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E-PAPER



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BRIEF

CM to review suspected polio case

Shillong, Aug 19

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday said he would review the suspected polio case in Meghalaya before coming up with a proper statement as well as a plan of action. "I will be taking a review on this in a couple of days and give my respond to the entire situation. We have to be careful as we are determining many factors and also come up with a proper statement as well as plan of action if we find that the specific information and intel is actually very serious as it has been made to be," Sangma told reporters.

GHADC staff strike for 34 months due

Tura, Aug 19

Work has once again come to a standstill in the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council with hundreds of employees beginning a week-long strike demanding authorities release 34 months of their pending salaries.

The employees, part of the Non-Gazetted Employees Association (NGEA) pitched camp at the Tura Government College field on Monday morning preparing to sit it out for the entire working week.

The district council staff is yet to get a hike in salary under the 5th pay commission. They are demanding that their dues ought to be paid under the new pay scale.

Traffic curbs in city on Aug 21

Shillong, Aug 19

To facilitate smooth traffic flow and effective crowd management, the Shillong Traffic Police (STP) has announced several traffic restrictions ahead of the Durand Cup 2024 quarter final football match in Shillong. Restrictions will be in place from 4 pm on match day until the event concludes. Several areas around Polo, will be designated as no-entry zones starting from 4 pm.

Vehicles approaching these restricted areas will be diverted. Heavy motor vehicles will be barred from 5:30 pm onwards. Parking will be prohibited around the Polo agglomeration starting from 1 pm.

Emergency service vehicles and those transporting sick individuals will be exempted.

WEATHER TODAY

- Shillong**
22/19°C
Cloudy, t-storms
- Jowai**
22/20°C
Couple of t-storms
- Nongpoh**
26/23°C
Cloudy, t-storm
- Williamnagar**
26/23°C
Occasional rain
- Baghmara**
27/25°C
Rain and t-storm
- Tura**
27/24°C
Rain and t-storm
- Resubelpara**
27/24°C
Heavy t-storm

Conrad stuns Congress with political manoeuvre, gets NPP golden 31

By Cosmos Sangma

Term it vengeance or settling of scores for the Tura Lok Sabha debacle, but a "surgical strike" by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, whisking away three opposition legislators from under the nose of the grand old party, has left the Congress "stunned" and "speechless".

It has given the NPP the much sought after number of 31- a clear majority in the assembly for the first time in the party's history.

The Congress, the biggest political player in Meghalaya for fifty long years, has been pushed to its lowest ever position- a lone sitting MLA in the form of Ronnie V Lyngdoh.

Three Congress legislators, namely Dr Celestine Lyngdoh of Umsning, Charles Marnagar of Mawhati and Gabriel Wahlang of Nongstoin constituency, walked out of the Congress to join the ruling NPP, on a day the opposition party had tried every page in the book to halt, or at least stall, their departure.

The Congress had suspended two of the MLAs, Charles and Gabriel, to block the defection and spared Celestine in the hope the rebel duo would fall under the anti-defection law.

But their "preventive" action fell through after Celestine joined the two suspended comrades and met with Assembly Speaker Thomas A Sangma to show that it was a two-thirds shift (3 out of 4 elected MLAs) and deserved to



Former Congress legislators, Celestine Lyngdoh of Umsning, Charles Marnagar of Mawhati and Gabriel Wahlang of Nongstoin looks on as NPP chief and Chief Minister Conrad Sangma delivers a speech to welcome them.

be recognized. The speaker's decision to quickly accept the rebels' petition sealed the fate of the Congress.

"This has given a boost to the party, and more importantly, it has reinforced our commitment to serving our people and taking our state forward," said the chief minister as he recalled the humble beginnings of the NPP that was formed by his late father P A Sangma.

The chief minister dismissed speculations of conflict among alliance parties sharing power with his party,

now that the NPP alone has a clear majority in the assembly.

"There are two aspects- one at party and the other at government level. We have been very clear, including the MLAs themselves that they are not coming into the party for any personal gains or positions. There are no conditions," said the chief minister.

Conrad Sangma also dismissed talk of a cabinet reshuffle in the light of the latest developments where the numbers of the NPP has swelled to 31.

Opposition's back against the wall

While the opposition Congress turned overnight into being a solo performer in the state assembly, for arch rivals NPP it was celebration time.

The political gamble by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma to break the opposition numbers has placed it in a formidable position to take on the opposition, whose numbers have been falling drastically.

The opposition now comprises just a handful of legis-



This has given a boost to the party, and more importantly, it has reinforced our commitment to serving our people and taking our state forward

Eye on Gambegre by-poll

As the by-elections for Gambegre constituency draws near, the ruling NPP needed a strike to rise from the defeat in the recent Lok Sabha polls when it lost to the VPP in Shillong and the Congress in Tura.

Today's vanquishing of the Congress and attaining single party majority for the NPP would act as an elixir for Conrad Sangma's party supporters and workers, believe many party leaders.

The effects of the potion will be felt when Gambegre is counted.

Decision to shift was in interest of people: Celestine



Shillong, Aug 19

Hoping to put all speculations to rest over their decision to shift from the Congress to the NPP camp, senior Congress-turned-NPP legislator Dr Celestine Lyngdoh said that it was done taking into consideration the interests of his people.

Speaking at a meeting to formally welcome them to the NPP, Lyngdoh said that situation had demanded the three MLAs of the Congress to merge with the ruling party.

"You take any road but take the road that give the best benefit to the people with no hatred to anyone," he said.

Having joined the NPP, Celestine Lyngdoh was all praise for the MDA government headed by Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma. "It is not easy for us to say

I am leaving my parent party from which I was elected and to join another party but the commitment and the faith that we have between the CM and us with the hope that agreement and commitment that we have will bring changes in our constituencies that paves the way for all things that is happening now," he said.

Lyngdoh said that the NPP has achieved absolute majority by increasing its strength to 31 in the 59-member House with their joining and this should give the government to decide what is best for the people of the state.

"The strength of the government by our joining is absolute majority. That number should give confidence and courage to this government to decide. People may have misunderstandings but as long as we decide for the good of the people that courage should see us through this journey,"



Looking at legal aspects of defection, says Congress chief

Shillong, Aug 19

The move by three of its legislators to arch-rival NPP's camp may have come as a rude shock to the Congress, which, till the other day, was celebrating its massive victory in the Tura Lok Sabha elections, but the party leadership doesn't appear to be taking it lying down.

"We are consulting our legal

experts on the steps to be taken. We were aware of the move to defect, which is why we had suspended two of our MLAs," said state Congress president Vincent Pala over phone from New Delhi on Monday night.

The MPCC president is said to have briefed the Congress high command on the political developments unfolding in Meghalaya where the party legislative number has shrunk to one MLA follow-

ing the defections.

'Money power in use to poach MLAs'

Working president of the state Congress and former deputy chief minister Deborah C Marak has accused the Conrad Sangma led NPP of using money and muscle power to poach opposition legislators.

"They are poaching MLAs from

other parties through the use of money and muscle power. They are even promising everything under the moon just to get the numbers," alleged Marak.

According to the Congress leader, the NPP launched the defection game with an eye on damaging the prospects of the Congress in Gambegre since Congress continues to remain in pole position.

"They know Gambegre is a

Congress bastion so they want to try and weaken the party by engineering defections," says Deborah Marak.

"But the people of Gambegre and Garo Hills are aware of what is happening. Our voters are very wise. Meghalaya is a small state, so from where are they getting to use so much money. People are questioning them. They are demanding answers," said Deborah Marak.

KHNAM holds sit-in to change recruitment process

Shillong, Aug 19

To put pressure on the state government to eliminate personal interview for government jobs, the Khun Hynniewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM) staged a one-day sit-in-demonstration in the city, on Monday.

"Through this protest, we are demanding the state government to do away with the personal interviews for government jobs to the posts falling under Group B, C&D in order to end practice of nepotism and favouritism in the job recruitment process." KHNAM working president Thomas Passah told reporters at the protest venue at Malki ground.

According to the KHNAM chief, it will encourage job aspirants to compete in different job examinations.

Passah said job recruitment should be based on merits and eliminating personal interview will ensure transparency, adding that the party had written to the state government on several occasions, pointing out that the central government and



23 states have done the same since 2016.

Passah said the majority of the people feel that they can only get a job in different government departments through backdoor recruitments recommended by those in power, no matter how qualified or educated they are.

"The conduct of the personal interview compels people to find out who can help them get the jobs before applying for any posts. This is very unfortunate. That is

why we feel if the state government wants to ensure transparency in the job recruitment process, it should welcome and comply with the demand of the party," he said.

More recently, we have also seen one of the NGOs protesting against alleged corruption in the MPSC, therefore, we need to end corruption by doing away with the personal interview as it will benefit the people of the state to a great extent, he added.

CM inaugurates Rongjeng Model Degree College in East Garo Hills

Garo Hills students get easier access to higher education

Shillong, Aug 19

Rongjeng students can now enroll for higher education in their own town, putting an end to their daily travel to district headquarter Williamnagar or even across district in pursuit of higher education.

The Rongjeng Model Degree College in East Garo Hills was inaugurated by Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday in presence of Education Minister Rakkam Sangma, MLA Jim Sangma and host of other dignitaries.

The academic session of the degree college will begin this year with Arts Stream.

The new model degree college has been constructed from grants under RUSA 2.0 at a cost of Rs 12 crore. The college was granted sanction under the funding priority of the scheme for under-served District in the North-eastern region as identified by NITI Aayog.

According to the 2011-2018 census, East Garo Hills district had a population of 52,584 and a literacy rate of 54 per cent. Being an unserved and under-served district of the state, the



district falls under educational backward district (EBD).

Reiterating that education has been the top most priority of the government, the chief minister said, "This model college is a small example of the many things that the government is doing to overhaul education in the state. As a government, we will ensure that the best opportunity is given to our students".

Inaugurating the college building, the chief minister said that the establishment of the college at Rongjeng is fructification of a promise made

by Purno Agitok Sangma to the people of the area. "It was a long cherished dream of our leader (L) Purno Agitok Sangma, who had promised to set up a college here in Rongjeng. Today, he is not amidst us but the promise made by him to the people has been fructified," he added.

Announcing that the college will be named after Late Purno Agitok Sangma, the chief minister said, "He (P.A. Sangma) had close affinity and love for the people of Rongjeng. It will be befitting to name the college after him".

Thanking Education Min-

ister Rakkam Sangma, Rongjeng MLA Jim Sangma and the Education department, the chief minister said, "The building has been successfully completed, now it should be the collective responsibility of each one of us to ensure that this building is converted into a temple of education".

He further informed that necessary sanction for approach road, water connection, and other components, which were not part of the building, have been sanctioned and will be completed

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Business

Rupee gains 8 paise, closes at 83.87 against USD

Mumbai, Aug 19

The Indian rupee appreciated by 8 paise to close at 83.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, supported by a weak US dollar and a decline in crude oil prices.

Forex traders said fresh foreign fund inflows boosted investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83.88 against the greenback, then gained ground and touched an intra-day high of 83.84, and a low of 83.93 against the American currency.

The local currency finally settled for the day at 83.88 (provisional) against the American currency.

On Friday, the rupee moved in a tight range and settled just 1 paise lower at 83.95 against the American currency.

Over the past shortened week, the rupee showed minimal fluctuation and narrowly steered clear of the critical 84-mark.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on rise in risk appetite in global markets and a weak US dollar. Softening of crude oil prices may also support the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary -- Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Traders said geopolitical tension in the Middle East



may cap a sharp upside for the local unit.

Investors may remain cautious ahead of PMI data from the US and Fed Chair Jerome Powell's speech at Jackson Hole Symposium for any cues on rate cuts by the central bank.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.28 per cent to 102.17.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.87 per cent to USD 78.99 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex declined

12.16 points, or 0.02 per cent, to 80,424.68 points. The Nifty rose 31.50 points, or 0.13 per cent, to 24,572.65 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday, as they purchased shares worth Rs 766.52 crore, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, India's forex reserves dropped USD 4.8 billion to USD 670.119 billion for the week ended August 9, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the kitty jumped USD 7.53 billion to an all-time high of USD 674.919 billion.

Sensex, Nifty end flat in dull trade

Mumbai, Aug 19

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended on a flat note in a lacklustre trade on Monday, as investors preferred to remain on the sidelines awaiting further triggers.

Participants also booked profits in select blue-chip stocks amid high valuation concerns, according to experts.

In a range-bound trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex slipped 12.16 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 80,424.68. During the day, it hit a high of 80,724.40 and a low of 80,332.65.

The NSE Nifty edged up 31.50 points or 0.13 per cent to 24,572.65 in a volatile trade.

Among the 30 Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Bharti Airtel, Axis Bank, Tata Motors and ICICI Bank were the biggest laggards.

In contrast, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC, JSW Steel, Asian Paints and Reliance Industries were gainers.

"The Indian market failed to catch up with the initial gains as there is a degree of profit locking witnessed in auto stocks due to a slowdown in demand," said Vinod Nair,

Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled higher, while Seoul and Tokyo ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly higher. The US markets ended in positive territory on Friday.

"Markets began the week on a muted note and ended nearly flat, taking a breather after Friday's surge. Following an initial uptick, the Nifty traded within a narrow range," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Friday as they bought equities worth Rs 766.52 crore, according to exchange data.

Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,606.18 crore on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.82 per cent to USD 79.03 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark jumped 1,330.96 points or 1.68 per cent to settle at 80,436.84 on Friday, marking its best single-day gains in more than two months. The NSE Nifty surged 397.40 points or 1.65 per cent to settle at a two-week high of 24,541.15.

TruAlt Bioenergy to raise Rs 750 Crore through IPO

New Delhi, Aug 19

Leading biofuel producer TruAlt Bioenergy Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO).

The IPO is a mix of fresh issuance of equity shares worth Rs 750 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to 36 lakh equity shares by promoters, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP).

The OFS consists of up to 18 lakh equity shares each by Dhaksyani Sangamesh Nirani and Sangamesh Rudrappa Nirani.

The company may consider raising Rs 150 crore under the pre-IPO placement round. If such placement is completed, the fresh issue size will be reduced.

Out of the proceeds from the fresh issuance, Rs 425 crore will be utilised for funding working capital requirements, Rs 172.68 crore for setting up multi-feed stock operations, besides, a portion will be used for general corporate purposes.

Based in Bengaluru, TruAlt Bioenergy focuses on ethanol production, with a daily production capacity of 1,400 kilolitres (KLPD).



The company plans to boost its production capacity by an additional 600 KLPD across three locations and aims for 2,000 KLPD by October 2024.

TruAlt is diversifying into new areas like second-generation (2G) ethanol, utilising surplus bagasse -- a byproduct of sugar production -- as a raw material.

Also, the company plans to use 8,00,000 MT of bagasse from its promoter group companies to produce about 6 crore litres of 2G ethanol annually.

TruAlt's business performance is heavily influenced by the price and availability of

Indian-origin winners dominate at first Commonwealth Business Awards on the African continent

Johannesburg, Aug 19 (PTI)

Indian-origin business leaders and women empowerment drivers from a dozen Commonwealth countries dominated at the Business Excellence Awards 2024 hosted here.

Over 60 awards were handed out on Saturday in various categories at the event hosted for the first time on the African continent after taking place in Singapore last year.

More than half of them were scooped up by Indian-origin businesses and individuals from South Africa, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Dubai and Mauritius.

"The Commonwealth Business Excellence Award aims to recognise your successes on the path to global best-in-class business performance," organisers said.

"The awards also recognise the important social and environmental contributions made by organisations through the excellence of service, commitment to their customers, philanthropic ideals, ethical behaviour, and environmental sustainability," it added.

The awards ended two days of activity that saw about 400 business, civil society and political leaders gather to discuss with industry-leading solution providers and financial institutions ways to discover opportunities for transformative partnerships and accelerated growth.

The inaugural African event was coordinated by South African Indian-origin businessman Vinesh Sukhari, the Executive Chairman of Expo International, who offered to host it in South Africa soon after he won an award at the last one in Singapore.

"Let us remember that business excellence is not just about individual success, but also about the positive impact on our communities, the environment and society."

"Our awardees have demonstrated exceptional leadership, vision and dedication in their craft. They have shown us that with hard work, perseverance and the commitment to excellence, we can achieve greatness," Sukhari said at the event which focused on the Fintech

industry. "These awards will inspire, challenge and motivate us to do better. They remind us that business excellence is not just about profit, but about purpose, passion and making a difference. Our award winners have shown us that with courage and determination, we can turn ideas into reality and create a better future," he added.

One of the South African winners, Indian-origin Sammy Naidoo, a pioneer in the printing industry and a philanthropist for decades, concurred with Sukhari.

"The success of our Apple Group of Companies has been based on giving back to the community that enabled our success," said Naidoo, who is the Group Chairman of the company, as he quoted St Francis of Assisi's statement that "it is in giving that we receive."

"It was very pleasing to learn as we interacted with so many awardees from all these countries that they share this philosophy because giving and receiving is like a continuous circle and is always gratifying," Naidoo shared.

India to expand ESG debt after surpassing 2021 issuance record

New Delhi, Aug 19

India's market regulator intends to expand the scope of its sustainable finance framework to include more products, a potential boost to ESG-labeled instruments in Asia.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India will consult on introducing social bonds, along with sustainable and sustainability-linked bonds, to the current suite of environmental, social and governance debt.

Plans also include adding eligible asset-backed securities and a requirement for independent external reviews of all ESG debt, according to a consultation paper released Friday.

"The proposal is a positive move for the market," said Xuan Sheng Ou Yong, sustainable fixed income lead for Asia Pacific at BNP Paribas Asset Management in Singapore. "It means we may have different opportunities to direct fixed income capital towards new

issuers and their projects, beyond green bonds."

India's issuance of ESG debt this year has touched \$15.6 billion, surpassing a previous annual record in 2021, according to data compiled by Bloomberg Intelligence. However, the volume remains lower than other key markets in Asia, including China and Japan.

An existing regulatory framework covers products that raise proceeds for use only in relation to environmental sustainability -- such as renewable energy or water management -- meaning the proposed changes will allow issuers to seek debt for a broader range of activities, Sebi said in its document. The regulator will continue its consultation to Sept. 6.

A stronger market in India for ESG debt would support Prime Minister Narendra Modi's wider focus on green growth. It would also help counteract a slowdown in Chinese issuances that's weighing on the global market.

Glenmark launches generic eye itch treatment in the US

New Delhi, Aug 19

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals on Monday said its US-based subsidiary has introduced a generic medication used for eye itching.

Glenmark Therapeutics Inc, USA has launched Olopatadine Hydrochloride Ophthalmic Solution (OTC) in the US market, the Mumbai-based drug maker said in a regulatory filing.

Fabio Moreno, Head of OTC Sales & Marketing, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Inc, said the launch of Olopatadine Ophthalmic Solution (USP, 0.1 per cent), addresses a growing demand for a new supplier in this category.

"This addition highlights our commitment to meeting market needs and providing high-quality over-the-counter solutions for our customers," Moreno said.



Retailers cut 52,000 jobs in 2023-24 amid weak demand

Mumbai, Aug 19

Multiple lifestyle and grocery retailers along with quick-service restaurants have reduced their employee count by close to 26,000 in the financial year 2023-24, the Economic Times reported, adding that this was in contrast to the hiring spree seen over the previous two financial years, which ended up slowing due to weakening

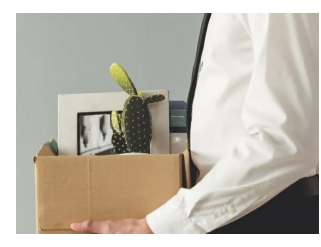
demand.

Reliance retail, Titan, Raymond, Page, and Spencers saw their combined permanent as well as contractual workforce fall by 17% or by 52,000 people.

The retail segment is India's second largest employer after agriculture.

The combined workforce of 455,000 employees fell to 429,000 in 2023-24.

Consumers reduced non-essential spending on apparel,



lifestyle products, electronics and dining since Diwali 2022, leading to retail sales growth slowing down to 4%.

This was because of infla-

tion, interest rate increase, and job losses in startups and IT.

Due to weak sales retailers saw the slowest pace of store expansions in at least five years at 9%, according to the report, which added that the retail sector which took up 7.1 million square feet of space across the top eight cities in 2023 is expected to reduce to about 6-6.5 million sq ft in 2024, according to commercial real estate services firm CBRE.

SIP outflows hit record Rs 14,367 cr in July

Mumbai, Aug 19

Volatility triggered by Budget announcements also played on investor sentiment.

"July 2024 saw a peak in the Nifty, which may have prompted profit-booking among investors nearing the end of their goal tenure."

"This could be one of the reasons for the higher outflows of funds accumulated through SIPs," said Feroze Azeez, deputy CEO, Anand Rathi Wealth.

Those who have been investing through SIP over the past few years have made handsome returns.

"Those satisfied with returns and not expecting further rally could be booking profits and also stopping SIPs," added Sriram BKR, senior investment strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

A part of the proceeds may have moved to new fund offerings (NFOs) that were open for subscription last month, according to industry officials.

Redemptions from SIP accounts have been rising for the last few months and have been outpacing growth in gross inflows.

As a result, even as gross SIP inflows have been making new highs, net inflows have been range-bound.

In July, net SIP inflows stood at Rs 8,964 crore as against gross SIP inflows of Rs 23,332 crore.

The net inflows were only 38 per cent of the gross tally, the lowest since December



2023.

The July SIP data is in continuation with the trend seen in the first six months of FY25. Aggregate gross inflows in the first six months of 2024 came in at Rs 1.2 trillion, 41 per cent higher than the inflows in the same period last year.

However, the net SIP inflows registered only a 25 per cent growth at Rs 52,016 crore in the same period.

According to experts, while the gross outflow has gathered some pace, investor confidence in mutual funds and the equity market remains elevated.

"SIP inflows have consistently peaked over the last 12 months, indicating strong investor confidence in the market, with equity being the preferred investment mode."

"The number of new SIPs registered has also grown consistently, with nearly 7.2 million new plans registered in July," said Azeez.

Raksha Bandhan Quick Commerce Boom: Blinkit, Zepto, Instamart Hit Record Sales

New Delhi, Aug 19 (PTI)

Quick commerce platforms had a field day on the occasion of Rakshabandhan as the nation ditched exhaustive post-office shopping for quick hassle-free deliveries.

Blinkit, which holds about 40 per cent share of the quick commerce market, sold about 700 rakhis every minute.

"We'll cross all-time high orders in a day on blinkit in a couple of minutes. We also hit highest ever OPM (orders per minute), GMV, chocolate sales and most other metrics today! And at its peak - we hit 693 RPM (Rakhis per minute)," Blinkit CEO and co-founder Albinder Dhindsa wrote on X.

Zomato-owned Blinkit on Saturday announced it will take international orders on Blinkit till August 19.

"Folks living abroad can now place orders on Blinkit to send Rakhis and gifts to their siblings in India and we'll deliver in 10 minutes! Countries from where you can order -- USA, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, France and Japan," Dhindsa announced.

Zepto, which raised USD 665 million (about Rs 5,560 crore) in its latest funding round in June that valued the firm at USD 3.6 billion, also reported hike in sales for festive merchandise.

Domestic air traffic up 7.3% in July 2024

Mumbai, Aug 19

Indian carriers flew more than 1.29 crore passengers in July, an increase of more than 7.3 per cent compared to the year-ago period, official data released on Monday showed.

However, the air traffic in July was lower compared to 1.32 crore people carried by the domestic airlines in June this year.

IndiGo continued to dominate domestic air traffic with its market share rising to 62 per cent in July while that of Air India dropped to 14.3 per cent.

Last month, the domestic market share of Vistara climbed to 10 per cent while that of AIX Connect and SpiceJet declined to 4.5 per cent and 3.1 per cent, respectively, as per the data released by the Directorate General of



Civil Aviation (DGCA).

Also, Akasa Air and Alliance Air's share slipped to 4.7 per cent and 0.9 per cent, respectively.

"Passengers carried by domestic airlines during January-July 2024 were 923.35 lakh as against 881.94 lakh during the corresponding

period of the previous year thereby registering an annual growth of 4.70 per cent and monthly growth of 7.33 per cent," DGCA said.

In July, domestic air traffic touched 129.87 lakh compared to 132.06 lakh in June this year and 121 lakh in July 2023.

Any attempt to disrupt peace in Assam will be thwarted: Top cop

Tezpur/Guwahati, Aug 19

Assam Director General of Police G P Singh on Monday asserted that any attempt to disrupt peace in the state will be thwarted by security forces.

His comments came against the backdrop of the banned ULFA(I)'s purported email on Independence Day, announcing planting 24 bombs in different areas, including multiple places in Guwahati.

Ten "bomb-like substances" have been recovered, including four in Guwahati, over the last two days.

"The state had been witnessing terrorist activities for the last 40 years. We have now reached a stage where such activities are almost nearing



an end. We will take stringent measures against those who attempt to bring back the days of violence and terror," Singh told reporters here on the sidelines of a programme.

We have now reached a stage where such activities are almost nearing an end. We will take stringent measures against those who attempt to bring back the days of violence and terror

The DGP said the force has been concentrating on strengthening its traditional policing duties so that criminal elements are dealt with.

"To sway our efforts, some may try to engage in terror activities. But, such attempts will not be successful," he asserted. Singh also dismissed allegations of an intelligence failure in connection with the recovery of "bomb-like substances" from various locations.

Bomb threat at Guwahati mall; shoppers evacuated

A shopping mall in the heart of Assam's Guwahati was evacuated and closed on Monday afternoon by its authorities, citing "technical issues", officials said.

Security personnel have arrived at the mall, leading to speculations of the presence of explosives inside, though

no official confirmation has been received yet.

The authorities of City Centre Mall put up an unsigned notice on the gates around 4 pm that read: "For technical issues, mall will be shut down for 2 hours".

The mall, which houses a number of shops, eateries, gaming zones and a multiplex, is located about three km from the state secretariat.

The incident comes four days after the banned ULFA(I) announced planting 24 bombs in different parts of the state, including multiple locations in Guwahati.

Ten "bomb-like substances" were recovered, including four in Guwahati, in the last two days, the officials said.

Respect for women is non-negotiable: Assam DGP

Guwahati, Aug 19

"Respect for women is non-negotiable; without it, society is on the brink of collapse," Assam Director General of Police (DGP) Gyanendra Pratap Singh said on Monday citing the recent RG Kar Medical College and Hospital incident.

Delivering the Deeksharambh oration at Tezpur University's (TU) Deeksharambh ceremony for its newly admitted students, Singh said: "The focus should be on building a strong society and nation. And you will become part of a good society by becoming a good human being."

Good people naturally succeed and contribute to a better society, the DGP said.

"I am hearing that the new generation is going into depression and anxiety. One way to deal with these negativities is to have a strong connection with your parents, teachers, and mentors," he advised the students.

The DGP also emphasized the importance of respecting diverse viewpoints for progress and fostering a healthy democracy.

Welcoming the students, YU Vice-Chancellor Prof Shambhu Nath Singh urged the students to engage in academic pursuits with passion.

"The success of higher learning institutions depends on the bonding between students, faculty members, and the administration. Therefore, when you bond with the institution, both the institution and the individual grow," the Vice Chancellor said.

He also urged the students to actively participate in co-curricular activities to develop life skills.

The university formally commenced the new academic session 2024-25 by organizing the Deeksharambh Ceremony at the KBR auditorium. Addressing the gathering, the DGP spoke about India's demographic dividend, emphasizing that the youth are the nation's most valuable asset.

Himanta meets West Bengal gov

Guwahati, Aug 19

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma met West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose and lauded him for his role in upholding the principles of the Constitution in "very adversarial circumstances".

Sarma called upon Bose in Guwahati on Sunday.

"In my courtesy meeting with the Governor of West Bengal Dr C V Ananda Bose Ji in Guwahati, I conveyed our immense appreciation for his sagacity in defending the Constitution even in very adversarial circumstances," Sarma posted on X, sharing a clip of the meeting.

The video featured both exchanging scarves and books and then sitting down for a conversation.

The governor and the Assam CM had discussions over the ongoing situation in West Bengal in the wake of the alleged rape and murder of a woman doctor, sources said.

Bose and Sarma also held discussions over developments in Bangladesh, they said.

The official X handle of the West Bengal governor also shared photographs of the meeting.

"Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal Dr C V Ananda Bose with Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam Himanta Biswas



Sarma in Guwahati," it posted.

A group of doctors from Assam also met the governor and demanded justice for the medic's murder in a state-run Kolkata hospital.

"The doctors of Assam expressed solidarity with the brutal murder of the post-graduate trainee doctor in the RG Kar Medical College, called on the honourable governor and expressed their grievances," another post on X said.

They submitted a memorandum requesting for the safety and security of medical professionals, it added.

Bose assured them of taking an initiative to ensure the protection of all those working in the healthcare sector in West Bengal, including legal action, an official said.

The governor also assured them that demands and grievances of the protesting doctors would be brought to the attention of the prime minister, and home and health ministers, the official added.

Arunachal to strengthen ILP system



Guwahati, Aug 19

Arunachal Pradesh is focusing on strengthening the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system to ensure more effective management and regulation of the movement of non-Arunachali people, especially Bangladeshi nationals in the state.

The ILP is a special permit required for outsiders to enter certain restricted areas, including Arunachal Pradesh, as part of efforts to protect the indigenous communities and their cultural heritage.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, on Monday, set the ball rolling to strengthen the existing ILP system, which makes it mandatory for any non-Arunachalee citizen to obtain a permit to enter the state.

In a joint meeting with top government officials and leaders of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) in Itanagar, Khandu emphasized the need to strengthen the ILP system to prevent illegal entry and prolonged stay of non-local migrants in the state.

"We held a meeting with the Chief Minister to discuss the strengthening of the ILP system. The meeting decided to enhance the ILP system to effectively check the illegal influx of Bangladeshi nationals into the state. During the meeting, we also gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation explaining in detail a survey conducted by us and ways and means to strengthen the present system," AAPSU president Dozi Tana Tara told The Meghalayan Express.

"The decision was made to regulate the ILP system more effectively to protect the state's indigenous people from the influx of Bangladeshi nationals and anti-social elements," Tara said.

In the meeting, Khandu said: "Our main objective is to protect our indigenous tribes from outside influx and we are committed to it."

While informing the state government that it is internally preparing to strengthen the ILP system, Khandu said that it was necessary to get input from the students' organization.

Later in a social media post, Khandu said: "We know the challenges—every one talks about them—but now, it's time for solutions."

"Attended a detailed and productive presentation by the AAPSU team, led by president Dozi Tana Tara, on strengthening the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system to safeguard our indigenous tribes and ensure the security of Arunachal Pradesh. We appreciate AAPSU's thorough survey and valuable suggestions," Khandu said.

"We focus on delivering a holistic approach, not just piecemeal solutions. The way forward is to embrace digital solutions for a robust ILP system," he said.

"Additionally, skilling our youth and promoting the dignity of labour is crucial to reducing our dependency on external labour. Arunachal has ample income opportunities, and we must tap into them by encouraging our local youth to take up skilled labour work," he added.

NE security a concern: Think tank

Tezpur/Guwahati, Aug 19

Former foreign secretary Harshvardan Shringla has said that India needs to engage with those in power now in Bangladesh, as instability in the neighbouring country has a direct impact on the security scenario of the North-eastern region.

Shringla said this at a programme in which a report on policy options for India in dealing with the current Bangladesh situation was released.

The report, to be submitted to the Centre, was prepared by a think tank Society to Harmonise Aspirations for Responsible Engagement (SHARE).

The political instability in Bangladesh has direct repercussions both on security and developmental projects in North East India, security and defence experts, who are members of SHARE, said at the event.

"India has to engage with those in power or those behind the powers in Bangladesh as stability in the neigh-

bourhood has a direct import to the security scenario of North East India.

"We have two core concerns - Bangladesh's territory not be used in any manner inimical to its (India's) interests and ensuring the safety of Hindus and other minorities in the neighbouring country," the former ambassador to Bangladesh said.

Shringla also said that the recommendations in this report are prefaced by three key facts -- it remains uncertain who is currently responsible for policy making in Bangladesh, there is palpable anti-India sentiments in the neighbouring country, and finally, economic stability and employment generation there.

The report will be submitted to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the National Security Advisor for implementation, former Eastern Command GOC-in-C Lt Gen R P Kalita (Retd) said at the event.

Assam Chief Information Commissioner Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, highlighting the recommendations, said dia-

logue with all stakeholders is in India's core interests, especially with regard to tackling a possible refugee crisis in the Northeast which has a border of 1885 kms with Bangladesh.

A matter of alarming concern for North East India is the disturbing developments of an armed mob breaking the high-security prison in Bangladesh's Sherpur on August 6 freeing more than 500 inmates while in another jailbreak in Gazipur, 209 prisoners escaped, Mahanta said.

Those who were freed include senior Ansarul Bangla Team (ABT) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB), the former DGP said.

"This is an exceptionally alarming situation, especially for Assam and Tripura, where several ABT and JMB modules have been busted with 60 members of these outfits arrested from these states in 2022-23 and more than 30 of them are from Bangladesh," he said.

"This should ring alarm bells within India's internal security and law enforcement apparatus, Mahanta said.

Shah, Scindia to attend NEC meet in Agartala

Agartala, Aug 19, PTI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will attend the two-day meeting of the North Eastern Council (NEC) scheduled to begin in Agartala on August 31, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Monday.

Governors, chief ministers, chief secretaries and DGPs of all the northeastern states will also join the meeting. "Tripura is going to host the two-day meeting of the NEC. Home Minister Amit Shah and DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will be present in the meeting," Saha said.

He said the border issues, development activities, and implementation of various projects will be discussed in the meeting adding that other states will also put forward their wishlists for the overall development of the region.

Saha said he would chair a review meeting to check the preparations.

PM Modi pays tribute to erstwhile Tripura king

Agartala, Aug 19

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday paid homage to Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur, considered the architect of modern Tripura, on his birth anniversary.

The king ruled Tripura from 1923 to 1947. He was born on August 19, 1908 and died on May 17, 1947.

"I pay homage to the great Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur on his birth anniversary. He played an indelible role in the development of Tripura," the Prime Minister said in a post on X.

He devoted his life towards empowering the poor and downtrodden and his welfare measures for the tribal communities are widely respected, Modi said.

"Our Government is committed to fulfilling his vision for Tripura's progress," the Prime Minister said.

Chief Minister Manik Saha while addressing a programme to observe the birth anniversary of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya in Agartala said it was the Prime Minister who set an example on how to respect Maharajas.

"There was a time when the contribution of Tripura's Manikya dynasty was overlooked by the erstwhile regime but it was the Prime Minister who started paying respect to the Maharajas who did a lot for the development of the northeastern state," he said.



Saha said the Prime Minister unveiled a statue of Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya at Agartala airport and renamed the facility after the Maharaja.

When the airport got a new terminal building, another statue of the Maharaja was installed, he said.

Saha claimed that there was no division between tribals and non-tribals during the regime of the kings but later division was created to rule the

state. "We want to make Ek Tripura Shrestha Tripura by joint efforts by the tribals and non-tribals. Tripura was the worst affected by the Partition in 1947 Had Chakla Roshnabad been part of the state, it would have access to river, sea and railways," he said.

Chakla Roshnabad, a part of the Manikya kingdom, was included in East Pakistan during the Partition, which later became Bangladesh.

Arunachal, Assam celebrate Raksha Bandhan

Itanagar, Aug 19, (PTI)

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (ret'd) K T Parnaik and Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday celebrated the Raksha Bandhan with the members of the Brahma Kumari organization and students and teachers of Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya (VKV) here.

They tied rakhis on the wrists of the governor and the chief minister at separate places.

At a programme held in the Raj Bhavan, Parnaik expressed hope that the occasion would continue strengthening the bonds of goodwill among all sections of society.

He said that in the age of nuclear families, this practice

has become more important as it brings the family members together.

The governor commended the Brahma Kumari and Vivekananda Kendra for their good work in the field of social service and education.

The chief minister thanked the students of VKV and the members of Brahma Kumaris who came to his office to tie rakhi on his wrist.

"Your love and warmth have made this Raksha Bandhan truly special. This beautiful tradition from Sanatana Dharma fosters goodwill and embodies the spirit of unity, promoting peace and harmony in our lives," Khandu posted on X.

Tying the Rakhi represents more than just tradition - it's

a symbol of love, respect and fostering bonds of goodwill, the chief minister said in another post.

Old-age home residents tie rakhi to Himanta

Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited presented Aadhaar, ration, Ayushman, and Orunodoi cards as gifts to residents of a government old age home in Sonapur, on the outskirts of Guwahati, on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan on Monday.

The residents of the home tied 'rakhis' to the chief minister and other dignitaries, also presenting them with red roses as symbols of their love and blessings.



He also announced that doctors from the nearby civil hospital would visit the old age home monthly for free health check-ups.

Sarma visited the Sonapur Government Old Age Home, accompanied by Social Welfare Minister Pijush

Hazarika and Dispur MLA Atul Bora.

During his speech, Sarma explained that the Aadhaar card would serve as identity proof for the senior citizens, enabling them to access government benefits and open bank accounts.

Assam Police detains, deports Bangladeshi woman

Guwahati, Aug 19

A Bangladeshi woman who had entered Assam illegally was handed over to officials of the neighbouring country at the international border along Dhubri district on Monday night, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"Assam Police pushed back an infiltrator from Bangladesh. Smt Lipi Akhtar from Dhaka Division was handed back to Bangladeshi Authorities a short while ago," the Chief Minister posted on X.

She was apprehended at Dhubri by Assam Police, he said.

"Investigation has revealed that Akhtar entered the Indian territory in the early hours of August 18, 2024

at Sukchar, South Salmara District, on foot, after multiple bus and boat rides spanning over 24 hours", he said.

After taking shelter at a house in Sukchar, she went to Dhubri by boat where she was intercepted, Sarma said.

"A search is underway to trace other accomplices/infiltrators", the Chief Minister added.

Meanwhile, BSF Eastern Command additional director general Ravi Gandhi concluded his four-day tour of border areas on Monday after visiting the Indo-Bangladesh border in Dhubri sector, including riverine border outposts and holding meetings with officials of the Guwahati Frontier headquarters.

'A Saga in Pictorials' exhibition opens on World Photography Day in Guwahati

Guwahati, Aug 19

A captivating journey through the evolution of photography and its role in preserving the region's cultural and historical heritage is under way at the Assam State Museum in Guwahati.

The exhibition, curated with meticulous attention, features a collection of evocative photographs that span decades, offering visitors an intimate look at the region's historical and cultural transformations. Each photograph is a visual testament to the powerful role of imagery in documenting and reflecting societal changes over time.

The Directorate of Museums, Assam, in collaboration with the Assam State Museum, has unveiled a special temporary photo exhibition titled "A Saga in Pictorials: Resonance from the Past" on World Photography Day. The exhibition runs from August 19 to September 30 (excluding Mondays).

The inauguration took place today, with Dr. Ranoo Pegu, Minister of Education, Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture (Museums), leading the ceremony. In his inaugural address, Dr. Pegu underscored the trans-

formative journey of photography and its vital role in chronicling the history and culture of societies. He reflected on the medium's ability to capture fleeting moments and preserve them for future generations, emphasizing the exhibition's importance in celebrating this artistic evolution.

The ceremony was further distinguished by the presence of notable figures, including Sri Ranjan Sharma, Commissioner and Secretary to the Government of Assam, ITFC Department, and Sri Manas Nath, Secretary to the Government of Assam, ITFC Department. The event attracted a diverse audience of academicians, photographers, researchers, students, and art enthusiasts, all eager to engage with the historical narratives presented through the lens.

Ranjan Sharma, in his welcome address, expressed gratitude to Dr. Pegu for the initiative and highlighted that this was the first time the Assam State Museum had hosted such an exhibition. He lauded the initiative as a significant step in showcasing the rich history captured in old photographs and enhancing public appreciation of this art form.

Editorial

The Third Eye: A welcome continuity

DC Pathak

The results of the recent Parliamentary election do have the effect of strengthening India's democratic state. They made it possible for a stable coalition government to return to power—in the absence of any single party securing a majority. India badly needed to have that in the current geopolitical environment. With stability linked to the factor of continuity that would enable people to further evaluate Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government's performance over its past two terms while providing also an opportunity to Prime Minister Modi of making course corrections if any.

Above all, the polls validate the robust character of this country's electoral democracy built on 'one man one vote' and bring out how an active opposition—its strength varying from state to state—helps the citizens in exercising their choices based on the relative appeal of the ruling dispensation compared to those politically opposed to it.

In a vast country of diverse socio-political equations like India, it is not surprising that the degree of opposition unity reached in states like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra this time did impact the prospect of the ruling party—which had otherwise gone on to acquire new grounds in states like Orissa, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

State-based parties with caste, communal and regional appeals have been a traditional feature of the Indian political scene which makes it important that the country should have all-India parties working in healthy competition at the national level. Over the decades after Independence, the Congress once ruled the nation suffered a decline but fortunately, the BJP rapidly rose to become a challenger to the Congress on the strength of its political merit and nationalist appeal.

The recent Parliamentary election saw a natural interplay of the two largest national parties and their state-level allies—its outcome is to be welcomed in terms of the advance of democracy that it represents in India. The BJP is doing well to go into a systematic examination of what caused its tally to fall short

of its expectations in certain states.

It is only appropriate politically that the Prime Minister should choose to draw strength from the victory of the National Democratic Alliance and express his determination to carry forward the national agenda of governance envisaged by the BJP. It is natural for him to continue with the same Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) as was in existence before and accommodate the allies in the Ministry honourably but without giving in to any pressure from them.

India needs to be governed with strong hands with a sense of accountability and effective execution of policies flowing top-down and the Prime Minister promises to do that—his credibility concerning governance is intact in the eyes of the people and this is his main asset.

His contribution to pushing India up in the comity of nations as the acknowledged voice of reason on issues of global conflicts and also on matters of advancement of humanity is well established and so is his policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism and forces threatening national unity and internal security.

These are among the major paradigms of successful governance in India and the Prime Minister would be right in pursuing this path undeterred by any other political factors. For him, the legacy of successfully safeguarding national interests during his rule is all that should matter to him at this stage.

He is an astute political combatant, is cognizant of the weaknesses in the opposition camp and is likely to keep NDA rule going as long as this was possible.

The first hurdle faced by PM Modi's government in the election of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha has been crossed over successfully as amid a noisy backdrop of contest, Om Birla, the candidate of BJP was elected by a voice vote—the strength of NDA demonstratively holding out against the opposition.

However, the fact that there was a contest for Speakership for the first time, reflected the distrust of the opposition in the ruling alliance and the former's intention of keeping up its pressure on the government.

It is to be seen how the Prime Minister goes ahead with legislation that requires only a simple majority, to keep his agenda of governance on the move. The course of campaigning in the election, content-wise, was of the type that could produce long-term consequences for the politics of the future in as much as the caste, communal and regional divides in the country might get accentuated in the period ahead.

Anti-India forces abroad in possible collusion with anti-establishment civil society groups inside the country had before the election built narratives designed to run down Indian democracy as a system vulnerable to 'majoritarianism', 'authoritarianism' and 'centrifugalism'. The electioneering revolved around the realpolitik of numbers that convinced the opposition that in a situation of multiple divisions among the Hindu majority of 80 percent a determined support of the Muslim minority of nearly 20 percent would prove to be the match-winner.

This aroused an equally strong response from BJP leadership in which it accused the opposition of indulging in 'minority appeasement' at the cost of national interests and tried to arouse a Hindu backlash that did not necessarily happen because of the complex Indian polity playing around the Indian phenomenon of 'caste vs creed' loyalties.

Divisions of Hindus along Backwards and Dalits showed up in the north in a big way and had a bearing on the poll results.

The caste pulls were accentuated by the environment of economic distress. Further, it is relevant to note that the legacy of Partition had created Hindu-Muslim tensions and riots over the decades in Independent India and kept communal politics alive mainly due to the role of many minority leaders—including the Ulema and the communal elite—who demanded a share in political power based on religion.

The facts of the adoption of universal franchise, grant of absolute freedom of worship and pursuit of policies of development that would not make any community distinction, seemed to have mattered little for these leaders.

The Hindu-Muslim divide became pronounced in the run-up to the just concluded election and this should be a cause for concern. All parties in a democratic dispensation must subscribe to the concept of nationalism to keep the state strong.

Nationalism is a perfectly secular call that helps to keep national security above politics and provides a shared sense of purpose to all in a country ridden by cultural diversities and differing political viewpoints.

It is not clear why some opposition parties shunned the idea of nationalism and left the credit for its advocacy to the BJP.

Apparently in a country with a historic majority-minority division, the concept of nationalism was deliberately mixed up with Hindu majoritarianism and by a twisted logic projected as an idea that was against the sensitivities of the Muslim minority. The expressed view of Islamic fundamentalists opposing the mandate of standing up while the singing of the national anthem was on or saluting the national flag, was not discounted.

Some opposition elements have even endorsed the idea that this mandate should be considered optional. Moreover, Western lobbies hostile to India do not take kindly to a strong nationalist country asserting its independent stand on issues of war and peace and trying to be self-dependent in the spheres of development and defence.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to the G7 summit in Rome, on the invitation of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in the middle of Cabinet formation, showed the importance he attached to India's image abroad and could not therefore be faulted.

His first policy announcements at home indicated that his political will in running the country was intact.

It would do India no good if Prime Minister Modi was looked upon as a leader presiding over a weak government. In the months ahead political campaigns in the country are likely to get intensified as the opposition continues to find fault with Prime Minister Modi's government on one count or the other.

The appointment of Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition will further add to this trend.

The external threats to internal security can also mount largely because of the covert operations of Pakistan and China working in concert against India.

Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and the North East apart, it is the communal front that would require a close vigil. The pro-minority politics of many in the opposition makes India more vulnerable to the plans of its adversaries to inject militancy in communal situations and even instigate faith-based terror.

An example of this in the past was the emergence of Indian Mujahideen (IM) as an offshoot of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) that indulged in terrorist activity some years ago. The new Penal codes enacted by the Parliament in December last year have to be put into action in an unbiased manner.

Impartial law-and-order management is an essence of democracy and issues of internal security being kept above party politics is another prerequisite of a democratic dispensation.

Prime Minister Modi is aware of the organized campaign against the 'arrogant' style of work attributed to him—which could as well be the impression created by his impatience with mediocrity, high expectations of delivery and notions of leading by example by highlighting the leader's achievements. He should not, however, while making any course corrections, allow 'the sense of drive' associated with his governance, to get diluted in any manner. The people of India have that expectation from him as for them this was the prime symbol of stability of any government.

The challenge of safeguarding internal security will likely outweigh the task of bringing about economic development in the times ahead and Prime Minister Modi's government will be tested more for its ability to maintain peace at home rather than for advancing the cause of India abroad.

The political scene in the months ahead would be keenly watched by strategic analysts.

Age of the influencers



Angshuman Dutta

A decade ago, the concept of "influencers" didn't exist; today, it has become almost a mainstream occupation. From electronic gadgets to food, social media influencing is booming. Before the age of social media, people actually needed to achieve something to be on screen. Today, all you need is a phone and an internet connection, and voila, you can create a sensation—whether sensible or foolish, but a sensation nonetheless.

The fitness industry has its share of social media influencers who discuss topics ranging from fat loss to muscle building and performance enhancement. While I fully support freedom of expression and the right to voice one's opinions, I often find myself alarmed by the sheer amount of misinformation being spread under the guise of facts. People spend 15-18 years earning a degree and countless hours on research, yet a young wannabe with only rudimentary high school education can spout utter nonsense—no credible science to back their claims. They rely on optics and "bro science," and the sad reality is that millions of people consume this misinformation daily.

The situation is similar with misleading advertisements for "health products"—products that make exaggerated claims about cleansing your system, healing your body, alleviating chronic

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The problem doesn't end with products; services too are being sold with little understanding of how the human body works

pain, or giving you superhuman strength. Consumer forums and advertising protocols do exist to check such misleading information, but are these agencies able to keep pace with the rapidly expanding and dynamic nature of today's media? More importantly, do these agencies have the wherewithal to understand the ramifications of what is being disseminated, and do they have the resources to effectively do their job? I dare say, no!

In such a situation, it is difficult for the average person to distinguish between truth and hearsay. People are always on the lookout for an easy way out, so when someone promises a quick fix, many fall prey to these scammers. Recently, while browsing my social media feed, I came across an advertisement from a protein company claiming their product was designed specifically for Indians. Being part of the industry, my interest was piqued. Upon closer in-

spection of the ingredients, I found that the product simply had a higher proportion of protein and very few carbohydrates—nothing new or specific to Indians. I requested an explanation of how their product was "designed" for Indians, but as expected, they couldn't provide a satisfactory answer and instead went on to explain something entirely different. Nonetheless, I wished them well and advised them to find an alternate way of representing their product without making baseless claims.

This is not an isolated incident; rampant mislabeling, false claims, and substandard products are abundant in the fitness industry. The irony is that most people fail to understand that the products they consume, believing them to promote good health, often cause more harm—sometimes irreversibly—than benefit.

The problem doesn't end with products; services too are being sold with little understanding of how the human body works or responds to training. Gym memberships and programs are sold like formalin-infused fish—the focus is purely on hitting sales targets. The industry, the advertisements, the cacophony of falsehoods isn't going to change. What you can do to minimize the damage is to be mindful. Do your research or seek the help of a professional you trust on matters of health and fitness. This might be your best chance as you navigate the murky waters of modern-day business.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Women's Safety

Sir—I am writing to express my deep shock and outrage over the recent rape case in Kolkata. This heinous crime has left me, like many others, feeling both helpless and angry. The brutality and disregard for human life are completely unacceptable, and it is our collective responsibility to demand justice.

As citizens of Assam, we cannot remain silent spectators. We must come together to condemn this atrocity and demand swift action from the authorities. I urge the people of Assam to organize peaceful protests, rallies, and awareness campaigns to show our solidarity with the victim and her family. The authorities must ensure justice is served swiftly, enforce stringent laws to prevent such crimes, and implement increased security measures to enhance women's safety.

Let us unite and raise our voices against this injustice. We owe it to the victim, her family, and ourselves to create a safer and more just society.

Jayanta Datta,
Guwahati

Glimmer of hope

Sir—The first assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir in a decade will be held in three phases on September 18, 25 and October 1, the Election Commission of India recently announced. All political processes have come to a standstill in J&K since Article 370 was revoked five years ago. The EC's deference to the "awaam ki umeed-ein" is thus welcome. In the aftermath of the abrogation, the restrictions on civil liberties have raised disquieting questions on the democratic deficit that seems to be the perennial inheritance of J&K. Given that key powers now rest with the lieutenant-governor of the Union territory, the onus is on him, too, to ensure that the elected assembly gets the space that is its due.

Jayanta Datta,
Guwahati

Note: Letters to the Editor (within 150-200 words) for publication on the editorial page may be sent to the email ID: tme.opinion@gmail.com

Thriving in VUCA world

Viiveck Verma

It would not be an overreach to say that the world today is unsparingly complex and relentlessly mysterious, always shifting and evolving. This can engender a feeling of anxiety, for the inability to fix the world into a stability of meaning means that we may not have adequate tools to reckon with it. However, this is not necessarily true and the key to this puzzle lies in one fascinating term, VUCA.

VUCA, an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity, was coined by the US military to describe the unpredictable nature of the post-Cold War world. It has since been adopted widely by several domains of intellectual life worldwide, including the business community to characterise the increasingly unpredictable, interconnected and fast-paced global marketplace. Thriving in VUCA, or a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world requires a new set of strategies and mindsets. Let us explore this in some detail.

World of Hope

The VUCA world is not a world of despair but a world of hope and curiosity against unending intricacy. The mindset to survive and do well in it, therefore, requires a concoction of varied approaches, all galvanised by reasonable optimism and an appetite for exploration. By embracing complexity with curiosity, fostering innovation amidst uncertainty, nurturing resilience and adaptability, promoting continuous learning, encouraging collaboration and leveraging digital transformation, individuals and organisations can flourish in this dynamic environment.

Firstly, agility, or the ability to swiftly adapt to changing conditions, is essential in a



VUCA world. Organisations that can pivot in response to new information, emerging trends and shifting market dynamics are better positioned to capitalise on opportunities and mitigate risks. Arguably, the most prominent example of this would be the response of the technology sector to the Covid-19 pandemic. Companies like Zoom, which saw a meteoric rise in demand for video conferencing services, rapidly scaled their infrastructure to accommodate millions of new users. Similarly, many businesses swiftly transitioned to remote work models, adopting new technologies and workflows to maintain productivity despite widespread disruptions.

Innovation is Key

Secondly, innovation is the key to success in a VUCA world. Organisations that prioritise creativity and encourage experimentation are more likely to develop groundbreaking products, services and business models that can propel them ahead of the competition. Simultaneously, resilience, or the ability to recover from setbacks and continue moving forward, is critical in a world characterised by volatility and uncertainty. Organisations and individuals who can bounce back from challenges are better equipped to navigate the ups and downs of

national collaborations on climate change initiatives demonstrate the power of collective action in a VUCA world. This also necessitates ethical leadership. Leaders who embody hope, integrity and a commitment to positive change can inspire their communities to navigate complexities with confidence and purpose.

Transparency Vital

On the level of organisations, building collaborative networks with partners, suppliers, customers and even competitors can enhance an organisation's ability to innovate, respond to market changes and manage risks. Internally, adopting a more flexible, decentralised organisational structure can enhance agility and empower employees to make decisions at all levels. In the same vein, effective communication and transparency are vital for navigating a VUCA world.

Organisations that prioritise open, honest and frequent communication can build trust, foster collaboration and ensure that all stakeholders are aligned and informed. At the same time, scenario planning and proactive risk management are essential strategies for thriving in a VUCA world. By anticipating potential future scenarios and developing contingency plans, organisations can better prepare for and respond to uncertainties.

Once all of these things are in place, the subtlest key ingredient has to be placed in this recipe for flourishing. A strong sense of purpose, no matter how intangible and abstract it may seem like an idea, can guide organisations and individuals through the complexities of a VUCA world. Purpose-driven organisations are more likely to inspire and engage their employees, foster customer loyalty and navigate challenges with resilience.

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Vinesh Lesson

The sight of an inconsolable Vinesh Phogat on her return to India after the heartbreak in Paris Olympics moved many a heart. On the first sight of her near and dear ones, the champion could not check her emotions and cried like a child. It was a poignant moment that every Indian could relate to and feel sympathetic. The feisty wrestler was on the brink of winning a historic gold but was done in by a cruel blow from fate. The 100 grams that she could not shed on the morning of the final bout would keep haunting Vinesh and the entire country till there is redemption in some or the other form.

That said, there is also a need to look at the entire episode dispassionately. That Vinesh's appeal against the Olympic verdict disqualifying her from the medal race for being 100 grams overweight was not going to succeed at the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) was known to all. Yet, the hype it found due to the delay in pronouncing the verdict made people hope against hope. It was a futile wait and the CAS has upheld the rule book, which is a fair call. Instead of getting emotional over the missed chance, it is imperative for Vinesh and the entire country to look at the rules for good of the sport. She did everything in her control to cut the excess weight gained overnight after the semi-final match. Yet, her support team could not manage the last 100 grams which ultimately resulted in the tragedy. The fact that Vinesh and the entire support staff were well aware of the rules even before the start of the Olympics. Seeking concessions from those that prepare the law and the wrestler and her team should accept that it was their mistake.

The rules were laid down by the authorities and the verdict had to be pronounced unconditionally. But what the Vinesh episode has done is to trigger a big debate on the set of rules and how they can be tweaked for gender equality. For instance, the men's rule allows flexibility of 1 kg in the final round. The men's rule came after the legendary wrestler Jordan Burroughs has argued about allowing 1 kg flexibility in the final round needs a good debate. Particularities of a woman's body must be factored in while allowing certain concessions. It will be the actual marker of gender equality.

The Vinesh episode and CAS verdict have given wrestling and similar sports a chance to reorganize the thinking behind the set of rules. The process must be sustained to create an equal platform for women athletes. And for that, Vinesh has to stay in the arena—as a wrestler and as a champion. The CAS exists to address discrepancies and make sport better. It can do that by taking a relook at rules using the Phogat case, and suggest reforms that could make wrestling a more sensitive sport, which protects the rights of all its participants.

Quota mandatory in govt hiring, no exceptions: Chirag Paswan on lateral entry issue

New Delhi, Aug 19 (PTI)

BJP ally and Union Minister Chirag Paswan on Monday slammed any move for appointments in government positions without following reservations and asserted that he would raise the lateral entry issue with the Centre.

The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) president's reaction came over the recent advertisement to fill posts through lateral entry on a contract basis that the opposition has alleged snatches away reservations for the disadvantaged communities.

"Reservation provisions must be there in any government appointment. There is no ifs and buts in this. No reservation exists in the private sector and if it is not implemented in government positions as well... The information came up before me on Sunday and it is a matter of concern for me," he told PTI.

Paswan said as a member of the government, he has the platform to raise the is-



sue and he would. The Union minister also said that as far as his party is concerned, it is absolutely not in support of such a measure.

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) last Saturday advertised 45 posts -- 10 of joint secretaries and 35

of directors/deputy secretaries -- to be filled through the lateral entry mode on a contract basis. It is the biggest tranche of lateral recruitment being undertaken by the Centre, an official said.

Opposition parties slammed the move, claiming

INC hypocrisy is evident on lateral entry matter. It was the UPA government which developed the concept of lateral entry

it would snatch reservations from SCs, STs and OBCs. The BJP hit back, stating the NDA government was bringing transparency to this mode of recruitment started by the Congress-led UPA.

The Congress, Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) also alleged that

it was a "conspiracy" by the BJP to appoint its ideological allies to high posts through the back door.

However, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had said the Congress' criticism of the lateral entry system in senior bureaucracy shows its "hypocrisy".

In a post on X, Vaishnaw said the reform measure implemented by the NDA government will improve governance. "INC (Indian National Congress) hypocrisy is evident on lateral entry matter. It was the UPA government which developed the concept of lateral entry," he said.

He said the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), chaired by Veerappa Moily and established in 2005 by the then Congress-led UPA government, "recommended recruitment of experts to fill the gaps in roles that require specialised knowledge".

The minister said the NDA government has created a transparent method to implement the recommendation made by the ARC.

BJP demands Mamata's resignation over medic's rape, murder; slams INDIA bloc

New Delhi, Aug 19 (PTI)

The BJP on Monday called West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee "shameless" and demanded her resignation, alleging that crucial evidence was destroyed at her behest to save the culprits in the rape and murder of a medic in Kolkata.

It also slammed leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc, including the Congress' Rahul Gandhi, and called them "political vultures", alleging that they "generalised" the trainee doctor's rape and murder by expressing a general concern over such cases reported in different parts of the country, including those in BJP-ruled states.

"Mamata Banerjee has become Mamata, the destroyer. By her misdeeds she destroyed the dignity of a woman, a doctor who was serving the society. Mamata Banerjee is the destroyer of the rule of law and the Constitution," BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said at a press conference at



the BJP headquarters here.

While the chief minister did not take concrete steps to ensure a swift probe into the "possibility" of gang-rape and murder of the medic, she got crucial evidence of the heinous crime destroyed, he charged.

"And see the brazenness of shameless Mamata, the destroyer. She took out a march in Kolkata while the entire country was embarrassed by the gruesome incident of rape and murder... She should immediately resign (as chief minister)," the BJP leader added.

The postgraduate trainee doctor's body was found on

the premises of the state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9.

A civic volunteer of the Kolkata Police was arrested in this connection and the case taken over by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) after a Calcutta High Court order.

Unidentified goons entered the hospital premises shortly after Wednesday midnight and vandalised portions of the facility, where the woman's body was found. The vandalism occurred amid midnight protests by women against the incident.

Delhi LG demands monthly reports on civic infra after monsoon collapse



New Delhi, Aug 19 (PTI)

Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena has directed Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to submit a monthly report on the inspections conducted by senior officers in the aftermath of deaths due to "complete collapse of civic infrastructure" this monsoon, officials said on Monday.

In a written communication to the chief secretary, Ashish Kundra, the principal Secretary to Saxena, said the LG has advised that an "institutionalised mechanism be put in place for scheduled inspections" by senior officers of facilities under their charge.

"It would help them obtain a first-hand feel of the core problems being faced by citizens and take corrective policy or regulatory measures. The chief secretary shall circulate a uniform format of inspection report to all departments and submit a monthly report on number of inspections done by each officer," read the letter.

Kundra also pointed out that even the Delhi High Court has taken a serious note in the matter of desilting of drains in the national capital and has made "stinging observations".

"The LG has observed that this monsoon has seen the complete collapse of civic infrastructure, leading to unfortunate and avoidable deaths of citizens. The underlying problems are symptomatic of endemic neglect," he said in the letter.

"Drains have not been desilted for years, sewer lines are choked leading to flooding even in planned colonies," he added.

According to LG Saxena, all of this points to a "complete absence of senior management oversight" in the city, Kundra's letter said.

Sharing the LG's directions on the issue, Kundra said all head of departments (HOD), secretaries, principal secretaries, or additional chief secretaries need to "draw up a schedule of field inspections" and ensure that all assets or areas are inspected thoroughly.

"The inspection note of the principal secretary or secretary of the department shall

be submitted to the chief secretary with a copy endorsed to the LG Secretariat and the minister-in-charge," he said.

According to Saxena's directions, the inspection note should summarise the core problem observed with the corrective measures invoked. The report should be annexed with geo-tagged pictures of before and after the intervention.

The communication to Kumar also fixed the frequency of inspections to be conducted by secretaries of the department concerned on a fortnightly basis while the HODs have to do them on a weekly basis.

The principal secretaries have also been advised to conduct inspections every fortnight.

The officers have also been directed to review the institutional mechanisms prescribed under various central and state acts and ensure that these are fully functional, the letter read.

"Formulation of any rules, authorities, boards under these laws should be taken up within three weeks," it added.

The LG also insisted that there should be a robust mechanism of field level inspections at district level under the district magistrates (DM).

The inspection notes need to be submitted to the divisional commissioner who shall then send a consolidated note to the chief secretary, Kundra said.

"District magistrates, SDMs and ADMS shall undertake inspection twice a week in areas of public delivery services, focusing on road infrastructure, drains, sewage management, education, transport, etc. The executive engineer, deputy directors, and other related officers shall invariably accompany the district magistrate during the inspections. The inspections should cover all kind of settlements such as rural, urban, planned areas, JJ colonies, unauthorised colonies, etc," the letter read.

The DMs have also been asked to interact with the resident welfare associations in their jurisdictions once a month to find out the issues faced by local people and resolve them.

Shiv Sena leader calls BJP's Ravindra Chavan 'useless'; Fadnavis responds

Mumbai, Aug 19 (PTI)

Shiv Sena leader Ramdas Kadam on Monday called BJP leader and Maharashtra PWD Minister Ravindra Chavan a "useless minister" over the poor state of the Mumbai-Goa Highway, only to be countered by Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis who questioned if his comments were in line with the principles of the Mahayuti alliance.

Talking to reporters in Thane, Kadam, a former minister, took a dig at Chavan over incomplete work on the Mumbai-Goa Highway that passes through the coastal districts of Maharashtra.

"After a 14-year wait, even Lord Ram's vanvas (exile)

ended, but problems on the Mumbai-Goa Highway persist. We are still deprived of good roads. State PWD Minister Ravindra Chavan seems completely useless. Despite being in an alliance, I openly believe that Devendra Fadnavis should ask for Chavan's resignation," he said.

He further questioned the purpose of the minister's review meetings and tours when the condition of roads has still not improved.

Reacting to the Shiv Sena leader's remarks, Fadnavis said, "What alliance principle does Kadam adhere to while making such comments in public? He could have addressed his concerns internally with us. Nevertheless, I will look into the issues he has raised."

NIA charges two for promoting ISIS activities in India

Bengaluru, Aug 19 (PTI)

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday charge sheeted two men for being part of a major terror conspiracy involving targeted killings and promoting "jihadi activities" of ISIS in India, according to an official statement.

The accused, Abdul Math-een Taha and Mussavir Hus-sain Shazib, are residents of Thirthahalli in Karnataka's Shivamogga district, it said. They were involved in a larger terror conspiracy of ISIS, and had been absconding until they were arrested on April 12, said the statement issued by the NIA.

NIA investigations have revealed that Taha was self-radicalised and had, in turn, radicalised and recruited Shazib and others, it said. In 2018, Taha was intro-



duced to online handler Bhai alias Laptop Bhai and went on to introduce Bhai to Mehaboob Pasha, who had formed the Al-Hind Trust in collaboration with his family members in Gurappanapalya, Bengaluru city, the NIA said.

Pasha was also responsible for passing on an online

handler link to Khaja Mo-hideen, who had joined Al-Hind Trust along with his associates to promote the ISIS terrorist activities in India, it added.

Further, Taha and Shazib had harboured accused Thowfeek and Abdul Shameem, as per the NIA inves-

tigations.

Thowfeek and Shameem later murdered Wilson (special sub inspector) of Tamil Nadu Police at the Kaliyaka-villai check-post at the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border, with a pistol provided by Mehaboob Pasha, the anti-terror agency said.

"The NIA has charge sheeted two more terrorists in the Karnataka Al-Hind ISIS module case relating to a major terror conspiracy involving targeted killings and other jihadi activities," it said.

In its second supplementary charge sheet filed before a special court here, the NIA has charged the duo under various sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. So far, a total of 18 accused have been charge sheeted in the case, which NIA took over from the Bengaluru city police on January 23, 2020.

FIR filed over Sabarmati Express derailment near Kanpur

Kanpur (UP), Aug 19 (PTI)

An FIR has been registered against unknown persons for alleged sabotage leading to the derailment of 20 coaches of the Sabarmati Express near Govindpuri station in Kanpur, police said on Monday.

The incident occurred early on Saturday after the train's engine hit an "object placed on the track", rail officials said. There was no report of any loss of life or injury in the incident.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Vijendra Dwivedi said, "The FIR was lodged on Saturday. According to it, a piece of an old rail line measuring 0.93 metres was found between the up and down lines and showed signs of recent heating that led to the derailment of 20 coaches."

The FIR was lodged at the Panki Police station under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita's sec-



tion 125 (act endangering life or personal safety of others) and under the Railways Act, 1989, based on a complaint by the railway's senior section engineer Mahendra Pratap Singh.

Police Commissioner Akhil Kumar has formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Rajesh Kumar Singh to probe the incident.

It has been alleged in the FIR that loco pilot A P Bunde-

la witnessed a heavy object on the tracks on the up lines between Govindpuri and Bhimsen station at 2:27 am on Saturday that prompted him and the assistant loco pilot to apply emergency brakes.

Despite making all efforts, the cattle guard in front of the engine hit the object, leading to the derailment of 20 coaches of the Sabarmati Express, the FIR stated.

The train was headed to Gujarat from Varanasi.

It has been claimed by the railways in the FIR that the piece of rail was placed deliberately on the tracks.

Forensic experts from and the railway's technical team have seized the rail piece mentioned in the FIR, the Kanpur police chief told PTI.

According to police sources, Intelligence Bureau (IB), Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) are investigating the derailment.

In a post on X on Saturday Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said, "The engine of Sabarmati Express (Varanasi to Ahmedabad) hit an object on the track and derailed near Kanpur at 02:35 am.

"Sharp hit marks are observed. Evidence is protected. IB and UP police are also working on it. No injuries to passengers or staff. Train arranged for passengers for onward journey to Ahmedabad," he had said.

Seven arrested in Thane for exam malpractice during police recruitment

Thane, Aug 19 (PTI)

Seven persons were arrested for allegedly indulging in malpractices in the ongoing police recruitment process in Thane, an official said on Monday.

They were arrested on Sunday in connection with three FIRs registered in Naupada, Thane Town and Vartak Nagar police stations where the exam centres for the recruitment process were located, the official added.

"They were caught using gadgets, Bluetooth etc while appearing for the exams. The seven, including two women, hail from Jalna, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar and Ahmednagar districts. One more person who helped them in these malpractices has been



booked," he said.

The official identified the seven as Sandeep Dudhe, Jeev Naimani, Chandan Bahure, Suvarna Pinjari, Sunil Salve, Anandsingh Dulat and Yuvraj Rajput.

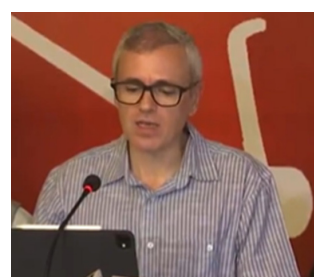
Omar Abdullah to unveil National Conference manifesto for J-K polls

Srinagar, Aug 19 (PTI)

The National Conference will release on Monday its manifesto for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

The document will be released during a press meet by party vice-president Omar Abdullah in the presence of senior leaders, including members of its manifesto committee. The three-phase elections to the 90-member Jammu and Kashmir Assembly will be held on September 18, September 25 and October 1. The results will be declared on October 4.

The National Conference had formed a committee led by former Jammu and Kashmir finance minister and senior leader Abdul Rahim Rather to draft the manifesto. The committee also included other senior



leaders, including the party's Srinagar MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi.

The party had sought suggestions from the people for the manifesto, saying their submissions would be discussed and incorporated in the final document.

Mehdi had said the biggest issues for the party were the political and constitutional statuses of Jammu and Kashmir and the restoration of the guarantees "snatched" from the people.

MP farmers destroy soybean crops over poor prices; Cong blames BJP

Bhopal/Mandsaur, Aug 19

A farmer in Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur district destroyed his soybean crop, claiming he did not receive a good price for his produce, prompting the Congress to question the BJP-led government's farm policies.

In a video that surfaced on social media, farmer Kamlesh Patidar, a resident of Devaria village in Mandsaur, is seen destroying standing crops on his field using a tractor.

Sharing the video in a post on X, Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Jitu Patwari said, "A shocking and worrying incident happened in Garoth of Mandsaur. Farmer Kamlesh Patidar ran his tractor over the soybean crop only because the market price was causing losses instead of earn-



ing him profit."

The Congress leader tagged Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in the post and said the pain is not just of one but thousands of farming families in the state.

He further claimed the BJP had failed to fulfil its promise about the minimum selling price for the soybean crop af-

ter coming to power. Taking to PTI, the farmer said he had 140 quintals of old soybean, which he sold at Shamgarh Mandi for Rs 3,800 per quintal.

If the new soybean price opens at Rs 3,500 to Rs 3,800 per quintal, cultivators will suffer a loss, he said.

He said four quintals of soybean are produced on one bigha (0.6 acres) land.

Patidar claimed he had spent Rs 8,000 per bigha till now and will have to spend another Rs 6,000 per bigha till the crop arrives.

"If the new soybean price opens at Rs 3,500 to Rs 3,800 per quintal, what will we get? Considering this, I destroyed standing crop on 12 to 13 bigha (more than 7 acres)," Patidar said.

BJP spokesman Pankaj Chaturvedi said Union Minister Chouhan recently exposed the agriculture policy of the previous Congress governments.

Improvements have come under the BJP government, with Rs 1.6 lakh crore being disbursed under the crop insurance scheme, besides direct transfer benefits and other schemes of farmers' welfare, he said.

International

China urges 'better management' of South China Sea disputes

Beijing, Aug 19

President Xi Jinping Monday called for "better management" of differences between China and Vietnam over their maritime disputes as he met Vietnam's new top leader to Lam here, amidst increasing tensions in the disputed South China Sea.

Just two weeks ago, Lam took over as the general secretary of the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party, a powerful post similar to one held by Xi, who heads the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) - the country's top political position.

Lam succeeded Nguyen Phu Trong, who died last month after 13 years as leader. Hosting Lam for crucial talks, Xi underscored that at the critical stage of national development and revitalization, China and Vietnam should consolidate the development pattern featuring higher political mutual trust, more solid security cooperation, deeper practical cooperation, stronger public support, closer multilateral coordination and cooperation, and better management and resolution of differences.

He welcomed Lam's State Visit to China - his first foreign trip after taking over power.

Xi said Lam's gesture fully reflects the great importance the Vietnamese leader attaches to the relations between the two communist parties and the two countries, as well as the high level and strategic nature of China-Vietnam relations.

He expressed willingness to establish good working



relations and personal friendship with Lam.

Xi said China takes Vietnam as a priority in its neighbourhood diplomacy and supports Vietnam in upholding the leadership of the CPV, taking the socialist path suited to its national conditions, and further advancing the cause of reform, opening up and socialist modernisation.

After their talks, the two leaders witnessed signing of 14 agreements to enhance cooperation between the two countries.

On his arrival in China, Lam said Vietnam accords top priority to ties with Beijing.

Though headed by the "brotherly Communist Parties", tensions remain between China and Vietnam over their overlapping claims in the disputed South China Sea.

Both countries claim the Paracel and Spratly islands, and Vietnam has become more vocal about the disputes, drawing closer to India,

the US and its allies.

Much to the chagrin of China, Vietnam in recent years has also upgraded its ties with India, the US and Japan to a comprehensive strategic partnership, the country's highest designation for a diplomatic relationship, in an apparent attempt to have international support for itself in the event of any conflict with China.

Both countries fought a bitter war in 1979.

Lam's visit is taking place amidst heightening tensions between China and the Philippines, backed by the US and Japan over the disputed South China Sea.

China claims most of the South China Sea, while the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims.

Xi told Lam that China is trying to maintain close strategic communication and high-level exchanges with Vietnam, firmly adheres to mutual support, actively explore ways to expand synergy between

the Belt and Road Initiative and the Two Corridors and One Economic Circle strategy, accelerate the "hard connectivity" of railway, expressway and port infrastructure, enhance the "soft connectivity" of smart customs, and jointly build a secure and stable industrial and supply chain, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Lam, who arrived in the Chinese city of Guangzhou on August 18, said the older generations of leaders of the two parties and countries have forged deep friendships, and the Vietnamese people will never forget China's assistance in Vietnam's national liberation, independence and socialist construction.

He said that his party and country have always considered the development of relations with China as the top priority in their foreign policy and will strive to carry on the tradition of bilateral friendship created by the older generations of leaders of the two parties and countries.

Pakistani YouTuber Khosa released after abduction by intelligence agencies

Lahore, Aug 19

Pakistani YouTuber and comedian Aun Ali Khosa, who was allegedly abducted by intelligence agencies last week for singing a song critical of the Shehbaz Sharif government and its backers, has returned home in Punjab province, his lawyer said on Monday.

Khosa was among the three other social media activists of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party who had recently been picked up allegedly by intelligence agencies.

The other two people were Naeem Ahmad Yasin and Arsalan Akbar. Their families have declared them "missing persons". The Sharif-led government and the establishment were facing scathing criticism on social media for "abducting" Aun Khosa for singing a parody song on soaring electricity bills.

Days before his abduction, Khosa had sung a song, "Bill Bill Pakistan", a parody of the famous Pakistani song "Dil Dil Pakistan" and released a video on social media criticising the high prices of electricity and extra taxes added to it.

Khosa also took on the worthlessness of the Pakistani passport and the cash-strapped country's loans. The comedian has a following of 137,000 on YouTube.

On Monday, Khosa's lawyer, Advocate Khadija Siddiqi, said on X: "Aun Ali Khosa has been released! He has reached home!"

Criticising the recurring cases of abductions, she said, "Over the last two months, we

have fought all missing persons cases, including Aun's, at the Lahore High Court."

She said that the kidnapers have the same modus operandi; they come in the dark of the night at 2 or 3 am, break down the door, and there are about a dozen men with masks on their faces, carrying weapons.

They take away mobile phones and laptops, and if there's a CCTV installed, they remove it. They harass the victim and take him away.

"Then, when the high court's ruling comes, they return the victim to his house in the dark of the night," Siddiqi said, adding that the practice of abduction of citizens should come to an end.

"If someone has violated the law, bring them to court and prosecute them there," she said.

Earlier, the Lahore High Court (LHC) directed the Punjab police chief to recover Khosa by August 20 and to recover missing PTI activist Arsalan Akbar by August 28.

The PTI has expressed concern over the recent 'forced disappearances' of its political workers.

Two brothers of PTI former social media head Azhar Mashwani - Professors Mazhar-ul-Hassan and Zahoor-ul-Hassan - as well as aide founder Khan's close aide Shabbaz Gill's brother Ghulam Shabbir have been missing since June last.

Amnesty International has also demanded the Pakistan government to immediately disclose the whereabouts of missing persons and ensure an effective, independent, and impartial investigation into these disappearances."

Thailand's new PM Shinawatra seeks to explore untapped ties with India



Singapore, Aug 19

Thailand's new prime minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra on Monday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his greetings and said she looked forward to working closely with him to build upon the existing ties and explore untapped potentials to create even greater opportunities for the two countries.

Shinawatra, the 37-year-old former business executive, became Thailand's youngest prime minister after receiving a royal letter of endorsement on Sunday, two days after she was chosen by Parliament following a court order that removed her predecessor.

"I look forward to working closely with you to further strengthen our bilateral relations, especially in the areas of trade and investment, culture, people-to-people contact, and tourism, in particular to increase air travel between both countries," Shinawatra said in a post on X.

"I am confident that we can build upon our existing ties and explore untapped poten-

tials to create even greater opportunities for our two countries, peoples and beyond," she said further in the post that was in response to Prime Minister Modi's post congratulating her.

"Congratulations @ingshin on your election as the Prime Minister of Thailand. Best wishes for a very successful tenure. Look forward to working with you to further strengthen the bilateral ties between India and Thailand that are based on the strong foundations of civilisational, cultural and people to people connect," Modi said earlier in the day in a post on X.

Paetongtarn became the Prime Minister days after the Constitutional Court removed Prime Minister SretthaThavisin within a year of his assuming charge after the court found him guilty of a serious ethical breach.

She belongs to a political dynasty founded by her billionaire father, Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted by a military coup in 2006. He returned to Thailand last year when his party formed the government.

India permits Nepal to export an additional 251 MW of power

Kathmandu, Aug 19

India has allowed Nepal to export an additional 251 MW of electricity to the country, marking the first time the Himalayan nation will supply power to Bihar under a medium-term sales agreement, an official statement said on Monday.

"India's Designated Authority for Cross-Border Trade has approved an additional 251 MW of power exports from 12 hydropower projects in Nepal," the Indian Embassy in Nepal said in a statement.

With this, Nepal would be exporting 941 MW of hydro-power from 28 projects. Earlier, Nepal was exporting 690 MW of electricity from 16 projects, it added.

Even before this 251 MW approval, Nepal had already become a net exporter of electricity and net revenue generator in the last fiscal year, selling NPR 16.93 billion worth of electricity, the statement said.

In October 2021, New Delhi approved 39 MW of electricity exports from Nepal to India for the first time, it said, adding that in less than three years, this figure has grown by more than 24 times.

Nepal first started its power exports by selling in the Day Ahead Market of the Indian Energy Exchange. Since then, India has also granted access to the Real-Time Market.

Nepal Electricity Authority has also entered into medium-term power sales agreements with discoms in Haryana and Bihar.

India has also opened the provision of counting hydropower imports from Nepal as a part of the Hydropower Purchase Obligation (HPO) for buyers in India, which further incentivises buyers to purchase power from Nepal.

India and Nepal had reached an agreement for long-term power trade that envisages the sale of up to 10,000 MW of power from Nepal to India in the next 10 years. This is the first year of the agreement and around 1,000 MW of exports have already been reached.

An agreement for the sale of 40 MW of power to Bangladesh has also been finalised and was planned to be signed on July 28 but postponed due to the recent political developments in Bangladesh.

With these developments, Nepal is now on track to become the leading hydropower exporter of the South Asian region.

New murder cases filed against Hasina over protester deaths

Dhaka, Aug 19

Two new murder cases were filed on Monday against Bangladesh's deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and ex-ministers of her cabinet over the killings of two people during the quota reform protests in the country that led to her ouster.

These were the latest in the slew of cases filed against the 76-year-old former premier, who resigned and fled to India on August 5 following a massive protest by students against a controversial quota system in government jobs.

The separate cases were filed for the murders of one Liton Hasan Lulu alias Hasan in the capital's Mirpur area and one Tarik Hossain in the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area during the violence that led to Hasina's ouster, state-run BSS news agency reported.

Liton's brother filed a case against 148 people, including Hasina, former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, former inspector general of police (IGP) Abdullah Al Mamun and others at the court of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mehedi Hasan.

According to the case documents, Liton joined a peaceful procession in the Mirpur area on August 4 as part of the students' movement. At around 2 pm, men of Hasina's Awami League party started firing at the procession indiscriminately, injuring Hasan, who succumbed to his injuries later.

Meanwhile, Tarik's mother, Fidushi Khatun, filed another case against 13 people, includ-



ing Hasina, former road, transport and bridges minister Obaidul Quader, former home minister Kamal, former foreign minister Hasan Mahmud and state minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat.

Tarik was shot by unidentified miscreants in front of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on August 5 and succumbed to his injuries on August 9, according to the report.

This raises the number of cases filed against Hasina after her ouster to fifteen.

Late on Sunday, another murder case was filed by Shahnaz Begum, the wife of Md Milon, who was shot dead on July 21 while returning home from a local fish market, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

As many as 62 people, including Hasina, former road transport and bridges minister Quader, former lawmaker Shamim Osman, and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan, were named as accused in the case.

According to the report, leaders and activists of the

Hasina-led Awami League and its affiliated organisations armed with firearms and sticks created obstacles to traffic on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway to disrupt the student movement.

It alleged that Hasina, Quader and Asaduzzaman ordered the shooting and attack on protesting students and the public.

Milon, who was returning home from a local fish market at that time, was shot in the chest and collapsed on the road. He was taken to Pro-Active Medical College and Hospital in the area, where he was declared dead, the report said.

Over 230 people were killed in the incidents of violence that erupted across the country following the fall of the Hasina-led Awami League government, taking the death toll to more than 600 since the massive protest by students first started in mid-July.

An interim government was formed after the fall of the Hasina-led government, and 84-year-old Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was appointed as its Chief Adviser.

Bangladesh govt prioritizes improving law and order

Dhaka, Aug 19

A newly-appointed top Bangladeshi security official on Monday acknowledged that law and order is the main challenge for the interim government and said that the new administration is focused on improving the situation as quickly as possible.

Talking to the media, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md. Jahangir Alam Chowdhury emphasised the urgency of addressing security concerns and outlined his dual responsibilities in both home affairs and agriculture.

"Our main challenge at the Ministry of Home Affairs is law and order. We are focused on improving the situation as quickly as possible," Chowdhury, who was appointed on Friday, was

quoted as saying by the UNB news.

Within three days of his appointment, Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hussain was replaced as home adviser in the interim government of Bangladesh by Lt Gen (retd) Chowdhury, amid criticism of the ex-army officer's conduct by student leaders, media reports on Saturday said.

The law and order situation deteriorated in Bangladesh after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India on August 5 following massive protests against her government over a controversial quota system in government jobs.

Over 230 people were killed in the incidents of violence that erupted across the country following the fall of the Hasina-led Awami League government, taking the death toll to more than 600 since the massive pro-

test by students first started in mid-July.

An interim government was formed after the fall of the Hasina-led government, and 84-year-old Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was appointed as its Chief Adviser.

The interim government has transferred the chiefs of 32 police stations in Dhaka and another 18 other officers-in-charge. With the latest transfer, the heads of all 50 police stations under the Dhaka Metropolitan Police have been transferred now.

Talking to the media, Chowdhury also discussed his objectives in the agriculture sector, saying his goal is to increase production and ensure that "we can feed more people."

Earlier in the day, Chowdhury met with UN Resident Coordinator Gwyn Lewis and

discussed the United Nations' potential support in various sectors.

"Our discussions centred on the types of assistance they can provide in this situation and which areas we are seeking help in," he said.

On the Rohingya crisis, he said that the government has requested additional support from the UN. "The Rohingya population is growing daily, with 1.2 million people now in the country. The costs are escalating, and it's uncertain how long we can sustain this," he said.

Chowdhury also said that a UN fact-finding mission is expected to arrive in Bangladesh next week.

"We discussed the kind of support they will offer and what assistance we require from them," he added.

Blinken: Ceasefire is the last chance to free hostages

Washington, Aug 19

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has emphasized that the current moment may be the best and possibly the last opportunity to secure a ceasefire and a deal for the release of hostages in Gaza.

He made these remarks during a meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog on his ninth visit to the region since the conflict began in October. The U.S. has shown optimism about reaching a deal since talks resumed in Doha last week, but Hamas

has dismissed suggestions of progress as an "illusion." The main point of contention is whether Israeli troops will fully withdraw from Gaza, a key demand from Hamas.

Blinken's visit is part of a broader effort to maintain pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who he also met with on Monday. Blinken stressed the importance of avoiding actions that could derail negotiations or escalate the conflict further. He called this a "decisive moment" that could lead to a ceasefire, the return of hos-

tages, and a path to lasting peace and security.

The negotiations are based on a revised U.S. proposal, which seeks to bridge the longstanding gaps between Israel and Hamas.

While the U.S. hopes to finalize the deal soon, neither the Israeli leadership nor Hamas shares this level of optimism. Both sides accuse each other of obstructing progress. Hamas has accused Netanyahu of placing new demands and conditions to prolong the war, holding him responsible for blocking an agreement.

Israeli sources, however,

suggest that alternative measures could replace an Israeli military presence along Gaza's southern border with Egypt.

The conflict intensified after an unprecedented attack by Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, which resulted in the deaths of around 1,200 people and the abduction of 251 hostages. In response, Israel launched a military campaign in Gaza aimed at destroying Hamas.

According to Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry, more than 40,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the conflict began.

Kamala Harris brings tremendous energy

Chicago, Aug 19

Kamala Harris has brought in tremendous energy as a Democratic presidential nominee and the party is looking forward to using the Chicago convention to drive the historic momentum behind the Harris-Walz ticket to defeat Republican Donald Trump, a top party leader has said.

The once-in-four-year Democratic National Convention that starts on Monday is being held in this windy city by Lake Michigan in Illinois state this year.

A roll call celebration of Vice President Harris and

Governor Tim Walz, the Democrat nominee as her running mate, will take place on Tuesday.

On Thursday, Harris, 59, would formally deliver her speech accepting the nomination of the Democratic Party as its presidential candidate for the November 5 election.

"Madam Vice President Kamala Harris as a nominee of the Democratic Party has brought such tremendous energy and enthusiasm into the presidential elections. She's bringing in so many young folks into this campaign and people from different backgrounds," Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime



Harrison told PTI in an interview.

"They're really interested in her," he said about Harris, who is of Indian and African heritage.

"She has brought a lot of hope and joy into this elec-

tion, which is so necessary, particularly when you're running against somebody like Donald Trump, who's about fear, who's about dividing the country, not bringing us together," Harrison said.

Harris is just a "tremendous figure ... she's running one of the most amazing campaigns I've ever seen."

Incumbent President Joe Biden, 81, withdrew from the race for the White House last month and backed Harris for the post. She soon received endorsements from former president Barack Obama and gathered sufficient delegate votes to be finalised as the party's presidential nominee.

Harris has now become the first-ever woman of colour to be on the top of a presidential ticket of a major American political party.

She is also the first ever Indian-American to be nominated as presidential candidate of either the Republican or the Democratic Party. Harris's mother, Shyamala Gopalan, was Indian and her father, Donald Jasper Harris, a Jamaican; both immigrants to the US.

Harrison, who is responsible for the successful conduct of the Convention in his capacity as the chair of the Democratic National Committee, said, "I think you're going to

get a lot of hope and joy from this podium. In essence, all of the stalwarts of the Democratic Party, those who have been anchors for the party for years, and those who are new and emerging stars in the party, they'll all be on the stage."

"Democrats from all across the country have made their voices heard in support of our Democratic nominees, and we look forward to using this convention to drive historic momentum behind the Harris-Walz ticket as we unify in our mission to defeat Donald Trump," he said.

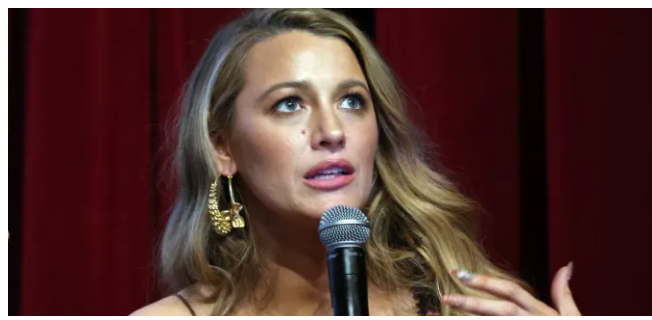
Biden, former presidents Obama and Bill Clinton are among the top leaders ex-

pected to address the four-day convention that is expected to be attended by more than 30,000 Democratic Party leaders and members from across the country.

"We are asking not only the Indian Americans, we are asking all Americans to go out and support Kamala Harris and Tim Walz because they are the party that is looking at America's future and not just anchored in America's past," Harrison said.

The Democratic National Convention is the formal event where Democrats from all 50 states and the US territories will gather to rally behind Harris and Walz.

Blake Lively criticized for using transgender slur in old interviews



Mumbai, Aug 19

Blake Lively faced heat for the use of transgender slurs during one of her old interviews. A particular quote by Lively from the interview resurfaced on the internet and went viral amid the ensuing *It Ends with Us* drama with Justin Baldoni. Netizens blasted Lively for her use of transgender slurs and for being insensitive towards their community.

Lively's 2012 interview resurfaced on the internet on Sunday and quickly went viral for a remark she made regarding her future children and simultaneously offended the transgender community. A user on X posted an image of an old interview which read, "I hope to have a few girls one day. If not girls, they better be trans." Because I have some amazing shoes and bags and stories that need to be appreciated.

The term she used has been deemed defamatory by some members of the community according to GLAAD. The post was captioned, "sometimes ill [sic] be quietly going about my day and then ill [sic] remember the time Blake Lively said this to a journalist," by the user, as reported by Page Six.

She also used the term in another interview with Allure

in 2009 when she discussed her insecurities on the sets of *Gossip Girl*. She said, "I feel like a tranny a lot of the time. I don't know, I'm... large? They put me in six-inch heels, and I tower over every man." She continued, "I've got this long hair and lots of clothes and makeup on. I just feel really big a lot of the time, and I'm surrounded by a lot of tiny people. I feel like a man sometimes."

As the clip of Lively's interview went viral, netizens lashed out at the actor for the use of transgender slurs. One user on X wrote, "You just blew up the whole smear campaign with this one," while another user wrote, "Not Lady Deadpool..." Another user wrote, "She's right but why would she use the T slur."

Others supported the *Gossip Girl* actor as one user wrote, "It was a different time, they used that word all the time on SATC even in scenes starring actual trans people" while another user wrote, "There was absolutely nothing wrong with that word when she said it, now people are oversensitive. RuPaul even had a song with it in the title." One user wrote, "I'm not mad at this at all. The word was thrown around a lot back in the day. If it was said today, it would be problematic, but nothing is wrong with wishing for a trans child."



Vicky Kaushal's Sambhaji vs Akshaye Khanna's Aurangzeb

Mumbai, Aug 19

Vicky Kaushal is all set to portray a real-life icon from Indian history once again. The actor will star in an epic action-drama based on the Maratha warrior-king Chhatrapati Sambhaji, and the movie, titled *Chhaava*, will soon hit the screens. The teaser of this period saga has been released, featuring the actor in the titular role.

The teaser begins with Vicky's voiceover saying, "Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is called a lion and I am his son, the cub of a lion is called Chhaava." The video depicts him riding a horse in warrior armour and then engaging in

battle against a large Mughal army in a fort where he is outnumbered by enemies.

The teaser is packed with adrenaline-filled moments as the injured and blood-soaked Sambhaji unleashes fury on the enemy's army. As the teaser concludes, Akshaye Khanna's look as Aurangzeb is unveiled as he says, "Shivaji is gone but his thoughts and vision are still alive." In the end Vicky is dressed in royal Maratha attire sitting on the throne.

While sharing the teaser on his Instagram handle, Vicky captioned his post, "Protector of Swarajya. Defender of Dharma. #Chhaava - An epic saga of a courageous warrior! (swords emojis) Teaser out

now."

Bhumi Pednekar lauded the teaser and wrote, "Is there anything you can't do @vickykaushal09 (blessings emojis) fab fab fab." Angira Dhar wrote, "Superb. (fire and hearts emojis)." A fan commented, "Ye hai asli Goosebumps (This is called real goosebumps)." Another fan wrote, "What is that what Vicky Kaushal can't do."

Chhaava is directed by Laxman Utekar. It also features Rashmika Mandanna, Ashutosh Rana, Divya Dutta, Neil Bhoopalam and Santosh Juvekar in pivotal characters. The movie is produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films. *Chhaava* is scheduled to release on December 6.

UAE cuts Khel Khel Mein scene on Fardeen's character's sexuality



Mumbai, Aug 19

Khel Khel Mein - co-starring Akshay Kumar, Taapsee Pannu and Vaani Kapoor - marks Fardeen Khan's return to the big screen after a 14-year hiatus. In a new interview with Mid-day, director Mudassar Aziz was asked about a scene featuring Fardeen - whose character arches on his sexuality - being snipped in the UAE, as per local restrictions.

He said it was 'heartbreaking to see that something so relevant, and done with so much dignity, found its way out of the UAE release'. The filmmaker told the portal, "I'm a filmmaker. To write all sorts of characters and raise topics of conversation is my professional and moral duty! *Khel Khel Mein* does that. While it's heartbreaking to see that something so relevant, and done with so much dignity, found its way out of the UAE release, I'm thrilled at the applause that [the rest] of the world is sending my way for those very scenes."

He added, "Through this (Fardeen's) role, I hoped to contribute to a conversation that is

necessary and relevant. While edits may have been made, the intention behind the role - that of acceptance - remains unchanged, and I stand by the message's importance."

Per the report, a fan from Dubai said that the 'edit changes the narrative of Fardeen's character'. They added it was disheartening to see 'such an important moment erased'. They told the portal that they 'felt cheated when they found out from Indian cine-goers about this' as censorship denies audiences the full experience of the film's 'powerful message'. Another fan was also quoted as saying that they were looking forward to seeing this film 'because of its progressive storyline'.

Multi-starrer *Khel Khel Mein*, which hit theatres on August 15, also features Ammy Virak, Aditya Seal and Pragya Jaiswal in the lead roles. Chitranga Singh has a cameo in the Mudassar Aziz-directorial.

Produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Vipul D Shah, Ashwin Varde, Rajesh Bahl, Shashikant Sinha and Ajay Rai, *Khel Khel Mein* 'aims to redefine the comedy-drama genre', per the makers.

Dakota Johnson flashes engagement ring amid split rumors with Chris Martin

Mumbai, Aug 19

Dakota Johnson has silenced the rumours surrounding her split with fiancé and Coldplay frontman Chris Martin. Pictures of the actor surfaced on social media, in which she can be seen roaming the streets of Malibu, California, this time flashing her engagement ring.

Rumours of their split began to brew when she was spotted in Malibu last week, sans the engagement ring which has been a fixture on her finger since 2020. She was also conspicuously absent from Coldplay's recent concerts. However, she seems to have put all rumours to rest now, by slipping in the engagement ring where it belongs.

The 34-year-old actor was out with friends Jeremy Allen White and Blake Lee in Malibu, California. Dakota kept her look casual in an oversized tan coat and jeans, but it was the emerald engagement ring on her left hand that caught everyone's attention. A representative for the actor had also earlier confirmed to People that the couple is "happily together." "They've had ups and downs, but now they're definitely back on," claimed another source to the publication.

Dakota and Chris, 47, were last seen together in June when she attended the Glastonbury Festival to support him during Coldplay's headlining performance. The two began dating in 2017, three years after Martin and his ex-wife Gwyneth Paltrow announced their separation.

Dakota was first seen wearing her emerald engagement ring in December 2020, but their engagement wasn't officially confirmed until March 2024. As per a source close to the couple, they got engaged years ago but were in no rush to marry. Although they keep their relationship mostly private, Dakota and Chris occasionally speak about each other and attend each other's events.

IIFA 2024 nominations: Ranbir, Ranveer for Best Actor; Deepika, Alia for Actress

Mumbai, Aug 19

IIFA 2024 full list of nominations: IIFA has announced nominees in all categories for this year, on Monday, August 19. Ranbir Kapoor-starrer *Animal* reigns with 11 nominations, closely followed by Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt-starrer *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani*, which earned 10 nominations.

Shah Rukh Khan's 2023 action hits, *Jawan* and *Pathaan*, have each garnered seven nominations in the Popular Category, while Vikrant Massey's 12th Fail secured five nominations.

Here's the complete list of IIFA 2024 nominations in the popular category:

Best Picture:

- *Vidhu Vinod Chopra-12th Fail
- *Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Pranay Reddy Vanga-Animal
- *Hiroo Yash Johar, Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- *Gauri Khan-Jawan
- *Sanjiv Nadiadwala, Shareen Mantri Keddia, Kishor Arora-Satyaprem Ki Katha
- *Ronnie Screwvala-Sam Bahadur

Direction

- *Vidhu Vinod Chopra-12th Fail
- *Sandeep Reddy Vanga-Animal
- *Karan Johar-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- *Atlee-Jawan
- *Siddharth Anand-Pathaan
- *Amit Rai-OMG 2

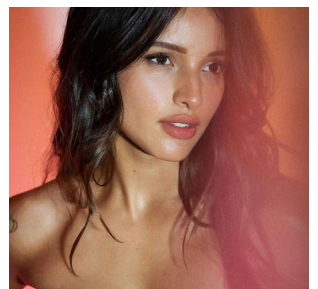


Performance In A Leading Role (Female)

- *Rani Mukerji-Mrs. Chatterjee vs Norway
- *Alia Bhatt-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- *Deepika Padukone-Pathaan
- *Kiara Advani-Satyaprem Ki Katha
- *Taapsee Pannu-Dunki

Performance In A Leading Role (Male)

- *Vikrant Massey-12th Fail
- *Ranbir Kapoor-Animal
- *Ranveer Singh-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- *Shah Rukh Khan-Jawan
- *Vicky Kaushal-Sam Bahadur
- *Sunny Deol-Gadar 2



Performance In A Supporting Role (Female)

- *Tripti Dimri-Animal
- *Geeta Aggarwal Sharma-12th Fail
- *Sanya Malhotra-Sam Bahadur
- *Jaya Bachchan-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- *Shabana Azmi-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani

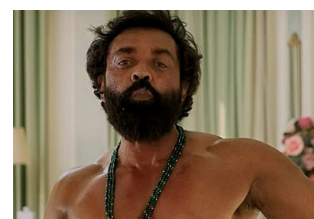


Performance In A Supporting Role (Male)

- *Dharmendra-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- *Anil Kapoor-Animal
- *Jaideep Ahlawat-An Action Hero

Performance In A Negative Role

- *Bobby Deol-Animal
- *John Abraham-Pathaan
- *Vijay Sethupathi-Jawan
- *Emraan Hashmi-Tiger 3
- *Yami Gautam-OMG 2



Music Direction

- *Pritam, Vishal Mishra, Manan Bhardwaj, Shreyas Puranik, Jaani, Bhupinder Babbal, Ashim Kemsom, Harshvardhan Rameshwar-Animal
- *Pritam-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
- *Vishal-Shekhar-Pathaan
- *Anirudh Ravichander-Jawan
- *Sachin-Jigar-Zara Hatke Zara Bachke
- *Shantanu Moitra-12th Fail

Playback Singer (Male)

- *Arijit Singh-Animal
- *Bhupinder Babbal-Animal
- *Vishal Mishra-Animal
- *Arijit Singh-Pathaan
- *Diljit Dosanjh-Dunki
- Playback Singer (Female)
 - *Shreya Ghoshal-Animal
 - *Shilpa Rao-Pathaan
 - *Shilpa Rao-Jawan
 - *Shreya Ghoshal-Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani
 - *Deepthi Suresh-Jawan

It Ends with Us hits \$180M worldwide despite Blake Lively-Justin Baldoni drama



Mumbai, Aug 19

Amid all the drama around the escalating tension between Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni, their film *It Ends with Us* has been blossoming at the box office worldwide. A Variety report states that *It Ends with Us* has now grossed more than \$180 million worldwide.

The report claims that *It Ends with Us*, made on a modest budget of \$25 million, has now earned more than 7x that amount. It crossed \$100 million at the global box office last week

and has now added another \$80 million to it. It earned \$33.1 million at the international box office this past weekend, bringing its overseas earnings to \$82.2 million, thereby crossing \$180 million in just 10 days since release.

At the North American box office, *It Ends with Us* earned \$24 million, down just 52% from its triumphant opening of \$50 million the weekend before. It landed at the third place in the box office rankings this weekend, immediately after Shawn Levy's buddy Marvel movie *Deadpool & Wolverine*,

which stars Blake's husband Ryan Reynolds in the lead. The film was adapted from the bestselling Colleen Hoover novel of the same name that follows Blake Lively as Lily Bloom, a woman at a crossroads when a past love upends her current relationship with Justin Baldoni's Ryle Kincaid.

Rumours of behind-the-scenes drama on the film also continue to dominate social media discourse and tabloid headlines—but Don't Worry Darling also taught us that gossip and chatter don't always translate to box office returns. That film had director Olivia Wilde at odds with Florence Pugh, the lead actor of the film.

However, *It Ends with Us* is clearly performing exceptionally well at the box office worldwide, while it's unclear if the surrounding drama has any effect on it, positive or negative. Rumours of Blake telling people that Justin fat-shamed her and kissed her for too long in an intimate scene have been doing the rounds. However, Justin has been praising Blake and her involvement in the film in his recent interviews.

Godfather star John Aprea dies at 83

Mumbai, Aug 19

The *Godfather* star John Aprea has reportedly died at the age of 83. Aprea, who portrayed a young Salvatore 'Sal' Tessio in *The Godfather Part II*, died on August 5, as per reports.

Aprea "died of natural causes" in Los Angeles, surrounded by his loved ones, his manager Will Levine told Fox News Digital. "I am very saddened by the death of Mr. Aprea," Levine said. "He was an incredibly talented actor and loved by his friends. One of the classiest guys I knew."

In 1941, Aprea was born to Italian immigrants in Englewood, New Jersey. His first break in the industry was in the 1968 Steve McQueen classic *San Francisco* cop drama, *Bullitt*. Aprea later played young Tessio in *The Godfather Part II*.

After being cast for the role, Aprea reportedly phoned Abe Vigoda and asked for character insight. Vigoda played the older version of Tessio.

Vigoda told Aprea, accord-



ing to New York Post, "I don't know what I did. Just have a good time, kid."

Aprea starred in various crime sagas, as well as soap opera dramas throughout his career. For several years, he worked as Alexander Nikos and Lucas Castiglione on *Another World*, a daytime hit. He also played John Stamos' father on the family sitcom *Full House*. The serial was picked up for a Netflix reboot for *Fuller House* years later, and Aprea went on to reprise his role.

Aprea also reprised his role as Jack Madison in the TV series *The Bay*. Creator/

showrunner Gregori J. Martin said after Aprea's death, "It was such a great honor to have the privilege of working with an icon like John on *The Bay*. I have always been a fan of his work and he was a true gentleman and absolute pro who brought some beautiful moments to the role of Jack in these later seasons. We will all miss him dearly."

Aprea is survived by his wife Betsy Graci, daughter Nicole from a previous marriage, and stepchildren Marika Parker and Valentino Graci. He was previously married to Ninon Aprea and Cherie Latimer.

Abhishek Banerjee addresses 'fired by Dharma' controversy

Mumbai, Aug 19

Abhishek Banerjee has made significant strides in Bollywood, excelling not only as an actor but also as a well-known casting director. In a recent interview with Siddharth Kannan, the actor mentioned that he was asked to leave Karan Malhotra's *Agneepath* because the latter was not impressed by his casting choice. Abhishek has since clarified his statement, emphasizing that his words were "misinterpreted as accusatory."

Abhishek took to his Twitter handle and shared a note which read, "This week I have been blessed with two releases and one controversy. I've been reading and hearing a lot of reports about Dharma Productions supposedly firing my company, Casting Bay, during the casting process of



Agneepath (2012). Unfortunately, this situation has been completely misrepresented as accusatory on our part. In a podcast interview, I had stated the reason for our dismissal, acknowledging that we were unable to align with the vision of director Karan Malhotra for *Agneepath*. I also emphasized that Anmol and I were quite young at the time, around 20 to 23 years old, with little to no experience in casting for a major commercial film, which perhaps led to us misinterpreting Mr. Mal-

hotra's requirements for the project."

"I have not accused or suggested any wrongdoing on the part of Dharma Productions. In fact, I have deep respect for Dharma Productions and Karan Johar. I never mentioned Karan Johar in relation to our dismissal, yet some reports falsely claim that he was the one who fired us. The decision was made by Mr. Malhotra's team, and I accepted our mistakes. I shared this story to encourage young people that even if you fail or hit a roadblock, you can always bounce back, as we did. We went on to work on several projects with Dharma, starting with *Ok Jaanu*, *Student of the Year 2*, *Kalank* and recent releases like *Kill* and *Gyarah Gyarah*. Additionally, Dharma even cast me as an actor in *Ajeb Daastaans*. Dharma has always been very good to

me and to my company, Casting Bay. It is a relationship we value and nurture. PS: I am not putting this out for the hamper. Abhishek Banerjee."

Abhishek recently reprised his character of Jana in Rajkumar Rao-Shradha Kapoor's horror-comedy *Stree 2*. The character had also appeared in Varun Dhawan-Kriti Sanon starrer *Bhediya* and Sharvari-Abhay Verma starrer *Munja*. The actor is a part of the Maddock Supernatural Universe and has featured in all the spin-off sequels. Abhishek also portrayed the antagonist in John Abraham-Sharvari's action-thriller *Vedaa*. The Nikhil Advani directorial also starred Tamannaah Bhatia and the film also featured Ashish Vidyarthi, Kumud Mishra and others in crucial roles. *Stree 2* and *Vedaa* clashed at the box office on August 15.

Sports

Luka Modric in Croatia's Nations League squad

Croatia, Aug 19



Luka Modric has been named in Croatia's 24-man squad for the opening matches of their Uefa Nations League campaign.

Real Madrid captain Modric, who turns 39 in September, has made 178 appearances for his country, having made his debut at the age of 20 in 2006.

Following Croatia's exit at the group stage of Euro 2024 this summer, there was uncertainty over whether Modric would continue to play for the national side.

But after team-mates Domagoj Vida and Marcelo Brozovic both announced their retirements from international football, head coach Zlatko Dalic said he was "happy that our captain remains on board."

"He is our great strength, both on and off the field," he added.

Modric - who signed a one-year contract extension with Spanish champions Real Madrid in July - started all three of Croatia's matches at the Euros.

They are in League A of the Nations League and visit Portugal on 5 September, before hosting Poland three days later.

Rabha Hasong taekwondo tourney concludes



Boko, Aug 19

A total of 450 players from 17 clubs from the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council took part in the 7th Annual Taekwondo Championship which was held from August 16 to 18 at Boko in Kamrup, Assam.

The competition had two categories, poomsae and kyorugi, where the kyorugi category was held in five categories - below 5 and 8 years, sub-junior, cadet, junior and senior category.

Boko Dragon academy secured the Best team trophy while Davidson Rabha from the same academy won the Best player trophy, said Bipin Rabha, general secretary of the RHAC Taekwondo Committee.

Sumit Rabha, executive member of RHAC and the president of the organising committee said that the tournament aims to achieve a comprehensive development of the area and to develop enthusiasm for sports in the children living in the RHAC area.

Sumit Antil aims for Paralympic Gold, world record



New Delhi, Aug 19

Tokyo Paralympics gold-medallist Indian javelin thrower Sumit Antil wants to improve upon his world record in his bid to defend his title in the Men's F64 category at the Paris Games.

Sumit, along with Bhagyashree Jadhav (shot put, F34 category), will be India's flag-bearer at the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games to be held from August 28 to September 8, 2024.

He had set a world record thrice in the Tokyo Paralympic Games and won gold with a best throw of 68.55 metres.

He bettered it with a world record throw of 70.83 metres at the 2023 Para World Championships and improved it further at the Hangzhou Para Asian Games (2023) to win gold with an effort of 73.29

metres. F64 category is for athletes with problems in the lower limb(s), those competing with prosthesis or those affected by leg length difference.

"My long-term goal is to achieve a distance of 80m but at the Paris Paralympics, I will try to win gold with an effort of 75m," the 26-year-old told PTI-Bhasha in an exclusive interview.

The athlete, who lost one of his limbs in a road accident in 2015, won the gold medal at the Para World Championship in May this year with an effort of 69.50 metres.

"My throws during practice have been quite consistent. I have worked hard on increasing my strength without changing the technique. I will try to improve my previous record," said Sumit.

Asked about the pressure of being the defending champi-

on and also India's flag-bearer, he said, "There is no pressure right now but things will be known after reaching Paris. Once you reach the Games Village or the competition venue, things become a little different. I will try to give my best without taking pressure."

"I want to enjoy this moment. For the first time, such a large and strong contingent from India is going to the Paralympics and I feel proud to be the flag-bearer," he added.

The Indian contingent comprises 84 athletes across 12 disciplines.

"Being the flag-bearer is a different kind of emotion. This is the first time I will be a part of the opening ceremony at the Paralympics.

"At the time of the Tokyo Paralympics, there were a lot of restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I had

reached late as per the schedule of my competition." Sumit said that after the Tokyo Paralympics, he focused more on practicing instead of participating in different competitions.

"I have participated in very limited competitions. I have spent more time in practice. Competitions keep going on but my aim is to get a medal for India in the Paralympics and my entire focus has been on this for the last three years," he said.

"I prefer to practice in India rather than going abroad. I went to Finland in 2018 but I did not feel much improvement there. I practice at the Sports Authority of India's Sonapat Centre, which is equipped with a track for javelin throw and has world-class facilities."

Asked if he too was a little disappointed with Neeraj Chopra's silver medal in the Olympics, he said, "Neeraj bhai performed very well. It would be wrong to say that we were heartbroken by his effort. A lot depends on the day at this level of competition. It wasn't our day in Tokyo. It was Arshad Nadeem's (gold-medal winner) day in Paris."

"I am very happy with Neeraj's performance. It is difficult to deliver your season's best under pressure on a stage like the Olympics. I think once he crosses the 90m mark, we will have a lot of gold medals."

Sumit said that he has been a part of Target Olympics Podium Scheme (TOPS) since 2019 and he is getting all kinds of help from the government.

"I have been a part of TOPS since 2019 and have been getting prosthetic legs from abroad. Along with my prosthetics, TOPS provides me with everything I need for my game," he concluded.

Cummins: We'll use Green, Marsh More vs. India



Melbourne, Aug 19

Australia Test captain Pat Cummins expects greater workload with the ball for all-rounders Cameron Green and Mitchell Marsh against India in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy this summer.

Cummins wants both the all-rounders to share the workload with the team's frontline pace attack in the gruelling five-Test series starting next November.

"It's been huge (having the all-rounders). In some ways we haven't had to use them as much as we thought we would. Which is a great thing. The last couple of summers have been pretty light (with) quick Test matches," Cummins said at the launch of Play Cricket week.

"I suspect this summer might be a bit different at time. We'll be drawing on Cam Green and Mitch Marsh a bit more."

"Even someone like Cam basically started in Shield cricket as a bowler but hasn't had to bowl heaps in Test matches. Now he is a few years older, I think we will be leaning on him a bit more," he added.

The 25-year-old Green has bagged 35 wickets at 35.31 in 28 Tests so far in his career.

"The first point is they (Green and Marsh) both absolutely make the top six on their batting alone which is a luxury," Cummins said.

"We're really lucky that Nathan Lyon bowls plenty of overs, so you don't necessarily have to have an all-rounder, but it makes a big difference to have that fifth bowling option."

"And with someone like Cam and Mitch we have six bowling options. It's a really nice thing to have. Top six should always make the team on their batting."

Cummins' bowling colleagues have been vocal about how having a bowling captain has benefited the team in managing the workload.

"It's nice of them to say that, they'd never say it to my face," Cummins said.

"When I'm at the top of their mark asking them to do something, they know I'm also doing it down the other end and wouldn't ask for something I can't do myself. Maybe there's a bit of built-up trust over the last decade or so."

Megan Jones ruled out of internationals and WXV

England, Aug 19

Megan Jones has been ruled out of England's September internationals and the WXV tournament after sustaining a "significant ankle injury" which requires surgery.

The 27-year-old centre represented Team GB at this summer's Paris Olympics in the women's rugby sevens, where they finished seventh.

England are set to play France on 7 September at Kingsholm Stadium and New Zealand at Twickenham a week later, before heading to Canada to start their WXV campaign against the USA on 29 September.

Head coach John Mitchell said it was "upsetting" for his side to lose a player of Jones' "personality, capability and leadership."

He added: "We wish Meg well for her recovery and look forward to having her back in the squad ahead of next year's Six Nations."

World Rugby launched the WXV in 2023, which this year runs from 27 September to 13 October, with the three-tier competition aiming to offer consistent annual fixtures for sides outside World Cup years.

England are in division one along with home nation Canada, France, Ireland, New Zealand and the United States.

Alyssa Healy struggles to imagine T20 WC in Bangladesh

Sydney, Aug 19

Australia skipper Alyssa Healy has said it might not be right to go ahead with the women's T20 World Cup in Bangladesh in October as it would put a lot of pressure on the country which is still recovering from the large-scale violence and protests that left hundreds dead.

The country's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India with Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus being made the chief of the interim government.

The women's T20 World Cup is scheduled in Bangladesh from October 3-19 with 10 teams, including defending champions Australia, competing in the event.

"I'd find it hard to fathom playing there at the moment, as a human being, I feel like it might be the wrong thing

to do," Healy was quoted as saying by AAP on Cricket Australia.

"(That would be) taking resources away from a country that is really struggling. They're needing everyone they can possibly get in there helping people that are dying."

Healy, however, said that the final call rests with the International Cricket Council, which is expected to make a decision this week.

"There's obviously bigger factors at play than putting a cricket tournament on in Bangladesh at the moment ... but I'll leave it to the ICC to work out," she added.

Australia recently played a white-ball series in Bangladesh - all the six matches -- three ODIs and an equal number of T20s -- being played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka.

It was Australia's first visit

to the country since the 2014 T20 World Cup, and was pivotal to their preparations for the T20 World Cup in Bangladesh.

However, Healy was confident that even if the tournament is shifted elsewhere, the entire exercise won't go waste. Australia had won all six matches held in March-April.

"Going there and getting used to those conditions and slow turning wickets has probably put us in a good place," Healy said.

"It's more about what our team looks like, and what people are working on individually headed into a World Cup on the subcontinent."

"Whether it is in Bangladesh, or it's not in Bangladesh, I don't think affects us greatly with the make-up of what we've got. We're well prepared for whatever is thrown at us."

Koepka edges Rahm in LIV Golf Greenbrier play-off



West Virginia, Aug 19

LIV Golf Greenbrier Invitational final leaderboard - 19 B Koepka (US) J Rahm (SPA); -18 J Korak (US); -17 M Leishman (AUS) R Bland (ENG); -15 L Herbert (AUS) Selected others: -14 S Garcia (SPA); -11 B DeChambeau (US); -3 L Westwood (ENG)

Brooks Koepka beat Jon Rahm in a play-off at the Greenbrier Invitational to win his fifth LIV Golf title and his second of the year.

Koepka, 34, shot a seven-under-par 63 in his final round to tie level with Rahm, who shot 65, on 19-under at the Old White course in West Virginia.

In the play-off on the 18th, Rahm's tee shot left him in a bunker at the back edge and his second shot got him to within 20 ft of the hole.

Koepka made par with ease, piling the pressure on

Rahm to match his opponent to stay in the contest.

The Spaniard went agonisingly close but missed his putt for par to hand victory to Koepka.

The win marked Koepka's fifth LIV Golf title of his career, following wins in Jeddah in 2022 and 2023, Orlando in 2023 and Singapore earlier this year.

"This is probably my favourite one," Koepka said.

"It's always good when you have to battle good players."

Rahm beat Koepka to the 2023 Masters to win his second major and the American said it was nice to get revenge on the 29-year-old.

"Jon is a hell of a player. For whatever reason, he has always gotten the better of me a little bit as of late. It feels nice just to get one."

Smash, captained by Koepka, won the team title by three shots.

Jeev tied-12th in Zambia Legends

Lusaka, Aug 19



Jeev Milkha Singh started the final round with three birdies in the first four holes and finished tied 12th at the Zambia Legends Championship.

In between his superb start and the great finish, Jeev had one birdie, an eagle two and three bogeys, as he gets ready for the HSBC Legends Indian Championship which will be hosted by Jeev himself.

South Africa's Keith Horne secured his maiden Legends Tour title in stunning style with some great front-running at Bonanza Golf Club, near Lusaka.

The nine-time Sunshine Tour champion opened the day with a three-shot lead and got off to a great start with three birdies in the first four holes.

Eventual runner-up Adilson da Silva stayed on his tail as he made it to the turn in five-under-par for the day, but he never got closer than within two shots of the leader.

Horne had eight birdies, four on each side of the turn. After 11 birdies in the second round against two bogeys in his 9-under, Horne was dominant during the week.

Tyson 'ready' to fight Paul



Los Angeles, Aug 19

Mike Tyson says he is "prepared" for his bout with Jake Paul on 15 November after the fight's original date had to be postponed.

The pair were due to fight on 20 July but Tyson had an ulcer flare-up that forced the match with the YouTuber to be rescheduled.

The fight, which will be held at the 80,000 capacity AT&T stadium in Texas, is a professional fight with a string of conditions.

Tyson, 58, has not fought professionally since 2005 but says he is ready to knock Paul out.

"I had a small adversity. I got sick, but I feel good. I'm just ready," Tyson said at a joint news conference on Sunday.

"He [Paul] may have been

in the ring with people who have the same intentions, but the actuality, no."

"As soon as I catch this guy it's going to be totally over, he is going to run. He is going to run like a thief."

Though Tyson fought in an exhibition against fellow veteran Roy Jones Jr in 2020, Paul is 31 years his junior.

Asked what his motivation was, Tyson said: "Because I can. Who else can do it but me? We have a YouTuber fighting the greatest fighter ever to live."

Paul, 27, has a 10-1 record in his career.

"I love Mike and I respect him but we are not friends any more until 15 November," Paul said.

The fight will consist of eight, two-minute rounds and both fighters will wear 14oz gloves, rather than 10z gloves.

Sinner tops Zverev for Cincinnati Open final spot

Cincinnati, Aug 19

World number one Jannik Sinner overcame Alexander Zverev in a three-set thriller to reach the final of the Cincinnati Open.

It took top seed Sinner three hours and seven minutes to seal a 7-6 (11-9) 5-7 7-6 (7-4) semi-final victory.

The 23-year-old Italian had lost all four of his previous matches against German Zverev but battled through a hip problem to advance to the final.

Sinner will face American Frances Tiafoe on Monday at about 23:00 BST for the chance to win his fifth ATP tour title this season.

Tiafoe, 26, defeated 15th seed Holger Rune of Denmark 4-6 6-1 7-6 (7-4) in the other semi-final.

Following his grueling game with 27-year-old Zverev - which was interrupted by rain - Sinner said he still has work to do in terms of his fitness.

"The physical aspect, of

course, I have to improve, because if I want to win Grand Slams or a bigger title I have to be, for sure, more in shape," he said.

"But I just tried to stay there mentally, which I'm very proud of - and let's see what's coming [on Monday]."

Sinner is aiming to win his second major championship this year when the US Open starts on 26 August in New York.

After losing the opening set on a tie-break, Zverev took the second set before going 5-4 up in the third.

However, Sinner rallied to win three of the next four games to force another tie-break where he broke world number four Zverev's serve twice on his way to victory.

"Sometimes you have to play a bit with the gut feeling. And I think this today was my strength," Sinner said.

"It was a good match, I think for both of us. He served very, very well so I can be very proud."

Matt Richardson joins GB cycling team

Australia, Aug 19

Track cyclist Matt Richardson, who won three medals for Australia at the Paris Olympics, has switched nationality and will now represent Great Britain.

The 25-year-old was born in Kent but moved to Western Australia at the age of nine, and maintained dual citizenship during his 16 years living there.

He will be part of GB's sprint squad, which is coached by seven-time Olympic gold medallist Sir Jason Kenny.

Writing on Instagram, external after his application with cycling's governing body the Union Cycliste Internationale was successful, Richardson said it had been a "difficult decision" to make and not one he "took lightly".

The two-time Commonwealth Games champion wrote: "It was a personal choice, made after careful consideration of my career and future."

"It's not something I decided on quickly or easily. I deeply respect Australia and the AusCycling Team and it will always be a part of who I am."

"But this decision is about following my passion and pushing myself to new heights."

Jesse Korf, AusCycling executive general manager of performance, said the move had come as a "surprise" and it was "disappointing that Richardson would be leaving a program that had delivered great personal and national success".

Korf added: "We also understand that the desire to compete for a country one was born in can bring forth strong emotions."

Richardson won silver in the individual sprint and keirin at Paris 2024, plus a bronze medal in the team sprint.

Athlete responsible to maintain weight, consequence of failed 2nd day weigh-in draconian: CAS

New Delhi, Aug 19

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) while rejecting wrestler Vinesh Phogat's appeal against her disqualification reasoned that it is an athlete's responsibility to stay within the weight-limit and no relief can be provided on that count but termed as "draconian" the consequence of failing the weigh-in on the second day.

Vinesh was disqualified from the Paris Olympics after failing to make weight on the second day of the competition. Scheduled to compete in the gold medal bout in the women's 50kg category, Vinesh was found overweight by 100g on August 8.

The UWW rules state that a wrestler has to clear the weigh-in on both days of the competition. While UWW allows a 2kg weight tolerance in many international competitions such as Ranking Series event, there is no such buffer at the Olympics.

Vinesh had become the first Indian woman wrestler to qualify for the Olympic final and her disqualification created a flutter in the wrestling world, especially after her stunning victory over the legendary Yui Susaki, who had not lost a single bout in her international career before bumping into Vinesh.

".....the Sole Arbitrator has concluded that the Applicant, of her own free will, entered into the 50 kg wrestling category and well knew that this required her to maintain a weight for competition below 50 kg."

"Article 7 of the Rules provides, relevantly, that each contestant is deemed to be taking part of her own free will and is responsible for herself and is entitled to compete in only one weight category, the one corresponding to her weight at the time of the official weigh-in," the detailed CAS order, which was published on Monday, stated.