

AT ALL-PARTY MEET, RAJNATH URGES OPP TO AVOID HOUSE DISRUPTIONS

Budget session begins: BJP faces Kanwar row heat, allies' special status demands

As Opp demands debate on key issues, Paswan joins JDU special status chorus

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

AT THE all-party meeting convened by the BJP-led NDA government on the eve of the Budget session of Parliament, the BJP appeared to have got a taste of the coalition politics with its allies as well as erstwhile friendly parties raising various demands and a resurgent Opposition asking the government to adopt "a new approach" in both the Houses.

The crucial three-week session starting Monday is taking place against the backdrop of a changed political landscape in the wake of a fractured verdict in the recent Lok Sabha polls that did not give the BJP a majority.

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Union Ministers and Opposition MPs at the all-party meeting in New Delhi, Sunday. Amit Mehra

EXPLAINED The task ahead

WITH KEY ally JD(U) and fence-sitters YSRCP and BJD — who are crucial for government in Rajya Sabha — reiterating their special status demands, the Budget will generate huge political interest. NDA's floor managers will have to ensure allies are happy and fence-sitters content.

Kanwar order: Jayant says not well thought out, Praful calls for its withdrawal

ASAD REHMAN
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

TWO DAYS after IJP (Ram Vilas) leader and Union minister Chirag Paswan opposed the police order in Uttar Pradesh asking eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display names of

their owners, another Union minister, RLD chief Jayant Chaudhary, on Sunday said the police move was unnecessary and the decision was "not taken after a lot of thought". Kanwar yatis don't check religion of people before accepting "sewa" from them, he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

SC to hear plea against Kanwar route order today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE SUPREME Court will take up for hearing on Monday a plea challenging the orders in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand asking eateries and stalls on the Kanwar Yatra route to display names of their owners.

The plea filed by NGO Association of Protection of Civil Rights (APCR) has been listed before a bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti.

Two more petitions have also been filed in the apex court challenging the move in the two states. While the plea by political commentator Apoorvanand and activist Aakar Patel sought the court's intervention to ask

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FIRST U.S. PRESIDENT IN 56 YRS TO OPT OUT

Biden drops out of White House race, endorses V-P Kamala Harris

Move under pressure from Democrats after debate disaster against Trump

PETER BAKER
WASHINGTON, JULY 21

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden on Sunday abruptly abandoned his campaign for a second term under intense pressure from fellow Democrats and threw his support to Vice President Kamala Harris to lead their party in a dramatic last-minute bid to stop former President Donald J Trump from returning to the White House.

"It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as your President," he said in a letter posted on social media. "And while it has been my intention to seek re-election, I believe it is in the best interest of my party and the country for me to stand down and to focus solely on fulfilling my duties as President for the remainder of my term."

Biden then posted a subse-



'It's time to come together and beat Trump': Biden

quent online message endorsing Harris. "My very first decision as the party nominee in 2020 was to pick Kamala Harris as my

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY

In ten years, look what has grown from micro to small to medium... the Opposition



Kerala teen who tested positive for Nipah dies

SHAJU PHILIP & ANONNA DUTT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, NEW DELHI, JULY 21

A 14-YEAR-OLD boy from Kerala's Malappuram, who had tested positive for the Nipah virus, died at the government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode on Sunday.

According to state Health Department officials, he had developed a fever 10 days ago, and on Friday, was put on ventilator support at a private hospital in Kozhikode.

On Saturday, after the National Institute of Virology in Pune confirmed that the boy had tested positive for the Nipah virus, he was moved to the Medical College Hospital.

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EXPRESS NETWORK



3 DEAD, 8 INJURED IN KEDARNATH LANDSLIDE PAGE 9

TURNOVER UP 4 TIMES IN 2 YEARS

F&Os surge hurt capital formation, growth; a major concern: SEBI, RBI

SANDEEP SINGH
MUMBAI, JULY 21

FINANCIAL MARKET regulators Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are worried that the surging volumes in futures and options have started impinging on capital formation and thus pose a systemic risk to India's economic growth.

"Two years ago, when retail investors flooded the F&O segment, we worried about losses to them, and restricted our action to educating them, warning them. Indeed, nine out of 10 investors were losing money as we subsequently found out. From a micro concern of retail investor losses, it has grown to be a macro problem in just two years; household savings are finding their way into F&Os, it is threatening to hurt cap-

ital formation, investment and growth," said a source close to regulatory decision making, who did not wish to be named.

Futures and options are derivative contracts that derive their value from underlying assets that include stocks, commodities, currencies etc. Based on their expectation of future price movement, investors enter into a contract to buy or sell the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Bangladesh SC scales back govt jobs quota that led to protests, killings

JULHAS ALAM & SHEIKH SAALIQ

DHAKA, NEW DELHI, JULY 21

BANGLADESH'S TOP court on Sunday scaled back a controversial quota system for government job applicants, in a partial victory for student protesters after days of nationwide unrest and deadly clashes between police and demonstrators that have killed scores of people.

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Police frisk commuters during a curfew in Dhaka, Sunday. AP

Over 2 yrs after Pune man goes missing, his family see reunion hopes — in an ad

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

CHANDAN HAYGUNDE & ATIKH RASHID

PUNE, JULY 21



Dnyaneshwar Tambe and (right) the ad with his photo, according to his family.

Sena.

The 'Mahayuti' government in Maharashtra, which, apart from Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, comprises the



BJP and the NCP (Ajit Pawar), last week launched the "Mukhyamantri Teerth Darshan Yojana", which provides a subsidy of up to Rs 30,000 to senior

citizens for pilgrimage to prominent religious destinations in the state and outside. With Assembly elections due later this year, the state government and CM Shinde's party have been aggressively publicising the scheme.

It was one such advertisement that took Tambe's son, Bharat, by surprise on Thursday. He says a friend sent him a screenshot of a WhatsApp status someone on his contacts list had posted. "I saw the screenshot and couldn't believe it. It was my father in the ad of the Teerth Darshan Yojana," said Bharat, who runs an eatery in Shikrapur.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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FROM PAGE ONE

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Budget session begins: BJP faces kanwar row heat, allies' special status demands

forcing it to lean on its NDA allies, especially N Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP and Nitish Kumar-led JD(U). At the all-party meeting on Sunday, the Opposition leaders were united in raising their concerns over the ADG, Meerut Zone's directive asking the eateries and carts on the Kanwar Yatra route to display the names of their owners and employees, ostensibly clarifying their religion. They asked the Centre to intervene, calling the order "divisive". While the JD(U) and the YSRC, known as one of the BJP's friendly parties, raised their demand for a Special Category Status (SCS) for Bihar and Andhra Pradesh respectively, the BJD, the Modi dispensation's erstwhile friendly party, also reminded the BJP about its pledge of the SCS for Odisha ahead of the 2014 elections. "Odisha has been deprived of the Special Category Status for more than two decades. Biju Janata Dal has been constantly demanding it. In the all party meeting, political parties from Bihar and Andhra Pradesh also demanded for the Special Category Status for their respec-

tive states. We joined our counterparts from the other states as well since there is a requirement for such a status for Odisha too," senior BJP leader Sasmit Patra told reporters after the meeting. Another BJP ally, Chirag Paswan, Union minister and IJP(RV) president, also joined the JD(U) in demanding the SCS for Bihar. In a post on X, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh stated: "In today's all-party meeting of floor leaders chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the JD(U) leader demanded special category status of Bihar. The YSRC leader demanded special category status for Andhra Pradesh. Strangely, the TDP leader kept quiet on the matter." The SCS is a classification of regions or states by the central government to provide special assistance in the form of tax benefits and financial support for development of the region. It was first introduced in 1969 based on the recommendations of the fifth Finance Commission. The BJP-led Centre has made it clear repeatedly that it will not consider the demands for a SCS by any new state.

Sources said when the SP's Ramgopal Yadav spoke against the police directive for the Kanwar Yatra route, the entire Opposition backed him, saying it would create communal division in the country. While Yadav warned the BJP "not to create a crisis in the country for some political benefits", AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi said the Centre has the constitutional powers to intervene because it was a "divisive order". The police directive for Muzaffarnagar and other districts has also been adopted by Uttarakhnad, even as it has drawn criticism from the BJP's own allies like the JD(U), Jayant Chaudhary-led RLD and Chirag Paswan. With the Opposition having not got a chance to raise the issue of the alleged irregularities and leaks in the NEET exams as well as the Manipur crisis in the first session after the Lok Sabha polls, its leaders asked the government Sunday to respect the public mandate. "What the government needs to do is very simple. It needs to read the message of the mandate which is to discuss and debate in the House," John Brittas, CPI(M) MP said, citing his remark

made in the meeting. "Everyone was of the view that Parliament's prestige has to be restored and healthy debate should be the norm," he added. Gaurav Gogoi, deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, said in his remarks that the government should offer the Deputy Speaker's post to the Opposition. He also said the Standing Committees should be constituted immediately in which the Opposition parties should be given adequate representation including the posts of their chairpersons. The AAP's Sanjay Singh raised the issue of the Centre allegedly misusing the central agencies against the Opposition leaders. The DMK's T R Baalu expressed concerns over the Opposition-ruled states not being given central funds in time. The meeting also witnessed heated arguments between the YSRC and the TDP when the former's Vijaysai Reddy raised the issue of "TDP hooliganism" in Andhra Pradesh after its victory in the recent Assembly elections. Speaking to The Indian Express, TDP leader Luv Krishna said: "They (YSRCP) could raise such is-

issues in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly which is meeting from Monday. This meeting was to ensure the smooth conduct of the Parliament session. They are just using diversionary tactics." The JD(U)'s Sanjay Jha wanted the government to respond promptly to the issues raised by the members during the Zero Hour. During the meeting many floor leaders were of the view that the Central Hall in the old Parliament House building should be reopened. "In the all-party meeting of floor leaders the universal demand has been that Central Hall should once again be opened up for MPs to mingle with each other and improve communications across the parties. The historic Central Hall has sadly fallen into disuse after the opening of the new building of Parliament," Ramesh said in another X post. Addressing the floor leaders, Rajnath Singh requested the Opposition to avoid disruptions during the speeches of senior leaders in order to protect the dignity of Parliament. Singh was apparently referring to the Opposition's move to heckle

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his reply to the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address to both the Houses during the last session. Besides Singh, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju and JPNadda of the BJP, the meeting was attended by Gogoi, Ramesh and K Suresh of the Congress, the JD(U)'s Sanjay Jha, AAP's Sanjay Singh, NCP's Praful Patel, and the RJD's Abhay Kushwaha, among other leaders. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget in Parliament on Tuesday. Sitharaman will table the Economic Survey on Monday. A united Opposition is set to corner the Modi government on issues ranging from the NEET paper leaks to railway safety, to unemployment and price rise. The session would have 19 sittings till August 12, during which the government is expected to present six bills, including the one to replace the 90-year-old Aircraft Act, besides getting Parliament's nod for the Budget of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been under the Central rule.

Biden drops out of race

Vice President," he wrote. "And it's been the best decision I've made. Today I want to offer my full support and endorsement for Kamala to be the nominee of our party this year. Democrats — it's time to come together and beat Trump. Let's do this." The president's decision upended the race and set the stage for a raucous and unpredictable campaign unlike any in modern times, leaving Harris just over 100 days to consolidate support from Democrats, establish herself as a credible national leader and prosecute the case against Trump. Although Democratic convention delegates must ratify the choice of Harris to take over as standard-bearer next month, Biden's endorsement meant the nomination was hers to lose and she appeared in a powerful position to claim it. While Biden, 81, remained president and still planned to finish out his term in January, the transition of the campaign to Harris, 59, amounted to a momentous generational change of leadership of the Democratic Party. The president said he would "speak to the nation later this week in more detail about my decision." One person informed about the matter said Biden had told his senior staff at 1:45 p.m. that he had changed his mind, an announcement that surprised many aides who had been told as recently as Saturday night that his campaign was still full speed ahead. It was not immediately clear whether he wrote the letter himself or had help, nor did his aides know when or how he might address the nation. The president's decision meant that a nomination will be settled at a convention rather than through primaries. Harris starts the truncated process in the strongest position. Within minutes of Biden's announcement, one potential rival, Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, announced she would not run. Another, Governor Gavin Newsom of California, had previously said he would not challenge Harris. Biden announced his withdrawal after a disastrous debate performance against Trump cemented public concerns about his age and touched off widespread panic among Democrats about his ability to prevent the former president from reclaiming power. Democratic congressional leaders petrified by dismal poll numbers pressed Biden to gracefully exit, angry donors threatened to withhold their money and down-ballot candidates feared he would take down the whole ticket. No sitting president has dropped out of a race so late in the election cycle in American history, and Harris and any other contenders for the nomination will have just weeks to earn the backing of the nearly 4,000 delegates to the Democratic National Convention. While the convention is scheduled to take place in Chicago from August 19

to August 22, the party had already planned to conduct a virtual roll call vote before August 7 to ensure access to ballots in all 50 states, leaving little time to assemble support. Biden's campaign for a second term collapsed in swift and stunning fashion after leading Democrats concluded that he would be unable to defeat Trump in the fall. During their nationally televised debate last month, Biden, the oldest president in American history, appeared frail, hesitant, confused and diminished, losing a critical opportunity to make his case against Trump, a convicted felon who tried to overturn the last election. Although Trump, 78, is just a few years younger than Biden, he came across as forceful at the debate even as he made repeated false and misleading statements. Questions have been raised about Trump's own cognitive decline. He often rambles incoherently in interviews and at campaign rallies and has confused names, dates and facts just as Biden has. But Republicans have not turned against him as Democrats did against Biden. The president's age was a primary concern of voters long before the debate. Even most Democrats told pollsters more than a year ago that they thought he was too old for the job. Born during World War II and first elected to the Senate in 1972 before two-thirds of today's Americans were even born, Biden would have been 86 at the end of a second term. Biden consistently maintained that his experience was an advantage, enabling him to pass landmark legislation and manage foreign policy crises. He maintained that he was the Democrat best equipped to defeat Trump given that he did so in 2020. But his efforts to reassure Democrats that he was up to the task following the damaging debate failed to shore up support. Instead, his slowness to reach out to party leaders and some of the answers he gave in interviews only fueled internal discontent. In bowing out, Biden became the first incumbent president in 56 years to give up a chance to run again. With six months remaining in his term, his decision instantly transformed him into a lame duck. But he can be expected to use his remaining time in office to try to consolidate gains on domestic policy and manage ongoing wars in Europe and the Middle East. Biden revitalised international alliances that frayed under Trump, rallying much of the world to stand against Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. He supported Israel in its war against Hamas following the October 7 terrorist attack, but he has grown frustrated with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying that Israel is not doing enough to avoid civilian casualties and guarantee humanitarian aid to Gaza. NYT

Bangladesh jobs quota

Students, frustrated by shortages of good jobs, have been demanding an end to a quota that reserved 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The government previously halted it in 2018 following mass student protests, but in June, Bangladesh's High Court reinstated the quotas and set off a new round of protests. Ruling on an appeal, the Supreme Court ordered that the veterans' quota be cut to 5%, with 93% of jobs to be allocated on merit. The remaining 2% will be set aside for members of ethnic minorities and transgender and disabled people. The protests have posed the most serious challenge to Bangladesh's government since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fourth consecutive term in January elections that were boycotted by the main opposition groups. Universities have been closed, the internet has been shut off and the government has ordered people to stay at home. The protests turned deadly on Tuesday, a day after students at Dhaka University began clashing with police. Violence continued to escalate as police fired tear gas and rubber bullets and hurled smoke grenades to scatter stone-throwing protesters. Bangladeshi authorities haven't shared any official numbers of those killed and injured, but the Daily Prothom Alo newspaper reported Saturday that at least 103 people have died so far. Sporadic clashes in some parts of Dhaka, the capital, were reported on Saturday but it was not immediately clear whether there were any fatalities. Ahead of the Supreme Court hearing, soldiers patrolled cities across the South Asian country. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said the stay at home or-

der will be relaxed from 3 pm to 5 pm. on Sunday for people to run essential errands. Meanwhile, the government has declared Sunday and Monday as public holidays, with only emergency services allowed to operate. Protesters argue the quota system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, saying it should be replaced with a merit-based system. Hasina has defended the quota system, saying that veterans deserve the highest respect for their contributions in the war against Pakistan, regardless of their political affiliation. Representatives from both sides met late Friday in an attempt to reach a resolution and Law Minister Anisul Huq said the government was open to discussing their demands. Their demands included the reform of the current quota system, the reopening of student dormitories shut by the police following the clashes and for some university officials to step down after failing to protect campuses from the violence. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has backed the protests, vowing to organise its own demonstrations as many of its supporters have joined the student-led protests. However, BNP said in a statement its followers were not responsible for the violence and denied the ruling party's accusations of using the protests for political gains. The Awami League and the BNP have often accused each other of fueling political chaos and violence, most recently ahead of the country's national election, which was marred by a crackdown on several opposition figures. Hasina's government had accused the opposition party of attempting to disrupt the vote. AP

Kanwar order: Jayant says not well thought out, Praful seeks withdrawal

This came even as another BJP ally — Ajit Pawar's NCP—joined the chorus against the police order and said it should be withdrawn. Speaking to reporters after the all-party meeting, Chaudhary, who is the Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Minister of State for Education, said the decision to issue the order "was taken in a hurry and the government is now sticking to it". Asked about the order, Chaudhary said his party's UP unit chief Ramashis Singh has already made the party stand clear against the police order. "Voh koi mudda toh hain nah. Humarajo stand hai iss issue pe uss par pradesh adhyaksh bol chuke hain. Poori party ka stand hai (It is not an issue. Our stand has been made clear by the state president. It is the stand of the entire party)," he said.

"Jo kanwar le kar jaate hain, unki sewa mein sabhi lag lagte hain. Na toh kanwar le kar jaane waala vyakti koi pehchan karta hai. Jo sewadar hai unki ek ashirwad ki tarah prapt karte hain, aur aage chalte hai. Koi jaati ya dharam ki pehchan kar ke sewa nah lete, aur na hi iss maamle ko dharam ya jaati se joda jana chahiye (Everyone is involved in service of those traveling with kanwar. The person carrying the kanwar doesn't identify anyone. Those who serve them do it for their blessings. No one recognises caste and religion before accepting service and this issue should not be linked to caste and religion)," Chaudhary said. "Sab pratishthan apna naam likhe. Maalik koi aur ho sakta hai, brand kuch aur sakta hai. Mcdonald kya likhega? Khatauli mein Burger King kya likhega? Purane brand hain, ek maalik nah kayi maalik ho sakte hain (All establishments can write their

name. The owner can be different and the brand can be different. What will McDonald's write? What will Burger King in Khatauli write? There are old brands, and they can have multiple owners)." "I feel the decision wasn't taken after a lot of thought, and now that decision has been taken, they are sticking to it. This happens in government sometimes. There is still time, maybe it isn't implemented very strictly. I am seeing pressure is not being put by administration," Chaudhary said. "As far as vegetarian and non-vegetarian is concerned, it makes sense. It should be clear that if food ingredients and process is vegetarian or not. How does it matter who makes it. There are vegetarian Muslims, and non-vegetarian Hindus," the RLD chief said. On Friday, the RLD, whose bastion is western Uttar Pradesh,

including Muzaffarnagar, had said it will raise its objections with both the Central and state governments, of which it is a part. On Sunday, NCP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Praful Patel joined NDA allies JD(U), RLD and IJP (Ram Vilas) in opposing the order to eateries, saying it should be withdrawn. "These steps have been taken for the first time in view of Kanwar Yatra. It needs amendment. The UP government needs to take it back," Patel after attending the all-party meeting. On Friday, Union minister and RLD (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan had said he does not agree with the directive, first issued by police in Muzaffarnagar. "It is every government's responsibility to work for the poor, which includes all sections of society such as Dalits, backwards, upper castes and Muslims as well," he had said. INPUTS FROM ENNS, MUMBAI

Kerala teen who tested positive for Nipah dies

Health Minister Veena George told reporters in Malappuram that the boy had a cardiac arrest at 10.50 am and that he was declared dead at 11.30 am. "All efforts were made to save his life. Doses of monoclonal antibodies were brought from NIV-Pune on Sunday. A medical board had met on Sunday for administering the antibodies," she said. The minister said four people in the victim's contact list have developed Nipah symptoms. "One of them is critical and on life support... Although the government medical college hospital in Kozhikode and Virology Lab in Thiruvananthapuram have the facility for testing the samples, a mobile lab from NIV-Pune will be brought to Malappuram for testing. Samples of all those in the high-risk category will be tested," she said. Samples of seven people, in-

cluding six friends of the victim, tested negative for Nipah. The minister said 330 people, including 68 health workers, are under observation after they emerged in the contact list of the 14-year-old. Of them, 101 are in the high-risk category. The Health Department has opened a control room in Malappuram, and an alert has been declared in the district. People were advised to wear masks and a lockdown was declared in selected areas under Pandikkad panchayat, where the boy is from, and nearby Anakkayam panchayat. A route map of the victim has been published to encourage people to self-report if they have come in contact with him. A door-to-door survey will also be held in these two panchayats. The Centre has rushed a "One Health" outbreak response team to Kerala to investigate the case. The team will identify epidemi-

ological linkages and provide technical assistance to the state. The Centre has urged the state to carry out active search for Nipah virus cases in the family of the boy, neighbouring areas, and areas with similar topography. The state has also been asked to trace all contacts of the boy over the last 12 days. Strict quarantine of the contacts and isolation of those suspected to have the infection have been advised. The Indian Council of Medical Research, on the state's request, has sent monoclonal antibodies against the infection to the state. While the monoclonal antibodies had reached before the death, it could not be used because of the poor general condition of the boy, according to a statement by the Union Health Ministry. Nipah is a viral infection that mainly affects animals such as bats, pigs, dogs, and horses, but can jump to humans who come

in contact with infected animals and cause serious illness. Nipah usually presents as fever and swelling of the brain. Kerala has had a number of Nipah outbreaks since 2018. In 2018, 17 of 18 infected persons had died. One death was reported in 2021, and two in 2023. With the death of the 14-year-old on Sunday, the total number of deaths due to Nipah in Kerala since 2018 has gone up to 21. The state Health Department has not yet found how the 14-year-old boy was exposed to the virus. The department has also not confirmed whether the victim is the index case for this year. A study on the 2018 outbreak had found that the first case was infected from bats, and others from hospital. The virus reported in Kerala belonged to a Bangladeshi strain, which is known for its high mortality rate.

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SC to hear plea against kanwar route

the states to withdraw the orders, the petition filed by TMC MP Mahua Moitra accused the Uttar Pradesh government of "targeting Muslim-owned businesses". In their petition, Apoorvanand and Patel said the "impugned directives encourage discrimination on grounds of caste and religion and cannot be seen to serve any 'legitimate purpose'." "These directives promote discrimination solely based on religious and caste identity, as they do not require the display of food items being served or a statement that is non-vegetarian or non-sattvik food is being served, but only the display of religious or caste identity explicit in one's name," the plea said. This, they argued, "directly breaches" Article 15 of the Constitution. The plea said the directions promote untouchability and compromise the privacy of the shop owners and their employees, exposing them to danger of being targeted. In her petition, Moitra accused the Uttar Pradesh government of creating "conditions for economic boycott of Muslims". "Since June 2023, the Respondent No. 1 (State of UP) continued to empower and embolden the anti-social elements by actively targeting Muslim-owned businesses based on fabricated and malicious information circulated by the anti-social elements. The Respondent No. 1, through acts of com-

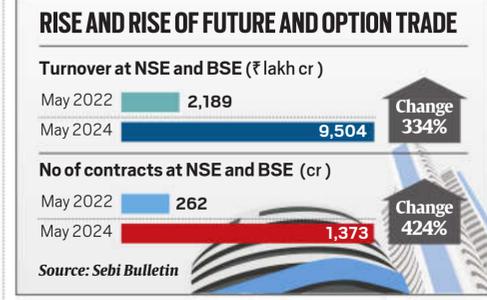
mission and omission, created conditions for the complete economic boycott of Muslim minorities on the pretext of their 'impure' dietary choices," the petition said. Her plea said that "in forcing the disclosure of the names of proprietors and even those of their staff, on the stated ground of respecting pilgrims' dietary choices, makes it clear that 'dietary choices' is a pretext, or a proxy, for the compelled disclosure of personal — and, in this case, religious — identity, through the disclosure of names. The upshot of this is to create a socially-enforced economic boycott on Muslim shop-owners and workers, and the loss of their livelihoods". The State's affirmative obligation to maintain public order. The State cannot outsource or abdicate its obligations by requiring citizens to give up their rights to free speech in order that public order is maintained, the petition said. This inverts the relationship between the State and the citizen, and amounts to giving in to the "heckler's veto". The plea said the directions impose unreasonable restrictions on business activities of eatery owners and food-sellers, infringing upon their freedom to carry on any occupation, trade or business under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution. The orders are also manifestly arbitrary, disproportionate, and violate the right to equality, the petition said.

Missing man

about 25 kilometres from Varude village, where he lives. Saying his family had grown sceptical of Tambe's well-being after he remained untraceable for three years, Bharat urged CM Shinde "to oblige me by finding my father and reuniting him with us." "Now we know for sure that he is alive and is well. Our hopes of a reunion are high now," he said. The police have already begun searching for Tambe. Bharat lodged a missing complaint on Saturday night after the cops approached him, said Inspector Deeppratan Gaikwad of Shikrapur police station. "The family had never lodged a missing report about Dnyaneshwar Tambe in the past," Gaikwad said. DSP Prashant Dhole said, "When we interacted with the family members, they told us that Dnyaneshwar Tambe has left home multiple times in the past and he used to return home on his own. Last time he left home during the Covid-19 outbreak in December 2021. But the family members believed that he would return again. So they did not inform the police or lodged any missing report about him before." "(Tambe's) family members said that after leaving home, he often visited places of pilgrimage.

They suspect he now went to the wari procession where his photograph may have been clicked. We have formed teams to search for him now," Dhole added. After the advertisement, Bharat contacted a local journalist and the news soon went viral, even drawing in the Opposition Congress, which criticised the state government. Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar, in an X post, said it was "a crime to use a photograph of a citizen in this manner illegally on the advertisement, without seeking their permission". Slamming the Mahayuti government, he said its schemes as well as advertisements were "hollow". The state government denied it issued the advertisement featuring the missing man. "The state government has not posted this ad on any of its social media accounts. It has also not been issued via the government in any form," said a statement issued through the Director General of Information and Public Relations. The Shiv Sena has now deleted the post. Party spokesperson Naresh Mhaske said: "As far as I am aware, the advertisement was issued by the government. But if it was our social media team that designed the post, we would surely try to trace the source of the photo so that the elderly man can be traced."

F&Os surge



asset in 'lots' (a lot has multiple units of the asset) by paying a small margin amount. Data sourced from a recent SEBI bulletin on futures and options shows a sharp jump in both turnover and number of contracts traded. While F&O combined turnover at BSE and NSE jumped more than four times to Rs 9,504 lakh crore in May 2024 from Rs 2,189 lakh crore in May 2022, the number of contracts traded surged by more than five times to 1,373 crore from 262 crore during the period. SEBI is also cognisant of the reservations of certain market players, who still do not agree with a clampdown on F&Os. While retail investors are the ones who end up with aggregate losses in F&O, those on the other side who make money are largely "proprietary traders and high frequency traders," the sources said. The market regulator no longer believes the only purpose that derivatives trading serves is risk hedging for investors and businesses at a low cost. "Much of it is speculation now," the sources said. SEBI had set up a working group under former executive director of RBI, G Padmanabhan, to study the derivatives segment and

suggest measures for risk management and investor protection. The sources said the working group met mid-July and is close to presenting a report to the standing committee of SEBI. It is learnt, an interim report with immediate measures that SEBI can immediately put in place is likely. The group is learnt to have sought more data on certain aspects. "Once SEBI provides all data, the group would present a final report," said a source. Sources said the recommendations in the interim report may include an increase in the minimum value of F&O contracts by 4-5 times from the current limit of Rs 5 lakh and also increase the margin requirement for investors among others. A source, who influences decision making in the financial markets, said, "I know that at an individual choice level we should not intervene. But now it's about individual choice and pace of growth. If it (F&Os) is allowed to continue at the same pace of growth, we can only imagine what will happen. A lot of money is going out for no good reason. So we need to think about this at a macro level."

LIQUOR STORES CLOSED UNTIL PROCESSION ENDS

Internet services suspended in Nuh ahead of Jalabhishek Yatra

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GURGAON, JULY 21

AHEAD OF the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Shobha Yatra on Monday in Haryana's Nuh, the state government ordered the suspension of internet and bulk SMS services for 24 hours starting 6 pm on Sunday. Police have also ordered that heavy vehicles will not be allowed to enter Nuh before the yatra concludes.

Deputy Commissioner Dharendra Khadgata stated that the orders were issued by the Additional Chief Secretary Anurag Rastogi to prevent any disturbance to peace and public order in the Nuh district amid the procession. The Deputy Commissioner further said that exemptions have been provided for personal SMS, mobile recharges, banking SMS, voice calls, corporate and domestic broadband, and leased line internet. All liquor stores will also be closed on Monday till the religious procession concludes, said officials.

The annual religious procession covers three temples in Nuh — Nalhar, Ferozpur Jhirka, and Singar. Last year, violence broke out during the yatra, leading to six deaths. Bajrang Dal members and a cleric at a mosque in Gurgaon were among those who



Security personnel take stock of preparations for the procession, on Sunday. Express

died.

To instill a sense of security among the public, a flag march was conducted on Sunday in the area in the presence of Vijay Pratap, Nuh Superintendent of Police.

Gurgaon Police conducted meetings with Hindu outfits in the wake of the procession. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) West Karan Goel and DCP Manesar Deepak Kumar gave necessary guidelines to maintain peace. The participants have been asked to not raise any provocative slogans during the procession.

Police have urged the public to not pay heed to any rumours.

Elaborate arrangements are in place, officials said. Fourteen duty magistrates have been des-

igned to oversee the procession. Police said that commandos, bomb squad personnel, and CRPF troops will also be deployed at every corner.

"Impenetrable security arrangements have been made for this year's Brajmandal Jalabhishek Shobha Yatra. The police will monitor every activity from the ground to the sky. Police, paramilitary, and commando personnel have also been deployed up to half the height of the Aravalli mountains, and surveillance is being conducted by drones around the Aravalli mountains and nearby areas. Additionally, continuous search operations are being conducted by the police on the Aravalli mountains adjacent to the temples," said a police spokesperson.

Nuh Police are also keeping an eye on the city, Nalleshwar Temple, Aravalli Mountains, Badkali Chowk, Jhirakeshwar Temple, Shringeshwar Temple (Singhar) which shall be covered during the procession. The spokesperson said that videography of vehicles of people coming from other states and districts to participate in the yatra will be carried out, and they will be thoroughly checked to ensure there are no explosive materials or weapons. DCP (South) Sidhant Jain said that drones have been deployed to monitor traffic on the Sohna highway leading to Nuh.

A traffic advisory has also been issued. Heavy vehicles traveling from Alwar to Sohna and Gurgaon should go via Ambedkar Chowk in Firozpur and then via KMP Rewasan to Sohna or Gurgaon, Nuh Police stated. Heavy vehicles traveling from Palwal, Hodal, and Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh) to Alwar should go via KMP to Mumbai Expressway and then via Ambedkar Chowk in Firozpur Jhirka to Alwar.

All heavy vehicles travelling to Nuh from various other locations should bring their vehicles to Nuh only after the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra concludes, police said.

Delhi Traffic Police: Elaborate arrangements in place in view of Kanwar Yatra

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

A DAY before the Kanwar Yatra begins, Delhi Traffic Police on Sunday issued an advisory urging commuters to plan their journey to avoid inconvenience.

"A large number of kanwariyas reach Delhi and some of them go to Haryana and Rajasthan via Delhi borders. This year the expected number is about 15-20 lakh," read the advisory.

With the kanwariyas expected to set up roadside camps during their journey, congestion is likely along Najafgarh Firni, Rohtak Road, Pankha Road, Dev Prakash, Shastr Marg, Nangloi-Najafgarh Road, Outer Ring Road, Rani Jhansi Road from Baraf, Khana Chowk to Fire Station, Boulevard Road and at Azad Market Chowk, and Mathura Road, as per the advisory. "Due to diversion of vehicular traffic, bound for Apsara Border and Maharajpur Border to Ghazipur, by UP Police, there will be congestion on NH-24 as well," it further read. Elaborate arrangements have been made to segregate the movement of kanwariyas and other road users and to minimise inconvenience to the general public and devotees, police said.

Govt releases nearly Rs 100 cr for 12 colleges affiliated to DU

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE DELHI government on Sunday released about Rs 100 crore for 12 colleges, which are financed by it and are affiliated with Delhi University (DU), as part of the funds for the second quarter approved by Education Minister Atishi.

In the upcoming Budget, a provision of about Rs 400 crore has been made by the Delhi government for these colleges for the financial year 2024-25, as per an official notification.

Last year in April, the government released Rs 100 crore in the first quarter for the 12 colleges.

The Indian Express had reported in January that the Delhi government had said it would only clear funding once these institutes were de-affiliated from DU and became part of one of Delhi's state universities. The statement came after DU Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh wrote to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, saying the colleges would remain with the varsity and the state should continue funding them.

Citing reports from the Directorate of Audit, Atishi earlier told The Indian Express that the special audit conducted in 2020 on six of the 12 colleges "unequivocally highlighted numerous instances of grave irreg-



At Delhi University Campus. File

ularities and procedural lapses of the 'highest levels' in expenditure exceeding hundreds of crores." "Let alone the approval, there should be an inquiry against these colleges. The Delhi government has directed strong action against the administration of these colleges for creating illegal posts, including recovering salaries since 2015 of illegally appointed staff members," Atishi said.

"These 12 colleges have consistently received an annual grant in aid exceeding Rs 300 crore from the Government of NCT of Delhi for several years. They must be held accountable for any misutilisation of funds," she added.

As per the notification on Sunday, Atishi stated, "Along with schools, the Kejriwal government focused on higher education and

opened three new universities and expanded the existing universities. The 12 Delhi University colleges — fully funded by the Delhi government — play an important role in higher education in Delhi."

"Many issues of financial mismanagement have come to the fore in these colleges in the last few years, but the Kejriwal government has decided that the teachers and students of those colleges should not suffer due to the mistakes of the management and administration.

Keeping in mind the welfare of teachers, their medical benefits, pension benefits which were stuck due to financial mismanagement, Delhi Government is releasing a fund of Rs 100 crore in the second quarter for these 12 colleges of Delhi University," she added.

Body of missing 2-yr-old found in abandoned toilet near Delhi slum

NEW DELHI: The body of a two-year-old missing boy was found in an abandoned toilet near a slum area in central Delhi on Sunday, said police. He was allegedly abducted while playing outside his home. In protest against the murder of the toddler, his family members blocked a road near the slum cluster. However, police dispersed the crowd after assuring strict action in the matter, said officials.

Said DCP (Central) Harsh Vardhan, "A two-year-old boy was found dead in the transit camp in a jhuggi area at around 10 am today. The body was found in an abandoned toilet block around 100 metre from the slum where he lived." An FIR has been lodged and multiple teams have been formed to probe the matter. "The manner of death will be clear after the post-mortem report is received."

A relative of the toddler alleged that there were several assault marks on the body. ENS

AMID TUSSLE OVER KEJRIWAL'S HEALTH

Attempt-to-murder case may be filed against L-G, BJP: AAP MP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

A DAY after Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena wrote to Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar expressing concern about Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's "non-consumption of prescribed medical diet and medications" in jail, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Sanjay Singh launched a fresh attack on the L-G and the BJP. Singh said that the party is planning to file an "attempt to murder case" against the L-G and the BJP.

"Both the BJP and its L-G are giving out false information regarding the health of the CM. Earlier, when he needed insulin as his sugar level increased, they said Kejriwal was eating mangoes, aloo puri... was increasing his calories, and refused to give him insulin. Then the court had to intervene and



Arvind Kejriwal was arrested in the excise policy case. File

he got insulin. They are now saying that Kejriwal is not eating anything, so his sugar level dropped at night... Which person wants to take his own life by not eating knowing that he has diabetes?," said Singh while addressing a press conference.

The AAP leader alleged a "conspiracy to kill the Chief Minister", a day after Delhi Minister Atishi made a similar claim. Showing a copy of Kejriwal's "medical reports",

Singh said, "These are data and graphs of his (Kejriwal) sugar level prepared and submitted by the Tihar Jail doctors, which clearly show that his sugar level has dropped and he is showing symptoms of hyperglycemia."

He accused the L-G and BJP of spreading false information about Kejriwal's health. "I want to ask why the L-G is denying this again and again (statements on Kejriwal's deteriorating health). By doing this, he is conspiring to harm Kejriwal. If anything happens to him, the L-G has to answer. We are consulting advocates to file an attempt to murder case against people involved in this conspiracy... After consulting lawyers, we will soon file a case of attempt to murder against the L-G and the BJP because hiding a patient/person's medical reports is a conspiracy to harm the person," he said.

There was no immediate response from the L-G's office to Singh's remarks.

Demolition fear looms in other slum clusters after hundreds displaced in Khyber Pass

SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

MORE THAN a week after the demolition at Khyber Pass in Delhi's Civil Lines area displaced hundreds, residents in several other slum clusters in the city are on the brink. The deadline to vacate houses for locals in such clusters in Sarojini Nagar and Inderlok ends on Monday, as per the recent eviction notices put up here by Northern Railways. However, residents are relying on courts for relief.

Other clusters where a similar fear is said to be prevailing are Delhi Cantt Jhuggi, Loha Mandi Jhuggi, Rajiv Gandhi Jhuggi, Buddha Nagar Jhuggi, Indrapuri Jhuggi and JJ clusters of Daya Basti and Tulsī Nagar. Several slum clusters — mostly set up on Railways' land — have been receiving eviction notices despite being listed under the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), the Delhi government's nodal agency responsible for the development of slums and resettlement. While residents of the JJ Camps in Buddha Nagar and Indrapuri claim they did not receive any eviction notice, a Northern Railways official stated, "We have provided a routine notice right now in the areas that are within the safety zone. These are people living within a 15-metre radius of the tracks. By doing so, they pose a threat to passengers as well as their own lives. The High Court had also earlier ordered that the encroachments within the safety zone can be cleared and that no rehabilitation policies need to be implemented for those



Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj at a slum cluster in Delhi. File

sitting within 15 meters." Another senior official said, "A lot of developmental projects are stuck for which these encroachments need to be cleared. For instance, the rail line at Shakur Basti needs to be doubled for the trains that are unable to pass through Delhi."

On Friday, Delhi Minister of Urban Development Saurabh Bharadwaj claimed that the central government's "agencies are illegally demolishing" slums. "All settlements where the Railways has put up notices are included in listed settlements of DUSIB... Last year too, the central government had illegally demolished houses of lakhs of people in Delhi... As per the Delhi government's norms, first slum dwellers will be given permanent houses, and then slums will be demolished," he said. He said that the AAP would not let the demolition take place until the slum dwellers are rehabilitated. For the last four years, the Delhi government and the Northern Railways have been in discussions for rehabilitation and other matters with around 48,000 jhuggis built alongside the 140 km of railway tracks in the city, as per officials. An order for the demolition had been passed

by the Supreme Court on August 31, 2020, which also said that no other court would grant a stay in the matter. In 2020, the Delhi government told Northern Railways that demolishing jhuggis along tracks would be illegal and that houses built for slum relocation could be made "ready to move in" by March 2021.

However, the houses have not been allocated yet. In October 2022, 70 to 80 homes were demolished in Northwest Delhi's Shakur Basti by the Railways, with residents claiming they were not warned of the action.

In Sarojini Nagar Flying Club, more than 200 families live in a dimly lit cluster under a railway bridge. Residents living in cramped spaces say they have

nowhere else to go.

"We have received multiple notices from Railways to vacate the area. Railway and airport officers often complain about the lack of hygiene here and easily point fingers at us. We have repeatedly challenged these orders in court," said Prabh Rana, who has lived in the cluster for the last 15 years. "The last notice asked us to vacate the area by July 11. Thankfully, the court has put a stay on it, but we do not know how much longer we will be allowed to stay here," said Rajesh, the Pradhan of the Sarojini Nagar cluster. In Inderlok, a cluster of slums located next to a railway track has received similar notices.

"They have asked us to vacate our houses by July 22. We received the notices just a week ago. We are seeking help from political parties to challenge these notices in court," said Mohammad Haris, a rickshaw puller who has been staying in the cluster for 20 years.

As per the annual report of a nonprofit, Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), on forced evictions in the country, around 2.78 lakh people were evicted by various authorities in Delhi between 2022 and 2023, the highest across India.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE DELHI Police have arrested an alleged gangster, said to also be a former state-level boxer, for allegedly shooting at his uncle following an argument in Panipat, officers said on Sunday.

A senior police officer said Constable Suren of the Crime Branch received a tip-off about the movement of a gangster named Rajan alias Mantri, who was

involved in an attempt to murder case at the Sanoli police station in Panipat.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Satish Kumar said, "The police source also informed us that Rajan was carrying illegal weapons." A team of Head Constable Amit, Soni, Trishpal, and Constable Suren, supervised by Inspector Pankaj Thakran, was constituted and a trap was set near Japani Park in Rohini. An SUV was spotted there, with the lone occupant identified by the in-

former as Rajan, said police. The team apprehended him and recovered an automatic pistol from his possession.

Two live cartridges were discovered in the pistol. A thorough search of the car revealed a loaded single-shot pistol and a live cartridge concealed beneath the driver's seat. A case was filed under relevant sections and the accused was charged. DCP Kumar said that Rajan had a property dispute with his uncle Azad, who used to reside in the same village. "Azad had also

previously been involved in criminal cases. A few days ago, Azad hurled abuses and allegedly insulted Rajan's mother. Enraged at this, Rajan vowed to take revenge. On June 23, as Azad was returning to Nangla Paar village in his car, Rajan, along with his associates, opened fire at him."

One of the bullets pierced the car, hitting Azad's waist. Despite his injury, Azad managed to drive home and was then taken to a hospital for treatment of his gunshot wounds.

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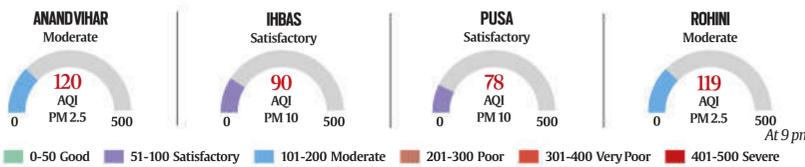
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CBC 41101/11/00072425



L-G orders revamp of Red Cross Hospital

New Delhi: Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena has issued directions for the "complete revamp" of a hospital run by the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) in east Delhi's Seemapuri area, Raj Niwas officials said on Sunday. He issued the directions while on an inspection of the hospital on Saturday, they added.

NO COERCIVE ACTION ON HOMEBUYERS: COURT

Granted relief by SC, buyers bearing brunt of subvention scheme slam builders, banks

DHEERAJ MISHRA NOIDA, JULY 21

WHEN DHEERAJ Sharma, 44, migrated from Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh to take up a private job in Noida two decades ago, he had one dream: a home of his own with dedicated rooms for his two children. In 2015, he booked a 2-BHK flat in Amrapali's Centurian Park in Greater Noida by availing the "Subvention Plan".

Nine years on, Sharma is yet to see a trace of the promised house for which he had paid Rs 7 lakh. On the other hand, the last few years have been a nightmare for him with the banks bombarding him with notices, asking him to pay the remaining amount.

For homebuyers like Sharma, a recent order from the Supreme Court has brought some relief with the court directing the bank not to take any coercive action against the buyers who booked a flat under Subvention Plan and are yet to get possession of their flats.

Under the subvention scheme, the banks or financial institutions would disburse the sanctioned amount directly to the builder who is supposed to pay the pre-EMIs or full EMIs until the possession of the flat is handed over to the home buyers. However, in many cases across the NCR, the builders left the projects midway, leading to alleged harassment of homebuyers by the banks as the loans were taken in their name.

Narrating his ordeal, Sharma said, "I bought the flat for Rs 30

WHAT IS SUBVENTION SCHEME?

Under the scheme, the home buyer, builder and the bank enter into a tripartite agreement, where the buyer pays 10% of the amount upfront while 80% of the amount is paid by the bank to the builder directly in the form of a loan, so that it can continue construction work. The remaining 10% is paid by the buyers to the builder after the delivery of the flat. The loan is disbursed to the builder in the name of buyer only, provided that the builder will pay the EMI until the possession of flat.

THE COURT ORDER "...there shall be interim stay in all the matters, to the effect that no coercive action including complaint under section 138 of the Negotiable Instrument Act, 1881 shall be entertained on behalf of Banks/Financial Institutions or Builders/Developers against home buyers," said the bench of Justice Suryakant and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan in its order dated July 15.

lakh. I did not have the money, but I wanted a flat for my children at any cost. The builder told me about a subvention plan and I thought that it could be a good opportunity as it will give me three years' time to arrange the money and the builder will pay the EMI (interest part only) till the delivery of the flat. They got a loan of Rs 17.80 lakh in my name. A total of Rs 21 lakh loan was sanctioned on my flat. But the builder paid the EMI only for six months and disappeared..." said Sharma, who works at a private university in Noida. He said that despite buying a flat, he is still living on rent in sector-122. "I am paying Rs 15,000 rent every month. At the same time, the banks are sending me notices, demanding payment of dues. They have declared my account a non-performing asset (NPA). Once I needed to take a loan but could not borrow a penny because the bank spoiled my CIBIL score. Now the banks are saying that I have a liability of Rs 55 lakh and will have to pay Rs 66,000 per month as EMI to clear the dues. I don't even make that much money every month, how will I be able to repay this loan?" said Sharma. On the Supreme Court order, he said, "Of course, the stay order is a relief for buyers like us. But our hope is that the court gives a clear decision in this, which has a clear roadmap to solve the problems of this subvention scheme."

ect was to be developed in three phases, but the builder sold the flat for the fourth and fifth phase also. My flat was in the fourth phase and after around a year, we got to know that the builder was misleading us," said Bhatia.

He further said, "The builders had created this scheme to take advantage of the helplessness of the common man and with the connivance of the banks, crores of rupees were lost. Many a times, people do not have enough money to make the full payment in one go. So in this scheme, the buyers were in a position to save some money and pay the EMI and get the flat after three years. But this is where we were cheated..."

NEFOWA, a body of flat buyers, said buyers in projects such as Earth Infrastructure, Airwil, Unibera, Amrapali, Unitech, Jaypee, Rudra Builders etc. are "victims of the irregularities" in the Subvention scheme.

"This is one of the biggest scams happening in broad daylight in the name of buyers. The banks, in collusion with builders, have loaned crores of money without due process and after they (builders) ran away, buyers are facing the brunt," said Abhishek Kumar, President of NEFOWA.

"RBI guidelines have been flouted at every step. This is a big relief, the stay from the SC but will the builders be prosecuted for cheating the buyers and banks as well? How can they go against the agreement and destroy the lives of thousands of buyers?" he added.

BRIEFLY

Murder accused held after 12 years

New Delhi: A 51-year-old murder accused and narcotics smuggler, who was on the run for the last 12 years, has been arrested here, officials said on Sunday. Mohammad Umar was arrested on July 16 for allegedly killing his associate Taslim in Delhi's Sonia Vihar area in 2012 and disfiguring his face by pouring acid to hide his identity, they said. He was declared a proclaimed offender on July 18, 2013, by a court and a reward of Rs 50,000 was announced for information leading to his arrest, the officials said.

Woman dies after falling from balcony

New Delhi: A 29-year-old woman died after she fell from the balcony of a building in Dwarka, police said Sunday. The victim's father alleged her husband pushed her from the balcony of the second floor in the Kakrola area. "On the intervening night of July 19 and 20, a call was received at Dwarka North police station regarding a woman falling from a building. Staff found the woman lying in a pool of blood..." police said. PTI

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE JHARKHAND 22 July 2003 Shaheed SI BAI SHAKHA SINGH 12-05-1949 To 22-07-2003 121 BN Punjab On July 22, 2003, troops of 121 Battalion of CRPF, alongside state police, launched an operation against Maoists in Jharkhand. During the operation, Maoists entrenched on a hilltop opened fire at the approaching troops. The troops immediately took positions and launched a counter-attack. Leading from the front, Shaheed SI Baishakha Singh was severely injured but continued to lead his men bravely, forcing the Maoists to flee. Despite being evacuated, he succumbed to his injuries and attained martyrdom. His leadership, bravery, and determination will always be remembered by the nation.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE Assam 22 July 2001

Shaheed SHRI VINOD KUMAR YADAV, ASST. COMDT. 21-06-1973 To 22-07-2001 40 BN Rajasthan On July 22, 2001, CRPF troops of 40 Battalion of CRPF were moving from Lumding (Nagaon) to Haflong (NC Hills) to shift stores. Near village Lavase, NC Hills district, insurgents ambushed the convoy from a vantage point in the hilly terrain. The insurgents fired heavily at the vehicles, prompting the troops to immediately de-board and launch a counter-attack. A fierce gunfight ensued as the troops closed in, despite their disadvantageous position. The brave troops forced the insurgents to flee. In the counter-attack, Shaheed Asst. Comdt. VK. Yadav, Shaheed Ct/Bugler Khem Singh, and Shaheed Ct/Dvr Rajbir Singh sacrificed their lives while charging at the insurgents. Their bravery and sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Shaheed Constable/Dvr RAJIBR SINGH 15-08-1965 To 22-07-2001 40 BN Haryana On July 22, 2001, CRPF troops of 40 Battalion of CRPF were moving from Lumding (Nagaon) to Haflong (NC Hills) to shift stores. Near village Lavase, NC Hills district, insurgents ambushed the convoy from a vantage point in the hilly terrain. The insurgents fired heavily at the vehicles, prompting the troops to immediately de-board and launch a counter-attack. A fierce gunfight ensued as the troops closed in, despite their disadvantageous position. The brave troops forced the insurgents to flee. In the counter-attack, Shaheed Asst. Comdt. VK. Yadav, Shaheed Ct/Bugler Khem Singh, and Shaheed Ct/Dvr Rajbir Singh sacrificed their lives while charging at the insurgents. Their bravery and sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Shaheed Constable T. RAVI 15-07-1970 To 22-07-1992 98 BN Andhra Pradesh The 98th Battalion of CRPF was deployed in Doda district, Jammu and Kashmir, for anti-terrorist operations. On July 18, 1992, during an area domination patrol, the troops were ambushed by militants firing from a dense jungle. The troops retaliated and advanced, forcing the militants to flee. During the encounter, Shaheed HC Vijay Shankar Rai and Shaheed Constable T. Ravi fought courageously from the front and were severely injured. Shaheed HC Vijay Shankar Rai succumbed to his injuries that day, while Shaheed Constable T. Ravi attained martyrdom on July 22. The sacrifices of these brave CRPF men will always be remembered.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE Jammu & Kashmir 18 July 1992

Shaheed Constable T. RAVI 15-07-1970 To 22-07-1992 98 BN Andhra Pradesh The 98th Battalion of CRPF was deployed in Doda district, Jammu and Kashmir, for anti-terrorist operations. On July 18, 1992, during an area domination patrol, the troops were ambushed by militants firing from a dense jungle. The troops retaliated and advanced, forcing the militants to flee. During the encounter, Shaheed HC Vijay Shankar Rai and Shaheed Constable T. Ravi fought courageously from the front and were severely injured. Shaheed HC Vijay Shankar Rai succumbed to his injuries that day, while Shaheed Constable T. Ravi attained martyrdom on July 22. The sacrifices of these brave CRPF men will always be remembered.

Shaheed Head Constable GULAB CHAND 01-10-1947 To 22-07-1995 71 BN Uttar Pradesh On July 22, 1995, the 71 Battalion of CRPF was deployed in Imphal, Manipur, for counterinsurgency operations. Troops set up a Naka at Moirang Kampu, Imphal East district, to curb insurgent movement. Upon seeing the troops, insurgents immediately opened fire. The troops swiftly took positions and retaliated, leading to a fierce encounter. During the firefight, Shaheed HC Gulab Chand sustained severe injuries. Despite his injuries, he continued firing and supporting his fellow troops. He later succumbed to his injuries, laying down his life for the nation. His valour remains engraved in the proud heart of the Force.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE Manipur 22 July 1995

Shaheed Head Constable GULAB CHAND 01-10-1947 To 22-07-1995 71 BN Uttar Pradesh On July 22, 1995, the 71 Battalion of CRPF was deployed in Imphal, Manipur, for counterinsurgency operations. Troops set up a Naka at Moirang Kampu, Imphal East district, to curb insurgent movement. Upon seeing the troops, insurgents immediately opened fire. The troops swiftly took positions and retaliated, leading to a fierce encounter. During the firefight, Shaheed HC Gulab Chand sustained severe injuries. Despite his injuries, he continued firing and supporting his fellow troops. He later succumbed to his injuries, laying down his life for the nation. His valour remains engraved in the proud heart of the Force.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE Sri Lanka 22 July 1988

Shaheed Constable R. S. BESAK RAO 16-10-1958 To 22-07-1988 35 BN Maharashtra 35 Battalion of CRPF was deployed in Sri Lanka as part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to help the war-torn nation. On July 22, 1988, a bomb ripped through the vehicle Constable R. S. Besak Rao was traveling in, resulting in his supreme sacrifice in the line of duty.

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE Assam 18 July 1968

Shaheed Constable OM PRAKASH 07-12-1947 To 22-07-1968 1 BN Haryana Shaheed Constable Om Prakash was posted to the 1st Battalion, deployed in what is now Manipur, then part of Assam, to maintain law and order and tackle underground militant activities. On July 18, 1968, while on duty, his party was ambushed by insurgents. In the ensuing encounter, he stood his ground and responded bravely but was the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty.



The Tagra Teyees family proudly remembers its Bravehearts who in the true traditions of the Assam Rifles made supreme sacrifice while bravely combating terrorists in Puneja, Doda District, (J&K) on 22 Jul 1995. May the Almighty grant eternal peace to the souls of under mentioned martyrs. Their gallant action will continue to inspire us all :-

Hav (Late) Rajender Singh, Rfn (Late) Karnail Singh, Rfn (Late) Hari Kumar Singha, Rfn (Late) Ram Pravesh Singh, Rfn (Late) Baldev Singh, Rfn (Late) Bansi Prasad, Rfn (Late) Ramendra Singh

DEEPLY REMEMBERED BY COMMANDANT & ALL RANKS 23 ASSAM RIFLES 'TAGRA TEYEES' Head Constable Madan Lal ITBP salutes its braveheart Head Constable Madan Lal of 25th Battalion, who made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty fighting bravely with the militants on this day in J&K in 2004. Resident of : Vill.- Yol Jharer, Distt.- Kangra (Himachal Pradesh) INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)

Congress slams BJP, AAP over Delhi pollution

Devender Yadav

New Delhi: The Delhi Congress has criticised both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for their alleged failure to address the air pollution in Delhi. The state unit's chief, Devender Yadav, accused both the parties of inaction, despite their significant representation in the Delhi Assembly, MCD, and Parliament.

"Despite the BJP having eight MLAs playing the role of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, more than 100 councillors in the MCD, and seven Members of Parliament, the BJP has not been serving the interest of the people of Delhi. The (CM Arvind) Kejriwal government has been caught in its own contradictions to live a life of deceit and falsehood, betraying the people of Delhi," he said in his statement to the press.

He said that both the parties need to collaborate to improve Delhi's air quality. ENS

8 held for duping man of Rs 91 L with promise of higher returns in trading

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, JULY 21

A WHATSAPP group, a promise of higher returns in stock and cryptocurrency trading, and an alleged fraud of Rs 91 lakh — Delhi Police has busted a gang and arrested eight men, including a contractual bank staff, in a case of cybercrime.

Hemant Tiwari, DCP, Intelligence Fusion, and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit, said that Sachin Bansal, the complainant, alleged he was cheated of Rs 91 lakh on the pretext of providing "handsome returns" in stocks and crypto trading. "The complainant was added to a WhatsApp group wherein perpetrators were giving stock recommendations, and upon persuasion of the accused, Bansal opened an account on a website — www.yotemog.com — and transferred Rs 91 lakh to 19 different accounts. After inquiry, a case of criminal conspiracy was lodged."

During probe, the alleged accounts were frozen. One of the bank accounts had a balance of Rs 46 lakh in it, said officials. The accused have been identified as Ajay, Mohit, Shankar (contractual bank employee), Partyaksh Koshar, Manish Jawla, Shrayance Pandit, and Dinesh, who would open bank accounts on fictitious addresses and sell them to other cyber fraudsters, as per officials. Meanwhile, the Delhi Police was investigating another case of cyber fraud where they had identified one such account and subsequently frozen it. The accused allegedly sent an e-mail to the bank manager, impersonating the investigative officer of the IFSO unit and asking him to immediately "de-freeze" the said account.

"During the investigation, all suspected accounts involved in the crime were frozen by the bank on the directions of the police. After analysis of bank accounts, it was found that one of the accounts, which was registered in the name of Gaurav Trading, had Rs 46 lakh as available balance, and the same was immediately seized," DCP said. (With inputs from PTI)

Revamp in store for Civil Lines to Kashmere Gate Ring Road stretch

GAYATHRI MANI NEW DELHI, JULY 21

A KEY section of the Ring Road, stretching from Civil Lines-Metcalf Road to Kashmere Gate ISBT, is all set to undergo a revamp, officials said. Besides, beautification of sidewalks on both sides of the road would be carried out, they added.

The stretch, which is about 4.5-km long, connects North Delhi with Central Delhi starting from Chandgi Ram Akhara to Nigambodh Ghat, near Kashmere Gate ISBT.

According to senior Public Works Department (PWD) officials, the stretch is due for repair and strengthening. "It is one of the key Ring Road stretches because not only it connects North Delhi with Central Delhi, it also connects VIP routes such as CM house, L-G house, Delhi University North Campus, ISBT, Hanuman Temple besides ITO, Pragati Maidan, Sarai Kale Khan, and Mathura Road," said an official.

"Currently, the road has many potholes and cracks. Besides, bituminous layers are peeling off

REVAMP PLAN Main carriageways to be relaid with new bituminous layers. All potholes, cracks and breaks along with Central verges and sideways to be repaired. Beautification of sidewalks on both sides of the road.

and this adds to the already heavily packed stretch... We have conducted a thorough assessment of this stretch with the assistance of experts, following which it has been decided to repair it. Once the road is strengthened, it will be helpful in reducing traffic jams and giving a safe and smooth ride to commuters," said another official.

Officials said the revamp of the stretch has got financial approval from the PWD minister in March, adding the project could not start due to the implementation of Model Code of Conduct ahead of Lok Sabha polls.

"Now, tenders have been floated. The bidding process and work of award will take about one month... Once the work is awarded, the repair work will begin by September," said an official.

As part of repair and strengthening work, the main carriageways of the stretch will be relaid with new bituminous layers. Besides, all the potholes, cracks and breaks along with Central verges and sideways will be repaired. Officials said the contractor which will be awarded the work will also maintain the stretch — bituminous work for five years and thermoplastic paints for two years. Besides, the defect liability period of the work will be for 12 months.

The stretch is used by more than one lakh commuters using vehicles such as cars, bikes, trucks, tempos and buses.

Besides, on Tuesdays, the stretch is heavily packed especially during the evening hours as large number of devotees visit the Hanuman Temple.

Officials said this stretch is part of the redevelopment of 60 key roads being undertaken by the PWD in three phases on priority.

BARAPULLAH OLD STONE BRIDGE

Mughal-era bridge that lends its name to a busy flyover, key drain

DEEPIKA SINGH NEW DELHI, JULY 21

FROM A key flyover in South Delhi to a drain notorious for overflowing during monsoon, making its way into people's homes and shops this season, Barapullah lends its names to two iconic landmarks of the Capital. But the original Barapullah is not far from these two: A 17th-century stone bridge, it stands quietly under the Barapullah flyover as a sluggish Barapullah drain passes underneath.

Once a thoroughfare, it now houses a bustling and congested Sabzi Mandi (vegetable market) in Block D of Jangpura. Educationist and reformer Sir Syed Ahmed Khan describes the bridge as "very beautifully constructed and located four miles south of Shahjahanabad on the way to Faridabad near an inn" in his book Asar-us-Sanadid published in 1847. The bridge is said to have

been built by Mihrban Agha, the chief eunuch of the court of Mughal Emperor Jahangir in 1611-12, according to Zafar Hasan's book Monuments of Delhi. The bridge is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Commenting on its significance, author and filmmaker Sohail Hashmi tells The Indian Express, "This must have been an important passage in its time as it falls right in the area connecting Nizamuddin area to Mathura." On the history of the drain, he says, "There used to be around 10-12 streams flowing from the Aravallis, carrying fresh water to the Yamuna. These would join behind Nizamuddin and form the Barapullah drain. Sadly, instead of fresh water, it carries untreated sewage into the river now."

Congress leader and former mayor Farhad Suri says the area once used to have a canal built by Sher Shah Suri who ruled Delhi in the mid 16th Century. "The bridge was later built to



A bird's eye view of the bridge over the Barapullah drain; (R) the sabzi mandi with a 400-year-old pillar seen in the background. Abhinav Saha/Deepika Singh

ease travel from Agra, the then Mughal capital, to Delhi which the emperor used to frequent to call on Humayun's tomb and Nizamuddin Dargah," he tells The Indian Express. "In its time, this was considered the most

beautiful road in Delhi, lined by trees on both sides. Like a boulevard... you can say."

In her book The Forgotten Cities of Delhi, author and historian Rana Safvi writes, "The original bridge had 11 arches and the name came from its 12 (baarah) pillars... It was made of lime mortar and stone, and is now an unkempt market near the Hazrat Nizamuddin railway station. The bridge itself is in poor condition..." Hashmi says the bridge used to carry traffic on it well into the 1980s before a slipway was built parallel to it to ease congestion. Now, around 400 years after it was built, the bridge is home to a market selling everything under the sun — from fresh meat to shoes to fruits and vegetables to garments. When asked about the historic bridge, most shoppers draw a blank. Rameen Khan, founder of City Tales, which conducts heritage walks in Delhi, says Barapullah is "the perfect example of the apathy that we have

towards functional heritage structures once they lose their purpose."

He tells The Indian Express, "Once upon a time, this bridge was so important with a tributary of Yamuna flowing through it. Now, it is surrounded by neglect and apathy. The bridge gives its name to the extremely busy modern flyover. Lakhs use it and still don't know how it got its name while the defunct Barapulla dies a slow death."

As hawkers shout "bhindi, taroi, lauki (okra, ridge gourd, bottle gourd)" and patrons nudge the butcher next door to cut them a premium piece, the bridge continues to serve as an object of utility and convenience, hosting a market catering to dwellers of nearby slums as well as upscale residents of Jangpura and Nizamuddin East.





Govt. of Haryana



Mahra Haryana

Non-Stop Haryana

We Haryanvis

Now reside in **Lal Dora** free villages

British era Lal Dora system abolished

All 6260 villages of the state are now Lal Dora free

Property cards issued to 25.17 lakhs residents of Haryana

Till now 4.62 lakh properties have been registered in 3613 villages without any dispute

Distribution of property cards continues...



6 GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



NITI REVIVES 15TH FINANCE COMMISSION'S PLAN

Govt considers ₹50,000 crore scheme to incentivise states for agricultural reforms

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

ALMOST THREE years after the Union government was forced to repeal its three farm laws in November 2021, the Centre is considering a new scheme with an outlay of Rs 50,000 crore to incentivise states to adopt agricultural reforms, *The Indian Express* has learned.

The proposed scheme—once finalised and approved—will allow states to avail central funding to implement farm sector reforms related to agriculture marketing, contract farming and land leasing.

It is learnt that the scheme was mooted by NITI Aayog officials in a powerpoint presentation to the Prime Minister's Office soon after the Lok Sabha elections results were announced, giving the NDA a third consecutive term. The presentation, titled "India's Amrit Kaal: Mobilising the nation to sustain fast growth", touched all sectors of the economy.

The scheme is among the ideas discussed by officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare and NITI Aayog as part of their efforts to identify farm sector-related regulatory and institutional reforms under "transformative interventions" being planned to roll out during India's Amrit Kaal, a 25-year period from 2022 to 2047. The other ideas include passing of the long-pending Seed Bill, raising public investment in agriculture to 5 per cent of Agriculture GVA (Gross Value Addition).

According to sources, the proposal is essentially a revival of the idea mooted by the 15th Finance Commission in its report for the financial year 2020-21. In this report, the Commission suggested performance-based incentives for implementation of agricultural reforms by the states.

Under the Finance Commission's proposal, states would have been eligible for financial incentives if they enacted and implemented all features of the Model Agricultural Produce and



Scheme entails reforms linked to marketing, contract farming and land leasing

Livestock Marketing (Promotion & Facilitation) Act issued by the Agriculture Ministry in 2017, the Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act of 2018, and the Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act, 2016 prepared by the NITI Aayog.

The above reforms were identified for incentivisation by the Commission since it was felt they were necessary to liberalise "agricultural markets, provide for seamless trading, promote competition and catalyse organised investment from the private

sector for better growth in the agriculture sector".

However, after the Centre enacted the three farm laws to usher in agricultural reforms in 2020, the 15th Finance Commission broadened its recommendations. "It is pertinent to mention that out of these three policy reforms recommended by us, the Union Government has passed two Acts—(a) The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020 and (b) The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020. We feel that with these two laws already in place, there is no need for the Commission to incentivise States to adopt the Model APLM Act and the Model Contract Farming Act. However, the Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act still remains on our agenda," the Commission noted in its report for 2021-26.

"After intense deliberations, we have selected four areas and parameters for performance-based incentives covering poli-

cies, investments, development initiatives and outcomes: i. land lease reforms, ii. sustainable and efficient water use in agriculture, iii. export promotion, and iv. contribution towards Atmanirbhar Bharat," it had said. "We recommend that Rs 45,000 crore be kept as performance-based incentives for all the States for carrying out agricultural reforms during the award period."

While the government had accepted the Commission's other recommendations, on grants to states for specific sectors including agricultural reforms, the Department of Economic Affairs said, "Government will give due consideration to sectors identified by the Commission while formulating and implementing existing and new Centrally Sponsored and Central Sector Schemes."

According to government sources, the move to revive the idea mooted by the 15th Finance Commission is significant as there has been no progress on farm sector reforms since the three farm laws were repealed.

Uttarakhand may consider giving Agniveers quota in govt depts

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
DEHRADUN, JULY 21

REITERATING ITS decision to prepare a programme to employ Agniveers, the Uttarakhand government Sunday said their plan includes a proposal to give quota to those who have completed four years as Agniveer in the Army to get recruited in Uttarakhand Police and other government departments of the state.

Preparations are also being made to implement Skill Training Scheme in the state, through which retired Agniveers will be given employment-related training, a state government statement said.

Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami has instructed officials to prepare a proposal and if necessary, it can also be brought in the upcoming Assembly session.

"... Dhami has said Uttarakhand is a soldier-dominated state. The youth here are recruited in the Indian Army on a large scale. Therefore, the state government will leave no stone unturned in employing retired soldiers after completing four years of service in the Army," said the statement, adding that the Sainik Welfare Department has already started preparing a proposal.

Earlier in the day, Dhami recalled that in June 2022 itself he had said that Agniveers will be accommodated in state government departments. If there is a need to make a provision for reservation for Agniveers, it will be decided by the Cabinet.

'Ban' on govt staff taking part in RSS activities removed: Cong, BJP cite 'order'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE CONGRESS Sunday cited a purported government order issued last week to claim that a "ban" on participation of government employees in the activities of the RSS has been removed.

While the veracity of the purported government order, which was posted on X by Congress leaders, could not be ascertained immediately, BJP's IT cell chief Amit Malviya also shared the screenshot of the order and said that an "unconstitutional" directive issued 58 years ago has been withdrawn by the Modi government.

Congress general secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh shared an office memorandum, dated July 9, issued by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension pertaining to participation of government servants in RSS activities.

"The undersigned is directed to refer to the OM (office memorandum), dated 30.11.1966, OM No. 7/4/70-Est.(B) dated 25.07.1970 and OM No. 15014/3(S)/80-Estt. (B) dated 28.10.1980 on the above subject. 2. The aforesaid instructions have been reviewed and it has been decided to remove mention of Rashtriya Swyam Sewak Sangh (R.S.S.) from impugned OMs dated 30.11.1966, 25.07.1970 and 28.10.1980," the purported order read.

In a post along with the picture of the order, Ramesh said, "Sardar Patel had banned RSS in February 1948 following Gandhiji's assassination. Subsequently, the ban was withdrawn on assurances of good behaviour. Even after this the RSS never flew the Tiranga in Nagpur." In 1966, a ban was imposed—and rightly so—on government employees taking part in RSS activities, Ramesh said.

"After June 4th, 2024, relations between the self-anointed non-biological PM and the RSS have nosedived. On July 9, 2024, the 58-year ban that was in force even during Mr Vajpayee's tenure as PM was removed," he said.

Tagging the order, Malviya said, "The unconstitutional order issued 58 years ago, in 1966, imposing a ban on Govt employees taking part in activities of RSS has been withdrawn by the Modi Govt." Sharing a screenshot of the order, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said 58 years ago, the central government had imposed a ban. The Modi government has withdrawn it, he said.

SESSION 'CONCESSION'

AT SUNDAY'S all-party meeting, some Opposition leaders raised the issue of "decreasing number of Parliament sittings". CPI(M)'s Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas, in fact, claimed "a clever ploy was being adopted" in drawing up the calendar for House sessions, resulting in "reduced number" of sittings. Pointing out that the Monsoon Session beginning Monday (July 22) is also scheduled to end on a Monday (August 12), Brittas argued that there would be pressure on the MPs to end the session on Friday (August 9) itself so they can avoid travelling to the national capital just for the first day of the week. The MP said this "trend" was seen during some sessions of the 17th Lok Sabha too.

POST PROTOCOL

JANATA DAL (United) working president Sanjay Kumar Jha on Sunday criticised a Congress leader for "posting live updates" on X from the all-party meeting held ahead of the Budget Session. Jha said he wished the senior Congress leader had "respected the sanctity of Parliamentary proceedings". Jha didn't name the leader, but Congress MP Jairam Ramesh's post on X at 11.51 am highlighted some of the issues raised during the meeting. "...the JD(U) leader demanded special category status for Bihar. The YSRCP leader demanded special category status for Andhra Pradesh. Strangely, the TDP leader kept quiet on the matter," the post read. Quoting Jha's post, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijji said, "This is unfortunate... Everyone must maintain the sanctity, propriety and protocol of Parliamentary traditions". Taking a swipe at Jha's post, Congress leader Pawan Khera said, "There's a difference between an All Party meeting and Parliamentary Proceedings".

DIGITAL RACE

AT AN industry event on digital health held earlier this week, NITI Aayog member (health) Dr VK Paul, while appreciating the pace at which digital technologies are advancing in the country, said that adoption of one of the government's flagship Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission has not kept pace in the private sector. Of the 40 crore health records created on the platform so far, only 1.7 crore are from private players, said Dr Paul.

Mamata says will give shelter if anyone from Bangladesh knocks on our door

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
& ATRI MITRA
KOLKATA, JULY 21

WITH OVER 100 people killed in Bangladesh as protests against job quotas convulse the neighbouring country, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee Sunday said she would keep her state's doors open for "helpless people" from the neighbouring country.

While maintaining caution not to comment on "a different country", Banerjee said "we have compassion and sympathy for anyone whose blood is shed..." and offered "shelter" to anyone from Bangladesh if they "knock on the door of Bengal".

Sources in the Ministry of External Affairs called the CM's comments "totally misplaced".

"These are matters handled by the Union Government. A state government has no locus standi on the issue and as such, their comments are totally misplaced," said a ministry official.

Speaking at the Martyrs' Day rally in Kolkata, Banerjee said: "I will not comment on Bangladesh. It is a different country. Whatever there is to say, the Indian government will say. *Jodi asohai manush banglar dorja thokhokai, amra tader asroy debo* (But if helpless people knock on the door of Bengal, we will shelter them). There is a UN resolution that neighbouring areas can help if someone is in trouble. Earlier, when some people faced problems in Assam, they took shelter in Bengal."

"I will ask everyone not to comment on Bangladesh, not to fall prey to investigations. We have compassion and sympathy for anyone whose blood is shed. We are sad for those people," she said.

She also said that her government was ready to help in the evacuation of Indian citizens stuck in Bangladesh. "If there are rela-



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav at Martyrs' Day rally in Kolkata on Sunday. Partha Paul

tives (of Indian citizens) in Bangladesh. They may have gone there to work or to study. We are ready to help their return," she said.

On X, she later wrote: "Hundreds of students and others are returning to West Bengal/India, from the trouble-torn Bangladesh. I have asked our State administration to render all help and assistance to returnees. For instance, around 300 students arrived at Hilli border today and most of them left for their respective destinations safely: 35 of them, however, needed help and

we provided them with basic amenities and facilitation assistance. United we stand!"

Meanwhile, the BJP's IT Cell chief Amit Malviya posted on X: "Who gave Mamata Banerjee the authority to welcome anyone in India? Immigration and citizenship are exclusively in the Center's domain. The States have no locus-standi. This is part of I.N.D.I Alliance's evil plan to settle illegal Bangladeshis from Bengal to Jharkhand, so that they can win elections."

WITH ENS, NEW DELHI

314 students entered India: BSF

Agartala: Even as the Supreme Court of Bangladesh scaled back the reservation quota in government jobs, 314 Indian and Nepalese students returned to the Indian territory via Srimantapur and Akhaura Integrated Check Posts (ICP) in Tripura Sunday.

A total of 693 students have so far been evacuated from violence-hit Bangladesh.

A senior BSF official said Sunday that of the 314 stu-

dents, 152 entered India through Akhaura ICP and 162 through Srimantapur ICP.

BSF Tripura Frontiers IG Patel Piyush Purushottam Das said, "The current law and order situation in Bangladesh due to anti-reservation protest is having security challenges and implications for BSF also as Tripura is a bordering state covered on all sides by Bangladesh."

ENS

Congress dissolves its Odisha unit in poll setback aftermath

SUJIT BISOI

BHUBANESWAR, JULY 21

THE ALL India Congress Committee (AICC) Sunday announced the complete dissolution of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC).

Party president Mallikarjun Kharge approved the proposal for OPCC's dissolution, including the removal of the state unit president and all other office bearers, AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said in a statement.

The OPCC executive committee, district/block/mandal Congress committees, frontal organisations, departments and cells will be dissolved with immediate effect, the statement said, adding current DCC presidents will serve as acting presidents until new DCC presidents are appointed.

The AICC move came amid demands from a section of leaders within the Congress in Odisha for the resignation of OPCC president Sarat Pattanayak

in light of the party's poor performance in Assembly and Lok Sabha polls.

Even as Congress improved its tally in the Assembly from just nine seats in 2019 to 14 seats in 2024, the party's vote share reduced to just 13.26%, which was 16.3% five years ago. In Lok Sabha polls, the party managed to retain its lone Koraput seat, and its vote share reduced to 12.52% against 14% in 2019.

Days after the results came, OPCC chief was doused with ink, allegedly by some "disgruntled" Congress members, following which the Congress expelled five local workers.

Meanwhile, the AICC also appointed three-time MLA Rama Chandra Kadam, a tribal face, as the leader of the Congress legislature party (CLP) in state Assembly. First-time MLA from Basudevpur, Ashok Das, was appointed CLP deputy leader. Also, two-time tribal legislator C S Raazen Ekka was appointed the party's chief whip.

Award will continue to have Biju's name, says Odisha CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, JULY 21

TWO DAYS after the Odisha's Sports Department decided to rename the state's highest sports award – the Biju Patnaik Sports Award – CM Mohan Charan Majhi Sunday said the prize would continue to be named after the former CM.

On July 19, the Sports Department had issued a notification renaming the Biju Patnaik Sports Award as "Odisha Rajya Krida Samman".

"I came to know about name change of the Biju Patnaik Sports Award from the media. No decision was taken about changing the name of the sports award," Majhi said at state secretariat.

He said his government respected legendary personalities



Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi with BJD chief Naveen Patnaik in Bhubaneswar on Sunday. PTI

of Odisha, and the social and political contributions of "Biju Babu" would remain in the memories of both the state and the country.

The Sports Department's move had led to criticism from the Opposition BJD. Senior BJD

leader Arun Kumar Sahoo had appealed to BJP government to "refrain" from taking such decisions.

"The government was forced to reconsider its decision as it likely realised that it could backfire," a senior official said.

NIKHILA HENRY
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE PANCHAMASALI Lingayats, a dominant agrarian caste in Karnataka, are on a warpath again, demanding 2A category reservation under the OBC list.

On July 23, about 150 Panchamasali lawyers from across Karnataka will gather in Bengaluru to exert pressure on the Siddaramaiah government to argue in favour of 2A category reservation, which provides for better benefits including higher quota share than 2D, the category under which Panchamasali currently fall.

A prominent seer of the Panchamasali community, Jaya Mruthyunjaya Swami of Kudalasangama Peetha, has said that Panchamasali MLAs of both

the Congress and the BJP are in favour of 2A category status. "All the MLAs from both parties have always been in favour of reservation for our community," he said. There are over 20 Panchamasali MLAs in the Assembly.

"The MLAs of both the ruling Congress and the BJP will raise the issue in the Assembly," a Panchamasali Lingayat leader told *The Indian Express*. From the Congress, Vijayanand Kashapannavar will lead the demand and the BJP's Arvind Bellad will also raise the issue, the leader said.

The Panchamasali Lingayats have been demanding special reservation for nearly a decade, citing social backwardness of the community. The former BJP government, which was in power in Karnataka till last year, had given them 2D category reservation af-

ter scrapping the quota for Muslims. This was challenged in the Karnataka HC, which directed the government not to violate constitutionally provisioned reservations.

As the matter is currently under judicial review, the 150 Panchamasali lawyers have been brought in to fight for the community, a Panchamasali leader said. "Jaya Mruthyunjaya Swami has passed the baton to the lawyers as he thinks the matter will have to be fought out in the Supreme Court, if the government does not relent," a source said.

The Siddaramaiah camp is confident of "resolving" the crisis. Asked about the Panchamasali's demand, a Congress leader said, "We are looking into the reservation demand and will soon take a call on this."

Explained

Why state can't snub their demand

The PANCHAMASALIS are an important voting bloc in Karnataka, forming about 80% of the politically powerful Lingayat caste group. Two chief ministers—BS Yediyurappa and Basavaraj Bommai—were accused of not heeding to the community's demand for 2A categorisation. Both faced electoral debacle in the state, with the BJP losing to the Congress by a huge margin in 2023.

epaper.indianexpress.com



श्री गणेशाय नमः

On the auspicious occasion of

RAJKIYA

SHRAVANI

MELA

A HEARTY WELCOME AND JOHAR

to all the devotees in
Mahadev's land, Deoghar

May Lord Shiva fulfill the wishes of all the devotees



Hemant Soren
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Jharkhand

INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT, GOVERNMENT OF JHARKHAND

PR-NO-330218 (IPRD) 2024-25

Duped into working as 'cyber slaves' in Cambodia, how these Goans got away

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA
RIBANDAR, PANAJI, JULY 21

ONA hot April day, a 26-year-old ran over 2 km from the hotel where he was holed up for two months to the Indian Embassy in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, desperately hoping to return to his home in South Goa.

In May, a 25-year-old, also from South Goa, faked illness to escape the compound, where he had been forced to work in Phnom Penh for nearly a month, and ended up at the Indian Embassy there.

In March, *The Indian Express* had reported how over 5,000 Indians were "trapped" in Cambodia and forced to carry out cryptocurrency frauds. Government estimates at the time said fraudsters had duped people in India of over Rs 500 crore through such scams.

In Goa, after a directive from Ministry of Home Affairs, the state's cyber-crime police sifted through a list of Goans who had "overstayed" their tourist visas in South-East Asia countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos and traced three such "cyber slaves" who had been lured by human traffickers on the pretext of "lucrative jobs" in Cambodia. The Indian Express spoke to two "cyber slaves" who have since returned home to Goa about their ordeal.

"I contemplated jumping off a building on many occasions. I cried daily...could not sleep. It was like a prison," the 26-year-old says, recounting his traumatic stay in Cambodia.

Since returning, he has been driving a cab for Rs 13,000 a month — a far cry from the promised monthly salary of



Illustration:Suavjit Dey

\$700 (nearly Rs 60,000) for a "data-entry job" abroad. Until 2023, he made Rs 10,000 per month as a cement factory supervisor. With his elder brother suffering a spinal injury, the responsibility of being the family's breadwinner was thrust on him, forcing him to look for a lucrative job.

In January, a recruitment agent "Lisa Fernandes" contacted him via an acquaintance for a "data-entry job" at a casino in Thailand. She told him the owners wanted to fill the position "without an interview". Lodging costs and meals would be borne by the company. He and his friend, 28, boarded a flight to Thailand on February 14 to start a new life.

With a return ticket and hotel bookings provided by "Lisa" — part of the ruse to trick immigration officers — they got an on-arrival tourist visa at Bangkok airport. She reportedly told them that their employer would get them a work visa later. Picked up by her associate from the airport, they stopped at a restaurant near the Thailand-

Cambodia border. Another "agent" — identified as "Aurora" in police files — briefed them about their "interview" and got their passports stamped at the Cambodia check-post for a "fee" of \$200 (around Rs 17,000).

"Aurora", who said he was from Sri Lanka, and the duo walked into Cambodia. Having never stepped out of Goa before this, the 26-year-old says he "had no idea we were in Cambodia". Then, "Aurora" drove them for over four hours to a compound, spread over 20 acres near the coast, for "a late-night interview".

On the way, he gave them tips: "speak in English and do not speak unless spoken to". The 26-year-old says they failed the interview — and another one the next day — due to "lack of fluency in spoken English". While his friend — feeling homesick and disillusioned, returned home, he asked "Aurora" to keep looking for a job.

On February 19, he cleared an interview in Phnom Penh. The job would pay \$700 (around Rs 60,000) per month, but there

14 Indian victims of scam rescued, says embassy

Phnom Penh: At least 14 Indian citizens trapped in a cybercrime scam in Cambodia were rescued, the Indian Embassy said in a statement on Saturday and informed that they are working for their expeditious return.

The Indian Embassy in collaboration with the authorities got the 14 Indian citizens released and they are being looked

after by the Cambodian side, the embassy said in a post on X.

The embassy provided specific leads to the Cambodian police leading to their rescue. The rescued individuals are currently being cared for by an NGO working in collaboration with Cambodia's Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. **PTI**

was a rider — creating fake social media accounts to lure Indians to invest in a cryptocurrency app.

During the few days he spent in the compound, he saw "hundreds" of Indians sitting in front of desktops for "12-15 hours per day" to get victims to invest up to \$1,000 daily. He says they were trained in creating fake social media identities: using photos of "good-looking women" from an "ideal" Instagram profile — someone with 500-20,000 followers. To appear "real", they looked for someone who posted photos of a "routine life" — with family, commuting, drinking coffee, etc.

They were also given a script, in Hindi and English, on initiating a chat with Indians on Telegram and Facebook Messenger. "Newcomers shadowed seniors for a week to refine their chatting skills. During the chats, they would casually mention how investing in a trading app had doubled their money, making it possible for them to buy a designer bag that day," says an investigator.

As soon as the targets in-

vested in the app or investment fund, they would be "ghosted (all communication stopped suddenly) or blocked".

The 26-year-old says failure to meet daily targets would result in solitary confinement, physical assault, push-ups or squatting for hours and delayed food breaks. "During our shift, the calling room would be locked from outside. We could not leave the building and guards were stationed at all exit points," he says.

He reached out to his agent in a few days, saying he wanted to quit. The agent took him to "Long Live Hotel" in Phnom Penh, where he ended up staying for two months "with very little cash". The agent, he claims, kept stalling his request to get his passport back from the company.

One April day, he simply ran from the hotel to the Embassy, where he was issued a white passport (an emergency certificate for Indians whose passports have been lost, stolen or damaged). **FULL REPORT ON**

www.indianexpress.com

World needs to see India without prejudice: PM

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

UNDERLINING THE significance of India's heritage as not just "itihahas (history) but also vigyaaan (science)", Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday said in order to know India, there is a need for "a mind free of pre-conceived notions".

He was talking about the recent archaeological findings in Uttar Pradesh's Sinauli, where the remains of a 4000-year-old horse drawn carriage were discovered by the Archaeological Survey of India, corresponding to Vedic period, rather than the Indus Valley civilisation.

"Jaise jaise naye tathya saamne aa rahe hain, jaise jaise itihaas are vaigyanik verification ho raha hai, humein aatek ko dekhne ke naye drishtikon viksit karne pad rahe hain (as new facts are coming to light, as history is getting scientifically and technologically verified, we have to develop new perspectives to see history)," the Prime Minister said, addressing the gathering at the opening of the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) at the Bharat Mandapam here.

While the Western scholars proposed that chariots and weapons came to India with the Aryan invasion, ASI says the Sinauli excavation shows evidence of burials of warriors, weapons and chariots which is



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay at the opening of 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee at Bharat Mandapam. **PTI**

indigenous in nature. Talking about the discovery of the 4000-year-old horse-driven chariot, the PM said, "Such discoveries stress that in order to know India, there is a need for prejudice-free new concepts."

The World Heritage Committee meets annually and is responsible for managing all matters on World Heritage and deciding on sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage list. India is hosting the WHC Meeting for the first time.

Referring to the artifacts returned from abroad the Prime Minister mentioned that more than 350 heritage items have been brought back in recent times. "This return of ancient heritage artifacts is a display of global

generosity and respect for history," he said. He also pointed out the growing research and tourism opportunities in the field as the technology progresses.

On Delhi hosting of the global meet, Modi said one can find heritage and history at every step of the way. He cited the example of the 2000-year-old Iron Pillar which has been rust-resistant and gives a glimpse of India's metallurgical prowess in the past.

Union Minister for External Affairs S Jaishankar, Union Minister for Culture and Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Director General of UNESCO Ms Audrey Azoulay and Chairperson of World Heritage Committee Vishal Sharma were present on the occasion.

Sharad Pawar biggest 'sargana' of graft in Indian politics: Shah

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, JULY 21

SOUNDING THE poll bugle for the upcoming Assembly elections in Maharashtra, Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah Sunday alleged that NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar has "institutionalised corruption" in the country.

Addressing the two-day BJP workers' conclave in Pune Shah said, "If there is any biggest 'sargana (leader)' of corruption in Indian politics, it is Sharad Pawar. There is no confusion in my mind about this. I am saying it openly that Pawar has institutionalised corruption in the country."

Training his guns at MVA leaders, Shah dubbed Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray "the head of the Aurangzeb fan club" who was sitting with people who sought pardon for 1993 Mumbai serial blasts convict Yakub Memon.

In his first visit to Maharashtra after Lok Sabha polls in which the BJP faced setback in the state, Shah urged the workers not to be disappointed and asked them to ensure that party comes back to power in Maharashtra.

The BJP which fought the polls under the Mahayuti alliance won just nine of the 28 seats it contested.

The Union minister further said that whenever the BJP came to power in the state, the Maratha community was given reservation. He claimed that the state had made progress under the Mahayuti rule and during 2014-2019 when the BJP-led coalition was in power.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the BJP conclave in Pune on Sunday. **Pavan Khengre**

Shah also slammed the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi saying that he is celebrating his loss.

"A student who always stood first and got 80 per cent decided to aim for 90 per cent (in the exams) while another student who failed four times in the class decided to aim for 30 per cent instead of his 20 per cent. The results showed that the student who had aimed for 90 per cent got 85 per cent, while the other student got 25 per cent," he said in an apparent reference to performance of Congress and BJP in the Lok Sabha polls.

The NCP (SP) hit back, saying it is the BJP which has "legitimised" corruption by incorporating tainted leaders in the saffron fold. "They accuse political leaders of corruption, and then once those who they accuse join BJP, they are all given a clean chit. This is the BJP's washing machine process of legitimising corruption," NCP (Shahardchandra Pawar) national spokesperson Clyde Crasto stated. **WITHPTIINPUTS**

Ajit says NCP to go solo in civic body elections



Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar

AJAY JADHAV
PUNE, JULY 21

DEPUTY CHIEF Minister and NCP chief Ajit Pawar on Sunday said that his party will contest the civic body elections in the state independently.

"We contested Lok Sabha elections in alliance and will be contesting Assembly polls in alliance. I want to declare the party will be contesting civic elections independently," Pawar said, addressing the Pune unit of NCP.

The NCP will contest civic elections on its strength, so the local leaders and cadre should work to strengthen the party in their respective areas, he said.

This comes after a section of local leaders of NCP in Pimpri Chinchwad left and joined the Sharad Pawar camp.

The schedule for elections to local bodies is not yet finalised. After his party's poor performance in Lok Sabha elections, Ajit Pawar is facing the challenge to prove political mettle in forthcoming Assembly elections.

Pawar said some local leaders in Pimpri Chinchwad left "but most of the party cadre have continued to be with the NCP".

NCP's Pune unit chief Deepak Mankar denied speculations of local leaders leaving the party.

He also said that there will be more development in the state when the same alliance is ruling in the state and Centre.

Eight Indians trapped in Myanmar job scam rescued, says embassy

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

EIGHT INDIAN citizens, victims of job scam, who were stuck in Myanmar's strife-torn Myawaddy region, were rescued Saturday and handed over to local authorities, the Indian Embassy in Laos said Sunday, adding that over the last two days, 11 other Indian nationals, were rescued.

"Eight Indian nationals, victims of a scam centre in Hpa Lu, Myawaddy, were rescued and

handed over safely to Myanmar police/immigration yesterday," the Embassy posted on X and thanked Myanmar.

"In the last two days, 19 Indian nationals were rescued from scam compounds in Myawaddy, of which 11 victims were in Shwe Ko Ko and eight in Hpa Lu. Due to the ongoing armed conflict in the area... we strongly advise all to guard against their job offers," it said.

This comes almost a week after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had taken up the issue

with his Myanmar counterpart U Than Shwe on the sidelines of a retreat session of the foreign ministers of BIMSTEC member nations in New Delhi.

Sunday, the Indian Embassy in Yangon reiterated its advisory against fraud job offers targeting Indian citizens. The latest advisory came on May 31, which said there has been an increase in the incidents of Indian nationals falling victim to the international crime syndicates active in the Myawaddy region on Myanmar-Thailand border.

Indian-origin man shot dead in US, road rage suspected

Washington: A 29-year-old newly wedded Indian-origin man was shot dead in front of his wife in a suspected road rage incident in Indiana, police said.

The incident happened when Gavin Dasaur was on his way home with his Mexican wife. Indianapolis Police Department (IMPD) Officer Amanda Hibsman said officers responded to a report just after 8 pm on Tuesday last week on Indy city's southeast side.

Arriving officers said they found a man on the ground in the middle of the road suffering

from at least one gunshot wound.

"I held him as he bled out and I was waiting for the ambulance," the victim's widow, Viviana ZaMora said.

Dasaur, reported to be hailing from Agra, and Viviana ZaMora, had just got married on June 29, a little over two weeks before his death.

Witnesses told police the shooting occurred over a road-rage incident between the Chevy driver and Dasaur, who was driving a black Honda, local WTHR reports. **PTI**

14-hour work in IT sector: Employees' union slams Karnataka govt's plans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU, JULY 21

KARNATAKA STATE IT/ITES Employees' Union (KITU) has urged the Siddaramaiah-led government to reconsider its reported plans to extend the working hours of the IT/ITES/BPO sector.

According to the union, the government plans to increase the working hours to 14 hours a day.

The proposal to amend the Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishment Act in this regard, was presented in a

recent meeting called by the labour department with various stakeholders in the industry, it said in a release.

Labour Minister Santosh Lad, officials from the Department of Labour and IT-BT Ministry attended the meeting, in which the representatives of the union took part. The union strongly opposed the proposed amendment which, it said, poses an "attack on the basic right of any worker to have a personal life." The labour minister agreed to have one more round of discussion before taking any decision, it added.

Karnataka High Court admits 'error', withdraws order on child pornography

ARNAB CHANDRASHEKHAR
BENGALURU, JULY 21

THE KARNATAKA High Court has withdrawn its earlier order that stated that merely watching child pornography would not constitute an offence.

A single-judge bench of Justice M Nagaprasanna withdrew the original order, delivered by the same bench on July 10, and allowed proceedings under the IT Act against a man whose phone's IP address was used for "accessing child pornography".

The bench had earlier stated

that since the man was only accused of watching the material as opposed to publishing or transmitting it, Section 67B of the IT Act could not be applied.

The bench revisited the order on Friday and noted that sub-clause (b) of Section 67 of the IT Act had been erroneously overlooked. This sub-clause refers to offenders who, "create text or digital images, collect, seek, browse, download, advertise, promote, exchange or distribute material in any electronic form depicting children in obscene or indecent or sexually explicit manner".

The bench observed that judges were also not infallible, and

recalled its previous order quashing the criminal proceedings.

Reading out the order, Justice Nagaprasanna said, "We judges are also humans. Infallibility is not known to humanity... Therefore, to perpetuate this error after coming to know that there is folly in the order is no heroism... I deem it appropriate to answer the judicial conscience and am compelled to recall the order dated 10th July and permit further investigation to go on against the petitioner."

The bench rejected the argument of the accused's counsel that the court could not recall its order due to Section 362 of the CrPC.

Why 'Bhil Pradesh' demand is back in Rajasthan

PARUL KULSHRESTHA
JAIPUR, JULY 21

THE DEMAND of the Bhil tribal community for a separate state is gaining momentum in Rajasthan. On July 18, many members of the Bhil community gathered for a "maha sammelan" at Mangarh Dham in Banswara, a tribal-dominated district, and raised the demand for a separate state of "Bhil Pradesh" by carving out 49 districts from four states.

The demand for Bhil Pradesh has been frequently raised by tribal leaders over the years, and the Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP), formed last year as a breakaway faction of the Bharatiya Tribal Party (BTP), has been buoyed by its performance in the recent Lok Sabha polls to champion it with renewed vigour.

The BAP, which was founded by first-time MP from Banswara Rajkumar Roat, had included the demand for Bhil Pradesh in its Lok Sabha poll manifesto and said it would be the party's focus after

the elections. Roat had also called for the meeting of the community at Mangarh Dham.

According to the BAP, the proposed Bhil Pradesh would cover 49 districts across four contiguous states including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. This would involve 12 districts from Rajasthan.

As per Census 2011, there are 1.7 crore Bhils across the country.

Their largest concentration is in Madhya Pradesh at about 60 lakh, followed by 42 lakh in Gujarat, 41 lakh in Rajasthan and 26 lakh in Maharashtra.

When asked about the necessity for a separate Bhil Pradesh, Roat said the demand is based on the geography, culture and language.

"If you talk to people in Dungarpur or in Nashik, we all speak Bhili and have a similar culture. If Gujarat and Maharashtra can be carved out due to similar

cultures and languages, then why not Bhil Pradesh? Moreover, it is not correct to say that the newly created state will be just for Bhils. At the gathering organised on July 18, there were Rajput, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Muslim community leaders supporting our cause," Roat told *The Indian Express*.

According to Roat and other BAP leaders, the demand for Bhil Pradesh dates back to 1913. The BTP leaders claim that Govind Giri Banjara, a tribal activist and social reformer, first demanded a Bhil state in 1913 when

he mobilised a gathering of thousands of tribals at Mangarh Hill. On November 17, 1913, around 1,500 tribals were massacred by the British for their rebellion.

Roat said his party was just following the footsteps of the ancestors. "Govindji Maharaj demanded a separate Bhil state, so that the exploitation of tribals,

which has been going on for so long, will end. The British government even drafted a map for a separate Bhil state in the 1900s, which is proof this is not a newly created demand but that we are fighting a battle for our existence," he said.

Sources in the Congress say the party has always supported the Bhil Pradesh demand as it has a strong presence in tribal belts. However, since the rise of the BTP and the BAP, the Congress has backed down over the issue and decided not to vocally support it.

The demand for a separate Bhil state was raised in the Rajasthan Assembly last Thursday. Thawarchand Meena, the BAP MLA from Dhariawad, said, "Today, when I am speaking in the House, 10 lakh tribals from four states are attending the maha sammelan at Mangarh Dham. We tribals have been divided into Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Our language, culture, customs are the same, then why can't we together form a Bhil state?"

The BAP leaders have even

said that they do not consider themselves Hindus. Two weeks ago, state Education Minister Madan Dilawar had asked the tribal leaders to take a DNA test if they do not consider themselves Hindus. Dilawar later apologised in the Assembly after protests by the BAP leaders. Both BAP MLAs wore "Bhil Pradesh" T-shirts during the Assembly session.

Samaram Garasiya, the BJP's tribal MLA from Sirohi district's Pindwara-Abu seat, said tribals who do not consider themselves Hindus do not have the right to reservation. "Tribals convert to Christianity. If they are not Hindus, then why are they taking advantage of reservation? Such people are not entitled to take advantage of the schemes run for the tribal areas. We do not support a state made on the basis of one community," he said.

On July 18, Roat and other BAP leaders acknowledged that their demand for a separate state would not be fulfilled soon, but they would continue their struggle to keep the movement alive.

9 EXPRESS NETWORK

Truck dumps gravel on 2 MP women; Cong targets govt, CM says accused held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE BHO PAL, JULY 21

TWO WOMEN protesting the construction of a road at a Madhya Pradesh village were nearly buried alive when gravel was dumped on them from a dumper truck, police said.

The incident took place in Hinauta, in Rewa district. The women, Mamta Pandey and Asha Pandey, were buried up to their waist and neck respectively in gravel before being rescued by local residents. One of the women had lost consciousness and required medical attention.

The driver of the dumper truck, Vipin Pandey, has been arrested and the vehicle has been seized by police. The women were protesting the construction of a road that they claimed was coming up in their leased land. As the opposition Congress targeted the BJP-ruled state government, raising questions over the law and order situation in MP after the incident, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said women's safety has been a top priority of his government. Police took swift action and arrested one of the three accused, the CM said. MP Congress chief Jitu Patwari said the Rewa incident has once again raised serious questions about women's safety under the BJP-ruled government as MP "ranks first in atrocities against women". He claimed the MP government has repeatedly failed to stop crimes against women. (WITH PTI INPUTS)

India comes 4th at Maths Olympiad, PM lauds team

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE MUMBAI, JULY 21

IN ITS best performance since 1989 when the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) began, the Indian team created history in the event held at Bath, United Kingdom, earlier this month with four gold medals, a silver medal and an honourable mention.

The team was led by Professor Krishnan Sivasubramanian of the Department of Mathematics, IIT-Bombay. It had Adhitya Mangudya Venkata Ganesh from Pune and Rushil Mathur from Mumbai, Ananda Bhaduri from Guwahati, Assam, and Kanav Talwar from Noida, Uttar Pradesh — all who won gold medals. Arjun Gupta from Delhi won silver medal and Siddharth Choppara from Pune won honourable mention. The team's rank is 4 out of 108 participating countries. Before this, the team recorded its best performance with rank 7 in 2001 and 1998. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the team via a post on X, appreciating their remarkable achievement. India's total score at the Olympiad is 167, which is only a mark behind South Korea which ranked third.

PARUL KULSHRESTHA KOTA, JULY 21

AROUND 17 km from the hubbub of Kota, where lakhs of JEE and NEET aspirants spend years in hope of walking the corridors of India's top engineering and medical institutes, a Rs 1,500-crore luxury hostel project in the Rajasthan city has started resembling a ghost town.

"To-Let" and "For Sale" posters dot the nearly 300 buildings today, which sprang up in Coral Park on Baran Road over the past five years in response to plans to move Kota's numerous coaching institutes to this government-allocated education zone.

Since January this year, investors of the ambitious Coral Park have been feeling the pinch due to a 30-40% dip in admissions in Kota, which is usually home to over 2 lakh JEE and NEET aspirants annually. ALLEN Career Institute in Kota, which had 125,000 students last year, says it has just 82,000 students this time, while Resonance Kota has 7,000

After 'love jihad' claims unravel, families in Uttarakhand town grapple with new normal

'We act like we've forgotten and moved on'

AVANEESH MISHRA PUROLA, JULY 21

ON THE surface, life seems to have returned to normal in the small town of Purola, nestled among the hills in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district, after the chaos it witnessed last year. Familiar faces were back in the market, which bustled with activity — a stark contrast to the agitations and shuttered shops seen last year.

Beneath the surface, however, there were deep, unhealed wounds for dozens of families who, despite having lived and done business in the town for decades, had to flee as "anti-outsider" sentiment boiled over last year in the aftermath of a single allegation that could not be substantiated in court.

On May 26 last year, a complaint by a 14-year-old girl's maternal uncle accused two young men, Ubaid Khan (25) and Jitendra Saini (24), of attempting to abduct his niece. This accusation sparked a wave of unrest in Purola, as allegations of "love jihad" ignited tensions.

Protest rallies held by right-



At the market area in Purola in Uttarkashi district. Express

wing groups, local traders union, and some residents called for action against the accused and demanded verification processes of those they deemed "outsiders". Posters appeared overnight, threatening Muslim traders with dire consequences if they did not shut down their shops. The case, however, fell apart in court. The girl's uncle admitted that his complaint was based solely on what he had been told by a neighbour, Ashish Chunar. Chunar, who had claimed to be an eyewitness, failed to identify the accused in court and confessed he did not know if they were taking the girl somewhere. Ubaid and Jitendra were acquitted.

The damage done to the relationship between communities in the town was harder to undo. A Muslim shopkeeper recounted

how the incident forced nearly all of the town's 40 Muslim families to flee. While most returned after several months, seven-eight families chose to leave Purola for good. "While everything appears to be the same as before, on the inside, we can sense a new dislike towards us. When all that was happening last year, my kids asked why the others were abusing us. I did not have an answer then. I do not have an answer now. Those same people who ignited all this come to my shop now and act like nothing ever happened. We also act like we have forgotten everything and moved on," said the shopkeeper.

During last year's unrest, the flex boards displaying his shop name were removed. He has not reinstalled the board. His family had come to Purola in 1978 from

Bijnor, and his shop was one of the first few in the area, he said. Three generations of his family lived here. "This is my birthplace. I studied in the local Saraswati Shishu Mandir. Most of my friends here are Hindus. I never felt like an outsider... But an incident, that too an entirely fake incident, changed our lives. Now, I do not feel like living here anymore. I feel suffocated. I have started thinking about leaving town," he said.

Sitting alone at his tailoring shop, 30-year-old Shah Nawaz also recounted how his family was impacted. They had purchased their own house in the Purola market area in 2004, a place that his father had rented since 1992. Shah Nawaz used to live there with his elder brother and his mother. But after the incident last year, he sold the house. "This place broke my mother's heart, and she was too scared to live here. This is why she and my brother, Shahid, left for Vikas Nagar (a Muslim-majority locality) in Dehradun. I stayed here to continue my tailoring business," said Shah Nawaz. His business has also been hit. "We are rarely greeted by others. My business has also gone down by around 50%," he said.

The Muslim man who used to run a readymade garment shop below Shah Nawaz's tailor shop has shut down his business permanently and left town. Another garment shop, which belonged to

one Saleem Ahmad and was named after his father Shakeel Ahmad, has been renamed "Raghunath Garments" under new ownership.

In the complaint, the uncle of the 14-year-old girl had alleged that on May 26 last year, Ubaid Khan and Jitendra Saini had lured her to a shop at Kumola Road and was preparing to take her away on the promise of marriage when Ashish Chunar, the "eyewitness", intervened and foiled the plan.

However, Chunar told *The Indian Express* that while he saw two men with the girl and assumed that they were abducting her, he had never named Ubaid and Jitendra. According to the court order of May 10 acquitting the two men, the girl had testified that she had gone to the market to get a kurti stitched and asked the two men where the tailor's shop was and requested them to take her there. From there, Chunar came and took her away, she said, adding, "The accused were not taking me anywhere. Rather, they were going with me to the tailor's shop when I asked."

Chunar said, "After the acquittal of the accused, my father scolded me, thinking that I created unnecessary trouble for two innocent men... However, after court order came, they (the two accused) thanked me for my statement (in which the two were not identified, leading to acquittal)."

Shirur landslide: Army, Navy roped in for rescue

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE BENGALURU, JULY 21

IN A bid to rescue three persons caught in a landslide along NH-66 at Shirur, the Karnataka government has roped in the Army and Navy. The incident took place in Uttara Kannada district on July 16. The soldiers have been called in to scan the waters nearby for possible traces of the missing people.

According to the government, 10 people were caught in the landslide and bodies of seven — five from the same family — were recovered by Saturday. The rescue operations, which entered its sixth day, continue to be hampered by the spell of very heavy rainfall.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who visited the spot Sunday, said that the state government would petition the Centre to initiate action against those responsible for



'Highway works unscientific': CM seeks action

the unscientific highway works that caused the accident.

A total of 44 Army personnel joined the rescue operations on Sunday, adding to the force of 44 State Disaster Response Force and 24 NDRF personnel at the landslide site. Multiple earth movers are deployed to clear the debris piled atop the highway stretch.

Among the three missing persons, one is identified as Arjun from Kerala. He was a lorry driver. Both Arjun and his vehicle remain untraced.

Of the seven bodies traced, the five from the same family ran a small hotel along the stretch of the accident.

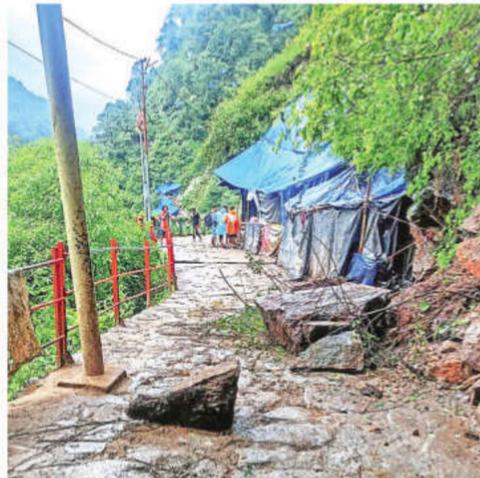
3 dead, 8 hurt in Kedarnath landslide

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE DEHRADUN, JULY 21

AT LEAST three people were killed and eight injured on the Kedarnath yatra route in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur district after a landslide hit the area on Sunday morning.

According to the information provided by the SDRF, the landslide occurred near Chirbasa when the pilgrims were travelling on foot to reach the Kedarnath temple from Gaurikund. The deceased were identified as Maharashtra natives Kishore Arun Parate, 31, from Nagpur; Sunil Mahadev Kale, 24, from Jalna; and Anurag Bisht, 22, from Rudrapur.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami offered condolences to the families of the deceased. "Relief and rescue work is going on at the site, I am constantly in touch with the officials," he said.



Rescue operation underway at the landslide site on Kedarnath trekking route in Rudrapur on Sunday. PTI

Plant a tree in mother's name: CM's festival call

Dehradun: On the occasion of Guru Purnima, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami participated in a program in Dehradun with his mother and planted trees under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam', the Chief Minister also urged people to plant trees. A large number of X users made posts backing Dhami's appeal, after which #JoinEkPedMaaKeNaam started trending on X. **ENS**

Punjab man gets 70 years in jail for three murders

JAGDEEP SINGH DEEP MOHALI, ROPAR, JULY 21

A COURT in Punjab has sentenced a man to 70 years in jail for three murders and an attempt to murder.

The district and sessions court in Rupnagar (Ropar) handed out three life terms to the convict in a triple murder case.

The court also awarded him

10-year jail for attempt to murder. The convict will have to undergo a total of 70 years in jail as the court ordered that all sentences will run consecutively.

The court of Rupnagar Sessions Judge Ramesh Kumari convicted Alam, a resident of Morinda town, on July 20. On the intervening night of June 3 and 4, 2020, the convict, Alam, had murdered his wife Kajal, sister-in-law Jaspreet Kaur and nephew Sahil with an axe.

FIR filed against CEO of firm for 'molesting' woman on flight

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, JULY 21

THE BIDHANNAGAR Police in West Bengal Sunday registered an FIR against a top executive of a firm with links to Naveen Jindal-promoted entities for allegedly molesting a woman on a flight from Kolkata to Abu Dhabi on July 16.

"We have received a complaint via email. On the basis of the email, an investigation has been initiated... The email is being treated as the FIR," Aishwarya Sagar, DC (Airport Division) of Bidhannagar City Police told *The Indian Express*, adding, "We have assured the woman of a thorough investigation."

The investigators will speak with the woman through video conference on Monday, sources said. The accused is most likely to be summoned soon, they added.

The case has been filed under BNS sections 74 (assault or use of criminal force with intent to outrage modesty), 75 (uttering words or making gestures or exhibiting any object in any form insulting the modesty of a

woman) and 79 (modesty of any woman, utters any words, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object in any form).

The 28-year-old woman, whose social media profile describes her as the co-chair of the India Conference at Harvard, identified the accused as Dinesh Kumar Saraogi, the CEO of Oman-based Vulcan Green Steel.

In her social media posts, the woman had written that after asking if she likes to watch movies, the accused allegedly "whipped out his phone and earphones to show me porn" and "he started groping me".

The executive has been placed on administrative leave by the Jindal Group, which has also initiated a third-party investigation into the matter.

On its website, Vulcan Green Steel calls itself a sister company to Jindal Shaded Iron & Steel LLC, an Oman-based firm controlled by key management personnel of Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL).

Saraogi stepped down as an executive director of JSPL's board in March 2023, according to company reports. He was also the CEO of the company's steel business until he stepped down.

Amroha, Alwar, Nadia: 3 goods trains derail in 24 hours, no casualty

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE MEERUT, JULY 21

ONE AFTER another, three goods trains derailed in three different states — Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal — between Saturday and Sunday evening. No casualty was reported in any of the incidents.

The first incident was reported near Amroha railway station in Uttar Pradesh, where nine wagons of a goods train derailed late Saturday evening, bringing movements on both up and down tracks on the Lucknow-Delhi section to a standstill.

Routes for at least 28 passenger trains were redirected and approximately six local and passenger trains were cancelled. Normal rail traffic on the route resumed by Sunday afternoon.

"Nine wagons of a goods train which was on its way to Ghaziabad from Gonda in Uttar Pradesh derailed near the Amroha railway station on the Moradabad section. The drivers, Iqbal and Amit, got command of the goods train from Moradabad and they said there was a sudden slump in the pressure in the locomotive, forcing them to apply the emergency brakes which perhaps caused the derailment," said



Restoration work underway after a goods train derailed, near Alwar, on Sunday. PTI

Aditya Gupta, the senior divisional commercial manager.

In Rajasthan's Alwar, three wagons of a goods train derailed in the early hours of Sunday, Railway officials said. The incident happened at 2:30 am, the officials said. "The Alwar-Mathura route was affected but since there was no passenger or freight train during that time it didn't affect train operations," he said.

In Bengal's Nadia, an empty goods rake derailed at Ranaghat station on Sunday evening. The minor accident did not disrupt any rail service in that division. Eastern Railway in a release stated, "During internal shunting in Ranaghat goods yard, brake van of empty BCN goods rake derailed on Point no.133. However, the brake van was quickly rerailed at 21:56 hrs in Sealdah Division."

As student numbers dip, Kota's luxury hostel project turns into a 'ghost town'

admissions this year, against last year's 8,800.

Around 4,000 hostels or "residences" and 40,000 paying guests (PGs) in Kota are dependent on these aspirants for their livelihood. In fact, almost every residential property here has been converted to a rental accommodation charging about Rs 7,000 per student per month, including food.

Realtor Sunil Aggarwal, the president of Coral Park Society and owner of two hostels, including one in Coral Park, says his monthly income has dipped from around Rs 3 lakh to Rs 30,000 this year.

When coaching institutes like ALLEN and Physics Wallah first opened shop on Baran Road around 2019, he says there were no hostels in the area. After multiple meetings, investors decided to build 300 luxury hostel buildings in Coral Park.

Spread over 68 bigha, most buildings are owned by a single owner and have 40-70 rental units (a room and an attached washroom) each. On the ground

floor is a common dining room. The rent, locals say, varies depending on the facilities — AC, bigger room, balcony, television, a kitchenette — available. Designed solely for coaching aspirants, Aggarwal says only 8,000 of 22,000 rooms are occupied at present.

As per 2023 official estimates, Kota's coaching industry and its ancillary businesses were worth nearly Rs 12,000 crore. On an average, a student pays about Rs 1 lakh annually as coaching fee in Kota, besides boarding and lodging expenses.

Even shopkeepers at Coral Park have been affected. Sitting in front of their shops, Manoj Singh and Rajesh Saini say they open at 9 am each day, but usually make their first sale only by evening. They say they had decided to rent shops in this "up-and-coming area" in 2019.

"Back then, shop rentals here were around Rs 30,000. Since January, most owners have cut the rent in half. Hostels charging Rs 15,000 per room earlier are now renting them for just Rs



Designed solely to meet the residential needs of coaching aspirants, only 8,000 of 22,000 rooms in Coral Park are occupied at present. Parul Kulshrestha

3,000. We will vacate our shops soon if the situation remains the same," says Singh.

Blaming coaching centres, society president Aggarwal says, "Their owners are investing in centres in other states instead of helping us. We will go bankrupt

if students stop coming to Kota."

District Collector Ravindra Goswami says a decline in students has impacted the city's economy. "Nearly 70% of the city's economy is dependent on coaching. Teachers, maids, shopkeepers, labourers — almost everyone

here is somehow dependent on the coaching industry. We are hopeful that things will improve," he told *The Indian Express*.

Even small business owners are suffering. While a retail stationery shop owner says his business has been operating at barely "30%" since January, a wholesaler said his sales had dropped to "just 50%".

The situation is equally bleak in the nearly 500 messes in Kota, where students can grab a meal for Rs 100. Lata Verma, a cook at a mess in Jawahar Nagar, says four of her colleagues were fired due to lower student turnout, while Kamala Devi, a house help, says most domestic helps, cooks and over 40,000 others in the unorganised sector are scared of being out of work by next year. In many hostels, owners have fired wardens and cooks due to low occupancies.

Naveen Mittal, president, Hostel Association of Kota, says the decline in student numbers was "evident" from February this year. "By February, we would get about 20 calls a day enquiring

about hostel accommodations, but we get barely two calls per day this year. Hostel business is down by nearly 40%. Many hostel owners here lease their buildings, but lessees are struggling this year due to lack of occupancy," he says.

While many reasons are being floated to explain this drop, institutes cited two main issues: delay in NEET results due the ongoing court cases over the recent paper leaks and opening of multiple coaching centres in other states. The decline has also been attributed to the Central government prohibiting coaching institutes from admitting students younger than 16 years of age or those who have not cleared Class 10. Earlier, Class 6 students would move to Kota to prepare for NEET/JEE.

RK Verma, founder and managing director of Resonance Kota, told *The Indian Express*, "NEET results have impacted admissions in Kota. Besides, many institutes have opened centres in big cities, where their intake is 10,000-20,000 students. Students sui-

cides in Kota have given the city a bad name but I believe that every institute here maintains a safe environment for aspirants since our livelihoods depend on them."

ALLEN declined to comment on the issue.

An employee of a coaching institute that has opened "centres in 65 cities in 15 years" says parents now prefer to send their children to local institutes and not Kota due reports on student suicides. "We have also tied-up with schools, where our faculty teaches students on the school premises. This is helping keep the business afloat," says the employee.

Yet, employees at two Kota-based institutes claimed their salaries had been cut around 30% on grounds of "fewer admissions" this year.

An employee adds, "Every business sees a peak, followed by a decline. This may well be the decline of Kota. While the coaching business remains profitable, those who have hitched their wagon to these centres alone will be the worst affected."



WORDLY WISE
POLITICAL CHAOS IS CONNECTED WITH
THE DECAY OF LANGUAGE.
— GEORGE ORWELL

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

REVERSE THE SLIDE

Government's first budget should bring agricultural research in public and private sectors back to centre stage

INDIA EXPORTED BASMATI rice valued at over \$5.8 billion or Rs 48,389 crore in 2023-24. More than 90 per cent of that comprised varieties such as Pusa Basmati 1121 and 1509 bred by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI). IARI varieties also cover roughly a third of the country's 30 million hectares-plus annual acreage under wheat. Yet, this institution, acclaimed as the cradle of India's Green Revolution, had a budget of just Rs 710 crore last fiscal. Out of that, Rs 540 crore went for paying salaries and pensions, and another Rs 98 crore towards administrative expenses. Where does it leave money for research and breeding or investing in equipment — from scanning electron microscopes and robotic DNA sequence analysers to liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry instruments — to enable these through high-throughput screening of large numbers of plants for their morphological and other specific traits of interest? Or attracting talent, including through lateral recruitment of those with specialisation in genome editing, block chain and artificial intelligence technologies in agriculture?

The public farm R&D system, comprising the various Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) institutes and state agricultural universities, is in dire need of rejuvenation. Most of them were set up during the 1960s and 1970s; the IARI campus in New Delhi goes back to 1936. There's definitely a case for a one-time fund of, say, Rs 5,000 crore — over and above ICAR's nearly Rs 10,000 crore annual budget — to help revamp their dilapidated buildings and create modern research infrastructure. Such fund infusion should be accompanied by organisational restructuring and reforms. ICAR has too many institutes focusing on single crops (from soybean and cotton to grapes, litchi, pomegranate and mushroom) and even animals (camel, pig, yak, etc). Farmers don't grow wheat, mustard or chana in isolation; they plant these after harvesting rice, soybean or maize. What's required is a cropping systems-based research approach tailored to varied agro-climatic zones and, perhaps, more IARs bringing together specialists across multiple disciplines. All these institutions should also have autonomy in hiring the best and raising resources, whether through public-private partnerships and sponsored research or charging royalty on seeds and other technologies.

Indian agriculture is today facing challenges different from the Green Revolution period. Then, it was about producing more crop from more inputs. Now, it's about more output from less nutrients, water and labour, while simultaneously coping with climate change and extreme weather events. The first budget of this government's third term would be an apt occasion to bring agricultural research — both in the public and private sector — back to centre stage. This also means providing greater intellectual property protection for breeders and technology developers. The lack of an enabling environment there is already showing in India's falling cotton and stagnant oilseeds production. That needs to be reversed.

DHAKA'S GRIM TEST

Bangladesh protests speak of simmering discontents.

Government should use court's reprieve to apply healing touch

ON SUNDAY, BANGLADESH'S Supreme Court scaled down the quota in government jobs for descendants of freedom fighters from 30 per cent to 5 per cent. The decision will hopefully restore calm in the country after nearly a month of unrest. But the Sheikh Hasina government, which has accused the Opposition of fomenting protests, cannot afford to ignore the political and economic fault-lines that have widened in recent years — in particular the discontent among students, who were at the frontlines when the Awami League, led by Hasina's father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, steered Bangladesh's national movement. The government has denied allegations of using security forces indiscriminately against the protestors. Its claims are, however, belied by the mounting toll: More than 100 people have lost their lives, at least 50 of them on Friday.

While Bangladesh has had job quotas for women, residents of backward districts, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, the reservation for families of martyrs has been contentious. Critics claim that the system gave disproportionate benefits to those close to the Awami League. In 2018, a student movement forced the government to revoke the quota. But in June, the Supreme Court reinstated the reservation, triggering protests. What started as a peaceful agitation in the country's campuses swelled into a civil unrest in less than a week. The Hasina government's handling of the situation aggravated matters. The PM, who has time and again made the Awami League's leadership of Bangladesh's freedom movement an election plank, is reported to have compared the protestor to "razakars" — a term used for collaborators with the Pakistan Army during the liberation struggle.

Bangladesh is amongst Asia's fastest-growing economies. However, progress has not translated into jobs that meet aspirations in a country where 28 per cent of the population is in the 15-30 age group. Textile exports earn Bangladesh almost \$40 billion annually. However, by all accounts, the country's educated youth, especially university graduates, do not want to work in factories. Many enterprises are yet to recover from Covid-related disruptions. Allegations of corruption and Hasina's autocratic ways have stoked resentments. That people from diverse sections — from underprivileged minorities to religious fundamentalists — joined the students on the streets, speaks of discontent pent up over several years. Particularly worrying from Delhi's standpoint are reports of the presence of Islamists amongst the protestors. Anti-India sentiments are not a new feature in Bangladesh politics. But they have rarely gone beyond the margins. In the coming days and weeks, the Narendra Modi government should tap into the goodwill it enjoys with Dhaka to ensure the turmoil does not spill over into India's Northeast.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



SANJAY K BHARDWAJ

Quota's edge

Student unrest over reservation policy in Bangladesh highlights political and social tensions in the country

THERE IS A sense of hard dichotomies, of the people choosing between two zero-sum options that permeates Bangladesh's politics. This began soon after the country gained independence and its leadership began drawing hard lines between competing goals and principles — democracy vs economic development, political participation vs national integration, liberty vs equality, and pro-liberation vs anti-liberation forces.

In the ongoing anti-quota protests, too, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has invoked "liberation" by comparing those opposed to her policy with "razakars" — a pejorative epithet for those who collaborated with Pakistani forces during the country's struggle for liberation. The pro/anti-liberation dichotomy has been deployed often in the recent past with regard to controversial policies. These include the Digital Security Act, sending "war criminals" to the gallows and banning the Jamaat-e-Islami.

The current protests were spearheaded predominantly by left-wing and liberal student groups. The Student Federation of Bangladesh, and Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Chatra Dal were among the organisations that backed the campaign, along with the Workers' Party of Bangladesh (WPB). They have also been supported by the country's main opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), which boycotted the recently concluded elections, alleging undemocratic practices. To be sure, the BNP's own track record in this regard is hardly without blemish, and thanks in part to the boycott, its political influence and organisational strength is waning.

In Bangladesh, students' politics has a long and storied history. These groups have been at the centre of crucial movements, starting with the Language Movement from 1948 to 1952, which advocated for Bengali to be recognised as the co-lingua franca, alongside Urdu, of what was then undivided Pakistan, to avoid the imposition of Urdu on the Bengali-speaking populace of East Pakistan. It eventually led to the creation of Bangladesh. Students' movements were also crucial in the

liberation struggle from 1969-1971, the protests against the Ershad regime in 1989, against army intervention in 2007, and the Shahbag Movement in 2013, calling for capital punishment of all those involved in crimes committed during the Liberation War.

Given the long-standing ideological differences between the country's prominent political parties, along with flailing political institutions, it is easy to understand why such protests become massive. Students' protests have gradually shifted from common issues and asking for social change to ideological mobilisation.

This time, students of Dhaka University are raising their voices against the government's policy of "positive reverse discrimination" (the quota system). The students claim that the current reservation policy goes against the constitutional values of equality and equal opportunity. They are invoking Article 29 (1) of Bangladesh's Constitution, which says, "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic". However, the student wing of the ruling Awami League argues that the reservation policy is a tool for achieving the cherished goal of social justice and equity. They cite Article 29 (3) (a) which says "the state can make special provisions in favour of any backward section... for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic".

The current trouble began on June 5, when the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh nullified the government's decision to scrap the quota system. It reinstated 30 per cent reservations for freedom fighters and their progeny. This irked opposition parties, especially the BNP. The opposition argues that the ruling benefits the families of pro-government groups who support the Awami League. Protesting students too felt disappointed and angry at being compared to 'razakars'.

The quota system was introduced in Bangladesh as early as 1972. It mandated that 30 per cent of seats in public-sector jobs and higher education institutions would be reserved for freedom fighters and later, for their children and grandchildren. Subsequently, another 10 per cent of seats were reserved in favour of women and an additional 10 per cent reservation was provided for candidates coming from backward districts. Moreover, 5 per cent reservation was provided to members of tribal communities and 1 per cent reservation was awarded to persons with disabilities. Thus, in total, the country has 56 per cent reservation. This became a bone of contention as many believe that such a high proportion of

reserved seats ignores merit. The students have been demanding that the system be reformed. In 2018, they carried out massive protests and successfully pressured the government to discontinue the quota system.

The current trouble began on June 5, when the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh nullified the government's decision to scrap the quota system. It reinstated 30 per cent reservations for freedom fighters and their progeny. This irked opposition parties, especially the BNP. They argued that the ruling benefitted the families of pro-government groups who support the Awami League. Protesting students too felt disappointed and angry at being compared to "razakars". The situation turned violent and conflagrations erupted between the pro-government student groups and the police on the one side and the anti-quota demonstrators on the other, killing over 100 and injuring over 2,500 injured.

While the Hasina government sees the protests as an effort to dislodge Awami League from power, it did appeal to the Supreme Court to review the decision. The Bangladesh Supreme Court has now ruled that 93 per cent of the jobs have to be based on merit; the job quota for Liberation War veterans' has been reduced to 5 per cent.

Unemployment is a major concern in Bangladesh. However, the acceptance of violence as a means to express political disagreement will profoundly affect the country's stability. Hasina's fourth consecutive victory has provided comparative political security to Bangladesh and this has yielded dividends for the economy. Bangladesh is set to graduate from being a Least Developed Country by 2026. As it does so, the issue of unemployment needs to be tackled carefully. It's important to find the balance between aspirations on the one hand and levelling the playing field on the other. What the country needs is to cultivate a culture of greater dialogue as it seeks reforms.

The writer is professor, School of International Studies, JNU



MRINAL PANDE

THE KANWAR'S JOURNEY

Challenge is to underline ways in which hybrid culture is becoming embattled

MUZAFFARNAGAR IS SAID to have been founded in 1633 by Syed Muzaffar Khan, a chieftain in the service of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. Located in the fertile Doab region, fed jointly by the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, the city in western Uttar Pradesh is fast becoming a centre of sabre-rattling. The polarising ways of the state government impart an extra edge to the communal tension during the annual march of *kanwariyas*.

In the past, much blood has been shed in Muzaffarnagar over *zar, joru* and *zameen* (gold, women and land). It has also seen communal violence. The city, ironically, has also been home to writers and artistes, leaders and rebels: From Alam Muzaffarnagari, Vishnu Prabhakar, Vishal Bhardwaj and Nawazuddin Siddiqui to Liaquat Ali Khan, the first PM of Pakistan, and the farmer-leader Rakesh Tikait to rebels-turned-dons such as Indrapal Jat and Ramesh Kaliya.

The population of western UP includes Jat farmers, cattle-rearing Gujjars and Muslims. The vast orchards of the region — many of them planted by Muslims — produce some of the best mangoes, lychees and guavas. The community also set up factories that produce a range of items, including furniture and musical instruments. The thriving sugar industry and steel and paper mills are major parts of the region's economy. Muzaffarnagar is located along the national highway between Delhi, Haridwar and Dehradun as well as the ones linking Delhi, Mumbai and Amritsar. Last week, the DIG of the area ordered all

eateries and vendors lining the Delhi-Haridwar route to display the name of the owner (an indicator of his/her caste and religion) along with the mobile number — he has since made adherence to the directive voluntary. According to reports in Hindi newspapers, one Yashvir Maharaj of the Baghara Ashram in Muzaffarnagar, had claimed that the Muslims in the area were pasting photos of Hindu gods outside their shops and giving these shops misleading names to attract customers. The *kanwariyas*, he said, have a right to know what they are eating is pure Hindu vegetarian cuisine, unsullied by the touch and cooking ware of flesh eaters.

This is no time to be intoxicated with thoughts of the Union government not lasting its entire term. The challenge today is to engage with a social milieu, not just the government. It is not just human rights, democracy and justice that are embattled. The entire cultural space that gave birth to a long and steady hybridisation of communities, languages and art forms is being attacked in the name of racial purity, while the "Other" is being pushed towards ghettos.

The news created an immediate furore. Surprisingly, the naysayers included one of the token minority leaders of the BJP. He said this discriminatory order from *ati utsahi* (overzealous) state officials would strengthen untouchability. Asaduddin Owaisi protested that the order would isolate Muslims further. But by now the dissenters' voices were drowned in the din. The Chief Minister's office reiterated that no halal products can be sold on the route and Muslim owners must not camouflage their identities by giving their eateries Hindu-sounding names. Samajwadi Party leader, Akhilesh Yadav, raised a pertinent question: Who can tell the *dham* or caste of a fruit seller named Munna, Fatte or Guddu? But overall, the political narrative seems to be completely bereft of empathy and rationality. The *kanwar yatra* seems to have become intertwined with rumours about attempts to "pollute" the food of Hindus, who are deemed

to be "endangered (*khatre mein*)". The timing is also important. After the 2024 election results, many advocates of a secular state believe that all-pervasive religiosity, which often assumes communal overtones, is a thing of the past. Their optimism is misplaced. The state CM is fighting his detractors at the Centre and trying to emerge as the chief protector of cows and Hindus. Other voices are mocking slogans of Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas. The *kanwar* juggernaut will be a big presence on crucial high-ways from late July to the end August — with demands for nothing but kosher food.

This is no time to be intoxicated with thoughts of the Union government not lasting its entire term. The challenge today is to engage with a social milieu, not just the government. It is not just human rights, democracy and justice that are embattled. The entire cultural space that gave birth to a long and steady hybridisation of communities, languages and art forms is being attacked in the name of racial purity, while the "Other" is being pushed towards ghettos.

If you wish to strategise and stall the coming tide, then do not take the North vs South bait, do not wisecrack about "uncouth" *khaini*-chewing "bumpkins" of UP and Bihar or the "babas" who have been nurturing hatred. And at the same time, let us also not just watch. Let us think, report and write honestly for our own people.

The writer is former chairperson, Prasar Bharti

JULY 22, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

BHAKRA CANAL BREACH

FOR THE SECOND time since Army action last month, the Bhakra main line canal was breached. The breach, which occurred near the Siswan super passage, about 5 km downstream of an earlier breach near Romar is in all probability an act of sabotage. The breach was about 20 feet wide on the right bank of the canal when it was detected in the morning.

GOVT IN THE DOCK

THE MONSOON SESSION of Parliament is certain to have a stormy opening with various major and minor opposition parties declaring their intention to confront the ruling party on

its recent actions in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Sikkim. There is near unanimity among opposition parties in condemning the dismissal of Farooq Abdullah's government in Jammu and Kashmir. Home Minister P V Narasimha Rao, in particular, will have a tough time in silencing protest on this count.

INDO-PAK ON SIACHEN

PAKISTANI AND INDIAN commanders held an emergency meeting at a remote Himalayan glacier to discuss recent clashes between their troops there, Pakistan Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan, said. The meeting under a ceasefire flag last week was the first step towards a solution of a border dispute over

the Siachen glacier. Khan said Islamabad wanted to improve relations with New Delhi and efforts were continuing to prevent further clashes.

THE RUPEE QUESTION

THE PERSISTENT DEVALUATION of the rupee in terms of the US dollar over the last three years has led to a controversy at the highest official level. While one of the chief advisors in the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council has taken exception to the management of the external value of the rupee, Finance Ministry circles maintain that the rupee has been appreciating in terms of the other currencies.



THE IDEAS PAGE

Bankrolling growth

With rising credit supply and financial innovation, banks and corporates are in a stronger position



AMISH MEHTA

THE ABILITY OF companies to bankroll their capital expenditure has risen more than threefold in the past decade after a long spell of deleveraging and profit growth, a CRISIL analysis shows. Similarly, a significant reduction in bad loans and timely recapitalisation have meant that the banking sector is very well-placed to lend. Together with rising credit supply from alternative channels and financial innovation, the growth finance available for both the "great Indian infrastructure build-out" and corporate capital expenditure is arguably the largest in memory, including as a percentage of nominal GDP.

As India Inc delivered, cash accruals rose, capex requirements fell and working capital cycles improved. An analysis of companies rated by CRISIL (excluding financial sector entities) shows that the median gearing (adjusted debt to adjusted net-worth) was at a decadal low of around 0.45 times as on March 31 — a fabulous improvement from around 1 time as on March 31, 2015. (The total rated outstanding companies as of March 2024 were around 7,000, out of which the calculation was done for a subset of around 4,000 companies where consistent data was available for at least three years).

Assuming this increases to 0.75 times (this assumption is half of the typical peak manufacturing gearing of 1.5x, the leverage potential of each company will vary depending on business requirements and risk appetite), we still find as many as 2,222 companies having material headroom to take on new debt.

The study presupposed half of the available surplus cash can contribute to capex — as was done for the same set of companies for fiscal 2015. Given the low median gearing and surplus cash, the ability of India Inc to undertake capex now is three times more than in fiscal 2015. Put another way, capex ability was 3.8 per cent of the nominal GDP a decade back, compared to 5.2 per cent now. On their part, companies will closely watch interest rates, global uncertainties, excess global capacity, and the uneven recovery before going for large-scale spending.

The banking sector numbers — March 31, 2024, compared with March 31, 2015 — are extremely encouraging, too. The absolute net worth of the sector has more than doubled to around Rs 24 lakh crore from Rs 9 lakh crore. Net non-performing assets (net NPAs) have plunged to an all-time low of around 0.6 per cent from a peak of 6 per cent, while gross NPAs have crunched to 2.8 per cent last fiscal-end from the peak of 11.2 per cent as on March 31, 2018.

Both net and gross NPAs were relatively low at 2.5 per cent and 4.6 per cent, respectively, as on March 31, 2015, but peaked by March 31, 2018, while improving thereafter. The provisioning coverage ratio has risen to an all-time high of 76.4 per cent from 41.7 per cent as on March 31, 2015, materially limiting the incremental impact on profitability from potential losses on NPAs. Additionally, banks have resorted to write-offs to clean up balance sheets. Gross write-offs (excluding recovery at a later stage from such accounts) between fiscals 2015 and 2024 were over Rs 15 lakh crore, a large proportion of which



ARRIVING AT 3X POTENTIAL CAPEX: ANALYSIS OF 2,222 COMPANIES

Year end	Total debt	Additional debt available for capex assumed if gearing goes up to 0.75x	Total cash surplus	50% of cash surplus available assumed for capex	Capex potential estimated
--	Rs lakh crore	Rs lakh crore	Rs lakh crore	Rs lakh crore	Rs lakh crore
		A		B	C=A+B
March 31, 2015	11.90	2.75	4.00	2.00	4.75
March 31, 2024	20.83	11.91	6.91	3.46	15.37

1. The total rated outstanding entities as of March 2024 is ~7,000 which is large and diverse portfolio, out of which the median gearing was calculated for a subset ~4,000 companies where consistent data was available for at least three years
2. The 0.75x assumption is half of the typical peak manufacturing gearing of 1.5x. The leverage potential of each company will vary depending on business requirements and risk appetite

CR Sasikumar

happened from 2018 onwards.

Capital infusion by the government into public-sector banks and capital raised by private-sector banks have enabled them to write off NPAs based on the assessment of recoverability, build a healthy provisioning coverage ratio for existing NPA stock and yet maintain strong capital buffers. The public-sector banks have done particularly well. At 15.5 per cent, their capital adequacy ratio is the best in two decades.

India's credit market has seen the advent of new avenues of fundraising, such as infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs), real estate investment trusts (REITs), restricted groups (RGs), and sustainability-linked and green bonds driven by environmental, social and governance persuasions. It is pertinent to note here that India's infrastructure capex has increased significantly since the past six fiscals. The outlay budgeted for this fiscal is Rs 11.1 lakh crore.

Traditionally, infrastructure projects were funded either by the government or by large corporations. There was almost no direct investment from the public or foreign investors. InvITs have funnelled both equity and debt from public and foreign investors into infrastructure assets and allowed infrastructure developers to monetise revenue-generating assets, thereby freeing up capital for new projects. When revenue-generating assets move to InvITs, many benefits are engendered — diversification, lower leverage, well-defined cash flows and regulatory oversight. That increases investor confidence in infrastructure assets housed in InvITs.

Since their introduction in 2017, there have been over 19 InvITs with assets under management (AUM) of Rs 4.9 lakh crore, half of which is funded by debt. REITs are similar in structure to InvITs, but specific to real estate assets. Four REITs today have AUM of Rs 1.4 lakh crore, a third of which is funded by debt. Because of the healthy credit profiles of InvITs and REITs, corporate bond market participants are also confident of participating in India's growth story.

Today, infrastructure issuances are 15 per cent of the annual corporate-bond issuances by volume. Some structural improvements via a policy pivot can make these amenable to patient-capital investors — insurers and pension funds. This can be in the form of allowing investments down the credit curve — below the AA rating, increasing exposure limits to the infrastructure sector, and adoption of expected loss ratings. And by improving the capacity and risk appetite of the corporate bond market, take-out financing of operational infrastructure projects can be facilitated. This can, in turn, create additional credit capacity to fund capex in new emerging sectors such as green energy.

Of late, RGs have emerged as another innovation, with similar benefits of diversification, debt limitation and ring-fencing of cash flows. Today, there are 13 RGs rated by CRISIL Ratings, of which 11 are for renewables with rated debt of Rs 14,000 crore, where it is becoming popular. Such structures are expected to gain further traction.

Additionally, sustainability-linked and green bonds are gaining currency given the emphasis on mitigating climate risk. Green bond issuances have begun to fund renewable energy projects. These are favoured by overseas investors and can gather momentum with India now being included in the JP Morgan Emerging Markets Bond Index and with more such inclusions underway. However, the domestic corporate bond market needs to deepen more to become a substantial flank of funding. The enablement of this platform cannot be overstated.

Today, infrastructure issuances are 15 per cent of the annual corporate-bond issuances by volume. Some structural improvements via a policy pivot can make these amenable to patient-capital investors — insurers and pension funds. This can be in the form of allowing investments down the credit curve — below the AA rating, increasing exposure limits to the infrastructure sector, and adoption of expected loss ratings. And by improving the capacity and risk appetite of the corporate bond market, take-out financing of operational infrastructure projects can be facilitated. This can, in turn, create additional credit capacity to fund capex in new emerging sectors such as green energy.

The growth-finance wherewithal is at its decadal best. Regulatory facilitation will be the key to its full unlocking. Relentless execution, strong credit discipline and income spurs for demand growth will be just as crucial, even as the focus on sustainability is kept razor-sharp. That will ensure an enduring ascent for India.

The writer is managing director and CEO, CRISIL Limited

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It is most unfortunate that the country's democratic political system has been viciously undermined over the past few years... Pakistan cannot continue to sleepwalk through its crises. The government must start putting out fires instead of fanning more flames."
— DAWN, PAKISTAN

How to heal a fractured people

Assassination attempt on Donald Trump is a signal to leaders everywhere to dial down on language of hatred, mend broken bonds



VIKRAM PATEL

THE ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION of Donald Trump has triggered a wave of soul-searching about how the US has found itself on the brink of the unthinkable. But anyone who has closely followed US history knows violence is no stranger to the US, a country founded on the genocide of indigenous people, which enslaved millions of Africans, is the most militarised and has waged war in more nations than any other. The private ownership of guns, enshrined as a fundamental right of citizens in the Constitution, contributes to one of the highest homicide rates in the world and the most tragic of American cataclysms — school shootings. Trump is now the 12th American president, a quarter of all who have occupied this hallowed seat, who has been the target of an assassination attempt — four of them died. America's exceptionalism is epitomised by the country's embrace of violence, meted out with varying justifications across history invoking the Bible, racial ideology, or national security.

All that being said, there is the realisation that the shooting cannot be unrelated to the polarisation which has engulfed contemporary American society, a division of her diverse peoples which has intensified inexorably as the country's reckoning with destiny in November draws closer. The polarisation is about profoundly differing visions for the country. It is hard to feel, and behave, like one people in such circumstances. Solidarity, that invisible glue which binds people, begins to unravel. Such an unravelling began when the US embraced neoliberal economic policies, emphasising market-based reforms and policies as the key to realising individual liberty. These policies had profound consequences for American society, with a dramatic increase in inequality and the gutting of a once-great manufacturing sector, rendering the working as almost disposable. These consequences have systematically dismantled the solidarity built upon the foundations of the social welfare state and the civil rights movements initiated by Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s.

There is a rich vein of scholarship documenting the impact of inequality on the fabric of society. All these inquiries conclude that inequality fractures the bonds which ties people who share the same land, hardening the boundaries which divide one group from another, and amplifying deeply entrenched prejudices about the other. In short, inequality leads to a dystopia in which each individual care only for themselves, and those whom they identify with. A hellscape where the majority of the population struggles to survive with insecure incomes and opportunities while a minority enjoy unimaginable wealth and power. Such a dystopia presents a fertile soil to plant the seeds of hate, against those whose ideolo-

The writer is the Paul Farmer Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School



VINAY LAL

Death and desolation in Gaza

Israel's impunity shows it doesn't intend to change approach to ongoing conflict

DAYS AFTER ISRAEL began its onslaught on Gaza in retaliation to Hamas's attack of October 7, with the intent — as its own leaders openly claimed — of seeking the complete elimination of Hamas and "total victory", the US began casting aspersions on press releases from the Palestinian Health Ministry that had a count of the dead and the injured.

At a time when the ministry had documented the deaths of more than 7,000 Palestinians, President Joe Biden declared that he had "no confidence in the number that the Palestinians are using", reiterating that "I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed."

One might suppose that he was alluding only to the fact that in wartime, data on casualties is neither easily obtained nor verifiable. But there is something far more insidious at work here: In Western discourse, a supposed aversion to veracity among "Orientals" is an ingrained idea. Curzon, as Viceroy of India, exclaimed before students at Calcutta University that the Indian was accustomed to abiding by a much lesser standard of truth than the Englishman. If Palestinians are nothing more than "terrorists", no one should doubt that they are liars and that they have greatly exaggerated casu-

alties to win global sympathy.

However, nine months into the war, it is the credulity of Israel and the US that is at stake. On March 7, in his State of the Union address, Biden conceded that more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed. The White House admitted that these figures were drawn from the Gaza Ministry of Health. Though two UN agencies — the WHO and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — keep track of casualties in war zones, they have not done so in the present conflict; rather, they have furnished reasons for relying on figures released by the Gaza Health Ministry. As Farhan Haq, a spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, remarked at a press conference on May 15, "Unfortunately, we have the sad experience of coordinating with the Ministry of Health on casualty figures every few years for large mass-casualty incidents in Gaza; and in past times, their figures have proven to be generally accurate."

The "correspondence" of July 5 published in the *Lancet*, the British medical journal, on "counting the dead" thus takes on new and, sadly, alarming significance. As of June 19, the journal reported, 37,396 people had died in Gaza; at least another 10,000

lie dead under the rubble of thousands of buildings now in ruins. This is scarcely new information; however, the picture that the *Lancet* paints of despair, desolation, disease, and death in Gaza is of a different magnitude. The authors contend, rightly, that in every such conflict, the proportion of "indirect deaths" to "direct deaths" is at least 3:1, sometimes as much as 15:1. Over time, a large number of people will succumb from reproductive, communicable and non-communicable diseases that will spread in consequence of the nearly complete destruction of Gaza. The health infrastructure is in shambles; desalination plants have been destroyed; and though famine has not officially been declared, malnutrition and starvation have already become widespread. According to the *Lancet*, it is reasonable to say that up to "1,86,000 or even more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza."

Some ask: Why is Israel apparently being singled out? After all, the last few decades alone have seen other conflicts — some of them, as in Guatemala, Rwanda, Sudan, and Syria, on a larger scale than what is on witness now in Gaza. However, Oxfam noted, around January 10, that "Israel's military is

killing Palestinians at an average rate of 250 people a day which exceeds the daily death toll of any other major conflict of recent years." But there is much that is distinctive about this conflict. The US and the democracies of Western Europe, all erstwhile colonising powers, have condoned what Israel has done at every turn, despite for decades, shouting themselves hoarse with the slogan, "Never again". But there is more to it: Israel tends to act with impunity while claiming special status as a victim nation.

There is nothing within the known pharmacopoeia of how international relations and violent conflict may be managed which enables the world to deal with such a situation. The International Court of Justice has, to simplify its ruling, issued restraining orders on Israel, but it has not made an iota of difference. Israel speaks of the International Criminal Court, which has requested arrest warrants in the name of two leaders each of Hamas and Israel, including Benjamin Netanyahu, with contempt. Nothing on the horizon suggests that Israel has any intention of changing its approach or that it is truly vulnerable even to pressure from the US.

The writer is professor of History, UCLA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE TRUMP CARD

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A bigger tent' (IE, July 20). As the Republican National Convention drew to a close, it became obvious that former president Donald Trump is not only capitalising on the popularity boost from surviving an assassination attempt, but is also in a strong position to take on incumbent President Joe Biden. There is much to analyse in Trump picking the 39-year-old JD Vance for Vice Presidential candidate in the upcoming race. He is evidently keen to win over younger demographics in this election; he is also aligned to white, male America, and what it stands for in the country's fraught politics today. While there is no denying Trump's overall strong position and lead in swing states, three months is a long time in politics, and that certainly applies to the US.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

RACISM IN SOCCER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Tainting a victory' (IE, July 20). The French Soccer Federation released a statement condemning "racist and discriminatory remarks" chanted by Argentine soccer players targeting French players that were circulated on social media following Argentina's Copa America victory.

Instances of racism have plagued soccer around the world and have been exacerbated in recent weeks. Three Spanish fans were recently found guilty of criminal racist behaviour targeting Real Madrid's Vinicius by the Magistrate's Court of Valencia in an unprecedented ruling.

SS Paul, Nadia

A DIFFERENT VERSION

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Trump's coming victory' (IE, July 20). For Trump, there are many versions of reality of which truth is just one. Hence, when he tells lies, he is articulating just one viewpoint of reality. He plays to an audience which requires emotional gratification rather than a reasoned discourse. To his devotees, traditional institutions are no longer relevant for contemporary times. So it is acceptable to bend rules to attain a certain objective. When, in 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev was viewed as a progressive ruler who reformed the Soviet Union, Trump saw him instead as being weak and correctly predicted the former's role in its dissolution while he regards Putin as a strongman who wants to make Russia great again. It is only through this prism can one make sense of Trump's attitude and anticipate his future course of action.

Animesh Rai, Noida

12 THE WORLD

NEGOTIATIONS DRAG ON OVER WAGES, OTHER BENEFITS DISNEYLAND WORKERS VOTE FOR STRIKE

Thousands of workers at Disney's theme park and resort properties in California voted late Friday to authorize a potential strike, as contract negotiations drag on over wages, sick leave and other benefits. The strike authorization was approved by an overwhelming margin, nearly 99 per cent of the members who cast votes, according to a union statement. **AP**



Oil tanks burn after an Israeli strike on the port in Hodeidah, Yemen, Saturday. **AP**

Israel hits Houthi stronghold, downs retaliatory missile fired from Yemen

Houthis say will continue to attack Israel without any 'red lines'

REUTERS
CAIRO, JERUSALEM, JULY 21

ISRAEL SAID it shot down a missile launched from Yemen on Sunday and the Yemeni Houthi movement said it had fired several missiles at the Israeli city of Eilat after Israel's first public strike against the Iran-aligned group a day earlier. The Houthis have launched missiles and drones at Israel and disrupted global trade through the Red Sea in response to Israel's assault on Gaza, further destabilising the Middle East as war in the Palestinian enclave rages on after nine months. Israel says the Houthis have launched 200 attacks against it since the Gaza war began, many of them intercepted and most of them not deadly. But a rare Houthi drone strike on Friday hit Tel Aviv and killed one person, prompting Israel to announce its first strikes against the group on Saturday. The strikes by warplanes hit near the Yemeni port of Hodeidah and killed six people, local medics said. The Houthi movement, known formally as Ansar Allah, said on Sunday it would continue to attack Israel in response. Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdulsalam told Qatar's Al Jazeera TV there would be "no red lines... all sensitive situations... will be a target for us." The Israeli military said its Arrow 3 missile defence system had shot down a surface-to-surface missile projectile launched from Yemen on Sunday before it crossed into Israeli territory.

Israeli strikes kill 15 in central Gaza

Israeli airstrikes killed at least 15 people including women and children overnight in Gaza, according to hospital officials and a body count by an AP journalist on Sunday. Israel's latest airstrikes were in the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, where nine people including two children were killed, and the southern city of Khan Younis, where at least six people were killed including two girls. Men and women wept and embraced the small bodies in white shrouds. **WITH AP INPUTS**

Nepal PM Oli wins trust vote, says he will step down in two yrs

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, JULY 21

PRIME MINISTER K P Sharma Oli won the vote of confidence in the House of Representatives, securing parliamentary legitimacy for his continuing in the post. Revealing the agreement reached between him and Nepali Congress Chief Sher Bahadur Deuba, Oli confirmed that he would be in the post for two years from the date of his appointment on July 15, and transfer the leadership of the coalition to Deuba till November 2027. Oli also said that he and Deuba had agreed to re-view the strengths and weaknesses of the Constitution and the complexities in implementing it. Oli secured 188 votes in favour of the motion whereas 74 votes — from the Maoists, Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, and the Rashtriya Swatantra Party — against it.

"We (the two parties) compete in our ideologies, but there are instances of collaboration between the Congress and the UML," he said. "This is a continuation of that collaboration. We have agreed to work together to protect national interests, control corruption, improve governance, expedite development activities, and ensure political stability, by the public desire," Oli said. The veteran Communist leader was sworn in Monday as Prime Minister along with 21 other members of the Cabinet. **WITH PTI INPUTS**

IF NOMINATED, HARRIS WILL HAVE THREE MONTHS TO CAMPAIGN AND UNITE THE PARTY

With spotlight on Harris, Democrats will bet against US history of sexism, racism

Her candidacy would offer a stark contrast with Trump and Vance, the two white men on Republican ticket

JEFF MASON & BIANCA FLOWERS
JULY 21

THE DEMOCRATIC party will be taking a historic gamble if it turns to Vice President Kamala Harris to become its presidential candidate, betting that a Black woman can overcome racism, sexism and her own missteps as a politician to defeat Republican Donald Trump. In more than two centuries of democracy, American voters have elected only one Black president and never a woman, a record that makes even some Black voters wonder if Harris can crash through the hardest ceiling in U.S. politics.

"Will her race and gender be an issue? Absolutely," said LaTosha Brown, a political strategist and co-founder of the Black Voters Matter Fund.

Harris would face other big challenges: if promoted to the top of the ticket, she would have barely three months to campaign and unite the party and donors behind her. Yet many Democrats are excited about her chances. Some three dozen Democratic lawmakers have voiced fears that President Joe Biden, 81, will lose an election that the party has cast as a battle for the future of U.S.



Vice President Kamala Harris campaigns at Westover High School in North Carolina earlier this week. **Reuters**

democracy because he lacks the mental and physical stamina to win and serve four more years.

Many fear Trump and the Republicans could not only take the White House, but both houses of Congress.

Harris, 59, is two decades younger than Trump and a leader in the party on abortion rights, an issue which resonates with younger voters and Democrats' progressive base. Proponents argue she would energize those voters, consolidate

Black support, and bring sharp debating skills to prosecute the political case against the former president.

Her candidacy would offer a contrast with Trump and his vice presidential running mate, Senator J.D. Vance, the two white men on the Republican ticket.

Harris's approval ratings, while low, are a tick higher than Biden's. According to polling outfit Five Thirty Eight, 38.6 percent of Americans approve of Harris

while 50.4 percent disapprove. Biden has 38.5 percent approval and 56.2 percent disapproval.

The US elected Barack Obama, the first and only Black president in 2008. The only woman to head a presidential ticket of a major party, Hillary Clinton, lost to Trump in 2016. Supporters of Harris, the first woman and first Black and South Asian person to serve as vice president, argue she has already weathered unfair attacks related to her race and gender and is prepared for more.

"America has a history of racism, sexism, so I'm sure that will factor into this conversation, factor into her campaign," said Jamal Simmons, a former Harris aide. But he said there is a flip side: Black voters could be galvanized if Harris is put at the top of the ticket, and women, including some who regret not voting for Clinton in 2016, would back her.

Harris benefits from greater name recognition than the other Democratic leaders who have been floated as potential presidential candidates, he said. California Governor Gavin Newsom and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer are among those talked about in Democratic circles as possible replacements. **REUTERS**

Trump says Kamala Harris will be easier to defeat than Biden

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, JULY 21

REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL candidate Donald Trump said on Sunday that he thinks Vice President Kamala Harris will be easier to defeat in November's election than President Joe Biden, who earlier in the day stepped aside as his party's candidate.

CNN said the Republican former president made the comments to the network shortly after Biden announced his decision. Trump also later attacked Biden on social media, saying that Biden was unfit to continue serving as president.

Biden ended his reelection campaign on Sunday after fellow Democrats lost faith in his mental acuity and ability to beat Trump. Biden endorsed Harris to replace him as the party's candidate.

Biden had faced growing doubts about his reelection chances after a weak and faltering



Donald Trump and JD Vance at Grand Rapids, Saturday **Reuters**

performance in a televised debate against Trump late last month. On his Truth Social platform on Sunday, Trump said Biden "was not fit to run for President, and is certainly not fit to serve."

Other top Republicans, including House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, also said Biden was not fit to serve as president and finish his term if he was stepping aside.

Trump and Biden had been mostly tied in polls, but after the debate some polls showed Trump narrowly ahead of the president.

What Biden's exit from Presidential race means, what next

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden's days at the White House were numbered. On Sunday, he made it official, withdrawing from the US Presidential race.

Ever since his disastrous performance at the US Presidential debate against former President and Republican Party candidate Donald Trump, there had been demands for Biden's exit.

His announcement had been predicted over the past few days, especially with former US President Barack Obama and former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi leaning in favour of him exiting the race, after several prominent US Congressmen and Governors asked him to pull out.

US Vice President Kamala Harris is now the top contender to

be on the ticket — but the jury is out whether she will be the Presidential nomination or still be the Vice Presidential nominee.

But what does this mean? First, Biden's candidature was increasingly looking like a win for Trump — some predicted a narrow margin, some said it will be a landslide. His health, age, fumbles and gaffes had made it quite clear that the octogenarian was not up for the challenges of the job.

A new poll of Michigan on Sunday showed Trump leading against Biden, 49% to 42%. The EPIC-MRA survey is for the Detroit Free Press, which reports that "Trump led in every region of the state, including in metro Detroit", where Biden beat Trump 56:40% in 2020.

So, by withdrawing himself from the race for the White House — Biden has avoided a walkover by Trump.



President Biden at a press meet earlier this month. **AP**

Second, the natural question is if not Biden, who? Harris is the most likely replacement to be on top of the ticket — the Presidential nomination. Biden already gave his endorsement.

But that will again depend on the Democratic Party's nomination process and whether she is

the most fit candidate. If she wins the nomination, she will be the first woman of colour to be on the party ticket.

Being of African-American and Indian-American heritage, she will have those credentials — but in an increasingly divided America, her candidature is not yet a sealed deal.

Third, Democrats are fighting against a juggernaut of Trump-Vance ticket. This is a tough nomination, though not an insurmountable challenge.

Trump is basking in the glory after being feted at the Republican National Convention — especially since the assassination attempt on him has transformed his status to someone who has defied death.

And, by choosing JD Vance as the V-P candidate, he has

trumped the Democrats on the X-factor — Vance is the first Millennial to be on the ticket.

Despite the Capitol Hill siege stain on Trump, the party is backing him as the sole saviour and has emerged as the most popular Republican candidate to lead the campaign.

Fourth, this will be a key moment in Democratic campaign where they have to scramble to find the best possible candidate to replace Biden, and a combination of President-VP to beat the Trump-Vance duo.

They have to keep in mind the permutation-combination of various communities of Hispanic votes, Arab-Americans, and of course, the White, Midwest votes in middle America.

Biden, Obama, Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, Hakim Jeffries, the Clintons will all be putting their minds together to come up with

the best possible candidate to take on Trump and the Republican machinery — who have the momentum by their side.

Fifth, for India, it is a moment to watch closely the race to the White House. The positive approach towards US-India ties has been bipartisan.

In the last few months, the ties had suffered after the alleged Pannun assassination plot and India's embrace of Russia — but with the fluid situation in Washington, Delhi has been hedging its bets.

So, its embrace of Putin may age well if Trump comes back to the White House, but the shadow of assassination plot may still linger — irrespective of change in the White House. Delhi will wait eagerly next few weeks, till the Democratic Party announces its candidates in its convention in August.

Imran imprisoned in inhumane conditions, says wife Bushra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, JULY 21

BUSHRA BIBI, the wife of incarcerated former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan, has expressed grave concerns about her husband's safety in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, alleging that he was kept in inhumane conditions and given contaminated food. Speaking informally to journalists on Saturday, Bushra revealed fears for her own life as well, *The Express Tribune* reported.



Former Pak Prime Minister Imran Khan

According to Bushra, Khan's life is in danger, keeping in view the past incidents where he was allegedly poisoned and shot at. She added that their legal request to investigate the poisoning has not been addressed by the court.

Describing conditions in the jail, Bushra, 49, alleged that 71-

year-old Khan was kept in unsanitary conditions and given contaminated food to eat. She said that during their meeting in Attock Jail, Khan appeared emaciated and had to pick insects from his hair throughout the night.

Bushra also said that other prisoners received VIP treatment while Khan struggled without even basic amenities. Responding to a journalist's question about Bushra's claims of toilet cleaner being added to her food, she asserted the claims were true despite lacking physical evidence.

Amid property, debt crises, China releases 60-point policy agenda

REUTERS
BEIJING, JULY 21

CHINA RELEASED a 60-point document on Sunday on policy goals, ranging from developing advanced industries to improving the business environment, adopted at the end of a Communist Party Central Committee meeting.

The document follows the closed-doors Central Committee meeting, led by President Xi Jinping, which takes place once



Chinese President Xi Jinping

in roughly five years, and is known as a plenum.

It took place on July 15-18 as the world's second largest economy faces a prolonged property crisis, surging debt and trade tensions. These have led economists to urge Beijing to shift focus to boosting consumer demand and

away from a debt-fuelled, investment-led model that funnels resources into manufacturing at the expense of households.

But the plenum reasserted China's quest for "new productive forces", a term Xi coined last year that envisions scientific research and technological upgrades of the country. It listed as strategic industries "new generation information technology, artificial intelligence, aviation and aerospace, new energy, new materials, high-end equipment, biomedicine, and quantum technology".

VENICE IS ONE OF DOZENS OF CITIES IN EUROPE GRAPPLING WITH A GLUT OF TOURISTS, CAUSING FRUSTRATIONS AMONG LOCALS

Venice tries 5-Euro entrance fee to deter day-trippers, ease pressure on residents

ELISABETTA POVOLEDO
VENICE, JULY 21

WHEN VENICE introduced a 5 euro entrance fee in April, officials said the aim was to dissuade day-trippers from visiting at peak times, in a bid to ease the pressure on beleaguered residents forced to share the fragile Italian city's limited space and public resources.

So, did the fee work? "We are convinced that we limited some peaks," said Luigi Brugnaro, Venice's mayor, who called the experiment a "great success." But at a news conference Friday, city officials conceded that a more thorough

analysis of the data was necessary before it could definitively be said that the objective had been realized in this test phase.

City officials had singled out 29 peak dates from April through the middle of this month — mostly national holidays and weekends — when single-day travelers arriving in Venice between 8:30 am and 4pm were required to pay the 5 euro fee.

Over the course of the period, the entrance fee was paid 485,000 times, making the city 2.43 million euros richer, according to statistics presented. "Much more than we expected," Brugnaro said, adding that it had been estimated that the city would collect about 700,000 euros.

But critics promptly called the pilot project a bust. "They brag that they raised a lot of money with this contribution, but that shows the opposite," said Giovanni Andrea Martini, an opposition City Council member, referring to day-tripper traffic. "If you made that much, it means you can't control it. It's evidence of a failure," he said.

City officials said Friday that comparisons of visitor numbers with previous years was difficult, because there was no comparable data. They said a complete report will be made public in the fall.

Martini said that city officials had access to comparable cell-phone data of people arriving in the city in prior years, and that the



Visitors outside the train station, waiting for inspectors to verify payment of the entry fee, in June. **NYT**

available data showed that more people had come to Venice this year on peak days, regardless of the fee. "They have all the numbers, all of them — they can't hide," he said. Another critic, Franco Migliorini, an architect who researches overtourism, said 5 euros was too little to "stop anyone." "Just about everything in Venice costs more than 5 euros, practically even a coffee," Migliorini said.

Venice is one of dozens of cities in Europe, and around the world, grappling with a glut of tourists, and growing frustrations among locals this year led some residents of Barcelona, Spain, to take to the streets and squirt tourists eating al fresco with water guns.

The wear and tear of mass tourism has been especially felt in Venice, a collection of islands crisscrossed with canals, which is also threatened by climate change and rising seas. Last year, UNESCO, the United Nations' culture agency, recommended that the city be put on the list of its endangered World Heritage Sites, citing mass tourism as a principal concern, though Venice stayed off the "in danger" list after the access fee was approved.

Officials had warned that transgressors faced steep fines, but a city spokesperson said Friday that none had been issued. Critics said that fines could have been challenged in court, so the city tread lightly.

So, will the program continue? Only after the data has been further examined will city officials decide whether to increase the number of days in which the fee would be levied next year, or to raise the cost, which could double on some days, said Brugnaro, the mayor. Looking at one graph, Brugnaro said that compared with the first weeks, there was a clear decrease in the number of people who paid an entrance fee on peak days during the final days it was in effect. "That means something is there," he said. Martini disagreed. "All it means is that there were fewer people paying the fee, because they knew no one was being fined," he said. **NYT**

13 ECONOMY

MARKET WATCH MCAP OF 8 OF TOP-10 VALUED COS JUMPS

The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms jumped Rs 2,10,330.26 crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Life Insurance Corporation of India emerging as the biggest gainers.

PATENT APPROVALS TO FOREIGN ENTITIES AMONG HIGHEST IN WORLD

Indian patent applicants lead in FY24, foreigners dominate final clearances

RAVIDUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

DRIVEN BY increased applications in sectors such as chemicals, pharma, computer science and information technology, domestic patent applications in FY24 have for the first time outpaced foreign applicants, even though foreign entities maintain a dominant share of patents granted in India, at nearly two-thirds of the overall applications cleared, an analysis of Indian patent data has shown.

Patent approvals, an indicator of research and development (R&D) activity by companies and firms, continue to be skewed in favour of foreign entities with global IT majors such as Qualcomm Inc., Samsung Electronic, Huawei Technologies and Apple taking top spots, edging out Indian companies, Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks (CGPDTM) data showed. The skew in final patents granted too has narrowed, though foreign entities still account for over 70 per cent of the final patent clearances.

Trade policy experts said that the wide gap between domestic and foreign patent holders reflects the inefficiencies in India's R&D capabilities that are exploited by foreign companies often by pre-empting entry of potential domestic competition in the fast-growing Indian consumer market. Lower R&D activity, economists said, results from weak private investments and stagnant government spending. This has resulted in Indian manufacturing depending on imported machinery, parts, and foreign technicians to fulfil export orders.

Foreign patents in India among highest globally

Global comparisons bear this out. Patents approved for non-resident Indians and entities stood at 74.46 per cent in 2022, which is among the highest in any major economy globally. The

	Indian applicants	Foreign applicants	% of foreign applicants
2022-23	43,301	39,519	47%
2021-22	29,508	36,932	55%
2020-21	24,326	34,167	58%
2019-20	20,843	35,625	63%
2018-19	17,005	33,654	66%

	Indian patentee	Foreign patentee	% of foreigners holding patents
2022-23	9,239	24,895	72%
2021-22	6,397	23,676	78%
2020-21	5,629	22,756	80%
2019-20	4,003	20,933	83%
2018-19	2,511	12,772	83%

Source: Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks (CGPDTM)



World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) data showed that the comparable number in the case of China stood at 12.87 per cent. Notably, India has a trade deficit with 8 out of the top 10 trade partners. India's imports in FY24 from China alone crossed \$100 billion.

WIPO data showed that the countries with high spending on R&D had a lower share of foreign patent approvals. For instance, the share was as low as 22.98 per cent for Japan and 26.61 per cent for the Republic of Korea. Japanese and Korean products also hold a dominant position in smartphone and automobile sales in India.

The foreign domination in patent approvals in the European Patent Office stood at 54.83 per cent, Germany at 40.97 per cent and the US at 56.11 per cent. India is the fifth largest economy in the world as per gross domestic product (GDP) data after the US, China, Germany and Japan and aims to become the third largest economy in the next 5 years. Experts pointed out that the rise in foreign patents in India has been fuelled by Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) and Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, which is a source of 90 per cent of the patents filed by foreign entities.

"India had no compulsion to join PCT in 1998 but India joined the treaty. Around 142 countries are members of PCT and it provides great ease for a multinational company to file patents in

multiple countries simultaneously. MNCs target big markets for expansion and India opened the floodgates by joining PCT," KM Gopakumar, legal advisor, Third World Network said.

Domestic patent applications rising

Domestic patent applications, however, have been steadily increasing since FY19, bridging the wide gap between domestic and foreign applicants. The patent application of residents in the total request to the patent office rose from 34 per cent in FY19 to 53 per cent in FY24, as per data released by the Office of the CGPDTM.

However, rising applications have not yet translated into approvals as foreigners' share in total patent approval continues to be above 70 per cent for nearly a decade. Experts said that one of the key reasons has been the quality of patent applications as well as the patent ecosystem in the country.

Gopakumar said that the quality of patent approval considered sacred in economies driven by research and innovation suffers from a lower number of patent examiners in the country. The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) examiners in India as per WIPO stands at 597 who approved over 1 lakh patents last year. Whereas, the EU has deployed 3,982 examiners, Germany 821 and the US over 8,000 examiners. "In 2022 India was 6th worldwide in terms of

patent grants wherein a total of 30,490 patents were granted, with 72 per cent awarded to non-residents. It is noteworthy that this trend is reflective of the fact that patents often come with a built-in time lag due to various procedural timelines. In simpler words, patents granted today often stem from applications filed 4-5 years prior," a government official said.

"Until half a decade ago foreign entities dominated the patent filings in India leading to a majority of grants going to them. This trend witnessed a dynamic shift since 2020. In the 2022-2023 period, total patent filings by residents was around 53 per cent whereas in 2023-24 this figure increased to 55 per cent and this shift is likely to be reflected in future patent grants, depending on the merit of their application as per patentability according to Indian Patent Act 1970 as amended," the official said.

Stagnation in India's R&D spending

India's spending on research and development as a percentage of GDP has stagnated over the years. R&D spending as a percentage of GDP is lower than the levels of 0.83 per cent seen in 2008, the highest in the last two decades. The comparable number has slipped by 0.65 per cent in 2022 as per World Bank data. This is much lower than the global average of 2.62 per cent. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) professor Biswajit Dhar said

that India's R&D intensity has stagnated over the years and does not augur well for the industrial growth which is highly dependent on Chinese imports. "One of the reasons for China's manufacturing success was innovation which complemented its capacity building. Foreign firms coming in a big chunk of patents would not only increase India's tech dependence but also increase foreign exchange outgo," Dhar added. Notably, New Delhi's R&D spending is lower than the top economies which are also the biggest source of patent applications in India. While neighbouring China spends 2.43 per cent of its GDP, for South Korea it stands at 4.93 per cent. In Thailand the number stands at 1.21 per cent, European Union 2.21 per cent and the United States 3.46 per cent. India's former chief statistician TCA Anant said that lower R&D spending is also a reflection of the weaker private investment climate in the country.

"As far as companies are concerned, corporate investments are also low right now. Patents will come down the cycle, once corporate investments are high then R&D investments will pick up. But initially, companies will try to expand capacity with readily available technology. Research is a long-term investment. We were close to China in the 1980s but since then we have lost ground to China. Chinese universities have ramped up research," Anant said.

'Critical mineral processing: Need US pact to make Indian products IRA-compliant'

EPSILON ADVANCED Materials, a Mumbai-based company that manufactures graphite anodes, is a key player in the electric vehicle (EV) battery supply chain. Graphite is a critical mineral and a crucial component in a lithium-ion battery, serving as the anode. Epsilon has a manufacturing facility in Bellary, Karnataka, which aims to produce 100,000 tonnes per annum by 2030. It also has operations in North Carolina, US, and Vassa, Finland, alongside a cathode material technology centre in Moosburg, Germany. In a conversation with AGGAM WALLA, VIKRAM HANDA, Managing Director of Epsilon, discussed challenges around battery-grade graphite manufacturing in India, the importance of bilateral critical minerals agreements, and strategies for enhancing the sustainability of graphite production.



THE EXPRESS
INTERVIEW
WITH VIKRAM HANDA
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
EPSILON ADVANCED MATERIALS

What is the distinction between natural and synthetic graphite in terms of use-case properties?

Both synthetic and natural graphite have different properties and end applications. Natural graphite is made from flake graphite from the earth, with certain restrictions in properties and crystalline structure.

Synthetic graphite is carbon converted into graphite at about 3,000 degrees, which usually gives you higher performance. High-end EVs use synthetic graphite, while energy storage often uses natural graphite, which is about 30 per cent cheaper.

Customers blend natural and synthetic graphite to balance cost and performance, with ratios like 50/50 or 60/40, depending on their proprietary know-how. The market outside China is tilting towards synthetic graphite for high-performance EV battery materials.

There have been recent attempts to auction graphite blocks for exploration. What will it take to develop graphite mining in India?

India's mines are primarily developed for thermal coal, iron ore, or bauxite. Graphite mines in India serve processors like us, not cell factories or EVs directly. African graphite often goes to China for processing before reaching cell factories. To develop critical mineral mines in India, we need to promote the processing industry. There's a lack of focus on processing, where China leads. Europe and the US are addressing this, but India should do more. Current graphite mines in India are small, between half a

manufacturing, what is your outlook on the availability of coal tar?

Globally, coal tar is becoming a dying commodity due to steel decarbonisation, with countries like China and Japan moving to electric arc furnace manufacturing.

However, India's steel production needs to grow from 130 million to 300 million tonnes in 7-10 years. The only way to take those big leaps is blast furnace technology. That's where India offers this unique opportunity for coal tar availability. We're also exploring other feedstocks as well, including qualifying petroleum sources in Europe and North America to localise supply chains as we expand globally. Over there, raw material won't be coal tar-based, it will be petroleum-based.

How can the synthetic graphite supply chain for lithium-ion batteries be made more sustainable and circular?

There's a perception that making battery materials or graphite is polluting, but with the right technology and sustainability focus, it's possible to mitigate this.

We use a lot of power in our process to produce graphite and it is 90 per cent renewable power in India, resulting in a carbon footprint that is 70 per cent lower than the same product made in China.

In Finland, it's even lower. The power source is crucial in determining environmental impact. Can this become a totally circular recycled industry? We believe it still has a long way to go.

Unlike lithium or nickel, which are easier to recover and process back into sulphates to put into a cathode, graphite is a unique product as it degenerates in a battery over time. It is possible to bring it back to life and we are working on blending recycled graphite with virgin graphite, but these technologies are still maturing.

The EV transition in India has been bumpy off late. As a key player in the battery supply chain, where do you see the market going from here?

While we all talk about EVs in India and transition is happening sometimes slower, sometimes faster, I think we should really focus on the energy storage system (ESS) market because that transition is much more mature and happening at a much faster speed. Renewable capacity is growing really fast and a lot of that needs storage—that's the low hanging fruit in India.

Coal tar from conventional steel production is used to produce synthetic graphite. With the market increasingly looking at green steel

FULL INTERVIEW ON
www.indianexpress.com

General insurers report lower growth in premium underwritten in first quarter

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, JULY 21

THE OVERALL growth in premium underwritten by general insurance companies declined during the quarter ended June of FY25 in the wake of the lower growth rate in the motor and health segments.

The growth in premium underwritten declined to 13.33 per cent at Rs 72,758 crore in the June quarter of FY25 as against a growth of 17.88 per cent (Rs 64,198 crore) in June quarter of FY23 and 22.15 per cent growth in the same period of FY22, according to data from the General Insurance Council, the apex body of general insurance companies in India. The growth in premium underwritten in the health insurance segment fell to 16.58 per cent at Rs 29,915 crore during June

2024 as against the growth of 20.75 (Rs 25,660 crore) in FY23 and 21.77 per cent in the same period of FY22. On the other hand, motor premium showed a lower growth of 11.95 per cent at Rs 21,348 crore during the June quarter this fiscal as against a growth of 20.93 per cent (Rs 19,069 crore) in the same quarter of FY23 and 26.32 per cent in FY22, according to GI Council data.

New India Assurance, the largest general insurer, reported a 2.82 per cent growth in premium underwritten at Rs 10,670 crore during the June quarter of FY25 as against a growth of 8.66 per cent in the same period of FY24. In the health segment, standalone insurers reported a 24.95 per cent growth in premium to Rs 8,318 crore during the latest quarter.

"India, being one of the fastest-growing insurance markets, still

EXPLAINED Lower growth rate in motor and health segments

IN THE wake of the lower growth rate in motor and health segments, growth in premium underwritten declined to 13.33 per cent at Rs 72,758 crore in the June quarter of FY25. In June 2024, however, the general insurance sector received a major relief amounting to over Rs 18,000 crore with the GST Council dropping demand for GST on insurers.

has a relatively low insurance penetration rate of 4 per cent of its GDP, leaving a sizable gap. This gap is largely due to a lack of aware-

ness and accessibility of insurance and its critical role in financial stability during unforeseen incidents," said the CEO of an insurer. The industry's demand will be sustained by robust growth in the health segment as well as in the motor segment. Additionally, competition is slated to rise especially in the health segments as new companies have commenced operations while others continue to be in line to enter the segment, said a CareEdge Ratings report.

The report estimated that the Indian non-life insurance market will grow at a rate of approximately 13-15 per cent in the medium term. The overall business growth would be supported by macroeconomic factors, a favourable regulatory environment and the Bima Trinity, it said. FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

BRIEFLY

Vedanta bags two critical mineral blocks

New Delhi: Vedanta Ltd on Sunday said that it has bagged two critical mineral blocks which were put on sale. The blocks are in Karnataka and Bihar, the company said in a filing to the BSE. "The company has been declared as preferred bidder" for the Gollarahatti-Mallenahalli Nickel Chromium and PGE Block and Genjana Nickel, Chromium and PGE Block," the filing said. PTI

No shortage of coal for power sector: Minister

New Delhi: Union Minister for Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy said there is "no shortage" of coal for the power sector and the Centre will ensure adequate supply of the dry fuel to meet demand. "We are supplying coal to all thermal power plants. We have requested plants based on imported coal to switch their technology to utilise domestic fuel. There is no shortage of coal in the country," Reddy, said. PTI

Hero MotoCorp plans affordable EVs this fiscal

New Delhi: Hero MotoCorp is looking to roll out affordable models in the current fiscal, according to CEO Niranjan Gupta. Addressing shareholders in the company's Annual Report for 2023-24, Gupta said the two-wheeler major has a roadmap to scale its electric vehicle business rapidly. The company will be launching products in the mid-and-affordable segments this fiscal, Gupta said. PTI

Airbus assessing 8 sites for H125 helicopter India assembly unit

SUKALP SHARMA
MARGNANE (FRANCE), JULY 21

THE LOCATION of the planned final assembly line (FAL) to manufacture European aerospace major Airbus's best-selling civil helicopter H125 in India is expected to be finalised shortly with eight potential sites under active consideration, top Airbus Helicopters officials said. The FAL — the first in the private sector in India and expected to be commissioned in 2026 — will be set up by Airbus Helicopters in partnership with Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL). "We have identified eight sites, which we are currently assessing ... we are still in the final assessment stage, but stay tuned, we should be in a position to announce shortly," Olivier Michalon, Executive Vice President Global Business of Airbus Helicopters, told reporters at the Airbus Helicopters headquarters in

Marignane on the outskirts of the French city of Marseille.

While Michalon declined to name any of the sites under consideration, he said that the final decision would be based on a host of considerations, including attractiveness for employees, and suitability in terms of industrial activity, logistics, and regulations. Airbus expects the ground-breaking ceremony for the H125 India FAL to be held around October-November this year. The first Made-in-India H125 helicopter is expected to roll out before the end of 2026. The FAL was announced on India's Republic Day earlier this year in conjunction with the state visit of the French President Emmanuel Macron to India. This is the second aircraft FAL being set up by Airbus and TASL, with the two majors already in the process of setting up the C295 military aircraft FAL in Vadodra.

The India FAL will be the fourth production unit for the single-en-



An Airbus H125 helicopter under production in Marignane, France. Sukalp Sharma

gine H125 helicopter with an initial annual production capacity of 10 helicopters. Currently, Airbus manufactures the H125 at its helicopters headquarters in Marignane, and in the US and Brazil. Airbus officials did not comment on investment figures and other financial details of the project. According to top Airbus Helicop-

ters officials, the India FAL's capacity could be ramped up contingent upon growth in demand in India and the broader South Asian region over the coming years. "I know 10 doesn't sound like a lot, but starting from scratch, it is not negligible. It could very well be 20, 30, or 50 in some years, depending on the market demand,"

Michalon said. Civil helicopter use in India lags many other countries where choppers are routinely used for a number of purposes. India's massive population and notable economic growth make it an attractive potential market for increased civil helicopter use. Airbus expects the H125 production in India to "catalyse" the use of helicopters in the country.

"We have the flexibility to ramp up how we want it, and we will be working with our partner Tata in this case. But the idea at the end of the day is to meet the demand in the region from this FAL. And as the demand picks up, we can ramp up," said Sunny Guglani, Head of Airbus Helicopters South Asia. As per Airbus, the projected demand for H125 class of helicopters in India and neighbouring countries — Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives — is pegged at 500 helicopters over the next 20 years, with India likely to account for a

"large majority" of the incremental demand. Currently, the region has around 350 civil and para-public helicopters, of which around 250 are in India. According to Guglani, Airbus Helicopters has a market share of 40 per cent in the region in civil and para-public helicopters. "We have approximately 140 Airbus Helicopters in the region, and out of those 140, 100 helicopters of Airbus are in India alone, majority of which are the H125/H130 single-engine class of helicopters," Guglani said. US-based helicopter manufacturer Bell is seen as Airbus's closest rival in the Indian market.

Michalon described the current civil and para-public helicopter market in India as "embryonic" and significantly smaller than its potential, which was a key driver for Airbus Helicopters to take a bet on India for the planned FAL.

(The correspondent was in Marignane, France at the invitation of Airbus)

UK Foreign Secy's visit set to revive trade talks

London: The renewed parameters of the India-UK free trade agreement negotiations are set to be defined this week as UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy is expected in India on Tuesday, the first high-profile visit under the newly elected Labour government in Britain.

The free trade agreement (FTA) talks began in January 2022, under the then Conservative government, with a target to significantly boost the GBP 38.1 billion a year bilateral trading partnership.

A report in *The Daily Telegraph* quoted a New Delhi source to claim India would seek clarity on whether the Labour government intends to pick things up. PTI

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NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM



VENKI RAMAKRISHNAN
MOLECULAR BIOLOGIST

WHY VENKI RAMAKRISHNAN

British-American molecular biologist of Indian origin, Venki Ramakrishnan shared the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for research on the structure and function of ribosomes. His recent book, *Why We Die*, discusses our understanding of the molecular pathways of death and ageing. As the former president of the Royal Society, he has contributed significantly to scientific and academic cooperation between different countries



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

ON LESSONS FROM COVID

THERE ARE A LOT OF LESSONS THAT WE'VE HOPEFULLY LEARNT, BUT I HAVE A FEELING THAT GOVERNMENTS TEND TO DEPRIORITISE THIS SORT OF PREPAREDNESS BECAUSE IT COSTS MONEY TO CONTINUALLY BE PREPARED

Amitabh Sinha: A significant increase in average life expectancy would mean a rise in global population, isn't it?

It is not a given that if you increase life expectancy, you're going to have population increase. If you look at history, when there were big advances in health, for example, the invention of fertilisers allowing greater food supply, and the discovery of antibiotics and vaccines, all of those increased our life expectancy. The population did go up but then it stabilised at a higher level because birth rates fell. Inevitably, this is what happens.

Today, fertility rates are dropping all over the world. Japan, in the last few decades, has increased its overall life expectancy, yet its population is not going up.

However, if it doesn't go up, then the flip side is that you will have a very long time between generations because fertility rates will go down, people will have fewer children, and the same people will live for a long time, and the replacement will be slower. That could lead to a stagnant society.

Leena Misra: How do scientists prioritise research areas? How do they decide whether they should be trying to increase life expectancy or working to eliminate diseases?

Research priorities are typically determined by two things. One is, what is possible? Where can you make meaningful advances? And, secondly, what are the priorities of governments and funding agencies? Ideally, it is not the job of governments and funding agencies to tell scientists how to do their job. They're not really qualified to do that. But they're the ones running the government. Often, they're the ones who've been elected by the people. So, it is their right to say that our top priority is to solve the food security problem, or sustainable energy, or cancer, infectious disease or childhood diarrhoea. They may tell scientists these are the areas and you tell us how to address these problems. And scientists have to figure out ways to do it.

The reason that ageing research is becoming better-funded now is that societies are facing an older population and nobody wants them to live in misery. They also don't want them to be a burden on the rest of society.

Amitabh Sinha: One of the diseases that makes repeated mentions in your book is cancer. What makes cancer such an intractable disease?

Cancer and ageing are closely related. Many things that cause us to age may have evolved as mechanisms to prevent cancer early in life so that we're able to grow and reproduce because evolution doesn't care too much about what happens to you after you've grown up and reproduced. It doesn't select longevity because it selects for the propagation of genes, for the survival of genes or what's called fitness.

There have been tremendous advances in cancer. Some cancers, which used to be a death sentence, are now highly treatable. Occasionally, in many cases, it's still a terrible disease. The reason it's difficult is two-fold. One is that cancer is not a single disease. It may have a single root cause, which is a deregulation of our genetic programme and the programme of the cell. So, the cell becomes deregulated, it then proliferates without control, takes over organs and tissues, and eventually kills the individual. But that root cause can manifest itself in many ways. So, that's why we have all these many different types of cancer. It's a disease of our own cells. It's not like a foreign organism, like a bacterium, that you can use differences between that organism and

us to selectively kill the organism, like with antibiotics.

Ageing is the same problem. Ageing is really when our own cells become deregulated in some way. The programme is not working as efficiently as it was when we were younger. So that's a hard problem as well. It's also due to multiple causes. There's DNA damage, there's damage to our cellular components and our proteins and the way cells communicate with each other, the way things are modified, like our immune system. Maybe the underlying cause is still a breakdown in the genetic programme, but it has different manifestations and it's our own cells. In that sense, they're similar and that's why they're both hard to tackle.

Anuradha Mascarenhas: What about the efficacy of therapeutics, especially gene therapy, in ageing or cancer? How promising is research in this area?

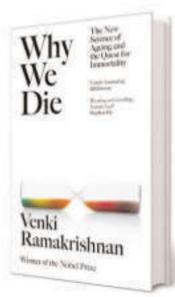
Gene therapy is most effective for diseases where a defect in a single gene causes a disease. It is not particularly useful for things like cancer and ageing because although there may be a genetic component, it's much more complex.

When they look at the genetic component of ageing, the heritability of ageing is only about 25 per cent. There are multiple causes. Some of it is simply random, what you call stochastic damage to our genes. Just because it damages your genes doesn't mean it's genetic in origin. It's not something you inherit. This damage is random and accumulates. There are some genes which are over-represented in centenarians, for example. But it doesn't mean that you

can modify human beings to have that gene because that gene may be serving different purposes in old age compared to when you're younger.

Manraj Grewal Sharma: Is there a way we can forecast a person's lifespan from his genes, his molecular health and so on?

There definitely is a genetic component. But it's not clear that people can sequence your genome and tell you how long



anxiety is higher in the middle age group and recedes as one grows older?

I have not heard of that. What I do know is that the general dissatisfaction with life peaks when you're in your 40s and early 50s. So, there's a sort of U-curve, with people happier when they're very young. There's a sort of general dissatisfaction around 40. As you get past 55-60, you feel okay again. What people have explained is that at 40 you realise you've sort of ended up where

work and more people to be taken care of.

I think this is one of the reasons why governments in developed countries are so interested in ageing research... One way to solve this problem, which is good for old people as well, is to ensure their good health, so that they can stay productive. They may not be able to do the same jobs that they did when they were younger, but they can be productive in different ways and contribute to the economy in different ways.

Amitabh Sinha: There have been some interventions in India in the last few years to correct some of the structural problems in scientific research. The establishment of the National Research Foundation, for example. Do you think these are steps in the right direction?

Encouraging young Indians to go into science is important because you cannot sustain a base of either technology or medicine without fundamental science. Even people who want to be engineers have to know fundamental physics, chemistry and mathematics.

Besides, applications really come from basic science. If you don't have a base of scientists who understand what's going on, even if the discoveries are made elsewhere, you won't be able to exploit them on time and you will always be catching up. From that point of view, it's good for the government to think about investing in science.

You should have a certain fraction of people who are going into fundamental science and mathematics. The exact mechanism is less important than trying to keep the administra-

tion of these entities free of politics and be really independent. Governments elected by the people are the ones who have the right to set overall goals. The overall goal has to be broad, whether it's improving agriculture, drought resistance, diseases, sustainable energy, whatever it is.

It's then up to scientists to try to implement that. There's a back-and-forth because governments may say we want to cure this disease. Scientists will say, okay, but then we need to understand the fundamental biology of this disease. So we have to do some fundamental biology first, then we can start understanding how this disease works. Both sides have to respect each other. Scientists also can't say we want to just do what we want because they're being funded by taxpayers.

Gopal B Kateshiya: We have a lot of caregivers from Gujarat going to other countries to take care of the elderly there. Given your research, what do you think are the learnings?

If we have an increasing fraction of old people and all of them are dependent and require care and you're also not having a great supply of younger people to take care of them, that's going to be a real problem for society. Economically, there's a cost as well.

So if people are living longer, the only solution is to make sure that they can stay healthy and independent for a very large fraction of their lives so that they don't require care. The number of years that they require care ideally

should be minimised. This could happen if there's a natural limit to our lifespan. But if you increase health span, which is a fraction of years that you're living healthily, the number of years that you require care can actually diminish. That's the only way that this will work. If you simply extend lifespan and then have a bunch of older people needing care, that's not going to work. That is to some extent the situation today. The UK is full of caregivers from places like India, operating the care homes for older people here.

ON GOVT & SCIENTISTS

YOU SHOULD HAVE A CERTAIN FRACTION OF PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING INTO FUNDAMENTAL SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS... THE ADMINISTRATION OF THESE ENTITIES SHOULD BE FREE OF POLITICS AND BE INDEPENDENT

Amitabh Sinha: In this book, you have discussed stem cell research and cloning but you haven't discussed CRISPR technology. Do you see that technology playing a role in health research? Also, what role can AI play in solving some of the intractable problems in biology?

CRISPR is simply the current prevailing form of gene therapy. It was not the first, and it's not going to be the last either. People may discover other ways of doing gene therapy that are actually an advance over CRISPR. For example, there are already technologies like prime editing, which allow you to do gene editing.

Gene therapy is very good for correcting individual genetic defects. For instance, single gene defects that cause a disease, those are the first points of call for technologies like CRISPR. And CRISPR, of course, is a great research tool. If you want to understand how a gene functions, you can knock it out or replace it, and you can do a lot of interesting biology with CRISPR. It has a great potential for genetic defects and diseases. Whether it will have any use at all in ageing is not clear to me. Maybe, in the future, if we understand more about the genetic basis of ageing, there might be some potential use of it, but it's not something immediate.

Amitabh Sinha: It's been two years since we have come out of the Covid pandemic. What are the lessons we have learnt in terms of public health, the challenges that it posed?

I think some countries have learnt lessons. East Asian countries dealt with the early stages of the pandemic better because they had experience with previous outbreaks like SARS. So when the pandemic started, they very quickly were able to implement testing and isolation, use preventives like mask wearing and social hygiene.

Countries differed very widely. New Zealand, for example, didn't have much of a lockdown and, with very careful testing and isolation, was able to contain the pandemic in the early stages. Later, when the virus evolved to become extremely contagious, it became hard to contain. But the advantage of doing this in the early stages is that it buys you enough time to develop vaccines.

We're also understanding how you can rapidly develop vaccines against potentially new infectious diseases. With Covid, we were somewhat lucky in that we knew what to make vaccines against because it's exactly the same gene as SARS. It's a spike protein and previous studies on SARS had shown that spike protein is the one that attaches to the receptor on the cell and makes it infectious. If it was a brand new virus, you would have to figure that out from scratch.

There are a lot of lessons that we've hopefully learnt, but I have a feeling that governments tend to deprioritise this sort of preparedness because it costs money to continually be prepared. You need to have surveillance machinery in place. You have to have PPE, masks, the preventive gear that people use, especially in hospitals. You have to have all the structures in place in the community to implement measures. All of that takes money to maintain.

I liken it to an insurance policy. You might say an insurance policy is a waste of money because most of us aren't going to have a flood or a fire, but we all buy insurance. Similarly, many of us buy health insurance because even if we're young, we may want to get health insurance. It's something like that. You have to think of this as some long-term investment for the good of the country.

‘Many things that cause ageing may have evolved as mechanisms to prevent cancer’

India-born Nobel Prize-winning molecular biologist Venki Ramakrishnan on the genetic basis of ageing, gene therapy, how scientists prioritise research areas and learnings from the Covid pandemic. This Idea Exchange was moderated by Amitabh Sinha, Deputy Editor, *The Indian Express*

ON INCREASING LIFE EXPECTANCY

IF PEOPLE ARE LIVING LONGER, THE ONLY SOLUTION IS TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY CAN STAY HEALTHY AND INDEPENDENT FOR A LARGE FRACTION OF THEIR LIVES SO THAT THEY DON'T REQUIRE CARE. THE NUMBER OF YEARS THAT THEY REQUIRE CARE SHOULD BE MINIMISED

you're going to live. I don't think we're anywhere near that. I'm not even sure that will ever happen. Because there are so many other variables, like your lifestyle, environment, the circumstances of your birth, the circumstances of your mother when she was carrying you in the uterus. All of those things count to your life potential.

Sunanda Mehta: Is it true that death

you're going to be. You know that some of the dreams of your youth are no longer achievable. Sometimes that's hard to reconcile with. By the time you're 60, you sort of accept it and are happy again. That's the explanation I've seen.

Harish Damodaran: I was looking at the nightmarish situation where there are too many old people. The pension bill will mount because there are fewer people to



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How children win with U-WIN, govt's new online vaccine portal

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

ON THE government's 100-day health agenda is the countrywide rollout of U-WIN, an online vaccine management portal for childhood vaccination — similar to CoWIN used during the Covid-19 pandemic.

With digitised and individualised immunisation records since birth, the government hopes to identify and reach the small proportion of children currently outside its vaccine net. The platform is already being piloted in several states, and national implementation is imminent.

What is U-WIN? How does it work

Children, up to the age of six years, and pregnant mothers are registered on U-WIN using government ID like Aadhaar, and their mobile phone numbers. Upon registration, records of all 25 shots given to a child —

and the two given to pregnant mothers — can be added.

For this, the platform generates a checked vaccination certificate that colour codes all vaccines. After each shot is administered (and recorded on U-WIN), its date gets added to the card, which also shows the due date for the next set of vaccines. The platform also sends SMS reminders to parents before their children are due for the next dose.

The digital vaccine certificate — which can be downloaded by parents using their registered mobile numbers — does away with the need to maintain the physical vaccination booklet, and allows one to get vaccinated anywhere in the country. U-WIN itself can be used to locate the nearest vaccination centre, and book an available slot.

As for health workers, the platform can automatically generate a due-list of children in their respective areas. Once the database matures, U-WIN will allow the government to study micro-trends across areas.

U-WIN also registers all births, the three vaccines against polio, hepatitis B, and tuberculosis administered at birth, a child's birth weight, and any physical deformities observed at birth. These data-points can be utilised by other government programmes as well — the idea is to eventually connect all digital records through ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account) ID.

U-WIN will also be linked to the government's existing eVIN platform for inventory management. eVIN tracks all vaccine vials, from large central stores to each vaccination site in the country. It keeps track of the number of doses used, the number of doses that go to waste, and the number of open vials that are submitted back by the sites, and is used by sites to raise demands for vaccines. eVIN also keeps track of, in real-time, the temperature and humidity that a vial has been subjected to using a sensor attached

to each freezer.

With U-WIN running on the same principles, and using the same digital infrastructure as CoWIN, adoption should not be a major challenge. An immunisation expert who has previously worked with government programmes said: "We already know that the digital infrastructure needed to run

such a big programme exists in the country. And most vaccinators have also worked with a similar platform, meaning they are likely to be comfortable with it".

EXPLAINED POLICY

How will U-WIN help with immunisation?

There are a number of benefits that the government foresees with U-WIN.

■ Reminders that U-WIN will furnish to parents are likely to improve compliance.

■ U-WIN will ensure portability — children who have received their first vaccines

in one village/city can receive the rest of the doses elsewhere in the country. This will be especially useful to ensure that children of migrant workers do not drop out.

■ The portal might help reduce errors. The aforementioned immunisation expert said that the platform can act as a decision support system. "If a health worker is about to administer the wrong dose, or administer the shot before time, the platform will not allow them to update it, thereby alerting them," the expert said.

■ U-WIN will provide granular, individualised details of childhood immunisation across the country. Dr Jayaprakash Muliyl, epidemiologist and former principal of Christian Medical College in Vellore, said that currently, "vaccination data is maintained only in terms of aggregate numbers and not individuals". This does not provide the full picture as some children might end up getting multiple doses while others remain unvaccinated. "The numbers cannot tell the dif-

ference. But, if the portal has data for individual children, they might," Dr Muliyl said.

■ Registration at birth may also help in bringing down the number of "zero dose" children — those who have not received any vaccinations. In India, the coverage of the first dose of diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT)-containing vaccine is taken as the proxy for zero dose children. Recently released data from the WHO and UNICEF show that while 93% of children received their first vaccine dose, there were still 1.6 million zero dose children in India in 2023. The data also showed that 1.6 million children missed their first measles-containing vaccine in 2023, up from 1.1 million the previous year. This is concerning as in 2022, five states — Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra — reported a rise in the incidence of measles. A centralised database, especially in the long-term, may facilitate better policy-making and implementation.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

PREDICTING 'ROGUE WAVES' USING AI: WHAT A NEW STUDY FOUND

ROGUE WAVES — unusually large waves compared to ones which come before and after — pose a threat to ships, coastal and offshore infrastructure, and human lives. Unfortunately, there has existed no method to forecast rogue waves — until now.

Using billions of data points collected by a network of 172 ocean buoys, University of Maryland mathematicians Thomas Breunung and Balakumar Balachandran have trained an artificial intelligence programme to distinguish wave patterns that preceded rogue waves, up to five minutes in advance.



A rogue wave moving away from a ship after crashing into it. NOAA

Deadly surprises

In oceanography, sea state refers to the condition of the surface of a large body of water at a certain location, at a certain point of time. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) sea state code characterises sea state based on wave height on a scale of 0 (no waves) to 9 (waves over 14 m).

Rogue waves defy the average sea state, and are twice the size of surrounding waves, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Such waves often form when swells — which occur not due to local winds, but distant weather systems — converge to raise a single, amplified wave. They may also form when ocean currents compress swells to create strong billows.

While scientists have long known rogue waves are not altogether unpredictable, the lack of a real-time forecasting method has had deadly consequences. According to oceanographer E.G. Didenkulova, between 2011 and 2018, rogue waves killed at least 386 people and sank 24 ships ("Catalogue of rogue waves occurred in the World Ocean from 2011 to 2018 reported by mass media sources", 2020).

Promise of AI

Breunung and Balachandran consid-

ered 20-minute long samples recorded by ocean buoys. For samples containing rogue waves (as defined by NOAA), the recording ends at the point when the rogue waves occur. The rogue wave samples were then compared to all other samples (in which rogue waves did not occur) to train the AI programme.

This programme was subsequently able to predict about 75% rogue waves one minute in advance. Roughly 73% rogue waves could be predicted five minutes in advance. Crucially, the researchers demonstrated that the tool could be used to predict the emergence of rogue waves near two buoys at widely different depths not included within the data sets used for training the AI — suggesting that the tool may have universal predictive capabilities.

The accuracy and advance warning time of the AI's forecasts could be further improved by incorporating physical quantities such as water depths, wind speeds, and buoy locations, the researchers said. Breunung hinted that harnessing more powerful AI architectures alongside more data may even lead to near-perfect predictions in the future.

The study, "Prediction of freak waves from buoy measurements", was published on July 18 in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

EXPLAINED LAW

The Governor's immunity

The Supreme Court is set to review the Constitution's Article 361, which grants Governors immunity from criminal prosecution. What does the article say? How have the courts interpreted it over the years?

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE SUPREME Court on July 19 agreed to hear a plea seeking to redefine the contours of the constitutional immunity enjoyed by the Governor of a state.

Article 361 of the Constitution shields the President and Governor from criminal prosecution, and bars any judicial scrutiny of their actions. Given that the case could have significant ramifications on the role of the constitutional head of a state, the court also asked Attorney General for India R Venkataramani to weigh in.

A three-judge Bench — comprising Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra — took up the issue after a petition was moved by a contractual woman employee of West Bengal Raj Bhavan. She has alleged sexual harassment by Governor CV Ananda Bose.

What is the immunity provided to Governors, and why is it under scrutiny?

Constitutional immunity

Article 361 states that the President, or the Governor of a state, "shall not be answerable to any court for the exercise and performance of the powers and duties of his office or for any act done or purporting to be done by him in the exercise and performance of those powers and duties", unless it is by Parliament for impeachment from office.

The provision further says "no criminal proceedings whatsoever shall be instituted or continued"; "no process for the arrest or imprisonment" can take place while the President, or the Governor, holds office.

The interpretation of these phrases — in Article 361(2) and 361(3) — "criminal proceedings" and "process for the arrest or imprisonment" is what is now before the SC. The court will consider whether that process covers a registration of FIR, initiation of a preliminary inquiry, or a magistrate taking cognisance of an offence, which is the technical start of a criminal case.

In the West Bengal case, the petitioner has argued that if none of the aforementioned actions can be taken against Governor Bose till he demits office, it could lead to a violation of rights, and impact the evidence in this case.

In its order, the SC said "the interpretation of clause (2) [of Article 361] arises for de-



Governor of West Bengal CV Ananda Bose (centre) has been accused of sexual harassment by a woman employee of the Raj Bhavan. Partha Paul

termination, more particularly, when criminal proceedings would be construed to have been "instituted".

Origins of Governor's immunity

The protection given to the President and the Governor can be traced to the Latin maxim *rex non potest peccare* or "the king can do no wrong", which is rooted in English legal traditions.

The Constituent Assembly discussed the introduction of Article 361 — or Draft Article 302 as it was known then — on September 8, 1949. On criminal immunity, Assembly Member H V Kamath from the Indian National Congress raised certain prescient questions. In case the President, or the Governor, commits a crime, he asked "Does this clause mean that no proceedings can be instituted against him (the President or the Governor) during the whole prescribed term, or whether it means while he is in office only". He also asked if the President should remove "a Governor or a Ruler committing a criminal act" in case a *prima facie* case is made against the Governor concerned.

However, the article was adopted without any further debate on criminal immunity. In the last decade, the courts have shed light on what it means for criminal proceedings to be "instituted" against the Governor, and when the protection under Article 361(2) lapses.

Judicial interpretation

The SC did so in the 2017 criminal case — *State vs Kalyan Singh & Ors* — concerning the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992. The court delayed the trial against then Rajasthan Governor Kalyan Singh, who was one of the accused in the case.

In its order, the SC said being the Governor, Kalyan Singh "is entitled to immunity under Article 361 of the Constitution as long as he remains Governor of Rajasthan. The Court of Sessions will frame charges and move against him as soon as he ceases to be Governor".

In 2015, the Madhya Pradesh High Court categorically held that Article 361(2) "guarantees absolute protection from any malicious campaign or publicity against the Head of a State, so as not to undermine the solemn-

ity of that office."

The observation came in a case pertaining to the Vyapam scam. Then Governor of Madhya Pradesh Ram Naresh Yadav was one of the accused in the scam, and the HC had to determine if the registration of an FIR against him would amount to criminal proceedings being "instituted" in the case.

In its ruling, the HC allowed investigation in that FIR against other accused, while "effacing" the name of the Governor till he occupied the office. As Yadav died in November 2016, the SC did not rule in appeal.

Another judicial intervention on the Governor's immunity came in the landmark 2006 ruling in *Rameshwar Prasad vs Union of India*. In the case, the SC had to deal with the Governor's immunity in civil cases after recommending the Bihar Assembly's dissolution in 2005.

The court said while the Governor enjoys "complete immunity" when exercising their powers under Article 361(1), this immunity "does not, however, take away the power of the Court to examine the validity of the action including on the ground of malafides (actions taken in bad faith)".

The SC in that case examined the Governor's actions in discharging his constitutional powers, which can be placed on a higher threshold compared to acts outside the discharge of constitutional or any official duties.

The case for revisiting

The debate on whether executive immunity is a blanket protection has been taking place in other countries as well.

The US Supreme Court on July 1 decided that former President Donald Trump, or any former US President, is entitled to "absolute immunity" from criminal prosecution for official acts but not unofficial or personal acts. This came as a huge relief for Trump, who faces a criminal case for allegedly attempting to subvert the 2020 presidential election results, while he was in power.

In the Indian context too, this discussion has to be viewed in the larger context of the tussle between the office of the Governor, and governments in opposition-ruled states. Even the SC has taken note of instances where Governors have acted with political motives.

The case is likely to be heard next on August 12.

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What ICJ said about Israel's occupation of West Bank and East Jerusalem

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, JULY 21

THE INTERNATIONAL Court of Justice (ICJ), the United Nations' principal judicial organ, said on July 19 that Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem violated international law, and its presence in Palestinian territories should come to an end "as soon as possible".

Israel has occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem since the Six-Day War in 1967. Prior to this, the territories were under Jordanian control.

What constitutes an 'occupation'?

In international law, the most widely accepted definition of an occupation comes from Article 42 of the "Hague Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex", 1907. It says that a "territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army." An occupation must only be temporary, and cannot involve any transfer of sovereignty to the occupying power.

Once a territory has been seized, the occupying power has certain obligations vis-à-vis persons within the occupied territory,

as spelled out in the 1907 Hague regulations, and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which established international legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war. These obligations include providing food and medical care to the population of an occupied territory. They also prohibit the occupying power from transferring its own civilian population into the territory.

Why did ICJ give its opinion on Israel's occupation?

In December 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution seeking the ICJ's advisory opinion on the "legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem." Presented in the UNGA by Nicaragua, it passed with 87 votes in favour, 26 against, and 53 abstentions.

This came well before Israel's assault on Gaza following the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023.

What did the ICJ opine?

The ICJ assessed the legality of Israel's prolonged occupation, and examined its settlement policy, whether it annexed Palestinian territories, and Israel's adoption

of allegedly discriminatory measures. It then appraised whether these affect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Here is what it said.

ON PROLONGED OCCUPATION

Since international law does not specify any temporal limit for an occupation, the ICJ noted that the legal status of an occupation cannot be determined by how long a territory has been occupied. What does affect the legality of the occupation, the court said, is the occupying power's "policies and practices and the manner in which they are implemented and applied on the ground".

ON SETTLEMENT POLICY

The first Israeli practice that the court examined was its policy of settlement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967. This, the court said, violated international law. According to the ICJ:

■ The settlement policy, and Israeli military measures, have pushed Palestinians to leave parts of occupied territories against their will. This violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which says that "The Occupying Power shall not deport or

transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies";

■ The policy breaches Articles 46 (protection of private property), 52 (general protection of civilian objects), and 55 (protection of the natural environment) of the Hague regulations, as Israel expanded its settlements in the occupied territories by "confiscation or requisitioning of large areas of land";

■ The policy's implementation fails to follow Article 43 of the Hague regulations, which mandates occupying powers, "unless absolutely prevented", to respect the law in force in the occupied territories. The court held that Israel treats occupied East Jerusalem "as its own national territory, where Israeli law is applied in full and to the exclusion of any other domestic legal system".

The court also held that the settlement policy led to violence by Israeli settlers and security forces against Palestinians, which Israel failed to prevent and effectively punish. This "contributed to the creation and maintenance of a coercive environment against Palestinians", the ICJ said.

ON ANNEXATION OF TERRITORIES

Annexation is the permanent control

over an occupied territory, the ICJ said. The court found that Israel's policies and practices in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are "designed to remain in place indefinitely and to create irreversible effects on the ground".

Apart from the maintenance and expansion of settlements, these include the exploitation of Palestine's natural resources, the proclamation of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and the application of Israeli domestic law in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

This is "contrary to the prohibition of the use of force in international relations," the ICJ said.

ON DISCRIMINATORY LEGISLATION

The court found that a broad array of legislation implemented by Israel in occupied territories "treat Palestinians differently". This, the court said, "constitutes systemic discrimination" based on, "race, religion or ethnic origin" of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1954 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1954, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965 (CERD).

The court observed that Israel's policies serve to maintain "near-complete separation" in the occupied territories between the set-

ters and Palestinians in clear violation of Article 3 (the obligation to eradicate apartheid and practices of racial segregation) of ICERD.

ON SELF-DETERMINATION

In light of all the above, the ICJ determined that Israel's occupation has violated Palestinians' right to self-determination. "... [The] Palestinian people have been deprived of their right to self-determination over a long period, and further prolongation of these policies and practices undermines the exercise of this right in the future," in contravention to the fundamental principles of international law, the court said.

ON FUTURE COURSE OF ACTION

The ICJ said that Israel is under obligation to immediately end its illegal occupation, cease new settlement activities and evacuate settlers from the occupied territories, and make reparation to all affected people for the damage caused.

The court observed that international organisations and other states should not recognise the occupied territories as part of Israel, and refrain from providing aid or assistance to Israel in maintaining this occupation.

The ICJ's opinion is not binding or enforceable.

ROAD TO PARIS

The lonely grind of athletes and their journeys that defy all odds; breaking down intricate concepts and capturing the buzz on the ground, *The Indian Express* goes behind the scenes in the build-up to the Olympic Games

OLYMPICS DIARY

A Parisian exodus, by force and choice



Authorities are keen to find space for the Olympic visitors. Reuters

THE OLYMPICS are returning to Paris after 100 years. But many Parisians won't be there to welcome it. Some have left by choice, due to the strict regulations, and many more have been forcefully evacuated.

According to a report released by French collective *Le Revers de la Médaille* (The Other Side of the Medal) last month, the Parisian authorities have removed thousands of homeless people, as well as others "coming from vulnerable sections" in a bid to empty the city "of the people that the powers that be consider undesirable." Per *The Guardian*, the report details the expulsion of over 12,000 people from the streets of Paris, from the start of April 2023, in the buildup to the Olympics.

Accusations of "social cleansing" against Parisian authorities have escalated after reports also emerged in April this year that hundreds of migrants from France's largest squat, Vitry-sur-Seine, located in the south of Paris, have been evicted.

They were allegedly put on buses and encouraged to occupy other parts of the country. According to *France24*, it was the third such evacuation drive conducted in the Île-de-France region, comprising Paris and its surrounding areas, since the start of 2023.

It's not just the homeless, vulnerable and migrants who have been prompted to leave the French capital. When French Minister of Transport Clément Beaune asked locals to engage in remote work or take time off to ease some of the burden on Paris' public transport system in July-August, it was seen as a nudge to push out locals to accommodate the droves that will arrive during the Olympics.

A poll in 2023 revealed that nearly 44 percent of residents of the Paris region expressed a negative opinion about the Olympics and Paralympics. According to the surveyor Odexa, in 2021, only 21 percent had reservations about the Olympics.

According to a Reuters report, locals now see the Olympics as a major inconvenience. Many plan remote work, others are looking for a place for themselves in other parts of France, but not all are likely to be so lucky.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

PREPARING FOR A MARATHON

Sen's Lakshya: Speed, endurance

To stay fresh in the third game when the match is on the line, the shuttler goes through a punishing '40-30-20' training grind

AMIT KAMATH
JULY 21

FOR A training drill that can knock the wind out of your lungs and make your legs feel like jelly, the name '40-30-20 multi-feed drill' doesn't completely capture its full intensity.

But the 40-30-20 multi-feed drill is one of those grinds in training sessions that are meant to infuse a sense of confidence when a tussle on the badminton court enters the third game and the scoreline reads 18-18 or 20-20.

For Lakshya Sen, who has faltered in deciders a few times this year, including against Kunlavut Vitidsarn in the French Open and Jonatan Christie at All England, the drill has become a cornerstone of his plans to keep up with his opponents at the Paris Olympics when the clash enters the third game.

"There's a lot of relation between you being fit and your thinking being a bit different. The fitter you are, the better your thinking and the better decisions you make," Lakshya tells *The Indian Express*. "When the rallies stretch long, and you're playing in the third game, you'll have an advantage over your opponent if you're fitter. Personally, it makes a lot of difference to know you're the fitter person on court. You can see the signs from your opponent that he's getting tired and he's not able to play those high-intensity rallies towards the end."

So what is this 40-30-20 multi-feed drill, or speed multi-feed drill?

Taken at face value, it's quite straightforward. Its impact on the body, though, can be punishing. There is a feeder at the one end of the net who will pepper 40 strategically-placed shuttles across the net for Lakshya to return. He does 10 sets of that. For making it to the end of the routine, Lakshya's reward is a break... of 10 seconds. Then the feeder will hit 10 sets of 30 shuttles in quick succession again. Then, Lakshya is allowed another short break. Then, another 10 sets of 20 shuttles. Once Lakshya reaches the end of this exercise, there are other training routines that he has to participate in.

"In singles, there are a lot of flat exchanges. The game is all about pace these days. Everybody retrieves! This is why multi-shuttle routines are very important elements. You do this on a daily basis," says Vimal Kumar, Lakshya's long-time coach.

Simulating match situations

Vimal points out that in training, they tweak the drill to simulate match situations.

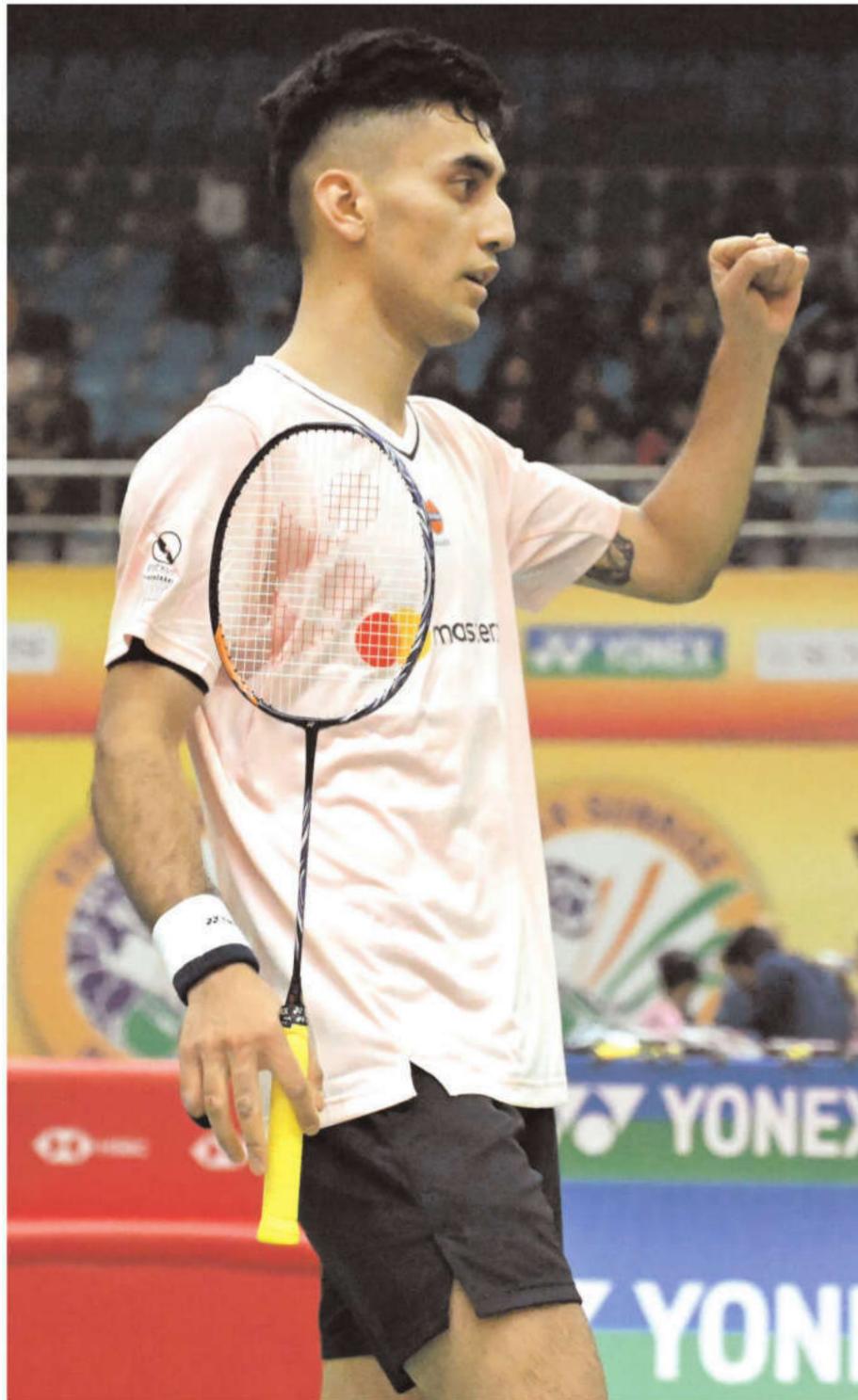
"There are a lot of sequences you can do with that drill. With 40 shuttles, sometimes you play a lot of defensive rallies... Lakshya will have to keep the rally going. That's at an endurance pace. And then sometimes we raise the pace of feeding him the shuttles when it comes to 20 shuttles."

These tweaks prepare Lakshya to continue rallies against defensive players like Kodai Naraoka and Vitidsarn, who love long rallies, as well as players like Viktor Axelsen and Lee Zii Jia, who can increase the pace and intensity of a rally at the flick of a switch.

Lakshya points out that while the routine is gruelling in itself, the timing of when they do it is what makes it more effective.

"We do this multi-shuttle routine of 40-30-20 at the end of a training session when I'm really exhausted. Your legs start to feel the load. The heart rate is highly elevated since these are long sessions with very short breaks in the middle. It helps your VO2 max levels (the maximum amount of oxygen someone can use during intense exercise). It's a really tough one. This lasts around 45 minutes to an hour," says Lakshya.

He adds: "These sessions help me in court coverage and overall endurance. It helps in the latter part of matches when you are out of breath and the rallies are stretching long. What makes this effective is that in an actual rally, you don't play that many shots. If you're hitting 40 shots, that's an 80-shot rally which is rare in games."



Lakshya Sen has faltered in the deciding game of a few matches this year and is working tirelessly to redress that. BAI

Lakshya says his peak VO2 max level is 62, a number he is particularly proud of. For context, elite male cyclists have VO2 max levels in the 70s. "I'm not too proud of the gym numbers. But VO2 max is something that I look for," he says.

Ask Lakshya — who has a score of 22.4 on the yo-yo test — who he thinks is the fittest player on the circuit and he grins, "Me."

Of course, there are other training drills that he does to stake claim to the tag of being the fittest player on the circuit.

"We usually train seven to eight hours a day including recovery, strength and conditioning or the on-court part," he says. "There

are different kinds of things that we do. If we are in an off-season period when we know that there is no competition for the next three to four weeks, we usually do a long run, like an eight-kilometre one, under 35 minutes. Then, maybe a 400m run or 2.4 kilometres within nine minutes."

When the rallies stretch long, and you're playing in the third game, you'll have an advantage over your opponent if you're fitter. It makes a lot of difference to know you're the fitter person on court. You can see the signs from your opponent that he's getting tired."

LAKSHYA SEN
INDIA'S OLYMPIC-BOUND SHUTTLE

Closer to tournaments, he adds, the sessions get shorter and more intense "with sprints and other outdoor training like Tabata runs" (a high-intensity interval training routine where one does multiple rounds of strenuous exercises in quick succession). "Or we run on the treadmill for 30 seconds and then rest for 15 seconds."

WHAT LAKSHYA SEN'S WEEK LOOKS LIKE:

MONDAY AND THURSDAYS:

Lakshya starts at 6 am with an outdoor running session. This happens twice a week. Runs from 6 to 7 am. From 10 am to noon, he will have an on-court badminton session. In the evenings, he will have another session from 3:30 till 6 pm. After the evening session ends, he will have one and a half hours of recovery session.

TUESDAYS AND FRIDAYS:

Tuesdays and Fridays are also heavy working days.

WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAYS:

After two good days of training, these two days are half days. Lakshya only trains in the first half, and the evenings are off to recover. He spends more time on recovery here after the running and the playing sessions. This day is reserved for recovery activities like ice baths and full-body massages. Or spending 15 to 20 minutes in the hydrotherapy pool and compression wear for limbs.

SUNDAYS:

Weekly off for Lakshya to recover. On Sundays, he tries to switch off from badminton and not think too much about it. He, however, plans his coming week. Lakshya does about an hour and half of recovery sessions on Sunday mornings because his weekly training load has been high. Or he will at least do some stretching, because he doesn't want to just sit and laze around. He tries to be active on Sundays — you take a walk or go out for meals — so the next day you don't feel too lethargic.



Photo: Instagram/senlakshya

At Paris 2024, Lakshya has been drawn in Group L, one of only two groups that have four players while the rest of the pools have three players. He's clubbed with Jonatan Christie and Kevin Cordón, expected to test his patience. In the quarters, there's potentially Naraoka, the endless retriever from Japan.

All the work he has been putting into his endurance training will come handy early. But essentially, Lakshya's opponents know he's not going away without a fight, and dread that he won't go away at all. Lakshya's superpower in Group L might well be to be the Last Man Standing.

OLY-XPLAINED

Can India's shooters, wrestlers take advantage of Russia's 'absence'?

MIHIR VASAVDA
JULY 21

AT THE Olympics, Russian athletes have been in a different league compared to their Indian counterparts. There have been some events, however, where athletes from the two countries have crossed paths as equals — primarily in shooting and wrestling. With Russian athletes not participating in these sports at the Paris Olympics, the question is whether India can take advantage of their absence.

Russia's 'absence'

When the parade of nations takes place during the July 26 opening ceremony in the most unique fashion — on boats down the River Seine — one country will be missing: Russia.

Unlike the Tokyo Games three years ago, where 335 athletes from the country competed in 30 sports, there will only be 16

Russians at the Paris Olympics in just six sports. But these 16 athletes won't be allowed to display their flag, or the colours of their flag on their clothes, and will participate as Individual Neutral Athletes.

This is because of the strict eligibility conditions imposed on Russian — and Belarusian — athletes by the International Olympic Committee following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. A key criterion was that the athletes must not have publicly supported Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions or be contracted to the country's military or security agencies.

The IOC vetted a bunch of Russian athletes and cleared them but many, including all 10 wrestlers, refused to participate as neutrals. Had they accepted the invite, wrestlers would have formed the largest group of Russian athletes in a particular sport.

Now, it'll be tennis where seven players from that country, including Wimbledon semifinalist Daniil Medvedev, will partici-



Russia's Vitalina Batsarashkina, who won gold in the 10m air pistol and 25m pistol events in Tokyo, will not be in the field in Paris. Reuters

Others include three each in canoeing and cycling, one each in swimming, trampolining and taekwondo.

For shooters, an opportunity

Russia's shooters have unfailingly been a podium presence at the Olympics. Along

with the USA and China, they are one of the most successful nations in Olympic shooting. At the Tokyo Games, Russian shooters finished third on the overall table with 8 medals — 2 gold, 4 silver and 2 bronze.

But months after the Tokyo Games concluded, the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF), in March 2022, banned Russian shooters — most of whom are with the country's military — in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine. Consequently, they won't be there in Paris.

In Tokyo, Russia's shooters won all their medals in rifle and pistol events. Vitalina Batsarashkina had a golden double in the 10m air pistol and 25m pistol events. And the country had podium finishes in women's 10m air rifle, men's and women's 50m rifle 3-position, and mixed team events.

Coincidentally, India's strongest chances to end their Olympic medal drought in the sport are in these events. But if the performances at the last two World Championships

— where Russians were absent — are anything to go by, it won't be so straightforward.

India's shooters have been below par in Olympic events at the Worlds, a trend that was repeated at the Asian Games, too.

57 kg freestyle wrestling gold medallist absent

Another prominent absentee would be the gold medallist in 57 kg men's freestyle wrestling, Zaur Uguev. The Russian had denied India its first Olympic gold in wrestling when he defeated Ravi Dahiya in the final.

While Dahiya, too, won't be there in Paris — he lost the selection trial at home — Uguev's absence opens up the field for Aman Sehrawat. The 21-year-old, the only male wrestler from India to qualify, still has a tough job at hand for a shot at a podium finish. His half of the draw features former Olympic and World Championship silver medallist Rei Higuchi of Japan and Worlds bronze medalist from Armenia, Arsen Harutyunyan.

BRIEFLY

England win series as Windies collapse

Nottingham: Spinner Shoaib Bashir took five wickets as England bowled out West Indies for 143 to secure a 241-run victory on the fourth day of the second test at Trent Bridge on Sunday and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series. The touring side, chasing 385 to win, started well thanks to a solid opening partnership of 61 between captain Kraigg Brathwaite and Mikyle Louis. The dismissal of Louis by Chris Woakes, however, prompted a collapse as West Indies lost five wickets in 35 balls. After Louis was caught by wicket-keeper Jamie Smith for 17, Kirk McKenzie edged Bashir to Smith for one and Brathwaite fell for 47 when he feathered a catch to Smith off Woakes. Kavem Hodge, who made a century in the first innings, was trapped lbw by Bashir for a duck and Alick Athanaze edged Bashir to Joe Root at slip for one to leave the West Indies reeling at 82-5. **REUTERS**

Nadal beaten in straight sets in final

Bastad: Rafa Nadal suffered a setback in his Paris 2024 Olympics preparations on Sunday as he was beaten 6-3 6-2 in the Swedish Open final by Portuguese seventh seed Nuno Borges. The 38-year-old Spaniard was playing his first title match since his 2022 French Open triumph, but saw his serve broken five times in the one-hour and 27-minute contest as Borges won his maiden tour final. Making first appearance at the ATP Tour 250 event since winning the singles as a 19-year-old in 2005, Nadal was warming up for his bid for another Olympic medal at the Paris 2024 Games. **REUTERS**

Piastrri wins first race in McLaren one-two

Budapest: Oscar Piastrri won his first Formula One race after completing a McLaren one-two with Lando Norris at the Hungarian Grand Prix on Sunday. The 23-year-old Australian driver started second behind pole-sitting Norris and beat him to the first turn to take the lead. Norris got ahead after a pit-stop strategy that favoured him, but he finally complied with his team's request to give the lead back to his partner. "This is the day I dreamed of, standing on the top step of an F1 podium," Piastrri said. Lewis Hamilton finished third behind the papaya-coloured pair for his record-extending 200th career podium. Points leader Max Verstappen finished fifth behind Charles Leclerc in a Ferrari and has now gone three races without a victory. Verstappen leads the standings with 265 points to Norris' 189. **AP**

Bhambri wins ATP Tour doubles title

Gstaad (Switzerland): India's Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivetti clinched the men's doubles title at the Swiss Open ATP Tour tennis tournament with a hard-fought win over Ugo Humbert and Fabrice Martin in the final here on Sunday. The pair of Bhambri and Olivetti, seeded third in the ATP 250 clay court tournament beat their French opponents 3-6-3 10-6 to win the title. The final match lasted one hour and six minutes with both pairs refusing to give an inch to the other before the Indo-French duo of Bhambri and Olivetti emerging winner in the end. This was the third ATP doubles title for the 32-year-old Bhambri and second while partnering with Olivetti. **PTI**

All kicks but no goal

Football, the world's most popular sport, is plagued by indecision and lack of identity at the Olympics

SANDIPG
JULY 21

THE GRANDEST sporting exhibition in Paris, the Olympics, would unfold without the country's most famous sportsperson, Kylian Mbappe. The French superstar footballer had, in the past, expressed his desire to compete in the event and win the "holy grail", but his transfer to Real Madrid, which prohibits those that had competed in the Euros and COPA America from participating in the Olympics, meant he would miss out. Unlike continental events and the World Cup, clubs have the power to decide a player's participation in the Olympics.

Some French politicians, rumours swirled, negotiated an exemption with the Spanish football giants, but Madrid did not relent. So when the Olympic torch is lit and the contingents parade in boats along the River Seine, past the city's historic landmarks, Mbappe would be in Madrid, soaking in the fanfare and tuning up for the pre-season that begins on August 1.

"Everyone knows I want to compete at the Games but if my club doesn't want that to happen, I'll understand because I am mature enough to understand both views," he said.

Not only Mbappe, most of France's rich pool of footballing talent would be absent from the Games and wouldn't be even in their country. So much so that France's Olympic football team coach Thierry Henry would say: "The last time I received so many rejections was at university."

France is not an aberration, the powerhouses among the 16 nations would be without their stars — Nico Williams and Lamine Yamal are not in the Spain squad; Argentina is minus Messi and a host of COPA America winners; Mohammed Salah, the anointed flag-bearer of Egypt in Paris, has chosen Liverpool over his country in a last-minute u-turn. Christian Pulisic wouldn't feature for the USA either.

Some of the storied football nations, such as Uruguay, Italy, the Netherlands and England, have historically detached themselves from the Olympics. Both Asian and African champions, Qatar and Ivory Coast, did not qualify through the continental U-23 championships. Instead, on show in Paris, would be a clutch of minnows such as Mali, Uzbekistan and Dominican Republic. Mismatches and thrashing thus are routine (Germany thrashed Fiji 10-0 in 2016), quality is not often of the elite level, even though football is the one sport guaranteed to fill stadiums.

At the heart of this indifference is foot-



Euro stars Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams aren't in Spain's Olympic squad. *Reuters*

ball's identity crisis, specifically in the men's stream, at the Olympics. No one really knows what it is, whether it is an exhibition of superstardom, or a youth development vehicle, or even an accidental parody. It is a paradox — it's not a fully amateur competition as it once was; it is not a professional grandee like the World Cup or the Euros either. It's meant for U-23s — though the best in the group are already established and occupied in pre-season rigours — but all teams could field three older than 23. It starts before the opening ceremony and ends after most big events have concluded; it is among the most featured disciplines in the event, yet a gold medal is not considered the pinnacle. Lots of goals are scored, but there is hardly any recall value. The Olympics adds little to football, just as football, in its current iteration, adds little to the Olympics.

Everything and nothing

Thus, football at the Olympics is a mix of everything, and like all things without a sharp, pinpoint focus, it is complex and confused. The great minds that have shaped and influenced the Olympics have not yet discovered the formula to package football so that it could embellish the spectacle, lighten each other's existence, rather than exist as a half-baked counterfeit, wandering in a state of purposelessness.

The sport has been a regular fixture since 1896, even though it was a club affair in the initial edition. Post the first World War, it was briefly the most coveted medal in football, as no other major international tournament existed yet. British broadcaster David Goldblatt called Uruguay's defeat of Argentina in the final of the 1928 Olympics, "football's first world championship".

But two years later, Uruguay would host the first World Cup and change the history of the sport and its relationship with the Olympics.

The sport was absent from the Los Angeles Games of 1932. FIFA feared the Olympics would take lustre off the nascent World Cup tournament; American organisers contested the "amateurism" of football, now that a fully professional football tournament has been held. Besides, stories go, that they were fearful of the sport taking root in the country and displace established ones like baseball and American football.

German organisers successfully lobbied for it to be reinstated for the Berlin Games, although the teams had to meet the definition of amateurism. It took another Los Angeles sojourn, in 1984 to tweak the rules again. Teams could now field professional players, but teams from Europe and Americas should not have competed in the World Cup or continent tournaments. Eight

TOP-5 FOOTBALLERS AT THE OLYMPICS

ALEXANDRE LACAZETTE (France): A former Arsenal man, Lacazette will be leading the frontline for France at the Olympics in a team featuring Bayern Munich's Michael Olise and Crystal Palace's Jean-Philippe Mateta, and coached by the legendary Thierry Henry.

JULIAN ALVAREZ (Argentina): Alvarez, who just won the Copa America with Argentina, will go for another accolade as he looks to become one of the first male players to win the World Cup first and then the Olympics. He will be joined by Nicolas Otamendi, Geronomo Rulli and Thiago Almada.

ACHRAF HAKIMI (Morocco): The 25-

year-old Hakimi is the most recognised face in the Morocco line-up and one of the key architects of their fairytale run to the 2022 World Cup semifinals, defeating the likes of Spain and Portugal.

NABY KEITA (Guinea): A former Liverpool man, Keita will be captaining Guinea, who are drawn in the same group as France, USA and New Zealand.

FERMIN LOPEZ (Spain): The 21-year-old Lopez is a recent Euro 2024 winner with Spain, playing just 28 minutes in the whole competition. So that keeps him relatively fresh heading into the Olympics. He will be joined by Alex Baena who also won the Euro.

TOP-5 ABSENTEES



LIONEL MESSI (Argentina): A huge name missing from Argentina's Olympic squad will be Messi, who had already informed coach Javier

Mascherano that he wouldn't be able to take part after a gruelling Copa America campaign. It would also keep him away from his club Inter Miami, who are already playing without him in the ongoing season.

KYLIAN MBAPPE (France): Mbappe failed to win his first Euro title and was unveiled as a Real Madrid player earlier in the week. Los Blancos had already made it clear that they wouldn't allow any of their players to participate in the Olympics due to the upcoming season.

LAMINE YAMAL (Spain): 17-year-old

Yamal, who lit up the Euro in Germany this year, will not participate in order to manage his workload. With the next La Liga season looming over the horizon, Yamal, who played 50 times for Barcelona last season and started in all 7 of Spain's matches in the Euro, opted to skip this event.

MOHAMED SALAH (Egypt): According to reports, even though Egypt's Olympic team manager Rugero Micali wanted Salah, the Liverpool legend opted to join his club for pre-season duties in the USA.

KUBO TAKEFUSA (Japan): Kubo, who was once signed for Real Madrid, spending most of his 5-year there on loan to various clubs before permanently moving to Real Sociedad, will also not take part in the Olympics due to his parent club refusing to release him. The clubs can do that because the Olympics are outside of FIFA's scheduled international match windows.

Asia Cup: Richa's off-side masterclass powers India to win

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
JULY 21

WHEN RICHA Ghosh walked into bat in Dambulla on Sunday against the UAE, India's score read 106/4 in the 12th over. Batting entry point in T20 cricket is one of the most critical tactical aspects these days and for India's sake, the young wicketkeeper couldn't have asked for better timing. Eight overs and a bit left, a solid foundation laid despite losing three wickets within the powerplay.

And Ghosh made the most of her time in the middle, with a blistering 64 off 29 balls, in an innings that was embellished by 12 fours and a six, finishing with a stunning strike-rate of 220.68.

That innings was critical in powering India to 201/5 — the first time they crossed 200 in women's T20Is — as they made it two comfortable wins out of two to start their Asia Cup campaign. The defending champions won by 78 runs to back up their thumping win against Pakistan on Friday.

The highlight of Ghosh's knock was her off-side strokeplay. From the moment she hit her first four of the knock, off the fourth ball she faced, she kept peppering that side as UAE bowlers offered her the width to free her arms consistently. UAE captain Esha Oza was the first one on the receiving end, as she floated up a full delivery up outside off-stump and Ghosh drove it square past the infield. Her second boundary was pure power, as she muscled a six over extra cover off Kavisha Egodage in the very next over.

Then came the 15th over where she stepped up another gear and Oza was the bowler who she went after again. First ball, a square cut past short-third as she picked up the length quickly to play off the back foot despite the ball being full. Next ball, slightly fuller, and was met with a serene cover drive. Ghosh made it a hat-trick of fours with a rare shot on the leg side as she pulled a short ball past square-leg, but finished the over with a fourth boundary, once more cutting past point.

While India were already on course for



India's Richa Ghosh celebrates after reaching her fifty on Sunday. *PTI*

what would have been a par score, with Harmanpreet Kaur going steady at one end, Ghosh turned the heat on UAE and they found no answers. Ghosh is known for her power-hitting, but this innings was quickly

developing into one filled with elegant shots that were more about timing and placement.

In the last over bowled by left-arm spinner Heena Hotchandani, Ghosh was perhaps guilty of running her captain out at the non-striker's end as Harmanpreet's knock of 66 (47 balls) came to an end just as she had found her fifth gear. But Ghosh didn't let that affect her rhythm as she smashed the remaining five deliveries for fours, taking India to their highest total in this format. She preferred the off-side so much that one of the five fours in the 20th over was a reverse sweep, as she picked up a delivery from almost outside leg stump and sent it flying past point.

In the end, 11 of her 13 boundaries came through the off-side. Indian batters in general preferred the leg-side during the match — what with Shafali Verma and Harmanpreet both heavily preferring that side of the pitch. Out of their total of 201, Indian batters scored 83 runs through the off-side. And Ghosh alone scored 48 of those (57.8%). Oza eventually led UAE to a creditable to-

tal but the run-chase was never really on as India restricted their opponents to 123/7.

"When Jemi and I were batting, we were looking to run hard rather than playing risky shots as we had lost three early wickets," Harmanpreet — who became the format's second leading run-getter on Sunday — said after the match. "We were still targeting around 7 or 8 runs an over. When Richa came I told her to keep watching the ball and she batted beautifully. My role was to stay on the pitch and keep rotating the strike. We had a good partnership, especially with Richa and all the credit goes to her for our big total."

Having not batted in the recent T20I series at home against South Africa after suffering a concussion while keeping in the first match, Richa returned to the XI with a bang. It was a timely reminder of her X-Factor finishing skills in India's middle-order that they have craved for often in the past.

BRIEF SCORES: India 201/5 in 20 overs (Harmanpreet 66, Ghosh 64 not out, Egodage 2/36) bt UAE 123/7 (Egodage 40, Oza 36, Deepti 2/23) by 78 runs.

Open houses, Russian translator: How GCL convinced players to sign

AMIT KAMATH
JULY 21

AFTER INTRODUCING a desi tadka to the way elite chess tournaments are organised with its first season, the Global Chess League (GCL) will be back for another season in October this year. In the first edition, the GCL managed to get some of the biggest names in the sport to sign up: from world champions like Viswanathan Anand, Magnus Carlsen and Hou Yifan to stars like Ian Nepomniachtchi, D Gukesh, R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi and Tan Zhongyi.

Five-time world champion Anand hailed the league recently as an "Indian way" of organising sport.

"Indians are enjoying lots of sports now. But we like imposing our own business model on it. We want something new. That's why last year we had the Global Chess League, which was this new Indian way of organising sport," Anand said at the recent Express Adda.

Convincing players from different countries and cultures was easier said than done, particularly since the GCL would be a team-based league, which had no precedence in a largely individualistic pursuit like chess. This is why organisers had to go the extra mile ahead of the first season.

"One player we signed for the GCL was

someone who spoke exclusively in Russian. Thankfully, there was a person in FIDE who became our translator. For Chinese players, we also got presentation decks made in Mandarin, which had detailed explanations on how we saw the league happening. It's not that players absolutely don't speak or understand English. But just to eliminate any communication gap and make the players completely comfortable, we did all this. This is how we got players from over 15 countries to sign up," Sameer Pathak, CEO of the Global Chess League, told The Indian Express.

Pathak says that there was one player with whom GCL organisers exchanged over 35 emails just to convince him about their vision for the league.

"Besides the emails, we would also hold something we called an Open House Hour. We would send a link to a conference call to all players that would be active for an hour on specified dates. Any player who had any doubts about the league could just hop in on that call and ask us whatever they had on their mind. We would be on the other end of the calls to allay any concerns," said Pathak. "These calls would take place after we first approached players, so that anyone who had any doubts could get those cleared up. Then, after the players had signed contracts, we would hold calls so that anyone who wanted to get familiarised with our unique points system could have clar-



The biggest names in chess like Magnus Carlsen played in the inaugural GCL. *Twitter*

ity. We had four of these Open House calls when we were trying to sign players. Then two more to explain the rules to the players."

Cooperation and coordination

In chess, most players know who the organisers are since several tournaments have been held for decades now. So a quick email or a phone call can suffice to get a verbal agreement in place before organisers can draw up contracts. For the GCL to start, the organisers

needed an assist from FIDE, the global governing body of the sport, who facilitated the introductions between the organisers and the players.

After these emails, the elite players who showed an interest in participating were explained the concept of the league by GCL organisers in individual orientation calls.

"Our strategy was to over-communicate so that players understand how this league will be different from anything they had

GCL convinced FIDE to forgo their strict rules about footwear — they prohibit players from wearing sneakers at events. But the organisers lobbied FIDE to drop the rule for GCL, realising the marketing potential of sneaker endorsements.

played in, what our commercial model was and so on," said Pathak. "This was so that they understood what a team owner's expectations from the players would be, why they would be wearing those colourful jerseys rather than suits that they usually wear at chess tournaments."

He revealed that they also convinced FIDE to forgo their strict rules about footwear — the global governing body has a code prohibiting players from wearing sneakers at events. But the organisers lobbied FIDE to drop the rule for GCL, realising the marketing potential of sneaker endorsements.

"Sneakers are allowed in our league only because what if some sports shoe brand wants to sponsor a team? Little things like these were also something that we had to focus on," said

Pathak. The other challenge after getting players to sign was devising a points system because FIDE winced at the idea of calling it a player auction, believing it to be demeaning.

"We don't call it an auction because the word brings up negative connotations. We didn't want to get into the money-based aspect. So to navigate these complexities, we devised a system where each team owner had 1,000 points and there were exactly 36 players in the draft pool for the 36 spots available. The points had no relation to how much the players' contracts were worth. But the team management knew what they would have to pay each player if they got someone via the draft. In the draft, you bid for players by exhausting these 1,000 points. One of the owners told us that the draft itself was like a chess game."

He revealed that the Indian players — particularly the golden generation of Indians rising rapidly in the ranks — were the easiest to convince to join the league.

"There was nothing like the GCL that existed in the world of chess. Praggnanandhaa was the easiest player to convince. The other young Indian players like Gukesh and Erigaisi didn't take any time to decide either. These three guys were the fastest players for us to get on board. No discussions of any kind."