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SC reiterates not to stay NEET UG counselling; retest for 1,563 candidates on June 23

THE DAMAGE CONTROL

The Supreme Court on Thursday reiterated that it would not pass any interim direction to stay the admission counselling process to medical programmes pursuant to the NEET UG 2024 examination amid the allegations of paper leak and other irregularities. During the hearing, a vacation bench presided over by Justice Vikram Nath was apprised that the scorecards of 1,563 candidates, who were awarded compensatory marks on account of loss of time, had been withdrawn and cancelled.

- The counselling for admissions into MBBS, BDS, and other courses will start on July 6, the Centre said.
- Some 24 lakh medical aspirants took the NEET-UG 2024 - an ultra-competitive entrance test for undergraduate medical courses - conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) on May 5.
- The results were to be declared on June 14 but were announced on June 4, apparently because the answer sheets were evaluated earlier.
- But allegations of a question paper leak and grace marks to over 1,500 medical aspirants triggered protests and lawsuits in seven High Courts besides the Supreme Court.
- Scores of students protested in Delhi on June 10 seeking an inquiry, and alleging that 67 students shared the top rank because of grace marks.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The scorecards of 1,563 NEET-UG 2024 candidates seeking admission into medical colleges will be scrapped after they were given grace marks for a wrong question, the Centre told the Supreme Court. The students can opt for a re-test on June 23 and the results will be declared on June 30.

The government's decision follows allegations of massive irregularities and unfair marking in the nationwide medical entrance exams. There were also allegations of distributing the wrong question paper, torn OMR sheets, or delays in distributing OMR sheets.

If these candidates do not take the re-test, their earlier score will be considered the result, without the grace marks. "A committee meeting was held on June 10, 11, and 12 to investigate the allegations. Based on the committee's recommendations, the scorecards of the affected candidates will be cancelled, and a re-examination will be held for these students," the Centre told the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court reaffirmed its decision not to halt the counselling process for NEET-UG 2024. "Counselling will proceed as sched-



uled and there will be no interruption. If the exam continues, everything else will proceed as well, so there is no cause for concern," the top court said. Petitioners from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh said there was "no defined logic" for the grace marks. The petitions cited "statistically impossible" marks, including students scoring the maximum - 720 of 720.67 students from one coaching centre secured perfect scores, the petitions pointed out. They also cited a provisional answer key released by

the NTA, which was contested by over 13,000 students as the problem pointed to a different answer. Underscoring the dangers of cheating in a medical test, the petitions said, "This field requires a deep understanding of scientific and medical knowledge... cheating or using unfair means to pass an exam can lead to a lack of competence and endanger lives of patients."

The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued notice to the Centre and NTA over petitions seeking to cancel the results of the exam.

"It is not that simple... that because you have done it (held the exam) it is sacrosanct," the court told the NTA, "Sanctity of (the examination) has been affected... so we need answers." The Centre told the top court: "A committee was set up to review the results of more than 1,563 NEET-UG 2024 candidates who received 'grace marks' due to time loss during the exam. The committee has decided to invalidate the scorecards of these candidates, who will now have the option to participate in a re-test."

The Supreme Court said all petitions, including those seeking cancellation of NEET-UG 2024 on account of the allegations, would be taken up on July 8.

MP CM launches 'PM Shri Tourism Air Services'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a bid to provide an easy mode of transport and to enhance connectivity for tourist destinations, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday launched 'PM Shri Tourism Air Services'.

Chief Minister Yadav flagged off the first flight between Bhopal and Jabalpur from Raja Bhoj airport. This flight will go from Bhopal to Jabalpur via Rewa, and from there it will land in Singrauli, an official said.

Meanwhile, the chief minister also inaugurated a ticket-booking counter at the airport. These air services would be operated in the state on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis through Jetserve Aviation Private Limited, the officer said. During the inauguration, CM Yadav said, "I am confident that PM Shri Tourism Air Service will benefit all sectors including industry, business and health."

He said these air services will also help to connect multiple cities in the state. CM Yadav also announced that airstrips will be developed in all districts.



"At present, our 30 districts have airstrips and this facility will be developed in all 55 districts in the coming days. We are going to provide another new facility in the future," Yadav added. The government has decided to provide air services in eight districts - Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Khajuraho, Ujjain, Gwalior, Rewa and Singrauli.

Some other districts having rich heritage and tourist destinations will also be connected with air services in the next phases, Managing Director of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Sheo Shekhar Shukla, told reporter.

AJIT DOVAL GETS THIRD TERM AS NSA

New Delhi: Ajit Doval has been reappointed as the National Security Advisor (NSA) for a third term and he will be assigned the rank of a Cabinet Minister, the government said on Thursday.

"His appointment will be co-terminus with the term of Prime Minister or until further orders, whichever is earlier," said a notification from the Ministry of Personnel and Training.

The notification further added that NSA Doval, during the term of his office, will be assigned the rank of Cabinet Minister.

Dr PK Mishra has also been reappointed as the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, with effect from June 10. He will also be assigned the rank of Cabinet Minister.

Ajit Doval as NSA and PK Mishra as Principal Secretary, both retired bureaucrats, are set to become the longest-serving advisors to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



53 people detained for questioning in connection with Reasi terror attack

Jammu | Agencies

J&K Police has detained 53 people for questioning in connection with the Sunday terrorist attack on a bus of pilgrims near the Shivkhori Temple in Reasi district, that left 9 people dead, officials said.

Police said that the "detentions were made following an intensive investigation led by the police" at the Kanda Area Police Station, Pouni.

"Significant leads have been uncovered, aiding in the identification and capture of those who may potentially be involved in orchestrating the attack. To ensure a comprehensive probe search operations have been expanded to encompass the far-flung areas of Arnas and Mahore," police said, adding that these operations "are aimed at uncovering further evidence and apprehend terrorists who may be hiding in these remote regions".

"The law enforcement agencies are committed to bringing the perpetrators of this dastardly crime to justice and ensure the safety and security of all residents and visitors in



the area," police said. The public has been urged to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity to police immediately.

Sunetra Pawar elected to RS unopposed, formal notification on June 18

Team Absolute | Mumbai

NCP chief Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar, who was defeated by Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule from the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency, has been elected to the Rajya Sabha unopposed.

Thursday was the last day for filing nominations for the Rajya Sabha bypoll slated for June 25. As Sunetra Pawar was the sole candidate who filed the nomination, she was elected to the Upper House unopposed. The Election Commission will issue a formal notification in this regard on June 18, the last date for withdrawing nomination.

With her election, Baramati will now have three MPs -- Sunetra Pawar and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar in the Rajya Sabha, and Supriya Sule in the



Lok Sabha. The by-election was necessitated after NCP MP Praful Patel resigned from the Upper House. The opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) did not nominate its nominee due to the paucity of numbers.

Strongly defending the party's move to nominate her, Sunetra Pawar said, "The decision was unanimous for which I thank NCP President Ajit Pawar, and party leaders and officer-bearers."

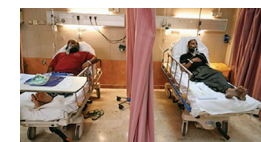
Kuwait fire tragedy Death toll of Keralites goes up to 24 from 19, seven serious

Thiruvananthapuram

The Kerala government on Thursday announced that the death toll of Keralites has gone up to 24 in the fire that broke out in a labour camp in Kuwait.

The Kerala government on Thursday announced that the death toll of Keralites has gone up to 24 from 19.

Out of the total 49 foreign workers killed, some 42 victims were confirmed to be Indian nationals, mostly from Kerala. Norka senior official, K Ajith on Thursday told the media that apart from the 24 dead, seven are in a serious condition. He added that the official announcement



would come from the Indian Embassy in Kuwait. Norka is the state-run body which looks after the affairs of Non-Resident Keralites and it has help desks in various countries. The fire broke out in the wee hours of Wednesday at a labour camp and devastated a building in Kuwait's southern city of Al-Mangaf. According to reports there were 197 workers living in the building spread over six floors and majority of them were Keralites.

'Fractured mandate', right time for 'One Nation, One Election': Sanjay Singh

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) lawmaker Sanjay Singh on Thursday took potshots at the BJP-led NDA dispensation over claims that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and 'One Nation, One Election' were not shelved, and the proposals were still on the table.

"This is the best time to call snap polls. The Prime Minister should resign, and the entire country should go to elections in one go," he said, taking a derisive taunt at the BJP. Notably, Union Minister for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, after taking charge, stated that the UCC and 'one nation, one poll' were two major poll promises of the BJP, and they remain very much a part of the government's agenda.

Given the BJP's numbers in Lok Sabha and its dependence on allies, the two issues are slated to face headwinds



as allies have expressed reservations over it, UCC, in particular.

The AAP Rajya Sabha MP said that the BJP got a "fractured mandate of 240" and failed to secure a majority of 272 on its own but remains hell-bent on pushing the 'divisive' UCC.

He claimed that the UCC not only affects the spirit of India's unity in diversity but will also harm the interests of various communities, including Adivasis, Sikhs, Jains, and other marginalised groups.

"You want to implement a uniform law across the nation when the traditions in some religions don't align with one particular law.

Delhi, Mumbai In Top 5 Global Cities For Housing Price Rise: Report

- ▶ Mumbai ranked 6th and Delhi 17th in the same period last year.
- ▶ Manila is in first position with a 26.2 per cent annual growth in prices, followed by Tokyo at 12.5 per cent.
- ▶ In its report 'Prime Global Cities Index Q1 2024', real estate consultant Knight Frank said that Mumbai recorded an 11.5 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth in prime residential prices in January-March 2024.
- ▶ Delhi rose from 17th rank in January-March 2023 to 5th position in January-March 2024 with a growth of 10.5 per cent YoY.

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Mumbai is ranked third and Delhi fifth among the top 44 cities globally in terms of appreciation of housing prices during the January-March 2024 period, according to Knight Frank.

However, Bengaluru observed a decline in ranking from 16th place in Q1 2024 to 17th rank in Q1 2024, even while it recorded a 4.8 per cent YoY growth in residential prices.

Knight Frank said the Prime Global Cities Index (PGCI) is a valuation-based index, tracking the movement of prime residential prices across 44 cities worldwide using data from its global research network. The index tracks nominal prices in local currency. Shishir Bajjal, Chairman and Managing Director at Knight Frank India, said the strong demand trend for residential properties has been a global phenomenon, led by gateway markets of Asia-Pacific and EMEA. "Like its peers in these regions, the improved rankings of Mumbai and New Delhi on the Prime Global Cities Index



was underscored by the resilience in sales growth volume. We expect the momentum of sales to remain stable over the next few quarters as the economic conditions are likely to remain broadly unchanged," he said.

The consultant noted that global housing price growth has strengthened. Across 44 cities globally, Knight Frank said the average annual house price growth rose by 4.1 per cent in the 12 months to March 2024. "Prices are rising at their fastest rate since the third quarter of 2022," it added.

Special Pcoso court issues non-bailable warrant against former CM Yediyurappa

Bengaluru | Agencies

In a major development, a special court in Bengaluru on Thursday issued a non-bailable warrant against veteran NCP leader and former Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa in connection with the POCOSO case, relating to the alleged sexual harassment of a minor, against him.

The First Fast Track Court, for Pcoso cases, issued the warrant, considering the submission by the prosecution that Yediyurappa is powerful and there is information that he is presently located in another state.

Yediyurappa had attempted to hush up the case and also tried to lure the complainant by giving Rs 2 lakh to withdraw the complaint, it added. The prosecution also brought to the notice of the court that Yediyurappa had not appeared for the investigation even after being issued notice. Following the order, the Karnataka Police are



preparing to arrest Yediyurappa in connection with the Pcoso case. Meanwhile, Yediyurappa on Thursday moved the Karnataka High Court seeking anticipatory bail in the case. The petition is yet to be taken up by the court. Yediyurappa had also filed a petition seeking a stay on the probe and quashing of the case. The plea is likely to be taken up by the court on Friday. The victim's mother, who passed away on May 26, had filed a case against Yediyurappa in March this year under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pcoso) Act, alleging harassment of her daughter when she went to the former CM's residence to seek help.



AGNIPATH SCHEME UNDER REVIEW, GROUP OF SECRETARIES LOOKS TO MAKE RECRUITMENT MORE LUCRATIVE

Team Absolute | New Delhi

As the National Democratic Alliance's allies aired their grievances over the appointment of Agniveers under the Agnipath scheme, the Centre has expressed its willingness to address the "lacunae" and also promised to make amends in the short-term recruitment to the Armed Forces.

It is now learnt that the BJP-led NDA government has formed a panel of secretaries, from at least 10 ministries to review the scheme and also to deliberate on how to make it more lucrative and rewarding for the young recruits.

The group of secretaries is expected to give their recommendations on making the short-term recruitment programme under Agnipath scheme, more attractive. The scheme became a key election issue in the poll campaign with Opposition parties vowing to revoke it, if voted to power.

The panel of secretaries is expected to give a final presentation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after he returns from the G7 Summit in Italy. A detailed presentation may be made before the Prime Minister on June 17



or 18, sources said.

The committee may suggest tweaks in the recruitment process and recommend additional monetary benefits for the Agniveers, currently selected for a four-year period.

The Indian Army is also believed to be conducting an internal assessment of the scheme and is likely to submit its report before the government.

As per those privy to assessment, the Army is likely to suggest certain tweaks which include enhancing the training period for Agniveer recruits

and also their retention percentage in the Armed forces. It may recommend retaining about 60-70 per cent of Agniveers, as against the existing 25 per cent. Prime Minister's Office is likely to take a final call on the changes after taking into account all the recommendations and feedback from all stakeholders.

The review of the Agnipath scheme is also included in the first 100-day agenda of the Modi government and therefore one can expect "necessary amends" in the scheme in the near

future. The Agnipath scheme was implemented in June 2022 to reduce the pension bill of the Armed Forces and create a downsized but more lean and robust Army. However, it drew strong protests from Opposition parties who accused the Centre of shortchanging the youth and playing with their future.

The scheme soon after its rollout drew strong protests in many states, particularly in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. It also became a focal point during the election campaign as many parties rebuked the Centre over what it called a flawed and disoriented policy in times of economic uncertainty. Ahead of government formation, the allies of the BJP, including JD(U) and LJP (Ram Vilas), expressed apprehensions over Agniveers' appointment and urged the government to review it.

Under the scheme, youth are inducted into all three branches of the Armed Forces, including Army, Navy and Air Force for four years. Out of all the recruits, 25 per cent of them are given a chance to continue for another 15 years under a permanent commission.

PM Modi scheduled to have series of bilaterals during G7 in Italy



Team Absolute | New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who left for Italy on Thursday evening to attend the Group of Seven (G7) Summit being held in Apulia, has a series of bilateral meetings lined up with several world leaders on the sidelines of the event.

PM Modi will attend the G7 Summit's Outreach Session on Friday at the invitation of Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Sources revealed that the Prime Minister will hold bilateral meetings on Friday, including with French President Emmanuel Macron, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky before leaving for Borgo Egnazia for the G7

meeting.

Following the Outreach session - which majorly focuses on artificial intelligence, energy, Africa, and the Mediterranean - PM Modi is expected to hold bilaterals with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida.

While there is a chance of them meeting informally during the official photo-op, there is no scheduled bilateral meeting between PM Modi and Canadian PM Justin Trudeau.

Meanwhile, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters en route Brindisi that US President Joe Biden and PM Modi will have an "opportunity to encounter one another" during the G7 session.

Ending years of wait, six Pakistani migrants awarded Indian citizenship in Jaipur

Jaipur | Agencies

Six Pakistani migrants were awarded Indian citizenship on Thursday in Jaipur at the Collectorate.

They had been trying for Indian citizenship for years, said officials.

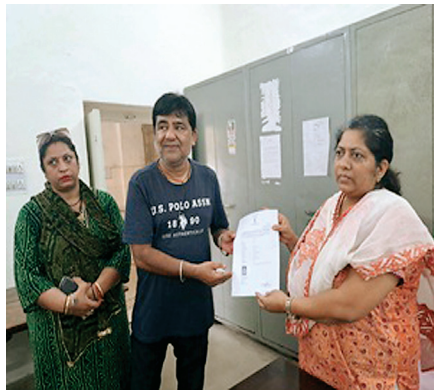
These six people included Kavita Bai, Nirmaldas, Shabbagu Mal, Puri Bai, Mukesh Lal and Shankar Lal.

Additional District Collector (South) Shaifali Kushwaha handed over Indian citizenship certificates to them on the directions of District Collector Prakash Rajpurohit.

Speaking on the occasion, she said, "With Indian citizenship being awarded to six migrants, a total of 325 Pakistani migrants have been awarded Indian citizenship by the Jaipur District Administration so far."

After getting Indian citizenship, tears of joy rolled down the cheeks of Shankar Lal.

He said, "Today, the long wait of many years has ended and we can say with pride



that we are Indians."

Shankar Lal said that he was unable to avail the benefits of government schemes due to lack of proof of Indian citizenship but now after getting it, not only has he got recognition but with the help of government schemes, he would be able to support his family in a better way.

SC DISPOSES OF DELHI GOVT'S PLEA SEEKING ADDITIONAL SUPPLY OF WATER

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday disposed of a plea filed by the Delhi government seeking additional supply of water from neighbouring states to address the raised water demand of the national capital.

A vacation bench, headed by Justice P.K. Mishra asked the city government to move an application before the Haryana government for the release of 150 cusecs of additional water on humanitarian grounds by 5 p.m. on Thursday, if not already made.

"Thereafter, the Upper Yamuna River Board shall convene a meeting tomorrow (Friday) and take a decision on the matter at the earliest. If need be, the board can convene on a day-to-day basis," ordered the Bench, also comprising Justice P.B. Varale.

The apex court emphasised that the issue concerning the sharing of water is complex and sensitive and must be left to the river board for resolution in terms of the MoU entered between



parties in 1994. Pertinently, the Advocate General representing Himachal Pradesh retracted an earlier statement made before the Supreme Court that it would release 137 cusecs of additional water for drinking purposes in the national capital. On Wednesday, the top court questioned Himachal Pradesh for making a "false" statement that it has excess water in reservoirs. "If you are already releas-

ing it, why was it not made known to the Upper Yamuna River Board? The other day, your Additional Advocate General said that this document (pertaining to 137 cusecs surplus water) was produced before the Board. Why are false statements made in the court?" it asked. Also, the Supreme Court came down heavily on the Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government for not acting against tanker mafias in

the city and cautioned that it would ask the Delhi Police for action to mitigate the water crisis in the national capital.

"If water is coming from Himachal Pradesh, where is the water going in Delhi? Have you taken any action or measures against these tanker mafias? There are reports that tanker mafias are working in Delhi and water is engulfed by them and you are not taking any action. If you are not taking any action, we will hand it over to Delhi Police to crack down on tanker mafias," it told the Delhi government. The SC wondered how the water is supplied through tankers to the common public when pipelines are dry and empty. In its petition filed before the apex court, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Delhi government demanded that neighbouring states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh be directed to release extra water for a month to address the extraordinary and excessive water demand of the city triggered due to a surge in summer temperature.

3 crore Lakhpati Didis must be created before 3-year deadline: Chouhan to officials

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, on Thursday, told officials to work towards achieving the target of creating three crore Lakhpati Didis in villages ahead of the three-year deadline as part of a stepped-up action plan.

The Minister directed senior officials to take strong steps to strengthen women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas.

Chouhan, who is also the Agriculture Minister, said that he will soon hold a meeting with Rural Development Ministers of states to give impetus to the Lakhpati Didi initiative and discuss with Chief Ministers to sort out issues, if any.

Chouhan appreciated the



efforts under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) and called upon the need for strengthening branding and marketing efforts for sale of products made by women's SHGs.

Chouhan observed that these women once considered 'un-bankable' were the 'lakhpatis of tomorrow' and SHGs were well poised to solve the decadal problem of rural credit - a true example of women-led development.

The Minister was informed that during FY 2023-24, banks disbursed credit worth Rs 2,06,636 crore to over 56 lakh women SHG. This represented a five-fold increase in the number of SHGs annually credit linked and a nearly ten-fold jump in annual credit disbursement during the past 10 years.

Lucknow | Agencies

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday formally forwarded his resignation from the Karhal Assembly seat in Uttar Pradesh to Speaker Satish Mahana.

Akhilesh Yadav, who won the recent Lok Sabha elections from UP's Kannauj, also held the Karhal assembly seat. In the Lok Sabha polls, Akhilesh secured his family's stronghold Kannauj by garnering 6,42,292 votes, surpassing the incumbent BJP MP Subrat Pathak by a margin exceeding 1 lakh votes.

Samajwadi Party MLA Awadhesh Prasad also tendered his resignation from the Assembly after being



elected as a Lok Sabha MP from Faizabad.

In the recently-concluded Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party clinched 37 seats, while the BJP won 33 seats. The

Congress won six seats, two seats went to the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), while the Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) and Apna Dal (Soneylal) bagged one seat each.

Three killed, three missing as downpour triggers landslide in Sikkim



Gangtok | Agencies

At least three people have died due to a landslide triggered by heavy rain in Sikkim's Mangan district on Thursday.

Three people are missing from Pakshep and Ambithang localities in the district after heavy downpours lashed the hill state, officials said.

A senior official said that one house was washed away due to a landslide and seven other houses were partially damaged. "One person was critically injured and rushed to a hospital," the official added. Meanwhile, incessant

rain blocked the Mangan-Gangtok and Mangan-Singhik routes and a workforce has been deployed to re-establish the road connectivity.

A landslide near the Bringbong Police outpost forced the staff to relocate, police said, adding that there has been damage to a bridge base in the Sakalang area, and it may collapse anytime soon. Furthermore, the police mentioned that there are communication problems in North Sikkim due to a non-working mobile network and efforts are on to restore the cell phone connectivity.

Treat Transgenders As Special Category For Employment, Education: High Court

Chennai | Agencies

Holding that the transgenders should be treated only as a special category irrespective of their caste, the Madras High Court has directed the Tamil Nadu government to not bring them under either female or male category for education and employment. Justice V Bhavani Subbaroyan in an order passed on June 12, 2024 said in 'every employment and educational avenues,' the government shall prescribe separate norms for transgenders.

The government shall direct all the state recruiting agencies to specify transgender as a special category and prescribe separate norms for their cut-off mark.

The age relaxation open to other special categories shall also be extended to transgenders, irrespective of their caste, in future employment and educational avenues.

The transgender at no point of time in future shall be brought under male or female categories, the judge made it clear.

Allowing a petition from R Anushri, a transgender who was denied the opportunity from being considered for combined civil service examination for the year 2017-18 which were



for non-interview post group-II A services under various categories, the judge said since the petitioner has scored the eligible cut-off mark the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission shall permit the petitioner to upload documents for certificate verification.

The judge said the petitioner has been placed in the scheduled caste woman category and denied permission by Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) to upload her certificate for verification as she

had scored less than the cut-off prescribed for scheduled caste women.

TNPSC's approach is unsustainable and it had not categorised transgenders as a special category. Also, bringing the petitioner under woman category went against the order passed by the Supreme Court and Madras High court, the judge added.

The top court has clearly said that the transgenders should be treated as unique and they should not be treated as one among the male or female. In fact, when Punjab had placed all the transgenders under male category, the top court had held such action as illegal and unsustainable.

It was also to be noted that the transgenders were placed in the caste in which they were born and treated in the said category. This was of no use and detrimental to their development, the judge added.

In her order, the judge said though the National Legal Service Authority case was decided by the Supreme Court as early as April 15, 2014, still, neither the state government, nor the central government has come forward to 'formulate a uniform mode of employment opportunities' to be provided for the transgenders.

PEMA KHANDU TAKES OATH AS ARUNACHAL CM FOR 3RD STRAIGHT TERM



Itanagar: Pema Khandu, who was re-elected as the BJP Legislature Party leader on Wednesday, took oath as Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister for the third straight term on Thursday.

Governor Lt-Gen (Retd), KT Parnaik administered the oath of office and secrecy to the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein and 10 other Cabinet Ministers at the Dorjee Khandu Convention Centre in Itanagar.

Son of former Chief Minister Dorjee Khandu, Monpa community leader Khandu (45) first became the Chief Minister in 2016 after he, along with several MLAs, left the Congress for the PPA before joining the BJP. The BJP registered its first electoral victory in Arunachal Pradesh in the 2019 Assembly elections.



LAST FAREWELL GIVEN TO CHHINDWARA SOLDIER MARTYRED IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Team Absolute | Chhindwara/Bhopal

CRPF jawan Kabir Das, a resident of Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh, who was martyred in an encounter with terrorists in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday night, was given a final farewell with state honors on Thursday.

The mortal remains of CRPF jawan Kabir Das, resident of Pulpudhoh, Chhindwara, reached Nagpur by air on Thursday and from there was brought to his village by road.

As soon as the body arrived, the village was immersed in grief, his entire family was crying. Slogans of 'Bharat Mata Zindabad' and 'Pakistan Murdabad' were echoing everywhere.

The mortal remains of Kabir Das were handed over to the family after the guard of honour. According to the tradition of tribal society, Kabir Das was given a final farewell.

Not only the village but hundreds of people from nearby areas came to pay tribute to martyr Kabir Das. People offered floral tributes to the mortal remains of the martyred soldier and paid homage to his martyrdom. Slogans were raised everywhere in the name of the martyr and it was said that the martyrdom of Kabir Das would not go in vain. The plans of



Pakistan and terrorists will never be fulfilled. There was an encounter between security forces and terrorists on Tuesday night in Heera Nagar area of Kathua district of Jammu and

Kashmir. Kabir Das, a resident of Chhindwara district and a CRPF jawan, was seriously injured in the encounter. He died on Wednesday morning.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav and former Chief Minister Kamal Nath had also expressed grief over the martyrdom of Kabir Das.

Save trees campaign gaining momentum in Bhopal

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, the protest against the ongoing preparation of allegedly cutting 29,000 trees for the bungalows of MLAs and ministers is gaining momentum.

On Thursday too, women took to the streets and registered their protest and assured their protection by clinging to trees.

There is a proposal to build bungalows for MLAs and ministers in Tulsi Nagar and Shivaji Nagar areas of the capital. There are a large number of trees in the areas where housing is to be built. It is alleged that these trees have to be cut, due to which anger is increasing among the people and they have started on the path of agitation.

Women also gathered in the Ram Mandir complex of Tulsi Nagar and Shivaji Nagar areas on Thursday. After this they took to the streets and protested. Women also adopted the Chipko movement that took place decades ago. Women hugged the trees and cried and even caressed them. The protesting women say that these trees were



planted by the elders and everyone together raised them like children. Now preparations are underway to cut these trees. She will not let this happen as long as she is alive. In the past, people are angry over cutting of trees for the smart city in the capital.

The protesting women say that the people of the world have learned the importance of trees during the Corona period. Trees are our oxygen banks. The government is preparing to cut trees without thinking.

Let us tell you that Congress has accused of cutting 29,000 trees for the bungalows of ministers and MLAs in the capital. Congress has also protested regarding this. Now the activism of women is increasing in this movement.

At the same time, the government is calling itself serious towards the environment and is denying the allegations. The government says that trees creating difficulty in development work or other works will be shifted to another place.

Vindhya will take flight for development with the facility of air travel - Deputy Chief Minister Shukla

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla has said that Vindhya region got another big gift of development. Air taxi facility has started from Rewa and Singrauli districts of Vindhya. With the facility of air travel, Vindhya will take flight for development. Deputy Chief Minister Shukla led the flight of "PM Shri Tourism Air Service" coming from Bhopal at Rewa Airport and flagged off the aircraft for Singrauli.

Shukla said that the inauguration of Rewa Airport is included in the upcoming 100 days program of Prime Minister Modi. All formalities of the inauguration will be completed in a week. Rewa Airport will be inaugurated in a grand ceremony next



month. Initially, there will be facility to travel from Rewa to Bhopal by 72 seater airplane. It will be expanded to Delhi, Indore, Bangalore and other big cities. It is noteworthy that Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav flagged off the flight from Bhopal to Rewa and Singrauli from Rajabhoj Airport in Bhopal. When the air taxi reached Rewa Airport,

Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla and MP Janardan Mishra welcomed the passengers with flowers. Shukla warmly welcomed the first passenger, MLA Sirmaur Divyaraj Singh, who reached Rewa from Bhopal by air taxi. In the first journey of air taxi, 6 passengers from Rewa got the opportunity to go to Singrauli.

RISP Achieves Milestone as NCVET-Recognised Dual Awarding Body for Skill Training Certification

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Centre for Industrial Staff Performance (CRISP) proudly announces its recognition as an Awarding Body (AB-Dual) by the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. This prestigious affiliation formalized through an agreement signed on June 10, 2024, in the presence of Dr. Nirmaljeet Singh Kalsi (Chairperson NCVET) and Atul Kumar Tiwari (Secretary MSDE - GOI).

Recognition of CRISP as an Awarding Body (Dual Category) by NCVET means that CRISP can award, assess and certify the learners where training is directly being imparted by CRISP in campuses or training centers owned or fully managed by it for its approved or adopted training programs (qualifications). With this recognition, CRISP has now expanded its role to not only conduct training programs for various organizations including government, private, and corporates but also assess and certify the candidates. This dual



capability ensures that CRISP can comprehensively address the growing need for skilled manpower demanded by industries, facilitating employment opportunities across various sectors. All skill training programs developed by CRISP will adhere to the National Credit Framework (NCF)

and National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) norms, ensuring that the curriculum meets the highest standards of industry relevance and employability. CRISP will ensure the availability of adequate training and learning materials, including resources in vernacular languages, to cater to a diverse learner base. The training and skilling pedagogy will be a blend of theoretical knowledge, practical training, and on-the-job training (OJT), providing a holistic learning experience. CRISP's enhanced role as an awarding body underscores its dedication to fostering a skilled workforce that meets the dynamic needs of today's industries. This development is set to have a profound impact on vocational education and skill development in Madhya Pradesh and beyond.

Big success of Bhopal Police 18 TWO-WHEELERS WORTH RS 16 LAKH RECOVERED, 4 VICIOUS THIEVES ARRESTED

Team Absolute | Bhopal

In a major breakthrough, Bhopal Police Commissionerate has recovered 18 two-wheelers worth Rs 16 lakh. The police have also arrested 4 vicious vehicle thieves, who were carrying out incidents of vehicle theft in the city for a long time.

On the instructions of Bhopal Police Commissioner Harinarayanachari Mishra and Additional Police Commissioner Awadhesh Goswami, Aishbagh police station succeeded in catching this gang. The police caught the accused with the help of informer's information, technical assistance, and 30 CCTV cameras. These thieves used to steal vehicles by using the master key after seeing the old lock.

Accused Majid Mansoori (20 years), resident of Silwani district Raisen, has already been arrested in Aishbagh police station for the crime of vehicle theft. Other arrested accused have also been involved in vehicle theft incidents in Police Station



Aishbagh, MP Nagar, Bajararia, Jahangirabad, and Ashoka Garden areas in the last two years. On 09.06.24, SI Suraj Atulkar and Head

Constable Yasin Ahmed saw a person driving an unnumbered car in front of Hariram's Vagh. Seeing the police, he started running away, but the police surrounded him and caught him. On interrogating the accused Majid Mansoori, he admitted to stealing the car from Aishbagh police station area. Police arrested the accused and took him on remand for 02 days. On the basis of the memorandum given by the accused Majid Mansoori during his interrogation, 6 vehicles from Police Station Aishbagh, 3 vehicles from Police Station Jahangirabad, 3 vehicles from Police Station Ashoka Garden, 2 vehicles from Police Station MP Nagar, 2 vehicles from Police Station Bajararia, Police Station Patakheda District. One vehicle was recovered from Betul and 1 vehicle from Sagar police station Gopalganj district.

Accused Majid Mansuri used to come to Bhopal by bus from Silwani and do rickshaw and steal the car and take it to Silwani, where he used to sell the car at low prices.

CMHO issues instructions to health institutions regarding pre-monsoon preparations

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Instructions have been issued by CMHO regarding necessary preparations to the health institutions for the control of water-borne and seasonal diseases due to waterlogging during the rainy season. In which instructions have been given to ensure availability of essential medicines in health institutions, identification of areas prone to vector-borne diseases, arrangement of beds and equipment in hospitals. In this regard, instructions were issued by the Additional Chief Secretary, Public Health and Medical Education Department to all

the District Collectors, Regional Health Directors, CMHOs and Civil Surgeons to deal with the situation of floods and heavy rains.

In the instructions issued to health institutions, it has been said that to avoid seepage due to accumulation of water on the roof, the roofs and outlets of health institutions should be cleaned before the rains. If necessary, water harvesting should be done for waterproofing and rain water conservation. The possibility of snake bite increases in this season, hence anti snake venom should be available in all health institutions. If it is necessary to refer the patient in

emergency situations, then he should be sent only after giving treatment.

Chief Medical and Health Officer, Bhopal, Dr. Prabhakar Tiwari said that during the rainy season, there is a strong possibility of gastroenteritis, cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid, amebiasis, hepatitis, giardiasis, scabies, worm infection along with malaria, dengue, filariasis, chikungunya etc. it occurs. All arrangements for treatment of diseases have been ensured in health institutions. Orientation of departmental field staff is also being done for prevention and control of infectious diseases.

DR ADESH SHRIVASTAVA'S NEUROSURGICAL INNOVATION AT AIIMS BHOPAL RECEIVES ACCOLADES AT YASARGIL INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS IN ISTANBUL

Team Absolute | Bhopal

AIIMS Bhopal continues to lead the way in academic excellence and innovative medical practices under the visionary leadership of Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director. Emphasizing a culture of knowledge-sharing and continuous learning, AIIMS Bhopal has garnered significant achievements across various academic platforms.

In a remarkable achievement, Dr. Aadesh Shrivastava, Additional Professor in the Department of Neurosurgery at AIIMS Bhopal, recently participated as faculty and innovator at the 1st Yasargil Microneurosurgery Congress held in Istanbul, Turkey, from June 4th to 7th, 2024. The congress saw the participation of over 600 renowned neurosurgeons from around the globe. Dr. Shrivastava presented a pioneering technique developed at AIIMS Bhopal - "Keyhole Microsurgery without Neuro Navigation." Traditional brain surgery often requires large incisions and results in prolonged recovery times. However, Dr. Shrivastava's keyhole microsurgery approach allows for brain surgery through a smaller incision, significantly reducing recovery time and surgical impact. This technique promises high quality neurosurgical outcomes even in resource constrained settings and poorly equipped centers across the globe. Dr. Shrivastava navigated the surgical process



without the aid of a neuro navigation machine, instead utilizing 3D virtual reality and available resources to accurately locate and remove brain tumors. This innovative technique received widespread acclaim from the global neurosurgical community present at the congress. Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal, extended his heartfelt congratulations to Dr. Aadesh Shrivastava for this outstanding achievement, acknowledging his contribution to advancing neurosurgical practices and bringing international recognition to AIIMS Bhopal.

"Dr. Shrivastava's innovative approach exemplifies the high standard of academic and clinical excellence we strive for at AIIMS Bhopal," stated Professor Singh. "His success at the Yasargil Microneurosurgery Congress underscores our commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and excellence in medical education and practice."

Not ordinary, the mangoes of Madhya Pradesh are special

Team Absolute | Bhopal

There are about 1500 varieties of mango in India. Some of these types are extremely popular and have become popular among common people. People often take the names of Alphonso, Bombay Green, Chausa Dussehra, Langra, Kesar, Neelam, Totapari Malda, Sindoori, Badami, Hapus, Noorjahan, Koh-e-Toor. Among these, there is special mention of mangoes of Madhya Pradesh.

Mangoes of Madhya Pradesh are very special. There would be no exaggeration if we say that a new branch of tourism has emerged in Madhya Pradesh in the form of "common tourism". Noorjahan of Katthiwada in Alirajpur district, people come from far and wide to even see the mango, let alone eat it. Booking for each fruit is done even before the mangoes arrive. The weight of a mango can range from 500 grams to 2 kg. Can grow up to twelve inches long. The taste is amazing.

Sundarja of Rewa
Last year, Sundarja mango grown in Govindgarh, Rewa got the Geographical



Indication tag. Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal happily shared the tweet. A postage stamp on Sundarja has been issued in the year 1968.

Sundarja mango is as beautiful to look at as it is delicious. Its aroma is intoxicating. It ripens after the first shower of rain.

It flourishes only in the environment of Govindgarh because here both soil and temperature have special importance for the Sundarja tree to flourish. Its leaves, bark and seeds are all

useful. It is antioxidant. Rich in Vitamin A, Vitamin C and Iron. The amount of sugar is less so diabetic patients also like it. Sundarja has become the identity of Rewa district and entire Madhya Pradesh. Sundarja has been included in the One District One Productive Project.

Miyazaki of Jabalpur
Miyazaki, the most expensive mango in Jabalpur, has created a stir in the world of taste. The price of one mango reaches Rs 20,000. In the international market, the price is available up to Rs 3 lakh per kg. It is red in colour. The weight of one mango ranges from 900 grams to one and a half kilos. This is a variety from Japan which also occurs in Thailand, Philippines. In Japan it is called egg of the sun. It is being produced in Jabalpur since 1984. It requires both hot weather and rain to ripen. These mangoes can be seen from a distance in Dagadga Hinauta village adjacent to Jabalpur. The mango trees here remain under strict security. All the energy of its owners goes into protecting the trees. Now mangoes are being exported from Madhya Pradesh to Bangladesh, Arab, UK, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain countries.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Fear of losing ground

More than her own Bahujan Samaj Party's stunning defeat in the just concluded Lok Sabha elections, it is the emergence of Chandra Shekhar Aazad of Azad Samaj Party that has rattled BSP President Mayawati. Chandra Shekhar Aazad won the Nagina reserved Lok Sabha seat with a huge margin even though he was pitted against BJP, BSP and SP in the constituency. Mayawati, according to sources, sees his victory as a direct threat to the existence of BSP and her leadership among Dalits. Another Azad Samaj Party candidate Amarjeet Singh who contested the Domariyaganj seat, ranked third with over 81,000 votes. The BSP ranked fourth in both the constituencies. According to sources close to Mayawati, the BSP president now plans to counter the increasing popularity of Chandra Shekhar by 'relaunching' her nephew Akash Anand. Mayawati had withdrawn her nephew from the midst of the election campaign, claiming that he lacked maturity. Interestingly, the BSP's failure to win even a single seat in the Lok Sabha elections has dealt a severe blow to its reputation of representing the voice of Dalits. In 2019, BSP won two reserved seats, Nagina and Lalganj -- and was runners-up on eight. The party has been winning Lalganj since 2009 but in 2024, Samajwadi Party wrested the seat this time. In 2024, BSP candidates trailed in third and fourth positions in most seats. Sources said that Mayawati's biggest problem in reviving the BSP was that the party did not have any second rung Dalit leadership that could reach out to the voters.

IITs And Women: It's Not A Question Of Merit, But Access

Bharti Mishra Nath

The results for this year's Indian Institute of Technology-Joint Entrance Examination (IIT-JEE) are out, and it is heartening to see that of the 48,248 students who have qualified for the test, 7,964 candidates are girls. In the Advanced test, Ved Lahoti of IIT Delhi zone topped in the Common Rank List (CRL) with 355 out of 360 marks, while Gujarat's Dwija Patel in the IIT Bombay zone was the top-ranked female candidate with CRL 7. She scored 332 marks. A total of 1,80,200 candidates appeared in the two JEE Advanced papers.

Science, particularly engineering, has been a male-dominated domain for long, with the female population on IIT campuses being almost negligible. There have been improvements though. The number of female enrolments in IITs more than tripled from just 995 in 2017 to 3,411 in 2023. A study by the sub-committee of the Joint Admission Board (JAB), the advisory body in charge of admissions to IITs, found that in 2016, as many as 4,570 girls cleared the JEE (Advanced) exam but only 848 were admitted to an IIT. This reflects that though women are in no way less meritorious, systemic societal biases forbid them from making it to these premier institutes. On an average, the ratio of male to female students on an IIT campus has been about 10:1, despite women performing significantly well in JEE exams.

Coaching plays an important role in preparation for JEE. But a majority of girls don't have access to such facilities given the gender bias in families. Most parents are not willing to invest much in her education, let alone coaching. There are also other restrictions that are amplified for girls, say, geographical access to coaching centres and social restrictions. All this deprives them of a level playing field. To address the under-representation of female students in IITs, the Central government in 2018 introduced supernumerary seats, that is, seats over and above the sanctioned limit by the government. With this, the IIT admissions council decided to set aside 800 (14%) additional seats for girls across the 23 IITs. In 2019, the numbers increased to 946 (17%) female-only seats. Then, in 2021, the JAB decided to allow IITs to fix their female enrolment targets at 20% of the total admissions. Not only did most institutes fulfil this quota, many even managed to exceed it. In 2023, as many as 3,411 female-only seats were



allotted, while 11 female candidates got admission in the gender-neutral pool. The overall percentage of females in IITs was 19.7% - one in five students was a girl.

Over the years, IITs have also taken progressive steps in offering scholarships, addressing gender disparity on campus, conducting special sessions with parents of girl students, and conducting outreach programmes in schools.

"IITs, or for that matter, even NITs [National Institute of Technology], are on their way to becoming gender-balanced with the increasing number of females in these institutions. Getting admission to IITs has always been tough. However, it has become just a bit easy for girls now. This will encourage female students to try for IITs," says Dr. Anjali Sharma, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, National Institute of Technology, Patna. "It is a myth that girls in

engineering colleges are less meritorious. Most often, girls outperform boys in reality. They are more sincere and hardworking. Females from these institutes have proved to be among the best in the corporate world."

Sarita Kumari, an MTech student of IIT Bombay, echoes these views. "Seeing more women succeed in these prestigious programmes helps dismantle stereotypes and encourages young girls to enter male-dominated fields... Ultimately, more girls attending IITs improves gender parity and benefits society by empowering women to effect meaningful change." This year, the IIT Madras zone has registered the highest number of qualified candidates. Of its 11,180 candidates, 145 feature in the top 500; four from the top 10 are also from here. The zone, also known as the IIT-Hyderabad zone - comprising Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil

Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry - had the largest number of qualifying candidates for JEE Advanced last year as well.

According to reports, in 2023 too, there were 10,432 qualifying candidates from this zone, with 174 candidates featuring in the top 500 and six in the top 10. The zone had the best gender ratio among all IIT campuses, with nearly 1,200 girls joining tech colleges last year. The proportion of female aspirants is also high - almost at par with males.

Apart from traditional subjects, IITs are also working on introducing diverse programmes like public policy and design. All these steps reflect the resolve to ease the journey to IIT for the female student.

(The views expressed are personal)

international

Unicef urges Taliban to let girls study 1,000 days after school ban

Kabul | Agencies
Marking 1,000 days since girls in Afghanistan were banned from secondary school, a top official at the United Nations children's agency, Unicef, on Thursday used this milestone to urge the Taliban to allow girls to go back to school.



For 1.5 million girls, this systematic exclusion is not only a blatant violation of their right to education but also results in dwindling opportunities and deteriorating mental health," UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said in a statement.

The statement emphasised the far-reaching consequences of the ban, extending beyond the immediate loss of

education. "It exacerbates the ongoing humanitarian crisis and has serious ramifications for Afghanistan's economy and development trajectory," the statement added.

Russell appealed for the return of girls to schools, pointing to the fact that no country can move forward when half its population is left behind.

"I urge the de-facto authorities to allow all children to resume learning immediately. And I urge the international community to remain engaged and support these girls, who need us more than ever."

Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban has banned girls and women from studying beyond primary school. However, in some parts of the country, women and girls still attend religious schools, as well as midwifery and nursing schools.

The Taliban government is not recognised internationally.

105 countries gather in Abu Dhabi to discuss critical issues of energy transition

Abu Dhabi | Agencies
The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) convened its 27th council meeting here on Thursday, just days after United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued an urgent call for climate action.



The two-day meetings gather representatives from 105 countries to discuss critical issues facing the global energy transition.

Over the next two days, IRENA members will focus on scaling up and de-risking renewable energy investments towards realising decarbonisation and sustainable development goals, bolstering partnerships with private sector entities and utilities and delving into best practices for energy planning. The council will also facilitate consultation and cooperation among IRENA members to review the agency's work programme, budget and annual report, among other relevant administrative and institutional matters.

"Despite the world installing more renewable energy capacity in 2023 than

any previous year, additions were still only half of what is necessary to limit rising temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius," said IRENA Director-General Francesco La Camera.

"To meet the global target of tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030, a significant increase in commitment and action from both public and private sectors is essential.

"IRENA will play a pivotal role in ensuring transparency and accountability by tracking progress and facilitating implementation towards the energy goals set at COP28."

Last week, La Camera met with Guterres and emphasised the critical need to prioritise energy infrastructure in the climate agenda.

He also highlighted IRENA's role as custodian

agency in monitoring progress towards the global target to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030, as tasked by the COP28 Presidency and supported by the incoming COP29 Presidency.

"IRENA's mission is critical on many levels," stated Gloria Magombo, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Energy and Power Development, Zimbabwe, and 27th IRENA Council Chair. "A renewable-based energy transition is not only the most effective climate solution available but also key to addressing the energy access challenges many countries currently face. As council chair, I am committed to ensuring that IRENA's exceptional work in advocacy, support, and progress tracking is fully supported by its members."

In May 2024, COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber officially tasked IRENA with the establishment of a special annual report series dedicated to monitoring progress and providing recommendations on achieving key energy goals of the UAE Consensus set at COP28.

G7 states agree to huge loan for Ukraine using frozen Russian assets

Bari, Italy | Agencies
G7 states have agreed to lend Ukraine \$50 billion using money generated from frozen Russian state assets, diplomats told dpa on Thursday, the first day of a summit in Italy among the leaders of the world's economically advanced democracies.

War-ravaged Ukraine is to use the loan package to strengthen its military defence against Russia, pay for the reconstruction of infrastructure and funding for Ukraine's state budget.

The US government says around \$280 billion of Russian central bank money has been immobilised in Western countries due to sanctions imposed since the full-scale Russian attack on Ukraine more than two years ago.

The bulk of the money is within the European Union. The bloc's member states recently approved the use of interest income generated from Russian state assets to finance aid for Ukraine.

The Brussels-based finan-



cial institution Euroclear - by far the largest holder in the EU of frozen Russian central bank assets - recently said that it had collected around \$4.7 billion in interest in 2023.

Planning for the structure of the loan package has been underway for months. The US had originally campaigned in favour of collecting not only the interest income but also the frozen assets themselves and using them to provide financial support to Kyiv. Some European capitals, however, had major reservations about this.

G7 leaders are meeting for a summit in southern Italy from Thursday to Saturday.

Hamas' requested changes on truce deal partially 'workable': Blinken



Doha | Agencies
US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said here that some of the changes requested by Hamas regarding the latest ceasefire proposal are "workable," while some are not.

Hamas had not explicitly agreed to the proposal, and "we are determined to try to bridge the gaps," Blinken said on Wednesday in a press conference after meeting with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, Xinhua news agency reported.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed Hamas' response to the latest truce deal, the latest developments in Gaza, and the latest updates in the joint mediation efforts to end the war, according to a statement by the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Qatar and Egypt announced on Tuesday that they have received a response from Hamas regarding the ceasefire proposal.

The mediators "will examine the response and coordinate with the parties concerned regarding the next steps," according to a previous statement by the Ministry on Tuesday.

US Fed keeps interest rate unchanged

Washington | Agencies
The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday kept the interest rate unchanged but hinted that there could be one cut between now and the end of the year as they continue the fight against inflation.

The Fed announcement came after a two-day meeting of its top officials.

They will meet four more times this year -- July, September, November and December.

Fed's interest rates determine interest on home and auto loans and credit cards.

Rate hikes are aimed at slowing down the economy



by curbing spending, which is a tool used by Central banks around the world to battle inflation.

The Fed increased interest rate multiple times starting in early 2022 when inflation hit a four-decade high and took it up to 5.3 per cent in July where it has been kept since.

The Fed expected to announce three cuts in 2024

as inflations showed signs of coming down, but decided against it every time as inflation stayed stubbornly high.

Inflation has cooled down notably since May and the Fed predicted that inflation could be more stubborn than expected and the overall rate could bottom out at 2.6 per cent by the end of the year instead of the 2.4 per cent

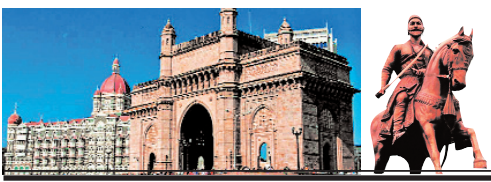
they had estimated earlier. The Fed aims to bring inflation under two per cent.

"We've made pretty good progress on inflation," Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said at a news conference.

But to cut rates, he added, "we'll need to see more good data."

A report by the US Labour Department released just hours before the Fed announcement showed that the consumer price index -- a measure of goods and services -- remained unchanged from June and at 3.3 per cent over June last year.

In April the number stood at 3.4 per cent.



Human finger in ice-cream

Mumbai firm pulls stocks from stores, stops contract manufacturing

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A day after a human finger was allegedly detected in one of its Yummo brand ice-cream cones delivered to a customer, Walko Food Co Ltd. said on Thursday that it has stopped outsourcing its manufacturing to a third-party and is withdrawing stocks of the ice-cream from all stores.

In a guarded statement, a company spokesperson said, "We are taking this incident very seriously. We have stopped manufacturing (the ice-cream) at this third-party facility. We have isolated the said product at the facility, our warehouses and are in the process of doing the same at the market level."

The company admitted to the customer complaint on Wednesday - raised by one Dr. Brendan Serrao of Malad west - that a "foreign object was found in one of our products ordered via a delivery partner."

The spokesperson said that product quality and safety were its top priority and they were addressing the situation even as an official police complaint was lodged by the customer, Dr. Serrao.

"We are a law-abiding company and shall fully co-operate and support the authorities to investi-



gate the matter thoroughly," said the spokesperson.

Official sources said that the state Food & Drugs Authority (FDA) has taken note of the matter and is likely to intervene, though officials declined to speak on record.

In a chilling incident, a Mumbai doctor who ordered ice-cream online, was stunned to find what he alleged was a severed piece of a human finger in it, sending officials into a tizzy.

The shocker happened on Wednesday when Dr. Brendan Serrao, asked his sister to include some ice-cream in her online grocery purchase list.

When the yummy cones of Yummo ice-cream were delivered, he started savouring it, but felt something rough and strange in his mouth.

The doctor alleged that when he yanked it out, to his horror he found that it was a small piece of a severed human finger, around 2 cms long.

Left with the bad taste in the mouth, Dr. Serrao immediately lodged a complaint with the Malad Police Station, which has started a probe and even sent the finger bit for a forensic analysis.

Dr. Serrao told local media persons that in view of his medical expertise, he recognised the human body piece and he saved it in an ice-pack to show the police while lodging his complaint.

4 women among five killed, 8 injured in Nagpur explosives factory blast

Team Absolute | Nagpur

At least five workers were killed, and another eight injured when a massive blast ripped through an explosives manufacturing company in Maharashtra's Waddhamna town on Thursday, officials said. The blast was reported at around 12 noon from the Chamundi Explosives Co. Ltd., situated on the Amravati-Nagpur Road, around 15 km from here.

Nagpur Commissioner of Police Ravinder Singh told the media that at least five persons including 4 women, lost their lives in the tragedy and police teams have rushed to the site to probe.

Eyewitnesses said that the explosion was heard in a radius of several km followed by a fire with clouds of dark smoke billowing in the sky, alarming people in the vicinity, even as the nearby Hingna Police Station and



fire brigade rushed teams to the factory.

The victims who are suspected to have perished instantly in the explosion have been identified as -- Pannalal Bandewar, 50 -- and four women, Vaishali Kshirsagar, 20, Prachi Phalke, 20, Pranjali Morde, 22 and Monali Aloney, 27.

Among the injured, including several women,

the condition of at least one was described as very critical, and all have been rushed to a nearby hospital, while the cause of the explosion is being investigated.

This is the second major industrial tragedy in Nagpur in the past six months.

In December 2023, nine persons were killed in an explosion at the Solar Explosive Ltd factory.

'Unanimous decision', says NCP's Sunetra Pawar after filing nomination for RS bypoll

Team Absolute | Mumbai

NCP nominee Sunetra Pawar, who lost the just concluded Lok Sabha elections from Baramati to her sister-in-law Supriya Sule, filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha by-elections slated for June 25 on Thursday.

Sunetra Pawar was accompanied by her husband and NCP President Ajit Pawar, Working President Praful Patel, state unit chief Sunil Tatkare, Assembly Deputy Speaker Narahari Zirwal, ministers Chhagan Bhujbal, Dhnananjay Munde, Anil Patil and Dharmarao Baba Atram. However, NCP allies BJP and Shiv Sena were conspicuous by their absence though NCP leaders claimed that they had already briefed the two allies about Sunetra Pawar's nomination.

The bypoll was necessitated after NCP leader Praful



Patel resigned after being re-elected to the Upper House in February.

After thanking her husband Ajit Pawar for her nomination, Sunetra Pawar said, "There was no resentment as the decision was taken unanimously. Veteran party leader and minister Chhagan Bhujbal has wished me luck. I was nominated because of people's demand. Parth

Pawar (her son) has also said that due to people's demand, I should be nominated."

Her nomination was formally cleared on Wednesday by the NCP ministers at a meeting chaired by Ajit Pawar, although senior leader Chhagan Bhujbal had expressed his resentment over the manner in which her name was proposed without following the due procedure

of getting the approval of the party's Parliamentary Board.

Apart from Bhujbal, former minister Baba Siddique, who recently left the Congress and joined the NCP, and ex-MP Anand Paranjape were also aspirants for a nomination.

However, Praful Patel claimed that there was no resentment over Sunetra Pawar's nomination as the decision was taken thoughtfully. Bhujbal also toned down later and said that he was not upset over Sunetra Pawar's nomination.

"The party's core group members have unanimously decided to give the Rajya Sabha seat to Sunetra Pawar. Several people, including me, wanted the seat but after discussions, we have decided that Sunetra Pawar should be sent to the Upper House. I am not at all upset by this decision. We have taken this decision for the party."

Team Absolute | Jauna

Shivba Sanghatana leader Manoj Jarange-Patil on Thursday called off his indefinite hunger strike on the sixth day after a state government delegation met and cajoled him to give time to resolve the pending Maratha quotas issue.

State Minister Shambhuraj Desai, MP Sandipan Bhumre, MLA Ranajagitsinh P. Patil and other officials travelled to Antaravali-Sarati village where Jarange-Patil had launched the agitation on June 8. The official team rushed there soon after the Maratha leader issued a stern 24-hour deadline to the government to resolve the Maratha quotas issue failing which he would intensify his agitation from Friday (June 14).

After discussions and a fervent appeal by the delegation, Jarange-Patil agreed to extend his ultimatum by one month - till July 13 - to enable the government to implement the necessary measures for Maratha quotas.

Jarange-Patil reiterated his earlier warning that Marathas would not only contest all the 288 Maharashtra Assembly elections in October, but also



name specific candidates from all parties against whom the community would vote en masse, and they would come to power and grant the reservation. Desai told media persons that the delegation assured him that the MahaYuti government is working sincerely to implement the pending demands including the 'sage-soyare' (bloodline) without unnecessary delays.

"We are committed and we shall definitely solve the issue of Maratha reservation within the framework of the law, objections will be placed before the next cabinet meeting. There is no intention to delay or drag the matter," he declared.

The Minister said that the election code of conduct for two months during

the Lok Sabha elections had delayed the decision-making, but now it will be revived, and he would speak with the concerned officials and set in motion the process to issue the notification for 'sage-soyare'.

After the assurances, Jarange-Patil accepted a glass of orange juice from the delegation members, symbolising the end of his fifth hunger strike in the past 11 months. Shortly after that, Jarange-Patil was driven off to the Galaxy Hospital in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (Aurangabad) for treatment as he had become weak after abstaining from food for the past 6 days.

In the past four days, parliamentarians and legislators from both the ruling MahaYuti's partners - the Shiv Sena, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and the Nationalist Congress Party and opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) allies, the Shiv Sena-UBT, the Nationalist Congress Party-SP, and the Congress including Bajrang Sonwane, Omraje Nimbalkar, Kalyan Kale, plus legislators, met and expressed support to Jarange-Patil while blaming the MahaYuti of remaining indifferent to the Marathas issue.

Sharad Pawar Talks Of "Taking Control Of Maharashtra"

Team Absolute | Pune

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar today said it would be his endeavour to "take control of Maharashtra", for which his party must win the state assembly polls scheduled later this year.

The Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) helmed by him put up an impressive show by winning eight out of ten Lok Sabha seats it contested in Maharashtra in the recently-concluded general elections. Sharad Pawar's daughter and NCP (SP) candidate Supriya Sule won the high-stake family battle for the Baramati seat for the fourth straight term, defeating her cousin Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar.

Following the Lok Sabha poll results, Sharad Pawar has been meeting people in Baramati and making preparations for the state assembly polls.

Addressing people from Shirsuphal village in Baramati, the former Union minister said the peo-



ple of Baramati constituency remained silent during the election period.

"Our party functionaries used to tell me that people are silent and they are not speaking openly. I asked them not to worry and said that even if they are not expressing themselves, they will press the right button (of EVMs). And the same thing happened. When the EVMs were opened, the magic was seen as you people voted in large numbers," he said. He appealed to people to stay united as the

state assembly elections are just around the corner.

"In the next three to four months, state elections are taking place. Come what may, it will be my endeavour to take control of Maharashtra. To achieve this, we must win the assembly polls," he said.

Sharad Pawar recalled that he was the chief minister of the state for four terms, Union agriculture minister for a decade and defence minister for two years. "All these things can happen when your collective power is there. The issues you have put forth before me, I will try and resolve them. However, I cannot give assurances now because a different government is in place. But after four months, we can certainly resolve these issues," he said.

Sharad Pawar criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his remarks made during the polls.

"During the polls campaign, the prime minister spoke on the topics that should have been avoided," he said.

3 of family injured as roof of their flat caves in

Team Absolute | Thane

On Thursday morning, officials said the roof of a flat in Thane city's Kalwa area collapsed injuring an elderly couple and their son. Officials further told news agency that the roof of their second-floor flat--in a four-storey building--collapsed on them shortly before midnight.

Yasin Tadv, the chief of the Regional Disaster Management Cell (RDMC) of Thane Municipal Corporation told the news agency that the incident happened in the Bhusar Ali area of Kalwa and that the build-



ing had been previously categorised as unsafe and inhabitable.

"A septuagenarian man, his wife and their son were injured after the roof of their second floor flat collapsed on them around 11.55 pm on Wednesday in Om Krishna Cooperative Housing Society located in Kalwa's Bhusar Ali

area," Yasin Tadv, chief of the Regional Disaster Management Cell (RDMC) of the Thane Municipal Corporation said.

He further said that the building is around 35 years old and that the civic body had earlier categorised it as an unsafe, dangerous and inhabitable structure which needed to be demolished.

Tadv further told the news agency that the personnel from the local fire brigade, the RDMC team had rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation. Reportedly, nearly 100 occupants living in 30 flats of the building were evacuated.

BMC allocates Rs 275 crore for pothole repairs amidst rising costs

Team Absolute | Mumbai

After awarding contracts to concrete over 1,000 km of roads in the past two years, the BMC has allocated around Rs 275 crore to fill potholes this year. Last year, the corporation filled over 70,000 potholes at a cost of Rs 400 crore. Annually, in addition to spending Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500 crore on concreting roads, the BMC spends Rs 150 to Rs 200 crore on pothole repairs. In recent years, the cost of filling potholes has also increased.

Mumbai's road network spans 2,050 km, with 990 km already concreted by 2022. The BMC had undertaken the concreting of 210 km of the city back in January 2022 and sanctioned a proposal for another 397 km in February 2023, costing Rs 6,080 crore excluding the GST of 18 per cent.

Soon, the tender process



for the remaining 397 km is to begin and has been estimated to cost Rs 6,250 crore. But BMC has been able to complete less than 20 per cent of concreting work till now and that's why the corporation is on high alert this season with regard to potholes.

According to a senior BMC official, "The narrow gullies up to 9 m width are with 24 wards while big roads above 9 m are with the central ward department." The BMC has appointed two contractors in each of the seven zones by allocating around Rs 8 to Rs 12 crore per ward depending upon the size of the ward for filling potholes on big roads.

Besides, the wards are allotted around Rs 1 to Rs 2 crore to fill potholes on small lanes.

The BMC has already spent approximately Rs 100 crore on resurfacing damaged road sections before the monsoon to ensure they are monsoon-ready. Additionally, the BMC has awarded contracts for concreting 600 km of roads. Contractors are responsible for the roads under construction or completed for at least five years (Defect Liability Period). In other words, only 400 km of roads remain that are not concreted or not under construction and the responsibility for these lies with the BMC. As per the data given by the BMC it had filled up 52,000 potholes till mid-August 2023. The number increased to around 70,000 by October and the corporation had to spend around Rs 400 crore on the same.

Central Railway's services on main line hit due to glitch in signalling system

Team Absolute | Mumbai

A signalling system glitch near Vikhroli station disrupted local train services on the Mainline of Central Railway's Mumbai's suburban network on Thursday morning, leading to overcrowding at several stations and causing significant inconvenience to commuters during rush hour.

Central Railway officials reported that a technical fault occurred in the signalling system on the UP (Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus-bound) fast line at around 7 am, causing some local trains to be held up for about an hour.

"Due to some Technical Faults at up through line near Vikhroli Station, local trains are held up hence some locals are running behind Schedule time. We are continuously working on it to resolve the same as early as possible. Inconvenience is highly regretted," tweeted Rajneesh Goyal, Divisional Railway Manager of Central Railway's Mumbai division.

He later updated that the glitch was rectified by 8:05 am. Commuters faced 20 to 30-minute delays, which resulted in congested trains and stations during peak hours. As CSMT-bound fast trains were held up for significant periods of time, many commuters took to walking along the tracks to the next station in search of alternate transportation.



Passengers were frustrated by the disruption. "Central Railway trains are always punctual - if you consider being at least 20 minutes late every day as on time. And don't expect any announcements about platform changes or cancellations; they like to keep things exciting," a commuter, Mandar Abhyankar, wrote on Facebook.

Earlier this month, commuters faced major disruptions across the Central and Western Railway, resulting in mayhem during peak hours.

The Central Railway operates over 1,800 suburban services daily across Raigad and Thane districts outside Mumbai, serving more than 30 lakh commuters.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Fear of losing ground

More than her own Bahujan Samaj Party's stunning defeat in the just concluded Lok Sabha elections, it is the emergence of Chandra Shekhar Aazad of Azad Samaj Party that has rattled BSP President Mayawati. Chandra Shekhar Aazad won the Nagina reserved Lok Sabha seat with a huge margin even though he was pitted against BJP, BSP and SP in the constituency. Mayawati, according to sources, sees his victory as a direct threat to the existence of BSP and her leadership among Dalits. Another Azad Samaj Party candidate Amarjeet Singh who contested the Domariyaganj seat, ranked third with over 81,000 votes. The BSP ranked fourth in both the constituencies. According to sources close to Mayawati, the BSP president now plans to counter the increasing popularity of Chandra Shekhar by 'relaunching' her nephew Akash Anand. Mayawati had withdrawn her nephew from the midst of the election campaign, claiming that he lacked maturity. Interestingly, the BSP's failure to win even a single seat in the Lok Sabha elections has dealt a severe blow to its reputation of representing the voice of Dalits. In 2019, BSP won two reserved seats, Nagina and Lalganj -- and was runners-up on eight. The party has been winning Lalganj since 2009 but in 2024, Samajwadi Party wrested the seat this time. In 2024, BSP candidates trailed in third and fourth positions in most seats. Sources said that Mayawati's biggest problem in reviving the BSP was that the party did not have any second rung Dalit leadership that could reach out to the voters.

IITs And Women: It's Not A Question Of Merit, But Access

Bharti Mishra Nath

The results for this year's Indian Institute of Technology-Joint Entrance Examination (IIT-JEE) are out, and it is heartening to see that of the 48,248 students who have qualified for the test, 7,964 candidates are girls. In the Advanced test, Ved Lahoti of IIT Delhi zone topped in the Common Rank List (CRL) with 355 out of 360 marks, while Gujarat's Dwija Patel in the IIT Bombay zone was the top-ranked female candidate with CRL 7. She scored 332 marks. A total of 1,80,200 candidates appeared in the two JEE Advanced papers.

Science, particularly engineering, has been a male-dominated domain for long, with the female population on IIT campuses being almost negligible. There have been improvements though. The number of female enrolments in IITs more than tripled from just 995 in 2017 to 3,411 in 2023. A study by the sub-committee of the Joint Admission Board (JAB), the advisory body in charge of admissions to IITs, found that in 2016, as many as 4,570 girls cleared the JEE (Advanced) exam but only 848 were admitted to an IIT. This reflects that though women are in no way less meritorious, systemic societal biases forbid them from making it to these premier institutes. On an average, the ratio of male to female students on an IIT campus has been about 10:1, despite women performing significantly well in JEE exams.

Coaching plays an important role in preparation for JEE. But a majority of girls don't have access to such facilities given the gender bias in families. Most parents are not willing to invest much in her education, let alone coaching. There are also other restrictions that are amplified for girls, say, geographical access to coaching centres and social restrictions. All this deprives them of a level playing field. To address the under-representation of female students in IITs, the Central government in 2018 introduced supernumerary seats, that is, seats over and above the sanctioned limit by the government. With this, the IIT admissions council decided to set aside 800 (14%) additional seats for girls across the 23 IITs. In 2019, the numbers increased to 946 (17%) female-only seats. Then, in 2021, the JAB decided to allow IITs to fix their female enrolment targets at 20% of the total admissions. Not only did most institutes fulfil this quota, many even managed to exceed it. In 2023, as many as 3,411 female-only seats were



allotted, while 11 female candidates got admission in the gender-neutral pool. The overall percentage of females in IITs was 19.7% - one in five students was a girl.

Over the years, IITs have also taken progressive steps in offering scholarships, addressing gender disparity on campus, conducting special sessions with parents of girl students, and conducting outreach programmes in schools.

"IITs, or for that matter, even NITs [National Institute of Technology], are on their way to becoming gender-balanced with the increasing number of females in these institutions. Getting admission to IITs has always been tough. However, it has become just a bit easy for girls now. This will encourage female students to try for IITs," says Dr. Anjali Sharma, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, National Institute of Technology, Patna. "It is a myth that girls in

engineering colleges are less meritorious. Most often, girls outperform boys in reality. They are more sincere and hardworking. Females from these institutes have proved to be among the best in the corporate world."

Sarita Kumari, an MTech student of IIT Bombay, echoes these views. "Seeing more women succeed in these prestigious programmes helps dismantle stereotypes and encourages young girls to enter male-dominated fields... Ultimately, more girls attending IITs improves gender parity and benefits society by empowering women to effect meaningful change." This year, the IIT Madras zone has registered the highest number of qualified candidates. Of its 11,180 candidates, 145 feature in the top 500; four from the top 10 are also from here. The zone, also known as the IIT-Hyderabad zone - comprising Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil

Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry - had the largest number of qualifying candidates for JEE Advanced last year as well.

According to reports, in 2023 too, there were 10,432 qualifying candidates from this zone, with 174 candidates featuring in the top 500 and six in the top 10. The zone had the best gender ratio among all IIT campuses, with nearly 1,200 girls joining tech colleges last year. The proportion of female aspirants is also high - almost at par with males.

Apart from traditional subjects, IITs are also working on introducing diverse programmes like public policy and design. All these steps reflect the resolve to ease the journey to IIT for the female student.

(The views expressed are personal)

international

Unicef urges Taliban to let girls study 1,000 days after school ban

Kabul | Agencies
Marking 1,000 days since girls in Afghanistan were banned from secondary school, a top official at the United Nations children's agency, Unicef, on Thursday used this milestone to urge the Taliban to allow girls to go back to school.



education.

"It exacerbates the ongoing humanitarian crisis and has serious ramifications for Afghanistan's economy and development trajectory," the statement added.

Russell appealed for the return of girls

to schools, pointing to the fact that no country can move forward when half its population is left behind.

"I urge the de-facto authorities to allow all children to resume learning immediately. And I urge the international community to remain engaged and support these girls, who need us more than ever."

Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban has banned girls and women from studying beyond primary school. However, in some parts of the country, women and girls still attend religious schools, as well as midwifery and nursing schools.

The Taliban government is not recognised internationally.

105 countries gather in Abu Dhabi to discuss critical issues of energy transition

Abu Dhabi | Agencies
The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) convened its 27th council meeting here on Thursday, just days after United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued an urgent call for climate action.



International Renewable Energy Agency

The two-day meetings gather representatives from 105 countries to discuss critical issues facing the global energy transition.

Over the next two days, IRENA members will focus on scaling up and de-risking renewable energy investments towards realising decarbonisation and sustainable development goals, bolstering partnerships with private sector entities and utilities and delving into best practices for energy planning. The council will also facilitate consultation and cooperation among IRENA members to review the agency's work programme, budget and annual report, among other relevant administrative and institutional matters.

"Despite the world installing more renewable energy capacity in 2023 than

any previous year, additions were still only half of what is necessary to limit rising temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius," said IRENA Director-General Francesco La Camera.

"To meet the global target of tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030, a significant increase in commitment and action from both public and private sectors is essential.

"IRENA will play a pivotal role in ensuring transparency and accountability by tracking progress and facilitating implementation towards the energy goals set at COP28."

Last week, La Camera met with Guterres and emphasised the critical need to prioritise energy infrastructure in the climate agenda.

He also highlighted IRENA's role as custodian

agency in monitoring progress towards the global target to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030, as tasked by the COP28 Presidency and supported by the incoming COP29 Presidency.

"IRENA's mission is critical on many levels," stated Gloria Magombo, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Energy and Power Development, Zimbabwe, and 27th IRENA Council Chair. "A renewable-based energy transition is not only the most effective climate solution available but also key to addressing the energy access challenges many countries currently face. As council chair, I am committed to ensuring that IRENA's exceptional work in advocacy, support, and progress tracking is fully supported by its members."

In May 2024, COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber officially tasked IRENA with the establishment of a special annual report series dedicated to monitoring progress and providing recommendations on achieving key energy goals of the UAE Consensus set at COP28.

G7 states agree to huge loan for Ukraine using frozen Russian assets

Bari, Italy | Agencies
G7 states have agreed to lend Ukraine \$50 billion using money generated from frozen Russian state assets, diplomats told dpa on Thursday, the first day of a summit in Italy among the leaders of the world's economically advanced democracies.

War-ravaged Ukraine is to use the loan package to strengthen its military defence against Russia, pay for the reconstruction of infrastructure and funding for Ukraine's state budget.

The US government says around \$280 billion of Russian central bank money has been immobilised in Western countries due to sanctions imposed since the full-scale Russian attack on Ukraine more than two years ago.

The bulk of the money is within the European Union. The bloc's member states recently approved the use of interest income generated from Russian state assets to finance aid for Ukraine.

The Brussels-based finan-

cial institution Euroclear - by far the largest holder in the EU of frozen Russian central bank assets - recently said that it had collected around \$4.7 billion in interest in 2023.

Planning for the structure of the loan package has been underway for months. The US had originally campaigned in favour of collecting not only the interest income but also the frozen assets themselves and using them to provide financial support to Kyiv. Some European capitals, however, had major reservations about this.

G7 leaders are meeting for a summit in southern Italy from Thursday to Saturday.

Hamas' requested changes on truce deal partially 'workable': Blinken



Doha | Agencies

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said here that some of the changes requested by Hamas regarding the latest ceasefire proposal are "workable," while some are not.

Hamas had not explicitly agreed to the proposal, and "we are determined to try to bridge the gaps," Blinken said on Wednesday in a press conference after meeting with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, Xinhua news agency reported.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed Hamas' response to the latest truce deal, the latest developments in Gaza, and the latest updates in the joint mediation efforts to end the war, according to a statement by the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Qatar and Egypt announced on Tuesday that they have received a response from Hamas regarding the ceasefire proposal.

The mediators "will examine the response and coordinate with the parties concerned regarding the next steps," according to a previous statement by the Ministry on Tuesday.

US Fed keeps interest rate unchanged

Washington | Agencies
The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday kept the interest rate unchanged but hinted that there could be one cut between now and the end of the year as they continue the fight against inflation.

The Fed announcement came after a two-day meeting of its top officials.

They will meet four more times this year -- July, September, November and December.

Fed's interest rates determine interest on home and auto loans and credit cards.

Rate hikes are aimed at slowing down the economy



by curbing spending, which is a tool used by Central banks around the world to battle inflation.

The Fed increased interest rate multiple times starting in early 2022 when inflation hit a four-decade high and took it up to 5.3 per cent in July where it has been kept since.

The Fed expected to announce three cuts in 2024

as inflations showed signs of coming down, but decided against it every time as inflation stayed stubbornly high.

Inflation has cooled down notably since May and the Fed predicted that inflation could be more stubborn than expected and the overall rate could bottom out at 2.6 per cent by the end of the year instead of the 2.4 per cent

they had estimated earlier. The Fed aims to bring inflation under two per cent. "We've made pretty good progress on inflation," Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said at a news conference.

But to cut rates, he added, "we'll need to see more good data."

A report by the US Labour Department released just hours before the Fed announcement showed that the consumer price index -- a measure of goods and services -- remained unchanged from June and at 3.3 per cent over June last year.

In April the number stood at 3.4 per cent.



T20 WORLD CUP: BANGLADESH BEAT THE NETHERLANDS BY 25 RUNS; INCH CLOSER TO SUPER 8 SPOT

Kingstown (St Vincent) | Agencies

Shakib Al Hasan slammed an unbeaten half-century to help Bangladesh beat the Netherlands by 25 runs in a Group D clash and put themselves on the verge of qualification for the Super 8 stage of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup here on Thursday. Bangladesh and the Netherlands were in the hunt for the second qualifying spot from the Group with South Africa assured their place in the Super Eight with three wins in three matches. By winning the match on Thursday, Bangladesh are Shakib hammered 64 not out off 46 balls to propel Bangladesh to 159/5 in 20 overs. Later, the Bangla Tigers defended the target with Rishad Hossain claiming 3-33 and Taskin Ahmed bagging 2-30 as the Netherlands were restricted to 132/8 in 20 overs at the Arnos Vale Ground, Kingstown, St Vincent.

Each of the top five in the Netherlands batting order reached double figures, with the match



seemingly in the balance for long stretches of their reply. But wickets fell too frequently for the Dutch to sustain their required run-rate, and their attempt fizzled out with

the target still 25 runs away at the close. Some clever pace-off bowling by Bangladesh ensured that the run rate never felt under control.

The Netherlands were off to a bad start in their chase of 160 as they lost Michael Levitt (15) to Taskin Ahmed in the fifth over with the score at 22. Max O'Dowd too departed soon for 12, caught by Tanzim Hasan off his own bowling. Vikramjit Singh (28) and Sybrand Engelbrecht (33) took the score to 69 before the former was out. Engelbrecht and skipper Scott Edwards (25) took the score to 110 before the former was out to Rishad Hossain. The Dutch fight ended when Edwards was out to Mustafizur Rahman for 25 off 23 balls as the Netherlands fell short by 25 runs.

Brief scores

Bangladesh 159/5 in 20 overs (Shakib Al Hasan 64 not out, Tanzid Hasan 35, Mahmudullah 25; Aryan Dutt 2-17, Paul van Meekeren 2-15) beat Netherlands 134/8 in 20 overs (Sybrand Engelbrecht 33, Vikramjit Singh 26, Scott Edwards 25; Rishad Hossain 3-33, Taskin Ahmed 2-30) by 25 runs.

MESSI SAYS HE WON'T PLAY FOR ARGENTINA AT PARIS OLYMPICS

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Lionel Messi has decided not to be part of Argentina's squad for the Paris Olympics as he is no longer at an age where he can play in every tournament.

Messi shared his thoughtful perspective, expressing his gratitude for the invitation from former teammate and under-23 manager Javier Mascherano.

"I talked to Mascherano and the truth is we both understood the situation," Messi told ESPN.

However, with the rigors of Copa America looming large and the demands on his aging physique becoming more pronounced, Messi recognised the importance of pacing himself. Balancing club commitments, international tournaments, and personal well-being, he conceded that participating in two consecutive tournaments would be too taxing at this stage of his career.

"It's hard (to think about the Olympics right now) because we're in Copa America. It would be two, three straight months of not being with the club, and more than anything I'm not at an age to be in everything."

"I have to choose carefully, and it would be too much to play two straight tournaments. I've been very lucky to play in the Olympics,



of winning it together with (Mascherano). It was a wonderful experience on a football level. Olympics, U20, memories I'll never forget."

Golf: Diksha, Pranavi lead Indian golf challenge in Rome

Rome | Agencies

Diksha Dagar and Pranavi Urs, the two top Indian women on the Ladies European Tour, will be in action this week at the Italian Open Golf alongside Tvesa Malik, Vani Kapoor and Ridhima Dilawari at Golf Nazionale.

Last week Pranavi Urs finished in Top-10 for the third time this season and has been progressing well in her rookie season. At one stage two weeks ago, Pranavi had a winning chance with a lead, but late mistakes cost her a possible win.

Diksha Dagar had a missed cut in the Scandinavian Open Mixed, where she was the lone Indian, alongside Shubhankar Sharma in the men's section. It has been a modest season for Diksha as compared to a spectacular one in 2023, when she won once and came close to doing so at the Hero Women's Indian Open at



home.

In the latest standings on the Ladies European Tour, Diksha is 11th and Pranavi lies 13th with more than half the season still left.

Tvesa Malik, who lost her card this year, has been showing better form and picked up a Top-10 recently. Vani Kapoor has had a less than average season for her potential. Ridhima Dilawari, who has been getting limited

starts, will be hoping for a better one in Rome.

Italy's top woman player, Alessandro Panali, is hoping to go one better than she did as an amateur last time in 2022. She is looking to make history by becoming her nation's first player to take the famous trophy.

The 300,000 Euros event returns after a gap of one year and the previous winner was Morgane Metraux.

'I think they've got to stick with Rohit and Kohli on top': Lara

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Legendary West Indies cricketer Brian Lara has thrown his support behind India's opening pair of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, urging the team to stick with the star duo despite their recent struggles in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

India's opening partnership has been under the spotlight, with Kohli's performances notably below par. The prolific right-hander has registered scores of 1, 4, and 0 in the tournament so far.

Meanwhile, Rohit began the campaign with a promising half-century against Ireland (52 off 37) but failed to capitalise in the subsequent matches, managing just 13 and 3 runs. Despite these setbacks, Lara believes that altering the opening combination could disrupt the team's balance and emphasised the importance of consistency, particularly in the top order.

"India had the option to play a left-right opening partnership. They went with two great players, two guys who've done a great job for India with the bat for their individual franchises as well, in terms of the captain Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. I think they've got to stick with it. If you make changes on top, Virat Kohli has to come in the order a little bit lower, and that's going to upset things there," Lara said on Star Sports.



The Windies great continued to express his confidence in the pair's ability to eventually deliver. "I believe that the combination India is having, India has to back the two of them. At some point in

time, they're going to come good. The batting conditions in the USA were not the very best. I don't believe you start making changes especially if you're winning," he added.

T20 World Cup: Siraj gets 'Fielder of the Match' medal from Yuvraj after India beat USA

New York | Agencies

India pacer Mohammed Siraj bagged the 'Fielder of the Match' medal for his outstanding athleticism on the field in the seven-wicket win against the USA in the T20 World Cup on Wednesday night.

India not only completed the hat-trick of wins in the showpiece event but also progressed to the Super Eight stage of the tournament. In the previous two games at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, the Rohit Sharma-led side outclassed Ireland and Pakistan to start the campaign on high.

Continuing the tradition of acknowledging the fielding efforts of the players, India's legendary all-rounder and T20 World Cup brand ambassador Yuvraj Singh presented the medal to Siraj, who grabbed two catches and a run-out on the final ball of the innings.

The pacer went wicketless in his four-over spell but he grabbed catches of Aaron Jones (11) and Nitesh Kumar (27), particularly taking the wonderful grab at the deep midwicket of the former.

Rishabh Pant, Suryakumar Yadav and Siraj were among the contenders for the medal.



"Whenever he is on the field, he not only took those catches and made those runouts, but it is an attitude. And every time he went on there, it was an attitude that was willing to make a difference," said Yuvraj in a BCCI video.

Indian fielding coach, T Dilip lauded the effort of his troops for their outstanding effort on the field.

"I always believe our team's consistency is what separates from good to great. And I think that was a perfect example. We showcased that very well today. Well done in the first three games," said Dilip.

"Every small effort, changing in pace, not giving up on the boundary line, backing up, going to hotspots, these are the small things that make a lot of difference as a group. This helps us to be the best version of ourselves, every time we keep pushing those limits."

"It is very, very important to acknowledge small errors is natural. And what makes us so special is we come back and keep pushing ourselves to the best. And that's what we can see in the last two games that even if we had a couple of errors, we came back very strongly as a unit. Well done!" he added.

India will next take on Canada in their last group-stage match in Florida on Saturday.

Asian Team Squash: India men to meet Pakistan in quarters

Dalin (China) | Agencies

India men qualified for the quarterfinals of the Asian Team Squash Championships 2024 here on Thursday as the second team from Pool D behind Japan following a 3-0 victory over Mongolia for their second win in the four-team group. Former champions India men will meet Pakistan in the quarterfinals on Friday.

Meanwhile, India women beat Chinese Taipei 3-0 but lost to Malaysia by an identical margin on Thursday, and will now meet South Korea on Friday in a must-win final Group A league match for a semifinal spot.

The Indian men's and women's teams made a winning start in the event.

The women, spearheaded by Rathika Suthanthira Seelan, beat Macau and Mongolia while the men, headed by Velavan Senthikumar, began with a convincing 3-1 win over Kuwait, before falling short against Japan, according to information provided by the SFI on Wednesday.

India results:
Men: India bt Mongolia 3-0 (Suraj Kumar Chand bt Yesun Otonchaimag 11-3, 11-5, 11-1; Om Semwal bt Brian Bolor Bayarmaa 11-2,



11-3, 11-2; Rahul Baitha bt Amartvshin Mandakhbayar 11-4, 11-5, 11-8).

Women: India bt Chinese Taipei 3-0 (Pooja Arthi R bt Wu Yi Chun 11-4, 11-1, 11-3; Sunita Patel bt Wang Yuan 11-6, 11-8, 11-9; Rathika Suthanthira Seelan bt Lee Yi Hsuan 11-7, 11-6, 11-5). Malaysia bt India 3-0 (Aifa Azman bt Pooja Arthi 11-3, 11-5, 11-4; Aifa Azman bt Janet Vidhi 11-1, 11-3, 11-1; Sivasangari Subramaniam bt Rathika Seelan 11-4, 11-5, 11-8).

Stuart Law admits 'penalty runs didn't affect' USA's defeat to India

New York | Agencies

USA head coach Stuart Law said he wouldn't blame his team's defeat to India in the men's T20 World Cup Group A match over the five-run penalty they were penalised for not starting their overs in time.

Law also admitted that players should have responded earlier to the previous warnings they got.

After restricting USA to 110/8, a nervy India chased the target in 18.2 overs, thanks to an unbeaten fifty from Suryakumar Yadav. But ahead of the start of the 16th over of their chase, India needed 35 runs to win. With USA being imposed the five-run penalty under the stop-clock rules, the equation was reduced to 30 runs needed off 30 balls.

"Players know the rule, but it's something that if you haven't played with it for a long time, it's very difficult to have it embedded in your brain. So, the information coming from the umpires was, they were given two clear warnings, then it's up to the players to respond. We didn't respond fast enough, we didn't do it well enough, and that's something we can address." "I don't think it affected the outcome of the game. Five runs wasn't going to affect the outcome of the game so I



don't think it rattled (the players). No, I thought we stuck to our guns, we fought hard, we fought to the death. I thought we showed some fantastic character against one of the best teams in the world," said Law in the post-match press conference.

He further said it wasn't something which took the USA team by surprise. "We had a few warnings in earlier games, and it's something we do talk about to get through faster between the overs. It's just one thing that we can improve on. I think that we're only a fledgling team. There's plenty to learn."

"There's not just the cricket aspect of the game of cricket, but there's also the other intricacies that need to be embedded (among the players). It's a rule that's only just come in. A lot of our players wouldn't have heard about it before we played in the Bangladesh series or the Canada series earlier this year. So, look, it's something that we need to address, we'll sit down and talk about, but we can improve it." "Asked if this was the ideal way to speed up cricket games internationally, Law remarked, "I think there needs to be a pace of play. I think if you're dragging games out that should last three-and-a-half hours, they're going for four-and-a-half hours, that's a bit much. The ICC are there to install rules and regulations. We as coaches and teams are there to follow those rules and regulations."



Tabu claims Ajay Devgn often calls her for industry gossip

Team Absolute | Mumbai

It was a moment of hilarious banter between two of the best friends in the Hindi film industry, Tabu and Ajay Devgn in the city on Thursday.

The actors attended the trailer launch of their upcoming film at a multiplex in the Juhu area of Mumbai. During the trailer launch as the two stars interacted with the media, they broke into a fun banter with Tabu saying that her best friend often enquires about the industry gossip from her. To which, Ajay responded in a jiffy, "Main koi gossip nahi karta (I don't engage in any gossip)". A surprised Tabu then looked at the media and pointed towards Ajay. She then looked at him and said: "Jhoot mat bol (don't lie)", before she turned to the media and said, "Sabke baare mein poochta hai ye (He asks about everyone in the industry)."

Ajay, still denying Tabu's claims, said, "Iska matlab tujhe sab pata rehta hai (that means you know all the gossip)."

Ajay and Tabu have known each other for over three decades now. They first shared the screen in 'Vijaypath', and have gone on to deliver successful collaborations with 'Drishyam', 'Drishyam 2', 'Golmaal Again' and others.



Sidharth cheers to a decade of hard work of Kiara

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Sidharth Malhotra on Thursday cheered for his wife and actress Kiara Advani who completed 10 years in the film industry, saying "cheers to a decade of hard work, love, and passion".

Taking to Instagram Stories, Sidharth, who shared the screen with Kiara in the 2021 biopic 'Shershaah', dropped a picture of the couple from a magazine cover with the caption, "Cheers to a decade of hard work, love, and passion! Keep shining! #10yearsofKiaraAdvani."

Kiara made her acting debut in 2014 with the comedy film 'Fugly' starring Jimmy Shergill, Mohit Marwah, and Vijender Singh in key roles.

She then went on to star in movies like 'M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story', 'Machine', Telugu films 'Bharat Ane Nenu' and 'Vinaya Vidheya Rama', the Shahid Kapoor-starrer 'Kabir Singh', 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2', 'Juggugg Jeeyo', and most recently, 'Satyaprem Ki Katha'.



Sunny Deol to return with 'Border 2'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

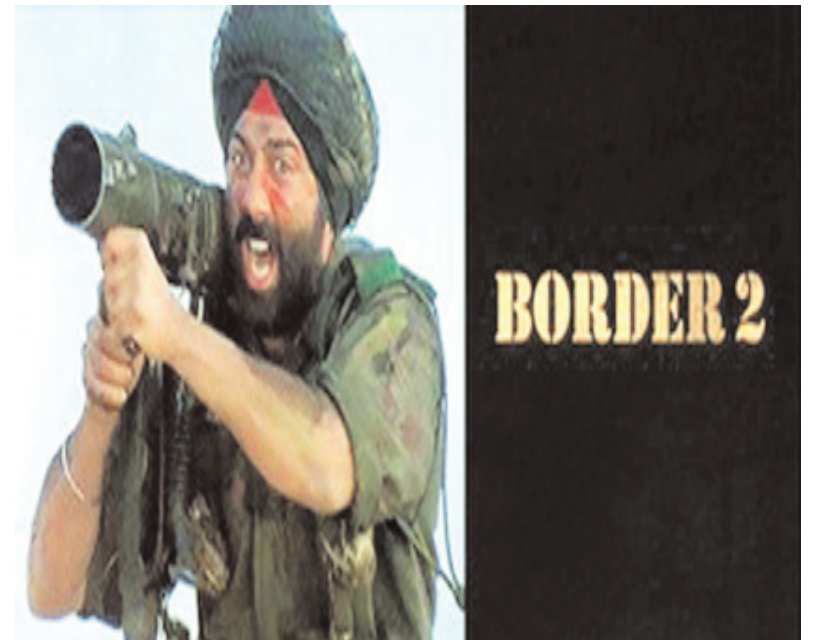
After rocking the theatres with 'Gadar 2', actor Sunny Deol is all set to return with the sequel to another iconic movie, 'Border'.

On Thursday, the makers of the film announced 'Border 2' with a special video.

The video, which contains only text and no visuals, begins with a voice-over by Sunny Deol, saying, "27 saal pehle, ek fauji ne waada kiya tha ki wo vapas aayega. Usi waade ko poora karne, Hindustan ki mitti ko apna salaam kehne, aa raha hai fir se (27 years ago, a soldier made a promise to return. To keep the promise, and to salute the soil of India, the soldier is coming back)."

The video ends with Sonu Nigam singing the song, 'Sandese Aate Hai'. 'Border 2' is written by Nidhi Dutta and produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, JP Dutta and Nidhi Dutta.

'Border', which was released in 1997, featured an ensemble cast including Suniel Shetty, Jackie Shroff, Akshaye Khanna, Sudesh Berry, and Puneet Issar, alongside a supporting cast including



Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Tabu, Raakhee, Pooja Bhatt, and Sharbani Mukherjee.

The film showcased the Battle of Longewala, albeit in a fictional way. It

featured music by Anu Malik and lyrics by Javed Akhtar. The film became a watershed moment in India's repertoire of war films.

India has a huge intangible library of folklore : Mona Singh

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Mona Singh, who has been receiving a lot of positive responses for her recently released film 'Munjya', feels that India has a huge intangible library of folklore, fables, and urban legends, which the industry needs to leverage to the fullest. The actress said that most of the horror movies made outside India are derived from folklore and urban legends. In India, 'Stree' is the biggest example of an urban legend breaking the box office with its performance, while 'Munjya' made on a humble budget is also climbing the ladder. "If you look at India, at every 200 km, the water changes, the language changes. So imagine how many folklore we can tell. 'Munjya' has travelled from Maharashtra to across the world. I'm sure we have many more folklore to tell. And some of them could be horror," she told.

For Mona, the most intriguing thing about working in a horror film like 'Munjya' is watching her performance as part of the finished product.

"When you're shooting, you're just acting, which is a very small part... You're not actually seeing the ghost. It's your imaginary world, and you're a part of it as an actor. But when

everything comes together, with sound effects, special effects, you eventually see the ghost. So it's a very different feeling when you're watching your work in a horror film," she said.



"Making heads turn." Nikki Tamboli has set the internet on fire with backless top

Team Absolute | Mumbai

'Bigg Boss 14' fame actress Nikki

Tamboli has set the internet on fire with her sultry pictures in a black backless top and matching skirt, with fans calling her a "sexy lady."

Nikki, who also participated in 'Fear Factor: Khatron Ke Khiladi 11', took to Instagram, where she has 5.3 million followers, and shared a series of hot pictures from her photoshoot.

In the photos, she is seen wearing a long-sleeved black backless top paired with a matching wrap-around skirt, which is open on both sides.

The actress, who appeared in an item song in the movie 'Jogira Sara Ra Ra', opted for dewy makeup and left her long tresses open, styled in soft waves.

Nikki captioned the post: "Making heads turn."

The pictures have taken the internet by storm, with fans showering Nikki with love. One user commented, "Killin' it," while another wrote, "Hotness overload."

A fan simply said, "So fireeee."



18th edition of MIFF to celebrate the achievements of women filmmakers worldwide



Team Absolute | Mumbai

The 18th Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) to be held from June 15-21 will celebrate the achievements of women filmmakers worldwide with a spotlight section on their contributions. The special segment titled 'Asian Women Film' will feature five films directed by women, including 'American Dream' by Rene

Shi and 'Tequila Sunset' by Jinsui Song, both from the US, 'Duet' by Ekin Ilkbag and Idil Akkus from Turkey, 'Happy Independence Day' by Camila Sagyntkan from Kazakhstan, and 'Triangle' by Zhino Hadi Hasan from Iraq.

A special package will also focus on cultural themes and feature three documentary films, 'Steps of Freedom - The Story of Irish Dance', 'Kanda Bode', and

'Flamenco: Passion in Danger'.

Additionally, the festival will also hold parallel screenings in Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, and Pune to extend its reach to a broader audience interested in short films, documentaries, and animation. The festival, organised by NFDC, will be held at the National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC) on Peddar Road in Mumbai from June 15.

INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Sakshi Malik