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BEYOND A FLAWED EXAM

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BREAKING RALLY

DEHRADUN, SATURDAY JUNE 22, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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HC halts Kejriwal's release

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

AAP convener and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will have to remain in jail for now as the Delhi High Court on Friday halted his anticipated release on bail after an urgent petition filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) just hours before he was set to leave Tihar jail.

The court said it was reserving the order for 2-3 days as it wanted to go through the entire records. The High Court is expected to pronounce its verdict by June 25, with the Delhi Chief Minister remaining in judicial custody.

Kejriwal, who was arrested on March 21 by the ED could have walked out of Tihar jail on Friday had the high court not granted the interim relief to the ED. The vacation bench of Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain said it would take two-three days to pronounce the order on ED's stay application. The court said till it heard the probe agency's petition, which could take another 2-3 days, Kejriwal would remain in jail. The High Court has asked the Kejriwal's counsel to file the written submissions by Monday.

"In the meantime the petitioner and the respondent shall be at the liberty to file written submissions latest by



AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

File photo

Monday," court noted in the order. Vacation judge Niyay Bindu on Thursday granted bail to Kejriwal and ordered his release subject to bail bond of ₹one lakh, saying the ED has failed to give any direct evidence linking Kejriwal to the proceeds of the crime and has also failed to show that another accused, Vijay Nair, was acting on Kejriwal's behalf.

Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal accused the ED of treating the Delhi CM as if he were the "most wanted terrorist in India." Her remarks came during a gathering in south Delhi's Bhogal, where Delhi Water

Minister Atishi commenced an indefinite hunger strike to demand more water from Haryana. AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said what the ED said about the trial court judge who granted bail to Kejriwal during High Court proceedings was "shameful."

"The ED is not being able to submit any proof to the courts... the AAP has been saying this consistently — this has also been noted in the trial court order," Bharadwaj said. Earlier, Additional solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju presented the plea to Justices Sudhir Kumar Jain and Ravinder Dubeja, who were

overseeing the matter during the court's vacation period called the trial court's decision as "perverse", lopsided, "one-sided" and "wrong-sided" and that the findings were based on irrelevant facts. The relevant facts, he claimed, were not considered by the special judge.

The ASG said the trial court arrived on the decision based on wrong facts. "On wrong facts, wrong dates, you come to a conclusion that mala fide. But why, the reason is missing. My note not considered, not allowed to argue. The arrest was challenged. The remanding court said the arrest was correct. It was challenged before this court. The single judge said nothing wrong with the arrest," he said.

"Material facts were not considered by the trial court. There cannot be a better case for cancellation of bail than this one. There cannot be greater perversity than this," he argued. Seeking a stay on the trial court's order, he contended that the ED was not given adequate opportunity to argue its case. During the arguments, Raju said after the order was passed, when the ED lawyers urged the trial court to keep its order in abeyance for 48 hours to enable them to approach superior courts, the prayer was not considered.

Rain relief for Delhiites battling heat



A resident covers himself with a scarf in rain on the Kartavya Path, in New Delhi, on Friday. Light rainfall on Friday brought some relief to the people in Delhi after a relentless heatwave in the region for over a month

PTI

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Several parts of Delhi on Friday received light rains, bringing relief amidst the intense heatwave in the National Capital and surrounding areas that has been grappling the city for more than a month. Thunderstorms with light to moderate intensity rain and gusty winds with speeds of 30 to 50 kmph hit Delhi and adjoining areas of the National Capital Region after 3 pm. The city's minimum temperature settled at 28.4 degrees Celsius, normal for this time of the season, the Met office said.

Many areas also witnessed waterlogging and trees falling due to the rain. According to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), a total of 13 areas witnessed waterlogging situation, including Karol Bagh, Chhattarpur, Shahdara

north, Karala, Narela, Sonia Vihar, Shahdara south, Rohini, Civil line, Hari Kunj, and Mitraon and Gaushala road in Najafgarh. Tree falling was also witnessed in various areas in the city, including Karol Bagh, East of Kailash, Mangolpuri, Rajinder Nagar, Karawal nagar, south Moti bagh, Tagore Garden extension, Gulabi Bagh and Rohini sector 11.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had earlier predicted thunderstorms with light to moderate intensity rain and gusty winds with speeds of 30 to 50 kmph in Delhi and adjoining areas of the National Capital Region for two hours. The maximum temperature was recorded at 40.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above the normal marking a deviation from the soaring temperatures being witnessed in Delhi. People in Delhi can also

enjoy their weekends outdoors this time as the IMD predicted some relief from the searing heatwave as the sky is likely to remain partly cloudy on Saturday and Sunday. Many children were seen on the streets playing in the rain and enjoying their summer holidays. Although, heatwave will return in the city as the IMD predicts its return on Monday. Maximum temperatures across different parts of the city dropped to below 40 degrees celsius bringing respite to the people who have been hit not only by heat but also with water crisis and power outage.

The Pusa area recorded the lowest maximum temperature of 37.9 degrees Celsius, followed by 38 degrees at Pragati Maidan and Rajghat, 38.8 degrees at Aya nagar, 39 degrees at Lodi road, Salwan Public school and Ridge, 39.3 degrees at Palam, 39.4 degrees at Jafarpur, 39.7 degrees at Pitampura and 39.9 degrees at Najafgarh. After days of significant deviations of maximum recorded temperatures from the normal, several areas like Jafarpur, Palam and Salwan witnessed no deviation. Moreover, Aya nagar recorded two notches below the normal maximum temperature, along with Ridge which marked a 1.9 degrees deviation from normal and Pragati Maidan and Rajghat, each of the areas recording one notch below the normal temperature.

EC sets ball rolling for J&K, 3 States Assembly polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Friday announced that it has initiated process of updation of electoral rolls in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, & Jammu & Kashmir. According to THE EC, July 1, 2024 will be the qualifying date for roll updation. For the just-held Lok Sabha polls, voters' list was updated with January 1 as the qualifying date. Qualifying date helps establish number of voters on a given date in a State or in the country.

The Assembly terms of Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand are going to end on November 3, November 26 and January 5, 2025 respectively while polls in Jammu & Kashmir now under President rule, must be completed by September 30 deadline set by Supreme Court. The last time Jammu & Kashmir voted in Assembly elections was in 2014 when it was still a State and enjoyed special status under Article 370. In 2019, Special status to the State was revoked and it was divided into two UTs — Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The UT has been awaiting Assembly elections since then.

India raps Canada for honouring Nijjar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday was critical of the Canadian Parliament observing "one minute silence" in the memory of Khalistan extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was gunned down in Surrey, British Columbia, in June last year. "We naturally oppose any moves giving political space to extremism and advocacy of violence," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. In an unusual move, the



Canadian Parliament observed "one minute silence" two days ago in memory of Nijjar. The relations between the two

countries came under severe strain following Trudeau's allegations in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in Nijjar's killing. New Delhi rejected Trudeau's charges as "absurd". India has been maintaining that the main issue between the two countries is that of Canada giving space to pro-Khalistan elements operating from Canadian soil with impunity. Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra last week said India's main issue with Canada

continues to be the political space that Ottawa provides to anti-India elements which advocate extremism and violence. India has repeatedly conveyed its "deep concerns" to Canada and New Delhi expects Ottawa to take strong action against those elements, he said. Nijjar, who was declared a terrorist by India, was shot dead outside a gurdwara in British Columbia on June 18 last year. The murder is being probed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

World looking at Yoga as agent of global good: Modi

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ SRINAGAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the number of yoga practitioners across the globe is growing every day as it is making new ways of positive change in society. Modi said the world is also looking at yoga as a powerful agent of global good.

The Prime Minister led the celebrations of the 10th International Yoga Day on the banks of Dal Lake in Srinagar and took part in the Yoga session. The mega event was scheduled to be held in the open but early morning rain forced the event indoors.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi performs Yoga during celebration on the 10th International Day of Yoga in Srinagar

PTI

Despite the rains, Dal Lake in Srinagar provided a wonderful setting for this year's Yoga Day programme, reflecting

perfect harmony with nature. Scores of students were amongst those who joined the Prime Minister in

performing various asanas on the occasion. They also asked him for selfies and he happily obliged.

Congress corners Govt over NEET

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA/GUWAHATI

Congress workers on Friday held nationwide demonstration near the BJP headquarters across the State Capitals and elsewhere over the alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG 2024 examinations. The demonstrations were led by State presidents and several top party leaders after senior leader Rahul Gandhi gave a clarion call to protest widely on the recent NEET and NET entrance paper leaks. The grand old party along with other Opposition



Police personnel detain a Congress worker during a protest over the alleged irregularities in NEET-UG 2024 results in Lucknow

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parties have decided to take on the Government right from day one of the

Special session of the Parliament which begins from Monday.

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Yadav stresses on robust mechanism to check fires, strengthening advanced early warning systems and providing protective gear to the frontline workers

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Union minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav chaired a review meeting at Forest Survey of India here to review the management and

viewed the current situation of forest fires and their mitigation in the country and laid stress on devising a sound strategy for the mitigation of forest fires through public par-

ticipation. He also reviewed the status of forest fire alert system in practice in the country. During the meeting, it was

stressed that the areas being afflicted by frequent fires year after year should be on high priority and the States should find suitable ways to deal with them. Strengthening the advance early warning systems and providing protective gear to the frontline workers combating forest fire was also deliberated upon.

The meeting was attended by the director general of forest and special secretary Jitender Kumar, senior officials of the ministry, Uttarakhand principal chief conservator of forests Dhananjai Mohan and other officers from the State's Forest department. The DG, Forest Survey of India, ICFRE DG, FRI director and senior officers from these institutions were also present in the meeting.



mitigation of forest fires across the country on Friday.

The Union minister re-

Transport Dept penalises over 500 for overloading and other violations

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In view of frequent accidents that were caused due to overloading, the Transport department conducted a checking drive in various parts of the State on Friday. The enforcement teams of the department imposed penalties on over 500 vehicle users and seized 55 vehicles. The teams conducted checks at ISBT and Haridwar Bypass Road in Dehradun and imposed penalties on 144 vehicle users and seized 15 vehicles mainly for overloading and other violations. They also penalised and seized four buses and minibuses for unauthorised operation, the regional transport officer (Enforcement) of Dehradun division Shailesh Tiwari said. He informed that the team also imposed penalties on 23 vehicle users and seized six vehicles in Vikasnagar. In Haridwar, the first team under ARTO Rashmi Pant penalised 50 drivers and seized a bus for unauthorised operation as it had one extra seat installed against the rules. Besides this, the second team



in Haridwar under the supervision of the transport tax officer Varuna Saini imposed penalties on 22 vehicle users out of which, six were penalised for overloading and three private vehicles were carrying passengers. In Rishikesh, the team imposed penalties on 20 vehicles and seized six vehicles out of which, five were overloading passengers. In Roorkee, the team imposed penalties on 24 vehicles and seized eight vehi-

cles out of which six were overloaded. In Nainital district, the department imposed penalties on 290 vehicles in the past two days. The two teams of transport officers were specially deployed in the morning and the evening at Haldwani-Haidakhan-Khansyu road, Haldwani-Haldwani-Kathgodam road, Kaladhungi-Nainital road and others to check traffic violations. The team imposed penalties on 21 buses, 97 tax

Pre-monsoon showers to bring relief from heat in State

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The rains experienced across the State since Thursday have brought much needed relief from the heat wave conditions witnessed in various parts of the State for more than 10 days. The State meteorological centre has forecast that the temperatures will now remain lower than those experienced during the heat wave conditions. Light to moderate rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at a few places in the mountainous districts and at isolated places in plain districts of the State on Saturday. The meteorological centre has also issued a yellow warning (watch) regarding the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/gusty wind (30-40 kmph) and intense spells of rain likely to occur at isolated places in the mountainous districts of the State today. Thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/gusty wind (30-40 kmph) are likely to occur at isolated places in the plain districts.

The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a partly cloudy sky. Thunder cloud development is likely to occur in some areas. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 36 degrees Celsius and 24 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various parts of the State on Friday were 36.5 degrees Celsius and 24.6 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 37.5 degrees Celsius and 28.3 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 26.6 degrees Celsius and 15.1 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 27.4 degrees Celsius and 18.3 degrees Celsius in New Tehri. Light to moderate rain was reported in various parts of the State with 35 millimetres in Nainital, 32.5 millimetres in Lansdowne, 30.5 millimetres in Jyotikot, 22.5 millimetres in Nainidanda, 11.7 millimetres in Dehradun and 2.4 millimetres in Mussoorie.

CFGD to hold walk on Sunday despite CM's orders to not cut trees for Cantt Road widening

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has verbally ordered that 240 trees from Dilaram to Centrio Mall will not be cut down for the planned widening of Cantt Road. However, the Citizens for Green Doon (CFGD) said that it will still be organising a 'peace walk' on June 23 as it is against unnecessary felling of trees across Dehradun and not just along one road. Stating this, the president at CFGD Himanshu Arora expressed appreciation towards the chief minister for overturning the initial plan to cut down the trees. Arora said that this action signifies the government's recognition of the significance of trees in the city to mitigate rising temperatures in the coming years. Commenting about the peace walk as part of the Paryavaran Bachao Andolan on Sunday, Arora said that it will proceed as scheduled. He emphasised that the purpose of the walk is not only to protest the cutting of trees for the planned widening of one particular road but also to oppose other projects in Dehradun that involve tree felling. Arora said that despite

the chief minister's decision, local residents remain vigilant and will participate in the walk to raise awareness and prevent further tree felling for development projects in Dehradun. He stressed on the need for officials in the State administration to prioritise the preservation of trees in the city over development initiatives. He further added that the felling of trees not only impacts the city but also endangers lives, especially as temperatures rise in the future. He urged the government to understand the importance of halting other development projects that involve tree cutting. Arora said that following the walk, they will proceed to present a letter to the chief minister urging for the cessation of tree felling for other projects. Further, he emphasised the need to permanently exclude tree felling from all future development initiatives. He also emphasised that the government should prioritise removing cemented

footpaths in city areas as they contribute to water scarcity rather than development.

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, DEHRADUN
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People should adopt Yoga for good health: Arya

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Sports minister Rekha Arya emphasised the importance of adopting Yoga to maintain good health at any age. She expressed these views during a programme held at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium to celebrate International Yoga Day on Friday. Arya participated in the programme along with many other officials and youth. Arya highlighted the significance of Yoga for spiritual growth, physical and mental well-



being, as well as for promoting a healthy and energetic India. She urged people to incorporate Yoga into their daily lives and to raise awareness about its benefits. She attributed the global popularity of Yoga to the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Arya also stressed that Yoga should not be limited to a single day but should be practiced regularly.

Children practice Yogasanas at KV to mark International Yoga Day

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Students of Kendriya Vidyalaya II in Roorkee practised Yogasanas under the guidance of instructor Nikki Baliyan at the school on Friday. The children performed various aspects of Yoga on the occasion. Retired vice principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya Haridwar Naresh Kumar Bansal and retired NIH scientist Digambar Singh were invited as special guests in the

school. They also performed Yoga with the children and spoke to them about the importance of Yoga and exhorted them to adopt it in life. The school principal Arvind Kumar said that Yoga is the most important method for strengthening concentration. It helps one maintain the balance of the physical and spiritual body and also inspires one to live a healthy life.

USCW asks NCW to hold awareness programmes in Uttarakhand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The chairperson of Uttarakhand State Commission for Women (USCW) Kusum Kandwal has proposed to the National Commission for Women (NCW) that it should organise awareness workshops for the women of State to prevent human trafficking. She made this proposal during a meeting organised by the NCW in Faridabad. The two-day meeting concluded on Friday. During the meeting, Kandwal proposed that

the NCW should organise programmes on various topics related to the empowerment of women in the State, their rights and their security. She also suggested organising legal and skill awareness workshops to prevent human trafficking and address the negative impact of social media on women in the State. Additionally, she emphasised the need for training programmes for women in the border areas of Uttarakhand to prevent

migration, empower them and connect them with employment opportunities. Notably, the NCW conducts various programmes and campaigns for women's rights, safety and empowerment after every three months. The agenda points for these campaigns are prepared every three months and reports of past programmes are also generated during this period.

UJVNL organises Yoga workshop

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The headquarters of the UJVNL Limited organised a Yoga workshop on Friday to mark International Yoga Day. The workshop included meditation and practical information on various Yoga practices including Pranayama, Kapalabhati, Bhramari, Chakrasana, Vajrasana, Bhadrasana, Tadasana, Ardha Chakrasana and many others. Speaking on the occasion, UJVNL managing director Sandeep Singhal said that the programme was organised to raise awareness about Yoga among employees, their families and the general public, with the goal of making Yoga a part of their daily lives. Further, the corporation's execu-

tive director of Human Resources Rajendra Singh emphasised the importance of adopting Yoga in daily life to maintain physical and mental well-being in today's hectic and stressful routines.

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Raipur shootout accused directed to demolish encroachment

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district administration on Friday issued a notice to the accused in the Raipur shootout case Devendra Bharadwaj alias Sonu to remove the encroachment at Dobhal Chowk within three days. The order issued by the Dehradun sub divisional magistrate stated that Bharadwaj had constructed a dairy on 66 square metres of land in the Raipur area.

The Revenue department and the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun analysed the records of the said land on June 20 and prepared their report. It is clear from the report that the accused Bharadwaj have

encroached upon the said land, as per the notice. It further stated, “You are informed through this notice that you should ensure to remove the said encroachment within three days after receiving this notice. Otherwise, the administration will have to act forcefully to remove the encroachment. The administration will also recover all the expenses done on the demolition by you.”

The officials informed that the notice was served to the accused’s family on Friday itself. They were asked to remove the encroachment by Monday or else, the administration

will demolish it on Tuesday. Bharadwaj is one of the prime accused among seven accused in the Raipur shootout case in which Deepak Badola alias Ravi died and Subhash Chhetri and Manoj Negi sustained severe injuries. They are currently undergoing treatment in the Mahant Indresh Hospital.

The Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said that the police are also analysing the properties of other accused involved in the case and will take action against them under the Gangster Act.

SSP forms SIT to collect evidence in Raipur shootout case

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh on Friday formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) in the Raipur shootout case for effective collection of concrete evidence against all the accused along with a detailed investigation of all aspects of the incident. The SIT has six police personnel including the circle officer of Doiwala Abhinay Chaudhary who will lead the team. The SSP said that having concrete evidence against all the seven arrested accused will make their case stronger in the court which is necessary to ensure the culprits get punishment for committing such a heinous crime. He also directed the SIT to investigate

all the property acquired by the accused illegally. He instructed them to coordinate with the departments concerned on the complaint of illegal occupation or construction on government land by the accused and take necessary action to ensure its demolition. Meanwhile, the SSP also informed that the police got a one-day police custody remand of one of the main accused in the case Ramveer Singh for Saturday. The police will interrogate him and will take further action to collect or recover evidence related to the case. The police will leave no stone unturned in making their case stronger in the court with evidence, he added.

Bus carrying 28 pilgrims overturns in Uttarkashi, no casualty reported

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A bus carrying 28 pilgrims from Madhya Pradesh overturned on the Gangotri national highway on Friday. The accident affected the traffic on the road for about four hours. All passengers were safe except five people who sustained minor injuries in the mishap as per the officials.

They informed that these pilgrims had visited Yamunotri Dham on Thursday and were going from Uttarkashi to Gangotri by bus on Friday morning. According to the officials, the driver reportedly lost control of the bus near Jhala on the national highway and it overturned on the road. Though no loss of life was reported,



the highway remained blocked for about four hours which severely affected the traffic. During this period, there was a long queue of vehicles on both sides while the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) was carrying out the process of removing the bus from the

road through the machine, the officials said. They also informed that the BRO also made arrangements for pilgrims to reach Gangotri Dham and all reached there safely. The authorities are yet to ascertain the cause of the accident, as per the officials.

Badrinath bypoll: Cong candidate Butola files nomination paper

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Congress party candidate Lakshpat Butola filed his nomination papers for Badrinath Assembly by election on Friday. He filed his papers at the office of returning officer at Gopeshwar, the district headquarters of Chamoli. Prior to filing papers, the Congress party organised a rally in Gopeshwar in which many senior leaders of the party took part. A public meeting

and for injustice to the family of Ankita Bhandari. Terming the BJP candidate from Badrinath Rajendra Bhandari as a party hopper the PCC president said that the people will teach him a lesson in the by election.

Former chief minister Harish Rawat said that the by election has been foisted on the people of Badrinath. He said that the

will teach the BJP and its candidate a lesson in the by election. Former PCC president Ganesh Godiyal said that the eyes of the entire State are on Badrinath by election. Accusing the BJP candidate Rajendra Singh Bhandari for betraying the people of Badrinath and Congress party, Godiyal said that the people have made up their mind to teach him a lesson.

BJP State chief heads Badrinath bypoll campaign, party says workers enthused

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Bharatiya Janata Party State president Mahendra Bhatt is heading the party’s election campaign efforts in Badrinath for the Assembly bypoll. He is touring various areas in the constituency and has had discussions with various sections. According to the party, Bhatt heading the campaign and his discussion with the stakeholders has boosted the enthusiasm of the party workers.

Meanwhile, the BJP has also managed to placate Virendra Singh Bhandari, the cousin of the BJP candidate from Badrinath Surendra Singh Bhandari, who had earlier announced that he would contest the bypoll in Badrinath as an independent candidate. Regional BJP leader Virendra Singh Bhandari was miffed at not being

fielded by the party and at the party fielding his cousin, who he said had worked against the BJP and party workers for years before defecting from the Congress to the BJP. He

extend his full support to the party candidate in the Badrinath Assembly bypoll. It is pertinent to mention here that the BJP candidate in Badrinath, Rajendra Singh Bhandari was the



met chief minister Pushkar Singh Bhandari and Bhatt and communicated some of his issues to them. After the meeting, he assured the CM and Bhatt that as a dedicated BJP worker, he will

local MLA before he left the Congress to join the BJP during the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP is confident of achieving a resounding victory in this constituency.

Solution to the world’s problems lies in the Indian way of life: Yadav

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

On the occasion of the International Yoga Day on Friday, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav practiced Yoga with the people associated with the institute at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy (IGNFA). The Union minister said we must all celebrate Yoga Day with the spirit of ‘Yoga for self and society’ under the

and special secretary Jitender Kumar, additional DG Sushil Awasthi, additional DG A Mohanti, IGNFA director Jagmohan Sharma, ICFRE DG Kanchan Devi and heads of various prominent institutions at Dehradun including the Forest Survey of India, Wildlife Institute of India, Forest Research Institute, Directorate of Forest Education, Central Academy of State Forest



leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said the solution to the world’s problems lies in the Indian way of life. Another highlight of the morning was the planting of a sapling by Yadav under the Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign, which indicated the government’s commitment to the protection and enhancement of the nation’s natural environment. The director general of Forests

Service, IFS probationers, SFS officer trainees, FRI students and others participated in the event. The participation of more than 400 persons demonstrated the shared obligation towards integrating Yoga and commitment to environmental conservation in professional and personal lives. Yadav also inaugurated a multipurpose hall of the IGNFA on the occasion.

Crores benefitted from Yoga, India’s gift to the world: CM Condition of border villages changing due to PM Modi's efforts and vision

PNS ■ PITHORAGARH

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has said that India has given the world the gift of Yoga from which crores of people worldwide are getting benefit. The CM attended a programme organised near

tion to the pilgrims to visit Adi Kailash located at an altitude of 15,000 feet by participating in a Yoga session there.

The CM said that Yoga is the confluence of body, mind

people aware about it.

In his address, the CM said that he is having the privilege of celebrating the International Yoga Day near the sacred Adi Kailash. The CM said that the picture of

last year, the number of tourists and pilgrims in Adi Kailash, Om Parvat, Kali temple and Vyas cave has increased. He said that people of Uttarakhand gave blessings to BJP by giving all the five seats to it in the recent Lok Sabha elections. The CM said that in reply to the public support the PM has given the position of the Minister of State for Road Transport to Almora Pithoragarh MP Ajay Tamta. He expressed confidence that road connectivity works in the State will gather further momentum. He said the people of Darma, Vyas and Chaudas valley have kept the social culture and traditions alive and it is a matter of pride for Uttarakhand.

Dhami said that everyone in the border areas of Gunji, Nabi, Kuti, Nauti and Bundi will be connected to the main stream of development.

The Union Minister of State for Transport, Ajay Tamta, Dharchula MLA Harish Dhami, PWD secretary Pankaj Kumar Pandey, Kumaon commissioner Deepak Rawat, DIG Yogendra Singh Rawat and others were present on the occasion.



Parvati Kund at Adi Kailash in Pithoragarh district on the occasion of the 10th International Yoga Day on Friday. He also gave invita-

and soul. He exhorted the people to include Yoga in their daily routine for physical, mental and emotional strength and to make other

border villages is changing due to the efforts and vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that after the visit of PM Modi in October

After PM Modi, CM Dhami promotes tourism in Adi Kailash

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The decision of chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami to visit Adi Kailash on the International Yoga day and perform Yoga near pristine Parvati Kund has helped in giving an immense forward push to his dream of developing Adi Kailash and nearby areas as a hub of religious and spiritual tourism in the State. The area was firmly placed on the world tourism map by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he visited Adi Kailash in October last year. The stunning visuals of PM doing meditation on the banks of Parvati Kund with

snow covered Adi Kailash in backdrop had drawn worldwide attention. The branding done by PM Modi has reflected in the increased tourist footfall in Adi Kailash and other tourist spots of Pithoragarh district. As per the data of district administration of Pithoragarh, more than one thousand tourists are visiting Om Parvat, Adi Kailash and the Parvati lake every day.

It appears as if CM Dhami who had accompanied PM Modi during his visit to Adi Kailash wanted to give another

push to highlight the tourism potential of the area and for this he decided to make Adi Kailash as the venue of the programme on International Yoga Day.

The fact that stunningly beautiful pictures and video of CM performing Yoga in the backdrop of majestic and reverential Adi Kailash are receiving public admiration has proved his decision to hold the programme there correct. It is pertinent to mention here that CM Dhami has envisioned Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission (MMMM) to promote

religious tourism in the Kumaon region of the State. The idea is to focus on the ancient temples of Manaskhand (Kumaon) and make the area another hub of religious tourism apart from the Char Dham circuit of Garhwal.

Experts opine that Adi Kailash and the temple cluster of Jageshwar are key temples of the Manaskhand mission and the promotion of these places by PM Modi and CM Dhami will help in the success of the MMMM.



CM Pushkar Singh Dhami pays obeisance to the lord at Parvati Kund near Adi Kailash on Friday
Pioneer photo

SC refuses to defer counselling for NEET

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to defer the counselling for the controversy-ridden NEET-UG 2024 examination scheduled to kick off on July 6, saying it is not an "open and shut" process. The Apex Court issued notices to the National Testing Agency (NTA), the Centre and others on a petition seeking cancellation of the exam over alleged irregularities in holding it on May 5. A vacation bench of Justices Vikram Nath and SVN Bhatti posted the matter for hearing on July 8 along with other pending pleas alleging irregularities in conduct of the examination.

The counsel appearing for the petitioners urged the bench that the counselling process may be paused for two days as the apex court is scheduled to hear all these pleas on July 8. "I am not seeking any stay of counselling. I am only praying that the counselling which is scheduled to be held



on July 6 may be paused for two days only. The reason being that the main matter is listed on July 8," the lawyer argued. The bench observed, "We have been hearing the same statement. Don't think otherwise for interrupting you. Counselling does not mean open and shut. It is a process. That process commences on July 6." When the bench asked about the duration of the first round of counselling, one of the lawyers appearing in the matter said it will last around a week. The bench, which refused to defer the

counselling process, said that counsel appearing for the NTA, the Centre and other respondents may file their response to the plea within two weeks. The bench also dealt with a separate application seeking certain directions to the NTA. The counsel appearing for the applicant raised the issue of re-test, which is to be conducted on June 23, and alleged that the NTA has withheld some material information. The bench then asked the NTA's counsel to file a response to the application and posted it for hearing on July 8.

On June 13, the Centre had told the apex court that the decision to give grace marks to 1,563 NEET-UG 2024 candidates for admission to MBBS, BDS and others courses has been cancelled and they will be given an option to take a re-test on June 23. During the hearing on Friday, the applicant's counsel raised the issue of re-test and said candidates will undergo the stress of giving the examination afresh.

Indian Armed forces perform asanas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Military personnel from the three services joined in the International Yoga day celebrations across the country on Friday performing asanas in varying weather conditions. While several army jawans stretched their limbs during sessions held on a range of terrains from Kutch to Kibithu and arid Longewala to Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, navy personnel showed their yoga skills onboard India's aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya and some naval ships.

In the national capital, a large number of air warriors converged at the Air Force Station to mark the International Day of Yoga. IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari led the event.

"The 10th International Day of Yoga (IDY) was celebrated across the IAF today. The CAS led the celebrations by performing Yoga with IAF personnel at Air Force Station New Delhi. The theme of this year's IDY is 'Yoga for Self and Society'. The CAS urged everyone to embrace Yoga and set forth on a path of serenity to discover the calmness when the mind, body and spirit unite," the IAF wrote in a post on X and shared photos.

Navy Chief Adm Dinesh K Tripathi attended a session held at Chanakya Bagh here by the Navy-Indian Naval Warships mission deployed across the Indian Ocean Region and Western Pacific Ocean conducted Yoga session at sea and in foreign ports. IN Ships Kolkata & Tabar at Djibouti, Sunayna at Port Louis, Mauritius, Tarkash at Salalah, Oman, Kamorta at Trincomalee, Sri Lanka and



Indian Army personnel perform Yoga on the 10th International Day of Yoga, in Sikkim, on Friday

Besides, para athletes of the Army at Army Paralympic Node, the cadets from Army Boys or Girls Sports Company also took part in the event in the country with lot of vigor and enthusiasm, it added.

The local population including students at various educational establishments including the border villages also participated in the celebrations, the ministry said. This year's IYD theme, 'Yoga for Self and Society', resonated deeply in the celebrations with all personnel reinforcing their commitment and responsibilities in serving the nation, the ministry said.

From the Indian Navy's side, personnel performed various yoga asanas, including 'Surya Namaskar', on board warships INS Tarkash and INS Teg, among other ships.

"The International Yoga Day #21Jun, witnesses the Sunrise Command embracing the Sun with #yoga at sea, on the beaches, and naval stations across the Eastern Seaboard #IDY2024 #yogaeverywhere," the Eastern Naval Command posted on X and also shared photos.

In another statement, the defence ministry said eight lakh National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets celebrated the occasion by participating in yoga sessions organised by NCC across the country.

The sessions were organised at numerous schools, colleges & iconic locations including the Sun Temple at Konark in Odisha), Red Fort in Delhi, along Dal Lake in Srinagar, Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad, Sanchi Stupa in MP, Gateway of India in Mumbai, Nainital Lake in Uttarakhand, Jhansi Fort in Uttar Pradesh, and Victoria Memorial in Kolkata, it added.

Saryu at Belawan, Indonesia -- conducted Yoga sessions in respective ports, spreading the spirit of yoga across the oceans, a Navy spokesperson said. The main celebrations of the 10th International Day of Yoga were led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who took part in an event in Srinagar, while several Union ministers participated in yoga sessions held in different parts of the national capital.

Recognising its universal appeal, in December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga by a resolution. The day aims to raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practising yoga. "Celebrating the timeless practice of oneness and harmony, the Indian Army celebrated 10th International Day of Yoga across the entire length and breadth of our nation. The event witnessed overwhelming participation by serving personnel, their families, children, veterans, NCC cadets, and civilian fraternity at various locations," the defence ministry said in a statement.

Yoga was also performed by soldiers deployed at the freezing heights of Siachen

Glacier in Ladakh to coastal areas of Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu. The occasion was also celebrated from areas of Longewala in Rajasthan and Kutch in Gujarat) to the mountainous terrain of Kibithu in Arunachal Pradesh and Imphal in Manipur, it said. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh joined all ranks and their families for the celebrations in the city of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande also attended it. Several personnel also performed yoga near Pangong lake in Ladakh.

In Delhi, the international yoga day was commemorated at Cariappa Parade Ground at the Delhi Cantonment, where serving army personnel, defence attaches of friendly foreign countries along with their families as well as NCC cadets participated. The yoga session here was led by Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi, the Vice Chief of the Army Staff.

Besides India, the IDY was also observed by all Indian Army contingents deployed in United Nations Missions across the globe. The local population there participated in the celebration in overwhelming numbers, the statement said.

10TH INTERNATIONAL DAY YOGA



(Top left clockwise): People perform yoga at Times Square, in New York, USA; in Tel Aviv, Israel; Tsukiji Hongwanji Temple premises in Tokyo, Japan and at the iconic Heroes' Square organised by Embassy of India, in Budapest

Yoga Day celebrated with fervour across the world

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Yoga enthusiasts world around from Israel to the UAE to the UK and the US celebrated International Day of Yoga (IDY) on Friday with the main event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Srinagar.

Reflecting a moment of global mindfulness and harmony, this year's theme, "Yoga for Self and Society," underscored its dual role in fostering individual and societal well-being.

The D-Day was held at the UN headquarters, New York, organised by the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in collaboration with the UN Secretariat, in the North Lawn Area of UNHQ while the Indian Embassy in New York celebrated the 10th International Day of Yoga at the iconic Times Square, In Stockholm, the Indian Embassy participated in the celebrations with well-known Indian spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. It held a special session with 800 participants and diplomats from 25 nations at Konserthuset. The Israeli Embassy in New Delhi put up a touching video of their staff doing yoga. "Namaste! This #InternationalYogaDay, our diplomats share why they LOVE #yoga. They might not be yogis yet, but they sure have fun trying!" it posted.

Likewise, the Ukrainian Embassy in a post said "Team

members of the Embassy of Ukraine in India join celebrations of the 10th Anniversary of the International Day of Yoga & more than 5,000 years of ancient Yoga tradition," while Philip Green, the Australian High Commissioner in India, in a post said "Over 10 lakh Australians practice yoga, including here in New Delhi." In Japan, IYD was held at the Tsukiji Hongwanji Temple with the Indian Embassy in a post stating "RAIN OR SHINE YOGA IN JAPAN." The Indian Embassy in Kuwait also marked the IYD at the embassy, which saw enthusiastic participation by yoga trainers and enthusiasts, members of diplomatic corps, and members of the Indian community.

The British High Commission in New Delhi shared X photographs of some of its members performing a few yoga asanas in the morning. "...Inhale' exhale' Armed with our yoga mats, team #UKinIndia joined millions of people in India and around the world to celebrate International #YogaDay," the UK High Commission here wrote on X.

The Israeli Embassy video, featuring envoy Naor Gilon and some of its staff, posted on social media, commenting, "Namaste! ... This #InternationalYogaDay, our diplomats share why they

LOVE #yoga. They might not be yogis yet, but they sure have fun trying! Tell us in the comments why YOU love yoga.#IDY2024#YogaDay#InternationalYogaDay2024#YogaDay2024#YogaForAll." Likewise, the US Embassy video featured little children trying their hands at different yoga asanas. "It's Yoga Day and our adorable little yogis are stealing hearts with their smiles and stretches! Watch as our tiny warriors strike adorable poses, from Virabhadrasana to the Bhujangasana! This #YogaDay, join us as we celebrate the flexibility, balance, and cuteness overload," the embassy posted on X.

The first citizen of India, President Droupadi Murmu who performed yoga at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here, said yoga is India's unique gift to humanity, and it has become far more important because of rising lifestyle-related problems. "Yoga is a way to physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Let us resolve to adopt yoga as an integral part of our day-to-day living," the president said in a post on X and shared pictures of her doing yoga.

In a similar spirit, as International Yoga Day entered into its tenth year and its impact continues to resonate across India, Gujarat's Chief Minister announced plans for 51 'Yoga Studios,' recognising yoga's invaluable role during

the COVID-19 pandemic, while Kerala committed to establishing 10,000 new yoga clubs. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, joined by his two deputies Kirti Vardhan Singh and Pabitra Margherita, performed a few asanas, along with several members of the diplomatic community at an indoor facility in Delhi, while the UK High Commission and embassies of the United States and Israel were among the diplomatic missions in India that joined in the yoga day celebrations on Friday. Back home, several Union ministers, Chief Ministers and Governors participated in yoga sessions held in different parts of the national capital and their respective States.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah was at his home town in Gujarat's Ahmedabad, participating at a yoga event as he said, "India has enriched the world by giving the gift of Yoga. In today's world, the remedy to every problem is Yoga. Yoga is beneficial for both health and the mind."

In Uttar Pradesh, State Governor Anandiben Patel and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath performed different asanas as they were joined by hundreds of people on the lawns of the Governor's House, while Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde appealed to citizens to make yoga an integral part of their daily lives.



Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina being welcomed by Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh upon her arrival on a two-day State visit to India in New Delhi on Friday

Bangladesh PM begins two-day visit to India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Friday began a two-day State visit to India with an aim to further expand the already close ties between the two countries. It is the first incoming bilateral State visit by a foreign leader after the formation of the new government in India following the Lok Sabha elections.

Hasina was among seven top leaders from India's neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean region who attended the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union council of ministers at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on June 9. Modi and Hasina are scheduled to hold wide-ranging talks on Saturday during which both sides are likely to firm up a raft of agreements providing for cooperation in several sectors. Apart from holding bilateral consultations with Modi, the vis-

iting leader is scheduled to call on President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is scheduled to call on Hasina this evening. The talks between the two prime ministers are expected to focus on taking the bilateral ties to new heights, said a source.

The overall strategic ties between India and Bangladesh have been on an upswing in the last few years. Bangladesh is an important partner for India under its "Neighbourhood First" policy and the cooperation extends to areas of security, trade, commerce, energy, connectivity, science and technology, defence and maritime affairs among others.

The achievements in the connectivity sector included the inauguration of the Maitri Setu bridge over river Fenī in Tripura and the rollout of the Chilahati-Haldibari rail link.

Water available in 150 main reservoirs dips

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With scorching heat battering a large swathes of India over the past few weeks, water available in the 150 main reservoirs across the country further dipped to just 21 per cent of their total live storage capacity. The Central Water Commission (CWC) has released the live storage status of 150 key reservoirs across India in its latest bulletin.

These reservoirs, crucial for hydroelectric projects and water supply, have a combined live storage capacity of 178.784 billion cubic meters (BCM), which is approximately 69.35 per cent of the total live storage capacity created in the country. As of Thursday, the live storage avail-

able in these reservoirs is 37.662 BCM, which is 21 per cent of their total capacity. Overall, the live storage available across the 150 reservoirs stands at 54.310 BCM against the estimated total capacity of 257.812 BCM. This marks a significant decrease from the same period last year, when the live storage was 46.883 BCM. The current storage is also lower than the 10-year average (normal) storage of 41.446 BCM. Thus, the present storage is 80 per cent of last year's levels and 91 per cent of the normal storage for this period.

For the past two weeks, the reservoirs were at 22 per cent while it was 23 per cent the week before that. Swathes of northern and eastern India remained in the grip of a punishingly

long heat wave, causing water stress in parts of the country including in the national capital. In terms of reservoir capacity, the southern region continues to be most hit. States like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, with 42 reservoirs, have a total capacity of 53.334 BCM. The available storage is 8.508 BCM (16 per cent of capacity), which is lower than last year's 21 per cent and the normal storage of 20 per cent.

Northern states including Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan, have 10 monitored reservoirs with a total capacity of 19.663 BCM. The current live storage is 5.488 BCM (28 per cent of capacity), which is lower than last year's 39 per cent and the normal stor-

age of 31 per cent. The eastern region covering Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, and Bihar has 23 reservoirs with a total capacity of 20.430 BCM. The available storage is 3.873 BCM (19 per cent of capacity), slightly better than last year's 18 per cent but below the normal storage of 23 per cent.

In the western region, Gujarat and Maharashtra, with 49 reservoirs, have a total capacity of 37.130 BCM. The current storage is 7.608 BCM (20.49 per cent of capacity), which is less than last year's 24 per cent but better than the normal storage of 19.56 per cent.

In the central region that includes Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya

Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, there are 26 reservoirs with a total capacity of 48.227 BCM. The current live storage is 12.185 BCM (25 per cent of capacity), which is less than last year's 32 per cent and the normal storage of 26 per cent.

The overall storage position in the country is less than that of the corresponding period last year and is also below the normal storage for this time of year. Specifically, better-than-normal storage is observed in river basins of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, Sabarmati, Narmada, Tapi, and a few others, while significant deficiencies are noted in the Brahmani and Baitarni, Krishna, Mahanadi, Godavari, and Cauvery basins, among others.

Early management of gestational diabetes can prevent maternal, child health complications: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Early management of gestational diabetes, particularly in the first trimester, can significantly reduce complications and improve delivery outcomes, according to a new study published in The Lancet. Gestational diabetes, which affects one in seven pregnancies globally, is becoming more prevalent and complex due to rising obesity rates.

Currently pregnant women are checked for diabetes post the 24th week. The researchers from an international team, including those from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi said current

practices typically delay testing and treatment until later in pregnancy, but earlier intervention could lead to better health outcomes. Worldwide about one in 14 pregnant women develop gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) which is characterised by blood sugar levels that are higher than normal but not as high as in people with a chronic blood sugar problem. The sugar levels usually normalise after delivery.

"Our new Series emphasises the urgent need for a major shift in how GDM is first diagnosed and managed, not only during pregnancy but throughout the lifetime of mothers and their babies," said Series lead Prof. David Simmons of Western Sydney



University, Australia. "GDM is an increasingly complex condition, and there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to managing it. Instead, a patient's unique risk factors and metabolic profile

should be considered to help guide them through pregnancy and support them afterward to achieve the best health outcomes for women and babies everywhere." As obesity continues to

increase worldwide, along with impaired glucose tolerance and T2D rates in women of reproductive age, GDM prevalence has also increased two to threefold across multiple countries over the last 20 years. The current GDM prevalence rates range from over 7% in North America and the Caribbean region to almost 28% in the Middle East and North Africa region. "GDM is a tremendous public health challenge. Women who experience it need support from the medical community, policymakers, and society as a whole to ensure they can effectively access proper treatment, reduce the stigma associated with GDM, and improve their overall pregnancy experience," said

Series author Dr Yashdeep Gupta from the AIIMS. GDM has historically been considered a pregnancy complication involving the treatment of high blood glucose levels late in the second trimester. The WHO's current diagnostic criteria for GDM recommends testing at 24-28 weeks gestation without prior screening. However, recent evidence suggests that GDM has foundations before pregnancy and can be present in early pregnancy. Overall, 30-70 per cent of GDM can be found early using oral glucose tolerance testing and includes those at most significant risk of requiring insulin therapy and experiencing pregnancy complications.

World embraced Yoga due to Modi's efforts, says Yogi

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The world has embraced yoga due to the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Friday on International Day of Yoga.

Governor Anandiben Patel and Adityanath performed different asanas as they led the Yoga Day celebrations in the state. They were joined by hundreds of people on the lawns of the Governor's House here.

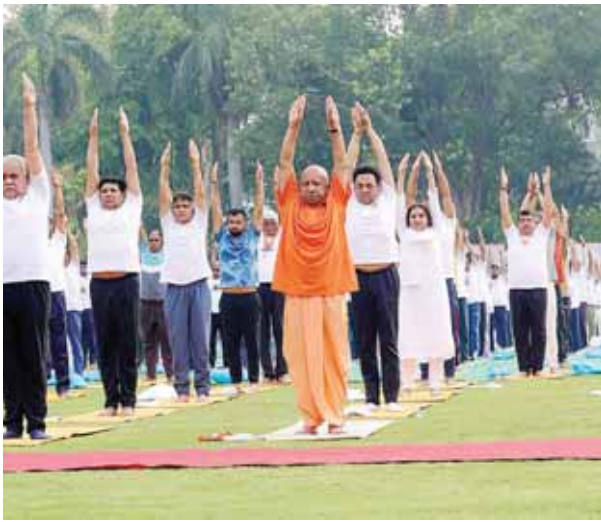
Addressing the gathering, Patel said, "International Yoga Day is actually a day for new encouragement. The day encourages us to take pride in our traditions."

Speaking before her, the chief minister said "nearly 200 countries" have embraced yoga due to Modi's efforts.

"We owe this opportunity to our esteemed prime minister whose vision and initiatives have led to nearly 200 countries embracing International Yoga Day."

"These countries have aligned themselves with our rich Indian heritage, thus honouring and enriching our culture and traditions. There can be no greater tribute to our ancestors, traditions, and heritage than this," he said.

Adityanath emphasised that yoga paves the way for the welfare of all humanity,



transcending the limitations of country, society, and time. By embracing yoga and connecting the entire human race, we show true respect for our ancestors and heritage, he said.

International Yoga Day has become a medium for all of us to express our respect towards this tradition of India. Yoga is a comprehensive knowledge that brings people together both physically and mentally.

"Reflecting on the sage tradition of India reveals their profound foresight in connecting society, where they made an innovative attempt to integrate 'dharma' with yoga in this way," he said.

He highlighted that the theme

of the International Yoga Day was 'Yoga for all' which signifies that yoga is free from any form of discrimination and transcends barriers of caste, region, language, time, and country.

"My appeal is to incorporate yoga into your daily routine... You will realise that the time you have dedicated to yoga has greatly contributed to your health and longevity, benefiting both your physical and mental well-being. If we continue this practice regularly, we will reap its full benefits," he said.

The event commenced with the national anthem, followed by the presentation of the Raj Bhavan song.

A significant number of yoga

practitioners and instructors participated in the group yoga practice.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya participated in a yoga event in Prayagraj.

Yoga day was celebrated in Varanasi, Ayodhya and other parts of Uttar Pradesh.

In Varanasi, state minister A K Sharma and others performed different asanas in the Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor. Later, Sharma told reporters, "I thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi for making people across the world know and appreciate an essential component of the country's rich tradition."

In the temple town of Ayodhya, senior civil and police officials, including District Magistrate Nitish Kumar and Superintendent of Police Ram Kiran Nair, performed yoga on the banks of the Saryu River. Aligarh Muslim University Vice Chancellor Naima Khatoon joined students, faculty members and other yoga enthusiasts on the lawns of the Department of Physical Education to perform yoga. In Gorakhpur, yoga was observed by saints and citizens in the Digvijaynath Smriti Bhawan while in Meerut, actor-politician Arun Govil and others performed yoga asanas on the campus of the Chaudhary Charan Singh University.

Maharashtra council polls crucial test for political parties ahead of Assembly elections

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The biennial elections to 11 seats in the Maharashtra legislative council from the MLA quota will be a crucial test for the ruling Mahayuti and the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) ahead of the assembly elections to be held later this year.

With 14 vacancies in the 288-member house, the electoral college is 274 and the quota for the winning candidate is 23. Out of the 11 seats, the MVA can get two and the ruling alliance nine as per their numerical strength in the lower house of the state legislature. Congress can get one candidate elected as an MLC, while the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) can get one candidate. BJP can get five, leaving the rest four for allies Shiv Sena and NCP. The elections are scheduled to be held on July 12 and nominations will open from June 25. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has 103 MLAs, followed by the Ajit Pawar-led NCP's 40, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena's 38. The Congress has 37 MLAs, Shiv Sena (UBT) 15 and Sharad Pawar-led NCP 10. NCP MLAs Ashok Pawar and Nawab Malik have not given affidavits supporting either of the two factions. MLAs Sandipan Bumre and Ravindra Waikar of the Shiv Sena, Nilesh Lanke of the NCP (SP), Pratibha Dhanorkar, Varsha Gaikwad, Balwant Wankhade, Praniti Shinde (all from the Congress have been elected as MPs in the recent Lok Sabha polls.



Ashok Chavan and Raju Parve of the Congress have resigned earlier. Sunil Kedar of the Congress has been disqualified.

While Govardhan Sharma, Rajendra Patni of the BJP, P N Patil of the Congress, Anil Babar of the Shiv Sena have passed away. An NCP (SP) leader said the council polls are likely to be unopposed since political parties would not like to take the risk of a contest for the upper house. Shiv Sena (UBT) has declared that it will approach the SC seeking a stay on the elections as many MLAs of the Shiv Sena and NCP are facing disqualification proceedings. While a BJP leader said a contest can be avoided only if there is no 12th candidate. The NCP (SP) has announced its support Jayant Patil of the Peasants and Workers' Party (PWP). The Congress will decide on whether to field one or two candidates in its meeting on June 25. As per

the strength of the 288-member House, the BJP had 105 MLAs, Congress 45, (undivided) NCP 53 and (undivided) Shiv Sena 56. The Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) has three MLAs, Samajwadi Party two, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) two, Prahar Janshakti Party two, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), Communist Party of India (Marxist), Swabhimani Paksh, Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSP), Jansurajya Shakti Party, Krantikari Shetkari Paksh and PWP one each, independents 13. The biennial elections are necessitated because 11 MLCs are retiring. These legislators are Manisha Kayande (Shiv Sena), Anil Parab (Shiv Sena-UBT), Vijay Girkar, Nilay Naik, Ramesh Patil, Ramrao Patil (BJP), Abdullah Durrani (NCP), Wajahat Mirza and Pragna Satav (Congress), Mahadev Jankar (RSP) and Jayant Patil (PWP).

Red alert issued in Karnataka's coastal districts warning of extremely heavy rain

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC) has issued a red alert for coastal Karnataka, which is likely to receive extremely heavy rainfall on June 22.

It also said thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds (30-40kmph) are likely at isolated places across the state. According to a KSNDMC advisory, between June 23 and June 26 isolated heavy rains are also expected in certain areas of the Krishna basin.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has also issued a weather forecast stating that coastal and adjacent districts in interior Karnataka are very likely to receive heavy to very heavy rains.

Although the Southwest Monsoon has further advanced into some more parts of Maharashtra, the remaining parts of Vidarbha, some parts of Madhya Pradesh, some other parts of Chhattisgarh and Odisha, some parts of Gangetic West Bengal, remaining parts of Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, some parts of Jharkhand and coastal and adjacent districts of interior Karnataka are very likely to receive heavy to very heavy with isolated extreme rainfall between June 21 and June 25, it said.

Strong winds as well as possibilities of land slides are predicted too.

Pune Porsche case: Is it not confinement if juvenile is kept in custody after bail, asks HC

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Friday queried if it amounted to confinement when the juvenile accused in the Pune Porsche case was granted bail but was taken back in custody and kept in an observation home.

A division bench of Justices Bharati Dangre and Manjusha Deshpande said there was no denying that the accident was unfortunate.

"Two people have lost their lives. There was trauma but the child (juvenile) was also in trauma," the court said.

The bench also questioned the police under what provision of law, the order granting bail to the minor accused in the Porsche accident case was amended and how he has been kept in "confinement".

In the early hours of May 19, the juvenile was allegedly driving a Porsche car at very high speed in an intoxicated state when the vehicle crashed into a bike, killing two software engineers — Aneesh

Awadhiya and Ashwini Koshta — in Pune's Kalyani Nagar.

The 17-year-old was granted bail the same day by the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB), which ordered that he be kept under the care and supervision of his parents and grandfather. He was also asked to write a 300-word essay on road safety.

Amid a nationwide uproar over the quick bail, the police appealed to the JJB to amend the bail order. On May 22, the board ordered the boy to be taken into custody and remanded him to an observation home.

Last week, the teenager's paternal aunt filed a habeas corpus (produce person) petition claiming that he was illegally detained and sought his immediate release.

The bench, while hearing the arguments in the plea on Friday, noted that till date, the police have not filed any application before a higher court seeking cancellation of the bail order passed by the JJB.



Instead, an application was filed seeking amendment of the bail order, HC said, adding that based on this application, the bail order was amended, the boy was taken in custody and remanded to an observation home.

"What type of remand is this? What is the power to remand? What kind of procedure is this where a person has been granted bail and then a remand is passed taking him in custody," the court said. The bench added that the minor was taken away from

the care and supervision of his family members and sent to an observation home.

"He is a person who has been granted bail, but now he has been confined to an observation home. Is this not confinement? We would like to know your source of power," HC said.

The bench said it also expected the Juvenile Justice Board to be responsible.

The court questioned why the police did not move an application for cancellation of the bail.

The court reserved its order on the plea and said it would be passed on Tuesday (June 25).

Public prosecutor Hiten Venegaonkar submitted that the remand orders passed by the board were all valid and hence no interference was required.

On May 19, Venegaonkar said, the JJB bail order was "rightly or wrongly" passed, and also the blood samples of the juvenile were tampered with.

"Action has been taken against the errant officers and doctors. We have to send a strong message to society. Just writing a 300-word essay is not enough," Venegaonkar said.

Senior counsel Aabad Ponda argued that the boy's fundamental rights were violated.

"A free citizen's personal liberty has been trampled upon. Can a child be taken in custody when he has been granted bail and the bail order is in force," Ponda said.

He added that there was no

provision under the law where such a review of a bail order can be sought and passed.

"You cannot turn back the clock. Had bail been refused, CCL could have been sent to an observation home. But having been granted bail how can he be sent back to an observation home," Ponda said. The senior counsel said such things are not even done in serious offences under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act and Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act. How the police can do this in a juvenile's case, he asked.

The boy's aunt in the plea claimed that because of the public uproar coupled with "political agenda", the police deviated from the right course of investigation concerning the minor thus defeating the entire purpose of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act.

The teenager is currently in an observation home till June 25.

Will request Bihar CM for CBI probe into links of accused in NEET case with RJD: DyCM



PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha on Friday said a request will be made to CM Nitish Kumar to recommend a CBI probe into the suspected links of the arrested prime suspect in the NEET "paper leak" with officials associated with RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav.

Sinha on Thursday had claimed that officials associated with Tejashwi

into alleged NEET paper leak case, the DyCM said, "I explained everything before the media on Thursday...I even shared certain evidence in this regard with media persons...now these things are in public domain...I also hope that the Economic Offences Unit (EOU) of Bihar Police, which is probing the alleged NEET 'paper leak' case, will probe this aspect (accused links with the officials of RJD leader)."

Sinha on Thursday claimed "The official associated with Yadav used to arrange accommodation for Sikandar at guest houses in Patna and other places. I have details of messages which the official had sent to the persons concerned for arranging accommodation for Sikandar."

The DyCM said he has the mobile number from which those messages were sent. He said, "It needs to be thoroughly probed. Why is the RJD leader (Tejashwi Prasad) maintaining a stoic silence on this?"

There are reports suggesting that the accused was also associated with RJD supremo Lalu Prasad when he was in judicial custody in Ranchi, the deputy chief minister had alleged.

The EOU of Bihar Police had last month arrested 13 people as part of its investigation into the alleged paper leak in NEET-UG 2024.

The arrested accused included examinees, their parents and alleged mastermind Sikander Prasad Yadvenu.

"The entire sequence of events reveals how RJD leaders indulge in corrupt practices. There are reports suggesting that the accused was associated with Lalu Prasad during his judicial custody in Ranchi," the deputy CM had alleged.

Ministers meet OBC activists on behalf of Govt, urge them to end fast

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBAHAJINAGAR

Three Maharashtra ministers and a member of the legislative council on Friday met OBC activists Laxman Hake and Navnath Waghmare and urged them to end their fast, which entered the ninth day.

The delegation comprising ministers Atul Save, Uday Samant and Girish Mahajan, and MLC Gopichand Padalkar met the activists at the protest site at Wadigodri village in Jalna district. Newly-elected Shiv Sena MP Sandipan Bhumre was also present.

Mahajan also called up Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis from the stage and made them talk to the protesting activists.

Later, Padalkar said a meeting between a delegation of the OBC (Other Backward Classes) community and the government has been organised in Mumbai.

Mahajan said five OBC leaders named by Hake will attend the meeting at 5 pm. "A way can be worked out only after talks. The government



will not let injustice happen to anyone," he said.

However, Hake and Waghmare, who have been fasting since June 13, refused to halt their agitation and instead, demanded a written assurance from the government that the OBC quota won't be diluted. The two are opposed to activist Manoj Jarange's demand over implementation of the draft notification that recognises Kunbis as "sage soyare" (blood relatives) of Maratha community members. Kunbi, an agrarian group, falls under the OBC category, and Jarange has been demanding that Kunbi certificates be issued to all Marathas, thus making them eligible for quota in

government jobs and education.

"The government doesn't take notice of OBC agitation but gives the red carpet treatment to the protest by a specific community," he said.

He said prominent OBC leaders like Dhananjay Munde, Pankaja Munde, Chhagan Bhujbal, Gopichand Padalkar and Vijay Wadetiwar should also be present during the meeting in Mumbai.

Waghmare also said that their protest will continue till the government gives in writing that the OBC reservation won't be disturbed. "The government says it will implement 'sage soyare' notification. But it also says OBC reservation won't be affected. Someone is telling the truth and someone is not," he said.

The government should make its stand clear and cancel the "back-door entry to reservation through 54 lakh Kunbi-Maratha records", he added.

On Thursday, Hake and Waghmare had alleged that Maratha youths were ending their lives due to confusion created by activist Jarange.

Will withdraw notification on acquiring land for Sabarimala airport: Kerala Govt to HC

PTI ■ KOCHI

The Kerala government has informed the High Court here that it will withdraw the preliminary notifications issued by it to acquire land for the construction of the Sabarimala Greenfield airport in Kottayam district. The government has also told the court that it will conduct a fresh Social Impact Assessment (SIA) study with regard to the project through a different agency.

The submissions were made by it before the court on Thursday, June 20, during the hearing of a plea by a charitable trust and its managing trustee challenging the land acquisition notification.

In view of the submissions by the government, Justice Viju Abraham closed the petition "leaving open all other contentions on both sides". The court had on April 25 directed the state government not to take any further steps for two months in connection with the preliminary notification to acquire land for the construction of the Sabarimala Greenfield airport.

The petitioners — Ayana Charitable Trust and its



managing trustee Siny Punnoose — had alleged that the land acquisition process was aimed at illegally taking over their property — a rubber plantation measuring around 2,263 acres.

The trust, represented by advocates P Haridas and Rishikesh Haridas, had claimed that the state government has been attempting to "grab its property" ever since it acquired the land in 2005.

In its plea, the trust had also cited various Kerala High Court orders by which actions initiated by the government to allegedly grab its land were struck down. The state government had

earlier said that the Sabarimala Greenfield airport will make it convenient for pilgrims coming from other states to reach the hill top shrine of Lord Ayyappa in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala.

It said that having an airport there would also promote tourism and boost the economy. The Centre has granted the site and defence clearance for the Sabarimala Greenfield Airport project which is being developed on land in Erumeli South and Manimala villages in Kottayam district.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had told the state Assembly in February that the application for security clearance for the project is under consideration of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The petitioners, in their plea, had sought quashing of the appointment of the Centre for Management Development (CMD) to carry out the SIA study, its report, the expert committee's recommendations, the sanction granted to proceed with acquisition and the land acquisition notification.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Yoga for self and society

PM Modi celebrates International Yoga Day in Kashmir, emphasising Yoga’s role in fostering peace and unity

On June 21, 2024, International Yoga Day gave new meaning to the people of Kashmir as the Prime Minister celebrated it with them. Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked a momentous occasion by celebrating International Yoga Day in the scenic valley of Kashmir. This event was not only significant as a global celebration of yoga but also as a powerful symbol of peace, unity and cultural heritage in a region that has seen its share of strife and conflict. Kashmir, often referred to as ‘Paradise on Earth’ due to its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural tapestry, was chosen by PM Modi as the venue for this year’s International Yoga Day celebration. The event was held at the iconic Shalimar Bagh in Srinagar. International Yoga Day, celebrated on June 21 each year, was established in 2015 following a resolution proposed by PM Modi at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. The day aims to raise awareness about the benefits of practising yoga, a 5,000-year-old tradition that originated in India. It emphasises the integration of body, mind and spirit, promoting a balanced and harmonious lifestyle. This year’s theme, yoga for self and society resonated deeply in Kashmir, a region known for its complex socio-political challenges.



By celebrating Yoga Day in Kashmir, PM Modi aimed to convey a message of reconciliation and the potential for a peaceful future. Indeed, Prime Minister Modi has always used the symbols very effectively and conveyed the message to the people, celebrating Yoga Day in Kashmir was no exception. The choice of Kashmir as the venue for this significant event is

laden with symbolism. The region, which has faced decades of conflict and unrest, witnessed an outpouring of support for the celebration, reflecting a desire for peace and normalcy. PM Modi’s presence and the enthusiastic participation of residents is a step towards healing and bridging divides. This was PM Modi’s first trip to the union territory since being re-elected for a third consecutive term. During this visit, PM Modi launched several significant developmental projects and participated in International Yoga Day 2024 activities. PM Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for various developmental projects valued at over Rs. 1,500 crores. The Prime Minister addressed the gathering. He underscored the importance of yoga in promoting health and unity. The Prime Minister took this occasion to send a strong message across the border that all acts of terrorism would be thwarted. Indeed, the trip did reinforce the confidence of the people as it came just weeks after the Jammu attacks. This would also be a message to the security forces also to beef up the security. PM Modi’s visit underscored his commitment to the development and integration of Jammu and Kashmir. Indeed, the event was not just a display of yoga poses but a concerted effort to promote wellness and unity of the State.

PICTALK



People perform yoga in the Yamuna river on the 10th International Day of Yoga, in New Delhi

PTI

India’s solar industry is a goldmine for investors

The surge in global demand for renewable energy has placed solar power at the centre stage, particularly in India

India’s solar energy sector is shining brighter than ever, emerging as a goldmine for investors and entrepreneurs. The market, valued at \$38 billion in 2021, is set to grow exponentially, reaching \$238 billion by 2032, driven by an impressive 40 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR). The surge in global demand for renewable energy has placed solar power at the centre stage, particularly in India. With supportive Government policies, technological advancements and an increasing shift towards sustainability, the solar energy sector is witnessing unprecedented growth. Entrepreneurs and investors capitalise on this momentum, prioritising their goals to reap substantial benefits in the coming years.



the industry is focused on squeezing out as much efficiency as possible. In recent years, PERC (Passivated Emitter and Rear Cell) technology has been predominant in India’s solar panel market. However, due to efficiency limitations in mass production, there is a gradual shift towards more advanced technologies like TOPCon (Tunnel Oxide Passivated Contact) and HJT (Heterojunction Technology). **Government Policies** The Indian Government’s policies have played a crucial role in transforming the solar energy landscape. The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, with substantial financial allocations (PLI-I with Rs. 4,500 crores and PLI-II with Rs. 19,500 crores), are designed to boost domestic manufacturing of solar components.

Further bolstering the “Make in India” initiative, the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) was reinstated on April 1, 2024, ensuring quality control and encouraging the use of domestically manufactured modules. Various projects by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), such as the CPSU Scheme Phase-II, PM-KUSUM Component B and the Grid-connected Rooftop Solar Programme Phase-II, mandate the use of Domestic Content Requirement (DCR) solar panels, providing subsidies to promote the adoption of solar energy. **Environmental Impact** The solar industry in India isn’t just about fulfilling energy requirements - it’s also helping the environment. By using more solar power and relying less on fossil fuels, the solar industry is assisting in eliminating greenhouse gas emissions and fighting climate change. Shifting towards renewable energy, like solar power, is super crucial for India’s climate goals and ensuring a sustainable future. **Market Potential and Investment Opportunities**

India’s solar energy market presents a plethora of opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs. The sector’s rapid growth and the increasing acceptance of solar power for both commercial and personal uses underscore its potential. With Government support and ongoing technological advancements, the barriers to entry are diminishing, making it an attractive proposition for new ventures. Besides, technological advancements enhance efficiency and reduce costs, increasing profitability. Entrepreneurs can explore various segments within the industry. On a larger front, the global shift towards sustainability ensures a steady demand for solar energy solutions, providing businesses with a long-term growth trajectory. Moreover, India’s solar industry’s robust market potential, Government support and technological innovation make it a compelling opportunity for those looking to invest or start a venture in renewable energy. *(The writer is the CEO, of Gautam Solar, views are personal)*



GAUTAM MOHANKA

Kundan | Delhi

Mitali | Noida

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

NEET: Malice extends beyond a flawed exam

The Supreme Court’s recent directive to the Govt to meticulously address any lapses in the NEET examination underscores the critical nature of the fiasco

Plans do go awry. Who could say this better than Modi Sarkar 3.0? Prime Minister Narendra Modi had planned a blitzkrieg of the first 100 days of good governance. It doesn’t seem to be happening as of now. First the number of BJP members elected to Lok Sabha did not sufficiently pile up, forcing a toned-down department of the Government. Worse has been the marks manipulation controversy generated around the results declared by National Testing Agency (NTA) of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to the undergraduate courses in the medical colleges across the country. The Supreme Court on June 18 told the Union Government and the NTA to ensure that even ‘0.001 per cent negligence’ in conducting the NEET-UG 2024 exams be looked into with all seriousness considering the immense labour that the candidates have put in for preparing the nationwide examination. Thankfully, we have a mature leader like Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister, who is expected to steer through the crisis and not a Smriti Irani or a Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank camping at the Shastr Bhawan, the seat of the Ministry of Education. Pradhan has so far shown the patience and perseverance in handling this gargantuan-like crisis. The mess around NEET is much deeper than just the alleged malpractice in the conduct of the examination and the manipulation of marks. It’s a question of the very high financial and emotional stakes involved, given the limited number of the seats available in the medical colleges. Over 15 lakh students appear for the NEET annually to fight over about 83,000 seats available. Less than half of these seats are available in the Government-run colleges. More than half of the seats in these colleges are allotted under various quotas. Thus, many deserving candidates are unable to secure admission to Government colleges. The fees in the private medical colleges in India are unbelievably



expensive, often touching Rs one crore for the entire course. For middle-class families, these costs are untenable, prompting them to look for more affordable options abroad. Thus the medical college market in countries like China, Ukraine, Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Here the cost of education at the best is less than half of what the private medical colleges charge. No wonder if there is COVID happening in China, war happening in central Asia or hooliganism in Kyrgyzstan, miserable State of the Indian students makes news. The problems of these students don’t end here. Even on the successful completion of the course, an uncertain future awaits them. The medical degrees obtained from foreign universities must be recognised by the National Medical Commission of India (NMC). Even if the college is recognised, the medical graduates need to clear the Foreign Medical Graduates Examination (FMGE) conducted by NMC to practice in India. The pass rate for FMGE is relatively low. This shortage of seats explains the repeated noise of corruption around the medical entrance tests for several years

THE SHORTAGE OF MEDICAL SEATS IN INDIA, COUPLED WITH HIGH FINANCIAL AND EMOTIONAL STAKES, FUELS CORRUPTION IN ENTRANCE EXAMS AND DRIVES STUDENTS TO SEEK MORE AFFORDABLE EDUCATION OPTIONS ABROAD

now. The most prominent among the many fallouts of this situation are higher prices, long wait times and increased competition for the limited available resources. When shortage occurs, an environment is created where individuals or stakeholders may be willing to pay bribes to secure access to the limited resources. Today, in the NEET eco-system, there aren’t just the students and testing agencies who are participating. It can be safely said that the financial stakes at this examination is much higher for the horde of coaching centres and admission counsellors than the students themselves. Then there are the people who manipulate the system to make entrance into an Indian college ‘convenient’ lest the candidate ends up selling family silver for an admission in a private college in India or go through the rigmarole of enrolling in a foreign medical college and face an uncertain future. The expected role of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in the current crisis would be to provide an immediate relief to the injury and pain caused to the lakhs of students by the NTA, which con-

ducted NEET 2024. The larger relief would only come by investment in the health infrastructure sector. Increasing the number of medical seats in Government and private colleges, in the higher numbers in the former category, would lessen the need for students to seek education abroad or the manipulators having a field day. This requires substantial investment in medical infrastructure and faculty. This would not come by the mere initiative of either Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan or the newly-appointed Health Minister JP Nadda. There has to be a Government vision and more importantly the political will to break the cartel of the private medical colleges. The management of these colleges maintains a Octopus-like stranglehold over the medical education system through its various arms like the coaching centres and the counsellors. The ‘costly’ admission process is the first step towards the crass commercialisation of the medical sector in this country. About it on some other day. *(The writer is author and president, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice, views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WILDLIFE FIRES IN UTTARAKHAND

Madam — Apropos the news story “Forest fires are a grim environmental reality,” published on June 21, this is my response. The recent wildlife fires in Uttarakhand highlight a pressing environmental and societal issue. These fires are not just a natural calamity but a reflection of human irresponsibility and systemic failures. Environmental pollution, an unrestrained culture among youth and weak law enforcement have contributed to these destructive events. Global warming, largely driven by hydrocarbon fuel use, has exacerbated the situation, similar to patterns seen in Australia and the USA. Local industries and vehicular pollution have significantly warmed the atmosphere, making the naturally fire-prone Chir Pine forests even more vulnerable. Additionally, reckless behaviour, such as setting fires for social media fame and illegal activities like unauthorised construction and tree felling, further fuel these disasters. The media often needs to delve more deeply into such incidents’ root causes and preventive measures. A more profound understanding, perhaps through the lens of Vedic Physics, could offer comprehensive solutions by integrating ancient wisdom with modern scientific approaches.

Kundan | Delhi

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

Madam — Apropos the news story “Benefits of integrating offline and online channels,” published on June 21, this is my response. The management of offline and online channels often operates in silos, with little intersection in their strategies. This separation ignores the fundamental fact that consumers are people whose decision-making spans both realms. Consumers today engage with brands through multiple touchpoints—retail stores, social media, online reviews and influencer videos—making integrated channel management essential. The AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Decision, Action) highlights the need for a coherent strategy across channels, as purchases

UGC to revamp higher education



Apropos the news story “UGC set to revolutionise higher education in India,” published on June 21, this is my response. The University Grants Commission’s decision to allow biannual admissions in higher education institutions is a significant move. It aims to increase student intake and introduce new programs in emerging areas, aligning Indian education with global standards. This policy mirrors the successful biannual admissions in Open and

Distance Learning and Online modes, which saw nearly half a million additional enrollments. While this decision offers flexibility and opportunities for students, especially those aspiring to study abroad, it raises concerns about infrastructure and faculty requirements. Educational experts worry about maintaining quality amid increased quantity. However, the global model of continuous education and skill upgrading, seen in countries like Germany, highlights the potential benefits. In India, there is a need to change the mindset towards vocational training and practical experience. Successful examples, like IIT graduate Mr Khatri, show that determination and expertise can lead to significant achievements. For the biannual admission system to succeed, policymakers must focus on engaging students and providing practical, hands-on learning experiences.

Bittu Jaat | Jind

can occur either offline or online. Structural issues and managerial specialisations contribute to the disjointed approach, but evolving consumer behaviour demands integration. While offline channels have a long-standing command-and-control structure, online channels are rapidly gaining significance. Companies must adopt integrated thinking to enhance customer experience and ensure sustainable success.

Mitali | Noida

WOMEN AND UNPAID WORK

Madam — Apropos the news story “The Unseen Burden of Women’s Unpaid Labour,” published on June 21, this is my response. The early 60s saw Canadian writer Alice Munro dismissed as a mere “housewife who finds time to write short stories.” Munro’s eventual Nobel Prize in 2013 underscored the absurdity of this condescension. Economist Claudia Goldin’s research reveals that women’s careers are often constrained by societal expectations that idealise their roles as unpaid caregivers. This has tangible impacts: women global-

ly spend 76.2 per cent of their time on unpaid care work, three times more than men. In regions like the Pacific and Asia, men contribute the least. The burden of unpaid care work keeps 606 million working-age women out of the labour market, compared to just 41 million men. This disparity is reflected in economic metrics; for example, women’s unpaid work could be worth up to 40 per cent of GDP in some countries. Additionally, the “motherhood penalty” persists, reducing women’s career prospects and earnings. Conversely, men often receive a wage bonus upon becoming fathers. To bridge this gap, significant investments in childcare and care industries are crucial. Research shows that such investments could create millions of jobs and significantly boost women’s employment rates. Meeting these needs is essential to achieving gender equality and fulfilling global commitments to women’s economic justice.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

FIRST COLUMN

THE ART OF ANGER MANAGEMENT



RAVI VALLURI

Anger or an outburst is an emotion which invariably leads to antipathetic results

Aeons ago lived a sagacious teacher who adopted unusual techniques as part of his pedagogy while imparting knowledge to his students. One day he provided his students with an empty jar and a bagful of pebbles. He directed them to fill the jar with as many pebbles as they could. The students fretted as they struggled to insert the pebbles in the jar, but eventually managed to insert them. Subsequently, the teacher gave them a bag of sand and guided them to pour it into the jar. The sand filled in all the gaps between the rocks. Eventually, the teacher gave them a pitcher of water and asked the students to pour it into the jar which filled in all the remaining gaps. It was then pronounced that the jar represented our lives and the pebbles, sand and water typified what we live with. The teacher went on to State, “If we fill our lives with anger (represented by the pebbles), there will not be any room for anything else. But if we focus on the important things (represented by the sand and water), we could discover a State of happiness and balance.” Among the students lived a boy who was disposed with a foul temper. He would get angry at every little issue. One day, the sagacious teacher gave him a bag of nails and told him, “Every time you get vexed, hammer a nail into that front wall.” And thus began the activity. On the first day, the boy hammered 50 nails. The following day, he hammered 40. Each time he went up to the wall, he repented being piqued. It was quite a challenge to hammer a nail into the bricks of the wall! Slowly, the stripling discovered that controlling his rage was easier than hammering countless nails into the wall. The strapping youth had already become a laughing stock of his batchmates performing this wasteful exercise. Over a period, the number of nails hammered began to diminish much to the amazement of the student and his friends.



Eventually, came a day when he was not cross and became joyous about the fact. The perspicacious teacher assigned the student yet another task, “If you do not get provoked the entire day, remove one nail from the wall.” After many days, eyebrows were raised as all the nails were extricated from the wall. Finally, the teacher took the student near the wall and asked him what he saw. The student replied that he could view holes in the wall. “These holes are like the scars that one leave’s on individuals when a person gets exasperated. No matter how many times you apologise, the scar does not vanish.” “Thus, I suggest you to do two things; realise that words once uttered linger on. Your irascibility hurts others and leaves a dampener on all.” He continued, “Each time you feel outraged, ‘hammer a nail’ in the wall. The simplest thing you can do is to carry a pocket diary and draw a line each time you get annoyed. At night, count the number of lines drawn for that day. If you make this a habit, each time you would become waspish, you would be reminded to note it down.” “Once you follow this regimen, your awareness and memory muscle about the damage you were inflicting among the people with whom you interact would increase.” The student had learned his lesson, through this ingenious teaching imparted by his teacher.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

India faces a severe groundwater crisis



KOTA SRIRAJ

The groundwater clock is ticking towards day zero. India needs a combination of strategy and investment to safeguard and revitalise the same



According to the India Water Portal, India uses 25 per cent of all groundwater extracted globally, ahead of the USA and China. Nearly 70 per cent of the water supply in Indian agriculture today is groundwater. For a resource that is under such heavy use, India still lacks a contingency plan when it comes to dealing with groundwater depletion and over-exploitation. Predictably, the writing on the wall is becoming increasingly clear. On June 19th, 2024 the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) dropped the shocking news that Delhi has already extracted 99 per cent of its available groundwater. The latest CGWB report revealed a decline in both annual recharge and available groundwater for extraction in the city. According to the CGWB’s findings, Delhi’s net annual groundwater recharge in 2023 was measured at 0.38 billion cubic meters (bcm), with only 0.34 bcm available for extraction. Shockingly, nearly all accessible groundwater has already been extracted, totalling 99.1 per cent. The concerning aspect here is the increased rate of extraction despite reduced groundwater recharge. These trying conditions come at a time when Delhi is already reeling under the worst heatwave in the last 120 years which has claimed 192 lives so far. Sadly the issue of water distressed cities is becoming a worrying trend across India. Bangalore hit rock bottom earlier this year with over 500 million litres of water deficit daily with over 7000 borewells running dry. Coupled with abnormally harsh summers the water scarcity conditions can not only take a toll on human lives but also bring the urban economy to a grinding halt. This trend of drying up groundwater may, unfortunately, become the norm for



INDIA'S WATER RESOURCES FACE A BLEAK FUTURE; THE GOVERNMENT MUST ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH A NATIONWIDE WATER BODY CENSUS, RAINWATER HARVESTING AND INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

most cities in India unless urgent remedial measures are taken. But sadly, most of the action taken is at best knee-jerk and impulsive with neither long-term strategy nor investment attached to it. Consecutive Governments, both at the State and central levels have always dealt with groundwater-related issues on a passive basis instead of a proactive basis. As a result every year the nature of the problem not only becomes complex but also more difficult to solve. The future of India’s water resources looks bleak and the Government must deploy a plethora of measures to ensure that the future generations have enough of this precious resource. As a first step, the central Government must conduct a nationwide satellite-assisted natural water body census along with the measurable extent of the water body. This will not only quantify the number of water bodies but will also capture any encroachment of the same. Additionally, steps have to be taken to rejuvenate and revive these water bodies. This can be done by removing the vegetation and setting up artificial groundwater recharge points such as percolation wells. Apart from this, the roping in of local municipal authorities, especially the anti-encroachment departments can help remove unauthorised occupation from the water body area. The central Government in association with State Government authorities can work on measures

such as metered borewells to monitor and regulate groundwater extraction. The concept of metered borewells is not new. The State of West Bengal has metered borewells for a while now and as a result, the State has been experiencing better levels of groundwater. The same can be replicated across India, especially in Karnataka which is witnessing over-exploitation of groundwater. Yet another measure that needs sincere application is rain-water harvesting (RWH). Even though a much-talked-about concept, RWH has seen minimal implementation in India. Bangalore is an apt example of the abysmal application of RWH. According to Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) data, only 1.8 lakh out of the 19 lakh eligible properties in Bengaluru have installed rain-water harvesting systems. Experts have opined that the city harvests only 10 per cent of the rainwater while the rest 90 per cent drains away wasted. Conditions such as these point towards the unfortunate reality of hyped concepts that receive very little implementation. The Government must try and understand the latent potential of RWH and ensure that not only residential but commercial properties across India implement RWH and the same must be enforceable by law. However conventional remedial measures may still not be able to rein in the runaway groundwater scarcity problem. Since the scale of the problem has risen, the Government must explore investments in innovative technologies to bolster the efforts to revive and boost the groundwater table in India. Efficient farming technologies that rely less on water for instance can make a huge difference. Investments in precision agriculture for the usage of groundwater for irrigation are an ideal solution for providing optimal water usage. This saves water compared to traditional flooding methods which increases output while conserving resources and reducing water wastage. Similarly, App-driven water meters that automatically regulate extraction and smart groundwater pressure sensors that maintain critical and minimum water levels can all help alleviate the burdens weighing on groundwater. With water scarcity spreading region-wise across India and with a rapidly increasing water use the structural imbalance between water supply and demand continues to widen. Therefore it is time that the Governments in association corporate under corporate social responsibility schemes (CSR) must increase capital expenditure on smart technologies that can actively provide solutions to water scarcity and water quality issues besides improving sustainability of water resources. The groundwater clock is ticking towards day zero. India needs a combination of strategy and investment to safeguard and revitalise the same.

(The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

Generative AI revolutionises smart wearable technology

By leveraging AI for coaching and healthcare, wearables are setting new standards in user experience and functionality



C P KHADELWAL

personalised insights and recommendations based on the user’s data. Through sensors embedded in the wearables, data is analysed to provide real-time advice and feedback that helps users improve performance, maximise productivity and prevent injuries. In an era where most people want to stay fighting fit, generative AI goes beyond merely counting the steps taken and monitoring their heart rate. By

employing AI algorithms, advanced fitness trackers analyse the user’s data to provide personalised insights and coaching. A dynamic, bespoke approach is adopted in managing the user’s health and well-being as the smart device adapts to each person’s preferences, goals and individual fitness levels. For instance, an AI-driven coaching algorithm, Zepp Coach, offers customised guidance so its users can train and recover more effectively. A user simply needs to enter his or her physical characteristics, exercise experience level and preferred number of training days each week into the app. The app then builds a personalised training regime for every user. As the days progress, the Zepp Coach app monitors



each person’s fitness level, fatigue threshold and current training status. Based on this data, it recommends a reduction (or increase) in training intensity. **Wearables in Healthcare** Besides personal training, generative AI-linked wearables are deployed in healthcare with a similar model of leveraging user data to provide personalised counsel and insights. For example, the WHOOP Coach app uses a generative AI feature to offer extremely personalised, precise advice and suggestions by using GPT-4 – the most advanced generative AI system of OpenAI. Thereby, WHOOP can discover patterns and connections in the data of users and then offer instant, conversational, customised responses to their

healthcare practitioners can employ preventive measures. Propelled by the power of predictive analytics, smart wearables are driving a steady shift from a purely reactive to a proactive healthcare model. Taking these capabilities one level higher, generative AI is empowering wearables with the capability to sense and react to the emotions of users. These emotion-sensing algorithms can analyse facial expressions, monitor heart rate variability and check other physiological cues to assess the emotional State of users. **Immersive Reality** Then there is smart clothing with adaptive features that respond to environmental circumstances and user preferences. Such smart clothing offers temperature-regulating

textiles and dynamically adjustable apparel tightness for maximum comfort, especially when users engage in physical activities. Or consider language translation earbuds that offer contextual understanding. Backed by generative AI, these language translation earbuds go way beyond mere word-for-word translations. Through advanced contextual understanding, these earbuds can comprehend the idioms, cultural references and nuances of a specific language. By eliminating language barriers, this smart innovation facilitates seamless and efficient cross-cultural communication. Another exciting wearables category is immersive AR (augmented reality) glasses. Generative AI has allowed

these glasses to take a giant leap forward by delivering immersive experiences for users, seamlessly blending the virtual realm with real-world surroundings. This is not all. Generative AI has even revolutionised navigation-aiding wearables for visually impaired people. Through AI algorithms, smart navigation devices can interpret the environmental data to offer real-time details about any obstacles, the surroundings or necessary directions. With these wearables, visually challenged users can enjoy enhanced mobility and a certain level of independence that is not possible otherwise.

(The writer is CEO of PR Innovations, brand custodian of Amazfit India, views are personal)

Armenia recognises Palestinian state

AP ■ YEREVAN,

Armenia said it would recognise a Palestinian state on Friday, prompting Israel to summon its ambassador for what the Foreign Ministry described as a “severe reprimand.” Dozens of countries have recognised a Palestinian state, though none of the major Western powers has done so. Palestinians believe the recognitions confer international legitimacy on their struggle, especially as Israel’s war against Hamas, now in its ninth month, faces growing international criticism over the campaign of systematic destruction in Gaza and huge cost in civilian lives. Also Friday, the head of a major hospital in north Gaza said his staff have seen some 250 children suffering from malnutrition, with numbers rising daily due to acute food shortages. Palestinians face widespread hunger as the war has largely cut off the flow of food, medi-

cine and basic goods to Gaza, which is now totally dependent on aid. Meanwhile, Israel’s pledge to guard a new aid route into southern Gaza has fallen flat, as the UN and international aid organisations say a breakdown in law and order has made that route unusable. The Israeli military said that two soldiers were killed in combat in central Gaza, while three were severely injured. Israeli ground offensives and bombardments have killed more than 37,100 people, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count. Israel launched the war after Hamas’ October 7 attack, in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. Currently:— The fate of the latest cease-fire proposal hinges on Netanyahu and Hamas’ leader in Gaza. — Israel’s pledge

to guard an aid route into Gaza falls flat as lawlessness blocks distribution. — A rare public rift appears between Israel’s political and military leadership over how the war in Gaza is being conducted. — The leader of Lebanon’s Hezbollah militant group warns archenemy Israel against wider war. Qatari foreign minister says ceasefire negotiations are making progress to some extent” Madrid: Qatar’s foreign minister says some progress has been made in negotiations over a Gaza cease-fire deal but gaps remain between Israel and Hamas. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, whose country is a mediator alongside the US and Egypt, said Friday “there has been progress to some extent in the situation.” Mediators have held “successive meetings” with the Hamas leadership in an effort to bridge the gaps, he said during a visit to Spain.

“There cannot be one party to the conflict adopting the vision of the other party,” he said. The solution “must be based on compromises between the two parties.” Two Israeli soldiers killed in central Gaza Jerusalem: Israel’s army said Friday that two Israeli soldiers were killed in combat in central Gaza. No information was given about the circumstances about the deaths of the two, both of whom were men in their 20s. Three other soldiers were severely injured, the army said. The news comes as public anger grows in Israel over the trajectory of the eight month conflict and exemptions from military service for young ultra-Orthodox men. Last week, an explosion in southern Gaza killed eight Israeli soldiers. In January, 21 Israeli troops were killed in a single attack by Palestinian militants in Gaza. Since the October 7 Hamas attack that triggered the war, more than

660 Israeli troops have been killed, about half in the Israeli ground operation in Gaza, according to the latest figures from the military. Over 37,000 Palestinians in the enclave have been killed by Israeli fire over that same period, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its figures. Gaza hospital chief says hundreds of children are suffering from malnutrition. Deir Al-Balah, Jun 21: The head of one of the largest hospitals in north Gaza says his staff has recently registered some 250 children suffering from malnutrition and the numbers are raising daily due to acute food shortages. Dr. Husam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, urged the international community to pressure Israel to allow an increased flow of food and other products into the Gaza Strip, warning that conditions are dire in the coastal territory.

Court upholds Canada’s no-fly list for Sikh extremists

PTI ■ OTTAWA

A Canadian court has thrown out a bid by two Sikh extremists to get off the country’s no-fly list, saying there are “reasonable grounds” to suspect they will threaten transportation security or travel by air to commit a terrorism offence. The Federal Court of Appeal in its ruling this week dismissed an appeal by Bhagat Singh Brar and Parvkar Singh Dulai after they lost a constitutional challenge of their no-fly designations under Canada’s Secure Air Travel Act, The Canadian Press news agency reported from Vancouver on Thursday. The two were not allowed to board planes in Vancouver in 2018. The ruling says the act empowers the public safety minister to ban people from flying if there are “reasonable grounds to suspect they will threaten transportation security or travel by air to commit a

terrorism offence.” “At some point, the appellants tried to fly. They could not,” the ruling says. “They were on the list and the minister had directed that they not fly.” The appellate panel found that based on confidential security information, the minister “had reasonable grounds to suspect that the appellants would travel by air to commit a terrorism offence.” In 2019, Brar and Dulai went to the Federal Court of Canada to have their names struck from the list. But Justice Simon Noel ruled against them both in 2022. The limits imposed on Dulai, he ruled, “were the result of evidence-based suspicions that he could fly abroad in order to plot a terrorist attack.” “The Government of Canada must enact laws that protect national security and intelligence activities in a way that respects rights and freedoms and encourages the international community to do the

same,” Noel ruled. In their appeal, both Brar and Dulai argued the impairment of their rights as a result of being placed on the list was not “minimal” and therefore unjustified. However, the appellate court ruled the legislation was justified and that confidential portions of the court process were procedurally fair. The Secure Air Travel Act deals with “national security, international relations and global co-operation to prevent terrorism” and is “not directed to past events that are tangible, certain and known,” the appellate court found. “Rather, it is forward-looking, designed to act preventatively, proactively and pre-emptively to deal with perhaps imprecise but nevertheless very real risks of harm to property, public safety and human life,” the ruling says. “Several of its features show careful tailoring to minimize the impairment of rights and freedoms.”

2 killed when police clash with locals in Mexico

PTI ■ SAN ANTONIO

Two people were killed Thursday when locals protesting alleged water contamination by a pork processing plant clashed with police in the Mexican gulf coast state of Veracruz. Residents of the community of San Antonio Limon had been blocking a road demanding government action against the operation, which they said was responsible for polluting the aquifer and using too much water. State security forces arrived Thursday in the community, also known as Totocal, and protesters said police began beating them and opened fire. Brothers Alberto and Jorge Cortina Vázquez, aged 22 and 27 respectively, were killed, according to the Veracruz state prosecutor’s office, which opened an investigation. A third brother, Carlos

Cortina Vázquez, said his brothers were not even at the roadblock. “They were just passing by and when they (the police) started to fire everyone ran,” he said. “That’s when they started shooting at them like they were animals. Residents said they tried to hide in their homes but some 400 police who arrived chased them. Some showed shell casings they said came from security forces’ guns. In a statement, the Veracruz state prosecutor’s office said it had undertaken “an exhaustive investigation to clarify the unfortunate events in Totocal.” The Veracruz state interior agency, which is responsible for security, said in a statement that the protesters had been holding two state police officers and had threatened to kill them. They said the protesters had not been open to dialogue.

Sunak angry over election date

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said that anyone involved in using inside information to bet on the date of Britain’s July 4 national election should be expelled from his Conservative Party. Sunak said on the BBC on Thursday that he was “incredibly angry, incredibly angry” to learn of allegations that Conservative politicians betted on the election date, and that they “should face the full force of the law” if they were found to have broken the law. “It’s right that they are being investigated properly by the relevant law enforcement authorities,” he said. “If anyone is found to have broken the rules, not only should they face the full consequences of the law, I will make sure that they are booted out of the Conservative Party.” Two weeks ahead of the general election, it was an uncomfortable experience for Sunak,



whose Conservative Party is trailing the main opposition Labour Party — by 20 points by many polls — ahead of the vote. Earlier, asked about reports that the UK’s Gambling Commission was investigating a second Conservative candidate for placing a bet on the timing of the election, housing minister Michael Gove told the BBC that if people used inside information to bet, it would be “deeply wrong.” “What I can’t do is sort of get

too much into the detail of the case while an investigation is going on,” Gove said. “But I can talk about the broad principle and you’re absolutely right, it’s reprehensible.” Sunak announced on May 22 that parliamentary elections would be held on July 4. The date had been a closely guarded secret and many, even those in Sunak’s governing Conservative Party, were taken by surprise as a vote had been expected in the fall. Under the United Kingdom’s electoral laws, the prime minister has the power to call the date within five years of the previous election. Many members of Sunak’s party have said that he called it too soon, as he had until January 2025 to call the balloting. British media, including the PA news agency and the BBC, reported on Thursday that Tory candidate Laura Saunders, who is married to the Conservative Party’s director of campaigning, Tony Lee, is facing a commission inves-

betting accusations

tigation into alleged betting offences. Saunders’ attorney, Nama Zarroug, of Astraea Linskills, said she would be co-operating with the commission investigation and that she had nothing further to add. “It is inappropriate to conduct any investigation of this kind via the media, and doing so risks jeopardising the work of the Gambling Commission and the integrity of its investigation,” the statement said. “The publication of the BBC’s story is premature and is a clear infringement of Ms Saunders’ privacy rights. She is considering legal action against the BBC and any other publishers who infringe her privacy rights,” it added. The Conservative Party said Britain’s Gambling Commission contacted it over a “small number of individuals” in connection with the investigation. The party declined to immediately comment on the fresh allegation pending the

commission investigation. But it said in a statement that Lee took a leave of absence from the party on Wednesday. The broadening scandal came after reports Wednesday that one of Sunak’s police bodyguards was arrested over alleged bets on the date of Britain’s national election made before it was announced. The constable in the Royalty and Specialist Protection Command was arrested Monday on suspicion of misconduct in public office, the Metropolitan Police force said. Last week, Sunak aide Craig Williams, who is running to be reelected to Parliament, acknowledged he was being investigated by the Gambling Commission for placing a 100 pound (USD 128) bet on a July election before the date had been announced. Betting is popular in the UK, with bookies offering odds on everything from sports to elections. Cheating by acting on inside information is a criminal offence.

Sudan’s vice-pres expresses concern over peace talks

Juba (AP): South Sudan’s vice president has said that peace talks in neighbouring Kenya have failed to acknowledge the country’s peace agreement established in 2018, alleging a new draft agreement is aimed at replacing the original peace deal. Riek Machar in a protest letter to the talks’ mediator on Thursday said the draft established alternative institutions to replace or run in parallel with those established by the previous peace agreement. He added that the current peace talks should complement and not obliterate the original deal. The former rebel leader signed an agreement with President Salva Kiir in 2018 that ended a five-year civil war that killed about 4,00,000 people. Machar and Kiir were on opposite sides in the war and Machar was appointed vice president after the 2018 deal.

Biden, Trump taking different approaches to prepare for next week’s debate

AP ■ NEW YORK

President Joe Biden begins an intense period of private preparations Friday at Camp David for what may be the most consequential presidential debate in decades. The 81-year-old Democrat’s team is aware that he cannot afford an underwhelming performance when he faces Republican rival Donald Trump for 90 minutes on live television Thursday night. Biden’s team is expecting aggressive attacks on his physical and mental strength, his record on the economy and immigration and even his family. Trump, 78 and ever confident, will stay on the campaign trail before going to his Florida estate next week for two days of private meetings as part of an informal prep process. The former president’s allies are pushing him to stay focused on his governing plans, but they’re expecting him to be tested by pointed questions about his unrelenting focus on election fraud, his role in the erosion of abortion rights and his unprecedented legal baggage.

Thursday’s debate on CNN will be full of firsts, with the potential to reshape the presidential race. Never before in the modern era have two presumptive nominees met on the debate stage so early in the general election season. Never before have two White House contenders faced off at such advanced ages, with widespread questions about their readiness. And never before has a general election debate participant been saddled with a felony conviction. The debate-stage meeting comes just two weeks before Trump is scheduled to be sentenced on 34 felony counts in his New York hush money trial. “You can argue this will be the most important debate, at least in my lifetime,” said Democratic strategist Jim Messina, 54, who managed former President Barack Obama’s 2012 campaign. “The ground rules for Thursday’s debate, the first of two scheduled meetings, are unusual. The candidates agreed to meet at a CNN studio in Atlanta with no audience. Each candidate’s microphone will be muted, except when it’s his turn to speak. No props or prewritten notes will be

allowed onstage. The candidates will be given only a pen, a pad of paper and a bottle of water. There will be no opening statements. A coin flip determined that Biden would stand at the podium to the viewer’s right, while Trump would deliver the final closing statement. The next debate won’t be until September. Any stumbles Thursday will be hard to erase or replace quickly. Biden arrived at Camp David on Thursday night and is expected to hunker down with senior campaign aides until next Thursday’s debate. While traveling to the mountainside retreat, he gave a thumbs up to reporters when asked how debate prep was going. The president’s aides have been reluctant to share details about his specific preparations, run by former chief of staff Ron Klain. But they have signaled that he is preparing to be aggressive and would not shy away from using the term “convicted felon” to describe his opponent onstage. One adviser not authorized to speak publicly about debate strategy noted that Biden has been increasingly punchier in recent

remarks about Trump and plans to carry that theme through to the debate. That’s still while trying to project himself as “the wise and steady leader” in contrast to Trump, the adviser said. Among some political operatives, there is the sense that Biden may have the most to lose given his struggle to generate momentum amid signs of weakness within his political coalition. Trump and his allies have set an extraordinarily low bar, however, by suggesting for months that Biden is contending with serious physical limitations that make it difficult for him to stand for 90 minutes or even string together two sentences. “It’s like the mirror test. Put a mirror under Biden’s nose, and if it fogs it up, he wins, right? That’s about what the threshold is for Biden,” Republican strategist and Trump ally David Urban said with a laugh. “Can Biden demonstrate that he’s mentally nimble? That’s the big question.” Yet Trump himself sought to shift expectations in a Thursday interview with the “The All-In Podcast” in which he veered sharply away from his typical Biden taunts.

NZ’s gun laws being revised by ex-gun lobbyist

AP ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand’s government will overhaul the tighter gun laws introduced after a deadly mass shooting by a white supremacist five years ago, because they put excessive burdens on gun owners who feel vilified by law enforcement and the public, the lawmaker leading the changes said. “What’s happened is a massive change with massive penalties and targets on people who didn’t do anything wrong,” Associate Justice Minister Nicole McKee — a lobbyist for gun owners before she entered Parliament in 2020 — told The Associated Press in an interview this week. Every part of the law will be scrutinised, including the restrictions that bar all but a few hundred New Zealanders from firing banned semiautomatic weapons, she said. McKee’s pledge of a wide-ranging review — following an earlier announcement that she would ease rules for gun clubs — was applauded by groups representing the country’s 250,000 license holders and decied by survivors of the

2019 terrorist attack at two Christchurch mosques where an Australian man opened fire on Muslim worshippers, killing 51 people. It makes me scared for our futures,” Temel Ataocogcu — who was shot nine times in the attack and fears an erosion of the assault weapon ban — told the AP. “What have the past five years been for? How are they going to prevent this from happening again?” New Zealand drew global admiration when its then-Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said six days after the massacre that her government would outlaw all semiautomatic weapons. The change was approved by 119 lawmakers with only one opposed, and sweeping reforms followed: bolstered licensing requirements, more rules for gun clubs, and the creation of a firearms registry. The changes introduced “onerous regulatory compliance,” said McKee, whose political party, Act, campaigned for New Zealand’s 2023 election on a platform for reversing many of them. Now in government as

part of a center-right coalition, McKee pledged to update the law before the next election in 2026. Her bloc has enough lawmakers to easily pass any reforms in the face of any resistance from the parliamentary opposition. “The changes we made off the back of March 15 took military-style semi-automatic weapons off the street and made our communities safer,” said Ginny Andersen, a lawmaker for Labour — the largest opposition party, previously led by Ardern. “Making those guns more accessible will take New Zealand backwards.” McKee’s consultation was a “box ticking exercise, with a select group and a very short time for responses,” Andersen said in her emailed statement. Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, whose party is in government with McKee’s, did not answer AP’s requests for comment. McKee said she would consult with the public before deciding specific measures and that her personal views would not direct the overhaul. Critics rejected that. “She was elected as a gun lob-

byst, that was her role,” said Chris Cahill, president of the Police Association, a group representing most New Zealand officers. “She’s got a loyalty to the gun lobby groups.” The review was “without a doubt, a backdoor into giving people access to semiautomatic assault rifles again,” Cahill said. At the time of the ban, McKee denounced it as “knee-jerk.” As a minister she is more guarded, but told the AP that New Zealand had not been entirely rid of such weapons; several hundred people have permits to use them for pest control in rural areas, while others can own but not fire them. “If we extend the access, what are the possible controls around the use of the extension? And would society be happy with what those controls mean?” McKee said she would ask during the review. “It’s about how do we find the balance with protecting people but not going over the top with a regulatory regime,” she said. Any concerns raised by opponents should be “realistic,” McKee added.

Enthusiasts worldwide mark 10th Yoga International Day

AP ■ NEW YORK/ TEL AVIV

Thousands of yoga enthusiasts from across the world rolled out their yoga mats as they joined day-long sessions of the ancient Indian practice to commemorate the 10th International Day of Yoga on Friday. Recognising its universal appeal, in December 2014, the UN proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga. The draft UN General Assembly resolution establishing the International Day of Yoga was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 175 member states. The Consulate General of India in New York along with the Times Square Alliance hosted special yoga sessions at the iconic Times Square. Amid heat advisories in place for the New York area, which experienced temperatures as high as 93°F (33.8°C) during the day, people from all walks of life and nationalities arrived early morning on Thursday



and rolled out their yoga mats in the heart of the popular New York City destination. Yoga instructor and breath meditation teacher Richa Dhekne, who has over two decades of experience as a volunteer and faculty member with the Art of Living Foundation, led the yoga and meditation session hosted by the Consulate General of India

in New York. Several other yoga teachers and experts led various meditation, exercises and breathing sessions throughout the day at Times Square, as thousands participated in the day-long activities. In Washington, hundreds of yoga enthusiasts came together to observe the day at an event that was addressed by India’s

Deputy Ambassador to the US Sripriya Ranganathan. At the picturesque Wharf, overlooking the Potomac River, the International Yoga Day event on Wednesday began with prayers and Indian classical dance performances. The yoga session highlighted the spirit of oneness and harmony inspired by the ancient Indian practice. Over three hundred people from across Israel rolled out yoga mats and performed asanas as they participated in International Yoga Day celebrations at the Peres Centre for Peace and Innovation in Tel Aviv. First Lady Michal Herzog was the chief guest at the main International Yoga Day event on Thursday. A series of events were held across the country. The event was organised by the Embassy of India in Israel in association with the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality and the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Israel. At the event, Herzog spoke

about the deep friendship between India and Israel. Singapore’s Minister of State for Health Rahayu Mahzam joined more than 200 yoga enthusiasts and the Indian High Commissioner Dr Shilpak Ambule in celebrating the 10th International Yoga Day here on a rain-washed cool morning. The minister emphasised in her keynote speech the importance of yoga in fostering a healthy and balanced lifestyle. “India has certainly played a leading role in promoting the benefits of yoga to the world. The flexible and adaptable nature of yoga also makes it inclusive for people of different ages, genders, and physical abilities. I am glad to see participants from all walks of life in today’s event,” she said. The event is celebrated by the High Commission of India in Singapore in partnership with Gardens by the Bay at Waterfront Plaza, a sprawling green complex popular among tourists and local joggers.

The Embassy of India in Nepal on Thursday organised yoga demonstrations at three iconic landmarks of Pokhara, the tourism capital of the country. “What better way to spread the message of #YogaForSelfAndSociety than to assimilate Yoga, Nature and Spirituality! @IndiaInNepal organised yoga demonstrations at 3 iconic landmarks of #Pokhara, the tourism capital of Nepal,” the mission tweeted. The mission also organised a Yoga demonstration at Lumbini. The chief minister of Lumbini, various provincial leaders and more than 900 people participated in the yoga demonstration, it said. “Hon’ble CM of Lumbini, Jokh Bahadur Mahara, thanked for organising the event at the sacred birthplace of Lord Buddha and for strengthening bilateral ties,” it said. India’s Ambassador to Nepal, Naveen Srivastava underlined that the birthplace of Lord

Buddha is an ideal place for the timeless practice of Yoga for health and longevity. India’s embassy in Sri Lanka also organised several yoga sessions, including in Jaffna and Kandy ahead of the day. The Indian Embassy in Beijing on Thursday organised a yoga class at Beijing Morning Star School led by the Embassy’s Cultural Teacher (Yoga) Lokesh Sharma. More than 45 students participated in the class and practised various yoga poses to improve body flexibility and enhance concentration. In Rome, Ambassador Vani Rao spoke about “Yoga for Self and Society” at the event organised by the Italian Hindu Union. The High Commission of India in the Maldives organised an event that witnessed the participation of Maldivian and Indian Yoga enthusiasts. The Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia celebrated the day at Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Olympic Complex, Riyadh.

Washington Post editor decides not to take job after backlash

New York (AP): Newly-named Washington Post editor Robert Winnett has decided not to take the job and remain in England amid leadership turmoil at the news organisation. The Post’s CEO and publisher, Will Lewis, announced Winnett’s decision to withdraw in a note to staff on Thursday morning. He will stay as deputy editor of the Telegraph in London. Several published reports had raised questions about Winnett’s involvement in articles where a source was paid and information gathered through deceptive means — practices more commonplace in England but frowned upon by journalists in US. As part of a reorganisation that has backfired, Lewis had named Winnett, a former colleague, to take over the Post’s core newsroom functions after the November election.

Tourist allegedly killed for Quran desecration in Pak

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

An enraged mob in the picturesque Pakistani town of Swat has gunned down a tourist, dragged him through the town and later hanged him in full public view for allegedly committing desecration of the Qurn. The incident happened on Thursday night when Muhammad Ismail, a resident of Sialkot in Punjab province, was visiting the northwestern Pakistan hill resort town of Swat and was accused of having burnt the pages of Islam's holy book in Madyan tehsil of Swat district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. District Police Officer (DPO), Swat, Zahidullah said that initially the police had taken Ismail in custody and locked him up in the police station when the alleged desecration incident was reported. However, the incident was announced from mosques through loudspeakers in the market, prompting thousands of people to gather outside the police station. Soon after, the angry mob demanded that the police hand over the suspect to them. On refusal, a fierce exchange of fire took place between the local people and the police in which eight persons were injured. The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

After that the mob torched the police station, forcing the cops on duty to flee for their lives. "After that, the people entered the police station and shot and killed the suspect and dragged his body to the Madyan Ada, where they hanged him. The people also set the police station and police vehicles on fire, while the policemen on duty fled. Meanwhile, more police force was called to control the mob," the officer was quoted as saying.

According to the police officials, the incident has caused a law and order situation in the hill town. More police force was called to restore order in the popular tourist destination. Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Ali Amin Gandapur has sought a report from the provincial police chief.He has directed the Inspector General of Police to take emergency steps to control the situation and urged people to remain calm.

Former Pakistan PM Abbasi launches new political party

Islamabad (PTI): Former Pakistan prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Friday formed a new political party named Awaam Pakistan after parting ways with the ruling PML-N due to the differences with the party's way of politics. Abbasi, who served as the prime minister from August 2017 to May 2018, was joined by former finance minister Miftah Ismail who also parted ways with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) led by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. The slogan of the new political entity is 'badlien gaen nizam' (we will change the system). The party would be formally launched on July 6 or 7. The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

A video shared on Awaam Pakistan's official X handle featured disheartened citizens addressing national issues such as inflation, energy shortages, corruption, unemployment, and educational disparities.

Abbasi, 65, has been appointed as head of the organising committee, while Ismail has been initially named as his deputy.

The organising committee also includes former Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa governor and PML-N leader Sardar Mehtab Abbasi, former PML-N Senator Javed Abbasi and former Muttahida Qaumi Movement lawmaker Sheikh Salahuddin. The founding members include former PML-N lawmaker from Faisalabad Rana Zahid Tauseef, former PTI health minister Zafar Mirza, former PML-N provincial lawmaker Zaem Qadri, Hazara region activist Fatima Atif, Sindhi nationalist leader Anwar Soomro, legal expert Moiz Jafari and educationist Tariq Banuri. Abbasi served as prime minister from August 2017 to May 2018 until PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif was disqualified by the Supreme Court. He belongs to the Murree area of Rawalpindi,

which is a famous hill resort frequented by tourists in summer to seek relief from scorching heat and in winter to enjoy snowfall. He is a businessman whose family owned the country's AirBlue airline. He entered politics in 1988 when he was elected as a member of the National Assembly for the first time. He was elected at least six times on the PML-N ticket and was considered close to Nawaz Sharif and also served as a federal minister. Abbasi and Ismail, who served as ministers in his cabinet, left the PML-N due to policy disagreements and initiated discussions nationwide in 2023 under the banner 'Reimagining Pakistan' to pay ground for a new party.He in many discussions and seminars has been insisting that only a new political party with the will to change the current system can pull the cash-strapped country out of crisis.

Pak PM assures PPP of addressing its concerns over budget

Islamabad (PTI): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has assured Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari that the government would take steps to address the key ally's reservations on multiple issues by forming a committee after tensions rose among ruling coalition partners over the budget.

A delegation of the PPP headed by Bilawal on Thursday met Prime Minister Sharif to sort out differences over the budget which was presented in Parliament last week. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb presented the federal budget on June 12 but the PPP, which is the major ally of the government, was not happy as it was not consulted when the budget was being prepared.As the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government lacks a majority, there is a genuine concern that the government may not be able to get the budget passed in Parliament if not supported by the PPP.Geo News reported that Sharif assured Bilawal Bhutto of taking steps to address the key concerns.The Dawn newspaper quoting sources said that the differences have been settled, with both sides agreeing to support each other and cooperate on issues of mutual concern.

According to Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, some "minor" reservations had been expressed by the PPP, which would be resolved by the government through talks. He said the government also formed a committee led by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar to take up the issue with the PPP and would take the dialogue forward in light of the meeting between Sharif and Bilawal. On the other hand, PPP sources said the premier agreed with the party chairperson on most issues as the latter expressed annoyance with him for bypassing his party on budget matters. Bhutto complained that the PPP had joined the government under an agreement with which the PML-N did not comply. The Prime Minister has also formed a committee to resolve the disagreement.Officials said the PPP delegation also included Chairman Senate Yusuf Raza Gilani, former premier Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and senior leaders Syed Khurshid Shah, Syed Naveed Qamar and Sherry Rehman. The discussion focused on the "national political issues" and it was agreed that further consultation would be held with the PPP regarding the budget 2024-2025, sources said.

S Korea summons Russian envoy

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador to protest the country's new defense pact with North Korea on Friday, as border tensions continued to rise with vague threats and brief, seemingly accidental incursions by North Korean troops. Earlier Friday, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un issued a vague threat of retaliation after South Korean activists flew balloons carrying anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border, and South Korea's military said it had fired warning shots the previous day to repel North Korean soldiers who briefly crossed the rivals' land border for the third time this month.

That came two days after Moscow and Pyongyang reached a pact vowing mutual defense assistance if either is attacked, and a day after Seoul responded by saying it would consider providing arms to Ukraine to fight Russia's invasion. South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong Kyun summoned Russian Ambassador Georgy Zinoviev to protest the deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un and called for Moscow to immediately halt its alleged military cooperation with Pyongyang. Kim, the South Korean diplomat, stressed that any cooperation that directly or indirectly helps the North build up its military capabilities would violate UN Security Council resolutions and pose a threat to the South's security, and warned of consequences for Seoul's relations with Moscow.

Zinoviev told Korean officials that any attempts to "threaten or blackmail" Russia were unacceptable and that his country's agreement with North Korea wasn't aimed at specific third countries, Russia's embassy wrote on its X account. The South Korean ministry said Zinoviev promised to convey Seoul's concerns to his superiors in Moscow. Leafletting campaigns by South Korean civilian activists in recent weeks have prompted a resumption of Cold War-style psychological warfare along the inter-Korean border. The South Korean civilian activists, led by North Korean defector Park Sang-hak, said it sent 20 balloons carrying 300,000 propaganda leaflets, 5,000 USB sticks with South Korean pop songs and TV dramas,

How did N Korean soldiers wander across most heavily guarded border

Seoul (AP): Don't believe the name: The Demilitarized Zone between the two rival Koreas might be the most heavily armed place on earth. Two million mines, barbed wire fences, tank traps and tens of thousands of troops from both countries patrol a divided swath of land 248 kilometers (154 miles) long and 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) wide.

So how are North Korean soldiers continuing to wander over the line separating North from South, causing South Korea to fire warning shots for the third time this month? The short answer appears to be shrubbery: Because of an overgrowth of foliage, the North Koreans may not have seen the signs marking the thin military demarcation line that divides the DMZ into northern and southern sides. But it's also just the latest entry in the long, often violent history of the unique border set up after the 1950-53 Korean War. It ended with an armistice, instead of a peace treaty, leaving the Korean Peninsula divided, and technically still in a state of war. On Friday, South Korea's military said it had fired warnings shots the previous day to repel several North Korean soldiers who briefly crossed

the military demarcation line that divides the countries while engaging in unspecified construction work. Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North Koreans retreated shortly after South Korean soldiers broadcast a warning and fired the shots Thursday morning, but didn't immediately release more details. Similar incidents took place on June 9 and June 18, each involving some 20 to 30 North Korean soldiers briefly crossing the demarcation line and retreating shortly after the South Koreans broadcast audio warnings and fired warning shots. South Korea's military says the incursions were likely accidents, noting that the North Koreans did not return fire and withdrew immediately. The demarcation line, in many parts of the DMZ, is simply a sign mounted on a stick or a slice of concrete. People have stepped across it before, under very special circumstances, and usually at the border village of Panmunjom. Former U.S. President Donald Trump walked across with Kim Jong Un. Last year an American soldier facing possible military discipline dashed over the line to the North.

Outside of Panmunjom, much of the DMZ is wilderness, but it is heavily monitored on both sides. And while the demarcation line may be easily crossed, it is very difficult to do so without being spotted immediately. The southern side of the land border is protected not only by thousands of soldiers, guns and mines, but also by a dense network of cameras, motion sensors and other high-tech surveillance equipment. Breaches are very rare and are usually detected quickly. Defections from the North are also unusual along the North-South land border, though they have happened with frequency along the porous China-North Korea border and occasionally in the Yellow Sea. The North's accidental intrusions this month may have been caused by a sudden jump in North Korean troops fortifying their side of the border. Because overgrown trees and plants may have been obscuring the signs marking the demarcation line, Seoul says, the North Korean troops may have stepped over the line without knowing it. Why are so many North Koreans working in the DMZ?

mas, and 3,000 US dollar bills from the South Korean border town of Paju on Thursday night. Pyongyang resents such material and fears it could demoralize front-line troops and residents and eventually weaken Kim Jong Un's grip on power, analysts say. In a statement carried by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency, Kim Yo Jong, one of her brother's top foreign policy officials, called the activists "defector scum" and issued what appeared to be a threat of retaliation. "When you do something you were clearly warned not to do, it's only natural that you will find yourself dealing with something you didn't have to," she said, without specifying what the North would do. After previous leafletting by South Korean activists, North Korea launched more than

1,000 balloons that dropped tons of trash in South Korea, smashing roof tiles and windows and causing other property damage. Kim Yo Jong previously hinted that balloons could become the North's standard response to leafletting, saying that the North would respond by "scattering dozens of times more rubbish than is being scattered on us."In response, South Korea resumed anti-North Korea propaganda broadcasts with military loudspeakers installed at the border for the first time in years, to which Kim Yo Jong, in another state media statement, warned that Seoul was "creating a prelude to a very dangerous situation." Tensions between the Koreans are at their highest in years as Kim Jong Un accelerates his nuclear weapons and missile development and attempts to strengthen his regional footing

by aligning with Russian President Vladimir Putin in a standoff against the US-led West. South Korea, a growing arms exporter with a well-equipped military backed by the United States, says it is considering upping support for Ukraine in response. Seoul has already provided humanitarian aid and other support while joining US-led economic sanctions against Moscow. But it has not directly provided arms, citing a long-standing policy of not supplying weapons to countries actively engaged in conflict. Putin told reporters in Hanoi, Vietnam, on Thursday that supplying weapons to Ukraine would be "a very big mistake," and said South Korea "shouldn't worry" about the agreement if it isn't planning aggression against Pyongyang.

China sanctions three executives over arms deals with Taiwan

Beijing (AP): China said Friday it has banned a number of business units of American aviation manufacturer Lockheed Martin Corp and three of its executives over arms deals the company has signed with Taiwan, the self-ruling island it claims as its own territory. The statement from China's Foreign Ministry said the company's cooperation with Taiwan had violated the country's sovereignty, standard terminology in its discussions of any outside dealings that support the island's government. The effects of the sanctions appeared largely symbolic since military cooperation between the US and China has been suspended since the People's Liberation Army's crackdown on student-led pro-democracy protests in Beijing and other cities in 1989.

Named under the sanctions were Lockheed Martin Missile System Integration Lab, Lockheed Martin Advanced Technology Laboratories and Lockheed Martin Ventures. Top executives James Donald Taiclet, Frank Andrew St John and Jesus Malave were listed as banned from travelling to China.China has been steadily growing its domestic aircraft industry, producing parts, planes and services for Airbus and producing its own commercial jets. Foreign technology has played a large part in that process, but Chinese companies have increasingly developed the means to replace their overseas suppliers. Taiwan relies heavily on US suppliers for arms, even as it works to boost its own defense industries and increase mandatory military service for men from four months to one year. That comes against the backdrop of China's rising threat to encircle or invade Taiwan to achieve what it calls a historical mission to annex the island. Taiwan was formerly a Japanese colony and separated from mainland China in 1949.

Fire that spread through settlements in Turkey left 11 dead, village evacuated

AP ■ ANKARA

A fire that apparently started in a crop stubble spread through settlements in south-east Turkey overnight, killing 11 people and leaving dozens of others requiring medical treatment, officials and news reports said Friday. In neighbouring Greece, authorities evacuated several villages south of Athens and in the southern Peloponnese region because of wildfires. The blaze in Turkey broke out in an area between the provinces of Diyarbakir and Mardin. Fanned by winds, it moved quickly through the villages of Koksalan, Yazicegi and Bagacik, Diyarbakir Gov. Ali Ihsan Su said. The fire was brought under control early Friday. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca posted on X that 11 people were killed. Around 80 others required treatment, including



six who were in serious condition. Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said that authorities have launched an investigation into the cause of the fire, which lit up the night sky. Residents believe the blaze was caused by sparks from a power line that set crop residue ablaze, according to independent news website Gazete Duvar. Some of

the hospitalised people were villagers who tried to extinguish the fire, it said. Hundreds of farm animals also perished in the fire, according to news channel HaberTurk. Across the country in north-west Turkey, meanwhile, firefighters were battling a wildfire near the town of Ayvacik in Canakkale province, the state-run Anadolu Agency said.

No one was hurt, but authorities evacuated the small village of Camkoy as a precaution, the agency reported. It was one of several wildfires that have erupted in the province of Canakkale in the past week amid high winds and scorching summer temperatures. Wildfires also erupted in Greece amid very windy, hot and dry conditions. Six villages or settlements were ordered evacuated as a precaution because of wildfires near Anavyssos, just south of Athens, and in the southern Peloponnese region. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage to property, and firefighters on the ground were assisted by water-dropping aircraft. The greater Athens region was on the top wildfire emergency footing Friday because of the weather forecast, with bans on entering forests and parks.

EU nations agree to start membership negotiations with Ukraine next week

Brussels (AP): The European Union agreed Friday to start membership negotiations with embattled Ukraine and Moldova, another step in the nations' long journey to move closer to the West and mute Russia's influence. Belgium, which currently holds the presidency of the EU, said member states have agreed that talks will start June 25 in Luxembourg. Ukraine applied to join the bloc less than a week after Russia invaded in February 2022, and EU leaders acted with uncharacteristic speed in making it a candidate in June of that year. But the process has moved more slowly since then — and membership, if it comes, will take years, or even decades. Still, the opening of talks sends another strong signal of solidarity with Ukraine on

top of the huge financial support provided by the EU. Leaders from the 27-nation bloc agreed last year that accession negotiations should start with both Ukraine and Moldova. That was a necessary political agreement, and Friday's move lays the legal basis for the talks. To join the EU, candidate countries must go through a lengthy process to align their laws and standards with those of the bloc and meet a host of economic and political conditions, including a commitment to the rule of law and other democratic principles. Ukraine, for instance, will have to curb entrenched government corruption and adopt other reforms.Ukraine is one of several countries that have long wanted to join the EU, seeing it as a path to wealth and stability. While the EU is

not a military alliance like NATO, membership in the bloc is also seen by some as offering protection against Russian influence. Moldova has nervously eyed the invasion of its neighbour by Russia. It has repeatedly accused Russia of conducting a "hybrid war" against the country, including alleging Moscow meddled in local elections and is running vast disinformation campaigns to try to topple the government and derail its path to joining the EU. Russia has denied the accusations, but the Moldovan government remains wary of Moscow's intentions. "Today, I signed the decree on initiating Moldova's EU accession negotiations," said Maia Sandu, the president of Moldova. "Becoming an EU member is our path to peace, prosperity, and a better life for all citizens."

US Supreme Court upholds gun control law for domestic violence protection

Washington (AP): The Supreme Court on Friday upheld a federal gun control law that is intended to protect victims of domestic violence. In their first Second Amendment case since they expanded gun rights in 2022, the justices ruled in favour of a 1994 ban on firearms for people under restraining orders to stay away from their spouses or partners. The justices reversed a ruling from the federal appeals court in New Orleans that had struck down the law. Last week, the court overturned a Trump-era ban on bump stocks, the rapid-fire gun accessories used in the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history. The court ruled that the Justice Department exceeded its authority in imposing that ban. Friday's case stemmed directly from the Supreme Court's Bruen decision in June 2022. A Texas man, Zackey Rahimi, was accused of hitting his girlfriend during an argument in a parking lot and later threatening to shoot her. At arguments in November, some justices voiced concern that a ruling for Rahimi could

also jeopardise the background check system that the Biden administration said has stopped more than 75,000 gun sales in the past 25 years based on domestic violence protective orders. The case also had been closely watched for its potential to affect cases in which other gun ownership laws have been called into question, including in the high-profile prosecution of Hunter Biden. President Joe Biden's son was convicted of lying on a form to buy a firearm while he was addicted to drugs. His lawyers have signalled they will appeal. A decision to strike down the domestic violence gun law might have signalled the court's scepticism of the other laws as well. The justices could weigh in soon in one or more of those other cases.Many of the gun law cases grow out of the Bruen decision. That high court ruling not only expanded Americans' gun rights under the Constitution but also changed the way courts are supposed to evaluate restrictions on firearms.

Kaspersky denies hazard after US bans its software

Washington (AP): The cybersecurity firm Kaspersky denied on Friday that it is a security threat after the US Commerce Department banned the use of its software in the United States. The Moscow-based company — whose CEO Eugene Kaspersky is Russian — said in a statement that the Commerce Department's decision would not affect its ability to sell and promote its cyber security products and training in the US. Kaspersky said the government had based its decision on the "geopolitical climate and theoretical concerns" rather than independently verifying if there was a risk. The government says Kaspersky's Russian connec-

tions mean the company poses an "undue or unacceptable risk to US national security or the safety and security." The company conducts much of its business in Russia and, as a Russian citizen who lives in that country, Eugene Kaspersky himself is subject to Russian law, the Commerce Department said in a decision dated June 14 that was posted on the Federal Register. The department said it had considered Kaspersky's objections to the initial findings of its investigation into whether its products or services posed a threat and found that the decision to ban its software was "well supported." Aside from the company's obligation to

abide by Russian laws and decisions, its software can be exploited to identify sensitive US citizens' data and make it available to Russian government actors, the department said. "The risks to US national security addressed in this Final Determination stem not from whether Kaspersky's products are effective at identifying viruses and other malware, but whether they can be used strategically to cause harm to the United States," it said. Kaspersky boasts one of the world's most popular consumer antivirus products and a research unit widely respected for routinely exposing elite hacking groups.

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR
NOTICE
Applications forms for allotment of hostel Shops/Vehicle Stands from session 2024-25 (Extendable upto 30.06.2029) of University Campus, Amritsar, Regional Campus, Gurdaspur and Regional Campus, Jalandhar are invited till **06.07.2024**. The details, terms & conditions and forms can be downloaded from the university website link:- <https://online.gndu.ac.in/tenders-notices.aspx>
Dean Students' Welfare
NA/12/23562/2023/34840
Dated CHD :- 6/21/2024

Markets halt record-breaking rally

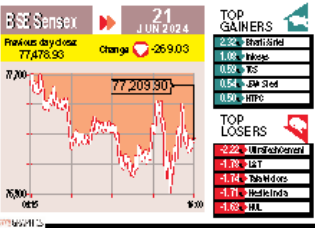
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Halting their record-breaking rally, equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure on Friday as investors pared exposure to oil & gas, capital goods and FMCG stocks amid a bearish trend in global markets.

However, recent foreign capital inflows and buying in index majors Bharti Airtel, Infosys and TCS helped indices restrict the losses, traders said.

Snapping its six-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 269.03 points or 0.35 per cent to settle at 77,209.90. During the day, it tanked 676.93 points or 0.87 per cent to 76,802.

The Nifty rose 100.1 points to hit a record intraday peak of 23,667.10 earlier in the day. However, it failed to maintain the momentum and slipped 65.90 points or 0.28 per cent to end at 23,501.10.



On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark climbed 217.13 points or 0.28 per cent, while the Nifty went up by 35.5 points or 0.15 per cent.

"The domestic market witnessed minor profit-taking amid concerns over the slow progress of monsoon, resulting in underperformance in the FMCG sector. The global markets were subdued as weak guidance from Accenture led to profit booking in US tech stocks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Among the Sensex companies, UltraTech Cement, Larsen &

Toubro, Tata Motors, Nestle, Tata Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finance, Reliance Industries, Mahindra & Mahindra and State Bank of India were the biggest laggards. In contrast, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, JSW Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro and NTPC were among the biggest gainers.

"Nifty ended lower in a highly volatile session on Friday; however it rose for three weeks in a row to record its highest weekly close even as it fell on Friday. Asian shares were mostly lower Friday after a retreat on Wall Street," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities, said.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.26 per cent, while smallcap climbed 0.06 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Oil & Gas went lower by 1.28 per cent, FMCG (1.08 per cent),

capital goods (0.96 per cent), commodities (0.92 per cent), realty (0.75 per cent) and auto (0.71 per cent).

On the other hand, IT, telecommunication, metal, power, tech and services were the gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were quoting in the red. US markets ended on a mixed note on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 415.30 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.16 per cent to USD 85.57 a barrel. Rallying for the sixth straight session on Thursday, the BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 141.34 points or 0.18 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 77,478.93. The Nifty rose 51 points or 0.22 per cent to settle at its fresh closing high of 23,567.

Gold surges ₹800; silver rallies ₹1,400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices surged Rs 800 to Rs 73,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid a rally in precious metal rates in the international markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous session, the yellow metal had closed at Rs 72,550 per 10 grams.

Extending gains for the fourth straight day, silver prices also rallied by Rs 1,400 to Rs 93,700 per kg. It had ended at Rs 92,300 per kg on Thursday.

"In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are trading at Rs 73,350 per 10 grams, up by Rs 800 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said.

Rural India bright star for FMCG sales, says Kantar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rural India remains a "bright star" for the growth of fast-moving consumer goods sales and the region is expected to maintain better pace of expansion than urban areas in the second quarter of 2024, a report said on Friday.

According to a report from data, insights and consulting firm Kantar, rural India will maintain "better growth levels" racing ahead of the urban markets for FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) companies in the second quarter (April-June) of 2024.

Terming the rural market as a "bright star", the report said it had a "resurgence" in 2024. While urban is likely to remain under stress, the rural may consolidate its position in second quarter of the year, it said. This growth in the rural areas is helped by region-centric measures by the government in the interim budget earlier this year, which provided stability.

Moreover, populist measures are expected by some states which are going to face elections this year, said Kantar FMCG pulse report for Q2.

"We should also bear in mind that more states are heading for polls in the coming months and the second half should only see a rise in populist measures for the rural market. After COVID-19, the rural market was in distress and faced degrowth in the past successive quarters. However, the start to 2024 from a rural perspective has been brilliant, with rural growth overtaking urban's; and the rural worm is looking upward," it said.

About the urban market, the



report said, it did not see growth for three straight quarters, and is contending with a huge Q2 2023 base.

"Therefore, Urban is likely to remain under stress, while Rural may consolidate its position in Q2," it said, adding that falling Urban curve coupled with a strong base is likely to constrict the numbers for the next quarters.

According to Kantar Worldpanel Managing Director — South Asia K Ramakrishnan, for the most part of 2023, Urban has maintained strong growth numbers.

"Rapid growth is unsustainable for a long term, and necessarily Urban is hitting brakes now. This has also coincided with typically Urban-centric categories such as noodles and salty snacks slowing down in growth within Urban, after continuously galloping since the pandemic," he said.

The rural market may also get a boost from the rabi crop, the report said, though it was unclear about its status.

"Central India, where the bulk of the rural populous resides, received excess rainfall in the

year. South India, a prominent rice and spice producer, has received below-par rainfall till now. There are reports that rabi harvests are likely to be hit this year," it said.

"The effect of rainfall will be felt towards the second half more, but "certain rural markets could turn on the caution switch already", the report said.

"Even with that, we do expect Rural to maintain better growth levels compared to Urban for the remainder of the year," it added.

Normally, rural area contributes around 35 to 37 per cent of the FMCG sales, and value offerings in the food segment dominates. The report also highlighted that though inflation might have slowed down to acceptable levels, its effects are not lost on the consumer.

"The Indian rural market is full of potential. Yes, inflation has dampened the mood of the rural shopper for a time, but the trends are now pointing up. Rural has outpaced Urban this quarter, and is likely to hold at that level for some time in the near future," said Ramakrishnan.

RAI's Budget wishlist: Lower taxes for individuals, benefits on land rates, electricity

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Retailers Association of India (RAI) on Friday called for lower taxes for individuals to generate demand and spur consumption besides seeking low-cost finance, subsidies and benefits on land rates and necessities such as electricity for retailers ahead of Union Budget FY25.

Retailing in India accounts for about 10 per cent of the country's GDP and the sector is second only to agriculture in terms of the number of people

directly employed, RAI said in its pre-Budget memorandum highlighting areas that need attention in order to make the industry stronger.

"To ensure the growth of the sector, the Union Budget for FY25 should focus on generating demand and spurring consumption by offering benefits or concessions in the form of lower taxes," RAI said.

It will boost the overall consumer sentiment and benefit the retail sector, it said adding, consumption equals to development and the "tax

benefits and relief to individual taxpayers will increase the monthly disposable income and support consumption".

Further, the budget should outline supportive policies, simplified regulations, skill development and simple goods and services tax (GST) norms to aid the development of the retail industry, RAI said.

Asking for low-cost finance to retailers, the industry body said, "There is a need to provide lower interest rate to the retailers through the special announcement in the

Budget to assure easier financing for the retail businesses." It also asked the government to consider the food and beverages retail sector as an essential service and said "subsidies and benefits should be given on land rates and other necessities such as electricity".

RAI also said there is a need to expedite the formulation and implementation of 'National Retail Policy' to enable ease of doing business and "such a step would provide a substantial boost to the retail sector".

Stating that benefits to retail and wholesale trade MSMEs are restricted to priority sector lending only, RAI also recommended that retail and wholesale traders should be eligible for all benefits available to other MSMEs.

Further, the retailers' body asked the Centre to encourage and incentivise states to adopt 'The Model Shops and Establishment (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services) Act 2016 that enables states to choose to keep shops and other such establishments through the year.

Zepto raises USD 665 million; valuation nearly triples to USD 3.6 billion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Quick commerce company Zepto on Friday said it has raised USD 665 million (about Rs 5,560 crore) in the latest funding round that valued the firm at USD 3.6 billion, almost triple than its worth a year back.

The massive fundraise comes less than a year after the Mumbai-based startup raised USD 235 million at a valuation of USD 1.4 billion. The funding round saw participation from new investors like Avenir, Lightspeed, and Avra, alongside existing investors Glade Brook, Nexus, and StepStone, Goodwater, and Lachy Groom.

"We've gone from 0 to 1 billion-plus in sales, or GMV, in 29 months, that is faster than any other internet company before us... Even on a base of over a billion dollars at this point, we are growing 100 per cent-plus year on year. And that



for us is one of the big drivers of this fundraise," Zepto co-founder and CEO Aadit Palicha told PTI.

Attributing the growth to the performance of the quick commerce firm, the young entrepreneur said, "This is largely because of the input excellence we've built across the supply chain. Whether it is sourcing excellence, mother hub efficiency, line haul utilisation, or our last mile, the innovation that we've done, or forecasting, we're in this place where even as we've been able to grow, we've been able to drive efficiency to get the business

to pretty much close to full operating cash flow positive today."

He said the overall business is close to operating at break-even cash flow.

Nearly 75 per cent of the company's stores are fully EBITDA positive as of May 2024, he said.

"Over the next 12-18 months, although it might fluctuate, but we'll still be pretty close to operating cash flow positive, and the idea is to keep in that direction, get the business to a place where we can list next 9-12 months," he said.

Zepto co-founder and CTO Kaivalya Vohra said the firm plans to hire top talent across engineering, product, growth, finance, operations, and category management.

"If you are looking for a high growth, high meritocracy and high intensity culture where you can convert hard work and ambition into disproportionate career growth, Zepto is the place for you," he said.

POWERGRID team honoured



PNS ■ GURUGRAM

POWERGRID's Team Communications has been featured in India's 30 Top Corporate Communications Teams for the fourth time by Reputation Today.

The team led by Anshuman Tandon, CGM Corporate Communications, along with Shri Ravi Kumar, DGM (Corp. Comm.) and Shri Akshat Chopra, Asst. Manager (Corp. Comm.) received the award at an event held in Bengaluru.

POWERGRID is the only PSU to feature in this prestigious list. POWERGRID has jumped 5 places from its last ranking.

To arrive at the list of Top Corporate Communication Teams, a jury independently evaluated the Top 30 teams scoring each one of them on set parameters like team responsibilities, and more.

More than 50 per cent Indian households downing soft drinks; to increase with intensifying heat: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The average Indian household's consumption of bottled soft drinks has increased in the last two years, breaching annual penetration of 50 per cent in FY24, a report said.

According to the latest Kantar FMCG pulse report, this trend is expected to rise further with intensifying summer.

It said the average household has expanded its consumption of bottled soft drinks by 250 ml in the last two years.

Moreover, fabric softeners, still considered to be a premium laundry item, have now reached one in every four households in the country, the report said.

Besides, washing liquids, another premium laundry product introduced by leading FMCG majors, breached the 100,000-tonne mark in FY24. All these trends are "record breakers", the report noted.

The bottled soft drink category had a "massive 41 per cent household growth in MAT (moving annual total) March 2023" and



continued to add more households and expanded 19 per cent in MAT March 2024.

"With the intensifying summer, the category is likely to continue its growth this year too," it said.

On the consumption, the report said now consumers shop FMCG products 156 times a year, or every 56 hours from online or offline channels.

However, it also added that the average basket value has gone down as shoppers are no longer buying more packs as they were purchasing

earlier.

"The frequency and the pack trends indicate that shoppers are no longer reducing their pack sizes, but holding on to the ones they are buying. In other words, we are very likely at the juncture where we see shoppers buying slightly bigger packs from now on," it said.

Now discretionary premium-end categories like washing liquids and indulgent products such as bottled soft drinks have performed exceedingly well.

Still, groceries are the biggest household expense, accounting for over 24 per cent of all quarterly expenses in a household, it added.

The report also highlighted that though inflation might have slowed to acceptable levels, its effects are not lost on the consumer.

"The worst of inflation is behind us, however, there are pockets of the market that are still under some stress...The shopper is looking at the future with great optimism, even those who are under stress, and this optimism has been the flag bearer of the Indian consum

Sun Pharma inks pact with Takeda to introduce gastrointestinal drug



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries on Friday said it has inked a licensing pact with Takeda Pharmaceutical Company to commercialise a novel gastrointestinal drug in India.

The company has entered into a non-exclusive patent licensing agreement with Takeda to commercialise Vonoprazan tablets in strengths of 10 and 20 mg in India, the Mumbai-based drug major said in a statement.

Vonoprazan is a novel, orally active potassium competitive acid blocker (PCAB), used to treat reflux esophagitis and other acid peptic disorders.

"Sun Pharma is a leader in gastroenterology and we are excited to introduce Vonoprazan in India under non-exclusive patent license from Takeda," Sun Pharma CEO — India Business Kirti Ganorkar said.

The partnership demonstrates the company's commitment to gastrointestinal health by providing patients and healthcare practitioners with a novel treatment option to manage reflux esophagitis and other acid peptic disorders, he added.

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) is common in India.

In November 2023, Vonoprazan was approved by the US FDA for healing and maintenance of all grades of Erosive esophagitis and providing relief from heartburn associated with Erosive esophagitis, and in combination with amoxicillin and clarithromycin or amoxicillin alone for the treatment of Helicobacter pylori (H. Pylori) infection in adults.

Vonoprazan was discovered and developed by Takeda. The drug is approved in India for treatment of adults with reflux esophagitis and other acid peptic disorders.

Shares of Sun Pharma were trading 0.69 per cent up at Rs 1,480.55 apiece on the BSE.

African, Asian tea producers flag concerns over global demand-supply mismatch

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Associations of tea producers in Asia and Africa have flagged concerns over the global mismatch of demand and supply and called for an early restoration of equilibrium, according to a statement issued by a planters' body on Friday.

In a meeting of the stakeholders of the global tea industry, recently held in Dubai, the associations also addressed the issue of quality and long-term sustainability of the sector.

Indian Tea Association (ITA) chairman Hemant Bangur said that the global tea industry is facing a demand-supply mismatch as production continues to outpace demand.

Representatives of ITA, East African Trade Association (EATTA), independent tea producers' body of Kenya, and tea associations of Malawi, Bangladesh and Uganda attended the meeting.

They voiced concern over



stagnating consumption demand in Europe and Asia, the ITA said in a statement.

Bangur said, "Africa with its growing population and rising income has the potential to become one of

the largest markets for black tea."

According to the ITA statement, EATTA chairman Arthur Sewe said the tea sector in East Africa is currently facing a decline in

quality and issues related to climate change, which require concerted efforts by all the stakeholders.

During the meeting, they deliberated on the impact of climate change, price stagnation, increasing input costs and challenges relating to fair price discovery, it said.

Malawi Tea Association chairman Sangwani Hara was quoted as saying that climate change is a big problem and must be addressed to sustain the level of tea productivity.

The industry is also facing a crisis in exports and falling value of the produce thereby threatening the livelihoods of millions, the ITA statement said.

The stakeholders also felt that the economic recession and geopolitical challenges due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the traditional bulk tea export markets had affected shipments.

The Russian Federation is one of the largest importers of tea, particularly from India.

Hindustan Zinc, AESir Technologies join hands for development of next-gen zinc batteries

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hindustan Zinc Ltd on Friday said it has partnered with US-based AESir Technologies, Inc for development of next-generation zinc batteries.

The company has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with AESir Technologies, Inc., a company that specialises in next-generation zinc battery technologies, to be the preferred supplier of zinc, a key raw material, Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL) said in a statement. The MoU is in line with the company's efforts towards exploring emerging applications of zinc in the clean energy transition, it said, adding that zinc batteries are revolutionising energy storage due to their corrosion resistance, cost-effectiveness, recyclability, stability and environmental friendliness.

"This partnership with AESir Technologies is yet another step in our ongoing developmental work in the emerging clean technology



space.

"By providing high-quality zinc for cutting-edge energy storage, we are opening sophisticated new avenues for environmentally friendly solutions for a greener tomorrow," HZL Chief Executive Officer Arun Misra said.

AESir Technologies CEO and Co-Founder, Randy Moore said energy storage is at the forefront of every major innovation in the energy transition space and "zinc batteries are the best story around energy storage".

"...This collaboration with Hindustan Zinc provides us with critical raw material for the development of next-gen

nickel-zinc batteries," Moore added.

AESir's Nickel Zinc (NiZn) batteries have proven dependable and successful in the high-end defence sector, including aerospace and marine, renewable energy and critical infrastructure for data centres and 5G telecom, the statement said.

Zinc-based batteries have emerged as a compelling alternative to other modern energy storage solutions, delivering higher power at lower costs with minimal maintenance and longer life spans of up to 20 years. This makes them ideal for large-scale energy storage in industrial settings, it added.

AIFF Futsal Club Championship to kick off in Gujarat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The third edition of the AIFF Futsal Club Championship is set to kick off at the Swarnim Gujarat Sports University in the Vadodara district of Gujarat on Saturday. The tournament will be streamed live on the Indian Football YouTube Channel. Nineteen teams will battle for 16 days to make it to the final and lift the trophy on July 7. They have been divided into four groups - Group A, B and C with five teams each, and Group D with four teams. The top two teams in each group will qualify for the quarter-finals. The first two editions of the AIFF Futsal Club Championship were held in Delhi, marking this as the first time the tournament will be played outside the capital.

For hosts Gujarat, Baroda Football Academy will hope to do better than their group stage exit in the inaugural edition in 2021-22. They are placed in Group C alongside Speed Force FC (Telangana), who narrowly missed out on the semi-finals last year. The other three teams in the group will make their tournament debut - FC Thyristor, Ramhlun Vengai (Mizoram), Guwahati City FC (Assam) and Ambelim Sports Club (Goa). Group A also consists of three teams making their AIFF Futsal Club Championship debut -- MUM - Millat FC (Maharashtra), Corbett FC (Uttarakhand) and Nyenshen FC (Nagaland). The latter will be the third different team to represent Nagaland in three years after Telongiem FC and Aphyumi FC, while Maharashtra and



Uttarakhand will be represented for the first time. Among the clubs with previous national experience in the group are Manipur's Classic Football Academy (2021-22) and Odisha's Sports Odisha (2022-23). Group B comprises defending champions Minerva Academy FC, who won last year's edition. Standing in the way of the Punjab side's title defence in the group stage are Electric Veng Futsal Club (Mizoram), Bangalore Arrows FC (Karnataka), Satvir FC (Haryana) and Goal Hunterz FC (Delhi). The rematch of last season's semi-final between Minerva Academy and Electric Veng, which the former triumphed 13-8 in a high-scoring thriller, is one of the most anticipated fixtures of the group stage. Bangalore Arrows will be making their debut, while

Satvir FC will become the first team to represent Haryana in the tournament. Goal Hunterz, who exited in the group stage last year, will hope to go one step better. Group D, the fourth and final group, consists of four teams, including Delhi FC, the champions of the inaugural edition. They failed to defend their title last year after losing to Mohammedan Sporting 6-7 in the semi-finals. The other three teams in the group will make their first appearance at the AIFF Futsal Club Championship - Casa Barwani Soccer Club (Madhya Pradesh), Golazo FC (Himachal Pradesh) and JCT Football Academy (Punjab). The group stage will last from June 22 to July 1. The quarter-finals will be played on July 3, followed by the semi-finals on July 5 and the final on July 7.

Euro 2024



Spain beats Italy 1-0 and advances to knockout round

AP ■ GELSENKIRCHEN (GERMANY)

Spain advanced to the round of 16 at Euro 2024 after a 1-0 win against defending champion Italy on Thursday. A 55th-minute own goal by Italy's Riccardo Calafiori handed victory to Spain in the first clash of international heavyweights at this European Championship. Three-time winner Spain totally dominated the Group B game at the Veltins Arena in Gelsenkirchen, with 16-year-old winger Lamine Yamal further enhancing his reputation as one of soccer's most exciting young stars with an outstanding performance. Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma kept the score down with a string of fine saves until inadvertently pushing the ball into the legs of Calafiori, who couldn't prevent it from ricocheting into his own goal. England drew 1-1 with Denmark in Group C after Harry Kane scored and then made a mistake that led to the Danes' leveller. Kane struck a record-extending 64th goal for his country to fire England ahead in Frankfurt. But his loose pass then allowed Morten Hjulmand to equalise from long range. In the other Group C game, Luka Jovic scored in stoppage time to salvage a 1-1 for Serbia against Slovenia. England leads the group on four points and is likely to advance to the round of 16.

England fails to convince in 1-1 draw with Denmark

AP ■ FRANKFURT

Where England stands after two European Championship games is the envy of most teams. Just not good enough yet to have title ambitions. A 1-1 draw Thursday with Denmark - a semifinalist last time, don't forget - means England is unbeaten and all-but certain to advance to the round of 16. It also was a slack, mistake-filled display that left coach Gareth Southgate angrily gesturing at his players for gifting a slew of scoring chances late in the game. "The team didn't function today, that is my responsibility," said Southgate, who heard jeers from fans behind the England goal in a ragged second half. Harry Kane gave England another fast start at Euro 2024, scoring it the 18th minute, but the captain was substituted off in the second half as the team faded. Denmark leveled in the 34th when



Morten Hjulmand fired in a powerful low shot from long distance, after Kane gave away the ball in defense. Eight years with Southgate has earned England sustained tournament success. The Three Lions reached the final of Euro 2020 - after beating Denmark in the last four - and a semifinal and a quarterfinal at the

past two World Cups. "We're in the environment of winning on the biggest stage," the coach acknowledged, adding "you have to accept what (criticism) comes our way." England has never won back-to-back games to begin a Euros and a pattern of second-game syndrome has

repeated at three straight tournaments. Opening wins in the past three years have been following by tepid 0-0 draws with Scotland and the United States, now a 1-1 with the Danes who deserved more. "I can't say we are disappointed but it's a shame," Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand said. "There is a result we could have gotten." Still, England started Euro 2024 by beating Serbia 1-0 and now sits top of Group C with four points. That tally always has been enough to advance in the 24-team Euros format where four third-place teams from the six groups go forward to the round of 16. England can finish in any position from first to third in the Group C standings after playing unbeaten Slovenia next Tuesday. Slovenia drew 1-1 with Serbia earlier Thursday, four days after getting the same result against Denmark. Serbia meets Denmark in their final games also on Tuesday evening.

Georgia, the Czech Republic desperate to get off mark

AP ■ HAMBURG

Georgia and the Czech Republic are desperately seeking a win as they meet in their second game of Euro 2024 in Hamburg. Kickoff is at 3 pm local time (1300 GMT) on Saturday. Turkey and Portugal are the other two teams in Group F and play later Saturday. Here's what to know about the match: Georgia and the Czech Republic were praised for fighting hard in their opening games but didn't get any points as Turkey beat Georgia 3-1 and Portugal beat the Czechs 2-1 on a stoppage-time goal from Francisco Conceicao. A win for either team would boost their chances of qualifying for the knockout rounds. The losing team wouldn't be eliminated for sure just yet because of the rule that some third-place teams can qualify. A draw would leave Georgia needing an upset win over Portugal in its last game, and the Czech team needing the same against Turkey.



Georgian fans were involved in a brawl in the stadium ahead of the Turkey game. Georgia midfielder Otar Kiteishvili has been on an individual training program separate from the rest of the squad. He was an unused substitute in the loss to Turkey. The Czech Republic has not reported any injury concerns since its first game. Czech striker Patrik Schick is set to play his 40th game for his country and his next goal will be his 20th. Five of his international goals to date came at the last European Championship.

Ronaldo back in action as Portugal, Turkey look for second straight win

AP ■ DORTMUND

Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal play Turkey in their second group game at the European Championship. Both countries opened Group F play with a win, with Portugal beating the Czech Republic 2-1 and Turkey defeating Georgia 3-1. Kickoff is at 6 pm local (1600 GMT) in Dortmund. Here's what to know about the match: The 39-year-old Ronaldo lost his place in the Portugal team at the World Cup in 2022 but he looks to be as guaranteed a starter as ever under Roberto Martinez, who took over as coach after the tournament in Qatar. Ronaldo is captain and played the full game against the Czechs, though didn't score. Portugal encountered a Czech Republic team which sat back and defended in numbers in Leipzig. Turkey is unlikely to do that, given its strength in attack, so expect Ronaldo and company to have more space going forward. Arda Guler is the one to watch for Turkey. The 19-year-old attacking midfielder from Real Madrid scored one of the goals of the tournament against Georgia - a long-range



screamer into the top corner - to take Ronaldo's record as the youngest debut scorer at a European Championship. Turkey is playing a second straight game at Dortmund's Westfalenstadion. Its fans turned the stadium into a sea of red against Georgia and look sure to outnumber the Portuguese support on Saturday. Portugal or Turkey will guarantee a first-place finish in the group with a win in Dortmund and if Georgia-Czech Republic is a draw in Hamburg earlier Saturday. Portugal's entire 26-man squad has been in training so Martinez again has some tough decisions to make, given the strength in depth of the group. Joao Palhinha is pushing for a return as the anchorman in midfield. Irfan Can Kahveci missed the win over Georgia because of injury and has yet to return to full training with Turkey. Ronaldo will look to add to his record 14 goals in European Championships. That is five more than his nearest rival - Michel Platini, whose nine goals all came in the same tournament (1984). It will also be Ronaldo's record-extending 27th appearance at the Euros.



Alcaraz loses in Queen's second round ahead of Wimbledon title defense

AP ■ LONDON

Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz's buildup took a hit when he lost in the second round of Queen's Club. Alcaraz, the defending Queen's champion and top seed, lost to Jack Draper 7-6 (3), 6-3. For Draper, the British No. 1, it was the biggest win of his career. He was impressively composed in front of his home crowd. Queen's was Alcaraz's only grass-court preparation last year en route to winning Wimbledon for the first time. But this time the Spaniard will have only two grass matches under his belt following his French Open victory. Wimbledon starts in 11 days. Draper ended Alcaraz's eight-match win streak while extending his own to seven after winning his first ATP title last week in Stuttgart. Draper didn't drop serve against Alcaraz. They were finally separated in the first set in the tiebreak, where Draper shot to 4-0 then 6-1. Alcaraz netted a return to concede the set. Alcaraz suffered the only break in the sixth game of the second set, after Draper's backhand return serve down the line. Draper saved a break point to hold for 5-2, then Alcaraz saved three match points to hold. Draper served out and threw his arms in the air. "I knew I had to come out here and play really well, and luckily I did that," he said on court. He faces fifth-seeded Tommy Paul in the quarterfinals. Also Thursday, Lorenzo Musetti eliminated Brandon Nakashima 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 and will face 29-year-old British wild card Billy Harris in the quarterfinals.

Verstappen aims for another F1 win in Barcelona

AP ■ MONTMELO (SPAIN)

Max Verstappen will be out to quash any hopes that his Red Bull could be beatable at the Spanish Grand Prix this weekend, where the three-time world champion enjoyed his breakout as a teenager and has won for the past two years. The race just north of Barcelona kicks off a run of three grand prix in as many weeks and five in six weeks. Given that tight schedule, teams will have less time to tweak their cars. So, the upgrades they bring to Spain could be key to determining who has the edge as the summer heats up. Verstappen has won six of the nine races this season and recorded his 60th career win in Montreal two weeks ago. Overall, the 26-year-old Dutchman has won 50 of the last 75 events and holds a 56-point over Ferrari's Charles



Leclerc going into Sunday's race. While some races have practically been over once Verstappen sped off the starting line, there have been signs that his chasers could at least make this season a bit more interesting. Both Mercedes and McLaren

led the pace during stretches of the Canadian GP before Verstappen steered clear. And, two of the last four races have gone to other drivers: McLaren's Lando Norris won in Miami after Verstappen clipped a chicane and had to pit, while Leclerc won in his home race in Monaco.

Spain, however, usually lets the flat-out fastest cars dominate. Twenty-four of 33 races here have been won by pole sitters, and no driver has won from starting further back than fifth. It is also well known to drivers because pre-season testing used to be held here.

The 4.6-kilometre Barcelona-Catalunya Circuit was made even fitter for speed last year when a chicane that was unpopular among drivers was replaced by two fast turns head of the main straightaway. "I think it's always very tricky, in a way of course exciting," Verstappen said about the state of the competition before practice started for the race on Friday. "This is normally a track that is a bit more straightforward. People have a bit more information about a track like this, it's been on the calendar for a while. Of course, from our side, we are hoping to have a good weekend here." Verstappen has fond memories of a track where he showed the stuff of a future champion by winning the 2016 Spanish GP on his Red Bull debut. That made him F1's youngest race winner at age 18. He also scored wins

here in the last two seasons. Norris lamented not having taken his chance to get a second win in Canada. Now, he hopes McLaren can match the Red Bulls for pure speed. "The whole season we've been strong, at every race," Norris continued. "If we can get the car performing like it has done in the past on high-speed circuits, then I'll be confident that we can. We should be able to fight." For Mercedes' George Russell, who finished third in Montreal, a good result here should translate into better things to come. "I think this is going to be a real test and if we can be fast this weekend, that bodes really well for the season," Russell said. Ferrari is looking to bounce back from a frustrating weekend in Canada when both Leclerc and Carlos Sainz struggled in qualifying and neither could finish the race.

Wimbledon champion Vondrousova retires

BERLIN, JUN 21 (AP)

Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova retired from her match in Berlin because of an apparent leg injury less than two weeks before play begins at the All England Club. Vondrousova was leading 5-3 in her second-round match against Anna Kalinskaya at the grass-court Ladies Open when she slipped behind the baseline and clutched her right leg. The 24-year-old Czech player got up holding her right hip area and returned after a medical timeout with the upper part of her leg heavily strapped. She played two more games, losing both, and then stopped. First-round play begins at Wimbledon on July 1. Also Thursday, top-seeded Coco Gauff beat Ekaterina Alexandrova 7-6 (6), 6-2,



and second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka defeated Daria Kasatkina 6-1, 6-4. Elena Rybakina reached the quarterfinals with a 6-4, 7-5 victory over Veronika Kudermetova. Ons Jabeur shook off a slow start to beat Linda Noskova 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4.

PRESSURE BUILDING ON TOP-ORDER AS INDIA TAKE ON BANGLADESH

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA)

The ever-present tension of their over a decade-long big-stage rivalry would make for an engrossing sub-plot when an undefeated India takes on a faltering Bangladesh, both teams desperately hoping for their batting stars to strike form in the Super Eights clash of the T20 World Cup here on Saturday.

The overall head-to-head record is overwhelmingly in India's favour but Bangladesh have been known to be plucky and Rohit Sharma and his men would be wary of that.

The two South Asian neighbours have also been locked in some off-field drama in the past with Bangladesh often expressing its misgivings with India's financial might in the sport.

At the ongoing World Cup though, there is no doubt that India are as mighty a cricketing power to be a serious title contender.

The Men in Blue produced a professional performance against Afghanistan in their opening Super Eights match.

With only a travel day separating their remaining two games, they would be hoping that the players, who have not performed as per expectations so far, deliver the goods.

Top of that list would be the opening pair of Virat Kohli and

Rohit Sharma, both of whom have got starts but have not been able to turn them into defining knocks. They have made a conscious effort to force the pace but have ended with minimal returns.

Another under-pressure team member is left-hander Shivam Dube, who was picked in the World Cup squad to hammer sixes in the middle and death overs.

However, the IPL form that helped him seal a World Cup berth has deserted him and he is yet to come to the party.

The southpaw did make an unbeaten 31 against the USA in a group league game but it was Suryakumar Yadav's effort that made the difference ultimately. Another failure might force the team management to consider Sanju Samson in the middle order.

The biggest positive in the batting department in the Afghanistan game was Hardik Pandya's cameo. The all-rounder is known for his brutal hitting and that was on display on Thursday.

On the bowling front, India are expected to retain the combination having given the first opportunity of the tournament to crafty left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav.

The wickets in the Caribbean have provided enough help for the spinners, prompting India to play three at the Kensington Oval.



The combination is likely to continue here with Kuldeep retaining his place at the expense of Mohammed Siraj.

"Playing three left-arm spinners, I feel there is an advantage. There are three left-arm spinners out of which we have two finger spinners and

one wrist spinner," said Axar Patel after the Afghanistan game.

"The combination of the three of us is very good. We have a good team. We communicate well. Like whoever comes to bowl first, we communicate what is working and what is

not. I think that is very important when you bowl as a unit," he added.

India's sole aim in the Caribbean is to win the trophy and a solid performance against Bangladesh will be another step forward in that context. A tougher battle

awaits against Australia on June 24.

Bangladesh, who have struggled with their batting throughout the tournament, find themselves in a must win situation after the loss to Australia.

The lack of power-hitters is

hurting them and there is no quick fix to that problem. The under-performance of opener Litton Das and Tanzid Khan has also compounded Bangladesh's woes.

"It's very important for the top-order to get runs like we did today, that's a big boost,

hopefully the bowlers will continue their form. Looking for a good show against India in our next match," Bangladesh captain Najmul Shanto said after the loss to Australia here on Friday.

Both Shanto (41) and Towhid Hridoy (40) did well but the rest of the line-up was not quite up to it.

They will need to find a way to tackle Bumrah, who has been sensational thus far, taking eight wickets at an unparalleled economy rate of 3.46 runs per over.

The pacers, led by Mustafizur Rahman, have done alright but leg-spinner Rishad Hossain needs more support in the spin department.

SQUADS:
Bangladesh: Tanzid Hasan, Litton Das, Najmul Hossain Shanto (captain), Shakib Al Hasan, Towhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah, Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Mustafizur Rahman, Jaker Ali, Tanvir Islam, Shoriful Islam, Soumya Sarkar.
India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Siraj.

Big margin between Bumrah and rest, India fortunate: Manjrekar

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN

India are fortunate to have a bowler of the calibre of Jasprit Bumrah, who is head and shoulders above the rest in international cricket, feels former batter Sanjay Manjrekar.

Bumrah bowled an incisive spell (3/7) to guide India to a convincing 47-run victory over Afghanistan in their opening Super Eights fixture of the T20 World Cup here.

With the bat, Suryakumar Yadav was the star performer as he slammed a 53 to power India to 181 for eight in 20 overs.

"There were many matches when we had not conceded the boundary and look at the difference between him and the couple of other seamers," Manjrekar told ESPNcricinfo.

"They were also international standard, but quite rightly I mean, he's looking even better and when you look at all the top-class bowlers around the world.

"There's a big margin between them

and Bumrah and India is so fortunate to have him in your playing 11," Manjrekar added.

Former India captain Anil Kumble also lauded Bumrah's performance.

"The kind of understanding of his own bowling you can make out, even when he got Rahmanullah Gurbaz out on a slower ball and wide line. He gets the execution perfect.

"For each batsman he would have figured that out and then doing it right in a big game. This doesn't come easy and I think he has given limited boundaries in the entire tournament," Kumble said.

Regarding Suryakumar, Manjrekar said his presence puts India at an advantageous position.

"This is the advantage India have for having one of the best T20 batters in the world. Tricky pitch, Rashid Khan on song and again you saw the value that Suryakumar Yadav brings to any team.

"And again the thing to like about him which is not really highlighted much is



the amount of ground shots that he plays. He chips the balls over the infield in the gaps.

"So, he's not somebody who's always looking for sixes which means sometimes there can be miss-execution trying to extract power," Manjrekar said.

KUMBLE HAILS SKY IMPACT IN SUPER 8S: Kumble said Suryakumar regaining form in the Super Eights is a good sign for India.

"It (Suryakumar's presence) gives India the kind of power and stroke play that you need from someone who's batting at number four," said Kumble.

"It certainly puts pressure on the opposition bowlers because it's not easy to control a Surya in this kind of a form.

"You don't know where to bowl, wherever you bowl, you find it hard to stop him from scoring boundaries.

"So, yeah, it certainly augurs well. First game of the Super 8s and you have Surya coming back into this kind of form," Kumble said.



India to tour South Africa for 4-match T20I series in November

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

India will tour South Africa for a short four-match T20I series in November this year, CSA and the BCCI announced in a joint statement on Friday.

As per the itinerary released by Cricket South Africa (CSA), the series will begin on November 8 at the Hollywoodbets Kingsmead Stadium in Durban, followed by matches in Gqeberha on November 10, Centurion on December 13 and Johannesburg on November 15.

"I would like to thank the BCCI for their continued support to South Africa's cricket, and world cricket in general," CSA chairperson Lawson Naidoo said in the statement.

"Any tour by the Indian cricket team to our shores is filled with amazing camaraderie and exciting cricket, and I know our fans will be eagerly awaiting this series which will showcase the exceptional talent from both teams," he added.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah added: "India and South Africa have always shared a deep and strong bond, one that both nations take great pride in. The Indian Cricket Team has consistently received immense appreciation and love from South African fans, and this sentiment is equally strong among Indian fans towards the South African side.

"I am confident that the upcoming series will once again highlight the on-field cricketing excellence and deliver enthralling, high-intensity contests."

India's short tour has been accommodated between their home Test series against New Zealand and their tour of Australia for the Border-Gavaskar series.

Cummins takes first hat-trick at T20 World Cup 2024

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA)

Australia pacer Pat Cummins grabbed the first hat-trick of the ongoing T20 World Cup during the team's Super Eights match against Bangladesh here.

The 31-year-old removed experienced campaigner Mahmudullah and Mahedi Hasan off the last two deliveries of the 18th over and then returned to dismiss Towhid Hridoy with the first ball of the last over to claim the seventh hat-trick in T20I World Cups.

"I didn't know I was on a hat-trick. I did the previous over, I saw it come up on the screen and by the time my next over came around I totally forgot about it," Cummins said at the post-match press conference.

"So, I think Stoinis ran in from the deep, was cheering and I was like, oh yeah, forgot about that. So, yeah, nice one," he added.



It was also the first hat-trick of Cummins' career for Australia.

"I had a few (hat-tricks) in juniors but never for Australia. I think I got one in grade cricket, maybe fourth grade. And I think I got one in second 11 when I was 17.

"And I think the hat-trick ball was similar. It was the first ball of the last day when it was Joe Burns.

"And I went to bowl a slower ball and he ducked underneath it and it hit the bail on the full. So yeah, not too dissimilar to today's," he recalled.

The fast bowler, who has been enjoying a purple patch in international cricket over the past year, finished with figures of 3/29, as Australia defeated Bangladesh by 28 runs via the Duckworth Lewis method at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium.

"(Ashton) Agar and (Nathan) Ellis on the bench have T20 hat-

tricks so good to join that club," Cummins, who was adjudged the player of the match said.

"Pretty awesome to tick that off. Boys are welcoming me in the club. Good club to be part of," he added.

The country's Test and ODI captain thus joined Brett Lee, the only other Australian to take a T20 World Cup hat-trick, which also came against Bangladesh.

Lee was the first to claim a hat-trick in the marquee event way back in 2007 and the Australian remained the only one to achieve the feat until the 2021 edition when Ireland pacer Curtis Campher (2021), Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga (2021) and South African quick Kagisa Rabada joined the elusive list. Other bowlers to claim a hat-trick in the T20 World Cup include UAE's Karthik Meiyappan (2022) and Joshua Little (2022) of Ireland.

WEST INDIES FACE CRUNCH USA CLASH

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

West Indies cannot afford another misstep as they take on a tenacious USA outfit in the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup here, seeking to renew their quest for an unprecedented third title.

After remaining unbeaten in the group stage, the West Indies slumped to an eight-wicket loss to defending champions England in their opening Super Eight fixture, paying the price for playing out as many as 51 dot balls and failing to rotate strike.

The heavy defeat to England has not only pushed Ravman Powell and his men to the bottom of the group but they now have -1.343 net run rate and need to win big to keep their hopes of lifting the title at home alive.

USA, on the other hand, haven't won any game since their victory against Pakistan earlier this month. But they gave a good

account of themselves against India and almost shocked South Africa, falling just 18 runs short of the Proteas' 194/4 against a high-quality bowling attack.

The co hosts of the tournament have shown that they are not here just to make up numbers and are not to be taken lightly. They have played an aggressive brand of cricket so far and in likelihood will continue to do so in the coming matches.

"Of course, I would say we're playing good cricket and the team is gelling well together and at the end of the day we know that we're going to be the underdogs for all teams that we played against in the Super 8s.

"So, we're just here to play good cricket and if we go in, we win - if we lose, we lose," USA batter Steven Taylor said at the pre-match press conference.

However, their weakness is their inexperienced bowling attack that sometimes lacks discipline, and



the West Indies, who are blessed with big hitters like Nicholas Pooran, Andre Russell, Powell, will like to capitalise on that.

"We did lack discipline in the bowling at times. Once we play good cricket we can beat any team in the world. But we need to be a lot more disciplined," vice-captain Aaron Jones had said after the game against South Africa.

Even though they have their backs against the walls, West Indies coach Darren Sammy asserted their "spirits are not dampened".

"In a tournament, there's a game where the opposition will get the better of you. But that doesn't mean you're out of it. Now, in order to win, we've got to win all our matches. And that's what we'll focus on," Sammy said.

Brandon King, who suffered a side strain and was forced to retire hurt against England, remains a doubtful starter for the hosts. If he doesn't recover,

Shimron Hetmyer could take King's place in the playing XI.

USA have been without skipper Monank Patel since their game against Pakistan.

TEAMS (FROM):
West Indies Squad: Rovman Powell (c), Brandon King, Johnson Charles, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Sherfane Rutherford, Andre Russell, Romario Shepherd, Roston Chase, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Gudakesh Motie, Obed McCoy, Shamar Joseph, Shimron Hetmyer and Shai Hope.
USA: Monank Patel (c), Aaron Jones, Andries Gous, Corey Anderson, Ali Khan, Harmet Singh, Jessy Singh, Milind Kumar, Nisarg Patel, Nitish Kumar, Noshutsh Kenjige, Saurabh Nathralvakar, Shadley Van Schalkwyk, Steven Taylor, Shayan Jahangir. Reserve Players: Gajanand Singh, Juanoy Drysdale, Yasir Mohammad.