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PEAKS AS INFLATION COOLS OFF

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LIONEL MESSI SAYS  
INTER MIAMI WILL  
BE MY LAST CLUB  
11 SPORTS



Residents of Anand Parbat area fill drinking water from a Delhi Jal Board tanker amid a water crisis in the national Capital  
Photo: Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

# Delhi remains hot, thirsty; neighbours plough water

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As Delhiites are reeling under the double blow of a relentless heatwave and water crisis, blame game continued between Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh in the Supreme Court on Thursday. In a twist in the Supreme Court battle over Delhi's spiralling water crisis, Himachal Pradesh has said it does not have surplus water to send to the national Capital, a day after the hill State said it

had released water for Delhi and the supply needs to go through Haryana while the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Delhi Government filed a fresh affidavit saying it "cannot" take action against tanker mafia as they are operating on the "Haryana side of the Yamuna River." Haryana should explain why action was not taken," the Delhi Government said in the affidavit shifting the responsibility. After hearing all stakeholders,

a vacation bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Prasanna B Varale said sharing of Yamuna water between States is a complex and sensitive issue and this court does not have the technical expertise to decide on it even on an interim basis. The bench, therefore, left it to the Upper Yamuna River Board to examine if some relief can be extended to Delhi in terms of releasing additional water supply.

# NEET-UG for 1,563 candidates on June 23

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a raging row over the NEET-UG examination, the National Testing Agency (NTA) will re-conduct the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, Undergraduate (NEET UG) 2024 exam for over 1,563 aspirants on June 23 while the result will be declared on June 30. For those who do not wish to appear, their original scorecards (without the grace marks) will be considered. The NTA informed a vacation bench of justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta that all 1,563 candidates who suffered as they got less than the allotted time to write NEET 2024, will be given the option for the re-test. "If they choose to take the re-exam, their earlier NEET score will stand cancelled (and the new score after the re-exam will be counted instead). If these students choose not to take the retest, their original scores would remain but without counting grace marks awarded earlier on account of the loss of time," the NTA told the court. The NTA conducts the all India pre-medical entrance test. The development has come amid controversy that the "arbitrary" award of grace marks led to a shocking surge of top scorers during



the NEET, with several claims being made of malpractices, cheating and irregularities in the conduct of the exam. Scores of students and their parents are protesting at the Jantar Mantar against the irregularities in the NEET-UG examination and demanding a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Refusing to stall the counselling for NEET-UG, 2024, scheduled to commence from July 6, the bench said, "As per the recommendations it has been suggested that scorecard of affected 1,563 candidates will be cancelled and withdrawn and actual scores will be informed without grace marks and re exam will be conducted for them. Result of those who do not take the retest will be the exam's actual scores without grace marks".

## Centre cancels grace marks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In his first statement after taking over once again as Union Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, on Thursday rejected allegations of paper leak in the medical entrance exam NEET-UG, saying there is no evidence to substantiate the claims and added that the Government is ensuring no student is at a disadvantage. Pradhan said the Opposition-led by Congress is spreading lies on sensitive issues without knowing facts. Soon after a series of developments during the day, the number of top rankers in NEET-UG is to come down to 61 from 67 after the NTA's decision to withdraw grace marks awarded to 1,563 students. Six of these 1,563 candidates who appeared in the medical entrance exam from a centre in Haryana had shared the top rank with 61 others. "There is no evidence of paper leak in NEET-UG. The allegations of corruption in NTA are unfounded, it is a very credible body," said the Minister.



# Deal with J&K terror with iron hand: PM

MOHIT KANDHARI/PNS ■ JAMMU/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday directed officials to deploy a full spectrum of counter-terror measures in Jammu and Kashmir in a high-level meeting attended by National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and other senior officials. The review was held in the backdrop of four terror attacks in as many days in Reasi, Kathua and Doda. Given this development, Modi also spoke to Home Minister Amit Shah and Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and discussed the deployment of security forces and anti-terror operations. Sinha briefed Modi on the efforts being undertaken by the local administration. In the wake of a sudden upswing in the terrorist violence across different districts of the Jammu region, the security forces deployed

in Jammu and Kashmir are bracing for a bigger challenge of peaceful conduct of the 52-day-long Amarnath yatra starting June 29. The meeting, meanwhile, also took stock of deployment of security forces and counter-terror operations and Modi was given a comprehensive overview of the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, including the ongoing counter-terrorism efforts. The Prime Minister directed officials present at the meeting to deploy the full spectrum of the country's counter-terror capabilities to restore peace in the region. Terrorists struck at four places in Reasi, Kathua and Doda districts over the past four days, killing nine pilgrims and a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan and leaving seven security personnel and several others injured.



## BJP shows might at Khandu's oath-taking

PNS ■ ITANAGAR/NEW DELHI

BJP leader Pema Khandu took oath as the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh for the third consecutive term on Thursday. Khandu, who was re-elected unopposed from the Mukto constituency in the border district of Tawang, was sworn-in by Governor KT Parnaik in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president JP Nadda, Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, among others. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Khandu and said his team will ensure that the state develops at an even faster pace. Eleven other MLAs were also sworn-in as Ministers at the function held in the Dorjee Khandu State Convention Centre. Among them were Deputy CM Chowna Mein, former Assembly Speaker PD Sona, BJP State president Biyuram Wahge, and Dasanglu Pul and other leaders.

# High airfares pinched Minister, vows to check flyaway prices

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Reiterating Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'hawai chappal se hawai jahaz tak', the newly appointed Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu on Thursday vowed to review the surging prices of air fares so that it becomes 'affordable' for the common man. Naidu said to make it a reality, the ticket prices have to be affordable and that benefits of the aviation sector should reach every corner of the country, with focus on Tier two and Tier three cities. "I am going to hold review meetings. Definitely, my intention would be to bring down the (ticket) prices because that is a challenge for the common man. Our intention is to take air travel to the common man, unless you make it affordable, it is not going to happen," Naidu, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MP said soon after he assumed the charge of Civil Aviation Minister. The 36-year-old three-time MP is the youngest Cabinet Minister in the Modi 3.0 Government. Increase in airfares is an important issue and it has been a talking point. Dynamic pricing and fluctuating airfare prices have been an issue with travellers across India. Over the past few months, ticket prices have seen sharp increases, impacting the ease



of flying for both domestic and international routes. Besides, due to Go First's insolvency, flight suspension, high demand during the busiest travel season, and capacity issues, travellers now have to pay more for their tickets. Additionally, Indian airlines do not have enough aircraft to launch new routes right now. Naidu said the key priorities of the Ministry would be to create an 'ease of flying' scenario, making air travel more accessible and convenient for every citizen. In February, a parliamentary panel proposed that the Government should frame guidelines to control sudden surges in airfares, adding that a route-specific fare ceiling can be examined, keeping in mind the interests of both the airlines and the customer. Moreover, the country's aviation sector has been grappling with global supply chain disruptions, which

have delayed plane deliveries and pushed fares higher. Domestic air traffic has grown by 23 per cent in 2023, reaching a record 153 million passengers, with analysts forecasting this number to climb to 300 million by 2030. Naidu expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for entrusting him with the crucial responsibility of leading the Ministry of Civil Aviation. He emphasised that the choice of a young and energetic leader signifies a forward-looking approach, focused on shaping the future of the aviation industry for the next 25 years. Naidu acknowledged the support of the people of Srikakulam and Andhra Pradesh, thanked Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and recalled the role of his father, Late Kinjarapu Yerran Naidu, a distinguished politician from Andhra Pradesh.

# DNA tests on to identify Kuwait victims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An IAF plane is on standby to bring back the mortal remains of Indians killed in a devastating fire in southern Kuwait's Mangaf area on Wednesday. Forty of the 49 killed were Indians including 24 from Kerala. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex-gratia payment of ₹two lakh each to the families of the deceased. The Kerala Government also announced payment of ₹five lakh each. Most of the Indian victims are from Kerala. Minister of state for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh left for Kuwait following a



direction from Modi to oversee assistance to Indians injured in the fire and to ensure early repatriation of mortal remains of those killed, officials said here on Thursday. They also said Kuwaiti authorities are conducting DNA tests on the bodies of those killed adding total number of people killed in the Al-Mangaf building is 49 and 42 of them are learnt to be Indians; the remaining ones

are Pakistani, Filipino, Egyptian and Nepali nationals. "In an unfortunate and tragic fire incident earlier today in a Labour housing facility in Mangaf area of Kuwait, around 40 Indians are understood to have died and over 50 injured," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had said in a statement late on Wednesday night. Prime Minister Modi, who described the incident as "saddening", reviewed the situation at a meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, NSA Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and Principal Secretary to PM PK Mishra among others.

Detailed report on Page 4

## CHILLING OUT



Traffic congestion on a road owing to tourists' rush near Rohtang Pass, in Manali, on Thursday

PTI

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Ex-IPS officer Doval reappointed NSA

New Delhi: The Government on Thursday reappointed former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Ajit Doval as the National Security Adviser (NSA), according to an official order. His appointment will be co-terminus with the term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi or until further orders, it said. "The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Ajit Doval, IPS (Retired) as National Security Adviser with effect from 10.06.2024," said the order.

### Modi leaves for Italy to attend G7

New Delhi: India will focus on artificial intelligence, energy, Africa, and the Mediterranean at the outreach session of the G7 summit in Italy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday. Modi left for Italy in his first foreign trip after becoming Prime Minister for the third term. He will attend the outreach session on Friday and is scheduled to hold bilateral talks with a number of world leaders on the margins of the summit.

Detailed report on P4

# Frozen thumb flavour in butterscotch cone, Mumbai ishtyle

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Enjoying a cone of ice cream turned out to be a bitter experience for a Mumbai-based man as he was appalled to find a piece of flesh, apparently a severed human thumb, in the frozen dessert that he ordered online, police said on Thursday. The incident occurred on Wednesday afternoon, following which the man lodged a complaint with the police, they said. The complainant, Brendon Ferrao (26), is a doctor with an MBBS degree and is a

resident of Malad area in the metropolis. "In his complaint, he said he ordered a butterscotch ice-cream cone from Yummo company through an e-Commerce app. While consuming the ice cream after lunch, he found a piece of flesh with a nail in it," a police official said. The man, who is pursuing his post-graduate studies, then took up the matter with the ice cream company by complaining about it on its Instagram page. But since there was no proper response from the

firm, the complainant put the piece of flesh in an ice bag and approached went to the Malad police station, where he lodged a complaint, the official said. Based on his complaint, the police registered a case under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 272 (adulteration of food or drink intended for sale), 273 (sale of noxious food and drink) and 336 (act endangering life or personal safety of others), against Yummo ice cream company officials, he said. "The piece of flesh, suspected



to be a piece of human finger, has been sent for forensic examination to ascertain whether it is a part of the human body," the official said. Speaking to media persons about the incident, complainant Ferrao said while eating the ice cream, he found a big piece in his mouth and initially thought it to be a nut. But as he suspected that something was wrong, he took out the piece from his mouth and was appalled to find a piece of flesh, he said. He said since he is a doctor,

he knows the human body parts well and figured out that the piece of flesh that he found was of a thumb. "After finding the piece of flesh in the ice cream, I was almost trembling. It left me traumatised," he said. Senior police inspector Ravindra Adane said the piece of flesh with a nail measured around one-and-a-half centimetres. After registering the case, the police have launched a probe to find out from where the ice cream was brought, and where and when it was manufactured, he said.



# Improved water supply and electricity soon, Saryu leads crucial meeting

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Jamshedpur East MLA Saryu Roy convened a crucial meeting with Tata Steel UISL (formerly Jusco) General Manager RK Singh on Thursday at the Tata Steel UISL General Manager's office. The meeting, which lasted for about two hours, focused on significant infrastructure topics such as road construction, drainage, water supply, and electricity provision in various settlements.

During the meeting, it was decided that forms for drinking water connections would be distributed in Bhuiyadhi and Nandnagar areas in July, and in Lalbhata and Babudhi from the last week of July. Additionally, forms for water connections will be distributed in



Jojobeda Basti, Neelkanth Apartment, and other apartments starting from July 15.

The meeting also concluded that residents of Mahanand Basti, Manifit, and surrounding areas would soon be able to access drinking water connections, with Jusco ready to supply the water.

The talks revealed that the construction of a sub-station near the de-addiction center in Bagunhatu has commenced and is expected to be completed within two months. Following this, network laying in the settlements and house connections will begin.

In other areas, work has started on laying cables to provide electricity in Moharda, Murakati, and Aastha. A site near Telco Sewage Plant, close to Ramni Kali Temple,

has been selected for a substation construction for the Moharda area, pending a No Objection Certificate from Tata Motors.

The meeting reached a consensus on the renovation, paving, and cleaning of major drains in the area and those extending from settlements. It was decided that roads and drains would be constructed in Manifit, Burmamines, Sidgora, Shiv Singh Garden, Kashidhi, and Sakchi garden areas.

A decision was made to construct a park on the vacant plot near Golmuri, Vijayanagar Temple. Furthermore, work on Moharda, Phase 2 will commence soon, with plans to lay about 6 km of pipelines in the remaining areas of Phase 1. In Phase 2, a water tank will be constructed at the foot of

Bhuvaneshwari temple to ensure water supply to houses at higher altitudes.

Roy proposed that Tata Steel UISL undertake the cleaning of the entire city, a proposal that the General Manager accepted. Emphasizing the need for pure drinking water, MLA Roy suggested laying a new pipeline from Chandil to Mango via Dimna Dam to supply pure drinking water to the entire city, including the Moharda water supply area. The General Manager assured a positive initiative on this proposal.

The meeting was attended by MLA Saryu Roy's personal secretary Sudhir Singh, Sanjeev Jha of Tata Steel UISL, NK Panda, Harpreet Singh, and Nirmal Kumar, among others.

## Home Guard jawan commits suicide in Jamshedpur

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Sandeep Rajak, a 34-year-old Home Guard jawan, committed suicide by hanging at his home late on Wednesday night. Sandeep, a resident of Shankosai Road No. 2 in the Ulidih police station area, reportedly took his own life using a scarf. The local police promptly arrived at the scene, prepared a 'Panchnama' of the body, and sent it to MGM Medical College for a post-mortem examination. Sandeep Rajak had married just six months ago, in December 2023. It is reported that he had been under significant stress since his marriage. According to his father, Naresh Rajak, Sandeep had been struggling with this stress but did not disclose the specifics despite several inquiries from his family. The family is in a state of shock and mourning the loss. Naresh Rajak expressed his grief, mentioning how he had tried to understand the cause of his son's distress, but Sandeep remained silent about his troubles. The tragic loss of Sandeep Rajak highlights the urgent need for mental health support and intervention, especially for those in high-stress professions like the Home Guard service. Sandeep was a Home Guard jawan initially posted at Azadnagar police station and later transferred to MGM hospital. Unfortunately, he did not join his new duty post before taking his own life. The police sent his body for a post-mortem at MGM Medical College, and on Thursday, it was handed over to the grieving family. The family is deeply shocked and mourning the loss of their loved one.

## Ninti Cardiac Care Planning to expand across Bihar

Flagship center in Saharsa, now launching in Muzaffarpur City



PNS : MUZAFFARPUR

The team at Ninti Cardiac Care is actively expanding to establish a statewide presence of cardiology-focused hospitals. This quality-driven and emerging hospital chain has already opened its first center in the Kosi region at Saharsa and has announced expansion plans across Bihar and Jharkhand in Phase 1.

Following the successful launch of its fully operational branch in Saharsa, Ninti Cardiac Care is poised to inaugurate new branches in Muzaffarpur very shortly & Begusarai is being planned in the near term.

The Saharsa branch which already has proven a ray of hope for many cardiac patients, is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities including a modern Cath lab and offers comprehensive cardiac procedures. Under the expert guidance of Dr Girija Shankar Jha, a renowned cardiologist, the branch has been providing exceptional cardiac care,



including diagnostic and interventional procedures.

In line with the commitment to delivering top-notch cardiac care, the team is setting up its second world class cardiology centre in Aasav Hospital Muzaffarpur. Muzaffarpur branch will be led by Dr. Om Prakash Narayan Arya, a distinguished Senior Interventional Cardiologist & Electrophysiologist.

Ninti Hospital is conceptualised by Dr. Gopal Sharan, an experienced hospital administrator, having worked with many corporate hospital chains in leadership role & Mr Amit Tiwari, a seasoned entrepreneur with multiple businesses under his belt.

According to Raj Sehgal, Business Director of Ninti Hospital Group, "This shall be a milestone to optimise healthcare infrastructure for cardiac patients in the city and nearby areas. The goal of setting up cardiac centres is to ensure that the patient can reach within 1st Golden hour of a cardiac emergency & that

life can be saved by timely intervention. The residents would not need to travel to a larger or a far city due to a lack of good medical facilities now. This will help to optimise patient's journey beyond treatment, aiding early diagnosis for cardiac patients and enhancing the capabilities of the healthcare ecosystem in Bihar with world-class medical facilities and treatment procedures."

All these new facilities will be equipped with the latest cardiac care technology and staffed by highly qualified cardiologists and healthcare professionals dedicated to providing comprehensive and compassionate care informed Raj Sehgal Ninti Cardiac Care's expansion reflects its firm commitment to addressing the growing need for specialised cardiac services in Bihar. With these new branches, Ninti Cardiac Care aims to enhance the accessibility and quality of cardiac care, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes for the people of Bihar.

## Bauri holds meeting to address severe power crisis in Bokaro, Chandanakiyari



PNS : BOKARO

A crucial meeting was held yesterday at the Bokaro Circuit House to address the severe power crisis affecting the Bokaro and Chandanakiyari assembly constituencies. The meeting was chaired by opposition leader Amar Bowri. Present at the meeting were Dhanbad MP Dhullu Mahto, Bokaro MLA Biranchi Narayan, Bokaro Deputy Commissioner Vijaya Jadhav, officials from DVC Bokaro Steel, and the Jharkhand Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (JUVNL).

During the meeting, electricity department officials assured that there will be a supply of electricity for 15 to 16 hours per day over the next three days. Following this period, nearly 24-hour power supply will be restored for the residents of the area.

Officials also highlighted issues such as the lack of procurement of essential materials like poles, wires, insulators, and transformers. The meeting concluded with a decision to send a requisition to the government for these necessary items.

The discussion emphasized the need for immediate action to alleviate the power crisis and provide relief to the affected residents.

## Fire in GLA college campus, no damages



PNS : DALTONGANJ

Fire broke out in the campus of the GLA college here in Daltonganj.

Principal Dr I G Khalkho said there is no loss of property except that this fire destroyed the shrubs etc there.

Classes and labs are pretty safe. The cause of the fire is unknown. It looks more accidental, said sources.

Fire tender was called in to contain, control and extinguish the fire. Last year too there had occurred surface fire at the same place where it broke out today. As summer vacation is on, the campus was empty of the students said the principal.

Registrar of the Nilamber Pitamber university "Dr Mritunjay Kumar said "The university will take report of this fire from the principal."

The registrar further said "A few smaller strength examinations like that of the nursing courses, law courses and Ignou are being held in the GLA college just to overcome the delay caused by the lok sabha election for which the district administration had almost requisitioned everything in this college from ground for parking hundreds of vehicles and rooms and multi purpose exam hall etc for having strong rooms for the EVMs and multi purpose exam hall for the counting of votes etc."

## DPS Bokaro teacher conferred with 'Vishwa Ratna Samman'

PNS : BOKARO

Mayank Kumar Bhakta, a music teacher at DPS Bokaro, has brought immense pride to Bokaro and the state of Jharkhand by being awarded the 'Vishwa Ratna Samman 2024'. The accolade, bestowed by the Delhi-based Worthy Wellness Foundation, is affiliated with Niti Ayog and the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Government of India. Bhakta, renowned for his mastery of the tabla, received the award for his exceptional contributions to music education. His selection was based on the merit of his achievements in the category of Music Teaching. Alongside the honor, he was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation, a trophy, and a medal, recognizing his unwavering dedication to teaching and his efforts in promoting India's rich musical heritage among the youth.

With an impressive array of awards at both national and international levels, Mayank's accolades include the National Talent Hunt Winner, Teacher Innovation Award, 'Rashtriya



Pratishtha Samman', Youth Festival Gold Award, Swar Sangam Award, and the Doordarshan-Akashvani Award.

The principal of DPS Bokaro, Dr. A. S. Gangwar congratulated Mayank on receiving this esteemed award and wished him continued success. In turn, Mayank expressed his gratitude for the school's support and the leadership of Principal Dr. Gangwar, which he credited for fostering an environment that encourages and supports teachers.

## District Admin initiates inquiry into OAH death incident

PANKAJ : DHANBAD

Preliminary inquiry into four deaths at government owned old age home(OAH) located at Sabalpur in Dhanbad indicate that the management had kept no health record of those who died here.

It may be recalled that four deaths were reported in two days here and the out-sourced operators of this old age home cremated the four bodies without informing the District Social Welfare officer (DSWO) who happens to be the nodal officer of this old age home.

The inquiry conducted by the DSWO Anita Kujur was submitted to district administration on Wednesday after the incident came to fore.

Those who died include Bhaskar Chakorvarti (85), Meenu Bhattacharya (84), Yamuna Devi (85) and Bulu Chakorvorti (72).

Meanwhile, deputy development commissioner (DDC) Sadat Anwar said the process of serving show cause to the operator of the OAH has been initiated.

More can be said on this issue only after we get a reply from the OHA operator.

The operator took over management of the OAH in August 2023. Incidentally, he also operates one private OAH in Tundi block.

## Jaiswal to organise health camps in city

PNS : RANCHI

A meeting with core team members was held at the residential office of Aditya Vikram Jaiswal, former president of Professionals congress and state representative of the Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee, at Kokar Distillery Bridge, Lalpur, Ranchi. The meeting primarily focused on strategizing for upcoming programs.

Aditya Vikram Jaiswal, former president of Professional Congress and state representative of the Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee, announced that under the "Aditya Vikram Aapke Dwar (Healthy Jharkhand) Prosperous Jharkhand)" program, mega health camps will be organized

and visits will be made to all ward areas of Ranchi. Additionally, small meetings will be conducted under the Aapke Dwar initiative to address basic issues of the city residents such as electricity, water, and road construction. Furthermore, the state's welfare schemes will be identified and utilized to benefit needy families. He also emphasized that under women empowerment, efforts will be made to connect women with self-employment opportunities.

The meeting was attended by key members including Bhuvnesh Thakur, Dr. Reema Khalkho, Krishna Sahay, Anil Singh, Asif Jiaoul, Rajiv Chaurasia, Suraj Jha, Prem Kumar, Vivek Dhan, Irfan Khan, Mohsin Ahmed, and others.



## VERTICAL MILLING MACHINE INAUGURATED AT RERS



PNS : BOKARO

The SMS-II & CCS department's RERS (Replaceable Equipment Repair Shop) witnessed the inauguration of a new vertical milling machine yesterday. The event was graced by the Executive Director (Projects & Additional Charge of Materials Management) C.R.

Mahapatra, and the Executive Director (HR & Additional Charge of Works) Rajan Prasad of Bokaro Steel Plant.

Present at the inauguration were Chief General Manager (SMS-II & CCS) Arvind Kumar, Chief General Manager (Projects) Rakesh Kumar Rai, along with senior executives and staff members.

The maintenance and refurbishment of the vertical milling machine were carried out by M/s Balaji Autotech Private Limited.

## CRPF jawan killed, two injured in road accident

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

A CRPF jawan was killed and two others were seriously injured when their Scooty was hit by a truck on the Kandara-Seraikela road late Wednesday night. The incident occurred under the Seraikela thana area, approximately 28 km from Jamshedpur. The deceased, identified as Harendra Kunkal, was a resident of Mango. The mishap took place near the Jio petrol station at Dugni around 11 pm as the victims were traveling on the Seraikela-Kandara road from the Seraikela end. Circle Inspector Santosh Gupta of

Seraikela revealed that the police learned about the fatal mishap early this morning. "A patrolling party found three men lying in a pool of blood on the road, one of them trapped under the wheel of a truck. The police rescued the injured trio and rushed them to Seraikela Sadar Hospital, where one of them was declared brought dead," Gupta said. Given the critical condition of the two injured individuals, they were immediately transferred to MGM Medical College Hospital (MGMMCH). Plans are underway to shift them to Tata Main Hospital for better treatment. The police inspector con-

firmed that the driver and cleaner of the truck fled the scene, abandoning the vehicle near the site of the mishap. The truck has since been seized by the police.

Harendra Kunkal, the CRPF jawan who lost his life in the accident, was posted at the CRPF's Battalion VI in Sundarnagar. "This incident underscores the need for increased road safety measures and vigilance to prevent such tragedies. The police are conducting a thorough investigation and efforts are ongoing to apprehend the absconding driver and cleaner of the truck," said an official.



PROF. ANANT KUMAR

The developmental trap is critical for understanding why people and communities remain impoverished despite various efforts to promote economic growth and development. I keep coming across development professionals, and civil society friends expressing their concerns about social and economic development and the urge to do something for society. Many such developmentalists do good work through their NGOs, CSR initiatives, and funds mobilised from different sources. However, I often fail to understand their

motives. People are not asking them to come forward and do something for them. Why do they want to become self-proclaimed saviours of humanity and development? I often wonder whether their interventions have improved or harmed the lives of the people.

One needs to understand its origin, construct, and the political economy of development. People with development agendas have travelled to far-off places in quest of development and found people who were different from them, those who do not have what they should have. The first thing these developmentalists do is to create a hierarchy and label these naive people as underdeveloped, poor, and marginalized. Nowadays, there is strong advocacy for creating a new class of 'Ultra-Poor'. Creating a ground to do something for development and bring change in the lives of these ultra-poor. They fail to under-

stand whether people need them and their intervention prescriptions.

It is necessary to reflect on whether this quest to do something has made a positive change or destroyed people's connection with their nature, society, social fabric, culture, and religion. Society evolves and develops gradually based on its needs, available resources, and sociocultural environment, in harmony without outside intervention. Often there is a demand for gradual change from within the society, and it evolves. Whereas the modern development agenda is imposed on people without understanding their society, culture, living, and needs from their perspectives. The feelings of supremacy, class, and hierarchy among developmentalists override the sense of what is right and wrong, leading to doubt and degradation of people's ability to make decisions for themselves. This makes people

dependent on others for their development. They lose control over themselves and their resources.

We do not allow people to interfere in our social lives and affairs. We know what is good for us. But when we extend this idea of 'what is good for us' will also be good for others,' creates a class of haves and have-nots in terms of ideas, knowledge, resources, and supremacy over others. Knowingly and unknowingly, this supremacy of developmentalists, crusaders or saviours of humanity takes away the power from these people to make decisions and to decide what is good for them.

For the development of society, it is important to empower people to let them decide 'what they want' rather than imposing our development agenda and prescriptions. These prescriptions have not only impoverished people but their ecology too. Many development agen-

das have exploited natural resources, leading to deforestation, water scarcity, and so on. People have become poor because of the hidden agenda of powerful, self-proclaimed saviours of humanity in the name of development.

The politics of development and developmental traps are complex and require context-specific local solutions. Breaking free from these traps is difficult and requires empowering people and strengthening their institutions. By addressing these hidden development agenda that perpetuates poverty, it is possible to pave the way for an equitable future for all. Let people be free to choose and decide what is good for them.

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# 12 more flyovers soon in State to ease traffic conditions

## CM asks officials to complete Siramtoli-Mecon flyover by September

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Minister Champai Soren today conducted a high-level review of the progress of the work being done by the Road Construction Department related to the Flyover Bridge, traffic system of Ranchi and other cities in the Jharkhand Ministry. In the meeting, Soren directed the officials to complete the construction work of the flyover from Siramtoli to Mecon by the end of September 2024. He said that the Siramtoli flyover is a better option to control the traffic problem of Ranchi city. There should not be any delay in the construction work of this flyover. He said that our government wants that the residents of Ranchi city should be relieved of the problem of traffic jam as soon as possible. He said that traffic control is the priority of our government in the entire

state.

In front of the CM, Principal Secretary of the Road Construction Department, Sunil Kumar kept an updated information about the progress of the flyover to be built from Siramtoli to Mecon through a power point presentation. Kumar informed the CM that in the construction work of the flyover being built from Siramtoli to Mecon, cable stay bridges are to be built at two places, for this purpose cooperation has been sought from the railways. Almost all the work has been completed except the two places where cable stay bridges are to be built.

The DRM of Ranchi Railway Division has said that he will give full cooperation so that the construction work of the cable stay bridge can start soon. As soon as instructions are received from the Railway Department, the construction



Chief Minister Champai Soren, Chief Secretary L Khiangte and Additional Chief Secretary to Chief Minister Avinash Kumar during a meeting at Project building in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

work of the cable stay bridge will be completed by employing additional manpower. On the occasion, DRM Jasmeet Singh Bindra told the Chief Minister that the State Government and Ranchi

Railway Division have established mutual coordination and all the procedures are being done as per the rules so that the construction work at the two places where the cable stay bridge is to be built

can be completed by the month of September, the construction work will start soon. Kumar informed the Chief Minister that about 4 decimals of land under the main post office Doranda will be

used in the construction of the flyover, for this talks have been held with the Post Master General, he has assured the department of all possible cooperation. In exchange for giving four decimals of land by the Postal Department, the state government is providing them land at another place. The CM told the Post Master General and the state government officials that the Postal Department and the Road Construction Department should resolve this problem soon by making mutual coordination.

Information about the important works being done by the Road Construction Department to solve the traffic problem in Ranchi and other cities was presented before CM. Kumar informed the CM that the department has started work on the proposal to build an internal ring road in Ranchi. The total length of the internal ring

road to be built in Ranchi will be 52 kilometers. This work is to be done in 11 sections, in which administrative approval of three departments has also been received. Three sections of the internal ring road are already constructed, the process of making DPR for the remaining construction work is in progress.

Departmental officials informed the CM that a proposal has been prepared to construct 12 flyovers to strengthen the traffic system in the entire state. 2 flyovers will be constructed in Saraikela and one in Dumka, while all the remaining flyovers are proposed to be constructed in Ranchi. Kumar informed the CM that the Road Construction Department is preparing DPR for construction of bypass roads in Dumka, Dalitganj, Chaibasa, Giridih and Jamshedpur of the state.

The CM was informed that DPR has been prepared for construction of flyovers from Karamtoli in Ranchi to Booti Mor via RIMS and from Hinoo to DPS School via Birs Chowk. The department also presented a power point presentation of this scheme before the Chief Minister.

Chief Secretary L. Khiangte, Additional Chief Secretary to Chief Minister Avinash Kumar, Principal Secretary to Road Construction Department Sunil Kumar, Secretary to Chief Minister Arwa Rajkamal, DRM Ranchi Railway Division Jasmeet Singh Bindra, Assistant Postmaster General Rupak Kumar Sinha, CE, CDO, RCD KK Lal, Chief Engineer Traffic Manohar Kumar along with other officials of Road Construction Department and representatives of L&T were present in the meeting.

## RPC delegation meets Kalpana Soren, discusses interests of journalists

PNS : RANCHI

A delegation of journalists along with Ranchi Press Club President Surendra Lal Soren met Gandey's newly elected MLA Kalpana Soren at her residence in Ranchi on Thursday. During the meeting, the journalists congratulated Kalpana Soren and submitted a demand letter in the interest of the state's journalists. RPC president Surendra Soren said through a demand letter that the matter of health insurance of journalists is pending for a year, and there is a need to implement pension scheme, housing scheme, journalist protection law in the state



soon.

He said that the government should take necessary steps towards the repair of the Press Club building while officially transferring it. For the past few months, entry of

journalists has been banned in Jharkhand Ministry, which seems to be undemocratic and a wrong decision in the direction of clean, fearless and transparent journalism. Also, Secretary and Director

level officers need to ensure time to meet journalists and share the achievements of the department with the media once a month. Regarding these demands, Kalpana Soren assured that she will take positive initiative and request the Chief Minister to take steps in this direction.

The delegation that met included the club's joint secretary Ratan Lal, treasurer Kuber Singh, executive members Rana Gautam, Monu Kumar, Saurabh Shukla and former president of the Press Club Rajesh Singh, former secretary Javed Akhtar, Shakeel Akhtar and Vivek Pandey.

## BJP smells scam in Women's Asian Champions Trophy

PNS : RANCHI

BJP State President and former Chief Minister Babul Marandi today launched a major attack on the state government alleging that there was big scam in the Jharkhand Women's Asian Champions Trophy-2023 held at Jaipal Singh Munda Astroturf Hockey Stadium in Ranchi. The tournament was held in November last year in which eight Asian women hockey teams participated.

India defeated Japan 4-0 in the final match of the Jharkhand Women's Asian Champions Trophy-2023 held at The Jaipal Singh Munda Astroturf Hockey Stadium in Ranchi.

Marandi said that Jharkhand Sports Ministry has also 'played'. Referring to the news published in the newspaper, he said that on the lines of the famous fodder scam of the then Bihar, the state's Sports Directorate has committed a scam of crores in the organization of the Asian Women's Hockey Championship held in Jharkhand last year 2023. The acts of loot are one better than the other.

The scam is as such that the bill for filling diesel in the petrol car was paid. The bill for filling diesel in the battery operated e-rickshaw was also paid. Not only this, food served was at the rate of Rs 19 thousand per plate, which is many times more than the rate of the most expensive hotel in the Capital.



## CM fiat to complete all examination processes of JSSC by September

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Minister Champai Soren today held a high-level meeting with senior officials to speed up the appointment process for vacant posts in government departments. During this, the CM directed to complete the selection process within the time limit. In the meeting, the CM took information about various competitive examinations to be conducted by the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC). The CM said that whatever calendar the commission releases, the competitive examinations should be conducted according to that.

The CM said that the government is committed to connect the youth with employment. In such a situation, whatever vacancies are there in government departments and the posts to be appointed, the selection process for that should be started as soon as possible. The CM said that the government's appointment rules and roster should be followed in all appointments.

The CM said that whatever competitive examinations are conducted by the JSSC, complete confidentiality and transparency should be maintained in it. Any kind of irregularity will not be tolerated in this. If incidents like paper leak occur, strict action will be taken against whoever is found guilty.

The CM said that whatever incidents happen, strict action will be taken against whoever is found guilty. He told the Director General of Police and the Chairman of JSSC that the process for 580 posts through Jharkhand Excise Constable Competitive Examination and 4919 posts of Jharkhand Constable Competitive Examination should be started immediately. The DGP said that the physical efficiency test of the candidates of



Chief Minister Champai Soren along with Chief Secretary L Khiangte holds a review meeting with senior officials at Project building in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

Jharkhand Excise Constable Competitive Examination will start this month. On completion of this process, the list of successful candidates will be made available to JSSC.

The Chief Minister gave clear instructions to use modern technology for transparency and monitoring in the physical efficiency test of the candidates of Jharkhand Excise Constable and Jharkhand Constable Competitive Examination.

JSSC Chairman Prashant Kumar informed the Chief Minister about the ongoing process of all the competitive examinations conducted by the Commission. He informed that the appointment process is going on for about 35 thousand posts from the Commission. In this, the recruitment process is going on for 1863 posts of postgraduate trained teacher competitive examination, 153 posts of Jharkhand diploma level joint competitive examination, 921 posts of Jharkhand Nagar Palika Service Cadre joint competitive examination, 904 posts of training officer competitive examination in various trades of Jharkhand Industrial Training Service, 11 thousand posts of Jharkhand primary school

trained assistant teacher joint competitive examination of intermediate level, 15001 posts of Jharkhand primary school trained assistant teacher joint competitive examination of graduate level, 488 posts of women supervisor competitive examination, 2025 posts of Jharkhand general graduate qualification holder joint competitive examination and 2532 posts of Jharkhand Para Medical joint competitive examination.

The Chief Minister directed to complete the selection process of all these competitive examinations by the month of September.

Chief Secretary L. Khiangte, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Avinash Kumar, Principal Secretary Vandana Dadel, Director General of Police Ajay Kumar Singh, Chairman of Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission Prashant Kumar, Secretary to the Chief Minister Arwa Rajkamal, ADG RK Malik, Secretary of School Education and Literacy Department Umashankar Singh and officials of the Personnel Department were present in this high level meeting.

## Implementation of a better PESA law priority of Govt: CM

PNS : RANCHI

The process of implementing PESA rules has intensified under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Champai Soren. A presentation was given by the officials of Panchayati Raj Department on the subject "PESA-An Introduction and Road Map" through a power point presentation in front of Chief Minister Champai Soren in the Jharkhand Ministry today. While reviewing "PESA-An Introduction and Road Map", the Chief Minister also gave many important guidelines to the officials. During the review, many important points were discussed in detail between the Chief Minister and the officials so that PESA law can be implemented soon in the state. On the occasion, the Chief Minister told the officials that it is the moral responsibility of all of us to make a better PESA rule in Jharkhand.

## LAND SCAM

## Court takes cognizance on charge sheet against Antu Tirkey, 10 others

PNS : RANCHI

The PMLA Special Court on Thursday took cognizance of the charge sheet filed by the ED against 10 accused including Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader Antu Tirkey in the land scam related to former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren. The trial will be heard after the charge is framed against these accused. The accused include two employees of the Registrar of Assurance office in Kolkata, Sanjit Kumar and Tapas Ghosh, Hazaribagh resident deed writer Md. Irshad, land dealer Afsar Ali, Priyaranjan Sahay, Saddam Hussain and Bipin Singh. All of them were arrested by the ED last month. Later, the agency interrogated several accused including JMM leader Antu Tirkey by taking them on remand. A large number of fake deeds were recovered from the residences of some of these accused in the raid con-

ducted by the ED in 2023 in the land scam. During the investigation, it has been confirmed that the original documents of many of these lands were made missing from the office of Registrar of Assurance in Kolkata and made available to the land mafia and after this, fake deeds were prepared by tampering with these documents. In the charge sheet filed by the agency, JMM leader Antu Tirkey and other accused have been said to be involved in the scam. According to the charge sheet, all the accused in collusion with each other made the restricted category land free from restriction by tampering with the original documents of the land. In return, a huge amount of money was transacted. JMM leader Antu Tirkey, one of the accused, has been the metropolitan president of the party. In the year 2019, he left JMM and contested the assembly elec-

tions from Khijri seat of Ranchi on the ticket of Jharkhand Vikas Morcha. He has been doing land business for a long time. In this land scam case, more than a dozen people including former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, former Deputy Commissioner of Ranchi Chhabhi Ranjan have been arrested. The Jharkhand High Court on Wednesday heard the arguments of Enforcement Directorate challenging the bail plea moved by former chief minister Hemant Soren. The ED counsel challenging the bail plea of former CM pleaded that, former CM Soren was instrumental in illegally acquiring land at Bargain in the capital. Challenging the bail plea, ED counsel SV Raju pleaded that Soren had acquired the land in 2009-10 and a boundary wall was constructed to secure its possession.

## Jewellery shop robbed at gunpoint in broad daylight

PNS : RANCHI

A jeweller's shop was robbed at gunpoint on Thursday afternoon in Bajra located on Itki Road in Pandra OP area where the criminals who came on a bike carried out the robbery at Panchvati Jewellers shop at gunpoint in broad daylight.

The criminals fled with jewellery and cash kept in the shop. After getting information about the incident, police officials reached the spot and are investigating the matter.

On Thursday afternoon, two armed criminals suddenly reached Panchvati Jewellers and took the shopkeeper into their custody and fled after looting jewellery worth lakhs. The criminals were armed. The criminals took the shop owner into their custody and fled after looting whatever jewellery was seen in the shop. According to the jeweller, jewellery worth lakhs has been looted, it will be known only after matching the stock how much jewellery the criminals took.

Expressing concern over the criminals escaping after



Three criminals robbed jewellery from Panchvati Jewellers shop at Bajra Itki Road in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

committing robbery in New Panchvati Jewellers establishment, Federation of Jharkhand Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FJCCI) expressed displeasure over the law and order situation in the city.

FJCCI General Secretary Paresh Gattani and Executive Member Sanjay Akhouri visited the spot and met the establishment's director Deepak Kumar Sahu and his grandmother Asha Devi to know about the matter. On the spot, after talking to the Superintendent of Police, the immediate arrest of the criminals involved in the incident and recovery of the goods was requested. The

Superintendent of Police informed that sufficient evidence has been collected from the spot and soon the criminals will be in the custody of the police.

FJCCI President Kishore Mantri said that Ranchi is the mirror of the entire State and incidents are happening here every day. "Incidents like sudden theft, snatching, murder, extortion are increasing in Ranchi. Businessmen and entrepreneur society are worried due to these incidents. The district administration needs to take concrete initiatives regarding crime control so that business and industry can be run in a fear-free environment," he added.

## EDUCATION DEPT TO RUN CAMPAIGN AGAINST DRUGS IN STATE

PNS : RANCHI

In an attempt to prevent the consumption and use of drugs and narcotics and to curb its increasing side effects among students, the School Education and Literacy Department of the State government has decided to run a comprehensive awareness campaign against drugs. From June 18 to June 25, the campaign will be conducted in all categories of government, non-government aided, non-aided, minority and private schools of the State.

In this regard, a one-day orientation program was organised at the Jharkhand Education Project Council (JEPC) on June 13. Secretary in-charge School Education and Literacy Department Umashankar Singh, Jharkhand Education Project Director Aditya Ranjan, Superintendent of Narcotics Control Bureau S Shariq Omar, Group Commandant of NCC Col Rajeev Kumar, Psychiatrist cum De-Addiction Specialist of Medanta Hospital Pawan



Kumar Barnwal, District Education Officers of all districts District Education Superintendents Nodal Officers of Education Department of all districts District Sports Officer, health officer, police officer and representatives of social and non-governmental organisations participated in the event.

During the orientation program, Secretary-in-charge of School Education and Literacy Department of Jharkhand Government, Umashankar Singh emphasised on training teachers of classes 9 to 12 and principals of schools at district level against intoxication. He advised on preparing a cur-

riculum for this or also for teachers to play the role of counsellor. In his address, Singh said that one-to-one intervention is necessary to make students and adolescents aware against drug abuse and that any change in the behaviour of the child and the reason for it should be monitored at the school level. He also elaborated on the role of Bal Sansad and SMC members in the campaign against drug abuse.

Jharkhand Education Project Director Aditya Ranjan said that if drugs are consumed or sold around schools, action will be taken against the school. He said that it is the responsibility of the teachers of more than

35000 schools in the state to ensure that no one is involved in such anti-social activities and only if they remain alert, students can be saved from drug abuse. He directed the BRP/CRP to list such schools around which there is suspicion of sale or consumption of narcotics and emphasised that the role of every department- education, health, child welfare, NGO, police department or experts in this field is important for the success of this campaign.

Addressing the program, Superintendent of Narcotics Control Bureau, S Shariq Omar said that NCB is continuously running a campaign in the State and so far 104 kg of narcotics have been seized. Omar shared important information citing the United Nations Charter and Conventions and said that such intoxicating drinks which directly affect the brain are called narcotics drugs. He also expressed concern over the compulsive use of drugs in Chatra, Khunti and Ranchi districts of Jharkhand, Group Commandant of

NCC (National Cadet Corps) Col. Rajiv Kumar highlighted the role of NCC in Jharkhand and said that NCC covers 12 out of 24 districts of Jharkhand. As many as 14 lakh children are involved in NCC from across the country and through this they have developed qualities like humility and self-control. He also stated that NCC is spread over 9 units in 12 districts of Jharkhand.

As a part of the awareness campaign against drugs, various activities from June 18 to June 22 will be conducted in all schools across Jharkhand. This will include quiz competition, poster making competition and essay writing competition. A Prabhat Pheri will be organised on June 22 after which there will be speech, slogan making and painting competition in the school. Cycle rally will be organised on June 24 and awareness messages will be read in prayer meetings June 25. On June 26, observed as World Drug Prevention Day, sankalp and prize distribution ceremony will be organised.



# Kuwait fire: IAF aircraft on standby to bring back victims' mortal remains to India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An IAF plane is on stand by to bring back the mortal remains of Indians killed in a devastating fire in southern Kuwait's Mangaf area on Wednesday. Forty of the 49 killed were Indians including 24 from Kerala. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs two lakh each to the families of the deceased. Kerala government also announced payment of Rs five lakh each. Most of the Indian victims are from Kerala.

Minister of state for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh left for Kuwait following a direction from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to oversee assistance to Indians injured in the fire and to ensure early repatriation of mortal remains of those killed, officials said here on Thursday. They also said Kuwaiti authorities are conducting DNA tests on the bodies of those killed adding total number of people killed in the Al-Mangaf building is 49 and 42 of them are learnt to be Indians; the remaining ones are Pakistani, Filipino, Egyptian and Nepali nationals.

"In an unfortunate and tragic fire incident earlier today in a Labour housing facility in Mangaf area of Kuwait, around 40 Indians are understood to



Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh on his arrival in Kuwait PTI

have died and over 50 injured," the Ministry of External Affairs(MEA)had said in a statement late on Wednesday night. Prime Minister Modi, who described the incident as "saddening", reviewed the situation at a meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, NSA Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and Principal Secretary to PM PK Mishra among others. Following the meeting, the prime minister announced ex-gratia relief of Rs 2 lakh to the families of the deceased Indian nationals from the PM Relief Fund and directed that the government should extend all pos-

sible assistance. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Kuwaiti counterpart Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya on phone and urged him for the early repatriation of the mortal remains of those killed. "Spoke to Kuwaiti FM Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya on the fire tragedy in Kuwait. Apprised of the efforts made by Kuwaiti authorities in that regard. Was assured that the incident would be fully investigated and that responsibility will be fixed," Jaishankar had said in a social media post. "Urged the early repatriation of the mortal remains of those who lost their lives. He emphasized that those injured were

getting the requisite medical attention," he had said. The officials had said most of the Indian victims are from Kerala. In a related development, the Kerala government on Thursday said it will provide Rs 5 lakh financial assistance to the families of the people from the state who died in the Kuwait fire tragedy that claimed 49 lives and left 50 others injured. The decision was taken at an emergency cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the morning, a statement issued by his office said. The Cabinet also decided to provide Rs one lakh financial assistance to those injured in the incident, it said. A decision was taken to immediately send state Health Minister Veena George to Kuwait to coordinate the efforts to provide treatment for the injured people as well as ensure the earliest repatriation of the mortal remains of the deceased to Kerala, it further said. The minister will be accompanied by Jeevan Babu, State Mission Director (NHM), it added. The statement also said prominent businessmen M A Yusuff Ali and Ravi Pillai have informed the Chief Minister that they will provide Rs 5 lakh and Rs 2 lakh, respectively, to each of the families of the Keralites who died in the fire.

# Rajnath sets ₹50,000 crore defence equipment export target by 2028-29

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath assumed charge here on Thursday and said the target for his Ministry is to export Rs 50,000 crore worth of defence equipment by 2028-29. He also chaired review meeting on first 100 days' action plan with focus on ex-servicemen welfare. Earlier, Rajnath was welcomed at South Block by Minister of state for defence Sanjay Seth, who was accompanied by Chief of Defence Staff(CDS)General Anil Chauhan, Army chief General Manoj Pande, IAF chief V R Chaudhari, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh Tripathi and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane besides Defence Research and Development Organisation(DRDO)chief Samir Kamat besides others. National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval called on Rajnath. Talking to reporters on the occasion, Rajnath outlined his vision for the next five years and stated that focus would be on carrying forward the priority areas with renewed thrust to establish a more secure, self-reliant and prosperous nation. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our aim will be to further strengthen the security apparatus of the country, with focus on achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing. Armed Forces modernisation and the wel-



fare of the soldiers, both serving and retired, will continue to be our main focus," he said. Rajnath added that the objective will be to increase defence exports in the times to come. "Defence exports had touched a record Rs 21,083 crore in Financial Year 2023-24. It was historic. Our target will be to export over Rs 50,000 crore worth of defence equipment by 2028-2029," he said. He asserted that the Armed Forces are being equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and platforms and they are ready to face every challenge. He commended the military personnel for protecting the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation with valour and commitment. Immediately after assumption of charge, Rajnath chaired a review meeting on the first 100 days' Action Plan of his ministry. The meeting focused on the welfare of veterans, wherein major issues pertaining to the

Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare were discussed. He instructed the officers to rededicate themselves to fulfill the agenda laid out in the 100 days' Action Plan. With a view to enhance defence preparedness and continued thrust on Aatmanirbharta in defence, Rajnath stated that he will be conducting regular review meetings to fast-track the progress of the flagship schemes and the initiatives of the defence ministry. Emphasising the growing salience of the Indian Ocean Region in the defence calculus, he has decided on his first visit in this tenure to the Eastern Naval Command, Visakhapatnam, wherein he will be interacting with the officers and sailors. After being elected to the Lok Sabha from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh for the third consecutive time, Rajnath Singh took oath as a Union Cabinet Minister on June 9.

# India has ample wheat stocks, no plans to alter import duty: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has sufficient wheat stocks to meet domestic requirements and undertake market interventions, if required, to keep prices stable, the Government said on Thursday, adding that it has no plans to alter the import duty on the grain for now. The Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, is closely monitoring the market price of wheat, it said in a statement. "Suitable interventions, as warranted, shall be undertaken to ensure that there is no hoarding by unscrupulous elements and the price remains stable," the statement said. During the 2024 rabi marketing season, the department reported wheat production of 112 million tonnes. The state-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) has procured around 26.6 million tonnes of the grain until June 11. After meeting the requirement for the public distribution system and other welfare schemes, estimated at around 18.4 million tonnes, sufficient wheat stock will be available for market interventions when needed, it said.

# NHRC issues advisory for widows' welfare, protection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Noting that widows continue to play a secondary role in society, largely unaffected by economic development efforts, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a detailed advisory urging government authorities at all levels to prioritize the welfare and protection of their human rights. Widowed women, constituting 78 per cent of the 5.6 crore widowed population, often lack familial support, financial independence, and basic necessities, leading to marginalization and severe hardship. As per the UN, widows account for 9 per cent of the women in India, approximately 34 million women and still, this group is ignored and

exploited. The top human rights body noted that without adequate familial support or financial independence, widowed women often find themselves marginalized, isolated from their communities, and even forced to seek refuge in shelter homes or ashrams. The prevalence of illiteracy and the challenges of aging only exacerbate their already dire situation, noted the rights body. The NHRC's advisory focuses on key areas such as ensuring proper identification documents for widows, developing and maintaining shelter homes for them, granting equal access to property, preventing their forced eviction, and protecting them from exploitation. It also emphasises the importance of providing skill devel-

opment opportunities, access to sustainable livelihoods, easy banking services, healthcare, mental health support, and community-based networks for widows. Additionally, the NHRC has highlighted the need to review existing legislation such as the Widows (Protection and Maintenance) Bill, 2015, and the recommendations of a Supreme Court directed panel from 2017. The advisory suggests creating a centralized database of government-run homes for widows, deploying monitoring teams to ensure their well-being, holding local authorities accountable for implementing welfare schemes, and establishing dedicated "Widows' Cells" in each district, as per a statement here.

# Modi heads for G7 summit in Italy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said in his departure statement during the G-7 summit in Italy the focus would be on artificial intelligence, energy, Africa and the Mediterranean. Before leaving for Italy, he also said "it will be an opportunity to bring greater synergy between the outcomes of the G20 Summit held under India's Presidency and the forthcoming G7 Summit, and deliberate on issues which are crucial for the Global South. I am also looking forward to meeting other leaders participating in the Summit. At the invitation of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, I am travelling to Apulia region in Italy to participate in the G7 Outreach Summit on 14 June 2024. I am glad that my first visit in



the third consecutive term is to Italy for the G-7 Summit. I warmly recall my visit to Italy for the G20 Summit in 2021. Prime Minister Meloni's two visits to India last year were instrumental in infusing momentum and depth in our bilateral agenda. We remain committed to consolidate the India-Italy strategic partner-

ship, and bolster cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the Mediterranean regions." Giving details of his schedule, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra had said here on Wednesday that Modi's participation in the G7 summit would provide an opportunity to follow up on outcomes of the G20 summit held under India's presidency

last year. The G7 summit, to be held in the luxury resort of Borgo Egnazia in Italy's Apulia region from June 13 to 15, is likely to be dominated by the raging war in Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza. US President Joe Biden, his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau are among the top leaders attending the summit. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is also scheduled for a session on the Russian invasion of his country. "We have always maintained that dialogue and diplomacy is the best option to resolve it," Kwatra said when asked about the Ukraine conflict. The foreign secretary said India's regular participation in the G7 summit points to increasing recognition of New

Delhi's efforts to address global challenges. Prime Minister Modi will be accompanied by a high-level delegation that is likely to include External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and National Security Advisor(NSA) Ajit Doval, it was learnt. The prime minister is set to hold a number of bilateral meetings including with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Modi had attended the previous G7 summit in Hiroshima in May last year. On the sidelines of the summit, he had held talks with Zelenskyy and a number of other leaders. The G7 comprises the US, the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Canada and Japan. Italy is holding the current presidency of the G7 (Group of Seven) and is hosting the summit in that capacity.



Union Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan assumes charge of his office in Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi, on Thursday. Ministers of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary, Sukanta Majumdar also assumed the charge Ranjan Dimri

# CBI raids 67 places in Odisha in recruitment fraud case

New Delhi: The CBI is conducting searches at 67 locations in Odisha in connection with an alleged recruitment fraud in the postal department, officials said Thursday. The CBI action comes on an year old complaint from the postal department alleging 63 candidates of the Gramin Dak Sevaks Examination allegedly submitted fake certificates. Over 204 officials, including 122 officers from the CBI and 82 personnel from other departments, swooped down at various premises in Kalahandi, Nuapada, Rayagada, Nabarangpur, Kandhamal, Kendujhar, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, and Bhadrak with an objective of uncovering the interstate organised gang responsible for providing these fake certificates. PNS

# Muslims told to follow Government guidelines on Eid-ul-Azha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prominent Muslim organisation Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind on Thursday urged Muslims to strictly follow government guidelines while offering sacrifice on Eid-ul-Azha and not share pictures of slaughtered animals on social media. Eid ul-Azha, also called the festival of sacrifice, will be celebrated on Monday. In his message to Muslims on Eid-ul-Azha, Jamiat president Maulana Arshad Madani said there is no substitute for sacrifice in Islam and it is a religious duty which is obligatory on every Muslim for whom it is prescribed. "It is important that Muslims

take precautionary measures while offering sacrifice. Avoid advertising, especially sharing pictures of slaughtered animals on social media," Madani said. He also urged Muslims to strictly follow government guidelines while performing 'Qurban' and avoid sacrificing prohibited animals. "If mischievous elements, at any place, prevent the sacrifice of a buffalo also, some sensible and influential people should take the administration into confidence and then sacrifice should be offered," he said. "If, however, there is no way to fulfil this religious obligation, then a sacrifice should be offered in a nearby place where there is no difficulty," Madani said.

# Kargil Vijay Diwas: Army flags off motorcycle rally

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a poignant tribute to bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice during Operation Vijay during the Kargil war, Dras Thunder Motorcycle Rally was ceremoniously flagged off here by Army Vice Chief Upendra Dwivedi. Dras Thunder Motorcycle Rally comprises of an Officer and 19 soldiers of 13 JAK RIFLES (KARGIL). Subedar Mehar Singh, Vir Chakra and Naib Subedar Kewal Kumar, Sena Medal, had shown immense courage and valour against adversary and had actively participated in capture of strategic peaks during Kargil War, which turned the tide against the adversary. To pay lasting tributes to the sacrifices made by Veer Naris and next of kin, Rahul Manhas, son of late Lance Naik Ranbir Singh, who fought gallantly in Kargil War and made the supreme sacrifice during the capture of Pt 5140, is also part of this motorcycle rally. 13 JAK RIFLES (KARGIL) has actively participated in two major wars, the 1971 Indo-Pak War and Operation Vijay. The unit achieved its peak of glory during Operation Vijay, when only after three days of acclimatisation, the unit hoisted the tricolour on Pt 5140 and Pt 4875, the most dominating features of Dras and Mushkoh Valleys respectively. This unique journey symbolises the enduring bond between the armed forces and the nation, that resonate with the spirit of courage, sacrifice and patriotism.

veterans and Veer Naris enroute and convey gratitude for their contribution in Op Vijay. The Motorcycle Rally will culminate at historic Kargil War Memorial, Dras on June 20. Twenty-five years ago on the same day, Indian Army etched an indelible mark in the annals of history by capturing Pt 5140. Subedar Mehar Singh, Vir Chakra and Naib Subedar Kewal Kumar, Sena Medal, had shown immense courage and valour against adversary and had actively participated in capture of strategic peaks during Kargil War, which turned the tide against the adversary. To pay lasting tributes to the sacrifices made by Veer Naris and next of kin, Rahul Manhas, son of late Lance Naik Ranbir Singh, who fought gallantly in Kargil War and made the supreme sacrifice during the capture of Pt 5140, is also part of this motorcycle rally. 13 JAK RIFLES (KARGIL) has actively participated in two major wars, the 1971 Indo-Pak War and Operation Vijay. The unit achieved its peak of glory during Operation Vijay, when only after three days of acclimatisation, the unit hoisted the tricolour on Pt 5140 and Pt 4875, the most dominating features of Dras and Mushkoh Valleys respectively. This unique journey symbolises the enduring bond between the armed forces and the nation, that resonate with the spirit of courage, sacrifice and patriotism.

# Congress for SC-monitored probe into NEET exam issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday reiterated its demand of a Supreme Court-monitored probe into the NEET exam issue, and asserted that the anger in the country over the matter will "reverberate inside Parliament as well". The opposition party also demanded the removal of the National Testing Agency (NTA) Director General and claimed that the BJP government's attitude towards the ongoing demand for an inquiry into the NEET examination is "irres-

sponsible and insensitive". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in the last 10 years, the Modi government has ruined the future of crores of youth through paper leaks and rigging. "Grace Marks was not the only problem in NEET exam. There has been rigging, papers have been leaked, corruption has taken place. The future of 24 lakh students appearing in the NEET examination is at stake due to the actions of the Modi government," the Congress president said. A nexus of examination centre and coaching centre has been



formed, where the game of "pay money, get paper" is being played, he alleged. "The Modi government cannot escape its responsibility by placing the responsibility of its actions on the shoulders of NTA. There should be a CBI

investigation into the entire NEET scam. If the Modi government is not ready for a CBI inquiry then the Congress party demands a fair inquiry under the supervision of the Supreme Court," Kharge said in a post. After investigation, the culprits should be given the harshest punishment and lakhs of students should be given compensation to save their year from being wasted, he said. Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here, Gogoi also slammed the government over the issue. "We demand a Supreme Court monitored investigation into

this entire scandal which has affected around 24 lakh students," he said. "The Congress believes that the BJP government's attitude towards the ongoing demand for an inquiry into the NEET exam is irresponsible and insensitive...Ordinary families have been forced to cough up amounts close to Rs 30 lakh due to promises given to them by different coaching and examination centres," he said. "We believe that no inquiry can be a just, fair and comprehensive if it is headed by the NTA itself. The NTA chairperson should be removed and

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who likes giving exam advice to Class 10 students, should not forget the mental anxiety caused to these undergraduates," Gogoi said. Instead of paying attention to the "NEET scam", he is busy attending oath-taking ceremonies and going abroad on foreign trips, he said. "Rest assured, the INDIA bloc will take up the cause of these students because that is our responsibility," Gogoi said. "Now the INDIA bloc has the sufficient strength to bring the government to its knees and make them accountable to the



# Despite opening Kerala account BJP is plagued with infighting

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Despite the party creating history in the recent Lok Sabha election by getting its candidate elected from Thrissur constituency (Suresh Gopi), there is total chaos and confusion in Kerala BJP. The insiders describe the party as a rudderless ship. This is the first time in the electoral history of Kerala, a BJP candidate got elected as member of parliament. A controversy has been erupted in the State over the paternity of Suresh Gopi's win with the BJP leaders claiming the victory was only because of the State leadership's relentless campaign. But records prove that the State leadership has no role in Suresh Gopi's election. He was a candidate fielded by the party high command and the State leaders had no role in it," said Sudheer Damodaran, a political critic based in Thrissur. Suresh Gopi has managed to win the hearts of a section of the Christian community through his actions of charity and social activities irrespective of case, community and religion, added Sudheer. Equally important is the fate of Rajeev Chandrasekhar, who finished a close second behind Sashi Tharoor at Thiruvananthapuram, M L Ashwini at Kasaragod and Shobha Surendran who gave her Congress and CPI(M) rivals a run for their money. "Had Shobha been fielded from Attingal, where she had put up a superb performance by polling 2.48 lakh votes, this time we would have seen the BJP tally going up by two seats," said P Sujathan, author and former editor of Kerala Kaumudi. Though Suresh Gopi was elected from Thrissur, the per cent of BJP votes showed just a marginal increase this time (16 per cent). While BJP polled slightly more than 33 lakh votes this time in Kerala, it did not show any improvement



from the morass it has stuck in, "The performance of K Surendran as party chief was a disaster as he is thoroughly incompetent," said a veteran party leader. There is widespread resentment against Surendran and the cartel of party activists who are his acolytes. People who were associated with BJP since its previous avatar as Jana Sangh suspect that there is a secret deal with the CPI(M). The statements made by Surendran and former union minister V Muraleedharan are with an eye to help the CPI(M), they allege. Surendran using derogatory and despicable words to humiliate political commentator Sreejith Panickar during a TV interview too has not gone down well with the people, according to Sujathan. The performance of Rajeev Chandrasekhar at Thiruvananthapuram is proof that the constituency is no more invincible for the Hindutva party. A team

of citizens led by former diplomat T P Sreenivasan led the election campaign for Chandrasekhar though the latter lost by 16,000 votes in a cliffhanger. "This was Chandrasekhar's first hustings in electoral battle and he put up a good show," said Sreenivasan. Even party insiders in BJP are of the view that services of people like Sreenivaan should be made use of by the party in future. Prakash Javadekar, the party in charge of the State did a wrong thing by going around Kerala and claiming that the BJP would win at least five seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The Prime Minister claimed that the party's tally would touch the double digit mark in this election and it is widely believed that Javadekar fed the PMO with wrong information. The chorus for ousting Surendran from the post of State party chief is growing day by day and it is likely to spread all over Kerala.

# Naidu 4.0 will be about performance: Andhra CM

PTI ■ TIRUPATI (ANDHRA PRADESH)

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said here on Thursday that people had seen his three versions in the past, and will see his 4.0 avatar which will be about performance. Naidu took oath as the CM for the fourth time at Kesarapalle on Wednesday. "You have seen 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, now you have come to 4.0 and you will see. That's why I am appealing to all, including officials, employees and political activists, we have suffered losses (past five years) and we have to recover. Let us all work together and go ahead," Naidu told reporters. Announcing that the people's government has started, he said in the past five years the state had regressed and added that he would work to see the state regain its glory. However, he predicted that by 2047, India will be in first or second position in the world and wished to see Telugu people on top. "My vision for 2047...Telugu people should be number one in the world. Poverty removal should be done as soon as possible. Zero-poverty state. Andhra Pradesh has to be the number one state. Telangana should also do good. I will be an elder to the Telugu community, not for 50 per cent or 30 percent of them," he said. Following his visit to the Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirumala along with his family, the CM said cleansing of the system will start from



the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD). TTD is the official custodian of the Lord Venkateswara temple. According to Naidu, Lord Venkateswara is their family deity and he always prays to Lord Venkateswara for a moment before undertaking any work. "After I wake up, I pray briefly to Venkateswara Swamy for the prosperity of the state. Nowadays, I make a simple prayer for India to be numero uno in the world. Also among Indians, Telugu people should be on top," he said. Though it is important to create wealth, Naidu said 'it should also go to the poor,' without being 'concentrated only in a few hands' and there should be a poverty-less society. Further, he said the government will initiate a plan to build Sri Venkateswara Swamy temples across the world. Naidu also said a Chief

Minister doesn't belong to any single person but to all the five crore people in Andhra Pradesh. Earlier in the morning, he offered prayers at the Sri Venkateswara temple at nearby Tirumala, accompanied by family members. Naidu's son and cabinet member Nara Lokesh also accompanied him. He was accorded a traditional welcome by the authorities and priests and offered theertham (sacred water) and prasadam. Following the visit, the CM is scheduled to return to Amaravati to assume office at the secretariat at 4:41 pm. Later, he will clear several files such as the mega DSC (teacher recruitment), revocation of the Land Titling Act and increase of welfare pensions to Rs 4,000 per month. He is also expected to clear files on reviving 'Anna Canteens' and skills census.

# NSF urges people to elect Nagas by blood in civic elections

PTI ■ KOHIMA

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has appealed to the people of Nagaland to elect "Nagas by blood and not by adoption" in the June 26 elections to 39 urban local bodies in the state. The students' body claimed that electing non-Nagas to local governance positions pose a significant risk to the preservation of the Naga cultural heritage. "The NSF, in collaboration with our federating units and subordinate bodies, reiterates our firm stance on the paramount importance of indigenous representation in the upcoming urban local body (ULB) elections in Nagaland," the body's vice president Mtseisuding said on Wednesday. NSF underscores the necessity of ensuring that the voices and aspirations of the indigenous Naga populace are authentically represented in all decision-making processes, he said. Naga people have a rich history and vibrant culture that are intricately woven into the fabric of the governance structures, he said, adding that central to this governance is the observance of customary laws and traditional practices, which are not merely symbolic gestures but are the very essence of Naga identity. These practices have been handed down through generations and are vital for maintaining social cohesion, he said.

# TMC's attempts to keep me out of Bengal will not succeed, says BJP leader Malviya

PTI ■ KOLKATA

A day after saying he would file a criminal defamation case against Kolkata-based lawyer Santanu Sinha for allegedly making 'slandorous' comments against him, BJP leader Amit Malviya on Thursday asserted that these are attempts by the TMC to keep him out of West Bengal, which will not succeed. Malviya, who is BJP's Bengal co-in-charge and the party's IT cell chief, challenged Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee to address concerns about Sandeshkhali through proper channels rather than resorting to smear campaigns. "Mamata Banerjee must



find other legitimate means to wipe the taint of #Sandeshkhali instead of using fringe elements to fling muck on me. Such attempts to keep me out of Bengal won't work. I ain't leaving till @BJP4Bengal

ensures justice for the women of Sandeshkhali and ousts the TMC from power," he posted on X. Malviya, also the convener of the BJP IT cell, added, "For the uninitiated, the BJP and even the Left had

branded Hindu Samhati as Trinamool's Hindutva wing". Malviya was referring to allegations leveled by lawyer and Hindu Samhati leader Santanu Sinha. He also shared a photograph of Sinha outside TMC Bhawan with the post. Reacting to it, Sinha told PTI, "Last year on August 16, we on behalf of Hindu Samhati had organized a programme and had invited all political parties including TMC, CPI(M), Congress, BJP and others. This photograph was taken after I came out of the TMC Bhawan after giving the invitation. Malviya has already sent a legal notice to Sinha for making "false and defamatory statements"

against him and demanded an apology. In the legal notice, Malviya's lawyer said Sinha, in a post on Facebook, made "some false and defamatory allegations" with an intention to harm his client's reputation." Sinha had said he is ready for a legal fight and added that he will not withdraw the post. "If my post hurts Mr Malviya and/or undermines my party for such misinterpretation and edited version, I do express my heartfelt sorrow for the same. Since I have not written anything untoward in my post, with the mission to malign, I am not withdrawing the post, the bone of contention," he had said in a Facebook post.

# Treat transgenders as special category for employment, education: Madras HC

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Holding that the transgenders should be treated only as a special category irrespective of their caste, the Madras High Court has directed the Tamil Nadu government to not bring them under either female or male category for education and employment. Justice V Bhavani Subbaroyan in an order passed on June 12, 2024 said in 'every employment and educational avenues,' the government shall prescribe separate norms for transgenders. The government shall direct all the state recruiting agencies to specify transgender as a special category and prescribe separate norms for their cut-off mark. The age relaxation open to other special categories shall also be extended to transgenders, irrespective of their caste, in future

employment and educational avenues. The transgender at no point of time in future shall be brought under male or female categories, the judge made it clear. Allowing a petition from R Anushri, a transgender who was denied the opportunity from being considered for combined civil service examination for the year 2017-18 which were for non-interview post group-II A services under various categories, the judge said since the petitioner has scored the eligible cut-off mark the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission shall permit the petitioner to upload documents for certificate verification. The judge said the petitioner has been placed in the scheduled caste woman category and denied permission by Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) to upload her certificate for

verification as she had scored less than the cut-off prescribed for scheduled caste women. TNPSC's approach is unsustainable and it had not categorised transgenders as a special category. Also, bringing the petitioner under woman category went against the order passed by the Supreme Court and Madras High court, the judge added. The Apex Court has clearly said that the transgenders should be treated as unique and they should not be treated as one among the male or female. In fact, when Punjab had placed all the transgenders under male category, the top court had held such action as illegal and unsustainable. It was also to be noted that the transgenders were placed in the caste in which they were born and treated in the said category. This was of no use and detrimental to their development, the judge added.

# ED makes fresh arrest in money laundering case against Soren

PTI ■ RANCHI

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested an alleged broker in connection with a land grab-linked money laundering case against former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and some others, official sources said. According to them, 39-year-old Shekhar Prasad Mahto alias Sehkhwar Kushwaha was arrested on Wednesday under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after his interrogation at the federal agency's zonal office here. Mahto is alleged to have "connived" with the prime accused in this case and former revenue department sub-inspector Bhanu Pratap Prasad in preparing a "fake" deed and "tampering" government records to "acquire" a 4.83-acre land, valued at Rs 22.61 crore, in Ranchi. The agency alleged that the man was "knowingly involved in the processes and activities connected with proceeds of crime (in the form of land and money) which are derived from illegal activities i.E. Preparation of fake deeds, committing forgery,



falsification and tampering with government records". It claimed that Mahto was "involved in a big conspiracy wherein huge proceeds of crime" were involved. The ED produced Mahto before a special PMLA court here on Thursday and informed the judge that the accused's custody was required "to ascertain the proceeds of crime used and generated out of the said activities and to find the trail of proceeds of crime involved in the present case". The probe agency added that it wanted Mahto's remand to "identify" the other beneficiaries of these activities. More than 25 people, including Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader Hemant Soren, IAS officer and former Ranchi

deputy commissioner Chhavi Ranjan, Bhanu Pratap Prasad and others have been arrested by the ED as part of this investigation. Land parcels worth Rs 266 crore, including a clutch of plots spread across 8.86 acres in the Bargain area of Ranchi acquired "illegally" by Soren, have been attached by the agency till now and four charge sheets have been filed. The latest supplementary chargesheet was filed on June 7 before a special court here, according to official sources. In a related development, the ED on Wednesday informed the Jharkhand High Court that Soren was instrumental in illegally occupying land in the Bargain area of Ranchi. Soren (48), who is also the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) executive president, had filed a petition before the high court on May 27, seeking bail in a money-laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. He has strongly denied land-grabbing charges, saying the money laundering case was foisted against him by the BJP-led Central government as part of a political vendetta. Soren was arrested by the ED on January 31 from the Ranchi Raj Bhavan, minutes after he resigned as chief minister.

# Punjab BJP chief urges Modi to name Adampur airport after Guru Ravidas

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to name Adampur airport in Jalandhar after Guru Ravidas. The prime minister, during his last poll rally in Punjab's Hoshiarpur on May 30, said it was his wish that the Adampur airport be named after Guru Ravidas. Modi had then said the welfare of the poor was his government's top priority and in this Guru Ravidas is a big inspiration. The Adampur airport in Jalandhar serves Punjab's Doaba region. Modi had virtually inaugurated the Adampur airport's new terminal buildings on March 10. In a letter on Thursday, Punjab BJP chief Jakhar congratulated Modi for becoming prime minister for a third time. "Your momentous third term in office as Prime Minister of India has provided new vigour to the people of the country, especially the constituents of Punjab, who see you as an embodiment of Viksit Bharat. On behalf of the people of Punjab, I would

like to congratulate you for this historic rare feat," Jakhar said. "I take this opportunity to draw your attention towards two issues that have a deep emotional-spiritual bearing on the minds of people. These issues also find resonance with your commitment towards the society," he said. Jakhar said, "The renaming of the Adampur Airport after the 15th-century spiritual sage Guru Ravidas, as already expressed by you during your recent visit to Punjab, will go a long way to underpin the ethos of spirituality in the diversity that binds India. This has also been a long-pending demand from the people of Punjab." Jakhar also requested Modi that since the Guru Ravidas temple in Tughlakabad in Delhi was to be rebuilt, it would be worthwhile to consider developing the area around the temple into a serene garden. "This will enhance the shrine's appeal without tinkering with the layout. This will inspire people from all over to soak in the egalitarian preaching of the revered saint," the Punjab BJP chief said.

# Himachal Assembly bypoll Congress appoints incharges for three seats vacated by Independent MLAs

PTI ■ SHIMLA

HPCC General Secretary Rajneesh Kimta on Thursday said the party is fully prepared for the upcoming assembly by-elections in the state and will face the "money power" with unity. In a statement released here, he informed that the Congress has appointed three ministers as in-charges for by-election to Dehra, Nalagarh and Hamirpur assembly seats. The three Independent MLAs — Ashish Sharma (Hamirpur), Hoshiyar Singh (Dehra) and KL Thakur (Nalagarh) — resigned from the assembly on March 22 and joined the BJP the following day. The by-elections will be held on July 10. Agriculture Minister Chander Kumar has been appointed incharge of Dehra assembly seat, Education Minister Rohit Thakur for Nalagarh and Technical Education Minister Rajesh Dharmani for Hamirpur. The Congress leaders have been alleging that nine MLAs, including six Congress rebels, and the three Independents who voted in favour of the BJP in the RS.

# Yediyurappa may be arrested in POC SO case, if necessary: Karnataka HM

PTI ■ TUMAKURU (KARNATAKA)

Karnataka Home Minister KG Parameshwara on Thursday said the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), probing the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) case against former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, has issued notice asking him to appear before it for questioning, and he may be arrested if necessary. "Notice has been served procedurally, the charge-sheet has to be filed by June 15. Before that they (CID) will file the charge-sheet. They will have to follow procedure for it. They will have to record his statement and produce him (in court), all these are procedures and the department will do it," he told reporters here. In response to a question, Parameshwara said: "If necessary they will arrest. I can't say (if) it is necessary, CID has to say it. If they feel it is necessary, they will do it." The BJP veteran, who is also a member of the party's parliamentary board, is presently in Delhi, and he is likely to join the probe after

he returns, sources close to him have said. According to police, Yediyurappa has been booked under the POC SO Act and Section 354 A (Sexual harassment) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) based on a complaint by the mother of a 17-year-old girl who alleged that he sexually assaulted her daughter during a meeting on February two this year, at his residence in Dollars Colony here. On March 14, hours after the Sadashivanagar police registered the case, the Karnataka Director General of Police Alok Mohan issued an order transferring it to the CID for further investigation with immediate effect. The 54-year-old woman, who had leveled the charge against Yediyurappa, died at a private hospital here last month, due to lung cancer. The 81-year-old Yediyurappa has denied the charge and said he would fight the case legally. In April, the CID collected the voice sample of Yediyurappa after summoning him to the office. The government, meanwhile, has appointed Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) Ashok H. Nayak to represent the CID in the case.



# Looming catastrophe

The ongoing heat and water crisis across north India is claiming lives, and there is no relief in sight

A serious heat and water catastrophe that has already claimed lives and is threatening many more is plaguing the northern parts of India, including the Capital. An unfavorable weather pattern marked by extreme heatwaves and weak rainfall is making it worse. For millions of people, the situation is getting unbearable as temperatures rise and water supply becomes scarce. North India is experiencing one of the worst heatwaves in recorded history. Many locations have regularly seen temperatures above 45 degrees Celsius, with some recording considerably greater values. Many occurrences of heatstroke, dehydration and other heat-related ailments have been reported. There is an increased danger for vulnerable groups, especially for youngsters and the elderly. The number of people enduring the heat in hospitals is overwhelming, and the availability of healthcare resources is limited. Compounding these problems, the monsoon season has started abnormally slowly. Rain, which usually provides much-needed relief, has been irregular and delayed. There are serious ramifications for both urban and rural communities from this delay. The lack of rain in cities like Delhi makes the heat unpleasant and living conditions nearly intolerable. The delayed monsoon in rural areas is disastrous for agriculture as it greatly depends on timely rainfall. Food security and livelihoods are expected to be threatened by crop failures and lower yields. There is severe water deficiency in northern India as a result of the heatwave and delayed monsoon. The levels of major rivers and reservoirs are perilously low, and groundwater has fallen.



Delhi's water supply is significantly impacted by the historically low levels of the Yamuna river; in fact, some areas get water for only a few hours a day. Concerns over water-borne illnesses have been raised, which has led to disputes over access to water and forced many people to rely on contaminated sources. Water rationing, the establishment of cooling facilities and the distribution of drinking water to communities badly impacted by the problem are just a few of the steps the administration has taken. However, because of the situation's seriousness, these actions have not seen much success. Long-term fixes are necessary to preempt disasters. This entails making investments in infrastructure for water conservation, such as effective irrigation systems and rainwater collection, as well as encouraging the groundwater resources to be used sustainably. To counter the urban heat island effect, green spaces and cooling strategies must be included in urban planning. Furthermore, raising people's knowledge of climate change and its effects helps promote a resilient culture. Millions of people are starkly reminded of their vulnerability in the face of climate change by the heat and water crises in north India. The people of this country continue to be its greatest strength as it fights this humanitarian and environmental crisis.

## PICTALK



A boy follows the cooling water mist released by an anti-smog gun, in New Delhi

# Time for BJP to set its house in order

The party must ponder Venkaiah Naidu's advice and start working towards repairing its ties with the RSS, besides looking for a proactive president



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

The swearing in of Narendra Modi 3.0 is over and it is now business as usual. But there is an eerie uncertainty pervading across India as the BJP Government is dependent on the life-support system provided by the TDP's Chandrababu Naidu and the JD(U)'s Nitish Kumar. The BJP had won 282 seats on its own in the 2014 elections (31 per cent) while the party had a dream run of scoring 303 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls (37 per cent) despite Naidu's best efforts to defeat the party. This is the first time in his tenure that Modi is dependent on allies for Government survival. The old slogan "Minimum Government and Maximum Governance" has been dusted out of the cupboard. The BJP's mission to enact the Uniform Civil Code, 'One Nation, One Poll' and its dream Agniveer project too would come a cropper without the support of Naidu and Nitish. The speech delivered by M Venkaiah Naidu, former Vice-President, at the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) should be noted seriously. "There is a message in the election. I hope people understand the message. The ruling BJP failed to reach the majority mark in the Lok Sabha on its own though it emerged as the single largest party while the Opposition put up an impressive performance," Naidu said. A discernible feature of this election was the absence of RSS volunteers from the campaign. What upset the RSS was the declaration made by party president JP Nadda that the BJP has no relation with the Bhagwa Dhvaj, the saffron flag that is emblematic of Sanatana Dharma. "Our flag was apparently created by lord Indra himself. The flag carries the saffron color of the lord. We chose the flag for our kingdom. The flag represents humanity and we need to ensure that we live up to its representation," Shivaji, the great Maratha emperor, told his ministers and commanders. It is time for Nadda to move out of party presidentship. He has neither inspired nor enlightened



people through his words or actions. Nadda should read and learn about two gentlemen from south India, K Kamaraj and S Nijalingappa, both former presidents of the Congress who were rated as titans of Indian politics. Public memory is not that short as they remember the efforts undertaken by Naidu to topple Modi in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The nation saw Naidu holding hands with Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, MK Stalin and, above all, the two most intelligent persons in the world; viz, Sitaram Yechury and D Raja as a prelude to oust Modi and Amit Shah. No political parties have absolute majority of their own to form the Government though the National Democratic Alliance (also termed as Non-Dependable Allies) has nearly 300 MPs, 27 more than the half way mark. Though the Congress, the main player in the Opposition, could not touch the three-digit mark, together with its allies, the party has emerged as a striking force. This year presents an entirely different scenario. The charismatic, uncompromising and powerful Modi is at the mercy of two satraps



THE BJP'S MISSION TO ENACT THE UNIFORM CIVIL CODE, 'ONE NATION, ONE POLL' AND ITS DREAM AGNIVEER PROJECT WOULD COME A CROPPER WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF CHANDRABABU NAIDU AND NITISH KUMAR

with national ambitions. Even before the NDA held its first meeting, Kumar and Naidu have put forward a set of demands, including conducting the caste census and scrapping of Agniveer scheme. It was Jagan Mohan Reddy, leader of YSR Congress and the outgoing Chief Minister, who forced Naidu to take refuge in the BJP camp. Reddy had launched a thorough probe into the charges of corruption against Naidu, for which he was arrested and imprisoned. When it was time for the 2024 Assembly elections, Naidu felt the need to cast his lot with BJP and Modi. Having got more than what he aspired for, Naidu is eyeing bigger rewards. We cannot expect anything better from a person who backstabbed his father-in-law NT Rama Rao, the founder of the TDP, and usurped the party proprietorship. Nitish is no different from Naidu. He is a living example of the Aaya Ram, Gaya Raam politics. Naidu and Nitish are two deceiving crutches and can lead Modi to 'no-man's land'. The current political imbroglio is BJP's own making. How many of us remem-

ber the five-day long crisis in Maharashtra when Devendra Fadnavis, the then leader of the Opposition, was sworn in as Chief Minister in 2019 with Ajit Pawar (NCP) as his deputy, only to make an ignominious exit after two days. Fadnavis and the other senior BJP leaders had termed Ajit as the embodiment of corruption but they found no qualms in forming a coalition Government with him. Despite Ajit returning to the Pawar Parivar within two days of swearing in, Fadnavis solicited him again and the former is now back in the Hindutva fold. How come BJP, which claims from rooftops that it is always against dynasty politics, forge an alliance with a purely family-run enterprise? Fadnavis' hurry forced him to commit the political harakiri. His case reminds us of the kamikaze by Chaudhary Charan Singh in 1979, ostensibly to teach the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai a lesson. Chaudhary Saheb went down with the Janata ship and could not stage a comeback even at a later stage. (The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### INADEQUATE PENALTIES FOR CRUELTY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Animal laws need more teeth say activists," published on June 12, this is my response. Reading about the brutal beating of a dog in Pune, resulting in a mere ₹50 fine, is both disheartening and infuriating. This case, alongside similar instances in Mumbai and Delhi, highlights the urgent need for stricter laws against animal cruelty in India. The proposed Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Amendment) Bill, 2022, seeks to address these issues by introducing harsher penalties, including fines up to ₹75,000 and imprisonment for severe offences. This amendment is crucial, as the current laws are woefully outdated and ineffective. Strengthening these laws is not just about protecting animals; it's about fostering a compassionate society where brutality is not tolerated. It's high time for the government to act, ensuring that offenders face appropriate consequences and that we cultivate a culture of empathy and respect. Our future generations deserve to grow up in a world where cruelty to animals is met with swift and severe justice.

Devansh Khatri | Jaipur

### SURGE IN GREEN ENERGY

Madam — Apropos the news story "India's green energy rise, including 'Green Coal'," published on June 12, this is my response. Reading about the Reserve Bank of India's latest report brings a sense of optimism about India's economic future, particularly in the energy sector. With green energy projects worth Rs 700 billion set to start this year and projected investments reaching Rs 765.2 billion by 2025-26, it's clear that sustainable energy policies are paying off. India's achievement of full electrification, with significant hours of power for rural and urban areas, coupled with its position as the third-largest renewable energy producer, is commendable. The innovation of green coal, which reduces CO2 emissions significantly, exemplifies India's commitment to sustainability. NTPC's ini-

## Lansdowne's rich military legacy



Apropos the news story "The Garhwal Regiment's glorious military heritage," published on June 12, this is my response. The still air of Lansdowne's Bhawani Dutt Joshi Parade Ground reverberates with the historic war cry "Jai Badri Vishal Ki Jai" from the Agniveers of the Garhwal Regiment. Established in 1887, the regiment boasts a legacy of val-

our, earning numerous military honours, including Victoria Crosses and Ashoka Chakras. Lansdowne, named after a British Viceroy, remains a testament to colonial heritage with its scenic ridge-top cantonments and hill stations. Colonel Minwaring's bungalow, now MES property, and the Darwan Singh War Museum reflect the regiment's storied past. The Garhwali Officers Mess, with its Victorian charm and unique artefacts like the Sun Dial and the billiards table, epitomises the regiment's historical opulence. Despite attempts to rename Lansdowne, locals cherish its colonial past and its connection to military excellence. The Garhwal Regiment's symbols—Lord Badrinath, the Unknown Soldier, and the Royal Rassi—continue to inspire courage and pride among its soldiers.

Aadhya Chawla | Chandigarh

tiatives, especially the Varanasi Harit Koyla Pariyojna, showcase impressive advancements. The green coal project, part of the "Make in India" initiative, symbolises a major stride towards the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" mission. MBL's success in converting municipal waste into eco-friendly coal is not just a technological breakthrough but also an effective solution to waste management, marking an important milestone in India's green energy journey.

Arya Sundaram | Chennai

### DREAMS OF A BETTER WORLD

Madam — Apropos the news story "Blueprint for a Better Society," published on June 12, this is my response. We all envision a world filled with peace, happiness, and harmony. Nobody desires environmental degradation, the loss of lives through violence, or the erosion of the human spirit due to crime, corruption, and poverty. Instead, we seek a life defined by health, wealth, and happiness. To achieve this, we must identify the values necessary to create a socio-politico-

economic system that fosters such a society. Most would agree that reducing wars, violence, poverty, unemployment, pollution, corruption, crime, and social injustices is crucial. Additionally, fostering freedom, reducing hunger, and promoting love and cooperation are essential. A survey would likely reveal that people expect scientists to embrace spirituality, religious leaders to adopt a scientific approach, and doctors to treat both body and soul. Education should include moral and spiritual development and societal attitudes towards women and children need to improve. Achieving these goals requires each societal segment to fulfil expectations and contribute time and talent. Global cooperation is essential, possibly through a new kind of bank where individuals and institutions can contribute towards building a better world.

Rohit Kapoor | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

# AI's influence on India's e-commerce industry

AI reshapes Indian e-commerce with personalisation, efficiency, security and stronger customer bonds, revolutionising shopping

In the bustling landscape of Indian e-commerce, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a transformative force, reshaping the industry in profound ways. From personalised shopping experiences to efficient logistics, AI has emerged as a cornerstone of success for online retailers in India. AI has a multifaceted impact on e-commerce and has implications for businesses, consumers, and the overall economy. One of the most noticeable effects of AI in Indian e-commerce is the enhancement of the shopping experience for consumers. Through advanced algorithms and data analytics, online retailers can now offer personalised product recommendations tailored to individual preferences and purchase histories. This level of customisation not only increases customer satisfaction but also drives sales and fosters brand loyalty. Moreover, AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants provide round-the-clock customer support, addressing queries and concerns in real time, thereby improving overall customer



engagement and retention. AI has also revolutionised the way products are discovered and marketed in the Indian e-commerce landscape. Sophisticated search algorithms powered by Natural Language Processing (NLP) enable users to find products more efficiently, even with vague or misspelt search queries. Additionally, image recognition technology allows consumers to search for products using images, streamlining the search process and enhancing the user experience. Furthermore, AI-driven targeted advertising helps businesses reach their target audience more effectively, maximising the return on investment for marketing campaigns. In the realm of supply chain management, AI has emerged as a game-changer

for Indian e-commerce businesses. By analysing vast amounts of data, including sales trends, inventory levels, and external factors like weather and transportation conditions, AI algorithms optimise inventory management, forecasting, and logistics operations. This results in reduced costs, minimised stockouts, and faster order fulfilment, ultimately leading to improved operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Moreover, AI plays a pivotal role in enhancing security and mitigating fraud risks in Indian e-commerce transactions. Advanced fraud detection systems leverage machine learning algorithms to identify and prevent fraudulent activities in real time, safeguarding both businesses and consumers from financial losses. Additionally, biometric authentication technologies, such as facial recognition and fingerprint scanning, provide enhanced security for online payments, bolstering consumer trust and confidence in the e-commerce ecosystem. Despite its numerous benefits, the widespread adoption

of AI in Indian e-commerce also presents certain challenges and concerns. Data privacy and security remain paramount, with the need for robust regulatory frameworks to protect consumer information from unauthorised access and misuse. Moreover, the increasing reliance on AI-powered systems raises questions about algorithmic bias and fairness, highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability in algorithm development and deployment. In conclusion, the impact of Artificial Intelligence on Indian e-commerce is undeniable, revolutionising the way businesses operate and consumers shop in the digital age. As AI continues to evolve and permeate every aspect of the industry, it is essential for businesses to embrace innovation, adapt to technological advancements, and prioritise ethical considerations to harness the full potential of AI while ensuring inclusivity, fairness, and security in the e-commerce ecosystem. (The author is BU head at Snapdeal; views expressed are personal)



AISHANI VIJ



FIRST COLUMN

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER MODI 3.0

Modi's G7 debut amidst global turmoil underscores diplomatic finesse



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

In less than a week of assuming office as the Prime Minister for the largest democracy in the world, Mr Modi is back where he excels. He was in Italy this week, meeting the leaders from the powerful group of nations also known as the G7. On the sidelines were several bilateral meetings with leaders of African, and Arab nations, besides several clear messages to the primarily American and European groups leaders. This was PM Modi's first trip abroad, after assuming office for a third time ( a remarkable feat in itself), where nearly 670 million voters patiently waited in queues under an extremely harsh summer sun over a period of nearly two months to choose the leader of the largest democracy. PM Modi and his party, despite setting ambitious expectations, could not manage a majority by themselves and are now dependent on a bunch of pre-poll alliance political parties to lead the National Democratic Alliance government. This assumes significance at a time when several parts of Europe, not to mention the US are going their own set of democratic churns. The US goes to poll end of the year, and voices on either side of the aisle, are getting harsher and louder. Similarly, the elections to the European Parliament have thrown a resurgence of far-right parties, which is likely to have an impact on the geopolitical dynamics for a long time. What Mr Modi may be comforted by is the fact that he may not need to look around for carefully worded diplomatic statements while explaining the state of Indian democracy to the Western nations.



In the past few years, several questions have been raised across the Western nations and in the US regarding the health of the Indian democracy, its report card on minority rights, religious freedom, the existence of the press etc. The near majority verdict, by the Indian electorate, with ample scope of checks and balances to keep the party with the highest seats under leash, a robust opposition presence in the parliament would be a clear talking point for the PM and his set of diplomats to set out a gold standard for democracy when engaging with several nations. Mr Modi, with his nearly three decades of experience as head of the state and nation, is not new to diplomacy and in several interviews, leading up to the general elections, has articulated his target of enhancing India's global image. The grand spectacle around G20 ( not to forget backroom diplomatic negotiations to arrive at a joint statement ), several high-level state visits, a bunch of rescue operations carried out for citizens and neighbours from war-torn areas, supply of emergency medicines during COVID are all pointers towards the focus the Prime Minister's Office attaches to global reputational management. PM's third-term visit to G7 assures continuity and explores fresh engagement strategies with current and potential allies, emphasizing continuity and innovation. Mr Modi's visit to Italy comes at a time when the Ukraine war is unrelenting, and despite severe reluctance, there seems to be chinks in the united European approach towards the aggressor Russia. Many of them, would have, similar concerns regarding Israel's war on terror, which has refused to die down in months. It may be recalled that both Israel and Russia are close allies of India, and India has so far walked a tightrope when commenting on both of these volatile situations. The dynamics of the past relationship, while building deeper relations with recent allies such as the US are likely to be a sensitive diplomatic trope. It is no wonder, that PM Modi has picked up S Jaishankar, a seasoned diplomat as the External Affairs minister for a second term, to retain the continuity and foreign policy focus achieved during his last term. The evolving geopolitical landscape and India's role in global affairs would continue to be tested and chiselled in days to come.

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

# Populism cripples revival of discoms

## The twin problems of AT&C losses and under-recoveries on sale to certain households or farmers in some States have existed for close to a quarter century

The Centre is planning to launch 'another' scheme to enable public sector power distribution utilities (discoms) to cut technical losses via "transition financing" of the required capital expenditure. The discoms stand at the core of the power supply and distribution network in the country. Mostly owned and controlled by State Governments, they buy electricity from the generating companies (call them gencos) in the public sector such as National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) etc and gencos in the private sector commonly referred to as independent power producers (IPPs) and supply to the consumers. Technical losses to be more precise, the aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses are a sophisticated nomenclature for leakage from the system or power theft. According to Union Power Minister RK Singh, AT&C's losses used to be high at 27 per cent. When, out of say 100 units of electricity that leaves the generating stations/power dispatch centre, 27 units are stolen and hence not paid for, this is bound to have a debilitating effect on the discoms' operations. The discoms could charge more on sale of the balance 73 units to compensate for the 'nil' revenue on the 27 stolen units. But this is theoretical. So, the discoms would end up making a loss to the extent of revenue lost on stolen units. There is another potent factor that exacerbates their losses. The Electricity Act (2003) and the Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Power require the discoms to fix the tariff on electricity supplied to consumers in a manner such that the average revenue realisation (ARR) from its sale is equal to the average cost of purchase, transmission and distribution (ACS). Yet under dictat from the State Government, either they don't bill certain households (HHs) at all (on consumption up to 200/300 units a month in Delhi/Punjab) or a flat subsidy of ₹800 on consumption (between 201 and 400 units a month in Delhi), besides free supply to farmers as in Punjab. The discoms seek to make up for the resulting under-recoveries by charging more from industries and businesses for which the tariff can go up to a high of ₹16 per unit (this indeed is a major reason for making Indian products and services uncompetitive in both the domestic and international markets). While the States also promise to compensate for a good portion of the under-recoveries, most of them make only partial reimbursement and that too after considerable delay. This further adds to discom losses. The twin problems of AT&C losses and under-recoveries on sale to HHs/farmers have existed for close to a quarter century. Since the beginning of 2000, the Centre has come up with four financial restructuring packages (FRPs) to help discoms. While, the first two (2002, 2012) merely sought to condone their losses, the third namely Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) launched in November 2015 required discoms to set their house in order and achieve certain milestones in exchange for financial assistance. Under UDAY, discoms' staggering debt of about ₹400,000 crore was condoned. Of this, while 75 per cent was taken over by the States, for the balance, they were allowed to issue bonds at a concessional rate of interest. In lieu of the FRP, discoms



were required to reduce AT&C losses from 20.7 per cent during 2015-16 to 15 per cent by 2018-19. Further, they were to reduce the ACS-ARR gap from ₹0.59 per unit of electricity during 2015-16 to 'zero' by 2018-19. But, the discoms failed to deliver. During 2019-20, their AT&C losses were 18.9 per cent against the 15 per cent target for 2018-19. The ACS-ARR gap during 2019-20 stood at ₹0.42 per unit against target of 'zero' for 2018-19. During 2020-21, even these limited improvements were reversed as ATC losses zoomed to 22.3 per cent and ACS-ARR gap ₹0.69 paise per unit. As a consequence, discoms losses which had decreased from ₹52,000 crore during 2015-16 to ₹17,000 crore during 2017-18 (courtesy, FRP) increased to about ₹30,000 crore during 2019-20 and further to ₹58,000 crore during 2020-21. Correspondingly, this has led to their ballooning debt which at the end of FY 2021-22, stood at ₹620,000 crore. This prompted the Centre to come out with a fourth package called 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBS-D). The scheme was unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech for FY 2021-22. Involving an outlay of ₹120,000 crore has been approved for loss reduction works and ₹130,000 crore for smart metering works.' Beyond this paperwork, as of January 2024, the total loan disbursed by PFC-REC under the

ity building, thereby improving the reliability and quality of the power supply. It had a provision for compulsory pre-paid and smart metering component to be implemented across the power supply chain, including in about 220 million households. Apart from gross budgetary support (GBS) of close to ₹100,000 crore by the Centre, implementation of the Scheme involves funding by State-run sector-specific lenders; viz, Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) under irrevocable State Government guarantee. The funds release is subject to discoms meeting the pre-qualifying criteria and achieving the basic minimum benchmark in reforms. The RLRBSD launched in FY 2021-22 talks of achieving the targets, which should have been achieved by 2018-19, by March 2025. This by itself is laughable. What about the progress? According to the Power Ministry, the Government has so far identified 57 discoms from 32 States and Union Territories under the scheme and has prepared detailed project reports (DPRs) for these. Further, in reply to a question in Parliament given by then Power Minister RK Singh in December 2023: "Till today, DPRs having total outlay of ₹120,000 crore has been approved for loss reduction works and ₹130,000 crore for smart metering works." Beyond this paperwork, as of January 2024, the total loan disbursed by PFC-REC under the

scheme was ₹112,000 crore for 16 States, while sanctioned amount was ₹133,000 crore. As for the gross budgetary support, the release of funds by the Centre during FY 2023-24 was a mere ₹6,000 crore against budget allocation of ₹12,000 crore. That things are moving at a snail's pace may be seen from the fact that 'against the sanctioned smart meters of around 220 million, only about 0.8 million have been installed so far'. One wonders whether the money is being used by discoms to merely pay back the loans taken earlier to fund their recurring losses --- as happened under UDAY. Now that the tenure of this scheme (launched in 2021-22) will end in just about 10 months on March 31, 2025, the Government is keen to launch its second version call it RLRBSD- II with similar aggregate outlay of ₹300,000 crore. Who knows, even the funds garnered under this scheme could end up being used to clear the continuous pile up of discoms' debt. The vicious cycle continues. The problem is entirely political. In a bid to win elections (these are held round the clock), almost every political party promises sops which include, among others, power supply to farmers and poor households at throwaway price or even free; they even ignore theft happening in slums/jhuggis that promise votes en masse. They use discoms as guinea pigs' for achieving these populist goals.

*(The writer is a policy analyst, views are personal)*

# Govt must reboot its 'Neighbourhood First' policy

## Modi's top priorities should include strengthening of bilateral ties with neighbours and herald a new era of dialogue to counter China's influence

The Narendra Modi Government must give priority to wean away neighbours who have drifted towards China. The presence of leaders from the neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean region at the inauguration of Narendra Modi's third term as Prime Minister highlights the significance New Delhi accords to these countries. Notable attendees included Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe. The swearing-in ceremony also witnessed the participation of Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Seychelles Vice-



KS TOMAR

President Ahmed Afif and Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu. The inclusion of President Muizzu is being interpreted as a good diplomatic move, especially when both nations currently have strained ties. It may be recalled that Modi invited leaders from the eight member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to his swearing-in ceremony in 2014. For his 2019 inauguration, the guests included leaders from the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIM-STECC), along with Mauritius and Kyrgyzstan. The Modi-led Government will have its plate full of national and international issues, which will warrant



immediate attention and formulation of strategy and action plan. Experts feel that India must resolve the US threat to impose sanctions if the Chabahar Port deal with Iran was not scrapped. Interestingly, the US did not raise any objection when India took up the construction of the port because it suited the US owing to its occupation of

Afghanistan. But now that the US has moved out, it has no interest in the port. Former Prime Minister Pt Jawaharlal Nehru's Indian National Congress achieved a remarkable victory, securing 44.7 per cent of the vote and winning 361 out of 494 seats in 1962. In contrast, the BJP, under Narendra Modi, won 238 seats out of 543, with the

NDA collectively securing 294 seats. Unlike the BJP, which relies on coalition partners like the TDP and others, the Congress under Nehru stood strong on its own. This scenario isn't unique to India. In Britain, leaders like Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair also managed to secure three terms. However, managing a coalition Government with a thin majority presents its own challenges. The reduced strength can increase the bargaining power of smaller coalition partners. The Modi Government's foreign policy has alienated neighbours like the Maldives, Nepal etc. Hence it needs a 'relook' as they have drifted towards China, which is using them to expand its influence. Regarding Pakistan,

India should respond to its initiative to have trade ties by keeping the political issues aside. The Sharif brothers may not be averse to it. China's expanding ties in the region are evident, and India needs to tread cautiously to counter its influence, as seen in the case of Nepal. The recent political shift in Nepal towards a communist Government ideologically aligned with China is concerning, especially considering China's 'Debt Trap' strategy. Pakistan serves as a stark example, with China extending a massive debt of \$23 billion, a substantial portion of which is tied to the Belt and Road Initiative. Pakistan's mounting debt to China, totalling \$67.2 billion from

2000 to 2021, underscores the risks associated with this debt dependency. Regarding neighbours, India needs to be worried as Maldives has already moved in the lap of China, and Nepal has also shown red flag as the communist Government led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' has moved closer to China. Modi will govern India for the next five years with a relatively weakened position but he has shown resolve to carry on economic reforms to make India a world power. In this backdrop, the Opposition is expected to play a constructive role in the interest of people of the country.

*(The writer is a political analyst and senior journalist based in Shimla; views are personal.)*



# G7 summit opens with deal to use Russian assets for Ukraine

AP ■ BORGIO EGNAZIA

A Group of Seven summit opened on Thursday with agreement reached on a US proposal to back a USD 50 billion loan to Ukraine using frozen Russian assets as collateral, giving Kyiv a strong show of support even as Europe's political chessboard shifts to the right.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni welcomed the heads of state of the G7 leading industrialised nations to a luxury resort in southern Italy, saying she wanted the message of the meeting to be one of dialogue with the global south and unity.

She likened the G7 to the ancient olive trees that are a symbol of the Puglia region, "with their solid roots, and branches projected toward the future".Beyond discussions on Ukraine, the war in Gaza and China's industrial policy, Pope Francis will become the first pope to address a G7 summit, adding a dash of celebrity and moral authority to the annual gathering. He'll be speaking on Friday about the promises and perils of artificial intelligence, but is expected to also renew his appeal for a peaceful end to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

The G7 includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Italy, which is hosting the summit, has invited several African leaders — Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Kenyan President William Ruto and Tunisian President Kais Saied — to press Meloni's development and migration initiatives on the continent. Other guests include Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, fresh off his own election, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

With Biden, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and now

French President Emmanuel Macron facing elections in the coming months, pressure was on the G7 to get done what it can while the status quo lasts. Frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine The US proposal involves engineering a USD 50 billion loan to help Ukraine in its fight against Russia that would use interest earned on profits from Russia's frozen central bank assets, most of them held in the European Union, as collateral.

A French official, briefing reporters on Wednesday, said a political decision by the leaders had been reached but that technical and legal details of the mechanism to tap into the assets still had to be worked out. The issue is complicated because if the Russian assets one day are unfrozen — say if the war ends — then the wind-fall profits will no longer be able to be used to pay off the loan, requiring a burden-sharing arrangement with other countries.

Zelenskyy listed the asset deal as one of many arrangements he hoped to see finalised during the summit, including a bilateral security agreement with the US.

"I am grateful to our partners for their belief in us and our victory," he said in a post on social media platform X. Sunak, for his part, announced up to 242 million pounds (286 million euros or USD 310 million) in nonmilitary aid to Ukraine and a new round of sanctions against suppliers of munitions and other aid to Russia's military located in China, Israel, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey.

Washington also sent strong signals of support, with widened sanctions against Russia to target Chinese companies that are helping its war machine.

## EUROPE'S NEW POLITICAL CHESSBOARD

Meloni goes into the meeting fortified at home and abroad after her far-right party had an even stronger showing in the

European Parliament election than in the national general election in 2022 that made her Italy's first female premier. Known for its revolving-door governments, Italy is now in the unusual position of being the most stable power in the EU.

The leaders of the G7's two other EU members, Germany and France, didn't fare nearly as well, rattled after hard-right parties made strong showings in the vote. Macron called a snap election and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz saw his Social Democrats finish behind mainstream conservatives and the far-right Alternative for Germany.

As a result, Meloni is likely to be able to steer the three-day meeting to her key priority items as she further cements her role on the world stage, analysts said. One sign of her flexed far-right muscles: Meloni's office denied media reports that Italy was trying to water down language about access to abortion in the final communique.

A French official, speaking anonymously in line with Macron's office's customary practices, said there were diverging views with Italian negotiators on some topics, including on sexual and reproductive health and vaccines. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani confirmed abortion was being addressed, but said discussions were continuing.

"While it's unlikely the recent results will radically shift the focus of the upcoming G7 summit, this electoral win offers Premier Meloni additional leverage to frame this as an essentially Mediterranean Summit," said Nick O'Connell, deputy director of the Atlantic Council.That includes pushing her migration agenda as Meloni seeks to leverage her program for a nonexploitative relationship with Africa to boost development while curbing illegal migration to Europe. The pope and artificial intelligence

Pope Francis has called for an international treaty to ensure AI is developed and used ethically, acknowledging the promise it offers but emphasising the grave and existential threats it poses.

He'll bring that campaign to the world's industrialised countries as wars are raging across multiple fronts. One of his greatest concerns has been on the use of AI in the armaments sector. But Francis is also concerned about what AI means for the poorest and weakest in daily life: technology that could determine the reliability of an applicant for a mortgage, the right of a migrant to receive political asylum or the chance of reoffending by someone previously convicted of a crime. It's happening where?

The G7 summit is taking place in a sprawling luxury resort that's something of a theater set, a faux town made to resemble one of Puglia's medieval white-stone hamlets but that actually only dates from 2010.

Located next to an actual archaeological park, Borgo Egnazia features narrow streets, villas, restaurants and a town square complete with a clock-tower. A favourite of celebrities, it was sealed off to outsiders for the duration of the summit. No such five-star accommodations await the 2,000-plus police and Carabinieri forces who have been brought in to provide security. Authorities on Wednesday sequestered the decommissioned cruise ship that had been housing them in Brindisi's port, after the police union complained about unacceptable hygienic conditions on board.

As with any G7, an assortment of anti-global, anti-war and climate activists are staging protests around the summit venue, but far from where the leaders are meeting. One group is staging a "dinner for the poor" on Friday night calling for "peace, the rights of peoples and against the Big 7 who claim to decide the destiny of the world and our planet".



From left: European Council President Charles Michel, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, French president Emmanuel Macron, Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, U.S. President Joe Biden, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pose for a family photo at a G7 world leaders summit at Borgo Egnazia, southern Italy, Thursday. AP/PTI

## Sunak to push for 'decisive' support for Ukraine

**Bari (Italy) (PTI):** Leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) nations on Thursday began their three-day summit on global affairs in the southern Italian region of Apulia, where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been invited for the Outreach session to be held on Friday. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is set to dominate the agenda as leaders of the G7 — the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France and Japan — are hosted by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the luxury resort of Borgo Egnazia on the Adriatic coast. While India has reiterated its stance on "dialogue and diplomacy" as the best approach, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is leading calls for "decisive" efforts to support Ukraine "whatever it takes."

"We must be decisive and creative in our efforts to support Ukraine and end (Russian President) Putin's illegal war at this critical moment," Sunak said in a statement ahead of the summit talks. "The UK remains at the forefront of the international response as we have been from the outset. We must move from 'as long as it takes' to 'whatever it takes' if we are to end this illegal war," he said. "From Ukraine to the Middle East, we will be discussing significant global threats at the summit. Such threats are why it is so vital to strengthen the UK's national defence, through our commitment to spend 2.5 per cent of GDP on defence by 2030," he added. According to Downing Street, at the summit, Sunak will announce up to GBP 242 million in bilateral assistance to Ukraine, to support immediate

humanitarian, energy and stabilisation needs, and lay the foundations for longer-term economic and social recovery and reconstruction. "A priority for the PM at the Summit will be to work with partners to agree a way to use immobilised Russian assets to support Ukraine," a Downing Street statement said. Meanwhile, in his pre-visit media briefing in New Delhi on Wednesday, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra recalled Modi's statement in September 2022 that "today's era is not of war." "We have always maintained that dialogue and diplomacy is the best option," he said, pointing to the consequences of the war such as an impact on food, fuel and fertiliser availability, challenges to global supply chains and disruptions in the global economy.

## Fistfight erupts in Italian Parliament

**Rome (AP):** Tensions in Italy's lower house erupted into a fistfight, sending an opposition lawmaker to hospital, over a controversial government proposal that opponents say will further impoverish the poor south. Video of the fight Wednesday shows lawmakers converging on 5-Star Movement lawmaker Leonardo Donno, who opposes the changes, after he tried to hand an Italian flag to regional affairs minister Roberto Calderoli. Calderoli, a firebrand lawmaker from the Lega party with northern roots, drafted the contested expansion of regional autonomy that would mostly benefit regions like Lega strongholds of Veneto and Lombardy.

## Kuwait vows to promptly investigate fire incident

AP ■ DUBAI/ KUWAIT CITY

Kuwait Thursday said authorities have identified the bodies of 45 Indians and three Filipino nationals killed in the tragic fire incident in a building housing foreign workers as the Gulf Kingdom vowed to promptly investigate the incident and assured full support in repatriating the mortal remains of the victims. At least 49 foreign workers were killed and 50 others injured in the fire on Wednesday at the seven-storey building where 196 migrant workers were staying in the southern city of Mangaf.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah, serving as the First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, and Minister of Defence, said that authorities have identified 48 bodies, among which 45 are of Indians and three are of Filipino nationality, English language daily Arab Times reported.

The efforts are still underway to determine the identity of one remaining body, said the first deputy prime minister. Kuwaiti authorities are conducting DNA tests on the

bodies of those killed in the devastating fire incident in southern Kuwait's Mangaf area and an Indian Air Force aircraft is on standby to bring back the mortal remains of Indians killed in the incident, officials said in New Delhi on Thursday.

Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh, who reached Kuwait to oversee assistance to Indians injured in the fire and to ensure early repatriation of mortal remains of those killed, met Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya who assured full support and vowed to promptly investigate the tragedy.

Singh also met some of the Indians injured in the massive fire and assured them all support from the Indian government.

Later, he called on First Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Fahad, who conveyed condolences on behalf of the Emir and his instructions to ensure all necessary assistance and support.

Singh conveyed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's greetings to the Emir and thanked the deputy prime

minister and the leadership of Kuwait for pro-active facilitation being provided by Kuwaiti authorities, the Indian mission said.

Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber al-Sabah has issued directives for the distribution of financial assistance to the families of the deceased, Sheikh Fahad said, without mentioning the quantum of the compensation. Additionally, the Emir has ordered the preparation of military aircraft to repatriate the bodies of deceased Indians back to their homeland.

Sheikh Fahad is heading an overall inspection campaign on illegal properties in many areas in Kuwait on Thursday. The minister, accompanied by the Minister of Public Works and Minister of Municipality Dr. Nora Al-Mashaan began their inspection campaign in Al-Mangaf, Al-Mahboubia, Khaitan, and Jileeb Al-Shuyoukh, the paper said.

The Interior Ministry, Kuwait Municipality, Kuwait Fire Force, Ministry of Electricity and Water and Public Authority for Manpower took part in the campaign.

## Top EU court fines Hungary \$216 mn for flouting asylum law

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The European Union's top court ordered Hungary to pay a fine of 200 million euros (USD 216 million) on Thursday for persistently breaking the bloc's asylum rules despite a previous European Court of Justice ruling, plus an additional 1 million euros for every day it fails to comply going forward.

Hungary had not implemented a 2020 ruling from top EU judges in Luxembourg, the ECJ wrote in a press release. "That failure, which consists in deliberately avoiding the application of a common EU policy as a whole, constitutes an unprecedented and extremely serious infringement of EU law."

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán slammed the ruling as "outrageous and unacceptable." "It seems that illegal migrants are more important to the Brussels bureaucrats than their own European citizens," he wrote on the social media platform X.

Hungary's anti-immigrant gov-

ernment has taken a hard line on people entering the country since well over 1 million people entered Europe in 2015, most of them fleeing conflict in Syria.

The case concerns changes Hungary made to its asylum system in the wake of that crisis, when some 400,000 people passed through Hungary on their way to Western Europe. Hungary built fences protected by razor wire on its southern borders with Serbia and Croatia and a pair of transit zones for holding asylum seekers on its border with Serbia. Those transit zones have since closed.

The measures were part of Orbán's increasingly strict anti-immigration policies and the extreme minimisation of Hungary's asylum system.

Back in 2020, the ECJ found that Budapest's policies had restricted access to international protection, unlawfully detained asylum applicants and failed to observe their right to stay in Hungary while their application went through the full due process, the court recalled on Thursday.

## Starmer vows to end era of 'gestures and gimmicks' if he wins power

AP ■ MANCHESTER

The left-of-centre politician aiming to become Britain's prime minister in three weeks' time said on Thursday he will lead a government that's both "pro-business and pro-worker" and restore stability after years of economic and political turmoil. Labour Party leader Keir Starmer said that if he's elected on July 4, he will end the "desperate era of gestures and gimmicks" of the Conservative Party's turbulent tenure.

Launching Labour's election manifesto in the northwest England city of Manchester, Starmer said a Labour government would "stop the chaos, turn the page and start to rebuild our country".

Next month British voters will elect lawmakers to fill all 650 seats in the House of Commons, and the leader of the party that can command a majority — either alone or in coalition — will become prime minister. Labour currently has a double-digit lead in opinion polls over Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's governing Conservatives, who have been in power for 14 years

under five different prime ministers.

The Conservatives jettisoned two prime ministers without an election in quick succession in 2022: first Boris Johnson, felled by scandals, then Liz Truss, who rocked the economy with drastic tax-slashing plans and lasted just seven weeks in office.

Starmer, a former chief prosecutor who is widely seen as competent but dull, is trying to turn his stolid image into an asset. His core message is that he has transformed Labour from its high-taxing, big-spending days under former leader Jeremy Corbyn into a party of the stable centre.

Starmer said his platform was "a manifesto for wealth creation", and acknowledged that a Labour government would face "hard choices" about public spending. "We cannot play fast and loose with the public finances," he said. He said he rejected the idea that "the only levers are tax and spend", and would get the economy expanding after years of sluggish growth. Starmer's cautious economic approach dismays some in his party, who want bolder change, but has

won the support of many business leaders.

Starmer called the party's platform a manifesto for "wealth creation", and its ambitious goals were largely long-term ones: establishing a new industrial policy, developing a 10-year infrastructure strategy, building 1.5 million new homes.

Labour pledged to improve ties with Britain's former partners in the European Union, but ruled out a return to the bloc's frictionless single market and customs union.

The plan's spending commitments were modest. The manifesto forecasts that taxes will rise by 7.4 billion pounds (USD 9.25 billion) by 2028-29, through measures including by closing loopholes related to the recent abolition of the "non-domiciled" tax status, which has allowed some wealthy individuals to avoid paying UK taxes.

The party is also planning to extend a windfall tax on energy companies. Starmer said personal taxes would not rise under a Labour government, but that did not stop the Conservatives casting Labour as the high-tax party.

## In initial victory for Argentine Pres Milei, Senate gives overall approval to key reform bills

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Argentina's Senate has approved key state overhaul and tax bills proposed by President Javier Milei, delivering an initial legislative victory to the libertarian leader in his efforts to deliver on his promises of radical change. Senators voted 37 to 36 late Wednesday to give their overall approval to the overhaul bill after 11 hours of heated debate as protesters urging lawmakers to reject Milei's harsh austerity clashed with police outside Congress. The lawmakers still must approve individual measures in an article-by-article vote that will stretch throughout the night.

In a reflection of the fierce backlash to the legislation and deep polarisation gripping Argentina's Congress, Vice President and head of the Senate Victoria Villarruel cast the tiebreaking vote in favour



Police fire tear gas at anti-government protesters outside Congress, where lawmakers debate a reform bill promoted by Argentine President Javier Milei in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday. AP/PTI

of Milei's agenda. The legislation delegates broad powers to the president in energy, pensions, security and other areas and includes several measures seen as controversial, including a generous incentive scheme for foreign

investors, tax amnesty for those with undeclared assets and plans to privatise some of Argentina's state-owned firms. If the Senate approves the articles with modifications, the lower house still has to okay them before Milei can claim

passing his first law since entering office last December. As Senators pored over the bills, protesters in downtown Buenos Aires hurled sticks, stones and Molotov cocktails at police who fired water cannons and tear gas to disperse the crowds.

The fiery right-wing economist rose to power on promises he would resolve Argentina's worst economic crisis in two decades, with annual inflation climbing toward 300 per cent and a recession deepening.

But his political party of relative novices holds just a tiny minority of seats in Congress and he has struggled to strike deals with the opposition. Senators approved two bills, a tax package that lowers the income tax threshold and a 238-article state reform bill that passed the lower house of Congress in late April after weeks of negotiations.

## Don't let difference become a chasm, Chinese Premier warns NZ as it mulls joining AUKUS

AP ■ BEIJING/ WELLINGTON

Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who is visiting New Zealand amid the country's plan to join the AUKUS alliance, has warned that both countries must stop their differences from becoming a "chasm" between them.

AUKUS, comprising Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, a trilateral security alliance is intended to strengthen the ability of each government to support security and defence interests, building on longstanding and ongoing bilateral ties by promoting deeper information sharing and technology sharing and fostering the integration of security and defence-related science, technology, industrial bases and supply chains.

Beijing avers the partnership is aimed at containing China's

rise. It is "natural" that the two countries "don't always see eye-to-eye with each other on everything", Li told a joint press conference with New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon after their talks in Wellington on Thursday.

"Such differences should not become a chasm that blocks exchanges and cooperation between us," Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted Li as saying. He added the two countries should use differences to "learn from each other and grow together".

An official text of Li's speech released by the Chinese Foreign Ministry here said: "The two sides should work to remove the disturbance of non-economic factors to bilateral trade and economic relations, and provide stable expectations and a sound busi-

ness environment for the operation and development of companies". He also announced a visa-free policy for New Zealanders to visit China.

The unusually strong words from Li, 64, a close associate of Chinese President Xi Jinping, come in the backdrop of reports that New Zealand plans to join the AUKUS alliance which involves the transfer of nuclear submarine technology and the latest cutting-edge technologies, including quantum computing, artificial intelligence and hypersonic weapons. China regards both Quad, (US, India, Japan, Australia) and AUKUS as alliances aimed at containing its rise and is bitterly critical of both. Reports from Wellington quoted Luxon as saying that he discussed with Li the significant China-New Zealand economic relationship with two-

way trade in goods worth nearly USD 23.43 billion, mainly New Zealand's dairy products. Luxon said he told the Chinese premier he would have "no tolerance" for foreign interference in New Zealand's affairs. Luxon said Li had raised concern about Wellington's possible participation in a trilateral security pact with Australia, the United States and Britain, the AP news agency reported. New Zealand is among the candidates to join Pillar 2 of an expanded AUKUS, the Post reported earlier. Launched in 2021, AUKUS has two key pillars: Pillar 1 supports Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines, while Pillar 2 focuses on cutting-edge technologies, including quantum computing, artificial intelligence and hypersonic weapons.



# S Africa parties cobble together unity govt

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

South African lawmakers are expected to elect the country's president on Friday after being sworn in at the first sitting of Parliament that will also reveal the kind of unity government the ruling African National Congress has managed to cobble together after losing its majority for the first time since 1994.

The lawmakers are also expected to elect Parliament's new speaker and deputy speaker, choices that will be determined by negotiations that have taken place between the ANC and opposition parties since the country's election results were declared nearly two weeks ago. Parties are under pressure to conclude negotiations by Thursday to fulfil the constitutional requirement to swear in lawmakers and elect the president within 14 days of election results being declared.

The African National Congress won 40 per cent of the national vote during the country's highly contested elections, followed by the Democratic Alliance with just over 21 per cent and the newly formed uMkhonto weSizwe Party with about 15 per cent of the vote in their first-ever elections. The ANC has opted to form a national unity government that will include most political parties that contested the elections instead of a straightforward coalition with a few parties.

However, initial negotiations have laid bare the deep divisions between South Africa's political parties, with some already rejecting the proposed unity government while others have agreed to be part of it. The ANC's national executive committee, the party's highest decision-making body between conferences, will meet in Cape Town on Thursday to finalise the agreements it has made with the other parties and will make an announcement afterwards. On Wednesday, the Inkatha Freedom Party, the fifth-biggest party with 3.85 per cent of the vote, confirmed it had decided to join the national unity government that will be led by the ANC.



A woman walks past Luthuli House, the ANC headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa, on June 5.

It said it had also started negotiations to form a coalition with the ANC and the Democratic Alliance in the KwaZulu-Natal province where the MK Party got the most votes.

"We will participate in the government of national unity for the sake of our country and for the sake of our people, who want life to continue with a stable government that will address their challenges," said IFP president Velenkosini Hlabisa.

While the MK Party emerged as arguably the biggest winner in the elections with an impressive performance despite being formed only six months ago, it has refused to join the unity government and sought to prevent the sitting from going ahead. The Constitutional Court on Thursday dismissed the party's application to interdict the chief justice from convening the first sitting, giving a go-ahead for it to proceed. The party continues to dispute the election results, claiming widespread vote-rigging, and has said its 58 elected lawmakers will boycott the sitting.

South Africa's constitution says only one-third of Parliament's 400 lawmakers need to be present for a quorum and for the vote to elect the president to

proceed.

South Africa's independent electoral commission and independent observers have declared the elections free and fair. As the deadline to reach an agreement approached on Thursday, the rift between the second-biggest party, Democratic Alliance, and the fourth-biggest party, Economic Freedom Fighters, appeared to be one of the main sticking points. The leftist Economic Freedom Fighters have said they will not be part of any arrangement that involves the centrist Democratic Alliance, which they accuse of being anti-Black and opposed to policies that aim to address the injustices of South Africa's past, including black economic empowerment and land redistribution.

The parties remain ideologically at odds, with the Democratic Alliance declaring the EFF its top rival last year. The animosity between the two suggests the ANC might have to form a national unity government that does not include the EFF and the MK Party, a pattern that may also play out in coalition governments at the provincial level, where the ANC also failed to maintain a majority in several provinces.

# Judge accuses ISI of harrassment for desired verdicts

PTI ■ LAHORE

An anti-terrorism court judge, hearing the cases related to attacks on military installations in May last year by workers of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party, has accused Pakistan's powerful intelligence agency ISI of harassing him and his family members to get desired verdicts.

Anti-Terrorism Court Judge (Sargodha) Muhammad Abbas has written a letter to Lahore High Court Chief Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan informing him how spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officials harassed him and his family members.

The judge has been hearing the cases against Opposition Leader in Parliament Omar Ayub and other workers of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) related to attacks on military installations in May last year.

Ayub had alleged that last week at a hearing in a case in Sargodha ATC Judge Abbas was made hostage by the intelligence agencies.

In March, six judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) reached out to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) informing alleged intrusion of intelligence operatives in judicial matters.

The six judges - out of a total strength of eight - wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council members, regarding alleged attempts to pressure judges through abduction and torture of their relatives as well as secret surveillance inside their homes.

All judges of IHC also unanimously acknowledged that intelligence agencies are interfering in their judicial functions.

The judges accused the intelligence operatives of coercing them to extract desired verdicts in the case of former prime minister Imran Khan and other PTI leaders. Khan has been in jail since August last year in different cases.

The Supreme Court has sought proposals from high courts as to how to protect the independence of the judiciary from the interference of intelligence agencies.

On the ATC judge's allegations, Lahore High Court Chief Justice Ahmad Khan summoned Punjab Inspector General of Police Dr Usman Anwar for Thursday.

"In today's hearing IGP Anwar told the LHC that police have launched an investigation into 'serious threats' given to the ATC judge," a court official told PTI on Thursday.

The LHC CJ asked the IGP why the roads leading to Sargodha ATC, some 200 km from Lahore, were closed by police when the judge refused to meet an ISI officer. The IGP said: "The roads were closed as the judge was facing serious threats."

The chief justice reserved the verdict on the alleged harassment of the ATC judge by the ISI. Khan's party had strongly condemned the incident in which the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly and PTI Central Secretary General, Omar Ayub, along with other members of Parliament, were prevented from entering the ATC Sargodha by the unelected and mandate-thief government.

"As part of a malicious and well-thought-out plot to coerce the judiciary into making decisions of their choice," a PTI spokesperson said. He said that the mandate thief Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz had a long history of armed attacks on courts to force judges to make favourable decisions, adding that this move was seen as a blatant attempt to intimidate the judiciary and prevent them from delivering justice. He said the purpose of preventing the NA Opposition Leader and other MPs from entering the court was to coerce the court to decide at gunpoint while denying justice to public representatives.

# Pak budgetary allocation for def falls to 1.7% of GDP

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's budgetary allocation of Rs 2,122 billion for defence for 2024-25 constitutes just 1.7 per cent of the cash-strapped but nuclear-armed nation's GDP, which is the same as the previous year, despite the higher than the Rs 1,804 billion set aside during the outgoing fiscal 2023-24, according to budget documents.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday presented a Rs 18,877 billion heavily taxed budget for 2024-25.

The finance minister's speech and various budget documents show that Rs 2,122 billion allocated for the next fiscal year is Rs 318 billion higher than Rs 1,804 billion budgeted for the outgoing fiscal year 2023-24, ending on June 30.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24, which is a key document showing the budget and performance of the economy each year and is released ahead of the budget each year, defence spending as a percentage of the GDP has come down since 2020. It shows that the defence spending was 2.6 per cent of the GDP in 2020 but it decreased to 2.4 per cent in 2021, and

went down further to 2.1 per cent in 2022, followed by 1.9 per cent in 2023 and 1.7 per cent in 2024. For the year 2025, defence spending has been retained at 1.7 per cent of the GDP, showing that there was no change in the share of the army in the overall pie despite it getting more money in the budget.

The document lists defence spending as per GDP since 2016 when it was 2.3 per cent, and increased to 2.5 per cent of the GDP in 2017 and further to 2.6 per cent in 2018. It remained unchanged at 2.6 per cent from 2018 to 2020 and then decreased.

However, the data released by the government may not convey the real picture of defence spending as several military-related expenses are budgeted in the civilian expenditures. For example, a sum of Pakistani Rs 662 billion, allocated for retired military personnel, which equals to about 31 per cent of the allocation for the armed forces, will not be drawn from the defence budget but rather from the government's current expenditure.

Similarly, it is believed that key military acquisitions or funding for nuclear weapons and missile programmes are believed to be financed through

separate channels, obscuring the exact military spending. However, the budget document provides some details about the latest allocation, showing that the share of the three services and inter-services organisations has remained fairly consistent since 2019, with the Army getting 47.5 per cent, the Air Force 21.3 per cent, the Navy 10.8 per cent and the inter-services organisations 20.3 per cent of the budget.

It shows that this year the Army, Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Navy and inter-services organisations will receive an equal percentage increase of 22.3 per cent in their respective allocations, a rare display of parity in funding distribution. The allocation is divided into four categories: 'Employees Related Expenses', covering salaries and allowances for servicemen; 'Operating Expenses', which include costs for transportation, fuel, rations, medical treatment, training, and other essential services; 'Physical Assets', which funds the procurement of arms, ammunition, and related equipment through local purchases and imports; and 'Civil Works' dedicated to maintaining existing infrastructure and financing new construction projects.

# Pact with IMF for new loan next month: Pak minister

**Islamabad (PTI):** Pakistan's finance minister Mohammad Aurangzeb on Thursday said an agreement to secure a fresh loan to address the country's economic woes is expected to be reached with the International Monetary Fund next month.

Aurangzeb, while addressing a post-budget press conference here, a day after unveiling the Rs 18,877 billion budget, announced that negotiations with the IMF were underway and going in the right direction.

"I don't want to say anything in finality other than the fact that it's (IMF talks) moving positively," he said and expressed hope that a staff-level agreement (SLA) is expected in July too. He, however, declined to talk

further on the topic of SLA. The budget, which many believe is designed to meet IMF requirements for securing another USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion loans under the medium-term Extended Fund Facility (EFF), marks a 25 per cent increase over the outgoing fiscal year's outlay.

The government has proposed historically-high additional taxes through various adjustments and new levies, potentially increasing the burden on already strained taxpayers. The increase in the taxes is aimed at collecting additional revenues of Rs 3.8 trillion in line with the IMF demands and it appears that a historic increase in both direct and indirect taxes is

aimed to convince the fund.

In July 2023, the IMF approved a USD 3 billion Stand-By Arrangement for debt-trapped Pakistan to support immediate efforts to stabilise the economy and guard against shocks while creating space for social and development spending to help the people of the country.

The minister also said that the tax base will be broadened with the tax to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio to be taken to 13 per cent in the next 2-3 years as the existing 10 per cent tax-to-GDP ratio is unsustainable. The minister said digitisation of the economy is a priority for the government, as it will help reduce corruption and increase transparency.

# IMF releases \$336 mn tranche to Sri Lanka

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The IMF has disbursed the third tranche of USD 336 million from its USD 2.9 billion bailout package to Sri Lanka, even as it cautioned that the economy of the cash-strapped nation remains vulnerable and the path to debt sustainability is "knife-edged".

The third tranche under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement was released during an executive board meeting of the International Monetary Fund held on Wednesday, the Washington-based global lender said in a statement.

With the release of the third tranche amounting to USD 336 million, the total IMF financial support disbursed so far to Sri Lanka under the bailout package is about USD 1 billion, the statement said.

Two tranches of USD 330 million each were released in March and December 2023.

The IMF noted that Sri Lanka's economy has started recovering, inflation remains low, revenue collection is improving, and reserves continue to accu-

mulate. However, "despite these positive developments, the economy is still vulnerable and the path to debt sustainability remains knife-edged," it warned.

Strong reform efforts, adequate safeguards, and contingency planning help mitigate these risks, the IMF said.

"To restore fiscal sustainability, sustained revenue mobilisation efforts, promptly finalising the debt restructuring in line with programme targets, and protecting social and capital spending remain critical. Advancing public financial management will help enhance fiscal discipline, and strengthening the debt management framework is also needed," it underlined.

The EFF-supported programme aims to restore Sri Lanka's macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability, mitigate the economic impact on the poor and vulnerable, rebuild external buffers, safeguard financial sector stability, and strengthen governance and growth potential, the IMF said.

# NATO def ministers thrash out new security aid and training support plan for Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

NATO defence ministers gathered on Thursday hoping to agree on a new plan to provide long-term security assistance and military training to Ukraine amid Russia's full-scale invasion, after Hungary promised not to veto the proposal as long as it's not forced to take part.

The ministers are meeting over two days at NATO headquarters in Brussels in the last high-level talks before a summit hosted by US President Joe Biden in Washington on July 9-11, where the military organization's leaders are expected to announce financial support for Ukraine.

Ukraine's Western allies are trying to bolster their military support as Russian troops launch attacks along the more than 1,000-km (620-mile) front line, taking advantage of a lengthy delay in US military aid. European Union money was also held up by political infighting.

NATO Secretary-General Jens

Stoltenberg, who is chairing Thursday's meeting, said that Ukraine's beleaguered armed forces need longer-term predictability about the kinds of weapons, ammunition and funds they can expect to receive.

"The whole idea is to minimise the risk for gaps and delays as we saw earlier this year," Stoltenberg told reporters. The hold-up, he said, "is one of the reasons why the Russians are now able to push and to actually occupy more land in Ukraine."

Since Russia's full-fledged invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's Western backers have routinely met as part of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, run by the Pentagon, to drum up weapons and ammunition for Kyiv. A fresh meeting was held at NATO headquarters on Thursday.

Canadian Defence Minister Bill Blair said that his country would send Ukraine 2,300 rocket motors, and that 80,000 more of the devices are being tested. "Pending the results of

those tests, we intend to ship more packages of these motors to our Ukrainian partners in the future," he told reporters.

While the contact group meetings have resulted in significant battlefield support, they have been of an ad-hoc and unpredictable nature.

Stoltenberg has spearheaded an effort to have NATO take up some of the slack.

The idea is for the 32-nation military alliance to coordinate the security assistance and training process, partly by using NATO's command structure and drawing on funds from its common budget.

Stoltenberg said he hopes Biden and his counterparts will agree in Washington to maintain the funding level for military support they have provided Ukraine since Russia launched its full-fledged invasion in February 2022.

He estimates this at around 40 billion euros (\$43 billion) worth of equipment each year. On Wednesday, Hungary announced that it would not

veto the plan as long as it's not forced to take part.

"I asked the Secretary-General to make it clear that all military action outside NATO territory can only be voluntary in nature, according to NATO rules and our traditions," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said. "Hungary has received the guarantees we need."

The world's biggest security alliance does not send weapons or ammunition to Ukraine as an organisation, and has no plans to put troops on the ground. But many of its members give help on a bilateral basis, and jointly provide more than 90% of the country's military support.

The other 31 allies see Russia's war on Ukraine as an existential security threat to Europe, but most of them, including Biden, have been extremely cautious to ensure that NATO is not drawn into a wider conflict with Russia.

NATO operates on the basis that an attack on any single ally will be met with a response from them all.

# Suspected missile attack by Houthi rebels strikes ship in Gulf of Aden

AP ■ DUBAI

A suspected attack on Thursday by Yemen's Houthi rebels saw missiles strike a ship in the Gulf of Aden, authorities said, setting the vessel ablaze, in what would be the latest such assault in their campaign over the Israel-Hamas war.

The attack happened in the Gulf of Aden off Yemen, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. It said the vessel caught fire in the attack. The private security firm Ambrey said a merchant vessel made a radio distress call saying it had been struck by a missile. The ship "was en route from Malaysia to Venice, Italy," Ambrey said. It added that the ship was "aligned with the Houthi target profile," without elaborating.

The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge Thursday's attack, but it typically takes the rebels hours or even days to claim them. The attack follows the Houthis launching a boat-borne bomb attack against a commercial ship in the Red Sea on Wednesday.

The Houthis, who seized Yemen's capital nearly a decade ago and have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition since shortly after, have been targeting shipping throughout the Red Sea

corridor. They say the attacks are aimed at stopping the war and supporting the Palestinians, though the attacks often target vessels that have nothing to do with the conflict.

The war in Gaza has killed more than 36,000 Palestinians there, according to Gaza health officials, while hundreds of others have been killed in Israeli operations in the West Bank. It began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on October 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostage. The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, killed three sailors, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the US Maritime Administration. A US-led airstrike campaign has targeted the Houthis since January with a series of strikes on May 30 killing at least 16 people and wounding 42 others, the rebels say.

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
FINANCE & ACCOUNTS DEPARTMENT  
No.FA/EDP/POS-06/2023/106 Date:12/06/2024  
CORRIGENDUM

1st CORRIGENDUM to Short e-Tender Call Notice (TCN) No.FA/EDP/POS-06/2023/99 issued vide dtd.05/06/2024 for the work "Facility Management of Integrated Port Operation System (POS) and SagarSetu". The date and time of submission of tender is hereby extended as per the following schedule: (i) Document download end date: 19/06/2024; 17:00 Hrs., (ii) Bid submission end date: 19/06/2024; 17:00 Hrs., (iii) Bid opening date: 19/06/2024; 17:00 Hrs. All other terms and conditions of the tender remain unaltered. Detailed Tender Document is available at the Website: <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app> for online bidding.

Sd/- Dy. Director (EDP), EDP Cell,  
Paradip Port Authority  
dtd.12.06.2024  
PPA/PR/16/2024-2025

# One year later, migrants who survived wreck off Greece seek justice

AP ■ ATHENS

Desperate hands clutched at Ali Elwan's arms, legs and neck, and screams misted his ears, as he spat out saltwater and fought for three hours to keep afloat in the night, dozens of miles from land.

Although a poor swimmer, he lived — one of just 104 survivors from the wreck of a dilapidated old metal fishing boat smuggling up to 750 migrants from North Africa to Europe.

"I was so, so lucky," the 30-year-old Egyptian told The Associated Press in Athens, Greece, where he works odd jobs while he waits to hear the outcome of his asylum application. "I have two babies. Maybe I stay(ed) in this life for them."

Thousands have died in Mediterranean Sea shipwrecks in recent years as migrants from the Middle East, Asia and Africa

seek a better life in the affluent European Union.

But the sinking of the Adriana a year ago Friday in international waters 75 kilometres (45 miles) off Pylos in southern Greece was one of the worst. Only 82 bodies were recovered, so that hundreds of families still lack even the grim certitude that their relatives are dead.

Elwan, a cook whose wife and children are in Cairo, says he still gets phone calls from Egypt from mothers, brothers and wives of the missing. "We (left) home to get best life for family and until now (their families) know nothing about them," he said.

And after a year there are only hazy answers as to why so many lives were lost, what caused the shipwreck and who can be held answerable.

Migrant charities and human rights groups have strongly crit-

icised Greece's handling of the sinking and its aftermath.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International said Thursday "a credible process for accountability" was needed.

"It is unconscionable that one year since this horrific tragedy, the investigation into the potential liability of (Greece's) Coast Guard has barely progressed," HRW official Judith Sunderland said in the groups' joint statement.

The Greek coast guard, migration ministry and other officials did not respond to AP requests for comment ahead of the anniversary.

Authorities had a coast guard boat on the scene and merchant ships in the vicinity during the trawler's last hours. They blame smugglers who crammed hundreds of people into an unseaworthy vessel — most in an airless hold designed to store a

catch of fish — for a nightmare voyage from Libya to Italy.

They also say the Adriana capsized when its passengers — some of whom wanted to press on for Italy after five dreadful days at sea, others to seek safety in Greece — suddenly surged to one side, causing it to lurch and turn turtle. And they insist that offers to take the migrants off the ship were rebuffed by people set on reaching Italy.

Elwan — who says he was on deck with a clear view of what happened — and other survivors say the lurching followed a botched coast guard attempt to tow the trawler. He claimed the coast guard hurriedly cut the towline when it became evident the Adriana would sink and drag their boat down with it.

"If you find the ship (at the bottom of the sea), you will find this rope" still attached to it, he said. But the logistics make such a feat

nigh-on impossible, Greek authorities say, as the ship rests some 5 kilometres (more than 3 miles) down, at one of the Mediterranean's deepest points. The coast guard has denied any towing attempt, and allegations that its vessel tried to shift the trawler into neighbouring Italy's area of responsibility.

A naval court began investigating last June, but has released no information on its progress or findings.

Separately, in November Greece's state ombudsman started an independent probe into authorities' handling of the tragedy, bemoaning the coast guard's "express denial" to initiate a disciplinary investigation. Last month, a Greek court dropped charges against nine Egyptians accused of crewing the Adriana and causing the shipwreck. Without examining evidence for or against them, it deter-

mined that Greece lacked jurisdiction as the wreck occurred in international waters.

Effie Doussi, one of the Egyptians' defence lawyers, argued that the ruling was "politically convenient" for Greek authorities.

"It saved the Greek state from being exposed over how the coast guard acted, given their responsibility for rescue," she said. Doussi said a full hearing would have included testimony from survivors and other witnesses, and let defence lawyers seek additional evidence from the coast guard, such as potential mobile phone data.

Zeeshan Sarwar, a 28-year-old Pakistani survivor, said he's still waiting for justice, "but apparently there is nothing."

"I may be looking fine right now, but I am broken from the inside. We are not getting justice," he told the AP.

**Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot**  
(Admission Branch)

**Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot**  
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# GTRI: Strategic reforms in customs duties, GST, commerce to push India’s inclusive growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Implementation of key strategic reforms such as simplification of customs duty structure, GST, and not incentivising low value-added electric vehicles would help India ensure its sustainable development and inclusive growth, GTRI said on Thursday. Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) also said that India is standing on the cusp of a transformative era and there is an urgent need for comprehensive economic reforms.

“From simplifying the convoluted customs duty structure to pioneering regulatory sandboxes for cryptocurrencies, and from boosting the MSME sector through GST (Goods and Services Tax) reforms to fortifying our energy security, this agenda lays the foundation for a robust, resilient, and globally competitive India,” it said. It said that the current basic customs duty structure, which affects USD 680 billion worth of imports, has not been reviewed in 20 years, leading to over 27 different duty rates and over 100 specific or mixed duty slabs.

Currently, 85 per cent of customs duty revenue comes from less than 10 per cent of tariff lines (or product categories), while 60 per cent of tariff lines contribute less than 3 per cent of revenue.

“With some adjustments, the average import tariff could be reduced from 18.1 per cent to below 10 per cent without



impacting important products. “Simplification is necessary to avoid global criticism, as highlighted by former US President Donald Trump calling India the tariff king,” it said.

The think tank suggested increasing the GST exemption limit for a firm’s annual turnover from 40 lakh to 1.5 crore as this will be transformative for India’s MSME sector, promoting job creation and growth. Firms with less than Rs 1.5 crore turnover make up over 80 per cent of registrations but contribute less than 7 per cent of the tax collected, it said adding a yearly turnover of 1.5 crore equals 12-13 lakh monthly turnover, translating to just Rs 1.2 lakh at a 10 per cent profit margin.

“The new limit would reduce the GST system’s load from 1.4 crore taxpayers to less than 23 lakh, allowing for the

introduction of invoice-matching for 100 per cent compliance, eliminating fake invoices and tax theft. Increased tax collection will offset the 7 per cent tax loss,” GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

It also asked the government not to incentivize low value-added Electric vehicles (EVs). Due to restrictions from the US and EU on Chinese EVs, China is shifting its focus to Southeast Asian markets, including India.

“In few years, every third EV on Indian roads, as well as numerous passenger and commercial vehicles, could be made by Chinese firms, either independently or through joint ventures with Indian companies,” it said.

Since current EVs rely heavily on Chinese batteries and parts, accounting for 60-90 per cent of their cost, India should avoid incentivizing low value-

added EVs,” the GTRI said, adding It is crucial to balance increased EV adoption with the need to protect and develop the domestic auto industry.

Further, it suggested focusing on developing capacity to produce inputs and intermediates for both chemical and fermentation-based Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).

India imports 70 per cent of its APIs and over 80 per cent of its biosimilars from China, posing a significant risk to the industry and national security. It added that simplification of e-commerce export rules will help in boosting India’s exports.

India has more than 20 lakh firms that produce good quality products and services but less than a lakh of these export. “Simplifying RBI, banking, Customs, GST and DGFT rules related to e-com export will help them to start exporting Handicrafts, jewellery, ethnic wear, decorative paintings, Ayurveda and many more products,” Srivastava said.

He added that India relies on China for 30 per cent of its industrial product imports, with imports soaring tenfold in the past two decades. China is also the top import supplier in each of the major industrial product categories. “As Chinese firms expand their operations in Indian markets, imports are expected to rise further. This escalating dependence calls for a strategic approach to cut reliance on China,” he said.

# India’s consumer market represents long term structural opportunity: Chandrasekaran

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s consumer market represents a long-term structural opportunity, driven by population, a growing middle class, rapid urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes and raising aspirations, Tata Consumer Products Ltd Chairman N Chandrasekaran said on Thursday.

The Tata group’s FMCG arm is well positioned to capitalise on the significant opportunity, he said, while addressing the annual general meeting (AGM) of TCPL.

Chandrasekaran said the India economy has been growing “very strongly” and the current momentum continues to be high.

India is likely to maintain similar growth momentum in the coming years, he said, adding that the global economic landscape has been rather volatile with the geopolitics reshaping supply chains, energy security, and overall resilience. The baseline forecast for the world economy is to continue to grow over 3 per cent during 2024 and 2025.

However, “India has been growing very strongly with the economic growth rate of 8.2 per cent for the fiscal 2023-2044. Looking at the future, the momentum continues to be high and India should maintain similar growth momentum in the coming years,” said Chandrasekaran.

Notably, India’s consumer market represents a “long-term structural” opportunity, Chandrasekaran said and noted that this is driven by a



young population, a growing middle class, rapid urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes, and raising aspirations. Chandrasekaran also added that the Indian middle class is growing rapidly, which will create opportunities for the company.

“India’s middle class is expected to grow from about 30 per cent of the population to 50 per cent by the end of this decade. That is about an additional 300 million people who will be entering the middle class,” he said.

Apart from this, rapid urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes and ever increasing aspirations of consumers, all bode well for Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL), which is well positioned to capitalise on the significant opportunity.

Over the latest acquisition of Capital Foods and Organic India by TCPL, Chandrasekaran said, this is to expand the company’s addressable market into high-growth, high-margin segments.

“The company has scaled its distribution to reach 4 million retail outlets in India, which

represents a two-fold increase since 2020. The company has also focused on innovation and has replaced a 5x growth in innovation revenue since the fiscal year FY21,” he said. TCPL, new innovations contributes 5 per cent to sales distribution, which is in line with the best metrics in the industry.

“The company’s digital transformation agenda has been progressing well,” he said.

On Tata Starbucks, its 50:50 JV with Starbuck, he said it has opened 95 new stores in FY24, setting a record for the highest number of stores opened in a single year since inception. “The company’s international business has been progressing well,” he said.

In FY24, TCPL delivered revenue of Rs 15,206 crores, with a growth of 10 per cent. TCPL was formed in 2020, after merging the consumer products business of Tata Chemicals with Tata Global Beverages. It owns brands as — Tata Salt, Tata Tea, Tetley, Eight O’Clock Coffee, Good Earth Tea, and Tata Sampann. It also operates coffee chain Tata Starbucks.

# India’s May Palm oil imports jump 74 per cent on rising demand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s palm oil imports surged 74 per cent to 7,63,300 tonnes in May this year from 4,39,173 tonnes in the year-ago period, as the world’s largest vegetable oil buyer stocked up the commodity to meet rising domestic demand, industry body Solvent Extractors Association (SEA) said on Thursday.

The total vegetable oil imports rose to 15.29 lakh tonnes in May this year from 10.58 lakh tonnes in May 2023, it added.

Palm oil constitutes a major part of imports.

Crude palm oil (CPO) imports rose to 5,32,555 tonnes in May this year from 3,48,118 tonnes in the year-ago period, while RBD Palmolein imports surged to 2,25,746 tonnes from 85,205 tonnes. However, Crude Palm Kernel Oil (CPKO) imports fell to 4,999 tonnes from 5,850 tonnes a year earlier.

Sunflower oil imports climbed to 4,10,727 tonnes from 2,95,206 tonnes, and soybean oil rose to 3,24,016 tonnes from 3,18,887 tonnes. For the first seven months of the 2023-24 marketing year started on November 1, Palm oil imports fell to 49.77 lakh tonnes from 53.48 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period, while soybean oil imports were down at 85.67 lakh tonnes against 90.55 lakh tonnes in the said period.

# Market share of top five cement makers to rise to 55 per cent by March 2025: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Top five domestic cement manufacturers could expand their market share to up to 55 per cent by March 2025, through organic and inorganic expansions, leading to further consolidation, said a report from rating agency ICRA. Helped by a healthy demand prospect, large companies operating in the cement sector are looking to increase their capacity and maintain market share, it said. “ICRA estimates that the market share of the top five cement companies witnessed a steep rise to 54 per cent as of December 2023, from 45 per cent as of March 2015, and

expects it to further increase to 55 per cent by March 2025, resulting in consolidation in the cement industry,” it said.

While organic growth is expected to continue in the medium-term, cement companies are also preferring the inorganic route to boost capacities rapidly, leading to consolidation in the industry, it added.

“Except the ACC and Ambuja acquisitions by the Adani Group, other mergers and acquisitions (M&As) were largely owing to the cash flow-starved nature of the acquired entity or the group’s financial stress,” it said.

According to data from the Cement Manufacturers



Association, the country has installed a cement capacity of 541 Metric Tonnes (MT).

The Indian cement market is led by Aditya Birla group firm UltraTech Cement Ltd, which has a consolidated capacity of 152.7 Million Tonnes Per Annum (MTPA).

This is followed by Adani Group firm Adani Cement, which owns Ambuja Cement and its subsidiaries ACC Ltd, which has the capacity to produce 77.4 million tonnes of cement annually. Besides, there are other large players such as Dalmia Bharat, Shree Cements and J K Cement.

According to the report, bulk of the cement produced within a region is usually consumed

internally and the excess transported to adjacent regions. “The consolidation, taking place across India, is primarily led by the eastern and the western regions. The share of the top five cement companies in the eastern and the western regions is estimated to increase to 76-79 per cent in FY2025 from 54 per cent in FY2015,” it said.

While the southern region is highly fragmented with only 40 per cent share held by the top five cement players in FY2015.

“This may go up to 50 per cent by FY2025,” the report said, adding “the northern and central regions were highly consolidated in the past (65-75

per cent in FY2015) and are expected to remain in the range of 75-85 per cent by FY2025,” it said.

It further added that till March 31, 2024, 947 corporate insolvency cases across the sectors were resolved under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) with an average haircut of 68 per cent.

According to ICRA Vice President and Co-Group Head, Corporate Ratings Anupama Reddy said the credit profile of cement producers are likely to remain stable, driven by healthy growth in operating income, improvement in operating margins and comfortable leverage metrics.

# Fund launched to back net zero transition in emerging markets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Brookfield Asset Management (Brookfield) and ALTERRA Management on Thursday announced the setting up of a fund to support companies’ transition to a net-zero entity in emerging markets including India.

Brookfield has opened the fundraising for the Catalytic Transition Fund (CTF) with anchor commitment from ALTERRA, a joint statement said.

“With the urgent need to cut emissions and accelerate the climate transition, the Brookfield-managed CTF will harness a USD 1 billion commitment by ALTERRA funds (ALTERRA) to catalyze up to USD 5 billion in total capital for deployment into emerging markets,” the statement said.

South and Southeast Asia represent a key focus for CTF. The fund will target large and emerging markets like India, which have clear targets and policy directives supporting the transition to a net-zero economy, strong corporate demand for decarbonization, and areas where Brookfield can leverage its platform capabilities to source and execute opportunities.

investment partners. A first close for CTF is expected by the end of 2024. It said the developing economies outside China receive less than 15 per cent of global clean energy investment,

despite representing nearly one-third of global emissions and often yielding greater emissions reductions per dollar invested than in developed countries.

“The first fund in the Brookfield Global Transition Fund series (BGTF I) raised a record USD 15 billion in 2022. In February 2024, the second fund in the series (BGTF II) announced a first close of USD 10 billion and is on track to be larger than its predecessor. CTF’s first close is expected by the end of 2024,” the statement said.

Mark Carney, Chair and Head of Transition Investing at Brookfield Asset Management, said, “CTF is a private market solution to the global challenge of delivering transition investment to emerging markets. Brookfield is already a leading transition investor in these regions and has first-hand knowledge of the incredible opportunity and impact that is available in these chronically underfunded markets.”

Nawal Saini, Managing Director, Renewable Power & Transition, Brookfield Asset Management, said, “Emerging markets will require USD 1.6 trillion per annum to help achieve their Paris-aligned decarbonisation targets.

# Indian ship recyclers revenue seen rising 15 per cent this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian ship recycling industry will see revenue growth of 15 per cent this fiscal after two years of decline, Crisil ratings said on Thursday.

The rating agency said the growth will be supported by the increased availability of ageing vessels for recycling due to addition of new vessel capacity globally and higher competitiveness of Indian ship

recyclers compared to key rival nations — Bangladesh and Pakistan.

“The Indian ship recycling industry will see revenue growth of 15 per cent this fiscal after two years of decline — 22 per cent in fiscal 2024 and 8.5 per cent in fiscal 2023,” it said. According to the rating agency, the increased availability of ageing vessels will bring down input cost for ship recyclers.

“This, along with higher



capacity utilization leading to better efficiency, will improve operating profitability by 75 basis points (bps) to 6.5 per cent this fiscal,” it said.

Crisil ratings said higher cash generation and absence of capital expenditure (capex), along with healthy balance sheets, will keep credit profiles stable for Indian ship recyclers.

Indian ship recyclers are expected to grab a lion’s share of the increased volume of

condemned vessels, given their higher competitiveness leading to likely volume growth of around 20-23 per cent, it said.

Key competitors — Bangladesh and Pakistan, are facing a severe crisis of foreign currency availability and ship recyclers in these countries are hence taking longer to complete vessel purchases and thus owners of condemned vessels are likely to avoid these markets.

# Sensex, Nifty scale fresh peaks as inflation cools off

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hit their fresh record levels on Thursday after lower inflation numbers raised hopes of an interest rate cut by the RBI.

Besides, heavy buying in capital goods, consumer durable and industrial stocks also helped the indices, traders said.

Retail inflation continued its downward slide to reach a one-year low of 4.75 per cent in May due to a marginal decline of prices in the food basket and remained within the Reserve Bank’s comfort zone of below 6 per cent, according to government data released on Wednesday.

advanced, 1,539 declined, and 100 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty rallied 75.95 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 23,398.90. During the day, it climbed 158.1 points or 0.67 per cent to its record peak of 23,481.05.

“The domestic equity benchmark traded with a modest gain, with domestic CPI data indicating that inflation is on a slow track of decline. A similar trend is reported in the US CPI, which brought down the market expectation from 2 rate cuts in 2024 to 1, which is having a mixed effect on the global markets.

“In the domestic broader market, the realty and consumer durable sectors took the lead owing to government initiatives to revive the affordable housing segment,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Among the 30 Sensex

companies, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, Larsen & Toubro, IndusInd Bank, Tech Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services, Bajaj Finance and Nestle were the biggest gainers. On the other hand, Hindustan Unilever, Power Grid, Axis Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank and ITC were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.89 per cent, and midcap index rallied 0.79 per cent.

Among the indices, realty jumped 2.15 per cent, capital goods (2.05 per cent), industrials (1.67 per cent), IT (1.08 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.88 per cent).

In contrast, telecommunication, bankex and metal were the laggards. “European stocks gave up some gains Thursday after the US Fed struck a more hawkish tone on interest rates and lowered its interest rate cut projections to just one this year,” said Deepak Jasani.

# India exports first batch of super sweet pineapples to UAE

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In what could be called as a sweet and juicy milestone, India has made its debut in the premium pineapple market by exporting its first batch of high quality MD2 ‘Golden Ripe’ also known as ‘Super Sweet’ pineapples to the UAE, a sector traditionally dominated by Costa Rica, Thailand and the Philippines

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, facilitated the successful export of the first consignment of MD 2 variety pineapples to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The consignment, comprising 8.7 metric tons (650 boxes) of the MD 2 pineapples, was ceremoniously flagged off by Chairman, APEDA, Abhishek Dev, in the presence of senior officials from APEDA and the Indian Council of



Agricultural Research - Central Coastal Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR CCARI).

“This marks a pivotal moment in India’s agricultural export history, showcasing our ability to produce and supply premium quality pineapples to global markets,” said Abhishek Dev. “The MD 2 variety is renowned for its exceptional sweetness and quality, and we are thrilled to introduce it to the UAE market,” he said.

The MD2 or Dinar pineapple is developed through hybridization by Del Monte scientists in Costa Rica and holds great popularity in the international market. Its superiority in terms of color,

flavor, shape, lifespan, and ripeness set it apart from other varieties.

As a result, it has become the gold standard in the pineapple industry, with significant cultivation in countries like Costa Rica, the Philippines, and Thailand.

An official said that ICAR CCARI provided essential technical support for post-harvest management and development of sea protocol for the MD 2 pineapple produced in the Sindhudurg district of the Konkan region in Maharashtra. A private firm successfully grew this variety on 200 acres in partnership with local farmers, ensuring optimal quality and yield.

The harvested pineapples were meticulously graded, sorted, packed, and stored in Panvel, Navi Mumbai. From there, the consignment was transported to Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) for its onward journey to the UAE.



# Quota belongs to country, not to athlete: Bindra backs NRAI's team selection for Olympics

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Olympics gold winner Abhinav Bindra on Thursday said promising shooter Rudranksh Patil was unfortunate to miss the flight to Paris Games, but emphasised that the quota belongs to the country and not to one athlete. Patil, who had bagged a 10m air rifle quota for the Paris Olympics, could not find a place in the 15-member Indian squad for the quadrennial extravaganza after finishing behind Sandeep Singh and Arjun Babuta in the selection trials organised by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI). As per the Olympic guidelines, a country can only send top two shooters in one event from trials to the Games. "See, it's not a call. It's a matter of selection. There's a due process laid out and they followed the process," Bindra

told the media here on the sidelines of the IISM Convocation Ceremony 2024. "You'll ask the same question in case the process was not followed. But a fair process was put out for everybody, and it was followed," Bindra added. Bindra further explained his point. "Well, that is the process laid down for the country. Many countries follow that process. It's not just that India is following that process. The quota doesn't belong to an athlete per se. It belongs to the country and a process was put out well in advance," he said. Bindra backed the method which NRAI followed and said a clear system should be followed. "I think credit the Federation for following the process. I think, as athletes, what do we need? We need a clear system. We need a clear process and we need that clear system and policies followed," he said. "That is what has been done, which I think is fair. You know,

when you (an athlete) make (it to the Olympics), when (another) athlete doesn't make it, there will be a few who will be disappointed. It is natural. It is fair. It is a normal thing," he added. Bindra said he was not aware if Patil had reached out to the Federation. The 2022 Asian Games gold medallist has written to NRAI to take his past performances into consideration for selection. "I am not aware of all of this. I just saw a press release of the team being announced so I have no idea of who he's in talks with," he said. "Of course, I feel bad for Rudranksh, who is a good athlete and who's been doing consistently well. But he's young and I'm sure that there will be many more opportunities for him in the future," Bindra said. Bindra admitted that hopes will be high on the Indian shooting contingent in Paris after having notched up seven medals - India's best-ever tally



- at the Tokyo Olympics. "I think (it is) the largest ever (medal haul) in history and I think I'm very positive that we'll do well. Of course, I know

very well what your next question is going to be, which is we didn't do too well in Tokyo, but I'm positive of a good performance by our

athletes," he said. "There are so many athletes who have qualified with strong performances. They've undergone a rigorous domestic

selection process as well this time. So, I'm quite hopeful and positive that we'll come back with some good results in Paris," he noted. "We won seven (medals) in Tokyo without shooting, firing at all. So, if we come close, or if we, it is realistic to expect close to 10, which will put us in double digits so I'm hopeful of that," he continued. Bindra, however, did not pick any favourite to bring a medal. "I don't want to discuss any particular athlete. But I think all of them who have made the team have the potential to go and do well," he said. "Of course, Manu (Bhaker) has done well. She's experienced. She has experience of competing in Tokyo, and now I think she's competing in three odd events in Paris so I wish her well. "I wish her all the best and hope for good results from her, but also from the rest," he said. Bindra did not read too much into theories like facing mental

blocks on a big occasion. "Well, the event has not happened, so where is the mental block? Let's give them a chance at least," he said. The first Indian to have won an individual Olympics gold medal, Bindra offered a word of advice for star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, a gold winner from Tokyo. "It's important and all athletes know, and Neeraj would know for sure, in sport yesterday never counts - you're only as good as what you're on the present day," he said. "The only advice to him would be to focus on his process, to remain in the present and to keep all distractions at bay because obviously with the profile that he enjoys, there will be a lot of eyeballs on him," Bindra said. "There will be a lot of expectations on him. But I think it is for him to put that aside and remain focused on doing what he does so well," said Bindra, adding that he would be travelling to Paris.



## UEFA promises more clarity for fans and players on refereeing decisions at Euro 2024

AP ■ MUNICH

Clarity for players and spectators and zero tolerance for serious foul play and dissent - that's what referees have been tasked with at the European Championship. UEFA had already announced last month that it would do more to explain decisions to teams, requiring in turn that only captains can approach the referees to discuss them. And that was emphasized on Wednesday at a media briefing on refereeing guidelines for Euro 2024 that took place at Munich's Allianz Arena, two days before host nation Germany kicks off the tournament in the same venue against Scotland. "Only the captain will approach the referee, the other players they have to think about (playing). That's it, finish," UEFA managing director for refereeing Roberto Rosetti said. UEFA has promised that the referees will attempt to give the captains an explanation of key incidents during the match, including what was discussed with VAR. Any teammate ignoring his captain's role and approaching the referee showing any sign of disrespect or dissent will receive a yellow card. Fans, meanwhile, will also get a better understanding of VAR decisions as they will be

broadcast on the giant screens in stadiums. "This is something new. I think it's very, very, very interesting," Rosetti said. "So we want to give, after the opinion of VAR, a technical explanation for the public. In live, simultaneously, the UEFA expert will prepare the explanation, a technical explanation about what happened in the specific situation. "For example, on-field review, the referee awards a penalty for handball... technical explanation: Germany number nine touch the ball with his left arm which was in an unnatural position above the shoulder and making his body bigger." Rosetti has met with all the teams participating at Euro 2024 and their coaches to present the refereeing guidelines for the tournament, including hammering home that any dangerous tackles will be severely punished. "One of the most important priority in refereeing guidelines is to protect the players," Rosetti said. "To protect the image of the game, but in particular to protect the safety of the main actors of the games. "We showed them a couple of clips that we are asking to the referees to be very strong in these kind of situations," he added. "So for such situations we asked to the referees to be zero tolerant because this is something that we cannot accept.

# Generational talent Kennedy Blades, 20, seeks Olympic gold in women wrestling

AP ■ OKLAHOMA CITY (USA)

Kennedy Blades initially struggled to fully appreciate her biggest moment on the mat. Her mind already was on Olympic gold. Blades, just 20 years old, defeated six-time world champion and Tokyo Olympics silver medalist Adeline Gray at the U.S. Olympic Wrestling Trials in April to qualify for the Paris Games in the 76-kilogram class. Blades barely cracked a smile, already thinking ahead to possibly becoming the third American woman to win an Olympic wrestling gold. "I felt there's something more that I wanted," she said. "And I think I've just manipulated my mind to going for gold, bringing home a gold medal from the Olympics. So that (beating Gray) was just the first step." Women's wrestling made it's Olympic debut in 2004, but the U.S. Didn't earn its first gold until Helen Maroulis won at 53 kg in 2016. Tamyra Mensah-Stock followed by winning 68 kg at Tokyo 2020. Blades, who dominates at nearly 6-feet tall in a sport that often favors stockier athletes, could be the next great star for a country where girls

wrestling is the fastest-growing high school sport. Blades solidified herself as a Paris favorite with the win over Gray, and U.S. Women's coach Terry Steiner believes she has the ability and the confidence to win it all. "We have a generational talent that we just don't see very often," Steiner said. "But it's one thing having that talent and another thing being ready for the stage that she's on. She's just shown us the past few years that she's ready to be on that stage." Blades has been a standout for years. In 2016, the Chicago native became the first Illinois girl to win an Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation championship against boys. She lost to Mensah-Stock in the finals of the Tokyo Olympic Trials in 2021 as a 17-year-old, then won a junior world championship later that year. She said Mensah-Stock overpowered her at the trials, but it was a learning experience that helped set her course for Paris. "It made me feel really good because I was right there," she said. "I did get some shots on her, so my technique and everything's right there, I think I just needed to mature a little bit.



These last three years, I've been focusing on just maturing, wrestling smart, not letting the girls get in my head." As Blades has matured, she has learned how to use her exceptional quickness and reach. Her height

makes her difficult to prepare for. Blades said she can surprise opponents with holds in positions where her opponents normally think they're safe. Blades, who is Afro-Latina, said she was happy when Mensah-Stock

became the first Black woman to win a wrestling gold medal. Blades said she is proud to represent several groups, including women and young people - but she wants to inspire all. She noted the importance of representation while telling the story of a young girl who noticed they looked alike and had the same kind of hair. The girl said she wants to be just like Blades and looks forward to watching her in Paris. "It gave me butterflies," Blades said. Steiner said another young person, Amit Elor, has helped Blades reach this point. Elor, the U.S. Olympic qualifier at 68 kg, won world titles in 2022 and 2023. Like Blades, Elor is just 20 years old. Blades said her younger sister, Korina, has also helped her prepare. Korina is 10 months younger and was an under-15 world champion in 2019 and a junior world bronze medalist in 2021. Injuries kept her out of the Olympic trials. "It's always nice because having each other, we kind of make each other a better version by competing," Kennedy Blades said. "But we compete in the best way as far as just to help each other grow.

# Prannoy, Sameer Verma enter Australian Open quarters

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Indian shuttlers HS Prannoy and Sameer Verma progressed to the men's singles quarterfinals of the Australian Open with contrasting victories over their respective opponents here on Thursday. While fifth seed Prannoy, a former world No.1, took just 46 minutes to get the better of Misha Zilberman of Israel 21-17 21-15 in the round of 16, Verma had to toil hard for one hour two minutes to upset eighth seed Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 21-14 14-21 21-19. Prannoy will be up against second seed Kodai Naraoka of Japan in the next round, while Verma will take on Chinese Taipei's Chun-Yi Lin on Friday.



However, it was curtains for Kiran George in the men's singles event as he lost 20-22 6-21 against seventh seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan. Among the Indian women shuttlers, eighth seed Aakarshi Kashyap beat Australia's Kai Qi Bernice Teoh 21-16 21-13 to progress to the quarterfinals, where she will be playing third

seed Yu Po Pai of Chinese Taipei. But the tournament ended for Anupama Upadhyaya and Malvika Bansod in the women's singles second round. While Anupama lost 11-21 18-21 against sixth seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia, Malvika was shown the door by another Indonesian, eight

seed Ester Nurumi Tri Wardoyo 17-21 21-23. It was also the end of the road for Panda sisters, Rutaparna and Swetaparna, in the women's doubles. The seventh seeded India pair were shocked 5-21 9-21 by Malaysian combination of Pei Jing Lai and Chiew Sien Lim. The mixed doubles pair of B Sumeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, however, continued to march ahead as the eighth seeded Indian duo defeated Australia's Kai Chen Teoh and Kai Qi Bernice Teoh 21-11 21-11 to enter the last-eight. But a tough contest awaits the mixed doubles duo in the quarterfinals. They will be up against top seeds Zhen Bang Jiang and Ya Xin Wei of China.



## Diksha to lead strong Indian challenge in Italian Open golf

PTI ■ ROME

Experienced Diksha Dagar will look to leave behind a rare missed cut, when she leads a strong five-member Indian contingent at the 2024 Ladies Italian Open starting here tomorrow. Diksha will return to action here, after a rare missed cut last week. The Indian star, who is headed to the Olympic Games in Paris, is just outside the Top-10 on the Ladies Order of Merit, where she was third last year. Diksha is one of the five Indians in the field this week, with rookie Pranavi Urs, experienced Tvesa Malik, Vani Kapoor and Ridhima Dilawari also teeing up at the Golf Nazionale, which is hosting the event for the first time. Diksha had nine Top-10s last year including a win in the Czech Ladies Open and a third place finish at the Hero Women's Indian Open. This year she has had two Top-10 finishes, including a third place at Joburg Open. She will tee off in the afternoon session, as will Tvesa, who this

year achieved her first international win on the Sunshine Tour in South Africa, and had her first Top-10 on the LET since 2021. In 2021, Tvesa had five tops, including T-10 at the Italian Open. Also teeing off in the afternoon will be Ridhima, while Pranavi and Vani will play in the morning session. While Diksha is currently 11th on the LET Order of Merit, Pranavi, with three Top-10s this season, is 13th. Her best came in her last start, the Dormy Open in Helsingborg, where finished tied third, after being in lead for a while. Among the locals looking for a win will be Alessandra Fanali, 24, who is hoping to become the first Italian player to lift the famous trophy. She finished runner-up as an amateur last time when she was just out of college. Now she is the highest ranked Italian women's player. This year she was runner-up in the season-opening Magical Kenya Ladies Open before finishing T-14 in the Aramco Saudi Ladies International. She had a back injury after that, but is now ready to go.

# Lionel Messi says Inter Miami will be my last club

AP ■ ATLANTA (USA)

Lionel Messi says Inter Miami will be "my last club." The 36-year-old World Cup champion isn't thinking about joining an Argentine club to write the last chapter of playing career. "I think Inter Miami is going to be my last club. Today I think it is going to be my last club," the Argentina captain said in an interview with ESPN. Messi is preparing with his national team to compete in the Copa America in the United States. Argentina is the defending champion. The former Barcelona star has nothing left to prove in the game and filled the only significant unchecked box on his resume by leading Argentina to the World Cup title in Qatar in 2022. He has won a record eight Ballon d'Or awards and left European football last year to



join the MLS club. Messi's contract with Inter Miami is set to expire at the end of the 2025 season. "It was a difficult step to leave Europe to come here," he said. "Having become a world champion helped a lot, and also to see things differently. But I don't think about it. I try

to enjoy. That's why I enjoy everything much more, because I am aware that there is less and less to go and I have a good time." Many Argentine fans hoped Messi would close his career with Newell's Old Boys, the club where he began his training as a child in his native city of Rosario. The star said he's trying to enjoy the final stretch of his career to the fullest. "I have a good time at the club, I am lucky enough to have teammates and friends (Luis Suárez, Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba, all former Barcelona players) by my side," he said. "I had a good time in the national team, where I have teammates and friends too. "I enjoy the little details that I know that when I don't play anymore, I'm going to miss," he added. "My whole life I did this. I love playing ball and I enjoy training, day-to-day life and match days.

## New Sports Minister Mandaviya meets IOA chief Usha; takes stock of Olympic preparations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Newly-appointed Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday took stock of India's Olympic preparations during a meeting with IOA President P T Usha here. Mandaviya took charge of the ministry on Tuesday after the new NDA government, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was sworn to office on June 9. Mandaviya replaced Anurag Thakur in the position. During the over one hour long meeting, which was also attended by new Minister of State for Sports, Raksha Khadse, Sports Secretary Sujata Chaturvedi, and Sports Authority of India Director General Sandip Pradhan among others, Mandaviya was briefed about country's preparations for Paris Games. "I today visited the IOA officials for the first time where they briefed me about India's



preparation for Paris Olympics. The government is committed to extend all possible support," Mandaviya said in a brief address to the media. Usha said the interaction with the minister went well but did not divulge the details. "The Sports Minister today visited IOA along with the Minister of State for Sports and I am so happy that they wanted to know about IOA and about Paris preparations. "We have done everything good this time and I have briefed him. We will be in contact every week and I hope that this is good for our Olympic athletes," she said.

Usha hoped, that like the Tokyo Games, India's contingent would be in excess of 100 even this time. "We have done everything for sportspersons. Whatever the players have wanted, we have done this time. So we are expecting more medals than Tokyo. I don't want to put any number and give tension to the players. "Already, 97 athletes have qualified and we are expecting around 115 to 120 athletes in all to represent India in Paris Olympics," the legendary athlete added. The Paris Olympics will be held from July 26 to August 11 this year.



# All round Afghans eye win over PNG, Super 8 entry

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Afghanistan will eye another all-round effort to crush an inexperienced Papua New Guinea here and enter the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup, and the result will have another underlying effect -- knock out New Zealand.

The win will carry Rashid Khan's side to Super Eight from Group 'C' alongside the West Indies, who have qualified on Thursday with a win over New Zealand.

It will also mean curtains for the 2021 finalists New Zealand who have lost two out of two.

That Rahamanullah Gurbaz (156 runs) and Fazalhaq Farooqi (9 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.

Apart from Gurbaz, the experienced Ibrahim Zadran too has contributed well to Afghanistan's totals, making 114 runs with a highest of 70.

In bowling, pacer Farooqi has made a fine combination with Rashid, who has so far taken six

wickets from two matches. It has ensured that Afghanistan's opponents do not have any let-up either upfront or in the middle passage. The PNG might be a spirited side, but it looks way beyond their abilities to overcome a formidable Afghanistan.

#### TEAMS (FROM)

**Afghanistan:** Rashid Khan (c), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Azmatullah Omarzai, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Ishaq, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Nangyal Kharoti, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad Malik.

**Papua New Guinea:** Assadollah Vala (c), Alei Nao, Chad Soper, CJ Amini, Hila Vare, Hiri Hiri, Jack Gardner, John Kariko, Kabua Vagi Morea, Kipling Doriga, Lega Siaka, Norman Vanua, Sema Kamea, Sese Bau, Tony Ura.

**Match starts at 6AM IST (Friday).**

**PAK WORRY OVER USA-IRELAND CLASH:** In a strange scenario, a non-playing Pakistan will be more keen on the result of USA and Ireland Group A match at



Lauderhill, Florida on Friday.

A win for USA, currently second in this group with four points, will put an end to the World Cup campaign of Pakistan, who have two points from three matches.

Of course, it will also take the co-hosts into the Super Eight from this group along with India. Ireland are a competitive side with experienced players in their ranks, but they look woefully out of sync

here and the task might be heavier against the US, who are playing some very good T20 cricket at the moment. They will be keeping an eye on the fitness of skipper Monank Patel,

who missed the match against India on Wednesday with a left-shoulder injury.

Aaron Jones did the duty of skipper against Rohit Sharma's men in New York.

There is also a strong rain threat to the match as per weather predictions, and even a washout can end the campaign of Pakistan. It will take the USA to five points and beyond the reach of Pakistan, who can now log a maximum of four points.

#### TEAMS (FROM)

**Ireland:** Paul Stirling (c), Mark Adair, Ross Adair, Andrew Balbirnie, Curtis Campher, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Graham Hume, Josh Little, Barry McCarthy, Neil Rock, Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker, Ben White, Craig Young.

**USA:** Monank Patel (c), Aaron Jones, Andries Gous, Corey Anderson, Ali Khan, Harmeet Singh, Jessy Singh, Milind Kumar, Nisarg Patel, Nitish Kumar, Noshtush Kenjige, Saurabh Nethralvakar, Shadley Van Schalkwyk, Steven Taylor, Shayan Jahangir. Reserve Players: Gajanand Singh, Juanoy Drysdale,

Yasir Mohammad.

**Match starts at 8 PM IST (Friday).**

**ENGLAND FACE OMAN:** England will look to resuscitate their fast-sinking title defence with a win over inexperienced but capable Oman in their T20 World Cup Group B match.

The situation is so grim that England need to win both their remaining matches by a good margin to equal Scotland on five points, and also hope that the latter lose badly against the Antipodeans.

#### TEAMS (FROM)

**England:** Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood.

**Oman:** Aqib Ilyas (c), Zeeshan Maqsood, Kashyap Prajapati, Pratik Athavale, Ayaan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Naseem Khushi, Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan, Rafiullah, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shakeel Ahmad, Khalid Kail. Reserves: Jatinder Singh, Samay Shrivastava, Sufyan Mehmood, Jay Odedra.

## Rampaging Rutherford powers West Indies into T20 World Cup Super 8

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Sherfane Rutherford smashed a career-best unbeaten half-century before pacer Alzarri Joseph and left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie ripped through the New Zealand line-up to steer West Indies into the T20 World Cup's Super Eight stage with a 13-run win here.

Rutherford came up with the innings of his life, smashing half a dozen sixes and two fours for his 39-ball 68 to lift West Indies to 149 for 9 from 76 for 7 in 12.3 overs after New Zealand opted to bowl in a virtual knock-out Group C fixture.

In reply, West Indies restricted the Kiwis to 136 for 9 with Rutherford's fellow Guyanese Motie returning with splendid figures of 3/25. Joseph turned up the heat lower down the order to become the wrecker-in-chief with his 4/19.

With three wins in a row, the tournament co-hosts qualified for the Super Eight stage, while New Zealand's hopes were all

but over following back to back losses.

They had earlier lost to Afghanistan by 84 runs after being shot out for 75. The 2021 runners-up, among the most consistent sides in World Cups, have been found wanting this time.

They made the semi-final in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 editions of the ODI World Cup, and in 2016, 2021 and 2022, the Black Caps ensured a last-four appearance in the T20 World Cups.

It was half past midnight in Trinidad but the locals erupted in joy to celebrate their team's Super Eight qualification, erasing the disappointment of successive setbacks in the big event.

The two-time former champions were eliminated in the Super-12 stage of the competition in UAE in 2021, while in 2022 in Australia, they failed to make the tournament proper and exited in the group stage.

"It was fantastic. I was sitting there with Nicholas (Pooran)



and it was such a beautiful night for someone to stand up and be counted," skipper Rovman Powell said. "That (Rutherford) innings gave us confidence and belief. We watched what they did well and tried to replicate it." "It is one tick in the box, but it is only the start of something big to come. Hopefully we can continue the momentum," said Rutherford on making Super Eight. Willilamson rung in three

changes to the lineup beaten convincingly by Afghanistan and the intent was clear when Trent Boult dismissed Johnson Charles (0) in the first over, forcing the opener to chop on to his stumps. The Kiwi left-arm pacer ended up with splendid figures of 4-1-16-3. Nicholas Pooran rode some luck for three quick boundaries, becoming the West Indies' highest T20I run-getter, moving past Chris

Gayle.

But New Zealand took ascendancy, forcing Pooran (17) and then Roston Chase (0) to both top edge straight to catchers in successive overs

The wicket of captain Rovman Powell capped off a dominant powerplay for the Kiwis -- 23/4 at the six-over mark -- with pacer Tim Southee (2/21) picking up two of the scalps. There was more misery in store as opener Brandon King was dismissed by James Neesham (1/27) and half of the West Indies side was back in the dugout by the seventh over.

But Rutherford had other ideas and played one of the best innings of his career. The 25-year-old Guyanese all-rounder hung around before turning up the heat in the final five overs, blasting five fours and two sixes. Rutherford brought up his 50 off the final ball of the 19th over and pounded 18 runs of it in all, leaving Mitchell Santner perplexed. Rutherford scored all 37 runs

in the closing partnership with Motie which became a new 10th wicket record in the ICC T20 World Cup history.

In reply, New Zealand got off to a poor start and lost both their openers -- Devon Conway (5) and Finn Allen (26) -- in the powerplay. Thereafter left-arm spinner Motie foxed the Kiwi batters finishing with a match-turning spell of 4-0-25-3 before Joseph turned on the heat with his four-wicket haul. Motie dismissed Rachin Ravindra after he ended up flicking straight to Russell at deep mid-wicket.

He bowled shorter and induced a faint edge from Williamson, who looked to cut it away. The ball went straight into the hands of Pooran. Glenn Phillips kept the Kiwi hopes alive with his 33-ball 40 before being dismissed by Joseph. New Zealand needed 33 runs from the last over and Mitchell Santner smashed three sixes off the first four balls but eventually fell short.



## It was special: Netravalkar on catching up with Surya, Rohit after more than 10 years

PTI ■ NEW YORK

He tormented them as long as the match was on but once the game was done and dusted, India-born American medium pacer Saurabh Netravalkar had a happy reunion with his former Mumbai teammates Rohit Sharma and Suryakumar Yadav. The software engineer has been nothing short of sensational in the ongoing T20 World Cup and was in his elements on Wednesday too, dismissing both Rohit and Virat Kohli in the group stage match of the T20 World Cup here. But India won by seven wickets in a chase of 111 riding on Suryakumar's unbeaten half century to enter the Super Eight stage.

Netravalkar has been close to Suryakumar as the two played together for Mumbai. He was seen having a long chat with the swashbuckler and India captain Rohit after the match.

"I met them after more than a decade. It was special. We were remembering old times because we played since childhood in U-15, U-17. It felt like we carried on from where we left off. Jokes from those times, casual conversations, and dressing room banter," Netravalkar, who returned with brilliant figures of 2/18 on Wednesday night, revealed in a media interaction after the game.

"I did talk to Rohit Sharma. I was my senior in Mumbai. I've played with him there. I haven't played much with Virat, but he acknowledged our efforts after the game. It's good that they see potential in this team," he said. The 32-year-old Oracle employee, who also happens to be a competent Ukelele player and a decent singer, represented India in the 2010 Under-19 World Cup before moving to the US on a scholarship to pursue higher studies in the prestigious Cornell University. His cricketing journey restarted once here and he is now a key player for the US team, which is an amalgamation of talent primarily from India, Pakistan and the West Indies.

At the ongoing World Cup, Netravalkar is quite literally living a dream. From scripting an incredible Super Over win over Pakistan to dismissing Virat Kohli for a golden duck, the late bloomer said he is still trying to process everything. "I'm still digesting what is happening right now. The last two games have been very high-profile. I'm glad we have done well as a unit. Always happy being myself, irrespective of the situation," said the soft-spoken player, whose family is based in Mumbai.

"It was about being clear with our plans and executing our processes rather than thinking about who we are facing and what the result would be. I'm glad that first spell worked for me," he added about his effort last night.

There was also assistance from the two-paced drop-in pitch and Netravalkar said it all boiled down to hitting the right areas. "The pitch plays a crucial role. Bowlers didn't have to do much, just hit the top of the stumps and let the pitch create the variation rather than us doing it. Credit to the coaching staff for giving us this clarity," he said.

Asked how he effected Kohli's dismissal, Netravalkar said: "That's my stock ball. I don't want to give too much away. The first ball, I tried to hit the top of off-stump, as simple as that. I didn't try to do anything special or get a wicket. It was a good ball and seemed nicely."

He loves cricket but at the same time, he also enjoys his job and would never give up on it. "I love my job at Oracle, and I enjoy entering the field and bowling every ball. I'm blessed that I get to do what I love the most. That's how it works."

Asked about his journey, he said it's hard to describe it in a few sentences. "It's been a journey of almost a decade with ups and downs. I had to take a practical call when I wasn't making it big in India due to the strong competition there," he recalled.



## Nassau Stadium, home to tense T20 World Cup matches, set for demolition

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The makeshift Nassau County cricket ground, which was built specifically for the T20 World Cup, is all set to be demolished after the New York leg of the event came to an end with India's seven-wicket victory over co-hosts USA here.

Built in just over 100 days, the stadium became notorious for its challenging drop-in pitches, which were sourced from Adelaide. The massive structure sat on the edge of the 930-acre Eisenhower Park in Long Island here.

The stadium had 10 drop-in pitches, four for the main ground and six for the adjacent training facility in Cantiague Park. "After the last match is held at East Meadow on June 12, the stadium will be dismantled, the parts shipped back to Las Vegas and another golf event, and Eisenhower Park will return to normal, but with a world-class cricket pitch left behind," a New York Times

report had stated a few days ago. The stadium that "almost popped up overnight" will be dismantled over a period of six weeks. It had a capacity of 34,000 and hosted a housefull crowd during India's marquee clash against Pakistan on June 9 with some tickets sold at an astronomical price of USD 2500 to USD 10,000. India played four matches at the venue, including a warm-up game against Bangladesh after the ground was thrown open on June 1. The drop-in pitches hosted eight matches and produced unpredictable and occasionally dangerous bounce, resulting in particularly low scores in the first two matches where no team crossed 100 runs.

In India's match against Ireland, who were bowled out for 96, Rishabh Pant and Rohit Sharma also copped body blows. It led to widespread criticism and prompted the International Cricket Council to issue a statement

acknowledging that the "pitches have not played consistently". The highest successful chase at the venue was only 111 runs by India in their win over USA on Wednesday. Canada's 137/7 against Ireland was the highest total recorded, while India successfully defended a low total of 119 against Pakistan.

In a nail-biting match, South Africa barely chased down 103 runs against the Netherlands losing six wickets in the process, and later defended 113 runs against Bangladesh, winning by a narrow margin of four runs.

The venue was finalised by the ICC in 2023 and was built in just 106 days.

"The playing field, with the rectangular pitch in the middle, was fashioned from special grass grown in Florida. The grandstands are borrowed materials most recently used at Las Vegas's Formula 1 race and professional golf events," the NYT report added.

## Kuldeep Yadav will be India's preferred spinner in Super 8 stage: Piyush Chawla

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former cricketer Piyush Chawla feels that wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav will be India's preferred specialist spinners when the Indian team competes in the Super Eight stage of the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean.

India won all three matches in tough batting conditions at the Nassau County Stadium in New York against Ireland, Pakistan and USA and will now take on Canada in their last Group stage match at Lauderhill, Florida before the Super Eight stage. Chawla said while the conditions in New York did not support spin bowling, the Indian spinners will now come into play in the tournament. India have four spin bowling options in Kuldeep, Yuzvendra Chahal, Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja.



"The pitch in New York was very dicey and the way India performed on that pitch and won three out of three games, so there are very good chances going forward," Chawla told media on the sidelines of IISM Convocation Ceremony here on Thursday. "The spinners were not needed as much in New York but once you enter the second leg for the Super Eight, the spinners have had a big role in the West Indies. Our spinners will come into play now," he added. Chawla picked Kuldeep as his

first choice even though Chahal finished the Indian Premier League (IPL) as one of the most successful bowlers.

"To be very honest only one will play, and I think Kuldeep will be the first preference because of what he has done in the last one and a half years. You have Axar and Jadeja who can give you the batting depth so I feel Kuldeep will get the nod," he said. Chawla said the 'tricky' pitch in New York brought the best out of 'good teams' such as India. "It was tricky, no doubt, but good teams have done well. Like India defended 120 runs against Pakistan," he said. "When they had made just 119 I do not think many people would have given them the chance but the way the Indian bowling unit bowled, especially Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik, that was really a treat to watch," he added.

## Kumble wants Arshdeep in side if India opt for two seamers in Caribbean

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Spin legend Anil Kumble feels going by current form, Mohammed Siraj should make way for left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh if India decides to play just two specialist fast bowlers in the West Indies-leg of the ongoing T20 World Cup. Arshdeep was lethal in India's seven-wicket win over USA, snaring four wickets for just nine runs in New York on Wednesday. Jasprit Bumrah is India's preferred choice and Kumble

has no doubt that Arshdeep should combine with him along side all-rounder Hardik Pandya. It will help India field an extra spinner on the slow Caribbean pitches. "I think the way he (Arshdeep) bowled that last over against Pakistan, and also the way he can bowl in different areas in the T20 game, I think certainly puts him ahead of Mohamed Siraj," the former India coach told ESPNcricinfo. "If at all India takes that option of going with just the two seamers and Hardik Pandya. So yes, in that sense, plus he

also gives you an extra variety with his left-arm pace. So overall, he must be happy." Arshdeep has done well for India in the three T20 World Cup matches so far, picking up seven wickets at an economy of 6.225 and strike rate of 10.28. In comparison, Siraj has managed just one wicket from three games at a strike rate of 66. India will play Canada in their final Group A match at Lauderhill, Florida on Saturday before departing for the Caribbean.

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