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WINDOWS



Tiger Woods during a practice round ahead of the British Open Golf Championships at Royal Troon golf club in Troon, Scotland, on Wednesday. — PTI

SC to hear petitions relating to Neet-UG controversy today

New Delhi: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Thursday a batch of petitions related to the controversy-ridden medical entrance exam Neet-UG 2024 which was held on May 5. According to the cause list of July 18 uploaded on the apex court's website, a bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra would hear more than 40 pleas, including those filed by the National Testing Agency (NTA) seeking transfer of cases pending against it in various high courts on the Neet-UG row to the SC to avoid multiplicity of litigations. **Full report on Page 2**

Haryana announces 10% job quota for Agniveers

New Delhi: Months ahead of the Assembly polls, Haryana's BJP government announced Wednesday a 10 per cent reservation for Agniveers in the recruitment of constables, forest guards and jail wardens, along with quotas in other posts. **Full report on Page 3**

Ex-foreign secy Kwatra to be new ambassador to US

New Delhi: The Centre has nominated retired diplomat Vinay Kwatra as its next ambassador to the US, months before the country heads to a pivotal election. Mr Kwatra, who retired as India's foreign secretary earlier this month, will look to bring certainty to the India-US relationship. **Full report on Page 4**

COUNTERPOINT



Not only your son and grandson... even your degrees are fake, sir!

WEATHER

Max: 36°C
Min: 29°C
RH: 65%
Rain: 20%

Forecast: Cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Krodhi: Uttarayana
Tithi: Ashada Shukla Dwadasi till 8.38 pm
Star: Jyeshtha till 3.23 am
Varjyam: 8.49 am to 10.26 am
Durmuhurtam: 10.13 am to 11.05 am; 3.23 pm to 4.15 pm
Rahukalam: 12 pm to 1.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.20 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.35 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 5.49 PM
MOONSET TODAY 2.04 AM

Shah, Nadda in damage control mode ■ Yogi focuses on bypolls UP BJP prez meets PM amid rift in party & reshuffle buzz

YOJNA GUSAI
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

Amidst a raging power struggle and mounting pressure on the BJP high command for a change of guard in Yogi Adityanath-ruled Uttar Pradesh, BJP state unit chief Bhupendra Chaudhary on Wednesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Later, Union home minister Amit Shah also held a meeting with the PM. And after Mr Shah's meeting with Mr Modi, the UP BJP chief met the Union home minister. Mr Chaudhary's meeting with Mr Modi lasted nearly an hour, where the two, sources said, discussed organisational issues and the BJP's performance in the state in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls. During the meeting, Mr Modi and Mr Chaudhary, sources said, discussed a range of organisational issues as well as the party's preparedness for the bypolls in 10 Assembly seats for which the Election Commission



Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath with governor Anandiben Patel at Raj Bhavan in Lucknow on Wednesday. — PTI

■ THE BJP state unit chief meeting with the PM lasted nearly an hour, where the two discussed organisational issues and the BJP's performance in the state in the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls is likely to issue the date soon. The BJP's performance in the last Lok Sabha polls also came up for discussion with Mr Shah, sources said. Mr Chaudhary had also met BJP president JP Nadda on Tuesday. Lack of coordination between the government and the organisation in Uttar Pradesh was blamed for the BJP's dismal performance. While Mr Chaudhary, owning the moral responsibility of the party's performance, offered to resign on the day the Lok Sabha poll verdict came, a section within the BJP has been demanding a change of guard in the state. Rift between the CM and one of his deputies, Keshav

■ IN LUCKNOW, Yogi Adityanath met governor Anandiben Patel in the evening to 'discuss the next Assembly session', which is likely to commence by the end of this month

Prasad Maurya, is also the talk of the town. A majority section and the state cadre are, however, backing Mr Adityanath. In Lucknow, Mr Adityanath met governor Anandiben Patel in the evening to "discuss the next Assembly session", which is likely to commence by the end of this month. Earlier in the day, the CM held a meeting of ministers at his residence to discuss the upcoming Assembly bypolls in 10 constituencies. These bypolls are crucial for the BJP. According to the buzz in the state BJP, the central leadership has given the responsibility of the bypolls to Mr Adityanath and the state organisation **■ Turn to Page 4**

Navy rescues 9 from tanker off Oman, Indians are still missing

PAWAN BALI
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

The Indian Navy's warship *INS Teg* on Wednesday rescued nine crew members, including eight Indians and one Sri Lankan, of an oil tanker that had capsized two days ago off the coast of Oman. The 16-member crew, composed of 13 Indian nationals and three Sri Lankans, of the Comoros-flagged merchant vessel *Prestige Falcon* were missing after it capsized on Monday southeast of Ras Madrasah, Oman. The search for the remaining six crew members is going on. The Indian Navy had pressed its warship *INS Teg* and long-range maritime surveillance aircraft P8I to search for the survivors. "The search and rescue operations by the Indian and Omani assets are being undertaken in challenging weather conditions as the area is experiencing rough seas and strong winds," said senior officials. "The Indian Naval warship *INS Teg* was sailed at short notice to render search and rescue assistance. Search teams said that one crew member was found deceased. They have not disclosed his nationality. **■ More on Page 4**

Modi to chair BJP meeting to review LS polls 'poor' results

■ Meet in July ■ Year-end Assembly polls also on agenda

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

With the recently concluded Lok Sabha and by-polls not fetching the desired results, the BJP high command has decided to go in for a major introspection and brainstorming session. The party's top brass, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will address chief ministers and deputy chief ministers of the BJP and the NDA-ruled states. Mr Modi will chair the meeting of the BJP chief ministers and deputy chief ministers later this month. Union home min-

■ THE BJP top brass is likely to discuss the results of the LS polls, coordination between the central leadership, the leadership in the BJP-ruled state and the BJP state organisations ister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda will also be attending the meeting. The meeting is expected to focus on the Lok Sabha results and the implementation of the BJP-led NDA government's welfare schemes. In this meeting, the BJP top brass is likely to discuss the results of the Lok

Sabha elections and coordination between the central leadership, the leadership in the BJP-ruled state and the BJP state organisations. The meeting could also see the BJP top brass reviewing preparedness for the Assembly polls in Jharkhand, Haryana and Maharashtra scheduled for the year-end. The Lok Sabha verdict comes as a setback for the BJP, which has been in power at the Centre, securing an absolute majority in the 2014 and 2019 polls but lagged behind the half mark in the 2024 general election.

Suvendu: End 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'

■ Beleaguered Bengal leader's demand stuns BJP ■ Wants minority morcha axed

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, JULY 17

Triggering a huge controversy, West Bengal's Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday called for an end to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's poll-winning slogan "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas", that has left BJP stumped at its first congregation in the city after the Lok Sabha election. The Nandigram MLA,

who has come under fire within the party for its poor performance, including candidate selection in the Lok Sabha polls in the state, also sought to dissolve the party's minority morcha but dissociated himself from the organisation as he already has a post. Mr Adhikari said at the working committee conference of the state BJP at Science City: "I have talked about nationalist Muslims and all of you

said, 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'. But I won't say it further. Instead, we will say: 'Jo Hamare Saath, Hum Unke Saath. Sabka



Suvendu Adhikari said, 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'. But I won't say it further. Instead, we will say: 'Jo Hamare Saath, Hum Unke Saath. Sabka

Saath, Sabka Vikas Bandh Karo. (We are with those who are with us. End 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'). There is also no need for a minority morcha." Two Union ministers, Sukanta Majumdar, who is also state BJP chief, and Manoharlal Khattar, and some central party leaders, including Sunil Bansal and Mangal Pandey, were at the dais when Mr Adhikari made the stunning comments.

In bid to shrug off the blame on him for the poll debacle here, the BJP MLA then pointed out: "There is a need for an in-depth analysis. But the place for this should be elsewhere, not in front of the media. I'm the Leader of the Opposition. I am not in charge of the organisation. You must have noticed that I did not make any comment before or after the LS polls so that our booth-level **■ Turn to Page 4**

Starmer vows 'national renewal', major reforms, 'reset' in EU ties

London, July 17: Britain's new Labour Party government promised to calm the country's febrile politics and ease its cost-of-living crisis as it set out its plans for "national renewal" at the grand state opening of Parliament on Wednesday. Stabilising the UK's public finances and spurring economic growth were at the center of Prime Minister Keir Starmer's legislative agenda, announced in a speech delivered by King Charles III. "My government will seek a new partnership

■ STABILISING THE UK'S public finances, spurring economic growth were at the center of Keir Starmer's legislative agenda, announced in a speech delivered by King Charles III with both business and working people and help the country move on from the recent cost of living challenges by prioritising wealth creation for all communities," the king said in a speech to hundreds of MPs and scarlet-robed members of the

House of Lords. The Labour government promised Wednesday to "reset" relations with Europe, as it bids to draw a line under years of fractious ties following Brexit under previous Conservative administrations. "My government will seek to reset the relationship with European partners and work to improve the United Kingdom's trade and investment relationship with the European Union," the King said. — AP



King Charles III with Queen Camilla reads the King's speech during the state opening of Parliament in the House of Lords in London on Wednesday. — AP

Capt. Brijesh Thapa's mortal remains reach Bengal



A portrait of martyred Army Capt. Brijesh Thapa, who was killed in a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district, kept near his mortal remains after his body was brought back to his home at Bagdogra in Darjeeling district of West Bengal on Wednesday. ■ Jammu protests killing of Armymen in terror attacks: Page 4 — PTI

Naidu to Shah: Andhra finances in a mess, give more in Budget

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu was in New Delhi to seek higher financial allocations from the Central government. This is his second visit since taking over as the Andhra CM. The visit comes days before the Centre will present its Budget. Mr Naidu, who met Union home minister Amit Shah, wrote on X that he apprised Mr Shah of the devastating condition of finances that Andhra had slipped into over the years. He added that he discussed the findings of the four white papers released between 2019 and 2024. Accusing the previous regime under YSRCP chief Jagan Mohan Reddy of economic incompetence and rampant corruption, Mr Naidu said this has caused irreparable damage to the state. "Honouring the mandate given by our people to the NDA, the Central and state governments will devise a recovery plan and bring our state's economy back on track. We shall fulfil people's aspirations together," he wrote.

HC reserves order on Kejriwal's plea against CBI arrest

No interim relief; bail hearing July 29

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

The Delhi high court on Wednesday reserved its verdict on chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea challenging the CBI arrest and his interim bail application in a corruption case linked to the liquor policy matter. The court also listed Mr Kejriwal's regular bail plea in the corruption case for further arguments on July 29. The high court's decision on the legality of Mr Kejriwal's arrest and interim bail will set the stage for the next phase of this high-profile legal battle. The Delhi CM was arrested by the CBI on June 26, months after he was taken into custody by the ED on March 21 in connection with a money laundering case related to the excise policy matter. On July 12, the Supreme Court granted interim bail to Mr Kejriwal while hearing his plea challenging his arrest by the ED. The AAP chief, however, remained in jail owing to his arrest by the CBI. Senior advocate



Arvind Kejriwal

■ THE AGENCY accused the Delhi chief minister of trying to derail the CBI's inquiry by blaming other accused during the interrogation

Abhishek Singhvi, representing Mr Kejriwal, told a single-judge bench of Justice Neena Bansal Krishna, who conducted the proceedings on a holiday on account of Muharram, that the CBI "did not intend to, and did not have any material" to arrest the Delhi CM. Appearing for the CBI, special public prosecutor D.P. Singh said the agency had the right to decide if and when it needed to question and/or arrest the chief **■ Turn to Page 4**

Nepal's PM Oli to seek vote of confidence in Parl Sunday

Kathmandu, July 17: Nepal's newly-appointed Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli will take a vote of confidence in Parliament on Sunday, a senior official announced on Wednesday, nearly a week after he was sworn in. The 72-year-old veteran Communist leader was sworn in on Monday as the Himalayan nation's Prime Minister for the fourth time. He was administered the oath of office and secrecy along with 21 other members of the Cabinet. Prime Minister Oli decided to take a vote of confidence on Sunday, said Dasharath Dhamala, information officer at the House of Representatives. According to Nepal's Constitution, K.P. Sharma Oli needs to secure a vote of confidence from Parliament within 30 days of appointment, which he is likely to secure easily, as the minimum number to form a government in the 275-strong House of Representatives is just 138. — PTI

IN BRIEF

Ghaziabad woman executive ends life

Noida/Ghaziabad: A 27-year-old private firm executive has ended her life allegedly due to physical and mental harassment by her colleagues, prompting the Ghaziabad police to launch an investigation into the matter, officials said on Wednesday. The woman, who lived in Ghaziabad and worked at the firm located in Noida, was allegedly being harassed for the past five-six months, her family claimed. After the woman killed herself on July 12 allegedly by consuming poison, her brother approached the local Nandgram police station in Ghaziabad where an FIR was lodged under section 108 (abetment of suicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The brother claimed that a note was found in her room, in which she had "written about committing suicide due to harassment by these persons as well as some other staff members", according to the FIR. Alleging that his sister ended her life due to physical and mental harassment, he said "these people are responsible for her suicide". — PTI

DMRC starts luggage check-in for intl fliers

New Delhi: The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation has extended check-in facilities for international passengers at the New Delhi and Shivaji Stadium Metro stations on the Airport Express Line, a statement said on Wednesday. Previously available only for domestic travellers, the 'check-in and baggage-drop' service now accommodates international passengers flying with Air India and Vistara Airlines, a DMRC statement said. "The DMRC invites more airlines to set up this facility to further benefit travellers," it added. According to the DMRC, the initiative aims to enhance passenger convenience and streamline travel procedures for international flights departing from Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGI). Passengers can check in their luggage at these Metro stations and their baggage will be securely transported to the aircraft using advanced automated systems, the DMRC said.

Cong protests over power tariff hike

New Delhi: Delhi Congress leaders and workers on Wednesday held protests at over 55 locations across the Delhi against power tariff hike by discoms. The protesters raised slogans against the AAP-led Delhi government, accusing it of colluding with the discoms in the city. Addressing party workers and public outside the Mandi House Metro station, Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav claimed that the Kejriwal government, which promised to halve power rates, has doubled them in the past decade through backdoor measures, allowing discoms to hike the power purchase adjustment charge by over nine percent. The Congress leader said that this sharp increase has put heavy financial burden on common households.

GR. NOIDA SCHOOL BUS TOPPLES, SOME KIDS HURT

New Delhi: A private bus carrying students from a private school overturned near a village in Greater Noida on Wednesday, leaving a few children hurt, the police said. Additional DCP (Greater Noida) Ashok Kumar said the incident took place near Falaida village under the Rabupura police station area. "The incident occurred as the bus was heading from Falaida to Karoli Bangar. The accident happened shortly after the bus left Falaida when one of its wheels got stuck in soft, wet soil, causing the vehicle to lose balance and overturn," Mr Kumar said. The school management reached the spot immediately after the incident while the police were also promptly deployed to manage the situation, he added. Some children on board the bus sustained minor injuries, while one student from Nagla Kanchan-Bari Karoli suffered a head injury, police said. The injured student was immediately taken to the hospital for treatment in the presence of his family members, they said.

Over 40 pleas, including NTA petitions seeking transfer of pending HC cases

SC hearing today on Neet pleas

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Thursday a clutch of pleas relating to alleged irregularities in the Neet-UG 2024 conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) on May 5. According to the cause list of July 18 uploaded on the apex court's website, a bench comprising Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra would hear over 40 pleas, including those filed by the NTA seeking transfer of cases pending against it in various high courts on the Neet-UG row to the top court to avoid multiplicity of litigations. On July 11, the top court

had adjourned till July 18 the hearing on the pleas, including those seeking cancellation of the exam, re-test and probe into alleged malpractices in the conduct of Neet-UG 2024, as the responses of the Centre and the NTA were yet to be received by some parties.

In an additional affidavit filed in the apex court last week, the Centre has said data analytics of the results of Neet-UG 2024 was conducted by IIT-Madras which found there was neither any indication of "mass malpractice" nor a localised set of candidates benefiting from it and scoring abnormally high marks. The government's asser-

tion came in the backdrop of the observations made by the top court on July 8 that it may order a re-test if there were large-scale malpractices in holding the exam. The Centre's fresh affidavit has said experts from IIT-Madras have found that the marks distribution follows the bell-shaped curve that is witnessed in any large-scale examination, indicating no abnormality.

A bell curve describes the shape of data conforming to a normal distribution. The affidavit said for 2024-25, the counselling process for undergraduate seats will be conducted in four rounds starting from the third week of July.

The NTA also filed a separate additional affidavit on similar lines and said, "This analysis indicates that the distribution of marks is quite normal and there seems to be no extraneous factor, which would influence the distribution of marks."

The NTA affidavit also gave details of the system

in place for ensuring the confidential printing of question papers, their transportation, and distribution.

On July 8, the top court had observed that the sanctity of the Neet-UG 2024 has been "breached."

Saying that a re-test may be ordered if the entire process was affected, the bench had sought details from the NTA and the CBI, including the timing and manner of the alleged paper leak, besides the number of wrongdoers to understand the extent of irregularities claimed by the petitioner.

Over 23.33 lakh students had taken the test on May 5 at 4,750 centres in 571 cities, including in 14 cities overseas.

The NTA affidavit also gave details of the system

Jamia prof accused of sexual abuse by 4 scholars shunted

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

The Jamia Milla Islamia has suspended a professor and ordered inquiry into complaints of sexual harassment against him by four PhD scholars, one of whom had to cancel her admission. The officiating vice-chancellor of the university, Mohammad Shakeel, ordered the suspension of the professor using his emergency powers and placed the inquiry before the internal complaints committee of the university, an order said.

The suspended professor has been barred from taking classes pending inquiry and is asked to mark his attendance at the chief proctor office until further order.

The students have alleged the professor used "uncouth and uncivilised language" against them during a lecture and also made sexual overtures.

According to the suspension order dated July 16, "four Ph.D scholars of Centre for Jawaharlal Nehru Studies, JMI, have levelled allegations and made specific complaints of sexual harassment, non-cooperation, disrespectful behaviour, undisciplined, uncouth and uncivilised language used by the Professor."

"In view of the above and considering the seriousness of the matter as one of the students (name not disclosed) has even

Man gets life imprisonment for raping minor

New Delhi, July 17: A court here has sentenced a man to life imprisonment for raping a five-year-old girl, saying the child was "dealt with animal-like passion" by the convict. Expressing distress and agony at the increasing rate of crimes against children, the court said the penalty should be commensurate with the gravity of the "heinous act" so that it serves as an effective deterrence.

Additional sessions judge Susheel Bala Dagar of Rohini district court was hearing the case against the man, earlier convicted under Section 6 (aggravated penetrative sexual assault) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. — PTI

got her Ph.D. admission cancelled because of such conduct of the professor," the varsity order read.

The accused professor could not be reached for his response.

The order also bars the professor from leaving the city without approval from the competent authority during the suspension period, the order stated.

Will not back out, says trust building Kedarnath replica

Faces legal action threat by BKTC

New Delhi, July 17: Shri Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust founder Surendra Rautela on Wednesday asserted he will not back out from building the replica of the Kedarnath temple here and is ready to fight a legal battle if needed.

The Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC), the apex body that oversees the shrines and temples in Uttarakhand, has threatened to take legal action against the Delhi Trust for planning to replicate the original Kedarnath temple here in Burari.

The prospect of replicating the holy shrine, which is among the four sacred shrines comprising the Char Dham, namely Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri, has also received objection from the Uttarakhand priests.

Mr Rautela said that he has decided to remove the word 'Dham' from his trust's name to avoid confusion but will not back out from building the temple for the devotees here. "We are not the first ones to build a temple modelled after Kedarnath. It is also there in Indore and Mumbai. If they (BKTC) want to take legal action they should do it against all," Mr Rautela told a news agency.

"We have not done anything wrong, we are doing good work for the Hindus and the Sanatan Dharma. We will continue to build

the temple irrespective of the legal challenge," he added. Mr Rautela informed that the Kedarnath temple in Delhi will be built from donation money collected by his trust and will be ready in the next two to three years.

BKTC chairperson Ajendra Ajay said they have filed a police complaint against the Shri Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust in Uttarakhand for allegedly using an online application promising devotees to arrange online 'darshan' of the Kedarnath Dham in Delhi.

"We have taken legal opinion and are considering different options to stop the construction of the Kedarnath temple in Delhi. Our objection from the Shri Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust is that they are using our name to collect money from people to build the temple," Mr Ajay told the news agency. Earlier this month, Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami attended the 'bhumi puja' ceremony of the temple here. — PTI



Muslim women participate in the Ashura procession during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, at the Kashmiri Gate area in New Delhi on Wednesday. — G.N. JHA

Court pulls up govt for 'insensitivity', felling of 422 trees Delhi must take blame for its acts: SC

New Delhi, July 17: The Delhi government has shown a lack of sensitivity over protecting the environment, the Supreme Court said while rapping it for granting permission to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to chop 422 trees in the southern Ridge's reserve forest area for the construction of a road.

A bench of Justices Abhay S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said it is an admitted position as reflected in the statement made by the tree officer that for felling 422 trees, the officer did not grant any permission.

The apex court was hearing suo motu (on its own) contempt proceedings against the vice chairman of the DDA over the alleged cutting of 1,100 trees in the Ridge forest

for a road widening project.

"The Delhi government must take the blame for granting permission to fell 422 trees, though there was no statutory power vesting in the Delhi government to grant such permission," the bench said in an order dated July 12.

"Thus, apart from the trees in the Ridge area, the government facilitated cutting and felling the trees outside the Ridge area without permission under the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994," it said.

The top court said, like the DDA, the Delhi government has shown a lack of sensitivity over protecting the environment.

The bench said the Delhi government has not even provided the tree officer

TOP COURT said, like the DDA, the Delhi government has shown a lack of sensitivity over protecting the environment

The bench said the Delhi government has not even provided the tree officer and the tree authority an office or basic infrastructure

and the tree authority an office or basic infrastructure.

"The Delhi government must come before the court and tell how it will compensate for the damage caused to the environment due to its illegal acts," the bench said.

"The affidavit of the Delhi government also shows that this is not the only instance where the

forest department of the Delhi government purported to grant permission for the felling of trees. They had done it earlier also," it said.

The Delhi government's stand is that "the DDA has accepted that they misread the notifications issued by the Delhi government," the bench said.

"That will not absolve the Delhi government of its responsibility of passing orders permitting the felling of trees, though no statutory power is vested in the Delhi government," it said.

The top court said the Delhi government must also come out with an action taken report, if any, against the erring officers who are alleged to have granted permissions for the felling of trees.

Staff at Kuwait embassy held for molesting domestic help

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

A fire broke out at Veg Gulati restaurant on Pandara Road near the India Gate here in the early hours of Wednesday. Delhi fire services (DFS) officials said. No was injured in the incident, they said. The restaurant is only a few shops away from the famous Gulati restaurant.

The fire broke out at 2.48 am in the sitting area of the Veg Gulati restaurant and soon spread to the first floor, a DFS official said. Four fire tenders were pressed into service and the blaze was brought under control within an hour. Some furniture and

other articles were gutted in the fire, the official said. The police said it appears that a short circuit caused the fire. A probe is underway.

In another incident, a fire broke out at a plastic bag manufacturing unit in outer Delhi's Narela Industrial area early Wednesday, an official said. No one was injured in the incident. An official from the DFS said the call regarding the fire was received at 1.42 am and 16 fire tenders were pressed into service. The blaze was brought under control after three hours of dousing operation. The cause of the blaze is being ascertained by the police.

Fire breaks out at Pandara Road Veg Gulati, none hurt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
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about not using the term, sex worker, which, she says, does not reflect the reality and is an ideological stance. She asserts the importance of rape sufferers being factual about their experience. Ms Krishnan has led by example. Speaking on the inspiration behind her work, she says: "It all began after I was gang-raped at 15. It was a backlash to our girl guide campaign on menstrual hygiene and against superstition. That is when I decided to fight back. I focussed on prostitution because it entails the largest scale of sex

Govt schools will enroll Class 9 repeat students in open school

New Delhi, July 17: The directorate of education (DoE) has issued a directive to the government schools to ensure that students who have failed Class 9 twice are enrolled in the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) for the academic session 2024-25. As per data from the computer cell (DoE), 17,308 students have been declared unsuccessful in Class 9 for the second time during the 2023-24 session.

However, only 6,200 of these students are currently in the process of enrollment through the NIOS portal of the DoE. The initiative seeks to address the high risk of

dropouts among these students. As the circular states, it has been observed that students who have failed twice are at risk of discontinuing their education. Ensuring they receive the necessary support and counselling, the heads of government schools are now mandat-

ed to counsel the students and their parents, emphasizing the importance of continuing education through the NIOS.

This approach allows the students to study at their own pace and choose subjects of interest, with ultimate goal of reintegrating them into their parent schools upon successful completion of Class X.

The directive has received the prior approval of the competent authority and underscores the commitment of the Directorate of Education to support all students in achieving their educational goals, as per the circular. — PTI

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The directive has received the prior approval of the competent authority and underscores the commitment of the Directorate of Education to support all students in achieving their educational goals, as per the circular. — PTI

Don't hide identity, but don't label rape victim: Sunitha Krishnan

SUCHETA DASGUPTA
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

Social worker and campaigner against human trafficking Sunitha Krishnan has released her memoir. Inscrutably titled *I Am What I Am*, it provides an engrossing account of what goes into a 27-year struggle accomplishing a job all too often labelled as impossible in our culture, the mainstreaming of prostitutes and their children, not once but 28,600 times, for she has rehabilitated as many individuals. Ms Krishnan is particular

about not using the term, sex worker, which, she says, does not reflect the reality and is an ideological stance. She asserts the importance of rape sufferers being factual about their experience. Ms Krishnan has led by example. Speaking on the inspiration behind her work, she says: "It all began after I was gang-raped at 15. It was a backlash to our girl guide campaign on menstrual hygiene and against superstition. That is when I decided to fight back. I focussed on prostitution because it entails the largest scale of sex

crimes." Few, however, are aware that Ms Krishnan's contributions defy easy categorisation. In 1996-97, she, along with others, went to court and helped secure relief for the evacuees of the now-stalled project for Musi river beautification. But in her chosen field, Ms Krishnan, with her otherwise short stature, might just be the tallest. She is credited with introducing video-conferencing during trials to take the testimony of witnesses. She is the mind behind the setting up of the national sex offenders' registry. With the help of NDTV's



Sunitha Krishnan

Uma Sudhir, she started the #ShameTheRapist campaign. The new anti-trafficking legislation came through her PIL in the Supreme Court. One of the changes in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) that has replaced

the Indian Penal Code is that it recognises human trafficking as an organised crime. That, too, is an outcome of Ms Krishnan's case.

Have things improved? "More people are reporting sex crimes, of which the #MeToo movement is a big example. The public positioning is changing. People are now intolerant towards such behaviour. More survivors are putting themselves in public spaces and speaking out against perpetrators."

And survivors should be facilitated as per the law (IPC Section 228A which

also lays down permissions required to publish their identity has been retained in BNS Sections 72, 73) but here Ms Krishnan has a problem: "It is one of labelling. When I am sitting in a panel discussing sex crimes, I am an equal domain expert. I am a rape survivor, yes, but I am also a social entrepreneur and an activist. I am no accidental participant. When the tag comes up under my name as Sunitha Krishnan, rape survivor, I find it very reductive." She urges society to look past labels.

SHORT TAKES

SP will do better in UP bypolls: Akhilesh

Lucknow: The Samajwadi Party's performance in the bypolls in Uttar Pradesh will be better than that of the Lok Sabha elections, its chief Akhilesh Yadav said on Wednesday. The Election Commission is yet to announce the schedule for the bypolls to 10 Assembly seats in BJP-ruled UP. "We will have a better outcome in the upcoming by-elections than the Lok Sabha polls," Mr Yadav said while talking to reporters at the party headquarters. In the recent Lok Sabha elections, the SP won 37 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, up from five in 2019. The BJP was got 33 seats, down from 62. Claiming that there was "infighting in the BJP in UP", Mr Yadav said, "Because of a fight for power, the people are suffering." Of the 10 Assembly seats in the state were bypoll is due, nine fell vacant after the MLAs were elected to the Lok Sabha in the recent polls. — PTI

Cong targets Centre over 'eco inequality'

New Delhi: The Congress on Wednesday hit out at the government over "growing economic inequalities" and claimed that every data points to a widening of gap between the rich and the poor. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh shared on X a media report which claimed that the difference between the consumption expenditure of the rich with that of the poor is about 10 times. "The Congress has been constantly raising the issue that the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing in the country," he said. Citing the media report, Mr Ramesh pointed out that the monthly consumption expenditure of the poorest 5 per cent of the country's population in rural areas is just ₹1,373, while the monthly consumption expenditure of the top 5 per cent rich in urban areas is ₹20,824. — PTI

Sukhu meets Shah over disaster funds

Shimla: Chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Wednesday called on Union home minister Amit Shah in New Delhi and urged him to expedite release of pending funds for effective disaster management in Himachal Pradesh. Apprising Mr Shah about the vulnerability of Himachal to natural disasters, Mr Sukhu requested him to release ₹9,042 crores as financial assistance, which was recommended by a Central team in a post-disaster assessment, a statement issued said. The assessment was carried out after the state witnessed one of its worst natural disasters during last year's monsoon, triggered due to excessive rain resulting in flash floods and landslides, the release said. He said the funds are pending with the ministry and they are required urgently as the monsoon has already arrived in the state. — PTI

'BJP TIEUP WITH AJIT CAMP LED TO LS DEBACLE'

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, JULY 17

After the magazine *Organiser*, another RSS-linked weekly has lashed out at the BJP over its alliance with the Ajit Pawar-led NCP in Maharashtra. The decision to join hands with Ajit Pawar did not go down well with BJP workers and the unrest among the party cadre was just the "tip of the iceberg", it said. *Vivek*, a Marathi weekly devoted to the RSS ideology, claimed that the BJP's alliance with Ajit Pawar's NCP was one of the major reasons for the saffron party's debacle in Maharashtra in the recently-held LS elections. In an article titled "Worker not disheartened, but confused", the weekly said, "Almost every party worker starts from the alliance with the NCP while explaining the reasons for the BJP's failure in the Lok Sabha or expressing their displeasure and discomfort (over it). It is clear that the BJP worker did not approve joining hands with the NCP." While the party workers accepted the BJP's tieup with the Shinde-led Shiv Sena as a "natural alliance", their sentiments went opposite when it decided to go together with Ajit's NCP, said the weekly.

K'taka job bill on hold after uproar

Bill 'very regressive, draconian': Pai ■ Move could force companies to relocate: Nasscom

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JULY 17

The Karnataka government has temporarily put on hold a bill mandating reservations for locals in the private sector after a huge backlash from the industry. The government will reassess the bill before it is tabled in the state Assembly. The decision came hours after the state Cabinet cleared the bill, which proposed the appointment of Kannadigas to 50 per cent of management positions and 75 per cent of non-management positions in the private sector. "The bill approved by the Cabinet to provide reservation for Kannadigas in private sector organisations, industries and enterprises has been temporarily put on hold. This will be revisited and decided in the coming days," a

statement issued by the office of the chief minister said on Wednesday. The Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, was likely to be tabled on Thursday in the Assembly. "Any industry, factory or other establishments shall appoint fifty per cent of local candidates in management categories and seventy per cent in non-management categories," the bill read. However, the bill has triggered controversy and criticism from across industry. Industry veteran Mohandas Pai termed the Bill "very regressive", and "draconian". Software body Nasscom said that Karnataka's job reservations for locals in the private sector would hamper growth of tech industry and impact jobs.



Farmer Fakeerappa, who was earlier denied entry owing to his attire of the traditional dhoti, enters the GT Mall in Bengaluru on Wednesday. — PTI

As the move could force companies to relocate, it also sought urgent meetings with state authorities. The Nasscom exhorted the state government to withdraw the bill as soon as possible. "Nasscom members are seriously concerned about the provisions of this bill

and urge the state government to withdraw the bill. The bill's provisions threaten to reverse this progress, drive away companies, and stifle start-ups, especially when more global firms (GCCs) are looking to invest in the state," it said in a statement.

Stating that the tech sector contributes to 25 per cent of the state GDP, houses a quarter of the country's digital talent, has over 11,000 startups and 30 per cent of the total GCCs, Nasscom contended that the restrictions could force companies to relocate as local skilled talent becomes scarce. The industry body also argued that globally, there is a huge shortage of skilled talent and Karnataka despite the large pool, is no exception. Pharma company Biocon Managing Director Kiran Mazumdar Shaw said, "As a tech hub we need skilled talent and whilst the aim is to provide jobs for locals, we must not affect our leading position in technology by this move. There must be caveats that exempt highly skilled recruitment from this policy."

Atiq's ₹50cr assets transferred to govt

Prayagraj, July 17: Slain gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed's property worth about ₹50 crores, allegedly brought using money earned from criminal activities, has been transferred to the government.



Atiq Ahmed

District government advocate (criminal) Gulab Chandra Agrahari said Atiq had bought 2.377 hectares of land in the name of a mason Hoobalal from the earnings of crime. While registering the land in the name of Hoobalal, Atiq had said that if needed, he would get the land registered in his name. Mr Agrahari said this property was attached by the police commissioner court under Section 14 (1) of the Gangsters Act and three months were given to file a reply. But no evidence was presented by the party concerned as

proof of ownership of the land. He said that after this, the police commissioner court sent the file in this case to the Gangster court, Prayagraj. On Tuesday, Judge Vinod Kumar Chaurasia ruled the police commissioner's action "fair and just" and vested the property acquired in favour of the government. According to the police, during the investigation of the case registered against Atiq under the Gangsters Act, it was found that he has property in the name of Hoobalal under the Airport police station area. During interrogation, Hoobalal said that Atiq had got this land registered in his name by threatening him in 2015. — PTI

10% quota for Agniveers in Haryana

Move amid anger among youth over Agnipath; eye on Assembly polls

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, JULY 17

In the runup to the Assembly polls, Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini on Wednesday announced a 10 per cent reservation for Agniveers in services such as police, forest guard and jail warden, besides other incentives like relaxation of age. The decision comes amid reports that anger among youth against the Agnipath scheme was behind the BJP's subdued performance in the Lok Sabha elections. Youth from the agrarian state constitute a major chunk of the armed forces. The move is being viewed as a political sop to woo youth in the backdrop of the drubbing the BJP received during the parliamentary polls in the state. The party, which bagged



Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini addresses a press conference in Chandigarh on Wednesday. — PTI

all 10 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, could retain only half of the seats in the recently-concluded LS elections. At a press conference, Mr Saini emphasised that the government will provide interest-free loans up to ₹5 lakhs if any Agniveer wishes to set up any business enterprise. "In direct recruitment to posts of constable, mining

guard, forest guard, jail warden and special police officer made by the state government, there will be a 10 per cent horizontal reservation for Agniveers," the chief minister said. He added that in Group C and D posts, an age relaxation of three years will also be granted to Agniveers. "However, for the first batch of

Agniveers, this age relaxation will be five years," Mr Saini added. In direct recruitment for Group C civil posts, there will be a five per cent horizontal reservation for Agniveers, he said. He also announced SOPs for industrial units employing Agniveers. "If any industrial unit employs an Agniveer at a salary of more than ₹30,000 per month, then our government will give that unit an annual subsidy of ₹60,000," Mr Saini said. He also announced that Agniveers will get arms licences on priority. The Agnipath military recruitment scheme, introduced by the BJP government at the Centre in June 2022 for short-term induction of personnel in the armed forces, has faced severe criticism from several quarters, including Opposition parties.

'Place for everyone in my house', says Sharad Big jolt to Ajit, 28 members quit NCP after LS drubbing

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, JULY 17

In a major jolt to the Ajit Pawar faction, 28 members of the NCP, including leaders and office-bearers from Pimpri-Chinchwad, joined the Sharad Pawar faction. NCP leader Ajit Gavhane, who was Pimpri-Chinchwad president, has shifted loyalties to Sharad Pawar. The cash-rich Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation has long been under the control of Ajit Pawar. The development assumes political significance in the backdrop of the upcoming Maharashtra Assembly elections, likely to be held in October. In the recently-concluded Lok Sabha elections, Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar was defeated in the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency by Supriya Sule. Besides Mr Gavhane, former MLA from the Bhosari Assembly constituency Vilas Lande, student leader Yash Sande and former corporators Pankaj Bhalekar and Rahul Bhosale quit the Ajit Pawar-led party to join the NCP(SP) in the presence of Sharad Pawar. In a response to a



NCP(SP) chief Sharad Pawar felicitates leaders from the Ajit Pawar camp as they join the party in Pune on Wednesday. — PTI

query over "ghar vapasi" of Ajit Pawar, the NCP founder said that there is a place for everyone in my house, but whether there is a place in the party or not, would not be his decision. "During the crisis, my colleagues stood firmly with me. I will ask them first and if they are ready, then we will decide whether to allow anyone to return," Sharad Pawar said. Two days ago, Maharashtra Cabinet minister and senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal met the NCP founder at his residence in Mumbai. Speaking about his

meeting with Mr Bhujbal, Sharad Pawar said that the minister had arrived at his home in Mumbai asking him to work for improvement of the current situation over the reservation issue. "Bhujbal came to meet me. I had a fever and I took two days off. I was told that he has come, that he has been waiting for an hour and does not want to leave. After that, I met him and he spoke to me at length. He asked me to work together to improve the social environment in Maharashtra, to work together in the state's interest," the veteran Marathi politician said.

Puja used fake ration card, address for PwD certificate

Asked to record statement over harassment claims

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, JULY 17

Controversial probationary IAS officer Puja Khedkar is landing in further trouble as it has now emerged that she allegedly used a fake residential address and bogus ration card to obtain her disability certificate from Yashwantrao Chavan Memorial Hospital, Pimpri. While obtaining the disability certificate, Puja used her ration card as residence proof and obtained the certificate at the address "Plot number 53, Dehu-Alandi, Talwade Pimpri Chinchwad" in Pune district, which was mentioned on the ration card. It is the registered address of Thermoverta Engineering Company Pvt Ltd, which is defunct and has not paid its tax to the Pimpri-Chinchwad tax collection department for the last three years. The probationary IAS officer's Audi car was also registered in the name of the same company. She

Pune civic body razes illegal part of IAS trainee bungalow

Pune, July 17: An "illegal" structure near trainee IAS officer Puja Khedkar's family bungalow has been cleared, days after the civic body issued them a notice to remove it, an official said on Wednesday. Ms Khedkar's family might have got the alleged encroachment removed as the deadline set by the Municipal Corporation (PMC) is not yet over, the official said. PMC officials had on July 13 pasted a notice outside the bungalow in the city's Baner Road area asking the IAS officer's family to clear an "unauthorised" structure measuring 60 feet in length, 3 feet in width and with a height of 2 feet along a footpath adjoining the property. "We had put up the notice at the bungalow asking them (Khedkar's family) to remove the encroachment within seven days. The notice said if the family failed to remove the structure within seven days, PMC would clear it and recover the expenses from them," said a senior civic official. The Pune civic body has not cleared the structure since the deadline is not yet over, the official said. — PTI

regarding allegations of harassment against the Pune district collector, a senior officer said on Wednesday. A senior official said that multiple agencies have been probing all the documents of Ms Khedkar.

3 N-E rebels shot dead in firefight along Assam border

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, JULY 17

The Assam police in an early morning encounter on Wednesday killed at least three militants of the Hmar People's Convention-Democratic (HPC-D) in Assam's Cachar district, near the Assam-Mizoram border. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that in the operation, the police killed three Hmar militants from Assam and neighbouring Manipur. The police also recovered 2 AK rifles, 1 other rifle and 1 pistol, he said in his social media post. Earlier in the day, three militants were arrested with weapons in Dhalai Ganga Nagar, Cachar. A team led by the police along with the arrested militants moved to the Bhuban Hills. During the search operation, other militants hiding in the hills opened fire, prompting the police to retaliate. The exchange of fire lasted for about an hour, resulting in the deaths of the three militants. Two of them were from Cachar and one was from Manipur.

Land-grabbing by rich under Odisha govt lens

Illegal structures to be bulldozed

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, JULY 17

The Odisha government has adopted a "zero tolerance" approach to free government land encroached upon by influential people. On Wednesday, it said bulldozers will be engaged to demolish illegal constructions on government lands in the state. Speaking to reporters in Sambalpur, revenue minister Suresh Pujari informed that during the previous BJD government used to evict poor people who had settled on small portions of government lands. Now, there would be action against the rich and influential people who have occupied

vast stretches of government lands and built illegal structures on them. "We have not got many records till now. I have seen in the past years that structures of people in two to four decimals of land were razed. However, the influential people always escaped action and remained touched due to their proximity to the power. There are many influential people and officials who have encroached on government lands. The state government will surely evict these people," Mr Pujari said. The minister added that such people and officials have constructed high-rise buildings and such structures will soon be razed by bulldozers.

Top Hindu outfit set to crack whip on godmen

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JULY 17

Ravindra Puri Maharaj, the head of Akhila Bharatiya Akhada Parishad, a body of Hindu religious leaders, on Wednesday vowed to crack the whip on godmen. The spiritual leader who visited Ujjain in MP on Wednesday to review preparations for the upcoming Mahakumbh, to be held in 2028, regretted that a disturbing trend has emerged in which seers are seen identifying them as gods. Instead of realising that they are dedicated devotees of the Lord, some spiritual leaders are seen projecting them as gods such as Ram, Vishnu and Brahma, he lamented. He described such actions by the seers as "anti-Sanatana" and said that the Akhada Parishad has decided to crack the whip on such religious leaders to rein them in. Such seers will be barred from the upcoming Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, he said. The religious leader regretted that some Hindu seers have been found making anti-Sanatana utterances at public platforms and said that the Akhada Parishad has decided to identify such religious leaders and take action against them as per the rules of the individual akhadas they belong to.

Event to coincide with state's foundation day ■ Adhering to zero-tolerance towards graft: Sai

CM sets eyes on developed C'garh, to unveil vision paper Nov. 1

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, JULY 17

Chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai has announced that Vision-2047, a document envisioning a developed Chhattisgarh in the coming two decades, will be unveiled on the state's foundation day on November 1. Setting in motion the process to prepare the "Chhattisgarh Vision-2047" document on Tuesday evening, Mr Sai said that the initiative aligns with PM Narendra

Modi's resolution to make India a developed nation by 2047. The CM was addressing a state-level dialogue programme, christened "Mor sapna mor vikshit Chhattisgarh" (my dream my developed Chhattisgarh), organised by the state Niti Aayog to prepare the vision document. "The vision document for a developed Chhattisgarh is being prepared with the participation of all stakeholders," he said. Mr Sai said that under Mr Modi's leadership, India has become the

world's fifth largest economy over the past decade and aims to become the third largest in the next five years. He emphasised Chhattisgarh's significant role in achieving this goal, considering the state's abundant natural resources, forest wealth and human resources. The CM stressed the importance of adding value to the state's resources to achieve "vikshit Chhattisgarh" (developed Chhattisgarh) and said that his government is implementing reforms in every sec-

tor with the cooperation of all stakeholders. The state government is taking steps to ensure transparency in governance, adhering to a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption. He said that the vision document will be dedicated to the public on November 1. He highlighted the significant discussions on organic farming and appreciated the perspectives shared by youth, farmers, women and intellectuals on the development of Chhattisgarh.



Union minister Mansukh Mandaviya meets Chhattisgarh chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai during a meeting in New Delhi.

SHORT TAKES

18-month-old dies in dog attacks in Hyd

Hyderabad: An 18-month-old boy died, while another boy suffered injuries when street dogs attacked them in separate incidents in Telangana, police said on Wednesday. Chief minister A. Revanth Reddy expressed anguish over the boy's death in Hyderabad and directed officials to take steps to prevent recurrence of such incidents in the future. The boy died after allegedly being mauled by a pack of stray dogs at Jawahar Nagar in Hyderabad when he came out of his house Tuesday night. A dog dragged him to some distance and later some strays bit him resulting in injuries, they said. The boy was initially rushed to a private hospital and from there referred to a state-run hospital where he died last night, a police official at Jawahar Nagar police station said. Based on a complaint from the boy's parents, a case was filed. The family hails from Siddipet district and shifted to Jawahar Nagar two months ago. — PTI

Fresh arrest by ED in Raj water scheme

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate has made a fresh arrest in connection with its money laundering investigation into alleged irregularities in the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme being implemented in Rajasthan. The ED took alleged middleman Sanjay Badaya into custody on Tuesday after questioning at the agency office in Jaipur, officials said. The Centre's Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water through household tap connections and is being implemented in Rajasthan by the state's public health engineering department. The ED had earlier arrested three suspects - Mahesh Mittal, proprietor of Shree Ganapati Tubewell Company, Padamchand Jain, proprietor of Shree Shyam Tubewell Company, and Piyush Jain.

Shivaji Maharaj's wagh nakh in Maha

Mumbai: The "wagh nakh" or tiger claw-shaped weapon used by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was brought to Mumbai from a London museum on Wednesday, state Culture Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar said. This wagh nakh will now be taken to Satara in western Maharashtra, where it will be displayed from July 19. "The wagh nakh has landed," Mungantiwar told PTI in response to a question, but did not divulge any further details. State excise minister Shambhuraj Desai on Tuesday said the wagh nakh will be accorded a grand welcome in Satara. The weapon will be kept at a museum in Satara for 7 months, he said. Mr Desai, who is also the guardian minister of Satara, reviewed the security arrangements at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Sangrahalay (museum) in the district on Tuesday. — PTI

J&K police lodges FIR over pro-Palestinian, pro-Hezbollah sloganeering during Muharram procession
Police crackdown after pro-Palestine chants

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, JULY 17

The Jammu and Kashmir police have registered an open FIR under the relevant provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) following pro-Palestine and pro-Hezbollah slogans were allegedly chanted by a section of mourners during a Muharram tazia procession taken out in Srinagar on Monday.

Justifying it, Inspector General of Police (Kashmir range), Vidhi Kumar Birdi, said, "Certain conditions were laid down to ensure smooth conduct of the procession. But some mischievous elements violated these conditions and tried to vitiate the atmosphere, prompting the police to act as per law." The police have cited



10th Muharram Ashoora procession in Srinagar, Zadibal. — H.U. NAQASH

concerns over the potential for such slogans and flags 'inciting unrest and disturbing public order'. The police appealed to the people to refrain from activities that could disrupt communal harmony during the sensitive period of Muharram.

The police sources said that following filing an open FIR at Srinagar's Kothi Bagh police station, several suspects were

summoned there for questioning.

A police source said that those who had waved the Palestinian flag and chanted anti-US and anti-Israel and pro-Hezbollah slogans during the procession are being identified through the photo and video footage of the procession.

The police sources said that the investigation in the case is underway and

formal arrests may be made after its completion. The sources said that the case has been registered under section 13 of the UAPA and sections 223 and 152 of the BNS.

Various Shia outfits have alleged that the police detained dozens of Shia youth after they waved Palestinian flags and chanted pro-Palestine and anti-US and anti-Israel slogans during the procession. They said that the police have also removed the Palestinians flags put up at places in Srinagar areas and the central district of Budgam.

National Conference MP Aga Syed Ruhollah Mehdi in a post on X said, "The Jammu and Kashmir police have arrested several youths for raising slogans in favour of the people of Palestine and carrying the Palestinian flag in a Muharram procession yesterday in Srinagar."

Jammu protests killing of Armymen in terror attacks

AGE CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, JULY 17

Several areas of Jammu on Wednesday witnessed street protests and rallies against the killing of four Army jawans in a clash with the militants in eastern Doda district and earlier such incidents in the region. They chanted slogans against Pakistan accusing it of pushing armed terrorists into J&K and burned the neighbouring country's national flag to vent their anger.

Meanwhile, a group of militants and the Village Defence Guards exchanged fire briefly in Malan village of the Dessa area of Doda late Tuesday night.

No casualties were reported in the clash though.

Police reinforcements were rushed to the area which with the help of an Army column launched a cordon-and-search operation but there was no trace of militants, the police sources said. On Monday night, Army Captain Brijesh Thapa and three other soldiers were critically injured in a gun fight with militants in the Uran Baggi Forest area of Doda. Captain Thapa, Naik D. Rajesh and sepoy Bijendra and Ajay succumbed to their injuries later.

A massive search operation launched jointly by the Army, the J&K police

and the CAPFs in a vast area of Doda soon after the clash continued

Wednesday. Dozens of VDGs, armed with .303 rifles, are helping security forces in hunting down the assailants who ran into thick woods after the clash.

In Jammu region, activists and supporters of various political organisations including Congress, Rashtriya Bajrang Dal and Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal rallied against the killings and demanded that the security forces must launch a more effective operation to kill militants and plug the infiltration points to ensure no more foreign terrorists sneak to cause mayhem.

Shankaracharya forging ahead Cong agenda: Temple panel

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH DEHRADUN, JULY 17

Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) has alleged that Shankaracharya of Badrinath seat Avimuktshwaranand is carrying forward the Congress party's agenda as the seer's allegation of no probe yet in the missing 228 kilograms of gold from Kedarnath temple went viral. Committee said it never purchased gold to plating it on the walls of temple sanctum sanctorum.

BKTC has opposed the allegations labeled by the Shankaracharya Avimuktshwaranand that 228 kilograms of gold-plating was missing from the walls of Kedarnath shrine sanctum sanctorum.

He alleged that Avimuktshwaranand is trying to forge ahead the Congress party agenda with his baseless and uncalled for allegations. "If Shankaracharya has evidences for his allegation he must produce and provide the same to the law enforcement and investigating agencies of the state and the centre. He must reach out to the court with his proofs and documents rather than sensationalising his allegations to carry forward the Congress party's agenda. We keep him in high esteem for the revered Sanatan seat and religious authority he holds but advocacy of the Congress party agenda on his part is not proper" alleged the BKTC chairman Ajeyendra Ajay.

Militants deliberately leak info to trap forces?

You have to take on these heavily equipped militants more professionally, cautions veteran

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, JULY 17

Jammu areas have become a terrorism staging ground again and, in the past less than three years more than fifty Army men and other security personnel have been killed-ten of them this month only- in sneak attacks or gun fights with militants.

Often the security forces suffered casualties after they moved in distant forested and hilly areas considered as being tough terrain for a ground war in the districts of Doda, Kishtwar, Reasi, Kathua, Poonch and Rajouri on "tip

offs" or "credible human intelligence" about the presence of militants.

The latest such incident occurred in the Uran Baggi woods of Doda's Dessa area on Monday night in which Captain Brijesh Thapa and three other soldiers of the Army's counterinsurgency Rashtriya Rifles laid down their lives.

While the Army with J&K police and various Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) is spearheading a series of operations to hunt down and eliminate militants in the upper reaches of these districts, some security

officers believe that it is possible that the militants may be deliberately getting the information about their locales leaked to trap the security forces. "It has happened in the heyday of insurgency in the Kashmir Valley also- if not frequently but at times - that the security forces were tipped off about the presence of militants in a particularly area and when they reached there, they found that militants were in a good attack position

forces officials who have vast experience in combatting militancy have reportedly called for acting "very cautiously and carefully" on such "tip-offs" to avoid possible dangers.

Navy rescues 9 from tanker off Oman, 6 are still missing

PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, JULY 17

Indian Navy's warship INS Teg on Wednesday rescued alive nine crew members, including eight Indian and one Sri Lankan nationals, of a oil tanker which had capsized two days ago off the coast of Oman.

The crew of the Comoros-flagged merchant vessel "Prestige Falcon" comprised 16 members, which includes 13 Indian nationals and three Sri Lankans were missing after it capsized on Monday at southeast of Ras Madrakah.

The search for the remaining six crew members is going on.

Indian Navy had pressed its warship INS Teg and long-range maritime surveillance aircraft P8L, to

search for the survivors. "The search and rescue by Indian and Omani assets is being undertaken in challenging weather conditions as the area is experiencing rough sea and strong winds," said senior officials.

Indian Naval warship Teg deployed in the region and undergoing Operational Turn Around, was sailed at short notice to render search and rescue assistance.

Indian embassy in Oman is also in constant touch with the Omani authorities.

"A search and rescue operation for the seafarers, coordinated by the Oman Maritime Security Center (OMSC), is on," said diplomatic sources.

The oil tanker was heading to the Yemeni port of

Aden and capsized off Oman's major industrial port of Duqm, as per ship tracking data.

The vessel is a 117-metre long oil products tanker built in 2007.

Meanwhile, in a coordinated sea-air operation, Indian Coast Guard (ICG), on Wednesday successfully rescued a stranded Indian Fishing Boat (IFB) Aashni, with 11 crew onboard, about 80 nautical miles from Kochi, Kerala, amid heavy rain and challenging weather conditions.

Oman Maritime Security Centre has said that one crew member was found dead. They have not disclosed his nationality. The search and rescue operations continue for the remaining six members of the vessel's crew.

Ex-foreign secy Kwatra is named next US envoy

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 17

Former foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra is tipped to be India's next ambassador to the United States. Mr Kwatra had demitted office as foreign secretary last Sunday. There was no official word from New Delhi on the impending appointment.

The position of India's ambassador to the US has been vacant since Taranjit Singh Sandhu completed his tenure in January.

India and the US have been growing closer for the past two decades, including under the previous Trump and current Biden administration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former president Donald Trump shared a good rapport and held a joint rally in the US



Vinay Mohan Kwatra

in 2019. Mr Kwatra has previously served in China, the US, in PM Narendra Modi's office and as

India's envoy to France before his tenure as the top bureaucrat in the foreign ministry. The new ambassador has been appointed at a time when India-US relations are going through a churn as the US has expressed its displeasure over India's ties with Russia. EAM S. Jaishankar on Sunday had thanked Mr Kwatra for his contributions and had said that "particularly in the last decade", he (Mr Kwatra) had "helped strategise and execute so many of our key policies."

UP BJP prez meets PM amid rift in party

Continued from Page 1 has been asked to coordinate with the CM. The coming Assembly bypolls have become a prestige issue for the BJP, with the CM taking regular meetings and asking for feedback. A group of three ministers has been designated to oversee the election preparedness for each of the 10 seats where the bypolls are due.

"The meeting today was especially held to discuss the upcoming elections and we will win all 10 Assembly seats where bypolls are to be held," said UP finance minister Suresh Khanna after the meeting. All the Cabinet ministers and ministers of state were present in the meeting, sources said.

In a bid to put its house in order, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Tuesday held a meeting with UP deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya amid reports of growing differences between the CM and the deputy CM. Mr Maurya's remark at the recent working committee meeting in Lucknow that "organisation is bigger than the

government" was seen by many as a dig at Mr Adityanath, who had blamed "overconfidence" as one of the main reasons for the BJP's dismal performance in the state. The ruling party was reduced to 33 seats, a drop of 29 seats from the 2019 general election. Both the CM and the deputy had made the remarks in the presence of Mr Nadda.

After his meeting with the BJP president, a social media handle of Mr Maurya's office reiterated his statement again on Wednesday, giving credence to speculation of a rift between the CM and the deputy CM.

Not to miss out on the opportunity, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav took a dig at the BJP saying the UP government is fighting among themselves. The former UP CM said the UP government is unstable and the public is troubled in their fight for power.

Amid the flurry of meetings, the UP BJP is abuzz that the organisation could witness some changes. Speculation of a Cabinet reshuffle is also doing the rounds.

HC reserves order on Delhi CM's plea against CBI arrest

Continued from Page 1 minister. Mr Singh also accused Mr Kejriwal of trying to derail the CBI's inquiry by blaming other accused during the interrogation.

On the bail plea, the CBI argued it was improper for the high court to hear the petition at this time, insisting it would first have to be argued before the trial court.

Mr Singhvi termed Mr Kejriwal's arrest by the CBI an "insurance arrest" to stop him from walking out of jail. He said the arrest was "in violation of the most overarching Fundamental Right... of liberty... and procedure

Suvendu: End 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'

Continued from Page 1 workers and voters feel dejected."

Strongly reacting to Mr Adhikari's observations, Mr Majumdar said: "Our party does not support his statement. He was invited as a delegate here. He made some proposals. Now it is the prerogative of the state president and his team to accept or reject them. Our party

established by law."

Mr Singhvi also referred to the controversy in Pakistan, where ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan has been arrested. "Three days ago... Mr Khan was released... Everybody read it in the newspaper. Then he gets arrested again in another case. This cannot happen in our country," he told the court.

Mr Singhvi said: "It is unfortunately an insurance arrest. I have effectively three release orders in my favour (in the ED case) under very stringent provisions... These orders show that the man is entitled to be released. He would have been released

but for this insurance arrest."

Asserting that Mr Kejriwal is "not a terrorist," Mr Singhvi argued that his arrest was not as per the mandate of the law and the chief minister is entitled to bail.

"Common sense tells you there cannot be any grounds for arrest in this kind of situation," Mr Singhvi said, adding, "It is clear as daylight that psychological winds of change are growing in the CBI's mind (following the trial court's bail order). But I won't say it is CBI... I will say there are others in whose minds there is psychological change."

stand with us, work against the interest of nation and Bengal, we need to expose them."

He added: "Also, like Mamata Banerjee, we shouldn't divide people in majority and minority and see them as Indians. I embody in letter and spirit Prime Minister's call for Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas."



A farmer with folded hands rolls on the floor to reach the district collector's office in Madhya Pradesh's Mandasaur district to lodge his complaint after his land was allegedly taken by a mafia on Wednesday. — PTI

4 die of electrocution, roof collapse in UP during Muharram marches

Lucknow, July 17: Four people died and 26 injured in separate incidents while tazia processions were being taken out on Muharram on Wednesday in Gonda, Pratapgarh, Ballia, Sant Kabir Nagar, and Kannauj districts, police said. In Gonda, a 12-year-old child was electrocuted to death and five others sustained injuries of current in separate processions.

Ashraf, 12, died in the Tarabganj area of Gonda when a fixture of the tazia came in contact with a high-tension wire. Another named Riyasat sustained burns in the same incident.

Both were rushed to a medical college, where Ashraf was declared dead while

Riyasat's condition was stated to be stable.

In another incident in Teliapurva village of the Itiathok area, four people were electrocuted when a tazia touched an overhead power cable.

Babu, Akram, Gaya Prasad, and Munni Devi were rushed to a hospital where they are undergoing treatment.

In Pratapgarh, 25-year-old Mohd Wasif died when a tazia touched the high-tension wire at Babuganj Railway Gate, the police said. Electrocution killed one and injured three in Bhatpur village. The deceased was Mohammad Ali, 24, a native of Bhatpur village.

In Ballia's Bharatpur

Chhapra village, four children were injured when the roof they were watching the procession from collapsed.

In Kannauj in an area under the Sakrava Police Station jurisdiction, a child died and 14 injured when the roof of a house collapsed on the people gathered to watch the Muharram procession.

In Bahraich, an interfaith clash broke out over route of the tazia procession.

Four people were injured in the incident that took place in Sanchauli village of Payagpur area.

BJP Payagpur MLA Subhash Tripathi identified three of the four wounded as Prem Chand Gautam, Pradeep, and Shubham. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

18 JULY 2024

Enlist Kashmiris' support to fight terrorism in J&K

The death of four Army soldiers, including a captain, in an encounter with Pakistan-backed terrorists in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday must occasion a rethink on the part of the Central government on its approach to the four-decade-old problem of militancy in the former state which is now a Union territory. The latest attack is not an isolated event — it is part of a series of such attacks in which soldiers and civilians, including pilgrims, have been targeted in the immediate past. They include the death of five Army soldiers in an ambush in Kathua as recently as on July 8.

The government and the Army have condemned the terrorist act. The Army, in a statement bordering on the political, has vowed to "eliminate the scourge of terrorism" in Jammu and Kashmir for which the relentless operations will continue. Its top commanders are under pressure as the Doda encounter comes close on the heels of the Kathua ambush.

However, Kashmir watchers have pointed out two disturbing trends. First is the increase in terrorist activity in the Jammu division which has been peaceful for more than a decade; and second, an increasing presence of local youth among militants. Reports suggest that India has lost 51 personnel from the Army and the Jammu and Kashmir police in the last four years. Among these, 11 lives were lost in 2024 alone.

Pakistan-backed terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir have a history of about four decades during which the Indian government has experimented with several strategies to contain them. Since inception, counterinsurgency operations were, by and large, entrusted to the Army, which should ideally be at the border or in the barracks. In the process, the role of the home-grown state police force has been reduced to that of aides of the armed forces. The people of the state, caught in a bind between terrorists and the security forces, suffered the worst.

The NDA government, in its 11th year, after winning three back-to-back elections to the Lok Sabha, had sought to blame Article 370 for having road-blocked the integration of Kashmir with the rest of India, and come in the way of the Union government from effectively tackling terrorism. However, the ground situation has only worsened since its invalidation in 2019.

The government has been harping on the changes and progress that have started visiting J&K. It talks of new investments, including foreign inflow of capital and job opportunities for youth. But the facts don't corroborate these claims.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his election campaign in the Union territory, had talked about winning the hearts of the people, and that's what the government must focus on now. It must take the people, who in record numbers turned up in the polling booths and became part of the democratic process, into confidence. Restoring Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and installing a popular government here must be the starting point. Instead of leaving it to the Army that has shed too much blood to resist terrorism, the government must do whatever it takes to enlist the support of the people.

White House battle lines drawn

The battle lines are nearly drawn with the Republicans formalising their presidential ticket with Mr Donald Trump and his former critic J.D. Vance. And the Democrats are hurrying up to make formal the Mr Joe Biden-Ms Kamala Harris ticket before critics of gerontocracy can gather more voice by carping at the incumbent's 81 years, which in the US President's case is not just a number.

The fact is the presumptive Republican candidate Donald Trump has moved swiftly into pole position for taking the White House after an assassin's bullet missed him by a fraction of an inch, which event might have rendered the combative, obstreperous Mr Trump a shoo-in for the top American and, presumably, the world's most responsible job.

Mr Vance may have stolen the privilege of being the vice-presidential pick from among many, but other Republican critics like Nikki Haley have also swung around to the view that making America great again and making it safer in November is their sacred duty now. How a gun-loving political party can ever secure a country with its Second Amendment guarantee is anyone's guess.

Representative of the legerdemain of political gymnastics in the United States' two-party system, his former acerbic critic Mr Vance, who once called him "America's Hitler", is not only a running mate but also torch-bearer who will carry forward the Trumpian dicta of nationalistic populism and "America First".

Mr Vance's pedigree for a high political office may have been well served with a grandmother who was said to have owned 27 or so handguns, and who himself served in the Marines. That his wife Usha Chilukuri Vance was a Democrat and a Hindu with roots in Andhra Pradesh, but with what is considered an advantage in the United States of being a child of immigrants, may also suit this grand Republican push for a colour change from Blue to Red.

Of interest to India is another child of American immigrants, the incumbent vice-president, Kamala Harris, with her maternal roots in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, is looking for another term with her boss Joe Biden who she has served well with, principally, loyalty. The social media may think this is some south Indian power battle, but it is just a diversion from issues of great import hanging on this seriously consequential election, both for America and the world.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



The glitter of India's rich: What they owe to society



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

The wedding extravaganza in Mumbai which so excited the world's media might never have taken place if a despondent Manmohan Singh, India's finance minister in 1991, had not told the then Prime Minister that people were accusing him of selling out to foreign interests. P.V. Narasimha Rao retorted dryly: "Who would want to buy this country anyway?"

Given that background to the glamour and glitter of India's billionaire raj, there was no reason for Mamata Banerjee to announce that she "might not have gone" to the Ambani-Merchant wedding "but the entire family, from Nitaji to Mukeshji, has been repeatedly requesting me to attend, so I am going".

Everyone would have assumed that West Bengal's feisty chief minister would not have gone if all the courtesies due to her rank had not been observed. Moreover, Ms Banerjee had business in Mumbai with political allies like the Nationalist Congress Party's Sharad Pawar, and Uddhav Thackeray of the Shiv Sena (UBT) group.

Why then the need for any kind of justification? One reason is the fashionable aversion to money that had prompted Dr Singh's misgivings even though he took pride in abolishing wealth tax and pioneered other reforms that made it possible for an Azim Premji to emerge. The complex attitude to money is by no means confined to Indians. The Bible quotes Jesus Christ as saying that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". The Quran makes a similar comment. Here, although Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi dwelt at length on the poor, and

despite Sarojini Naidu's crack about the cost of keeping Gandhiji in poverty, his incisive observations on the poor show he fully understood their aspirations.

It was this aspect of poverty that Dr Singh addressed when he talked to Michel Camdessus, the International Monetary Fund's managing director, within hours of accepting the finance portfolio in 1991. Mr Camdessus was ready to help but insisted on a thorough time-bound overhaul of the economy with the rupee stabilised at a realistic level. His concern was understandable for the exchequer faced its second fiscal crisis in three months, largely because of the Gulf War. Foreign exchange reserves had dwindled to \$1.1 billion — just enough for two weeks' imports. New Delhi had been considering shutting down some of its diplomatic missions and selling off embassy properties. It had asked Venezuela for oil and sent a foreign service director to Washington to seek a bridging loan. By July, the foreign debt, which stood at \$20.5 billion in 1980, had soared to \$70 billion. In addition, India had short-term obligations of about \$4 billion.

India's diaspora proved very different from overseas Chinese. It invested in India when the going was good but scrambled out when times changed, withdrawing \$2 billion during the Gulf War and the political upheavals of 1991-92. Dr Singh's decision to repatriate the gold that Chandra Shekhar as Prime Minister had sent to London and Tokyo had a restorative effect. He also tried to get some of the undeclared cash — 21 per cent of the GDP, meaning an annual generation of well over ₹800,000 million (\$26,700 million at the 1992 exchange rate), according to the National

Amit Mitra, the economist, laments that 'around 83 per cent of jobless people are young men and women... and two-thirds of educated young men and women are unemployed'

Institute of Public Finance and Policy — in the parallel economy back into circulation.

The rupee was devalued by 25 per cent, and rules restricting overseas trade slashed from 850 pages to 87. Other austerity measures cut inflation from 15.7 per cent to 13.4 per cent while structural reforms reduced the fiscal deficit from 8.3 per cent of the GDP to under 6.5 per cent. Unlike today's BJP, the party was unstinting in its praise with the general secretary, Govindacharya, saying the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh regime had "taken more radical steps in one month than past governments in 43 years".

The sanction for these measures was dug out of the platiitudinous prose of Rajiv Gandhi's 1991 election manifesto. There were nuggets such as promises to eliminate wasteful expenditure, encourage banks to raise offshore funds, expand and strengthen the service industries, invite foreign investment and technology, build toll highways and bridges, and replace a "lethargic, inefficient and expensive" public sector with one that was "leaner, more dynamic and profit-oriented".

If American pressure induced liberalisation, it was liberalisation that attracted American investment. Acknowledging the chicken-and-egg linkage, the external affairs ministry's 1991-92 report noted that "India's liberalised economic policies have opened new possibilities of a long-term mutually beneficial economic partnership with the United States". That was India's agenda. The reforms yielded \$350 million in American investment

between July 1991 and August 1992 against \$650 million during the previous 44 years. Investment and collaboration proposals that were hanging fire — some for as long as five years — were quickly cleared. Many of the biggest US corporate giants — IBM, Kellogg, Asea Brown Boveri, AT&T, Fujitsu and Polymer Tech — responded to Dr Singh's invitation. "Don't blink," said Coca-Cola International's president, John Hunter, in New Delhi. "You may miss something."

That was fine while it lasted. The point is: how was the money spent?

Amit Mitra, the economist, laments that "around 83 per cent of jobless people are young men and women... and two-thirds of educated young men and women are unemployed". Sam Pitroda's warning, "Temples are not going to create jobs for tomorrow. Only science will create the future", is ignored. Some 1.3 crore Indians live abroad because they can't get jobs at home, and are joined every month by a lakh of young Indian migrants. As for those who remain, Marion Barwell, wife of the last British baron to practise in the Calcutta high court, regretted in her memoirs that Indian society had become a hotch-potch, "hence the startling increase of vulgarity in the entertainment world and some at least of the indiscipline amongst the young..."

Dr Singh has noticed the ostentatious vulgarity. So has Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition. India needs schools, teachers, hospitals, bridges that don't collapse, trains that run safely. "You need an educated, healthy workforce to sustain economic development", advises Amartya Sen. "Earn your crores by all means", Mr Gandhi says to the Ambanis and their like. "But understand that your wealth is not yours; it belongs to the people. Take what you require for your legitimate needs, and use the remainder for society."

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

SACK PUJA KHEDKAR

The the IAS probationer Puja Khedkar's episode is another example of dichotomy in our administrative beaurocracy wherein the lobby of its elite holds sway. Decades ago, a trainee IAS in its National Academy at Mussoorie had grossly misbehaved. The then academy director, P.S. Appu, had called for the sacking of the trainee from service. As the case against the trainee was getting soft-pedalled, Mr Appu resigned from his post. The nation lost a great administrator. The Khedkar indiscipline is as similar and so is the manner it is being dealt with. Her parents were involved as diversionary tactics. If the IAS cadre is elevated to elite status, the price to pay for moral turpitude must be set very high.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

DON'T ELECT MONKS

RELIGION AND POLITICS form a dangerous mix. Religious leaders should keep away from politics. Because they are not just individuals but representatives of a religion with millions of followers. Unfortunately, in order to gain some advantage, the BJP started using them to gain favour with the electorate. Today the religious leaders are occupying seats in the legislature and in one case is the chief minister of the state. Due to their religious training they are likely to put religion first even if it may not serve the larger public interest.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

GIVE SCHOOLS DUE

OVER THE PAST two decades, decentralisation has been the stated principle of the Centre's universal education projects. In the past 10 years, the Union education ministry has not always been on the same page with non-NDA states. Now, the ministry has stopped funds under the SSA to Delhi, Punjab and Bengal because of their reluctance to participate in the PM-SHRI, the Centre's scheme for exemplar schools. The schoolgoer should not be caught in the crosshairs of competitive populism.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal



Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu

Naidu's rejig of bureaucracy heralds change in Andhra govt

With Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu firmly in the saddle, there's a palpable sense that a new era has begun. The state government is clearly sending a message that things are set to change, starting with the administration itself.

One of the latest moves in this wave of change is the appointment of IPS officer L. Subbarayudu who has been deputed from Telangana to Andhra Pradesh for three years on personal grounds. This move, alongside the request for his immediate relieving from Telangana, signals that Mr Naidu's administration is keen on bringing in officers of its choice to implement its vision effectively.

But this is just the beginning. In a significant reshuffle, 19 IAS officers have been transferred within Andhra Pradesh. Chief secretary Neerabh Prasad issued the relevant orders indicating a major overhaul of the bureaucratic machinery. Among the notable changes, Harish Gupta has been appointed as the DG of vigilance and enforcement, and Kumar Vishwajit as the principal secretary, home.

The reshuffle doesn't stop there. Special chief secretary (BC welfare) G. Anantha Ramu has been moved to the environment, forests, science and technology department, relieving chief secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad from additional duties. Similarly, AP Human Resources

Development Institute director general Ram Prakash Sisodia is now special CS (Lands & DM, Registration and Stamps) in the revenue department, relieving Ajay Jain from additional responsibilities.

The message is clear: a new dispensation is in power, and it's time for things to change. Naidu is setting the stage for a transformative period, emphasising efficiency, accountability, and a fresh approach to governance. It also indicates that things will get more difficult for his predecessor and archrival, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

PUJA KHEDKAR FRAUD CASE PUTS IAS SELECTION PROCESS UNDER SCANNER

An IAS success story this may not be. Pooja Khedkar, a 2023 IAS probationary officer, has found herself in hot water. She's under scrutiny for allegedly using a fake visual impairment certificate to secure her position in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) through the UPSC exam. This has cast serious doubts on the legitimacy of her appointment, with a high possibility that her IAS position could be revoked.

Questions are swirling about how she managed to get an IAS post despite opposition from the UPSC and the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT). There's also speculation about which political leaders might have influenced her appointment. Sources have told DKB that

reportedly a minister in the previous Union government is supposedly close to the Khedkar family and may have had a hand in getting her an IAS posting as well as Maharashtra cadre. We'll wait for the single-member panel's inquiry report to see what turns up.

This episode underscores that even the UPSC exam can be rigged, suggesting that politicians and former civil servants can sway the selection of their preferred candidates. This concern isn't trivial, especially following the NEEET controversy, which faced intense scrutiny for a paper leak.

Ms Khedkar's case is a significant test for the government as well, particularly the department of personnel and training (DoPT) which needs to re-examine its verification processes. However, the public information so far suggests that Ms Khedkar may have successfully gamed the system.

Now, it's up to the government to uncover the truth and restore the credibility of the UPSC. Only by addressing these allegations head-on can the integrity of one of India's most esteemed institutions be preserved.

IS A RETIRED BABU NITISH KUMAR'S NEW HOPE?

In a move reminiscent of Odisha politics, chief minister Nitish Kumar's adviser, Manish Verma, officially joined the Janata Dal (United) recently. Mr Verma, a retired IAS officer from

the 2000 batch, had taken voluntary retirement in 2018 on Nitish Kumar's advice and has since been working closely with him.

There's a lot of buzz around Mr Verma's entry into JD(U), with many speculating that he's being groomed as the party's future leader. For over a year, Mr Verma has been actively involved in the party's organisational activities. His formal induction into JD(U) took place in the presence of JD(U) working president and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Kumar Jha, as well as state water resources minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary.

Mr Verma played a crucial role in JD(U)'s campaign during the recent Lok Sabha elections. He extensively toured all 16 parliamentary constituencies contested by the party, contributing significantly to their success. The JD(U) emerged victorious in 12 of these seats, solidifying its position as a major ally of the Narendra Modi-led NDA government.

Mr Verma's transition from a bureaucrat to a political leader marks an intriguing chapter in Bihar's politics. The overwhelming question is how his influence will shape the future of JD(U).

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

N. IRELAND AMNESTY SCHEME TO BE SCRAPPED

Belfast, July 17: Britain's new government said on Wednesday it would scrap an amnesty scheme for ex-soldiers and militants involved in decades of violence in Northern Ireland that has been opposed by all major parties in the region and by the Irish government.

The move fulfils a promise in the Labour Party's election manifesto to repeal and replace the Legacy Act, which the government said "denies justice to the families and victims of the Troubles". Specifically, it will repeal the "conditional immunity scheme."

FRENCH PRIEST ACCUSED OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS

Paris, July 17: A late French priest celebrated for his work with the poor has been accused of sexually assaulting several women, one of them underage, charities Emmaus and Fondation Abbe Pierre said.

"Our organisations celebrate the courage of the people who have given testimony and, through their words, allowed these facts to come to light. We believe them," the organisations said in a joint statement about Henri Groues, known as "Abbe Pierre" (Abbott Pierre), who died in 2007 aged 94.

The allegations are detailed in an independent report.

NK LANDMINES COULD FLOAT INTO SK, WARNS SEOUL

Seoul, July 17: North Korean landmines could be swept into South Korea by flooding, South Korea's military warned on Wednesday, after the North has recently placed tens of thousands of additional deadly explosives along the rivals' heavily fortified border.

North Korea's minelaying is part of construction at the border that's been going on since April, which also includes adding anti-tank barriers and reinforcing roads. Officials believe North Korea aims to boost its frontline security and prevent its soldiers and citizens from defecting to South Korea.

3 MINERS KILLED, 4 HURT IN PAK MINE COLLAPSE

Peshawar, July 17: Three coal miners were killed and four others injured when a coal mine collapsed in northwestern Pakistan, police said.

The incident took place on Tuesday in Darra Adam Khel town, 35 km southwest of Peshawar. The miners hailed from Shangla district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PKP) province, they said.

Emergency response teams were quick to reach the site, where they managed to retrieve the bodies of the three deceased miners. The four injured workers were immediately shifted to a nearby hospital.

WAR ERODING KIDS' RIGHTS, SAYS RIGHTS GROUP

London, July 17: Children's rights are being increasingly eroded by the rise in armed conflict around the world, including the wars in Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, aid group KidsRights said on Wednesday, calling for better protections.

The group, which organises the International Children's Peace Prize won previously by Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai, said there had been "a 21 per cent rise of serious children's rights violations in armed conflicts around the world" since last year.

Violations include the killing and maiming of children, as well as the recruitment and use of child soldiers, abduction, and the denial of humanitarian assistance.

As well as conflict, young people are still reeling from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, with rates of child immunisation declining in the Global South and in almost a third of countries in Western Europe, KidsRights said in its annual report.

"Climate change induced disasters and the related displacement" also continue to threaten children's rights around the world, as countries struggle to mitigate risks, it added.

Marc Dullaert, founder and chair at KidsRights, said the report "highlights the devastating impact that the deepening polycrisis has had on children and their rights by undermining decades of progress".

Six people killed in blaze at China shopping centre

Beijing, July 17: Firefighters pulled six bodies from a shopping centre on Wednesday, with an unknown number still trapped after the building set ablaze sending plumes of thick black smoke into the air. Around 30 others have been rescued from the shopping complex in the city of Zigong in southwestern Sichuan province with the blaze extinguished by rescuers, state broadcaster CCTV said.

"Six people have been killed," CCTV reported, adding that search and rescue operations were continuing with people still trapped.

Footage broadcast by the channel and shared on social media showed thick black smoke towering above the building.

"By 8:20 pm (1220 GMT), the fire had been extinguished," CCTV said.

The fire started in a shopping centre at the foot of a 14-storey building, the channel said.

Other images shared on social media — which

AROUND 30 others were rescued from the shopping complex in the city of Zigong in southwestern Sichuan province with the blaze extinguished by rescuers, state broadcaster CCTV said.

AFP could not immediately verify — show people gathered in front of the burning building.

Fire engines and ambulances could be seen nearby. Zigong's emergency services department received news about the fire at around 6:10 pm and immediately dispatched firefighters to extinguish the blaze, the broadcaster said. The emergency department has called on the public to "not to believe or amplify rumours" about the fire.

Zigong, some 1,900 kilometres from the capital Beijing, is home to nearly 2.5 million people.

Fires and other deadly accidents are common in China due to lax safety standards and poor enforcement.

— AFP

War crimes in Oct. 7 attack by Hamas: HRW

Jerusalem, July 17: Hamas led other Palestinian armed groups in committing hundreds of war crimes in the surprise October 7 attack on Israel that set off the Gaza war, Human Rights Watch said in a report released on Wednesday.

One of the most in-depth international studies on the unprecedented incursion into southern Israel outlined a host of potential war crimes cases.

"It's impossible for us to put a number on the specific instances," HRW associate director Belkis Wile told a news conference, adding that "there were obviously hundreds on that day".

The crimes include "deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects; wilful killing of persons in custody; cruel and other inhumane treatment; sexual and gender-based violence; hostage taking; mutilation and despoiling (robbing) of bodies; use of human shields; and pillage and looting", said the report. It focuses on violations of international humanitarian law, rules mostly rooted in the Geneva Conventions for conduct in war.

Although Palestinian Islamist group Hamas is recognised as the orchestrator of the attack, the report lists other armed groups that committed war crimes on October 7, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

"The reality is that it really wasn't civilians from Gaza who perpetrated the worst abuses," said Wile. "That was a claim made very early on by Hamas to distance itself from the events, and by Israel to justify its retaliation operation." Wile pointed to the "incredibly organised and coordinated nature" of the assault on cities, kibbutz communities, and military bases around Gaza.

— AFP

ISRAEL POUNDS GAZA, TANKS IN NORTH OF RAFAH

Cairo, July 17: Israeli forces hit areas in the central Gaza Strip on Wednesday, killing at least nine Palestinians, according to health officials, while Israeli tanks carried out a limited advance further into Rafah in the south.

Over the past 24 hours, Israeli strikes have killed at least 81 Palestinians and wounded 198, the Gaza health ministry said. The ministry does not distinguish between militants and civilians in its casualty count.

In one Israeli air strike around midnight on a Al-Zawda house in the central Gaza Strip, eight people were killed, the health officials said.

ISRAEL TO DRAFT ULTRA-ORTHODOX MEN ON SUNDAY

Jerusalem, July 17: The Israeli military on Tuesday said it would begin sending draft notices to Jewish ultra-Orthodox men on Sunday — a step that could destabilise Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The announcement followed a landmark Supreme Court order for young religious men to begin enlisting for military service in Israel.

Under long-standing political arrangements, ultra-Orthodox men had been exempt from the draft, which is compulsory for most Jewish men.

The exemptions created resentment among the general public in Israel, especially after more than nine months of war against Hamas militants in Gaza.

— AP

At GOP convention, Trump watches ex-rivals fall in line

Haley says unified Republican Party is essential for saving the nation

Milwaukee, July 17: Donald Trump returned to the Republican National Convention on Tuesday for a night intended to unify the party, as his failed primary challengers displayed their fealty to the now official US presidential candidate.

Three former rivals took the stage during prime time to publicly throw their support behind the former president, including onetime UN ambassador Nikki Haley who told delegates that "a unified Republican Party is essential for saving" the nation.

Trump, again wearing a white bandage on his ear that was injured in Saturday's assassination attempt, waved, shook hands and said "thank you very much" as delegates burst into an ovation.

While he made no formal remarks, the 78-year-old backslapped and chatted with his new running mate J.D. Vance and others, pumping his fist and looking visibly more relaxed than during his emotional entrance the previous night.

The Republican leader has been widely feted at the four-day convention, where on Thursday he is set to formally accept his party's nomination as the flagbearer to challenge Democratic President Joe Biden in November.

Tuesday was an exercise in presenting a unified front, but the smattering of boos that echoed with cheers across the convention floor when Haley took the stage — with Trump looking on — suggested the party had work to do to gather the base's four corners for the final four months of a bruising presidential campaign.

Haley had antagonised Trump during the primary battle but on Tuesday she was clear: "Donald Trump has my strong endorsement, period."

Her fellow former Tru-



Republican presidential candidate, former US president Donald Trump stands with Republican vice presidential candidate, US Senator J.D. Vance on the second day of the Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee.

Will let Fed Chair Powell finish term, says Donald

Washington, July 17: Donald Trump, the Republican presidential candidate, said in an interview with *Bloomberg Businessweek* that he would allow Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell to complete his term if he won the November election.

"I would let him serve it out, especially if I thought he was doing the right thing," Trump said.

President Joe Biden had nominated Powell for a second four-year term as Fed chief in May 2022. Powell will also remain a Fed governor until January 31, 2028.

Trump's remarks represent a noteworthy change in stance, given his historically contentious relationship with Powell.

During the *Bloomberg* interview, Trump also stressed that the Federal Reserve should avoid cutting interest rates before the November elections, where he faces Democrat Joe Biden.

Over the past week, Powell has been repeatedly questioned about whether the upcoming election would influence the Fed's decision on rate cuts. Pow-

I would let him serve it out, especially if I thought he was doing the right thing.

— DONALD TRUMP
US ex-president (on Fed Chair Powell's term)

ell reiterated on Monday that he and other policymakers do not consider political factors in their decision-making.

Apart from the Fed, the former US President discussed several other key points on his plans for a potential second term.

If re-elected, Trump said he would implement new tariffs to extract trade concessions from both allies and adversaries. He plans to renew expiring tax cuts, reduce regulations, increase domestic energy production through more drilling, and support the crypto industry while curbing big tech companies.

Trump believes higher tariffs will benefit the United States. — *Agencies*

mp challengers — Florida governor Ron DeSantis and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy — also kicked the ring, with the latter telling the 2,400 Republican delegates: "Donald Trump is the president who will actually unite this country — not through empty words, but through action."

Haley, who this year had

said the United States can't "go through four more years of chaos" under the leadership of Trump, had not been expected to appear.

MAN WIELDING 2 KNIVES KILLED BLOCKS AWAY FROM THE RNC

Milwaukee, July 17: Ohio police officers in Wisconsin for the Republican National Convention shot and killed a man who was wielding two knives just blocks away from the convention, Milwaukee's police chief has said.

Five members of the Columbus, Ohio, police department fired on the man, who had a knife in each hand, refused police commands and charged at an unarmed man before police fired, Milwaukee Chief Jeffrey Norman said at a news conference on Tuesday. Two knives were recovered from the scene, the chief said. "Someone's life was in danger," Norman said.

TRUMP SECURITY STEPPED UP DUE TO PLOT BY IRAN

Washington, July 17: The US Secret Service increased security for Donald Trump weeks ago after authorities learned of an Iranian plot to kill him, although it was not linked to the recent attempt on his life, US media reported on Tuesday.

CNN reported that US authorities received intelligence from a "human source" on a plan by Tehran targeting the former president, causing protection to be boosted for Trump. Other US outlets also reported the plot.

But it was not connected to the shooting at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, in which gunman Thomas Matthew Crooks opened fire.

EU COMMISSION FAULTED OVER COVID VACCINE

Brussels, July 17: Europe's second-highest court on Wednesday criticised the European Commission for a lack of transparency over Covid-19 vaccine contracts four years ago, a day before a key vote on Commission head Ursula von der Leyen's bid for a second term.

Some European lawmakers have been highly critical of the Commission's handling of the multibillion-euro contracts, and in particular for not disclosing text messages between von der Leyen and the boss of drugmaker Pfizer about one of the contracts. The Commission says she did not keep the messages.

The Commission signed deals with Covid vaccine suppliers AstraZeneca, Sanofi, GSK, Johnson & Johnson, BioNTech, Pfizer, Moderna and others at the height of the pandemic.

Some European Parliament lawmakers asked for access to the documents to understand the terms and contracts. But, the Commission gave only partial access and redacted some documents.

B'desh varsities shut over job stir

Dhaka, July 17: Police in Bangladesh fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse students protesting against the government's job quota system on Wednesday, a day after violent clashes left six people dead and scores injured.

Authorities also announced the indefinite closure of all public and private universities from Wednesday following the protests over public sector job quotas, which include a 30% reservation for family members of fighters from the 1971 War of Independence from Pakistan.

Authorities deployed units of the paramilitary Border Guard force alongside riot police on Wednesday.



Police fire tear shells as students protest against quotas in government jobs alongside symbolic coffins of victims who died in a clash with the police, at Dhaka University, on Wednesday.

ay outside the Dhaka University campus as students chanted: "We will not let our brothers' blood go in vain". Police fired teargas

and rubber bullets and lobbed sound grenades at the students as they marched in processions carrying coffins in solidarity

Oz to take Russia to task on MH17

Sydney, July 17: Australia vowed on Wednesday to hold Russia to account for the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 10 years ago that killed nearly 300 people.

On July 17, 2014 the Boeing 777 — en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur — was shot down by a Russian-made Buk surface-to-air missile over eastern Ukraine.

All 298 people aboard

were killed, including 38 Australians.

Australia will "not be deterred in our commitment to hold Russia to account," foreign minister Penny Wong told bereaved relatives and dignitaries at a memorial service at Parliament in Canberra.

"I recommit our collective pursuit of truth, justice and accountability for the outrages perpetrated on the 17th of July, 2014," she

said. "Grief never fully leaves us but time and love can lessen its weight." Names of the dead Australians were read out at the memorial service as family members placed golden flowers on a wreath, many pausing for a moment or wiping away tears.

A Dutch court has sentenced in absentia three men to life imprisonment for their roles in downing the plane over separatist-

held pro-Russian territory during the early stages of a war that saw Moscow seize the Crimean peninsula. Australia and the Netherlands have an ongoing case against Russia with the International Civil Aviation Organization, a United Nations agency with limited enforcement powers.

Russia has denied any involvement in the incident.

GLOBAL WARMING | Developing states need massive investments in energy systems to cut carbon footprints

COP29 host tells rich nations to break climate stalemate

Paris, July 17: The hosts of this year's UN climate summit urged governments on Wednesday to start compromising to break a deadlock over how to help poorer countries tackle global warming.

The COP29 summit in gas-rich Azerbaijan in November is supposed to produce a global agreement on how rich nations should help fund climate investments in developing countries, but negotiations have stalled.

Developing states need massive investments in en-

ergy systems to reduce their own carbon footprints while shoring up defences against the effects of global warming.

Yet, poorer nations are the least responsible for carbon emissions but suffer the most from a warming planet.

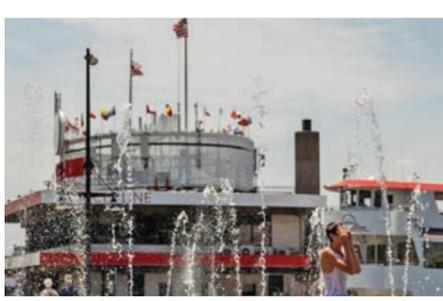
A crucial diplomatic meeting in Bonn last month ended in bitter stalemate with countries unable to advance an issue that has eroded trust between nations at climate talks for years.

In a letter to the roughly 200 nations signed onto

UN climate accords, COP29 president Mukhtar Babayev lamented the absence of "necessary progress" and warned time was running out.

"We clearly need a rapid increase in the pace of our work. Time lost is lives, livelihoods and the planet lost," wrote Babayev, a minister and former executive at Azerbaijan's national oil company.

"We call on all parties to increase the pace of their work and move on from their early negotiating positions."



A person cools off in a water fountain near the Hudson River during a heatwave in New York City.

Heatwave dries up lake, triggers fires

Belgrade, July 17: The Balkans, along with much of Europe, continued to swelter in a prolonged heatwave on Wednesday, triggering forest fires and drying up a Serbian lake for the first time, as a meteorologist warned such heatwaves could become more regular.

amid an extreme weather event, a heatwave characterised by its length and intensity," Vladimir Djurdjevic, a Belgrade-based meteorologist, told *Reuters*, adding climate change could make such super-hot summers more frequent events. Temperatures sizzled across the Balkans this week.

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	80,716.55 0.06
Nifty 50	24,613.00 0.11
S&P 500*	5,598.42 -1.21
Dollar (₹)	83.58 0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	108.44 0.03
Euro (₹)	91.1 0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	74,565.292 0.39
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	84.78 1.25
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.966 -0.014
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.173 0.006

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Panasonic arm opens software centre in Pune

In-flight Engagement and Connectivity (IFEC) solutions provider Panasonic Avionics on Wednesday opened a new software design and development facility in Pune. The new facility, inaugurated by the minister of state for civil aviation, Murlidhar Mohol, is the first in the country by Panasonic Avionics Corporation dedicated to supporting the development and delivery of IFEC solutions.



Citroen inks pact with Reflex Green for 500 vehicles

French automaker Citroen has signed a memorandum of understanding with Reflex Green Mobility, a subsidiary of Reflex Group, towards the procurement of 500 Citroen e-C3 electric vehicles. "Our partnership with Reflex underscores Citroen's commitment to our customers, the reliability of our products and a strong sustainable operation," said Citroen India Brand director Shishir Mishra.

Alphacorp plans to invest ₹350 cr in Gurugram

Realty firm Alphacorp will invest ₹350 crore to develop a luxury housing project in Gurugram as part of its expansion plan. Without divulging the name of the partner, Alphacorp said it has tied up with an entity that owns two land parcels of nearly 2.4 acre each. "We will develop a total of 200 apartments on these two land parcels," said Santosh Agarwal, executive director and CFO of Alphacorp.

Nazara arms get ₹1,120-cr GST liability notice

Nazara Technologies informed that two of its subsidiaries have received show cause notice and intimation for GST liability adding up to nearly ₹1,120 crore. Openplay Technologies has received a show cause notice from the director general of GST Intelligence, Kolkata for a proposed liability of ₹845.72 crore, and in Halaplay Technologies the liability amounts to ₹274.21 crore, the company said.

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Musk to move X, SpaceX offices out of California

Texas, July 17: Elon Musk said he will relocate the headquarters for X and SpaceX to Texas, adding more fuel to the billionaire's efforts to align himself with the political right and distance himself from left-leaning California.

Musk made the announcements on his X social media site, citing frustration over a new law in California related to transgender children in public schools. California became the first US state to ban school districts from requiring teachers to notify parents about changes to a student's sexual orientation and gender identity.

"This is the final straw," Musk said in the post announcing SpaceX's relocation.

He has long criticised California's liberal politics, and has threatened to pull X and his other businesses out of the state on numerous occasions.

SpaceX's headquarters is currently in Hawthorne, California, but it has been building out a large facility in South Texas dubbed Starbase over the last few years.

The site in Boca Chica is the primary location where SpaceX builds and launches its massive Starship rocket system, and the company recently added a massive warehouse factory at Starbase known as the Starfactory, which replaced many of the site's production tents.

X's headquarters is currently in San Francisco, though the company put several floors of its main



● **SPACEX'S HEADQUARTERS** is currently in Hawthorne, California, but it has been building out a large facility in South Texas dubbed Starbase over the last few years.

building up for lease last week. It was still expected to retain some of that space for employees. In January, X said it was planning to open a small office in Austin to help deal with content moderation problems.

SpaceX has roughly 13,000 employees. Its Hawthorne facility has been the primary location for production and processing of the company's Falcon 9 workhorse rocket, as well as the larger, more powerful Falcon Heavy rocket.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in an X post that the move "cements Texas as the leader in space exploration."

Musk also has several ties to Texas already. His electric car company, Tesla, earlier this year moved its business incorporation to Texas from Delaware, and similarly moved its headquarters from California to Austin in 2021. — Bloomberg

SUZUKI PLANS LIGHTER BODIES, SMALL BATTERIES FOR ITS MODELS

New Delhi, July 17: Suzuki Motor Corporation on Wednesday said it will focus on aspects like light body structures and usage of small batteries to power its models including electric vehicles (EVs) across various markets, including India.

Outlining the company's technology strategy for the next ten years, the Japanese automaker stated that compact and light vehicles not only reduce CO2 emissions during use, but also reduce the resources and CO2 emissions in production, thus contributing to resource conservation and CO2 reduction.

The automaker, which has around 58 per cent stake in the country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India, said it will further evolve the light-weight and safety body 'Heartect', and also work to minimise energy consumption through weight reduction technology.

For battery EVs and hybrid vehicles, the company said it aims to provide its customers with the most energy-efficient electric vehicles based on the renewal energy ratio and usage conditions in each country and region.

"Suzuki will be developing EVs that minimise energy consumption by combining components that embody... small and efficient electric units, and a small and light battery," the automaker said. — PTI

Thematic funds garner favour of retail investors

There are about 60 thematic funds now and more are in pipeline

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JULY 17

Thematic funds are the new mutual fund offers that have flooded the market over the last few months with fund houses trying to compete with each other in collecting fresh funds to manage through this category.

For fund managers, high valuations make it challenging to find undervalued opportunities under the existing themes of large, mid-cap and small-cap funds and their other variants like flexi-cap fund, multi-cap fund or large and mid-cap fund etc.

Last month nine out of 17 new fund offers (NFOs) were from thematic funds category that mobilised ₹12,974 crore (cr). In May though only one thematic fund NFO - HDFC manufacturing fund was launched

Month	Inflows (₹ crore)
June 2024	22,351.69
May 2024	19,213.43
April 2024	5,166.05
March 2024	7,917.72
February 2024	11,262
January 2024	4,804.69
December 2023	6,005.49
November 2023	1,964.67

Source: AMFI

but the collection and response was huge as it collected ₹9,563 crore.

Kenneth Andrade, CIO, Old Bridge Mutual Fund sees "goldilocks period" for the Indian economy; and recommends aligning with growth businesses amid scarce undervalued opportunities.

Soon thematic funds are likely to become the largest pool of funds to be

managed by the fund houses. As of now there are about 60 thematic funds managed by the fund houses and more are in pipeline.

The thematic funds launched so far cover manufacturing, transportation and logistics, defence, housing opportunities, innovation, business cycle, automotive, special opportunities, and

financial services.

MF industry's thematic funds with total assets under management of over ₹3.83 lakh crore are the second largest equity fund category after flexi cap funds (₹4.01 lakh cr) as of June 30, 2024 in terms of AUM among the equity fund categories.

The growth has been rapid over the last three months as total AUM of thematic funds rose from being the fourth largest in April 2024 at over ₹3.13 lakh crore to now second highest at ₹3.83 lakh crore.

The inflows too have been rising to thematic funds since Dec. 2023 instilling investor confidence in thematic funds. Where there are limited stocks in business theme with high growth opportunities fund houses are launching exchange traded fund or ETFs as NFOs.

IMF, ADB project India to grow at 7% in FY25

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, JULY 17

Both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have projected India to grow by 7 per cent in FY25. While the IMF has revised its estimate upward by 0.2 percentage points from its April forecast, ADB has retained its previous projection.

"The forecast has been revised upward by 0.2 percentage points, with the change reflecting carry-

over from upward revisions to growth and improved prospects for private consumption, particularly in rural areas," IMF said in its July update. In its April update, the IMF had raised its forecast for the country to 6.8 per cent against 6.5 per cent predicted earlier.

The GDP growth forecast for FY26 has been retained at 6.5 per cent. It also has revised the forecast for growth in emerging markets and develop-

● **THE FORECAST** has been revised upward by 0.2 percentage points, with the change reflecting carryover from upward revisions to growth and improved prospects for private consumption.

ing economies upward. Meanwhile, ADB has retained its growth projection for FY25 and FY26 at 7 per cent and 7.2 per cent, respectively. "Services continued to

expand robustly in Q4 of FY2023, and the forward-looking services PMI is well above its long-term average. Industry is expected to grow robustly, driven by manufacturing and strong demand for construction led by housing. A rebound in agriculture is expected," ADB said.

This is notwithstanding the slower advance of the monsoon in June. A rebound in agriculture will be important to sustain growth momentum in rural areas.

Silver may see bull run in 18 months

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, JULY 17

● **SILVER DEMAND** is expected to hit the 1.2 billion ounces this year, the second-highest annual silver demand on record.

The current gold-silver ratio indicates a significant bull-run for silver. In the next 18 months silver prices in the domestic market can touch ₹1.5 lakh per kg level.

The gold-silver ratio, which indicates how many ounces of silver it takes to buy one ounce of gold, usually stays

between 40-1 and 60-1, but when it gets far above the high end of that historical average, it tends to return to the mean with a vengeance, said Ajay Kedia, managing director,

Kedia Commodities.

It had touched high levels of 87-1 three months ago and currently stands at 79-1. The current gold-to-silver ratio still sits at a historically high level, currently dropping below 80. Historically, such elevated ratios have been a precursor to substantial silver price appreciation.

Silver demand is expected to hit 1.2 billion ounces this year, the second-high-

est annual silver demand on record.

"We are witnessing a 'once-in-a-decade opportunity' for silver investors. My analysis suggests that Indian silver prices could reach ₹1,50,000 per kg within the next 18 months as current scenarios favour this rally," said Kedia.

The price of silver in MCX currently stands at ₹93,047 per kg.



CENTRE EXEMPTS RAILWAY SERVICES FROM GST SCOPE

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

In line with the goods and services tax (GST) Council's decision, the government on Wednesday announced that accommodation services less than or equal to ₹20,000 per person per month and services provided by the ministry of railways to the general public have been exempted from GST with effect from July 15.

"Services provided by the ministry of railways (Indian Railways) to the general public have been exempted under GST w.e.f. 15.07.2024. Similarly, accommodation services less than or equal to ₹20,000/- per person per month has been exempted from GST w.e.f. 15.07.2024," central board of indirect taxes and customs (CBIC) under the Union finance ministry said in post on X (formerly Twitter).

The GST Council had approved measures to ease compliance for small businesses, exempted hotel accommodation worth up to ₹20,000 a month as well as railway services, and resolved to reconvene in August to initiate parleys on re-jigging multiple rates levied under seven-year old indirect tax.

Gold price rises on global cues

SANGEETHA G.
CHENNAI, JULY 17

Gold prices made a new high on Wednesday in the domestic market after international prices touched a record high level on Tuesday on expectations of the US Federal Reserve going for an interest rate cut in September.

Gold prices in the multi-commodity exchange made a new high of ₹74,510 per 10 gms after the market opened in the evening on Wednesday against the previous close of ₹74,273. The previous high of ₹74,442 was made



on May 20, said Ajay Kedia, managing director, Kedia Commodities.

On Tuesday, gold prices reached \$2,465.29 an ounce, surpassing the previous high of \$2,450.10.

This rally was led by rising expectations of an interest rate cut by the US Fed in September, follow-

ing softer inflation data in June and dovish comments from Fed chair Jerome Powell.

The current economic landscape and market dynamics suggest that gold prices are poised to continue their upward trajectory.

With the market sitting above the \$2,400 level, the risks appear skewed to the upside. As a result, it is projected that Comex gold will soon target \$2,532 and beyond. This upward momentum is expected to extend to the MCX, driving gold prices to ₹75,200 and beyond, said Kedia.

TVS Motor plans to invest £200 million in Norton

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JULY 17

TVS Motor, which bought the British iconic bike-maker Norton Motorcycles in 2020, said on Wednesday that it will invest around £200 million in Norton Motorcycles to develop and launch new bikes, facilities, research and development.

Norton has planned to launch a total of six new bike models in the international market over the next three years.

Till now, Norton has been selling improved versions of its existing motorcycles.

Germany, France, Italy and India, it noted.

"Our vision, commitment and investment into the Norton brand is entering an exciting phase. We look forward to sharing that with motorcyclists across the world," said Sudarshan Venu, managing director, TVS Motor Company.

He said Norton motorcycles will follow the company's philosophy of 'design, dynamism and detail'.

"The investment in research and development and leadership has us positioned to take six products to countries across the world," said Dr Robert Hentschel, executive director and chief executive officer, Norton Motorcycles.

NEW | DRIVE Last funding in Sept. led by Temasek, valued it at \$5.4 bn

Ola Electric likely to list in August

New Delhi, July 17:

SoftBank-backed Indian e-scooter maker Ola Electric is likely to value the company at around \$4.5 billion (about ₹37,350 crore) for its initial public offering (IPO), around 16 per cent to 20 per cent lower than the valuation at its last funding round, two sources said.

The Indian markets regulator in June approved Ola's \$660 million stock market listing, the first IPO by an EV maker in India and set to be one of the country's largest share sales this year.

Ola Electric is likely to list on Indian bourses in the first week of August, said the two sources, who have direct knowledge of the matter.



● **OLA ELECTRIC'S** valuation is likely to be lower as "it wants the IPO to be attractively priced so there is an opportunity for investors to create wealth".

round in September, led by Singapore's investment firm Temasek, valued it at \$5.4 billion (about ₹44,820 crore), but one of the sources said that would drop this time, pointing to a "rebalancing" in the valuation of tech stocks globally.

"Valuations have corrected overall in the market," said the person, adding that the final valuation could still change

but is unlikely to come anywhere close to the at least \$6 billion that Ola Electric's founder Bhavish Aggarwal had hoped to achieve for the IPO.

The second source said Ola Electric's valuation is likely to be lower as "it wants the IPO to be attractively priced so there is an opportunity for investors to create wealth".

India is seeing a sharp surge in IPOs, with its

stock markets near record highs. Benchmark indices have doubled between 2019 and 2023.

Ola Electric was founded in 2017. It dominates the e-scooter market with a 46 per cent share and competes with TVS Motor, Bajaj Auto and Ather Energy.

In December last year, Ola Electric slashed its sales goals for 2023-25 by more than half and delayed its target of achieving profits by a year after reduced government incentives pushed up e-scooter prices.

Its consolidated loss widened to ₹1,472 crore (\$176.14 million) for the year ended March 2023, while revenue from operations climbed more than seven times. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

Surya stays on second spot

Dubai: The big-hitting Suryakumar Yadav is the highest placed Indian at second spot, while young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal occupies the sixth position in the ICC T20I batting rankings issued on Wednesday. Ruturaj Gaikwad has dropped a place to the eighth position in the T20I batters' list, which was updated following India's recent 4-1 series triumph over Zimbabwe. Jaiswal was the big winner following his 141 runs in the series as he rose four places, behind No.1 ranked batter Travis Head of Australia and Suryakumar. Shubman Gill, who led India against Zimbabwe and was the leading run-scorer of the series with 170 runs from five innings, moved up a whopping 36 places to 37th. No Indian features in the top 10 of the T20I bowlers rankings. Axar Patel, who was rested for the Zimbabwe series, dropped four places to 13th spot. Fast bowler Mukesh Kumar and spinner Washington Sundar also made upward movements. Mukesh, who scalped eight wickets from three games, has gained 36 places to rise to 46th spot. — PTI

Messi to miss next two games

Miami, United States: Lionel Messi will miss Inter Miami's next two Major League Soccer matches after injuring his right ankle in Argentina's Copa America final triumph, Miami coach Gerardo Martino said Tuesday. The 37-year-old Argentine star went down in the 64th minute of a 1-0 victory over Colombia, hobbling off the field with cameras showing a huge swollen ankle. Messi is set to miss Inter Miami home matches on Wednesday against Toronto FC and on Saturday against the Chicago Fire. "There will be further testing to determine the severity of the situation," Martino said. "He has to have more tests and wait for the results." Messi, in an Instagram posting, was thankful for messages of concern and support he received after Sunday's match. "I want to thank everyone for the messages and greetings. I'm fine, thank God, and I hope I can soon be on the field again enjoying what I like to do most," Messi wrote. — AFP

1.2 million tickets left for Olympics

Paris: Organisers of the Paris Olympics said on Wednesday that there were still 1.2 million tickets left for the Games, mostly for football, basketball and handball. Team sports such as football have struggled to sell out the large venues chosen for the matches, while organisers are also set to release new more sought-after places for the finals of swimming and athletics. "More than 50,000 tickets will be put on sale in more than 30 sports (on Thursday)," deputy director general Mickael Aloisio told reporters. The Paris Games have set a new record for the total number of tickets sold, with the 8.7 million purchased surpassing the previous high of 8.3 million at the Atlanta Games in 1996. "More than 60 per cent" of tickets have been sold in France, Aloisio said. Organisers faced severe criticism from fans and even some athletes over the cost of tickets when they were first released last year. — AFP

Nagal-Drzewiecki pair crashes out

Bastad, Sweden: Olympic bound Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal and his Polish partner Karol Drzewiecki made a first round exit after suffering straight-set loss in the Nordea Open here. The Indo-Polish pair suffered a 3-6, 4-6 defeat in the hands of the French duo of Alexandre Muller and Luca Van Assche in a 59 minute round of 16 contest on Tuesday. The 26-year-old however is still alive in the singles event. Meanwhile, veteran Rohan Bopanna and N. Sriram Balaji's men's doubles first round match against the German duo of Jakob Schnaitter and Mark Wallner at the Hamburg Open has been postponed to Thursday. — PTI

BONJOUR PARIS

IOA releases list of 117 athletes, 140 support staff for Olympics

New Delhi, July 17: India will be represented by 117 athletes at this month's Paris Olympics after the sports ministry cleared the final contingent that also features 140 support staff and officials, of which 72 have been approved at "cost to the government" to meet the "requirements" of the travelling sportspersons.

The only qualified athlete missing from the list is shot-putter Abha Khatua. The Games will run from July 26 to August 11.

Khatua, who made the cut through world rankings quota, has been dropped without any explanation after her name was found missing from the World Athletics' list of Olympic participants a few days ago.

There is no word yet on whether her name has been knocked off owing to injury, a doping violation or any other technical issue.

The rest of the contingent that has been cleared is on expected lines with London Olympics bronze medal-winning former shooter Gagan Narang as chef-de-mission. Narang is also a vice president in the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

"The permissible limit for stay of support personnel in the Games Village against accreditation as per norms of the Paris Organising Committee for the 2024 Olympic Games is 67 including 11 IOA Contingent Officials, which includes five Medical Team Members," stated a letter from the ministry to IOA President P. T. Usha, explaining the ratio of support staff allowed as per the size of the contingent.

"For catering to the requirements of the athletes, additional coaches and other support staff numbering 72 have been approved at cost to the Government and arrangements for their stay have been made in Hotels/in locations outside the Games Village," it added.

Despite Khatua's absence, athletics will make for the biggest group in the contingent with 29 names (11 women and 18 men), followed by shooting (21) and hockey (19).



A soldier and police officers patrol by Paris 2024 Olympic banners, just nine days before the start of the Games in Paris on Wednesday.

● The only qualified athlete missing from the list is Abha Khatua. The shot-putter, who made the cut through world rankings quota, has been dropped without any explanation after her name was found missing from the World Athletics' list of Olympic participants a few days ago.

Table tennis will be represented by eight players, while badminton (7) will feature seven competitors, including two-time Olympic medalist P. V. Sindhu.

Wrestling (6), archery (6), and boxing (6) will have six representatives each, followed by golf (4), tennis (3), swimming (2), sailing (2), and one each for equestrian, judo, rowing and weightlifting.

The shooting contingent, which is the second biggest, consists of 11 women and 10 men, while table tennis will have four players each in both categories.

Tokyo Olympic silver medalist Mirabai Chanu is the lone weightlifter in the contingent and will compete in women's 49kg

Games Village, the cost of which will be borne by the government.

Shooting (18) will have the highest number of support staff, which includes one High Performance Director and six coaches, who will stay at the Games Village while the remaining 11 (four coaches, four physios, two psychologists, one strength and conditioning expert) will stay in hotels.

Athletics will have 17 support staff members, followed by wrestling (12), boxing (11), hockey (10), table tennis (9), badminton (9), golf (7), equestrian (5), archery (4), sailing (4), weightlifting (4) tennis (3), swimming (2) and judo (1).

The ministry letter further stated that Air Commodore Prashant Arya, Air Attache in Embassy of India at Paris will be Olympic Attache, who will have accreditation, and will take care of any issues requiring assistance and intervention of the Embassy. — PTI

GIVEN THE BEST BUT STILL BEING CRITICISED: USHA

New Delhi, July 17: Indian Olympic Association President P. T. Usha on Wednesday said "unprecedented teamwork" between the sports ministry, IOA and the national federations ensured that Paris-bound athletes got the support staff of their choice and lashed out at critics for turning a "blind eye to such synergy".

"At IOA, we have embarked on an era when athletes are at the centre of our planning and preparations. Instead of the usual 3:1 ratio between athletes and support staff, we have worked hard to change it to slightly better than 1:1 ratio," said Usha in a statement on Wednesday.

Usha said despite the efforts to ensure athletes' demands were met, it was "disappointing" to hear that some reports were still painting a negative picture of the work.

"Together with the sports ministry, and its units, the National Sports Federations and a good bunch of corporate partners, IOA had forged unprecedented teamwork. It is shocking that some have turned a blind eye to such synergy," she added. — PTI

IOA CHIEF CHIDES WFI FOR AXING ANTIM'S COACHES

New Delhi, July 17: IOA President P. T. Usha on Wednesday came down heavily on the ad-hoc panel that managed the suspended WFI, saying the committee did not do due diligence and missed out on giving the names of wrestler Antim Panghal's coaches in the long list, sent to the Paris Olympic Games organisers.

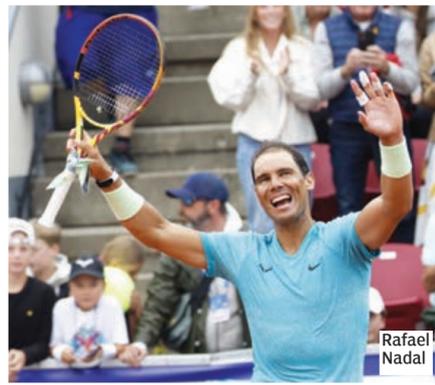
The IOA's reaction came in the wake of delay in visa clearance for Panghal's preferred coaches for the Games.

The 19-year-old was the first Indian wrestler to qualify for the Paris Games when she won a bronze at the World Championship in 2023.

She wants her coaches Bhagat Singh and Vikas to travel with her along with physiotherapist Heera. The IOA has cleared all the names but the support staff members attached with Panghal are still awaiting visa clearance.

The wrestlers are supposed to reach Paris on August 3 and the support staff members have got appointment for bio-metrics for August 2. — PTI

PARIS | OLYMPICS



Nadal & Murray could be bidding adieu to tennis

Paris, July 17: All the way back when he first discussed the likelihood that 2024 would be his final season as a professional tennis player, Rafael Nadal made sure to refer to the Paris Olympics as "one of the important competitions I would like to be at."

If, indeed, this is his last hurrah, and if, indeed, he does make it to the Summer Games a little more than a year after hip surgery — neither of which is an absolute certainty — it would be fitting that the site of the French Open is also the site of this goodbye.

No event, at least in this sport, defines an athlete's legacy the way the clay-court Grand Slam tournament does for Nadal. And the opposite is true, too, which is why there is a statue of the 38-year-old Spaniard at Roland Garros, the site of a record 14 of his 22 major trophies and where the Olympic tennis matches begin on July 27.

Rafael Nadal skipped Wimbledon before the Olympics

Nadal skipped Wimbledon in order to avoid going from clay to grass and back to clay at the Paris Games, where he has been planning to team in doubles with Carlos Alcaraz, the 21-year-old coming off back-

to-back major titles at Roland Garros and the All England Club.

And even though the idea that Nadal could add to his gold medals — in singles at Beijing in 2008, and in doubles with Marc López at Rio de Janeiro in 2016 — seems far-fetched, just the sight of him back in Paris will mean a lot to him and his fans.

"My body has been a jungle for two years. You don't know what to expect. I wake up one day and I (felt like I had) a snake biting me. Another day, a tiger," said Nadal, who has been able to play only 16 matches since the start of last year, going 8-8, including a first-round loss at the French Open this May.

Another popular, and successful, figure in men's tennis whose body has let him down lately, Andy Murray of Britain, says this Olympics will mark his adieu.

The 37-year-old Murray, a three-time Slam champion, is the only athlete with two singles golds in the sport — from London in 2012 and Rio four years later. After having hip replacement surgery in 2019, and various other injuries more recently, he withdrew from singles at Wimbledon because he needed a procedure to remove a cyst from his spine last month. — AP



Tiger Woods of the United States plays from a bunker during a practice round ahead of the British Open Golf Championships at Royal Troon Golf Club in Troon, Scotland, on Wednesday. — AP

McIlroy aims to end title drought

Troon (United Kingdom), July 17: Rory McIlroy is aiming to bounce back from his heartbreak at the US Open, while world number one Scottie Scheffler looks to round off a stunning season when the British Open begins in Troon on Friday.

The final major of the year gives McIlroy the chance to quickly forget blowing two short putts at Pinehurst last month which cost him the chance to end a decade-long major drought as Bryson DeChambeau won by one shot.

McIlroy has avoided the spotlight since, returning to play for the first time at last week's Scottish Open, where he finished tied for fourth when defending his title.

The world number two has finished in the top 10 in five of the last seven British Opens, part of his 21 top-10 finishes since last winning a major. McIlroy conceded he

had let a "huge opportunity" pass him by at the US Open as he missed twice from inside four feet at the 16th and the 18th.

But the Northern Irishman remains confident he can harness the hurt of his major heartbreak to add to the sole British Open he won in 2014.

Scheffler looks the man to beat despite so far failing to take his world leading form on the PGA circuit in America across the Atlantic to the challenge of links golf.

Tiger Woods makes his return to Britain after missing last year's event.

The three-time winner has dismissed talk of imminent retirement despite playing sparingly since a serious car accident in 2021.

Indeed, Woods believes the conditions on a links course give him a better chance to compete than the longer hitting needed in the US. — AP



Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo swims in the Seine river in Paris on Wednesday. After months of anticipation, Paris Mayor took a dip in the Seine River on Wednesday, fulfilling a promise she made months ago to show the river is clean enough to host open-swimming competitions during the 2024 Olympics. — AP

Paris mayor swims in 'clean' Seine

Paris, July 17: The mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, took a long-awaited swim in the murky waters of the Seine on Wednesday amid joy and relief that the river is finally clean enough for outdoor Olympic swimming events later this month.

Wearing goggles and a wet suit, the 65-year-old city leader swam breaststroke under bright sunshine before immersing her face and beginning a front crawl, covering around 100 metres (yards) downstream. "It's wonderful, very, very pleasant. It's fresh but not cold," Hidalgo told reporters of

the greenish water. She was joined by senior local officials and chief organiser of the Paris Games, Tony Estanguet, a gold medal-winning canoeist who has been sweating on the state of the opening of the Paris Games next week.

"Today is a confirmation that we are exactly where we meant to be,"

Estanguet said. "We are now ready to organise the Games in the Seine."

The swimming leg of the Olympics triathlon is set to take place in its waters on July 30-31 and August 5, followed by the open-water swimming on August 8-9.

Despite an investment of 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) to prevent sewage leaks into the waterway,

the river had been continually failing water quality tests until the start of this month. Wednesday's dip in front of more than 150 journalists was intended to demonstrate that the river was ready, but also to underline what is meant to be one of the key legacy achievements of Paris 2024. Hidalgo plans to create three public bathing areas in the Seine for the city's residents next year — a century after swimming was banned — while fish and other organisms are also returning to the waterway in greater numbers. — AFP