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## Fourteen of Nagarjuna Sagar Project's 26 crest gates lifted

Hyderabad: Ending a year-long crop holiday and severe scarcity conditions that stalked its vast ayacut of 18 lakh acres spread over the Telugu States of Telangana (6.3 lakh acres) and Andhra Pradesh (11.74 lakh acres), 14 of the 26 crest gates of the Nagarjuna Sagar Project (NSP) were lifted releasing the flood flow from the dam on Monday. The project is discharging a combined outflow of over 2 lakh cusecs from all the outlets including its two main canals. The volume will be raised further if needed taking the inflows from the upstream projects into consideration.

## Hyderabad She teams arrests 305 accused, including 16 minors, in sexual harassment cases

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad She teams during Bonalu festival in the city caught 305 persons including 16 minors for sexually harassing women. While 173 people were let off with a warning, the police produced the remaining individuals before the court, out of which 5 were sentenced to three day jail term and a fine of Rs 1,050 was imposed. Apart from Bonalu festival, in July, the She teams received another 115 complaints pertaining to crimes against women and children. She teams facilitated registration of FIR in 19 cases and in four cases POSCO Act was invoked.

## PM Sheikh Hasina resigns and leaves Bangladesh; protesters storm her official residence; Army Chief announces interim govt



Dhaka, GNS News Agency, August 5

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has resigned and an interim government is taking over, Army Chief General Waqar-uz-Zaman announced here on Monday, in a dramatic development amid massive protests against her government that claimed more than 100 lives in the last two days. "I'm taking all responsibility (of the country). Please cooperate," he said in a televised address amid reports that Hasina has left the country. There were unconfirmed reports that she was headed to a city in India.

The Army Chief said he had met political leaders and told them the Army would take over responsibility for law and order. However, there were no leaders from Hasina's Awami League party at the meeting. Hasina, the 76-year-old daughter of Bangladesh founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had been ruling the strategically located South Asian nation since 2009. She was elected for a record fourth consecutive term and fifth overall term in the 12th general election held in January, amid a boycott by the main opposition party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of former premier Khaleda Zia and its allies. More than 100 people have been killed in the protests against the Hasina government over the last two days. The country has been witnessing fierce demonstrations over the controversial quota system that reserves 30 per cent of jobs for the families of veterans who fought the 1971 liberation war. As protests spiralled across the country, the Army Chief said he had asked both the Army and the police not to fire any shots. Zaman also urged restraint and asked protesters to end the violence. He vowed "justice" for all the people. Soon after the Army Chief's announcement, hundreds of people took to the streets, celebrating Hasina's ouster. Earlier, hundreds of protesters stormed the Prime Minister's official residence 'Ganabhaban'. Footage showed protesters looting Hasina's official residence and some of them were seen carrying chairs and sofa from the Ganabhaban residence.

## Anand Mahindra likely to be made as Chairman of Young India Skill University, official orders awaited



GNS News Agency, August 5

In a significant development during his visit to the United States, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy announced the appointment of Anand Mahindra, Chairman of Mahindra and Mahindra Group, as the Chairman of the upcoming Young India Skill University in Telangana. Official orders regarding this appointment are expected to be issued shortly.

During his visit, CM Reddy also highlighted the strategic importance of the Young India Skill University, which has been designated as the assembly venue for discussing skill development initiatives. In this context, IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu presented the Skill Varsity Bill in the Legislative Assembly, which prompted a thorough debate among lawmakers. The Telangana government aims to address the growing challenges of employment and skills mismatch by establishing this university. A total of 17 diverse courses will be introduced, focusing on equipping youth with practical skills essential for the competitive job market. The initiative underscores the importance of developing technical expertise, assuring that mere certificates will not suffice in securing employment opportunities for the youth. With the establishment of Young India Skill University,

## Revanth Reddy urges Telugu diaspora to become partners in Telangana's development

GNS News Agency, August 5

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has called on the Telugu diaspora in the United States to become partners in the development of the state and contribute to the government's efforts to attract investments. The Chief Minister, who is currently on a visit to the United States, addressed Telugu NRIs at a programme in New Jersey.

According to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) here on Monday, he was welcomed by the NRIs with a huge rally. Revanth Reddy said the government will come out with a new industrial policy keeping in view the future requirements and to expeditiously achieve inclusive economic development. He said besides mobilising funds the government will focus on employment and skill



development. Praising the NRIs, he said with their skills and talent, they helped to develop the US into a strong and wealthy nation. He urged them to now become partners in the development of Telangana. The government is creating a special mechanism to attract investments by dividing Telangana into Metro Core Urban, Semi Urban and Rural clusters, he said. While interacting with people from the Indian community on the US East

Coast, the Chief Minister said his government would develop a fourth city near Hyderabad as the future city. Revanth Reddy recalled that he had visited the US last year as the president of the Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee. "I had promised that I would come again after liberating Telangana from misgovernance and destruction of 10 years and after bringing the Congress to power. I have fulfilled that promise," he said. He reiterated that his govern-

ment would fulfil every promise made to the people. The government has already taken many steps for the welfare and development of farmers, women and youth. Schemes like crop loan waiver of up to Rs.2 lakh, Rythu Bharosa for input subsidy to farmers, jobs to unemployed, free bus travel for women, gas cylinder for Rs.500, free electricity for poor up to 200 units per month, promotion for teachers and quality education for students have been implemented. According to the CMO, the NRIs hailed the efforts of Revanth Reddy to fulfil the commitments made to the people. They lauded the efforts to develop Hyderabad and praised the plans. They assured him that they would work with the government to attract investments for Hyderabad.

## Supreme Court junks PIL seeking direction to freeze election symbol resembling human body parts

GNS News Agency, August 5

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking direction to the Election Commission (EC) to remove, freeze and cancel election symbols which resemble "parts of the human body". Refusing to entertain the plea, a bench, headed over by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud, remarked that it cannot issue a writ of mandamus to the poll body as sought in the PIL.

The petition said that the PIL litigant lodged several complaints against the symbols, which resemble or are identical to parts of the human body for ensuring free and fair elections in India, but the EC has not taken any steps in the matter. It added that the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) clearly describes the cessation of the election campaign before 48 hours of the polling and Section 130 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, bans the exhibition of the election symbol within 100 metres of the periphery on polling day and therefore, some symbols which resemble or are identical with the human body parts cannot be hidden and can be misused by exhibition of such human body parts. The PIL filed through ad-



vocate Omprakash Parihar calls upon the apex court to decide whether EC can allot the symbol of human body parts as an election symbol to any party and whether such allotment of such symbols is in violation of Article 324 of the Constitution of India, read with section 29A and Section 130 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, section 21 of the General Clauses Act, 1897, and Rules 5 and 10 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961.

## BRS to pursue legal action against defecting MLAs, says KTR

GNS News Agency, August 5

Hyderabad: The BRS is gearing up for a legal battle seeking the disqualification of MLAs, who defected to the ruling Congress, with party working president KT Rama Rao announcing plans to file a case in the Supreme Court. He exuded confidence that either the Telangana High Court or the Supreme Court might give necessary directions on the issue within a month, making by-elections inevitable in Telangana. "The defected MLAs will be made accountable for their actions in the public arena, during the bypolls," he asserted, following a meeting with legal and constitutional experts in Delhi on Monday.

He consulted legal and constitutional experts, along with former Ministers and senior BRS leaders T Harish Rao, G Jagadish Reddy, Gangula Kamalakar and others, about the legal course to be adopted against the defected MLAs. The BRS leaders presented documents related to their High Court petition and the complaints to the Speaker against the defected MLAs. Constitutional expert Chetpat Aryama Sundaram informed the BRS delegation that the Supreme Court has previously ruled on similar matters, emphasising that the Speaker cannot



delay disqualification decisions indefinitely. Legal advisors indicated that the High Court is likely to make a swift decision based on Supreme Court guidelines, and if not, BRS will escalate the matter to the Supreme Court.

Rama Rao said the BRS would continue its legal

## Manu Bhaker to be India's flag bearer at Paris Olympics closing ceremony

GNS News Agency, August 5

Paris: Star shooter Manu Bhaker, who created history by winning two bronze medals at the Paris Games, is set to be India's flag bearer at the Olympic closing ceremony here on Sunday. Manu opened India's medal account at the ongoing Games by winning a bronze in individual 10m air pistol event, becoming the first marksman from the country to win an Olympic medal. She then joined forces with Sarabjot Singh to bag

the 10m air pistol mixed team bronze. "Yes, Manu has been chosen to be the flag bearer. She has done exceptionally well and deserves the honour," an IOA official said. The 22-year-old shooter from Haryana had earlier said it would be an honour to be India's flag bearer. "There are many in the contingent who are more deserving but it will be a real honour, if I am asked to," Manu had said. IOA has not named a male flag bearer yet but are likely announce one in the coming days.

## Wanted decision on Art 370 to happen with concurrence of people rather than imposition: PM



New Delhi, GNS News Agency, August 5

"There was complete clarity in my mind that taking the public in Jammu and Kashmir into confidence was absolutely essential for the execution of the decision," Prime Minister Narendra Modi says about his government's decision to abrogate Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. The prime minister's remarks come in the foreword of a new book titled "370: Undoing the Unjust, A New Future for J&K".

"We wanted the decision, whenever it would be taken, to happen with concurrence of the people rather than imposition," he writes in the book, researched and written by non-profit organisation BlueKraft Digital Foundation and published under the Penguin Enterprise imprint. The book mentions in detail how Modi managed to achieve the goal that he set out for himself. The publishers said the book, which is scheduled to release this month, "chronicles, what is inarguably the greatest constitutional feat in India's history and tells the inside story of how Prime Minister Modi managed the seemingly impossible". It "delves into multiple blunders at the time of independence that culminated into the unjust regimen of Article 370. It discusses the social, political and economic ramifications of Article 370 since its inception in 1949", a statement by Penguin said on Monday, which marks five years of revocation of Article 370. "It sheds light on the historical reluctance to challenge this provision and the eventual paradigm shift brought about by its abrogation in 2019. Through careful examination, it discusses how the government resolved legal complexities and safeguarded against security threats to successfully execute the historic decision," the statement said.

Replete with anecdotes, the book recounts the events leading to the abrogation and also chronicles the region's history -- from the ancient to contemporary times. The publishers claimed this is the "first book of its kind on the Modi government where the actual decision-making process has been documented through interactions with top decision makers including Prime Minister Narendra Modi". In advance praise for the book, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said, "An eminently readable account of a crucial decision that has promoted national integration while transforming the development and security landscape of Jammu & Kashmir. It brings out how the political calculations and personal proclivities of an earlier era were finally countered by national sentiment."

## Prayers, faith & hope for NASA astronauts Sunita Williams, Barry Wilmore stranded at ISS

GNS News Agency, August 5

Washington: About 10 miles from the Johnson Space Center, a Houston-area church takes a moment during Wednesday Bible studies and Sunday evening services to pray for two members who cannot be there. In fact, there's no way on Earth for NASA astronauts Barry 'Butch' Wilmore and Tracy Dyson to show up at Providence Baptist Church. They're in space, orbiting the planet. More specifically, these two members are working on the International Space Station together.

Like many astronauts before them, they brought along their faith when they launched into space. "God uses all of us in pretty neat ways, and I think I get the most joy from what I do thinking about it in those terms," said Dyson, discussing her job on the 'Bible Project' podcast ahead of her March launch on a Russian Soyuz spacecraft. Dyson's six-month mission isn't scheduled to end until September, but Wilmore and his fellow NASA test pilot Sunita Williams should have been back weeks ago.

They are staying longer than expected following thruster failures and helium leaks on Boeing's inaugural crew flight for its Starliner capsule. Wilmore and Williams have said they are confident the capsule will return them home safely; engineers are still poring over Starliner test data. There's no return date yet, which means the congregation's worries have subsided for now since they are safe aboard the space station, said Tommy Dahn. He is a pastor for the Pasadena, Texas, church where Dyson worships as a newer member and Wilmore is a longtime elder.

It's the launch and return days that ratchet up their anxieties — and prayers. "We will definitely be on vigil as we find out when that's going to happen," said Dahn, who is in close contact with Wilmore and his wife during the latest mission.

# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Unfair play

THE timing couldn't have been worse. A controversy has erupted over the allocation of funds to the states for the development of sports infrastructure under the Centre's Khelo India Scheme, even as Indian players are battling it out to win medals in the Paris Olympics. The Congress-led Opposition and a section of the sports fraternity have accused the Centre of discriminating with states such as Haryana and Punjab. Haryana, which accounts for one-fifth of the athletes in the Indian contingent, has been allocated Rs 66.6 crore under the scheme, while Gujarat, which has sent only a couple of players to the Games, has got Rs 426 crore; Uttar Pradesh has received Rs 438 crore, though only six athletes from the state are representing the country in Paris. The share of Punjab, which has a dominant presence in the Indian men's hockey team, is Rs 78 crore. The 'Khelo India — National Programme for Development of Sports' was launched in 2016-17 with the win objectives of mass participation and promotion of excellence across the country. The creation and upgradation of sports infrastructure are central to this ambitious programme, which the government claims is spurring sportspersons to raise the bar in national and international events. However, with some states performing better than others in terms of producing national/international-level players, the funding should be proportionate to the sporting success, something on the lines of the production-linked incentive schemes for the industry. The Centre needs to spell out the criteria for the allocation of funds. Is it based on the geographical area and population of the respective states or are there other considerations? In any case, a thorough review of the scheme is a must to address disparities. At the same time, it is imperative to monitor the use of funds by various states to ensure that corruption and red tape don't defeat the very purpose of Khelo India.

## Pune startup's formula for 'red gold' comes with a greater vision

GNS News Agency, August 5

Growing up and well into adulthood, Shailesh Modak could not remember a time when he was not trying to get better at communication and public speaking. Now, as Modak drives to work in the mornings, past a traffic-congested highway, up the NDA hill and into a deeply forested area, he feels the stress seep away. Through the trees, Modak catches the first glimpse of his startup—a shipping container, a cold storage area and a polyhouse.

It is here, amid one of Pune's richest biodiversity zones, that Modak has created a way to marry the exotic appeal of saffron fields with an innovative agricultural practice that can help people grow the spice. A few years ago, he gave a Ted Talk on hydroponics and is, at present, in demand for lectures. Modak's formula, which he says "is not rocket science but science", involves managing the essentials that plants require—CO<sub>2</sub>, nutrients, water and the environment, which includes humidity and temperature. Soil, crucially, is not mandatory. Since 2019, Modak has been growing a range of plants, from leafy vegetables to strawberries to microgreens, in shipping containers using hydroponics, a form of agriculture that does not use soil but aqueous solutions with nutrients. He decided on saffron after Covid. "I thought of doing something new," he says. According to IMARC Group, a market research firm, the size of India's saffron market is projected to have a compounded annual growth rate of 13.6 per cent between 2024 and 2032. "The growing popularity of traditional Indian cuisine and the escalating demand for saffron as an essential ingredient, increasing incorporation of saffron into various beauty and cosmetics products, and augmenting demand for ethically sourced saffron represent some of the key factors driving the market," reads a report on the company's website. Festive offer Modak, who was a software engineer before diverting into agriculture, has been a fighter since childhood. The youngest of three brothers in a family of educationists, he was the one who did not get to attend an English-medium school but studied in Marathi. Modak, who was a software engineer before diverting into agriculture, has been a fighter since childhood. The youngest of three brothers in a family of educationists, he was the one who did not get to attend an English-medium school but studied in Marathi. Known as "red gold", saffron is primarily cultivated in Kashmir in India, with Pampore being the hub. Modak adds that the demand for saffron in India is 100 tonnes, of which only 10-15 per cent is met by Kashmir. His vision is to "design a system by which an ordinary person can grow a lot of saffron crop". He is close to cracking the code, having made strides since the first year when he would stress over the flowering of the plant. Now he is concerned about increasing the multiplication of saffron bulbs so that he does not have to depend on Kashmir. He has managed to increase the multiplication by 40 per cent. "Once we can nail the multiplication process, we can make seeds available everywhere. If one lakh people can grow saffron, we can fulfil a good chunk of the market requirement," he says. Already, Modak is receiving inquiries from people who want to grow saffron in their homes, terraces and balconies. His saffron sells for Rs 499 per gram but the business model also includes selling the petals to the soap industry and ayurvedic practitioners, among others. Then there are the one thousand students who have been trained by him, generating a revenue through the educational vertical. As Modak launches into passionate details of saffron growing, it is clear that it is his tenacity that keeps him going. He travels to Kashmir to understand the cultivation process and supplement that by studying literature on the spice on the internet. Modak, who was a software engineer before diverting into agriculture, has been a fighter since childhood. The youngest of three brothers in a family of educationists, he was the one who did not get to attend an English-medium school but studied in Marathi. "It was always in my mind that I could not express myself in the English language," Modak says. He was a wiz in software "because it was an area where I didn't have to talk, only work silently". Modak took classes in English but kept getting rejected at interviews, until one company took the bet on him. During the interview, he was asked to write on the board rather than speak. He was hired but paid by cheque for six months before the company became confident and sent him across the world on off-site assignments. Modak rose up the ranks but the question "when will I learn to talk?" hounded him.

## Irregularities in construction of classrooms: Delhi PWD officials served show-cause notices



GNS News Agency, August 5

The Delhi Directorate of Vigilance has issued show-cause notices to 24 Public Works Department (PWD) officials, including superintendent engineers and executive engineers, for alleged "violations of financial rules, guidelines, lapses and irregularities" in the construction of classrooms in government schools. This Delhi government project was moved and approved in 2015 to construct new classrooms by the education department to reduce that student-classroom ratio. According to the notices issued by Special Secretary (Vigilance) Y V V J Rajasekhar, 24 engineers involved in the construction of additional classrooms are under scanner, including the current engineer-in-charge, the then engineer-in-charge, a chief engineer, a superintending engineer, a chief project manager and 20 executive engineers.

As per the notice, the engineers were "prima facie responsible" for "various lapses and irregularities", such as violation of General Financial Rules (GFRs), provisions of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) works manual, guidelines of Union Ministry of Finance and Central Vigilance Commission guidelines, in the construction of the classrooms. The education department noticed that the student-to-classroom ratio was very high. It proposed to construct additional classrooms in government schools to reduce the ratio, according to the notice. Afterwards, the education secretary requested the PWD secretary to conduct a survey and prepare a cost estimate. The PWD failed to submit a single consolidated estimate for constructing additional classrooms, as per the show-cause notice. Instead, it submitted 16 preliminary estimates, which divided the project. The total amount of the initial estimates submitted by the PWD to the education department was Rs 1033.73 crore. Subsequently, the education department issued 16 sanctions to PWD

for this purpose.

The notice stated, "The PWD split the 16 sanctions into 63 tenders, further dividing the project into smaller parts." The notice also mentioned that according to the rules, contractors have two weeks to submit bids for projects with estimated costs of Rs 2 crore and above. However, for 63 tenders, the submission period was only seven to 10 days. The DOV also said that the PWD did not provide detailed information when submitting preliminary estimates regarding whether the land was available for construction, whether the soil had load-bearing capacity, and whether appropriate approval from local authorities had been obtained. The vigilance department also stated that the cost of construction increased by Rs 326 crore due to the "incorporation" of richer specifications without the approval of the council of ministers and without calling fresh tenders.

The Chief Technical Examiner (CTE)/CVC also reviewed the matter. After examining the records and visiting various schools under priority projects, they noted and communicated lapses and irregularities. The vigilance also said its detailed examination revealed a number of disturbing facts, ranging from the mysterious involvement of private entities in government functioning to enhancements in project execution by more than Rs 200 crore without the approval of the competent authority. The notices to the officers also stated, "The survey conducted by the PWD before preparing the list of schools where additional classrooms were to be constructed was merely an eyewash, and tenders were floated without even the actual requirements of works to be undertaken by the PWD." In addition, it was reported that 53 schools were completely excluded from the upgrade program, despite being included in the original approval by the cabinet. It was also noted that the nodal chief engineer of the PWD was instructed to ensure that construction costs remained within Rs 1,200 per square foot. However, it was found that the actual cost had increased to Rs 2,292 per square foot, exceeding the budget limit. The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) responded, "The Delhi government's vigilance department is conducting a thorough investigation, and we await the findings. The AAP government has always prioritised quality education and infrastructure for Delhi's students. If any irregularities are found, strict action will be taken against those responsible. We remain committed to ensuring that public funds are used effectively and efficiently for the benefit of the people."

## Diamond workers union demands economic package for recession-hit industry



GNS News Agency, August 5

The Diamond Workers Union Gujarat (DWUG) Monday urged the state government to announce an economic package and the revival of the Ratnadeep scheme for the recession-hit industry. The union has also demanded financial aid to the families of diamond polishers who had died by suicide, in addition to the formation of a welfare board for the workers and the abolition of professional tax. On Monday, the union members, led by DWUG Surat president Bhavesh Tank, handed over a

memorandum to Surat District Collector stating their demands.

Under the Ratnadeep Kaushalya Vardhak Scheme, which was introduced during the 2008 recession, workers were given a stipend for skill upgradation. The scheme was discontinued in 2012. Surat's diamond industry, which employs over six lakh workers, has been hit by twin Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars leading to job losses and salary cuts. The recession saw factory owners reducing the working hours and hence, polishers got wages depending on the work done instead of a fixed salary. Meanwhile, Tank said DWUG, which launched a suicide helpline earlier this month, has received more than 1,500 calls so far. "...over 70 per cent calls are from diamond polishers rendered jobless. We have also distributed over 60 rations kits to the workers' families, which will last three months. We have also prepared a list of the children of diamond polishers whose fees are pending in the schools and are working on it to get the donors," he said. According to the memorandum, more than 60 diamond polishers had died by suicide in the past 18 months due to financial constraints. "There are many diamond factories who have declared holidays three days a week resulting in low salaries," it stated.

## Chandigarh aims to be Smart City, but website devoid of smartness

GNS News Agency, August 5

Chandigarh is one of the 100 cities under the ambitious Smart Cities Mission and although Chandigarh Smart City Limited (CSCL) has existed since 2016 to enhance urban facilities, the organisation's website falls short due to inadequate and incomplete information. Chandigarh's smart city website mainly focuses on providing links to public services provided by the municipal corporation (MC). The lack of information to the common person regarding the projects leaves much to be desired. The lack of transparency is evident when the website is compared with those of Indore and Jaipur, which are among the top 10 smart cities in India. While Jaipur and Indore's websites both provide a directory of phone numbers for important company staff, including the CEO, CSCL only provides an office landline number for contact. With the central government extending the deadline for implementation of remaining projects to March 2025 as of July 6, 2024, the list of completed projects now outnumbered ongoing projects nationwide. However, the CSCL website has no tab listing their completed projects, a stark contrast from smart city websites of Indore and Jaipur. Both cities' smart city pages have separate tabs for completed and proposed projects, presented in tabular forms which are easy to understand and accessible. Out of a total of 98 projects, only 29 are listed under latest and ongoing projects on the CSCL website, of which seven links are blank. For the ongoing projects with working links, project components are adequately explained and the cost of each is mentioned. Yet there are instances of contradictory information being displayed, such as under the 24x7 water supply pilot project in Manimajra. The date of completion is mentioned as June 2023, but the project status shows 'under implementation'. project seems to contradict the brief on upgradation of the existing sewage treatment plant as well, which mentions increasing pressure on water supply as a result of limited availability. Some ongoing projects mention intended durations for implementing projects while others do not. The existing information presented in a haphazard manner. For projects whose status shows 'under implementation', no start dates are mentioned. As an organisation that aims to implement information and communication technology (ICT) initiatives in the city, facts regarding its projects should be made clearer and more



accessible, which will indeed be a smarter step to make Chandigarh smart for its people.

## No relief for Wayanad, IMD warns of extremely heavy rainfall

GNS News Agency, August 5

Thiruvananthapuram: The India Meteorological Department on Tuesday issued a red alert for the high-range Wayanad district rocked by landslides triggered by incessant rains and neighbouring Malappuram, Kozhikode and Kannur districts indicating extremely heavy rainfall. While the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a Red alert for four districts including Wayanad, an Orange alert has been issued for Tuesday for all other districts of the state except Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam. A red alert indicates heavy to extremely heavy rain of over 20 cm in 24 hours. An orange alert means very heavy rain of 11 cm to 20 cm, and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm. An Orange alert has been issued for Tuesday to Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Idukki, Thrissur, Palakkad and Kasaragod districts. The Met office has also issued an Orange alert for Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad and Kannur districts on Wednesday also. Amidst the heavy rain, multiple NDRF teams, two helicopters and other rescue teams are on their way to Mundakkai, which has been totally cut off by a devastating landslides that rocked Wayanad district, the state government said on Tuesday.

## US woman found tied to tree: Maharashtra Police file attempt to murder case against former husband



GNS News Agency, August 5

The Maharashtra Police said on Tuesday that an attempt to murder case has been registered against the former husband of a 50-year-old American woman who was found chained to a tree in a jungle in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district. The case was lodged based on a note found in the woman's bag. "We have suo motu registered a First Information Report (FIR) in the matter. She is currently not in a position to talk," Saurabh Agarwal, Superintendent of Police, Sindhudurg, said. The woman, Lalita Kayi, was found on July 27 in Sonurli village in Sawantwadi, over 450 km away from Mumbai, after a shepherd heard her cries for help. He alerted the police, who broke the chain tied to her leg and rescued her. The woman, prima facie, appears to be suffering from schizophrenia and is currently admitted to a Goa hospital.

The police had earlier recovered a photocopy of her US passport and an Aadhaar card that identified her as Lalita Kayi with a Tamil Nadu address. The police also found a note in which she had scribbled "my former husband". The police are looking for her former husband, who allegedly hails from Tamil Nadu, and a team has left to trace his whereabouts. "We have found that the woman, who appears to have been born in the US, had also resided in Goa for some time. We are trying to find out whom she was in touch with in the past few months," Agarwal added. The woman was initially taken to a Sawantwadi hospital from where she was moved to another local hospital. However, in light of her deteriorating physical and mental condition, she was moved to Goa Medical College for advanced treatment. The police said that while she was out of danger, they were informed by doctors that she might be suffering from psychiatric problems. The police have also found a medical prescription from her.

The police said her visa had expired, adding that she had been in India for 10 years. An officer said the woman was not in a position to give a statement as she was weak owing to dehydration and not having eaten anything in the past couple of days.

## Bengal ration scam case: ED searches houses of ex-minister Jyotipriya Mallick's aide

GNS News Agency, August 5

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday conducted search operations at 10 locations across West Bengal, including properties linked to former minister Jyotipriya Mallick's aide Barik Biswas, in connection with a case related to alleged corruption in ration distribution. Biswas is a rice mill owner allegedly close to Mallick, the former West Bengal food minister arrested by the ED in November 2023. As per sources, ED officials conducted searches at Biswas's house in Basirhat and apartment in Rajarhat early Tuesday morning.

The ED is investigating if there is any connection between Biswas and the huge amount of money that has allegedly been misappropriated in the ration corruption case, sources said. Apart from interrogating Biswas, the ED is looking into his bank and business documents, sources added. Earlier, the ED had arrested Mallick's close aide Bakibur Rahman, a rice mill owner, from Deganga in North 24 Parganas district. According to ED officials, ration meant for public distribution system (PDS) beneficiaries was allegedly siphoned off by flour millers in connivance with distributors and others in the supply chain. The proceeds from selling the ration in the open market were worth crores of rupees, the agency claimed. The proceeds were deposited in the bank accounts of three shell firms under the garb of bogus share premiums and commission from foodgrain trading, the agency further said. As per the ED, these companies were subsequently liquidated. These bogus firms had no real business and were used only for laundering the proceeds of crime, the central agency added.

## Builder booked days after youth drowned in flooded basement of Surat building

GNS News Agency, August 5 The Surat police Monday booked a builder and his son in connection with the death of a 20-year-old youth who drowned in a water-logged basement of an under-construction building in the Godadara area of Surat on July 25.

Satyanarayan Rathi, the builder of the under-construction structure, and his son Abhishek Rathi were booked under sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 125 (act endangering life or personal safety of others), and 54 (abatement of offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita based on a complaint by the victim's father, Satyaprakash Mishra, at the Godadara police station.

"We have started a probe. We have also sought the project details from the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC). The project (construction) has been halted for some unknown reasons. We have also sent our teams to nab the two accused," Godadara police inspector H S Acharya said.

According to the police, the youth, Dipesh Mishra (20), was returning back to his home when he slipped and fell into the basement of an under-construction high-rise building filled with water from the Mithi creek near Citizen Square complex in Godadara.

## Punjab to encourage eco-management of cattle dung, to use funds from NGT fine



GNS News Agency, August 15

Funds from a fine imposed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on the State for causing pollution to the Beas and the Sutlej rivers may soon be used in Punjab to encourage eco-management of cattle dung in cowsheds (gaushalas) and dairy farms through vermicomposting, under which biodegradable waste is converted into organic fertilisers with the help of earthworms. The Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB) has invited applications from interested gaushalas and dairy farms of Punjab through an Expression of Interest. The board will provide technical as well as financial assistance to the selected gaushalas and dairy farms. The move is aimed at curbing the problem of water pollution caused by the non-scientific disposal of dung and urinal wastewater generated from gaushalas/dairies in the State. The PPCB has proposed to utilise funds from the eco-restoration plan for eco-management and utilisation of cattle dung through vermicomposting, manure making, cattle dung logs/cake etc. The PPCB plans to use Rs 63 lakh from the eco-restoration plan from the Rs 50 crore penalty imposed by the NGT, a senior PPCB official told in 2018, the NGT had slapped a fine of Rs 50 crore on the Punjab government over pollution caused to the Sutlej and the Beas rivers.

According to a PPCB official, the paid fine was di-

vided among departments of the local government, industry, rural development and panchayats and the PPCB, with the local bodies department getting the lion's share. The official said departments concerned submitted to the NGT, seeking the release of the penalty amount while assuring the released funds would be used for the betterment of the environment through the eco-restoration plan.

Subsequently, the official said, departments concerned came up with various projects to utilise the money. "We decided to use our share for the management of cow dung waste through vermicomposting," the official said. PPCB chairman Dr Adarsh Pal Vig said, "We will provide funding and technical know-how. If we get a good response, we can provide more funds in addition to Rs 63 lakh earmarked initially." Dr Vig, a professor who specialises in vermiculture, bioactivities of glucosinolates, solid waste management using earthworms and earthworm biodiversity, added, "This eco-management initiative could also help create small entrepreneurs." The Expression of Interest inviting applications from gaushalas and dairy farms reads, "Major environmental issues of dairy farms and gaushalas are related to the disposal of dung and urinal wastewater. Poor handling and disposal of dung and wastewater causes water pollution and odour problems. Solid wastes produced from dairy farms and gaushalas are cattle dung, feed residue, etc., which are organic and non-hazardous but require proper handling and disposal. Disposal of cattle dung is the biggest challenge in dairy farms and gaushalas. However, cattle dung, if effectively utilised, can be a resource of manure and energy. Cattle dung may be used for many purposes i.e. for combustion (dung wood) or for producing biogas or as a soil conditioner or as fertilisers or as material for wall plastering, etc." The PPCB has proposed the above-mentioned category-wise eco-management projects depending on the size (small, medium, large) of gaushalas and clusters, and their location.

## DGP wrote multiple letters to Haryana home dept for 4 IPS officers' salary fixation

GNS News Agency, August 5

Haryana DGP Shatruejt Kapur has written multiple letters, including several reminders, to the state home department seeking salary fixation of four IPS officers. The Indian Express has learnt that the Haryana government had on May 29 this year received the latest of the 22 letters from the DGP in which it was mentioned that the initial proposal and the subsequent reminders to fix the pay of four IPS officers was still not done.

As many as four Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) rank IPS officers from 1996 batch in Haryana have been waiting for fixing of their salaries for over two years while the salaries of two 1997 batch IPS have already been fixed. M Ravi Kiran, a 1996 batch IPS officer of Haryana had in April urged the state government to fix the pay of his and three other IPS officers — Mamta Singh, Hanif Qureshi and Krishan Kumar Rao — of the same batch to the rank of ADGP. Kiran had approached the government three days after the state government fixed the salary of two IPS officers of the 1997 batch to the rank of ADGP. The two IPS officers, who were withdrawing Rs 1,99,600 (level-14) per month from July 1, 2023, are now withdrawing Rs 2.17 lakh (level-15) per month from July



1, 2024. While the state government had on May 20, 2022, promoted the four 1996 IPS officers from IGP rank to the ADGP rank, it is learnt that the state police had sent a proposal to the state home department on May 30, 2022 seeking their pay fixation.

## Punjab CM Mann to skip Guv Purohit's farewell today, will attend INDIA bloc protest in Delhi

GNS News Agency, August 5

Bhagwant Mann Punjab power subsidy Mann and Purohit had been on a confrontational path since July 2022, when the Governor visited the border areas of the state and made a statement that drugs were available freely in the state and had reached schools too. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann won't be attending the farewell being given to Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit on Tuesday and will instead be participating in the INDIA bloc's protest rally at Delhi's Jantar Mantar to raise the issue of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's declining health in judicial custody.

President Droupadi Murmu Saturday night accepted the resignation of Purohit as the Governor of Punjab and the administrator of Chandigarh and appointed Gulab Chand Kataria, currently posted as Assam Governor, as his replacement. Kataria will take charge as Punjab Governor on July 31, the day Purohit relinquishes the post. Purohit's farewell is being organised by the government at the Raj Bhavan on Tuesday. Mann will skip the farewell, but will attend the swearing in ceremony of Kataria.

"CM Mann is in Delhi to participate in INDIA bloc protest. He has assigned Cabinet ministers Harpal Singh Cheema and Aman Arora to attend Purohit's farewell. The two ministers will also be receiving Kataria when he arrives in Chandigarh," said an official. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh Monday said, "Congress, Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress, DMK, CPI, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Nationalist Congress Party — Sharadchandra Pawar (NCP-SP), Shiv Sena (UBT) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation will attend the INDIA Bloc protest at Jantar Mantar. We are in talks with two to three more parties," he said. He, however said the names of the leaders joining the rally at Jantar Mantar will be known on Tuesday. Mann and Purohit had been on a confrontational path since July 2022, when the Governor visited the border areas of the state and made a statement that drugs were available freely in the state and had reached schools too.

The confrontation between the Raj Bhavan and the CM in Punjab had even reached Supreme Court in 2023, when the government had not got the budget session prorogued by the Governor. On the other hand Governor had refused to give his assent to four important Bills passed by the Assembly. In August last year, the Governor had written to CM that he was contemplating sending a report to the President of India under Article 356. A state is brought under direct rule of the Centre with the invocation of Article 356, usually after a report is sent by the Governor. Purohit, 83, had resigned on February 3 citing personal reasons. On March 7, however, he had stated that his resignation has not been accepted that he has been asked to continue. A day before his resignation was accepted, Purohit had said that he would be visiting border areas even if it left the CM "upset." As far as Kataria



is concerned, Mann has said he will welcome the new Governor and will work in coordination with him. Mann also said he respected Purohit but was not happy with his visits to the border districts. Purohit tried to create an "atmosphere of conflict," he said.

## Delhi L-G meets student protesters, offers multiple assurances

GNS News Agency, August 5

Vinai Kumar Saxena, Delhi L-G meets student protesters, blame game, Central Delhi's Rajinder Nagar, sloganeering against LG, civil services aspirants, Indian express news L-G V K Saxena met student protesters on Monday. From action within 24 hours against government officials who are to be blamed for looking the other way, to policy changes — Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena on Monday gave several assurances to the protesting students at Central Delhi's Rajinder Nagar. He, however, left soon after as some demonstrators started sloganeering against him. Several protesters expressed dismay at the sloganeering. Blaming student unions who had "nothing to do with the civil services aspirants," they said the attitude hampered the possibility of fruitful discussion. "We want to have constructive discussions with the government and put our demands forward. How can we do that when these student unions say 'Haye, Haye' to the L-G?" asked Ayush Singh (23), an aspirant. Saxena, whose office said he had announced a compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the next of kin of the three UPSC aspirants who died on Saturday in the flooded basement of Rau's IAS Study Circle, said he would "attempt to get commensurate compensation to the families" following the meeting with protesting students. According to Saxena's office, among the demands of the protesting students was immediate compensation to the family of the deceased students by the coaching centre on moral grounds, in addition to the government compensation.

## Who is the driver of the SUV arrested in UPSC coaching centre deaths case



GNS News Agency, August 5

At 6:45 pm on Saturday, Manoj Kathuria, 50, drove his SUV on a waterlogged road in front of Rau's IAS Study Circle in Central Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar. He was on his way home, just 700 metres away. A day later, he faced the consequences of the short drive past the coaching centre. Held on Sunday evening by police, the businessman was accused of having forced a wave of water that breached the entrance of the coaching centre, and eventually led to the flooding in the basement. Three students died due to the flooding.

In a video purportedly shot by one of the students of the coaching centre, Kathuria's Force Gurkha can be seen passing the water-logged road. The gate of the coaching centre collapses due to the force of the water. The ve-

hicle is then seen exiting through the other end of the road in the clip. Advocate Rakesh Malhotra, his lawyer, told a court on Monday that there was no restriction on the road. The speed of the vehicle was just 15 km per hour while the water rose to a height of around 2.5 feet. A day after the coaching centre's CEO Abhishek Gupta and coordinator Deshpal Singh were arrested, Delhi Police on Monday said five more people have been arrested in the case, including Kathuria, taking the total number of arrests to seven.

Police said that Kathuria has been booked under the same sections which were listed in the initial FIR — sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 115 (2) (voluntarily causing hurt) of the BNS, among others. According to police, his vehicle became one of the contributing factors in the coaching centre basement flooding. DCP (Central) Harsh Vardhan said the arrested people include the owners of the basement. "We are committed to ensuring strict action against all those involved in the case". Kathuria's SUV has also been impounded, he added. According to police, Kathuria was dropping off his accountant, who lives nearby, and returning home when the gate got damaged. The owners of the basement, which was given to the coaching centre, who have been arrested have been identified as Parvinder Singh, Sarabjit Singh, Harvinder Singh and Tejender Singh. All four are brothers and they, along with Kathuria, have been sent to judicial custody for 14 days. Abhishek Gupta and Deshpal Singh were sent to 14-day judicial custody

## 'Our lives seen as cheap': Students' voices echo in Old Rajinder Nagar as stir continues

GNS News Agency, August 5

"We want justice", "Our lives are seen as cheap", "Not the first incident of flooding", "Sad state of affairs" — students' voices echoed on Monday in Central Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar as they continued to protest the deaths of three UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) aspirants in the flooded basement of Rau's IAS Study Circle. Demonstrations have been ongoing since late Saturday night against the alleged negligence of authorities in ensuring the safety of students and the lack of monsoon preparedness. Hundreds of students gathered at Bada Bazar Road near Rau's. "This is not the first time that Old Rajinder Nagar has been flooded. Each year, the area witnesses waist-deep waterlogging. This has now become an issue as people have died because of this negligence," said Ayush Singh (23).

"They (coaching centres) take exorbitant amounts of money from us," said Roshan Singh (26), another UPSC aspirant. Singh said that while rates vary across coaching institutes, on average, an aspirant pays Rs 1.75 lakh for a foundation or general studies course, then Rs 50,000 to 60,000 for optional subject classes, Rs 15,000 for aptitude test classes, and Rs 50,000 for the mock-test series. "If the aspirant passes the prelims (preliminary exam) they pay another Rs 80,000 to Rs 1 lakh for mentorship from top teachers in Delhi to prepare for the mains," he said. Arvind Kumar (24), who's been studying for the civil services exam in Delhi for the last three years, said, "It is a sad state of affairs, the way we live in Old Rajinder Nagar. We've raised safety-related issues multiple times but not one person has listened to us. Then there's the 'broker-raj'. Even though the rooms we live in are as small as matchboxes, they take at least Rs 15,000 in rent, and every year, they increase it. For people who come from rural areas of India to prepare for UPSC, it becomes very difficult to survive in Delhi," he said. Even as hundreds protested together, their concerns varied. Some



flagged the negligence of the urban authorities, others spoke of the appalling living conditions. Some expressed concern over the exorbitant prices of the courses and rent. In the three days since the protests started, a divide seems to have emerged.

"What we want is that the families of the victims — including the boy who was electrocuted to death — receive at least Rs 1 crore in compensation. The other demand is for a proper and detailed investigation to take place in the negligence of the MCD and to take action against those responsible," said an aspirant who asked not to be named. "We don't want the protest to become politicised, which is what has been happening ever since students from JNU and DU have become involved," he said. Despite differences, the body of students sat together clapping, and chanted till late evening — "We want justice". More and more students seemed to trickle in as dusk fell. "It seems our lives are seen as cheap," said Priyanshu Jangid (19), an undergraduate student preparing for civil services. "We're here to remind them that we aren't ordinary protesters. We know exactly what they've been doing wrong. We study the system after all," he said.

## Another Kangaroo court in Bengal where TMC leader is accused of assaulting man

GNS News Agency, August 5

TMC leader assault case, Trinamool congress, loan issue, Rajarhat area, North 24 Parganas, Bengal police, Indian express news A senior Biddhannagar police commissionerate officer said, "A complaint has been filed in this matter. We are looking into the matter." A local TMC leader and his associates were accused of beating up a man employed with a firm providing loans in the Rajarhat area of North 24 Parganas district, police said.

The TMC leader, Raktim Kar, however, denied the allegations, alleging that it was an attempt to tarnish the image of the ruling party in West Bengal. Goutam Sarkar on Monday lodged a complaint at the Rajarhat police station against Kar. "I work in a private firm which provides loan. On Friday, Raktim Kar called me and asked me to come to his party office. Later, some of his associates came to my house and took me to their party office. They beat me up in there," said Sarkar. The person who had borrowed money from his firm contacted Kar to settle the matter.

"That is why I was made a target. I lost my father last week. I had just come home after performing last rites. But I was taken away and beaten up. I am scared for my safety," said Sarkar. Kar said, "No one beat him up. He is



making false allegations. His firm is not paying a poor person his dues. Everything has been sorted out. Yet he is crying foul. He is a BJP supporter and is trying to malign my party's image." The BJP slammed the TMC for indulging in "unlawful activities". "Everywhere TMC leaders are inflicting torture on the people. They are doing this with the support of the police. We want the culprit to be arrested," said party MLA Agnimitra Paul. A senior Biddhannagar police commissionerate officer said, "A complaint has been filed in this matter. We are looking into the matter."

## Over 1.89 lakh register for engineering admissions

GNS News Agency, August 5

As many as 1,89,000 students have registered for the Common Admission Process (CAP) for engineering admissions in Maharashtra and number of registrations is expected to increase further as the registration window will end on Tuesday. Last year, total 1,61,336 candidates registered for CAP for admission to engineering colleges, according to data shared by the Maharashtra Common Entrance Test (CET) cell. Even as the number of candidates who registered for engineering admissions increased, there are ample seats available that will help ensure no student will be without a seat, said the CET cell. Even as the intake capacity for engineering admissions is not final yet, an official from CET cell said, "Last year, there were 1,58,585 seats. A total of 1,17,948 candidates were finally admitted to various engineering courses, leaving over 40,000 seats vacant. This year, there will be an increase in the number of total available seats...there will be more than adequate seats for engineering admissions."



According to officials from the CET cell, this happens because students evaluate before taking admissions. "There are various branches in engineering and in the past few years, computer engineering, Information Technology and newly emerging Artificial Intelligence are attracting most students."

## 'Won't blame West, but will be surprised if India looks at Middle East as a unit': Jordan Tourism Minister



GNS News Agency, August 5

The tourist foothold to Jordan has fallen considerably in the wake of the Israel-Hamas conflict in West Asia, said Jordanian Tourism and Antiquities Minister Makram Mustafa Quesi, who was in New Delhi this week for the World Heritage Committee meet, where Jordan's Umm el Jimal city got included in the World Heritage List. In an interview with The Indian Express, Quesi spoke on how they are planning to increase tourism from India, change the perception of the world about their region, and how India and Jordan can learn from each other on archaeological and heritage conservation. Was tourism to Jordan greatly impacted after the Israel-Hamas conflict?

Sadly, yes. Usually, 18% of our tourists come from Europe and the United States. We lost 70% of that. But the decline in the numbers from Asian countries surprised us more. I would not blame the West for looking at the Middle East as one unit but I would be surprised if we are looked at so, in India. Amman is different from other cities in the region. Amman has been safe. Though we received 6.2 million tourists in 2023, there has been a drop after the Israeli aggression in Gaza, in the fourth quarter of 2023. Things have picked up in 2024 but the profile has changed. Now, half of our tourists come from the Arab world itself, compensating for the chunk that comes from the West.

Where does India stand? And what are the other important markets?

In 2023, we had 76,000 Indians traveling to Jordan. This is a good number, and they are competing with the

French, the British, and the Italians. Looking at your population, we hope to double the numbers this year. And hopefully, in the coming few years, you will see a complete jump in the numbers. In my meeting with Tourism & Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, there was a discussion on how to work together to increase the number of tourists. We are trying to revive the direct flights between Amman and New Delhi, which stopped a few years back. Incentives for low-cost carriers from India — on the lines of those offered to airlines that bring tourists from the West, Europe and the United States, Canada, and Australia — are being considered.

Is there also a discussion on a mutual simplification of visas?

It's already simple. Any Indian can just apply online and they can get their visas online straight-forward. And the same applies to the Jordanians. What are the other important markets for Jordan? We are exploring new markets. I started in Africa two months ago and now I am in India, followed by China. The Russian market is very important for us. As we speak, we are trying to resume our direct flights between Amman and Moscow. Jordanians are extremely kind to foreigners and even refugees. Historically, we have received refugees since the start of the crisis in the region and there's still there. As much as 30% of the Jordanian population today are refugees.

What are the other areas of cooperation with India that you're looking at?

We can also cooperate in several fields, including archaeology. The Archaeological Survey of India has been operating for the past 160 years. Our Department of Antiquities too has been operating for the past hundred years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke proudly about retrieving the objects of archaeology from other countries with this diplomatic efforts. Some of our objects are displayed in various parts of the world. One of them is displayed in the Louvre in Paris, and we gave it to the French under an agreement. The oldest piece of archaeology under their roof is our piece, the Ayn Ghazal statue — the oldest human statue found on this planet. Does Jordan face similar problems of antiquities being trafficked? It's an international problem. Two things are important to consider here — the national law to protect antiquities. We enacted the first law back in 1976. We told our citizens that we will not go after you if you register your pieces but have them on our national register so that we control the assets. Secondly, globally, you cannot claim anything taken before 1970 due to the UN convention. Is it fair? I don't think so.

## As SC courtrooms turn into lok adalats, speedy justice and quick wit

GNS News Agency, August 5

Supreme Court Lok Adalat. Lok Adalats, speedy justice, SC courtrooms, supreme court, SC hearing pendency, Arjun Meghwal, D Y Chandrachud, J B Pardiwala, Manoj Misra, Indian express news. The special five-day Lok Adalat, which began Monday, is being held to mark 75 years of the Supreme Court. When Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud stepped into Courtroom Number 1 after lunch on Monday, he walked past the podium and the red high-backed chairs designated for judges. The CJI and his colleagues Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra sat just below the podium along with two lawyers on the bench. "Welcome to the Supreme Court Lok Adalat," the CJI said.

Marking its 75th year, the Supreme Court kicked off a week-long, first-of-its-kind Lok Adalat, a "mega settlement drive", as part of which, over the next four days, nearly 6,700 cases will be heard and disposed quickly. These cases will be taken up post lunch in the first seven courtrooms. In a reply to the Lok Sabha, Union Law Minister Arjun Meghwal said that as of December 2023, the pendency in Supreme Court was 807,65 cases, nearly 35% up from 59,859 cases at the end of 2019. Lok Adalats are an alternative dispute redressal mechanism, where the aim is to settle or compromise cases amicably. While litigants get the benefit of swift justice and substantially reduced litigation costs, as per the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, the decision of the court is binding and it cannot be appealed against. This week, several senior lawyers and advocates on record (lawyers qualified to file cases in the SC) will sit with judges in the special benches. For example, in the CJI's court on Monday, June 29, Supreme Court Bar Association President and senior advocate Kapil Sibal and Supreme Court Advocates on Record Association President Vipin Nair sat with the CJI-led bench.

During the proceedings, several senior lawyers were seen watching the proceedings to get a sense of the format since they would have to be part of the hearings in



the coming days. In the special Lok Adalat benches, both the composition of the court and its conduct is less formal. Justice Sanjiv Khanna, heading the Lok Adalat bench in court number 2, was seen in a brown suit while Justice B R Gavai, heading the bench in court number 2, was dressed in a light green Nehru jacket, a departure from the trademark black suit and robes.

In the Chief Justice's courtroom, the cases listed were largely tax related. According to a March 2024 circular by the Central Board of Direct Taxes, the Centre set monetary limits for filing appeals in courts in taxation matters. For the Supreme Court, this limit is Rs 2 crore — which means, no dispute below this limit should reach the court. On Monday, the Centre withdrew several cases that did not qualify this monetary limit. The CJI referred to these as "low tax" matters and the label quickly caught on with every lawyer mentioning their "low tax" cases. In another courtroom before a bench headed by Justice Khanna Kant, several long pending insurance cases were settled. In one case, to expedite the process, Justice Khanna read out the cell phone number of the party to a lawyer appearing virtually and asked him to immediately get instructions from his client. "They (the insurance company) are willing to pay you. You can take the money and walk away happily," Justice Khanna told the lawyer as the courtroom erupted in laughter.

## Nearly 60 properties from India on Tentative List for inclusion on World Heritage List, says govt

GNS News Agency, August 5

There are nearly 60 properties in India which find a place in the Tentative List for further inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List, according to information shared by the government in Parliament on Monday. India is hosting the key event of UNESCO for the first time. The mound-burial system of the Ahom dynasty in Assam — 'Moidams' — was on July 26 inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, making it the first cultural property from the Northeast to get the coveted tag. 'Moidams' was submitted as India's nomination for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for the year 2023-24. The site was put in the Tentative List of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2014. In a written response to a query in Lok Sabha, Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said, "There are 57 properties in the Tentative List for further inclusion in the World Heritage List. However, as per the Operational Guidelines 2023, only one property can be submitted for the World Heritage inscription process each year. As of now, 42 properties have been inscribed on the World Heritage List." The updated list for India, after the inclusion of centuries-old 'Moidams', is now 43 sites on the World Heritage List and 56 properties on the Tentative List, according to the website of UNESCO, which adds that out of the 195 States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, 189 have submitted a Tentative List.

Shekhawat was also asked whether the government has formulated any scheme for the protection of cultural heritage in compliance with the guidelines of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). "No, sir, there is no such scheme formulated for the protection of cultural heritage in compliance with the guidelines of UNESCO. However, India has ratified the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention. All the World Heritage properties, along with other sites and monuments under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, are protected and conserved by funds provided by the Government of India based on their requirements and Annual Conservation Plan (ACP)," the Union minister replied. In response to another query, he said the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) takes up conservation and maintenance work of protected monuments and sites throughout the country, including 286 in the state of Maharashtra. "Conservation and maintenance of monuments and archaeological sites is a continuous process and is taken up as per the need of monuments and availability of resources," the minister said. Shekhawat, in his response, also shared details of expenditure incurred on conservation, preservation and environmental development of protected monuments during the last three years and till July 15 of the current financial year. The figures stand as follows — Rs 269.57 crore (2021-22), Rs 391.93 crore (2022-23), and Rs 443.53 crore (2023-24), while it was Rs 73.36 crore (2024-25) till July 15 of the current financial year.

## Govt gave tax concessions of almost Rs 4,000 crore on donations to political parties in 2022-23



GNS News Agency, August 5

Union Budget 2024, Budget 2024 analysis, Tax concessions, political donations, income tax act, Income tax returns, political donations cost exchequer, tax deductions, revenue impact, corporate firms, Indian express news. Overall, the total revenue impact of tax concessions availed on political donations in nine years since 2014-15 is an estimated Rs 12,270.19 crore. The data for FY 2023-24 is yet to be made public. The revenue impact of tax deductions availed by corporates, firms and individuals on account of donations to political parties was an estimated Rs 3,967.54 crore in FY 2022-23, according to projections made by the Finance Ministry in the Union Budget 2024-25. The figure is 13% higher than 2021-22 and reflects a further rise in electoral funding which has been witnessing a steep upward trend during the past nine years, according to an analysis of the past Union Budgets (see chart). In 2021-22, tax concessions for political donations was Rs 3,516.47 crore, jumping over 300% from the previous fiscal. In 2014-15, it was Rs 170.86 crore.

Overall, the total revenue impact of tax concessions availed on political donations in nine years since 2014-15 is an estimated Rs 12,270.19 crore. The data for FY 2023-24 is yet to be made public. Union Budget 2024, Budget 2024 analysis, Tax concessions, political donations, income tax act, Income tax returns, political donations cost exchequer, tax deductions, revenue impact, corporate firms, Indian express news. Under the Income Tax Act, 1961, taxpayers, including Indian companies, firms, Association of Persons (AOPs), Body of Individuals (BOIs), individuals or Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs),

are allowed to claim deductions in respect to donations made by them to political parties. These include donations made through cheques, account transfers or electoral bonds.

In 2022-23, of the projected revenue impact of Rs 3,967.54 crore, the most — Rs 2,003.43 crore — was due to donations by corporate taxpayers under Section 80GGB. Section 80GGB of the Income Tax Act states that "In computing the total income of an assessee, being an Indian company, there shall be deducted any sum contributed by it, in the previous year to any political party or an electoral trust." However, it does not allow deductions "in respect of any sum contributed by way of cash". Under Section 80GGC, the tax concessions claimed by individuals for political donations was Rs 1,862.38 crore and Rs 101.73 crore by non-corporate taxpayers (firms/AOPs/BOIs).

"In computing the total income of an assessee, being any person, except local authority and every artificial juridical person wholly or partly funded by the Government, there shall be deducted any amount of contribution made by him, in the previous year, to a political party or an electoral trust..." Section 80GGC of the Income Tax Act states. Like companies, individuals are also not allowed to claim deduction under Section 80GGC in respect of any sum contributed to political parties by way of cash. For the purpose of the Section 80GGB and 80GGC, the Act defines the term "political party" as "a political party registered under section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951". Harikishan Sharma, Senior Assistant Editor at The Indian Express' National Bureau, specializes in reporting on governance, policy, and data. He covers the Prime Minister's Office and pivotal central ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Ministry of Cooperation, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Ministry of Rural Development, and Ministry of Jal Shakti. His work primarily revolves around reporting and policy analysis. In addition to this, he authors a weekly column titled "STATE-ISTICALLY SPEAKING," which is prominently featured on website. In this column, he immerses readers in narratives deeply rooted in socio-economic, political, and electoral data, providing insightful perspectives on these critical aspects of governance and society. ... Read More

## IAS trainee Puja Khedkar moves Delhi court for anticipatory bail

GNS News Agency, August 5

Days after the Delhi Police booked IAS probationer Puja Khedkar for allegedly "faking her identity to fraudulently avail attempts beyond permissible limit" in the civil services examination, she moved an application for "anticipatory bail" in a Delhi Court and the arguments on her bail application will be on Tuesday. Khedkar, 32, who joined the Pune Collectorate as part of her probationary training in June 2024, faces allegations of misusing quotas under Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Persons With Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD) to clear the civil services examination.

Earlier this month, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) had registered an FIR against Khedkar and also issued a show cause notice to her on the cancellation of her selection and barring her from future examinations. Additional Sessions Judge, Patiala House Courts, Devender Kumar Jangala, in his order issued on July 27 said, "An application under Section 338 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023 for allowing to file objection and assisting the Additional Public Prosecutor is moved, on behalf of the complainant. "Section 338 (2) of BNSS lays down that if any private person instructs its advocate to prosecute any person in any court, the Public Prosecutor in charge of the case shall conduct the prosecution, and the advocate so instructed, shall act therein under the directions of the Public Prosecutor with the permission of the court," he said.

"The complainant wants to oppose the present bail application through private counsel, therefore, the permission of the court to advance the arguments in the bail application is granted to the counsel for the complainant. The complainant is also at liberty to file the 'objections', if any, on record during the proceedings of bail application. Application stands disposed off accordingly. Be put up for arguments on the bail application on July 30," he said. The UPSC had said it had conducted an investigation and found that Khedkar had violated rules. "The UPSC has conducted a detailed and thorough investigation into



the misdemeanour of Ms Puja Manorama Dilip Khedkar, a provisionally recommended candidate of the Civil Services Examination-2022. From this investigation, it has been revealed that she fraudulently availed attempts beyond the permissible limit under the Examination Rules by faking her identity by way of changing her name, her father's & mother's names, her photograph/signature, her email ID, mobile number and address," said the UPSC in a statement.

During investigation, the crime branch of Delhi Police has sought details from UPSC, asking to share all the documents submitted by Khedkar during her admission, a source said. An FIR was earlier lodged against Puja's mother Manorama, father Dilip and few others at Paud police station of Pune rural police, for allegedly threatening farmers in Mulshi at gunpoint over a land dispute. Manorama was arrested in this case on July 17 and later remanded to judicial custody. Currently she is lodged in Yerawada jail. However, a court granted anticipatory bail to Dilip Khedkar in this case. Meanwhile, the Pune city police have called Puja Khedkar twice to record her statement regarding her harassment complaint filed against Pune district collector Suhas Diwase. A senior police officer said that Puja has not responded to both the communications. "We called Puja Khedkar twice as we want to get more details about her allegations. But she did not come. There is no response from her," the police officer said.

## HC sets aside Afzal Ansari's conviction in Gangster case, will continue as MP

GNS News Agency, August 5

The Allahabad High Court on Monday set aside a lower court's order convicting Samajwadi Party MP Afzal Ansari in a UP Gangster Act case linked to the murder of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai in 2005. Last year, the Ghazipur court had also sentenced Ansari to four years of imprisonment. The High Court, meanwhile, dismissed the UP government's appeal and criminal revision plea seeking enhancement of the sentence given to Ansari by the Ghazipur court. With the conviction now set aside, Ansari can continue as an MP. Out on bail, Ansari, had contested the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections from Ghazipur on a Samajwadi Party ticket and won.

Setting aside the conviction, Justice Sanjay Kumar Singh of the High Court, said the prosecution could not prove its case and charges under Section 3(1) of the UP Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act against Ansari "beyond reasonable doubt". The judgment also cited Delhi trial court's order acquitting Ansari in the 2005 murder case of BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai. "As a fallout and consequence of above discussion, the impugned judgement and order passed by the learned Additional Sessions Judge/Special Judge, MP/MLA Court, Ghazipur... convicting and sentencing the appellant (Ansari) is hereby set aside... The appellant (Ansari) is acquitted of all the charges levelled against him," the High Court judgment read. On the state government's appeal and Criminal Revision filed by Krishna Nand Rai's son, Piyush Kumar Rai, for enhancement of sentence awarded to accused Ansari, the High Court said, "...this Court is of the view that there is no dispute about the propositions of law laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme

Court in the case of Sumer Singh (supra) and Suryakant Baburao Alias Ramrao Phad (supra), but for enhancement of sentence every case turns on its own facts and evidence. Even one additional or different fact may make a big difference between the conclusion in two cases, because even a single significant detail may alter the entire aspect. Since... the order of conviction of Ansari has been set aside... therefore... Government Appeal and Criminal Revision are liable to be dismissed." The High Court noted that "making allegations against any person and to lead evidence admissible under the law in the concerned courts to prove the allegations, both are entirely different".

"No person can be convicted on the basis of allegations only, unless the prosecuting agency prove its case in accordance with law beyond reasonable doubt. Hence a high responsibility lies upon the prosecution and on the investigating agencies to be more careful in collecting evidence in order to ensure fair investigation, because without fair investigation, fair trial is not possible. It must be impartial, conscious and uninfluenced by external influences, which is one of the essentials of criminal justice system and integral facet of rule of law. The procedure for setting the criminal law in motion, investigation should also be free from objectionable feature or legal infirmities because the just, fair and transparent investigation is right of the accused as well as victim. The conviction or acquittal of any accused is based on the material evidences led by the prosecution before the trial Court not on the allegations of the prosecution and it is prosecution who has to prove its case, not the accused," the court observed.

## 'White Dudes for Harris' raise \$3.7 million, Mark Ruffalo, Jeff Bridges show up



GNS News Agency, August 5

A Zoom call called 'White Dudes for Harris', featuring celebrities, elected officials, and political activists, has raised over \$3.7 million for Kamala Harris's presidential campaign. A Zoom call featuring celebrities and elected officials raised over \$3.7 million for US Vice President Kamala Harris's presidential campaign. The call, titled 'White Dudes for Harris', attracted more than 180,000 participants and included Hollywood stars like Mark Ruffalo, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Sean Astin, Mark Hamill, and Josh Gad.

Actor Jeff Bridges, known for playing 'The Dude' in the 1998 film *The Big Lebowski*, made a surprise appearance to voice his support for Kamala Harris, saying, "I'm white, I'm a dude, and I'm here for Harris." The call, held on Monday evening (local time), lasted over three hours and saw top Democratic officials, including Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, and Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, also present. The Zoom call was marked by a mix of humour

and serious discussion, with participants taking swipes at Republican nominee Donald Trump and his running mate JD Vance. Governor Walz, a potential running mate for Harris, said it was an opportunity for white men to show that Trump did not represent all white men, while Governor Pritzker joked about joining a call called "Couches Against Trump, better known as CATS", a reference to Vance's "childless cat ladies" attack on prominent Democrats.

Actor Josh Gad pointed out that the 'White Dudes for Harris' call was a stark contrast to the testosterone-heavy Republican National Convention. "They have Kid Rock, Kevin Sorbo and a dolphin aficionado, and we have the Hulk, Samwise Gamgee, Luke Skywalker and Mayor Pete just on the Zoom," he said. The call was part of a series of Zoom gatherings aimed at raising money and rallying support for Harris after US President Joe Biden announced his withdrawal from the presidential race and endorsed her. Previous Zoom calls, such as 'White Women for Harris', have also seen an overwhelming turnout, with over 164,000 attendees. These events have featured celebrities who previously supported Biden's campaign, demonstrating the need for Harris to appeal to diverse segments of the population. The campaign has welcomed the assistance, with communications director Michael Tyler stating, "Winning campaigns are powered by real, organic support." After she became the Democratic Party's de facto presidential nominee, Republicans have disparaged Harris, a woman of colour, as a "diversity hire". They have criticised her focus on diversity, equality, and inclusion, suggesting that her political career was aided by Democratic efforts to promote diversity.

## Trump calls Kamala Harris 'worse candidate' than Biden for presidential polls

GNS News Agency, August 5

Donald Trump, former president and Republican presidential candidate, criticised Vice President Kamala Harris, calling her a worse candidate than Joe Biden. Trump's comments came as Harris becomes the presumptive Democratic nominee. Former president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has called his likely Democratic opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris, a "worse candidate" than President Joe Biden, who she replaced more than a week ago. "I think she (Harris) is the worst candidate than him (Biden). She is far more radical left," Trump told Fox News host Laura Ingraham in an interview on Monday, his first after Harris, 59, became the presumptive nominee of the Democratic Party. Harris officially declared her candidacy after incumbent President Biden withdrew from the race for a second term on July 20. She is expected to be officially declared as the presidential candidate by the Democrats next month.

"I thought she was a little younger. I mean, she's 60 years old. I didn't realise she was 60. She's talking a big game. But her game is pretty bad. She was the border czar. She's trying to pretend that she wasn't," Trump said. "She was for defunding the police. She was for open borders. She was for having anybody come in. Now I notice that they're actually saying they want to have immunity for everybody that came into the country, and they want to have citizenship," Trump alleged, asserting that giving citizenship to everybody would destroy the country. "It's in such bad shape. Our country has never been in a position like this. In addition to which we could end up in a third world war. We have 20 million people that have come into the country. I would say by now 20 (million) is probably going over that number," he said.

Trump reiterated his allegations that the Democratic establishment staged a coup against Biden. "They staged a coup against the president of the United States. They went to him and told him 'You are leaving. You are way



down in the poll'. Seventeen points, I think," he said. "It's like you're in a fight with somebody, and you're really winning, and they take him out and they put somebody else in. Nobody ever heard of this before," he added. "This is a coup. They took him. They said even though you got 14 million votes, you're out. And he said 'I am not going out'. They took him out. He was losing badly, so they took him out. He wants something to say. He's sitting there with nothing to do, nobody to talk to. They threw him out. This was a coup, the first one of the president of the United States," Trump said. Trump also said that while he "probably" will debate Harris, he "could also make a case" to avoid a face-to-face confrontation with her, CNBC News reported. After the interview's broadcast, the Harris for President campaign said Ingraham practically begged Trump on Fox News to commit to debating Harris. "Why won't Donald Trump give a straight answer on debating Vice President Harris? It's clear from tonight's question-dodging: he's scared he'll have to defend his running mate's weird attacks on women or his own calls to end elections in America in a debate against the vice president," said Harris for President spokesperson Ammar Moussa. "Vice President Harris will be on the debate stage (on) September 10th. Donald Trump can show up, or not," Moussa said.

## Venezuela snaps ties with 7 nations over poll rigging claims after Maduro win

GNS News Agency, August 5

Venezuela on Monday expelled the diplomatic missions of seven Latin American nations that cast heavy doubt on the election victory of President Nicolas Maduro amid allegations of poll rigging and election fraud. Protesters demonstrate against the official election results declaring President Nicolas Maduro's reelection, the day after the vote in Valencia, Venezuela, Monday, July 29, 2024. Venezuela has severed diplomatic relations with seven Latin American nations that questioned the legitimacy of President Nicolas Maduro's election victory, expelling their diplomatic missions and withdrawing its own staff from those countries.

Maduro's Foreign Minister Yvan Gil ordered the immediate departure of diplomatic personnel from Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay, citing "interventionist acts" by these nations. "Venezuela reserves all legal and political rights to enforce, preserve and defend our inalienable right to self-determination," the Maduro government said in a statement, according to the Miami Herald. "We will confront all actions that threaten the climate of peace and coexistence."

The move comes after these countries expressed concerns over the results of Sunday's presidential election, which Maduro won with 51.2 per cent of the votes according to the regime-controlled electoral council. Disputed Election Opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia and his coalition claim they have obtained 73.2 per cent of the voting tallies, disputing the official results. Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado (R) and presidential candidate Edmundo Gonzalez hold a press conference after election results were declared. Urrutia's ally and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado argued that a review of voting records shows a "mathematically irreversible" lead for him, with 6.27 million votes to Maduro's 2.75 million, the Associated Press reported. Protests and Unrest Thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets to protest what they called a stolen election, chanting "Freedom, freedom!" and "This government is going to fall!" Security forces responded with tear gas and rubber bullets.

A protester steps on a campaign sign of President Nicolas Maduro after he was declared the winner of the



Maduro's Foreign Minister Yvan Gil ordered the immediate departure of diplomatic personnel from Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay, citing "interventionist acts" by these nations.

presidential election. The opposition has vowed to continue challenging the election results, which they claim were tainted by fraud and political intimidation. Regional Divide The diplomatic fallout has exposed a deep divide in Latin America, with some nations supporting Maduro's government and others rejecting the election outcome. Peru recalled its ambassador to Caracas because of the "very serious" results announced in Venezuela, while Costa Rica's President Rodrigo Chaves rejected what he called the "fraudulent" outcome. Chilean President Gabriel Boric called Maduro's victory "hard to believe", while Colombia's Foreign Minister Luis Gilberto Murillo called for an "independent audit" of the result. Argentina's right-wing President Javier Milei wrote in a social media post: "DICTATOR MADURO, OUT!!!" On the other hand, allies Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Honduras have congratulated Maduro on his victory.

International Reaction The United States, Britain, and the European Union have expressed concerns over the election's legitimacy, calling for transparency and a fair count of votes. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the announced result "does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people." Russia and China, however, have congratulated Maduro on his victory.

## Spain PM to testify in graft probe into wife's business dealings



GNS News Agency, August 5

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is set to testify in a graft probe concerning his wife's business dealings. The case has intensified political tensions, with Sanchez denying any wrongdoing. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez is set to testify on Tuesday in a preliminary graft probe into his wife's business dealings, a case that has piled pressure on his fragile minority government. He has denied any wrongdoing by his wife, Begona Gomez, and dismissed the allegations as part of a right-wing smear campaign against his leftist government. But the case has stoked acrimony in Spanish politics, with the conservative opposition calling on him to resign. Gomez is being investigated for alleged influence peddling and corruption following a complaint filed by an anti-graft NGO with links to the far right called "Manos Limpias" -- Spanish for "Clean Hands". The only other time a sitting Spanish prime minister had to testify in a judicial case was in 2017, when Mariano Rajoy was summoned in a graft case that led to the conviction of several members of his conservative Popular Party (PP).

Sanchez asked to testify in writing as is allowed under Spanish law for top government officials, but Peinado rejected the request, arguing he would quiz him as Gomez's spouse. The premier can now choose to remain silent but "politically this could look bad", said University of Alicante criminal law professor Bernardo del

Rosal. "Not answering the judge, or answering in writing, could create the image that he is arrogant," Del Rosal told AFP. Gomez, who has worked in fundraising for years, invoked her right to remain silent under questioning by the judge earlier this month. She is alleged to have used her husband's position as leverage within her professional circles, notably with businessman Juan Carlos Barrabes, who was seeking public funding. In his testimony, Barrabes -- who teaches part of a master's course at Madrid's Complutense University that is run by Gomez -- acknowledged meeting her five or six times at Moncloa, the premier's official residence. Sanchez was also present at two of those meetings, he said.

Barrabes -- who got two letters of recommendation from Gomez before pitching for a public tender worth several million euros -- said they only talked about matters of innovation, judicial sources said. Manos Limpias has said its allegations against Gomez were entirely based on media reports, which could turn out to be false. Spanish prosecutors have failed to get the case dismissed. Even if a court eventually decides to shelve the case without a trial, "all this noise" will damage the PM's image, Del Rosal said. Sanchez's supporters have accused Peinado, whose daughter is a PP city councillor, of political bias. The judge has taken controversial decisions seen as being in sync with the right, such as in 2015 when he accepted another complaint from Manos Limpias over tweets made by two leftist Madrid city councillors deemed offensive. Peinado will allow a lawyer from the far-right party Vox to question Sanchez as part of the probe. Vox is taking part in the investigation as a so-called "popular prosecutor" -- a set-up under Spanish law that allows citizens or organisations to be an accuser in court.

When the probe was opened in April, Sanchez took five days off to consider his future but ultimately stayed on. Federico Santi, senior analyst for Europe at Eurasia Group, said Sanchez "is leveraging the issue to rally support within his left-wing base with some success". Sanchez, who has been in office since 2018, has struggled to pass legislation since he returned to power last year after an inconclusive election.

## US claims manipulation in disputed Venezuela polls, may reassess sanctions

GNS News Agency, August 5

The US and a number of other governments cast doubt on the official vote count. Maduro's opposition rival, Edmundo Gonzalez, asserted that he was the true winner. The Biden administration said on Monday that electoral manipulation had stripped Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's claim of reelection victory of "any credibility," and Washington left the door open to fresh sanctions on the OPEC nation. Senior U.S. officials, briefing reporters on Sunday's election, sharpened Washington's response to the disputed vote, in which Venezuela's electoral authority declared Maduro had won a third term, extending 25 years of socialist party rule. Independent exit polls pointed to a landslide opposition win. The U.S. and a number of other governments cast doubt on the official vote count. Maduro's opposition rival, Edmundo Gonzalez, asserted that he was the true winner. The U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, amplified public demands by President Joe Biden's senior aides that Maduro publish a detailed tabulation of votes and said a failure to do would leave the international community unwilling to accept the announced outcome.

The officials did not unveil any new punitive measures but said Washington would assess its sanctions policy toward Venezuela based on whatever actions Maduro took going forward. "We are faced with potentially a new scenario," one official said. "We are going to take that into account as we map forward where we may head with respect to sanctions toward Venezuela." Washington, which rejected Maduro's 2018 reelection as a sham, broadly eased sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry last October in response to a deal between Maduro and opposition parties. But in April the U.S. reimposed the sanctions, accusing Maduro of reneging on electoral commitments. "By engaging in repression and electoral manipulation, and by declaring a winner without the detailed precinct by precinct polling results ... Maduro representatives have stripped the supposed election results they announced of any credibility," a U.S. official said. Speaking earlier in Tokyo, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said: "We have serious concerns that the result announced does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people." Maduro early on Monday reiterated his campaign assertion that Venezuela's electoral system is transparent.



The U.S. officials did not offer many specifics of electoral misconduct it believes Maduro's side committed. But one official said the electoral commission's announcement "does not track with data that we've received through quick-count mechanisms and other sources" and appeared at odds with how Venezuelans voted. The officials said the U.S. was coordinating with regional allies on a response and would also work with international partners on potential consequences for Maduro's government. A senior U.S. official said the administration was in contact with Brazil and other Latin American governments concerned about the political situation in Venezuela. Biden will speak with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Tuesday afternoon, the White House said. They defended the Biden's administration's decision last year to re-engage with Maduro following the Trump-era "maximum pressure" campaign, despite the Venezuelan leader's history of failing to make good on his political promises. Sunday's election, one official said, was a sweeping call for change from Venezuelan voters and would put the opposition in a better position to negotiate with Maduro. But Republican U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, a harsh Maduro critic, chided the Democratic administration in a post on X, calling it "the latest example of how our enemies have suckered Biden and (Vice President Kamala) Harris repeatedly." Analysts have suggested that a Maduro reelection or post-election upheaval could spur more Venezuelans to leave the country and head for the U.S.-Mexico border. With immigration already a hot-button issue in the U.S. presidential campaign, that could create new problems for Harris, seen as the likely Democratic nominee after Biden ended his reelection bid on July 21.

## South Africa's Zuma expelled from ruling party for backing rival group in polls

GNS News Agency, August 5

The African National Congress (ANC) has expelled former President Jacob Zuma for leading a rival party into elections. This comes after the ANC lost its absolute parliamentary majority for the first time, largely due to Zuma's actions. South Africa's ruling ANC on Monday expelled its former leader ex-president Jacob Zuma for leading a rival party into elections following disciplinary proceedings. The African National Congress, which lost its absolute parliamentary majority for the first time in May largely due to Zuma's defection, said the veteran politician's conduct was "irreconcilable" with its constitution. "Former President Jacob Zuma has actively impugned the integrity of the ANC and campaigned to dislodge the ANC from power while claiming that he had not yet severed his membership," ANC Secretary General Filile Mbalula told a press conference. He was thus "expelled" from the party, Mbalula said. The ANC first suspended the scandal-tainted ex-leader in January, after he endorsed the newly formed uMkhonto weSizwe (MK). MK cut into the ANC's share of votes in the May 29 elections, taking third place with 14.5 percent. The ANC managed 40 percent in the May vote -- its weakest score since it came to power three decades ago to replace the apartheid government.

The result forced it to form a coalition government with nine other parties. MK was left out and is leading the opposition, with 58 lawmakers in the 400-seat National Assembly. MK, a populist, radical leftist party, initially disputed the election result. "His platform is dangerous, appeals to extremist instincts in our body politic and riles up



a political base that may foment social unrest," Mbalula said of Zuma's MK. Zuma has been barred from serving as an MP because of a 2021 conviction for contempt of court. After news of his upcoming expulsion was leaked, the party lashed out at the "grave injustices against its leader." "An examination of the leaked document reveals that the disciplinary process was not only not only profoundly flawed but also conducted in a manner akin to a kangaroo court," said MK spokesman Nhlamulo Ndhlala. Zuma will engage legal counsel to determine the course of action, he said. The former president has 21 days to appeal the decision. Zuma joined the ANC via its youth league as a teenager in 1959. Elected South African president in 2009, he was forced from office in 2018 under the cloud of corruption allegations and was replaced by long-term rival, President Cyril Ramaphosa. The charismatic and outspoken 82-year-old still carries considerable political clout in South Africa, even enjoying support within some factions of the ANC.

## 11 PSU banks charge Rs 2,331 cr from account holders for not maintaining minimum balance in FY24



and receipt/ credit of money through any electronic channel or by means of deposit /collection of cheques drawn by Central/State Government agencies and departments. There is no limit on number and value of deposits that can be made in a month. Under BSBDA, minimum of four withdrawals in a month, including ATM withdrawal are allowed. For all other type of bank accounts, banks are competent to provide any value-added service, free of cost, as per their board approved policy. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) vide its circulars issued in 2014 and 2015 has laid down guidelines regarding levy of penal charges on non-maintenance of minimum balances in savings bank accounts and regarding customer service in banks. Banks were permitted to fix penal charges regarding non-maintenance of minimum balance in savings account, as per their board approved policy, while ensuring that penal charges should be a fixed percentage levied on the amount of difference between the actual balance maintained and the minimum balance as agreed upon at the time of opening the account. Banks have formulated slab structures for recovery of charges considering different geographies and segments. Further, RBI norms require the banks to inform the customers regarding the requirement of minimum balance at the time of opening the account. Any subsequent changes should also be intimated to the account holders. "Account holders are normally notified by SMS and mail in advance if their accounts don't have the minimum balance required," said a bank official. In case of non-maintenance of minimum balance, the bank should notify the customer about the penal charges which will be applicable if the balance is not replenished within one month from the date of notice. It should be ensured that savings account does not turn into negative balance solely on account of levy of charges for non-maintenance of minimum balance, according to the guidelines. Banks minimum balance Eleven public sector banks—excluding State Bank of India (SBI) — have charged Rs 2,331 crore from account holders for their failure to maintain minimum balance in savings banks in FY2024, a rise of 25.63 per cent from Rs 1,855.43 crore in FY2023.

PSUAs per guidelines, some basic minimum facilities are being provided to account holders under Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA), free of charge, without any requirement of minimum balance. Eleven public sector banks—excluding State Bank of India (SBI) — have charged Rs 2,331 crore from account holders for their failure to maintain minimum balance in savings banks in FY2024, a rise of 25.63 per cent from Rs 1,855.43 crore in FY2023. These banks collected Rs 5,614 crore from account holders for not maintaining the minimum balance in the last three years, according to Ministry of Finance figures. SBI stopped charging penalty for not maintaining minimum balance since FY2020.

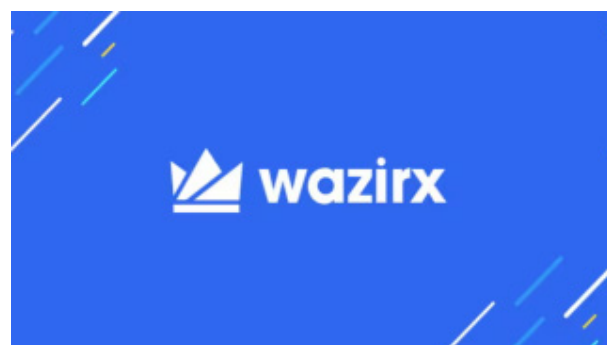
Punjab National Bank (PNB) collected the maximum amount of Rs 633.4 crore from their customers, followed by Bank of Baroda Rs 386.51 crore and Indian Bank Rs 369.16 crore, Ministry of Finance said in its reply to a question raised in the Parliament. The minimum balance penalty will be higher if charges levied by private sector banks are taken into account. All the private banks are charging hefty amounts from account holders if they fail to keep the minimum balance in their accounts.

As per guidelines, some basic minimum facilities are being provided to account holders under Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA), free of charge, without any requirement of minimum balance. These include deposit of cash at bank branch as well as ATMs/CDMs

## WazirX plan to 'socialise' \$230-million security breach losses draws user ire

WazirX plan to 'socialise' \$230-million security breach losses draws user ire. The platform faced a major security breach earlier this month, which resulted in nearly half of its reserves getting stolen. Embattled cryptocurrency exchange WazirX's decision to "socialise" the \$230 million loss from its recent security breach among all its customers has sent shockwaves across the industry. Socialising losses in what is a purely capitalistic venture has drawn the ire of crypto industry insiders who have questioned whether the strategy being explored by WazirX has any legal backing and if it could pass regulatory scrutiny. The platform faced a major security breach earlier this month, which resulted in nearly half of its reserves getting stolen. Since then, the firm has halted deposits and withdrawals from its platform as it scrambles to come up with a workable solution to recoup some of its losses. The firm's ability to maintain 1:1 collaterals with assets has also been "deeply impacted". It has called the breach a "force majeure event beyond our control". The government and Reserve Bank of India are yet to publicly respond to the incident.

"We are implementing a fair and transparent socialised loss strategy to distribute the impact across all users equitably... By socialising the loss, we ensure fairness across our user base and preserve the exchange's stability. This approach balances quick access for some with potential recovery for others, aiming to resolve the situation more efficiently than traditional proceedings," WazirX said in a blog post. Essentially, WazirX will "rebalance" customer portfolios on its platform, returning only 55 per cent of their holdings while locking the remaining 45 per cent in USDT-equivalent tokens. This will also impact customers whose tokens were not directly affected by the breach, with the company stating that "users with 100 per cent of their tokens in the 'not stolen' category will receive 55 per cent of those tokens back." The decision has not gone down well, however. Ragul Goel, former CEO of financial services firm Equitymaster Research, called it "weird". "Is there any legal or regulatory sanctity to all this? Is anyone in the management liable for negligence that allowed the hack in the first place? Why is it that whenever something goes wrong, it's almost always only the little guy that takes the hit?" he said on social



media platform X.

Sumit Gupta, founder of crypto investment platform CoinDCX said that WazirX's move was "hurting other ecosystem participants". "The first contribution to losses should always come from the company and the treasury and assets the company holds. I have not seen any such commitment around this from the company side, instead making customers directly absorb the 45 per cent losses is utter nonsense," Gupta said in a post on X. After the criticism, WazirX clarified that it was a "preliminary step" to understand users' opinions and "is not legally binding upon the users". WazirX is offering users two options moving forward. The first option allows customers to trade and hold their assets with priority for recovery efforts but restricts withdrawals. The second one permits trading and withdrawals but places users at a lower priority for recovery. "55 per cent of user crypto assets will be made available for trading and/or withdrawals (depending upon the option that you select), while the remaining 45 per cent will be converted to USDT-equivalent tokens and locked," WazirX said in a blog post. "For both options, we'll create a balanced portfolio for your unlocked portion (55 per cent) using a basket of crypto assets derived from available crypto assets on the platform." In an email to users, WazirX said that it has filed an online police complaint on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and is processing a physical complaint. It has also reported the incident to the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) India and the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN).

## Digitalisation can expose consumers to impulsive spending, data breaches: RBI report

While digitalisation improves accessibility and convenience of financial services, it can expose consumers to impulsive spending, herd behaviour and data breaches, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a report. In the Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for 2023-24, released on Monday, the RBI said digitalisation-induced changes in the behaviour of consumers and financial intermediaries can have implications for monetary policy. Digitalisation can also create a more complex and interconnected financial system with implications for financial stability.

"While improving accessibility and convenience of financial services for customers, digitalisation raises concerns related to impulsive spending, herd behaviour and data security," the report said. Digital platforms enable quick dissemination of financial trends and choices, allowing information about investments, spending habits, and financial products to spread rapidly across social networks, it said. When customers observe large groups engaging in certain financial activities, such as mass buying or selling of stocks during a market frenzy, they are more likely to follow the crowd. Similarly, driven by herd behaviour, depositors may withdraw their money from banks, leading to potential bank runs or failures, the survey said.

The RBI has joined Project Nexus, a multilateral international initiative to enable instant cross-border retail payments by interlinking domestic Fast Payments System (FPS). As part of the project, the country's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and FPSs of Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand will be interlinked through Nexus. In terms of data breaches, the survey said that the average cost of data breaches in India stood at \$2.18 million in 2023, a 28 per cent increase since 2020 albeit

less than the global average cost of data breach. The most common attacks in India are phishing (22 per cent), followed by stolen or compromised credentials (16 per cent), the report said. The report said that digitalisation can impact inflation and output dynamics, and monetary policy transmission in diverse manners and the overall impact could vary over time given the fast pace of developments. The monetary policy impact could be dampened if digitalisation leads to shifting of credit supply from banks to less-regulated / unregulated nonbanks, or by offsetting reductions in bank deposits. In this environment, central banks would need to incorporate digitalisation aspects comprehensively into their models for the continued efficacy of monetary policy and the achievement of their price and financial stability goals," the report said. The RBI has been undertaking proactive policy measures to harness the benefits of digitalisation while mitigating the emerging risks of digitisation in the financial sector. The report, however, said that digitalisation can provide a strong boost to India's external trade in goods and services, given the country's relative comparative advantage in modern services exports, which are not conditional upon the geographical proximity of the trading partners. Digitalisation in international payment systems has the potential to reduce the cost of receiving remittances, thereby leading to higher remittances and income or savings for the recipients. Earlier this month, the RBI joined Project Nexus, a multilateral international initiative to enable instant cross-border retail payments by interlinking domestic Fast Payments System (FPS). As part of the project, the country's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and FPSs of Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand will be interlinked through Nexus.

## What is a complete blood count test, and when do doctors recommend getting it done?



After learning how to read the report of a 'lipid profile' test and a 'routine and culture blood (or stool)' test, let's deep dive into a 'complete blood count' test. Commonly known as CBC, it encompasses an investigation of hemoglobin, white blood cell count, and platelets. It also includes other parameters that indicate the nature of the red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelet morphology. But that's not all, according to Dr Suchmitha Rajamanya, lead consultant and HOD, internal medicine, Aster Whitefield Hospital, Bengaluru. A CBC further includes a differential count, which provides information about the proportion of the various types of white blood cells, such as neutrophils, lymphocytes, monocytes, and eosinophils. "A complete blood count cannot be performed without including all these vital parameters. We can request separate tests for hemoglobin, white blood cell counts, and platelets. However, a complete blood count encompasses all of these tests. White blood cells are essential for helping the body fight against infections and maintaining immunity. Typically, when we have a bacterial infection, the white blood cell count tends to increase. In contrast, during a viral infection or some-

times even in typhoid infection, their count shows a decreasing trend," explained Dr Rajamanya.

In certain cases of leukemia or lymphoma, the white blood cell count can increase tremendously or decrease significantly. Based on the white blood cell and the differential counts, experts consider many differential diagnoses, which help evaluate a patient further. Some symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, fever, inflammation, bruising, and bleeding may require doctors to suggest CBC for their patients. It may also be advised for general health monitoring during routine checkups or treating chronic conditions. "In contrast, a doctor may suggest a White Blood Cell (WBC) count test when specifically assessing for infection or inflammation, monitoring immune-related conditions or treatment efficacy, or during post-surgical or trauma recovery," said Dr Rajamanya.

For a layperson, interpreting a CBC report can be challenging. "A non-medico can read the report as nowadays most reports come with the normal range of values. But what a non-medico should not do is self-diagnose or Google search his or her findings based upon the report. There are a lot of things which go into the interpretation of a report beyond the normal values," cautioned Dr Pruthi Dhekane, consultant infectious disease, Manipal Hospital, Baner, Pune. Certain other parameters apart from absolute cell counts help give a head start direction for evaluating a suspected disease. "In short, we can say that a CBC is a vital diagnostic tool that provides essential information about a person's health. Abnormal results should prompt immediate medical consultation to determine the underlying cause and appropriate treatment," said Dr Arora.

## 'New couple' Khushi Kapoor and Vedang Raina took the ramp by storm as they walked for Gaurav Gupta at FDCI India Couture Week

The Archies co-stars beautifully complemented each other, with Khushi looking lovely in a silver fishtail lehenga, a matching full-sleeve blouse, and delicate cape-like sleeves pinned to her shoulders, and Vedang in a midnight black sherwani jacket with classic embroidered swirl detailing, matching black dress pants and polished black brogues from the designer's latest collection, Arunodaya, roughly translating to early dawn, stood for elements 'symbolising hope, renewal, and infinite possibilities'. Allowing the outfit — which was adorned with thousands of dripping crystals, pearls, and Zardozi embroidery — to do all the talking, Khushi completed her classy yet elegant look with hair left open in loose waves, a multi-layered diamond necklace, pink lips, and subtle makeup. But it was the blush on her face when Vedang joined her on the catwalk that simply stole the show.



According to the press note, the collection "captures the serene tones of early morning with white, ivory pearl, comet blue, petal pink, mauve, slate, sand, Bordeaux, and lava, blending tradition with innovation. Intricate embroideries, including Indian zardozi, cage embroidery, and colorful details, bring the dawn narrative to life. Sheer fabrics evoke the lightness of dawn, while high end couture pieces like opulent lehengas, saree gowns, and draped sarees showcase Gaurav Gupta's craftsmanship and innovative spirit". The collection also featured elements like metallic breastplates and reflective embroidery on men's jackets. Talking to Elle, Gaurav Gupta said,

"Khushi and Vedang are the new couple, and it's young love. Young, passionate love in this country. And I feel like, for me, they bring in a lot of hope for the future. This collection is all about hope and light." In the same conversation, Khushi added that it was her first time walking for a designer, and to offset jitters, Gupta was gracious enough to give her a hug backstage. Also seen during the show were models in structured silhouettes, accessorised with glittering diamonds and emeralds, sleek pulled back hair and shimmering metallic eyeshadows. The stage had two ginormous silver hands with fingers folded in characteristic meditation pose, and a silver snake slithering between the digits, setting the perfect transcendental backdrop for the presentation.

## Rishabh Pant was on a 'khichdi diet' after car accident, reveals nutritionist: 'He was unable to walk even for a minute'



T20 World Cup-winning wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant has made full recovery after an unfortunate car accident in December 2022 and is going full throttle on the field. But behind this successful comeback lies his sheer determination to overcome that phase of life with a dedicated fitness routine and a strict diet which, according to nutritionist Shweta Shah, included khichdi.

T20 World Cup-winning wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant has made full recovery after an unfortunate car accident in December 2022 and is going full throttle on the field. But behind this successful comeback lies his sheer determination to overcome that phase of life with a dedicated fitness routine and a strict diet which, according to nutritionist Shweta Shah, included khichdi.

"I have known Rishabh Pant since before his accident. I knew about his lifestyle, what he eats, and everything else. But 5-6 months after the accident, on a video call, he told me that he was not able to eat anything. He told me how he was unable to walk even for a minute. So, you can very well understand the mental state of an athlete who is unable to walk and has no energy," Shah told yoga trainer Shiloka. Acknowledging that Rishabh Pant "blindly trusted" her, Shah said that he was made to "stop all medications". "I started a khichdi diet with him, something I believe in. Trust me on it. You get all the nutrients. In Ayurveda, khichdi is a superfood for healing the body. While people associate khichdi with sick or bedridden people, it is recommended even for muscular and healthy people. I can bet that with a khichdi diet, I can give you washboard abs. It is a typical high-quality diet for a vegetarian," said Shah. Adding that the khichdi, made with rice and dal, together have all the essential amino acids making it a "first-class protein for a vegetarian", Shah said, "With a khichdi diet, 50 per cent of his issues were solved, and he started eating regular food." Another problem at hand was inflammation. "So, we started with various kinds of decoctions like lemon shots, black raisins,

black pepper, and gond katira for recovery of the bones. They helped tackle his inflammation in 15-20 days," Shah said.

Finally, the goal was to regain strength and energy. "We made plans for him to follow. His everyday food was back. So, now he is back. Weight loss, inch loss is happening." Shah also shared that when following a khichdi diet, one must choose "easy-to-digest rice like kolam or sona masoori. Not brown or Basmati rice, which are heavy and processed". Taking a cue, we spoke to an expert to understand what makes khichdi a must-have meal option.

Khichdi, a traditional Indian dish made from rice and lentils, offers a range of health benefits that can be particularly advantageous for managing various disease conditions. "After surgery, the body needs gentle, easy-to-digest foods. Khichdi fits this requirement perfectly, providing essential nutrients without causing stress on the digestive system," said Fouziya Ansari, dietitian, Apollo Spectra Hospital, Mumbai. Khichdi is also filling due to its high fibre and protein content, which can help control appetite and prevent overeating. "It provides a balanced mix of nutrients, making it a great option for those looking to manage weight effectively without compromising on nutrition," said Ansari, adding that one can add healing spices and herbs to support recovery. Khichdi also has an anti-inflammatory effect. "Adding turmeric and ginger can reduce inflammation, making khichdi a soothing option for conditions like arthritis or other inflammatory disorders," said Ansari.

## Umar Riaz defends Asim Riaz after Khatron Ke Khiladi 14 ouster; Kushal Tandon and Arjit Taneja take a dig at him: 'Bank account details...'



After Asim Riaz was expelled from Khatron Ke Khiladi 14, his brother, actor/model Umar Riaz, came out in his support and shared a cryptic message on X (formerly Twitter) addressing the issue and asking people not to 'degrade' someone to a level that their 'demons come out.' Asim was expelled from the show after an altercation with the host, Rohit Shetty, and other contestants. Umar wrote, "Don't degrade someone to a level that their worst demons come out! After that, anything that happens is not justified and never will be! Love can do wonders to a person, and hate can make a person his own worst enemy! Just saying!"

While Umar has come out in Asim's support, other TV actors like Kushal Tandon and Arjit Taneja have taken a dig at Asim's behaviour on the show. Arjit, who participated in a previous season of Khatron Ke Khiladi, called Asim an 'idiot' and declared that he needs help. He wrote, "I did Khatron Ke Khiladi last year and had one of the best times of my life. This guy is clearly deluded AF, it's a stunt-based show, get over Bigg Boss. Nobody gives a fuck. I so wish he was in my season. Don't know how

Rohit sir tolerated this idiot. On a serious note, he needs help." I did KhatronKeKhiladi last year and had one of the best times of my life. This guy is clearly deluded AF, it's a stunt based show get over Bigg boss. Nobody gives a fuck. I so wish he was in my season. Don't know how Rohit sir tolerated this idiot. On a serious note He needs help.

Responding to Arjit's post, Kushal addressed Asim's statement on the show when he told the makers that 'he won't take money from them if they can do the stunt themselves.' Kushal wrote, "I wish he did that in front of me. He really needs help, main do teen stunt marne aya hoon, aree bhai maal nahi hain jo marleghaaaa. And when he said, 'I will take no money if anyone can do that stunt from the team,' then well, he should stick to his words and take no money." During a heated argument on the show, when the show's team stepped in to calm Asim down, he shouted at them and said, "The money that you guys are giving me, I earn triple of it. I have so much money you can't even imagine. I change four cars within six months. Do you think I need that money? It is for the fans I was here, not for these losers." Kushal took a dig at Asim's statement and wrote, "Sohrat kya sohrat bro, Ek Bigg Boss? And what car is he flaunting about, second-hand cars? Kitnaaa paisaaa hain be? Bank account details share karna. Hats off to Rohit Shetty sir for how he handled that crap. Huge respect for Rohit sir." During the second episode of Khatron Ke Khiladi 14, Asim slammed other contestants and called them 'losers' after he failed to complete a task and was asked to take responsibility for his failure. He also tried to charge at Abhishek Kumar with his shoe. His behavior didn't sit well with Rohit, who warned him, saying, "Utha ke yahi patak dunga (I will thrash you right here)," and later expelled him from the show for his bad behavior.

## 'Matlab Europe ka kachra?': Bharti Singh says Farah Khan fed her 'European fungus' at a 'mehenga Bandra restaurant'

Comedian and television presenter Bharti Singh and her writer husband Haarsh Limbachiya appreciated Farah Khan's generosity and kindness, despite being a high-profile Bollywood personality with a decades-long career. They also praised her for constantly looking to evolve as a creative person, and appreciated her for being a gracious host. Recalling one of Farah's many parties, they said that she once made them try a rather unusual food that Bharti described as 'Europe ka kachra

Haarsh said in an episode of their podcast, "She invited us to eat 'English' food once. There was sushi, and 'ajeeb (strange)' stuff. There was also something that looked like 'keechad (mud)'. It looked like mud, but it was actually some mushroom dish." He patted Bharti and asked if she remembers the dish, and Bharti said, "It was fungus." She added, "They were calling it 'European fungus', and I thought, 'Matlab, Europe ka kachra (You mean garbage from Europe)?' We think of fungus as mould, but they eat it. Come over to my house, I'll also feed you onion peels." Bharti joked that she was admitted to hospital a week later, but clarified that it had nothing to do with having eaten 'fungus'. Haarsh continued, "Aur Bandra ka tagda restaurant tha, mehenga restaurant tha (It was a big, Bandra restaurant. It was very expensive)." He added, "She's so sweet. If you ask her for her special mutton



dish, she makes sure that she sends it over the very next day. I've never seen such a big celebrity be so kind." Bharti said that she learns a lot from Farah, and described her as an extremely 'hard-working' person. Both Bharti and Haarsh praised Farah for always looking to evolve. "She has a bunch of Filmfare awards, National Awards, she's made some of the biggest films, but she knew that it makes sense to start a YouTube channel," he said. Farah recently launched her personal YouTube channel, where she creates cooking videos with her personal chef. The humorous videos have garnered praise, and a loyal following.

## Shah Rukh Khan got injured on the head while protecting Mita Vashisht during Dil Se action scene: 'Get some ice, it's OK'

Actor Mita Vashisht recalled memories of working on the film Dil Se, with actors Shah Rukh Khan, Manisha Koirala, and director Mani Ratnam. In an interview, she expressed her dissatisfaction with how things turned out for her character in the acclaimed film, and revealed that an intense six-minute fight sequence between her and Shah Rukh's characters was filmed, but it was ultimately cut out of the film. She said that she was disappointed, and wondered if it was done to protect the hero's invincible image.

She recalled SRK being 'very sensitive' with her on set, and made an effort to protect her head from injury while filming. Ironically, he got injured on the head himself. "He put his hand behind my head to protect me, that's how sensitive he is... But he got injured himself. He got a cut on his head, and the whole unit was concerned, but he said, 'It's okay, don't worry about it, get some ice.'" Mita recalled that Mani Ratnam wanted the fight scene to have a sexual undercurrent, and that he wanted their bodies to be intertwined, like a lioness and lion. She revealed that she scene was shot at Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, and that a large crowd had gathered to see Shah Rukh, who had turned his back to them. When Mita asked him why he had his back to the crowd, he said that it was a problem. But just before they shot the scene, he turned around once and showed them his face, and the crowd erupted. He knew this would happen, and had waited before turning around. The scene was ultimately cut, and Mita wondered if Mani Ratnam did this because Hindi film heroes couldn't appear vulnerable on screen back then. She also accused Mani Ratnam of rewriting scenes to favour Manisha Koirala. She said that she was particularly dejected when the director insisted on covering her up in a scene with Manisha, and thereby hiding the bits that she had built through hard training. Mita said that this was mainly done to cover up Manisha's lack of preparation, because she was looking too feeble in front of her. "I was a little disillusioned by (the process), but that's the thing with commercial Hindi films, they'll protect their main leads," she said. Recalling what happened on set during a scene with her and Manisha, Mita said that she had worked out and developed muscles to play her character. For the scene in question, both her and Manisha were initially required to be bare-armed. But then, she said, Mani Ratnam called for the costume designer after shooting one take, and asked her to put her, Nita, in a long-sleeved T-shirt. "I knew what was being done. You were protecting your heroine. She should have done her

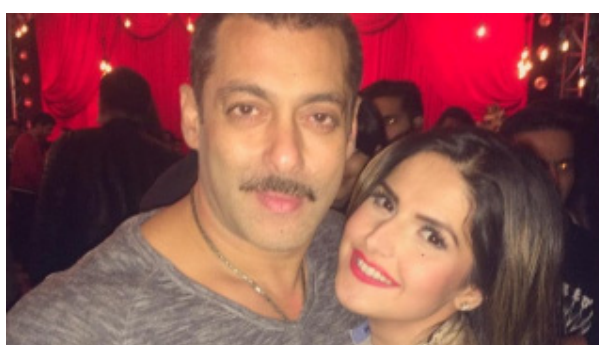


homework better. You should've told her to go to the gym. In fact, you'd keep asking her when she would lose some weight, and she'd (make excuses)," Mita snapped. "I knew that the killer's body that I had made was dominating Manisha, who hadn't done anything to look menacing. She hadn't paid attention to her physique; she was focusing only on her beautiful face. And when we were both together on camera, the difference became obvious." Dil Se also starred Preity Zinta. Recently, actor Divya Dutta recalled visiting the film's set to request Shah Rukh to put in a good word for her with Mani Ratnam, and described the large crowds that were present to watch him work.

## Madhubala plays Pannaga in Vishnu Manchu-starrer 'Kannappa'

Mumbai: Actress Madhubala, who is known for 'Roja', 'Ottayal Pattalam', 'Ennodishtam Koodamo' and others, is set to essay the role of Pannaga in the upcoming pan-India film 'Kannappa'. The makers shared a poster featuring the actress on Monday. In the poster, she can be seen wielding a sword with a fierce look on her face while wearing ancient attire. The film also stars Vishnu Manchu, Mohan Babu, Mohanlal, Prabhas, Sharath Kumar, Kajal Agarwal, Akshay Kumar and Prabhas. The teaser of the film was unveiled last month and boasts of many war sequences, and the use of primitive weapons as Vishnu Manchu's titular character takes on a band of bandits who are on their way to destroy a village.

## 'Salman Khan ke saath darr rehta hai': Zareen Khan recalls shooting debut Veer with star, says she would keep staring at him



Actress Zareen Khan recently opened up about her experience working and sharing the screen space with Salman Khan in her breakthrough movies Veer (2010) and Ready (2011). Zareen shared fun anecdotes from being on set with Salman but confessed that she felt a bit intimidated by him.

Talking to comedian Bharti Singh and her husband Harsh Limbachiya, Zareen shared, "Salman ke saath toh hamesha hi woh darr rehta hai (there is always some sort of fear one feels around Salman). More than fear, intimidation. But Salman is such a good person, he never made

me feel that way. If he realised that I was intimidated by him then he would say something or do something to make me feel better. I was like a creep around him during the shoot. I remember in-between shots, in the resting period, he would sit outside his vanity with the crew and I would sit there with them too. Salman would be doing his thing and and I would keep staring at him and he would ask me, 'kya hua? (What happened?)' and I would say, 'I can't believe I am sitting opposite you. I've only seen you in movies and my whole family is a huge fan.'

She then shared how before getting into movies and being discovered by Salman, she used to chase him during his bicycle rides in Mumbai's Bandra. She shared, "When I was in college, I remember how he would ride his cycle on Carter Road (Bandra, Mumbai), and I had chased him. I am sure he doesn't even remember because I was double or triple my size. And suddenly I am sitting opposite Salman Khan. So I would keep thinking about all that and would keep staring at him. I never thought (I'd one day work with him)." On the work front Zareen, who was called Katrina Kaif's lookalike when she first made her debut in movies with Salman Khan was last seen in Hum Bhi Akele Tum Bhi Akele (2021).

## Ranvir Shorey gives Sana Makbul the finger over comments about his divorce, son during task: 'He is still on dating apps'



Even though Bigg Boss OTT Season 3 is inching closer to its grand finale, tensions are running high in the house. Recently, the situation escalated between contestants Ranvir Shorey and Sana Makbul, who have frequently clashed throughout the season, when Sana made remarks about Ranvir's personal life, including his teenage son. The controversy erupted during a task where contestants were divided into two teams, with actor-former VJ Ranvir and actor-model Sana on opposite sides. The task required one contestant to place their head and hands inside a setup resembling an ancient pillory, smiling throughout, while members of the opposing team tried to make them lose their smile.

When Ranvir stepped forward for the task, Sana made personal attacks, mentioning his son and failed marriage, which allegedly led Ranvir to give her the finger. "How old is your son? 13, right? And he is in the US. Why are you here then? You are more interested in the Rs 25 lakh than the trophy and you mentioned how you want to use the money for your son's college. But Rs 25 lakh isn't enough for that," she said, according to the Times of India, prompting Ranvir's reaction. "You are on dating apps, right? How many dates have you been on? Man is hitting century and is still on dating apps; can anyone believe? He has a 13-year-old son in the US and is still doing all this," she continued, the report added.

Following the task, Ranvir confronted Sana for bringing up his son, calling her a "gutterchaap" once again. Later, when contestant Naved Shaikh, the rapper, known professionally as Naezy, asked her about the incident, Sana defended her actions. "Yes I said those things because I wanted to. I didn't say anything wrong. I just mentioned his son in the US. I know everything about him and his life but the only difference between him and me is that he speaks and I don't say a lot. He called me gutterchapp, main meri gutterchappgi or aagai toh he will be completely naked," she was quoted as saying. Ranvir Shorey was previously married to renowned actor-filmmaker Konkona Sen Sharma. The two started dating in 2007 and tied the knot in a private ceremony in 2010. They announced their separation in 2015 and their divorce was finalised in 2020. Following their separation, Ranvir had said that there was no one else to be blamed or held responsible but himself for their parting ways. Ranvir and Konkona, however, continue to co-parent their son since the separation.

The grand finale of Bigg Boss OTT 3 will take place on August 2 and will stream on JioCinema. In addition to Ranvir, Sana and Naezy, four other contestants remain in the house — Lovekesh Kataria, Armaan Malik, Kritika Malik, and Sai Ketan Rao.

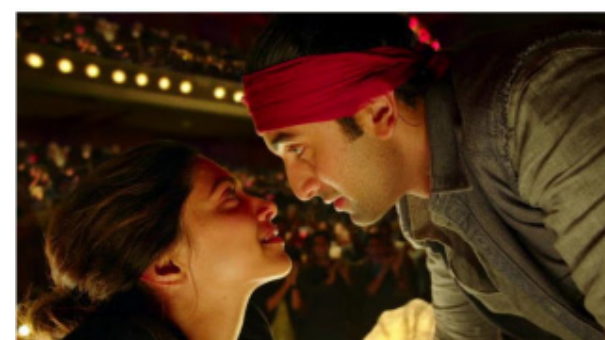
## Ranbir Kapoor on being 'labelled a cheater' after dating Deepika Padukone, Katrina Kaif: 'It's not entirely true'

Before dating Alia Bhatt and eventually tying the knot with her, Ranbir Kapoor had dated two of the most successful actors in the Hindi film industry — Deepika Padukone and Katrina Kaif. In a recent interaction, the Bachna Ae Haseeno actor talked about how dating these two actors became an inseparable part of his identity, leading to him being labeled a 'cheater' and 'Casanova.'

Talking about his relationships, Ranbir told Nikhil Kamath, "When I started, I was always regarded as this playboy guy, who was just dating actresses. Let me tell you- I was in New York for three years nine months — from 2000 to 2003. I didn't date one girl. I was always an aashiq... So, I made myself believe that my first girlfriend in school when I left for New York, even though I was not with her, I made myself believe that that she was my love of my life. And now it's over, let's just focus on work."

He added, "Of course, I dated two very successful actresses and that just became my identity. That he is a Casanova, I was labelled a cheater for a very large part of my life and I still am. I don't care about it but it used to bother me because it's not entirely true. People don't know the entire story and I would never speak about somebody like this in public because it's very private thing. But, things were spoken about me and if it makes that person happy, I don't have any conflict with that person." Ranbir also stated how the unfair tag might have bothered his parents, Rishi Kapoor and Neetu Kapoor. "It used to bother me when it used to bother my parents, but I later realised that it isn't bothering them, I only used to think that."

In an earlier episode of Koffee With Karan, Deepika



Padukone had hinted at Ranbir cheating on her during their relationship. In an old interview with Verve magazine, she also openly spoke about Ranbir cheating on her. She said, "For me, sex is not just about physicality; there are emotions involved. I have never cheated or strayed when I'm in a relationship. If I'm going to be fooling around, why would I be in a relationship? It's better to be single and have fun. But not everyone thinks like that. Maybe that's why I've been hurt in the past. The first time he cheated on me, I thought there was something wrong with the relationship or me. But when someone makes a habit of it, you know the problem lies with him."

After dating Deepika, Ranbir got into a relationship with Katrina Kaif, which lasted for about seven years. He then dated Alia Bhatt, with whom he eventually tied the knot in 2022 after living together for years. They welcomed their daughter Raha in November 2022.

## How Sarabjot Singh recovered from near medal miss to climb the mixed team podium with Manu Bhaker



Last Saturday when Sarabjot Singh missed the final of the men's 10m air pistol event after hitting one inner 10 shot fewer than German Robin Walter, the 22-year-old from Ambala could not control his tears. When his farmer father Jatinder Singh Sahanswerla called him in the evening, the conversation would play a big role in Sarabjot clinching an Olympic bronze medal with Manu Bhaker in the mixed 10m air pistol event at the Chateauroux Shooting Range. Sarabjot and Manu defeated Koreans Oh Ye Jin and Lee Wonho 16-10 in the bronze medal contest to secure their place on the podium. There was a bit of drama towards the end when the Koreans made a little comeback, but the Indian duo wasn't denied.

Sarabjot's father said that not getting too down on himself played a part in the turnaround in the youngster's fortunes. "Kisan da puttar hai, dil thoda chadi da (You are a farmer's son, don't be disheartened)," his father recalls what he told him. "Sarabjot is very emotional about his shooting. That's what he has passionately done for the last 10 years and that's what I reminded him when he missed the final. I have always taught him to forget the past and look ahead and we are glad that he forgave the disappointment and has now won an Olympic medal," Sahanswerla told. Talking about Sarabjot's initiation in the sport, he said it took place during a school camp at a nearby village under coach Shakti Rana in 2014. A pistol was shared by more than 30 trainees. But when the academy closed in 2016, Sarabjot joined the Shooters Terrace Academy at Ambala Cantt under coach Abhishek Rana. With no direct buses from his village to Ambala Cantt, Sarabjot would park his bicycle at a friend's place and catch the bus to Ambala.

"Sometimes, when I did not have work in the mandi

or on days when he won a medal, Sarabjot would ask me to drop or pick him at the bus stand on the motorcycle. But on most days, he would cycle for more than three kms before catching the bus. There were days when he would return home at 7pm, but he never complained," says Sahanswerla. It was only in early 2017 that the father bought Sarabjot his first pistol after the youngster had won a youth bronze in the nationals. Sahanswerla shares the story behind it.

"When he won the bronze at the Nationals, he called me and asked, 'Papa, apan navin pistol le sakde han?' I said 'of course' without thinking about how. Those were the days just after demonetisation and cash flow in the mandi was limited. I had to borrow Rs 1.70 lakh from a commission agent to get Sarabjot his own pistol. I also tilled the land with a tractor on nearby farms at Rs 1,000 per day for arranging more funds," remembers the father. A gold at the Junior World Cup and Asian Championships in 2019 would mean that Sarabjot would get his first cash award from the Haryana government the following year. "When I first met him, like other village boys, he was strong physically. He told me that he assisted his father on the farm and I knew standing for long won't be a problem for him. He had a natural grip but it took some time to perfect his triggering movement. Initially, he would shoot scores of 577-78 but then he improved to 584-585," says coach Abhishek Rana. Two World Cups titles in the last 18 months, apart from fourth-place finishes, and a bronze in the Asian Championships last year, where he bagged the Paris quota for India, meant that Sarabjot was in fine form in the Olympic trials too, where he shot scores of 579, 581, 581 and 584.

On Saturday, Singh had shot 577 before Walter edged him out for the final spot. "Sarabjot had suffered a shoulder injury last year after winning the title at the Bhopal World Cup. He had scores of 585, 581, 581 and 589 in the four World Cups during the last 18 months. He is a slow starter in finals, but can make up once he is set. We did talk about the miss on Saturday but I am glad that he recovered soon. We also had him shooting in the mixed format with other shooters at the academy and worked on him based on his scores," says Rana. Though Singh got his family a new SUV recently from the Asian Games prize money, father Sahanswerla knows how Sarabjot would spend the cash awards. "He likes riding our old motorbike with his friends. But he knows he is a farmer's son and whatever cash award he gets, he asks me to buy more farmland," says the proud father.

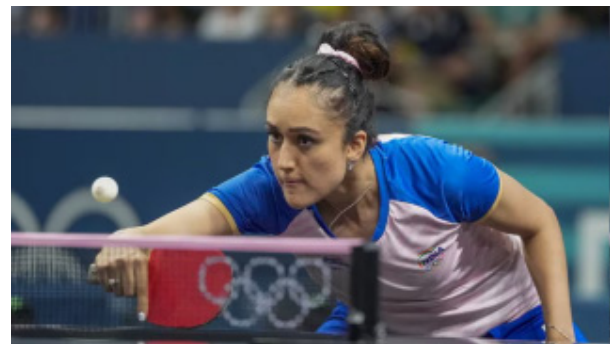
## Manika Batra creates history, becomes first ever Indian TT player to reach singles Round of 16 at the Olympic Games

GNS News Agency, August 5

India's Manika Batra plays a shot during the women's singles round of 32 table tennis match against France's Prithika Pavade at the 2024 Summer Olympics, in Paris. India's Manika Batra plays a shot during the women's singles round of 32 table tennis match against France's Prithika Pavade at the 2024 Summer Olympics, in Paris. It was well past midnight in India on Day 3 action at the Paris Olympics when a significant milestone was achieved in Indian sport. Never before had a Table Tennis player reached the round of 16 in a singles event at the Olympic Games. And, not for the first time in her career, Manika Batra stood on the cusp of becoming the first at something in Indian table tennis. She's no stranger to that feeling. And with a breathtaking display of both attack and defence, she went where no Indian had gone before, becoming the first ever paddler to reach the singles round of 16 at the Olympic Games.

The most impressive aspect of the win, apart from the milestone itself was how dominant Manika was against a higher-ranked player, as she cruised to a fluent 4-0 win over world number 18 and home favourite Prithika Pavade. The 29-year-old Manika dominated from start to finish for a 11-9 11-6 11-9 11-7 win over Prithika, who is ranked 10 places above the Indian at 18. Manika had previously reached the round of 32 at the Tokyo Olympics and she bettered that performance on Monday. "I am happy that I beat a French player in Paris. I defeated a higher-ranked player. I did not think of creating history and making the pre-quarters, there are more rounds, I will take it match by match and give my best as I always do," Manika told PTI after her match.

India's Manika Batra reacts after defeating France's Prithika Pavade in the women's singles round of 32 match at the Summer Olympics, in Paris, India's Manika Batra



reacts after defeating France's Prithika Pavade in the women's singles round of 32 match at the Summer Olympics, in Paris. (PTI) It was a sluggish start for Manika at an arena where Felix Lebrun had defeated Harmeet Desai the previous night in front of a raucous support. Surely Manika must have known from then that she was up against. It wasn't just Prithika, who has her roots in Pondicherry where her father is from, but it was also the home crowd. But once Manika got into the match, she silenced the crowd for the large part, barely letting the left-handed Prithika a way into the proceedings.

Manika, who was cheered on by the rest of the Indian contingent from the stands, spoke about her tactics post game. "I had planned to play to her forehand as discussed with my coach but I was getting the points on her backhand, so I did not change the tactics. I did play a few shot on her forehand too, I did not want her to think that I am playing only on her backhand. It was a tough match. Staying relaxed helps me both on and off the court. I do breathing exercises that help me during the match. I will give my best whoever I play against in the next round," she said.

## 'Pain is unbearable': Shooter Arjun Babuta after joining heartbreak club of Indian legends who finished fourth at Olympics

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pistol shooter Sarabjot Singh choked when asked to describe his emotions after missing out on the final because of one poor shot out of 60. Sarabjot returned stronger and now has a chance to redeem himself after he qualified for the mixed team bronze medal match together with Manu Bhaker, who has a chance to become the first Indian athlete to win two medals at the Olympics. But Arjun Babuta, who on Monday missed an Olympic medal in the 10m air rifle in the cruellest of ways, sounded like a man who would pay a fortune to be anywhere but the cramped room at the shooting ranges in Chateauroux. He was asked if a fourth-place finish was a scenario he

planned for. He looked incredulous. For more than half of his life, the 25-year-old has pursued a solitary goal: an Olympic podium finish.

When he started shooting, hanging a target on a roadside tree outside his house in Jalalabad, a border town in Fazilka, Babuta visualised himself shooting in the Olympics and finishing with a medal around his neck. Finishing fourth isn't something athletes prepare themselves for. "Fourth is the worst position to be in. The pain is unbearable," he said, taking long pauses between words. "It's very hard to deal with." In a way, Babuta continued India's dubious Olympic tradition of fourth-place finishers. The members of this heartbreak club date back earlier genera-

tions, including Milkha Singh and PT Usha, to Abhinav Bindra and Aditi Ashok more recently. Babuta would trade anything to not be a part of this company. In what turned out to be his last shot, Babuta needed a score of 10.3 to remain in medal contention. He aimed for perfection — defined in shooting by a score of 10.9, which is as close to the bulls-eye as one can get. When he pulled the trigger, Babuta felt good. "I executed the shot well," he says. But when the scores flashed on the screens, his jaw dropped: It was just 9.5. From being in silver medal position only a few shots before, Babuta exited in fourth place. He made no bones about how it felt. "Rona dhona toh hai he hai... How I wish I shot that

one shot better! Eventually, I have to move on. Today, I'll indulge my thoughts, whatever they may be. I am fighting with my thoughts right now. Did I give my 100 per cent? I did. So was it luck? Is there a blind spot in my technique? Or is there any other aspect which I don't know now?"

Among the calmest and most articulate shooters, Babuta was grappling with self-doubts. Bindra, who finished fourth under similar circumstances at the Rio Olympics — his last Games — had a brief word with Babuta — competing in his first — soon after the match. "He explained to me that the fourth-place finish will only make me stronger. It's important, he stressed, that I accepted it and moved soon either by laughing

## Amid talk of 'last dance', how Paris cheers Nadal: From chef to ball boys to spectators to officials



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The last dance of the man whose birthday cakes he's made, designed and delivered, for a better part of the last two decades could be near. And Chef Marc Riviere fears it'll be here. "The thought of it makes me sad," says Riviere, who was also the pastry chef for the Ambani wedding last month, adding, "very, very sad." About 6 km away, inside the centre court of Roland-Garros, the sentiment is the same. A Frenchman has a Spanish flag draped around his shoulders. On it is a request: "Rafa, please don't retire." Monday's biggest draw at the Paris Olympics wasn't the medal events at the gymnastics arena or the pool. It was a second-round tennis match. Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, who have 46 Grand Slams between them, have played each other 60 times — no two players have faced one another more.

The result, in a way, was a foregone conclusion. Djokovic won 6-1, 6-4 in a little under two hours. But the thousands in Court Philippe-Chatrier weren't there for the outcome. They sat under the harsh sun just to pay homage to a player who has won more matches and more titles than any other player on this court — Nadal. The first Sunday of the Games saw many first shows. Simone Biles, the pioneering American gymnast, made a dazzling return to the Olympic platform after mental health problems paralysed her first flight in Tokyo. It was a performance to see, and the venue — buzzing with A-listers — was a place to be seen.

The LeBron James-led US basketball side — "Dream Team" — made its first recital, beating a team with another NBA superstar, Serbia's Nikola Jokic. Two of the many superheroes from the NBA universe who have descended upon Lille. For the home nation, Leon Marchand gave the packed La Defense Arena a reason to go back smiling and wake up with a sense of pride; the Monday morning papers splashing the swim sensation's photo on their front pages. It was a celebrity catwalk in the world's fashion hub. But in this constellation of stars, one burnt the brightest — Nadal. He was the biggest storyline of the first weekend of the Games.

Right from the opening ceremony — in the rarest of rare moments, the honour of receiving the torch from

## Ind vs Arg Olympics Hockey: Late equaliser from Harmanpreet saves India the blushes, but sub-par PC conversion rate cause for worry

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It is hard to accurately estimate how good or bad the Indian men's hockey team have started their campaign at the Paris Olympics. There is a case to be made that both matches so far have posed more questions than answers. For all the talk of getting to the Olympics fully ready to hit top gear, they have stuttered in large parts of their matches. After identifying that conceding early goals was a concern, they have gone down 0-1 against New Zealand and Argentina.

And yet you could say, for the glass-half-full kind, they have gathered four points from two matches, behind only Belgium and Australia. Harmanpreet Singh has scored two thrilling late goals, both in the penultimate minute of the match. They have clinched victory from the jaws of the draw, and draw from that of defeat. Surely, that can't be too bad? On Monday, up against a gritty Argentine side that weathered the Indian storm until the 58th minute, the captain stepped up once again to somewhat paper over the cracks but also brought cheer that late goals inevitably tend to do. It wasn't perhaps the most clearest drag flick he has ever sent towards goal, but it had enough venom and a dash of that crucial as-

French legend Zinedine Zidane in the last stretch of the relay was given to him. Most countries would have chosen one of their own. Here in Paris, however, Nadal is one of their own. "Rafa belongs to Paris," Riviera says. "And Paris is Rafa's." So, the Parisians turned out in unprecedented numbers on Saturday to watch his doubles opener partnering Carlos Alcaraz. It was the king of clay sharing the court with the crown prince, set to succeed the throne. When Nadal said he was unsure about his participation in the singles, they held their breath. And after he complained about the scheduling of matches, calling it "outrageous", they firmly stood behind him. That's how Paris has taken care of Nadal from the time he first came here as a muscular teenager in those capris and sleeveless shirts, with that signature bandana strapped around his forehead. Riviera took it upon himself to make sure Nadal's birthday, on June 3, in the middle of the French Open, was always a special occasion. His prestigious patisserie, Potel et Chabot, makes more than 8,000 dishes every year during Roland-Garros. More than 100 chefs work on it, but Riviera has made it a point to ensure that a traditional birthday cake always reaches Nadal. "Initially, when he started coming here, we would give him a box of olives because he likes them a lot. Then, we put some in his cake one time as an ode to his hometown, Mallorca. He really loved that touch," Riviera says. Over the years, they anticipated his different requirements. "He prefers very low sugar in his food and likes fruit cakes. So we make different types, but we really like to hide olives in his cake so it comes to him as a surprise. I have always made olive ice cream for him."

The cakes are of different designs — a tennis racquet one year, a ball the other, and one time, a bull, which is one of Nadal's nicknames. "You know, I doubt if he eats more than one spoon. His team eats the rest. But he has always politely thanked me and met me. I won't say he is a friend, but when he is in Paris at Roland-Garros, we meet and he is always courteous," Riviera says. On court, Arthur Bongrand, the head of ball boys, ensures Nadal's bottles — which he arranges meticulously — aren't disturbed. But, over the years, he found another quirk: Nadal's love for dates. So, before the Spaniard could even ask the referee, the ball boys would keep dates on his bench during matches. Stephan Brun, who manages players' entourages, once recalled how his team — most of them Roger Federer fans — was left awestruck when Nadal, after making an injury-forced third-round exit in 2016, came out to thank all of them despite writhing in pain and sadness. The court manager, Philippe Vaillant, has said in past interviews that the Spaniard got more "shy" than his wife when he introduced them. "He is a star. But he is also like you and me. He doesn't float here," Riviera says, pointing upwards. Perhaps, this explains why he has become the de facto face of these Games, at least for the first weekend. Nadal's presence warms up the centre court, the site of his otherworldly exploits. And the fans cheer every point, every return as if it is his last. They know the last dance is near. And, fittingly, it might well be here.

pect that often decides these tight matches — luck — as it took a deflection and beat the otherwise sensational Tomas Santiago in goal. India remained unbeaten after two matches in Pool B.

A quick statistical comparison between India's performance against New Zealand and Argentina, however, paints a clear picture on where the problem lies. Against the Black Sticks, the performance was disjointed at times but they scored thrice from 11 shots on goal, for a 27% conversion efficiency. Against Argentina, they took 15 shots on goal, for the solitary success at the very end; that's 7% efficiency. Against NZ, India scored once from 5 Penalty Corners, but Harmanpreet's strike on Monday meant India scored one from 10 PCs. Harmanpreet Singh, speaking to JioCinema, was upbeat about his team's performances so far, but admitted, "With the ball, we're creating a lot of chances and getting into the opponent's circle. We can improve the outcome and the finishing in the upcoming games. We have a plan, we're creating chances, but our finishing needs to be better."

In an ideal performance, a good international team expects to convert 1 out of 3 PCs in a match but India were well off the mark.



her lowest after scoring 98 in her opening two. Sarabjot had tallied the same total in his opening series. A point here or there, and the story would

have been vastly different as Serbia finished with 581 points and India with 580. Sarabjot and Manu will face the South Korean team of Lee Wonho and Oh Ye

Jin in Tuesday's medal match. Both Lee and Oh won gold medals in their individual rounds, pointing at the huge challenge that stares at the Indian duo,