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Centre to take crucial step on simultaneous polls

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Keeping with its commitment, the Centre is all set to table the report of the former President Ram Nath Kovind led high-level committee on "one nation, one election" soon in the Cabinet to decide the future course of action. After the approval of the Cabinet, a Bill in this regard is likely to be tabled in Parliament during the Monsoon Session in July which will be a full-fledged first Session of Narendra Modi's third tenure as the Prime Minister in the BJP-led NDA regime. The annual Budget is also to be brought in beginning of the Monsoon session. Sources said the Union Law Ministry is working "overtime" on it which is also part of the 100-day agenda of the Legislative Affairs Department which was set ahead of the Lok Sabha elections by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Before going to polls in its last Cabinet of the second tenure in March, Modi had directed all Union Ministries and departments to draw up a 100-day agenda for the next Government. In the midst of election campaign in May, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the NDA, if voted to power for the third term, will



Former President Ram Nath Kovind with President Droupadi Murmu
File Photo

implement the "one nation-one election" policy. "The elections for the Lok Sabha and Assembly seats are being held simultaneously in Andhra Pradesh. We will fulfill our commitment of one nation one election in the next five years. One nation, one election will save a lot of time and money," Singh had said. The Kovind Committee has recommended a two-step approach to lead to the simultaneous elections. As the first step, simultaneous elections will be held for the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies. In the second step, elections to the Municipalities and the Panchayats will be synchronised with the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies in such a way that Municipalities and

Panchayats elections are held within 100 days of holding elections to the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies. Separately, the Law Commission is also likely to come up soon with its own report on simultaneous polls, of which Modi has been a strong votary. Sources said the Law Commission is likely to recommend holding simultaneous polls for all three tiers of Government — Lok Sabha, State Assemblies and local bodies — starting from 2029 and a provision for a unity Government in cases like hung house or no-confidence motion. The Kovind panel had also proposed setting up an 'Implementation Group' to look into the execution of the recommendations made by the committee. "Simultaneous polls will help save resources, spur development and social cohesion, deepen 'foundations of the democratic rubric' and help realise the aspirations of 'India, that is Bharat', the panel had said. It has also recommended the preparation of a common electoral roll and voter ID cards by the Election Commission of India in consultation with state election authorities.

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Students' organisations protest at Shastri Bhawan on Friday against NEET exam, demanding for the exam to be held again
Photo: Pankaj Kumar / The Pioneer

SC seeks NTA, Centre reply on NEET issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a raging row over the irregularities in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test-Undergraduate, 2024 (NEET-UG), the Supreme Court on Friday asked the National Testing Agency and the Centre to respond to pleas seeking a probe by a committee chaired by a retired Supreme Court or High Court judge or an investigation agency into allegations of question paper leak and discrepancies in the NEET-UG 2024 examination. Petitioners appearing before a Vacation Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta urged the "imminent need for a CBI investigation". The bench which was hearing a batch of pleas, including a PIL filed by Hiten Singh

Kashyap, also sought responses from the CBI and the Bihar Government within two weeks. It said the pleas will be taken up with other pending ones on July 8, when the top court will start functioning after the summer vacation. During brief hearing, the bench got irked when a lawyer referred to the students committing suicides at Kota, a hub of coaching centres, in Rajasthan as an argument to buttress his case for a CBI probe. "Don't make unnecessary emotional arguments here," Justice Nath said. Responding to the submission for ordering a CBI probe, the bench said the reply of the NTA was necessary before an order could be passed.

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Arundhati to face music for provocative speech

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has sanctioned the prosecution of writer Arundhati Roy and former Professor of International Law in Central University of Kashmir, Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain, u/s 45 (1) of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in case FIR No. 258/2010 dated 29.11.2010 u/s 124-A/153A/153B/504 and 505 of IPC and 13 UA (P) Act, officials said here on Friday. The FIR against Roy and former Central University of Kashmir Professor Sheikh Showkat Hussain was registered following the orders of the court of Metropolitan Magistrate, New Delhi, they added. There was no immediate reaction from Roy and Hussain. The FIR in the matter was registered on a complaint made by Sushil Pandit, a social activist from Kashmir, on October 28, 2010. "Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena has sanctioned the prosecution of Arundhati Roy and former Professor of International Law in Central University of Kashmir, Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain, under section 45 (1) of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the case," a Raj Niwas official said on Friday.



Arundhati Roy PTI

Last October, the LG had granted sanction to prosecute them under section 196 of CrPC for commission of offences punishable under different sections of the Indian Penal Code: 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony), 153B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national-integration) and 505 (statements conducing to public mischief). Under Section 196 of CrPC, the central or state government is required to grant a sanction before courts can take cognisance of certain offences under the IPC. Section 13 of the UAPA deals

with punishment for unlawful activities for advocating, abetting or inciting any unlawful activity and is punishable with imprisonment for up to seven years. Section 153A deals with "promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony", while Section 153B with "imputations, assertions prejudicial to national-integration". Section 505 deals with intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace. Roy and Hussain had allegedly made provocative speeches at a conference organised under the banner of 'Azadi — The Only Way' on October 21, 2010 at LTG Auditorium, Copernicus Marg, here. "The issues discussed and spoken about at the conference propagated the separation of Kashmir from India," said the official. Those who delivered speeches at the conference included Syed Ali Shah Geelani, SAR Geelani (anchor of the conference and prime accused in Parliament attack case), Arundhati Roy, Dr Sheikh Showkat Hussain and Varavara Rao.

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, is welcomed by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the G7 in Borgo Egnazia, near Bari in southern Italy
PTI

Modi meets world leaders at G7

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/BARI(ITALY)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday held bilateral meetings with several world leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in the southern resort town of Italy. It is Modi's first foreign visit after assuming office this month. He is also likely to meet Pope Francis on the sidelines of the meet. In his talks with Zelenskyy, Modi conveyed to him that India believes in a "human-centric" approach and that the way to peace is through "dialogue and diplomacy". "Regarding the ongoing hostilities, reiterated that India believes in a human-centric approach and believes that the way to peace is through dialogue and diplomacy," he said. The Prime Minister described the meeting with the Ukrainian President as "very productive" and said India is eager to "further cement" bilateral relations with Ukraine. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the two leaders reviewed bilateral relationship and exchanged views on the situation in Ukraine. "Furthering India-Ukraine partnership! PM @narendramodi met President @ZelenskyyUa of Ukraine on the sidelines of the 50th G7 Summit in Apulia, Italy," he said in a

social media post. "The leaders reviewed bilateral relationship and exchanged views on situation in Ukraine. The PM conveyed that India continues to encourage peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy," he said. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra were part of Modi's delegation at the talks. It is learnt that Zelenskyy briefed Modi on various aspects of the conflict. Modi had met Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the previous G7 summit in Hiroshima in May last year as well. India has been maintaining that the conflict in Ukraine must be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. The meeting between Modi and Zelenskyy came ahead of the Swiss Peace Summit. India on Wednesday said it will participate in the upcoming peace summit on the Ukraine conflict at an "appropriate level". The Peace Summit will take place at Bürgenstock in Lucerne on June 15 and 16. Switzerland has invited Modi to attend it. However, it is learnt that a senior diplomat will represent India at the summit. Modi and Macron discussed ways to further strengthen the strategic partnership including in areas of defence, nuclear and space, and exchanged views on key global and regional issues. The two leaders met on the sidelines of the G7 summit in the southern resort town of Italy.

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No respite from heat for next five days

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

There's no escaping the intense temperatures for the people in the heat-struck North India over the next 4-5 days till June 18 with mercury to hover between 44 and 47 degrees Celsius across regions like Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, parts of Jharkhand, southwest Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and north Rajasthan. The national Capital recorded its highest temperature of 46.4 degrees Celsius at Ayanagar observatory on Thursday, significantly above normal levels. Night-time temperatures are also elevated, exacerbating heat stress, leaving the residents at the receiving end as they prefer to stay indoors or look for shades when outdoors. This marks the second

heatwave spell in June, following the first from May 17 to June 5. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted severe heatwaves to persist across Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Bihar, and other northern areas, with temperatures remaining 4-5 degrees Celsius above normal due to scant rainfall. "The night-time temperatures are also surging past normal values worsening the heat-stress. The mercury has been hovering at least 4-5 degrees Celsius above-normal as rains elude the region," added the IMD. The heatwave currently affecting Northern India is quite intense, with extreme temperatures and severe conditions impacting a broad area.

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Beating the heat: A woman drinks water on a hot summer day at Red Fort in New Delhi on Friday
Photo: Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

Double whammy for Capital street vendors

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Over 80 per cent of the street vendors surveyed in Delhi reported a decline in customers during heatwave days in April and May, and around 50 per cent experienced significant income loss, according to a new study. The study, involving 721 street vendors, was conducted in April and May in various locations including Meena Bazaar, Old Delhi Railway Station area, Red Fort area, Nehru Place, Guru Tegh Bahadur Nagar, Karol Bagh, India Gate, Janpath, Chandni Chowk, Sadar Bazar Road, Saket, Sarojini Market, among others. "Data from over 700 respondents highlight the devastating impact on their health, productivity, and livelihoods. We demand immediate Government intervention, including the establishment of heat shelters in markets with essential facilities, safety kits, and institutional support for the most vulnerable," said Sandeep Verma, Convener of the National Hawker Federation Delhi.



Biometric to speed up immigration at airports

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

You could soon be whizzing past immigration at Indian airports starting with Delhi with the Government going to introduce biometric-based immigration complete with e-gates. Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) on Friday announced the launch of innovative biometric registration kiosks at the international arrival pier of the airport. This expansion will further expedite the immigration process for arriving passengers. According to DIAL, before implementing this new mechanism, visa-holding passengers arriving in Delhi without biometric registration were required to utilise the designated immigration counters, resulting in an average wait time of 4-5 minutes per passenger. During peak hours, these queues could lead to even longer delays. DIAL said five kiosks are currently operational at the international arrival pier of the airport and it plans to add five more soon. The kiosks

would be operated under direct supervision of the Bureau of Immigration (BOI). The specially-designed kiosks for foreign nationals arriving in India with a visa where biometric information was not collected during the application process, have been set up for the first time at any airport in the country, DIAL said. During peak hours, these queues could lead to even longer delays, it said. DIAL said after registering biometric at the kiosk, time taken by immigration agent/officer at the counter will be minimised by more than half, as the passengers entering India with an e-visa can now complete their biometric registration upon arrival at the kiosks and then proceed to any immigration counter for entry. The kiosks provide a more convenient and time-saving experience for arriving passengers, especially those who were unable to complete biometric registration during the visa application process.

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Shock, grief as bodies arrive from Kuwait



IAF aircraft brings back mortal remains of Indian fire victims from Kuwait on Friday
PTI

Mortal remains of 45 Indians, who perished in the inferno that swallowed a labour camp in Kuwait on Wednesday, were brought back to Kochi by a special Indian Air Force aircraft on Friday. Meanwhile, a separate IAF aircraft carrying the mortal remains of 14 Indians landed in Palam Technical Airport in the national Capital from Kochi in the evening. The newly elected BJP MPs, including Northwest Delhi's Yogender Chandel, New Delhi's Bansuri Swaraj and South Delhi's Kamaljeet Sehrawat received the body at the airport. The coffins carrying dead bodies of 23 persons from Kerala were accorded homage by the State Government at the goods terminal of Cochin International Airport Ltd where Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his Council of Ministers had lined up to pay the last respect to the victims. Kirti Vardhan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs, accompanied the bodies from Kuwait to Kochi. The bodies of 23 expatriates from Kerala were taken to their native places by special ambulances arranged by the Government. Heartrending scenes were seen at the cargo terminal where the bodies were deplaned while the rest of the bodies were taken to New Delhi. Thirty one bodies were flown to Kerala in the special IAF aircraft and this included seven from Karnataka and one from Tamil Nadu. The bodies of deceased from other States were received at Kochi airport by the official representatives of the concerned States.

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Kashmiri Pandits see 'return of spring'

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Aj Chaman main phir se bahaar aaye hai' (spring has come back again), said Ashok Kumar, a devout Kashmiri Pandit, leaving in exile for the last 34 years, when he was asked to share his emotions after he paid obeisance at the famous Ragnya Devi temple in Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir on the occasion of annual Mela Kheer Bhawani on Friday. Along with him thousands of others also participated in the rituals and soaked

themselves in the spiritual atmosphere in the precincts of the temple complex nestled amidst mammoth Chinara trees in the central Kashmir district. The recent upsurge in terrorist violence across the Jammu region failed to deter these Kashmiri Pandits from visiting the annual Kheer Bhawani Mela often labelled as a symbol of communal harmony. Every year, Kashmiri Pandits express hope to one day return to their 'homes and hearths'. However, to date, successive Governments have failed to



ensure their permanent return to the valley. "We have been yearning for 'ghar wapsi' since 1990. We have been coming here like tourists all these years. There is no yatri niwas. The government should think about expanding boarding and lodging facilities for us. We can't go back to our homes. Our old friends come and meet us. Some of them even host us for a day or two but we are still waiting for our permanent homecoming," said Pyare Lal from Ganderbal.

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Sheena Bora murder case: Bones, remains gone missing, CBI court told

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a shocking development, the CBI has informed a special court here that the bones and mortal remains purportedly of Mumbai executive Sheena Bora recovered by the Raigad Police 14 years ago after her murder, had reportedly gone "missing". During his examination before the special CBI court, Dr Zeba Khan, a forensic expert from the state-run JJ hospital -- who first examined the bones recovered from the jungles of the jungles Gogade Khurd village in Raigad district -- said on Thursday that the bones and mortal remains were not traceable. At the previous hearing held on May 7, the CBI's Public Prosecutor C J Nandode had sought production of the bones that were recovered, for identification by Dr. Khan, who is the 91st witness in the case. However at the hearing held on Thursday, the CBI told the



special court that after a diligent search, the two marked packets containing the evidence (bones) could not be traced. Despite the absence of the crucial evidence, the Prosecution said that it would continue to examine Dr Khan would continue without showing pieces of evidence (bones) to him. The Prosecution's case is that

Indrani, along with Sanjeev and her driver Shyamvar Rai -- who has turned an approver in the case -- had allegedly "kidnapped" Sheena between 6.30 pm and 7.30 pm on April 24, 2012, from Bandra (west) in their car. Sheena was allegedly strangled in the car on the same evening and that on the following morning they carried the body of the deceased

packed in a bag (which had they kept in the rear side of the car) to the jungles Gogade Khurd village off the Khopoli-Pen Road, where they doused the bag with petrol and set it on fire. Indrani, who was arrested on August 25, 2015 for her alleged role in the murder of her daughter Sheena, is the key accused in the Sheena Bora murder case. The CBI -- which took over the investigations into the Sheena Bora murder case from the Mumbai police on September 29, 2015 -- on November 19, 2015 filed a comprehensive charge-sheet, running into 1,000-odd pages, against Indrani, her former husband Khanna and driver Shyamvar Rai. On the same (November 19,2015) evening, the CBI arrested Peter Mukherjee in connection with the sensational crime. The burnt bones and remains were found by the Pen police after the arrests of the accused

Church changes tune, starts singing in praise of Modi

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, a numerically powerful sect of Christian community, made a volte-face on Friday and started singing peans at the Narendra Modi Government for its "impressive victory" in the recent Lok Sabha election. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, the supreme head of the MOSC, said he was happy that Narendra Modi has been elected as Prime Minister for a record third term and congratulated Modi for the rare feat. Interestingly, the MOSC was in the forefront of the protest against the riots in Manipur which claimed many lives. "The riots in Manipur is a tussle between two tribes and both the sections suffered casualties and loss of properties," said Baselios Marthoma Mathews in a release on Friday. The head of the MOSC said there was no need of any apprehension over the happenings in Manipur. "We



understand it was not at all a pogrom or communal riot as made out by a section of politicians and media," he said. Friday's statement is in contrast to what he had said in June 2023 when he criticized the Centre and the union home minister for the callous attitude towards the despicable incidents in Manipur. When asked whether the Christians in Kerala had voted for the BJP in the Lok Sabha election, the Church head feigned ignorance. "We never tell the laity to vote for any particular political party and leave the decision to them. Some

Christians might have voted for the BJP and it od for that party to ensure that they vote for them again in the upcoming election," he said. Baselios Marthoma Mathews pointed out that the BJP had won an assembly constituency in Kerala in 2016 but lost the same in the 2021 poll. "If the voters are taken onto confidence, they would continue voting for the party of their choice," he said. In the recent Lok Sabha poll, Suresh Gopi of the BJP has won from Thrissur parliamentary constituency which has a considerable Christian population.

GNDU signs MoU with AAI for internship programme

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

The Guru Nanak Dev University of Amritsar entered a MoU with the Airports Authority of India, under the aegis of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India. This partnership marks a significant step towards enriching educational experiences for students of the university through an innovative Student Internship Program. The decision was reached during a meeting between Prof Jaspal Singh Sandhu Vice Chancellor and V.K. Seth Airport Director, Airports Authority of India, Sri Guru Ram Dass Jee International Airport, Amritsar. Speaking on the occasion, Prof Sandhu reiterated the University's commitment to equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the dynamic field.

TMC announces names for four Assembly seats bypolls

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress has given tickets to the BJP turncoats even as the party on Friday announced its candidates for the upcoming by-elections to four Assembly seats. The elections will take place on July 10 and results will be declared on July 13. Two former BJP leaders Krishna Kalyani and Mukut Mani Adhikari were given tickets by the TMC. While Kalyani who lost to BJP in recently concluded Lok Sabha elections was given a ticket from Hemtabad seat in Raiganj Adhikari a Matua leader was given a ticket from Ranaghat South seat. Adhikari a sitting BJP MLA who joined the TMC and contested in the Parliamentary elections too lost the polls. Besides Madhuparna Thakur the daughter of Matua leader



and TMC MP Mamata Bala Thakur was given a ticket from Bagda Assembly seat in Kolkata's Manicktala seat Supti Pandey the widow of late TMC leader and minister Sadhan Pandey will contest on the party ticket. Meanwhile, Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari on Friday conceded defeat saying the TMC had indeed fared bet-

ter than the BJP but assured his fight would continue in future. "Yes Mamata Banerjee has successfully navigated her party to victory and we have lost some seats but it is equally true that she and her party has been defeated in mu home district East Midnapore," Adhikari who has been under attack from the BJP old-timers who have RSS background said adding his fight against the TMC misrule would continue. "There will be no let up in the struggle against the corrupt TMC government ... we will continue our fight and carry it till the end," he said. While both the BJP and the Left are yet to declare their candidates inside sources said the Left-Congress alliance would continue for the time being as the Congress in most likelihood contest from Raiganj leaving the remaining three for the Left.

AAP leadership pledges to work harder

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior AAP leadership on Friday pledged that they would work harder for the next general election following their discussion of the poll debacle in Lok Sabha 2024 elections as the party secured just three seats in Punjab out of the 22 contested. Despite an alliance with the Congress in Delhi, it lost all the four seats it contested at the hands of the BJP. "AAP definitely got fewer seats than expected, but the game is not over yet. We will come with new energy in the next election," AAP General Secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak said. He said that the decision of the people of Delhi was a top priority for the party and acknowledged that "there must have been some shortcomings in our hard work" while pledging to work harder to win next time.

Pathak said Assembly elections in Haryana and Delhi and by-elections in Punjab were the next goals of the party. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said that the top party leaders, including national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Satyender Jain, were put behind bars. "If we wanted, we could have negotiated with them, but we have come to politics to work for people as leaders, not to become dealers," Singh asserted. Delhi AAP Convener Gopal Rai said the INDIA bloc fought on seven seats in the national capital in adverse conditions yet managed to raise its vote percentage. The AAP-Congress alliance, with a four-three seat sharing formula in place, lost against BJP candidates in all seven constituencies despite partially succeeding in preventing a vote split.

Governor writes to Mamata after cops deny Suvendu entry to Raj Bhawan

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari was prevented from entering the Raj Bhawan along with the victims of the post-poll violence Bengal Governor C.V. Ananada Bose on Friday wrote to Chief Minister asking the reason behind the police action. The police had earlier prevented Adhikari from entering the Raj Bhawan citing the enforcement of Section 144 CrPC in the area by the administration. Reminding the Chief Minister that she may win elections but she cannot defeat law he said, that her high post notwithstanding, law was higher than her. In his letter the Governor wrote: The Chief Minister cannot deface the Constitution of India. It is a dance of death, a

macabre of what is happening in West Bengal. However high you may think you are, the law is above you." Post June 4 results reports of violence against opposition workers had been trickling in from all parts of the State with both the BJP and CPI(M) workers standing at the receiving end of the TMC violence. "So much so that the workers have to be shifted from their native villages to the district party offices and even at various locations in Kolkata," Adhikari on Friday iterated comparing the situation in Bengal to other States where life was functioning normally after the elections. "Why should the people be attacked and killed for their political faith ... why a man will be punished because he has been a booth agent of a BJP candidate ... you may get an electoral victory but you

cannot break laws for that reason," Adhikari said. CPI(M)'s Sujan Chakrabarty said there was no semblance of any law and order in Bengal. "Our party offices have been attacked and vandalised not only in the districts but also in proper Kolkata ... electoral victory does not give you license to do whatever you want... now there will be resistance". Reports of violence had been coming in from Cooch Behar in North Bengal to Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Basirhat, Barasat in North 24 Parganas, Diamond harbor, Mathurapur and Canning in South 24 Parganas, sources said. There were reports of violence from various parts of Capital Kolkata, sources said adding the attack on the political workers were taking place at the behest of senior TMC leadership.

SC seeks NTA...

From Page 1

"It is the future of 24 lakh students," the lawyer said. "We understand. We are conscious of all that," the bench said. "Issue notice," the bench said, adding it will be taken up for hearing on July 8 along with other related petitions on the NEET-UG row. NTA counsel Vardhaman Kaushik, however, said the NTA wanted to withdraw three other petitions, which were seeking transfer of cases from high courts to the top court, as they pertained to grant of grace marks to 1,563 candidates on account of loss of time during the examination on May 5. He said the NTA will be informing the high courts that the issue over grace marks has been settled and that the decision to cancel the compensatory marks given to 1,536 candidates has been taken. The bench permitted the NTA to withdraw the transfer petitions pertaining to row over grant of grace marks to 1,563 candidates. On June 14, the Centre and

the NTA told the Supreme Court they have cancelled the grace marks given to 1,563 candidates who took the examination for admission to MBBS and other such courses. They will have the option to either take a re-test or forgo the compensatory marks awarded to them for loss of time, the centre had said. The examination was held on May 5 across 4,750 centres and around 24 lakh candidates took it. The results were expected to be declared on June 14 but were announced on June 4, apparently because the evaluation of the answer sheets got completed earlier. There have been allegations of question paper leaks in states like Bihar and other irregularities in the prestigious exam. The allegations have led to protests in several cities and filing of cases in seven high courts as also the Supreme Court. Scores of students protested in Delhi on June 10 seeking a probe into alleged irregularities.

No respite from heat...

From Page 1

As per the IMD, Northern parts of India, including Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Punjab, are experiencing severe heat wave conditions in certain areas. North Odisha and Gangetic West Bengal are also impacted. Other affected areas include parts of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, and isolated places in Rajasthan, said the IMD. The highest recorded temperature was 47.2°C at Buxar in Bihar. There is no respite in night-time also with IMD stating that warm nights have been reported, with temperatures remaining high in parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh-Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and northwest Rajasthan. Such high temperatures can lead to heat-related illnesses like heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Vulnerable populations, including the elderly, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions, are at greater risk, said the IMD.

Kashmiri Pandits...

From Page 1

He said that Kashmiri Pandit families travelled from different corners of the country and even from other countries to offer prayers on the occasion of Jyeshtha Ashtami. "Devotees offer milk and kheer (rice pudding) at the sacred spring within the temple complex while chanting 'shlokas'". The local Muslim families welcome us and set up small shops offering pooja materials and other logistics support to ensure hassle-free celebrations. Krishan ji Bhat, another migrant Kashmiri Pandit, claimed, "Each year, we board buses from the Jagti migrant camp and come here under tight security cover. We feel caged. We are told to obey strict instructions given by the security officers to ensure our safety." "Everything is in the hands of God. There is some fear but people have come here in large numbers. Faith is more powerful than fear," Sunny, a Kashmiri Pandit

from Delhi, said. It is believed that the colour of the sacred spring water flowing beneath the temple here reflects the conditions in the valley. While most of the colours do not have any particular significance, black or darkish colour of the water is believed to be an indication of inauspicious times for Kashmir. However, the water in the spring was clean and milky white this year. Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha also paid obeisance at the temple and offered special prayers. Speaking to reporters later, the LG said that over 30,000 devotees paid obeisance at Mela Kheer Bhawani this year. "More than 30,000 devotees visited the Kheer Bhawani temple. Jammu and Kashmir administration and those who have faith in the deity, have made very good arrangements. The devotees were ferried in around 200 buses from Jammu. Some people have come from Delhi as well," he said.

Arundhati to face music...

From Page 1

The complainant filed a complaint under Section 156(3) of CrPC before the Metropolitan Magistrate Court, New Delhi, who disposed the complaint on November 27, 2010 with the directions to register an FIR. Accordingly, an FIR was registered and investigation was carried out, they said. Roy has been a vocal critic of the BJP and Modi government and has criticised it on several issues. The controversial 'author' had promoted the BBC documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which attempted to shield

Islamists responsible for burning the Sabarmati Express and killing 59 Hindus (29 women and 10 children) in the process. "The BBC broadcast a two-part documentary called India: The Modi Question... The BBC film implicates Modi in the abetment of mass murder... Episode 1 of the BBC film The Modi Question is about the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom which raged through the state of Gujarat after Muslims were held responsible for the burning of a railway coach in which 59 Hindu pilgrims were burned alive," she had said.

Biometric to speed up...

From Page 1

Speeding up these processes, especially immigration, and bringing them in line with the best global practices is key to having international hubs in India. "The introduction of these biometric registration kiosks is among the many firsts that Delhi Airport has achieved. It represents a significant step forward in expediting the immigration process and enhancing passenger convenience, particularly for those who were unable to submit their biometrics during the visa application process," said CEO at DIAL.

Shock, grief as bodies arrive from...

From Page 1

The CPI(M) and Congress leaders blamed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Centre for the fire tragedy that resulted in the loss of human lives. Kerala's Minister for Health Veena George who expressed her desire to visit Kuwait ostensibly to lead the rescue and relief mission had to abort her travel plans as she was denied "political clearance" by the Centre. A visibly upset Veena George had to return to her bungalow after the flight to Kuwait took off from Kochi late Thursday night. The entire council of ministers turning up at the airport to pay tributes to the victims was in stark contrast to what happened when the body of Soumya, a 32-year-old home nurse who was killed by the Hamas terrorists in Israel in May 2021 was flown to Kochi. There was no representatives from the State government or any political leaders present at the airport though the mortal remains was accompanied by senior officials of Israeli embassy.

Modi meets world...

From Page 1

"Taking Strategic Partnership to new levels! PM @narendramodi met President Emmanuel Macron of France on the sidelines of the 50th G7 Summit in Apulia, Italy," Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal posted on X. "The two leaders discussed ways to further strengthen the partnership including in areas of defence, nuclear, space, education, climate action, digital public infrastructure, critical technologies, connectivity and culture.

They also exchanged views on key global and regional issues," he wrote. The two leaders last met in January when the French President visited India to attend the 75th Republic Day of India. During their last meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed their shared vision for bilateral cooperation and international partnership, outlined in Horizon 2047 and other documents from the July 2023 Summit. Horizon 2047 Roadmap sets an ambitious and broad-ranging course for the bilateral relationship for 2047, the centenary year of India's independence. Modi is attending the 50th G7 Summit on the invitation of Italian President Georgia Meloni and will address an Outreach session on Artificial Intelligence, Energy, Africa and the Mediterranean

alongside leaders of other invited countries and Pope Francis. During Modi's meeting with Sunak, the leaders talked about the India-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, enhancing industrial cooperation in the defence sector, boosting trade and commerce. "It was a delight to meet PM @Rishi Sunak in Italy. I reiterated my commitment to further strengthen the India-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the third term of the NDA Government. There is great scope to deepen ties in sectors like semiconductors, technology and trade," Modi said in a social media post. The two leaders greeted each other with a warm hug. While Sunak congratulated Prime Minister Modi on his historic third consecutive term, the Indian leader

extended his best wishes to the people of the United Kingdom as they prepare for general elections next month, a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. The two leaders reaffirmed the shared commitment of both countries to further strengthen bilateral relations, the statement said. "We also talked about further cementing ties in the defence sector," Modi wrote in his post. The MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal described the meeting between the two leaders as "fruitful." "The leaders discussed the implementation of the Roadmap 2030 and expressed happiness on progress in all areas of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership including regular high-level political consultations, defence and security, trade

and economic collaboration, critical and high technology sectors and people-to-people ties," the statement said. "They also expressed satisfaction with the progress made in the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations between the two countries. Both leaders also discussed regional and multilateral matters of mutual interest," it added. Sunak and Modi last met in person at the G20 Summit in New Delhi last September, which also marked Sunak's first official visit to India as Britain's first Prime Minister of Indian heritage. The two leaders then agreed to accelerate the FTA talks with the hope of signing off before India's general election. However, the trade talks are now expected to resume only after a new UK government is elected on July 4.

Centre to take crucial step on...

From Page 1

At present, the Election Commission of India is responsible for Lok Sabha and assembly polls, while polls for municipalities and panchayats are managed by state election commissions. The panel has recommended 18 constitutional amendments, most of which will not need ratification by state assemblies. However, these would require certain constitutional amendment bills that would need to be passed by Parliament. Some proposed changes regarding the single electoral roll and single voter ID card would need ratification by at least half of the states. The Kovind Report comprises of 18,626 pages which is an outcome of extensive

consultations with stakeholders, experts and research work. The other members of the Committee were Amit Shah, Union Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Cooperation, Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, N.K. Singh, former Chairman, 15th Finance Commission, Dr. Subhash C. Kashyap, former Secretary General, Lok Sabha, Harish Salve, Senior Advocate, and Sanjay Kothari, former Chief Vigilance Commissioner. Arjun Ram Meghwal, Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ministry of Law and Justice was a Special Invitee and Dr. Niten Chandra was the Secretary of the HLC. The Committee held extensive consultations to understand

the views of different stakeholders. 47 political parties submitted their views and suggestions, out of which 32 supported simultaneous elections. Many political parties had extensive discussions with the HLC on this matter besides 21,558 responses received from citizens from all over India of which 80 per cent of the respondents supported simultaneous elections. Experts on law such as four former Chief Justices of India and 12 former Chief Justices of major High Courts, four former Chief Election Commissioners of India, eight State Election Commissioners, and Chairman, Law Commission of India were also invited by the Committee for interaction in person.

Water production in city decreasing continuously: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior AAP leader and Delhi Water Minister Atishi on Friday said water production in the national Capital is decreasing continuously as less water is reaching the Yamuna river. Meanwhile, two tankers were seized for allegedly stealing water from the Munak canal by the Delhi Police. The AAP dispensation has been alleging that Haryana has not been releasing Delhi's share of water while the BJP is attacking the ruling party for not taking any action against the 'tanker mafia'. "Due to less water reaching Yamuna, water production in Delhi is continuously decreasing. Under normal circumstances, 1005 MGD of water is produced in Delhi, but it has been continuously decreasing since last one week. Due to reduced production, there is water shortage in many parts of Delhi. Everyone is requested to use water very economically," she said in a post on X (formerly Twitter) in Hindi. Sharing figures, the minister said the water production on June 6 was 1,002 million gallons



per day (MGD) which declined to 993 MGD the next day and 990 MGD on June 8. It was 978 MGD on June 9 and 958 MGD the next day. On June 11, June 12 and June 13, it stood at 919 MGD, 951 MGD and 939 MGD respectively, the minister added. Further, AAP Rajya Sabha MP

Sanjay Singh slammed the BJP and its seven MPs in Delhi for not giving Delhi its rightful water. "The people of Delhi have elected all the seven BJP MPs. Even after this, the BJP government of Haryana is punishing Delhiites. In such a scorching heat, the BJP government of Haryana is taking

out its enmity with us by stopping Delhi's rightful water. I want to tell all the seven BJP MPs that they should appeal to the Haryana and Central governments to provide water to Delhi and meet the LG, but he is missing," he said, asking the Haryana government to take out its enmity with us but not

trouble the people of Delhi. Additionally, the seizure of the tankers from the canal area comes a day after police began patrolling the canal area to check the activities of the tanker mafia as the water crisis in Delhi worsened. "We have seized two water tankers for stealing water from the canal. One tanker was seized from 'kacchi sadar' near an agricultural field and the other from D-Block, DSIIDC. We have registered two cases under the Environment Protection Act at Bawana and NIA police stations," a senior police officer said.

The officer said 56 police personnel are guarding the canal in shifts. According to officials, police teams have set up pickets and are patrolling the 15-kilometre stretch of the canal on the Haryana borders. The canal enters Delhi from Bawana and reaches the Haiderpur treatment plant. Teams from Bawana, Narela Industrial Area, Shahbad Dairy and Samaypur Badli police stations have been tasked with patrolling the canal and the nearby areas.

Minister trying to mislead Delhiites: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Friday accused the AAP leader and Water Minister Atishi of trying to mislead people in the national capital by issuing cooked up figures and social media posts instead of working to fix leakages in pipelines and taking action against AAP MLAs involved in water theft by 'tanker mafia' amid the city facing water crisis. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said, "The Minister Atishi has said that normal water production in Delhi is 1005 MGD and she has issued data of water production between 6th June to 13th June which by itself shows that there is hardly any water production shortage. Against normal production of 1005 MGD on 6th June, Delhi produced 1002 MGD which is hardly 0.5 per cent less while on 13th June production was 939 MGD that is 7 per cent less." Questioning Atishi about why



the city is parched when the production is reduced by barely 0.5 to 7 per cent, Sachdeva said, "If Kejriwal government had worked to check leakages and water theft which account for 54 per cent water loss then even at 939 MGD Delhi could have got proper water supply." Sachdeva said it's shameful that instead of working round the clock to fix leakages and check theft the AAP Minister is working round the clock to spread fake stories and feeding misleading information to Delhiites through media and social media. Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said

that it's shameful that instead of solving the water crisis, AAP Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bhardwaj are doing political melodramas like calling MLA meetings and praising jailed Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for his concern for Delhiites water problem. "Most of the 61 AAP MLAs have been there for almost 9.5 years and it's shocking that Ministers have to call meetings of MLAs to cajole them to work for restarting development works or to ensure proper water supply," he said. Further, he said, "People of Delhi want to know from Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bhardwaj what action have they taken against their MLAs like Bhawna Gaud whose accomplices are part of Delhi's water tank mafia." Delhi BJP President said that while on normal days in Delhi the water theft and leakage loss is 54% but on Friday it's 75 per cent as the water theft by tanker mafia has almost doubled.

IAF aircraft carrying mortal remains of 14 Indians killed in Kuwait fire lands from Kochi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

An IAF aircraft carrying the mortal remains of 14 of the 45 Indians who died in a devastating fire at a building in Kuwait landed in Palam Technical Airport in the national capital from Kerala's Kochi on Friday evening. After the plane arrived in the national capital, newly elected BJP MPs including Northwest Delhi's Yogender Chandolia, New Delhi's Bansuri Swaraj and South Delhi's Kamaljeet Sehrawat stood on the tarmac with folded hands as the caskets were lowered from the aircraft. They paid their tributes to them by laying wreaths on the caskets. "A special Indian Air Force aircraft carrying the bodies of 45 Indians killed in a massive fire in a multi-storey building in the Mangaf area of southern Kuwait on Wednesday reached Delhi's Palam Airport via Kochi today. After reaching there, today I handed over the bodies of the deceased to their families and paid tribute. During this, I experienced heart-wrenching pain. May God give peace to all those



departed souls and give strength to their families to bear this grief," said Chandolia in a post on X (formerly Twitter). A C-130J aircraft carrying the 45 bodies landed at the Kochi international airport around 10.30 am. Thirty-one bodies were received at the airport by Central and state ministers, including Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. The remaining 14 bodies were sent to Delhi in the same aircraft as a domestic flight from Kochi, airport authorities in Kerala said. The special IAF aircraft had taken off for Kochi from Kuwait on Friday morning. According to the Indian

embassy, out of the 45 Indians killed in the fire incident, 23 were from Kerala, seven from Tamil Nadu, three each from Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, two from Odisha and one each from Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Haryana, according to the embassy. The mortal remains would be handed over to the respective state government representatives in Kochi and Delhi. At least 49 foreign workers were killed and 50 others injured in the fire on Wednesday at the seven-storey building where 196 migrant workers were staying in the southern city of Mangaf.

Firefighters toil for 10 hours to douse Chandni Chowk blaze

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Firefighters toiled overnight for more than 10 hours in stifling heat to bring under control a massive fire that gutted more than 50 shops in tightly-packed buildings in north Delhi's Chandni Chowk area. Delhi Fire Services (DFS) officials said that flames were still simmering under some collapsed portions of buildings and a cooling operation is underway. The fire broke out in Chandni Chowk's Old Katra Marwadi Market around 5 pm on Thursday. There were no casualties reported from the massive fire. Stating that the fire was brought under control at 4.30 am, Garg said, "Eight fire tenders have been deployed for the cooling operation. Over 50 fire tenders and 200 personnel worked through the night to control the blaze." He added that more than 50 small and big shops were gutted in the fire. A 51 year old shopkeeper Jaspreet Singh has tears in his eyes as the fire engulfed his shop, stating that it was his only source of earning. He said, "My priority was to save my



workers and customers. I asked them to evacuate the shop as quickly as possible. I was the last person to leave. After ensuring that no one was left behind, somehow I closed the shutter which was already hot and ran away." Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) M K Meena said forensics and electricity departments will conduct an inspection after the cooling operation is complete and an FIR is being registered in the matter. Chandni Chowk BJP

MP Praveen Khandelwal also visited the fire affected area and talked to the local businessmen. DFS officials said firefighters had to face several challenges in the operation. "Due to the (narrow) lanes, we had to extend our fire hose for more than 300 metres and had to add extra pressure," an official said, adding that the fire department also had to use water bowsers and robots to douse the flames. He further said that there were no water sources nearby which

added to the problem of refilling the water tanks. "The shops had combustible material which only needed a small spark," he said. Dangling power lines in the area also posed a challenge for the firefighters. Another officer said the fire broke out due to a short circuit in an air conditioner in a shop on the second floor of one of the buildings and it quickly spread to other shops. Firefighters struggled to douse the flames as shops are interconnected in the narrow lanes

of the old Katra Marwadi Market, he said. Nai Sadak Traders Welfare Association president Deepal Mahendru said the number of damaged shops may go up to 100. Deepak Mahendru, president of Nai Sadak Traders Association, said that police and fire brigade teams are still keeping traders away from their shops as more buildings could still collapse. "Once the cooling operation and inspection are completed, we can calculate the losses. They will be in crores. So far, I got to know that more than 50 shops are gutted causing a loss of Rs 70 to 80 crores of products only," Mahendru said, adding that the fire started from shop number 1580 or 1581, and within no time it engulfed the entire area. Two buildings housing multiple shops, including the one where the fire started, collapsed due to the blaze. Small fires are still simmering in combustible items under the debris, Garg said, adding that the shops that were gutted sold sarees, dupattas and other combustible items. The AAP government is exploring all possible ways to restore the gutted Katra Marwadi market.

Court seeks response of Tihar jail on Kejriwal's plea seeking to allow wife to join medical board



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A court here on Friday sought Tihar jail's response on Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's application seeking to allow his wife to join a medical board constituted to determine his health condition and treatment. Additional Sessions Judge Mukesh Kumar directed the authorities concerned to file their reply in the matter by Saturday. Kejriwal is lodged in Tihar jail after being arrested in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. The judge, meanwhile, fixed for June 19 another plea of Kejriwal seeking regular bail in the case. The matter was adjourned after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) sought time to file a reply in the matter. The Delhi chief minister has filed a fresh application seeking his wife to be permitted to join the medical board through video conference. "Application has been moved by the accused seeking directions to allow his wife to join the medical board. Before

passing any order, I deem it appropriate to call for a reply from the jail superintendent concerned. The application be kept for tomorrow," the judge said. During the proceedings, ED sought 10 days to file a reply to the bail application and requested the court to adjourn the matter till June 25. The judge, however, said he would consider the accused's convenience for the next date of hearing, not the probe agency's. "The accused is in judicial custody (JC), and not in your (ED's) custody. If he wants some convenience, you do not have any role in that. You have no role to play... He is in JC. I will consider his convenience, not yours," the judge said. The court on June 5 dismissed Kejriwal's application seeking interim bail in the case on medical grounds. The judge, however, had directed the Tihar jail authorities to take care of Kejriwal's medical needs while in judicial custody. He had also extended Kejriwal's judicial custody till June 19.

PWD seeks report on choke points to end street congestion

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national capital's never ending struggle with traffic congestion can see some relief, as the Delhi government's Public Works Department (PWD) has sought a report from the transport department and traffic police on choke-points in the national capital to see what interventions can be made to make them congestion-free. The PWD has planned 10 new projects to decongest the national capital by building flyovers, elevated roads and underpasses at an estimated cost of Rs 4,000 crore, they added. "We are working with various stakeholders to see what interventions can be made to ease

traffic congestion. There are many roundabouts and areas that witness congestion. "The PWD has been working on projects to ease the traffic situation and we have been communicating with the transport department and the traffic police over the matter. There have been multiple meetings over the issue," an official said. Furnishing more details, he said the department has planned 10 projects but based on a report by the two stakeholders, it will be decided whether an underpass, an elevated road or a flyover is needed to solve the problem of traffic congestion. "The report will have details on the traffic volume in those areas at different hours of the



day and the reason for the situation. Based on the feedback, we will proceed with the projects," the official added. The department also receives suggestions from MLAs on projects that can be carried out

in their constituencies to ease traffic congestion. Last year, the Delhi Police said it had identified 117 key traffic congestion points across the national capital and attributed them to a variety of causes,

including construction activities and encroachments. Among the 117 congestion points, the highest number is found in the northern range of Delhi, specifically in the districts of Rohini, North-West, and Outer-North. In Rohini alone, there are 13 spots, including two near the Rohini West metro station, one near the Rithala metro station, and another near a school. These areas experience heavy traffic due to vehicular volume, pedestrian movement, and illegal parking. In the southern range, there are 22 congestion points, with 12 in south Delhi and 10 in the South-East district. Areas like Yusuf Sarai Market, Andheria Mod, Chirag Dilli flyover, Savitri flyover, and Tara

Apartment-Alaknanda Road are frequently congested. Construction activities near the Saket metro station, Sarai Kale Khan, MB Road from Pul Prah Ladpur traffic light to Lal Kuan intersection, and Khadar Puliya also contribute to traffic jams. The police had said congestion is being regulated through the deployment of staff at major intersections, introducing "one-way" traffic schemes and launching encroachment or congestion removal drives. The northern range had a maximum number of such congestion points at 27 followed by the southern range at 22, the central range at 21, the eastern range at 20, the western range at 19 and the New Delhi range at eight.

Blood donation camp on June 15

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Association of Surgeons of India, Delhi State Chapter, is going to organise on 15th June a Nationwide Voluntary Blood donation camp in which Delhi top medical colleges and institutions are going to take part. The institutions which have confirmed their participation include Lady Hardinge medical College, Ram Manohar Lohia hospital, Sehgal Neo Hospital, Jeevan hospital, South Delhi, VMMC and Safdarjung Hospital, Northern Railway Central Hospital, MAMC and LNJP hospital, DDU Hospital, Hindu Rao hospital, and ESI hospital, Basaidharapur. Voluntary Blood donation has been one of the noblest gifts



that a human being can give back to society. "We as surgeons have always been the largest indirect consumers of this precious commodity. It is time now for us to pay back or facilitate it through our noble efforts. We plan to make it a big success and show the country that we stand together collectively for our Society and empathise with our patients and the people at large", said the association in a statement,

Raaj Kumar Anand disqualified from Assembly membership

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi social welfare minister Raaj Kumar Anand has been disqualified from the membership of the Delhi assembly. Anand resigned as minister from the Arvind Kejriwal cabinet and on April 10, but did not resign either as an MLA. On May 5, Anand joined BSP, and a day later he filed his nomination as the BSP candidate from New Delhi Lok Sabha seat. He had contested the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls from New Delhi seat and lost to BJP candidate Bansuri Swaraj. "He was given the date of June 10 for replying to the notice served to him but he did not reply. In the same notice, he was asked to be present physically on June 11 but he did not appear. He

was given another chance to be physically present on June 14 but he did not come. His membership from the Delhi assembly has been terminated," Delhi Assembly speaker Rm Nirwas Goel said. When contacted, Anand did not respond. According to officials, on May 31, Raaj K u m a r Anand was served a notice by the Delhi assembly secretary under anti-defection laws and was

asked to file his reply to the assembly by 5pm on June 10. Anand was elected from the

Patel Nagar reserved assembly constituency in the 2020 election.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Growing clout

The G7 Summit provides India with a significant platform to contribute to critical global discussions

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Italy on Friday for the G7 Summit's Outreach session. This visit marks PM Modi's first foreign trip since the beginning his third term in office. India has been invited to the Summit by Italy. The Group of Seven, or G7, a coalition of the world's most happening economies --- Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US --- makes the world go round. India has emerged as one of the most trusted G7 partners over the years. This forum is instrumental in shaping global economic policies and addressing critical issues such as climate change, trade and geopolitical stability; in nutshell a force to reckon with. The G7 Summit is an annual gathering where the member nations discuss these pressing matters and seek collaborative solutions. India, while not a member, has a significant interest in the G7's activities and decisions due to its expanding global influence and economic aspirations. The G7 holds substantial sway over global economic and political affairs. Collectively, these nations represent about 40 per cent of global GDP and wield considerable influence over international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. The group's decisions can impact global markets, set economic trends and influence international policies. However, the biggest cementing factor is geopolitics. India happens to be in the frontline in G7's economic and political tussle with China. The G7 often discusses security issues, including those related to regional stability and counterterrorism with India as Indian inputs are taken seriously.



India has had a long relationship with the G7. The country's engagement with the G7 is driven by several strategic national interests. India aims to bolster its economic growth through increased trade and investment. The G7 economies are significant trading partners and sources of foreign direct investment. Engaging with the G7 helps India to advocate for fairer trade practices, access to advanced technologies and support for its economic initiatives. Besides, India is deeply invested in the global climate agenda. As a developing nation facing the dual challenges of economic growth and environmental sustainability, India's participation in G7 discussions on climate change is crucial. The G7's commitments to carbon neutrality, renewable energy and financial support for developing nations align with India's goals of transitioning to a green economy. India's participation in these dialogues is vital for addressing security concerns, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region where China's assertive actions have raised alarms. Moreover, as a country aspiring to become a global technology hub, India seeks collaboration with G7 countries on innovation and technological development. Participation in G7 initiatives can help India gain access to cutting-edge technologies, foster research and development partnerships, and support its digital economy.

PICTALK



Spotted deer drink water inside their zoo enclosure on a hot summer day, in Patna

PTI

Addressing misinformation about health supplements

Online misinformation about health supplements exploits trust and evades scientific scrutiny, posing dangerous consequences

In this digital age, people believe online resources more than fellow human beings. It's a common practice during our travel; we unthinkingly follow whatever is told by Google map rather than asking a commoner. Even if a local person gives the correct direction, we look at him with scepticism. For the present generation, Google and WhatsApp are like libraries and teachers. Even in health care, people believe in using Internet sources rather than a physical doctor.



Health supplements, ranging from vitamins and minerals to herbal extracts and dietary supplements, have become increasingly popular in recent years. Marketed as natural remedies to improve health, boost immunity and enhance performance, these products often attract consumers seeking quick fixes or alternative treatments for various health conditions. One of the primary drivers of online misinformation about health supplements is the commercial interests of manufacturers and distributors. Profit-driven motives often precede scientific evidence and consumer safety in an industry valued at billions of dollars globally. Misleading advertisements, exaggerated claims and cherry-picked testimonials are commonly used tactics to promote supplements and exploit consumer vulnerabilities. The consequences of online

misinformation about health supplements can be far-reaching and profound. Individuals misled by false or exaggerated claims may forgo evidence-based treatments, delay seeking medical advice, or experience adverse reactions due to improper use or dosage of supplements. Recent studies have shown significant repercussions for young people who consume dietary supplements that are marketed to reduce body fat or increase muscle mass. Consuming excessive fat-soluble vitamins, such as vitamins A, D, E and K, can cause the body to accumulate these vitamins, which can lead to toxicity. Toxic quantities of vitamin A, for instance, can induce symptoms such as lightheadedness, nausea and changes in the skin. In more severe situations, vitamin A poisoning can also cause damage to organs, such as the liver and bone discomfort. To counter the spread of misinformation about health supplements, it is essential to promote critical thinking skills and scientific literacy among consumers. Education and awareness campaigns can empower

individuals to question and evaluate the credibility of online sources, distinguish between reliable information and pseudoscience and make informed decisions about their health and wellness. People who share misinformation on social media should also be made accountable and dealt with severely. Social media platforms should invest in better content moderation tools, including AI and human moderators, to quickly detect and remove false information. Furthermore, stringent regulatory measures should be enforced against manufacturers propagating such misinformation. The manufacturers propagating such misinformations should be heavily penalised. The recent Supreme Court ruling against a prominent manufacturer to halt misleading advertisements claiming false cures is a positive step in this direction, but enforcement agencies must ensure proper implementation.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

Dogs that save human lives with devotion

On the one side is canine unconditional love and care; on the other, human beings are indifferent or cruel to animals, hurting and exploiting them

From Oregon in the United States comes the report of a dog saving the life of his owner through a combination of devotion, will and intelligence. As reported by several newspapers, a gentleman by the name of Brendan Garrett, who was driving a truck, failed to negotiate a curve in the road, went through the embankment and fell into a deep ravine. He was injured, as were two of the four dogs travelling with him. One the four, Blue, a whippet, who was obviously not injured, ran through the dense forest covering the ravine and, travelling a distance of nearly four miles, reached a campsite where a friend of Garrett was waiting for him.

On Blue's arrival, the friend, who had been worrying because of the delay in Garrett's arrival, feared that that something terrible had happened and alerted Garrett's brother, Tyree. The family mounted a search of the area and Tyree Brandon managed to see the truck lying deep inside the ravine. Brendan Garrett and the dog were rescued and treated. Needless to say, this was one of the numerous accounts of the loyalty and devotion the canines harbour towards humans who love and care for them, going to the extent of even dying for them. In this case, Blue has survived. He, however, ran the risk of being attacked by wild animals and run over by speeding vehicles, as he raced to the campsite. Recognition of the deep and loving ties with which dogs attach themselves with humans who care for them, is one side of the story. The other is how humans treat them. There are doubtless those who care deeply for their dogs and other animals kept as pets, regarding them as family members and even dying for them. There are others who believe that all animals have to be treated with dignity and consideration. There, however, are others who are indifferent or cruel to animals, killing, injuring, enslaving and exploiting them at will. The belief that animals are inferior to humans and are meant



for their benefit, has emerged from the Judeo-Christian theological tradition and the anthropocentric world view rooted in the Humanist philosophy of the classical Greeks. Aristotle wrote in *Politics* that nature made all animals for the sake of man and that it was permissible to enslave people who did not possess reason as it was to enslave animals. Saint Augustine wrote in *The City of God*, "When we read 'Thou shalt not kill', we do not understand this phrase to apply to bushes, because they have no sensation, nor to unreasoning animals that fly, walk or crawl, because they are not associated in a community with us by reason... Hence it is by a very just ordinance of the Creator that their life and death is subordinated to us." This attitude continued through history. In *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, Charles Patterson points out that like Aristotle, whose work he incorporated in his theology, Saint Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the greatest exponent of medieval Scholasticism, believed that only the reasoning part of the soul survived after death.



THERE ARE DOUBTLESS THOSE WHO CARE DEEPLY FOR THEIR DOGS AND OTHER ANIMALS KEPT AS PETS, REGARDING THEM AS FAMILY MEMBERS AND EVEN DYING FOR THEM

Since animals lacked the capacity to reason, he claimed that "their souls, unlike human souls, did not survive their death". The European Renaissance, which lasted from the late 14th century to the first half of the 16th century, and the Enlightenment, which flourished in the salons of Paris in the 18th, revived the full tradition of Greek humanism, parts of which were marginalised by scholasticism because these were not deemed compatible with Christian faith. The result was a new emphasis on rationality as the species attribute of humans as well as the affirmation of the latter's supreme position in the universe as expressed in the Greek sophist Protagoras's famous aphorism, "Man is the measure of all things." This led to a further relegation of the status of animals who are treated with unprecedented savagery in animal food processing industries, avoidable medical research, cosmetic products testing, savage torture during bullfighting and holding of jallikattu, and mindless displays of sadism. One sees the same process at work in India though its predominant spiritual heritage as

expressed in the Vedas, Upanishads, the great epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the Puranas, give an exalted position to non-human living beings and give them the same rights as humans. Swami Vivekananda summed up the essence of this heritage when he said in his seminal speech on Vedantism in Jaffna in January 1897. "In every man and in every animal, however weak or wicked, great or small, resides the same omnipresent, omniscient soul. The difference is not in the soul, but in the manifestation. Between me and the smallest animal, the difference is only in manifestation, but as a principle he is the same as I am, he is my brother, he has the same soul as I have. This is the greatest principle that India has preached. The talk of the brotherhood of man becomes in India the brotherhood of universal life, of animals, and of all life down to the little ants - all these are our bodies as our scripture says, "Thus the sage, knowing that the same Lord inhabits all bodies, will worship everybody as such." (The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DELHI'S TULIP MAKEOVER

Madam — Apropos the news story "Capital to plant over 9 lakh tulips to transform it into 'City of Flowers'", published on June 13, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, the initiative to plant over nine lakh exotic Tulips across Delhi is truly inspiring. This ambitious project aligns with Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena's vision of transforming Delhi into a "City of Flowers," reflecting a significant commitment to enhancing the city's aesthetic appeal. It's fascinating to note the rapid increase in the number of Tulips—from 1.5 lakh in 2022 to an impressive nine lakh this year. The widespread enthusiasm for these vibrant flowers, which will now adorn key areas such as the Parliament House and popular parks along the Yamuna riverbed, is heartening. Moreover, the decision to sell potted Tulips through various nurseries will allow more residents to participate in this beautification effort. This initiative not only promises to uplift the city's landscape but also fosters a sense of community and pride among Delhi's citizens. It's a beautiful step towards a greener and more colourful urban environment.

Reyansh Tiwari | Tirupati

MIFF'S GLOBAL FILM IMPACT

Madam — Regarding the news article "Spotlight on reality: MIFF's role in documentary cinema," released on June 12, here is my feedback. As an avid newspaper reader, I find the role of documentary film festivals incredibly significant in today's cinema landscape. Events like the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) offer a vital platform for non-fiction storytelling, highlighting real-life events, societal issues and diverse cultures. MIFF, one of Asia's oldest and most respected festivals, has evolved since its inception in 1990, now featuring global talent and embracing technological advancements. The upcoming 18th edition, with the innovative 'Documentary Film Bazaar', promises to connect filmmakers with international

Challenges of biannual admissions



Regarding the news article "DU, other institutions mull implementing biannual admission system from next year," released on June 13th, here is my reply. The proposal to implement a biannual admission system by the UGC is a promising step forward, though it comes with challenges. Delhi University and other institutions in the capital are considering this change, aiming

for a full roll-out in the future. While DU will start with a pilot project for a few courses in the next academic year, logistical constraints like additional infrastructure need addressing. Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University show cautious optimism but await necessary approvals from statutory bodies. State universities like IP University and Ambedkar University see potential benefits, including increased opportunities for students and better utilisation of resources. However, they acknowledge the need for more space, staff and faculty. Private universities like Lovely Professional University also support this initiative, highlighting its flexibility and accessibility for students. Overall, this move aligns Indian universities with international standards, potentially enhancing the educational landscape but requiring careful, phased implementation.

Siya Bhatia | Mangaluru

producers, enhancing the creation and distribution of documentaries. MIFF's educational workshops, discussions and masterclasses foster professional growth and provide audiences with deeper insights into documentary filmmaking. Such initiatives ensure MIFF's enduring relevance and influence, showcasing its commitment to promoting creativity and meaningful social discussions in the ever-changing global film landscape.

Khirabdi | Noida

MOBILE PHONE USAGE CONCERNS

Madam — Apropos the news story "The impact of mobile radiation on children," published on June 13, this is my response. Smartphones are incredibly versatile and indispensable in modern life, keeping us constantly connected. However, the impact of mobile phone usage on children raises growing concerns among parents, educators and health professionals. While these devices offer numerous benefits— instant communication, access to information and social connectivity—they pose significant risks, particularly for chil-

dren. Children's dependency on mobile phones can lead to addiction-like behaviours, impairing their engagement in other vital activities. The risks: eye strain, disrupted sleep from blue light, affecting melatonin. Excessive screen time can harm health. The mental and emotional toll is substantial, with high mobile phone usage linked to increased anxiety, depression and loneliness. It also hampers attention spans and academic performance while reducing face-to-face interactions essential for social skills and emotional intelligence development. To mitigate these risks, parents and guardians should encourage moderate and supervised use of mobile devices, employ hands-free options, limit screen time before bed and choose devices with lower SAR values to reduce radiation exposure. Balancing technology use is crucial to safeguard children's health and development.

Ananya Gupta | Amravati

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

GOD'S VARIED INTEREST IN HUMANITY

Performing welfare acts ensures no downfall in this or next world



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Is God interested in us? Yes, very much so. Because we, souls, are His parts. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 15.7) But it depends on where we are placed in the human hierarchy. From what I have learnt, we can classify all humans into six main categories. Starting from the top, devotees of God are most dear to God. Lord Krishna States, "I am similarly inclined towards all beings; no one is hateful for me and no one is dear. However, those who worship Me with devotion, they are in Me and I am also in them." (9.29) This means that devotees of God have God in their hearts and similarly, God keeps them in His heart. Good examples of great devotees of God are Adi Shankaracharya and Vivekananda. What does God do for them? He liberates them. Such persons preach what they have learnt and realised. Lord Krishna States, "No one other than him among men pleases Me more and there will be no one other than him who is dear to Me on the earth. (18.68-69)

The next category is God's 'nimitta' (instruments), as Arjuna was. What do they do? They carry out God's instructions, as Arjuna did, by fighting to uphold dharma. What does God do for them? He becomes 'karta' (doer) in their lives. (11.33) And they are rewarded with heaven after death. But they must return to earth after exhausting their pious karmas (acts). (9.21) The third category of human beings is social workers, those engaged in the welfare of others. Lord Krishna has cited the example of King Janaka in the Bhagavad-Geeta in this connection. (3.20) There are many in the recent past like Hanuman Prasad Poddar.



The fourth category is good people, those mostly in the mode of goodness. Such persons have brightness and knowledge in all their senses; they are always doing what is right with their minds and senses. (14.11) Then come philanthropists, who are kind enough to donate. What they feel they should do is help others, who are not so blessed. Such people not only bring up the deprived but also in some ways follow Lord Krishna's instruction to not be so attached to the fruits of action. (18.9) Such actions ensure good karmaphalas in their next birth, which help them to be pleasant. The fifth category comprises common people, primarily driven by passion, living to survive. They constitute the foundational fabric of society, reincarnating repeatedly. God is very interested in the first three categories, as detailed in the Geeta. Highly advanced devotees are freed from the painful cycle of birth and death. (12.7) Imagine being in the womb of a mother for nine long months where there is hardly any movement and of course no interaction. Exalted individuals embody God consciousness, dedicating themselves primarily to spiritual acts and preaching. God selects those inclined to serve humanity, nurturing them from youth. Such souls are protected from self-destructive behaviors, guided onto virtuous paths. Social workers follow, benefiting humanity, assured by God: "Performing welfare acts ensures no downfall in this or the next world." God empowers all those who are good and mean well. For example, if someone wishes to invent something, which will benefit mankind, God helps him, because the source is God only. Preachers are helped by providing the needed knowledge. Many famous writers have admitted that God dictates and they write. Help is extended to those aiding others, akin to 'Siddha purushas' (exalted beings). Spiritual fundraisers also gain empowerment. How else can mortals amass billions? God, impartial yet partial to surrendered devotees, keeps them in mind. Then, dharma is very dear to God, because dharma is the bedrock upon which His creation rests. The conclusion is: you start taking shelter from God or at least be desirous to help others. God will take note of you. Then, the sky is the limit, as detailed herein.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

The robustness of India's political system



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The recent Indian parliamentary elections underscore the resilience and maturity of the country's democratic processes, reflecting the electorate's nuanced choices



Civil society requires an acceptance of rules, regulations and practices for the orderly conduct of affairs. These rules, regulations and practices may or may not be documented but they are generally composed of items which everyone agrees to confirm. A commonly referred example is the fact that the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution, yet it manages to conduct its affairs in a fairly orderly fashion. This requires a great deal of self-regulation and the ability to allow matters to function together, even in disagreement. This enables the orderly conduct of affairs with or without agreement and with mutual respect. It is a significant achievement. Compared to this, there are some countries with written constitutions that find it difficult to conduct their affairs in an orderly manner and often have to resort to courts. Appealing to the courts itself is an acceptable method of conflict resolution, even though it may be seen as a less evolved order than working with mutual agreement. The ability to manage oneself and manage disagreements is a significant constituent trait of civil society. In extreme cases, withdrawal from participation is known to happen, but this needs to be an exception rather than the rule. Put simply, agreeing to disagree is a gentlemanly art which only the evolved can practice. Together with this, the use of temperate language and polite methods of disagree-



CIVIL SOCIETY REQUIRES ACCEPTANCE OF RULES, REGULATIONS AND PRACTICES FOR ORDERLY CONDUCT, EVEN WITHOUT WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION, SHOWCASING SELF-REGULATION AND MUTUAL RESPECT

ment are inherent parts of civil society. Loose talk and abrasive postures can, of course, happen, but they do credit to nobody and become an indicator of a lower level of evolution. The recent elections for the parliament are a tell-tale story of the State of health of Indian political processes. On one hand, it is a resounding testimony to the fairness of the Indian electoral process and the sheer maturity of political choices. It truly reflects the thinking of the electorate, who went to record one's views in a matter most consistent with the individual's judgement and inclination. Such large-scale observance of the peaceful exercise of political choices can and should fill with joy any one's thinking and observation. That being said and done, there are other actions which need thought and some better understanding of the causative factors. That some victors of the electoral process, even if they otherwise had the credentials, did not make it to the cabinet is an understandable aberration. There is no one's 'right' to be in the cabinet and if the Prime Minister, in his inherent prerogative, did not deem it so, he exercised a conscious choice. Similarly, the inclusion of some

who lost the election in the cabinet is also justifiable under prime-ministerial prerogative. An example being cited is a former Congressman who lost the election, under the BJP ticket, taking oath as a minister. Another interesting case is of a BJP functionary in Kerala (the General Secretary of the BJP there) without being a member of any of the two houses of Parliament, taking oath as a minister. From a particular State, eight ministers were chosen, but two veterans, former members of the different era cabinets of the party, notwithstanding their success in the election, lost out for a cabinet berth. Examples are many, but they all carry the stamp of prime-ministerial prerogative. A gentleman who was a minister in the outgoing Government has found a place in Modi 3.0 despite losing the election. This particular gentleman, as noted above, was not only a minister in the outgoing Government and lost the election (he has at least the redeeming feature of being a member of the Rajya Sabha). There have been some negative press reports and commentaries on such examples. It does not help a cause. Mounting a telescope on a micro-

scope to detect departures and deviations from what one believes should be the norm of cabinet-making in a parliamentary system, cannot be accepted as an algorithm of decision-making. No rule or regulation can be followed 100 per cent in all exceptions and this is what judgment and prerogatives are all about. By and large, the ministry formation of 70+ has been a remarkable achievement of balance and poise. Whether it be the case of Ravi Shankar Prasad/Rajiv Pratap Rudy/L Murugan/Rajiv Chandrasekhar, whether for inclusion in the cabinet or exclusion, not too much can be made out of such decisions. A case can be cited of a veteran BJP leader from Gujarat who took the oath in the first and second Modi's Government and won this election but did not make it to the cabinet. Such decisions are to be taken in stride and accepted for what they are worth. It can be rightly claimed that constituting a 70+ ministerial house is a major feat and it has been achieved with consummate artistry. It is one more testimony, if any, be needed to the maturity of the Indian political process. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

Modi's third term to drive India's global diplomacy

Modi 3.0 advances India's global presence with robust diplomacy, strategic alliances and a renewed national identity focus

On June 4, the results for the Indian Lok Sabha elections 2024 started coming in. For many, the results came with an element of surprise, amidst the euphoria created by our Exit polls and expectations of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Despite no single party getting the majority, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP is set to form the next Government. Modi 3, as we may call it, led by Narendra Modi is well prepared to lead the nation once again. In the last decade, India has well-positioned itself as an influential global player. Led by the pro-active diplomacy of the Narendra Modi Government, India has made a shift from being a 'strategically reticent' State to a 'balancing power' in



ABHISHEK PRATAP SINGH

global politics. As an "aspirational power", India has refused to be drawn into any great power rivalries and has remained focussed on strengthening neighbourhood relations, soft power expansion, promoting humanitarian aid, building economic cooperation, fighting global terrorism and climate change, adherence to international laws and seeking UN security council

reforms. In an editorial written by the Prime Minister himself, he reiterated that India is being "acknowledged as a strong and important voice of the Global South." Modi 3.0 is likely to build on these continuities and achievements of foreign policy. In a complex world, Modi's third term faces new diplomatic challenges and opportunities. Alliance partners may influence policy, but key trends will shape India's foreign policy under the NDA Government. Firstly, the direction of India's Foreign policy cannot be understood without any reference to the question of our national identity which remains well aligned with our ancient past and glory. In the last ten years, our diplomacy

has invested its intellectual energy and political strength embracing the importance of our civilizational identity. And this identity is well shaped by the values and culture of the glorious Hindu past. Against the backdrop of coalition partners, it would be interesting to see if this question of civilizational identity has to emulate any sub-national diplomacy chore given the TDP's role in the Government and its style of politics and pride in Telugu identity. For the BJP and Narendra Modi, the call for a resurgent India is well shaped and defined by our core and united civilizational identity. Secondly, the role of foreign policy will be critical in Modi 3 in terms of building political alliances and economic part-



nerships, that may well align with our major policy goals as we drive towards 'building Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047. Diplomacy is crucial for achieving Government goals in the global world. Market reforms, free trade agreements, digital infrastructure upgrades and energy security are essential for our economic resilience

and global relevance. Thirdly, it would be interesting to see India's diplomatic manoeuvring and great power engagements as we keep pushing for a multipolar world order. India's relationship with the United States is likely to deepen further, shaped by strategic convergence between both on concerns over China's assertiveness and developments in the Indo-Pacific region. Modi 3 will focus on strong India-US ties, people-to-people connections, business, science/tech and strategic cooperation. India will assert national interests confidently, as seen with Ukraine and Doklam. Emphasising 'neighbourhood policy', India seeks to improve regional connectivity and trade, shown by its \$4

billion aid to Sri Lanka during the 2022 crisis. Leaders from neighbouring countries are invited to the NDA Government's oath ceremony, underscoring regional partnerships despite challenges. Lastly, managing relations with China is not going to be an easy cakewalk for foreign policy under Modi 3. BJP's election manifesto very clearly pledged to "accelerate the development of robust infrastructure" along the two countries' border. Amidst the growing trust deficit, India fully recognises the potential threat of aggressive and resurgent China. The electoral campaign also witnessed the use of a 'China card' by the opposition against the BJP. How diplomacy comes out of this pause in bilateral

relations will be an enquiring concern under the new Government. We need to find a new equilibrium in its ties with China while building our defence capabilities and strengthening strategic with like-minded States. In the given scenario, diplomacy under Modi 3 is poised for continuity and comprehensive foreign policy reforms, strengthening strategic alliances and India's leading role in the Global South. Moreover, India's role in global politics is set to expand and evolve, as India strives to be a pivotal player on the world stage. (The author is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Delhi; his views are personal)

Putin pledges truce if Ukraine exits occupied areas, drops NATO bid

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin promised Friday to “immediately” order a cease-fire in Ukraine and begin negotiations if Kyiv started withdrawing troops from the four regions annexed by Moscow in 2022 and renounced plans to join NATO. Such a deal appears a nonstarter for Kyiv, which wants to join the military alliance and has demanded that Russia withdraw its troops from all of its territory. There was no immediate comment from Ukraine on Putin’s proposal. “We will do it immediately,” Putin said

in a speech at the Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow. His remarks came as leaders of the Group of Seven leading industrialised nations met in Italy and as Switzerland prepared to host scores of world leaders — but not from Moscow — this weekend to try to map out first steps toward peace in Ukraine. Putin said his proposal is aimed at a “final resolution” of the conflict in Ukraine rather than “freezing it,” and stressed that the Kremlin is “ready to start negotiations without delay.” Broader demands for peace that the Russian leader listed included Ukraine’s non-nuclear status, restrictions on its

military force and protecting the interests of the Russian-speaking population in the country. All of these should become part of “fundamental international agreements,” and all Western sanctions against Russia should be lifted, Putin said. “We’re urging to turn this tragic page of history and to begin restoring, step-by-step, restore the unity between Russia and Ukraine and in Europe in general,” he said. Putin’s remarks represented a rare occasion in which he clearly laid out his conditions for ending the war in Ukraine, but it didn’t include any new demands. The Kremlin has said before

that Kyiv should recognise its territorial gains and drop its bid to join NATO. Russia doesn’t fully control neither of the four regions it illegally annexed in 2022, but Putin insisted Friday that Kyiv should withdraw from them entirely and essentially cede them to Moscow within their administrative borders. In Zaporizhzhia in the south-east, Russia still doesn’t control the region’s namesake administrative capital of 700,000 people, and in the neighbouring Kherson region, Moscow withdrew from Kherson’s biggest city and capital of the same name in November 2022.

G7 leaders tackle issue of migration

AP ■ BARI (ITALY)

Leaders of the Group of Seven leading industrialised nations are turning their attention to migration on the second day of their summit Friday, seeking ways to combat trafficking and increase investment in countries from where migrants start out on often life-threatening journeys. The gathering in a luxury resort in Italy’s southern Puglia region is also discussing other major topics, such as financial support for Ukraine, the war in Gaza, artificial intelligence and climate change, as well as China’s industrial policy and economic security. But some divisions also appeared to emerge over the wording of the summit’s final declaration, with disagreement reported over the inclusion of a reference to abortion. Migration is of particular interest to summit host Italy, which lies on one of the major routes into the European Union for people fleeing war and poverty in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Right-wing Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, known for her hard-line stance on the issue, has been keen to increase investment and funding for African nations as a means of reducing migratory pressure on Europe. Italy “wanted to dedicate ample space to another continent that is fundamental to the future of all of us, which is Africa, with its difficulties, its opportunities,” Meloni said at the summit opening Thursday. “Linked to Africa, and not only to Africa, there is another fundamental issue that Italy has placed at the center of the

presidency, which is the issue of migration, the increasingly worrying role that trafficking organizations are assuming, clearly exploiting the desperation of human beings,” she said. Meloni has a controversial five-year deal with neighboring Albania for the Balkan country to host thousands of asylum-seekers while Italy processes their claims. She has also spearheaded the “Mattei Plan” for Africa, a continentwide strategy to increase economic opportunities at home and so discourage migration to Europe. More than 22,000 people have arrived in Italy by sea so far in 2024, according to UNHCR figures. In 2023, more than 157,000 arrived, and nearly 2,000 died or went missing while attempting the perilous Mediterranean crossing. The United States has also been struggling with a growing number of migrants at its southern border. President Joe Biden introduced new policies to curb migration after a bill he tried to get through Congress failed to pass. However, immigrant rights advocates filed lawsuits on Thursday over the new policies, and it is unclear whether they will be able to withstand the legal challenges in the US courts. Tackling migration “is a common challenge,” European Council President Charles Michel said after arriving at the summit. “This is the route that we intend, together with our partners, to put in place: this coalition to fight against the smugglers, these criminal groups which are abusing (vulnerable

people) to make money and to destabilize regions and countries across the world,” he added. Apart from the G7 nations of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the U.S., the Italian hosts have also invited several African leaders — Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Kenyan President William Ruto and Tunisian President Kais Saied — to press Meloni’s migration and development initiatives. Pope Francis will also become the first pontiff to address a G7 summit when he delivers a speech on artificial intelligence Friday. Other invitees include Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The summit opened Thursday with a strong show of support for Kyiv: an agreement reached on a U.S. proposal to back a \$50 billion loan to Ukraine using frozen Russian assets as collateral. Biden also signed a bilateral security agreement with Zelenskyy on Thursday evening, aiming to send a signal to Russia of American resolve in supporting Kyiv. Describing it as a “truly historic day,” Zelenskyy said the agreement was “on security and thus on the protection of human life.” But some cracks appeared among the G7 leaders, with French President Emmanuel Macron deploring a lack of reference to abortion in the draft of the summit’s final document.

Explosions in Swiss garage leave 2 dead

AP ■ BERLIN

Two people have been found dead after explosions in an underground parking garage at an apartment building in northern Switzerland and 11 others sustained minor injuries, authorities said Friday. Swiss media reported that the explosions created a large cloud of smoke that was visible from afar and the explosions were heard from well outside the town. Police said that the fire at one point spread to several floors of the building. Several buildings were evacuated. The explosions rocked the Nussbaumen neighbourhood of the small town of Obersiggenthal, northwest of Zurich, at about 7 pm Thursday. Police in Aargau canton (state) said they appeared to have been caused by an accident, but didn’t give more details.



US President Joe Biden and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, right, meet for bilateral talks at the G7 on Friday in Borgo Egnazia, near Bari, southern Italy. AP/PTI

Kuwait building blaze caused by electrical short circuit

PTI ■ DUBAI/KUWAIT CITY

The death toll of Indians killed in the massive fire in Kuwait has risen to 46 with one more person succumbing to injuries as authorities said that an electrical short circuit in the room of the guard on the ground floor of the building caused the blaze that killed 50 people. Most deaths were due to smoke inhalation while residents in the six-storey building were sleeping when the fire broke out early Wednesday in Kuwait’s southern Ahmadi Governorate. The building was home to 196 migrant workers, mostly Indians. “One of the injured died” overnight, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Abdullah Al-Yahya told reporters, raising the death toll of Indians to 46. Three other deceased are Filipinos and the identity of one of the victims has not been established, the Kuwait Times newspaper reported on Friday. The investigation team of the fire department said on Thursday that the fire was caused by an electric short circuit in the room of the build-

ing guard and spread to other places. The guard’s room is located on the ground floor. Citing security sources, the paper said that there were 179 workers inside the building when the fire broke out, while 17 were outside. Of the 196 residents, 175 are Indians, 11 are Filipinos and the rest are from Thailand, Pakistan and Egypt. According to an official, many of the victims suffocated while trying to run down the stairs because they were filled with smoke. He added that the victims could not go to the rooftop because the door was locked. The Accident Investigation Department’s teams concluded their technical inspections, which included analyzing samples of fire debris and conducting interviews with witnesses present during the incident, English language daily Arab Times reported, citing a press statement. Their investigation determined that the fire originated in the security guard’s room located on the ground floor of the six-storey building, the paper said. The specialists from the Investigations Department

meticulously examined the site to ascertain the exact cause of the fire. Their findings unequivocally pointed to an electrical short circuit as the root cause, the statement said. This discovery underscores the importance of adhering to electrical safety protocols to prevent such tragic incidents in the future, it added. Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah, serving as the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Minister of Defence, on Thursday headed an overall inspection campaign on illegal properties in many areas in Kuwait. The minister, accompanied by the Minister of Public Works and Minister of Municipality Dr. Nora Al-Mashaan began their inspection campaign in Al-Mangaf, Al-Mahboubah, Khaitan, and Jileeb Al-Shuyoukh, the paper said. The Interior Ministry, Kuwait Municipality, Kuwait Fire Force, Ministry of Electricity and Water and the Public Authority for Manpower took part in the campaign. Kuwait Municipality said on Thursday its teams had shut

down 568 irregular basements of residential and commercial buildings in the past ten months. The personnel issued 1,639 citations and “blocked” 596 properties. Moreover, up to 189 basements packed with various unlicensed items had been evacuated. Meanwhile, a Kuwaiti citizen and several foreigners have been arrested in connection with charges of manslaughter and causing injuries due to negligence in security and safety measures following the fire incident. “The Public Prosecution has mandated the provisional detention of a Kuwaiti citizen and several expats in connection with charges of manslaughter and causing injuries due to negligence in security and safety measures, following a fire incident in the Al-Mangaf area,” the paper reported. Kuwait’s public prosecutor has launched an investigation into the incident. The probe aims to uncover the circumstances behind the incident and what might have triggered the deadly fire, the public prosecutor said on X.

South Africa’s Parliament is choosing president in a vote with unprecedented uncertainty

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

For the first time in 30 years, South African lawmakers will elect a president on Friday with the outcome not a mere formality. Cyril Ramaphosa is seeking a second term as leader of Africa’s most industrialised economy but his African National Congress party has been weakened after losing its long-held majority in an election last month and he will need the support of other parties if he is to return as president. The ANC is hoping that a general coalition agreement with others — particularly the main opposition Democratic Alliance — will hold and they will back Ramaphosa’s reelection. The ANC needs lawmakers from parties that were once its main political foes to now vote for Ramaphosa and continue the ANC’s three-decade hold on the presidency. The ANC announced late Thursday night that it had a coalition agreement in principle with the DA and other smaller parties, but ANC Secretary-General Fikile



South African president Cyril Ramaphosa raises his hand as he is sworn in as a member of Parliament ahead of an expected vote by lawmakers to decide if he is reelected as leader of the country in Cape Town, South Africa on Friday. At right is Pemmy Majodina, an ANC lawmaker. AP/PTI

Mbalula said the final details of the agreement were still being worked out. Crucially, he did not say there was an agreement among those coalition partners for their lawmakers to vote for Ramaphosa in Parliament, even if he said that’s what the ANC hoped would happen. The DA, the second largest party in Parliament behind the ANC and which has a potentially decisive number of lawmakers, said talks on the

exact details had continued through the night and into early Friday and there was no signed agreement just hours before Parliament was due to convene at 10 am local time. The 71-year-old Ramaphosa is expected to be reelected given no other candidate has been put forward, but the country was on a political knife-edge ahead of the first sitting of Parliament since the landmark May 29 election. He could

have a smooth passage to a second term if he is the only candidate nominated, in which case he would be elected automatically. But if other candidates are nominated by other parties, a vote follows. The ANC was also facing a deadline to cobble together a coalition agreement of some sort given Parliament must sit for the first time and vote for the president within 14 days of the election results being declared. The deadline is Sunday, and Parliament was sitting on Friday to meet that deadline. South Africa has not faced this level of political uncertainty since the ANC swept to power in the first all-race election in 1994 that ended nearly a half-century of white minority rule under the apartheid system of racial segregation. The ANC had held a clear majority in Parliament ever since then, meaning elections for president were formalities and every South African leader since has been from the ANC, starting with Nelson Mandela. Last month’s election changed that as the ANC’s share of the vote slumped to 40 per cent.

Muslims start Hajj against backdrop of destructive Israel-Hamas war

AP ■ MINA (SAUDI ARABIA)

In sweltering temperatures, Muslim pilgrims in Mecca converged on a vast tent camp in the desert on Friday, officially opening the annual Hajj pilgrimage. Ahead of their trip, they circled the cube-shaped Kaaba in the Grand Mosque, Islam’s holiest site. More than 1.5 million pilgrims from around the world have already amassed in and around Mecca for the Hajj, and the number was still growing as more pilgrims from inside Saudi Arabia joined. Saudi authorities expected the number of pilgrims to exceed 2 million this year. This year’s Hajj came against the backdrop of the raging war in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Palestinian militants, which pushed the entire Middle East to the brink of a regional war between Israel and its allies on one side and Iran-backed militant groups on the other. Palestinians in the coastal enclave of Gaza were not able to travel to Mecca for Hajj this year because of the closure of the Rafah crossing in May when Israel extended its

ground offensive to the strips southern city of Rafah on the border with Egypt. Palestinian authorities said 4,200 pilgrims from the occupied West Bank arrived in Mecca for Hajj. Saudi authorities said 1,000 more from the families of Palestinians killed or wounded in the war in Gaza also arrived to perform Hajj at the invitation of King Salman of Saudi Arabia. The 1,000 invitees were already outside Gaza — mostly in Egypt — before closure of the Rafah crossing. “We are deprived of (performing) Hajj because the crossing is closed, and because of the raging wars and destruction,” said Amna Abu Mutlaq, a 75-year-old Palestinian woman from Gaza’s southern city of Khan Younis who had planned to perform Hajj this year. “They (Israel) deprived us from everything.” This year’s Hajj also saw Syrian pilgrims travelling to Mecca on direct flights from Damascus for the first time in more than a decade. The move was part of an ongoing thaw in relations between Saudi Arabia and conflict-stricken Syria. Syrians in rebel-held areas used to cross



the border into neighbouring Turkey in their exhausting trip to Mecca for Hajj. “This is the natural thing: Pilgrims go to Hajj directly from their home countries,” said Abdel-Aziz al-Ashqar, a Syrian coordinator of the group of pilgrims who left Damascus this year for Hajj. The pilgrimage is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, and all Muslims are required to make the five-day Hajj at least once in their lives if they are physically and financially able to do it. It is a moving spiritual experience for pilgrims who believe it absolves sins and brings them closer to God, while uniting the world’s more than 2 billion Muslims. It’s also a chance to pray for peace in

many conflict-stricken Arab and Muslim countries, including Yemen and Sudan, where more than a year of war between rival generals created the world’s largest displacement crisis. For many Muslims, the Hajj is the only major journey that they made in their life. Some spend years saving up money and waiting for a permit to embark on the journey in their 50s and 60s after they raised their children. The rituals during the Hajj largely commemorate the Quran’s accounts of Prophet Ibrahim, his son Prophet Ismail and Ismail’s mother Hajar — or Abraham and Ismael as they are named in the Bible. Male pilgrims wear an ihram, two unstitched sheets of white cloth that resemble a shroud, while women dress conservatively, loose-fitting clothing with headscarves, and forgo makeup and perfume. They have been doing the ritual circuit around the cube-shaped Kaaba, counter-clockwise in the seven-minaret Grand Mosque since arriving in Mecca over recent days. Saudi authorities have adopted security restrictions in and

around Mecca, with checkpoints set up on roads leading to the city to prevent those who don’t have Hajj permits from reaching the holy sites. Security authorities arrested many people who attempted to take pilgrims to Mecca who didn’t have Hajj permits, said Lt. Gen. Muhammad al-Bassami, head of Hajj Security Committee. Most of them were expelled from the country, while travel agents faced jail for up to six months, according to the Interior Ministry. On Friday, the pilgrims made their way to Mina, officially opening the Hajj. They then will move for a daylong vigil Saturday on Mount Arafat, a desert hill where the Prophet Muhammad is said to have delivered his final speech, known as the Farewell Sermon. Healthy pilgrims make the trip on foot, others use bus or train. The time of year when the Hajj takes place varies, given that Hajj is set for five days in the second week of Dhu al-Hijjah, the last month in the Islamic lunar calendar. Most of the Hajj rituals are held outdoors with little if any shade. When it falls in the sum-

mer months, temperatures can soar to over 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit). The Health Ministry has cautioned that temperatures in the holy sites could reach 48 Celsius (118 Fahrenheit). Many pilgrims carried umbrellas against the burning sun. After Saturday’s warship in Arafat, pilgrims will travel a few kilometers (miles) to a site known as Muzdalifa to collect pebbles that they will use in the symbolic stoning of pillars representing the devil back in Mina. Pilgrims then return to Mina for three days, coinciding with the festive Eid al-Adha holiday, when financially able Muslims around the world slaughter livestock and distribute the meat to the poor. Afterwards, they return to Mecca for final circumambulation, known as Farewell Tawaf. In recent years, the annual pilgrimage has returned to its monumental scale after three years of heavy restrictions because of the coronavirus pandemic. Last year, more than 1.8 million pilgrims performed Hajj, approaching the 2019 level when more than 2.4 million pilgrims participated in the pilgrimage.

UN leaders, aid groups seek release of 17 staffers held by Yemen's rebels

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The heads of six UN agencies and three international humanitarian organisations issued a joint appeal Thursday to Yemen's Houthi rebels for the immediate release of 17 members of their staff who were recently detained along with many others also being held by the Iranian-backed group.

Their appeal was echoed by a statement from several dozen nations and the European Union ahead of a UN Security Council meeting on Yemen where UN special envoy Hans Grundberg said the Houthis were holding all those detained in the crackdown incommunicado. The Houthis said Monday they had arrested members of an "American-Israeli spy network," days after detaining the staffers from the UN and aid organisations.

Major General Abdulhakim al-Khayewani, head of the Houthis' intelligence agency, announced the arrests, saying the spy network had first operated out of the US Embassy in the capital Sanaa. After it was closed in 2015 following the

Houthi takeover of Sanaa and northern Yemen, he said, they continued "their subversive agenda under the cover of international and UN organisations."

He did not say how many people were arrested. Houthi authorities issued what they purported to be videotaped confessions by 10 Yemenis, several of whom said they were recruited by the US Embassy. They did not include any of the UN employees who were arrested. The Houthis' claims could not be independently verified.

The statement from the heads of the UN and aid organisations whose staffers are being held called their detentions "unprecedented — not only in Yemen but globally."

They asked the Houthis to confirm the exact whereabouts of those detained and for immediate access, citing international humanitarian law which requires all parties to armed conflict to respect and protect humanitarian personnel.

"The targeting of humanitarian, human rights, and develop-

ment workers in Yemen must stop," the joint statement said. "All those detained must be immediately released."

The statement from UN member nations, read by British Ambassador Barbara Woodward outside the Security Council chamber, strongly condemned the detentions since June 7, demanded the release of all those being held, and expressed grave concern at the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen. The countries expressed deep concern at the risk of delivering humanitarian aid in Yemen, and called for unimpeded access for all humanitarian workers.

The Houthis have been engaged in a civil war with Yemen's internationally recognized government, backed by a Saudi-led coalition, since 2014, when they took control of Sanaa and most of the north.

Grundberg, the UN envoy who has been trying to get both sides back to the negotiating table to end the conflict, appealed not only for the release of the 13 recently detained U.N. personnel —

including one from his staff — but for four other U.N. staffers being held incommunicado — two since 2021 and two since 2023.

"The United Nations is present to serve Yemenis," he told the Security Council. "Such arbitrary detentions are not the expected signal of an actor who is seeking a mediated solution to the conflict."

The detentions came as the Houthis have been targeting shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, their administration has faced increased financial pressure, and the group has cracked down on dissent at home, including the recent sentencing of 45 people to death. Grundberg expressed concern at the 45 death sentences, reiterating the United Nations' opposition to the death penalty.

It's unclear what exactly sparked the latest detentions. Former employees of the US Embassy in Sanaa, which shuttered in 2015, also have been detained and held by the Houthis.

Pak PM invites former ally JUI-F chief to join ruling coalition

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has invited his former ally JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman to become a part of the ruling coalition led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and play a role in resolving the political tensions in the country, according to a media report on Friday.

Sharif, who is heading a coalition government supported by Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party and other smaller parties, visited the residence of the Chief Ulema-e-Islam (F) Jamiat, to enquire about his well-being on

Thursday, the Dawn newspaper reported.

The 72-year-old premier also proposed the formation of a committee to address the prevailing political issues and asked Maulana Rehman to join the ruling coalition.

Quoting a source in the PM Office, the newspaper said the JUI-F leader was asked to join the ruling alliance and play a role in a proposed committee to resolve political tension prevailing in the country. However, Maulana Rehman refused to join the government, a JUI-F spokesperson said.

"I don't think it's true (that the JUI-F will join the government). Seeking power is not a

part of our politics. We already had a better offer before the formation of the present government," the spokesperson claimed.

Maulana Rehman led an opposition alliance, namely the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), during the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government of Imran Khan. The PDM later formed a government at the Centre, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, after the ouster of Imran Khan's government in a vote of no-confidence in April 2022.

The fissures within Pakistan's ruling coalition government have surfaced in recent days with the PPP, a key ally,

accusing the ruling PML-N of sidelining its inputs in the preparation of the annual budget and questioning if the Shehbaz Sharif-led government still values its support.

The PPP expressed its reservations in its parliamentary committee meeting presided over by the party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Tuesday, ahead of the presentation of the budget for the financial year 2024-25 in Parliament.

The PPP has blamed the PML-N government for not taking any inputs from the party while preparing the annual budget and wondered if it still wanted the ally's support.

PTI-picked negotiator willing to hold talks with Sharif, Zardari

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Mahmood Khan Achakzai, the chairman of the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), who was picked by Imran Khan's party to lead the negotiations with Pakistan's ruling coalition, on Friday expressed willingness to hold talks with PML-N president Nawaz Sharif and PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari, according to a media report on Friday.

Earlier this week, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of jailed former premier Khan picked Achakzai to lead the negotiations via the opposition alliance's platform Tehreek-e-Tahafuz Ayeen (TTAP), the Geo News reported.

Achakzai, while speaking on a news programme, said Pakistan needs a "strong army" and clarified that his movement is not against the military. "We have raised the banner for the supremacy of democracy and the Constitution," he added.

The 75-year-old, who also stood in the presidential elections in March as a candidate of the Sunni Ittehad Council against Asif Ali

Zardari, warned that if "Zardari and Nawaz Sharif do not join us, a time will come when they will not be able to step out of their homes".

The PKMAP chief talked about the growing public frustration over the rising cost of living and said, "People are angry. They are facing trouble to make both ends meet."

Achakzai enjoys the full authority from the PTI to lead the talks with the government which will reportedly centre around releasing incarcerated leaders and workers, electoral transparency, and the constitutional boundaries of the judiciary, parliament and other state institutions, Geo News reported.

Earlier this week, PTI chairman Gohar Khan said Imran Khan has given a green signal for talks with the government and is "ready to forgive" what has happened to him.

"We told the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder that dialogue is necessary, as the distance is widening. He agreed with us (on this)," Gohar told the media outside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

Lahore HC Chief Justice rues 'interference' in judiciary

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani high court chief justice on Friday claimed that he received written and verbal complaints about interference in the judiciary by a "few institutions" of the country, in an oblique reference to the powerful spy agencies.

Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad, while addressing a local bar association event in Rawalpindi, said it was a misfortune that the interference in judicial affairs began from the Moulvi Tamuzuddin case and was still ongoing. The judge was referring to the famous 1955 case when the top court ruled in favour of the then governor-general by rejecting a petition of the speaker of the Moulvi Tamuzuddin against the dissolution of the then Constituent Assembly by the governor-general.

"We receive letters, complaints and oral complaints that interference is being done in the judi-

ciary in which a few institutions — naming them is not appropriate — are involved," the chief justice said.

But he expressed confidence that the interference would soon come to an end. "I have full faith that this interference of the establishment in the judiciary will come to its end very soon," Justice Ahmad asserted.

The chief justice explained that he was making the claims because it was "part of my faith but also includes my experience" that such interference finally ends. He also said that he was glad that the judiciary was "fulfilling its responsibilities without any fear or greed" and referred to a recent claim of a sessions judge of an Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Sargodha about interference by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's intelligence agency. He said that the ATC judge in his complaint declared that he was not afraid of any of the incidents he allegedly faced.



People wade through a flooded road after storms overflowed the Pichilo River in Arauco province of Chile. AP/PTI

Shareholders approve USD 44.9b pay pack for Musk

AP ■ DETROIT

Tesla shareholders voted on Thursday to restore CEO Elon Musk's record USD 44.9 billion pay package that was thrown out by a Delaware judge earlier this year, sending a strong vote of confidence in his leadership of the world's largest electric vehicle maker.

The favourable vote doesn't necessarily mean that Musk will get the all-stock compensation anytime soon. The package is likely to remain tied up in the Delaware Chancery Court and Supreme Court for months as Tesla tries to overturn the Delaware judge's rejection.

Musk has raised doubts about his future with Tesla this year, writing on X, the social media platform he owns, that he wanted a 25 per cent stake in the company in order to stop him from taking artificial intelligence development elsewhere.

The higher stake is needed to control the use of AI, he has said.

Tesla also has struggled with falling sales and profit margins as demand for electric vehicles slows worldwide.

But at the company's annual meeting Thursday in Austin, Texas, Musk reassured shareholders that he will stick around, telling them he can't sell any stock in the compensation package for five years.

"It's not actually cash, and I can't cut and run, nor would I want to," he said.

The company said late Thursday that shareholders had voted for Musk's compensation plan, which initially was approved by the board and stockholders six years ago.

Tesla last valued the package at USD 44.9 billion in an April regulatory filing. It was once as much as USD 56 billion but has declined in value in tandem with Tesla's stock, which has dropped about 25 per cent so far this year.

Chancellor Kathleen St. Jude McCormick ruled in January in a shareholder's lawsuit that Musk essentially controlled the Tesla board when it ratified the package in 2018, and that it failed to fully inform shareholders who approved it the same year.

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No.-MD/SP6/H2/2022/639 Date:11/06/2024

Name of the work: Supply of 01 no. Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) (Drone) System for Paradip Port Authority including Installation, Commissioning, Certification, Test, Trial and Training for a period of five years (Comprehensive Warranty of 02 Years + Annual Maintenance Contract for 03 Years) including Buy Back. Estimated cost: Rs.1,36,15,000/- Plus GST. Last date & time of submission of tender through on-line bidding is 17:00 hours on 04/07/2024. Technical Bids shall be opened at 12:00 hours on 04/07/2024. For further details, please log on to the Website: <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.

Sd/- Deputy Conservator, Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/14/2024-2025 dtd.12.06.2024

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Chinese journalist who promoted #MeToo movement sentenced

AP ■ BEIJING

Supporters say a Chinese journalist who promoted women's rights as part of the country's nascent #MeToo movement has been sentenced to five years in prison on charges of incitement to subvert state authority, almost three years after she and an activist were detained.

The verdict provided to The Associated Press stated that Huang Xueqin would also face a fine of 100,000 yuan (USD 14,000), underscoring the ruling Communist Party's intolerance of any activism outside its control in a system whose upper echelons are dominated by men. China's #MeToo movement flourished briefly before being snuffed out by the government.

China often silences activists by holding them incommunicado for a long time and then sentencing them to prison.

Huang's release date was listed as September 18, 2026, accounting for her earlier detention. Co-defendant Wang Jianbing was sentenced to three years and six

months on the same charge. Wang is more known for his labour rights activity but also helped women report sexual harassment.

Huang and Wang's cases appear to have become intertwined as part of the most recent wave of a general crackdown on rights advocates, a trend that predates the #MeToo movement and includes previous incidents such as the 2015 detentions of women distributing pamphlets against sexual harassment on public transport.

Working as a freelance journalist, Huang helped spark China's first #MeToo case in 2018 when she publicised allegations of sexual harassment made by a graduate student against her Ph.D. supervisor at one of China's most prestigious universities.

Friends say that Huang and Wang disappeared on September 19, 2021, a day before Huang was scheduled to fly to the United Kingdom to start a master's degree program on gender violence and conflict at the University of Sussex.

They went on trial in September 2023.

The International Women's Media Foundation earlier gave Huang its Wallis Annenberg Justice for Women Journalists Award.

Supporters of Huang and Wang created a GitHub webpage to post case updates and share their thoughts. China is routinely listed by monitoring groups as among the top imprisoning nations of journalists.

Amnesty International's China Director Sarah Brooks issued a statement condemning Huang's conviction as an attack on women's advocacy in the People's Republic of China, which has long promoted the concept that "women hold up half the sky," but whose institutions remain dominated by men.

"These convictions will prolong their deeply unjust detention and have a further chilling effect on human rights and social advocacy in a country where activists face increasing state crackdowns," Brooks said in an emailed statement.

Niger's court lifts immunity of deposed Pres

AP ■ NIAMEY (NIGER)

Niger's highest court lifted the immunity of the country's democratically elected president, Mohamed Bazoum, nearly a year after he was overthrown by mutinous soldiers, his lawyer said Friday, opening the door for the military junta to prosecute him for alleged high treason.

Bazoum's lawyer, Reed Brody, made the announcement on Friday. Bazoum and his family have been under house arrest since a military coup that overthrew his rule last summer. The junta authorities said they planned to prosecute him for "high treason" and for undermining national security, and earlier this year initiated legal proceedings to lift his immunity in a newly created State Court, which became the country's highest judicial authority. Before Bazoum was forcibly removed from power, Niger was the West's last major security partner in the Sahel, the vast region south of the Sahara Desert that Islamic extremist groups have turned into a global terror hot spot.

Putin ratifies plan to jointly build lunar base with China

PTI ■ BEIJING

Russian President Vladimir Putin has approved a plan to jointly build the International Lunar Research Station with China, an ambitious space project which was announced previously by the two close neighbours.

The document connected with the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) was published on a Russian official legal information portal on Wednesday, Russia's state-run Sputnik news agency reported. The ILRS will consist of sec-

tions on the lunar surface, sections in lunar orbit and sections on Earth, and it will be built in two phases. Wu Weiren, chief designer of China's lunar exploration programme said in April this year. According to Wu, the first phase of the ILRS construction project will see a basic station built by 2035 in the lunar south pole region. The second phase will see the expansion of the station, set for completion by 2045, the official Xinhua news agency quoted Wu as saying.

Some 12 more countries and

international organisations have signed on to the ambitious initiative, Sergey Savelyev, deputy general director for International Cooperation at the Russian state space agency Roscosmos said, according to a report in China's state-run Global Times.

Earlier in March, the Russian government submitted to parliament's lower house a bill to ratify the agreement with China. The ratification comes days after the ascender of China's Change-6 probe took off from the lunar surface

carrying samples collected from the moon's far side earlier this month.

This was the first endeavour of its kind to collect the soil from this rarely explored terrain and is currently on its way back to the earth with the samples. The Change-6 probe, comprising an orbiter, a lander, an ascender and a returner — like its predecessor Change-5 — was launched on May 3. During his visit to China last month, Putin spoke of 'very interesting' plans for joint moon exploration with China.

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NA/12/23432/2023/34609 **Dy. General Manager (Purchase)**

Sensex, Nifty hit fresh lifetime highs on buying in blue chips HDFC Bank, Reliance

PTI ■ MUMBAI
 Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty hit their new closing lifetime highs on Friday, following buying in market heavyweights HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and Mahindra & Mahindra amid encouraging export data. However, foreign capital outflows amid lack of fresh triggers capped sharp gains, traders said. Rising for the third straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 181.87 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 76,992.77. During the day, it jumped 270.4 points or 0.35 per cent to 77,081.30. The NSE Nifty rallied 66.70 points or 0.29 per cent to hit a record closing high of 23,465.60. Intra-day, it rose 91.5 points or 0.39 per cent to hit a fresh all-time high of 23,490.40. On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark climbed 299.41 points or 0.39 per cent, while the Nifty advanced 175.45



points or 0.75 per cent. "There is a temporary blip in the market momentum, due to a lack of fresh triggers after the hawkish commentary from the US Fed, lowering the plausibility of a rate cut in the short-term. A near-term consolidation seems probable as domestic investors await cues from the upcoming union budget," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Among the 30 Sensex companies, Mahindra &

Mahindra, Titan, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries, UltraTech Cement, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, Tata Motors and Asian Paints were the biggest gainers. On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were among the major laggards. India's merchandise exports in May 2024 rose by 9 per cent to USD 38.13 billion, from USD 34.95 billion in the year-ago month, according to

government data released on Friday. Imports also increased by 7.7 per cent to USD 61.91 billion from USD 57.48 billion in May 2023. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.18 per cent, and smallcap index climbed 1.03 per cent. Among indices, industrials jumped 1.68 per cent, capital goods (1.62 per cent), telecommunication (1.31 per cent), auto (1.26 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.15 per cent) and realty (0.94 per cent). In contrast, IT and tech were the laggards. "Asian stocks were mixed on Friday as Japanese shares rose after the Bank of Japan surprised markets by signalling no near-term changes to its bond-buying programme, while Chinese markets were the worst performers for the day, hit by new European Union tariffs against the country's major electric vehicle makers," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities, said.

NSE chief cautions retail investors against derivatives trading

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National Stock Exchange (NSE) chief Ashishkumar Chauhan on Friday cautioned retail investors against trading in derivatives and suggested them to invest in equities through mutual fund route. He emphasised that trading in Futures & Options (F&O) derivatives should be limited to informed investors who can manage risk and comprehend the market. Recently, Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and chief economic advisor V Anantha Nageswaran flagged the growing risk of F&O trading for retail investors. In November 2023, Sebi chief Madhabi Puri Buch also cautioned investors against heavy bets on F&O. "Retail investors should not participate in F&O trading. They should invest in equities through mutual fund route," Chauhan, MD and CEO of NSE, said at an event here. He cautioned that while derivatives have their utility, it should only be traded by those



who fully understand the risks and have the capacity to manage them. Those lacking this understanding or risk appetite should avoid derivatives trading. Despite this, F&O trading continues to grow in popularity, driven by the potential for profit and the rising trading volumes. The segment's popularity is evident from its massive growth, with the monthly turnover in the F&O segment reaching Rs 8,740 lakh crore in

March 2024, compared to Rs 217 lakh crore in March 2019. At the same time, the average daily turnover in the equity cash segment was Rs 1 lakh crore, while the F&O segment saw an average daily turnover of about Rs 330 lakh crore. F&O trading involves contracts that derive their value from an underlying asset, such as stocks or commodities. Futures contracts obligate the buyer and seller to transact at a predetermined future date and price, while options give the holder the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell the asset at a set price within a specific period. These financial instruments are used for hedging risks, speculating on price movements, and arbitrage price differences. However, they come with significant risks, including leverage risk and market volatility, which can lead to substantial losses. F&O trading is largely being utilized as a speculative tool for quick profits in the stock market. However, the reality is that most retail investors are losing money. A study by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) revealed that 89 per cent of individual traders in the equity F&O segment suffered losses, with average losses of Rs 1.1 lakh in FY22. Additionally, there was an exponential increase in the F&O segment participation during the pandemic, with the total number of unique individual traders increasing from 7.1 lakh in FY19 to 45.24 lakh in FY21, the study noted. Earlier this month, Sebi proposed stricter norms for the entry of individual stocks in the derivatives segment. The new proposal is aimed at weeding out stocks with consistently low turnover from the F&O segment of the bourses. Moreover, Chauhan noted the growing participation of retail investors in the stock market. Asked about the much-awaited NSE IPO, he declined to comment on the matter. On the wishlist for the upcoming Union Budget, he said that Budget should be growth-oriented.

Sebi bats for tax benefits to firms investing in zero coupon zero principal bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To encourage social sector spending, markets regulator Sebi has suggested that the government should allow tax benefits to companies investing in zero coupon zero principal bonds issued by not-for-profit organisations listed at the social stock exchange. Talking to reporters here on Friday, Sebi's Whole Time Member Kamlesh Chandra Varshney said the regulator has already sent a proposal to the finance ministry and is hopeful of getting the approval. "We have given the proposal to the government that corporate entities who invest in ZCZPs should get the benefits of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). We are hopeful that the government will soon approve the proposal," Varshney said at an event organised by NSE on Friday. Moreover, the CBDT has already clarified that investors or donors buying such bonds will get the tax benefits under section 80G of Income Tax rules, he added. These measures will be pertinent towards inclusive growth of the social sector and will help build trust and



expand the donor base for the organisations, he said. The 'zero-coupon, zero-principal' are instruments for donating money to non-profit organisations listed on the SSE. The Social Stock Exchange (SSE) is a novel concept in India and such a bourse is meant to serve private and non-profit sector providers by channelling greater capital to them. The idea was floated by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Union Budget 2019-20 speech. SSE is a separate segment of the existing stock exchanges that bring together social enterprises and donors, facilitates funding and growth of social enterprises and enables mechanisms to ensure robust standards of social

impact and financial reporting. At present, 8-9 NPOs are listed on the SSE with a collective fundraising of close to Rs 11 crore and now one NPO is soon going to raise Rs 14 crore alone through the platform, NSE MD and CEO Ashishkumar Chauhan said here. "We believe that SSE has a great future ahead in India as the government is committed to supporting the platform, as this will help in the democratisation of investments," he said. Moreover, Sebi has been taking measures to widen the participation of subscribers at the social stock exchange. In November, the regulator reduced the issue size of ZCZP from Rs 1 crore to Rs 50 lakh. It has also reduced the minimum application size for donors to Rs 10,000 from Rs 2 lakh. Last month, Sebi asked social enterprises, which have registered or mobilised funds through SSE, to submit an 'annual impact report' for the financial year 2023-24 to such bourse by October-end. The annual impact report to SSE captures the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the social impact generated by the social enterprise.

Rupee falls 2 paise to close at 83.56 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled 2 paise lower at 83.56 (provisional) against US dollar on Friday, as positive domestic markets and a decline in crude oil prices supported the rupee, while strong US Dollar and FII outflows capped sharp gains. Forex traders said rupee was seen resilient against the dollar, on hawkish Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting and commentary by the Fed Chair. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.54 and finally settled for the day lower by 2 paise at 83.56 (provisional) against the American currency. On Thursday, the rupee settled for the day lower by 6 paise at 83.54 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on the strong US Dollar and weak global markets. However, a positive tone in the domestic markets and expectations of fresh foreign inflows may support the



rupee at lower levels," Anuj Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas — said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 105.61, higher by 0.40 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.12 per cent to USD 82.65 per barrel. On the domestic macroeconomic front, India's merchandise exports in May 2024 rose 9 per cent to USD 38.13 billion, and imports too increased 7.7 per cent to USD 61.91 billion, from USD 57.48

billion in May 2023, according to government data released on Friday. Trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, during the month under review stood at USD 23.78 billion. Meanwhile, the wholesale inflation rose for the third consecutive month in May at 2.61 per cent on account of rise in prices of food articles, especially vegetables, and manufactured items. On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 181.87 points, or 0.24 per cent, to close at a new peak of 76,992.77 points. The broader NSE Nifty settled 66.70 points, or 0.29 per cent, higher to close at all-time high of 23,465.60 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,033.00 crore, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, Moody's Ratings on Thursday said India will remain the Asia-Pacific region's fastest-growing economy in 2024, sustaining last year's domestically-driven momentum.

Hyundai may file draft IPO papers with Sebi to raise about ₹25,000 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

South Korean automaker Hyundai's Indian arm is likely to file preliminary papers with Sebi shortly to raise at least USD 3 billion (around Rs 25,000 crore) through an initial public offering, sources close to the development said on Friday. The company's initial public offering (IPO), if it goes through, would be the largest in India, surpassing LIC's share sale of Rs 21,000 crore. This development marks a significant milestone for the Indian industry, as it is the first automaker to go for an initial share sale in over two decades, after Japanese automaker Maruti Suzuki's listing in 2003. Earlier this week, electric two-wheeler company Ola Electric received capital markets regulator Sebi's clearance to raise funds through an IPO. Under the proposed IPO, Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL), which is the second largest carmaker in India after Maruti Suzuki India, may dilute 15-20 per cent stake to raise funds in the range of USD 3.3-5.6 billion, sources said. They said the company is likely to file its papers with the regulatory body Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) soon. When contacted over the issue, HMIL company declined to comment. HMIL commenced operations in India in 1996 and currently, sells 13 models across segments. HMIL reported a 7 per cent year-on-year increase in total sales at 63,551 units in May 2024 against 59,601 units in the corresponding month last year. Domestic dispatch of vehicles to dealers saw a 1 per cent rise to 49,151 units last month from 48,601 units in the year-ago period. Exports of the vehicles grew 31 per cent in May to 14,400 units compared to 11,000 units a year ago.

Union Minister Kishan Reddy holds first review meeting of coal, mines ministries

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister G Kishan Reddy has reviewed both the coal and mines ministries after taking charge. "Held a detailed review meeting of the Ministry of Mines (@MinesMinIndia) in New Delhi," he said on Friday in a post on X (formerly known as twitter). Reddy on Thursday took charge as coal and mines minister and said that India should increase domestic production of the fossil-fuel and reduce coal imports. The minister of state for coal and mines Satish Chandra Dubey and other officials of the mines ministry were also present during the meeting. In another post, the minister



said, "Chaired 1st review meeting of the Ministry of Coal after taking charge in New Delhi." Reddy on Thursday told reporters that India should increase domestic coal production and reduce import of fossil fuel. India's coal import rose by 7.7 per

cent to 268.24 million tonnes (MT) in FY '24. Reddy further said 10 years ago there was a coal shortage in the country and due to this there was also a shortage of electricity. But in the last 10 years there has been sufficient power availability. When asked what will be the

priority of his government for the mines sector, he had said "I have just taken charge and I will review the department... First I want to see my officers then only I can say something. I want to review first." In order to strengthen India, both the coal ministry and the mines ministry will be at the forefront, he had said, and added in the coming five years, "we will work with determination, dedication, discipline and devotion. Both the ministries, he said, will work as a team. Reddy retained the Secunderabad Lok Sabha constituency with a margin of over 49,000 votes in the recent Lok Sabha polls, defeating his nearest Congress rival Danam

Nagender. Born to middle-class farmer-parents in Ranga Reddy district of Telangana near Hyderabad, he started his political career as an ordinary worker in 1977. He has held important party positions, including the president of the BJP's state unit and national president of BJP's Yuva Morcha (BJYM). As the Union Minister, the leader has held the portfolios of home, tourism, culture and development of the northeast region. He is also a three-time MLA. Satish Chandra Dubey, who is considered a strong Brahmin leader of the BJP in Bihar, also took the charge as the Minister of State for Coal and Mines Ministries.

Prices of tur, chana, urad dals likely to soften from July on good monsoon, higher imports: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prices of tur, chana and urad dals are likely to soften from next month helped by expectations of a good monsoon and increased imports, Union Consumers Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare said on Friday, stressing there is no need for panic. Imports of these three pulses will also increase from next month, she said adding this would help augment domestic supply. "Prices of tur, chana and urad dals have been stable in the last six months but at a high level. The price situation in moong and masoor dals is comfortable," Khare told reporters here. On June 13, the average retail price of chana dal was Rs 87.74 per kg, tur (arhar) Rs

160.75 per kg, urad Rs 126.67 per kg, moong Rs 118.9 per kg and masoor Rs 94.34 per kg. The consumer affairs department collects retail prices from 550 major consuming centres. "From July onwards, prices of tur, urad and chana are likely to soften," Khare said. The secretary noted that weather office has forecast normal monsoon rains. "We are expecting good monsoon, more than average rainfall. We expect area under pulses to improve significantly. Farmers will put more area under crops considering high market prices. Market sentiments will also improve," she said, adding that the government is making efforts to provide better seeds to farmers. Khare asserted that the

government would take all necessary measures to boost domestic availability and keep retail prices under check. She highlighted that the government's scheme to sell Bharat chana dal at Rs 60 per kg is providing relief to the common man. "We are not leaving any stone unturned to boost domestic availability," she emphasised. India imported nearly 8 lakh tonne of tur and 6 lakh tonne of urad in the last financial year. Myanmar and African countries are major exporters to India. The secretary said her department is in constant touch with global suppliers to boost imports as well as domestic retailers, wholesalers and big retail chains to ensure there is no hoardings.

Biden Admin urged to take urgent action to protect over 250K Documented Dreamers

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A bipartisan group of 43 lawmakers has urged the Biden administration to take urgent action to protect more than 250,000 Documented Dreamers, a significantly large number of whom are Indians, who will be forced to self-deport after ageing out of the temporary legal status derived through their parents' visas. Documented Dreamers are foreign nationals who entered the United States as dependents under their

parents' temporary, nonimmigrant visa status, usually a work visa. Despite growing up in the US with legal status, children of long-term visa holders age out of their dependent status when they turn 21 and are often left with no choice but to leave the United States if they cannot transition to a new status, the lawmakers said in a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Director Ur M Jaddou.



"This is because, in part, their families' adjustment of status applications face extensive backlogs, preventing them from securing permanent resident status," the letter said. The campaign was led by Senator Alex Padilla, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Safety, and Representative Deborah Ross, who have introduced a bipartisan legislative push to protect over 250,000 Documented Dreamers

through America's CHILDREN Act. "These young people grow up in the United States, complete their education in the American school system, and graduate with degrees from American institutions," wrote the lawmakers. "However, due to the long green-card backlog, families with approved immigrant petitions are often stuck waiting decades for permanent resident status." "While we continue to pursue legislative solutions to permanently protect these

individuals, such as the bipartisan and bicameral America's Children Act of 2023, we urge you to take administrative action to protect the thousands of children who may be forced to self-deport each year," continued the lawmakers. Specifically, the lawmakers made three recommendations to help address the ongoing threats Documented Dreamers face. This includes clarifying the use of deferred action on a case-by-case basis, where discretion is warranted, for

children of long-term visa holders who age out of status; and expanding eligibility for Employment Authorization to child dependents of visa holders and those with approved I-140 petitions (for a noncitizen worker to become a permanent resident in the United States). It also called for creating a process to allow long-term visa holders who age out to seek parole, on a case-by-case basis, if warranted for urgent humanitarian reasons or to advance a significant public benefit.

Euro 2024: Home fans anxious to see if Germany can fire up in opener

AP ■ MUNICH
The sound of bagpipes, and men in kilts on the streets of Munich - Scotland is in town and the excitement is ramping up ahead of the European Championship curtain-raiser on Friday. Host nation Germany plays Scotland at Allianz Arena in the opener of the monthlong tournament. The final is in Berlin on July 14 and Germany is even keener to get there after three straight fiascos at major tournaments that has forced its fans to readjust their expectations of the men's national team. "We are not here just to say hello but we still have to be humble," Germany defender Antonio Rüdiger said. "We don't have to talk about past tournaments, we all know what happened there. It's been up and down for us all the way here and that's why we have to be humble. The first match is very important and then we'll see what happens during the rest of the tournament." A good first match and group stage would set off a new wave

of excitement in Germany, even though scenes similar to when it brilliantly hosted the 2006 World Cup (and reached the semifinals) are hard to imagine in a changed political landscape. While the Scots are out in droves in Munich, proudly wearing their team jerseys (many combined with kilts), there is hardly a sighting of a Germany shirt or flag. Political extremists are flourishing, anxiety pervades the country, and the national team has under-performed. It is understandable the home fans are going about their daily life in contrast to the partying visitors. The anticipation might still be simmering but Germany captain Ilkay Gündogan believes a convincing start could change the picture. "I think the atmosphere will be positive but then they will look at how we're playing, how much will we'll show. So we have to then pass it on to the fans," he said on the eve of the match. "At the end no one remembers how you won a game, they just remember that you won. No other game is like the first one because after that you can



use the momentum, use the euphoria for the next few games. That's why the most important objective is to win the game." While the Germans are bemused by their raucous Scottish counterparts, there should still be plenty of more colors on matchday. And plenty of pressure on the home nation which is the clear favorite. "We are the team with a little more pressure, and they will certainly want to take advantage of that," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann said on Thursday. "We can beat the pressure and we can beat

Scotland." Germany went out at the group stage of both previous World Cups and was eliminated by England in the round of 16 at Euro 2020. But defeat to Scotland would be a shock, even though the Scots have improved significantly in recent years. "It's going to be an amazing experience ... being part of that kind of opening ceremony," Scotland forward Ryan Christie said when asked about playing the opening match. "Germany, an amazing team. All the international teams go through peaks and drops in form. But when these big tournaments come up, the big teams normally show up most of the time. So it will be a really tough game." Hungary and Switzerland are also in Group A. Having failed to reach the Euros from 2000-16, Scotland has qualified for back-to-back tournaments and the next aim is to reach the knockout stage for the first time. "Qualifying for the first Euros was massive for us, and then to get two in a row was incredible. But now we want to compete ... we don't want to have any regrets this time," Scotland captain Andy Robertson said on Thursday. "What's the worst that can happen? We go into a long list of (Scotland) teams that have failed to make it out of the group. And that's the worst that can happen. So let's start from that point and move on from it. And we believe that we can be the team that can create history." Scotland showed during the qualifying campaign it can surprise, in beating Spain and Norway. However, Scotland has won only one of its last 13 matches against Germany and that was more than 25 years ago, 1-0 in a friendly in April 1999. Plus, Germany has another, rather more unusual motivation to win the trophy on its own turf. Deniz Undav has said he will shave the head of fellow Germany forward Thomas Müller if the team becomes European champion. "Thomas Müller bald? Then we have to do everything we can to make this happen. I don't think he will look so beautiful with a shaved head," defender Rüdiger said with a laugh.



HI begins registration process for revived league

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Hockey India on Friday said it has started the registration process for its flagship national league, which is set to be revived after a gap of eight years and will feature both the men's and women's teams. The Hockey India League (HIL) will feature eight men's and six women's teams and the registration deadline for it is June 30. HI has also invited applications for players and support staff to register their interest in featuring in the league, which is set to run between December 2024 and February 2025. The window has been approved by the International Hockey Federation (FIH). "This step signifies that we are close to restarting the HIL, a league that was loved by hockey players and fans across the world," HI President Dilip Tirkey said in a media release. "We are confident that budding Indian hockey players will snatch the opportunity to play

with and against some of the best players in the world." The HIL was first started in 2013, and its last edition was played in 2017, won by Kalinga Lancers. All five editions were won by five different sides. Ranchi has won two titles. The inaugural edition was won by Ranchi Rhinos before the franchise was discontinued. Later, a new Ranchi franchise was created -- Ranchi Rays -- owned by the legendary Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni, which won in its debut season in 2015. Commenting on the upcoming revamped new season, HI Secretary General Bhola Nath Singh stated, "The HIL played a pivotal role in the resurgence of the Indian Hockey Teams, and it is a matter of great joy and pride that we are on the verge of restarting it." "The league will help improve the standard of young players and propagate a culture of hockey across the nation. We look forward to receiving heaps of applications from India and abroad," he added.

Street in The Hague gets all encompassing orange facelift for Euro 2024

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)
The fluttering of 64 kilometres (40 miles) of orange bunting and a hammer driving a nail into a wall to hold up orange tarps are the sounds of a Dutch summer of soccer in a normally drab suburban street in The Hague. The Marktweg is one of several streets in the Netherlands that get an all-encompassing orange facelift during European Championships and World Cups when the national team - known as Oranje after the Dutch royal family and the colour of their shirts - are looking to add to the Euro it won 36 years ago. For two months leading up to Euro 2024, which starts on Friday in Germany, a dedicated team of up to 10 volunteers - more at the weekends - has been decorating their street, creating not just an orange overload, but also a sense of

community. Houses are plastered with orange tarps and banners, street lights and trees are wrapped in orange, garbage containers are - you guessed it - orange, while litter bins are red, white and blue, the equally patriotic colours of the Dutch flag. Even a crew of municipal workers fits in, decked out in uniforms of orange high-visibility clothes. Macho Vink, a 35-year-old truck driver, is on a cherry picker banging nails into houses' walls to secure tarps covering the entire street. "It's time for a big party," he said. "Get some positivity back," he added as the driver of a passing car tooted his horn and gave a thumbs up. The decorations appeared in the street for the first time during Euro 1988 - where the Netherlands won its only major soccer tournament - in West Germany. Danny van Dijk, one of the driving



forces behind the decorations, said it's been getting bigger and better ever since, with sponsorship from local businesses now helping to foot

the bill. "It started as a joke - hang a ball sprayed with text in a tree," Van Dijk told The Associated Press. But, the ball idea quickly snowballed into arguably the orangeest place on the planet. However, some other equally lavishly decorated Dutch streets also seek to claim that honour. "The neighbours liked it, we liked it and now every two years we're up in the scaffolding and cherry pickers to decorate the street," Van Dijk said. The decorations draw visitors to the street and allow neighbours to get to know one another. "You meet other people, have a chat. The children like it, the people like it. It really brings people together," he added. And, once the tournament ends for the Dutch team, Van Dijk is hoping this year it will be with captain Virgil van Dijk, who has no relation, lifting the trophy. The team of decorators gets back to work in the Marktweg. "We wait for two or three days to recover from the hangover," he said.

Paris Olympics organisers say swimming events still set for cleaned up Seine after heavy rain

AP ■ LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND)
Despite the complication of recent heavy rain, swimming in the River Seine is still the plan at the Paris Olympics after a \$1.5 billion investment to improve the water quality. "No reasons to doubt," International Olympic Committee executive Christophe Dubi said Thursday at an online briefing after hearing from city officials and Summer Games organizers. "We are confident that we will swim in the Seine this summer." Marathon swimmers and triathletes are scheduled to plunge into the cleaned-up waters after the Olympics open July 26. French President Emmanuel Macron and Paris Mayor Anne

Hidalgo have promised to take a dip and show their citizens and visiting athletes all is well. Key to the cleaning up has been digging a huge reservoir next to Austerlitz train station to collect excess rainwater and prevent bacteria-laden waste entering the river. Heavy rains that overwhelmed old sewers in Paris prevented some test events for the Olympics from taking place last August. Organizers also have not been lucky with the weather so far this summer. Those downpours have complicated the issue, Dubi acknowledged, though said the update Thursday was "very reassuring." In other Paris Olympics news - from 124 years ago - the IOC awarded France an extra medal Thursday from the 1900

Summer Games and took it from Britain. The silver medal won by Lloyd Hildebrand in men's 25-kilometer cycling has now been credited to France because, the IOC executive board decided, "even though Hildebrand was a British citizen, he was born and brought up in France, and competed for a French club before and after Paris 1900. Indian women's archery team gets fifth seed in Olympic qualifiers, two wins shy from Paris quota Antalya (Turkey),(PTI) Indian women's recurve team of Deepika Kumari, Bhajan Kaur and Ankita Bhakat qualified as fifth seed in the Final Olympic Qualifiers here on Friday and now stands two victories away from securing quota for the

Paris Games. The Indian team aggregated 1978 points to finish behind leaders China (1996), second-placed Japan (1991), Spain (1990) and Chinese Taipei (1982) in the qualifying standings. By qualifying as fifth seeds, India will start from the round of 16 in the 24-team draw against 21st seeds Ukraine and may have to overcome Chinese Taipei in the quarters to grab the Paris quota. The semifinalists will land Paris Olympic quota places. The elimination rounds are slated later in the day. India had an incredible qualifying round, shooting 90 perfect scores of 10 and X (the closest to the centre arrow). It was second behind the Taiwanese archers who shot 91 10+X scores. But it did not matter as they fell behind in the overall scores. To put things in perspective, Chinese team had a share of 88, while Japan and Spain shot 89 and 76 10+X scores. The 10+X shots are counted to determine the placings in case of a tie. The men's team qualifying event will be held on Saturday and will see stiff competition among 46 teams for just three available quotas. More than 300 recurve archers from 80-plus nations are competing in the final qualifying event for the Paris Olympics, beginning on July 26.



Tank Davis makes long awaited return to ring to defend WBA lightweight title vs Martin

AP ■ LAS VEGAS
Even when others had the microphone at their news conference, Gervonta "Tank" Davis and Frank Martin couldn't help themselves. They carried on a seemingly endless conversation Wednesday that ended only when Davis pretended to take a swing at Martin as they posed side by side for photos. Martin flinched and Davis left the podium laughing. Whether Davis has the last laugh Saturday night will be determined when the undefeated fighters, both 29, face each other for Tank's WBA lightweight championship belt. That bout highlights the 100th championship fight night at the MGM Grand Garden Arena, which has been replaced by T-Mobile Arena as Las Vegas' prime spot for combat sports. But the MGM has a rich history, and the co-main event will feature the interim WBC light heavyweight title fight between



David Benavidez and Oleksandr Gvozdyk. Davis (29-0, 27 KOs) hopes to create more MGM memories by putting on a show similar to the last time he was in a ring more than a year ago. He delivered a devastating left uppercut that floored Ryan Garcia for a seventh-round knockout in the April 22, 2023, fight at T-Mobile. "I've been locked in for a long time now," Davis said. "My give-back is going to be a great performance on Saturday night." As Davis noted, the Baltimore native and resident

anyone's guess, but Tank make sure to play the familiar role of taunting his opponent. "He's shaking up there," Davis said of Martin. "He was talking tough (Tuesday) when it was just him. It's going to show. He's a frontrunner. "He's just worried about not getting knocked out. He's not worrying about winning." Martin, who lives in Indianapolis, has done nothing but win in building an 18-0 record with 12 knockouts. This is his first shot at a championship belt, though there were arguably better and more marketable opponents for Davis in Devin Haney and Shakur Stevenson. Those fighters could still be waiting for Davis, but Martin can put a damper on such plans with an upset victory. Davis a -700 favorite at BetMGM Sportsbook, meaning a \$700 wager would pay \$100 if he wins. "I appreciate Tank giving me the opportunity to whoop his (butt)," Martin said. "He just hasn't been in there with

anybody like me." Unlike with Davis and Martin, Benavidez (28-0, 24 KOs) and Gvozdyk (20-1, 16 KOs) praised each other in the lead-up to their match, including at Thursday's news conference. "I'm excited to face the best version of David Benavidez," said Gvozdyk, a Ukraine native who trains in Oxnard, California. "This is a great opportunity to face a tough fighter like David Benavidez. He's representing boxing really well. We're going to show everyone a great fight." Gvozdyk, 37, is 10 years older than Benavidez. The younger fighter is moving up a weight class from super middleweight, so this could be quite a test for Benavidez, a -600 favorite at BetMGM. "This is the easiest weight cut I've had in my life," said Benavidez, who lives in Las Vegas. "My speed, strength and endurance are all going to be better. I left no stone unturned for this training camp. I'm facing a great fighter and we've put together a great gameplan.

Chennayin FC sign Kiyan Nassiri from Mohun Bagan



PTI ■ CHENNAI
Former champions Chennayin FC on Friday announced the signing of rising Indian forward Kiyan Nassiri from Kolkata heavyweights Mohun Bagan. Son of East Bengal great Jamshid Nassiri, the 23-year-old made his senior professional debut with the Mariners in 2019. The youngster has signed a three-year contract keeping

him at the Chennai-based club until 2027, the club said. "I am extremely excited and grateful to be a part of this amazing sea of blue. Bringing all my humility and respect for the management, coaches and fans. "Looking forward to bringing with me, my endless passion for the beautiful game and my spirit to win with and for my team." CFC head coach Owen Coyle added, "When you score a hat

KOHLI'S FORM A BOTHERING POINT AS INDIA FACE CANADA AMID RAIN THREAT

PTI ■ LAUDERHILL (USA)

Star batter Virat Kohli's string of low scores would be a concern for India when they square off against Canada in their final group match of the T20 World Cup on Saturday, hoping that the sky remains clear in this city even as several parts of Florida are ravaged by torrential rain. With three consecutive wins, India are through to the Super Eight stage, which will be held entirely in the West Indies. Kohli came into the T20 World Cup after setting the IPL ablaze, scoring upwards of 700 runs at a strike-rate of over 150 for Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Therefore, it wasn't an entirely misplaced expectation that he will continue to fire in the ICC showpiece, which is perhaps his final chance to earn India an ICC World Cup after 13 years. But three matches have gone by, and Kohli has five runs at an average of 1.66, including a 'Golden Duck' against the USA. His form has provided an interesting subplot to the game against tournament-debutants Canada, which is otherwise inconsequential, at least for India. Perhaps, an 1850km trip from New York to Florida might bring with it a turnaround in fortunes for Kohli,

who must be hurting after those ordinary outings. The pitch at the Broward County stadium might not be as spiteful as the one in New York, where the uneven bounce of the tracks and the slow nature of the outfield became bigger talking points than the cricket that was played. What would ease some pressure on him is the fact that the lean run has not really affected the team's fortunes. However, the premier batter's low scores, particularly since he is opening alongside skipper Rohit Sharma, has put some pressure on the subsequent batters to take the India board forward. Creditably, Rishabh Pant and Suryakumar Yadav have more than made up for Kohli. Pant made 36 and 42 against Ireland and Pakistan, good enough contributions for India to emerge victors. Suryakumar overcame a diffident start to the tournament just at the right time, making a crucial fifty against the USA. 'Spin Basher' Shivam Dube has been on a tailspin since his arrival in the US, but a laboured 31 off 35 balls against the co-hosts might just have fetched him another game ahead of the waiting Sanju Samson and Yashasvi Jaiswal. If India want to bring in Jaiswal,



then it has to be as an opener and Kohli will have to return to his No.3 slot. While India's batting might, just as other teams, has been neutralised by the drop-in pitches in New York, their bowling worked like a well-oiled machine on those very tracks.

The trio of Jasprit Bumrah (five wickets), Hardik Pandya (seven wickets), Arshdeep Singh (seven wickets) have not given anything to the rival batters. The performance of Pandya and Arshdeep would be particularly pleasing to the management. Both of them had a torrid time in the IPL on various counts and were heavily criticised. But here, they have put all that behind them to lead India's attack along with the ever-reliable Bumrah. The think-tank will also hope that at some stage Mohammed Siraj (one wicket) and Ravindra Jadeja, who is yet to pick up a wicket, will join their colleagues, even though both of them have not leaked runs. It can also help the bowling unit prepare ahead of the Super Eights in the Caribbean, where the pitches are expected to be more spin-friendly. On the other hand, Canada are a

bit green behind the ears but not short of determination, as they had manifested during their 12-run win over Ireland. Players such as opener Aaron Johnson can spring a surprise on their day. But stopping this superior quality Indian side on its tracks could be a task beyond the Canadians, who might be banking more on the predicted spell of disruptive rains for that. Lauderdale is about 50km from Miami, which has been battling flash floods caused by a tropical storm, a worrisome situation for the organisers of the showpiece who are hoping to make space for cricket in the American market. **SQUADS:** **India:** Rohit Sharma (c), 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. **Canada:** Saad Bin Zafar (c), Aaron Johnson, Dillon Heyliger, Dilpreet Bajwa, Rishiv Joshi, Jeremy Gordon, Junaid Siddiqui, Kalem Sana, Kanwarpal Tathgur (wk), Navneet Dhaliwal, Nicholas Kirton, Pargat Singh, Ravinderpal Singh, Rayankhan Pathan, Shreyas Movva (wk).

England eye dominant show to stay in Super 8 contention; ousted Kiwis search elusive win

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA)

Defending champions England will be eager to brush aside Namibia ruthlessly here on Saturday and stay relevant in the race to the T20 World Cup Super Eight stage. England were living on the edge after a washout against Scotland and a loss against Australia, but the Jos Buttler-led side turned it around in style with an eight-wicket win over Oman. After bundling out Oman for 47, England raced past the target in just 3.1 overs, a record margin of 101 balls to spare. The result has also done wonders to England's net run rate (NRR), the crucial separating factor between them and Scotland in Group B. The Three Lions' NRR leapt from -1.8 to +3.08, going past Scotland's +2.16. However, Scotland have five points to England's three. Hence, the former two-time champions will need to defeat Namibia to go equal with Scotland and then hope that the latter will lose to Australia, who have already qualified for Super Eight. In that scenario, England will enter Super Eight with better NRR, but an upset win over Australia by Scotland or a washout at Gros Islet will eliminate Buttler and his wards. But skipper Buttler sounded confident after their massive win over Oman. "I've been around long enough to know how it works," Buttler said after their win over Oman. "We know what's going on in the dressing room. We have lots of confidence in our team and we have another huge match to come," he added. The pitch at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium here has



offered steep bounce and turn. England bowlers such as leg-spinner Adil Rashid (4/11) and the pace duo of Jofra Archer and Mark Wood, who claimed identical figures of 3/12, exploited it to their advantage while bowling out Oman for their lowest ever T20I total of 47 -- the overall fourth lowest in the T20 World Cup. Buttler will hope to win the toss again to unleash his bowlers against the inexperienced Namibia who had folded for 72 in their last match against Australia. **TEAMS (FROM):** **England:** Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley and Mark Wood. **Namibia:** Gerhard Erasmus (c), Zane Green, Michael Van Lingen, Dylan Leicher, Ruben Trimpelman, Jack Brassell, Ben Shikongo, Tangeni Lungameni, Niko Davin, JJ Smit, Jan Frylinck, JP Kotze, David Wiese, Bernard Scholtz, Malan Kruger and PD

Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi and Tim Southee. **Uganda:** Brian Masaba (c), Simon Ssesazi, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Dinesh Nakrani, Fred Achelam, Kenneth Waiswa, Alpesh Ramjani, Frank Nsubuga, Henry Ssenyondo, Bilal Hassun, Robinson Obuya, Riazat Ali Shah, Juma Miyaji and Ronak Patel. **Match starts:** 6am IST.

SA FACE NEPAL, AIM FOUR IN FOUR: Having already stormed into the Super Eight, South Africa will take on Nepal in a clash between Group D table-toppers and wooden spooners at Kingstown. Anrich Nortje, who is the joint second leading wicket-taker with eight scalps, has been in splendid form, and he will look to make life tough for Nepal batters. The Proteas would also hope that their top-order in Quinton De Kock, Reeza Hendricks, skipper Aiden Markram and Tristan Stubbs to get back their mojo ahead of the Super Eight. **TEAMS (FROM):** **Nepal:** Rohit Paudel (c), Aasif Sheikh, Anil Kumar Sah, Kushal Bhurtel, Kushal Malla, Dipendra Singh Airee, Lalit Rajbanshi, Karan KC, Gulshan Jha, Sompal Kami, Pratis GC, Sundeep Jora, Abinash Bohara, Sagar Dhakal and Kamal Singh Airee. **South Africa:** Aiden Markram (c), Otniel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi and Tristan Stubbs.

Run rate manipulation would have been against Spirit of Cricket, says Cummins

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA)

Insisting that Josh Hazlewood's remarks were not serious, Australia lead pacer Pat Cummins said they would have never tried to manipulate their net run rate to knock England out of the ongoing T20 World Cup, which would have been "against the Spirit of Cricket". Pacer Hazlewood had sparked a controversy when he said Aussies would try to eliminate England from the tournament if there was such an opportunity for them in their upcoming Group B match against Scotland. "I think when you go out and play you are trying your best every time and if you are not, that's probably against the spirit of cricket. We haven't really thought too deeply because it's (NRR manipulation) never really popped up," Cummins told reporters here. Cummins said he had a talk with Hazlewood about the latter's comments, and said the thought about NRR never really figured in anybody's thought process. "I was speaking to Joshy, who had a bit of a



joke about it the other day, and think it (his comments) got taken a little bit out of context. We'll go there and just try and play Scotland who have had a really good tournament so far and will be tough. "It's (NRR) something you kind of discuss as one of the quirks of the set-up but in terms of does it change the way we play, absolutely not," Cummins offered. "I've never stepped into the field without the mindset of trying to take the game on and be aggressive, like the guys have so far," he added. Cummins himself would know a fair bit about the Spirit of Cricket as he was in the

eye of a storm during the last Ashes as Alex Carey's stumping off Jonny Bairstow paved away for heated debates. However, the scenario of Australia manipulating their NRR does no longer exist after England's thumping eight-wicket win over Oman on Friday at Antigua. The victory has boosted England's NRR to 3.08, well ahead of Scotland's 2.16. If England manage to go past Namibia on Saturday, and Australia beat Scotland, then the Three Lions can enter the Super Eight. However, if Scotland (5 points) beat Australia, then England (3 points) will have to pack their bags. Senior pacer Mitchell Starc will be available for selection after sitting out of the match against Namibia with a sore calf, but Cummins said the management has not taken any call towards the rotation of players. "I haven't spoken to the selectors, so, I don't know what they're thinking. But I wouldn't be surprised. I know going into the start of the tournament, in a perfect world, we'd get a game into just about all the squad members," he noted.

England spinner Adil Rashid relies on mixing up deliveries to return to form

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA)

England leg-spinner Adil Rashid feels the judicious use of his variations was the reason behind his excellent four-wicket burst against Oman after starting the T20 World Cup on a lukewarm note. Rashid's 4 for 11 helped the title holders bowl out Oman for 47, and then overhaul the target in 3.1 overs to stay in contention for a Super Eight berth from Group B. "It's always nice to get wickets three-four...whether it's against Oman or Australia or India. But I felt okay (today). I

just needed to get a few wickets, spin the ball, googlies, few leggies, whatever it is, mix it up well," Rashid said the post-match press conference after England's eight-wicket victory. Rashid had conceded 26 runs in two overs against Scotland in their tournament opener which was washed out, and gave away 41 runs in four overs against Australia in England's 36-run defeat. However, Rashid also gave credit to other England bowlers for supporting him. "I thought we needed a win and a comprehensive one. We set the tone upfront there with the ball. I thought the seamers

England needed to win big to leap over Scotland on net run rate, and Rashid did not deny that a few calculators were drawn out during the innings break in his camp. "There were talks about that (NRR). But we had to be positive and play that if you're going to a position to do that, we knew we had to take it on - to get the runs within five and a half overs (in Power Play). "But we also knew that we can't just go out there and be slow. That's what happened, we played the way and things just started unfolding. We've got the runs within the first three-four overs," said Rashid.

- Joff (Jofra Archer) and Woody (Mark Wood) set the tone there perfectly," said Rashid. Archer and Wood had similar figures of 3 for 12 and rocked Oman upfront with quick spells.



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Fantastic Farooqi seals Afghanistan's maiden Super 8 berth with rout of PNG

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

The pace combination of Fazalhaq Farooqi and Naveen-ul-Haq led Afghanistan's seven-wicket rout of Papua New Guinea here as the strife-torn country stormed into the T20 World Cup's Super Eight stage for the first time, knocking out group favourites New Zealand in the process. Gulbadin Naib scored an unbeaten 49 as Afghanistan gunned down the target of 96 in 15.1 overs overcoming early jitters. Put in to bat, PNG were bundled out for 95 with Farooqi and Naveen ripping through the line-up. The Afghans will face title favourites India in their first Super Eight clash on June 20 in Barbados. The result also meant that New Zealand, the 2021 finalists, were knocked out of the ICC

showpiece. The Kiwis find themselves at the bottom of the table with two defeats from as many matches. Tournament co-hosts West Indies have already entered the Super Eight from Group C with six points, which is the same as the Afghans. New Zealand will face Uganda and PNG in their remaining two matches, which will now be of mere academic interest. On Thursday, Farooqi took two wickets in two balls in his second over and finished with 3/16 from his four overs after Rashid Khan opted to bowl. He now has tournament figures of 11.2-0-42-12 to lead the bowling chart. His pace bowling partner Naveen provided the perfect assistance, returning with a miserly 2.5-0-4-2 as PNG were bowled out in 19.5 overs. Semo Kamea was run out in the penultimate delivery of their

innings. It would have been much worse for PNG had Afghanistan not leaked 25 runs in extras, and 13 of them wides. This was yet another superlative display by the Afghanistan bowlers who are yet to concede 100 runs in this tournament -- Uganda (58; 16 overs), New Zealand (75; 15.2 overs). "Feeling great to qualify for the next round. First time for Afghanistan being in Super Eight in T20Is. The boys have done well, adjusting to the conditions very quickly and that is something very pleasing for me," said skipper Rashid Khan. Congratulating the team, Farooqi said: "I feel proud. Before the warm-up match, I was in the IPL. I did not get any chances there unfortunately. I played just one warm-up game.

However, Afghanistan stuttered in their small chase as both their in-form openers -- Rahmanullah Gurbaz (11) and Ibrahim Zadran (0) -- were dismissed by the gritty PNG new-ball bowlers Alei Nao and Kamea inside three overs. But Gulbadin Naib ensured that there was no further disruption as he returned to form and anchored the chase with his 36-ball 49 not out. Naib took his time before coming on his own, hitting four fours and two sixes. PNG kept chipping away with the wickets as Norman Vanua got rid of Azmutullah Omarzai (13, 18 balls) against the run of play, but Mohammed Nabi stayed calm and provided assistance to Naib who sealed it with a six over Chad Soper's head. But PNG started positively and showed intent while running between the wickets before

Assad Vala found himself out of his crease. Farooqi affected the run out and he continued making impact with the ball in hand as well, picking up back-to-back wickets to commence his job of destruction. Naveen let the ball do the talking in the powerplay, claiming a pair of wickets including the crucial scalp of Tony Ura (11 off 18). Soper and Kipling Doriga went about rebuilding the total towards something defensible, but things went from bad to worse just before drinks. The pair had a moment of miscommunication, leading to the second run-out of the innings and it wasn't to be the last either. The inexperienced PNG have suffered six run outs in the tournament, the most by any team and only Doriga who went past 15.

