

PUNJAB & HARYANA

Promote adoption of healthy lifestyle, Kovind urges doctors

CHANDIGARH Noting the country is facing the epidemic of lifestyle diseases, former president Ram Nath Kovind on Friday urged doctors to promote the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, saying their word would carry a great weight for their patients. “Our country is also facing the epidemic of lifestyle diseases - diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery diseases and lipid disorders are on a rapid rise,” Kovind said. “Today, more than 10 crore Indians suffer from diabetes. We have earned the dubious distinction of being the diabetes capital of the world... This is a serious issue,” he pointed out. Kovind was addressing the first convocation of post gradu-

ate courses of the Government Medical College and Hospital here. Kovind further said these lifestyle diseases not only drastically reduce the quality of life, but also cost large amounts of money. Therefore, it is imperative to promote the adoption of a healthy lifestyle as a means to reduce the burden of these lifestyle diseases, he said, adding, “your words, as doctors, I believe would certainly carry a great weight to your patients. “Your words would inspire them to adopt healthy practices like eating a balanced diet, performing regular physical exercises and imbibing the practice of Yoga etc. We all know the immense benefits of adopting this traditional, but scientific way of physical and

mental fitness,” he said. He said India has progressed a lot in providing international quality healthcare to not only our own people, but also to patients from the countries in our neighbourhood and beyond. “To them, India is a medical destination as high quality medical services are reasonably provided and are delivered with care and compassion,” he said. However, the hospitals that provide such high quality care are located mostly in the big cities, he said. “Despite the strides we have taken as a country, there remain regional, rural, urban and gender imbalances in the availability of healthcare. We are facing a severe shortage of doctors in rural and

semi-urban areas. This situation needs to be corrected,” he said. The doctors can be given some incentives to serve in rural areas or we can have people trained only for serving in rural areas, he said, emphasising “without adequately correcting this discrepancy, we cannot rest”. He urged doctors to always try to maintain the highest ethical standards and professionalism. “The care, concern, compassion, personal attention and professional services you give to ailing humanity plays a vital role in their recovery. “Doctors need a sharp mind, but more than that they need compassion, that is ‘karuna’, a warm compassionate heart,” he said. / PTI /



Former President Ram Nath Kovind being felicitated with a memento by Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit during the first post-graduation convocation at the Government Medical College and Hospital, in Chandigarh on Friday. / PTI

Briefly

THREE DEVOTEES KILLED, 14 INJURED AFTER THEIR VEHICLE CRASHES INTO TRUCK IN NUH

NUH Three people, including an 8-year-old girl, were killed and 14 others were injured when their vehicle rammed into a parked truck on the KMP expressway here, police said on Friday. The accident took place on Thursday night when around 22 devotees including eight children were returning from Vrindavan to Punjab in a Tata tempo, police said. The tempo crashed into a stationary truck that was parked without any parking light, killing three people on the spot and leaving 14 others injured, they said. The injured were rushed to the hospital, they said. The police have identified the deceased as Beena (45) and Riti (8). While the third deceased, a man, is yet to be identified, they said. “Four seriously injured were referred to medical college, Nalhad and three other injured were referred to Rewari and Rohtak hospitals. An FIR was registered against the truck driver at Sadar Tauru police station,” said Krishan Kumar, a spokesperson of Nuh police. The bodies were sent for post-mortem and further investigation is underway, they added. / PTI /

JJP APPOINTS NATIONAL SECRETARY BRIJ SHARMA AS HARYANA UNIT CHIEF

CHANDIGARH The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) on Friday appointed its national general secretary Brij Sharma as the new Haryana unit chief. Earlier this month, JJP's Haryana unit chief Nishan Singh had quit the party. According to a party statement, Sharma is a resident of Karnal. Headed by former MP Ajay Singh Chautala, the five-and-a-half-year-old JJP parted ways with its ally BJP last month and announced that it would field candidates for the May 25 Lok Sabha elections in Haryana. It has already announced candidates for some of the seats. / PTI /

MOTHER SAYS RADICAL PREACHER AMRITPAL SINGH TO FIGHT LS POLLS AS INDEPENDENT



AMRITSAR Jailed radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh's mother on Friday said he will contest the Lok Sabha polls from Punjab's Khadoor Sahib seat as an Independent candidate. Earlier on Wednesday, Amritpal Singh's legal counsel Rajdev Singh Khalsa had also claimed that the ‘Waris Punjab De’ chief would contest the elections. Speaking to media persons here on Friday, Balwinder Kaur said her son has agreed to enter the fray. Amritpal Singh was arrested in April last year and the stringent NSA was invoked against him. He, along with nine of his associates, is currently lodged in the Dibrugarh jail in Assam. He was arrested in Moga's Rode village on April 23 last year following an over one-month-long manhunt. The Khalistan sympathiser had escaped the police net in Jalandhar district in March last year, switching vehicles and changing appearances. The Punjab Police had launched a crackdown after the February 23 Ajnala incident last year in which Amritpal Singh and his supporters, some of them brandishing swords and guns, broke through barricades and barged into the police station on the outskirts of Amritsar city, and clashed with police for the release of Lovepreet Singh Toofan, one of his aides. / PTI /

GURUGRAM: 42 SCHOOLS GET NOTICE WITHOUT PERMISSION IN SOHNA

GURUGRAM Despite having no affiliation from the Haryana government, many private schools in Gurugram's Sohna block are operational, which is a gross violation of educational norms. Moreover, despite restricting them from not enrolling any student from April 1, these schools have also been enrolling students for the new academic session. Taking serious note of it, Sangeeta Sanghi, Block Education Officer, Sohna, has served notices to 42 schools in Sohna block running without prior permission from the state government. The block education officer issued the notice to the school management, with a warning that necessary legal proceedings would be initiated for running a school without permission. / IANS /



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann with his wife Gurpreet Kaur and family members pays obeisance at the Golden Temple, in Amritsar on Friday. / PTI

11 members of organised crime gang arrested: DGP

DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

THE PUNJAB Police Anti-Gangster Task Force has in a joint operation with the central agencies and the Jammu and Kashmir Police arrested 11 members of an organised criminal gang. “In a major breakthrough, #AGTF Punjab in a joint operation with Central agencies & J&K Police, has arrested 11 members of an organised criminal gang operated by Charanjit Singh @ Raju Shooter,” Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said in a post on X on Friday. Raju Shooter is also among those arrested. Yadav said that the gang was involved in September 2023 in a failed attempt to loot a bank in Dhotion village in Tarn Taran during which a police officer was critically wounded in firing by the accused. “On April 16, 2024 associates of Raju shooter had orchestrated his escape from

Civil Hospital, Tarn Taran where he was admitted for treatment,” the DGP said in his post. He said that the arrested accused were involved in organised criminal activities such as attempt to murder, robbery and drug smuggling. The DGP later in a statement said that the arrests were made during a 48-hour-long operation carried out in different parts of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. The police teams have also recovered four weapons, including one double barrel rifle, which got stolen from Tarn Taran-based gun house on February 28, and three pistols along with 26 live cartridges from their possession, he said. Raju Shooter is the kingpin of an organised criminal gang active in the Majha region mainly in districts, including Tarn Taran, Amritsar and Amritsar Rural, he said. Yadav said that following reliable inputs, AGTF Punjab headed by Additional

DGP Promod Ban mobilised 12 police teams under the supervision of Additional IG Sandeep Goel to track gangster Raju Shooter and his gang members. “Over 48 hours long operation, which involved meticulous intelligence gathering, technical analysis and swift action led to the apprehension of Raju Shooter and his 10 aides from different parts of Punjab and J&K,” said the DGP expressing gratitude to the J&K Police and the central agencies for their enormous support to accomplish this operation. Meanwhile, Goel said a preliminary investigation has revealed that six associates of Raju Shooter had facilitated his escape from the hospital earlier. Out of six, the police have arrested three facilitators, including Gulab Singh, Husanpreet Singh and Amritpal Singh alias Chidhi, he said, adding that a manhunt is on to arrest another three facilitators.

CM thanks farmers for heeding his advice on not sowing particular paddy variety

DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

CHIEF MINISTER Bhagwant Mann on Friday thanked the farmers of Punjab for following his advice and not cultivating PUSA-44 type of paddy last season, a move which he said resulted in saving electricity worth Rs 477 crore. The chief minister said he is working hard to save farming and make it a profitable business again. Mann also said he ensured that the farmers should get re-

quired electricity in the daytime. Mann, in a video message, said that he requested the farmers to not sow PUSA-44, a long duration paddy variety, in the last kharif season as it takes more than 150 days to get ready. He said paying heed to his advice the area under PUSA-44 was decreased by 50 per cent. Instead of PUSA-44, our farmers planted PR-126, PR-127, PR-128, PR-129 and PR-130 variety which only take 90 days to mature, Mann said.

“Due to lesser area under PUSA-44, the electricity worth Rs 477 crore was saved and it also saved 5 billion cusecs groundwater,” he said. Asserting he is extremely happy that farmers followed his advice at one simple request, the chief minister said he will always take decisions for the betterment of Punjab. Mann said PUSA-44 produces more stubble than other varieties and requested the farmers again that they should not sow this variety at all.

Chief Secretary visits grain market in Khanna, takes stock of wheat procurement

DW BUREAU / KHANNA

PUNJAB'S CHIEF Secretary Anurag Verma on Friday visited Khanna 'mandi' (grain market) and reviewed the ongoing procurement of wheat. He directed the procurement agencies to ensure that farmers do not face any problems in the 'mandis', according to an official statement. Verma said that during the current procurement season, 132 lakh metric tonnes of wheat are expected to arrive in the grain markets of the state. “Out of this, till yesterday evening 66.8 LMT of wheat had arrived in the mandis. Out of this, 60.9 LMT has already been purchased,” he said. The top official said all efforts are being made that the crop is cleaned, purchased and



weighed within 24 hours of its arrival in the mandis. Once this is done the farmer is free to leave the grain market and payment will be credited into his account within 48 hours of purchase and he will get an SMS in this regard. So far, a payment of Rs 9,170 crore has already been made to the farmers. The payment has been made to more than 4

lakh farmers so far, he added. The chief secretary also interacted with the farmers. Verma further said that due to delay in harvesting, the arrivals in the 'mandis' were initially slow and peaked suddenly, but the entire state machinery is working round-the-clock to ensure that the farmers do not face any problems. Last year, peak lifting

in a single day was 4.8 LMT. The record was breached on Thursday when lifting reached 5.5 LMT, he said. Verma said that he is reviewing the progress with Deputy Commissioners via video conference every alternate day. The official also said that he has directed all the Deputy Commissioners to visit the 'mandis' daily and ensure that the crop lifting is increased to 6.5 lakh metric tonnes per day. So far, as Khanna mandi is concerned, till yesterday evening 54,000 metric tons of wheat arrived and 100 per cent of this has been purchased, he said. Verma said that the government is committed to ensuring that the crop of the farmers is purchased immediately in the mandis.

Pak's Punjab government seeks time naming Lahore Chowk after Bhagat Singh

M ZULQERNAIN / LAHORE

PAKISTAN'S PUNJAB government on Friday sought time from a high court on the issue of naming the Shadman Chowk here after freedom fighter Bhagat Singh. The Lahore High Court (LHC) Justice Shams Mahmood Mirza was hearing a petition by the Bhagat Singh Memorial Foundation Pakistan seeking contempt proceedings against three top officials of the provincial and district governments for not complying with the court's order about naming the Shadman Chowk after Bhagat Singh. In 2018, the LHC ordered the government to name after Bhagat Singh the Shadman Chowk in Lahore, where he was hanged 93 years ago. During the hearing, Assistant Advocate General of the Punjab government Imran Khan told the court that the government should be given more time for the issuance of a notification to name Shadman Chowk after the freedom fighter. The petitioner's counsel, advocate Khalid Zama Kakar, argued that a lot of delay had already been made in the matter. The court accepted the request of the government law officer and adjourned the hearing till June 7. The provincial and district governments committed contempt by deliberately not complying with the LHC's order to change

the chowk's name in 2018. Bhagat Singh, who fought for the independence of the subcontinent, was hanged by British rulers on March 23, 1931, along with Shivaram Rajguru and Sukhdev Thapar after being tried under charges of hatching a conspiracy against the regime. Singh was initially jailed for life but later awarded the death sentence in another “fabricated case”. Bhagat Singh is respected in the subcontinent not only by Sikhs and Hindus but also by Muslims. Pakistan founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah reportedly paid him tribute twice during his speech in the central assembly, saying there had never been another brave person in the subcontinent like Bhagat Singh. Imtiaz Rasheed Qureshi, Chairman of Bhagat Singh Memorial Foundation Pakistan, stated Bhagat Singh was a freedom fighter of the subcontinent and gave his life along with his companions for the cause of freedom. “It will be in the interest of justice to name Shadman Chowk after Bhagat Singh and also install his statue at the square to inspire the people of Pakistan and the world,” he said, adding that in neighbouring India, there were many roads and thoroughfares named after Muslim rulers such as Akbar Road, Shahjahan Road and Bahadur Shah Road. / PTI /



Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Harsimrat kaur Badal offers prayers at the Golden Temple, in Amritsar on Friday. / PTI

Delhi-based political parties are like East India Company: Sukhbir Badal

BATHINDA Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) President Sukhbir Singh Badal on Friday said Delhi-based parties were trying to capture Punjab in the same manner as done by the East India Company and urged them to vote for the Akali Dal to ensure peace and communal harmony as well as development in the state. The SAD president, who interacted with members of the District Bar Association and taxation lawyers here, said “this is the most sensitive point in the history of Punjab”. “It is of utmost importance that Punjabis get together to save Punjab from Delhi-based parties who are only concerned about winning seats and least concerned about Punjabis or their problems. “Punjab has suffered earlier also at the hands of national parties, but this time the situation is grave. Punjab is not only afflicted by a breakdown of law and order as well as communal tensions, but has been bankrupted by successive Congress and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) governments. The situation is such that each and every section of society is suffering be it farmers,

youth, poor or traders,” he added. Urging Punjabis to “save Punjab now before it is too late”, Badal said: “SAD is the only answer to the ills afflicting Punjab,” adding, “only a regional party can fight for your rights and keep you first”. In an attack on the AAP-Congress alliance in the state, Badal said: “AAP and the Congress are aligned in Punjab also like in the rest of the country. Only here they have not gone into an open alliance as they feel by doing so the anti-incumbency of the AAP government will affect both their chances.” Badal urged Punjabis to understand this and reject both the parties at the hustings. When queried by the media, Badal said the manner in which the SAD was gaining in strength day upon day as well as the virtual close down of the election campaign of the Delhi-based parties proved that people understood that SAD alone could fulfill their aspirations. “The forthcoming parliamentary polls will witness a historic verdict which will wipe out all the national parties in Punjab,” Badal added. / IANS /

Punjab Congress chief challenges BJP to nominate state prez Jakhar to contest polls



CHANDIGARH Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring on Friday challenged the BJP to nominate its state unit chief Sunil Jakhar to contest from any constituency and he would contest against him. “I am confident the people will not give the BJP a single seat in Punjab. I extend an invitation to the BJP to nominate its leader, Sunil Jakhar, to contest from any constituency in Punjab. Should he choose to do so, I will contest against him and secure a resounding victory,” he told the media here.

Commenting on the INDIA bloc, Warring said, “Punjab’s distinct identity necessitated the avoidance of an alliance with AAP and this has been duly acknowledged. The unique challenges faced by Punjab preclude the possibility of any collaboration with AAP under any circumstance. Punjab Congress leaders and candidates will not share platforms with AAP counterparts. Despite AAP’s claims of a 13-0 victory, reality will unveil a starkly different narrative.”

He said the BJP and AAP in Punjab have made claims, but the time has come for a reality check. “Only the Congress party can effectively address the concerns of the people, a fact recognised by the electorates. Rahul Gandhi’s nationwide tours have enabled us to comprehend the grievances, which have been meticulously addressed in our manifesto,” he said.

Responding to a question concerning the provision of Y-plus security for BJP leaders, Warring said, “It appears to be an established norm that upon affiliating with the BJP, leaders are granted Y-plus security. While our nation’s borders may not be secure under the BJP regime, its leaders from Punjab evidently enjoy substantial security.” / IANS /

Firing outside Salman’s residence: 2 men nabbed from Punjab sent to police custody till April 30



Two accused, arrested from Punjab in connection with the firing incident outside Salman Khan’s residence, being produced before the Esplanade court, in Mumbai on Friday. / PTI

MUMBAI A Mumbai court on Friday remanded to police custody till April 30 two men arrested from Punjab in connection with the firing outside Bollywood superstar Salman Khan’s residence in Bandra. Subhash Chander (37) and Anuj Thapan (32) were produced before a magistrate’s court.

The crime branch on Thursday arrested the duo, who had allegedly provided weapons and cartridges to the shooters, from Punjab.

The police informed the court that the accused were key persons in the crime and were arrested based on technical evidence.

They need to be interrogated to find out who supplied them with weapons and asked them to give the same to the two shooters arrested earlier, police said.

The police have alleged that Chander and Thapan had come to Panvel (in Raigad district near Mumbai) on March 15 to hand over two country-made pistols and 38 live rounds to the shooters Sagar Pal and Vicky Gupta.

The court on Thursday remanded Pal (21) and Gupta (24) to police custody till April 29.

Besides the four accused, the police have declared jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and his younger brother Anmol Bishnoi as wanted accused in the case.

Appearing for the accused, advocate Ajay Dubey submitted that Chander and Thapan had not provided weapons to the other accused or visited Panvel, and they had no connection to the Bishnoi gang.

All charges against them are baseless, and they were falsely implicated in the case, he said. Gupta and Pal allegedly fired inside 58-year-old Khan’s house at the Galaxy Apartment in Bandra in the early hours of April 14 before fleeing the spot on a motorbike.

They were apprehended from Mata No Madh village in Gujarat’s Kutch district on April 16.

The crime branch team later recovered two pistols, magazines and bullets from the Tapi river in Gujarat during a search operation to recover weapons allegedly used in the firing. / PTI /



Ensuring fairness, transparency Haryana prepares for Lok Sabha polls

DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

AS HARYANA gears up for the Lok Sabha General Elections-2024, a steadfast commitment to fairness and transparency under the guidelines set by the Election Commission of India and the Model Code of Conduct is being diligently maintained in the State.

The Election Commission is resolute in safeguarding voters from any form of inducement, with a keen focus on monitoring the movement of illicit substances such as liquor, drugs, and cash across the state.

A comprehensive effort by various agencies has resulted in the seizure of illicit liquor, drugs, and cash valued at over Rs 25.45 crore in Haryana so far, highlighting the rigorous enforcement measures undertaken to uphold electoral integrity.

Divulging more details in this regard Chief Electoral Of-

ficer, Sh. Anurag Agarwal said that stringent action has been taken by the police, Income Tax Department, Excise and Taxation Department, and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) in the state after the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct.

As a result of which, a total of Rs. 4.33 crore illicit cash has been seized, including Rs. 71.21 lakh seized by the police, Rs. 81.19 lakh by the Income Tax Department, Rs. 3.04 lakh by the Excise Department, and Rs. 278 lakh by the DRI, he shared.

Besides this, various agencies have confiscated over 2,67,821 liters of illicit liquor valued at Rs 8.40 crore. This includes 1,75,140 liters seized by the police worth Rs 552.23 lakh and 92,669 liters seized by the Excise Department worth Rs 288.19 lakh, said Sh. Anurag Agarwal.

He said that a total of 5,844.44 kg of drugs, narcotics worth Rs

9.38 crore, have been seized by the agencies. The police have seized 5,839.18 kg of narcotics worth Rs 9.34 crore. Additionally, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has confiscated 2 kg of drugs valued at Rs 4 lakh. Apart from this, valuables worth Rs 1.73 crore and other items worth Rs 1.59 crore have also been seized.

The Chief Electoral Officer said that the notification for elections in Haryana is to be issued on April 29, but the voters of the state are already very aware. Despite the official notification for elections scheduled on April 29, voters have already raised 2541 complaints through the C-Vigil mobile app.

Out of these complaints, after scrutiny by the Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers, 2195 complaints were found to be true, on which action has been taken as per rules.

Heat wave: Polling stations to have addl resources: CEO

DW BUREAU / CHANDIGARH

HARYANA CHIEF Electoral Officer, Sh Anurag Agarwal said that in view of the challenges posed by the prevailing heatwave conditions during the Lok Sabha General Elections 2024, instructions were given to all the District Election Officers/Deputy Commissioners of the state to ensure the provision of supplementary resources at all polling stations.

Furthermore, arrangements such as adequate shade, seating, and fans are to be made available for voters waiting in queues to shield them from direct sunlight.

Sh. Agarwal underscored the importance of extending special assistance to vulnerable groups, including senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

Notably, the Election Commission of India has enabled those with disabilities exceeding 40 percent and senior citizens aged over 85 years to exercise their voting rights from home. Apart from this, proper ventilation must be ensured at every polling station.

Seven-month-old girl killed by stepfather in Gurugram

GURUGRAM A seven-month-old girl was allegedly killed by her stepfather, who threw her on the floor in a slum near Nathupur village here last night, police on Friday said. An FIR was registered in this regard at DLF phase 3 police station and the accused was arrested within hours, they said.

The accused has been identified as 30-year-old Vijay Sahni, a native of Bihar’s Sitamarhi district, police said.

The incident took place in a slum near Nathupur hilly area last night where the wife of the accused was living with his brother and the seven-

month-old girl, they said.

The accused started a quarrel with his wife after reaching there and threw the seven-month-old stepdaughter on the floor, police said. The accused ran away after the incident following which the police was called.

A team reached the spot and took the girl to a nearby hospital where the doctors declared her dead, police said.

According to the complaint filed by the mother of the deceased girl, her husband Vijay Sahni was caught in the case of selling liquor in Delhi,

police said. After being released from jail, he was caught in the case of chain snatching about four years ago in Gurugram and was lodged in the Bhondsi jail, they said.

“During this time, I had started living a family life with the brother of my husband and I gave birth to a baby girl seven months ago. Vijay was released from the Bhondsi jail on Wednesday,” the accused’s wife said in her complaint.

“He came to our slum on Thursday night and during a fight with me, he threw my seven-month-old daughter

on the ground due to which she died. Vijay ran away after this,” she added in the complaint.

An FIR was registered against Sahni following the complaint under section 302 (murder) of the IPC at DLF phase 3 police station, police said.

The accused was arrested within hours from a slum in Nathupura area, they said.

“We handed over the girl’s body to the kin after the post-mortem today and we are questioning the accused, said a spokesperson of the Gurugram Police. / PTI /

Man hit by a jeep, dragged for 50 meters in Haryana’s Rewari

REWARI A man trying to stop his friend from being thrashed by a group of men was allegedly hit by a jeep driven by them and dragged for 50 meters, police said on Friday. The incident occurred around 2.30 pm on Thursday when Shubham along with his friend Vedpal and Dharmender was sitting at a car service station in Kund, police said.

According to the complaint filed by Dharmender, around 10 people, in a Bolero Camper Jeep came and thrashed Shubham with sticks. When he and his friend Vedant intervened, they beat them up as well. “After this, the main accused Harender, a resident of Ateli Begpur village drove his vehicle and hit us, intending to kill us,” Dharmender alleged in his complaint. During the incident, Vedpal was allegedly dragged for about 50 meters by the vehicle. The crowd nearby tried to chase the accused, but they managed to flee, he said.

“Vedpal got fractures in his spine, hands and legs and is being treated in a private hospital in Rewari,” Dharmender said in his complaint. Based on the complaint, an FIR has been registered at Khol police station against the Harender and nine others under sections 148 (rioting), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code, Sub-Inspector Surender Singh said. / PTI /

Briefly

ACS INSPECTS PROCUREMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN FATEHABAD

CHANDIGARH Haryana Additional Chief Secretary of Higher Education Department Sh Vineet Garg today conducted a visit to several grain markets in Fatehabad district to assess crop procurement process. He said that proper arrangements have been made to ensure that farmers do not face any kind of trouble in selling their produce. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of ensuring seamless crop lifting. Earlier, the Additional Chief Secretary convened a meeting with officials at the Public Works Department’s rest house to review the preparations for wheat procurement in the district. The Additional Chief Secretary instructed officials to ensure timely payment to farmers for their crops. Additionally, considering the summer season, he emphasized the need for adequate provisions such as clean drinking water, electricity, toilets, and gunny bags at the grain markets in the district. Furthermore, he engaged with traders and farmers, attentively addressing their concerns. ACS Vineet Garg encouraged farmers to bring their crops to the markets and procurement centers only after thoroughly drying and cleaning them, enabling procurement agencies to purchase their produce promptly. / DW BUREAU /

67TH NATIONAL SCHOOL BOYS BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP IN GURUGRAM



CHANDIGARH Haryana Chief Secretary T.V.S.N. Prasad will inaugurate the ‘National School Boys Basketball Championship’ in Gurugram, Haryana, on April 27. According to a government spokesperson, the 67th National Basketball Championship will be held from April 27 to April 30 at Tau Devi Lal Stadium in Gurugram under the auspices of the School Games Federation of India. Haryana Chief Secretary Sh T.V.S.N. Prasad will inaugurate the event on April 27 at 5:30 pm. The spokesperson further stated that this tournament will be for boys under 17 years of age, with a total of 44 teams from across the country participating. The spokesperson also mentioned that the championship will conclude on April 30. / DW BUREAU /

3-YEAR-OLD GIRL FOUND LYING IN POOL OF BLOOD IN GURUGRAM

GURUGRAM A three-year-old girl was found lying in a pool of blood here in the early morning on Friday, police said. She was found near an under-construction house in the Rithoi village, where her parents were working as labourers. A 45-year-old labourer is also missing and he is suspected of sexually assaulting the girl, the police added. The girl has been admitted to a hospital, they added. “The matter is under investigation and the picture will be clear after the medical examination report of the child. The girl is being treated in a hospital and is stable”, said inspector Mahender Pathak, SHO of the Bhondsi police station. / PTI /

NORTH



People stand in queue to vote in the 2nd phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Naugaon village, Amroha district of Uttar Pradesh on Friday./ T. NARAYAN

BJP alleges over 3k files pending with Delhi CM, ministers; AAP says ‘baseless lies’

NEW DELHI The Delhi BJP on Friday slammed Kejriwal government alleging it is “least concerned with governance” as more than 3,000 files related to important work were pending with different ministers as well as the chief minister for many years, a charge rejected by AAP as “baseless lies”. “The Kejriwal government is not meant for administration and governance but publicity and corruption, which is evident by 3,060 files lying pending, gathering dust at its different departments. Also, there are 420 files related to important work that are pending at the level of the chief minister,” Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva alleged in a press conference. Showing copies of purported official documents, Sachdeva claimed the files stuck up at the chief minister’s level were related to ‘Garib Sanjivini Ayushman Yojna’, enhancing powers of Delhi Lokayukta, Delhi Water Policy file pending for seven years, development of unauthorised colonies, construction of STPs for Yamuna cleaning, among others. “The pending files show that this government is least concerned about work and more interested in publicity and corruption. Still, they claim to be serving

Delhi,” charged the Delhi BJP president. AAP’s Delhi unit secretary Reena Gupta hit back in a statement saying the BJP has “resorted to baseless lies” and the documents shown in its press conference were “sham”. “All the sham documents that the BJP has presented, are their mere concocted lies. Shamelessly, the BJP has tried to misguide Delhiites by presenting the files in which the work has already been completed,” she charged. Secretary of Delhi BJP Harish Khurana alleged that the AAP government as well leaders of the ruling party were used to alleging that they were not being allowed to work by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi’s Lieutenant Governor. But they sat over important files for many years, he said. He claimed the file related to land acquisition for setting up a sports university in Delhi was lying pending since February 2016. Gupta held Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena and the bureaucracy responsible for any work that was delayed, claiming the bureaucracy was not adhering to the Supreme Court-mandated triple chain of accountability in the matter of services. / PTI /

Omar, Mehbooba ask EC not to postpone polls in Anantnag-Rajouri LS seat



National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah addresses a press conference in Srinagar on Friday. / PTI

SRINAGAR/JAMMU NC leader Omar Abdullah and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Friday asked the Election Commission not to postpone polls in the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat. The former chief ministers made the appeal after the EC sought a report from Chief Secretary Atal Dooloo and the Chief Electoral Officer on representations submitted by some parties and three candidates seeking rescheduling of elections in the constituency due to adverse weather conditions. “I appeal to the EC that such a step should not be taken. The demand for postponement is not from all parties. The weird thing is that some of the people who have written to the EC are not contesting. If I write to the EC about constituencies in Tamil Nadu etc. will they take notice,” he told a press conference in Srinagar. Abdullah said “all options are open”, including legal recourse, for his party if the Election Commission decides to postpone the

polls. “All options are open to us. First and foremost, we appeal to the Election Commission not to do it (postpone the elections). The Election Commission should issue a directive to the local administration to keep the road open,” he said. Abdullah, who was accompanied by National Conference candidate for the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat Mian Altaf Ahmad, said the EC should not pay heed to the letter written by some parties and individuals, including the BJP for postponement of the elections under the garb of closure of the Mughal Road, the fair weather road which connects south Kashmir to Poonch-Rajouri region on other side of the Pir Panjal mountain range. Abdullah said he failed to understand why anyone would seek postponement of an election based on presumption that the road will be closed due to inclement weather. “The road is open today. Even if there is rain, it won’t be difficult to restore the road. Even if the

road gets closed, our candidate is ready to go (to Poonch-Rajouri) by alternative road through Reasi,” he said. “If they can keep the roads to Kargil, Keran, Machil and Gurez open, there is no reason why they can’t keep the Mughal road open,” he added. Speaking to reporters in Surankote area of Poonch district, Mehbooba said, “They all have ganged up against me because they do not want to see me in Parliament. The people, cutting across religious and party lines, are coming forward in my support and they are, therefore, using the Election Commission to defer and rig the elections”. The PDP leader said she travelled through the Mughal road which was recently opened for traffic. “There is no justification in deferring voting in Anantnag-Rajouri seat. My request to the Election Commission is not to postpone the elections when only 10 days are left in the polling. This will send the wrong message and

will have serious consequences,” she said before leaving for Mender town to carry forward her campaign. Mehbooba referred to the alleged rigging in the 1987 assembly polls leading to eruption of militancy in J-K, and said, “We request Election Commission not to do such an adventure as the people in J-K have already suffered a lot and have little faith left in the electoral process.” She said former prime minister A B Vajpayee had to given an assurance to the people of J-K about free and fair elections from the ramparts of the Red Fort. Attacking the BJP government at the Centre, Mehbooba said they first reshaped Anantnag parliamentary constituency, using delimitation as an attempt to rig the elections in their favour. “Don’t they have knowledge that the Mughal road traditionally remains closed for six months but they joined parts on both sides of Pir Panjal just to rig elections. This is not happening anywhere else in the country,” she charged. / PTI /

Briefly

2 TERRORISTS DEAD, 2 ARMY PERSONNEL INJURED AS GUNBATTLE RESUMES IN J-K’S BARAMULLA

SRINAGAR Two terrorists were killed while as many Army personnel got injured on Friday as a gunbattle between the militants and security forces continued for the second day in Jammu and Kashmir’s Baramulla district, officials said. The encounter began on Thursday at Check Mohalla Nowpora in the Sopore area of north Kashmir. After the night’s lull, a fresh exchange of firing took place on Friday morning, they said. Two terrorists have been killed so far, according to the officials. Two army personnel injured in the gunfight have been shifted to a hospital for treatment, they said. A civilian was also injured near the site of the encounter on Thursday. The operation to flush out the terrorists from the area is underway , they added. / PTI /

SWATI MALIwal CAMPAIGNS FOR AAP’S LOK SABHA CANDIDATE FROM EAST DELHI

NEW DELHI AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Friday campaigned for the party’s Lok Sabha candidate from East Delhi Kuldeep Kumar. She participated in a ‘padyatra’ and door-to-door campaign in Vivek Vihar area of the Shahdara assembly constituency along with Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel, the party said in a statement. She interacted with several women. She discussed their issues and appealed to them to vote in large numbers. “My family lives in the USA and I was there due to an emergency. Now I am back and shall be campaigning for AAP. I shall be interacting with women and girls in general and shall appeal to them to come out and exercise their right to vote,” she said. / PTI /

CONG CONSPIRING TO SNATCH RIGHTS OF OBCS, STS, SCS, GIVE THESE TO MUSLIMS: KESHAV MAURYA

NEW DELHI The Congress has “conspired” to snatch the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs, who are in “majority” in the country, and give these to Muslims, senior BJP leader Keshav Prasad Maurya alleged on Friday. The Congress’ “dangerous thinking” of taking away the rights of Dalits, the backwards and adivasis (tribals) and hand them over to “intruders” is clear from its Lok Sabha poll manifesto, Maurya told a press conference at the BJP headquarters here. “They (the Congress) have clearly said in their manifesto that if given a chance, they will finish majoritarianism (in the country). The OBCs (Other Backward Classes), SCs (Scheduled Castes) and STs (Scheduled Tribes) are majority in the country,” the Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister said. The Congress will be punished in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections for the “social injustice” it has done with the country’s Dalits, backwards and adivasis for 70 years, he said. / PTI /

J-K BOAT CAPSIZE TRAGEDY: ANOTHER BODY FOUND, DEATH TOLL RISES TO 7

SRINAGAR The body of a minor, who was missing after the April 16 boat capsizing tragedy in the Jhelum river here, was recovered on Friday, taking the death toll in the incident to seven, officials said. The body of a minor boy who drowned in the tragedy in the Gandabal area in the outskirts of the city here, was retrieved from the river near the Old Zero Bridge in the Rajbagh area of the city, the officials said. They said the body was taken to a hospital here for medico-legal formalities. Six people died, while three had gone missing after the incident took place. With the recovery of the body, the death toll has risen to seven, while two others are still missing. Officials said 19 people were on board, out of which 10 were rescued. / PTI /

REPUDIATION OF MATRIMONIAL BOND, REFUSAL TO ACCEPT KIDS, GRAVEST KIND OF MENTAL CRUELTY: DELHI HC

NEW DELHI Repudiation of matrimonial bond and refusal to accept children, who are innocent victims in the “vile allegations,” is the gravest kind of mental cruelty, the Delhi High Court has observed. The high court made the observations while dismissing a husband’s appeal seeking divorce from his estranged wife on the ground of cruelty and held that it is the woman who has been subjected to cruelty and not the man. / PTI /

Nadda says Cong seeks to give Muslims quota meant for SCs, OBCs



NEW DELHI BJP president J P Nadda on Friday accused the Congress of seeking to snatch the rights of SCs, STs and OBCs to benefit Muslims, alleging that it is the hidden agenda of the opposition party. Continuing with the BJP’s attempts to project the Congress as a party championing interests of Muslims at the cost of traditionally deprived Hindu groups, Nadda said the opposition party has long been making the grounds for the minority community to be declared as SCs and give them reservation. He issued a video statement as the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls got underway. Nadda cited the then prime minister Manmohan Singh’s 2006 statement of minorities, especially Muslims,

having the first rights on the country’s resources and added that he made similar comments in April 2009. The Congress has accused the BJP of selectively quoting Singh and claimed that the ruling party has resorted to spreading falsehoods and communal division for polarisation during the elections due to a lack of public support to it in the ongoing polls. Nadda, however, noted that the Congress has in some states tried to provide reservation to Muslims, including in Karnataka where the BJP government, he said, had ended the quota but it was brought back by the Siddaramaiah government. It had attempted to give reservations to Muslims in Andhra Pradesh too but could not due to the Supreme

Court’s orders, he said. He said the Congress in its 2009 election manifesto had promised reservation for Muslims in educational institutions and jobs through a sub-quota in the Other Backward Classes category. The BJP president claimed that the Congress’ stand against majoritarianism in its 2024 poll manifesto underscores its “hate” for the SCs, STs and the OBCs as they make up for a majority in the society. “False claims were made through the Sachar committee report and it was said that Muslims are worse off than Dalits. It means that the Congress had been making the ground for Muslims to be declared as SCs so that they can given the reservation

due to Dalits,” Nadda said. The party has this old habit of robbing the SCs, STs and OBCs of their rights, he said, citing B R Ambedkar’s criticism of Jawahar Lal Nehru for not speaking about the welfare of Dalits in speeches. Nehru was always in support of Muslims, he claimed. Nadda said he never wanted that Muslims to be neglected but that they should not get undue benefits at the cost of other communities. Those who need more protection should get these benefits, he said, accusing the opposition party of giving the impression that there are Dalits among Muslims too so that the minority community gets the SC quota benefits. / PTI /

Land sinks in J-K’s Ramban; over 50 houses, power infra damaged

BANIHAL/JAMMU More than 50 houses, four electricity towers, a receiving station, and a main road were damaged in Jammu and Kashmir’s Ramban district due to sinking of a road, officials said on Friday. Ramban Deputy Commissioner Baseer-ul-Haq Choudhary visited the Pernote village, five kms from the district headquarters, on Friday morning and assured assistance to the affected families and restoration of essential services, including electricity. Houses started developing cracks and the road connectivity between Gool and Ramban snapped Thursday evening following the sudden ‘sinking of land’ in Pernote village, prompting several families to move to safer places. “This is a natural disaster and being the head of the district, I take full responsibility for providing food and shelter to the affected families,” Choudhary, who was accompanied by district Development Council (DDC) chairperson Shamsad Shan, told reporters at the scene.

He said the authorities have summoned geology experts to know the cause behind the sinking of the land, while a team of district officials has been deployed round-the-clock to supervise the rehabilitation of the affected population and restoration of essential services. “The land is still sinking and our effort is to restore essential services like the road and electricity as our first priority. We will provide tents and other items and also organise medical camps for the victims,” the deputy commissioner said. The deputy commissioner advised people not to panic and take precautionary measures to safeguard their lives. Local volunteers joined SDRF and NDRF teams in helping the affected people to move their belongings from the damaged houses. Meanwhile, the officials said an alternate road via Sumer-Digdoal has been made operational to connect Gool sub-division with the district headquarters. / PTI /

Separatist ideology ‘dead’ in J-K, people realised it is futile: Sajad Lone

SHEIKH SUHAIL / SRINAGAR

THE ideology of separatism is “dead” in Jammu and Kashmir as people realised it is futile, separatist-turned-mainstream politician Sajad Lone said. In a freewheeling interview with PTI, the Jammu and Kashmir People’s Conference (JKPC) chief called for an end to violence, saying, “India is our land and there is no ambiguity about that.” Asked if the separatist ideology is dead and buried in Jammu and Kashmir, Lone said, “I think yes, it is. I think it is dead. People see that it was futile and I would also add that the ball is in Delhi’s court (now),” said Lone. “Kashmiris are ready to be a part of India but they are looking at a dignified coexistence, they are not looking at the status of indignity or (being) unequal Indians. “They are looking at being Indians with pride and at par with an Indian from Gujarat or Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu,” he added. Lone, who is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Baram-



ulla constituency, said one of the reasons he wants to go to Parliament is to strive and advocate for the same set of laws for the children of Kashmir and the rest of the country. He cited the example of police verifications in Jammu and Kashmir. While police verification in other parts of the country entails checking if an individual has any criminal antecedents or if an FIR is registered against them, in Kashmir, the entire family tree is investigated, he said. “So, if in a family of 500 people, cousins and second cousins, one person is involved in violence, 499 will not get police clearance. This means they will not get a job, they will not get a passport, they can’t participate in govern-

ment contracts and probably they (government) might even pass a law that they can’t get a bank loan,” he said. Lone also underlined the importance of reintegration in conflict resolution. “Those who rebelled against the system, how much time will you give them to reintegrate into the system? So, if they are clean for 10 years, it is time to take the stigma off and let them live like normal civilians. This is done in all civilised countries,” he said. In response to a question, the JKPC president said he would not want Kashmir to be an issue between India and Pakistan, and the people of Jammu and Kashmir should focus on their lives and development. “If there is an issue, the two countries have their foreign ministries to deal with it. We are a union territory, hopefully (will become) a state, and let’s focus on development. It (their issues) is something that the two countries will take care of,” he said. He said his opinion might

not be politically very correct or palatable but it was the truth which would save lives. “Anybody saying anything to the contrary is talking about sacrifice. Sacrifice means blood, dead bodies and jail. Whosoever says so should first qualify whose children will die and whose children will go to jail. “I don’t want... the army of orphans to supply more (bodies) to the graves,” he said. Lone, whose father and separatist leader Abdul Ghani Lone was assassinated on May 21, 2022, added that he detests violence as he has been at the receiving end. On his past association with separatist Hurriyat Conference, the JKPC chief said the amalgam never accepted him while the mainstream political parties labelled him as an agent of agencies. Lone, who is pitted against National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah in Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency, said the mainstream political parties paint him as a separatist as well as a BJP man in the same breath. “They say his father created militant outfits and in the same breath, they say he is with the BJP. / PTI /

EDITORIAL

“You never have to change anything you got up in the middle of the night to write.”

SAUL BELLOW

PARKINSON’S DISEASE

RARE GENE variants may explain why long-term pesticide exposure spikes the risk of developing Parkinson’s disease, a study said. Although pesticide exposure is linked to Parkinson’s disease risk, the new study sought to explain why some individuals with high exposure develop the disease while others do not. Researchers from the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) found that variants in some rare gene variants were enriched in patients with more severe Parkinson’s disease who also had higher exposure to pesticides.

“These variants also appeared to be deleterious to protein function suggesting that disruption of lysosomal activity may be underlying the development of Parkinson’s disease combined with pesticide exposure,” they noted in the paper published in the journal NPJ Parkinson’s Disease. For the study, the team used genetic data from nearly 800 California residents with Parkinson’s disease, many of whom had long-term exposure to 10 pesticides used on cotton crops for at least a decade before developing the neurological disease.

Their genetic makeup was examined for rare gene variants linked to the function of lysosomes -- cellular compartments that break down waste and debris and are thought to be associated with the development of Parkinson’s. It was then compared with high exposure to pesticides. “While the specific interactions between pesticides and the expression of these genetic variants require further study, the results suggest that in someone with such variants, long-term exposure to the cotton pesticides could lead to the buildup of toxic compounds, due to alterations of the cells’ ability to break down damaged proteins and organelles -- a process known as autophagy -- and thus lead to Parkinson’s disease,” Dr Brent Fogel, corresponding author and professor of Neurology and Human Genetics at UCLA, said. “On a day-to-day basis, these variants are not having much of an impact. But under the right stress, such as exposure to certain pesticides, they can fail and that could, over time, lead to the development of Parkinson’s disease. This is called a gene-environment interaction,” Fogel said.

Breaking free from professional habits

AS SEASONED professionals, we often pride ourselves on our expertise and accumulated knowledge. However, what if some of that knowledge is holding us back? What if the habits we’ve developed over decades are actually hindering our progress rather than propelling us forward? My own journey in unlearning, particularly through the lens of my experience with swimming, sheds light on the importance of breaking free from ingrained habits and embracing change in our professional lives.

Allow me to share a personal anecdote that resonates deeply with the concept of unlearning. Despite my passion for swimming, I found myself struggling to improve for over four decades. It wasn’t because of a lack of effort or determination, but rather because I had learned the wrong techniques at an early age. Swimming alongside friends in a river, I absorbed habits that stuck with me throughout my life, hindering my progress despite my best intentions.

Finally acknowledging the need for change, I enrolled in a beginner’s swimming course. The process of unlearning was arduous; it required me to confront not only physical challenges but also the mental resistance to change. Watching others progress while I struggled to undo years of ingrained habits was a humbling

experience. Yet, with perseverance and dedication, I began to see incremental improvements.

The parallels between my swimming journey and professional life are striking. Just as I had unknowingly absorbed detrimental habits in swimming, so too can we pick up negative behaviours in our careers. Our first job, and our initial experiences with bosses and colleagues -- they all shape our professional identity. Yet, over time, some of these habits can become obstacles to growth and success.

Too often, we attribute our professional challenges to external factors -- the current workplace culture, our managers, or the industry itself. Yet, true growth requires introspection and a willingness to unlearn ingrained behaviours that no longer serve us. It’s about challenging the status quo, breaking free from the comfort of familiarity, and embracing the discomfort of change.

Unlearning is not a one-time event but an ongoing process -- one that demands resilience, humility, and self-awareness. It requires us to confront our own limitations and biases, to question long-held assumptions, and to embrace new perspectives and ways of working. It’s about recognising that the path to success is not always linear, and that failure is an essential part of the learning process.

Trump’s company applies for visa his supporters want to curb

/ ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON /

The social media company founded by former President Donald Trump applied for a business visa program that he sought to restrict during his administration and which many of his allies want him to curtail in a potential second term. Trump Media & Technology Group, the company behind Truth Social, filed an application in June 2022 for an H-1B visa for a worker at a USD 65,000 annual salary, the lowest wage category allowed under the program. Federal immigration data shows the company was approved for a visa a few months later. The company says it did not hire the worker.

Filing for the visa sets the image of Trump the candidate, who has proposed a protectionist agenda for companies to “hire American,” in conflict with Trump the businessman, who has said his companies will use every tool at their disposal. Records show the investment firm started by Trump’s son-in-law and White House adviser, Jared Kushner, also filed an application and was approved to hire a foreigner as an associate under the same visa program.

Trump Media & Technology Group said in a statement the application “was made under prior management,” even though the current CEO, former House Intelligence Committee chairman and longtime Trump ally Devin Nunes, was already leading the company at the time the application was first filed with the US Department of Labour.

“The company has never hired -- and has no plans to hire -- an H-1B visa program worker. When current management learned of this application, which was made under prior management, it swiftly terminated the process in November 2022,” the company said in a statement.

An H-1B visa petition can cost companies about USD 5,000 per employee. Companies can withdraw petitions even after being approved. US Citizenship and Immigration Services records data doesn’t note when visas are revoked. But a spokeswoman for the Labour Department, which also



tracks H-1B applications, said they had no records of Truth Social requesting a withdrawal.

A COMMON TOOL FOR TECH COMPANIES

Tech companies commonly hire employees using the H-1B program. Trump never hid the fact he used the visas before he became president, using them mostly to bring in foreign models and a few workers for his hotels and resorts, per a review of petitions filed since 2009.

But with exceptions to renew existing applications, his companies appeared to have no longer petitioned for H-1B visas until Truth Social was created.

Data from the Labour Department shows that an application was filed by Trump Media & Technology Group for an employee to earn USD 65,000. It lists as the employer Will Wilkerson, a company co-founder and former senior vice president of operations, and an Atlanta address as the job’s location.

Wilkerson filed a whistleblower complaint in August 2022 with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, alleging securities violations by the company. He was fired, according to The Washington Post, and is cooperating with federal authorities. His lawyers said he would not comment.

“I SHOULDN’T BE ALLOWED TO USE IT”

Trump frequently talks about the

arrivals of migrants who cross the US-Mexico border illegally, but his policy proposals while in the White House also included curbs on legal immigration such as family-based visas and the visa lottery program.

In a 2016 primary debate, Trump spoke about the H-1B visa program and said it was “very bad” and “unfair” for US workers.

“First of all, I think and I know the H-1B very well. And it’s something that I frankly use and I shouldn’t be allowed to use it. We shouldn’t have it,” he said. “Second of all, I think it’s very important to say, well, I’m a businessman and I have to do what I have to do.”

Three months after taking office, Trump issued his “Buy American and Hire American” executive order, which directed Cabinet members to suggest reforms to ensure that H-1B visas were awarded to the highest-paid or most-skilled applicants to protect American workers. He has previously said the program was used by tech companies to get foreign workers for lower pay.

During his administration, a study by the nonpartisan National Foundation for American Policy found the government was scrutinising cases more by launching requests for more information from companies filing to hire foreign workers and denying more petitions.

The “Project 2025” handbook, com-

plied by allies preparing for Trump’s potential transition to power, says the H-1B program should be transformed “into an elite mechanism exclusively to bring in the best and brightest” at the highest wages while simultaneously ensuring that US workers are not being disadvantaged by the program.”

Companies in the professional, scientific and technical services fields account for more than 60 per cent of the total visas granted, said Nicolas Morales, an economist at the research department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond who specialises in labour and migration. Morales said he has found the visa program has been beneficial for small companies to stay in business.

“Winning the H-1B lottery actually helps them. It increases their chances of survival,” he said. “In the next five years, they are more likely to stay active, particularly small companies that are very dependent on skilled labour.”

The applications require companies to attest they will provide the foreign workers the same benefits offered to US workers and pay more than what they pay others with similar experience and qualifications or more than the typical wage for that type of occupation. Companies also have to provide a notice of the filing to the workers by posting a notice in two locations at the place of employment.

Much of the criticism regarding the H-1B program is about companies offering salaries in the lower wage categories to foreign workers. The application filed by Kushner’s investment firm to hire a foreign employee appears to satisfy that complaint.

The Labour Department certified a document where Kushner’s investment firm specified it would pay this employee a USD 200,000 salary, which falls under the highest wage level for the H-1B visas typically reserved for those who are experts in their field and have senior responsibilities. Recent data from US Citizenship and Immigration Services shows the company was approved for a visa.

Kushner has not joined the Trump campaign and has been pursuing his own business interests applying for tourism projects in the Balkans. / AP /

Climate change is leading to the spread of malaria

DAN IKPOYI AND FARAI MUTSAKA

When a small number of cases of locally transmitted malaria were found in the United States last year, it was a reminder that climate change is reviving or migrating the threat of some diseases. But across the African continent malaria has never left, killing or sickening millions of people.

Take Funmilayo Kotun, a 66-year-old resident of Makoko, an informal neighbourhood in Nigeria’s Lagos city. Its ponds of dirty water provide favourable breeding conditions for malaria-spreading mosquitoes. Kotun can’t afford insecticide-treated bed nets that cost between USD 7 and USD 21 each, much less antimalarial medications or treatment.

For World Malaria Day on Thursday, here is what you need to know about the situation in Africa:

MALARIA IS STILL WIDESPREAD

The malaria parasite mostly spreads to people via infected mosquitoes and can cause symptoms including fever, headaches and chills. It mostly affects children under 5 and pregnant women.

Vaccine efforts are still in early stages: Cameroon this year became the first country to routinely give children a new malaria vaccine, which is only about 30 per cent effective and doesn’t stop transmission. A second vaccine was recently approved. On Thursday, WHO announced that three African countries -- Benin, Liberia and Sierra Leone -- were rolling out vaccine programs for millions of children.

Cases of resistance to antimalarial drugs and insecticides

are increasing, while funding by governments and donors for innovation is slowing.

Living conditions play a role, with crowded neighbourhoods, stagnant water, poor sanitation and lack of access to treatment and prevention materials all issues in many areas. And an invasive species of mosquito previously seen mostly in India and the Persian Gulf is a new concern.

A GROWING PROBLEM

Globally, malaria cases are on the rise. Infections increased from 233 million in 2019 to 249 million in 85 countries in 2022. Malaria deaths rose from 576,000 in 2019 to 608,000 in 2022, according to the World Health Organisation.

Of the 12 countries that carry about 70 per cent of the global burden of malaria, 11 are in Africa and the other is India. Children under 5 constituted 80 per cent of the 580,000 malaria deaths recorded in

Africa in 2022.

COVID-19 HURT PROGRESS

The fight against malaria saw some progress in areas such as rapid diagnostic tests, vaccines and new bed nets meant to counter insecticide resistance, but the COVID-19 pandemic and a shift in focus and funding set back efforts. A study published in Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease last year said COVID-19-induced lockdowns led to disruptions at 30 per cent of rural community health service points across Africa. Malaria cases started spiking again, breaking a downward trend between 2000 and 2019.

That downward trend could soon return, according to the WHO.

A WARMING WORLD AND NEW FRONTIERS

Africa is “at the sharp end of climate change,” and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events causes havoc

in efforts to combat malaria in low- and middle-income regions, Peter Sands, the executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, warned in December.

In 2023, the WHO’s World Malaria Report included a chapter on the link between malaria and climate change for the first time, highlighting its significance as a potential risk multiplier. Scientists worry that people living in areas once inhospitable to mosquitoes, including the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro and the mountains of eastern Ethiopia, could be exposed.

In Zimbabwe, which has recorded some of its hottest days in decades, malaria transmission periods have extended in some districts, “and this shift has been attributed to climate change,” said Dr. Precious Andifasi, a WHO technical officer for malaria in Zimbabwe. / AP /

Bird’s eye view

Would you like to be a long-term single?

CHRISTOPHER PEPPING

Are all single people insecure? When we think about people who have been single for a long time, we may assume it’s because single people have insecurities that make it difficult for them to find a partner or maintain a relationship.

But is this true? Or can long-term single people also be secure and thriving?

Our latest research published in the Journal of Personality suggests they can. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, not everybody tends to thrive in singlehood. Our study shows a crucial factor may be a person’s attachment style.

Singlehood is on the rise. Singlehood is on the rise around the world. In Canada, single status among young

adults aged 25 to 29 has increased from 32% in 1981 to 61% in 2021. The number of people living solo has increased from 1.7 million people in 1981 to 4.4 million in 2021.

People are single for many reasons: some choose to remain single, some are focusing on personal goals and aspirations, some report dating has become harder, and some become single again due to a relationship breakdown.

People may also remain single due to their attachment style. Attachment theory is a popular and well-researched model of how we form relationships with other people. An Amazon search for attachment theory returns thousands of titles. The hashtag #attachmenttheory has been viewed over 140 million times on TikTok alone. What does attachment

theory say about relationships?

Attachment theory suggests our relationships with others are shaped by our degree of “anxiety” and “avoidance.”

Attachment anxiety is a type of insecurity that leads people to feel anxious about relationships and worry about abandonment. Attachment avoidance leads people to feel uncomfortable with intimacy and closeness.

People who are lower in attachment anxiety and avoidance are considered “securely attached”, and are comfortable depending on others, and giving and receiving intimacy.

Single people are often stereotyped as being too clingy or non-committal. Research comparing single and coupled people also suggests single people have higher levels of attachment insecurities compared to

people in relationships.

At the same time, evidence suggests many single people are choosing to remain single and living happy lives.

Single people represent a diverse group of secure and insecure people

In our latest research, our team of social and clinical psychologists examined single people’s attachment styles and how they related to their happiness and wellbeing.

We carried out two studies, one of 482 younger single people and the other of 400 older long-term singles. We found overall 78% were categorised as insecure, with the other 22% being secure.

Looking at our results more closely, we found four distinct subgroups of singles:

- secure singles are relatively comfortable with intimacy

and closeness in relationships (22%)

- anxious singles question whether they are loved by others and worry about being rejected (37%)

- avoidant singles are uncomfortable getting close to others and prioritise their independence (23% of younger singles and 11% of older long-term singles)

- fearful singles have heightened anxiety about abandonment, but are simultaneously uncomfortable with intimacy and closeness (16% of younger singles and 28% of older long-term singles). Insecure singles find singlehood challenging, but secure singles are thriving

Our findings also revealed these distinct subgroups of singles have distinct experiences and outcomes.

and are generally less satisfied with these relationships than secure singles. Avoidant singles also report less meaning in life and tend to be less happy compared to secure singles.

Fearful singles reported more difficulties navigating close relationships than secure singles. For instance, they were less able to regulate their emotions, and were less satisfied with the quality of their close relationships relative to secure singles. They also reported some of the lowest levels of life satisfaction across all subgroups.

These findings should be considered alongside several relevant points. First, although most singles in our samples were insecure (78%), a sizeable number were secure and thriving (22%). / THE CONVERSATION /



Briefly

‘JOB-EATER BJP’: MAMATA’S JIBE AFTER COURT SCRAPS RECRUITMENT OF NEARLY 26,000 TEACHERS



PINGLA/ GARBETA Taking a dig at the BJP, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday dubbed it a “job-eater” and said the people of West Bengal would not forgive its leaders for “conspiring to snatch” the livelihood of nearly 26,000 teachers. Addressing an election rally in support of TMC’s Ghatol candidate Dev, Banerjee also attacked the CPI(M) and Congress in the same breath, calling the two parties “eyes and ears” of the BJP in the state. “You have heard about man-eater tigers, but have you heard about the job-eater BJP? Did you see the glee on the face of the leaders of the BJP, CPI(M) and Congress after so many people were rendered jobless by the court?” she asked the people at the rally. “I don’t want to comment on the judgement or say anything about the judges. But after taking away the jobs of 26,000 youths, you are asking them to return the salary along with 12 per cent interest. Can you take jobs like that? Give them a chance to rectify. How can 26,000 people be treated in such a way?” she asked. / PTI /

LS POLLS: LEFT RATTLED BY ALLEGATIONS OF CPI(M) VETERAN’S PLANS TO JOIN BJP

KANNUR/ALAPPUZHA (Kerala) The accusations levelled by political opponents about senior CPI(M) leader E P Jayarajan’s alleged plans to join the BJP continued to trigger shock waves in the ruling Left in Kerala on Friday, the day of Lok Sabha polls, with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan cautioning his party colleague to be vigilant in his associations. “If Lord Shiva joins a sinner, Shiva will also become a sinner,” Vijayan said using a vernacular saying indirectly cautioning Jayarajan, who is also the convenor of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF). The chief minister’s statement came a day after BJP’s firebrand leader Sobha Surendran fired a salvo at CPI(M) by revealing the alleged bid made to take Jayarajan into the saffron party fold. / PTI /

TRAIN SERVICES TO ASSAM’S BARAK VALLEY RESTORED: NFR

GUWAHATI Train services to Assam’s Barak Valley was restored late on Friday afternoon after being snapped since the previous day which had left around 500 passengers stranded, many of whom were on way to vote in the ongoing second phase elections. Political parties had appealed to the railway authorities to expedite restoration of the affected section and arrange for alternate transportation means, with polling taking place in Silchar and Kamringanj constituencies of Barak Valley. Several trains were cancelled, short-terminated or rescheduled since Thursday following the derailment of the engine of a goods train between Jatinga Lampur and New Harangajao stations under Lumding division, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) chief spokesperson Sabyasachi De said here. Senior railway officials, including the NFR general manager, rushed to the site to oversee restoration work in spite of heavy rainfall in the hilly area. / PTI /

LS POLLS: FOR THE FIRST TIME, UDDHAV TO VOTE FOR POLITICAL FOE-TURNED-FRIEND CONGRESS

MUMBAI Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray will, perhaps for the first time, vote for the Congress, his political foe-turned-friend, a reflection of the churning Maharashtra polity has undergone since 2019, a year which saw realignment of parties.The Congress, part of the opposition bloc, on Thursday fielded its city unit president Varsha Gaikwad from the Mumbai North Central Lok Sabha seat, which covers the area where Thackeray is registered as a voter. THE former CM’s residence, Matoshree, is in Vandre (Bandra) East assembly constituency, which falls under the Mumbai North Central seat. “I am going to vote for Varsha Gaikwad as she is contesting from here (Mumbai North Central),” Thackeray told reporters on Friday. / PTI /

Modi slams TMC over school jobs scam, says Bengal’s youth paying price



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being presented a crown during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Malda district on Friday. / PTI

MALDA Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday lambasted the TMC over the cancellation of around 26,000 jobs following a high court order, asserting that the youth of West Bengal have suffered due to the “cut-and-commission” culture of the party, which is now “synonymous with scams”. Speaking at an election rally in Malda, Modi highlighted the plight of the youth who, in desperation, took loans to pay bribes to TMC leaders. “The TMC indulges in scams for which the people of the state have to suffer. The party has been playing with the future of the youth of Bengal,” he said. He emphasised how the TMC’s involvement in scams has not only jeopardised the future of Bengal’s youth but has also adversely affected thousands of families. “The teacher recruitment scam snatched the livelihood of around 26,000 families. The youth who took loans to pay bribes to the TMC leaders are now burdened by this situation too. The Centre is working towards generating jobs for the youth of the coun-

try,” he said. Earlier this week, the Calcutta High Court declared the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools as “null and void,” ordering the cancellation of all appointments made through it. “Under TMC rule, only one thing exists - scams totalling thousands of crores. The culprit is TMC, but the entire state is forced to pay for its deception and scams,” he said. Highlighting various scams, including the Sharada chit fund scam, the Rose Valley chit fund scam, and the coal smuggling scandal, Modi accused the TMC of prioritizing corruption over the welfare of the people. Addressing the women electorate, particularly in the minority-dominated district of Malda, Modi accused the TMC of betraying Muslim sisters by opposing the abolition of triple talaq. “The TMC, which came to power by talking about Maa-Mati-Manush (Mother-land-people), has committed the biggest betrayal

against the women here. When the BJP government abolished triple talaq to protect Muslim sisters from atrocities, TMC opposed it,” he said. Referring to recent incidents in Sandeshkhali, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders surfaced, Modi criticised the state government for its alleged apathy towards the victims. “So many atrocities were committed against women in Sandeshkhali and the TMC government kept protecting the main accused till the end... Whereas the BJP government is working for the dignity of women,” he said. Slamming the Congress and the TMC for spreading canards about CAA, Modi said the Citizenship (Amendment) Act “is about granting citizenship and not snatching it.” “The Congress and the TMC to appease their vote-bank politics are opposing the CAA. Why are they opposing Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist refugees, who were forced to leave their land due to religious persecution, from getting citizenship? The CAA is about granting citizenship and not snatching it,” he said.

He warned against the “dangerous intentions” of the INDIA alliance, comprising TMC and Congress, accusing them of divisive policies and appeasement politics. “They want to revoke decisions made in the interest of the nation, such as reinstating Article 370 and repealing the CAA law for their vested political interests,” Modi said. Seizing on Congress leader Sam Pitroda’s remarks amid the row on the issue of wealth redistribution, Modi said, “The Congress and the INDI alliance are planning to take the wealth that you have accumulated by working hard and enduring hardships. Even mangalsutra of the poor and Dalit woman will not be spared.” Modi, while questioning the TMC’s stand on the issue, said both the parties have now engaged in competition over appeasement politics. “The Congress wants to grab your property, and the TMC is not uttering even a single word against this. There is a competition of appeasement going on between these two parties. / PTI /

‘PM is scared, may even shed tears on stage’: Rahul Gandhi’s fresh salvo at Modi



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Bijapur, Karnataka. / PTI

VIJAYAPURA/BALLARI (Karnataka) Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday took potshots at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his attack on the grand old party, saying he is scared and may even shed tears on the stage. He called the BJP ‘Bharatiya Chombu Party’. Chombu in Kannada means round water pot, which is sometimes used to convey emptiness and deception. “You have heard the prime minister’s speeches. He is scared. It’s possible that he may shed tears on stage,” Gandhi said, addressing public meetings in the district headquarters towns of Vijayapura and Ballari in the party-governed state. Modi has targeted the Congress on a variety of issues in recent campaign rallies, including “mangalsutra”, “redistribution of wealth” and “inheritance tax” charges. The former Congress chief accused Modi of ‘diverting public attention’ through various means. “Sometimes he talks about China and Pakistan, and sometimes he will make you beat plates and ask you to switch on the torch light of your mobile phones.” He pointed out that there are three to four core issues in India including poverty, unemployment and price rise, and claimed that only Congress can eradicate unemployment, con-

tain price rise and give people their due share. “Modi has only snatched money from poor people. He has made some billionaires. There are 22 people who have wealth equivalent to the 70 crore people of the country. Just one per cent people are controlling 40 per cent of the wealth of the nation,” Gandhi alleged. The Congress leader said in the present scheme of things, there is “no scope” for Dalits, OBCs, tribals, minorities and poor general category people. “I will just tell you a clear thing in a simple one line. The wealth Modi has given to those billionaires, the same money we are going to give to the poor people of the country,” he said. Gandhi also promised the youth that his party will scrap the ‘Agniveer’ scheme if it is voted to power. He dubbed the scheme in the armed forces offering three years services to the youth from 18 years to 21 years as an insult to the Army and soldiers. “Narendra Modi snatched the Army jobs from the youth of India. He brought the Agniveer scheme, which is an insult to the Indian Army and soldiers. We will scrap it,” he said. The Congress leader charged Modi with imposing a faulty GST where he introduced five different types of tax, which are hefty. / PTI /

Congress has Muslim League’s agenda, says it will make separate law for minorities: Shah

BEMETARA (Chhattisgarh) Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday claimed that Congress has said it would make a separate law for minorities, and asked whether the country should “function on the basis of Sharia”. Speaking at an election rally in Bemetara district of Chhattisgarh, he also said that those who refused invitation for the consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya for their vote bank politics did not have the right to rule the country. Bemetara falls in Durg Lok Sabha constituency which will go to polls on May 7. “...They (Congress) have said they will make a separate law for minorities. Tell me, should the country function on the basis of Sharia? Should triple talaq be reintroduced? Congress has been heading forward

with the agenda of Muslim League,” the senior BJP leader alleged. “Rahul baba, neither the people will elect you, nor will triple talaq be reintroduced. I am saying today that we will not allow anyone to touch CAA (Citizenship (Amendment) Act), triple talaq (prohibition act) and (scrapping of) Article 370,” he said. In the greed of its vote bank, the Congress maintained Article 370 in Kashmir for many years, Shah alleged. “You (people) all elected Modi ji the prime minister for the second time and he abolished Article 370 on August 5, 2019 and Kashmir became a part of India forever,” he said. Highlighting the achievements of the Narendra Modi government, Shah said the prime minister has ended terrorism and safeguarded the country.

“The Congress nourished and nurtured Naxalism due to its political interest. When Modi ji became the PM, he ended Naxalism from the country in 10 years. The menace survived only in Chhattisgarh because the Bhupesh Kakkal-led Congress government was in power in the state (2018-2023),” he said. But as soon as you elected Vishnu Deo Sai as the Chief Minister (in the last assembly elections), he and Home Minister (Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma) worked to eliminate around 90 Naxalites in just four months. 123 Naxalites were arrested and 225 surrendered (during this period), he said. “Give a third term to PM Modi, and Naxalism will be eliminated from Chhattisgarh in two years,” he averred. Nobody can accomplish in 1,000 years what Modi has done in 10 years,

Shah said.During the Sonia (Sonia Gandhi)-Manmohan (former PM Manmohan Singh) led UPA government, every day terrorists used to enter from Pakistan and carry out bomb blasts. You made Modi ji the Prime Minister. Pakistan had got into the habit of attacking and carried out attacks in Uri and Pulwama. But this time Manmohan Singh was not the prime minister, it was Narendra Modi. Our jawans entered Pakistan and eliminated terrorists by carrying out surgical strikes and air strikes within just 10 days (of the attacks), he said. The Union minister also accused the Congress of being anti-Other Backward Class, and said it was Modi’s guarantee that no one can touch the reservations for Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and OBCs. / PTI /



Cache of arms including foreign-made revolvers seized by CBI in Sandeshkhali raids

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA The CBI seized arms and ammunition, including foreign-made firearms, during searches at multiple locations in West Bengal’s Sandeshkhali on Friday in connection with the January attack on an Enforcement Directorate team by a mob allegedly instigated by now-suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh, officials said. Teams of the Central Bureau Investigation (CBI), the bomb detection squad, the National Security Guard (NSG), the central paramilitary forces and the West Bengal Police were part of the searches at the village -- a riverine delta -- on the fringes of the Sunderbans in North 24 Parganas district. “During investigation of this case, information was received that the items lost by the ED team and other incriminating articles may be hidden at the residence of an associate of Sheikh at Sandeshkhali, North 24 Parganas. Accordingly, the team of the CBI along with

CRPF personnel searched two premises at Sandeshkhali today,” the spokesperson of the CBI. The swift operation, till afternoon, resulted in the seizure of a huge cache of small arms and ammunition, and these included foreign-made pistols, the officials said. During the searches, the CBI seized three foreign-made revolvers and one foreign-made pistol, one Indian revolver, one Colt official issue police revolver, one country-made pistol, 120 nine mm bullets, 50 cartridges of .45 calibre, 120 nine mm cartridges, 50 cartridges of .380 and eight cartridges of .32, the spokesperson said. “Besides, many incriminating documents related to Shajahan have also been recovered. Some items suspected to be country-made bombs have also been recovered, which are being handled and disposed of by the teams of the NSG,” the spokesperson said in a

statement. As officials spread across Sandeshkhali to search targeted locations, NSG units had the responsibility for detecting and handling explosives found during the operation, the officials said. Five teams of CBI officials, with support from the West Bengal Police, the central forces and the NSG, conducted a search at the house in Sarberia, a senior official said in Kolkata. “We had received specific information regarding the stockpiling of this huge cache of arms and ammunition, and explosives. Explosives stacked inside boxes have also been found. The search operation is underway,” the official had told PTI during the operation. The owner of the house, identified as Abu Taleb Molah, is a relative of Sheikh, sources in the CBI said and added that it was not clear why such a huge cache of arms and ammunition, and explosives

were stacked inside the house. The house, which was cordoned off by security forces, was built amid water bodies used for fish farming. Central forces were used metal detectors outside the house to check whether more arms and ammunition were buried. A robotic device was also deployed for the purpose. The searches were launched in connection with the three FIRs that the CBI had registered related to the attack on the team of Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials in Sandeshkhali on January 5 when it had gone to raid the premises of Sheikh in connection with an alleged ration scam. On the orders of the Calcutta High Court, the central agency had registered three FIRs related to the incidents on January 5. The FIRs pertain to the alleged attack on ED officers by a mob on the complaint by officers, allegations against ED officials levelled by the guard of suspended TMC leader Sheikh and a suo motu case registered by the Nazat police station about the attack on ED officers. Sheikh was arrested by the West Bengal Police on February 29 in connection with the attack. / PTI /

Ex-CM Kumaraswamy alleges voter inducements in Bangalore Rural segment, DKS hits back

RAMANAGARA (Karnataka) JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Friday alleged that cash and gift vouchers were distributed in Bengaluru Rural constituency, especially in Kanakapura Taluk, a charge rejected by Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar. D K Suresh, brother of Shivakumar, is seeking re-election from the seat for the fourth time. The NDA, of which JD(S) is a part, has fielded cardiologist Dr C N Manjunath -- brother-in-law of Kumaraswamy and son-in-law of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda -- who is contesting on BJP ticket. As the elections were in progress in 14 constituencies in the state, Kumaraswamy alleged that some supporters of BJP and the JD(S), were attacked in Kanakapura Taluk and their shirts were torn off. “Guarantee cards (gift vouchers) were distributed with which people can make purchases up to Rs 10,000. When our boys made a noise, they were attacked,” he alleged.

Money was also distributed since Thursday night, he said, adding that in Kunigal Taluk, a man died by suicide after Congress workers “attacked, pestered and threatened him.” “Even after giving complaints to the Election Commission, no action was taken,” Kumaraswamy said, and added sarcastically: “I want to tell the EC to allow people to openly allow distribution.” Dismissing the allegation, Shivakumar accused Kumaraswamy of specialising in blame shifting. Speaking to reporters after casting his vote at his birthplace Doddaballapur in Kanakapura Taluk in Ramanagara district, he said, “It is Kumaraswamy’s habit to shift blame to others after committing a crime. He distributes gift cards and money to voters but accuses the Congress of doing so.” Regarding the allegation that Congress is giving gift coupons worth Rs 10,000 in Lulu Mall, Shivakumar said, “Let him (Kumaraswamy) go and lodge a complaint with the Election Commission. It is easy to do hit-and-run without any proof.” / PTI /

News
makers

SOUTH KOREA, JAPAN COULD CONSIDER SIMPLIFIED ENTRY AGREEMENT AMID WARMING TIES: SEOUL OFFICIAL

South Korea and Japan could consider adopting a simplified entry procedure for people travelling between the two countries, as an effort to keep the momentum going in the dramatic improvement in bilateral relations, a Seoul official said Friday. The official suggested as one of the possibilities that the two neighbours could explore, likening the idea to the Schengen Agreement in Europe that allows nationals of the signatory countries and eligible members to travel freely without border checks, Yonhap news agency reported.



THREE DEAD AFTER MINI CAR FALLS INTO PADDY FIELD IN JAPAN

Three teenagers died after a mini car fell into a paddy field in the western Japanese prefecture of Tokushima, local authorities reported on Friday. Around 10.30 p.m. local time on Thursday, a report was made to emergency services that a mini car fell from prefectural road Route 24 in the town of Chosei in Anan City. Xinhua news agency reported. Four teenagers, all aged 18, were in the car and were rushed to the hospital, with three of them later confirmed dead, according to local police. The survivor suffered minor injuries.



DON'T DRAG PAKISTAN FOR POLITICAL MILEAGE DURING ELECTIONS IN INDIA: FOREIGN OFFICE

Pakistan on Friday urged Indian leaders to stop dragging the country in their speeches for political mileage during the election season. Speaking at a press briefing here, Pakistan's Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said that Islamabad rejects all the claims made by Indian leaders over Jammu and Kashmir.

Briefly

DON'T DRAG PAKISTAN FOR POLITICAL MILEAGE DURING ELECTIONS IN INDIA: FOREIGN OFFICE

ISLAMABAD Pakistan on Friday urged Indian leaders to stop dragging the country in their speeches for political mileage during the election season. Speaking at a press briefing here, Pakistan's Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said that Islamabad rejects all the claims made by Indian leaders over Jammu and Kashmir. "Indian politicians to cease their reckless practice of dragging Pakistan into India's populist public discourse for electoral motives," she said. "We are witnessing an alarming surge in provocative statements from Indian leaders asserting unwarranted claims on Jammu and Kashmir."

/ PTI /

24 MORE INDIAN FISHERMEN DETAINED IN SRI LANKA REPATRIATED TO INDIA

COLOMBO Twenty-four Indian fishermen who were detained by the Sri Lanka Navy for allegedly fishing in the island nation's waters were on Friday repatriated to India, two days after another group of five Indian fishermen were sent to their homeland. "Twenty-four Indian fishermen repatriated from Sri Lanka. They have boarded from Colombo and are currently on their way home," the Indian High Commission in Colombo said in a post on X. On Wednesday, five Indian fishermen detained by the Sri Lanka Navy were repatriated to India. Earlier this month, 19 Indian fishermen detained by the Sri Lanka Navy were repatriated to India, the Indian High Commission said. The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

/ PTI /

INDIAN & RUSSIAN FIRMS AWARDED MANAGEMENT OF SRI LANKA'S MATTALA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

COLOMBO A joint venture between an Indian and a Russian firm have been awarded the management of Sri Lanka's Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport in Hambantota, the government spokesman said on Friday. The USD 209 million facility was once dubbed the "world's emptiest airport" due to a lack of flights. The Sri Lankan Cabinet, which met on January 9, approved the calling of Expression of Interest by prospective parties, government spokesman and minister Bandula Gunawardena told reporters here. Accordingly, five proposals were received, and the Cabinet-appointed consultative committee decided to award a management contract spanning 30 years to Shaurya Aeronautics (Pvt) Ltd of India and Airports of Regions Management Company of Russia. The Cabinet approved the proposal submitted by the minister of civil aviation and airport services, Gunawardena said.

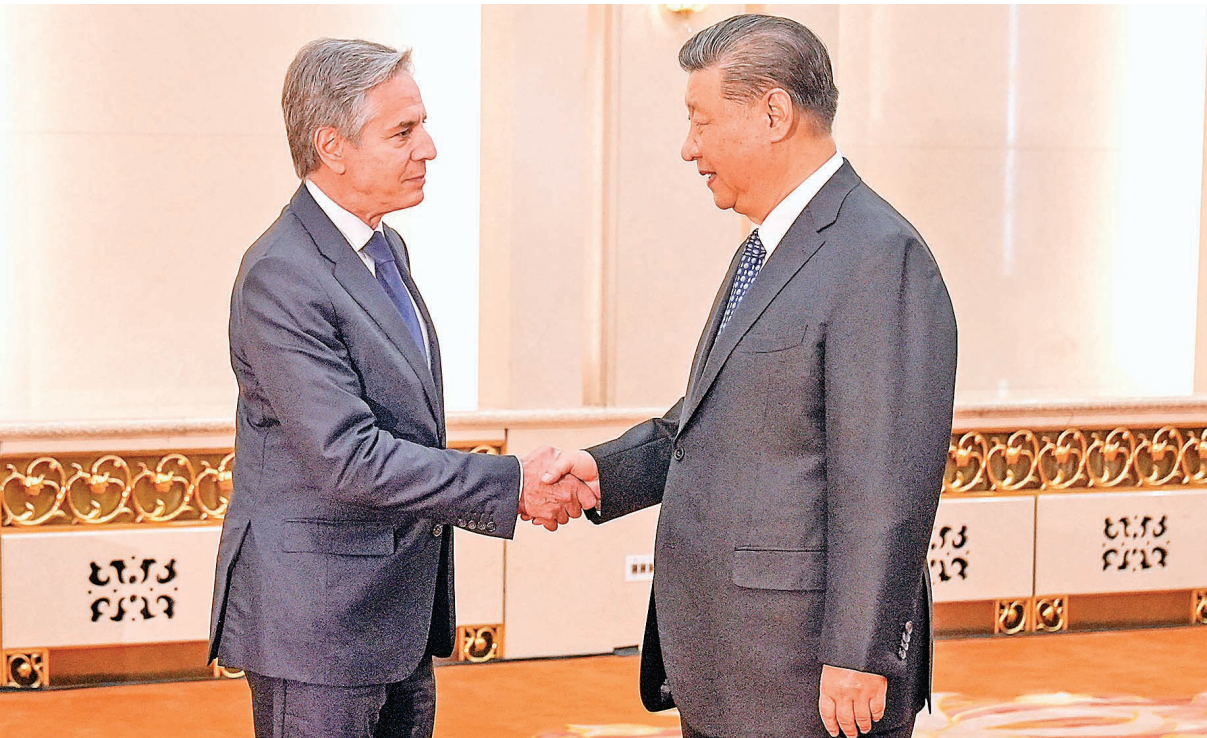
/ PTI /

CHINA'S TOP DIPLOMAT: 'NEGATIVE FACTORS' UP IN RELATIONSHIP WITH US

BEIJING On the last day of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to China, Beijing has warned of a deterioration in relations between the two powers. Although the two sides are talking to each other again, the "negative factors" in the relationship between the US and China have increased, said China's chief diplomat Wang Yi on Friday in Beijing. Wang cited China's right to develop being "unreasonably suppressed" as one of the reasons. According to him, the two countries are faced with the question of whether their relationship will either stabilise or slide into a downward spiral. According to US media reports, Blinken said that progress had been made in some areas to close the gap between the two countries. However, he wanted to express clearly and directly the issues on which there were differences of opinion with China.

/ IANS /

Defiant Xi Jinping tells Blinken China not afraid of competition



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People, Friday, April 26, 2024, in Beijing, China. AP / PTI

K J M VARMA / BEIJING

SPARRING over a host of differences, including China's support to Russia over the Ukraine war and mounting US pressure on Beijing to stop flooding global markets with cheap goods, China and the US on Friday managed to reach a five-point consensus to stabilise strained ties after a testy meeting between President Xi Jinping and Secretary of State Antony Blinken here. A defiant Xi told Blinken that China is not afraid of competition as the US top diplomat raised con-

cerns about Beijing's support for Russia in the Ukraine war and the country's "dangerous actions" in the South China Sea in its escalating conflict with the Philippines as well as tensions in the Taiwan Strait in recent months. Xi told Blinken that China is willing to cooperate with the US but cooperation should be a two-way street. "China is not afraid of competition, but competition should be about common progress, not a zero-sum game," Xi said, official media reported. Xi said China is com-

mitted to non-alignment but the US should not form small circles -- an apparent reference to the AUKUS, (Australia, the UK and the US) nuclear submarine deal as well as the Quad (the US, India, Australia, Japan) which Beijing alleges is aimed at containing its rise. Xi said both sides can have their friends and partners and should refrain from targeting, opposing or damaging each other. He also called on the US to be a partner of China and not to "say one thing and do another". "The two coun-

tries should be partners, not rivals.. they should be true to their words and be resolute in deeds, rather than saying one thing and doing another," Xi said. He asked the US to view China's development positively so that bilateral relations could be stabilised. In his media interaction after meeting Xi, Blinken did not mince words asserting that the US, EU and NATO countries want China to stop Russia's defence industrial base failing which Beijing has to face additional measures. The US has already imposed sanctions on more than 100

Chinese entities export controls etc, Blinken said. "We are fully prepared to take additional measures and I made it very clear in my meetings today", he said. "There are profound concerns about the actions the Chinese enterprises are taking to support Russia's defence industrial base because this goes not only to the immediate threat posed by Russia in its aggression against Ukraine, it goes to a medium long threat, many Europeans feel Russia poses to them," he said. "All of us are looking at China to take steps to curb this action. We are also looking at the actions we are fully prepared to take if we don't see a change", he said.

Besides meeting Xi, Blinken held lengthy talks with Chinese counterpart Wang Yi spanning over five and half hours discussing measures to stabilise the ties between the top two economies of the world. Wang also cautioned Blinken against stepping on China's "red lines". The China-US relationship is beginning to stabilise, but it is still being tested by "negative factors", he added. The US recently approved its latest aid package which included military assistance to Taiwan, drawing sharp criticism from Beijing. China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunited with the mainland, even by force. Wang asserted that no one shall deprive the Chinese people of their right to development. The US has employed all kinds of measures to hit China on trade, economy and technology, he said.

/ PTI /

Pak Army chief Gen Munir says armed forces to provide full support to government in quest for development

SAJJAD HUSSAIN / ISLAMABAD

PAKISTAN'S Army chief General Asim Munir on Friday said the armed forces would provide full support to the government in its effort towards the country's economic development. The COAS while addressing the Green Pakistan Initiative (GPI) Conference said that Pakistan was a blessed land with industrious and resilient people who needed to come together for national development, a statement from the army said.

"The Pakistan Army will continue to provide all possible support for the economic development of Pakistan," the COAS said, underscoring the army's efforts would "contribute towards comprehensive national security and collective good of the nation". Munir also said a "united team Pakistan" could defeat "negative forces", asserting that negative propaganda and social media trolls could not distract the nation from marching towards its development and prosperity.

He said the country's armed forces, with the nation's support, would defeat all the inimical forces bent on impeding Pakistan's development and prosperity.

"We are all a united team Pakistan - InshaAllah (God willing), with the co-operation and support of the people, all efforts of those who distract and obstruct Pakistan's development journey will fail," he said at the conference which among others was also attended by Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal and Minister for National Food Security Rana Tanveer Hussain. The ministers lauded this transformative initiative and underscored that agriculture is the lifeline of Pakistan.

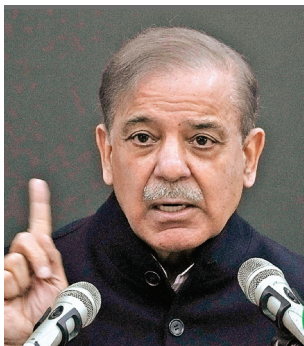
/ PTI /

Pak govt extends deadline for deportation of Afghans till June 30: Official

SAJJAD HUSSAIN / ISLAMABAD

PAKISTAN Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday extended the deadline till June 30th for the deportation of Afghan refugees residing in the country with Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, according to an official statement.

The deportation of illegal Afghan refugees staying in Pakistan has been going on since the government gave an ultimatum



to all refugee Afghan nationals to leave Pakistan by November 1 last year.

The PoR is an identity card for Afghan refugees that entitles them to remain in Pakistan legally and is issued by the country's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). PoRs are issued to Afghan refugees after they get themselves registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sharif, the Pak government also said that Afghans with POR would be repatriated to Afghanistan in the third phase.

"The Cabinet has approved the extension of POR cards of Afghan refugees till 30th June this year, enabling the cardholders to avail schools, bank accounts and other facilities in Pakistan for the time being. These POR cardholders will be repatriated

in the third phase of the ongoing repatriation program of illegal nationals residing in Pakistan," said the statement.

Pakistan's move to deport Afghans back to their native country has been condemned by the global human rights bodies.

According to Amnesty International, since November 2023, a total of 5,27,981 Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan—leaving behind their homes, properties and community in

Pakistan.

The global rights body has repeatedly urged the government to reverse its decision to deport Afghan refugees, most recently in its ten-point Human Rights Charter for the newly elected government in Pakistan.

During the cabinet meeting, the members also received a briefing from the Aviation secretary on the progress of the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines.

/ PTI /

China says talks on Tibet only with Dalai Lama's representatives; rules out dialogue on autonomy

K J M VARMA / BEIJING

CHINA on Friday said it will talk only with the representatives of the Dalai Lama and not the officials of the Tibetan government in exile based in India but ruled out dialogue on the highest Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader's long-pending demand for autonomy for his remote Himalayan homeland. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin was reacting to reports of the back-channel talks between the Tibetan government-in-exile and the Chinese government when he said China regards the Tibetan government-in-exile based in Dharamshala as a "separatist" bloc.

"The so-called Xizang's government-in-exile is a completely separatist political bloc. It is totally against the Chinese Constitution and laws. It is illegal," Wang told a media briefing here. "No country has recognised it." On Thursday, Sikyong or the political head of Tibet's government-in-exile, Penpa Tsering, told a visiting group of journalists in Dharamshala, India, "We have had back-channel (engagement) since last year. But we have no immediate expectations from it. It has to be a long-term (one)." Insisting that the talks are "very informal," the head of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) said, "I have my interlocutor who deals with people in Beijing

/ PTI /

The US and China spar with warnings about misunderstandings

BEIJING The United States and China butted heads over a number of contentious bilateral, regional and global issues as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Friday with senior Chinese officials and warned of the dangers of misunderstandings and miscalculations.

Blinken's discussions started with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and then Public Security Minister Wang Xiaohong, who said Blinken would also see President Xi Jinping -- a meeting that had been expected but not previously announced by either said. A State Department official confirmed that Blinken would meet the president before leaving the country late Friday. Talks between the two sides have increased in recent months, even as differences have grown. Blinken and Wang underscored the importance of keeping lines of communication open, but they also lamented that divisions were becoming more serious in nature. They each underscored the importance of keeping lines of communication open but they also lamented persistent and deepening divisions that threaten global security. Those divisions were highlighted earlier this week when U.S. President Joe Biden signed a massive foreign aid bill that contains several elements that the Chinese see as problematic.



Their comments hinted at a long list of differences to be discussed, including Taiwan and the South China Sea, and trade and human rights, China's support for Russia and the production and export of synthetic opioid precursors.

"Overall, the China-U.S. relationship is beginning to stabilize," Wang told Blinken at the start of about 5 1/2 hours of talks. "But at the same time, the negative factors in the relationship are still increasing and building and the relationship is facing all kinds of disruptions." "Should China and the United States keep to the right direction of moving forward with stability or return to a downward spiral?" he asked. "This is a major question before our two countries and tests

our sincerity and ability." Wang also outlined, without being specific, well-known Chinese complaints about U.S. policies and positions on the South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights and China's right to conduct relations with countries it deems fit. "China's legitimate development rights have been unreasonably suppressed and our core interests are facing challenges," he said. "China's concerns are consistent. We have always called for respect of each other's core interests and urge the United States not to interfere in China's internal affairs, not to hold China's development back, and not to step on China's red lines on China's sovereignty, security, and development interests." / AP /

S. KOREA DOCTORS' PROTEST: MORE MEDICAL PROFESSORS CONSIDERING WEEKLY BREAKS

SEOUL Professors from around 20 major medical schools in South Korea will decide on Friday whether to take a weekly day off while struggling to fill the void of trainee doctors who have walked off their jobs for more than two months, officials said.

The emergency committee for national medical professors will hold a general meeting online later in the day and discuss the potential suspension of all surgeries and treatment for outpatients once a week, according to its officials, Yonhap news agency reported. "Professors have hit their limit both mentally and physically," said a committee official, adding: "We will review whether to take a day off on a regular basis, and details will be fixed in accordance with the situation of each hospital." Despite looming closures, hospitals will likely continue the operations of their emergency rooms and intensive care units, he added.

The committee involves professors from around 20 medical schools, and those affiliated with some of the schools have already decided to have a weekly break starting next month.

/ IANS /



EUROPE & AUSTRALIA



KREMLIN SAYS RUSSIA, EUROPE UNLIKELY TO RESTORE TIES

Russia and Europe will no longer be able to resume their past relations under the current circumstances, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday. There is a lack of willingness to build such relations, especially on Russia's part, said Peskov, adding that Moscow will take into account past experiences when forging new ties with European countries, Xinhua news agency reported. He said Russia and Europe, being geographic neighbors, "will still have to agree on how we will live". Russia does not pose a threat to Europe and expects that no one in Europe will pose a threat to it, said Peskov.

A RUSSIAN JOURNALIST HAS BEEN DETAINED FOR POSTS CRITICIZING THE MILITARY, HIS LAWYER SAYS

A journalist for the Russian edition of Forbes magazine has been detained on charges of spreading false information about the Russian military, his lawyer said Friday. Sergei Mingazov is being held in the Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk, lawyer Konstantin Bubon said on Facebook. He said that Mingazov was detained because of social media posts he made about the Ukrainian city of Bucha, where more than 400 bodies of civilians were found.



FORMER UK MINISTER WARNS AGAINST FROZEN CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

Former UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has warned against suggestions that the conflict in Ukraine should be frozen, during an interview that addressed the outlook in the war with Russia. The idea of "freezing" the war in Ukraine was put forward recently by a senior member of Germany's governing Social Democrats. "In 2014 they froze the conflict, and Ukraine had 18,000 soldiers murdered on the front line between 2014 and the invasion," Wallace said in an interview with dpa on Thursday.

Ukraine's farm minister latest corruption suspect as Kyiv aims to undo Russian gains

KYIV (UKRAINE) A Ukrainian court on Friday ordered the detention of the country's farm minister in the latest high-profile corruption investigation, while Kyiv security officials assessed how they can recover lost battlefield momentum in the war against Russia.

Ukraine's High Anti-Corruption Court ruled that Agriculture Minister Oleksandr Soloskyi should be held in custody for 60 days, but he was released after paying bail of 75 million Hryvnias (USD 1.77 million), a statement said.

Ukraine's National Anti-Corruption Bureau suspects Soloskyi headed an organized

crime group that between 2017 and 2021 unlawfully obtained land worth 291 million Hryvnias (USD 6.85 million) and attempted to obtain other land worth 190 million Hryvnias (USD 4.47 million).

Ukraine is trying to root out corruption that has long dogged the country. A dragnet over the past two years has seen Ukraine's defense minister, top prosecutor, intelligence chief and other senior officials lose their jobs.

That has caused embarrassment and unease as Ukraine receives tens of billions of dollars in foreign aid to help fight Russia's army, and the European Union and NATO

have demanded widespread anti-graft measures before Kyiv can realize its ambition of joining the blocs.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to hold online talks Friday with the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which has been the key international organization coordinating the delivery of weapons and other aid to Ukraine.

Zelenskyy said late Thursday that the meeting would discuss how to turn around Ukraine's fortunes on the battlefield. The Kremlin's forces have gained an edge over Kyiv's army in recent months as Ukraine grappled

with a shortage of ammunition and troops.

Russia, despite sustaining high losses, has been taking control of small settlements as part of its effort to drive deeper into eastern Ukraine after capturing the city of Avdiivka in February, the defense ministry said Friday.

It's been slow going for the Kremlin's troops in eastern Ukraine and is likely to stay that way, according to the Institute for the Study of War. However, the key hilltop town of Chasiv Yar is vulnerable to the Russian onslaught, which is using glide bombs – powerful Soviet-era weapons that were originally unguided. / AP /

Briefly

2 MEN CHARGED IN THE UK WITH SPYING FOR CHINA ARE GRANTED BAIL AFTER A COURT APPEARANCE IN LONDON

LONDON A former researcher working in the UK Parliament and another man charged with spying for China were granted bail Friday after an initial court appearance in London. Christopher Cash, 29, and Christopher Berry, 32, were charged with violating the Official Secrets Act by providing information or documents that could be "useful to an enemy" – China – and "prejudicial to the safety or interests" of the UK between late 2021 and February 2023. Cash, a parliamentary researcher who worked with senior lawmakers from the governing Conservatives, was ordered not to enter Parliament or contact members of the House of Commons. Cash's colleagues included Alicia Kearns, who now heads the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee, and her predecessor in that role, Tom Tugendhat, who is now security minister. Berry is reportedly an academic based in Oxfordshire. The two didn't enter pleas during a short hearing in Westminster Magistrates' Court. The defendants were also ordered not to travel outside the UK or contact each other. / AP /

BRITAIN'S KING CHARLES III WILL RESUME PUBLIC DUTIES NEXT WEEK AFTER CANCER TREATMENT, PALACE SAYS

LONDON King Charles III will resume his public duties next week following treatment for cancer, Buckingham Palace announced on Friday. Charles took a break from public appearances almost three months ago to focus on his treatment for an undisclosed type of cancer. The palace said Charles would make a public visit to a cancer treatment centre on Tuesday in the first of several appearances he will make in coming weeks. One of his first major engagements will be hosting a state visit by the emperor and empress of Japan in June. The palace didn't provide an update on the king's health or his treatment, though it said that his "medical team are very encouraged by the progress made so far and remain positive about the king's continued recovery". / AP /

LONDON RESIDENT ARRESTED BY NIA IN INDIAN MISSION ATTACK CASE

LONDON A man who was arrested for unlawful activities by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as part of its investigations into the attack on the High Commission of India here in March 2023 had previously been detained at the Attari border while entering India from Pakistan last year. Inderpal Singh Gaba, a resident of Hounslow in west London, was arrested in India on Thursday for committing offences under Section 13(1) of UA (P) Act, Section 2 of the Prevention of Insult of National Honour Act and Section 34 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), official sources here said. There were two major violent protests in front of India House in London on March 19 and 22, 2023. On March 19, a large group of protesters were found to have attacked Indian officials, damaged the High Commission building and insulted the Indian National Flag. On March 22, they chanted anti-India slogans, insulted the Indian National Flag again and indulged in unlawful and threatening behaviour, according to the reports logged by the NIA following the incidents. / PTI /

RUSSIAN OIL PRODUCTION FACILITY IN SIBERIA CATCHES FIRE

MOSCOW A fire has broken out at an oil production facility in Russia's central Siberian oblast of Omsk, regional Governor Vitaliy Khotsenko said on Thursday. Three 200-litre containers of petroleum products are on fire, and two fire-fighting trains have been involved in extinguishing the blaze, which is estimated as a medium, the Ministry of Emergency Situations said in a statement, Xinhua news agency reported. / IANS /

Ukraine pushe to military-age men to come home, Some countries say they will help

KYIV (UKRAINE) Ukraine's foreign minister doubled down Friday on the government's move to bolster the pool of fighting forces by cutting off consular services to conscription-age men outside the country, saying it was a question of "justice." Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the policy would ensure men in Ukraine and those who have left were both treated fairly.

"IT'S about justice – justice in the relationship between Ukrainian men abroad and Ukrainian men inside of Ukraine," he said.

Ukraine secured a much-needed package of military aid from the US this week after months of wrangling in Congress. But as well as weapons, Ukraine needs troops. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have been killed or wounded in more than two years of fighting. Russia has also suffered heavy losses, but has vastly more conscripts to throw into the fight.

Earlier this month, Ukraine lowered the conscription age from 27 to 25 in an effort to bolster the size of its military.

The latest government decision means men aged 18-60 can't renew their passports unless they return to Ukraine. Some opposition politicians and human rights activists have criticized the move, saying it could deprive Ukrainians of access to services and benefits in other countries, and might backfire by prompting men to seek refugee status elsewhere.

Kuleba gave that argument short shrift, noting that Ukrainians fleeing the war were treated better in their host countries than refugees from many other parts of the world.

"They owe everything they have now in these countries to this fact, their Ukrainian citizenship," Kuleba said at a news conference alongside his Latvian counterpart, Baiba Braze. "And these men should not forget about this when they argue that the state of Ukraine owes them something. They should not forget that they owe much more to the state of Ukraine." The announcement on passports has been welcomed by many people in Ukraine who agree with Kule-

ba's argument about fairness. "Why should some have to fight while others evade and hide abroad?" said bank worker Yuliia Lystopad in Kyiv.

Though Ukraine repulsed an all-out Russian invasion in the weeks after President Vladimir Putin sent troops in in February 2022, Moscow's forces occupy about a fifth of Ukraine's territory and strike all over the country with drones, bombs and missiles.

On the frontline in eastern and southern Ukraine, Russia is slowly taking ground from outnumbered and outgunned troops. A soldier who only gave his first name, Oleh, for security reasons, said getting more troops into the field was essential. "Someone has to fight," he said. "The front line is getting closer, and there are fewer guys on the front. "But for now, we stand and fight," he added. "All the guys understand that if they (Russians) go further, it will just be tough for everyone here." Kuleba said he hoped countries that are home to displaced Ukrainians would share the Ukrainian government's logic and approach. / AP /

Students at prestigious Paris university occupy campus building in pro-Palestinian protest

PARIS Students in Paris inspired by Gaza solidarity encampments at campuses in the United States blocked access to a campus building at a prestigious French university Friday, prompting administrators to move all classes online.

The pro-Palestinian protest at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, known as Sciences Po, came two days after police broke up a separate demonstration at one of the university's amphitheatres.

On Friday, scores of protesters occupied a central campus building and dozens of others blocked its entrance with trash cans, wooden platforms and a bicycle. Protesters gathered at the building's windows chanted slogans and hung placards reading "We are all Palestinians", in defiance of administrators who students say called the police on their peers two days earlier.

Later Friday, pro-Israeli protesters arrived to face off with the pro-Palestinian demonstrators outside the entrance of the famous school, which counts President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Gabriel Attal among its many famous alumni.

Some of the pro-Israeli demonstrators carried photos of people held hostage by Hamas in Gaza and called for their release.

Riot police with shields stepped in to separate the opposing groups who together numbered about 200 people. / AP /

ADITI KHANNA

UK CANCER PATIENT JOINS TRIAL FOR WORLD'S FIRST SKIN CANCER VACCINE



AN INTERNATIONAL clinical trial testing a novel cancer immunotherapy, which may prevent skin cancer from recurring, has recruited its first patient in Britain this week. The mRNA-based technology, the vaccine tech used for some COVID vaccinations, is aimed at people who have already had high-risk melanomas – the most serious form of cancer – removed.

For the trial, University College London Hospitals (UCLH) doctors are giving it alongside another drug, pembrolizumab or Keytruda, that also helps the immune system kill cancer cells.

One of the first patients to sign up for the trial is British musician Steve Young, 52, from Hertfordshire, east England, who was diagnosed with stage II melanoma, which was removed.

"I feel lucky to be part of this clinical trial. Of course, I did not feel so lucky when I was diagnosed with skin cancer, in fact, it came as quite a shock, but now that I've had treatment, I'm keen to ensure it does not recur.

This is my best chance at stopping the cancer in its tracks," Young said.

The personalised treatment works by instructing the body to make up to 34 proteins, each targeting "neoantigens" identified by gene sequencing and thought to be driving the cancer in that particular patient. The neoantigens are proteins found only on the cancer cells, and the individualised neoantigen therapy is designed to prime the immune system to attack the tumour cells in each patient, while Keytruda blocks an immunological "brake" that protects the cancer.

"The idea behind this immunotherapy is that, by prompting the body to make these proteins, it can prepare the immune system to quickly identify and attack any cancer cells bearing them, with the aim of preventing recurrence of melanoma," said University College London medical oncologist Heather Shaw, the national coordinating investigator of the new trial.

The new Phase 3 clinical trial, being led by UCLH, is evaluating the combination of mRNA-4157 (V940) and Keytruda (pembrolizumab) versus a current standard of care (pembrolizumab) as a risk-reducing treatment option for patients with resected high-risk, stage IIB to IV melanoma.

It follows a successful Phase 2 study, which found that in patients with stage IIIB to IV resected melanoma, this treatment option almost halved the risk of cancer recurrence or death after three years compared with treatment with Keytruda alone among patients with advanced melanomas following surgical removal of cancer.

Melanoma is characterised by the uncontrolled growth of pigment-producing cells. The rates of melanoma have been rising over the past few decades, with nearly 3.25,000 new cases diagnosed worldwide in 2020. / PTI /

India-UK vaccine partnership helps fight malaria in African countries

LONDON The UK government hailed its vaccine partnership with India which will help combat malaria as one of the biggest killers of children in sub-Saharan Africa. Collaboration between British scientists and Indian manufacturers has resulted in two essential life-saving malaria vaccines – RTS,S and R21 – being developed. These have been used in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi, with 2 million children vaccinated since 2019, and, in

January, Cameroon became the first country to give the vaccines to children routinely.

"Both vaccines are significant scientific breakthroughs and important additions to the range of tools we have for fighting malaria," Anne-Marie Trevelyan, UK Minister of State for the Indo-Pacific in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), said recently.

"Both vaccines are now

being rolled out across Africa to immunise more than 6 million children by the end of 2025. This is a huge step forward in the global fight against malaria and would not have been possible without a strong UK-India partnership," she said.

On Thursday, to mark the World Health Organisation's World Malaria Day, the FCDO announced that Sierra Leone, Liberia and Benin will begin their first rollout of the UK-Indian developed

RTS,S vaccine, "marking a significant milestone in ending malaria".

"Another success story in India-UK collaboration. The joint effort in developing and manufacturing two malaria vaccines," the High Commission of India in London said in response.

The UK is the largest sovereign donor to the core immunisation programme of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which is currently supporting the rollout of the RTS,S

malaria vaccine. A total of 22 countries are approved to roll out the vaccine, with Gavi aiming to immunise more than six million children from malaria by the end of 2025. The only two WHO-approved malaria vaccines are developed by UK scientists at GSK and the University of Oxford and are now being manufactured at scale by Indian pharmaceutical companies. The GSK vaccine RTS,S is being produced by Bharat Biotech. / PTI /

King Charles to resume public duties amid cancer treatment progress

ADITI KHANNA / LONDON

KING Charles III will begin resuming some of his public-facing duties as medical experts were "sufficiently pleased" and "very encouraged" with his progress following a cancer diagnosis earlier this year, Buckingham Palace said in a statement released here on Friday. The 75-year-old monarch will mark his recuperation milestone with a joint visit with his wife, Queen Camilla, to a cancer treatment centre in London next Tuesday.

The schedule for further public-facing duties will be managed to minimise any health risks, with the State Visit of Japanese Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako in June expected to be among the King's next major events.

"His Majesty the King will shortly return to public-facing duties after a period of treatment and recuperation following his recent cancer diagnosis," reads the palace statement.

"To help mark this milestone, the



King and Queen will make a joint visit to a cancer treatment centre next Tuesday, where they will meet medical specialists and patients. This visit will be the first in a number of external engagements His Majesty will undertake in the weeks ahead," it said.

The palace added that the King's medical team are "very encouraged by the progress made so far and remain positive" about his continued recovery.

As the first anniversary of King

Charles' Coronation on May 6 last year approaches, the palace said the royals remain "deeply grateful" for the many kindnesses and good wishes they have received from around the world throughout the joys and challenges of the past year.

"His Majesty's treatment programme will continue, but doctors are sufficiently pleased with the progress made so far that the King is now able to resume a number of public-facing duties. Forthcoming engagements will be adapted where necessary to minimise any risks to His Majesty's continued recovery," a palace spokesperson said.

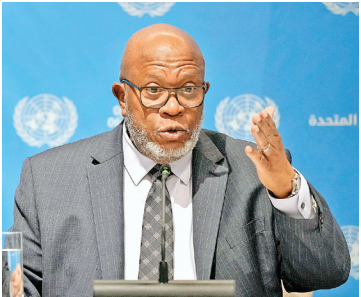
All public-facing engagements, which had been cancelled when Charles' cancer diagnosis was made public in early February, will remain subject to his doctors' advice and will not be a "full summer programme".

All other official state business, such as audiences with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, will continue the same as throughout the King's treatment. / PTI /

News
makers

INDIA EXEMPLIFIES HOW DIGITAL REVOLUTION CAN BECOME ACCESSIBLE TO MILLIONS: UNGA PRESIDENT

India exemplifies how the digital revolution can be made accessible to millions and become “a fundamental driver of social transformation and progress”, according to UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis. “Models like the Citizen Stack (of India) should be embraced and replicated across countries in the Global South – supporting and empowering people, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities, in the true spirit of leaving no one behind,” he said on Thursday.



STUDY DECODES HOW LONG-TERM PESTICIDE EXPOSURE RAISES PARKINSON'S RISK

Rare gene variants may explain why long-term pesticide exposure spikes the risk of developing Parkinson's disease, a study said on Thursday. Although pesticide exposure is linked to Parkinson's disease risk, the new study sought to explain why some individuals with high exposure develop the disease while others do not. Researchers from the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) found that variants in some rare gene variants were enriched in patients with more severe Parkinson's disease who also had higher exposure to pesticides.



HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS ARRESTED ACROSS US IN SURGING PRO-PALESTINE PROTESTS

Hundreds of students have been arrested on US campuses as protests against Washington's support for Israel are surging sea to sea. By Wednesday, the protests that started last week at the Ivy League Columbia University campus in New York City where more than 100 students were arrested and their tent encampment cleared had skipped across the nation.

Urgent reforms imperative to make UN reflective of current geopolitical realities: India



YOSHITA SINGH / UNITED NATIONS

INDIA has said that the revitalisation of the UN General Assembly must be seen in the wider context of the overall reform of the United Nations, including the Security Council, ensuring that it reflects the current geopolitical realities and can meet increasingly complex challenges. “India has always been of the view that the General Assembly can be revitalised only when its position as the primary deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations is respected in letter and spirit,” Minister at India's Permanent Mission to the UN, Pratik Mathur said. Addressing the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalisation of the Work of the General Assembly on Thursday, Mathur said that the revitalisation of the 193-member General Assembly must also be seen in the wider context of the overall reform of the UN.

“It is our firm belief that the urgent and comprehensive UN reform, including of the Security Council, is imperative to make it reflective of current geopolitical realities and enhance its capability to meet increasingly complex challenges of our time,” he said.

The UN's success rests on the effectiveness of the General Assembly in carrying out its role as its chief deliberative and policy-making body as envisaged in the UN Charter, Mathur said.

India gave a clarion call to make this reform of global governance architecture -- that is fit for purpose for the 21st century -- a reality in the 'Pact of the Future' that Member States are currently negotiating ahead of the Summit of the Future to be held in September, during the high-level UN General Assembly session. Mathur said that with the proliferation of the agenda of the General Assembly, the Annual General Debate is gradually turning out to be one of the several high-level events that take place at the start of each new session of the General Assembly. / PTI /



Delegates during the first conference on 'Citizen Stack: Digital Public Infrastructure, Transformative Technology for Citizens' organised by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations together with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, at the UN headquarters, in New York, Thursday, April 25, 2024. / PTI

Trump's lawyers to grill ex-tabloid publisher as hush money trial wraps

NEW YORK After prosecutors' lead witness painted a tawdry portrait of “catch-and-kill” tabloid schemes, defence lawyers in Donald Trump's hush money trial are poised on Friday to dig into an account of the former publisher of the National Enquirer and his efforts to protect Trump from negative stories during the 2016 election.

David Pecker will return to the witness stand for the fourth day as defence attorneys try to poke holes in his testimony after he described helping bury embarrassing stories that Trump feared could hurt his campaign.

It will cap a consequential week in the criminal cases the former president is facing as he vies to reclaim the White House in November.

At the same time jurors

listened to testimony in Manhattan, the Supreme Court on Thursday signalled it was likely to reject Trump's sweeping claims that he is immune from prosecution in his 2020 election interference case in Washington. But the conservative-majority high court seemed inclined to limit when former presidents could be prosecuted – a ruling that could benefit Trump by delaying that trial, potentially until after the November election.

In New York – the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial – the presumptive Republican presidential nominee faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments meant to stifle negative stories from surfacing in the final days of the 2016 campaign.

Trump denies any wrongdoing. Before entering the courtroom on Friday, he told reporters he believes Thursday's proceedings went “very well” for the defense, adding that “the case should be over”.

Prosecutors allege that Trump sought to illegally influence the 2016 race through a tabloid industry practice that involves catching a potentially damaging story by buying the rights to it and then killing it through agreements that prevent the paid person from telling the story to anyone else.

Over several days on the witness stand, Pecker has described how he and the tabloid parlayed rumour-mongering into splashy stories that smeared Trump's opponents and, just as crucially, leveraged his connections to suppress seamy stories about Trump.

The charges centre on USD 130,000 in payments that Trump's company made to his then-lawyer, Michael Cohen. He paid that sum on Trump's behalf to keep porn actor Stormy Daniels from going public with her claims of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier. Trump has denied the encounter ever happened.

During the cross-examination that began Thursday, defence attorney Emil Bove grilled Pecker on his recollection of specific dates and meanings. He appeared to be laying further groundwork for the defense's argument that any dealings Trump had Pecker were intended

to protect himself, his reputation and his family – not his campaign.

Pecker recalled how an editor told him that Daniels' representative was trying to sell her story and that the tabloid could acquire it for USD 120,000. Pecker said he put his foot down, noting that the tabloid was already USD 180,000 in the hole for Trump-related catch-and-kill transactions. But, Pecker said, he told Cohen to buy the story himself to prevent Daniels from going public with her claim.

“I said to Michael, my suggestion to you is that you should buy the story, and you should take it off the market because if you don't and it gets out, I believe the boss will be very angry with you.” / AP /

Briefly

THREE PALESTINIANS KILLED IN ISRAELI ATTACK ON ICRC FACILITY IN GAZA

GAZA At least three people were killed during an Israeli attack targeting a facility belonging to the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in Gaza City, Palestinian medical sources said on Friday. The medical sources told Xinhua news agency that “at least three bodies of people were transferred to a local hospital as an Israeli warplane attacked them while they were in a refugee facility belonging to the ICRC.” So far, the ICRC has not commented on the incident, Xinhua news agency reported. Israel has been launching a large-scale offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip to retaliate against a Hamas rampage through the southern Israeli border on October 7, 2023, during which about 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 were taken hostage. / IANS /

ISRAEL TO BEGIN 'SOON' EVACUATING CIVILIANS IN RAFAH

JERUSALEM Israel is expected to “soon” begin evacuating civilians from Rafah ahead of a planned ground attack on Gaza's southernmost city, a state-owned media outlet has reported. The planned evacuation will start “soon”, pending final approval by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Xinhua news agency reported, citing the Israeli Kan TV report. Earlier on Thursday, the country's wartime cabinet and security cabinet convened to discuss a possible assault on Rafah, a city previously considered a “safe zone” from the relentless Israeli bombardments, where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians have found refuge. The ministers also discussed new attempts to push forward a ceasefire that would secure the release of more than 100 hostages held in Gaza. / IANS /

As some universities negotiate with pro-Palestinian protesters, others quickly call the police

WASHINGTON The students at Columbia University who inspired pro-Palestinian demonstrations across the country dug in at their encampment for the 10th day on Friday as administrators and police at campuses from California to Massachusetts wrestled with how to address protests that have seen scuffles with police and hundreds of arrests.

Officials at Columbia and some other schools have been negotiating with student protesters who have rebuffed police and doubled down. Other schools have quickly turned to law enforcement to douse demonstrations before they can take hold. As the death toll mounts in the war in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis worsens, protesters at universities across the country are demanding schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies they say are enabling the conflict. Some Jewish students say the protests have veered into antisemitism and made them afraid to set foot on campus, partly prompting the calls for police intervention.

After a tent encampment popped up Thursday at Indiana University Bloomington, police with shields and batons shoved into protesters and arrested 33. Hours later at the University of Connecticut, police tore down tents and arrested one person.

And at Ohio State University, police clashed with protesters just hours after they gathered Thursday evening. Those who refused to leave after warnings were arrested and charged with criminal trespass, said university spokesperson Benjamin Johnson, citing rules barring overnight events.

The clock is ticking as May commencement ceremonies near, putting added pressure on schools to clear demonstrations. At Columbia, protesters defiantly erected a tent encampment where many are set to graduate in front of families in just a few weeks. / AP /

US-led effort to bring aid to Gaza by sea moving forward

LOLITA C BALDOR, JULIA FRANKEL AND JON GAMBRELL / JERUSALEM

THE construction of a new port in Gaza and an accompanying US military-built pier offshore are underway, but the complex plan to bring more desperately-needed food to Palestinian civilians is still mired in fears over security and how the humanitarian aid will be delivered.

The Israeli-developed port, for example, has already been attacked by mortar fire, sending high-ranking UN officials scrambling for shelter this week, and there is still no solid decision on when the aid deliveries will actually begin.

While satellite photos show major port construction along the shore near Gaza City, aid groups are making it clear that they have broad concerns about their safety and reservations about how Israeli forces will handle security.

Sonali Korde, an official with the US Agency for International Development, said key agreements for security and handling the aid deliveries are still being negotiated. Those include how Israeli forces will operate in Gaza to ensure that aid workers are not harmed.

“We need to see steps implemented. And the humanitarian community and IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) continue to talk and engage and iterate and improve the

system so that everyone feels safe and secure in this very difficult operating environment,” Korde said.

A senior US military official said on Thursday the US is on track to begin delivering aid using the new port and pier by early May. The official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet made public, said deliveries through the sea route initially will total about 90 trucks a day and could quickly increase to about 150 trucks daily.

The senior official acknowledged, however, that the final installation of the US-built causeway onto the beach at the port will be governed by the security situation, which is assessed daily. / AP /



Students sit among tents on the campus of George Washington University during a protest over the Israel-Hamas War on Thursday, April 25, 2024, in Washington. AP / PTI

EGYPT SENDS DELEGATION TO ISRAEL IN HOPES OF BROKERING A CEASE-FIRE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS

CAIRO Egypt sent a high-level delegation to Israel on Friday with the hope of brokering a cease-fire agreement with Hamas in Gaza, two officials said. At the same time, it warned that a possible Israeli offensive focused on Gaza's city of Rafah on the border with Egypt could have catastrophic consequences to regional stability. Egypt's top intelligence official, Abbas Kamel, is leading the delegation and plans to discuss with Israel a “new vision” for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, an Egyptian official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the mission freely. As the war drags on and casualties mount, there has been growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach an agreement on a cease fire.

Friday's talks will focus at first on a limited exchange of hostages held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners, and the return of a significant number of displaced Palestinians to their homes in northern Gaza “with minimum restrictions,” the Egyptian official said. The hope is that negotiations will then continue, with the goal of a larger deal to end the war, he said.

The official said mediators are working on a compromise that will answer most of both parties' main demands. Hamas has said it will not back down from its demands for a permanent cease-fire and full withdrawal of Israeli troops, both of which Israel has rejected. Israel says it will continue military operations until Hamas is defeated and that it will retain a security presence in Gaza afterwards.

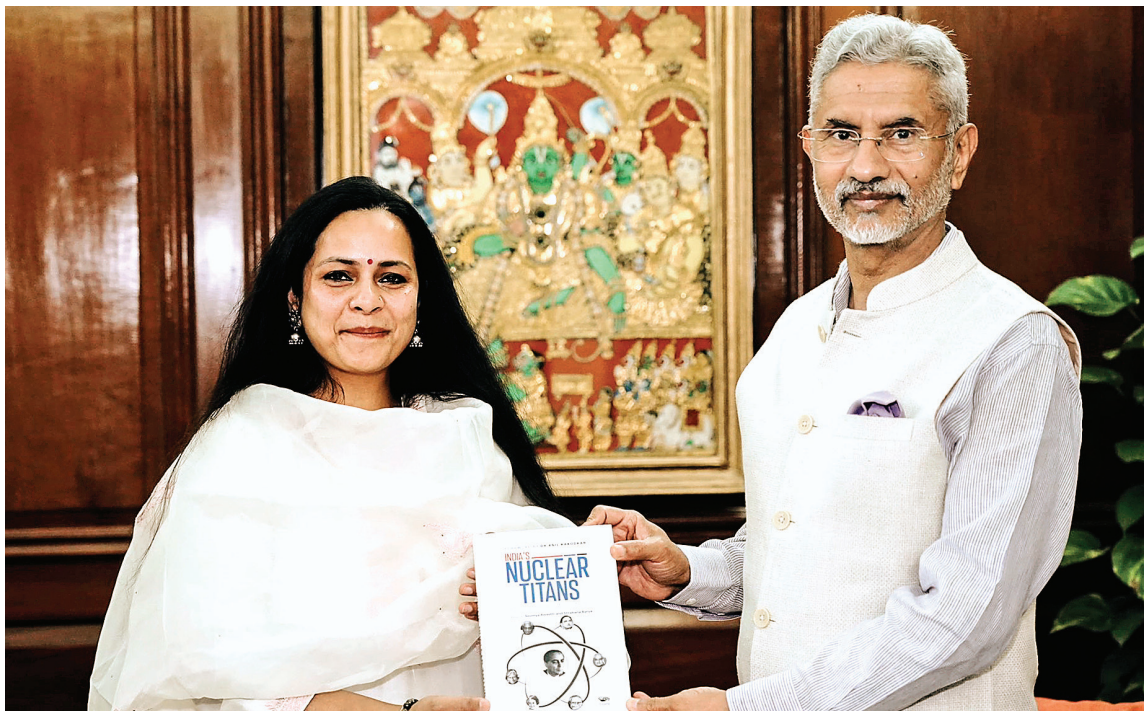
Ahead of the talks, senior Hamas official Basem Naim told The Associated Press “there is nothing new from our side,” when asked about the negotiations.

Overnight, Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group fired anti-tank missiles and artillery shells at an Israeli military convoy in a disputed border area, killing an Israeli civilian. Hezbollah said its fighters ambushed the convoy shortly before midnight Thursday, destroying two vehicles. / AP /

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Visitors look at a Lamborghini car during the China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Friday, April 26, 2024. / AP/ PTI

Maruti Suzuki posts record Rs 3,878 cr profit in Q4

NEW DELHI India's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki on Friday its highest quarterly net profit in March reported quarter net profit as sports utility vehicles drove an increase in sales and favourable commodity prices helped margins. Consolidated net profit of Rs 3,877.8 crore in January-March (fourth quarter of fiscal year April 2023 to March 2024) soared 47.8 per cent when compared with Rs 2,623.6 crore in the same period a year back, the company said in a stock exchange filing and media statement.

The company, in which Japan's Suzuki Motor Corporation holds 58.19 per cent stake, sold 13.4 per cent more cars in the fourth quarter at 5.84 lakh (including 78,740 units exported) while material cost as percentage of sales dropped 190 bps to 74.2 per cent.

Maruti, however, does not share an exact number of SUVs sold. It sold 71.5 per cent more utility vehicles -- mostly SUVs and multi-purpose vehicles (MPVs) -- at 1.81 lakh. Utility vehicle share was 36 per cent in the March quarter, up from 24 per cent last year. In an investor presentation, it attributed the rise in profit to "improved capacity utilisation, cost reduction efforts, softening of commodity prices, improved realisation and higher non-operating income."

These outdid higher sales promotion expense and higher manufacturing overheads.

During the quarter, the company registered net sales of Rs 36,697.5 crore against Rs 30,821.8 crore in the same period of the previous year.

For the full fiscal year (FY24), the company reported a 64 per cent jump in

net profit to a record Rs 13,209.4 crore. Sales were up 20 per cent to Rs 134,937.8 crore in April 2023 to March 2024.

During the year, the firm sold 2 million cars. The numbers "represent the company's highest ever unit sales, net sales, and net profit both for the quarter and the financial year," a company statement said.

Addressing a virtual media briefing here, the company's Chairman R C Bhargava said it will start production of the first electric vehicle in the current fiscal.

"As far as EV is concerned, we will start production in this financial year. We have a commitment to export the first lot of cars to Europe," he said. The domestic market may not see EV cars in reasonable numbers this financial year... maybe in the next fiscal year, he said, while replying to a query. / PTI /

Forex
kitty
drops
USD 2.28
bn to USD
640.33 bn

MUMBAI India's forex reserves decreased USD 2.282 billion to USD 640.334 billion for the seven days ended April 19 in the second consecutive week of drop in the kitty, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday. The reserves had dropped USD 5.401 billion to USD 643.162 billion in the previous reporting week, ending a multi-week trend of an increase, which also saw the overall reserves touching a new all-time high of USD USD

648.562 billion for the week ended April 5.

In September 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached a high of USD 642.453 billion, which was breached in March this year. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global events, but there had been a steady accretion over the past few months.

For the week ended April 19, the foreign currency as-

sets, a major component of the reserves, decreased USD 3.793 billion to USD 560.86 billion, according to the data released on Friday. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves continued to rise and increased USD 1.01 billion to USD 56.808 billion during the week, the RBI said. / PTI /

MARKETS SNAP FIVE-DAY RALLY; SENSEX TUMBLES OVER 600 PTS

MUMBAI Market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure on Friday after a five-day rally as investors pared exposure to banking, financial and consumer durable stocks amid mixed trends in global markets. Rising global crude prices, a depreciating rupee and persistent foreign fund outflows further weighed on sentiment, traders said.

Profit-taking also came into play as the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 609.28 points or 0.82 per cent to settle at 73,730.16. During the day, it lost 722.79 points or 0.97 per cent to 73,616.65.

The NSE Nifty declined 150.40 points or 0.67 per cent to 22,419.95.

On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark advanced 641.83 points or 0.87, and the NSE Nifty climbed 272.95 points or 1.23 per cent.

"The fall was on expected lines as both the benchmark indices had rallied for five straight sessions, and profit-taking has been due for some time.

"Correction is also attributed to global factors after the Japanese Yen fell to a new 34-year low and disappointing US data pushed its benchmark yields to over 4.7 per cent, thus worsening hopes of an interest rate cut in the medium term," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. Bajaj Finance was the biggest drag on the Sensex chart, skidding nearly 8 per cent after the company's March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Bajaj Finserv also declined over 3 per cent.

IndusInd Bank, Nestle, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the other laggards.

Meanwhile, Tech Mahindra jumped over 7 per cent after the IT services company's CEO outlined an ambitious three-year roadmap to accelerate revenue growth and lift margins.



Wipro, ITC, UltraTech Cement, Titan and Axis Bank were among the gainers.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.83 per cent, and the small-cap index climbed 0.27 per cent.

Among the indices, bankex declined 0.70 per cent, financial services (0.68 per cent), tech (0.26 per cent), auto (0.25 per cent) and telecommunication (0.15 per cent).

Energy, healthcare, services and power were among the gainers.

"The unexpected surge of the US core PCE price index, accompanied by weaker-than-forecast GDP growth and Treasury yield spikes, impacted market sentiments.

"Investors are concerned about the possibility of a looming recession in the US. Indian market lagged behind its Asian and European peers due to worries over lofty valuations and lacklustre Q4 earnings, fuel-

ling expectations of downward revisions for FY25 earnings," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. European markets were trading in the green. Wall Street ended lower on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.31 per cent to USD 89.29 a barrel.

The rupee declined 8 paise to close at 83.36 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,823.33 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 486.50 points or 0.66 per cent to settle at 74,339.44 on Thursday. The NSE Nifty advanced 167.95 points or 0.75 per cent to 22,570.35. / PTI /

JK Cement Boosts Production Capacity with New Production Line at Panna Plant Panna

MADHYA PRADESH JK Cement, one of India's leading manufacturers of grey cement and a prominent white cement producer globally, proudly announces the inauguration of a new production line at its Panna Plant. This development marks a significant milestone in the company's expansion strategy and reaffirms its commitment to meeting the growing demand for cement while setting its position as a key industry player.

The new production line at the Panna Plant effectively doubles its clinker production capacity to 6.6 million metric tons per annum (MTPA), up from the previous 3.3 MTPA. This expansion positions JK Cement to cater efficiently to the increasing demand for cement across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Central India.

Dr. Raghavpat Singhania, Managing Director, JK Cement Ltd., said, "JK Cement is built on a foundation of growth and expansion. Our new Panna Plant production line is a key pillar in our comprehensive business expansion plan, propelling us towards our vision of becoming a leading player in the cement industry. This strategic expansion allows us to meet the rising demand for high-quality cement, ultimately enhancing our ability to serve our customers. We remain committed to delivering value to all stakeholders and contributing to the nation's development."

Mr. Madhavkrishna Singhania, Deputy Managing Director and CEO, JK Cement Ltd., commented, "The launch of our new production line underscores JK Cement's unwavering commitment to achieving long-term growth and operational excellence. This expansion empowers us to optimize production processes, unlock our full potential, and position ourselves for the future of the cement industry." The new production line integrates advanced automation systems for precise control and monitoring, minimising human intervention and enhancing efficiency. State-of-the-art machinery and equipment ensure optimal performance, reliability, consistent output quality, and energy efficiency, reflecting JK Cement's commitment to sustainability. The plant incorporates energy-saving technologies, optimised kiln systems, and waste heat recovery systems to reduce energy consumption and lower the carbon footprint. Stringent quality control measures in the plant guarantee that cement products meet the highest industry standards.

Additionally, the Panna Plant expansion project generates employment opportunities, contributing to socio-economic growth in the region. JK Cement actively engages with the local community through educational, healthcare, and social initiatives, strengthening its bond with stakeholders. With a significant investment of Rs. 2850 Cr, the Panna Plant expansion project reflects JK Cement's vision for sustainable growth, environmental protection, and contribution to economic.

/ PTI /

Punjab Chief Secretary visits grain market in Khanna, takes stock of wheat procurement

KHANNA (PUNJAB) Punjab's Chief Secretary Anurag Verma on Friday visited Khanna 'mandi' (grain market) and reviewed the ongoing procurement of wheat. He directed the procurement agencies to ensure that farmers do not face any problems in the 'mandis', according to an official statement.

Verma said that during the current procurement season, 132 lakh metric tonnes of wheat are expected to arrive in the grain markets of the state.

"Out of this, till yesterday evening 66.8 LMT of wheat had arrived in the mandis. Out of this, 60.9 LMT has already been purchased," he said. The top official said all efforts are

being made that the crop is cleaned, purchased and weighed within 24 hours of its arrival in the mandis. Once this is done the farmer is free to leave the grain market and payment will be credited into his account within 48 hours of purchase and he will get an SMS in this regard.

So far, a payment of Rs 9,170 crore has already been made to the farmers. The payment has been made to more than 4 lakh farmers so far, he added.

The chief secretary also interacted with the farmers. Verma further said that due to delay in harvesting, the arrivals in the 'mandis' were initially slow and peaked.

/ PTI /

IIFL Samasta Finance adds three members to its Board

NEW DELHI IIFL Samasta Finance, one of India's largest non-banking microfinance companies (NBFC-MFI), has announced the appointment of three members to its Board of Directors.

This strategic move reflects the company's commitment to further strengthen its governance structure and drive continued growth and innovation in the microfinance sector.

The three members include the Co-promoter of IIFL Group, R. Venkataraman, former Chairman of NABARD, Dr. Govinda Rajulu Chintala, and

former Managing Director of Equifax Credit Information Services, Kalengada Mandanna Nanaiah.

R. Venkataraman joined as an Additional Director (non-executive), while Govinda Chintala and Kalengada Nanaiah joined as Additional Directors (non-executive and independent). The Board will now consist of six members.

Commenting on his appointments, Govinda Chintala said, "I am glad to join this exceptional team as we celebrate our company's impressive financial year results. Looking forward

to contributing to our continued success."

Govinda Chintala has more than 20 years of experience as Director of Boards of various financial, insurance, and microfinance institutions.

He was the Chairman of NABARD till July 31, 2022. As the Chairman, he spearheaded pivotal initiatives including the sanctioning of landmark projects and forging strategic partnerships. These endeavours encompassed the establishment of the Long-term Irrigation Fund and Rural Infrastructure.

/ IANS /

At least USD 12 trillion needed for tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030: COP28 president

NEW DELHI At least USD 12 trillion is required to create new infrastructure over the next six years for tripling global renewable energy capacity by 2030, COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber said on Friday. Addressing the annual Petersberg Climate Dialogue, Al Jaber said the energy transition will not happen without significant investment and a level-up in climate finance.

He said the four key priorities to level up climate finance are infrastructure, technology, people and the Global South.

"On infrastructure, we need to invest at least USD 6 trillion over the next six years to meet our 2030 target of 11TW of renewable energy capacity. And we need to spend a similar amount to upgrade outdated or non-existent grids," the COP28 president said.

World leaders reached a historic agreement at COP28 in Dubai last year to triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030.

According to the International Energy Agency, tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency is crucial to limiting the average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, a political target set in 2015 to prevent worsening of climate impacts.

At the United Nations climate conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) or a new climate finance goal will be the key issue.

is the new amount developed countries must mobilise every year from 2025 onwards to support climate action in developing countries. Rich countries are expected to raise more than the USD 100 billion they promised to provide every year from 2020 but repeatedly failed.

Al Jaber said artificial intelligence can be a game changer by multiplying efficiencies and helping solve intermittency and storage.

"Every country must invest in its people, developing a new set of skills for a new green economy. And we must invest in the Global South. Right now, over 120 developing countries attract less than 15 per cent of global clean tech investment. Public, private, and development finance must work in tandem in creative catalytic models that turn billions into trillions," he said.

Al Jaber said the COP troika, a collaboration between the COP hosts of 2023, 2024, and 2025, is pushing for more ambitious nationally determined contributions (NDCs) or national climate plans ahead of the UN climate conference in Brazil.

"We are encouraging all governments to set out economy-wide emission reduction plans, with explicit renewable energy targets. And we are advocating for smart policies that push industries to step up... and incentivise the private sector to invest," he said.

/ PTI /

SNAPCHAT REACHES 422 MILLION DAILY ACTIVE USERS GLOBALLY

Social media platform Snapchat reached 422 million daily active users in the first quarter (Q1) this year, an increase of 39 million or 10 per cent (year-on-year). In Q1, the revenue of its parent company Snap grew 21 per cent (on-year) to \$1.195 billion, driven by improvements made to its advertising platform and an increase in demand for its direct-response (DR) advertising solutions. "We continued to make progress toward diversifying our revenue sources, with Snapchat+ growing to more than 9 million subscribers in Q1," the company said in a statement. In the quarter, overall time spent watching content globally grew year-over-year, driven primarily by strong growth in total time spent watching Spotlight and Creator Stories.

Trendingnews

RBI ISSUES FAQs ON DEFAULT LOSS GUARANTEE IN DIGITAL LENDING

MUMBAI The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday issued frequently asked questions (FAQs) to provide more clarity on its guidelines for default loss guarantee (DLG) in digital lending, which were first issued in June 2023. DLG is an agreement between the bank and an entity under which the latter guarantees to provide compensation to the bank for losses due to default up to a certain percentage of the loan portfolio of the bank. While issuing the guidelines in June 2023, the RBI had said that banks must ensure that the total amount of DLG cover on any outstanding portfolio -- which is specified upfront -- shall not exceed five per cent of the amount of that loan portfolio. In its list of FAQs, the RBI said the portfolio for which DLG can be offered needs to consist of identifiable and measurable loan assets. This portfolio will remain fixed for the purpose of DLG cover and is not meant to be dynamic. The 5 per cent cap is applicable on the total amount disbursed out of the DLG set at any given time, the RBI said. / IANS /

MYNTRA INDIA'S TREND INDEX REPORT CAPTURES NATION'S TRYST WITH LATEST FASHION

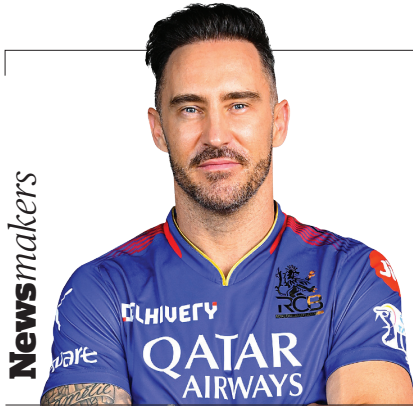
BENGALURU Myntra, India's favourite fashion, beauty, and lifestyle destination, on Friday launched the very first edition of the 'Myntra Trend Index', a report summarising some of the most outstanding fashion trends observed in the country, as exhibited by Myntra's base of millions of customers in FY24. With industry-defining insights, it dives into the heart of India's fashion, beauty, and lifestyle preferences, shining a spotlight on the ever-evolving trends that shape the closets. The report puts a spotlight on how customers are showering love on Myntra. / IANS /

BLINKIT NOW MORE VALUABLE THAN ZOMATO'S CORE FOOD BUSINESS: REPORT

NEW DELHI Zomato's quick delivery service, Blinkit, has become more valuable than its core food delivery business, according to a new Goldman Sachs report. While Zomato's food delivery business is valued at Rs 98 per share, Blinkit's "implied value" is at Rs 119 per share, or about \$13 billion, according to the investment bank's report. In March last year, Goldman Sachs marked Blinkit's valuation at \$2 billion, reports TechCrunch. The report forecasts Blinkit's gross order value (GOV) to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 53 per cent from 2024-2027. / IANS /

SATURDAY 27 APRIL 2024
CHANDIGARH

Newsmakers



THERE IS A LOT LEFT IN THE TANK: DU PLESSIS ON RCB SNAPING SIX-GAME LOSING STREAK

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis expressed his delight at his side ending its six-fixture losing streak in the IPL, reminding one and all that there is still a lot left in team's tank. Bottom-placed RCB emerged victorious against third-ranked SunRisers Hyderabad, winning by 35 runs. With this win, RCB has two successes in nine clashes, having lost the remaining seven. "We have worked really hard for the last two games to get to this point," de Plessis was quoted as saying in an RCB release to the players in the dressing room after the conquest on Thursday.

I WOULD LIKE TO SEE SHIVAM DUBE IN THE INDIAN T20 WC SQUAD, SAYS YUVRAJ SINGH

Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh has picked Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson as the wicketkeeper batter options for India's T20 World Cup and identified Suryakumar Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah as a 'key player'. The Ajit Agarkar-led selection committee has to finalise the 15-member India squad ahead of the May 1 deadline for boards to submit their Men's T20 World Cup squads. The most toughest choice will be the wicketkeeping option as there are multiple options starting from Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, KL Rahul and Dinesh Karthik.



CHARLIE WOODS, SON OF TIGER, SHOOTS 81 IN US OPEN LOCAL QUALIFIER AND FAILS TO ADVANCE

Charlie Woods failed to advance in a U.S. Open local qualifying event Thursday, shooting a 9-over 81 at Legacy Golf & Tennis Club. The 15-year-old son of Tiger Woods tied for 61st among the 74 players who finished. The top five advanced to regional qualifying. Woods shot 40 on the front nine, opening bogey-double bogey. He followed a birdie on the par-3 fifth with another double bogey. He shot 41 on the back with three bogeys and a double bogey.

Ganguly bats for Axar and Pant's inclusion in T20 World Cup squad



NEW DELHI Former captain Sourav Ganguly feels Axar Patel will book his place in the Indian team for the upcoming T20 World Cup as he can be moved around in the batting order depending on match situation. Axar has bowled splendidly all season at an economy rate of 7.06 and when promoted, he showed his batting prowess against Gujarat Titans.

"Axar, is a certainty. Both Rishabh and Axar are certainties for me at the T20 World Cup. The way things are going in T20, Rohit will want someone to come at No. 8 and bat, give those 15-20 runs which Axar can easily do, and if he needs someone to go and smack spinners, Axar can do that as well.

"That's the advantage with Jadeja and Axar, they are so talented and gifted," Ganguly, Delhi Capitals' Director of Cricket, said on the eve of their IPL clash against Mumbai Indians here.

Ganguly, who has helped the left-handed Axar with his batting, said the all-rounder has the ability to bat in Tests as well as T20s. "You should have the ability to strike the ball. You don't have to have time for technique in T20 cricket. But your basics should be there and he's always had that.

/ PTI /

Bairstow ton, Shashank pyrotechnics in historic run-chase by Punjab Kings



Punjab Kings batter Jonny Bairstow celebrates his century during Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 cricket match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Punjab Kings, at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata, Friday, April 26, 2024. / PTI

TAPAN MOHANTA / KOLKATA

JONNY BAIRSTOW lit the Kolkata skyline with a monstrous century as Punjab Kings owned the 'City of Joy' with a world record chase of 262 against a completely befuddled Kolkata Knight Riders in an IPL match here on Friday.

On a sultry evening in a parched Kolkata, Punjab Kings batters rained sixes --- 24 of them all as a target of 262 was overhauled in 18.4 overs, courtesy Bairstow's unbeaten 108 off 48 balls, well supported by

Shashank Singh 68 not out off 28 balls and pint-sized Prabhsimran Singh's punchy 54 off just 20 balls.

When Sunil Narine (71 off 32 balls) and Phil Salt (75 off 37 balls) smoked the Punjab bowlers in 40 degree plus temperature in the early evening, little did Shreyas Iyer envisage what awaited fate awaited him and his men at night. The night never belonged to Knights as Bairstow had earmarked the Friday night for his redemption with a 'Shashank' for company.

No credit is enough for Prabhsimran, who started in earnest making a mincemeat of KKR attack on a flat deck, giving Bairstow some time to get his bearings right.

After Prabhsimran's departure, Rilee Rossouw struck a 16-ball 26, while in-form Shashank blasted eight sixes, only one less than Bairstow's nine in what turned out to be a walk in the park.

The match also witnessed 523 runs and an all time IPL record sixes of 42 maximums. Both the record chases

now have come against KKR in space of 10 days and at the same venue of Eden Gardens.

It was on April 16, KKR had failed to defend 223/6 with another Englishman -- Jos Buttler -- who smashed a 55-ball century to pull off the heist.

It was IPL's joint record chase till then and both by with Rajasthan Royals -- first against Mumbai Indians in 2000 and then vs KKR in 2024.

The two defeats also highlighted KKR's bowling plight this season as their 24.75 crore buy Mitchell Starc has failed to

live up to his big prize purse, something that may be a big concern for the team poised to make the playoffs.

This win may be a little too late for PBKS to make the playoffs. This was their third win from nine matches as they improved their position to eighth spot in the 10-team standings.

For KKR, this was their third loss from eight matches as they have 10 points, occupying the second spot behind Rajasthan.

Prabhsimran made the perfect impact at the top replacing pacer Arshdeep Singh when he creamed an 18-ball fifty with five sixes and four fours to give PBKS an ideal start to the massive chase.

Prabhsimran teed off against Harshit Rana, smoking him for two sixes in three balls, before Dushmantha Chameera bore his burnt and conceded 23 runs in his over.

On six off five balls, Bairstow was a mute spectator at his end with Prabhsimran blazing all guns.

Down on one knee, Prabhsimran launched into Narine for a six over backward square leg that summed up the the effortlessness with which the batters had their way while wielding the willow.

Bairstow came on his own in the next over when he went ballistic against KKR's 'Impact Player', left-arm spinner Anukul Roy, who leaked three fours and two sixes in his first five balls. The only respite was Narine's direct hit from short fine-leg in the final delivery of that Roy over that brought an end to Prabhsimran's blazing knock.

/ PTI /

Upbeat DC take on struggling MI as playoff race intensifies

APARAJITA UPADHYAY / NEW DELHI

BOLSTERED By Rishabh Pant's brilliant batting form and inspiring leadership, the resurrected Delhi Capitals will aim to continue their upward march in the IPL points table when they take on an inconsistent Mumbai Indians here on Saturday.

The Capitals have endured a rollercoaster season so far, showing flashes of brilliance while also succumbing to embarrassing defeats.

But three wins in the last four matches have helped them climb to the sixth spot and a win

against MI will strengthen their claim to a play off spot.

On the other hand, after a familiar poor start, MI bounced back with three wins in their next four matches but a comprehensive nine-wicket thrashing by Rajasthan Royals put an end to their resurgence. They are tottering on the eighth place on the points table and can ill-afford to lose.

DC's biggest positive has undoubtedly been skipper Rishabh Pant's form, which appears to be improving with each game.

He has looked sharp behind the stumps and seems to be bat-



ting with freedom. He was at his belligerent best during a match-winning unbeaten knock against Gujarat Titans on Wednesday.

It would be fair to say that the southpaw is in prime position to make India's squad for the T20 World Cup despite stiff opposition from the likes of Sanju Samson, Dinesh Karthik and Ishan Kishan.

In Jack Fraser-McGurk, DC have found an able top-order batter who can exploit the powerplay but more is expected of opener Prithvi Shaw, given that his only responsibility is to bat as he is used as an Impact Sub-

stitute.

David Warner missed out the previous game, making way for Shai Hope, who couldn't capitalise on the opportunity, and the veteran Australian might be brought back in the playing XI.

Tristan Stubbs has time and again proved he can be brutal with the bat while Axar Patel also showcased his batting prowess when he was elevated up the order in the four-run win against GT.

While the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar have bowled economically, DC's fast bowling unit needs to step up.

/ PTI /

World Cup: Deepika ousts Korean rival to make semis; archers confirm four medals



Former world number one archer Deepika Kumari poses for photos after reaching the Archery World Cup Stage 1 semifinal, in Shanghai, Friday, April 26, 2024. / PTI

SHANGHAI Continuing her spirited progress post motherhood, former world number one Deepika Kumari eliminated Korean Jeon Hunyoung to storm into the semifinal, while compound archers continued to shine to assure India a fourth medal in the World Cup Stage 1 here on Friday.

Deepika, the three-time Olympian, who has slipped to world No. 142 and qualified as 30th seed in the rankings round, overcame a 1-3 deficit

to defeat Jeon 6-4 (27-28, 27-27, 29-28, 29-27, 28-28) in the women's recurve individual quarterfinal.

Having started off with an eight, Deepika lost the first set 27-28, but the 29-year-old continued to improve and levelled the second at 27-all, before taking the third (29-28) by dropping just one point.

From three-all, there was no stopping Deepika who went on to drill in four 10s including two X (closer to centre) from six arrows to make the semis.

Deepika, who embraced motherhood in December 2022 and returned to win the Asia Cup gold in Baghdad in February this year, may have to overcome two more Korean rivals in her bid to win a first World Cup individual gold medal since the Paris Stage 3 in June 2021.

Korean teenager Nam Suhyeon, who qualified as the seventh seed, stands in Deepika's way in the semifinal.

The other half will feature top seed and 20-year-old world No. 2 Korean Lim Sihyeon taking on Li Jiaman of China.

JYOTHI, VERMA CONFIRM FOURTH MEDAL

The day began with Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Abhishek Verma advancing into the compound mixed team final.

The world No. 2 Indians dropped just five points to prevail over their Mexican opponents Andrea Becerra and Lot Maximo Mendez Ortiz 155-151.

They will face lower-ranked Estonia in the gold-medal clash on Saturday. Jyothi is also a member of the women's compound team, which had entered the final on Wednesday.

With Jyothi also securing a semi-final spot in the individual section on Thursday, the World No. 3 and Asian Games gold medallist is in the hunt for a hat-trick of top podium finishes.

Overall, Indian archers have qualified in four finals, all in the team events, and are in the hunt for two medals in compound individual events -- where Jyothi and Priyansh have made the semifinals.

The four events where Indian teams have made the gold-medal round are compound men's, women's, mixed categories and men's recurve. / PTI /

High-flying RR look to maintain winning run against resurgent LSG

LUCKNOW High-flying Rajasthan Royals will look to continue their winning momentum and consolidate their position at the top when they take on a resurgent Lucknow Super Giants, who would be gunning for revenge at home in an IPL match here on Saturday. Former champions RR have looked in ominous form this season with seven wins from eight games, and they could be a tough nut to crack for LSG.

LSG, meanwhile, too have played some good cricket and are placed fourth with five wins from eight games.

But going into Saturday's match, RR would certainly be the favourites as they have registered a hat-trick of victories after a rare blip against Gujarat Titans.

Assam batter Riyan Parag has been the flavour of the season for RR in the batting department. The youngster reinvented himself and has been the team's highest scorer with 318 runs from eight games.

The return to form of Yashasvi

Jaiswal, who was struggling a bit this season, has further strengthened RR's batting. While chasing a 180-run target in the last game against Mumbai Indians, Jaiswal smashed an unbeaten 104 off 60 balls to power his side to a comfortable nine-wicket win.

Jaiswal's return to form is something RR's opponents should really be worried about given the devastation the youngster and Jos Buttler can wreak at the top of the order.

RR's batting typically revolves around skipper Sanju Samson, who has scored 314 runs so far, and with West Indian Shimron Hetmyer capable of hitting top gear, the 2008 IPL champions have a potent lineup.

The likes of Rovman Powell and Dhruv Jurel, though, need to contribute more.

RR also boast of a potent bowling attack comprising the experienced Trent Boult, Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma, whose 5 for 18 against Mumbai Indians has really fired up the side.

/ PTI /

Briefly

NADAL BEATS TEENAGER BLANCH IN MADRID, FACES DE MINAUR NEXT



MADRID Rafael Nadal made a winning start at the Madrid Open when he raced past 16-year-old wild card Darwin Blanch 6-1, 6-0 after 64 minutes. A five-time champion in Madrid, Nadal owns the most wins (57) at the Caja Magica, where the home favourite first claimed the title in 2008 and most recently triumphed in 2017. In what was the largest age gap (21 years, 117 days) between two opponents at ATP Masters 1000 level, Nadal won 59 per cent of his return points and did not face a break point on his own serve, according to Infosys ATP Stats. "He's a very young player, I think he has a great future ahead of him. He has very powerful shots, but I think he's lacked continuity. I wish him all the best. I played fine, I'm happy, this gave me the opportunity of having another day in Madrid, which means a lot to me. I need to play these tournaments and I think it's part of a process of improvement," said Nadal.

/ IANS /

MAHESHWARI SHOOTS 48 TO STAY IN HUNT

NEW DELHI Maheshwari Chauhan kept Indian hopes high at the ISSF Final Olympic Qualification Championship for shotgun in Doha as she was placed at sixth position in the 71-strong women's skeet field after two rounds of qualification on Friday. She shot a perfect 25 in the second for a tally of 48 on the day, which tied her with nine others and put her one behind a group of four leaders which included Rio Olympics champion Diana Bacosi of Italy. Two more rounds come up on Saturday, before the finals on Sunday, which follow the fifth and final qualifying round. The top six go through to the final.

/ PTI /

NETHRA KUMANAN SECURES INDIA'S SECOND PARIS OLYMPICS QUOTA IN SAILING

NEW DELHI Nethra Kumanan on Friday secured India's second Paris Olympics quota in sailing, claiming it under the Emerging Nations Program banner at the Last Chance Regatta, an Olympic qualifier, in Hyeres, France. Nethra, who has competed in the Tokyo Games three years ago, was competing in the women's dinghy (ILCA 6). Nethra managed 67 net points to finish fifth on the overall leaderboard. However, she secured the Olympic quota as the top performer among sailors from the Emerging Nations Program (ENP) who had not yet obtained a quota. World Sailing, the world governing body for the sport, aims to help athletes from less well-known sailing nations make an impact at the top level through its ENP programme.

/ PTI /

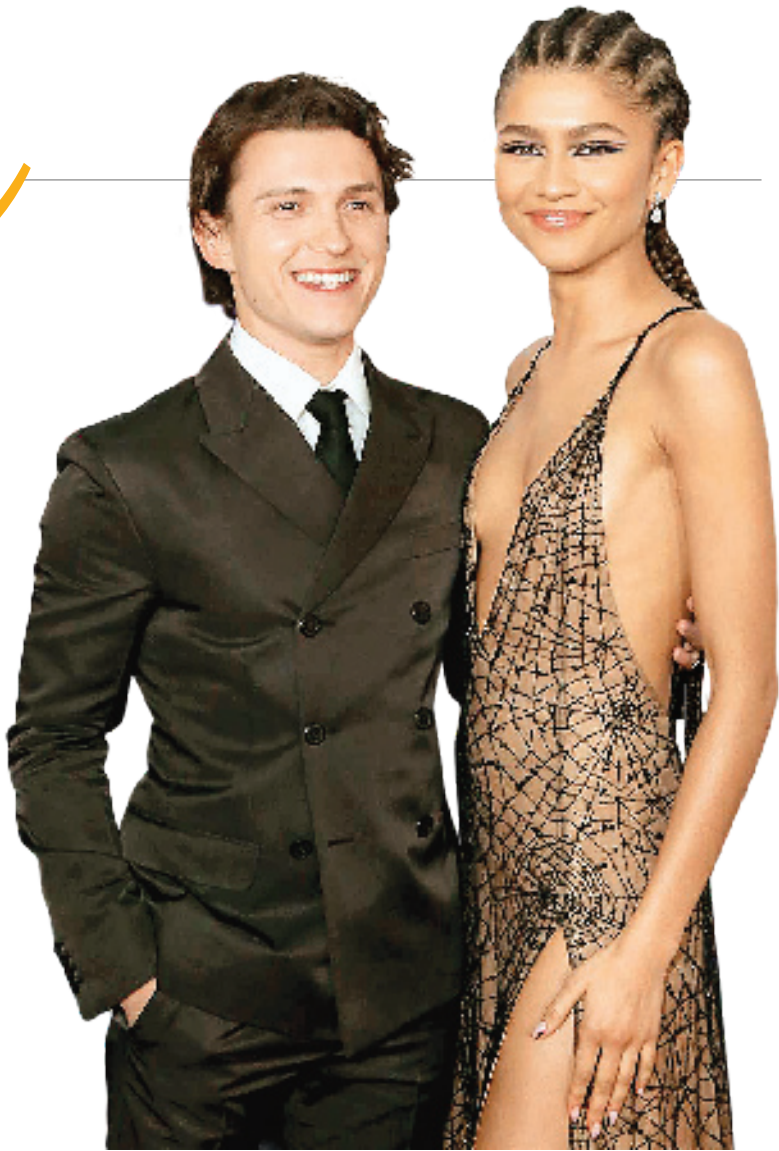
PREMIER LEAGUE: FODEN'S BRACE TAKES MAN CITY CLOSE TO LEADERS ARSENAL

BRIGHTON Phil Foden scored twice as Manchester City leapfrogged Liverpool and kept pressure on leaders Arsenal with a superb 4-0 win away to Brighton & Hove Albion. By City out of Premier League action for 12 days, both the Gunners and Liverpool had moved above Pep Guardiola's side during the interim. But, knowing six victories would guarantee another title, City were at their best on the south coast, dispatching a Brighton side previously beaten just twice at home this campaign. Foden moved onto 16 league goals for the season with a first-half brace, his first a free-kick deflected past a wrong-footed Jason Steele before stroking home his second after some reckless play from the Seagulls.

/ IANS /



Dev Patel attends the Time100 Gala, celebrating the 100 most influential people in the world, at Frederick P. Rose Hall, Jazz at Lincoln Center on Thursday, April 25, 2024, in New York. AP/ PTI



Amid rumours of split, source says
Zendaya, Tom Holland
have discussed marriage

actress Zendaya and Tom Holland have reportedly been discussing marriage, according to a source.

"There has been talk of marriage, and that is a reality," a source told people.com.

The two met while filming their trilogy of Spider-Man movies together. Since then, they've kept their off-camera romance private.

"They are not the kind of stars who put their lives out there on social media for the most part," explained the source.

"Both are private," said the source, who added that the attention on them while in the public eye "has never been easy or comfortable for either of them."

Zendaya's film 'Challengers' is set to release, and Holland, who stars in 'Romeo and Juliet' on London's West End in May.

/ IANS /



'BRIDGERTON' STAR NICOLA COUGHLAN WARNED ABOUT NOT GETTING WORK FOR SUPPORTING PALESTINE

Actress Nicola Coughlan, who is known for her role of Penelope Featherington in the hit streaming show 'Bridgerton', has revealed she faced repercussions for her vocal support to Palestine

during the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The actress shared that she was told her support for Palestine could affect the acting roles she's offered, reports 'Mirror.co.uk'.

The Irish actress has been vocal about her support for Palestine amid the Israel-Hamas war on social media. She explained her support and willingness to be vocal - especially about the children of Palestine - comes from a "moral responsibility to give back" because of her privileged position.

Nicola noted her desire to be proactive in support of causes she believes strongly in began before

she landed her breakout role in Derry Girls.

As per 'Mirror.co.uk', she recalled getting involved in several causes, including campaigning for marriage equality in Ireland and marching for abortion rights.

"I've always cared about causes and social justice," she told Teen Vogue. "To me, it always becomes about supporting all innocent people, which sounds oversimplified, but I think you've got to look at situations and just think, 'Are we supporting innocent people no matter where they're from, who they are?' That's my drive".

/ IANS /



EMMA STONE
REVEALS SHE WANTS TO BE KNOWN BY HER REAL NAME - EMILY

Oscar-winning actress Emma Stone has expressed her preference to be called by her given name, Emily, rather than the name she adopted at the beginning of her career.

The 35-year-old star shared with The Hollywood Reporter: "That would be so nice. I would like to be Emily."

Although the actress initially adopted her stage name when she registered for the Screen Actors Guild, she actually prefers when her colleagues use her birth name, as reported by femalefirst.co.uk.

She explained: "When I get to know them, people that I work with do. It's just because my name was taken (by another actress in SAG).

"Then I freaked out a couple of years ago. For some reason, I was like, 'I can't do it anymore. Just call me Emily.' Nathan calls me Em, which is easier."

Stone previously disclosed that her stage name was inspired by Spice Girls star Emma Bunton.

/ IANS /

Tiffany Haddish opens up on miscarriages - she has had to suffer eight of them

Actress-comedian Tiffany Haddish revealed she has suffered eight miscarriages and battled with painful heavy periods for years.

The actress told People magazine: "It's so devastating. Every time I find out I'm pregnant, I'm like, 'Don't drink, don't smoke, don't do nothin'." "Even if I don't really want (the baby), I still try to give it a chance..."



She said: "It's like, I don't know why there's so much blood. And then I go to the doctor, and they're like, 'Oh, you're miscarrying right now. And I just D.C. (dilation and curettage, a procedure to remove pregnancy tissue)."

Haddish said there is "a part" of her that would still like to have a child, reports femalefirst.co.uk.

The actress said: "I've got all this love, I

should give it to somebody who can grow with it."

Haddish has struggled for years with painful periods and was told recently she likely has endometriosis, a condition where the endometrium extends outside of the uterus, after experiencing pain so bad because she thought she was "dying" and regularly passes out as a result.

"My body be playing tricks on me. I'm pretty sure the devil is real because on the first day of my period, no matter what, the devil goes into overdrive. I feel like my life gets turned upside down," she said.

/ IANS /



Singer Aya Nakamura poses before the Flamme awards Thursday, April 25, 2024 in Paris. Aya Nakamura is expected to perform during the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. AP/ PTI

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Actor Malaika Arora and Raveena Tandon poses for photos at the Elle awards, in Mumbai, Thursday, April 25, 2024. / PTI

Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu has opened up about how success has been her focus since childhood, as she did not experience a luxurious upbringing. Samantha discussed this topic on her podcast 'Take 20', where she aims to assist people by sharing her experiences, helping them relate, understand, and seek help when needed.

In one episode, Samantha explored the human body's fight or flight response in certain situations alongside wellness coach and nutritionist Alkesh Sharotri.

"I used to believe that exhaustion and the need for rest were signs of weakness. I was proud of being a hustler, thriving on only six hours of sleep, and being exceptionally productive throughout the day," said the actress, who has been diagnosed with an autoimmune condition called myositis.

"Despite feeling exhausted, I refused to acknowledge it, working tirelessly without a break for 13 years." The actress added: "Growing up, I didn't have a luxurious childhood, so success was my focus from an early age. I always felt intense pressure to 'Make It' in life. Constantly fed with the notion that I wasn't good enough, so that

became an intense motivation for me to succeed at any cost."

Samantha, who captivated the nation with her sizzling performance in the song 'Oo Antava' from 'Pushpa: The Rise', said that people often perceive "acting as glamorous, which it is, but that's not the entire reality".

"It is a lot of hard work and pressure, especially when you're constantly in the spotlight and being judged. I started in this industry when I was just 22-23 years old, and some girls start even younger. We don't come into this knowing everything; we let others dictate and define us," she said.

Reflecting on her own journey, Samantha said: "I've been letting others define me since childhood, creating a pattern where I worked tirelessly to please and seek approval from others. Eventually, my own thoughts, feelings, and desires became insignificant."

Fears emerged once she achieved success.

"When I achieved success, I feared losing it, immediately searching for the next big accomplishment. So, I believe I've been in fight or flight mode throughout my career," she explained.

Samantha will soon be seen in the lead role opposite Varun Dhawan in the OTT series 'Citadel: Honey Bunny'.



Samantha:
I didn't have a luxurious childhood, so success was my focus



NIMRAT KAUR TALKS ABOUT 'THE ONLY GOOD PART' ABOUT A NIGHT SHOOT: SUNRISE

Actress Nimrat Kaur, who is currently shooting for her next project, shared what is the "only good part about night shoots". Nimrat, who is shooting on Madh Island in Mumbai, took to

her Instagram stories and shared a picture of the blue water and the rising sun.

The actress captioned it: "The only good part about night shoots."

The actress didn't reveal details about her shoot on Madh Island.

On the work front, Nimrat was last seen on screen in 'Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video' directed by Mikhil Musale. It also stars Radhika Madan, Bhagyashree, and Subodh Bhawe.

/ IANS /

Rajkummar Rao, Khushi, Nayanthara lead celeb lineup at GQ Most Influential Young Indians

A galaxy of stars, including names such as Rajkummar Rao, Tiger Shroff, Nayanthara, Navya Naveli Nanda,

black plunging neckline gown.

Actress Alaya F chose a white number, while Khushi looked gorgeous in a vintage-styled black and white co-ord outfit.

Brother-sister duo Agastya and Navya Naveli Nanda looked like Yin and Yang, with the 'Archies' actor in a black suit and Navya looking surreal in white.

Breaking away from the monochromes were actors Varun Dhawan, Sanya Malhotra, and Palak Tiwari, who wore a navy blue suit, denim anti-fit ensemble, and a colourful shimmer short dress, respectively.

Actress Pednekar flaunted her curves in an ivory-hued cutout outfit, while designer Kunal Rawal walked the red carpet in a gender-fluid number.

'Bhabhi' Mira Kapoor, who wore a bright orange dress with a side trail, posed with her 'deva' Ishaan Kapoor on the red carpet.

Others seen at the event included names such as Ali Fazal, Richa Chadha, Kunal Kemmu, Akshay Oberoi, Tahir Raj Bhasin, Sunny Singh, Chef Ranveer Brar, Mannara Chopra, and Kubbra Sait.

/ IANS /



Anoushka Shankar to get honorary degree by Oxford University, calls it 'pinch-me moment'

Nine-time Grammy-nominated sitarist, producer, and film composer Anoushka Shankar will receive an honorary degree from the University of Oxford and described it as a "pinch-me moment" in her career.

The prestigious recognition is being conferred "in recognition of her outstanding achievements within the music industry" and underscores her profound influence on the global music landscape and her unwavering commitment to bridging cultural divides through her art.

Anoushka said: "This is truly a pinch-me moment in my career; I never even dreamed I might receive an honour such as this, let alone from one of the most prestigious universities in the world. I am deeply grateful to Oxford University for conferring me with an honorary degree."

"I also feel reflective and grateful for all my past teachers who got me to this point. I was fortunate to have had the most precious education in music under the guidance of my father and unbelievable coaching and support in my career aged thirteen onwards from my mother. This is all thanks to them," she added.

Anoushka will be awarded her degree on June 19 at the university's annual Encaenia academic ceremony.

/ IANS /

Vidya recalls how Pradeep Sarkar told her 'Ae ladki tere saath film banaunga' after Euphoria song shoot



DURGA CHAKRAVARTY

Nearly two decades have passed since the release of the song 'Kabhi aana tu meri gali' by pop band Euphoria, featuring Vidya Balan.

Vidya recently reminisced about how her first Bollywood film, 'Parineeta', directed by Pradeep Sarkar in 2005, came her way.

Reflecting on her experiences while shooting the song alongside Palash Sen and under Sarkar's direction, Vidya told IANS: "I remember when I shot 'Kabhi aana tu meri gali', it was over five nights. When I say nights, the shoot was supposed to be from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. But dada (Sarkar) would shoot beyond that."

The National Award-winning actress used to reside two hours away in Chembur, Mumbai, from the shoot location in Boisar.

"For five days, I did not come back home. I had a model friend living close by, and I would go to her house, bathe, come back, and sleep on location," she recalled with laughter.

Vidya confessed that she still loves the song.

"I love the song, and I loved the opportunity I was getting to

do a music video and to work with Pradeep Sarkar and Euphoria. It was so much fun," Vidya said.

The actress then recounted another anecdote from the shoot, where she got giddy during a particular scene.

"I remember on the last day in the morning we were supposed to finish at 6 a.m., but we were continuing to shoot. It was 10 a.m., and there was a shot of me pouring water into the Tulsi, and when I went there, suddenly the sun hit me," she said.

"I got giddy, and people started saying 'shakkar lao, paani lao, and all, and dada is telling me, 'I don't have time for all this, come on, come on'.... And I was like, 'what?' Dada was so passionate, unhe kuch nahi dikhta tha."

Vidya added: "At that time, I thought he was so rude, but later, once I got to know him, I realised that dada was different."

The actress then shared how Sarkar expressed his desire to make a film with her.

They both ventured into the world of cinema with the 2005 film 'Parineeta', an adaptation of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's 1914 Bengali novella of the same name.

"That was my first big work with dada. I had done an ad with dada, but that was my first big work with him. At the end of the shoot, he said, 'Ae ladki tere saath film banaunga,' and I was like, 'haan haan'. Dada actually kept his word," she shared.

/ IANS /



and Khushi Kapoor, among many others, illuminated the red carpet of the GQ Most Influential Young Indians event.

Rajkummar looked dapper in a classic black suit with a white shirt, while Tiger brought his stylish self in a blue suit with striped pants and completed his look with sunglasses.

Actress Nayanthara looked drop-dead beautiful in a



JIMMY SHERGILL SAYS THOSE WHO'VE MADE MOVIES OR SERIES ON BALAKOT HAVE JUST SKIMMED THE SURFACE

Actor Jimmy Shergill has shared about his upcoming series 'Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond', stating that those who have ventured into creating movies or series on Balakot have merely skimmed the surface.

Jimmy said: "Those who have ventured into creating such movies or series have merely

skimmed the surface, but with 'Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond' we delve deep into the heart of the narrative."

'Ranneeti: Balakot & Beyond' features Lara Dutta, Ashutosh Rana, Ashish Vidyarthi, and Prasanna.

The web series takes audiences behind the scenes of a major defence operation like Balakot.

/ IANS /