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- ଗ୍ରାମାଞ୍ଚଳରୁ ସହରାଞ୍ଚଳକୁ ସୁନିଶ୍ଚିତ ବସ୍ ସଂଯୋଗ
- ସୁଲଭ ଓ ନିର୍ଭରଯୋଗ୍ୟ ସେବା
- ମହିଳା, ଛାତ୍ରଛାତ୍ରୀ ଏବଂ ସ୍ଥାନୀୟ ସମ୍ପ୍ରଦାୟକୁ ସଶକ୍ତ କରିବା
- ପର୍ଯ୍ୟଟନ ଏବଂ ଆଞ୍ଚଳିକ ଅର୍ଥ ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥାକୁ ପ୍ରୋତ୍ସାହନ
- ଯାତ୍ରୀ ଏବଂ ସଡ଼କ ସୁରକ୍ଷାକୁ ଗୁରୁତ୍ବ
- ସ୍ବଚ୍ଛ ଏବଂ ବୈଷୟିକ ଜ୍ଞାନକୌଶଳ ଦ୍ବାରା ପରିଚାଳିତ ସାଧାରଣ ପରିବହନ



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BJP to form govt in Odisha: Party in-charge Tomar

NALINI SAHU
■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJP on Sunday exuded confidence of forming the next government in Odisha by ousting the ruling BJD from power.

Speaking to reporters after his arrival here, BJP Odisha election in-charge Vijaypal Singh Tomar said the party's popularity graph in the State is rising and people would vote for a change this time.

"Odisha is going to have a double-engine government. We are confident of winning over 80 of the 147 Assembly



seats and 16 out of the 21 Lok Sabha seats," claimed Tomar. As for the reported BJP-BJD bonhomie, Tomar said the BJD

has definitely given the BJP support in the Parliament several times, but that does not mean they are friends.

He cited, "Former Telangana Chief Minister Chandrashekhar Rao, who is a political rival of BJP, has supported us on many

issues and some other leaders are supporting us on the basis of issues."

BJP Odisha co-in-charge Lata Usendi said, "Women in Odisha are with the BJP. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a lot of work is being done by the NDA Government for women's welfare here in the State." On Monday, Tomar will meet State party functionaries to chalk out strategies for the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP won eight seats in Odisha. Of the 147 Assembly seats, it bagged 23.

Noted Odia litterateur Satakadi Hota no more

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Noted Odia litterateur Satakadi Hota passed away here on Sunday morning. He was 95.

Hota, the Editor of Odia daily 'Samay', was the President of Odisha Sahitya Akademi from March 6, 2013 to March 5, 2016.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik deeply condoled Hota's demise and declared that his last rites would be performed with full State honours.

Born at Jagannathkhunta village under Bangiriposhi tehsil in Mayurbhanj district in the year 1929, Hota has penned many poems, novels



and short stories. He has published 27 stories, 21 novels and a book of poems. He started his literary pursuits with poetry. He has authored books including 'Byakula Hrudaya', 'Swapna Shiuli' and 'Ete Swapna Ete Aloka'.

Hota was conferred with Odisha Sahitya Akademi award in 1987 for the novel 'Ashanta Aranya'. He was

awarded the prestigious Sarala Puraskar in 2004 for his collection of stories 'Muktimantri' and 'Janani Janmabhoomi'. This apart, he had received many honours like Sahitya Bharati Samman and Utkal Sahitya Samaj.

He has also left his marks in the field of journalism. He was the Chief Editor of Samay newspaper since its inception till date.

The prolific writer had held key positions in Indian Railway. The retired IRTS Officer was the DRM, Khurda Road during his service in East Coast Railway.

Besides, Hota was a strong organiser. He was the President of Bhubaneswar Book Fair.

Rains for 2 days predicted in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Some parts of the State are likely to experience light rain or thundershower during the next two days, the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here said on Sunday.

The IMD said light rain and thundershower is also likely to occur at one or two places over some parts of the State on February 15 and 16.

The weather office said the minimum temperatures observed appreciable rise at a few places over the districts of interior Odisha and no large change elsewhere in the districts of the State.

The IMD predicted further rise in minimum (night) temperature slightly by 2 degree Celsius at many places and no large change thereafter in the districts.

Light rain/or thundershower is likely to occur in Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Deogarh districts by Monday morning.

Similarly, light rain/thundershower may occur in the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Dhenkanal and Angul on Monday and Tuesday.

21 drunk drivers caught by police in city



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate Police-Bhubaneswar caught as many as 21 drunk drivers in the State capital during a massive drive carried out on Saturday night, an official source said on Sunday.

At least 21 cases have been registered in this connection and 21 vehicles seized by police.

Acting on the direction of Bhubaneswar Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Prateek Singh, a massive drive against drunken driving is going on in different areas such as Cuttack Road, Nandankanan Road, Janapath

Road, Lewis Road and Khandagiri Road with officers and staffs of the police stations concerned.

Accordingly, at night by 1 am, cases were registered under the Bharatpur, Badagada, Laxmisagar, Jatani, Khandagiri, Kharvel Nagar and Sahid Nagar police stations along with the seizure of vehicles.

"Enforcement is being carried out in the city under the 'Safe City Drive' initiative. Twenty-one persons were apprehended for driving under the influence of alcohol and the drive to curb drunken driving activities will continue in the days ahead. Such people pose a threat to safe driving," a senior cop stated.

'CM wants 'best of sports facilities' in Sambalpur'

Pandian reviews projects in district
PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman V Karthikeyan Pandian on Sunday said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik is eager to provide "best of sports facilities" in Sambalpur.

He was on a visit to Sambalpur district. He took a detailed review of projects with the concerned senior officials.

He flagged off the First Mahanadi Half Marathon. Over 4,000 runners participated in the event under various categories.

Pandian said, "Sambalpur has good sports culture; and to further develop the talent, the Chief Minister has directed to provide the best of facilities.

Recently, the indoor stadium in Burla, constructed at a cost of Rs 32 crore, was inaugurated. Foundation-stones were also laid for a Sambalpur Football Academy and a sports complex in Sambalpur University including a hockey stadium and indoor sports facilities at a total cost of Rs 100 crore, he said.

Pandian mentioned that the CM has directed to construct a new football stadium and upgrade the VSS cricket sta-



dium into a modern stadium. These stadiums will be built at an approximate cost of over Rs 350 crore. This would be a major boost for the sports development in the district.

He visited the VSS stadium and interacted with the players. Pandian was a sportsperson himself and used to stay in sports hostel. He shared his experience with the players, who were excited and motivated to see the 5T chief playing with them in the field.

Later, Pandian discussed with the Director and senior

doctors and staffs regarding development of the Veer Surendar Sai Institute of Medical Science and Research (VIMSAR).

In the first phase, it was decided that mother and child health care facilities (O&G, Paediatrics) will be given priority with a 700-bed hospital. The hostel campus will be taken up for development along with the sports complex. The residences for the staffs will also be prioritised. In the initial phase, the facilities will be developed with a project cost of Rs 1,000 crore.

A master plan will be prepared for overall development of the campus in various phases as per availability of land.

Pandian reviewed the project for development of the birthplace of Veer Surendar Sai at Khinda and directed the officials to expedite the work progress.

An ardent devotee of Mata Shakti, Pandian visited the Samaleswari Temple and interacted with the pilgrims and took their feedback on the new facilities. The pilgrims expressed their happiness regarding development under the Samlei project.

CAPF constable exam to be held in Odia

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

For the first time, examination for recruitment of constables in the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) will be conducted in 13 regional languages, including Odia.

Earlier, the exam was being held only in Hindi and English.

This year, the examination will be conducted from February 20 to March 7 for around 48 lakh candidates in 128 cities across the country.

The 13 languages are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, Urdu, Punjabi, Manipuri and

Konkani. The decision has been taken to increase the participation of local youths in the Central Armed Police Force and to promote regional languages.

The Ministry of Home Affairs and the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) have signed an MoU to facilitate conduct of the examination in

the 13 regional languages.

The decision will result in lakhs of youths taking part in the examination in their mother tongue/ regional language and improve their selection prospects. As a result, the reach of this examination will increase among the candidates in the entire country.

Mo College Abhijan bags SKOCH

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Mo College Abhijan has added another feather to its crown as it is awarded with the prestigious SKOCH Award.

Around 1,000 departments of various State Governments participated in the challenging process. The process and the procedure involved three major steps, i.e., PR voting, online voting and jury evaluation. The most useful outcome of the SKOCH assessment process is that it benchmarks well performing projects and their outcomes.

On Sunday, Mo College Chairperson Akash Dasnayak received the award at the Constitution Club of India, New Delhi.

Since last two decades, the SKOCH Award salutes people, projects and institutions that



go the extra mile to make India a better nation. The award covers the best of efforts in digital, financial and social inclusion. Awardees value

'SKOCH Award' as the highest civilian honour in the country conferred by an independent organisation.

"This award is inspiring and

I strongly believe that the day isn't far when Odisha will shine even higher in global chart of higher education," said Dasnayak post ceremony.

At IIT Bhubaneswar

Pradhan launches 100-Cube Start-Up drive

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Union Minister for Education, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan launched the transformative 100-Cube Start-Up initiative of the IIT Bhubaneswar's Research and Entrepreneurship Park on Sunday.

The programme aims to create 100 startup each with a valuation of Rs 100 crore by the 100th anniversary of Odisha in 2036. To achieve this goal, the park will provide essential resources, mentorship, seed capital and access to potential investors. The park is set to expand from its present 20,000 square feet area to about 80,000 square feet over the next two years with the support of Rs 130 crore from the Ministry of Education.



Pradhan commended the burgeoning start-up ecosys-

tem in India, particularly in Odisha where 40% of start-ups

are led by women. He urged the faculty of IIT Bhubaneswar to lead by example.

Dr RP Singh, Chairman, Board of Governors, IIT Bhubaneswar, highlighted the significance of innovation and research along with a balance by utilising science and technology judiciously for the betterment of the society.

At the outset, Prof Shreepad Karmalkar, Director, IIT Bhubaneswar, informed that the 100Cube Start-up Initiative marks a significant milestone in IIT Bhubaneswar's journey towards establishing Odisha as a hub of entrepreneurship and nurturing the start-up culture in the country.

During the occasion, the IIT Bhubaneswar signed MoUs with 16 companies to build strategic collaborations for achieving the 100-Cube objective.



OPINION 6

MESSI CONFRONTS CHINA
IN HIS OWN WAY

WORLD 8

ISRAELI DRONE STRIKE
IN LEBANON KILLS 2

MONEY 10

MARKET CAP OF 4 MOST VALUED
FIRMS JUMPS ₹2.18 LAKH CRORE

BHUBANESWAR, MONDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

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REAL SHOW STEALER
WAS BOOMBALL,
SAYS ASHWIN
12 SPORTS

DELHI BRACES UP FOR FARMERS ONSLAUGHT

RAJESH KUMAR ■
NEW DELHI

In a bid to avoid a re-run of the 2020 Farmers' protest in the Delhi-NCR, the Haryana and the Delhi Police have left no stone unturned to prevent any untoward situation for the farmers' 'Chalo Delhi' protest scheduled to be held on Tuesday. Large cement barricades, nails punched on access roads, suspension of internet and bulk SMS services, and heavy police deployment to block the farmers have been put in place at the borders.

The Centre has invited representatives of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to hold another meeting to discuss their demands on February 12. Three Union Ministers — Piyush Goyal, Arjun Munda and Nityanand Rai, will hold talks with farmers' in Chandigarh. The meeting will be held at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26. Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has accused the Haryana Government of creating a border "between Punjab and India", referring to the concrete blocks, nails and barbed wire placed on some roads to scuttle the farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march. He said the Manohar Khattar-led Haryana Government has placed as much barbed wire at the State's borders with Punjab as there is at the country's border with Pakistan. Khattar, however,



Security personnel deployed at Ghazipur border in view of farmers' Delhi Chalo March, in New Delhi, on Sunday. A large number of farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab are expected to march towards the national Capital on Tuesday

PTI

justified the steps taken by his Government to seal the State's borders and stop Punjab farmers from marching towards the national Capital, saying the arrangements are aimed at maintaining law and order. The Delhi Police has issued prohibitory orders under section 144, which bars large gatherings, were imposed in the northeast district and is making every attempt to avoid the unfortunate January 26, 2021 incident wherein protesting farmers clashed with the Delhi Police and

one particular wing of the tractor rally, led by Deep Sidhu, moved to Red Fort causing chaos in the national Capital. Apprehending the disturbance of peace, Haryana has sealed the border with Punjab at Shambhu border on GT Road border (National Highway-44) which falls between Punjab's Patiala and Haryana's Ambala districts, also suspended mobile internet services and bulk SMS in seven districts — Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa — from February 11 to

13. In a notification, the Haryana Government said dongle services provided on mobile phones, will remain suspended and only voice calls would go through. In Sonipat, the district administration has asked fuel pump owners to not fill up bottles or other containers. A 10-litre cap has been introduced for tractors. The administration has warned that providing fuel to those associated with the farmers' protest will attract action.

Elaborate arrangements are in place at the borders in Jind and Fatehabad districts to stop the march.

Sources said the Delhi Police are blocking the city's borders with Haryana by placing massive containers. Cranes have been deployed to move these barriers if farmers try to cross into Delhi. In fact, Haryana too has brought in cement barriers to ensure that the protesting farmers cannot enter Delhi. In Delhi, cops are holding drills to practise firing teargas shells if farmers refuse to stop. A video shows the Delhi Police lining up and firing teargas shells in an open area in north Delhi. The exercise, meanwhile, has left local residents in discomfort. Many of them complained of burning sensation in their eyes after the drill. The Delhi Police is also keeping a close watch on social media in the run-up to the protest.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha had announced the 'Delhi Chalo' march by more than 200 farmers' unions on February 13 to press the Centre into accepting several demands, including the enactment of a law to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) for crops, implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, provision of pensions for farmers and farm laborers, forgiveness of farm debts, withdrawal of police charges, and seeking justice for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.



Deserted Janata Dal (United) office ahead of the floor test of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led Government in Patna on Sunday

PTI

All eyes on Bihar Floor test

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ PATNA /
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the floor test for the newly aligned Nitish Kumar-led NDA Government on Monday, while political parties were busy keeping their members together through sumptuous meals, antakshari, and indoor games, all eyes are also focused on the role of incumbent Speaker Avadh Bihari Chaudhary, an RJD member, and Jitan Ram Manjhi-led HAM, a constituent of the present Nitish regime.

Sources indicate that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar himself is apprehensive of potential cross-voting by some of his party MLAs who have reportedly been unreachable since last week. The JD(U) chief is seemingly facing internal dissent within the party for his frequent changes in stance, treating the party as his personal fiefdom, and his recent decision to replace his close confidant and predecessor Lallan Singh as the chief of JD(U).

Another former JD(U) president

and once a close aide to Nitish, RCP Singh, is also aiming to sideline Nitish from Bihar politics entirely. RCP, who was part of Narendra Modi's Cabinet as a JD(U) partner and has now joined the BJP.

The Bihar Assembly has a total strength of 243, with the majority mark set at 122. The NDA holds a comfortable majority with 128 seats, comprising 78 from BJP, 45 from JD(U), 4 from Hindustani Awam Morcha, and Independent MLA Sumit Singh. On the other side, led by RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, efforts are underway to "woo" 14 legislators, as the party remains the largest in the Bihar Assembly with 79 MLAs, followed by the Congress with 19, Left parties with 18, and the lone AIMM also in the Mahagathbandhan.

Sources indicate that Manjhi had a meeting with an emissary of RJD supremo Lalu Prasad a day earlier, and now he is attempting to exert his influence with four MLAs in his camp, including the former's son, who was sworn in as part of the newly formed Nitish Ministry.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Deputy Chief Ministers KP Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, UP Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana and State legislators during a visit to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on Sunday

PTI

Yogi takes politicians on a spiritual odyssey

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA

In response to the call of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana, MLAs from various political affiliations, barring the Samajwadi Party, ventured on a spiritual odyssey to Ayodhya to pay homage to Lord Ram.

Expressing gratitude for the opportunity, the MLAs commended Yogi and Mahana for extending the invitation. "I am overwhelmed to be present at the 'Darbar' of Lord Ram. My dream has come true," Mahana told reporters after his temple visit. He reflected on the evolution of the site, from its humble origins to the grandeur it stands as today. "I never envisioned the temple would be such a majestic structure reflecting our religious and cultural ethos," he said.

Accompanied by Ministers and legislators from the ruling

coalition, Opposition members from parties including the BSP, the RLD, and the Congress set aside political disparities to partake in the collective reverence for Lord Ram. Luxurious buses provided by the Transport Corporation facilitated the journey, resonating with the chanting of Ramdhun and adorned with vibrant flowers, creating a serene ambiance. Refreshments were provided for comfort, alongside thoughtful tokens of remembrance like diaries, pens, and calendars for each MLA. As flower petals showered the luxurious buses upon arrival in Ayodhya, the journey symbolised a historic milestone, embodying the realisation of a centuries-old dream — the construction of the grand temple of Lord Ram. The unity displayed by the Government and MLAs across the political spectrum was praised as a testament to Yogi's visionary leadership.

CM opens Cognizant centre in BBSR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik here on Sunday inaugurated a new facility of Cognizant, one of the largest professional services companies in the world.

Cognizant is a \$ 19.4 billion, US-based multinational company recognised as one of the world's leading IT services providers with a purpose to engineer modern businesses that improve everyday life. The company employs more 350,000 professionals worldwide.

Patnaik said, "The entry of Cognizant marks a significant milestone for a new Odisha further solidifies its reputation as a leading IT investment destination in the country."



Minister of Electronics & IT Tusharkanti Behera said that under the leadership of the Chief Minister, Bhubaneswar has become global hotspot for IT, ESDM and consulting companies. The new centre of Cognizant shall create more opportunities for the State's youths and drive the economy upwards.

Principal Secretary, E&IT Department Manoj Kumar Mishra said, "We are excited

to begin our expansion to Tier II cities with the opening of a new Cognizant centre in Bhubaneswar."

The Cognizant centre is spread over 52,000 sqft and designed to accommodate 1,000 of the company's associates in hybrid work environment. It is located at the Odisha Technology Centre. The new centre is projected to be expanded further to accommodate 5,000+ associates in two years.

RAJYA SABHA NOMINATIONS

Parties unfold their cards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the elections for vacant seats in the Rajya Sabha scheduled this month, the BJP and the TMC announced their candidates on Sunday. The BJP released a list of 14 candidates for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal. The list includes Sudhanshu Trivedi, and former Congress leader RPN Singh from Uttar Pradesh, with former Haryana BJP

chief Subhash Barala announced as the candidate from Haryana. The Trinamool Congress nominated journalist Sagarika Ghose among its candidates for the biennial polls on February 27.

In Uttar Pradesh, besides Sudhanshu Trivedi, former BJP MLA Sadhna Singh, and RPN Singh, the other candidates are Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, Amarpal Maurya, Sangita Balwant, and Navin Jain. RPN Singh, a former Congress leader from the politically important Kurmi caste, joined the BJP in 2022.

The State has the highest number of vacancies with 10 seats. None of the Union Ministers whose terms are ending were named in the list, indicating a strong possibility that many of them will contest the Lok Sabha polls. However, the party is yet to name several candidates. Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, representing Karnataka in the Rajya Sabha, and BJP chief spokesperson and media head Anil Baluni, the outgoing MP from Uttarakhand, have not been nominated.

50% bonus to be paid

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Sunday announced a slew of measures for the welfare of Kendu leaf pluckers and others engaged in the sector.

According to the Chief Minister, the Kendu leaf pluckers would be provided 50% bonus in the ongoing crop season. The amount would be provided to the pluckers through the direct benefit transfer (DBT) method.

The binders and seasonal staffs of the Kendu leaf sector would also get 10% incentives. The State Government has also hiked the price of Kendu leaves. The price of a bundle of 20 leaves has been increased from Rs 1.40 to Rs 1.60 while the same for a bundle of 40 leaves has been raised to Rs 3.20 from Rs 2.80.

The government has also accepted a

proposal for revision of wages for the seasonal staffs of the Kendu leaf sector. Besides, the travelling and cycle allowances for the seasonal employees have been hiked by 50%. Now, the pluckers can avail the social security measures till 62 years of age.

The government would provide financial assistance of Rs 25,000 for the wedding of daughters of Kendu leaf pluckers during the upcoming crop season.

As many as 9 lakh Kendu leaf pluckers, binders and seasonal employees would be benefitted by the welfare measures.

However, the BJP said the announcement has been made keeping the 2024 general elections in mind. The Kendu leaf pluckers were demanding 100% bonus, but only 50% has been announced. The government has not announced any hike in the salary of signal employees.

In Kalahandi

5 die, 25 hurt as van overturns

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As many as five farm labourers were killed and 25 others critically injured after a pickup van by which they were travelling overturned near Dokaripada under the Golamunda police station in Kalahandi district in the evening on Sunday.

The injured people were admitted to the Dharmagarh, Junagarh and Bhawanipatna hospitals.

As per reports, over 60 farm labourers were returning home from their workplace when the mishap occurred.

The conditions of the 25 injured were stated to be critical and the casualties were likely to increase.

Humans continue to invade sacred forests, their inhabitants

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Pioneer's report published recently that Kerala was fast becoming the graveyard for wild animals is being substantiated by the State's Forest Department, an institution set up to protect jungles and wild animals. The entire population in Wayanad district has demanded a "death sentence" for a wild tusker that killed a 47-year-old man in Mananthawadi, a forest suburb, on Saturday.

Residents insist that the Forest Department should eliminate the elephant, either by shooting it or relocating it to a safer area. However, recent incidents prove that the Forest Department does not have qualified veterinary specialists for tranquilising the elephant. "A few weeks ago, we saw an elephant known as 'Thanneer



PTI

Komban' succumbing to a tranquilising shot administered by the Forest Department's veterinary surgeon. No investigation was conducted to determine the cause of the pachyderm's death," said V K Venkitachalam, chairman of the Heritage Animal Task Force, an organisation in Thrissur dedicated to wildlife welfare.

Venkitachalam noted that the death of Thanneer Komban, reportedly tranquilised by a Government veterinarian,

could be attributed to outdated tranquiliser. "The tranquilising pistol and drug have expired, and there is no official record indicating the provision of new tranquiliser. Additionally, there is a shortage of qualified veterinarians to tranquilise elephants or other wild animals," he added. The past two months saw a leopard and a wild boar being killed within minutes of receiving tranquiliser shots, which Venkitachalam considers a strange coincidence.

A K Saseendran, Kerala Minister for Forest and wild Life, who celebrated his 78th birthday on January 29 remained incommunicado for hours and ordered the tusker be tranquilised at the earliest and shifted to Muthanga Elephant Camp. However, the Minister was non-committal regarding the mission's timing. Local residents in Mananthawadi, many of whom reside on forest land allocated to them by regional political parties, blamed the Forest Department for the

elephant's intrusion into residential areas. Venkitachalam countered, saying the animals' habitat has diminished due to the Government's concessions to the forest mafia, who distribute forest land at their discretion. "There is a lack of water and vegetation for elephants and other wild animals, prompting them to encroach upon human settlements in search of sustenance. We cannot blame wild animals for their efforts to survive," he said.

In Rourkela

Minor girl raped; accused detained

PNS ■ ROURKELA

The victim was as a resident of Lahunipada

A minor girl was allegedly raped by a local youth in the Bedavyas-Marengapidhi locality of Rourkela on Sunday. A police team detained the youth in this connection and launched a probe into the allegation.

According to police, the girl had come to the house of a relative in Marengapidhi along with her family. The accused youth lured the girl and took her to a secluded place where he forcibly outraged her modesty. Later, the girl narrated her

ordeal after returning home.

The girl's family lodged an FIR at the Brahmani Tarang police station in this connection. Acting on the FIR, the police team picked up the youth. "The accused is now being interrogated to gather more evidence to substantiate the allegation," a police official said.

In Baripada

Engineer held for exploiting 4 women

PNS ■ BARIPADA

A Junior Engineer was arrested by the Town police here on Saturday for allegedly physically exploiting four women on the pretext of marriage to them.

According to sources, Sukura Singh, a Junior Engineer in Rairangpur Irrigation

Department, had established physical relationship with four women in the same period

He had allegedly promised all the women to marry and had sexual relationship with them after gaining their trust.

He was nabbed by police after two of the women had suspicion about him and lodged a complaint against

him. Police investigated the matter; and, following an inquiry, found he sexually exploited the four women giving false assurances of marriage. He had also borrowed money from each of the women on different occasions.

After arrest, he was forwarded to court under the relevant sections of IPC.

4L spawns released into Budhabalanga

To enhance fish population

PNS ■ BALESWAR

To enhance freshwater fish population, as many as about 4 lakh high quality spawns, including Rohu, were released in the Budhabalanga river near Barunighat under Dahapada panchayat of Remuna block.

District Collector DB Shinde, District Fisheries Officer Jitendra Behera and Deputy Director Fisheries Dipti Kumar Mohapatra, BDO Remuna Sangram Parida, MLA Sudhansu Parida, ZP President Narayan Pradhan, local Sarpanch Pranati Jena and Mandarpur

Sarpanch Manjushree Das were among others present.

The speakers mentioned about various Government schemes to promote and encourage sustainable fish farming.

In another development the Sub collector Balasore Sadar after getting complaints from the villagers that mafias are lifting sand and soil illegally from riverbeds and sources at Dahapada, Barunighat and Hatiagand etc, raided the site and seized four tractors and heaps of sand which were illegally excavated and dumped. The Sub Collector also asked the Tehsiladr to adopt zero tolerance towards sand mafias.

Golden Triangle Cycling Championship held



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Bhubaneswar Cycling and Adventure Club (BCAC) conducted its flagship event 'Golden Triangle Cycling Championship (GTCC)' for the sixth consecutive year on Sunday.

Aimed at improving competitive spirit among the budding cyclists of Odisha, the GTCC witnessed one of the largest participations so far in terms of more than 100 pro-cyclists from 12 States racing against their competitors.

Commissioner of Police, Cuttack Bhubaneswar and BCAC president Sanjeeb Panda graced the prize distribution ceremony as chief guest.

The podium finishers were: 1st position Manzeet Singh of Punjab (time taken 2:44:32) Rs 1,00,000 cash award; 2nd position Hanuman Yashwant Chopade of Maharashtra (time

taken: 02:44:40) Rs 50,000 cash award; 3rd position Krishna Nayakodi of Punjab (time 02:44:41) Rs 25,000 cash award

Earlier in the morning, the race had been flagged off from the Ashoka Pillar on the foothills of Dhauli Peace Pagoda at 6.30am. Two foreign nationals (from Austria and South Africa) also participated in the event.

The BCAC also awarded cash prizes to first 10 finishers along with prizes in different age categories.

The BCAC has earlier conducted mega cycling events like Vietnam to Cambodia, Bhubaneswar to Bhutan, Cuttack to Kathmandu, Manali to Khardung La in the Himalayas as well as an expedition in Sri Lanka. The BCAC is committed to promote both running and cycling culture in Odisha along with other adventure activities.

MP Majhi injured in car accident

PNS ■ NABARANGPUR

Nabarangpur MP Ramesh Majhi sustained minor injuries when the car carrying him met with an accident near Chikalpadar under the Umarkote police station late on Saturday night.

As per reports, the driver of the car and another person were also injured after the vehicle skidded off the road following a tire burst.

The accident took place

when Majhi was returning home via Raipur after conclusion of the Budget Session of Parliament. While the exact reason behind the accident was not yet clear, the driver of the car was stated to have lost control over the wheels after a tyre of the vehicle reportedly burst.

The driver and the PSO of the MP also sustained minor injuries. The three were provided with treatment at the Community Health Centre at Umarkote.

Fishery channel sand casting 10K fishers in Chhatrapur to lose livelihood



Matsyajivi Forum renews demand for maintenance of channel, construction of new jetty

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR

Sand casting and negligence in maintenance of fishery channel in Aryapalli village under Chhatrapur block has severely affected the livelihood of 10,000 fishermen, alleged Ganjam Zilla Matsyajivi Forum president M Gumali and joint secretary B Bhimsen.

According to them, after the coming up of the Gopalpur Port, the then Chief Minister late Biju Patnaik in order to protect the livelihood of the native fishermen, had constructed a jetty in 1993

adjacent to the port boundary that facilitated the operation of fishing boats for catching fish. About 20 fishermen villages under Gopalpur and Chhatrapur area were benefited.

Bijubabu's Government had also directed the port administration to look after the day-to-day maintenance of the channel by periodically removing the sand casting which is regularly taking place due to high tide. After the transfer of the port management, the responsibility was entrusted upon the private port management which took over. But unfortunately, it did not adhere to the direction, thereby giving rise to the present crisis threatening the livelihood of thousands of fishermen.

Against such apathy of the private port authorities, the fishermen had resorted to dharna in 2017 after which the

district administration called a tripartite meeting in which a written agreement was signed on 28.10.2017 calling upon the port authorities to clear the channel from time to time in order to facilitate smooth operation of the boats and, entrusting the responsibility on the Fisheries Department to assist and supervise the channel. The agreement, however, was not followed and not implemented sincerely, the forum alleged.

For a permanent solution, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had sanctioned about Rs 300 crore for installation of a new jetty on the north side of Gopalpur port. However, due to some technical grounds, the work has not yet been started.

ST Chairman VK Pandian to whom Ganjam Zilla Mashya Jivi Forum had submitted a memorandum in the matter in August last to

start the work of the proposed new harbour and to remove sand casting in the existing channel, Pandian realising the needs of the fishermen, too had directed the competent authorities for immediate starting of the construction work. The forum also submitted a copy of their memorandum to the former Deputy Speaker of Assembly Rama Chandra Panda.

Meanwhile, the forum appealed to the Government to renew their efforts once again and take expeditious steps to start the construction work of the new jetty and remove the sand casting from the old one. Hundreds of fishermen also demanded proper illumination of the area, besides, a rest room, provision of drinking water, a new go-down by demolishing the old one and a pucca road from Marine PS to jetty point.

4 die in vain-truck collision in Jharsuguda



1 killed, 10 hurt as SUV hits truck in Bhadrak

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA/ BHADRAK

At least five persons lost their lives and 19 others were grievously injured in two separate road accidents in the State on Sunday morning.

In the first accident, a pickup van carrying passengers collided head-on with a truck at Lakhanpur in Jharsuguda district on NH-49.

As per reports, four persons in the pickup van lost their lives and nine others were se-

riously injured in the mishap that occurred at around 10:30am on Sunday morning.

All the injured were rushed to Jharsuguda District Headquarters Hospital.

Following the mishap, the Lakhanpur police reached the spot and sent the bodies for postmortem.

In the second accident, one person died on the spot after the Bolero he was travelling in hit a Hyva truck near Aradi chhak in Bhadrak in the wee hours of Sunday.

10 persons including five children were also injured in the mishap and they have been admitted to Bhadrak Hospital.

Out of them, six injured were later shifted to SCB Medical College Hospital after their health condition deteriorated.

As per reports, the passengers in the Bolero were returning to Baleswar's Gopalpur after darshan of Lord Jagannath in Puri when the mishap occurred.

While the reason for the accident was still unclear, it is suspected that the Hyva truck was in the wrong lane when the mishap occurred.

Bhadrak Rural police have launched a probe into this connection. The driver of the Hyva truck fled the spot following the mishap.

Drunk man kills infant son in Bargarh

PNS ■ BARGARH

A man allegedly in an inebriated state killed his 5-month-old infant son in Bargarh district.

The accused was identified as Hemant Bhue. The incident occurred at Cherangajhanj under the Paikmal police limits on Saturday evening.

According to reports, Hemant in a drunk state asked his wife for money to con-

sume liquor. As his wife refused to give him money and argued with him, the irate man held his infant son in his hand and slammed him on the road twice causing the death.

The baby in critical condition was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he was declared dead.

On receiving information, the Paikmal police reached the village and arrested the accused father.

Woman's body found in bag in Jaipur

PNS ■ JAJPUR

A decomposed body of a woman was found packed in a gunny bag near Baitarani river at Kuanrpur under the Mangalpur police station in Jaipur district on Sunday. The identity of the deceased was yet to be established.

Some locals initially spotted the bag and detected foul smell emanating from it. On

being informed, police reached the spot, recovered the body for postmortem and initiated an investigation into the matter.

Though the reason of the death was not known, it was suspected that the woman was murdered and the body was stuffed in the gunny bag. A case has been registered in this connection while further probe was on.

PM's Principal Secretary visits IIM Sambalpur



PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Dr Pramod Kumar Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, was in the Sambalpur University to attend the National Economics Conference on Saturday and he was also invited to visit the IIM Sambalpur for a campus tour followed by an interaction with faculty members. He was taken on the tour by Prof Mahadeo Jaiswal, Director, IIM Sambalpur.

The Director shared the core values of IIM Sambalpur, i.e., Innovation, Integrity and Inclusion. He informed that IIM Sambalpur is focusing on five key initiatives of the Government of India: the New Education Policy, Make in India, Startup India, Digital India and Women Empowerment. He also informed about the training programme run for the master weavers.

Prof Jaiswal also informed that IIM Sambalpur is the first

institute among the other IIMs, which have the highest gender ratio in MBA admissions as well as a 50-50 ratio in the faculty and staffs. He also shared a recent MoU signed with NSE and Soborne Business School of University of Paris for the new course launched in Fintech.

Dr Mishra emphasised the transformative potential of the PM Gati Shakti initiative by the Government of India. He said IIM Sambalpur could serve as a catalyst for the development of numerous projects and master plans, significantly contributing to the advancement of the economies of the State and the nation.

He further emphasised the potential of IIM Sambalpur as a hub for hosting significant conferences and events. He also underscored the government's recognition of the strategic importance of IIM Sambalpur in driving economic growth and fostering innovation.

More Odisha communities included in ST list

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is committed to the development of tribal communities while preserving their socio-cultural heritage, said Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Arjun Munda on the three Bills passed by the Parliament to fulfil a long-pending demand of tribal communities of Jammu & Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

One of the Bills is The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2024 proposed to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950

to modify the list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in relation to Odisha.

The following changes/inclusions will be made in list of Scheduled Tribes of Odisha:

I. Four Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), which are proposed to be included in their own names in the list of STs:

Pauri Bhuyan, Paudi Bhuyan as synonyms of Bhuiya, Bhuyan at Sl. No. 6;

Chuktia Bhunjia as synonym of Bhunjia at Sl. No. 9;

Bondo as sub-entry under STs "Bondo Paraja, Bonda Paroja. Banda Paroja" at Sl. No.13; and Mankidia as synonym of ST "Mankirdia" at

Sl.No. 47.

II. Omitting of two names from the list of Scheduled Castes

Tamadia at Sl. No. 87; and Tamudia at Sl. No. 88.

III. Inclusion of communities names of which are phonetic variations or synonyms of pre-existing entries in the list of STs of the State:

Tamadia, Tamaria, Tamudia, Tamodia Bhumij, Tamudia Bhumij, Tamundia Bhumij, Tamulia Bhumij, Tamadia Bhumij as a sub-entry under main entry "Bhumij" at Sl. No. 8.

(These communities are proposed to be omitted from the Scheduled Caste list.)

Banda Paraja, Bonda Paraja, Bonda, Banda as sub-

entry under STs "Bondo Poraja, Bonda Paroja. Banda Paroja" at Sl. No.13.

Durua, Dhurua, Dhurava as subset of Dharua, Dhuruba, Dhurva at Sl. No. 17.

Kaur, Kunwar, Kaonr, Kuanr, Konwar, Kuanar, Kaanr, Koanr, Kuanwar as synonym of ST "Kawar, Kanwar" at Sl. No. 28.

Inclusion of Kui (Kandha) as a new sub-entry under the ST Khond and Kandha Kumbhar community as a subset of Kandha Scheduled Tribe at Sl. No. 31.

Uram, Oram, Uraon, Dhangara and Oraon Mudi communities as synonyms of Oraon listed at Sl. No. 53.

Bareng Jhodia Paroja, Penga Paroja, Pengu Paroja,

Porja, Selia Paroja, as synonym of ST Paroja at Sl. No. 55.

Rajual, Rajuad as synonym of ST Rajuar at Sl. No. 57.

Saara as synonym under Saora, Savar, Saura, Sahara, etc at Sl. No. 59.

IV. Inclusion of communities through New Entry:

Muka Dora, Mooka Dora, Nuka Dora, Nooka Dora with area restriction (in undivided Koraput District i.e., Koraput, Nowrangapur, Rayagada & Malkangiri districts) at Sl. No. 63.

Konda Reddy, Konda Reddi at Sl. No. 64.

After the Bills become an Act, member of the communities newly listed in the revised list of Scheduled Tribes of J&K,

Andhra Pradesh and Odisha will also be able to derive benefits meant for STs under the existing schemes of the government.

Some of the major schemes run by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs include Pre- and Post-Matric Scholarship, National Overseas Scholarship, National Fellowship and scholarship schemes along with concessional loans from National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation, hostels for ST boys and girls, etc. In addition to above, they will also be entitled to benefits of reservation in services and admission to educational institutions as per government policy.

Modi to distribute one lakh appointment letters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will distribute more than one lakh appointment letters to newly inducted recruits in Central Government departments on Monday via video conferencing. On this occasion, the Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone of Phase-I of the Integrated Complex “Karmayogi Bhavan”. This complex will promote collaboration and synergy among various pillars of Mission Karmayogi. Prime Minister Modi will distribute more than 1 lakh appointment letters to newly inducted recruits on February 12 at 10:30 am via video conferencing, a statement issued by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) said. The Rozgar Mela will be held at 47 locations across the country and the recruitments are taking place across central government departments, and state and Union Territory governments are supporting this initiative. The new recruits will be joining the government in various



ministries and departments vis-a-vis Department of Revenue, Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Higher Education, Department of Atomic Energy, Ministry of Defence, Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Ministry of Railways, the statement said. The Rozgar Mela is a step towards fulfilment of the commitment of the prime minister to accord highest priority to employment generation in the country, it said.

The mela is expected to leverage further employment generation and provide gainful opportunities to the youth for their empowerment and direct participation in National Development, the statement said. The newly inducted appointees are also getting an opportunity to train themselves through “Karmayogi Praramb”, an online module on iGOT Karmayogi portal where more than 880 e-learning courses have been made available for ‘anywhere any device’ learning format, it said.

PM to witness India UPI services launch in Lanka, Mauritius

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India’s Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services will be rolled out in Sri Lanka and Mauritius at a virtual ceremony on Monday that will be witnessed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the top leadership of the two island nations. India’s RuPay card services would also be launched in Mauritius at the event. Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth and Sri Lanka’s President Ranil Wickremesinghe will join Modi at the virtual ceremony, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). “Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe and Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth will witness the launch of Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, and also RuPay card services in Mauritius on February 12 at 1 PM via video conferencing,” it said. Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI is an instant real-time payment system to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones. RuPay



is a global card payment network from India, with wide acceptance at shops, ATMs, and online. The launch of the Indian services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius is taking place amid New Delhi’s increasing bilateral economic ties with the two countries. “India has emerged as a leader in Fintech innovation and Digital Public Infrastructure. The prime minister has placed a strong emphasis on sharing our development experiences and innovation with partner countries,” the MEA said in a statement. It said given India’s robust cultural and people-to-people linkages with Sri Lanka and

Mauritius, the launch will benefit a wide cross-section of people through a faster and seamless digital transaction experience and enhance digital connectivity between the countries.”The launch will enable availability of UPI settlement services for Indian nationals travelling to Sri Lanka and Mauritius as well as for Mauritian nationals travelling to India,” it said. “The extension of RuPay card services in Mauritius will enable Mauritian banks to issue cards based on RuPay mechanism in Mauritius and facilitate usage of RuPay card for settlements both in India and Mauritius,” it added.

Modi pays tribute to Pandit Deendayal



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday paid tributes to Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, a key party ideologue, on his death anniversary, saying he showed the path to take the country forward by keeping the Indian culture and heritage at its centre. These have become an inspiration in building a developed India as well, Modi posted on X. Upadhyaya, an RSS functionary, was among the founding members of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the BJP forerunner. His ideas of “antyodaya” (uplift

of the most impoverished) and “integral humanism” have often been cited by Modi as an inspiration for his governance model. Upadhyaya died in 1968. Other BJP leaders also paid rich tributes to him, with party president J P Nadda asserting that his values will always be a guiding light for the party. Home Minister Amit Shah said Upadhyaya’s life is a giant symbol of serving the nation and devotion towards it. He believed no country can progress by neglecting the fundamental values of its culture, Shah said.

Expelled Congress leader hints at rift in Gandhi family

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Expelled Congress leader Acharya Pramod Krishnam on Sunday dropped a bombshell indicating of a clear rift in the Congress’ first family — the Gandhis. Krishnam who is all set to join BJP said the High Command has a division and that the former party chief Rahul Gandhi has done everything to keep away his sibling Priyanka Gandhi and questioned why the latter has been in the party without any portfolio. He also mentioned the perpetual disrespect to the another stalwart Sachin Pilot who has been batting day in an out to sustain himself in the party led by a reluctant politician like Rahul Gandhi. Krishnam also sought to know why it’s now to be one month for the second leg of Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra that Priyanka



has not joined the yatra. “Like Lord Shiv, Sachin Pilot is gulping poison, Pramod Krishnam said adding that, Priyanka Gandhi -- for the first time in the party’s history -- was kept as the general secretary without any portfolio. Ask Priyanka Gandhi whether she is happy about it. Ask her why she is not joining Rahul Gandhi’s Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra. Who is orchestrating all

this because our president (Mallikarjun Kharge) is a rubber stamp,” Pramod Krishnam said. Krishnam was expelled from the Congress for six years for indiscipline and anti-party remarks. In the statement issued by Congress general secretary KC Venugopal, the party said, “In view of complaints about indiscipline and repeatedly making statement

against the party, Congress president has approved the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee’s proposal to expel Pramod Krishnam for six years with immediate effect.” “When I was 16 or 17 years old, I gave my words to Rajiv Gandhi that I would stand with him. Today I am giving my words to PM Modi that I would stand with PM Modi because he is working for the development of the country. Everyone is asking what was my fault — whether me meeting Narendra Modi, Yogi Adityanath or me attending the pran pratishtha ceremony of Ram Temple,” Pramod Krishnam said. On being asked whether he would join the BJP, he said he did not know what he would do. “I have faith in God. I will go wherever God takes me. I am with Modi ji because he is with the country,” Pramod Krishnam said.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawala said Pramod Krishnam earned Rahul Gandhi’s wrath because of his ‘strident defence of Priyanka Vadra’. “Congress cannot even tolerate aides of Priyanka now!” Poonawala said adding that when he was in the Congress he alerted Acharya Pramod that ‘Priyanka was no better than Rahul’ but Acharya chose to remain loyal to Priyanka. Among his anti-party activities, Acharya Pramod criticised the Congress’s stand of not attending the pran pratishtha ceremony of Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22 and despite the top leadership declining the invitation, he attended. On the expulsion, he said he was happy that the party freed him. “I wish to Congress party to expel me for 14 years instead of 6 years. Lord Rama was also expelled for 14 years,” he said.

In a first, CAPF constable exam being conducted in 13 regional languages

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time, the constable recruitment examination in the Central Armed Police Forces such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) will be conducted in 13 regional languages apart from Hindi and English. The examination are being conducted from February 10-March 7 and around 48 lakh candidates are appearing in 128 cities across the country, according to an official statement. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the guidance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had decided to conduct



the constable (general duty) examination for recruitment in CAPFs in 13 regional languages in addition to Hindi and English from January 1, 2024. This “historic decision” has been taken on the initiative of the home minister to increase the participation of local youths in the Central Armed Police Forces and to promote regional languages, it said. In addition to Hindi and

English, the question papers will now be prepared in the following 13 regional languages: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, Urdu, Punjabi, Manipuri and Konkani. Constable examination is one of the flagship recruitment tests conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) attracting lakhs of youths from across the country.

Kharge extends party support to protesting farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday extended his party’s support to the farmers who have set on march to Delhi seeking fulfillment of the promises Modi government made to them when they withdrew their year long protest outside the Delhi borders. He congratulated the Punjab farmers for launching the stir for the fulfillment of their demands. Addressing an impressive workers convention organized by the Punjab Congress, Kharge pointed out, Modi had promised so many things to the farmers including guarantee on Minimum Support Price. “What happened to those promises?” he asked. The Congress president accused Prime Minister Modi of calling farmers names and describing them as terrorists and ‘andolan jeeves’ in a most derogatory manner. Congratulating the people of Punjab, he said, the state was unique as it was only here that both the Jawsans and Kisans are found. He said, in some places there are kisans but no jawsans and in some places there are jawsans but no kisans. But, he remarked, it is only in Punjab we find both Jawsans and Kisans thus a great and unique instance of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri’s slogan, “Jai Jawan Jai Kisan”. But, Kharge regretted, Modi had tried to damage and destroy the both institutions of farming as well as the defence services. He said, while Modi first brought three black laws, then he introduced the Agnipath scheme in the defence services. Substantiating his charge that Modi was anti-farmer, Kharge



disclosed that Rs one lakh crores allocated for the agriculture sector had lapsed as the Modi government did not spend it on agriculture. He disclosed that Rs 40,000 crores was pocketed by the private insurance companies under the ‘Fasal Beema Yojana’. Besides, for the first time in independent India’s history, farmers were paying tax of Rs 25,000 per hectare. Similarly, Kharge added, the Modi government was not filling about 30 lakh vacancies in various government departments and public sector undertakings. He alleged that Modi does not want the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Classes to get 50 percent jobs. He said, Modi wants the poor to remain poor. He said, the big and huge industries set up under the Public Sector by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were being handed over to one single friend of the Prime Minister. Responding to Modi’s question as to what Congress did, Kharge said, “we built dams, brought white and green revolution and set up institutions like the Punjab Agriculture University”. He challenged the BJP and Modi to name a single such thing they had done for the country. Taking a jibe at the Prime Minister, he remarked, sometimes Modi flirts off a single train twice, first from South and second time from the north.

Navy conferences on warship maintenance organised in Mumbai



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

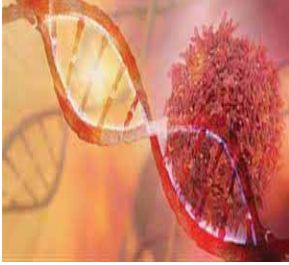
With the objective of maintain its fleet of submarines and warships in top operational condition, Indian Navy’s Annual Refit Conference 24 (ARC 24) and Annual Infrastructure Conference 24 (AIC 24) were conducted on February 8–9 at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai, under the Chairmanship of VAdm Kiran Deshmukh, Chief of Materiel, navy officials said here on Sunday. Refit Plans of Indian Naval Ships and Submarines, augmentation of infrastructure to meet the maintenance requirements of the new ships and submarines being inducted, Materiel Cooperation with Friendly Foreign Countries and digital solutions being implemented in enhancing maintenance were discussed. Foreseeable challenges in Maintenance of Indian Navy’s platforms and their solutions, including changes at the strategic level required to make refit and repair processes efficient were also deliberated, they said. The Chief of Materiel complemented all Naval Dockyards and Repair Yards for the efforts in successfully ensuring enhanced operational availability of naval assets. He also highlighted the importance of all Logistics and Maintenance Organisations to be more agile by harnessing new technology and efficient work processes, as

also the requirement for modernisation of marine assets and yard infrastructure. During the AIC, progress of various technical and marine infrastructure projects was reviewed by the Chief of Materiel. He emphasised the need to develop ‘Future Ready’ repair and support infrastructure while modernising and revitalising the existing infrastructure. He expressed happiness with the progress made in the ongoing infrastructure projects and appreciated the completion of various projects in the previous year including the Wet Basin and Refit Jetty at Port Blair. Vice Admiral Sanjay J Singh, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Naval Command, addressing the forum complemented the efforts put in by all concerned in ensuring enhanced operational availability of platforms and emphasised the need to maintain the focus towards supporting heightened operational readiness, upskilling of workforce to develop expertise in new inductions and attention to information security. The conference was attended by delegates from Naval Headquarters, the three Naval Commands, the Tri-Services Andaman and Nicobar Command, Director General Naval Projects, Naval Dockyards, Repair Yards and Material Organisations of the Indian Navy.

Need for expanding oncology services in tier two cities: Experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The increasing incidence of cancer in India, coupled with alarming statistics such as 50 per cent of lung cancer cases occurring in non-smokers and breast cancer affecting every eighth woman, underscores the urgent need to expand oncology services in tier two cities to close the care gap in cancer treatment across the States. On the inaugural day of the two-day IO-CON2024 conference which was held here, top oncologists also highlighted the impact of factors like declining air quality and lifestyle habits on cancer prevalence, emphasizing the importance of enhancing awareness and early diagnosis. Dr. Madhur Garg, the Clinical Director of Radiation Oncology at Montefiore Medical Center in the United States, emphasized the importance of expanding oncology services in tier two cities in India and advocated for a strong public-private partnership to achieve the goal. Dr. Garg also pointed out that doctors are willing to serve in tier two cities, provided there is adequate infrastructure in place to support cancer treatment services. He also acknowledged the positive impact of the central flagship Ayushman Bharat health coverage. “Of the almost 14 lakh new cancer cases diagnosed in India every year, more than 60% get diagnosed in advanced stages which underscores the need for an enhancing the awareness and diagnosis,” said Dr. Shubham Garg, Director of Surgical Oncology, IOCI, Fortis Hospital, Noida while Dr Anita Malik, Senior Consultant and Clinical Lead Radiation Oncology at IOCI stressed the



importance of scaling up radiation therapy equipment to meet the increasing demand, calling for greater cooperation between the public and private sectors. Dr PK Sharma, Executive Director, International Oncology Cancer Institute stressed on the need for a holistic treatment, personalized medicine in oncology leverages molecular testing and comprehensive genomic profiling to develop individualized treatment strategies that consider the unique genetic, molecular, and environmental factors influencing each patient’s cancer. In India, there are more than 640 radiation therapy equipment, but because the country is now experiencing a 5-7% annual growth in cancer cases, the number of machines needs to be scaled up to 1400 as per WHO, said the experts. “The infrastructure costs associated with any oncology institution exceed Rs 100 crore, and the cost of radiation devices is at least Rs 25 crore. This calls for sufficient public-private cooperation to make the treatment accessible to the greatest number of people, which is still limited to a set of people,” said Dr Malik. Looking ahead, Dr Rajat Bajaj, Program Director, IOCI emphasized the importance of timely detection and a people-friendly approach in oncology centers and stressed the need for government-private sector cooperation to save more lives.

Ambitious football for schools plan launched across country

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, in collaboration with All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has launched the ambitious Football for Schools (F4S) programme of FIFA for school students across the country. According to a Press release by the Ministry of Education, the programme aims to significantly broaden the accessibility of football for students, regardless of gender, within the school setting, while seamlessly integrating football-related activities into the education system in collaboration with various stakeholders. Under the programme, on 9th February 2024, 6848 footballs were distributed to 1260 Schools of 17 Districts of Odisha. The footballs were distributed from Nodal district NVS with the presence of local dignitaries from various fields. The kick-off of the distribution of balls was launched by Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on December 2, 2023 from JNV Cuttack, Odisha. Further, the footballs were distributed in the districts of Angul, Dhenkanal and Deogarh in Odisha; and Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat and UT of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu in a phased manner. An MoU was earlier signed between the Ministry of Education, AIFF and FIFA on 30 October, 30, 2022. Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya is the Nodal organization for the F4S programme. Under this programme, more than 11 lakh FIFA footballs are

to be distributed throughout the country in a phased manner. More than 1.50 lakh schools will benefit from this programme. As a part of the programme, to enhance capacity building, recently the department has conducted a master training programme at 3 venues, viz., Sambalpur, Pune and Bengaluru where around 300 physical education teachers/trainees from States/UTs, KVS, NVS and AIFF across India participated with an aim to learn from the best and further use their training and skills as Master Trainers at State level for further capacity building in the field. F4S aims to contribute to the education, development, and empowerment of around 700 million children across the world. It seeks to make football more accessible to both boys and girls by incorporating football activities into the education system, in partnership with relevant authorities and stakeholders. Through the F4S programme, the aim has also been to significantly broaden the accessibility of football for students, regardless of gender, within the school setting, while seamlessly integrating football-related activities into the education system in collaboration with various stakeholders. By fostering partnerships at different levels, the programme wishes to instil a sense of enthusiasm for the sport, laying the foundation for a lasting sports culture that goes beyond individual schools. It will not only introduce the joy of playing football to students but also infuse values of teamwork, discipline, and fitness, contributing to their holistic development.

An exhilarating term

Parliament adjourns for the last time before LS polls are held and the next Govt assumes office

As both Houses of Parliament have been adjourned sine die one last time before the general elections, it is time to reflect on the Government's achievements, challenges and legacy of the past five years. This period has been marked by significant policy reforms, legislative milestones and moments of both triumph and controversy. The concluding session of Parliament holds special significance as it serves as a crucial juncture for the Government to showcase its accomplishments and for the Opposition to hold the former accountable for its actions. Over the past five years, the Government has introduced a plethora of reforms across sectors, ranging from economy and governance to social welfare and national security. Initiatives such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and ambitious welfare schemes like Ayushman Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have left a deep impact on the nation's socio-economic milieu. However, alongside these successes,



the Government has faced its fair share of challenges and criticism. Issues such as economic slowdowns, agrarian distress, unemployment and social unrest have tested the administration's resolve and elicited strong reactions from both critics and supporters. Debates on contentious issues like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), farm laws and handling of COVID-19 pandemic have dominated parliamentary discourse. Besides, the Government's inability to take timely action to quell Manipur violence would also be a blot on its tenure. As the 17th Lok Sabha is bid farewell, the parliamentarians must assess the overall progress made and identify areas that require further attention. This

introspection is essential not only for the ruling party but for the entire political spectrum to understand the pulse of the nation and address people's aspirations effectively. Beyond legislative achievements, the last five years have witnessed significant shifts in the political landscape with coalition dynamics, rise of regional parties and evolving voter preferences shaping the electoral narrative. The general elections present an opportunity for citizens to voice their verdict on the Government's performance and chart the course for the nation. Moreover, the conclusion of the session marks the beginning of a new chapter in India's democratic journey, where the electorate will exercise its right to choose the next set of leaders to steer the country forward. It is time for political parties to engage in constructive dialogue, present their vision and earn the electorate's trust. In this transitional phase, lawmakers must uphold the principles of democracy, foster inclusivity and prioritise mass welfare. The Government's legacy will be defined not only by its legislative accomplishments but also by its commitment to upholding democratic values, promoting social justice and growth for all. As the nation embarks on the next phase of governance, let us reflect on the lessons learnt and communicate effectively to our would-be lawmaker representatives.

PICTALK



Children fly kites in a field in the backdrop of the Taj Mahal, in Agra

PTI

Synergise regional and national science academies

It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote science through regional media and provide regular updates

Science education in the country is at a crossroads, because of the declining trend among the new generation to pursue a career in Science. Across the country, many brilliant students move towards professional courses that fetch them a good placement soon after their studies. No one will wait 5 or 10 years to get a good placement. Even our policymakers neglect basic science education, forgetting the fact that it's the backbone for building a strong Viksit Bharat. The trend of student exodus to foreign countries is increasing. The public's initial encounter with scientific advancements often occurs through newspapers, television programs, and various other media outlets. The reduction in space or airtime allocated to Science can be viewed as a direct challenge to the field. Many media organisations prioritise commercial considerations when making decisions about content allocation. They may contribute to a lack of public awareness and understanding of scientific concepts, potentially hindering progress in scientific literacy and societal



engagement with Science. This lack of awareness leads to parental pressure on students to move away from science courses. It is where our regional science academies in the country can play a lead role in building a robust scientific force for the future. We have three national science academies in India -the Indian National Science Academy, the Indian Academy of Sciences, and the National Academy of Sciences, India. Even though our National Science Academies are doing their service to promote Science, it doesn't reach every nook and corner of the country. Here, regional science academies come into the picture. Regional science academies can play a crucial role in fostering scientific advancement, education, and collaboration within specific geographic

regions. These academies are well-positioned to address and prioritize issues that are specific to a particular region. They can focus on problems related to geography, climate, biodiversity, and other factors that may vary from one region to another. By bringing together scientists and researchers from a specific region, science academies help build a strong and collaborative scientific community. This facilitates the exchange of ideas, expertise, and resources, fostering a culture of innovation and cooperation. It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote Science through regional language media channels, maintain regular interactions with journalists, and offer science updates. accessible format. Apart from science popularisation activities, many regional academies conduct studies on various topics that could affect the enhancement of Science in society, for example, student exodus to foreign countries, public perception of science and scientific research, etc. Regional academies can offer insights into

the unique challenges faced by their communities and contribute to developing informed policies that address regional needs. Regional science academies can promote diversity and inclusion in Science by supporting underrepresented groups within the region. This contributes to a more inclusive and equitable scientific community. Regional science academies' contributions to nation-building and developing scientific temper are well documented in history. In our journey towards a Viksit Bharat, we should take various regional science academies and the National Science Academies' by affiliating them to the National body. When both academies work with a common goal, it can foster significant advancements in Indian Science. By aligning their efforts and resources, these academies can synergise their strengths, expertise, and networks to tackle scientific challenges more effectively.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

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Messi confronts China in his own way

China's psychological warfare extends from visa manipulations to Messi's 'snub,' providing a taste of their own strategy in return



BHOPINDER SINGH



Last year, three Indian Wushu players i.e., Nyeman Wangsu, Onilu Tega and Mepung Lamgu, were given stapled visas to travel to China, for the World University Games. All three were proud Indian Arunachalis, and the entire Indian squad pulled out of the competition in protest of the Chinese sleight. It was reminiscent of the 2016 incident when the Manager of the Indian Badminton team, Bamang Tago, was denied a visa to travel to China - he too was a Arunachali! Much earlier in 2011, a 45-team Indian Karate team travelling to China were issued standard visas, except five members who were given stapled visas, again all Arunachalis. Chinese are past masters in psychological warfare and no domain or opportunity is too irrelevant for them to resist partaking a 'ping'. It is culturally part and parcel of their patented 'three warfare' approach where they relentlessly invoke psychological, legal, and public opinion warfare. The recurring bone of contention is the Indian State Arunachal Pradesh which expansionist China falsely claims as so-called 'South Tibet', and therefore shadow boxing on the same. It's the same pressure tactic that it applies with Taiwan and forces its athletes to compete under an unfamiliar name called 'Chinese Taipei', in Olympics and other events. Taiwanese athletes also compete under an alien flag (1981 agreement with the International Olympics Committee led a newly designed white flag with a flower outline around a sun and the Olympic rings in the middle) with an unheard flag-raising song. The Chinese are constantly looking to score a symbolic and psychological 'hit'. Therefore, with such fixation with political posturing and insinuations in everything that it does and imagines, it also leads to hallucinations or perceived indignities whenever it is on the receiving end, deliberately or inadvertently. The latest issue of a 'non-starter' by the global football superstar, Lionel Messi, whilst in Hong Kong owing to an ostensible 'swollen and painful injury' got

doubly compounded by the football icon subsequently playing in Japan, within three days thereafter. The angst against Messi started early with fans booing the 'no-show' on field (which extended to even avoiding interacting with fans or receiving the trophy). The Chinese were not amused and were seen openly questioning the intent of the player and called out what they thought was a 'deliberate and calculated snub'. All hell broke loose when just after a couple of days Messi took to the ground in Japan. As it is, China has major beef with Japan. An indignant Global Times echoed Chinese frustrations in its editorial, "The match in Hong Kong became the only one in Messi's six pre-season friendly matches on this trip where he was absent. The situation ... has magnified these doubts and suspicions on the integrity of Inter Miami and Messi himself." The Chinese finally got a flavour of a dish that they so routinely serve, even if Messi who is an Argentine (which little or no sovereign stakes for or against China) is not known to make political points, unlike some other stars. This incident harks back to 2019 when the then Arsenal football club legend Mesut Ozil openly condemned China's treatment of the coun-

try's Uighur minority - the thin-skinned Chinese reacted furiously, and Arsenal club had humiliatingly buckled under pressure, offering meek clarification, "The content published is Ozil's personal opinion. As a football club, Arsenal has always adhered to the principle of not involving itself in politics". The Chinese had flexed muscle and extracted their revenge. For the Chinese, football is particularly important given its global popularity and Xi Jinping's penchant in the same reflecting with its declared aspiration to be a 'soccer powerhouse' with the stated intent of winning the Football World Cup in 2050! Perhaps the only time that Messi did come under political suspicion (indirectly again) was with his purported move to Saudi Arabia earlier, a move rife with suspicions of Saudis 'sportswashing' their murky credentials, by luring sportsmen with money. But Messi didn't move, finally. Despite a long career he has remained steadfastly apolitical and steered clear of political controversies. With a permanent house in Barcelona, Messi took no position on the contentious Catalan-independence issue, given its resonance in Barcelona region. However, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner has somehow never played against England at internation-

al level, with whom the Argentinian emotions date back to the 1982 Falkland War and Diego Maradona's infamous 'Hand of God' moment in 1986. In fact, Messi now plays for Inter Miami owned by the English star David Beckham, who had his own 'moment' against rival Argentines when he kicked their captain Diego Simeone in the crucial FIFA World Cup match of 1998. So, it is extremely unlikely that Messi would be making a political point this late in his career, and especially given the lucrative contracts he has with Chinese conglomerates. If anything, Messi has been in the news for milking his stardom by signing brand endorsements without bothering too much about the brand product or service itself. Incidentally, he had signed up with the now-in-news Byju's as their global ambassador, only to be put on hold when the company started going belly-up. Nonetheless, the Chinese are feeling insulted and aggrieved, Messi's likely innocence and apology notwithstanding. But it is a providential taste of China's own medicine. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POWER SECTOR WOES

Sir — The government in Andhra Pradesh seems to be under complacency with the pittance of Navarathnas Scheme provided to the poor sector. Though the beneficiaries are thankful for the small benefit they are equally upset over the increase in the burden imposed by an increase in the power bill. The functioning of three companies in the power sector seems to be let loose to function the way they want. Inadequate planning by distribution companies results in purchasing power from private players, who dictate unfavorable Power Purchase Agreements. This compels the distribution companies to burden consumers with charges like FPPCA I, FPPCA II, True Up Charge. Government offices' delayed power bill payments, subsidies, and unauthorized payouts of ₹1,400 crores to a private company further strain consumers, leading to unjustified extra charges of ₹500 and an unfair share of system-induced losses. To add to the woes Smart meters are going to be provided to each consumer. Each consumer has to bear the cost of it, which is likely to be around? 13,000/-. It is to be paid in monthly instalments for a few years. The smart meter lacks consumer benefits, focusing on prepaid and dynamic tariffs that favour private entities. Prepaid setups benefit companies, while dynamic pricing confuses consumers, hindering consumption planning. Reforms prioritize profits over people's well-being, urging the government to prioritize citizens over private interests for a better quality of life.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

INFLATION RISING

Sir — The Reserve Bank of India is trying to control the inflation rate. According to the RBI report, the inflation rate between April and December in the current financial year has been 5.5 per cent. The inflation rate is estimated to be 5.4 per cent during the entire current financial year. The inflation rate is likely to come down in the next financial year, and it may remain at 4.5 per cent.

Well-deserved Bharat Ratna



The Bharat Ratna, the Country's highest civilian honour has been given to three distinguished personalities of the country P V Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh and Swaminathan who have made monumental contributions to the nation in different sectors. P V Narasimha Rao the 9th prime minister of India, was a statesman and distinguished scholar of our times. He held the reins of the country during a politically tumultuous time in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when the nation was facing an extremely grave economic crisis and was on the brink of bankruptcy, indeed there were several challenges galore for him, the shattered Economy and several internal security problems, but with his visionary leadership he steered the country through successfully. Narasimha Rao's unmatched legacy secures his pivotal place in Indian history. Chaudhary Charan Singh dedicated his life to farmers' rights, earning the title 'champion of farmers.' A principled socialist, he advocated higher taxes for the wealthy and opposed luxury consumption. MS Swaminathan, a distinguished agricultural scientist, played a crucial role in India's transformation from a food-importing to a self-sufficient, food-exporting nation, earning him the moniker 'father of the green revolution' during challenging times marked by droughts.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bangalore

However, the efforts of the Reserve Bank of India and the claims of the government are in their place, but the bitter reality is that the food plate of the common man of the country is still expensive. This inflation is likely to increase further. In other words, the growth rate of our economy has been more than 7.5 per cent. But for the common man, economic development means that he gets relief from inflation and adequate employment opportunities. If inflation is not under control and youth are not getting employment, then the figures of economic progress have no relevance to the life of the common man.

Jahangir Shaikh | Mumbai

GRAHAM STAINES' DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Sir — A few days ago, on January 22, residents of Manoharpur, a remote village in Keonjhar district of Odisha observed the 25th death anniversary of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons. Graham Staines had been working with leprosy patients in Odisha since his coming to India in 1965 till his death in 1999. For 35 years, Saibo, clad in casuals with

his trademark hat, pedaled his rickety bicycle, a familiar sight in Baripada. Known for doing God's work, he cared for leprosy patients in a dedicated home on the outskirts. Tragically, Graham Staines and his two sons, Timothy (6) and Philip (10), were burned alive while sleeping in their jeep in a Manoharpur forest. When Dara Singh and his followers had set fire to the vehicle, they woke up and tried to come out. But those fanatics used their long stout sticks to shove them back into the fire, till they died close to midnight of January 22, 1999. His wife Gladys Staines told television reporters, "I forgive those who have killed my husband and my two sons." After his husband's death, she continued to serve leprosy patients and managed to turn his husband's home for those patients into a hospital. Every year, January 22 will come and remind us about the warning signs of religious fanaticism on the road to our evolutionary progress.

Sujit De | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A JOURNEY THROUGH LOSS AND HEALING

The Buddhist approach offers a grounded and rational way to cope with grief



RAVI VALLURI

The doctor was an early riser. Upon waking he hit the gym. He remained fit and in proper shape by maintaining this regimen. The medico was a noted pediatrician, his wife an eminent cardiologist. Unfortunately, their only daughter suffered from a compromised heart condition. The trio had attended a party the previous evening. It was time to drop the daughter to school and the father knocked at the door. But the cherubic girl did not respond. Life was snuffed out; tragedy had struck the family and a pall of gloom descended.

A few weeks back an old aunt had kicked the bucket. It was a double whammy for the family, and they were inconsolable. Several centuries ago, in the time of the Buddha, a woman lost her only child to the cruel hands of fate. In an anguished state she implored the Enlightened One to resuscitate the dead child. Buddha, the compassionate, agreed to perform the miracle. He asked the lady to collect mustard seeds from all the houses of the village which had never seen death or grief. The woman knocked at the doors of all the houses in the village but returned empty handed. Handling grief is a challenging task and only skillful minds can undertake this responsibility.

The doctor couple who could not save their precious child were subsumed into a cesspool of anger, guilt, sadness, pangs of loneliness, numbness, and a yearning for their beloved one. To overcome their grief and desolation, the husband, a moderate drinker, became a quotidian one and his spouse began administering herself sedatives.

Several eminent psychologists like Parker, Arewill and Worden have zeroed in on the point that those suffering from grief, need to move on from the feeling of numbness, pining, depression, a feeling of shock and despair



to the process of recovery. It is important for the grieving to accept the reality of the loss, experience the pain of the departed one, adjust to the environment of living without the deceased person.

Medical science has made rapid advancements such that proper diagnosis, therapy, and counselling along with proper medication can trigger the change agent in the wrecked mind. Alternatively, there are techniques like hypnosis and even providing ECT (in the worst-case scenario) to address the problem.

The Theravada Buddhist traditions have dealt with the subject of handling grief in a dynamic manner. The human mind by the process of strong internal resolution can overcome this vicissitude in life by mindfulness. The process is called Satipatthana.

The emotionally wrought can find solace and succour by becoming aware of the reality about the impermanence of events, happenings, and people. The mind should become strong to accept the reality and look ahead. There are breathing techniques like Vipassana and Sudarshan Kriya which have proven ability to transfigure the mind from a depressed state to a positive one. Both the techniques have been validated by medical science as alternative therapies and have the power to alter the thought process, bringing it to the present moment.

Several grieving souls adopt holistic measures like the breathing techniques mentioned, meditation, pranayama, yoga, chanting of mantras, being in communion with nature or seva to overcome their grief and restore normalcy in their lives. It is the recalcitrant human mind which acts as a deterrent and needs to be tamed. "Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is remaking of life," writes Anne Roiphe.

(The writer is a CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd and is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

The impact and evolution of IBC 2016



MANOJ KUMAR ANAND

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code IBC of 2016 streamlines insolvency resolution processes and bolstering investor confidence



The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) of 2016 stands as a transformative milestone in recent Indian legislative history. Enacted with the aim of streamlining and expediting the resolution process for distressed businesses, the IBC has had far-reaching implications for India's economic landscape and global standing. In this comprehensive exploration, we delve into the genesis of the IBC, its impact on India's Ease of Doing Business Index, the role of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), and the recent amendments that have further refined and strengthened the framework.

The IBC of 2016 was a response to the urgent need for a comprehensive insolvency regime in India. Prior to its enactment, the country grappled with a fragmented and inefficient system that often led to protracted legal battles and value destruction for all stakeholders involved. Recognizing the critical importance of a robust insolvency framework in fostering economic growth and investor confidence, the Indian government embarked on a journey to overhaul the existing system.

The passage of the IBC in 2016 marked a paradigm shift in India's approach to insolvency resolution. By introducing a unified legal framework that streamlined the resolution process and prioritized creditor rights, the IBC sought to expedite the resolution of distressed assets and maximize value for all stakeholders. Key provisions of the IBC include the establishment of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), as well as the creation of Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs) to facilitate the resolution process.

One of the most significant outcomes of the IBC has been its impact on India's Ease of Doing Business Index. Since the



THE SUCCESS OF THE IBC CAN ALSO BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE EFFORTS OF THE INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY BOARD OF INDIA (IBBI), THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY TASKED WITH OVERSEEING ITS IMPLEMENTATION

enactment of the IBC, India's ranking in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index has steadily improved, climbing by another 14 places to 63 in 2019. This improvement can be attributed in large part to the IBC's success in resolving insolvency cases more efficiently and effectively, thereby enhancing the overall business environment in the country.

In particular, India's ranking in resolving insolvency saw a remarkable jump of 56 places to 52 in 2019, marking the highest-ever leap recorded by any country in the history of the World Bank. This significant improvement reflects the positive impact of the IBC in expediting the resolution process, reducing the time and cost involved in resolving insolvency cases, and maximising the value recovered by creditors.

The success of the IBC can also be attributed to the efforts of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), the regulatory authority tasked with overseeing the implementation of the IBC. Since its inception, the IBBI has played a crucial role in shaping and refining the insolvency framework, issuing regulations, guidelines, and circulars to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the IBC.

In its journey of seven years, the IBBI has introduced six amendments to the IBC, each aimed at further enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the insolvency resolution process. These amendments have addressed various challenges and loopholes in the framework, making it more robust and resilient to emerging

complexities in the insolvency landscape.

One of the key areas of focus for the IBBI has been the regulation of Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs), who play a critical role in the insolvency resolution process. The IBBI has introduced several amendments to the regulations governing IPs and IPEs, aimed at enhancing their role and capabilities in resolving insolvency cases.

For example, the IBBI has introduced amendments to allow IPs to resign from their roles under certain circumstances, thereby addressing concerns about the prolonged tenure of IPs without remuneration. Additionally, amendments have been made to allow IPEs to engage their partners or directors in insolvency assignments, expanding their capacity and expertise in the resolution process.

Furthermore, the IBBI has introduced amendments to streamline the appointment process for IPs by introducing a panel of eligible candidates for appointment by the adjudicating authority. This has helped to expedite the appointment process and ensure a more transparent and efficient resolution process.

In addition to amendments related to IPs and IPEs, the IBBI has also introduced amendments to other regulations governing the insolvency process. For example, amendments have been made to clarify the role of monitoring committees in the resolution process and to streamline the billing process for insolvency professionals. Overall, the amendments introduced by the

IBBI have helped to address various challenges and complexities in the insolvency resolution process, making it more efficient, transparent, and effective. These amendments have further strengthened the IBC and solidified India's position as a leader in insolvency reform.

Looking ahead, the IBBI remains committed to continuously improving and refining the insolvency framework to ensure that it remains responsive to the evolving needs and challenges of the insolvency landscape. By fostering an environment that is conducive to efficient and effective insolvency resolution, the IBBI aims to support India's economic growth and development goals and enhance investor confidence in the country's business environment.

In conclusion, the IBC of 2016 stands as a testament to India's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and enhancing the ease of doing business in the country. Through its robust framework and proactive regulatory efforts, the IBC has contributed significantly to improving India's ranking in the Ease of Doing Business Index and enhancing investor confidence in the country's business environment. With the continued support and efforts of regulatory authorities like the IBBI, India is well-positioned to further strengthen its insolvency framework and drive economic growth and development in the years to come.

(The writer is a chartered accountant and a visiting faculty to ICAI, ICSI; Views are personal)

Celebrating women in science: Recognising their achievements

Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers, including gender bias, unequal representation and limited access to opportunities

Yesterday, we celebrated the International Day of Women in Science, a day dedicated to recognising and honouring the achievements of women in the field of science. This annual event serves as a reminder of the invaluable contributions women have made to scientific progress and innovation throughout history. It is an opportunity to highlight their accomplishments, shed light on the challenges they face, and inspire future generations of women to pursue careers in science.

Recently, while presenting the interim Budget 2024, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted that female enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses



VEERENDRA MISHRA

has reached 43 per cent, which is one of the world's highest figures. She said, "Female enrollment in higher education has gone up by 28 percent in ten years. In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43 percent of enrollment—one of the highest in the world. All these measures reflect the increasing participation of women in the workforce." She also mentioned the empowerment of women through entre-

preneurship, ease of living, and dignity, mentioning, "Thirty crore Mudra Yojana loans have been given to women entrepreneurs."

From historic figures like Savitribai Jyotiba Phule, who was the first female teacher of India and founded the first girls' school, to Lady Abala Bose, who was the first Indian woman to study medicine at Madras University, to Kamala Sohonie, the first Indian woman to receive a PhD in a scientific discipline, to Ayyalasomayajula Lalitha, India's first woman engineer, to Shakuntala Devi, who was popularly known as the "Human Computer," women continue to leave an indelible mark on the scientific landscape. Today, women scientists are assuming leadership posi-

tions in groundbreaking projects like Chandrayaan-3 and the Aditya-L1 solar mission, showcasing their continued influence and expertise in pushing the boundaries of scientific exploration.

The Government has taken significant strides to bolster STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, recognising its pivotal role in driving innovation, economic prosperity, and societal advancement. Initiatives like the Vigyan Jyoti Scheme, spearheaded by the Ministry of Science and Technology, are breaking gender barriers by empowering young girls in STEM fields through exposure and mentorship programs. Additionally, programmes like INSPIRE foster innovation

among students through scholarships and research opportunities, while Atal Tinkering Labs nurture creativity and problem-solving skills among school students.

The Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan promotes a culture of innovation in schools, bridging the gap between theory and real-world applications. Moreover, the government provides research fellowships and grants, digital learning resources through the National Digital Library, and skill enhancement programmes via Skill India, all aimed at nurturing a skilled workforce and fostering growth in STEM-related industries. These concerted efforts underscore the government's commitment to nurturing a robust ecosystem for scientific inquiry and tech-

nological advancement in the country.

Women in STEM in India have been steadily challenging stereotypes and contributing significantly to various disciplines. Pioneers like Dr. Tessy Thomas, known as the "Missile Woman of India," have shattered glass ceilings in fields traditionally dominated by men. Indian women researchers are excelling in areas like space technology, biotechnology, and mathematics, making remarkable advancements.

Additionally, the government's Vigyan Jyoti scheme aims to encourage young girls to pursue STEM education and careers, fostering inclusivity. Women have made groundbreaking strides in diverse scientific domains, ranging from astronomy and biology to

engineering and computer science. Their discoveries, innovations, and leadership have enriched our understanding of the world and advanced technological progress.

Women have played a pivotal role in shaping the scientific landscape, yet their contributions have often been overlooked or undervalued. By celebrating the International Day of Women in Science, we aim to rectify this imbalance and bring attention to the remarkable achievements of women scientists. It is crucial to showcase diverse role models in science to inspire young girls and women to pursue their passions and break down the barriers that still exist in the field. While progress has been made, women in science still face numerous challenges.

Gender bias, a lack of representation, and unequal opportunities persist in many scientific fields. It is essential to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for women in science. By providing equal opportunities, mentorship, and support, we can empower women to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives to scientific advancements. Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers. By encouraging and showcasing the achievements of women in science, we hope to ignite a passion for discovery and innovation in young girls.

(The writer is an IPS officer and the director RACE Lab, Samvedna India, views are personal)

Egypt threatens to suspend key peace treaty

AP ■ RAFAH

Egypt is threatening to suspend its peace treaty with Israel if Israeli troops are sent into the densely populated Gaza border town of Rafah, and says fighting there could force the closure of the territory's main aid supply route, two Egyptian officials and a Western diplomat said on Sunday. The threat to suspend the Camp David Accords, a cornerstone of regional stability for nearly a half-century, came after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said sending troops into Rafah was necessary to win the four-month-old war against the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Over half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled to Rafah to escape fighting in other areas, and are packed into sprawling tent camps and UN-run shelters near the border. Egypt fears a mass influx of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who may never be allowed to return.



Smoke and explosion following an Israeli bombardment inside the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel, Sunday. The army is battling Palestinian militants across Gaza in the war ignited by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel.

AP/PTI

The stand-off between Israel and Egypt, two close US allies, comes as aid groups warn that an offensive in Rafah would worsen the already

Netanyahu, in an interview

with ABC News "This Week with George Stephanopoulos", suggested civilians in Rafah could flee north, saying there are "plenty of areas" that have been cleared by the army. He said

Israel is developing a "detailed plan" to relocate them.

But the offensive has caused widespread destruction, particularly in northern Gaza, and heavy fighting is still taking place in central Gaza and the southern city of Khan Younis. A ground operation in Rafah could also force the closure of its crossing, cutting off one of the only avenues for delivering badly needed food and medical supplies.

All three officials confirmed Egypt's threats, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief reporters on the sensitive negotiations. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries have also warned of severe repercussions if Israel goes into Rafah.

"An Israeli offensive on Rafah would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe and grave tensions with Egypt," European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell wrote on X. Israel and Egypt had fought five

years before signing the Camp David Accords, a landmark peace treaty brokered by then-US President Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s. The treaty includes several provisions governing the deployment of forces on both sides of the border.

Egypt has heavily fortified its border with Gaza, carving out a 5-kilometre buffer zone and erecting concrete walls above and below ground. It has denied Israeli allegations that Hamas still operates smuggling tunnels beneath the border, saying Egyptian forces have full control on their side. But Egyptian officials fear that if the border is breached, the military would be unable to stop a tide of people fleeing into the Sinai Peninsula.

The United Nations says Rafah, which is normally home to less than 300,000 people, now hosts 1.4 million more who fled fighting elsewhere and is "severely overcrowded". Netanyahu said Hamas still has four battalions there. Israel has ordered much of

Gaza's population to flee south with evacuation orders covering two-thirds of the territory, even as it regularly carries out airstrikes in all areas, including Rafah. Airstrikes on the town in recent days have killed dozens of Palestinians, including women and children. Gaza's Health Ministry said Sunday that the bodies of 112 people killed across the territory have been brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours, as well as 173 wounded people.

The fatalities brought the death toll in the strip to 28,176 since the start of the war. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and fighters but says most of those killed were women and children.

The war began with Hamas' attack into southern Israel on October 7, when Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Over 100 hostages were released in November.

Israeli drone strike in Lebanon kills 2

AP ■ BEIRUT

An Israeli drone struck a car near Lebanon's southern port city of Sidon on Saturday, killing at least two people and wounding two others, security officials said. The strike came as tensions across the Middle East grow with the Israel-Hamas war, a drone attack last month that killed three US troops in northeastern Jordan near the Syrian border, and attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on vessels passing through the Red Sea. The drone strike near the coastal town of Jadra took place about 60 kilometres from the Israeli border, making it one of the farthest inside Lebanon since violence erupted along the Lebanon-Israel border on October 8. An Israeli security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the target of the strike in Sidon was Hamas official Basel Saleh, who was "injured to an unknown extent".

The official said Saleh was responsible for enlistment of new Hamas recruits in Gaza and the West Bank.

Two Lebanese security officials said the strike damaged a car and killed two people.

Drone strikes in Lebanon blamed on Israel have so far killed several officials from Hezbollah as well as the Palestinian militant group Hamas. The previous farthest strike was the January 2 attack that killed top Hamas official Saleh Arouri in Beirut.

On Saturday night, Israeli forces shelled the southern Lebanese border village of Houla, killing one person and wounding nine as they left a mosque after prayers, state-run National News Agency reported. The attacks in Lebanon came as Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian met in Beirut with Lebanese leaders including the country's caretaker prime minister, parliament speaker and the head of the militant Hezbollah group. Amirabdollahian said that if the US wants to bring stability to the region again, it should work on forcing Israel to end its military operations in

the Gaza Strip. He told reporters after meeting his counterpart Abdallah Bouhabbib that after four months of war, Israel and its backers had not achieved "anything tangible".

In an apparent reference to attacks by Iran-backed fighters in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, Amirabdollahian said that "if American wars calm to prevail in the region, then the mechanism and the solution is to stop the genocide, crimes and the war against Gaza and the West Bank".

He blasted Washington, saying the US is working on two tracks, one of which is sending weapons to Israel "and participating in the genocide in Gaza" and at the same time speaking about reaching a political solution to the war.

The US Central Command announced on Saturday that the US military conducted self-defence strikes against two mobile unmanned surface vessels, four anti-ship cruise missiles, and one mobile land attack cruise missile that were prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea from Yemen.

The military said the missiles and an unmanned vessel in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen presented an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza, imperiling a key route for trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe.

The Houthis' media office said the US-led coalition launched three airstrikes on Salif district in the Red Sea province of Hodeida on Saturday. In response, the US and the UK launched several airstrikes on Houthi-held areas across Yemen, including the rebel-held capital of Sanaa.

The Houthis held a mass funeral in Sanaa on Saturday for 17 of their fighters who they said were killed in strikes by the US-led coalition, according to the Houthi-run SABA news agency.

Special counsel report used our son's death to 'score political points': Jill Biden

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US First Lady Jill Biden has come out in defence of her husband President Joe Biden's health and memory and she slammed the special counsel for using their son's death to score political points.

Her defence came in response to the voluminous report of Special Counsel Robert Hur in which he said that Biden, 81, "willfully" mishandled classified documents as a private citizen.

The special counsel in his report early this week recommended against filing any charges against Biden for misuse of classified documents when he was a private citizen but made scathing observations on his mental health and memory and claimed that the president did not even remember the date of the death of his son.

"The reason I'm writing is because of what else was in the report: Inaccurate and personal political attacks about Joe. Rather than just saying the case was closed, as they have for others, the Special Counsel claimed that Joe 'couldn't remember the year his son died.' Believe me, like anyone who has lost a child, Beau and his death never leave him," Jill wrote in a mass email to her supporters on Saturday.

"I hope you can imagine how it felt to read that attack — not just as Joe's wife, but as Beau's mother. I don't know what this Special Counsel was trying to achieve," she said.

Beau Biden, who died of brain cancer in 2015, appears 16 times in the pages of the report prepared by Hur, the special counsel appointed to investigate Biden's handling of classified documents after serving as vice president until 2017.

"We should give everyone grace, and I can't imagine someone would try to use our son's death to score political points. If you've experienced a loss like that, you know that you don't measure it in years — you measure it in grief," she said. "May 30th is a day forever etched on our hearts. It shattered me, it shattered our family," she said.

Al-Shabab claims Somali capital attack

AP ■ DUBAI

The al-Qaida-linked militant group al-Shabab claimed an attack that killed four Emirati troops and a Bahraini military officer on a training mission at a military base in the Somali capital, authorities said on Sunday. The attack on Saturday targeted the troops at the General Gordon Military Base in Mogadishu. Details about the attack and whether it killed others remained scarce Sunday, though Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud offered his condolences to the UAE for the loss of its troops.

Early Sunday, the UAE's state-run WAM news agency reported the killing of three of its troops and the Bahraini officer in a "terrorist act". A fourth later died en route back to the Emirates, WAM reported.

WAM released footage of three flag-draped caskets coming off of an Emirati Boeing C-17A Globemaster III at Al Bateen Executive Airport in Abu Dhabi with an honour



guard present. WAM identified the dead as a colonel, two warrant officers and a corporal.

Anwar Gargash, a senior Emirati diplomat, offered condolences to those killed and a quick recovery for the wounded. "No treacherous act will prevent us from continuing the message of security and safety and combating extremism and terrorism in all its forms,"

Gargash wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

The military of Bahrain, an island nation in the Persian Gulf off the coast of Saudi Arabia, later acknowledged the death of a major in a statement carried by the state-run Bahrain News Agency. Al-Shabab claimed the attack in a statement online, alleging it killed multiple people involved in the Emirati military effort.

It described the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, as an "enemy" of Islamic Shariah law for backing the Somali government in its efforts to battle al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab, or "the youth" in Arabic, is a Sunni Islamic extremist group in Somalia born out of that country's years of anarchy following its 1991 civil war. The affiliate of al-Qaida once held Mogadishu. Over time, an African Union-led force, with the backing of the US and other countries, pushed the militants out of Mogadishu. In the years since, al-Shabab has remained a threat as it seeks to overthrow the Western-backed Somali government. Al-Shabab has carried out attacks in neighbouring Kenya as well, since Nairobi provides troops and materiel to the African Union force in Somalia. The US under every president since George W. Bush has launched airstrikes against militants in Somalia, with the number of strikes now exceeding 300, according to

New America, a Washington-based security think tank. The vast majority of those strikes took place under then-President Donald Trump.

The US Embassy in Somalia on Sunday condemned what it called a "cowardly attack" against the training mission.

"We extend our deepest condolences to the loved ones of those who lost their lives in yesterday's deplorable terrorist attack against UAE military trainers and Somali soldiers valiantly working to advance the nation's stability," the embassy said. Somalia has also been an intense interest for Gulf states, particularly during the Qatar diplomatic crisis that gripped the region for several years and saw four nations including the UAE boycott Doha in a political dispute. Somali troops once seized millions of dollars of Emirati cash from a jet at gunpoint, sparking a diplomatic incident between Mogadishu and the UAE that halted its troop training programme there.

Trump mocks Nikki Haley for absence of her husband

American allies worry US growing less dependable

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Former US president Donald Trump has mocked his Republican rival Nikki Haley over the absence of her husband, who is deployed overseas, drawing a sharp reaction from the Indian-American politician who said the person who disrespects military families has no business being commander-in-chief.

Haley's husband Major Michael Haley, a commissioned officer with the South Carolina National Guard, is currently on a year-long deployment with the 218th Maneuver Enhancement Bridge, which is providing support in the Horn of Africa. He deployed in June.

The war of words between two Republican presidential candidates started with a Trump rally on Saturday in South Carolina where the 77-year-old former president, seemingly unaware of his deployment, when started questioning his whereabouts.

"Where's her husband? Oh, he's away. ... What happened to her husband? Where is he? He's gone," Trump said at his rally in



Conway in South Carolina, his first visit to the state this year. Haley, 52, the only candidate against Trump in the Republican Party's nomination race, fired back at Trump's comments later on Saturday.

"Donald, if you have something to say, don't say it behind my back; get on a debate stage and say it to my face," she told a crowd in South Carolina.

"I am proud of Michael's service. Every military family knows it's a sacrifice. I have long talked about the fact that we need to have mental competency tests for [politicians] over the age of 75,"

she said.

Trump claims he would pass that — maybe he would, maybe he wouldn't, she said.

"But if you mock the service of a combat veteran, you don't deserve a driver's license, let alone to be president of the United States," she said.

"Michael is deployed serving the US country, something you know nothing about. Someone who continually disrespects the sacrifices of military families has no business being commander-in-chief," Haley said. Trump's comment on Haley's husband also drew criticism from various quarters.

"Only a sick individual would put down a service member who is deployed. This disrespects every military family in our country. It's exactly the chaos we don't need in America," said General (rt'd) Don Bolduc. In a rare move, Michael Haley fired back at the former president, posting a meme on Twitter reading, "The difference between humans and animals? Animals would never allow the dumbest ones to lead the pack," while mentioning Trump's account in

the caption.

Continuing his attack, Trump alleged that Haley is the candidate of globalists and warmongers who want to spend trillions and trillions of dollars on endless wars.

"The radical left Democrats want Nikki Haley because they know that she's easy to beat. She's very easy to beat."

Haley supports a 23% national sales tax, and she wants to gut Medicare and Social Security..., he said. Earlier, Haley kicked off her "Beast of the Southeast" bus tour with a stop in Newberry.

In an interaction with the media, she spoke about her opponents' lack of stamina and stressed the importance of mental competency tests for politicians over the age of 75.

Her campaign also distributed examples of the mental competency tests used by medical professionals, demonstrating that it should not be a difficult test for those who are seeking the highest office in the land. "(For months) I have always said that (President) Joe Biden was not going to be president."

Sunak says 'totally up for fight' to win UK general election

PTI ■ LONDON



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said he is "totally up for the fight" of pitching his policies to the electorate to win another term for the governing Conservative Party as he prepares for a general election expected to take place in the second half of the year.

In an interview with The Times this weekend, the 43-year-old British Indian leader said he had reasons to be optimistic because the economy was "pointing in the right direction" and that the "future is going to be better".

"At the beginning of this year there is a sense that the country is pointing in the right direction," he told the newspaper.

"Because economic conditions have improved, because

progress," he said. In a message as much for the voters as for the rebels within his own Tory ranks, the Conservative leader reiterated his plan to cut taxes for the hardworking people of the country. "It's because those are my values, those are the values of my party. It's one where hard work should be rewarded. And actually, the best way to express that through the tax system is to cut people's taxes so when they are working hard they get to enjoy more of the rewards of that for themselves and their family," he said.

"Because economic conditions have improved, because the plan is working, you are starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes," he added.

"I'm totally up for the fight," he said.

However, Sunak appeared to echo his Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, who has already sought to temper expectations over the size of any tax cuts in his Spring Budget next month, despite senior Tories publicly indicating they are coming. "None of us ever talk about this stuff before budgets. Other people are. I think they're over-interpreting. What the Chancellor and I have said is that of course, our long-term plan is to cut people's taxes," he said.

The Tories continue to lag behind the Opposition Labour Party in surveys, with the Sunak-led government contending with a high rate of anti-incumbency among the electorate.

King Charles thanks public for support

PTI ■ LONDON



Britain's King Charles III on Sunday expressed his "heartfelt thanks" to the British public for their messages of support ever since his cancer diagnosis was revealed by Buckingham Palace this week. The 75-year-old monarch wrote the message from his royal estate at Sandringham in Norfolk, eastern England, in which he also expressed his "lifelong admiration" for the work done by cancer charities.

On Sunday, a smiling King Charles also attended church on the estate — the first time since his diagnosis. He briefly waved at photographers as he walked up to St. Mary Magdalene's church holding an umbrella, accompanied by Queen Camilla. He was then greeted by Reverend Canon Dr Paul Williams before going inside. In his message, the King said he was heartened that

his personal experience of the disease had helped shine a light on the tireless care provided by cancer organisations around the world. "I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for the many messages of support and good wishes I have received in recent days," reads the King's message released by Buckingham Palace on Sunday. "As all those who have been affected by cancer will know, such kind thoughts are the greatest comfort and

encouragement," he said. "It is equally heartening to hear how sharing my diagnosis has helped promote public understanding and shine a light on the work of all those organisations which support cancer patients and their families across the UK and the wider world. My lifelong admiration for their tireless care and dedication is all the greater as a result of my own experience," he added. On Monday, Buckingham Palace announced the King had been diagnosed with cancer while undergoing a procedure for an enlarged prostate. In line with the initial announcement, the latest statement also does not reference any further details about what kind of cancer the monarch has been detected with, the type of treatment he is having or what stage the cancer is at.

Earlier, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had indicated that the cancer had been

"caught early" as his customary weekly audiences with the King are expected to continue during the treatment. King Charles started his treatment in London before flying out to Sandringham with Queen Camilla, who revealed at an event that her husband was doing "extremely well" since the start of his treatment. The palace has said it will not provide any further details about the diagnosis or the treatment. In an official statement, it said that the King's recent hospital procedure for benign prostate enlargement, a separate issue of concern was noted and subsequent diagnostic tests have identified a form of cancer. The monarch has commenced a schedule of regular treatments, during which time he has been advised by doctors to postpone public-facing duties. However, he will continue to undertake State business and official paperwork as usual.

Pak parties intensify efforts to form coalition government

PTI ■ LAHORE/ISLAMABAD

The three main political parties in Pakistan on Sunday intensified their efforts for the formation of a coalition government after it became clear that the coup-prone country faced a hung Parliament after general elections marred by allegations of rigging.

The general elections were held on Thursday, but the unusual delay in the announcement of results vitiated the atmosphere as several parties cried foul and some resorted to protests. Former prime minister and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supreme Nawaz Sharif received the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Saturday for his call for a unity government to pull Pakistan out of its current difficulties.

Amidst allegations of vote rigging and inordinate delay in announcing the results, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Sunday published the results of 264 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly. The result of one constituency was withheld by the ECP due to complaints of fraud. Election to one seat was

postponed after the death of a candidate.

Independent candidates, a vast majority of them backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), won 101 seats in the National Assembly.

They were followed by three-time former Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 75 seats, which technically is the single largest party in Parliament.

The Pakistan Peoples Party of Bilawal Zardari Bhutto got 54 seats, and the Karachi-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) of Urdu-speaking people who migrated from India during the Partition, got 17 seats. Other smaller parties won the rest of the 12 seats.

To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the National Assembly.

Overall, 169 seats are needed to secure a simple majority out of its total 336 seats, which include the reserved slots for women and minorities which will be decided later based on proportional representation.

The PML-N was leading the push to form the coalition



government on the pattern of one it set up after Khan, 71, was removed as prime minister through a no-confidence vote in April 2022. Party supremo Sharif, 74, tasked his younger brother former premier Shehbaz Sharif to hold talks on the issue.

The PML-N leaders on Sunday held a meeting with MQM-P leaders in Lahore.

After an hour-long meeting, they have reached a "principle agreement" to work together in the upcoming government, according to a statement released by Sharif's party.

"We will work together in the interest of the country and public," the statement said, adding that basic points had been agreed upon by the two parties.

MQM-P leader Haider Rizvi earlier told Geo News in an interview that his party would be more comfortable with the PML-N as the "two parties don't compete in Karachi" unlike the PPP or other parties.

PML-N President Shehbaz on Saturday met senior PPP leaders Asif Ali Zardari and his Bilawal on Friday night and

discussed the future coalition.

Shehbaz told the party leaders that former president and PPP leader Asif Zardari has demanded the prime minister's slot for PPP Chairman Bilawal and major ministerial portfolios in exchange for support for the PML-N to form the government, sources said.

Party sources added that so far making a coalition with Zardari was the first option the PML-N was exploring but didn't want to give away the slot of prime minister.

Sources claimed the meeting decided that in case the negotiations with the PPP failed, the PML-N would make a coalition government with MQM, JUI-F and other smaller parties, including independents.

They further claimed that in this scenario, the PML-N would make Shehbaz Sharif the prime minister and Maryam Sharif the Chief Minister of Punjab.

"Shehbaz Sharif is the favourite for the PM office for being more close to the military establishment besides the PML-N has more seats in Parliament than the PPP," sources said.

Losing candidates backed by PTI challenge Pak poll results

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan courts have been flooded with petitions by losing candidates who challenged the provisional results in their constituencies within days after the highly polarised general elections in the country, it emerged on Sunday.

Though Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) emerged as the single largest party in the February 8 elections, the number of independent candidates, a vast majority of them backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, were the single largest block of winners.

The PTI claimed that its supported candidates have won the maximum number of seats but the results were manipulated to deprive it of the majority, and in order to turn the tide, its losing candidates have thronged the courts.

According to a report in the Dawn newspaper, a vast

majority of those filing challenges against results are PTI-backed independents, including high-profile politicians such as former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi and his wife Qaisera, former Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) finance minister Taimoor Jhagra and ex-KP speaker Mahmood Jan, Islamabad-based lawyer Shuaib Shaheen, former Punjab health minister Dr Yasmin Rashid, as well as Rehana Dar, mother of Usman Dar who was in-charge youth affairs in the PTI government.

In Lahore, the victories of PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, PML-N Attaullah Tarar and former defence minister Khawaja Asif were assailed in separate petitions before the high court, which allege manipulation of Form 47s, which showed consolidated results of every constituency. The petitioners claim that they were successful against

their opponents as per the Form 45, showing results of individual polling stations, handed to them.

However, in their absence, their victories were allegedly turned into defeats in the Form 47. The have also alleged collusion in the alteration of election results and demand that the results of Form 47 be prepared according to the Form 45s.

In PP 146 Sialkot, Omar Dar's wife, Ruba Omar, has challenged the election results. According to Form 45, Ruba Omar has won, but she was evidently defeated in Form 47 due to collusion.

Maryam's victory from NA-119 has been challenged by independent candidate Shahzad Farooq, alleging that the presiding officers did not provide Form 45, and the returning officer issued the result in his absence. Farooq claims to have won against Maryam but was defeated due to rigging.

Russia launches 45 drones as Kyiv continues war cabinet reshuffle

AP ■ KYIV

Russian forces launched 45 drones over Ukraine on Sunday in a five-and-a-half-hour barrage, officials said, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy continued the reshuffle of his war cabinet as the war enters its third year. In a statement, the Ukrainian air force said it had shot down 40 of the Iranian-made Shahed drones over nine different regions, including on the outskirts of the country's capital, Kyiv.

The five-and-a-half-hour attack targeted agricultural facilities and coastal infrastructure, officials for Ukraine's southern defense forces wrote on Telegram. They said that a strike in the Mykolaiv region had injured one person, sparking a fire and damaging nearby residential buildings.

Another person was injured in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region when a blaze broke out due to falling debris from a destroyed drone,



said the head of the region's military administration, Serhiy Lysak. The strikes come as Zelenskyy continues his shake-up of military commanders in a bid to maintain momentum against attacking Russian forces. Kyiv announced on

Sunday that former deputy defence minister Lt Gen Alexander Pavlyuk would become the new commander of Ukraine's ground forces. The post was previously held by Col Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi, who was named on Thursday

as the replacement for Ukraine's outgoing military chief, Gen Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

New presidential decrees also named Yuriy Sodal, the former head of Ukraine's marine corps, as the new commander of Ukraine's combined forces; Brig Gen Ihor Skibiuk as commander of Ukraine's air assault forces; and Maj Gen Ihor Plahuta as commander of Ukraine's territorial defense forces.

Incoming commander-in-chief Syrskyi has signalled that his immediate goals include improving troop rotation at the front lines and harnessing the power of new technology at a time when Kyiv's forces are largely on the defensive. In a statement on Telegram Saturday, Zelenskyy said that he hoped to "reboot" the upper levels of Ukraine's armed forces with experienced combat commanders. "Now, people who are well-known in the army and who themselves know well what the army needs are taking on new responsibilities," he said.

Finns vote for a new president

AP ■ HELSINKI

Voters in Finland are choosing on Sunday between two experienced politicians to be their next president, whose main task will be to steer the Nordic country's foreign and security policy now that it is a member of NATO, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Former prime minister Alexander Stubb, 55, on the centre right, and former foreign minister Pekka Haavisto, 65, from the green left, largely agree on Finland's foreign policy and security priorities.

These include maintaining a hard line toward Moscow and Russia's current leadership, strengthening security ties with Washington, and the need to help Ukraine both militarily and at a civilian level. Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia.

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government, especially concerning countries outside the European Union such as the United States, Russia and China.

The head of state also commands the military — particularly important in Europe's current security environment and the changed geopolitical situation of Finland, which joined NATO in April 2023 in the aftermath of Russia's attack on Ukraine a year earlier.

A politician with the conservative National Coalition Party who led the government in 2014-2015 and earlier held several other Cabinet posts, Stubb took the top spot in the first round of the election on January 28 with 27.2 per cent of the votes and is the favourite to win the presidency.

Haavisto, the runnerup in the first round, was Finland's top diplomat in 2019-2023 and the main negotiator of its entry into NATO. A former conflict mediator with the United Nations and a devout environmentalist, Haavisto took 25.8 per cent of the votes in the first round. This is his third bid for the presidency. He is running as an independent although he is a former leader of the Green League.

In the last days of campaigning tiny differences in style and approach between the candidates have emerged.

Stubb and Haavisto differ in their stance on the hypothetical question of whether Finland would allow the transportation of the alliance's nuclear weapons through its territory. "Nuclear weapons are a strong element of our deterrence and our security. We signed our NATO agreement without any kind of limits," Stubb told The Associated Press during a campaign event just outside the capital, Helsinki, on Saturday. But "we (Stubb and Haavisto) also agree that no one is offering us nuclear weapons ... we don't want any nuclear weapons."

Haavisto said on Saturday that he does not favour nuclear arms being transported via Finland in a crisis situation. His country of 5.6 million makes up a substantial part of NATO's northeastern flank and is the European Union's external border in the north.

"I think there hasn't been any need to transport nuclear weapons to Finland or over Finland. As I've seen during NATO negotiations, the current nuclear policies of NATO are well-established and there is no need of changing them," he said.

CEO of major Nigerian bank killed in California helicopter crash

AP ■ CALIFORNIA

The CEO of one of Nigeria's largest banks was killed on Friday along with his wife and son when a helicopter they were riding in crashed near Interstate 15 in southern California's Mojave Desert.

Herbert Wigwe, chief executive of Access Bank, was among the six people on board when the helicopter crashed shortly after 10 pm. Bamofin Abimbola Ogunbanjo, former chair of NGX Group, the Nigerian stock exchange, was also killed. Their deaths were confirmed by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a former Nigerian finance minister who is now the director general of the World Trade Organization.

"Terribly saddened by the news of the terrible loss of Herbert Wigwe ... his wife and son as well as Bimbo

Ogunbanjo in a helicopter crash," Okonjo-Iweala wrote in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. "May the souls of the departed rest in perfect peace."

The death of Wigwe (57) shocked many in Nigeria and in the banking sector where he was widely seen as an industry leader having been involved in two of the country's biggest banks, including Guaranty Trust Bank where he was previously executive director.

Under Wigwe's leadership, Access Bank's assets and presence grew beyond borders in several African countries. His death is "a terrible blow" for Nigeria and Africa's banking industry, Nigerian presidential spokesman Bayo Onanuga wrote on X. "Wigwe had a big vision to make Access Holdings (the parent company) Africa's biggest, with all the unquenchable thirst for acquisitions,"

Onanuga added. Wigwe's interests also spanned the education sector. His private university, founded in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region where he was from, is scheduled to open in September. Last year he said the university was "an opportunity for me to give back to society."

"This is surreal and I am lost for words," Festus Keyamo, Nigeria's minister of aviation and aerospace development, wrote in a post on X. "May Almighty God comfort his aged parents and sibling ... his immediate family members, his staff, friends across Nigeria and dependents." The crash happened east of Interstate 15 near Halloran Springs Road and not far from the California-Nevada border. Halloran Springs Road crosses the highway in an area known to travellers for an abandoned gas station with a sign declaring "Lo Gas" and "Eat".

Hungary president resigns over pardon to man convicted in child sexual abuse case

AP ■ BUDAPEST

Hungary's conservative president resigned on Saturday amid public outcry over a pardon she granted to a man convicted as an accomplice in a child sexual abuse case, a decision that unleashed an unprecedented political scandal for the long-serving nationalist government.

Katalin Novák (46) announced in a televised message that she would step down from the presidency, an office she has held since 2022. Her decision came after more than a week of public outrage after it was revealed that she issued a presidential pardon in April 2023 to a man convicted of hiding a string of child sexual abuses in a state-run children's home. "I issued a pardon that caused bewilderment and unrest for many people," Novák said on Saturday. "I

made a mistake." Novák's resignation came as a rare episode of political turmoil for Hungary's nationalist governing party Fidesz, which has ruled with a constitutional majority since 2010. Under the leadership of populist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Fidesz has been accused of dismantling democratic institutions and rigging the electoral system and media in its favour.

Novák, a key Orbán ally and a former vice president of Fidesz, served as the minister for families until her appointment to the presidency. She has been outspoken in advocating for traditional family values and the protection of children.

She was the first female president in Hungary's history, and the youngest person to ever hold the office. But her term came to an end after she pardoned a man sentenced in

2018 to more than three years in prison. He was found guilty of pressuring victims to retract their claims of sexual abuse by the institution's director, who was sentenced to eight years for abusing at least 10 children between 2004 and 2016.

"I decided in favour of clemency in April of last year in the belief that the convict did not abuse the vulnerability of the children entrusted to him. I made a mistake," Novák said on Saturday. "I apologise to those I have hurt and to any victims who may have felt I am not standing up for them."

"As head of state, I am addressing you for the last time today. I resign from the office of president of the republic," she said. Also implicated was Judit Varga, another key Fidesz figure who was minister of justice at the time and endorsed the pardon. Varga was expected to lead the

list of European Parliament candidates from Fidesz when elections are held this summer. But in a Facebook post on Saturday, Varga announced that she would take political responsibility and "retire from public life, resigning my seat as a member of parliament and also as leader of the EP list."

At the presidential headquarters in Budapest on Saturday evening, around 200 people gathered in what was originally planned as a protest to call on Novák to resign. After her announcement, attendees said they were happy, but that it wasn't enough to fundamentally change Orbán's system of governance.

"I'm glad that she resigned but I think things aren't solved this way. She's not the main criminal, you've got to look all the way to the top," said Anna Bujna.

Pope and Milei embrace after pontiff canonises Argentina's first female saint

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis and Argentine President Javier Milei embraced on Sunday in St. Peter's Basilica, as Argentine faith and politics came together during a Mass to canonise the country's first female saint.

The ceremony to declare Mama Antula a saint marked the first meeting between the Argentine pope and Milei, who once called Francis an "imbecile" for defending social justice. The president, who was seated to Francis' right on the side of the main altar throughout the ceremony, bent over and gave the pope a big bearhug when Francis was wheeled over to him at the end of the service. Mama Antula was an 18th century laywoman

who ministered to the poor and helped keep Jesuit spirituality alive in Argentina after the religious order — to which the pope belongs — was suppressed. Argentines flocked to the canonisation, which turned into something of an Argentine fiesta in Rome. Milei waved to supporters in the pews as he entered the basilica and posed for selfie photos before the liturgy, while Argentine women, in particular, celebrated a saint who defied the norms for women of her time to spread the faith. In his homily, Francis praised Mama Antula as a model of charity and urged the faithful to really touch the wounds of the poor, as Jesus overcame fear and prejudice to touch the wounds of lepers. "How many

suffering men and women do we meet on the sidewalks of our cities," he said. "And how many fears, prejudices and inconsistencies, even among those who are believers and call themselves Christians, contribute to wounding them all the more!"

Milei is to meet privately with Francis on Monday, before also having private talks with Italy's far-right Premier Giorgia Meloni and the president. During his campaign, Milei described Francis as an "imbecile" and "the representative of malignance on Earth".

Francis spoke at length with Milei after he was elected in December and has indicated he has forgiven him for the campaign rhetoric. Francis has said he is considering visiting



Argentina later this year in what would be his first trip home since his 2013 election. After arriving in Rome on Friday from Israel, where Milei announced the relocation of

the Argentine embassy to Jerusalem, the president visited the Colosseum and the church housing one of Michelangelo's best-known sculptures: a seated Moses. In

an Instagram post accompanying a photo of himself looking at the sculpture, Milei wrote his frequent motto "Long live freedom damn it....!"

The president, who describes himself as an anarcho-capitalist, has promised to drastically reduce state spending to shore up a government budget deficit that he says is fuelling inflation, which finished 2023 at 211 per cent.

On Sunday, he appeared firmly engaged in the Mass, making the sign of the cross several times, receiving Communion and burying his head in his hands as he knelt in prayer afterward.

Mama Antula, born María Antonia de Paz y Figueroa, is a figure beloved to Argentines, a woman who left behind a life

of privilege to spread Ignatian spirituality across Argentina after the Jesuits were ordered expelled from Spain's colonies. She is held up in particular by Argentine women as a model of strength and independence, at a time when women's options in life included marriage or entering the convent.

"The first female saint — it's an enormous step forward," said Argentine pilgrim Annabella Lopez as she waited for the Mass to begin. "It's a pity it couldn't have happened before, but fine, now women are starting to have more visibility and this is a great step also for the church."

Silvia Correale, who spearheaded Mama Antula's sainthood process, said she remembered she first met the future

Pope Francis when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires and Mama Antula's candidacy had just cleared an important hurdle in the Vatican.

"I know that he esteems her a lot, like all the Jesuits of Argentina and Uruguay, because they consider her their spiritual mother," Correale told The Associated Press in the runup to the ceremony. "They know that she kept the treasure of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius alive in the years they weren't there." But the current archbishop of Buenos Aires, Archbishop Jorge Ignacio García Cuerva, said it would be wrong to think that Mama Antula is only being made a saint now because a Jesuit Argentine pope happens to be running the Catholic Church.

Market cap of four most valued firms jumps ₹2.18 lakh crore

LIC, SBI lead gainers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Four of the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 2.18 lakh crore in market valuation last week, with Life Insurance Corporation and State Bank of India emerging as the biggest gainers. From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Life Insurance Corporation of

India (LIC) and SBI were the gainers. They collectively added Rs 2,18,598.29 crore in market capitalisation. On the other hand, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC faced erosion from their valuation to the tune of Rs 1,06,631.39 crore. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined by 490.14 points or 0.67 per cent. Market valuation of LIC jumped Rs 86,146.47 crore to Rs 6,83,637.38 crore. The share price of LIC on Monday jumped nearly 6 per cent to hit the Rs 1,000 mark for the first



time. SBI added Rs 65,908.26 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 6,46,365.02 crore. Market valuation of TCS climbed Rs 61,435.47 crore to Rs 15,12,743.31 crore and that of Reliance advanced Rs 5,108.09 crore to reach Rs 19,77,136.54 crore. Shares of TCS jumped 4 per cent on Tuesday, taking its market valuation to above Rs 15 lakh crore. However, market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank declined by Rs 32,963.94 crore to Rs 10,65,808.71 crore. The valuation of ITC eroded by Rs 30,698.62 crore to Rs 5,18,632.02 crore.

Mcap of Bharti Airtel fell by Rs 16,132.15 crore and that of Infosys went lower by Rs 10,044.09 crore to Rs 6,92,980.35 crore. The valuation of ICICI Bank dipped Rs 9,779.06 crore to Rs 7,09,254.77 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever diminished by Rs 7,013.53 crore to Rs 5,69,587.91 crore. In the ranking of top-10 most valued firms, Reliance Industries continued to rule the chart followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, LIC, State Bank of India, Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.



FPIs infuse over ₹15,000 crore in debt market in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continued their bullish stance on the country's debt markets with a net infusion of over Rs 15,000 crore so far this month, on the back of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index along with relatively stable economy. This followed a net investment of Rs 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they infused Rs 25,685 crore. On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out more than Rs 3,000 crore from equities during the period under review. Before this, they withdrew a massive Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

"The main trigger for this divergent trend in equity and debt is the high valuation in the Indian equity market and the rising bond yields in the US," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, attributed the outflow from equities to the uncertainty surrounding the interest rate environment, both domestically as well as globally. According to the data, FPIs made a net investment of Rs

15,093 crore in the debt markets in this month (till February 9). With this, the total investment by FPIs reached over Rs 34,930 crore in 2024. They have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months. FPIs infused Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, Rs 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October.

"The Indian debt markets witnessed a reversal in FPI flow trend last year after the announcement of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. This was one of the major drivers for the robust flows from FPIs, along with relatively stable economy," Srivastava said. JP Morgan Chase & Co. In September last year announced that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024.

This landmark inclusion is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around USD 20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months. This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the rupee, thereby bolstering the economy, he added. Overall, the total FPI flows in 2023 stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt markets. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market.

Government examining FDI flow from China in Paytm Payments Services

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is examining foreign direct investment from China in Paytm Payments Services Ltd (PPSL), the payment aggregator subsidiary of One97 Communications Ltd, sources said. In November 2020, PPSL had applied for licence with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a payment aggregator under the guidelines on Regulation of Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways. However, in November 2022, RBI rejected PPSL's application and asked the company to resubmit it, so as to comply with Press Note 3 under FDI rules. One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) has investment from Chinese firm Ant Group Co. Subsequently, the company filed the required application on December 14, 2022 with Government of India for past downward investment from OCL into the company in order to comply with Press Note 3 prescribed under FDI guidelines.

An inter-ministerial committee is examining investments from China in PPSL and decision would be taken on the FDI issue after due consideration and

comprehensive examination, sources said. Under Press Note 3, the government had made its prior approval mandatory for foreign investments in any sector from countries that share land border with India to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic firms following the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan. A query sent to OCL for comments remained unanswered till the filing of the story. The Reserve Bank last month barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL), an associate company of OCL, from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, and FASTags, among others after February 29, 2024. The Reserve Bank's action against PPBL follows a comprehensive system audit report and subsequent compliance validation report of external auditors. RBI had said that these reports revealed persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns in PPBL, warranting further supervisory action.

Direct tax collection grows 20 per cent, reaches ₹15.60 lakh crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Net direct tax collection so far in current fiscal grew 20 per cent year-on-year to Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 80 per cent of revised budget estimates for full fiscal year. "The provisional figures of direct tax collections continue to register steady growth. Direct tax collections up to 10th February, 2024 show that gross collections are at Rs



18.38 lakh crore, which is 17.30 per cent higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year," Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement. Direct tax collection, net of refunds, till February 10 of FY24 stands at Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 20.25 per cent higher than the net collections in the corresponding period last year. This collection is 80.23 per

cent of the total revised estimates of direct taxes for 2023-24. Refunds amounting to Rs 2.77 lakh crore have been issued during April 1, 2023 to February 10, 2024. Gross revenue collections for Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) also showed a steady growth. Growth rate for CIT was 9.16 per cent while for PIT, it was 25.67 per cent (PIT only).

Adani Ports secures top position for climate actions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Sunday said it has secured top position for its climate actions and environmental performance in assessments done by four global rating agencies. The assessments were done by CDP, S&P, Sustainalytics and Moody's. While the company secured 'leadership band' in CDP Climate Assessment 2023, it ranked first on the environmental dimension among 324 companies in the transport and transport



infrastructure sector by S&P Global CSA 2023, a statement said. The company also secured the top rank in the marine ports sector on a low carbon transition rating by Sustainalytics. It also received the 'advanced' rating in Moody's

Energy Transition Rating and the first rank in the overall ESG Assessment and Strategy review in their last update. APSEZ is a part of the globally diversified Adani Group and is the largest port developer and operator in India.

Jeff Bezos sells nearly 12 million Amazon shares

AP ■ SEATTLE

Jeff Bezos filed a statement with federal regulators indicating his sale of nearly 12 million shares of Amazon stock worth more than USD 2 billion. The Amazon executive chairman notified the US Securities and Exchange Commission of the sale of 11,997,698 shares of common stock on February 7 and February 8. The collective value of the shares of Amazon, which is based in Seattle where he founded the company in a garage about three decades ago, is more than USD 2.04 billion.

Akums Drugs eyes ₹680 crore via fresh issue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Akums Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd has filed draft papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The initial share-sale is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 680 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 1.86 crore shares by promoters and an existing investor, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Saturday. Those selling shares in the OFS are Sanjeev Jain, Sandeep Jain and Ruby QC Investment Holdings Pte Ltd. The company is looking to raise Rs 136 crore through a pre-IPO placement. If such placement is undertaken, then fresh issue size will be reduced. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to repay debt, fund working capital requirements of the company, pursue inorganic growth initiatives through acquisition and for general corporate purposes. Founded in 2004, Akums is a pharmaceutical contract development and manufacturing organization (CDMO) offering a comprehensive range of pharmaceutical products and services in India and overseas. As of September 30, 2023, key clients of the company include Alembic Pharmaceuticals, Alkem Laboratories, Cipla, Dabur India, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, among others.

Close to ₹750 crore stuck in projects in Qatar, says Voltas

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Group firm Voltas is facing a major headwind in Qatar as around Rs 750 crore has been stuck due to delays in the realisation of overdue receivables and execution timelines, said its MD and CEO Pradeep Bakshi. In some projects, bank guarantees were "unethically" encashed by some contractors, which was an "uncalled" action to make quick money, derailing the international project business of Tata Group firm in the December quarter, he added. "Unprecedented things are happening in that area, especially in Qatar, wherein, unfortunately, our dues are

not being paid to us timely, and inordinate delays are happening. We have completed the project and handed it over, and despite that, payments are not made," Bakshi told PTI. Voltas has already approached the Indian government for help on the issue and also approached the Embassy in Qatar. MEP (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing) contractor Voltas has completed the projects in Qatar and handed them over as per the contract. However, its bills are not getting certified and paid. "There has to be some basic ethics when you do business with your partners... Unfortunately, our payments are not coming.

Duty concession on gold major concern in FTA with Peru: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Duty concessions on gold, which accounts for 80 per cent of India's imports from Peru, is the most challenging issue for New Delhi under the proposed free trade agreement with the South American nation, a report said on Sunday. Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that gold, a high-value product with low volume, attracts a 10 per cent basic customs duty in India, and even minor tariff concessions could lead to a significant increase in imports. India and the South American nation Peru are negotiating a free trade agreement to promote bilateral trade and

investments between the two countries. In such pacts, two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them, besides easing norms to promote trade in services. The next round of talks is expected to start this week in Lima, Peru. "Tariff concessions on gold, accounting for USD 1.8 billion or 80 per cent of India's imports from Peru in FY23, is the most challenging issue for India," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said. He argued that after tariff concessions under the India-UAE free trade agreement, gold imports from the UAE, India's second-largest gold supplier, doubled in 2023



compared to 2022. "Peru, the fifth-largest supplier to India, could see a similar surge in gold imports if concessions are made," the report said. In 2023, India's global imports of unwrought gold are estimated at USD 43 billion, with Switzerland accounting for 40 per cent of these

imports, it said, adding that given Peru's gold mines, its gold would easily meet any Rules of Origin criteria. "FTAs offer concessions on effective duties rather than on the bound duty. Excluding gold from an FTA would violate the World Trade Organization's Article XXIV, which requires duty cuts on

substantial trade for FTAs," Srivastava said. He also said that India's bound duty on gold is set at 40 per cent, but the current applied tariff is 10 per cent. "FTAs allow concessions in effective duties and not on bound duty. If the FTA does not include gold, it may not meet the WTO Article XXIV condition for FTAs to have duty cuts on substantial trade," Srivastava said. Peru has a bilateral trade pact with major economies like the US, EU, China, Australia, and Singapore. It also has multi-country agreements with the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, and Mexico) and the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador). These FTAs allow tariff-free imports of most products imported into Peru.

Majority of employees feel difficulty in adapting work from office module: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Amid companies encouraging their employees to return to the office, a majority of workers interviewed feel that it will be difficult for them to adapt to this transition, according to a report. There is an apprehension among employees regarding the adaptation to the work-from-office module, and 69 per cent of respondents have expressed concerns about the potential challenges associated with this transition, a report by staffing solutions and HR services



provider Genius Consultants said. However, 25 per cent of employees showcased resilience and confidence in their ability to navigate and adapt to the renewed office environment, it added. The report is based on an online survey among 1,213

employees from October 26 to November 30 across sectors like banking and finance, education, FMCG, hospitality, HR solutions, IT, ITES, and manufacturing. The report also anticipated a potential rise in attrition as a consequence of the work-from-office call. A significant 82 per cent of employees have expressed concerns, citing the increasing availability of work-from-home job opportunities in the market, the report said. This presents the evolving nature of the job market and the need for organisations to

consider and address the preferences and demands of their workforce, it added. On the flip side, 12 per cent of respondents do not perceive attrition as a major concern, signalling a degree of optimism about the benefits of the in-office experience. About 67 per cent believe that work-from-office facilitates the integration of new employees with the larger workforce, serving as a catalyst for instilling organisational values. This perspective highlights the importance employees place on interpersonal connections.

ONGC Q3 profit falls 14 per cent to ₹9,536 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Sunday reported 14 per cent drop in net profit for the third quarter ended December 31 as oil and gas prices fell. Standalone net profit of Rs 9,536 crore in October-December 2023 (third quarter of 2023-24 fiscal year) was 13.7 per cent lower than Rs 11,045 crore earning in the same period of previous financial year, the company said in a statement. The earning was lower as

price realised for crude oil the firm produced and sold in the quarter fell 6.4 per cent to USD 81.59 per barrel. Gas price too was 24.2 per cent lower at USD 6.5 per mmBtu. Also contributing to lower profit was a decline in production of crude oil, which is converted into fuel like petrol and diesel at refineries, and natural gas which is used to generate electricity, produce fertilizer, turned into CNG and piped to kitchens for cooking. Crude oil production dropped 3.3 per cent to 5.22 million tonne while gas

output was 4.3 per cent lower at 5.12 billion cubic meters. Gross revenue was down 10 per cent at Rs 34,789 crore in Q3. The board of the company approved a second interim dividend of 80 per cent or Rs 4 a share. "The total payout on this account will be Rs 5,032 crore," the statement said. This is in addition to the first interim dividend of Rs 5.75 per share declared last year. ONGC's standalone net profit in the first nine months of the current fiscal fell 24 per cent to Rs 29,767 crore as oil price realised dropped to \$75.55 a

Nagal, Ramkumar draw French rivals in opening round of Bengaluru Open

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian ace Sumit Nagal is pitted against Geoffrey Blancaneaux, while wild card entrant Ramkumar Ramanathan will face Maxime Janvier in the men's singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open beginning here on Monday. World ranked 121 Nagal will aim to extend his dominance over French player Blancaneaux, whom he has beaten three times, including in the Australian Open Qualifiers. India No 2 Ramkumar has a 1-1 head-to-head record against Janvier of France and if he clears the first round hurdle, he is likely to run into top-seed Italian Luca Nardi, who has been drawn to meet a qualifier in his opening round. Australian Adam Walton has been seeded third and will open his campaign against



Indian wild card entrant Prajwal Dev. In the doubles main draw, Frenchman Dan Added and Korea's Yun Seong Chung have been given the top billing and will clash with the Australian pair Tristan Schoolkate and Adam Walton. Australia's Christopher Matthew Romios and Poland's Piotr Matuszewski are seeded second and will take on Taipei's Ray Ho and Australia's Calum Puttergill. There are nine Indians in the doubles main draw. N Sriram Balaji and Andre Begemann of Germany will clash with the German duo of Mark Wallner and Jakob Schnaitter. The ATP Challenger event is being organised by Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association at KSLTA Stadium. Qualifying rounds began on Sunday, while the final is scheduled on February 18.



Man City keeps pressure on Liverpool

AP ■ LONDON

Watch out, Premier League. The competition's most lethal attacking combination is back in tandem. Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne - both recently back from long injury absences - linked up for the clinching goal in Manchester City's 2-0 win over Everton on Saturday in what will be a worrying sight for the defending champions' rivals. Liverpool remained in first place after a 3-1 victory over Burnley but City is ominously placed on the leader's shoulder, two points behind with a game in hand, and with its superstar attackers back in the groove. Make it 12 times that De Bruyne has set up Haaland for a goal since they started playing together at the beginning of last season following the striker's move to England. No other Premier League partnership has delivered that many goals in this period. "With him, I know I'm going to get it perfect. You know the ball is going to come," Haaland said of De Bruyne, English soccer's king of the assists. "I watch a lot of football and I already saw for many years where he plays the ball, and he hasn't changed anything for the last five years. For me, it was about coming in and finishing those actions." And there was something so familiar with the way De Bruyne collected the ball in center-field and deftly slid in Haaland, who bundled his marker off the ball and opened his body to steer home a finish in the 85th minute. It was Haaland's second of the game, after he broke Everton's stubborn resistance in the 71st by pouncing on a loose ball following a corner. "I like to win this type of game - suffering and knowing how difficult everything is - because we learn the lessons for what's coming," City manager Pep Guardiola said. City has won six games in a row in the league, and 10 straight in all competitions. Still, Liverpool is holding strong at the top, with Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez - the starting front three while Mohamed Salah is out injured - all scoring at Anfield. Vincent Kompany, the Man City great in charge of Burnley, couldn't do his old club a favor. Liverpool bounced back from only its second league loss this season, at Arsenal last weekend, though there might be concerns over the fitness of Trent Alexander-Arnold after the right back came off at halftime with a recurrence of a recent knee injury, when the score was 1-1. "Same area in the knee. Nothing really bad but he felt it again," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said. SON'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN Son Heung-min marked his return for Tottenham after more than a month away at the Asian Cup by creating a dramatic winner against Brighton. Son, whose South Korea team was eliminated in the semifinals on Tuesday, started on the bench for his comeback game, came on at 1-1 and set up Brennan Johnson for a goal in the sixth minute of stoppage time that made it 2-1. "It's fair to say that we are still a work in progress but we had a world-class player in Son who makes the most difficult ball look simple to set up Brennan," said Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou, whose team jumped above Aston Villa into fourth place. GUIMARAES DOUBLE Bruno Guimaraes continues to be the shining light in a difficult season for Newcastle. The Brazil midfielder scored in each half, including a superb curling shot for the winner, as Newcastle beat Nottingham Forest 3-2 to climb two places to seventh. Guimaraes' performances have been consistently excellent for Newcastle while, crucially, he has stayed healthy in a campaign that has seen manager Eddie Howe lose player after player to injury. Forest stayed two points and two places above the relegation zone but, like third-to-last Everton, was recently charged with breaching the league's financial regulations and could yet be facing a points deduction. IN-FORM TONEY Ivan Toney scored for the third time in four games since his return from a ban for breaching betting regulations as Brentford won 2-0 at Wolverhampton. Last-place Sheffield United won for just the third time this season, 3-1 at relegation rival Luton, and Fulham was the winner by the same score at Bournemouth.



Inter wins 4-2 at Roma to end De Rossi perfect record

AP ■ MILAN

A sublime second-half performance from league leader Inter Milan saw it win 4-2 at Roma in the teeming rain and end Daniele De Rossi's perfect record. Goals from Gianluca Mancini and Stephan El Shaarawy had given Roma the lead at halftime following Francesco Acerbi's opener for Inter. But the Nerazzurri turned things around immediately after the break with a strike from Marcus Thuram, who also forced an own-goal from new Roma defender Angelino. Alessandro Bastoni sealed the match late on as Inter moved seven points above second-place Juventus. The Bianconeri can cut the gap to four points with a win at home to relegation-threatened Udinese on Monday but will then have played a match more than Inter. Roma remained a point behind fourth-place Atalanta after De Rossi's first loss. The former Roma player had won all three of his matches as coach after replacing the fired Jose Mourinho. The Nerazzurri were without coach Simone Inzaghi on the bench in Rome after he picked up his fifth yellow card of the season in last weekend's win over Juventus. The suspended Inzaghi watched from the stands as his team took the lead in the 17th minute - with the help of a former Inter player. Former Nerazzurri forward Romelu Lukaku headed away an Inter corner but only as far as Acerbi, who headed it into the back of the net. However, Roma leveled in the 28th minute when a free kick was floated over the top and Mancini headed it into the bottom right corner from close range. And Roma turned the match around on the stroke of halftime as a counterattack sent El Shaarawy sprinting into the area and he unleashed a shot which hit the crossbar and the left post before also bouncing off the right post and going in.

Qatar win Asian Cup titles after beating Jordan 3-1

AP ■ LUSAIL (QATAR)

Akram Afif dropped to his knees. Pretty soon he was being thrown into the air by his joyous teammates after the forward's hat trick of penalties secured back-to-back Asian Cup titles for Qatar. Afif, the outstanding player of the tournament and leading scorer with eight goals, was nerveless when converting his spot kicks in a 3-1 win against Jordan at Lusail Stadium on Saturday. Just over a year ago it had been Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe who had lit up this spectacular venue in arguably the greatest World Cup final of all time. On this occasion it was Afif taking center stage and becoming the first player to score a hat trick in the Asian Cup final. He had been his country's standout performer from the start of the tournament and did not disappoint when it fell to him to produce the decisive moments against Jordan as Qatar became the first back-to-back winner since Japan in 2000 and 2004.

In front of more than 86,000 fans and with the pressure on, Afif never looked likely to miss from the spot and he sparked wild celebrations with each goal. (I scored) the penalties because of the confidence my teammates had in me. It is not about technique, it is about the feeling that people are behind me - my team," Afif said. He won and converted his first penalty in the 22nd minute. And after Yazan Al Naimat leveled the game in the 67th he struck again from the spot in the 73rd and sealed the win in the fifth minute of stoppage time. Afif had spoken earlier in the tournament of his wish to return to European soccer after spells in Spain and Belgium at the start of his career. His performances, which also earned him the award for the Asian Cup's most valuable player, will likely have caught the attention of clubs far and wide. While this was a personal triumph for him, it was redemption for Qatar, which had endured a miserable World Cup on home soil in



2022 when exiting the tournament after three straight defeats in the group stage. Even as host and defending champion, Qatar had been an unexpected finalist, let alone winner. Captain Hassan Al-Haydos noted on the eve of the final how critics had expected little of the team ahead of the tournament. How satisfying for him, then, to be draped in the same type of black Qatari ceremonial robe that Messi had worn to lift the World Cup. After the pain of that tournament, here was a

moment of national celebration as the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani handed Al-Haydos the trophy and shortly after there was an eruption of tickertape and fireworks. Earlier, Qatar's Spanish coach, Márquez López slumped in his seat, seemingly exhausted, as he waited out 17 minutes of stoppage time. The exertions of the past month appeared to have taken its toll. He had only been hired in December and Qatar had been beaten 2-1 by Jordan in a friendly in January.

Shankar wins season opening meet in Belgium

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National record holder in high jump Tejaswin Shankar won the top prize in the International High Jump Gala Elmos 2024 athletics meet in Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium with a leap of 2.23 metres. Shankar, competing for the first time since October last year, finished ahead of Greece's Antonios Merlos (2.20 metres) in the World Athletics Indoor Tour Challenger event on Saturday. The 25-year-old, who holds both the men's high jump and decathlon national records, however, could not better his personal best of 2.29m. Shankar is also focusing on decathlon and had won bronze and silver in the discipline in the Asian Championships and Asian Games last year.



Shankar has trained his eyes on a Paris Olympics berth but for that he will have to achieve a qualifying standard of 2.33 metres. The other Indian in fray, Jesse Sandesh finished joint-10th with a jump of 2.09 metres. Shankar will next be seen in action at the Hvezdy v Nehvizdech athletics meet in Nehvizdy, Czech Republic on February 20.

Jota, Diaz, Nunez score for Liverpool in 3-1 win over Burnley

AP ■ LIVERPOL

Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez - Liverpool's starting front three while Mohamed Salah is out injured - all scored for the Premier League leaders in a 3-1 win over Burnley. The Reds responded to Manchester City's extremely brief return to the league's summit, after its 2-0 victory against Everton hours earlier, with a triumph that tested their mettle even more than their stretched resources. While the three points reestablished Liverpool's two-point advantage, the less-than-convincing nature of victory against the league's next-to-last side was not quite befitting the occasion of the hosts' biggest league crowd of 59,896 after the full opening of the Anfield Road stand. For a time it appeared Liverpool, which was without goalkeeper Alisson Becker



and defender Joe Gomez because of illness as well as the injured Salah, was still suffering a hangover from the defeat at Arsenal last week. It took the familiar right boot of Trent Alexander-Arnold, setting a new mark of 58 for Premier League assists by a defender, and the equally reliable head of Jota to put

them ahead at a corner in the 31st. The sloppy concession of an equalizer, when Dara O'Shea headed in at a corner on the stroke of halftime, posed further problems as did the withdrawal of Alexander-Arnold - only recently returned from a knee injury - at the break. It was the England international's replacement, Harvey Elliott, who set up headed goals for Diaz in the 52nd and Nunez in the 78th to ease the pressure. However, had on-loan Chelsea forward David Fofana been as clinical as he was scoring twice last weekend, then not only would Liverpool be looking up at City but questions would have started to be asked about their ability to match their long-time rivals. Liverpool should have Salah and Dominic Szoboszlai back from injury in the next couple of weeks.

Paul, Giron advance to Dallas Open final

AP ■ DALLAS

Second-seeded Tommy Paul and unseeded Marcos Giron won in straight sets to set up an all-American final in the Dallas Open. Paul beat No. 3 seed Ben Shelton of the U.S., 6-2, 6-4, and Giron rolled over a seeded opponent again, beating No. 4 seed Adrian Mannarino of France, 6-1, 6-3, in the semifinals. The 30-year-old Giron, who beat top-seeded American Frances Tiafoe in the

quarterfinals, is seeking his first ATP Tour title Sunday in his second trip to a final. Paul's only title came in 2021 in Stockholm. Paul won the final four games of the first set before a break early in the second set held up against the 21-year-old Shelton in the hardcourt event on the SMU campus. Giron took a 4-0 lead in the first set a day after going up 5-0 in a straight-set win over Tiafoe, who was the highest-ranked player in the tournament at No. 14.



The first break of the second set came when Giron made a

lunging save with a forehand, then ran down Mannarino's

volley for a backhand crosscourt passing shot and a 5-3 lead. Giron, who hasn't lost a service game in four matches in the tournament, had little trouble closing out the match on his serve. With three victories over seeded opponents, Giron has a chance to surpass his career-best ranking of 49th from 2022, when Giron lost his only previous final in San Diego. Giron reached the semifinals in Dallas two years ago, losing a three-setter to Jensen

Brooksby while having match points. The final two sets went to tiebreakers. "That stuck with me, and that's hard," Giron said. "I have experience. I know what it's like to lose. I know what it's like to win. Having a big win yesterday was awesome, and I'm really, really happy to be able to come back today." Paul reached two finals last year, losing in a grass-court event at Eastbourne and a hardcourt tournament in Acapulco. The 26-year-old Paul

converted three of eight break points against the hard-serving Giron while saving all three break points he faced. The 15th-ranked Paul, who stopped a six-match losing streak against top 20 opponents, had dropped his previous two matches against Shelton, who is No. 16. "Obviously, his serve is unbelievable," Paul said. "These courts kind of help me a little bit. You don't have to jump in quite as high. Kind of kept the ball in my strike zone.

U-19 WORLD CUP FINAL

India lose by 79 runs to Australia

PTI ■ BENONI (SOUTH AFRICA)

India's batting lineup misfired when it mattered the most as they suffered a heartbreaking 79-run loss to Australia in the final of the U-19 World Cup here on Sunday. Opting to bat, Australia first posted 253 for 7, courtesy Oliver Peake's enterprising 43-ball 46 and Harjas Singh's 55 off 64 balls, and then returned to bowl out the five-time champions for 174 in 43.5 overs. Australia, thus, became four-time champions. Chasing 254, opener Adarsh Singh made a 77-ball 47 but India kept losing wickets at regular intervals to collapse to 122 for 8 in 31.5 overs. Number 8 batter Murugan Abhishek (42 off 46 balls) then played an entertaining knock but it was too little and too late. The loss brought back memories of Indian senior team's gut-wrenching loss to Australia in the 50-over



World Cup final at home in November last year. For Australia, seamer Mahli Beardman (3/15) and off-spinner Raf MacMillan (3/43) did most of the damage. Callum Vidler (2/35) and Charlie Anderson (1/42) were the other wicket-takers. Earlier, Harjas top-scored for Australia with 55, while Weibgen and opener Harry Dixon made 48 and 42 respectively. Later, Peake propped up Australia with his breezy knock. Raj Limbani was the most successful Indian bowler with figures of 3/38, while Naman Tiwari picked up two wickets for 63 runs in nine overs. **BRIEF SCORES:** Australia: 253/7 in 50 overs (Harjas Singh 55, Hugh Weibgen 48, Harry Dixon 42, Oliver Peake not out 46; Raj Limbani 3/38, Naman Tiwari 2/63). India: 174 all out in 43.5 overs (Adarsh Singh 47; Mahli Beardman 3/15, Raf MacMillan 3/43).



Real show stealer was Boomball, says Ashwin

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Lavishing praise on teammate Jasprit Bumrah, senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said "Boomball" stole the show in the second Test against England and the pacer reaching top of the ICC rankings across three formats is a "Himalayan feat". Bumrah displayed brilliance with the ball to play a key role in the team's series-levelling 106-run win in the second Test in Visakhapatnam. He put up a reverse swing master-class in England's first innings that yielded him six wickets (6/45), following it up with a three-wicket haul in their second essay for match figures of 9 for 91. His performance enabled him to jump to number one in the Test rankings list, becoming the first Indian pacer to achieve the feat. Bumrah has also held the top spot in the ODI and T20 rankings previously. "The real show stealer was BoomBall. Jasprit Bumrah has bowled extraordinarily," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel. "He is the leading wicket-taker with 14 wickets and also the No.1 ranked Test bowler. The first India fast bowler to achieve number one across all formats. I am a big fan of his and this is a Himalayan feat." Ashwin said that the extraordinary vibe and energy on the fourth day of the second Test helped India secure a favourable result. "We came into the fourth day with it all being even-stevens. But our extraordinary vibe, energy and team performance helped us level the series 1-1." The five-match series will be played across Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Rajkot, Ranchi and Dharamasala and Ashwin noted that most Indian players have not played Test cricket at these venues. "There's never been a marquee Test series like this in five such venues before. In 2017, we played Australia in Dharamasala and Ranchi and then Pune and Bengaluru. Usually, if there is a 4-5 match Test series at least one or two happen in metro cities. "Unlike that, this time it's happening in venues that weren't part of World Cup matches. "For most of the Indian players, these venues are new. There are a lot of players playing in our team who haven't played a first-class or Test match in Vizag stadium. "I'm not sure that is possible in any other country. But possible in India as there are so many 'Test venues'."



Leach ruled out of remaining three Tests against India

PTI ■ LONDON

England left-arm spinner Jack Leach was on Sunday ruled out of the remaining three Tests against India with a left knee injury, announced the England and Wales Cricket Board. However, no replacement will be called up for Leach, an indication that England will continue with the spin trio of Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Basheer for the rest of the tour. Joe Root is the visitors' fourth spin option behind the three regular spinners. Leach had sustained the injury during England's first Test victory in Hyderabad and missed the second Test in Visakhapatnam as a result. "He will fly home from Abu Dhabi in the next 24 hours, where the England team has been staying ahead of the third Test in Rajkot, which starts on Thursday (February 15). "Leach will work closely with the England and Somerset medical teams in respect of his rehabilitation," stated the ECB in a media release. The 32-year-old Leach has taken 126 wickets in 36 Tests, besides being a handy lower-order batter.

Zimbabwe Cricket to restructure after WC qualification woes

PTI ■ HARARE

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) has decided to effect far-reaching changes in both its domestic and development pathway following failure to qualify for the 2023 Men's ODI World Cup and the 2024 Men's T20 World Cup. As a first step, the ZC board, which met on Saturday, decided to appoint 51-year-old former first-class player Walter Chawaguta as the head coach of the senior women's national team and accepted the resignation of U19 men's national team head coach Prosper Utseya. It also decided to appoint the senior and U19 men's team coaches on an urgent basis. A ZC statement said that the



board had "adopted the comprehensive report presented by a committee of inquiry that was established

to probe Zimbabwe's World Cup qualification failures as well as to review ZC's cricket affairs structure".

The three-member committee was headed by lawyer Lloyd Mhishi. "The three-member

Committee, chaired by Lloyd Mhishi, presented its report to the board after gathering input from various stakeholders, both internal and external... The board resolved to adopt the report in its entirety and to immediately implement the committee's recommendations," the statement added. Among the recommendations accepted by ZC board are a complete restructuring of the cricket affairs department and its personnel, overhaul of the domestic and development pathway, advertising for the head coach's job for the national senior men's and U19 teams and restructuring of the coaching set-up at first-class level.

Debutant Sharma completes 10 wickets match haul

PTI ■ THUTHIPET (PUDUCHERRY)

Left-arm spinner Vanshaj Sharma completed a maiden ten-wicket match haul on his debut as Jammu and Kashmir dismissed Puducherry for 67 in their chase of 87 to register a 19-run win in the Ranji Trophy group D match here on Sunday. Resuming at 35 for 7, Puducherry folded in 35.3 overs with the 20-year-old Sharma claiming all the remaining three wickets, returning with figures of 5 for 16 to go with his first innings figures of 5 for 74.



On Saturday, another left-arm spinner Abid Mushtaq notched up a 10-wicket match haul, his second in First-Class cricket. He had taken five for 28 in the second innings, returning with figures of 25-3-64-5 in the first innings.

Mushtaq was adjudged the Player-of-the-match for his exploits at the Cricket Association of Pondicherry (CAP) Siechem ground here. With the win, Jammu and Kashmir continued their unbeaten run and grabbed the third place with 18 points, behind Baroda and Madhya Pradesh. For Pondicherry (15), their hopes of reaching the knockout stage is almost over. **Brief Score:** J&K 106 and 152 (Sagar Udeshi 3/48) beat Puducherry 172 and 67 allout in 35.3 overs (Damodaran Rohit 17; Vanshaj Sharma 5/16, Abid Mushtaq 5/28) by 19 runs.

Sunrisers claim back to back SA20 titles

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Sunrisers Eastern Cape won back-to-back SA20 titles after an empathic 89-run victory over Durban's Super Giants at Newlands here. After topping the group stage, the Sunrisers delivered a clinical performance in the final on Saturday. Half-centuries from Tom Abell (55) and Tristan Stubbs (56 not out) along with contributions from Jordan Hermann and captain Aiden Markram, who both contributed 42, respectively, saw the Sunrisers post a formidable 204/3. The defending champions then bowled out the Super Giants for a paltry 115 in 17 overs. Partnerships were crucial in



the Sunrisers' innings with Hermann and Abell setting up the winning total with a 90-run stand for the second wicket after the early loss of Dawid Malan. Durban's Super Giants captain, Keshav Maharaj, hit back with a double-wicket over by removing both set batters in

Hermann and Abell. But the Sunrisers showed they had plenty more in reserve with Markram and Stubbs rebuilding the innings before exploding towards the backend with 98 runs off 55 balls. The Sunrisers' bowling has been their strongest discipline

all season and their seamers certainly rose to the occasion on the night. Dan Worrall (2/15) set the tone upfront again with the dismissal of Quinton de Kock early on before Marco Jansen delivered two hammer blows in the fourth over with the removal of Jon Jon Smuts and Bhanuka Rajapaksa to leave the Super Giants reeling at 7/3. Wiaan Mulder attempted a recovery job with quickfire 38, but that's when Ottiene Baartman (2/17) delivered the moment of the match. He had already dismissed Matthew Breetzke, but it was his in-swinging that wrapped the dangerous Heinrich Klaasen on the pads first ball that closed the game as a contest.

Saxena grabs 9/68 as Bengal stare at second successive defeat

PTI ■ THUMBA (KERALA)

Domestic cricket stalwart Jalaj Saxena destroyed Bengal with career-best figures of 9/68 as the visitors found themselves on the brink of a second successive defeat in the Ranji Trophy Group B here on Sunday. Resuming on 172/8, Bengal managed to add just eight runs to their overnight total with the veteran all-rounder adding two more wickets to his name. The 37-year-old now has 439 wickets and has 6600-plus runs from 138 matches in first-class cricket. Despite a substantial lead, Kerala skipper Sanju Samson chose not to enforce follow-on and declared their second essay at 265/6 to set a massive 449-run target for the visitors. In reply, Bengal were 77/2 with Abhimanyu Easwaran batting on 33. Bengal had

lost their last match against Mumbai at Eden Gardens.

Khare slams fighting 143, but Mumbai hold edge In Raipur, skipper Amandeep Khare led from the front with a stellar 143 as Chhattisgarh put up a strong fight, falling just one run short of Mumbai's first innings total of 351. From 180/4 overnight, Khare, who was unbeaten on 35, showed utmost patience in his composed knock from 211 balls. Mumbai kept taking wickets at one end but Khare stood firm and was the last man to get out. He struck 14 fours and four sixes. In reply, Mumbai were 97/1 at close on day three. With a lead of 98 runs, Mumbai seemed to be well-placed with Bhupen Lalwani and Amogh Bhatkal at the crease. Shubham Singh managed the



only breakthrough for Chhattisgarh in Mumbai's second innings when he dismissed Mumbai's first innings hero Prithvi Shaw,

five runs short of a half-century. The Indian batter's 159 off 185 balls had powered Mumbai to 351.

Assam eyeing maiden win of season Veteran off-spinner Swarupam Purkayastha was the star performer with the

ball, securing four wickets for just 11 runs, as Assam bundled out Bihar for 207 to take a huge first innings lead of 198 runs in Guwahati.

Assam were quick to enforce the follow-on and reduced Bihar to 168/3 at close of play on the penultimate day. Opener Piyush Singh displayed resilience with an unbeaten 79 from 204, steering Bihar in their second essay. The visitors face a challenging task ahead, trailing by 30 runs as Assam will be eyeing their first win of the season. The visitors face a challenging task ahead, trailing by 30 runs as Assam will be eyeing their first win of the season.

Brief Scores

In Raipur: Mumbai 351 and 97/1; 28 overs (Prithvi Shaw 45, Bhupen Lalwani 40 batting). Chhattisgarh 350; 106.1 overs (Amandeep Khare 143, Shashank Chandrakar 56, Sanjeet Desai 41; Tushar Deshpande 5/121, Royston Dias 2/44). Mumbai lead by 98 runs. In Guwahati: Assam: 405.

Bihar 207; 71.5 overs (Paramjeet Singh 53, Bipin Saurabh 39; Swarupam Purkayastha 4/11, Mukhtar Hussain 3/22) and following on 168/3; 61 overs (Piyush Singh 79 not out, Bipin Saurabh 44; Mukhtar Hussain 1/15, Rahul Singh 1/13). Bihar trails by 30 runs. In Thumba: Kerala: 363 and 265/6 declared; 64.2 overs (Rohan Kunnummal 51, Sachin Baby 51, Shreyas Gopal 50 not out; Shahbaz Ahmed 3/80). Bengal: 180; 51.1 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 72; Jalaj Saxena 9/68) and 77/2; 20.4 overs (Target: 449) (Abhimanyu Easwaran 33 batting, Sudip Gharami 31). Bengal need 372 runs. In Vizianagaram: Andhra 261 and 271/5; 92 overs (Ricky Bhui 100 batting, Hanuma Vihari 48, Shaik Rasheed 42 batting; Saurabh Kumar 3/73). Uttar Pradesh 198. Andhra lead by 338 runs.