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11 SPORT

Judicial probe to resolve Manipur violence: Shah

HM emphasises need for dialogue as sole solution to ongoing crisis

PNS ■ IMPHAL

In a significant development aimed at resolving the recent clashes in Manipur, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday announced to set up a judicial probe led by a retired Chief Justice of a High Court. Shah announced this during a Press conference, stressing the imperative need for dialogue as the sole solution to the ongoing crisis.

Moreover, Shah unveiled plans to establish a peace committee under the leadership of Manipur Governor Anusuya Uikey. This committee will consist of representatives from all political parties, as well as members from the Kuki and the Meitei communities and various social organisations.

Its primary objective is to facilitate constructive discussions and foster peace-building efforts in the region.

During the Press conference, Shah declared, "We will soon announce a judicial probe headed by a retired High Court Chief Justice and set up a peace committee."



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a Press conference in Imphal on Thursday. PTI

In an additional endeavour to address the situation comprehensively, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) will launch an investigation into multiple FIRs alleging criminal conspiracies behind the violence in Manipur.

Despite the recent outbreaks of violence, Shah expressed optimism regarding the state of affairs, affirming that violence is merely a temporary phase and that misunderstandings will eventually be resolved.

He revealed that he personally visited relief camps, met with representatives from the Kuki and the Meitei civil groups, and engaged in discussions pertaining to the peace process. Leaders from both the Meitei and the Kuki communities, along with other civil society representatives,

assured Shah of their unwavering commitment to easing tensions and addressing misunderstandings. Shah also disclosed plans to establish an Inter-Agency Unified Command to enhance coordination among various security agencies operating in Manipur. Presently, approximately 10,000 personnel from the Army and the Assam rifles have been deployed in the State, in addition to the Central and State police forces.

In response to concerns regarding the Indo-Myanmar border, Shah emphasised the criticality of completing the border fencing between the two countries.

The porous nature of the border has raised apprehensions about drug smuggling and the movement of militants. Additionally, biometric data

of individuals arriving from neighbouring countries is being collected to monitor the influx of refugees from Myanmar.

Addressing the origins of the ethnic riots were triggered by the Manipur High Court's request to the State Government for its opinion on granting Scheduled Tribe status to a particular community.

When questioned about the Kuki community's demand for a separate administrative unit, the Minister refrained from making any sensational statements, reiterating the central government's unwavering commitment to preserving Manipur's territorial integrity.

Shah proudly highlighted the accomplishments of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government in Manipur over the past six years, underscoring that the State has remained free from strikes, curfews, and blockades, experiencing substantial growth and harmony.

Shah assured the public that the Government would soon announce a relief and rehabilitation package.

This package aims to provide financial assistance to families who have suffered losses, injuries, or property damage as a result of the violence. The funds will be directly transferred to the bank accounts of the victims and their relatives, serving as a crucial step toward recovery and restoration.

Ties with Nepal 'super hit': Modi

Nepal PM hails Modi's 'neighbourhood first policy'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Nepal on Thursday reviewed their historic bilateral ties during talks here between Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He described the relationship between the two countries a "hit" and said the two sides will strive to take their relationship to "Himalayan heights."

The two Prime Ministers also jointly unveiled the e-plaque of the Kurtha-Bijalpara section of the Railway. Both leaders jointly flagged off the Indian Railway cargo train from Bathnaha in Bihar to Nepal Custom yard.

The two sides also signed seven agreements to boost cooperation in a range of areas, including extension of cross-border petroleum pipeline, development of integrated check posts and boosting cooperation in hydroelectric power. One of the key pacts signed was the revised India-Nepal treaty of transit.

Prachanda arrived here on Wednesday on a four-day visit. It is his first bilateral visit to a foreign country since he



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Nepali counterpart Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' during their joint press statement after a meeting at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI

assumed office in December last year.

The Nepalese PM said he appreciated Modi's "neighbourhood first policy."

In his media statement after the talks, Modi said he and Prachanda took many important decisions to make the partnership between the

two countries a "super hit" in the future. The two leaders remotely inaugurated a number of projects and laid the foundation stone of some others.

"We will continue to strive to take our relationship to Himalayan heights. And in this spirit, we will resolve all issues, be it boundary related or

any other issue," Modi said in the presence of Prachanda.

Modi also referred to his priority in strengthening ties with Nepal after he took charge as Prime Minister nine years back. "I remember, nine years ago, in 2014, within three months of taking office, I made my first visit to Nepal. At that time I had given a 'hit' formula for India-Nepal relations — Highways, I-ways, and Trans-ways," Modi said.

"I had said that we will establish such a relationship between India and Nepal that our borders do not become barriers between us," he said.

Modi said he was feeling proud to say after nine years that "our partnership has been really a 'hit'."

Following the talks, the two leaders virtually inaugurated integrated check posts at Rupaidiha in India and Nepalgunj in Nepal. They also virtually flagged off a cargo train from Bathnaha in Bihar to Nepal custom yard.

To further strengthen cultural and religious ties, "PM Prachanda and I decided that projects related to Ramayana circuit should be expedited," Modi said.

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CAPSULE

BISHNOI-BRAR GANG'S 10 SHOOTERS ARRESTED
Gurgaon: Ten shooters allegedly associated with gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldie Brar were arrested here, police said on Thursday. Four pistols, 28 live cartridges, two vehicles and seven police uniforms were seized from their possession, they said, adding one of the vehicles recovered was reportedly stolen from Delhi.

CONG SHOULD CELEBRATE INDIA'S SUCCESS: RIJJU
New Delhi: With India reporting 7.2 per cent growth rate, Union Minister Kiren Rijju on Thursday asked the Congress to celebrate it and not take "sadistic pleasure" by undermining the country's success stories.

TMC'S ABHISHEK LEADS RALLY IN NANDIGRAM
Nandigram: Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee led a 20-km-long march to Nandigram in Purba Medinipur on Thursday, taking the fight for the panchayat elections to the stronghold of Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari who defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in this seat in the 2021 Assembly polls.

All must resolve to fight terror, its financing: EAM at BRICS meet

Jaishankar urges BRICS nations to show sincerity in reforming UNSC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/CAPE TOWN

In a veiled attack on Pakistan, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday described terrorism as the key threat to international peace and security and said all nations must take resolute measures against this menace, including its financing and propaganda. In his opening remarks at the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting here, Jaishankar also said that terrorism must be combated in all its forms and manifestations, and never be condoned under any circumstances.

"Among the key threats to international peace and security is that of terrorism. All nations must take resolute measures against this menace,



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar shake hands with Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan at BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting, in Cape Town on Thursday. PTI

including its financing and propaganda," the Minister said at the forum attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor among others.

Jaishankar has in the past described Pakistan as the "epi-centre of terrorism" where terrorists like Hafiz Saeed, Masood Azhar, Sajid Mir and Dawood Ibrahim are sheltered.

He also called on BRICS nations to demonstrate their sincerity in reforming multi-

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IAF aircraft crashes in K'taka field, pilots hurt



PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/CHAMARAJANAGAR (KARNATAKA)

A Kiran trainer aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) on Thursday crashed in an open field at a village in ChamaraJanagar district of Karnataka. The two pilots, including a woman, managed to eject safely from the plane before the mishap. A mandatory court of inquiry was initiated by the IAF to find out the cause of the crash.

The training aircraft, which took off from the air force station in Bengaluru, crashed in the morning at Bhogapura village. It was good fortune that aircraft hit the ground on barren land and not in the nearby village, a villager said.

District officials said the pilots, identified only as Tejpal and Bhumika, sustained minor injuries. No casualties were reported. According to the IAF, the pilots were on a routine training sortie when the incident occurred. A court of inquiry has been ordered to ascertain the cause of accident.

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Khap to take up with Prez

wrestlers' fight for justice

PNS ■ MUZAFFARNAGAR

In a significant development, I a Khap Mahapanchayat held in Muzaffarnagar on Thursday announced its decision to form a delegation to meet President Droupadi Murmu to seek justice for wrestlers who have bravely come forward with allegations of sexual abuse against Brij Bhusan Sharan Singh, the BJP MP and outgoing chief of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI).

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday came out in support of protesting wrestlers who have been seeking arrest of WFI chief stating that she will fight till they get justice.

"I will request the wrestlers to continue their movement. This fight is for life, for independence, for humanitarian justice," she said.

But Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur maintained that the Government is handling the issue "sensitively", and has agreed to the wrestlers' earlier demands.

Security was tightened at Delhi's border points on Thursday in view of a call for nationwide demonstrations given by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) in support of wrestlers protesting against WFI chief.

Security personnel are maintaining strict vigil at the border points and extra pickets have been put up to prevent



Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait addresses a Khap 'Mahapanchayat' organised over the ongoing protest by wrestlers against WFI President Brij Bhusan Sharan Singh, at Soram village, in Muzaffarnagar on Thursday. PTI

any untoward incident, Delhi Police officials said.

Led by farmer leader Rakesh Tikait, the mahapanchayat was convened by Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Naresh Tikait, a day after they successfully dissuaded

several prominent wrestlers from discarding their hard-earned medals into the Ganga river as a mark of protest against the alleged inaction of the police regarding the accused.

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Democracy no more in NCERT Class X book

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) has dropped chapters on the Periodic Table, the contribution of agriculture to the national economy, challenges to democracy, and sustainable management of natural resources from the Class 10 textbook as part of a "rationalisation" exercise. The changes were based on expert recommendations and the revised textbooks are now available in the market.

While the entire chapter introducing the Periodic Table has been dropped from the Class 10 Chemistry textbook, it remains a part of the syllabus for Class 11. The significance of the topic is highlighted in the Class 11 Chemistry textbook,



which includes a quote by American chemist Glenn T Seaborg stating that the Periodic Table is the most important concept in chemistry.

The NCERT justified the changes by stating that reducing content load on students is crucial in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasises the need to decrease content load and promote experiential learning.

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AAP gets DMK support on ordinance row

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Thursday accused the Centre of creating a crisis in the non-BJP ruled States and said the ruling DMK would strongly oppose the Central ordinance on control over administrative services in the national Capital.

"The Centre is creating a crisis to the Aam Aadmi Party and is preventing a duly elected Government from functioning independently.

Despite the Supreme Court verdict in favour of the AAP Government, the Centre brought the ordinance.

The DMK will strongly oppose it," Stalin, who is president of the DMK, told reporters outside his Alwarpet residence here.

Flanked by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, with Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, addresses the media after their meeting at his residence in Chennai on Thursday. PTI

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann, Stalin described Kejriwal as his "good friend" and said the discussion between them on opposing the ordinance was fruitful.

"The Chief Ministers in the non-BJP ruled States and also the political party leaders should extend their support in opposing the ordinance," Stalin urged.

"This sort of healthy discussion among the Opposition parties should continue to protect the democracy in the country," he added.

Accusing the BJP-led

Government of bringing the ordinance nullifying the Supreme Court order, Kejriwal, who air dashed to Chennai and sought Stalin's support, said the DMK agreed to strongly oppose it and stand by the AAP Government and the people of Delhi.

"This ordinance should be collectively defeated in Parliament as it is undemocratic, against the federal structure and unconstitutional," he said and termed the coming together of opposition parties to defeat the ordinance as semi-finals to the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

Mann said the DMK Government had to put up a fight against a Governor who not only refrained from passing the Assembly bills but also did not read out the speech prepared by the State Government.

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Delhi excise case: Hyd trader turns approver; pardoned

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Thursday allowed Hyderabad businessman P Sarath Chandra Reddy, accused in a money laundering case related to the alleged excise policy scam, to turn approver.

Special Judge MK Nagpal allowed his prayer and granted pardon to Reddy on an application moved by him. Special Judge Nagpal passed this order on May 29. Former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia is also an accused in the case.

The development may compound the legal woes of other accused in the politically sensitive case for both Sisodia and the AAP, which is only regional political outfit that runs the Governments in Delhi and Punjab.

The court made the decision on an application moved by Reddy, who in his application said, "I am ready to make true disclosure voluntarily about the case and want to be an approver in the case."

Reddy was recently granted bail by the Delhi High



Court on medical grounds.

According to the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Reddy is the head of Hyderabad-based company Aurobindo Pharma, and was also engaged in liquor business.

Reddy had in the past accused the ED of putting undue pressure and using force on witnesses to sign "pre-dictated" statements. However, in the course of investigation, he had later said the allegations were "baseless".

The CBI and the ED have alleged that irregularities were committed while modifying the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22, undue favours were extended to licence holders, licence fee was waived or reduced and L-1 licence was extended without the competent authority's approval.

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10 shooters of Bishnoi, Brar gangs land in police net

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

In a major breakthrough, Haryana police have arrested 10 shooters allegedly associated with gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldie Brar from Gurugram's Bhondsi area and near Rajiv Chowk Devial Stadium on Thursday. According to police, four pistols, 28 live cartridges, two vehicles and seven police uniforms were seized from their possession, they said, adding one of the vehicles recovered was reportedly stolen from Delhi.

The police during a press conference on Thursday revealed that following the direction of Gurugram Police Commissioner Kala

Ramachandran and under the supervision of Vijay Pratap Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) and Varun Dahiya ACP (Crime) the police nabbed the accused with huge arms on Wednesday.

Rakesh Kumar alias Anil, Harjot Singh alias Leela, Ajay Isharwalia alias Punjabi, Prince alias Golu, Joginder alias Joga, Sandeep alias Deep, and Sinderpal alias Bittu were arrested from Mehandwad at Bhondsi, Gurugram on a specific input while they were plotting to commit a crime Wednesday night, police said.

During interrogation, they revealed the names of their three other associates — Dharmendra alias Dharma, Deepak alias Dilawar and Bharat — who were also appre-

hended near Rajiv Chowk Devi Lal Stadium, the police said.

Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldie Brar were allegedly involved in the murder of singer Sidhu Moosewala, who was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district on May 29 last year. Canada-based gangster Goldie Brar, a member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, had claimed responsibility for the murder. The 10 accused arrested told the police that they were active shooters working for Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldie Brar.

"They had come to Gurugram to carry out a major dacoity and kidnapping. Their plan involved posing as police officers, with Joginder impersonating a police inspector. The intention was to kidnap



someone and demand a ransom of crores of rupees. However, the police managed to apprehend them before they could execute their plan," said Vijay Pratap Singh, DCP, Crime.

The shooters confessed that they carried out crimes under the instructions of Goldie Brar, Rohit Godara and Veeru, who are believed to be residing abroad, he said. They had bought police uniforms, belts, shoes and other items for their operations in Gurugram, the DCP said.

The accused arrested wear in regular contact with Goldie Brar and others abroad and on their instructions carried out kidnappings and collected ransom, he said.

"It also came to the fore that multiple cases are registered against the arrested individuals, including robbery, dacoity, attempted murder, theft, assault, possession of illegal weapons. These cases have been filed in various districts of Haryana, including Bhiwani, Panchkula, Sirsa, Ambala, Gurugram, and in Mohali (Punjab) and Rajasthan," said varun Dahiya, ACP, Crime. Sharing individual crime records of the accused, police said Jogendra alias Joga is the leader of the

shooters and is associated with Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldie Brar gangs.

He hails from Baddunai in Bhiwani district and has more than 15 cases against him, including robbery, dacoity, attempted murder and extortion, they said.

Jogendra has been to jail multiple times and served a five-year sentence in Ambala Jail from 2017 to October 2021. He was released from jail in 2021 and was arrested again in February 2022, but obtained bail after about 35 days. He was absconding since then and has not appeared before court, police said.

During his stay in Patiala Jail, Joginder met Lawrence Bishnoi and his gang members and after that he became an

active member of his gang, they said.

Harjot Singh alias Leela hails from Badraklai village in Moga district of Punjab. He has six cases registered against him in Badhni Kalan Moga police station, including assault, attempted murder and drug-related offenses, police said. Sinderpal alias Bittu belongs to Kalwanu village in Patiala district, Punjab. Three cases, including dacoity and drug offenses, are registered against him in Patiala, they said.

Sandeep alias Deep is from Sisai village in Hisar. He has been charged with attempt to murder, police said. Ajay Isharwalia alias Punjabi hails from Isharwal in Bhiwani and also faces various charges, they said.

Anti-encroachment drive: 55 jhuggis razed, 40 families homeless

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The demolition squad on Thursday demolished over 55 shanties on Bhairon Singh Marg, near Pragati Maidan on Thursday morning as part of an anti-encroachment drive, displacing more than 40 families. Residents say they woke up to the rumble of JCBs around 4 am and were shocked to see people preparing to take their houses down.

The authorities have been conducting anti-encroachment drives across the national capital ahead of the G20 summit to be held in the city later this year. Security personnel were deployed on Bhairon Marg to prevent any confrontation, they said.

A makeshift school which was being run by an NGO for the last nine years was also demolished in the drive. "Around 30 students studied in the school. Children of slum dwellers use to attend classes here after their school hours.



A bulldozer being used to demolish illegal structures during an anti-encroachment drive near Pragati Maidan, in New Delhi on Thursday

Children from 5 to 16 years old used to regularly visit the school where they were also trained in arts and skill development," said the residents. They said the notice they were issued did not mention school demolition.

The slum dwellers who were seen sifting through the rubble to salvage any belongings said they had been asking the government to allot them an alternate place somewhere within 5 km radius. "When they want our votes, they come to us and talk about big things

but now when we are displaced and have nowhere to go, they couldn't care less..." said angry residents.

"We were sleeping in our shanties. It was around 4 am, when these people came with JCB machines and other equipment to demolish our homes. We pleaded with them to not demolish our homes, but they said they had the legal right to do so... We lost all our belongings, our furniture, vessels, books of our children... we lost it all," said another resident.

LG OK's appointment of CBI prosecutors in 20 POCSO cases

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved a proposal for issuing a notification to appoint senior public prosecutors of CBI for trial in 20 POCSO cases after a "delay" of several months on the part of the Arvind Kejriwal Government.

Meanwhile, the AAP Government in a statement alleged that the Lieutenant Governor issued the orders "behind the back of an elected government" and termed it "illegal" while asserting that it would challenge the order in the Supreme Court.

"Neither the minister nor the chief minister was taken into confidence by the LG. We are surprised that despite facing strong reprimand from the Supreme Court repeatedly, the LG has issued orders without jurisdiction," the statement said.



"Constrained by this inaction and unexplained delay on the part of the Kejriwal government, Delhi LG V K Saxena has approved the Home Department proposal to invoke the power of Central Government under Section 24(8) of CrPC and send the proposal for issue of notification for appointment of senior prosecutors, to the Ministry of Home Affairs," the official said.

The file seeking notification by the Delhi government under Section 32 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) Act for appointment of the senior public prosecutors of CBI was moved by the home department following a direction by a trial court and subsequent letters by the central probe agency to ensure the same in August and December 2022, he said.

The direction was issued by the trial court to ensure that

trials in different POCSO courts are completed within the stipulated time period of one year, as envisaged under Section 35 of the Act. The proposal for the appointment of prosecutors was moved in January this year by the Home Department and has been pending with Chief Minister Kejriwal since May 8, 2023, the Raj Nivas official claimed.

The file first reached the Delhi Home Minister, on 11.01.2023, and subsequently to the chief minister on 16.01.2023. The chief minister marked the file back to the minister-in-charge on 06.02.2023, and after reaching the law minister, GNETD, through an unspecified date in the file monitoring system, it was submitted back to the chief minister on 08.05.2023. Since then it has been lying unaddressed, he said.

"Even as Chief Minister Kejriwal and his ministers politicised incidents of crime in the city and spoke about the absence of fear of law amongst criminals, when it came to practice they did not even comply with the basic requirements of investigation and justice delivery system," charged the Raj Nivas official.

Min Atishi gets another portfolio

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Thursday allotted Cabinet Minister Atishi another portfolio of the Public Relations department — which was previously held by Kailash Gahlot. There is no change in any portfolios of the ministers of Delhi government.



notification issued by the General Administrative Department (GAD).

Atishi is currently holding nine departments Women and Child Development, Public Works Department, Power, Education, Art, Culture and Language, Tourism, Higher Education, Training and Technical Education and Public Relations department.

"In exercise of power conferred under Rule 3 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Allocation of Business) Rules 1993, the Lieutenant Governor in consultation with the Chief Minister is pleased to allocate the portfolio of Public Relations Department to Atishi Marlenna, in addition to the portfolios she is presently holding," read a

It is learnt that the PR department has been given to Atishi to improve the government image.

Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj were inducted into the Delhi government in March this year following the resignations of former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and minister Satyendar Jain — both currently in Tihar jail in alleged corruption and money laundering cases, respectively.

INBRIEF

COMPLY WITH SERVICES ORDINANCE, OFFICIALS TOLD
New Delhi: The Delhi government's law department has directed all the top officials for a "strict compliance" of the Centre's ordinance related to services issued earlier this month. In a communication sent to all the additional chief secretaries, principal secretaries, secretaries and heads of departments on May 26, the law department asked for a "strict compliance" of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023 issued by the Centre related to services. The move came following a letter from the lieutenant governor's (LG) office to the Delhi chief secretary on May 23, informing him to bring the ordinance to the notice of all the top officials of the city government for a "strict compliance". The ordinance issued by the Centre on May 19 brought back the executive control over matters related to services, including the transfers and postings of Delhi government officers, to its domain.

CONTAMINATION FREE DRIVE IN HAUZ KHAS WARD
New Delhi: Delhi Jal Board (DJB) Vice Chairman Somnath Bhatti has launched a "Contamination Free Drive" in Hauz Khas Ward No. 148 of Malviya Nagar area today under the policy of zero tolerance against supply of contaminated water in the national capital. Bhatti reached Hauz Khas ward number 148 early in the morning and had the water quality tested by the quality control team of DJB. The DJB team collected water samples from houses of the area at 4 am when water supply commenced and tested the water quality on the spot. A total of 33 samples were collected by the quality control team of DJB and the testing revealed that 31 samples met the prescribed quality standards. The DJB Vice Chairman said that this drive will run in every assembly constituency of Delhi.

PARYAWARAN SAMMELAN TO BE HELD
New Delhi: Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai chaired a joint meeting with the officers of the Environment and Forest Department and decided to organise a "Paryawaran Sammelan" at Thyagraj Stadium. After the meeting, Rai said that during this program, children and teachers of about 2000 eco clubs of Delhi will be present in the event. "Chief Minister Shri Arvind Kejriwal will be the chief guest of this program. The program will encompass the screening of feature films, street plays, and other awareness-raising activities for the children present. Additionally, the winners of the slogan writing competition held during the I Love Yamuna campaign will be felicitated on the spot", he said.

'NOW POLITICAL CLASS INTOLERANT TO MEDIA CRITICISM'
New Delhi: There has been gradual depletion between the relation between the political class and media. The political class is no longer tolerant of their criticism in the media," said Dr Shashi Tharoor, the Member of Parliament and former under-secretary general of the United Nations. He was speaking at the official launch of Dr Vijay Darda's latest book "Ringside: up close and personal on India and Beyond" at the constitution club, in New Delhi. The book was unveiled by none other than the distinguished writer and politician, Dr Tharoor who has also written the preface of the book. At the launch, Sanjaya Baru, former advisor to the PM Manmohan Singh, Shekhar Gupta, eminent journalist and padamshree awarded journalist Rajdeep Sardesai were present on the stage.

'JHOOTHA KAHIN KA' SCREENED IN CAPITAL
New Delhi: The short film 'Jhoota Kahin Ka' based on the lies and deceit of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, being shown in different parts of Delhi by the Delhi BJP, was screened at Connaught Place on Thursday, in which Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Delhi BJP Vice President Ashok Goyal, New Delhi District President Prashant Sharma along with BJP workers and general public saw and heard the story of Kejriwal's false promises and misdeeds. There was a lot of attraction for this short film among the people gathered in large numbers. Bidhuri said that every mistake of Kejriwal government, which is steeped in corruption, is slowly coming out. After watching the short film 'Jhoota Kahi Ka' based on Kejriwal's lies, the people of Delhi have understood that in the last eight years, the Chief Minister of Delhi Kejriwal has shown only betrayed the people of Delhi instead of development.

NDMC to organise next Suvidha Camp soon



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has decided to organise its next Suvidha Camp to provide information, facilitation and grievances redressal for the benefit of its services users.

The Suvidha Camp Helpdesks of the various departments will provide facilitations and redress the grievances of service users, employees, RWAs, MTAs and residents of NDMC.

The Departments that will be part of this Suvidha Camp are Civil Engineering-1 & 2, Electrical Engineering - 1 & 2, Public Health, Architect & Environment, Commercial, Health Licensing, Estate-I, Estate-II, Horticulture - North, Horticulture - South, Property Tax, Education, Fire, Accounts/Finance/Pension, Enforcement - North, Enforcement - South, Personal Department, Welfare Department, Medical Services, Parking Management System, Chief Security office, EBR Department, Municipal Housing, Vigilance, Library and IT Department.

Sisodia's manhandling claim: Court asks officials to save May 23 CCTV footage

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Thursday directed officials to preserve the May 23 CCTV footage of the court premises after AAP leader and former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia alleged he was manhandled by security personnel that day during his production in a case related to the alleged excise policy scam.

The court has also ordered Sisodia should only be produced via video conferencing during hearings in the ongoing Delhi Excise Policy scam case due to security issues. During Thursday's hearing as well, the AAP leader was produced before the Rouse Avenue Court through video conferencing after the Delhi Police's request. This was however, opposed by Sisodia and his counsel.

The police also moved an application seeking court's permission to produce Sisodia only via video conference (VC), after he levelled the allegation. Police favoured Sisodia's virtual production contending that bringing him to court "creates chaos" due to the presence of

Aam Aadmi Party supporters and media in the corridors.

Special Judge M K Nagpal, after taking note of both the applications, directed Sisodia's production through video conference pending his decision on the prayers. The court stated that until a decision is made regarding the Delhi Police's application concerning security, Sisodia will be produced through video conferencing. It then fixed July 19 as the next date of hearing. Sisodia's judicial custody has also been extended to this date.

The counsel appearing for Sisodia alleged that the AAP leader had been mistreated during his previous appearance. The counsel told the court that his neck was grabbed and was taken away by the police when he was answering questions of media.

The court raised questions about the behavior of the media and expressed displeasure when there was a gathering of people in the courtroom.

The AAP leader was arrested by the ED in a money laundering case related to the alleged scam on March 9.

Shahbad Dairy murder accused's police custody extended by 3 days

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Thursday extended the custodial interrogation of the accused Sahil in the Shahbad Dairy murder case for three days.

Sahil was brought before the Rohini court after the expiration of his previous custodial remand.

The police informed the court that further interrogation of Sahil was necessary. They stated that they needed his remand to recover the knife used in the crime and his mobile phone. After considering the police's argument, the court granted their request.

Deputy commissioner of police (DCP) (outer north) Ravi Kumar Singh said the investigator produced Sahil before a duty metropolitan magistrate's residence on Thursday morning with a request to extend his police remand for three more days for his further interrogation.

"Due to security reasons, Sahil was produced in the early court, instead of the regular court. Considering our request, the court extended his police custody till Saturday," said the



DCP. Singh said that Sahil has so far given many contradictory statements about the incidents and weapons used in the commission of crime, to mislead the police investigation.

"We have searched all the spots from Shahbad Dairy to Rithala metro station, where the accused had claimed to throw the knife.

"But, the weapon has not yet been recovered. We may take him to his aunt's place in Bulandshahr— from where he was arrested, to trace the entire route.

"Since the weapon of offence will be vital evidence for the prosecution, we are mainly focusing on its recovery right now," the DCP added.

According to Delhi police, Sahil stabbed the minor girl at least 16 times, kicked her limp body, and battered her relentlessly with a stone slab in a brutal attack in a narrow lane in northwest Delhi's Shahbad Dairy on Sunday.

He then fled to his aunt's house in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr and was arrested from that city on Monday after police traced a call he made to his mother. As a call was traced from his aunt to his father, Sahil was arrested and brought to Delhi on Monday.

The FIR registered by the police in connection with the brutal murder of 16-year-old Sakshi by her boyfriend Mohammad Sahil Khan to death in Delhi's Shahbad Dairy area, reveals that her father was aware about their affair.

Based on the FIR obtained by IANS, it was revealed that his daughter had been friends with Sahil for the past year. Janak Raj (35), mentioned in the FIR, said, "She would often talk about him, and we would advise her that it's not appropriate at her age. However, she would always take offence and go to her friend Neetu's house."

Anand Vihar RAPIDX station to get FOB

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) will build a dedicated pedestrian bridge at Anand Vihar RAPIDX Station of the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor. Two separate bridges are also being constructed for segregated entry and exit of vehicles.

The bridges are being constructed by the NCRTC over the Ghazipur drain passing between Anand Vihar RAPIDX station and Chaudhary Charan Singh Marg. Among the three bridges, the bridge on the right will be used for vehicular entry

to the Anand Vihar RAPIDX station, while the bridge on the left will be used as the vehicular exit. The one on the middle will be used only by pedestrians for movement inside the station premises.

The bridge being constructed for the entry of vehicles into the Anand Vihar RAPIDX station is about 10 metres wide, NCRTC officials said. "Taxi and private vehicles will be able to enter the premises from this entrance bridge and drop passengers at the station gate," they said.

While the exit bridge will be 13 metres wide, the pedestrian bridge will be about 5



metres wide, they added. The station is being integrated with six modes of public transport, which include Swami

Vivekananda (Anand Vihar) inter-state bus stand, city bus stand, Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation's bus stand at Kaushambi, two metro lines (Pink and Blue Line) and Anand Vihar Railway Station.

A bus stop is also proposed to be built on the main road along the bridge routes. Stairs, lifts and escalators will also be provided, officials said. NCRTC officials also said that they aim to make the entire 82-km-long Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut corridor operational by 2025. Before that, NCRTC will commission the 17-km-long priority section of the corridor in 2023.

UPSC comes to aid of Manipur candidates

Offers alternative centres to people from strife-hit State to appear for recruitment tests for Govt jobs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has offered alternative centres to candidates from Imphal, Manipur to appear for Enforcement Officer/Accounts Officer and Assistant Provident Fund Commissioner examination, scheduled to be held on July 2, an official statement issued on Thursday said.

Manipur, which has been hit by ethnic conflict for nearly a month, witnessed a sudden spurt in clashes and firing between militants and security forces on Sunday, after a relative lull for over a fortnight. The death toll from the clashes since the ethnic violence began on May 3 has gone up to 80, officials said.

For the prevalent situation in the State of Manipur, the Commission has decided to offer alternative centres to the candidates of Imphal (Manipur) centre of the Enforcement Officer/Accounts Officer and Assistant Provident Fund Commissioner Examination, 2023, which is to be held on July 2, 2023, said the statement issued by the personnel ministry.

These candidates will be offered Aizawl (Mizoram), Kohima (Nagaland), Shillong



(Meghalaya), Dispur (Assam), Jorhat (Assam), Kolkata (West Bengal) and Delhi, it said.

The centre change option will be available to the candidates of Imphal centre through the Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) facility, the statement said.

A message in this regard will be sent to each candidate on his/her registered mobile number with the Commission. The candidates must use their said registered mobile number to avail this facility through IVRS.

Alternatively, a candidate may also contact the UPSC through telephone numbers 011-23070641, 23381073, 23384508 and 23387876 from 12 noon of June 2 till 5 pm of June 12.

Moreover, the option of

change of centres for such candidates will also be available on the website of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) from 12 noon of June 2, 2023 to 5 pm of June 12, 2023 on round-the-clock basis, the statement said.

On receipt of centre change options from the willing candidates through any of the above modes, they will be allocated to the venues of their chosen centres and accordingly, their e-admit cards will be released, it said.

A message confirming the change of centres shall be sent to each such candidate on his/her registered mobile number, the statement said, adding that the e-admit cards will be available for downloading from the UPSC's website.

Pawar calls on Shinde, sparks speculation

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a development that sparked fierce speculation in the State's political circles, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Sharad Pawar on Thursday called on Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the latter's official residence 'Varsha' at Malabar Hills in south Mumbai.

Though the purpose of the meeting was not immediately known, 82-year-old Pawar spent more than half an hour with Shinde.

Incidentally, this was the first meeting between the two leaders after the transfer of power that took place under most dramatic circumstances in June last year. Shinde, then a senior Shiv Sena leader, had rebelled against the then Chief Minister



and Sena president Uddhav Thackeray, walked out of the party along with 40-odd MLAs leading to the collapse of the Government Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), a grand alliance comprising Shiv Sena, the

NCP and the Congress. Shinde later teamed up the then Opposition BJP to form a new Government in the State.

Pawar's meeting with Shinde came at a time when Uddhav Thackeray was out of the country.

Informed sources said that Pawar had gone to meet Shinde to invite the latter for the 75th anniversary function of the Maratha Mandir group.

Later in the night, Shinde - speaking to a leading Marathi television channel - said that his meeting with Pawar and the NCP supremo did not discuss any political matters. He said that the NCP chief had come to meet him for a function. "Don't read too much into this meeting," the Chief Minister told the TV channel.

BJP insensitive to women wrestlers' cause: Didi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

For the second-consecutive day on Thursday, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee led a protest on Kolkata's streets in support of Indian wrestlers slamming the BJP Government for doing nothing to punish one of its MPs "accused of playing with the modesty of our international players."

Banerjee who led a candle light walk expressing solidarity with the Olympic medal winners, said, "it is strange that when these players win international titles the Government misses no opportunity to claim the credit... But when they are insulted and molested by one of their MPs who were in charge of their well-being this Government keeps mum." Banerjee had walked in support



of the wrestlers on Wednesday, too.

Saying that the wrestlers like most other players had toiled hard to reach the position where they were today, Banerjee iterated, "The action of this Government only proves that they have no respect for the players and their struggle ... they don't want the players to flourish."

Asking why no police action was not taken against Brij Bhushan the alleged accused and BJP MP, Banerjee said, "They should have arrested him ... But they did not do so... Even after the Supreme Court order they did not take any action ... as a citizen of this country I feel ashamed of whatever is going on in Delhi ... But I can assure the

entire sporting community that one day the law will definitely take its own course and the guilty will be punished."

Elsewhere, BJP national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, too, attacked the BJP Government saying its arrogance and misrule would lead to its downfall. "The beginning of the end of the BJP has started," Banerjee who is also the nephew of the Chief Minister, said adding, "The BJP will lose in the coming Assembly elections in all the five States."

The junior Banerjee on Thursday walked almost 20 km from Math Chandipur to Nandigram as a part of his Jan Sanyog Yatra (public outreach rally).

Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari later said that he too would lead a similar 20-km walk at Nandigram.



Pak intruder shot by BSF in Samba

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

A Pakistani intruder was shot dead by BSF troops along the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) Samba district in the early hours of Thursday.

The incident took place near Mangu Chak border outpost (BoP) in Samba sector around 3.00 AM.

A Jammu-based BSF spokesman in a statement said, "In the early hours of Thursday, alert BSF troops noticed suspicious movement of a person, who crossed the IB from Pakistan's side, in Samba area. He was challenged by the troops but the intruder kept advancing towards the border fencing. The troops opened fire, killing him."

The BSF has launched a search operation along the IB in Samba sector as the intruder's body is lying in the forward area. This is the second such incident of infiltration in Jammu division in the last two days.

On Wednesday, the Army foiled an infiltration bid with the arrest of three terrorists along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district.

The terrorists, from whom a huge consignment of arms and narcotics was recovered, were arrested after an exchange of fire near the border fence, according to a Defence spokesman.

Meanwhile, continuing its crackdown on harbouring terrorists and providing logistic support to them, the State Intelligence Unit (SIU) Anantnag, on Thursday attached an under-construction residential house of a terrorist associate in Danwathpora Kokernag area of Anantnag district used for terrorist activities after obtaining necessary sanctions from the competent authority.

During the course of investigation in case FIR No. 103/2022 of Police Station Kokernag under UA(P) Act, one under-construction residential house belonging to terrorist associate namely Mohammad Ishaq Malik son of Mohammad Saifullah Malik resident of Danwathpora Kokernag has been found used by terrorists of proscribed terrorist outfit HM.

Major blaze averted by alert Rly staff



Fire in Alappuzha-Kannur Executive Express compartment stopped from spreading to BP fuel depot close by

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A major tragedy was averted by alert Railway staff who stopped a blaze in the Alappuzha-Kannur Executive Express compartment from spreading to a Bharat Petroleum fuel depot located a few meters away.

The fire broke out in the Alappuzha-Kannur Executive Express in the wee hours of Thursday as the train was getting ready for its journey to Alappuzha. A general compartment was gutted in the fire but fortunately no casualty has been reported. Later in the day, a migrant labourer from West Bengal was taken into custody by the police. Further investigations were on at the time of going to Press.

This is the second such incident to take place in Kerala during the last two months. Interestingly, on April 1 this year the same train met with arson as a Delhi youth set the train on fire that led to the death of three persons, including an infant.

The recurrence of the mishap has shocked police officers as well as the people of the State despite the fact that no untoward incidents took place. But what is intriguing is the fact that a Bharat Petroleum fuel depot was hardly a few meters away from the ill-fated compartment and had it not been for the alertness of the Railway staff, the fire would have led to an inferno.

While police officers remained tight-lipped, Dr Jacob Thomas, former Director General, Kerala Police told The Pioneer that it was a matter of concern. "The Inspector-General of Police, P Vijayan, who led the investigation into the April 1 fire was unceremoniously removed as the head of the anti-terrorism squad. It was his expertise and quick actions that led to the arrest of the Delhi youth within days of the incident from Maharashtra. But what he got in return was bricksbats, and that does not augur well for the Service," said Dr Thomas.

Mekedatu project: We won't trouble you, be generous, says Shivakumar to TN Govt

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday raised a pitch for the contentious Mekedatu balancing reservoir across Cauvery river near Kanakapura and appealed to the Tamil Nadu Government to be generous.

Shivakumar, who hails from Kanakapura and is an MLA from there, said the Karnataka Government will have to make preparations required for the project. He also insisted that it will benefit not only Bengaluru but also the farmers of Tamil Nadu.

"With regard to Mekedatu, we had marched for water (in 2021). Tamil Nadu will not have any problem. After our march, (the then) Chief Minister (Basavaraj Bommai) had earmarked Rs 1,000 crore for the project. It has been proposed but has not been spent yet. We have to make the requisite preparations," Shivakumar told reporters here.

He said, "It's not that we have any hatred for Tamil Nadu or wage a war against it. Those residing there are our brethren and their brethren are here as well. So, there is no scope for hatred or jealousy. It is our project. It will benefit them as well. We have to help all the farmers in the Cauvery basin."

Stating that the key to unlock the Mekedatu issue is with the Centre, Shivakumar said there were orders on how much water Karnataka has to release. He wondered how Tamil Nadu will be at loss if Karnataka sets up a power plant there.

"We will store water and supply it to Bengaluru. It has been approved in the Cauvery Tribunal award. So there is no need to panic," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

He appealed to the Tamil Nadu Government to consider the project as it will not affect their interest.

"I request you (Tamil Nadu Government) that we will not trouble you. Be generous. We



too are generous. We are neighbouring States. We have fought enough and seen enough legal battles. It never helps. May we deal with it harmoniously. It will help in providing drinking water and benefit your farmers as well," Shivakumar said.

The Mekedatu multi-purpose (drinking and power) project involves building a balancing reservoir near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district. The estimated Rs 9,000-crore project, once completed, is aimed at ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighbouring areas (4.75 TMC) and it can also generate 400 MW of power.

Karnataka has maintained that the project within its territory will benefit both States as the surplus water stored can be managed between the two during a distress year, and its implementation will in no way affect the interests of Tamil Nadu's farming communities, as there will be no impact on its share of water.

However, the neighbouring state is of the view that the project would "impound and divert" the uncontrolled water flow due to Tamil Nadu from Kabini sub-basin, the catchment area below Krishnarajasagara, and also from Simsha, Arkavathi and Suvarnavathi sub-basins besides other small streams.

Gujarat Govt to challenge acquittal of six people in 2013 rape case against Asaram

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat Government will move the High Court to challenge the acquittal of self-styled godman Asaram's wife, their daughter and his four disciples in a 2013 rape case in which he was sentenced to life imprisonment, an official said on Thursday. A court in Gandhinagar on January 31 sentenced Asaram to life imprisonment in the rape case filed by his former woman disciple in 2013.

Asaram's wife Laxmiben, their daughter Bharati, and his four disciples, who were accused by the prosecution of aiding and abetting the crime, were acquitted by the court for want of evidence. "The State's legal department passed a resolution on May 6 and directed the prosecution to file an appeal against the acquittal of six accused by a Gandhinagar court in the 2013 rape case against self-styled godman Asaram," special public prosecutor in the case, RC



Kodekar said.

The prosecution has also sought the Government's consent to challenge the Gandhinagar court's January 31 order, in which it suggested that life sentences for Asaram in Jodhpur and Ahmedabad cases should run concurrently. The Government's consent for the same is awaited, Kodekar said. The octogenarian godman is currently serving a life term in a Jodhpur jail in another case of raping a minor girl at his ashram in Rajasthan in 2013. The Gandhinagar court sentenced Asaram in the case for raping a woman disciple, who hailed from Surat, on several occasions from 2001 to 2007 at his ashram at Motera near Ahmedabad before her escape.

Table with 5 columns: Particulars, Quarter Ended 31.03.2023 (Audited), Quarter Ended 31.03.2022 (Audited), Year Ended 31.03.2023 (Audited), Year Ended 31.03.2022 (Audited). Rows include Total income from operations (net), Net Profit, Total Comprehensive Income, Equity Share Capital, Reserves, Earnings Per equity Share, etc.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Too bullish to be true

Morgan Stanley has painted a rosy picture of the economy, but it omits some key indicators

Government and Bharatiya Janata Party supporters must be happy over the recent report by Morgan Stanley, the global financial services firm. "This India is different from what it was in 2013. In a short span of 10 years, India has gained positions in the world order with significant positive consequences for the macro and market outlook," it said. "India has transformed in less than a decade." This is surely a vote of confidence for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his economic policies. The report has highlighted 10 big changes that have taken place since 2014. Bringing down the corporate tax rate at par with the same in other major economies and heavy infrastructure investment are among the top supply-side policy reforms, Morgan Stanley said. The soaring collection of goods and services tax (GST) and the growing share of digital transactions as a percentage of GDP indicate the formalisation of the economy, it added. Other pluses, according to Morgan Stanley, are direct transfer of subsidies to accounts of beneficiaries, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, flexible inflation targeting, focus on foreign direct investment (FDI), Government support for corporate profits, a new law for the realty sector, and MNC sentiment at multi-year high. Manufacturing and capital spending as a percentage of GDP has continuously risen, Morgan Stanley said, adding export market share is projected to more than double to 4.5 per cent by 2031.



Much of what Morgan Stanley has said is correct, but at places optimism seems a bit excessive. It seems to have overlooked a few facts. For instance, FDI inflows into the country fell by 16 per cent to \$71 billion on a gross basis in the last fiscal, though

the decline has been attributed to weak global factors. Similarly, manufacturing remains a laggard; its share continues to languish at 16-17 per cent of the country's GDP. The Government has made big claims about the potential of industrial growth; it launched ambitious programmes like Make in India and the production-linked incentive or PLI scheme for several sectors. And yet, manufacturing's share in GDP is no different than it was in 2011, the year in which the National Manufacturing Policy was announced with the target to make the share go up by 2022. Then there is the issue of jobs; the economy is not able to generate quality employment. This reflects in consumption patterns. The sales of luxury products are zooming, whereas the items used by common people like kitchen appliances are not doing as well. Growth accelerated to 6.1 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2022-23, and for the entire fiscal it was upwardly revised to 7.2 per cent. For 2023-24 too, India is likely to grow by over 6 per cent, and will be the fastest growing big economy. The Government must persist with reforms and ensure the more supply-side bottlenecks are removed so that the fruits of growth and development are equitably distributed.

PICTALK



Burqa-clad students play cricket in the J J Hospital premises at Byculla in Mumbai

PTI

The nuisance that is convocation ceremony

Ceremonies get value only if they are conducted appropriately. Mimicking an auspicious ceremony only demeans its value

Does education have any value in life? Does a degree guarantee a job? These questions always rhyme in our society.

Of course, these questions need detailed discussion. But the root cause of these questions is the declining value of education in today's society, due to the mockeries shown by education institutions. Even from kindergarten onwards, many private educational institutions conduct graduation ceremonies, making a mockery of our education system. We are demeaning the value of actual degree certificates through these ceremonies.

According to UGC, "Convocation" means a ceremonial assembly of a university, normally held for conferring Degrees and other awards to its eligible candidates. Usually, it is the universities that conduct convocation ceremonies in India. But in recent times, many colleges conduct convocation ceremonies or graduation ceremonies. The programme is conducted in a grand manner inviting eminent personalities; in some cases, even the vice-chancellors of universi-



ties attend the function. The funny thing is that even students who failed university examinations also get a certificate at these graduation ceremonies. Some college authorities make poor students and parents believe that these certificates have more value than the ones issued by the universities. The ceremony itself is a huge business involving many event managers. A photo in graduation attire can convince the public that the particular person is a degree holder. This can fetch them status and demand in the marriage market. It's like what we see in the movie 'Three Idiots'.

After attending the graduation ceremony conducted by their colleges, students post on social media stating that they have officially become graduates. During earlier times, the convocation

ceremonies are performed only by universities where the university authority hand over graduation certificates. Every student dreams of wearing the ceremonial convocation dress and taking a photo with the degree certificate. There was a time, before the 1990s, when every household used to hang pictures of their graduating family members. During that time, students from every stream and every level, undergraduate to higher degrees, had the privilege to attend convocation ceremonies conducted at universities. Society viewed a university graduate with awe and much respect. With the increase in the number of graduates passing out from our universities, the convocation ceremonies are limited to professional courses and higher degrees like PhD.

The value given to original degree certificates issued by good universities is slowly diminishing because of ceremonies conducted by these private institutions. The students and society at large are finding it challenging to understand which is genuine and which is fake. There are many people with "Dr." affil-

iation in our community, whose degree is awarded by private institutions. These institutions, which are mostly registered societies, provide honorary doctoral degrees by charging hefty fees. They even give professional awards after taking huge fees from the nominees. Ceremonies get value only if it is conducted appropriately by the appropriate agency concerned. Mimicking an auspicious ceremony will demean its value. Can we mimic our marriage ceremony to show it to someone? All educational institutions should respect the value associated with various ceremonies and show the correct path to the students and society. Otherwise, our students shall carry certificates that have only a paper's value and have value only on social media platforms. We need to build quality graduates in every domain of knowledge in nation-building. For this, educational institutions should stay away from such gimmicks that make a mockery of our education system and should show the true path to our youngsters. (The writer is a columnist)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

Syncretism: A vision for India's future

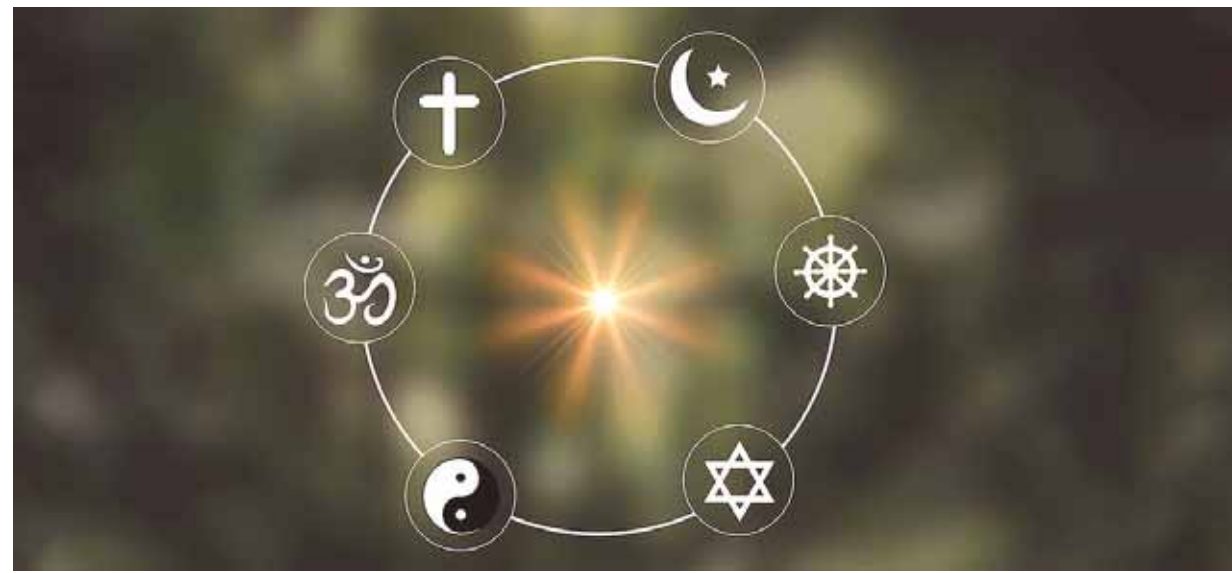
As India moves forward, it must consciously embrace its rich diversity, essential for nurturing a harmonious society that grows together



RAJDEEP PATHAK

The inauguration of the New Parliament Building has heralded a new history of India in its 75th year of Independence. Leaving apart the controversies wrangling in different corridors, we must realize that the value of democracy lies in upholding the essence and spirit of this new development and with it the whole idea of multiculturalism and the syncretic tradition that binds this nation of 140 crore Indians together. 'Sarva Dharma Prarthana' or Inter-Faith Prayer is one of the great steps in this direction which happened at the inaugural programme on May 28.

India, known for its rich cultural tapestry and religious diversity, has long embraced the idea of syncretism and multiculturalism. This inherent acceptance of diverse beliefs and traditions is exemplified through inter-faith prayers, which hold great significance in various ceremonies across the country. These prayers serve as a unifying force, promoting harmony, tolerance, and cultural integration. Inter-faith prayers at the inaugural ceremony, symbolize the nation's commitment to embracing and maintaining its cultural syncretism. By incorporating inter-faith prayers into the ceremony, the diversity that India stands for was celebrated. This inclusive approach not only strengthens the social fabric but also sends a strong message to the world about India's commitment to secularism and pluralism. Inter-faith prayers hold immense significance in India, as they bring together people from different religious backgrounds/faith, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. India's cultural tapestry is intricately woven with the threads of various religions, each contributing to the vibrant fabric of society. From Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism to Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, the Bahai, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and others, India has been a melting pot of diverse religious beliefs, rituals, and practices. 'Sarva Dharma Prarthana' acts as the glue that holds this mosaic together, fostering an environment of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. These prayers serve as a powerful



reminder of our shared humanity and transcend religious boundaries, emphasizing the common values and aspirations that bind us as a nation. As the seat or Temple of democracy, the Parliament represents the voice of the people and their diverse aspirations. Symbolizing the inclusive spirit of India, for India's syncretic traditions are deeply embedded in its cultural fabric. The country's history is replete with instances where different religious beliefs and practices have intermingled and influenced each other. This syncretism is evident in various aspects of Indian life, including festivals, rituals, and philosophical ideologies. Festivals such as Diwali, Eid, Christmas, and Guru Nanak Jayanti to name a few, are celebrated with equal enthusiasm by people of different faiths. These celebrations not only showcase cultural diversity but also provide an opportunity for individuals to learn about and appreciate different religious traditions.

It is undeniable that India's artistic heritage spans millennia, with influences from various cultures and civilizations. The intricate carvings of the ancient temples in Khajuraho, the Mughal architecture of the Taj Mahal, and the vibrant frescoes of Rajasthan are just a few examples of how differ-

ent artistic styles have merged to create a distinct Indian aesthetic. By appreciating and preserving these art forms, India not only showcases its multicultural heritage but also encourages dialogue and understanding among diverse communities. India's rich spiritual heritage and its embrace of diverse philosophies have given rise to a syncretic tapestry, interwoven with the teachings of renowned saints and philosophers throughout history. Kabir, the 15th-century poet and mystic, whose teachings emphasized the unity of all religions, says, "Dheere dheere re mana, dheere sab kuch hoi. Mali seenche sau ghada, ritu aaye phal hoye", embodies the essence of cultural syncretism by emphasizing the gradual evolution of spiritual growth and the universality of divine wisdom. Swami Vivekananda also stressed the importance of embracing diversity and unity among religions. He famously said, "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true." Conceptualized by Swami Vivekananda himself and designed and developed by his engineer brother-monk Swami Vijnanananda, the Ramakrishna Mission in

Belur Math is a clear example of an architectural marvel that beautifully embodies syncretic traditions, blending elements from various Indian architectural styles, with its ornate carvings, domes, and spires, along with Islamic arches and intricate floral motifs and further incorporating elements reminiscent of Gothic architecture, such as stained-glass windows. Mahatma Gandhi too emphasized the importance of embracing diverse cultures and traditions without losing one's own identity. He envisioned a society where different cultures coexist and enrich one another, fostering understanding and unity. As India embarked on a new chapter with the inauguration of its New Parliament Building, it is essential for all of us to value such wisdom and teachings that have inspired individuals and Nations alike. By promoting interfaith dialogue, preserving linguistic diversity, celebrating artistic expressions, and embracing such vast and versatile traditions, India can continue to be a shining example of unity in diversity in her global endeavour to become a global power under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'DRESS CODE' FOR TEMPLES

Sir — As per the report, the temple worshippers from across Maharashtra's villages have pushed back against the imposition of a 'dress code' for visiting temples for both male and female devotees. A "vastra samhita" or dress code was imposed mid-May at four temples of Nagpur, these include the Gopalkrishna temple in Dhantoli (a middle-class settlement within the city), Sankatmochan Panchmukhi Hanuman temple in Saoner (a farmers town near Nagpur), the Brihaspati temple, in Hingna (an industrial township bordering the Wardha district), and the Durgamata temple at Koradi (the thermal power township located north of Nagpur). Religious bodies should refrain from issuing such diktats that would create new problems within society. "Parents in rural areas do not buy full pants for young boys until they go to junior college. When we were in school, we did not get to wear full pants until Class 10. We had to wear shorts to school. Our parents used to tell us that they would give us full pants only after we entered Class 11. This is prevalent in rural areas across Maharashtra. Then why are little boys being stopped from entering temples? Has any God said, "Don't allow kids wearing shorts to come for my darshan?" While several other popular shrines in the state are exercising caution and not rushing to impose the dress code, the issue has the potential of blowing up into a full-scale political confrontation

N Mateeni | Mumbai

MANIPUR UNREST

Sir — Amid the ongoing tension in Manipur, Olympic medallist Mirabai Chanu and weightlifter kunjarani devi signed a memorandum to Home Minister Amit Shah, along with 11 other athletes demanding to restore peace in Manipur and sought rigid action against the extremist groups behind the violence as soon as possible that if peace

Telangana suicides



Recently, eight students committed suicide in Telangana after the announcement of the intermediate examination results as they failed or fared poorly. Perhaps, this was one of those cases where exam-related suicide was reported in a newspaper. There are many instances where these deaths go unreported. Society is by and large mum to the increasing number of suicides by students close on the heels of the declaration of results of important examinations that decide entry into professional courses because taking one's own life after the dec-

laration of exam results is not considered a social evil by most stakeholders in India even though every year history repeats.

Plenty of them eye careers that suit them but are forced to look elsewhere due to parental pressure. It is indisputable that parental pressure is the biggest contributor to augmented anxiety and depression among students paving the way for suicides. For a long time, it is not what the child wants but it is almost like what the "father and mother want" that has pushed children to the brink. Of course, obtaining excellent marks is a sure shot highway to a reasonable job in later life. But it's doubtful as to whether an individual, having painstakingly defeated a mind-boggling rat race at a young age against his/her wishes and aspirations, would live with peace and harmony rest of his/her life despite bagging ranks and marks. Self-employment is never considered a great option in the country, and the results are there to see.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

is not restored, they will return their medals. It is concerning that Manipur BJP rules the state but the BJP doesn't bother those who lost their loved ones rather busy conducting expensive election campaigns for Prime minister in states across the country due to which the government is still unable to normalize the unrest and restore the peace.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

Sir — The battle of narratives between the Congress and the BJP is once again at a peak. PM Modi and Rahul Gandhi are attacking each other. Whenever the election is about to come, the ruling and the opposition start taking voters under their guise by opening their bags of populist promises. If we look at the election manifests of the last decade, it is known that all the parties have run the same agenda of distributing freebies. After getting the power, even if the election promises

become a jumla, the leaders will not mind. The poor people would have sold their vote by getting trapped in the promises of freebies, while the upper class has no worries about voting and inflation. The middle class has to bear the brunt. Unfortunately the voters are too gullible and fall for such gimmicks election after election. The politicians know that public memory is short and there are a number of ways to distract them and harness their votes. But this is not what the maker of the constitution Baba Saheb Ambedkar had contemplated. Over the period of 75 years the standards of public life have gone down drastically and speaking lies and even spreading hate has become a new normal. This is not what makes India great it only is a surefire recipe to take the country down. Hope politicians are listening.

Jahangir Ali | Maharashtra

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

IMPORTANCE OF PM MODI'S US STATE VISIT

Domestic politics aside, there is much at stake for PM Modi's upcoming state visit to the US



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be on a high-profile visit to the United States later this month. The state visit would be the first for the PM, and for the president of the USA and the second during his current tenure, as a host. This visit is happening against the backdrop of many high-profile visits by Indian and American diplomats, secretaries and ministers setting the ground, plank by plank, in what could be one of the most significant milestones in the India US bilateral relationship. The last such fillip to the relationship came in the period from 2005 to 2009 when India went nuclear and, US keeping aside its domestic political reservations and ally concerns (read Pakistan), eased India into the nuclear club, finally culminating in, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's state visit to the US. A state visit is the highest level of honour and prestige accorded bilaterally, and is considered to be the top-notch level in diplomatic relationships.

Prime Minister Modi's scheduled state visit was supposed to have been preceded, by his meeting with US President Joe Biden, at least thrice in less than a month. These included bilateral meetings during G7, to which India was invited, a meeting in Papua New Guinea and a QUAD leaders' summit before culminating in a state visit. However, President Biden had to cut short his trip to the Pacific Ocean Island nation and Australia, due to domestic issues, leading to a few hurried meetings on the sidelines of the G7 in Japan.

The domestic environment for both India and the US is just warming up, to what would be an extremely hot and noisy space for the world's oldest and largest democracy. India and the US face general elections next year and the domestic political climate, if not decibels, are already exceeding tolerable limits. Moving forward it would be unbearable and rough. This casts the dice for these leaders, both of whom are seeking re-election (PM Modi for the third term and President Biden second term), to make it worthwhile for their respective constituencies, which will send them back to the top posts. The US president would have to ensure that his voters, if not the congress and some of his colleagues, see the value of upgrading the India-US bilateral relationship, despite, India's conspicuous silence on Ukraine (except for it is not a time for War statement), close relations and dependencies on Russia and some uncomfortable questions regarding human rights, religious freedom etc.

Indian Prime Minister on his part would like to take the spectacle quotient a tad higher than the Howdy Modi, grand concerts event, when



PM Mod and then President Donald Trump, jointly addressed thousands of Indian Americans in Houston. The PM would expect a significant outcome from the state visit, albeit the cheering crowds, public events would definitely be a part of the package. The PM who was recently on a visit to Australia and Pacific island countries, where he got a rock stars welcome, addressed large cheering crowds in packed arenas and was even called "the boss" by the Australian PM. The Indian American groups are also prepping up for PM Modi's visit, as many of them are expected to participate in some key official ceremonies at the white house, including witnessing the 21-gun salute and perhaps yoga sessions led by Indian PM on International World yoga day on June 21st.

It would be worth remembering that PM Modi's visit would also follow opposition leader Rahul Gandhi's ten days trip to the US, where he interacted with a wide array of stakeholders, civil society, think tanks etc on questions surrounding Indian democracy. The larger questions regarding shrinking space for democratic manoeuvre and political opposition in India, which have been brought out by the opposition leader during his earlier visits to UK etc and which have led to some influencer groups doubting Indian democratic credentials, could have been contained, by the time PM Modi lands in the US. Domestic politics aside there is much at stake for PM Modis' upcoming state visit to the US. (The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal)

Judgement, education and effective action



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Whether one is the top man or the so-called bottom man, there is always an element of decision-making vested in the role



One of the critical components of decision-making is the ability to decipher decision spaces. Consider the example of a doorkeeper. By any standards, it is a lowly rank and humble in many ways. Yet, in times of knocking at the door, that position becomes more important than that of the Chairman himself. It is the doorkeeper's decision to let somebody in or keep him out. It is a power loaded with security concerns and at times with grave implications of time, life and death. Consider a situation where somebody is ill, and a doctor has been summoned in the late hours of the evening to the building to take care of the ailing person.

The doctor does not get a security clearance, but his entry into the building is critical. Like anything else, there is a risk involved, and somebody may be impersonating the doctor; there may be a rogue doctor or the doctor himself may be very impatient—the possibilities are several. The judgement of the gatekeeper and the judgement to be exercised on the spot make him the kingpin, not only for the moment of the act but indeed for much else, besides.

The derivation is obvious: everyone needs to have effective decision-making skills. The story goes that King Shivaji approached his Rajgad Fort near Pune, in the early hours of the morning after



THE PRIME MINISTER HAS TO NOT ONLY LEAD BUT ALSO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KEY DECISIONS. HIS ABILITY TO JUDGE AND DECIDE WHO TO CONSENT TO, AND TO WHAT EXTENT IS CRUCIAL.

(The writer is a policy analyst)

a long long ride and wanted to enter the Rajgad Fort. He had enemies at his heels. The head of security of the fort had it from the king (Maharaj) himself (in this case, Shivaji Maharaj) that no exceptions would be allowed for entry into the fort before dawn.

Shivaji Maharaj had some enemies in his hot pursuit, which he had evaded. The Head of Security took the call that the order of the Maharaj was sacred and Shivaji would not be let into the fort. Shivaji tried to explain to him that his life may be at risk and that he had been exercising his supreme powers by ordering a gate to be opened. The Head of Security refused to comply. When Shivaji asked him who would be responsible for his security, the Head of Security responded, "I am the head of security, and I shall be responsible. We shall make preparations for your comfort outside the fort, and you will be absolutely safe. Our full force will protect you and protect you successfully." The story concludes that Shivaji was finally allowed entry into the fort only at dawn. One of his first acts after his entry was to elevate the rank to the Head of Security.

The narrative, as it is, needs no comment. The larger part of the story is that it makes a point.

In the ultimate analysis of the making of the human being: health and judgement are the two most important things. Judgement cannot be taught; it cannot be 'given'. It has to grow from within. It is a judgement that makes a person.

Judgement is both subtle and growing. In a parliamentary system, the Prime Minister is the head of the Executive. He has to not only lead but also be responsible for the key decisions. His ability to judge and decide who to consent to, and to what extent is crucial. He has also to assess to what extent amalgamate the various strands of advice received.

This brings us to the essence of training of the mind and education. The current rollout of the National Education Policy raises these questions in many ways. With increasing frequency, it is being asked many, how so many people, who do not even finish their school education become such original thinkers and make such brilliant contributions. Rabintra Nath Thakur is a common reference.

Indeed, many formally educated people do not get very far and flounder in the race of life in a worse-than-mediocre pattern. This appears as an enigma when it is actually it is not so. The truth is that creativity and judgement propelled even those who had not completed their formal education to higher levels of achievement. Higher levels of achievement do not necessarily follow high degrees. In the case of the educated, the natural achievements which would have followed creativity were sharpened and results were better than if they had not been educated at all.

It is soulful to remember this and use it as a compass to navigate one's own career and those dependent on one. The meaning, the content, the delivery, and the keeping alive of the educational processes are important phenomena. The whys and wherefores of this process need to be understood and developed more fruitfully as a part of any project related to the educational process. Hopefully, as the National Education Policy makes its rollout, these questions will not only surface but get addressed.

Caribbean medical degree can lead to a career in the West

Pursuing medical education in a Caribbean university is a viable route to a career in medicine in the West, although it is not without its challenges

In recent years, there has been a significant surge in the demand for doctors and the aspirations to pursue a medical career. However, the available resources and facilities have struggled to match the pace of this demand, resulting in a considerable gap. Consequently, numerous students have opted to relocate to different countries in search of admission to medical courses, as the distribution of requirements and available facilities remains imbalanced.

To pursue a medical career in the USA or Canada, students typically follow a structured path. Upon finishing their undergraduate degree, students are required to clear the MCAT exam as a prerequisite for admission to medical school. Once a student enters



MAMTA PURBEY

(The writer is Associate Vice President, Student Acquisition - International, American University of Antigua College of Medicine)

medical school, they spend another 4-5 years in a medical school which would include their pre-clinical and clinical. Once the student is done with clinical rotations and graduates from medical school, s/he applies for residency. Students submit applications through the National Residency Matching Program (NRMP). Depending on the specialisation they opt for, many doctors complete their residency programs in 3 to 7 years.

To become a doctor in the US/Canada, students have the option to pursue a Caribbean medical college route. This involves selecting a reputable and accredited medical school in the Caribbean and completing a 2-year pre-med program, followed by 2 years of pre-clinical studies. The stu-

dents then continue their clinical rotations in the USA/Canada. Studying medicine in the Caribbean region offers a multitude of benefits for aspiring medical students aiming to become practising doctors in the USA, UK, and Canada.

These advantages make Caribbean medical schools an appealing choice for those seeking a top-tier education, practical exposure, and a unique cultural experience. Additionally, these medical schools hold recognition from esteemed international organizations like the World Health Organization and the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates, ensuring that graduates can practice medicine across all 50 states in the US or in the UK,

and Canada, among other various countries worldwide.

Lower Financial Burden: Studying MBBS at leading Caribbean medical colleges generally comes at a lower cost compared to US medical colleges, including both public and private institutions. While certain Caribbean colleges may have costs that approach those of US medical colleges, the overall expenses remain significantly more affordable.

Hassle-free Admission: Unlike other foreign medical universities, getting admission to top Caribbean medical colleges is less complex. Apart from decent credentials at the school level, you need to clear the country-specific medical entrance exam such as NEET in India. Most Caribbean colleges have rolling admissions

with three intakes- January, May and September.

Diverse Learning: Caribbean medical universities attract a diverse student population from various countries and cultural backgrounds. This multicultural environment fosters a rich learning experience, promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

Gateway to the US: The Caribbean region is globally recognized for its esteemed medical schools. These institutions hold accreditation from prominent international organizations including the Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and Other Health Professions (CAAM-HP), World Health Organization (WHO), and the Educational

Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). Such recognition empowers graduates to pursue medical practice in diverse countries across the globe. International medical graduates (IMGs) have a vital role in the American healthcare system, making up 25 per cent of the existing US physician workforce. Among these IMGs, 18 per cent are graduates of Caribbean medical schools, indicating that approximately 4.5 per cent of licensed doctors in the US obtained their MD degrees from Caribbean institutions.

Accredited Medical Schools: While choosing a Caribbean medical school, it's very important to check the recognitions and accreditations to ensure quality edu-

cation. Only schools that are recognized by CAAM-HP and accredited by the US Dept of Education, New York State Education Department and other US & Canadian medical education-related departments/bodies should be chosen to ensure a smooth transition into USA / Canada.

Pursuing a medical education at a Caribbean medical school offers a viable route to a rewarding career in medicine, although it is not without its challenges. While the entry requirements may be less stringent compared to those in the US, achieving exceptional grades and excelling in USMLE exams are still essential for securing a position in an American residency program.

NATO presses Turkiye to approve Sweden's membership

OSLO/NORWAY

NATO on Thursday ramped up pressure on member nation Turkiye to drop its objections to Sweden's membership as the military organisation seeks to deal with the issue by the time US President Joe Biden and his counterparts meet next month. The 31-member alliance is also looking at boosting Ukraine's non-member status in NATO and preparing a framework for security commitments that it can offer once the war with Russia is over. Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said NATO wants to bring Sweden into the fold by the time allied leaders meet in Lithuania on July 11-12. The allies also hope to make progress on long-term funding and the security plan for Ukraine at the same event, Stoltenberg said. He said the allies continue to agree that Ukraine will become a NATO member but that in the meantime the

alliance should provide it with security commitments and substantial new funding. "Our focus today was on how we can bring Ukraine closer to NATO where it belongs," he said. "No one knows when the war will end, but we must ensure that when it does we have credible arrangements in place to guarantee Ukraine's security in the future and break Russia's cycle of aggression," Stoltenberg said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the allies were "focused on helping Ukraine to build up its medium- and long-term security capacity so that if and when the current aggression settles, Ukraine has the full capacity to deter future aggression." "NATO has a role in that in terms of the work it can do to bring Ukraine up to NATO standards," he said. He did not elaborate. Fearing they might be targeted by Moscow after Russia invaded Ukraine last year,



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, listens as he gives a statement to the media, at Oslo City Hall, during a meeting of NATO's foreign ministers in Oslo on Thursday. AP/PTI

Sweden and Finland abandoned their traditional positions of military nonalignment to seek protection under NATO's security umbrella. Finland became NATO's 31st member country in April. Turkiye's government accuses Sweden of being too lenient on terrorist organisations and security threats, including militant Kurdish groups and peo-

ple associated with a 2016 coup attempt. Hungary has also delayed its approval, but the reasons why have not been made public. Stoltenberg said that he would travel to Ankara "in the near future to continue to address how we can ensure the fastest possible accession of Sweden." He said his and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's staffs were working on dates for the trip. "My message is that Sweden has delivered, and the time has come to ratify Sweden," he told reporters at the conclusion of two days of informal talks between alliance foreign ministers to prepare for the summit in Lithuania. Others echoed his comments. "It's time for Sweden to join now," Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt told reporters. "I'm confident that also Hungary will ratify the accession protocol," Stoltenberg said.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said that "it is essential that we can finally welcome Sweden as the 32nd member." She stressed that the Swedish government has Berlin's "full support". Sweden's foreign minister, Tobias Billström, said that "it is time for Turkey and Hungary to start the ratification of the Swedish membership to NATO". He said that "everything (that) bars Sweden joining NATO will be seen as wine for (Russian president Vladimir) Putin". For months, Sweden, Finland and Turkiye held talks to try to address Ankara's concerns. Billström said he expected things to be made clear at a new meeting of this "permanent joint mechanism" in coming weeks. He noted that as of Thursday, Sweden had tightened its anti-terrorism laws. It is now illegal to finance, recruit for or publicly encourage "a terrorist organisation", or to travel abroad with the inten-

tion of joining such groups. The time may be ripe for movement. Sweden's membership became embroiled in campaigning for elections in Turkiye, which Erdogan won on Sunday. Erdogan has also been seeking upgraded US fighter jets, and Washington signalled this week that they might be delivered. "I spoke to Erdogan and he still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted a deal with Sweden. So let's get that done," Biden said on Monday. On Tuesday, Blinken insisted that the issues of Sweden's membership and the fighter jets were distinct. However, he stressed that the completion of both would dramatically strengthen European security. "Both of these are vital, in our judgement, to European security," Blinken told reporters. "We believe that both should go forward as quickly as possible; that is to say Sweden's accession and moving forward on the F-16 package more broadly."

China accuses US of interfering in training exercise

Beijing (AP): China's Defence Ministry accused the US of "interference and surveillance" of a naval exercise in the South China Sea ahead of an incident in which a Chinese fighter pilot flew at high speed in front of a US Air Force reconnaissance plane, underscoring the rupture in contacts between their militaries. A statement issued late Wednesday by the Chinese military's Southern Theater Command said it had "organized air forces to track and monitor the whole process, dealt with it according to laws and regulations, and operated professionally." The US Indo-Pacific Command said the pilot of a Chinese J-16 fighter had "performed an unnecessarily aggressive maneuver" while intercepting a US Air Force RC-135 aircraft on May 26, flying directly in front of the plane's nose. "The RC-135 was conducting safe and routine operations over the South China Sea in international airspace, in accordance with international law," the US. side said. "We expect all countries in the Indo-Pacific region to use international airspace safely and in accordance with international law." Southern Theater Command spokesperson Senior Col. Zhang Nandong was quoted in the statement accusing the U.S. of "mixing up black and white and making false accusations in an attempt to confuse the international audience." "We solemnly urge the U.S. to conscientiously restrain the actions of front-line naval and air forces, strictly abide by relevant international laws and relevant agreements, and prevent accidents at sea and in the air," Zhang said. "If not, the US will bear all consequences," he said. Zhang did not say what international laws he was referring to. China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea is not recognized by the US and strongly contested by other countries bordering on the strategic waterway, through which an estimated \$5 trillion of international trade passes each year.

N Korean leader's sister slams US for criticising failed satellite launch

SEOUL

The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Thursday accused the United States of "gangster-like" hypocrisy for criticizing her country's failed launch of a military spy satellite and insisted a successful launch will be made soon. Kim Yo Jong said North Korea's efforts to acquire space-based reconnaissance capabilities were a legitimate exercise of its sovereign right and restated the country's rejection of UN Security Council resolutions that ban it from conducting any launch involving ballistic missile technology. Her comments on state media came a day after the rocket carrying the satellite failed. North Korea said the rocket lost thrust after a stage separation and crashed in waters off the Korean Peninsula's western coast. Washington, South Korea and Japan had quickly criticized the launch. Adam Hodge, a



spokesperson at the US National Security Council, said Washington strongly condemns the North Korean launch because it used banned ballistic missile technology, raised tensions and risked destabilizing security in the region and beyond. In her statement, Kim Yo Jong briefly mentioned Hodge's comments before saying the United States "is letting loose a hackneyed gibberish prompted by its brigandish and abnormal thinking." "If the DPRK's satellite launch should be particularly censured, the US and all other

countries, which have already launched thousands of satellites, should be denounced. This is nothing but sophism of self-contradiction," she said, using the initials of North Korea's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. She noted how the United States closely monitors the North through its own reconnaissance satellites and other aerial assets, calling the Americans a "group of gangsters" who would deem it as "illegal and threatening" had North Korea attempted to send a satellite into space by balloon. "The far-fetched logic that only the DPRK should not be allowed to do so according to the (UN Security Council's) resolution" which bans the use of ballistic rocket technology irrespective of its purpose, though other countries are doing so, is clearly a gangster-like and wrong one of seriously violating the DPRK's right to use space and illegally oppressing it," she said.

Bombing kills 3 in Kyiv

KYIV

Russia launched a pre-dawn missile barrage on Ukraine's capital Thursday, killing 3 people including a 9-year-old and her mother, officials said, and damaging apartment buildings, schools and a children's hospital. It was the highest casualty toll from a single attack on Kyiv over the past month. A 33-year-old woman died as she and others waited to enter a locked Kyiv air raid shelter, leaving her and others at the mercy of falling missile fragments, according to her husband. Officials ordered an investigation into what happened. The latest Russian attack, using what Ukrainian officials said were short-range Iskander ground-launched missiles, coincided with events scheduled in Kyiv to celebrate International Children's Day. Those events were cancelled. Ukrainian air defences shot down all 10 cruise and ballistic missiles launched by the Kremlin's forces, but falling debris caused damage and casualties on the ground, wounding 16 people, according to author-



Police inspect a building damaged by a Russian night attack in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Thursday. AP/PTI

ities.

Russia has kept up a steady barrage on the Ukrainian capital and other parts of the country in recent weeks as Kyiv readies what it says is a counter-offensive to push back Moscow's troops, 15 months after their full-scale invasion. Kyiv was the target of drone and missile attacks on 17 days last month. Ukraine's first lady, Olena Zelenska, said one child was in hospital after the attack. "Children's Day has to be about

safe childhood, summer, life," she tweeted. "But today it is about new crimes of (Russia) against children." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted that the dead included a 9-year-old girl, her mother and another woman. At the Kyiv air raid shelter that was locked, Yaroslav Riabchuk said he and his wife of 17 years, Natalia, were outside with other debris when he ran around the back of the building to summon the guard in charge.

Russian court prepares way for new trial against jailed Kremlin foe

Moscow (AP): A Moscow court on Wednesday set a new date for a hearing paving the way for another trial of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny that could keep him in prison for decades. The Moscow City Court initially scheduled for Wednesday a preliminary hearing to discuss technical issues related to the trial of the Kremlin's arch foe but moved it to June 6 without giving a reason. The court rejected a request by Navalny's lawyers for more time to examine voluminous case materials. Navalny has said that the new extremism charges which he rejected as "absurd" could keep him in prison for another 30 years. He said an investigator told him that he would also face a separate military court trial on terrorism charges that could potentially carry a life sentence.

Court charges 5 men for Irish peacekeeper's killing

Beirut (AP): Lebanon's military tribunal on Thursday charged five men with the killing of an Irish UN peacekeeper in December, a senior judicial official said. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, alleged all five are linked with Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. The indictment followed a half-year probe after an attack on a UN peacekeeping convoy near the town of Al-Aqbiya in Lebanon's south, a stronghold of Hezbollah. The shooting resulted in the death of Pvt. Sean Rooney, 24, of Newtown Cunningham, Ireland, and seriously wounded Pvt. Shane Kearney, 22. The wounded peacekeeper was medically evacuated to Ireland. Two other Irish soldiers sustained light injuries. The indictment includes evidence from bystanders' testimonies, as well as audio recordings and video footage from surveillance cameras, the Lebanese official said.

Turkish election body confirms Erdogan's victory in runoff vote

ANKARA

Turkiye's election board certified the results of the May 28 presidential runoff election on Thursday, confirming that Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been a dominant force in Turkish politics for the past two decades, has won a third term as president. Ahmet Yener, the head of the Supreme Electoral Council said Erdogan won 52.18 per cent of the votes, while main opposition party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu garnered 47.82 per cent.

According to these results, it is understood that Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been elected president and the results were sent to the Official Gazette for publication," Yener announced. He said turnout was 85.72 per cent. Already Turkiye's longest serving leader, Erdogan, 69, can now govern until 2028. Unconfirmed reports say he is scheduled to take the oath of office on Saturday, after which he is expected to announce the lineup of his new



Cabinet. Erdogan faces a host of domestic challenges, from a battered economy to pressure for the repatriation of millions of Syrian refugees and the need to rebuild after a devastating earthquake in February that killed 50,000 and leveled cities. Investors will be watching closely to see if Mehmet Simsek, a respected former finance minister and deputy prime minister, is reappointed to head the economy portfolio, for signs of a return by Erdogan to more conventional economic policies. Inflation in Turkiye hit a staggering 85 per cent in October before easing to 44 per cent last month, according to official figures, although independent experts say the true rate is much higher. Critics blame the turmoil on Erdogan's policy of keeping interest rates low to promote growth. Economists generally recommend raising rates to combat inflation. The Turkish lira has lost around 10 per cent of its value since the start of the year.

European summit opens in Moldova

BULBOACA

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived at a sprawling summit of some 50 European leaders in Moldova on Thursday, becoming the focal point of an event that seeks to quell regional conflicts and shore up unity in the face of Russia's war. The meeting of the European Political Community, a pan-continental gathering of heads of state and government from 47 countries, brings together leaders from European Union nations and others to the 27-member bloc's south and east — a region pushed to a turning point in its relationship with Moscow by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year.

The EU, represented at the summit by the bloc's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel, wants to use the summit to reach out to many Eastern European countries that spent decades either within the Soviet Union or under its immediate sphere of influence, and to bolster the conti-



Moldova's President Maia Sandu, right, greets Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni during arrivals for the European Political Community Summit at the Mimi Castle in Bulboaca, Moldova on Thursday. AP/PTI

nent's unified response to Russian aggression. The choice to hold the summit in Moldova, a former Soviet republic of around 2.6 million people, is seen as a message to the Kremlin both from the EU and the pro-Western Moldovan government, which received EU candidate status in June of last year at the same time as Ukraine. Moldova, Europe's poorest country which is cradled by Ukraine on three sides, aspires to join the EU by the end of the decade, and has consistently

signalled its support for Ukraine and taken in refugees fleeing the war. Speaking from the summit venue, a 19th-century castle and vineyard around 35 kilometers (21 miles) from the capital, Chisinau, Moldovan President Maia Sandu said a major aim of the summit was "restoring peace on the continent" and protecting democracy in Moldova and Ukraine from threats posed by Russia. "We need to reconfirm our support for Ukraine as it resists Russian aggression," she said. "Ukraine keeps Moldova safe today, and we are very, very grateful for that." Zelenskyy, the first foreign leader to arrive at Thursday's summit, entered an expansive courtyard of the castle in his trademark olive green shirt and cargo pants before meeting with Sandu on a red carpet. He thanked the Moldovan people for hosting Ukrainian refugees, and said both Ukraine and Moldova were destined to work "shoulder to shoulder" for EU membership. "What is very important: our future in the EU," he said, adding that his country is ready to enter NATO whenever the Western military alliance is ready to accept it. "I think security guarantees are very important, not only for Ukraine, but for our neighbors, for Moldova, because of Russian aggression in Ukraine and potential aggression in other parts of Europe," Zelenskyy said. Other summit participants include German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Amazon workers protest return-to-office mandate

Seattle (AP): Telling executives to "strive harder," hundreds of corporate Amazon workers protested what they decried as the company's lack of progress on climate goals and an inequitable return-to-office mandate during a lunchtime demonstration at its Seattle headquarters Wednesday. The protest came a week after Amazon's annual shareholder meeting and a month after a policy took effect returning workers to the office three days per week. Previously, team leaders were allowed to determine how their charges worked. The employees chanted their disappointment with the pace of



the company's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint — "Emissions climbing, time to act" — and urged Amazon to return authority to team leaders when it comes to work location. Wearing a black pirate hat and red coat, Church Hindley, a quality assurance engineer, said

working from home allowed him to live a better, healthier life. "I'm out here because I refuse to just sit idly by while mandates are dictated from above down that don't make sense and hurt the planet, hurt families and individual lives," Hindley said.

Technology radically changing sleep pattern

Loveborough: From sleep trackers to wakefulness drugs, the 21st century has seen an influx of new technology that could radically alter the way we sleep. Many of these new technologies chase the dream of optimised slumber. They promise to help tailor our sleep schedules to fit around our social lives, help us sleep for longer or even skip a night's sleep altogether. Here's how technology is permeating our sleep, and what the future holds. TIME TO WAKE UP Sleeping pills have recently been joined by a wave of wakefulness drugs, purportedly safer and more powerful alternatives to caffeine.



It seems that they work best on people who are already sleep deprived and don't have a huge effect on those who are already well rested. Modafinil is touted for its cognition enhancing effects (especially in sleep-deprived people) and can supposedly keep people awake and alert for several days at a time. Some scientific studies are showing that

this may indeed be the case, although results are mixed, with other research showing the effects are similar to caffeine. The drug was developed to help people with narcolepsy but some have started using it for its focus-enhancing effects. It is a controlled drug (prescription only) in most countries. People who use it for cognitive enhancement or wakefulness are buying it on the black market or getting it from friends who have a prescription. Modafinil is popular with students — in 2020, Loughborough University researchers found that, of 506 students surveyed at 54 UK universities, 19% had taken cognitive enhancement sub-

stances. But people who take them for non-medical purposes are risking their health. Studies of the safety of these drugs do not consider this type of use. We don't know what using these drugs to stay awake for long periods of time does to people's bodies. But we do know that disrupting your sleep pattern (for example, shift work) is linked to health problems such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Recent studies suggest some people are combining sleep and wakefulness pills to manage their body rhythms and optimise their sleep or unwind after a day of hard work. The effects of taking wakefulness pills with other drugs is largely unknown. In the UK sale or supply of

a prescription-only or unlicensed medicine is a criminal offence. Whereas in the US, even possession of stimulants without a prescription is a crime. SMART SLEEP Many people already use smart watches, smart jewellery and fitness bands to track their sleep — for example, alarms that wake people up at the optimal point in their sleep cycle and motion sensor apps that analyse sleep patterns. New ways of tracking sleep could soon include donning a pair of pyjamas embedded with sensors to track changes in posture, and heart rate, whose algorithm creates a breathing pattern to mimic and help you fall asleep.

SEVILLA END SEASON WITH EUROPA LEAGUE TITLE

AP ■ MADRID
It was the usual ending for Sevilla in an unusual season for the Spanish soccer club.

Sevilla won the Europa League trophy yet again on Thursday after a season in which it went through coaching changes and had to fight just to avoid relegation in the Spanish league.

The team's struggles were quickly forgotten with its victory on penalties over Roma in the Europa League final on Wednesday in Budapest, which gave the club a record seventh title in the second-tier European competition.

What looked like a season to forget turned into triumph after another impressive campaign by the Spanish club in the competition where it has been dominant in recent years. Five of its titles came within the last 10



years — 2014-16, 2020 and 2023. This time, Sevilla eliminated European powerhouses Manchester United in the quarterfinals and Juventus in the

semifinals. It had gotten past Fenerbahce and PSV Eindhoven in previous rounds. On Wednesday, the team beat José Mourinho-coached Roma 4-1 in a penalty shootout

after a 1-1 draw. Sevilla's turnaround this season came after the club decided to replace Jorge Sampaoli with José Luis Mendilibar in March. Before Mendilibar arrived, the

team had won only twice in eight games in all competitions, with five losses. Since he took over, Sevilla lost only twice in 16 games.

"I'm happy to be here, to have won for the club, which was having a hard time when we got here," Mendilibar said. "We have done something good that can have repercussions for the good of the club."

The coach who had spent a large part of his career with Eibar came on a contract until the end of the season but was expected to stay with Sevilla following his successful stint.

"He transformed us," said Sevilla defender Jesús Navas, the only player from the current squad who was with the club when it won the Europa League title for the first time in 2006. "He got the best out of us and the result is there. He deserves to be with this club for a long time."

Sampaoli had taken over for Julen Lopetegui after the team's unusually poor start to the season. Sevilla had finished fourth in the league the last three seasons, only behind powerhouses Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid.

This time it is sitting in 11th place entering its final match at Real Sociedad on Sunday, and will only make it to the Champions League again next season thanks to its Europa League title.

Sevilla made it to the Champions League quarterfinals in 2018, but since then had only once advanced past the group stage.

Having to play in the second-tier Europa League has certainly turned out OK for Sevilla, though, and on Thursday it will be parading to celebrate yet another European title with its fans.



Neville backs City

AP ■ MANCHESTER
As a part of Manchester United's treble-winning team of 1999, Gary Neville admits he is in fear ahead of Saturday's FA Cup final.

United is the only team to win the three major trophies in a single English soccer season — the Premier League title, Champions League and FA Cup.

Now Manchester City is in contention to replicate that feat, having already secured the league title. City has the chance to win its second trophy this season when it faces United in the FA Cup final at Wembley Stadium, which would set up a possible treble when the team coached by Pep Guardiola meets Inter Milan in the Champions League final in Istanbul on June 10.

"I do fear it is on the cards," Neville told The Associated Press. "City have not got there yet, but they look like they are on the way, on the path. They've got a great manager, they've got great players, but they've still got to get over the line. Anything can happen and we just pray and (have our) fingers crossed. It doesn't bear thinking about." City has overtaken United as English soccer's dominant team over the past decade and has just won its fifth league title in six years. But the club has yet to match United's greatest ever achievement, and has yet to ever win the European title.

And now United has the chance to end its rival's trophy pursuit at Wembley on Saturday.

United manager Erik ten Hag has enjoyed an impressive first season in charge, having led United to success in the League Cup in February, as well securing a return to the Champions League next season. But Neville still considers City the favorite in the final.

"I think they will almost be disappointed now if they don't win it (the treble)," Neville said. "They'll be expected to win every game. The Cup final might present an issue or two, it is Manchester United, but they are far better than the teams they've got left to play."

City put together an unstoppable run to win the title and has blown away some of the best teams at home and abroad in its charge toward the treble. Liverpool and Arsenal were beaten 4-1 and Real Madrid lost 4-0 at Etihad Stadium in the Champions League semifinals.

Former City women's player Jill Scott believes City will be too strong for United. "I went to the Arsenal game and it could have been 7-0," she told the AP. "The football they played was incredible."

"I can't see City not coming away with that FA Cup win. Sometimes in a one-off game anything can happen, but I just think they will be far superior."

United looking to stop treble-chasing City

AP ■ LONDON
The roars grew louder inside Old Trafford as Erik ten Hag addressed Manchester United fans from the middle of the field, reminding them of the role they have in protecting the club's greatest ever achievement.

There was one game to go this season, the United manager told the baying crowd, and his players standing right in front of him were ready to give their all to beat Manchester City in the FA Cup final at Wembley Stadium.

"We count on you as well," he said, pointing to the supporters, who by now were punching the air in defiance. "They will give everything when you are at our backs, and I'm sure we've a really good chance to take the cup back to Old Trafford."

As rallying cries go, it was pretty much pitch perfect from Ten Hag, who knows exactly what's at stake on Saturday in a local derby with widespread repercussions.

For United, this is about much more than capturing a second trophy of the season — after the English League Cup in February that ended the club's six-year title drought — to cap an encouraging first season under Ten Hag. It's also about preserving United's proud status as the only English team to have won the league-FA Cup-European Cup treble in the same season.

City, after all, is two wins from emulating that feat, having already clinched the Premier League title and booked its place in the Champions League final against Inter Milan in Istanbul on June 10.

That United can ruin City's treble bid adds more spice to the first cup final between the rivals, which is taking place about 170 miles (270 kilometers) south of Manchester.

City starts as the undoubtedly favorite on the back of its stunning form since February that reeled in long-time leader Arsenal in the Premier League race and saw Bayern Munich



and Real Madrid swept aside in the Champions League knockout stage.

Before a much-weakened team — featuring a bunch of youth players — lost at Brentford 1-0 in a league match with little riding on it last Sunday, City went on a 25-match unbeaten run in all competitions and won 20 of them. Along the way, Madrid was beaten 4-0, Bayern 3-0 and Arsenal 4-1. Back in October, City thrashed United 6-3.

All those games were at home, though, and City hasn't been quite so machine-like on the road. And that's not the only source of hope for United, which is seeking its 13th FA Cup title — with only Arsenal (14) having more.

City manager Pep Guardiola talks often of his players having "rhythm" but that might have been lost after he chose to rotate his lineups for the final two league games, with the title wrapped up. Before the loss at Brentford, City was possibly fortunate to come away from Brighton with a 1-1 draw.

Erling Haaland has 52 goals in all competitions in a stunning first season at City but it's just one goal in his last six games for the Norway striker.

Meanwhile, United won its final four matches in the league, conceding just two goals in that period. And in the last meeting between the teams, United won at Old Trafford 2-1 in January — albeit after a debatable equalizing goal from Marcus Rashford.

Sabalenka refuses to take questions on Ukraine war

AP ■ PARIS
Aryna Sabalenka, a Belarusian tennis player seeded No. 2 at the French Open, declined to answer questions about Russia's invasion of Ukraine after she won a match on Wednesday.

After her first-round win Sunday, Sabalenka had said no Russian or Belarusian athletes support the war, but she was asked Wednesday to personally condemn Belarus' role in supporting Russia's invasion.

"I've got no comments to you," the Australian Open champion said in a press conference after her 7-5, 6-2 victory over



Iryna Shymanovich in the second round at the Grand Slam tournament.

Sabalenka's first-round opponent, Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine, had urged reporters to ask the 25-year-old Sabalenka if she personally supports or

opposes the war. Sabalenka was asked — in the context of potentially becoming the world's No. 1 player — about whether she supports Belarus' authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko. "I have no comments to

you, so thank you for your question," she replied.

Next was the question about Belarus' role in the war.

When a third question was posed, the moderator stepped in, and Sabalenka added: "You've got enough answers from me, and I've got no comments to you." On Sunday, Kostyuk had refused to shake hands with Sabalenka after their match on Court Philippe Chatrier.

After that match, Sabalenka said: "Nobody in this world, Russian athletes or Belarusian athletes, support the war. Nobody. How can we support the war? Nobody — normal people — will never support it."

Gael Monfils withdraws with wrist injury

AP ■ PARIS
A thrilling five-set victory took a toll on Gael Monfils, whose withdrawal from the French Open handed No. 6 Holger Rune a walkover to the third round.

The 36-year-old Frenchman said he has a strained left wrist and can't continue.

He battled Sebastian Baez for nearly four hours on Court Philippe Chatrier before beating the Argentine 3-6, 6-3, 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 in a first-round match that ended at 12:18 a.m. local time Wednesday.

The victory was Monfils' first at tour level this year, as the veteran was coming back from heel surgery.

"Actually, physically, I'm quite fine. But I had the problem with my wrist that I cannot solve," he said. "The doctor say was not good to play with that type of injury. Yesterday was actually very risky, and then today definitely say I should stop."

Monfils reached the semifinals at the French Open in 2008 and made it to the quarterfinals on three other occasions.

French Open hopes AI can help players block death threats, hate

AP ■ PARIS
Frances Tiafoe says he receives death threats via social media after he loses professional tennis matches. Jessica Pegula says the same. So does Donna Vekic — directed at just her or her family, too.

"Everybody gets them after a loss," said Tiafoe, a 25-year-old from Maryland who was scheduled to play in the French Open's second round on Thursday and was a semifinalist at last year's US Open.

"It's just how society is today. I know how that affects people's mental health. That's very real." Sloane Stephens, the 2017 champion at Flushing Meadows and 2018 runner-up at Roland Garros, says she often deals with racist messages directed at her online, and said some prompted the FBI to investigate.

"It's obviously been a problem my entire career. It has never stopped," said Stephens, who is Black. "If anything, it's only gotten worse."

In a bid to protect athletes from that sort of abuse at Roland Garros during the 15-day Grand Slam tournament that ends June 11, the French Tennis Federation (FFT) is paying a company to provide play-

ers with software that uses artificial intelligence to block these sorts of negative comments.

Every contestant in every category — singles, doubles, juniors, wheelchair competitors and so on, for a total of around 700 to 800 — is allowed free access to Bodyguard.ai for use on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. A few dozen players had signed up for the service as of the start of this week, according to Bodyguard.

"This is really important for us: for the players to be very comfortable and be able to focus on the competition. Tennis is mental. It's really what you have in your mind that counts; you're making 1,000 decisions during a match," said FFT CEO

Caroline Flaissier, who put the cost to the federation at somewhere between \$30,000 and \$50,000.

"We know that there is a lot of cyberbullying," she said. "We have to address that major issue, so we thought let's do a test."

That includes monitoring social media used by the FFT and the French Open itself. An FFT spokeswoman said Wednesday that 4,500 messages had been deleted out of the 79,000 received on those accounts since May 21.

Yann Guerin, head of sports for Nice-based Bodyguard, said the company's software — which is constantly updated by employees who might notice new words or emojis that should be part of



the screening — needs less than 100 milliseconds to analyze a comment and delete it if it's "hateful or undesirable." He cited the example of one player who participated in qualifying rounds last week, before the start of the tournament proper.

"He lost ... so he was disappointed. Then he checked his phone and was like, 'Whoa,'" Guerin said, estimating that more than 70% of the comments that athlete received would fall under the heading of "toxicity."

"Very bad," Guerin said. "Not bad. VERY bad."

Novak Djokovic moves on from Kosovo comments

AP ■ PARIS
Novak Djokovic sure seemed like someone ready to move on from the latest non-tennis issue he's been involved in during a Grand Slam tournament. Criticized after his previous match for comments about clashes in northern Kosovo between ethnic Serbs and NATO-led peacekeepers, the 22-time major champion stayed away from political matters on Wednesday night.

When his 7-6 (2), 6-0, 6-3 victory over Marton Fucsovics in the second round of the French Open ended, Djokovic, a 36-year-old from Serbia, wrote on the lens of a TV camera — a custom at more and more tennis tournaments — and kept it simple, with an autograph and a smiley face.

It was quite different from what happened after his win Monday, when Djokovic drew attention for writing in Serbian, "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. Stop the violence," and then speaking out about the matter at a news conference with reporters from his home country.

That drew rebukes from a member of France's government, French Open tournament director Amelie Mauresmo and the Kosovo tennis federation.

Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera warned Djokovic over Wednesday morning not to wade into such international issues again at Roland Garros, saying his comments were "not appropriate." Speaking on TV station France 2, Oudea-Castera said Mauresmo encouraged Djokovic and his entourage to maintain "neutrality" on the field of play.

Asked about Oudea-Castera and Mauresmo, Djokovic responded: "I have no more comment on that. I said what I needed to say."



Thailand Open: Kiran moves to QFs, Ashmita bows out

PTI ■ BANGKOK
India's Kiran George continued this good run as he cruised into the quarterfinals of the Thailand Open Super 500 tournament, beating world number 26 China's Weng Hong Yang in straight games here on Thursday.

Kiran, the world number 59, took 39 minutes to beat his higher-ranked Chinese opponent 21-11, 21-19 in the men's singles round of 16 clash.

It is the first time that Kiran has reached the quarterfinal at a BWF World Tour Super 500 event.

The 2022 Odisha Open winner will face the winner of the match between Ng Ka Long Angus of Hong Kong and Toma Junior Popov of France in last eight clash on Friday.

However, it was the end of the road for 23-year-old Ashmita Chaliha, who went down 18-21



Harjai Milkha leads, Nihal second

PTI ■ EDINBURGH
Harjai Milkha Singh proved he is a chip of the old block as he finished strongly with three birdies in the last five holes to card 2-under 70 and take sole lead in Boys 13 category of the US Kids Golf European Championship here.

Playing in extremely cold and freezing conditions, Harjai, son of Indian golf legend Jeev Milkha Singh, and grandson of the Olympic icon the late Milkha Singh, leads at 2-under 142.

With rounds of 72-70, he is two ahead of three others at tied second.

The Indians, who gained an entry into the event after solid showings on local Tours, had another fine day at the highly competitive European Championship.

While Harjai is in sole lead in Boy's 13, Nihal Cheema, the youngest member of the 16-strong Indian squad, is tied-second in Boys under-7.

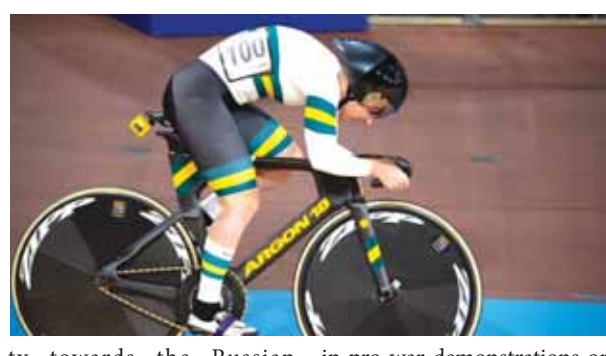
Bengaluru's Adit

Russian Olympic cycling medalists barred from races

AP ■ AIGLE (SWITZERLAND)
Two Russian track cyclists who won medals at the Tokyo Olympics were ruled ineligible to race Wednesday for breaching rules monitoring their neutrality during the war on Ukraine.

Anastasiya Voinova and Mariya Novolodskaya cannot race in International Cycling Union (UCI) events from Thursday, the governing body said in a document posted on its website. The world championships are held in August in Glasgow, Scotland.

"This ineligibility will apply for as long as the ad hoc rules regarding Russia and Belarus remain in force," the UCI said in the document without detailing the breaches.



The UCI can deny neutral status to riders or officials "who are or have been contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military" or who have shown support for the war in interviews or social media posts. Taking part

in pro-war demonstrations or displaying the "Z" symbol that is associated with the invasion of Ukraine also should be disqualifying.

At the Olympics held in 2021, Voinova took bronze in women's team sprint on the track after getting silver in the event at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games. The 30-year-old racer is also a multiple world champion.

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Bengaluru's Adit

WE ARE USED TO DUKES BALL: AXAR



PTI ■ PORTSMOUTH

Switching from playing T20s to the longest format of the game is difficult but practising with the red ball through the IPL will help in the tough transition at the World Test Championship final against Australia, feels India all-rounder Axar Patel.

Most members of the Indian team head to the marquee event after playing T20 cricket in the IPL for over two months.

Additionally, while the SG balls are used to play the red-ball format in India, the Dukes ball will be used for the WTC final.

However, India are well prepared for the twin challenges. To familiarise themselves with the Dukes ball, which is used in English conditions, the 'Men in Blue' have been working with it.

"We knew about this before the start of the IPL. So even dur-

ing the IPL, it was discussed that we will bowl with the red ball," Axar told ICC.

"We had red balls, so we were using them. You know when and how to play, how much time you have. This mental switch from white ball to red ball is obviously tough, but we have enough time," Axar added.

The left-arm spinner, however, said that the focus is on hitting the right spot irrespective of the ball used.

"We switch from white ball to red ball. It is a similar switch to go from SG to Dukes, you have to use your talent and skill. You have to execute your plan, your bowling rhythm. Irrespective of the ball, if you bowl a good ball at a good spot, it works.

"So, that's what we're doing. Since the match is in England, which is different from India, we are planning what lines and

lengths will work here. The same thing in practice, we are good to go."

The first batch of Indian players, including the likes of Virat Kohli and Axar, landed in London early last week and have been preparing for the final, scheduled to be held at The Oval from June 7 to 11.

"Those who did not qualify (for IPL Playoffs) got more time. So I don't think there will be many problems because we have had a good time to prepare." "The difference is the Dukes ball remains shinier for longer. But during the IPL, we had ordered the ball, so were practising with it and have gotten used to it," Axar said.

The Indian team will also have to quickly adapt to the relatively cooler conditions in England, having played the IPL in sweltering heat.

"We came after playing IPL,

where it was 40-45 degrees in India. After that it feels great here. We have taken out our winter clothes and are roaming around wearing jumpers. It's also a bit windy. Whenever we come to the UK, we enjoy the weather. It remains a little cool, there is no heat."

In stark contrast to India's spin-friendly pitches, the conditions in England are more suited to swing bowling.

"Obviously, the conditions in India and England are different. The fast bowlers have more of a role here. In India, spinners play a more important role," Axar said. "The conditions are the same for both teams. In England, the wind assists swing bowling and offers good bounce if you bowl at the right spots.

"The team is getting together slowly, so the planning will go on. We'll leave the planning to our bowling coach."

Oz need to be wary of Pujara, Kohli: Ponting

PTI ■ LONDON

Australia will have to guard against the "thorn in their side" Cheteshwar Pujara and a "back at his best" Virat Kohli if they are to counter India in the World Test Championship final at The Oval next week, feels legendary cricketer Ricky Ponting.

India's Test batting mainstay Pujara could provide valuable insights to his teammates, having played extensively at Sussex in the English County Championship, while Kohli is at his absolute best having cracked two centuries and six half-tens for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the recently-concluded Indian Premier League.

"The Australian team will be talking about Virat, no doubt about it, and they'll be talking about Pujara. They're the two," Ponting said on 'The ICC Review.'

Pujara is known to relish the challenges thrown at him by Australian bowlers, having scored more Test runs and centuries against them than any other side, and his contribution would be crucial to India's chances of lifting the WTC trophy in their second attempt.

"Pujara has been a thorn in their side a lot in the past, and in Australia, and this wicket will potentially be a lot more like an Australian pitch. They know that they'll have to get him early," opined the former Australian captain.

Pujara, who bats at No. 3, has 2,033 runs and five centuries in 24 Tests against Australia, and skipper Rohit Sharma will hope he makes a couple of more vital contributions for the side in the



WTC final.

Kohli, apart from his sparkling form in the IPL, had smashed 186 in the fourth Test against Australia in March during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and would be itching to have a go at the Pat Cummins-led side.

"They also know that Virat over the last few weeks is probably just about back to his absolute best, albeit in T20 cricket. He told me that the feeling he's getting right now is that he's almost back to his best, and that's an ominous warning for the Australians going into a one-off game," said Ponting.

Ponting is also mightily impressed with young Shubman Gill's performance in the IPL and the 23-year-old's exploits in the last two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar series.

Gill hit three centuries for Gujarat Titans in IPL. "He looks like a terrific young guy. He's got that bit of attitude about him as



Australia head into the WTC final against India wary of their dismal Oval record

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

As Australia begin preparations for the World Test Championship final against India, the men from Down Under would be eager to put their past struggles at The Oval behind them.

In over 140 years of Test cricket in England, Australia have had one of the worst records at The Oval, which will host the final from June 7 to 11 between the top two Test sides.

Australia, who played at The Oval in 1880 in what was the first-ever Test in England, have managed a mere seven wins from 38 Tests at the famous South London venue, putting their success rate at the venue at 18.42 per cent, their poorest across England.

Australia have won just twice in the past 50 years at The Oval. On the other hand, they have 17 wins from 29 matches at The Lord's at a success rate of 43.59 per cent, which is better than hosts England's 39.72 per cent from 141 games and South Africa's 33.33 per cent at the same venue.

Australia have a success rate of 34.62 per cent at Headingley, 30.43 per cent at Trent Bridge, and 29.03 per cent and 26.67 per cent at Old Trafford and Edgbaston respectively.

India, on the other hand, haven't fared too well at the venue either having won two, drawn seven and lost five games. But the Rohit Sharma-led side will be boosted by the 157-run win over England here in 2021, which was its first victory at the venue in a Test match in 40 years.

According to cricket.com.au, Australia will have their first full training session in the UK on Thursday in Beckenham, which is 20km from central London.

Pat Cummins and his men will train at Kent's out-ground across the weekend as both sides will be granted access to facilities at The Oval only two days prior to the fixture.

And while The Oval is likely to favour the pacers, Beckenham is known to have a batter-friendly track.

Australia finished the 2021-23 WTC cycle on top of the table, their only loss being the 2-1 away defeat to India earlier this year.

They haven't beaten the Men in Blue, both home and away, in eight years — four successive series defeats.



Key for both teams will be to dismiss Smith and Kohli early: Finch

PTI ■ LONDON

Former captain Aaron Finch believes that he will put his money on Steve Smith even though Australia will also need to get rid of star India batter Virat Kohli as early as possible in what promises to be an enticing World Test Championship final, starting June 7 at the Oval here.

"Both (Kohli and Smith) will be batting at number four, so the key is to try and get them as early as possible. Early wickets to expose them to the brand new ball will be absolutely key. I will always side with Steve Smith, I think his record is outstanding, but it will be a very good contest," Finch told Star Sports.

India vs Australia rivalry brings out the best in both teams, he said.

"I think the rivalry is held in such high regard in both countries, that I think it brings out the best in both teams," he added.

"Obviously, India has had the better of Australia in the last three series I think, so both teams will rise to the occasion no matter where it's played, at home or away or this time at neutral territory. It's just a must watch thing."



'Conway has caught Williamson bug to keep learning'

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Former New Zealand spinner John Bracewell believes charismatic batter Devon Conway has caught the "Kane Williamson bug" to "keep learning from past mistakes and making rapid improvements in his batting technique."

Conway, a late entrant into the New Zealand setup at 29, took the cricketing world by storm by smashing a double hundred on Test debut against England in 2021 to become only the seventh batter to do so in the longest format.

Conway, now 31, also played a vital role for Chennai Super Kings in only his second IPL season, scoring six half-centuries and aggregating 672 runs with a highest of an unbeaten 92 and an average touching 52.

His opening partnerships with Ruturaj Gaikwad formed the cornerstone of CSK's record-equalling fifth title. The all-format New Zealand cricketer was third on the IPL's Orange Cap list behind Shubman Gill and RCB's South African skipper Faf du Plessis.

"I think he's been an absolute magician in terms of his adaptability to all three formats, his skillset and his (growth)," Bracewell, who played 41 Tests garnering 102 wickets and 1000-plus runs, told Sen Radio.

"I like the way he's become

ing a better cricketer all the time, so he's obviously caught the Kane Williamson bug of being a learner, not a guy that actually just sits there and relies on being talented," said the 65-year-old. Conway has so far amassed 1212 Test, 508 ODI and 632 T20I runs, and Bracewell believes the cricketer can rival the best in the business.

"His game is just continuing to progress and that's something that Kane Williamson had introduced into the New Zealand side along with (former wicketkeeper) B.J. Watling.

"That's something that Devon Conway's picked up and moved forward with him taking it to another dimension."

Bracewell believes Conway will play a huge role during the ODI World Cup, scheduled to be held in India in October-November this year, given that Williamson would unlikely have recovered completely from an ACL injury he suffered in the IPL.

"He's one of a series of components, but he's certainly an important one," said Bracewell.

"One, that he knows those (Indian) conditions (and) two, that he's extremely adaptable in terms of how he's opening the batting in T20. So he has that adaptability to be able to move up and down the order and fit in, so that makes him a good replacement for somebody like Kane."

Dhoni undergoes knee surgery: CSK CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni successfully underwent a left knee surgery in a Mumbai hospital on Thursday, raising hopes of playing in the 17th edition of Indian Premier League next year.

Dhoni, who led Chennai Super Kings to their fifth IPL title, had flown to Mumbai from Ahmedabad after the final on Monday and consulted renowned sports orthopaedic surgeon Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, who is also on the BCCI medical panel and had performed surgeries on a number of top Indian cricketers, including Rishabh Pant.

"Yes, Dhoni has had a successful knee surgery at the Kokilaben Hospital in Mumbai on Thursday. He is doing fine and the surgery happened in the morning. I don't have details. I am yet to get all the details about



the nature of surgery and other things," CSK CEO Kasi Viswanathan confirmed to PTI.

"He will be discharged in a day or two. He would be resting for a few days before his extensive rehabilitation starts. It is now expected that he would have enough time to get fit to play in the next IPL," another source close to CSK management told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Dhoni had played the entire season with heavy strapping on his left knee and while he looked absolutely fine during wicket-keeping, he came into bat as low as No. 8 at times and didn't look in his element while running between the wickets.

On Wednesday, Viswanathan had said that whether Dhoni wants to undergo surgery

will be completely the iconic captain's call.

After the IPL final, Dhoni had said: "If you circumstantially see, it's the best time to announce retirement. The easy thing for me to say is thank you and retire. But the hard thing to do is to work hard for nine months and try to play one more IPL season. The body has to hold up. But the amount of love I have received from CSK fans, it would be a gift for them to play one more season.

"The way they've shown their love and emotion, it's something I need to do for them. It's the last part of my career. It started over here and full house was chanting my name. It was same thing in Chennai, but it will be good to come back and play whatever I can. The kind of cricket I play, they feel they can play that cricket. There's nothing orthodox about it and I like to keep it simple."

Ronaldo absent with injury as Saudi soccer season ends

AP ■ RIYADH

Cristiano Ronaldo's first season in Saudi Arabia came to an end, although the star forward was absent as Al-Nassr beat Al-Fateh 3-0 to finish in second place in the league.

Ronaldo, who signed for the Riyadh club in December before scoring 14 goals in 16 league games, picked up a muscle injury four days previously and was rested ahead of Portugal's European Championship qualifiers against Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iceland in June.

In the 38-year-old Ronaldo's absence on Wednesday, Anderson Talisca took center stage to score twice. He also assisted Mohammed Marwan for a third. Al-Ittihad, which had already secured the league championship in the penultimate round, celebrated a first title since 2009 with a 2-0 win against Al-Tai.



Abderazak Hamdallah of Morocco opened the scoring with a second-half penalty that also secured the golden boot with his 21st goal of the season. Former Leeds United and Wolverhampton winger Helder Costa added the second in injury time. It's the first league title won by coach Nuno Santo, just 18 months after the Portuguese tactician was dismissed by Tottenham Hotspur in the English Premier League.

Al-Hilal, champions last season, finished in third spot with a 3-2 win over Al-Raed.

The league will expand from 16 to 18 teams next season.

Pathirana set to make ODI debut ahead of WC qualifiers

AP ■ HAMBANTOTA



Sri Lanka has unleashed some special bowling talents ahead of big events over the years.

In the case of Lasith Malinga, he was thrown into the deep end during a so-called Top End tour of Australia in 2004. In the case of Ajantha Mendis, he was introduced just before the Asia Cup and he starred with six wickets against India in the final as Sri Lanka clinched the trophy in 2008.

The same blueprint is to be followed with 20-year-old Matheesha Pathirana, who will make his ODI debut in the three-match series against Afghanistan that gets underway on Friday.

Although Pathirana has played just one Twenty20 International, he is already a star after performing a key role for Chennai in the Super Kings' run to a record fifth Indian Premier League title.

Pathirana bowls with a unique round-arm action and Sri Lankans hope that he'll be quite a handful for batters during the World Cup qualifiers later this month in Zimbabwe. Sri Lanka, which won the 1996 World Cup title and has twice been runner-up, needs to go through qualifying because of its slide down the International Cricket Council rankings in the one-day format.

Afghanistan has no such issues after qualifying automatically for the showpiece event later this year in India.

Bowling is Afghanistan's strength, with three Afghan players featuring in the list of top 10 bowlers in official ICC rankings. Leg-spinner Rashid Khan will miss the first two games because

of a lower-back injury, but off-spinners Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi will find the conditions in Hambantota to their liking.

Afghanistan also has left-arm wrist spinner Noor Ahmed, who was quite a handful for Gujarat Titans during the IPL.

Although bowling is the team's strong point, Afghanistan also some solid batting.

Ibrahim Zadran showcased that he is a star in the making during the ICC Under-19 World Cup and since graduating to the senior side, he has smashed three centuries in just eight one-dayers. That includes a career-best 162, the highest score by an Afghan in ODIs.

Friday's series-opener will be the first international to be staged at Hambantota in more than three years.

The series was hastily arranged after Sri Lanka failed to automatically qualify for the World Cup, and will provide an opportunity for the selectors to take a final look at some of the players before they submit the squad to the ICC before the June 10 deadline.

Sri Lanka has recalled test captain Dimuth Karunaratne to the squad. Karunaratne was fired as ODI captain and dropped from the squad in 2021. However, with the batting unit not able to utilize the full quota of 50 overs often enough, the need for Karunaratne's stable presence has been felt.

The hosts also have recalled fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera, who is returning after seven months following ankle surgery.

SQUADS:

SRI LANKA: Dasun Shanaka (captain), Kusal Mendis (vice-captain) Pathum Nissanka, Dimuth Karunaratne, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Angelo Mathews, Dhananjaya de Silva, Charith Asalanka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Maheesh Theekshana, Dushan Hemantha, Chamika Karunaratne, Dushmantha Chameera, Matheesha Pathirana, Lahiru Kumara, Kasun Rajitha.

AFGHANISTAN: Hashmatullah Shahidi (captain), Rahmat Shah (vice-captain), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Riaz Hassan, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Ikram Alikhail, Azmatullah Omarzai, Rashid Khan, Mujib ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Abdul Rahman, Fazal Haq Farooqi, Farid Ahmad Malik.

You had a lot of selfish characters playing for England: Harmison

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England pacer Steve Harmison has hinted that quite a few senior players in the side did not contribute to the team spirit in the late 90s and early 2000s, but all that changed during the 2005 Ashes series, which the hosts won 2-1.

Responding to former Australian quick Jason Gillespie's assessment that he had noticed a big change in the England side during the 2005 Ashes, Harmison, who was part of the 2005 side, said that, "The difference between that and 2003,

2001 and 1999, 1997, was in 2005 we were a team."

Gillespie had suggested that he had never seen such camaraderie in the England team during previous series between the two sides.

"I noticed a big difference in the England side in the '05 Ashes... we'd never felt that as an Australian side before," Gillespie told 'Sen Radio' on Thursday.

"England would normally go out in dribs or drabs going onto the field... (but this time) it was really noticeable that as soon as the umpires walked out there,



(England skipper) Michael Vaughan was straight out there, everyone was straight out there, quick chat and then they would literally run to their fielding positions, the bowler would run

and hand his cap to the umpire and before our batters were halfway onto the ground, the whole England team was set up ready to play, ready to rock," added Gillespie.

Harmison, 44, who played 63 Tests taking 226 wickets, said quite a few "selfish" players contributed to the poor culture in the England side.

"We'd grown up as a team, we played as a team and we behaved off the field like a team (in 2005). In 1997, 2001, 2003/04, you had a lot of selfish characters playing for England," said Harmison.

"Some great cricketers, don't get me wrong... but when you look at — and I've got no problem saying this — the likes of Nasser (Hussain), Athers (Michael Atherton), Thorpey (Graham Thorpe), Corkey (Dominic Cork), Darren Gough, Andy Caddock, there was a group of individuals playing all together as a team where you look at 2005, we were a team," added Harmison.

Harmison added that even though Australian cricketers might have had differences, they were swept aside for the common good of the side.