

THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON FRIDAY 5 JULY 2024



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Radical preacher Amritpal can meet family but won't be allowed to leave Delhi



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Pankaj Tripathi: I evaluate my work often and try to find out what went wrong

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A wax statue of singer Beyoncé unveiled at the Grévin Museum in Paris on Thursday. — AFP

AP CM Naidu meets Modi, seeks financial assistance for state

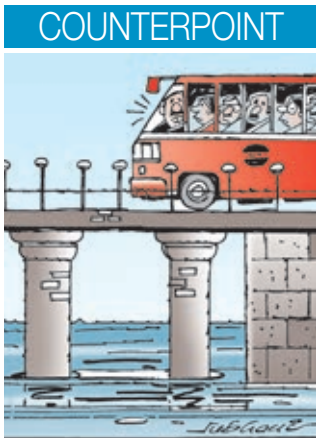
New Delhi: Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the national capital on Thursday and described their discussions on key development issues concerning the state as “constructive”. During the meeting, Mr Naidu advocated for increased assistance to Andhra Pradesh in lieu of special category status. The chief of TDP, which is an important ally in the BJP-led NDA government, presented several crucial proposals for the state’s development and sought the Union government support, sources said. Following the meeting, he expressed confidence in Andhra Pradesh’s potential to “re-emerge as a powerhouse among states” under PM Modi’s leadership. **Full report on Page 3**

5 Maoists killed in Bastar had bounty of ₹40L: Cops

Raipur: Five Maoists, slain on July 2 in an encounter with the security forces in Bastar, have been identified as members of the central committee (CC) protection team. They carried a total bounty of ₹40 lakh, the police said on Thursday. **Full report on Page 4**

L.K. Advani admitted to Apollo, then discharged

New Delhi: BJP veteran and former deputy PM Lal Krishna Advani was discharged from the Apollo Hospital here on Thursday evening, sources said. The 96-year-old was admitted to the hospital on Wednesday, days after being discharged from the AIIMS following a night-long stay there.



Please wear a life jacket and pray to God that we cross the river by bridge!



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■ On BRI: ‘Respect national sovereignty in connectivity projects’ PM targets Pak, China at SCO: ‘Respond decisively to terror’

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

In thinly-veiled attacks on both Pakistan for its terror record and China on the connectivity front, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday informed the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit that cross-border terrorism needs a “decisive response”, while national sovereignty should be respected in connectivity projects. Mr Modi’s comments were delivered by external affairs minister S. Jaishankar who was present in Astana, Kazakhstan, where the summit was held on Thursday and led the Indian side there. While the SCO summit was attended by several heads of state, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, Mr Modi did not attend in the physical format. The SCO now has nine members — Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, along with four Central Asian nations — Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and the



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar with Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi during a meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, on Thursday. — PTI

▶ **THE PM’s comments** are being seen as criticism of Pakistan in the wake of the recent Poonch, Reasi attacks in J&K that were believed to have been carried out by Pakistani terrorists

Kyrgyz Republic. Belarus is also joining the grouping as its 10th member. Mr Modi’s comments are being seen as criticism of Pakistan in the wake of the recent Poonch and Reasi attacks in J&K that were believed to have been carried out by Pakistani terrorists who

infiltrated from across the Line of Control. The comments on connectivity are being seen as a criticism of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a Chinese-led global connectivity project that India has refused to join since the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the BRI, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, which India regards as its territory that was illegally occupied by Pakistan in 1947-48.

In his remarks, Mr Modi

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Modi to visit Russia and Austria from July 8 to 10

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agcy inputs
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a visit to Russia from July 8 to 9 to hold the 22nd India-Russia annual summit that will review the entire range of multifaceted ties between the two countries, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) announced on Thursday. After concluding the trip to Russia, the PM will be in Austria on July 9 and 10, which will be the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to that country in 41 years, it said. It will be Mr Modi’s first visit to Russia in nearly five years. His last visit to Russia was in 2019 when he attended an economic conclave in the Far East city of Vladivostok.

The annual summit between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia is the highest institutional dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between the two countries.

So far, 21 annual summits have taken place alternately in India and Russia. The last summit was held on December 6, 2021 in New Delhi. President Vladimir Putin had visited India to attend the summit.

The summit saw both sides sealing 28 MoUs and agreements besides coming out with a joint statement titled “India-Russia Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity”.

India showers its love on Team Rohit



Team India acknowledged fans during their open bus victory parade in Mumbai on Thursday. The parade commenced after a two-hour delay as complete crowd chaos along the stretch of South Mumbai brought the traffic to a halt after Rohit Sharma and his men touched down a little after 5 pm on Thursday.

— DEBASISH DEY
■ **Report on Page 8**



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with the World Cup-winning team during a breakfast hosted by him at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg, in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Hathras stampede: 6 held, prime accused on the run

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/HATHRAS, JULY 4

Three days after the Hathras stampede incident, in which 121 people lost their lives, the Uttar Pradesh police on Thursday arrested six “sevadars”, including two women, of the organising committee of the religious congregation. The only accused named in the FIR is at large, while preacher Surajpal, who is also known as Narayan Sakar Hari, alias Bhole Baba, will be questioned if required during the investigation. Meanwhile, the Congress and the

▶ **THE ONLY** accused named in the FIR is at large, while preacher Surajpal, who is also known as Narayan Sakar Hari, alias Bhole Baba, will be questioned if required during the investigation

SP trained guns at the ruling BJP over the tragedy.

Briefing the media on the police action, inspector-general of police (Aligarh Range) Shalabh Mathur said, “All six persons who have been arrested are sevadars (volunteers) at the ‘sat-sang’... A reward of ₹1 lakh will be announced soon and a non-bailable

warrant will also be issued against key accused Devprakash Madhukar.”

According to the police, the preacher is not mentioned as an accused in the FIR lodged at the local Sikandra Rau police station on Tuesday after the stampede at Phulrai village that left 121 people dead in its wake.

Those arrested have been identified by the police as Ram Ladaite (50), Upendra Singh Yadav (62), Megh Singh (61), Mukesh Kumar (38) and women Manju Yadav (30) and Manju Devi (40). Mr Ladaite is a native of Mainpuri district, ■ **Turn to Page 4**

Restore LAC status, disengage: Jaishankar to China’s Wang Yi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

China needs to respect the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and redouble efforts with India for the disengagement of troops from the remaining friction points in the Ladakh sector, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar told his Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi on Thursday in a meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Astana,

▶ **THE EAM** also told the Chinese side to “fully abide by relevant bilateral agreements, protocols, and understandings reached between the two govts in the past”

Kazakhstan. During the meeting, Mr Jaishankar also told the Chinese side to “fully abide by relevant bilateral agreements, protocols, and understandings reached between the two governments in the past”. The “two ministers also

agreed that the prolongation of the current situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side” and also “agreed to continue and step up meetings of the diplomatic and military officials of the two sides to take forward their discussions to resolve the remaining issues at the earliest,” New Delhi said in a statement.

The meeting comes amid strains in ties between India and China that were triggered by the

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Blow to BJP in Rajasthan as top mantri Meena quits

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/JAIPUR, JULY 4

Simmering differences within the BJP surfaced in the desert state as senior party leader Kirodi Lal Meena resigned from the state Cabinet following the poor performance of the party in the recent Lok Sabha polls. Sources, meanwhile, said that Mr Meena had to resign after his “differences” with the state leadership and chief minister Bhajan Lal Sharma.

Rajasthan minister K.L. Meena, who had said he will quit the state Cabinet if the BJP loses any Lok Sabha seat under his responsibility, has submitted his resignation but it is yet to be accepted. He holds multiple portfolios: agriculture, rural development, disaster management and relief.

Mr Meena, however denying any differences with the state leadership or the chief minister, said he has no expectations, or resentment with the organisation or

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Hemant Soren is back as J’khand CM ■ ‘Jailed because of BJP conspiracy’ ■ Cabinet undecided

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/RANCHI, JULY 4

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha executive president Hemant Soren on Thursday took oath as the 13th chief minister of Jharkhand. He was administered the oath of office and secrecy by governor C.P. Radhakrishnan at the Raj Bhavan in Ranchi, an official said.

Mr Soren’s father and JMM supremo Shibhu Soren, his mother Rupri Soren, his wife Kalpana Soren and senior leaders of the JMM-led alliance



JMM leader Hemant Soren takes the oath of office and secrecy as the 13th chief minister of Jharkhand during the swearing-in ceremony at the Raj Bhavan in Ranchi on Thursday. — PTI

were present at the swearing-in ceremony.

Chamapi Soren, who

resigned as the chief minister on Wednesday, was also present on the occa-

sion. AICC executive committee member Ajoy Kumar said Mr Soren will be the face of the INDIA bloc in the Assembly poll in Jharkhand, due to be held later this year. For the BJP, Mr Soren’s acquittal has hurt its poll plank of corruption and the party’s strategists feel that the JMM and the tribal leader has gained sympathy in the tribal dominated state.

Mr Soren was released from jail on June 28 after the Jharkhand high court granted bail to him in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land

■ **Turn to Page 4**

UK votes: Starmer says ‘new chapter’ lies ahead for Britain

London, July 4: The future of Rishi Sunak as Britain’s first Prime Minister of Indian origin and the leader of the Conservative Party — fighting anti-incumbency of 14 years — hangs in the balance as millions of voters cast their ballots in a historic general poll on Thursday.

The British Indian leader and the man who wants his job — Labour leader Keir Starmer were among the early voters from an estimated 46 million registered voters as around 40,000 polling booths opened across the country at 7 am local time.

Mr Sunak and his wife Akshata Murty walked to

▶ **RISHI SUNAK** is up against voter angst towards the incumbent Tories after 14 years in power and has had to contend with trailing far behind Keir Starmer-led Labour Party throughout the six-week campaign

their local polling booth in his constituency of Richmond and North-lier-ton in Yorkshire..

A little later, Starmer and wife Victoria were at their polling station in Camden, north London..

“Today, Britain can begin a new chapter,” Mr Starmer told voters in a statement. — PTI

■ **More on Page 6**

“We cannot afford five more years under the Conservatives. But change will only happen if you vote Labour,” he said.

Mr Sunak, meanwhile, took to social media to drive home his message: “Polls are open. It’s time to stop the Labour supermajority that would mean higher taxes for the rest of your life.”

Mr Sunak, 44, is up against voter angst towards the incumbent Tories after 14 years in power and has had to contend with trailing far behind Keir Starmer-led Labour Party throughout the campaign. — PTI

■ **More on Page 6**



Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his wife Akshata Murty (left), Labour leader Keir Starmer and his wife Victoria after casting their votes in the general election 2024 in London on Thursday. — PTI

MP HC grants ASI till July 15 to file report on Bhojshala

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JULY 4

The Indore bench of the Madhya Pradesh high court on Thursday granted a 10-day extension to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to complete the scientific survey of the disputed site of Bhojshala temple-Kamal Maula mosque in Dhar district in the state.

In response to an ASI plea seeking an extension by three-four weeks to submit its survey report, the Indore bench of the Madhya Pradesh high court directed the Central agency to complete the scientific survey of the site by July 15 and submit the report.

In the plea, the ASI contended that the Hyderabad-based National Geophysical Research Institute had sought three weeks to study the huge data collected during the survey. This is the second extension of time given to the ASI by the high court to conduct the scientific survey of the 13th century monument and submit a report.

The high court had earlier set an April 29 deadline for the ASI to submit its report. The deadline was later extended till July 2.

■ **More on Page 3**

IN BRIEF

HC judge recuses from Sharjeel hearing

New Delhi: The Delhi high court judge Amit Sharma recused himself on Thursday from hearing a batch of bail pleas in a UAPA case linked to an alleged larger conspiracy behind the 2020 communal riots here, including that of student activist Sharjeel Imam. The matters were listed before a division bench headed by Justice Prathiba M. Singh after a change in the roster of judges dealing with such cases. "Let these matters be listed before another bench of which one of us, Justice Sharma, is not a member, subject to the orders of the acting chief justice, on July 24," Justice Singh ordered. The other accused persons in the case include RJD youth wing leader and Jamia Millia Islamia student Meeran Haider and alumni association of Jamia Millia Islamia president Shifa-ur-Rehman. Imam, United Against Hate founder Khalid Saifi and several others, including former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student Umar Khalid, have been booked 2020 riots in Northeast Delhi that left 53 people dead and more than 700 injured.

Man stabbed multiple times by 2 minors

New Delhi: A 23-year-old man was stabbed multiple times allegedly by two teenagers in Southeast Delhi's Nizamuddin, the police said on Thursday. Victim Sahil, who lives with his parents in the Nizamuddin Basti, was sitting alone at a park when he was attacked on Wednesday night, a police officer said. Both the accused fled from the spot leaving Sahil critically injured, the police said. The victim's family members reached the spot and informed the police. Sahil was admitted to Safdarjung Hospital, where his condition is stated to be critical, the officer said. The police said both the accused have been identified and teams have been formed to nab the duo. During investigations, it was found that the victim was attacked two weeks ago also, the officer added.

30-yr-old man shoots self dead in Rohini

New Delhi: A 30-year-old man allegedly shot himself dead in Rohini on Thursday, the police said. The deceased was identified as Sunil Thakur, a resident of Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, they said. According to the police, they received a PCR call at around 8.40 am at the KN Katju Marg police station regarding a person dying of a gunshot injury in the Sector 17 area. When the police team reached the spot, they found Thakur lying on the staircase of a building. They rushed him to the hospital, where the doctors declared him dead on arrival. The police said that a suicide note was recovered from the place of the incident.

NOW, AYURVEDA TO KEEP ANIMALS AT ZOO HEALTHY

New Delhi: The authorities at the Delhi Zoo are using ayurvedic methods, including neem oil, turmeric and quicklime, to keep the animals healthy and free from bacterial and viral infections during the rainy season. As the monsoon season sets in, Delhi Zoo is taking innovative steps to ensure the health and safety of its animals by incorporating traditional ayurvedic methods. "The monsoon has entered the capital and we have to take all necessary measures to keep the animals healthy and safe during this season. We will use some Indian home remedies like neem oil, which will help protect the animals from common biting insects, including mosquitoes, biting mites and fleas," Delhi Zoo director Sanjeet Kumar said. Neem oil acts as an herbal insectant and fly repellent, said Mr Kumar, turmeric, known for its anti-inflammatory and healing properties, will be used to treat itchy skin conditions, infections and wounds. Heavy rains often lead to waterlogging in certain parts of the zoo which create breeding grounds for mosquitoes. To counter this, quicklime (chuna) will be sprinkled in these areas to prevent mosquito proliferation. — PTI

■ Platform will have arts, crafts, innovation projects by students

Amid Neet mess, NCERT to recreate Pariksha pe Charcha

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Amid Neet row, the NCERT is working on a proposal to recreate 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' in a virtual format via a web platform, which will host Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches and allow students to "capture selfies" with him and "share on social media."

The proposed virtual exhibition of the 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' will seek to provide an "immersive experience" to the students, who will be offered the opportunity to showcase their projects on the platform that will also host the speeches made by other Union ministers.

The plan is to draw at least 1 crore online visitors annually.

The NCERT move comes against the backdrop of a raging row over alleged irregularities in competi-

tive examinations with the Opposition raising questions on the credibility of the examination processes in the country.

The Opposition has taken swipes at PM Modi, demanding that he should hold one such interaction on the medical entrance exam Neet issue as well.

Launched in 2018, 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' (PPC) is an annual event in which PM Modi interacts with students, teachers, and parents on ways to tackle exam-related stress.

The NCERT released an expression of interest document this week to identify vendors for developing the virtual exhibition for 'Pariksha Pe Charcha.'

"The aim is to recreate 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' in a virtual format, allowing audiences from across the country to experience the event all through the year from the comfort of their homes.



Narendra Modi's

"The virtual platform will showcase the arts, crafts, and innovation projects undertaken by students, providing inspiration and motivation to others," according to an official document.

"The experience will be an immersive 3D/2D experience, similar to the physical exhibition, offering attendees a unique and engaging virtual environment," it added.

The virtual exhibition will feature an exhibition hall, an auditorium, a selfie zone, a quiz zone, and a leaderboard.

The document said, "A dedicated selfie zone could be there to allow attendees to capture selfies with the Honorable Prime Minister, post them on a selfie wall or download them and share them on social media...The auditorium will feature speeches and addresses from the Prime Minister of India and esteemed ministers, as well as essential sessions and discussions necessary for students."

The seventh edition of PPC saw 2.26 crore registrations and took place in January. The only time it was shifted online was in 2021 due to the Covid pandemic.

It is streamed live across television and social media platforms. Students are selected through an online multiple-choice question competition, themes for which are shared with schools across the country.

Govt halts transfers of 5,000 teachers over graft charges

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Delhi education minister Atishi has instructed the chief secretary to immediately stop the mandatory transfer of 5,000 teachers who have been teaching in Delhi government schools for more than 10 years, following allegations of corruption in the transfer process.

At a press conference here, Ms Atishi highlighted the detrimental impact of the transfer order on the education system.

"This order is absolutely wrong and anti-education. It undermines the hard work of teachers who have transformed Delhi's government schools over the last 10 years," she said.

A circular was issued by the Directorate of Education (DoE) on June 11, titled "Online requests for transfer of teaching staff of the Directorate of Education," wherein, vide Clause 16, it was directed that all teachers who have served for more than 10 years in the same school shall compulsorily apply for transfer, failing which they will be transferred to



Atishi

any school by the DoE.

Ms Atishi had ordered on July 1 that no teacher should be transferred solely because he has spent more than 10 years in a particular school.

The minister emphasised the crucial role these teachers play in the lives of their students, particularly those from impoverished backgrounds.

"These children are mostly first-generation learners with no academic support at home. For them, their teachers are their sole academic guides," she said.

The minister also referred to the National Education Policy (NEP), which discourages frequent or large-scale transfers of teachers.

Stability in teacher

placement is essential for maintaining the quality of education, especially for vulnerable student populations, she said.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader also raised serious concerns about "corruption" in the transfer process.

"There are worrying reports that bribes have been taken to stop the transfers. This is extremely concerning as corruption within the education department threatens the future of our children," she said.

The minister called for an immediate investigation into these allegations and strict action against any officials found guilty of accepting bribes.

She reaffirmed the Arvind Kejriwal government's commitment to supporting teachers and improving the education system in the capital.

"We respect our teachers and will not allow any compromise with their rights or the education of our children. It is because of these dedicated teachers that our government schools are now outperforming private schools," she added.

RSS outfit for overhaul of competitive exam system

Expresses concern over Neet-UG paper leak

56 Neet-UG students move SC against any bid to cancel exam

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

A group of 56 successful Gujarat-based Neet-UG candidates have moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to restrain the Centre and the National Testing Agency from cancelling the controversy-hit entrance test results.

The petitioners have sought a direction from the apex court to the Union education ministry to probe, identify and take strict action against students and others who indulged in unfair practices like paper leak and impersonation in the Neet-UG exam conducted on May 5.

The fresh plea moved by Siddharth Komal Singla and 55 other students said: "The Hon'ble court

may further direct the respondents (Centre and the NTA) not to re-conduct Neet-UG ... As that would not only be unreasonable and harsh for the honest and hardworking students but also would lead to the infringement of the Right to Education and therefore violative of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution."

The plea also sought a direction to the Centre and the NTA to take appropriate action where any "compromise to the established guidelines for Neet-UG 2024 examinations has been done."

The fresh plea has been filed days before a top court bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud is slated to hear on July 8 as many as 26 petitions seeking reliefs like re-test.

methods and pitched for the introduction of an open-book examination system for competitive examinations designed to test the candidates' "competence, aptitude, attitude, and intelligence quotient."

"Candidates may be provided with question banks, say 2,000 questions, in advance to enable them to understand the scope of their exams so that they can prepare well for it on their own," he said.

If changes are brought in the current examina-

tion pattern adopted by the NTA, there would be no incidents of paper leaks and dependency of students on coaching institutes, he said.

Mr Rao was addressing an annual press conference of the Vidya Bharti Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Sansthan to highlight the organisation's contributions to the field of education and the achievements made by more than 12,000 schools run by it in different parts of the country.

— PTI

Over 25% OTs in govt hosps non-functional: Cong's Yadav

New Delhi, July 4: Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav on Thursday

alleged that out of the 235 operation theatres (OT) in the 28 city government hospitals, 62 are non-functional.

According to a statement, Mr Yadav said that OTs in many Delhi government hospitals are not functioning due to a shortage of staff, such as OT assistants, anaesthetists, technicians etc.

He said this was a matter of grave concern as it puts the lives of patients, who have already waited for several months to get an appointment, at risk because many scheduled operations are either cancelled or postponed.

It was shocking that six out of the 13 existing OTs at Delhi's premier government hospital, Lok Nayak Hospital, were shut down following the hospital management sacking 51 paramedical staff and 170 nurses, Mr Yadav alleged in the statement.

He said that these staff members had rendered selfless service during the Covid-19 pandemic, saving many lives with their dedication and commitment.

No immediate reaction was received from the Delhi government over Mr Yadav's allegations.



Devender Yadav

'Not much scope for Cong-AAP to ally for Delhi, Haryana polls'

New Delhi, July 4: There does not appear to be much scope for an alliance between the Congress and the AAP for the Assembly polls in Haryana and Delhi but the INDIA bloc will fight elections together in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on Thursday.

Mr Ramesh said there is no one formula the INDIA bloc will follow for state elections. The grouping will fight together in states where Congress leaders and other alliance partners agree to such an understanding, he said.

Asked whether the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) will fight the Assembly polls together going forward, Mr Ramesh said the alliance will do so in Jharkhand and Maharashtra.

"There is no INDIA 'janbandhan' in Punjab. In Haryana, we had given one seat to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the Lok Sabha polls but I don't think that INDIA janbandhan will be there for Assembly polls. In Delhi, the AAP itself has said that INDIA janbandhan will not be there for Assembly polls," Mr Ramesh said.

The Congress and the AAP had fought the Lok Sabha polls together in Delhi, while they contested separately in Punjab. Mr Ramesh said, "In the context of West Bengal also, I had said that the



Jairam Ramesh

INDIA bloc is for Lok Sabha polls but in states where the circumstances are such that our leaders of the state and leaders of our alliance partners want, the alliance will remain. In Maharashtra, the alliance will be there with Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SCP). In Jharkhand, we have an alliance with the Jharkhand Mukti Morch.

Where the state Congress leaders and the respective alliance parties agree, there will be an alliance, he said, adding there is no one formula on which the alliance will be done for Assembly polls.

Asked specifically as to whether there would be an alliance in Haryana and Delhi, Mr Ramesh said, "There does not appear to be much scope (for alliance) in Delhi and Haryana."

Last month, AAP's Delhi state convener Gopal Rai had said his party's alliance with the Congress was only for the Lok Sabha elections and hinted that the ruling party in the city will go solo in next year's Assembly polls here.

Study MP, Maha scheme to decide Mahila Yojana criteria: Govt to staff

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Delhi women and child development minister Kailash Gahlot has asked the department officials to study schemes implemented in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra for providing a monthly honorarium to women before finalising the criteria for the government's Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana, officials said on Thursday.

Mr Gahlot held a meeting with the officials of the department of women and child development on Wednesday to discuss the scheme, the officials said.

The scheme proposes to give ₹1,000 monthly to all

women aged above 18 from the fiscal year 2024-25. "During the meeting, the minister directed officials to study the schemes being implemented in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The scheme in Delhi was announced by finance minister Atishi. She had said that women above 18 will be eligible for the scheme," an official said.

In Madhya Pradesh, the scheme is titled 'Ladli Behna Yojana'. Under the scheme, women aged between 23-60 years are eligible to receive ₹1,000 per month with certain riders, including that they should not be income tax payees and their families' annual income is below ₹2.5 lakh.

Infant continues to struggle for life mnth after hosp fire

New Delhi, July 4: Over a month after a fire in the East Delhi children hospital killed seven newborns and injured five, an infant continues to fight for her life with breathing complications and burn injuries. The parents — Rakesh and Karishma — recalled the horrific night and said that they remembered when they were standing outside the hospital balcony to know if their first child was alive.

On May 26, a fire tragedy at the Baby Care New Born Hospital in East Delhi's Vivek Vihar area claimed the lives of

▶ PARENTS SAID that they are worried about future of their baby and have decided never to tell her about her scars

seven newborns and left five babies injured.

"My daughter is still having breathing issues after the fire incident. However, her burn marks are healing with every passing day. She is still undergoing treatment in Chacha Nehra Bal Chikitsalaya," Rakesh told a news agency.

He said that they are worried about the future

of their baby and have decided never to tell her about her burn scars. But they also want justice for the parents who lost their children in the fire.

"Currently I, along with my wife are giving our entire time in hospital. We both have taken leaves from our work and are focusing on her betterment," he added.

The police had said that during the investigation, they found that the hospital was operating despite the expiry of its license. It did not have qualified doctors nor did they have clearance from the fire department. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Appear on July 15:
B'uru court to BSY

Bengaluru: A Bengaluru court on Thursday issued a summons to former chief minister B S Yediyurappa to appear before it on July 15 in connection with a Pocco Act case filed against him. The criminal investigation department had filed a chargesheet against the BJP leader at a fast-track court for Pocco Act cases on June 27. A day later, the Karnataka high court extended its interim order restraining the CID from arresting Mr Yediyurappa after allowing the prosecution to file objections to the petition filed by him seeking quashing of the FIR against him, and then adjourned a further hearing by two weeks. The CID, probing charges against Mr Yediyurappa of sexually assaulting a minor girl, has alleged in the chargesheet that he and three other accused paid money to the alleged victim and her mother to buy their silence. — PTI

2 kanwariyas from
Delhi washed away

Uttarkashi: Two kanwariyas (Shiv devotees) from Delhi were washed away on Thursday when the flooding of a stream along the Gangotri-Gomukh trek damaged the temporary wooden bridge over it. The kanwariyas, named Suraj and Monu, both residents of Delhi, were washed away by the raging waves of the Chirbasa stream as the bridge collapsed when they were crossing it. The spot where the incident happened is about nine km from Gangotri, forest department officials said. The water level of the stream rose suddenly due to the melting of a glacier, they said. Uttarkashi district magistrate Meharban Singh Bisht has asked the deputy director of Gangotri National Park to search for the kanwariyas swept away in the stream. — PTI

Hottest July day in
Srinagar in 25 yrs

Srinagar: Heatwave conditions persisted in Kashmir on Thursday with Srinagar recording a maximum temperature of 35.7°C, six notches above normal and the highest in July in 25 years, officials said. The city had recorded a high of 37°C in July 1999. Srinagar was hotter than Delhi (31.7°C). Other parts of the Valley also witnessed scorching temperatures with Qazigund recording a high of 32.8°C and Kupwara 35.2°C, officials said. The Valley has been experiencing rising temperatures and scorching heat over the past few weeks, leading to water shortage in many areas. The health department has issued advisories to deal with the heatwave conditions. The school education department has already announced a 10-day summer vacation for all schools in the Valley from July 8. — PTI

'IT'S MY GOAL TO
ENSURE RESPECT
FOR LABOURERS'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi met labourers in Delhi on Thursday and asserted that providing full rights and respect to those involved in manual labour is the mission of his life. He met workers at Guru Tegh Bahadur Nagar and listened to their problems. Gandhi also did manual labour with them at a construction site. Sharing pictures from the interaction on his WhatsApp channel, Mr Gandhi said, "There is no respect for manual labour in India today, I had said this earlier also — today, this thing got confirmed after meeting the labourers who stand daily in search of work in GTB Nagar. They survive on a meagre daily wage due to inflation and even that is not guaranteed. To provide full rights and respect to the labourers and manual workers of India — this is the mission of my life," he said. In a post on X, the Congress said, "These hardworking labourers are the backbone of India's economy. It is our responsibility to make their lives simpler and secure their future."



Rahul Gandhi

Amritpal can meet family,
not allowed to leave Delhi

Being brought to Delhi on parole to take oath as MP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH,
JULY 4

Jailed radical preacher Amritpal Singh, who is being brought to Delhi on parole to take oath as a Lok Sabha member, will be allowed to meet his family but will not be permitted to leave the "territorial jurisdiction" of New Delhi.

The Khalistani sympathiser, who won the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha seat in Punjab in the recent parliamentary elections while being lodged in a jail in Assam's Dibrugarh district, is scheduled to take oath on Friday.

Singh will be flown in from Assam to Delhi to take oath and his parole period of four days starts from July 5, sources said on Wednesday.

During his stay in the national capital, neither Singh nor his relatives or family members can make a statement in any form of media, the conditions laid down in his parole order issued by the district mag-



Amritpal Singh

istrate of Punjab's Amritsar from where he was arrested on April 23 last year.

The parole order, which mentions 10 conditions, stated that the period of temporary release would include the time taken for the journey from the Central jail in Dibrugarh to New Delhi and back.

He will "not enter the territorial jurisdiction of any place other than New Delhi during the period of temporary release", it stated.

"Any of his relatives shall not be permitted to videograph any statement of Singh or circulate any such statement in any electronic form," accord-

ing to the order. He will also "refrain from taking any action or making any statement that is prejudicial to national security", it stated.

On the deployment of security personnel for Singh, the order stated that he will be accompanied by such a number of police personnel as is deemed appropriate by the senior superintendent of police, Amritsar (rural).

These personnel will be there with him from the date and time of his temporary release from the jail, and till the time he returns to the prison for the continuation of his period of detention, it stated.



Villagers catch fish in flood water in Assam's Morigaon district on Thursday. Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the state's flood situation was "under control" but everything depends on the weather conditions during the next few days. — PTI

Odisha earmarks ₹200cr
to tackle urban flooding

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO
BHUBANESWAR, JULY 4

Odisha chief minister Mohan Charan Mahi on Thursday said his government emphasised "zero casualties" while tackling and managing natural disasters in the state. He said elaborate planning had been made in the natural disaster management committee meeting held under his chairmanship at Lok Seva Bhavan in Bhubaneswar on Thursday.

Emphasis has been given to control artificial flooding during torrential rainfall in urban areas. A proposal has been given to earmark ₹200 crores for the purpose, the CM said.

As per reports, the government has decided to increase the number of Odisha disaster rapid action force (ODRAF) in the state from 20 to 30 units. The home department has been ordered to ensure ODRAF works as a dedicated force. The government is also planning

CM bows before secretariat,
then enters official chamber

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR, JULY 4

Twenty-two days after taking oath as chief minister (CM) of Odisha, new CM Mohan Charan Mahi on Thursday entered the state secretariat building (Lok Seva Bhavan) and discharged his responsibilities from his official chamber.

What was quite striking is that Mr Mahi got down from his vehicle before climbing the stairs of the secretariat building and bowed down as a mark of respect to the state administration's highest office from where the CM and

all other ministers along with the bureaucrats serve the people.

The CM was led to his official chamber by senior bureaucrats and sat in his chair amidst the chanting of mantras by priests. Soon after sitting in the CM's chair, Mr Mahi took a slew of decisions, apart from making some ground-breaking announcements for the promotion and preservation of Odia culture. He informed that all government work will be executed in Odia language and a commission will be formed for the promotion and preservation of the language.

to set up as many as five regional fire services hubs to manage sudden accidents like the Bahanaga train tragedy. Discussion was held on how to manage the possible flood situations during

the ongoing rainy season in the meeting. An elaborate discussion was held with special relief commissioner Satyabrata Sahu regarding the preparedness to deal with the problem.

■ T'gana CM meets Shah, seeks financial support for intel infra

Revanth meets Modi, presents
agenda for state development

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Telangana chief minister Revanth Reddy on Thursday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his 12-point wish list, which according to him is "critical" for the development of his state. The meeting between the PM and CM, who was accompanied by deputy chief minister Bhatti Vikramarka, lasted about an hour, during which the CM raised matters that ranged from the power sector to education, the upgradation of state highways to national highways and the inclusion of Telangana in the national semiconductor mission. He also met Union home minister Amit Shah and sought substantial financial support for the southern state's intelligence infrastructure.

In a post on X, the CM said he has given a petition to the PM covering 12 issues which include setting up of an IIM in



Telangana chief minister Revanth Reddy and his deputy Bhatti Vikramarka meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

Hyderabad and 24 new Navodaya schools. Mr Reddy also urged Mr Modi to include Telangana in the India semiconductor mission given the interest of several companies in setting up semiconductor fabs in Hyderabad.

Emphasising the need to boost IT infrastructure, Mr Reddy sought the revival of ITIR in Hyderabad to encourage the growth of new IT companies and developers.

The project, initially approved in 2010, has been stalled since 2014. "He requested the immediate sanction of an Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Hyderabad and said land for the campus is available within the Hyderabad Central University campus," sources said.

State government officials said a request was made to the Union government for the allocation of 2,450 acres of defence land

to the state for infrastructure projects, including elevated corridors on the Hyderabad-Karimnagar and Hyderabad-Nagpur highways (NH-44). The chief minister offered alternative land in Raviryal in exchange.

Highlighting the lower allocation in the initial phase, the chief minister requested the Centre to sanction 2.5 million houses for Telangana in the upcoming phase of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). He said the state is prepared to align its guidelines with those of PMAY.

During his meeting, the chief minister reiterated the need to fulfil promises made during the state reorganisation and asked for the establishment of a steel plant in Bayyaram in Khammam district and a railway coach factory in Kazipet.

A request was also made for the release of ₹1,800 crores under the Backward Regions Grant Fund for the years 2019-2024.

Andhra CM meets PM in
Delhi, seeks financial help

'State grappling with repercussions of unfair bifurcation'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and sought the Centre's support in overcoming the financial deficit in the state. It is learnt the CM has sought enhanced assistance for Andhra in case the special category status cannot be granted to the state. The Andhra Pradesh chief minister's Delhi visit is seen as crucial for securing the Centre's support for the state's development following its bifurcation in 2014.

"Today, I had a constructive meeting with the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi Ji, in Delhi to address important matters concerning the welfare and development of Andhra Pradesh. I am confident that under his leadership, our State will re-emerge as a powerhouse among states," he wrote on X.

Mr Naidu, who is on a two-day visit to Delhi, also held talks with Union home minister Amit Shah, minister of road-way transport and high-



N. Chandrababu Naidu

way Nitin Gadkari, commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal and agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan.

While urging for "hand-holding" of state finances in the short term, the CM sought the Centre's support in the commissioning of the Polavaram National Irrigation Project and for the development of the Duggirajapatnam port.

He also asked for comprehensive financial support for the completion of the government complex and trunk infrastructure of the capital city of Amaravati and incentives for industrial development. In addition, Mr Naidu asked for an additional allocation under the scheme for special assistance to states for capital investment, target-

ing essential sectors such as roads, bridges, irrigation and drinking water projects. He has also sought support for the backward regions of Andhra Pradesh along lines of the Bundelkhand package.

During their meeting, the CM highlighted that Andhra Pradesh continues to grapple with the repercussions of the unscientific, unfair and unjust bifurcation of 2014, a statement from the Andhra government said. He added that the miserable governance of the previous administration, marked by malice, corruption and misgovernance, has dealt a more deleterious blow to the state than bifurcation itself.

Sources said the CM drew the attention of the PM to the current fiscal situation in Andhra Pradesh, saying it has significantly deteriorated due to the previous government's misadventures and the absence of a strategic long-term development plan.

Mr Naidu said that the state exchequer remains severely constrained by lack of financial resources.

Pawar jr hits
out at Opp in
video msg,
lauds Budget

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JULY 4

Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday released a video message for people claiming that the Opposition is criticising him unfairly. Praising the Budget he presented last week as "historical", Mr Pawar said his only crime was that he always thinks of the poor and farmers, trying to ease their burden and improve their condition. I was falsely accused of corruption, but not a single charge has been proved against me, nor will it be so in future, he said.

The Sharad Pawar faction alleged that Ajit Pawar's video was part of a race among the ruling parties to take credit for populist schemes announced in the Budget.

In the video message, Ajit Pawar said that people with a negative mindset are criticising the Budget. "A few days ago, I presented the state Budget. I got the opportunity to present the historic budget and consider it my fortune."

Mr Pawar presented the state Budget on June 29, announcing a series of sops.

HC directs ASI to
submit Bhojshala
report by July 15

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JULY 4

The Indore bench of the Madhya Pradesh high court on Thursday granted an extension by around two weeks to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to complete the scientific survey of the disputed site of Bhojshala temple-Kamal Maula Mosque in Dhar district in the state.

In response to the plea by the ASI seeking an extension by three-four weeks to submit its survey report, the high court directed the Central agency to complete the scientific survey of the site by July 15 and submit the report.

This was the second extension of time given to the ASI by the high court to conduct the scientific survey of the 13th-century monument and submit a report.

The high court had earlier set an April 29 deadline for the ASI to submit its report. The deadline was later extended until July 2.

"The ASI's plea for an extension of time to submit the report on the Bhojshala temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex came up for hearing on

■ THE HIGH court had earlier set an April 29 deadline for the ASI to submit its report. The deadline was later extended until July 2.

Thursday. The high court granted an extension to the ASI to submit its report by July 15.

"The next date of hearing of the case has been fixed to July 22," the counsel for the Central agency Himansu Joshi told this newspaper.

In its directive to the ASI on March 11 this year, the high court had sought a scientific survey of the Bhojshala temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex, observing that the nature and character of the mediaeval-era monument needed to be "demystified and freed from the shackles of confusion".

The high court's directive was in response to a petition filed by the Hindu front for justice seeking intervention by the court to hand over the site to Hindus, claiming that it was originally a temple.

The ASI, which was to submit its report on July 2, sought an extension of time by "three-four weeks" to produce the survey report.

■ Dhami govt to set up council to regulate flow of pilgrims
U'khand focuses on Char Dham mgmt

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH
DEHRADUN, JULY 4

The Uttarakhand government will form a Char Dham council as the successor of the Char Dham Devasthanam Board of 2020 to assess and fix carrying capacities and regulate the flow of pilgrimage to the Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri shrines along with yatras in the state. The council will have three different committees to manage the flow of pilgrims.

A high-level committee, formed by the Pushkar Singh Dhami government, in its report submitted on Wednesday recommended the formation of an Uttarakhand endowment and pilgrimage council to regulate and manage the

'Historic decisions taken, many
challenges overcome in 3 years'

Dehradun, July 4: Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, who completed three years in office on Thursday, said several challenges were overcome and many historic decisions taken during the period.

"We have kept the original identity of Devbhoomi intact by taking strict action against appeasement, land jihad

and forced conversion and by introducing a Uniform Civil Code in the state," Mr Dhami said.

"We brought an ordinance against use of unfair means in recruitment examinations to make the process transparent. A record 14,800 youths were recruited into government jobs over the last three years," he said in a statement. — PTI

Char Dham pilgrimage that attracts lakhs of devotees from across the country and other parts of the world. Every year a huge rush of devotees often leads to chaos and long

traffic jams in the hills, throwing the government's preparations in tatters. The committee, headed by additional chief secretary Anand Bardhan, also recommended that

SHORT TAKES

Jagannath rath yatra in Ahmedabad July 7

Ahmedabad: The 147th edition of the annual Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath will take place on July 7 in Ahmedabad where more than 22,000 security personnel will guard the event which draws lakhs of devotees, an official said on Thursday. Extra care will be taken to manage the crowd in view of the recent stampede in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras where more than 100 persons were killed, Ahmedabad commissioner of police G.S. Malik said at a press conference here after holding a review meeting with nearly 600 police officers. This time, police will use face detection cameras to identify criminals by matching people's faces in crowds with the database, he said. The Ahmedabad police will also deploy 20 drones and some balloon-mounted cameras to keep a watch on the people's movement, the official said. — PTI

Restore LAC status: EAM to China's Wang Yi

■ Continued from Page 1 Chinese military build-up in the Ladakh sector four years ago at the LAC, the de-facto border between the two sides, in violation of Sino-Indian pacts that led to the deadly clash between troops of both sides in the Galwan valley in mid-June of 2020. The Chinese troops have yet to withdraw from some of the friction points in the Ladakh sector, despite numerous rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military levels between the two Asian giants. New Dehi has already made it clear to Beijing that ties between India and China cannot be normal until the Chinese troops pull back and the status quo that existed in the spring of 2020 is restored. In a statement, the ministry of external affairs said, "The two ministers had an in-depth exchange of views on finding an early resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in eastern Ladakh to stabilise and rebuild bilateral relations... Mr Jaishankar highlighted the need to redouble efforts to achieve complete disengagement from the remaining areas in eastern Ladakh and restore border peace and tranquillity in order to remove obstacles towards the return of normalcy in bilateral relations..." The foreign ministry added: "Both ministers agreed that the working mechanism on consultation and coordination on India-China border affairs should hold an early meeting. Mr Jaishankar reiterated that India-China relationship is best served by observing the three mutuals — mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests. The two ministers also exchanged views on the global situation. Mr Jaishankar extended to Mr Wang India's support for China's presidency of SCO next year."

PM targets Pak, China at SCO

■ Continued from Page 1 stated: "Priority must naturally be given to combating terrorism, one of the original goals of the SCO. Many of us have had our experiences, often originating beyond our borders. Let us be clear that if left unchecked, it can become a major threat to regional and global peace. Terrorism in any form or manifestation cannot be justified or condoned. International community must isolate and expose those countries that harbour terrorists, provide safe havens and condone terrorism. Cross-border terrorism requires a decisive response and terrorism financing and recruitment must be resolutely countered. We should also take proactive steps to prevent the spread of radicalisation among our youth. The joint statement issued during India's presidency last year on this subject underlines our shared commitment." Mr Modi further said: "At this time, it is particularly noteworthy that we are reiterating mutual respect for sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, equality, mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of use of force as a basis for our foreign policies. We have also agreed not to take any measures contrary to the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity." He added: "We gather today in the backdrop of the pandemic impact, ongoing conflicts, rising tensions, trust deficits

No end to student suicides in Kota, 13th incident this year

JEE aspirant hangs self in Kota

Kota, July 4: A 16-year-old engineering aspirant allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan inside his PG room here, police said on Thursday. This is the thirteenth case of suspected suicide by a coaching student in Kota since January. The number of student suicides in Kota stood at 26 in 2023. Sandeep Kumar Kurmi, a native of Bihar's Nalanda district, was taking coaching for the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) in Kota for the last two years and lived in a paying guest (PG) room in Mahaveer Nagar-III, the police said.

Speaker calls spl session of WB Assembly amid oath row

Kolkata, July 4: Amid the ongoing impasse over the swearing-in of two newly elected TMC MLAs, Speaker Biman Banerjee on Thursday summoned a special session of the West Bengal Assembly and asserted that the functioning of the House is not solely dependent on the governor. While talking to reporters, Mr Banerjee said the business advisory committee meeting has been scheduled for noon on Friday and the tenure of the session will be decided in the meeting. "The special session will begin at 2 pm tomorrow," he said. "If someone thinks that we are helpless, then he or she is wrong. The Assembly is not helpless, and everything is not in the hands of the Governor. You can't just force everything down our throats; there are rules, regulations, and constitutional norms. All of us have to abide by them," Mr Banerjee said. Two newly elected Trinamul Congress MLAs staged a sit-in protest on the West Bengal Assembly premises for the sixth day on Thursday, demanding that they be administered the oath of office in the House rather than at Raj Bhavan, following an invitation from governor C.V. Ananda Bose. Baranagar MLA Sayantika Bandyopadhyay and Bhagabangola legislator Rayat Hossain Sarkar began their sit-in protest on June 27 and continued on June 28, July 1, 2, 3, and 4. Despite being declared winners in the assembly bypolls, they have yet to assume their roles as elected representatives due to the pending swearing-in process. — PTI

At around 7 am on Thursday, the teen's classmate went to his room. When he did not get any response, he peeped through the window and found Kurmi hanging from the ceiling fan, Mahaveer Nagar SHO Mahendra Maru said. Kurmi's classmate informed the PG caretaker who then informed the police, he said. According to the SHO, the student committed suicide on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday. No suicide note was recovered from the room, the police said. Kurmi's brother, Sanjeet, is taking coaching for the

3 more Bihar bridges fall in 24 hrs; 10th in 16 days

‘Probe ordered to determine cause of incidents’

Patna, July 4: Another bridge collapsed in Bihar's Saran district on Thursday, the 10th such incident in the state in just over a fortnight. District magistrate Aman Samir said it was the third bridge collapse in Saran in the last 24 hours. "A high-level probe has been ordered to determine the causes of these small bridge collapses in the district," he said. The small bridge over Gandaki river was located in Baneyapur block and connected several villages in Saran with the neighboring Siwan district. In all, ten bridges have collapsed in Siwan, Saran, Madhubani, Araria, East Champaran, and Kishanganj districts over the past 16 days. "It was constructed 15 years ago. The exact cause of the collapse is yet to be ascertained, but desilting work was recently undertaken," the district magistrate told PTI. On Wednesday, four small

► THE PG room where the student lived did not have any anti-suicide device installed on the ceiling fan. No suicide note was recovered from the room, the police said. medical entrance exam NEET in Kota and lives in a separate PG room in Dadabari area, Head Constable Mahaveer Prasad said. The two brothers reportedly lost their parents four years ago and their uncle was funding for their education, he added. During a preliminary probe it was found that Kurmi was an average student and would often miss

his coaching classes, the SHO said. According to the police, the PG room where Kurmi lived did not have any anti-suicide device installed on the ceiling fan. The district administration has made it mandatory for all hostels and PGs in the coaching hub to install anti-suicide devices in their rooms to prevent such cases. An anti-suicide device is a spring-like structure which is attached to the ceiling fans. When an object weighing more than 20 kilos is hung from the fan, the spring attached to it expands and a siren goes off. — PTI

Dead snake found in mid-day meal packet in Maha's Sangli

Sangli, July 4: A tiny dead snake was allegedly found in a packet distributed under the mid-day meal scheme meant for children aged between six months and three years at an "Anganwadi" or a government-run nursery school in western Maharashtra's Sangli district, prompting the authorities to launch a probe. The incident was reported by the parents of a child in Palus on Monday, said Anandi Bhosale, Vice-President of the State Anganwadi Workers' Union. Calling it a "serious" incident, Congress

5 Reds killed in C'garh, carried bounty of ₹40L

‘Total 136 Maoists killed in encounters in 2024 so far’

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, JULY 4

Five Maoists, slain in encounters with security forces in Abujhmad area of Bastar in Chhattisgarh on July 2, have been identified as members the Central Committee (CC) protection team of CPI (Maoist), the police said on Thursday. The five deceased Maoists, who together carried bounty of ₹40 lakhs, have been identified as Rakesh (35), Konda Togda (30-35), Edma Wadde (40), Kamlu Wadde (40), and Farsa Tumda (30). They were all CC protection team members each carrying a bounty of ₹8 lakhs, police said. "The killing of five CC protection team members indicates the likely presence of CC members of the outlawed CPI (Maoist) in the area," Bastar range inspector general of police P. Sunderraj told this newspaper. They may have fled the



spot during the encounter, he added. The 72-hour counter-insurgency operation was launched in Hikulnar-Ghamandi under Kohakmat in Narayanpur district, falling under Abujhmad, in Bastar on June 30 following inputs on the presence of Maoists' CC members Sonu and Kosa, and divisional committee members Arun, Ranita alias Jaymati, Radhika, Arab, Sukhlal in the forested area. An encounter took place between the Maoists and security forces in the area on July 2 leading to killing of five Naxals and seizure of a huge cache of weapons, which included .303 and 315 bore rifles and

► AN ENCOUNTER took place in Abujhmad area on July 2 leading to killing of 5 Naxals and seizure of a huge cache of weapons, which included .303 and 315 bore rifles and barrel grenade launcher

barrel grenade launcher and its shells. This was the fifth major counter-insurgency operation undertaken by the security forces in Abujhmad area in Narayanpur district in the last two months. The security forces have of late achieved major successes in counter-insurgency measures in Bastar, particularly the Abujhmad area, said to be used as a safe haven by the CC members of CPI (Maoist), police said. In the current year so far, a total of 136 Maoists were killed in encounters in different parts of Left Wing extremism-hit Bastar, according to Mr Sunderraj.

ED arrests 2 bizmen in C'garh liquor scam

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 4

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday said it has arrested two liquor businessmen named Arvind Singh and Trilok Singh Dhillon in connection with its money laundering probe into an alleged excise scam of Chhattisgarh that is estimated to have generated over ₹2,100 crores of slush funds. Both Singh and Dhillon were arrested on July 1 at the Central Jail in Raipur and later a special PMLA court sent them to ED custody till July 6, the federal probe agency said in a statement. The two were lodged in jail after the Chhattisgarh police's economic offences wing arrested them in the case sometime back. The alleged scam, where the ED has estimated the proceeds of crime at ₹2,161 crores, purportedly took place between 2019-2022 when the Congress was in power in the state. In an ongoing probe in this case, the central financial probe agency has arrested former IAS officer Anil Tuteja as well as some other bureaucrats and politicians.

Dead snake found in mid-day meal packet in Maha's Sangli

Sangli, July 4: A tiny dead snake was allegedly found in a packet distributed under the mid-day meal scheme meant for children aged between six months and three years at an "Anganwadi" or a government-run nursery school in western Maharashtra's Sangli district, prompting the authorities to launch a probe. The incident was reported by the parents of a child in Palus on Monday, said Anandi Bhosale, Vice-President of the State Anganwadi Workers' Union. Calling it a "serious" incident, Congress

leader and Palus-dead snake was allegedly found in a packet distributed under the mid-day meal scheme meant for children aged between six months and three years at an "Anganwadi" or a government-run nursery school in western Maharashtra's Sangli district, prompting the authorities to launch a probe. The incident was reported by the parents of a child in Palus on Monday, said Anandi Bhosale, Vice-President of the State Anganwadi Workers' Union. Calling it a "serious" incident, Congress

‘New laws will bring speedy justice to victims’

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 4

Former senior police officers, including a former CBI chief, have said that the new criminal laws, which came into force on July 1, will ensure speedy justice for the victims. Former Maharashtra DGP Sanjeev Dayal said the three new criminal laws are a "welcome change" from the colonial mindset of previous laws. "They bring necessary emphasis on crime against women, reflecting concerns on rape, molestation and child trafficking. The use of scientific aids in

investigation should help in securing better conviction rates and a cap on adjournments by the courts should get faster justice for victims," he said. Mr Dayal was part of a committee, which also included senior police officers, including Satish Sahney, M.R. Reddy and S.S. Puri besides three young officers nominated by the then Maharashtra DGP in 2020. The committee had made a recommendation to bring victimology to the centre of the criminal justice system. "It is very satisfying to see many of the recommendations codified. Now it is

► FORMER CBI chief and Mumbai police former commissioner Subodh Kumar Jaiswal said the new laws represent a tectonic shift towards a people centric approach

over to implementing agencies and courts," he said. Former Maharashtra police DGP A.N. Roy also said that new laws take a victim-centric approach compared to the British era penal code. "The provisions in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita aim to provide timely justice to women and children with increased pun-

ishment under these cases. It introduces digital electronic evidence reviews along with more focus on national security," Mr Roy said. Former CBI chief and Mumbai police former commissioner Subodh Kumar Jaiswal said the new laws represent a tectonic shift towards a people centric approach to justice. "This will ensure justice is served rightly, timely and swiftly. Indian criminal justice system is now more victim friendly and justice oriented, a transformation achieved through extensive deliberation," he said.

CBI registers its 1st FIR under new laws

New Delhi: The CBI has registered its first FIR under newly enforced Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) against two Delhi police officers for allegedly demanding ₹10 lakhs bribe to help the release of a person lodged in Tihar Jail. The BNS has replaced the British era penal code. The FIR registered on Wednesday evening booking head constables Ravindra Dhaka and Parveen Saini both posted in narcotics cell. — PTI

Soren back as CM

■ Continued from Page 1 scam. He had resigned as the CM shortly before his arrest on January 31 by the Enforcement Directorate. The ED is preparing to challenge Mr Soren's acquittal in the Supreme Court. After taking the oath, Mr Soren said former CM Champai Soren discharged his duties well. "The court order is in the public domain for all to see," the JMM executive president said, adding that he will discharge his duties with commitment. In a video message to people, Mr Soren said that a conspiracy was hatched against him by the BJP-led Opposition, because of which he had to spend about five months behind bars. "I was arrested on January 31... I had given a message to you about how the Opposition hatched a conspiracy against me and how they succeeded in their evil designs. They attempted to keep me in jail for a long time, but I chose to fight a legal battle. You supported me on the streets. Finally, justice was delivered and I was released clean," Mr Soren said in the video clip. The JMM leader said he was given an opportunity to serve the people in 2019, but "the conspirators could not digest that a tribal youth could reach

such heights, and finally, on January 31, I was removed on false charges. There could be delay in God's plans but ultimately truth prevails." Mr Soren said he was ready to serve the people of Jharkhand with dedication. Former Jharkhand CM Champai Soren extended good wishes to Mr Soren. The decision on Mr Soren's new Cabinet is yet to be taken. Asked about the council of ministers, Jharkhand Congress in-charge Ghulam Ahmad Mir said that the high command will decide about the party faces in the Soren Cabinet. Mr Mir said the Congress is yet to decide who will join the Cabinet from the party. Taking a jibe at the political developments in Jharkhand, BJP MP Nishkant Dubey, in a post on X on Wednesday, said, "The Champai Soren era is over in Jharkhand. In the family-oriented party, people outside the family have no political future. I wish the chief minister drew inspiration from Bhagwan Birsa Munda and stood up against the corrupt Hemant Soren ji." Jharkhand BJP president Babulal Marandi also hit out at the JMM, claiming that the "tribals" outside Shibu Soren's family are only temporary faces in JMM.

Meena quits as mantri

■ Continued from Page 1 Mr Sharma. Mr Meena said the party high command has called him to Delhi on Friday and he would explain to them why he put in his papers. Mr Meena said he has submitted his papers due to his public vow that he will resign if the party loses any LS seat which was his responsibility. During the recent Lok Sabha elections, Mr Meena had said Prime Minister Narendra Modi assigned him seven seats in eastern Rajasthan, on which he worked hard during the polls. In the poll results announced on June 4, the BJP lost four seats, including his native Dausa, in eastern Rajasthan. Overall, the BJP won 14 of the state's 25 seats, its tally coming down from 24 in the 2019 polls. "The party high command has called me to Delhi tomorrow. I will go and satisfy them (on my decision). I could not make the party win. I had said if the party does not win, I will resign. It is my moral responsibility to resign. I met the chief minister but he rejected my resignation. My credibility among the people should remain intact. I have resigned," he said. When asked whether he was unhappy with the party for not making him

a deputy chief minister, Mr Meena said no. "If I was dissatisfied, I would have resigned immediately after taking the oath. I have no complaint against the organisation or the chief minister, neither do I have any complaints nor am I greedy for power. I did not resign because of the post. I resigned because I stand by what I said about my failure to get the party win seats," he said. Earlier, Mr Meena posted on X: "Raghukul reeti sada chahi aai, pran jaai par vachan na jayi" to underline his unwavering intent to keep his promise at any cost. Mr Meena campaigned in eastern Rajasthan seats, including Dausa, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur, Alwar, Tonk-Sawai Madhopur and Kota-Bundi. In the results last month, the BJP lost Dausa, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur and Tonk-Sawai Madhopur. He was also in the race for the chief minister's post after the results of the Assembly elections in December last year, but the party high command picked first-time MLA B.L. Sharma to lead the state. Mr Meena, who is a five-time MLA and a former Rajya Sabha MP, has been a Lok Sabha MP from Dausa and Sawai Madhopur.

6 held in Hathras stampede; prime accused on run

■ Continued from Page 1 Mr Yadav is from Manipuri and the rest are local residents of Hathras. All six were arrested on Thursday by the officials of Hathras Kotwall and Sikandra Rau police stations, the police said. Mr Mathur said: "When information regarding the arrestees was obtained through detailed inquiry, these people told that they are members of the organising committee and work as sevadars... The organisers and members gathered a crowd and collected donations in the sat-sang for cooperation." The FIR was lodged on July 2 under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide), 126 (2) (wrongful restraint), 223 (disobedience to an order duly promulgated by the public servant) and 238 (causing the disappearance of evidence). Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition and former Congress president Rahul Gandhi will visit the site and offer support to those affected, senior party leader K.C. Venugopal said on Thursday.



THE ASIAN AGE

5 JULY 2024

Spirit of cooperation will help govt in Parliament

The discussion on the motion thanking the President for her address to the joint session of Parliament showcased before the people the portraits of a government side which remains in denial mode on critical issues of national importance and an Opposition that has regained its strength, voice and relevance.

The BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi can be justifiably proud of their third successive electoral win, albeit with lesser numbers, but they might do well to remember that those who elected them do not have the luxury to celebrate with them forever. Far too many issues need urgent attention of the government. However, the Prime Minister, while replying to the motion, appeared not to be in a mood to address what has shaken the people's trust in the nation's institutions but played it safe by expatiating on platitudes and mouthing stale rhetoric.

Manipur has been on a boil for over a year. More than 200 people have died; thousands are still living in relief camps. Armed rebels engage each other in battle on a regular basis. In fact, the strife has of late spread to border villages with more than 2,000 having taken refuge in neighboring Assam last month fearing violence in the border district of Jiribam. While the President did not bring it up in her address, the Prime Minister, who has skirted Manipur in his speeches and electoral campaign, would now claim in the Rajya Sabha that the state is returning to normal, citing the reopening of schools and data on arrests and FIRs. He would even reprimand the Opposition for raising it. It is highly regrettable that the government refuses to acknowledge ground realities.

The government also appears to be in a state of denial when it comes to the mess related to the conduct of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test for medical education and other national competitive examinations and it looks to be unmindful of the death blow it has dealt to the foundations of institutional integrity. The President mentioned it in her address and the Prime Minister assured the nation in his reply that the government has been working on a war footing to fix the problem. However, it has not yet considered scrapping the tainted examination and ordering a retest despite the investigating agencies, including CBI, making several arrests across the country. No resolute action means allowing the cheats to get their way.

The Prime Minister was only stating the obvious when he tells the Congress Party that it was the NDA which won the election, and not the INDIA bloc. But Mr Modi and the BJP must keep in mind that it sought a mandate that will give it sufficient numbers to amend the Constitution but it got a number which won't even allow it to pass a law without requiring the help of its allies. It must realise that the people have elected a Lower House unlike in the past two elections and ensured that it has an Opposition in substantial numbers and a Leader of Opposition who can lay legitimate claim to the post. It should perish the thought of sweeping contentious issues under the carpet or expelling Opposition MPs. Instead of painting their suggestions as imbecile, it should open its eyes to the reflection in them of popular demands. Picking out the actionable points, it should then proceed to frame policy and notify redress. A spirit of accommodation and cooperation is all that the people are asking for.

Team India can still do it!

Team India may have taken an eternity to get home. In fact, so many days did Hurricane Beryl take to move west beyond the southeastern island of Barbados that the T20World Cup organisers could have held a best-of-three finals at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown so that any lingering doubts about Team India being a worthy winner could have been made to disappear.

Having found a former national carrier willing to send a huge aircraft out to evacuate the victorious Indians, the team were jetted directly to New Delhi to meet the Prime Minister. But, before the Opposition, given today's polarised world of Indian politics, can raise any objections, let it be said that the triumph in the 1983 World Cup, a revolutionary event that turned the cricket world upside down, felt more complete when the then PM Mrs Indira Gandhi said to the team, famously, "India can do it."

Having driven India's enthusiastic cricket fans numbering way over one billion to the point of vexation in a decade of non-performance in the most crucial of knockout games, Team India proved they could play to capacity and win something as major as the T20 World Cup once again. Which is why whatever was laid out for Rohit Sharma's team of achievers by way of a grand welcome as they brought home the cup was something that they so thoroughly deserved.

A ticker tape welcome was once given to the first achievers in international cricket of Ajit Wadekar's team who won Test series both in the Caribbean and in England in 1971 and lit up the expectations of an Indian public who progressively became crazy over the game. When Kapil's Devils beat the champions in '83, it became an explosive moment that changed Indian cricket forever.

As MS Dhoni's men won the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007 they helped transform the sport so much that it soon became an Indian game that is spreading around the globe much more now. And what Rohit Sharma and Rahul Dravid's men have achieved now is to prove that "India can still do it", win Cup finals to justify the talent, the money, the attention and the adulation that Indian cricketers receive from their adoring fans.

It appears now that the sky's the limit for Team India, currently ranked No. 1 in all three formats, because Rohit's men broke the shackles of the inhibitions, the anxieties and the fears that may have seen them stumble at the last hurdle for too long. They are truly champions of cricket now.

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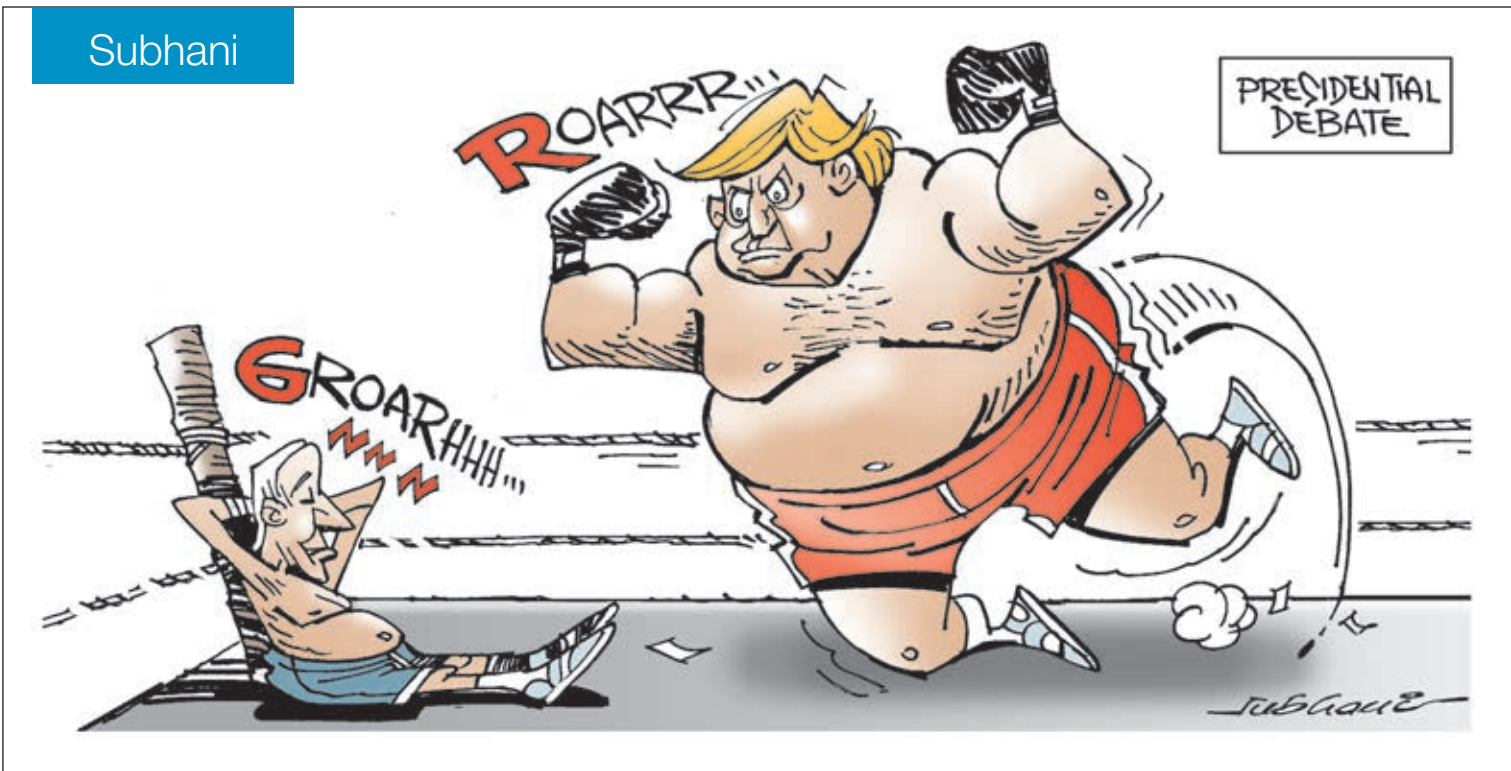
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Subhani



Why New Delhi needs to take fresh look at Beijing



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

With the Narendra Modi government having begun a fresh term last month, it is time for it to undertake a full-scale review of its policy towards the People's Republic of China. One only has to see the sordid happenings during its 2019-2024 second term. This included the Dragon's unilateral push to Delhi to the precipice, to show who's the real boss of Asia, especially South Asia.

The unilateralism shown by the post-1949 Communist Party of China and its overlord, Chairman Mao Zedong, has now rubbed off on his successors. Little wonder then that what Mao did to India in 1950s and 1962, Xi Jinping did to India in 2019-2024 with vengeance. History repeated itself in its ugliest form to hit the 21st century successors of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-1964).

Nehru, a liberal, had idealism and a vision, which regrettably led to his monumental China failure. It will be wrong, however, to look at Nehru's broad vision and policies only through the China prism, for he also had mega-successes which far outweigh the negativity. Just as non-violence was Mahatma Gandhi's path-breaking means to end British rule, "non-alignment" and "Panchsheel" were Nehru's enduring contributions to the world of diplomacy. India still follows this path with great elan, as seen by the world in the 28-month ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. So far, India has done very well; thanks to inherited wisdom of the professional mandarins of South Block, who have kept the ship of state steady, even in a rocky ambience of deceptive Chinese hostility and Western diplomatic irritants and pressure.

In dealing with China, one has to be prepared for more

deception. Remember Mao's formula of "one step backward and two steps forward" when the situation so demands? Remember Deng Xiaoping's prescription once China started interacting with the world of foreign "barbarians" from its claustrophobic Forbidden City: "Hide your intent and bide your time"? Secretiveness is in the DNA of Chinese diplomacy. That is what needs to be effectively countered by India today.

The inflexibly bellicose Han dictator must be tackled upfront. As China now faces a robust pushback from the West and East on trade, import, export and military hotspots, out of sheer exasperation Xi Jinping was forced to quote Nehru's 1954 "Panchsheel" (Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence) to influence the world, without of course giving Nehru due credit for coining those memorable words.

In India, two Chinese diplomats (the ambassador in Delhi and the consul-general in Kolkata) arrived in midst of the parliamentary election and straightway began a verbal charm-offensive to impress Indians and create a pro-China lobby. The idea was to put pressure on Indians - to humble the enemy without a fight, through internal sabotage. The Chinese take their cue from India's history, where battles were lost to foreigners, with internal lobbyists ensuring victory for external foes.

One need not go into the myriad ways in which China has inflicted damage on India. The question is how India should re-orient its entire policy spectrum in order to counter-balance Han aggression. The Hans' psyche solely revolves around the Opium War (1839-1842) and subsequent events like the burning of Royal Summer Palace (1860), Boxer Revolt (1898), and suppression by the

India has let itself become excessively dependent on cheap Chinese products and raw material. It's now heard that some Indian companies may 'collapse' without 'imported Chinese managers' running them.

"barbarians" (foreigners) of the "Son of Heaven" (Emperor) living in the opulent Forbidden City of Beijing.

This "revenge factor" is deeply embedded in the psyche of 1.5 billion Chinese people. Let India not be bullied or get carried away by false hopes from outside and internal pressures mounted by China's lobbyists for their own private agenda, which may not necessarily benefit the 1.4 billion Indians.

Therefore, first insist on going back to India's territorial status quo ante of April-May 2020. This is absolutely non-negotiable. Inviolability and sovereignty of territory comes first and foremost for any nation-state. It's good that India's external affairs minister, at least, has been publicly harping on this for quite some time. Despite the parrot-like utterances of some of China's "wolf-warrior" diplomats, there can be no "business as usual" without a proper territorial resolution. Beijing is circulating a false narrative that "India and China have more convergence than divergence". This is nothing more than a backdoor device to open the gates for hordes of Chinese people to enter India for "business", which will only benefit Beijing. New Delhi must not fall into this trap, otherwise the leaders of today will face the harsh judgment of history, even worse than Nehru in 1962.

India-China bilateral trade is in shambles. The \$100 billion-plus deficit can't be wished away with a magic wand. The options are limited, and some hard decisions are needed. It's time to take action to prohibit through the commerce ministry the import of all non-essential goods from

the Chinese, on which India's traders are making humongous profits by selling in the domestic market at steep markups. Second, impose stiff tariffs on all Chinese imports. Then, impose non-tariff barriers as well.

The WTO today is hardly in a position to deal with disputes between the "big boys". The United States imposed 100 per cent tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles. The European Union followed, with a maximum 38.4 per cent import duty. The entire West is trying to protect their domestic industry from brutal Chinese assault through cheap products. Let India recognise the harsh reality that the days of rampant globalization may be past. The monopoly-like Chinese juggernaut has taken on the entire West, and India is bound to be Dragon's next target.

The global pushback Beijing is facing is bad news for its economy. India must keep watch on the fast-unfolding scenario. Unfortunately, it has let itself become excessively dependent on cheap Chinese products and raw material. It's now heard that some Indian companies may "collapse" without "imported Chinese managers" running them. Truly bizarre! Have some people, in their over-enthusiasm to make money through any means, lost their mind? Can India be (mis)-guided by them?

It's time for South Block to crack the whip and ensure that the tentacles of the Chinese Dragon don't spread any further in this country. Just consider some facts. In a reply to a Parliament question in December 2022, the government had acknowledged that "nearly 3,560 companies in India have Chinese directors" and that "174 Chinese companies are registered in India". These need to be kept under close watch and acted upon, to ensure that India's self-interest is not compromised in any way.

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College, New Delhi. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

WHY WOMEN?

Bhole Baba must really have some divine powers. How else can one explain his name missing in the FIR? There are 121 deaths officially, but eye-witness accounts suggest the numbers are grossly under-reported. How the godmen manage to garner lakhs of devotees is a complete mystery. The presence of high-ranking officers and politicians at such gatherings give the godmen a certain legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Faith is one thing but to believe dust beneath the godman's feet would cure all ailments is taking matters a little too far. It is observed the women devotees attending such programmes outnumber men by a wide margin. A study on the issue would be illuminating.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

THREE REASONS

THERE ARE two reasons why women outnumber men in religious gatherings in our culture. One, men are too proud to admit surrender to a higher power while women are encouraged to be obey a master. Two, the welfare of the family is seen as the job of the wife and she is also locked down indoors in most important ways, so this becomes her means to socialise with the baba but mainly with other women. One reason why more women die in stampedes, on the other hand, is because they are usually veiled and sari-clad, unable to move, groomed to stick together and not behave independently and hence cannot take decisions in a crisis even with regard to mobility. At fairs and long distance journeys it is common to see them led and herded to their destinations by their male guardians.

Priyanka Mathur
Noida, UP

INDIANS 'HAPPY'

ACCORDING TO the Ipsos "What Worries the World" survey for June 2024, India stands out as one of the most optimistic nations. An impressive 69 per cent of surveyed Indians believe their country is moving in the right direction, similar to the sentiments of 79 per cent in Singapore and 70 per cent in Indonesia. Globally, only 38 per cent of citizens share this optimism. Despite concerns about inflation and unemployment, India's economic trajectory remains hopeful. This is driven by factors like robust domestic consumption.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazaribagh

John J. Kennedy



After the fiasco over Neet leaks & NET row, what's the way forward?

The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Neet) fiasco is becoming increasingly contentious. Intense discussions and widespread protests are occurring on multiple fronts. In Parliament, heated debates are taking place, while on the legal front, petitions have been filed in the courts in several states. Meanwhile, the government is implementing mechanisms to investigate the issue and recommend remedial measures.

Politically, the issue has ignited sharp criticism and pertinent questions in Parliament. The Opposition leaders have demanded a detailed discussion, urging the Prime Minister to facilitate a debate as the issue impacts millions of hopeful students. Samajwadi Party MP Akhilesh Yadav has accused the government of fostering paper leaks. Rahul Gandhi's call for a debate deserves serious consideration. A thorough discussion on this critical issue is crucial for the nation. The government could improve its image by engaging in such a debate and showing commitment to addressing significant student-related problems. No system is perfect, but efforts must be made to rectify exposed flaws. The discussion should aim to identify loopholes and find solutions. The government must prioritize student welfare by allowing this discussion. Rhetoric alone is insufficient. Although President Droupadi Murmu did mention the issue in her address to the joint sitting of both Houses, and emphasise the government's commitment to a fair investigation, a debate in both Houses of

Parliament would be a good starting point. Also, it is important not to dismiss the government's actions, such as replacing officials and postponing exams, as mere "cover-up". However, to restore faith in the system, it must engage in a thorough discussion. The nation deserves to know the truth.

On the legal front, aggrieved students are seeking a fair resolution, but the path is fraught with challenges. Opinions are divided: Some students advocate for a re-examination, while others are firmly opposed, and both sides have some valid points. Cancelling the exam and ordering a retake would impose extra stress on students who genuinely prepared and performed well, subjecting them to further hardship. But, given the malpractices that compromised the exam's integrity, the results cannot be deemed valid for selecting candidates. This situation presents a classic Hegelian dilemma, where the courts must choose between two justifiable yet conflicting options. Deciding without causing harm to one party will be a difficult task for the judiciary.

Meanwhile, student organisations like NSUI, AISF and AISA are intensifying their protests. Their anger is natural and spontaneous. Interestingly, even the ABVP has raised concerns. Some organisations demand scrapping the National Testing Agency (NTA), while others have called for the Union education minister's resignation. While the minister's resignation might be seen as a political move, it is up to him to decide on moral grounds.

The call to disband the NTA is more significant

due to its ongoing controversies. As investigations continue, doubts about the exam's reliability and the NTA's role are only mounting. For instance, the retest results for 813 out of 1,563 candidates, where no one achieved full marks, highlight systemic corruption. This casts doubt on the NTA's practices since its inception in 2017 and questions past candidate selection. Public faith in the NTA is waning. An opinion poll showed only 18 per cent of 857 respondents have confidence in the NTA, while 77 per cent believe it should no longer conduct exams.

One of the major problems contributing to the NTA's predicament is the overwhelming volume of work it has been assigned. A brand-new organisation with inadequate and underqualified staff to meet millions of aspirants' needs to compete in top-notch exams was a sure recipe for disaster. Lord Acton's words ring true: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Such an outcome was inevitable. Compounding the issue, several officials responsible for maintaining the integrity of the exam process have also fallen prey to greed. The arrest of a school principal and district coordinator of Neet exams in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, has eroded public confidence.

The silver lining in these troubling events is the government's acknowledgment that not all is well with Neet and the NTA, prompting the initiation of reforms. A seven-member expert committee, led by K. Radhakrishnan, former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro), is expected to

submit its recommendations in two months. While it is unlikely that the committee will recommend abolishing the NTA — indicating the government's continued commitment to its "one nation, one exam" approach — the focus will be on reforms in the examination process and improvements in data security protocols.

However, importantly, the committee should consider regional realities and the perspectives of state governments, many of which advocate for education to be returned to the State List from the Concurrent List. The committee has invited feedback from stakeholders; it would be worthwhile to include opinions from state representatives as well.

In this regard, closely examining the A.K. Rajan committee report on Neet could provide valuable insights. The solutions proposed by the committee need to be enduring. Understanding the negative impacts of a centralised approach, its effects on different sections of society and how a "one-size-fits-all" method undermines social justice is essential. Any proposed solutions will likely be cosmetic without sincerely addressing these concerns in the recommendations. The committee's work must ensure that the reforms lead to substantial, long-lasting improvements in the examination system while simultaneously avoiding discrimination.

The writer is professor and dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Christ University in Bengaluru

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	80,049.67	0.08
Nifty 50	24,302.15	0.06
S&P 500*	5,537.02	0.51
Dollar (₹)	83.50	0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	106.48	0.40
Euro (₹)	90.15	0.35
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	72,338.65	0.09
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	87.23	-0.13
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.998	-0.002
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.355	-0.081

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Servotech Power launches solar EV charging port

Servotech Power Systems said it has inaugurated Delhi's first grid-connected solar-powered EV charging carport. This solar-powered EV charging carport, established as a pilot project at the Hauz Khas village parking station, marks a milestone in sustainable energy and electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, it said. Servotech has manufactured, designed, and commissioned the solar panels and EV chargers used to establish the carport.



Inox Wind Energy promoters infuse ₹900 cr into firm

Shares of Inox Wind surged more than 14 per cent in the morning trade on Thursday after the wind energy service provider said its promoter Inox Wind Energy has infused ₹900 crore into the company. The scrip of the company soared 14.45 per cent to trade at ₹163.07 apiece on the National Stock Exchange (NSE). On the BSE, shares of Inox Wind zoomed 13.80 per cent to trade at ₹162 per piece.

Emcure Pharma's IPO subscribed 4.98 times

Emcure Pharmaceuticals ₹1,952 crore initial public offering (IPO) got fully subscribed and on close of second day's bidding has been over all subscribed 4.98 times. The retail individual investors portion has been subscribed 3.43 times while non-institutional investors (HNI) portion got 13.67 times bids and qualified institutional portion got fully subscribed. The IPO to close on Friday, July 5, 2024.



Zydus gets nod to market blood pressure drug

Zydus Lifesciences said it has received tentative approval from the US health regulator to market its generic Azilsartan Medoxomil tablets used to treat high blood pressure. The tentative approval by the US food and drug administration is for Azilsartan Medoxomil tablets of strengths 40 mg and 80 mg, it said. The drug will be manufactured at the group's formulation facility in Ahmedabad SEZ - II, it added.

Cargo traffic at 12 major ports rises by 6.8% to 69 MT

Mumbai, July 4: Cargo traffic across 12 major Indian ports rose 6.8 per cent to 69.08 million tonnes (MT) in June from 64.69 MT in the year-ago month, with ten ports showing positive growth while the remaining two witnessed a decline.

Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Maharashtra recorded the highest growth in cargo handling at 15.12 per cent during the reporting month, followed by Cochin Port with 15.12 per cent, Kamarajar Port (10.70 per cent), Deendayal Port (8.57 per cent) and New Mangalore Port (8.53 per cent), according to the data released by the major ports' apex body Indian Ports Association (IPA).

According to the IPA, VO Chidambaranar Port's cargo traffic grew 7.73 per cent and Paradip Port 7.41 per cent growth, respectively, during the previous month. SMP Kolkata Port registered a 6.66 per cent growth in traffic handling, followed by Chennai Port (6.09 per cent) and Mormugao Port (3.75 per cent).

On other hand, Mumbai Port witnessed a 6.59 per cent decline in cargo traffic, and Visakhapatnam Port saw a 0.27 per cent year-on-year drop in June this year, as per the IPA.

Meanwhile, a government official said the focus should be on further improving processes as well as ensuring faster turnaround time to tap the potential of the country's air cargo sector.

Piyush Srivastava, senior economic advisor at the ministry of civil aviation, said the air cargo sector has a bright future and the number of freighters in the country is expected to rise.



● JAWAHARLAL NEHRU Port in Maharashtra recorded the highest growth in cargo handling at 15.12% during the reporting month, followed by Cochin Port with 15.12%.

Currently, Indian carriers have around 18 freighters.

There will be a focus on further improving the ease of doing business and faster turnaround time in the air cargo sector, he said while speaking at the conference organised by the air cargo forum India (ACFI) in the national capital.

Air cargo is yet to fully recover to the pre-Covid levels. In 2023-24, the air cargo handled in the country was a little over 3.36 million tonnes.

Surendra Kumar Ahirwar, joint secretary at DPIIT, a lot of movement is happening on the logistics side, including the skilling of people.

He said there is sub-optimal utilisation of existing air cargo facilities and emphasised the need for developing hubs as part of logistics infra.

RBI DIVIDEND TO GOVT WILL LOWER NEED FOR BIG DIVESTMENT: CARE

Mumbai, July 4: The record ₹2.1 lakh crore dividend payout by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will limit the need for big-ticket divestment, a domestic rating agency said.

Care Ratings said the new government will retain the interim budget's ₹50,000 crore target on receipts from divestments. "With a bumper dividend from the RBI, the central government's fiscal position remains comfortable, which may limit the urgency to push ahead with big-ticket divestments," it said.

If there is a shortfall in the resource accretion, the government will prefer asset monetisation, it added.

Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) sales expected to be completed during the year will make it easy sailing for the government on the FY25 target, the agency said. "If the government offloads its entire stake in SCI, it could generate ₹12,500-22,500 crore as divestment proceeds," according to the report.

The other plausible candidates include Concor and Pawan Hans, Care Ratings said.

In the last ten years, the government has raised ₹5.2 lakh crore from the divestment initiatives. The government can raise ₹11.5 lakh crore by selling stakes in state-owned companies without getting the stake below 51 per cent, according to the report.

Govt brings new funding guidelines

New Delhi, July 4: The ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) on Thursday said it has issued scheme guidelines for funding testing facilities, infrastructure, and institutional support under the national green hydrogen mission.

The scheme will have a total budget of ₹200 crore and will be implemented till the FY2025-26, said MNRE in a statement.

The scheme includes the

development of robust quality and performance testing facilities to ensure the quality, sustainability, and safety of green hydrogen (GH2) production and trade, according to the statement.

It will support the identification of the gaps in the existing testing facilities for components, technologies, and processes in the value chain of Green Hydrogen and its derivatives, it said.

● SCHEME INCLUDES the development of robust quality and performance testing facilities to ensure the quality, sustainability, and safety of green hydrogen production and trade.

The scheme will support the creation of new testing facilities and the upgradation of existing testing facilities to ensure

Rising streak in markets leads to profit booking

FPIs were net buyers of equities worth ₹2,575.85 cr

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JULY 4

Sensex and Nifty-50 scaled new highs of 80,391.64 and 24,401 respectively, but later pared gains on profit taking.

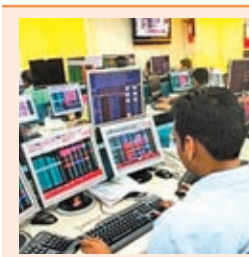
The Sensex closed above 80,000 mark for the first time at 80,049.65 gaining 62.87 points or 0.08 per cent while the Nifty-50 closed at new high of 24,302.15 gaining 16 points or 0.06 per cent.

The broader market outperformed with BSE mid-cap index up 0.60 per cent and BSE small-cap index up 0.62 per cent.

BSE's market capitalisation touched a new high of over ₹447.30 lakh crore or \$5.36 trillion.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net buyers of equities worth ₹2,575.85 cr while domestic institutions were net sellers by ₹2,375.18 crore.

"Domestic benchmark



● RELEASE OF pre-quarterly business updates are giving confidence in healthy Q1 earnings. Sentiments got a further boost in the hope of a rate cut as the recent data points indicate the softening of US economy.

indices opened higher on Thursday, driven by positive global cues. As a result, the Nifty-50 registered a new record high of 24,401 and finally settled the day on a flat note at 24,302. However, the broader market outperformed the benchmarks, with the midcap and smallcap indices registering fresh highs," said Hrishikesh Yedve, technical analyst, Asit C. Mehta Investment.

The pharma sector gained more than 1 per cent to be the top performer followed by IT,

auto and realty while bank, FMCG, oil and gas, were the laggards.

"Sector-wise it was a mixed bag with buying seen in IT, pharma, and auto. Defence witnessed a smart rally today on the expectation of continued focus on the upcoming budget and strong order inflows," said Siddhartha Khemka, head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Release of pre-quarterly business updates are giving confidence in healthy Q1 earnings. Sentiments got a further boost in the

hope of a rate cut as the recent data points indicate the softening of the US economy, Khemka said.

Quarterly business updates by large corporates have triggered fresh buying in some sectors.

"The defensive bet on large caps like IT and pharma gained momentum due to the diminishing US inflationary pressure, improvement in QoQ earnings outlook and a resultant sharp fall in the US 10 year bond yield," said Vinod Nair, head, Research, Geojit Financial Services.

The buoyancy in government spending and the green shoots in corporate earnings are now supporting the premium valuation. Return of FIIs to the domestic market and expectation of a rate cut in September are supporting market sentiment, Nair added.

Coal output increases in May

New Delhi, July 4: The coal sector has registered a growth of 10.2 per cent among all eight core industries of the economy in May, the government said on Thursday.

The index of coal industry has reached 184.7 points during May as compared to 167.6 points during the same month last year.

This increase in production underscores the sector's capacity to meet

growing demand of energy and manufacturing industries.

"The coal sector has demonstrated highest growth of 10.2 per cent (provisional), following the electricity industry among the eight core industries for the month of May, 2024 as per the index of eight core industries (ICI) released by ministry of commerce and industries," the coal ministry said in a state-

● THE PRODUCTION growth of coal, natural gas and electricity rose by 10.2%, 7.5% and 12.8%, respectively, against 7.2%, (-) 0.3% and 0.8% in May 2023

ment.

The driving force behind growth can be attributed to a considerable rise in coal production during May. The latest data released on June 28

showed the eight key infrastructure sectors' growth rose by 6.3 per cent in May. The production of the eight sectors grew 6.7 per cent in April.

The production growth of coal, natural gas and electricity rose by 10.2 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 12.8 per cent, respectively, against 7.2 per cent, (-) 0.3 per cent and 0.8 per cent in May 2023, according to the data released by the commerce ministry.

Sebi asks brokers to hone fraud detection

New Delhi, July 4: Sebi on Thursday issued a circular requiring stock brokers to establish an institutional mechanism for prevention and detection of fraud or market abuse in a bid to protect the interest of investors in the securities market.

The circular mandates the implementation of systems for the surveillance of trading activities and internal controls, introduction of a whistleblower policy, among other obligations.

The standards for implementation of the same, including operational modalities will be formulated by the broker's industry standards forum (ISF), in consultation with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the regulator said.

The implementation will be based on the size of the stock brokers. Brokers with more than 50,000 active unique client codes (UCCs) are required to comply by Jan. 1, 2025.

Those with 2,001 to 50,000 active UCCs have to comply by April 1, 2025, and brokers with up to 2,000 active UCCs must comply by April 1, 2026. Qualified stock brokers must comply with these requirements by Aug. 1, 2024.

Persistent, Starfish in acquisition deal

New Delhi, July 4: Indian IT company Persistent Systems' US-based arm is set to acquire a 100 per cent stake in New Jersey-based software company Starfish Associates, LLC, USA (Starfish) on July 2, 2024 (US time).

The acquisition is expected to be completed within 4-6 weeks, the company said in a statement.

"Persistent Systems Inc, USA (Wholly owned Subsidiary) has entered into a stock purchase agreement for the acquisition of Starfish Associates, LLC, USA (Starfish)" on July 2, 2024 (US time).

"Further, Persistent Systems Ltd, the parent company is not a party to this transaction," the filing said.



FMCG REVENUES TO GROW 7-9% THIS FISCAL, SAYS CRISIL

New Delhi, July 4: The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is expected to see a revenue growth of 7 to 9 per cent this fiscal, helped by higher sales volume and a revival of rural markets, Crisil Ratings said in a report.

Volume growth from urban consumers will also remain steady at 7 to 8 per cent supported by rising disposable incomes and continued focus on premium offerings by the industry players, especially in the personal care and home care segments, it said.

Moreover, the premiumisation trend and growth in volume will expand the operating margin of FMCG companies "by 50-75 basis points to 20-21 per cent", it said.

"The margin expansion would have been higher but for rising selling and marketing expenses amid heightened competition among organised and unorganised players alike," the report added.

The product realisations in FY25 are "expected to grow in low single digits with a marginal rise in prices of key raw materials for the food and beverages (F&B) segment", however, key raw material prices for personal care (PC) and home care (HC) segments are seen to be stable, it added.

Over the revenue growth, the report added the FMCG sector will also be supported by modest realisation growth of 1 to 2 per cent "primarily due to marginal rise in prices" of some key F&B raw materials.

Crisil Ratings associate director Rabindra Verma said revenue growth will vary across product segments and firms.

It estimated the FMCG growth for the fiscal 2024 to be around 5 to 7 per cent.

Firms woo staff with swanky offices

Mumbai, July 4: To retain employees and bring them back to office, many companies are res-orting to "Office Peacocking", which involves creating a swanky or fancy work space, and spending huge amounts of their budget on attractive designns, says industry experts.

The 'Office Peacocking' concept gained significant traction in India post-Covid, as companies sought to entice employees back to the office following the remote work shift induced by the pandemic in order to compete with the comfort of home offices, human resource service provider TeamLease Services chief executive officer-Staffing Kartik Narayan said.

Peacocking involves



redesigning office spaces with stylish decor, trendy furniture, cosy corners, natural light, and well-stocked pantries to create an inviting and vibrant work environment.

"Companies are allocating a substantial portion of their budgets for office redesigns. Although specific figures vary, investments in office aesthetics are seen as strategic moves to improve employee productivity," he said.

Technology, finance, and

consulting sectors are particularly keen on office peacocking as these sectors face higher competition for talent and a greater need to entice employees back to physical workspaces, he said.

Echoing the view, staffing firm CIEL HR director and CEO Aditya Narayan Mishra said over the past 2-3 years, 'Office Peacocking' has seen remarkable growth, with an estimated 25-30 per cent surge in investment in office aesthetics and interior design.

Major metropolitan cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi NCR, and Hyderabad are leading in 'Office Peacocking' as these cities host many multinational corporations and start-ups.

BYTE | SIZED T20 World Cup, IPL, and WPL 2024 sparked cricket conversations this year

India active on Threads with 175 mn users

New Delhi, July 4: India is one of the most active countries for Threads, which has notched over 175 million monthly active users globally, according to social media giant Meta.

The update assumes significance as it marks the completion of nearly one year since Meta officially launched a rival to Twitter (now X).

"With 175 million activities, we're seeing Threads become a place where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. India is one of the most active countries for

Threads globally," Meta said in a release.

In India, some of the most popular tags and topics on Threads are centred around film, TV and OTT content, celebrity-related conversations and sports.

Meta chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg announced that Threads has over 175 million monthly active users as the social media giant asserted that Threads was launched with the belief that "everyone has something valuable to say".

"It's been a year now, and we're seeing it become a place where people feel



● THREADS SCALED highs immediately after it was unveiled in July 2023 - it snapped up 100 million user sign-ups within a week of its launch.

comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. In fact, India is one of the most active countries for Threads globally," the release said.

Among the other major takeaways are creation of 50 million topic tags on Threads till date, globally. "Cricket has been reign-

ing on Threads in India, with players from the current Indian squad like Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja, to former cricketers like Akash Chopra and Suresh Raina, experts like Riddhima Pathak and international cricketers like AB de Villiers sharing their pas-



SHORT TAKES

Gukesh holds leader Caruana

Bucharest, Romania: World Championship challenger Grandmaster D Gukesh played out a draw with tournament leader and top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States in the seventh round of the Superbet classic chess tournament here.

On another all-draws day, R. Praggnanandhaa signed peace with Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia leaving the lead positions intact like the previous round.

Caruana on 4.5 points remains in front with two victories and five draws, he is followed by Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa and Alireza Firouzja of France, who are all half a point behind the American.

Nepomniachtchi shares the fifth spot with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France with a fifty percent score, a half point ahead of the trio of American Wesley So, Dutch Anish Giri and Uzbekistan's first son in chess Nodirbek Abdusattorov. Just two rounds remain in the \$350000 prize money tournament.

Gukesh's choice of Italian opening gave him an optical advantage against Caruana. — PTI

Rajawat advances in Canada Open

Calgary, Canada: Promising Indian shuttler Priyanshu Rajawat stunned higher-ranked Rasmus Gemke of Denmark in a hard-fought three game contest to advance to the second round of men's singles event at the Canada Open here.

World No.39 Rajawat had to dig deep to get the better of eighth seed Gemke of Denmark 17-21, 21-16, 21-14 in his opening round match that lasted one hour and 10 minutes on Wednesday night.

Rajawat, thus, remained the only Indian surviving player in the men's singles competition and will take on Takuma Obayashi of Japan in the next round.

The two other Indians in the fray, Ayush Shetty lost 14-21, 11-21 to sixth seed Koki Watanabe of Japan, while S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian was shown the door by France's Alex Lanier 16-21, 17-21.

In the women's singles, Tanya Hemanth and Anupama Upadhyay also progressed to the second round.

While Tanya beat Jackie Dent of Canada 21-13, 20-22 21-14, Anupama defeated Rachael Darragh of Ireland 21-11, 21-11. — PTI

Gritty Advani wards off Parikh

Riyadh: Ace Indian cueist Pankaj Advani scored a fine come-from-behind 4-2 win over Siddharth Parikh to keep himself in line for a hat-trick of Asian Billiards titles here.

The match started with Parikh taking an early lead. Showing precision, he scored 101 points, leaving Advani trailing with 38.

The second frame was a nail-biter.

Parikh managed to edge out Advani at 100-99. Parikh's highest break was 65, but the latter almost turned the frame in his favour with an impressive break of 92.

Trailing 0-2, Advani bounced back strongly in the third frame with a commanding 101-0 win.

His break of 60 was a testament to his strategic prowess and execution.

The fourth frame was an intense battle. Parikh scored 95, including a break of 95, but it wasn't enough to surpass his opponent's 101.

Advani, with a break of 93, demonstrated his resilience and ability to perform under pressure, narrowly winning the frame.

Advani was dominant in the fifth frame winning it 104-2, including a remarkable break of 87. — PTI

NADA suspends runner Deepanshi

New Delhi: NADA has suspended India's top woman 400m runner Deepanshi for flunking her dope test during the recent National Inter-State Championships, where she won a silver medal.

The 21-year-old Deepanshi had clocked 52.01 seconds to finish second behind Kiran Pahal (50.92) in the women's 400m final in Panchkula on Friday.

The in-competition dope sample, which was taken on June 27 (either after heat race or semifinal), contained anabolic steroids.

This was the first dope positive case from the National Inter-State Championships (June 27-30), which was the final qualifying event for the Paris Olympics.

Deepanshi does not train at National camp. — PTI

HEROES HOME



Players of the T20 World Cup-winning team during their open bus victory parade in Mumbai on Thursday. — PTI

Champs arrive in Delhi to fan frenzy

New Delhi, July 4: Exuberant fans lined up to express support despite monsoon showers and heavy security deployment before Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted them for a breakfast meet as India's T20 World Cup-winning cricket stars returned to a euphoric reception, here on Thursday.

Hundreds of supporters, holding placards congratulating their favourites and waving the national flag, braved the inclement weather to wait outside the airport for the victorious side, which defeated South Africa by seven runs in the final in Bridgetown on Saturday last week.

The side was unable to head back home immediately after the title win due to a shutdown forced by hurricane Beryl in Barbados. They were cocooned in their hotel before the BCCI secretary Jay Shah made arrangements for a special charter flight.

The Air India special charter flight AIC24WC — Air India Champions 24 World Cup — arrived in Delhi at 6am (IST) on



Virat Kohli and coach Rahul Dravid gestures to the fans upon their arrival in New Delhi on Thursday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Thursday after a 16-hour non-stop journey.

Heavy security was deployed to keep the crowd in check at the Indira Gandhi International airport but that did little to dampen

the spirits as fans cheered enthusiastically holding up posters of star batter Virat Kohli, skipper Rohit Sharma and outgoing head coach Rahul Dravid.

Two buses were stationed outside the T3

Terminal to ferry the players to ITC Maurya Sheraton, where they were greeted by dhol and traditional Bhangra dancers.

Most of them, including skipper Rohit Sharma, all-rounder Hardik Pandya,

Suryakumar Yadav and Rishabh Pant, shook a leg with the assembled dancers, giving them a memory that would last a lifetime.

All of this unfolded amid expected media frenzy. A brief while later, they left to meet Modi at his official residence, continuing a hectic schedule that awaits them through the day.

Accompanied by BCCI President Roger Binny and secretary Jay Shah, the squad, including outgoing head coach Rahul Dravid, spent close to two hours at the 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence of the Prime Minister before heading back to the hotel.

In a video later shared by the Prime Minister's Office, the players could be seen having light-hearted conversations with Modi.

"What a great honour, meeting our honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji. Thank you sir for inviting us to the Prime Minister's residence," Kohli posted on Instagram with a picture of him with the PM. — PTI

MUMBAI HALTS TO SALUTE TEAM INDIA

Mumbai, July 4: An ocean of humanity greeted the victory parade of the T20 World Cup winning Indian team in South Mumbai's Marine Drive as thousands of passionate fans gathered to catch a glimpse of their favourite stars, bringing the traffic to a complete standstill.

The two-hour open bus parade, which was delayed by two hours, started from the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) in Nariman Point at 7:30pm and went till the Wankhede Stadium.

The distance is covered usually in five minutes but it took more than an hour.

In 2007, Rohit Sharma was the youngest member of the Mahendra Singh Dhoni's epoch-making squad and now at 37, for him to lead his T20 World Champion Indian cricket team on a victory parade must have given him a sense of deja vu.

He is now the oldest

member of this current team, 'been there and done that' and even as the faces around him changed in more than one-and-a-half decades, the now-retired Indian T20 skipper remained a constant for all these years.

As the bus passed through the sea of human, his mind must have travelled back to that September morning in 2007 when Mumbai was as drenched as it was on Thursday evening.

Chants of "Mumbaicha Raja Kaun? Rohit Sharma" (Who's the King of Mumbai? Rohit Sharma) reverberated through the roads.

"This (crowd) tells that the desperation we had to win was similar to the desperation which the fans had. The win has brought smiles on faces of crores of people. This is a special team and this trophy belongs to the nation," Rohit said while addressing the fans inside the stadium. — PTI

India women look to continue spree

AGE CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JULY 4

India women will look to continue their purple patch when they take on South Africa in a three-match T20I series starting here at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Friday.

Having dominated the Proteas in the ODI format and the one-off Test, Harmanpreet Kaur & Co. have set their sights on another sweep.

The T20 series, the final phase of South Africa women's India tour, holds significant importance for both teams as they prepare for the upcoming T20 World Cup in Bangladesh this October.

While India are set to participate in the Asia Cup later this month, it's the final opportunity for the Proteas to fine-tune and finalise their team composition ahead of the ICC event.

India's recent T20 form

has been impressive, having won six out of eight matches since January, including a commanding 5-0 sweep against Bangladesh in May. The likes of Smriti Mandhana and D. Hemalatha were in scintillating form with the bat against Bangladesh, while left-arm spinner Radha Yadav's 10-wicket haul earned her the Player of the Series award.

All eyes will be on Smriti who has scored three centuries in her last four — three ODIs and one Test — international innings.

South Africa, on the other hand, has faced challenges in the shortest format. They were white-washed by Sri Lanka in their last T20 series in April.

However, their valiant performance on a challenging Chepaunk track in the one-off Test should instill a sense of belief.

Djokovic survives rookie test

London, July 4: Novak Djokovic came through a testing Wimbledon workout to stay on course for a record-equalling eighth men's title on Thursday as Andy Murray prepared to launch his emotional farewell.

Jessica Pegula became the highest-ranked player to exit the tournament so far, dumped out by China's Wang Xinyu in the second round.

Seven-time champion Djokovic did not have it all his own way against British wild card Jacob Fearnley but came through 6-3, 6-4, 5-7, 7-5 in a second-round match lasting three hours.

It appeared to be business as usual for the Serbian as he coasted into a two-set lead on Centre Court but the 27th-ranked Fearnley broke his illustrious opponent twice in the third set to reduce the deficit.

Fearnley, playing in his first Grand Slam, carved out two break points in the sixth game of the fourth



Novak Djokovic of Serbia returns to Britain's Jacob Fearnley during their second round match at the Wimbledon championships on Thursday. — AP

set but missed his chance and Djokovic broke in the 11th game before serving out for the win.

PEGULA OUSTED

Fifth-ranked Pegula went down 6-4, 6-7 (7/9), 6-1 to

China's Wang Xinyu, who celebrated her first win against a top-10 player.

The American battled back after losing the first set, saving a match point in the second-set tie-break, before levelling the

match. But China's 42nd-ranked Wang raced into a 5-0 lead in the decider.

BOPANNA-EBDEN IN SECOND ROUND

India's Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden moved into the second round of the men's doubles event with a smooth win over Robin Haas and Sander Arends.

Bopanna and Ebden sailed past their Dutch opponents 7-5, 6-4 in an hour and 11 minutes in a rain-interrupted match.

Another Indian Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivetti prevailed against a quality pair to move to the men's doubles second round but Olympic-bound N. Sriram Balaji made an exit from the Wimbledon Championships along with Luke Johnson.

Bhambri and Olivetti downed Kazakhstan duo of Alexander Bublik and Alexander Shevchenko 6-4, 6-4 in 58 minutes at court nine. — Agencies

CHOPRA SETS TO LEAD 28-MEMBER SQUAD IN PARIS

New Delhi, July 4: Defending champion Neeraj Chopra will headline a 28-member Indian athletics contingent at the Paris Olympics starting July 26.

The squad comprises 17 men and 11 women athletes with some of the other prominent names being Asian Games champions Avinash Sable, Tejinderpal Singh Toor along with sprint hurdler Jyothi Yarraji, to name a few.

The 4x400m men's relay team, featuring Muhammed Anas, Muhammed Ajmal, Amoj Jacob and Rajesh Ramesh, which had created quite a stir by leaving behind the USA team in one of the heats at the last World Championships.

The track and field competition will be conducted at the Stade de France between August 1 to August 11. — PTI