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UNLEASHING AI FOR
SOCIAL JUSTICE

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MUSLIMS IN ASIA CELEBRATE
EID UL-ADHA

MONEY 10
SBI EXPECTS 14-15 PER CENT
CREDIT GROWTH IN CURRENT FISCAL

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1 SPORTS

15 dead, 50 hurt in Bengal train collision

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
KOLKATA

At least 15 people were killed and more than 50 injured — about a dozen grievously — when a goods train rammed into the tail of a slow moving Kanchenjunga Express at Rangapani area off New Jalpaiguri in North Bengal early on Monday morning.

Among the dead are four railway staff, including two loco pilots of the goods trains and the guard of the ill-fated passengers' train, as also an employee of the Railway Mail Services, sources said.

Death toll could mount as some passengers were still stuck inside the mangled bogie, sources said.

The horror of Coromandal Express incident returned at New Jalpaiguri when the driver of the goods train allegedly overshot the signal and collided with the Sealdah bound Express train which was coming from Agartala. A parallel view did not rule out technical problems or some kind of negligence on the part of the points men causing the two trains to come on the same track.

The accident occurring at about 8 on Monday morning tended to remind of the death of about 200 passengers when the ill-gated Coromandal Express collided last year with stationary goods train at Balasore in Odisha.



Rescue work underway after a collision between the Kanchanjunga Express and a goods train, near Rangapani Railway Station, on Monday PTI

"I was walking back from the toilet when the train stopped at once with a big jerk ... I thought the driver had applied emergency brake because it is not very uncommon to do so to save cattle but then there was commotion outside as people from the other coaches jumped out and ran towards the rear... I also followed them and found what really had happened... how a full coach had telescoped upon the engine of the goods train and how the people were screaming for help... many of them were stuck inside the mangled coach... before we could decide what to do

Alert train pilot saves 10 lions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BHAVNAGAR

The loco pilot of a goods train saved the lives of 10 lions after applying emergency brakes on spotting them on the tracks near Pipavav Port in Gujarat's Amreli district in the early hours of Monday, a railway official said.

The incident took place when Mukesh Kumar Meena was piloting the goods train from Pipavav Port station to a siding (a short track beside the main corridor), a release

from Western Railway's Bhavnagar division said. "Meena stopped the train by applying emergency brakes as soon as he spotted 10 lions resting on the tracks. He waited till the lions got up and moved away from the tracks. He then took the train to its destination. This commendable work by the loco pilot was praised by officials," the release said. Several lions have died in the last few years on this railway line connecting Pipavav Port with north Gujarat.

villagers rushed in to start the rescue work." The accident happened when Kanchenjunga Express was travelling slowly apparently owing to heavy rains, said villagers, adding they heard a loud bang and "thought it was a thunder but then realised that trains had collided when we heard screams of passengers." While administrative help came about two hours later the locals jumped to rescue operations, said passengers, adding "had the local villagers not been there some of the injured passengers would have bled to death."

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Shah focuses on Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday here chaired a high-level meeting to review the security situation in Manipur which has been witnessing violence for over a year. Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, Army Chief General Manoj Pande, Army Chief designate Lt General Upendra Dwivedi, Intelligence Bureau chief Tapan Deka, Manipur Chief Secretary Vineet Joshi, Manipur police chief Rajiv Singh and Assam Rifles head Pradeep Chandran attended the meeting.

This was first such high-level meeting by the Central Government after the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was re-elected earlier this month. The meeting was held at the Ministry of Home Affairs as fresh violence was reported in Manipur.

Since May 3 last year, Manipur has witnessed clashes between the two communities Kukis and Meiteis, which has claimed at least 225 lives to date and uprooted around 50,000 people, many of whom are still residing in relief Centres. The Northeastern State has seen fresh violence in the last couple of weeks with a school building near Moreh being set ablaze and a missing person's beheaded body found was found.

Last week, armed militants ambushed the convoy of



Union Home Minister Amit Shah chairs a high-level meeting to review the security situation in Manipur, in New Delhi, on Monday. Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla is also seen PTI

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh's advanced security team in Kangpokpi district, leaving a civilian driver and a security officer injured.

On Sunday, Manipur Governor Anusuiya Uikey had called on Shah here and is believed to have discussed the prevailing situation in the Northeastern State. Violence broke out in Manipur on May 3, 2023 after a tribal solidarity march in the hill districts of the State to protest against the demand for Scheduled Tribe status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts.

On June 10, Rashtriya

Swayamsevaka Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat expressed concern over peace eluding Manipur even after one year and said the situation in the strife-torn Northeastern State must be considered with priority. Addressing a gathering of RSS trainees in Nagpur, he said, "Manipur is waiting for peace for the last one year. There was peace in Manipur 10 years ago. It felt like gun culture had finished there. But the State has suddenly seen violence". Bhagwat said the situation in Manipur will have to be considered with priority and there is need to get over election rhetoric and focus on problems facing the nation. "The unrest either got triggered or was triggered, but Manipur is burning and people are facing its extreme heat," the RSS chief had said.



(Left to right): Bhupender Yadav, Dharmendra Pradhan, Shivraj Singh Chouhan and G Kishan Reddy File Photo

BJP rolls up sleeves for 4 States elections

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Apparently, in view of the upcoming Assembly elections in Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand and Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP on Monday appointed senior party leaders as in-charges and co-incharges for the four election-bound States.

BJP national president JP Nadda made the announcement to this effect on Monday. The most keenly watched Assembly polls would, however, be for Haryana and Maharashtra scheduled to be held around October 2024 — about four months from now as these would be the first real test for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and INDIA Bloc after the Lok Sabha polls.

Notably, both the BJP-ruled States have thrown not-so-good results for the NDA.

The Assembly polls in Maharashtra and Haryana would be a litmus test for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity. Maharashtra Assembly has 288 members while Haryana has 90 members.

Senior BJP leader and Union Minister Bhupender Yadav has been appointed as the in-charge for Maharashtra while Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav will be the co-incharge for the State.

Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is the election in-

charge for Jharkhand and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma the co-incharge for the State.

For Jammu and Kashmir, where elections are to be held before September on the directive of the Supreme Court, the BJP has deployed the Union Minister G Kishan Reddy.

While Assembly polls in Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand are due later this year, the Supreme Court has directed the Election Commission to hold the elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September.

In Haryana, the BJP, which had won all 10 seats in 2019, finished with just five seats in 2024 elections.

The Congress party bagged five of ten seats from Haryana in 2024 general elections. Likewise in Maharashtra, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) won 30 of the State's 48 seats from the State. The ruling Mahayuti, a part of the NDA, bagged just 18 seats. The Congress emerged as the best-performing party with 13 seats.

The BJP, however, saw its tally dip from 23 in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls to nine in 2024. In the Lok Sabha polls, the NDA secured 43.55 per cent of votes, while the MVA got 43.71 per cent.

In 2019, the NDA had won 43 of the 48 seats from Maharashtra while the then UPA had bagged the remaining five seats.

Though voters chose differently in the Lok Sabha and Assembly Elections, the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections will have a bearing on the upcoming State Assembly elections in these two States.

Contest for Speaker's post to set a new precedence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

If elections for the post of Speaker of the Lok Sabha are held next week, it would be the first such instance in the history of independent India as the presiding officer has always been chosen by a consensus. The first Session of the 18th Lok Sabha will commence on June 24 during which new members of the Lower House will take oath and elect the Speaker.

Elections to the post of the Speaker of the Central Legislative Assembly, as Parliament was called in the pre-Independence days, were held for the first time on August 24, 1925 when Swarajist Party nominee Vitthalbhai J Patel won the coveted post against T Rangachariar.

Patel, the first non-official member to be elected as the Speaker, won the maiden election with a narrow margin of two votes. Patel had polled 58 votes against 56 garnered by Rangachariar.

Buoyed by its increased strength in the Lok Sabha, the Opposition INDIA Bloc is now aggressively demanding the post of the Deputy Speaker, which by convention is held by a member of an Opposition party. "We will force a contest for



Inside of the new Parliament building complex File Photo

the post of Lok Sabha Speaker if the Government does not agree to have an Opposition leader as Deputy Speaker," a senior Congress leader said. The INDIA Bloc won 233 seats in the Lok Sabha elections, while the BJP-led NDA won 293 seats to retain power for the third consecutive term. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) with 16 seats and Janata Dal (U) with 12 seats are the biggest allies of the BJP which won 240 seats.

The Opposition Bloc is also egging on the BJP ally TDP to insist on the post of the Lok Sabha Speaker or face gradual disintegration of the party. "We have the experience that the BJP betrays the people who support it," Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said in Mumbai on Sunday.

The JD(U) has declared support for a BJP candidate as the Lok Sabha Speaker, while the TDP is understood to have favoured a consensus candidate for the coveted post.

The post of the Speaker of the Central Legislative Assembly has witnessed a contest on six occasions between 1925 and 1946.

Vitthalbhai Patel was re-elected to the post unanimously on January 20, 1927 after the completion of his first term.

Patel quit the post on April 28, 1930 following a call for Civil Disobedience by Mahatma Gandhi. Sir Muhammad Yakub (78 votes) won the Speaker's election against Nand Lal (22 votes) on July 9, 1930.

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One-man mission to offset loss of forests

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Deforestation has devoured vast swathes of forest areas in the once heavily forested Kerala. Hydro electric projects, quarrying, mining and clearance of reserve forests for planting eucalyptus and cultivation of cannabis have robbed the southern State of its wild forests, and what remains today is the skeleton of dense forests, which, according to poets, is what Mother Earth has got as dowry.

The loss of forests has led to climate change and very high temperatures (45 degrees Celsius on an average) and irreversible changes in the weather pattern. The Southwest monsoon that earlier brought copious rainfall during May-July often plays truant or is rain-deficient.

Human encroachment of forest lands disturbs the ecological balance forcing wild animals like elephants, tigers, leopards, boars and cheetahs to leave their habitat and enter human settlements in search of food and water setting up a human-animal conflict. Some of these runaway animals get killed if they become a threat to humans.

Some of the inexperienced veterinary doctors also become a cause of death of such animals while trying to tranquilise them for capture. Steps in a fighter for



MR Hari

afforestation: Instead of crying over the rapid loss of forest cover, MR Hari, a Left activist who set up the State's first information technology company, has launched an innovative mission to grow forests in cities, towns, rural areas and wherever there is a small piece of land.

The managing director of Invis Multi Media, the Thiruvananthapuram-based company is not the one who depends on any Government help. His vast reading took him to the world of Akira Miyawaki, the Japanese environmentalist who discovered the healing power of forests and the philosophy behind restoring Earth's balance with Native Trees.

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NIA to probe terror attack on pilgrims in Kashmir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Monday handed over the probe into the recent terror attack on a bus in Jammu and Kashmir to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), officials said.

The decision came a day after Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the preparations for the annual Amarnath Yatra in two back-to-back meetings here. Nine people, including three women, were killed and 41 injured as a bus carrying pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi plunged into a deep gorge after an ambush by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district on June 9. The terrorists opened fire at the 53-seater bus when it was on way to Mata Vaishno Devi shrine at Katra from Shiv Khori temple.

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NEWS BRIEF

Rahul leaves Wayanad LS seat for Priyanka

New Delhi: Ending weeks of suspense, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Monday finally decided to retain the party bastion Raebareilly Lok Sabha seat and vacate Wayanad in Kerala from where his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will contest. As per the rules, Rahul who won both Wayanad and Raebareilly seats, has to decide within 14 days of the results which seat he would retain which came out on June 4.

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Power outage leaves fliers sweating at airport

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■
NEW DELHI

As if the scorching heat with temperatures soaring several notches above the normal (47 degrees Celsius on Monday) was not enough, Delhi residents are having to struggle with frequent power outages and persistent water crisis which have exacerbated their plight.

A power outage at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport in the city threw operations into disarray, badly affecting working of boarding and check-in facilities.

The T3 terminal of the Delhi airport was choked due to power outage for a brief period. Digi Yatra and the

check-in counters were also not functioning, creating chaos among the passengers. An official statement by Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), said, "Around 2pm on Monday, Delhi Airport's Main Receiving Substation (MRSS) detected a significant voltage spike at the grid, said to be caused by the tripping of a 765KV line.

This voltage imbalance from the Delhi Transco Limited (DTL) grid briefly impacted all IGI terminals, affecting baggage acceptance and e-gates."

To maintain essential services, the airport proactively switched all terminals to DG load.



Passengers at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport File Photo

"The power back-up system, installed by DIAL, was operationalised within a few minutes, and all back-up procedures were initiated to facilitate passengers at all

touch points," said a DIAL spokesperson, adding that by 3:00 pm everything was stabilised.

In another incident, a technical problem caused by

high ground temperatures caused an IndiGo flight from Delhi to Bagdogra to get delayed at the IGI Airport for more than two hours.

The national Capital sizzled on Monday with Pitampura weather station recording the maximum temperature of 47.3 degrees Celsius, nine notches above the normal while the minimum temperature settled at 35.9 degrees Celsius, eight degrees Celsius above the normal.

Safdarjung, considered as a parameter for the whole of Delhi, recorded a maximum temperature of 45.2 degrees Celsius, 6.4 degrees above the normal.

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Nine nuclear-armed nations continued to modernise N-arsenal in 2023: SIPRI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nine nuclear-armed nations including the US, Russia, France, China, India and Pakistan, continued to modernise their nuclear arsenals and several of them deployed new nuclear-capable weapon systems in 2023, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in its report released on Monday. The report said China's nuclear arsenal increased from 410 warheads in January 2023 to 500 in January 2024, and it is expected to keep growing. The report put India's stored nuclear warheads at 172 in January this year while the number for Pakistan was 170.

"While Pakistan remains the main focus of India's nuclear deterrent, India appears to be placing growing emphasis on longer-range weapons, including those capable of reaching targets throughout China," the report said. India slightly expanded its nuclear arsenal in 2023, it said, adding that both India and Pakistan continued to develop new types of nuclear delivery systems in 2023. The report said some 2,100 of the deployed warheads were kept in a state of high operational alert on ballistic missiles, and nearly all of them belonged to Russia or the US. However, for the first time China is believed to have some warheads on high operational alert, it said.

The SIPRI said nine nuclear-armed states -- the US, Russia, the UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel -- continued to modernise their nuclear arsenals and several deployed new nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable weapon systems in 2023. Of the total global inventory of an estimated 12,121 warheads in January 2024, about 9,585 were in military stockpiles for potential use, it said. An estimated 3,904 of those warheads were deployed with missiles and aircraft -- 60 more than in January 2023 -- and the rest were in central storage, it said. "Around 2,100 of the deployed warheads were kept in a state of high operational alert on



ballistic missiles. Nearly all of these warheads belonged to Russia or the US, but for the first time China is believed to have some warheads on high operational alert," the report said. According to the Swedish think-tank, India, Pakistan and North Korea are all pursuing the capability to deploy multiple warheads on ballistic missiles, something Russia, France, the UK, the US and more recently China already have. This would enable a rapid potential increase in deployed warheads, as well as the possibility for nuclear-armed countries to threaten the destruction of significantly more targets, it said. The SIPRI said Russia and the

US together possess almost 90 per cent of all nuclear weapons. The sizes of their respective military stockpiles seem to have remained relatively stable in 2023, although Russia is estimated to have deployed around 36 more warheads with operational forces than in January 2023, it said. Transparency regarding nuclear forces has declined in both countries in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and debates around nuclear-sharing arrangements have increased in saliency, it added. The report said depending on how it decides to structure its forces, China could potentially have at least as many intercontinental ballistic mis-

siles (ICBMs) as either Russia or the US by the turn of the decade. At the same time, the report said China's stockpile of nuclear warheads is still expected to remain much smaller than the stockpiles of either of Russia and the US. "China is expanding its nuclear arsenal faster than any other country," said Hans M Kristensen, Associate Senior Fellow with SIPRI's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programme and Director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists (FAS). "But in nearly all of the nuclear-armed states there are either plans or a significant push to increase nuclear forces," Kristensen said.

CDS Chauhan reviews Armed Forces preparedness in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A day after the Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the security situation at a high-level meeting in New Delhi and directed the security forces to intensify counter-terror operations in the wake of the recent upsurge in terrorist attacks across Jammu region, the Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan on Monday took stock of the prevailing security situation and operational preparedness of the armed forces.

Gen Chauhan was briefed by the senior army officers including the Northern Army Commander and General Officer Commanding (GoC) here at the White Knight Corps headquarters in Nagrota. Since the majority of attacks by the suspected Pakistani terrorists were aimed at the army personnel, a comprehensive review of the deployment pattern was also undertaken by the CDS with the senior army officers to prevent these attacks and prepare a counter-terror strategy to flush these foreign terrorists from their safe hideouts.



Emphasis was laid on strictly following the standard operating procedures (SoP). The senior army officers also highlighted the importance of gathering human intelligence to track down the footprints of the over-ground workers. A series of security review meetings have been held at various levels to further chart out a strategy to deal with growing terrorism in the Jammu region with a strong arm. Terrorists struck at four places in the Reasi, Kathua and Doda districts of Jammu and Kashmir within four days last week, killing nine pil-

grims and martyrdom of CRPF jawan and leaving seven security personnel and several others injured. Two suspected Pakistani terrorists were also killed in an encounter with security forces in Kathua district. On June 9, terrorists opened fire on a bus carrying pilgrims when it was en route to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra from the Shiv Khori temple. The bus plunged into a deep gorge following the gunfire, killing nine people and injuring 41 others. On June 11, terrorists fired at

a joint checkpoint of the Rashtriya Rifles and police at Chattergalla in Baderwah while a search party in the Gandoh area of Doda district was attacked on June 12, resulting in injuries to seven security personnel, including a policeman. Meanwhile, a terrorist was killed in an encounter with security forces in Bandipora district on Monday. The gunfight broke out after security forces launched a cordon and search operation in the Aragam area of the district on Sunday night following information about the presence of terrorists there. The army's Srinagar-based Chinar Corps said one terrorist has been killed. The operation was in progress till the last reports, it said. "Based on specific intelligence input regarding the presence of terrorists, a joint operation was launched by the Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police on the intervening night of June 16-17 in the general area of Gurihajin, Aragam Bandipora; one terrorist was eliminated, operation in progress," the Chinar Corps posted on X.

Brothers sacrifice Eid festivities to help survivors

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Three brothers Rauf, Asfaqur and Safiqur who were returning from their place of work at Guwahati to Sujapur in Malda to celebrate Bakr Eid with their relatives abandoned their journey midway and joined rescue operations with the villagers sending more than a dozen of injured passengers of the ill-fated Kanchenjanga Express to hospitals. "We were to attend the sacrificial programme but what can be a bigger sacrifice than this one ... to help the humanity in grief ... we did not do anything big ... my father would be very happy when he learns about what we did," said Rauf possibly the eldest of the three. "We offered the passengers water ... took care of the little children and helped the other passengers find their near and dear ones because it was a complete mess ... people were trapped in mangled metal and we could not gather courage to enter there so we were only giving water to them to survive till help came



in ... the villagers too were very helpful," Asfaqur said. When asked as how they would make up for time they lost they said, "Nabi tells us about Qurbani or sacrifice ... can there be a bigger sacrifice than this ... the little child I was holding in my arms and taking her to safety with her mother she was clutching at my clothes and trembling ... I thought this was the biggest chance that Allah had given me and I thank him for letting me do this," said Rauf adding they would catch the evening bus and reach Malda by late evening. "Arey sahib Allah ke bandon ko help kiya hei Allah kuch jaroor dega," one of them said. Albeit they return home with a great feeling of content.

Video of UPSC aspirant's weeping parents gets over 2.6 mn views

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A video that has garnered more than 2.6 million views on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) showed weeping parents as an aspirant appearing for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Service Prelims examination was denied entry into the exam centre in Haryana's Gurugram after she arrived late. After the girl was denied entry, the aspirant's mother can be seen in an unconscious state as her father weeps in the video which has been doing rounds on X. "Papa! paani piyo. Kyun aise kar rahe ho? Papa, hum agli baar de denge. Kuch aisi baat nahi hai (Papa, please have water and calm down. Why are you behaving like this? I will appear for the exam next year. It's not a big deal)," the aspirant said. While the father said that a year has been wasted, the girl, in a bid to assure him, said that she can appear next

year. Her father can be seen howling and cursing the school authorities. The distressed mother refused to leave the place. Sharing the video, an X user Sakshi wrote, "Heartbreaking video. Condition of Parents who came along with their daughter for the UPSC Prelims exam today, as their daughter was not allowed for being late. Exam starts at 9:30 am, and they were at the gate at 9 am but were not allowed in by the principal of S.D. Adarsh Vidyalaya, Sector 47, Gurugram." The video, shared on Sunday, amassed over 7,500 likes as many social media users expressed empathy. "Even I attended exam yesterday, they allowed me in after 9 AM too. But some colleges, it depends on type of principal present. He allowed candidates till 9:25 AM and closed the gate afterwards. He was kind." Another user commented, "Respect for his daughter to be strong in this condition," a user said while reacting to the video.

Shiv Sena (UBT) to challenge Mumbai North West LS seat poll results in court

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Alleged manipulation in the counting of votes, the Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Monday announced that his party would challenge the Lok Sabha poll result in the Mumbai North-West constituency on the ground that the official machinery was "misused" to favour the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena candidate.

A day after Mumbai Suburban district's Additional Collector and Returning Officer of Mumbai North-West constituency Vandana Suryavanshi categorically stated that there was no attempt to hack the EVM machines, inside the counting centre, Aaditya dubbed the result declared in the Mumbai North-West constituency was a "fraud". "We will challenge the result in the Mumbai



North-West seat," he said. In the Mumbai North-West constituency, Shinde-led Shiv Sena candidate Ravindra Waikar Trounced Shiv Sena (UBT) candidate Amol Kirtikar by a margin of mere 48 votes in the polls. While Waikar polled 4,52,644 votes, Kirtikar secured 4,52,596 votes. Addressing a news conference along Sena leader and former state minister Anil Parab, Aaditya alleged that his party

candidate's victory was snatched from through the "misuse" of the official machinery. "There is an ongoing debate on the election process and EVMs. I have already said the Election Commission is an 'entirely compromised' commission. If the election process was "free and fair", the BJP would have won only 40 Lok Sabha seats and not 240," Aaditya said. Alluding to the LS poll result in the Mumbai North-west constituency, Parab said that the Election Commission of India should take suo motu action based on the information available and declare Kirtikar as winner. "The results declared in Mumbai north-west constituency were suspicious. We will take a legal recourse against the alleged misuse of official machinery under the Representation of the People Act in a day or two," Parab said.

15 dead, 50...

From Page 1
A passenger who was travelling in an AC coach said "had there been no parcel van which acted like a buffer between the general coaches and the speeding engine of the goods train there would have been more casualties." However, Darjeeling District Magistrate Preeti Goyal who visited the site and the North Bengal Medical College Hospital where the injured were being treated said that the rescue operations had started with "minimum lapse of time," adding "we have been able to save most of the injured persons." The DM said the frequency of the bus services had been increased and the passengers who wanted to reach their destinations by bus were being helped to do so. About a dozen buses of North Bengal State Transport Corporation were immediately deployed its chairperson said adding that additional bus services would be started to. Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Minister who flew off to Siliguri by a late noon flight blamed the Centre for neglecting the passengers' safety in its bid to earn money and publicity. "Today there has been a big accident like it has been happening in regular intervals ... and the Government is sleeping ... today I hear many people

have died ... I am told that their corpses are being kept aside and will be cremated silently to show lesser number of casualties ... I am rushing to the area to see things for myself," Banerjee said adding as the Railway Minister she had made plans for introducing safety devices on trains in collaboration with the Concon Railways "but I don't know what has happened to that project ... they are only giving different names to these projects for publicity but failing to stop accidents." She was apparently referring to installation of Kabach device in the trains. The CEO of the Indian Railways however said in the morning that Kabach was yet to be fitted with trains running through Bengal. "The entire Indian Railways is in shambles ... They have discontinued the Railway Budget and the ministry is hardly visible ... today we can get information about Railways only when there is an inauguration and whenever there is some publicity work done," Banerjee said. Meanwhile, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav too had started for Siliguri reports last coming in said. Helpline Numbers for Kolkata: 033-23508794, 033-23833326 Helpline Numbers for Guwahati: 03612731621, 03612731622, 03612731623

Power...

From Page 1
The minimum temperature in Delhi settled at 33 degrees Celsius, 5.5 notches above the season's average. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted an average to severe heatwave conditions and a warm night with strong surface winds. It is predicted that similar weather conditions will persist on Tuesday as well. The bad news for Delhiites, however, is that water supply will be affected in parts of the Lutyens' Delhi as the Tilak Marg and Bengali Market underground water reservoirs are receiving less water from the Delhi Jal Board. According to New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) officials, there is a 40 per cent drop in supply being received from the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) in the NDMC area. According to DJB, production of potable water from Wazirabad water plant is not at full capacity due to non-availability of raw water. So supply in command area of Tilak Marg underground water reservoir (UGR) and Bengali market UGR will be made once in a day, preferably in morning times. Due to this, water supply will be affected in areas like Bengali Market, Ashoka Road, HC Mathur Lane, Copernicus Marg, Purana Quila Road, Babar Road, Barakhamba Road, K G Marg, Windsor Place, Firozshah Marg, Canning Lane and surrounding areas.

NIA to probe terror attack on pilgrims...

From Page 1
The high-level meetings were called in the wake of the terror attack on the bus in Reasi district and a few other terror incidents in the Union Territory. On June 11, terrorists fired at a joint check-post of the Rashtriya Rifles and police at Chattergalla in Baderwah while a search party in the Gandoh area of Doda district was attacked on June 12, resulting in injuries to seven security personnel, including a policeman. Prime Minister Narendra Modi too had reviewed the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir on June 13 and, directed officials to deploy the "full spectrum of counter-terror capabilities" after a spate of terror incidents, including the attack on the bus carrying pilgrims. Shah on Sunday said the fight against terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir was in its decisive phase and recent incidents showed that terrorism has been forced to shrink from highly organised acts of violence to a mere proxy war. He also directed security agencies to implement 'area domination and zero-terror' plans in the Jammu division like they did in Kashmir to achieve success. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Manoj Sinha, Army Chief General Manoj Pande, Army Chief-designate Lt. General Upendra Dwivedi, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, Director of Intelligence Bureau Tapan Deka, CRPF Director General Anish Dyal Singh, BSF Director General Nitin Agarwal, Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police R R Swain and other top security officials attended both the meetings held by Shah.

One-man mission to offset...

From Page 1
Enthused by what Prof. Miyawaki has written, Hari caught the next available flight to Tokyo where he had a lengthy and wide-ranging discussion with the professor. "You do not require vast tracts of land for afforestation. Whatever forests have been destroyed are lost forever. Prof Miyawaki taught me that a forest model equivalent to the natural forests could be retrieved even on small tracts of land," Hari told The Pioneer. Each region has its own flora and fauna and we should focus on them instead of planting saplings alien to the region. "In ordinary forestation, we plant 400 trees per acre. But, according to Prof Miyawaki, one acre of such land could hold 16,000 saplings. Out of these, 4,000 grow into trees. The Miyawaki forests could be grown in any crowded cities. All you need is a small space to jam-pack with saplings," said Hari. Hari, a professional IT consultant-turned forester has planted thousands of Miyawaki forests across Kerala during the last six years. "We selected 4,000 species of plants and trees and this includes traditional herbs and medicinal plants for home remedies. These saplings grew into two-meter-high trees in six months. During the last four years we have grown 50,000 plants," explained Hari, who is popularly known as Great Forester among ecologists. What is unique about Miyawaki Model is that no model would fit into it which is detrimental to the 'inheritors of earth' and the natural food chain. "Forests are repositories of almost all species. No insecticide or pesticide is used in these forests. The species surviving in the forests do not eat away the forests. The nature itself has established a balance between the hunters and the hunted," said Hari.

Contest for Speaker's post to set a new...

From Page 1
Yakub stayed in the post for one session, the last of the third Assembly. In the fourth Assembly, Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola (76 votes) won the Speaker's election against Hari Singh Gour who got 36 votes. Rahimtoola resigned on health grounds on March 7, 1933 and was succeeded by Shanmukham Chetty on March 14, 1933 as the unanimous choice. Sir Abdur Rahim was elected as the Speaker of

the Fifth Assembly on January 24, 1935. Rahim had polled 70 votes against T A K Sherwani, who could muster the support of 62 members. Rahim held the high office for more than 10 years as the tenure of the fifth Legislative Assembly was extended from time to time on account of the contemplated constitutional changes and later due to the World War II. The last contest for the post of the Central Legislative

Assembly Speaker was held on January 24, 1946 when the Congress leader G V Mavalankar won the election against Cowsajee Jehangir by a margin of three votes. Mavalankar polled 66 votes against 63 by Jehangir. Mavalankar was subsequently appointed as the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly and the Provisional Parliament that came into being after the Constitution came into force on January 26, 1950.

Mavalankar continued to be the Speaker of the Provisional Parliament till April 17, 1952 when the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha were constituted after the first general elections. Since Independence, Lok Sabha Speakers have been chosen by consensus, and only M A Ayyangar, G S Dhillon, Balram Jakhar and G M C Balayogi have been re-elected to the coveted posts in the subsequent Lok Sabhas. Ayyangar, the first Deputy

Speaker of the Lok Sabha, was chosen as the Speaker following the death of Mavalankar in 1956. He won the 1957 general elections and was chosen as the Speaker of the second Lok Sabha. Dhillon was chosen as the Speaker of the fourth Lok Sabha after the resignation of incumbent N Sanjeeva Reddy in 1969. Dhillon was also chosen as the Speaker of the fifth Lok Sabha in 1971 and continued in office till December 1,

1975, when he quit during the Emergency. Jakhar was Speaker of the seventh and the eighth Lok Sabha and holds the distinction of being the only presiding officer to complete two full terms. Balayogi was chosen as the Speaker of the 12th Lok Sabha, which had a tenure of 19 months. He was also chosen as the Speaker of the 13th Lok Sabha on October 22, 1999, till his death in a helicopter crash on March 3, 2002.

BJP holds protest at 52 major locations against water crisis

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP held protests at 52 major locations in the national capital against the water crisis in the city while slamming the AAP government. Carrying bottles of dirty water, the BJP protesters raised slogans against the ruling government and smashed 'matkas' (earthen pitchers) as a mark of protest over water scarcity in the national capital.

They also alleged that people were getting sick after being forced to drink dirty water from the taps. Addressing the protest at Krishna Nagar, BJP Delhi President Virendra Sachdeva stated that they have proven that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his government are solely responsible if Delhiites are not getting water today.

"By sheltering water thieves and tanker mafias, Aam Aadmi Party legislators have turned water into a business, regardless of whether the people of Delhi get water or not. If water theft and leakage are stopped in Delhi, every resident will get sufficient water, but Aam Aadmi Party legislators have no sympathy for the people of Delhi. They only care about their hefty earnings," he alleged, adding



that BJP will continue its struggle until every drop is accounted for.

Addressing the protest at the Jal Board office in Mukherjee Nagar, three times BJP North east Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari said that all departments of the Delhi government are mired in corruption, with the Jal Board being the epicentre. "The MLA's office is running inside the Jal Board. It seems Atishi has become the water minister just to sell water to tanker mafias. We will continue to fight for justice for

the people of Delhi," he said. South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, while demonstrating a protest at Khanpur, claimed, "Arvind Kejriwal lied to get votes from Delhiites and, despite being in power for three terms, has done nothing for water supply, even though he has promised dozens of times that he will provide 24-hour water from taps."

He mentioned that Kejriwal promised to bring 150 MGD of water from Muradnagar through pipelines, but that

has not been done. "The Kejriwal government has not built a single water treatment plant in the past 10 years," he said.

Northwest Delhi BJP MP Yogendra Chandolia asked Water Minister Atishi why, despite having three Rajya Sabha MPs, 61 MLAs, and councillors in Delhi, they are not providing water to Delhiites.

"The truth is that Kejriwal planned to make alcohol cheaper and water expensive, but BJP did not let it succeed.

Just like the liquor scam has been exposed, with Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia in jail, the water board scam will also be revealed. When people approach AAP legislators about water, they are threatened," he said, while addressing the public at a protest at Karol Bagh.

At the protest in Moti Nagar, New Delhi BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj said, "If there is a will, there is a way, but Kejriwal's government lacks the will, which is why Delhiites are suffering for water while their legislators are busy trading water. The crumbling pipelines and the decade-long AAP government have forced Delhiites to take to the streets for water." She stated that Water Minister Atishi should address the shortcomings in water availability on the ground instead of holding press conferences. Addressing the protest at Sangam Park Lal Bagh, Chandni Chowk BJP MP Praveen Khandelwal said "The water issue in Delhi is not new, so Kejriwal should explain what his government has done in the past 10 years. Did they come up with any permanent solution? The reality is that Kejriwal's government only wants to politicise the issue."

AAP MLA threatening to kill people suffering from water crisis, claims BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva alleged on Monday that AAP Bawana MLA Jai Bhagwan Upkar has openly threatened to kill people suffering from water crisis in a viral video.

In a press conference, Sachdeva played a video of Upkar, going viral on social media, in which the MLA is threatening the people of Bawana who had come to his office with a complaint of water crisis while telling them 'you know me, if you speak too much, I will cool you down'. He further stated that in rural language, 'thanda kar doonga', words used by the AAP MLA in the video, means I will kill you. Delhi BJP Media Head Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that after the open threat of MLA, the responsibility falls on the entire AAP. Delhi BJP President said, "We have seen AAP MLA Prakash Jarwal get-



ting a tanker owner killed for extortion and Delhi has seen another MLA Dinesh Mohania misbehaving with women asking for water." "In such a situation, this video of AAP MLA Jai Bhagwan Upkar threatening to cool down people has not only shocked the people of Delhi but has also forced them to think what kind of government is there in Delhi, under whose rule whenever the water problem becomes severe, their MLAs kill people, thrash beat them and also threaten to cool down i.e. kill them," Sachdeva stated.

Questioning AAP leaders, he said, "Will Delhi Minister Atishi and MP Sanjay Singh, who called BJP an anarchist and hooligan party yesterday after the glass of an office was broken, also speak out against their domineering MLA Jai Bhagwan." He said that the people of Delhi demand that Atishi immediately expel Jai Bhagwan Upkar from her party and the Delhi Assembly. "On Tuesday morning our MP Yogendra Chandolia will file a police FIR based on the threatening video of the MLA," he announced.

Congress president demands action against those responsible for water crisis

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress President Devender Yadav on Monday wrote to Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena demanding action against those responsible for the "unprecedented water crisis" in the national capital in this extreme heat amid the water crisis.

In his letter, Yadav pointed out that despite "significant water wastage", the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and Delhi Police have not taken any action against the guilty, as water theft from the DJB pipes have become a regular feature in many parts of Delhi.

"Water theft happens due to the collusion of the Tanker Mafia with ruling party politicians, who aid and abet the water pilferage," he stated. Bringing attention of the Governor to a newspaper report about AAP Deoli MLA Prakash Jarwal taking an alleged bribe of Rs 60 lakh monthly from the water tanker owners, he said, "About 20 water tanker owners reported to have come forward claiming that Jarwal had asked them for money, and four of them recorded their statements before a magistrate stating that they had paid him Rs 20,000 each to clear their file and Rs 500 for each round of supply. It may be recalled that a water tanker owner, Dr

Rajender Singh, had committed suicide a few years ago due to alleged harassment by Jarwal even after making a payment of Rs 10 lakh bribe to him."

"According to ground reports, significant leakage of treated water takes place under the very nose of the DJB officials and Delhi Police, yet no action has been taken to punish the guilty," he said. He mentioned his complaint to the Central Vigilance Commissioner about a massive loss of Rs 17,575 crore to the DJB due to water leakage between 2015-16 and 2022-23, and demanded a probe into the nexus between corrupt officials and politicians in this DJB scam.

He assured him that Delhi Congress Committee workers and leaders have been fully cooperating in identifying the leakage points, and held a peaceful 'matka phod' demonstration to highlight the issue, while the BJP demonstration became violent, damaging Government property.

Yadav appealed to Saxena to issue "stringent directive" to the officials and their political leaders involved in the blame game to collaborate in effectively managing the present water crisis, and registration of an FIR against those responsible for the rapid rise in the water scarcity.

AAP questions Union Government on New Jalpaiguri rail accident

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP expressed sorrow over the recent rail accident in West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri, which left at least 15 dead and 30 injured, and demanded accountability from the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. Mentioning the Balasore train accident in Odisha, which left at least 275 people dead and more than 1,000 injured, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said, "Indian Railways is in a very bad state. The Railway Minister only makes big claims. Despite the train accident at Balasore in Odisha, he was made the Railway Minister again. It is not known for what he has been rewarded. Today, in trains, from General Coaches to Second and Third AC coaches, people are packed like straws. They are being treated like animals. Even in this scorching heat, people are forced to travel in these train coaches with their small children."

He claimed that another investigation committee will be set up to investigate this train accident, a couple of statements will be given and later the matter will be hushed up by whitewashing it. "The Railway Minister or any officer will not take responsibility for this accident, a couple of lower-ranking officers at the bottom of the hierarchy will be suspended. This is extremely unfortunate. People



should keep these things in their hearts and minds so that they can answer them when the time comes. The public has answered it before, it will have to be answered even more strongly in the future," Singh said.

AAP General Secretary (Organisation) Dr Sandeep Pathak labelled the accident as deeply heart-wrenching and questioned whether the collision resulted from signal failures or errors, while inquiring about the presence of anti-collision devices. "We urge the government to take moral responsibility instead of deflecting blame onto officials," he said. Extending full sympathy with the families of those who have lost their lives, Pathak said, "The Prime Minister and Railway Minister of the country should answer how long will such train accidents keep happening in our coun-

try. You talk about running bullet trains in the country but are not able to provide safety to an ordinary passenger from train accidents. How will this work?"

He added that the Union Railway Minister should answer these questions of the people of the country. "First, it is being said that both the trains were running on the same track, so did your signal system fail or was there any human error in it? Second, were anti-collision devices installed in these trains? If they were installed, then why did this accident happen and if they were not installed, then when will anti-collision devices be installed in these trains?" he questioned, adding that while the Modi government has been talking about this 'Kavach' (protection device) for years, there is no knowledge about progress made in it.

AAP MP Sanjay claims water crisis deliberately created by BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Monday alleged that the water crisis in Delhi has been "deliberately created" by the BJP to keep the people of the national capital thirsty. Addressing a press conference, Singh accused BJP of hatching a conspiracy against the residents of the national capital. "We believe 'pyase ko paani pilane se zyada punya ka kaam nahi hota' and there is no bigger sin than stopping water. For the last several days, there has been a water crisis in Delhi sponsored by the BJP and when I am saying that it is a water crisis sponsored by the BJP, I want to tell you that the BJP people want that the people of Delhi do not get water and for this, the BJP people are trying their best to put Delhi in a water crisis by whatever means, whatever conspiracies, whatever methods they can," he alleged.

He said Delhi gets water from Haryana and when the BJP-ruled state does not give the required water, it leads to a shortage. "The production of water is decreasing in Delhi because we are not getting sufficient water from Haryana and this has resulted in a water crisis in Delhi," he added. Meanwhile, Delhi Water Minister Atishi visited the Wazirabad barrage and appealed to the Haryana government to release water in the Yamuna river. She said the Wazirabad barrage gets water from Haryana which goes to



the water treatment plants of Chandrawal, Okhla and Wazirabad. "If no water is received, how will the water treatment plants work? We appeal to Haryana that the people in Delhi are worried and they should release water in Yamuna river," she added. Further, Singh said that despite repeated pleas with the Haryana government to give Delhi its rightful share, it is not getting its due. "We are not asking for the part of water for the people of Haryana, we are asking for Delhi's share of water, you do not want to give that too. Secondly, when we complain to the LG (Delhi), instead of resolving the complaints, the LG keeps issuing his political statements," he added.

The AAP leader claimed the BJP is not working to solve the water problem in Delhi, but to increase the water crisis. "This is a crisis sponsored by the BJP's LG, Haryana government and the BJP. If Delhi starts getting its full share of water,

the water problem can be reduced. The Prime Minister, Home Minister and BJP of the country are accountable to the people of Delhi," he said.

Hitting at the AAP leaders, BJP Delhi President Virendra Sachdeva said, "Due to the negligence of the Kejriwal government, Delhiites are grappling with a water crisis because more than half of the drinking water is either being stolen or leaking, but Delhi's Water Minister Atishi and MP Sanjay Singh are busy issuing statements rather than stopping leakage and theft of water." Reiterating that the government's job is to solve problems, he said, "But today in Delhi, there is a government that has itself become a problem. Whether it is Water Minister Atishi or MP Sanjay Singh, instead of fulfilling their responsibilities and addressing water leakage and theft, they hold press conferences on their self-created artificial water crisis just to stay in the news."

Amul regrets centipede in ice cream at Noida, orders investigation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/NOIDA

In an unexpected turn of events, Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), Amul, one of India's leading dairy brands, faces scrutiny after a Noida woman alleged finding a centipede in her ice cream tub. The woman, Deepa Devi, shared a picture of the insect on X, prompting immediate action from Amul and food safety officials.

Amul brand, regretted the inconvenience caused to the woman customer in Noida and requested her to return the ice cream tub, in which she claimed to have found centipede, for further investigation and asserted that it offers superior quality dairy products in both India and global markets. Noida's food safety department has launched a probe into this matter.

In a statement, Amul said it immediately responded to the complaint on social media. "We deeply regret the inconvenience caused to her



because of this incident," the statement said. Amul said its team was trying to contact the customer continuously and was allowed to meet after 9:30 pm on the same day (June 15).

"During our meeting with the customer, we had requested the customer to provide the said ice cream tub for investigation, unfortunately, the customer refused to hand over the same. "Unless the complaint pack is retrieved from the customer it would be difficult for us to investigate the matter and hence comment specifically on the issue which involves pack and supply

chain integrity as well," Amul said.

A woman in Noida has claimed she has found a centipede inside an ice cream tub she ordered through an instant delivery app, said food safety officials, who have launched a probe into the matter. In a post on X on June 15, the woman, who identified herself as Deepa Devi, shared a picture showing the insect inside the ice cream tub.

"During the interaction, the customer was informed and assured about Amul's state-of-the-art ISO-certified plants which are automated and pass through numerous stringent

quality checks before offering any product for sale to the esteemed customers. Amul also invited the customer to visit its plant to assure her about the quality processes being followed.

Amul assured customers about the superior quality of Amul Ice Cream. Amul highlighted that it is among India's most trusted brands, owned by 36 lakh farmers. It markets 22 billion packs of Amul products annually across 50+ countries with the highest quality and food safety standards from 100+ dairies across India. "We would like to assure you that we take the utmost care to ensure our products are safe, healthy and nutritious to serve our customers daily," Amul said. The cooperative organisation requested the customer to return the ice cream tub for a thorough investigation.

"Once we receive the complaint pack from the customer, we shall investigate the matter from all angles and again get back to our customers with the findings," Amul said.

Bidhuri asks to be relieved from post of LoP of Delhi Assembly

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

BJP MLA Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, who was elected to the Lok Sabha, has requested party President JP Nadda to relieve him from the post of the Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly. Bidhuri contested the recently held general elections from the South Delhi Parliamentary Constituency. A bypoll on the Badarpur Assembly seat which he represents is unlikely in view of the schedule of the Delhi Assembly elections in early 2025.

In a statement, Bidhuri said he has decided to resign from membership of the Delhi assembly following his election from the South Delhi seat and written to the BJP national president to be relieved from the post of leader of opposition in the assembly. He said according to rules, he needs to resign from either the assembly or the Lok Sabha within 14 days of the notification being issued. Therefore, he will be resigning from the membership of the assembly on June 18,



Bidhuri said. The BJP has eight MLAs in the 70-member Delhi assembly. The number will come down to seven after his resignation. The party has yet to announce the name of next Leader of Opposition in the Assembly. Bidhuri said that as per the rules, he needs to resign from either the Assembly or the Lok Sabha within 14 days of the notification being issued. Therefore, he will be resign-

ing from the membership of the Assembly on June 18.

Elected as a member of the first Delhi Legislative Assembly in 1993, Bidhuri has since been elected four times as an MLA. After he won the assembly election in 2020, BJP chose him to be the LoP in Delhi assembly because he was the senior most legislator among BJP's 8 winners. He was also appointed a member of BJP's National Executive in 2013.

Man kills daughter for wanting to marry into another caste, held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A man allegedly slit his daughter's throat and dumped her body here on a farm in Rohini's Kanjhawala area for wanting to marry a man from another caste against the wishes of the family.

The woman was found lying in a pool of blood with multiple stab wounds in a farmland in Chandpur village in Kanjhawala on Sunday. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Rohini) Guriqbal Singh Sidhu said the 46-year-old accused has been arrested, adding that the police received a call about the incident at 8:53 pm on Sunday.

Sidhu said a police team immediately reached the spot and found a woman with deep injuries in her neck and abdomen. She was shifted to a hospital where doctors declared her brought dead. In view of the sensitivity case, multiple police teams were formed for the case. CCTV footage of the area was analysed, he said.

Modi to visit UP, Bihar to participate in Kisan Samman Sammelan today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to Varanasi on Tuesday, his first visit after assuming office for the third consecutive term. During his visit, the prime minister will participate in the PM Kisan Samman Sammelan and release Rs 20,000 crore as part of the income support scheme for over 9.26 crore farmers.

At around 7 PM, Modi will witness Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat. He will also perform 'pooja' and 'darshan' at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple at around 8 PM, an official statement said. Varanasi district media in-charge of BJP, Arvind Mishra said the prime minister is coming to Kashi to express his gratitude to the voters of his constituency.

In the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections, Modi won from his parliamentary constituency of Varanasi for the third consecutive time. The prime minister will be in Bihar on Wednesday where he will inaugurate the campus of the Nalanda University in Rajgir. He will also address the



gathering on the occasion. After being sworn in as prime minister for the third time, Modi signed his first file authorising release of 17th instalment of PM Kisan Nidhi reflecting the commitment of the government towards farmer welfare. In continuation of this commitment, Modi will release the instalment amounting to more than Rs 20,000 crore to around 9.26 crore beneficiary farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) through Direct Benefit Transfer.

So far, more than 11 crore eligible farmer families have received benefits of more than Rs. 3.04 lakh crore under PM-KISAN. During the event in Varanasi, the prime minister will also grant certificates to more than 30,000 women from Self Help Groups (SHGs) as Krishi Sakhis. Krishi Sakhi Convergence Program (KSCP) aims to transform rural India through the empowerment of rural women as Krishi Sakhi, by imparting training and certification of Krishi Sakhis as Para-extension Workers. This

certification course also aligns with the objectives of the "Lakhpati Didi" Program. In Bihar, the prime minister will inaugurate the new campus of Nalanda University which is conceived as a joint collaboration between India and East Asia Summit (EAS) countries. The inauguration ceremony will be attended by several eminent people, including the Head of Missions of 17 Countries.

The campus has two academic blocks with 40 classrooms having a total seating capacity of around 1900. It has two auditoria having a capacity of 300 seats each. It has a student hostel with a capacity of around 550 students. It also has various other facilities including International Centre, amphitheatre that can accommodate up to 2000 individuals, faculty club and sports complex among others. The campus is a 'Net Zero' green campus. It is self-sustainable with solar plant, domestic and drinking water treatment plant, water recycling plant for reusing waste water, 100 acres of water bodies, and many other environment friendly facilities.

NSA Doval holds wide ranging talks with American counterpart Sullivan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

National Security Advisor(NSA)Ajit Doval on Monday here held detailed talks with his American counterpart Jake Sullivan, focusing on implementation of the ambitious India-US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), bilateral defence ties and regional security situation. Sullivan is visiting Delhi from June 17 to 18, in the first trip to India by a senior Biden administration official after the Modi government came to power for the third term. The US National Security Adviser (NSA) is accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising senior US government officials and industry leaders.

It is learnt that the two NSAs also deliberated on the proposed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) against the backdrop of a delay in its rollout in view of the current situation in West Asia. Sullivan's visit to India came three days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden had a brief conversation on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Italy's Apulia region.



The top Biden administration official also met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. He is also expected to call on Prime Minister Modi. "Delighted to welcome US NSA @JakeSullivan46 in New Delhi today morning. A comprehensive discussion on a broad range of bilateral, regional and global issues," Jaishankar said in a social media post. "Confident that India-US strategic partnership will continue to advance strongly in our new term," he said. Sullivan is also likely to call on Prime Minister Modi. The iCET was launched by Prime Minister Modi and President Biden on the sidelines of the Quad summit in

Tokyo on May 24, 2022. Subsequently, Doval and Sullivan have made concerted efforts to implement the roadmap under the iCET framework with a focus on cooperation in new and emerging technologies, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, defence innovation, space and advanced telecommunications. The two sides have included new areas under iCET that included biotechnology, critical minerals and rare earths processing technologies, digital connectivity, digital public infrastructure and advanced materials. The ongoing visit gives the

NSAs an opportunity to review the progress and set new priorities and deliverables for iCET, people familiar with Doval-Sullivan talks said.

The two NSAs also discussed bilateral issues and reviewed the India-US partnership on regional and global issues of mutual interest besides reviewing strategic ties between the two nations.

They were also scheduled to chair the first annual review of iCET with an inter-departmental delegation from both countries.

On Tuesday, the two NSAs will address participants at an India-US iCET roundtable with industry CEOs, being organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Doval and Sullivan have been holding regular consultations on bilateral, regional and global issues. The current visit continues their high-level engagement on multi-faceted agenda of the India-US global strategic partnership, the people cited above said.

The US NSA called off a visit to India for the review of iCET twice this year in view of the US administration's focus on the evolving situation in West Asia arising out of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Congress asks EC: How many EVMs found faulty throughout LS polls?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Monday asked the Election Commission to put out data on how many EVMs were found faulty throughout the Lok Sabha polls.

Gogoi, who won the just concluded Lok Sabha elections from Assam's Jorhat seat by defeating his nearest BJP rival by a margin of over 1.44 lakh votes, said he can confidently say that these machines have shown inaccurate results. His statement came a day after a fresh political row erupted over EVM tampering claims with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders citing a media report that alleged that a relative of the Shiv Sena candidate in Mumbai North West Lok Sabha constituency was found using a mobile phone "connected" to an electronic voting machine during the counting of votes on June 4.

In a social media post, Gogoi said before treating the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) as infallible, the Election Commission of India should put out data on how many EVMs were found faulty throughout the elections. He said the ECI should answer how many machines showed the wrong time, date, votes registered during the general elections and how many EVMs had their components replaced - counting unit, ballot unit and how many EVMs were found



faulty during the mock poll. "Having contested the elections, I can confidently say that these machines have shown inaccurate results. I hope the Election Commission puts out the above data because the public have the right to know," he said. Returning officer of the Mumbai North West Lok Sabha constituency, Vandana Suryavanshi, has dismissed the report in Mid-Day newspaper as "false news" and said that a defamation notice has been issued to the publication. She asserted the EVM is a stand-alone system, not programmable and has no wireless communication capabilities. Questioning the reliability of EVMs, Rahul Gandhi and other leaders had on Sunday also quoted a post by Elon Musk, chairman of social media platform X and CEO of Tesla, in which he talked about eliminating the EVMs and claimed the risk of hacking was "too high". "We should eliminate electronic voting machines. The risk of being hacked by humans or AI, while small, is still too high," Musk said while responding to a post by US

politician Robert F Kennedy Jr alleging Puerto Rico's primary elections experienced "hundreds of voting irregularities related to electronic voting machines".

Rahul said in his social media post EVMs in India are a 'black box' and nobody is allowed to scrutinise them. He said that serious concerns are being raised about transparency in our electoral process. "Democracy ends up becoming a sham and prone to fraud when institutions lack accountability," he said in a post and tagged the media report which claimed that a relative of Shiv Sena's candidate Ravindra Waikar, who won the polls from Mumbai's North-West seat by 48 votes, had a phone that unlocks an EVM.

However, former Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar of the BJP countered Musk's criticism of the EVMs and said that the billionaire businessman's view may apply to the US and other places where they use regular compute platforms to build "Internet-connected voting machines". "But Indian EVMs are custom designed, secure and isolated from any network or media - No connectivity, no Bluetooth, wifi, Internet. If there is no way in. Factory-programmed controllers that cannot be reprogrammed," Chandrasekhar said in a social media post. "Electronic voting machines can be architected and built right as India has done. We would be happy to run a tutorial Elon," the BJP leader added.

Congress seeks thorough review of mega infrastructure project in Great Nicobar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday demanded a thorough review of a proposed "mega infrastructure project" in Great Nicobar initiated at the "instance" of the Niti Aayog, claiming that it poses a grave threat to the island's tribal communities.

Raising red flags over the proposed project, Congress general secretary and former Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh said all clearances given to the Rs 72,000-crore project should be suspended immediately and an impartial review of it conducted, including by the parliamentary committees concerned.

"The Union government's proposed Rs 72,000-crore 'Mega Infra Project' in Great Nicobar Island is a grave threat to Great Nicobar Island's tribal communities and natural ecosystem. The project, initiated in March 2021 at the instance of the NITI Aayog, shows numerous red flags," Ramesh said in a statement, which he also social media.

"The Congress demands an immediate suspension of all clearances and conduct of a thorough impartial review of the proposed project, including by the parliamentary committees concerned," he said. He claimed that the environment, forests and climate change ministry has given an "in-principle" clearance for



diverting 13,075 hectares of forest land.

"This area is about 15 per cent of the island's land mass and constitutes one of the country's largest forest diversions in a nationally and globally unique rainforest ecosystem," the Congress leader said. Compensatory afforestation for the loss of this unique rainforest ecosystem has been planned in the state of Haryana, thousands of kilometres away and in a vastly different ecological zone, Ramesh claimed.

"The coastline where the port and the project is proposed to come up is an earthquake prone zone, and saw a permanent subsidence of about 15 feet during the tsunami of December 2004. Locating such a massive project here puts investment, infrastructure, people, and the ecology in harm's way," he said in the statement. "The project poses a direct threat to the wellbeing and survival of the Shompen, an indigenous community classified as a particularly vulnera-

ble tribal group (PVTG). Thirty-nine experts from across the world have warned the administration that the project poses the threat of genocide to the Shompen," Ramesh said.

"The administration has compromised on due process in its rush to get approval — the administration did not adequately consult the Tribal Council of the Islands, as is legally required. The Tribal Council of Great Nicobar Island has in fact expressed objections to the project, claiming that authorities had earlier 'rushed them' into signing a 'No Objection' letter based on misleading information — and that the No Objection letter has since been revoked," he claimed.

The administration has "ignored" the island's Shompen Policy, notified by the Union tribal affairs ministry, which requires authorities to prioritise the tribe's welfare when considering "large scale development proposals", the Congress leader said.

Congress condoles loss of lives in Bengal train accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi on Monday criticized the Modi government for "utter mismanagement" of the Railway Ministry as they condoled the loss of lives in the West Bengal train accident.

"Extremely distressed by the Kanchanjunga Express train collision accident in Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, where many people have lost their lives and several have been injured," Kharge said.

"The scenes of the accident are painful. Our heart goes out to the families of the victims. In this hour of grief, we express our solidarity and condolences to each one of them. We wish a speedy recovery to the injured. Immediate and full compensation must be provided to the victims," he demanded. Kharge alleged that in the past 10 years, the Modi government has indulged in "utter mismanagement" of the Railway Ministry.

"As a responsible Opposition, it is our bounden duty to underline how the Modi Government has systematically converted the Rail Ministry into a platform of 'Camera-driven' self-promotion," the Congress chief claimed. "Today's tragedy is yet another reminder of this stark reality," he alleged. "Make no mistake, we will remain persistent with our questions and shall make the Modi



Government accountable for its criminal abandonment of the Indian Railways," Kharge said. Rahul Gandhi alleged the increase in railway accidents in the last 10 years is a "direct result of the mismanagement and negligence of the Modi government, which has resulted in loss of lives and property of passengers on a daily basis".

"Today's accident is another example of this reality - as a responsible opposition, we will continue to question this blatant negligence and hold the Modi government accountable for these accidents," he claimed in a post on X in Hindi. Rahul Gandhi said the news of death of several people due to the accident of Kanchanjunga Express in West Bengal is extremely sad.

"I express my deepest condolences to all the bereaved families and wish for the speedy recovery of the injured. The government should immediately provide full compensation to all the victims or their families. Congress workers are requested to provide all possible assistance in relief and rescue efforts," he said in his post.

Himalayas experiencing significantly low snow persistence: Report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid reports of growing water shortages in heat-affected regions of India, a new alarm has been raised regarding an impending water crisis with a new report saying that the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region is experiencing significantly reduced snow persistence, critical for water supply to downstream communities.

The latest Snow Update Report - 2024 released by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) on Monday said that snow levels across the region are nearly 20% below normal, with the most significant declines observed in western areas where dependence on snowmelt for water supply is highest.

This decline, affecting approximately 23% of water flow in major river basins originating from the HKH, poses grave implications for water security. Known as the world's most important 'water tower', the HKH is the source of ten of Asia's largest rivers including Ganga and Brahmaputra in India and holds the largest



volume of ice and snow outside of the Arctic and Antarctica. It stretches over 3500 kilometres and across eight countries - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Myanmar and Pakistan. Regarding India, the report said, snow persistence dropped 17 per cent below normal in the Ganga basin and 14.6 per cent below normal in the Brahmaputra basin. The HKH is heavily dependent on the cryosphere -- frozen water on the Earth's surface, including snow, permafrost, and ice from glaciers, lakes and

rivers. This frozen water is a critical source of freshwater for around 240 million (24 crore) people living in the HKH region and has far-reaching benefits for around 1.65 billion (165 crore) people downstream. Snowmelt accounts for around 23 per cent of the total water flow of 12 major river basins originating in the HKH. However, its contribution varies from river to river, representing 74 per cent of the Amu Darya's flow, 77 per cent of the Helmand's flow, and 40 per cent of the Indus' flow. Monitoring shows snow levels

are almost a fifth below normal across the region this year, with the most dramatic declines in the west, where its contribution to water supply is the highest. The Indus basin has fallen to 23.3 per cent below normal, the lowest level in 22 years. The previous lowest year for this basin was 2018, with a 9.4 per cent shortfall. The Mekong basin had the smallest variation from normal, with snow persistence around 1 per cent below normal. "We have seen a pattern of decreasing amounts and per-

sistence of snow across the Hindu Kush Himalaya, with 13 of the past 22 years registering lower-than-normal seasonal snow persistence," said ICIMOD cryosphere specialist Sher Muhammad, who is also author of the report.

"This is a wake-up call for researchers, policymakers and downstream communities. Lower snow accumulation and fluctuating snow levels pose a serious increased risk of water shortages, particularly this year," he said. Miriam Jackson, ICIMOD's senior cryosphere specialist, said agencies must take proactive steps to address possible drought situations, especially in early summer. "Plans must be updated to accommodate water stress, and communities need to be notified of the risks." The experts said promoting rainwater harvesting and establishing local water committees may help mitigate the immediate impacts of below-normal snowfall on the water supply in the HKH region.

However, to ensure long-term resilience to climate change, countries sharing trans-boundary rivers must collaborate to update their water management laws.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh sets ambitious goals for NIOT scientists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, has set ambitious goals for the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) scientists: to complete the initial harbor trial of Matsyayaan 6000, capable of diving 6000 meters deep into the ocean, by September 2024. Matsya 6000 is India's first manned submersible which will carry three people to a depth of 6,000 metres to study deep sea resources being built under the Samudrayaan project. The Minister also emphasised the need to conclude all subsequent trials of this advanced deep-sea exploration technology by 2026.

Speaking at a meeting here focused on the Ministry of Earth Sciences' 100-day Action Plan, Dr. Singh underscored the role of the Mission in advancing ocean sciences, exploring marine flora and fauna, and conserving biodiversity. The Minister said that India is poised to become the sixth nation globally to embark



on its own Deep Sea Mission, a feat achieved by very few nations.

Dr. Jitendra Singh also appreciated the NIOT scientists for working in collaboration with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to successfully bear extreme pressure by developing 'Titanium Hull'. He also enquired on the development of Self-Floation technology to deal with emergency conditions and be submerged for 72 hours. Some of the highlights were the progress on the 4hr descent of the Yaan. He asked institutes to focus on achieving a resilient blue-economy to empower people dependent on the ocean and its energy for livelihood. On drawing contours of the deep sea

mission he said "Mission is not limited to mineral exploration but development of ocean sciences and exploration of flora and fauna and conservation of marine biodiversity etc." "Deep Sea Mission has the potential to contribute greatly to the overall growth of Indian economy," said Dr. Jitendra Singh highlighting the multi-fold impact this mission will have on Flora and fauna, deep sea exploration, rare earth metals commercial exploitation, exploration and discovery of metals and poly metallic nodules in the Indian Sea bed. He also directed and motivated scientists and officials to develop indigenous technology and capability and reduce India's dependence.

CRPF helps kids of its slain personnel secure seats in tech streams

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The CRPF is helping the children of its personnel killed in action or decorated with gallantry medals secure seats in technical streams like artificial intelligence, computer science and electronics through special MoUs with prominent institutions. The country's largest paramilitary force has inked such memorandums with 31 universities till now, out of which 22 are located in Tamil Nadu, officials told PTI. The initiative was launched last year and results are visible now, they said. As part of this scheme, the tuition fee for the entire course of a candidate is waived off and the families of such personnel have to only bear the hostel and mess

charges, they said. There are a total seven categories created as part of this welfare initiative, with the children of personnel killed in action being the top-most priority followed by those who were disabled and the ones who died on duty, among others. The essential criteria for availing the benefit of this scheme is a student obtaining minimum 60 per cent marks in their class 12 exams. "This initiative is part of the welfare measures initiated by the force for the families of our brave personnel who do not hesitate to even risk their lives in the line of duty. More such avenues are being explored to ensure an assured future for the CRPF families and their children," M Dhinakaran, CRPF deputy inspector general (DIG) at its



group centre in Avadi, said. Karthika S, daughter of slain CRPF head constable M Subramaniam, is happy to

start her 2024-25 academic session at the SRM Institute of Science and Technology located in Chengalpattu

district of the state. Subramaniam laid down his life during an anti-Naxal operation in Chhattisgarh's

Bijapur district in May, 2010. She is among the three such students who have been awarded seats in this college for the current academic year, with the other two getting computer science engineering (CSE) streams. "I have been enrolled in the four-year B.Tech (artificial intelligence) course. The CRPF took care of me and helped in securing admission in every way possible. They did what my father would have done for me," Karthika said. Difixlin Josy C M, whose father made the supreme sacrifice during an operational task in Chhattisgarh in 2013 during an anti-Maoist operation, said, "I have been studying B.Tech computer science and engineering since last year. The CRPF officials helped me

throughout the admission process and ensured my year is not wasted for want of a good institute". Pro Vice Chancellor of SRM University, C. Muthamizhchelvan, says his institute tied up with the CRPF for this initiative as they wanted to ensure good education for the children of those who lay down their lives in the service of the nation. "CRPF is a versatile force looking after internal security of the country. It has the highest operational casualties amongst the security forces and we wanted to provide good education for the children of those who made the supreme sacrifice," he said. Officials said the CRPF has inked similar MoUs with institutes based in Himachal

Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka and there are a total of 297 seats on offer among these institutes. The entire tuition and registration fee that comes to about Rs 18-20 lakh for the entire course is completely waived off. The families have to bear the cost of lodging and messing, they said. The about 3.25 lakh personnel strength CRPF, the country's largest paramilitary, is the lead internal security force with its three main operating theatres being Left Wing Extremism affected areas, counter-terrorism duties in Jammu and Kashmir and counter-insurgency tasks in the north east. According to data, 2,262 personnel have been killed in action till date.

BJP announces name of candidates for bypolls to four Assembly seats in Bengal

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The BJP on Monday announced the name of Kalyan Chaubey and three new faces for the four assembly seats in West Bengal where by-polls are slated to be held on July 10. The ruling Trinamool Congress has already announced its candidates for the by-polls a few days back. The BJP has fielded Kalyan Chaubey from Maniktala constituency in Kolkata, Manas Kumar Ghosh from Raiganj in Uttar Dinajpur district, Manoj Kumar Biswas from Ranaghat Dakshin (SC) in Nadia district and Binay Kumar Biswas from Bagda (SC) seat. Both Manoj Kumar Biswas and Binay Kumar Biswas belong to the Matua community which has a significant chunk of voters in Ranaghat Dakshin and Bagda, both seats reserved for SCs.



Chaubey had been defeated by TMC leader Sadhan Pandey in the 2021 assembly polls but the seat fell vacant after Pandey's death. The TMC has announced Krishna Kalyani from Raiganj, Mukut Mani Adhikari from Ranaghat-

Dakshin, Supti Pandey from Maniktala and Madhuparna Thakur from Bagdah as their candidates. Kalyani had won on a BJP ticket from Raiganj in the 2021 assembly polls and later switched to the TMC as the party's candidate for Lok

Sabha polls but lost in the election. Adhikari had joined the TMC earlier this year and lost in the Lok Sabha elections from Ranaghat. BJP turncoat Biswajit Das had joined TMC and contested on a TMC ticket from Bongaon Lok Sabha seat but was defeated. In the 2021 assembly polls, he had been elected on a BJP ticket from Bagda but as he resigned from the seat before filing nominations for contesting Lok Sabha polls, the assembly by-polls were necessitated in the Bagda seat. On June 10, the Election Commission of India announced that by-elections to fill vacancies in 13 assembly constituencies in seven states will be held on July 10 and the counting of the votes will take place on July 13. The last date to file nominations is June 21 and candidates can withdraw their candidature till June 26.

Centre will definitely support Polavaram Project: Andhra BJP chief Purandeswari

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh BJP chief Purandeswari on Monday said the NDA-led union government will 'definitely' extend support to Polavaram Project immediately after the state government asks for it. Purandeswari made this observation while speaking to a vernacular news channel, and accused the previous YSRCP government led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for its current state of affairs. "Definitely, the Central government will extend its support immediately after the state government asks for it," she said. Andhra Pradesh's NDA government, comprising TDP, BJP and Janasena, is led by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. According to the state BJP chief, the Central government 'has been extending its cooperation' to the project from the time it



was declared a national project till now. "Maybe, there is a delay in submitting the bills but once they are submitted, funds are released immediately. But the responsibility of submitting the bills to the Centre in the proper format falls on the state

government," she said. She alleged that the project didn't move forward during the previous YSRCP regime and that it showed the erstwhile government's dedication towards it. Purandeswari said the mega irrigation project suffered serious damage in the past

floods, such as the diaphragm wall and cofferdam getting affected. On Monday, Naidu visited the project to take stock of the situation. Polavaram Project is on river Godavari near Ramayyapeta village in Polavaram Mandalam of Eluru district, located about 34 km upstream of Kovvuru-Rajahmundry road-cum-rail bridge. It emerges from the last ranges of the Eastern Ghats at this location and enters the plains in the Godavari region. According to the Polavaram Project Authority (PPA), the multi-purpose irrigation project is intended to irrigate over 4.3 lakh hectares of land and generate 960 MW of hydropower, along with the supply of drinking water to nearly 30 lakh people in 611 villages. The mega project is also envisaged to divert 80 TMC water to the Krishna river basin.

Sikkim: Evacuation of stranded tourists begins from Lachung

PTI ■ GANGTOK

The much-delayed evacuation of stranded tourists began by road from Toong in Sikkim's Mangan district on Monday noon, officials said. So far, a total of nine tourists have been evacuated, they said. The evacuation process is being led by the Mangan District Magistrate Hem Kumar Chettri and officials from Tourism and Civil Aviation and Forest Departments, besides the Travel Agent Association of Sikkim (TAAS). Despite incessant rains and multiple slides to cross over, the team is handling the evacuation with safety, care and caution, in batches, they said. Around 1200 tourists,

including some foreigners, are stranded in Lachung town for the past one week as the road and communication networks have been crippled by torrential rains and landslides in several areas of Mangan district disrupting connectivity with the rest of the country. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is carrying out the restoration of the road network to facilitate vehicular traffic to and from Mangan district at the earliest, the officials added. At least six people have been killed in Sikkim due to landslides triggered by heavy rain over the past few days. The natural calamity has also damaged properties and disrupted power and food supplies and mobile networks in several areas, officials said.

Gujarat Govt orders restoration of Jain idols at Pavagadh after protest by community

PTI ■ HALOL (GUJARAT)

The Gujarat government on Monday instructed authorities in Panchmahal district to reinstall centuries-old Jain idols at their original place near the stairs leading to Kalika Mata temple on Pavagadh hill after community members staged protests over their alleged removal from the site. While community members alleged these idols of Jain Tirthankars (supreme spiritual teachers) were removed by the temple trust as part of a renovation project, the trust clarified they might have been displaced while removing an old shed on the stairs and maintained it was not done out of any ill will. These Jain idols were placed on both sides of the steps of an old pathway, which goes to the hill temple, but is not

in use at present. On Monday morning, some community members noticed that the idols were removed from the side walls and put together at one place, said Jain leader Dinesh Shah. On learning about the removal of these 6 to 7 idols, members as well as religious leaders of the Jain community staged protests at Vadodara, Halol and Surat and gave memorandum to district collectors. Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi swung into action and ordered restoration of these idols at their original site after discussing the issue with Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel. "These idols were placed there centuries ago and were being worshiped by people. Permission was never given to any trust or individual to remove these idols. This act

has hurt the religious sentiments of many people. After discussing the issue with the CM, the (Panchmahal) district collector has been asked to reinstall these idols at the same place near the steps," said Sanghavi. In a memorandum submitted to the Halol police, community leader Kiran Duggad accused the trustees of 'Shree Kalika Mataji Mandir Trust Pavagadh' of removing the idols from both sides of the old stairs. Duggad, on behalf of the Halol Jain Sangh, demanded immediate restoration of these idols and registration of an FIR against those involved in this act of "hurting religious sentiments of Jains". Vinod Variya, one of the temple trustees, held a meeting with Jain leaders in the presence of district authorities on Monday

afternoon at Halol and announced the idols will be placed at the same place. "I want to clarify that there was no desecration of any religious structure. As you all know renovation has been going on at Pavagadh to provide better facilities to devotees coming there. This mega renovation is being done by the trust as well as the government," said Variya after the meeting. "As part of the renovation work, an old shed on the steps was removed as a precautionary measure so that it does not collapse in high-speed winds. It is possible some idols might have been displaced while removing the old shed. But, we have arrived at a solution during the meeting and we have announced to restore those idols at the original place," he told reporters.

Kuwait fire tragedy: Mortal remains of Punjab man consigned to flames in Hoshiarpur

PTI ■ HOSHIARPUR

The mortal remains of 62-year-old Himat Rai, who was among those killed in a devastating fire in southern Kuwait's Mangaf, were consigned to flames at a cremation ground here. His son, Arshdeep Singh (16), led the funeral pyre. Rai was among 49 people killed in the fire in the Al-Mangaf building on June 12. A majority of those killed were Indians; the remaining were Pakistani, Filipino, Egyptian and Nepali nationals. The building housed around 195 migrant workers. Rai's family lives in Kakkon, a suburb of Hoshiarpur city.



Sham Chaurasi MLA Dr. Ravjot Singh and Hoshiarpur Tehsildar Gursewak Chand among many people who paid their last respects.

OBC leaders should focus on quota for Dhangar community, says Jarange

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Activist Manoj Jarange on Monday said the OBC leaders should focus on seeking reservation for the Dhangar community under the ST category instead of criticising the demand for Maratha quota. Speaking to reporters here, Jarange said the OBC leaders are "not our enemies" and Marathas would support the demand for reservation to the Dhangar (shepherd) community under the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category. On June 13, Jarange suspended his indefinite fast over the Maratha quota, six days after launching it, and set a deadline of one month

before the Maharashtra government to accept the community's demands. He made the announcement after Maharashtra minister and member of Maratha sub-committee Shambhuraj Desai and Shiv Sena MP Sandipan Bhumare met him at his native Antarwali Sarati village in Jalna district and discussed the issue. Some leaders from the Other Backward Classes have opposed the Maratha quota under the OBC category. In February this year, the Maharashtra legislature unanimously passed a bill providing 10 per cent reservation for the Marathas in education and government jobs under a separate category.



Jarange has been demanding implementation of the draft notification that recognises Kunbis as "sage soyare" (blood relatives) of Maratha community members and a law to identify Kunbis as Marathas. Kunbi, an agrarian group,

falls under the OBC category, and Jarange has been demanding that Kunbi certificates be issued to all Marathas, thus making them eligible for quota benefits. Speaking to reporters at a private hospital in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar where he is undergoing treatment, Jarange on Monday said, "The OBC leaders are not our enemies. I have not spoken anything against them." "Instead of criticising and talking about the Maratha quota, they should spend their energy to get reservation for the Dhangar community under the ST category. The Maratha community will also stand firmly with them," he said. On statements made by

some OBC leaders that they plan to contest the upcoming state assembly elections, Jarange said it is a democracy and anyone can contest polls. "Instead of discussing who will win and who will lose, they should work and see how the children of their Dhangar community will get educated. Today they have to graze the cattle and work in farms," he said. "Only 10-20 persons from every community will move forward if they join politics. But we should think about how our children will get educated. When they (OBC leaders) say that their political existence will come to an end, it means the career of only 5-10 persons will end," he added.

Three Independents extend unconditional support to Khandu Govt in Arunachal

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Three independents in Arunachal Pradesh have extended their unconditional support to the BJP government led by Chief Minister Pema Khandu. The MLAs — Laisam Simai, Wanglam Sawin, and Tenzin Nima Glow — conveyed their decision through a letter of support to Khandu, BJP sources confirmed. "Heartfelt thanks to Independent MLAs Shri Laisam Simai Ji, Shri Wanglam Sawin Ji, and Shri Tenzin Nima Glow Ji for extending support to the BJP government in Arunachal Pradesh," Khandu said in a statement.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I/Ramesh Kapoor S/o Parkash R/o H. No. C-497, Avantiika, Sector-1, Rohini, North West, Delhi-110085 (UAI-4559 0409 8713) during the shifting, property papers of Property No. 1932, Situated at Gali Ahiran, Malka Ganj, Subzi Mandi, Delhi-110007, i.e. original GPA, ATS, Affidavit, Possession Letter and Cash Receipt in the name of my mother Late Brij Rani Kapoor in W/o Late Prakash Chander Kapoor, executed by Late Aasa Nand S/o Anvashi Ram, have been lost/misplaced. Use of the said documents by any of the person in any manner will be treated as illegal/criminal act. Please return the documents, if anybody found the same.
Ramesh Kapoor S/o Parkash, R/o H. No. C-497, Avantiika, Sector-1, Rohini, North West, Delhi-110085

PUBLIC NOTICE
My client Mrs. Kaushal Goyal W/o Mr. Harish Chand Goyal the owner property part of house no. 151, old house no. 205, area measuring 42.90 sq. yards approx., situated at Right Ganj Pashchami, Old Munsaphi, Ghaziabad, Tehsil & District Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh through registered sale deed dated 05.05.2008 executed by Mrs. Bano W/o Mr. Asgar in favour of Mrs. Kaushal Goyal W/o Mr. Harish Chand Goyal vide reg. no. 2342 at SR-1 GZB U.P. The above-mentioned property is going to be mortgaged with Foc Bank Financial Services Limited, if any person / bank / financial institution having any claim / right, lien, any objection whatsoever in regard to the above property, should notified to the undersigned, Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address through registered within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived.
VISHAL MEHAN, ADVOCATE
E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092, Mobile No. 9811215151

PUBLIC NOTICE
My client Mr. Gambhira Sah the owner residential property no. B/A-736-A, area measuring-37.62 Sq. Mtrs. (45 Sq. Yds.) out of Kharsa no. 7/10, situated in the area of village Mirzapur in the colony, known as Mahavir, Enclave, Gali No. 19, New Delhi. Through conveyance deed dated 22.10.2020 executed by PGI through DDA in favour of Mr. Kamal Kapoor, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address through registered within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived.
ASHWANI KUMAR (Advocate)
Ch. No. 512, Western Wing, Tis Hazari Court Near Shiv Mandir, Delhi-110054, Mob. 9891200739

PUBLIC NOTICE
Be it known to all through this Public Notice that My clients Mr. Kamal Kapoor S/o Late Shri Vishwajeet Kapoor: It is informed to the public that the above mentioned photographs are of Lokesh Gulati and the Chirag Gulati whoever know the residence of them, and give the information to the below mentioned name will be awarded by Rs.100000/- and the name of the informant will be kept secret.
The above mentioned Chirag Gulati is third gender and he also loves my nephew and want to marry him but, I am completely against the third gender marriage, and can't accept. It is believed that the Chirag Gulati will try to contact so that they both could abscond.
Contact to:- Mr. Kamal Kapoor, email:- kamskapoor_bjp@gmail.com, Phone:- 011-22800785

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PAPER WITH PASSION

The menace of terrorism

The recent terror attacks in Jammu have underscored the persistent security challenges faced by the country

The recent terror attacks in Jammu once again highlight the fact that terrorism is far from over. They may be down but not out for sure. Indeed, Jammu serial attacks are a wake-up call for the Modi administration which is settling for the third time in office. Jammu, a region perennially at the forefront of geopolitical tensions and security concerns, has recently become the focal point of a series of terror attacks that have jolted the local populace and security apparatus alike. Over the past few weeks, a surge in terrorist activities, including targeted attacks on both civilians and security forces, has painted a grim picture of the region's fragile peace. The most recent and severe incident involved an assault on an Indian Air Force convoy in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. One airman was killed and four injured. These violent episodes have not only led to the tragic loss of life but also sowed seeds of fear and uncertainty among the residents. The attacks underscore the persistent and evolving threat posed by terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, necessitating urgent and comprehensive security measures.



In the wake of these escalating threats, Union Home Minister Amit Shah convened a high-level security review meeting in New Delhi. Shah's review underscored the gravity of the situation and highlighted the need for a multi-faceted and proactive approach to counter the burgeoning terror threat.

Let us face it, something is lacking on our part that emboldens the terrorists and gives them daring to carry out such operations. One of the biggest loopholes in combating terrorism is that there is little intelligence sharing among different security agencies. Effective

coordination between local police forces, the Indian Army and intelligence agencies is deemed vital for timely intervention and the prevention of further attacks. Besides local communities must be taken into confidence to take on the menace of terrorism as residents are often the first to notice unusual activities and their cooperation is essential for pre-emptive actions against potential threats. Besides, there is a need to address the root causes of terrorism, such as the radicalisation of vulnerable sections on the lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder. These factors are often exploited by terrorist organizations to recruit individuals and perpetuate violence. However, it is a welcome step to induct more troops in the Jammu sector so that the local population can feel safe and secure. Within Jammu, troops will be deployed in both urban centres and rural areas to ensure a comprehensive and pervasive security presence. However, these security enhancements come with their own set of challenges. There is a need to ensure that the increased military presence does not exacerbate tensions or alienate the local populace. The Government must strike a delicate balance between maintaining robust security and fostering trust and cooperation with the communities affected by these security measures.

PICTALK



People take part in a yoga session at Juhu, in Mumbai

Unleashing AI for social justice

By prioritising ethical deployment, AI stands poised to become a powerful tool for driving meaningful social change



SANJAY SARMA



The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become ubiquitous, permeating various facets of our lives. While AI has made crucial inroads into fields such as medical science, space exploration, financial inclusion, cyber security, manufacturing and transportation, its true potential lies in addressing complex everyday societal challenges and easing human struggles at the grassroots level.

In simple terms, we need AI to uplift the marginalised, improve social equity and bring about meaningful and measurable change in society. Not drive our cars, switch on our air conditioners, write our essays, or enhance our art. Therefore, while navigating our technological landscape and priorities, it is essential to reimagine AI's role, directing its capabilities towards issues that uphold human dignity and promote social progress.

In the realm of primary education, AI can play a crucial role in overcoming fundamental barriers faced by children of migrant labourers and displaced civilians, thereby breaking the cycle of disadvantage

and bridging gaps. Lack of access, resources, language, quality of instruction and personalised support are barriers that can be effectively addressed through AI. Adaptive learning platforms and customised educational content can cater to individual needs, enabling children to seamlessly integrate into the mainstream education system at a later date. This gives equitable access to educational opportunities for all, regardless of their background or circumstances and ensures that no one lags behind.

Another pressing issue that demands AI intervention is the eradication of manual scavenging in countries like India. Despite legislative bans, manual scavenging persists, subjecting individuals to hazardous conditions and robbing them of their basic dignity. AI-powered sanitation systems and robotics deployed on a rapid scale can offer a viable solution, automating waste management processes and eliminating the need for manual intervention.

Access to justice is another



BY HARNESSING AI FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES, ONE CAN ALSO STRIVE TO COMBAT SYSTEMIC BIASES AND PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY BY ANALYSING LARGE DATASETS AND IDENTIFYING PATTERNS OF DISCRIMINATION IN VARIOUS DOMAINS

area where AI intervention can make a significant difference and lead to faster resolutions and improved outcomes. From managing databases to providing legal assistance, support services and information resources to underserved communities, AI can assist individuals in navigating the legal system, understanding their rights and accessing legal representation, particularly in cases of war crimes, civil rights violations, discrimination, or social injustice.

By harnessing AI for social justice initiatives, one can also strive to combat systemic biases and promote inclusivity by analysing large datasets and identifying patterns of discrimination in various domains - from education to criminal justice. AI-driven decision-making can help mitigate biases in hiring processes and law enforcement, fostering fair and equitable treatment for all. These are just a few of the many areas where AI intervention can be transformative. It is important to prioritise a ground-up approach rather than a top-

down one. Safeguards, however, must be in place to prevent biases in algorithms and mitigate the risks of misuse or manipulation. This makes it crucial for interdisciplinary collaboration to exist between technologists and policymakers in order to navigate the ethical complexities inherent to AI development and implementation.

Let's remember that AI is a tool, not a solution. We can only deem AI transformational if it is deployed to eradicate dehumanising practices, build social equity and improve the lives of grassroots communities. So let us harness it as a force for positive change, ensuring that it remains a tool for empowerment and progress. Let us direct its capabilities towards endeavours that empower humanity and promote social progress. Everything else can be temporarily set aside.

(The writer is the Founding Partner at Civic Spectrum LLP and also the Founder at SSARMA Consults. Views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CLOSER CONNECTIVITY FOR KASHMIR

Madam — Apropos the news story "World's highest steel arch rail bridge nears completion in J&K," published on June 17, this is my response. The world's highest steel arch rail bridge over the Chenab River is set to transform connectivity to the Kashmir Valley. At 1,315 metres long and taller than the Eiffel Tower, this engineering marvel is part of the ambitious Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL). The 46-km Sangaldan-Reasi section, expected to open by month's end, marks a significant milestone. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to be the first passenger on this route, emphasising its national importance.

This bridge, alongside India's first cable-stayed rail bridge at Anji Khad, highlights remarkable engineering feats. The project has been progressively commissioned, with the final phase between Reasi and Katra anticipated by year-end. The community eagerly awaits the inaugural train on June 30, a historic moment reflecting India's infrastructural prowess and enhancing the valley's integration with the rest of the country. This development signifies not just improved transportation but also a symbol of national pride and unity.

Khiraabdi | Noida

LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP SUCCESS

Madam — Apropos the news story "Reimagining Success in Long-Term Relationships," published on June 17, this is my response. Fairytales and romantic comedies paint idyllic pictures of love, but real-life relationships are far more dynamic and challenging. The notion of "happily ever after" is often impractical; instead, we should aim for a realistic understanding of success and fulfilment in lasting partnerships. Healthy relationships are dynamic ecosystems, thriving on personal growth and strong communication. Openness, acceptance and a shared sense of purpose are crucial for a deep bond.



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

India champions inclusive use of technology

Modi's recent visit to Italy for the G7 summit marked a significant step in India's diplomatic engagements and technological ambitions

On June 14, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni met in Italy for their fifth meeting. This encounter followed their previous meetings at the G20 India Summit and COP28 in Dubai, making it a significant continuation of their diplomatic engagements. Expressing his satisfaction, PM Modi highlighted that this visit to Italy was his first foreign trip in his third consecutive term as Prime Minister.



He also shared a photo with PM Trudeau, reinforcing the friendly relations between the two leaders.

PM Modi emphasized that India is committed to representing the priorities of the Global South, highlighting two upcoming Global South summits in Delhi in 2023. PM Modi also stressed the importance of collaboration with G7 countries to address global challenges.

Discussing the role of artificial intelligence (AI), a key theme of the G7 outreach session led by Prime Minister Meloni, PM Modi stressed the need for technology to be used constructively. He underscored India's emphasis on international governance of AI during the G20 summit, advocating for AI to be transparent, fair, safe, accessible and responsible. French

President Emmanuel Macron praised PM Modi's initiatives on AI and digital public infrastructure as significant contributions during India's G20 presidency.

Reflecting on the magnitude of India's Lok Sabha elections, PM Modi drew comparisons with upcoming elections in Europe and the US, emphasizing the unique scale and swift results of Indian elections. He described them as the largest celebration of democracy and highlighted India's ancient values as the "mother of democracy." PM Modi articulated India's vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047, stressing the importance of inclusive development that leaves no segment of society behind. He reiterated India's commitment to addressing the concerns of Global South countries, which are disproportionately affected by global uncertainties.

Addressing technology's transformative role, PM Modi noted that it touches all aspects of human life, from space exploration to cyber security challenges. He emphasized the collective responsibility to ensure that

technological benefits reach all societal segments, eliminate inequalities and empower individuals. He advocated for transforming technological monopolies into widespread use, promoting a human-centric approach that enhances human potential. PM Modi highlighted India's proactive approach to AI, launching the AI Mission this year under the mantra "AI for All" and leading the Global Partnership for AI to foster international cooperation. On the energy front, another focal point of the outreach session, PM Modi outlined India's four principles: availability, accessibility, affordability and acceptability. He highlighted India's leadership in fulfilling COP commitments ahead of schedule and its efforts to achieve net zero emissions by 2070.

He acknowledged the dual nature of technology as both an enabler of human achievement and a source of challenges like cyber security, advocating for its benefits to be shared equitably across society. (The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Raging row over NEET



Apropos the news story "NEET row: Sibal demands probe by SC-appointed officials," published on June 16, this is my response. As a regular newspaper reader, I find the controversy surrounding the NEET exam deeply troubling. Former HRD Minister Kapil Sibal's call for a Supreme Court-appointed probe into alleged irregularities is crucial. Sibal criticises Prime

Minister Modi's silence on the issue, highlighting the gravity of corruption in the testing system.

The allegations of paper leaks and rigging, particularly in states like Gujarat, point to a broader problem within the National Testing Agency (NTA). Sibal's concerns about NEET's favouritism towards CBSE students and his call for a consensus-driven approach to medical admissions reflect the complexity of India's educational landscape. Sibal's emphasis on a thorough, independent inquiry, ideally by the CBI under Supreme Court supervision, is vital for restoring trust. His urge for political parties to address this in Parliament underscores the need for accountability and reform in an exam that affects millions of aspiring medical students. The Government's response will be pivotal in shaping the future integrity of NEET.

Abhinay Delhi

Maintaining intimacy requires effort, focusing on quality time and physical affection while resisting social media pressures for perfection. Couples must prioritise self-love and may seek professional support when needed. The key to a successful relationship is not about perpetual bliss but embracing the journey's twists and turns. By valuing communication, shared goals and individual interests, partners can build a resilient connection. Real love supports each other through challenges and celebrates joy, making the journey deeply enriching.

Pankaj Jain | Faridabad

PRIORITISE BREAKS FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Importance of Breaks in Work Life," published on June 17, this is my response. Are you someone who makes yourself available 24/7? Or the one who prefers clearing all work emails over a family get-together? If yes, then it might be time to set healthy boundaries at work. Pausing amidst busy days allows the mind and body to recharge and refocus. Studies

suggest that the most productive employees work for 52 minutes, followed by a 17-minute break. Our minds aren't designed for nonstop work, making regular breaks essential for sustaining high performance and avoiding mental fatigue.

Regardless of your job profile, taking regular breaks enhances your overall work performance and well-being. Continuous work without breaks can lead to burnout, which is characterised by exhaustion and decreased productivity. By integrating breaks into your work routine, you can maintain high productivity, reduce stress and improve your physical and mental health. Prioritising breaks is an investment in your long-term career success and personal happiness, fostering creativity and innovation. In a post-COVID-19 world where work-life boundaries are blurred, taking breaks is more crucial than ever.

Sakshi Sharma | Meerut

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN OVERCOMING CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

To stop worrying, we have to learn to make a clean break from our past actions



RAVI VALLURI

Once an accomplished and legendary Sufi Master was invited by a management institute in the USA to explicate the nuances of Sufism and its relevance to contemporary society. Erudite scholars were packed inside the auditorium like sardines. At the appointed hour that the discourse was to begin, a disciple of the Sufi Master walked onto the stage and announced that the venerable Master had woken up and would be in their midst shortly.

As noon turned to late afternoon, scholars, professors and neophytes alike began trooping out of the auditorium in sheer disgust. The clock struck three; and another attendant of the Sufi Master appeared onstage and declared to the thinly populated audience that the venerable Master would shortly commence the lecture, soon after he finished his conversation with a prepossessing woman that he had met at the gates of the institute. This proved to be the last straw and in a state of pique a majority of the audience staged a walkout, cursing the Sufi Master. It was by now evening time and shadows were lengthening across the institute. The Sufi suzerain appeared in an inebriated state and addressed the minuscule numbers in the audience. "My dear friends, with all humility at my command let me congratulate you! For you have already passed the first test on the path towards a deeper understanding of the tenets of Sufism," said the Master, now ceasing to act drunk. "It is cardinal and mandatory for those desirous of traversing this path, that they overcome early mortification and dismay in life."

Patience, the key

The Sufi Master was primarily testing their patience to delineate various schools of Sufism and the underlying concepts. Patience, he believed is the bedrock for the progress.



Worry and stress: An unhealthy equilibrium

Quite often we are cannonaded by a constant haze of nagging thoughts. "Did I act correctly?" "Was there something more I could have done?" "Was it the correct choice?" Stress is a more often than not the cause of a lot of our worries, real or imaginary. Management of stressors can alleviate our mood swings and humans can live natural lives with smiling faces bereft of scowls and ill-health.

Kinds of stressors

Stressors could be environmental, social or psychological; varying in intensity, duration and complexity. The amount of strain it generates in an individual also depends on various facets of the individual's coping mechanism. This, in turn, would depend on the resources available to the individual; in terms of finances, family and societal support, access to medical and/or professional help.

Overcoming stressors

To stop worrying and remove stress out of the equation, we have to learn to make a clean break from our past actions. What is done is done! Sure, there would be consequences, but accept them and try best to live with them. Another very effective way to deal with stress is to actively take responsibility of one's life. Realise that no one but you are responsible for what happens in your life. One thing at a time and the art of letting go. "When walking, walk. While eating, eat!" This popular Zen aphorism can be bewildering in its simplicity. As one ponders upon it and reads between the lines, one realises all that it leaves unsaid.

"Over thinking, I guess is the unwanted gift of our urban lifestyle to a great extent. We believe all answers can come through analysis and we have to solve everything... Perhaps letting go of that belief, just a bit is the answer," says Sadia Sayeed Rawal, chief psychologist of Inner Space India.

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

Saudi's petrodollar shift offers little relief to India



SHIVAJI SARKAR

India's significant reliance on Saudi oil imports suggests that the status quo in its trade deficit and forex outflows will largely stay unchanged



Indians are hopeful of a new petroleum pricing regime with Saudi Arabia refusing to renew the 50-year-old US-Saudi Petrodollar Agreement that expired early June. Indeed, there may be a new agreement with Saudi Arabia, but expecting a cheaper deal is to remain a dream as the Rial is pegged to the dollar.

It may gradually open up new avenues in the global economy. The petrodollar system replaced gold as the standard of value which enabled the US to maintain dominance over international trade and allowed the US govt to control the world's energy market. The Saudi decision marks a significant departure from the long-standing financial arrangement between the two nations that was established in 1974. The arrangement to recycle petrodollars positioned the US dollar as the primary currency for international oil transactions.

The crucial decision to not renew the contract enables Saudi Arabia to sell oil and other goods in multiple currencies, including the Chinese RMB, Euros, Yen and Yuan, instead of exclusively in US dollars. Additionally, the potential use of digital currencies like Bitcoin may also be considered. It is more theoretical. Despite scrapping of the agreement, the ties to continue.

Benefit to India could be minimal. The Saudis want a deal in Rial or dollar and not so much in rupee. Even a rupee deal if hypothetically agreed would not help India as the outgo would remain the same. A better option available to India is trading with Iran in rupee. The Iranian crude is supposed to be one of the best. The US has forced India to scuttle its ties with Iran. The original petrodollar agreement was signed on June 8, 1974 by US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Prince Fand Ibn Abdel Aziz of Saudi Arabia. It was a period marked by the aftermath of the Arab oil embargo and a notable spike in international oil prices.



BENEFIT TO INDIA COULD BE MINIMAL. THE SAUDIS WANT A DEAL IN RIAL OR DOLLAR AND NOT SO MUCH IN RUPEE. EVEN A RUPEE DEAL IF HYPOTHETICALLY AGREED WOULD NOT HELP INDIA AS THE OUTGO WOULD REMAIN THE SAME

Under the agreement, Saudi Arabia agreed to price its oil exports exclusively in US dollars and invest its surplus oil revenues in US Treasury bonds and it was promised US military, security and economic development assistance in return. This system replaced gold as the standard of value which enabled the US to maintain dominance over international trade and allowed the US govt to control the world's energy market. Although the agreement was signed by the Saudi govt, almost all OPEC countries use the US Dollar to sell their oil in the international market. The agreement was meant to stabilise the oil market. In reality, it never happened.

The petro-dollar influenced the global economic dynamics. It was a clever US ploy to create a constant demand for US dollars as the currency was required for oil transactions. The value of the US dollar increased significantly and it reinforced the currency's status as the primary reserve currency of the world. It allowed the US to run larger trade deficits and maintain lower interest rates than would otherwise be possible.

In the changed situation it would be interesting to watch how the value of the dollar changes or not. In the immediate context, India cannot expect lower value of the dollar. That is why Reserve Bank of India is gradually shifting to gold as a parallel currency for international trading. The gold despite appreciating has less market cost than the dollar. If the dollar falls, which at present looks improbable, gold would provide the cover.

According to data from the Centre

for Monitoring Indian Economy and the Bank of Baroda, Saudi Arabia accounted for about 16.6 percent of India's crude oil imports. India imported \$170B crude petroleum in 2022, becoming the third largest importer in the world. At the same year, crude was the first most imported product in India. India's trade with Saudi Arabia in 2022-23 amounted to \$52.76 billion, with exports at \$10.73 billion and imports at \$42.04 billion. As such, India had a trade deficit of \$31.31 billion with Saudi Arabia in the last financial year.

India imports crude petroleum primarily from Iraq (\$37.1 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$32.7B), Russia (\$25.5B), United Arab Emirates (\$14.8B) and United States (\$10.8B). The fastest growing import markets in crude for India between 2021 and 2022 were Russia (\$24.6B), Saudi Arabia (\$14.8B) and Iraq (\$12B).

India also exports crude petroleum. In 2022, \$2.3 million worth crude were exported, making it the 99th largest exporter of crude in the world. The main destination of crude exports from India are South Korea (\$2.19M), El Salvador (\$86.8k), New Zealand (\$19.1k), Tanzania (\$1.41k) and Spain (\$227). Primarily, India is an importer. The benefit of refined Russian crude to Europe is pocketed by two private refineries. Now as the new Saudi system unfolds, India's import bills are not likely to come down.

Major commodities of export from India to Saudi Arabia include engineering goods, rice, petroleum products, chemicals, textiles, food products, ceramic tiles. Whereas, major commodities of import for India from Saudi Arabia are crude

oil, LPG, fertilizers, chemicals and plastic. India and Saudi Arabia have begun discussions on settling their trade in local currencies.

Over the last year, India has pushed the use of the rupee globally, with the RBI announcing the setting up of a mechanism to settle global trade in rupees in July 2022. Early use of this system was seemingly for the purchase of discounted oil from sanction-hit Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, the mechanism has not taken off, with reports emerging that negotiations over the settlement of bilateral trade in rupees between India and Russia had been suspended after Russia had accumulated billions of rupees in Indian banks which it could not use. In recent months, India has entered into bilateral agreements to settle trade in local currencies, with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up a Local Currency Settlement System being signed with the United Arab Emirates in July, 2023.

Discussions with Indonesia to settle cross-border transactions in local currencies have also begun. It is trying to have talks with Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Senegal and Tanzania. Not much progress is made. India would have to continue with the present system and may have little relief in terms of global trade. International petroleum prices are unlikely to soften. The forex outgo would continue at the present level till rupee attains an international status and Indian consumers would have to pay domestically a higher price.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Sri Lanka on the path to revival through tourism initiatives

As it embraces sustainable tourism and innovative growth, the island nation stands poised to reclaim its place as a top global destination

Nestled in the azure embrace of the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka is a gem that gleams with an unparalleled blend of natural beauty and cultural richness. This teardrop-shaped island, often referred to as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, boasts a mesmerizing landscape ranging from golden sandy beaches to lush tea plantations and from tranquil lagoons to majestic mountains. Its verdant rainforests and national parks teem with diverse wildlife, making it a haven for nature enthusiasts. Beyond its stunning scenery, Sri Lanka's true treasure lies in the warmth and hospitality of its people, who greet every visitor with a heartfelt smile and an open heart. Rich in history, vibrant in tradition and bustling with life, Sri



GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Lanka offers an unforgettable journey through both tranquil and thrilling experiences. For the avid traveller seeking an authentic and captivating destination, Sri Lanka is a must-visit paradise that promises to leave an indelible mark on the soul. Sri Lanka, an island nation known for its rich cultural heritage and breathtaking landscapes, has been undergoing a remarkable resurgence in

recent years. After facing significant economic challenges and political instability, the country is now bouncing back with vigour, propelled by a series of strategic initiatives aimed at revitalising its economy and positioning itself as a premier global destination. One of the cornerstones of this revival is the booming MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) sector, highlighted by the successful MICE Expo. In tandem with these initiatives, Sri Lanka's renowned tourist attractions continue to captivate and draw in visitors from around the world, making it a compelling destination for both business and leisure. Economic revival and booming tourism sector The feat has been incredible,



the country which went through 30-year war and saw almost all its resources and faced political and economic instability is on the fast track to recovery. The signs of revival are all over the place. It is one of the safest places to travel and has welcoming people all across. Indeed, Sri Lanka is a tourism friendly country and has ties with India that go back to ancient

times. No wonder maximum tourism arrival in Sri Lanka is from India. Sri Lanka's focus on the MICE sector has been a significant driver in its economic resurgence. Sri Lanka is betting big on MICE as it has world class infrastructure to host events at large scale. It shows the country's resolve and renewed vigour and commitment to becoming a hub for business

events and tourism. Indeed, the island nation has a lot to showcase in hosting world-class events --- Plush venues with worldclass facilities. Sri Lanka's MICE drive has received positive responses from the global business community, highlighting the country's potential as a leading MICE destination in South Asia. The Government's proactive stance in developing the necessary infrastructure has played a crucial role in this success. State-of-the-art conference facilities, along with improved connectivity and hospitality services, have made Sri Lanka an attractive venue for international conferences and exhibitions. The MICE sector is expected to generate significant revenue, create jobs

and contribute to the overall economic growth of the country. **Embracing a New Era** Beyond the MICE sector, Sri Lanka has embarked on various other initiatives to stimulate economic growth and enhance its global standing. Key among these is the emphasis on sustainable tourism, digital innovation and the development of new tourism products. The country is leveraging its natural and cultural assets to create unique and immersive experiences for visitors. The Government has also launched the "Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance," a collaborative platform aimed at promoting sustainable tourism practices and ensuring the long-term health of the tourism sector. This initiative

encourages private-public partnerships to develop new attractions, improve existing ones and market Sri Lanka as a year-round destination. Sri Lanka's resurgence is a testament to its resilience and determination to overcome challenges and embrace opportunities for growth. The successful hosting of the MICE Expo and the country's proactive approach in enhancing its tourism offerings reflect a bright future for the island nation. As it continues to build on its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, Sri Lanka is poised to reclaim its place as a top destination for travellers and business professionals alike.

(The writer is a columnist and documentary filmmaker; views are personal)

BIDEN'S REELECTION TEAM LAUNCHES \$50 MILLION AD CAMPAIGN TARGETING TRUMP

AP ■ WASHINGTON
President Joe Biden's reelection campaign said Monday it will spend \$50 million through the end of June on a new ad campaign that includes efforts to spotlight Republican Donald Trump's felony conviction. The costly advertising push comes with Election Day still more than four and a half months away. But Biden's campaign says it wants to more clearly define the choice between the two candidates ahead of the first debate between them in Atlanta on June 27. A central part of Biden's campaign strategy is highlighting Trump's far-reaching policy proposals for a second term and firing up disaffected Democrats and independent voters. The

campaign producing an ad that leans heavily into Trump's conviction, and including it in such a large advertising buy, indicates a renewed effort to make Trump's legal problems an election issue in ways Biden's team previously resisted. The new ad campaign includes more than \$1 million geared toward media reaching Black, Hispanic and Asian American voters, and an ad highlighting Trump's conviction on 34 felony counts in a New York hush money case. That spot will air on general market television and connected TV on streaming devices and cell phones in battleground states, as well as on national cable. In addition to Trump's criminal conviction, the ad, titled "Character Matters," notes the former president also was found liable for sexual



assault and financial fraud in separate proceedings. Trump also faces felony charges in three separate criminal cases, none of which may go to trial before the November election. "This election is between a convicted criminal who's only out for himself and a president who's fighting for your family," intones the ad's narrator over images of a Trump mug shot and Biden high-fiving supporters. The Trump campaign did not respond to a request for comment Sunday night. But Trump has denied any wrongdoing and argued without evidence that Biden or Justice Department officials orchestrated the New York case against him for political reasons. He and his allies also have raised the prospect of prosecuting political opponents in revenge if he returns to the White House.



UK force probes after outrage over runaway calf rammed by police car

PTI ■ LONDON
A UK police force has been strongly criticised by ministers, animal rights groups and outraged members of the public after a squad car rammed into a runaway calf on the streets of west London was caught on camera. UK Home Secretary James Cleverly demanded a "full, urgent explanation" for the incident over the weekend and Surrey Police said on Sunday that the officer who was driving the police car has been removed from frontline duties pending the outcome of investigations. The 10-month-old calf named Beau Lucy had escaped from Staines Moor on Friday and is recovering after being hit twice by a police car on Raleigh Road in Feltham, west London. "I fully appreciate the distress our handling of this incident has caused and will ensure that it is thoroughly and diligently investigated," Nev Kemp, Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey Police, said in a statement in the wake of the outrage the footage unleashed over the weekend. "In addition to an internal referral to our Professional Standards Department, we have also referred the matter to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) for independent consideration. At this time, the officer who was driving the police car has been removed from frontline duties pending the outcome of these investigations," he said. Addressing concerns for the wellbeing of the injured calf, the police said she is now back with her owner and "recuperating with her herd" after sustaining a large cut to one leg and cuts and grazes. "She continues to be monitored by a vet and our rural officers are staying in

contact with the owner for updates. I can confirm that on the night, efforts were made to contact local vets without success and efforts were simultaneously being made to identify the owner. Why these were unsuccessful and what more could and should have been done will form a key part of the investigation," Kemp added. In response to criticism of the force's initial response saying the police officer concerned had acted with public safety concerns in mind, Kemp stressed that "as well as our overriding duty to protect the public, the welfare of animals is important to us". "I am committed to ensuring that we have a full understanding of what took place and why, and we will fully support any investigation. I have also briefed the Home Office on what action we are taking and we are liaising with several animal charities that have been in touch with us about this incident," he added. Home Secretary Cleverly had reposted the video of the incident on X and demanded answers: "I can think of no reasonable need for this action. I've asked for a full, urgent explanation for this. It appears to be unnecessarily heavy handed." The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) charity also issued a statement condemning the treatment of the animal. "This is upsetting and distressing footage. As soon as we were made aware, we urgently contacted the police to establish the background and to find out what happened to the calf. We are pleased to hear the calf survived and is receiving vet care," an RSPCA statement said.

EU leaders are gathering to discuss nominees for the bloc's top jobs after an election shakeup

AP ■ BRUSSELS
The 27 leaders of the European Union gather in Brussels on Monday evening to take stock of recent European election results and begin the fraught process of dividing up the bloc's top jobs, but they will be playing their usual political game with a deck of reshuffled cards. The June 6-9 elections saw the European Parliament shift to the right and dealt major blows to pro-European governing parties in Paris and Berlin. The Franco-German motor that usually propels EU politics along was weakened, and new dynamics could be on show at the informal dinner. Under the EU's complicated division of powers, the presidents and prime ministers get to nominate the next head of the bloc's powerful executive branch, the European Commission, which is responsible for drawing up EU policy on everything from climate to the colossal shared budget. Under the EU's treaties, their choice should take into account the results of the election. German conservative Ursula von der Leyen looks likely to stay on as president for another five years after a strong showing for her centre-right



European People's Party parliamentary group. In an interview with Germany's Welt TV on Saturday, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said, "It is clear after the results of the elections that everything indicates that there can be a second term in office for Ursula von der Leyen." He said he believes the top job nominations could be agreed "quickly". Von der Leyen, at the helm of the EU

corners of the EU Parliament, where she will need the support of 361 of the 720 lawmakers to hold on to her job. The other big posts up for grabs are that of European Council president, held by Belgian centrist Charles Michel, and EU foreign policy chief, occupied by Josep Borrell of Spain from the centre-left. The council president's job is to broker deals between the 27 member states, while the top diplomat represents the EU on the world stage. In Brussels, names for the big posts have circulated for months. Former Portuguese Socialist Prime Minister António Costa is frequently mentioned to become council president. Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, well known for her tough line on Russia, has been floated as the bloc's potential top diplomat. French President Emmanuel Macron said the aim Monday is "to try to have a quick consensus. But perhaps we need to wait until June 27-28," when the leaders meet again in Brussels for a formal EU summit. "I don't want to preempt things," Macron said on Saturday. "These discussions are happening with 27 of us, so we have advanced, several of us have called each other, and I think it's

possible. I think it's possible in the days to come, or in the week to come." Von der Leyen's own path to power in 2019 shows that the tussle over EU top jobs can be unpredictable. A German defense minister somewhat tainted by scandal in her ministry, von der Leyen was a relative unknown in Brussels when her name was raised by leaders in closed-door discussions. Back then, the support of her close ally, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Macron helped her clinch the nomination. Given the current balance of power in Europe, it's hard to imagine Macron and Scholz pulling a major surprise this time. Scholz is licking his wounds after his Social Democrats took a drubbing, while Macron is tied up with the snap elections he called last week in a risky bid to see off the far right. In a secret ballot in 2019, von der Leyen made it over the line with 383 votes, nail biting close to the threshold of 374. She was an unpopular nominee because she had not campaigned in elections as a lead candidate and was seen as being imposed on Parliament by the leaders.



Muslims in Asia celebrate Eid ul-Adha with sacrifice festival, traditional feast

AP ■ JAKARTA (INDONESIA)
Muslims in Asia on Monday celebrated Eid ul-Adha, or the Feast of Sacrifice, with food and prayers for people in Gaza suffering from the Israel-Hamas war. One of the biggest Islamic holidays, the occasion commemorates Prophet Ibrahim's test of faith through slaughtering livestock and animals and distributing the meat to the poor. It's a joyous occasion for which food is a hallmark where devout Muslims buy and slaughter animals and share two-thirds of the meat with the poor and it's a revered observance that coincides with the final rites of the Hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. Much of Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Bangladesh, observed Eid ul-Adha on Monday, while Muslims in other parts of the globe, including Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen celebrated the holiday on Sunday. On Monday, worshippers shoulder-to-shoulder joined in communal prayers in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. Preachers in their sermons called on people to pray for Muslims in Gaza and Rafah. "Our prayers and thoughts are with our brother and sisters who are now suffering in Palestine," worshipper Adi

Prasetya said after praying at a field in southern Jakarta. "There are many opportunities for us now to channel our help through charities." "May Allah give strength to those ravaged by war... May those who are divided can live in peace again," said another devotee, Berlina Yustiza. Although Indonesia has more Muslims than any other country in the world, its traditions to mark Eid ul-Adha have been influenced by other religions. Residents in Yogyakarta, an ancient centre of Javanese culture and the seat of royal dynasties going back centuries, believe that if they manage to catch the crops arranged in the form of a cone-shaped pile called "gunungan" that is paraded from the royal palace to the Kauman Grand Mosque, it can bring them good luck. They scrambled to grab various food offerings, made of fruit, vegetables and traditional snacks. A day before the sacrifice festival, people in East Java's Pasuruan city expressed their gratitude and respect for the sacrificial animals by dressing them as beautiful as a bride. The sacrificial cow is wrapped in a seven-fold garland, a shroud, turban and prayer mat and paraded in a tradition called "manten sapi", or bride cow, before being handed to the sacrificial committee.

The trial of US reporter charged with espionage in Russia to begin soon

AP ■ MOSCOW
The espionage trial in Russia of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich will begin on June 26 and will be held behind closed doors, a statement from the court that will hear the case said Monday. Gershkovich, a US citizen, has been behind bars since his March 2023 arrest and faces 20 years in prison if convicted. The trial is to be held in the Sverdlovsky Regional Court in Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, where he was arrested. Gershkovich has since been held in Moscow's Lefortovo prison, about 1,400 kilometers (870 miles) to the west. The court said trial will be closed to the public, as is usual in espionage cases. Gershkovich, 32, is accused of "gathering secret information" on orders from the CIA about Uralvagonzavod, a facility that produces and repairs military equipment, the Prosecutor General's office said last week in the first details of the accusations against him. The reporter, his employer and the US government have denied the allegations, and Washington designated him as wrongfully detained. Russia's Federal Security Service alleged that Gershkovich was acting on US orders to collect state secrets but provided no evidence to back up the accusations. "Evan has done nothing wrong. He should never have been arrested in the first place. Journalism



is not a crime," US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said last week. "The charges against him are false. And the Russian government knows that they're false. He should be released immediately." The Biden administration has sought to negotiate Gershkovich's release, but Russia's Foreign Ministry said Moscow would consider a prisoner swap only after a trial verdict. Uralvagonzavod, a state tank and railroad car factory in the city of Nizhny Tagil, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Yekaterinburg, became known in 2011-12 as a bedrock of support for President Vladimir Putin. Plant foreman Igor Kholmanski appeared on Putin's annual phone-in program in December 2011 and denounced mass protests occurring in Moscow at the time as a threat to "stability," proposing that he and his colleagues travel to the Russian capital to help suppress the unrest. A week later, Putin appointed Kholmanski to be his envoy in the region.

Chinese premier agrees with Australia to properly manage differences

AP ■ MELBOURNE
Chinese Premier Li Qiang said he agreed with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Monday to properly manage their nations' differences as they emerge from a hostile era in which minister-to-minister contacts were banned and trade barriers cost Australian exporters up to 20 billion Australian dollars (USD 13 billion) a year. Li, Albanese and senior ministers of both administrations met at Parliament House to discuss thorny issues, including lingering trade barriers, conflict between their militaries in international waters and China's desire to invest in critical minerals. Li, China's most senior leader after President Xi Jinping, arrived in the South Australian state capital of Adelaide on Saturday and the national capital of Canberra late Sunday in the first visit to the country by a Chinese premier in seven years.



Li told reporters after Monday's meeting that the bilateral relationship was "on the right track of steady improvement and development." "We... Had a candid exchange of views on some differences and disagreements and agreed to properly manage them in a manner befitting our comprehensive strategic partnership," Li said through an interpreter. Albanese, who in November last year became the first Australian prime minister to visit China since 2016, described the discussions as "constructive."

"Australia advocates that we should all work together to promote a regional balance where no country dominates and no country is dominated," Albanese said. "I've made it clear as nations with different histories, political systems and values, we will cooperate with China where we can, disagree where we must and engage in the national interest," the Australian leader added. Their relations have improved markedly since Albanese's center-left Labor Party was elected in 2022 following nine years of conservative government in Australia.

Malawi's vice president laid to rest as president calls for independent probe into his death

AP ■ BLANTYRE
Malawi Vice President Saulos Chilima was laid to rest in his village south of the capital on Monday following a funeral where President Lazarus Chakwera called for an independent probe into his death in a plane crash. Chilima and nine other people died in the plane crash last week in Malawi's northern region of Mzimba. The state funeral was held at the Bingu Bingu National Stadium in Lilongwe on Sunday, where Chakwera and other dignitaries paid their final respects to the late vice president. In his address, Chakwera called for an independent

investigation into the crash. "Our tears are about the desire to know what delayed the search for this plane. ... I would like to assure you, Malawians, that this accident will be investigated by an independent expert," Chakwera said amid boos and jeers from the crowd. Hundreds of soldiers, police officers and forest rangers had searched for more than 24 hours before the wreckage was

discovered in a forest plantation south of Mzuzu. The plane was on a short flight from Lilongwe to the northern city of Mzuzu when it went missing last Monday morning. Chakwera had said earlier that air traffic controllers had told the plane not to land in Mzuzu because of bad weather and poor visibility and to return to Lilongwe. Air traffic controllers then lost contact

with the plane. Chakwera on Sunday called for unity and patience as the investigations continued, saying, "We need answers, but we must remain calm and supportive of each other during this difficult time." He said that the Malawi Defense Force cannot conduct an investigation "that can be credible on its own, which is why we need an independent investigation." He did not

elaborate. The military rendered a 19-gun salute as the body was laid to rest, followed by a long trumpet post and reveille. Those who laid wreaths included Chakwera, all of Malawi's three former presidents and Chilima's wife, children and relatives. The Chilima family also called for an independent probe. "We are grateful to the pathologists who carried out

tests to ascertain the deaths, but there is need for a thorough investigation on what exactly happened. Such a probe is important to ensure that such an accident does not happen again," said Ben Chilima, the late vice-president's brother. In another tragic accident, four people died at the funeral on Sunday when a vehicle crashed into bystanders, authorities said.

War in Gaza has wiped out entire Palestinian families

AP ■ BEIRUT
He is among the very last survivors of his Gaza family, a clan so close they knew without thinking how blood and marriage bound them across generations and city blocks. Then, branch by branch, 173 of Youssef Salem's relatives were killed in Israeli airstrikes in a matter of days in December. By spring that toll had risen to 270. Bones and flesh strewn over the ruins of family homes. Blond curls of a young cousin peeking through bricks. Unrecognizable bodies piled on a donkey cart. Lines of burial shrouds. These images are what survivors are left with from hundreds of families in Gaza like the al-Aghas, Salems and Abu Najas. To a degree never seen before, Israel is killing entire Palestinian families, a loss even more devastating than the physical destruction and the massive displacement. An Associated Press investigation identified at least 60 Palestinian families where at least 25 people were killed - sometimes four generations from the same bloodline - in bombings between October and December, the deadliest and most destructive period of the war. Nearly a quarter of those families lost more than 50 family members in those weeks. Several families have almost no one left to document

the toll, especially as documenting and sharing information became harder. Youssef Salem's hard drive is stocked with photos of the dead. He spent months filling a spreadsheet with their vital details as news of their deaths was confirmed, to preserve a last link to the web of relationships he thought would thrive for generations more. "My uncles were wiped out, totally. The heads of households, their wives, children, and grandchildren," Salem said from his home in Istanbul. In the last two decades, 10 members of his family were killed in Israeli strikes. "Nothing like this war," he said. The AP review encompassed casualty records released by Gaza's health ministry until March, online death notices, family and neighborhood social media pages and spreadsheets, witness and survivor accounts, as well as a casualty data from Airwars, a London-based conflict monitor. The Mughrabi family: more than 70 were killed in a single Israeli airstrike in December. The Abu Najas: over 50 were killed in October strikes, including at least two pregnant women. The large Doghmush clan lost at least 44 members in a strike on a mosque; AP documented over 100 family members killed in following weeks. By the spring, over 80 members of the Abu al-Qumssan family were killed. "The numbers are shocking,"

said Hussam Abu al-Qumssan, who lives in Libya and has taken over documenting the family death toll as his relatives in Gaza struggled to keep track. In the 51-day war of 2014, the number of families that lost three or more members was less than 150. In this one, nearly 1,900 families have suffered multiple deaths by January, including more than 300 that lost over 10 members in the first month of the war alone, according to Gaza's health ministry. Ramy Abdu, chairman for the Geneva-based EuroMed Human Rights Monitor, which monitors the Gaza war, said dozens of his researchers in Gaza stopped documenting family deaths in March after identifying over 2,500 with at least three deaths. "We can hardly keep up with the total death toll," Abdu said. The killing of families across generations is a key part of the genocide case against Israel, now before the International Court of Justice. Separately, the International Criminal Court prosecutor is seeking arrest warrants for two Israeli leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including for the intentional killing of civilians, as well as for three Hamas leaders over crimes connected to the Oct. 7 attack. Palestinians will remember entire families that have disappeared from their lives, Abdu said: "It is like a whole village or hamlet has been wiped out."



Without warning The deaths across generations slice through the Palestinian society, history, and future. Entire families are buried in mass graves, in hospital courtyards or beneath staircases in the homes where they were killed. Getting detailed images and documentation is difficult even for Palestinians. Power is limited to hospitals and Israel cuts communication networks frequently. Nearly all of Gaza's 2.3 million population has been displaced, dividing entire families and severing contacts between parts of the small territory. Homes that normally would shelter a nuclear family fill with multiple generations of

displaced relatives. Hamas militants from Gaza attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people in the Jewish state's 75-year history. Israel promised to destroy Hamas' leadership and its estimated 35,000 fighting force in response. Within five days, Israel Air Force dropped 6,000 bombs on Gaza, including many unguided missiles. Israel's relentless bombing since has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians by early June, including many women and children. Eleven members of the al-Agha family were killed in a single strike on a family home in the first week of the war.

Then death reached Khamis al-Agha's home in the second week. Back in 2021, Khamis al-Agha, an employee at a Hamas-linked charity, received a phone call from an Israeli soldier alluding to his ties to the militant group and warning him to evacuate his house in Khan Younis to avoid an impending airstrike nearby. Al-Agha recorded the call and posted it online. He didn't evacuate and no one was killed. On October 14 there was no warning. The airstrike killed Khamis al-Agha and 10 others: his wife, their four young children; his brother and his 9-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter; his cousin and her

18-year-old boy. Only the brother's wife survived. Jaser al-Agha, a second cousin of Khamis, helped medics pull bodies from the debris. "Nothing is left of the house," said Jaser al-Agha. Israel's army confirmed the airstrikes, saying it had hit unspecified Hamas targets near the locations identified by AP. It said the targets were anywhere from a few meters (feet) to 460 meters (1,500 feet) away. It gave no details on the nature of the targets, but said it hit a Hamas military compound in one of the strikes. It did not say whether it had taken any measures to reduce civilian casualties. In general, Israel has said it targets Hamas and accuses the militant group of endangering civilians by operating among the population and in tunnels below them. A senior Israeli official told reporters in December that the army calculated two Palestinian civilians were killed for every Hamas militant, a ratio an army spokesman called "tremendously positive" but which experts said showed a higher tolerance for civilian casualties than in previous wars. Israel estimates 15,000 Hamas militants had been killed by June, but has not given evidence or explanation. It is not clear whether the count includes men like al-Agha, who worked in one of the hundreds of Hamas-linked organizations or officials in the government that administered

life in Gaza for over 16 years. Israel has said it takes measures to mitigate against civilian harm, such as direct warnings to civilians in past conflicts. But in this war, that method has been partly replaced by evacuation orders for entire areas that not everyone is willing or able to obey. Standards have clearly been relaxed, fueled by anger over the Oct. 7 attacks and domestic politics, said Craig Jones, a lecturer at Newcastle University who studied the role of Israel's military lawyers. The law of war allows for a "sort of rushed form of warfare" with higher civilian casualties where a military needs to respond quickly and in changing circumstances. But "Israel is just so clearly violating the law because it's pushing the rules so far," he said. The AP geolocated and analyzed 10 strikes, among the deadliest from Oct. 7 to December 24, and found they hit residential buildings and shelters with families inside. In no case was there an obvious military target or direct warning to those inside, and in one case the family said they had raised a white flag on their building in a combat zone. Together, the strikes killed more than 500 people, including the two bombings that wiped out the Salems and three others that killed 30 members of the al-Agha family. AP also consulted six weapons investigators, open-source analysts and experts.

New airport could spark economy in a rural part of Florida

AP ■ LABELLE
One of Florida's poorest counties is preparing for the new "Airlades" airport, a USD 300 million cargo hub that could transform its economy. Local leaders see the project as a generational opportunity, one that could bring more than 1,400 new, high-skilled jobs to their largely agricultural community at the edge of the Everglades. But to make good on its promise, the region's educators will have to overcome some harsh realities. A third of Hendry County's working-age adults lack a high-school diploma, while almost half speak a language other than English at home, among the highest in Florida. Before local leaders can prepare residents for jobs in engineering and manufacturing, educators must first help them earn their GEDs and learn English. "We have some of God's most

beautiful country that has never been touched by man," said Michael Swindle, the county schools superintendent, and yet "by all the metrics you would judge a county on, we're either No. 1 or No. 2 in the ugly categories." As the airport project pursues approval, community groups and schools are working to fill teacher shortages and make investments in adult education. The challenges also include some political headwinds. Most of the county's workforce is Black and Latino. Efforts to tailor education to serve those demographic groups have drawn scrutiny in Florida, where politicians have forbidden programs factoring race and national origin into people's treatment. Educators say the political context adds to the difficulties in recruiting teachers. The plan to convert the small, county-owned airport to private ownership still has to



win approval from the Federal Aviation Administration, which will depend partly on solidifying contracts with vendors in Latin America to prove its potential as a hub for perishable goods. Meanwhile, two adult education centers in the county expanded with support from the FutureMakers Coalition, a community organization that has spearheaded education retraining efforts across southwest Florida. It also is paying for a counselor to help adults looking to develop new skills and change careers. Spanish-speaking students have filled the adult education center in LaBelle, the 5,000-

person county seat. Many are working jobs or have kids at home, which has forced their instructor, Silvia Gullett, to get creative to meet their needs. She started a WhatsApp group so students could organize carpooling or split childcare duties. If students don't show up to class, Gullett texts them to figure out the problem. She doesn't settle for easy excuses. "In the beginning, I had some students who didn't want to continue. I try to tell people that the only one who can stop them is themselves," said Gullett, who was born in Peru before starting her teaching career in Florida two decades

ago. At the country's other adult education center, in Clewiston, sparks fly as dozens of students in thick gloves and respirator masks work toward industrial certifications needed to enter the workforce. One of them, Samantha Garza, 21, initially studied child care at a community college in Fort Myers but pivoted after watching YouTube videos about female welders. "I'm an artsy person, so I have more of a steady hand already, and I love to be down and dirty doing physical things, so I felt like this would be a career for me," she said. Even before the airport arrives, there are still plenty of local employers waiting to hire the students. As current employees near retirement age, US Sugar, the Clewiston-based farming giant, has such urgent needs it started an in-house welding program. "We're trying to close that generation gap between

mechanics and welders," said Nathan Hollis, an industrial skills trainer at the company. Finding enough instructors to offer the training has been a challenge. Swindle had to recruit a US Sugar worker to teach welding and coax a school bus mechanic out of retirement to lead the diesel mechanics program. Still, the program has been so successful the county is using tuition revenue and donations to open another training facility in LaBelle focused on HVAC and plumbing. There has been controversy around some efforts, including a slide on the topic of "white privilege" shown during a teacher training event led by FutureMakers. It sparked an outcry from conservative activists who accused organizers of racism, and a Republican city commissioner in LaBelle suggested it violated the "Stop WOKE Act" signed into law by Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican.



Nikhil, accused of murder for hire plot, extradited to US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON
Indian national Nikhil Gupta, accused of being involved in a murder-for-hire plot against a Sikh extremist on American soil, has been extradited to the US from the Czech Republic, media reports here. Gupta, 52, was arrested in the Czech Republic last year at the request of the US government on charges of being involved in a plot to assassinate Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, an American citizen, in New York. The Czech Constitutional Court last month rejected a petition by Gupta against his extradition to the US to face the charges. US federal prosecutors allege that Gupta had been working according to the directions of an unnamed Indian government official. India has however denied its involvement in such a case and has instituted a high-level investigation into the allegations. Gupta is currently lodged at the federal Metropolitan Detention Centre in Brooklyn and expected to be produced before a federal court in New York on Monday. Gupta is listed as an inmate at the Brooklyn Detention Centre, according to The Washington Post -- the first news outlet to report his extradition. "Gupta, who had been detained in the Czech Republic, arrived in New York over the weekend, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive legal proceedings. Typically, extradited defendants must appear in court within a day of their arrival in the country," the report said. Federal prosecutors allege that

Gupta hired a hitman to kill Pannun and paid USD 15,000 in advance. Gupta, through his attorney, has denied the charges and said that he has been "unfairly charged". "Gupta's attorney, Rohini Musa, wrote in a petition to the Indian Supreme Court that her client is being unfairly prosecuted, saying there is 'nothing on record to link the petitioner to the massive alleged plot to assassinate the alleged victim'." The Washington Post said. "Musa complained that Gupta received adverse legal advice from a Czech government-appointed attorney 'under the undue influence of ... US Agencies' during the initial phase of his detention. She said India and the United States were 'going back and forth to blame each other for their foreign policy', the daily reported. Gupta's extradition comes ahead of US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's planned visit to New Delhi this week for the annual initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) dialogue with his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval. Pannun holds dual American and Canadian citizenship. The Washington Post in April 2024 reported that Vikram Yadav, a Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) officer, was the Indian official behind the plot. The paper also said the then R&AW chief Samant Goel sanctioned the operation. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs, however, dismissed the report, saying it makes "unwarranted and unsubstantiated imputations" to claim that Indian agents were involved in the plot to kill Pannun.

Two political outliers claim seats in European Parliament by leveraging social media's viral power

AP ■ NICOSIA (CYPRUS)
One is a wildly popular, seemingly happy-go-lucky YouTuber from Cyprus. The other is a brash, fringe figure of Spain's far right who rails against unauthorised immigrants. They both are new members of the European Parliament thanks to their savvy use of video-based social media. YouTuber and TikToker Fidiyas Panayiotou is a 24-year-old with no political experience and no formal higher education who rode the wave of his online popularity - and public anger at the country's political elites - all the way to one of six seats allotted to Cyprus in the European Parliament. He says he'll keep using social media "as my biggest weapon to use" when he formally takes up his new job as a legislator in Brussels and Strasbourg, France. Widely addressed by his first name, Fidiyas secured a remarkable one in five votes cast in Sunday's election without the support of any political party - until now, thought to be the be-all and end-all of getting elected in any political contest in Cyprus. Fidiyas sent shockwaves through the Cypriot political system by running a campaign in which he took no political positions, made no promises or even



presented a program for his time in office. "It seems now that people are hungry not for political positions, but for true people that are not lying (but) saying the truth," he told The Associated Press in an interview in English, the language he uses for most of his posts. **RIDING THE WAVE:** While Fidiyas avoided strong political positions and was already widely known for his online high jinks, Spaniard Alvis Perez was mostly unknown until he leveraged his diatribes on Instagram and Telegram against the alleged dangers of immigration. He also railed against claims of widespread corruption among politicians to score not one, but three of the 61 seats Spain gets in the European Parliament. The common factor between the Alvis and Fidiyas is that both hit the bulls-eye

thanks to their mastery of social media to garner support among young people, many of whom may have been indifferent to politics. "This is not just a Spanish phenomenon or only about a YouTuber in Cyprus," Steven Forti, a professor of history at Barcelona's Autonomous University and expert on the far right, told the AP. Forti said the creation of "digital subcultures" around unorthodox candidates had been critical to the rise of Donald Trump in the United States and, more recently, Javier Milei in Argentina, as well as far-right figures across Europe. But this dynamic has been turbocharged by the increasingly video-based trends in social media. "The newer types of digital platforms like TikTok and Instagram have clearly accelerated" the fragmentation of politics, Forti said, because they help the far right achieve its two main objectives of disseminating their ideas very quickly and making themselves appear as everyday, normal people. **PROVOCATIVE FUN:** Fidiyas has spent the last five years boosting his popularity with outrageous video posts of him spending wads of cash in Vietnam, living a week in an airport for free, and burying himself alive for 10 days.

Singapore says dredger that hit tanker reported sudden loss of control

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR (MALAYSIA)
Singapore authorities said on Monday a dredger boat reported a sudden loss in engine and steering control that led it to hit a stationary cargo tanker, causing an oil spill that has blackened part of the city-island's southern shores. The Netherlands-flagged dredger Vox Maxima struck the Singaporean fuel supply ship Marine Honour on Friday. It ruptured one of the cargo tanks on the Marine Honour, which leaked low-sulphur oil into the sea. Although the leak has been contained, tides washed the spilled oil that had been treated with dispersants further along the shoreline, including to the popular resort island of Sentosa. Singapore's Maritime and Port Authority, in a joint statement with the National Environment Agency, the National Parks Board and



Sentosa Development Corp., said the master and crew members of Vox Maxima are assisting in the ongoing investigations. Part of the beachfront at a public park, beaches at three southern islands and a nature reserve have been closed to facilitate cleanup efforts. Sentosa beaches remain open to the public but sea activities and swimming are prohibited. Oil Spill Response Limited, an industry-funded cooperative that responds to spills, will deploy floating containment and recovery devices to corral the oil on the water surface, where two skimmer craft will then lift the oil into storage tanks, the statement said.

Heavy rain sets off landslides in Ecuador

AP ■ QUITO (ECUADOR)
A landslide surged over a highway in central Ecuador on Sunday, killing at least six people and leaving 30 others missing, authorities said as heavy rains pummelled the country and caused rivers to overflow. The flood of mud and debris plowed down the hillside and

hit three cars, two houses and a bus in the Ecuadorian resort city of Baños, the city's fire department said. Deputy fire chief Capt. Angel Barriga told The Associated Press that rescuers were treating nine injured and had retrieved six bodies from the disaster site, while 30 more people were believed to be trapped by the mud.

The city of Baños, known among tourists as a jumping-off point for adventures in the Amazon jungle, has long been a magnet for travellers exploring Ecuador's volcanoes and craters. It is about 135 kilometers (84 miles) south of the capital, Quito, by air or 186 kilometers (115 miles) by road.

Heavy rains have drenched Ecuador and other parts of the region over the past several days, with a landslide killing two children in El Salvador earlier this week. Across Ecuador, storms sent a deluge of mud and floodwaters crashing into highways and bridges, severing the main road connecting Ecuador's

highlands to its Amazonian provinces. Torrential rains caused several Ecuadorian rivers to jump their banks. A torrent of water from the Pisque River flooded a popular waterpark north of the capital Sunday. There were no immediate reports of casualties. Emergency workers in

Ecuador said several landslides had blocked or swept away streets, slowing rescue efforts as the downpour continued. The mayor of Baños city, Miguel Guevara, urged residents to steer clear of treacherous roads and said authorities were racing to clear the area along the northern coast to search for more victims.

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Extreme heat melts diesel demand, sales drop 4 per cent in June

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's diesel demand slumped in June as extreme heat conditions in parts of the country curtailed travel, preliminary data of state-owned firms showed on Monday.

Fuel sales, which traditionally surge during elections, have defied the trend this year, falling month after month. And the decline has now extended even after the end of the general elections.

Petrol sales of three state-owned firms, which control 90 per cent of the fuel market, at 1.42 million tonnes in the first half of June was almost the same as 1.41 million tonnes of fuel consumed in the same period last year. Month-on-month consumption dropped 4.6 per cent.

Diesel sales dropped 3.9 per cent to 3.95 million tonnes during June 1 to 15 when compared with the year-ago period. The demand for the nation's most consumed fuel had fallen 2.3 per cent in April and 2.7 per cent in March. In May it fell 1.1 per cent. Besides electioneering, the



summer harvest season as also the scorching summer that increases the demand for air conditioning in cars, should have led to a rise in fuel consumption. However, this year has defied the trend.

Petrol and diesel prices were reduced by Rs 2 per litre in mid-March, ending a nearly two-year-long hiatus in rate revision, which should have also propelled sales. Month-on-month petrol sales fell 3.6 per cent compared to 1.47 million tonnes of consumption during May 1-

15. Diesel demand was flat month-on-month against 3.54 million tonnes in the first half of May.

Diesel is India's most consumed fuel, accounting for almost 40 per cent of all petroleum product consumption. The transport sector accounts for 70 per cent of all diesel sales in the country. It is also the predominant fuel used in agriculture sectors, including in harvesters and tractors.

Consumption of petrol during June 1-15 was 4.6 per cent

lower than in the first fortnight of June 2022, and 28.1 per cent more than in the Covid-marred same period of 2020.

Diesel demand slumped 10.5 per cent over June 1-15, 2022, and 14 per cent higher compared to June 1-15, 2020.

Jet fuel (ATF) sales rose 2.3 per cent year-on-year to 331,000 tonnes during June 1-15, 2024. But, this was 4.5 per cent lower month-on-month when compared to 346,500 tonnes in May 1-15, the data showed.

Like petrol and diesel, ATF demand, too, is now firmly above pre-Covid levels.

ATF consumption was 10.1 per cent more than during June 1-15, 2022, and 6.1 per cent more than in June 1-15, 2020, as per the data.

Cooking gas LPG sales were up 0.1 per cent year-on-year to 1.24 million tonnes in June 1-15, 2024. LPG consumption dropped 0.9 per cent as compared to June 1-15, 2022 and was 32 per cent more than June 1-15, 2020.

Month-on-month, LPG demand fell 5.2 per cent against 1.3 million tonnes consumption.

SBI expects 14-15 per cent credit growth in current fiscal: Chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Given the current economic growth rate, SBI is expecting 14-15 per cent loan growth during the fiscal year 2024-25, the bank's chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara said.

"Normally the way we look at it is that the GDP growth rate plus inflation and 2-3 per cent over that. That gives us the number around 14 per cent or so," Khara told PTI in an interview. "Hence, 14-15 per cent credit growth depends upon the opportunities available for lending, and it meets our risk appetite. We will be happy to grow at this pace," he said.

As far as deposits are concerned, he said, it grew by 11 per cent last year. "And we have some elbow room available in terms of excess SLR and which ensures that we don't have any pressure on us to raise the deposit rates for supporting our loan-to-deposit ratio," he said. The bank has an excess Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) between Rs 3.5 lakh crore and Rs 4 lakh crore.

"Incidentally, I may add here that our loan-to-deposit ratio is around 68-69 per cent only. That leaves enough room for us to lend without having pressure on the deposit interest rates.



Nevertheless, he said, "We always give importance to deposits. That is the reason why we increased the interest rate for the short-term deposits recently because we felt that there's room for improvement...We should improve our deposit growth rate to some extent during this year. And our effort would be that we should at least grow around 12-13 per cent this year."

Last month, SBI hiked the fixed deposit rate on select short-term maturity up to 75 basis points. For retail term deposits of 46-179 days, the rate increased by 75 basis points to 5.50 per cent against the earlier 4.75 per cent. Asked about the Net Interest Margin (NIM) outlook for the current financial year, Khara expressed hope and said it would be around the same level recorded in FY24 or could be 2-3 basis points movement

here or there. The domestic NIM of the bank stood at 3.43 per cent for FY24 down by 15 basis points (bps) while the whole bank NIM stood at 3.28 per cent lower by 9 bps year-on-year basis.

The rise in both rupee liquidity and dollar liquidity cost due to tight monetary policy pursued by central banks across the globe was a major factor affecting NIM during FY24. As far as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) are concerned, Khara said, "We should have a downward trajectory both for net and gross. However, it is very difficult to make any projections as it is also a function of the macroeconomy."

The bank is trying to insulate its book for macro stress nevertheless it's difficult to give any kind of guidance on NPAs. "Our guidance as far as our credit cost is concerned, we have kept it at 0.50 per cent but our effort is to keep it at the level of 0.29 per cent," he added. Gross NPA of SBI declined to 2.24 per cent, an improvement of 54 bps compared to previous FY23 while the net NPA stood at 0.57 per cent, an improvement of 10 bps YoY. The credit cost also fell by 3 bps to 0.29 per cent at the end of FY24.

RBI cancels licence of Purvanchal Co-op Bank, Ghazipur

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank has cancelled the licence of Purvanchal Co-operative Bank, Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh as it does not have adequate capital and earning prospects.

The Commissioner for Cooperation and Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Uttar Pradesh has also been asked to issue an order for winding up the bank and appoint a liquidator, the RBI said in a statement.

On liquidation, every depositor would be entitled to receive deposit insurance claim amount of his/her deposits up to Rs 5 lakh only from Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC). As per the data submitted by the Purvanchal Co-operative Bank, about 99.51 per cent of the depositors are entitled to receive full amount of their deposits from DICGC, the RBI said. Giving details, the RBI said the cooperative bank with its present financial position would be unable to pay its present depositors in full.

"The bank does not have adequate capital and earning prospects," it said, and added public interest would be adversely affected if the bank is allowed to carry on banking business any further.

Gold, silver import surges 210 per cent in 2023-24 from UAE: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's gold and silver imports from its free trade agreement (FTA) partner UAE have skyrocketed 210 per cent to USD 10.7 billion in 2023-24 and there is a need to potentially revise the concessional customs duty rates under the pact to mitigate the arbitrage driving this surge, a report said on Monday.

Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said this sharp rise in gold and silver imports is primarily driven by import duty concessions granted by India to the UAE under the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

India allows 7 per cent tariffs or customs duty concessions on import of unlimited quantities of silver and a 1 per cent concession on 160

metric tonnes of gold. CEPA was signed in February 2022 and implemented in May 2022.

Additionally, India facilitates gold and silver imports by allowing private firms to import from the UAE through the India International Bullion Exchange (IIBX) in Gift City. Previously, only authorised agencies could handle such imports, the report said.

"While India's total imports from the UAE fell 9.8 per cent from USD 53.2 billion in FY23 to USD 48 billion in FY24, imports of gold and silver skyrocketed 210 per cent, from USD 3.5 billion to USD 10.7 billion," it said. "Import of all remaining products fell 25 per cent, from USD 49.7 billion in FY23 to USD 37.3 billion in FY24," it said.

GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said the current



import of gold and silver from the UAE is unsustainable as the UAE does not mine gold or silver or add sufficient value to imports.

"High import duties in India on gold, silver, and jewellery at 15 per cent are at the root of the problem. Consider lowering tariffs to 5 per cent.

This will cut large-scale smuggling and other misuse," Srivastava said.

Trade in gold, silver, and diamonds has been prone to misuse due to their low volume but high value and prevent revenue loss," it said, adding that India should rigorously verify the claimed value addition by Dubai-based refiners in gold and silver imports to ensure

profits arising through tariff arbitrage and never pass it to consumers, he said.

Srivastava suggested the government implement certain measures to help India balance its trade policies, protect domestic revenue, and ensure fair competition in the import of precious metals and jewellery.

It suggested reassessing and potentially revising the concessional duty rates under CEPA to mitigate the arbitrage driving the surge in imports of gold and silver.

"At least, implement yearly import quotas (tariff rate quotas) for silver, similar to those for gold, to control the volume of imports and prevent revenue loss," it said, adding that India should rigorously verify the claimed value addition by Dubai-based refiners in gold and silver imports to ensure

compliance with CEPA rules of origin.

It also asked to tighten regulations around the India International Bullion Exchange (IIBX) at Gift City to control the volume and nature of precious metal imports and the exchange should not allow country-based exemptions.

As increased imports contribute to a higher current account deficit and since gold and silver act more like financial instruments than regular trade items, India should avoid including them in any FTA. "India has granted tariff concessions for these items in many FTAs and under the DFT (duty-free tariff preference) scheme, so a comprehensive review is needed.

India announced the scheme for LDCs (least developed countries) in 2008. Under

this, India provides duty free/preferential market access on about 98.2 per cent of India's tariff lines (or product categories).

Further, the report stated that silver imports from the UAE increased multifold to USD 1.74 billion in 2023-24 from a meagre USD 29.2 million in 2022-23 due to India charging an 8 per cent duty under the CEPA versus a 15 per cent duty from other countries.

"The large 7 per cent tariff arbitrage resulted in a loss of revenue for India of Rs 1,010 crore in FY24. Revenue loss will increase as India has committed to make tariffs zero on unlimited quantities of silver from the UAE within next 8 years," it added.

It said this trade is unusual because the UAE just imports large silver and gold bars, melt and convert these

into silver grains and unwrought gold for exports. "A check with global refiners will show that value addition in such process is much less than 1 per cent as opposed to 3 per cent required under the FTA," it said.

On gold bars, the report said India agreed to import 200 metric tons of gold annually from the UAE with a 1 per cent tariff concession and due to this gold imports rose 147.6 per cent from USD 3 billion in FY23 to USD 7.6 billion in FY24, causing India to lose Rs 635 crore in revenue in FY24.

Similarly, India's jewellery imports have increased 187.6 per cent from USD 1.1 billion in FY23 to USD 3.3 billion in FY24, whereas these imports from the UAE have increased 290 per cent from USD 347 million in FY23 to USD 1.35 billion in the last fiscal.

Asian shares mostly lower as China reports factory output slowed

AP ■ BANGKOK

Shares were mixed in Asia on Monday after China reported its factory output slowed in May, with the property market still deep in the doldrums.

US futures edged lower and oil prices fell. Shares fell 1.9% in Tokyo to 38,070.40 and in Seoul, the Kospi declined 0.5% to 2,744.63.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gave up 0.2% to 7,712.90.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.1% to 17,960.09, while the Shanghai Composite index shed 0.6% to 3,015.95.

Factory output fell 5.6% in China in May, the government reported, below analysts' forecasts and slowing from 6.7% the month before. Retail sales rose just 4.1% in the first five months of the year.

Overshadowing those lackluster numbers, property investments fell 10% in May from a year earlier, while home prices in major cities fell 3.2%. Property sales plunged 30.5% year-on-year, in further evidence that a raft of measures to try to turn around a slump in the property sector have yet to take hold.

Most markets in Southeast Asia were closed for holidays, while Thailand's SET lost 1.2%. On Friday, US stocks hung around their record levels, with the S&P 500 down less than 0.1%, to 5,431.60, the first time last week that it did not set an all-time high.



The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 0.1%, to 38,589.16, and the Nasdaq composite added 0.1% to its record set a day before on the back of gains for technology stocks, closing at 17,688.88.

In Europe, stocks sank following elections that have raised uncertainty over the region's future.

Wins by far-right parties have raised pressure on France's president in particular, and investors worry it could weaken the European Union, stall fiscal plans and ultimately hurt France's ability to pay its debt. Recent elections have also shaken markets in Mexico, India and elsewhere.

France's CAC 40 fell 2.7% to bring its loss for the week to 6.2%, its worst in more than two years. Germany's DAX lost 1.4%.

US stocks have set records as hopes rise that inflation is slowing enough to convince the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates later this year. Big technology stocks, meanwhile, continue to race ahead almost regardless of what the economy and interest rates are doing.

Hyundai Motor India plans to launch EV models in future

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hyundai Motor India Ltd plans to launch four electric vehicle models in future, including Creta EV, in the last quarter of the current fiscal, according to the company's preliminary IPO papers filed with Sebi.

The company is looking to maximise the price competitiveness of its electric vehicle (EV) models and intends to focus on securing local production capabilities for key parts, such as cells, battery packs, power electronics, and drivetrain and building a localised EV supply chain.

In the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP), Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) said it seeks to calibrate its EV strategy and plan EV timelines in line with market demands in India by launching the appropriate EV models within each price segment.

"We are following a transition strategy, having started with the launch of high-end premium EVs and plan to transition towards the mass markets as the EV market and ecosystem scales up in India. In line with the same, we aim to launch four EV models in future, including Creta EV in the last quarter of fiscal 2025," the company said.

At present, HMIL sells two EV models in India — IONIQ5 and Kona Electric — priced around Rs 45 lakh and Rs 24 lakh, respectively. The company further said, "To maximise price competitiveness of our EV models, we intend to focus on securing local production capabilities for key parts, such as cells, battery packs, power electronics, drivetrain and building a localised EV supply chain."

HMIL has leased a section of the Chennai Manufacturing Plant to Mobis, a Hyundai Motor Company (HMC) group



firm, for the assembly of EV batteries, which will be supplied to the company, in turn, reducing import costs for battery packs, it added.

"Further, we intend to localise the EV supply chain through collaboration with both local and global EV power electronic vendors," it said, adding recently in 2024, HMC announced a strategic collaboration with Exide Energy Solutions Ltd to facilitate localised battery

production and supply in India. Similarly, HMIL said,

"Currently, our company is also exploring different avenues for a strategic collaboration for the production of batteries. We believe the addition of domestically sourced EV models will contribute to diversifying our passenger vehicle offering and further expand our market coverage."

Further, in the near term, the company aims to increase localisation to secure production-linked incentive (PLI) subsidies and transition to a dedicated EV platform to optimise costs, it added.

Beyond EV manufacturing, HMIL said, "We aim to develop the EV infrastructure in India by constructing charging stations. As of March 31, 2024, we have established 11 fast charging stations in India. We intend to support the adoption of EVs by installing charging points across cities and highways in India."

Pointing out threats and challenges to the automotive industry in its DRHP, the company pointed out 'ad-hoc changes in policies' as one of the factors.

"Another challenge that the industry is facing is frequent changes in policies, which makes it difficult for the auto industry stakeholders not only to ensure adherence but also commit investments. Overall policy stability and transparency will be required going forward to ensure smooth technology transition and localisation in the country," HMIL said.

Further, it also pointed out that there are still concerns about meeting the eligibility criteria and availing of the benefits. "Going forward, it said, "Simplification and better tracking of the policies will ensure localisation in India. The progress of the vendors tied up with individual OEMs would also lead to a change in the risk profile of the industry from a supply-side perspective."

manufacturing program, 'Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India, it said.

"While the end goal of localisation is to reduce import dependence, and bring down overall manufacturing costs, it also involves significant initial capital investments from several stakeholders within the automotive industry," HMIL said in its preliminary papers. The company further said, "While the government has designed the schemes to support investments by offering several subsidies and import duty benefits, there are still concerns around meeting the eligibility criteria and availing of the benefits". Going forward, it said, "Simplification and better tracking of the policies will ensure localisation in India. The progress of the vendors tied up with individual OEMs would also lead to a change in the risk profile of the industry from a supply-side perspective."

Streamlining FDI, boosting R&D, manufacturing key to achieve USD 5 bn defence export: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Factors like streamlining foreign direct investment (FDI) as well as augmenting Research & Development (R&D) and manufacturing capabilities can help the country realise its USD 5 billion defence export target by 2024-25, says a study.

Nexgen Exhibitions, organisers of International Police Expo, one of Asia's premier homeland security and defence expos, have released the findings of a comprehensive survey aimed at streamlining Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and bolstering Defence Research

& Development (R&D) and manufacturing capabilities, as per a statement.

According to the statement, this initiative aims to propel India towards its ambitious USD 5 billion defence exports target by 2024-25.

The survey, conducted across 15 cities in India, saw participation from over 130 national and international arms, ammunition, and security equipment manufacturers, exporters, and startups.

The key highlights of the survey, underscored the need for streamlined FDI inflows, elevated technology integration with AI and other

futuristic technologies, and a robust skill development ecosystem to create a large pool of industry-ready professionals.

By enhancing R&D and manufacturing capabilities, India's homeland security and defence sector is poised to emerge as a global manufacturing hub, it stated.

Additionally, it stated that increasing procurement categories is a significant step towards boosting domestic defence manufacturing. Currently, India exports defence equipment to over 75 countries, demonstrating its growing footprint in the global defence market.

The homeland security sector is crucial for maintaining internal stability and protecting national interests.

Integrating advanced technologies and data analytics is paramount for effective threat detection, surveillance, and response. By leveraging AI and machine learning, security agencies can predict and mitigate risks more efficiently.

Moreover, it said that developing a robust disaster management mechanism ensures preparedness and swift response to emergencies, enhancing public safety and national resilience.

Drone logistics solution provider Skye Air secures USD 4 million funding

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Skye Air, a drone logistics solution provider, on Monday said it has secured USD 4 million (about Rs 34 crore) funding, which will be used to expand the company's operations across Gurugram and other cities for healthcare, and quick-commerce deliveries, said Ankit Kumar, Founder & CEO of Skye Air.

Ventures and other existing investors, family offices and angels also participated in the funding round.

"The fresh capital will help the company expand its last-mile network across Gurugram and other cities for healthcare, e-commerce, and quick-commerce deliveries," said Ankit Kumar, Founder & CEO of Skye Air. He further said that with the Modi 3.0 government at the centre stage, the company envisages a plethora of growth coming in the Indian drone sector, which will make Bharat a global drone hub by 2030.

NEERAJ SET TO RESUME OLYMPIC BUILD UP AT PAAVO NURMI GAMES IN FINLAND

PTI ■ TURKU (FINLAND)

Forced into a short break to mend a niggling Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will return to competitive action at the Paavo Nurmi Games here on Tuesday against a stellar field, hoping to continue his build-up to Paris Games with renewed vigour. The 26-year-old superstar, the lone Indian in the field here, will be up against German teenaged sensation Max Denning, who is the youngest member of the coveted 90m club, which Chopra is aspiring to enter. The 19-year-old is being seen as a major competition for Chopra when he defends his Tokyo Games gold medal in Paris. Local favourite Oliver Helander, who had beaten the Indian in the 2022 edition of the one-day competition, will also be there. The Indian won a silver medal in 2022 with a throw of 89.30m, which was a personal best at that time. Chopra



improved that mark to 89.94m at the Stockholm leg of the Diamond League in the same year. Two-time world champion Anderson Peters of Grenada

and 2012 Olympic champion Keshorn Walcott of Trinidad and Tobago are in fray as well here. Chopra had withdrawn from last month's Ostrava Golden

Spike as a precautionary measure after he "felt something in my adductor (group of muscles located on inner thighs)" He began his season at the

Doha Diamond League in May, where he finished second with his final throw of 88.36m, the ninth best mark of his career.

Jakub Vadlejch, who beat Chopra in the Doha Diamond League will not be competing here.

Chopra also participated at the National Federation Cup Senior Athletics Championships in Bhubaneswar, where he secured the gold medal with an underwhelming effort of 82.27m.

After the Paavo Nurmi Games, Chopra will next be seen in action at the Paris Diamond League on July 7.

He has opted out of the National Inter-State Athletics in Panchkula to be held from June 27 to avoid a hectic schedule ahead of the Olympics.

"Further competition schedule will be decided later according to situation and my body. Otherwise, I will go to Paris from there (after competing in Turku)," Chopra had stated after the Federation Cup.

Aditi finishes T-17 on Meijer LPGA Classic



PTI ■ GRAND RAPIDS, (US)

Olympic-bound Indian golfer Aditi Ashok finished T-17 with a final round of 1-under 71 for a total of 10-under 278 in a low-scoring Meijer Classic on the LPGA.

It was an action-packed round with five birdies against one bogey for Aditi, who shot 68-70-69-71 over the four days. While she has been consistently making a lot of cuts, Aditi is still seeking her first Top-10 of the season. The T-17 is her best finish this season and the first in Top-20. She is due to play the Majors and the Olympics later this

year. Lilia Vu spoilt Lexi Thompson's bid for her first victory in five years, as she won a three-way play-off beating Lexi and Grace Kim after all three were tied at 16-under.

Playing for the first time since the Ford Championship in late March in Arizona, Vu beat Thompson and third-round leader Kim with a 5-foot birdie putt on the third extra hole which was the par-5 fourth at the Blytheheld Country Club.

A former No. 1 player and double major winner last year, Vu won for the fifth time on the LPGA Tour. She birdied four of the last six holes in regulation to match Thomson and Kim at 16-under 272.

Thompson, the 2015 winner, has said this will be her last year playing a full schedule. She won the last of her 11 LPGA Tour titles at the ShopRite LPGA Classic in June 2019.

Ally Ewing was fourth at 15 under after a 69. Allisen Corpuz and Narin An were 14 under, each shooting 70s. The major KPMG Women's PGA Championship begins Thursday at Sahalee outside Seattle.



UEFA wants to keep Russian flags out of stadium for Ukraine's opening game at Euro 2024

AP ■ MUNICH (GERMANY)

The Union of European Football Associations wants to keep Russian flags out of the stadium when Ukraine plays its first European Championship game on Monday after some were displayed in the stands at other matches.

UEFA said security staff will try to intercept and remove Russian flags from being displayed at the Munich stadium where Ukraine plays Romania on Monday afternoon in the Euro 2024 group stage.

Russian teams were banned by UEFA from international competitions within days of the full military invasion of Ukraine starting in February 2022.

Still, Russian citizens could try to buy tickets for the Euro 2024 games. The national flag of white, red and blue horizontal bands has been displayed at some of the first group-stage matches, including Munich last Friday next to Scotland flags at the opening game against Germany.

Several Russian flags also were seen among Serbia fans during their team's game against England on Sunday in Gelsenkirchen. Serbia is one of Russia's strongest traditional allies in Europe.

Many images of Jude Bellingham celebrating scoring the game's only goal for England had Russian flags that could be seen behind him in the Serbian end of the stadium. German authorities previously said they only wanted to allow flags of the participating teams to be brought to stadiums and official fan zones broadcasting games on big screens in the 10 host cities. That was seen as a protective measure to avoid likely provocations if Israeli and Palestinian flags were displayed.

UEFA also has disciplinary rules against political messages at stadiums and can punish teams if such are displayed by their fans.



Jude's goal secures England 1-0 win against Serbia

AP ■ GELSENKIRCHEN (GERMANY)

Jude Bellingham scored to give England a winning start at the European Championship by beating Serbia 1-0. The Real Madrid star put Gareth Southgate's team in front with a stooping header in the 13th minute at the Veltins Arena from Bukayo Saka's cross.

The buildup to the game had been overshadowed by concerns about violence between rival supporters. And some of those fears were realized when police rushed to separate brawling fans in Gelsenkirchen earlier in the day.

Social media footage showed men throwing chairs at each other outside a restaurant festooned with Serbian flags in the city.

England fans were soon celebrating once the game got underway after Bellingham's early goal. "It's a great start for me personally to get my confidence up and to help the

lads get the win is the most important thing," Bellingham said.

Harry Kane so nearly extended the lead in the second half when Serbia goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic pushed his far post header onto the underside of the bar.

Kane set a record for his country by making his 23rd appearance at a major tournament.

"It's a tough game. They are a tough team and have good players," the England captain said. "We stood up to it well and it is good to get the three points and (for us) to progress. It's good that we got the win today."

Victory sent England to the top of Group C after Denmark drew 1-1 with Slovenia in an earlier game, with Christian Eriksen scoring three years after suffering a cardiac arrest on the field at the last Euros.

England plays Denmark in Frankfurt on Thursday.

England was a beaten finalist at the last Euros, losing on penalties to Italy in the final three years ago. It is one of the favorites this time around.

Gretchen follows world record with first Olympic berth

AP ■ INDIANAPOLIS

Gretchen Walsh followed up a world record in the 100-meter butterfly with something that felt just as good.

Her first trip to the Olympics. Walsh didn't go quite as fast as a night earlier in the semifinals, but she touched in 55.31 seconds to claim the coveted Olympic berth against a loaded field at the U.S. Olympic swimming trials on Sunday.

"I was definitely nervous," Walsh said. "There were a lot of what-ifs. Coming off breaking the world record, I was thinking, Do I need to do that again just to make the team? What if I get third? What's that even even going to look like?" No worries. She's heading to Paris.

So is Carson Foster. He made up for the disappointment of 2021, when he just missed out on the Olympics, with a victory in the men's 400 individual medley.

And 30-year-old Nic Fink, whose wife is expecting a child, made it quite a Father's Day - or should that be Expectant Father's Day? - by winning the 100 breaststroke on the second night of the trials.

Looking into the stands at massive Lucas Oil Stadium, he spotted Melanie Margolis Fink - herself a swimming gold medalist at the 2016 Rio Games - and made a rocking motion.

Clearly, Nic Fink's mind was on more than just a gold of his own. The couple's first child, a boy, is due in mid-September.

"It's one of those things that doesn't really make sense to me," Fink said. "I feel like I haven't earned it yet. But the next (Father's Day) will feel like one for sure after diapers and late nights and stuff like that."

Facing three medalists from the Tokyo Games, Walsh knew she had her work cut out for her - even after setting a world record in the semifinals with a time of 55.18 that broke the mark held by Sweden's Sarah Sjöström since the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

Following the same strategy, Walsh went out strong again in the final and was under her world-record pace at the turn. Then, it was a matter of hanging on for the 21-year-old native of Nashville, Tennessee, who swims for the University of Virginia.

She finished with the second-fastest time in history, while Torri Huske grabbed the second Olympic spot with a time of 55.52 that made her the third-fastest woman in the swimming history.

"I couldn't ask for a better start to the meet," Walsh said. Regan Smith became the fourth-fastest female ever at 55.62 - but the third-place showing wasn't enough to get her to Paris on the powerhouse American team. She'll have more chances later in the meet to claim her spot.



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World Number 1 Scottie finishes disappointing US Open with 72, all four rounds over par

AP ■ PINEHURST (USA)

Scottie Scheffler's final round at the U.S. Open ended a lot like his tournament began - with a lack of birdies and plenty of disappointment. The world No. 1 shot 72 on Sunday, marking the first time in his career he's finished all four rounds over par at a major championship.

He made the cut on the number, had just four birdies all week, finished 8-over 288 and was never a factor in a tournament he was heavily favored to win. Scheffler won the Masters in April, one of his five PGA Tour victories this year.

Scheffler came in averaging 5.22 birdies per round this season, but could never figure out Pinehurst No. 2's tricky greens.

"It was a long week," an exhausted looking Scheffler said as he spoke reporters with his golf shirt untucked following another round in 90-degree heat. "Obviously didn't play my best. A bit frustrating to end."

Scheffler pointed to his putting. "I couldn't hole anything," he said. "I could not see the break on these greens. The greens this week kind of had my number. I felt like I hit a lot of really good putts that did weird things at the cup that I was not expecting them to do."

Scheffler said when he returns to Pinehurst the next time it hosts the

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Scheffler said when he returns to Pinehurst the next time it hosts the



U.S. Open in 2029, he'll spend more time on the course getting the know the greens. He said the practice greens weren't the same speed.

"It was hard to find something similar" to practice on, Scheffler said. "I'd say that was definitely an added challenge."

In terms in preparation, Scheffler said it might have been beneficial for him to stay home last week and prepare for the U.S. Open instead of playing the Memorial, which he won. But he quickly added that he would never miss Jack Nicklaus' tournament.

"I'm obviously not going to skip Jack's tournament," Scheffler said. "It's a tournament I love playing. It's a tournament that I'm humbled to be the champion at."

PAYING TRIBUTE TO PAYNE: The USGA honored Payne Stewart on the 25th anniversary of the late Hall of Famer's U.S. Open triumph. The flags for the final round at Pinehurst No. 2 on Sunday carried his familiar silhouette, and special fencing was put up around the 18th green.

without ever having a serious chance of winning. This is not the same DeChambeau had become such a polarizing figure - a target of heckling for slow play and his spat with Brooks Koepka. In the sandhills of North Carolina, he had thousands on his side. He signed autographs during his round, he engaged with fans and he delivered one hell of a show.

And when it was over, he looked at the double-decker grandstands around the 18th and thousands circling the 18th green and invited them to his party. DeChambeau wasn't flawless. He hit only five fairways, the fewest in the final round by a U.S. Open champion since Angel Cabrera at Oakmont in 2007. He couldn't escape the trouble on the 12th, leading to a bogey that dropped him two shots behind. He had his first three-putt of the week at the worst time, on the 15th to briefly fall behind.

Bryson wins another US Open with a clutch finish to deny Rory

AP ■ PINEHURST (USA)

Bryson DeChambeau climbed back into the most famous bunker at Pinehurst No. 2, this time with the U.S. Open trophy instead of his 55-degree sand wedge, filling the silver prize with grains of sand to commemorate the best shot of his life.

Rory McIlroy wanted to bury his head in the sand. DeChambeau won his second U.S. Open title on Sunday by getting up-and-down from 55 yards in a bunker - one of the toughest shots in golf - to deliver another unforgettable finish at Pinehurst and a celebration just as raucous as when his hero, Payne Stewart, won with a big par putt in 1999.

"That's Payne right there, baby!" DeChambeau screamed as he walked off the 18th green. This was nothing like DeChambeau winning at Winged Foot in 2020, when there were no fans and no drama. This was high suspense

that ultimately came down to a trio of short putts.

McIlroy, who for so much of the final round looked certain to end 10 years without a major, had a one-shot lead until missing a 30-inch par putt on the 16th hole. Tied for the lead on the 18th, with DeChambeau behind him in the final group, McIlroy missed a par attempt from just inside 4 feet.

He was in the scoring room watching, hoping, for a two-hole playoff when DeChambeau got into trouble off the tee as he had done all day. But then DeChambeau delivered the magic moment with his bunker shot to 4 feet and made the par putt for a 1-over 71.

"That bunker shot was the shot of my life," DeChambeau said. Moments later, McIlroy was in his car, the wheels spinning on the gravel to get out of Pinehurst without comment. There wasn't much to say. This one will sting.

"As much as it is heartbreaking

for some people, it was heartbreak for me at the PGA," said DeChambeau, who a month ago made a dramatic birdie on the 18th hole at Valhalla, only for Xander Schauffele to match him with a birdie to win the PGA Championship.

"I really wanted this one," DeChambeau said. "When I turned the corner and saw I was a couple back, I said, Nope, I'm not going to let that happen. I have to focus on figuring out how to make this happen."

True to his form as one of golf's great entertainers, he put on quite the show. The par putt wasn't as long or as suspenseful as Stewart's in 1999. The celebration was every bit of that. DeChambeau repeatedly pumped those strong arms as he screamed to the blue sky, turning in every direction to a gallery that cheered him on all week.

As much as this U.S. Open will be remembered for DeChambeau's marvelous



bunker shot, McIlroy played a big part. He not missed a putt under 4 feet for 69 holes on the slick, domed Donald Ross greens. And then with the U.S. Open on the line, he missed two over the final three holes for a 69.

McIlroy had the look of a winner. He ran off four birdies in a five-hole stretch around the turn. He was a model of cool, the opposite of DeChambeau's exuberance. He walked confidently to the

14th tee with a two-shot lead as the chants grew louder. "Ror-EE! Ror-EE!" DeChambeau could hear them, and he pounded a 3-wood on the reachable par-4 13th - the tees were moved forward to 316 yards - to the middle of the green for a birdie to stay close.

McIlroy took bogey from behind the 15th green, but he stayed one ahead when DeChambeau, playing in the group behind him, had his first

three-putt of the week on the 15th when he missed from 4 feet. And that's where this U.S. Open took a devastating turn for McIlroy.

He missed a 30-inch par putt on the 16th hole to fall back into a tie. On the 18th hole, McIlroy's tee shot landed behind a wiregrass bush. He blasted out short of the green and pitched beautifully to 4 feet. And he missed again.

DeChambeau kept fans on the edge to the end. He pulled his drive to the left into an awful lie, with a tree in his back swing and a root in front of the golf ball. The best he could manage was to punch it toward the green, and it rolled into a front right bunker.

"One of the worst places I could have been," DeChambeau. But he said his caddie, Greg Bodine, kept it simple. "G-Bo just said, Bryson, just get it up-and-down. That's all you've got to do. You've done this plenty of times before. I've

seen some crazy shots from you from 50 yards out of a bunker," DeChambeau said. During the trophy ceremony, the shot was replayed on a video screen.

"I still can't believe that up-and-down," DeChambeau said. Since he won the U.S. Open at Congressional in 2011, McIlroy has seven top 10s in this championship without a victory - it's been more than 100 years since anyone did that well without going home with the trophy.

DeChambeau becomes the second LIV Golf player to win a major, following Brooks Koepka at the PGA Championship last year. He finished at 6-under 274.

Patrick Cantlay lingered around this duel all afternoon, unable to get the putts to fall at the right time until he missed a 7-foot par putt on the 16th hole that ended his chances. He closed with a 70 and tied for third with Tony Finau, who matched a Sunday best with 67

Pandya, Pant biggest positives for India in T20 WC: Harbhajan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lauding India's group stage performance in the T20 World Cup, former off-spinner Harbhajan Singh said Hardik Pandya's better-than-expected bowling show and Rishabh Pant's good run at the number three position are some of the biggest positives to be drawn from the campaign so far. India are through to the Super Eight stage after going undefeated in their group league matches. Rohit Sharma and his men defeated Ireland, Pakistan, and USA before their last league game against Canada was called off due to a wet outfield in Florida.

"The biggest positive is that Hardik Pandya took the wicket. He was the fourth bowler in this tournament. But if you look at his wicket tally, he has done much better than what was expected of him," Harbhajan said on 'Star Sports'.

Pandya, who came into the World Cup after a horror run in the IPL, has so far snared seven wickets and has bowled full tilt, quelling any apprehensions surrounding his fitness. Pant, who is making his



international return after recovering from the life-threatening car accident in 2022, has also been on a roll and has a strike rate of 124.67 in the tournament.

"Along with him, Rishabh Pant played at number 3. His role was completely changed. Before this World Cup, we were saying that Sanju Samson will play in the team because he has made big runs.

"To make Rishabh Pant play at number three is a big positive. Left-Right combination is formed when Rishabh Pant plays at number three," Harbhajan said on Pant's promotion up the order.

India will open their Super Eight campaign against Afghanistan on June 20 in Barbados. Harbhajan said the side has what it takes to face the challenge of new conditions, having played all its previous matches in the USA.

"There are a lot of positives. Of course, there are challenges and difficulties. But the challenges come in front of those who are brave. This team is a team of brave players.

"They fought well and played very well. Because of this, they topped the group," he said.



Worried about our batting form: Bangladesh skipper Shanto

PTI ■ KINGSTOWN (ST VINCENT)

Delighted that his team is through to the Super Eights but disappointed by its batting performance so far, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto said he is yet to figure out why his batters have not been up to the mark in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

Bangladesh managed to trump Nepal by 21 runs to seal their place in the Super Eights. However, getting shot out for 106 put them in a spot of bother before their bowlers managed to get the job done.

"First of all, very happy that we are going to play Super Eights, and yeah, our batting is not up to the mark. But, the way our bowler bowled in the last three-four matches, really happy," Shanto said during the post-match media interaction here on Sunday night.

"I hope they will continue their form, and as a batting group, we need to do our proper planning so that we can come back in the next round," Shanto admitted that the side's batting failures have been hard to decipher but he rejected suggestions that slow pitches were a reason. Bangladesh have gone past the 150-run mark just once in this tournament, against the Netherlands.

"I hope they (the bowlers) make us win every day; that's what I hope for, but the batsmen also have a responsibility. And why it is not happening, everyone is trying to find out. But it is not happening anyway, and it is not acceptable," he said.

"The wicket is not the issue. This was a wicket where you can score 140-150 runs, maybe which we could not do. So, it is definitely a reason for us to worry," he said.

Despite managing scores close to 130, the team has emerged triumphant in three games and its only defeat so far has come against South Africa.

Shanto emphasised the importance of getting a good start from his batters.

"Of course, it is a reason for me to worry. I don't think it is a good thing for the team to bat like this because the start is very important. We are not getting the start, and the lower-order batsmen are not finishing it well," he pointed out.

"But we have to come out of this and think about how to come out of this. And we do plan and think about this all the time. Still, this mistake is happening again and again." Bangladesh have been clubbed in Group 1 alongside India, Australia and Afghanistan for the Super Eights.

Shanto feels it will be a tough challenge for his team to overcome the in-form rivals.

"All 20 teams are here to win. So now, we are going to play Super Eights. All matches will be competitive," he stated.

"There are no big teams or big names, I hope we'll have a good Super Eights."

Bangladesh will play their Super Eight opener against Australia on Thursday in Antigua, followed by India two days later at the same venue before finishing off against Afghanistan on June 24 here.

Tanzim, Mustafizur star in Bangladesh's Super Eight entry

PTI ■ KINGSTOWN (SAINT VINCENT)

Pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib's career-best figures of 4 for 7 with an astounding 21 dot balls headlined Bangladesh's dominant bowling performance as they entered the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup with a comfortable 21-run win against Nepal in their final group league game. Having nearly shocked South Africa in their previous game, Nepal bowlers were again on target, bowling out Bangladesh for 106 but Tanzim along with seasoned Shakib al Hasan (2/9) and Mustafizur Rahman (3/7) bowled out Nepal for 85 in 19.2 overs.

Nepal were on course at 78 for 5 at one stage before losing their last five wickets for seven

runs as a determined Bangladesh team used all its reservoir of experience after a disappointing batting show. Bangladesh should have won the match when Nepal were reduced to 26 for 5 after seven overs courtesy the right arm outswing specialist Tanzim but Kushal Malla (27) and world record holder Dipendra Singh Airee (25) added 52 runs to raise visions of a first big win for the country against a major Test playing nation.

But as it happens with ICC's Associate Member nations, the batters with little exposure of facing quality bowling didn't know what to do with an experienced player like Mustafizur.

Needing 22 off 12 balls, "The Fizz" was an artist at work as he bowled his customary slow off-



cutters, which would pitch on middle stump and cut across the right hander.

Airee, who holds the world record of fastest T20I fifty off 9 balls and only third cricketer after Yuvraj Singh and Kieron Pollard to hit six sixes in an over, understood the difference of facing a world class operator

remaining not out without troubling the scorers.

"Very happy the way we played this round. I hope we can continue with our bowling performance and hope that our batting performance will be fine in the next round," Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto said at post-match presentation ceremony.

The skipper wasn't happy that none of the Bangladeshi batters could even cross 20 but has confidence that his bowling unit can defend any totals.

"We have everything. All the fast bowlers have worked really hard in the last two or three years. In this format, the bowling unit is very important and I hope they continue their form. We have to plan for the next round and execute our

plans," he said.

As far as Nepal skipper Rohit Paudel is concerned, he conceded that inexperience became their undoing.

"As a batting unit, we could have done better, especially the top order batters. We could have batted tighter. Bangladesh bowled really well with the new ball and we were under pressure after that. They were asking us challenging questions," a dejected Paudel said at post-match presentation ceremony.

"Top order batters could have done better and taken more responsibility. We need to step up, need to know where to score runs and how to assess conditions," the skipper said as he promised the ardent fans of a better show in the coming tournaments.

West Indies Afghanistan to engage in battle for supremacy

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (SAINT LUCIA)

Hosts West Indies and Afghanistan will indulge in a battle of one upmanship and strive to gain momentum for the Super Eight stage when they take on each other in their final group stage game of the T20 World Cup here.

After starting off with a scrappy win over Papua New Guinea, West Indies are slowly but steadily finding their rhythm. They brushed aside Uganda and New Zealand. Afghanistan, on the other hand, have had a flawless campaign so far. Rashid Khan and Co. Are enjoying the conditions that the Caribbean pitches are offering.

Gaining momentum is the only thing at stake in the final Group C clash with both teams having qualified for the Super Eights.

"Momentum is a very important word for us it's important for us to keep playing good cricket and consistent cricket," West Indies skipper Rovman Powell said on the eve of the game.

"After this game the Super 8 is very, very important so you want players going into the Super 8 with good performances, you want to go in the Super 8 as a team winning."

That opener Rahamanullah Gurbaz (167 runs) and pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi (12 wickets) are currently leading the chart of run-makers and wicket-takers respectively is a just reflection of their fine run in this ICC showpiece.

Besides Gurbaz, the experienced Ibrahim Zadran has also made significant contributions collecting 114 runs with a highest score of 70. But the Afghans who have a lot of right hand batters will have their task cut out against left-arm spinners Akeal Hosen and Gudakesh Motie. The Afghans themselves will



be without off spinner Mujeeb ur Rahman, who has been ruled out of the tournament due to a finger injury. However, they have no dearth of spinners with the likes of skipper Rashid and young Noor Ahmad, who bowled economically against Papua New Guinea and New Zealand, in their ranks.

"It's been three good games but realising there's a lot more than three games to go obviously tomorrow and then three more in the group stage and hopefully beyond," Afghanistan head coach Jonathan Trott said.

"That's the focus but we're not worried about looking too far ahead the focus obviously the main goal is to go as far as we can and achieve things that no other Afghanistan team has done before.

"And we've taken a step in the right direction so far, but that's all it is. There's a lot more cricket ahead and a lot of good teams to play against," he added.

The Darren Sammy National Stadium has one of the best pitches across both USA and the Caribbean.

With the ball coming on to the bat nicely, both matches played here so far have been high-scoring affairs with Sri Lanka

Haven't thought out quitting captaincy: Babar Azam

PTI ■ FORT LAUDERHILL (FLORIDA)

Under-fire Pakistan skipper Babar Azam hasn't yet thought about quitting captaincy despite his team's group-stage exit from the T20 World Cup, insisting that any decision on the matter will be taken only after discussions with his Cricket Board.

The 2009 champions and also the finalists of 2007 and 2022 editions, lost to USA and India in their first two games to exit the tournament even before the Super Eights.

Having faced massive criticism, the Pakistan skipper hit back when asked if he has any plans to tender his resignation.

"When I go back, we will discuss all the things that happened here. And if I have to leave the captaincy, this decision, I will tell you openly. I will not announce anything behind the scenes. Whatever happens, will happen in front of you," Babar said after Pakistan ended their group league campaign with a hard-fought three-wicket win over Ireland.

Babar said it was the Pakistan Cricket Board which reinstated him and whether he continues or not, will be

their call.

"I have not thought about it. The decision is of the PCB," he said, asserting that he never asked for a leadership role.

"About the captaincy - when I had left it (after ODI World Cup), I thought that I shouldn't be doing it now, that's why I left it and I announced it myself. Then when they gave it back to me, it was the decision of the PCB."

Babar was visibly miffed at being repeatedly probed about his future as a leader and told the assembled media that one person cannot be blamed for team losses.

"...Everyone is sad. As a team, we did not play. I told you that we did not lose this because of one person," he told a probing scribe.

"We are losing as a team. I am not saying this because of one person. You are pointing out that because of the captain, I cannot play in every player's place. There are 11 players and each of them has a role.

"I think we as a team have not been able to apply, follow and finish things. We have to settle down and accept that we didn't play well as a team."

Imad Wasim, in a media interaction,



had spoken how Pakistan is not changing its archaic style at a time when the world order in the shortest format had undergone a sea change.

Babar partially agreed with Imad's assertion.

"I think eight-nine players are the same who have been playing for four years. They should not fear. All of them are the same players. They are being backed. They are being given opportunities," he said.

Batting is an area of concern he admitted.

"You need to assess the conditions,

what's the demand here. If you follow that then - tell me how many matches have been played here and there's been outstanding batting?"

"There's been a struggle, but you need to be proactive about what's required here. I think it's about game awareness and common sense, which is what is required here."

CRITICAL OF US WICKETS: Babar joined the chorus of criticism against the standard of pitches in the tournament's USA leg, which concluded on Saturday. While drop-in pitches in New York copped a lot of flak, inadequate covers for the full ground in Florida also didn't go down well with teams.

"I was expecting someone to ask this question (on US tracks). As far as pitches are concerned...In New York, you saw that the game was played on toss. I think the timing was a little too early.

"Because when you win a toss, every second team opted to bowl. And bowlers got help...You didn't have the idea of bounce because there was no consistent bounce. Sometimes the ball went too high, sometimes it stayed down."

Sri Lanka beat Netherlands by 83 runs

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (SAINT LUCIA)

Sri Lanka finally found their Smojo as they clinically disposed off the Netherlands by a whopping 83 runs in an inconsequential final group D league game of the T20 World Cup here.

With Bangladesh beating Nepal by 21 runs in the other group league game, the faint outside chance that the Netherlands had despite a way inferior net run-rate was up in smoke as they were bowled out for 118 in pursuit of an improbable target of 202 set by Wanindu Hasaranga's men.

The Sri Lankans left it too late while bringing their A game to the fore as all three units fired in unison but the horse has already bolted as they were out of reckoning for the Super Eights.

The Sri Lankan middle order were brilliant with veteran

Angelo Mathews (30 off 15 balls) and skipper Hasaranga (20 off 10 balls) shored up the scoring rate but it was left-hander Charith Asalanka's 21-ball-46 that was the real difference in their innings. Asalanka smashed five sixes as Sri Lanka crossed the 200-run mark.

Asalanka, smoked the Netherlands bowlers with

minimal footwork and maximum power, keeping a stable base that allowed him to go for the jugular.

"These are far better conditions than the USA, and we enjoyed those conditions. It can be tough to come in at No. 5. We just played the conditions," said Asalanka, who was adjudged 'Player of the Match'.

"I know I have to be a little



more consistent. In general we are a little disappointed about the results in the first two games. But in the end we had a good game here," the southpaw said. During the chase, the Netherlands openers Michael Levitt (31) and Max O'Dowd (11) added 45 in just 4.2 overs but once Maheesh Theekshana got the former stumped, there was virtually no resistance from the other batters.

Slinger Nuwan Thushara (3/24) was the pick of the Lankan bowlers while Chennai Super Kings star Matheesha Pathirana (2/12) also remained accurate during his overs hitting the blockhole consistently.

From being 45 for no loss in the first five overs, the Netherlands lost half of the side by the time they reached the halfway stage. Any remote chances of an impressive win ended then and there.

It was one of the best tracks across both USA and the Caribbean islands and there was very little room for error on a track where ball came onto the bat nicely. Kusal Mendis, a seasoned campaigner, started the onslaught with 46 off 29 balls with a flurry of boundaries in the Powerplay to set the tone. That allowed Asalanka, Mathews and Hasaranga to go hammer and tongs towards the back-end.

"After the bad first two games this win is very healthy for us. The wicket was really good we just wanted to put a 160-170 score on this wicket. With our attack anything over 160 we can defend. In the first two games we lost two or three wickets in the first six overs. Today we didn't. I think that was the difference," Hasaranga said at post-match presentation ceremony.