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NEW DELHI, FRIDAY JUNE 30, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3

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Drama mars Rahul's Imphal trip

Cong slams stopping of Gandhi's convoy by cops; leader takes chopper to relief camp, says Manipur needs peace and healing

PNS ■ IMPHAL
Ethnic strife-torn Manipur witnessed high drama on Thursday as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's visit to relief camps in Churachandpur was met with obstacles when his convoy was stopped by the police midway. Gandhi had to resort to taking a helicopter to reach his destination. During his interaction with the people sheltering in relief camps, Gandhi emphasised the need for healing and prioritising peace in Manipur.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi after being stopped by the Manipur Police, in Bishnupur district on Thursday. After arriving at Imphal, he was travelling in a convoy to Churachandpur to visit relief camps in the area when police halted his convoy. PTI

The blocking of Gandhi's convoy sparked a political slugfest, with the Congress alleging that the BJP-led Government was attempting to thwart the leader's visit, while the saffron party accused Gandhi of being "stubborn" for choosing a road trip despite advice to take a helicopter due to opposition from various quarters. Expressing his disappointment, Gandhi tweeted, "People of all communities are very welcoming and loving. It's very unfortunate that the Government is stopping me." He further stated in another Twitter post, "I came to listen to all my brothers and sisters of Manipur. Manipur needs healing. Peace has to be our only priority."

Cong, BJP spar over Rahul's visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
In a visit that sparked a heated exchange between political parties, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi's trip to strife-torn Manipur became a point of contention between the Congress and the BJP on Thursday. The Congress accused the Modi Government of obstructing Rahul's attempt to reach out to the victims of violence and offer solace, while the BJP criticised Rahul's behaviour as "irresponsible," claiming that it had triggered fresh unrest in the State. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that the local police, acting on the orders of the Modi Government, halted Rahul Gandhi's convoy near Bishnupur. He called it "totally unacceptable and a violation of constitutional and democratic norms. Gandhi's convoy in Manipur has been halted by the police near Bishnupur. He intended to visit the people suffering in relief camps and extend a healing touch to the strife-torn state. PM Modi has remained silent on the situation in Manipur, leaving the state to fend for itself," Kharge said. Responding to the incident, BJP national spokesperson and Manipur in-charge Sambit Patra criticized Rahul Gandhi's visit. *Continued on Page 2*

2 killed, 5 hurt in fighting with security forces

PTI ■ IMPHAL
Two suspected rioters were killed and five injured in an exchange of fire with security personnel at Haraothel village in Kangpokpi district of Manipur on Thursday morning, officials said. They said armed rioters opened unprovoked firing at the village. The army said security forces personnel "responded in a calibrated manner" to tackle the situation. Two suspected armed rioters were killed and five were injured in the exchange of fire in the village, the officials said. Another rioter was also believed to have been killed, but the body is yet to be retrieved as the spot witnessed intermittent firing, they said. Later in the day, members of the community to which the two rioters belonged collected their bodies and took out a procession to the chief minister's residence in Imphal, the officials said. As police stopped them from marching to the Chief Minister's residence, the processionists turned violent, they said, adding police used tear gas shells and resorted to lathi-charge to disperse the mob. Giving details of the morning firing, the official Twitter handle of the army, operating in the region, stated armed rioters opened unprovoked firing at 5.30 am. "Own troops deployed in the area immediately mobilised to prevent escalation of situation. While enroute to the site, own columns drew effective fire from armed rioters," the official "Spear Corps" handle of the army said. *Continued on Page 2*

TN Gov takes back dismissal of jailed Min

Ravi had removed Balaji without CM's consent, Stalin Govt had vowed to take legal action

PNS ■ CHENNAI
In a surprising turn of events, Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi revoked his highly contentious decision on Thursday night to dismiss Minister V Senthil Balaji from the Council of Ministers. The move, made without consulting Chief Minister MK Stalin, has ignited a heated standoff with the DMK Government in the State which had vowed to take legal action over the issue. Minister Balaji, who is currently imprisoned and facing criminal charges in a corruption case involving an alleged cash-for-jobs scandal, had been retained by Chief Minister Stalin as a Minister without portfolio. However, Governor Ravi unilaterally chose to reverse this decision earlier in the day. As legal experts raised concerns about the legality of the Governor's order, sources from the Governor's office stated that he was seeking advice from the Attorney General and keeping the decision in abeyance. They further confirmed that Balaji would continue to serve as a Minister for the time being. Chief Minister Stalin vehemently criticised the Governor, asserting that he does not possess the authority to dismiss a sitting Minister. He vowed to take legal action in response to the Governor's actions. According to news agency PTI,



Stalin declared, "The Governor does not have the right to dismiss a sitting Minister, and we will challenge this legally." An official statement released by Raj Bhavan, the Governor's residence, indicated that Balaji is facing multiple criminal proceedings related to corruption. It is alleged that he abused his position as a Minister to manipulate ongoing investigations and obstruct the due process of law and justice. The statement emphasised the concern that allowing Balaji to remain in the Council of Ministers could have a detrimental impact on the due process of law, including fair investigation, potentially leading to a breakdown of the Constitutional machinery in the State. Consequently, the Governor promptly dismissed Balaji from the Council of Ministers, effective immediately. The statement from Raj Bhavan clarified, "Minister Thiru V Senthil Balaji is facing serious criminal charges in several corruption cases, including allegations of accepting bribes for job placements and engaging in money laundering. By misusing his position as a minister, he has been interfering with investigations and impeding the course of law and justice." Supporters of the DMK, including Left parties, rallied behind the ruling party and condemned the Governor's actions. Political analyst Durai Karuna pointed out that the Chief Minister has the exclusive authority to appoint or remove Ministers from the Cabinet. DMK leader A Saravanan accused the Governor of undermining the Constitution, stating that the order dismissing Balaji from the State's Council of Ministers is "not even worth the paper it was drafted on." He criticised the Governor's actions, proclaiming, "The Governor is disregarding the Constitution. He is pandering to his political masters. The law of the land is not determined by personal beliefs. A Governor should uphold the Constitution above all. His order is utterly meaningless and should be discarded." *Continued on Page 2*

Modi Cabinet rejig in offing?

PM to meet Council of Mins on July 3 after holding talks with top BJP leaders

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to chair a crucial meeting of the Union Council of Ministers on July 3, officials announced on Thursday. The meeting comes following intensive discussions held by Modi with top leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), fueling speculation about a potential reshuffle in his Council of Ministers. The July 3 meeting is expected to take place at the newly-constructed convention centre in Pragati Maidan, which is also set to host the G20 summit in September. Earlier this week, Modi engaged in extensive deliberations with Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president JP Nadda,



and other prominent leaders. Nadda's participation in the meeting has prompted speculation regarding possible changes in both, the Government and the BJP organisation, including at the State-level. These discussions coincide with the party's preparations for crucial Assembly elections scheduled later this year, as well as the highly-anticipated 2024 Lok Sabha polls. In recent days, Shah, Nadda, and BJP general secretary (Organisation) BL Santosh

have held multiple rounds of deliberations, focusing on organisational and political matters. The Council of Ministers' meeting is scheduled just before the Monsoon Session of Parliament, which is expected to commence in the third week of July. Notably, there has not been a significant reshuffle in the Modi Cabinet for almost two years. However, in May, the demise of Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Rattan Lal Kataria, created a vacancy that was subsequently filled by Arjun Ram Meghwal. The last major reshuffle took place in July 2021 when 12 Ministers were removed from the Modi Government and 17 new Ministers were sworn in. During the previous reshuffle, notable figures such as Ravi Shankar Prasad, Harsh Vardhan, Prakash Javadekar, Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank and Santosh Gangwar were among those removed from the Cabinet. *Continued on Page 2*

Vehicle used in attack on Ravan recovered

Bhim Army chief discharged from hospital, seeks Yogi's resignation

PNS ■ LUCKNOW
The Uttar Pradesh (UP) police have recovered the vehicle used by the attackers who targeted Dalit leader and Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad alias Ravan. The vehicle was found in a village in Saharanpur district. In a related development, the police in Amethi district have registered a case of criminal intimidation under Section 506 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) after it was revealed that a Facebook page had issued a death threat to Azad prior to the attack. Activists of the Bhim Army

and Azad Samaj Party staged a demonstration at Parivartan Chowk, demanding increased security measures for Azad. However, they were subsequently taken into police custody. Unidentified assailants had opened fire at Azad's car in Saharanpur's Deoband on Wednesday evening, as he was attending a ritual at a supporter's home. A bullet grazed Azad's abdomen, resulting in injuries. The vehicle used in the attack was seized from Miragpur Village late on Wednesday night. The registration plate indicated that the car was registered in Haryana, according to police sources. Superintendent of Police (Dehat Saharanpur) Sagar Jain confirmed that Azad who was receiving treatment at Saharanpur District Hospital was stable. *Continued on Page 2*

Next Opp meet in B'luru

Venue changed from Shimla due to heavy rain, says Pawar

PNS ■ MUMBAI
The forthcoming Opposition meeting, aimed at devising a united strategy against the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), will now take place in Bengaluru on July 13 and 14, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar said on Thursday. The change in venue from Shimla to Bengaluru was prompted by heavy rainfall in Himachal Pradesh, making Bengaluru a more suitable location. Following the first Opposition meeting in Patna on June 23, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said that the next meeting would be held in Shimla. "After our initial meeting, we have now decided to hold



the second meeting of the Opposition party in Bengaluru on July 13 and 14. We made this decision today, as the intended venue in Shimla was unsuitable due to heavy rainfall. In Bengaluru, we will focus on strategising and maintaining unity as we prepare to face the upcoming elections together. Additionally, we will work on devising a robust plan to address communal tensions and the alleged misuse of central forces in various States," Pawar said. The Opposition parties are striving to streamline their efforts and present a cohesive agenda to challenge the BJP in the forthcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections. During the Patna meeting, which lasted for four hours, there were spirited exchanges between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The AAP has expressed its unwillingness to participate in future Opposition meetings involving the Congress until the party publicly denounces the Central Government's contentious Ordinance regarding the control of administrative services in Delhi. *Continued on Page 2*

CAPSULE

ALL PANCHAYATS TO BE UPI-ENABLED SOON
New Delhi: All panchayats across the country will mandatorily use digital payments for all development work and revenue collection this Independence Day onwards, and will be declared UPI-enabled, a letter issued by the Panchayati Raj Ministry said.

SUNAK HONOURS SIKH WW-II VETERAN
London: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has honoured Rajindar Singh Dhatt, one of the last surviving Sikh soldiers who fought in the Second World War with a Points of Light honour at a UK-India Week reception at 10 Downing Street. Dhatt, 101, was recognised for his service and his work running the 'Undivided Indian Ex-Servicemen's Association' to help bring together British Indian veterans.

'US Predator drones will be 27% cheaper'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
A day after Congress alleged that India was procuring MQ-9B Predator armed drones from the US at a higher price and demanded complete transparency in the proposed deal, a senior Government functionary claimed on Thursday that the average estimated cost would be 27 per cent lower than the price incurred by other countries. Making this assertion, the functionary also said the price may further dip during negotiations unless India seeks additional features. He also stated so far negotiations on the pricing issue have not begun. He also clarified that the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) on June 15 accorded "acceptance of necessity" and the pricing issue is not part of

Walkway tragedy: Woman loses leg at airport

Passenger's trapped leg had to be amputated from above knee to extricate her

AP ■ BANGKOK
A woman's leg had to be amputated in a Thai airport after it was trapped by a movable walkway Thursday, officials said. The 57-year-old Thai passenger was due to board a morning flight from Bangkok's Don Mueang Airport to the southern Nakhon Si Thammarat province when she was caught by the walkway in the airport's Terminal 2. A medical team there eventually had to cut her left leg off from above the knee, according to the airport's officials.

"On behalf of the Don Mueang International Airport, I'd like to express my deepest condolences regarding the accident," Don Mueang Airport Director Karun Thanakuljeer-apat said during a news conference. "I'd like to insist that we will ensure that no such accident will happen again." He said the airport will be fully responsible for the woman's medical costs and will be open for negotiations on other compensations. The medical team at the hospital she was initially sent to, informed Karun that they could not reattach her leg, but the woman requested to be transferred to another hospital to assess the possibility, he said. Images shared online showed the lower part of the woman's leg trapped beneath the belt at the end of the walkway as she was being assisted by airport staff. A suitcase lying near



her was missing two wheels, and the yellow comb-like plates were seen broken off from where they typically cover the edge of the belt where the moving walkway ends. Karun said the suitcase wheels were found underneath the belt, but it was unclear how it might relate to the accident. He said walkways at the airport are checked daily, with an additional monthly inspection. He said the walkway has been closed and a team of engineers was inspecting it to determine the cause of the accident. The walkway was manufactured by Japanese company Hitachi and was installed in 1996, the airport director said, adding that there is a plan to request for a budget to change to a newer model in 2025. In 2019, a passenger's shoe was damaged after it was caught in the airport's moving walkway in Terminal 1. The airport released a statement afterward saying the faulty walkway was repaired and reopened in about an hour.

I bowled a googly, claimed Fadnavis wicket: NCP chief

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In significant disclosure, the INCP chief Sharad Pawar says that he had "bowled a googly" to senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis that claimed the latter's wicket, leading to the fall of the Fadnavis-Ajit Pawar government within 89 hours of its formation in November 2019.

A day after Fadnavis claimed in a television interview that after having agreed to form a government in alliance with the BJP in November 2019, Pawar had reneged on his extending support to his government, Pawar said: "We had to do certain things to expose the BJP's lust for power... I had then bowled a googly to Fadnavis that claimed his wicket. He has not spoken about that".

It may be recalled that on November 26, 2019, the BJP's much-discussed surreptitious effort to install its government had fizzled out, as then chief minister Devendra Fadnavis resigned from his post after the NCP's breakaway group leader



Ajit Pawar pulled out of the new dispensation under tremendous pressure from the parent party leaders. On his part, Fadnavis had in a television interview claimed that claimed Sharad Pawar agreed to form government with the BJP in November 2019 and then backed off from the agreement three to four days three-four days to four days before the swearing-in ceremony of the BJP-led government.

Talking to media persons in Pune, Pawar indirectly admitted that his party had agreed to support the BJP-led government, when he said that ahead of the formation of a government in the state, the BJP leaders had met the NCP leadership and had discussions on sever-

al things. "But he (Fadnavis) himself said yesterday that I changed the decision to go with the BJP two to three days earlier (before the swearing-in ceremony).

Going by Fadnavis' own claim that if I had changed the decision, what was the reason for him to go ahead and take the oath of office, and that too so discreetly in the early hours of the morning," Pawar said. "If Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar had the NCP's support, wouldn't the BJP-led government have survived? The government fell, and he (Fadnavis) had to resign... At that time.

certain things were done to expose before the public how far they (BJP) can go for power... There was a need to bring out that they could not live without power," the NCP chief said. Alluding to his remark of "howling a googly" to Fadnavis, Pawar said: "My father-in-law Sadu Shinde was a test cricketer. He used to bowl googlies and had taken the wickets of several good batsmen of his time.

6,889 women have gone missing in Maha in last one year: Pawar

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a staunch criticism of the Fadnavis-Shinde government in Maharashtra, NCP chief Sharad Pawar claimed here that more than 6,889 women-girls had gone missing in various parts of the state during the last one year - from May 2022 to 2023.

Little over a week after he had claimed that 391 distressed farmers had committed suicide during the last five months in the state, a staggering 3,152 children had gone missing during the period, the NCP chief said: "As many as 6,889 women-girls have gone missing during the past one year - from May 2022-May 2023". Giving the break-up of missing cases, Pawar said: "During the first half of 2023 -- from January 2023 to May 2023, a total of 2,458 girls-women have gone in four major corporation areas. They comprise: 738 from Mumbai, 937 from Pune, 721



from Thane and 62 from Solapur". Quoting the statistics collated by the police, Pawar said that a total of 4,431 females have disappeared from 14 districts of Amravati, Beed, Bhandara, Buldhana, Chandrapur, Dhule, Gondia, Jalgaon, Nandurbar, Nanded, Pune, Raigad, Ratnagiri and Washim "In essence, during the past one year i.e., from May 2022 to May 2023 - a staggering 6,889 women-girls have gone missing in the state with no information on their whereabouts," Pawar said.

Chahat Pandey joins AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

TV actress Chahat Pandey joined the AAP here on Thursday saying she was impressed by the party's ideology and wanted to work for the welfare of the people of her home state Madhya Pradesh. She was welcomed into the party by Sandeep Pathak, who holds the charge of national general secretary (organisation).

"There is rampant corruption in Madhya Pradesh. BJP and Congress are no different and both have literally exploited the state to fulfil



their own motives. People want to give a chance to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the state," he said. The Rajya Sabha MP said Pandey has left the world of showbiz to venture into politics. "Today, she feels that her state needs her. She is leaving her successful career as

an actress. The people of Damoh look up to her," he added. Pandey, who has worked in TV shows like Pavitra Bandhan and Hamari Bahi Silk, said she had been living in Mumbai for the last seven to eight years and working as an actor. "Everyone lives and earns for themselves.

But we have some duties towards our home state, our country. I want to fulfil those duties. I come from a small place, Damoh in Madhya Pradesh. No one knows Damoh. People say it is near Bhopal. I want them to know Damoh," she said.

I-T dept launches tax-evasion probe against social media influencers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The income-tax department has launched a probe against certain social media influencers and content creators on platforms like YouTube and Instagram for allegedly not showing their income and profits commensurate with their earnings, official sources said on Thursday.

The department initiated the action last week after it searched about 10 YouTubers and other social media influencers - mostly young artists and actors - in Kerala.

The sources said a "data analytics" investigation undertaken by the department found out that these social media influencers and online content creators are making "substantial" earnings but either not showing or under-reporting it

in their income tax returns (ITRs) or filings, largely due to ignorance of tax laws.

Social media influencers and online content creators are those who have the power to address online and affect their audiences' purchasing decisions or opinions about a product, service, brand or experience because of their authority, knowledge, position or relationship with their audience.

The individuals searched in Kerala were treated "very gently" by the tax department during the process of evidence gathering and even during the recording of their statements, the sources said.

These individuals were also issued notices as part of taking forward the probe so that their "exact tax liability" is determined, they added.

Teenaged girl gangraped in Shahbad Dairy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 16-year-old girl was allegedly gangraped on the evening of June 27 in Delhi's Shahbad Dairy area. The victim was sitting with her friend in a park when three people came, took turns to rape her and fled the spot.

All the four accused were identified and three of them, including a juvenile, were nabbed. One accused is absconding and efforts are underway to apprehend him. Two arrested accused have been identified as Bobby (19) and Rahul (20), both residents of the Shahbad Dairy area. One accused is absconding and efforts are underway to apprehend him, police said.

Vehicle used in attack on Ravan recovered

From Page 1

Later in the day Azad was discharged from hospital, and 36-year-old Bhim Army chief said he was feeling better and his blood pressure was stable. "I am taking medicine for the pain and hope that I will be fine

in the next two-three days," he said. Earlier, in a note posted on Twitter, Azad demanded Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's resignation, claiming his Government is providing protection to criminals on the basis of caste and religion. During the day, the hospital premises saw a heavy deployment of police personnel as

Azad's supporters began gathering, demanding the immediate arrest of the attackers and raising slogans.

The police have taken the death threat issued by the Facebook page 'Kshatriya of Amethi' seriously and registered a case against unidentified individuals under Section 506 of the IPC and relevant

provisions of the IT Act. Deputy Superintendent of Police, Gauriganj, Mayank Dwivedi, stated that the police are investigating the matter. The Facebook page had posted a threat five days prior to the attack, stating that Azad would be killed by the Thakurs of Amethi at a road crossing in broad daylight. Another post

shared on Thursday claimed that Azad had been shot in the waist and warned that he would not survive the next time. The post emphasised the need for Azad's security, including a bulletproof vehicle and jacket, given his Intelligence. It also warned of a significant movement if any innocent Rajput is falsely implicated in the attack.

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Mrs. Meenu Pareek and Mr. Jiten Pareek had entered into an Agreement to sell for purchase of Entire Second Floor of Property No. 131 (OLD) & 158 (New), measuring 210 Sq.Yards, out of Khari No. 189/150, situated in the area of Village Gharhi Jharia Maria, Sant Nagar, East of Kailash, New Delhi from Mr. Pawan Gupta (30% share), Mr. Arun Kumar Mittal (35% share) and Shri Raj Kumar Saini (35% share) who are registered owners vide Sale Deed dated 31.08.2020 which has been executed by Shri Ashok Kumar Bhatia, Shri Vijay Pratap Bhatia and Smt. Neelam Bhatia who had inherited the Entire Property by virtue of Relinquishment Deed dated 27.01.2015 executed by the legal heirs of Late Smt. Pushpa Rani Bhatia, Late Shri Daulat Ram Bhatia and Late Shri Ashwani Kumar Bhatia and except the legal heirs as mentioned in said Relinquishment Deed dated 27.01.2015, there are no other legal heirs remains of Late Smt. Pushpa Rani Bhatia, Late Shri Daulat Ram Bhatia and Late Shri Ashwani Kumar Bhatia, and my clients is mortgaging the same to HDFC Ltd. If anybody including Bank, Financial Institutions, persons, relative has any claim, right, interest whatsoever in the said property shall inform within 7 days to the undersigned with documentary evidence. In the event of no response to this notice, than our client shall presume that title of the said property is unencumbered and clear.

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(By Order), ECL
VISIT US AT www.easterncoal.nic.in

Drama mars Rahul's Imphal trip

From Page 1

To disperse the mob, the police employed tear gas shells. After being stuck for a few hours in Bishnupur, Gandhi returned to Imphal airport and took a helicopter to Churachandpur, one of the towns worst affected by the ethnic riots that occurred in the state nearly two months ago.

A source at the airport confirmed, "Rahul Gandhi took a chopper provided by the state government to visit Churachandpur. Top police and administration officials accompanied him in the heli-

copter." The Congress alleged that the BJP governments at the central and state levels employed "autocratic methods" to obstruct Gandhi's visit. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge tweeted, "The 'double-engine disastrous' governments are using autocratic methods to stall a compassionate outreach by Shri Rahul Gandhi.

This is totally unacceptable and shatters all constitutional and democratic norms." He added, "He is going there to meet the people suffering in relief camps and to provide a healing touch in the strife-

tor state." The state president of the Congress, Keisham Meghachandra, accused Chief Minister N Biren Singh of ordering the convoy's halt, despite the welcoming atmosphere. Meghachandra stated, "The order to stop Gandhi's convoy came from Chief Minister N Biren Singh as everyone was welcoming him."

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) also criticized the central government after Gandhi's convoy was halted by the local police, alleging that it reflects the BJP's "desperation." TMC Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien

explained a police officer. To date, more than 100 people have lost their lives in ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities in north-eastern state. The clashes initially erupted on May 3 following a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organized in hill districts to protest against Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Manipur's population consists of approximately 53% Meiteis, who predominantly reside in Imphal Valley, and around 40% tribals—Nagas and Kukis—who inhabit hill districts.

Police sources reported that tires were set on fire on the highway near Ulo village in Bishnupur district, and a few stones were thrown at the convoy. "We feared a repetition of such events, and hence, as a precaution, requested the convoy to halt at Bishnupur,"

explained a police officer. To date, more than 100 people have lost their lives in ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities in north-eastern state. The clashes initially erupted on May 3 following a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organized in hill districts to protest against Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Manipur's population consists of approximately 53% Meiteis, who predominantly reside in Imphal Valley, and around 40% tribals—Nagas and Kukis—who inhabit hill districts.

Office of the Superintending Engineer, Construction Circle, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Haldwani

(E-mail : eedujnramnagar@gmail.com, Phone: 05947-251259)

Letter No. 2225 / 613 / 215 Date:- 28-06-2023

E-Tender Notice (Revised)
Name of the work:- Supply, Carting, Laying, Jointing of DI-K7 pipe and G.I.(M) pipe in distribution, with all fittings & appurtenant works, for proper completion of work, as specified in BOQ of tender document including confirmatory survey, testing and commissioning (with one year DLP) on item rate contract basis including supply of all materials, labour and T&P etc. complete under Kaladhungi source augmentation & Strengthening W/S Scheme, Block-Kotabagh (Nainital)

1	Date of Calling of tenders	28-06-2023
2	Date of Online Publication	29-06-2023 at 17:00 hrs.
3	Document download : Start Date	30-06-2023 at 10:00 hrs.
4	Pre Bid Meeting	02-07-2023 at 13:00 hrs.
5	Bid Submission : Start date	03-07-2023 at 10:00 hrs.
6	Bid Submission : End date	10-07-2023 at 17:00 hrs.
7	Offline submission of documents (Cost of bidding document, Bid Security, Original Affidavits & all the Supporting Documents in support of qualification)	11-07-2023 upto 17:00 hrs.
8	Date of Technical Bid Opening	12-07-2023 at 11:00 hrs.
9	Date of Financial Bid Opening	To be announced later

Note:- For full details of the tender, corrigendum and cancellation etc., please log-in to the website www.uktenders.gov.in
Superintending Engineer

कार्यालय पर्यावरण वानिकी वनमंडल भोपाल (म.प्र.)

पता- सी.पी.ए. बिल्डिंग ई-5 अरेरा कॉलोनी, बिट्टन मार्केट भोपाल-462016

E-Mail :- dfoevaniki.bp@mp.gov.in Phone :- 0755-246079

Corrigendum

Following changes may kindly be noted for submission of technical and financial proposal for the REOI for "Assessment and Valuation of Plantation done under Paryavarvan Vaniki Vanmandal, Bhopal (Former Capital Project Forestry Wing), Bhopal in terms of Ecological and Project Impact Assessment, Biodiversity assessment, Carbon Stocks measurement and Ecosystem Services Valuation"

- Page 2** : at the end of paragraph 1, following will be added: "the consulting firm will include Firms, Companies, Societies, NOG's Public Sector undertakings, academic institutions etc. Application deadline as mentioned in Sl. No 5 to be read as" 15.07.2023 in Place of "30.06.2023"
- Page 5**
- Scope of work**, point 2 will read as below
- Satellite image analysis (pre and current) using google images for the project sites (1986 to 2002), if and where available, on google earth.
- Scope of work point 5 will read as follows
- Assessment of Floral biodiversity
- Page 6**
- Deliverable and Payment Schedule**, point 4 to read as follows
- Assessment of Floral biodiversity footnote no 2 on page 6 to read as follows

The consulting agency needs to submit 03 separate reports (i) for Bho; wetland (Buffer and Roadside Biodiversity) Should include qualitative input on avifauna (ii) Parks and Nagar Van, (iii) Urban Plantation (Where area of plantation is more than 1 hac.)

- Page no 9; in the last line of paragraph 14, "15th July 2023 is to be read in place of "30th June 2023"

वनमंडलधिकारी
पर्यावरण वानिकी वनमंडल
भोपाल

G-15753/23

Cong, BJP...

From Page 1

He emphasizing the importance of sensitivity in such situations. He stated, "It is regrettable that Rahul Gandhi went to Manipur with such stubbornness. Sensitivity is far more important than obstinacy."

During a press conference at the BJP headquarters, Sambit Patra criticized Rahul Gandhi's behavior, stating, "Rahul Gandhi's conduct was highly irresponsible. Rahul and responsibility never go together. He has once again proven it today." Patra also mentioned that there had been no incidents or reports of loss of life in Manipur since June 13, but unfortunately, news of a loss of life emerged on the same day as Rahul's visit.

Accompanying Rahul Gandhi, Congress general secretary of organization, K C Venugopal, expressed disappointment over the police's actions. He stated, "Such actions are unfortunate and have no place in a democracy. At a time when the people of Manipur are suffering, Rahul ji is in Manipur to convey a message of peace and harmony. Manipur needs healing, not further acrimony. It is our constitutional right to travel across Manipur, engage with the people who have endured so much, and build bridges between communities."

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra highlighted the duty of every patriot to work towards peace and brotherhood in the country. She questioned the government's motives in attempting to halt Rahul Gandhi's visit, saying, "Rahul Gandhi ji has gone to share the pain of the people of Manipur and spread the message of peace.

Modi Cabinet rejig in offing?

From Page 1

On the other hand, new entrants like Jyotiraditya Scindia, Narayan Rane, Sarbananda Sonowal, and Ashwini Vaishnaw were inducted into the Cabinet.

The forthcoming meeting of the Union Council of Ministers is eagerly awaited as it is expected to unveil key decisions and potential changes in the Government's structure. As the nation gears up for important political events in the coming months, the reshuffle holds significance in shaping the course of the BJP-led Government.

Meanwhile, the BJP will organise three meetings in Delhi, Guwahati and Hyderabad next month for its state leaders from the respective zones as it gears up its campaign for the Lok Sabha polls in 2024, party sources said on Thursday.

Senior national leaders will also join the meetings. Guwahati is expected to host leaders from eastern and north-

eastern states on July 6, followed the Delhi meeting of mostly northern states on July 7 and another in Hyderabad of largely southern states on July 8. The Gujarat BJP unit will be part of the Delhi meeting, while its Maharashtra leaders will join the deliberations in Hyderabad.

Sources said the meetings will also take stock of the month-long programmes run by the party across the country to mark the Narendra Modi government's nine years in power.

"Sewa, sushashan and garib kalyan (service, good governance, welfare of the poor)" have been the theme of the exercise with a focus on achievements and new initiatives of the government, and it will come up for deliberations during the meetings.

The BJP has stepped up its organisational activities as it gears up its campaign to retain power at the Centre under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

2 killed, 5 hurt...

It said the troops "responded in a calibrated manner to prevent any collateral damage. Swift action by troops resulted in cessation of firing. "Additional columns moved to the area. Unconfirmed reports indicate some casualties. Build up of large crowds in the area also reported. Situation being closely monitored and further details will follow," it said.

army said, "Buildup of mob in the area to interfere with operations by security forces effectively controlled." At approx 4 PM, troops deployed in the area heard firing from east of village K Munlai. Further, at approx 5.15 PM, exchange of fire reported from direction of village Bethel, south of National Sports University. Own columns are dominating the area to de-escalate the situation," it added. The area is located around 20 km from capital city of Imphal.

TN Gov takes ...

From Page 1

In a separate development, a court in Chennai extended the judicial custody of Balaji, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate, earlier this month. The extension will last until July 12. Prior to this, the Supreme Court had granted permission for Balaji to undergo heart surgery at a private hospital, following his treatment at a Government hospital for complaints of uneasiness and chest pain.

The Enforcement Directorate had challenged a previous order from the Madras High Court that allowed Balaji to be moved to a private hospital. The relationship between the DMK Government and the Governor's office has been tense for months, marked by disagreements over several issues, most notably the Governor's refusal to assent to

Next Opp ...

From Page 1

Key discussions during the Patna meeting revolved around crucial issues such as inflation, unemployment, and alleged deliberate attempts to fuel communal violence in specific regions of the country. Sharad Pawar clarified that there were no discussions regarding the "prime ministerial post" during the meeting.

'US...

From Page 1

Sixteen of these drones purchased by the UK cost it \$69 million each but it was only a "green aircraft" without sensors, weapons and certification. Features like sensors, weapons and payloads make up for 60-70 per cent of the total cost, he said, adding that even the US acquired five of them at \$119 million each.

Due to the size of India's deal and the fact that the manufacturer might have recovered a big part of its initial investment from earlier deals, the price for the country is working out to be less than others, he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

He, however, added that India may need to integrate some of its own radars and missiles with these drones, which may prompt a price revision. Reacting to reports that the Air Force had raised some questions about the drones, sources said it is expected that all these wings of defence forces will make their points during consultation.

Atishi to get Finance, Revenue charge post Cabinet reshuffle

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Cabinet minister Atishi may get the additional charges of Finance, Revenue and Development following a reshuffle. Atishi, along with Saurabh Bhardwaj, was inducted into the Cabinet in March following the resignations of Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain.

Meanwhile, a row erupted over the cabinet reshuffle file government sources claiming that the matter is pending with the Lieutenant Governor office, a charge denied by the latter.

The file relating to the cabinet reshuffle in the AAP government has been lying with Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena for the last four days waiting to be signed, a government source said on Thursday. "The LG has not yet



given any approval to the cabinet reshuffle proposal. If at all the LG Office still wishes to stand by its baseless claims, it must produce a copy of the order or any other relevant evidence to prove the same," AAP sources said. "The file to approve these changes has been with the Lt Governor for last four days. His predecessor, Anil Baijal, used to approve such files within half an hour," the source said, adding the reshuffle is going to be a major

one. All the same, sources from the LG office denied the allegation and said the file was signed on Wednesday and sent to the government.

Atishi had been holding the portfolios of power, education, art, culture and language, tourism, higher education, training and technical education and public relations. The latest addition will raise the number of portfolios held by her to 11. Her cabinet col-

league, Kailash Gahlot, currently holds charge of the Revenue and Finance departments and the development portfolio is held by minister Gopal Rai. The portfolio change will come into effect after a notification is issued which will likely happen on Friday, officials said.

"In the cabinet reshuffle, Atishi may get the responsibilities of Finance, Development and Revenue. She was recently also given the charge of public relations department," a source said. Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also said that all is not well in the Aam Admi Party (AAP). This is a known fact that Atishi is closed to Sisodia. Sisodia must have told Kejriwal to give powerful portfolios -finance, development and revenue to her," he said.

PM Modi to be chief guest at DU centenary celebrations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be the chief guest at the closing ceremony of Delhi University centenary celebrations on Friday.

During his visit to the campus, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of three buildings and release a set of coffee table books. These buildings are for the Faculty of Technology, a computer centre and an academic block.

"Looking forward to joining the University of Delhi's centenary celebrations at 11 AM tomorrow, 30th June. As a premier centre of learning, DU has been nurturing talent and fostering intellectual growth for a century. Congratulations to the DU fraternity on this milestone," PM Modi tweeted on Saturday.

Union Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan will be the guest of



honour for the ceremony.

The DU also urged the colleges to give their students an opportunity to interact with the Prime Minister.

An exhibition will be organised at the multipurpose hall of the university and finishing touches are being given, DU South Campus Director

Prakash Singh said.

Among the colleges that have been assigned stalls for the exhibition are Miranda House, Hindu College, Kirori Mal College and Ramjas College.

"We wanted to invite all the colleges but due to a space crunch, we have selected those colleges with high NIRF and NAAC rankings. They have assembled the stalls and final touches are being given," Singh said.

"We have asked the colleges to let students present their college's best practices and

this way, they will get a chance to interact with Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he added.

There will be stalls on DU's adoption of the National Education Policy, skill enhancement courses, scientific inventions and startups. The colleges will also showcase their history, achievements and distinguished alumni, the official said.

The Miranda House will showcase semiconductors prepared by a group of students and teachers, and bamboo products made by a startup launched by a student from the Northeast, Principal B Nanda said.

"We have a student from the Northeast whose startup makes eco-friendly products from bamboo... Some of our students, along with their teachers, have created semiconductors for industrial purposes. We'll exhibit them too," Nanda said.

CM halts appointment of some Edu Dept officials

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday halted the appointment of some officials in the Education department citing ongoing vigilance inquiries against them. The Chief Minister deliberated with officials on three matters related to appointments in the second meet of the National Capital Civil Service Authority (NCCSA). The first meeting of the NCCSA was held on June 20. This is the second meeting of the NCCSA.

Sources in the Raj Niwas denied the charges, saying the file has been signed and sent to the government. In another matter that came up in Thursday meet, there was a



proposal to remove some competent officers from the Education department, which the Chief Minister also objected to and stopped the proposal, an official said.

The third matter in the meeting pertained to the demand of some female officers. They had requested transfers from the post of Sub-

Registrar on personal grounds, which the Chief Minister approved on humanitarian grounds, he said. The Delhi Lt Governor is still sitting on the minutes of the first meeting and has not processed the file, he said.

Addressing a press conference following the first meeting of the NCCSA earlier this month, Kejriwal had termed the delay in approving of minutes a "farce" and a "conspiracy to not let the elected government do any work in Delhi."

He claimed that through the NCCSA, the Centre wants to make it look like the body takes important decisions for Delhi mutually. But in reality, that is not the case, he had claimed.

DISCOM inspecting, maintaining electrical lines in public places

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As a part of a pre-monsoon safety drive, DISCOM is conducting inspections and maintenance of electrical equipment and lines installed in public areas to minimise the risk of electricity-related incidents.

The drive aimed to ensure the safety of DISCOM consumers was carried out in view of the two deaths due to electrocution in Delhi within a span of 48 hours. As a part of the ongoing preventive maintenance activity, the DISCOM is conducting tree trimming exercises in the vicinity of electrical installations, poles, and overhead lines to prevent leakage cur-



rent and power interruption, it said.

According to the statement, DISCOM has recently conducted leakage testing of 9,154 poles, 300 PWD/MCD poles, 66 ATMs, and 81 street-light poles installed in MCD and DDA parks, and the same drive shall be continued. Due attention is being given

to ensuring the healthiness of the earthing of electrical installations.

"The DISCOM has also carried out safety audits of more than 1,100 major public installations like malls, hospitals, schools, and colleges to ensure public safety and will continue to do so throughout the year," it said.

Delhi Govt decides to engage law firms to speed up DJB work

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of providing drinking water to unauthorized colonies and villages and connect them with sewer network and clean the Yamuna, the Delhi government has decided to engage law firms for the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) to speed up the work. The DJB is executing 1,500 projects and the decision to hire law firms was taken to ensure that these projects are completed with high quality in public interest, Water Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj said here on Thursday. He also said the DJB has passed an order that in all new projects above Rs. 10 crores, different expert law firms will be mandatorily engaged.

The law firms will ensure all the legal compliance, communication and contract agreement work related to the project. Thus, while the DJB will take immediate action on any violation of agreement by the company, the law firm will ensure that the projects launched for the public can be completed with high quality and following all the laws, so that the public can benefit from them in a timely fashion. While reviewing the projects, it was observed that in many projects of public interest, there are deviations from the legal agreement. It has also been learned that there are many such projects which are stuck in the courts for various legal and miscellaneous reasons.

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JASOLA Sec. 9-B (41 Flats)
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Doval discusses security, co-operation with Russia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Russia have discussed issues related to security and enhancing co-operation in this field during telephonic talks between National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev. Incidentally, the talks on Wednesday took place days after a mercenary group launched a short-lived armed rebellion that rocked Moscow and the Russian NSA reportedly briefed Doval about it. A Russian readout said on Thursday that Patrushev held a telephonic conversation with Doval and informed him about the "latest events" in Russia. "The current issues of Russian-Indian cooperation in the field of security and the prospects for their deepening within the framework of bilateral and multilateral formats were discussed in detail," it said. "In addition, Patrushev informed Doval about the latest events in Russia," it said, adding "the interlocutors agreed to continue a confi-



dential dialogue". An official statement from the Security Council of Russia said the two NSAs discussed current issues of cooperation between India and Russia in the security sector. The two sides discussed prospects for deepening the cooperation between the two nations within the framework of bilateral and multilateral formats. The two sides agreed to continue the dialogue. "The current issues of Russian-Indian cooperation in the field of security and the prospects for their deepening within the framework of bilateral and multilateral formats were discussed in detail, the Security Council of Russia

SC to hear on July 3 plea of NGO seeking protection for Kuki tribals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on July 3 a plea by an NGO seeking Army protection for the minority Kuki tribals in Manipur and prosecution of communal groups attacking them. A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and Manoj Misra will be hearing the petition filed by NGO 'Manipur Tribal Forum'. On June 20, a vacation bench headed by Justice Surya Kant had declined urgent hearing on the plea, saying it's a law and order issue which the administration should tackle. Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, appearing for the NGO had submitted notwithstanding the solemn assurances that nobody will die, 70 tribals have been killed in ethnic violence in the state. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the State had opposed the prayer for urgent hearing, and asserted security agencies are on the ground doing their best to stem violence and restore normalcy. He had submitted that the main matter pertaining to the Manipur High Court's order for grant of Scheduled Tribe status to the majority Meitei com-



munity, which set off a chain of violence in the northeastern state, has been posted for hearing on July 17 by the top court. The vacation bench had then posted the plea of the NGO for hearing on July 3. The Manipur Tribal Forum, in its plea filed through advocate Satya Mitra, has alleged the central government and the chief minister of Manipur have jointly embarked on a communal agenda aimed at "ethnic cleansing" of Kuki tribals in the northeastern state. The NGO urged the apex court not to rely on "empty assurances" given by the Centre and sought Army protection for the Kukis. More than 120 people have

lost their lives in bloody clashes between Meitei and Kuki communities which first broke out on May 3 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts of the state to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribal Nagas and Kukis constitute another 40 per cent of the population and reside in the hill districts. "The reason why this court ought not to rely anymore on the empty assurances given by UOI (Union of India) is because both the UOI and the Chief Minister of the State

have embarked jointly on a communal agenda for the ethnic cleansing of the Kukis," the NGO has alleged in its petition. The petition said the narrative that there is a "clash" between the two communities - the majority Meiteis and the tribals - is far from truth as the two have coexisted since long. "Such a narrative misses the fact that the two communities have co-existed for a long time despite their sometime deep-rooted differences and, secondly, that the unique situation presently existing is of a couple of armed communal groups linked to the party in power in the State, carrying out a pre-designed communal attack on the tribals.

"The 'clash' narrative camouflages the presence of these two groups' behind all the attacks and renders them immune from prosecution thereby emboldening them to carry on further attacks," the petition alleged. It has sought constitution of an SIT headed by former Assam police chief Harekrishna Deka to go into the violence and an ex-gratia payment of Rs 2 crore to the kin of each of those killed within three months. It also demanded a permanent government job to a member of the families of those slain. The state is in the throes of a bloody conflict between the Meiteis and tribal Kukis since the March 27 Manipur High Court order that asked the state government to send a recommendation to the Centre within four weeks on the demand for ST status to the majority community. The apex court is seized of a batch of pleas on the Manipur situation, including one by a ruling BJP MLA challenging the high court order on Scheduled Tribe status to the Meitei community, and a PIL by the tribal NGO for an SIT probe into the violence that has rocked the northeastern state.

'Modi's US visit caused further erosion of India's autonomy'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States, alleging that it resulted in a "further erosion of India's strategic autonomy," according to the latest editorial in the party's mouthpiece, People's Democracy. The editorial argued that the visit had led to a self-imposed restriction on India's independent foreign policy, hindering the nation's potential to play a creative and autonomous role in an increasingly multipolar world. It emphasized that the Modi government's pro-US stance had curtailed India's opportunities, stating, "The net outcome of the Modi visit was a further erosion of India's strategic autonomy and a self-inflicted fettering of its independent foreign policy. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, origi-



nally scheduled to be held physically in July in New Delhi, was converted into a virtual meeting." The editorial also asserted that the Prime Minister's visit solidified India's strategic and military relationship with the United States. It argued that the deepening ties between the two countries were driven by the US's need for India to be a strong partner in its ongoing efforts to economically and militarily contain China, despite the rhetoric of a partnership between two democ-

racies and shared values. The CPI(M) highlighted a 2002 study commissioned by the Pentagon, which identified India as a countervailing force to China and outlined the US approach toward India. It suggested that the recent lavish treatment of Modi during his state visit to Washington, including a state banquet and the opportunity to address a joint session of Congress for the second time, coincided with the realization by the Joe Biden administration that its past efforts to check and isolate

China had not yielded the desired results. According to the CPI(M), the US's first major initiative to engage India in a strategic alliance was the offer of a civilian nuclear agreement in 2005. However, it claimed that opposition to the nuclear deal from the Left had hindered the implementation of various logistics and interoperability agreements included in the Defense Framework Agreement. The editorial further explained that it was only during the past few years of the Modi government that the so-called four foundational agreements were signed, ensuring logistics support and interoperability between the armed forces of India and the United States. It suggested that the Indo-US military relationship had acquired the characteristics of an alliance, except for a clause akin to Article 5 in the NATO treaty, where an attack on one country is considered an attack on the other.

India, Tanzania take stock of Def ties in JDCC meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Tanzania took stock of their bilateral Defence ties including collaboration to enhance security in the Indian Ocean region during two-day talks ending Thursday in Arusha, Tanzania. These issues were discussed in the second edition of Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting between the two countries. Giving details of the meeting, defence ministry officials said here, the two sides discussed a wide range of opportunities for collaboration with a view to enhancing security in the Indian Ocean Region. The Indian delegation highlighted the growing prowess of the Indian Defence manufacturing to export to friendly countries. A five-year roadmap for defence coopera-



tion was also agreed to between the two sides, which covers initiatives ranging from customised training and capacity building to maritime cooperation, infrastructure building and collaboration in defence equipment and technology. Representatives from Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) also accompanied the Indian delegation. They held extensive meetings with the stakeholders from the Tanzanian Forces on the sidelines of the JDCC meeting. The Indian delegation, led by Joint Secretary Amitabh Prasad, included senior officials from Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces. High Commissioner of India to Tanzania Binay S Pradhan also attended the meeting. India shares close, warm and friendly relations with Tanzania which is bolstered by robust capacity building and avenues for development partnership. The visit of the Indian delegation for the JDCC meeting is expected to further strengthen defence relations with Tanzania.

India, Philippines review bilateral ties as Jaishankar talks with Manalo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and the Philippines on Thursday reviewed the entire gamut of their bilateral ties during talks here between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Foreign Secretary Enrique A Manalo with special focus on defence, maritime security, counter-terrorism and transnational crimes. Giving details of the par-



leys, Jaishankar also said "our growing economic ties, including trade and investments; development cooperation; health and pharma, tourism, air services, agriculture, fintech, science and technology and space cooperation," also figured. The two sides noted the importance of greater people to people ties, specifically in tourism and education sectors, he said adding India and the Philippines recognized our strong collaboration in ASEAN and in multilateral forums. As Indo-Pacific countries, underlined our strong convergence on key issues," the external affairs minister said. In a tweet after the talks, Jaishankar said "Just concluded a productive and comprehensive meeting of the 5th India-Philippines Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation with Enrique A Manalo, Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines. Our talks covered enhancing contacts and broadening cooperation as we head towards the 75th anniversary of our diplomatic ties..." Earlier in his opening remarks, Jaishankar said the domestic agenda of both countries is focused on inclusion and empowerment, that business to business is the pathway of going forward, the importance of our defence cooperation, the need to stabilise the

Rahul's programmes abroad organised by 'anti-India forces': Thakur

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's programmes abroad are organised by "anti-India forces" which run an agenda against the country. Gandhi and the Congress party should tell the nation as to why such elements are "associated" with them, the senior BJP leader told reporters here. There was no immediate reaction from the Congress. Thakur was interacting with reporters on the sidelines of the BJP's outreach campaign 'Sampark se Samarthan' to mark nine years of the Modi



government. "Thinking of Congress gets evident when Rahul Gandhi visits abroad, and with whose support his programmes are organised. People whose names are associated with organisations who run an agenda

against India. And, who fund them, who talk of breaking India, who funds those campaigns," the information and broadcasting minister alleged. Shaheen Bagh matter's funding was done, funding is done for "those who spew venom against India", Thakur claimed. And, Rahul Gandhi's programmes abroad are organised by those "who get direct or indirect funding and support from those (elements)," he said. "Those who praise Pakistan, and run an agenda against the country, support Rahul Gandhi and organise his programmes," the minister alleged. "So, my question is to Rahul Gandhi and Congress party that "what kind of helplessness is there that they have to get support and assistance from anti-India forces...Have to accept their invitations and on their forum, Rahul Gandhi raises his voice against the country," Thakur charged. So, those who talk of "breaking the country, in and out of India, to get into power", and those who run an agenda against the country, Rahul Gandhi is "with them...He will have to answer to the nation," the BJP leader said. The BJP has often been critical of statements made by Gandhi during programmes held in foreign countries. "These anti-India forces...Why are they associated with Congress and Rahul Gandhi, and what is their agenda, clarify to the nation," he asked.

NIA takes over probe into IED explosion on bridge in Manipur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken over the probe into an IED explosion on a bridge in Bishnupur district of Manipur earlier this month in which at least three persons were injured. The NIA has registered the case under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) including criminal conspiracy, attempt to murder, dacoity, waging war against the Government of India, unlawful assembly, causing hurt by dangerous weapons, intentional insult, criminal intimidation and mischief. In its FIR, the NIA has also slapped provisions of the Explosives Substances Act and Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act. A bomb blast took place on June 21 over a bridge adjoining the area of Phougachao Ikhai Awang Leikai and Kwakta along Tiddim road in Bishnupur dis-

trict of Manipur. According to the FIR, the IED was placed inside a Mahindra Scorpio vehicle parked on the bridge by some unknown miscreants suspected to be militants. As a result of this explosion, part of the bridge was damaged on the western side. Three persons were injured and few houses were damaged due to the impact of the blast. The NIA took over the case following a notification from the Union Home Ministry. The incident took place even as the State is on the boil and facing ethnic strife for over a month.

trict of Manipur. According to the FIR, the IED was placed inside a Mahindra Scorpio vehicle parked on the bridge by some unknown miscreants suspected to be militants. As a result of this explosion, part of the bridge was damaged on the western side. Three persons were injured and few houses were damaged due to the impact of the blast. The NIA took over the case following a notification from the Union Home Ministry. The incident took place even as the State is on the boil and facing ethnic strife for over a month.



BJP National President JP Nadda being welcomed by Rajasthani BJP President CP Joshi and former Rajasthani Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje upon his arrival in Bharatpur. PTI

Bengal Govt printing duplicate ballot papers to rig polls: Adhir



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Senior Congress MP and party's Bengal president Adhir Chowdhury has alleged that the Trinamool Congress in connivance with the State Government is printing duplicate ballot papers — from the same printing presses where the Election Commission is printing the ballot papers for panchayat elections — so that they can be exchanged with the real ones .post panchayat polls while in the process of being transported from the booths to the strongrooms. "We have definite reports that ballot papers are being printed in duplicates ... they are printing double ballot papers so that they can be swapped with the original ones after the elections and while being transported to the strong rooms," Chowdhury said, adding how three officials who had not heeded the orders from the superior authorities had been shunted out.

who were in charge of the printing process have been shunted out ... they had refused to hand-over the keys were the ballot papers are being stored ... we will soon come out with concrete proof of what happened and move the High Court if required," Nepal Mahato a former Congress MLA and PCC member complained. While the TMC leadership rejected Chowdhury's claims, Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari too confirmed such reports saying "I have been told about double ballot papers being printed ... and we are keeping a close watch on this ... we will ask our party men to keep a close vigil while the papers are being transported from the booths ... I will ask them to follow the transport vans and remain awake through the day and night keeping vigil on the strong-rooms." He further advised the BJP men to destroy the ballot boxes if they were looted from the booths by the TMC goons. CPI(M) State secretary Md Salim too said that his party cadres have been alerted about the ballot boxes. "We have asked our comrades to keep a strict vigil ... the TMC has lost support bases in large parts ... so they will this time rely on their musclemen and loot the ballot papers ... but we will not allow this to happen this time round." TMC however, rejected Chowdhury's claim saying this was one way of conceding defeat. "They know that they will lose the elections and so they are giving excuses," said TMC MP Shantanu Sen adding "let Adhir Chowdhury prove his claim ... but if he fails the TMC will take him to task ... he will have to face legal consequences for this."

BJP leader found hanging; party claims murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

In yet another suspected panchayat poll-related murder a booth-level BJP leader at Balpai village of Sabang in West Midnapore district was on Thursday found hanging at his residence. The BJP worker who earlier received threats from the local Trinamool Congress men who asked him not to campaign in the elections had been missing since the past couple of days, sources said. This was the 12th death since panchayat elections were declared about 20 days ago. Local police officials said that the body of Dipak Samanta, 35, the booth president of BJP was found hanging from the ceiling of his residence. "He is a BJP member ... we are investigating the matter," a senior police officer said, adding murder angle was not being ruled out. Samanta's wife told the media that his husband paid the price of not surrendering to the TMC and not joining their side. Alleging that the family had earlier received a white saree and some sweets and flowers — things that are given to widows after the death of their husbands — from unknown senders his wife said that his husband had refused to withdraw from the campaign. Tanmoy Das, a BJP leader from Ghatol, a local sub-divisional town, said the family had lodged a complaint with the police about the incident but no action was taken. A TMC man named MK Maiti was issuing threats to him regularly, family members were quoted as saying.



The local TMC goons had socially ostracized Samanta in order to put pressure on him for changing sides. "After 2021 Assembly elections they had even captured his lands ... the TMC men were cultivating his lands as a punishment for working for the BJP ... and this time they started issuing life threats to him and finally killed him," the BJP leader said. "They had reported to the police about the white saree being sent to them and about the regular threats he was receiving to either leave politics or join the TMC ... but the police would not take any action," he said, demanding a CBI investigation into the murder. In the past several years about half-a-dozen BJP leaders have hung to death. State BJP leader and former West Midnapore police SP Bharati Ghosh who rushed to the spot said "the police know the murderers but they will do nothing to them," adding "it is a clear case of cold-blooded murder and the BJP will not sit quite until the guilty are brought to book." TMC leadership however denied any link with the murder. Ajit Maiti a senior district level TMC leader said "the TMC is in no way connected to the death."

Stalin criticizes Modi over Uniform Civil Code push

PTI ■ CHENNAI

DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Thursday lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for seeking to implement the Uniform Civil Code. Referring to Modi's remarks on the UCC, Stalin blamed him for attempting to completely 'disrupt the law and order situation' and cause 'religious violence.' "Our Modi says that there should not be two types of laws in a country." The Prime Minister was hence thinking of winning the 2024 Lok Sabha polls by fanning communal sentiments and creating confusion in the country, the DMK chief alleged. "I am telling you categorically, people are ready to teach a fitting lesson to the BJP in the upcoming LS polls; you (people) should be prepared and be resolute (to trounce the BJP at the hustings)," he said. The recent meeting of Opposition leaders in Patna to defeat the BJP in the LS polls has caused fear to Modi. Stalin hit out at Modi for not visiting the strife-torn Manipur, which is ruled by the BJP. "Manipur is burning for the past 50 days and 150 people have so far been killed. Thousands have fled the state. So far, the PM has not visited the state. Amit Shah held an all-party meeting only after 50 days," he said. Such was the deplorable state of governance of the Union government when he visited the Saffron party. "When this was the case, Modi has commented on UCC implementation. Recalling his incarceration during the infamous Emergency (1975-77), he said, 'this is history, many people do not understand this history; when



even Prime Minister Modi does not know it, what could I say? In sync with DMK tradition, Stalin described his party as a 'family,' and hit back at the BJP for hurling the accusation of family politics. The Chief Minister said Modi has accused "us of doing family politics, true, this is family politics; DMK is comprised of families and I am thanking him for mentioning that." The party founder CN Annadurai addressed cadres as "Thambi" (younger brother) and late party patriarch M Karunanidhi addressed party workers and the people as "Udanpirappu" (brothers/sisters). Kalaingar (Karunanidhi) used to invite cadres to take part with their families in party conferences and demonstrations and this was the practice of the Dravidian movement. Such was the DMK's tradition of bonding as a family and hence, 'this is as such family politics.' Stalin said Modi had made a mention that a vote for DMK would only lead to the growth of Karunanidhi's family. "Yes, Karunanidhi's family is Tamil Nadu and the Tamil people." Karunanidhi considered everyone jailed during the Emergency as his children. Hence, the PM's family politics remark matched with that of the party's tradition of standing together as a family. For the past 50 years, the Dravidian movement is ruling Tamil Nadu. "My appeal is that the PM should talk after evaluating the growth Tamil Nadu has attained in the past 50 years." The CM said Karunanidhi (1924-2018) was the architect of modern Tamil Nadu and his birth centenary (2023-24) was being celebrated now. Underscoring the late leader's 'list of achievements,' he said the incumbent DMK regime was following Karunanidhi's footsteps and provided to people the social justice-led Dravidian model of good governance. "This is your government (TN state government), this is the Dravidian model of governance," he said and reiterated that all assurances made to the people by the DMK ahead of the 2021 Assembly election were being fulfilled. People voted DMK to power in the state in 2021 and similarly they should get ready to usher in a regime at the Centre in 2024 that would be secular and one that provided due rights to the states. Stalin made the remarks here in his address while presiding over the wedding of the grand-daughter of a veteran party office-bearer.

Leaders who attended Opp meet in Patna involved in scams: Shah

PTI ■ MUNGER (BIHAR)

Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah on Thursday accused opposition leaders, who had attended the June 23 meeting in Patna, of being involved in scams worth over Rs 20 lakh crore. Taking on Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar who organised the meeting, Shah said the people of the state will give a "befitting reply to corrupt leaders" in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah with Bihar BJP President Samrat Choudhary during a public meeting in Lakhisarai district, Thursday, June 29, 2023

While addressing a mega rally at Lakhisarai in Munger parliamentary constituency, organised by his party BJP, the union home minister claimed that all attempts of the Congress to project Rahul Gandhi as a mass leader have "failed". "Bihar has always raised its voice against corruption. Opposition leaders who attended the June 23 meeting in Patna are involved in scams worth over Rs 20 lakh crore... Bihar will give a befitting reply to corrupt leaders in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls," Shah said. The union home minister visited Bihar for the first time after the meeting of opposition leaders in Patna last week. Previously, Shah had visited the state nearly three months ago. In a reference to Kumar who dumped the BJP last year to form the 'Mahagathbandhan' government in the state, Shah said leaders who ditched the

National Democratic Alliance must be "punished". He also questioned the chief minister's track record and asked, "Nitish Babu must explain what he has done for Bihar". "Paltu Babu Nitish Kumar was asking what BJP has done in the last nine years (of the NDA government at the Centre)...Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji has done a lot for the overall growth of the country... Nitish always changes his alliance partners and is simply misleading (BJP chief) Lalu ji. He is not trustworthy," Shah alleged. "The Congress has been trying to launch Rahul Gandhi for the last 20 years. But they failed.... Electorates have full faith in Modi ji," the union home minister said. Shah also alleged that the law and order situation

Everyone is free to come to Bihar: Nitish on Amit Shah's visit to State

PTI ■ PATNA

Ahead of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Lakhisarai on Thursday, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said everybody is free to visit the state. Shah's visit to the state later during the day will be the first by any top BJP leader after the June 23 meeting here of opposition parties which was held to discuss and chart out a path ahead of the 2024 general election. Kumar, who was speaking to reporters here, however, evaded questions on the Modi gov-

ernment's strong pitch for the Uniform Civil Code. "Everyone is free to come here. Everyone has the right to visit Bihar," the chief minister said to questions on Shah's proposed visit to Lakhisarai later in the day. Asked for his comment on the Opposition parties' meeting here, which was hosted by him, Kumar said, "The meeting is over ... We will speak later on this". Shah is slated to arrive at the Jay Prakash Narayan International Airport here this afternoon and leave for Lakhisarai in Munger district, about 150 km



dedicated to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, before addressing a public meeting there. Shah had last visited the state nearly three months ago. Meanwhile, ahead of his visit to Lakhisarai, supporters of the ruling Mahagathbandhan parties and the opposition BJP have put up posters near the airport and at several locations in Patna. Those put up by supporters of the Grand Alliance government criticised the BJP leadership for violence in Manipur and misuse of central agencies - the CBI, ED and the Income Tax department.

Some of the posters put up by the ruling alliance questioned the alleged silence of BJP leaders in the matter of wrestlers protesting against the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI). On the other hand, BJP supporters have put up posters slamming the opposition unity against it. Reacting to the poster war, spokesperson Neeraj Kumar of the ruling JD (U), told PTI "The party has nothing to do with these posters. The concept and ideas for them were created by party workers and they have put posters in the city".

No need for Rahul's 'mohabbat ki dukaan', says Rajnath Singh

PTI ■ YAMUNANAGAR (HARYANA)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his "market of hate" remarks, saying his so-called "shop of love" was not needed. Addressing a "Gauravshahi Bharat" rally on the completion of nine years of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, he said the country's stature rose under the leadership of the Prime Minister. The defence minister said several schemes which could never be imagined earlier were introduced by the PM. "But what is happening with our Congress people? Their one



leader and that नेता ji — wherever he goes he says there is a 'nafrat ka bazaar' (market of hate) there and he has come there to open a 'mohabbat ki dukan' (shop of love)," Singh did not name Gandhi but was taking a dig at him over the phrase

used by the opposition leader. Particularly during his "Bharat Jodo Yatra", Gandhi had accused the ruling BJP of spreading hatred. He said he wanted to open a "shop of love" in the "market of hatred". "I want to ask you if there is any 'nafrat ka bazaar' in Haryana," he said, adding there no scope for the Congress leader's 'mohabbat ki dukan' (shop of love). "Where is the hate," Singh asked. The minister said when India addressed international forums earlier people didn't take it seriously as they considered it a "weak" country and the land of the poor. "Today when India speaks anything on international platforms, people lis-

ten." Whatever the BJP promised in its election manifestos, it delivered, he said, referring to the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the abrogation of Article 370 on special status for Jammu and Kashmir. Singh asked whether the prime minister thought about the caste or religion of the beneficiaries when toilets are built for them. "Has there been any discrimination against anyone?" he said. He made a similar point about the distribution of money to farmers under the Kisan Samman Nidhi. "They are uttering nonsense out of frustration, to unnecessarily mislead people," he said, attacking the Congress.

Fadnavis 'misusing' Pawar's name to outshine Maha CM Shinde: NCP

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Nationalist Congress Party on Thursday accused Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis of trying to garner publicity by "misusing" NCP president Sharad Pawar's name to outshine CM Eknath Shinde. Bharatiya Janata Party leader Fadnavis in an interview to a TV channel recently claimed Pawar agreed to form government with the BJP in 2019 and then backed off after three-four days. Reacting to the deputy CM's claim, NCP national spokesperson Clyde Crasto in a statement said, "After being subdued by Eknath Shinde in advertisements in the past few days, Devendra Fadnavis is now trying to garner publicity on his own, he is therefore misusing the name of Sharad Pawar in interviews, to gain free publicity and outshine Eknath Shinde." After the 2019 Assembly elections in Maharashtra, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (then undivided) snapped ties with long-term ally BJP over the issue of sharing the chief ministerial post. Later, Fadnavis was sworn in as the chief minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar



as his deputy in a hush-hush early morning ceremony at the Raj Bhawan, but the government lasted only 80 hours. Thackeray subsequently tied-up with the NCP and the Congress to form the Maha Vikas Aghadi government (MVA) in the state. In June last year, Shinde led a revolt against the Shiv Sena leadership, leading to a split in the party and collapse of the MVA government. On June 30, 2022, Shinde was sworn in as the CM with Fadnavis as his deputy.

Singh Deo's appointment as CM deputy an insult: BJP

PTI ■ RAIPUR

BJP's Chhattisgarh unit chief Arun Sao on Wednesday termed state minister T S Singh Deo's appointment as the state deputy chief minister as his insult, and said the decision will not save the Congress from being defeated in the upcoming assembly elections in the state. Talking to reporters, Sao said, the move is just an attempt to settle differences within the ruling party in the state. The Congress — the ruling party in Chhattisgarh — said in a statement on Wednesday night that party president Mallikarjun Kharge has approved the proposal to appoint Singh Deo as the deputy chief minister in Chhattisgarh. When asked about the development, Sao told reporters in Bilaspur, "Congress party does not have the right to appoint a deputy CM. It is the right of the CM and Governor." "The other thing is that the Congress party, which had promised Singh Deo to make him CM for two-and-a-half-years, has done injustice to him by making him deputy CM for just four months. It is an insult to Singh Deo ji," he said.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

BJP's poll vault

The party's well-oiled machinery must perform to pull off a hat trick in 2024

The BJP's preparations for the 2024 general elections are already in full swing. The party is anticipated to highlight a diverse range of issues, including economic revival, national security, social welfare, cultural nationalism and governance reforms. As the election campaign unfolds, it will be interesting to see how the BJP navigates these issues. Ultimately, the electorate will have the final say in determining the course of the nation as it evaluates the BJP's promises and compares them with the performance of other political contenders. As the election year nears, political parties are already gearing up for the next general elections. Among them, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India's ruling party, has wasted no time in kickstarting its preparations and putting its boots on the ground. The party is known for being one of the best well-oiled election machines which routed the Congress under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the chief architect of its victory, in 2014 and 2019. A recurring theme in the BJP's campaigns has been cultural nationalism and identity politics. In the run-up to the 2024 elections, the party is expected to invoke these sentiments, focusing on issues like the protection of Hindu traditions and cultural heritage. It may seek to consolidate its support base by raising issues such as the Uniform Civil Code, temple construction and review of certain constitutional provisions. However, striking a balance between cultural nationalism and social harmony will be crucial for the party's electoral fortunes. The construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya is in the final stages and it is likely to be inaugurated anytime in 2024 before the elections for maximum impact. Likewise, the issue of Uniform Civil Code, one of the cherished goals of the Sangh Parivar, has sneaked into public discourse.

However, the party is also likely to face certain roadblocks along the way to pull off a hat trick. Anti-incumbency for sure is going to be one of the major negatives it would have to deal with. Likewise, the grim economic scenario for the common man, unemployment, price rise, inflation and dismal performance of its various programmes could be major impediments to its free run. Given the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on India's economy, the BJP is likely to prioritise economic revival and development as core campaign issues. The party may highlight its previous initiatives, such as "Make in India" and "Digital India," and unveil new plans to boost infrastructure, employment generation and foreign investments. It may showcase its flagship initiatives such as Aayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and Ujjwala Yojana to highlight its commitment to uplifting the marginalised sections of society. Though many of its schemes like demonetisation may not have worked, it has successfully steered people's attention away from them. It could showcase implementation of policies like the GST to change the narrative. But should the Opposition rake up its embarrassments again, the BJP would have a tough time explaining.

PICTALK



A resident of Ghaziabad carries grandparents on shoulder during Kanwar Yatra, in Muzaffarnagar

The rise of generative AI on social media

AI is transforming entertainment, news, and advertising in an era of heightened competition. Its impact will be profound

Generative Artificial Intelligence has been gaining a lot of popularity lately. And social media platforms are singing the songs of its glory. The unchecked power to create, predict, and adapt generative AI transforms how we work across industries. From entertainment to news and advertising, no one is taking a back seat when experimenting with generative AI to see how it can make traditional and monotonous practices more efficient. As new generative AI technologies come into the picture, we will not only see content that's engaging but also personalized and dynamic.

Generative AI is stepping into many shoes in the entertainment industry - from scriptwriters to voiceover artists. AI algorithms are trained on a vast database of information, and based on their analysis, they can create new and original narratives. This gives a great head start to the creative process, laying out a myriad of stories on the table. In addition, AI is bringing unprecedented changes to the music industry. Generative AI can



recognize patterns and trends from the past and compose new songs that appeal to the listeners. People have also been creating virtual performers on social media using AI, which significantly boosts their user engagement.

AI is also taking centre stage when it comes to news. Generative Artificial Intelligence is enabling efficient delivery and consumption of news. Automated news writing and reporting will become more popular, disseminating news quickly and accurately, primarily during time-sensitive circumstances. Generative AI goes a long way in mapping out the way forward, given its ability to analyse huge chunks of

data and recognise trends, which will help journalists make more insightful and comprehensive news stories. AI could also give the news industry an upper hand in tackling the spread of fake news by identifying discrepancies in the news, thereby shaping a credible new ecosystem on social media.

Artificial intelligence in the advertising sector is exploring new ways to engage with consumers. With the help of generative AI, marketers are working on ways to make the whole consumer experience more personalized based on user behaviour and preferences. Deploying AI-driven, customized experiences for cus-

When Manmohan Singh was Prime Minister, he repeatedly declared "Muslims First", "15 per cent of the country's resources should be earmarked for the Muslims", etc. For some leaders around the world, this has become the starting point for understanding India. Former US President Barack Obama has been one of those individuals who has picked up this delusional understanding of India. Nonetheless, it seems to have crystallized into his opinion of what India is.

Barouk or Barack was the horse that carried the Holy Prophet to heaven from Jerusalem and also brought him back. Husein was the brother of al Hasan, the Prophet's grandson who was in line to become the fifth Caliph. These holy names were given to Obama though his mother had him baptized in a church. A special corner of his heart naturally beats for the denizens of the ummah.

After Pakistan's breakup in 1971, Obama seems concerned that India too should not "fall apart", in his terminology. He might not be aware that India was partitioned in 1947; he was not born then. In fact, most people today would be unfamiliar with the history of how Pakistan and Bangladesh have treated the Hindus, where, from previously being one-third of the population in 1947 they have been reduced to minuscule percentages through persecution, ethnic cleansing and expulsion.

Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his senior colleagues wanted an exchange of populations on the lines of what had taken place between the Christians and Muslims of Greece and Turkey respectively, under the auspices of the League of Nations, the predecessor of today's United Nations Organization (UNO). But India's then-political leaders rejected this proposal, as a result of which India today has some 18 per cent Muslims in its total population.

Islamic countries, like, for example, Turkey, could hardly believe that these Indian leaders could be so gullible. The great



SAHIL CHOPRA

tomers could result in increased engagement rates. Recently, Google announced AI integration within Google Ads, which will simplify creating ad campaigns for advertisers. In addition, AI significantly pushes programmatic advertising by introducing automated, real-time bidding that will further optimise ad spend and ensure precise targeting to maximize impact.

Generative AI has created a new wave of innovation and creativity across entertainment, news and advertising. AI will be at the core of creating personalized content for your target audience. With generative AI changing our world in ways we could have never imagined, it's crucial to ensure mindful use of this technology to make the most in the era of digital experience.

Generative AI has also raised concerns about privacy, authenticity and misinformation. Marketers must maintain ethical standards while leveraging generative AI for innovation and creativity. (The writer is founder and CEO, iCubesWire)

Barack Obama, Muslims and India



PRAFULL GORADIA

Barack Obama has shown himself to be unequal to the responsibility of rising to genuine global statesmanship



sociologist Joseph Ernest Renan believed that a nation's total soul had to be one for it to be happy and remain united. The phenomenon to be compared with is the Hindu belief, that the Divine or the Paramatma is the total soul of all living beings. Those whose individual souls are not in tune with the rest of the nation are detached from this nationhood, no matter where they reside. Religion is not crucial to the sense of the nation; what matters is one's attitude.

Had Obama's soul been wholly in tune with the universal, his utterance would not have occurred just when his entire country was celebrating a hugely successful visit by India's Prime Minister. He would have also worried about the minorities in Pakistan, Bangladesh et al. The former American President's utterance has only irritated the majority in India and possibly harmed the minority interests. The world at large could not care less.

Pakistan's founder Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had said: "The problem in India is not that of an inter-communal character but manifestly of an international one, and must be treated as such. So long as this basic truth is not



PAKISTAN'S FOUNDER QAID-E-AZAM MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAH HAD SAID, "THE PROBLEM IN INDIA IS NOT THAT OF AN INTER-COMMUNAL CHARACTER BUT MANIFESTLY OF AN INTERNATIONAL ONE, AND MUST BE TREATED AS SUCH

realized, any constitution that may be built will result in disaster and will prove destructive and harmful not only to the Muslims but also to the British and Hindus. It is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve into a common nationality. This notion of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of most of our troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise this misconception in time.

The Hindus and Muslims have different religious philosophies, social customs and literature. They neither intermarry nor inter-dine and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their views on life and of life are different. It is also quite clear that Hindus and Muslims derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics and different heroes in different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one a numerical minority and the other a majority must lead to growing discontent and the final destruction

of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state".

The Partition of India made Hindus believe that Pakistan was for Muslims and Hindustan was for Hindus and others. When they woke up after Partition they were surprised to see the Muslims largely where they were, whereas new Hindus had arrived in hundreds of thousands. Hindus felt that their leaders, Hindu or Muslim, had deceived them. Over the decades, people forgot this historical experience. Why on earth is Obama trying to open these wounds all over again?

From the USA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Egypt. There, the grand mufti of Cairo as well as the Indian Bohra Muslim community resident in Egypt tried to do the opposite, though there was very little time to do so. Sadly, Barack Obama, despite his elevation to the world's highest political office of the world's leading nation, has shown himself to be unequal to the responsibility of rising to genuine global statesmanship. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMERICA RESPECTS ITS JOURNALISTS

Sir - In nine years of rule it said that our PM has taken one or two press conferences. Opposition leaders say that he is afraid to face the press, he is afraid of being asked uncomfortable questions. Yes, the PM has lots of questions to answer and somebody needs to put those questions on him. In the PM's visit to America, the Wall Street Journal journalist Sabrina Siddique was picked from the American side to pose questions to our PM. Then Sabrina asked the question to the PM on alleged discrimination of Minorities in India. The PM responded positively and answered the question and talked about democracy in India. But Sabrina's question has created a domestic political backlash in India. Sabrina Siddique has been subjected to online trolling, harassment and Twitter abuses for questioning PM Modi, with many highlighting her Pakistan connections and her Muslim faith. Many labelled her as the daughter of "Pakistani" parents and accused her as echoing the claim of Islamists. The tool kit of BJP labelled her as "Prostitutes". The White House swiftly condemned the harassment of their journalist. America said that Sabrina Siddique is a respectable journalist and she is known for her integrity and unbiased reporting. America is indeed a great country because there is freedom of the press in that country and it is proven that it respects their journalists.

Zeeshaan | Kazipet

UCC IS THE NEED OF THE TIME

Sir - Once again there is talk of the Uniform Civil Code, which should have been done according to law earlier, now the struggle is on for that. But in fact, the situation is that there should be such a law in the country. Many times the courts and the commission have also made it clear that two different types of laws in a country lead to many legal hurdles, due to which it takes a long time to get justice. It also creates discrimination in society. Recently, the Law Commission has

RAGA's convoy stopped



The Congress Party on Thursday hit out at the government after Rahul Gandhi's convoy was stopped by the police near Bishnupur in Manipur and accused of using "autocratic methods" to stall his "compassionate outreach" to the people hit by ethnic violence. The government action is "totally unacceptable

and shatters all constitutional and democratic norms." Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said. Gandhi was stopped on his way to Churachandpur to visit relief camps with police officials saying it was a precautionary measure to prevent the recurrence of violence. He was going there to meet the people suffering in relief camps and to provide a healing touch in the strife-torn state. Gandhi arrived in Imphal on Thursday on a two-day visit to the northeastern state. He was travelling in a convoy to Churachandpur to visit relief camps in the area. Police officials said the convoy was stopped fearing violence along the route. With this, all is not well for the government under fear.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

sought suggestions from the people on this code. There are different laws of marriage, divorce, property division, adoption and succession in different communities of society. There are other beliefs and when these matters reach the courts, it takes a long time for the courts to give justice because of the diversity and complexity of their rules and regulations, due to which the matter of uniform civil code has been raised by many forums of the country.

The code is the demand of the present time, but it will not be appropriate to implement it in a hurry just as an election agenda, because this country is full of diversity, every class, community and state has its own identity, taking them all into confidence. No one's faith should be hurt. A best and unanimous draft should be prepared in which everyone's sentiments are respected, only then Uniform Civil Code can be properly implemented in the whole country. During the Shahbano case, the Supreme Court had said about this code. Its main purpose is to remove discrimination in the country and to implement uniform laws in every section of society. Goa is the first state where Uniform Civil Code is

applicable, that too without any dispute, then what is the problem in implementing it in other parts of the country?

Devanand Roy | Delhi

US SANCTIONS ON WAGNER BUSINESS

Sir - In a move to cut the finance of the dreaded Wagner paramilitary group the US govt has rightfully imposed sanctions on the gold and diamond business of the Russian organization which is sending thousands of troops into the war zone. The sanctions have targeted four major companies working in the Central African Republic. The United Arab Emirates, Mali and Russia are well connected with the group's founder Yevzeny Prigozhin. Recent investigation has shown evidence in favour of the group's expanding gold and diamond business jinis. The group has plans to invest illicit money to contribute to conflict and Chaos across the globe. Thus this timely move may stop adding fuel to the fire

Arka Goswami | Durgapur

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FIRST COLUMN

SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES OF THE PM'S VISIT

The PM's visit garnered US support against China and ensured tech transfer



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Indian Prime Minister Modi and US President Joe Biden managed to fire the first gunshot for one of the most significant partnerships of the 21st century between the two countries, during the first state visit of Indian PM to Washington last week. The red carpet welcome events spruced with vegetarian meals prepared by celebrated chefs, Bollywood numbers playing in the background, thousands of Indian Americans lining up streets in Washington DC, and unique gift exchanges between the two countries were straight out of a big budget blockbuster hitting the screens, but with a sharp message of upgraded partnership.

The lengthy joint statement running into 58 paragraphs summed it up as "Taken together, the leaders today affirmed that this document, in its breadth and depth, represents the most expansive and comprehensive vision for progress in the history of our bilateral relationship. Still, our ambitions are to reach ever greater heights, and we commit both our governments and our peoples to this endeavour, now and into the future." A large chunk of the blueprint for the future roadmap was dedicated to defining the contours of the technology embrace US and India will undertake, keeping in mind the current and future geopolitical environment. One of the most significant outcomes was India granted a seat to the US-led Minerals security partnership (MSP).



The US launched MSP last year, bringing in 12 other countries and the European Union "to enable diversified private sector investment and catalyse public sector financing." Indian private sector has already announced investments of \$650 mn creating one of the largest such Indian investments in the US electric battery industry, creating nearly 500 jobs. However, the potential for this alliance is huge as all of these like-minded countries on board are expected to exchange information and push their private sectors to make investments into building reliable sustainable supply chains of critical minerals. Drones, mobile phones, electric cars, tablets and laptops and high-end defence equipment to name a few, are all dependent on these critical minerals. The MSP promises to be the solution by diversifying the supply chains across these 14 geographies.

The other major outcome of the state visit was India joining the US-led Artemis Accords. A fact sheet released by the White House summarised this as an effort to "advance a common vision of space exploration for the benefit of all humankind. India joins 26 other countries committed to peaceful, sustainable, and transparent cooperation that will enable exploration of the Moon, Mars, and beyond. NASA will provide advanced training to Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) astronauts to launch a joint effort to the International Space Station in 2024." Space is the next frontier of the India-US partnership, having been in silos till last week. The US has significant expertise in space launches and exploration, and granting India a seat in its wider alliance, signalled an equal partner status to India. India's space explorations and technology so far are a fraction of what the US, China, and Russia spend, which is also reflected in the poor number of active Indian satellites hovering above us. The minister of science and technology Jitendra Singh summed up the importance of the Artemis Accords as "paving the way for easing restrictions on import of critical technologies in the space domain, especially electronics benefitting Indian companies to develop systems and innovate for US markets." The US-India partnership is daring to explore frontiers that none in both country have tried before.

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal)

A call to condemn all ritualistic killings

Animals do not have a voice but they surely are living beings. Their welfare is often side-lined on the altars of religious traditions



VARDA MEHROTRA



The contentious issue of animal sacrifice as a hot topic in public discourse never dies. Its recurrence prompts us to reflect on the ethical implications surrounding the ritualistic practice of animal sacrifice. While such reflection is valuable, it is critical to not restrict this conversation to any specific religious observance. In our pursuit of cultivating a society grounded in compassion and justice, we should boldly question and challenge all forms of animal sacrifice, transcending religious demarcations.

The topic of animal sacrifice should not be confined solely to the discourse surrounding Eid al-Adha. This practice possesses deep historical and religious foundations that stretch across a myriad of religious traditions, encompassing Hinduism and Judaism, certain Christian denominations, and myriad indigenous belief systems worldwide. A 2015 study on animal sacrifice in contemporary Hindu rituals estimated that millions of animals are sacrificed each year in India and Nepal alone during festivals like Gadhimai or Navaratri. By channelling the debate onto a single religious community during the period of Eid, we inadvertently run the risk of promoting a skewed narrative. Not only is this unfair, but it also hinders our broader goal of acknowledging the inherent worth of animals and opposing the practice of sacrifice, irrespective of the religious context in which it occurs.

There are pressing concerns regarding the congruence of this practice with our rapidly evolving understanding of animal sentience and rights. Numerous scientific studies have affirmed the



WHEN THE CONVERSATION AROUND ANIMAL SACRIFICE NARROWS ITS FOCUS ON A SINGLE RELIGION, WE INADVERTENTLY REDUCE ANIMALS TO MERE PAWNS IN A LARGER DEBATE

The writer is the Director of Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations (FIAPO)

complex emotional lives and cognitive abilities of animals, heightening the ethical stakes of our treatment towards them. The distress and pain endured by the animals involved in the sacrificial process cannot be overlooked or minimized. While proponents of these practices might argue in favour of tradition and religious liberty, these considerations must be weighed against the burgeoning global consensus on the imperative of animal welfare and sentience.

To effectively address the concerns related to animal sacrifice, it is important to broaden our perspective beyond Eid al-Adha and instigate a comprehensive conversation that poses challenging questions to all religious communities. It becomes our shared responsibility to stimulate critical introspection and potential reevaluation of age-old practices that encompass the ritualistic slaughter of animals. Such an approach facilitates fairness, intellectual sincerity, and respect for all religious traditions while simultaneously advocating for more compassionate and ethical treatment of animals. It is our collective obligation to work towards creating a world where justice and respect for life extend to all beings, transcending the barriers of religion, culture, and tradition.

Indeed, when the conversation around animal sacrifice narrows its focus to a single religion,

we inadvertently reduce animals to mere pawns in a larger debate. It is crucial to remember that the core issue at hand involves living, sentient beings who are directly impacted by these rituals. By constraining our focus on one religious event, we risk obscuring the broader issue of animal welfare across diverse cultural and religious contexts.

Animals do not have a voice in these debates, and their welfare is often side-lined when religious traditions come under scrutiny. In this way, they become unwilling pawns in a larger societal game where their intrinsic value as sentient beings is overshadowed by ideological disputes.

Moreover, this limited focus can lead to unintended consequences such as heightened cultural tensions and an unfair portrayal of certain religious communities. It can contribute to an unbalanced narrative that unfairly stigmatizes one religious group, thus deflecting attention away from a comprehensive discussion about animal welfare across all traditions. This can, in turn, allow other practices involving animal harm to continue unexamined and unchallenged.

It is therefore vital to recognize the inherent dignity and rights of animals in these discussions. By doing so, we ensure that they are not merely pawns in a broader ideological conflict, but

sentient beings deserving of our respect and protection. Rather than focusing on individual religious practices, our efforts should be concentrated on promoting a universal ethos of compassion and respect for all forms of life, irrespective of the religious, cultural, or traditional contexts in which they occur.

A crucial aspect of this dialogue is promoting alternatives to animal sacrifice. Religious communities can embrace rituals that symbolically embody the spirit of sacrifice without the actual taking of animal lives. Making donations to charitable organizations, supporting animal sanctuaries, or undertaking compassionate actions towards all living beings, can serve as potential alternatives that foster a profound spiritual connection. By accentuating the foundational principles of love, empathy, and justice that permeate most religious doctrines, we can uphold the sanctity of life without resorting to acts of violence.

In our collective journey towards justice, let us ensure that the interests of animals remain at the forefront of our concerns, not a side issue in debates about specific religious practices. Only then can we truly claim to be working towards a more just and ethical world, where all sentient beings are accorded the respect and dignity they inherently deserve.

One-time toll tax can end woes of commuters

Ending toll for private four-wheelers by implementing a one-time lump sum fee at the time of vehicle purchase can ensure a safer and efficient traffic flow

Toll booths have become hotspots for conflicts, delays, and disputes, undermining efficient traffic flow and safety. The booths have become a common place for clashes, arguments, and even tragic incidents.

The introduction of FASTag has also not given the desired result as far as convenience is concerned to the commuter and there is an urgent need for relook as a sustainable and equitable alternative is needed to mitigate the issue and create a more harmonious driving environment.

I was forced to think, although I am not an expert on toll collection as revenue for Government, after a recent tragic incident where



SANJAY OJHA

(The writer is Vice President, of Corporate Communications, Bajaj Group)

a toll gate operator Pavan Naik was killed on duty in the wee hours of June 5, 2023, in Karnataka when the FASTag payment didn't go through swiftly, leading to a delay in the lifting of the bar at the gate. Naik was working at the Bengaluru-Mysore Seshagiri toll near Bidadi. There was a delay in the tax getting deducted from the car's FASTag. This forced the car to wait longer behind the gate and led to the tragic incident.

I suggest the elimination of toll collection for private four-wheelers by implementing a one-time lump sum fee at the time of vehicle purchase, like Road Tax.

Such a transformative approach not only addresses issues of congestion, fuel consumption, and pollution but

also ensures a harmonious driving experience while bolstering the economy.

Paying upfront a lifetime tax of Rs 5,000 or Rs 10,000 while purchasing a four-wheeler for at least Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh and above won't be a major issue. At the same time, it will give a huge amount to the Government exchequer for which it has to wait for years.

By replacing toll collection with a one-time lump sum fee, collected at the time of vehicle purchase, we can address the challenges associated with toll booths and unlock numerous benefits mentioned below.

Congestion Alleviation: The elimination of toll booths will streamline traffic flow, reducing congestion and trav-



el times. With no interruptions caused by toll collection, vehicles can seamlessly move through roadways, enhancing overall efficiency and productivity. Smoother traffic flow will lead to fewer bottlenecks, alleviating the frustration and delays often experienced at toll booths.

Fuel Conservation: Removing toll booths eliminates the need for vehicles to stop and idle, resulting in substantial fuel savings. By enabling a continuous flow of traffic, fuel consumption decreases, leading to cost savings for individual motorists. Additionally, reduced fuel usage translates into a positive environmental impact, as it contributes to lower carbon emissions and air pollution.

Pollution Reduction: The reduction of idle time at toll booths significantly curtails emissions of greenhouse gases and harmful pollutants. Improved air quality not only benefits public health but also fosters a more sustainable ecosystem. By implementing the lump sum road tax, we can contribute to a cleaner

and healthier environment for current and future generations.

Economic Advantages: Transitioning from toll collection to a one-time lump sum fee system carries economic benefits. The removal of toll booths eliminates administrative and operational costs associated with toll collection infrastructure. These cost savings can be directed towards more productive endeavours, such as infrastructure development, road maintenance, and public transportation improvements. Moreover, the reduction in traffic congestion leads to enhanced productivity, fuelling economic growth.

To conclude I can say ending toll collection for private four-wheelers by implementing a one-time lump

sum fee at the time of vehicle purchase represents a pivotal step towards a safer, more efficient, and economically thriving transportation system. By eliminating congestion, conserving fuel, reducing pollution, and fostering a peaceful driving experience, this innovative approach tackles the challenges inherent in the current tolling system.

Policymakers, stakeholders, and citizens must collaborate to embrace this progressive change, ensuring a harmonious and sustainable future on our roadways. Through the implementation of a lump sum road tax, we can achieve a transportation system that is efficient, equitable and contributes to the overall well-being of society.

Top PML-N leader hints at return of London-based Nawaz Sharif to Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
A senior leader of the PML-N on Thursday hinted at the return of former prime minister and party supremo Nawaz Sharif ahead of the general election, saying that the senior Sharif who was earlier eight hours away from Pakistan in London was now only two-and-a-half hours away in Dubai. Referring to the recent meeting held between Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Asif Ali Zardari, the co-chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in Dubai to hammer out a consensus on the upcoming poll alliance, senior party leader and federal minister Mian Javed Latif said that "prosperity would return whenever Nawaz returned to the country". "Nawaz was earlier eight



hours away from Pakistan, and now he was only two-and-a-half hours away. He will decide about the PML-N's alliance for the upcoming elections," Latif said while addressing reporters about the meeting between Sharif and Zardari. Last week Sharif, 73, travelled to the UAE from London, the city where he has been living in self-exile since November 2019 after acquiring a medical bail from jail following his conviction in a series of graft cases. Nawaz Sharif was issued a diplomatic passport for a period of five years by the government under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in November last year. Shehbaz Sharif, 71, is the younger brother of Nawaz Sharif. On Thursday, Latif said that

friendly countries were making investments in Pakistan at the request of Nawaz Sharif, as he would become the prime minister of Pakistan "for the fourth time". During a party meeting last week, Shehbaz Sharif, the president of PML-N, had also hinted at the possible return of his elder brother to lead the party's poll campaign in the general election and become the premier of the nation for a record fourth time. In a separate press conference on PML-N and PPP meeting in Dubai, PPP leader Faisal Karim Kundi said that the shape of any future alliance with the PML-N or other political players depended purely on the outcome of the general election, expected to be held in October. Insiders said that it was decided that elder Sharif of

PML-N and Zardari of PPP, would "talk directly" on these issues instead of allowing a prolonged debate "at the lower level", which would be a waste of time. Pakistan, currently in the throes of a major political as well as economic crisis, started preparations for the general election with a meeting of the election commission recently. The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) led by the PML-N is also fighting the challenge posed by former prime minister Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. The current National Assembly will complete its five-year term on August 12 and the fresh general election must be conducted within 60 days as laid down in the Constitution of Pakistan.



French police officer who shot 17-year-old under investigation for 'voluntary homicide'

AP ■ NANTERRE (FRANCE)
French prosecutors said magistrates will investigate a police officer who shot and killed a 17-year-old driver for "voluntary homicide," following two days of violent fires and protests. Overnight, protesters set cars and public buildings ablaze in Paris suburbs and unrest spread to some other French cities and towns, despite increased security efforts and the president's calls for calm. The killing of 17-year-old Nahel during a traffic check Tuesday, captured on video, shocked the country and stirred up long-simmering tensions between young people and police in housing projects and other disadvantaged neighbourhoods around France. Nanterre prosecutor Pascal Prache said that based on an initial investigation, he concluded that "the conditions for the legal use of the weapon were not met."

Two magistrates have been named to lead the investigation, he said. Under the French legal system, which differs from the US and British systems, magistrates often assigned to lead investigations. Prache said he requested that the officer be held in custody. That decision is to be made by another magistrate. Nahel's surname has not been released by authorities or by his family. In earlier statements, lawyers for the family spelled the name Nael. Clashes first erupted Tuesday night in and around the Paris suburb of Nanterre, where Nahel was killed, and the government deployed 2,000 police to maintain order Wednesday. But violence resumed after dusk. Police and firefighters struggled to contain protesters and extinguish numerous blazes through the night that damaged schools, police stations and town halls or other public buildings, according to a spokesperson for the national police. The national police on Thursday reported fires or skirmishes in multiple cities overnight, from Toulouse in the south to Lille in the north, though the nexus of tensions was Nanterre and other Paris suburbs. Police arrested 150 people around the country, more than half of them in the Paris region, the spokesperson said. She was not authorised to be publicly named according to police rules. The number of injured was not immediately released. French President Emmanuel Macron held an emergency security meeting Thursday about the violence. "These acts are totally unjustifiable," Macron said at the beginning of the meeting, which aimed at securing hot spots and planning for the coming days "so full peace can return."

Former Google executive enters 2024 US Senate race

AP ■ LOS ANGELES
Former tech executive Lexi Reese announced Thursday that she is entering California's 2024 U.S. Senate contest, adding another Democrat to a growing field of candidates that already includes several members of Congress. The Google and Facebook veteran enters the contest to replace retiring Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein as a virtual unknown in the nation's most populous state, home to 22 million voters. In her first run for office she is hoping to distinguish herself as an outsider - "a new candidate with a fresh message," her advisers say. That would contrast with established politicians already in the race: Democratic U.S. Reps. Katie Porter, Adam Schiff and Barbara Lee. "The California dream is dying," Reese says in an online video launching her campaign. "Millions of families are working hard but barely getting by. It is time to work together to



build a better future together." Reese filed a statement of candidacy with federal election regulators on June 15, designated a committee to raise funds and indicated she intended to spend personal funds on the campaign. It typically takes tens of millions of dollars to wage a successful statewide campaign in the vast state, which includes some of the nation's most expensive media markets. It's not clear how much Reese intends to spend from her personal funds on campaigning. Schiff, for example, had \$25 million in his campaign account at the end of March and is likely to have millions more after second-quarter fundraising concludes at the end of June.

EU leaders to assess Putin's position in talks with NATO and Ukraine chiefs

AP ■ BRUSSELS
All eyes were on NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at Thursday's European Union summit because their presence will underscore the importance the 27 EU leaders attach to protecting their eastern flank from Russian aggression and beefing up Ukraine's defense capabilities. Zelenskyy is set to address the gathering by video link and Stoltenberg will host an early lunch at the spring summit for leaders. But the biggest seat at the table will be reserved for something that's not officially on the agenda: the fallout from the stunning weekend mutiny in Russia. "The mutiny we saw at the weekend demonstrates that there are cracks and divisions within the Russian system. At the same time, it is important to underline that these are internal Russian matters," said



Stoltenberg on arrival at the summit. President Gitanas Nauseda of Lithuania, one of several EU nations bordering Russia, insisted it was all the more reason to take a robust posture toward Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Some colleagues sometimes say that a strong Putin is less dangerous than a weak Putin. I don't agree with that. We have to move forward and be decisive, because now is a crucial moment of history," he said. Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins of Latvia, another nation bordering Russia, said that "we cannot control what is happening inside Russia, but we can control what we do on the outside." Officials from several member states and EU institutions said the chaos and instability created by the rebellion would not only force the EU to double down on its support for Ukraine with commitments for more ammunition but also to ensure fighting and violence does not spill over into the bloc itself. "There is no room for hesitation," said Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas. "We must continue to increase the price of Russian aggression."

Greece's Left-wing Opposition leader, Alexis Tsipras, stepping down

AP ■ ATHENS
Greece's firebrand opposition leader, Alexis Tsipras, announced his decision Thursday to step down as leader of the left-wing Syriza party, days after a crushing general election defeat. Tsipras, 48, served as Greece's prime minister from 2015 to 2019 during politically tumultuous years as the country struggled to remain in the euro zone and end a series of international bailouts. "I have therefore decided to propose the election of a new leadership by the members of the party ... Of course I will not be a candidate," Tsipras said in a televised address. "I make no secret of the fact that this is a painful decision ... I don't take hasty decisions. I put them under my pillow and torture myself with them first," he added. In Sunday's general election, Tsipras' left-wing Syriza party received just under 18 per cent of the vote - losing almost half its support over the past four years - while Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' winning New Democracy party topped 40 per cent. "The party must take difficult and courageous decisions, which are called upon to serve a new vision. This obviously concerns me too," Tsipras said.

Muslim pilgrims take part in symbolic stoning of the devil as Hajj pilgrimage winds down

AP ■ MINA (SAUDI ARABIA)
Muslim pilgrims cast stones at pillars representing the devil on Thursday in the final days of the annual Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. This year's pilgrimage was the first in three years to be held without coronavirus restrictions and drew over 1.8 million Muslims from all corners of the earth. The pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam,

required of all Muslims at least once in their lives if they are able. For the pilgrims, it is a deeply spiritual journey that wipes away sins and affirms the unity of the worldwide Muslim community. It began with pilgrims circling the Kaaba in Mecca's Grand Mosque, the cube-shaped structure to which Muslims face during their five daily prayers. The spiritual high point came on Tuesday. That's when pilgrims flocked to Mount Arafat, where the Prophet Muhammad delivered his final sermon. During the final three days of the Hajj, pilgrims cast stones at pillars representing the devil, a reenactment of the temptation of the Prophet Ibrahim as related in Muslim traditions. Christian and Jewish traditions refer to him as Abraham. Those three days coincide with Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, when Muslims the world over slaughter sheep and cattle and share the meat with the poor. This year the Hajj was held in intense heat, with daytime temperatures reaching 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit). The Saudi Health Ministry said it treated thousands of pilgrims for heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

Philippines considering US request to host visa processing centre

AP ■ MANILA
Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said Thursday that a request for his country to temporarily host a US immigrant visa processing centre for thousands of Afghan nationals faces security and other concerns but is still being considered by his administration. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken first relayed the request to his Philippine counterpart last year, and President Joe Biden discussed the request when Marcos visited the United States in May, Philippine officials said. The full details of the request, which remains under negotiations between the treaty allies, have not been made public, but Marcos said he was told by American officials that only a maximum of 1,000 Afghan nationals would be allowed to stay in the Philippines at any one time while their special immigrant visas are being processed. A Philippine official said an initial 600 Afghan nationals would be allowed in a "pilot phase" if the US proposal gets approved.

125 Sudanese army soldiers held by paramilitary force are freed: Red Cross

AP ■ CAIRO
The International Committee of the Red Cross said Thursday it had facilitated the release of 125 Sudanese army soldiers held captive by the country's rival paramilitary force. The soldiers walked free on Wednesday, the ICRC said, as the violent conflict between the army, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, enters its 11th week. Fighting between the rival forces broke out on April 15 and has killed more than 3,000 people, the country's Health Ministry said. Over 2.5 million people have been displaced, according to the latest U.N. figures.



The freed men - 44 of whom were wounded - were transported from the capital, Khartoum, to the city of Wad Madani, 160 kilometers (100 miles) to the south, the ICRC said in a short statement. It remains unclear where the 125 men were being held. "This positive step means that families will be celebrating Eid al-Adha with their loved ones," said Jean Christophe Sandoz, ICRC's head of delegation in Sudan. The RSF claim to have detained hundreds of army soldiers since the fighting broke out. Interviews with army detainees feature prominently on the paramilitary's social media, with soldiers - who often appear bruised and frightened - telling their families they are being treated well by their RSF captors. Earlier this week, both generals separately announced a cease-fire to mark the first day of the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha, which fell on Wednesday. Residents from East Khartoum said light gunfire and intermittent explosions could be heard throughout the truce. Since the conflict broke out there have been at least nine cease-fires, but all have foundered.

UK appeals court rules that plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda is unlawful

AP ■ LONDON
A British court ruled Thursday that a government plan to send asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda is unlawful, delivering a blow to the Conservative administration's pledge to stop migrants making risky journeys across the English Channel. In a split two-to-one ruling, three Court of Appeal judges said Rwanda could not be considered a "safe third country" where migrants could be sent. But the judges said that a policy of deporting asylum seekers to another country was not in itself illegal, and the government said it would challenge the ruling at the UK Supreme Court. It has until July 6 to lodge an appeal. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that "while I respect the court I fundamentally disagree with their conclusions." Sunak has pledged to "stop the boats" - a reference to the overcrowded dinghies and other small craft that make the journey from northern France carrying migrants who hope to live in the UK. More than 45,000 people arrived in Britain across the Channel in 2022, and several died in the attempt. The UK and Rwandan governments agreed more than a year ago that some migrants who arrive in the UK as stowaways or in small boats would be sent to Rwanda, where their asylum claims would be processed. Those granted asylum would stay in the East African country rather than return to Britain. The UK government argues that the policy will smash the business model of criminal gangs that ferry migrants on hazardous journeys across one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. Human rights groups say it is immoral and inhumane to send people more than 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometres) to a country they don't want to live in, and argue that most Channel migrants are desperate people who have no authorised way to come to the UK. They also cite Rwanda's poor human rights record, including allegations of torture and killings of government opponents. Britain has already paid Rwanda 140 million pounds (USD 170 million) under the deal, but no one has yet been deported there. Britain's High Court ruled in December that the policy is legal and doesn't breach Britain's obligations under the UN Refugee Convention or other international agreements, rejecting a lawsuit from several asylum-seekers, aid groups and a border officials' union.



extended the ban to the rest of Ethiopia, where over 20 million people rely on such assistance. Tigray was the epicentre of a two-year war that ended in November and killed an estimated hundreds of thousands of people. Aid access to Tigray was blocked or restricted for much of the conflict, and humanitarian supplies were only just returning to the region when the US and UN halted food assistance. The US and UN first halted food aid to Tigray in March, and in early June they

US says it's horrified by conditions in Ethiopia after theft leads to food aid pause

AP ■ NAIROBI
The United States humanitarian agency told The Associated Press it is horrified by conditions in Ethiopia, where local officials have reported hundreds of hunger deaths in recent weeks after the US and the United Nations paused food aid for one-sixth of the country's population over massive theft of the aid. In an unusually strong statement emailed to the AP, the US Agency for International

Development called the aid suspension "wrenching" and a measure of last resort because of the "extreme scale and coordination of food aid diversion identified across the country." US officials have said in private that this could be the biggest-ever theft of aid in any country. The US and UN have not said who was involved in the theft, which was first discovered in March in the northern Tigray region when tons of food meant for needy people were instead found for sale in sacks branded with the US flag. Aid workers said Ethiopian government officials are deeply involved. The government, which largely controls the aid delivery process, dismisses as harmful propaganda the suggestion that it bears primary responsibility for the disappearance of aid. It has agreed to a joint investigation with the US while the UN's World Food Programme carries out a separate probe.



"The theft of food from this highly vulnerable population is unconscionable," the USAID email said after the AP reported this week that local officials and university researchers had recorded over 700 starvation-related deaths in Tigray since the food pause started three months ago. The officials and researchers linked the deaths to the suspension. The US and UN first halted food aid to Tigray in March, and in early June they

The US and UN are demanding the removal of Ethiopian government officials from the aid distribution process and seek the introduction of biometric checks before resuming food deliveries, which they hope to do as early as July. "We are horrified by the ongoing suffering experienced by the people of Ethiopia and our focus is on resuming food assistance as quickly as possible once we can be confident it is going to the people in need," the USAID email said.

India removed from UNSG report on impact of armed conflict on children

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS
UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has removed India from his annual report on the impact of armed conflict on children, citing measures taken by the Indian government to better protect them.
India was mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict since 2010 along with other countries of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Lake Chad basin, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the Philippines for alleged recruitment and use of boys by armed groups in Jammu and Kashmir; detention of boys by Indian security forces in J&K for their alleged association with armed groups, or on national security grounds.
Guterres said in his report last year, he had welcomed the engagement of the Indian government with his special repre-

sentative and noted that it might lead to the removal of India as a situation of concern.
In his 2023 report on Children and Armed Conflict, the UN chief said, "In view of the measures taken by the government to better protect children, India has been removed from the report in 2023."
Guterres highlighted the technical mission of the office of his special representative in July 2022 to identify areas of cooperation for child protection, and the workshop on strengthening child protection held in Jammu and Kashmir last November by the government, with the participation of the United Nations.
In his latest report, he also called upon India to implement the remaining measures identified in consultation with his special representative and the United Nations.
These include the training of armed and security forces on child protection, prohibition of



the use of lethal and non-lethal force on children, including ending the use of pellet guns, ensuring that children are detained as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, Guterres said.
He also stressed the implementation of measures to prevent all forms of ill-treatment in detention and the full implementation of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of

Children) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.
Briefing reporters on Tuesday, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba said that for the last two years, "we have been working very closely with India".
"India decided to start a prevention engagement," she said, adding the country indicated

that it was ready to start engagement to see if it could put in place measures that could be sustained through time and would allow for it to be removed from the report.
In last year's report, Guterres had said he was concerned by the "increased number of violations against children verified in Jammu and Kashmir", and had called upon the Indian government to strengthen child protection. The UN chief had welcomed the legal and administrative framework for the protection of children and improved access to child protection services in Chhattisgarh, Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha and Jammu and Kashmir, and progress in the creation of a Jammu and Kashmir Commission for Protection of Child Rights.
In his annual report on children and armed conflict released here Tuesday, Guterres said that globally in 2022, children continued to be dispro-



Federal Reserve may tighten financial rules after US bank failures, says Powell

AP ■ WASHINGTON
Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Thursday that the central bank may have to tighten its oversight of the American financial system in the wake of the failure of three large US banks this spring.
Powell said in prepared remarks delivered at a banking conference in Madrid that tougher regulations put in place after the 2007-2008 financial crisis have made large multinational banks much more resilient to widespread loan defaults, such as the bursting of the housing bubble that led to that crisis.
But the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and First Republic Bank exposed different vulnerabilities that the Fed will likely address through new proposals, Powell said.
He did not provide details, but other Fed officials have said banks should be required to hold more capital in reserve to guard against loan losses.
Such proposals are likely to face resistance from the banking industry and some congressional Republicans, who argue that the Fed had the necessary tools to prevent the bank collapses but failed to use them.
One reason regulators missed the threats to the three banks was "the natural human tendency to fight the last war," Powell said.
The 2008 financial crisis occurred because of widespread defaults after the housing bubble burst. But Silicon Valley Bank failed for different reasons: A rapid increase in interest rates

sharply lowered the value of its bond holdings, because they paid out lower interest rates than newer bonds.
"These events suggest a need to strengthen our supervision and regulation of institutions of the size of SVB," Powell said. "I look forward to evaluating proposals for such changes and implementing them where appropriate."
In a question and answer session, he indicated that the rules needed to be updated to account for how quickly a bank run could happen.
"A bank run used to be people standing in line at an ATM," the Fed chief said. "That's very different from what we saw at Silicon Valley Bank," with depositors using smartphones to move money instantly.
Fed supervisors had spotted bank vulnerabilities, including exposure to rising rates, but were working within a system that moved too slowly to head off trouble, Powell said.
"The supervisors were on the right issues, but they were operating under a standard playbook where you escalate things fairly carefully, fairly slowly," he said.
An ongoing review of Fed supervision would "try to find ways to be more agile and, where appropriate, more forceful," Powell said.
Banks with USD 100 billion to USD 250 billion in assets - which included all three failed banks - were freed from some requirements in 2018 under legislation passed by Congress and rules issued by the Fed.



Nelson Mandela Foundation CEO axed over 'unacceptable' conduct

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG
The Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) Board has summarily axed its CEO Sello Hatang for "unacceptable" conduct following an investigation into complaints about him from some employees.
The complaints were received last month, shortly after Hatang tendered his resignation, and he was placed on special leave by the Board pending the investigation's outcome being conducted by an independent panel.
The Foundation is housed in a building in Johannesburg, sponsored by the Indian government after Mandela became South Africa's first democratically elected president after serving 27 years as a political prisoner.
In a statement on Wednesday, the NMF Board said that Hatang had been dismissed after an investigation into complaints about him from some employees revealed that he had conducted himself in an unacceptable manner. It did not provide any details of this conduct.
"After considering the outcomes of the independent investigation and ensuring that the process had been conducted fairly and without prejudice, the Board concluded that Mr Hatang's conduct had been unbecoming and was unacceptable for someone in his position and that he should be summarily dismissed," the statement said.
It added that the investigation took careful consideration of the rights of the complainants and Hatang, "as well as the Board's commitment to entrenching the Foundation's core values of respect and trust.

Lanka spares banks in \$20 bn local debt restructuring plan

AP ■ COLOMBO
Sri Lanka will spare banks from being part of its local debt restructuring plan because of the possible impact on deposits, while the bulk of the burden will be shared by the Central Bank and superannuation funds, officials said Thursday.
Sri Lanka's Cabinet a day earlier approved a plan to restructure nearly half of its \$42.1 billion local debt following a bailout agreement with the International Monetary Fund. A special Parliament sitting has been convened for Saturday to seek approval for the plan.
The government has announced a bank holiday until next week to prevent any speculation-triggered bank run.
Central Bank governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said the treasury bills owned by the bank will be converted into treasury bonds with a longer maturity period and the same has been proposed to superannuation funds. If those funds are unwilling to be part of the plan they may have to pay a 30% tax instead of the 14% special treatment effective now.
Sri Lanka is also seeking to reduce nearly \$17 billion of its \$41.5 billion foreign debt through restructuring.



Sri Lanka announced last year that it was suspending repayment of foreign loans because of a severe foreign currency crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, excessive borrowing by the government and efforts by the central bank to stabilize the Sri Lankan rupee with scarce foreign reserves.
Sri Lanka sought the support of the IMF, which approved a bailout package in March, through which \$3 billion will be disbursed in stages.
Sri Lanka's economic crisis, the worst in its history, caused severe shortages of food, medicine, fuel, cooking gas and electricity last year. That led to massive street protests that forced President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and resign.

UNESCO members expected to approve US decision to rejoin the UN's cultural agency

AP ■ PARIS
UNESCO's 193 member states are gathering Thursday for a two-day meeting in Paris aimed at voting on the United States' plans to rejoin the U.N. Cultural and scientific agency after a decade-long dispute sparked by the organization's move to include Palestine as a member.
The U.S. Announced earlier this month, that it wanted to return, five years after it withdrew from the agency during the presidency of Donald Trump.
U.S. Officials say the decision was motivated by concern that China is filling the gap left by the U.S. In UNESCO poli-

Trump's GOP support dips slightly after his indictment over classified documents

AP ■ NEW YORK
Former President Donald Trump's criminal indictment on charges of mishandling government secrets appears to have dented his popularity among Republicans - but only slightly - according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.
Sixty percent of Republicans now have a favorable view of Trump, down slightly from April, when 68% of Republicans said they had a favorable view of the 2024 GOP presidential front-runner. The poll found 38% of Republicans have an unfavorable view of Trump, an uptick from 30% in April.
The dip suggests some Republicans could be growing weary of Trump's never-ending legal drama after he became the first former president in U.S. History to be indicted on federal criminal charges. Trump, who was also indicted on separate charges in New York this spring, pleaded not guilty this month to 37 felony counts accusing him of improperly storing classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, concealing them from investigators and refusing to turn them over when subpoenaed.
Overall, Americans are more likely to have an unfavorable view of Trump than a favorable one, 63% to 33% - similar to April. The poll was conducted June 22-26, after the full indictment became public and after Trump's not guilty plea.



tics, notably in setting standards for artificial intelligence and technology education around the world.
Approval by member states seems a formality since not a single country has raised an objection to the return of a country that was once the agency's single biggest funder. The vote is expected Thursday or Friday.
The U.S. And Israel stopped financing UNESCO after it voted to include Palestine as a member state in 2011. The Trump administration decided in 2017 to withdraw from the agency altogether the following year, citing long-running anti-Israel bias and management problems.

UK PM Rishi Sunak honours 101-year-old Sikh WW-II veteran

PTI ■ LONDON
British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has honoured Rajinder Singh Dhatt, one of the last surviving Sikh soldiers who fought in the Second World War with a Points of Light honour at a UK-India Week reception at 10 Downing Street.
Dhatt, 101, was recognised on Wednesday for his service and his work running the "Undivided Indian Ex-Servicemen's Association" to help bring together British Indian war veterans.
Dhatt, based in Hounslow in southwest London since 1963, was born in pre-Partition India in 1921 and fought with the Allied forces during the British colonial period.
"It is an immense honour to receive this recognition from the Prime Minister, to whom I would like to extend my deepest appreciation for acknowledging the importance and impact of the 'Undivided Indian Ex-Servicemen's Association'," said Dhatt.
"The journey of establishing this organisation was driven by a deep sense of duty as an ex-serviceman and the vision of fostering unity, support, and camaraderie. This award serves as a testament to the tireless efforts of countless individuals who have contributed to the success and growth of the association over the years," he said.
"Their unwavering commitment and selfless service has played a pivotal role in bringing about positive change in the lives of our ex-servicemen and their families," he added.
Dhatt's honour coincided with a Downing Street reception celebrating India Global Forum's UK-India Week celebration of the bilateral relationship, where Prime Minister Sunak spoke of Dhatt as an "incredible man" and thanked him for his service as a member of the Indian diaspora "living bridge".



Australian prosecutor says former Israeli principal feigned mental illness

AP ■ CANBERRA
A former principal of an Australian Jewish school feigned mental illness in a seven-year battle to avoid extradition on child sex abuse charges, a prosecutor said Thursday.
Malka Leifer fought her extradition in Jerusalem courts from 2014 until 2021, when she was flown from Israel with her ankles and wrists shackled.
Leifer appeared Thursday in the Victoria state County Court for the second day of a sentencing hearing after she was convicted in April of sexually abusing two students between 2003 and 2007 while she was principal of Melbourne's ultra-Orthodox Adass Israel School for girls.
Prosecutor Justin Lewis told Judge Mark Gamble that Leifer deserved less credit in her sentence for time she spent in custody and under house arrest in her native Israel because she had "improperly frustrated and delayed the extradition proceedings."
The District Court of Jerusalem ruled she was fit to stand trial and had been pretending to be mentally ill in order to avoid extradition, he said, and three judges of the Supreme Court of Israel unanimously agreed she should be prosecuted.
Two psychiatrists appointed by the Jerusalem District Psychiatrist reported to the District Court in February 2018 that Leifer did not suffer from a mental illness in the legal sense and was



feigning her psychiatric condition in order to prevent her extradition to Australia.
A second assessment, which included a third psychiatrist appointed by the Jerusalem District Psychiatrist, also concluded that Leifer was feigning mental illness.
The District Court then ordered the Tel Aviv District Psychiatrist to appoint a panel of experts to assess her.
That panel unanimously concluded in January 2020 that she was mentally fit to stand trial and that she had "unquestionably been feigning her inability to function and comprehend her situation," Lewis said.

Biden wrapping campaign fundraising blitz aimed at making statement

AP ■ WASHINGTON
President Joe Biden has cozied up to high-dollar donors at posh Upper East Side penthouses and on West Coast decks gussied up with floral arrangements and flags in recent weeks. He has two more fundraisers in New York on Thursday that will close out an end-of-quarter campaign blitz his team believes will put him on strong financial footing for a contest they expect to set new spending records.
Friday's events will be Biden's 9th and 10th fundraising receptions of the past two weeks, numbers that have been matched by Vice President Kamala Harris, first lady Jill Biden, and second gentleman



comers like Govs. Gavin Newsom of California and J.B. Pritzker of Illinois and more established figures like former President Barack Obama. Obama on Thursday will be featured in a new Biden campaign video meant to encourage small-dollar online donations ahead of the Friday donation deadline. Allies insist that despite polls showing lagging enthusiasm among the Democratic base for the 80-year-old president, the party is solidly behind him.
"I've been doing this for a really long time for a number of presidents and presidential candidates," said Jeffrey Katzenberg, the Hollywood mogul, Democratic mega-donor and co-chair of Biden's campaign.

Facebook content moderators in Kenya call the work 'torture'

AP ■ NAIROBI
On the verge of tears, Nathan Nkunzimana recalled watching a video of a child being molested and another of a woman being killed.
Eight hours a day, his job as a content moderator for a Facebook contractor required him to look at horrors so the world wouldn't have to. Some overwhelmed colleagues would scream or cry, he said.
Now, Nkunzimana is among nearly 200 former employees in Kenya who are suing Facebook and local contractor Sama over working conditions that could have implications for social media moderators around the world.
It is the first known court challenge outside the United States, where Facebook settled with moderators in 2020.
The group was employed at the social media giant's outsourced hub for content moderation in Kenya's capital of Nairobi, where workers screen posts, videos, messages and other content from users across Africa, removing any illegal or harmful material that breaches its community standards and terms of service.
The moderators from several African countries are seeking a USD 1.6 billion compensation fund after alleging poor working conditions, including insufficient mental health support and low pay.
Earlier this year, they were laid off by Sama as it left the business of content moderation. They assert that the companies are ignoring a court order for their contracts to be extended until the case is resolved.
Facebook and Sama have defended their employment practices.
With little certainty of how long the case will take to conclude, the moderators



expressed despair as money and work permits run out and they wrestle with the traumatic images that haunt them.
"If you feel comfortable browsing and going through the Facebook page, it is because there's someone like me who has been there on that screen, checking. Is this okay to be here?" Nkunzimana, a father of three from Burundi, told The Associated Press in Nairobi.
The 33-year-old said content moderation is like "soldiers" taking a bullet for Facebook users, with workers watching harmful content showing killing, suicide and sexual assault and making sure it is taken down.
For Nkunzimana and others, the job began with a sense of pride, feeling like they were "heroes to the community," he said.
But as the exposure to alarming content reignited past traumas for some like him who had fled political or ethnic violence back home, the moderators found little support and a culture of secrecy.
They were asked to sign nondisclosure agreements. Personal items like phones were not allowed at work.

Amtrak train with 198 passengers derailed after hitting truck on tracks in Southern California

AP ■ MOORPARK (US)
An Amtrak train carrying nearly 200 passengers struck a county water truck and derailed on Wednesday in Southern California, critically injuring the truck's driver, authorities said.
Three of the train's seven cars went off the tracks following the collision in Moorpark, said Ventura County Fire Department Captain Brian McGrath. Fourteen people on the train were taken to hospitals with minor injuries, while the truck driver was taken to a trauma center with a head injury, McGrath said.



DJOKOVIC'S BID FOR WIMBLEDON TITLE STARTS NEXT WEEK

AP ■ WIMBLEDON
Listen to Novak Djokovic's opponents explain why he is as successful as he is - why he will begin his pursuit of a fifth consecutive and eighth overall Wimbledon championship on Monday; why he also will be attempting to claim an Open era-record 24th Grand Slam trophy over the coming fortnight on the All England Club's grass courts - and they'll offer plenty of answers.

every cell in my body. And I just want to send a message out there to every young person: Be in the present moment; forget about what happened in the past; the future is something that is just going to happen," Djokovic said. "But if you want a better future, you create it. Take the means in your hands. Believe it. Create it." Speaking that day about his own hopes and dreams as a 7-year-old kid, Djokovic noted two primary goals: getting to No. 1 and winning Wimbledon.



more," said Djokovic's coach, Goran Ivanisevic. "It's fascinating to see, because sometimes you think, OK, now you have 23. But he's going to find, again, some kind of motivation to win 24, maybe 25. Who knows where is the end?" Entering the 2011 season, the so-called Big Three's Slam standings looked like this:

Federer with 16, Nadal with nine, Djokovic with one. After winning his initial major title at the 2008 Australian Open, Djokovic went through an 11-major span where four of the losses came against Federer or Nadal in a semifinal or final. His self-confidence waned a bit. "That's where I was really doubting myself, whether I

Aleksandar Kovacevic, put it - Djokovic dug in away from the court and found ways to improve. And still does that, which is part of why most consider him, and not No. 1 seed Carlos Alcaraz, the favorite as Djokovic continues to pursue the first calendar-year Grand Slam by a man since Rod Laver in 1969.

So where did this belief come from? Djokovic points to several factors: his upbringing during a time of war and embargo in Serbia in the 1990s; his parents ("95-plus percent of people ... Were laughing at them, and were discouraging them to spend whatever is left over from the family budget into such an expensive sport," he said); his first coach and "tennis mother," Jelena Genic; and a later coach and "tennis father," Niki Pilic. All helped him grow as an athlete and person. When he was 7 or 8, Djokovic said, Genic would show him video of the best male and female tennis players. She also taught him "the importance of relaxing and listening to classical music, reading poetry, singing, and reading, breathing consciously and so forth." His mother, he said, "is a rock," and his father "instilled in me such power of belief and positive thinking."



Ex-No1 Wozniacki returning to tennis 3 years after retiring

AP ■ NEW YORK
Caroline Wozniacki, a former No. 1-ranked tennis player and the 2018 Australian Open champion, announced on Thursday that she is returning to competition three years after she retired to start a family. The US Tennis Association said it will grant Wozniacki a wild-card invitation to participate in the US Open, which begins in New York on August 28. She also is receiving a wild-card entry for a tournament in Montreal that begins earlier in August, she intends to play in the Australian Open next January and hopes to represent Denmark at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Another aim: She wants to show women that it is possible to combine motherhood with a career. Wozniacki, who turns 33 in July, has not played an official match since losing to Ons Jabeur in the third round of the Australian Open in January 2020. Wozniacki revealed a month earlier that her appearance at Melbourne Park would be the last of her career. She and her husband, former NBA player David Lee, have a 2-year-old daughter and an 8-month-old son. "Over these past three years away from the game I got to make up for lost time with my family. I became a mother and now have two beautiful children I am so grateful for. But I still have goals I want to accomplish. I want to show my kids that you can pursue your dreams no matter your age or role," Wozniacki wrote Thursday on Twitter. "We decided as a family it's time. I'm coming back to play and I can't wait!" She was No. 1 in the WTA rankings for a total of 71 weeks - first reaching that spot in 2010 - and earned 30 titles, including the first in Grand Slam singles for a player from Denmark when she triumphed in Australia about 5 1/2 years ago. Wozniacki twice was the runner-up at the U.S. Open, in 2009 to Kim Clijsters and in 2014 to good friend Serena Williams, and reached the semifinals at Flushing Meadows three other times. She announced in October 2018 that she has rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune condition that can cause pain and swelling in the wrist and other joints. "Am I nervous? Not really. I'm coming back to something I love. Yes, I'll be nervous before a match; I'm OK with that. I'm great with that. Can I win the U.S. Open? I think so. Can I win the Australian Open? I think so," Wozniacki wrote in a first-person piece for Vogue magazine posted on Thursday. "That's why I'm doing this. And I guess we'll see what happens." She wrote about speaking to women "who gave up on their own dreams because they wanted to be with their families, but somewhere deep down they have this yearning to do something they're passionate about." Wozniacki continued: "I want to show those women that maybe there's a way. It's certainly not easy to find the right balance - and I'm so lucky to have a supportive husband and supportive parents, and the help of a nanny - but I think it's possible. I want to prove that to myself and to those women. You can have both: You can be thrilled with your family and with everything at home and still have a career - and be great at it."

India move up by one spot of FIFA ranking

IANS ■ NEW DELHI
The Indian football team has risen by one place in the latest FIFA Men's World Rankings, from 101 to 100, which was released on Thursday. This is the first time in five years that the Blue Tigers have reached the top 100, having last been ranked at the 97th place in 2018. "India move up to 100 in the latest FIFA Men's World Ranking. Steadily we rise," said the Indian football team's official handle in a tweet. In April, India moved up to 101 in the FIFA Rankings. They have now gained 4.24 points which have helped them move into the top 100 after going unbeaten in June in the Intercontinental Cup and the SAFF Championships. India have been on a hot streak of form recently and have been unbeaten since their 0-3 defeat to Vietnam in the 2022 VFF Tri-Nation Series



They have won seven out of nine games in 2023 while drawing twice, recently against Kuwait in the ongoing SAFF Championship and one against Lebanon in the Hero Intercontinental Cup. Igor Stimac's men have also won two titles this year - Tri-Nation Series and the Intercontinental Cup. In the nine games since the loss to Vietnam in September 2022, India have also netted 15 goals while registering eight clean sheets in a row - a new national record. Sunil Chhetri and Co. will look to continue their unbeaten streak as they face Lebanon in the SAFF Championship semifinals on Saturday.

James Maddison leaves Leicester for Tottenham

AP ■ LONDON
Tottenham completed the signing of England midfielder James Maddison from Leicester. Spurs entered advanced talks with the recently relegated Foxes earlier this week and secured Maddison in a deal worth 40 million pounds (\$50 million) plus add-ons. Maddison has agreed a five-year deal with the club and becomes new Tottenham coach Ange Postecoglou's third arrival of the summer. The transfer of Maddison will represent a major coup for Spurs, who have been long-term admirers of the 26-year-old player. During five largely successful years with Leicester, which won the FA Cup in 2021, Maddison made 203 appearances, scored 55 goals and produced 41 assists. While Maddison was unable to prevent Leicester suffering a shock relegation to the second tier, he was still able to hit double figures for goals. Leicester's fight for survival saw the club turn down advances for Maddison in the January transfer window but it has now agreed for him to depart. Maddison's creativity and versatility will boost a Spurs squad that has lacked a player in his mold since Christian Eriksen left in 2020. His arrival completes a busy couple of weeks for Tottenham, who made Dejan Kulusevski's loan switch from Juventus permanent and signed Empoli goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario.



Kerala ready to host Lionel Messi's Argentina

IANS ■ NEW DELHI
Days after the All India Football Federation (AIFF) turned down a proposal from Argentina to play a football friendly in India citing its staggering appearance fee, Kerala Sports Minister V. Abdurrahiman said the state is ready to host the Lionel Messi-led world champions, provided they are willing to come. Abdurrahiman said he has already spoken to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in this regard. "Everyone knows how passionate the Chief Minister is about sports. It was Vijayan who first mooted the idea of hosting Argentina for a friendly, which has been conveyed to them. Once we get a confirmation from Argentina, will go forward with it. We will also approach the AIFF, and I don't see any reason for it to turn down our proposal," said Abdurrahiman, who hails from Malappuram, the most football crazy district in Kerala. When asked about the likely expenses and if the state will be able to afford it, Abdurrahiman replied, "Kerala's love for football is known to all, so funds will not be an issue at all."



Stimac not happy with players losing possession

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Indian football team head coach Igor Stimac has expressed his displeasure over his wards losing possession of the ball at crucial junctures of a game. Following up their triumph in the Intercontinental Cup, India have reached the semifinals of the SAFF Championship, and Lebanon stand in their way in the last-four clash. "There's not much to complain about. We need to improve in those moments of the game when our focus and concentration needs to be at the highest possible level and try not to give away anything," said Stimac. "The part I'm not satisfied with is when we give away simple passes without any pressure because, after that, you need to waste an enormous amount of energy to get the ball back with the high press that we do. Overall, I'm very happy with the boys. They are coming very close to the level where I

want them to be," he added. The match against Kuwait may have ended in heartbreak for the Blue Tigers, who were on their way to victory until an Anwar Ali own goal led to a share of points, but Stimac said that the result has, in no way, dampened the spirits in the camp. "We are improving from game to game. We have a great mood whenever we step out on the training pitch," said Stimac. "We knew that some time or the other, we were going to concede a goal. We didn't expect it would happen with an own goal in the last minute. But that's part of football, and you need to accept it." There was plenty of drama on and off the pitch in the final 10 minutes of the game, which saw three red cards - two for India (Stimac and Rahim Ali) and one for Kuwait (Hamad Al-Qallaf). The late equaliser led to theatrical reactions from the visitors' bench, which rejoiced by

making aggressive gestures towards the Indian dugout. "The important thing is that we dominated Kuwait in all aspects of the game. So, I'm really happy with the boys. We are now preparing for the semifinals, and everything is going to be okay and in place there," said the former Croatia international. The Blue Tigers have put that result behind, and the sole focus is now on the semifinal against Lebanon on Saturday. After already facing the Cedars twice in the Intercontinental Cup in Bhubaneswar earlier this month, including in the final, India will head into the clash with confidence. According to the latest FIFA men's rankings released on Thursday, India have risen by one place to 100 courtesy of their Intercontinental Cup triumph. "I'm happy with the news, but we need to cement that position in our next few games," said Stimac.

Top French court upholds hijab ban in women's football



AFP ■ PARIS
France's top administrative court on Thursday upheld a ban on women football players wearing Islamic hijab headscarves, after the issue was seized on by politicians claiming secularism was at risk. "Sporting federations whose task is to ensure the good functioning of public services... can impose a neutrality requirement on their players in competitions and sporting events, to guarantee the smooth running of matches and any clashes or confrontation," the Constitutional Council said in a statement. It found a French Football Federation (FFF) rule against "any sign or clothing clearly showing political, philosophical, religious or union affiliation" during play to be "appropriate and proportionate". A group of Muslim women footballers called the "Hijabeuses" had launched the action against the FFF regulation. The FFF said simply that it

had "taken note" of the ruling, adding that the sporting body "reaffirms the republican and civic values that bring football to life, and its total commitment to fighting all forms of discrimination and promoting female-male equality". Marion Ogier, a lawyer for the "Hijabeuses", said the decision "upsets secularism and freedom of expression" as well as "abusing 30 years of legal precedent" on the question. "This decision goes against social cohesion in a country founded on diversity and pluralism," she told AFP. Judges had found themselves under political pressure ahead of the ruling as mainstream parties look to fend off the far right riding high in the polls. Secularism is a sensitive topic in France, presented by its defenders as a way of guaranteeing the state's religious neutrality and by critics as a dog-whistle against ethnic and religious minorities, especially Muslims.



Andy Murray condemns snub to female stars in Wimbledon's poster as 'disastrous'

IANS ■ NEW DELHI
Andy Murray has criticised Wimbledon's contentious artwork showcasing tennis's most iconic rivalries, labelling it a "disaster" due to its inadequate recognition of female players. In a recently shared image on Wimbledon's Twitter account, a depiction of 15 renowned players descending a staircase at the All England Club drew attention. Notably, the positioning of four of the six women were at the back, while Andy Murray was excluded entirely, with Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz, who have not gone beyond the quarterfinals in the

grass-court grand slam, at the front. Of the six women players, only Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova are among the front 11 players while Serena and Venus Williams, who have won a combined 12 Wimbledon singles titles, were near the back. Speaking after his 6-4, 6-4 loss to world number six Holger Rune at the Hurlingham exhibition, Murray said "Me not being on it is certainly not a problem" but the grouping of the men at the front was "slightly strange". "It was a disaster, wasn't it? I don't need to elaborate any more on it, it's pretty obvious if you see the poster. I guess the

players that are on the poster are ones that have had incredible careers and have been unbelievably successful at Wimbledon," the 36-year-old was quoted by BBC. "Alcaraz and Sinner are unbelievable players but it just seems strange that they were all sort of behind them. I personally don't really care that much about it. But I can see when you look at it, it's like, 'that does look a bit strange'." Murray won two Challenger titles in the home grass-court season but suffered a first-round exit at Queen's last week. He will not be seeded at Wimbledon, which begins on July 3.

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ENG FIGHT BACK AFTER SMITH'S 110

AP LONDON

England cruised to 145-1 by tea on day two of the second Ashes Test after bowling out Australia for 416 at Lord's on Thursday.

Steve Smith scores 32nd Test hundred

IANS NEW DELHI

Australia's Steve Smith scored a hundred against England during the second Ashes Test on Thursday at the Lord's Cricket Ground in London.

Cook made 98. That was 32 Ashes tests ago. Crawley was the more impressive of the pair, hitting back-to-back fours against Mitchell Starc, driving and pulling Josh Hazlewood to the rope, and sweeping Lyon through midwicket.

Australia's Lyon suffers calf injury in Ashes blow

AFP LONDON

Australia off-spinner Nathan Lyon suffered an Ashes injury scare when he limped off with a calf problem during the second day of the second Test at Lord's.

a boundary though midwicket against the expensive Starc.

Duckett was strong through midwicket and the covers for his eighth fifty in his 12th test.

Pope was relatively haring along with 32 from 40 balls, and showing no sign of the injured right shoulder from Wednesday that kept him from the field for most of three sessions.

He and Duckett had an unbeaten 54 together. Starc was picked ahead of Scott Boland in the only change by Australia after winning at Edgbaston last week, but was proving costlier after his first seven overs were plundered for 55 runs.



KL Should Play In Nets Before Making India Comeback

PNS NEW DELHI

Star Indian wicketkeeper-batter KL Rahul who picked up an injury, suffered a hamstring injury while playing for LSG against RCB during IPL 2023 match and is currently in NCA in Bengaluru for regaining full fitness.



Australia's bid to retain the Ashes.

Pat Cummins' side led 1-0 after winning the first Test of the five-match series at Edgbaston. Earlier on Thursday, Lyon had dismissed Zak Crawley to claim his 496th Test wicket and ninth of the series.

Ganguly Questions Rahane's Test Vice Captaincy



PNS NEW DELHI

Sourav Ganguly finds it extremely baffling that Ajinkya Rahane has been handed Test vice captaincy after spending nearly 18 months on the sidelines as the former India skipper demanded "consistency and continuity" in the selection process.

be clear with a player, who has featured in more than 100 Tests for India.

Somebody like Pujara can't be dropped, then picked, dropped again and then picked. Same with Ajinkya Rahane also," the straight-talking Ganguly said.

While he didn't term Rahane's ascendancy as a step backward, he didn't term it as a pragmatic decision. "I won't say it's a step backward. You have been out for 18 months, then you play a Test and you become a vice-captain. I don't understand the thought process behind it. There is Ravindra Jadeja, who has been there for a long time and a certainty in Test matches, he is a candidate." "...but to just come back and straightaway become vice-captain after 18 months, I don't understand. My only thing is that selection shouldn't be hot and cold. There has to be continuity and consistency in selection," Ganguly, one of India's finest Test captains, said.

Iyer Unlikely To Return For ODI WC 2023: Reports

PNS NEW DELHI

India is all set for the West Indies tour starting June 28 before they fight for the Asia Cup 2023 Trophy. There have been a lot of speculations about Indian team selection for the Asia Cup, as many star performers availability for the game has not been confirmed yet.

Star Indian middle order batter Shreyas Iyer is likely to miss Asia Cup 2023 due to an injury is an impinged nerve caused by a bulged disc in the lower back area on the right side. He has been struggling with the injury since returning from the Bangladesh series in December 2022.

Apurim Khan deserves a chance to prove his mettle. There has been an overwriting feeling that even to get a nod in Test cricket, one needs to have a solid IPL like Ruturaj Gaikwad had. Ganguly, though, disagrees with that notion.



Chennai Likely To Be Back-Up Venue For India vs Pakistan

PNS NEW DELHI

ICC recently announced the official and complete schedule for the upcoming ODI World Cup 2023 set to be held in India entirely for the first time ever.

The much-awaited India vs Pakistan clash is currently set to take place on October 15 at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium.

However, as per recent reports, Chennai's Chepauk Stadium is likely to be the back-up for the mega clash between arch-rivals. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) needs permission from the Pakistani government to travel to India for the tournament and the clash between two neighboring sides is likely to be shifted to Chennai from Ahmedabad in case the Pakistan government is concerned with the security.

Nishant, Harshit maiden hundred put North in driver's seat

PTI BENGALURU

Wicketkeeper-batter Nishant Sindhu slammed 150 while pacer Harshit Rana notched up his maiden hundred in first-class cricket to put North Zone in the driver's seat against North East Zone on Day 2 of the Duleep Trophy quarterfinal at M Chinnaswamy Stadium, here on Thursday.



Chennai's Chepauk Stadium is likely to be the back-up for the mega clash between arch-rivals.

A total of 10 teams will participate at the showcase event, the first eight having already qualified through the Cricket World Cup Super League. The final two spots will be determined at the end of the Qualifier tournament in Zimbabwe, which concludes on July 9.

Zimbabwe move one step closer to WC qualification

PTI BULAWAYO

A second successive century from Sean Williams fired Zimbabwe to a 14-run victory over Oman in the Super Six stage of the ICC World Cup Qualifier here on Thursday as the hosts inched closer to the 50-over showpiece in India.



In their first match here, Zimbabwe carried the form they showed in Group A to get the better of a fighting Oman, with Williams continuing his stellar run. After winning four out of four matches in the group stages, the hosts are now up to six points in the Super Six, thanks to their four points carried over and a further two picked up at the Queens Sports Club.

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IANS HARARE

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