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Om Birla is Lok Sabha Speaker for 2nd term

New Delhi

BJP's Kota MP Om Birla has been re-elected as the Lok Sabha Speaker by a voice vote in a rare election forced by the opposition after the NDA refused to offer INDIA bloc the deputy speaker's position.

Role & powers of Speaker

As Speaker, Birla will preside over the Lower House proceedings and will play a key role in the smooth functioning of the House. Here are the core responsibilities and powers of a Lok Sabha Speaker:

Conducting the House:

The Speaker must ensure that the House operates according to parliamentary traditions and democracy. He or she presides over the House meetings, maintains discipline and decorum among members. This includes deciding who speaks, the order of proceedings, and making sure the rules of the House are followed. The Speaker also safeguards the rights and privileges of MPs.

Acting against MPs: In serious cases, the Speaker can remove an MP from their position.

Questions and records: The Speaker decides the admissibility of a question raised by a member and how the proceedings of the House are published. The Speaker has the power to expunge, in full or in part, remarks that he or she may consider unparliamentary. Critical remarks against the ruling party may not be published



if the Speaker decides to expunge them.

Voice votes: When the treasury benches seem thin in the House, the Speaker can disregard a request for division and push a Bill through by voice vote. The Speaker also certifies Money Bills and can decide on other bills related to finance.

Power to adjourn: If there are not enough MPs present, the Speaker can adjourn or suspend the meeting until the quorum is met.

Disqualification of members: The Tenth Schedule or the anti-defection law gives the Speaker of the House the power to disqualify legislators who 'defect' from a party. Defections can alter numbers in the House and cause a government to fall.

Can a Speaker be removed?

The Speaker does not enjoy immunity in the House and his/her term can be cut short by a resolution passed by a majority of Lok Sabha members.

A motion of no-confidence can be moved against the Speaker with a notice of 14 days as per Article 94 of the Constitution.

The reasons for removal could be resignation from the House, disqualification from Parliament or loss of faith by MPs.

How is a Speaker elected?

According to the Constitution, the Speaker is elected by a simple majority in the House. A Speaker's term ends with the dissolution of the House.

Any member of the House can be elected as Speaker. There are no specific qualifications for becoming Speaker. The salary of the Speaker is drawn from the Consolidated Fund of India while that of other MPs flow from a statute voted on by the House.

In the history of Lok Sabha, there have been only four instances when a Speaker has not been elected unopposed. The

fourth instance happened on Wednesday when the opposition fielded K Suresh as its candidate for the post. However, Birla won easily by a voice vote.

'Jiska speaker, uski sarkar'

This time, the BJP does not have a majority of its own in the Lok Sabha. This was also the situation in 1999 when Atal Bihar Vajpayee was the Prime Minister. The Speaker's role became crucial. A single vote cast by Odisha Congress leader Giridhar Gamang led to the fall of the government.

Lok Sabha Speaker GMC Balayogi of the TDP allowed Gamang to vote, despite him being sworn-in as the Chief Minister of Orissa (now Odisha) a few days ago. The final votes on the confidence motion stood at 269 for the NDA and 270 against it. A single vote led to the Vajpayee government's dismissal.

Inside...

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Streets, footpaths cleared for Prime Minister and VVIPs, why not for everyone: Bombay High Court

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Monday said when streets and footpaths are cleared for the Prime Minister and other VVIPs for one day, why can't it be done on a daily basis for everyone else too.

Having a clear footpath and a safe place to walk was every person's fundamental right and the state authorities were obligated to provide the same, a division bench of Justices MS Sonak and Kamal Khata.

The state cannot perpetually just wonder what can be done to work out the problem of unauthorised hawkers encroaching upon footpaths in the city and has to now do something drastically, the bench said.

The high court last year took suo motu (on its own) cognisance of the issue of

illegal and unauthorised hawkers and vendors in the city. On Monday, the bench said while it knows the problem is large, the state and other authorities, including the civic body, cannot just leave it at that



and called for some drastic action.

"When the prime minister or some VVIPs come, the streets and footpaths are immediately cleared...and it stays so till they are here. How is it done then? Why can't it be done for everyone else? Citizens are ratepayers... they need to have a clear footpath and safe place to

walk," the court said.

"Footpath and a safe place to walk is a fundamental right. We tell our children to walk on footpaths but if there is no footpath left to walk on, what do we tell our children?" the court asked.

For years together, the authorities have been saying they are working on the issue, it said.

"The state has to do something drastically.

It cannot be that the authorities are perpetually just wondering what to do and working on it. There seems to be a lack of will, because where there is a will there is always a way," the high court said.

Senior counsel SU Kamdar, appearing for Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), said periodic action is taken

against such vendors and hawkers but they keep coming back.

He said BMC was also considering the option of underground markets.

The court then remarked in jest that the corporation was literally trying to bury the problem underground.

The bench noted the fine imposed by civic bodies on these vendors/hawkers was irrelevant as they have higher sales per day. "Your fine is pittance to them. They will pay and leave," the high court said.

The court suggested BMC to develop a database identifying all such hawkers so that they do not breach orders and come back with their stalls.

"Let there be a combing operation. Start with one street...the biggest trouble is identification. They keep coming back because they are not identifiable," it said.

The court posted the matter for further hearing on July 22

Police find Maharashtra connection in alleged NEET irregularities; Zilla Parishad schoolteacher held

Latur

The Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has arrested a Zilla Parishad school teacher from Latur in Maharashtra and registered a case against four persons after it emerged that a racket was being operated to help NEET students willing to pay money to crack the exam, police said on Monday.

The four persons against whom a case was registered by the Nanded ATS unit include two teachers from Latur, a man from Nanded, and a resident of Delhi.

An FIR has been registered against Sanjay Tukaram Jadhav and Jalil Khan Umar Khan Pathan, both teachers from Latur, Iranna Mashnaji Kongalway from Nanded and one Gangadhar, a resident of Delhi under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024.

Pathan was arrested on Sunday late at night, while the other three accused are at large, police said.

"ATS officials had received a tip-off that some suspects were running an illegal racket to help NEET students pass the exam in exchange for money," stated a release issued by the office of the Latur district superintendent of police.

Subsequently, the ATS detained Jadhav and Pathan from Latur on Saturday night for questioning.

According to police, suspicious information regarding the NEET 2024 exam was found in the mobile phone of one of the detained persons.

"The arrested accused is identified as Jaleel Khan Umar Khan Pathan, while

others are absconding and a search is on to trace them," police stated.

Police said Jadhav and Pathan, the headmaster of a ZP school in Latur district, run a private coaching centre.

The ATS action came after the Centre handed over the probe into the alleged irregularities in the medical entrance exam- NEET-UG- to the CBI, giving in to demands of students protesting across the country for an investigation into the matter.

The CBI subsequently filed an FIR into the alleged irregularities in the exam conducted on May 5.

Meanwhile, a CBI team reached Godhra city in Gujarat's Panchmahal district to investigate the case, officials said.

A case was registered by the Godhra police on May 8 under various Indian Penal Code sections, including criminal conspiracy, cheating and criminal breach of trust, for allegedly trying to help 27 candidates clear the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) for a sum of Rs 10 lakh each.

The Gujarat police have so far arrested five persons, including the principal and teacher of a school in Godhra, in connection with the alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG exam.

The racket was unearthed at a Godhra school designated as a centre for the NEET-UG, held on May 5 for entrance to medical colleges, after the district collector received a tip-off that some persons were involved in malpractice, as per the FIR registered on May 9.

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Mumbai hoarding collapse: IPS officer who approved hoarding suspended

Mumbai

Over a month after 17 people died in the hoarding collapse in Ghatkopar on May 13, the Maharashtra government on Tuesday suspended senior IPS officer Quaiser Khalid, who was the Commissioner of Government Railway Police (GRP) at the time when approvals were given for the massive hoarding that crashed.

The state Home department initiated the disciplinary action against Khalid for alleged 'administrative lapses', 'irregularities' and 'misuse of power' by allowing the massive hoarding without approval from the office of the Director General of Police (DGP). Khalid was currently posted as Additional

Railways, Mumbai, in respect of administrative lapses and irregularities in sanctioning the hoarding, on his own, without approval of the DGP office and in respect of the misuse of powers by allowing massive hoarding size of 120×140 sq ft deviating from the approved norms as pointed out in the report of Director General of Police, Maharashtra."

"Now therefore, in exercise of power conferred under the sub-rule (1) of Rule 3 of the All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969, the Government of Maharashtra hereby place the said Md. Quaiser Khalid... under suspension with immediate effect from the date of this order, until further orders," it further read.

Amid gusty winds and rainfall



Director General of Protection of Civil Rights (PCR).

The suspension order comes days after some media on June 22 reported that Mumbai police investigators are probing the role of one Arshad Khan, a business associate of Khalid's wife Sumanna Quaiser Khalid. Khan is suspected to have indirectly received payments from Ego Media Pvt Ltd, the firm that owned the massive hoarding that was approved by Khalid.

The order issued by the Home department said the Maharashtra government decided to initiate disciplinary proceedings against Khalid after the report submitted by the DGP highlighted gross irregularities and administrative lapses on his part while sanctioning the hoarding.

The order reads, "The Maharashtra government has decided to initiate disciplinary proceedings against Md. Quaiser Khalid, IPS (MH: 1997), Additional Director General of PCR, Maharashtra, the then CP,

on May 13, the hoarding collapsed on a petrol pump in Ghatkopar, which left 17 people dead and over 70 wounded. Following the incident, a case was registered at Pant Nagar police station and a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Mumbai crime branch was appointed to probe the matter.

During the course of investigation, the police arrested Bhavesh Bhinde, director of Ego Media Pvt Ltd, its former staffers Janhavi Marathe and Sagar Patil for their alleged involvement in erecting the structure. Structural engineer Manoj Sanghu, who provided the stability certificate, allegedly without detailed inspection, was also arrested.

The Director General of Railway Police had then conducted an internal inquiry and submitted a report to the Maharashtra DGP.

The report was later handed over to the state government following which a decision to initiate disciplinary proceedings and suspend Khalid was taken.

Nationalised banks asking CIBIL scores for farm loans will invite FIRs: Fadnavis

Mumbai

The Maharashtra government on Tuesday warned nationalised banks of lodging FIRs against them if they make CIBIL score mandatory for issuance of crop loans to farmers for kharif season.

The decision was taken at a state-level bankers' meet held in Mumbai on Tuesday which was attended by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar along with representatives of RBI, NABARD.

The purpose of the meet was to discuss the problems faced by farmers over crop loans in kharif season.

Speaking at the meet, CM Shinde said, "The banks should adopt flexibility to accommodate the concerns of farmers. They should come forward to address their problems and provide crop loans."

The farmers, he said, have to confront multiple challenges due to climate challenges.

Addressing mediapersons after the meeting, Fadnavis said, "The Reserve Bank of India representatives were also called for the meeting. It was categorically conveyed to them that national banks should not make CIBIL scores of farmers as precondition to issue crop loan. If they do, it will invite FIR against them."

A larger number of farmers despite being eligible are denied crop loans as national banks often make CIBIL scores mandatory for the same.

Fadnavis, who holds Home portfolio, said that the state

government has to initiate strict



measures to safeguard the farmers rights and interests. "CIBIL scores will not be necessary for crop loans. And if financial institutions insist on it, they will be subjected to FIR."

The RBI representative, during the meeting, assured that they have given instructions to all bank branches not to refer to CIBIL score for crop loan.

To which Fadnavis replied, "Such assurance is given in every meeting but on the ground branch officials ask for CIBIL score from farmers. They are denied crop loans... Therefore, I warn all banks of filing FIR if they are violating RBI guidelines."

Over the years it has been noticed that crop loan disbursement target of district cooperative banks is higher compared to nationalised and commercial banks. The low crop loan disbursement by national and commercial banks to farmers is attributed to strict conditions and documents which often result in farmers failing to access crop loan on time.

The kharif sowing has already

since the arrival of monsoon in mid-June. With good monsoon expected this season, kharif sowing, it is believed, would be optimum.

Agriculture minister Dhananjay Munde had said that the area under kharif sowing is likely to increase by 1.50 lakh hectares this season. Accordingly, the state government has made provisions for additional seeds and fertilizers.

The area under kharif in Maharashtra averages to 142 lakh hectares. Last kharif season the area under sowing declined 2.72 lakh hectares.

Fadnavis said, "With decline in DAP fertilizers across world, nano fertilizers should be promoted among farmers."

While dwelling on the hurdles faced by farmers in state, Fadnavis said, "There will be strict monitoring of crop insurance companies to ensure farmers are not deprived of assistance."

Murder accused moves Mumbai court against Ujjwal Nikam's reinstatement as special public prosecutor

Mumbai

A murder accused has approached a Mumbai sessions court against advocate Ujjwal Nikam's reinstatement as a special public prosecutor (SPP) and requested that he be kept away from the case "in the interest of justice and fundamental rights". Nikam had recently contested the Lok Sabha elections as a BJP candidate.

A day before his name was declared as the BJP candidate for the Mumbai North Central Lok

Sabha seat, Nikam had resigned from 29 pending cases, including the 26/11 Mumbai attack trial where he was appointed as SPP. After he lost the seat, the Maharashtra government earlier this month re-appointed Nikam as SPP in the said cases.

On Monday, Vijay Bhivajirao Palande, who was booked in 2012 for allegedly murdering Arunkumar Tikku, the father of an actor in Mumbai's Oshiwara, filed an application in the sessions court seeking an order "to keep

Nikam away" from the case. Palande claimed that Nikam's reappointment was against the law and public interest and sought cancellation of the same and a fresh appointment in the case.

Palande claimed that Nikam would act to further the BJP's agenda and alleged that he may go to any extent to get a false conviction in high-profile cases to bolster the party's image. This, Palande said, was against the fundamental rights of the accused and his expectation of fairness.

"Your smile never faded..." PM Modi hails LS Speaker Om Birla for guiding house in impartial manner

New Delhi

Addressing the Parliament minutes after NDA's Om Birla was elected as Speaker of Lok Sabha by voice vote, Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised Kota MP Om Birla for his exemplary performance during his first term (2019-2024).

The election also saw a moment of rare bonhomie between the treasury and Opposition benches as Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi walked up to Om Birla to congratulate him and also shook hands with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"It is the good fortune of the House that you are occupying this Chair for the second time. I congratulate you and the entire House," added PM Modi. Om Birla's work as parliamentarian should be inspiration for new Lok Sabha members, observed the Prime Minister.

"I want to congratulate you on behalf of the House. It is a huge responsibility

for you to sit on this post for the second time during the Amrit Kaal. With your experience, we hope that you will guide us for the next 5 years. 'Aapke chehre par yeh meethi meethi muskaan poore Sadan ko prasann rakhti hai'. Becoming the Speaker for the second time is a record in itself. Balram Jakhar got the opportunity to serve as the Speaker for the second term after competing 5 years and today you are doing the same...", said PM Modi recalling Birla's first stint as the Speaker.

"The works that didn't happen during 70 years of independence, were made possible by this House under your chairmanship. Several milestones come in the long journey of democracy. A few occasions are such when we receive the opportunity to establish milestones. I am very confident that the country will be proud of the achievements of the 17th Lok Sabha..." reiterated PM Modi.



"Kindly Be Impartial...": Opposition MPs' Appeal To Speaker Om Birla

New Delhi

The re-election of Om Birla to the Lok Sabha Speaker's post - a formality given the ruling BJP-led coalition always had the numbers - was followed by a flurry of congratulatory messages, and appeals to the Kota MP to run an impartial House - from opposition leaders, including the Congress' Rahul Gandhi.

The opposition MPs - who backed the Congress' Kodikunnil Suresh - struck several common notes, including urging Mr Birla, a three-time BJP MP from Rajasthan's Kota, to ensure impartiality in conduct of the House and to allow their members time to voice their concerns and criticisms.

The reference - made overtly by some - was to the shocking mass suspension of MPs last year.

Nearly two-third of the opposition was ejected by Mr Birla amid vociferous protests on several issues, including a security breach that month. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor - re-elected to the 18th Lok Sabha from Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram - called the suspensions a "betrayal of democracy".

Today, after a rare election

for the post of the Speaker - traditionally a unanimous pick to underscore bonhomie on conduct of the House - the Congress' Rahul Gandhi - was the first opposition leader to speak, and he immediately

efficiently - by silencing the voice of the opposition - is a non-democratic idea, and this election has shown the people expect the opposition to defend the Constitution," Mr Gandhi, now Leader of the Opposition,

The Congress leader was followed by Akhilesh Yadav, whose Samajwadi Party is a member of the INDIA bloc and the third-largest party in the Lok Sabha, thanks to a stunning show in Uttar Pradesh.

equal respect to every MP... we will stand by all your just decisions (but) expect it won't be just the opposition kept under check," Mr Yadav, who won the Kannauj seat, said.

The Trinamool's Sudip Bandyopadhyay and the DMK's TR Baalu made similar appeals.

Mr Bandyopadhyay - whose party demurred yesterday over the nomination of K Suresh - said the functioning of the House depended on maintaining parliamentary democratic practice.

"It is my firm belief, so far as parliamentary democratic practice is concerned, that the House belongs to the opposition. This attitude needs to be adopted by the ruling party," he said.

He referred to last year's mass suspension of MPs and called it "not desirable".

Mr Baalu, meanwhile, reminded the new Speaker that he does not, now, belong to any party.

"You might have been elected by my BJP friends (but) there can now be no politics between you and the powers. You have to treat the opposition and the ruling party the same. Kindly be impartial," he said.



took a jab at the new two-time Speaker.

"I am confident you will allow us to speak. The question is not how efficiently the House is run... it is how much of India's voice is being heard. So the idea you can run the House

said.

Mr Gandhi contested and won the Congress' Raebareli bastion in Uttar Pradesh and its stronghold of Wayanad in Kerala. He will surrender the latter and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will contest the bypoll.

"We expect the voice of the opposition will not be crushed... we expect there will be no more expulsions," Mr Yadav said, urging Om Birla to ensure equality in treatment of all MPs.

"We hope you will give

Not happy with Centre for excluding Bengal government from Teesta talks with Bangladesh: Mamata Banerjee to PM Modi



Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressing "strong reservation" over the Centre excluding the state government from discussions with Bangladesh regarding Teesta water sharing and the Farakka Treaty.

Banerjee also urged the PM to not hold any such discussion with the neighbouring country without involving the West Bengal government.

"I am writing this letter in context of the recent visit of Prime Minister of Bangladesh. It seems that water sharing issues relating to the Ganges and Teesta rivers may have been discussed during the meeting. Such unilateral deliberations and discussions

without consultation and the opinion of the state government is neither acceptable nor desirable," she said in a three-page letter to Modi.

Bengal has a very close relationship with Bangladesh - geographically, culturally and economically, she noted.

"I love and respect people of Bangladesh and always wish for their well-being... I convey my strong reservation that no discussion on sharing of Teesta water and the Farakka Treaty should be taken up with Bangladesh without the involvement of the state government. The interest of people in West Bengal is paramount, which should not be compromised at any cost," Banerjee said.

'No more support to BJP': Naveen Patnaik asks BJD Rajya Sabha MPs to emerge as strong opposition

New Delhi

BJD president Naveen Patnaik held a meeting with his party's nine Rajya Sabha MPs on Monday and asked them to emerge as a "vibrant and strong" opposition in the Upper House of Parliament during its upcoming session that would begin on June 27.

At the meeting, Patnaik also asked the lawmakers to raise issues concerning the state's interests in a befitting manner. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the party's leader in Rajya Sabha Sasmit Patra said, "The BJD MPs this time will not be confined to speaking on issues only, but are determined to agitate if the BJP-led government at the Centre ignores Odisha's interest."

Besides raising the demand for special status to Odisha, the BJD MPs will raise the issues of poor mobile connectivity and low density of bank branches in the state, he said. "Odisha's demand for revision of coal royalty has been ignored by the Centre for the last 10 years. This is causing great loss to the people of the state who are deprived of their rightful share," he added. Maintaining that the nine MPs in Rajya Sabha will act as a strong opposition, Patra



said Patnaik has given clear instructions to fight for the rights of the state's people in the Parliament.

When asked whether BJD would maintain its earlier stance of giving issue-based support to the BJP-led government, he said, "No more support to BJP, only opposition. We may go to any extent to protect the interests of Odisha." Later, Patra told PTI, "There is no question of supporting the BJP. The BJD president asked us to act as a strong and vibrant opposition if the NDA government continues to ignore the genuine demands of Odisha."

The BJD has nine MPs in the Rajya Sabha, while it failed to win any seat in the recently held Lok Sabha elections, for the

first time since its formation in 1997. The BJD also lost power in the state with the BJP bringing an end to its government of 24 years. The BJD not only supported the BJP in Parliament on different issues over the last few years but also helped Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw get elected to Rajya Sabha in 2019 and 2024.

At a meeting with senior BJD leaders on Sunday, Patnaik had said, "You all know that the BJP has got four seats more than the majority mark in the Odisha assembly. At the Centre also, it does not have a majority on its own. Hence, you should work hard, stay united, and strengthen the party."

"Hope Suspension Of MPs Will...": Akhilesh Yadav To New Lok Sabha Speaker

New Delhi

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday said that he hoped that actions like suspension of MPs would not be taken in the 18th Lok Sabha. Speaking shortly after NDA's Om Birla was re-elected as the Lok Sabha speaker, Mr Yadav said he believed that the BJP MP would be impartial towards the opposition and give its leaders equal opportunity.

"I congratulate you and extend you best wishes on behalf of all my colleagues. The

post that you are occupying has glorious traditions attached to it. We believe that this will continue without any discrimination and as Lok Sabha Speaker you will give equal opportunities and respect to every member and party," he said.

Impartiality is a great responsibility of this great position... We expect that no public representative's voice will be stifled, nor will an action like expulsion take place again," he said.

Mr Yadav was apparently

referring to the unprecedented suspension of more than 100 MPs during the Winter Session of Parliament last year.

"Your control is on the Opposition but it should be on the ruling side too. The House should function on your signals and not the other way round," he said.

"I hope that you would respect the Opposition as much as you respect the ruling dispensation and let them present their side," Mr Yadav said.



TN hooch tragedy: Toll touches 58; BJP slams Congress' 'stoic' silence; issue being 'politicised', says DMK

New Delhi

The death toll in the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy climbed to 58 on Monday as the political slugfest escalated over the issue with BJP training its guns against Congress, questioning its "stoic silence" over the deadly episode in Tamil Nadu where 'DMK-INDI Alliance' is in power.

The BJP's Tamil Nadu unit also petitioned the state Governor for a CBI probe into the matter and the Edappadi K Palaniswami-led AIADMK staged state-wide protests, demanding Chief Minister M K Stalin's explanation over the illicit arrack deaths.

The ruling DMK hit back at the AIADMK and BJP, accusing them of politicising the issue and falsely linking its leaders with the sale of illicit arrack.

Meanwhile, state Health Minister Ma Subramanian said 58 persons have died so far after consuming illicit liquor, nearly a week after the tragic incident at Kallakurichi's Karunapuram locality.

As many as 219 persons have been admitted to various hospitals so far. Out of 219, 58 persons including 3 women and a transgender have died, Subramanian told reporters in Chennai.

Stepping up the attack over the incident, BJP chief J P Nadda wrote to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, questioning the "stoic silence" of his party on the tragedy and said, "certain issues require us to rise above and beyond party lines and the welfare and safety of the SC, ST community is one such issue."

The tragedy was entirely a "man-made disaster", Nadda said in his letter to Kharge and alleged a nexus between the ruling "DMK-INDI alliance" dispensation and illicit liquor mafia as the reason behind the

"worst ever" such incident.

The ghastly images of burning funeral pyres from Karunapuram in the aftermath of Tamil Nadu's "worst ever spurious liquor consumption tragedy has shaken the conscience of the entire nation", he said.

"Kharge ji, as you know Karunapuram is largely populated by the Scheduled Castes, who face several challenges due to poverty and discrimination in Tamil Nadu. In light of this, I was shocked that when such a huge disaster has taken place, the

double speak of the Congress party and particularly of Rahul Gandhi and leaders of the INDI Alliance," the BJP chief said.

Suddenly, all the "sanctimonious preachings" of Rahul Gandhi about the Constitution and ensuring the welfare and rights of the SC/ OBC community have stopped, he charged.

Nadda alleged there seems to be "a penchant" for illegal liquor business and "sharab ghotala" (liquor scam) amongst various constituents of the

opposition's INDIA bloc and asked Kharge to "purge" his party's allies of such elements as these "proclivities" damage the nation and society.

The BJP's Tamil Nadu unit petitioned state Governor R N Ravi seeking a CBI probe into the matter and urged him to advise Chief Minister Stalin to drop Muthusamy

from the cabinet, holding him 'responsible' for the episode.

At Kallakurichi, AIADMK chief and Leader of Opposition (LoP) Palaniswami led a massive protest against the ruling DMK over the hooch tragedy. The party held protests across the state.

The former CM said the people's state of disorder and the turbulent scenes being witnessed in Karunapuram over the distilling and sale of spurious liquor, deserved a response from the chief minister.

"Stalin has an obligation to give an explanation for the spurious liquor tragedy and the time will soon come" for the chief

minister to reply, he said.

The DMK, in response to the attack from the AIADMK and BJP, alleged they were trying to 'politicise' the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy to get 'political mileage.'

Listing the steps taken by the state government over the hooch deaths, DMK organisation secretary, R S Bharathi said his party would go to the people with facts of the matter and the government's stringent action and slammed the motivated propaganda of the AIADMK and BJP.

Pointing to the government setting up a one-man commission led by a retired judge, he expressed confidence truth will emerge.

"Everyday new information is emerging," and there are information/reports that persons belonging to the BJP and AIADMK sold illicit arrack.

Answering a question, Bharathi said Youth Welfare Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin has already visited Kallakurichi and that the Chief Minister would make a visit soon. "Assembly is in session," he added.

He hit out at Palaniswami for 'enacting a drama' on the matter though the government was discussing it in the state Assembly.

On the demand for the CBI probe, he said the Central agency did not take swift action in several cases, including the 'gutkha case,' and the seizure of Rs 570 crore from containers in the run-up to the 2016 Assembly election.

However, the state police (CB-CID) has taken immediate action on the hooch tragedy, he asserted.

"The reason for them seeking the CBI probe is to cause diversion and to try to create some problem."

He wondered if CBI probed similar cases including in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.



Congress party led by you has maintained a stoic silence on this," the BJP president said.

Nadda asked Kharge to press upon its alliance partner DMK's government in Tamil Nadu to go for a CBI probe and ensure the "immediate removal" of State Prohibition and Excise Minister S Muthusamy from his post.

Today is the "time to truly walk the talk on 'nyay' (justice) and not reduce it to a catchy campaign slogan, deployed for the launch of a failed political dynast. Today, the people of Tamil Nadu and the entire SC community are witnessing the

"Dead" man turns up alive at his own funeral in Telangana

Hyderabad

In a case of mistaken identity of a dead person, a man turned up alive at his "funeral" in Vikarabad district of Telangana where his family and relatives were making arrangements for burial after being informed about his death.

The incident took place in Navandgi village in Basheerabad mandal of Vikarabad district, an official of Government Railway Police (GRP) said on Tuesday.

The man, P Yellappa, (40), a daily wage labourer was presumed dead after his family members were informed about his death when a body was found with a mobile phone on it.

The GRP personnel found the body of an unidentified person on the tracks at the Vikarabad railway station on the night of June 22, with the head crushed and beyond recognition, the official said.

One mobile phone was found near the body and police officials called up the family members from the phone, who informed that it belonged to Yellappa.

Yellappa's wife and his family members reached the government hospital in Vikarabad on June 23 and "identified" the body to be that of Yellappa, the official said.

After an autopsy, the family members were handed over the body and they took

it to their village.

As the family and relatives were making arrangements for the burial, some villagers informed them in the afternoon that they had seen Yellappa alive in Tandur town of the district.

In the meanwhile, Yellappa also returned home to the surprise of the family members.

Yellappa's family members immediately informed GRP about it, who reached the village and brought back the body and kept it in mortuary at government hospital in Vikarabad, the official said, adding the deceased man was not identified so far.

GRP also examined Yellappa and he told them that he had left home as part of work and someone stole his phone when he was sleeping at a bus stop in Tandur on June 20.

His family members told the police that Yellappa used to return home after a week or so after being away on work, the official said.

With regard to the unidentified man, police said he was hit by a train while crossing the tracks at the railway station on June 22 and a case was registered by GRP. Further probe was on.

Rahul Gandhi to be Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha



New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will occupy the post of Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a letter about the decision has been sent to Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab by the Congress party.

The decision on Rahul Gandhi's appointment as the Leader of Opposition was announced soon after a meeting of the floor leaders of the INDIA bloc at Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge's residence.

AICC general secretary, Organisation, KC Venugopal, told the media that CPP chairperson Sonia Gandhi had written to the Pro-tem Speaker about the decision of the Congress party.

"Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson (Sonia Gandhi) wrote to Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab, informing him of the decision to appoint Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha," Venugopal told reporters after the meeting.

He said the decision on other appointments would be taken later.

The floor leaders of opposition INDIA bloc had got together at the Congress chief's residence to discuss the Speaker's election and sources said they were informed about the "good news".

With this decision, Rahul Gandhi would now get the status of a cabinet minister's rank. This will also enhance his position in the protocol list and he could be a natural claimant to the post of prime minister of the opposition bloc.

Gandhi as the LoP of Lok Sabha would also be a member of important panels on key

appointments of Lokpal, CBI chief, Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners, besides the selection of Central Vigilance Commission, the Central Information Commission and the NHRC chief. The prime minister heads all such panels.

Kharge hailed the decision, saying in the 18th Lok Sabha, the House of the People shall truly reflect the aspirations of the last person standing, with Rahul Gandhi becoming their voice.

"As Congress president, I am confident that a leader who has traversed the length and breadth of the country from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, and from Manipur to Maharashtra shall raise the voice of the people — especially the marginalised and the poor," he said in a post on X.

"The Congress party is strongly committed to protecting Democracy and the Constitution, by upholding its eternal principles of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," Kharge said.

Several leaders lauded and thanked Rahul Gandhi for accepting the position and hoped he would remain the voice of people in Parliament by raising their issues.

"We are confident that as LOP, Rahul ji will be a bold voice for the common people of India and ensure that the NDA government is held firmly accountable at all times," Venugopal later said in a post on X.

Earlier, the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the highest decision-making body of the grand old party, had passed a resolution urging Rahul Gandhi to take up the position of Leader of Opposition, saying he is the "right person" to hold the post.

BJP hatching conspiracy with CBI officers to frame Kejriwal in fake case: AAP leader Sanjay Singh



New Delhi

AAP leader Sanjay Singh alleged on Tuesday that the BJP had hatched a conspiracy with CBI officers to frame Delhi Chief

Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a "fake case".

There was no immediate reaction to the allegation from the Central Bureau of Investigation

(CBI) or the BJP.

In a video message on X, Singh wondered how one would get justice when such things are happening.

"We have learnt from reliable sources that the BJP-led Centre has hatched a conspiracy with CBI officers at a time when there is a huge possibility of Kejriwal getting bail from the Supreme Court. They have planned to frame him in a fake case by the CBI and get him arrested.

"The entire country is watching the atrocities of the BJP. How will one get justice in such circumstances? People will stand up against this," the Rajya Sabha MP of the AAP said.

Owaisi hails conflict-hit West Asian country Palestine after taking oath, remarks expunged

New Delhi

AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi Tuesday hailed a conflict-hit West Asian country after taking oath as a member of the 18th Lok Sabha, triggering an uproar from the treasury benches that led to the Chair ordering that the remarks be expunged.

Owaisi, however, justified his slogans after he came out of the House and told reporters there was nothing wrong in him saying "Jai Bheem, Jai Meem, Jai Telangana, Jai Palestine".

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, meanwhile, said he has received complaints from some members about the mention of Palestine.

Asked about his remarks, Owaisi told reporters, "Other members are also saying different things... How is it wrong? Tell me the provision of the Constitution? You should also listen to what others said. I said what I had to. Read what Mahatma Gandhi had said about Palestine."

Asked why he mentioned Palestine, he said, "They are oppressed people." The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen leader, who has been elected from the Hyderabad seat for his fifth term, took oath in Urdu. He also recited a prayer before taking oath.

After taking oath, he hailed his state Telangana, Bhimrao Ambedkar, apart from raising the AIMIM's slogan for Muslim, along with the West Asian country.

His remarks led to uproar in the Lower House. Radha Mohan Singh, who was in the Chair at the time, assured the members that anything apart from the oath will not go on record.

The uproar continued for few minutes, after which the oath-taking resumed.

Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab returned to

the Chair soon, and said that only oath or affirmation is being recorded.

"I have said earlier please avoid invoking anything other than oath or affirmation. That is only to be recorded... That should be adhered to," Mahtab said.

Talking to reporters outside Parliament later, Rijiju said he will check the rules regarding remarks.

"We do not have any enmity with Palestine or any other country. The only issue is, while taking the oath, is it proper for any member to raise the slogan praising another country? We will have to check the rules. Some members have come to me and complained about raising of Palestine slogan at the end of oath," Rijiju said. Union Minister G Kishan Reddy, meanwhile, took a jibe at Owaisi, questioning if he could say "Bharat Mata Ki Jai".

He said Owaisi's remarks are "totally wrong and against the rules of Parliament". "Living in India, he cannot say 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai', but he can hail Palestine. Such people are doing anti-Constitutional work in the name

of Constitution, that should be understood," BJP leader Amit Malviya, meanwhile, objected to the prayer said by Owaisi. "Palestine apart, is invoking religious idioms kosher, while taking oath in secular India? Is Owaisi guilty of infusing religion and communalising a solemn occasion?" Malviya said in a post on X.

Malviya claimed Owaisi can be disqualified for this. "As per extant rules, Asaduddin Owaisi can be disqualified from his Lok Sabha membership, for demonstrating adherence to a foreign State, that is Palestine."

He posted the clip of the rule that said "any acknowledgement of allegiance or adherence to a foreign state" as one of the factors for disqualifying a member.



Emergency mindset still alive in Congress: PM Narendra Modi

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday flagged the “dark days of the 1975 Emergency” to attack the Congress as anti-Constitution and said the mindset that led to the suspension of all fundamental rights was still alive in the party.

Speaking on the 50th year of the imposition of Emergency by late PM Indira Gandhi, the PM said the day was all about paying homage to the men and women who resisted the Emergency.

“The #Dark Days Of Emergency remind us of how the Congress subverted basic freedoms and trampled over the Constitution which every Indian respects greatly,” Modi said, with the ruling BJP observing the day as a “black day” nationally and top ministers slamming the Congress for paying just “lip service to the Constitution and democracy”.

Leading the party’s event “Dark Days of Emergency”, BJP chief JP Nadda said the Congress insistence on deputy speaker’s post for the opposition as a condition to support the



NDA’s Speaker nominee was unprecedented.

“Has Speaker’s election ever be held on conditions? In the states where they rule — Telangana, Karnataka and West Bengal — the opposition parties have their own Speakers and Deputy Speakers and in the Lok Sabha, they are putting conditions. This is their hypocrisy and anti-Constitution approach,” said Nadda, adding the Congress removed elected governments 90 times and late Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency after the

Allahabad High Court declared her election invalid on June 12, 1975, banning her for six years from contesting.

Earlier, the PM also said, “Just to cling on to power, the then Congress government disregarded every democratic principle and turned the nation into a jail. Any person who disagreed with the Congress was tortured and harassed. Socially regressive policies were unleashed to target the weakest sections.”

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge slams PM Narendra Modi over remarks

New Delhi

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his comments on the Emergency and accused him of enforcing an “undeclared emergency” in the last 10 years.



The PM had on Tuesday said that those who imposed the Emergency have no right to profess love for the Constitution. “The mindset which led to the imposition of the Emergency is very much alive among the same party which imposed it. They hide their disdain for the Constitution through their tokenism but people of India have seen through their antics

and that is why they have rejected them time and again,” Modi posted from his account on X. “Those who imposed the Emergency have no right to profess their love for the Constitution. These are the same people who imposed Article 356 on innumerable occasions, got a Bill to destroy press freedom, destroyed federalism and violated every aspect of the Constitution,” he said.

On June 25, 1975, Indira Gandhi, a Congress stalwart, imposed the Emergency in the country. Kharge highlighted a series of actions that he termed as an “undeclared emergency”, including the alleged misuse of investigative agencies against opposition leaders, toppling elected governments, and passing significant laws without proper consensus.

From ‘jai samvidhan’ to ‘jai inquilab’, MPs raise slogans at swearing-in

New Delhi

All regional MP’s from Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, except Khadoor Sahib MP Amritpal Singh, were administered the oath at the Lok Sabha today.

As many as 534 members took oath on Monday and Tuesday with seven yet to complete the process. A total of 12 MPs from Punjab took oath in Punjabi. Two AAP MPs — Malvinder Singh Kang and Gurmeet Singh Meht Hayer — ended their oath with ‘jai inquilab’.

Independent MP from Faridkot Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, son of Beant Singh, one of the assassins of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, was also administered the oath. As he walked up to take the oath, Indira Gandhi’s grandson Rahul Gandhi was not in the House. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took oath as an MP from Raebareli with a copy of the



Constitution in his hand

Among others who took the oath were Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, GS Aujla, Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, Dr Amar Singh, Sher Singh Ghubaya,

Dr Dharamvir Gandhi (all of Congress); Harsimrat Kaur Badal (Akali Dal) and Dr Raj Kumar Chabbewal (AAP)

The name of MP-elect Amritpal Singh, detained under

the National Security Act was called out for oath taking after GS Aujla. The ‘Waris Punjab De’ outfit chief had written to the Punjab Government on June 11 seeking temporary release from

Assam jail to take oath as an MP.

Amritpal Singh is among the seven MPs who have not taken oath in the two-day session, the first of the 18th Lok Sabha. Among those who have not taken oath during the session are Pro tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab, Shashi Tharoor, Shatrughan Sinha, Afzal Ansari, Nurul Islam, Deepak Adhikari and Engineer Rashid.

Engineer Rashid, who was elected to the Lok Sabha from Baramulla is lodged in Delhi’s Tihar jail in a case registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Opposition members chanted “Manipur, Manipur” in chorus while Congress MPs from the violence-hit Northeastern state took their oaths.

AIMIM leader Owaisi hailed his state Telangana and expressed his solidarity with the conflict-hit Palestine.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange heads home to Australia after he pleaded guilty for publishing US secrets



Saipan

An aircraft carrying WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has left Saipan after he pleaded guilty on Wednesday to obtaining and publishing US military secrets.

The plea in the US Pacific commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands concluded a drawn-out legal saga that spanned continents.

The agreement with the US Justice Department required

Assange to admit guilt to a single felony count but permitted him to return to his home country of Australia without any time in an American prison.

The judge sentenced him to five years he'd already spent behind bars in the United Kingdom, fighting extradition to the United States.

His plane was heading to Australia.

Netanyahu says he won't agree to a deal that ends the war in Gaza, testing the latest truce proposal

Tel Aviv

The viability of a US-backed proposal to wind down the 8-month-long war in Gaza was cast into doubt on Monday after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would only be willing to agree to a "partial" cease-fire deal that would not end the war, comments that sparked an uproar from families of hostages held by Hamas.

In an interview broadcast, the Israeli leader said he was "prepared to make a partial deal — this is no secret — that will return to us some of the people," referring to the roughly 120 hostages still held in the Gaza Strip. "But we are committed to continuing the war after a pause, in order to complete the goal of eliminating Hamas. I'm not willing to give up on that." Netanyahu's comments did not deviate dramatically from what he has said previously about his terms for a deal. But they come at a sensitive time as Israel and Hamas appear to be moving further apart over the latest cease-fire proposal, and they could represent another setback for mediators trying to end the war.



Netanyahu's comments stood in sharp contrast to the outlines of the deal detailed late last month by US President Joe Biden, who framed the plan as an Israeli one and which some in Israel refer to as "Netanyahu's deal". His remarks could further strain Israel's ties to the US, its top ally, which launched a major diplomatic push for the latest cease-fire proposal.

The three-phased plan would bring about the release of the remaining hostages in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. But disputes and mistrust persist between Israel and Hamas over how the deal plays out.

Hamas has insisted it will not release the remaining hostages unless there's a permanent cease-fire and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. When Biden announced the latest proposal last month, he said it included both.

But Netanyahu says Israel is still committed to destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities, and ensuring it can never again carry out an October 7-style assault. A full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, where Hamas' top leadership and much of its forces are still intact, would almost certainly leave the group in control of the territory and able to rearm. In the interview, Netanyahu said that the current phase of fighting is ending, but that didn't mean the war was over.

During the initial six-week phase, the sides are supposed to negotiate an agreement on the second phase, which Biden said would include the release of all remaining living hostages, including male soldiers, and Israel's full withdrawal from Gaza. The temporary cease-fire

would become permanent.

Hamas appears concerned that Israel will resume the war once its most vulnerable hostages are returned. And even if it doesn't, Israel could make demands in that stage of negotiations that were not part of the initial deal and are unacceptable to Hamas — and then resume the war when Hamas refuses them.

Netanyahu's remarks reinforced that concern. After they were aired, Hamas said they represented "unmistakable confirmation of his rejection" of the US-supported deal, which also received the backing of the United Nations' Security Council.

In a statement late Sunday after Netanyahu's lengthy TV interview, the Palestinian militant group said his position was "in contrast" to what the US administration said that Israel had approved. The group said that its insistence that any deal should include a permanent cease-fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces out of the entire Gaza Strip "was an inevitable necessity to block Netanyahu's attempts of evasion, deception, and perpetuation of aggression and the war of extermination against our people".

Netanyahu shot back and in a statement from his office said Hamas opposed a deal. He said Israel would not withdraw from Gaza until all 120 hostages are returned.

Hamas welcomed the broad outline of the US plan but proposed what it said were "amendments". US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, during a visit to the region earlier this month, said some of Hamas' demands were "workable" and some were not, without elaborating.

Israeli tanks push deeper into Rafah, 11 Palestinians killed in fresh strikes

Cairo

Two Israeli air strikes targeting aid supplies killed at least 11 Palestinians in Gaza on Monday, medics said, as Israeli tanks pushed deeper into Rafah in the south and fought their way back into areas in the north they had already subdued months ago.

One strike at a food distribution centre in Gaza City, near the Shati historic refugee camp, killed three people. Another, near Bani Suhaila town in the southern Gaza Strip, killed at least eight, including guards who accompany aid trucks, the medics said.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which denies attacking aid efforts and accuses militants of causing harm to civilians by operating among them.

Overnight, an Israeli air strike at a medical clinic in Gaza City



killed the director of Gaza's Ambulance and Emergency Department, the enclave's health ministry said. Israel's military said that strike had killed a senior Hamas armed commander.

The health ministry said the killing of Hani al-Jaafarawi

brought the number of medical staff killed by Israeli fire since Oct 7 to 500.

In a statement, the Israeli military said the strike targeted Mohammad Salah, who it said was responsible for developing Hamas weaponry.

New House meets

THE BJP's numbers in the Lok Sabha may have come down, but a buoyant Opposition's expectations of any new rules of engagement have got an early reality check. The appointment of seven-time MP Bhartruhari Mahtab as the pro tem Speaker, overlooking the seniority of eight-time member K Suresh of the Congress, has already generated a tiff. In his remarks ahead of the start of the first Parliament session in his third term, Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed no hints of any concession despite the changed dynamics in the Lower House. June 25, he said, would mark five decades of the Emergency and 'the new generation will not forget how the Constitution was scrapped by the Indira Gandhi government'. As he walked up to take oath as an MP, Opposition leaders held copies of the Constitution. Rahul Gandhi said it was done to show that the



attack by PM Modi on the Constitution was not acceptable. The daggers are firmly drawn.

His government, the Prime Minister said, will work three times harder in its third term and deliver three-fold results. To the Opposition, his message was that people wanted substance and not

slogans, debate and not drama or disturbance. Given its numerical strength, the INDIA bloc missing out on the opportunity to make its presence felt would be a huge disappointment. An effective and impactful line of questioning demands that the MPs are well prepared and a lot of research has gone into their pointed queries. Substance is the key.

Taking a jibe, the Prime Minister said he hoped the Opposition would live up to the people's expectations. It's a fair observation. The eyes of the nation are fixed as much on the Opposition as on the government. It's a test for both sides.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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If you look at what you have in life, you'll always have more. If you look at what you don't have in life, you'll never have enough. -Oprah Winfrey

Attack on Crimea

US role under scrutiny as hostilities worsen

A Ukrainian attack on Crimea with US-supplied missiles has triggered a sharp response from Russia. Calling the strike 'absolutely barbaric', Moscow has blamed it on the US and warned that retaliation would follow. The Russian foreign ministry has claimed that the missiles were programmed by American specialists on the basis of intelligence data from US satellites and a nearby US reconnaissance drone. Four persons, including two children, were killed and over 150 were injured in the attack on the Crimean city of Sevastopol, where locals were enjoying a holiday.

The incident has triggered a fresh escalation of hostilities in the Russia-Ukraine war, which has entered its 29th month. The civilian casualties have put



Ukraine and the US on a sticky wicket, even as the Russian President has been accusing Washington of using Kyiv to undermine Moscow's security and sovereignty. The spectre of a direct confrontation between Russia and the US-led NATO alliance is looming large,

a worrisome throwback to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. This is bad news not only for eastern Europe but for the entire world in both geopolitical and economic terms, considering the adverse impact of supply chain disruptions over the past two years. One grave

provocation after another will only make the war drag on, with no end in sight.

A way out has to be found to bring both warring sides to the negotiating table. Unfortunately, the recent peace conference on Ukraine, held in Burgenstock, Switzerland, turned to be an exercise in futility. Some of the attendees, including India, did not sign the joint communique. Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis candidly admitted that most of the decisions taken at the conference could not be implemented without Russian participation. As suggested by New Delhi, there is a need for a 'sincere and practical engagement' between Moscow and Kyiv for a peaceful resolution to the protracted conflict.

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Exam mess

It's time to remove systemic flaws

LATE in the day, but the Centre has finally cracked the whip. The National Testing Agency (NTA) chief has been shown the door, the Central Bureau of Investigation has been tasked with the probe into the alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination and a committee constituted to suggest an

examination was postponed and the UGC-NET cancelled a day after it was conducted. A relook at the testing procedures and a fresh start have been the need of the hour for some time, and this aspect is finally being addressed. Comprehensive recommendations that leave no scope for error and suggest absolute integrity must be on the agenda.

The decisions come on the eve of the commencement of the Parliament session. A resurgent Opposition is expected to take up the issue strongly. The Centre would do itself and the entire student community a favour by being transparent about the NTA mess. The issue has transcended political one-upmanship. Fixing inadequacies and regaining trust in the institutions is of paramount importance.

A larger question demands an informed debate: When a staggering 24 lakh students compete for a mere one lakh medical seats, what's apparent is the lack of opportunity and a failure to match aspirations. The issues of education and unemployment are the core challenges that confront the nation. Walkouts, sloganeering or sidestepping these matters won't help. Politicians across party lines must sit together, talk and work toward finding solutions. Everyone is affected.

overhaul of the examination system. The last-minute cancellation of the NEET-PG examination, though, underscores an unchanged component of the entire process — insensitivity. What could have been announced a day or two in advance was done just hours before the candidates were supposed to take the test. The inconvenience, hassle and mental trauma such decisions result in were hardly factored in. Earlier, the CSIR-UGC-NET

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi ticked all the right boxes during his visit to the Kashmir valley — he not only chose the Sher-i-Kashmir International Convention Centre on the banks of the Dal Lake to lead the nation's International Yoga Day celebrations, but also reassured the people of Jammu and Kashmir that Assembly elections would be held soon and plans were afoot to restore J&K's statehood. In his first trip to the Valley after assuming office as the PM for the third time, Modi termed the recent terror attacks 'last-ditch efforts of the enemies of Kashmir's progress' and asserted that India would teach them a befitting lesson.

The PM's decision to tour Kashmir and showcase India's soft power through yoga — days after the attacks in Reasi and Kathua districts — was also aimed at boosting the morale of the security forces, which are fighting a pitched battle with terrorists in the Jammu region. It will be a big challenge

for the Union Government to conduct the polls by September 30, the deadline set by the Supreme Court, if the security situation does not improve over the next couple of months.

The PM has praised the voters of Kashmir, and rightly so, for turning out in large numbers in the recent Lok Sabha elections. The Centre must build on the renewed faith of the Kashmiri people in democracy to fast-track the process of holding the Assembly elections. At the same time, counter-

Delhi-Dhaka rapport

Neighbours boost ties under Chinese, US gaze



defence production.

Describing India as Bangladesh's major neighbour and a trusted friend, she recalled the contribution of the government and the people of India to her country's liberation in 1971. Beyond the historical legacy, Modi and Hasina have developed a good rapport over the past decade. This has helped bilateral relations go from strength to strength. In November last year, when Hasina was under pressure not only from the Bangladeshi Opposition but also the US ahead of the national elections, PM Modi joined her in virtually inaugurating three infrastructure projects. This had given a major fillip to Hasina's poll campaign.

A key takeaway from last week's interaction was India's decision to send a technical team to Bangladesh for a mega project to conserve the Teesta river. China, which spares no effort in wooing or coercing India's neighbours, has been eyeing the estimated \$1-billion project amid New Delhi's reservations. Hasina's bonhomie with India will be put to the test next month, when she is expected to travel to China. India, meanwhile, is in no mood to walk a tightrope. In a fresh assertion of its independent foreign policy, New Delhi is engaging closely with Dhaka even though the US has been critical of the Hasina-led Awami League government over alleged human rights violations and electoral irregularities.

IN her second trip to India within a fortnight, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina held wide-ranging talks with PM Narendra Modi, underlining the commitment of both nations to bolster their ties. This was the first bilateral state visit by a foreign leader after the formation of the new BJP-led NDA government. The agreements signed by New Delhi and Dhaka covered a lot of ground — maritime cooperation and blue economy, railway connectivity, space sector, digital partnership, healthcare and

chaos and uncertainty. The Modi 2.0 government repeatedly described the 2019 abrogation of Article 370 as its major achievement. However, the job

Kashmir outreach

PM Modi ticks the right boxes



terror operations need to be stepped up so that peace and progress are not disrupted in J&K and people can become part of the democratic exercise in an environment devoid of fear,

will remain half-done until sincere and sustained efforts are made by the Modi 3.0 dispensation to fulfil the aspirations of the people of J&K.

Drug crackdown

Police transfers a start, rethink entire strategy

THE transfer of nearly 10,000 Punjab Police personnel is being projected by the state government as a demonstration of its resolve to take on the drug mafia. Breaking the nexus between drug peddlers and the police is a key element of the crackdown, the Chief Minister has said. He has warned cops of immediate dismissal from service and confiscation of property if a link is established. This development comes amid a political storm triggered by a report in *The Tribune* on 14 deaths in 14 days due to drug overdose. The acknowledgement of complaints going unheeded and preferential treatment to the accused puts the police at the front and centre of a flawed strategy to deal with those involved in this nefarious trade. The role of



civil society has been no less disappointing. The difficulty in enlarging the scope of social resistance to drugs is symptomatic of a gap in policy planning and community involvement.

Course correction would

require a lot more than just the en masse shifting of mainly lower-ranked cops. An attitudinal shift among the rank and file calls for changes, first and foremost in their demanding working conditions. Unreasonably long duty hours and

perpetual staff shortage cannot be the foundational basis of a team that is otherwise ready or even motivated to lead a sustained fight against drugs. Stopping the flow of drugs, through drones from across the border or from ports in Gujarat and Maharashtra, needs constant vigil, and thus, enhanced state-Centre coordination.

A reductionist view confining the drug menace to being a Punjab-centric issue and notions of victimhood may be appealing for politicians to indulge in the customary blame game, but that would be a waste of effort. It's a national fight and should be proclaimed as such. The authorities must seek help from all quarters, heed experts' voices, explore new solutions — and change may come.

Child labour

Madhya Pradesh case a wake-up call

THE harrowing case of child labour that has come to light in Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh is a wake-up call. As many as 58 minors, including 19 girls, were found working in appalling conditions at a liquor factory by a team of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) last week. Many had sustained terrible chemical burns. Now, 39 of those rescued have gone missing. The NCPCR chairperson says the case involves not just child labour, but also human trafficking. Questions are being raised about gross negligence and the collusion of corrupt officials. The regulatory bodies are under the scanner. Stringent action against the factory owners is a must. Any laxity will reinforce the perception that tackling child labour is low on the state's priority list, and that the rule of law can easily be subverted.

According to the International Labour Organisation, more than 16 crore children are working as child labourers globally, and the

number is only going up. Cases of human trafficking have seen a rise since the Covid-19 pandemic. Vulnerable families were further pushed into poverty and a large number of children dropped out of school, exacerbating the risk. The data also points to an increasing number of children being subjected to abuse and violence. Child labour and trafficking are organised crime. The Raisen case is a reminder that efforts must be redoubled to rein in the perpetrators. Rehabilitation of the children remains an underserved aspect.

Eradicating child labour should be a shared moral responsibility of civil society, businesses and governments alike. In India, 11 per cent of the workforce is said to be underage. Child labour laws have proven to be ineffective. Whatever the justification that is offered, the moral quotient is entirely absent from the social sanction to child labour in the country.

Pariksha pe charcha

UGC-NET cancellation a huge letdown

THE cancellation of the University Grants Commission-National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET) examination a day after it was conducted comes as a huge embarrassment for the Centre and a big letdown for the over nine lakh candidates. The shock cancellation has been attributed to inputs that the integrity of the examination may have been compromised. One reason for the swift action could be to avoid a repeat of the raging controversy over the alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination. After this, a sense of betrayal in the public consciousness is inevitable. After the twin botch-ups in quick succession, the National Testing Agency (NTA) finds itself in a worsening crisis of credibility. The Central Bureau of Investigation has been tasked with conducting the probe. This reflects the seriousness being attached to the matter, but the damage has already been done.

The NTA has been holding the UGC-NET examination in a computer-based format since

2018. It had gone back to the pen-and-paper version this year. The Education Minister has spoken of setting up a high-level committee to recommend an overhaul of the examination processes. Wide-ranging discussions among domain experts — 'pariksha pe charcha' in its true sense — would be expected. Unilateral imposition of new guidelines and patterns may not be a pragmatic solution when faced with a trust deficit.

Conducted twice a year, UGC-NET is the first such examination to be scrapped after the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act was passed in February. This law provides for three to five years in prison and a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh for resorting to unfair means. It will take time to gauge how effective the legislation proves to be as a deterrent. Cancellation can take a heavy toll on the mental and emotional wellbeing of candidates. A zero-error system has to be the end goal.

India digital currency transactions slump after reaching initial RBI target



Mumbai

India digital currency transactions slump after reaching initial RBI target

Usage of India's digital currency, the e-rupee, has slumped to just a tenth of the peak hit in December, four sources said, reflecting the struggles several countries have experienced in trying to generate public support for digital currencies.

The Reserve Bank of India started a pilot for the e-rupee, devised as a digital alternative to physical cash, in December 2022, and successfully reached a target of 1 million retail transactions per day by December 2023.

The achievement came only after banks were asked to push up transactions by offering incentives to retail users and disbursing a portion of bank employees' salaries using the e-rupee.

But now that the push has diminished, daily transaction numbers have fallen to about 100,000, said two of the sources, who are directly involved in the pilot.

This shows there is little organic demand to use the e-rupee, said a third source, a banker involved in the project.

The sources declined to be identified because they are not allowed to speak to media. The RBI did not respond to an email seeking comment and the data on retail transactions via the e-rupee is not publicly disclosed.

The transactions that are

continuing are in part due to banks disbursing benefits to their employees via the e-rupee, all four of the sources said.

This has helped to push up transactions to about 250,000 to 300,000 per day towards the end of each month, the two sources cited earlier said.

The RBI had asked banks to boost transactions to at least 1 million per day by late 2023 because it wanted to "test the system's resilience at scale," but that push has now stopped, the second of the two sources said.

The RBI is not planning to rapidly expand the pilot and the current focus is on testing the technology and developing use cases for the digital currency, the source said.

"Adoption should grow as more use cases develop," the source added.

Globally, among 86 central banks surveyed by the Bank of International Settlements, a third are running a pilot for a central bank digital currency (CBDC).

Even those that have been launched, like in the Caribbean by the Bahamas and Jamaica, have had only limited success, the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City said in a April note.

"We have observed that to spur adoption, consumers may need more than just (retail) CBDC technology. They may need the (retail) CBDC to add value relative to cash."

Indian imports of Russian coal fall, US shipments rise

New Delhi

Indian imports of Russian coal have declined while U.S. shipments have risen in the three months ending in May, data from coal consultancy Bigmint showed, which traders attributed to Russian supplies becoming less competitive.

Russia's exports of all types of coal to India over the period fell 22.4% from a year earlier to 6.76 million metric tons, Bigmint's data showed. U.S. exports rose 14.4% to 6.68 million tons in the same period.

The decline in Indian imports of Russian coal was driven by a 67% plunge year-on-year in shipments of thermal coal, used mainly for power generation. Purchases of steelmaking grades such as coking coal, anthracite and pulverized coal injection (PCI) coal rose during the period, the Bigmint data showed.

India is Russia's second-largest coal market after China and the decrease follows fresh western sanctions on Russia because of the war in Ukraine. However, buyers downplayed their impact and said Russia thermal coal was less attractive without lower discounts amid a drop in global prices.



"Main issue is thermal coal prices and not the sanctions. Logistics cost has gone up in Russia, that is why they are not able to compete," said K.C. Gandhi, Joint President of Materials Management at India's Shree Cement.

Russia has been boosting supplies to China amid the lower Indian exports, pushing coal shipments to China to the highest in eight months in May.

U.S. exports of thermal coal to India in the three months ended May 31 rose 21.6% from a year earlier to 4.57 million tons, with its share in Indian imports increasing to 9.2% from 6.7%. However, its share in India's coking coal imports fell from 16% to 13.5%.

A 44% year-on-year increase in Russia's coking coal imports to India pushed its share in India's seaborne market for the steelmaking feed to 13.9% from 10.9%, while its share in India's thermal coal imports fell to 3.2% from 8.8%, the Bigmint data showed.

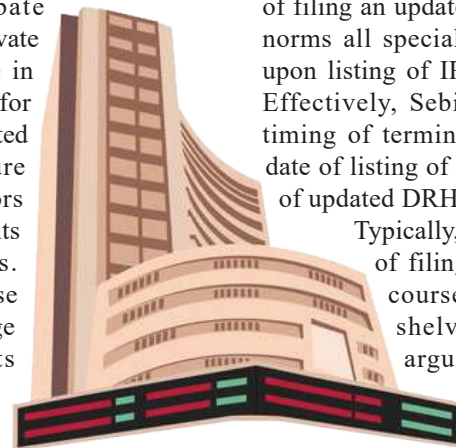
Russia continued to dominate Indian imports of other steelmaking grades such as anthracite and PCI, continuing to account for nearly all its imports.

"Other thermal coal exporting countries may benefit in the short term from Russia's pricing constraints," said Riya Vyas, senior analyst at iEnergy Natural Resources Limited, an Indian coal trading firm.

Sebi's diktat on IPO-bound companies gives a jolt to PE investors

Mumbai

A recent advisory by Sebi to merchant bankers has again sparked a debate around special rights that private equity (PE) investors have in portfolio companies going for public listing. Sebi has directed merchant bankers to ensure that private equity investors do not have any special rights in IPO-bound companies. Implicitly, Sebi wants these rights to fall away at the stage when a company files its updated Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP). For PE investors, this SEBI mandate presents an unnecessary complexity and risk, should there be any unforeseen last-minute issue or change in the IPO roll-out.



The changes may seem a bit odd for Sebi to ask companies to now drop these rights at the stage of filing an updated DRHP, when as per existing norms all special rights in any case fall away upon listing of IPO shares on stock exchanges. Effectively, Sebi is intending to advance the timing of terminating special rights, from the date of listing of IPO shares to the date of filing of updated DRHP.

Typically, shares are listed within a month of filing of updated DRHP, unless of course a company itself delays or shelves its IPO. Sebi's objective arguably is to ensure that no PE investor or for that matter no person or investor or promoter of an IPO-bound company has any special or superior rights over public shareholders. Therefore, all rights must fall away before the company is listed.

Water shortage may affect India's growth, weigh on credit health: Moody's Ratings



New Delhi

India's water shortage could be detrimental to the credit health of sovereign, water-dependent entities like coal power generators and steel-makers, global rating agency Moody's Ratings alerted on June 25.

The ratings agency pointed out that growing water crisis may exacerbate volatility in growth and undermine country's ability to withstand shocks. "India's fast economic growth, accompanied by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, is reducing water availability in the world's most populous country," it noted in a report.

The global rating agency highlighted that a drying water supply may affect farming, leading to higher food inflation

and a decline in income for certain businesses.

"India has the poorest access to basic services, including water, among G-20 economies, a key component for an assessment of the credit impact of ESG factors," Moody's said. ESG stands for environment, social and governance.

Moody's sovereign rating for India is Baa3 with a stable outlook. The rating agency expects India to be fastest growing major economy with 6.5 percent growth in 2024.

India's food inflation has been sticky at over 8 percent despite overall inflation declining below 5 percent. In May, food inflation had remained unchanged at 8.7 percent and is likely to stay elevated for the coming months, according to experts.

Moody's pointed out that investments in water infrastructure and renewable energy could mitigate risks in the long term. "India's burgeoning sustainable finance market can help companies finance water investment," the rating agency noted.

In February 2024, Vadodra Municipal Corporation issued \$12 million of green bonds to enhance liquid wastewater management infrastructure. In 2021, Ghaziabad had raised \$18 million for water treatment plants.

The Centre had allocated \$2.52 billion for Ganga Rejuvenation in the interim budget.

"India's average annual water availability per capita is likely to drop to 1,367 cubic metres by 2031 from an already low 1,486 cubic metres in 2021, according to the Ministry of Water Resources," Moody's pointed out.

India considers a level below 1,700 as a sign of water stress and 1,000 cubic metres as a threshold for water scarcity.

The industry's demand for water is expected to double from 2.1 percent in 2025 to 4.4 percent by 2050, whereas energy demand for water will grow six-fold to 9 percent during this period.

RBI policymakers divided over rate-growth debate



Mumbai

A consensus appears to be emerging among the external members of the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy committee that high interest rates are damaging to economic growth, a sign that the debate over the timing of any easing is intensifying.

Jayanth Rama Varma and Ashima Goyal voted at the June meeting for a rate cut, arguing that too restrictive policy will hurt growth, recent minutes showed. Shashanka Bhide, the third external official on the six-member committee, voted against easing, but in an emailed response to questions, he acknowledged that inflation-adjusted rates above 1.5% "is not supportive of higher growth." India's real, or inflation-adjusted, rate is currently at 1.75%.

Bhide still advocated for caution, though, saying rapid economic growth and inflation can be "sub-optimal."

The rest of the monetary policy committee is made up of RBI officials, who have stuck to their relatively hawkish stance on inflation, including Governor Shaktikanta Das. Any "hasty action" will do more harm than good, Das argued at the last MPC meeting, according to the minutes.

The split in the views show a widening gap between the external and internal members on how to balance economic growth and inflation. The committee has kept the benchmark repurchase rate unchanged at 6.5% for more than a year now, with inflation still hovering above the RBI's 4% target.

Madhavi Arora, lead economist at Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd., said it's unclear if the differences in views

means any rate action will follow in coming months. She predicted the RBI likely won't ease until after the Federal Reserve does so.

"We maintain that rate cuts will be a calendar year 2025 tale but liquidity management will be the near-term story, implying that a mild stealth easing is still on the anvil," she wrote in a note.

Economists surveyed by Bloomberg predict the RBI will lower rates in the final quarter of 2024. The next rate decision is on Aug. 8.

External MPC member Varma said as inflation moves closer to the target, monetary policy should be "only mildly restrictive, so that the growth sacrifice is modest."

Bhide refuted the notion that too-high borrowing costs have choked off growth, saying rapid expansion of more than 7% in recent years has been driven by domestic demand. To sustain that pace, "we need supportive external demand conditions" going forward, he said.

Varma argued that India needs faster growth rates than what's projected over the next two years, given its "current stage of the demographic transition."

Both MPC members will leave the committee in October, once its term ends. Here's more of what they said in emailed responses to questions:

"It is important to recognize that we now have a lower inflation rate and we need to sustain this lower inflation rate close to the target," Bhide said

"A well distributed normal monsoon would be supportive of rural growth," Bhide said

Both the members denied that the MPC is waiting for the US Federal Reserve to cut rates first. "I believe that there are honest differences of opinion here," Varma said.

India's current account deficit narrows to 0.7% of GDP in FY24; Q4 shows 0.6% surplus

New Delhi

India's current account deficit moderated to 0.7% of the GDP in FY24, compared with 2% in the previous years, on account of higher services trade and greater net portfolio inflows before India's inclusion in the global bond index, data released by the Reserve Bank of India showed on Monday.

The current account deficit for FY24 declined to \$23.2 billion from \$67 billion in the previous fiscal, as the current account turned positive in the last quarter of the year to 0.6% of the GDP or \$5.7 billion. In the year-ago period, the current account deficit stood at 0.2% of the GDP.

Economists contend there is likely to be some slippage in CAD in FY25 to above 1% levels, but it is likely to stay manageable. "For FY25, going by the early trends, the CAD should be manageable at 1-1.5% of GDP, and the steady capital inflows should ensure that the balance of payments which reflect the fundamentals remain comfortable," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda.

This is expected to keep rupee steady between 83-84 against the dollar, Sabnavis further added.

India is likely to witness an infusion of \$20-25 billion of capital owing to its inclusion in the global bond index. The country will be included in the GBI-EM Index suit on June 28.

Rising services exports

While the merchandise trade deficit narrowed compared with the previous year, net services trade was up nearly \$20 billion during this period.

"Services exports grew by 4.1 per cent on a y-o-y basis in Q4:2023-24 on the back of rising exports of software, travel and business services. Net services receipt at US\$ 42.7 billion was higher than its level a year ago (US\$ 39.1 billion), which contributed to the surplus in the current account balance during Q4:2023-24," RBI noted.

Remittances were up 11.9% in the last quarter from \$28.6 billion in Q4FY23, whereas portfolio inflows turned positive to \$11.4 billion in the last quarter of FY24 compared with an outgo of \$1.7 billion a year before.

For FY24, portfolio investment recorded a net inflow of \$44.1 billion as against \$5.2 billion outflow in the previous year.

India is engineering a future as AI disrupts the software industry

Mumbai

In the early 2000s, Alok Nanda's new colleagues called him the "bumper guy."

Nanda's job at General Electric Co back then was putting some plastic between the bumper and the beam of a Suzuki Swift. The plastics division, which traced its history to the early days of synthetic rubber, had hired the young engineer from the state-run Defense Research & Development Organization, placed him at one of GE's new facilities on the outskirts of Bengaluru, and asked him to find a cost-efficient way to reduce the impact on pedestrians in auto accidents.

Two decades later, the former bumper guy and the John F. Welch Technology Center he now heads in Bengaluru are executing far more complex projects. In the process, they're writing a template for multinationals on how to use India's engineering talent to create intellectual property, not just cut costs.

This is very different from the code-writing work that has brought the most-populous nation global recognition in the last quarter-century. While software outsourcing will face an existential challenge from generative artificial intelligence, the engineering prowess — if harnessed well — will launch the next wave of productive and lucrative jobs.

Policymakers in New Delhi have their sight on China's factory-to-the-world crown. They are spending \$24 billion over five years on production-linked incentives. Trouble is,



the rivalry is not limited to other Asian countries like Vietnam, which have the same goal and are ahead in the game. The US, too, is running a very generous industrial policy to revive its manufacturing past.

While India's factory ambitions are hobbled by its stifling bureaucracy

and protectionist attitude to trade, it's still possible for it to make a play as a global engineering workshop and research lab. The knowhow it exports will be embedded in products manufactured elsewhere. As Frederic Neumann, HSBC's chief Asia economist, says: "India's services connectivity to the world economy is so large nowadays that it 'compensates' for the lack of goods trade connectivity." It's time to use those links to target commercial services, where cross-border demand grew 9% to \$7.5 trillion last year. World goods trade is three times larger, but it shrank by 5%.

Take Nanda's next big mission. As the chief technology officer for India at GE Aerospace, a role he's held since 2018, he

and his team are working with colleagues in Niskayuna, New York, on a novel development platform that would, in one shot, offer 20% efficiency gains in future jet engines. Typically, each new generation of engines offers improvements only half as large. "I feel really privileged," Nanda told me. "For an engineer, it's like being a kid in a candy store."

When Chief Executive Officer Larry Culp rang the opening bell on the New York Stock Exchange on April 2, launching GE Aerospace as an independent public company, joining the party on the podium was Ravindra Shankar Ganiger. With 100-plus patents, Ganiger has one of the richest hauls of all scientists and engineers at the Bengaluru center. The team's intellectual inputs, already at the heart of newer jet engines like GE9X, is crucial to Culp's vision of "defining the future of flight."

GE woke up to India's potential early. Others are doing it now. Nearly 1,600 multinationals have set up captive units, employing 1.7 million highly educated professionals. With a determined effort to lift the

quantity and quality of the 2.5 million-plus graduates and Ph.Ds India mints annually in science, technology, engineering and medicine, it can conceivably expand its relevant talent pool. A little less red tape — and some improvement in civic amenities and quality of life in fast-growing cities like Bengaluru — will keep more of them at home with good jobs.

Suppose each of these highly paid individuals supports three other Indians — and not just as their chauffeurs and housemaids. By generating tax resources for publicly funded employment in urban infrastructure, the narrow top of the employment pyramid would start filling its own middle. Stronger mass consumption will create demand for locally manufactured factory goods.

The engineering that has gone into the 360 Foam Wash shows the way forward for adding value through research. Vidya Venkataramani and her team wanted to test a portable washer that could chemically clean jet engines between flights. To simulate the actual condition faced by planes over Middle Eastern routes, the Ph.D chemical engineer created her own dust in the lab. The washing machine for jet engines is already in commercial use, saving global airlines thousands of gallons of fuel every year.

Sanjeev Jha, a mechanical engineer who joined the Bengaluru center around the same time as Nanda, uses sophisticated machine-learning models to predict the maintenance schedule so carriers get the most

out of their engines. That, in turn, requires a trove of data so vast that each physical engine ends up with its digital twin. Even the probes for collecting standardized pictures that can be analyzed by artificial intelligence are award-winning products designed in Bengaluru.

In September 2000, GE's then-boss Jack Welch came to India to open the Bengaluru center now named after him. I was among the reporters present. At the time, the global behemoth had 12,000 employees in a market that barely generated \$1 billion in sales, not even 1% of its global revenue. "Market growth will come," he told us. "The real opportunity in India is its incredibly skilled workforce. We have used the software generated by our India business to change the company. That's great."

In the past 25 years, the appeal of India's talent has transformed — from streamlining internal processes to being harnessed in hardware sold to external customers.

One idea for GE's upcoming engine platform is a hybrid-powered jet: A Toyota Prius of the skies that could deliver thrust at high altitudes and temperatures — without the electronics becoming so bulky as to be unviable. Electrical engineer Suma MN is trying to crack that puzzle. I asked Suma if she is the first woman Ph.D from her village in Kerala, on India's southeastern coast. "I'm the first human," she corrected me.

Centre imposes stockholding limit on wheat to check hoarding, ensure price stability

New Delhi

Centre has imposed a stockholding limit on wheat for retailers, wholesalers, processors and big-chain retailers from Monday, to check the hoarding of the foodgrain and to ensure price stability, a senior official said on Monday.

Single retailers, big-chain retailers, processors and wholesalers will disclose wheat stocks every Friday, said Union Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra in a press briefing here.

Chopra stressed that "I want to dispel the shortage of wheat in the country." He also noted

that there is no ban on wheat exports as of now and there is no proposal to review a ban on export of sugar.

He stated, "We want prices of wheat to be stable." Chopra further informed that the stock limit for wholesalers will be 3,000 tonnes, while it would be 70 per cent of the processing capacity for processors.

For big chain retailers it would be 10 tonnes per outlet with an overall limit for 3,000 tonnes and for single retailers it would be 10 tonnes, he informed.

Chopra explained that the stock limit has been

imposed in view of recent media reports that the prices of essential commodities are increasing including wheat. He pointed out that the stock limit has been imposed to reduce hoarding and noted that there are many tools (to keep a tab on retail prices) and stock limit is one of such tools.

He also informed that the opening stock of wheat was 82 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) on April 1, 2023 while it was 75 LMT on April 1, 2024.

He further informed that 266 LMT was procured last year, while this year the government has procured 262 LMT and procurement is still on.

The Fundamental Principles of Covert Military Action

Lessons from India's 1971 Experience

The Baloch insurgency is a serious concern for Pakistan. Since 1970, the insurgency has gained significant momentum owing to a rising national consciousness among the Baloch people. Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, former Governor of Balochistan, dismissed the notion that being a Muslim was a sufficient condition to be a Pakistani and, therefore, championed the creation of an independent Balochistan. This idea of being a Baloch before a Pakistani Muslim resonates with the 1971 insurgency in East Pakistan, which developed along the lines that the East Pakistanis were "Bengalis first, Muslims second, and Pakistanis third." For both humanitarian and strategic reasons, Indian analysts are divided between proponents of covert military action in Balochistan and others who believe that talks of bravado must be tempered with realism. There also appears to be a large constituency within Balochistan seeking greater Indian support for its independence. This paper draws attention to the success of India's covert actions in East Pakistan that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

There is little in the public domain focused on examining the planning and conduct of India's 1971 covert action. To be sure, there have been scholarly works produced on the 1971 war from various perspectives—such as international diplomatic history, military operations, intelligence operations, as well as from the perspective of other security agencies involved in the liberation efforts, primarily the Border Security Force (BSF). There is a lack, however, of a narrative dedicated solely to the planning and conduct of India's covert actions in 1971 that could enable reflection and analysis half a century since those events occurred.

India's decision to intervene in East Pakistan arose as the region started witnessing political turmoil in 1970. The general elections in Pakistan saw the Awami League of East Pakistan led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerge as the prominent party with an absolute majority, while Zulfikar Ali Bhutto secured a majority in West Pakistan. Under martial law, Pakistan was governed by the military chief at that time, General Yahya Khan. Yahya's refusal to concede power to Mujib resulted in popular unrest in East Pakistan.

The Bengali populace rose in revolt against the military leadership and were supported by the Bengali sections of the Pakistan Army—the East Bengal Regiment and East Pakistan Rifles. The crisis escalated in March 1971 as the Pakistan Army launched Operation Searchlight on 25 March to crack down on the protesters, thereby

causing a massive refugee crisis in neighbouring Indian states. It was against this backdrop that India made the decision to begin covert action in East Pakistan.

This paper retells the story of Indian covert actions in East Pakistan prior to the liberation of Bangladesh. It aims to give insights into the fundamental rules and principles for a successful covert action to both inform and facilitate public discussion on this domain of national security and foreign policy that is little understood. The paper builds on information derived from Indian and British declassified documents, as well as published primary and secondary source material. The narration is presented in three phases as the action was planned and executed between January and December 1971, prior to the commencement of the war on 3 December. It does not explore covert operations that were conducted during the war in support of the Indian Army's war efforts, limiting the observations to covert actions during peacetime that laid the foundation for the war. The final section of the paper outlines the key lessons learned from 1971 and underlines the principles of covert action that remain relevant today.

Crafting Covert Action Policy Phase 1: January-March 1971

India's focus on East Pakistan began in the mid-1960s as a response to Pakistan's covert support to Indian insurgent groups in Kashmir and the Northeast. The Indian intelligence agencies had developed contacts with Bengali patriots, cultivated student leaders, established safe houses to shelter them, and provided them with propaganda material on a large scale. With no state policy to support the Bengalis, however, these contacts mostly served the objective of intelligence coverage. Once the crisis broke out in March 1971, several individuals began to perceive the events differently and set in motion an elaborate covert action policy. In retrospect, the *raison d'être* for India's support to the Bengali rebels appears as follows:

1. The Bengalis in East Pakistan did not share the West Pakistani obsession with Kashmir and the Indian threat.
2. The Bengalis were eager to revive trade relations with India—links that were suspended following the 1965 India-Pakistan War.
3. The Awami League's secular outlook could potentially ease communal tensions and stop the migration of Hindus.
4. The Awami League, if in power, might stop sponsoring Indian insurgent groups.

Indeed, in early April, a senior

member of the Awami League in the Pakistan National Assembly had conveyed to the Indians that his party was "a bulwark against Communism"; and considered the "two-nation theory dead" (a communal thesis that led to the creation of Pakistan in 1947); and therefore, "an independent Bangla Desh will solve many of [India's] problems and incidentally, it may solve also Kashmir problem once and for all." The source also assured India that they will not encourage Indian insurgent groups to create trouble across the border.

At the same time, however, there were reasons for considering denial of support to the secessionist movement in East Pakistan. Primary among them was the possibility that an independent Bangladesh might fall under the control of pro-China communists and, worse, demand a United Bengal by carving out the Indian state of West Bengal. Weighing these conflicting factors, New Delhi was unsure of the necessary course of action. Intelligence assessments also fell short of making authoritative conclusions, compelling New Delhi to exercise restraint. Earlier, in April 1969, the R&AW, India's foreign intelligence agency, had forecast the possibility of a secessionist movement emerging in East Pakistan with the possible end result being independence. Yet, as late as mid-January 1971, the agency assessed that the East and West Pakistani politicians would "reach a working understanding." It also put forth the possibility of Pakistan creating conflict with India as "somewhat remote" although it mentioned that Yahya Khan might encounter pressure from "the hardliners" to act against India.

The mid-January assessment observed that Pakistan's main strategy against India at that point would be to infiltrate militants into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) with the objective of conducting subversion and sabotage missions. It noted that Pakistan's efforts would be to "promote a popular uprising and to prevent the agitation from dying down." In effect, "the situation as it develops in J&K and the trend of political events in Pakistan, would have considerable bearing on the question of the Pakistani military threat to India during 1971." Therefore, the concern for India then was less about East Pakistan, and more around the possible effect of the situation in East Pakistan on the security situation in J&K.

Against the backdrop of this assessment, a development occurred that allowed India to launch its first covert action which would, nevertheless, have an impact on the East Pakistani situation. In July 1970, India's counterintelligence

agency, the Intelligence Bureau (IB), had received inputs about a Pakistani intelligence plan for hijacking a flight from Srinagar. The organisation in charge of carrying out the operation was the National Liberation Front (NLF) and its key operative was Hashim Qureshi. In early January, Qureshi was nabbed by the Border Security Force (BSF) as he tried infiltrating into India. Thereafter, instead of putting him on trial, the R&AW and the BSF decided to conduct an operation with the stated objective of shedding light on Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in J&K and also assessing Sheikh Mujib's position on the Kashmir issue. In what was a significant departure from India's preference for transparency and diplomacy in its foreign policy conduct, PM Gandhi approved this covert operation.

To avoid suspicions, Qureshi was given the cover of a BSF sub-inspector and protected from the J&K state CID, which had been keen on investigating him. Pakistan also bought into this ploy. On 30 January, Qureshi and his associates hijacked an old, decommissioned flight named Ganga that was specifically chosen by the R&AW for this operation. The hijacked flight was landed in Lahore (West Pakistan) and burnt down after the hijackers were greeted by Bhutto and the hostages were released. The hijackers were briefly hailed as heroes in Pakistan until the Indian operation became apparent and they were jailed for lengthy terms. For India, however, the operation served three key objectives. First, the international community realised Pakistan's support for terrorism in J&K. Second, India used the hijacking episode as a reason to block overflights from West to East Pakistan, thereby reducing the pressure of the Pakistani military on the Bengalis in the East. Finally, the hijacking was condemned by Sheikh Mujib, which convinced New Delhi of his secular and pro-peace credentials.

This event was the first notable expression of independent India's changed attitude towards the role of covert action in foreign policy. It also cleared doubts in New Delhi about the intentions of Awami League and its leadership with regard to J&K. This would have an important effect as the Bengali crisis worsened in March 1971. The R&AW received information that Mujib seriously considered secession as he felt his hands were tied. Armed with this knowledge, the agency began lobbying for the provision of assistance to the Bengali rebels. On 2 March, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi instructed

Rameshwar Nath Kao, chief of R&AW, to organise a committee comprising the cabinet secretary, secretary to the PM, foreign secretary, home secretary, and the chief of R&AW. The committee was tasked with examining the internal and external implications of recognising an independent Bangladesh as well as the political, economic, and military implications of offering aid to Bangladesh. Owing to Indian diplomatic reports indicating the possibility of an East-West rapprochement and Mujib's unwillingness to convey his aims with clarity, the committee (barring Kao) decided to wait and watch.

Kao, however, brought to the attention of the committee that it would be impossible for the Pakistan Army to "crush the liberation movement." He warned that the prolonged fighting would lead to the movement going underground and "develop on the lines of a widespread guerrilla movement." He also alerted the committee that the longer the struggle, greater were "the chances of its control moving into the hands of extremists and pro-China communists", which "would be greatly to the disadvantage of India." Consequently, Kao argued in favour of offering "aid, adequate and quick enough to ensure the early success of the liberation movement."

Despite the majority in the committee meeting advising caution, events by the end of March convinced New Delhi that some action was required. With the influx of refugees and some of the leaders of the Awami League entering India, New Delhi decided that the Bengali rebels would receive minimal covert assistance, which included arms, ammunition, communication equipment, logistics support, food, and medicines. The Bengalis were allowed to establish a liaison unit in Delhi, an office in Calcutta, and a "liberated area" near the border. The overall authority for supervision and coordination was vested in the hands of the R&AW whilst the executive agency was the BSF. The Indian Army was envisaged to play a supportive role where needed, but as far as possible the operations were to be limited to the R&AW and the BSF given the high premium placed on "secrecy". From here began the second phase of India's covert action—one that was clearly focused on throwing the spotlight on the humanitarian crisis developing in both India and East Pakistan.

Azm-e-Istehkam: China's wish is Pakistan's command



Military operations by Pakistan Army against Islamist radicals and terrorists are like the country's annual budgets: They all pretend to be aimed at solving the critical problems but they all falter because they never address the underlying structural causes that gave rise to the problem in the first place. And, quite like the budgets, military operations are often devised and designed not so much to address the principal problem as they are to satisfy and appease foreign players—the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in case of the budget, and increasingly China, in case of the anti-terror operations.

Yet another operation

Once again, Pakistan's hybrid regime has announced yet another military operation—Azm-e-Istehkaam (Resolve of durable stability)—to “combat the menaces of extremism and terrorism in a comprehensive and decisive manner”. Since 2007, this is the twelfth major anti-Islamist terrorist military operation, there have been many minor ones as well. Most of the earlier operations were of a tactical nature, focusing on a particular area that had become particularly troublesome. For instance, the Operation Rah-e-Rast and Rah-e-Haq were in Swat region, Sherdil was in Bajaur and Rah-e-Nijaat was in South Waziristan agency. The two big operations on a much broader front were the Zarb-e-Azb, which started in North Waziristan and then was extended to other regions, followed by Radd-ul-Fassad which was more an intelligence based operation to strike at terrorist networks which had spread throughout Pakistan.

The new operation Azm-e-Istehkaam is aimed at curbing the Islamist terror networks which have resurfaced with renewed vigour and virulence after the Afghan Taliban shattered the “shackles of slavery” of US and its allies, ironically enough with Pakistan's assiduous assistance.

The new operation Azm-e-Istehkaam is aimed at curbing the Islamist terror networks which have resurfaced with renewed vigour and virulence after the Afghan Taliban shattered the “shackles of slavery” of US and its allies, ironically enough with Pakistan's assiduous assistance. Ostensibly, it aims at “full-blown kinetic efforts of the armed forces [which] will be augmented by full support from all law enforcement agencies, empowered by effective legislation to address legal voids that hinder effective prosecution of terrorism-related cases and award of exemplary punishments to them [terrorists].” Every

military operation bears the unique imprint of the Army chief: Gen Ashfaq Kayani was very cautious and worried about the blowback, and therefore preferred limited operations; Gen Raheel Sharif preferred an all-out kind of operations without bothering too much about consequences; Gen Qamar Bajwa preferred small, tactical, intelligence based operations. The next few weeks will give a good idea about the military approach of the current Army Chief Gen Asim Munir.

China gets what China wants

However, what is clear is that this is the third military operation that is being taken to assuage the Chinese. In 2007, the Lal Masjid operation which became the catalyst for the formation of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and led to a massive spike in terrorist activity inside Pakistan was launched after the Islamist radicals in the mosque raided a Chinese massage parlour and abducted the Chinese workers. The Chinese government is reported to have leaned very heavily on the then military dictator Pervez Musharraf to send in the Army to clean up the Lal Masjid. The Zarb-e-Azb operation was also prompted in part by Pakistan wanting to assure the Chinese that the operation was aimed at Uyghur militants. This latest operation has once again been forced on Pakistan by the Chinese. On 29 May, the Business Recorder newspaper reported that Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong told a visiting Pakistani delegation that was in Beijing to prepare for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit about “the need for another Zarb-e-Azb against terrorist forces such as TTP, Majeed Bridge, BLA and others to crush them once and for all”. Recent attacks on Chinese—the latest being the suicide bombing in March of a bus carrying Chinese engineers working on the Dash dam project—had angered the Chinese who had been given repeated assurances by the Pakistanis of

fool proof security.

Not only were Chinese investments in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) proving to be a loss-making venture, even the physical security of Chinese workers in Pakistan was in grave jeopardy. It was made clear to the Pakistanis that future Chinese investments were contingent on Pakistan getting its act together on providing security to the Chinese workers. During Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Beijing in June last, despite all the hyperbole that usually accompanies anything to do between China and Pakistan, there was very little outcome in substantive terms. Speculation has been rife that there is a visible cooling off in the bilateral relationship. The Chinese seemed to be losing interest in at least the economic side of things which was supposed to have added a new dimension to the security and strategic relationship when CPEC was initiated 10 years ago. For a couple of years now, the Chinese have been trying to impress on Pakistan that without political stability (Istehkaam) and security, there was no way that the CPEC projects could move forward. The same message was given by Xi Jinping during Shehbaz Sharif's visit. And just a day before the announcement of the new military operation, the visiting Chinese minister Liu Jianchao bluntly informed his Pakistani hosts that “security threats are the main hazards to CPEC cooperation... In the case of Pakistan, the primary factor shaking the confidence of Chinese investors is the security situation.”

The Chinese have, for long, been trying to impress upon the Pakistanis that if they are unable to protect Chinese workers, China should be allowed to bring in their own security. But Pakistan has balked at this demand and reiterated assurances of providing complete security to all Chinese.

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long, been trying to impress upon the Pakistanis that if they are unable to protect Chinese workers, China should be allowed to bring in their own security. But Pakistan has balked at this demand and reiterated assurances of providing complete security to all Chinese. However, things seem to be reaching the point where Pakistani assurances need to be backed by concrete action on ground. This is required not just to satisfy the Chinese who are critical because they are really the only economic game in town for Pakistan, but also to push back the alarming inroads made by the TTP and other armed groups, including Baloch separatists. With Pakistan's economy in a mess, it desperately needs both foreign and domestic investment. But given the political instability and the deteriorating security situation, neither domestic nor foreign investors are ready to invest in Pakistan. However, conducting a large scale anti-terrorist military operation will not be an easy option for a variety of reasons.

Between a rock and a hard place

First, there is no political consensus behind such an operation. In the fractious political environment, there are already carping sounds being made by the opposition. Add to this the fact that the civilian government does not really have the mandate to govern because they have come into power through a very controversial and tainted election. Second, a military operation is an expensive exercise. Although the defence budget has been increased by around around 18 percent, more money will need to be pumped into what is essentially both a war of attrition accompanied by some higher intensity combat. Third, if the military operations lead to greater violence, then it will spook most potential investors. The economic crisis is immediate and if there are major terror attacks then whatever negligible chance there is of the economy recovering will go up in smoke. Fourth,

Pakistan is increasingly getting embroiled in what threatens to be an endless war, especially because the Afghan Taliban are unlikely to dump the Pakistani Taliban. Taking the war into Afghanistan to force compellence on the Afghan Taliban will mean a conflict that will suck Pakistan into the Afghan vortex.

Fifth, Pakistan has a fundamental ideological confusion in both state and society that militates against successfully fighting terrorism. It is not possible to extol the virtues of jihad against India, nurture and support terrorist organisations active against India, but fight against similar organisations that target Pakistan. Add to this the growth of fundamentalism and radicalism inside Pakistan, and it becomes even more difficult to prosecute this war. Soft-peddling and encouraging groups like the Barelvi radicals of Tehrik-e-Labbaik and turning a blind eye to extremist ideology and indoctrination that is running rampant in society will only increase the complexity of the task of fighting terrorism. Pakistan Army just doesn't get it that the antidote of terrorism is not extremism. Finally, at a time when Pakistan has ramped up tensions against India—the recent terrorist attacks in Jammu are an example—can it afford a three active fronts, i.e., against India, Afghanistan and internal?

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While the economic aspect could be addressed with assistance from the US (which appears to be cozying up to the idea of cooperating with Pakistan on the terrorism issue) and China, the bigger problem will be the political crisis which is likely to deepen in coming weeks with rising economic difficulties being faced by an already squeezed citizenry that is increasingly blaming the Pakistan Army and the incumbent regime for much of its woes. On the flip side, the Pakistani state doesn't have the luxury of time to wait until the economic and political situation stabilises before it grabs the bull of terrorism by its horn. The longer it waits, the greater the ingress of the Taliban and the more difficult it will be to extirpate them.

Running the world: Women in diplomacy

Sustainable development and the promotion of gender equality have become a pivotal position in contemporary times. In fact, the expanding conversation on gender and increasing women's participation in different spheres of life pertinently highlights one critical thing: sustainability cannot thrive without gender equality. A powerful synergy between the two is critical to ensure a reality marked by an equitable, inclusive, and prosperous future. Indeed, women's presence in the field of diplomacy towards decision-making and shaping policy debates is crucial for building or implementing multilateral agendas. During the 76th session of the UN General Assembly held in 2022, the members collectively decided to celebrate 24 June every year as women in diplomacy day to recognise their efforts in reaffirming Agenda 2030. However, diplomacy has been historically and still remains a preserve of men.

Sustainable development and the promotion of gender equality have become a pivotal position in contemporary times.

Despite talks of increasing women's participation in diplomacy, a mere 20.54 percent of ambassador positions were held by women in 2023. Moreover, the share of women ambassadors in some regions, such as the Nordic is nearly half of its population (i.e., 42 percent in 2019); yet, other parts of the world trail behind (11 percent in Central Asia and 13 percent in Asia).

For India, looking at the larger picture, the representation of IFS is a meagre 800 for a country of 1.4 billion, out of which 14 women get the opportunity to break the glass ceiling. This is definitely not an encouraging picture. In fact, the art of diplomacy which involves conducting negotiations for conflict resolution, building collaborations, and partnerships between countries, and reinforcing developmental objectives for long-term goals are elements quite gender neutral in nature. In this sense, the need for discussing gender equality in diplomacy is itself quite incongruous. For diplomacy to succeed, it should abstain from concepts of hierarchy and hegemonism, and instead embrace diversity of all spheres.

Further, calls for ushering greater reforms to encourage women's involvement in diplomacy are gaining ground—offering more positions to women in top services



confining women diplomats to 'soft' portfolios like child welfare or gender issues but also for 'hard' portfolios like defence or security; giving access to leadership not only during times of crisis but more frequently; giving space for maintaining work-life balance; and breaking unequal hierarchies and gendered power relations within institutions are some of the key issues.



Calls for ushering greater reforms to encourage women's involvement in diplomacy are gaining ground—offering more positions to women in top services

Reiterating the importance of viewing diplomacy from a gender-neutral lens is key yet there is a need to explicitly focus on women's inclusion for the sake of the larger narrative. Amidst the evolving geopolitical landscape, nations are striving

to redefine women's participation in diplomacy. In this sense, the adoption of a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) emerges as a pertinent strategy.

Adopting a Feminist Foreign Policy lens

FFP can be understood as a states' practice to define its relationship with other actors, with gender being a principal consideration. This approach takes a bottom-up approach to rethinking traditional power structures, promoting inclusive and equitable decision-making power, as well as prioritising policy outcomes that benefit women, such as in development partnerships, trade agreements, and climate policies.

India does not have an FFP of its own, yet its commitment to gender equality has grown positively over time. With India's G20 Presidency championing 'women-led development', viewing women not as mere recipients of aid but as active agents of change, seek to fuel positive development for women, domestically. Further internationally, India's critical role in developmental partnerships significantly highlights gender as an important consideration.

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yet its commitment to gender equality has grown positively over time.

Incorporating more women into diplomatic roles offer substantial advantages like enriching negotiations with diverse perspectives and experiences, fostering better decision-making providing a wider range of viewpoints and innovative solutions. Studies have also found women play a positive role in diplomatic dialogues towards peace, and resolving conflicts. Furthermore, women in diplomacy are found to have a domino effect, as they also become crucial advocates for gender equality.

Therefore, for India, using an FFP lens would be fruitful towards not just creating more opportunities for women in policymaking and diplomacy, but to also further its goal of achieving SDG 5.

After a remarkable stint at the G20 Presidency and the emergence as the voice of the Global South, India through the adoption of FFP lens, can lead by example in promoting inclusive diplomacy globally. Prioritising the inclusion of women in diplomacy will also enhance India's international outreach, strengthen its soft power, foster global partnerships, and drive economic growth, contributing to global peace and development.

Climate dimension of disease prevention

In India, the southwest monsoon brings the combined concern of droughts and floods. While Vidarbha (Maharashtra), Bundelkhand (Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), Purulia (West Bengal), and northern parts of Karnataka often face protracted drought, the regions along the Brahmaputra and Ganga River basins face the onslaught of floods. Both these sudden and slow onset climate anomalies are looked upon as ecological problems, exacerbated by anthropogenic activities.

The problems may be ecological, but their impact has multiple dimensions. The Leprosy Mission Trust India recently conducted a multi-state study to understand the impact of climate anomalies such as droughts and floods on a population that already experiences multidimensional poverty, high exposure and sensitivity to extreme weather events, and poor socio-economic indicators.

The study reaffirmed that climate anomalies not only cause long-term disruption in traditional livelihood options (agriculture) and worsen existing multidimensional poverty but also reduce people's access to nutrition, clean water, and sanitation

The study reaffirmed that climate anomalies not only cause long-term disruption in traditional livelihood options (agriculture) and worsen existing multidimensional poverty but also reduce people's access to nutrition, clean water, and sanitation—prerequisites for the prevention of several neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).

Correlation between climate extremes and disease prevalence

There is scientific evidence to suggest that nutritional deficiencies, such as protein-energy malnutrition, is linked to reduced immunity and increased susceptibility to leprosy—a bacterial infection that affects more than 100,000 people in India each year. It is also a leading cause of disability among communicable diseases. Similarly, some studies attribute leprosy transmission to the “lack of hygiene and proper sanitation, poor and inadequate supply of water”.

The two southwestern districts of Odisha—Nabarangpur and Nuapada—face the triple challenge of the high rate of multidimensional poverty, extreme climate vulnerability, and high leprosy prevalence. According to the multi-hazard mapping done by the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority,



both Nabarangapur and Nuapada have a very high risk of drought. They also have a very high rate of annual new case detection rate (ANCDR) for leprosy. Nabarangapur has an ANCDR of 19.5 per 1,00,000 population and Nuapada has an ANCDR as high as 47/1,00,000—close to 10 times the national average of 5.09/100,000 population (2021-2022). In these districts, a steady rise in prolonged and recurring drought has raised concerns over nutrition security—potentially creating a situation conducive to leprosy transmission in the community.

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Purulia district in West Bengal is no stranger to droughts. However, in the last two decades, rising temperatures and erratic rainfall have made it most susceptible to it, leading to a decline in agricultural production by 65 percent, and malnutrition. Purulia, along with the neighbouring Bankura district, have red soil, which usually supports a single crop a year, which sustains families for about six months. The other six months are uncertain. Drought is now making it difficult to grow even a single crop,

which has affected the availability and accessibility of food. All the 20 blocks of Purulia—a district where almost 50 percent of the population is multidimensionally poor—have an ANCDR of leprosy of more than 17/100,000, with the highest being 37.83/100,000. This is almost 800 percent higher than the national average.

Maharashtra mirrors this phenomenon. Nandurbar district in northwest Maharashtra has witnessed the highest reduction in rainfall in the recent past. This not only affects farmers, but also has a direct impact on food security of the district, which is already grappling with malnutrition. Nandurbar has the second-highest number of underweight children under five in the country (57.2 percent). It also has a much higher percentage (69.3 percent) of tribal population than the state average (9.3 percent). They are more vulnerable to climate extremes as they are dependent on natural resources for their livelihood. The district also has a high number of cases of leprosy.

During the monsoon months of 2022, over 23.32 million farmers in Uttar Pradesh were “swinging between drought and floods”. Residents of the eastern districts of Shravasti and Bahraich know what it means to shuttle between droughts and floods. Their crop yield and

cropped areas have been affected, and so are their livestock. These districts have a high prevalence of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) such as leprosy, kala-azar, filariasis, and chikungunya. They also have an alarmingly high multidimensional poverty: 74 percent of the population in Shravasti and 71.8 percent of the population in Bahraich.

Residents of the eastern districts of Shravasti and Bahraich know what it means to shuttle between droughts and floods. Their crop yield and cropped areas have been affected, and so are their livestock.

Under such circumstances, what we need is a greater push on building India's resilience to climate anomalies. We can achieve that by looking at it not just as an ecological threat but by emphasising the link between climate anomalies and their health threats. Subsequently, we will be able to engage multiple stakeholders, develop more insightful databases and surveillance systems, identify holistic solutions to risks and impacts, and make the community more invested in this process. We need to look at developing climate resilience measures as an opportunity to address gaps in social determinants of health and strengthen disease prevention strategies.

Diljit Dosanjh wins hearts as he offers water to a fan who starts crying after seeing him



Diljit Dosanjh, the beloved Punjabi singer and actor, has always been known for his humility and genuine affection for his fans. This compassionate nature was on full display in a recent encounter with a fan who was overcome with emotion at the sight of the star. The heartwarming moment, captured and shared widely on social media, shows Diljit offering water to a fan who couldn't stop crying upon meeting him.

In the video, Diljit Dosanjh is seen sitting inside a car, engaging with a visibly emotional fan. The fan, overwhelmed by the moment, has his face buried in his hands, tears streaming down his face. Diljit, wearing his signature turban and a calm demeanor, extends a bottle of water to the fan, encouraging him to drink and calm down.

Diljit's gesture did not end with offering water. He is seen standing outside, holding a framed portrait that the fan had brought as a gift. The portrait is a hand-drawn image of Diljit, showcasing the fan's admiration and dedication. Surrounded by a crowd, Diljit takes the time to appreciate the gift, once again demonstrating his respect and gratitude for his supporters.

The caption on the images, "The way Diljit stopped his fan's crying and respected his feelings," along with prayer and heart emojis, encapsulates the sentiment of the moment. It highlights not just the fan's emotional response but also Diljit's thoughtful reaction, which went beyond mere celebrity interactions.

This incident is a testament

to Diljit Dosanjh's down-to-earth nature and his genuine care for his fans. In the often glitzy and detached world of entertainment, such moments of real connection are rare and precious. Diljit's actions resonate deeply with his fan base, reinforcing the idea that he is not just an entertainer but also a compassionate human being who values his fans.

The images and the story behind them have struck a chord with fans across social media platforms. Comments praising Diljit's humility and kindness have flooded in, with many people sharing their admiration for the star. Fans have noted that such gestures are what set Diljit apart, making him a beloved figure not just in the music and film industry, but also in the hearts of many.

One comment read, "This is why we love Diljit. He is not just a superstar but a super human being." Another fan wrote, "Diljit's humility and love for his fans make him a true icon. This gesture is so heartwarming."

Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan never fails to spend quality time with his family. This time, Shah Rukh Khan flew off to London for a vacation with his family. In a picture that is going viral, Shah Rukh Khan was spotted playing cricket with his family, including daughter Suhana Khan.

The captured image shows Shah Rukh Khan, who was fielding, keenly observing Suhana Khan who is waiting for the bowler with a bat in her hand. Shah Rukh Khan was dressed casually in a blue t-shirt and beige pants with a cap on his head. Gauri Khan's mother, Savita Chhibber, was seen sitting on a wooden bench observing the family game.

Sonakshi Sinha wore a Kurta Set worth Rs 2.55 lakh on her wedding reception party

Sonakshi Sinha, the beloved Bollywood actress, recently tied the knot with her long-time partner, Zaheer Iqbal. The wedding was a star-studded affair, filled with joy and celebration. One of the standout moments from her wedding festivities was her choice of attire for the afterparty reception.

Sonakshi chose a stunning red-hued zardozi kurta set designed by the renowned Anita Dongre, which left everyone in awe. The regal piece, known for its intricate design and luxurious fabric, comes with a hefty price tag of Rs. 2.55 lakh.

Sonakshi Sinha has always been a fashion icon, and her wedding looks were no exception. For her afterparty reception, she donned an embroidered kurta set that was nothing short of breathtaking. The kurta was embellished with golden work all over, creating a dazzling effect that perfectly complemented her bridal glow. The sequined work over the kurta and the matching flared bottoms were inspired by lush tropics, adding a unique touch to the traditional attire.

Her outfit featured a V neckline and fuller sleeves, which added a modern twist to the classic design. The intricate zardozi embroidery, a traditional form of metal embroidery hailing from India, was meticulously crafted, showcasing the high level of artistry that went into creating this masterpiece.

A Touch of Tradition

To complete her look, Sonakshi teamed her Anita Dongre kurta set with a statement choker featuring



emeralds and matching earrings. Her makeup was kept soft and subtle, with a sheen touch that added an extra glow to her look. Sonakshi's hair was styled in a tied-up bun adorned with a touch of traditional gajra, enhancing her bridal elegance.

The final touch of the bride's look was completed with sindoor and a red bindi. This combination increased her beauty manifolds, leaving everyone in awe of her timeless beauty and impeccable style.

The Price Tag

The kurta set from Anita Dongre, which Sonakshi wore for her reception, comes at a price tag of Rs. 2,55,000. The designer piece is part of Dongre's exclusive collection and is known for its exquisite craftsmanship and luxurious materials. This outfit is a testament to the designer's ability to blend traditional Indian aesthetics with contemporary fashion, creating pieces that are both timeless and trendy.

A Glimpse of the Reception

The reception was a grand

event, with Sonakshi and Zaheer radiating happiness as they celebrated their union with family and friends. The duo's happiness was clearly visible in their eyes as they embarked on this new journey together. Sonakshi's choice of attire for the reception was a highlight of the event, garnering admiration from guests and fashion enthusiasts alike.

For her first appearance with Zaheer Iqbal as husband and wife, Sonakshi Sinha chose a red-hued Banarasi saree for the initial reception. This saree, from the popular brand Raw Mango, was priced at almost Rs. 80,000. The saree featured sun and moon prints all over it, teamed with a matching blouse. Sonakshi's hair was styled into a bun adorned with gajra, and she wore a statement necklace with matching earrings to complete the look. Her makeup was soft and minimalistic, with a huge diamond ring adding to the glamour. The mehendi-adorned palms added a traditional touch, making her look every bit the quintessential Indian bride.

Shah Rukh Khan captured playing cricket with family



In an old interview, Shah Rukh Khan opened up about how much he likes spending time with his children on an off day. "On a relaxed day, just spending time with kids. If I am sitting with the girl, then watching Pretty Little Liars or some chick flick. If I am sitting with the son then watching Doraemon and if I am sitting with the elder son, then watching something deeper and darker from Korea, which I don't understand but my son does."

So watching pictures with them, having potato chips and colas, being in shorts and completely untidy in bed. I think that's kind of a perfect day," he said.

Amitabh Bachchan reading Ramacharitmanas before the release of his much awaited Kalki 2898 AD

Amitabh Bachchan wrote, "The effect of that early bird shall be exercised and the results reverted upon."

Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan, who will be seen playing the role of mighty Ashwathama in the upcoming sci fi movie Kalki 2898 AD, is reading Ramcharitmanas nowadays.

Big B shared this information on his daily blog and wrote: "We are in time after ages .. and the age of the ages is beginning to get a control .. which is recommended and practised all over .. so the effect of that early bird shall be exercised and the results reverted upon ..

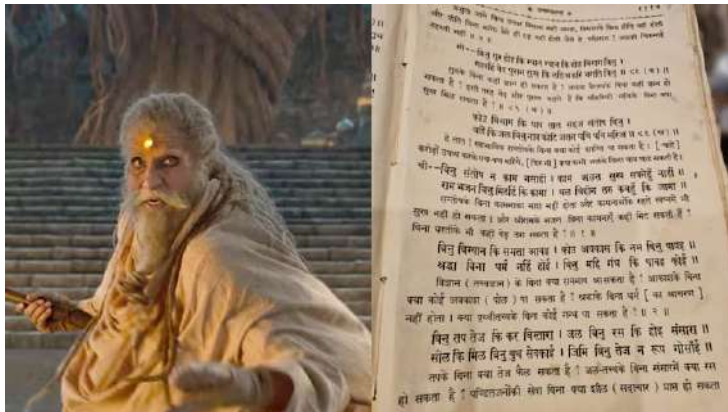
some wisdom from the Ramcharitmanas ..

Words to Garud ..

but my weak immature attempt :

without knowing divinity , there is no belief .. without belief there is no love, and without love how can there be devotion .. just like the reflected smoothness of water is never still or stagnant ..

without a guru, there can be



no learning ; without reclusion, quietude can there be learning .. the Veda and the Puraan say that without the prayer devotion to Hari , can there be peace and calm ..

can a boat ever move without being in water .. without the earth can there be trees that grow ..

and many more such examples .. to exemplify the presence and the prayers to the Almighty , the absence of which a lot is not possible ..

I pray for eternal peace and calm ..

Who so ever listens to it , may there be fructification ..

Love

Amitabh Bachchan was recently spotted at the grand launch of Kalki 2898 AD event in Mumbai. He also revealed that it is rare that he attends any launch function but this he did for personal reasons.

Big B is going to play the protector Ashwatthama to Deepika Padukone's character in the movie.

Kalki 2898 AD directed by Nag Ashwin also stars Kamal Haasan, Prabhas and Disha Patani. It is going to release on June 27.

Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, and their daughter Raha spotted at the construction site of their new home

Before Rishi Kapoor's death from cancer in 2020, he had also visited the site a few times.

Bollywood actors Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, along with their daughter Raha Kapoor, made an early morning visit to the construction site of their

arms as Ranbir led them to the under construction site.

Ranbir Kapoor, who is busy shooting for his upcoming magnum opus Ramayan, looked smart in casuals—a t-shirt, jacket, and shorts with sneakers.

Later, the trio was joined

by their mother, Neetu Kapoor, who was seen in all white. Neetu was all smiles as she looked delighted to meet Raha.

Their under-construction home is going to be a five-storied



bungalow in Mumbai.

Their dream home is going to be ready soon, and if reports are to be believed, then the Kapoor family plans to shift to their newly constructed abode before Diwali this year.

Both Raha and Alia were twinning in shades of beige. While Alia wore a comfy loose-fitting, sleeveless top, her daughter Raha was seen in a beige T-shirt and shorts. Alia Bhatt was comfortably carrying Raha in her

building now.

Before Rishi Kapoor's death from cancer in 2020, he had also visited the site a few times.

It has been named Krishna Raj after Ranbir's grandmother, and it holds emotional significance to the entire family.

Ranbir's parents, Rishi Kapoor and Neetu, bought the house in 1980, after their marriage, and started their family in the same house.

Pankaj Tripathi on Mirzapur 3, says 'It's Mirzapur that has transformed us into stars

The spectacular preview of the series piqued the anticipation among fans worldwide, as it teased the return of the King of Mirzapur, AKA Kaleen Bhaiya.

One of India's most- awaited crime thriller series, Mirzapur Season 3 has left audiences in a frenzy with its power-packed trailer, which garnered a whopping 1.9 M views across various platforms over the weekend.

Stirring up Bhaukaal across the country, the trailer showcased an intense game of chess amongst the bahu-bahis, each striving to prove their worth and claim the throne of Mirzapur.

Filled with revenge, ambition, politics, betrayal, deceit, and intricate family dynamics, the upcoming season promises to only get bigger and better.

The spectacular preview of the series piqued the anticipation among fans worldwide, as it teased the return of the King of Mirzapur, AKA Kaleen Bhaiya.

This iconic character is brought to life by none other than Pankaj Tripathi, who has time and again proved his mettle as a highly versatile and gifted actor. Reflecting on the show that catapulted him to global stardom,



— Pankaj Tripathi expressed, "Mirzapur undeniably marked a stepping stone in my career. Notably, during interviews, journalists often refer to us as the 'star cast'.

But before Mirzapur became a global phenomenon, we were simply just the 'cast' of the show. It's Mirzapur that has transformed us into stars. After season 1, the reaction I received from fans, especially women, took me by surprise. It made me realise that Kaleen Bhaiya is unlike any other dons Indian masses have ever seen on celluloid. As opposed to conventional mafias and dons, he effectively puts up a facade of being soft-spoken, ethical, and trustworthy. Kaleen Bhaiya is not your run-of-the-mill criminal, which makes him truly stand out among others. We, as humans, have multiple facets to ourselves, and Kaleen Bhaiya is a perfect depiction of the same."

Produced by Excel Media & Entertainment, Mirzapur Season 3 is directed by Gurmmeet Singh and Anand Iyer. It boasts a stellar ensemble cast, including Ali Fazal, Shweta Tripathi Sharma, Rasika Dugal, Vijay Varma, Isha Talwar, Anjum Shharma, Priyanshu Painyuli, Harshita Shekhar Gaur, Rajesh Tailang, Sheeba Chadha, Meghna Malik, and Manu Rishi Chadha.

The ten-episode series will premiere exclusively on Prime Video on July 5.

Rohit Sharma becomes highest run scorer surpassing Babar Azam and Virat Kohli in T20I

Antigua

India's captain Rohit Sharma hits a six during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match between India and Bangladesh at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, Saturday, June 22, 2024.

Recently, Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma has made significant strides in the T20 International (T20I) format, excelling both as a leader and a batsman. Following India's T20 World Cup victory over Australia on Monday, he has matched Pakistan captain Babar Azam's record for the most wins as a captain in this format.

Moreover, surpassing his teammate Virat Kohli, Sharma now holds the record for the highest runs scored in T20Is. As captain, Rohit Sharma has guided India to 48 victories in the T20I format, a tally he shares with Babar Azam, who also boasts 48 wins as Pakistan's captain.

Sharma's leadership was particularly evident during India's recent 24-run triumph over Australia, marking his 60th match as captain and encompassing wins decided by Super Overs. His recent performance signals a return



to form, with the batsman showcasing his skills at a pivotal juncture.

Across 157 matches, Sharma has accumulated a total of 4,165 runs, achieving an average of 32.03 and a strike rate of 140.75.

His onslaught began immediately after India suffered an initial setback when Josh Hazlewood dismissed Virat Kohli for a duck. In the subsequent over, Sharma took on Mitchell Starc, smashing 28 runs (including a wide) off his over, four of them towering sixes. Rohit maintained his momentum throughout his innings, hitting seven fours and a total of eight sixes, reaching his fifty in just 19 deliveries.

However, despite nearing a century, Rohit was dismissed by a yorker-length delivery from Starc in the 12th over of the match. Named player of the match, Rohit addressed missing out on his century in the post-match presentation.

"I mentioned in my previous post-match presentation that 50s and 100s don't concern me. I aim to bat with the same tempo, play my shots when needed, and keep pressure on the bowlers," Rohit remarked.

This achievement firmly places him as the leading run-scorer in T20Is, with Babar Azam following in second place with 4,145 runs from 123 matches, and Virat Kohli in third place.

Zimbabwe T20I Series: BCCI announces Squad, Rohit, Virat, Hardik rested, Shubman Gill to lead India



Mumbai

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced the 15-member Indian squad for the five-match T20I series against Zimbabwe. Key players such as Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant, and Suryakumar Yadav being rested. In the absence of regular skipper Rohit, Shubman Gill will lead the team.

Other notable names missing the series include Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, and Jasprit Bumrah, who are all competing in the ongoing T20 World Cup in the Americas but have been given a break before the demanding season.

The series kicks off on 6th July in Harare. The subsequent matches will take place on 7, 10, 13, and 14 July, all of which will be played in Harare. Shubman

Gill will lead the team in the absence of regular skipper Rohit Sharma. Nitish Reddy, Riyan Parag, Abhishek Sharma, and Tushar Deshpande have earned their maiden national call-ups, rewarded for their exploits in the IPL.

The upcoming series will be played without the services of key pacers Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, and Arshdeep Singh, who have been given a well-deserved break. In their absence, Khaleel Ahmed and Avesh Khan, who were part of the standby group for the T20 World Cup, have been promoted to the main squad. Another notable inclusion is Rinku Singh, a talented batsman who was surprisingly overlooked for the T20 World Cup squad for the tournaments held in the USA and West Indies. His selection comes as a relief to his supporters, who were disappointed by his earlier exclusion. The 15-member squad also includes Sanju Samson and Yashasvi Jaiswal, both of whom were part of the contingent during the T20 World Cup but did not feature in the playing eleven.

Regarding the newcomers, Abhishek and Parag dominated IPL 17 with their brilliant batting performances. Punjab batsman Abhishek, who represents Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL, scored 484 runs, while Rajasthan Royals' Parag, the first player from Assam to be picked in the senior Indian team, amassed 573 runs.

Squad: Shubman Gill (Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Abhishek Sharma, Rinku Singh, Sanju Samson (WK), Dhruv Jurel (WK), Nitish Reddy, Riyan Parag, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Avesh Khan, Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar, Tushar Deshpande.

Afghanistan beat Bangladesh to reach Semi Finals, Australia eliminated

Antigua

Afghanistan advanced to their first-ever T20 World Cup semi-final after completing a dramatic eight-run victory over Bangladesh in a rain-affected clash at the Arnos Vale Stadium in St Vincent on Monday.

Defending a modest total of 115 for five on a bowler-friendly surface, Afghan captain Rashid Khan belied three rain stoppages, a slippery ball and a revised target of 114 off 19 overs to take four for 23 as Bangladesh, who themselves harboured faint hopes of making the last four, were dismissed for 105 off 17.5 overs.

An unbeaten 54 from opener Litton Das was threatening to take Bangladesh to victory and earn Australia the last semi-final spot on net run-rate.

But pacer Naveen ul Haq claimed the last two wickets – Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman – off consecutive



deliveries in the penultimate over of the match to trigger delirious Afghan celebrations.

With India defeating Australia earlier in the day and advancing to the second semi-final against England in Guyana on Thursday,

this result assured the Afghans of second spot in the group and eliminated the Aussies together with the Bangladeshis.

Afghanistan will now face South Africa in the first semi-final in Trinidad on Wednesday.

Messi marks 37th birthday with sporting greatness

New Delhi

The iconic Argentine footballer Lionel Messi, often hailed as the 'greatest footballer of all time', celebrates his 37th birthday on Monday. Born in Rosario, Argentina, in 1987, Messi recently secured his eighth Ballon d'Or, setting a new record. The next closest is Portuguese icon Cristiano Ronaldo, who has five Ballon d'Or awards to his name.

At the age of 13, Messi and his family relocated to Barcelona, where the club supported him in treating his growth hormone deficiency. Starting with FC Barcelona's U14 squad, Messi swiftly progressed through the ranks, impressing everyone with his exceptional talent and skills. He made his senior club debut at just 17 against Espanyol, quickly becoming a pivotal figure for the Blaugranas. At the time, the 37-year-old was the team's youngest star to feature in the competition.

During his 17-year tenure with the Spanish club, Messi amassed an impressive collection of 10 La Liga titles, 4 Champions League triumphs, and 7 Copa del Rey medals. His tally of 474 goals in La Liga cements him as the league's all-time leading scorer.

Messi captivated the world with his recreation of Diego Maradona's 'goal of the century' in 2007. During a Copa del



Rey semifinal against Getafe at Camp Nou, he dribbled past six defenders to score an unforgettable goal.

In 2009, Messi claimed his first UEFA Champions League title as Barcelona defeated Manchester United 2-0 in the final, with the Argentine national team captain scoring a header.

In 2020, Messi achieved another milestone by scoring his 644th goal in a 3-0 win over Real Valladolid, surpassing Pele's record for most goals scored for a single club (643 goals for Santos FC).

After leaving Barcelona, Messi joined Paris Saint-Germain in the French Ligue 1 from 2021 to 2023, playing 58 games and scoring 22 goals for the club. In 2023, he moved to Inter Miami, owned by David Beckham, where he has played 18 matches and scored 13 goals so far.

Messi made his international

debut in August 2005, replacing an injured player during a match against Hungary. However, his debut was cut short when he was sent off minutes after clashing with Vilmos Vanczak.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Messi played a pivotal role in Argentina's gold medal win, assisting the game-winning goal as La Albiceleste secured their second consecutive Olympic title with a 1-0 victory over Nigeria.

In the 2021 Copa America final at Maracana Stadium, Messi fulfilled his long quest for a major international trophy as Argentina defeated Brazil 1-0.

The pinnacle of Messi's career came in 2022 when he led Argentina to victory in the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Scoring twice in the final against France, Messi helped Argentina claim the world champions title via a penalty shootout, ending a 36-year drought for the national team.

NADA suspends Bajrang again, serves him notice of charge

New Delhi

The National Anti-Doping Agency on Sunday suspended Bajrang Punia for a second time, three weeks after ADDP had revoked his suspension on the grounds that NADA had not issued a 'notice of charge' to the wrestler.

NADA had on April 23 suspended Tokyo Games bronze medallist wrestler for refusal to give his urine sample for dope test during the selection trials held in Sonapat on March 10. World Governing body UWW had also suspended him.

Bajrang had appealed against the provisional suspension and NADA's Anti-Disciplinary Doping panel (ADDP) had revoked it on May 31 till NADA issues the notice of charge.

Swinging to action, NADA on Sunday served the notice to the wrestler. "This serves as a formal notice that you are being charged with the violation of Article 2.3 of the National Anti-Doping Rules, 2021 and now you are provisionally suspended," said NADA's communication to Bajrang. Bajrang has time till July 11 to request for a hearing or accept the charge.

The elite wrestler has maintained that he never refused to give sample but only demanded to know NADA's response to his email where he sought answer why expired kits were sent to take his samples in December 2023. NADA also explained the reason for its action. "Chaperone/DCO had duly approached you and informed you that you were required to provide a urine sample for dope analysis purposes.

"Even after several requests made by the DCO, you had refused to provide your urine sample on the ground that you would not provide the sample unless NADA replies to your email regarding the issue of expired kits, which were used by the concerned DCO who had come to collect the sample of the athlete for the dope test about two months ago. Following your refusal to submit to sample collection, the DCO of NADA had also explained to you in detail, about its consequences and outcomes under the NADR, 2021.

"Despite all the efforts made by the DCO, you had refused to submit for the sample collection." NADA made it clear that of Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) is upheld. It will seek "disqualification of results in the event during which the ADRV occurred, commission of the ADRV with all resulting consequences including forfeiture of any medals, points and prizes." The NADA may, at their discretion, also elect to recover from Bajrang the financial costs associated with the ADRV and or impose a fine as provided in the NADR, 2021.

PCB set for overhaul; code of conduct for Pak players after chaotic T20 WC campaign

Karachi

Pakistan's shambolic T20 World Cup campaign in the USA is all set to trigger a churning in the country's cricket board and lead to the formulation of a code of conduct for players, who are drawing criticism for taking their families along and making paid appearances at promotional events during the tournament.

A reliable source in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed that Chairman Mohsin Naqvi is livid with the performance of some senior officials and held them responsible for the indiscipline prevailing in the team, which could not go beyond the league stage.

"You can expect the PCB to lose senior management level officials and also enforce some strict policies for the players in future," the source said.

He said a policy decision on players not being allowed to have their families in ICC and other major events is also expected to be announced soon by the PCB as part of its clean-up operation.

"The fact that so many players not only took their wives and children to the World Cup even had their parents, brothers, etc., staying in the team hotel has left the chairman unhappy," the source said.

He said when inquiries were made as to who gave permission for players to

take all their family members on tour, it came to light that some senior officials in the board were behind this decision.

"Some of these officials are not professionals but fans of the players and have given them lot of concessions which eventually led to the World Cup debacle," the source said.

He said the PCB chief had now asked for a performance assessment report from all senior management level officials as he is also unhappy with the progress of work for the ICC Champions Trophy scheduled early next year in Pakistan.

Reports emerge of paid appearances by players

A report in the 'Jang' newspaper

stated that some Pakistani players accepted appearance fee as low as USD 2,500 per person to attend a meet-and-greet function in Dallas.

It also stated that another event, 'A night with stars', was called off because of differences in payments made to captain, Babar Azam and other players.

All these revelations are going to be analysed during the post-mortem of the league-stage exit, following losses to tournament debutants USA and arch-foes India.

While the board has had four chairmen since December 2022, none of the senior management level officials have been moved or terminated.



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प्रस्तुत

निर्माते
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सोहम

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