

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 1 AUGUST 2024



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Ashwini Vaishnav: India working on bullet trains with indigenous tech



WORLD | 6

US' Kamala Harris only Democratic candidate to qualify for Prez race



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Manu Bhaker: Created fake account once to defend P.V. Sindhu from trolls

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WINDOWS



Virat Kohli during a practice session in Colombo on Wednesday ahead of the 1st ODI match against Sri Lanka on Friday. — PTI

UPSC axes Khedkar's selection for IAS job, bars future attempts

New Delhi: The UPSC on Wednesday said it has cancelled the provisional candidature of probationary IAS officer Pujja Khedkar and debarred her from all future examinations or selections. "The UPSC has examined the available records carefully and found her guilty of acting in contravention of the provisions of the CSE-2022 Rules," the UPSC said. It said the provisional candidature of the 2023 batch probationary IAS officer for the CSE-2022 (Civil Services Examination-2022) has been "cancelled" and she has also been "debarred permanently" from all future examinations or selections conducted by the UPSC. **Full report on Page 3**

Vietnam PM will hold talks with Modi today

New Delhi: Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh reached New Delhi on Tuesday for a three-day visit which is expected to further strengthen the ties between both countries. Mr Ching will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday. **Full report on Page 3**

UK stabbing: Mob attacks mosque, clashes with cops

London: A far right mob targeted a mosque in north-west England that saw three young girls fatally stabbed during a peaceful vigil in their memory and around 40 police officers suffered injuries in the disorder. British PM Keir Starmer condemned the mob attack. — PTI **Full report on Page 6**

COUNTERPOINT



Sir, one more derailment today... our meetings have gone off-track!

WEATHER

Max: 30°C
Min: 27°C
RH: 87%
Rain: 100%

Forecast: Thunderstorms

ASTROGUIDE

Krodhi: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Ashada Bahula Dwadasi till 3.31 pm
Star: Mrigasira till 10.25 am
Varjyam: 7.01 pm to 8.40 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.15 am to 11.06 am; 3.21 pm to 4.13 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.12 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.43 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 3.15 AM
MOONSET TODAY 5.07 PM

Delhi govt to bring in law on coaching institutions

AVINASH PRABHAKAR JHA
New Delhi, July 31

Delhi education minister Atishi on Wednesday announced plans to bring in a law for regulating coaching centres in the national capital following the death of three UPSC aspirants in a flooded basement of a coaching institute in Old Rajinder Nagar on July 27. She said that the law will specify the qualification of teachers and the minimum infrastructure needed for a coaching institute, among others. The government has also issued guidelines for students' safety in state-run and private schools in the aftermath of the coaching centre incident.

The guidelines for schools mandate the use of basements for only permissible activities and necessary steps to be taken to avoid water logging. In order to seek inputs on the proposed law, Ms Atishi along with mayor Shelly Oberoi first met the protesting students at Old Rajinder Nagar. Later in the day, the two along with city ministers Gopal Rai and Saurabh Bharadwaj met students at the Delhi Secretariat to discuss their grievances. She said the students highlighted the lack of facilities for food and added these grievances will be included in the regulation to be framed by the government. **More on Page 2**

Biggest-ever IAF exercises from Aug. 6

New Delhi, July 31: The Indian Air Force (IAF) will host its biggest multi-nation exercise, "Tarang Shakti," in two phases starting August 6. The exercise aims to showcase India's defense capabilities and provide a platform for international military cooperation.

However, there are concerns over delays in the delivery of indigenous Tejas Mk-1A aircraft by HAL, now expected in November, impacting IAF's combat readiness. The exercise will feature India's LCA Tejas, Mirage 2000, and Rafale, alongside aircraft from 10 countries, including France, Germany, and Australia. The first phase will occur at Air Force Station Sulur, and the second at Air Force Station Jodhpur. **More on Page 3**

Hamas' top leader killed in Tehran in Israeli strike, Iran vows revenge

Beirut, July 31: Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed by a pre-dawn airstrike in the Iranian capital Wednesday, Iran and the militant group said, blaming Israel for a shock assassination that risks escalating the conflict even as the US and other nations were scrambling to prevent an all-out regional war. Iran's supreme leader vowed revenge against Israel. "There was no immediate comment from Israel, which has pledged to kill Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders over the group's October 7 attack on southern Israel in which the

Heavy rains paralyse Delhi: 10 flights diverted



Protesting students sit on barricades amid waterlogging in front of Rau's IAS Study Circle at Old Rajinder Nagar in New Delhi on Wednesday. Delhi recorded more than 100 mm of rainfall in one hour, leading to waterlogging in several areas and prompting the weather office to issue a "red" warning. At least 10 flights that were to land at the IGI airport were diverted due to heavy rains. **Report on Page 2** — PTI

Wayanad toll rises to 239; search for 150 missing on

Govt, Opp. MPs spar in Parl on Kerala landslides
'State ignored alerts': Shah **'Baseless': Pinarayi**

GILVESTER ASSARY, VINEETA PANDEY and AMRESH SRIVASTAVA
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

As the rescue teams race against time to save lives in Kerala's Wayanad, the possibility of finding people alive is getting bleaker. The rescue teams are now extracting the limbs of the dismembered bodies that perished in the massive landslides that hit the district on Tuesday. On Wednesday, the death toll in Wayanad increased to 239, with over 150 still reported missing.

The death toll will likely rise as rescue teams recover bodies in the disaster-hit areas of Mundakkai, Chooralmala and Attamala and many people remain unaccounted for. Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan said there was difficulty in retrieving bodies, but res-



Rescue work is under way following landslides triggered by heavy rain at Chooralmala in Wayanad district of Kerala on Wednesday. — PTI

cue operations are ongoing. So far, 1,592 individuals have been rescued. The catastrophe at Mundakkai and Chooralmala is devastating and unparalleled, with both locales almost destroyed. In Delhi, the politics over the tragedy began. While the Opposition

Sonia: Public mood is in favour of Congress

'As polls near, don't get complacent'

ASHHAR KHAN
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

With Assembly elections approaching, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday claimed that the public mood was in favour of the party. "We must not become complacent and over-confident... I dare say that if we perform well, reflecting the trend we witnessed in the Lok Sabha elections, national politics will undergo a transforma-



tion," she told the CPP. "In a few months, elections will be held in four states. We must sustain the momentum and goodwill that had been generated for us in the Lok Sabha polls. We must not become complacent." **Turn to Page 4**

'Fine balance' of growth, jobs in Budget, says FM

Debunks Opp. criticism; claims all sectors, states got funds

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Defending the Union Budget for the fiscal year 2024-25, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday called it a fine balance between growth, employment, capital investment and fiscal consolidation, among others. While replying to the discussion on the Union Budget in the Rajya Sabha, Ms Sitharaman said that the Budget has taken into consideration all sectors of the econo-



my, aids employment generation and supports cooperative federalism. The Union finance minister also attacked the Opposition bloc, especially the Congress, which raised several issues,

including Budget allocations, inadequate funds for J&K, agriculture and allied sectors, high inflation, etc. Replying to the discussion, Ms Sitharaman said that the Budget has taken into consideration all sectors of the economy and that every state is allocated sufficient funds. "The Budget strikes a balance with various aspects of growth. It proposes unflinching support for cooperative federalism as well...", the Union minister said, adding that **Turn to Page 4**



Drop 18% GST on life, health insurance; Gadkari to FM

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Union minister of road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari has requested finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to withdraw the 18 per cent goods and services tax (GST) on life and medical insurance premiums. "The GST amounts to taxing the uncertainties of life and restricts the sector's growth as both life and medical insurance premiums attract a GST of 18 per cent," the minister said. "The main issue raised by the union is related to the withdrawal of GST on life and medical insurance premiums," he added.



India's Lovlina Borgohain celebrates after winning a boxing match against Norway's Sunniva Hofstad at the Olympics Games in Paris on Wednesday. Borgohain prevailed 5-0 in the contest and she is now just one win away from adding to her Tokyo bronze. **Report on Page 8** — PTI

IN BRIEF

Kejriwal, Sisodia custody extended

New Delhi: A court here on Wednesday extended till August 13 the judicial custody of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his former deputy Manish Sisodia in a money laundering case related to the alleged excise scam. Special judge Kavari Baweja also extended the custody of BRS leader K. Kavitha till then in the case. The judge further extended the judicial custody of Mr Sisodia and Ms Kavitha in a related corruption case, being probed by the CBI, till August 9. The court passed the order after the accused were produced before it on expiry of their judicial custody granted earlier. The court had on July 25 extended the judicial custody of Mr Kejriwal in the money laundering case till July 31, while his custody in the corruption case was extended till August 8. The Supreme Court had earlier granted interim bail to Mr Kejriwal in the ED case. However, he continues to be lodged in Tihar jail here as he has not furnished the bail bond in the case. The Delhi CM is in judicial custody in the CBI case.

Aspirants death: Cong holds candle march

New Delhi: Extending solidarity with the UPSC aspirants and demanding impartial probe in the matter, the Delhi Congress held candle-light marches in all the 280 Blocks of Delhi. Delhi Congress unit chief Devender Yadav, who took part in the candle-light marches at the Badli Assembly, thanked the high court for taking cognisance of the tragedy, and demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe.

Teen dies after being pulled into machine

New Delhi: A 15-year-old girl died after her hand got entangled and her head was pulled into a dough kneading machine, used to make momos and spring rolls, in West Delhi's Rohini, the police said on Wednesday. According to the police, the incident took place on Tuesday evening in Begumpur area, where the machine was operating from inside a room. The victim was working when her hand got entangled in the machine, pulling her head into the dough kneading tub, they said. The girl was severely injured and unresponsive with her head stuck in the machine when the team reached the spot.

Fresh spell of rain brings Delhi to its knees again

Old Rajinder Nagar floods, red warning issued

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar, where three students died due to flooding in the basement of a coaching centre last week, was flooded again following a spell of heavy rain on Wednesday. Several videos surfaced of the flood-like situation in the stretch that is lined with many coaching centres.

"We had come out from our home for dinner and it suddenly started raining and within minutes the whole area got flooded with water," a resident of the area said.

"Even after five days (of the death of the UPSC aspirants), the administration and MCD is applying its complete force to suppress the protest and has done nothing for cleaning the drains," he said.

A civil services aspirant, who has been part of the protest in Rajinder Nagar area, said, "There is sparking in the electric poles.



A woman being assisted by a policeman on a waterlogged road during rain near Pusa Road area in New Delhi on Wednesday. —PTI

Rainwater is gushing into the basements. Students are worried about their safety in such a situation."

Delhi has been put on a 'red' alert heavy rain lashed Delhi-NCR causing water-logging and traffic congestion in several areas.

A 'red' warning calls for action and vigilance.

At least 10 flights that were to land at the Delhi airport

were diverted due to heavy rains. An official said that at least 10 flights were diverted at the airport after 1930 hours due to bad weather. Of these, eight were diverted to Jaipur and two flights to Lucknow.

The National Flash Flood Guidance Bulletin has included Delhi in its list of 'areas of concern', the weather office said.

Woman shot dead in road rage incident in Gokalpuri

New Delhi, July 31: A 30-year-old woman was shot dead allegedly by an unidentified man in a road rage incident on Wednesday after their two wheelers brushed against each other in Northeast Delhi's Gokalpuri area, the police said.

The incident took place at Gokalpuri flyover at around 3.15 pm when the woman, identified as Simranjeet Kaur, was travelling with

her husband Heera Singh and two sons aged 12 and four years.

DCP Joy Tirkey said Mr Singh had a verbal spat with the man on another two-wheeler near Gokalpuri flyover after their vehicles almost brushed against each other.

Mr Singh told the police that the accused fired a single shot from the flyover down below, from a distance of about 30-35 feet. —PTI

L-G forms CS-led panel to address regulation of centres ■ Guidelines issued for state-run, private schools
Govt to bring law to regulate coaching centres

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
JHA
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Delhi education minister Atishi on Wednesday announced plans to bring in a law for regulating coaching centres in the national capital following the death of three UPSC aspirants in a flooded basement of a coaching institute in Old Rajinder Nagar on July 27.

She said that the law will specify the qualification of teachers and the minimum infrastructure needed for a coaching institute, among others.

The government has also issued guidelines for students' safety in state-run and private schools in the aftermath of the coaching centre incident.

The guidelines for schools mandate the use of basements for only permissible activities and necessary steps to be taken to avoid water logging.

In order to seek inputs on the proposed law, Ms Atishi along with mayor Shelly Oberoi first met the protesting students at Old Rajinder Nagar. Later in the day, the two along with city ministers Gopal Raj and Saurabh Bharadwaj met students at the Delhi Secretariat to discuss their grievances.

"We met representatives from various coaching hubs like Old Rajinder Nagar and Nehru Vihar. Students put forth their



Delhi minister Atishi speaks with students protesting in Old Rajinder Nagar area in New Delhi on Wednesday, MCD mayor Shelly Oberoi is also seen. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

concerns and feedback regarding high fees and lack of infrastructure at coaching centres. They also shared concerns about how exploitation is happening in the form of high rent and high brokerage charges," Ms Atishi said.

She said the students also highlighted the lack of facilities for food and added these grievances will be included in the regulation to be framed by the government.

Lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena, meanwhile, formed a committee headed by the chief secretary to frame guidelines to regulate coaching centres in the city and redress issues faced by students.

The committee will comprise five to six represen-

tatives of coaching institutes, students, and officials of the departments concerned.

A senior Raj Niwas official said the panel will comprehensively address all issues related to regulation, exorbitant rentals, fire clearances, desilting of drains, and other immediate needs of students.

The committee shall prepare a long-term and a short-term action plan for gradually shifting the coaching institutes to a well-planned area in Narela and Rohini.

The chief secretary will take up the matter of formulation of a regulatory framework in line with the guidelines framed by the government of India.

The L-G also directed

the police commissioner to crack down on property owners charging exorbitant rentals from students.

He also issued orders to create a portal with Aadhaar-based log-in credentials for all coaching institutes and students enrolled there.

Earlier in the day, Ms Atishi said, "The Central government has not brought any legislation to regulate the illegalities in coaching institutes. The Delhi government will not wait for the Centre. The Delhi government will bring legislation that will regulate all types of coaching institutes in the city. As a long-term solution, the Coaching Institutes Regulation Act will be introduced."

'Case of criminal neglect': HC blasts MCD, cops

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Lambasting the MCD and the police over the death of three IAS aspirants in the basement of a coaching centre, the Delhi high court has hinted at tasking a Central agency to probe the incident and directed the civic body's commissioner, deputy commissioner of police, and the investigating officer in the case to appear before it on Friday.

A bench of acting chief justice Manmohan and justice Tushar Rao Gedela on Wednesday termed the incident as a "case of criminal neglect," saying a "strange probe" was going on with the Delhi police taking action against a "passer-by" who drove a car outside the coaching centre



Furniture turned down in the Press Club after heavy rains in New Delhi on Wednesday. — G.N. JHA

in Old Rajinder Nagar but did not act against the MCD officials.

The high court was referring to SUV driver Manuj Kathuria, who along with four others was denied bail by a trial court later in the day.

The high court also

some official been held accountable for the incident till now? We are telling you, once the responsibility is fixed on officials, no such incident will ever happen in future."

The high court also directed the authorities to remove all encroachments on drains in the Rajinder Nagar area by Friday.

"This is such a serious incident. There is infrastructure failure in the city at a large scale," the bench said, adding that the situation is absolutely chaotic at the ground level and wondered if these civic authorities even exist at the ground level.

The high court said the construction of multi-storey buildings was being allowed but there

was no proper drainage.

"Your authorities are bankrupt. If you don't have money to pay salaries, how will you upgrade the infrastructure? There is a need to revamp the infrastructure. You want to have a freebie culture, you don't want to collect taxes. You are not collecting any money, so you are not spending any money..The tragedy was bound to happen," it said.

The high court was hearing a plea seeking the constitution of a high-level committee to investigate the death of the three civil services aspirants.

The court was also hearing a plea related to hundreds of libraries running in basements in the city.

MCD: It is failure for all of us, should have done better

Students set up 15-member panel as fast enters Day 2

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

As the UPSC aspirants continued their hunger strike for the second consecutive day on Wednesday, the Delhi police removed a few "outsiders" from the protest site in Rajinder Nagar where hundreds have been demonstrating to seek justice following the deaths of three civil services aspirants at Rau's IAS Study Circle.

The students formed a coordination committee comprising 15 members to decide a future course of action and communicate with the authorities concerned.

In a related development, chief secretary Naresh Kumar directed all the departments concerned not to make payments to contractors engaged in the desilting of drains unless a third-party audit of such work is completed.

A delegation of students also met MCD commissioner Ashwani Kumar and highlighted the poor safety measures at several coaching centres in the national capital, posing a

threat to their lives, among other issues.

After their meeting with the MCD commissioner, the students said, "We met him and submitted several short-term and long-term demands seeking a written response from him. He has said a press release carrying his response to our demands will be released by Thursday."

"The immediate demands that we raised include compensation for the deceased, fixing responsibility of the coaching institute, and releasing FIR copy and CCTV footage of the incident," they said, adding, "The long-term demands include action against institutes that have hiked fees from ₹2,000-3,000 to ₹5,000-6,000 for libraries set up on higher floors after those operating in the basement were sealed. We also demanded an inspec-

tion of the mess facilities here and other poor living conditions," they said.

The protest, which has seen participation from more than 400 civil services aspirants, has been ongoing since Sunday under heavy police deployment. The students are demanding better facilities and are adamant about keeping the issue non-political.

Some students who began a hunger strike to press their demands said, "We will continue our protest till our demands are met."

At the protest site, MCD additional commissioner Tariq Thomas, meanwhile, accepted the civic body's failure and said there are serious structural issues that need to be addressed.

The civic official said there can be no excuses for the incident and the agency should have done its duty better.

According to a police officer, over a dozen individuals were removed from the protest site as they were identified as "outsiders" and not students of any coaching institute.

Depts asked not to release pay for desilting till 3rd party audit

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

In the wake of the tragic deaths of three civil services aspirants after water from a flooded drain gushed into the library of the basement of Rau's IAS Study Circle in Old Rajinder Nagar on Saturday, Delhi chief secretary Naresh Kumar has directed all the departments concerned not to make payments to contractors engaged for desilting of drains unless a third-party audit of such work is completed.

In reply to a note written to him by Delhi urban development minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, the chief secretary

said that the additional chief secretary (urban development) has been directed to provide a factual note along with information sought by the minister over third-party audit of desilting of drains by various agencies.

The urban development department wrote to all the departments on May 27 for third-party audit of desilting work, in compliance of high court order. Mr Kumar said that all the departments concerned have been directed not to release any payment to any contractor engaged in desilting of drains unless such work is duly verified through third-party audit.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

For the convenience of Rail passengers, Railways have decided to extend the Periodicity of run of the following Summer Special Trains as per Details given below:-

Train No. & Name	Frequency	Extended Upto
09195 Vadodara Jn.-Mau Jn. Summer Special (Weekly)	Saturday	Upto 28.09.2024
09196 Mau Jn.-Vadodara Jn. Summer Special (Weekly)	Sunday	Upto 29.09.2024
09417 Ahmedabad-Danapur Summer Special (Weekly)	Monday	Upto 30.09.2024
09418 Danapur-Ahmedabad Summer Special (Weekly)	Tuesday	Upto 01.10.2024
09557 Bhavnagar Terminus-Delhi Cantt. Summer Spl. (Weekly)	Friday	Upto 27.09.2024
09558 Delhi Cantt.-Bhavnagar Terminus Summer Spl. (Weekly)	Saturday	Upto 28.09.2024
09405 Sabarmati Bg-Patna Jn. Summer Special (Weekly)	Tuesday	Upto 24.09.2024
09406 Patna Jn.-Sabarmati Bg Summer Special (Weekly)	Thursday	Upto 26.09.2024
09097 Bandra(T.)-Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Summer Spl. (Weekly)	Sunday	Upto 29.12.2024
09098 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-Bandra(T.) Summer Spl. (Weekly)	Tuesday	Upto 31.12.2024
09525 Hapa-Naharlagun Summer Special (Weekly)	Wednesday	Upto 25.12.2024
09526 Naharlagun-Hapa Summer Special (Weekly)	Saturday	Upto 28.12.2024
09183 Mumbai Central-Banaras Summer Special (Weekly)	Wednesday	Upto 25.12.2024
09184 Banaras-Mumbai Central Summer Special (Weekly)	Friday	Upto 27.12.2024
09309 Indore Jn.-Hazrat Nizamuddin Summer Special (Bi-Weekly)	Fri, Sun	Upto 29.12.2024
09310 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Indore Jn. Summer Special (Bi-Weekly)	Mon, Sat	Upto 30.12.2024
09075 Mumbai Central-Kathgodam Summer Special (Weekly)	Wednesday	Upto 25.12.2024
09076 Kathgodam-Mumbai Central Summer Special (Weekly)	Thursday	Upto 26.12.2024
09189 Mumbai Central-Katihar Jn. Summer Special (Weekly)	Saturday	Upto 28.12.2024
09190 Katihar Jn.-Mumbai Central Summer Special (Weekly)	Tuesday	Upto 31.12.2024
04123 Prayagraj-Hazrat Nizamuddin Summer Special (Bi-Weekly)	Sun, Wed	04 to 28.08.2024
04124 Hazrat Nizamuddin-Prayagraj Summer Special (Bi-Weekly)	Mon, Thu	05 to 29.08.2024
04141 Subedarganj-Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan Summer Special (Weekly)	Monday	05.08.2024 to 26.08.2024
04142 Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan-Subedarganj Summer Special (Weekly)	Tuesday	06.08.2024 to 27.08.2024
04137 Gwalior-Barauni Jn. Summer Special (Bi-Weekly)	Sun, Wed	04 to 28.08.2024
04138 Barauni Jn.-Gwalior Summer Special (Bi-Weekly)	Mon, Thu	05 to 29.08.2024

Note: Rest of the instruction will hold good.
For any kind of information, passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

Visit RailMadad website www.railmadad.indianrailways.gov.in Download RailMadad app. RailMadad Helpline No. 139

FOR SALE
One vehicle of the High Commission is available for sale.
Details are as follows:-
TOYOTA COROLLA ALTIS CAR
Petrol 1794 CC (Model 2013)
Colour: White
Vehicle can be inspected in High Commission between office hours (Mon-Friday). Sealed offers/bids are invited till 15th August 2024 (1400 hours). The High Commission reserves the right to approve the bid quoted & also reserve the right to reject any bid with no liability to the parties/bidders under Public Procurement Rules 2004 available at www.pprp.org.pk/Rules.asp.
High Commission for Pakistan
2/50-G, Shantipath, Chanakyaपुरी
New Delhi - 110021
Contact: 011-26888320

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NORTHERN RAILWAY e-Tender Notice
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender for the under noted work:
Name of work Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) of SCADA system of DEE-RE with its location section for a period of Four Years
Approx. Cost of work Rs. 52,40,527.20/-
Earnest Money Deposit Rs. 1,04,800/-
E-Tender Bid Online Submission period 13.08.2024 (00.00 Hrs.) to 27.08.2024 (15.00 Hrs.)
E-Tender Bid Submission on End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time 27.08.2024 (15.00 hrs)
Fund Allocation 09061032
Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen www.ireps.gov.in
E-Tender No.: 25-TRD-NDL5-2024-25 Dated : 30.07.2024 2336/2024
Serving Customers With A Smile

NORTHERN RAILWAY Tender Notice
The Dy. Chief Engineer/TMC/Line, Northern Railway, State Entry Road, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites Open E-tender under One Packet System for the under noted work:-
Name of work and location IOH and Major repair of track machines at TMMD/LKO & MB under jurisdiction of Dy.CE/TMC/Line/New Delhi.
Completion period of the work 24 Months
Approx cost of work ₹ 34932904.32
Earnest Money amount (to be deposited Online) ₹ 324700.00
Cost of Tender Document (to be deposited Online) Rs. Nil
Date & Time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender Tender document remain available on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 30.07.2024 upto 15.00 Hrs on 20.08.2024 Tender Bids may be uploaded from 06.08.2024 & upto 15:00 hrs on 20.08.2024 on IREPS web site. The tender will be opened soon after 15:00 hrs on 20.08.2024.
Detailed Tender Notice & Tender Document The detailed tender document is available on www.ireps.gov.in. Above tender document will be available for online submission of offer on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 06.08.2024 to 20.08.2024. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tenders are given in tender document.
Tender Notice No. 1-W-Dy.CETMCL-I0H-11-24-25 Dated: 30.07.2024 2324/2024
Serving Customers With A Smile

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE
The Dy. Chief Engineer/TMC/Line, Northern Railway, State Entry Road, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites Open E-tender under One Packet System for the under noted work:-
1. Name of work and location IOH and Major repair of track machines at TMMD/TKD, KKKE & BTI under jurisdiction of Dy.CE/TMC/Line/New Delhi.
2. Completion period of the work 24 Months
3. Approx. cost of work Rs. 32277045.65
4. Earnest Money amount (to be deposited Online) Rs. 311400.00
5. Cost of Tender Document (to be deposited Online) Rs. Nil
6. Date & Time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender Tender document remain available on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 30.07.2024 upto 15:00 Hrs. on 20.08.2024. Tender Bids may be uploaded from 06.08.2024 & upto 15:00 hrs on 20.08.2024 on IREPS web site. The tender will be opened soon after 15:00 hrs on 20.08.2024.
7. Detailed Tender Notice & Tender Document The detailed tender document is available on www.ireps.gov.in. Above tender document will be available for online submission of offer on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 06.08.2024 to 20.08.2024. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tenders are given in tender document. The detailed tender notice also can be seen on the Notice Board of the above office.
Tender Notice No. 1-W-Dy.CETMCL-I0H-12-24-25 Dated : 30.07.2024 2323/2024
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE



महतारी वंदन योजना

खुशियों का नोटिफिकेशन

महतारी वंदन से मातृशक्ति का सम्मान
माँ को समर्पित है “एक पेड़ माँ के नाम”

1 अगस्त 2024

₹1000 की छठवीं किश्त जारी



प्रदेश की महतारियां
आज करेंगी
पौधरोपण

एक
पेड़
माँ
के
नाम

श्री विष्णु देव साय
मुख्यमंत्री, छत्तीसगढ़

श्री नरेंद्र मोदी
माननीय प्रधानमंत्री



मुख्यमंत्री
श्री विष्णु देव साय
से जुड़ने के लिए
QR CODE स्कैन करें

हमने बनाया है, हम ही सँवारेंगे

विष्णु के सुशासन से
सँवर रहा छत्तीसगढ़

SHORT TAKES

NIA charges man for human trafficking

New Delhi: The National Investigation Agency has filed a chargesheet against an alleged arms peddler, Lalngaihawma, who was allegedly running a pan-India trafficking racket and had links with Myanmar-based insurgent groups, the officials said Wednesday. In its chargesheet filed on Tuesday before an NIA Special court here in Delhi, the agency invoked various sections of IPC, Arms Act, Explosive Substance Act, and stringent anti-terror UA(P) Act and he has been charged with active involvement in the network operating in the Northeast region, along with others parts of the country.

House rocked by caste remarks chaos

Continued From Page 1 country and create violence. The Congress talks about "jaati" (caste) day and night, he said, stressing that everyone should go by the rules and regulations of the House. Mr Rijji said that the Opposition doesn't have any issue and they are playing with the security of the nation by making statements against the Army. The Congress members responded by displaying placards that read, "We want caste census".

Mr Birla objected to it, saying that it had been decided that placards will not be displayed in the House. As protests continued, Mr Birla adjourned the House for around 20 minutes. Before the House was adjourned, four questions and their supplementaries were taken up during the Question Hour amidst protests. Two Congress MPs, including Manickam Tagore, did not ask questions even though their names were called by the Chair during the Question Hour.

The Congress member from Maharashtra, Kirsan Namdeo, however, asked a question as he was apparently unaware of the Congress strategy in the House. Mr Gogoi went to him to stop him and after that Mr Namdeo also joined other protesters in the Well.

Mr Birla told Mr Gogoi, "You have gone to his (Mr Namdeo) seat to stop him from asking the question. You are stopping your own MP from asking the question. You should not do that."

Later, speaking with the media outside the Parliament, Mr Gogoi said the INDIA bloc protested inside the House on Wednesday against the "insensitive and cruel" remarks made by the BJP leaders during a discussion on the Budget, with respect to the caste census. "We know the caste census is an emotional issue. Many people in India from the SC, ST and OBC categories want the caste census, but their demand was mocked by the BJP in Parliament. They were insulted by the BJP in Parliament and it is unfortunate that later in the evening, the PM shared that speech and praised that speech," Mr Gogoi said, adding, "The PM praised the speech that insulted the dalits, OBCs and adivasis. We are here fighting for their rights and fighting for the caste census."

'Fine balance of growth, jobs in Budget'

Continued From Page 1

India to contain inflation included the free food grain scheme, offloading of wheat and rice under the open market and price stabilisation funds, which maintain a buffer stock of pulses. Duty on crude edible oil was cut too," she added. On the Agniveer issue, the Union minister said it is a reformative step to enhance the capabilities and battle readiness of our armed forces. "It ensures that we have fit soldiers on the frontlines. One of the expected outcomes of this scheme is that the armed forces will have a much younger force by recruiting those in the 17.5-21 years age group and retaining only 25 per cent of those reducing the average age," she said, adding, "While in 2014, the Indian armed forces, particularly the Army, didn't even have bulletproof vests. Today in our country, we produce bulletproof vests that are good for our Army."

On education and youth, the finance minister said that the government has already announced measures for education loans in the Budget to help our youth, who have not been eligible for any benefit from any government policies or schemes. "We have announced a financial support of ₹10 lakhs for higher education. e-vouchers for this purpose will be given to 1 lakh students, with 3 per cent interest," she said.

Ms Sitharaman attacked the Opposition on the Neet exam row, saying that the Supreme Court did not scrap the Neet exam. "Neet does not disadvantage anyone... Tamil Nadu students procure 85 per cent of the seats under the 69 per cent reservation in that state." Her remarks met with protests by the DMK MPs, who urged the finance minister to talk over the paper leak issue and the rising suicides among Neet aspirants. "In 2011, there were only 1,945 medical seats in Tamil Nadu. At present, there are 10,423 seats in the state. Neet has ensured cost-effective medical education for backward families and hurt certain vested interests," said Ms Sitharaman, listing out the names of several students from humble backgrounds who have cracked the medical entrance exam.

'860, other than children, were in Mundakkai at the time of disaster'

Grim scenes unfold as rescue efforts resume in Wayanad

Wayanad (Kerala), July 31: Harrowing scenes of dead bodies in sitting and lying positions inside destroyed houses could be seen as rescue operations resumed in the landslide-devastated Mundakkai hamlet in Kerala's Wayanad district on Wednesday morning.

In one house flattened by massive boulders, the lifeless bodies of four to five people were reportedly seen hugging each other tightly in their death.

The rescuers could reach many inland areas, which were totally cut off, on Wednesday morning.

According to visuals aired on TV channels, army personnel were seen breaking the tin roof of a house that was completely submerged in mud and using ropes to reach inside to retrieve the bodies of those trapped there.

A local, who entered one such house, said saw mud-covered bodies in sitting positions on chairs and



Family members of landslides' victims mourn at a crematorium in Wayanad district on Wednesday.

lying down on cots. "The deceased persons might be sitting or lying down when the tragedy struck them in the small hours of Tuesday," he said.

K. Babu, a ward member of the local panchayat here, said over 860 people other than children were in Mundakkai during the time of the disaster.

Besides the locals and children, migrant workers and tourists were also in the area.

The panchayat member said the intensity of the disaster is beyond imagination and what they witnessed during the rescue operations was harrowing and disturbing.

"In many places, people were found trapped alive and were pleading for help. Dead bodies, including those of children, were seen as hugging each other tightly. Bodies of women were found under huge tree trunks," he recounted.

Rahul, Priyanka to meet families of victims today

New Delhi, July 31: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will visit landslides-hit Wayanad on Thursday and meet several families affected by the natural calamity, sources said. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi were scheduled to visit Wayanad Wednesday morning but they put off the visit as authorities informed them that they would not be able to land due to incessant rain and adverse weather conditions.

Congress sources said the two leaders would visit relief camps at the Government Higher Secondary School and St Joseph UP School, Meppadi.

'Odisha has over 16L ghost ration cards'

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO BHUBANESWAR, JULY 31

Odisha food supplies and consumer welfare minister Krushna Chandra Patra on Wednesday said there are over 16 lakh ghost ration card holders under the food security scheme in the state.

While replying to a question by BJP MLA Durga Prasanna Nayak in the State Assembly, Patra informed that 6,19,836 applicants have applied for new ration cards.

"We want the beneficiaries, whose names were deleted due to political rivalry or some other issues, to apply again and the government will consider such applications," said Patra.

According to the minister, the Odisha government has already started the process for updation of KYC to check original beneficiaries.

"Biometrics and other details of the beneficiaries will be taken for ration cards. Those beneficiaries, who have died, their names will be deleted and new cards will be issued to eligible beneficiaries," Patra added.

Sources said that already there are 10 parameters for enrollment and issuing new ration cards. The process has already started to delete the ghost ration card holders and addition of eligible beneficiaries. This will be done through updation of KYC norms.

Hide like rats in holes: TMC MLA threatens 2 BJP MLAs

PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI BERHAMPURE, JULY 31

Controversial Bharatpur Trinamul Congress (TMC) MLA Humayun Kabir has triggered a fresh controversy. This time, he threatened two BJP MLAs, Gouri Shankar Ghosh and Subrata Moitra who are also from Murshidabad district, to break their legs and force them to hide like 'rats in holes.'

Mr Kabir claimed at a press meet on Tuesday evening, "I am openly threatening two BJP MLAs to break their legs. Two lakh armed workers of our party will garhara and compel them to take shelter like rats in holes



Humayun Kabir

out of fear."

He alleged, "These two opposition MLAs supported division of West Bengal. They echoed their party MP Nishikanta Dubey's demand to add Murshidabad and Malda with Bihar to bifurcate Bengal on communal lines, thus endangering our communal harmony."

Parts of UP Vidhan Sabha building flooded after rain

12 killed in rain-linked incidents, 3 died fires in 24 hrs

Lucknow, July 31: Heavy rainfall on Wednesday afternoon flooded parts of the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha building, where the Monsoon session of the state Assembly is now on.

The two-hour spell of rain led to waterlogging in several parts of the state capital, including around the Vidhan Bhavan.

There was waterlogging at the building's entrance normally used by MLAs, and there was flooding in the corridor and some rooms on the ground floor. Staff used buckets and mops to clear away the water.

The situation triggered some caustic comments from the Opposition.

"The state Assembly needs the budget the most. If this is the condition after a single spell of heavy rain, then the rest of the state is at the mercy of God," Samajwadi Party general secretary and MLA Shivpal Singh Yadav said sharing a video of the



Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly staff clears rainwater from the flooded premises of the Assembly in Lucknow on Wednesday.

flooded Vidhan Sabha building on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The chambers where the state Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Councils hold their sessions were not affected.

Twelve people were killed in rain-related incidents and three died fires in the last 24 hours, the

state relief commissioner's office said.

Four deaths were reported in Chandauli, three each in Banda and Gautam Buddha Nagar, two in Prayagraj, one each in Pratapgarh, Gonda and Etawah, it said. Twelve of these deaths are related to lightning, drowning and snake bites.

Centre opposes in SC plea for refund of mining royalty

'Order will have multipolar impact'

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, JULY 31

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its order on the issue of whether royalty levied by the Centre on mines and mineral-bearing lands since 1989 would be refunded on a retrospective basis to the states. During the hearing, the Centre argued that any such order asking it to pay the alleged dues with retrospective effect would have a "multipolar" impact.

In a landmark verdict on July 25, a nine-judge Constitution bench headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud, by a majority 8:1 verdict, had held that the legislative power to tax mineral rights vests with the states and the royalty paid on minerals is not a tax.

The judgment, however, led to another dispute with some Opposition-ruled mineral-bearing states claiming refund of royalty from the Centre with retrospective effect. A nine-judge Constitution bench headed by the CJI reserved its verdict after hearing the arguments of the Centre, states and mining companies on whether its verdict giving states legislative competence to impose tax on mineral wealth will have prospec-

SC confirms order staying Gawli's release

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Quoting the iconic dialogue "So ja beta, nahi toh Gabbar aa jayega" from the Bollywood blockbuster *Sholay*, the Supreme Court on Wednesday "confirmed" its earlier order staying the premature release of gangster-turned-politician Arun Gawli who is serving life imprisonment in a murder case.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Dipankar Datta made absolute its June 3 order staying the operation of the April 5 order of the Bombay HC's Nagpur bench. The HC had directed state authorities to consider Gawli's application for premature release under the 2006 remission policy.

multiple or retrospective effect. Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told the bench that making the July 25 verdict retrospective will have cascading effects on common people as companies will pass on the financial burden on them.

Police refused to lodge complaint, says Prajapati community; cops reject charge MP witnesses high drama over '16 missing' donkeys

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JULY 31

District headquarters of Burhanpur in MP has witnessed high drama over "disappearance" of 16 donkeys with some members of a particular community hurling bizarre charges of "indifference" against the police for the "stigma" attached to the docile animal.

The owners of the "missing" donkeys have moved from pillar to post to make the police act in the matter,

leading to registration of FIR in the case on Wednesday. The donkey owners belong to the Prajapati community. "We have received a complaint regarding missing 16 donkeys in the area. An FIR was registered in connection with the incident on Wednesday," in-charge of Shikarpura police station Kamal Pawar told this newspaper.

The police finally yielded to our pressure and lodged a complaint in the matter, Aditya Prajapati, president of the youth wing of the

local Prajapati community, told this newspaper.

Mr Prajapati alleged that a complaint in connection with the incident could not be lodged for the last two days as the two police stations in Burhanpur city, Shikarpura and Kotwali, were in a dilemma if the incident had taken place in the area of their jurisdictions.

As per Mr Prajapati, the donkey owners lived in Kotwali police station area while the alleged theft took place in Shikarpura. "We had taken up the

matter at the 'Jan Sunbai' or public hearing conducted by the local administration in Burhanpur on Tuesday. But, we were advised to go to the police," Mr Prajapati said.

Interestingly, a blame game started between the police and some members of the community over the issue with both the sections linking the stigma attached to the pet animal to pin down each other.

"Police was perhaps initially hesitant to lodge the complaint considering the stigma attached to the don-

key. That was our initial feelings. But, we no longer entertain such impressions since police registered the FIR now," Mr Prajapati said, as a matter of fact.

The police officer Mr Pawar however dismissed it saying that "It is absolutely baseless". "We have scanned the footage of around 250 CCTVs installed in the area to get the clue on the missing donkeys. But, we have not noticed any sign of stealing of the animals. A probe is on into the matter", Mr Pawar said.

Sonia: Public mood is in favour of Congress

Continued From Page 1

complacent and over-confident. The 'mahaul' does favour us, but we have to work unitedly with a sense of purpose. I dare say that if we perform well, reflecting the trend that we witnessed in the Lok Sabha elections, national politics will undergo a transformation," Mrs Gandhi said. Assembly polls are due in Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand and J&K this year, while Bihar and Delhi go to polls early next year. The CPP also endorsed the deaths in Wayanad.

She also spoke about the demands of farmers and youths being ignored in the Union Budget by the ruling party. "Allocations in a number of vital sectors have not done justice to the tasks required to be fulfilled", she said. "There has been widespread disappointment, in spite of the PM, the finance minister and others to talk up the Budget and its so-called accomplishments. The Union government, especially its top leadership, continues to be self-delusional as crores of families across the country are devastated by mounting unemployment and price rise," she added.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi claimed the Modi government had not drawn the right lessons from "their significant decline" in the Lok Sabha polls and alleged it was persisting with its policy of "dividing communities and spreading an atmosphere of fear and animosity". "Fortunately, the SC intervened at the right time," she said in an apparent reference to the stay on the orders passed by UP and Uttarakhand government asking eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display the name of owners.

"But this can only be a temporary respite. Look at how the rules have been suddenly changed to permit the bureaucracy to participate in the activities of the RSS. It calls itself a cultural organisation but the whole world knows that it is the BJP's political and ideological base," Mrs Gandhi said.

Wayanad toll rises to 239; search on

Continued From Page 1

the Kerala government was alerted about the heavy rains from July 18 onwards.

"The state was alerted on July 23, seven days prior, then again on July 24 and July 25. On July 26, it was informed that there will be heavy rainfall of more than 20 centimetres, there was a possibility of landslides, there could be a rush of mud and people could even die by getting buried beneath it. Therefore, we dispatched nine NDRF teams there on July 23, whereas three additional battalions were sent yesterday (July 30). If the state government had been alert to the arrival of the NDRF teams, a lot could have been saved," said Mr Shah.

"Seven days is a long time. It is for the states to act. An IIT Delhi report had said 4,000 persons in the region are at high potential risk and they were to be removed from specific places. The same persons have perished. Six years back we saved many lives due to the early warning system, but this time we could not," said Mr Shah in statements in both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha.

Kerala CM, however, refuted these claims and said the Union home minister has presented information in Parliament that is "inconsistent" with facts. The CM said an orange alert was in place with a warning that rainfall will be between 115 and 204 mm but the actual rainfall was much higher than predicted.

"The area received 200 mm of rain in the first 24 hours and 372 mm in the next 24 hours, totaling 572 mm in 48 hours. This far exceeded the initial warning. The area had never been on red alert before the disaster. However, after the incident, a red alert was issued at 6 am," said Mr Vijayan.

On the NDRF teams in the state, the Kerala CM said these teams were made available at the beginning of the rainy season based on Kerala's prior request for nine NDRF teams.

While intervening in the short duration calling attention motion on the Wayanad landslide tragedy in both Houses, Mr Shah assured that the Centre is standing like a "rock" with the Kerala government and people of the state in this moment of the tragedy.

However, the assurance came with a pinch of salt. In Lok Sabha, BJP MP Tejaswi Surya gave a complete political-religious twist to the tragedy and even accused the former Congress MP from Wayanad, Rahul Gandhi, of neglecting the area. Indicating towards Mr Gandhi, Mr Surya alleged that he never raised the issue of landslides in his constituency and "illegal encroachments were not removed in Wayanad due to alleged pressure from religious organisations."

His remarks led to protests by Congress members. Congress MP K.C. Venugopal claimed that Mr Surya was

trying to sabotage the debate and he will have to apologise for making "false claims" about Mr Gandhi.

Mr Venugopal, who hails from Kerala, had started the discussion in the Lok Sabha on an emotional note. The other Kerala MPs from the Opposition Benches also joined him and sought to know what the Centre was doing and if it had alerted the Kerala government in advance.

Terminating it a huge tragedy, Mr Gandhi also urged the government to extend all possible help to the people of Wayanad and look into the "ecological issue" there. In the Rajya Sabha, the Opposition blamed the loss of lives on the lack of early warning systems for natural calamities such as the one in Wayanad, amid calls from several members cutting across party lines to declare the tragedy in Kerala a national disaster.

Responding to queries, Mr Shah criticised the Opposition for questioning the Central government's early warning systems and its response to the tragedy.

"The Central government sent nine NDRF teams by air. May I ask what the Kerala government did? Whether or not unauthorised people were living there? This was a vulnerable situation at hand...were the people evacuated? Why were they not evacuated? Who stopped them and if they were evacuated, how did the people die?" Mr Shah asked.

SHORT TAKES

Recognition of 56 MP madrasas cancelled

Bhopal: The Madhya Pradesh Madrasa Board (MPMB) has withdrawn recognition accorded to 56 madrasas in the state after they were found "non-operational", official sources said on Wednesday. These madrasas were functioning in Sheopur district. The action followed a physical inspection by the Sheopur district education officer (DEO), the board secretary Nitin Saxena said. Eighty madrasas in Sheopur district have been accorded recognition by the board. Fifty four of them have received grants by the state government. The development followed an instruction by the board to all the DEOs in the state to make physical inspection of madrasas in their respective areas to find out if they are functioning as per the rules of the state government, official sources said.

Ex-BJP MP sworn in as Chhattisgarh gov

Raipur: Ex-BJP MP Ramen Deka was on Wednesday sworn in as the 10th governor of Chhattisgarh. He was administered the oath of office by Chhattisgarh high court chief justice Ramesh Sinha in a grand ceremony at the Darbar Hall of Raj Bhavan here. Chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai and a host of his ministerial colleagues and the Speaker of Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly Dr Raman Singh were present on the occasion. Born on March 1, 1954 in Sualkuchi under Kamrup district in Assam, the new governor Mr Deka has been active in politics since 1977. He was one of the founding members of BJP in 2006. He has held the position of vice chairman of the innovation and transformation commission of Assam from August 2021 until July 29, 2024. He has served as a MP twice in 2009 and 2014.

BJP targets MVA over Maratha quota

Mumbai: Senior BJP leader and former Union minister Raosaheb Danve on Wednesday asked the Opposition in Maharashtra to clarify its stance on granting reservation to Marathas from the OBC quota. He said the BJP supports Maratha reservation without affecting any other existing reservation. Mr Danve, who is former Maharashtra BJP president, told the reporters that his party wants to give reservation to Maratha community without touching any other community's reservation. The senior BJP leader's remarks came a day after Shiv Sena (UBT) chief and former chief minister of Maharashtra Uddhav Thackeray had said the quota issue can only be addressed by the Centre by passing an amendment to remove the cap of 50 per cent reservation.

ED RAIDS HP CONG MLA OVER AYUSHMAN SCAM

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI/SHIMLA, JULY 31

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday raided the premises of Himachal Pradesh Congress MLA R.S. Bali, some private hospitals and their promoters as part of money laundering probe linked to the alleged Ayushman Bharat scheme fraud. About 19 locations in Shimla, Kangra, Una, Mandi and Kullu districts of the state apart



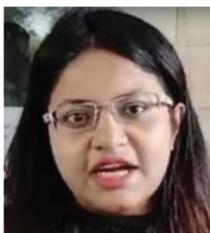
R.S. Bali

from those in Delhi, Chandigarh and Punjab are being searched since morning, the officials said. The premises of Mr Bali — a legislator from Nagrota Assembly seat — Fortis Hospital in Kangra (promoted by Bali's company Himachal Healthcare Pvt Ltd.), Balaji Hospital in Kangra and its promoter Rajesh Sharma's premises were raided. Mr Sharma, as per officials, is a close associate of CM Sukhu. He gave up his ticket for the recent Dehra Assembly bypoll for state chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's wife Kamlesh Thakur. She won the bypoll. Mr Bali is also the chairman and vice-chairman of the Himachal Pradesh tourism development bodies.

UPSC cancels selection of trainee IAS Puja Khedkar

Bars future attempts; Court's order on her bail today

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31



Puja Khedkar

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) cancelled the provisional candidature of probationary IAS officer Puja Khedkar and debarred her from all future examinations or selections. In a related development, a Delhi court is expected to pronounce on August 1 its order on the anticipatory bail plea of Ms Khedkar, accused in a case of cheating and forgery.

Additional sessions judge Devender Kumar Jangala on Wednesday reserved the order after hearing arguments on the application filed by Ms Khedkar, who claimed through her lawyer that she has an "imminent threat of arrest".

During the proceeding, the prosecution as well as the counsel appearing for the UPSC opposed the application, claiming she has "cheated the system".

"This person has abused the law and process of law. The chances of her further abusing the law is still there. She is a resourceful person," the counsel appearing for the UPSC claimed before the court.

The UPSC in its statement said, "The UPSC has examined the available records carefully and found her guilty of acting in contravention of the provisions of the CSE-2022 Rules. Her provisional candidature for the

CSE-2022 (Civil Services Examination-2022) has been "cancelled" and she has also been "debarred permanently" from all future examinations or selections conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

The Commission said a show cause notice (SCN) was issued to Puja Manorama Dilip Khedkar on July 18 for "fraudulently" availing attempts beyond the permissible limit in the examination by "faking" her identity.

She was to submit her response to the SCN by July 25, but she requested for time till August 4 to gather the necessary documents for her response, it said.

The UPSC granted her a "final opportunity" to submit her response by 3:30 pm on July 30 but she "failed to submit her explanation within the prescribed time", the Commission said.

India working on speedy trains with local technology: Vaishnav 'Working on make in India bullet train'

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, JULY 31

India is working on developing bullet trains with indigenous technology, railways minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Wednesday. He said in the Lok Sabha that the bullet train project, first of which is under construction between Ahmedabad and Mumbai, is very complex technologically and is being implemented with the help of Japan.

"Bullet train project is a very complex and technology intensive project. Considering the highest level of safety and associated maintenance protocols, bullet train project has been designed with



Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnav speaks in the Lok Sabha in New Delhi on Wednesday.

the support of Japanese railway. It is customised for Indian requirements and climatic conditions," Mr Vaishnav said.

"Timelines for the completion of the project can be reasonably ascertained after the completion of all associated works of civil structures, track, electrical, signalling, etc," the

Anurag didn't ask LoP's caste, take anybody's name, says saffron party You ask caste of soldiers, PM: BJP steps up attack on Rahul

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Calling Congress leader Rahul Gandhi "icchadhari" when it comes to his caste, the BJP on Wednesday said, "When the Leader of the Opposition has no problem in asking about the castes of others, including the government officials, judges and even journalists, why does he have a problem when asked about his caste?"

In the similar vein, however, the ruling party clarified that Anurag Thakur did not ask about Mr Gandhi's caste, while speaking on the Union Budget, and wondered why the LoP took it an offence and called it an insult to him when none of the other members raised any objection to Mr Thakur's remarks.

BJP national spokesperson and MP Sambit Patra,



Congress parliamentary party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi with ambassador of Ireland to India Kevin Kelly during a meeting in New Delhi.

while addressing the media at the BJP headquarters, lashed out at the Congress, saying it's a "surprise" that Mr Gandhi who can ask anybody's caste in India, takes it an offence when his caste is asked about. "Let me first clarify that Anurag Thakur did not take anybody's name and

without naming anybody, he said the one, whose caste is not known, is asking about caste...Then only one person out of 542 (Lok Sabha) members took offence at it, and at his behest, all Congress members were up on their feet," Mr Patra said.

The BJP leader clarified though Mr Gandhi's name

was not taken but there is nothing wrong in asking about caste of a person who can ask anybody's caste in India. "You are demanding caste census. If it is an insult to ask about caste in Lok Sabha, how can a caste census be done in the country? How will the enumeration be done?" said Mr Patra, while adding that the Congress leader has asked about the caste of judges, soldiers, journalists in the past as well as that of the officials who participated in customary pre-Budget Halwa ceremony, while speaking in the LS.

"He visited the Somnath temple, as someone advised him to do that, fearing the Congress misfortune in the then state polls. We held a press conference, and then Randeep Surjewala held a press conference, claiming him (Gandhi) as a 'janeudhari Brahmin'," he said.

'Think tank of highest order': V-P in reply to remark on RSS

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Calling the RSS a global think tank of the highest order, Rajya Sabha chairman Jagdeep Dhankar on Wednesday said the organisation had "unimpeachable credentials" and has constitutional rights to contribute to the development of the nation.

The chairman's remarks came after the he took an objection to SP MP Ramji Suman's remarks on the RSS, considered as the ideological mentor of the BJP by many.

Mr Dhankar said that he will not permit the member to single out an organisation, which is doing national service.

The Modi government recently revoked the ban on government servants from joining the RSS. The Union home ministry displayed the government's official order on lifting the ban on the participation of government employees in activities of the RSS on its website on Wednesday.

While asking a supplementary question, during the Question Hour in Rajya Sabha, about the National Testing Agency, the SP MP alleged that main criterion for appointments in government jobs "is if a person belongs to the RSS".

RS LoP Mallikarjun Kharge then asked the Chair to allow the SP member to speak, to which, the Chairman said that Mr Suman had "trampled the Constitution of India".

"RSS is an organisation, which is a global think tank of the highest order. I will not permit honourable member to single out an organisation which is doing national service. I rule that RSS is an organisation that has full constitutional rights to participate in country's development journey," Mr Dhankar said.

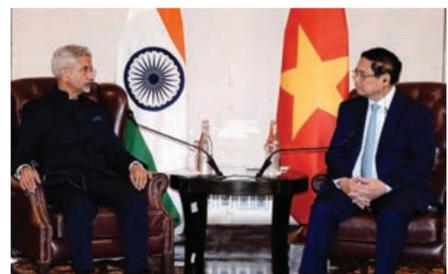
India, Vietnam cementing trade ties: Vietnamese PM

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

India and Vietnam are strengthening trade ties, thereby, enabling a "brighter economic future", and bilateral ties are "expanding steadily", the Southeast Asian nation's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh said at a business event in New Delhi on Wednesday.

The Vietnamese leader, who was welcomed warmly on his arrival in New Delhi late on Tuesday night, will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, to strengthen the "comprehensive strategic partnership" (CSP) between the two nations, including in the spheres of defence, maritime security, trade and investment, energy, education, culture and technology.

According to trade body FICCI, the Vietnamese PM addressed the India Business Forum in the national capital and said that "India and Vietnam's traditional bonds, trust and growing markets — combined with similar-



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh during a meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday.

ties in culture and history, shared aspirations and rapid growth — help bring our businesses together, paving the way for a brighter economic future."

The Vietnamese PM also reportedly said that Vietnam is a crucial partner for India's "Act East policy", and that investment between India and Vietnam is growing, with bilateral relationships expanding steadily over the years.

The Vietnamese leader is being accompanied by a

railway minister added. Meanwhile, the members of Parliament raised the issue of rail safety, during the debate on the demands for grants for the rail ministry in the Lok Sabha.

"No one is paying attention to rail accidents. This is a political Budget, with no new trains or relief for my constituency. Two trains were shut down but have not been restarted yet. I demand that these trains be operational...Vaishnavji, in his position, is following in the footsteps of great leaders like Lal Bahadur Shastri, who took responsibility and resigned. Who is accountable here?" Congress MP from Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Harish Meena said.



West Pakistani refugees celebrate in Jammu on Wednesday after the J&K administration granted proprietary rights to WPRs for land in the Union territory.

Peace at LAC must for normalcy in ties with China: MEA

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

India and China on Wednesday held "constructive" and "forward-looking" diplomatic talks to resolve the over four-year border standoff along the line of actual control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh but there was clear no indication of any breakthrough.

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) said restoration of peace and tranquillity, and respect for the LAC are "essential basis" for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations.

The talks, held in Delhi under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), came days after external affairs minister S. Jaishankar held a bilateral meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Vientiane, the capital of Lao PDR.

It may be noted that Mr Jaishankar had delivered the same message clearly to his Chinese counterpart Yi in two meetings in Kazakhstan and Laos in the past few weeks.

It may also be recalled

that Chinese troops have so far refused to pull back from some of the friction points at the LAC in the Ladakh sector after Chinese troops amassed there four years ago in violation of bilateral border pacts.

In a statement on Wednesday, New Delhi said, "Further to discussions between the two foreign ministers in their recent meetings at Astana and Vientiane, the two sides reviewed the current situation along the line of actual control (LAC) with a view to finding an early resolution of the outstanding issues. Restoration of peace and tranquillity, and respect for the LAC are an essential basis for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations."

"They agreed on the need to jointly uphold peace and tranquillity on the ground in the border areas in accordance with relevant bilateral agreements, protocols and understandings reached between the two governments," it said in a statement.

"The discussion at the meeting was in-depth, constructive and forward-looking," it said.

Biggest-ever IAF's 'Tarang Shakti' drill from Aug. 6

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Indian Air Force (IAF) will be holding its biggest multi-nation exercise "Tarang Shakti" in two phases from August 6, which will showcase India's defence prowess and provide a platform to participating militaries. Meanwhile, the IAF fears that delay in receiving indigenous Tejas Mk-1A aircraft from state-owned HAL could be longer than earlier anticipated.

The state-owned HAL failed to start the delivery of the aircraft on schedule, which was March 31 due to supply issues with engine manufacturer GE.

Now there is concern that first Tejas Mk-1A may be delivered only in November and other aircraft delayed much beyond the deadline, impacting IAF's combat power.

IAF extended invitations to 51 friendly foreign countries for "Tarang Shakti".

Will look into remark, remove anything objectionable, says V-P Expunge 'parivarvaad' slur: Kharge

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

An emotional Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday urged the Chair to expunge certain remarks made by BJP MP Ghanshyam Tiwari in the House regarding his political journey who reportedly said that his entire family was in politics.

Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar said he would look into the remarks made by Mr Tiwari on Tuesday in the House and assured that any word that has hurt the Congress leader would not remain in the record.

Bill tabled in LS to scrap 90-year-old Aircraft Act

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 31

Civil aviation minister K. Ram Mohan Naidu on Wednesday introduced the Bharatiya Vayuvan Vidheyak Bill in the Lok Sabha amid protests from a section of the Opposition from the South over the draft legis-

lation's Hindi title. The bill seeks to overhaul India's civil aviation regulations by replacing the 90-year-old Aircraft Act.

Mr Naidu said the objection to the nomenclature of the bill was settled during the discussion on the three criminal justice laws.

political journey and said "his (Kharge's) entire family" was in politics. "He made a comment regarding 'parivarvaad'. I

request that this should be expunged (from the records)," Mr Kharge said. The Leader of Opposition further said he was a first generation politician and gave details of his political journey which started after joining the Congress party.

At one point he said his father died at the age of 85. To this, Mr Dhankar wished him a life longer than his father. To this, Mr Kharge said, "I don't wish to live for long in this environment."

Mr Dhankar said he does not think that the BJP leader meant anything wrong for him. He assured the Congress leader he will minutely examine the records.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	81,741.34	0.35
Nifty 50	24,951.15	0.38
S&P 500*	5,528.86	1.70
Dollar (₹)	83.72	0.01
Pound Sterling (₹)	107.44	0.23
Euro (₹)	90.65	0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	68,960.350	0.51
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	80.55	2.44
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.924	-0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.134	-0.007

* As of 8:30 PM IST

M&M posts 20% gain in net profit to ₹3,283 crore

Mahindra & Mahindra on Wednesday posted a 20 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit at ₹3,283 crore for the first quarter ended June 30, 2024. The Mumbai-based company had reported a profit after tax of ₹2,745 crore in the year-ago period. Revenue rose 10 per cent year-on-year to ₹3,218 crore as compared to ₹3,892 crore in the June quarter of last fiscal, the company said in a regulatory filing.

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Markets continue momentum to hit new peaks again

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JULY 31

Market maintained upward momentum for the fourth consecutive session and closed at record highs for both Sensex and Nifty-50 on sustained domestic institutions' buying. The Nifty-50 index again missed 25,000 mark by a whisker as it rose up to 24,951.15 before a climb down and closed at new high of 24,951.15 gaining 93.85 points or 0.38 per cent. The Sensex too closed at a new high of 81,741.34 gaining 284.95 points or 0.35 per cent.

BSE's market capitalisation jumped to a new peak of ₹462.38 lakh crore or \$5.52 trillion. A positive US Fed meeting outcome is likely to push Nifty-50 beyond 25,000, said analysts. "The Nifty-50 is heading towards the psychological barrier of 25,000 and a sustainable move above the same will push the Index further higher to 25,200 whereas on the downside 24,800 will be considered as immediate support," said Aditya Gagar, director, Progressive Shares.

Broader markets also gained with BSE mid-cap index up 0.86 per cent and BSE small-cap index up 0.14 per cent. Among the sectors, metal was the top performer followed by pharma and media while the PSU banking sector underperformed. Domestic institutions were net buyers of equi-



● **THE NIFTY-50** is heading towards the psychological barrier of 25,000 and a sustainable move above the same will push the Index further higher to 25,200 whereas on the downside 24,800 will be considered as immediate support.

ties worth ₹3,366.51 crore while foreign portfolio investors were net sellers by ₹3,462.36 crore.

"Sensex and Nifty-50 gained around 3 per cent in the month of July supported by growth led Budget and second month consecutive buying by foreign investors. We expect this momentum to continue with sectorial rotation at play," said Siddhartha Khemka, head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services. "On the global front, the Bank of Japan raised its benchmark interest rate to "around 0.25 per cent" from its previous range of 0 per cent to 0.1 per cent. Now all eyes will be on the US Fed policy decision where investors are expecting a dovish commentary. Thus, on Thursday the market would react to global cues," Khemka added.

SALES OF PREMIUM PHONES RISE AS CUSTOMERS OPT FOR NEW FEATURES

New Delhi, July 31: India's smartphone sales is being driven by the ongoing trend of premiumisation, as per a report by global research firm Counterpoint.

Notably, 5G smartphones captured their highest-ever share of 77 per cent in overall shipments, according to Counterpoint's Monthly India Smartphone Tracker. Samsung led the market in terms of value with a 25 per cent share, followed by vivo and Apple, as per the global research firm.

Consumers continued to upgrade to higher-value smartphones, supported by better trade-in values and easy financing schemes.

However, India's smartphone shipments fell two per cent year-on-year in June quarter, hurt by the heatwave and slower demand, according to the Counterpoint.

Xiaomi reclaimed the top spot with an 18.9 per cent shipment share, and Vivo followed closely with 18.8 per cent share.

Senior Research Analyst Shilpi Jain explained that heatwave conditions in various regions led to lower footfalls in offline channels and delayed smartphone purchases as consumers prioritised appliances like air-conditioners and refrigerators.

This reduced demand led to an inventory build-up. —PTI

Fiscal deficit narrows to 8.1% in April-June period

Central govt's total expenditure in Q1 stood at ₹9.69 lakh cr

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 31

The Centre's fiscal deficit at the end of the first quarter touched 8.1 per cent of the full-year target, while the growth in production of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to a 20-month low of 4 per cent in June this year due to the poor performance in sectors involved in crude oil and refinery products, two separate government data showed on Wednesday.

As per the controller general of accounts (CGA), the fiscal deficit was ₹1,35,712 crore as of June-end.

The deficit stood at 25.3 per cent of the Budget Estimates (BE) in the corresponding period of the financial year 2023-24.



● **THE DEFICIT** was 5.6 per cent of the GDP in 2023-24. In absolute terms, the government aims to contain the fiscal deficit at ₹16,85,494 crore during the current fiscal.

In the Union Budget, the Centre projected to bring down the fiscal deficit to 4.9 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the current 2024-25 financial year.

The deficit was 5.6 per cent of the GDP in 2023-24. In absolute terms, the government aims to contain the fiscal deficit at ₹16,85,494 crore during the current fiscal.

Unveiling the revenue-expenditure data of the union government for the

first three months of 2024-25, the CGA also said the net tax revenue was ₹5,49,633 crore or 21.1 per cent of the BE for the current fiscal.

"The net tax revenue collection was 18.6 per cent at end-June 2023," it said.

The data further showed that the central government's total expenditure in the first quarter stood at ₹9.69 lakh crore or 20.4 per cent of BE.

"The expenditure had just crossed 23 per cent of

the BE in the year-ago period. Of the total expenditure, ₹7.88 lakh crore was on the revenue account and ₹1.81 lakh crore was towards the capital account," the data showed.

Meanwhile, the growth in production of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed down to a 20-month low of 4 per cent in June this year due to a decline in the output of crude oil and refinery products, while it grew by 6.4 per cent in May 2024.

The growth of core sectors - coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity - was 8.4 per cent in June 2023.

The previous low level of growth was recorded in October 2022 at 0.7 per cent.

Ransomware hits small banks

Mumbai, July 31: A ransomware attack on a technology service provider said that it had "temporarily isolated C-Edge Technologies from accessing retail payments system operated by NPCI."

"Customers of banks serviced by C-Edge will not be able to access payment systems during the period of isolation," the NPCI said.

Nearly 300 small banks have been isolated from the country's broader payment network to prevent any wider impact, the sources, who are officials

in a public advisory issued late on Wednesday said that it had "temporarily isolated C-Edge Technologies from accessing retail payments system operated by NPCI."

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Nearly 300 small banks have been isolated from the country's broader payment network to prevent any wider impact, the sources, who are officials

● **THE ATTACK** affected the C-Edge Technologies, a provider of banking technology systems to small banks across the country.

at a regulatory authority, said.

"Most of these are small banks and only about 0.5 per cent of the country's payment system volumes would be impacted," said one of the sources. India has nearly 1,500

cooperative and regional banks which mostly have operations outside big cities.

It is some of these banks that have been affected, the sources said.

NPCI is conducting an audit to ensure that the attack does not spread, the second source said.

The Reserve Bank of India and the cyber authorities have warned Indian banks about possible cyber attacks in the past few weeks, banking industry sources and the first source said. —Reuters

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

MOSQUE TARGETED BY MOB AT UK STABBING SITE

London, July 31: A far-right mob targeted a mosque in north-west England that saw three young girls fatally stabbed during a peaceful vigil in their memory and around 40 police officers suffered injuries in the disorder.

Misinformation being spread on social media about the ethnicity and religion of the 17-year-old male suspect in police custody led to the rioting at the mosque in Southport on Tuesday night.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who had earlier visited the site of Monday's brutal stabbing attack on a dance studio on Hart Street, condemned the mobs for hijacking the vigil and insulting the grieving community with their actions.

"The people of Southport are reeling after the horror inflicted on them yesterday. They deserve our support and our respect," said Starmer. "Those who have hijacked the vigil for the victims have insulted the community."

PROTESTERS BACK ON ROADS OF BANGLADESH

Dhaka, July 31: Police in Bangladesh fired tear gas and lobbed sound grenades on Wednesday to scatter protesters marching to demonstrate against violence that killed at least 150 people this month during student-led agitation against job reservations.

The unrest is the biggest test facing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, 76, since she won a fourth straight term in January elections that were boycotted by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and also marred by deadly protests. Police said they had to use force when protesters in the northeastern district of Sylhet broke through barricades to head for the courts.

"We requested the protesters to move from the road. However, they didn't listen and instead attacked the police, forcing us to disperse them with tear gas and stun grenades," said regional deputy commissioner Azbahar Ali Sheikh.

Hamas chief assassinated in Iran, fuels fear of retaliation

Israelis fear for hostages, Hezbollah confirms commander Shukr killed

Cairo, Dubai, Doha, Haifa, Beirut, July 31: Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in the Iranian capital Tehran early on Wednesday morning, an attack that drew threats of revenge on Israel and fuelled further concern that the conflict in Gaza was turning into a wider Middle East war. The burial of Haniyeh is to be held in Doha on Friday a day after a public funeral ceremony in Tehran, the Palestinian group said on Wednesday.

Concerns grew among Israelis on Wednesday over the fate of dozens of hostages still held captive in Gaza following the killing of Haniyeh in Tehran. Haniyeh's killing "was a mistake as it threatens the possibility of having a hostage deal," said Anat Noy, a resident of the coastal city of Haifa, in his 50s.

"We woke up today with a sense of fear in our hearts that this can escalate even more.

Lebanon's armed group Hezbollah confirmed on Wednesday that senior military commander Fuad Shukr had been killed, more than 24 hours after an Israeli strike hit a building in the southern suburb of the Lebanese capital that he was in.

The Palestinian militant group and Iran's Revolutionary Guards confirmed Haniyeh's death. The Guards said it took place hours after he attended a swearing-in ceremony for Iran's new president.

Although the attack was widely assumed to have been carried out by Israel, PM Benjamin Netanyahu's government made no claim of responsibility and said it would not make any comment on the killing. Haniyeh had been the face of Hamas's global diplomacy as the war set off by the Hamas-led attack on Israel on Oct. 7 has raged in Gaza. He had been taking part in internationally-brokered indirect talks on reaching a ceasefire in the Palestinian enclave.



POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS & CONTINUED targeting of civilians in Gaza while talks continue leads us to ask, how can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on other side? Peace needs serious partners.

— SHEIKH MOHAMMED, Qatar's PM

STRONGLY CONDEMN the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

— MAHMUD ABBAS, Palestinian Authority President



MAY GOD have mercy on my brother Ismail Haniyeh, fallen in martyrdom after this odious attack.

— RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN, Turkish President



Smoke billows from burning tyres behind an Israeli army vehicle in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron on Wednesday, during a demonstration by Palestinians denouncing the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. — AFP



WE BELIEVE that such actions are directed against attempts to restore peace in the region and could significantly destabilise an already tense situation.

— DMITRY PESKOV, Kremlin spokesman



THIS IS something we were not aware of or involved in. It's very hard to speculate.

— ANTONY BLINKEN, US secretary of state

ISRAEL'S TARGETED KILLINGS

July 2024: Israel targets Hamas' shadowy military commander Mohammed Deif. His fate remains unknown.

April 2024: Two Iranian generals are killed in Syria.

January 2024: An Israeli drone strike in Beirut kills top Hamas official Saleh Arouri.

December 2023: Seyed Razi Mousavi, a longtime adviser of the Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, killed outside of Damascus.

2019: Bahaa Abu el-Atta, a senior Islamic Jihad commander, killed.

2012: Ahmad Jabari, head of Hamas' armed wing, killed.

2010: Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, a top Hamas operative, killed in Dubai.

2008: Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's military chief, is killed after his car explodes in Damascus.

2004: Hamas spiritual leader Ahmed Yassin is killed. His successor, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, is killed less than a month later.

2002: Hamas's second-in-command military leader Salah Shehadeh is killed.

1995: Islamic Jihad founder Fathi Shikaki is shot in Malta.

1973: Israeli commandos shoot Palestinian Liberation Organisation leaders in Beirut, in retaliation for the killings of 11 Israeli coaches and athletes at the 1972 Olympics.

Palestinians faced torture: UN

Geneva, July 31: The UN human rights office issued a report on Wednesday saying Palestinians detained by Israeli authorities since the October 7 attacks faced waterboarding, sleep deprivation, electric shocks, the release of dogs, and other forms of torture and mistreatment.

The report said Israel's prison service held more than 9,400 security detainees as of the end of June, and some have been held in secret without access to lawyers or respect for their legal rights.

A summary of the report, based on interviews with former detainees and other sources, decried a staggering number of detainees, including men, women, children, journalists

and human rights defenders and said such practices raise concerns about arbitrary detention. The testimonies indicate appalling acts, such as waterboarding and the release of dogs on detainees, in flagrant violation of human rights law and international humanitarian law, said UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk. — AP

The latest events appear to set back chances of any imminent ceasefire agreement in the nearly 10-month-old war in Gaza between Israel and Palestinian Hamas.

Hamas' armed wing said in a statement Haniyeh's killing would "take the battle to new dimensions and have major repercussions". Vowing to retaliate, Iran declared three days of national mourning and said the US bears responsibility because of its support for Israel.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Israel had provided the grounds for "harsh punishment for itself" and it was the duty of Tehran to avenge the Hamas leader's death at the right time. — Agencies

Harris only Dem candidate to make it to Prez poll race

Washington, July 31: Vice President Kamala Harris has sealed her Democratic presidential nomination as she emerged as the only candidate to qualify for virtual roll call votes from the party's delegates from across the country.

Harris appears to have energised Democrats in the early days of her candidacy, with the surge in warm feelings extending across multiple groups, including some key Democratic constituencies that had been especially tepid about President Joe Biden, a new poll shows.

Harris has challenged her Republican rival, former president Donald Trump, for a debate, provoking him to say whatever he has to say to her face.

As many as 3,923 delegates from across the country petitioned to put Harris, 59, on the ballot for the Democratic nomination, and she secured the support of 99 per cent of the participating delegates, the Democratic Party announced on Tuesday night after the official deadline.

In a joint statement, Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chair Jaime Harrison and the Democratic National Convention Committee (DNCC) Chair Minyon Moore said no other candidate met the threshold of 300 delegate signatures to qualify for the ballot. "We have a fight in front of us," the likely nominee said.

The chairs said that voting on the virtual roll call — the process through which Harris will officially become the Democratic nominee — will begin on August 1 and end on August 5.

Democratic delegates from across the nation made their voices heard, overwhelmingly backing Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee. "As we prepare to open the voting on our virtual roll call, we move to this final stage of our nomination process with unprecedented momentum and unity across our



Kamala Harris

party," the chairs said. "We stand united in our mission to elect a Democratic nominee who has the experience, the wisdom, and the bold determination to lead our country, and we stand united in our mission to defeat Donald Trump once again," they said.

The electronic roll call will commence at 9:00 am ET on August 1, marking the official beginning of the 2024 Convention. Delegates will receive a secure ballot and support to cast their vote on a rolling basis starting at 9:00 am. The roll call voting period will end at 6:00 pm on August 5, the deadline for delegates to return their ballot.

Because Harris has the verified support of a number of pledged delegates equal to or greater than a majority of all pledged and automatic delegates, the votes of both pledged, and automatic delegates will be counted on the first ballot, it said.

Traillblazer Harris is the first Indian-American and first African American woman to be ever named on a presidential ticket for any major political party in the US.

Former president Barack Obama was the first-ever African American in 2008, and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton was the first woman to be the presidential candidate of a major political party.

Noticeably, all three — Obama, Clinton and Harris — are from the Democratic Party, which has ruled the country for 12 of the last 16 years. —PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

1 AUGUST 2024

Shooter's Olympic deeds tribute to Indian women

Manu Bhaker, the young shooter from Haryana, has not only made history by winning two medals at an Olympic Games but also captivated India's millions of sports lovers with the clarity of her thinking. She did not break the glass ceiling so much as shatter it in becoming the first Indian woman to win a medal in shooting and then going on to better it by winning a medal in the mixed tam shooting event, too.

As the first Indian athlete to win two medals in one Olympics Games since Britisher Norman Pritchard did it while competing for India in Paris in 1900 in what was only the second of the modern Olympics, Manu has created history with her success in nerveless marksmanship in the stress of world class competition in a sporting capital that has hosted the Games several times.

The world of advertising has been the quickest to jump on the bandwagon with myriad offers already for endorsements for a bright young lady whose journey from a promising shooter who shook up the competitions among juniors at the world level to an Olympic medalist has been a truly inspiring tale of sporting conquest, even if it is only the third prize that she won in the extreme world of precision shooting where a centimetre makes a huge difference.

Two of India's individual gold medalists may be men, but the women have contributed immensely to the rise in India's sporting stature with lifters, boxers, wrestlers and shuttlers accounting for eight medals...

Manu had missed qualifying for the gold medal final because of one poor shot. The vicissitudes of sport are such that only three years ago a dejected Manu had even contemplated quitting shooting after her air pistol malfunctioned in the Covid-hit Olympics in Tokyo. Turning to the spiritual, much in the Indian tradition of seeking out a message in divinity, she says she found herself inspired by the advice in the *Bhagavad Gita* to "just do what you are meant to do and leave the rest to your destiny."

Manu's partner Sarabjot Singh, a farmer's son, was another who had to draw on inspiration to stay in the sport after setbacks and who made up for disappointment in the men's individual event to partner Manu who seemed to have been the steadier, more calm and composed of the pair as they fought off the South Korean duo of Ye Jin Oh and Wonho Lee in marksmanship in the mixed team 10m air pistol bronze medal match.

Two of India's individual gold medal winning athletes may be men in Abhinav Bindra and Neeraj Chopra, but the women have contributed immensely to the rise in India's sporting stature with weightlifters, boxers, wrestlers and badminton players accounting for eight medals after the nearly-there run of P.T. Usha in Los Angeles in 1984. The sacrifices they have made and the balance they have achieved between pursuing sporting excellence and life and career place them in a category of people who may have had to work harder to achieve success.

The difficulties faced and conquered in seeking gender equality in sporting opportunities and finding funding in the amateur era are pointers to how the women athletes of yore fought battles to establish the present-day scene in which the chance to excel in sport is available to athletes of the fairer sex. And performances like those of P.V. Sindhu and Manu Bhaker in winning more than one medal are a tribute to their spirit. Manu, who can have a decent shot at another medal in the 25m sports pistol event, will be carrying the weight of even greater expectations.

Economy robust, rise inevitable

The Indian economy is currently the fifth largest in the world. It is growing fast and on the path to becoming the third largest soon. Speaking at an event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi drove home the point that given the rate at which our domestic industry is flourishing, the day is not far behind when it will be behind only the two superpowers.

The Prime Minister has been holding out this hope for some time now. He estimates that India is on track towards achieving this extraordinary rise within the next five years. Exuding confidence that global investors are looking at India as an investment hub with a keen eye, Mr Modi has time and again been urging domestic industry to not lose this "golden opportunity".

Many factors contributed to achieving this tipping point — where the further rise of the Indian economy is nearly inevitable. It has been achieved through a series of policies, steps and milestones as a nation since economic liberalisation began in 1991. Global attention is now firmly riveted on the Indian economy. This focus is making wealth creators, the main driving force behind the country's economic growth, push for local sectors.

The necessary push to domestic industry in the form of various government schemes and robust spending, the positive impact of growth on manufacturing and better agricultural production have also contributed in making India the fast-growing large economy in the world. Banking heavily on its large working-age population, it now boasts of high growth and relatively low inflation at a time when the world at large is struggling with low growth and high inflation rates.

Not just its young demographic, India also saw a digital expansion and infra push in the last decade. The former helped the government in cutting down corruption. India tops the world today in global digital payments. The infra push, as witnessed by the ever-present construction vehicles on the roads, is another factor when understanding the optimistic air around the Indian economy.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Push for Bengal's division will be damaging for BJP



Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay

Leaders of the BJP wouldn't have much time for one of India's finest filmmakers, the late Mrinal Sen. Even if they would have interacted with him, I am not sure they would have heeded the advice he gave me over four decades ago. This goes back to a retrospective of his films way back in 1981-82 during the International Film Festival of India. Watching his films one after another with a friend, we spotted Sen during a break. Still students, we approached him with trepidation. But we found him to be a genial conversationalist. Seeing that, off the cuff I asked if we could interview him.

"Sure, why not?" Next morning we were in his hotel room and an engaging discussion on his films followed. As we were leaving, he asked about me, I being the Bengali in our duo. Hearing I was a "probashi" (non-resident Bengali), he advised: If I wanted to relate to the Bengali psyche, comprehending the deep impact of three episodes of history was essential: Partition of Bengal, the British attempt in 1905 and the subsequent tragic events of 1947; Bengal Famine of 1943; and Naxalbari and the related political turbulence of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Its obsession with history is not the BJP's best kept secret. However, its interest is only with those episodes that can be used to recall Bharat's "goldenness", or if Muslims featured in them and could be depicted as villains. Of these three chapters of Bengal's history, only the partition of Bengal, the rolled-back one in 1905-11 and the permanent division in 1947, had basis in the religious identity of people. This however, does not fit the Hindutva template of "usable" history: both episodes were seen as tragedies by people on both

sides of the border. After over seven-and-a-half decades, the romanticised dream of reunion, the central theme of the Ritwik Ghatak classic, *Komal Gandhar*, no longer finds resonance. But the idea of an indivisible West Bengal is predominant in the state and any political leader can rake up the issue of another partition of the state only at grave political cost.

The BJP and its leaders have unmistakably not come to terms with the June 4 verdict, depriving them of a parliamentary majority and a not-so-small loss of 63 Lok Sabha seats. But, as the party has not conducted a methodical review of its declined performance and formulate corrective steps, individual leaders in various regions are presenting impromptu proposals which even they have not thought out, and certainly doesn't have top-level sanction. Barely a fortnight ago, Bengal BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, in a clear rejection of inclusive politics, said the party has had enough of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas", and instead the party's new mantra should be to proclaim "Jo Hamare Saath, Hum Unke Saath".

While Mr Adhikari, who doesn't hold any party office besides being Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, issued a hasty "clarification" on his assertion, Sukanta Majumdar, now Union minister of state for education, called for North Bengal to be hived off and incorporated into the Northeast in a presentation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He immediately publicised this demand and found ready support from Raju Bista, BJP MP from Darjeeling, who also alleged the region's neglect by a succession of state governments.

Around the same time,

But, for the ruling Trinamul Congress too, there are lessons that the success of the BJP in North Bengal has a lot to do with its failure to prioritise the development in this region

another BJP MP, Nishikant Dubey, demanded that parts of Jharkhand, along with Murshidabad and Malda districts in West Bengal, and Kishanganj and Katihar in Bihar, be declared a Union territory. A completely untenable demand because of the size of the proposed UT, he contended that this was required to deal with challenges posed by increasing number of "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh" (read Muslims) in the region, which, Mr Dubey argued, has led to a sizeable reduction of tribal populations. He claimed the tribal population in the Santal Parganas declined from 36 per cent in 2000 to 26 per cent now. BJP Murshidabad MLA Gouri Shankar Ghosh also supported this demand. There might be some basis in Mr Dubey's claim on the tribal population's decline, but this can be precisely established and its causes, if true, can be studied, only if the much-delayed Census is done. His government however, is yet to show any eagerness in the exercise.

Nagendra Ray, another BJP MP in the Rajya Sabha, was put up by the party in July 2023 despite being a longtime advocate of carving out Cooch Behar from West Bengal. His alleges that the region's development is tardy because South Bengal-based upper caste leaders pursue lopsided development policies.

After chief minister Mamata Banerjee threw a "dare" to the BJP to partition the state again, Mr Adhikari, clearly realising its political cost, issued a formal denial of any plan, saying this was not the party's position. He however, flagged the deprivation of parts of North Bengal

and asked the state government to allocate funds and projects like AIIMS or an IT-like institution in the region beyond the "Chicken's Neck" corridor.

There is some truth in each of the allegations levelled by various BJP leaders but the "solution" suggested will be politically suicidal for the party in other parts of West Bengal. Part of the problem is that in its efforts to win Assembly or Lok Sabha seats from this region, the party has been implicitly backing separatist sentiments. For instance, last July when deciding its first representative from West Bengal to the Rajya Sabha, the BJP chose Mr Ray, who was heading a faction of the Greater Cooch Behar People's Association, which seeks statehood for the district. Social engineering was what the party had in mind because he is from the Rajbanshi community, or the Koch-Rajbanshis, who account for about 33 lakh of West Bengal's population, according to the 2011 census. But politically this was an unwise decision as the BJP implicitly backed yet another partition of Bengal. The BJP should have learnt its lesson from this round of uncoordinated mis-statements by its leaders, eagerly looking solely at their political pie. But, for the ruling Trinamul Congress too, there are lessons that the success of the BJP in North Bengal has a lot to do with its failure to prioritise the development in this region. Even the issues raised by Mr Dubey may have some basis, but empirical data is required for a correct picture. It is time the BJP realised that the reluctance for diverse data, which would prevent it from whipping up the fear of the "other", is counter-productive in the long run.

Author-journalist Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay's latest book is The Demolition, The Verdict and The Temple: The Definitive Book on the Ram Mandir Project. He is also the author of Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times. He tweets at @NilanjanUdwin.

LETTERS NEED SPORTS INFRA

The recent Olympic Games saw Indian athletes gaining ground consecutively. The Prime Minister of India congratulated shooters Manu Bhaker and Sarabjot Singh on winning the bronze medal on Tuesday. But while it's a common occurrence in our country for athletes to receive congratulations and awards from high-ranking officials after achieving fame, during their journey to success, their troubles often go unnoticed. Only those who have financial means can continue their journey, while many talented individuals fall by the wayside. Worst of all, lack of infra is a big blow to aspiring athletes from small towns and rural areas.

Jakir Hussain
Kanpur

SAVE THE HILLS

HILLS AND FORESTS are nature's bulwark for ecosystem sustenance. India, compared to other nations, is less blessed. Population growth has been invading it. Disaster capitalism and a tourism fad is driving the plunder of pristine resources. Uttarakhand recently witnessed a devastation entirely attributable to human greed. Today it is Wayanad and in future it could be Kashmir Valley in the hunt for lithium. Time we have a binding national diktat on development and preservation of such resources founded on scientific study buttressed by political will. Climate change initiatives must begin at home with diligence.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

FOCUS ON SAFETY

INDIANS as a rule pay little attention to safety norms either as individuals or commercial establishments. We perform all prescribed religious rituals and believe God will protect us from all calamities while disregarding safety procedures. The tragedy of the Delhi coaching centre has had officialdom checking if the other coaching classes have the necessary permissions and the prescribed safety measures installed. There is no doubt that not just the coaching centres but also other commercial establishments will fail in the safety tests. How such activities spring up on narrow streets remains a mystery. This cannot happen without the connivance of civic authorities.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Rajiv Gauba all set to retire as longest-serving Cabinet Secy

Rajiv Gauba will make history when he steps down at the end of August, becoming India's longest-serving cabinet secretary. A 1982-batch IAS officer from Jharkhand cadre, Mr Gauba will have clocked five years in the top role.

His predecessors didn't come close: Pradeep Kumar Sinha served four years and 79 days, while Y.N. Sukthankar, the second Cabinet secretary of Independent India, held the post for a day less. Traditionally, a Cabinet secretary's term can be extended from two to four years. However, during Mr Sinha's tenure, the rules were tweaked, giving him an additional three months. Last year, in extending Mr Gauba's term for the third time, the government further relaxed these rules.

As Mr Gauba's tenure wraps up, there's a buzz about his successor. Sources have informed DKB that three senior IAS officers from the 1987 batch are in the running: Finance secretary T.V. Somanathan (Tamil Nadu cadre), Gujarat chief secretary Raj Kumar, and Jal Shakti secretary Vini Mahajan (Punjab cadre). Additionally, S. Krishnan (Tamil Nadu cadre) from the 1989 batch has emerged as a dark horse.

Sources say that Mr Somanathan seems to be leading the race. Known for his financial acumen and integrity, he's been the expenditure secretary since December 2019 and also serves as finance secretary. His reputation is so stellar that the

World Bank once asked for an extension of his tenure there, which was granted by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Raj Kumar, another strong contender, is noted for his proximity to Prime Minister Modi and his principal secretary P.K. Mishra. Mr Kumar's tenure as secretary of defence production was highly challenging, and he now serves as Gujarat's chief secretary, known for his no-nonsense approach.

Vini Mahajan, the third contender, could make history as India's first woman cabinet secretary. Currently the secretary of drinking water and sanitation, Ms Mahajan has extensive experience in the PMO and previously served as Punjab's chief secretary.

So, who among these worthies will ultimately succeed Mr Gauba or will Mr Modi surprise us with someone else? Stay tuned for updates.

GREEN REVOLUTION IN ELECTIONS: ANANDPUR SAHIB LEADS THE WAY

Dr Heera Lal, a 2009-batch IAS from the Uttar Pradesh cadre and author of the popular book *Dynamic DM*, has spearheaded a groundbreaking initiative in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, setting a remarkable benchmark for green elections. This initiative isn't just about conducting elections but doing so in a way that is environmentally conscious and sustainable.

In an era where environmental concerns are paramount, the efforts in Anandpur Sahib stand out. By focusing on reducing the carbon footprint of the electoral process, Dr Heera Lal demonstrated how civic responsibilities and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand. This initiative includes measures such as reducing paper use, promoting digital campaigns, and ensuring waste management practices are in place. These steps, though simple, are significant in their impact, reducing the strain on our natural resources.

What makes this endeavour particularly praiseworthy is its replicability. Anandpur Sahib's model can be adopted by other constituencies, creating a ripple effect that could lead to nationwide changes in how we conduct elections. This is not just about one town or election but about setting a precedent for future generations.

Dr Heera Lal's vision for a green election is a commendable stride towards a more sustainable and responsible democratic process. It's a call to action for other leaders to follow suit, embracing innovation to protect our environment while upholding democratic principles. Anandpur Sahib and Dr Lal have shown that thoughtful planning and execution can help achieve greener, cleaner, and more efficient elections.

THE PUJA KHEDKAR SCANDAL & BEYOND
The Pooja Khedkar scandal is causing quite a stir

and revealing some ugly truths about our bureaucracy. The rot runs deep.

Ever since the news broke about IAS probationer Pooja Khedkar using fake documents about her caste and financial status to snag her position, the media and social media have been flooded with similar stories. It turns out several IAS and IPS officers have been misusing the reservation quota to pass the UPSC exams. Now, babus like Abhishek Singh from Uttar Pradesh and four officers from Gujarat are under investigation. The CBI is looking into favouritism in Chhattisgarh exams from 2020-2022, while Rajasthan is reviewing over one lakh hires for irregularities.

This rush to report has unfortunately led to some genuine and eligible candidates being wrongly accused. With all these investigations ordered, doubts about the selection process are mounting, especially since the Neet exam is already under the microscope. This whole mess has sparked a call for more transparency and scrutiny in selecting babus, particularly under the disability criteria. The integrity of the civil services is at stake. Without quick and thorough action, public trust will keep eroding.

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

MEDAL TABLE

COUNTRY	G	S	B	T
China	8	6	2	16
Japan	7	2	4	13
France	6	9	6	21
Great Britain	6	6	5	17
Australia	6	4	3	13
S. Korea	5	3	3	11
USA	4	12	11	27
Italy	3	6	4	13
Canada	2	2	2	6
Germany	2	0	1	3
India	0	0	2	2

short takes

Shooter Swapnil is in 50m rifle final round

Indian shooter Swapnil Kusale on Wednesday qualified for the finals of 50m rifle 3 positions here after finishing seventh in the qualification round but Aishwary Tomar ended at the 11th position to make an exit. Kusale shot 198 (99, 99) in kneeling position, 197 (98, 99) in prone and 195 (98, 97) in standing position as top eight shooters in a field of 44 made it to the final round.

Kusale finished with an overall score of 590 (38x), while Tomar accumulated 589 (33x) with shots of 197 (98, 99) in kneeling position, 199 (100, 99) in prone and 193 (95, 98) in standing position.

The finals of 50m rifle 3 positions will be held on Thursday. China's Liu Yukun finished at the first spot with a total of 594 points, followed by Norway's Jon-Hermann Hegg at second with 593.

The third place went to Ukraine's Serhiy Kulish with 592 points while France's Lucas Krysz (592-35x) was fourth, Serbia's Lazar Kovacevic (592-33x) was fifth and Tomasz Bartnik (590-40x) of Poland was sixth. The last place for the finals was taken by Jiri Privratsky of Czech Republic with 590 (35x).

Sharma & Bhullar eye dream debut

Shubhankar Sharma and Gaganjeet Bhullar compete week in and week out for PGA's Order of Merit, points and money needed to survive in a niche sport like golf but on a Thursday, when they tee off at the Le Golf National for their debut Olympic round, the only numbers that will matter are 1, 2 and 3. The duo are India's finest on men's tour but in a 60-strong field with likes of multiple Major winner world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler, world No. 2 Rory McIlroy and Tokyo gold medalist Xander Schauffele vying for the yellow metal, it couldn't have been tougher for world No. 219 Sharma and no. 261 Bhullar. All the top seven golfers in the world are taking part.

But they also know that a memorable Olympic could just make them household names which even 10 PGA tour titles won't be able to give them. They are aware and excited.

"The Olympian tag, that stays with you forever," Sharma said. "To be able to represent India at the Olympics is something we all dreamt of but when I started playing golf, it was still not an Olympic sport," Sharma added.

Equestrian Agarwalla finishes ninth, exits

Asian Games medallist Anush Agarwalla crashed out of the Equestrian event, finishing a below-par ninth in his group in the individual dressage category on Wednesday.

Agarwalla, who won a gold and a bronze medal in team and individual dressage events in 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games, scored a below-par 66.444 with his partner Sir Caramello Old but that was not enough to ensure him a place in the medal round. But it was still a good enough achievement as Agarwalla became the first Indian equestrian to compete in dressage at the Olympics after achieving the Minimum Eligibility Requirement (MER) four times to obtain a quota for the country.

SHUTTLE SERVICE

Sindhu, Lakshya march into pre-quarters with dominant wins

Paris, July 31: Indian badminton heavyweights P. V. Sindhu and Lakshya Sen stormed into the pre-quarterfinals of the women's and men's singles events, respectively, with dominant wins at the Paris Olympics here on Wednesday.

Chasing an unprecedented third Olympic medal, Sindhu did not have to toil much before getting past Kristin Kuuba of Estonia 21-5, 21-10 in her second and last Group 'M' match, while Sen was simply sensational in his 21-18, 21-12 thrashing of Indonesia's world number 4 Jonatan Christie, the reigning All England and Asian champion.

"I think it was a tough match today, happy with the way I played," world number 22 Sen said.

"Yes, definitely (gold is in sight). I think the last few months the form has been really good."

"There has been ups and downs, but overall, I was in good shape in the last few months, and especially while playing here in the French Open, I found my momentum and from."

"I was just trying to build up for a good event and I'm really pumped up to fight every match and every point."

The only time Sen had defeated Christie was four years ago at the Badminton Asia Team Championships and came into this match with a dismal 1-4 head-to-head count.

However, the 22-year-old from Almera, a 2021 world championships bronze medalist, showed great maturity and tactical acumen as he went about his business on Wednesday.

He tried to keep the shuttle flat and target the weak forehand of Christie, who looked to slow down the rallies and used his cross-court shots at the corners to trouble the Indian, albeit without much success.

DOMINANT SHOW BY SINDHU

Earlier, Sindhu topped the group following her facile win over Kuuba, ranked 73rd in the world, in 33 minutes. "It was important for me to



P. V. Sindhu in action against Estonia's Kristin Kuuba during their group stage match in Paris on Wednesday. — AP

top the group. I would be playing against He Bingjiao mostly. I hope I take this confidence and go forward. It's not going to be easy, especially in the next coming rounds, so I have to be prepared and be 100%," said Sindhu, who won a silver medal in the 2016 Rio Games and a bronze in the Tokyo edition.

The winner of each of the 16 groups qualifies for the round of 16.

PADDLER SREEJA ADVANCES

Sreeja Akula rallied to enter the pre-quarterfinals after a hard-fought 4-2 win over Singapore's Jian Zeng in a women's singles round of 32 match as Indian table tennis continued to make history. On her 26th birthday,



(Above) India's Sreeja Akula returns to Singapore's Zeng Jian during their Round of 32 Table Tennis match on Wednesday. (Left) Lakshya Sen celebrates after defeating Indonesia's Jonatan Christie in their group stage match on Wednesday. — AP

Sreeja won the match 9-11, 12-10, 11-4, 11-5, 10-12, 12-10. She lost the opening game but fought back strongly to emerge as the winner in the contest, which lasted 51 minutes. Batra had made the pre-quarters on Monday. Sreeja will take on China's world number one Sun Yingsha in the pre-quarterfinals.

Meanwhile, Indian ace Manika Batra's impressive run came to an end with a 1-4 defeat at the hands of higher-ranked Japanese Miu Hirano in the pre-quarterfinals. An error-prone Batra lost 6-11, 9-11, 11-9, 14-12, 8-11, 6-11 in 47 minutes. — PTI

Lovlina one win away from medal

Paris, July 31: Tokyo Olympics bronze medal-winner Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) began her quest for a second successive Games medal confidently as she out-punched Norway's Sunniva Hofstad in her opening bout here on Wednesday.

Borgohain prevailed 5-0 in the contest and she is now just one win away from adding to her Tokyo bronze, which was claimed in the 69kg category, and achieve a feat that is unprecedented in Indian boxing.

But her path is not an easy one as she will take on top-seeded Chinese Li Qian in the last-eight stage on August 4. A win in this bout would ensure at least a bronze medal for her.

Her performance on the day was an assured one. While her rival seemed keen to draw her into a slugfest, Borgohain kept her composure and dis-



Lovlina Borgohain (right) lands a punch on Norway's Sunniva Hofstad in their women's 75kg preliminary boxing match on Wednesday. — AP

tance to land clean blows on counter-attack. The Indian also had to deal with plenty of clinching by Hofstad, who came across busier of the two boxers, complete with a perilously low guard.

But the Assam-boxer didn't fall into the trap and attacked the Norwegian with precision by drawing her in. Borgohain has been handed a tough draw but the wiry pugilist has

shown the ability to rise above it in her past performances, most notably in Tokyo where she defeated world champion Chen Nien-Chin in the quarterfinals to secure herself a bronze. — PTI

Djokovic edges closer to first Olympic gold

Paris, July 31: Novak Djokovic remained comfortably on course for a first Olympic gold medal to add to his record-breaking collection of titles on Wednesday as fellow superstars Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz aimed for a place in the doubles semi-finals.

Djokovic, who has won three of his 24 Grand Slam titles on the clay courts of Roland Garros, defeated German left-hander Dominik Koepfer 7-5, 6-3 to become the first man to reach four Olympic singles quarter-finals.

The 37-year-old Serb has only ever collected a bronze at the Olympics, back in 2008 at Beijing, but he was rarely troubled on Wednesday by his 70th-ranked opponent, whose chal-

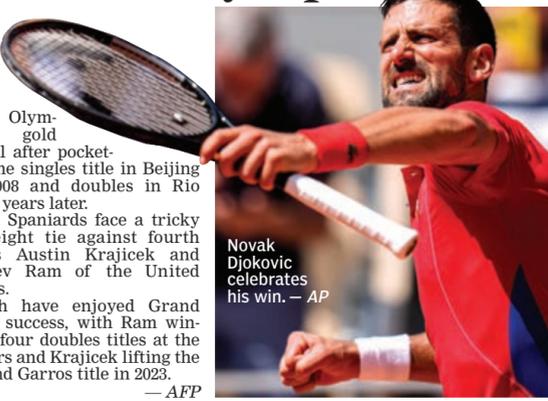
lenge eventually fizzled out. Djokovic, who had breezed past old rival Rafael Nadal in the second round, goes on to face 11th-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas, the Greek he defeated in the 2021 French Open final.

Later Wednesday, French Open and Wimbledon champion Alcaraz tackles Roman Safiullin, the 66th-ranked Russian playing in Paris as a neutral.

NADALCARAZ

Nadal plays for the fifth successive day as he and partner Alcaraz eye a place in the men's doubles semifinals.

Nadal, a 14-time French Open singles champion on the clay courts of Paris, is chasing a



Novak Djokovic celebrates his win. — AP

third Olympics gold medal after pocketing the singles title in Beijing in 2008 and doubles in Rio eight years later.

The Spaniards face a tricky last-eight tie against fourth seeds Austin Krajicek and Rajeev Ram of the United States.

Both have enjoyed Grand Slam success, with Ram winning four doubles titles at the majors and Krajicek lifting the Roland Garros title in 2023. — AFP

Chopra to rely on consistency to defend gold

Paris, July 31: Neeraj Chopra's broad shoulders will carry a weight of massive expectations when his fabled consistency is put through a trial by fire, while the lesser known names in India's 29-strong contingent will aim to emulate some of his success when the Olympic Games' athletics competition gets underway here on Thursday.

A nagging injury forced Chopra to compete in very few events in the build-up to the Games, but the star javelin thrower is still among the favourites to finish on the podium and perhaps clinch an unprecedented second successive gold medal.

A top podium finish on August 8 for Chopra will make him only the fifth man in Olympics history to defend his title and the first Indian to win two gold medals in an individual event in the multi-sporting spectacle.

Eric Lemming (Sweden; 1908 and 1912), Jonni Myyra (Finland; 1920 and 1924), Jan Zelezny (Czech Republic; 1992, 1996 and 2000) and Andreas Thorkildsen (Norway; 2004 and 2008) are the only ones to have defended the men's javelin gold medals in the Olympics.

He has competed in just three events this year but the 26-year-old world champion is

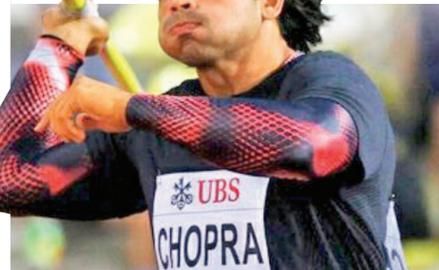
● A nagging injury forced Neeraj Chopra to compete in very few events in the build-up to the Games, but the star javelin thrower is still among the favourites to finish on the podium.

back in full flow in a season where none of his global competitors have done exceptionally well. After finishing second in the Doha Diamond League in May with a throw of 88.36m, which is his season's best, Chopra withdrew from Ostrava Golden Spike on May 28 as a precautionary measure after he felt "something" in his adductor (group of muscles located on inner thighs).

Chopra, who has a personal best of 89.94m, made a strong comeback by winning gold at the Paavo Nurmi Games in Finland on June 18 with a throw of 85.97m.

The qualification round of men's javelin throw competition will be held on August 6. Athletics competition will begin with the men's and women's 20km race walk. Akshdeep Singh, Vikash Singh and Paramjeet Singh Bisht will compete in the men's event while

Priyanka Goswami will feature in the women's event. — PTI



INDIA TODAY

GOLF

- Men's Individual Finals: Gaganjeet Bhullar and Shubhankar Sharma — 12.30 pm.

SHOOTING

- Men's 50m Rifle Three Positions (Medal round): Swapnil Kusale — 1.00 pm.
- Women's 50m Rifle Three Positions (Qualification): Sift Kaur Samra and Anjum Moudgil — 3.30 pm.

HOCKEY

- India vs Belgium (Group stage): 1.30 pm.

BOXING

- Women's Flyweight (Pre-quarterfinal): Nikhat Zareen vs Yu Wu (China) — 2.30 pm.

ARCHERY

- Men's Individual (1/32 eliminations): Pravin Jadhav vs Kao Wenchao (China) — 2.31 pm.
- Men's Individual (1/16 Eliminations): 3.10 pm onwards.

TABLE TENNIS

- Women's Singles (Quarterfinals): 1.30 pm onwards.

SAILING

- Men's Dinghy Race 1: Vishnu Saravanan — 3.45 pm.
- Men's Dinghy Race 2: Vishnu Saravanan — After Race 1
- Women's Dinghy Race 1: Nethra Kumanan — 7.05 pm
- Women's Dinghy Race 2: Nethra Kumanan — After Race 1.

ARCHER DEEPIKA MAKES IT TO PRE-QUARTERFINALS

Paris, July 31: Ace Indian archer Deepika Kumari entered the pre-quarterfinals in the women's individual event of the Olympic Games after winning back-to-back matches here on Wednesday.

Deepika, who flattered to deceive in the team event, first defeated Reena Parnat of Estonia 6-5 in a shoot-off before beating Quiny Roeffen of the Netherlands 6-2.

Deepika faces Michelle Kroppen of Germany in the pre-quarterfinals on Saturday.

The first match was a close affair as both Deepika and her Estonian opponent were neck-to-neck before the outcome was decided in a shoot-off.

Deepika took the first set but lost the next. After the scores were in the third set, Deepika trailed 3-5 but made a stunning

recovery by shooting 10s with all three arrows to level the score 5-5.

The Indian won the shoot-off with a 9 as against an 8 by her opponent.

The second match was, however, easier for Deepika and she did not have to toil much. Her opponent had a few bad shots also and that helped the India's cause.

Deepika took the first set with two solid 10s and a 9 but the Dutch woman fought back to win the second.

Earlier, Indian archer Bhajan Kaur notched twin victories to advance to the women's individual pre-quarterfinals but compatriot

Dhiraj Bommadevara exited the men's event after losing in the shoot-off on Tuesday. — PTI