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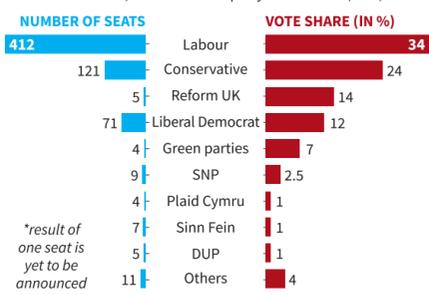
Starmer is new British PM as Labour Party wins polls

It secures 412 seats as Conservative Party down to 121 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons; PM Rishi Sunak retains Richmond seat; far-right party Reform UK wins 14 per cent vote share



New dawn: New British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and wife Victoria arrive at 10 Downing Street on Friday. REUTERS

The chart shows the number of seats won by each party in the 2024 U.K. election, as well as each party's vote share (in %)



Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

The U.K.'s Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, won the July 4 general election by a landslide, securing 412 (+211) seats with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party down to 121 (-250) seats in the 650-seat House of Commons.

Nevertheless, the vote shares told a story of a more modest victory for Labour, while confirming the Conservative defeat, with Labour getting 35% and the Conservatives 24%. Labour had consistently polled 20 points ahead of the Conservatives in opinion polls.

"In many ways, this looks more like an election the Conservatives have lost than one Labour has won," political scientist and psephologist John Curtice wrote on the BBC's website.

The Liberal Democrats gained 63 seats, taking their tally to 71 seats. The Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant Reform UK party won five seats but a vote share of 14%, eating into the Conservative vote.

Following Labour's victory, King Charles III, the country's monarch, appointed Mr. Starmer the U.K.'s Prime Minister, the country's 58th. Standing outside London's iconic Tate Modern in the early

hours of Friday morning, the 61-year-old Mr. Starmer spoke of change, Labour's central theme, reflecting "a changed Labour Party" and a change to 14 years of Tory government.

"And now we can look forward, walk into the morning, the sunlight of hope, pale at first, but getting stronger through the day, shining once again on a country with the opportunity — after 14 years — to get its future back," he said. "Our work is urgent and we begin it today," Mr. Starmer said, as he vowed to work for all Britons.

Sunak concedes defeat
In Yorkshire, the outgoing Prime Minister, Mr. Sunak,

who managed to retain his Richmond seat, conceded and took responsibility for the results. Mr. Sunak's political future has been in doubt as some polls projected that he would lose his own seat.

"The Labour Party has won this general election and I've called Sir Kier Starmer to congratulate him on his victory," Mr. Sunak said, adding, that power would change hands "in a peaceful and orderly manner".

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IN BRIEF

Main accused in Hathras stampede held from Delhi

NEW DELHI
The U.P. police arrested Devprakash Madhukar, the main accused in the Hathras stampede that left 121 dead, from Delhi on Friday. SSP Hathras Nipun Agarwal said the accused will be produced in court on Saturday.

» **Rahul in Hathras: Page 11**



Scrapping NEET-UG not a good idea, Centre tells Supreme Court

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Centre in the Supreme Court on Friday said it is irrational to scrap the undergraduate National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET-UG) 2024 in its entirety.

The government further indicated that cancelling a pan-India exam would not be advisable in the "absence of any proof of any large-scale breach of confidentiality".

The government said a drastic move like a re-ex-

Drastic move like re-examination will jeopardise the future of lakhs of honest students, says govt.

amination would jeopardise the future of lakhs of honest students. The National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts NEET, in a separate affidavit, said the alleged irregularities were localised at Patna and Godhra in Bihar and Gujarat, respectively.

The exam agency was

also against cancelling the test for all.

NEET is a uniform test held for medical admissions across the country under Section 14(1) of the National Medical Commission Act. The NTA, an "independent, autonomous and self-sustained premier organisation", has been conducting NEET since May 2019. NEET-UG 2024 was held across 4,750 centres in 571 cities, including 14 abroad, on May 5.

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West Bengal Speaker swears in 2 TMC MLAs; constitutional impropriety, says Raj Bhavan

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Over a month after two Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders were elected as MLAs, West Bengal Speaker Biman Banerjee administered the oath to them during a special session of the Assembly on Friday, sparking accusations of constitutional impropriety from Raj Bhavan.

in administering the oath of affirmation to the newly elected MLAs," a statement from Raj Bhavan said.

It added that the transgression had been committed despite the Governor appointing Deputy Speaker Asish Banerjee for the task on Thursday evening.

However, during the one-day special session, Mr. Asish Banerjee declined to administer the oath, citing that it would amount to disrespecting the Chair of the Speaker.

Mr. Biman Banerjee then called the MLAs — Reyat Hossain Sarkar from

Bhagabangola in Murshidabad and Sayantika Banerjee from Baranagar in Kolkata — to the floor of the House and administered the oath. Members of the ruling TMC raised slogans and cheered as the MLAs took their oaths. BJP MLAs had boycotted the session.

Month-long impasse
The swearing-in of the two TMC legislators, who were elected on June 4 in the Assembly byelections, ended a month-long impasse between Raj Bhavan and the Assembly over the oath-taking ceremony.

The two legislators had been staging a sit-in on the Assembly premises after Raj Bhavan invited them to take the oath at the Governor's residence. The MLAs demanded that they be sworn in at the Assembly.

While TMC leader and Minister Sovandeb Chattopadhyay said the oath was administered under Rule 5 of the Rules of Procedural Conduct of Business of the Assembly, Leader of the Opposition and senior BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari termed it an "illegal process" and said he would take up the matter.

A.P. in crisis, needs more than special category status: CM

Sobhana K. Nair
Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI



N. Chandrababu Naidu

In the national capital for the first time since becoming Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister for the fourth time, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader N. Chandrababu Naidu said the State's economy has gone beyond the stage of even a special category status.

"We need to rebuild and reconstruct almost every institution in the State. It is far beyond just demanding a special category status," he told *The Hindu*.

His remarks assume significance since the NDA government has already ruled out special category status to any State. Mr. Naidu's stance rules out any immediate possibility of a conflict between the BJP and the TDP.

Comparing his earlier tenures in power, Mr. Naidu said this time he is start-

ing his tenure "not from scratch but far below that".

"When I first came to power (1995), there was a lot of euphoria among our party cadres. We had our work cut out. In the second tenure (1999), we took forward from where we had left. My third tenure (2014) was tough because the State had suffered a setback after the bifurcation. But this tenure, by far, is the most difficult. We are starting not from scratch, but far below that," Mr. Naidu said.

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24 lakh hit by Assam floods

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Religious practices and court judgments
Constitutional ethos, values are paramount

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HC seeks CBI's response on Arvind Kejriwal's bail plea

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The High Court on Friday asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to respond to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's bail plea in the corruption case registered by the agency in connection with the excise policy 'scam'.

Justice Neena Bansal Krishna listed the case for further hearing on July 17, when Mr Kejriwal's other plea - challenging his arrest by the CBI - is also likely to be heard.

Senior advocate Abhishhek Singhvi, representing Mr. Kejriwal, said that the AAP leader is neither a flight risk nor a terrorist and that the CBI arrested him after he got bail in the ED's money laundering case. Mr. Singhvi added that he was pressing for an interim relief in the matter.

Advocate D.P. Singh, ap-

CBI arrested the AAP chief from Tihar Jail, where he is lodged in connection with a case registered by ED

pearing for the CBI, objected to Mr. Kejriwal directly approaching the High Court without first filing the bail plea before a trial court.

In response, Justice Krishna said, "The contention shall be considered at the time of arguments". "In how many cases have the Supreme Court or the High Courts said that please go back, on propriety. On law, there is no quarrel. I am not on law. They also say don't clog the higher courts when alternate remedy is available. There should be a reason why this [court] is better. We also have the benefit of going through the trial

court's decision," it added.

Senior advocate Vikram Chaudhari, also representing Mr. Kejriwal, said that the trial court had said the arrest was illegal and when that argument has already been addressed, there is no point in sending it back and that it would be futile.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener was arrested by the CBI on June 26 from Tihar Jail, where he is lodged in judicial custody in connection with a money laundering case filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

He was arrested by the ED on March 21 but was granted bail by a trial court in the money laundering case on June 20.

However, the trial court's order was stayed by the High Court. The ED has alleged him to be the "key conspirator" in framing the now-defunct excise policy.

Delay in CUET-UG results likely to impact academic calendar of DU: teachers

CUET results were expected on June 30; amid prevailing confusion, many DU aspirants say they're applying to private universities; we are advising students to wait patiently, says university official

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

The delay in the results of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET-UG) is likely to impact Delhi University (DU)'s academic calendar, several teachers and an official told *The Hindu*. Moreover, because of the lack of clarity about the results, several DU aspirants said they were applying to private colleges.

The results of CUET, which is the admission test for universities across the country conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), were expected to be released on June 30.

However, the NTA is yet to share any information about the likely date of release of the results.

DU launched its online admissions portal around the end of May. While post-graduate admissions at the university are under way, undergraduate admissions, which are being done through CUET for the third consecutive year, will start only after the declaration of results.

"We are ready with the admission procedure. If there are delays, it might have an impact on our admissions calendar, but we are advising students to



In queue: Many students said they fear the delay in announcement of results will cost them a seat in DU. FILE PHOTO

wait patiently," said a DU official.

Worried students

Sneha Pandey, a resident of Rohini, has been visiting the NTA portal every day for the past week to check for information on the CUET results. She is worried that the delay could derail her dream of studying English (Hons.) at St. Stephen's College.

"Putting the students under so much stress is unfair. My daughter, who is very bright and has her heart set on going to DU, has no clue about her future," said her father Satya

Prakash Pandey.

Mr. Pandey, who is also the Delhi chief of the All India Parents' Association, said, "Because of NTA's inefficiency, many students have started applying to private colleges. This will push well-off students into private colleges and lead to segmentation of students on the basis of their family's income."

Saksham Tiwari, who lives in Lucknow, has been hoping to get admitted to a DU college for a BSc (Economics) or BCom programme. "But with the NTA delaying other examinations, we are scared of

similar chaos with the CUET," he said. Like his friends, he has also secured admission in a private university. "However, DU still remains the top priority."

'Will lead to burnout'

"Every delay of 10-15 days eats into the efficiency of the admission process. It pushes back teaching and vacation schedule, leading to a burnout in the teaching-learning process," said Maya John, Assistant Professor of History at DU's Jesu and Mary College.

Abha Dev Habib, Assistant Professor of Physics at Miranda House, said, "Central universities no longer have their own admissions calendar. It is entirely dependent on the NTA. Students, many of whom are from other States, need vacations and time to engage in internships and conferences. All this gets impacted when the academic calendar is delayed."

Pankaj Garg, who teaches Mathematics at Rajdhani College, said, "The answer key is not out yet. It generally takes around 15 days after the answer key is released for results to be announced. So, the new session might start only by September-October."

Delhi BJP to hold meeting tomorrow on Assembly poll

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The BJP's Delhi unit will discuss its strategy for the Assembly election due next year at a meeting of its extended executive committee on Sunday, a party leader said.

The meeting, to be held at the Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium, will be attended by more than 2,000 people, including functionaries from the district and ward levels.

The BJP has not won an Assembly poll in the national capital in more than two decades while AAP has won the election twice in a row - in 2015 and 2020 - with thumping majorities.

The BJP has eight legislators in the 70-member Assembly, while the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP has 61.

Raaj Kumar Anand, the MLA from Patel Nagar, was disqualified after he quit AAP and fought the Lok Sabha election on a BSP ticket.

Senior BJP leader and Union Minister Piyush Goyal will address the meeting, the party leader said.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said several political resolutions will be passed in the meeting.

"Apart from thanking the people of Delhi and the party leaders for the BJP's landslide victory in the Lok Sabha poll in the city, there will be a discussion on the upcoming Assembly poll as well," Mr. Sachdeva added.

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Delhi Weather
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Govt. sets up flood control room to monitor river level

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has set up a flood control room to monitor real-time data from the Hathnikund barrage round the clock, PWD Minister Atishi said on Friday.

"Officials at the control room are in touch with those at the Hathnikund barrage, from where the Yamuna river enters Delhi," she said, adding that whenever over one lakh cusec of water is released through the barrage, relief and rescue measures will be activated.

The flood control room will be monitored by various civic agencies, including the MCD, DDA, and the NDMC, said Ms. Atishi

The Delhi government is taking active measures to avoid an emergency like the one the Capital faced last year, when the Yamuna rose to its highest level in 70 years, said the Minister.

The Ministers added that the decision was made following a meeting of the apex committee on supervising, recommending and coordinating flood control measures in Delhi.

"Laughable claims" Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said Ms. Atishi's claims about flood control were "laughable and hollow".

"The Minister made grand promises of uninterrupted water supply through the summer, but by June, she was proven wrong when Delhi experienced a water crisis," Mr. Sachdeva said.

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IN BRIEF



Sanjay Singh appointed head of AAP parliamentary party

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Sanjay Singh was appointed the chairperson of the party's parliamentary party on Friday. AAP has 13 MPs combined in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha. Mr. Singh has also been chosen as the leader of the party in the Rajya Sabha. Thanking Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Mr. Singh in a post in Hindi on X said, "Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has always given me the opportunity to raise my voice from the streets to the Parliament. I will fulfil the responsibility... with utmost dedication. I am deeply grateful to Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party."

BJP's B.L. Maurya elected unopposed as MLC in U.P.

BJP's Bahoran Lal Maurya was elected unopposed on Friday in the bye-election to a seat of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council, said Special Secretary and Returning Officer of the State Assembly Mohammad Mushahid. Mr. Maurya was given the certificate of election after the nomination withdrawal period ended on Friday, he said. Mr. Maurya had filed his nomination as a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) on Tuesday. As there was no nomination from the Opposition parties against him, he was declared elected unopposed. The seat fell vacant due to the resignation of Samajwadi Party member Swami Prasad Maurya on February 20 this year. His term was to end in July 2028. Mr. Maurya was elected MLA from Bareilly's Bhojipura seat in 1996 and 2017. PTI

Maharashtra tables Bill to prevent unfair means in competitive exams

The proposed legislation classifies offences as cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable; those caught engaging in illegal practices could face a minimum penalty of three years in prison

Abhinav Deshpande
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Friday introduced a new Bill aimed at curbing malpractices in competitive examinations. The Bill – Maharashtra Competitive Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 – was presented in the Assembly by Minister and Shiv Sena leader Shambhuraj Desai.

The proposed legislation classifies offences related to competitive exams as cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable.

Those caught engaging in illegal practices during these exams could face a minimum of three years in prison, extendable up to five years, and fines up to ₹10 lakh.

According to the Bill, failure to pay the fine would result in additional imprisonment as outlined in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

The Union government on June 21 had enacted the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means)



Bestowing honour: Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde with the Indian cricketers from Mumbai – Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Shivam Dube – at Vidhan Bhavan on Friday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Act, 2024, which targets malpractices in competitive exams, imposing a maximum jail term of 10 years and fines of up to ₹1 crore for those found guilty.

The Bill, introduced in the Lower House of the State Legislature, also stipulates that service providers facilitating the exams could be fined up to ₹1 crore and held accountable for the costs associated with the examination.

Key provisions of the State Act include measures to prevent disruptions during exams, defining the responsibilities of paper setters, and granting investigative authority to high-ranking police officers.

Cricketers feted

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde felicitated Indian men's cricket team captain Rohit Sharma and three other players and announced a cash reward of

₹11 crore for the team that won the T20 World Cup. He announced this in the Central Hall of the Assembly, where four Mumbai players from the India team – Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Shivam Dube – were honoured.

Mr. Shinde also recognised the contributions of the team's support staff members – Paras Mhambrey and Arun Kanade – by felicitating them.

Hooda is doing BJP's bidding for RS poll: Dushyant

The Hindu Bureau
GURUGRAM

Turning up the heat over the Rajya Sabha election in Haryana, Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) leader Dushyant Chautala has accused Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda of not contesting the poll at the behest of the BJP.

Mr. Hooda, however, defended his decision, saying that the Congress does not have the requisite numbers to field a candidate.

A Rajya Sabha seat has fallen vacant in the State with Congress leader Deepender Hooda getting elected as MP from the Rohtak Lok Sabha seat. The Election Commission of India is yet to announce the date for the poll.

In a post on X late on Thursday evening, Mr. Chautala said Mr. Hooda, on the one hand, claimed the State government was in "minority" while on the other, maintained that the Opposition did not have the adequate numbers to contest the election.

"The people of Haryana want to see the BJP losing in the Rajya Sabha election, but Bhupinder Singh Hooda does not want to contest the election at the behest of the BJP," the JJP leader's post said.

Reiterating that the en-



Dushyant Chautala

tire Opposition was with the Congress, Mr. Chautala said the party must fulfil its role of the principal Opposition party and field a prominent personality as a consensus candidate for the election. He said the BJP was set to lose if the Congress contested the election seriously.

Mr. Hooda, at a press conference in Chandigarh on Thursday, had said his party might consider fielding a candidate if Mr. Chautala gave the assurance that all 10 MLAs of his party were on his side.

House numbers

The effective strength of the Assembly is 87 with three seats falling vacant. The BJP (41 MLAs) has the support of one Independent MLA and a lone legislator of the Haryana Lokhit Party, while the Opposition – Congress (29), JJP (10), and the lone MLA of the Indian National Lok Dal – needs the backing of 44 MLAs to win the poll.

How can you give huge sum to families of hooch tragedy victims, HC asks Tamil Nadu

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The Acting Chief Justice of the Madras High Court, R. Mahadevan, on Friday asked how the Tamil Nadu government could give away a huge amount of ₹10 lakh each to the families of 65 persons who died in the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy.

Presiding over the First Division Bench, along with Justice Mohammed Shafiq, the ACJ said the government might be justified in awarding such a compensation if lives had been lost in an accident, but not for those who drank spurious liquor. The Bench directed the government counsel to take instructions within two weeks on reconsider-



Relatives during a funeral procession on Friday of those who died after consuming hooch in Kallakurichi. S.S. KUMAR

ing the compensation.

The direction was issued on a PIL petition against granting compensation to hooch consumers. A. Mohamed Ghouse of Chennai had filed the

petition stating that those who died in Kallakurichi were neither freedom fighters nor those who died for a social cause for their families to be awarded such a huge sum.

Rajasthan govt. takes over Gandhi Vatika Museum management

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

The Bharatiya Janata Party government in Rajasthan has taken over the management of the Gandhi Vatika Museum constructed by the previous Congress regime, depicting Mahatma Gandhi's legacy and freedom struggle. The BJP has decided to abolish the trust established for the museum by repealing the statute governing the body.

The museum, built at a cost of ₹85 crore in Jaipur's Central Park last year, is yet to be thrown open to the public.

The Opposition Congress had recently demanded that the museum be opened to apprise the people of the Gandhian values amid attempts being

made to erase the Mahatma from people's memory.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel said on Friday that the decision to repeal the Gandhi Vatika Trust Act, 2023, was taken in view of some "inconsistencies and flaws" in the law. "The Congress government granted unlimited financial powers to the trust's vice president," Mr. Patel said.

The Chief Minister was nominated as the president of the trust under the Act. The vice president had the authority to sell, mortgage or dispose of any property belonging to the trust. Mr. Patel said the museum would come under the control of the State's Museum Department, just like all other museums operated and managed by it.

Shinde govt. to form panels at taluka level for Ladki Bahin scheme's implementation

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

Taluka-level and ward-level committees of non-governmental elected members will be formed for the smooth implementation of the 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana' in Maharashtra.

The State Women and Child Development Department on Friday issued a Government Resolution (GR) notifying the role and structure of these panels.

On July 2, Deputy CM Ajit Pawar had announced the scheme while presenting the budget in the Assembly. The scheme has been introduced to enhance the economic independence of women in the State and improve their



Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde and his deputies Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar at a meeting on the Ladki Bahin Yojana. FILE PHOTO

health and nutrition, says the GR. The committee will comprise eight members – social welfare officer, senior child development project officer, an anganwadi member, a Defence officer, three non-governmental members and the ward authority concerned.

Among the three non-governmental members, one will be the chairperson. The role of the taluka-

level committee will be that of implementing and coordinating the policy.

The GR states that the committees should check the applications, filter out the ineligible, and submit a final list of eligible/ineligible beneficiaries to the district-level committee.

Earlier, July 1 was the deadline to submit application, but now it has been extended to August 31.

With four out of five NEET 'solver gang' arrests from the district, no easy answers in Nalanda

Amit Bhelari
NALANDA (BIHAR)

Until recently, every time Baldev Kumar drove his SUV into the dusty lanes of Gulariya Bigha, everyone in the nondescript village in Bihar's Nalanda district would watch him in awe. While the youngsters looked up to him as their role model, the village elders saw in him an obedient son who built a new house for his parents.

But things took a quick turn for Baldev when his name appeared in newspapers and on television channels – Baldev alias Chintu was among five members of a 'solver gang' arrested in connection with the alleged paper leak of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) 2024. Baldev, the police said, is a close aide of Sanjeev Mukhiya, who is

believed to be the kingpin of an inter-State gang.

"Now, we know where he got all the money from. He has brought such bad name to our village," said Prem Ranjan Prasad, a resident of Gulariya Bigha.

What made matters worse for Gulariya Bigha and other nearby villages is that four of the five arrested are residents of Nalanda district, according to the police. The other arrested members include Panku Kumar and Paramjit Singh alias Bittu from Chhabilpur in Nalanda, Rajeev Kumar alias Karu from Ekanarsara in Nalanda, and Mukesh Kumar from Agamkuan in Patna.

Even Mukhiya, who also goes by the name of Lootan, is from Balwapar under Bhutwakhur panchayat of Nagarnausa block in Nalanda district. The 53-year-old was posted

as a technical assistant at the Nalanda College of Horticulture in Noorsarai.

According to the police, the 'solver gang' is spread across Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat. Mukhiya allegedly runs the gang with Ravi Atri, offering leaked question papers or proxies to take exams.

Baldev, officials said, received the PDF version of the solved question paper on his mobile phone a day before the exam that was conducted on May 5.

He and his accomplices then used a Wi-Fi printer at the Learn Boys Hostel and Play School in Nandlal Chhapra in Patna and distributed the copies to aspiring candidates on the eve of the examination so that they could memorise the answers overnight.

Ravindra alias Aman Singh was the last arrest



Gajendra Naresh, ward member of Gajendra Bigha village in Hilsa block, Nalanda district. Villagers say the incident has left them deeply embarrassed. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

made by CBI from Dhanbad. Aman is said to be the key person in the case and very close to Rocky, who is currently absconding, and is a relative of Mukhiya.

Epicentre of paper leak

On June 19, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the new campus of Nalanda University, he said Nalanda was a symbol of India's academic herit-

age. Little did the villagers know that days after his address, the ancient hub of knowledge would emerge as the epicentre of the NEET-UG paper leak case.

Gulariya Bigha villagers said the incident has left such a deep impact on Baldev's father Omprakash Prasad that he left his house after the alleged involvement of his son came to light. "Nobody knows

where his father is. People too are maintaining a distance from his family," said Mr. Prem Ranjan.

As a big lock hangs on the door of the new house built by Baldev, villagers often find themselves explaining to visitors how no one wants to associate with Baldev's family.

"Nobody is there in his house, you better leave," said an elderly man standing among a bunch of villagers attending to visiting mediapersons.

Amrit Raj, a village youth, said apart from the fact that Baldev went to study in Patna, villagers didn't know much about his occupation. "He used to come to the village in his car and would often leave the next day. He would hardly talk to people of his age," he said.

Not too far away in Gajendra Bigha village in Hil-

sa block, when a CBI team went to search the house of Rocky on June 30, it was locked from outside. The Central team broke the lock in front of two eyewitnesses – Gajendra Naresh and his wife Sarita Devi, both ward members.

"His real name is Rakesh Ranjan, son of Suresh Choudhary. The CBI officials called us as eyewitnesses and broke the lock of the house in front of us. After searching the house for nearly an hour, they seized photocopies of some documents, including a cheque book, voter ID and PAN cards," Mr. Naresh said, adding that the fact that a CBI team came to conduct a raid here is itself a matter of embarrassment for the villagers.

"Though his house is not very far from ours, we don't know much about the family members as

they mostly kept to themselves," Ms. Devi said.

'My son is innocent'

In Nagarnausa, Mukhiya's father Janak Kishore Prasad was not ready to believe that his son could be involved in such a scandal.

"My son is completely innocent. He is a social worker and always helps people. His name is being dragged into the matter as there are some local politicians who are worried over his growing popularity. Now that the CBI is investigating the case, everything would become clear soon," Mr. Prasad told *The Hindu*.

Villagers though don't seem to agree with the dotting father. "It doesn't matter what he says now. The fact that he has ruined the reputation of Nalanda cannot be denied," said a villager who did not wish to be named.

Sena (Punjab) leader attacked with swords in Ludhiana

Press Trust of India
LUDHIANA

A Shiv Sena (Punjab) leader was grievously injured after he was attacked with swords by four unidentified assailants in full public view here on Friday, the police said.

Sandeep Thapar, 58, was attacked when he came out of the office of the Samvedna Trust near the Civil Hospital after attending a ceremony there, police said.

In a purported video of the incident, the assailants, dressed as Nihang Sikhs, approached Mr. Thapar while he was on a scooter with his security personnel riding pillion. Two of the assailants could then be seen attacking him with a sword and speeding off on Mr. Thapar's scooter.

The Sena leader, who suffered serious head injuries, was rushed to the Civil Hospital and later transferred to a private facility.

Bihar govt. suspends 15 engineers after 10 bridges collapse in 2 weeks

Contractors responsible for the poor construction of the bridges will also be identified, says govt.; Nitish directs quality check of existing bridges; Tejashwi Yadav says JD(U) held Rural Works portfolio for maximum time and should be held accountable

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

The Bihar government on Friday suspended 15 engineers from the Water Resources Department and four engineers from the Rural Works Department after as many as 10 bridges collapsed across the State in the last fortnight.

The engineers were suspended after reports of the high-level committees formed to probe the collapse of the bridges came in, said a government release.

"The State government has been quite serious in probing the incidents of bridges collapsing in the State. The contractors responsible for the construction of the bridges too will be traced and held accountable," Bihar Development Secretary Chaitanya Pra-



A portion of the bridge over the Bakra river collapsed in Araria on Tuesday. FILE PHOTO

sad told the media on Friday.

In the last 14 days, 10 bridges collapsed in districts including Siwan, Saran, Araria, East Champaran, Kishanganj and Madhubani. The most recent incident took place in Saran district on July 4.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had held a review meeting with top officials

on July 3 and instructed them to conduct a spot verification of old bridges and initiate proper upkeep. He also had asserted that "quality should be maintained in under-construction bridges", which should be completed on time.

"Our objective is not only to construct roads and bridges but also ensure

their proper upkeep," Mr. Kumar had told officials.

Opposition lashes out Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav slammed the State government over the frequent bridge collapse incidents. "Since the day Nitish Kumar became the Chief Minister, leaving aside only 18 months, the Rural Works

Department has been under the Janata Dal (United) for the rest of the time," Mr. Yadav said.

He also questioned the silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi - Mr. Kumar's alliance partner - and asked in a post on X, "What happened to the claims of good governance and a corruption-free government?"

Rural Works Department Minister Ashok Choudhary reacted to Mr. Yadav's statements, saying he was to blame as he had previously held the portfolio.

"He [Tejashwi Yadav] must remember that he had held this portfolio for 15 months during the previous Mahagathbandhan government. What was he doing then? The previous RJD-led government should be held responsible for this mess," he said.

BSP leader hacked to death in Chennai

R. Sivaraman
CHENNAI

K. Armstrong, 52, the Tamil Nadu president of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), was hacked to death by a gang of unidentified men near his house at Sembium here on Friday night, said the police.

When he was standing near a construction site near his house on Venugopalaswamy Street at 7 p.m., a number of gang members on bikes surrounded him and attacked him with knives. Arm-

strong's supporters, who came to his rescue, were also attacked, police sources said. A senior police officer said the gang members wore the uniform of food delivery executives.

His family members and supporters rushed him to Apollo Hospital on Grems Road, where he was declared dead.

Asra Garg, ACP (North), visited the spot and held a preliminary inquiry. He also constituted 5 special teams to trace the assailants, and ordered a speedy probe.

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Sl. No. - (2) Tender reference No.: E-Tender-L-15-24-25, Name of Work: Electrical work for Energy Efficiency & Green Energy work over BSB Division... Approx. Cost (In Rs.): 5492108.14, Earnest Money (In Rs.): 109900.00 Completion period : 120 Days, Date & time of Closing Tender: 26.07.2024 14:30 Hrs., Date & time of Opening Tender: 26.07.2024 14:30 Hrs.
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A.P. CM Naidu seeks Central support for shoring up State finances

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu met Union Ministers Nirmala Sitharaman (Finance), Rajnath Singh (Defence) and J.P. Nadda (Health) in New Delhi on Friday.

He took multiple issues to the Ministers' notice and deliberated on a mechanism for effective coordination and timely intervention of the Union government in matters pending resolution.

Mr. Naidu requested Ms. Sitharaman to extend support to Andhra Pradesh in the short term till its finances improved.

He also sought the provision of a 90% grant in Central government schemes not limited to drinking water, irrigation, horticulture and other projects being implemented in Rayalaseema and north coastal regions of the State.

Industrial incentives

Besides, Mr. Naidu asked for industrial incentives for the backward regions as per A.P. Reorganisation Act. He requested Ms. Sitharaman to give early approval of funds for completion of the Polavaram project and assistance for the development of the capital city Amaravati.

In his interaction with Mr. Rajnath Singh, Mr. Naidu sought Central support for creation of a defence industry-related ecosystem in the State.

Yet another jolt to BRS as six of its Council members join Congress

The defection has increased Congress party's strength in Telangana Legislative Council to 12; BRS MLCs number has been reduced to 21; most of these MLCs were originally from Congress but crossed over to the BRS when it was in power

R. Ravikanth Reddy
HYDERABAD

In yet another setback to the Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS), six of its members in the Legislative Council joined the Congress late on Thursday in the presence of Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy.

The MLCs are Dande Vittal, Bhanu Prasad, B. Dayanand, Prabhakar Rao, Egge Malleshham and Basavaraju Saraiah.

From various segments
Their joining would boost the Congress party's number in the 40-member Legislative Council to 12. It already has six MLCs in the



New innings: BRS MLCs with Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy after joining the Congress in Hyderabad on Thursday.

Upper House. The BRS MLCs number has been reduced to 21 now.

Those who joined the Congress come from various segments. Dande Vittal is elected from Adilabad local body; Bhanu Prasad

from Karimnagar local body; Prabhakar Rao from Ranga Reddy local body; Egge Malleshham from MLAs' quota, Boggavarapu Dayanand and Basavaraju Saraiah from the Governor's quota.

Interestingly, most of these MLCs were originally from Congress but crossed over to the BRS when it was in power. Apart from these, two more MLCs of the BRS have been sailing with the Congress for some time and they include Kuchukulla Damodar Reddy and Patnam Mahender Reddy, who was also a Minister in the second term of the BRS.

It is widely rumoured that Council Chairman Gutha Sukhender Reddy too might join the Congress as he has been critical of the BRS party for quite some time. Mr. Reddy's son Amit Reddy joined the Congress before the Parliament election after

he was denied ticket by the BRS. Mr. Sukhender Reddy was elected as MP from the Congress and joined the BRS. After completing his term he was elected as BRS MLC and made the Council Chairman.

The latest round of defections come a day after BRS senior leader and Rajya Sabha member K. Keshava Rao quit the party and joined the Congress in the presence of AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and others. Mr. Rao subsequently met the Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar and tendered his resignation as MP. Already six BRS MLCs have crossed over to the Congress in the last few months.

DJB 'scam': ED conducts raids in 4 cities; seizes cash, digital evidence

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday said it has conducted searches at various places in Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad in connection with the alleged corruption in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB). The ED probe is based on an FIR registered by the Anti-Corruption Branch of Delhi against Euroteck Environmental Private Limited. The searches were carried out on July 3, the agency said.

Condemning the ED action, Delhi Minister and AAP leader Atishi, in a statement, said, "What the ED does, against whom it works, on whose orders it works, is well known. In this country, everyone has seen the 'washing machine' of the BJP...". The AAP leader said, "They [the ED] have been investigating the 'liquor scam' for two years, they did not find anything. They were probing the construction of classrooms... Mohalla Clinics, they did not find anything there. AAP has never done corruption of even a rupee, nor will it ever do. They can do as much investigation as they want against us."

Alleged irregularities

The ED has alleged a scam in the DJB in the name of augmentation and upgrade of 10 sewage treatment plants. They are in Delhi's Pappan Kalan, Nilothi, Najafgarh, Keshopur, Coronation Pillar, Narela, Rohini, and Kondli.

The four tenders worth ₹1,943 crore were awarded

to various joint venture (JV) entities in October 2022. The FIR alleges that only three JV firms participated in all the four tenders. While two of them got one tender each, one was allotted two tenders. It is alleged that the entities participated in the tenders mutually to ensure that each one got the tender. The FIR also alleges that the tendering conditions were made restrictive, including the adoption of integrated fixed film activated sludge technology, to ensure that selected few entities could participate.

"The cost estimates initially prepared was ₹1,546 crore but was revised during the tender process to ₹1,943 crore. It is alleged that the contracts were awarded to three JVs at inflated rates which caused a substantive loss to the exchequer," the ED said.

The agency said its probe revealed that there were irregularities related to the costs for the upgrade and augmentation of the water treatment plants. It also found that the three JVs had allegedly submitted the same experience certificate, issued from a Taiwan project, to the DJB for securing the tenders and the same was accepted without any verification. "Thereafter, all the three JVs subcontracted the work related to the four tenders to Euroteck Environment Pvt. Ltd., Hyderabad... During the search, about ₹41 lakh in cash, various incriminating documents, and digital evidence were found and seized," it said.

Celebrations in Kottayam as Labour Party's Sojan Joseph wins British Parliament seat from Ashford

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM

As the Labour Party registers a landslide victory in the U.K. general elections, Onamthuruth - a quaint village nestled in the backwater landscape of Kottayam - has erupted in celebrations. The joyous occasion is in honour of Sojan Joseph, a 49-year-old man from the village, who has been elected to the British Parliament from

Ashford, one of the constituencies in Kent.

Mr. Joseph's victory is historic as the Conservatives have been mostly dominant in Ashford since the seat was established 139 years ago. He emerged victorious defeating six candidates vying for the seat, which has an electorate of about 74,000 people.

His family members have gathered at the ancestral home to celebrate this



Sojan Joseph

momentous achievement. "We are so thrilled. He called us to inform about the election result," said Jo-

seph Palaththinkal, Mr. Joseph's brother-in-law.

A nurse by profession, Mr. Joseph moved to the U.K. in November 2001 and joined William Harvey Hospital in Ashford. He has become a well-known figure within the Indian diaspora in Ashford and was elected Labour councillor for Aylesford and East Stour Ward last year. Additionally, he serves as an elected official for BAME, representing the

Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities.

Mr. Joseph is married to Brighty, a fellow nurse from Irinjalakuda in Thrissur, and they have three children - Hannah, Sara, and Mathew, who are all studying in the U.K.

"He visits the village every year since he left for England. His last visit was in March, just a few weeks before launching his election campaign," added Mr. Palaththinkal.

Delhi court extends judicial custody of Kavitha till July 18

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday extended till July 18 the judicial custody of Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader K. Kavitha, who was lodged in Tihar jail in connection with a money laundering case linked to the Delhi excise policy scam.

Special Judge Kaveri Bajwa's order came just two days after the Delhi High Court upheld the lower court's order cancelling her bail. The court declined her bail in both CBI and ED cases, citing *prima facie* evidence towards her involvement in the alleged scam.

The case against Ms. Kavitha was based on the FIR initially filed by the CBI on the complaint of the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi alleging multiple irregularities in the Delhi excise policy-2021-22, which was subsequently withdrawn.

Proxy partner

The CBI cited WhatsApp chats that allegedly placed her as a proxy partner of the liquor company Indospirit. The Central agency claimed that her interrogation was necessary as Ms. Kavitha was the "kingpin and main conspirator" and alleged that she gave evasive and contrary replies during her questioning.

In full flow



Water level at the Krishnaraja Sagar reservoir, built across the river Cauvery in Mandya district of Karnataka, breached the 100 feet mark against the maximum level of 124.80 feet on Friday. This is in contrast to dam level hovering at 78.4 ft on the same day last year. M.A. SRIRAM

African Swine Fever outbreak reported in Kerala's Thrissur

The Hindu Bureau
THRISSUR

As many as 310 pigs at Maddakkathara grama panchayat in Kerala's Thrissur are set to be culled after an outbreak of African Swine Fever was reported at a private farm in the 14th ward of the local body.

The highly contagious swine disease has been confirmed in the pigs at the farm in Veliyanthara.

Disinfection measures

The Thrissur Collector has directed the district animal husbandry officer to cull the pigs and bury them, according to an official release here on Friday.

A team consisting of doctors, livestock inspectors, and attendants will carry out the culling operations, and further primary disinfection measures will also be taken.

The area within one-km radius of the affected farm has been declared disease-hit and the area within 10-km radius has been declared a disease surveillance area.

The transportation of pork from the affected areas, the operation of such farms, and the movement of pigs, pork, and feed from the affected areas to other parts of the district have been prohibited until further orders.

Stage set for meeting of Telangana and A.P. CMs today

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The stage is all set for the meeting between Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu in Hyderabad on Saturday.

The meeting will focus on the resolution of bifurcation issues arising out of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014.

The meeting of the Chief Ministers, the first after four years, has been initiated by Mr. Naidu who wanted the pending issues to be resolved amicably. Mr. Revanth Reddy reciprocated and arranged for the meet.

Ensure safety of Tirumala temple jewellery, says BJP

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUMALA

G. Bhanuprakash Reddy, BJP Andhra Pradesh spokesperson, on Friday sought a comprehensive investigation led by a sitting High Court judge to address concerns over the safety of Tirumala temple jewellery.

Citing the growing apprehensions among devotees about the safety of the temple jewellery and referencing the past inquiries by the Wadhwa and Justice Jagannatha Rao committees into the temple jewellery, he demanded that a similar exercise be taken up to allay the fears of the

public. The inquiry committees not only investigated the allegations of misappropriation but also made an inventory of the jewellery before submitting reports.

He said he would also bring the issue to the notice of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu.

Mr. Reddy criticised TTD's vigilance and security department headed by an officer of the rank of Superintendent of Police, for not registering a single case despite allegations of severe irregularities in TTD's engineering department and alleged that works were awarded at will with 10-15% commissions.

Kerala village compiles in-depth biodiversity register

Sam Paul A.
ALAPPUZZHA

The Indian black turtle (Indian pond terrapin) was once a common species in Thazhakara grama panchayat in Kerala's Alappuzha district. However, its numbers have dwindled due to "poaching for meat." Similarly, the populations of Indian garden lizards, barn owls, Indian flying foxes, and plants such as henna and palash have also decreased. Meanwhile, the numbers of rock pigeons, rufous treepies, and other species have increased. The grama panchayat boasts 38 sacred groves, 10 paddy polders, and 35 ponds.

These details are part of the extensive information available in the second volume of the People's Biodiversity Register (PBR) prepared by the local body.

Thazhakara has become the first panchayat in Alappuzha and one of the first in Kerala to update and publish a comprehensive PBR with the involvement of local communities.

It recently submitted the 261-page document detailing the region's biodiversity, including the identification of resources, discoveries, traditional knowledge, ongoing changes, and the impact of climate change, among other details, to the Kerala State Biodiversity Board (KSBB).

"The first volume of PBR was published 10 years ago and lacked vital information. The second volume serves as a comprehensive report on the biodiversity across all 21



One for the ages: Varieties of fish documented in the People's Biodiversity Register of the Thazhakara grama panchayat.

wards in Thazhakara. The three-month survey conducted to prepare PBR was carried out by trained volunteers. It provided valuable insights into various aspects of biodiversity, including medicinal plants and agricultural practices, previously unknown in the region," says K.K. Viswambharan, convener,

Biodiversity Management Committee, Thazhakara grama panchayat.

Mr. Viswambharan says PBR will play a crucial role in conservation, sustainable resource utilisation, and protection of traditional knowledge.

Based on the register, the local body is in the process of preparing various

projects in agriculture, drinking water, and waste management, among others, with a focus on biodiversity conservation and equitable sharing of benefits.

Grama panchayats, municipalities, and corporations across Kerala are updating PBR.

'First State'

"Kerala was the first State in the country to publish the first volume of PBR across all local bodies. This document is dynamic, requiring periodic updates on ecosystem details, landscapes, species, and traditional knowledge," says V. Balakrishnan, member secretary, KSBB.

The KSBB hopes to complete the updation of PBR in 50% of local bodies in the State before 2024.



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GROUND ZERO



The relatives and neighbours of Rajkumari, Jaimanti, and Bhumi — three women of three generations of one family who died in the Hathras stampede — grieve. R.V. MOORTHY



We are all poor people. The men here find solace in alcohol, while women search for peace at these *satsangs*

ANJALI
Neighbour of Asha Devi, a victim

in Aligarh (about 30 km away), at the Sikandara-rau community health centres (about 30 km away), and even in Kasganj (more than 60 km away), but to no avail," says Urmila, 70, holding an orange bag in her hand with a set of clothes and some money. She cannot call people at home in Etah, more than 65 km away, as Khubshoo had her phone. She refuses to go back until she finds her granddaughter.

Vinod found the bodies of the three women of his family in the mortuaries of three different districts. Bhumi's body was in Aligarh, Rajkumari's was in Hathras, and Jaimanti's was in Agra.

From policeman to 'godman'

Pal, 65, the son of a farmer, hails from the Jatav community, one of the largest Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh, and is a resident of Bahadur Nagar village in Kasganj district. He spent several years of his life as a policeman. After opting for voluntary retirement in the late 1990s, Pal returned to his village to rebrand himself as a religious preacher. He claimed that he had a personal encounter with god and was 'anointed' with supernatural powers. Unlike other 'godmen', Pal wore pants or shorts instead of robes. He took his wife, Premvati, to his *satsangs* where he spoke about the importance of shunning the practice of untouchability; maintaining love, unity, and harmony in society; helping the poor; and following the laws of the land.

Within his first decade as 'Baba', Pal managed to build assets worth millions. He has swanky ashrams spread across acres of land in several cities of the State, including Mainpuri, Kasganj, and Kanpur. Luxury cars are part of his convoy. The 'Baba' loves branded goggles.

Pal's followers, who are mostly from the so-called lower castes and poor socio-economic backgrounds and face various kinds of discrimination, claim that they have seen the *sudarshan chakra* (a divine discus worn by the Hindu god Vishnu) in Pal's hands. They also say that he has a halo around his head, "just like gods".

Many people blame not just the police and organisers, but also the followers for the stampede. They wonder why the followers gathered in such large numbers just to hear a 'godman' preach about issues that are already known to them.

"When Dalits and others face all kinds of discrimination in society, such 'Babas' shower them with love. So, people automatically become their followers," explains Sanjay Nirmal from Nagla-heera locality in Hathras. Nirmal used to visit Pal's *satsangs* after some persuasion from his wife. He says he gave up drinking after that.

A life of struggle with no solace

There is an unbearable stench in Sokhna as the drains are overflowing. Some of the homes in this village have small rooms that have space for nothing more than a cot. A few toilets are covered with curtains and have no taps. Residents say the water supply is irregular. They say the men are unlettered and work as labourers, masons, painters, and hawkers. Most families speak of their struggles to make ends meet. It is the middle of the week, but children are not at school. Residents say most of the women who flocked to Pal's *satsangs* have alcoholic and violent husbands.

The conditions in the Nabipur Kalan area of Hathras, which is 5 km from Sokhna, is no different. Two people from Nabipur died in the stampede: Asha Devi, 62, and Munni Devi, 58.

"Asha's elder son, Harikant, used to treat her badly. Her younger son was not able to get a job. She started following Bhole Baba when she heard that he could solve all her problems," says Pushpa Devi, Asha's sister. Asha had a small poster of Pal in her room.

Harikant merely says he is expecting guests. "This is the importance that women are given in our homes. Even when they die, the family gets over the grief so quickly," says Anjali, Asha Devi's neighbour. "We are all poor people. The men here find solace in alcohol, while women search for peace at these *satsangs*," she adds.

Munni Devi used to visit Pal so that her younger son, Jugnu, would quit drinking, say residents. Jugnu continues to drink after her death.

At Sokhna, Savita Jatav, who lives 300 metres from Vinod's house, feels "blessed" that she refused to visit the *satsang* even though many women in her village tried to persuade her. But Savita has her own problems. "My husband drinks regularly and beats me up. We have been married for 14 years; we have no children," she says.

One day, she met a 'sister', who asked her to go to Church. Savita followed her advice. Since then, her husband's behaviour has changed remarkably, she claims. "Is Baba se acche to humare church wale hain. Waha bhagdad to nahi machti," ("Our church people are better than this Baba. There is no stampede there)," says Savita, who has a portrait of Jesus Christ on the main door of her house. In this village, most homes have portraits of Hindu gods at the entrance.

There are also big blue posters everywhere. These have been put up by small organisations which claim to preach Buddhism and the ideas of B.R. Ambedkar. The posters say the groups will conduct marriages and take care of naming ceremonies for those who follow them.

As Vinod prepares to cremate his wife and mother, who lie on a wooden stretcher, relatives and neighbours start gathering around the bodies. Each of them begins a ritual which involves offering a piece of cloth to the dead.

Jaimanti's neighbour, Vineeta Devi, makes an offering, too. Within minutes, Jaimanti's body is covered with more than 25 sarees. Vineeta Devi observes this with regret: "In life, she had only two or three sarees."

The godman who failed his devotees

On July 2, thousands of people, mostly from disadvantaged sections of society, gathered in Hathras to listen to a 'godman' preach. As he left the venue, they ran out to catch a final glimpse of him and knelt down to collect the mud on which he had walked. A stampede broke out, killing 121 people, most of whom were women. **Ishita Mishra** reports on the tragic turn of events

It is July 3, the day after 121 people, most of them women, were killed during a stampede at a *satsang* (religious gathering) of a 'godman', Suraj Pal alias Narayan Sakar Hari, in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh. At two grounds, which are equidistant from reserve police lines, contrasting scenes play out.

At the first ground, excited men and children gather to catch a glimpse of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He has just flown down in a blue helicopter to inspect the administrative scramble following the stampede that drew both condolences and criticism from across the world.

At the second ground, the mood dramatically shifts. Grieving men and children congregate to bury Bhumi, 10, wrapped in a piece of blue cloth.

At both places, videos are shot. They will be uploaded later on social media. As relatives start lowering Bhumi's body into the grave, dug about 3 feet deep, Vinod Kumar uncovers her face and stares at his daughter for the last time. As the body underwent an autopsy, the chest has been stitched up. Bhumi had suffered injuries to her head in the stampede. Before she is laid to rest, Vinod removes an absorbent sheet from behind her neck, placed there the previous day to stop the bleeding.

"Kitni chot aai hogi meri betiya ko. Kitna dard hua hoga. Wo chillai bhi hogi. Koi bachane nahi aaya use (My daughter must have been injured badly. She must have been in so much pain. She must have even screamed. No one came to save her)," says Vinod.

His older brother, Rajveer, stands by his side impatiently. In Sokhna village, just 1 kilometre away, the brothers need to perform two cremations after the girl's burial: one for Vinod's wife, Rajkumari, and the other for their mother, Jaimanti. Rajveer asks his brother to hurry up.

It was Jaimanti's wish to attend the *satsang*. She had persuaded her daughter-in-law and granddaughter to come along to listen to Bhole Baba, a term of endearment for the guru; it was their first time at the *satsang*.

Kalicharan, Vinod's brother-in-law, explains how the stampede took place. "The frenzied crowd rushed to collect *charan raj* (soil from under the feet of the 'godman'), but Bhole Baba left them to die. Forget taking responsibility for the incident, he did not even return to apologise," he says. "In this family alone, three women from three generations have died in the tragedy."

Horror at Hathras

The open field in Phulrai village, located parallel to a bypass in Hathras, is partially submerged in water after heavy rains. Workers remove the poles that were erected to place a gigantic tent for the *satsang*. A few boys throw stones at a giant poster of Pal, placed on a temporary entrance



The frenzied crowd rushed to collect soil from under the feet of the 'godman', but Bhole Baba left them to die.

KALICHARAN
Victims' relative

gate. Villagers and passers-by holding umbrellas explain to journalists the ghastly scenes they had witnessed on the afternoon of July 2.

"I left my grocery shop open as the news of the stampede broke. I cannot sleep peacefully for years after seeing what I did. The bodies of tens of saree-clad women, soaked in mud, were lying on top of the other on the roadside. Slippers and bags lay scattered everywhere. There were calls for help from all directions. I stood helpless for minutes just watching the horror," says Ram Gopal, a resident of Phulrai village, pointing towards the field on the other side of the highway. It has been sealed by the forensic team which had come to collect evidence of the crime.

Pushpendra Yadav, a resident who also saw the tragedy unfold, says no one will ever know the real death toll. "Buses and lorries carried away bodies. People also piled bodies into autos, placed them on bikes, and carried them on their shoulders," he recalls. This is also why estimating the number of injured is difficult.

Soon after the incident, videos of bodies flooding hospitals emerged on social media. In them, relatives screamed about mismanagement and the unavailability of doctors and treatment.

"The police and ambulances came late. It would have been better if we had proper police

arrangements in place considering the fact that the *satsang* organisers had already obtained permission for 80,000 people," says Vinod.

The Inspector General of Police, Aligarh range, Shalabh Mathur, refutes these claims. "There was adequate police force at the site, including traffic police," he contends.

Rekha Devi, 55, who got injured in the melee, was admitted in ward number 6 of the district hospital in Hathras. "I fell when someone pushed me," she recalls. "People ran over my hands and chest, and I lost consciousness. I woke up in hospital. I will never visit a *satsang* again."

Another woman, Pushpa, who also fell in the stampede but managed to escape unhurt, feels that Rekha's decision is unjust and blaming Pal is unfair. She says Pal was dull that afternoon and finished preaching in 30 minutes.

"He had already announced that the crowd was too big at the venue and had asked his volunteers to ensure that people leave smoothly. He also asked men and women to leave from different gates. As he got into his car, all of us ran out of the venue to get a closer glimpse of him. Many people knelt down and began collecting mud from the path on which he had walked. The volunteers tried to control the crowd and asked followers to go to the other side of the highway, which had a swamp and a pit dug ahead of it. When people ran, they fell into that pit one on top of the other and died."

At a press conference, Chief Minister Adityanath announced a judicial probe and indicated that if it was a "conspiracy", those behind it would be punished.

The police have arrested six people so far, all volunteers of the 'godman'. Pal is absconding. He has issued a letter claiming that he condones the deaths but had no role to play in the incident.

The administration conducted the post-mortem of all the bodies within 24 hours of the stampede, handed them over to the relatives, and removed slippers from the sides of the highway. There is no trace of a stampede having taken place. But several people remain missing.

Urmila Devi's 16-year-old granddaughter, Khubshoo, is one of them. "She has been missing since the *satsang*. I have already searched for her



The bodies of victims lie in a bus in Hathras. PTI

From Page One

Starmer is new British PM as Labour wins polls

Later, as he left No.10 Downing Street for the last time, Mr. Sunak apologised to his supporters and said he would step down from the post of party leader. Mr. Sunak, a 44-year-old father of two girls, asked the public to support Mr. Starmer and his family as they transition into No.10. He also made a reference to his being the first non-White British Prime Minister.

"One of the most remarkable things about Britain is just how unremarkable it is," he said. "That two generations after my grandparents came here with little, I could become Prime Minister, and that I could watch my two young daughters light Diwali [Deepavali] candles on the steps in Downing Street," he said.

Mr. Sunak and his wife, Akshata Murthy, were then driven to Buckingham Palace, to cheers and boos from onlookers. Mr. Sunak offered his resignation to King Charles.

With Mr. Sunak's departure, the question of party leadership remains open. Former Leader of the House of Commons and a possible candidate for the leadership of the party, Penny Mordaunt, lost her Portsmouth North seat to Labour by a wafer-thin margin of 780 votes, ruling out her leadership run. Another possible contender, Jacob Reese-Mogg, also lost his seat as did several other high-profile Conservatives, including former Defence Secretary Grant Shapps, who lost his Hertfordshire seat. The Education Secretary, Culture Secretary and Justice Secretary also lost their seats.

'A.P. needs more than special category status'

He accused his predecessor, YSR Congress leader Jagan Mohan Reddy, of leaving the State in a precarious economic position.

Mr. Naidu clarified that his party did not ask for the Lok Sabha Speaker's position nor was it aiming for the Deputy Speaker's post. "I did not join the alliance in search of any positions," he added.

During his two-day visit, apart from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he met six Union Ministers, with a long laundry list of demands for the State, including "hand-holding the State finances in the short term", the Centre's support for commissioning the Polavaram irrigation project, assistance to complete infrastructure works in Amaravati, the designated capital city of the State, and support to the backward regions of Andhra Pradesh on lines of the Bundelkhand package.

All the promises made to the people during the election campaign, he said, were made by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and not the TDP alone, adding that he had no doubt that the State and the Centre would work closely to deliver the same.

Recently, the Janata Dal (United), another key BJP ally, had also scaled down its demand for special category status for Bihar. The party's national executive, at a recent meeting, passed a resolution demanding either "special status or special package" for Bihar.

Scrapping NEET-UG not a good idea, says Centre

Around 24 lakh candidates had registered and more than 23 lakh appeared in the exam this year.

In its affidavit before the top court, the Union government argued that honest candidates should not suffer for the crimes of others.

It said the competing interests of honest and successful NEET-UG 2024 candidates should be taken into consideration while addressing petitions seeking re-examination. The focus should be to segregate the wrongdoers from the innocent ones rather than call for the cancellation of the exam.

"Those who are innocent of wrongdoing should not pay a price for those who are actually found to be involved in irregularities. By segregating the wrongdoers, the selection of the untainted candidates can be allowed to pass muster by taking the selection process to its logical conclusion. To treat the innocent and the wrongdoers equally by subjecting the former to the consequences of the cancellation of the entire process would be contrary to Article 14 (right to equality) because unequals would be treated equally... Public bodies have to act fairly and reasonably," the Centre submitted in its affidavit, referring to a judicial precedent from the Supreme Court.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud is scheduled on July 8 to hear over 25 separate petitions concerning various aspects and irregularities and seeking myriad reliefs, including fresh conduct of NEET-UG 2024.

The Centre said criminal elements who have breached the confidentiality of NEET-UG 2024 would be dealt with sternly and with the full force of law.

The affidavit said the CBI was conducting a "comprehensive investigation" into the entire gamut of the alleged irregularities. Cases have been transferred to the CBI from different States.

Besides, a high-level committee of experts — led by former Indian Space Research Organisation Chairman K. Radhakrishnan — was constituted by the government to suggest reforms in the mechanism of the examination process, improvement in data security protocols and the structure and functioning of NTA.

The committee has to submit its report to the government in two months.

'Modi's visit to Russia purely bilateral'

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra dismisses comparisons to the NATO summit in U.S. on same day, says Modi will discuss a range of issues with Putin, including trade, connectivity, space, oil and LNG; PM also likely to request 'early discharge of Indian nationals misled into service in the Russian Army'

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The timing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia is "purely bilateral", said Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, dismissing suggestions that his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 9 would appear in contrast to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit scheduled in the U.S. on the same day.

The summit is expected to focus on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Briefing the media about the upcoming visit on July 8 and 9, he said that when the two meet for the 22nd annual summit, they will discuss the conflict in Ukraine, particularly the issue of Indians recruited by the Russian military, along with other global and regional issues. They are expected to focus, however, on the many issues pending between them since the last annual summit in 2021, with trade, connectivity, space, oil and

LNG, defence supplies, payment issues given Western sanctions as well as cooperation on nuclear power reactors in India high on the agenda.

U.S. President Joseph Biden is hosting the transatlantic group of NATO for a special 75th anniversary summit, which will also have Asia-Pacific leaders and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as guests from July 8-10.

"With regard to the scheduling of Prime Minister [Modi's] visit to Russia... we look at our relationship with Russia purely through a bilateral framework of reference. The annual summit has not been held since 2021 and it has been scheduled now. I would not read any other significance into the meeting except that we attach great importance to it," Mr. Kwatra said, downplaying any comparison to the parallel summit in the U.S.

He said India's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict is consistently in favour of dialogue and diplomacy and a settlement that



Packed agenda: Vladimir Putin and Narendra Modi are scheduled to meet for a number of events during the July 8-9 visit. REUTERS

includes the two parties.

When asked if India will discuss G-7 sanctions on Russia during the talks, he said India is "careful in adhering to UN sanctions" but its discussions on the G-7 sanctions are only to "protect India's economic and national needs, whether it relates to diamonds or other sectors of our economy".

Mr. Kwatra said India has been pursuing the cases of an "estimated 30-45" Indian nationals who are working with the Russian Army after being recruited

through "illegal and unethical means", saying that Mr. Modi will likely request an "early discharge of Indian nationals who have been misled into the service of the Russian Army" in his talks.

Mr. Modi and Mr. Putin are expected to meet for a number of events during the two-day visit. Mr. Modi will land in Moscow on Monday afternoon, and Mr. Putin will host him for dinner that evening. The next morning, after the ceremonial welcome, the leaders are expected to vi-

I would not read any other significance into the meeting except that we attach great importance to it

VINAY KWATRA
Foreign Secretary

visit the tomb of the unknown soldier inside the Kremlin to pay their respects.

Mr. Modi will visit an exhibition to view new developments by Russian nuclear corporation Rosatom that has built the reactors at Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu.

While India has signed a number of civil nuclear agreements with many countries, Russia is the only foreign country operating nuclear power plants in India thus far with Kudankulam units 1 and 2 operational and units 3-6 under construction. Following the exhibition, Mr. Modi will hold bilateral talks with Mr. Putin followed by delegation-level talks.

Trying to resolve the trade deficit between the two countries would also be high on the leaders' agenda, Mr. Kwatra said, pointing out that India's imports from Russia were about \$60 billion dollars owing to a surge in oil purchases since the Ukraine war, while India's exports to Russia stand at about \$4 billion.

"In every sector, whether it is in agriculture, manufacturing, pharmaceutical or services, we are trying to maximise Indian exports to Russia so that the trade imbalance can be addressed," he added but said that the payment mechanisms between the two countries that had been stuck due to sanctions were "working fine" at present.

Mr. Modi will leave on Tuesday evening for the second leg of his visit, to Vienna, becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Austria in more than 40 years. While there, he will discuss trade and broadening the scope of the India-Austria partnership.

'Indo-Russian venture delivered 35,000 assault rifles to MoD'

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Just ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia, the Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL), a joint venture between the two countries, has produced and transferred 35,000 Kalashnikov AK-203 assault rifles to the Indian Ministry of Defence, Rostec state corporation of Russia announced on Friday.

"The IRRPL joint venture, co-founded by Roboronexport on the Russian side, has completed the first phase of the project to produce AK-203 Kalashnikov assault rifles in India. To increase the degree of localization, all necessary equipment has been shipped to the Korwa Ordnance Factory in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh state, and production facilities are now fully equipped," said Alexander Mikheev, Director General of Roboronexport in a statement.

"This made it possible to produce and deliver a

batch of 35,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles to the Indian Army within the time-frame agreed with the Ministry of Defence of India."

Mr. Modi is scheduled to visit Russia on July 8 and 9 for the 22nd annual summit.

As reported by *The Hindu* in May, the initial lot has been handed over to various Army Units and the later batches are being inspected and will be handed very soon.

Under an over ₹5,000 crore contract signed in July 2021, over 6.1 lakh AK-203 assault rifles are to be manufactured in India with technology transfer from Russia, by a joint venture Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL).

As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, as per contractual terms, the first 70,000 rifles will be produced in India with a phased increase in the extent of localisation from 5% to 70%. The remaining rifles will be produced with 100% localisation.

At ₹1.27 lakh crore, defence production registered a new high in 2023-24, says Centre

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The country has recorded the highest-ever growth in indigenous defence production in value terms in the financial year (FY) 2023-24, the Defence Ministry said on Friday.

As per the data received from all Defence Public Sector undertakings (DPSUs), other PSUs manufacturing defence items, and private companies, the value of defence production in the country has gone up to a record-high figure of ₹1,26,887 crore, reflecting a growth of 16.7% over the defence production of the previous financial year, the Ministry said in a statement.

"Of the total value of production [VoP] in 2023-24, about 79.2% has been contributed by DPSUs/other PSUs and 20.8% by the private sector. The data show that in terms of abso-



FY24's figure reflected a growth of 16.7% over the previous year's defence production.

lute value, both DPSUs/PSUs and private sector have recorded a steady growth in defence production," the statement said.

The feat has been achieved due to the policy reforms, initiatives and ease of doing business brought in by the government in the past 10 years with a focus on attaining self-reliance, it stated.

New milestones

"The Make in India programme is crossing new milestones, year after year,

under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Many congratulations to our industry including DPSUs, other PSUs manufacturing defence items and the private industry. The government is committed to creating more conducive regime for developing India as a leading global defence manufacturing hub," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on X.

In addition, the spiralling defence exports have contributed tremendously to the overall growth in indigenous defence production, the Ministry pointed out.

Defence exports touched a record-high of ₹21,083 crore in FY 2023-24, reflecting a growth of 32.5% over the last fiscal when the figure was ₹15,920 crore.

In the past five years (since 2019-20), the value of defence production has been increasing steadily, and has grown by over 60%, the statement added.

Avoid arrest of boys who go on a date: HC in response to PIL on gender discrimination

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The boy should not be arrested if two young persons go on a date, said Uttarakhanda High Court, while hearing a public interest litigation pertaining to gender discrimination in teenage dating.

The observations were made by a Bench of Chief Justice Ritu Bahari and Justice Rakesh Thapliyal, who said that the State could examine the issue whether recording of the statement under Section 161 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) would be sufficient to not arrest the boy, who had gone on a date with the girl.

It is worth mentioning here that CrPC has now been replaced with the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita.

'Call for advice'

"...at the most, he can be called for giving him advice not to indulge in these things, but he should not be arrested. The State can examine this issue and issue a general direction for the police department," the High Court observed in a July 1 order.

In the PIL, advocate Manish Bhandari sought directions to the State to examine the issue of minors getting arrested for dating, mostly on the complaints filed by parents of girls.

POCSO Act

"In cases where two young persons, one is girl and one is boy, are dating each other, they may be between the age of 16 to 18 years, and on the complaint made by the parents of the girl, the boy should not be arrested if no offence under Sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences [POCSO] Act is made out," the PIL reads.

The petitioner says he was forced to file the PIL as in most cases of teenage dating, the girls are considered as victims while boys are treated as perpetrators.

Cabinet expansion, not floor test, may be Hemant Soren's real task in election year

NEWS ANALYSIS

Amit Bhelari
RANCHI

On July 8, when Hemant Soren, who has become the Chief Minister of Jharkhand for the third time, takes a floor test, he will do so amid challenges thrown up by a changed political landscape in a State that is going to the polls later this year.

For the first time in the State, no MLA was sworn in as a Minister along with the Chief Minister. Sources in Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) said it was a well-planned strategy not to swear in any Minister before the floor test.

"Had the names of Ministers been announced before the floor test, Hemant Soren would have

landed in trouble. The situation after the results of the Assembly elections in December 2019 and now is totally different," a party source said.

Five months ago, when Mr. Soren went to jail and Champai Soren took over the reins, there was rumble within the party over ministerial berths. Pressure mounted on Mr. Champai Soren as many MLAs wanted to become Ministers. Baidyanath Ram of the party openly said that his name was dropped at the last minute when Mr. Champai Soren formed the government. There was talk of Irfan Ansari of the Congress being made a Minister after Alamgir Alam of the Congress went to jail in an alleged commission scam.

However, the bail granted to Mr. Soren by the



Hemant Soren

Jharkhand High Court and his return to the Chief Minister's office seems to have started another round of discussion on giving ministerial berths to MLAs, especially keeping the Assembly election, scheduled later this year, in mind.

In 2019, Mr. Soren did not face any trouble in forming and running the government. Initially, the

coalition government had 46 MLAs — 30 of the JMM, 15 of the Congress and one of the Rashtriya Janata Dal. Later, one MLA each from the CPI-ML and Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction) joined the coalition. Two MLAs of Jharkhand Vikas Morcha, Pradeep Yadav and Bandhu Tirkey, joined the Congress, taking the total number of MLAs to 50.

In the 81-seat Jharkhand Assembly, the majority mark is 41. However, out of the 30 MLAs of JMM, Nalin Soren and Joba Manjhi have become Lok Sabha members. Sita Soren, the eldest daughter-in-law of JMM supremo Shibu Soren, has been expelled from the party after she resigned and joined the BJP to contest the Lok Sabha election. Two BJP MLAs, Manish Jaiswal and Dhullu

Mahato, have become Lok Sabha members bringing the total number of MLAs in the Assembly to 76. Mr. Soren requires 39 MLAs to win the floor test.

With 46 MLAs, the Chief Minister is expected to sail through. While rebel MLAs like Lobin Hembrom and Chamra Linda may cause trouble, the possibility of the Opposition playing any tricks is negligible. The Opposition has 30 MLAs, including two Independent MLAs Saryu Roy and Amit Yadav. During the floor test of the Champai Soren government, Mr. Roy abstained from voting and Mr. Yadav was absent.

Despite that, Mr. Soren has opted to play it close to the chest, given that the next few months will be crucial in keeping his flock together as he prepares for the Assembly election.

IN BRIEF



President honours six CRPF men for gallantry

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Six Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel, including four posthumously, were decorated with military gallantry medals by President Droupadi Murmu during a defence investiture ceremony held here on Friday.

The family members of Inspector Dilip Kumar Das, Head Constable Raj Kumar Yadav and Constables Bablu Rabha and Shambhu Roy received Kirti Chakras (posthumous) from Ms. Murmu. They were recognised for gallant action during an anti-Naxal operation in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on April 3, 2021. Twenty-two security personnel were killed in action during this gun battle, followed by a Naxal ambush that went on for six hours.

Ms. Murmu also awarded Shaurya Chakras to two other personnel – Assistant Commandant Bibhor Kumar Singh and Constable Gamit Mukesh Kumar – of the country's largest paramilitary force for showing gallantry during an anti-Naxal operation and counter-terrorist action in Jammu and Kashmir, respectively.

Over 24 lakh hit as Assam flood situation worsens

Two persons killed in landslide; 30 of the 35 districts in the State affected by floods as Brahmaputra and 12 rivers flow above the danger mark; three rhinos among 77 animals killed in Kaziranga

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam worsened in the past 24 hours, affecting 24.21 lakh people across 30 of the State's 35 districts by Friday evening.

Officials of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said no loss of human lives was recorded from the affected districts although an eight-year-old boy was reported missing in Guwahati. They said two persons, including a boy, died in a rain-induced landslide in the Jorabat area bordering Assam and Meghalaya.

At least 52 people have died in two waves of floods since May. Assam has had up to five waves of floods in the past.

"Moderate to heavy rainfall last [June 4 and 5] night added to the woes of the people. Rescue workers shifted many people to safe areas and district officials have been providing relief materials adequately," an ASDMA spokesperson said.

The data provided by



SDRF personnel distributing relief material to flood-affected people in Guwahati on Friday. PTI

the ASDMA on Friday evening said the Brahmaputra and 12 other rivers, including southern Assam's Barak, were flowing above the danger mark in several places.

More relief camps

"The number of affected people across 30 districts shot up by more than three lakh overnight. We had to increase the number of relief camps from 247 on Thursday to 273 to accommodate 47,103 flood-affected people, an increase of more than 8,000 in the last

24 hours," the spokesperson said. Western Assam's Dhubri continued to be the worst affected district with 7.76 lakh people displaced followed by northern Assam's Darrang (1.86 lakh) and southern Assam's Cachar (1.75 lakh).

Officials of the 1,307.49 sq. km Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve in eastern Assam said the number of inundated anti-poaching camps came down from 95 on Thursday to 75 on Friday but the water level was high enough to drown three one-

horned rhinos during the intervening period.

Three rhinos were among 77 animals – 73 hog deer and an otter pup – killed in the park so far due to drowning or health complications after rescue. Eleven hog deer that died were among 94 animals that were rescued.

Meanwhile, the Golaghat district administration has regulated the timing of commercial vehicles using National Highway 715 skirting the southern boundary of the Kaziranga National Park.

Kashmir reels under rare heatwave; rain likely soon

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Kashmir is grappling with a rare heatwave with day temperatures running six degrees Celsius above normal. However, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted showers in parts of J&K, which is likely to bring some relief on Saturday.

According to the IMD, the maximum temperature on Thursday stood at 35.7 degrees Celsius in Srinagar, much higher than the 35.5 degrees Celsius recorded in 2006 and Srinagar recorded the highest maximum temperature of 38.3 degrees Celsius in 1946.

The day temperature in Srinagar has remained five to six degrees Celsius above normal this week.

North Kashmir's Kupwara recorded 35.2 degrees Celsius and south Kashmir's Qazigund recorded 32.8 degrees Celsius on Thursday while Bandipora, nestled in a thick forest cover, recorded 34.7 degrees Celsius.

According to the IMD, north Kashmir's Kokernag recorded 33 degrees Celsius on July 4, "which is the highest ever temperature since 1993."

NEET-PG 2024 exam to be conducted on August 11

The National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences has announced that the NEET-PG 2024 will be conducted on August 11 in two shifts. The notice added that the cut-off date for eligibility to appear in the examination would continue to be August 15, 2024. Further details regarding the conduct of the examination in two shifts will be published on the NBEMS website. With questions being raised about the "integrity of certain competitive examinations", the Health Ministry had earlier announced the postponement of the NEET-PG entrance examination "as a precautionary measure", just hours before it was due to be held on June 23 morning. PTI

Court seeks ASI's reply in Krishna Janmabhoomi case

The Allahabad High Court has asked the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to file its reply in a suit seeking a survey of Jama Masjid in Agra, with petitioners claiming that the remains of Thakur Keshav Dev's idol in Krishna Janmabhoomi were buried in the mosque. The plaintiffs sought a survey by the ASI claiming that the Mughal king Aurangzeb had demolished the temple of Keshav Dev in Mathura in 1670 and buried the remains of the idol. The plaintiffs also prayed for the appointment of an Advocate Commissioner in the case. The court has fixed August 5 as the next date of hearing. PTI

Pune luxury car crash: minor submits essay on road safety

The 17-year-old minor allegedly involved in the Pune Porsche car crash that killed two techies has submitted a 300-word essay on road safety complying with the bail conditions of the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB), an official said on Friday. He was released from an observation home last month after the Bombay High Court held that the orders remanding him to the facility were illegal. Hours after the fatal accident in the city's Kalyani Nagar area on May 19, the JJB had ordered that he be kept under the care and supervision of his parents and grandfather. It also asked the minor to write a 300-word essay on road safety. PTI

9 dead after entering wells in Chhattisgarh; police probe on

Nine persons, including a man and his two sons as well as a father-daughter duo, were killed on Friday in two incidents in Chhattisgarh's Janjgir-Champa and Korba after suspected inhalation of poisonous gas inside wells, police officials said, adding that a probe is on. In Kikirda village under Birra police station limits in Janjgir-Champa, Ramchandra Jaiswal (60), Ramesh Patel (50), his two sons Rajendra (20) and Jitendra (25), and Tikeshwar Chandra (25) died, Bilaspur Range Inspector General of Police Sanjeev Shukla said. Prima facie, it appears the men died after inhaling some poisonous gas, though the exact cause would be known once the autopsy reports arrive, a district administration official said. PTI

'About ₹99 lakh paid to Agniveer Kumar's family in three tranches'

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

About ₹99 lakh has been credited to the family of Agniveer Ajay Kumar in three tranches beginning February 13, Army sources in the know said. The remaining amount of about ₹67 lakh will be paid soon, they said.

The 23-year-old Agniveer was killed in a landmine blast in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir near the Line of Control on January 18.

On Wednesday, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi put out a video clip of the Agniveer's father, in which the latter claimed that the family didn't receive any compensation after his son's death.

₹67 lakh to be paid soon
Army sources said the first tranche of insurance of ₹50 lakh was credited on Fe-



Rahul Gandhi put out a video clip of Agniveer Ajay Kumar's father, in which he claimed the family did not get any compensation. PTI

bruary 13. Another insurance amount of ₹48 lakh, through the non-contributory scheme paid by the government, was credited on June 10. An amount of ₹1 lakh as well as an additional sum of ₹39,000 were credited on July 3, they said. The ₹50 lakh is an insurance by banks as part a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Army with banks, the source stated. The Punjab government has also given ₹1

crore to the family.

The Army had said Agniveer Ajay Kumar's family will get a total amount of approximately ₹1.65 crore. The remaining amount of ₹67 lakh will be paid on final settlement shortly post police verification.

Giving a break-up of the balance ₹67.3 lakh, officials said it comprises ex gratia of ₹44 lakh, Army welfare fund of ₹8 lakh, balance of pay till completion of his tenure amounting to ap-

proximately ₹13 lakh and Seva Nidhi fund of ₹2.3 lakh. So far, nearly 18 Agniveers have lost their lives, though the exact number has not been released officially.

Note of concern

Several veterans have expressed concern over the impact of the scheme.

Former Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh said on social media platform X, "The only motivation driving the Agniveer is reducing the pension bill. The fact that this scheme will degrade combat effectiveness is known to all who understand national security". Another former Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash said, "Economics (must) take a back seat to national security. The sole litmus test for any change or reform in the military must be: 'Does it enhance or degrade combat potential?'"

Compensation and insurance different, says Rahul Gandhi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Continuing his attack on the government over the compensation for Agniveers, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Friday said that "there is a difference between compensation and insurance".

In a new video posted on his X handle, Mr. Gandhi shared a clip of the father of Ajay Kumar, an Agniveer who was killed in the line of the duty, reiterating his claim that he did not get any money from the Centre apart from ₹48 lakh from Army group insurance and ₹50 lakh insurance from ICICI Lombard.

Salary dues

"There is a difference between compensation and insurance. Till today, they have not got the compensation amount. Till today,

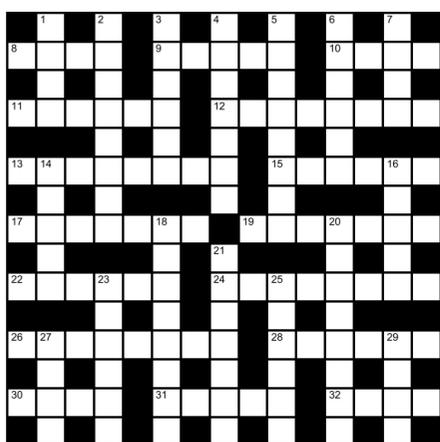
why have they not got their salary arrears in their bank account," Mr. Gandhi asked. "The truth is that there are two types of martyrs in India today. One is a Nirmal Jawan and the other is the Agniveer. Both will become martyrs but one will get pension while the other won't. One will get canteen facilities while the other won't. If someone dies for the country, he should be respected," the Congress leader said.

On July 1, Mr. Gandhi, during his speech in the Lok Sabha, had claimed that Agniveers were not entitled to any compensation after their death.

Intervening, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had asserted that Agniveers get a compensation of ₹1 crore from the Centre. The Army also issued a statement to contest Mr. Gandhi's claim saying an amount of ₹1.65 crore would be paid.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14220

To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ <https://qrqo.page.link/jjpTn>



Across

- 8 Letters adorning the Cross carried in jinriksha (1,1,1,1)
9 Country friend carries some news (5)
10 Test old flame before morning (4)
11 Time to say, "Hands up!" (6)
12 "Spanish queen is with Lincoln. Everyone go back." (8)
13 Begin trade by giving up right to name (8)

- 15 South African gets chance to get a celestial body (6)
17 Papa leaves relative by marriage to hide aunt's last hat (7)
19 Say "Cheese", for example, breaking curd pot (7)
22 General method to give room for manoeuvre (6)
24 Mountaineer has aluminium fastener at first (8)
26 Some rest organised for Mr Maugham (8)
28 Mollycoddle Pamela for some period (6)
30 Animal returns carrying little cosmetic (4)
31 Extraordinary interest taken by uncle (5)
32 Boy leaves shed behind Middle Eastern lake (4)

Down

- 1 Precipitation starting sometime at present (4)
2 Mad pilot flies envoy (8)
3 Bury new trainee (6)
4 Rushed carrying lubricant that's gone bad (7)
5 For example, shampoo pole dipped in mixed cereals (8)
6 Say again, "Engineers fuel" (6)
7 Post warrior's protective attire (4)
14 / 16 Where a sailor may find his craft if consuming liquor like this? (2,3,5)
18 Greek hero used soy concoction around end of dinners (8)
20 Wrongly end amity to produce explosive (8)
21 Brown model taking drink gets fit of rage (7)
23 Girl has right tool (6)
25 Look after father, the Sailor Man (6)
27 Jewel from ring with mate (4)
29 Make bearing... Not big... (4)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



FAITH

Praising the Lord's qualities

The term *stotra* refers to praising one's good qualities. God is called *Stotra Priya* – who can be easily pleased with praise and prayer. The grandsire Bhisma's praise of God is called *Bhisma Sthuthi*. Sri Bhisma refers to Him as *Shavya Shava Priya stotram* in Sri Vishnu Sahasra Nama. Similarly, *Dhruva Sthuthi*, *Kunti Sthuthi*, *Utharai Sthuthi* and *Prahladha Sthuthi* praise Him. Azhwars, Nayanmars and Acharyas have all sung in praise of Him.

Vedas praise Him through various sukthas such as *Purusha Suktham*. He possesses infinite good qualities (*Bahavo Nrupa Kalyana gunaa*.)

Sri Kesava Vajapeyar Swamy said in a discourse that Lord Krishna Himself says to Arjuna that His qualities cannot be fully described. Still, only prominent ones can be narrated as His splendour is limitless – *Hantha te Kathayishyami* – chapter X, sloka 19.

We should maintain our status of ever remembering God as an unfortunate situation may arise for us at any time, and we may forget Him.

The gatekeepers of Sri Vaikunta (*dvara palakas*), who were very close to God, were censured out of a curse to be born as demons. Born as Hiranya Kasipu, he was in search of God (forgetting Him) and asked his son Prahladha where God was.

IN BRIEF



Bajaj Auto introduces CNG bike starting at ₹95,000

Bajaj Auto Ltd. has introduced a compressed natural gas (CNG) motorcycle named 'Freedom' with prices starting at ₹95,000 (ex-showroom Delhi). The company said its 125 cc bike is 'the world's first CNG motorcycle.' The product offers about 50% cost savings by significantly reducing fuel expenses compared with similar petrol motorcycles. The CNG tank provides a range of over 200 km on just 2 kg of CNG fuel. Also, it has a 2-litre petrol tank which is a 'range extender.'

Indian Overseas Bank offers to upgrade savings scheme

Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) said it was offering customers a facility to upgrade existing savings account scheme to higher variants through the bank website. The higher variants of savings account - SB Max and SB HNI - offer a host of enhanced facilities and features, which includes concessions and waiver of various charges, said the lender. IOB also introduced a service allowing clients to access loan-account statements directly through the Digilocker app or the web portal.

iTNT event in Chennai may witness signing of 50 MoUs

Over 50 Memoranda of Understanding are likely to be signed on July 11 to mark celebrations of the first Tamil Nadu Technology Hub (iTNT) day in Chennai. iTNT Day is a culmination of the hub's year-long efforts and will set the tone for the hallmark initiatives for the year 2024-25, it said in a statement. The event is being organised by iTNT and Information Technology and Digital Services Department along with industry support, as per a press statement.

Women get only 7% MSME credit: RBI ED

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Reserve Bank of India Executive Director Neeraj Nigam said low labour force participation among women stunts their financial inclusion and broader economic growth.

He said there was also a need to raise credit supply to women, pointing out that only 7% of the overall outstanding loans to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) were to women-led businesses.

"Significant barrier" for financial inclusion and indeed to economic growth and development is more participation of females in



economic activities," he said, pointing out that official data suggested female labour force participation was 32.8% in FY22, against more than 77% of men.

A fifth of MSMEs were women-led but only 7% of outstanding credit went to them, Mr. Nigam said. He was speaking at 'Financing Women Collaborative', organised by Niti Aayog and Transunion Cibil.

Super Auto aims to double revenue to ₹3,000 cr., targets domestic push

N. Anand
CHENNAI

Super Auto Forging Pvt. Ltd. (SAF) has chalked out a five-year plan to double its revenue to ₹3,000 crore by FY29, aided by a strong export market and an aggressive strategy to double its domestic market share, said a top official.

"We closed last fiscal with a revenue of ₹1,580 crore and we are planning to cross ₹2,000 crore in FY26 and hit ₹3,000 crore by FY29 by riding on 10-15% growth YoY," Chairman S. Seetharaman said during an interaction.

To achieve this goal, SAF plans to acquire used forging presses from reputed global Original Equipment



S. Seetharaman (centre) with S. Ravishankar (left) and S. Muralishankar. N. ANAND

Manufacturers (OEMs). SAF acquired four cold forging lines from Japan recently, and two warm forging lines from Germany, while investing in two new aluminium forging lines. "Like China plus one factor, Europe plus one factor will help the Indian automotive sector, particu-

'Food costs lift veg thali price 10%'

Veg and non-veg food plate prices rose in June to six and seven month highs, respectively; tomato, onion, potato, rice, and pulses continued to record double-digit inflation, Crisil's food cost tracker signals; official food inflation was 8.7% in May

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Food inflation likely hardened further in June from the 8.7% mark recorded in April and May, going by Crisil's food plate cost tracker, which showed that a home-cooked vegetarian meal's cost rose 10% year-on-year to a six-month high, while non-vegetarian meal costs hit a seven-month peak.

The cost of a non-vegetarian meal was 4% lower than a year earlier, but inched up 4% sequentially to ₹58, the highest price since November. The average ve-



Unbridled surge: The prices of tomatoes, onions and potatoes rose 30%, 46% and 59%, respectively, in June. THE HINDU

getarian meal cost had touched ₹29.4, the highest so far in 2024 and 6% over May levels, Crisil's calculations show.

The monthly CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics report on food plate costs points to food inflation trends ahead of

the official retail inflation data for June, due on July 12. In May, vegetarian food plate costs rose 9%, quickening from April's 8%, while official food inflation for consumers was 8.7% in both the months.

TOP driven

A large part of the rise in June's vegetarian meal costs was driven by a surge of 30%, 46% and 59% in prices of tomato, onion and potato (TOP), respectively. In May, the prices of these three key vegetables had risen 39%, 43% and 41%, respectively. On a month-on-month basis,

prices of tomato, onion and potato rose 29%, 15% and 9%, respectively, due to lower arrivals. The calculation of a vegetarian thali's cost also includes the prices of roti, rice, dal, curd, and salad.

"A dip in acreage, resulting in subdued arrivals, has led to a 13% on-year increase in the price of rice (accounting for 13% of the veg thali cost), while a dry spell in key kharif months impacted production of pulses, leading to a price increase of 22% on-year," Crisil said. Prices of pulses had risen 21% in May, while rice prices were up 13%.

'Vistara-AI merger to meet NCLT timeline'

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

Vistara is hopeful of meeting the nine-month National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) order timeline to complete its merger with Air India "comfortably", said CEO Vinod Kannan to employees in an email.

On June 6, the NCLT granted its approval for the merger allowing nine months for the dissolution of Vistara. Vistara's flying permit from the Director General Civil Aviation (DGCA) expires in December 2024. A key approval that is pending is regarding the Foreign Direct Invest-



Vinod Kannan

ment from Singapore Airlines, which was also "on track", Mr. Kannan said.

While the flying crew and a minimum administrative staff will continue to be at Vistara till December, a larger tranche of its employees will be sent on secondment to Air India from July 17.

SAIL to invest ₹6,500 crore in capex for FY25: CMD

Press Trust of India
HYDERABAD

The Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) will invest ₹6,500 crore towards capital expenditure in the current financial year as part of its ₹1 lakh crore investment plan over the next few years, SAIL CMD Amarendra Prakash said.

Speaking to the media, he said the steel industry approached the government for measures to control dumping of cheap metal by China into India and hoped steps will be taken to address the menace.

JSW Energy plans ₹15,000-cr. capex

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

JSW Energy CMD Sajjan Jindal said the company has planned a capital expenditure of ₹15,000 crore during the current fiscal year.

In his address at the AGM, he said, the firm intends to spend about ₹15,000 crore to reach the goal of 20 GW generation and 40 GWh storage under 'Strategy 2.0'.

He further said the firm is also actively scouting for acquisition opportunities in the power sector.

The company is on track to commission ongoing projects for power genera-



tion, battery storage and green hydrogen production, it said.

The growth capital secured through the recently completed QIP (qualified institutional placement) strategically positions the firm to accelerate the execution of returns-accretive growth plans, he noted.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	FRIDAY	CHANGE
Sensex	79,997	-0.07
US Dollar	₹83.49	0.01
Gold	73,310	0.31
Brent oil	₹81.81	0.27

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	3147.90	-3.65
Adani Ports	1500.45	-3.20
Apollo Hosp	6328.55	103.50
Asian Paints	2935.90	-1.00
Axis Bank	1287.05	-6.15
Bajaj Auto	9635.80	174.95
Bajaj Finserv	1579.60	-6.10
Bajaj Finance	7138.00	30.95
Bharti Airtel	1429.70	6.65
BPCL	306.65	-3.65
Britannia Ind	5546.80	120.55
Cipla	1509.90	29.15
Coal India	491.50	-1.95
Divis Lab	4629.70	85.65
Dr Reddy's Lab	6520.00	40.65
Eicher Motors	4737.30	47.80
Grasim Ind	2748.00	13.15
HCL Tech	1519.40	-2.95
HDFC Bank	1648.10	-79.05
HDFC Life	607.35	-3.40
Hero MotoCorp	5558.05	-4.30
Hindalco	699.15	7.30
Hind Unilever	2547.00	51.05
IICI Bank	1233.40	0.40
IndusInd Bank	1434.25	-8.60
Infosys	1647.45	-3.20
ITC	433.65	-4.60
JSW Steel	954.05	9.70
Kotak Bank	1852.70	18.85
L&T	3627.15	53.85
LTMindtree Ltd.	5421.70	-37.80
M&M	2880.60	-22.20
Maruti Suzuki	12104.05	14.45
NestleIndia	2574.15	29.00
NTPC	379.80	6.85
ONGC	288.20	11.15
PowerGrid Corp	339.40	4.40
Reliance Ind	3177.25	69.20
SBI Life	1529.40	21.65
State Bank	859.75	20.45
Shriram Finance Ltd.	2865.85	32.10
Sun Pharma	1568.40	10.50
TataConsumerProduct	1137.40	-2.20
Tata Motors	993.65	-4.55
Tata Steel	174.71	-1.58
TCS	4011.80	-9.15
Tech Mahindra	1461.35	-2.20
Titan	3269.35	-66.65
UltraTech Cement	11690.15	-69.90
Wipro	535.10	4.40

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on July 05

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	83.29	83.61
Euro	90.14	90.49
British Pound	106.48	106.89
Japanese Yen (100)	51.81	52.01
Chinese Yuan	11.46	11.51
Swiss Franc	92.66	93.02
Singapore Dollar	61.71	61.96
Canadian Dollar	61.19	61.43
Malaysian Ringgit	17.68	17.76
Australian Dollar	56.08	56.30

Source: Indian Bank

Panattoni to tap India, invest \$100 mn a year

Lalendu Mishra
MUMBAI

U.S. based Panattoni Group, one of the world's largest industrial real-estate developers, is planning to invest \$100 million in India every year for a few years to expand its base in this emerging market, Robert Dobrzycki, CEO and co-owner, Panattoni Europe, U.K., Middle East & India said.

The Group, as part of its plan to set up industrial warehouses in key markets in India, held the groundbreaking ceremony of its first warehouse project in India at Panattoni Park NH71 in Delhi NCR.

The warehouse park, to come up at an investment



Robert Dobrzycki

of ₹120 crore will be operational in mid-2025.

In the first phase the park will offer more than 32,000 sq. m. space and will be developed on a site area of 66,000 sq.m. making it ideal for a wide range of industrial & logistics needs, the company said.

"We are committed to accelerating expansion across India in the coming years," Mr. Dobrzycki said.

MAHANAGAR TELEPHONE NIGAM LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise)
Eastern Court, Janpath, New Delhi-110001

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that I Anil Kumar, Manager (Admin.) and on behalf of GM (Central) MTNL Eastern Court, Janpath inform that MTNL is the allottee of asset i.e. situated at Shop No. 10, Arunachal Building, 19, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi. The original documents i.e. Allotment cum Demand Letter, Possession Letter, Site Possession Slip, NOC for water and electricity connection of the above said property have been lost or misplaced and are not traceable in spite of my and this office best efforts. A FIR to this effect has been lodged vide LR No. 1455794/2024 dated 17.02.2024. Any person(s) found in possession of original documents, may write/contact at below address / Phone No 011-23312366/ 9868136870 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Manager (Admin.) Central O/o GM (Central)
1st Floor, Eastern Court, Janpath, MTNL, New Delhi-110001

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE ADDL. CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD(R&B)
HILLS, ASSAM, HAFLONG
E-mail ID: acshafllong@gmail.com
No. ACEH/TECH/CS/11/2024-25/7

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
(E-Procurement)
The Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD(R&B), Hills, Assam, Haflong invites bids on behalf-of the Governor of Assam for 01 (One) No. of Building Works "Construction of Veer Sambudhan Phonglo Memorial Park at Maibang, Dima Hasao under DHATC Package" under P.W.D., Haflong Territorial Building Division, Haflong from approved and eligible contractors Class-1 (A) registered with Public Works Department (Building), Assam for a total amount Rs. 11.9425 Crore (Approx).
Details may be seen from 10/07/2024 at the website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
Addl. Chief Engineer, PWD (R&B) Hills, Assam, Haflong
Janasanyog /CF/564/ 24/06 July 2024

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B Nagar, (U.P.)
Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE
E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors / firms for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened / downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website : www.noidaauthorityonline.in & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes / amendments & corrigendum etc.

Sr. No.	Job Number	Name of Work	Amount
(1)	01/SPE/PE (PH-II)/ E-Tender/ 2024-25	Engagement of Agency for Manual Based Night Sweeping and Housekeeping Services in Commercial Areas (Package-1), PH-II Area Noida	Rs. 3824036.88

The above tenders can be uploaded from dated 08/07/2024 to 15/07/2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-Qualification shall be opened / downloaded on dated 16/07/2024 at 11.00 AM.

Dy. GM/Sr. Project Engineer (Public Health)
Noida
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

HIMACHAL PRADESH JAL SHAKTI VIBHAG
Tel. 01783-264437
iphnerwa@gmail.com

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Sealed item rate tender on form No.6&8 are called by the Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Nerwa for the following works from approved and eligible contractors enlisted with Jal Shakti Vibhag so as to reach in this office on or before 10-07-2024 upto 11.00 AM and will be opened on the same day at 11.30 AM in the presence of intending contractors or their authorized representatives if any. The tender forms can be had from this office against cash payment (Non-refundable) on any working day up to 09-07-2024 till 3.00 PM, and tender form will be issued till 09-07-2024 upto 5.00 PM. The form can also be downloaded from Departmental web site www.hpiph.org. Opening of tenders shall be considered as next working day if any holiday on above specified date.

The earnest money in the shape of FDR in any of the Nationalized Bank duly pledged in favour of Executive Engineer Jal Shakti Division Nerwa must be accompanied with each tender. Conditional tenders and the tenders received without earnest money will summarily be rejected. The Executive Engineer reserves the right to reject the tenders without assigning any reason. The contractors are advised to see site and read the conditions carefully before tendering. The offer of the tender shall be kept open for 120 days. Rate to be quoted both in words and figures.

Sr. No.	Name of Work	E/Cost (in Rs)	E/ Money (in Rs)	Time	Cost of form
1.	R/M of LWSS Churdhar Temple in GP Sarain Tehsil Chopal Distt. Shimla H.P. (SH-C/O Replacement of existing pumping machinery P/F 1 st set of New Pumping Machinery)	472500/-	9450/-	2 months	250/-
2.	R/M of LWSS Churdhar Temple in GP Sarain Tehsil Chopal Distt Shimla H.P. (SH-C/O Replacement of existing pumping machinery P/F 2 nd set of New Pumping Machinery)	472500/-	9450/-	2 months	250/-
3.	Providing balance functional household tap connection under JJM by source level Augmentation and retrofitting of 5 Nos existing LWSS schemes in Chopal constituency in Tehsil Chopal Distt. Shimla H.P. (SH- C/O Plum 1.5:10 CC R/wall RD 0/0 to 12 = 12 Rmt at pump house Obri Dwada stage 1 st)	308275/-	6175/-	3 months	250/-
4.	R/R damages to FIS Kierla in GP Paban Tehsil Nerwa Distt Shimla (SH- C/O CC lining at various RDs & 1 No C/O plum CC R/wall RD 0/30 to 46 = 16 mtr)	301265/-	6025/-	2 months	250/-
5.	LWSS to various habitation under IPH Sub Division Kupvi Tehsil Kupvi Distt Shimla (SH- Providing laying of GI pipe line for connected of distribution system)	334756/-	6695/-	2 months	250/-
6.	R/M of SDO residence at Jal Shakti Division Nerwa Tehsil Nerwa Distt Shimla (SH- C/O white washing & Tiles work type-II)	370772/-	7415/-	2 months	250/-
7.	R/M of GWSS Aar in GP Bijnal Tehsil Nerwa Distt Shimla (SH- C/O 1no storage tank of 10000 ltr cap laying jointing of GI pipe 15mm dia 300 Rmt for village Lanni in GP Bijnal)	243058/-	4861/-	2 months	250/-

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:-
1 The contractor should submit documents i.e. Registration with HP Jal Shakti Vibhag and latest renewal, cost of tender form, Earnest Money in shape of FDR, PAN Number & GST No.
2 The tender form will be issued only to those contractors who will submit the proof the required documents
3 The tender received without above documents will be rejected.
4 The income tax, GST and L/cess shall be deducted according to instruction issued by Govt. time to time.
5 Telegraphic / conditional tenders shall not be accepted.
6 The tender form for Job No 1, & 2 will be issued to only those contractors who have experienced work of pumping machinery.

Executive Engineer,
Jal Shakti Division Nerwa.
HP/0574/24-25 "HIM SUCHNA AVAM JAN SAMPRAK"

NEW YORK

Trump congratulates Reform UK's Farage, ignores Keir Starmer's win



REUTERS

Former U.S. President Donald Trump celebrated the election of fellow populist Nigel Farage to Britain's Parliament on Friday, neglecting to mention the new Prime Minister, Keir Starmer. Mr. Farage is a long-standing ally of Mr. Trump, and his anti-immigration Reform UK party won the third largest vote haul. AFP

PARIS

France to 'pursue cooperation' with U.K. after Labour win: Macron



AFP

French President Emmanuel Macron congratulated Labour Party leader Keir Starmer on his election victory on Friday, saying his country would seek to cooperate with Britain on security, technology and climate. In a post on social media, Mr. Macron said he had already had a positive first exchange with Mr. Starmer. AFP

BERLIN

Starmer will be 'very good, very successful' British PM: Scholz



AFP

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz congratulated Britain's Labour for its landslide victory in general elections, saying that the party's leader Keir Starmer will be a "very good" Prime Minister for the country. "I know Starmer personally. He will be a very successful Prime Minister. I am convinced about that," Mr. Scholz said. AFP

BRUSSELS

EU hails new U.K. govt., but seen sticking to Brexit deal



AFP

The EU on Friday congratulated Keir Starmer on his election win in Britain, with Brussels foreseeing warmer ties with London — though little scope to change existing post-Brexit arrangements. European Council president Charles Michel called Mr. Starmer's victory "historic", and stressed the EU and Britain "are crucial partners". AFP

'Country first, party second', PM Starmer promises a changed U.K.

You have a government unburdened by doctrine, guided only by a determination to serve your interests, says the new Labour Prime Minister; David Lammy has been appointed Foreign Secretary and John Healey named Defence Secretary

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

The U.K.'s new Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, promised to carry fourth the theme of his Labour Party campaign, 'change' into his government, brining the notions of "service and respect" back into government.

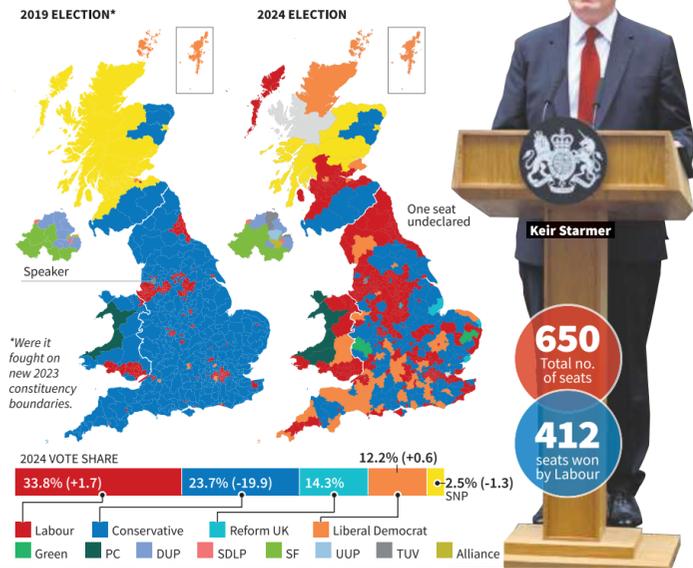
Standing outside the Prime Minister's official residence, No.10 Downing Street, with his wife Victoria Starmer, minutes after the residence's former occupants, outgoing Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his family, had departed, Mr. Starmer said he his government would put the "country first, party second".

In a thinly veiled reference to the five Prime Ministers the 14 years of Tory government had seen, Mr. Starmer said Britain had an ability to steer itself to calmer waters but that depended on politicians, especially those favouring "stability and moderation".

But for Labour under Mr. Starmer, "change" has not just meant a change from the Tories but also a move towards the centre that has occurred since he took over the reins

How the U.K. voted

With nearly all of the 650 seats declared, Keir Starmer's Labour won 412 seats with 33.8% vote share, while the Tories secured 121 seats with 23.7% vote.



of the party from Jeremy Corbyn in 2020. Mr. Starmer has made repeated explicit references through the campaign, including on Friday, to a changed party.

"You have a government unburdened by doctrine, guided only by a determination to serve your inter-

ests, to defy, quietly, those who have written off our country," he said in his first speech as Prime Minister, adding that his government would "tread more lightly" on the lives of citizens.

Specifically mentioning "nurses, builders, drivers, carers", Mr.

Starmer said their lives had become more insecure. Labour's manifesto has promised to strengthen workers' rights in the first 100 days of government as part of its 'New deal for working people'. The new Prime Minister made references to other manifesto themes in his

Downing Street speech: renewing Britain's universal health care system, clean energy, border security and safer streets.

"And so my government will fight, every day, until you believe again," Mr. Starmer said. He also paid special tribute to Mr. Sunak, acknowledging that the former Prime Minister, who is of Indian-descent, was the first Asian Briton to hold the post.

"His achievement as the first British Asian Prime Minister of our country, the extra effort that will have required, should not be underestimated by anyone," Mr. Starmer said, as he paid tribute to Mr. Sunak's dedication and hard work.

By the early afternoon, the Cabinet announcements began emerging. Angela Rayner, deputy leader of Labour, was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary. Rachel Reeves, a former Bank of England staffer and MP, was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. David Lammy, a long time MP from Tottenham, was appointed Foreign Secretary. John Healey, a long time MP from the Tony Blair era, was appointed Defence Secretary.

U.K. parties left and right of mainstream do well

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Although the U.K.'s smaller parties won just 17% of the seats in Thursday's election, they increased their vote share from 2019, winning some 40% of the vote. Parties to the right and left of the two mainstream parties, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, did well, with the far right eating into the Conservatives' votes and Labour, which secured a landslide victory, losing some seats because of its stand on the Israel-Gaza conflict.

The Green Party won a record four seats. The Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant Reform UK party won five seats, and its leader, Nigel Farage, won a seat after seven unsuccessful attempts. Mr. Farage was the de facto leader of the Brexit movement.

"Conservative support fell most heavily in seats they were trying to defend. This is primarily the result of a large increase in Reform's support, especially in places where there was a high Leave [the European Union] vote in 2016," psephologist John Curtice wrote on BBC.

Mr. Farage described the results as just the beginning of something larger. "Believe me, folks, this is just the first step of something that is going to stun all of you," he said. Former Labour leader



Britain's King Charles welcomes Keir Starmer during an audience at Buckingham Palace, in London on Friday. AFP

Jeremy Corbyn won his seat of Islington North as an independent candidate. He said his victory was a warning to the incoming government that "dissent cannot be crushed without consequences". Mr. Starmer had suspended Mr. Corbyn from the party in 2020 for his response to an inquiry into anti-Semitism within Labour. The Labour party lost four seats on Thursday to pro-Gaza independents. After Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7 and Israel's counter-attack on Gaza, Mr. Starmer's positions on the manner of Israel's retaliation were criticised for being too soft on Israel. Shadow Cabinet Office minister Jonathan Ashworth was among those who lost his seat (South Leicester), losing it to Shokat Adam. "This is for Gaza," Mr Adam declared.

In Leicester East, Indian-born Rajesh Agrawal lost to Conservative Shivani Raja, with the non-Tory vote getting split between various candidates, including former MP Claudia Webbe, who has actively campaigned for Palestine.

Across the Irish Sea, in Northern Ireland (NI), the Republican Sinn Fein became the largest NI party in Westminster, retaining seven seats, while the Democratic and Unionist Party (DUP) won just five seats, a loss of three seats since 2019. Sinn Fein has had a majority in the NI Assembly since 2019 and is in favour of a Irish unification referendum by 2030.

In Scotland, the Scottish National Party woke up to bad news on Friday, winning just nine seats, a loss of 38. The pro-independence party, which has been governing Scotland for 17 years, lost the Westminster seats in the two major cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Rishi Sunak's term was marred by divisions within party

Associated Press
LONDON

Rishi Sunak's campaign to remain Britain's Prime Minister showed a lack of political touch.

The Conservative Party's problems were grave before Friday's resounding election defeat but missteps by Britain's richest Prime Minister contributed to its defeat.

Predecessors such as Tony Blair and Boris Johnson were more politically astute and able to connect

with voters. As for Mr. Sunak, he didn't have to call the election until January 2025. He defied political advice by doing so in May — with Conservative support dwindling steadily amid an economic slump, ethics scandals and a revolving door of leaders over the last two years — and announced the July 4 date in the pouring rain.

What's more, the Conservative Party didn't appear ready for the campaign compared with Labour, and voters haven't



Rishi Sunak

really felt the improvement in Britain's economy yet. "I have heard your anger, your disappointment, and I take responsibility

for this loss," Mr. Sunak said in his final speech as Prime Minister outside the residence at 10 Downing St.

Arguably, Mr. Sunak's biggest blunder — one that prompted him to apologise and which many analysts think was the final death knell of the Conservative Party's campaign — was his decision to leave early from the 80-year D-day commemorations in northern France on June 6.

Critics said the decision to skip the international

event that closed the commemorations showed disrespect to the veterans and diminished the U.K.'s international standing. Other world leaders including President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy all were present. As was Keir Starmer, the new Prime Minister.

Born in 1980 in Southampton on England's south coast to parents of

Indian descent, Mr. Sunak became Britain's first leader of colour and the first Hindu to become Prime Minister.

In his 21 months as Prime Minister, Mr. Sunak struggled to keep a lid on bitter divisions within his Conservative Party. One side wanted him to be much tougher on immigration and bolder in cutting taxes, while another urged him to move more to the centre of politics, the space where, historically, British elections are won.

SNP's setback derails independence push

Reuters
LONDON

The Scottish National Party was set for its worst showing at a British parliamentary election since 2010, projections showed, derailed their push for a new independence referendum as a resurgent Labour Party made gains in former heartlands.

The SNP, which held 43 seats before the election

was called, has suffered from a period of turmoil that has seen two leaders quit in little over a year, a police investigation into the party's finances and splits on a range of policies including its attempts to secure a second referendum on independence.

A police investigation into the SNP's finances, Mr. Sturgeon have contributed to the party's declining fortunes.

Iran holds run-off pitting conservative Jalili against reformist Pezeshkian

Associated Press
DUBAI

Iranians voted on Friday in a run-off presidential election between a conservative former nuclear negotiator and a reformist lawmaker, with both men trying to convince a sceptical public to cast ballots after years of economic woes and mass protests roiling the Islamic Republic.

The race between Saeed Jalili and Masoud Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon and longtime member of Par-

liament, comes after a first round of voting saw the lowest turnout ever for an Iranian election, leaving turnout on Friday a major question.

Meanwhile, wider tensions have gripped the West Asia over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. In April, Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel over the war in Gaza, while militia groups that Tehran arms in the region — such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels

— are engaged in the fighting and have escalated their attacks.

Iran also continues to enrich uranium at near weapons-grade levels and maintains a stockpile large enough to build several nuclear weapons, should it choose to do so. And while Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei remains the final decision-maker on matters of state, whichever man ends up winning the presidency could bend the country's foreign policy toward either confrontation



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei votes during the presidential runoff election in Tehran on Friday. GETTY IMAGES

or collaboration with the West. A heavy security pre-

sence could be seen on the streets of Tehran on Friday, as crowds appeared

light at dozens of polling places. State television broadcast scenes of modest lines at polling centres around the country.

Both Mr. Jalili and Mr. Pezeshkian voted in southern Tehran, home to many poor neighbourhoods, in a bid to boost turnout. Though Mr. Pezeshkian came out on top in the first round of voting on June 28, Mr. Jalili has been trying to secure the votes of people who supported hard-line parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf,

who came in third and later endorsed the former negotiator.

One voter, 27-year-old Yaghoob Mohammadi, said he voted for Mr. Jalili in both rounds.

"He is clean, without depending on powerful people in the establishment," Mohammadi said.

"He represents those who have no access to power." Voter Samira Sharafi, the 34-year-old mother of a toddler, said she voted for reformist Pezeshkian, des-

pite having voted for Qalibaf in the first round. She described him as "more experienced" than Mr. Jalili.

As has been the case since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, women and those calling for radical change have been barred from the ballot while the vote itself will have no oversight from internationally recognised monitors. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, who is in charge of overseeing the election, announced all the polls had opened at 8 a.m.



From reluctance to gusto: tracing India's limited-overs evolution

The country's cricketers and administrators have often been hesitant to embrace new developments. But two defining moments – the 1983 World Cup triumph and the 2007 World T20 victory – have transformed India's attitude and standing in the 50-over and 20-over formats

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

Grown men wiping tears, losing themselves in bearhugs, laughing with abandon and a captain pinching a little soil from the pitch and tasting it: these were all images that leapt across from Bridgetown in Barbados last Saturday. India had again won an ICC title, the T20 World Cup at that, to end the long drought that began after the 2013 Champions Trophy victory in England.

Rohit Sharma's men remained unbeaten in the championship and importantly held their nerve when South Africa threatened to pocket the match while chasing India's 176 for seven. A seven-run win was snatched and India had another piece of ICC silverware in its cupboard, which now features the 1983 and 2011 World Cups, the 2002 and 2013 Champions Trophy titles, and the 2007 and 2024 T20 crowns. We are talking intercontinental tournaments here and not Asia Cups and other similar events.

Five-decade journey

While Rohit, Virat Kohli, Axar Patel, Jasprit Bumrah, Hardik Pandya, Suryakumar Yadav and Arshdeep Singh all played their parts in the summit clash, be it through leadership, batting, bowling or fielding, it is also time to record the manner in which India has evolved in limited-overs cricket over the last five decades. Often coy to embrace any new development in the willow game, India would hesitate at the start, take its time and then suddenly woo that same format with the ardour of a college kid in the throes of first-love excitement.

Like Don Bradman's 99.94 Test average, Kapil's unbeaten 175 has gained a mythical allure. Perhaps it was that moment that made Indians believe that no cricket match is lost until the last ball



When ODIs first surfaced and that too the 60-over-per-side version, India took its time in the World Cups, so much so that across the 1975 and 1979 editions, the only triumph was secured against East Africa, a team which no longer exists. Back then, India was the land of the twirly men, as spinners of the calibre of Bishan Singh Bedi ruled the roost. Seamers were there to help the red cherry lose its shine before the quartet ambled in with their slow-art and secured great wins in Tests.

The ambivalence towards ODIs was evident in India's first ever World Cup game. During the inaugural 1975 edition, chasing host England's 334 for four, India finished with 132 for three, with Sunil Gavaskar remaining unbeaten on a 174-ball 36. To be fair to the great opener, he had gone on record saying it was a frustrating phase and he tried to get dismissed but to no avail.

Cut to 1983, India was clued in to the instant



thrills permeating ODIs. Kapil Dev led an exuberant bunch and on June 25, the World Cup was won while the mighty West Indians were humbled. This was a classic David quelling Goliath episode, and from that moment, ODIs were embraced with gusto. All the theoretical embellishments that later became part of cricket's limited-overs discourse were seemingly ushered in by India even before those terms came into vogue.

Think pinch-hitter then go no further than K. Srikkanth; think bits-and-pieces then rest on Roger Binny, Kirti Azad and Madan Lal; think all-rounder then anoint Kapil upon that mighty throne; think smart batting then you have Gavaskar, Dilip Vengsarkar, Mohinder Amarnath and Sandeep Patil to revel in. The cogs were in place, to this add the right attitude and sharp fielding, and India was bound to prosper.

India winning the Benson and Hedges World Championship of Cricket at Melbourne in 1985

was proof that 1983 wasn't a one-off miracle. This squad, led astutely by Gavaskar, also had the added youthful vigour of Mohammad Azharuddin, Sadanand Viswanath and Laxman Sivaramakrishnan, while Ravi Shastri, full of chutzpah, was named the Champion of Champions and took his ecstatic teammates on a merry spin in the Audi that was gifted to him.

In the spirit of things

That the ODI spirit was fully imbibed was evident in the 1987 World Cup at home and co-hosted with Pakistan. Gavaskar smashed a hundred (103 n.o., 88b, 10x4, 3x6), his lone one in ODIs, against a hapless New Zealand while Srikkanth looked bemused. It was great fun to watch and in the same championship, Navjot Singh Sidhu was scraping the skies with massive sixes off traumatised spinners.

India stumbled in the semifinal against England but the point is, in almost every multi-team limited-overs championship since that heady June day in 1983, the Indians were considered a threat to the other squads. Credit has to be bequeathed to what Kapil achieved in 1983. His unbeaten 175 against Zimbabwe is perhaps one of the greatest ever ODI knocks. "The match was not telecast, such a pity, maybe the BBC thought it wasn't worth it, apparently there was some strike," Syed Kirmani, that master wicketkeeper, once said.

Like Don Bradman's 99.94 Test average, Kapil's unbeaten 175 has gained a mythical allure. At least there are some clips of Bradman's batting, but for Kapil just a few photographs from Tunbridge Wells remain. Perhaps it was that moment that made Indians believe that no cricket match is lost until the last ball. A belief that was further amplified by Sachin Tendulkar, Anil Kumble, M.S. Dhoni, Zaheer Khan, Yuvraj Singh, Kohli, Rohit and Bumrah, to name a few, over the years in ODIs and T20Is.

There was also this weird phase when matches would be lost to Pakistan in Sharjah but whisper World Cup and the Men in Blue would thrash their western neighbour even if the overall title wasn't won. Just as India and its excitable fandom dug into ODIs, cricket welcomed T20s. India's cricketering administrators and even its leading stars replicated an old habit of hinting that the game's latest version wasn't worth their attention.

But once Dhoni and his merry band won the inaugural 2007 ICC World Twenty20 in South Africa's Johannesburg, another love story found its initial pitch. Gone were those cold vibes, there was a sense of wonder and India was the new convert. Soon the Indian Premier League (IPL) was unveiled in 2008 and the global cricketering landscape changed forever. India's dalliance with limited-overs cricket gained another fillip when Dhoni held aloft the World Cup at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium on an April night in 2011.

Shedding inhibitions

Cut to the latest high at Bridgetown, India has the strength to field multiple units especially in cricket's abridged formats. Just as Rohit's men took the flight out of Barbados, an Indian team was already in Zimbabwe, with V.V.S. Laxman stepping up as coach. The IPL has made players shed inhibitions and when a rookie now checks into the Indian dressing room, he is aware of his seniors and equally knows what to expect from rivals on the turf. This is a confidence that has also seeped into the Indian women's team, as there is a belief that matches will be won.

The men, at least players of the pedigree of Kohli, swear by Tests, and yet all of them have the zest to remain unhinged in ODIs and T20Is, and add fresh chapters to the history books. And Rahul Dravid, that quintessential classical man has the 2001 Eden Gardens Test, as player, and the 2024 T20 World Cup, as coach, to savour. Across formats, India has surely found its metier, this is the reluctant lover now wearing a beach-shirt, strutting around and wooing a gobsmacked audience.

STACKING UP

ATP Men's Top 15			
#	Player	Age	Points Events
1	Jannik Sinner	22	9,890 18
2	Novak Djokovic	37	8,360 18
3	Carlos Alcaraz	21	8,130 17
4	Alexander Zverev	27	6,905 25
5	Daniil Medvedev	28	6,445 18
6	Andrey Rublev	26	4,420 24
7	Hubert Hurkacz	27	4,235 23
8	Casper Ruud	25	4,025 24
9	Alex de Minaur	25	3,830 25
10	Grigor Dimitrov	33	3,750 21
11	Stefanos Tsitsipas	25	3,745 23
12	Taylor Fritz	26	3,390 24
13	Tommy Paul	27	3,100 23
14	Ben Shelton	21	2,595 25
15	Holger Rune	21	2,370 23

F1 Drivers' standings			
#	Driver	Team	Points Wins
1	Max Verstappen	Red Bull	237 7
2	Lando Norris	McLaren	156 1
3	Charles Leclerc	Ferrari	150 1
4	Carlos Sainz	Ferrari	135 1
5	Sergio Perez	Red Bull	118 0
6	Oscar Piastri	McLaren	112 0
7	George Russell	Mercedes	111 1
8	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes	85 0
9	Fernando Alonso	Aston Martin	41 0
10	Yuki Tsunoda	RB	19 0
11	Lance Stroll	Aston Martin	17 0
12	Nico Hulkenberg	Haas	14 0
13	Daniel Ricciardo	RB	11 0
14	Oliver Bearman	Ferrari	6 0
15	Pierre Gasly	Alpine	6 0
16	Kevin Magnussen	Haas	5 0
17	Esteban Ocon	Alpine	3 0
18	Alex Albon	Williams	2 0
19	Zhou Guanyu	Sauber	0 0
20	Valtteri Bottas	Sauber	0 0

Badminton Men's ranking			
#	Player	Points	Events
1	Shi Yu Qi	102415	18
2	Viktor Axelsen	93870	15
3	Jonatan Christie	89447	18
4	Anders Antonsen	89241	22
5	Li Shi Feng	84956	19
6	Kodai Naraoka	83697	21
7	Lee Zii Jia	78816	24
8	Kunlavut Vitidsarn	77508	18
9	Anthony Sinisuka Ginting	70485	18
10	Kenta Nishimoto	66232	25
11	Loh Kean Yew	65193	24
12	Chou Tien Chen	64567	30
13	Prannoy H. S.	63542	19
14	Lakshya Sen	61618	19
15	Lu Guang Zu	59271	22

Test Batting			
#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Kane Williamson	859	919
2	Joe Root	824	923
3	Babar Azam	768	882
4	Daryl Mitchell	768	804
5	Steve Smith	757	947
6	Rohit Sharma	751	813
7	Yashasvi Jaiswal	740	740
8	Dimuth Karunaratne	739	783
9	Virat Kohli	737	937
10	Harry Brook	735	773

WTA Women's Top 15			
#	Player	Age	Points Events
1	Iga Swiatek	23	11,585 18
2	Coco Gauff	20	7,943 18
3	Aryna Sabalenka	26	7,841 17
4	Elena Rybakina	25	6,026 19
5	Jessica Pegula	30	5,025 22
6	Marketa Vondrousova	25	4,463 18
7	Jasmine Paolini	28	4,228 25
8	Qinwen Zheng	21	4,055 20
9	Maria Sakkari	28	3,805 24
10	Ons Jabeur	29	3,801 23
11	Danielle Collins	30	3,532 20
12	Daria Kasatkina	27	3,283 24
13	Madison Keys	29	3,068 16
14	Jelena Ostapenko	27	3,058 23
15	Liudmila Samsonova	25	2,830 25

F1 Constructors' standings			
Pos	Team	Points	Wins
1	Red Bull	355	7
2	Ferrari	291	2
3	McLaren	268	1
4	Mercedes	196	1
5	Aston Martin	58	0
6	RB	30	0
7	Haas	19	0
8	Alpine	9	0
9	Williams	2	0
10	Sauber	0	0

Badminton Women's ranking			
#	Player	Points	Events
1	An Se Young	113,217	16
2	Chen Yu Fei	104,282	18
3	Tai Tzu Ying	92,221	18
4	Carolina Marin	88,786	16
5	Akane Yamaguchi	86,427	13
6	Wang Zhi Yi	83,215	21
7	Han Yue	77,609	24
8	He Bing Jiao	74,868	17
9	Gregoria Mariska Tunjung	73,862	22
10	Aya Ohori	66,267	24
11	Beiwen Zhang	64,556	23
12	P.V. Sindhu	61,882	17
13	Nozomi Okuhara	60,341	22
14	Zhang Yi Man	59,734	19
15	Supanida Katethong	57,814	25

Test Bowling			
#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	R. Ashwin	870	904
2	Josh Hazlewood	847	864
2	Jasprit Bumrah	847	881
4	Kagiso Rabada	834	902
5	Pat Cummins	820	914
6	Nathan Lyon	801	801
7	Ravindra Jadeja	788	899
8	James Anderson	739	903
9	Shaheen Afridi	733	836
10	Kyle Jamieson	729	836

GETTY IMAGES

Simone Biles' redemption song continues to silence Tokyo demons

The 27-year-old gymnast, regarded as one of the best ever, booked her ticket to Paris with a resounding victory at the US trials. Having successfully made a comeback after a two-year break to safeguard her mental health, she has the opportunity to put the 2020 Olympics firmly in her rearview mirror



I feel like success is just what I make it. I feel like right now I've been successful at competing at the trials and making the Paris Olympic team. So then we'll see from there on out

Associated Press
Agence France-Presse

For a generation, Simone Biles has defined gymnastics. For the last three years, she has done everything in her power to ensure it doesn't define her.

At the Tokyo Games in 2021, Biles – regarded by then as one of the best of all time – had a bout of the disorienting 'twisties'. It's a temporary condition in which gymnasts lose their sense of where they are in the air, increasing the risk of injury when they land.

Rediscovering her best

Biles memorably pulled out of multiple finals to protect her mental health and safety – a decision that came with a backlash that still litters her social media feed – but has since worked to return to competitive gymnastics and rediscover her best. At the World Championships last year, she increased her World and Olympics medal tally to 37, making her the most decorated gymnast ever – male or female – at the sport's two signature events ahead of the retired Vitaly Scherbo. It was an astonishing big-stage comeback.

And now she has the opportunity to put the Tokyo Olympics firmly in her rearview mirror. Biles booked her ticket to the Paris Games after a resounding all-around victory at the US gymnastics trials last weekend and will headline an American team eyeing a shot at redemption.

The 27-year-old took two years off after Tokyo, a break in which she prioritised her mental health – she now meets with her therapist weekly, even during competitions – and moved on with her life. Biles' gut told her that if she wanted to come



Nobody's forcing me to do it. I wake up every day and choose to grind in the gym and come out here and perform for myself. Just to remind myself that I can still do it

back, she needed to do it on her terms. That meant taking intentional steps to make sure her life is no longer defined by her gymnastics.

She married Chicago Bears safety Jonathan Owens last spring and has shifted gymnastics to something she does, not the essence of her self-worth. Indeed, the couple are building a house in the northern Houston suburbs they hope to move into shortly after Biles returns from Paris.

The oldest American woman to make an Olympic gymnastics team since the 1950s, Biles never expected to still be doing this nearly a decade after becoming a crossover sensation at the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro. Besides, in the immediate aftermath of Tokyo, she had "never pictured going to another Olympic Games".

"I never thought I would go back in the gym again, be twisting, feel free," Biles told an excited crowd at the US trials in Minneapolis. And yet here she is. Still working. Still pushing. Not to shut up the critics who still flood her mentions on social media wondering if she will "quit" again, but because she remains determined to extract everything she can out of her remarkable talent.

Embracing the grind

"Nobody's forcing me to do it," said Biles, who posted a two-day total of 117,225 to claim the all-around by almost six points over Sunisa Lee, who took the all-around gold in Tokyo. "I wake up every day and choose to grind in the gym and come out here and perform for myself. Just to remind myself that I can still do it."

And do it at a level that no one else in her sport – and when she's at her best, maybe sports in general – can match. A trip to France has never really been in doubt since Biles returned last sum-

mer. All she's done over the last 12 months is win a sixth world all-around title and capture her eighth and ninth national championships – both records.

Biles will be a prohibitive favourite when she steps onto the Bercy Arena floor in Paris although there is plenty to work on before women's qualifying on July 28.

At the trials, Biles backpedalled after landing her Yurchenko double pike vault, a testament to both the vault's difficulty and the immense power she generates during a skill few male gymnasts try and even fewer land as cleanly. She hopped off the beam after failing to land her side aerial, though she wasn't quite as frustrated as she was during a sloppy performance last Friday that left her uttering an expletive for all the world to see.

Biles finished with a flourish on floor exercise, her signature event. Though there was a small step out of bounds, there was also the unmatched world-class tumbling that recently drew a shout-out from pop star Taylor Swift, whose song 'Ready For It' opens Biles' routine.

At an age where most gymnasts are simply trying to hold on to their skills – that is if they haven't already retired – Biles may be as good as ever. Her vaulting and floor exercise routines are the hardest being done by any woman on the planet. The Houston-area native is a four-time world champion on beam and has even started to fancy uneven bars.

For decades, the US teenage gymnasts would head to the Games, win medals and then cede the spotlight to the next wave of talent. Those days are long gone. Biles joked that she needs to apologise to 2016 Olympic teammate Aly Raisman, who was nicknamed "grandma", when Raisman

was all of 22. "I'm way older now," Biles said with a laugh.

The 4'8" Biles, who has five skills named after her, will spend the next few weeks ramping up for the Games. The Americans are heavily favoured to ace the qualifying, breeze into the eight-team finals scheduled for July 30 and finish atop the podium, with defending champion Russia unable to compete as part of the fallout of its war with Ukraine.

The real intrigue for the US will likely centre on who makes the all-around and event finals. The International Gymnastics Federation rules limit countries to two athletes per individual competition. There is every chance, though, that Biles will feature heavily.

Safeguards in place

She heads to France as perhaps the face of the US Olympic movement, though she's well aware that more than a few of the millions that will tune in to watch will be checking to see if the demons that derailed her in Tokyo resurface.

And while there are still moments of anxiety – including at last year's World Championships – she has put safeguards in place – therapy, breathing and visualisation exercises – to protect herself. It's an aspect she did not include in her preparation for the 2020 Games.

So while there is plenty of buzz about her adding to the four gold medals she claimed at Rio in 2016, she is intent on not getting ahead of herself, something she may have done in 2021. "I feel like success is just what I make it," she said. "I feel like right now I've been successful at competing at the trials and making the Paris Olympic team. So then we'll see from there on out."

GAME THEORY

Keepers' corner: glovemen in the T20 World Cup

Wicketkeeping records don't always register on the radar of mainstream sports coverage, so it's only fair that we devote some space to them here. Rishabh Pant's glove work contributed to India's triumph in the 2024 T20 World Cup; his 14 dismissals weren't just the most this edition, they were the most for any edition of the tournament's 17-year history.

MOST DISMISSALS IN THE 2024 EDITION

Wicketkeeper	Team	Inn	Dis	Ct	St	Dismissals per innings
Rishabh Pant	India	8	14	13	1	1.75
Litton Das	Bangladesh	7	8	4	4	1.14
Nicholas Pooran	West Indies	7	8	8	0	1.14
Quinton de Kock	South Africa	9	8	6	2	0.89
Jos Buttler	England	8	7	5	2	0.88
Devon Conway	New Zealand	4	6	5	1	1.50
Rahmanullah Gurbaz	Afghanistan	8	6	6	0	0.75
Shreyas Movva	Canada	3	5	5	0	1.67
Mohammad Rizwan	Pakistan	3	4	4	0	1.33
Zane Green	Namibia	4	4	3	1	1.00

MOST DISMISSALS IN ANY EDITION

Wicketkeeper	Edition	Inn	Dis	Ct	St	Dismissals per innings
Rishabh Pant (IND)	2024	8	14	13	1	1.75
AB de Villiers (SA)	2012	5	9	7	2	1.80
Jos Buttler (ENG)	2022	6	9	9	0	1.50
Adam Gilchrist (AUS)	2007	6	9	9	0	1.50
Kamran Akmal (PAK)	2010	6	9	3	6	1.50
Kumar Sangakkara (SL)	2009	7	9	5	4	1.29
Matthew Wade (AUS)	2021	7	9	9	0	1.29
Scott Edwards (NED)	2022	8	9	9	0	1.13
Quinton de Kock (SA)	2014	5	8	6	2	1.60
M.S. Dhoni (IND)	2016	5	8	4	4	1.60
Kamran Akmal (PAK)	2009	7	8	1	7	1.14
Litton Das (BAN)	2024	7	8	4	4	1.14
Nicholas Pooran (WI)	2024	7	8	8	0	1.14
Matthew Cross (SCOT)	2021	8	8	6	2	1.00
Quinton de Kock (SA)	2024	9	8	6	2	0.89



PICTURE THIS



GETTY IMAGES

Diagonal attack

This photograph, taken at the New Hampshire Motor Speedway in Loudon, New Hampshire, features drivers competing in the recent NASCAR Xfinity Series SciAps 200.

The race, when it was first

held in 1990, was contested over 300 laps of the oval. It was reduced by 50 laps three years later and again scaled back, to 200 laps, three years after that.

The New Hampshire Motor Speedway, nicknamed 'The Magic Mile', has staged NASCAR racing since 1990 and is known for hosting one of the oldest

motorcycle races in North America, the Loudon Classic. Its design and construction has an unusual story: no engineers were consulted; just one surveyor was used.

The Xfinity Series is marketed as NASCAR's second-tier circuit, below the top-division Cup Series, and is

often held as a support race.

Indeed, several top drivers have competed in the Xfinity Series on their days off, as a means of logging race-time and familiarising themselves with the track. This practice has both critics and advocates, but fans and many Xfinity Series drivers have welcomed it.

INJURY

Sajana replaces Richa as concussion substitute



Wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh suffered a knock to the head while attempting to take the catch of South Africa opener Tazmin Brits during her 50th T20I game for India. Kerala all-rounder S. Sajana was brought in as the concussion substitute in the match held at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday.

BRITSSPEAK

'Wanted to hit the lid off the ball and send it back to South Africa'



Tazmin Brits, named Player-of-the-Match in the first T20I, said she wasn't happy with her knock. "I wanted to hit the lid off the ball and maybe send it back to South Africa, but I wasn't getting into good positions. When you struggle, you have to find a way out of it," said Brits, who was stretchered off with a contusion while fielding.

A CHALLENGE

We had to innovate as the fuller deliveries were skidding: Radha



Radha Yadav revealed that the bowlers had to innovate on the go during the first T20I between India and South Africa on Friday. "I realised very quickly that fuller deliveries were skidding and going away to the boundary... so we had to pull it back to find assistance." Radha took the wickets of Laura Wolvaardt and Marizanne Kapp.

MAIDEN WIN

Pogacar keeps Tour lead as Evenepoel wins time-trial



Tadej Pogacar dug deep to keep the overall lead on the Tour de France on Friday with Remco Evenepoel winning Stage 7, a 25.3km time-trial through the Burgundy vineyards. It was a first Tour de France stage win for the 24-year-old Belgian time-trial World champion who finished 12sec ahead of second-placed Pogacar.

Brits and Kapp grind it out as South Africa takes a 1-0 lead

The duo's 96-run partnership takes the visitors to 189; Pooja (4-0-23-2) the pick of the Indian bowlers while Radha also picks up two wickets; despite Smriti and Jemimah's knocks, the Women in Blue fall 12 runs short in a high-scoring game

SA IN INDIA

Lavanya L
CHENNAI

Nonkululeko Mlaba was assigned the job of denying an aggressive Jemimah Rodrigues (53 not out, 30b, 7x4, 1x6) and Harmanpreet Kaur (35, 29b, 5x4) 21 runs in the final over of the game as South Africa defended a 190-run target. And the left-arm spinner did just that as the visitors registered a 12-run win in the first T20I at the MAC Stadium here on Friday.

Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana gave the fans – more than 12,000 were in attendance – their money's worth, forging a 50-run stand in just five overs. Ayabonga Khaka, the Protean pace spearhead as Marizanne Kapp stayed away from the bowling crease, removed the dangerous Shafali, deceiving her with a slower one. Smriti, with D. Hemalatha for company, kept the scoreboard ticking.

Chloe Tryon gave South Africa a big break, setting Smriti up with a few dot balls before drawing an edge which went to the 'keeper. Hemalatha then lost her wicket to a ripper from Nadine de Klerk.

Skipper Harmanpreet and Jemimah steadied the Indian ship, effortlessly finding boundaries even as the asking rate escalated. As many as 65 were needed off the last five overs,



On the attack: Brits' 56-ball 81 was studded with 10 fours and three sixes. R. RAGU

but the two managed to bring down the equation to 21 off six deliveries. Almost every spectator had risen from his/her seat, some even parking themselves near the railings, and the vuvuzelas making way for a tense silence.

Mlaba held her nerve, even dismissing Harmanpreet off the last ball, and the boisterous Chennai crowd went quiet. This was

South Africa's first win of the tour after losing the three ODIs and the one-off Test.

Batting first, Tazmin Brits and Kapp's contrasting fifties carried South Africa to 189 for four in 20 overs. They were also helped by a sluggish effort from the Indians.

The home side's sloppiness saw at least three simple chances being squandered,

probably proving the difference in the final analysis.

Brits got off to a slow start, making just one off 10 balls at one stage. Skipper Laura Wolvaardt, who had to turn aggressor to compensate, was dismissed early.

Brits and Kapp stitched together a 96-run stand for the second wicket – the highlight of the Proteas innings.

SCOREBOARD

SOUTH AFRICA
Laura Wolvaardt b Radha 33 (22b, 3x4, 2x6), Tazmin Brits c Radha b Pooja 81 (56b, 10x4, 3x6), Marizanne Kapp c Asha b Radha 57 (33b, 8x4, 1x6), Chloe Tryon c Renuka b Pooja 12 (8b, 1x6), Nadine de Klerk (not out) 1 (1b); Extras (w-5): 5; Total (for four wkts. in 20 overs): 189.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-50 (Wolvaardt, 7.1 overs), 2-146 (Kapp, 16.3), 3-184 (Tryon, 19.3), 4-189 (Brits, 19.6).

INDIA BOWLING
Renuka 4-0-42-0, Pooja 4-0-23-2, Radha 4-0-40-2, Deepti 4-0-45-0, Asha 4-0-39-0.

INDIA
Shafali Verma c Jafta b Khaka 18 (14b, 2x4), Smriti Mandhana c Jafta b Tryon 46 (30b, 7x4, 2x6), D. Hemalatha b de Klerk 14 (17b, 2x4), Harmanpreet Kaur st. Jafta b Mlaba 35 (29b, 5x4), Jemimah Rodrigues (not out) 53 (30b, 7x4, 1x6); Extras (w-11): 11; Total (for four wkts. in 20 overs): 177.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-56 (Shafali, 5.2), 2-87 (Smriti, 9.6), 3-87 (Hemalatha, 10.1), 4-177 (Harmanpreet, 19.6).

SOUTH AFRICA BOWLING
Khaka 4-0-39-1, Tryon 4-0-32-1, Marx 3-0-36-0, de Klerk 4-0-30-1, Mlaba 4-0-32-1, Dercksen 1-0-8-0.

Toss: India; **PoM:** Brits. South Africa won by 12 runs to lead three-match series 1-0. **Second T20I:** July 7, Chennai, 7 p.m.

Merino's header tears down German wall and breaks hearts



Decisive: Merino's goal took Spain into yet another Euro semifinal. GETTY IMAGES



Agence France-Presse
STUTTGART

A Mikel Merino goal in the final minute of extra-time took Spain to a 2-1 win over Germany and into the Euro 2024 semifinals.

After a fiery yet goalless first half, Spain's Dani Olmo latched onto an inch-perfect pass from Spanish wunderkind Lamine Yamal to give La Roja the lead on 51 minutes.

Niclas Füllkrug struck the post with 14 minutes remaining but with the host staring at an early exit, Florian Wirtz slammed in a Joshua Kimmich knock-down in the 89th minute to take the game to extra-time.

With a minute remaining in extra-time and the game looking set for penalties, Olmo lofted a cross for Merino, who headed Spain into the semifinals.

Germany's exit brings to an end the host's hope of a fairytale Euros victory after a decade of poor performances at major tournaments, while also lowering the curtain on Toni Kroos' stellar career.

After a goalless first half, Nagelsmann took off surprise starter Emre Can for the pink-haired Robert Andrich, while the ineffective Leroy Sane was hooked in place of Wirtz.

The substitution who would make his mark however was Olmo. He sliced through the sleepy German defence to perfectly place a Yamal pass past Manuel Neuer in the bottom left corner.

The goal kicked Germany into gear.

With 10 minutes remaining Nagelsmann made his final substitution, bringing

veteran Thomas Mueller from the bench.

But it was Wirtz who made the difference, skimming a Joshua Kimmich header across the grass and in at the far post in the final minute, sending the game to extra-time.

Mikel Oyarzabal, on for Williams, curled a 104th-minute shot just wide of the post and Wirtz did the same a minute later with the goal beckoning.

Penalty controversy

Germany appealed strongly for a penalty in the second period of extra-time, after a goal-bound Jamal Musiala shot clearly connected with Marc Cucurella's outstretched hand.

After the penalty drama, Olmo curled in a cross for Merino, who leapt high to head the ball past Neuer and put Spain into the semifinals.

The result: Spain 2 (Olmo 51, Merino 119) bt Germany 1 (Wirtz 89) in extra-time.

Gill's men take centrestage

Press Trust of India
HARARE

A new-look Indian T20I team would embark on a journey of self-discovery, hoping to unearth its mainstays for the future in a five-match series against Zimbabwe starting here on Saturday.

Even as the euphoria of T20 World Cup triumph sweeps through India, Shubman Gill, who was a reserve in that squad, will hit a refresh button along with a bunch of IPL performers.

Two young men, who are lined for debut could be Punjab's Abhishek Sharma, who had a stupendous IPL for Sunrisers Hyderabad and Riyan Parag, who has given ample demonstration of his capabilities as a competent T20 batter.

The host, led by the gutsy Sikandar Raza, could prove to be a handful on nippy afternoons at the Harare Sports Club.

While Gill is expected to



All set: Laxman and Gill will hope for a good show. X@BCCI

open, one needs to see whether Abhishek gets his maiden India cap or CSK skipper Rituraj Gaikwad ends up being the chosen one.

In case Abhishek opens, Rituraj could come in at No. 3. Rinku Singh is expected to bat at No. 5 while one among Jitesh Sharma or Dhruv Jurel will bat at No. 6.

In the bowling department, Avesh Khan and Khaleel Ahmed, the two standbys during the T20 World Cup are certainties, and Mukesh Kumar could be the third seamer.

The teams (from):
India: Shubman Gill (Capt.), Rituraj Gaikwad, Abhishek Sharma, Rinku Singh, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Riyan Parag, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Avesh Khan, Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar, Tushar Deshpande, Sai Sudharsan, Jitesh Sharma (wk), and Harshit Rana.
Zimbabwe: Sikandar Raza (Capt.), Faraz Akram, Brian Bennett, Johnathan Campbell, Tendai Chatara, Luke Jongwe, Innocent Kaia, Clive Madande, Westley Madhevere, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Wellington Masakadza, Brandon Mavuta, Blessing Muzarabani, Dion Myers, Antum Naqvi, Richard Ngarava, and Milton Shumba. Match starts at 4.30 p.m. IST.

Alcaraz dodges Tiafoe bullet in five-set thriller; Gauff and Paolini through to fourth round

WIMBLEDON

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Carlos Alcaraz survived a brutal encounter with close friend Frances Tiafoe at Wimbledon on Friday to keep his title defence on track with a 5-7, 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (2), 6-2 win.

The Spanish third seed was out-hit and out-fought for large periods of the match on Centre Court by his US opponent but found an extra gear when he needed to in a match lasting nearly four hours.

The two men were meeting for the first time since Alcaraz came out on top in an epic five-set match in the semifinals of the 2022 US Open on the way to his first Grand Slam title.

Tiafoe won their only other meeting on clay at Barcelona in 2021, when



Tested: Alcaraz was out-hit and out-fought for large periods of the match but found an extra gear when he needed to. AP

Alcaraz was a 17-year-old wild card.

No. 12-seeded Tommy Paul of the United States beat No. 23 Alexander Bublik 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 to enter the fourth round.

Second seed Coco Gauff ended the dream run of

British qualifier Sonay Kartal as the American marched into the fourth round with a 6-4, 6-0 victory.

French Open runner-up Jasmine Paolini overcame 2109 U.S. Open champion Bianca Andreescu 7-6(4),

6-1. Paolini, the No. 7 seed, was broken in the opening game of the first set but broke right back and didn't face another break point after that.

The Italian, who reached her first Grand Slam final at Roland Garros before losing to Iga Swiatek, had never been past the first round in three previous appearances at Wimbledon.

Lulu Sun became the first woman from New Zealand to reach the Wimbledon last 16 with a straight-sets victory over China's Zhu Lin.

Sun, 23, who had to come through qualifying to make her debut at the All England Club won 7-6(4), 7-6(6). Emma Raducanu reached the last 16 after defeating World No. 9 Maria Sakkari 6-2, 6-3. The 21-year-old British star defeated her Greek opponent for only her second win over a top-10 player.

TOP RESULTS

Men: Third round: 12-Paul (USA) bt 23-Bublik (Kaz) 6-3, 6-4, 6-2; 10-Dimitrov (Bul) bt Monfils (Fra) 6-3, 6-4, 6-3; 3-Alcaraz (Esp) bt 29-Tiafoe (USA) 5-7, 6-2, 4-6, 7-6(2), 6-2. **Second round:** Ruusuvuori (Fin) bt 11-Tsitsipas (Gre) 7-6(6), 7-6(10), 3-6, 6-3; 4-Zverev (Ger) bt Giron (USA) 6-2, 6-1, 6-4.

Doubles: Second round: 8-Krawietz & Puetz (Ger) bt Bhamri (Ind) & Olivetti (Fra) 4-6, 6-4, 6-3.

Women: Third round: 2-Gauff (USA) bt Kartal (GBR) 6-4, 6-0; Raducanu (GBR) bt 9-Sakkari (Gre) 6-2, 6-3. 7-Paolini (Ita) bt Andreescu (Can) 7-6(4), 6-1; 19-Navarro (USA) bt Shnaider (Rus) 2-6, 6-3, 6-4; Sun (NZ) bt Zhu (Chn) 7-6(4), 7-6(6); 12-Keys (USA) bt 18-Kostyuk (Ukr) 6-4, 6-3; Badosa (Esp) bt 14-Kasatkina (Rus) 7-6(6), 4-6, 6-4.

Second round: 15-Samsonova (Rus) bt Avanesyan (Rus) 6-3, 6-3; Wozniacki (Den) bt 30-Fernandez (Can) 6-3, 2-6, 7-5.

Fallen seeds
Men: 11-Tsitsipas, 23-Bublik
Women: 14-Kasatkina, 18-Kostyuk, 30-Fernandez

IN BRIEF



England star Bellingham avoids immediate ban

Jude Bellingham has avoided an immediate ban after the England midfielder appeared to make an offensive gesture in his team's win over Slovakia at Euro 2024. Bellingham will be available for England's game against Switzerland after UEFA on Friday imposed a one-game ban but said it "is not immediately enforced" and is subject to a probationary period of a year. The Real Madrid midfielder will have to pay a fine of \$32,500.

Pragg draws with Caruana, Gukesh holds Giri

R. Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with Fabiano Caruana of the United States, while D. Gukesh also split the point with Dutchman Anish Giri in the eighth and penultimate round of the Superbet Classic chess tournament here. For the fourth time, the day did not produce a single decisive game and draws on all five boards meant that Caruana kept his slender half point lead going in to the final round in the 10-player round-robin tournament, a part of the Grand Chess tour.

The results (round 8): Firouzja (Fra) 4.5 drew with Nepomniachtchi (FIDE) 4; Caruana (USA) 5 drew with Praggnanandhaa (Ind) 4.5; Abdusattorov (Uzb) 3.5 drew with Bogdan-Daniel (Rou) 3; Gukesh (Ind) 4.5 drew with Giri (Ned) 3.5; Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 4 drew with So (USA) 3.5.



Abhay Singh enters the men's and mixed doubles semifinals

India's Abhay Singh is in two semifinals in the ongoing Asian doubles squash championships in Johor (Malaysia). On Friday, Abhay moved into the mixed doubles last-four partnering the experienced Joshna Chinappa, and topped the men's group stage with Velavan Senthilkumar.

The results (involving Indians):
Men: Abhay Singh & Velavan Senthilkumar bt Hafiz Zafri & Duncan Lee (Mas) 11-3, 11-9; Abhay & Velavan bt Lau Tsz Kwan & Chung Yat Lung (Hkg) 11-8, 11-10.
Women: Rathika Suthanthira Seelan & R. Pooja Arthi lost to Ainaa Amani & Chan Yiwon (Mas) 6-11, 2-11; Rathika & Pooja bt Lee Zi Fang & Gracia Chua Rui En (Sgp) 11-6, 11-7.
Mixed quarterfinals: Abhay & Joshna bt Syafiq Kamal & Aira Azman (MAS) 11-9, 11-6.



Nagal confirmed for men's singles tennis at Paris 2024

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has confirmed Sumit Nagal's presence in the men's singles event at Paris 2024 Olympics. As per *Olympics.com*, this will mark Nagal's second Olympics appearance after Tokyo 2020, where he defeated Denis Istomin in the first round but lost to Daniil Medvedev in round two. The ITF confirmed Nagal's presence through their entry list released on Thursday. The men's and women's singles event in Tennis at Paris Olympics, the multi-sport extravaganza starting from July 26 onwards, will feature 64 players. Nagal also featured in Wimbledon but crashed out in the opening round in both singles and doubles.

LIVE TELECAST

Wimbledon: SS Select 1, 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 3.30 p.m.

TNPL: Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & FanCode, 3.15 & 7.15 p.m.

Zimbabwe vs India: 1st T20I, Sony Sports Ten 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 4.30 p.m.

Formula One: British GP (Qualifying), F1 TV, F1 TV Pro App & FanCode, 7.30 p.m.

Euro 2024: Sony Sports Ten 2, 3, 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 9.30 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Sunday)

Badminton: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & JioCinema, 10.30 p.m.

Martinez the hero again as Argentina enters semifinals

The goalkeeper makes two saves in the shootout, after Messi's messes up his effort, to deny Ecuador following a 1-1 stalemate in regulation time

COPA AMERICA

Reuters
HOUSTON

Argentina beat Ecuador 4-2 on penalties to move into the semifinals of the Copa America on Thursday after goalkeeper Emi Martinez made two saves for the reigning champion in the shootout following a 1-1 draw in regulation time.

Lionel Messi allayed concerns about a hamstring injury to start the game and in the 35th minute the captain's corner was flicked on by Alexis Mac Allister for Lisandro Martinez to score with a header to give Argentina a 1-0 lead.

Ecuador skipper Enner Valencia hit the post from the penalty spot before Kevin Rodriguez scored a stoppage-time equaliser to force the shootout. There is no extra time in Copa America knockout games apart from the final.

In the shootout, Messi clipped the crossbar with Argentina's first effort but Martinez saved Ecuador's



Saviour! Martinez pulls off his second save in the shootout by thwarting Minda. AFP

first two spot-kicks before Nicolas Otamendi scored the decisive penalty to book a last four spot.

Not an option

The 31-year-old goalkeeper said he has made it clear to his teammates before the shootout that defeat was not an option.

"I told the boys I wasn't ready to go home. They weren't either," added

Martinez after being named 'player-of-the-match'. "We are champions of the world and of (South) America, this team deserved to go on"

Martinez had every right to be confident in the shootout. The shotstopper has now won all four he has been involved in with Argentina - including the 2022 World Cup final where it beat France.

"In penalties, the team has blind confidence in its goalkeeper and that is fundamental," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said.

"Even after Leo's miss and with all that means for the team, it's very important that our goalkeeper came up clutch.

"I think it's not enjoyable when you win this way. Of course, we are happy, but I didn't enjoy this."

Can sparkling Switzerland outshine a not-so-sparkling England?

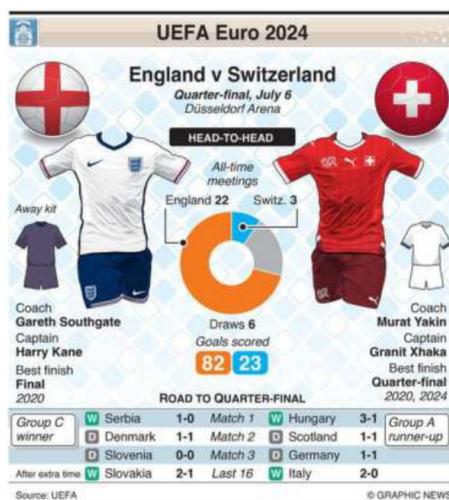


Agence France-Presse
DUSSELDORF

Switzerland has never reached the last four of a major international tournament but has shown that it can battle with the big boys ahead of its Euro 2024 clash with England on Saturday.

Murat Yakin's side was ruthless in dumping hapless holder Italy out of the tournament last weekend and went within seconds of beating host Germany and topping Group A.

Switzerland has reached its second straight Euros quarterfinal with a squad which contains very



few stars, with Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Granit Xhaka and Manuel Akanji of Manchester City their biggest names.

Instead, Switzerland has a team unit which is more than the sum of its

parts and has a great chance to reach a historic semifinal by eliminating England.

"How they've played this tournament and the players they've got, they've been brilliant,"



said England defender John Stones.

"They've got some great players and I think it will be a really good match up, a test for us."

Meanwhile, Cody Gakpo and Arda Guler en-

dured frustrating seasons but both have established themselves as their team's vital players as the Netherlands faces Turkey in a quarterfinal clash in Berlin.

In Gakpo's way is Tur-

key goalkeeper Mert Gu-nok, whose sensational last-minute save to claw out Christoph Baumgartner's header was compared to Gordon Banks denying Pele at the 1970 World Cup.

At the other end, Real Madrid attacker Guler is Turkey's main weapon.

The 19-year-old scored a stunning effort against Georgia in Turkey's thrilling opening win and created both of his team's goals against Austria in the 2-1 last-16 win with set pieces.

"He put in a great performance and he ran like he's never done before in his career, and I'm proud of that too," said Turkey coach Vincenzo Montella.

"It will be an away match," Netherlands defender Daley Blind warned his teammates on Thursday, with around three million Turks living in Germany, many supporting their team fervently.



Advani. FILE PHOTO

Advani on the cusp of a hat-trick

Press Trust of India
RIYADH

Pankaj Advani was one match away from registering a hat-trick of Asian Billiards titles as he advanced to the final after registering a comprehensive 5-0 win over compatriot Sourav Kothari in the semifinals.

Advani will take on fellow-Indian Dhruv Sitwala, who beat compatriot Dhvaj Haria in the other last-four match.

Earlier in the quarterfinals, Advani had got the better of another Indian S. Shrikrishna with an identical margin.

Fruitful day for Adil Kalyanpur

TENNIS

Sports Bureau

Adil Kalyanpur won three matches on day to reach the singles semifinals and doubles final in the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand, on Friday.

Kalyanpur beat Issei Okamura of Japan 6-3, 6-3 in the singles quarterfinals and in partnership with Vishnu Vardhan won the doubles quarterfinals and semifinals without dropping a set.

In the women's \$25,000 event in Thailand, Vaidehi Chaudhari made the doubles final along with Peang-tarn Pliuech.

The results:
€74,825 Challenger, Karlsruhe, Germany: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Ignacio Carou (Uru) & Mariano Kestelboim (Arg) bt Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan & Vijay Sundar Prashanth 6-4, 7-5.
\$15,000 ITF men, Tianjin,

China: Singles (quarterfinals): Zhou Yi (Chn) bt S Mukund 6-3, 3-6, 6-4.

\$15,000 ITF men, Hillcrest, South Africa: Singles (quarterfinals): Khololwam Montsi (RSA) bt Aryan Shah 6-7(4), 6-2, 6-2.

Doubles (quarterfinals): Ishaque Eqbal & Aryan Shah bt Guelfo Baldoivineti & Luca Fantini (Ita) 6-7(4), 6-4, [10-5].

\$15,000 ITF men, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand: Singles (quarterfinals): Adil Kalyanpur bt Issei Okamura (Jpn) 6-3, 6-3.

Doubles (semifinals): Adil Kalyanpur & Vishnu Vardhan bt Ajeet Rai & James Watt (NZ) 6-3, 6-4. **Quarterfinals:** Adil & Vishnu bt Isaac Becroft (Nzl) & Chase Ferguson (Aus) 6-3, 6-4.

\$15,000 ITF men, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhstan: Singles (quarterfinals): Maxim Zhukov bt Siddharth Vishwakarma 6-4, 7-5.

\$25,000 ITF women, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand: Doubles (semifinals): Vaidehi Chaudhari & Peangtarn Pliuech (Tha) bt Monique Barry (NZ) & Alicia Smith (Aus) 6-1, 6-2. **Quarterfinals:** Vaidehi & Peangtarn bt Pawinee Ruamrak & Bunyawit Thamchaiwat (Tha) 7-6(2), 6-3.

Rajawat and Treesa-Gayatri duo enter the quarterfinals

CANADA OPEN

Press Trust of India
CALGARY

Priyanshu Rajawat continued his fine form and advanced to the men's singles quarterfinal of the Canada Open badminton tournament with a straight-game win over Japan's Takuma Obayashi here on Thursday.

Besides Rajawat, the third-seeded Indian women's doubles duo of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also progressed to the quarterfinals.

Rajawat, ranked World No. 39, defeated 33rd ranked Obayashi 21-19, 21-11 in 38 minutes on Thursday night to progress to the last-eight round, where he will be up against top seed Anders Antonsen of Denmark.

Treesa and Gayatri fought back from a game down to beat Natasja P. Anthonisen of Denmark



Facile win: Rajawat took out Obayashi in straight games.

FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

and Netherlands's Alyssa Tirtosentono 17-21, 21-7, 21-8 in a round of 16 match that lasted 48 minutes.

The Indian pair will next be up against Pei Shan Hsieh and En-Tzu Hung of Chinese Taipei. But it was curtains for all the other Indians in action.

The results (round of 16):
Men: Priyanshu Rajawat bt Takuma Obayashi (Jpn) 21-19, 21-11.

Doubles: Bing-Wei Lin & Ching Heng Su (Tpe) bt Krishna Prasad Garaga & K. Sai Pratheek 19-21, 21-18, 21-17.

Women: Michelle Li (can) bt Anupama Upadhyaya 21-14, 17-21, 21-13; Busanan Ongbamrunghpan (Tha) bt Tanya Hemanth 21-11, 21-13.

Doubles: Treesa Jolly & Gayatri Gopichand bt Natasja P. Anthonisen (Den) & Alyssa Tirtosentono (Ned) 17-21, 21-7, 21-8.
Men's doubles: Cheng Kuan Chen & Yin-Hui Hsu (Tpe) bt Rohan Kapoor & Ruthvika Shivani Gadde 21-15, 19-21, 21-9.

SNAPSHOTS

GM Ziaur Rahman passes away mid-match

DHAKA: Bangladesh's top-ranked chess grandmaster Ziaur Rahman died in Dhaka Friday at the age of 50 after suffering a stroke and collapsing on his board in the middle of a national championship match, an official said.

The Bangladesh Chess Federation general secretary Shahab Uddin Shamim said that Ziaur collapsed during his 12th round match of the championship against fellow grandmaster Enamul Hossain before he was declared dead at a hospital here.

Enamul said it took them a few seconds to realise that he had suffered a massive stroke.

"It was my move. So, when he was falling down, I thought he was leaning down to pick up a water bottle.

"But then he collapsed, and we rushed him to the hospital. His son was playing at the next table".

Ziaur is the highest-ranked of Bangladesh's five chess grandmasters. He won the National championship multiple times and represented the country in the 44th Chess Olympiad in India in 2022.



Ziaur Rahman.

Sanchez to quit as Ecuador coach

HOUSTON: Ecuador's Football Federation (FEF) announced its Spanish coach Felix Sanchez was leaving the team, just a few hours after the defeat on penalties to Argentina.

Hockey team to train in Switzerland

NEW DELHI: The Indian men's hockey team will undergo a three-day training camp in renowned adventurer Mike Horn's base in Switzerland to strengthen the mental toughness of the players ahead of the Paris Olympics.

The training camp at Horn's base was arranged by renowned South African mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton, who will assist the Indian men's hockey team in Paris.