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Teacher takes up deeksha for voting rights of SGTs in Telangana MLC elections

Kothagudem: A Secondary Grade Teacher (SGT) Shaik Mahamood Pasha has taken up a unique deeksha to highlight the SGT's problems and get them addressed. He on Monday launched a 108 days Phalahara Deeksha wherein he consumes only fruits as main meal till October 16. The reason for taking up for the deeksha is to get voting right to SGTs in Teachers MLC Constituency elections, repealing of contributory pension scheme (CPS) and re-introduction of old pension scheme, he said. Speaking Telangana Today Pasha informed that the SGTs, who have been recruited with intermediate and two-year D. Ed qualification, have no voting right in the MLC elections.

27 killed, several injured in stampede at religious event in Hathras



GNS News Agency, July 2

Hathras: Victims outside the Trauma Centre after a stampede broke out at a religious gathering, in Hathras district, Tuesday, July 2, 2024. At least 27 people were killed and several injured in the stampede, according to officials. Nearly 27 persons, including women and children, were killed after a stampede broke out at a religious event in Hathras district on Tuesday, officials said.

The stampede occurred during a 'satsang' (prayer meeting) for Lord Shiva. Visuals from the Community Health Centre showed several bodies being brought there in the presence of crying relatives.

Chief medical officer (CMO) Etah, Umesh Kumar Tripathi said, "We have received 27 bodies, of which 25 are females and two are males. Some injured have also been taken to hospitals. We have heard that there was a stampede during a 'satsang' but do not have too many more details." Senior Superintendent of Police, Etah, Rajesh Kumar later said three children were among those killed in the stampede, which broke out in a village within the Sikandra Rao police station limits in Hathras. Officials said that further details about the incident are awaited. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered a probe into the incident. ADG Agra and Commissioner Aligarh will be members of the probe committee. UP Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh and DGP Prashant Kumar along with ministers Chaudhary Laxmi Narayan Singh and Sandeep Singh have left for Hathras.

Odisha CM announces 2-day holiday for Lord Jagannath's Rath Yatra

GNS News Agency, July 2

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday announced a two-day holiday for the annual Rath Yatra festival this year falling on July 7. He made the announcement following a review meeting on preparations for the Rath Yatra at Puri on Tuesday. Majhi sought the cooperation of all the stakeholders including the district administration and the local public for smooth and hassle-free conduct of the Rath Yatra festival. "Tribals are the original servitors of Lord Jagannath and being a tribal I have surrendered myself before Him. Lord Jagannath is the identity of the Odia people. The Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath is an important religious and spiritual festival for the world. The successful management of the festival is our responsibility," said Chief Minister. Majhi expressed that the festival will be witnessed by lakhs of devotees from abroad and India and with the cooperation of all the stakeholders the festival will be held smoothly and peacefully. "It is a unique and rare Rath Yatra which will be celebrated for two days (July 7 and 8). So, the decision has been taken to declare the day after Rath Yatra as a holiday," added CM Majhi. Notably, after a gap of 53 years, Rath Yatra is going to be celebrated simultaneously with Netra Utshav and Nabajaubana Darshan on the same day, July 7.

1 killed, several injured after school bus overturns in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore

GNS News Agency, July 2

The cleaner of a school bus died after the vehicle was hit by a truck in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district on Tuesday. A total of 36 students and teaching staff were on board when the accident occurred. Several students



were also wounded in the mishap, the police stated. The bus belonged to the RSR International School, owned by former YSRCP MLA Ramireddy Pratap Kumar Reddy. The accident occurred when the truck hit the school bus from behind, causing it to overturn. The injured were rushed to a private hospital in Kavali for treatment. State Education Minister Nara Lokesh expressed shock and grief over the incident and instructed officials to provide immediate medical attention to the injured students. "The incident of a truck hitting a school bus near Kavali today has left me deeply worried. It is sad that a cleaner died in an accident," he stated in a post on X.

3,035 posts in TGSRTC to be filled

Hyderabad: The Telangana government has accorded permission to fill 3,035 posts in the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC).

The posts include 2,000 of driver, 743 of labourer, 114 of deputy superintendent (mechanic), 84 of deputy superintendent (traffic), 25 of depot manager/assistant traffic manager, 23 of assistant engineer (civil), 15 of assistant mechanical engineer, 11 of section officer (civil), seven of medical officer (general) and seven of medical officer (specialist). Ponnamp Prabhakar, Minister of Transport and BC Welfare, expressed happiness over the government's approval of 3,035 posts in various categories and said with this, the public transport system in the State will be further strengthened.

PM Modi address punctured by 'Justice for Manipur' slogans, Speaker's sharp rebuke

GNS News Agency, July 2

PM Modi replied to the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in Lok Sabha on Tuesday. His address was disrupted by slogans raised by opposition leaders. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday replied to the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in Lok Sabha. PM Modi's speech was disrupted by 'Justice for Manipur' slogans raised by the opposition leaders. The Opposition has on several occasions accused PM Modi of keeping silent on Manipur, which saw intense ethnic violence erupt in May last year. The continuous ruckus and sloganeering prompted Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to reprimand the opposition leaders. Speaker Om Birla chided Leader of



Opposition Rahul Gandhi for directing members to enter the Well of House in protest during PM Modi's speech. PM Modi on Tuesday reiterated his '24x7 for 2047' commitment. "We keep India first in policy and governance," PM Modi said amid massive sloganeering by the opposition leaders

"Our one and only target is 'nation first', 'India first'. Each of our policy, our decision and our work has

that he could understand the "pain of those who lost badly after continuously spreading lies". The prime minister said that prior to his government coming to power for the first term in 2014, the country was plagued by corruption. "When we came to power in 2014, we had said that we will have zero tolerance towards corruption. Corruption had ravaged the country like termites. However, the countrymen have blessed us for our zero tolerance approach to corruption," he said. PM Modi spoke about the successes and achievements of his government in the past 10 years. He said that in the third term, his government would work at three times the speed, put in three times the energy, and give three times the results to the people of the country.

been on one scale - 'India first'. In the last 10 years, our government has been working with the objective of 'Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas'. This country has seen politics of appeasement for a long time, this country has seen model of governance of appeasement for a long time. We have moved forward with the idea of 'santushtikaran' (satisfaction), not appeasement," PM Modi said. Taking a dig at the Opposition, PM Modi said

10k cybercrime cases booked in Telangana this year: CM Revanth

GNS News Agency, July 2

Hyderabad: As many as 10,000 First Information Reports (FIRs) were booked with regard to cybercrime incidents across the State this year until now, said Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy during his visit to the Telangana Command & Control Centre (TGCC) in Banjara Hills, on Tuesday. The Chief Minister interacted with the officers from Hyderabad, Cyberabad and Rachakonda police and said the State government was committed to curb cybercrimes and make Telangana a cyber-safe state.

Stressing the need to deal cybercrimes with iron hand, he said Telangana was among the few States in the country which have a fully functional Cyber Security Bureau and a fully operational 1930 call centre. "We are among the top States in the country in freezing the bank accounts of the fraudsters. Until now, almost Rs 263 crore lost amount has been frozen in banks apart from blocking 36,000 SIMs and 2,300 fraudulent apps," Revanth Reddy said.

By using state-of-art tools and technology, Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) has estab-



lished crime links of 671 suspects to almost 77,000 cybercrime cases registered across the country. This information has been shared with all the states concerned. Since April, new Specialized Cyber Crime Police Stations have started functioning in the State. To help the public get back their lost money, the process of refund has been simplified and a total amount of Rs. 32 crore has been refunded to 5,191 victims. Every police station in the state has a trained cyber warrior posted to handle cybercrime complaints.

Truth can be expunged in Modi's world but not in reality, says Rahul



GNS News Agency, July 2

New Delhi: A defiant Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said truth can be expunged in the world of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but not in reality, hours after significant

parts of his Lok Sabha speech were deleted by the chair. "Whatever I had to say, I have said and that is the truth. They can expunge as much as they want, but the truth will prevail," Gandhi told reporters in Parliament complex.

The Congress leader was responding to questions on certain remarks he made during the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address in the Lok Sabha on Monday. "Truth can be expunged in the world of Modi ji, but in reality truth cannot be expunged," Gandhi said. In his first speech as the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Gandhi had launched a no-holds-barred attack on the BJP, accusing the leaders of the ruling party of dividing people on communal lines. Gandhi's remarks drew massive protests from the treasury benches and a rare intervention from the prime minister, who slammed the Congress leader for calling the entire Hindu community violent.

Lok Sabha polls marked end of communal politics in India: Akhilesh Yadav

GNS News Agency, July 2

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday said the 2024 Lok Sabha polls marked the end of communal politics in India, and were a moral victory for the INDIA bloc. Participating in the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the president's address, the Kannauj MP also questioned the authenticity of EVMs and said he and his party will oppose it even if his party wins all seats in Uttar Pradesh. Yadav called June 4, the day the election results were declared, as the day of independence from communal politics for India. He also said that the BJP's defeat in Faizabad seat of Ayodhya, where the Ram temple has been built, shows the wisdom of voters. "The whole India has understood that INDIA is pro-India. This election is the moral victory of INDIA. It is a victory of

positive politics. It is victory of PDA (Pichde Dali Alpsankhayak), social justice movement. 2024's message is also full of responsibility for the INDIA bloc," the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said. "June 4, 2024 was the day of independence from communal politics for India. In this election, communal politics has lost forever," Yadav said. "This election is a new era of positive politics, pro-Constitution people have won, the Constitution has won... It is the end of top-down politics," he said. Referring to the BJP's defeat in Faizabad, he said it was perhaps the wish of Lord Ram. "Hoi wahi jo Ram rachi rakha (Whatever Ram has planned will happen)," Yadav said. "The victory of Ayodhya is the victory of the wisdom of India's voters,

Telugu film industry bigwigs should do more to raise awareness on menace of drugs: Revanth Reddy



GNS News Agency, July 2

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Tuesday said Telugu film industry bigwigs, who seek government permission to increase ticket prices when a big budget film is released, are not fulfilling their social responsibility to raise awareness on the menace of drugs and cyber crime. He directed the officials to set a pre-condition to filmmakers to provide a video of one or two minutes duration to the government to promote awareness on drugs and cybercrime when they approach the government to hike ticket prices.

The video can be made with the same cast who acted in the film for which permission to hike ticket prices is sought, he said. It is a routine practice in Telangana and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh to increase ticket prices, with government permission, for some days after the film's release. Revanth Reddy, who was speaking after flagging off a fleet of vehicles of state anti-narcotics bureau and cyber security bureau, appreciated mega star Chiranjeevi for handing over a video to the government against the problem of narcotic substances. The Chief Minister also asked the Cyberabad and Rachakonda police commissioners here to place the request before filmmakers to provide a short duration video to raise awareness against narcotics and cyber crime when permissions are sought for film shootings.

He said he agrees that films are made with investment of crores of rupees but drugs is a societal problem, he said. Filmmakers should give back to the society, he said. He instructed that cinema theatre owners should screen short duration films free of cost before beginning the film screening to promote awareness against drugs and cyber crime. Highlighting the menace of drugs, he said one person dies in a murder but families suffer if a person is addicted to drugs. Asserting that the state government is committed to check the scourge of narcotics, Revanth Reddy urged personnel of state anti-narcotics bureau and cyber crime bureau to check the crimes effectively. It is the government's responsibility to ensure departmental promotions to the officials who perform their duties efficiently, he said. Police should instil fear among cyber criminals and those involved in supply of drugs to carry out their activities in Telangana, he added.

Over dozen students protesting NEET irregularities detained in Delhi

GNS News Agency, July 2

Over a dozen students were detained while attempting to march towards the Parliament on July 2 to protest against alleged irregularities in several competitive exams. The students belonging to different outfits under the banner "India against NTA" gathered at the Patel Chowk metro station in New Delhi and started raising "anti-NTA" slogans.

Carrying posters and banners with slogans like "Sack Union Education Minister" and "NTA must go" written over them, the students staged demonstrations against the reported incidents of paper leaks and corruption in the medical entrance exam, besides others. The Delhi Police detained the protesting students while they tried to march towards the Parliament to press their demands. "After holding a presser at the Press Club, the students gathered at the Patel Chowk metro station from where they started marching towards the Parliament. Over a dozen students were detained while attempting to do so," said a police officer. Various student outfits under the banner "India against NTA" have been staging an indefinite sit-in at the Jantar Mantar against alleged rigging in the NTA held examinations — NEET UG, PG and UGC NET. Their protest entered its seventh day on Tuesday with a call to take out a march to the Parliament to forward the agitation.

The members of the Left-backed All India Students Association (AISA) and Delhi University's Krantikari Yuva Sangathan (KYS) are among those sitting on the protest. The students have called for another march for "Sansad Gherao" on Wednesday along with the student outfits of INDIA block parties on the last day of 18th Lok Sabha. Their demands include scrapping of NTA, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation and decentralisation of entrance examinations.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

New Army Chief

A continued focus on modernisation has been listed among the top priorities of Gen Upendra Dwivedi, the 30th Chief of the Army Staff. The Vice Chief since February, he takes over from Gen Manoj Pande, whose tenure, in an unusual move, was extended by a month. Gen Dwivedi has pointed to a faster induction of new technology and greater emphasis on self-reliance, amid the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. Acknowledging the unique security challenges, he has given an assurance of the Army's capability and readiness. As the standoff with China along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh lingers on, the Army Chief's immediate concern will be to tackle the spike in terror attacks in the Jammu region. He had, as the Northern Army Commander, effected major deployment changes in the area bordering Pakistan.

Theaterisation plans and structural reforms, being overseen by the Chief of Defence Staff, remain a work in progress. Elaborate consultative mechanisms are time-consuming, and so they should be. It is vital to ensure there is no forced acquiescence. The envisaged synergy between the Army, Air Force and the Navy has to be a natural progression of shared goals and purpose. To actualise it, the role of the Service Chiefs becomes critical. Demands of a higher percentage of Agniveer retention at the end of four years have found resonance in political circles, particularly after it became a major election issue recently. How concerns over the Agniveer recruitment scheme are handled by Gen Dwivedi will be keenly watched. Gen Dwivedi, who was commissioned into the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles in 1984, is an alumnus of the Sainik School at Rewa, Madhya Pradesh. He and Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh Tripathi studied together. That's a comforting coincidence for the armed forces fraternity.

BBMP to conduct door-to-door survey to control dengue cases in Bengaluru



GNS News Agency, July 2

To prevent the spread of dengue in the city, a door-to-door survey will be conducted with focus on larva testing and raising awareness among citizens by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), chief commissioner Tushar Giri Nath said on Wednesday after a meeting with officials. The action comes after Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah instructed officials to conduct door-to-door surveys, especially among the urban poor following the increase in dengue cases.

He said that around 25 lakh urban poor living in dense population and low-lying areas have been identified for the survey across all BBMP zones where, health inspectors, ASHA workers, ANMs, nursing college students, NSS volunteers, will be directed to create a block covering 1,000 houses each. The target is to cover at least 12-14 lakh houses every 15 days. They should then identify larval habitats, raise awareness among citizens,

and instruct those with fever to visit nearby primary health centres (PHCs) for testing. He said officials have been instructed to conduct a comprehensive house-to-house survey and submit reports.

To control mosquitoes, officials have been instructed to identify and destroy larval habitats. "Officials will raise awareness on keeping the surroundings dry without any water stagnation, which is the major cause of mosquito breeding," Nath said.

He said that from January 2024 to June 2024, 1,230 cases have been reported, which is more than what was reported last year until June (730). As a result, testing will be ramped up using NS1 test kits which will be procured from Karnataka Drugs and Logistics Society. Around 38,000 NS1 kits will be distributed across all PHCs under BBMP limits with each PHC getting around 2,000-3,000 kits. According to Nath, the highest number of dengue cases have been recorded in Mahadevapura. "A micro-plan has been made zone-wise to control the spread of dengue. Due to intermittent rains in the city, mosquito breeding has increased. Hence, awareness activities are being conducted more intensively," he said. In addition to door-to-door visits, there will be coordination with the Horticulture Department, Forest Department, Solid Waste, Large Drainage, Road Infrastructure Division and other departments to identify and prevent water stagnation areas, he said. Meanwhile, across Karnataka a total of 5,374 cases and five deaths have been reported this year till now. Maximum cases have been reported from Bengaluru, Chikkamagaluru, Mysore, Haveri, Shivamogga, Chitradurga, Dakshina Kannada districts.

Dedicated counsellor in all colleges to stop youths falling prey to drugs: Chandrakant Patil



GNS News Agency, July 2

Expressing concern over the drug-related incidents in the city and the need to keep youths away from it, minister for higher education and technical education Chandrakant Patil on Wednesday said the state government will create a dedicated counsellor's post in every college. "The state government is serious about creating a dedicated counsellor's post in every college to discourage youths from falling prey to narcotics and other addictions. If not a permanent one, there should be a visiting counsellor in each college," Patil said.

At an awareness function to mark World Anti-Narcotics Day, Patil said, "Incidents of drug consumption are increasing and it is very serious. It is creating an image that Pune city, with a population of 70 lakh people, has gone out of control. This is changing the public view about Pune. It is an education hub with a large number of industries and the best of health facilities. It is the eighth fastest growing city in the country, but its image across the world is getting hampered. The administration should take strict action against it and include citizens in the vigilance squad." He added there should be rules for pubs and that citizens should come together to stop illegal activities without bringing politics into it. Patil said the decision to create the post of a counsellor will likely be made in the assembly session. "Everyone should come together and decide on a day of the week to keep pubs and bars closed in the city," he said. He added there should be a deadline for bars and pubs in the night as they can't be allowed to remain open till 4 am. Patil said the media had wrongly misinterpreted a previous statement he had made on the issue. "If the media is trying to create differences between me and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar then it will not happen," he said. He added that the issue will not be resolved by blaming any minister. "If there is a fear that those employed in bars and pubs will lose their jobs, then an alternate source of income should be provided to them," Patil said.

Transition away from coal power poses grave challenges to marginalised groups: report



GNS News Agency, July 2

From working irregular jobs with poor wages to facing grave health conditions, people from the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are likely to bear the maximum impact as India transitions away from coal, a new report by the National Foundation of India (NFI) has said. Across six districts of Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh, which produce 70 per cent of India's coal, 1,209 households were surveyed within a 10km area of coal mines and coal-allied activities. The survey was carried out in the coal-allied districts of Ramgarh, Raigarh and Jajpur, where industries and other economic activities are coal-dependent, and the coal-producing districts of Koriya, Dhanbad and Angul. Angul in Odisha is India's top coal-producing district.

It was found that 81.5 per cent among those surveyed belonged to the marginalised SC, ST, and OBC communities and the rest were from the general category. The survey found lower levels of income and educational attainment among SC and ST groups compared to OBC groups, and their higher representation in low-paying, irregular jobs in coal-dumping yards, coal sidings, coal loading, coal transport, coal washeries and other informal work. This disparity, the report said, indicated the challenges that marginalised groups will face as India gradually phases down coal use, resulting in significant job losses and economic downturns in coal-dependent regions. This will not only impact coal miners and workers directly but also the broader local economy. "Without a clear plan in place, workers in declining industries may face sudden job losses without adequate support or alternative employment opportunities, exacerbating tensions within the affected communities," said Pooja Gupta, researcher and co-author of the study.

The survey-based study found a clear correlation between caste and educational attainment. Households with primary education or no education were more prominent among SCs, STs and OBCs. "In coal-producing districts such as Dhanbad and Koriya, nearly 57.5% and 52% of the marginalised communities had no formal education or had only primary education," the NFI report said. Further, 65 per cent of respondents reported experiencing skin issues, while respiratory diseases prevailed among several respondents because of prolonged exposure to pollutants from coal mines. India's last nationally determined contribution submitted to the United Nations has committed to reducing the emissions intensity of its gross domestic product by 45 per cent by 2030 from the 2005 levels and achieving 50 per cent cumulative electric power installed capacity from sources based on non-fossil fuels by 2030. For this, India plans to phase down coal use. Transitioning away from coal is expected to affect 13 million people and 266 districts would be vulnerable to the change, as per a 2021 NFI report. Biraj Patnaik, Executive Director, NFI, said the stark caste-based inequalities in coal-dependent regions need targeted policies as India transitions away from coal. "There is an urgent need for community-specific policies and robust institutional mechanisms to address the socio-economic impacts of coal transition on marginalised communities," he said. An award-winning journalist with 14 years of experience, Nikhil Ghanekar is an Assistant Editor with the National Bureau [Government] of The Indian Express in New Delhi. He primarily covers environmental policy matters which involve tracking key decisions and inner workings of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

After milk, now curd set to be dearer in Karnataka; volume rise temporary

GNS News Agency, July 2

After the Rs 2 hike in the price of Nandini milk, consumers should brace themselves for another hit in their grocery bills, with the price of curd set to rise, the Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) chief said on Wednesday. M K Jagadish, MD, KMF, told indianexpress.com that the federation was working out a mechanism to increase the curd price by next week, adding that prices of other milk-related products would remain unchanged.

"We couldn't increase the price of curd at the same time as milk because we were still working out the modalities. Once we arrive at a pricing mechanism, we will try to increase the rate of curd by Rs 2 and also the volume accordingly. This is again on the grounds of excess production of milk in Karnataka," he said. Jagadish said the rise in the milk production would not affect the production cost and that the increase in the volume of milk sold would be temporary. "This is only a temporary solution given that the current season has seen milk production increase multifold in the state. Depending on the supply of milk in the coming seasons, we will decide on reduction accordingly," he said. Many consumers and the Opposition BJP have opposed the milk price rise. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, however, has said the KMF has only priced milk proportionally by taking into account the additional 50 ml of milk it provides.

"This decision by the KMF aims to ensure that farmers' additional milk production is not rejected at collection centres. Compared to last year, milk production in the state has increased by 15 per cent. Last year, the average daily production was 90 lakh litres, whereas this



year it has increased to an average of 99 lakh litres per day," he said. "To accommodate this surplus production and ensure farmers are not turned away, the KMF has decided to increase the milk content in each packet by 50 ml, with only a Rs 2 charge for the additional milk... This decision by the KMF aims to benefit the lakhs of dairy farmers and ensure the surplus milk directly reaches consumers." Most of the milk now goes into milk powder production, Siddaramaiah said. Approximately 30 lakh litres of milk is used daily for producing 250 metric tonnes of milk powder. "When our government came into power, the average daily milk collection in the state was around 72 lakh litres. We implemented a Rs 3 increase in the milk price, directing the additional funds directly to farmers and making dairy farming more profitable," he said. The chief minister said the daily milk production has risen significantly thanks to factors including good rainfall, which has ensured ample green fodder for cattle, adding that the KMF decision was therefore "beneficial for both farmers and consumers".

No MVA ally should name CM face in Maharashtra, instead focus on gaining power: Jayant Patil



GNS News Agency, July 2

NCP (SP) state president Jayant Patil on Wednesday said the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) constituents should stay away from naming a chief ministerial candidate ahead of the Maharashtra assembly elections and instead focus on returning to power in the state. He also said that no MVA ally should (unilaterally) declare the number of seats it is contesting as winnability will be the only criteria in the upcoming polls. The MVA, an alliance of Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar), Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress, was in power in the state from November 2019. However, it collapsed in June 2022 after the Shiv Sena split following a rebellion led by Eknath Shinde. Of the three MVA allies, the NCP (SP) has clocked 80 per cent strike rate in the Lok Sabha elections by winning eight out of 10 seats it contested. Patil was present in the city to attend party-related programmes and meetings. "The Maha Vikas Aghadi constituents should stay away from naming anyone as the chief minister (candidate). Instead, their priority should be returning to power. There should be no competition among the alliance members to avoid a gap," the former state minister said. On seat-sharing in the MVA for the assembly polls, he said the allies planned to hold a meeting on June 25, but Congress also had a meeting that day, so a new date will be finalised.

"There is no need to declare (unilaterally) the number of seats that the parties are contesting. Winnability will be the criteria for the candidates in the upcoming polls and we will support such candidates," he said. Ahead of this year's Lok Sabha elections, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) had announced candidates for 21 out of the total 48 seats in the state. Its decision had drawn flak from the Congress, which said every MVA constituent must follow the coalition dharna. The Congress finally contested 17 seats, while the NCP (SP) fought on 10 seats. After the Lok Sabha poll results, the Sharad Pawar-led party gained an upper hand as it won eight

out of 10 seats it contested. The Congress, which had won only one Lok Sabha seat in Maharashtra in the 2019 polls, made an impressive comeback, winning 13 out of the 17 seats it contested. The Thackeray-led party recorded a strike rate of 41 per cent, winning only nine of the 21 seats it contested. Patil said inducting leaders from the rival NCP led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar was not the priority of the party.

"Taking old colleagues back is not our priority. But the party workers who could not become part of the (Eknath Shinde-led) government and were used to making an entry into power are in our contact. New people, youth faces are joining us," he said. NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Tuesday maintained that there was no issue in welcoming people back from the rival NCP as their entry will benefit the opposition outfit and boost the morale of workers. On the protests linked to different castes over reservation in the Marathwada region, he said, "This is very serious... There should be social equality. People of all religions and castes have lived together in villages and efforts should be made so that they remain together."

IRCTC clarifies false social media claims about e-ticket booking restrictions

GNS News Agency, July 2

Hyderabad: In response to circulating rumours on social media regarding restrictions on the booking of e-tickets, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has issued a statement via 'X' (formerly Twitter) clarifying that the claims are false and misleading. According to the IRCTC, bookings through their website adhere strictly to Railway Board Guidelines. "The news in circulation on social media about restriction in the booking of e-tickets due to different surname is false and misleading," read the tweet from IRCTC. The IRCTC emphasized that users can book tickets for friends, family, and relatives using their User ID. Furthermore, individuals can book up to 12 tickets per month. For Aadhaar-authenticated users, this limit extends to 24 tickets per month, provided at least one of the passengers on the ticket is Aadhaar-authenticated. The IRCTC also reminded users that tickets booked under personal User IDs are intended for personal use only. Utilizing these tickets for commercial purposes is a violation of Section 143 of the Railways Act 1989.

'Passengers carried like cattle': HC expresses concern over Mumbai suburban railway's high death rate

GNS News Agency, July 2

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday expressed concern over the high rate of fatalities in Mumbai's suburban railway system, saying "human passengers are carried like cattle" on local trains and that the court would make officers at the highest level accountable. A bench led by Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya directed the general managers of the Western and Central Railways to look into the "very serious issue" and sought affidavits on the measures taken to avoid such accidents, while hearing a PIL petition filed by one Yatin Jadhav regarding the high rate of fatalities in the second busiest suburban railway in the world.

The bench also comprising Justice Amit Borkar said it would consider setting up a committee of commissioners and experts to suggest measures to meet challenges faced by the daily occurrence of deaths in the suburban railway system. As per petitioner, over 2,000 deaths take place every year in such accidents within the suburban railway system in Mumbai. Advocate Rohan Shah, appearing for the petitioner, added that though there was a phenomenal growth in the number of local train passengers in the past few years, infrastructure remained the same and inadequate. In many situations, deaths are disowned by authorities by terming them to be caused by "untoward incidents", he added. "It is almost a daily affair that newspapers carry reports of deaths of humans falling from running trains or being hit by a moving train while crossing railway tracks on the station itself... The issue raised in this petition needs urgent attention by all concerned, specially authorities at the higher level of the railway administration, including the member concerned in the Railway Board and principal chief security commissioners in zonal railways including Western and Central Railways," the bench said in its order. The bench directed higher-level officers nominated by the zonal general managers to file affidavits in reply within six weeks.

When the Western Railway's lawyer submitted that the railway had been implementing earlier orders of the high court in related matters, Chief Justice Upadhyaya orally asked if everything had been done as per past orders. "Have you been able to stop the deaths of passengers falling from running trains... It is your duty and responsibility. You should not depend on court directions to save the lives of people," he remarked orally. Chief Justice Upadhyaya went on to say, "Whether those (court) directions were sufficient? Would that be the end of the matter and can it check death rates? A large number of commuters (over 30 lakh per day on Western Railways) cannot be a refuge and you cannot be happy about it or use it as a refuge. You have to change your attitude and mindset. A very serious issue has been flagged in the PIL and therefore you have to address it. These excuses are not available to you. You carry human passengers like cattle." Chief Justice Upadhyaya said that "a very robust system" is required to keep the accidents in check. "I feel ashamed of the manner in which local train passengers are made to commute. You (railway officials) need to give a certain kind of commitment. Only then you can alleviate the situation," he added. He also said the authorities should aim to reduce the fatality rate to the minimum like in cities such as London.

State will no longer pay income tax for ministers as Madhya Pradesh cabinet strikes down 1972 rule



GNS News Agency, July 2

The Madhya Pradesh Cabinet on Tuesday decided that state ministers would pay their own income tax on salaries and allowances, striking down a 1972 rule under which the state government paid it for them. Urban Administration Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya said the move was suggested by Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during the Cabinet meeting.

"The Chief Minister proposed that ministers should pay their own income taxes on allowances, rather than the state government covering these taxes. The Cabinet has decided to end the provision allowing the state to pay these taxes," Vijayvargiya said. The Congress criticised the BJP government's move, with the party's state president Jitu Patwari saying the government should actually be curbing wasteful expenditure on "purchasing aeroplanes, decorating official bungalows, and buying luxury cars". According to section 9K of the Madhya

Pradesh Ministers (Salary and Allowances) Act, "No income tax shall be levied on any Minister, Minister of State, Deputy Minister, or Parliamentary Secretary for all allowances payable to them, for the facility of a furnished residence provided without payment of rent, and for other perquisites permissible to them under this Act."

"The income tax, as applicable, shall be payable by the State Government at the maximum rate payable by a Minister, Minister of State, Deputy Minister, or Parliamentary Secretary," the Act read. Officials from the Finance department said the law was enacted to ensure "ministers from poor backgrounds did not have to bear income tax burden".

With this practice coming to an end, officials said there would be "direct financial savings for the state", leading to "better allocation of resources towards development projects and public services". An official said, "Ministers paying their own taxes fosters a culture of responsibility and aligns with public expectations of transparency in governance. This will also reduce unnecessary expenditure from the state Budget, allowing funds to be redirected to other essential services and development projects. The state is currently reeling from financial burden..." There are other states that have in the past amended provisions exempting ministers from paying tax. In 2019, the Uttar Pradesh Cabinet decided to amend the law that exempted the Chief Minister and other ministers from paying their own income tax. The Himachal Pradesh Cabinet had in 2022 also said that all ministers and MLAs would pay their own income tax, which was till then being paid by the state government.

A tale of luxury homes on a flood-prone riverbank

GNS News Agency, July 2

Despite severe flooding last year that left the housing belt near the Kaushalya dam cut off from the mainland for four months, demand for property in this area remains high. Residents had to take a lengthy detour through villages to reach the mainland, but this has not deterred buyers. Major developers are promoting "pristine living" and an "elite club crafted by untouched nature," attracting buyers willing to pay crores for houses and flats. This rapidly developing area in the foothills of the Shivaliks, adjacent to the Panchkula-Kalka highway, has become highly sought after by elites, including retired defense personnel, judges, doctors, and advocates.

However, residents who have lived here for some time have a different story to tell. Festive offer Site for Trident Hills in Pinjore. Express Photo by Kamleshwar Singh Site for Trident Hills in Pinjore. (Express Photo by Kamleshwar Singh) Lt General KJ Singh (retd), who resides in the DLF Valley Panchkula near the Kaushalya dam, summed up the residents' situation with this poem: "Rehta Kaushalya- Ghaggar paar... Pehle Builder ne liya pocket maar... Phir, Sarkaar ne diya nakkar. Sehta baadh, gandagi ki maar. Chahe Tadi-paar, lekin himmat mat haar..." Singh recited this poem at a recent residents' event. Speaking to The Indian Express, Lt Gen Singh emphasized the need for the government to implement stringent measures in the trans-Ghaggar belt. "First off, I would say that it is typically not part of Panchkula; it is part of the Kalka Municipal Corporation, which neither provides proper civic facilities nor intervenes to ensure basic necessities. With ongoing development altering the geography, the government should ensure at least river protection works and manage the river's flow. That's the least they can do for the residents," he said. Singh highlighted that during the last floods, the entire area was cut off for four months, some houses at the periphery developed cracks, and there were "mudslides in the EWS units too."

"We suggest the government look at the ecological aspects and at least implement risk mitigation measures if development cannot be stopped. Some peripheral areas experienced water runoffs last year," he added, stressing that the government should not abandon this trans-Ghaggar belt. Col BS Rangji, President of Democrats Welfare Association of the Amravati Enclave Residents' Welfare Association (DWAAR), explained how the thought of the monsoon scares residents, making them feel disconnected from Panchkula. "Connectivity is a major issue for all residents here. The narrow bridge that Amravati constructed to connect to the main highway is not fit for heavy traffic. When we were cut off for four months and had to take the Pinjore route, we realized the government had abandoned us," Col Rangji said.

He added, "We are in an earthquake-prone area, and too many stilt-plus-floor structures have come up. We are building more houses without considering residents' safety." Work in progress of damaged bridge during last year flood at Kaushalya River in Pinjore. (Express Photo by Kamleshwar Singh) Work in progress of damaged bridge during last year flood at Kaushalya River in Pinjore. (Express Photo by Kamleshwar Singh)

Is this belt environmentally safe?

PEC Director Professor Baldev Setia stated that "any construction obstructing the river's right of way should be avoided." "About ten years ago, I had seen this area around the Kaushalya dam. With so much activity in and around the area, it is likely to change soil and slope characteristics. When floods occur, releasing water from upstream can cause erosion. Such activity should be avoided," he said. A retired chief engineer with the Irrigation Department told that "the housing near the banks of the river needs a relook." "There is something called the hitting zone of the stream. When you release water from the dam, it gushes through the hitting range. Carrying out activities in and near the hitting zone is very tricky because that kind of strata has sand and gravel," the former engineer from the Irrigation Department said, requesting anonymity. He explained, "For example, there is a difference when you construct a house on rock and when you construct a house on sand and gravel. Excess rain can make the latter unstable. These are earthen hills, not rocks." Construction in progress of stilt plus floors at DLF Pinjore. (Express Photo by Kamleshwar Singh) Construction in progress of stilt plus floors at DLF Pinjore.

The retired engineer also noted that the damage from the last floods should have been exemplary enough. "What happened during the last flooding is evident enough when the water took away a significant chunk of the main highway. By constructing, you are narrowing down the water's right of way. I would say that the housing near the banks requires a complete relook," he



added. The engineer emphasized that "the floodplain of a river basically serves as a cushion to mitigate the impact of the river's velocity. When you carry out construction activity in this floodplain, you narrow the area where water has to gush through, restricting the flow."

Stilt Plus Floor: Another Challenge A visit to the area showed several stilt plus floor houses rapidly coming up, with boards advertising individual floors for sale. "Even houses as small as 2 marlas are being reconstructed with four floors. When damage is occurring in houses on the plain land of proper Panchkula, you can imagine the plight here. High-rise buildings should be avoided in seismic zone 4," Ram Kumar Shokeen, a retired senior bank manager residing at Amravati, said.

Despite environmental concerns and residents' issues, this area has become the "pricy outskirts" of the region, attracting major real estate developers. Previously, DLF developed housing over 200 acres here. Now, another major developer, Trident, has entered the market with a project also spread over 200 acres. Rapid construction of internal roads connecting the private developers' housing is ongoing as buyers rush to purchase plots and flats. Amravati Enclave already occupies 118 acres. A 3 BHK basic flat in a private township, which cost around Rs 40 lakh a few years ago, is now selling for Rs 1.75 crore to Rs 3.35 crore. A plot up to 200 square yards costs over Rs 2.25 crore. Independent floors in the stilt plus floor buildings are also on sale, with one 4 BHK floor available. Villagers of Islamagar Majri recently protested against the construction of a wall by a private developer that virtually locked them in. The villager stated that "to hide them, the wall was being constructed, obstructing their connectivity." "They have constructed a wall around us. After the villagers protested, the developer agreed to give a 12-foot way for connectivity. We have lost our original open space," said Gurcharan Ambka, a zila parishad member.

Transgender persons to become school bus drivers in Karimnagar

GNS News Agency, July 2

Karimnagar: Collector Pamela Satpathy on Wednesday promised to provide driver jobs on private school buses to transgender persons if they learned driving. Those who were interested in working as school bus drivers could learn driving, she advised.

Conducting a meeting with the transgender community at the Collectorate here on Wednesday, Satpathy promised to provide all support to the transgender community and encourage them in fields wherein they were interested besides taking steps to provide jobs by giving training.

The Collector said employment opportunities would be given by forming groups and steps would also be taken to strengthen their financial status by providing bank loans. She later distributed identity certificates to transgender persons.

The Karimnagar district administration has been taking multiple steps to support the transgender community. In February 2023, a transgender woman was sanctioned a loan to set up a self-employment unit under the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme. Karimnagar also recorded a first by giving a transgender person a four-wheeler driving license the same day.

Ashadam Asha, a member from the scheduled caste community, was sanctioned a subsidy loan of Rs.5 lakh, with which she was planning to run a photo studio, while Nakka Sindhu was provided with a four-wheeler driving license.

'Emergency resolution in LS exposes anti-democratic thinking of Congress,' says Amit Shah



GNS News Agency, July 2

Birla's reference to the Emergency, shortly after his election as Lok Sabha speaker, also saw a face-off between the treasury benches and the opposition in the first session of the lower house. Birla's reference to the Emergency, shortly after his election as Lok Sabha speaker, also saw a face-off between the treasury benches and the opposition in the first session of the lower house. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday hailed Speaker Om Birla for moving a resolution in Lok Sabha condemning the imposition of Emergency in 1975 by former prime minister Indira Gandhi and said it has exposed the "anti-democratic" thinking of the Congress which harmed the major pillars of democracy like "judiciary, bureaucracy and media". Shah also said that Lok Sabha remembered the Emergency, which was an "Era of Injustice" and expressed its sympathy to the poor, Dalits and backward people, who had to suffer the exploitation and atrocities of the then Indira Gandhi government, when the rights of the citizens of the country were destroyed and their freedom was snatched away.

The home minister said many sensitive amendments made in the Constitution during the dark period of Emergency expose the dictatorial mentality of the Congress which centralised all powers in one person. "It (resolution) has exposed the anti-democratic thinking of the

Congress which has harmed the major pillars like judiciary, bureaucracy and media, has condemned the cruelty of Congress in imprisoning lakhs of opposition leaders for more than one and a half year without any reason," Shah wrote in a post on X in Hindi with hashtag #EmergencyHorrors. He said a message has also been given to spread awareness so that the Congress thinking that ended parliamentary democracy is never repeated.

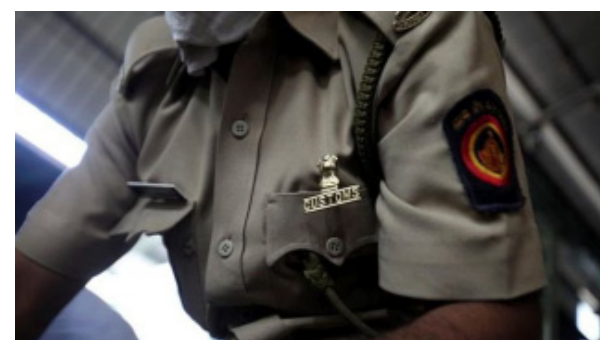
The home minister said the Lok Sabha also expressed regret at how the entire country was turned into a prison during the Emergency and how the Indira Gandhi government worked to crush the spirit of the country's Constitution. "Today, by moving a resolution in the Lok Sabha against the Emergency of 1975, Speaker Shri Om Birla has honoured the struggle of the Satyagrahis who raised their voices against the repression and exploitation of the Congress government that insulted Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution. I wholeheartedly support the resolution," he said. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla read out the resolution condemning the imposition of Emergency and termed the decision by Indira Gandhi an attack on the Constitution, triggering a wave of protests by the opposition in the House. Birla's reference to the Emergency, shortly after his election as Lok Sabha speaker, also saw a face-off between the treasury benches and the opposition in the first session of the lower house. "This House strongly condemns the decision to impose Emergency in 1975. We appreciate the determination of all those people who opposed the Emergency, fought and fulfilled the responsibility of protecting India's democracy," Birla said amid shouts of protests by the opposition parties. Opposition MPs, including those from the Congress, were on their feet, raising slogans against the reference to the Emergency. 1975 will always be known as a black chapter in the history of India. On this day, then prime minister Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency in the country and attacked the Constitution made by Babasaheb Ambedkar," the speaker said.

Customs and excise superintendent at Surat's airport suspended for 'hand-in-glove role' with gold paste smugglers

GNS News Agency, July 2

The Customs and Excise department superintendent of Surat has been suspended from her duties after a vigilance inquiry was proceeded against her for her alleged involvement in aiding gold smugglers. In the beginning of June, customs department officials received information about three women from Mumbai travelling to the UAE who were concealing illegally smuggled gold paste and were to land at Surat midway. The suspected superintendent, Preeti Arya, who was posted at the Surat airport, happened to be absent on the day of the landing.

Officials questioned and frisked the suspected travellers, finding over 1,400 grams of gold paste on them. On further questioning, the trio alleged that they have a "mutual understanding" with a customs female officer posted at Surat Airport who was not there on the day. The officials on the duty later learnt that these women were referring to Arya. Sources said that a departmental probe was initiated on these allegations. Arya's phones and other gadgets were seized by the vigilance team and her statements were also recorded.



A senior customs official on condition of anonymity said, "Preeti Arya has been suspended by the orders of the State Head of Customs and Excise department, after her role of hand-in-glove with the women. The probe is still ongoing." Sources said that Arya had earlier worked in Ahmedabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport. Her possible role there is also being assessed by department officials.

'Land-for-jobs scam': Delhi High Court grants Amit Katyal 6 weeks' interim bail on medical grounds

GNS News Agency, July 2

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday granted interim bail for six weeks on medical grounds to businessman Amit Katyal, who was arrested in the Enforcement Directorate's money-laundering case linked to the alleged land-for-jobs scam. A single-judge bench of Justice Dharmesh Sharma said in its order, "Having bestowed my thoughtful consideration to the submissions advanced by the learned counsels for the rival parties and on meticulous perusal of the relevant record of the case, this Court finds that evidently in terms of the report of the Deputy Superintendent, Central Jail No. 7, Tihar, Delhi, the dietary requirements for the health and survival of the petitioner are being provided only partially to him."

"If the remarks/opinion of the doctors at DDU Hospital are believed, the provision of a strict diet is very critical and essential for the adequate recovery of the petitioner since the surgery has led to removal of 75% of (the) stomach. The said remarks on the treatment card dated 21.06.2024 also... suggest that until and unless proper diet is given, the recovery of the patient is unlikely to happen. It is brought forth that the applicant has been experiencing fever and deranged blood glucose level besides the fact that there has been several episodes of blood vomiting," the court observed. The high court said that while the ED had rightly pointed out that AIIMS medical board (which the court had ordered to be constituted on June 7) had opined that treatment could easily be provided in the jail's primary healthcare facility, Katyal needed to be provided "special dietary requirements" to have "full physical, mental and psychological recovery" post his bariatric surgery. "Evidently, as per the diet chart for the period 13.06.2024 to 18.06.2024, the facilities at the jail appear to be completely ill-equipped so as to meet even the elementary dietary requirement of the petitioner," the court said after taking note of the diet chart provided to Katyal, placed on the record by the Tihar Jail superintendent. Taking note of a June 14 report of the AIIMS medical board, a June 21 prescription of the treating doctors at DDU Hospital and Katyal's medical history, the high court said, "It is but manifest that the dietary requirements of the applicant are such that they cannot be provided in the jail premises. Considering that the petitioner has undergone surgery on 09.04.2024, post-bariatric surgery, he needs to be given a proper diet in order to attain adequate physical, mental and psychological well-being for at least a period of 3 to 4 months."

The high court said the "level of care, attention, minute-to-minute monitoring and emergency response" that Katyal requires "cannot be provided at the jail

presently". Justice Sharma further said that providing home-cooked food on an "everyday basis for a long duration is fraught with several technical hurdles at the jail premises".

The high court also observed that although the chargesheet has since been filed against Katyal, the matter is still under investigation with respect to the co-accused in the case. It also noted that Katyal was previously granted interim bail on the medical grounds for about 84 days, and nothing was attributed against him to claim that he interfered or influenced the course of investigation in any manner. The high court allowed Katyal's application for interim bail on medical grounds for a period six weeks from the date of his release from jail, subject to certain terms and conditions such as that Katyal should furnish a "personal bond with a surety of Rs 2,50,000 each to the satisfaction of the concerned court/ Duty MM".

The conditions also include that Katyal should appear before the court as and when directed, surrender his passport before the investigating officer at the time of his release and not leave the country during the bail period. On June 7, a coordinate single-judge bench of the high court ordered the constitution of a medical board at AIIMS to evaluate Katyal's condition after observing that in the absence of an expert opinion, it was difficult for the court to conclude whether it was a case for grant of interim bail on medical grounds. The high court then said that Katyal's medical condition borne out from the medical status report "cannot be simply brushed aside" as the material on record suggested that he was a heart patient and had undergone bariatric surgery recently besides having other ailments.

The high court then directed the director of AIIMS to immediately constitute a medical board of doctors from minimum three different specialities related to the nature of ailments Katyal claimed to be suffering from. Katyal was arrested by the ED in November last year in the case stemming from a CBI investigation into allegations that when RJD president Lalu Prasad was railways minister, people were given railway jobs in return for land parcels gifted or sold at cheap rates to his family members and associates. Atyal and his AK Infosystems Private Limited had been under the scanner of the CBI and the ED in connection with the alleged scam for a long time. The ED has found during its investigation that AK Infosystems had received a land parcel from a relative of a candidate who was selected as a Group D substitute in the Railways. In 2014, Katyal allegedly handed over his company to the family members of Lalu Prasad.

Tribal Affairs Minister's promise to look into Nicobar project clearances 'mildly' encouraging: Congress



GNS News Agency, July 2

Calling Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram's promise to look into the clearances granted for the ₹72,000 crore Great Nicobar Island Project only "mildly" encouraging, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Wednesday doubted how much power Union Ministers have over their own portfolios in a government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He also called for the Tribal Affairs Minister to review all decisions taken in the last 10 years that "weakened tribal rights".

Mr. Ramesh, Congress' General Secretary-in-charge, Communications, was responding to Mr. Oram's remarks with The Hindu, published on Monday. In the

interaction, Mr. Oram had said that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs would be looking into the forest clearances granted for the mega infrastructure project while highlighting his intent to focus on forest and land rights issues of tribal communities during his term.

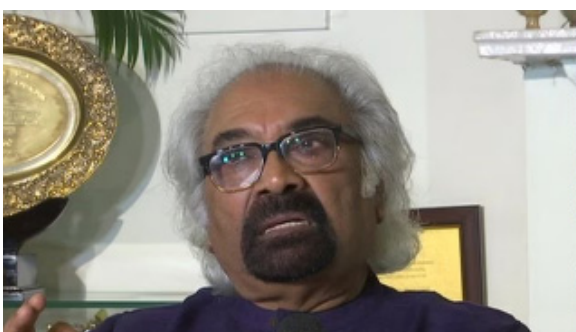
Mr. Oram's remarks had come as the Congress pushed hard to withdraw clearances granted for the project and ground-up review of it citing complaints that it would be detrimental to the environment on the island and the people who reside there — including the Shompen — a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group. Responding to Mr. Oram's promise of looking into the complaints against the project's clearances, Mr. Ramesh said in a social media post on X (formerly Twitter), "The very first interview given by the Minister of Tribal Affairs Jual Oram indicates that he is not averse to a review of the 72,000 crores project in Greater Nicobar Islands that is a perfect recipe for ecological and humanitarian disaster. This is mildly encouraging. I say 'mildly' because the REAL decisions are taken for him by the non-biological PM and his band." He added that "while he's at it", the Tribal Affairs Minister should also ensure "independent" functioning of bodies like the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) and called for a review of the Forest Conservation Rules, 2022, over which then NCST chief Harsh Chouhan had raised serious concerns before resigning. He also called for Mr. Oram to review all other decisions taken between 2014 and 2024 that "weakened tribal rights while giving environmental and forest clearances" — including the Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023 and the Biological Diversity Amendment Act of 2023. Mr. Ramesh also urged that the Tribal Affairs Minister strengthen the forest rights movement, which was "launched through the Forest Rights Act (2006) in April 2011 from Menda Lekha Gram Sabha in Gadchiroli District of Maharashtra".

Sam Pitroda re-appointed Indian Overseas Congress chairman, month after stepping down from post

GNS News Agency, July 2

Gandhi family loyalist Sam Pitroda was re-appointed as the Indian Overseas Congress' chairman on Wednesday, a month after he stepped down from the position following ire over his politically incorrect remarks to underline India's diversity. His remarks had drawn criticism from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP's chief ministers in the Northeast.

Pitroda had said in an interview to The Statesman, "People in the East look like the Chinese, people in the West look like the Arabs, people in the North look like, maybe, White, and people in the South look like Africans," adding, "It does not matter. All of us are brothers and sisters." Then in the middle of campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls, the Congress had accepted his resignation, hoping for damage control. Senior party leader Jairam Ramesh said, "The analogies drawn by Mr Sam Pitroda in a podcast to illustrate India's diversity are most unfortunate and unacceptable. The Indian National Congress completely dissociates itself from these analogies." Meanwhile, Modi had aimed a salvo at Pitroda's remarks. "Can people's ability be decided on the basis of their skin colour? Yeh chamadi ki rang ka khel Shehzade ko kisne ijazat di hai. Samvidhan sar pe lekarke nachne wale log.. (Who gave him permission for this game on skin colour. Those who dance around with the Constitution on their head) are insulting the people of my country on the basis of skin colour. Shehzade... you will have to answer. The nation will not tolerate insulting our citizens on the basis of skin colour and Modi will never tolerate it," he said at a rally in Telangana in



May. Assam Chief Minister and chairman of the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance, Himanta Biswa Sarma, had said, "Sam bhai. I am from the Northeast and I look like an Indian. We are a diverse country — we may look different but we are all one. Hamare desh ke baare mein thoda to samajh lo (learn about our country a bit)." Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma also condemned the remarks.

Pitroda was also in the eye of the storm in April when he said that the inheritance tax along the lines of the United States law was an "interesting" provision. In 1989, he became the first chairman of the Telecom Commission and also headed the National Knowledge Commission from 2005 to 2009 under PM Manmohan Singh. In 2009, he was appointed as an adviser to the PM on public information infrastructure with the rank of a Cabinet minister. Pitroda also organises Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's international speaking events, among other engagements.

NIA declares Rs 10 lakh cash reward each on arrest of Canada-based terrorist Goldy Brar, his aide



GNS News Agency, July 2

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday declared a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh each for sharing information that can help in arresting Canada-based terrorist Goldy Brar and another accused wanted in an "extortion and firing" case in Chandigarh. The two accused are wanted in the case related to firing at the house of a businessman as part of an extortion bid on March 8 this year, said a statement issued by the probe agency. The case has been registered under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Unlawful Activities (Prevention)

Act and the Arms Act against accused Satwinder Singh alias Satinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar, son of Shamsher Singh, a resident of Adesh Nagar, Sri Muktsar Sahib City, Punjab, and accused Gurpreet Singh alias Goldy Dhillon alias Goldy Rajpura, son of Sukhjinder Singh of Baba Deep Singh Colony, Rajpura, Punjab, it said.

"The NIA on Wednesday spread its dragnet further in search of designated terrorist Goldy Brar and one other gangster wanted in a case of extortion and firing at the house of a businessman in Chandigarh with the declaration of a cash reward for their arrest," the statement said. The agency has announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh each for any information leading to the apprehension/arrest of either of the two men, it said, adding the "identity of the informant will be kept a secret". Information with regard to the duo can be shared at the NIA headquarters telephone number 011-24368800, WhatsApp/Telegram: +91-8585931100 and through email ID: do.nia@gov.in. Inputs can also be shared at telephone number: 0172-2682900, 2682901, WhatsApp/Telegram number: 7743002947 and email ID: info-chd.nia@gov.in of the probe agency's Chandigarh branch office, the statement said.

13-year-old girl gang-raped, killed; body found along Haridwar highway

GNS News Agency, July 2

A 13-year-old girl who went missing three days ago was found dead along a highway here with her mother alleging she was gang-raped by a local BJP worker and his accomplice before being murdered, police said on Wednesday. The body was found along the highway in the Bahadrapur area on Tuesday morning, they added. The main accused, Adityaraj Saini, was a member of the local BJP OBC Morcha. The party expelled him from his primary membership on Tuesday, according to a letter issued by state BJP general secretary Aditya Kothari. The girl's mother claimed Adityaraj, who is the husband of a village head, was in a relationship with her daughter who suddenly went missing on Sunday

evening. When she called her on her mobile phone, it was received by Adityaraj who said the girl was with him. The phone got switched off after that, the victim's mother said in her complaint. After the teenager did not return home until next day morning, the woman went to the man's house, where the accused accomplice Amit Saini also resides, but could not find her. When she told him she would take the matter to police, Adityaraj pressured her not to do so and threatened to kill her if she did. The girl's mother, however, approached the police and lodged a missing complaint on Monday. After the body was found on Tuesday, the woman alleged her daughter was gang-raped and killed by Adityaraj and Amit.

Why Tamil Nadu is pressing Centre for a caste census



GNS News Agency, July 2

The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution on Wednesday urging the Centre to conduct a caste-based census along with the pending population census. The resolution, proposed by Chief Minister M K Stalin, talks about the necessity of a census to formulate policies ensuring equal rights and opportunities in education, economy, and employment for every citizen of India. "This House considers that caste-based population census is essential to formulate policies in order to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities in education, economy and employment to every citizen of India. This House, therefore, unanimously urges the Union Government to immediately commence the census work, which is due from the year 2021, along with caste-based population census," the resolution said.

The call for a caste-based census has been a contentious issue in national politics, with various states and political parties advocating for it to address socio-economic disparities. In Tamil Nadu, the demand has been particularly strong due to the state's history of caste-based reservations and social justice movements. There was 16 percent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and 25 percent for other backward classes (OBC) in 1951. The Karunanidhi regime, in 1971, had increased the OBC reservation to 30%, and for SCs and STs to 18%. His third regime conferred a 20% exclusive reservation, a radical move, for most backward classes (MBCs) by taking them away from the OBC category. The impact of this reform was that, for

instance, 187 seats were reserved for MBC students in 1989-90 as compared to 65 in 1988-89. During the debate in the assembly, Pattai Makkal Katchi (PMK) MLA R Arul voiced his disagreement with the resolution, suggesting that the state government itself could conduct a caste-based census. However, Law Minister S Regupathy countered this by explaining the legal constraints. "Though the state government could undertake the exercise of a caste-based census under the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008, the Census Act could override this," he said.

Chief Minister Stalin also addressed the House, recalling his previous communication with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023, where he demanded a caste census alongside the general census. "The decisions and acts of a state government can get legal protection only if they are done on the basis of data collected by the Centre. If state governments collect data through surveys, these may be stayed by the courts in the future," he said. Stalin explained that under Section 3 of the Census Act, only the Union government is authorised to conduct a census. While there is an argument that a state government could conduct a caste-based census as per the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008, this act only permits the collection of data on socio-economic conditions, not a comprehensive caste census. The resolution came after PMK floor leader G K Mani raised the issue of a 10.5% reservation for the Vanniyar community. Mani demanded the implementation of separate reservation for Vanniyars, and Stalin replied that this would be possible only after a caste-based census was conducted. "Even in Bihar, the caste-wise census has been stayed by the High Court," Stalin said, and reminded Mani that his own party, the PMK, is part of the NDA alliance. On Monday, Law Minister Regupathy, who engaged in the debate, reiterated that the 10.5% reservation for Vanniyars was struck down by the Madras High Court and the Supreme Court due to the lack of proper socio-economic data. He emphasised that the current government had provided additional terms of reference to the Backward Classes Commission and supplied data on educational and employment opportunities. However, comprehensive socio-economic data could only be collected through a nationwide caste census.

From remote Chhattisgarh village to IIT Gandhinagar: Inspiring journey of a farmer's son who dreamt big

GNS News Agency, July 2

Amid the challenges of the harsh realities of impoverished life, 22-year-old R Yeeshu Dhurandhar's determination to rise above his circumstances set him on a journey from a modest village in Chhattisgarh to the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar (IITGN), over 1,300 kilometres away. From the remote village of Jara, nestled in the Balodabazar district of Chhattisgarh, where long-term goals are a rarity and daily wage labour is the norm, the Dhurandhar family who are farmers had never thought Yeeshu would someday make it to the sought-after premier technology institute.

At the 13th convocation of IITGN on June 29, Yeeshu, the second son of Salik Ram and Rukhmani Dhurandhar, will receive his degree in Electrical Engineering, with minors in Computer Science and Engineering and Artificial Intelligence. Jara, located 70 kilometres from Raipur, had never seen anyone secure a place at an IIT, making Yeeshu's achievement a groundbreaking milestone.

He is among the batch that was started amid the COVID-19 pandemic that posed significant challenges. Just as Yeeshu was about to start his classes, the pandemic forced him to stay home, facing unreliable internet and an un conducive learning environment. With first-year students not provided with hostel facilities due to Covid pandemic, Yeeshu risked falling behind. He wrote an email to the then IITGN director Professor Sudhir Jain, detailing his predicament. The director, recognising the gravity of the situation, formed a committee that eventually granted Yeeshu hostel accommodation.

Yeeshu's academic journey began at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) in Raipur, where he studied from Class 6 to 12. Out of 30,000 applicants at JNV, Yeeshu was among the 80 who were selected. He attributes this to the guidance and support of his elder brother, S Anshu, who helped him prepare for the JNV entrance examination. At JNV, Yeeshu fondly recalls his mathematics teacher H K Chandrakar, science teacher Jaimala Shrivastava, and the then Principal Neelam Pani. "Their strict yet nurturing approach inspired me to realize my full potential. Their insistence on excellence and unwavering belief in my capabilities were instrumental in shaping my academic aspirations," he says. Clearing the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) and securing admission to IIT Gandhinagar in Electrical Engi-



neering was a significant achievement. However, Yeeshu's passion lay in Computer Science. Despite being placed during his internship with Rs 30 lakh CTC, he pursued two dual minors in Computer Science and Engineering and Artificial Intelligence, aligning his studies with his entrepreneurial ambitions. He recently completed an internship at Skan.AI in Bengaluru and is set to join the company as a Data Scientist in July. Throughout his time at IIT Gandhinagar, he funded his education through numerous scholarships, with significant support from the Chhattisgarh government, and his family's unwavering support remained a constant source of strength. Reflecting on his journey, Yeeshu feels a profound sense of gratitude and luck. Returning to Jara, Yeeshu was struck by the stark contrast between his achievements and the paths taken by his peers. "Many of my classmates had abandoned their studies to sell vegetables, a reality that deepened my gratitude and solidified my resolve to make a difference," he says. Yeeshu is not content with his success; he dreams of contributing to higher education nationwide, ensuring that more students from remote villages like Jara can break free from their circumstances and achieve their full potential.

'Illegal and high-ended acts': SC notice to Delhi govt, forest dept, civic agencies over tree felling

GNS News Agency, July 2

Supreme Court (Express photo by Abhinav Saha) The apex court had earlier issued a notice of criminal contempt against DDA vice chairman for allowing the large-scale felling of trees in the southern Ridge's Satbari area to build a road from Chhattarpur to South Asian University.

Considering the "illegal and high-ended acts" of felling of trees in the national capital, the Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notices to the Delhi government, the forest and environment department, the Tree Authority, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). The top court further directed the Delhi government and the civic agencies to convene a meeting and discuss comprehensive measures to enhance the city's green cover while observing that people are feeling the heat as tree cover is lost.

A vacation bench of Justice Abhay S Oka and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan said it expects the forest department and tree authority to keep a vigil on the activity of illegal damaging of trees in Delhi. The Supreme Court had on Monday quizzed the DDA over the felling of trees in the national capital's protected Ridge area and sought to know if the Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G), the Chairman of the Authority, had anything to do with it. A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan, which perused a report of a committee set up by



DDA to enquire into the matter, said the emails purportedly sent by the Executive Engineer to the contractor referred to a "site visit by the L-G on February 3" and that "emails state the L-G, after the visit, directed to clear the trees".

The apex court had earlier issued a notice of criminal contempt against DDA vice chairman Subhasish Panda for allowing the large-scale felling of trees in the southern Ridge's Satbari area to build a road from Chhattarpur to South Asian University. It had expressed displeasure over a "misleading" affidavit filed by the vice chairman and presenting "wrong facts" before the court. It also directed the planting of 100 trees for each tree felled by the DDA.

Biden vs Trump: What will be the face-off points in first 2024 presidential debate?



GNS News Agency, July 2

Joe Biden and Donald Trump are headed for the first 2024 presidential debate on Thursday, June 27. The US president previously challenged the presumptive GOP nominee in a video, saying, "Make my day." As all eyes will be on them, here's a look at some of the potential face-off points: Earlier this month, Biden released a new campaign in an indirect attack on his Republican rival. The advertisement brings to the viewer's notice Trump's guilty verdict in the historic hush money trial. "This election is between a convicted criminal who is only out for himself and a president who is fighting for your family," the voiceover says.

Although Trump's historic guilty verdict has made him the first-ever US president in history to be convicted of criminal charges, it may offer him an opportunity, according to Republican strategist James Davis. Explaining how the former president can turn it in his favour, Davis told Al Jazeera, "He can say, 'I've known that the justice system doesn't treat people fairly across the board... and that's why I passed the First Step Act, because it's been treating minority and Black communities unfairly for

years.'" However, Davis warned that Trump "can do well" only "if he can keep it clean and message-focused, adding, "But if he appears to lean more into the Trump revenge tour, then that will ultimately substantiate some of the arguments against him that Biden has been making."

Democratic strategist Kristian Ramos notes that the debate holds an exclusive opportunity for Biden in terms of what his administration has done for the US economy. "It's an opportunity for him to tell the story of the last three years and what he's done and how he can help the American people," Ramos told the outlet. Ramos explained that Biden could highlight his administration's policies on employment as Trump's conviction may cause some of his potential voters to drift away. "It still may be a bridge too far for many voters," Ramos said of Trump's guilty verdict, adding, "So this is an opportunity for Biden to tell that story to those voters and to reach them through the debate."

On one too many occasions, the Republican frontrunner has said that he was proud of his role in overturning Roe vs. Wade. His selection of justices during the Trump administration enabled the court to throw away the case, triggering abortion restrictions and bans in several states. Although he has previously said he won't establish a nationwide ban on abortion should he be re-elected, his track record won't be enough to convince those fighting for abortion rights. Illegal immigration, Israel-Hamas war and other foreign issues Meanwhile, the major topic that looms over Biden in the coming debate is foreign issues. With the Biden administration facing heat amid the Israel-Hamas war and Trump's most favourite topic of discussion being illegal immigration, the US president may face some tough questions, which could play a major part in gaining or losing the trust of his voters.

U.S., India can achieve headway in defence, technologies and economic prosperity in Modi 3.0: Eric Garcetti



GNS News Agency, July 2

Congratulating Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP and the ruling NDA coalition for their successful election, Mr. Garcetti said in Modi 3.0 is a time to turn dreams of the bilateral relationship into reality. "I think in Modi 3.0, it's a time for us to take our dreams and to really make them reality," Mr. Garcetti said in the interview with PTI, the first by a senior Biden Administration official after the recent general elections in India in which after which Prime Minister Modi was voted to power for a historic third consecutive term. "Whether it's the work that we're doing together on our defence partnership, whether it's our critical emerging technologies, or whether it's the work that we're doing to build economic prosperity, I think those three things in Modi 3.0, we can look forward to seeing an ambitious India working with an ambitious America to achieve," Mr. Garcetti said. "I think 3.0 is all about how we make the U.S. and India, again, this relationship that can do good not only for our people but in the world, that can show the world that democracies are better than dictatorships, that a free and open Indo-Pacific is something that is a benefit to every human being," he said. Mr. Garcetti, who recently completed one year as the United States envoy to India, said that during Prime Minister Modi's second term, "we saw a state visit, the visit of the President during G20, and over 150 agreements reached on everything from the seabed to the stars". "Whether it's in space, whether it's in health, whether it's in defence, whether it's in trade, we resolved past conflicts and really moved forward with our ambitions in the future," the 53-year-old former Mayor of Los Angeles city, said. Mr. Garcetti, a close confidant of President Joe Biden is currently in Washington DC to attend the Select USA Summit, in which India has the largest delegation. He will also address the U.S.-India Aviation Summit, the first in seven years.

Responding to a question on the Indian elections, he said, "First of all, what an impressive election to see a country of 1.4 billion people exercise their right to vote, to see the logistics, the security, the work that was done to ensure the largest democratic election in the world was

awesome to see." "Second, elections are all about people exercising their fundamental rights. It was wonderful for us to see that. We are the two largest democracies in the world," he said. Congratulating Prime Minister Modi, the BJP, and the coalition for their successful election, he said, "It certainly is a group of leaders that we know well, that we respect well, and we work with incredibly well." "We can't wait to get back to business. But I assure people, even in the midst of an election, the U.S.-India relationship didn't take a pause and didn't miss a beat," he said. "We continued that critical work, even in the height of the Indian election, as I know it will continue in the height of ours," he said in response to a question. Describing his ambassadorship as the best job in the world, he said he feels like the luckiest guy on the face of the earth. "Personally, I have loved the warmth that Indians have received me with. I love my interactions with my Indian counterparts," he said. Underscoring that he has tried to promote two things, Mr. Garcetti said, "One is that this is a bigger relationship than just us. Whether we work together in Africa, Pacific Island countries, Southeast Asia, in the multilateral space, in delivering the best G20 ever, that when India and the U.S. are aligned, we're an unstoppable force." Secondly, Mr. Garcetti asserted that this is more than about governments to governments. "What I have felt is not just my amazing interactions with the Prime Minister, with the Minister of External Affairs and other members of the cabinet, it's been local people in small villages, in remote states, in places off the tourist map where I really have seen the soul of India alive and breathing and its ambitions," he said. He said his fundamental impression of India as a diverse democracy full of the "most generous, welcoming people anywhere on the face of the earth" hasn't changed. "It's a place that is always in a constant state of flux, that is the crossroad of the past and the future together. What has changed is seeing on the ground what's being actually built," he said. "When I arrived in India when I was just 14 years old, you know, it was an underdeveloped country that was struggling with infrastructure, could barely get the power there, and wasn't connected to the international economy," he said. "It was a proud, independent nation, but it wasn't yet prosperous. And what I can see now is that vision of prosperity for everyone," he said. "I also see the empowerment of people who are the most creative, entrepreneurial, and also caring people that I've ever met, who want to help their fellow Indians do better," he added. "I also see the breakdown of kind of the insular look of India having to survive on its own, it's now able to project itself into the world, whether it's protecting the oceans, as we've seen in the West Indian Ocean recently, its piracy, whether it's in development and health, manufacturing the world's vaccines," he said. "Those are the sorts of things that, to me, inspire me that the India of tomorrow is different in its capacity, but it fundamentally hasn't changed in its soul," Mr. Garcetti said.

Sri Lanka finalises debt restructuring agreement after financial crisis

GNS News Agency, July 2

Sri Lanka's government said on June 26 it has finalised a long-delayed debt restructuring agreement for \$5.8 billion with its bilateral lenders, including India and China, in Paris to meet a key condition of an IMF bailout. This was announced by President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office, which said the agreement grants significant debt relief allowing Sri Lanka to allocate funds to essential public services and secure concessional financing for its development needs. "Sri Lanka reached a final restructuring agreement for \$5.8 billion with its bilateral lenders' official creditor committee in Paris," the President's office said in a statement. The statement came ahead of a televised address to the nation later tonight by Mr. Wickremesinghe, who has steered the effort to take the island out of the economic crisis since Sri Lanka declared its first-ever sovereign default in 2022. Mr. Wickremesinghe, who also holds the portfolio as the finance minister, is expected to contest the presidential election in the coming months. It is understood that Mr. Wickremesinghe, 75, will 'declare an end to bankruptcy' following the agreement reached with bilateral creditors and private bondholders on external debt restructuring.

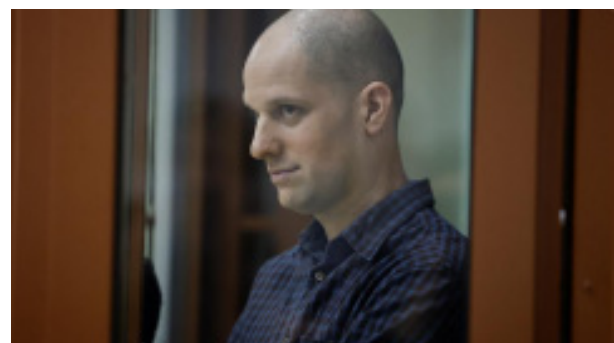


India and the rest. The government officials said a special session of Parliament is to be convened on July 2 ahead of its scheduled July 8 date to discuss the deal. Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena has issued a special gazette convening parliament on July 2 at the request of Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena. Having sealed the deal with the bilateral creditors the Government was to have another round of talks starting this week with private creditors and the international sovereign bondholders for restructuring. By March 2024, the outstanding commercial loan stock was \$14,735.9 million. Waiting for the 'good news' Earlier this week, posters appeared on the city walls captioned "good news" which appears to be part of the political campaign on the success of the debt restructuring effort which took so long to achieve. Sri Lanka in mid-April of 2022 declared its only sovereign default since gaining independence in 1948.

The International Monetary Fund had made external debt restructuring conditional to the \$2.9 billion bailout, the third tranche of which came to be released last week. Mr. Wickremesinghe supervised the IMF programme while setting in motion hard economic reforms prescribed by the world lender. On June 23, he made his first public statement on the presidential election, which is likely to take place in the last quarter of this year. Addressing a group of youth, he said that the election could take place either in September or October. Mr. Wickremesinghe is yet to announce his candidacy, while two other main opposition leaders have already declared their candidacy. In July 2022, he was elected through parliament to become stop-gap president for the balance term of Gotabaya Rajapaksa who resigned following public protests over his inability to handle the economic crisis.

Who is Evan Gershkovich and why is he on trial in Russia?

U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich went on trial in Russia on June 26 on spying charges, which he denies. Here is a short guide to his case. Who is Evan Gershkovich? Mr. Gershkovich is a 32-year-old American who grew up in New Jersey, the son of Soviet parents who emigrated to the United States in 1979. He joined the Wall Street Journal in January 2022 and was among the small number of Western journalists to continue reporting from inside Russia after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February of that year. When and why was he arrested?



The FSB security service arrested him on March 29, 2023, in a steakhouse in the city of Yekaterinburg, where he was on a reporting trip. He was accused of spying, which carries a sentence of up to 20 years. Prosecutors allege he was gathering information on the orders of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency about Uralvagonzavod, a Russian company that makes tanks for the war in Ukraine. Since his arrest, he has been held for nearly 16 months in Moscow's Lefortovo prison. Mr. Gershkovich and the Wall Street Journal vehemently protest his innocence. They say he was doing his job as a reporter accredited by Russia's Foreign Ministry to work there. The WSJ says the trial is a sham and a guilty verdict is a foregone conclusion. What does the Kremlin say? The Kremlin says the case is a legal, not a political, matter but has alleged from the start — without presenting evidence — that Mr. Gershkovich was caught "red-handed". President Vladimir Putin has said Russia is open to a possible prisoner exchange with the United States involving Gershkovich, and that contacts have taken place but must remain secret.

What is the U.S.' stand? Washington says Russia is using Mr. Gershkovich as a bargaining chip and should immediately free him and Paul Whelan, a former U.S. Marine who was convicted in 2020 and is serving a 16-year sentence for spying. It has designated both men as "wrongfully detained".

What will the trial look like? The trial is taking place

behind closed doors, meaning that the proceedings are secret and the lawyers must sign non-disclosure agreements. No press, family members or U.S. embassy officials are allowed inside, although two U.S. consular staff travelled to Yekaterinburg for the start of the case and had brief access to Mr. Gershkovich before it began. Wednesday's hearing concluded after several hours and the next one is on August 13, an indication that the case will drag on for a number of months. Evgeniy Smirnov, a lawyer specialising in cases of treason and espionage, said there was no precedent in Mr. Putin's Russia for a defendant in a spy case to be acquitted in court. But if Mr. Gershkovich is found guilty, it could clear the way for a deal on a prisoner swap — something that Russia said, very early on in his case, could only happen after a trial had taken place. Judge Andrei Mineyev is hearing the case. He is the son of a policeman and has spent three decades working in the legal system. He is also presiding over the treason trial that opened this month of Ksenia Karelina, a U.S.-Russian dual national accused of donating funds to the Ukrainian armed forces. In a 2021 interview, he said he had only overseen "three or four" acquittals in his career. "The system is organised in such a way that, ideally, cases against innocent and uninvolved persons do not get to court at all. That's why the percentage is so small. There is nothing wrong with that," he said.

Indian-origin victim of U.K.'s Post Office scandal rejects apology

GNS News Agency, July 2

An Indian-origin former manager of a Post Office in England wrongly jailed while pregnant has rejected the apology of an engineer whose evidence helped convict her over faulty accounting software. Seema Misra, now 47, had her conviction quashed in April 2021 as the Court of Appeal ruled that she had been wrongly imprisoned over 12 years ago after being accused of stealing GBP 75,000 from her Post Office branch in Surrey where she was the sub-postmistress. At the ongoing public inquiry into the scandal, she told the BBC that the apology of ex-Fujitsu engineer Gareth Jenkins was "too little, too late". "Nobody can understand it," she said of the ordeal she went through and said Mr. Jenkins could have apologised "ages ago". Her reaction followed a written witness statement submitted to the Post Office Inquiry by Mr. Jenkins, in which he said: "I did not know that Mrs. Misra was pregnant at the time of her conviction and only learned of this many years later." This makes what has happened even more tragic. I can only apologise, again, to Mrs. Misra and her family for what happened to her." The former engineer who appeared as an expert witness in 15 sub-postmaster cases is currently being investigated by police for potential perjury or lying to a court. In one of his earlier witness statements to the inquiry, he denied any wrongdoing. Earlier, Ms. Misra had rejected a similar apology from former Post Office Managing Director David Smith for a congratulatory email he sent after Ms. Misra's conviction. "It was intended to be a congratulatory email to the team, knowing that they had worked hard on the case," Mr. Smith said in his written evidence to the inquiry. "However, knowing what I do now, it is evident that my email would have caused Seema Misra and her family substantial distress to read and I would like to apologise for that... Even if this had been a correct conviction, I would absolutely never think that it was 'brilliant

news' for a pregnant woman to go to prison and I am hugely apologetic that my email can be read as such," he said. "However, seeing this email in the light of what I know now, I understand the anger and the upset that it will have caused and sincerely apologise for that," he added. "I was eight weeks pregnant — they need to apologise to my youngest son. It was terrible. I haven't accepted the apologies," Ms. Misra said at the time in April. "We had my conviction overturned, nobody came at that time to apologise. And now they just suddenly realised that when they have to appear in a public inquiry, they have to apologise," she said. Ms. Misra was sent to Bronzefield prison in south-east England and served four-and-a-half months, later giving birth to her second son wearing an electronic tag. Mr. Smith told the inquiry that Ms. Misra had been used as a "test case" and the success of the case led to more confidence in the faulty Horizon IT accounting system. "How can they do a test on a human being? I'm a living creature. I heard that my case has been used as a test case before. But hearing it again and again, it's just annoying. It makes me more and more angry, to be honest," Ms. Misra added. The U.K. government, which formally owns Post Office Ltd, has paid out millions in compensation to hundreds of sub-postmasters — many of them of Indian heritage — impacted by the faulty Horizon software. Earlier this year, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledged action in the historic scandal which wrongly accused sub-postmasters of fraud. Last month, a new law tabled in Parliament introduced the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Bill, a blanket exoneration to quash convictions brought about by erroneous Horizon evidence. A public inquiry in the case, underway in a phased manner, is expected to conclude in July. The controversial Horizon system, developed by the Japanese company Fujitsu, was first rolled out in 1999 to some post offices to be used for a variety of tasks, including accounting and stocktaking.

Suspected North Korean hypersonic missile exploded in flight, South Korea says

GNS News Agency, July 2

A South Korean national flag flutters in the wind at the unification observatory in Paju, South Korea, Wednesday, June 26, 2024. A suspected hypersonic missile launched by North Korea exploded in flight on Wednesday, South Korea's military said, a development that comes as North Korea is protesting the regional deployment of a U.S. aircraft carrier for a trilateral military drill with South Korea and Japan. A South Korean national flag flutters in the wind at the unification observatory in Paju, South Korea, Wednesday, June 26, 2024. A suspected hypersonic missile launched by North Korea exploded in flight on Wednesday, South Korea's military said, a development that comes as North Korea is protesting the regional deployment of a U.S. aircraft carrier for a trilateral military drill with South Korea and Japan. A suspected hypersonic missile launched by North Korea exploded in flight on Wednesday, South Korea's

military said, as North Korea protests the regional deployment of a U.S. aircraft carrier for a military drill with South Korea and Japan. Later Wednesday, South Korea conducted live-fire drills along its disputed western sea boundary with North Korea, its first since it suspended a 2018 agreement with the North aimed at reducing front-line military tensions in early June. The North Korean missile was launched at about 5:30 a.m. and was aimed toward the North's eastern waters before the failure, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Missile fragments were scattered in the water up to 250 kilometers (155 miles) from the launch site near North Korea's capital, it said. No damage was immediately reported. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said it believes the weapon was a solid-fueled hypersonic missile. The launch generated more smoke than normal launches, possibly because of an engine fault, it told South Korean reporters at a background briefing. The contents of the briefing were shared with foreign media.

Unambiguous commitment needed to bring down inflation to 4% target: RBI Governor Das



basis points (bps) cut in the repo rate. Drawing an analogy from the game of chess, Das stated that while dealing with the challenge of inflation, a single wrong move can throw one off the track and coming back to the track can be far more costly and time consuming. "There is one game where if you make a wrong move, you are finished... that is the game of chess. Therefore, as in the game of chess, we cannot afford to make any mistake or policy error or any wrong move. We have to play our game and decide our monetary policy actions primarily driven by the inflation numbers and the outlook that we have," Das said.

The RBI has projected CPI at 4.5 per cent in FY2025. Inflation is expected to be at 4.9 per cent in Q1, 3.8 per cent in Q3, 4.6 per cent in Q3 and 4.5 per cent in Q4. On growth, the Governor said the growth in the country is well sustained and the outlook for the current year looks very optimistic. "We are very sanguine about the fact that India will record 7.2 per cent growth in the current year (FY2025)," Das said.

He said in Q4 FY2024, the country recorded a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 7.8 per cent and growth in the first quarter of this financial year is estimated at 7.3 per cent. Das said the growth momentum continues to be strong and rural consumption, which was lagging for a long time, has now picked up. The external demand has also gained traction. "Government capital expenditure has sustained the growth story over the last three years in the post-COVID period, but now private sector investment is picking up in specific sectors including cement and steel," he said. Das, however, said the risks to growth include weather-related events, frequent geo-political conflicts, fragmentation in global trade and capital flows and a possibility of heightened financial sector volatility.

Did you know Indian textile ikat was first discovered in an Egyptian pharaoh's tomb?



royalty or auspicious occasions, spoke volumes without a single word. The creation of ikat, often a family legacy passed down through generations, demanded the patience of a meditating sadhu and the dexterity of a temple dancer. Each finished piece, a testament to human skill, became an heirloom, telling stories of the weaver's lineage and the wearer's stature. Udit Bansal of home-grown brand trueBrowns, who often uses ikat in their collections, explained this labour-intensive process can take from a few days to several weeks, depending on the pattern's complexity and the number of colours used. "Simple designs may take around 50-100 hours, while intricate patterns require significantly more time. The result is a unique piece of fabric that showcases the artistry and dedication of skilled weavers," she told indianexpress.com.

The ikat technique involves resist-dyeing the warp or weft yarns before weaving by tightly binding sections of the yarn to create the desired pattern. The bound sections resist the dye, resulting in an elaborate pattern once the yarns are woven together. This process requires precise calculation and immense skill from the artisans. Abraham & Thakore said their ikat can take hundreds, if not thousands, of hours to complete. The time required varies depending on the complexity of the design, the type of ikat (single or double), and the skill level of the artisans involved, the designer-duo said, bolstering Udit's point.

Ikat's modern revival: What can you do?

The 20th century saw a dimming of these vibrant threads. Mass-produced fabrics, cheap and ubiquitous, threatened to silence the ancient looms. Livelihoods dwindled, and the very essence of ikat, its soul woven into the rhythm of generations, teetered on the precipice of oblivion. A renewed appreciation for slow fashion and handcrafted textiles has brought these exquisite fabrics back into the spotlight. Modern designers like Udit Bansal of trueBrowns and Abraham & Thakore, storytellers in their own right, weave ikat's legacy into their contemporary creations, reinterpreting ancient motifs for a global audience. For Abraham & Thakore, this has meant maintaining and honouring the legacy and skills of the traditional ikat artisans while also adding their own modern design flair and interpretation to the craft. Innovations in dyeing and weaving have expanded creative possibilities, but the labour-intensive nature of ikat poses financial challenges for artisans, explained Udit, and stressed the need to revitalise ikat through consumer education and support for fair trade practices, ensuring the craft's survival. People can support the rich history of this textile by being a conscious consumer and buying genuine, hand-crafted ikat textiles from reputable sources. This supports artisans and keeps traditional techniques alive. Ikat By recognising the meticulous craftsmanship and heritage embedded in each piece, we can play a part in keeping ikat alive. (Source: Wikimedia Commons) Here's how to differentiate between real and fake ikat. Spotting real ikat requires a keen eye. Look for imperfections like colour bleeding or subtle pattern variations, as these are hallmarks of hand-dyeing. While intricate designs are possible, extreme detail can suggest a machine-made imitation. A handmade authentic ikat will always have slight irregularities, a sign of its authenticity, said Abraham & Thakore. Authentic ikat is woven, so the pattern will be visible on both sides of the fabric. Printed imitations typically have the pattern only on one side, added Prof. Varghese. From the tombs of ancient pharaohs to modern fashion runways, ikat has woven its way through time, preserving stories and traditions with every thread. Yet, this beautiful art form stands at a crossroads, threatened by the proliferation of mass-produced imitations. By recognising the meticulous craftsmanship and heritage embedded in each piece, we can play a part in keeping ikat alive.

In a bustling marketplace, sunlight catches on a woman's sari, its intricate patterns shimmering like a desert mirage. This is ikat, a captivating Indian textile where the resist-dyed threads don't just capture its beauty but also whisper the tales of history and artistry. According to Professor John Varghese, School of Fashion, World University of Design (WUD), Sonapat, the oldest surviving fragment of ikat was discovered in the tomb of an Egyptian pharaoh, suggesting its antiquity and early global reach. This particular piece was traced back to the Indian state of Odisha, highlighting India's rich textile heritage, he said. For centuries, ikat has been used to create intricate, colourful patterns on textiles, often serving as a symbol of social status and cultural identity in regions such as South and Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America, explained Prof. Varghese.

Designer duo David Abraham and Rakesh Thakore, better known as Abraham & Thakore, are famous for having worked extensively with the textile. One of their first pieces, a double-ikat houndstooth sari in amla and black, now resides at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, as a part of their permanent archives.

From ancient India to the modern The word "ikat" comes from the Malaysian-Indonesian word "mengikat", which means "to tie" or "to bind," they explained, referencing the method used to resist the application of dyes to the yarns. As it adapted to many parts of India, each region developed its own distinct ikat styles and patterns, often influenced by local motifs, colours, and traditions, the designer duo said in an interaction.

Across the vast subcontinent, ikat blossoms in a kaleidoscope of regional expressions. Odisha boasts its double ikat, a mesmerising dance of resist-dyed warp and weft threads, birthing dazzling geometric patterns. Gujarat's Patola silk, as vibrant as a thousand marigold sunsets, is woven with stories in its threads – paisleys like teardrops and flowers blooming in eternal spring. In Andhra Pradesh, Uppada — though more famous for its jamdani, its ikat too whispers tales of the earth, its geometric patterns echoing the symmetry of temples and its colours, the hues of natural dyes. Each region, a distinct verse in the epic poem of ikat. But ikat was more than just adornment. It was a language woven in silk, a social code etched in vibrant hues. Specific patterns, reserved for

Farmers are also consumers, lower inflation is in their interest: RBI Governor

Amid a debate over the possible disenchantment among agriculturists because of the policy focus on arresting price rise, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Tuesday said lower inflation is also beneficial to the farmers. Policymakers always grapple with the dilemma of balancing out between multiple objectives, and keeping the agricultural produce prices low to serve the consumers while depressing the farmers' incomes is one such conundrum, Das said addressing a Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry event here.



"Let us also remember, that the farmer is also a consumer. Apart from wheat, he buys so many other things for his day to day living. It is also in the interest of farmers to have a low inflation," he said. The comments, which come weeks after the election results, assume significance because setbacks to the ruling BJP in some pockets like Maharashtra, where the onion growers were left peeved, have been analysed as a fallout of a pro-consumer stance of the government which suppressed farmer incomes. Das said any government has to move forward in a "balanced manner", and weigh in the interest of the farmers with that of the consumers. "It's a complicated and complex task," he said, citing the RBI's own dilemmas on the exchange rate management as one such instance.

per cent to 4 per cent, it will increase the purchasing power of each of the 140 crore Indians, which will in turn have ripple effects that will benefit purchasing power, consumption, growth and also employment.

The Governor, however, said that there is "still a lot of work" remaining to be done even though there have been some successes. "A lot of achievements have been made, but agriculture sector there is still a lot of work to be done especially with regard to improvement of the supply chains and the value chain framework," he said. The governor also said that the sector has become much more climate resilient in recent years.

He said if the headline inflation comes down from 6

Jute crisis deepens as prices fall below MSP amid reduced orders



The jute industry is faced with a crisis following reduced orders from customers, as prices of the golden fibre plummeted below Rs 5,000 per quintal, while the Minimum Support Price (MSP) is Rs 5,335 per quintal for the 2024-25 season. This alarming drop in prices has occurred despite projections of reduced production by the Expert Committee on Jute (ECJ), primarily due to significantly reduced orders for GBT (Gunny Burlap Textile) bags by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State Procuring Agencies (SPAs). "The raw jute price has slumped. The price for the new raw jute season (June-July) ideally should have been Rs 5,800, but it has come down to Rs 5000 per quintal," Om Prakash Soni of the Jute Balers Association told PTI on Tuesday. He said that the industry is reeling under a situation which it has not seen in decades, with orders halved for mills, leading to operations only for two shifts and just 4-5 days a week.

"The carryforward stock will be huge 30 lakh bales in the industry. This season, farmers will have to make distress sales for their new crop, which will hit in a month," Soni added. Central jute trade unions have also sought

an appointment with the West Bengal Labour Minister and the Jute Commissioner to highlight the situation of low orders for mills, which will impact the employment of the 2.5-3 lakh mill workers attached to the sector in the state.

Industry veteran and former Indian Jute Mills Association chairman Sanjay Kajaria said the FCI and SPAs have drastically reduced their orders for GBT bags, resulting in a surplus of finished jute bales in mills' godowns. With no new orders in sight, many jute mills have been forced to cut back on production and reduce shifts, leading to severe economic repercussions for the industry, he said.

"Despite the ECJ's projections of a decline in production, raw jute is being sold at prices below Rs 5,000 per quintal, far below the MSP. This pre-season price slump will compound the difficulties faced by both farmers and mill workers. The central government must take immediate steps to ensure that farmers receive at least the MSP for their produce. This includes strict enforcement of MSP and facilitating direct procurement from farmers," Kajaria said. "To prevent the situation from becoming graver, the FCI and SPAs need to increase their orders for GBT bags to stabilize the market and support the jute industry. Timely and adequate orders can help reduce the surplus in mills and prevent further production cuts," Kajaria added. The government should also provide financial assistance and support to jute farmers and workers affected by the crisis. This could include subsidies, financial aid packages, and programs to support alternative livelihoods, he suggested. Meanwhile, sources said Jute Commissioner Moloy Chandan Chakraborty is in Delhi to meet senior Union textile ministry officials.

Mandira Bedi says hosting cricket World Cup was a 'miserable' experience: 'They had never had a woman sitting on the panel'

Mandira Bedi faced sexism while hosting the 2003 Cricket World Cup. In a recent interview, she opened up about the constant disregard from cricket experts on the panel. Despite initial struggles, Mandira persevered. The actor's role was to ask questions from a layperson's perspective. In a chat with Humans of Bombay, Mandira said, "It was not easy, because they had never had a woman sitting on the panel. So, the legends sitting on the left and the right, they weren't particularly excited about having a woman on the panel." Even though some of her questions might have been considered basic, her instructions were clear: ask anything that comes to mind.

However, Mandira described her experience as isolating. Despite asking questions relevant to the average viewer, the experts would simply talk over her, ignoring her completely. She recalled that at the end of every show, "I would put my head down and I would cry, and people sitting on my left and right would say, 'I will just go and get some coffee. Would you like some coffee?' and leave. I was just miserable and nobody said anything to me for the first week. I was stuttering and stumbling and I was nervous, and I was not getting any support from any-



where. I had a co-host. His questions were acknowledged."

According to Dr Shaunak Ajinkya, consultant psychiatrist, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, Mumbai, research on sexism identified several barriers to calling it out at the workplace e.g., people don't recognise sexism, or deem it inappropriate, or they don't know how to address it. Women Workplace gender gap By taking some of these steps, you can create a more inclusive and respectful work environment for yourself and others. "Research also shows that men are worse than women at detecting sexism. If a man can't see the bias or doesn't feel it should stop, it's unlikely that he'll step in. A recent Canadian research showed four categories of distinct

behaviours among men when they're faced with sexism – Directly interrupt, Redirect, Unassertively react or Do nothing," he explained in an interaction

1. Identify Sexism: The first step in addressing sexist comments is to realize that they don't all look the same. Be aware of what constitutes sexist behaviour like derogatory comments, unequal treatment, inappropriate jokes, or exclusion based on gender. Recognize the different kinds of sexism at work, and then make a conscious attempt to say something. You can keep a record of any sexist behaviour you experience or witness.

2. Respond Calmly but Assertively: If you feel safe, address the behaviour directly. Let the person know

that their comment or action is inappropriate. Remind your colleague that words have power. Then, explicitly state that their particular comments have hurt or offended you in a personal way. Clearly state what behaviour you find unacceptable and assert your right to be treated with respect. Never assume malintent. Don't just point fingers in an angry way, because that can do more to enhance tension than improve upon it.

3. Seek Support: It's important to get to the heart of the matter. Share your experiences with trusted colleagues. They may have faced similar issues and can offer support or advice. Identify friends in your workplace who can support you in addressing the issue.

Notorious 'Dhar gang' on prowl in Sangareddy

Sangareddy: The notorious Dhar gang from Madhya Pradesh, known for the brutal manners of its members, was found moving in a village located close to Sangareddy town in the early hours of Wednesday.

A three-member Dhar gang was found moving in Tallapally village which falls under Sangareddy rural police station limits. Wearing vests and trousers, they were seen walking holding their footwear in their hands. As per the CCTV visuals recorded from cameras in the village, they were seen checking doors and windows moving closely to each house along the way.

The burglars also allegedly snatched a gold chain from a woman who was in deep sleep. Meanwhile, the

police also found the gang moving in Sangareddy town a few hours before they entered Tallapally. The police also found their movement at Basveshwar Nagar from CCTV footage. The rural police suspected the involvement of the same gang in a theft reported at Ismailkhanpet village a few days ago.

The movement of the gang has put the entire Sangareddy police force on its toes. The cops are now tracking the movement of the gang, which was allegedly involved in several robberies under the three Commissionerates in Hyderabad in the last few months. The police have asked citizens to be alert as the notorious gang was on the prowl.

Kamal Haasan, S Shankar confirm Indian 3: 'Our initial idea was to do only one film, but...'



films. And that's the kind of decision that Shankar made."

Kamal then said that at a time when filmmakers struggle to find banners to back one film, Shankar managed to get Lyca Productions, a banner that was ready to support both the film he had envisioned. "I'm very sure we would have given him hell and said, no, let's make one film that was there in his mind. And above all, like I was ready to do that. There are many competent directors who are waiting for the right producer to make one film. He got the opportunity to make two. Why not use it? That's what he must have thought. That's what I think," he said.

On this, the filmmaker said that even he had only one film (Indian 2) in his mind, but Indian 3 evolved as the film was being shot. He said, "I would like to explain. Because the part one only revolves around one state. That part one itself is 3 hours 20 minutes film. Now the story spreads all over the country, to all the states. So naturally the story has become big. Actually, our initial idea was to do only one part."

"(However), after we started filming and when I sat in the editing room, all the scenes from my point of view came out very well. If I compress the whole thing (to make one film) the soul of each and every scene, the feel of every scene would have been lost. All the scenes were looking good and it was not boring. That's when I realised that I was able to see there are two parts in that story. And each part has its own strength and whole form and engaging scenes and a start, a body and a climax. So it evolved automatically in two parts," Shankar concluded.

Actor Kamal Haasan and filmmaker S Shankar have confirmed that the highly anticipated Indian 2 (Hindustani 2) will release in two parts and will be called Indian 2 and Indian 3. The third part of the Indian film franchise will be released in cinemas in 2025, few months after Indian 2 releases in theatres on July 12.

Disclosing that both — Indian 2 and Indian 3 — were shot simultaneously, Kamal shared, at the trailer launch event of the film in Mumbai, said, "That's the choice of the director. I'll talk for myself. When I made Vishwaroop, we read the script, it was 350 pages long. I was told to edit it and that it'd turn into a fantastic film. On day one in Vishwaroop, I was shooting for Vishwaroop part 2. I had made the decision, and told my crew that this film is going to be in two parts. I told them that we had embarked on a journey to make two films and that they'll be paid as such. I was shooting sporadically, back and forth between two

Mandira Bedi says shooting for Dilwale

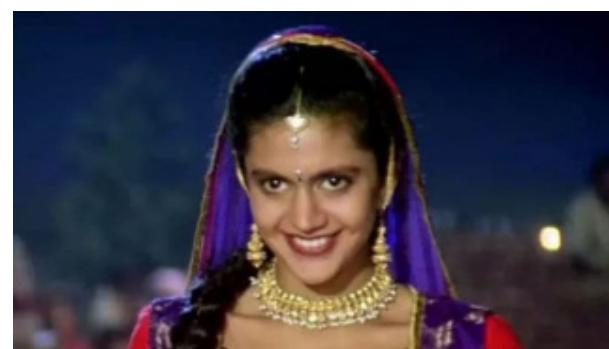
Dulhania Le Jayenge 'wasn't fun': 'I was made to do many things I have never done before'

Mandira Bedi recently revealed how she landed her first acting job in Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol-starrer Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge even though acting was the last thing on her mind at the time. Mandira also shared an anecdote from the shoot of the film. "Let me tell you it wasn't fun", said Mandira in a recent interview.

In a conversation with Curly Tales, Mandira Bedi recalled getting the role of Shanti. She shared that since her older brother was a banker who had finished his MBA, she wanted to follow his path but since she couldn't crack that, she started studying at Sophia College for a media communication course. It was there that she started interning in advertising firms and landed an internship at Prahlad Kakkar's office. It was during her time there that she landed her first breakout role in the TV show Shanti. She added, "It was not something I ever imagined would happen or wanted to happen. I was this junior most intern and 'go for'—go for this, go for that, clean this, wash that, so I was that. The director and producer of the show Shanti had come to Prahlad Kakkar to get an ad film made and he saw me there. I don't know what he saw in me. And he asked me to come for an audition in a business suit and I didn't own one. I was in college, who wants a business suit for college, right? And I went wearing a jeans and a t-shirt and I got called for another audition and for the second one, I was returning from lunch, wearing a salwar kameez, and I happened to have a little arrow drawn with eyeliner on my forehead and he was like what was I thinking? This is Shanti. This is the look I like. Three and half years and 800-1000 episodes, I wore an arrow all the time. Couple of scenes in the hospital was the only time when the arrow wasn't on my forehead. That's how it happened."

Mandira said that she also landed a job in advertising as she planned on working in advertising after she finished her education. When she started getting acting offers, she promised her employer that she would come back to her job but that never happened.

Revealing her first pay cheque of Rs 30,000, she said, "I used to intern every semester, but the one with Prahlad was my last. My first pay cheque was when I did Shanti. I used to get paid 30,000 per month. I was like, 'I



have never seen so much money before'. I could be working 10 days in that month, or 25, didn't matter, my salary for the month was Rs 30,000. The first cheque came to me that was of Rs 15,000, because we started to work from the 15th of the month, so it was half month salary. And I remember, I took that cheque, I deposited in the bank and I took presents for everyone. My first pay cheque, I need to buy something for every body."

Mandira then featured in the 1995 film Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge. She played the role of Preeti. Recalling her time shooting for the film, Mandira said that she started with the shoot of the song "Mehendi Laga Ke Rakhna." She shared, "I remember Saroj Khan telling me, 'you are shaking your shoulder like Sunny Deol, you need to shake your hips, women shake their hips, men shake their shoulders'. So I was like, 'okay, this is not a good start'. And I have very little grace in me. I can lift weights and I can run miles, but I don't have adayein. Woh adayein mujh mein bilkul bhi nahi hai. It was a little horrifying for me." She shared that she shot the song for four days and found it to be a completely different experience than Shanti. "Four days, where I am asked to do things I have never done before. Move parts of my body which I have never moved before so let me tell you it wasn't fun and I was like 'what have I got myself into?' With Shanti, I was giving this hard strong looks, but with Preeti I was made to do many things I have never done before," she said.

Kartik Aaryan's mom recalls beating him with sandals for bunking coaching classes: 'I was so enraged and frustrated, hit him really hard'

The grand finale of The Great Indian Kapil Show was one of the most relatable episodes of the season, thanks to Kartik Aaryan's mom, Mala, who didn't hold back in sharing some of the most embarrassing details of the actor's young adult life. During the show, Mala recalled the time she beat the actor with sandals after she caught him bunking coaching classes.

Mala shared, "I used to teach Kartik and I was very strict. I would keep an eye on what he was doing and where he was going, and I would often follow him. One day, I followed him to his coaching class when he was in the 10th or 12th standard. I had told the teacher to inform me if he ever missed a class. He missed one or two classes, so the teacher called and informed me." She continued, "So, after that day, when he went to the coaching class, I followed him without his knowledge. I noticed that he took a dif-



ferent route and went behind a millet grinding shop with his friends. I followed them and saw that there was a big screen where all the kids were playing video games. He got scared when he saw me. I grabbed him and took him home. The whole way, he kept saying, 'Nahi, mummy'. When we reached home, I was so enraged and frus-

trated that I looked for something to hit him with and ended up using my sandal. I hit him really hard. All our dogs started running here and there. I really beat him a lot."

On the show, Kartik revealed that while his parents were never interested in his ambition to become an actor, he began pursuing acting in college and

only told them about it after he bagged a role in Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAME. On the professional front, Kartik's latest film, Chandu Champion, has collected Rs 52.9 crore at the box office in 12 days. He will next be seen in Bhoole Bhulaiyaa 3. He will also be seen in a romantic film with Anurag Basu and a war drama film with Karan Johar.

'Amitabh Bachchan arrived on the set before cleaners, Rajesh Khanna was always late': Sharmila Tagore compares them to Ranbir Kapoor, Ranveer Singh



Sharmila Tagore, regarded as one of the greatest actresses in the history of Indian cinema and a Padma Bhushan awardee, recently talked about the stars from her time who didn't value time. Taking examples of actors from her time and now, the veteran star shared how things regarding time have changed in Bollywood. Talking about it in detail, Sharmila said that the Hindi film industry is far more disciplined, "Even if you are Ranveer Singh or Ranbir Kapoor, you will be reconsidered (in a film) if you are late." In a recent conversation with legal eagle Kapil Sibal, Sharmila Tagore revealed, "Shashi Kapoor was the first one who was on time and Amitabh went a little ahead because he would be the first to arrive before anybody else, even before the cleaners came. In case of Sanjeev Kumar, you could only suggest time to him but anybody even Rajesh Khanna used to be

late." Due to this, everybody on set including Tagore, who was a working mother used to suffer. When Sibal asked, "You were working two shifts, morning and evening, and you had to look after your children and if somebody comes 4-5 hours late, it would make your life impossible." The actress, who established herself as one of the leading actresses of Hindi cinema with films like Waqt, Daag, Amar Prem, and Chupke Chupke, among others, shared how the time problem has now changed.

She revealed, "That is now changed because money is in place and they can't afford somebody so what they do now they make a contract which says they will work for 10 hours or they will work for 8 hours, beginning now lets say it starts at 2 in the afternoon then carry on for 10 hours or if they start at 4 in the evening, they will carry on for 10 hours from then. So the contract is made accordingly so if they want to wake up late or if they want to workout, their workout is very important. Like Akshay Kumar, he works out for 3-4 hours and then runs for a while and then he starts working so that's alright. But to keep people waiting for four hours even if you are Ranveer Singh or Ranbir Kapoor, but if you are four hours late, people will reconsider."

The actress, who has worked in over 100 films, was recently seen in the film Gulmohar alongside Manoj Bajpayee. Sharmila Tagore married Mansoor Ali Khan—cricketer and the son of Iftikhar Ali Khan Pataudi, the last ruler of the princely state of Pataudi during the British Raj. The couple has three children—Saif Ali Khan, Soha, and Saba.

Malaika Arora shares cryptic note after giving Arjun Kapoor's birthday bash a miss: 'I like people that I can trust...'

Malaika Arora shares cryptic post after giving Arjun Kapoor's birthday party a miss. Malaika Arora shares cryptic post after giving Arjun Kapoor's birthday party a miss. Malaika Arora shared a cryptic post on boyfriend Arjun Kapoor's birthday, hours after she gave his celebration a miss. Her absence has added to the speculation that the duo ended their relationship earlier this year.

While she hasn't posted a birthday wish for Arjun, Malaika took to her Instagram Stories with a cryptic message about trust. The post, shared without a caption, read: "I like people that I can trust with my eyes closed & my back turned." This comes amidst recent reports by Pinkvilla claiming Malaika and Arjun have called it quits. According to the report source close to the couple stated that Malaika and Arjun have chosen to part ways and will maintain a dignified silence. The source emphasised there's no animosity, but their relationship has simply run its course. "Malaika and Arjun had a very special relationship and both of them will continue to hold a special place in each other's hearts. They have chosen to part ways and will maintain a dignified silence in this matter. They won't allow anyone to drag and dissect their relationship," read the report. The report further emphasised that "there was no bad blood" between them. "They respect each other hugely and have been a pillar of strength for each other. Over the years, they have given



their relationship a lot of respect. They will continue to give each other the same respect despite them deciding to part ways.

Both of them were in a serious relationship for years, and they expect people to be gracious enough to give them space at this emotional time," the insider told the outlet. While Arjun and Malaika, who started dating in 2019, are yet to issue a formal statement. Malaika's manager threw a curveball, denying speculations around their breakup to calling them "all rumours." With no official statement from either Malaika or Arjun, the status of their relationship remains unclear.

I Am Celine Dion movie review: Canadian legend's body might be giving up, but her heart will go on

A deeply uncomfortable film that is unafraid to address themes of grief and regret — perhaps the two most potent emotions that can infiltrate the mind of a human being — director Irene Taylor's I Am: Celine Dion is more a celebration of the pop star's spirit than her many professional achievements. Documenting the two-ish years that she spent mostly indoors after being diagnosed with the extremely rare neurological disorder stiff-person syndrome, the film offers an intimate and often unflinching look at Dion's resilience, but more importantly, her pain.

She suffers in different ways. She says in the film that she first began noticing muscle spasms nearly two decades ago, but chalked it up to stress and exhaustion. The film opens with cellphone footage of paramedics being summoned to her hotel room, to rush her to the hospital after her entire body stiffens up like a corpse. This appears to happen frequently to her, and although there's an argument to be made that certain things should be kept private, Taylor and Dion choose to devote a significant chunk of the film's third act to an extended stiffening episode that is practically impossible to watch.

It's a viscerally moving scene; we watch as Dion freezes on a bed, mid-treatment, moments after complaining about something in her foot. As her doctor zaps into action, her body stops moving entirely. Tears stream down her face; a scream of pain escapes her mouth. But she cannot do anything about it. She is frozen. Some minutes later, when Dion has regained partial control of her movements, someone asks, "Do you want the cameras?" Or something along those lines. The scene raises questions about the lines that documentaries mustn't cross in their reporting of the truth; or, at the very least, the lens that they should present certain truths through, without seeming exploitative, or worse, voyeuristic.

But her bigger pain — and she addresses this several times in the movie — is losing her ability to sing. Dion could famously bring the house down — through the sheer power of her voice. "It was the conductor of my life," she says tearfully in one scene. Dion admits that it took her some time to surrender all power to her vocals. But as she speaks about the heartbreak of not being able to exercise her gift any more, she breaks down completely. And then, almost as if she's tentatively checking if her voice has magically returned, she tries to hit a high note, but she can't. And it destroys her. Taylor intersperses these moments, perhaps a little cruelly, with footage of her old concerts. The only thing that this achieves is to remind the viewer, and Dion herself, of what she was capable of. It's like playing a sprinter's 100 metre dash to them after they've lost their legs. Surprisingly, I Am Celine Dion doesn't feature anybody outside the singer's immediate



I Am Celine Dion movie review: Equal parts cruel and contemplative, Prime Video's documentary film makes top use of Celine Dion's deeply expressive face as it details her journey with a rare disease.

ecosystem. We don't hear from past band members, record executives, or even her contemporaries. Her children appear on camera, but aren't interviewed. No doctor explains the details of her illness for the audience's benefit; no Grammy-winning legend drops by to sing her praises.

In that regard, the movie is devoid of ego, even though there is a scene in which Dion, attempting to sing for the first time in two years, declares that it is all about her in that moment. Watching her repeatedly miss notes is upsetting, but not as upsetting as the several moments in which she speaks eloquently, and rather philosophically, about her predicament. Dion has a deeply expressive face; every wrinkle tells a story; every drop of moisture has character. And Taylor wisely chooses to shoot these interactions in a tight close-up. It's impossible to not be moved. As a film, I Am Celine Dion is considerably lacking; it is neither intimate nor sprawling, neither insightful nor particularly imaginative. But as a portrait of insecurity and female rage, it's unexpectedly revelatory. Dion's body might be giving up, but her heart will go on.

Suryakumar Yadav on The Catch: "I knew that I hadn't touched the rope ..."



GNS News Agency, July 2

Kapil Dev waltzed back; Sreesanth backtracked a couple of steps, and waited for the ball to drop into his flapping hands, and Suryakumar Yadav rushed to his left skimming the boundary ropes – and the nation held their breath for a few seconds that stretched inexorably. In 1983, for Kapil, they waited for 9 confidently-hopeful seconds; in 2007, for Sreesanth they fretted for 4 nervy seconds; and in 2024, for Surya, they dropped their jaws for 7 clueless seconds without knowing what to expect for the danger that encircled him was multifold. Kapil yanking his head behind his left shoulder, Sreesanth staring into the skies, and Suryakumar's eyes fixated on the ball even as his feet were tiptoeing the skirting of the ropes would go down as three great visuals from the Indian limited-overs flip book of memories.

Kapil Dev remains India's most supreme natural athlete to have ever played the game – he didn't run; he waltzed, he didn't catch; he serenely pouched blurs. Sreesanth remains the most enigmatic talented Indian cricketer, an emotionally-vulnerable man almost fatally attracted to self-destruction. He catches, but it induces even atheists to contemplate praying. Suryakumar, a modern-marvel in the way he bats and works on his fitness with a private chef often travelling on tours for him, was one of the three best placed Indians on that field, alongside Ravindra Jadeja and Virat Kohli, to even contemplate the possibility of that catch. It's in that contemplation that great catches achieve immortality. For Kapil to run 20 yards to grab that game-turning catch of the best batsman in the world Viv Richards wasn't a big deal. It lies in the fact that he chose to go for it. Yashpal Sharma running in from the boundary was probably closer to it as Kris Srikkanth would once say, Kapil kept saying and gesturing pretty early in the piece that it was his. Or as the current coach Rahul Dravid once described that catch perfectly: "It was incredible that he went for it. You take a lot of that kind of catches in practice but to replicate it in the final against the opposing team's best batsman, you can have some doubt in going for it. It was incredible that he went for it. That's Kapil Dev."

Kapil had no doubts. No self-doubts, nothing about the swirling wind, nothing about who the batsman was, nothing but his eye on the ball. Just before that over, as a captain he had had second doubts about giving one more over to the genial medium pacer Madan Lal, but was convinced otherwise by the bowler who said he would get Richards. A short ball outside off and Richards swivelled into his famous pull, but was pulled down by the greatest all-round cricketing talent India has ever produced. Kapil didn't even celebrate it and would perhaps have quietly walked back if not for the fans who had charged out and Yashpal fiercely hugging him. Sreesanth came from the opposite spectrum on that contemplation scale. Of the three, taking in account the fielder and the nature of the catch, Sreesanth's was pretty difficult. Kapil had to run, Surya had to run and balance – and there was no time for any dangerous self-defeating doubts and the pressure of oh-god-what-if-I-drop-this thoughts to invade the headspace. Sreesanth had to cope with that as he waited for those 4 seconds to end.

From the moment Misbah-ul-Haq unwisely chose to

lap a slower-ball, there was no question of anyone else taking that catch. No one else was close. Sreesanth was carefully placed there, not for a catch but to be hidden from any such eventuality. "Dhoni put me there I guess because he didn't want the ball to come to me!" Sreesanth once told this newspaper with a lovely smile. "Even I wasn't thinking about any catches; I just wanted to make sure I didn't give any extra run as there was no one behind me at short fine-leg. I think I was quite blank during that over." The ball wobbled up from the Pakistani's blade and Sreesanth would in hindsight throw up a meme he read later, "Misbah forgot that there is a Malayali in every corner. Only I would change that Malayali to Indian!". So there he stood, hands flapping away after the initial back-track. Once at some event, Dhoni would say with a smile that when he turned and saw it was Sreesanth there, he had lost hope. It could be the sentiment shared by many Indians on that night. But the palms managed to press together and cup as the ball landed. "It popped up slightly if you remember, and I grabbed it on the second attempt." And he would spread his hands and roar. For 7 seconds, Suryakumar had no time to think about the end result. He had to rush at full speed, he had to somehow skirt away from the boundary and hold his balance but still have his gaze at the white round thing that was sinking down from the skies. India's fielding coach Dilip had assigned Surya, Kohli, Axar and Jadeja, the job to guard 'hotspot areas', SKY would tell the Express. Hotspots were where there was maximum chance of ball coming to the fielder, and players would practice in specific fielding positions.

"I had practiced the same catch at different grounds, depending on winds. I was standing a bit wide yesterday because Hardik and Rohit bhai had put a field for a wide yorker, and Miller had hit straight," Surya recalls. "The ball was travelling straight in fact. My mind was clear that kaise bhi karke pakad he lena hai. Rohit bhai usually never stands at long on, but at that moment he was standing there. So when the ball travelled, for a second I looked for him and looked towards me. I ran and the aim was to catch the ball. Had he (Rohit) been closer, I would have thrown the ball towards him but he wasn't." Surya says those 4-5 seconds are beyond imagination now, and there are more than 1000 unread whatsapp messages on his phone. "The catch is all over social media. I'm grateful that I was there in that five seconds of the play. When I pushed the ball and when I took the catch, I knew that I hadn't touched the rope. The only thing I was cautious about was that when I threw the ball back inside the ground, my feet doesn't touch the rope. I knew it was a fair catch," he stresses. As Dravid said of Kapil's catch, to train for it is one thing, but to replicate it in the last over of the World Cup final to end the knock from a marauding David Miller and to put himself between himself and India's defeat is quite something. There were so many variables where it could have gone pear shaped. If the run wasn't a sprint, he would never have got there. If the feet didn't listen to his brain, he would have trampled on the boundary rope – even now many fans are sweating over zoomed-in ultra-close-up shots. If the hands were nervy, the ball would have popped out. And all this was just half the job: the run, the hand-stretch, and the dancing feet. Unlike Kapil's and Sreesanth's, he couldn't just clasp his palms over the ball and be done with it. His brain now had to work overtime to think beyond the bubbling emotions: to pop up the ball, get over the line and jump back to the legal side and catch. The moment he did all that, the pupils of his eyes are worth a million close-up replays. Not his feet. His eyes widen into indescribable glee at what he has done. Kapil's toothy grin flashed at Lord's. Sreesanth's relief-tinged growl reverberated in Durban and it's that wide-eyed bliss of Surya at Barbados that would linger on for years. Three catches, three World Cups, and to borrow a line from the football commentator Peter Drury, sport takes human beings to places they can't even imagine. Sometimes, just sometimes, reality beats dreams as it did on all these three occasions.

Team India's new head coach to take charge from Sri Lanka series: BCCI secretary Jay Shah

GNS News Agency, July 2

The Indian cricket team will have a new head coach from the limited-overs series in Sri Lanka starting later this month, BCCI secretary Jay Shah said on Monday but did not reveal who has been finalised to succeed the outgoing Rahul Dravid. Former opener Gautam Gambhir is expected to succeed Dravid as the India head coach. The Cricket Advisory Committee has also conducted the interviews for the high-profile job and short-listed Gambhir and former India women's coach W.V. Raman. The appointment of a selector will also be made soon, said Shah, who is in the Caribbean with the India squad that won the T20 World Cup title on Saturday, beating South Africa by seven runs in the final. "Both coach and selector appointment will be made shortly. CAC has interviewed and shortlisted two names and after reaching Mumbai whatever they have decided we will go by that. V.V.S. Laxman is going to Zimbabwe but new coach will join from Sri Lanka series," Shah told select media, referring to the Zimbabwe tour beginning July 6.

Shah showed his elation after India won an ICC title after 11 years here on Saturday. He praised the efforts of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, who played a match-winning knock in the final. Both the stalwarts announced their retirement from T20Is after the triumph and were joined by all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja in saying goodbye to the format a day later.

"It was same captain last year and same here in Barbados. We won all games except the final in 2023 as Australia played better. This time we worked even harder and played better to win the title." "If you look at other teams, experience counts. From Rohit to Virat, all excelled. Experience makes a lot of difference, in World Cups you can't experiment much also." "A good player knows when to say goodbye to the game, we saw that yesterday. You look at Rohit's strike rate, it is better than a lot of young players," he said. How does he see the transition panning out following the retirement of Rohit, Kohli and Jadeja? "Transition has already happened with three greats retiring," Shah said. India, who had built a reputation of losing the big finals over the past decade, finally ended their title drought after losing two ICC finals over the last 12 months and Shah hoped the winning run will continue.



Former opener Gautam Gambhir is expected to succeed Dravid as the India head coach

"I would want India to win all the titles. We have the biggest bench strength, only three players from this team are going to Zimbabwe. We can field three teams if the need arises." "The way this team is progressing, our target is to win World Test Championship final and Champions Trophy. There will be a similar squad playing there. The seniors will be there," said Shah. On Hardik Pandya's all-round performance in the World Cup and chances of him taking over captaincy from Rohit, Shah said: "Captaincy will be decided by the selectors and we will announce it after discussing with them. You asked about Hardik, there were lot of questions over his form but we and selectors showed faith in him and he proved himself." India A to tour Australia

Shah also confirmed that an A team will be travelling to Australia later in the year ahead of the five Tests Down Under. The BCCI is planning a felicitation after reaching India but the Hurricane warning has shut down the airport in Barbados indefinitely, leaving the victorious squad stranded. "Like you we are also stuck here. After the travel plans are clear, we will think about the felicitation," said Shah.

Bellingham, Kane rescue England from shock Euro 2024 exit to Slovakia



GNS News Agency, July 2

England escaped an embarrassing last-16 exit at Euro 2024 thanks to Jude Bellingham's overhead kick before Harry Kane struck in extra-time to grab a 2-1 win over Slovakia. The Three Lions have been hyped as one of the favourites as they bid to end a 58-year wait for major tournament glory but looked set to go out with a whimper to Ivan Schranz's 25th minute goal. However, Bellingham's moment of inspiration five minutes into six added on in stoppage time breathed new life into Gareth Southgate's reign as England boss. Kane then headed in just a minute into extra-time to set up a quarter-final meeting with Switzerland on Saturday. "That's the desire and the attitude from the boys. It looked tough for a second there but you keep going," said Kane. "Jude does what Jude does and what an unbelievable goal." Southgate looked set to fall on his sword after steadfastly refusing to make changes to a side that stumbled through as winners of Group C despite scoring just two goals in three games. Kobbie Mainoo was introduced for his first competitive start in Southgate's only change and he paid the

price with another lacklustre display lacking in any speed or invention for long spells. "We want to be better," said Southgate. "I'm not going to hide from that but the spirit and character was there for everybody to see and we're still in there fighting." The one saving grace of England's performances in the group stage was that a makeshift defence had held up well, conceding just once in three games. However, they were torn to pieces early on by a Slovakia side ranked 45th in the world.

England did not heed a couple of warnings as David Hancko and Lukas Haraslin were wasteful with big chances. Slovakia finally punished their more illustrious opponents when David Strelec was given acres of room to turn and play in Schranz, who confidently stroked past Jordan Pickford for his third goal of the tournament. The half-time whistle was met with a chorus of boos but Southgate still stuck to his guns and did not make a change until 25 minutes to go. England did at least improve on a dismal first half and had the ball in the net within five minutes of the restart. Phil Foden turned in Kieran Trippier's cross but was caught offside after a VAR review. Kane seals victory - Slovakia should have doubled their lead shortly afterwards when England gave away possession and Strelec saw Pickford well off his line but failed to hit the target from the halfway line. Southgate's hand was finally forced on 66 minutes by an injury to Trippier. But England still struggled to create and looked down and out when Kane headed wide a golden opportunity and Declan Rice smashed the post with a long-range pot shot. Southgate was even derided by the England support for bringing on Ivan Toney deep into stoppage time with chants of "you don't know what you're doing." However, there was an incredible twist as Bellingham acrobatically turned home Guehi's flick-on from a throw-in in the final moments of added-on time. "It's a feeling that is like no other," said Bellingham. "You're 30 seconds from going home and having to listen to all the rubbish and feeling like you've let a nation of people down. In 30 seconds or one kick of the ball everything can change." Slovakia were suddenly rattled and Toney was to have a telling contribution. The Brentford striker headed Eberechi Eze's mishit shot back across goal for Kane to power home his second goal of the tournament. Slovakia should still have taken the game to penalties when full-back Peter Pekarik failed to turn in a dangerous driven cross from point-blank range. But England live to fight another day come the quarter-final against an impressive Switzerland, who comfortably knocked out holders Italy 2-0 on Saturday.

Supreme Spain reach Euros last eight to shatter Georgia dreams



GNS News Agency, July 2

Three-times champions Spain survived an early scare to beat a spirited Georgia 4-1 on Sunday and reach the last eight of Euro 2024, coming out on top in an exhilarating encounter that brought an end to the minnows' fairytale run. La Roja will meet hosts Germany in the quarter-finals after sending a message of intent in a polished performance, with goals from Rodri, Fabian Ruiz, Nico Williams and Dani Olmo. They had gone behind in the 18th minute when Robin Le Normand turned Otar Kakabadze's bouncing cross into his own net.

Spain had a perfect record in the group stage with three wins and no goals conceded, their best start since 2008 when they went on to win the tournament. Coach Luis de la Fuente brought his first choices back into the starting lineup having made 10 changes in the final group game, while Georgia kept faith with a side that included the tournament's joint top scorer and its leading shot-stopper. Playing in their maiden Euros, Georgia were

riding a wave of euphoria and seeking an unlikely Iberian double after last week's staggering 2-0 win over Portugal sent them into the knockout rounds. Spain were dominant from the outset and almost went ahead five minutes in when Dani Carvajal's cross from the right found Pedri, who forced an early save from Giorgi Mamardashvili. Williams came close soon after when his goal-bound shot was deflected wide of the target.

But Georgia stunned Spain when they went ahead as Georges Mikautadze found Kakabadze on the right and he whipped in an early cross that struck Le Normand and bounced into the net. Spain kept their cool and equalised after 39 minutes when Williams picked out Rodri, who fired a low shot into the corner. They made it 2-1 six minutes after the break when the magnificent Lamine Yamal's curling cross was headed home by Fabian Ruiz. Williams killed off any hope of a Georgia comeback with a superbly taken strike in the 75th before substitute Dani Olmo completed the rout with seven minutes left.

Euro 2024: Belgium, France clash after battling first-round blues

GNS News Agency, July 2

By this stage of the European Championship, favourites France and contenders Belgium would have wanted to be well into their stride and hitting their straps as they enter the knockout stages. Instead, the neighbours go spluttering into the last 16 and into a head-on collision in Duesseldorf on Monday after both failed to finish top of their first-round group. France's much-vaunted attack is suffering from a crisis of confidence and coach Didier Deschamps, usually a steady hand guiding the squad, looks unsure of what his next move will be. Belgium will have had some motivation sucked out of their cause following an astonishingly hostile reaction from their own supporters after they limped into the next stage of the tournament in Germany. Despite Wednesday's draw with Ukraine assuring them progress, they were subjected to loud barracking from their fans and have since closed ranks. Captain Kevin De Bruyne did not take kindly to the

abuse. His attitude and demeanour will set the tone for the rest of the Belgian side as they look to leave behind them the limp performances from the group stage. Romelu Lukaku needs to find his scoring touch after a number of missed opportunities in the tournament. His record 85 goals for Belgium does not include any from Euro 2024, and overall he has a poor scoring record at major tournaments. Few would have envisaged a French forward line failing to score in open play in their opening three matches at the tournament. One of their two goals was a penalty from Kylian Mbappe, the other an own goal from Austria in their opening game. Deschamps must now decide whether to restore Antoine Griezmann to the line-up and pair him up front with Mbappe. Griezmann has been a long-time mainstay for Deschamps but was dropped for their last game, a 1-1 draw with Poland, which allowed Austria to emerge unexpected winners of Group D, which also included the Netherlands. Belgium is France's oldest and most frequent opponent.