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INDIVIDUAL FOR FLOUTING NORMS

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**MBAPPE RETURNS
TO TRAINING
WITH PSG**
11 SPORT

CAPSULE

**IIT-D DROPS 1 SET OF
MID-SEMESTER EXAMS**
New Delhi: The Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi has revamped its evaluation system and dropped a set of mid-semester exams to reduce students' stress, according to institute director Rangan Banerjee. The decision comes against the backdrop of several cases of student suicides across IITs which has sparked a debate about whether the curriculum and the rigorous study schedule are impacting the mental health of students.

SP DECLARES UP STATE EXECUTIVE UNIT

Lucknow: The Samajwadi Party (SP) on Sunday declared its Uttar Pradesh State Executive unit which was dissolved after the 2022 Assembly elections by party president Akhilesh Yadav. The State Executive will have 61 secretaries, 48 members and 62 special invitee members besides others, the party's chief spokesperson Rajendra Chowdhury said. He added that the 182-member State Executive was declared after Yadav's approval.

CLIPS OF 'JAWAN' STOLEN, LEAKED ONLINE

Mumbai: The Mumbai police have registered an offence against unidentified persons for allegedly stealing and leaking clips of Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming film "Jawan" on Twitter, an official said on Sunday.

UNTRACEABLE CHEETAH CAPTURED AFTER 22 DAYS

Sheopor: A South African female cheetah that went untraceable in the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopor district since her radio collar stopped working on July 21, was captured on Sunday after a 22-day search operation, officials said. The cheetah, Nirva, was caught at around 10 AM in the Dhoret range of the Kuno National Park.

'Abolish Nuh district, give arms licenses'

VHP yatra to resume on Aug 28, Mahapanchayat demands NIA probe

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In a gathering that included hundreds of Haryana Khaps, religious leaders, and Hindu organisations, the Palwal Mahapanchayat on Sunday decided to resume Brajmadal Jalabhishek Yatra in Nuh, slated for August 28. Demanding a thorough investigation by the National Investigating Agency (NIA) into the recent communal violence in the Nuh district, the Assembly also advocated for granting arms licences to Hindus in Nuh for self-defence.

The Yatra had previously been halted due to communal clashes in Nuh on July 31, which resulted in six fatalities and numerous injuries.

Spearheaded by the Sarv Hindu Samaj, the Mahapanchayat was convened at Pondri Village in Palwal. The primary agenda was to chart the course for the revival of the Vishva Hindu Parishad's (VHP) Brajmadal Jalabhishek Yatra. Participants came from various regions, including Palwal and Gurugram. The consensus emerged to recommence the yatra from Nalhar in Nuh, passing through Firozpur Jhirka's Jhir and Singar temples within the district.

Ajeet Singh, the president of VHP in Gurugram, said, "We have decided that the Yatra will resume on August 28 as per the plan. People from across the State will take out



People attend a 'Mahapanchayat' called by Hindu outfits, at Pondri village in Palwal District, Sunday. PTI

the procession and gather at Nalhar temple for a uniform yatra up to the Shringar temple. We urge people to join the Yatra which was earlier disrupted by mobsters." Arun Zaidar, a senior VHP leader, asserted, "Our Hindu brothers required that the Brajmadal Jalabhishek Yatra be resumed. So, we have decided it will again start on August 28 in Nuh. It was our religious procession and will be completed as per the plan scheduled. We demanded a fair probe into the entire incident and the guilty to be punished."

However, the Mahapanchayat's attendance far exceeded the stipulated limit of 500

individuals. The police had taken preventive measures, barring outsiders from entering the village and enhancing security arrangements. Citing cow smuggling as a primary cause of discord in the region, the gathering voiced their demand for the establishment of a paramilitary force headquarters in Nuh to ensure security. Additionally, they called for the dissolution of Nuh district status and its reclassification as a cow slaughter-free district.

The Assembly also sought compensation of Rs 1 crore and Government jobs for the families of the deceased, along with Rs 50 lakh for those

injured in the Nuh riots. They urged the removal of Rohingyas and individuals from other countries residing in the city. The assembly also advocated for arms licenses to be issued to Hindus living in Nuh for self-defence, the transfer of FIRs registered in Nuh to Gurugram, permanent deployment of security forces in Nuh, and an inquiry into the actions of former Nuh SP Varun Singla, who was on leave despite Intelligence inputs on potential violence. They further demanded the restitution of shops and homes owned by Hindus that were affected during the riots.

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No question of NCP joining BJP: Sr Pawar

Comment came day after his meet with Ajit created flutter in Maha

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar held a closed-door meeting with his uncle in Pune ahead of the Opposition India alliance meeting in Mumbai on August 31-September 1, NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Sunday made it clear that his party will not join hands with the BJP.

Having apparently found himself on the defensive over what came to be dubbed as a "secret meeting" that took place between the two leaders at the bungalow of an industrialist in Pune's posh Koregaon Park area, Pawar said: "What's wrong in meeting a family meeting? Ajit Pawar is my nephew. I am a father figure in the Pawar family. Whom should I meet or whosever should call for a meeting cannot become an issue of public debate. The meeting between Ajit Pawar and I was not a secret one as is being made out by the media."

Interacting with media persons at Solapur where he shared a stage, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis of the BJP, Sharad Pawar said: "The question of going with the BJP does not arise since it does not fit in the NCP's national policy. Though some of our erstwhile colleagues have taken a different position, but, as the national president of the NCP, I would like to make it clear that my party will not go with the BJP."

Ajit Pawar had rebelled against his uncle and NCP president Sharad Pawar, which



away with 40-odd MLAs and joined the Eknath Shinde-BJP alliance Government on July 2.

A fortnight after the rebellion, he had met Sr Pawar along with his other breakaway group leaders apparently to seek the latter's blessings and called on his aunt Pratibha Pawar (Sr Pawar's wife) to enquire about her health after a surgery on her hand. Even those meetings had sparked off major speculation in the State's political circles.

Notwithstanding the NCP chief's frequent meeting with his nephew Ajit Pawar, the leaders of the other constituent parties of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) — the Congress and Uddhav Thackeray-headed Shiv Sena — have also dismissed the possibility of Sr Pawar going with the BJP.

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole had on Saturday sought not to lend importance to the meeting between Sr Pawar and Ajit Pawar.

"What happens internally within an alliance party is not a matter of concern for us. We will take all those parties who want to fight the BJP. We are confident that Sharad Pawar will remain with the India

alliance".

Patole on Sunday met Uddhav Thackeray in connection with the meeting on August 31 and September 1 of the Opposition bloc India in Mumbai. He also said the issue of confusion in the ranks of the MVA in connection with the meeting between Sr Pawar and Ajit Pawar in Pune on Saturday was discussed.

"People of Maharashtra see us as one and there should be no confusion among the workers. The MVA is united and everyone's stand should be made clear at the earliest," Patole told reporters.

Downplaying the meeting between Sr Pawar and Ajit Pawar, Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut said in a lighter vein: "Sharad Pawar probably invited Ajit Pawar to the Opposition India bloc's meeting in Mumbai. If Narendra Modi and Nawaz Sharif could meet, then why not the Pawars?"

When his attention was drawn to the meeting between Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar, Devendra Fadnis said: "I don't know anything about the meeting. I do not know whether the meeting indeed did take place and what was discussed at the meeting?"

Need wider debate on 3 Bills to replace criminal laws: Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress party has called for extensive consultations involving experts and the general public regarding the three Bills aimed at revamping India's criminal justice system. The party warned against the "trap of bulldozing the entire criminal law structure" without proper discussion. Congress General Secretary Randeep Surjewala on Sunday said that on August 11, the Modi Government introduced three Bills without any prior notice, public consultation, or inputs from legal experts, jurists, criminologists, and other stakeholders. He characterised this move as pulling out Bills from a "black magic hat," effectively restructuring the nation's criminal law framework in a secretive and non-transparent manner.



"The introductory remarks made by the Home Minister themselves revealed that Amit Shah is inadequately informed, lacking knowledge, and unaware of the entire exercise," Surjewala said.

He continued, "Apart from seeking credit and attempting to score points in a state of desperation, conducting an undisclosed exercise away from public scrutiny and devoid of stakeholders' insights and wisdom cannot fulfill the public's

interest in reforming the country's criminal law structure."

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on August 11 introduced in Lok Sabha the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill, 2023; Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) Bill, 2023; and Bharatiya Sakshya (BS) Bill, 2023. These Bills are intended to replace the Indian Penal Code, of 1860, the Criminal Procedure Act, 1898, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, respectively.

Shah also appealed to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to refer these Bills for review by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs.

Surjewala countered Shah's statements about the changes proposed by the Bills and accused Shah of "misleading and distorting the truth" in several aspects of the proposed legislation.

Continued on Page 2

I-Day: Security in Manipur tightened

PTI/PNS ■ IMPHAL

Security arrangements were beefed up in Manipur on Sunday after some Imphal valley-based banned organisations called for a strike on Independence Day, officials said. Meanwhile, the CBI is set to take over nine more cases on Manipur violence, taking the total to 17.

Officials in the know of the developments said the probe by the central agency would not be limited to these 17 cases. Any other case related to crime against women or sexual assault may also be referred to it on priority, they said. The CBI has so far registered eight cases which include two related to alleged sexual assault on women in Manipur. It is in the process of taking over nine more cases, officials said. During the day, in the run up to Independence Day security arrangements were beefed

up in Manipur. Security forces also conducted search operations in vulnerable areas of five districts and recovered arms and ammunition, the police said.

Preparations for the I-Day celebrations are in full swing across the State with BSF, police and Assam Rifles personnel and students joining rehearsals for march past to be held on August 15.

"Rehearsals for I-Day celebrations were held on Saturday at Peace Ground in Churachandpur district's Thouboung area. Twenty-one parade contingents of BSF, police, students and Assam Rifles participated in the preparations," an official said.

Preparations are also underway in the capital Imphal with temporary gates being erected and hoardings being put up to celebrate Independence Day on August 15. Continued on Page 2

Khalistanis vandalise temple in Canada

Affix posters of late terrorist, demand probe into India's role in Nijjar's death

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/OTTAWA

Alleged Khalistan supporters have vandalised a temple in Canada and also affixed posters of the deceased Khalistan terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, demanding an investigation into India's alleged involvement in the death of Khalistani terrorist Nijjar on June 18.

This incident sparked strong outrage within the Indian community.

The latest such incidents took place on Saturday, targeting Surrey's Lakshmi Narayan Mandir in British Columbia - a temple with historical significance. "Pro-Khalistan" posters

were prominently displayed on the temple walls and gate. These posters demand an investigation by Canada into India's alleged involvement in the death of Nijjar. A video captured by a security camera shows two masked men pasting the posters on the walls and the gate of the temple. Designated terrorist Nijjar, who headed Khalistan Tiger Force and the Canadian arm of Sikhs For Justice (SFJ), was shot dead by unknown attackers in June. This is the fourth incident of temple vandalism in the country this year. In April this year, Swaminarayan temple was vandalised in Ontario. In February, the Ram Mandir in Canada's Mississauga was attacked, and in January a temple in Brampton was defaced with anti-India graffiti. India has expressed concern over escalating activities by Khalistan supporters in Canada. The Centre has clamped down

on organisations and individuals trying to stoke separatist sentiment in different countries. Last month, posters labelling several senior Indian diplomats as "killers" surfaced in Canada.

Following this, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had called upon partner countries, including Canada, the UK, and the US, to resist providing platforms to "extremist Khalistani ideology," arguing that it's detrimental to international relations. India has been asking Canada against giving space to pro-Khalistani separatists and extremist elements, Jaishankar had said.

Rejecting the notion that his Government is soft on Khalistan supporters, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had said Canada has always taken threats of violence "extremely seriously".

He said, "We have always taken serious action against terrorism, and we always will."

1,800 'special guests' to grace I-Day event

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort this year will see the participation of more than 1,800 people from different vocations as "special guests". Seventy-five couples from each State and Union Territories, in their traditional attire, will also witness the ceremony there.

The other new initiative includes selfie points dedicated to different schemes and initiatives of the Government that have been installed at 12 locations, including the National War Memorial, India Gate, Vijay Chowk, New Delhi Railway Station, Pragati Maidan, Raj Ghat, Jama Masjid Metro Station, Rajiv Chowk Metro Station, Delhi Gate Metro Station, ITO Metro Gate, Naubat Khana and Sheesh Ganj

Gurudwara, Defence Ministry officials said here on Sunday.

The schemes include Global Hope, Vaccine and Yoga, Ujjwala Yojana; Space Power, Digital India; Skill India, Start-up India, Sashakt Bharat, Naya Bharat, Powering India, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and Jal Jeevan Mission.

Modi will lead the nation in celebrating the 77th Independence Day from the iconic Red Fort in Delhi on August 15, 2023. He will unfurl the National Flag and deliver the customary address to the nation from the historic monument.

This year's Independence Day will culminate the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebrations, which were launched by Modi from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on March 12, 2021. Continued on Page 2



IAF's helicopters shower petals as the Tricolour is unfurled at Red Fort, during dress rehearsal for Independence Day celebrations, in New Delhi, Sunday. PTI

Google pays tribute to India's diva

The search engine commemorated what would have been late Sridevi's 60th b'day with a doodle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a heartfelt tribute, search engine giant Google commemorated what would have been the 60th birthday of the legendary Indian cinema sensation, Sridevi, with a captivating doodle that pays homage to her enchanting on-screen presence. Born on this day in 1963 in what is now Tamil Nadu, Sridevi's fascination with the world of cinema began in her childhood, leading her to grace the silver screen from the tender age of four, marking her



debut with the Tamil film 'Kandhan Karunai'.

"Today's Doodle, illustrated by Mumbai-based guest artist Bhumika Mukherjee, celebrates Indian actress Sridevi's 60th birthday! Starring in nearly three hundred movies over four decades, Sridevi made Bollywood's sweeping dramas and comedies shine, often-times without a male counterpart in a traditionally male-dominated industry," said the search engine in its description

of the doodle.

Sridevi's linguistic versatility enabled her to effortlessly break into various film industries. During the early stages of her career, she showcased her talents across multiple genres and languages, including Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam.

The pivotal moment came in 1976 when she gained national acclaim through K Balachander's 'Moondru Mudichu,' alongside cinema



stalwarts Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan. A reigning star in Tamil cinema, Sridevi's magnetic presence attracted the attention of Hindi film producers. Following her lead role in the action comedy 'Himmatwala,' she became an indelible Bollywood icon, leaving her mark with memorable performances in classics such as "Sadma," "Chaalbaaz," "Lamhe," "Chandani," and "Judaai," before taking a hiatus from acting. Cont on Page 2

IIT Delhi nixed mid-semester exam to reduce stress: Dir

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi has revamped its evaluation system and dropped a set of mid-semester exams to reduce students' stress, according to institute director Rangan Banerjee.

The decision comes against the backdrop of several cases of student suicides across IITs which has sparked a debate about whether the curriculum and the rigorous study schedule are impacting the mental health of students.

"Earlier we used to have two sets of exams during a semester, final exams at the end of each semester and several continuous evaluation mechanisms. We conducted an internal survey and based on feedback from all students and faculty, we have decided to drop one set of exams. So, now there will be two sets of exams besides routine evaluations," Banerjee told PTI in an interview.

"We felt that the exam calendar was too packed and hence decided to reduce student burden and stress. The decision has also been approved by the Senate and will

be implemented from the ongoing semester. A maximum cap of 80 per cent weightage has been kept for the two examinations," he added.

The IIT Council, in its meeting in April, decided that there is a need for a robust grievance redressal system; increasing psychological counselling services; reducing pressure, fear of failure and rejection among students.

The issue of student suicide, alleged discrimination, and ensuring the mental well-being of students was discussed at length during the meeting. According to data shared in Parliament last month, IITs have reported the highest number of student suicide cases in the last five years.

From 2018 to 2023, at least 39 out of the total 98 deaths by suicide in top higher education institutions of India took place at IITs.

"In addition to existing mechanisms to deal with stress and ensure mental well-being among the students, IIT Delhi is pushing to strengthen some mentorship and interactive verticals, especially to encourage interactions with students outside the classrooms, prefer-

ably at an individual level," Banerjee said. "We are also increasing the frequency of 'open house' interactions with students besides the frequency of periodic informal dinners or meals between students and faculty in small groups through the existing Student-Teacher Interaction Council," he added.

The institute is also facilitating faculty-student interactions via academic-domain-independent and academic-domain-dependent faculty mentorships.

Talking about student suicides Banerjee said, "Students in IITs come through an extremely competitive process, they have come into a classroom where there are so many people who are very intelligent... We have to be able to tell people how to cope with failure... This is something we are focusing on."

"We have expanded our counselling set up, we have students as well as professional counsellors in our hostels. We want to track students whose performance is deteriorating so they can be mentored accordingly," he said. Banerjee said, "Any suicide is tragic and it's heartbreaking for everyone."

Indian Army on high alert at LoC ahead of I-Day

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In the run-up to 77th Independence Day celebrations, the foot soldiers of the Indian army have been maintaining a tight vigil along the 750 Km-long line of control in Jammu and Kashmir to foil any possible infiltration bid by the Border Action Team of the Pakistan army and heavily armed terrorists.

The jawans deployed along the twin border districts of Rajouri and Poonch have been kept in a state of 'high alert' following repeated attempts aimed at pushing small groups of terrorists in the region South of Pir Panjal range.

The local villagers in the region have been regularly spotting suspected movement of armed infiltrators in the higher reaches.

The Indian army has jointly conducted several anti-terrorist operations to neutralize these terrorists yet some of the freshly infiltrated terrorists remain active in the region. Regular long-range foot patrols and exclusive combing and search operations are launched to track down the footprints of



these terrorists hiding inside thickly forested belts/natural caves.

While discharging their duties these jawans face numerous challenges.

While maintaining operational readiness these jawans focus hard on stringent training standards. Equipped with state-of-the-art weaponry the jawans have been ensuring 24x7 vigil with the help of cutting-edge technology to enhance border security and surveillance.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday flagged-off the Tiranga Yatra in Srinagar and joined thousands of enthusiastic citizens in the walkathon

upto Botanical Garden.

The Lt Governor said the Tricolor represents the dreams of our freedom fighters, our martyrs.

I bow to all the great personalities who have made invaluable contributions and fought till their last breath for the progress and prosperity of the nation, he added.

"Today the entire J&K is participating in the Tiranga Yatra.

The Tricolor is flying high in the sky, streets are filled with enthusiasm. Participation of men, women, youths and senior citizens across the UT is an inspiration for the country as well," the Lt Governor said.

Didi, Cong made Bengal backward, says Nadda



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

BJP national president JP Nadda on Sunday attacked the Congress and Trinamool Congress governments for failing Bengal on every front turning it into a 'backward state'.

Reminding the State's 'glorious past' he said there was a time when it was said that "what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow... But today we see how the Congress and Mamata Banerjee have turned Bengal into a backward State in the past 30-40 years... They have done everything to ruin Bengal..."

Nadda was speaking at BJP's 'Sanyukt Morcha Sammelan' in Kolkata.

Saying that the TMC had given endless trouble to the people of Bengal he wondered when the State's woes would end.

He said, "people want to know when there problem will end insisting, 'only the people sitting on the stage (BJP leaders) will address their issues as people have great expectations from them.'"

Nadda was on a two-day visit to Kolkata.

Earlier on Saturday he attacked the State government for unleashing massive violence in Bengal.

Alleging that no elections were held democratically sans violence he said, "Is this a reflection of democracy? Is this how elections are being held under the TMC government? We have witnessed post-poll violence after the 2021 assembly polls. But the violence we witnessed during the rural polls resembled the bloody days of partition here."

'Abolish Nuh district, give...

From Page 1

Amidst heavy security deployment in Pindri village, Palwal, the Mahapanchayat took place. Para-military forces and police personnel patrolled the area from 9 am to 4 pm.

"Strict action is required against those involved in this conspiracy. Several decisions have been taken in today's mahapanchayat including the resumption of the yatra, the NIA probe, compensation for victims, arms licenses for Hindus living in Nuh, and others. Such violence will not be tolerated anymore," asserted Kulbhushan Bhardwaj, a leader of Bajrang Dal.

Despite the "no hate speech" condition for permission granted to Hindu groups for large gatherings in Haryana, certain speakers issued open threats during the event. Although organizers warned speakers against hate speech, some individuals disregarded these instructions. A speaker was heard stating, "if you raise a finger, we will cut off your hands," while another demanded licenses for rifles.

The organizers also utilized various social media platforms to publicize the mahapanchayat. A poster disseminated online proclaimed, "The yatra is being organized to boost the confidence of Hindus."

Notable attendees included Khaps from various regions of Haryana, leaders of VHP and Bajrang Dal, current and former MLAs from Sohna, Sanjay Singh, Nuh BJP president Narendra Patel, Arun Zaildar, senior VHP leader, and Kulbhushan Bhardwaj, a Bajrang Dal leader, among others.

Originally slated to be held in Nuh, the mahapanchayat was relocated due to security concerns, as the Nuh administration denied permission. Subsequently, the Palwal administration granted conditional permission for a gathering of around 500 people. Strict action will be taken against any individual engaging in hate speech.

In a related event, a Hindu group was granted police permission to hold a mahapanchayat in Palwal. The primary agenda was discussing the preparations for resuming the Vishva Hindu Parishad's Brij Mandal Jalabhishek Yatra, which had been disrupted by stone pelting on July 31.

with State-specific amendments. Over the past century, each provision within these enactments has undergone extensive legal scrutiny. Judicial pronouncements by various courts, including the Privy Council, Federal Court, Supreme Court, and numerous high courts, have interpreted each provision," Tewari shared on the platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

Tewari stressed the need for meticulous examination of each provision in the three new Bills introduced by Shah. This scrutiny should be based on judicial interpretations of the provisions.

"To ensure a thorough evaluation, it is crucial to establish a Joint Committee of Parliament consisting of legal experts, retired judges, former police officials/civil servants, jurists, and activists involved in human, women, and civil rights. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar should form this committee. It should critically assess all three bills," Tewari said.

Tewari asserted that these bills have significant implications for the fundamental rights outlined in Part III of the Indian Constitution, especially Articles 14, 19, and 21.

Among other changes, the proposed bills aim to abolish the sedition law and introduce a broader definition of the offense. Additionally, they define terrorism for the first time and propose modifications to the criminal justice system. These include imposing the death penalty for mob lynching and sexual assault of minors, as well as introducing a maximum prison term of 20 years for all forms of gang-rape. Community service is also suggested as a potential penalty for first-time minor offenses.

Need wider debate on 3 Bills...

From Page 1

"While the bills are set to be examined by the Select Committee of Parliament, it is imperative to open the bills and their provisions to extensive public debate. This should involve judges, lawyers, jurists, criminologists, reform advocates, stakeholders, and the general public. This approach would prevent the mistake of recklessly altering the criminal law structure without proper discussion, a tendency that seems deeply ingrained in the BJP government's approach," Surjewala emphasized.

"We remain hopeful that rationality will prevail," he added.

Congress MP Manish Tewari has also echoed the call for broader consultations on the bills.

"Given that law and order is a state subject, certain acts, particularly the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), come

with State-specific amendments. Over the past century, each provision within these enactments has undergone extensive legal scrutiny. Judicial pronouncements by various courts, including the Privy Council, Federal Court, Supreme Court, and numerous high courts, have interpreted each provision," Tewari shared on the platform X, formerly known as Twitter.

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cinema's inaugural female superstar, she was bestowed with the esteemed Padma Shri, one of the highest civilian awards granted by the Government of India.

Sridevi's influence on the film industry is immeasurable, as she carved new pathways for women to take center stage in Indian cinema. Her final cinematic endeavor, "Mom" (2017), continued this legacy. Tragically, Sridevi left the world prematurely in 2018, passing away at the age of 54 in Dubai

RSS can't erase its dark deeds from Indian history: Ambedkar

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) President and late BR Ambedkar's grandson Prakash Ambedkar on Sunday charged that the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak (RSS)-BJP combine was "whitewashing" of Indian history but it could never erase the RSS dark deeds nor the people could ever forget that the Hindu outfit celebrated Pakistan's Independence Day and it observed mourning on Indian Independence day.

Talking to media persons ahead of Independence Day, Prakash Ambedkar said in Pune: "The white-washing of Indian history is in progress. But, the dark history of RSS cannot be erased... RSS celebrated Pakistan's Independence Day, while it mourned and observed black day on Independence Day. It rejected the Indian National flag, the Emblem and the democratic-secular Constitution."

"Instead, the RSS demanded the anti-egalitarian Manusmriti, which they still do to this day. These very prodigies of Hegdewar,



taken by the Union Home Minister that "we were born after Indian Independence", Prakash Ambedkar said: "I have only one question for him: Did you or not wear khaki short of RSS and pay salutation like Hitler? Let him and others of his ilk make a public statement in this regard. Before that, I want them to admit their mistakes in their black history."

In a separate interview telecast by leading Marathi television channel ABP Majha, Prakash Ambedkar contended that Prime Minister Narendra Modi posed a "big danger" to the country and asked the Hindu outfits in the country to reconsider their decision to support him.

Singling out Modi for a severe attack on the Manipur issue, the VBA leader demanded to know from the Prime Minister: "Whether his government gave Adivasi status to the Meitei people in Manipur. Whether Meitei people had such a demand?"

Prakash Ambedkar, who was a member of 12th and 13th Lok Sabha, said that he would contest the 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Akola constituency in Vidarbha.

Prakash Ambedkar, who was a member of 12th and 13th Lok Sabha, said that he would contest the 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Akola constituency in Vidarbha.

छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल
पर्यावास भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.) 492002

// सर्व संबंधित को सूचना //

भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, नई दिल्ली की अधिसूचना दिनांक 14.09.2006 (यथा संशोधित) के तहत सर्व संबंधित को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेसर्स सुकुलपारा लाईम स्टोन माईन (प्रो.- श्री गोविंद प्रसाद यादव), ग्राम- सुकुलपारा, तहसील- पामगाढ़, जिला- जांजगीर-चांपा (छ.ग.) द्वारा कुल क्षेत्रफल - 1.061 हेक्टेयर में प्रस्तावित चूना पत्थर (गौण खनिज)-उत्खनन क्षमता - 20,007 टन (8,002.8 घनमीटर) प्रक्रियार्थक पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृति हेतु लोक सुनवाई बाबत छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल में आवेदन किया गया है। उक्त प्रस्तावित परियोजना के संबंध में आपत्ति/सुझाव/टीका-टिप्पणी इस अधिसूचना के जारी होने के दिनांक से 30 दिवस के अंदर क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी, छ.ग. पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, बिलासपुर के कार्यालय में मौखिक अथवा लिखित रूप से कार्यालयीन समय में प्रस्तुत की जा सकती है। इस परियोजना के लिए लोक सुनवाई दिनांक 20/09/2023 को समय प्रातः 11:00 बजे स्थान: मंडी परिसर खरीद, तहसील- पामगाढ़, जिला-जांजगीर-चांपा (छ.ग.) में नियत की गई है। यह भी सूचित हो कि लोक सुनवाई के दौरान भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, नई दिल्ली के ऑफिस मेमोरेडम F No. 22-25/2000-IA, III दिनांक 14.09.2020 तथा कोरोना वायरस के नियंत्रण एवं रोकथाम हेतु शासन द्वारा जारी समस्त दिशा-निर्देशों का अक्षरशः पालन कराया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।

ई.आई.ए. अधिसूचना दिनांक 14.09.2006 (यथा संशोधित) के प्रावधानों के अनुसार ड्राफ्ट ई.आई.ए. रिपोर्ट, कार्यपालकसारी की प्रति (हिन्दी व अंग्रेजी में) एवं इसकी सी.डी. (साफ्ट कॉपी) जन सामान्य के अवलोकन / पठन हेतु कार्यालय कलेक्टर, जांजगीर, जिला-जांजगीर-चांपा, मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, कार्यालय जिला पंचायत जांजगीर, जिला-जांजगीर-चांपा, अनुविभागीय अधिकारी (रा.), कार्यालय अनुविभागीय अधिकारी (रा.), पामगाढ़, जिला- जांजगीर- चांपा, महाप्रबंधक, कार्यालय जिला व्यापार एवं उद्योग केंद्र चांपा, जिला-जांजगीर-चांपा, मुख्य नगर पालिका अधिकारी, नगर पंचायत खरीद / शिवरीनारायण, जिला-जांजगीर-चांपा, क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, व्यापार विहार पं. दीनदयाल उपाध्याय पार्क के पास, बिलासपुर, सरपंच / सचिव कार्यालय ग्राम पंचायत- सुकुलपारा, देवरी, लोहरी, खोर्सरी, धरदेई, जनपद पंचायत पामगाढ़ व रिमनी, कुकवा, तुम्ना, जनपद पंचायत नवागढ़, जिला- जांजगीर-चांपा (छ.ग.), डायरेक्टर, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन, मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार, इंदिरा पर्यावरण मवन, वायु विंग, जोरबाग रोड, नई दिल्ली, मुख्य वन संरक्षक, एकीकृत क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार, अरण्य भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर एवं मुख्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, पर्यावास भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर (छ.ग.) में रखी गई है।

सदय सचिव
छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल,
नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

1,800 'special guests' to grace I-Day...

From Page 1

He will, once again, usher the country into "Amrit Kaal" with renewed vigour to realise dream of making India a developed country by 2047.

Giving details about the "Special Guests", officials said around 1,800 people from different vocations, with their spouses, have been invited from across the country.

The initiative has been taken in line with the Government's vision of "Jan Bhagidari".

These "special guests" include over 400 Sarpanches of more than 660 vibrant villages; 250 from Farmer Producer Organisations scheme; 50 participants each of Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana and 50 Shram Yogis (construction workers) of the Central Vista Project, including the New Parliament Building.

Invitees also include 50 each Khadi workers, those involved in the construction of border roads, the making of Amrit Sarovar and Har Ghar Jal Yojana as well as 50 each primary school teachers, nurses, and fishermen. Some of these Special Guests are scheduled to visit the National War Memorial and call on Minister of State for Defence

Ajay Bhatt as part of their stay in Delhi.

As part of the celebrations, an online selfie contest will be conducted by the Ministry of Defence on the MyGov portal from August 15-20. People are encouraged to take selfies at one or more of the 12 installations and upload them on the MyGov platform to take part in the contest. Twelve winners, one from each installation, will be selected on the basis of the online selfie contest. The winners would be given prize money of Rs 10,000 each.

Upon his arrival at the Red Fort, the Prime Minister will be received by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt, and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane. The Defence Secretary will introduce the General Officer Commanding (GoC), Delhi Area, Lieutenant General Dhiraj Seth to the Prime Minister.

The GoC Delhi Area will then conduct Prime Minister Modi to the Saluting Base where a combined Inter-Services and Delhi Police Guard will present a general salute to the Prime Minister. Thereafter, the Prime Minister will inspect the Guard of Honour.

The Guard of Honour

contingent for the Prime Minister will consist of one officer and 25 personnel each from the Army, Air Force, and Delhi Police and one officer and 24 personnel from the Navy. The Indian Army is the coordinating service this year.

The Guard of Honour will be commanded by Major Vikas Sangwan. The Army Contingent in the Prime Minister's Guard will be commanded by Major Indrajit Sachin, the Naval contingent by Lieutenant Commander MV Rahul Raman and the Air Force contingent by Squadron Leader Akash Ganghas. The Delhi Police contingent will be commanded by Additional DCP Sandhya Swami.

After inspecting the Guard of Honour, the Prime Minister will proceed to the ramparts of the Red Fort where he will be greeted by Rajnath, Bhatt, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral R Hari Kumar and Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari. The GoC, Delhi area will conduct the Prime Minister to the dais on the ramparts to unfurl the National Flag.

After being unfurled, the Tricolour will receive a "Rashtriya Salute". The Army

band, consisting of one JCO and 20 Other Ranks, will play the National Anthem during the unfurling of the National Flag and presenting of the "Rashtriya Salute". The Band will be conducted by Naib Subedar Jatinder Singh.

Major Nikita Nair and Major Jasmine Kaur will assist the Prime Minister in unfurling the National Flag. It will be synchronized with the 21 Gun Salute by the valiant gunners of the elite 8711 Field Battery (Ceremonial). The ceremonial battery will be commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Vikas Kumar and the Gun Position Officer will be Naib Subedar (AIG) Anoop Singh.

The National Flag Guard comprising five officers and 128 Other Ranks from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Delhi Police will present Rashtriya Salute at the time of the unfurling of the National Flag by the Prime Minister. Major Abhinav Detha from the Army will be in command of this Inter-Services Guard and Police Guard.

The Army Contingent in the National Flag Guard will be commanded by Major Mukesh Kumar Singh, the Naval contingent by Lieutenant Commander Harpreet Mann and the Air Force Contingent by Squadron Leader Shrey

Chawdhary. The Delhi Police contingent will be commanded by Additional DCP Shashank Jaiswal.

As soon as the National Flag is unfurled by the Prime Minister, flower petals will be showered at the venue by two Advanced Light Helicopters Mark-III Dhruv of the Indian Air Force in the Line Astern Formation. The captains of the helicopter will be Wing Commander Amber Agarwal and Squadron Leader Himanshu Sharma.

After showering flower petals, the Prime Minister will address the Nation. At the conclusion of the speech of the Prime Minister, the cadets of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) will sing the National Anthem. One thousand one hundred (1,100) boy and girl NCC cadets (Army, Navy, and Air Force) from different schools across the country will take part in this festival of National Fervour. Bleachers have been installed at the Gyanpath, on which the cadets would be seated in official white dress.

In addition, NCC cadets in uniform will be seated at the Gyan Path as part of the celebrations. Another high-light would be the G-20 logo, which will be part of the floral decorations at the Red Fort.

I-Day: Security...

From Page 1

"Security measures have been significantly heightened after several militant outfits called for a strike on I-Day," another official said.

Several outlawed outfits, such as Coordinating Committee (Corcom), called for a general strike on I-Day from 1 am to 6.30 pm.

Corcom includes banned groups including United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Liberation Army (PLA), and PREPAK.

Two more proscribed outfits in Manipur have also separately called for a shutdown on August 15.

"Search operations were conducted in the fringe and vulnerable areas of Imphal-West, Imphal-East, Thoubal, Bishnupur and Churachandpur districts by the state police and central security forces and recovered 12 arms, six ammunitions and eight explosives," the Manipur Police said on Twitter.

Notably, more than 160 people lost their lives and several hundred were injured since the ethnic clashes broke out in Manipur on May 3, after a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

1K cameras, anti-drone systems to keep vigil on I-DAY

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 1,000 facial recognition cameras, anti-drone systems, and over 10,000 police personnel keeping vigil are part of the security measures in place at the Mughal-era Red Fort, from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation on August 15. The Special Protection Group (SPG) has taken over control of the premises for safeguarding and sanitising the area.

As the national capital gears up to celebrate the 77th Independence Day on Tuesday, robust arrangements have been made as a large gathering is expected at the event, which has no COVID-19 restrictions after a span of two years.

Police said that keeping in mind the recent violence in Haryana's Nuh and adjoining areas, a strict vigil is being ensured.

Sharing details of the security arrangements, Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Dependra Pathak



Security personnel with sniffer dogs during full dress rehearsal for the celebrations of 77th Independence Day, at Red Fort in New Delhi on Sunday PTI

said, "Independence Day will be celebrated with full enthusiasm this year with no COVID-19 restrictions in place. Therefore, a robust and adequate deployment of police will be ensured." "We will also

coordinate and share real-time information with other agencies to provide security. The Delhi Police will also use technology systems for security purposes. We are on our toes and doing rehearsals," Pathak

said. The Gyan Path in front of the Red Fort in central Delhi will be decked up with flowers and G20 signage for the national festival celebrations. However, there will be no major decorations on the ram-

part of the fort from where the prime minister addresses the nation. The government has invited around 1,800 special guests, including beneficiaries of the PM-KISAN scheme, from across the country to attend the Independence Day ceremony here. "This year, more than 20,000 officials and civilians will take part in the Independence Day celebrations. Gyan Path is being decorated with flowers and G20 signage for the national festival," a police officer said.

Around 1,000 cameras with facial recognition and video analytic systems have been installed in and around the Mughal-era fort and at other strategic locations to ensure foolproof security and monitor VVIP movements, the police said.

Anti-drone systems have been installed at the Red Fort as is convention. All anti-terror measures have been initiated, including the installation of air defence guns. Snipers, elite SWAT commandos and sharpshooters will be positioned at

strategic locations for the security of the prime minister and other VVIP guests.

Forces continue to remain on high alert to thwart any untoward incident as police have intensified patrolling and deployed extra pickets at vital installations based on intelligence inputs received from central agencies, a senior police officer said. Thorough checking is being carried out at the borders and police have warned of strict action against anyone trying to disrupt the law and order situation in the national capital.

The areas surrounding the Red Fort have been demarcated as a "no kite flying zone" till the completion of the programme. A total of 153 kite catchers will be deployed with the necessary equipment at strategic locations to intercept kites, the police said, adding that the residents of areas near the Red Fort have been asked not to fly kites till the event is over. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day address in

2017, a kite had landed just below the podium. The prime minister had, however, continued with his speech unfazed. "The Delhi Police has also intensified patrolling and anti-sabotage checks.

Hotels, guest houses, parking lots and restaurants are being checked and verification of tenants and servants is being carried out. Meetings are also being held with RWA (resident welfare associations) and MWA (market welfare associations) members," Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Sagar Singh Kalsi said.

Police had on Thursday imposed prohibitory orders under CrPC Section 144 in areas such as Rajghat, ITO and Red Fort ahead of Independence Day.

In view of Independence Day celebrations, Section 144 of CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure) has been invoked in areas nearby Rajghat, ITO, Red Fort etc. No gathering of any kind is permitted in these areas," police posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. Delhi

Police also conducted a security assessment between July 27 and July 29 across the city and 100 vulnerable spots were identified.

The local police stations have been instructed by Deputy Commissioner of Police, HQ & TYR, Special cell, to rectify the security flaws found at various Hotels, Guest Houses, busy markets, taxi stands, parking lots, cyber cafes, PG accommodations, Cinema Halls, Malls and other places. In 2021, the Delhi Police had erected a huge wall of shipping containers decorated with graffiti at the main gate of Red Fort for security reasons. There will be no such wall this year.

The flying of sub-conventional aerial platforms like para-gliders, para-motors, hang gliders, UAVs, microflight aircraft, remotely piloted aircraft, hot air balloons, small-size powered aircraft, quadcopters or para-jumping from aircraft etc. are prohibited over the jurisdiction of National Capital Territory of Delhi up to August 16, the police said.

Advisory issued for smooth traffic flow, 8 roads shut

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has issued a traffic advisory to ensure smooth vehicular movement in the city on Tuesday, when Independence Day will be celebrated. According to the advisory, traffic for the general public around Red Fort, from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation on August 15, will remain closed from 4 am to 10 am. It will be open to only authorised vehicles, it added.

Eight road stretches -- Netaji Subhash Marg, Lothian Road, SP Mukherjee Marg, Chandni Chowk Road, Nishad Raj Marg, Esplanade Road and its link road to Netaji Subhash Marg, Ring Road from Rajghat to ISBT and Outer Ring Road from ISBT to IP Flyover -- will remain closed for general traffic on Tuesday, the advisory said issued on Sunday said.

Vehicles that do not have parking labels for Independence Day may avoid C-Hexagon, India Gate, Copernicus Marg, Mandi



House, Sikandra Road, W Point, A Point Tilak Marg, Mathura Road, BSZ Marg, Netaji Subhash Marg, J L Nehru Marg, Ring Road between Nizamuddin Khatta and ISBT Kashmir Gate, and Outer Ring Road from Nizamuddin Khatta to ISBT Kashmir Gate via Salimgarh bypass, it said.

For north to south access, commuters can take alternative routes from Aurobindo Marg, Safdarjang Road, Kamal Ataturk Marg, Kautilya Marg, SP Marg, 11 Murti, Mother

Teresa Crescent, Park Street, Mandir Marg, Panchkulan Road, Rani Jhansi Road, and reach their destinations in north Delhi and vice-versa, the advisory said.

Similarly, commuters going from east to west can take NH-24 (NH-9) Nizamuddin Khatta, Barapula Road, under ALLMS Flyover Ring Road, NH-24 (NH-9) Nizamuddin Khatta, Ring Road, Bhairon Road, Mathura Road, Subramanian Bharti Marg, Rajesh Pilot Marg, Prithviray Road, Safdarjung Road, Kamal Ataturk Marg,

Panchsheel Marg, SP Marg/Ridge Road, accordingly and vice versa, it stated.

Old Iron Bridge and Geeta Colony Bridge towards Shanti Van will be closed on that day, it said. Goods vehicles will not be permitted between Nizamuddin Khatta and Wazirabad Bridge from 12 am Monday to 11 am Tuesday. Interstate buses will not be allowed between Maharana Pratap ISBT and Sarai Kale Khan ISBT from 12 am Monday to 11 am Tuesday, the advisory stated.

Local city buses, including from the DTC, should not move on Ring Road from 12 am Monday to 11 am Tuesday between ISBT Kashmir Gate and Ring Road - NH-24 (NH-9)/NH T-point (Nizamuddin Khatta) and should take available alternative routes, it said.

Buses ordinarily terminating at Red Fort, Jama Masjid and Delhi Main Railway Station will be curtailed or diverted. Normal bus service will be restored after 11 am Tuesday, the advisory stated.

SOL sets up panel to look into minor errors in study materials

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi University's School of Open Learning (SOL) has constituted a review committee over minor errors in Self Learning Material (SLM) of two Political Science papers. Giving information, Principal of SOL, Prof. Ajay Jaiswal said that during the Academic Council (AC) meeting of University on August 11, 2023, some errors were pointed out in the SLM of two papers of Political Science by some elected AC members.

In both Hindi and English study materials for various course many such factual and grammatical errors have been detected. There are errors of transliteration and translation galore in the Hindi study material for BA Programme.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report has been transliterated inexplicably to 'Mountain Dew' and the words of the Indian Constitution's Preamble are so erroneous as to change their meanings completely. There is also the implication that the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution in 1994. Prof.



Jaiswal informed that the School of Open Learning has constituted a review committee of eminent educationists on August 12, with immediate effect, taking the translation, typographical, grammatical, faculty errors seriously.

He said that Content writers along with editorial board prepared the study material which was also checked for plagiarism. "Stringent review mechanism is the top priority of the Institution," he said. Prof. Jaiswal said that NEP was Introduced in Delhi University (DU) simultaneously in the regular mode as well as the distance mode. After implementation of NEP 2020 and UGCF

DU announces setting up of Centre for Independence and Partition Studies

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Independence Day, the Delhi University (DU) on Sunday announced the establishment of the Centre for Independence and Partition Studies.

The centre will facilitate research on the "high voltage politics" accompanying the country's Partition and how the then central leadership failed to contain the "germs of separatism". The varsity is also organising an exhibition on the occasion of Partition horror Remembrance Day at conference center, on August 14.

Informing this, Director, South Delhi Campus Prof. Prakash Singh said that the Centre shall focus on the different facets of the freedom struggle and its aftermath. "There are innumerable facts, anecdotes, stories and memories that are waiting to be unearthed to depict the intense human tragedy, pain, loss, survival intensity, and finally triumph, to emerge out of the horrors of partition.

The Centre is a sincere academic endeavour to encourage research and learning through dedicated archival sources and oral histories. It is ambitious to be created as a dedicated resource centre for exclusive studies in the domain," he said. "This Centre would function under the Chairmanship and patronage of the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Yogesh Singh," Singh added.

The Centre will prioritize highlighting the historical narratives of the people who have gone unacknowledged, who are seldom referred in the mainstream and those whose identities have received a biased and prejudiced treatment, and whose route- maps of displacement and migration have affected permanently their future generations and embossed scars for a life-time.

The Centre will also focus on the role played by Cyril Radcliffe in the Partition. Radcliffe was a British lawyer who drew the 'Radcliffe Line' - a geographical marker that demarcated the boundary between India and newly-created dominion of Pakistan.



Firefighters douse a fire that broke out at a godown, in Delhi's Alipur area on Sunday PTI

Bidhuri seeks extension of 10 days for Assembly session

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri has demanded an extension of at least 10 days for the two-day session called from August 16th in the Delhi Assembly. Earlier, Bidhuri, has written a letter to the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, detailing instances of violations of laws, rules, and traditions in the Delhi Legislative Assembly.

He has stated that the conduct and recklessness of the AAP government are causing the Delhi Legislative Assembly to lose its meaning and importance. A delegation of BJP MLAs has recently submitted a memorandum to Lieutenant Governor, and he had sought



further information on this matter. In his letter to the Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel, he stated that a two-day session is insufficient to discuss the issues of the capital. BJP legislators have already given notice for discussions on 12 burning issues of Delhi. Therefore, the duration of the session must be extended. In the letter, Bidhuri has discussed the 12 issues for which notices have been sent to the Assembly by BJP MLAs. These

issues include embezzlement of crores in the panic buttons installed for women's safety and preventing untoward incidents, manipulation of corruption cases files by the Vigilance Department in the middle of the night, expenditure of crores in transforming the Chief Minister's residence into Shishmahal, and the failure of the Delhi government in dealing with the flood crisis.

In addition, the continuous rise in pollution levels, non-implementation of the announcement to conduct 450 tests in mohalla clinics, frequent breakdowns of DTC buses, and the Delhi government's inability to address the issue of dirty Yamuna despite receiving ₹2419 crore from the central government.

BJP to commemorate Aug 14, as Vibhajan Vibhishika Smriti Diwas

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP will commemorate August 14, as Vibhajan Vibhishika Smriti Diwas. Informing this, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said on the occasion, BJP National President Jagat Prakash Nadda will address a seminar at the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) Convention Centre.

Delhi BJP President has said that representatives of various social organizations of people whose families faced the agony of partition will join alongwith senior leaders. An exhibition recalling the partition sufferings of those who came to India from the land which is now known as Pakistan will be put up.

We will remove garbage mountains: Mayor Shelly

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi on Sunday said the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) will work towards removing "mini garbage mountains" and beautifying those areas. The MCD has started a cleanliness campaign to clean all the 250 wards of the city, she told a press conference.

Oberoi said that "at some places, mini garbage mountains come up as people throw garbage there". "We will remove those mountains and beautify those areas," she added. "The BJP didn't clean any lane, ward



MCD Mayor and AAP leader Shelly Oberoi addresses a press conference at AAP headquarters in New Delhi on Sunday Ranjan Dimri / Pioneer

and toilets and because of this whole Delhi is flooded with litter, these litters got converted into 3 big mountains of

garbage. Because of this, the people of Delhi kicked the BJP from the MCD, they elected 'AAP' and provided us with an opportunity to make Delhi neat and tidy," she said.

She said that teams have been formed to survey areas and upload pictures on the MCD app, following which they will be cleaned. Oberoi further stated, "All the Councillors, MLAs, Officials and Employees, collectively we all would make Delhi neat and tidy, now all officials, Deputy Commissioners will be instructed to identify all the garbage points of the wards coming under their zone.

2 docs let off after violation of ICMR's IVF guidelines by NMC

PAYAL BANERJEE/PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A doctor of the AIIMS-Delhi's gynaecology department who provided some eggs from a patient undergoing IVF treatment to two women without her consent in violation of ICMR's guidelines has been let off by the National Medical Commission with a warning almost six years after the incident.

Issuing the warning on July 18, the NMC noted the doctor has contributed immensely to the field of reproductive medicine. "In spite of the fact that the act in question was done in good faith to benefit the poor

patients without accruing any personal gain, it cannot be denied that prevailing guidelines were violated. So, the doctor is warned to be more careful in future," the order read.

The doctor had appealed to the National Medical Commission after the Delhi Medical Council (DMC) in September last year ordered the suspension of her license for one month.

According to the complaint received by the DMC in 2017, 30 eggs were retrieved from the patient on August 12 of that year for an IVF procedure. Of these, 14 were taken by the doctor from the embryologist and provided those to two patients

without the consent of the woman, said Dr Girish Tyagi, the secretary of DMC.

A disciplinary committee of the DMC investigated the complaint. Following this, the DMC observed that "sharing a patient's eggs/oocytes is not only illegal, as sharing/donation of such nature is prohibited as per the ICMR guidelines, but also unethical, moreover, when no written consent of the donor as well as recipient as per the guidelines have been made available to the Delhi Medical Council."

The AIIMS in its internal enquiry report dated August 30, 2017, also highlighted the lapses committed by doctor.

Rai launches tree plantation drive

New Delhi: Delhi Environment and Forest Minister Gopal Rai Sunday launched a portal to provide training to stakeholders and citizens on the several acts, schemes, and activities of the Forest and Wildlife Department.

Rai launched the portal during the inauguration of a tree plantation drive in Patparganj here to increase green belt in area and reduce pollution levels, a statement said. The training initiative would facilitate a deeper understanding of the forest department's operations, the statement said. Rai emphasised that Kejriwal government is committed to planting over 52 lakh saplings this year and has set a goal of enhancing green cover across city. The green agencies of each of the 21 involved



departments will work together to achieve this goal. In addition, the NDMC will plant 50 lakh shrubs/saplings. In Delhi, where the green area was 20 percent in the year 2013, it has increased to 23.06 percent in year 2021 due to efforts of Kejriwal government. Under government's Green Action Plan, the continuous decline in pollution and increase in green cover have been notable achievements, contributing to a 30 per cent reduction in pollution levels over the last 8 years, the statement said.

Sibal slams Bills to replace criminal laws



New Delhi: Terming the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill as "unconstitutional", former law minister Kapil Sibal on Sunday alleged that the government talks about ending colonial-era laws but their thinking is that they want to "bring dictatorship" through such legislations.

The Rajya Sabha MP called on the government to take back the three bills it has brought to replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860, Criminal Procedure Act, 1898, and Indian Evidence Act, 1872, alleging that if such laws become a reality, they would "imperil the future" of the country.

"They (NDA government) talk about ending colonial era laws, but their thinking is that they want to bring dictatorship in the country through laws. They want to make such laws under which action can be taken against Supreme Court and high court judges, magistrates, public servants, CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General), and other government officials," Sibal said at a press conference here. **PTI**

Adivasis true owners of forests, have rights over its lands: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ WAYNAD/NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Sunday asserted and reiterated that the Adivasis were the original owners of the forestlands and they have every right over it. Criticising the ruling BJP, he accused it of trying to confine the Adivasis to the jungles only.

Addressing a public meeting in his Parliamentary constituency Waynad in Kerala, Rahul said, Adivasis being the original owners of this country should be given rights on land and forest and should be allowed to do whatever they want to do there.

Rahul said he was very happy to come to Waynad. "I have a relationship with the people of Waynad, regardless of which party they belong to", he said, adding that when he was disqualified, the entire Waynad supported him.

Earlier he mentioned that he believed that the Adivasis should not be restricted and categorized and the entire planet should be open to them with all opportunities.

"On the other hand, he said, the BJP described them as 'Vanvasis'. He said, there was 'a perverted logic behind the word 'Vanvasi'. It denies that adivasis were the original owners of India; it also restricts you



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during his visit, in Waynad on Sunday

to the jungle," Rahul said. Rahul Gandhi said, the idea behind the word 'Vanvasi' means that you belong to the jungle and you should never leave the jungle. "This is simply not acceptable to us. This word is a distortion of your history, your tradition and it is an attack on your relationship

with this country. For us, you are Adivasis and we can learn from you", he said. Referring to the contribution of Adivasis in protecting the environment, he pointed out, today, the word 'environment' has become fashionable. "For a few hundred years, modern society has been

destroying the environment...burning forests, creating pollution. Now, suddenly the word 'environment protection' has come", he said, while pointing out, "but look at the wisdom of Adivasis. They have been talking about environmental protection for 3,000-5,000 years.

Hold all-party peace rally in Manipur: Adhir to PM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to lead an all-party delegation to Manipur and hold a "peace rally" there to bring an end to the ethnic violence in the northeastern state.

Prime Minister Modi must tell the people of Manipur that they need not fear and the entire nation stands with them for the restoration of peace in the state, Chowdhury said.

Modi should lead an all-party delegation to hold a peace rally in the state torn by ethnic violence and "we will join", he said in the 'Aap Ki Adalat' show on India TV.

"We made this suggestion in writing in the House, but they did not agree. This is nothing but 'bahumat ka bahubali' (arrogance of majority)", Chowdhury said. When asked why the opposition walked out even before the prime minister



started speaking on Manipur, Chowdhury said, "During his speech, we waited for him to speak on Manipur for two hours, but he did not do so. Even his ministers started doing off during his speech. You can watch the visuals." "He spoke on the Manipur issue only for three minutes towards the end of his speech.

Had we known that he would speak on Manipur, we would not have walked out", he said. Chowdhury also said that his fight against Prime Minister Modi and West Bengal Chief Minister Banerjee is "not personal, but political and ideological".

logical". Asked about his remarks describing the Trinamool Congress as a party of thieves", Chowdhury said, "Patna's (opposition meeting) topic was different and Bengal's topic was different.

Panchayat elections were going on in Bengal... At a time when the INDIA bloc has been formed at a national level, and Narendra Modi has become worried, it is impossible for me to react more on this." On whether violence was still taking place in West Bengal, Chowdhury said, "Yes. Kuch bhi theek nahin hai (Nothing is alright).

Hum jo karte hain, locally karte hain (whatever we do, we do it locally). Iska matlab yeh nahin ki sab theek hai (it does not mean, everything is alright)." "There is a difference between pond (talaab) and river (nadi). For me, Bengal is a pond, and India is a river. Naturally, we will give more preference to the river than to a pond.

RaGa overtook PM in viewership during Monsoon Session: Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday claimed that their top most leader former party president Rahul Gandhi has overtaken Prime Minister Narendra Modi in terms of viewership during the Monsoon Session of the Parliament this year.

A day after ruling BJP tried to score on the subject, the grand party shared some data on the viewership of both Rahul Gandhi and Modi's speeches and the party on X platform (formerly known as Twitter).

Rahul Gandhi has received more viewership than Modi in Parliament across all social media platforms, claimed Congress. According to a post by the AICC Rahul Gandhi's speech got 3.5 lakh views while Modi got 2.3 lakh views on Sansad TV.

On YouTube, the Gandhi scion speech got 26 lakh views, and PM Modi's over 2 hours long speech got only 6.5 lakh views.

On X and Facebook, Rahul Gandhi's speech was viewed by 23,000, 73 lakh viewers whereas Prime Minister Modi's speech received 22,000 views

on Twitter and 11,000 views on Facebook respectively, the Congress party claimed. However, the party did not mention the period of the data. Rahul Gandhi spoke from 12:09 pm to 12:46 pm i.e. 37 minutes during the No-Confidence Motion in Parliament on 9 August while PM spoke for 2 hours and 13 minutes on 10 August in the Lok Sabha.

BJP claimed that Prime Minister Modi is far ahead of Rahul Gandhi in terms of social media followers. While PM Modi has 90.9 million followers, the Gandhi scion has 24 million followers.

Quoting a study by Observer Research Foundation (ORF), the PM's account on the X platform received around 2.77 crore engagements in the last three months while Rahul Gandhi's account received 58.23 lakh (approx) engagements in the same period.

PM Modi, who has 6.5 million subscribers on YouTube received 25.46 crore views in the past one month and Rahul Gandhi gained 4.82 crore views in the same period.

On Sansad TV's Youtube channel, the Congress shared screenshots showcasing view-

ership on both of the leaders' speeches in the Parliament. Congress showed that Rahul Gandhi's speech in Parliament grabbed more viewers than PM Modi's.

As the two parties pushed their campaigns on various online platforms in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, BJP reiterated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media interactions have a significantly wider audience than those of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. According to the data, Modi's account on X received approximately 79.9 lakh engagements in the past month whereas Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's account received 23.43 lakh engagements.

Rahul Gandhi and Prime Minister Modi both had their tweets compared by the Congress. According to the party's social media team, PM Modi's most recent 30 tweets had 21.59 million impressions, compared to 48.13 million for Rahul Gandhi.

According to the BJP, PM Modi's account on Facebook had 57.89 lakh engagements in the previous month, while Rahul Gandhi's account had 28.38 lakh.

IAF airlifted over 68K soldiers to Ladakh after Galwan Valley clashes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Over 68,000 Army soldiers, around 90 tanks and other weapon systems were airlifted by the Indian Air Force to eastern Ladakh from across the country for rapid deployment along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) after the deadly clashes in the Galwan Valley, top sources in defence and security establishment said.

The IAF deployed its Su-30 MKI and Jaguar jets in the region for round-the-clock surveillance and intelligence gathering on the enemy build-up, apart from putting several squadrons of combat aircraft in "offensive posturing" in the wake of the clashes on June 15, 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades, they said.

The troops and weapons were ferried by the transport fleet of the IAF within a "very short period of time" for quick deployment in various inhospitable areas along the LAC under a special operation, the sources said while highlighting how the force's strategic airlift capability has increased over the years.

In view of the escalating tensions, the IAF had also deployed a sizeable number of remotely piloted aircraft (RPAs) in the region to keep a hawk-eye vigil on Chinese activities, they said. The IAF aircraft airlifted multiple divisions of the Indian Army, totalling over 68,000 troops, more than 90 tanks, nearly 330 BMP infantry combat vehicles,

radar systems, artillery guns and many other equipments, they said. The total load carried by the transport fleet of the IAF, which included C-130J Super Hercules and C-17 Globemaster aircraft, was 9,000 tonnes and displayed the IAF's increasing strategic airlift capabilities, they added.

Following the clashes, a plethora of fighter jets, including Rafale and Mig-29 aircraft, were deployed for combat air patrol while various helicopters of the IAF were pressed into service for the transport of prefabricated structures, ammunition and spares of military equipment to mountainous bases.

Murmu to launch frigate Vindhyagiri on Aug 17

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on August 17 will launch Vindhyagiri, a Project 17A frigate, at Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Limited (GRSE), Kolkata, Navy said here on Sunday.

Vindhyagiri, named after the mountain range in Karnataka, is the sixth ship of the Project 17A frigates. These warships are follow-ons of the Project 17 Class frigates (Shivalik Class), with improved stealth features, advanced weapons and sensors and platform management systems.

"Vindhyagiri, a technologically advanced frigate, pays a befitting tribute to the distinguished service of its predecessor, the erstwhile INS Vindhyagiri, the Leander Class



ASW Frigate. The old Vindhyagiri in its nearly 31 years of service from 1981 to 2012, had witnessed various challenging operations and multinational exercises. The newly christened Vindhyagiri stands as a symbol of India's determination to embrace its rich naval heritage while propelling itself towards a future of indigenous defence capabilities. Under the Project 17A program, a total of four

ships by Mazagaon Docks Limited, Mumbai and three ships by GRSE are under construction. The project's first five ships have been launched by MDL and GRSE, between 2019-2022.

Project 17A ships have been designed in-house by Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau, the pioneer organisation for all warship design activities. Aligning with the country's resolute commitment to 'AatmaNirbharta', a substantial 75% of the orders for equipment and systems of Project 17A ships are from indigenous firms, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The launch of Vindhyagiri is an apt testament to incredible progress our Nation has made in building a self-reliant naval force.

NIA raids in 5 States in PFI conspiracy case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday conducted a series of raids and searches across five States as part of its continued efforts to foil the Popular Front of India (PFI) conspiracy to disturb peace by driving a communal wedge among the people to destabilise the country.

The NIA said a total of 14 locations in Kannur, Malappuram, Dakshin Kannada, Nashik, Kolhapur, Murshidabad and Katihar districts of the States of Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Bihar were raided. "Several incriminating digital devices as well as documents

were seized during the raids aimed at unearthing the banned outfit's conspiracy to disturb peace and communal harmony of India", the agency said. The NIA has been working to unravel and thwart the attempts by PFI and its top leadership to create an armed cadre and raise a PFI Army for establishing an Islamic Caliphate in India by the year 2047 through acts of terror, violence and sabotage.

PFI has been conspiring to radicalise gullible youth and provide them weapons training in a bid to further its violent anti-India agenda by fighting against certain sections of the society, as per NIA investigations. NIA suspects several mid-rung PFI agents to be operating

as master trainers who have been conducting Arms Training Camps across various States of the country for training its highly radicalised PFI cadres in the use of weapons, iron rods, swords and knives. On the basis of intelligence and investigative analysis and insights, it has been raiding multiple locations in various States over the past several months to identify and arrest these cadres and operatives.

The case against PFI was registered here by the NIA in April 2022. Incriminating evidence was collected by the agency, leading to the arrest of several top PFI leaders, including over a dozen National Executive Committee (NEC)

members, following country-wide operations during September 2022. The NIA conducted intensive investigations against the accused and filed a chargesheet against 19 of them in March 2023. PFI as an organisation was also named in the chargesheet. Subsequently, in April 2023, a supplementary chargesheet was filed against the PFI National Coordinator of weapons training. Investigations are continuing to unearth and expose the complete PFI conspiracy to indoctrinate and train susceptible youth to create mayhem in country. The eventual aim of the conspiracy is to create an Islamic State by the time India completes a century of its Independence, it added.

Indian-origin researcher detects 135 new melanin genes causing pigmentation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A new study by an Indian-origin researcher has identified 135 new genes associated with pigmentation, which when targeted could help in developing melanin-modifying drugs for vitiligo and other pigmentation diseases.

The skin, hair and eye colour of humans is determined by the light-absorbing pigment known as melanin.

"By understanding what regulates melanin, we can help protect lighter-skinned people from melanoma, or skin cancer," Vivek Bajpai, the lead research author, said.

"By targeting these new melanin genes, we could also develop melanin-modifying drugs for vitiligo and other pigmentation diseases," he added. The researchers found 169 functionally diverse genes that impacted melanin production.

Of those, 135 were not previously associated with pigmentation. The article recently published in the 'Science' journal features research by Bajpai, an assistant professor in the School of Sustainable Chemical, Biological and Materials Engineering at the University of Oklahoma, and collaborators from Stanford University.

Melanin is produced within special structures called melanosomes, which are found inside melanin-producing pigment cells called melanocytes.

Although all humans have the same number of melanocytes, the amount of melanin they produce differs and gives rise to the variation in human skin colour.

"To understand what actually causes different amounts of melanin to be produced, we used a technology called CRISPR-Cas9 to genetically engineer cells," Bajpai said.

Jadavpur, Jamia Hamdard should not get IoE tag: UGC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An expert panel of the UGC have recommended that Jadavpur University and Jamia Hamdard University, which were shortlisted by the Centre for granting Institutions of Eminence (IoE) status, should not be granted the tag, according to officials.

Also, the Tamil Nadu government has withdrawn the proposal submitted earlier to confer the status of IoE on the Anna University, they said. The Ministry of Education is yet to take call on the recommendations by the Empowered Expert Committee (EEC) and the University Grants Commission (UGC). "Jadavpur University, a state public varsity had initially submitted a proposal with budget outlay of Rs 3,299



creore under the scheme.

Subsequently, the Ministry had sought financial commitment from the West Bengal government for their share of funds since the scheme has a provision to fund up to Rs 1,000 crore of the proposed outlay only and to ensure continuity of funds for the implementation plans in case of any shortfall," a top official privy to the development told PTI.

"However, the same was



not agreed to by West Bengal government and it revised the proposal, first to Rs 1,015 crore and then again revised steeply downward to Rs 606 crore with 25 per cent of the amount to be generated by the university at its level.

Noticing a significant decrease in the budget outlay, the matter was referred to the UGC and EEC to examine the proposal afresh and both of them recommended the

Ministry of Education to not consider the university for IoE status," the official added. No response was available from the three universities on the issue.

The Education Ministry had launched the IoE scheme in 2018 as per which 20 institutions were to be selected -- 10 public and 10 private ones -- that would enjoy complete academic and administrative autonomy.

In the first lot, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, IIT Bombay and the Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science (IISc) were awarded the IoE status in the public sector, and Manipal Academy of Higher Education and BITS Pilani in private sector, while the Jio Institute by Reliance Foundation was given the tag in Greenfield category.

Microplastics in lungs of 2/3rd marine mammals: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Microplastics particles which have been found in almost all the body parts of humans have now reached the fats and lungs of two-thirds of marine mammals, according to a recent study published in the Environmental Pollution journal.

"This is an extra burden on top of everything else they face: climate change, pollution, noise, and now they're not only ingesting plastic and contending with the big pieces in their stomach, but they're also being internalized," said Greg Merrill Jr., a fifth-year graduate student at the Duke University Marine Lab.

"Some proportion of their mass is now plastic," Merrill added. The samples in this

study were acquired from 32 stranded or subsistence-harvested animals between 2,000 and 2021 in Alaska, California and North Carolina. Twelve species are represented in the data, including one bearded seal, which also had plastic in its tissues.

Plastics are attracted to fats -- they are lipophilic -- and so are believed to be easily attracted to blubber, the sound-producing melon on a toothed whale's forehead, and the fat pads along the lower jaw that focus sound to the whales' internal ears. The study sampled these three kinds of fats plus the lungs and found plastics in all four tissues.

Plastic particles identified in tissues ranged on average from 198 microns to 537 microns. A human hair is about 100 microns in diameter.

Merrill pointed out that, in addition to whatever chemical threat the plastics pose, plastic pieces also can tear and abrade tissues.

"Now that we know plastic is in these tissues, we're looking at what the metabolic impact might be," he said. For the next stage of his dissertation research, Merrill will use cell lines grown from biopsied whale tissue to run toxicology tests of plastic particles.

Polyester fibres, a common byproduct of laundry machines, were the most common in tissue samples, as was poly-ethylene, which is a component of beverage containers. Blue plastic was the most common colour found in all four kinds of tissue.

A 2022 paper in Nature Communications estimated, based on known concentra-

tions of microplastics off the Pacific Coast of California, that a filter-feeding blue whale might be gulping down 95 pounds of plastic waste per day as it catches tiny creatures in the water column. Whales and dolphins that prey on fish and other larger organisms also might be acquiring accumulated plastic in the animals they eat, Merrill said.

"We haven't done the math, but most of the microplastics probably do pass through the gut and get defecated. But some proportion of it is ending up in the animals' tissues," Merrill said.

"For me, this just underscores the ubiquity of ocean plastics and scale of this problem," he said, adding, "Some of these samples date back to 2001. Like, this has been happening for at least 20 years."

PM's LS constituency to host many events ahead of polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The district administration is going to organise various programmes in this parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, especially prior to 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Giving this indication while addressing a press conference here on Sunday, District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam gave the details of all these events. These programmes are 'Kashi Sansad Sanskrit Mahotsav' (cultural festival), 'Sanskad Khel Pratiyogita' (sports competitions), 'Sanskad Gyan Pratiyogita (quiz contest) and 'Tourists Guide Competition'.

The DM said that the proposed 'Kashi Sansad Sanskrit Mahotsav' would be such a platform for the budding artists in the fields of various genres, so that such artists would be able to showcase their talents. "A proper and big stage will be provided in which competitions of music, dance, street plays etc will be organised," he said, adding



DM S Rajalingam addressing a press conference in Varanasi on Sunday.

that these competitions will be conducted, starting from nyay panchayat level and then passing through the blocks, it will be held at district level.

According to him, these programmes will be organised at the nyay panchayat level from September 1 to 5, at the block level from September 6 to 12 and at the district level from September 13 to 15. The mega final event will be held on September 17. All the residents of the district can participate in it on a large-scale.

He said that the proposed Sansad Khel Pratiyogita (sports competitions) will be organised from October 2 in five age-group categories including a separate section for the Divyangjan (persons with disabilities). In the same event, the competitions will be organised right from panchayat to district level. He said that the main aim of the event is to promote sports and provide a platform to all and added that last year 1,15,000 participants had shown their sporting talents in

this competition. "This time even more participants are expected to take part in the event," he added.

Besides, Rajalingam said that for the first time Sansad Gyan Pratiyogita (quiz contests) in which mainly the questions related to the religious and cultural history of Kashi will be asked and knowledge of the participants will be tested.

The event will be organised from January 12 to January 26 next year. According to him, the last event will be Tourist Guide Competition, in which the persons related to particular field can take part in essay writing and quiz competitions and in the contests, their knowledge regarding the information related to Ganga ghats of Banaras, Jainism and Buddhism apart from others will be tested and the event will be organised in February next year.

Besides, a competition will also be organised among the people of social media who make videos etc.

Breakthrough in robbery & murder case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The police got a big success in the case of robbery and murder in Hetapatti in the Tharvai police station area. The miscreants of Shahjahanpur had an encounter with the police and the SOG team in Nawabganj area in the early hours of Sunday. Two miscreants who fired at the police team got shot in the leg. The injured have been admitted to a hospital for treatment. The police arrested four miscreants. Top officials also reached the spot on receipt of information. Looted jewellery and weapons have been recovered from their possession. According to the police, during interrogation of the miscreants arrested during the encounter in Shankargarh a day earlier a clue was found about the miscreants involved in the robbery in Hetapatti. Information was received that the miscreants were about to catch an early morning train from Lalgalpalganj railway station and go towards Lucknow. The police reached the spot and arrested the four miscreants and recovered two pistols, two

empty cartridges and goods related to the murder of Tharvai and robbery incident from them. In the encounter the accused Dharendra alias Laddu and Kushalpal alias Krishna were shot in the leg.

After interrogating the accused, five women of their family were arrested near Manil Ka Inara in Nawabganj police station area at the instance of the accused Dayaram and Nanhe alias Jairam. The arrested accused included Dayaram, Nanhe alias Jairam and Kushal Pal alias Krishna, of Ishapur village and Dharendra alias Laddu of Milkia village, all under Nigohi police station in Shahjahanpur. A total of 11 cases are registered against Dayaram in Shahjahanpur, Pilibhit, Prayagraj and eight cases are registered against Dharendra in Etah, Shahjahanpur and Prayagraj. Besides, two cases are registered against Nanhe and Kushpal.

Five women of their family who helped them have also been arrested. The jewellery looted in Tharvai has also been recovered from these women. The arrested women

include Shanti Devi, Vedavati, Lilavati and Gangadevi alias Jhilmila, Belavati.

A sum of Rs 73,064 has been recovered from the possession of the miscreants besides ornaments and other valuable items. A loot was committed in the shop of Santosh Kumar Kesarwani in Hetapatti market Shopkeeper Santosh Kumar and his wife Aarti Devi and brother Ashok Kumar Kesarwani were also thrashed. The watchman of the market was murdered. The miscreants had also gang-raped the watchman's minor granddaughter. Five police teams were engaged in the search of miscreants. The STF team was also deputed for working out this case.

FIRs REGISTERED: The police registered two separate FIRs against slain gangster-politician Atiq Ahmed's son Ali Ahmed and his henchman Asad Kalia for extortion. Both Ali and Kalia are lodged in Naini Central Jail. While the first FIR was on a complaint submitted by Mohamad Afzal of Kasari Masari, the second complainant is Wasik Jafri, brother of former MLA Ashif

Jafri. Afzal complained that on August 7 he got information that a few people were trying to grab his land. When he went to face them, Faizan and Altamash asked Afzal that Ali and Kalia said that either he should give Rs 30 lakh as extortion money or hand over the land to them. In the second case, Wasik Jafri of Dhoonganjan complained that Imran, brother-in-law of Kalia, has sought an extortion of Rs 10 lakh and threatened him to hand over the money or face action.

ARRESTED: A joint team of special operation group (SOG) and Kotwali police of Fatehpur district claimed to have arrested Mohd Imtiyaz (72), a resident of Maheva (Naini) from Lucknow who was absconding despite the fact that the court had issued an order under section 82 of CrPC.

Police, however, said that Mohd Imtiyaz was arrested from an apartment in Lucknow late on Friday night.

A total of four cases were registered against him under different sections of IPC in Fatehpur.



CRS Manoj Arora inspecting Banaras Coaching Depot in Varanasi on Saturday.

CRS inspects Banaras station

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Commissioner Railway Safety (CRS), Central Circle Mumbai, Manoj Arora inspected the Accident Relief Train (ART) and Accident Relief Medical Equipment (ARME) vehicles available at Banaras Coaching Depot here on Saturday. He also inspected Banaras railway station of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) in order to ensure safety in operation and security of passengers.

The CRS started his inspection from Banaras Coaching Depot with plantation of saplings and then he made a thorough inspection of the depot. While reviewing the arrangements for the safety of the working employees, Arora made a thorough inspection of all types of safety measures in the rakes maintained in the coaching depot. During this, he tested smoke detectors, fire detectors and alarms in modern LHB coaches and expressed satisfaction on getting them repaired. He also inquired about the

timely maintenance of the rakes of trains as well as tested the safety knowledge of the employees working in the depot. He appreciated the quality level of maintenance of rakes being done in the depot. Along with this, he also administered oaths to the employees working there to be always responsible for their safety. During this, the refresher training of the employees was reviewed and expressed satisfaction over the knowledge of the employees from the point of view of safety.

Thereafter, the CRS reached Banaras railway station and inspected the station yard. He did a thorough inspection of route relay interlocking, data logger with sensor, fouling mark with sensor, track occupation detection, colour light signals, relay room, power distribution system, battery room etc.

Arora also checked the competency certificates and periodic medical examination reports of the safety related employees of Engineering, Signal and Operations departments.

Surveillance net to be widened

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The district administration and Prayagraj police have decided to widen the surveillance net by linking CCTV cameras installed at main gates of schools and colleges in urban and rural areas of the district to the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC).

Not only this with an aim of making Sangam City more secure for denizens it has been decided to instal CCTV cameras not only on main roads but also in streets and lanes. Apart from schools and colleges, markets, hospitals, wine shops,

etc. too have been asked to provide access to CCTV installed at their respective places to the ICCC.

The CCTV footage of these cameras will be preserved for five months. In the initiative, being taken under 'Operation Drishti', the district administration has identified a number of schools affiliated with various boards like the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), UP Board of Secondary Education (UP Board), Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), etc which will now play an important role in this mega exercise.

Experimental play staged

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

As part of Vinod Rastogi's birth centenary year celebrations, an experimental play "Khwajasara" was staged by Vinod Rastogi Smriti Sansthan at Ravindralay on Sunday evening under the direction of Ajay Mukherjee.

The play based on the story of agony, pain and feelings of a transgender compelled the audience to think as to why people with different identity do not find a place in the society and become a laughing stock.

Shammo Devi narrated the story right from her childhood to a grown up transgender who

preferred not to adopt singing and dancing but to educate herself and find a respectable place in the society.

Sudhanshu Giri impressed a lot with his transgender get-up and acting talent. He was supported on the stage by Abhilash Narain, Madhurima Bose, Pratima Srivastava, Shubham Paliwal, Himanshu Tiwari, Prateek Singh, Abhishek Nishad, Ahona Bhattacharya, Shubham Verma and others. Back stage responsibilities were shared by Sujoy Ghoshal (light design), Ashish Yadav (music operation), Alok Rastogi (producer) and Ajay Mukherjee (writer and director).

Government of Haryana | G20 2023 INDIA | 75 Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav Meri Maati Mera Desh 09th-15th August 2023

“Partition’s pains can never be forgotten. Partition Horrors Remembrance Day keep reminding us of the need to remove the poison of social divisions, disharmony and further strengthen the spirit of oneness, social harmony and human empowerment.”

- Narendra Modi

Partition Horrors Remembrance Day State Level Programme

Chief Guest

Sh. Manohar Lal

Chief Minister, Haryana

Date - Monday, 14th August, 2023

Time - 10:00 AM

Venue - Fatehabad

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To be spiritually inclined one must leave the baggage behind and start afresh



RAVI VALLURI

Once there lived a physicist, who taught in several universities and was decorated with numerous awards for his pioneering work. He became a celebratory figure and was to develop a swollen head. The master of his field, he lost his equilibrium and was charged with salacious behaviour and lost his sheen in the society.

TROUBLES COME IN THREES

The administration stripped him of all the awards and his wife deserted him. The professor was unable to grapple with these misadventures in life. Quite ironically the physicist who had been on the verge of decoding the mysteries of the universe was soon enveloped by darkness. At his tethers end, his edifice of wisdom collapsed and he began dabbling with drugs and alcohol, to which he became addicted. Sakhya Muni, Lord Buddha had said, "Be strong, but not rude. Be kind, but not weak. Be humble not shy, be proud but not arrogant."

BABY STEPS TO RECOVERY

Some well-wishers from his fraternity were filled with compassion for their former colleague. The physicist was wheeled into a rehabilitation centre and under a detoxification regimen was slowly weaned off alcohol and drugs. He also underwent the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living and learnt the unique rhythmic breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya which provided the ballast for his recovery. Upon recovery he attempted to regain his lost fame by unearthing the quintessential truth about the origin of universe.



THE PROCESS OF LETTING GO BEGINS

The spiritual journey took him halfway around the world till he arrived in the Himalayas, at the feet of an accomplished master. This pure person dressed in ochre robes welcomed the professor with a warm embrace. His searching eyes scanned the professor. The physicist narrated his story. He concluded by adding that he was now trying to fathom the mysteries hidden in the womb of the universe from both spiritual and scientific points of view. "But this is what you were doing at the university and in your laboratory, is it not professor?" enquired the seer. The Professor felt that the Zen Master could ignite the missing spark from his life to upend the pyramid. He had successfully extricated himself from the whirlpool of gloom and he could see light at the end of the tunnel. Yet there was something missing in his life ...!

TIME YOU LET LOOSE

"So, what new are you attempting to unravel? Ok, let us have a cup of tea," said the venerated soul. The professor appeared at ease as the enlightened soul poured the tea. Soon the cup began to overflow. Seeing this, the professor exclaimed, "Holy Sir, the cup is overflowing!" "Precisely, and I was examining your reaction," remarked the Master. "Unless you just let go of your self-conceit, the way the tea overflowed from the cup, you will never learn anything afresh. This is the secret," stated the Zen Master. "Drop all your desires when you approach a Master. Let go of your baggage," he added. The Zen Master was to further add, "Buddha advocated four concepts-

- Observe the body (Kayana Paschana)
- Observe the sensations (Vedanana Paschana)
- Observe the flow of mind (Chittana Paschana)
- Observe your true nature (Dhammanu Paschana)."

The professor realised that he stumbled into uncharted territories without understanding his mind. He was neither simple nor humble or aware. These were the keys for him to let go and become absolutely childlike which he was taught in the Happiness Programme but his arrogant mind did not appreciate.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. and is a faculty of the Art of Living)

Discoms show signs of 'turn around'

Without long-pending reforms in the power sector, the momentum can't be sustained. Electricity distribution should be deregulated at the earliest



UTTAM GUPTA

According to PRAAPTI (Payment Ratification and Analysis in Power Procurement for Transparency in Invoicing of generators) - a portal maintained by the Ministry of Power (MoP), the legacy dues of power generating companies (gencos) from distribution companies or discoms in short came down from Rs 1,20,540 crore in June 2022 to Rs 61,025 crore in July 2023. If, we include dues of transmission companies (transcodes) and traders also, then the total dues of all those involved in the electricity supply chain decreased from Rs 1,39,747 crore to Rs 69,957 crore during the same period.

The MoP has attributed this drastic improvement in the clearance of dues by discoms to the implementation of late payment surcharge (LPS) and related matters Rules, 2022 as well as the 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD) launched by the Union Government in July 2021 (the scheme was announced by the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget for 2021-22).

The LPS rules made it mandatory for distribution companies to clear their legacy dues as existing on June 3, 2022, in a time-bound manner in 12 equal monthly instalments (EMI) with the benefit of non-applicability of the LPS after its implementation date. The same rules are also provided for time-bound clearance of current dues failing, which will attract a power supply cut.

This was a sort of carrot-and-stick policy. On the liberal side, it provided for splitting the payment liability in 12 EMIs alongside total exemption from any penal provision for this one year. On the stringent side, if the dues including current dues are not cleared within 12 months, the discoms attract penal provisions.

One would have expected discoms to avail of this opportunity and clear all of their legacy dues besides ensuring that even current dues are not kept pending. But, they cleared only half. Hopefully, they would pay back the remaining 50 per cent 'promptly' or else they run the risk of being penalized including a cut in power supply. A more crucial point is whether the discoms are in a position to pay back. For close to two-and-a-half decades, they have been under serious financial stress. We can get a sense of this by looking at the fact that

Since 2000, the Union Government has sanctioned for discoms four financial restructuring packages or FRPs (a jargon for condoning their accumulated debt) in 2002, 2012, 2015 and 2021. The irony is despite these FRPs, their total debt at the end of the financial year (FY) 2021-22 was Rs 620,000 crore.

Discoms have borrowed on an increasing scale primarily to fund their galloping losses year-after-year. The losses in recent years say it all 2015-16: Rs 52,000 crore; 2017-18: Rs 17,000 crore; 2019-20: Rs 34,500 crore; 2020-21: Rs 50,200 crore; 2021-22: Rs 59,000 crore; The dip during 2017-18 was due to an FRP in 2015-16 under which debt relief of Rs 400,000 crore was given.

The collateral damage of their persistent precarious finances was a pile-up of their dues to independent power producers (IPPs) and public sector power generators, such as NTPC, to Rs 1,39,747



crore as of June 2022. Against this backdrop, how come discoms have garnered funds to pay back over 50 per cent of their dues?

Here comes the RLRBSD. The Scheme identifies the aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses - a jargon for power theft - and shortfall in the average revenue realisation from the sale of electricity vis-a-vis the average cost of supply (cost of purchase, wheeling and distribution), or the ACS-ARR gap, as major causes for losses of discoms and their resulting financial stress. Accordingly, it sets the target for both - AT&C losses to 12-15 per cent from the existing level and the ACS-ARR gap to 'zero' - to be achieved by March 2025.

Under the Scheme, requisite investment is proposed for improving the reliability and quality of the power supply, reducing losses and improving the efficiency of discoms. It has compulsory pre-paid and smart metering components to be implemented across the power supply chain, including in about 250 million households. An outlay of Rs 300,000 crore is contemplated under it.

Of this, while the Centre is expected to contribute around Rs 60,000 crore, the balance of Rs 240,000 crore is to be sourced from multilateral funding agencies such as ADB and World Bank (WB). The Centre's contribution is met from the previous allocations of the ongoing schemes, viz. the Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS) and the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY).

(The writer is a policy analyst)

THE COLLATERAL DAMAGE OF THEIR PERSISTENT PRECARIOUS FINANCES WAS A PILE-UP OF THEIR DUES TO INDEPENDENT POWER PRODUCERS (IPPS) AND PUBLIC SECTOR POWER GENERATORS

RLRBSD has been under implementation for two years now. What is the outcome? The AT&C losses of discoms went down from 22.32 per cent during 2020-21 to 13.5 per cent during 2022-23. As for the ACS-ARR gap, this has reduced from Rs 0.54 per kWh during 2020-21 to Rs 0.15 per kWh in 2022-23. Comparing these numbers with the targets, it turns out that discoms have already achieved the target for AT&C losses whereas in respect of ACS-ARR gap, the drop is impressive. At this pace, reaching zero gaps by March 2025 is eminently possible.

Here, it is pertinent to note that under Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) launched in November 2015 cost the States' exchequer a whopping Rs 400,000 crore, Union Government had aimed at reducing discom AT&C losses from 20.7 per cent during 2015-16 to 15 per cent by 2018-19. It also intended to reduce the ACS-ARR gap from Rs 0.59 per unit during 2015-16 to 'zero' by 2018-19. But, the outcome of that scheme was disappointing even as the targets were missed by a huge margin.

During 2019-20, AT&C's losses of discoms were 18.9 per cent against the 15 per cent target for 2018-19. The ACS-ARR gap during 2019-20, stood at Rs 0.42 per unit against a target of 'zero' for 2018-19. Since then, AT&C losses further increased to 22.32 per cent during 2020-21 whereas the ACS-ARR gap scaled to Rs 0.54 per kWh during 2020-21. In sharp contrast, RLRBSD has done reasonably well.

A steep reduction of close to 9 per cent in AT&C losses in two years points towards the state governments making a dent in power theft is the result of strengthening and modernizing distribution infrastructure (courtesy, investment under the Scheme) on one hand and more effective monitoring and surveillance on the other. These efforts must continue. The states should aim at zero losses. The revenue of discoms has also got a boost from the states releasing their dues for the electricity consumed by their departments and agencies owned by them. The states are also releasing their 'subsidy dues' being the excess of the cost of purchase, transmission and distribution over the subsidized tariff they ask discoms to charge from preferred consumers, viz. poor households and farmers.

While, this should help discoms in turning the corner, given the legacy handicaps (read: high debt and cost of servicing it), the Centre has galvanized state financial institutions such as PFC and REC to give loans to them (for instance, Rs 130,000 crore given under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan') - subject to prudential norms - to enable clearance of the dues as also meet working capital expenses. RLRBSD has made a good beginning. However, sans long-pending reforms in the power sector, the momentum can't be sustained. Electricity distribution should be deregulated and consumers given the power to choose their supplier. And, states should give subsidies directly to the consumers.

Is the ban on Chinese manjha effective?

The Delhi Government banned razor-sharp kite-flying Chinese manjha (sharp thread) in 2017, but is the ban for real?

The answer is 'NO' as the authorities have miserably failed to prevent the manufacturing, stocking and sale of the deadly strings, which is evident from the recurring reports of fatal deaths even post Notification of the ban. The reason for inaction can be authorities' lethargy, sloth or unholy association with the Chinese manjha mafia.

Flying kites, especially on the eve of Independence Day is a common feature in Delhi. It is said to have been introduced in India by Chinese travellers centuries ago. Flying kites at times leads to accidents causing harm and injury to humans and birds. Kite flying becomes lethal and hazardous because of the glass powder and metal-coated strings used



HASAN KHURSHID

in flying kites.

The Chinese manjha and Bareilly ka manjha are most in demand as they make it easier to cut an opponent's kite easily. It's the sharpness of these strings that causes grievous and even fatal injuries to humans and birds. Every year mostly on the occasion of Independence Day hundreds of injured birds are brought for treatment at a charitable bird hospital, in Delhi's Chandni Chowk.

A seven-year-old girl died on July 19, 23, after a stray glass- powder-coated Chinese manjha (kite string) got tangled around her neck and slit in Delhi's Paschim Vihar. Police said her father Sandeep was riding the scooter and the girl was sitting in front. The child fell from the moving

scooter. The tale of deaths caused by deadly strings is not a new phenomenon. The horrible incidents have a history of occurrences with police and other authorities casually taking the serious matter.

On August 24, 2019, a 4-year-old girl reportedly died in East Delhi's Khajori Khas area after her throat was slit by the Chinese manjha. The victim Ishika Sharma was with her family on a scooter to a temple trip. In the same period, a 28-year-old engineer Manav Sharma died on August 15, 2019, at Paschim Vihar, in outer Delhi, after his throat was slit by a manjha, while he was riding a scooter.

On the eve of Independence Day, in 2016, three fatal incidents took place. In the first incident, a thread

slit 3-year-old Sanchi Goyal's neck when she insisted on looking out through the car's sunroof while returning with her parents from a movie. "The manjha had cut through her neck, including the wind-pipe. The cut was so deep that she died instantly", a senior police officer had reportedly said.

In another case too, a 4-year-old Harry had put his head out through the sunroof window when a stray thread slit his throat in the Tilak Nagar area. The same day, a 22-year-old motorcycle rider Jaffar Khan died after a hanging Chinese kite string cut his throat. He fell from his bike, hit his head on the divider and died on the spot. The incident was reported from West Delhi's Mina Wali Nagar.

Even a sub-inspector Manoj Kumar, posted at Anand Vihar, was injured while he was patrolling the area. A kite string reportedly came in his way and his throat was slit. He sustained a deep wound. On July 8, 2016, a middle-aged biker was found in a pool of blood with his throat slit by a kite string on the Thakurdwara Flyover in old Ghaziabad. Ghaziabad authorities enforced a ban on Chinese manjha the day after the death of the biker. A Bench of the High Court of Delhi, comprising Chief Justice G. Rohini and Dr Justice Sangita Dhingra Sehgal, on August 11, 2016, clamped down on the use of 'Chinese Manjha' or any other razor-sharp threads used to fly kites.

The Supreme Court, in November 2017, refused to lift the ban on kite strings such as Chinese Manjha, plastic and nylon manjha and Bareilly ka manjha, which is coated with crushed glass or metal, which had been brought into effect by the National Green Tribunal in 2016. The Delhi Government issued a 'Public Notice' in the exercise of the powers conferred by Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, read with Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs' Notifications No. SO 667 (E), dated 10th December 1992, a Notification was issued on 10th January 2017, by order and in the name of Lt. Governor of Delhi, with the following directions:- "That there shall be a complete ban on the sale, production,

storage, supply, import and use of kite flying thread made out of nylon, plastic or any other synthetic material including popularly known as "Chinese Manjha"

However, despite the abovementioned harsh provisions, the implementation part is lacking and for this following steps are most needed to further prevent the loss of precious lives:-

Hold area police personnel right from SHO to DCP legally accountable wherever an occurrence of injury/ fatal injury takes place.

Ban kite flying on roadsides/ parks/ public places.

Police patrols in kite-selling markets

Control Online supply of banned items through cyber experts.

7 killed in Ukraine's Kherson region

AP ■ KYIV

Seven people — including a 23-day-old baby girl — were killed in Russian shelling in Ukraine's southern Kherson region on Sunday, the country's Internal Affairs Ministry said.

Artillery shelling in the village of Shiroka Balka, on the banks of the Dnieper River killed a family — a husband, wife, 12-year-old boy and 23-day-old girl — and another resident.

Two men were killed in the neighbouring village of Stanislav, where a woman was also wounded.

The attack on Kherson province followed Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar's comments on Saturday attempting to quell rumors that Ukrainian forces had landed on the occupied left (east) bank of the Dnieper in the Kherson region.

"Again, the expert hype around the left bank in the Kherson region began. There are no reasons for excitement," she said.

Kherson regional Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin said Sunday that three people had been wounded in Russian attacks on the province on Saturday.



Ukrainian military officials said Saturday evening that Kyiv's forces had made progress in the south, claiming some success near a key village in the southern Zaporizhzhia region and capturing other unspecified territories.

Ukraine's General Staff said they had "partial success" around the tactically important Robotyne area in the Zaporizhzhia region, a key Russian stronghold that Ukraine needs to retake in order to continue pushing

south towards Melitopol. "There are liberated territories. The defense forces are working," General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, commander of Ukraine's southern forces, said of the southern front.

Battles in recent weeks have taken place on multiple points along the over 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line as Ukraine wages a counteroffensive with Western-supplied weapons and Western-trained troops against Russian forces who invaded nearly 18 months

ago. Ukrainian troops have made only incremental gains since launching a counteroffensive in early June.

In Russia, local officials reported on Sunday that air defense systems shot down two drones over the Belgorod region and one over the neighbouring Kursk region, both of which border Ukraine.

Ukrainian drone strikes on Russian border regions are a fairly regular occurrence. Drone attacks deeper inside

Russian territory have been on the rise since a drone was destroyed over the Kremlin in early May. In recent weeks, attacks have increased both on Moscow and on Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014 — a move that most of the world considered illegal.

Firing drones at Russia, after more than 17 months of war, has little apparent military value for Ukraine but the strategy has served to unsettle Russians and bring home to them the conflict's consequences.

The Wagner mercenary group has played a key role in Russia's military campaign, but there is a "realistic possibility" that the Kremlin is no longer providing funding, according to British defense officials.

In its latest intelligence briefing, the Ministry of Defense said it believed Wagner was "likely moving towards a down-sizing and reconfiguration process" in order to save money, and that the Kremlin had "acted against some other business interests" of Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin. The officials assessed that Belarusian authorities were the "second most plausible paymasters."

2 terrorists killed in exchange of fire with Pak's security forces in Gwadar

PTI ■ KARACHI

Two terrorists were killed by security forces on Sunday after they attacked a convoy, believed to be carrying Chinese engineers, in the port city of Gwadar in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, the army said. Gwadar is one of the focal points of the multi-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) with many Chinese workers working at the port. China is investing heavily in Balochistan under the CPEC.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, the terrorists attacked at 10 am, using small arms and hand grenades.

"However, due to the efficient and swift response, two terrorists were sent to hell with no harm to any military or civil persons," the ISPR said.

It said the military expressed its resolve to "thwart efforts of the enemies of peace and prosperity in the country". There was no mention of any attack on Chinese engineers in the statement. The Baloch Liberation Army - Majeed

Brigade, a militant group active in Balochistan, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Earlier, media outlets in Quetta reported that a convoy of Chinese engineers came under attack as they were passing through the main Gwadar town but reports said they had escaped any casualties or injuries.

An earlier statement by the ISPR said security forces launched an operation after the inputs about the presence of terrorists in the area, killing one militant and injuring three others. "The security forces have cordoned off the entire area [and] launched a search operation," the ISPR said.

"I strongly condemn the heinous terror attack on the Chinese workers convoy in Gwadar. Thankfully, no loss of life happened, but there are reports that the ambush has been repulsed and the attackers have been killed," Senator Sarfraz Bugti said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"The ruptures within the militants' fold are getting wider by the day as our armed forces are courageously thwarting their nefarious designs. There

is no reprieve for anyone who casts an evil eye on Pakistan," he added.

Attacks on Chinese nationals working on the CPEC have been carried out in the past by suspected outlawed separatist groups and militants particularly in or near Gwadar.

Militants and separatists have even targeted Chinese nationals working or doing business in Karachi in the past.

In a similar incident, one soldier was killed and four terrorists were shot dead during clashes in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P)'s Bajaur District on Saturday night.

The ISPR said that the army conducted an intelligence-based operation in Charamang, Bajaur District on the reported presence of terrorists. It added that weapons, ammunition and explosives, including a suicide vest, were also recovered from the militants. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency.

Baloch insurgent groups have carried out several attacks targeting the CPEC projects in the region in recent times.

Russia evacuates 2,000 in Far East flooding

Moscow (AP): Over 2,000 people have been evacuated from flooded areas of the Primorye region in Russia's Far East, emergency officials said Sunday. Heavy downpours flooded villages in the region in the aftermath of Typhoon Khanun, which battered Japan earlier this week before making its way toward the Korean peninsula.

The remnants of the storm, now downgraded from typhoon status, were slated to bring double the monthly rainfall to some areas of the region over the weekend, according to Russian state media. "More than 2,000 people, including 405 children, have been evacuated in Primorye," the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry said on Telegram.

Over 4,300 residential buildings were flooded and 28 settlements cut off by floodwaters, with 16 of the region's districts affected.

Indian journalist lauded for exceptional reporting in US

AP ■ WASHINGTON

An Indian journalist has been felicitated by a business body here in recognition of his exceptional contribution to journalism focused on the US-India relationship.

Rohit Sharma, who works with various Indian and international media outlets, was presented the Distinguished Senior Journalist Award by US-India SME Council during its 20th annual gala early this week.

Elisha Pulvarti, CEO of the US-India SME Council, praised Sharma's outstanding dedication to providing comprehensive insights into the dynamics of the US-India relationship through print and TV media, a media release

said on Saturday. Senator Van Hollen was bestowed with the Mahatma Gandhi Global Peace Award during the event.

Hollen took the opportunity to emphasise the significance of the India-US relationship and underscore the strength of the bond between the two nations.

The US India SME Council, a non-profit organisation established two decades ago, has emerged as a premier advocate for businesses based in Washington, DC.

Its membership comprises US-based small to medium-sized business enterprises owned and operated by Indian Americans and Asian Americans.

Death toll from Maui fire reaches 93

AP ■ LAHAINA

As the death toll from a wildfire that razed a historic Maui town reached 93, authorities warned Saturday that the effort to find and identify the dead was still in its early stages. It's already the deadliest US wildfire for over a century. Crews with cadaver dogs have covered just 3 per cent of the search area, Maui Police Chief John Pelletier said.

"We've got an area that we have to contain that is at least 5 square miles and it is full of our loved ones," noting that the death toll is likely to grow and "none of us really know the size of it yet."

He spoke as federal emergency workers picked through the ash landscape left by the fire that razed the centuries-old town of Lahaina. Teams marked the ruins of homes with a bright orange X to record an initial search, and HR when they found human remains. Pelletier said identifying the dead is extremely chal-



lenging because "we pick up the remains and they fall apart ... When we find our family and our friends, the remains that we're finding is through a fire that melted metal." Two people have been identified so far, he said. Dogs worked the rubble, and their occasional bark — used to alert their handlers to a possible corpse — echoed over the hot and colourless landscape. "It will certainly be the worst natural disaster that Hawaii ever faced," Gov. Josh Green remarked Saturday as he

toured the devastation on historic Front Street. "We can only wait and support those who are living. Our focus now is to reunite people when we can and get them housing and get them health care, and then turn to rebuilding." At least 2,200 buildings were damaged or destroyed in West Maui, Green said, of which 86 per cent were residential. Across the island, he added, damage was estimated at close to USD 6 billion. He

said it would take "an incredible amount of time" to recover. The confirmed death toll was later raised to 93 from the total of 89 announced in a press conference with Green and other officials.

At least two other fires have been burning on Maui, with no fatalities reported thus far: in south Maui's Kihei area and in the mountainous, inland communities known as Upcountry. A fourth broke out Friday evening in Kaanapali, a coastal community north of Lahaina, but crews were able to extinguish it, authorities said.

Green said the Upcountry fire had affected 544 structures, of which 96% were residential.

Emergency managers in Maui were searching for places to house people displaced from their homes. As many as 4,500 people are in need of shelter, county officials said on Facebook early Saturday, citing figures from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Pacific Disaster Centre.

Pakistan media watchdog bans coverage of 11 persons

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan electronic media watchdog has stopped TV channels from giving air space to 11 people, including journalists, accused of criticising the military and the Shehbaz Sharif-led previous government and declared 'proclaimed offenders' or absconders by courts.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) issued a directive on Saturday, citing a decision from the Sindh High Court that such people cannot enjoy certain rights like appearing on television, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Pemra directive has also said that under section 27 of Pemra Ordinance 2002, "hereby prohibits media coverage of above-mentioned individuals being proclaimed offenders on electronic media and refrain from airing any news, reports, statements or tickers of these individuals".

While warning the news channels of serious penalties in case of a violation of the directive, Pemra has also referred the matter to the Council of Complaints, reported Dawn.

The 11 persons include Sabir Shakir, Moid Peerzada, Wajahat Saeed Khan, Shaheen Sehba, Adil Farooq Raja, Ali Nawaz Awan, Murad Saeed and Hammad Azhar.

Shakir, Peerzada, Saeed Khan and Sehba are journalists who are considered supporters of former premier Imran Khan, who was ousted as prime minister in April last year when he fell out with the powerful military establishment.

Saeed, Awan and Azhar were part of Khan's government. Adil Farooq Raja is a former Army major who lives in the UK and has been extremely critical of the Army because of the treatment meted out to Khan.

Miss Universe cuts ties with Indonesian organiser over harassment allegation

AP ■ JAKARTA

The Miss Universe Organisation has cut its ties with its Indonesian franchisee and will cancel an upcoming pageant in Malaysia after contestants complained to police, accusing local organisers of sexual harassment. The New York-based organisation said in a statement late on Saturday it had decided to sever ties with PT Capella Swastika Karya, and its National Director, Poppy Capella.

Six contestants of a Miss Universe Indonesia pageant recently filed complaints with police, accusing local organisers of asking them to strip to their underwear for "body checks" for scars or cellulite, in



a room with about two dozen people present, including men. Five of the contestants said they were then photographed topless. "In light of what we have learned took place at Miss Universe Indonesia, it has become clear that this franchise has not lived up to our brand standards and ethics," the Miss Universe Organisation said on

the social media site X, formerly known as Twitter.

The organisation also said it would be cancelling this year's Miss Universe Malaysia as the Indonesian franchisee also holds the license for the pageant. It said it would make arrangements for the Indonesia 2023 title holder to compete in Miss Universe pageant to be held in El Salvador late this year. The Miss Universe Indonesia pageant was held from July 29 to August 3 to choose Indonesia's representative to the 2023 Miss Universe contest, and was won by Fabienne Nicole Groeneveld. PT Capella Swastika Karya is an Indonesian beauty company which took over the license for Miss Universe Indonesia in March

from Yayasan Putri Indonesia or YPI, an Indonesian foundation that held the license for 30 years.

The company founder, Poppy Capella, denied her involvement in the physical examination during the contest and said that she is against any kind of "violence and sexual harassment". "I, as the National Director and as the owner of the Miss Universe Indonesia license, was not involved at all and have never known, ordered, requested or allowed anyone who played a role and participated in the Miss Universe Indonesia 2023 process to commit violence or sexual harassment through body checking," she posted on social media late Saturday.

Argentines vote in primary election

Buenos Aires: Argentines vote Sunday in a primary election that will act as a bellwether ahead of October general elections and give a hint at how eager citizens are for a change in a country that is suffering one of the world's worst inflation rates. The primary will determine who will be the presidential candidate in the main centre-right opposition coalition in which Buenos Aires Mayor Horacio Rodríguez Larreta is facing off against former Security Minister Patricia Bullrich. Whoever comes out on top will almost certainly be running against Economy Minister Sergio Massa, who is facing a leftist challenger to become the candidate of the ruling coalition. Centre-left President Alberto Fernández

decided not to run for reelection as he suffers from rock-bottom approval ratings amid annual inflation of more than 100 per cent, rising poverty and a rapidly depreciating currency.

The primary will also finally give a firm answer on how much traction upstart right-wing populist candidate Javier Milei has gained with voters. An admirer of former US President Donald Trump, Milei has attracted voters with an anti-establishment message that has particularly resonated with the young. The campaign was largely dominated by the economy, but crime suddenly took center stage in the final days of campaigning after the killing of an 11-year-old girl during a snatch-and-grab robbery in a Buenos Aires suburb Wednesday. AP

Explosion at restaurant in China kills two

Beijing (AP): A gas explosion Sunday at a restaurant in eastern China killed two people, state media reported, two months after a deadly restaurant blast prompted the government to order a safety crackdown.

The explosion at 7:15 a.m. at a grilled fish restaurant in the city of Gaomi was powerful enough to knock a passing car sideways on the street outside, according to a video on the website of the Beijing Youth Daily newspaper.

The cause was under investigation, state TV reported on its website.

The reports gave no details of who was killed or how. State TV said two people also were taken to a hospital with minor injuries.

Car crashes into Welsh coast campground, injuring nine people

London (AP): Nine people were injured when a driver lost control and careened into a tent in a campground on the coast of Wales, police said on Sunday.

At least two people were seriously injured in the crash late Saturday night and one was flown by helicopter to a hospital, Dyfed-Powys Police said. Occupants of the vehicle were among the injured. Clare Harris, who owns the Newgale Campsite with her husband, said the car was speeding and lost control and rolled into an area where people had pitched tents on the open grass that overlooks the Pembrokeshire coast. The car was speeding down the hill, realized it needed to slow down and tried to brake," she said. "It

flipped and rolled several times, and crashed into the tent."

A baby in the tent that was struck was miraculously uninjured, she said.

"It's a tragic accident that the police are dealing with, that's all we can say at the moment," Harris said.

Harris said it's peak season at the campground but it wasn't as busy as normal because of poor weather.

Some campers with medical training quickly attended to the wounded and emergency crews arrived quickly, she said.

Police appealed to the public for footage from dashcams and doorbell cameras that might show the blue Ford Fiesta or its occupants before the crash.

With fading free press, pro-govt influencers rise in El Salvador

AP ■ SAN SALVADOR

Douglas Guzmán's TikTok feed was dotted with workout routines and videos showcasing his favourite parts of his country.

That changed about a year ago, as rights groups, civil society and even some officials criticised El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele for violating human rights in his crackdown on criminal gangs, and said that his unconstitutional bid for re-election would corrode the country's democracy.

Within days of Bukele announcing his bid for a second five-year term, Guzmán's feed was plastered with videos describing Bukele as the "future liberator of Latin America" and slick montages of the leader's "mega-prison" for accused gangsters.

Views on the social media influencer's videos skyrocketed.

The 39-year-old member of Bukele's party said he found a new mission: counteracting negative press from independent media about his



populist president.

"(Journalists) don't know anything. All they do is sit at their desks and watch as President Bukele ... makes a massive effort to save thousands of lives. But they don't see that because they've never cared about the lives of Salvadorans," Guzmán said. "That's why we're here. To show the true reality."

Guzmán is part of an expanding network of social media personalities acting as a megaphone for the millennial leader.

At the same time Bukele has cracked down on the press, his government has embraced those influencers.

As the president seeks to hold onto power, he has harnessed that

flood of pro-Bukele content slowly turning his Central American nation into an informational echo chamber.

"A news organisation doing an investigation can't compare to the sounding board that these influencers have because they flood your social media with the government's narrative," said Roberto Dubon, a communications strategist and congressional candidate for Bukele's former party, FMLN. "What you have is an apparatus to spread their propaganda."

Bukele, a 42-year-old leader often donning a backwards baseball cap, worked years in political advertising before social media became a key to his rise to power five years ago.

Since, his approval ratings have soared to 90 per cent, according to a June CID Gallup poll.

Bukele's modern political messaging, charisma and brutal crackdown on the country's gangs only continue to win him fans domestically and abroad even in the midst of controversy. By doing so, Bukele is using a

playbook increasingly utilised by 21st century autocrats, said Seva Gunitsky, a political scientist at the University of Toronto.

Social media was once hailed as the ultimate democratic tool to organise protests, even revolutions, across the world.

Now, governments from Russia to Uganda are now using it to control the narrative.

"They use this tool of liberation technology to actually prolong and strengthen their rule," Gunitsky said. Such governments use influencers because their content "doesn't look as much like propaganda and is more about shaping the narrative in more subtle ways."

Under Bukele, El Salvador constructed a sophisticated communications machine. It locked down access to information out of line with official messaging and hired teams of former journalists to produce blockbuster-quality videos showcasing security forces taking on the nation's gangs.

Biden to make curbing 'junk fees' a winning issue

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Congressional Democrats care teaming up with the Biden administration and a progressive advocacy group to turn policy efforts to curb "junk fees" into a political rallying cry, betting that a small but potentially potent kitchen table issue will resonate with voters.

President Joe Biden promised in this year's State of the Union address to target unexpected fees tacked on to things like plane and concert tickets, hotel rooms, hospital and cellphone bills and housing transactions. He's since worked with major businesses to see that pricing is more transparent about all fees.

More than a dozen House Democrats around the country plan to hold events organised with help from the Progressive Change Institute to promote the administration's effort to curb junk fees. Events have already happened in suburban Detroit, Philadelphia, central New Jersey and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Similar efforts are planned in coming weeks in Pittsburgh, New York and Las

Vegas, as well as in Wisconsin, Ohio and North Carolina. Still others are in the works.

"Hidden and deceptive junk fees cost Americans billions of dollars every year," said Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the Democratic House leader. "House Democrats will continue to work with President Biden to fight these excessive fees, hold corporations accountable and lower costs for families across the country."

Rep. Elissa Slotkin a swing-district Michigan Democrat who is now running for the Senate, is planning an event in a few weeks and said "the administration's initiative to eliminate junk fees will put money back in peoples' pockets." Fellow Michigan Democratic Rep Rashida Tlaib referred to seat assignment fees in saying she was "taken aback to see airlines charging more for you to sit next to your child" during an event last week at a health centre outside Detroit with Democratic Rep Debbie Dingell.

The push is part of "Bidenomics," the president's effort to stimulate the economy



by increasing social spending in ways he says can strengthen the middle class.

It could ease the sting of inflation, which has moderated in recent months but remains high. But it may also help Biden bridge the gap between an economy that many metrics show is strong — with low unemployment rates and wages rising — and polling suggesting that many Americans don't view that as a positive for Democrats.

"We've got to be in a position to show people what we've done," Biden said at a fundraiser last week for his 2024 reelection campaign in New Mexico,

referring to public perceptions on the economy. He added: "It doesn't show. It takes time for people to realize why that's there."

The Biden administration has used executive action to try to limit ticketing and medical fees, and used federal agencies to try to curb unexpected charges in banking, airlines and other sectors. The president also announced in June that company executives meeting with him at the White House, including from Live Nation Entertainment, the parent company of Ticketmaster, and SeatGeek, had agreed to disclose more ticketing fees up front so consumers have a better idea of final pricing as they comparison shop.

House Democrats have introduced legislation to crack down on unexpected fees and, at their events, some are seeking to localise the issue, inviting people to speak about their experiences of being forced to pay them.

One such story comes from Joe Pfister, a 36-year-old paralegal. He had been looking to buy a home for a year and a half and went for a tour of the

Brooklyn co-op he eventually bought on the day before New York shut in the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. But he wasn't expecting thousands of dollars in additional fees that came later from the mortgage lender, real estate agent and co-op company.

"They just kind of sprang up one at a time, and you just had to keep paying to move your application forward," said Pfister, whose unexpected charges included more than USD 400 worth of questionnaire fees, USD 200 in COVID-19 cleaning fees and a USD 750 move-in deposit. "You were kind of on the ride and you couldn't get off."

The Progressive Change Institute's political arm, the Progress Change Campaign Committee, was closely allied with Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren's 2020 presidential campaign, which was built around championing consumer protections and promoting progressive causes through economic populism.

Combating unexpected fees could be an extension of that theme, with appeals for progressives but also for mod-

erate Democrats and swing voters. "Fighting surprise junk fees is super popular and bipartisan with the public because everyone hates these abusive extra costs," said Adam Green, the Progressive Change Institute co-founder. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the party's House campaign arm, says its members are spending the August recess trumpeting the economic impact of Biden-championed legislation promoting domestic microchip production and the Inflation Reduction Act, which advanced green energy and drastically increased federal social spending.

But some lawmakers, including in competitive districts, are pointing to quelling junk fees as a pocketbook issue that voters will feel more immediately than data points about the larger economy. "Bidenomics is about growing the middle class, which is why President Biden is spearheading the fight against junk fees that are unjustly raising costs," said Kevin Munoz, a spokesperson for Biden's reelection campaign.

Niger's junta gains upper hand over regional bloc

AP ■ NIAMEY

One week after a deadline passed for mutinous soldiers in Niger to reinstate the country's ousted president or face military intervention, the junta has not acquiesced.

No military action has been taken and the coup leaders appear to have gained the upper hand over the regional group that issued the threat, analysts say.

The West African bloc ECOWAS had given the soldiers that overthrew Niger's democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum until last Sunday to release and reinstate him or they threatened military action.

On Thursday, the bloc ordered the deployment of a "standby" force to restore constitutional rule in Niger, with Nigeria, Benin, Senegal and Ivory Coast saying they would contribute troops.

But it's unclear when, how or if the troops will deploy. The move could take weeks or months to set into motion, and while the bloc decides what to do the junta is gaining power, some observers say.

"It looks as though the putschists have won and will stay ... The putschists are holding all the cards and have cemented their rule," said Ulf Laessing, head of the Sahel programme at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a think tank. ECOWAS is unlikely to intervene militarily and risk dragging Niger into civil war, he said, adding that ECOWAS and Western countries would instead likely press the junta to agree to a short transition period. Europe and the United States will have little choice but to recognize the junta in order to continue the security cooperation in the region, Laessing said.

The July 26 coup is seen as a major blow to many Western nations, which viewed Niger as one of its last partners in the conflict-riddled Sahel region south of the Sahara Desert that they could work with to beat back a growing jihadi insurgency linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. The US and France have more than 2,500 military per-

sonnel in the region and together with other European countries have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance and training Niger's forces.

There was still little clarity about what would happen days after ECOWAS announced the "standby" force deployment. A meeting of the region's defense chiefs was postponed indefinitely. The African Union is expected to hold a meeting on Monday to discuss Niger's crisis. The group's Peace and Security Council could overrule the decision if it felt that wider peace and security on the continent were threatened by an intervention.

The delay of the defense chiefs' meeting to discuss the "standby" force shows that ECOWAS views the use of force as a last resort, said Nate Allen, an associate professor at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. "Given the likely challenges an intervention would face, (the use of force would) require a high degree of consensus and coordination not just within ECOWAS, but within the African Union and international community writ large," he said.

But those with ties to the junta say they are preparing for a fight, especially since the soldiers are unwilling to negotiate unless ECOWAS acknowledges its leader, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, who overthrew the president, as the new ruler. "ECOWAS is demanding that (the junta) immediately release President Bazoum and restore him as head of state. Is this a joke?" said Insa Garba Saidou, a local activist who assists Niger's new military rulers with their communications and says he is in direct contact with them. "Whether Bazoum resigns or not, he will never be Niger's president again."

As time drags on, there is mounting concern for the safety of Bazoum, who has been under house arrest with his wife and son since the coup. Those close to him say his situation is deteriorating with no water, electricity and a lack of food.

Pence signals debate plan to attack Trump, DeSantis

AP ■ DES MOINES

Former Vice President Mike Pence said Friday he expected to call out former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis during this month's Republican presidential debate for not insisting on a national abortion ban, an issue Pence says requires federal action.

"My former running mate, the governor of Florida and others are suggesting that the Supreme Court returned the question of abortion to the states," Pence told reporters while touring the Iowa State Fair on Friday. The 2022 Supreme Court decision overturning Roe v. Wade stripped away constitutional protections for the procedure.

"I truly do believe it's vitally important that we seize the opportunity at the national level to advance protections for the right to life, and I'll do so as president," he added. "This is a really big issue. It will be on



the stage in Milwaukee." Pence was referring to the Republican presidential debate scheduled for August 23 in Milwaukee.

Pence has recommended federal legislation that would ban abortion nationwide at 15 weeks of pregnancy, a notion fellow Republican presidential candidate Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina has also proposed. Trump's position that the legality of abortion should be determined by states, not the federal government, was sharply rebuked by top abortion opponents, including the

Susan B Anthony Pro-Life America group. Trump's three Supreme Court nominees voted with the majority last year to overturn the 49-year-old decision that recognized a federal abortion right.

As governor, DeSantis has signed legislation this year banning abortion in Florida at six weeks, but has not pressed for a national ban. That has also drawn criticism from the groups that rebuked Trump. Trump has not said whether he plans to attend the debate in Milwaukee.

Polish govt plans referendum on illegal immigrants

AP ■ WARSAW

Poland's ruling party wants to ask voters in a referendum whether they support accepting "thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa" as part of a European Union relocation plan, the prime minister said Sunday, as his conservative party seeks to hold onto power in an October parliamentary election.

Mateusz Morawiecki announced the referendum question in a new video published on social media. It indicated that his party, Law and Justice, is seeking to use migration in its election campaign, a tactic that helped it take power in 2015. Poland is hosting more than a million Ukrainian refugees, who are primarily white and Christian, but officials have long made clear that they consider Muslims and others from different cultures to be a threat to the nation's cultural identity and security. EU

interior ministers in June endorsed a plan to share out responsibility for migrants entering Europe without authorisation, the root of one of the bloc's longest-running political crises. The Polish government wants to hold the referendum alongside the parliamentary election, scheduled for October 15. Morawiecki said that the question would say: "Do you support the admission of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa under the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?"

The video announcing the question includes scenes of burning cars and other street violence in Western Europe. A Black man licks a huge knife in apparent anticipation of committing a crime. Party leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski then says: "Do you want this to happen in Poland as well? Do you want to cease being masters of your own country?"

Leaders have announced

two other questions in recent days. One will ask voters for their views on privatising state-owned enterprises and the other will ask if they support raising the retirement age, which Law and Justice lowered to 60 for women and 65 for men. The questions are set up to depict the opposition party, Civic Platform, as a threat to the interests of Poles.

The pro-business and pro-EU party, which governed from 2007 to 2015, raised the retirement age during its time in power, favoured some privatisation and signalled a willingness to accept a few thousand refugees before it lost power.

The video takes aim directly at Civic Platform leader Donald Tusk, a former president of the European Council. "Tusk is the greatest threat to our security, he is the greatest threat to Poland's security," Morawiecki says. "Let's not let Tusk — as an envoy of the Brussels elites — demolish security in Poland."

Leader of crime gang moved to max-security prison days

PTI ■ LONDON

Authorities moved the leader of one of Ecuador's most powerful gangs into a maximum-security prison Saturday, three days after the assassination of a presidential candidate who had denounced threats from the feared criminal.

President Guillermo Lasso said the relocation of Los Choneros leader Adolfo Macias, alias "Fito," was meant "for the safety of citizens and detainees." The gang boss was moved out of a jail with lighter security into a maximum-security prison in the same large complex of detention facilities in the port city of Guayaquil.

"Ecuador will recover peace and security," Lasso tweeted. "If violent reactions arise, we will act with full force." About 4,000 soldiers and police officers raided the jail where Macias was being held Saturday and seized weapons, ammunition and explosives. Corrections officials released images of the raid showing several prisoners, including Macias, who is serving a 34-year sentence for drug trafficking, organised crime and homicide.

Ecuador's transformation into a major drug trafficking hub and the ensuing three-year surge of violence reached a new level with Wednesday's assassination of Fernando Villavicencio during a campaign rally in Quito, the capital. The candidate, who was not a front-runner, was known for speaking up against drug cartels. Authorities have not disclosed a motive for the killing. An Ecuadorian judge on Friday ordered preventive detention for six Colombian men described by authorities as being suspected of involvement in the slaying.

Villavicencio, 59, was one of eight registered candidates for the August 20 presidential election.

Suella speaks of tragic loss of lives as migrants drown

PTI ■ LONDON

The British government is under renewed pressure on Sunday as six migrants drowned in the English Channel and 59 were rescued after their vessel sank off the French coast. Home Secretary Suella Braverman said she spoke to UK Border Force teams as she expressed her grief over the "tragic" loss of lives.

The Opposition Labour Party and campaigners renewed their calls on the government to act on the small boat crisis of unsafe vessels being used by migrants to cross over illegally into the UK. "My thoughts and prayers are with those affected by the tragic loss of life in the Channel today. This morning I spoke with our Border Force teams who have been supporting the French authorities in response to this incident," Braverman tweeted on Saturday.

The overloaded vessel got

into difficulty and capsized 20km off Sangatte in France on Saturday. Five French ships, two British ships and a helicopter were involved in the rescue operation to save lives.

"This incident is sadly another reminder of the extreme dangers of crossing the Channel in small boats and how vital it is that we break the people smugglers' business model and stop the boats," a UK government spokesperson said. Labour's shadow immigration minister, Stephen Kinnock, accused the government of having "no workable plan" to sort out the asylum system.

"It's time to end the small boats nightmare — we can't sit by as more lives are put at risk. The country deserves better than this mess," he writes in the 'Sunday Mirror'. The Conservative Party government also faced pressure on the issue from within its own ranks, with

former Tory chairman Jake Berry calling for "radical changes" to turn the tide. "We have a moral duty, both to our own citizens and those asylum seekers, to act," he writes in the 'Sunday Express'.

Meanwhile, human rights groups are urging the government to create more safe routes for asylum seekers to the UK, with the Refugee Council warning "more people will die" unless urgent action is taken.

"This terrible loss of life demonstrates yet again the need for a system of safe passage to the UK for refugees," said refugee charity Care4Calais. The incident came in the wake of a backlash over the UK government's plan to house asylum seekers on a barge docked in south-west England after the first set of migrants had to be removed just days after being moved in over dangerous bacteria fears.



A pedestrian walks past as a woman works on a mural restoration in honor of former President Salvador Allende, and the executed and disappeared, on the perimeter wall of the Alamos 3 and 4 detention center in Santiago, Chile, on Saturday. This year marks 50 years since the military coup that toppled Allende. AP/PTI

Syrian capital rocked by explosions

Beirut (AP): Repeated explosions were heard in the area around the Syrian capital before dawn on Sunday, state media and Damascus residents said. There was no immediate statement from government officials on the source or target of the attack. Similar incidents in the past have usually been attributed to Israeli airstrikes, with Syrian air defences responding to shoot down the missiles.

Britain-based opposition war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the explosion came from a warehouse storing rockets for Iran-backed militias, though it could not confirm whether it was an Israeli strike. The Observatory said it was still unclear if anyone was wounded or killed in the explosion. The most recent reported Israeli strike was on August 7, when Syrian state media reported airstrikes in areas around Damascus, killing at least four Syrian army soldiers.

After checkered results, Malaysian leader needs to unite polarised nation

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

After a checkered victory in Saturday's state elections that saw strong gains by the Malay-Islamist opposition, analysts say Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim faces a daunting task in uniting an increasingly polarized nation and strengthening his nascent unity government.

Anwar's multi-coalition unity government and the opposition Perikatan Nasional (PN) bloc, that includes the conservative Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, retained control of three states each, as widely expected. While the PN bloc, led by former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, failed to alter the status quo, it did make major inroads in the government-controlled states and nearly swept all the seats

on its own turf on the back of continuous support from the ethnic Malay majority.

PN took 60 per cent of the 245 state assembly seats contested, relying on the contention that Anwar and his multiethnic coalition would not protect Malays and Islam. Still, analysts said Sunday that what mattered was that Anwar had successfully kept control of the three richer and more developed states despite a strong opposition campaign.

In power for only eight months, Anwar has not yet won public confidence amid a rising cost of living and a slowing economy. Although his government has a two-thirds majority in Parliament, he was seeking to shore up support among Malay voters. While his Pakatan Harapan alliance generally held on to its political

base, his ally in the government, the United Malays National Organization, suffered another routing after losing the majority of the Malay seats it contested.

"Anwar survived the election. There will still be a constant momentum to pressure UMNO but he has passed this particular hurdle. He hasn't jumped very high over it but at least he passed through," said Bridget Welsh, a Southeast Asia expert with the University of Nottingham in Malaysia. "Still, the country is very polarized. The use of identity politics is tearing at the country's social fabrics. If this continues, what you will see is a potential for instability."

Deputy Trade Minister Liew Chin Tong said the 3:3 result in the state elections has "put an end to any talks of a



midway change of government." He said PN is handicapped as it mobilized Malay anger but failed to win the support of the large Chinese and Indian minorities.

Many Malays, who account for two-thirds of Malaysia's 33 million people, view Anwar as too liberal. They fear their Islamic identity and economic privileges under a decades-old affirmative action program could be chipped away.

Before Anwar, Malaysia had three prime ministers since 2018 as lawmakers shifted allegiance for political gains.

Anwar, 76, told a news conference late Saturday that his federal government remains stable and strong, and urged all sides to accept the people's decision. He said all parties should close ranks and work together for peace and economic development.

But the opposition framed its gains as a protest vote against Anwar's unity government. Muhyiddin said it was a clear sign that UMNO has

become irrelevant to the Malays. He said the people wanted change and that Anwar and his deputy, UMNO leader Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, should resign.

UMNO once led a coalition that had ruled Malaysia since the country's independence from Britain in 1957, but it was defeated in the 2018 general election amid anger over government corruption. It was again routed last year, winning only 26 parliamentary seats.

UMNO and Zahid's support was key to Anwar becoming prime minister after November's general election led to a hung Parliament. UMNO leader Zahid is, however, battling 47 graft charges and his appointment as one of Anwar's two deputies has stained Anwar's anti-corruption platform.

UMNO's poor performance in Saturday's polls will be tricky for Anwar. There are already renewed calls in UMNO for Zahid to step down, but Zahid said in a statement that the mandate won on Saturday will be the basis for the allies in the unity government to work harder to maintain their rule until the 2027 general elections.

Analysts said Anwar also has to move forward with reforms to elevate the economy, restructure his Cabinet and improve efforts to counter the opposition's religious narrative. Peninsula Malaysia is now split, with much of the northern and northeast areas dominated by the Malay-Islamist opposition while Anwar's government controls the urban and richer central and southern zone.

Sebi fines man ₹60L for flouting regulatory norms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi has levied fine totalling Rs 60 lakh on an individual for violating market norms.

The penalty is to be paid by Manish Goel (Manish Kr. Goyal), a Sebi-registered research analyst, within 45 days.

In its 46-page order on Friday, Sebi found that Manish had collected Rs 4.16 crore from 583 clients by charging them for services provided as a Research Analyst.

However, he failed to comply with basic requirements of research analyst (RA) norms and also promised assured returns and mis-sold his services to clients. The regulator also observed that Manish assured the members of the Whatsapp/Telegram groups that they would get one stock recommendation for free in case anyone suffers a loss on account of a particular stock



recommendation.

"... The promise of an assured return in the Whatsapp/Telegram chats, which were not supported by any research on noticee's part, amounted to dissemination of misleading information which amounted to a violation of PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) regulations," Sebi's adjudicating officer Soma Majumder said in the order.

In addition, the regulator also alleged that Manish being

an individual RA, was engaged as principal officer of a Sebi-registered investment adviser while undertaking business as a research analyst.

The investment advisory business of MSRAPL and noticee's business as a research analyst should have been managed by separate teams and separate accounts should have been maintained with respect to revenues from noticee's investment advisory business and research analyst business, as per the order.

Markets to focus on inflation data, global trends in holiday-shortened week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Inflation data, global trends and foreign fund trading activity would guide equity market movement in a holiday-shortened week, analysts said.

Stock markets would remain closed on Tuesday for Independence Day.

"Macroeconomic indicators, rupee and FII activities will be pivotal in shaping market trends in the coming days. Domestically, inflation figures hold significance. Globally, attention will be directed toward Japan's inflation data, China's IIP numbers, and the US retail sales statistics," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

On the macroeconomic front, wholesale and retail inflation numbers for July would be announced on Monday.

"India's WPI and CPI inflation data, exports and imports numbers will be in focus in the coming days. We expect the



Indian market will continue to remain rangebound and will take further cues from US jobs data and minutes of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting," Arvinder Singh Nanda, Senior Vice President, Master Capital Services Ltd, said.

Hindustan Copper and ITC would announce their earnings this week.

The movement of the rupee against the dollar and global oil benchmark Brent crude would also influence trading in the equity market. India's industrial produc-

tion growth declined to a three-month low of 3.7 per cent in June mainly due to poor showing by the manufacturing sector, according to official data released on Friday.

The BSE benchmark declined 398.6 points or 0.60 per cent and the NSE Nifty fell by 88.7 points or 0.45 per cent last week. "The Indian market experienced bearishness during the last week that focused on economic data as inflation concerns dented domestic sentiments," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Expect sales to bounce back in Q2: Elgi Equipments Ltd

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Manufacturers of air compressors Elgi Equipments Ltd expects the sales during the second quarter of the current financial year, to bounce back to normal levels, the company said on Sunday.

The Tamil Nadu-based company declared its financial results for the April-June 2023 quarter with its profit after tax growing by 24.2 per cent, to Rs 60.5 crore, from Rs 48.7 crore registered in the corresponding quarter of last year.

The consolidated sales during the quarter under review rose to Rs 724 crore, from Rs 694 crore registered in the same period of last year.

In a statement, the company said compressor business in the domestic market met the targeted numbers.

However, sales realisation was affected in the United States market due to temporary



disruption caused by the ongoing ERP implementation.

The business performance in the Middle East and Africa, Australia and South-East Asian countries were 'satisfactory', the company said.

On the outlook for the July-September 2023 quarter, the company said, "sales is expected to bounce back to normal levels".

The ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) implementation in the United States has stabilised and expects to return to normal levels during the second quarter, the company said.

RBI selects McKinsey and Company, Accenture Solutions to use AI, ML to improve regulatory supervision

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank has selected global consultancy firms McKinsey and Company India LLP and Accenture Solutions Pvt Ltd India to develop systems using artificial intelligence and machine learning for its supervisory functions.

The RBI is looking to extensively use advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning to analyse its huge database and improve regulatory supervision over banks and NBFCs. For this purpose, the central bank plans to hire external experts.

In September last year, the RBI invited expressions of interest (EOI) for engaging consultants for the use of advanced analytics, artificial intelligence and machine



learning for generating supervisory inputs.

Based on the scrutiny/evaluation set out in the EOI document, the central bank had shortlisted seven applicants to participate in the request for proposal process (RFP) for the selection of consultant(s).

The seven firms were Accenture Solutions Private Limited; Boston Consulting Group (India) Pvt Ltd; Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP; Ernst and Young LLP; KPMG Assurance and Consulting

Services LLP; McKinsey and Company; and Pricewaterhouse Coopers Pvt Ltd.

Of these, McKinsey and Company India LLP and Accenture Solutions Private Limited India have been awarded the contract, as per a Reserve Bank document.

The value of the contract is about Rs 91 crore.

While the RBI is already using AI and ML in supervisory processes, it now intends to upscale it to ensure that the benefits of advanced analytics can accrue to the Department of Supervision in the central bank.

The Department of Supervision has been developing and using linear and a few machine-learned models for supervisory examinations. The interest now is to explore

the data to identify its attributes that can be leveraged to generate new and improved supervisory inputs, said the EOI issued in September.

The supervisory jurisdiction of the RBI extends over banks, urban cooperative banks, NBFCs, payment banks, small finance banks, local area banks, credit information companies and select all Indian financial institutions.

It undertakes supervision of these entities with the objective of assessing their financial soundness, solvency, asset quality, governance framework, liquidity, and operational viability to protect depositors' interests and financial stability.

The RBI undertakes continuous supervision of SEs with the help of on-site inspections and off-site monitoring,

the EOI said.

Across the world, regulatory and supervisory authorities are using machine learning techniques (commonly referred to as 'supstech' and 'regtech') for assisting supervisory and regulatory activities, it added.

Most of these techniques are still exploratory, however, they are rapidly gaining popularity and scale.

On the data collection side, AI and ML technologies are used for real-time data reporting, effective data management and dissemination.

For data analytics, these are being used for monitoring supervised firm-specific risks, including liquidity risks, market risks, credit exposures and concentration risks; misconduct analysis; and mis-selling of products.

Not so keen on any other new acquisitions: Tata Steel CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Steel - which is in an expansion mode in India - is not so keen on any other new acquisitions, the company CEO T V Narendran has said.

The statement from Narendran has come amid Vedanta Ltd reviewing and evaluating its steel and steel-making raw materials businesses.

In June, Vedanta Ltd said it will immediately begin the review and evaluate a broad range of options including potential strategic sale of some or all of its steel businesses.

"Not so keen on any other new acquisitions... We don't need it," Narendran said in a reply to a question on his company's interest in buying Vedanta Ltd's steel business.

There is a lot to do at Tata



Steel's existing sites, he added.

The company has a plan to scale up its annual installed steel making capacity to 40 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) by 2030 in India, from around 22 MTPA at present.

In June 2018, Vedanta Limited acquired Jharkhand-based steel company ESL Steel Limited through an insolvency resolution process.

The company set up a green field integrated manufacturing facility, which is cur-

rently commissioned at a capacity of 2.5 MT per annum.

Speaking on Tata Steel UK operations, Narendran, who is also the MD of the company, said "we are (still) engaged with the UK government to find a solution. If we can find a common ground with the government (there).

"There is no problem in the UK. The production is not affected. The only challenge is the upstream assets are old and reliability of the equipment is sometimes not so great, he said.

India-headquartered Tata Steel owns the UK's largest steelworks at Port Talbot in South Wales and employs around 8,000 people across all its operations in the country.

The company had sought 1.5 billion pounds from the UK government to execute its decarbonisation plans.

After short breather, FPIs invest in equities on global uncertainty

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have infused over Rs 3,200 crore in Indian equities so far this month driven by uncertainty in the global markets, economic concerns in China, and stability of the domestic economy.

"Since the markets have rallied smartly during the last three months, some profit booking by FPIs would be rational and can be expected," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

With the global economic mood getting challenging due to slackening Chinese demand, any weakness in global equities could trigger wild gyrations in local shares and result in FPI flow turning choppy going ahead. Srikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail) at Kotak



Securities, said.

According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have put in a net sum of Rs 3,272 crore in Indian equities from August 1-11.

However, in the first week of August, FPIs took a breather and pulled out over Rs 2,000 crore from equities.

"The uncertainty in the global markets and economic concerns in China again played a role in FPIs shifting their focus back toward Indian markets, which have been more resilient and stable,"

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India, said.

Also, better-than-expected earnings season for the June quarter lent positive support to the sentiments, he added.

"Despite stocks trading at higher levels, the June quarter results have led to a reduction in the market's Price-to-Earnings (PE) ratio. This favorable PE ratio, backed by strong corporate performance, provides valuation comfort to FPIs," Mayank Mehra, small case manager and principal partner at Craving Alpha, said.

Additionally, the relative stability in the Indian Treasury rates, in contrast to the volatility observed in the US 10-year rates, enhances India's appeal for FPIs, he added.

Income from ad revenue sharing by X liable to GST, if it exceeds threshold: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Remuneration received by individuals from X (formerly Twitter), as part of its advertisement revenue sharing plan, will be treated as supply under the GST law and will be subject to 18 per cent tax, experts said.

The tax will kick in if the total income from various services, including rental income, interest on bank fixed deposit, and other professional services, rendered by an individual exceeds Rs 20 lakh in a year.

In recent times, X (formerly Twitter) has started advertisement revenue sharing for its X Premium subscribers or verified organisations. The account needs to have 15 million organic impressions on the posts in the last three months and have at least 500 followers to be able to be part of this revenue sharing programme.



Content creators on X are able to set up Ad Revenue Sharing and Creator Subscriptions independently.

Many social media users have in the recent past posted tweets about receiving revenue share from X.

Experts said it is not only the revenue share earnings from Twitter posts, but income from other sources, like interest, rental income, which will contribute to the calculation of the threshold for GST registration.

So, for calculating the Rs

20-lakh threshold, the revenues which are otherwise exempt from GST would be included. However, GST would not be leviable on such exempt income.

Currently, individuals and entities earning revenues or income from services exceeding Rs 20 lakh is liable to take Goods and Services Tax registration. The limit is Rs 10 lakh for some special category states like Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur.

Explaining this, AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan gave an illustration and said if an individual earning interest income from banks amounting to Rs 20 lakhs annually who neither pays GST nor is required to take GST registration.

Now, if he generates any additional taxable income, say Rs 1 lakh, from platforms like Twitter, he would need a GST

registration. GST would be levied at 18 per cent on the amount above Rs 20 lakh, which is Rs 1 lakh.

Mohan said if a social influencer earns income through their online presence, which includes any income paid by Twitter, these earnings are subject to annual consolidation. Notably, GST registration becomes mandatory if this income surpasses the Rs 20 lakh threshold, leading to potential GST liabilities.

"The moot point is not only the income from social influencing but other sources, like interest, which will contribute to the calculation of the threshold for GST registration. Even though interest remains tax neutral even after a GST registration," Mohan said.

EY Tax Partner Saurabh Agarwal for over the past few years, we have seen a steady

increase in the number of individuals making content for digital platforms and being remunerated for the same.

"The said activities are subject to GST and therefore rendering it mandatory for such individuals to comply with registration, return and tax payment requirements where it exceeds the threshold of Rs 20 lakh," Agarwal said.

Nangia Andersen LLP Partner Sandeep Jhunjhunwala said the content creator sources income from Twitter as a reward or in addition, from corporates as professional fee/sponsorship.

"For a content creator in India, share in ad revenue from Twitter would qualify as 'export of services' in the nature of OIDAR under GST, considering Twitter is outside India and as a result, the place of supply is outside India," Jhunjhunwala said.

Deloitte sought independent external probe into Hindenburg allegations Adani firm says reasons for Deloitte's resignation not convincing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Before resigning as an auditor of an Adani Group firm, Deloitte had sought an independent external examination of allegations made by a US short-seller but the company said the allegations had no effect on financial statements and the reasons cited for quitting were not convincing to warrant such a move.

In a 163-page filing with stock exchanges relating to Deloitte Haskins & Sells LLP's resignation, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) said that in meetings with its leadership, Deloitte indicated concern over a lack of a wider audit role as auditors of other listed Adani companies.

However, the firm conveyed to the auditor that it was not within its remit to recommend such appointments as other entities are "completely

independent".

"The Audit Committee (of APSEZ) was of the view that the grounds advanced by Deloitte for resignation as Statutory Auditor were not convincing or sufficient to warrant such a move," said Gopal Krishna Pillai, former union home secretary and chairman of the Audit Committee of APSEZ, in a statement.

"Deloitte was not willing to continue as ... Auditor and, therefore, it was agreed to amicably end the client-auditor contractual relationship," he said.

In the August 12 resignation letter, Deloitte said it was resigning as auditor of APSEZ with immediate effect "because we are not statutory auditors of a substantial number of other Adani Group of companies."

It went on to state that it had given a qualified opinion in audit of financial state-

ments for quarters ended March 2023 and June 2023.

APSEZ appointed MSKA & Associates, an independent member firm of BDO International, as its statutory auditors in place of Deloitte, until the date of its next annual general meeting to be held in 2024, the company said in a filing.

Deloitte, which had been the auditor of APSEZ since 2017 and was in July 2022 given another five-year term, had in May raised concern over certain transactions flagged in the report of Hindenburg Research.

These included recoveries from a contractor identified in the Hindenburg report. Hindenburg in its January 24 report that levelled allegations of fraud, stock manipulation, and money laundering against the Adani Group, had also flagged inadequate disclosures of related party transactions.



Adani Group has denied all allegations.

"We requested the company to initiate an independent external examination of these allegations to determine whether these allegations may have any possible effect on the standalone financial statements of the company," Deloitte said.

"The company represented to us that these allegations has no effect on the standalone

financial statements of the company."

Adani Group did not consider it necessary to have an independent external examination of these allegations because of their evaluation and the ongoing investigation by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

"The assessment by the company did not constitute sufficient appropriate audit

evidence for the purposes of our audit," Deloitte said.

In the absence of the independent external examination and the pending completion of investigation by SEBI, the auditor said it cannot comment if the company was fully compliant with the law and if the transactions flagged may result in possible adjustments and/or disclosures in the financial statement in respect of related parties.

The six-member expert panel appointed by the Supreme Court in May found no regulatory failure or signs of price manipulation in the Adani Group stocks in its interim report.

The transactions flagged by Deloitte included engineering, procurement and construction (PEC) purchase contracts with a subsidiary of the party identified in the Hindenburg report.

"As at March 31, 2023, a

net balance of Rs 2,457.05 crore is recoverable from this contractor, of which Rs 713.63 crore relate to security deposits paid to the contractor and Rs 1,501.50 crore in respect of capital advances," it said.

Also, the group "re-negotiated the terms of sale of its container terminal under construction in Myanmar" to Anguilla-incorporated Solar Energy Ltd. The sale consideration was revised from Rs 2,015 crore to Rs 246.51 crore and an impairment charge was taken. The group told the auditor these are not related parties.

APSEZ in the statement on Saturday said, "in response to a query by the Audit Committee, Deloitte confirmed that they have received all the APSEZ information from the management of the company."

"The same has been confirmed by Deloitte in their res-

ignation letter dated August 12, 2023 to the company," it added.

APSEZ said "the 'other matters' highlighted in the auditor's resignation are adequately disclosed and addressed in our FY23 financial statements. We are fully confident that these matters will be appropriately resolved in our September 23 filing."

In the aftermath of Hindenburg report, Adani group stocks lost about USD 150 billion in market value at the lowest point, but have since regained by around USD 50 billion after it paid debt and sold stake in group firms to investors such as US-based boutique investment firm GQG Partners and Qatar Investment Authority.

This month, Adani's Ambuja Cements acquired a smaller rival Sanghi Industries for up to USD 295 million, its first major purchase since the Hindenburg turmoil.

Shillong beat Heroes to finish Durand Cup campaign with win

PTI ■ KOKRAJHAR

Ronney Wilson Kharbudon's brace helped 10-man Shillong Lajong FC beat Downtown Heroes 2-1 in a Group D fixture, and end their campaign on a high note in the Durand Cup here on Sunday.

Lajong goalkeeper Ngamsanglena Haokip was shown a straight red card in the 10th minute of the game at the SAI Stadium.

Wilson's own goal in the 23rd minute gave Downtown the lead, but he recovered to score two more goals in the 36th and 52nd minute as Lajong finished the tournament with three points from three matches.

Lajong were playing for pride as they were already out of reckoning to qualify for the knockouts, while Downtown were playing to make a mark at the highest level of Indian football.

The first real chance of the opening half came for Lajong as Pursunep's effort was saved brilliantly by Downtown keeper Paramjit Baghel. The counter attack on that save led to Shillong Lajong being reduced



to ten men. Nigerian Ezekeil Oroh was free on goal but he was felled by Lajong goalkeeper Haokip who came rushing outside the box.

Lajong played positively even with a man down as they came close to breaking the dead-

lock in the 16th minute. Kynsailang Khongsit's cross was met by Laiwang Bohham before the Downtown keeper could punch it away but his header went wide.

Figo Syndai's effort minutes later hit the side net. Downtown

broke the deadlock in the 23rd minute through an own goal by Ronney.

DHFC Captain Shahid Nazir's free kick was deflected into his own goal by Ronney giving the lead for the side from Kashmir.

Lajong continued to play positive football which led to the equaliser in the 36th minute. A corner from Laiwang Bohham was met by Syndai and the ball was headed in by Ronney, making amends for his own goal earlier.

The teams went into the break with scores level on 1-1.

Downtown were trying to make use of their personnel advantage but could not find the decisive moves in the final stretch. On the other end, Lajong were menacing on the counter attacks and were making good use of their set pieces.

One such move led to the second goal for the Reds. Captain Hardy Cliff Nongbri's freekick from the center circle was met well by Ronney and his glancing header beat keeper Paramjit Baghel to give them a 2-1 lead.

The game followed the same pattern as Downtown chased an equaliser. The Shillong side was organised in defence and made good use of the counter attacks.

They created better chances as well, mostly from set pieces. Syndai had a golden opportunity to finish off the game but he shot wide after the Downtown keeper spilled the ball off a corner.

Lajong saw off the rest of the game as they signed off the tournament with a win. Their next assignment will be I-League, having gained a promotion this year.



KERALA DERBY

Gokulam edge past Blasters 4-3 in Durand Cup

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Gokulam Kerala earned three valuable points along with bragging rights as they edged past formidable ISL outfit Kerala Blasters 4-3 in a Durand Cup group league game here on Sunday.

There were four goals in the first-half and three in the second as Gokulam clinched their second straight victory in as many games to go on top of the group.

Bouba Aminou (17th min), Sreekuttan (43rd min), Alex Sanchez (45+1 min) and Abhijith K (47th min) scored for the winners, while Emmanuel Justine (34th min), Prabir Das (54th minute) and Adrian Luna (77th minute) scored for the Blasters.

For Indian Super League (ISL) side Kerala Blasters, this was their first game in the group and they will now be looking to win their remaining two, to remain in contention.

Basit Bhat, who has been impressive in this tournament, won the corner after his long-ranger took a touch off a Blasters defender and deflected away from goal.

Spaniard Nili Perdomo curled the right-footer in for Gokulam's Cameroonian captain Bouba Aminou to use his height and soar above Jeakson Singh and turn the header into top left corner.

The Blasters were stunned and responded with urgency. Seven minutes later young 20-year-old Nigerian striker Emmanuel Justine, turned a similar header from an Adrian Luna corner above the crossbar. Then Luna missed from about six-inches wide.

Finally, off a Luna freekick which Gokulam keeper Zothanmawia fisted back towards the six-yard box, Naocha's header on the rebound hit the bar and came back into play again.

In the melee which ensued, Justine did well to muscle the ball in to level proceedings. Blasters' joy was short-lived though as Perdomo put through Alex Sanchez inside the Blasters

box, three minutes ahead of the regulation first 45.

The Spaniard drove in and cut-back towards the far post, where Sreekuttan did well to balance himself perfectly and direct a header into goal. It was a second quality goal from him in the tournament in as many successful attempts.

Then in the first minute of added time, a similar ball for Alex by Perdomo, saw him fend-off his marker Naocha and get a lucky touch ahead of him and an onrushing keeper Sachin Suresh, as the ball hit the keeper's gloves and trickled in for Gokulam's third.

The break did nothing to stop the goal rush and Abhijith K this time, put Sreekuttan's strike in the first game against the Air Force into oblivion with a thunderbolt just two-minutes into the second-half.

Alex it was who got his second assist after a galloping run to the box, whereafter he withdrew and laid it on square for Abhijith. The 26-year-old central midfielder put his laces through the ball, bulging the right top-corner of Sachin's goal for Gokulam's fourth.

If anyone thought the Blasters would give up in a derby, they were in for a surprise.

The sixth goal of the game was scored by Prabir, after a dazzling and penetrating foray by Md. Aimen, who took out two defenders and then finally the goalkeeper with his dink back into the box. Prabir who had followed up on the far post, made no mistake with the finish.

Then Luna made it a one-goal game again, after a few minutes of inspiring play by substitute Bidhyasagar Singh.

After he had missed a sitter, the 25-year-old Manipuri striker embarked on a solo run and put through Aimen once more on the left. The young midfielder put it in the box where after a couple of deflections it fell for the Uruguayan who blasted it in.



Mancini announces surprise resignation as Italy coach after up-and-down tenure

AP ■ ROME

Italy coach Roberto Mancini surprisingly resigned on Sunday, ending an up-and-down tenure with the national team that included a European Championship title in 2021 but also a failed qualification for last year's World Cup.

The Italian soccer federation issued a short announcement saying that Mancini communicated his resignation "late last night," adding that a new coach would be named "over the next days."

The federation doesn't have much time with Euro 2024 qualifying matches against North Macedonia and Ukraine scheduled for September 9 and 12, respectively. Former Italy coach Antonio Conte, who left Tottenham in March, and Luciano Spalletti, who led Napoli to the Serie A title last season and said he wants to take a sabbatical this season, are among those being mentioned as a possible replacement.

Only nine days ago, the federation had announced that Mancini was being given the added responsibility of overseeing



the under-20 and under-21 teams, too. He was under contract through the 2026 World Cup.

"It's a bit surprising. Nobody expected it," Renzo Ulivieri, the president of Italy's coaches association, told the LaPresse news agency.

"Nothing can be said until the reasons behind the resignation are known. It's useless to say anything without knowing that. I'm sorry that he's left. He did a good job despite those last things," Ulivieri added, referring to the failed World Cup qualification.

Mancini was hired in May 2018 to revive the Azzurri after they also failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup under predecessor Gian Piero Ventura. And he did by adding flair and youth to a team that won admirers all over the continent during the year-delayed Euro 2020.

Mancini was hailed for his vision when he called up then-Roma forward Nicolò Zaniolo before he had ever played in Serie A, but he also struggled to find top players from the Italian league, which has been hesitant to use young players at times.

A 1-0 semifinal playoff loss to 67th-ranked North Macedonia at home last year meant that the Azzurri missed the World Cup in Qatar.

It's also been an emotional time for Mancini, who lost his good friend, former teammate and national team delegation

chief Gianluca Vialli to pancreatic cancer in January. Vialli was 58.

Siniša Mihajlovic, another of Mancini's former teammates and then a fellow coach, died three weeks before Vialli following a long battle with leukemia. He was 53.

It's unclear what's next for the 58-year-old Mancini, who was a leading club coach before taking over the national team, having won league titles at both Inter Milan and Manchester City. Mancini was also a stand-out player for Sampdoria, Lazio and Italy.

Mancini's exit puts the federation in complete rebuilding mode, with women's coach Milena Bertolini having also announced her resignation after the Azzurri failed to advance from the Women's World Cup group stage.

Mancini's last match in charge was a 3-2 win over the host Netherlands in the Nations League final fourth-place match on June 18.

Having lost its opening Euro 2024 qualifier to England, Italy is also facing an uphill battle to qualify for next year's tournament in Germany.

Kane signals he needs time to adapt at Bayern Munich after loss on his debut

AP ■ MUNI

England captain Harry Kane said Sunday that he may need time to adapt to German football following a loss in his first game for Bayern Munich and won't "panic" if he isn't scoring.

Kane came on as a 64th-minute substitute in a 3-0 defeat to Leipzig in the German Super Cup on Saturday after being confirmed as a Bayern player earlier in the day.

"Obviously, I've spent my whole career, my whole life, in England and in the Premier League so it might take a bit of adapting to get used to a new league," he said.

"For me it's just about settling in, as comfortable as possible, understanding the different types of teams, the way I have to play and adapt. I've done that throughout my whole career, whether it's with Tottenham or the national team and I'll do that here."

Bayern is next in action in the opening game of the Bundesliga season against Werder Bremen on Friday. Kane said he will work on his link-up play with his new teammates and that his time at Bayern shouldn't be considered a success or failure on goal tallies alone.

"It's part of the reason I joined this club because they've got amazing talent and now I feel like if we can get a good connection, then of course I will score goals," he said.

"But as always in my career, you know, I never panic if I don't. I give my all every game. I try and work for the team and I think I've shown that my game is more than just goalscoring and trying to link up play and help with assists and build up. So that's what I'll try and do starting on Friday."

Kane's arrival fills a gap in the squad left when Robert Lewandowski departed for Barcelona a year ago, but Bayern is heading into the new season without an established first-choice goalkeeper. Captain Manuel Neuer hasn't played since breaking his leg skiing in December.

Chief executive Jan-Christian Dreesen took the unusual step Sunday of admitting the club had tried and failed to sign Kupa Arrizabalaga from Chelsea. Kupa is widely expected to sign for Real Madrid on loan.

Dreesen said Neuer isn't expected to return until the second half of the season but his injury is hard to predict. Neuer needed another operation this month to remove metal implants from his leg.

Dreesen added he's "confident that we will find a solution" to Bayern's goalkeeper difficulties but it remains unclear if any new signing will be considered a candidate to replace Neuer long-term, or a stop-gap solution. Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer was sold to Inter Milan this month and longtime Neuer backup Sven Ulreich played in the loss to Leipzig.

Lahiri shoots 7-under, rises to fourth in LIV Golf at Bedminster

PTI ■ BEDMINSTER (NEW JERSEY)

India's Anirban Lahiri was on fire with five birdies in his first six holes as he shot 7-under 64 to rise to Tied-4th place in the LIV Golf Bedminster.

Lahiri, who shot 3-over 74 on the first day, is now 4-under and shares the fourth place with Bubba Watson and Patrick Reed. Lahiri began on the 10th and birdied the 10th, 11th, 12th, 14th and 15th and added one more on the 18th to be six-under with half the round still left.

He birdied the second, bogeyed the fifth and added more gains with birdies on the seventh and eighth but dropped a shot on his last hole, the ninth.



Cameron Smith will take a four-shot lead into the final round. Smith, who won LIV Golf London last month, is seeking his third LIV Golf victory.

He shot a 4-under 67 after a first round 5-under 66 and is

now 9-under. He leads by four shots over Dean Burmester (69-68) and Phil Mickelson (70-67) at 5-under.

One of Smith's closest pursuers is Phil Mickelson, who also shot 67 and is tied for second with Burmester at 5-under. Smith, Mickelson and Burmester will be in the leaders' group.

Although Smith has a healthy advantage on the individual leaderboard, the team competition at Bedminster is tight.

Smith's Ripper GC and Burmester's Stinger GC are tied at 11-under, with RangeGoats GC, led by Bubba Watson, at 7-under. HyFlyers, led by Mickelson, are 6-under.

Lahiri, who is with Crushers led by Bryson DeChambeau are at 5-under.

Nishtha finishes 55th on Epson Tour

PTI ■ SOUTH BEND (US)

Nishtha Madan finished in a tie for the 55th place in the Four Winds Invitational on the Epson Tour in the United States.

With a round of 1-over 73 at the South Bend Country Club and earlier scores of 71-75 on the first two days, she was 3-over for the 54-hole event.

Earlier, India's Nikita Arjun had missed the cut in the event, which is on the second rung women's tour in the US.

Meanwhile, Gabriela Ruffels sealed her third win of the season. The Aussie played a final round of 3-under par 69 and totalled 12-under overall for a three-shot victory, over Katherine Smith and Becca Huffer.

Though Ruffels won for a third time, the Battlefield Promotion to the LPGA Tour is no longer in play. It was changed with the overall restructuring with the coming in of Q-Series in 2018.

Ruffels plans to compete in most of the final events on the Epson Tour calendar and prepare for what looks like her rookie season on the LPGA in 2024. She now has three wins in 12 starts on the Epson Tour.

She does have a start on the Canadian (CPKC Women's Open) on the LPGA Tour.

Katherine Smith made four birdies in the first 10 holes to challenge Ruffels but then dropped back and settled for 69. Becca Huffer turned in a card of 70 (-2) to join Smith in the tied-2 position.



Real Madrid defender Militao to undergo knee surgery

AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid defender Eder Militao will need to undergo surgery after injuring his left knee in the team's Spanish league opener, the club said Sunday.

Madrid said Militao has been diagnosed with a torn anterior cruciate ligament and will undergo surgery in the coming days. The club did not specify how long it expects the defender to be sidelined, though such injuries usually require several months of recovery.

The 25-year-old Brazil defender got hurt early in the second half of Madrid's 2-0 win at Athletic Bilbao on Saturday. He went down in pain when his left knee appeared to twist awkwardly and had to be helped to walk off the field by two team doctors.

Madrid had already lost starting goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois because of a knee ligament injury last week. Newly signed midfielder Arda Güler also won't be available for some time - reportedly several weeks - because of a knee problem that will also likely require surgery.



Mbappe returns to training with PSG after constructive talks with club

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe has returned to training with Paris Saint-Germain after "constructive and positive talks" between the two parties, the club said Sunday.

Mbappe watched from the stands on Saturday night as defending champion PSG drew 0-0 at

home to Lorient because he is hired in a contract standoff. He wants to play this season and leave for free when his contract runs out, but PSG wants to sell him to stop this happening.

"After very constructive and positive discussions between Paris Saint-Germain and Kylian Mbappe before the PSG-Lorient match, the

player has returned to training with the first-team group this (Sunday) morning," PSG said in a statement.

The World Cup star was left out of the pre-season tour to Japan and South Korea and then trained apart from the first-team regulars last week. Now he could play away to Toulouse on Saturday.

PSG received a world-record \$332 million bid from Saudi Arabian team Al-Hilal for Mbappe, who reportedly refused to meet with representatives from the Saudi club when they were in Paris last month to sign another player.

The 24-year-old Mbappe is widely thought to want to join Real

Madrid next season on a free transfer, complete with a massive signing-on fee.

PSG did not say if Mbappe had opened negotiations over a new contract, but positive talks at least points to an improvement in relations.

Mbappe posted a welcome message online when France winger Ousmane Dembele joined PSG from Barcelona on Saturday.

But Brazil forward Neymar could leave PSG this summer along with midfielder Marco Verratti, who also did not play against Lorient.

SURYAKUMAR SCORES 61 BUT INDIA STRUGGLE TO REACH 165 FOR 9

PTI ■ LAUDERHILL (US)

Suryakumar Yadav was scratchy yet effective during his second half-century of the series but Indian batters struggled on a slow surface to post a par score of 165/9 against the West Indies in the fifth and final T20 International, here on Sunday.

On a pitch where stroke-making wasn't an easy proposition, Surya had to curb his flair a bit but still had enough firepower in his arsenal to hit four fours and three sixes in 45 balls. It was a used track where the ball started gripping from the very first over bowled by left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein (2/24 in 4 overs), who made an impact against the Indian batters throughout the series.

Between him and off-spinner Roston Chase (1/25 in 4 overs), they bowled 8 overs for just 49 runs taking three wickets in the process.

Yashasvi Jaiswal (5) started with a reverse sweep but Hosein's delivery that stopped and turned with a tad extra bounce forced the batter to offer a simple return catch. Shubman Gill (9) was unlucky as he would have sur-



vived had he taken a review with TV replays showing that Hosein's arm ball was drifting down the leg-side.

Tilak Varma (27 off 18 balls) was at his fluent best taking 19 off the final Powerplay over bowled by Alzarri Joseph. But he also fell prey to the slowness of the track offering Chase a return catch.

This was Surya's 15th T20I fifty but it was on the scratchier side despite some glorious strokes including the six off Joseph over long-off to complete his milestone.

But it didn't help that Sanju Samson (13 off 9 deliveries) played a nothing shot without any footwork off Romario Shepherd (4/31 in 4 overs) to put more pressure on Surya.

Skipper Hardik Pandya (14 off 18 balls) couldn't get off the blocks and wasted too many balls before finally connecting one and then perishing off the very next ball as Shepherd used the slower ones to good effect.

Pandya's problems did have its effect as Surya couldn't provide the final flourish. Axar Patel (13) and Mukesh Kumar, who hit a final ball boundary, pushed India to a par-score.

India jump to No 3 place in FIH rankings after ACT triumph

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Giving them a big boost ahead of the Asian Games, India on Sunday rose to third in FIH rankings following their Asian Champions Trophy triumph.

India (2771.35 points) jumped one place to third and went past England (2763.50 points) behind top-ranked Netherlands (3095.90 points) and Belgium (2917.87 points).

This was the second time India rose to No 3 in FIH rankings. India had achieved a similar ranking in 2021 after securing a bronze in the Tokyo Olympics, which was their first medal at the Games in 41 years.

On Saturday, the Harmanpreet Singh-led side defeated Malaysia 4-3 to lift the ACT title. They made an incredible comeback from 1-3 down.

In the last edition of the event in 2021, India had finished third. The Indian hockey team's next



assignment will be the Asian Games in Hangzhou from September 23.

The ACT runners-up Malaysia remained on ninth in the FIH rankings.

Apart from India and Malaysia, South Korea too find themselves at 11th while Pakistan is placed 16th.

Jessica beats top-ranked Iga to reach Montreal final



AP ■ MONTREAL

Jessica Pegula beat top-ranked Iga Swiatek on Saturday to reach the National Bank Open final, breaking serve 11 times in a 6-2, 6-7 (4), 6-4 victory.

Pegula, the 29-year-old American seeded fourth, finally broke through in the semifinals after falling in the round the previous two years.

"It was a great match," Pegula said. "It was tough. Kind of a roller-coaster. Really up and down, but I'm glad I was able to hold my nerve there at the end."

Pegula beat Swiatek a day after fellow American Tommy Paul knocked off top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz in the men's event in Toronto. U.S. Players had not beaten the top-ranked man and woman in the same week since April 2008 in Miami when Serena Williams beat Justine Henin, and Andy Roddick topped Roger Federer.

Both players struggled to hold serve, with Swiatek breaking Pegula eight times. They only won 11 of 30 service games combined.

"I was getting frustrated that I wasn't holding," Pegula said. "But then at the same time I knew she was having trouble holding as well. I was just like, 'I know I'll get more chances if I can just... hold.' Basically, it was whoever could kind of consolidate the break."

Rain forced the postponement of the night semifinal between third-seeded Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan and 15th-seeded Liudmila Samsonova of Russia until Sunday. Early Saturday, Rybakina outlasted 10th-seeded Daria Kasatkina of Russia 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 (8) in a match that ended at 2:54 a.m.

Pegula, whose parents own the NFL's Buffalo Bills and NHL's Buffalo Sabres, has two career victories - in 2019 in Washington and 2022 in Guadalajara.

Swiatek leads the tour with 50 match victories. The Polish star won the French Open in June and added her fourth title of the year last week at home in Warsaw.

"I kind of knew what I had to do to push her. Sometimes I could do that, sometimes I was making more mistakes - and I think that was the difference," Swiatek said. "But I tried to play aggressively for the whole match."

Pegula ended the match in 2 hours, 30 minutes, breaking Swiatek a final time after the

top seed hit two shots long. Pegula had a chance to end the match much earlier, up 5-4 in the second set and serving, but Swiatek broke her serve to stay alive and took the set in a tiebreaker.

Pegula wondered if the service woes might have something to do with new balls. WTA players are testing out Wilson extra duty balls for the first time on hard courts this week, through next week and into the U.S. Open.

"I don't know why this week all of us seem to be really having trouble, even girls that are considered the best servers on tour. It's weird," Pegula said. "It feels like the conditions, it's flying a little bit, it's swirling. I know it's also the first week we're playing with the Wilson extra duty balls."

"They're a little bit heavier, so they're not quite coming off the racket as well."

Joshua knocks out Helienuis in 7th round after earlier jeers from fans

London, Aug 13 (AP) Former two-time world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua won for the second time on his comeback trail after blocking out jeers from the O2 Arena crowd to produce a thunderous seventh-round stoppage against Robert Helienuis on Saturday night and stay on track for a future bout with Deontay Wilder.

Joshua had been set to face fellow British heavyweight Dillian Whyte until his rival had to be pulled from the show last weekend when "adverse analytical findings" were detected in his doping test.

Helienuis stepped in as a last-minute opponent, but the pre-match focus was on what next for Joshua with talks taking place with Wilder's camp over a fight in the new year.

It would only happen if Joshua could navigate the Finnish veteran and a slow start to proceedings in London saw whistles followed by boos in round three and further jeers at the end of round six.

Joshua was able to provide the crowd with a spectacular finish, unleashing a huge right hand to knock Helienuis off his feet after 1 minute, 27 seconds of round seven.

Joshua had returned to his winning ways in April but only after an unconvincing display in a unanimous points victory over Jermaine Franklin.

CT title triumph over Malaysia will 'really count' as India prepare for Asian Games: Fulton

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Asian Champions Trophy title triumph will "really count" as India set sights on Asian Games gold in order to secure automatic qualification to 2024 Paris Olympics, said head coach Craig Fulton.

The India hockey team fought back from two goals down to eke out a 4-3 win over Malaysia in the final to claim their fourth ACT title here on Saturday.

With the Hangzhou Asian Games scheduled to commence on September 23, Fulton was asked whether a thrilling final like this will help the side in the continental showpiece event. "Finals are cagier; they never go smooth. It comes down to a moment or shootouts. So, it's important to

have a game like this because it really counts.

"At the same time, it's (ACT) not the Asian Games. So, our feet are firmly on the ground. But, if you said to me to win the Asian Games and lose this final, I would obviously vouch for winning the Games," added Fulton.

Fulton said the comeback story of the team had begun two months back.

"Two months ago," Fulton told PTI on the sidelines after India's comeback win.

Asked about the biggest learning from this tournament, he said, "Not to have back-to-back tournaments; that would be a start."

Several teams had reservations over the timing of ACT with the Asian Games just weeks away.



DECODING THE PERFORMANCE

India were trailing 1-3 at half-time before they turned things around in the second half.

Decoding the performance, Fulton, while giving due credit to Malaysia, said that coming into the final after a

"high-quality" semifinal against Japan the previous day hadn't been easy.

India thrashed Japan 5-0 in the last-four stage.

"We had a really good game (against Malaysia). Also, against Japan in the semis -- a high-quality match. To back that up is always hard.

"Malaysia raised their game and controlled the first half. We didn't do bad, but we were not 100 per cent committed to what we were trying to do," he added.

"We regrouped at half-time. All we needed was a goal to bounce back. And then, it was just a matter of time to equalise and try to get the winner."

Fulton gave credit to his boys for trusting each other when the chips were down. He added that fighting back from a two-goal deficit showed the true character of the side.

"You will find guys who trust each other and trust to get the job done. They feel confident about stepping up. After the first half, we decided to press, and the younger players stood up along with the senior players.

"The character of the team is great. It is a really important step because you need to know that you can come from behind, as it's easy to play when you are up by two or three goals," he continued.

"Also, how to tackle if a team is trying to come back despite you being up is also a big challenge. We have covered a lot of those areas before the Asian Games, but we still have a lot of work to do," added Fulton.

He, however, said the team should have done better in the first half.

"We didn't play well in the first half. We turned the game around in the second half; that's character. We are on a little journey at the moment, but we still got another step to go."

Women's WC highlights shortage of female coaches

AP ■ SYDNEY

Sarina Wiegman is in a unique position at the Women's World Cup, where she's the only female head coach still in contention for the title.

That was the case even before England advanced to the semifinals, by beating Colombia 2-1, with Wiegman also the outlier from the eight teams that reached the quarterfinals.

"Of course what we hope is to get more female football coaches at the top level and the balance gets better than it is right now," Wiegman said. "Of course males are welcome too. There are lots of males who have done a very good job in the women's game, but if the balance is better that will also inspire other women to start coaching."

Women's soccer is growing at pace. This World Cup has seen record attendance, rising talent from around the globe and showcased a closing of the gap between the sport's traditional elite and emerging nations.

Yet the disparity in the coaching ranks has also been laid bare.

Of the 32 nations that started the tournament, 12 had a woman as head coach. Three advanced to the round of 16. Hege Riise's Norway team and Desiree Ellis's South Africa team lost in the first knockout stage.

At the 2015 World Cup, eight teams had a woman as head coach, a number that increased by one in 2019. So it's an improvement in terms of numbers, although the tournament was expanded from 24 to 32 teams for this edition.

It is also worth noting that female coaches have more than held their own at the top of the women's game. The last two World Cups were won by teams coached by Jill Ellis, who led the Americans to back-to-back victories in 2015 and '19.

Under Vlatko Andonovski, the United States had its earliest exit in the history of the tournament by going out at the round of 16.

Wiegman led her native Netherlands to the 2019 final and appears to be taking over from Ellis as the premier coach in international women's soccer.



She won back-to-back European titles with Netherlands and England in 2017 and 2022. Now she's closing in on a second successive World Cup final.

England forward Alessia Russo said Wiegman's presence is important to the growth of the game.

"We always say about inspiring the

next generation and to go on and play football and getting as many young girls involved as possible," she said. "To know that they can be a coach as well and see Sarina on the biggest stage is incredible."

"She's one of best managers I've ever played for, so to have her as our leader and our role model -- we really appreciate it."

Wiegman is more than just a figurehead.

England appointed her to replace Phil Neville in the belief she would take the Lionesses to the next level.

She has done that and stands as the national team's most successful coach for men or women since Alf Ramsey led England to the men's World Cup title in 1966.

If England wins this tournament, she will become the first England coach to lift multiple major trophies.

"She's a winner and she's done it before," Russo said. "She has the full respect of everyone and it's great to have someone leading us that knows how to deal with those high-pressure moments."

American player Julian Green racially abused in German Cup soccer game

AP ■ HALLE (GERMANY)

American soccer player Julian Green was the victim of racist abuse in a German Cup game on Saturday.

Green, who is Black, was playing for Greuther Fuerth against host Hallescher FC in the first round of the competition.

On the Fuerth club website, Green said a spectator racially abused him during the game.

Fuerth coach Alex Zorniger said the abuse occurred repeatedly and called for other fans to intervene in cases of racist abuse.

"The stadium was 95% full. There were enough people there who could have intervened," Zorniger said in comments reported by German news agency dpa.

The dpa agency also reported that Halle club spokeswoman Lisa Schöppe issued an apology on behalf of the club.

Green has played for Fuerth in Germany since 2017 and also played 15 times for the United States national team from 2014 through 2018.

AP ■ AUCKLAND

There will be a first-time winner of the Women's World Cup this year, and maybe, just maybe, it will be host country Australia.

The Matildas, serving as co-hosts of the tournament with New Zealand, became the first home team since the United States in 1999 to win a quarter-final in nine Women's World Cups. Australia has reached its first semifinal in team history and faces England on Wednesday for a chance to play for the title.

"I genuinely really believe that this team can do great history in so many ways," Australia coach Tony Gustavsson said, "not just winning football games, but the way that they can inspire the next generation, how they can unite the nation, how they can leave a legacy that is much bigger than football."

England, the European champion, advanced with a 2-1 victory over upstart Colombia. England also reached the semifinals in 2015 and 2019, only to

Oz makes it through to Women's WC semifinals seeking history for Matildas



finish third and fourth and never reach the Women's World Cup final.

But before the Australia and England showdown, first-time semifinalist Spain takes on powerhouse Sweden on Tuesday in Auckland.

Aside from a 4-0 loss to Japan in group play, Spain has been a force throughout the tournament. It even tuned out

an earthquake roughly an hour before its quarterfinal win over 2019 runner-up Netherlands.

The earthquake Friday in New Zealand's capital of Wellington measured 5.6 on the Richter scale and created minor shaking in and around the stadium.

"We were so concentrated on the game that we didn't feel it, although we felt some shakes

at the hotel the day before," Spain coach Jorge Vilda said. "The victory of Spain was the earthquake."

Sweden, meanwhile, is the highest ranked team still in the tournament at second in the world, according to FIFA. The Swedes got into the semifinals by knocking off previously undefeated Japan, the 2011 winners and last remaining champions in the tournament after so many early eliminations of the best teams in women's soccer.

"I think we have the team to go all the way," left back Jonna Andersson said, "and now we are one step closer."

AUSTRALIA

The Matildas advanced after a tense - and electric - penalty shootout 7-6 over France in front of a sold-out crowd in Brisbane, Australia.

It took 20 penalties to decide the winner in the longest shootout in the history of the tournament. It was the game of a lifetime for goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold, who stepped up to take a penalty with the score at 3-3 but hit the post.

Arnold then managed to twice save shots from French midfielder Kenza Dali, the first being waved off after Arnold was ruled to have come off her line for the first save. Arnold said she was "incredibly disappointed" to have missed her shot on goal and thanked her teammates for keeping the Matildas in the game.

Australia, at 12th in the world, is the lowest-ranked team remaining in the tournament.

Sam Kerr, the injured superstar who missed all of group play, came off the bench against

France but ended up playing nearly a full game when the match went to extra time. Kerr converted her penalty kick. And the Australians have also been boosted by the play of 20-year-old Mary Fowler, who has stepped in to fill Kerr's void in this tournament.

Arnold said the Matildas need a day to regroup before focusing on England.

"I don't want to ever get ahead of myself, and we're all the same in that aspect," she said. "We just take one game at a time, one half at a time, whatever that is, and we just keep getting to the next step every time. So now that we've made the semifinal for the first time, we'll take a moment to process what we've actually done."

ENGLAND

England very much wants to add a World Cup title to last year's European championship, and coach Sarina Wiegman understands the Lionesses will have their hands full in a semifinal that will be a home game for Australia.