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Farmer attempts suicide in Khammam

Khammam: Close on the heels of death of a farmer by suicide in Khammam, a farmer attempted suicide in Singareni mandal in the district on Thursday.

According to the family members, the farmer Pachipala Bhadracharya has allegedly consumed pesticide in his agriculture land at Alia thanda in the mandal. It was alleged that someone had encroached upon the farmer's one and half acre land. Bhadracharya was fighting for his land for the past three years, during which occupant was said to have been cultivating the land. There was a court case pending in the court. On Thursday, the said occupant's henchmen started tilling the land with a tractor. On learning that the farmer and his family tried to stop them questioning why they were tilling his land. Then the farmer was beaten up by the henchmen; upset over the development he tried to end his life.

Prime Minister Modi hosts T20 World Cup champs, hails them for stunning victory



GNS News Agency, July 4

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted the T20 World Cup-winning Indian cricket team in his 7 Lok Kalyan Marg residence, here on Thursday. PM Modi interacted with each member of the team and congratulated them for their stunning victory. PM Modi was handed the trophy by Rohit Sharma and the entire team posed for the photo. BCCI president Roger Binny and secretary Jay Shah were also present on the occasion. The Men in Blue will now return to the airport to board a special flight to Mumbai. After reaching Mumbai airport, the team will move to the Wankhede Stadium. The BCCI has arranged for a 1 km victory parade from Nariman Point to Wankhede followed by a small ceremony at Wankhede Stadium. It is

at the iconic venue in Mumbai where BCCI secretary Jay Shah, who was present in Barbados for the final against South Africa on Saturday, will distribute the Rs 125 crore cash prize to the Indian team for winning their first ICC trophy in over a decade. The Men in Blue were supposed to depart Barbados for New York on Monday morning before taking a connecting flight from Dubai for India a couple of days after winning the T20 World Cup for a second time. However, the Indian cricketers were stuck on the island for three days due to Hurricane Beryl which swept through the Caribbean, and were only able to fly out of Barbados in the early hours of Wednesday via a charter flight named 'AIC24WC' (Air India Champions 24 World Cup).

Out on bail, Hemant Soren takes oath as Jharkhand CM

GNS News Agency, July 4

Ranchi: Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) Executive President Hemant Soren was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand at a ceremony organised at the Raj Bhavan on Thursday. Governor C. P. Radhakrishnan administered Hemant Soren the oath of office and secrecy at the ceremony attended by outgoing Chief Minister Champai Soren, Congress's Jharkhand in-charge Ghulam Ahmad Mir, and top leaders of the INDIA bloc's Jharkhand unit.

Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on January 31 in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. On June 28, Soren was granted bail, and on the seventh day, he took the oath as the Chief Minister. When Soren went to the Raj Bhavan to resign before his arrest, Champai Soren, who accompanied the JMM leader, staked a claim to form the government and took over as the Chief Minister on February 2. This is the third time that Soren is taking oath as the Chief Minister after December 29, 2019, and July 13, 2013. Two hours before taking oath, Soren shared a file photo on X in which he could be seen submitting his



resignation to the Governor. Along with the photo, he wrote, "Har anyay ko pata hai ki ek din use nyay parast karega (Justice will prevail over injustice). Jai Jharkhand." On Wednesday, Champai Soren submitted his resignation to the Governor at the Raj Bhavan, barely five months after taking oath, following which Soren handed over a Letter of Support to the Governor, staking claim to form the new government.

2 women among 6 sevadars arrested over Hathras stampede that killed 121 people

Hathras (UP), GNS News Agency, July 4

The Uttar Pradesh police on Thursday said they have arrested six 'sevadars', including two women, of the organising committee in connection with the Hathras stampede that killed 121 people. The only accused named in the FIR is at large while preacher Surajpal, who is also known as Narayan Sakar Hari and Bhole Baba, will be questioned if required during investigation, a senior officer said. "All six persons who have been arrested worked as 'sevadars' (volunteers) at the 'satsang'," Inspector General of Police (Aligarh Range) Shalabh Mathur told reporters here. "A reward of Rs 1 lakh will be announced soon and non-bailable warrant (NBW) will also be issued against key accused Devprakash Madhukar," Mathur said.

The preacher, Surajpal, was not mentioned as an accused in the FIR lodged at the local Sikandra Rau police station on Tuesday after the stampede at Phulrai village that left 121 people dead in its wake.

Those arrested have been identified by the police as Ram Ladaite (50), Upendra Singh Yadav (62), Megh Singh (61), Mukesh Kumar (38), and women Manju Yadav (30) and Manju Devi (40). Ram Ladaite is a native of Mainpuri district while Upendra Singh Yadav is from Manipuri and the rest are local residents of Hathras.

All six were arrested on Thursday by the officials of Hathras Kotwali and Sikandra Rau police stations, the police said. IG Mathur said, "When information regarding



the arrestees was obtained through detailed enquiry, these people told during inquiry that they are members of the organising committee and work as 'sevadars'." "The organisers and members gathered crowd and collected donations in the 'satsang' committee for cooperation," the officer added.

The FIR was lodged on July 2 under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide), 126 (2) (wrongful restraint), 223 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by the public servant) and 238 (causing disappearance of evidence).

Medigadda barrage safe and intact, says Chief Engineer

Hyderabad: The Medigadda barrage on the Godavari river is intact and safe, with no new issues spotted, Chief Engineer (CE) of the project Sudhakar Reddy said on Thursday.

The barrage, which is the key component of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS), has been receiving inflows in the order of some 14,000 cusecs from the Godavari and its tributary Pranahita. As it may add up to its storage by about 1 tmc a day, every drop received was being let off. With a view to avoiding impounding of water in the barrage, a part of the cofferdam, which was put up from the river bank to the seventh block, was also being cleared. As recommended by the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA), all gates were kept fully open.

Telangana CM Revanth Reddy Meets PM Modi, seeks funds

GNS News Agency, July 4

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy recently met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Delhi to address various issues of the state. The meeting focused on discussions regarding the funds allocated by the Centre, guarantees of bifurcation, and other important matters concerning Telangana.

Prior to meeting with PM Modi, CM Revanth Reddy also held discussions with Home Minister Amit Shah. The Chief Minister had previously conferred with party leadership regarding the expansion of the Telangana cabinet and the election of the Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC). During his visit to Delhi, meeting with PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah became a top priority for CM Revanth Reddy. In addition to the Chief Minister, Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka also had the opportunity to meet with PM Modi during their visit. The dis-



ussions held during these meetings are expected to pave the way for addressing key issues in Telangana and fostering better cooperation between the state government and the Centre.

Over 50 successful NEET-UG candidates move SC for direction against any move to cancel exam



GNS News Agency, July 4

New Delhi: Over 50 successful Gujarat-based NEET-UG candidates, including several who have been ranked first, have moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to restrain the Centre and the National Testing Agency from cancelling the controversy-ridden exam. They have sought a direction from the top court to the Union Education Ministry to probe, identify and take strict action against students and others who indulged in unfair practices like paper leak and impersonation in the NEET-UG exam conducted on May 5 this year.

The fresh plea by 56 students has been filed days

before a top court bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud is scheduled to hear as many as 26 petitions seeking reliefs like re-test and probe into the conduct of the examination plagued by allegations of malpractices. The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) is conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses in government and private institutions across the country. NEET-UG, 2024 was held across 4,750 centres on May 5 and around 24 lakh candidates appeared in the exam. Allegations of irregularities, including paper leaks, have led to protests in several cities and sparring between rival political parties. The pleas seeking cancellation of the exam, re-test and high-level probe are listed for hearing on July 8 in the SC. The fresh plea of Sidharth Komal Singla and 55 other students was filed through lawyer Devendra Singh. It said "The Hon'ble court may further direct the respondents (Centre and the NTA) not to re-conduct NEET-UG ... as that would not only be unreasonable and harsh for the honest and hardworking students but also would lead to the infringement of the Right to Education and therefore violative of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution." The plea sought a direction to the Centre and the NTA to identify and punish the examinees who adopted unfair means, identify the centres and take appropriate action where any "compromise to the established guidelines for NEET-UG 2024 examinations has been done."

No scope for alliance between Congress, AAP for Assembly polls in Haryana

GNS News Agency, July 4

There is no scope for an alliance between the Congress and the AAP for Assembly polls in Haryana and Delhi but the INDIA bloc will fight elections together in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on July 4. In an interview with PTI, Mr. Ramesh said there is no one formula the INDIA bloc will follow for State elections. The grouping will fight together in States where Congress leaders and other alliance partners agree to such an understanding, he said. Asked whether the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) will fight the Assembly polls together going forward, Mr. Ramesh said the alliance will do so in Jharkhand and Maharashtra.

"There is no INDIA 'janbandhan' in Punjab. In Haryana, we had given one seat to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the Lok Sabha polls but I don't think that INDIA janbandhan will be there for Assembly polls. In Delhi, the AAP itself has said that INDIA janbandhan will not be there for Assembly polls," Mr. Ramesh said. The Congress and AAP had fought the Lok Sabha polls together in Delhi, while they contested separately in Punjab. Mr. Ramesh said, "In the context of West Bengal also, I had said that the INDIA bloc is for Lok Sabha polls but in States where the circumstances are such that our leaders of the State and leaders of our alliance partners want, the alliance will remain. In Maharashtra, the alliance will be there



with Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SCP). In Jharkhand, we have an alliance with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha." Where State Congress leaders and the respective alliance parties agree, there will be an alliance, he said, adding there is no one formula on which the alliance will be done for Assembly polls. Asked specifically as to whether there would be an alliance in Haryana and Delhi, Mr. Ramesh said, "There is no scope (for alliance) in Delhi and Haryana." Jharkhand, Haryana and Maharashtra are slated to go for polls later this year, while Assembly elections in Delhi will be held early next year.

Revanth Reddy Seeks Cooperation from centre, urges to address state bifurcation issues

GNS News Agency, July 4

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy recently met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah to discuss issues related to the development of the state. After the meeting, CM Revanth Reddy and Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka addressed the media, emphasizing the importance of maintaining good relations between the central and state governments beyond politics. During the meeting, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy requested the cooperation of the Prime Minister in addressing pending issues in various departments and working towards the continuous development of the state.



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On road to equity

THE free bus travel scheme for women in non-AC, intra-state buses across Punjab, initiated by the state government in 2021, has significantly empowered women by enhancing their mobility and providing them substantial financial relief. Serving as a lifeline, it enables girls and women to commute to better educational institutes and workplaces and even visit their family members without the burden of travel costs or dependence on others. The success of the scheme is evident from official data: in April 2021, around 61 lakh women benefited from this scheme every day in the state. By November 2022, this figure had nearly doubled. However, the state-run Pepsu Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) is facing a resource crunch, with the government owing the PRTC over Rs 250 crore in reimbursement for the free travel provided to women. The delay in clearing these dues has left the PRTC struggling to release salaries and pensions. The government must explore other avenues to address concerns over the sustainability of this service. A cross-subsidy mechanism is a viable option to mitigate financial losses. By slightly increasing fares for other passengers or introducing additional charges on premium services, the government can offset the costs of the scheme. Public-private partnerships as part of corporate social responsibility and targeted subsidies could also provide some financial support. The free bus service has undeniably improved the lives of women in Punjab, enabling greater equity and participation in education, work and family activities. Ensuring the scheme's long-term sustainability is crucial as it is bound to foster socioeconomic growth in the state. Promoting women's empowerment is a crucial developmental objective as they tend to invest more in their children's education, health and nutrition, which, in turn, boosts economic growth.

With Assembly polls in sight, farmers showered with a bounty of sops

GNS News Agency, July 4

In an attempt to reach out to farmers whose unrest led to electoral setback in the just concluded parliament polls, the Maharashtra government on Friday announced major sops to agriculture sector in its budget 2024-25.

Under the Mukhya Mantri Baliraj Vij Yojana scheme, the government will bear the burden of electricity bills of farmers and provide them free electricity for use of agriculture pumps upto 7.5 horse power capacity. It will benefit 44.06 lakh farmers, for which a budgetary allocation of Rs 14,761 crore has been made in the form of subsidy. A financial assistance of Rs 5,000 per hectare has been provided to cotton and soybean farmers up to two hectares for kharif season 2023-24. Cotton and soybean are among the main crops cultivated in the backward regions of Marathwada and Vidarbha.

Apart from that, a special action plan will be implemented to increase the productivity and value chain development of cotton, soybean and other oilseeds. The government has made a provision of Rs 341 crore for the scheme for the year 2024-25. To placate the angry onion farmers, especially in North Maharashtra, a Rs 851.66 crore subsidy has been provided at the rate of Rs 350 per quintal. A revolving fund of Rs 200 crore each is being created for assured purchase of onion and cotton. In his budget speech, Finance Minister Ajit Pawar said, "In an agriculture driven nation/state which is dependent on monsoon, a drastic change in seasonal weather in the past few years due to global climate change has adversely affected the farmers. The objective of our scheme is to provide relief to farmers who are in distress and need assistance." While emphasising that the free power scheme to farmers was well planned with a complete road map, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said, "The cost of power per unit is Rs 7. But we have high subsidies for farmers at Rs 1.25 to Rs 1.5 per unit. When we completely shift to solar power, the average cost of electricity per unit will work to Rs 3 to 3.50 per unit." "We are working towards moving agriculture power entirely on solar in phases. Even now the state government shells out Rs 9,500 crore to cross subsidise the agriculture sector. With agriculture moving to solar energy, the amount incurred on cross subsidy will also decline. The incentive upto 7.5 HP will cover small and marginal farmers entirely and it will also help check excess misuse of water," he added. Taking lessons from the parliament polls where onion, cotton and soybean farmers' anger led to ruling parties' debacle especially in Vidarbha, Marathwada and North Maharashtra regions, corrective measures have been made in this budget. It also announced an incentive of Rs 1,350 crore to six lakh paddy farmers at the rate of Rs 20,000 per hectare. The dairy farming, which drives the rural economy especially in Western Maharashtra and partially in other regions of the state, has been announced a subsidy of Rs five per litre on cow milk. The finance minister said, "The government has decided to launch a new dairy business entrepreneurship project. Its aim is to create new entrepreneurship in the fields of animal husbandry, dairy farming, animal fodder and animal feed production to achieve economic uplift of farmers through employment and self-employment and increase productivity of animals. I announce that Rs 5 per litre subsidy will continue from July 2024 onwards to support dairy farmers." A subsidy of Rs 223.83 crore has been allocated to 2.93 lakh registered milk producers at Rs 5 per litre. The remaining subsidy will be disbursed immediately. A new scheme to help farmers titled Atal Bamboo Yojna has also been launched which entails bamboo plantation on 10,000 hectares of private land for which a subsidy of Rs 125 per plant would be extended to farmers. The scheme will start on 1.2 lakh acres in tribal-dominated Nandurbar district. The revised administrative approval for 108 irrigation projects, of which 61 are expected to be completed in the next two years, will add to 3.65 lakh hectares' irrigation potential. Through Maharashtra Irrigation Improvement Programme, a canal distribution system of 155 projects within three years to augment 4.28 lakh hectares is also underway. The Nabard has decided to provide financial assistance of Rs 15,000 crore for irrigation projects in the state. The Wainganga Nalganga River Linking project will help irrigate 3.71 lakh hectares in Nagpur, Wardha, Amravati, Yavatmal, Akola and Buldhana districts in Vidarbha region by diverting 62.57 TMC of water from Gosikhurd project through Wainganga Nalganga interlinking project.

Amid populist schemes, Maharashtra govt faces challenge of fiscal management



GNS News Agency, July 4

Ajit Pawar Clarifying on the means of raising revenue to meet the additional expenditures, Deputy CM and finance minister Ajit Pawar said the government has presented the budget by exploring every aspect of increasing revenue. Even as the government announced a series of populist schemes ahead of the Assembly elections, the state government's budget estimates projected a decline in fiscal deficit at 2.59 per cent of GSDP for 2024-25 as against 2.77 per cent in the previous year. In absolute terms, fiscal deficit is projected at Rs 1,10,355.22 crore while the revenue deficit has been projected at Rs 20,050.69 crore (0.47 per cent of GSDP).

With the announcement of sops eyeing assembly polls, which may cost an additional over Rs one lakh crore to state exchequer, the state government has estimated a rise in revenue to meet the enhanced expenditure. The revenue receipts have been projected to increase from Rs 4.86 lakh crore in 2023-24 to Rs 4.99 lakh crore in 2024-25. Clarifying on the means of raising

revenue to meet the additional expenditures, Deputy CM and finance minister Ajit Pawar said, "We have presented the budget by exploring every aspect of increasing revenue. One of the major mode of earning revenue is acquiring land around the big infra projects shaping up in the state and developing that land," Pawar said. He added that GST, VAT and Professional Tax witness an increase of 12 per cent every year and excise duty too gives additional money every year. "We will be asking more money from the 16th pay commission," Pawar said. He added that the state can always present supplementary demands to fulfil the need of funds to carry out the schemes announced in the budget.

Pawar on Friday presented the budget for the fiscal 2024-25 with an outlay of Rs 6,12,293 crore. The revenue receipts are proposed at Rs 4,99,463 crore and the revenue expenditure at Rs 5,19,514 crore. The revenue deficit is estimated at Rs 20,051 crore. In addition, the total debt stock of the state as per the budget estimates for 2024-25 has risen to Rs 7,82,991 crore which is 18.35 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), continuing the increasing trend of the past two years. In 2023-24, the total debt stock as per cent to GSDP was 17.59 per cent and it was 17.26 per cent in 2022-23. Pawar, however, qualified that it was well within the sanctioned threshold of 25 per cent. "There is nothing to worry about the debt on the state. We can still avail debt from big banks like ADB or World Bank," he added. Interestingly, despite sanctioning supplementary demands worth more than Rs one lakh crore in the previous fiscal, the revenue deficit for that period stands at Rs 19,531 crore. Supplementary demands is an expenditure additional than that approved in the budget.

Bombay High Court directs principal district judges to provide details of 'pending trials' against MPs, MLAs

GNS News Agency, July 4

A special bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice N J Jamadar was hearing a suo motu PIL view of Supreme Court directives seeking expeditious disposal of cases pending against present or former MPs and MLAs. A special bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice N J Jamadar was hearing a suo motu PIL view of Supreme Court directives seeking expeditious disposal of cases pending against present or former MPs and MLAs. Noting that several trials in cases against MPs and MLAs are pending across the state, the Bombay High Court has directed Principal District Judges across Maharashtra to give details of such cases and stages of trials in the same within a month. A special bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice N J Jamadar was hearing a suo motu PIL view of Supreme Court directives seeking expeditious disposal of cases pending against present or former MPs and MLAs. The bench noted, "It has come to our notice that certain trials against MP/MLAs are pending in large numbers before trial courts across the state. We direct that the Principal District Judges of all districts shall furnish details of trials pending and stage of trial in tabular form (charts) within a period of four weeks."

On April 19 this year, the bench had passed orders with regard to nearly six cases and gave permission to prosecution to withdraw the same. On March 22, the bench passed an order with regard to 22 cases, which were already withdrawn since September 2022, grant-



ing approval for their withdrawal. The state government then informed the bench that it had taken a policy decision to withdraw cases arising out of social and political causes as per Government Resolutions (GRs) of March 14, 2016, and December 16, 2020. It had submitted that a committee had been constituted to consider withdrawal of prosecutions in those cases if there was no loss of life or destruction of property in excess of Rs.5 lakh. Based on the recommendations of the committee, the state government issued instructions to concerned prosecutors to file applications for withdrawal of the proceedings. After Additional Public Prosecutor A R Patil submitted on Friday that in certain matters, trials are not proceeding further due to interim orders passed by courts including the high court, the bench asked Patil to furnish details of such matters to the Registrar General of the high court before the next date of hearing after four weeks.

Central Railway comes up with innovative solution to prevent point machine failure due to flooding



GNS News Agency, July 4

With the monsoon season already set in, the Central Railway (CR) is taking all preventive measures aimed at minimizing disruptions and ensuring seamless operations and passenger safety across its extensive network. As part of this, an innovative cover has been provided to prevent point machine failures during flooding. The modification of point machine covers has been developed internally by a dedicated team of the Central Railways.

This solution has already been implemented at 231 identified flood-prone locations across the network, ensuring widespread protection and reliability. The reduction in point machine failures during flooding significantly

improves operational efficiency. This enhancement ensures that train operations remain smooth and uninterrupted, eliminating the need for manual clamping of points, which are traditionally required during such failures. The modifications to the point machine covers ensure their effective functioning even in severe weather conditions, thus providing a more reliable and robust railway infrastructure. This initiative underscores Central Railway's commitment to passenger safety and operational excellence, said a Central Railway official. Besides other initiatives undertaken by Central Railway amid monsoon is 24 vulnerable locations identified and equipped with 192 pumps with increased pump capacity upto 100HP, micro-tunnelling at Vikhroli-Kanjurmarg, Kanjurmarg, and Sion, desilting and cleaning of 119.82km of drains in the sub-urban section, 1.55 lakh cubic metres of muck/garbage collected from May to June this year.

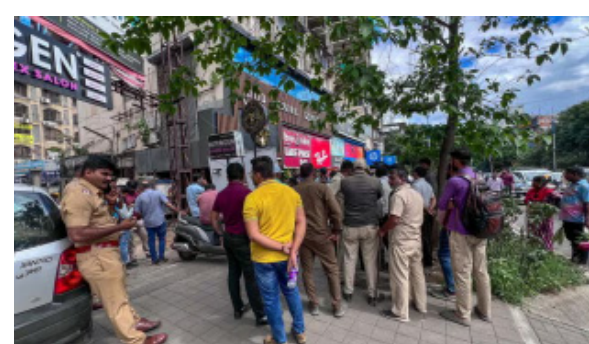
All 157 rakes of EMU have been checked for safe operation during monsoon. Over 6,000 tree branches near OHE have been trimmed, 16,000 insulators cleaned, and earthing, bonding, and lightning arresters have been checked. Additionally, round-the-clock continuous and real-time monitoring, along with inter-agency coordination in liaison with the India Meteorological Department and Disaster Management cell are being undertaken. Adequate staff have also been deployed in the flood-prone areas.

PMC takes down illegal constructions, encroachments by bars, restaurants

GNS News Agency, July 4

After the state government directive to Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), the civic body has begun to initiate action against city bars and pubs operating illegally. In the last four days, it has pulled down structures over upto 2.5 lakh sq feet area built mainly by bars and restaurants. By Friday, PMC had made vacant an area of about 43,545 sq feet that bars and hotels in Mohammadwadi and Hadapsar area had encroached upon. It also took action on structures that had encroached on over 21,000 sq feet area in Karvenagar alongside Mutha river.

In Kalyaninagar, Kondhwa Khurd and Karvenagar, the PMC on Thursday pulled down structures over 1.03 lakh sq feet area which included bars and restaurants. The action in Karvenagar initiated after the Bombay High Court rejected a petition seeking protection for property owners along Mutha river. The action began on June 25



with the civic body demolishing encroachments over as much as 36,845 sq feet. However, the largest drive was carried out on June 26, wherein PMC tore down illegal structures over 56,000 sq feet built mainly by bars in Baner and Koregaon Park.

State plans to fully reimburse tuition, exam fee of girl students from OBC, EWS categories



GNS News Agency, July 4

Maharashtra schools girl students fee reimbursement According to information provided by the office of higher and technical education minister Chandrakant Patil, the facility can be availed by female students pursuing professional courses such as engineering, architecture, pharmacy, medical and agriculture. In a move that would help increase girls' enrolment in professional education in Maharashtra and may also benefit the ruling alliance in the upcoming Assembly elections, the state government decided to extend the benefit of 100 per cent reimbursement of tuition and examination fee for girls coming from Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) with annual family income of upto Rs. 8 lakh.

Maharashtra Finance Minister Ajit Pawar made the announcement on Friday while presenting the interim state budget, adding that it will be applicable from the 2024-25 academic year. According to information provided by the office of higher and technical education minister Chandrakant Patil, the facility can be availed by female students pursuing professional courses such as engineering, architecture, pharmacy, medical and agriculture. As a result, the decision is expected to benefit around 2,05,499 girls. The state will bear the expenditure of Rs.2000 crore every year.

The decision however has not moved beneficiaries, who complain that many are already struggling with delayed reimbursements in similar existing schemes. There is already a 50 per cent fee-reimbursement for girls from OBC and EWS as opposed to 100 per cent fee-reimbursement for girls from SC and ST category. "But these reimbursements are never on time. Students have to pay the entire fee at the time of admission and then continue to wait for the reimbursement until the course ends, forcing many to drop out due to financial constraints," said Kuldeep Ambekar from Students' Helping Hand, an organisation helping students from underprivileged backgrounds.

Giving examples of delayed reimbursements, Ambekar said, "Shahu Maharaj academic fee reimbursement for all students having annual family income less than Rs 8 lakh and Panjabrao Deshmukh scheme, as part of which hostel residences are given allowance, both are pending for the past two years. Many students have approached us with complaints. The newly announced scheme will not be effective unless delayed reimbursements are resolved." Highlighting another point of contention, a student who is a beneficiary said, "The income condition is to establish that we are unable to bear the expenses for the course. Yet, we are expected to pay the full fee because the government will reimburse it later. Many are not able to arrange the funds. It will be more helpful if the government waives off the fee and bears the expense or pays the fee at the time of admission and not as reimbursement."

Continue blending of 4 pc imported coal till October 15, govt tells power plants



GNS News Agency, July 4

The government has asked domestic coal-based thermal power producers to continue blending imported fuel until October 15, and reduced the proportion of blending to 4 per cent from six per cent to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply during summer. The move will ensure an adequate supply of dry fuel at power plants to meet electricity demand while reducing the use of imported coal, according to the power ministry. In order to meet the power demand during the crucial monsoon months and to ensure uninterrupted power supply across the country, adequate coal reserves in domestic coal-based plants (DCBs) need to be maintained by all the central/state gencos (power generation companies) and IPPs (independent power producers), the Union power ministry said in its latest advisory. In an earlier direction issued in March 2024, the power ministry had allowed all thermal power plants to blend up to six per cent of imported coal with domestic fuel till June this year. The ministry has "decided to extend the advisory dated 04.03.2024 by modifying the blending requirement to 4 per cent (by weight) till 15.10.2024", said the fresh advisory dated June 27. However, the said advisory will not be applicable to domestic coal based (DCB) plants located within a radius of 200 kms from the linked mine/coal source. The power minister on June 13 reviewed the position of coal stocks at DCB plants. The peak power demand has already touched the highest-ever level of 250 GW in May 2024. Although there is a significant improvement in rake loading as well as receipt of domestic coal in the first quarter of FY25 compared to Q1 of FY24, there is still a gap between receipt and consumption of coal at the level of DCB plants of around 1,30,000 tonnes per day. This gap is partly made up with import of coal. "...due to various logistical issues, the domestic coal supply declines during monsoons. This year also, while the average rake loading in Q1 till date is around 432 rakes per day, Railways have informed about the likely availability of around 403 rakes per day in Q2," the ministry said.

Nigerian among 3 held as probe expands in drug consumption at FC road pub



GNS News Agency, July 4

Pune city police have now arrested three persons including a Nigerian national in connection with the supply of drugs to an architect and an IT professional held for allegedly taking drugs in the washroom of the Liquid Leisure Lounge, a pub on Fergusson College Road. Police have identified the three accused as Abhishek Amol Sonawane (23), resident of Diesel Colony, Omkar Ashok Sakat (28) of Mahatma Phule Peth and Idoko Stavley Sunday (about 30 years old) of Nigeria.

Pune city police and the state excise department initiated legal action after videos of alleged drug use at the Liquid Leisure Lounge pub and the establishment operating much after its deadline to shut were circulated on social media. On Monday, as many as 14 people linked to the case were arrested — eight by the Pune city police and six more by the excise department — on charges of alleged illegal operations, including organising an illegal party at the pub, which was attended by dozens of people. The police had also collected samples from some spots in the pub to identify the drugs consumed on the premises. A first information report (FIR) was lodged at the Shivajinagar police station under sections of Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) and Maharashtra Liquor Prohibition Act. Then, on Tuesday, the police arrested Nitin Nathuram Thombre (34), an architect from Mumbai and his friend Karan Rajendra

Mishra (34) an IT professional from Pune, who were allegedly visible in a video using drugs in the washroom of the Liquid Leisure Lounge. Police confirmed the drug they were seen using in the video was mephedrone. During searches, cops recovered cocaine from Thombre's house. So on Wednesday, police invoked the NDPS (Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) Act in the case. A court had remanded the duo to police custody till June 29. Further investigations revealed that Abhishek Sonawane allegedly provided Mishra Mephedrone during a party at the Liquid Leisure Lounge in the wee hours of June 23. Police arrested Sonawane on Friday early morning in possession of one gram of cocaine. Soon, cops arrested Sakat and Idoko for allegedly supplying cocaine to Sonawane. While 6.7 grams of Mephedrone was seized from Omkar, 2.6 grams of cocaine was recovered from Idoko, police said. Senior police inspector Chandrashekhar Sawant produced the three accused persons before additional chief judicial magistrate A U Supekar on Friday afternoon. Assistant public prosecutor Shridhar Jawale sought their police custody for seven days for further investigation. Police said a probe is on to determine where the accused persons had procured the drugs seized from them. Police said Idoko claimed to have misplaced his passport in 2019. He told the court he came to India for "business".

The Police suspect he was currently residing illegally in India. Police are probing his links with a larger drug cartel and that he kept shifting his locations. Checks were being conducted to find out if he had been booked in any other offences. Police were probing financial transactions of the accused persons and how they used social media and the telephone to communicate with drug peddlers and customers. Police told the court that a probe was also underway to determine whether the accused persons supplied drugs to hotels or pubs. The court remanded the accused to police custody till July 2. Meanwhile, the pub was sealed by the state excise department on Sunday for violating various rules and norms related to serving liquor.

'I feel people are afraid': Playwright Alekar on India's democratic values, threats to it

GNS News Agency, July 4

Rich in symbols, the play revolves around a 75-year-old protagonist who is approaching the end of his life all alone, except for hordes of Amazon boxes and a traditional doll of Maharashtra, the Thaki. Rich in symbols, the play revolves around a 75-year-old protagonist who is approaching the end of his life all alone, except for hordes of Amazon boxes and a traditional doll of Maharashtra, the Thaki. Satish Alekar was a young graduate from biochemistry and had started his first job as a biochemist at BJ Medical College in Pune, where he became friends with Mohan Agashe and Jabbar Patel, among others, when the Emergency had been declared in 1975.

"A lot of people were in jail. Two police vans used to bring people from the jail to the hospital for their medical check-up where I was working. That's when we started to make our own gestures of support. Many of the people who were in jail were our friends. They were kept in jail for a month, even a whole year, without a chargesheet. We began to carry the messages of the arrested people to their families and relatives," said Alekar, one of the most important playwrights of the country. A child of India's Independence, Alekar has been an engaged witness to the decades that followed the midnight when Jawaharlal Nehru declared a tryst with destiny. "Even in that troubled time, there were protests without fear. There was a very strong anti-Congress anger during the Emergency, which we all joined. We were against the attack on democracy," he said.

Though he was among those caught in the post-Babri Masjid demolition riots and curfews, Alekar sensed another attack on democracy only after 2014. "Everything started to become of two colours only — are you with the majoritarian colour or against it? The latter are called urban naxal and anti-national. People stopped being vocal. Those who persisted were killed in broad daylight. Among them, Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, Prof Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh, and there is no cue or clue about it. There is no kind of closure. This is very damag-

ing to democracy and I feel that people are really afraid," said Alekar. Alekar's sociopolitical concerns have taken the form of plays, such as Mahanirvan, which will celebrate 50 years in November 2024 and is still going strong in halls, and Begum Barve. One of the moving forces of Theatre Academy, an organisation dedicated to experimental plays, and the former director of Lalit Kala Kendra, Pune University's department of performing arts, Alekar has created one of the most powerful and moving plays in the last decade of Indian politics, Thakishi Samvad.

"In this play, I wanted to correlate the protagonist's journey with that of my generation. Our generation had parents who had fought against the British. After the 1942 movement, both my parents were in jail. My grandfather, from my mother's side, had gone to jail. Today, a lot of talk goes on about the RSS, but growing up in Pune, most of our teachers belonged to the Sangh and our schools were managed by the organisation but none of us became pro RSS. Teachers never pushed their ideology on us," said Alekar. This is the third time he is not directing a play he has written, handing the baton to Anupam Barve instead. Rich in symbols, the play revolves around a 75-year-old protagonist who is approaching the end of his life all

alone, except for hordes of Amazon boxes and a traditional doll of Maharashtra, the Thaki. He fills the silence with a conversation with the doll, reflecting the existential death of a person in a milieu that has killed freedom of expression. Like the majority of Indians who do not comment on political realities, even regarding pressing issues, the protagonist has never taken a position. Like Alekar during the lockdown, who wrote the play amid waves of claustrophobia with politics, his protagonist is suffocated. Unlike the playwright, he is an icon of mediocrity who has turned whichever way the wind blew. "I wrote this play in 2022 because the changes happening around me had made me very restless," Alekar said, adding that the results of the recent general elections hinted that people's voices were not entirely silenced though "they took 10 years to be heard".

said.

After this Yediyurappa asked her what her age was then, to which she replied six-and-half; at this point he allegedly tried to sexually assault her, the CID alleged. The horrified victim pushed Yediyurappa's hand, moved away and asked him to open the door. Yediyurappa then opened the door and exited after putting some cash in the hands of the victim from his pocket. He then told the victim's mother that he couldn't help them in the case and also gave her some money from his pocket and sent them away, the chargesheet said. After the victim's mother uploaded a video related to the incident on her Facebook account, on February 20, at the behest of Yediyurappa, the other accused — Arun, Rudresh and Mariswamy — went to their house and brought them to his residence, it said. According to the chargesheet, Arun then ensured that the victim's mother deleted the video from her Facebook account and her iPhone's gallery. On Yediyurappa's directions, Rudresh is said to have paid the alleged victim Rs two lakh in cash. A Bengaluru court on June 13 issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against Yediyurappa in the case registered against him on March 14 this year. The Karnataka High Court on June 14 restrained the CID from arresting Yediyurappa, while directing him to appear before it for probe. Yediyurappa was questioned for over three hours by the CID on June 17. The victim's mother, who had leveled the charge against Yediyurappa, died at a private hospital here last month, due to lung cancer. The victim's brother filed a petition in the court earlier this month alleging that though the case was registered on March 14, no progress has been made in the investigation. The petitioner prayed that Yediyurappa should be arrested and interrogated. Yediyurappa has denied the charge and said he would fight the case legally. He has filed another petition challenging the entire proceedings initiated against him, which is pending before the High Court.

Studio Tamasha and Gaysi Family's play 'Be-Loved' presents a lively exploration of queer love and history



GNS News Agency, July 4

Pride Month By employing a comical spin on traditional 'item songs' such as 'Sheila Ki Jawaani' into their musical performances, and engaging with slam poetry by the writer-contributors, the play soundly resonated with the young audience. To celebrate the pride month, Studio Tamasha and Gaysi Family joined hands as they organised an evening filled with vibrant colours and unmatched enthusiasm at the Royal Opera House on Wednesday. The highlight of the event, put together in collaboration with Future Generali India Insurance Company, was a play titled 'Be-Loved'.

Directed by Sapan Saran, co-founder of Studio Tamasha, the play drew from powerful writings that celebrate queer history and literature, and offered a kalei-

doscopic exploration of queer love through music, poetry and movement. "Mohini, Ila, Narad, Agni, Shikhandi, Saamb, Budh guruh, Bhagiratha — Indian mythology is full of queer characters and stories. But proscenium theatre history is intertwined with our colonial past and colonial ideas like censorship — which ensured a certain heterosexual framework — while traditional forms of Indian theatre have been closely linked with mythology," she shared. The 80-minute production, which was a combined effort of renowned writers like Aditi Angiras, Dhiren Borisa, Madhavi Menon, Nikhita Singh, Sapan Saran and Utkarsh Mazumdar looked at the queer history, from the tumultuous legal judgements in the late 1950s to humorous narratives on the idea of love, monogamy and relationships. By employing a comical spin on traditional 'item songs' such as 'Sheila Ki Jawaani' into their musical performances, and engaging with slam poetry by the writer-contributors, the play soundly resonated with the young audience. One of the performers, Mx. Siaan said, "I am a drag artist and performer, and in many ways, the storyline resonated with my personal experiences. The objective of the play is to present multiple accounts in a non-conditioned way. "Together, we the performers, are metaphorically a patchwork of queer ideas in India. We come from different places and ideas of what queerness means to us. Ultimately, we represent the idea of 'be-loved,'" added another performer, Ojaswi.

Environmentalist seeks inquiry against water resources dept staff over illegal flood line maps

GNS News Agency, July 4

Pune In a communication to Pune region chief engineer of the state Water Resource department, Yadwadkar said, "You must be well aware that the public interest litigation (PIL) filed in Bombay High Court originated from the unscientific and illegal flood line maps. Two days after the Bombay High Court directed the state government to review flood lines of rivers in Pune, petitioner and environmental activist Sarang Yadwadkar on Friday urged for a legal inquiry to investigate the performance of the executive engineer of the Water Resources Department Pandurang Shelar who allegedly submitted unscientific and illegal flood line maps to the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) and sought strict punitive actions against the officer.

In a communication to Pune region chief engineer of the state Water Resource department, Yadwadkar said, "You must be well aware that the public interest litigation (PIL) filed in Bombay High Court originated from the unscientific and illegal flood line maps issued to Pune Municipal Corporation in 2016 by the then executive engineer. These fraudulent flood lines maps were issued to PMC without any approval from the then chief engineer as required by law." He said, "Because of this unlawful,



unethical and unwarranted act of then Executive Engineer, all of us had to spend lot of time and resources to challenge and rectify his misdeeds. Not only this but due to him, irreversible damage to the environment has also been caused with a steeply increased risk to the lives of hundreds of innocent citizens residing along riverbanks in Pune." Yadwadkar requested to initiate legal inquiry to investigate the performance of then Executive Engineer at the earliest and take strictest punitive actions.

Opposition slams govt for continuing Rajya Sabha proceedings after Congress MP fainted

GNS News Agency, July 4

Objecting to the Rajya Sabha continuing its proceedings after a member fainted in the House and was taken to the hospital, the Opposition MPs on Friday accused the government of showing a total lack of concern towards the member. The Opposition parties staged a walkout from the Rajya Sabha after the Chair refused to adjourn the House even as MP Phulo Devi Netam fainted and was taken to the hospital. This came as the entire opposition staged a protest in the Upper House demanding a debate on the NEET issue.

Netam, a Rajya Sabha member of the Congress from Chhattisgarh, fainted while the opposition leaders were protesting demanding an immediate discussion on the NEET issue. According to the Rajya Sabha MPs, Netam's blood pressure had shot up to 214/140, which the doctor said was "stroke level". She was taken to the Ram Manohar Lohia hospital and admitted in the ICU. Congress leader Renuka Chowdhury said that continuing the House in such a situation was against humanity. "A member of the Parliament fainted, the Parliament doctor saw her blood pressure was at stroke level. Some MPs are going to the hospital to take care of her, but the House will go on proceeding... There is no value in the life of a person, a member of the Parliament, a woman," Chowdhury said. "Are they disposable commodities? They can run the House as and when they like. Is this democracy? Humanity and social decency says if a member has fainted, the MPs should accompany them. The House can run after that," she added. "We gave notices under Rule 267 to discuss the NEET issue... But they didn't allow it. Opposition parties were raising slogans which is nothing abnormal. Ruling party did not yield to that. Phulo Devi suddenly fainted, even after that they are continuing the debate," Siva said.

"In over two decades in the Parliament, I have never come across anything like this. Chair used to listen to the opposition parties. Both sides should be treated equally, there should be a balance. Now everything is tilted to



one side. Even after such an incident, the House continues. What are they going to achieve?" he asked. Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Sagarika Ghose said there was total lack of concern from the government when the MP fainted. "Her blood pressure was at the level of getting a stroke. If someone is in such bad condition, some mercy should be shown. They are not showing any mercy, they are continuing to run the House, so we walked out in protest because she became unconscious, fell on the floor and there has been such lack of concern from the government, it is inhuman," she said. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) MP Mahua Majhi said that she accompanied Netam in the ambulance, adding she has been admitted to the ICU and is recovering. "She was given medicine. She is now in the ICU and recovering. She will be under observation for some time," Majhi said. The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) also joined the INDIA bloc parties in the protest demanding discussion on the NEET exam, as well as the walkout. "We wanted a debate on NEET. When it was not done, we went to the House, protested, that was not allowed. Thereafter an honourable member fainted while she was in the Well. She has been shifted to the RML. We urged the House to be adjourned but that was not done, so we all opposition parties walked out in protest," said BJD leader Sasmit Patra.

Fake attempt to take everyone along, false narrative: Uddhav on Maharashtra budget

GNS News Agency, July 4

Uddhav Thackeray Shiv Sena (UBT) Maharashtra budget committee of experts should be formed to find out how many of the schemes announced by the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP 'Mahayuti' government in the last two years were implemented, said Thackeray. Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Friday described the Maharashtra budget as a "torrent of assurances" and a "false narrative" pretending to offer something to every section of society. Talking to reporters at the legislative complex here, the former chief minister said the 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin' scheme under which a monthly allowance of Rs 1,500 would be given to the eligible women was a "pitiable attempt" to woo women voters ahead of the assembly elections. Deputy Chief Minister and finance minister Ajit Pawar earlier in the day presented a Rs 20,051 crore revenue deficit budget, an-

nouncing sops for women, youth and farmers among other sections, entailing an outlay of more than Rs 80,000 crore. Thackeray asked why a similar allowance was not announced for men as unemployment was on the rise, and said nothing was being done to create jobs. "The budget is a torrent of assurances. It is a fake attempt to take all sections of society along. It is what (deputy Chief Minister) Devendra Fadnis calls 'false narrative,'" he said. A committee of experts should be formed to find out how many of the schemes announced by the BJP-Shiv Sena-NCP 'Mahayuti' government in the last two years were implemented, said Thackeray. There was no mention of how the funds would be raised, he said. On the waiver of electricity bills of farmers, Thackeray said although his demand in this regard was accepted by the government, his main demand that farmers be made debt-free remains unfulfilled.

Castles on Sand: In Amravati enclave, a dream turns into a nightmare



GNS News Agency, July 4

Around two decades ago, a wave of hopeful residents flocked to Amravati Enclave, enticed by its promise of picturesque hill views and a tranquil environment. As the first 118-acre township to sprout across the Kaushalya belt, it was a dream come true. But now, under the shadow of Panchkula Mayor Kulbushan Goyal who owns this enclave, this once-idyllic haven faces a storm of discontent as residents feel increasingly unheard. Some residents, including retired defence personnel, spent their life savings or took loans to settle permanently in this environment. The first mid-air revolving restaurant in the region was a significant attraction, in addition to the serene view of the hills and the feeling of being in "nature's lap."

However, today, the residents who have spent decades here tell a different story. Some are fighting in court for certain amenities and provisions, and they are also dealing with flood damages—a thought that becomes particularly worrisome during the monsoon season. A small, weak bridge that cannot take heavy vehicles is the only route connecting Amravati Enclave to the main highway leading to Panchkula. When it rains in the hills, residents fear that the bridge may give way, leaving them disconnected from the mainland. Amravati Enclave, Amravati Enclave Panchkula, Amravati Enclave infrastructure, Amravati Enclave flooding, Amravati Enclave connectivity, Amravati Enclave ownership disputes, Amravati Enclave mutation records, Amravati Enclave NOC from developer, Amravati Enclave internal road conditions, Amravati Enclave maintenance charges, Aasma revolving restaurant, Indian express, news, Indian express castles on sand The bridge connecting to Amravati Enclave, Pinjore. (Express Photo by Kamleshwar Singh) During floods last year, residents claim that not only did the lifts of certain towers fill with water, but at night, they had to rush to park their vehicles at a height as water entered and accumulated in the parking lots.

"When we hear that it is raining heavily, we begin making arrangements so that the water doesn't flood our houses and our vehicles aren't damaged. Last year, the security guard woke us up at night to move the cars from the parking lot to higher ground as water was entering the area. This is the fear we live with," said Ram Kumar Shokeen, a retired senior bank manager. He added that certain makeshift structures in the enclave were also immediately vacated as the swelling water could have washed them away. The rains not only scare the residents regarding connectivity to the mainland but also cause them to fear cracks in their houses.

"Connectivity is via a weak bridge that gets closed down during monsoons, and neither the developer nor the government is planning to strengthen or replace it. For the big developers coming up in the belt, a four-lane road is being constructed, passing from the backside of Amravati Enclave. However, as of now, no connectivity is being provided to Amravati residents from this road," he added. There are over 4,000 people residing in the enclave. Last year, residents were alarmed when not only were their houses flooded, but a part of the main highway adjacent to the small bridge also caved in due to the rains. The repair work is still ongoing, even after a year. "What can be worse than this? Commuters have to pay a toll to pass through a broken flyover that hasn't been repaired for almost a year now," another resident said. One of the biggest complaints of the residents is that they still don't have freehold ownership of their plots.

Col BS Ranghi (ret) said he spent his life savings to buy a plot here but alleged that they still don't have free-

hold ownership of the plots. He mentioned that even if they have to take a loan from the bank, they must obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Mayor because the bank records do not list their names in the mutation records. Amravati Enclave, Amravati Enclave Panchkula, Amravati Enclave infrastructure, Amravati Enclave flooding, Amravati Enclave connectivity, Amravati Enclave ownership disputes, Amravati Enclave mutation records, Amravati Enclave NOC from developer, Amravati Enclave internal road conditions, Amravati Enclave maintenance charges, Aasma revolving restaurant, Indian express, news, Indian express castles on sand Under construction independent floors at Amravati enclave, Pinjore. "When we seek to have our names registered in the mutations, the authorities decline due to technical deficiencies. Because of this long-pending issue, we have moved to the High Court. Imagine, if I have to sell my house, I will have to get permission from the developer. Banks don't give us loans without a NOC from the developer," Col Ranghi said. He also highlighted that the internal roads were in deplorable condition. "Most of the internal roads are in very poor condition even though the developer continues to unilaterally levy high maintenance and water charges," he added.

A 220 KV Line Within Residential Area Amravati Enclave, Amravati Enclave Panchkula, Amravati Enclave infrastructure, Amravati Enclave flooding, Amravati Enclave connectivity, Amravati Enclave ownership disputes, Amravati Enclave mutation records, Amravati Enclave NOC from developer, Amravati Enclave internal road conditions, Amravati Enclave maintenance charges, Aasma revolving restaurant, Indian express, news, Indian express castles on sand Residents have also raised objections regarding the erection of a 220 KV line within the residential area, Residents have also raised objections regarding the erection of a 220 KV line within the residential area, which they find alarming, especially during rains when they fear the tower might fall. "Technically, one has to leave a considerable area on both sides if you lay a 220 KV line, and here, just between both residential belts, the tower has been erected. Can you imagine the damage that can take place if this 220 KV line falls?" Shokeen said.

Amravati Enclave, Amravati Enclave Panchkula, Amravati Enclave infrastructure, Amravati Enclave flooding, Amravati Enclave connectivity, Amravati Enclave ownership disputes, Amravati Enclave mutation records, Amravati Enclave NOC from developer, Amravati Enclave internal road conditions, Amravati Enclave maintenance charges, Aasma revolving restaurant, Indian express, news, Indian express castles on sand The residents also alleged that, as per the plan, a government school was to be constructed on a five-acre site, most of which now falls in a riverbed. The residents also alleged that, as per the plan, a government school was to be constructed on a five-acre site, most of which now falls in a riverbed. "There are promises that haven't been kept. We feel a step-motherly treatment is given to the residents. A government school that was to come up here now falls majorly in the riverbed. Not everyone can afford the private schools constructed here," said Ramesh Malik, an advocate with the Punjab and Haryana High Court who also resides there and has filed the petition. Residents alleged that river protection works have not been carried out in certain places and that the retaining wall hasn't been built, which would protect their houses during heavy rains. "We know how we spend sleepless nights when it rains heavily for more than a few minutes," Col Ranghi said. Additionally, the rapid construction of stilt plus floor buildings in this belt presents another challenge. The biggest attraction of the region, the revolving restaurant Aasma, has been closed down for around a year. There was a fire in the restaurant, after which it was closed. To date, it has not reopened. "I wouldn't be commenting on it because the matter is subjudice. But, I'd like to inform that I have constructed nine schools in that area, where one school is for EWS children, and many children are studying there. "As far as ownership is concerned, how can I change the government laws? I can't change what the government provisions are and what residents need to follow as per the laws." He added, "We have been giving the best amenities to the residents there. And it wouldn't be right on my part to comment further as the matter is subjudice."

Floating case files, damaged furniture: Lawyers stare at losses after offices in basements flooded

GNS News Agency, July 4

Case files floating, furniture submerged in water, no electricity — lawyers operating their offices from basements in South Extension, Jangpura, Defence Colony and other parts in Delhi stared at losses after heavy rain lashed the city on Friday. "My staff says books are floating in the office..." said Swarupama Chaturvedi, a senior advocate who practices in the Supreme Court. "I don't have an estimate of the losses yet. My library at the office had some rare books that I bought from various places across the world in my 24 years of academia and litigation career," she added.

On Friday, Safdarjung base station of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) recorded an unusually heavy rainfall of about 228 mm in 24 hours, which was the highest in Delhi since 1936. Chaturvedi's office is located in South Extension-1, and she was not the only advocate in the capital struggling due to the heavy rain, she said. "Most of the advocate's offices are in basements. We are not in a situation to assess real losses at this moment," she said. Speaking to The Indian Express, Delhi-based lawyer Shrey Sharawat, whose office is located at Safdarjung Enclave, blamed "(the) deaf ears of the authorities".

"Even as there wasn't much damage... water came into our office, both this year and last year. The drainage system outside my office, which was set up by the Delhi Jal Board, has been damaged by rats. Over the course of the last two years, I have even called the authorities and requested that they take action. However, the request fell on deaf ears. The flooding happens due to a faulty drainage system," she said.

"The situation is terrible at Jangpura block-B. The basement is flooded. There is no electricity. Books are floating, files are floating and the basement is choked," said advocate Nishank Tripathi, who works with senior advocate and former associate solicitor general (ASG) Sanjay Jain. A video showed the extent of damage with two men — half their bodies in water — dragging out chairs from his office in Jangpura. "There is water till our waists... we're trying to pump it out," he said. Delhi The



"My staff says books are floating in the office..." said Swarupama Chaturvedi, a senior advocate who practices in the Supreme Court. "I don't have an estimate of the losses yet. My library at the office had some rare books that I bought from various places across the world in my 24 years of academia and litigation career," she added.

Indian Express spoke to several other lawyers who had files damaged but were unwilling to go on record since it could impact relationships with their clientele. (Express Photo) Supreme Court advocate Vikram Hegde's office in Defence Colony also got flooded. "My office staff managed to save the stuff as best as possible. I am reaching Delhi this evening so I don't yet know the full extent of damage. Files are more or less no issue because we have soft copies. Books and furniture are my main concern," he told. "Our office in Nizamuddin East is completely flooded. Some of our books have been damaged. We will be able to make out (the complete damage), maybe by the end of the day. We are starting with the cleaning now," said Supreme Court advocate Sanbha.

DGP 'pressured' police to allow demolition of Goan home, claims report sent to Chief Secy



GNS News Agency, July 4

Days after partial demolition of a residence in North Goa's Assagao prompted Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's intervention, a purported report submitted to the state government has claimed that Goa Director General of Police Jaspal Singh "pressurised" his subordinates from Anjuna police station to allow the house to be razed, it is learnt. The report, purportedly written by a policeman from the police station and submitted to Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel, claims that the DGP was "continuously pressuring" the police officer to allow the demolition and warned of "consequences" if work didn't begin in 10 minutes. This comes days after police registered an FIR in the case based on a complaint by Prinsha Agarwadekar who, along with her husband, claims to be "owners-in-possession" of the house since 2001. She claimed that her landlord had "fraudulently" entered into a sale with one of the suspects, a Mumbai-based

woman. In her complaint, Agarwadekar claimed she and her husband were inside the house in Bairo Alto Assagao on June 22 when 15 people barged in, telling her they had orders to knock it down.

The purported report quotes the DGP as saying that the Mumbai-based woman was the owner of the property and that there was "no need to take action into the complaint". Both DGP Singh and chief secretary Goel declined to comment. SDPO Mapusa, under whose jurisdiction the police station comes, too declined to comment on the issue. Superintendent of Police, Crime, Rahul Gupta said, "There is one unnamed and unsigned document which was received today... levelling allegations against senior officers. It is premature to draw conclusions from such unverifiable document. Investigation is already ongoing in the case."

The incident had snowballed into a political slugfest, with the Opposition demanding a high-level inquiry committee under a retired High Court judge to probe the case and alleging that the act was perpetrated by "land and real-estate mafia". The Opposition has also called for a probe into the involvement of police officers in the matter. Three police officials of Anjuna police station — inspector Prashal Desai, sub-inspector Sanket Pokhara and sub-inspector Nitin Naik — were suspended after a preliminary enquiry. The purported report states that one of the police officers received a call from the DGP asking him "why the work of demolition" had been stopped. It also claims that the DGP said that any person obstructing the demolition should be "lifted from the spot and brought to the police station".

India slams US report on religious freedom: Deeply biased, driven by vote-bank politics

GNS News Agency, July 4

A day after the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken released the 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom and flagged "concerning increase" in anti-conversion laws and hate speech in India, India hit back on Friday, calling the report "deeply biased, visibly driven by vote-bank politics". Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal also cited "numerous cases" of hate crimes, racial attacks on Indian nationals and other minorities, and targeting of places of worship in the US which he said India had officially taken up with the Biden administration. "We have noted the release by the US State Department of its report on International Religious Freedom for 2023. As in the past, the report is deeply biased, lacks understanding of India's social fabric and is visibly driven by vote bank considerations and a prescriptive outlook. We, therefore, reject it," Jaiswal told reporters. The US Presidential election is slated for November.

The report, which tracks threats to religious freedom in almost 200 countries, is prepared by American embassies based on inputs from government officials, religious groups, NGOs, journalists, human rights monitors and academics. Slamming it, Jaiswal said the exercise of compiling the report was "a mix of imputations, misrepresentations, selective usage of facts, reliance on biased sources and a one-sided projection of issues". "This extends even to the depiction of our Constitutional provisions and duly enacted laws of India. It has selectively picked incidents to advance a preconceived narrative as well," Jaiswal said, adding that the report appeared to



challenge the integrity of certain legal judgements given by Indian courts.

Releasing the report Wednesday, Blinken had said, "In India, we see a concerning increase in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, demolitions of homes and places of worship for members of minority faith communities." Rounding off on the top US official, Jaiswal said human rights and respect for diversity have been a subject of mutual discussion between the two countries. "In 2023, India has officially taken up numerous cases in the US of hate crimes, racial attacks on Indian nationals and other minorities, vandalism and targeting of places of worship, violence and mistreatment by law enforcement authorities, as well as the according of political space to advocates of extremism and terrorism abroad," Jaiswal said. However, such dialogues should not become a licence for foreign interference in other polities," he added.

Cannot look at Andaman and Nicobar only from strategic lens; tri junction of geology, ecology and people issues crucial: Pankaj Sekhsaria

GNS News Agency, July 4

Researcher, author and journalist Pankaj Sekhsaria, 52, has been assiduously chronicling the ecology, culture and development issues of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for nearly three decades. An author of two books based on the island chain, Sekhsaria has now curated a new book 'The Great Nicobar Betrayal', which was launched earlier this month. The book is a compilation of selected writings published on the ecological, legal, socio-cultural and environmental concerns surrounding the proposed Rs 72,000-crore government project in Great Nicobar Island. Sekhsaria spoke to The Indian Express on this project and more.

You have been visiting the islands for three decades and have chronicled different aspects. What do you think are the biggest challenges for this region? These islands are located at a crucial trijunction of what might be called the geological, the ecological and cultural context. Which I think is true for most places, but in different ways. There are many unique dimensions to this place.

It's a biodiversity hotspot with fantastic tropical evergreen forests. A lot of biodiversity is still undocumented, much of it very rare and unique, and there are a lot of endangered and endemic species. So that is one dimension to it. Now the second dimension, which is very important, is the geological dimension. So we are sitting on a ring of fires, areas prone to high seismic activity. This region falls in seismic zone five. On average, earthquakes happen once a week in this landscape. We are in the 20th year of the 2004 giant tsunami, which was triggered off the coast of Sumatra, just 100 nautical miles from Great Nicobar. Any development paradigm has to account for the ecological diversity and sensitivity, but perhaps even more so, the geological vulnerability and volatility of the place. The third dimension which has linked up to this is the socio-cultural dimension. We have had communities of indigenous people there for a very long time. You have, over the last 100 years, a whole set of people coming from mainland India, pre-independence and post-independence. So you have a very unique combination of people there. So, in my view unless we consider all these unique dimensions and place the issue at this trijunction, we will invite troubles. We should have had course corrected after the tsunami as far as the vision for the islands is concerned and we don't seem to realise that it cannot be business as usual.

What was the genesis of the new book?

The genesis of the books is in the project. Around

three-four years ago, this massive, Rs 72,000-crore project was asked for by the NITI Aayog, and it was proposed and pushed aggressively. Environmental clearances and other clearances have been obtained. Much has happened in the last two-and-a-half years. The project's scale is something the islands have never seen. It's almost a nine or maybe \$10 billion investment in the Great Nicobar Island, which is in the extreme south of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. I want to point out that when the 2004 earthquake happened, the lighthouse of Indira Point, which is the southernmost tip of India, was many metres above the high tide line. But if you see pictures after the tsunami, including the cover of the book, it is surrounded by sea.

This area saw a permanent subsidence of 15 feet and on this very coastline, we are going to construct a port. Then there is the issue of felling of nearly a million trees, which a minister submitted in Parliament. We also saw the tribal welfare department supporting the project to get clearances in tribal reserves. All these issues seemed very problematic and thus I have been writing on it for the past three years. You have in the past talked about the existing military assets, missile testing on the island and how the state looks at the region through a specific prism of strategic issues. Could you elaborate on this? This is my perspective and there could be other ways of looking at it. Looking at the region through the strategic and defence perspective, while important, cannot be the only lens we can use to look at it. What about the local people, their history, the geological issues and ecological history. In that context, we cannot look at it only from a strategic lens. There have been discussions on the potential strategic interests but my submission is that the entire framing of the project is an out and out commercial one. In fact Admiral Arun Prakash in his piece in The Indian Express expressed that the defence and commercial aspects have to be addressed separately. While it may be of importance strategically, and that can be best answered by a defence expert, my submission is that it is a commercial project. Also, the question to be asked is, can strategic interest not be looked into in different ways?

Would you say that successive governments have looked at this region only from a mainland perspective, serving a purpose which is removed from the local people? To some extent, I would agree with that. The local context cannot be adjunct to other interests. There is so much else that is at stake over there. In fact, if you look at the stories from the tsunami, one of the entities to be most affected was the defence establishment.

California university academics halt pro-Palestine strike, return to job



GNS News Agency, July 4

An Orange County Superior Court judge late on Friday granted a temporary restraining order sought by the university, which asserted that the walkout stemmed from non-labor issues and that it violated the no-strike clause in the union's contract. California Public University academics on Monday returned to their job after court orders to halt pro-Palestine strike. Thousands of University of California academic workers who went on strike at six campuses protesting administrators' response to pro-Palestinian protests returned to the job on Monday under court order, but their union vowed more protests to come.

An Orange County Superior Court judge late on Friday granted a temporary restraining order sought by the university, which asserted that the walkout stemmed from non-labor issues and that it violated the no-strike clause in the union's contract. University officials had originally petitioned the California Public Employment Relations Board, but the panel twice rejected their requests for an injunction. Unionized academic researchers, graduate teaching assistants and post-doctoral scholars walked off the job over what they called unfair labor practices in the university's handling of pro-Palestinian demonstrations in recent weeks. The work stoppage was organized by the United Auto Workers union Local 4811, which represents some 48,000 non-tenured academic employees

across 10 UC campuses and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The protest strike began on May 20 at the UC Santa Cruz campus, and was expanded over the following two weeks to encompass UCLA, UC Davis near Sacramento, and campuses at San Diego, Santa Barbara and Irvine. Those six campuses account for roughly 31,500 UAW members. The UC system has a total of 10 campuses. Continuation of the strike "would have caused irreversible setback to the students' academic achievements and may have stalled critical research projects in the final quarter," Melissa Matella, UC's associate vice president for labor relations, said in a statement welcoming the restraining order. Judge Randall Sherman set a hearing for June 27 to hear arguments on whether to extend the injunction. The union's own strike authorization expires on June 30. UAW 4811 leaders denounced the ruling, saying the judge defied the authority of the Employment Relations Board by intervening in a labor matter outside the court's jurisdiction.

Nevertheless, the union said its members were abiding by the court order. The UAW said it would focus its efforts on an upcoming grievance proceeding against the university. Among other things, the union is demanding amnesty for grad students and other academic workers who were arrested or face discipline for their roles in campus protests against Israel's military offensive in the besieged Palestinian territory of Gaza. The strike marked the first union-backed protest in solidarity with a surge of pro-Palestinian student activism on dozens of U.S. campuses in recent months. The UAW said it was planning additional protests at UC Davis on Tuesday and at UCLA on Wednesday. Union leaders have said a major impetus for the strike was the arrest of 210 people, including campus-employed grad students, at the scene of a Palestinian solidarity protest camp torn down by police at UCLA on May 2. Masked assailants armed with sticks and clubs attacked the encampment and its occupants the night before, sparking a bloody clash that persisted for at least three hours before police restored order.

Huge blow to defence? Shocking texts Hunter Biden sent drug dealer revealed



GNS News Agency, July 4

Text messages highlighted by federal prosecutors during Hunter Biden's trial revealed that he tried to meet up with a since-convicted drug dealer to buy a .38-calibre revolver. This happened a day before he lied about using crack cocaine. Hunter allegedly asked a contact to "[m]eet me 7/11 at 3" on the evening of October 11, 2018. Reportedly, the first son had spent the previous two days trying to arrange a meeting with someone who was saved in his contacts as "Q." "Can you meet me @ 7/11 now[?]," Hunter asked on the afternoon of Oct. 10, 2018. He was told that "Q," who also called himself "Jr," would not be able to make it right away. It is unclear if Hunter and Q ever met before the first son on October 12, 2018, allegedly stopped in at Starquest Shooters & Survival Supply in Wilmington.

According to the Daily Mail, Hunter's contact is a person named Eladio Otero Jr. In June last year, he pleaded guilty to one count of using a communication

device to facilitate a drug conspiracy as part of a deal with Delaware federal prosecutors. The man was subsequently sentenced to 15 months in prison, as well as a year of supervised release. This was not all in Otero's rap sheet. In 2010, he was convicted of second-degree assault in Maryland in connection with an armed robbery in 2007. After the text messages were revealed, prosecutor Derek Hines noted that Hunter referenced the convenience store "both before and after the gun purchase." This suggested that this was a spot that he regularly visited to buy the drug. However, defence attorney Abbe Lowell noted that the messages sent before Hunter allegedly bought the gun had no location data to confirm his whereabouts. "Was he going to meet Q or getting a cup of coffee?" he asked Erika Jensen, who had taken the stand to counter defence claims that the first son was not addicted to the drug at the time he bought the weapon. "I don't know," said Jensen, who reportedly analysed evidence from Hunter's laptop. "I have no further context." As per emails recovered from Hunter's hard drive, he withdrew 800 from his Wells Fargo checking account on October 11 evening. This information is damning as Hunter's ex-girlfriend Zoe Kestan previously testified that he often removed huge amounts of cash to purchase drugs. Data from a text Hunter sent to his sister-in-law and lover Hallie Biden showed that he was at the 7-Eleven about an hour later, on October 16, 2018. "Sometimes we had text messages without location data," Lowell said to Jensen. "Sometimes we had location data without text messages." Three witnesses, including Hunter's daughter Naomi, were called by the defence before they rested their case on Monday, June 10.

No matter who wins, both Biden and Trump can likely agree on one thing: doing less in the Middle East

GNS News Agency, July 4

Sydney, Prior to the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan posited that the Middle East had been "quieter than it has been for decades". This is obviously no longer the case. On the contrary, the heart-wrenching state of the region has inflamed tensions and inspired generation-defining protests across the world. This unrest has led many to wonder if the Biden administration's Middle East policies will ultimately undermine the president's re-election campaign against former president Donald Trump in November. It ultimately may. But even if the occupant of the White House changes, US policy toward the region largely will not. This is because Biden and Trump will both do everything possible to attain what Sullivan had hoped for: an ultimately quieter Middle East.

No single US initiative will be more crucial to securing a quieter Middle East than the boosting of ties between regional partners. The groundwork has already been laid through the Abraham Accords, the Arab-Israeli normalisation agreements initiated by the Trump administration and embraced by the Biden administration. The fruits of such efforts became apparent when a diverse coalition — featuring the US, France, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel — worked together to down 300 Iranian projectiles launched at Israel on April 13. It was the first direct attack by Tehran against Israel in their decades-long shadow war. The coalition's joint response marked dramatic progress towards a long-term and bipartisan US goal for the Middle East: a level of regional co-operation and stabilisation that will finally allow for a decreased US footprint. As much as Trump may not have appreciated certain US alliances as much as his predecessors, it is safe to assume that whoever occupies the White House next year will likely seek to build on these regional alliances. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the scope and severity of Iran's destabilising conduct in the region has only increased. Iranian proxy militant groups across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Gaza have displayed unprecedented levels of aggression in recent years. It's debatable whether Iran was fully aware of Hamas' attack on October 7, but Tehran undeniably continues to financially support the group. Iran has been no less aggressive in its own conduct. In addition to its unprecedented attack on Israel in April, this has included:

1. alleged plots to assassinate former senior US government officials
2. further increasing its stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels
3. extensive international hostage-taking
4. ever-closer alignment with Russia, North Korea and China.

Israeli-Arab ties persist. Second, Iran's conduct has undoubtedly contributed to stronger ties between Israel and the Arab world. Such ties have persisted — albeit more quietly since the start of the war in Gaza. Jordan's King Hussein, who rules over a mostly Palestinian popu-

lation, may be a vociferous critic of Israel's conduct in Gaza, but he nonetheless benefits from record levels of Israeli gas and desalinated water going to his energy-poor and water-scarce country. The Egyptian economy is so reliant on Israeli energy that Egyptians endured rolling blackouts when Israel briefly cut gas exports at the start of the war. The UAE and Israel have only deepened their commercial, political and military links after their new Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement went into effect last year. While the UAE has repeatedly condemned Israel for its actions in Gaza, bilateral trade actually increased by 7 per cent in the first quarter of 2024. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, both Republicans and Democrats agree on the need to shift US attention and resources to the Indo-Pacific region. This is not lost on US partners in the Middle East.

This is why the Biden administration both endorsed and continued two of the Trump administration's top diplomatic initiatives in the region — the Abraham Accords and the US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. The reason is the longstanding, bipartisan sentiment that the US should not expend further resources — or, even worse, lose more US lives — in the Middle East. On Gaza, Trump has urged Israel to wrap up its operations, saying: "Israel has to be very careful, because you're losing a lot of the world, you're losing a lot of support." The Biden administration's public and private urgings for Israeli restraint in Gaza make clear it also has little interest in being further enmeshed in the Middle East. No matter who wins in November, both Trump and Biden would be vexed if Israel and Hamas' war continued in January 2025. They would also be equally concerned if Hamas resumed attacks on Israel. But neither wants to expend any more than the bare minimum of political capital to resolve the situation. In an era in which the US is producing more of its own energy and US fears of terrorism are decreasing, American citizens and politicians alike would much prefer its allies in the Middle East take care of their own security. The US role in the region remains integral. Despite this desire for the US to pull back from the region, the next president still has a critical role to play. The normalisation of Saudi-Israeli relations, for example, is undoubtedly the most important goal of the Abraham Accords. And this will prove challenging without a binding US security guarantee for Saudi Arabia, a Saudi-US civil nuclear agreement, and increased US support for an independent Palestinian state. The US military presence in the region will also continue to prove integral to uniting the diverse coalition of countries countering Iran's increasing influence. After all, it was the US Central Command's extensive coordination that enabled the international response to Iran's April 13 attack on Israel. A future US role in the region could perhaps best be described as "leading from behind" — though no US president has said or likely ever will say that explicitly. Instead, the winner of November's election will publicly champion regional "stability". And on this front, bolstering a regional coalition will remain the primary strategy — and could, ultimately, be the foundation for peace.

UN Security Council backs Biden's ceasefire proposal for Gaza

GNS News Agency, July 4

The United Nations Security Council on Monday backed a proposal outlined by President Joe Biden for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and urged the Palestinian militants to accept the deal aimed at ending the eight-month-long war. The United Nations Security Council on Monday backed a proposal outlined by President Joe Biden for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and urged the Palestinian militants to accept the deal aimed at ending the eight-month-long war.

Hamas welcomed the adoption of the US-drafted resolution and said in a statement that it is ready to cooperate with mediators over implementing the principles of the plan "that are consistent with the demands of our people and resistance." Russia abstained from the UN vote, while the remaining 14 Security Council members voted in favour of the resolution supporting a three-phase ceasefire plan laid out by Biden on May 31 that he described as an Israeli initiative. "Today we voted for peace," US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the council after the vote. The resolution welcomes the new ceasefire proposal, states that Israel has accepted it, calls on Hamas to agree to it and "urges both parties to fully implement its terms without delay and without conditions."

Algeria, the only Arab member of the council, supported the resolution because "we believe it can represent a step forward toward an immediate and lasting ceasefire." Algeria's UN Ambassador Amar Bendjama told the council. "It offers a glimmer of hope to the Palestinians," he said. "It's time to halt the killing." The resolution also goes into detail about the proposal, and spells out that "if the negotiations take longer than six weeks for phase one, the ceasefire will still continue as long as negotiations continue." However, it did not contain enough detail for Moscow. Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia asked what Israel had specifically agreed to and said the Security Council should not be signing up to



agreements with "vague parameters." "We did not wish to block the resolution simply because it, as much as we understand, is supported by the Arab world," Nebenzia told the council. Israel's UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan was present for the vote, but did not address the council. Instead, senior Israeli UN diplomat Reut Shapir Ben Naftaly told the body that Israel's goals in Gaza had always been clear. "Israel is committed to these goals - to free all the hostages, to destroy Hamas' military and governing capabilities and to ensure that Gaza does not pose a threat to Israel in the future," she said. "It is Hamas that is preventing this war from ending. Hamas and Hamas alone." The council in March demanded for an immediate ceasefire and unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas.

For months, negotiators from the US, Egypt and Qatar have been trying to mediate a ceasefire. Hamas says it wants a permanent end to the war in the Gaza Strip and Israeli withdrawal from the enclave of 2.3 million people. Israel is retaliating against Hamas, which rules Gaza, over an October 7 attack by its militants. More than 1,200 people were killed and over 250 taken hostage by Hamas on October 7, according to Israeli tallies. More than 100 hostages are believed to remain captive in Gaza. Israel launched an air, ground and sea assault on the Palestinian territory, killing more than 37,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities.

N Korean soldiers briefly cross border, South fires warning shots



GNS News Agency, July 4

Seoul: South Korean soldiers fired warning shots after North Korean troops briefly violated the tense border earlier this week, South Korea's military said on Tuesday, as the rivals are embroiled in Cold War-style campaigns such as balloon launches and propaganda broadcasts. Bloodshed and violent confrontations have occasionally occurred at the Koreas' heavily fortified border, called the Demilitarized Zone. While Sunday's incident happened amid simmering tensions between the two Koreas, observers say it won't likely develop into another source of animosity as South Korea believes the North Koreans didn't deliberately commit the border intrusion and North Korea also didn't return fire.

At 12:30 pm on Sunday, some North Korean soldiers who were engaged in unspecified work on the northern side of the border crossed the military demarcation line that bisects the two countries, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Those North Korean soldiers carrying construction tools — some of them armed — immediately returned to their territory after South Korea's military fired warning shots and issued warning broadcasts, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. It said North Korea had not conducted

any other suspicious activities. South Korea's military has assessed that the North Korean soldiers didn't appear to have intentionally crossed the border because the site is a wooded area and MDL signs there weren't clearly visible, Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung Joon told reporters. Lee gave no further details. But South Korean media reports said that about 20-30 North Korean soldiers had entered South Korean territory about 50 metres (165 feet) after they likely lost their way. The reports said most of the North Korean soldiers were carrying pickaxes and other construction tools.

The 248-kilometer (155-mile)-long, 4-kilometer (2.5-mile)-wide DMZ is the world's most heavily armed border. An estimated 2 million mines are peppered inside and near the border, which is also guarded by barbed wire fences, tank traps and combat troops on both sides. It's a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty.

On Sunday, South Korea resumed anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts from its border loudspeakers in response to the North's recent launches of balloons carrying manure and rubbish across the border. South Korea said North Korea has installed its own border loudspeakers in response but hasn't turned them on yet. North Korea has said its balloon campaign was in response to South Korean activists' launches of their own balloons to drop propaganda leaflets critical of leader Kim Jong Un's authoritarian rule, USB sticks with K-pop songs and South Korean drama shows, and other items in North Korea. North Korea is extremely sensitive to any outside criticism of its political system as most of its 26 million people have no official access to foreign news. On Sunday night, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, warned of "a new response" if South Korea continued its loudspeaker broadcasts and refused to stop civilian leafletting campaigns.

Tensions rise as North Korea sends 300 more trash balloons over South

GNS News Agency, July 4

Pyongyang: North Korea floated over 300 more waste-loaded balloons into South Korea, as tensions between the two countries continue to mount, 'Al Jazeera' reported citing Seoul's military on Monday. This comes after Kim Jong Un's influential sister, Kim Yo Jong warned Seoul to halt propaganda broadcasts across their tense border. She warned that the loudspeaker broadcasts risked provoking a "crisis of confrontation." "This is a prelude to a very dangerous situation," Kim said in a statement carried by state media on Sunday. The latest balloons carried only scrap paper and plastic, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said, unlike previous batches that carried unsanitary material such as manure, toilet paper and cigarette butts. Military officials said they did not detect any balloons floating in the air as of 8:30 am (local time). Loudspeaker broadcasts were resumed by South Korea hours earlier in response to the North sending more than 1,000 rubbish-carrying balloons in recent weeks, Al Jazeera reported. In the past, the broadcasts have included international news and K-pop, both of which are restricted by the Kim regime. Seoul halted the broadcasts in 2018 during a period of inter-Korean rapprochement initiated by former President Moon Jae-in, the predecessor of the conservative incumbent, Yoon Seok-yeol. Pyongyang said it started the balloon campaign in



retaliation for South Korean activists sending anti-North Korean leaflets and USB sticks filled with South Korean music and dramas across the border, as reported by Al Jazeera. "Seoul does not want military tension at the inter-Korean border, and Pyongyang does not want outside information threatening the legitimacy of the Kim regime," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul. "For both sides, 'escalating to deescalate' is a risky proposition. North Korea may have already miscalculated, as South Korea's democracy cannot simply turn off NGO balloon launches the way an autocracy would expect.

With high withdrawals, patent process still under stress; approvals up, says govt

Woman goes viral flaunting her lungi on the streets of London; learn more about this garment's history



A little over two days after Proctor and Gamble (P&G) received a request for clarification on its patent application on October 5, 2018 for a detergent composition, the patent office rejected its application on October 8 without giving the company the prescribed six months to deal with the issue. Following a legal challenge, the Delhi High Court in an order on December 8, 2023 pulled up the patent office saying that the manner of dealing with the application filed by the American multinational company was "extremely arbitrary and whimsical".

In March 2023, the Delhi High Court pulled up the patent office for passing "mechanical, cut-paste order" while rejecting Blackberry Ltd's invention application saying that the patent office "must bear in mind that the question of grant and rejection of a patent is a serious matter". Not only did the court order the application to be decided by another officer, it suggested the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks (CGPDTM) take "necessary administrative action". In 2018, the anti-corruption branch of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) booked SP Subramanian, Deputy Controller and branch head in the office of Controller-General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks for demanding a bribe of Rs 10 lakh for releasing a patent. Patents Act, Delhi High Court, Delhi HC on patent act, Proctor and Gamble, product patent applications, P&G patent request, Competition Act, Delhi High Court, Exclusive rights, Invention, Patentee, Register of patents, Government patent office, indian express news. The patent applicant in this case had first applied for the patent in 2010 and was allegedly made to wait for five years to get a patent.

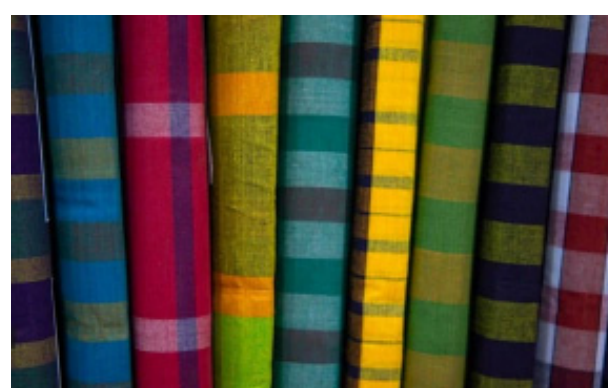
Arbitrary refusals and procedural inconsistencies have marred the track record of India's patent office, pushing the share of patent applications withdrawn in the country to one of the highest in the world at a time when countries such as the US, Japan, South Korea and China are using their patent processing systems to foster scientific research and technological innovation. While admitting to key shortcomings such as shortage of manpower in the patent office, government officials contend that they have begun addressing these issues and started conducting open house sessions to address grievances, which have improved the process of granting patents over the last 12 months. Amid multiple cases raising question marks over the operations of Controller General of Patents Designs and Trademarks (CGPDTM), which is responsible for administering Intellectual Property Laws in India, a new complaint regarding mismanagement has been filed with the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) which looks into corruption in administration and public services. Citing a whistleblower, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress Member of Parliament (MP) Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, in a letter to Vigilance Commissioner Praveen Kumar Srivastava earlier this year, sought an inquiry over allegations that intellectual property (IP) cases are handled by "compromised officials" for monetary gains. A government official, seeking anonymity, said that the patent department has given show cause notices to officers for adopting incorrect practices or passing incorrect orders. "I am not saying that officers don't make deliberate mistakes. In a recent Delhi High Court case involving a patent officer, the court asked a patent officer to file an affidavit as he did not give a reason to reject a patent, which is wrong as per law. After the court asked the officer to file an affidavit, the officer agreed to review the case because filing an affidavit could have resulted in him potentially losing his job," a government official seeking anonymity told The Indian Express. In legal parlance, an affidavit is a written statement sworn before a person having the authority to administer an oath.

The fresh corruption allegation comes at a time when India is witnessing record patent filings. India reported a sharp 44.6 per cent growth in international patent filing in 2023 compared to 2022, as per the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The growth rates in 2022 stood at 31.6 in 2022 compared to 2021. WIPO ranked India third in terms of trademark registrations in force in 2022 at nearly 2.9 million, after China at 42.7 million and the US at 3.1 million. Chowdhury, in his missive, has stated that the arbitrary engagement of contractual manpower through the Quality Council of India (QCI) and the arbitrary manner of processing applications have had a "disruptive effect" on the ecosystem of granting Intellectual Property (IP) rights. He also alleged the misutilisation and misappropriation of government funds in violation of statutorily laid-down rules and norms. "The department has taken action against officials in cases where complaints have been received. People don't give evidence of al-

leged corruption, which is the biggest problem. Wherever the department feels an officer has done something wrong...we change the workstation of the officer during routine transfers. The department has seen 400 promotions or transfers in the last one year," the government official quoted earlier said. Chowdhury, however, alleged that mass transfer of officials was followed by reversion to the original place of posting for monetary considerations and thereby demanded a third party administrative audit to investigate the same. "Corruption used to be a big problem earlier because businesses used to pay to get patents approved faster. Such cases have come down because we have put in place a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). The wait time has come down from 14 days to 72 hours so there is no need for bribes," the official added. A country's IP rights ecosystem involves granting patents, trademarks, and copyright to incentivise research and inventions across industries. Typically, developed nations have a much higher number of patents and trademarks, which helps businesses gain market share. "Specific facts and figures that have been cited in the letter on matters which smack of illegality, arbitrariness and corruption in the office of the CGPDTM include, (i) hiring more than 400 contractual employees through the QCI with designations such as Associate Manager, Analyst and Coordinator for performing statutory duties of Hearing and Analyzing applications/cases of Intellectual Property Rights - an act which is violative of Trademarks and Geographical Indications Registry (Registrar and Examiners) Recruitment Rules," Chowdhury said. Questioning the legality of delegating the discharge of legal, judicial, and quasi-judicial functions to an external agency, the QCI, Chowdhury said that there was a lack of progress in granting TradeMark (TM) registrations and Geographical indications (GI). "Despite the increase in the strength of manpower from 115 in April 2022 to 159 in April 2023 to over 400 in April 2024, there is no change in the pendency level of cases, and as a matter of fact, the number of pending cases has gone up from 46,615 in April 2023 to 50,420 as of February 2024," the Congress MP said in the letter. However, the official quoted above said the data used in the letter is a misrepresentation of facts as pendency has come down and that the additional workforce has been added to deal with sharply rising patent applications. "There used to be a lot of corruption related concerns in the patent office 10 years back. Prior to 2014, patents being granted annually used to be 6,500 but this year 2023-24, the patent office has granted about 1 lakh patents. Everyday about 250 patents are issued and the patent office receives patent applications every six minutes online. Everyday, an open house is conducted which has brought ease in the patent ecosystem," Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had said.

In 2023-24, 98 new GIs (geographical indicators) have been registered, and another 62 will be registered by March 31 this year. Similarly, so far this fiscal year, copyright and design registrations totalled at 36,378 and 27,819 respectively, the commerce and industry ministry said. "Every 6 minutes one technology is seeking IP protection in India. In 2023, an all-time high of 90,300 patent applications were received. The patent office granted over one lakh patents in the last one year (15-Mar-2023 to 14-Mar-2024). Every working day, 250 patents were granted," the ministry further added. Responding to a query on whether the Commerce and Industry Ministry has received a communication from the CVC over the issue, a ministry spokesperson said: "The ministry is not in receipt of any such complaint from CVC. No such correspondence has been received in the CVC in this matter". On patent dismissals, the spokesperson said: "The Patent Dismissals are Judicial Proceedings, the Ministry is not involved directly in patent dismissal cases, which are handled by various courts across the country. The said information is not maintained by the Ministry". Query mailed to the CVC remained unanswered till press time.

A Economic Advisory Council to PM (EAC-PM) report in August 2022 on patent problems had noted that despite the overall jump in patent applications, India lags behind in overall patent granted in India. The reports said that in 2020, the number of patents filed in India was 56,771, merely 4 percent of China where 14.97 lakh applications were filed and 9.5 percent of US where 5.97 lakh applications were filed in the same year. Similarly, the patents granted in India were 26,361 as compared to 5.3 lakh in China and 3.5 lakh in US. Moreover, in India, it takes about 58 months on average to dispose of a patent application as compared to about 20 months in China and 23 months in the US, the EAC-PM report said. The EAC-PM analysis in this paper suggests that the major cause of this delay is the shortage of manpower in the patent office as only 860 people were employed in the patent office in India at the end of March 2022, including both examiners and controllers, as compared to 13704 in China and 8132 in US. Thus, approximately 1.64 lakh applications were pending at the controller level as on 31st March 2022. "The paper further identifies few places in the registration system, where no human intervention is required- for instance, giving notice of opposition, abandonment of application in case response to opposition notice has not been received in the stipulated time, etc and argues for putting in place an automatic process to reduce the processing time further," the paper further said.



The lungi, a versatile garment consisting of a long piece of fabric wrapped around the lower waist, has a rich history and cultural importance that spans across India and beyond.

In a video that has gone viral on social media, a woman is seen proudly wearing a lungi on the streets of London; a symbol of her cultural heritage. Valery, who has been living in the city for several years is seen wearing a white t-shirt along with a lungi. She completes the look with a pair of stylish sunglasses. After the clip was uploaded, it quickly went viral amassing millions of views, with many commenting about how they appreciate her confidence and pride in her culture. The lungi is an unstitched garment worn around the waist, popular across South Asia. But its origins go back much further than recent centuries, according to Indian handicrafts curator Jaya Jaitly. "India cannot claim to be the originator of the lungi," she says. "I would say it was right across human civilisation as soon as they started covering themselves." Before stitched clothing became commonplace, cultures around the world draped lengths of fabric around their waists for comfort and modesty. "Whether it's the Africans or the Aborigines or even the Red Indians,

everybody wore these short leather sort of pieces," Jaitly explains. As weaving developed, people transitioned to using "unstitched cloth" fashioned from grass, tree bark, and eventually yarn. While stitched garments like the pyjama arrived in India with the Mughals, the lungi remained a simple solution for informal occasions. "For comfort at home and informality, or even working in the field, they wear a draped cloth and not a stitched cloth," Jaitly notes. "And lungi comes into that category." The lungi took different forms based on region and custom. "The men in South India wear the mundu," says Jaitly. Others would tie a longer cloth around the waist "between their legs" creating "like a pyjama or pant." Women typically wore the stitched sarong or other wrapped garments. The widespread popularity of the lungi in modern India may be surprising to some. As Jaitly shares, "My son-in-law Ajay Jadeja... when he went to the West Indies... was most of the time wearing a red lungi with a white kurta." For many Indian men, wearing the lungi is simply "his comfort." At the same time, the lungi is not regarded as a formal or ceremonial dress in India. "If it's a ceremony, even a wedding or a temple visit, you wouldn't go in a lungi. You would go in a white dhoti or mundu," says Jaitly. The lungi remains solidly "home wear" for relaxing and labour for men. Interestingly, the lungi's simple wrapped style persists in diverse cultures today. Jaitly notes that "in Nigeria, they wear lungi, probably more the sarong style. And Meghan Markle was shown in a white shirt and a lungi" on her recent visit with Prince Harry in the country. The story of the Madras check lungi. One interesting fact she shares is the origin of the iconic "Madras check" pattern frequently seen on lungis. In the early 1800s, a company began producing lungis whose colours bled during washing - something that became embraced as the "bleeding Madras check" rather than a flaw. While the lungi's use today is primarily confined to informal occasions for certain socioeconomic groups, it's simple, unstitched design dates back to the most ancient origins of human clothing across cultures, which makes it an important part of history.

Losing even an hour of sleep can take four days to recover from; this is why

If you lose just one hour of sleep, it could take 4 days to recover from that. Sleep deprivation can cause various symptoms, such as headache, poor focus and attention, increased irritability, poor judgement, poor decision making and increased sleepiness. #sleep #HealthyHabits Dr Shiva Kumar R, head of the department and senior consultant in Neurology and Epileptology at the Manipal Hospitals, says, "When even a small amount of sleep is lost, such as one hour, the body experiences a disruption in its circadian rhythm. This internal clock regulates the sleep-wake cycles and any disruption can lead to a decrease in sleep quality in subsequent nights." According to research from the Sleep Research Society, he continues, it takes multiple days to fully recover because sleep debt accumulates, and your body needs time to restore normal function and balance in your sleep architecture, particularly the deep sleep stages that are crucial for physical and cognitive recovery. "The body needs to go through several complete sleep cycles to make up for the deficit, which explains why a single hour of lost sleep can take up to four days to recover from." Impact on cognitive functions

The impact of losing a small amount of sleep can be significant. "Research shows that sleep is critical for cognitive functions including focus, attention, and decision-making. When sleep is disrupted, the brain's ability to process information and maintain attention is impaired," Dr Shiva states. He cites a few studies that have indicated that even a minor reduction in sleep can lead to decreased performance in tasks requiring cognitive effort. The cumulative effect of losing small amounts of sleep over several days can be similar to losing several hours of sleep in one night, with substantial impacts on cognitive abilities.

Dr Shiva suggests, "To mitigate the negative effects of losing an hour of sleep and expedite recovery, individuals can adopt several strategies. Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule helps regulate the circadian rhythm. Power naps, no longer than 20-30 minutes, can also provide a temporary boost in alertness and cognitive perfor-



mance." Additionally, improving sleep hygiene by avoiding caffeine and heavy meals before bedtime, creating a relaxing pre-sleep routine, and ensuring a comfortable sleep environment can enhance sleep quality. Regular physical activity, he says, but not too close to bedtime, can also promote better sleep. "According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, these strategies can help mitigate the effects of sleep loss and improve overall sleep quality," Dr Shiva informs. People who are more vulnerable to the effects of disrupted sleep. Dr Shiva warns that certain groups are more vulnerable to the effects of losing even a small amount of sleep. "Children, for instance, require more sleep for growth and cognitive development, and even a minor sleep deficit can impact their learning and behaviour. The elderly may also be more susceptible due to changes in sleep patterns and a higher prevalence of sleep disorders." Anyone who has chronic health conditions, he explains, such as sleep apnea or mental health disorders, may experience exacerbated symptoms with any loss of sleep. Their body's ability to cope with stressors and recover is often compromised, making adequate sleep even more critical for maintaining health.

Is khapli wheat the new superfood? Dietician breaks it down

In the world of whole grains, a contender from the past is making a comeback. Khapli wheat, also known as Emmer wheat, is an ancient grain with a rich history in India. Cultivated as early as 6000 BCE, it was a staple food for millennia. But with the Green Revolution, khapli wheat receded into the background. Today, however, there's a renewed interest in this unique grain, driven by its potential health benefits and distinctive flavour profile.

Is khapli wheat the new superfood, or is it simply a different option? Kanikka Malhotra, Consultant Dietician & Diabetes Educator, said there's no single "best" wheat, but khapli offers some potential advantages. It's a good source of fibre, protein, and certain minerals like magnesium and iron. Additionally, khapli boasts a lower glycemic index (GI), which may benefit blood sugar control. Some individuals also find khapli easier to digest than modern wheat varieties. A look at the num-



bers: Khapli wheat's nutritional profile. Kanikka provided a breakdown of the typical nutritional content you can expect from 100 grams of khapli wheat: While generally safe for consumption, there are a few things to consider, said Kanikka: Limited Research: More research is needed to compare the long-term effects of khapli wheat to common wheat varieties. Khapli has a nuttier flavor that some may find

strong. Blending it with regular wheat flour can ease the transition. Availability can be limited compared to common wheat varieties, and khapli may come at a slightly higher price point. Variety is key: Is Khapli the ultimate wheat? Khapli wheat can be a healthy addition to your diet, but incorporating a variety of whole grains is crucial, according to Kanikka. This ensures you get a broader range of nutrients

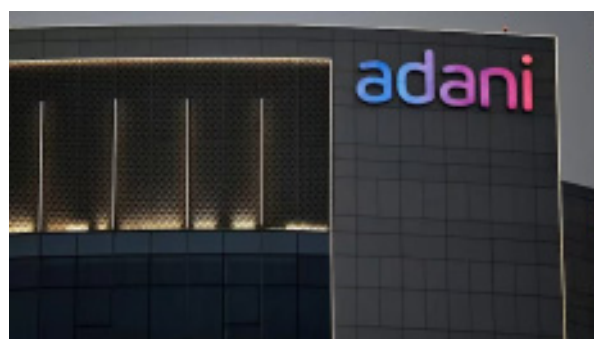
and allows you to explore different taste preferences. Khapli offers a unique and potentially beneficial nutritional profile, making it a worthwhile addition to your exploration of ancient grains. Khapli wheat presents a fascinating historical connection and a potentially nutritious option for those seeking to diversify their whole grain intake. However, consult your doctor if you have any concerns about gluten or other dietary

Adani Energy Solutions seeks Rs 12,500 crore investment

According to a statement filed by the company to the exchanges, the proposed funds will be raised by issuing equity shares with a face value of Rs 10 each. Adani Energy's shares closed marginally lower at Rs 1,104.05, marking a decline of 0.17% in the trading session.

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd has announced plans to raise funds up to Rs 12,500 crore on Monday following the approval from its board of directors. The company plans to carry out this fundraising through Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) or any other allowed method.

"We wish to inform you that the Board of directors of the company has approved raising of funds by way of issuance of such number of equity shares having face value of Rs 10 each for an aggregate amount not exceeding Rs 12,500 crore or an equivalent amount thereof by way of Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) or other permissible mode, in one or more tranches," said the company in a BSE filing. According to a statement filed by the company to the exchanges, the proposed funds will be raised by issuing equity shares with a face value of Rs 10 each. The total amount sought is not to exceed Rs 12,500 crore, or an equivalent sum, through one or more tranches via QIP or other permissible means. However, the execution of this plan is subject to several approvals, including



According to a statement filed by the company to the exchanges, the proposed funds will be raised by issuing equity shares with a face value of Rs 10 each.

the nod from the company's shareholders during the scheduled AGM on June 25, 2024. The official announcement was made post-market hours today. Adani Energy's shares closed marginally lower at Rs 1,104.05, marking a decline of 0.17% in the trading session.

Vicky Kaushal reacts to Katrina Kaif pregnancy rumours, says they'll share the 'good news' when the time is right



the news at the right time.

At the trailer launch, when Vicky Kaushal was asked if the rumours were true, the actor said, "Abhi ke liye aap Bad newz enjoy kar lo, jo hum la rahe hain. Jab uska time aayega, we won't be shying away from giving that news (For now, please enjoy Bad Newz. When the time is right, we won't shy away from announcing the pregnancy news)."

Rumours around Katrina Kaif's pregnancy have been doing the rounds online after a video of the couple from their London trip went viral. It was rumoured that the couple is all set to welcome their first baby in the city. The speculation didn't die down when Katrina returned to Mumbai from their trip. Bad Newz is a comedy film that deals with a rare scientific occurrence called heteropaternal superfecundation, through which a woman can be impregnated by multiple male partners. The film, a spiritual sequel to Good Newz, will hit theatres on July 19. Katrina and Vicky tied the knot in a grand wedding ceremony in Rajasthan in 2021. He was last seen in the film Sam Bahadur, while Katrina last starred in Merry Christmas.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui indirectly lashes out at Jim Sarbh, Prashant Narayanan for undermining Ranveer Singh's acting process: 'Very irresponsible'



The National School of Drama graduate said, "Actors tap into uncomfortable spaces to get into the minds of their characters. How can you casually say that this is all pretentious? Have you ever tried to play any such character yourself?"

When the interviewer identified Ranveer's critics as the main villain of Murder 2 (Prashant Narayanan), and his co-star in Padmaavat (Jim Sarbh), Nawazuddin asked, "What are they doing now? Do you see what Bobby Deol has been doing lately? And what is the man who commented doing currently?" "Who are we to say if Ranveer should or should not put himself through a painful process? What if he did? How do we know it? It is very easy to make such comments. We cannot underestimate anyone.. This is an actor's job," he concluded. In a recent conversation with The Quint, Jim Sarbh said, "There are all those actors who are like 'You know, I was so stuck in my character that I had to get mental therapy for weeks after.' I was like 'shut up bro. You didn't even know your lines on the day, what nonsense.'" Nawazuddin Siddiqui's film Rautu Ka Raaz premiered on ZEE5 on June 28. Ranveer was last seen in Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani.

Shah Rukh Khan would smoke constantly, slept for just four hours; Salman Khan didn't interact much on Wanted set: Govind Namdev



Veteran actor Govind Namdev said that he had heard about "workaholics," but hadn't actually seen one in action until he met superstar Shah Rukh Khan. The actor recalled his time with SRK when they were shooting for the 2000 drama Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani. In an interview with Bollywood Bubble, Govinda Namdev said that because Shah Rukh was also producing the film, he was going above and beyond his responsibilities as an actor. Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani was backed by Dreamz Unlimited, founded by Shah Rukh, his actor friend Juhi Chawla, and filmmaker Aziz Mirza, who helmed the film.

"I had heard a lot about workaholics, jinhe sirf kaam ki dhun hoti hai. I had heard about them, but I saw it the first time when I worked with Shah Rukh Khan," Govind Namdev said. The veteran actor recalled that Shah Rukh would finish the shoot, have dinner with the cast and then excuse himself for the next day's work, which would get over late at night. "We worked throughout the day, then at night he mingled with the whole crew, we ate together

and then, because he was also the producer, he worked till 2 AM. The next day, he had to take an early morning flight to Chennai to attend a function, then come back and resume shooting! He would've slept for not more than three and a half or four hours maximum. Kaam mein dhuni hai woh. He will smoke like a chimney and keep working, keep thinking about what to do next. Superstars usually have this attitude, these tantrums, but not him," the 69-year-old actor said.

Govind Namdev was also asked about his experience of working with superstar Salman Khan, with whom he teamed up for the Boney Kapoor-backed actioner Wanted. The actor said that as far as on-set interactions go, Salman was the opposite of Shah Rukh. "He doesn't interact much, sirf kaam se kaam. There was no personal talk at all. Just sometimes how unke father kaise hote the, kuch bhi tedha kiya toh padti thi humko" (Salman would share how if the kids did anything naughty, they would get a beating by their father Salim).

As Kalki 2898 AD smashes box office opening records, understanding why Prabhas remains big draw for Hindi audience despite few misfires: 'He's the tallest pan-India star'



The strangest pattern with every Prabhas film post the gigantic blockbuster Baahubali 2 goes like this: There is a lot of pre-release hype, the trailer is out, neutral social media users diss it, closer to the release there is an online chatter that hints that the movie is going to tank and despite everything, the film records a massive box office opening. It is almost as if, going against the tide, Prabhas reaffirms his media moniker every Friday he comes on-screen: 'Rebel star', for a reason.

The actor's latest feature Kalki 2898 AD is no exception. The trailer of the Nag Ashwin directed sci-fi film was dubbed lukewarm and too futuristic to appeal to his core mass audience and yet the Telugu epic, co-starring Amitabh Bachchan, Deepika Padukone and Kamal Haasan, took a smashing global opening of Rs 191.5 crore, as per producers Vyjayanthi Movies. Out of which, the film's domestic total was Rs 95 crore, which includes its Hindi collection of over Rs 22 cr.

While Prabhas is not new to big openings, including recording massive figures worldwide thanks to the diaspora, his hold on the North Indian market remains fascinating. "Prabhas stands tall amongst all pan-India stars," trade critic Taran Adarsh told Indianexpress.com. "In fact, with due respect to everyone, he is the tallest," he added. Kalki 2898 AD has recorded the second-best Hindi film opening of the year after Hrithik Roshan-led Fighter, but there is a catch. Fighter was billed as a big scale aerial actioner with Hrithik — who the Hindi film audiences have known since his debut in 2000 — directed by Siddharth Anand, who was coming off Rs 1000 crore success of Shah Rukh Khan's Pathaan, co-starring Deepika Padukone in her golden run and Vishal-Shekar's music to keep the publicity campaign alive. It was also released on Thursday, with Republic Day as its second day. Kalki 2898 AD had no such benefits, as it opened on a working Thursday, with no national holiday the next day.

"And there was the big India vs England semi-final cricket match as well, which did impact its evening and night shows, otherwise the collections would have been 10 percent more," veteran distributor and exhibitor Raj Bansal noted. But what is the Prabhas magic that makes Hindi film audiences turn up for him? The answer is multifold.

"I would give full credit to Baahubali one and two," Taran Adarsh says about Prabhas' staggering rise in the Hindi market over the years. "The contribution of SS Rajamouli can't be denied. His character was so much loved, and so was Prabhas, that the audience cannot erase him from their minds and hearts." SS Rajamouli's Baahubali 2 (2017) smashed existing box office records of Indian cinema, Hindi market notwithstanding. The film had an opening day of Rs 41 crore and ended its run at Rs 510 crore — a record which was held for six years before Shah Rukh Khan's Pathaan broke it in 2023. But a superstar's might is not examined by what the lifetime collections of his films stand at; it is the opening day and weekend the determines their pull. Which is where Prabhas rises and surprises, despite the duds that followed Baahubali 2.

His first release after the Rajamouli epic was the actioner Saaho, which opened at Rs 18 cr and ended at a disaster of Rs 153 cr in the Hindi market. But except for his 2022 romantic drama Radhe Shyam, which was dead on arrival at Rs 4.44 cr, every other subsequent Prabhas film managed to clock good opening numbers, despite poor reviews. Adipurush, the controversial screen adaptation of the epic Ramayana, opened at Rs 36 cr, followed by last December's Salaar, which netted Rs 24 cr despite a clash with Shah Rukh's Christmas release Dunki. "In this industry, you are known by your last Friday. Salaar clashed with a Shah Rukh Khan film, but

Adipurush didn't work and before that was Radhe Shyam, which was a disaster. When you have back-to-back disasters, anyone can be shaken. It is a ruthless industry, but people don't remember Radhe Shyam or Adipurush, they remember him for Baahubali. That is the love and respect they have for him," Taran Adarsh explained.

A trade source shared the reason why the Hindi audiences show up to watch Prabhas, is because he is doing what Bollywood heroes aren't. "He is doing the kind of films that Hindi stars are not doing — larger than life spectacles which warrant a theatrical viewing. They may be good or bad but at least they create the initial euphoria because of the visuals, set up and scale. It is the case of him doing exciting films, which can't be experienced on mobiles phones or TV." It is not that his past few duds didn't dent his credibility. The source explains how the failures have chewed up his profits and opening numbers of his recent films. "If there was no Adipurush, Salaar would have opened higher by Rs 30 cr, because it would have been the first action film of his after Baahubali and Saaho. But Radhe Shyam and Adipurush dented that and took out at least 15-20 percent of Salaar's business." So if it did Rs 140 cr, it would have done over Rs 180 cr if the previous outings hadn't played a spoiler. Same with Kalki, if Salaar would have opened better, then this would have opened around Rs 28 cr, and not Rs 21 cr. So, the impact is there, but his weaker films are better than the stronger films of most in today's times. "Adarsh said what works in Prabhas' favour is that he has won over the "hardcore mass areas", where the "real star power" is flexed. "Why do we always talk of 90s superstars even today? Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, Ajay Devgn, Akshay Kumar and even Hrithik Roshan? Because they have been able to penetrate beyond metros and cities. They have gone deeper into the pockets. That's the case with Prabhas."

Raj Bansal said the euphoria of Prabhas must also be looked at from what he manages to do on a global scale. The kind of numbers his film clock can only be mirrored by Shah Rukh Khan. "Sure his hold in mass pockets is stronger than many current day Hindi film actors and not just that, if you look at USA and overseas markets, Shah Rukh Khan dominates that list, after him there's just Prabhas who matches his box office numbers in the territory. His films take opening because the audience trust has remained intact. They just back on his name and brand of cinema, so they come film after film for him. He is undoubtedly the strongest pan-India star today, with Allu Arjun, and Jr NTR also right behind him."

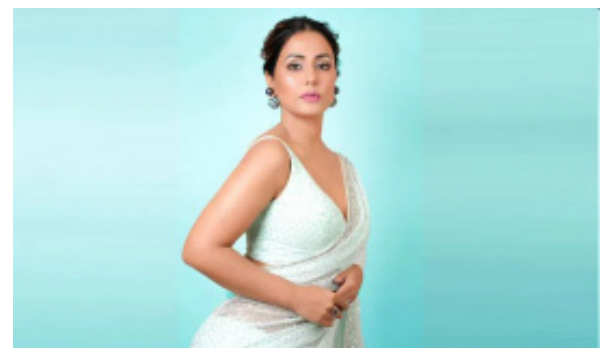
Adarsh said there is an "incredible faith" people have in Prabhas, that at least on face value, there will be "some assurance of an entertainer". The trade critic said what also works in his favour — and in turn his choices — is his honesty. "I had met him after Adipurush teaser launch and told him that I didn't like it. But he said we will work harder. He does respect a professional, and accepts faults. That's a big quality as a superstar, to move on, and look forward gracefully. That's the reason why there is always a queue of producers outside his house. He works on limited films as well, it isn't like, 'Maine dukaan khol di hai, aajao!' That explains why he is consistent, it is phenomenal, what a track record, irrespective of failures and non performers." In terms of Hindi market ranking, the trade source shared that Prabhas has now cemented his position in the top four bracket. "He is the biggest pan-India star. He is in fact the biggest star from the Southern market to leave a mark in the North Indian belt, probably surpassing Rajinikanth also, in terms of the impact a South star has created in the northern market. He is not the biggest star of Hindi, which will continue to be the two Khans — Shah Rukh and Salman, depending on which is the right film. But Prabhas is definitely in the top four stars list in the Hindi market at this time."

Actor Hina Khan diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer

Mumbai: Actress Hina Khan on Friday announced that she has been diagnosed with stage three breast cancer, saying she is strong, determined, and fully committed to overcoming this disease.

Taking to social media, Hina shared a post which read: "Hello Everyone, To address the recent rumour, I want to share some important news with all the Hinaholics and everyone who loves and cares for me. I have been diagnosed with Stage Three Breast Cancer. Despite this challenging diagnosis, I want to reassure everyone that I am doing well. I am strong, determined, and fully committed to overcoming this disease. My treatment has already begun, and I am ready to do everything necessary to emerge from this even stronger."

"I kindly ask for your respect and privacy during this time. I deeply appreciate your love, strength, and blessings. Your personal experiences, anecdotes, and supportive suggestions would mean the world to me as I navigate this journey. I, along with my family and loved



ones, remain focused, determined, and positive. With the grace of the Almighty, we believe I will overcome this challenge and be completely healthy. Please send your prayers, blessings, and love. Love, Hina," the note ended. Actor Jay Bhanushali commented: "Get well soon Hina."

Superbet Chess Classic 2024: Grandmaster Gukesh holds Fabiano Caruana; Praggnanandhaa draws with Ian Nepomniachtchi



GNS News Agency, July 4

World Championship challenger Grandmaster D. Gukesh played out a draw with tournament leader and top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States in the seventh round of the Superbet Chess Classic tournament in Bucharest. On another all-draws day, R. Praggnanandhaa signed peace with Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia leaving the lead positions intact like the previous round. Caruana on 4.5 points remains in front with two victories and five draws, he is followed by Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa and Alireza Firouzja of France, who are all half a point behind the American. Nepomniachtchi shares the fifth spot with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France with a 50% score, a half point ahead of the trio of American Wesley So, Dutch Anish Giri and Uzbekistan's first son in chess Nodirbek Abdusattorov. Gukesh's choice

of Italian opening gave him an optical advantage against Caruana. After the initial tussle, the players reached a middle game wherein the Indian had an edge thanks to better placed forces but Caruana was up to the task in finding the defence to maintain the balance.

The pieces got traded at regular intervals in this encounter and the players arrived at a Queen and rook endgame where neither side had a real chance. The game was drawn after 62 moves. Praggnanandhaa had a relatively easy day against Nepomniachtchi despite playing black. Years of working with World number one Magnus Carlsen and his own expertise as the two-time world championship challenger has made Nepomniachtchi a leading theoretician but in the seventh round the Indian surprised him with what looked like a sensational preparation. The next round would mostly decide the final outcome of the tournament as Caruana is facing Praggnanandhaa and Gukesh has a tough nut to crack in his final white game in Anish. Firouzja might also fancy his chances for a maiden victory in the Grand chess tour if he can conquer the machine-like precision of Nepomniachtchi. Results round 7: Ian Nepomniachtchi (FID, 3.5) drew with R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 4); Deac Bogdan-Daniel (Rom, 2) drew with Alireza Firouzja (fra, 4); Anish Giri (Ned, 3) drew with Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra, 3.5); D Gukesh (Ind, 4) drew with Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 4.5); Alireza Firouzja (Fra, 3.5) beat Wesley So (Usa, 3) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 3).

Hardik Pandya becomes first Indian to occupy top spot in ICC T20I all-rounders' rankings

GNS News Agency, July 4

Hardik Pandya rose two places to become the first Indian to occupy the number one spot in the ICC's T20I all-rounders' rankings on July 3, as the country's cricketers improved their standings following their title-winning performance in the just-concluded World Cup. The 30-year-old, who handed telling blows to South Africa in the T20 World Cup final on July 29 by dismissing half-century Heinrich Klaasen and David Miller in his 3/20 effort, climbed up two places to go level with Sri Lankan star Wanindu Hasaranga as the top-ranked men's T20I all-rounder.

Following a topsy-turvy IPL where he was the target of fans' boos as Mumbai Indians' new captain, Pandya turned it around in style in the T20 World Cup in the USA and the Caribbean. Pandya made impactful cameos down the order with the bat and made breakthroughs with the ball when the team needed him to. He finished with 144 runs at a batting strike-rate of over 150 and also took 11 wickets in the tournament.

His best performance came in the final when he triggered a dramatic South African collapse after the Proteas needed 30 runs from 30 balls with Klaasen in full flow. Pandya gave the decisive blow by dismissing Klaasen in the first ball of the 17th over. He went on to bowl the tense final over and defended 16 runs to help



India pip South Africa by seven runs and win their second T20 World Cup title. India's star fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah, who won the Player of the Tournament award at the T20 World Cup for his 15 wickets, moved up 12 spots to be just outside the top-10. He's at 12th, his highest position since the end of 2020. There were other movements in the top 10 of the T20I all-rounders' rankings, with Marcus Stoinis, Sikandar Raza, Shakib Al Hasan and Liam Livingstone rising by one spot each. Mohammad Nabi moved down four spots to go out of the top five. In the T20I bowling rankings, South Africa's Anrich Nortje rose seven places to a career-best second spot to be just behind top-ranked Adil Rashid with 675 rating points.

Manchester United extend manager Erik ten Hag's contract through 2026



GNS News Agency, July 4

Erik ten Hag has signed a new contract with Manchester United to extend his stay at Old Trafford until 2026, the Premier League club said on Thursday as the Dutchman gets another chance to restore the record 20-times champions to former glories. There had been speculation he would be sacked after United ended eighth last season — their lowest ever finish in the Premier League — and with British billionaire and INEOS chairman Jim Ratcliffe taking charge of football operations. A shock victory over champions Manchester City in the FA Cup final, however, earned the 54-year-old Ten Hag a lifeline. "Looking back at the past two years, we can reflect with pride on two trophies and many examples of progression from where we were when I joined," he said in a statement.

"We must also be clear that there is still lots of hard

work ahead to reach the levels expected of Manchester United, which means challenging for English and European titles. "In my discussions with the club, we have found complete unity in our vision for reaching those goals, and we are strongly committed to making that journey together. "Ten Hag's contract had been set to expire at the end of the 2024-25 season but denying Manchester City a domestic double and qualifying for the Europa League earned him another chance.

"With two trophies in the past two seasons, Erik has reinforced his record as one of the most consistently successful coaches in European football," the club's Sporting Director Dan Ashworth said in a statement. "While the club's review of last season highlighted areas of improvement, it also reached a clear conclusion that Erik was the best partner for us to work with in driving up standards and outcomes. "This group of players and staff have already shown they are capable of competing at the top level; now they have to do it more consistently."

Despite winning two trophies, results and performances have fallen away dramatically despite more than 400 million pounds being spent on new players since Ten Hag took charge. United struggled early in his first season, but Ten Hag instilled a sense of togetherness that had been missing since Alex Ferguson retired in 2013. They enjoyed a nine-match winning run in all competitions, lifting the League Cup and finishing third in the Premier League. The second season was much worse but United's fan base largely stayed loyal to Ten Hag and sung his name loudly at Wembley in the Cup final as their team produced the best performance of his spell in charge.

Indian-origin schoolgirl to be youngest in England Chess team

London: Bodhana Sivanandan, a nine-year-old Indian-origin schoolgirl is set to make chess history after she became the youngest person selected to represent England internationally in any sport. Bodhana, from Harrow in north-west London, will join the England Women's Team at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary, in September. The others in her team are all in their 20s, 30s or 40s. "I found out yesterday after I came back from school when my dad told me, I was happy. I hope I'll do well and I'll get another title," she told the BBC on Wednesday. Malcolm Pein, manager of the England chess team, described the schoolgirl as one of the most remarkable British chess prodigies he has ever seen. "It's exciting — she's on course to be one of the best British

players ever," he said. Her father, Siva Sivanandan, says he remains mystified about where his daughter got her talent. "I'm an engineering graduate, as is my wife, but I'm not good at chess," he said. Bodhana first picked up chess during the pandemic lockdown when Siva's friend was going back to India and gave her a few bags which also had a chess board. "I was interested in the pieces, so I started playing," she recalls. Last December, Sivanandan won the European Blitz Chess Championship in Zagreb, Croatia, and was dubbed "super talented" at the time. Soon after, she was among a group of young chess enthusiasts invited by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to 10 Downing Street to mark the government's major new GBP 1 million investment package for the game.

Glamorgan's 592 vs Gloucestershire is third highest total in fourth innings of first-class cricket what are top two?



GNS News Agency, July 4

Glamorgan almost pulled off a heist against Gloucestershire chasing an improbable target of 593 at the college ground in Cheltenham. The former just fell short by one run as the final wicket fell off the last ball of the game with Glamorgan ending up at 592 all out in 152

overs and the match ending up in a tie. In the first innings, both teams were bowled out for low scores with Gloucestershire making 179 and Glamorgan taking a slender lead as they managed to get to 197. However, in the second innings, the pitch got better for batting and both teams piled on runs. Courtesy of James Bracey's double ton Gloucestershire made 610/5. In the chase, Glamorgan skipper Sam Northeast scored 187 runs. However, in a thrilling finish, Jamie McIlroy the final batter for Glamorgan edged one to keeper Bracey off Ajeet Dale's bowling ending the match in a tie. If Glamorgan had won the game it would have been the highest fourth-innings chase in the history of first-class cricket. The best is held by South Zone who chased down 536 runs against West Zone in the Duleep Trophy in Indian domestic first-class cricket. The fourth innings total from Glamorgan is the third-highest total of all time. Both Gloucestershire and Glamorgan are lingering at the bottom of the table at sixth and seventh position respectively in the eight-team tournament in the second division of County Championships.

'Lucky enough to witness us play cricket': Ben Stokes's bizarre rallying call to England during 2023 Ashes

GNS News Agency, July 4

England skipper Ben Stokes gave a curious speech in the dressing room after the 4th Ashes Test was washed out with the Australians leading 2-1, saying that they'll be forever entrenched in the minds of people who have watched the team play Bazball. "Everything we've done up until now isn't going to stop because we haven't managed to win the urn back. The reward for our work isn't what we get but what we become. And what we have managed to do is we've managed to become a sports team that will live forever in the memory of people who were lucky enough to witness us play cricket," Stokes was quoted as saying in the documentary 'Ashes 2023 | Our Take.'

With the Aussies leading 2-1, England would not be able to win the urn even after playing the 5th Test which they did and the series was tied 2-2. "I know it's going to be a bit flat, I know it's going to hurt that we go into the next game (at The Oval) not being able to get the urn back. But what we have done is something a lot bigger than any Ashes trophy could ever signify for this team — be the team that everybody will always remember," Stokes added. Fox Cricket had shared the quotes on Wednesday with the caption, "right, year, sure," to which



Stokes replied, "Said this to the team who had watched it rain for 2 days when we had our foot on your throats, just tried to cheer up the disappointment tbh, but anyways rent free and all that."

After the Ashes, England's Bazball mentality continued into the India series where they were brutally crushed 4-1 and their nature of playing came under fire. The Three Lions will again tour India in 2025 for five T20Is and three ODIs across January and February while their next Ashes appointment will be in 2025-26 in Australia.

Indian cricket team's victory parade bus awaits champions in Mumbai ahead of mega celebrations; security beefed up

Mumbai, GNS News Agency, July 4

The T20 World Cup-winning Indian cricket team will soon take part in an open bus roadshow followed by a felicitation ceremony at the Wankhede Stadium. Ahead of the historic victory progression in Mumbai, the special open-top bus has geared up for the extravaganza evening in the city. The champions will be driven around the city in a specially designed bus, making the occasion a visually spectacular and appropriate celebration of the team's victory. Meanwhile, extra security has been deployed at Churchgate and other local railway stations in view of the victory parade, the Western Railway (WR) said.

Extra security arrangements have been made at Churchgate, Marine Lines and Charni Road stations for efficient crowd management, the WR said on X. The victory parade of the Indian team from Ma-



rine Drive to Wankhede Stadium in an open bus would coincide with the evening rush hour when thousands of commuters working in south Mumbai return to their homes in northern suburbs. "Additional Ticket Checking staff have also been deployed at the stations and additional UTS windows at Churchgate will remain operational till midnight," Western Railway stated.

Crowds at Churchgate and other railway stations began to swell since afternoon as people were reaching south Mumbai to witness the victory parade and have a glimpse of the cricket team, officials said. Earlier in the day, the Rohit Sharma-led Indian team arrived in New Delhi via a special flight from Barbados after being stuck for days due to hurricane Beryl in the Caribbean. The team met

Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence in New Delhi. The BCCI has arranged a road show for world champions in Mumbai from Nariman Point to Wankhede Stadium, where the team will be felicitated by the Indian board.

Mumbai Police have made stringent measures to ensure the safety and security of the spectators including traffic diversions on the route.

Rohan Bopanna-Matthew Ebden move to second round

GNS News Agency, July 4

India's Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden moved into the second round of the Wimbledon men's doubles event with a smooth win over Robin Haas and Sander Arends in London.

Bopanna and Ebden sailed past their Dutch opponents 7-5, 6-4 in an hour and 11 minutes in a rain-interrupted match on July 3. The second seeds, who are the current Australian Open champions, will face Germany's Hendrik Jebens and Constantin Frantzen in the second round. The Indo-Australian pair had reached the semifinals of the season's third Grand Slam last year. Earlier on Wednesday, India's Sumit Nagal and his Serbian partner Dusan Lajovic were ousted in the first round by Spaniards Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar. Martinez and Munar won 6-2, 6-2 in one hour and seven minutes. India will have further representation in men's doubles first round through N Sriram Balaji and Yuki Bhambri later on



July 4. Balaji will partner Britain's Luke Johnson and will face fourth seeds Mate Pavic of Serbia and Marcelo Arevalo of El Salvador. On the other hand, Bhambri and France's Albano Olivetti will take on the Kazakh duo of Alexander Bublik and Alexander Shevchenko.