

WORLD 5
ANOTHER INDIAN ANNOUNCES
2024 US PRESIDENTIAL BID

MONEY 6
SEBI MULLS SIMPLIFICATION OF
CLIENT ONBOARDING NORMS

SPORT 8
ICC INSPECTS B'LURU VENUE
AHEAD OF WORLD CUP

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CAPSULE

BIDEN URGED TO CLEAR GREEN CARD BACKLOG

New Delhi: Underlining huge backlog and long wait period for Indians seeking Green Card, a group of US lawmakers has urged President Joe Biden to take executive action to make priority dates current for aspirants to reduce the 195-year-long wait period and backlog. **P4**

4 ELECTROCUTED DURING MUHARRAM PREPARATION

Bokaro: Four people were killed and 10 others injured on Saturday after they came in contact with a high-tension wire while preparing for a Muharram procession in Jharkhand's Bokaro district, police said.

HOSTEL RENT TO RISE WITH 12% GST: AAR

New Delhi: Students will have to shell out more for hostel accommodation as a 12 per cent GST would be applicable on the rent paid, the Authority of Advance Ruling said. **P6**

CASE AGAINST BHIDE FOR ANTI-GANDHI REMARKS

Amravati: The police in Maharashtra's Amravati district on Saturday registered a case against Right-wing activist Sambhaji Bhide for his alleged derogatory remarks on Mahatma Gandhi. **P2**

DELHI SERVICES DRAFT BILL SHOWN TO MPS

New Delhi: The draft Bill to replace the ordinance which mandated creation of authority for transfers and postings of senior officers in the Delhi Government is ready and has been circulated among MPs.

INDIA is here to help, Opp MPs tell people in camps

Thakur dares INDIA to visit Bengal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/IMPHAL

A delegation of Opposition MPs from the Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) alliance visited a relief camp in Churachandpur district, Manipur, on Saturday. The 21-member delegation has been divided into two groups.

Hours after landing in Manipur, the delegation visited the victims of Manipur violence at a relief camp in Churachandpur. The leaders slammed the Centre for not sending its delegation and said their visit is just a way to provide some "psychological healing" to the people in distress. Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP Manoj Jha said, "We met several people in the relief camp here and listened to their problems. We have assured them of help and that there will be a change in the situation and we are all working in that direction. This is our small step in the direction of psychological healing".

Congress MP Adhir



Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, JMM MP Mahua Maji, former Manipur Chief Minister Okram Singh and other leaders of the INDIA alliance meet people affected by the ethnic violence in Manipur, at a relief camp in Imphal East district on Saturday. PTI

Ranjan Chowdhury said after meeting the victims in the relief camp that all are looking very scared.

"It is clear from their faces, that they are extremely scared. They do not want to talk to anyone. They know that this Government is not going to provide any help to them," he said.

In response, the BJP-ruled Centre criticised the Opposition bloc's visit to riot-hit Manipur, calling it a "show-off" and "political tourism".

Continued on Page 2

CBI takes over sexual assault probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has taken over the investigation into the naked parading, sexual assault and gangrape of two women by a mob in Manipur on May 4. The incident came to light when a video clip of the horrifying incident went viral on social media earlier this month, sparking nationwide

outrage. The video shows two women from a particular community being paraded naked by men from another lineage. The men can be seen continuously molesting the helpless women, who plead for mercy.

Following the massive uproar and condemnation of the crime, the case was referred to the CBI by the Union Home Ministry.

Continued on Page 2

Eye on 2024, BJP rejigs team of office-bearers

Tariq Mansoor, Anil Antony, Sanjay Bandi brought in

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Revamping the central office-bearer's list, BJP president JP Nadda on Saturday brought in former Telangana BJP president Sanjay Bandi from Andhra Pradesh, former senior Congress leader AK Antony's son Anil Antony from Kerala and more significantly a 'Pasmanda' Muslim Tariq Mansoor from Uttar Pradesh (UP) in the central team to streamline the organisation ahead of the Lok Sabha polls next year. The BJP has dropped CT Ravi, an important leader from Karnataka, and Dilip Saikia, a Lok Sabha MP from Assam, as its general secretaries. Ravi and Saikia may be fielded by the party as Lok Sabha candidates, sources said.

The reshuffle, however, does not draw from the Union Council of Ministers.

Most of the office-bearers have been retained as vice-presidents, general secretaries, and secretaries in the new list.

There are 13 vice-presidents, nine general secretaries, including BL Santhosh as the in-charge of organisation and



13 secretaries on the list.

Sanjay Bandi (Telangana) and Radhamohan Agarwal (UP) have replaced Ravi and Saikia in the new team as general secretaries.

Early this month, Union Culture and Tourism Minister, G Kishan Reddy replaced Bandi Sanjay Kumar as BJP president of Telangana which goes to poll later this year.

Among national vice-presidents, Nadda has retained former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh, Rajasthan ex-Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje, Jharkhand ex-Chief Minister Raghubar Das, Saudan Singh, Baijayant Panda, Rekha Verma, DK Aruna (Telangana), M Chuba Ao (Nagaland) and Abdulla Kutty (Kerala).

New entrants in the vice-president's list are Saroj Pande from poll-bound Chhattisgarh, Laxmikant Bajpai from UP, Lata Usendi from Chhattisgarh,

and Tariq Mansoor, currently a member, UP Legislative Council.

Former Minister Radha Mohan Singh, ex-Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh, and Gujarat Lok Sabha MP Bharti Ben Shyal have been dropped as national vice-presidents.

Those retained in the BJP's central office-bearers' list as general secretaries are Arun Singh, Kailash Vijayvargiya, Dudhyant Gautam, Tarun Chugh, Vinod Tawde and Sunil Bansal.

At 13, the number of secretaries remains the same. Those retained in the list of secretaries are Vijaya Rahatkar, Maharashtra; Satya Kumar, Andhra Pradesh; Arvind Menon, Delhi; OP Dhruve, Madhya Pradesh; Anupam Hazra, West Bengal; Alka Gurjar, Rajasthan; Asha Lakra, Jharkhand; Rituraj Sinha, Bihar; and Narendra Singh Raina, Punjab. **Continued on Page 2**

NEP recognises talent over language: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Saturday, underscored India's burgeoning prominence as a fertile ground for new opportunities and asserted that several countries have shown keen interest in establishing Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) campuses. Two campuses, one in Tanzania and the other in Abu Dhabi, are on the cusp of initiating their operations. He was addressing the Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Samagam on the occasion of three years of the National Education Policy (NEP).

Modi stressed the importance of recognising talent over language and praised the NEP for according equal significance to both traditional and futuristic knowledge systems. He urged a forward-looking approach, considering the integration of technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) into daily life, which were once the realm of science fiction.

Emphasising the need to liberate students from the bur-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the inauguration of Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Samagam at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

den of conventional textbooks, the Prime Minister called for introducing subjects such as disaster management, climate change, and clean energy in schools. The two-day Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Samagam was held at the newly-constructed Bharat Mandapam in Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. Among the attendees were Union Minister for Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Dharmendra

Pradhan, and Ministers of State for Education Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Annapurna Devi, Dr. Subhas Sarkar, along with Secretaries of the Ministry of Education and Skill Development.

Modi commended the stakeholders in the field of education for their dedication to shaping the new curriculum, introducing regional language books for primary education.

Continued on Page 2

Indian Navy to do away with colonial baton for Sr officers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy has decided with immediate effect to do away with the colonial practice of its senior officers carrying the baton. The decision comes in the backdrop of the Government urging the Armed forces to shed colonial practices. An official communication issued by the Navy said the practice of carrying batons does not suit the "transformed Navy of Amrit Kaal". "The symbolism of authority or power pot heated through the holding of a baton is a colonial legacy that is out of place in the transformed navy of Amrit Kaal. Carrying of batons by all personnel including those from the provost be discontinued with immediate effect," the communication reads.

Now, the Navy has decided to place a ceremonial baton in the office of the Head of the Organisation of every unit. A ceremonial handing over of the baton may be undertaken within the office, as a part of Change of Command. **Contid on Page 2**

MP tops States in number of tigers; 18 reserves have less than 10 big cats left

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The latest tiger estimation report released on International Tiger Day revealed that Madhya Pradesh remains the State with the highest number of tigers in India, followed by Karnataka, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra.

However, Uttar Pradesh's Corbett Tiger Reserve stood out among all tiger reserves for having the highest density of tigers, followed by Bandipur, Nagarhole, Bandhavgarh, and Dudhwa.

Madhya Pradesh with 785 royal big cats continues to be the home of the maximum number of tigers in the country followed by Karnataka (563), Uttarakhand (560), and Maharashtra (444).



steals the show by reporting the highest density of predators (260), followed by Bandipur (150), Nagarhole (141), Bandhavgarh (135), and Dudhwa (135).

However, amid the celebration, there was cause for concern also as at least 18

tiger reserves have less than 10 big cats left. In fact, approximately, 35 per cent of the 53 tiger reserves in India urgently require enhanced protection measures, habitat restoration, ungulate augmentation, and subsequent tiger reintroduction, the Union Environment

Ministry said in a statement here.

Overall, the number of tigers in India has increased from 2,967 in 2018 to 3,682 in 2022, an annual rise of 6 per cent, said the data.

With this, India has become home to approximately 75 per cent of the world's tiger population, said Union Minister of State for Forest, Environment and Climate Change Ashwini Kumar Choubey in Ramnagar while releasing the data for 2022.

In his message on the occasion, Union Minister of Forest, Environment and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav said, "India's exemplary efforts in tiger conservation and the increase in tiger numbers is not just a statistic but a testament to the determination and commitment of the nation".

Continued on Page 2

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Priyanka may contest LS poll from Rae Bareilly

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress star campaigner Priyanka Gandhi is poised to enter the political battleground of Uttar Pradesh in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections as speculations are rife that in the absence of Sonia Gandhi, she might contest from Rae Bareilly and even try her luck from Amethi.

Congress Parliamentary Party president Sonia Gandhi has represented Rae Bareilly in the Lok Sabha in the last four elections. Owing to her ill health, speculations are that she might not contest the election this time, but party leaders have rejected such speculations.

They say as Congress has lost all the assembly seats that come in the Rae Bareilly parliamentary constituency, it is mandatory for the party that Sonia should contest from there in the 2024 elections.

"However, in the event of an unavoidable situation where Sonia Gandhi declines to contest the election, Priyanka Gandhi may step in as the party candidate from Rae Bareilly," a senior Congress leader said and added that in the absence of Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka might also be considered as a contender from Amethi.

Sources close to the Congress top leadership reveal a third strategy is under consideration. If Sonia Gandhi contests from Rae Bareilly and Rahul Gandhi from Amethi, Priyanka Gandhi could be fielded from Sultanpur, a neighbouring constituency of Amethi. Sultanpur was once considered a Congress bastion but it lost out to Bharatiya Janata Party in the last two elections.

The party's strategists believe that the presence of Priyanka Gandhi in the Uttar Pradesh Lok Sabha elections will not only increase the



number of MPs of Congress in UP but also increase the popularity of the party among voters.

UP Congress president Brijlal Khabri said Priyanka had been urged to contest election from Uttar Pradesh. The party is evaluating the ground reality with party leaders camping in Rae Bareilly and Amethi. A comprehensive report on all aspects is being prepared and will soon be presented to national leadership.

With the possibility of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra entering the electoral arena in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress aims to make a strategic impact, bolster its prospects, and resonate with the public sentiment in the region.

The forthcoming Lok Sabha elections are likely to witness an intense political battle and all eyes are on the Gandhi family's decisions, which could have far-reaching implications for the state and the nation, said Amarnath Agarwal, a senior Congress leader.

Case registered against Bhide for remarks insulting Gandhi

PTI ■ AMRAVATI

The police in Maharashtra's Amravati district on Saturday registered a case against right-wing activist Sambhaji Bhide for his alleged derogatory remarks on Mahatma Gandhi, a day after the Congress raised the matter in the assembly, an official said.

The Rajapeth police have registered the case against Bhide under Indian Penal Code section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony), the official said.

Congress workers held a protest in Amravati demanding that the sedition charge be also invoked against Bhide, while demonstrators tore the Hindutva leader's banners in Yavatmal.

The Congress has accused Bhide, the founder of Shri Shiv Pratishthan Hindustan outfit, of making offensive remarks about the Father of the Nation in his speech during a programme at Bharat Mangal Hall in Badnera Road area in Amravati district on Thursday. It had prompted Congress



state secretary Nandkishore Kuyate to file a complaint against Bhide at Rajapeth police station here, demanding that a case be registered against him.

On Friday, Maharashtra Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Balasaheb Thorat demanded strict action against Bhide, terming his comments shameful.

"Sambhaji Bhide has a twisted mindset. His comments about the Father of the Nation have disturbed the country. He repeatedly makes controversial comments and it needs to be found out who is backing him for political interests. We want strict action against him," said the former minister.

Without taking names, he claimed that a machinery was working to finish off progressive ideology.

Man from Indore receives 40K page reply to Covid-19 RTI

PNS ■ INDORE

In a remarkable incident, LDharmendra Shukla, a resident of Indore, Madhya Pradesh, received an astounding reply to his Right to Information Act (RTI) plea related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The reply consisted of a staggering 40,000 pages, completely packing his sports utility vehicle (SUV) with documents.

Shukla had submitted the RTI plea to the Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) of Indore, seeking details of tenders, bill payments, and procurement of medicines, equipment, and allied materials during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Notably, Shukla was not charged the stipulated ₹2 per page, as his plea went unanswered within the mandated one-month time frame. Frustrated by the lack of response, he approached the first appellate officer, Dr. Sharad Gupta, who accepted his plea and directed that the information be provided to him free of cost.



Upon receiving the directive, Shukla embarked on a unique task of bringing back the extensive documents in his SUV. Surprisingly, the entire vehicle got packed with the pages, leaving only the driver's seat free.

In response to the situation, Dr. Sharad Gupta, the appellate officer and Regional Joint Director of the state health department, confirmed that he ordered the information to be provided to Shukla without any charges. He further directed the CMHO to take appropriate action against the personnel responsible for the delay, as the state exchequer incurred a loss of ₹80,000 due to the information not being provided in a timely manner.

'4-6 Naxals hurt or killed in gunfight'

PTI ■ SUKMA

A fierce gunbattle took place between security personnel and Naxalites in Sukma district in Chhattisgarh on Saturday, with officials saying at least four to six ultras were either killed or injured though no bodies have been found at the site.

Naxalites managed to drag those injured or killed into the forests, these officials said. The encounter broke out this morning in the forest of village Chhotekedwal, located in a Maoist stronghold on the border of Chintagufa and Kistaram police station limits, when security personnel were out on an anti-Naxalite operation,



a police official said. Personnel belonging to the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) of the Central Reserve Police Force were involved in the operation, he said.

"The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of Divisional Committee member and in charge of Kistaram area committee of Maoists Raju and in-charge of platoon number 8 Masa along with 30-35 cadres in Chhotekedwal, Badekedwal and Singhanmadgu villages to observe outlawed movement's martyrs' week," he said.

The Naxalites opened fire on security personnel and faced retaliation, he said, adding that one-hour gunbattle resulted in four to six ultras getting injured or killed.

Eye on 2024, BJP rejigs team of office...

From Page 1

Pankaja Munde, the daughter of late BJP veteran Gopinath Munde, has been brought in as national BJP secretary from Maharashtra along with Kamakhya Prasad from Assam, Surendra Singh Nagar, a Rajya Sabha MP from UP, and Anil Antony from Kerala.

Among those dropped as secretaries are Vinod Sonkar, Sunil Deodhar and Harish Dwivedi (Lok Sabha MP from UP's Basti).

In a significant induction former Aligarh Muslim University vice-chancellor Mansoor, currently a Vidhan Parishad member -MLC- from UP, has been appointed Vice-president of the party.

The BJP government had earlier extended his term as VC of Aligarh University in 2022 by one year.

Manoor's inclusion in the central team comes close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public pitch for 'Pasmanda' Muslims who he said are backward vis-a-vis Upper-class Muslims in the community.

Modi had accused the Congress of giving 'lip service' to the welfare of 'Pasmandas' while allowing major benefits to go to the minuscule percentage of elites in the Muslim communi-

NEP recognises talent over...

From Page 1

He also praised it for strengthening higher education, and bolstering the research ecosystem in India.

Under the NEP, the new 5+3+3+4 system has replaced the previous 10+2 system, starting education at the age of three to achieve uniformity across the country. Additionally, the Cabinet has approved the National Research Foundation Bill to be presented in Parliament.

The National Curriculum Framework, catering to 3-8-year-old students, is ready for implementation, ensuring a uniform syllabus throughout the country. New course books in 22 different languages are being prepared by NCERT for Classes 3 to 12.

Modi emphasised the significance of imparting education in regional languages, promoting social justice, and empowering students in India.

He cited the example of Europe, where native languages play a pivotal role in education, and advocated shedding the perception that non-English speakers are backward or overlooked.

MP tops States in number...

From Page 1

However, the mortality data available on the website of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for 2023 (from January to July 2023) presents a disturbing picture. In the first seven months this year, at least 112 predators have died. More than half of the total deaths have been reported from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The Government report released on Saturday at Rampur also shows that States such as Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand have recorded a dip in the number of majestic cats in the last few years.

The Ministry has called for serious conservation efforts to aid in the recovery of the tiger population in these states. Arunachal Pradesh lost around 70 per cent of its tigers -- from 29 in 2018 to just 9 in 2022. The number of tigers dropped from 28 to 20 in Odisha, from 5 to 1 in Jharkhand, from 19 to 17 in Chhattisgarh and from 26 to 21 in Telangana.

The count dipped from 6 in 2006 to nil in 2022 in Mizoram and from 10 in 2006 to just 2 in 2022 in northern West Bengal. Nagaland also does not have any tigers now, according to the data.

The other tiger reserves having tigers in three-digit numbers are Mudumalai (114), Kanha (105), Kaziranga (104), Sundarbans (100). Tadoba reported two-digit tiger numbers (97) followed by Sathyamangalam (85), and Pench-MP (77).

The reserves where numbers of tiger are less are Ranipur in Uttar Pradesh; Achanakmar, Indravati and Udanti Sitanadi in Chhattisgarh; Palamau in Jharkhand; Bor and Sahyadri in Maharashtra; Satkosia in Odisha; Mukundara and Ramgarh Vishdhari in Rajasthan; Kawal in Telangana; Kalakad Mundanthurai in Tamil Nadu; Nameri in Assam; Dampa in Mizoram; Pakke, Kamlang and Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh and Buxa in West Bengal, as per a statement from the Ministry.

Released in April, the "Status of Tigers 2022" report had highlighted both encouraging and concerning trends in tiger populations across various landscapes. For instance, the tiger population in the forest divisions of the Shivalik Hills and Gangetic Plains landscape has experienced a significant surge: 804 unique tigers have been photographed in these regions.

In contrast, the Western Ghats witnessed a decrease in tiger occupancy, except for a few areas like Kali (Anshi Dandeli), where the number of unique tigers remains stable. The report pointed to "increasing human footprint and development" as the primary reasons behind the declining tiger population in the Western Ghats and stressed the need to address the issue of human-mega herbivore and carnivore tensions in this vital biodiversity hotspot.

Moving to the Northeastern Hills and Brahmaputra Plains landscape, while the number of distinctive tigers captured on camera decreased to 194 from the estimated 219 in 2018, the report assured that the tiger population in the region is still "secure", says the statement. Central India has seen an increase in the tiger population, with 1,161 tigers photographed compared to the estimated 1,033 in 2018. While this expansion of tiger habitats is positive, urgent attention and conservation efforts are required in areas where local tiger populations have become extinct, including reserves like Kawal, Satkosia, and Sahyadri, to prevent the extinction of small populations and mitigate human-tiger interactions, as per the statement.

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On behalf of Wilful Defaulter Screening Committee

CBI takes over sexual assault...

From Page 1

The government decided to hand over the case to the CBI, which was already investigating six other cases related to violence and heinous crimes in Manipur due to the ongoing ethnic conflict.

The State police had initially registered a case of abduction, gang rape, and murder against unidentified

armed individuals at the Nongpok Sekmai police station in Thoubal district on May 18.

The CBI has now taken over the FIR registered by the Manipur Police as its own case and has stationed its Special Investigation Team (SIT) in Manipur, led by a Deputy Inspector General-ranger officer. More women

Indian Navy to do away with colonial baton for...

From Page 1

Earlier, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked the defence forces to shed their colonial practices as the country entered Amrit Kalh having been Independent for over 75 years.

The Navy has taken several steps to get rid of British-era practices in the past. Last year, the Navy did away with its ensign, a white flag with horizontal and vertical red stripes and adopted a new one with the emblem of India emblazoned at the intersection of the two stripes.

Named Nishaan, the new ensign has the Tricolour at the top left, with the Indian Navy crest in an octagon, representing Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's rajmudra.

INDIA is here to help, Opp MPs tell...

From Page 1

Union Minister of Information & Broadcasting and Youth Affairs, Anurag Thakur, accused the Congress of being responsible for the ongoing ethnic clashes in Manipur, citing that the violence escalated during their regime.

Taking aim at Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Thakur questioned the Opposition and its allies' silence during Manipur's turbulent times under their governance. He urged Chowdhury to bring the delegation to West Bengal and questioned their stance on atrocities against women in the State.

from different parties, now part of the new Opposition alliance, comes a month after former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi visited the strife-torn State and appealed to the Centre to act swiftly to prevent further escalation of the ethnic clashes.

The delegates expressed their objective to visit relief camps and meet the Governor to seek a peaceful resolution to end the conflict. In a joint statement, the members of the Opposition's INDIA revealed their intention to meet members of both communities affected by the violence that erupted in the State nearly three months ago.

action to restore peace and highlighted the atrocities committed against women during the ethnic violence since May 3, stating that it could tarnish the country's image if not addressed promptly.

Former Chief Minister Okram Ibobi, who received the delegates at the airport, along with other Congress party workers, aims to assess the ground realities and the situation of the people who have been displaced from their homes for almost three months. The delegates plan to inform the Government about the situation and discuss their demand for the resignation of Manipur CM N Biren.

Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), an umbrella group of tribals in Manipur, on Saturday wrote a letter to the Opposition alliance INDIA, seeking its support for their demand of a separate administration and implementation of President's Rule in the violence-hit State. Manipur has been witnessing ethnic clashes since May 3 between the majority Meiteis and tribals that have left over 150 people dead.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mostly in the hill districts. "We fervently appeal

to the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) to take up our cause and apprise the nation about our plight.

"We implore you to help us survive this onslaught by supporting our demand for a separate administration from Manipur and to urge the central government to introduce President rule immediately in Manipur to end the violence," the ITLF said in its two-page letter to the Opposition parties.

The letter, signed by ITLF chairman Pagin Haokip and secretary Muan Tombing, said almost three months into the sectarian conflict, peace remains a distant dream in the northeast State.

'Capital records best air quality so far this year'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi on Saturday recorded its cleanest air quality so far this year with an AQI of 59, according to the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).

Intermittent rain in most parts of Delhi has played a role in improving the national capital's air quality and keeping temperatures in check. "Delhi today registered its best AQI of 2023. Delhi's average AQI clocked 59 today.

The earlier recorded best AQI of Delhi during current year was 64 on 9th July. Let's continue working together towards cleaner skies and a healthier environment," the CAQM said in a tweet.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'. Delhi on Saturday recorded a maximum temperature of 31.6 degrees



Celsius, three notches below the season's average, and a minimum temperature of 25 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department

(IMD). Delhi recorded 15 mm rainfall in the 24 hours till Saturday morning, it said. Relative humidity oscillated between 96 per cent and 81 per cent. The weather department has predicted a general-

ly cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle in the city on Sunday. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to settle around 35 degrees Celsius and 26 degrees Celsius, respectively, the IMD said.

Violence during Muharram processions, 10 cops injured

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A section of people taking about Muharram processions clashed with police and pelted stones at them, injuring around 10 cops and damaging several vehicles, after they were stopped from changing the designated route in west Delhi's Nagloi on Saturday, officials said. The police resorted to lathicharge to disperse the "unruly crowd", they said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Harendra Singh said, "Several tazia processions were being carried out in Nagloi area and around eight to ten thousand people participated in them. One or two organisers became unruly and tried to divert their procession route which was earlier decided."

"When police objected to it, they started pelting stones at police personnel. In order to control them, police resorted to a mild lathicharge and dispersed them from the area,"



PTI photo

Singh said. According to the police, around 10 personnel received minor injuries and some police vehicles were damaged in the stone pelting. The situation in the area is under control, the police said. Some purported videos of the incident were circulated on social media. In the videos, some people in the area are seen pelting stones causing damage to public vehicles, including buses, and private cars. In one of the videos,

police are seen resorting to lathicharge. Muslims take out "tazia" processions on Muharram to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, a grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in the battle of Karbala in 680 AD. "Tazia" is a miniature replica of the tomb of Imam Hussain. Muslims took out "tazia" processions, flagellated themselves and offered special prayers as they observed Muharram - the martyrdom of

Imam Hussain - on Saturday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several other leaders paid tributes to Hazrat Imam Hussain. "We recall the sacrifices made by Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS).

His courage and commitment to the ideals of justice and human dignity are noteworthy," Modi said on Twitter.

On Ashura, the 10th day of Muharram, Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain Ali, a grandson of Prophet Muhammad, in the battle of Karbala in 680 AD with mourning rituals.

Dressed in black and chanting in unison, Shias parade through streets beating their chests and chanting, while some emulate the suffering of Hussain by flagellating themselves with chains, ropes, etc. Sunni observe fast and offer prayers. "Tazia" is a miniature replica of the tomb of Imam Hussain. Elaborate security arrangements were made in states for peaceful processions.

LG takes stock of restoration work at Sanjay Van

Restoration efforts initiated after Saxena's first visit to these sites last year

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Saturday visited the Mehrauli Archaeological Park and Sanjay Van to assess the progress of restoration works being carried out by DDA in collaboration with ASI.

These restoration efforts were initiated after Saxena's first visits to these sites last year, shortly after assuming his role as LG. During his fourth visit to the Mehrauli Archaeological Park, Saxena inspected the ongoing restora-

tion works at significant sites such as the Tomb of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban, Metcalfe's Lodge (Dil Khusha - Mohammad Quli Khan's Tomb), Jamali-Kamali Mosque, and Rajaon ki Baoli. Notably, Rajaon ki Baoli, which was previously filled with silt and garbage, has now been restored into a vibrant water body in a remarkably short period.

The restoration of Metcalfe Lodge - Dil Khusha is also nearing completion, and an eco-friendly restaurant is set to be operationalized in its vicinity by the end of August,



adding a unique attraction to this historically iconic site. Expressing concern over the state of King Prithviraj Chauhan's Qila Rai Pithora due to negligence by authorities, Saxena directed DDA and ASI to immediately commence restoration works. He request-

ed that cleaning operations be initiated, and restoration designs be submitted within the upcoming week, emphasizing the need for coordinated efforts. Additionally, during his visit to Sanjay Van, the LG oversaw the ongoing restoration works of the 11th Century

Anang Tal Baoli, which began last year. He urged officials to expedite restoration process for this unexplored heritage site, which houses a diverse range of flora and fauna, envisioning it as a captivating showcase for visitors to National Capital of India.

3 arrested over online sale of Chinese manjha

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has busted a racket involved in online sale of banned Chinese manjha and arrested three people, officials said on Saturday.

The accused have been identified as Ali Hasan (36), Harsh Vardhan Khatri (28), residents of Faridabad in Haryana, and Ritik Kumar Chaurasia (24), a resident of Madanpur Khadar, they said.

The accused were using social media sites and a webpage named MONO KITE for the illegal trade. A total of 201 rolls of Chinese manjha were recovered from them, police said.

According to the police, they got a tip-off about illegal sale and purchase of nylon-based banned Chinese manjha in Madanpur Khadar.

A trap was laid and Chaurasia was nabbed. During the search of his shop, 16 rolls of Chinese manjha were recovered. Special Commissioner of Police (Crime) Ravindra Singh Yadav said.

At the instance of Chaurasia, Khatri was apprehended from Faridabad and 69 rolls of Chinese manjha were recovered from his possession. He was selling these banned strings through online as well



as offline mode, Yadav said. Later, Hasan was also arrested and 116 rolls of Chinese manjha were recovered from his house.

Khatri is tech savvy and he had posted many pictures of Chinese manjha and kite flying videos on social media. He created a webpage "MONO KITE" and the purchasers used to contact him using the mobile number posted by him on social media platforms, police said.

Hasan, the main source of manjha-supplying network, used to supply the banned string in Faridabad, Gurugram, Delhi/NCR etc., police added.

In another incident, police arrested a Chinese manjha dealer in northeast Delhi's Welcome area on Saturday and

recovered 422 rolls of the banned kite string, Deputy Commissioner of Police (northeast) Joy Tirkey said. The accused has been identified as Nizam (42), a resident of Janta Colony in Welcome. His further sources of supply of manjha are being ascertained, the DCP said.

In 2017, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned Chinese manjha in the national capital as it posed a risk to people and animals by cutting through their skin.

In February this year, the Delhi High Court directed the crime branch of the city police to investigate the manufacturing, sale, purchase and storage of Chinese synthetic manjha, used for kite flying, in markets and shops here.

Atishi 'pulls up' top bureaucrat over delay in disbursement of flood relief sum

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A fresh confrontation between Delhi's Aam Aadmi Party government and bureaucrats emerged on Saturday, as NCT's revenue minister, Atishi, criticised chief secretary Naresh Kumar over the delay in disbursing flood relief funds.

In a letter addressed to the NCT's top bureaucrat, Atishi expressed shock at the slow progress in providing relief to flood-affected families. She highlighted that out of 4,716 affected families eligible for the ₹10,000 ex-gratia amount sanctioned by the Delhi Government, only 197 had received the assistance so far.

The Cabinet had taken the decision to provide Rs 10,000 relief to the affected families 10



days ago. However, despite the deployment of 19 IAS and 18 DANICS officers, along with 6 DMs, 6 ADMs, and 18 SDMs, the relief package processing for the families had not been completed.

Atishi pointed out that each officer assigned to flood relief had to process the assistance for 70 families, meaning they should have provided relief to seven families per day.

Expressing concern over this "laxity" during a disaster, she questioned the officers' ability to handle regular workloads if they faced difficulties in times of crisis. Earlier, ministers Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi had raised objections to the principal secretary (home) regarding the deployment of the army and NDRF to control a breach in a drain regulator that led to flooding in ITO region.

Govt to replicate Chilla WTP's hydro energy tech in other wastewater treatment plants

City Govt aims to maximise use of treated water for non-drinking purposes, says Min

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

During a visit to the Chilla plant in east Delhi to assess its operations and technology, Bharti said it is unique as it generates hydro energy from wastewater, a pioneering move in the city.

It treats both wastewater from the Ghazipur drain and the adjoining state of Uttar Pradesh, the Delhi Jal Board vice chairman said.

Bharti said the Arvind Kejriwal government aims to maximise the use of treated water for non-drinking purposes.

The Chilla plant fills around 78 water tankers daily with treated water for irrigation, industries, agriculture and construction works.

16-year-old boy hangs self over study pressure in Chander Vihar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 16-year-old boy allegedly hanged himself in the bathroom of his house Saturday morning in east Delhi's Chander Vihar area, police said.

A PCR call was received at 7.06 am about suicide in the Chander Vihar area near Madhu Vihar, they said.

Police found the boy, Ankit Badola, a student of Class 11, hanging in the bathroom with a rope tied to a window rod, Deputy Commissioner of Police (east) Amrutha Guguloth said.

HC quashes 2 FIRs in assault case

Court asks parties to get rid of negative energy by planting 400 saplings

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed the members of two families, who were involved in a fight on a trivial issue that was subsequently settled, to plant 400 saplings in their areas to put an end to their "negative energy" by contributing to the society.

The court said the parties shall plant the saplings and take care of those for five years. The court quashed the proceedings in two criminal cases registered for the alleged offences of voluntarily causing hurt, house-trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint, criminal intimidation and attempt to commit culpable homicide. "However, I consider that the negative

energy of the parties should be put to an end by directing them to contribute to the society. Hence, the petitioners in both cases are directed to plant 200 trees each in their areas.

The place shall be identified by the investigating officer (IO) after consultation with the horticulture department and he shall inform the petitioners 15 days in advance," Justice Dinesh Kumar Sharma said.

The court said the IO shall also explore the possibility of geo-tagging the saplings for proper monitoring by the appropriate authority. It has called for a compliance report in the matter in November. In the first FIR, the complainant said the case dates back to March 4, 2017, when three members of a family

came to his house and asked for their IDs for the purpose of getting their blankets that were to be distributed by a candidate of a political party.

However, the complainant told the three that they were supporters of another political party, which led to a verbal dispute and subsequently, a fight. In the other FIR, it was



Drunk duo hit police car in Kerala Govt's convoy, arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two inebriated men in an SUV were arrested here after they breached security to enter the convoy of Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and hit a police vehicle, officials said on Saturday.

The incident took place around 10.45 pm on Friday when the Kerala governor was in the city for a programme, the Noida police said, adding no one was injured in the collision.

Khan had a programme at the Express Zenith society in Sector 77, under Sector 113 police station of the area. After the event, he left for Delhi from Noida with a pilot car and an escort vehicle of the Noida police in his fleet, according to an official statement.

"At around 10.45 pm, when the fleet reached near metro station Sector 76, the driver of a black-coloured Mahindra Scorpio UP 16 DM 3155 obstructed the VIP fleet while driving rashly and negligently. The escort police team signalled the SUV to stay away from the fleet. However, a little later the SUV hit a traffic police vehicle in the fleet," the police said.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (Noida) Shakti Mohan



Avasthy said the two men who were inside the Mahindra Scorpio were immediately taken into custody by the police. "Those held were found under the influence of alcohol. They have been identified as Gaurav Solanki and Monu Kumar, both residents of adjoining Ghaziabad district. An FIR has been lodged against them at the local police station," Avasthy.

He said the FIR has been lodged under Indian Penal Code sections 279 (rash driving in public road), 504 (intentionally disrupting public peace), 34 (act done by more than one person with common intention), 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharging duty) and 427 (mischief).

Further legal proceedings against them are being carried out, the officer added.

'Noida major centre of GST irregularities'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

Noida in Gautam Buddha Nagar district has emerged as the major centre of irregularities in goods and services tax where GST fraud cases have doubled in the last three years. According to the data of the Uttar Pradesh GST officials, in the 2020-21 fiscal, a fine of Rs 18.04 crore was collected in 66 cases of tax evasion. In 2021-22, fraud of Rs 11.56 crore was detected in 91 cases, while in 2022-23, 134 tax evasion cases were unearthed in which a fine of Rs 45.72 was collected. A UP GST official pointed out that fake tax invoice was like a fake note and companies evade GST when they sell goods but do not provide the bill.

He added that most of these irregularities were seen in sectors which were unorganised and informal, because they had no proper system like big companies.

Big companies have proper accounting systems and management, along with other systems which prevent these kinds of frauds. However, despite the irregularities and frauds, goods and services tax/value-added tax collection is continuously increasing in the state due to efforts of the government.

Solve visa backlog for Indians, Biden told

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Underlining huge backlog and long wait period for Indians seeking Green Card, a group of US lawmakers has urged President Joe Biden to take executive action to make priority dates current for applicants to reduce the 195-year-long wait period and backlog which has left them in a constant state of limbo.

Led by Congressmen Raja Krishnamoorthi and Larry Bucshon, the bipartisan group of 56 lawmakers sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas requesting the administration take executive action to provide relief to high-skilled employment-based visa holders.

In their letter, the US lawmakers also appealed to the administration to mark all dates for filing of employment-based visa applications in the Bureau of Consular Affairs' published Employment-Based



Visa Bulletin as "current"

A Green Card, known officially as a Permanent Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the US as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently. The current situation surrounding the seven per cent country cap on employment-based Green Card allocation is causing severe repercussions, particularly for countries such as India, where the backlog has reached an astonishing 195 years, said

Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS USA) in a separate appeal to President Joe Biden.

This backlog disproportionately affects Indian tech professionals, who constitute a significant portion of the highly skilled STEM talent and US-educated graduates, playing a crucial role in maintaining the United States' competitive edge in the technology industries, it said. STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

(STEM) subjects. However, the backlog has created a significant barrier, hindering these talented individuals from contributing meaningfully to the country's growth and innovation, the FIIDS observed.

This year, the FIIDS has made several efforts in addressing the concerns of the immigrant Indian community, in particular those related to Green Card and H-1B visas. "We started efforts to get relief to Indian H-1Bs who are stuck in Green Card processing. We launched a change petition, we are approaching representatives, various other organisations and influencers.

We are reaching out to the Bureau of consular services in the state department as well as the USCIS in the DHS to take administrative action to make the priority dates current for green card applicants," Khanderao Kand from FIIDS said. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or

technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The lawmakers in their letter said marking all dates as "current" would allow employment-based applications to be filed regardless of applicants' country-based priority date.

This would provide relief to thousands of individuals attempting to legally navigate the US immigration system and could potentially also make some eligible for employment authorisation documents to change jobs, start businesses, and travel abroad to visit family without penalty, it said.

Without this administrative action, which was also used during the administration of President George W Bush, individuals are left in a constant state of limbo and, in some cases, are punished for utilising a pathway of legal immigration by being forced to stay with one company or organisation due to their Green Card status, they said in the letter. "I'm

proud to join my colleagues in urging the Biden administration to address bureaucratic delays in our legal immigration system that are holding back our economy while leaving so many families in limbo," Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said.

"By using its authority under the existing law, the administration can ease this burden while strengthening our economy and helping to create jobs," he said.

Congressman Bucshon said, unfortunately, due to bureaucratic red tape in "our nation's legal immigration system, they are caught in the visa backlog and don't have the flexibility to change jobs, start businesses, and travel abroad without penalty."

"I believe that it's important for the administration to act within the current law to make it easier for these legal immigrants to navigate our immigration system and continue making a positive contribution to our nation and our economy," Bucshon said.

INDIA's Maha meet may be postponed as some leaders unavailable on Aug 25-26

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The opposition alliance INDIA is likely to defer its third meeting in Mumbai to the first week of September after some leaders conveyed they may be unavailable on August 25-26 due to other engagements, sources said on Saturday.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar, whose party recently saw a split, will embark on a tour of Maharashtra from mid-August and is among the leaders who will be unavailable next month, they said.

"August 25-26 is still under consideration but we are looking at another set of dates to ensure that everyone is available," a senior leader of the INDIA bloc in Mumbai said. Speaking at a press conference after a meeting of the Maha Vikas Aghadi on Friday, Maharashtra Congress chief

Nana Patole said MVA leaders have rallied lined up in August which had taken a backseat due to the monsoon. The MVA constituents — Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena (UBT) — are scheduled to meet again next Saturday. While the Congress is leading the 26-member opposition alliance's efforts nationally, it was considered a junior partner in Maharashtra due to its numbers in the state assembly till the Shiv Sena and the NCP saw a split in their ranks.

Former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray was projected as the leader of the MVA in the 'Vajramuth' rallies of the coalition before Ajit Pawar's rebellion led to a split in the NCP. Thackeray's party has taken lead in organising Mumbai meeting of opposition alliance. "The Shiv Sena is coordinating the meeting dates as far as we have been told.

Cyberfraud is area which requires a lot of attention, says Asthana

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former CBI chief Rakesh Asthana said on Saturday incidents of cyberfraud are increasing and this is a domain that now requires a lot of attention.

He cited his own case in which he became a victim of cyberfraud when he was serving as the Border Security Force (BSF) director general, and some fraudsters withdrew Rs 40,000 from his account using his Aadhaar biometrics. "This is an area which requires a lot of attention not only from the police and the government law-enforcement bodies but also from private investigating agencies.

You can assist the law enforcement agencies," Asthana said at an event, National Corporate Investigators Conclave-2023, organised by the Association of Professional Detectives &



Investigators (APDI). Talking about his case, Asthana, who also served as the Delhi Police chief, said the crime was linked to several places in Bihar and Jharkhand from where 40 people were arrested. Multiple laptops and mobile phones were seized, he said.

One of the masterminds was son of a police officer who was an engineer and got into cybercrime as he could not get a job. Asthana said the modus

operandi they adopted to access his fingerprint was very surprising.

"I had purchased a flat some three years back so from the registry office they obtained my fingerprint, took a very high-definition photograph of it, and transferred it onto a butter paper. This was done by those private people who were employed by the banks and insurance companies," he said.

He also advised budding private investigators, who were present for the launch of a "Certified Corporate Investigator" programme by APDI, not to steal the personal data of individuals or corporates because this is against the law.

"We know about people who have secured private data through dubious means by paying money to the service providers and using it unauthorisedly. Please don't do that

because it is not only illegal, it will cause a lot of harm to your company which is working with you for the sake of corporate investigation," Asthana said. He was of the view that with the growing cases of corporate fraud and data theft, there is a dire need to have trained professionals.

He also said that though the role of private investigators and detectives is not mandated by law, they do support legal and investigating agencies. "Certification of private investigators and detectives will provide them with some legal sanctity. It will add value to their work," he added.

APDI Chairman Kunwar Vikram Singh, while launching the programme at the APDI National Corporate Investigators Conclave-2023, said corporate investigations are crucial in maintaining the integrity and trust within the business ecosystem.

'Release of 1% of dormant bugs could cause major environmental damage'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change could hasten the release of 'time-travelling' pathogens from melting permafrost and ice that have been trapped for millennia, a team of researchers has rang the alarm bell as they warn that even a minute 1 per cent of dormant bugs could cause major environmental damage and the widespread loss of host organisms around the world.

The global study led by Dr. Giovanni Strona of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre and Matthew Flinders Professor of Global Ecology Corey Bradshaw from Flinders University in Australia is published in the open-access journal PLOS Computational Biology. The researchers reached this disturbing conclusion as they constructed simulated experiments where digital pathogens from the past invade communities of bacteria-like hosts. They compared the effects of the invading

pathogens on the diversity of host bacteria to those in communities where no invasions occurred. The researchers found that in their simulations, the ancient invading pathogens could often survive and evolve in the modern world, and about 3% became dominant in their new environment.

About 1% of those invaders presented unpredictable results — some caused up to one-third of the host species to die out, while others increased diversity by up to 12% compared to the simulations where escape was not permitted in the simulations.

The risks posed by this 1% of released pathogens might seem small, but given the sheer number of ancient microbes regularly released into modern communities, the researchers say these outbreaks represent a substantial danger. "The scientific debate on the topic has been dominated by speculation, due to challenges in collecting data or designing exper-

iments to elaborate and test hypotheses. For the first time, we provide an extensive analysis of the risk posed to modern ecological communities by these 'time-travelling' pathogens through advanced computer simulations," said lead author Dr Giovanni Strona.

"We found that invading pathogens could often survive, evolve and, in a few cases, become exceptionally persistent and dominant in the community, causing either substantial losses or changes in number of living species.

Our findings therefore suggest that unpredictable threats so far confined to science fiction could in reality pose serious risks as powerful drivers of ecological damage." Flinders University Professor Corey Bradshaw said new findings show that risk of invasion of unknown 'black swan' pathogens that can cause irreversible damage is not negligible.

'Disturbed by trivialisation of Holocaust in Bawaal'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Israel Embassy here has taken exception to "trivialisation" of Holocaust in Hindi film 'Bawaal' and said "we urge everyone who may not be fully aware of the horrors of the Holocaust to educate themselves about it."

Israeli Ambassador to India Naor Gilon also tweeted, "I did not and will not watch the film Bawaal but from what I've read, there was a poor choice of terminology and symbolism. Trivialization of the Holocaust should disturb all. I urge those who don't know enough about the horrors of the #Holocaust to educate themselves about it."

These remarks came days after Jewish organisation The Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) raised objections regarding some scenes in the film. 'Bawaal' follows a high school history teacher Ajay Dixit (Varun Dhawan) and his wife Nisha (Jahnvi Kapoor) as they go on a Europe tour where they visit prominent World War 2 sites, including Auschwitz and Anne Frank's home in Amsterdam.

The film includes some dialogues comparing marital discord to Auschwitz and greedy people to Hitler. It also shows Jahnvi and Varun in striped pyjamas in a Nazi camp in a fantasy sequence.

In a statement, the Israeli embassy said, "The Israeli embassy is disturbed by the trivialization of the significance of the Holocaust in the recent movie 'Bawaal'."

There was a poor choice in the utilization of some terminology in the movie, and though we assume no malice was intended, we urge everyone who may not be fully aware of the horrors of the Holocaust to educate themselves about it.

Our embassy is constantly working to propagate educational materials on this crucial subject, and we are open to engaging in conversations with all individuals to foster a better understanding of the universal lessons derived from the Holocaust."

People with Alzheimer's risk gene may lose ability to detect odours early

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

People who carry the gene variant associated with the strongest risk for Alzheimer's disease may lose their ability to detect odors earlier than people who do not carry the gene variant, which may be an early sign of future memory and thinking problems, according to a study.

Published in the online issue of Neurology, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology, the study says the gene variant associated with this increased risk of Alzheimer's is called APOE ε4.

Testing a person's ability to detect odors may be a useful way to predict future problems with cognition. While more research is needed to confirm these findings and determine what level of smell loss would predict future risk, these results could be promising, especially in studies aiming to identify people at risk for dementia early in the disease."

The study involved an at-home survey that included testing the sense of smell of over 865 people both their ability to detect an odor at all and their ability to identify what odor they were smelling. Tests were given at five-year intervals.

People's thinking and memory skills were also tested twice, five years apart. DNA samples gave researchers information about who carried the gene associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's.

For the test to see if people could detect odors, scores ranged from zero to six based on how many of the different concentrations of odors they could smell. People who carried the gene variant were 37% less likely to have good odor detection than people without the



gene at a single time point. Researchers accounted for other factors that could affect the results, such as age, sex, and educational level.

The gene carriers started experiencing reduced smell detection from age 65 to 69. At that age, the gene carriers could detect an average of about 3.2 of the smells, compared to about 3.9 smells for the people who did not carry the gene.

The people carrying the gene variant did not show a difference in their ability to identify what odor they were smelling until they reached age 75 to 79. Once they started to lose their ability to identify odors, the gene carriers' ability declined more quickly than those who did not carry the gene.

Thinking and memory skills were similar among the two groups at the start of the study. But as expected, those carrying the gene variant experienced more rapid declines in their thinking skills over time than those without the gene.

"Identifying the mechanisms underlying these relationships will help us understand the role of smell in neurodegeneration," GoodSmith said. A limitation of the study is that people with severe dementia were not included.

The study was supported by the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute on Aging, and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

CBI registers fresh FIR in Bihar shelter home case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Saturday registered a fresh FIR against unidentified officials of a shelter home for girls in Muzaffarpur in Bihar, which dominated national headlines in 2018 for large-scale sexual abuse of inmates, in connection with a missing girl who was shown as reunited with parents in 2015 on the basis of forged documents.

Brajesh Thakur, whose NGO ran the shelter home, Balika Gruh, was sentenced to imprisonment till last breath by a special CBI court here in 2020. During its probe, the CBI found details of a physically and mentally disabled girl, who was shown on paper to have been reunited with her parents in 2015, remains missing. "During further investigation of that case, it was revealed that one



minor girl...Who was physically and mentally disabled and was reportedly restored on November 10 to her father...In compliance of the order dated November 10, 2015 purportedly passed by Child Welfare Committee, Sitamarhi," the FIR alleged.

When the CBI dug further it found that the voter ID cards of persons claiming to be the father and his wife were fake. "It was also found that Nathuni Mukhiya, the identifier of the father and his wife, is a fictitious person and no such person ever functioned as Mukhiya of the said village and it has also

established that release order...Dated November 10, 2015 was not signed by Mansi Samadar, the then chairperson, and Renu Kumari Singh, the then member, CWC (Child Welfare Committee) Sitamarhi. The said order was found to be fake and forged," the CBI has alleged in its FIR. Based on the report, the Bihar government handed over probe to CBI in March this year which has now registered the FIR.

Thakur is currently serving life sentence after a Delhi court in February 2020 sentenced him to "rigorous imprisonment till remainder of his life" and imposed a fine of ₹32.20 lakh on him in shelter home case. The sexual abuse of inmates of shelter home had come to light on May 26, 2018 after Tata Institute of Social Sciences submitted a report to Bihar government highlighting plight of victims.

Corporate Affairs Ministry officials among 4 arrested in ₹3 lakh bribery case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI on Saturday said it has arrested four persons, including two joint directors posted in the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and an associate of Mumbai-based Alok Industries, in connection with alleged bribery of Rs 3 lakh.

The agency conducted searches in Delhi, Gurugram and Chennai at the premises of the accused which led to the recovery of cash of Rs 59.80 lakh, several incriminating documents and digital evidence, the CBI said in a statement.

Those arrested were Joint Directors Manjit Singh and Puneet Duggal, Senior Technical Assistant Ruhu Arora, all posted in the offices of the

Ministry of Corporate Affairs, and Alok Industries associate Reshabh Raizada, officials said. While Singh and Arora are posted in the office of the Director General of Corporate Affairs, Duggal is posted as official liquidator in Chennai.

The agency had booked them on Friday for allegedly indulging in corrupt and illegal activities and, in pursuance of a conspiracy, taking bribe from the private person for showing favour in the files of Alok Industries pertaining to the investigation being made by the ministry for adopting illegal and unethical business activities. Following the FIR, a trap was laid and the accused were arrested along with bribe money of Rs 3 lakh, they added.

Punjab leader meets Shah, thanks HM for opening NCB unit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP leader from Punjab and former Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu, Dr. Jagmohan Singh Raju, met with Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday and Raju thanked Shah on behalf of the people of Punjab, particularly Amritsar, for opening a unit of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) in the city.

He also presented a representation suggesting several measures to mitigate the menace of drugs in Punjab. These include setting up de-addiction Centres (under the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) in each of the

badly drug-affected districts of Punjab. He also asked Sha to provide a special pension of INR 2500 per month to destitute women whose husbands have died of drugs. Similarly, grant Special Old Age Pensions for elderly couples whose male children have died due to drug abuse.

Dr. Raju emphasized that with terror organizations in Pakistan, along with ISI, actively pushing drugs through the border as part of their narcotics project, Amritsar has become a hotbed of drugs. He expressed dissatisfaction with the efforts of the AAP in controlling the drug menace in the state, citing around 200 drug overdose deaths reported during the AAP's regime.

'Narrative Ka Mayajaal' unveiled

Book delves into power, impact of narratives on India's culture, politics and society

New Delhi: Renowned columnist and former Member of Parliament, Balbir Punj, unveiled his latest book titled "Narrative Ka Mayajaal" on Friday at a book release function in New Delhi.

The thought-provoking work examines the complex web of narratives that influence individual and collective identities, challenging the colonial narrative while shedding light on neglected facts surrounding current social and political controversies. In "Narrative Ka Mayajaal," Balbir Punj meticulously dissects various

narratives, ranging from truth and half-truths to outright lies, myths, and fabrications. The book takes readers on a journey through historical narratives, showcasing their profound impact on society, culture, and politics. It emphasizes the need to critically analyze these narratives to discern the truth amidst the plethora of tales.

One of the key themes celebrated in the book is India's rich cultural legacy of pluralism and diversity. Balbir Punj highlights the country's unique tradition of embracing and nurturing various belief systems, warmly welcoming Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity, which coexist harmoniously within the nation's fabric.

Speaking about his book, the author said, "In 'Narrative Ka Mayajaal,' I have endeavored to unravel the intricate web of

narratives that shape our thoughts and beliefs. It is essential for us to discern the truth amidst the myriad of tales that surround us.

This book aims to empower readers with the knowledge to critically analyze narratives, fostering a more informed and harmonious society. I hope 'Narrative Ka Mayajaal' contributes to the decolonization of Indian minds."

The book launch event witnessed the esteemed presence of notable figures such as Arif Mohammad Khan, the Governor of Kerala; Dattatreya Hosabale, General Secretary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and J. Sai Deepak, a distinguished author, and Eminent Legal Counsel.

About the Author: Balbir Punj is a respected columnist and has served as the Chairman of the Indian

Institute of Mass Communication. He is also a social activist who represented the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Rajya Sabha for two terms, one from Uttar Pradesh during 2000-2006 and another from Orissa during 2008-2014.

Balbir Punj played a pivotal role as the convener of the Intellectual Cell of the BJP for a decade, contributing significantly to the party's ideological direction.

Additionally, he held the esteemed position of Chairman of the National Commission for Youth, with Minister of State status. "Narrative Ka Mayajaal" promises to be an engaging and enlightening read, urging readers to critically examine the narratives that shape their perceptions and beliefs, and fostering a more introspective and empowered society. PNS

BNP supporters clash with cops as Opp protests

PTI ■ DHAKA

At least 90 activists of the Aamin opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were arrested on Saturday as a five-hour sit-in protest here turned violent when police in riot gears clashed with protesters who tried to enforce road blockades demanding an interim caretaker government ahead of the January 2024 elections.

Witnesses said the opposition activists set on fire at least four passenger buses, and a police car, damaged several other vehicles and attacked the police armoured personnel carriers (APC) with stones and bamboo sticks.

The police fired rubber bullets, tear gas canisters, and used batons and arrested 90 BNP activists as they vandalised at least 30 vehicles - at least 10 police vehicles, and injured 19 members of the law enforce-

ment agency.

"We are going to file cases against them on charges of sabotage and attacks," Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) spokesman Faruque Hossain told reporters.

Two injured senior BNP leaders Goyeshwar Roy and Amanullah Aman were also taken into custody as they were leading the protests.

Roy was released later while television footage showed police offering the BNP member a lavish lunch alongside a senior police officer at DMP's Detective Branch ahead of his release. Aman was admitted to the state-run National Cardiac Institute as he was suffering from heart issues but police made no comment on whether or not he was under arrest.

The BNP headed by former prime minister Khalida Zia is campaigning for the resignation of the incumbent Awami League government led by

Sheikh Hasina, claiming that no election would be fair and credible under the current government.

The opposition protests disrupted transport links between the capital and other parts of the country causing traffic gridlocks inside Dhaka city and its entry points but no major casualty was reported despite the clashes. An officer at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) police outpost, however, said six protesters were admitted with injuries to the capital's main state-run health facility.

The BNP enforced the protest despite a police ban a day after the party staged a huge rally in the capital even as the ruling Awami League announced a counter-rally in a demonstration of strength by both parties.

The Awami League announced that it would stage rallies at the capital and all sub-districts in unitary Bangladesh

on Sunday, protesting "BNP vandalism".

"The BNP has again resorted to their arson campaign when Awami League can't stay as a silent spectator. We will discharge our responsibility," party general secretary Obaidul Quader told the media.

He added: "We will stay in the field until the election."

Shortly after the Awami League announcement, BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said the party would organise nationwide rallies on Monday to protest assaults on its activists.

"We had plans to stage the countrywide rallies tomorrow (Sunday), but rescheduled it to avoid an issue in view of the Awami League announcement," Alamgir said in a press conference. BNP chairperson Zia, a two-time premier, is debarred from taking part in political activities as a convict of two graft charges with a court hand-

ing her down a total of 17 years of imprisonment.

The government however allowed her to stay at home using a special legal discretion.

"No election can be held under this illegal, unconstitutional government. We have only one demand - the government must resign and dissolve parliament," Fakhrul said in an address to supporters during the Friday rally, renewing the BNP demand for an election-time caretaker administration.

This was the first rally by the BNP after protest marches earlier this month following its announcement of a "final push" to topple the Hasina government before the next general election scheduled to be held after six months.

The BNP is currently waging a campaign for holding the early January 2024 elections under a non-party caretaker government, fearing rigged polling.

US to announce \$345 mn military aid for Taiwan

Washington (AP): The US is set to announce \$345 million in military aid for Taiwan, two US officials said on Friday. It would be the Biden administration's first major package drawing on America's own stockpiles under a new policy intended to speed up military aid to help Taiwan counter China.

The package includes man-portable air defense systems, or MANPADS, intelligence and surveillance capabilities, firearms and missiles, according to the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters ahead of the announcement.

US lawmakers have been pressuring the Pentagon and White House to speed weapons to Taiwan, to help it counter China.

The aid is part of a presidential authority approved by Congress last year to draw weapons from US military stockpiles to support Taiwan. This gets weapons delivered faster than providing funding for new weapons.

The Pentagon has used a similar authority to get billions of dollars worth of munitions to Ukraine.

Taiwan split from China in 1949 amid civil war. Chinese President Xi Jinping maintains China's right to take over the now self-ruled island, by force if necessary.

Getting stockpiles of weapons to Taiwan now, before an attack begins, is one of the lessons the US has learned from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Pentagon deputy defense secretary Kathleen Hicks told The Associated Press earlier this year.

Ukraine "was more of a cold-start approach than the planned approach we have been working on for Taiwan, and we will apply those lessons," Hicks said. Efforts to resupply Taiwan after a conflict erupted would be complicated because it is an island, she said.

WORLD BRIEFS

THAILAND FIREWORKS WAREHOUSE EXPLOSION KILLS
Bangkok: A large explosion at a fireworks warehouse in southern Thailand on Saturday killed at least nine people and wounded scores, officials said. The governor of the province of Narathiwat, Sanan Pongakorn, told public broadcaster Thai PBS that also at least 115 people were hurt, and that many were in serious condition. He said about 500 to 800 people who live nearby may have to be moved to a temporary shelter. He did not elaborate. Videos posted on social media from the site show a huge plume of smoke over the area and many damaged structures, cars and motorbikes, as well as streets covered with debris. Many of the houses and other buildings have collapsed roofs and walls.

COLOMBIA'S PREZ SON ARRESTED FOR MONEY LAUNDERING
Bogota: Colombian police arrested the president's son Saturday as part of a high-profile money laundering probe into funds he allegedly collected during last year's presidential campaign. President Gustavo Petro said he wouldn't interfere with the probe. "As an individual and father, it pains me to see so much self destruction and one of my sons going to jail," Petro said in an early morning message on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter.

5 HONDURAN MIGRANTS DIE IN MEXICO VAN CRASH
Mexico City: Five Honduran migrants are dead and another 18 are injured following the crash of the van they were riding in on Mexico's southern Gulf coast, Mexico's National Immigration Institute said on Friday. The dead include four adult women and a two-year-old child. About half of those injured are children. The type of panel van in which the 23 migrants were traveling is frequently used both for public transport and smuggling migrants in southern Mexico. The van appears to have skidded off a highway Thursday and rolled, or somehow been crushed into a mangled heap, according to photos distributed by the institute.

TURKISH STRIKES IN SYRIA, IRAQ KILL EIGHT FIGHTERS
Baghdad: Kurdish-led armed groups in Iraq and Syria alleged that Turkish airstrikes killed a total of eight of their fighters on Friday. The counterterrorism service of the regional government in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq said in a statement that four members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, were killed and another wounded in a Turkish drone strike in Sharbazher district in Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdish region of Iraq. The drone targeted a vehicle carrying PKK fighters near the village of Rangina, it said. Also on Friday, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which controls much of north-east Syria, said in a statement that four of its fighters were killed by a Turkish drone attack on the village of Khirbet Khwei in the Amuda region.

'X' LOGO INSTALLED ATOP TWITTER BUILDING
San Francisco: The city of San Francisco has opened a complaint and launched an investigation into a giant 'X' sign that was installed Friday on top of the downtown building formerly known as Twitter headquarters as owner Elon Musk continues his rebrand of the social media platform. City officials say replacing letters or symbols on buildings, or erecting a sign on top of one, requires a permit for design and safety reasons. The X appeared after San Francisco police stopped workers on Monday from removing the brand's iconic bird and logo from the side of the building, saying they hadn't taped off the sidewalk to keep pedestrians safe if anything fell.

THREE PEOPLE FATALLY SHOT IN GERMANY
Berlin: Three people were shot and killed at a residential building in southern Germany on Friday and another two wounded in a nearby house, police said. A suspect was arrested. The shooting took place on Friday evening in Langweid, just outside the Bavarian city of Augsburg. Police said the suspect, a 64-year-old man, was then arrested, German news agency dpa reported. Authorities said the motive was still under investigation. Police said the suspect fatally shot two women, ages 49 and 72, and a 52-year-old man, before continuing to another house in a nearby street.

SEATTLE SHOOTING INJURES 5 PEOPLE
Seattle: A shooting in a Seattle parking lot on Friday night wounded five people, including two who were in critical condition, the city's police chief said. The Seattle Police Department responded to a reported shooting around 9 pm in the 9200 block of Rainier Avenue South. The shooting started in the parking lot of what was formerly known as King Donuts, Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz said at the scene.

Macron discusses ties with Wickremesinghe

PTI ■ COLOMBO

French President Emmanuel Macron pledged strong support for the island nation's debt restructuring and discussed ways to enhance bilateral relations with his Sri Lankan counterpart Ranil Wickremesinghe during a historic visit to Colombo.

The first-ever visit by a French president to Sri Lanka took place as the two countries celebrate 75 years of diplomatic ties this year.

Macron, who was on his return home from a 5-day visit to the Pacific islands of Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, was met by Wickremesinghe at the airport and spent over two hours in Colombo on Friday. His visit marked the first time a French President visited Sri Lanka.

Wickremesinghe and Macron held "friendly and productive" bilateral discussions to enhance and elevate the existing relations between Sri Lanka and France, the President's Media Division said in a statement on Saturday.

The discussions figured on Sri

Lanka's ongoing debt restructuring process.

Macron reaffirmed France's willingness and commitment to support Sri Lanka in its economic recovery. As Colombo's fourth-largest creditor, France pledged its assistance in the debt restructuring process, aiming for a positive outcome for the country, the statement said.

Sri Lanka was hit by an unprecedented financial crisis in 2022, the worst since its independence from Britain in 1948, due to a severe paucity of foreign exchange reserves.

"Sri Lanka and France are two nations in the Indian Ocean sharing the same goal: an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific. In Colombo, we confirmed it: strong as in our 75 years of diplomatic relations, we would open a new era to our partnership," Macron tweeted after the meeting.

The discussions during the one-hour meeting between the two presidents focused on strengthening cooperation in various sectors, including politics, economics, tourism, climate

Japan backs Lanka as Indo-Pacific partner

Colombo (AP): Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said on Saturday that Sri Lanka is a key partner in a Tokyo-led initiative aimed at building security and economic cooperation around the Indo-Pacific but also at countering an increasingly assertive China.

Sri Lanka, strategically located in the Indian Ocean, is integral to realising a free and open Indo-Pacific, Hayashi said. He was speaking after a meeting with his Sri Lankan counterpart, Ali Sabry, in the capital, Colombo.

The initiative, announced by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in March includes Japan's assistance to emerging economies, support for maritime security, a provision of coast guard patrol boats and equipment and other infrastructure cooperation.

change, sustainable development, and maritime activities.

As part of the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations, several specific areas for further collaboration were identified, according to the statement.

"These areas of cooperation included the establishment of a school for maritime safety and security, the opening of a permanent office for the French Agency for Development (AFD) in Sri Lanka, the initiation of high-level diplomatic dialogues, cooperation in the education sector, and the enhancement of efforts to combat human trafficking in the maritime safety and security sector," the statement reads.

Additionally, both leaders exchanged views on regional and multilateral interests in the current global context.

Macron expressed keen interest in collaborating with Sri Lanka during its upcoming chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), of which France is a member.

Hezbollah leader urges Muslims to 'punish' Quran desecrators

AP ■ BAGHDAD

The leader of Lebanon's Shiite militant group Hezbollah said Saturday that if governments of Muslim-majority nations do not act against countries that allow the desecration of the Quran, Muslims should "punish" those who facilitate attacks on Islam's holy book.

The comments by Hassan Nasrallah came in a video address to tens of thousands gathered in Beirut's southern suburbs to mark Ashoura, a

Shiite holy day commemorating the 7th century martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussein.

Nasrallah often uses religious occasions to send political messages to followers, and on Saturday slammed recent incidents in which the Quran was burned or otherwise desecrated at authorised demonstrations in Sweden and Denmark.

He said Muslims should watch for the outcome of an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, scheduled to take place

in Baghdad on Monday to discuss the organisation's response to the Quran burnings.

The organisation and its member states should "send a firm, decisive and unequivocal message to these governments that any repeat of the attacks will be met with a boycott," Nasrallah said. If they do not, he said, Muslim youth should "punish the desecrators."

He did not elaborate what such a boycott and punishment should entail.

Members of the crowd, who carried banners with religious slogans

alongside the flags of Hezbollah, Lebanon and Palestine, chanted, "Oh, Quran, we are at your service; Oh, Hussein, we are at your service."

Shiites represent over 10 per cent of the world's 1.8 billion Muslims and view Hussein as the rightful successor to the Prophet Muhammad. Hussein's death in battle at the hands of Sunnis at Karbala, south of Baghdad, ingrained a deep rift in Islam and continues to this day to play a key role in shaping Shiite identity.

Millions of Shiite Muslims in

Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and around the world on Friday commemorated Ashoura, while Saturday marked the culmination of the observances in countries such as Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims gathered in the Iraqi city of Karbala, where Hussein is entombed in a gold-domed shrine. In the streets of the Baghdad suburb of Sadr City, mourners gathered to watch reenactments of the Battle of Karbala and Hussein's death.

He Lifeng to attend 10th anniv of CPEC in Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng will arrive here on Sunday on a three-day visit to participate in the 10th anniversary celebrations of the ambitious multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the foreign office said on Saturday.

The Vice Premier, who is a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, will visit Islamabad from July 30 to August 1 at the invitation of Pakistan, the statement from the FO said.

"Vice Premier He will attend the 10th-anniversary celebrations of CPEC and call on the President and the Prime Minister," FO said, adding that He will also be the chief guest at an event celebrating the decade of the CPEC.

The CPEC is a collection of

infrastructure and other projects under construction throughout Pakistan since 2013.

The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of China's ambitious multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The BRI was launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. It aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.

The BRI is seen as an attempt by China to further its influence abroad with infrastructure projects funded by Chinese investments all over the world.

4 crew missing as copter ditches off Queensland coast

Canberra (AP): Four air crew members were missing after an Australian army helicopter ditched into waters off the Queensland state coast during joint military exercises with the United States, officials said on Saturday.

The MRH-90 Taipan helicopter went down near Hamilton Island, a Great Barrier Reef tourist resort, at about 10:30 pm on Friday, Defence Minister Richard Marles said.

A search was underway to find the crew, and their families had been notified, officials said. A rescue helicopter reported spotting debris Saturday morning near Dent Island in the Whitsunday Islands group. The Taipan was taking part in Talisman Sabre, a biennial joint US-Australian military exercise that is largely based in Queensland.

Another Indian announces 2024 US presidential bid

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Harish Vardhan Singh, an Indian-American engineer, has announced his bid for the White House, becoming the third person of Indian descent after Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy to join the crowded Republican field of candidates vying to become US President in 2024.

In a video message posted on Twitter, Singh, 38, said that he is a "lifelong Republican" and "America First" conservative who worked to restore a conservative wing of the New Jersey Republican Party.

"We need strong leadership to reverse the changes that have occurred in the past few years and restore American values. That is why I have decided to seek the Republican Party's nomination for the 2024 election for the office of president of the United States," Singh said on Friday in a 3-minute video.

He officially filed his candidacy with the Federal Election Commission

on Thursday, reported The Hill newspaper on Friday.

Prior to Singh, former South Carolina Governor Haley, 51, and millionaire entrepreneur Ramaswamy, 37, announced their candidacy from the Republican Party for the top US post earlier this year.

They will contest against former US president Donald Trump, who is leading in the race for the Republican Party's nomination for 2024 despite the legal challenges he is facing.

Republicans will meet in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from July 15-18, 2024, for their national convention to formally select their party's next presidential nominee.

Singh also called himself the "only pureblood candidate" because he "never gave in to the COVID vaccinations."

He ran in the Republican primaries for governor of New Jersey in 2017 and 2021, for a House seat in 2018 and for Senate in 2020 but was unsuccessful in winning the Republican Party's nomination, the report said.

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 UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER ENDED 30TH JUNE 2023

Particulars	Quarter Ended		Year Ended	
	30-06-2023	31-03-2023	30-06-2022	31-03-2023
	UNAUDITED	AUDITED	UNAUDITED	AUDITED
1. Total Income from operations	16.26	18.29	10.03	58.09
2. Net Profit for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	5.13	4.09	1.04	17.23
3. Net Profit for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	5.13	4.09	1.04	17.23
4. Net Profit for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	3.90	4.40	0.79	11.61
5. Total Comprehensive Income for the period (comprising profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	160.11	-13.83	-49.68	59.88
6. Equity Share Capital	338.04	338.04	338.04	338.04
7. Earnings Per Share (Face Value of Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinuing operations)	0.12	0.13	0.02	0.34
- Basic	0.12	0.13	0.02	0.34
- Diluted	0.12	0.13	0.02	0.34

Notes:
 1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter ended June 30, 2023 which have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by Board of Directors and filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the aforesaid Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter ended June 30, 2023 is available on the Stock Exchange website (www.bseindia.com) and on Company's website (www.bbinvestments.in).

2. The above financial results were reviewed and recommended by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at their meeting held on 29.07.2023.

3. The figures of the previous period have been regrouped/reclassified, wherever considered necessary.

ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
 Sd/-
 Vijay Bhushan
 Director
 DIN: 00024241

Place : New Delhi
 Date : 29.07.2023

Fresh charges to deepen Trump's legal woes

AP ■ WASHINGTON

It's a stunning new allegation in an already serious case: Former President Donald Trump sought to delete Mar-a-Lago surveillance footage to obstruct the Justice Department's investigation into his handling of classified documents.

The latest criminal charges unsealed on Thursday deepen Trump's legal jeopardy, alleging a more central role for the former president than previously known in a cover-up that prosecutors say was meant to prevent them from recovering top-secret documents he took with him after he left the White House. Coming as Trump braces for possible additional indictments related

Trump appeals to keep hush-money case in NY state

New York (AP): Donald Trump asked a federal appeals court Friday to reverse a federal judge's decision to keep his hush-money criminal case in a New York state court that the former president claims is "very unfair" to him.

Trump's lawyers filed a notice of appeal with the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan after US District Judge Alvin K Hellerstein last week rejected his bid to move the case to federal court, where his lawyers were primed to argue he was immune from prosecution.

to efforts to overturn the 2020 election, the new allegations strengthen special counsel Jack Smith's already powerful case against Trump while undercutting potential defenses floated by the former president, experts say.

"Before these new charges, you could maybe try some sort of defense that this was all a mistake, it was my staff" or confusion about what documents he actually had," said former federal prosecutor Randall Eliason, a George Washington University law professor.

"But especially now, when you're trying to destroy video footage," he added, "that's kind of the final nail in the coffin. I don't see much in the way of a defense, not a real defense.

All he can do is claim he's being persecuted and hope for a holdout juror or something."

Trump resorted to that familiar playbook on Friday, writing in a post on his Truth Social platform that "this is textbook Third World intimidation by rabid, lawless prosecutors." He insisted during an interview with radio host John Fredericks that he did nothing wrong and accused prosecutors of trying to intimidate his staff into making up lies about him.

Later on Friday, Trump posted on Truth Social that Mar-a-Lago security tapes were voluntarily handed over to prosecutors. Trump said he was told they were not "deleted in any way, shape or form."

Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
 Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 4333 / 984C-03/(Yata 'A')/2023 Dated : 28/07/2023

National Competitive E-Tender Notice

The Superintending Engineer, 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from date 03-08-2023 at 5.00 PM onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (₹)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Two Bid System						
1	PD, PWD, Pithoragarh Maintenance work of Chupkote bend Jmrari Motor Road transferred from PMGSY (One time maintenance)	3.09	5000.00 +G.S.T.	120	09	Category B & higher for road works, in state Govt./ Govt. of India
2	PD, PWD, Pithoragarh Maintenance work of Salla Motor Road from km. 5 of Gurana Gogina motor road transferred from PMGSY (One time maintenance)	4.14	5000.00 +G.S.T.	120	09	-do-

To make India developed nation by 2024 focus on investment, innovation



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the focus of the government is on four I's — infrastructure, investment, innovation and inclusiveness — to make India a developed nation by 2047.

She said India has necessary wherewithal to meet the goal set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Besides several investor-friendly reforms undertaken by the government, she said, India has a very vibrant young population and the emphasis on skilling them to suit the requirement of the economy would yield dividend.

With the aim to build India a developed country by 2047, she said "the emphasis has been on four different issues (I's). We are looking at infrastructure (first I) in a very big way. In the last 3

to 5 years, consistently, the public expenditure for infrastructure building has been ramped up significantly and it will reach Rs 10 lakh crore in 2023-24."

With infrastructure comes investment (second I), she said, adding that emphasis on investment will promote greater participation of both the public and private sector.

So, she said, infrastructure is not just going to be physical such as bridges, roads, ports or airports, but also creation of digital infrastructure is given importance.

"We are looking for both public investment and private investment and creating necessary environment, the ecosystem as we often refer to for attracting private investment. And the global discussions which are going on blended finance is also something which we're looking at," she said at an event organised by CII here.

Pointing out that innovation is the third I, she said, "the government has opened up several areas inclusive of the space, nuclear energy, looking at getting out of fossil fuels. We have enough reason to believe the youth today are giving us solutions, which are very good for the frontier technologies that we're talking about, as much as for the legacy issues which persist in India for which we need solutions."

On the fourth I, inclusiveness, she said, "as we aim to reach for the developed nation in 25 years by focussing on inclusiveness, making sure that every section of India, the common man, benefits by everything that we do (whether) investment or reforms are trying to take schemes to the people."

IDFC FIRST Bank Q1 net profit up 61% at ₹765 cr



PTI ■ MUMBAI

IDFC FIRST Bank on Saturday said its net profit rose by 61 per cent year-on-year to Rs 765 crore in the April-June quarter this year mainly driven by strong growth in core operating income.

The bank's net profit for the April-June quarter of 2022-23 was Rs 474 crore.

"Core operating profit (pre-provision operating profit excluding trading gains) grew strongly by 45 per cent Y-o-Y from Rs 987 crore in Q1-FY23 to Rs 1,427 crore for the quarter Q1-FY24," the bank said in a statement.

The bank's net interest income (NII) grew 36 per cent to Rs 3,745 crore in the first quarter of the current fiscal compared to Rs 2,751 crore in the year-ago period.

Its Gross NPA improved to 2.17 per cent as of June 30, 2023, from 3.36 per cent as of end-June 2022. Net NPAs of the bank

improved to 0.70 per cent at end-June 2023 from 1.30 per cent at June 30, 2022.

Commenting on the result, V Vaidyanathan, Managing Director and CEO, IDFC FIRST Bank, said, "We continue to build a strong franchise with a high CASA Ratio of 46.5 per cent. Our retail deposits are growing well, based on our strong positive brand, ethics, customer-friendly products and digital innovations".

The private sector lender's funded assets increased by 25 per cent from Rs 1,37,663 crore as of June 30, 2022, to Rs 1,71,578 crore as of June 30, 2023.

IDFC FIRST Bank further said it continues to wind down infrastructure financing as per stated strategy and now constitutes only 2.2 per cent of total funded assets as of June 30, 2023.

Its exposure to top 20 single borrowers reduced from 9 per cent as of June 30, 2022, to 7 per cent as of June 30, 2023.



IGGL, GAIL sign interconnection agreement

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Indradhanush Gas Grid Limited (IGGL) and GAIL India have signed an interconnection agreement to connect the North East Gas Grid (NEGG) of IGGL with the Barauni Guwahati Pipeline (BGPL) of GAIL, according to an official release on Saturday.

The agreement was signed by IGGL chief executive officer Ajit Kumar Thakur and GAIL's zonal chief general manager R Choudhury here on Friday.

The interconnection agreement will facilitate connection of the NEGG with the BGPL at three locations - Jalpaiguri in West Bengal and Baihata and Panikhaiti in Assam, Thakur said.

The interconnection agreement will pave the way for making the NEGG a part of the National Gas Grid, he said.

The pipeline for interconnection will be laid by GAIL at an estimated cost of Rs 15.16 crore. The amount will be reimbursed by IGGL to GAIL. IGGL is laying the 1,656km-long NEGG at an estimated project cost of Rs 9,265 crore.

The project has so far achieved a physical progress of 75 per cent with scheduled mechanical completion of Phase 1 by March 2024, the release added.

Sebi mulls simplification of clients onboarding norms

No plans to curb retail trading in derivative market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Saturday said it is at an early stage of considering simplification of the process of onboarding clients by adoption of a risk-based approach.

In addition, it said there is no proposal to curb retail participation in derivative markets. The statement came after a section of media reported that Sebi is seeking curbing



retail participation in derivative markets.

Currently, for trading in the derivative segment, the Sebi circular issued in December 2009 prescribes that the stock

broker will have documentary evidence of financial capability for all clients under its circular.

"Sebi, in line with the objective of ease of doing business, is at an early stage of evaluating if

the aforesaid circular can be made applicable based on the risk assessment of the clients," the regulator said in a statement.

This would promote ease of compliance for brokers and investors, it added.

Further, Sebi said its focus has always been on adequate risk management while ensuring ease of doing business and compliance, rather than on placing any curbs on trading.

It reiterated that proposals that result in any change in the regulatory framework, go through a process of comprehensive consultation with all stakeholders including the public, before any decision is taken by Sebi's board.

TCS introduces organisational rejig under its new CEO

PTI ■ MUMBAI

In an organisational rejig, TCS on Saturday announced that it will now have business groups based on industry sectors and geographies under the new chief executive and managing director K Krithivasan. It also elevated Harrick Vin as the new chief technology officer and Abhinav Kumar as the interim head for marketing.

Under former chief executive and managing director Rajesh Gopinathan, the company in April 2022 adopted a new structure where its clients were organised depending on their respective revenue size. As per some media reports, this structure had led to some unease within the company especially in the higher echelons.

In a memo sent to col-



leagues reviewed by PTI, Krithivasan - who took over from Gopinathan as the head of the largest tech exporter on June 1 - said meetings with staffers and clients over the past two months led to the decision. "...it has become increasingly evident that TCS could deliver the best value to our cus-

tomers by synergising our domain and contextual knowledge across units," Krithivasan wrote. A company spokesperson said the new operating structure regroups existing industry solutions units (ISUs) along industry segments into key business groups and added that the changes will help in deepening

customer centricity, which it feels is key to growth. This is the fourth reorganisation in the company in the last few years. Gopinathan had effected two such moves, while his predecessor N Chandrasekaran had also introduced one during his stint.

Interestingly, there are new services practices created by Krithivasan which are devoted to the enterprise cognitive business operations and artificial intelligence cloud which is prompted by the change in the business environment.

Officials said under every business group - which is arrived at either on the basis of industry or geography - there will be a division of clients as per their respective revenue sizes under the new structure, which means a part of the earlier structure has been retained.

New supply of office space down 25% in April-June in top 7 cities: Vestian



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

New supply of office space fell 25 per cent to 11.30 million square feet during April-June across seven major cities amid subdued demand and high base effect, according to Vestian.

Bengaluru-based real estate consultant Vestian recently released its quarterly office market report, which showed that the total office leasing across the seven cities fell 6 per cent to 13.9 million sq ft during April-June against 14.8 million sq ft in the year-ago period due to delays in decision-making by large domestic firms and MNCs amid global uncertainties.

"New completions (of office space) registered a decline of 25 per cent in Q2 2023 over the same period a year earlier due to the base effect," Vestian said in the report "The Connect Q2

2023". The consultant noted that new completions demonstrated a significant upturn, rising from 8.60 million sq ft in January-March this year to 11.30 million sq ft in June quarter.

"The increase in new completions effectively stopped the consecutive decline witnessed over the past three quarters, indicating a positive sentiment across the construction sector," Vestian said.

As per the data, Bengaluru saw 21 per cent decline year-on-year to 3.5 million sq ft during April-June period of this calendar year.

New supply of office space in Chennai rose 75 per cent to 2.10 million sq ft.

In Kolkata, there was no new supply in June quarter.

In Hyderabad, new supply fell 9 per cent to 4.10 million sq ft.

Mumbai too saw a 86 per

cent fall in new supply to 0.30 million sq ft.

New supply of office space in Pune dropped 56 per cent to 0.80 million square feet.

In Delhi-NCR, the new office space supply was down 79 per cent year-on-year to 0.50 million square feet during April-June.

"Hyderabad witnessed the completion of several large office buildings during the current quarter, registering new completions of over 4 million sq ft.

While Hyderabad accounted for 36 per cent of the overall supply in Q2 (April-June) 2023, Bengaluru followed with a 31 per cent share.

"Absorption surpassing new completions led to a reduction of 60 basis points in overall vacancy levels during the current quarter. Currently, average vacancy stands at 15.5 per cent," Vestian said.



Tea production fell 3.7% to 138 mn kg in June: Board data

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Tea production during the month of June this year has dropped to 137.85 million kilograms as compared to 143.12 million kilograms in the same month of 2022.

According to Tea Board provisional data, there is a drop of around 3.7 per cent in the volume of tea production in the month of June 2023.

Region-wise, North India produced 109.70 million kilograms during the month, while production volumes in South India was 28.15 million kilograms.

In North India, Assam pro-

duced 63.51 million kilograms in June 2023, while the state's production was 75.16 million kilograms in the same month of the previous similar period.

The other major producer in North India, West Bengal produced marginally higher volumes at 42.64 million kilograms in June this year, as against 40.42 million kilograms in the similar month of June 2023.

Sources at Indian Tea Association (ITA) said the dip in production volumes has been due to inconducive weather conditions and pest attacks in the gardens.

Tribunal to take call on NCLT order on insolvency against Coffee Day Global

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An appeal has been filed before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) challenging the NCLT order to initiate insolvency proceedings against Coffee Day Global Ltd (CDGL), which owns and operates the popular chain Cafe Coffee Day.

Malavika Hegde, the suspended Director of CDGL, has approached the Chennai bench of NCLAT against the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) order to initiate Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) against Coffee Day Global.

The application, seeking a stay on the NCLT order, was listed for hearing before a NCLAT bench comprising Justice Rakesh Kumar Jain and



Shreesha Merla on Friday.

Earlier on July 20, the Bengaluru bench of the NCLT passed an order over a plea filed by IndusInd Bank, a financial creditor of the company, claiming dues of Rs 94 crore.

The NCLT had also appointed Shailendra Ajmera as the interim resolution professional after suspending the board.

The order has been chal-

lenged by Malavika Hegde, a director on the suspended board of CDGL and wife of late VG Siddhartha.

In 2022-23, CDGL's consolidated total income was Rs 920.41 crore. It had reported a loss of Rs 67.77 crore in the year.

As per the annual report of its parent firm Coffee Day Enterprises Ltd for FY22, CDGL owns 495 cafes in 158 cities and 285 CCD Value Express kiosks. There are 38,810 vending machines that dispense coffee in corporate workplaces and hotels under the brand.

Coffee Day Enterprises is in trouble after the death of founder Chairman V G Siddhartha in July 2019. It is paring its debts through asset resolutions and has significantly scaled it down from the time the trouble started.

Power Grid board approves raising ₹5,700 cr via bonds in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Power Grid Corporation's board has approved a proposal to raise up to Rs 5,700 crore through issuance of bonds on private placement basis in multiple tranches in 2023-24.

The fund raised will be used to part finance its capex requirement, for providing inter corporate loans to wholly-owned subsidiaries/JVs and for general corporate purposes.

This will be done by securitization of cashflows of 4 operational SPVs (special purpose vehicles) viz. POWERGRID Bhuj Transmission, POWERGRID Khetri Transmission System, POWERGRID Medinipur Jeerat Transmission System and POWERGRID Varanasi Transmission System up to March, 2034.

The company is raising Rs 500 crore in the first tranche with a green shoe o

Hostel accommodation to attract 12% GST, says AAR

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Students will have to shell out more for hostel accommodation as a 12 per cent GST would be applicable on the rent paid, the Authority of Advance Ruling said in two separate cases.

The Bengaluru bench of the Authority of Advance Ruling (AAR) said hostels are not akin to residential dwelling units and hence are not exempt from Goods and Services Tax (GST).

In an advance Ruling sought by Srisai Luxurious Stay LLP, the AAR said GST exemption was applicable on the accommodation services, of charges up to Rs 1,000/- per day, provided by hotels, clubs, campsites etc. Till July 17, 2022.

"PG/Hostel Rent paid by inhabitants do not qualify for GST exemption... as the services provided by applicant are not akin to renting of residential dwelling for use as residence," the Bengaluru bench



said.

GST on reverse charge will be applicable on the rental to be paid to the landowners by the applicant as the services of the applicant are leviable to GST and thus the applicant has to obtain GST registration, it added.

"... Residential dwelling is a

/hostel' services and are akin to guest house and lodging services and therefore can't be termed as residential dwelling', the Bengaluru bench said.

In a similar reference by Noida-based V S Institute & Hostel Pvt Ltd, the Lucknow bench of the AAR said that GST would apply on hostel accommodation costing less than Rs 1,000 per day.

"Hence, from July 18, 2022, onward services provided by an applicant will be (covered under GST for taxation)...," the Lucknow bench AAR said.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said 12 per cent tax on student accommodation in hostels and dormitories would lead to a higher cost for Indian families.

"The GST council may consider taking a policy decision to neutralise the tax cost built into the entire education ecosystem, including student's accommodation," Mohan said.

World University Games: India win 3 gold, 1 bronze



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Shooters led the show with three gold as India opened their account with four medals in the World University Games at Chengdu, China on Saturday.
Olympian shooter Elavani Valarivan, a silver medalist in the 2019 edition in Italy, bettered her performance this year to clinch the first gold medal for

India in the 10m Air Rifle Women's event.
Her shooting colleague Manu Bhaker claimed the second gold medal of the day in 10m Air Pistol Women's event.
Bhaker along with Yashwini Singh Deswal and Abhinaya Ashok Patil also won the gold medal in 10m Air Pistol Team Women's event.
India also won a medal in judo for the first time in the

tournament with Yamini Mourya claiming the bronze in Women's 57kg event.
India also have assured themselves a third medal in archery after the compound mixed team of Aman Saini and Pragati advanced into the final. Overall, India are in the hunt for eight medals in archery.
The compound mixed team of Aman Saini and Pragati reached the final after edging out

hosts China by just one-point (152-151) in the semi-final.
Now they will play against Korea for gold medal. India are now behind leaders Japan (four gold, three silver one bronze), hosts China (4-2-2) and Korea (4-2-2) in the medal standings on day three of the meet.
In table tennis, the Indian women's team started their campaign by defeating third seed Germany 3-1.

Nepal's army FC reaches Guwahati for Durand Cup

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
Nepal's Tribhuvan Army Football Club arrived here on Saturday to participate in the 132nd Durand Cup 2023.
The 42-member squad is headed by Lt Col. Basanta Raj Gurung (retd) and will be captained by seasoned international Nayyug Shrestha, who has eight career goals for Nepal in 43 internationals.
The squad was flown by an Indian Air Force plane from their base in Nepal and brought to Guwahati, from there they will move to Kokrajhar to play their first game at the newly-built SAI stadium.
The visitors will kick off their tournament against newly-promoted I-League (Indian second division) side Delhi FC on August 9.



Nepal has been placed in Group E, alongside Indian Super League (ISL) sides Hyderabad FC and Chennaiyin FC, besides Delhi FC.
The winners of each of the six groups of this year's Durand Cup will go through to the last eight, along with two best second-placed sides.

"It is a great honour for us to participate in this prestigious tournament and we look forward to give our best," Shrestha said in a release.
Besides Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh are the two other international teams in this year's edition, which will witness participation of a total of 24 teams.
This year's edition will have its first game between Mohun Bagan Super Giant and Bangladesh Army Football Team on August 3 at Kolkata's Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (VYBK).
The four venues for this year's tournament are Kolkata, Kokrajhar, Guwahati and Shillong.
The Durand Cup is Asia's oldest tournament, held mostly between top Indian football clubs across divisions.

Le, Renard score as France edges Brazil 2-1 at the Women's World Cup

AP ■ BRISBANE
Veterans Eugénie Le Sommer and Wendie Renard revived France's Women's World Cup hopes with a goal each in a 2-1 win over Brazil on Saturday to give Les Bleues the lead in Group F. After missing with an angled header in the 13th minute, Le Sommer scored her 90th international goal to extend her national record four minutes later with an emphatic header that gave Brazilian goalkeeper Leticia little chance.
Sakina Karchaoui's long floating ball into the area found Kadidiatou Diani, who headed back across to Le Sommer to finish off from directly in front.
Unlike a lackluster 0-0 opening draw against Jamaica, the French started with high tempo and had the better of the early exchanges.
But the Brazilians, coming



off a thumping 4-0 opening win over Panama, met them for energy, helped by the majority of an almost 50,000 crowd.
Debinha equalized in the 58th, finishing off a quick passing movement into the area, controlling the ball with the outside of her leg then firing in a right-footed shot.

Le Sommer was replaced in the 66th by Vicki Becho to add some extra speed to the French attack.
Leticia pushed a hard strike over the crossbar to keep Brazil level and Selma Bacha hit the side netting with her shot from the right in the 75th, unable to break the deadlock for France.
Renard, who was a doubtful start after picking an injury in the opening game, stepped up when the French most needed it.
The veteran defender was unmarked in perfect position in the 83rd to meet a corner with a header that she nudged powerfully into the top right of the net.
France has four points, one more than Brazil ahead of the last group games on Wednesday. The French will play Panama in Sydney, and Brazil will take on Jamaica in Melbourne.



Punjab FC sign Leon, Mohan, Melroy ahead of ISL debut

PTI ■ MOHALI
Punjab FC on Saturday announced the signing of Leon Augustine, Prasanth K Mohan and Melroy Assisi ahead of their Indian Super League debut this season. Midfielders Leon and Prasanth come with ISL experience as they were signed from Bengaluru FC and Chennaiyin FC respectively, while defender Melroy was roped in from I-League side Rajasthan United FC. "We are happy to welcome these young and talented players to the Club," Technical Director of Punjab FC, Nikolaos Topoliatis, said in a release.
Mohan, 26, graduated from the AIF Elite Academy and was signed by Kerala Blasters FC in the ISL. The winger remained with the Kerala side for five years before shifting to Chennaiyin FC

for the 2022-23 season.
He featured 15 times for the Chennai side, registering a goal and an assist during the last season. He has signed a one year contract with the club.
Leon joins the club after spending his entire career with Bengaluru FC. The 24-year-old winger joined Bengaluru FC in the 2017-18 season and debuted for it in the 2018 AFC Cup.
He has played a total of 40 matches for the club, scoring six times. Leon has signed a two year contract with the club.
Melroy, 24, has signed a three year deal. The center back was one of the standout performers for Rajasthan in the last couple of seasons. The Dubai-born defender has previously played for the youth side of Chennaiyin FC before joining Rajasthan United FC.

F1 leader Verstappen takes pole for Belgian GP sprint race ahead of Piastri

AP ■ SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (BELGIUM)
Two-time reigning Formula One champion Max Verstappen edged out rookie driver Oscar Piastri by just .011 seconds to take pole position for the sprint race at the Belgian Grand Prix later Saturday.
The shortened qualifying format - known as the "sprint shootout" - sets the grid for the sprint race. It was delayed by 35 minutes because of wet and rainy conditions, with air blowers used to clear water from the track.
Piastri has been in good form recently and the McLaren driver shot to the top of the leaderboard on his last run, only for Verstappen to typical-



ly find extra pace from his Red Bull. "Simply lovely," Verstappen said on team radio. "Not easy with this weather."
Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. Starts the sprint from third ahead of his teammate Charles Leclerc, with McLaren's Lando Norris fifth, Alpine's Pierre Gasly sixth and Mercedes driver

Lewis Hamilton going from seventh. It was a disappointing session for Red Bull's Sergio Perez, who qualified eighth.
This is the third of six scheduled sprint races this season, with Perez winning in Azerbaijan and Verstappen winning in Austria. The top eight drivers all score points.
Skies had cleared when drivers set out in Q1, the first part of qualifying, but some spray was still flying off the tarmac and reducing visibility in some sections. Alfa Romeo's Valtteri Bottas was among the five drivers eliminated from Q1.
Aston Martin's Lance Stroll pushed too hard in the final seconds of Q2 and slid off into the barriers, mangling his right tire and bringing out a red flag. His

teammate Fernando Alonso was on his out lap when the crash happened and couldn't set a time, meaning he also failed to make into Q3.
Heavy rain had also impacted Friday's running at the 7-kilometer (4.3-mile) Spa-Francorchamps circuit, which is nestled in a forest amid the Ardennes countryside and is often impacted by gloomy weather.
Verstappen also set the fastest time in qualifying for Sunday's main race, but Leclerc will start from pole because of Verstappen's five-place grid penalty for a gearbox change. He begins Sunday's race from sixth, but that will not bother Verstappen considering he won here last year from 14th.



Swedish swimmer Sjöestroem breaks her own world record in 50-meter freestyle

AP ■ FUKUOKA
Swedish swimmer Sarah Sjöestroem broke her own world record in the 50-meter freestyle on Saturday, swimming a time of 23.61 seconds in a semifinal heat at the World Aquatics Championships.
Her previous record was 23.67 set in 2017. The new record came just over 10 minutes after she won gold in the 50-meter butterfly. Her time there was 24.77.
Sjöestroem has now won 20 individual medals at the world championships to tie Michael Phelps. Relays are not included in the count.

Lalremsiami's hat-trick hands India 3-0 win over England

PTI ■ BARCELONA
Striker Lalremsiami slammed a hat-trick to hand the Indian women's team a comfortable 3-0 win over England in the ongoing 100th Anniversary Spanish Hockey Federation - International Tournament here on Saturday.
Lalremsiami starred for India, scoring thrice in the 13th, 17th and 56th minutes of the match.
This was India's first win of the tour after ending their previous two matches in a stalemate against England (1-1) and Spain (2-2). Having remained unbeaten so far, the Indian women led by Savita will march into Sunday's last match of the tournament as table toppers.
In the first quarter, the proceedings began with England getting off the mark

in a dominant fashion with speedy attack, while the Indian team worked calmly to stitch together an effective structure that would yield results.
First, it was Neha Goyal who worked a brilliant attempt on goal but was well-defended by the English defence.
However in India's next attempt a few minutes later, a long pass by experienced Deep Grace Ekka from the deep midfield was swiftly deflected into the goal by Lalremsiami in the 13th minute.
This early goal gave India the right momentum going into the second quarter. They were able to extend the lead to 2-0 in the 17th minute, when a good circle penetration saw Lalremsiami score her second goal.
She showcased good footwork as she picked up the ball well and guided it past



England's goalie Sabbie Heesh.
The 2-0 lead put India in a formidable position, giving them the cushion to work different combinations that would fetch results in the circle.
The third quarter remained goalless after England squandered a few chances to score. India held on to the lead with some solid defending that kept them in control of the match.
With England desperately trying to find ways to bounce back, the last quarter was entertaining with both teams displaying quick-fire hockey.
Though England could not beat India's defence, the Indian strikers worked in tandem to extend the team's lead. It was eventually Lalremsiami who struck again in the 56th minute to help India seal the match.

England faces anxious wait over Keira's injury at Women's World Cup

AP ■ SYDNEY
The world's most expensive female soccer player could be out of the Women's World Cup. Keira Walsh's knee injury in the Lionesses' 1-0 win against Denmark on Friday leaves a hole in the heart of the midfield that may be impossible to fill.
Walsh - considered the conductor during England's European Championship triumph last year - had to leave the field in Sydney on a stretcher and later exited the stadium on crutches.
What follows now for Walsh and England is an anxious wait to learn the severity of the damage. If the worst case-scenario is realized, the question will be how England copes without her for the rest of the tournament co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand.
At the Euros, "everything came through Keira. There wasn't a Plan B," England's all-time leading scorer Ellen White said in her role as an ana-

lyst for the BBC. "I dreaded to think of the idea of us ever losing her because she was one of our best players. Beth Mead was scoring all the goals but all of our play came through Keira. "She was the key cog, everything moved through her." Walsh joined Barcelona from Manchester City after the Euros for a reported record fee of 400,000 pounds (\$513,000). Her departure from the game against Denmark, with England leading 1-0, was quickly felt and indicated just how big a loss she could be to coach Sarina Wiegman.
Denmark grew into the game, ended the stronger team and missed out on a late equalizer when substitute Amalie Vangsgaard headed against the post.
"I feel a little bit sorry for England that they lost Keira Walsh," Denmark coach Lars Sondergaard said. "We hope it is not as bad as it looked, but of course that could also be a reason why we came back into the game - that she was not there."



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between defense and attack and there is no obvious replacement for her. She can direct England's forward moves with her vision and passing and also she operates as a protective screen for her defenders. "She is a special player and special person. Let's hope it isn't as bad as it looked and it was only a precaution," England teammate Rachel Daly said. Walsh's reaction to the injury did not look good.
Television cameras appeared to show her quickly signal to England's bench that the problem was her knee. She had her hands over her face as she left the field. Without her, England did enough to seal its second narrow win of the tournament and move to the brink of advancing to the knockout rounds.
The players can be forgiven for taking time to adapt to the loss of such a key a player in the middle of a match. If Walsh's injury is as bad as feared, however, England's band of players will quickly have to adjust to life without its conductor.



ICC inspects venues at Bengaluru, Chennai, T'Puram ahead of World Cup

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Ahead of the ODI World Cup, an inspection team from the International Cricket Council is checking the readiness of venues that will host the quadrennial extravaganza in October-November this year.

The ICC team, which is currently at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, has paid a visit to three venues in South — Bengaluru, Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram, where practice matches will be held — and the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

The reconnaissance unit dropped in at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here on July 28, and expressed their satisfaction over the facilities.

"They were here on Friday, and were satisfied by our preparations. We have been hosting matches from the Duleep Trophy at the venue, and we are ready for the (World Cup) games," a KSCA official told PTI.

Bengaluru is scheduled to host five matches, including India's fixture against Netherlands and two games of Pakistan against Australia and New Zealand.

India is set to begin their World Cup campaign on October 8 against five-time champions Australia at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai.

The Chepauk will also host two other high-profile matches of Pakistan against South Africa and Afghanistan. The ICC team inspected the facilities at the stadium on July 26.

"Yes, they were here and it was the routine pre-tournament visit checking on the venue preparation. They have given an all-clear for us, and we will be in touch with the ICC in the coming days as well," said a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association official.

The Greenfield Stadium will not host any main draw matches but the Kerala capital will see a few preparation games ahead of the World Cup.

"We have recently hosted an ODI and a T20I match here. So, the experience will help us and we are also working on the recommendations of the ICC team to make further improvements," said a Kerala Cricket Association official.

The Greenfield Stadium had hosted India's one-day against Sri Lanka earlier this year and a T20I match against South Africa in September last year.

In the days to come, the ICC team will visit all the other venues that will host matches, including the practice games.

The ICC team's main focus will be assisting the host venues on matters like security inside the stadium, necessities of broadcast teams among others.

Anderson doesn't want to retire after Ashes, says he has a lot more to give



PTI ■ LONDON

Veteran England fast bowler James Anderson has no plans to retire after the ongoing fifth Ashes Test as he still has a "lot more to give" to his team.

England's all-time leading wicket-taker Anderson will turn 41 on Sunday.

Although he has taken only five wickets in the Ashes series, he feels he is not bowling badly.

"I don't feel like I'm bowling badly or losing pace or that I'm on the way out. I still feel I can

offer a lot to this team.

"In terms of retirement, I've got no interest in going any time soon. I feel like I've got a lot more to give," Anderson was quoted as saying by the BBC after second day's play on Friday.

Anderson bowled well on the second day of the fifth Test, but picked up his only wicket in the form of Mitchell Marsh.

"You pray that these lean patches don't come in one of the biggest series you could play in but unfortunately for me that is the case," he said.

"I've still got another innings to try to do something for the team. I felt like today I bowled really well and on another day I could have got a couple more wickets.

"It felt like I challenged the forward defence a lot, which is what I've tried to do throughout my career." Unaided by the pitches in the first two Tests, Anderson picked up only one wicket at Edgbaston and two at Lord's with England suffering defeats on both occasions.

He, however, missed the Headingley Test which England won on a lively surface.

In the ongoing fifth Test at The Oval, Anderson became the oldest player to open the bowling for England in an Ashes Test since Johnny Douglas in 1925.

After the Ashes, Anderson's next chance to don the England whites will come in January in India and he is hoping to continue till then.

"As soon as you get into your 30s as a bowler, people are asking how long you've got left.

"But in the past three or four years, I've bowled as well as I ever have. I feel like I've been in so much control, my body has been in a good place, my skills are as good as they ever have been.

"The numbers, the wickets, the selection side of it is a completely different issue. If Stokesy (Stokes) and Baz (Brendon McCullum) say 'you've not got the wickets we would have liked' then I'd be absolutely fine with that," Anderson added.

WI OPT TO BOWL AGAINST INDIA IN SECOND ODI

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN

West Indies skipper Shai Hope opted to bowl against India after winning the toss in the second ODI of the three-match series, here on Saturday.

India skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli were rested and Hardik Pandya is leading the side in the penultimate ODI.

"Few questions need to be answered for us, so Virat and Rohit are resting," Pandya said at the toss. India included Sanju Samson and Axar Patel in their XI.

Alzarri Joseph and Keacy Carty came in place of Rowman Powell and Dominic Drakes for the hosts.

India won the first ODI by five wickets to go 1-0 up in the three-match series.

The final ODI of the series is slated at Taouba on Tuesday.

TEAMS:

India: Shubman Gill, Ishan Kishan(w), Sanju Samson, Hardik Pandya(c), Suryakumar Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Shardul Thakur, Kuldeep Yadav, Umran Malik and Mukesh Kumar.

West Indies: Brandon King, Kyle Mayers, Alick Athanaze, Shai Hope (c/wk), Shimron Hetmyer, Keacy Carty, Romario Shepherd, Yannic Cariah, Gudakesh Motie, Alzarri Joseph, Jayden Seales.



Ashes: England cricketers swap jerseys in support of dementia patients

PTI ■ LONDON

The third day of the final Ashes Test on Saturday began with a humane touch to it as England cricketers wore jerseys with wrong names printed on it, supporting people affected by dementia.

Veteran pacer James Anderson wore a jersey carrying the name of Stuart Broad, Jonny Bairstow wore one with the name of Ben Stokes on it and Moeen Ali donned the flannel with the name of Chris Woakes, and so on. The move was symbolic of the confusion often experienced by people suffering from dementia, the disease that causes loss of memory.

England assistant coach Marcus Trescothick explained the decision, a joint call of ECB and Alzheimer's Society.

"We are here supporting the Alzheimer's Society, and it is a subject very close to our hearts. It is a terrible disease," said Trescothick while talking to Sky Sports.

"We are here to try and raise awareness and bring it to the fore by educating people, and raising money too. The more money and awareness go into it, there will be more research.

"We have seen that new medication and new drugs have come into the market, they can make a big impact into that. Hopefully, today's initiative will keep pushing people to understand that," added Trescothick.

However, Trescothick, a former England opener, has a personal reason too to get associated with the novel effort as his father, Martyn, is living with dementia.

Shame that interest in motorsport has drastically gone down in India: Karun

PTI ■ LONDON

Someone who has witnessed the frenzy and fascination around a Formula 1 race in India, it pains Karun Chandhok to see that interest in motorsport in the country has declined drastically.

Not only the high-profile sport exited the country due to varied reasons, the agonising wait to see the next Indian in Formula 1 after Narain Karthikeyan and Chandhok continues.

Chandhok now ensures India's small presence in the paddock as a pundit.

The 39-year-old racer-turned-commentator badly misses the days when Formula 1 visited India and puts the steep decline in popularity of motorsport in the country down to lack of an Indian driver on the grid.

"Honestly it's been a bit of a disappointment, a bit of a shame about how much the interest has gone down actually.

"That period around 2008 to 2013 we had two Indians in F1, we had a race (Indian GP) and the interest was amazing. You can't imagine that these days," Chandhok told PTI in an interview on the sidelines of the Formula E season finale in London.

Chandhok said while cricket gained massively from IPL in

the last decade, motorsport badly needed a home-grown Formula 1 driver to sustain the interest.

"There's been a big shift I think certainly the IPL is has gotten so much bigger. IPL in cricket has really exploded. You now have a cricket team that is doing exceedingly well in that 10-year period, the interest has gone up with that.

"So because of that, other sports are struggling a little bit but ultimately not having an Indian presence in F1 has had a negative impact on the sport as a whole"

Chandhok said there are no clear answers why the interest from the fans is not what it used to be but not having the government backing is also a huge contributor to the sport's downfall.

"If you look at any of the recent countries that have backed motorsport, whether it's Bahrain, Saudi Arabia even, and I'm choosing the Middle Eastern Asia, where the sport is growing. Singapore is another one who recognizes and understands what motor racing can bring to the country.

"The amount of tourists who now go to watch motor racing in these places is putting money back in the economy, and unfortunately, in Delhi, when we had the Grand Prix, we never really had the backing of the government.



"It's quite tough for the central government to do the projects, maybe they can work with state governments. The state governments as well as the central government need to get behind it."

Of late, Jehan Daruvala, Arjun and Kush Maini have competed in the Formula 1 feeder series like F2 and F3 but Chandhok was candid in admitting that the pinnacle was far away from the reach of the young Indian trio.

"Jehan's future is in Formula E. I can see him racing here with Mahindra next year, probably. Kush has done a very good job in his rookie season in F2 this year he's done a some very strong races he was on the

podium in Australia, but it's tough at the moment for both of them to make that last step into F1.

"At the moment, it looks like it's definitely not for next year. We'll see what happens in the future."

Daruvala, who was dropped from Red Bull's junior driver program after three underwhelming seasons of F2, is now struggling in his fourth season in the championship. He is currently 11th in the standings with 53 points.

"The season he's had in an F2 this year, for him to make that step into F1 realistically, he would have needed to win the Championship this year.

"At the moment he's not

there, in the points battle there are some other drivers who've gone ahead, so realistically for him to have a seat in F1 next year is quite hard.

"I think he'd be a very good candidate for the Formula E seat. He's a very talented driver; he's a very smart driver; also he thinks a lot about the strategy and the tactics in the race and that's a useful tool to have in Formula E," said Chandhok referring to the Mahindra reserve driver.

Talking about Formula E making its debut in India earlier this year, Chandhok hoped that organisers in Hyderabad will be able to do an even better job in 2024. "The Hyderabad event was very terrific, there were no real traffic issues, no issues in terms of the track safety and things like that, it was top notch

"We had a bit of dust which is not a major problem I think. On the whole it was a good event

"There are always small lessons you can learn right in terms of logistics and access to the pits and things like that. There were not any major red flags I thought they did a good job," he added.

Hyderabad is not on the provisional calendar for next season but it is expected to retain its place in the final list, to be announced in October.

Aditi makes cut in France, Diksha misses out

PTI ■ EVIAN LES BAIN (FRANCE)

Star Indian golfer Aditi Ashok played a steady round of even par 72 to be Tied-28th after the second round of the Amundi Evian Championship, a Major on the women's circuit.

Aditi added 72 to her first round 71 and was 1-over 143 going into the weekend

However, Diksha Dagar, who had a chance to make her first cut in a Major, struggled in the closing stages with two double bogeys in a second round of 81, which was 10 shots more than her first round 71.

Dagar, who is lying fifth on the Order of Merit in Europe, missed the cut and will play the Women's Scottish Open next week.

Aditi birdied the third and the 13th, but dropped shots on fifth, 11th and 14th.

Aditi will now play her third round with Japan's Minami Katsu and Korea's Amy Yang.

Local favourite Celine Boutier carded a round of 69 (-2) on day two of the Evian Championship to lead by one stroke at the halfway stage. Two players sit in a tie for second place one shot behind Boutier with Japan's Yuka Saso and Thailand's Patty Tavatanakit on six-under-par.

The cut fell at +4 with 70 players making it through to the final two rounds.

Jeev makes cut at Senior Open, as Atwal, Randhawa miss out



PTI ■ PORTHCAWL (WALES)

India's Jeev Milkha Singh survived some strong winds that kept switching directions to recover on the back nine of the challenging Royal Porthcawl Golf Club to make his first cut at the Senior Open Championships here.

Jeev, who missed the cut last year at Gleneagles, was fourth after the first round, but slipped to T-48 after a round of 6-over 77.

Jeev gave away four bogeys and a double on the front nine and was in danger of missing cut. He recovered well with two birdies on Par-3 15th and the Par-5 18th, which he had birdied on the first day also. At 4-over he was down to T-48, but with the leader Steven Alker (71-68) at 4-under, the leaderboard was tight and Jeev could make a move on the weekend.

"It was brutal out there. Though there was no rain, the wind made it really tough," said Jeev, who won the 2012 Scottish Open in tough conditions a decade ago. Things did not pan out well for the other two Indians in fray, Arjun Atwal and Jyoti Randhawa, who were making their Open debuts.

Atwal (78-76) and Jyoti, who came through the qualifiers, shot rounds of 76-78. Both missed the cut. Alker cut through the wind to lead the Senior Open. The absence of rain did not make the task facing the 144-strong field any easier than the tough opening round. However

New Zealand's Alker carded an impressive three under par round of 68 - which included just one dropped shot - to reach four under par and lead by one from Germany's Alex Cejka.

Alker, the 2022 Charles Schwab Cup Standings winner, has only finished outside the top 10 twice in his eight Senior Major appearances to date, as well as winning last year's Senior PGA Championship and finished in a tie for third in The Senior Open at Gleneagles, his first appearance in the event. Scotland's Greig Hutcheon, making his debut Senior Major appearance, sits in third place on two under par after matching the Kiwi's round of 68, while countryman Paul Lawrie, Fijian Vijay Singh, Denmark's Anders Hansen and 2016 Senior Open Champion Paul Broadhurst share fourth on one under and complete the group of seven players in the red figures.

Bernhard Langer, the 46-time PGA TOUR Champions winner who won both previous editions of The Senior Open in South Wales, cancelled out his opening two over par 73 with a two under 69 to sit in a tie for eighth alongside seven others including fellow past champion Miguel Ángel Jiménez, 2010 Ryder Cup Captain Colin Montgomerie and Spain's Santiago Luna, who posted the lowest round of the day, an impressive four under 67. Another Ryder Cup captain, Padraig Harrington, carded two double bogeys but still managed a round of 68 to move to one over par, five strokes off Alker's lead.

Vikram, Chaufla, Nandal to shoulder India's challenge at Racketlon World Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has named a 16-member squad for the Racketlon World Championship beginning in Rotterdam on August 2. Adarsh Vikram will captain India in the 'World Cup', which is the premier category in the competition.

Former badminton player Vikramaditya Chaufla and Siddharth Nandal, who won silver medals in the individual category in the last edition in Austria, are also part of the World Cup squad. The Indian team had won gold in the Nations Cup at the World Championship last year.

Racketlon is a combination sport in which the competitors are required to play four racket sports: table tennis, badminton, tennis and squash.

Prashant Sen, Adit Patel, Nikhil Mansukhani, Varun Motasha and Krishna B Kotak will be seen in the C category 'Challenge Cup'. K A Aadith and K A Aadirai form the under-18 team. K K Cheema, who is the president of Racketlon India Sports Association, will be the team manager.

Sen puts up gallant fight in loss to Christie in Japan Open semifinals

PTI ■ TOKYO

Star Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen fought gallantly before going down in three games to world number 9 and Asian Games champion Jonatan Christie in the semifinals of the Japan Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Saturday.

The 21-year-old from Almora bounced back from an opening game reversal to keep his rival under pressure but in the end couldn't get across the fifth-seeded Christie, who rode on his solid defence and quality of shots to eke out a 21-15 13-21 21-16 win.

The duo had a 1-1 head-to-head count before the match and it turned out to be another pulsating contest with Sen and Christie involved in some exquisite rallies during the 68-minute contest.

Sen is known to be faster and to negotiate his speed, Christie needed to produce high-quality shots.

However, the Indonesian wasn't consistent and made too many unforced errors initially to allow the Indian take a 7-4 lead early on. However, a superb net



shot coupled with Sen's errors on the sidelines helped Christie claw back with three points.

Sen unleashed two booming smashes to keep himself ahead and went to the interval with a two-point advantage after Christie went long and wide.

Christie levelled the scores after the resumption, playing some superb blocks and drop shots. He went up to 15-12 after winning a 32-shot rally.

The Indonesian started constructing his rallies by mixing his shots and also finished well to move to 19-13 after Sen went wide.

A quick exchange ended with Sen missing a shot as Christie had a five game points and he sealed it with a backhand

flick near the net.

Pegged back, Sen needed to change his strategy and he found his groove after an initial duel in the second game.

The Indian varied the pace of the rallies and produced some quality shots to make his opponent work hard. He also mixed his services to disrupt Christie's strategy.

Sen played some sensational smashes and drops while Christie sprayed into the net twice. The result was Sen entered the interval with an 11-5 advantage after another cross-court return.

At 13-7, Sen was called for a service fault for height. However, an incredible return during a fast-paced rally fol-

lowed by another cross-court jump smash kept Sen ahead.

Sen won a flat exchange and followed it with a straight smash. Another miscued net shot gave Sen seven game points and he converted it when Christie went long.

The decider was another rollercoaster ride as leads exchanged hands frequently.

Sen needed to keep a calm head as he looked to outwit his rival in the rallies but it was Christie who managed to keep things in his grip to move to 9-6.

The Indonesian grabbed a decisive four-point cushion at the final interval after producing two precise returns.

After resumption, Sen did everything in his hand but couldn't break Christie's solid defence with the Indonesian led 15-11.

Another cross-court jump smash saw Sen make it 13-17 but he smashed wide next.

Christie moved to 19-15 with an accurate smash and grabbed five match points when Sen went marginally wide. Sen saved one with a smash on the backline before pushing one to the net.

"Make the right decisions when nobody's looking, especially when nobody's looking, and you will always turn out okay"
—Oprah Winfrey



The Manipur horror story of parading naked women on the streets of a village has once again brought the spotlight to the escalating cases of crime against women in India and the alarming impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. **NAVIN UPADHYAY** addresses this pressing issue, shedding light on the need for urgent action and justice for the victims

DO WE REALLY CARE FOR INDIA'S DAUGHTERS?

On July 19, the video of a horrifying incident went viral, showing the parading of two hapless Manipur women through the streets of a village amid a cheering mob. Although the video capturing this ghastly crime may have been removed from social media platforms, the haunting memory of that day remains etched in the minds of those who witnessed the scene of horror.

The massive protest and uproar that ensued after the video went viral is understandable, even if some reactions may have been politically motivated. However, amidst the clamor and selective outrage, the country must not lose sight of the truth behind the incident in Manipur and the role played by the police and administration in conniving with the perpetrators.

The connivance of police and administration and the apathy of the state in the Manipur horror tale exposes a disturbing trend that has contributed to the declining number of prosecutions in cases of crimes against women in India. Such crimes predominantly target women from impoverished backgrounds who lack the resources to fight for justice in a justice system where access to justice comes at a premium. The situation becomes even more complex when the perpetrators are resourceful or politically connected. Then witnesses are bought or silenced, the prosecution is compromised, and cases are delayed to break down the victims further.

All this results in a low rate of conviction in crimes against women. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the conviction rate for crimes against women in India was only 26.5% in 2021. This means that only 26.5% of cases filed against perpetrators resulted in convictions. While the rate of conviction remains low, crimes against women continue to rise, as evidenced by a 7% increase reported by the NCRB in 2022. Last year, over 350,000 cases of crimes against women were reported in India, up from 325,000 in 2021.

The NCRB data also reveals that states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal reported the highest number of crimes against women in India. The top five crimes against women in India are rape, kidnapping and abduction, domestic violence, dowry deaths, and sexual harassment. In 2022, there were over 32,000 reported cases of rape, marking a 10% increase from the previous year. Kidnapping and abduction cases saw a 5% rise, with over 25,000 incidents reported. Domestic violence cases

increased by 3%, reaching over 22,000. However, there was a slight decrease of 2% in dowry deaths, with over 7,000 cases reported. Shockingly, there was a 15% increase in sexual harassment cases, with over 14,000 incidents reported.

One significant step towards addressing this issue is increasing the representation of women in the police force. Currently, women constitute a relatively low percentage of the police force in India, but there has been some progress in recent years. For example, Andhra Pradesh has the highest number of women police officers, with 44,993 out of a total police force of 2,07,753, making up 21.7% of the police force in the state. Bihar is the second state with the highest number of women police officers, with 65,737 out of a total police force of 2,88,831, making up 22.7% of the police force. Chandigarh follows closely as the third state with the highest number of women police officers, with 20,746 out of a total police force of 9,357, making up 22.1% of the police force. Delhi stands as the fourth state with the highest number of women police officers, with 15,940 out of a total police force of 89,360, making up 18% of the police force. Gujarat takes the fifth spot with the highest number of women police officers, with 30,734 out of a total police force of 1,58,501, making up 19.4% of the police force.

The states with the lowest number of women police officers are Jammu and Kashmir, Tripura, and Meghalaya. Jammu and Kashmir has only 2,854 women police officers out of a total police force of 85,074, which means that women make up only 3.3% of the police force in Jammu and Kashmir. Tripura has 8,139 women police officers out of a total police force of 41,145, which means that women make up 19.5% of the police force in Tripura. Meghalaya has 7,327 women police officers out of a total police force of 41,894, which means that women make up 17.5% of the police force in Meghalaya.

Overall, the number of women police officers in India is still relatively low. However, there has been some progress in recent years. The number of women police officers has increased by about 20% since 2012. This is due in part to the efforts of the government to increase the representation of women in the police force.

Empowering women police officers can have several positive impacts on combating crimes against women. They bring a unique perspective, empathy, and approachability when dealing with victims, challenging traditional gender

IN RECENT TIMES, INDIA HAS WITNESSED AN ALARMING SURGE IN CASES OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN, PAINTING A GRIM AND DISTRESSING PICTURE OF THE NATION'S SAFETY LANDSCAPE. FROM HEINOUS ACTS OF VIOLENCE TO INSIDIOUS FORMS OF HARASSMENT, WOMEN ACROSS THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN ENDURING A HARROWING ORDEAL. THIS RISE IN CRIME HAS RAISED URGENT QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STATE OF WOMEN'S SECURITY AND THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO PROTECT THEIR RIGHTS AND DIGNITY. IT IS REQUIRED THAT SOCIETY GIVES MORE ATTENTION TO THE TROUBLING REALITIES OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA, SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE ROOT CAUSES, HIGHLIGHT THE CHALLENGES, AND ADVOCATE FOR A SOCIETY WHERE EVERY WOMAN CAN LIVE WITHOUT FEAR AND RECLAIM HER RIGHTFUL PLACE WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

roles and inspiring young girls. Moreover, they can elicit crucial information and evidence from victims, foster trust, and create a safer environment for women to report crimes.

Addressing the low conviction rate in crimes against women requires investing in the training of police officers and prosecutors. Adequate resources should also be allocated to the criminal justice system to ensure thorough investigations and timely prosecutions. Additionally, changing social and cultural attitudes towards women is crucial to create a society where women feel safe and empowered to report crimes against them without fear of judgment or bias.

But more than anything, it is the will of the governments, both at the states and the center, and a change in approach towards women that alone could tackle such crimes. Raising awareness about gender equality and promoting gender-sensitive education are also essential steps to challenge deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Educational institutions play a vital role in nurturing a culture of respect and understanding, which can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive society.

Civil society organizations and NGOs also play a pivotal role in supporting victims and providing them with access to legal aid, counseling, and rehabilitation services. These organizations can also work towards changing societal attitudes and dismantling harmful stereotypes that perpetuate violence against women.

In conclusion, the Manipur incident serves as a stark reminder that the crime against women was not a state-specific problem, with a difference that in this case, the perpetrators had the blessing of those mandated for the enforcement of law and order. However, the incident has once again highlighted the fact that it was necessary to combat this epidemic and ensure a safer and more equitable society for women. The government must take decisive steps to empower women police officers, improve conviction rates, and change societal attitudes toward women. By unitedly working towards eradicating this scourge from our society, India can pave the way for a future where every woman can live without fear and exercise her rights with dignity and pride. The blame game that the police class has engaged in after the Manipur horror tale emerged is only going to detract attention from the real issue at hand

(The writer is Executive Editor of The Pioneer)

CRIME AGAINST WOMEN ON THE RISE

Crimes against women in India continue to be a serious problem, with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reporting a 7% rise in such crimes in 2022. The data shows that there were over 350,000 cases of crimes against women reported in India last year, up from 325,000 in 2021.

THE TOP FIVE CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA ARE:

- **Rape:** There were over 32,000 cases of rape reported in India in 2022, an increase of 10% from the previous year.
- **Kidnapping and abduction:** There were over 25,000 cases of kidnapping and abduction reported in India in 2022, an increase of 5% from the previous year.

- **Domestic violence:** There were over 22,000 cases of domestic violence reported in India in 2022, an increase of 3% from the previous year.
- **Dowry deaths:** There were over 7,000 cases of dowry deaths reported in India in 2022, a decrease of 2% from the previous year.

Sexual harassment: There were over 14,000 cases of sexual harassment reported in India in 2022, an increase of 15% from the previous year.

The NCRB data also shows that the states with the highest number of crimes against women in India are Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal.

SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR WOMEN

India ranks 136 out of 167 countries in the 2022 Global Women, Peace and Security Index. This index measures the level of safety and security for women in different countries.

INDIA SCORES PARTICULARLY LOW ON THE FOLLOWING INDICATORS:

- **Violence against women:** India has a high rate of violence against women, including rape, domestic violence, and acid attacks.
- **Access to justice:** Women in India often face discrimination in the justice system. For

example, they may be less likely to report crimes against them, and they may be less likely to receive justice if they do report them.

- **Political participation:** Women in India are underrepresented in government and decision-making positions. For example, women hold only 14% of seats in the Indian Parliament.
- **Economic opportunity:** Women in India have less access to economic opportunities than men. For example, they are more likely to be unemployed, and they are paid less for their work.

GENDER DISPARITY

According to the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, India ranks 140 out of 156 countries in terms of gender equality. This means that India is one of the countries with the highest gender gaps in the world.

- The report ranks countries on a number of factors, including economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, political empowerment, and social norms. India scores particularly low on the political empowerment and social norms indicators.

- In terms of political empowerment, India ranks 138 out of 156 countries. This is because women are underrepresented in government and decision-making positions. For example, women hold only 14% of seats in the Indian Parliament.
- In terms of social norms, India ranks 145 out of 156 countries. This is because there are strong patriarchal attitudes in India that contribute to violence against women. For example, a recent survey found that 52% of men in India believe that a woman should obey her husband even if he is wrong.

DON'T IGNORE HERNIA

In this concluding part, doctors from AIIMS Delhi's Surgical Disciplines Department talk about the surgical interventions, new techniques, preventive tips and supportive aids among others for the patients suffering with hernia. It affects 15%-20% of the general population in India. The prevalence of most commonly found inguinal hernia is estimated to be 1.5 to 2 million. ARCHANA JYOTI reports

SURGICAL INTERVENTION

Surgical intervention is the primary treatment for hernia, aiming to repair the hernia defect and reinforce the weakened or damaged tissues. **Dr. Prasanna Ramana** and **Dr. Piyush Ranjan** said that the selection of a surgical approach is based on factors such as the type, size, and location of the hernia, as well as patient-specific considerations and surgeon expertise.

"There are two main surgical techniques employed for hernia repair: open surgery and laparoscopic (minimally invasive) surgery. Open hernia repair involves making an incision directly over the hernia site, allowing direct access to the hernia sac. The protruding contents are carefully reduced, and the weakened muscles or tissues are repaired using sutures or by placing a synthetic mesh to provide additional reinforcement.

"Open surgery remains a widely utilized approach for various types of hernias, including inguinal, umbilical, and incisional hernias," he says.

It is more economical and the learning curve for surgeons is shorter. Laparoscopic hernia repair is a minimally invasive technique performed through small keyhole incisions, typically using a laparoscope and specialized instruments. The laparoscope provides a magnified view of the hernia, while the surgeon utilizes the instruments to repair the hernia from within the abdominal cavity. Laparoscopic surgery has gained popularity due to advantages such as reduced post-operative pain, shorter hospital stays, and faster recovery compared to open surgery. It is commonly employed for inguinal and ventral hernias.

INDICATIONS OF SURGERY

Hernias that do not cause any problems can be managed without surgery, however, surgery is usually preferred in symptomatic hernias. **Dr. Ankita Singh Tiwari** said that surgery is also preferred in people where the hernia cannot be

pushed back into the abdomen. These cases may present in the emergency with severe cramping pain in the abdomen, nausea, vomiting and inability to pass stools or gas. Severe cases may lead to impairment of the blood supply of the herniated

tissue which is trapped and may lead to tissue death. This situation is considered as a medical emergency and requires urgent surgery to remove the trapped tissue and restore blood flow. **Dr. Jyoti Sharma** added that surgery is also recom-

mended for large hernias which may cause significant discomfort or restrict a person's daily activities. These are usually seen in hernias occurring at scar sites. Surgery may be considered to repair the weakened area and prevent further herniation.



Working as a team: (From left to right): Dr. Amol Sood, Dr. Ankita Singh, Dr. Yashwant Singh Rathore, Dr. Piyush Ranjan, Dr. Devender Singh, Dr. Sunil Chumber (HoD), Dr. Rijuta Aphale, Dr. Jasmine Dhal, Dr. Anurag Kushwaha, Dr. Vikram Saini, Dr. Richa Garg, Dr. Ajay Mohan. In front of Surgery block, AIIMS Delhi

PRE-SURGERY PREPARATIONS

Dr. MVVS Srikanth and **Dr. Aditya Bakshi** advised that any pre-existing illness such as diabetes, blood pressure etc. should be well controlled before a planned hernia surgery. Smoking should be stopped at least two weeks (preferably three months) prior to the operation.

Coughing and straining to pass urine or stool can cause the hernia to recur after surgery. Patients with constipation are encouraged to take high fibre diet (such as green leafy vegetables, fruits, whole grains) and drink lots of water. Laxatives may be added in severe constipation. Elderly males frequently have urinary problems due to increased size of the prostate gland. They should consult a urologist before hernia surgery.

Overweight and obese people with hernia are advised to lose at least 10% body weight before hernia repair, by diet and exercise. Patients with severe obesity may even need bariatric surgery for weight loss prior to hernia repair. When an urgent operation is needed due to a complicated hernia, such preparation is not possible. Emergency operations are inherently more risky. Most surgeons, therefore, recommend hernia repair even in patients without symptoms.

PREVENTING HERNIA: SIMPLE TIPS FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

Dr. Ajay Mohan and **Dr. Sakshi Dholpuria** informed that while some risk factors like age and family history are beyond our control, there are several practical steps we can take to reduce the risk of developing a hernia.

● **Exercise Regularly:** Engaging in regular physical activity can strengthen the muscles, including those in the abdominal area. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week. Activities like walking, swimming, or cycling are excellent choices.

● **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** One of the most effective ways to prevent hernia is to maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight or obese can put additional strain on the muscles in the abdominal area, making them more susceptible to weakening and herniation. Engaging in regular physical activity and adopting a balanced diet can help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

● **Lift Objects Properly:** Improper lifting is a common cause of hernia. When lifting heavy objects, always use your leg muscles instead of your back, and avoid twisting while lifting. Bend your knees and keep the object close to your body. If something feels too heavy, don't hesitate to ask for help or use lifting aids.

● **Avoid Straining:** Straining during bowel movements or while urinating can increase the pressure inside the abdominal region, potentially leading to hernia development. To prevent straining, ensure you have enough fibre in your diet to promote regular bowel movements. Staying hydrated is also crucial for maintaining healthy bowel function.

● **Quit Smoking:** Smoking weakens the

body's tissues, making hernias more likely to occur. If you smoke, consider quitting to improve your overall health and reduce the risk of hernia and other related health problems.

● **Manage Chronic Conditions:** Conditions like chronic cough, constipation, or difficulty urinating can lead to increased pressure on the abdominal area, potentially contributing to hernia development. Work with your healthcare provider to manage these conditions effectively.

● **Be Mindful During Pregnancy:** If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, be mindful of your abdominal muscles. Prenatal exercises and maintaining proper posture can help reduce the strain on your abdominal region during pregnancy.

SUPPORT SYSTEM: BELTS IN HERNIA

Dr. Anurag Kushwaha and **Dr. Brahma Kumar Rath** talked about belts, a supportive garment for hernia patients.

A hernia belt is a supportive undergarment which provides support to weak areas and prevents the tissues from bulging out. Trusses, binders, and corsets are types of hernia belts. To support hernias in the abdomen, one should wear binders and corsets; while trusses are hernia belts to support groin hernias. All of these terms are used interchangeably.

Most belts are manufactured using elastic fabrics. Some of them also come with plastic or metal support plates. Hernia belts can be worn all through the day and also while doing any activity. However, in most of the cases a belt is not required while sleeping as the abdominal pressure is low.

Hernia belts can only minimize the symptoms until the patient goes for surgery. Now-a-days, we hardly ever or we do not ever advise patients with hernia to use a truss because surgery is the standard of care.

We used to advise a different type of belt called an abdominal binder for the patients who had undergone ventral or incisional hernia repair or any patient who had undergone a major abdominal surgery.

MESH IN HERNIA

Mesh used in hernia are synthetic materials that provide strength and support to the weakened area. The mesh is typically made of polypropylene, polyester, PTFE or composite materials. Some absorbable and biological mesh are also newer advances used in specific conditions. They gradually break down over time and let the body's own tissue

replace the mesh. This may also help reduce the permanent complications associated with the non-absorbable mesh.

However, the mesh may get infected, can migrate or may cause pain that may last for years in few patients. But, these complications are rare and the use of mesh in hernia surgery is now the standard of care, said **Dr. Rijuta Aphale**



ANAESTHESIA MANAGEMENT

For hernia surgery, the patient is asked to stop taking solid food after midnight. Clear liquids like water are allowed up to 2 hours before surgery. After the surgery, the patient is observed in the post-operative area for an hour after the operation, till the patient is completely awake and comfortable, after general anaesthesia and there is complete recov-

ery of sensation in lower limbs after regional anaesthesia. Patient is allowed to take clear fluids after a few hours of surgery and advised paracetamol as well as ketorolac injection for pain relief during the next 24 hours, according to **Dr. Anshul Singh** from Department of Anaesthesiology, Pain Medicine and Critical Care

HERNIA IN A NATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAMME?

Dr. Sanjeet S Rai and **Dr. Puneeth Thalasta** bat for including hernia in national health programme given that just a simple physical examination is often enough to diagnose the condition. This would be helpful and worth implementing in preventing serious complications associated with hernia. There must be encouragement for scientific research and practice of hernia surgery, they say.

According to the doctors, congenital hernias occur in about 15% of newborns, mostly umbilical. Incisional hernias make up about 10% of hernias, and all other types make up another 10%.

Most of the time hernias aren't serious, but over time it increases in size and may get complicated sometime. Usually patients with hernia have swelling in the groin or abdominal wall region which appear

on sneezing, coughing or straining and disappear once the patient relaxes and lies down. Sometimes it becomes serious when the intestines get stuck inside the defect and cannot go back inside the abdomen even after pushing it.

In that situation it is very serious, the patient may experience severe abdominal pain and if the patient does not visit the medical care as early as possible it may lead to obstruction

or strangulation (blood supply to the intestines gets cut off). Definitive treatment for hernia is surgery only.

If your hernia changes colour, goes numb, or causes symptoms like fever, nausea and vomiting it is very serious where the blood supply to the herniated contents have already been compromised, may be life threatening and may require a major surgery, according to the doctors.

Newer methods for hernia repair with the help of laparoscopic instruments and, currently, robotics are being performed. Currently, laparoscopic surgery is used for inguinal and other types of hernias.

Similarly, a lot of modifications have been established in open abdominal wall hernia surgery with minimal incisions and fewer complications, like the MILOS tech-

NEWER METHODS OF SURGERY

nique (Mini or Less Open Sublay Repair). Different types of laparoscopic surgeries for abdominal wall hernias are IPOM/IPOM+ (intra-peritoneal onlay mesh), eTEP (extended totally extraperitoneal), TARM (transabdominal retromuscular), and SCOLA (subcutaneous onlay). In IPOM/IPOM+, specially designed mesh is placed over the abdominal wall defect after entering into the abdom-

inal cavity. With the better understanding and experience of the surgical fraternity, the results of laparoscopic repair is comparable to an open approach and seems more promising in terms of early recovery, lesser pain, and shorter length of hospital stay.

In robotic surgery, surgical procedures are performed using robotic systems, and mesh is placed in a similar

fashion as in laparoscopic surgery. However, its acceptance will grow proportionately with equipment availability and cost reduction. Nevertheless, conventional laparoscopic mesh repair appears to be a safe alternative and seems to have an edge over open repair with the increasing experience of the surgical fraternity, underlined **Dr. Vikram Saini** and **Dr. Nelson T.**

VICIOUS CYCLE OF ARTHRITIS AND OBESITY

GETTING TOO COMMON FOR COMFORT

With a poor and sedentary lifestyle, comes obesity. In its wake, obesity brings along a plethora of diseases. In fact, today it is one of the main causes of spiraling severe arthritis leading to the need for total knee replacement (TKR), **Dr. AASHISH CHAUDHRY**, managing director, senior consultant and head, orthopaedics and joint replacement from Aakash Healthcare tells THE HEALTH PIONEER

In the case of obesity-induced arthritis, I would strongly suggest that one must act before the situation reaches a point where Total Knee Replacement (TKR) is the only choice left. But it is not so simple. TKR in such a condition is acutely difficult for the patient, caregiver and the surgeon involved," pointed out **Dr. Chaudhry**.

To bring home his point, he shared about the challenges he faced in the TKR surgery, which he recently performed on a 140 kg female (69).

"The risks involved in such an operation increase manifold. The whole procedure also turns very precarious and hard for the surgeon. The high risk of infection and difficulty in the postoperative recovery phase are huge challenges in case the patient requiring the TKR is obese.

"The biggest challenge is the high risk of infection as in such patients resistance to

infection is very low. Even giving the anesthesia becomes difficult because of the fat involved."

He cautioned that "In the case of obese patients TKR operation must be resorted to only when all the other solutions have been exhausted. Ideally, the situation must be stopped well before TKR is the only remaining solution.

"And if TKR is the only remaining solution then the patient must make sure to undergo the operation at a place with cumulative experience of handling 3000-5000 TKR patients."

Though, for obese elderly patients, Knee replacement looks like a good option, one has to be very careful. "Because of obesity and old age, everything associated with the TKR becomes extra challenging."

But the problem of obesity-related arthritis is on the rise. The doctor shared that a good majority of the TKR



operations he performs are on **Dr. Aashish Chaudhry with the patient and her relatives**

the obese people. This is a very significant and easily noticeable trend. "It is a vicious cycle. Lack of physical exercise leads to weight gain

and that causes arthritis of the knees. Then because of arthritis, the physical movement of people is further restricted and this leads to further weight gain. This continued weight gain then becomes responsible for making arthritis a severe one," said the doctor.

A research presented at the International Congress on Obesity last year reflects his concern. It said that gaining even a small amount of weight may not only damage your knees — leading to pain, stiffness and mobility issues — but also increase your odds of

needing knee replacement surgery.

Among study participants, a gain of just 11 pounds made total knee replacement 34 percent more likely for women and 25 percent more likely for men. The finding stems from the researchers' review of two studies, involving some 264,000 people.

Overall, however, they reviewed data from 23 studies, focusing on the relationship between weight gain and knee osteoarthritis and finding that, as weight increased, participants' symptoms and radiographic scans of their knees indicated worsening osteoarthritis, said the research.

The need for TKR is likely to increase in the near future. For, more than half of the world's population will be overweight or obese by 2035 unless urgent action is taken to curb the growing epidemic of excess weight, warns a report by the World Obesity Federation.

Monsoon Woes: Eye Infections On Rise

Heavy rains and flooding in north India have resulted into a massive surge of eye infections this time.

Doctors say that the adenovirus strain may be responsible for the spike in conjunctivitis cases. However, much to the relief, this strain is relatively "safer" and does not cause severe damage.

"This virus is normally seen causing inflammation, commonly known as conjunctivitis. It is not that harmful, doesn't damage the eyes and only affects the superficial layer of the conjunctiva, a membrane protecting the eyes. Adenovirus is safer than other viruses, like herpes, which can cause a lot of damage to the cornea and is recurrent too," said **Dr. JS Titiyal**, chief of RP Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS Delhi.

AIIMS Delhi is seeing nearly 100 cases daily. **Dr. Titiyal** added: "Usually, in some cases of adenovirus, there is a little bit of involvement of the cornea too. But this time, it is targeting only the conjunctiva. No treatment is required. In two weeks, the virus is gone from the surface."



DR. JS TITIYAL
Chief of RP Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS Delhi

"Any episode that is more than the usual presentation can be called an epidemic.

Bacteria is also responsible for eye infection and normally happens in a compromised situation. It does not target healthy people. With bacterial infection, the ocular surface is compromised," **Dr. Titiyal** explained.

Most of the time conjunctivitis resolves on its own within a week. Eye drops help, but get them after consulting a doctor, say health experts.

They also warn the people not to take over-the-counter medication (for conjunctivitis) as most of them tend to contain steroids.

US Presidential elections: Anybody's game

Then US President Donald Trump has been an errant phenomenon for some observers and analysts in the discipline of international politics and American domestic policy. Trump is an enigmatic entity, and questions have been raised about the efficacy of his race for the Republican Presidency, particularly due to his implication in amoral practices with an American woman in the past, along with the hiding of White House documents in his Mar-a-Lago home in Florida.

These factors have led to doubts about his final showdown with the Democratic incumbent Joe Biden. The first executive order President Trump signed upon taking office in the White House was aimed at keeping out and ostracising citizens of seven Islamic nations, aligning with the counter-terror plank of his regime, which was heavily promoted during his election campaign along with the credo of "MAGA: Make America Great Again."

American pollsters predict that Trump will dominate the Republican primaries, but his closest rival Ron DeSantis is expected to win the GOP Florida primary. However, the election results remain uncertain, and we must wait for the electoral system to attempt a forecast of the US Presidential elections.

Both Republican rivals and adroit Democrats argue that Trump has besmirched the name and hallowed pedestal of the American Presidency through the Capitol Hill insurrection and disregard for the Constitution, values of liberty, democracy, and the rule of law. The Republicans are particu-

larly critical, contending that the former President did not behave as a "principled conservative" and tarnished the larger idiom of feisty conservatism in the United States and global politics.

Let's delve into the electoral personage and prospects by profiling the strongest Republican candidate for the Presidency after Donald Trump: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, as mentioned by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). According to BBC, "Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has worked hard to emulate Mr Trump and is often viewed as the candidate most capable of defeating him in a head-to-head race. Boosted to the governorship by Mr Trump's endorsement in 2018, he romped to re-election in last year's midterms by more than 1.5 million votes, the largest margin in the state in more than four decades. Under his tenure, Republican voters outnumber Democrats in the state for the first time. At 44 years old, the Harvard and Yale-educated lawyer is still a relative newcomer in US politics."

Additionally, former American Vice President Mike Pence also fancies his fortune, presenting himself as a "Mr politically correct conservative" who can restore the moral high pedestal and pontificated perch of Republican values and conservatism.

USA Today reports diligently that, "For some, Donald Trump's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024 is looking a lot like his victorious run in 2016 — and at the same time is totally unprecedented in the history of American politics. As in the 2016 campaign cycle,



Trump faces a flock of primary challengers who could split the Opposition vote and enable the former businessman and television celebrity to win primaries — and delegates — with as little as 30 per cent of the vote. Meanwhile, the Trump of 2024 is not the Trump of 2016: He is a former president who virtually controls the Republican Party."

Thus, numerous similarities are being drawn between the 2016 Presidential Elections and the contemporary context of 2024. Apart from DeSantis, no other Republican appears in close proximity to challenge the

Republican path of Trump. Besides the juggernaut factor of Trump's Presidency, anti-incumbency sentiment also looms large upon President Joe Biden. The debates surrounding issues like Roe Vs Wade in the context of abortion and the acerbic brouhaha over race and racism in the establishment cast aspersions upon the incumbent's Presidential prospects. Furthermore, the US's handling of global responsibilities in Afghanistan and Ukraine has sparked domestic debate and unrest.

The United States' election time is a confetti and memo-

abilia-laden mega-event, involving deft and impressive event management and a surreal celebration of the grandiloquent American dream and democracy.

The participatory nature of the US Presidential elections makes it a celebration of the demos and the hoi polloi. The US Presidential elections determine the most powerful person on the face of the good old Planet Earth.

Ruy Teixeira writes in the American Enterprise Institute, "His approval rating has been in the low 40s seemingly forever. Right now, it stands at a

little under 43 per cent in the 538 rolling average. Generally, presidents get pretty close to their approval rating in voting support. The last three incumbent presidents (W Bush, Obama, and Trump) got only 1-2 points higher support than their approval rating at the time of the election. This pattern would make Biden dead in the water if his low '40s approval rating continues to election day."

This prognostication can be a pollster's delight, and they may gloat in its accuracy if it comes true. Nevertheless, going by the numbers and President

Joe Biden's ripe old age, he might provide the apt grist to the electoral mill of the rampant Republicans. President Obama augmented his approval rating by 4 per cent and emerged as the victor at the hustings, but that might be a long haul for the geriatrics of President Joe Biden. With his flip-flops along with the recent debt crisis, the incumbent might have his task more than cut out.

The Real Clear Politics poll also indicates that Trump is one point ahead of the incumbent, and the public's awareness of Trump, with all his faults, makes him a serious contender for the highest seat of power in the American homeland. Another issue in the mainstream US media is that the battle for the White House in 2024 is going to pit crazy against the normal, and it's anybody's guess who will be called crazy and who will be labeled the boring and predictable Mr Normal.

As an attendant fact, the Biden inaugural had nothing "stand out" in its narrative, as hackneyed references to Democracy, liberalism, constitutionalism, and regaining American strength and stealth have been the hallmarks of several Presidential campaigns. The maverick but telling repertoire of President Trump might be the hidden swansong of the electoral season, but what if the legal hurdles to President Trump turn out to be true blue obstacles? That is any sane observer's guesswork.

(The writer teaches at International Relations and International Organisations, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi)

In the 2024 US Presidential polls, Trump's candidacy faces scrutiny due to past controversies. He is predicted to dominate Republican primaries, but Ron DeSantis poses a strong challenge. Uncertainty surrounds the outcome due to Trump's polarising tenure and conservative stance. But anti-incumbency sentiment affects Joe Biden, and domestic debates arise over abortion and global responsibilities. As the polls approaches, Trump's poll lead and the unpredictable race create an open contest with a clash of opposing ideologies



MANAN DWIVEDI

PERSPECTIVE

Hun Sen's historic retirement and son rise

Cambodia faces a hereditary power transfer from Hun Sen to his son Hun Manet, raising concerns about continued autocracy and suppression of the Opposition under the ruling party CPP. Hun Sen plans to retain influence, and critics worry about his son's ability to manage relationships with China and the US. Stability remains a key concern for Cambodia's economy

Cambodia is set for a historic power transfer in four decades, but only from the father to the son. It is going to be just another hereditary rule. No ordinary or elected member from the public is taking over. Hun Sen is simply changing hands within the family. He is planning to leave the levers of power after ruling the country for 38 years since 1985. Now 70 years old, Hun Sen has become increasingly authoritarian, along with his political party called the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), at the helm of affairs for too long in Cambodia. For the first time, he flagged his intention in the year 2021 but did not specify the exact timeline for power transfer. Now it is clear that it is taking place next month.

Over the years, Cambodia witnessed the end of the civil war, a sharp fall in poverty, and massive economic growth. However, his rule has so far been marred by violence, corruption, and the mass elimination of Opposition parties in the country.

In 2017, John Sifton, the Asia Advocacy Director of Human Rights Watch, wrote: "Maybe Hun Sen is getting tired. After all, he has been ruling Cambodia since 1985, and it probably has not been easy. To maintain his grip on power through five elections of varying fairness since 1993, he has frequently resorted to violence, intimidation, buyoffs, and manipulation of the legislature and the courts. Tactics have shifted over time, the systematic unfettered violence of the 1990s giving way to subtler methods today: more ballot rigging, misuse of the law, threats. But the outcome of elections has always left Hun Sen in charge, whatever the supposed results and whether or not observers considered the vote free and fair."

This all tells the gory tale of Cambodia under Hun Sen. He has run Cambodia like his

family fiefdom. The Opposition has literally been obliterated, and other dissenting voices have been silenced either through state agencies or by secret agents.

In 2017, during the campaign of the local elections in Cambodia, Hun Sen publicly said, "To ensure the lives of millions of people, we are willing to eliminate 100 or 200 people because we have seen a bitter past experience."

This reveals his intentions of continuing in power for a long time then. During that election, he was so obsessed with winning that he threatened to return to civil war if he loses the election. Whereas the opposition had promised to give USD 500,000 to each of the 1646 communes of the country. This kind of threat was made by Hun Sen in the past also. But this time he had gone a step further when he declared how many lives are expendable in pursuit of power. He told his countrymen that to ensure peace and to continue development, the only option is the CPP must win elections at all stages. He wants his party to rule at every stage like the way the Chinese Communist Party does. But then the reality in China and in Cambodia is altogether different.

Now the question is, what will Hun Sen do after his retirement? He won't go anywhere. Cambodia is his family business. In the past, he promised to rule until he attains 74, 90, and at times indefinitely. Thus he has simply surprised many by fixing a clear deadline for transferring power to his son. It is learned that he will take up several key positions after his formal exit from the office of the Prime Minister. He is likely to become the President of the Senate, President of the Supreme Council of the King, and finally, the President of the CPP. It is very clear now how he will continue to wield enormous



power to influence the making of major policy decisions. It seems Hun Manet will be a formal or titular head of the Government, and the real functional would be Hun Sen only. It is quite possible.

Hun Sen, in all these years, carefully outmaneuvered the high offices of global governance institutions like the UN, diplomats from foreign nations, and particularly donor nations to simply pretend that Cambodia is a genuine democracy. And in the name of democracy, he has gathered enough power to sideline pub-

lic opinion and particularly the opposition. Cambodia's party-controlled courts are a serious threat to government critics, independent media, and the Opposition leaders.

Hun Manet, the eldest son of Hun Sen, will take over as the Prime Minister of Cambodia from his father in August, as announced by the latter in a televised speech. This has happened only three days after the resounding victory of Hun Sen's political party, the CPP, in the parliamentary elections of last Sunday. His son Manet is just 45 years old, and

many Southeast Asian political observers say that he has a long way to go. Indeed, he has been groomed for the job for quite a long time.

Currently, Manet is serving as a four-star general and commander of the Royal Cambodian Army. With a strong overseas education background in the UK and in the US, unlike his father, he speaks very good English and can handle diplomatic affairs much better. For the last two years, he has been actively engaging with foreign dignitaries, officials, and lawmakers

simply to make the world aware that he is taking over the reins of Cambodia soon.

Washington is now interested in how Manet will navigate the recent deadlocks between the US and China. At this time, Cambodia is an old ally of China, and the latter is the largest investor in that country. On the other hand, the US is the biggest trading partner of Cambodia. In the early career days, Hun Manet received training at the US Military Academy at West Point in New York. Further, he also studied masters in eco-

nomics from New York University and a PhD in the same subject from the University of Bristol from the UK. So his western linkages from military and academic perspectives are very clear.

Now, the pertinent question is how he will manage an anti-China global narrative marshaled by the western nations led by the US and its allies in the Asia-Pacific and in other frontiers of the world.

Meanwhile, the Opposition and the critics of the CPP and Hun Sen are not hopeful about Hun Manet. To them, Cambodia will go deep down the path of family rule and autocracy in the name of democracy. Sam Rainsy, the exiled Opposition leader of the Cambodian National Party, commented that Hun Manet will not take the country towards a democratic future. And it is true because he will be working hard to sustain the legacy of his father and continue the family rule in this Southeast Asian nation.

The real problem is that the indispensable Hun Sen would be lurking behind the scenes to keep a tight grip on power in the country. He will not go anywhere. The remnants of this former Khmer Rouge cadre will continue to be visible everywhere in Cambodia.

Neither will he allow anyone, including his son, to demolish his nearly 40 years of powerful legacy. Manet, the heir to Cambodia's autocracy, needs to urgently balance the power equations in the country the way his maverick father has done for decades. More than anything else, this budding economy and one of Asia's famous manufacturing hubs for Western MNCs demand political stability. Hope Hun Manet would understand it much better than anyone else!

(The writer is currently president of the Global Research Foundation)



MAKHAN SAIKIA

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE DOES NOT REMOVE US FROM THE WORLD BUT LEADS US DEEPER INTO IT — HENRI JM NOUWEN



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

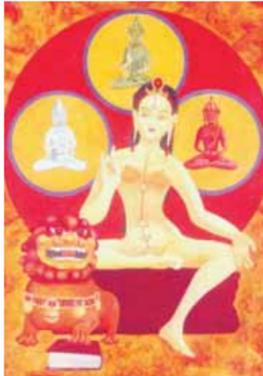
MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

Opportunities are knocking on your door. There are fresh opportunities or promising starts on the love, work, or emotional fronts. A later period of regret may result from ignoring them and carrying on as usual. So, stop being introspective and open your eyes. This week, a significant and unexpected shift will occur in your life. Remember that life is a wheel that should be turning continuously; thus, develop fresh aspirations, dreams, and passions since they are the very core of existence. The moment to appreciate and make the most of God's time is now. A love or marriage proposal is on the cards. Smooth operation is preferred when functioning as a partnership. The working environment will be harmonious and balanced. The results will be more impressive.

Lucky number 13 | **Lucky colour** Navy Blue
Lucky day Tuesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

There are difficulties and hurdles in life, but because of your bravery and fortitude, you will overcome them and reach your objective. Given that success is possible with work, resourcefulness, and strong direction, you have the confidence to persevere at this point. There are indications that you could experience emotional pain in the middle of the week. The partner can be unfaithful, ignorant, or careless. You must be patient because this is only a temporary period. Your relationships will get stronger and more secure during the weekend. Positive energy, prosperity, financial success, good fortune, love, and relationships will all improve. It will be easy for you to communicate, you will have a great social life, and you will be happy. Everything is in its proper position, and you have all the conveniences imaginable.

Lucky number 19 | **Lucky colour** White
Lucky day Friday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

Make your objectives clear and go on with recognising your talents because your contradictory nature and uncertainty may negatively impact your life. Reaffirm your beliefs and have faith in your abilities. Midway through the week, there will be emotional problems as some of you reminisce and experience nostalgia. Your emotions are so intense that you could plan a trip to visit your coworkers, friends, or family. There will be happy moments, even with your kids. Your energy level will increase since you will feel refreshed and renewed. By the end of the week, you will have written your own fate. Certain spiritual forces govern you and direct you in the proper direction. Your emotions, passions, and wants will be under your control, and your body, mind, and spirit will all be in harmony.

Lucky number 39 | **Lucky colour** Red
Lucky day Wednesday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

The week's focus is on prosperity and abundance. You are the one who toils as a slave and lives as a prince. You do not stop until your objectives are met. You have a clear goal, are committed, and are aware of the facts. With this strategy, your perspective is widened, and you have a significant influence on others. You are not a victim of your passions and ambitions. You are sensitive to the sentiments and emotions of others. To prevent things from slipping out of your control, you must be a stern disciplinarian throughout the middle of the week. You should take the situation seriously if you hold a senior position or are in charge. Your acts of kindness and generosity will pay off at the end of the week.

Lucky number 17 | **Lucky colour** Golden
Lucky day Sunday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week's subject is balancing the wrongs of the past and redressing them. Every action has a cause and a consequence, much like the rules of karma. If you are seeking work, a position can appear out of nowhere. If you already have a job, things are about to get extremely hectic. If you are in a serious relationship, it could be about to end. We suggest you take things a little more slowly because haste and aggression might damage your relationship. For your understanding to grow, you need time and space in solitude. Your investment return is looking terrific. Your mental, emotional, and physical stamina will be at its best. It is time to let go of relationships that are no longer nourishing or if your profession is no longer fulfilling.

Lucky number 14 | **Lucky colour** Pastel Green
Lucky day Friday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

You are the creator, the one with the creative thinking and fresh spark. Your team-building abilities, poise, and fortitude will unite your partners, colleagues, and associates, and you have a big-picture mindset for the sake of your job. Excellent outcomes will be produced when your creativity and expertise are used in the appropriate proportions, giving you the edge you need to succeed and build a reputation at work. Giving your younger workforce the correct direction and training can further enhance your company's image. Domestic concerns take a backseat to work-related issues. Emotions, socialising, and devoting time to caring for family needs have no place in the workplace. You give your entire attention to your work, your profession, and the results you produce. At the end of the week, you want to unwind and spend time with your loved ones.

Lucky number 28 | **Lucky colour** Peach
Lucky day Saturday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

You need to rest this week. You felt worn out last week due to a heavy workload. The theme of the week is renewal and healing. You can re-energize yourself and lift your spirits in solitude. Through your confidence and control, you will be able to overcome difficulties and chaos. Despite the obstacles you confront in your job, you will not allow anything to deter you from achieving your objective. Unexpectedly positive news is indicated. You believe in yourself and your skills. The likelihood of travel is very high. The trip might be one of physical exploration or spiritual awakening. But you must protect your own interests. Make all efforts to preserve or improve your health. You could run into a dominant, competitive figure towards the end of the week.

Lucky number 11 | **Lucky colour** Orange
Lucky day Tuesday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

You might experience a lack of vigour or vitality this week. Your health can be an issue. The financial situation will not be as good as anticipated either, so it is best not to take it too seriously but to exercise caution because prevention is better than cure. Look for aspects of your life that are out of balance and trust your intuition. Pay attention to your inner voice. There will be plenty of possibilities towards the week's end. You will be kept occupied with new business assignments, pay raises, new friendships, partnerships, and emotional ties. Your social circle will grow as a result of contacts, communication, and teamwork. Your life's objectives will become obvious through reflection and self-discovery. The success of your decision will depend on how much time you have to wait, analyse, and pick the best course of action.

Lucky number 29 | **Lucky colour** Sky Blue
Lucky day Tuesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

Although you are energetic and full of life, you are unsure of how to set your life's objectives. You want to start a new business, and every new adventure requires your patience and care. You can feel stressed if you have to invest more money to complete your task. It will be difficult to manage the income, debts, and cash. Spend some time planning for unforeseen expenses. During this time, caution is required. In your current situation, a little confusion may be harmful. There is a chance that you will build valuable new relationships. You can talk to someone close to you about your feelings and important issues. Going back to your hometown or running into an old acquaintance will make you happy. Enjoy your time.

Lucky number 18 | **Lucky colour** Indigo
Lucky day Friday



CANCER June 21-July 22

You have a drive to learn nearly everything, and you feel fresh and active. Concerned with material wellbeing, a fresh start or a fresh occurrence is likely to occur. You put in a lot of effort and are careful with your money. Mid-week is a very lucky time for you, and you may experience success, monetary comfort, relaxation, and pleasure. You could be pleased with yourself and feel passionate about life. You experience an unforeseen creative spark that sets you on the path to a fresh creative idea. In this challenging environment, your confidence helps you get far. You have a young spirit and a fresh perspective. Children will bring joy and open up new avenues for self-expression.

Lucky number 21 | **Lucky colour** Grey
Lucky day Saturday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

You are a strong individual with lots of drive and concentration. As the leader, you have the power to not only take charge of the situation but also to shape it in the direction you choose. You energise and motivate others. Due to your job or a vacation with the family, you will be looking to relocate. Your endurance is exceptional. Some of you may travel abroad for business purposes, which will be profitable and result in fantastic outcomes. At the end of the week, you may have a gala, parties, or get-togethers to celebrate your accomplishments, or a special ceremony may be held at your house. Shopping, personal grooming, spa visits, and visits to the beauty parlour will enrich your personality and make you the centre of attention.

Lucky number 12 | **Lucky colour** Black
Lucky day Tuesday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

You should avoid building castles in the air if you have unrealistic expectations for your romantic relationships or professional or business achievements. Put an end to it and face reality. Your practical attitude may present you with advantageous opportunities. You might not be able to live up to your partner's high expectations. You might be disappointed by your lack of comprehension and foresight. Relationships may end, or a minor injury may be on the cards. This week, lovers need to exercise caution. Your parents have a significant impact on how your life progresses. Dealing with physical and emotional problems requires new thinking and careful planning. There is a fresh spirit towards the end of the week. A new job opportunity will set you on the proper course.

Lucky number 31 | **Lucky colour** Turquoise
Lucky day Thursday

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ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Lord Shiva – Existence personified



process, covering both the seen and unseen sides. Also, it offers lesson in how to relate to the world around. See how beautifully, vital truths relating to worldly existence has been portrayed

through two imageries of Lord Shiva. First, Lord Shiva seated in meditative posture on Mount Kailasha. Second, Lord Shiva with his entourage. Read together, it comes out that Lord Shiva

is 'Existence Personified'. For, the pictures put together cover the primal source, the manifest, intervening dynamisms between the two, and the conduct rules of life on earth plane.

In the first imagery Lord Shiva is shown with lunar crescent over His head. He is perceived almost bare bodied, with just the private part covered with tiger skin. His poison fed blue neck is encircled by venomous snake. River Ganges flows down His hair locks. He is perceived holding a trident in one arm, Damru (double headed hand drum) in another, rosary in the third, and the 4th palm in blessing mode. Lord Shiva's meditative posture symbolises reflecting within on the run of the life cycle. As the rosary keeps going round and round, so does life cycle keeps moving in succession. Different beads of the rosary imply varied existences on the run. The blessing mode implies that all existences draw succour out of his inexhaustible potential.

Mount Kailasha, said to be the place of abode of Lord Shiva, is one of the high peaks in the Himalayan range to which lot of perennial rivers are

sourced. Contextually, however, only the river Ganges alone emerging out of Shiva's hairlock has been named for the sake of understanding. Being one of the highest peaks, it is closest to the cosmic world, simultaneously having all round view of life down below. Lord Shiva, with lunar crescent over the head, read together with his place of abode, the Himalayan range having in store perennial rivers, is symbolic of eternity, infinity.

The presence of lunar crescent symbolizes the convergence of all nature driven forces. For, Moon's luminosity is drawn out of the Sun, as well as all the planets and stars up above in the sky. But before all light drawn thus, flows down the line, Moon does its own stamping by turning them into an amiable form, to facilitate creation of form-existences on earth plane. The obvious implication is that Moon symbolises convergence of all nature driven energy streams.

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