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DERIVATIVES EXPIRY: ANALYSTS

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OIPR-15001/13/0464/2324



MYTH BECOMES REALITY

Modi Bridges Ancient and Modern India



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated 'Sudarshan Setu', the country's longest cable-stayed bridge of 2.32 km, on the Arabian sea connecting Beyt Dwarka island to mainland Okha in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district. Modi began his day by offering prayers at Lord Sri Krishna temple at Beyt Dwarka. He later inaugurated the four-lane cable-stayed bridge called the 'Sudarshan Setu', which boasts a unique design, featuring a footpath adorned with verses from Srimad Bhagavad Gita and images of Lord Krishna on both sides. The 2.32 km bridge, including 900 metres of central double span cable-stayed portion and a 2.45 km long approach road, has been constructed at a cost of ₹979 crore, as per an official release. PTI

Ex-minister Nayak joins BJP

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Former minister Debasis Nayak on Sunday joined the BJP, hours after quitting the BJD.

He joined the BJP in the presence of party Odisha unit president Manmohan Samal and other senior leaders at its headquarters here.

Nayak, a four-time MLA from Bari in Jajpur district, quit the BJD and sent his resignation letter to BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Nayak had been denied the BJD ticket in 2019 Assembly elections.



"BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik has changed a lot over the years. The regional party has also sacrificed its ideology and principles," Nayak alleged after joining the BJP.

In a related development, former Congress MLA from Attabira constituency in Bargarh district Nihar Ranjan Mahananda also joined the BJP on the day.

Assembly and Lok Sabha polls

10,000 aspirants apply for BJD tickets

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

More than 10,000 aspirants have applied for Biju Janata Dal (BJD) tickets for the simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Odisha.

This was revealed by BJD general secretary (organisation) and Jajpur MLA Pranab Prakash Das in his Twitter (X) handle on Sunday.

"The BJD has received applications from more than 10,000 aspirants for party tickets. Many professionals and

leaders from a few national parties have submitted their applications for BJD tickets," wrote Das in his Twitter post.

Das exuded confidence that the BJD, under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, would register a landslide victory in the twin polls.

"With the blessings of 4.5 crore Odias, we are confident of retaining power in Odisha in 2024. Our leader Naveen Patnaik will take oath as the Chief Minister of Odisha for the sixth straight term," he added.



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‘Mann Ki Baat’

PM praises Odisha couple for setting up ‘Goat Bank’

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded a couple from Odisha for their unique initiative of a ‘Goat Bank’ to promote goat rearing at the community level.

In the 110th episode of his radio show ‘Mann Ki Baat’, Modi highlighted the animal husbandry adopted by professionals from various fields for farmers’ empowerment. He talked about Jayanti Mahapatra and Biren Sahu, a couple in

Kalahandi district, who have opted for goat rearing to improve their livelihood and others as well in rural areas.

“In Kalahandi, Odisha, goat rearing is becoming a major means of improving the livelihood of the village people as well as their standard of living. Behind this effort is a major decision of Jayanti Mahapatra ji and her husband Biren Sahu ji. Both of them were management professionals in Bengaluru, but they decided to take a break and come

to Salebhata village of Kalahandi. These people wanted to do something that would solve the problems of the villagers here and simultaneously empower them. With this thinking full of service and dedication, they established Manikastu Agro and started working with the farmers. Jayanti ji and Biren ji have also opened an interesting Manikastu Goat Bank here. They are promoting goat rearing at the community level. There are about dozens of goats

at their Goat Farm,” the PM said in the radio programme.

The Manikastu Goat Bank has set up a complete system for the farmers. Through this, farmers are given two goats for 24 months. Goats give birth to nine to 10 kids in two years, out of which six kids are kept by the bank and the rest are given to the same family which rears goats. Not only that, necessary services are also provided for the care of goats.

Modi said that more than 1,000 farmers from 50 villages

are now associated with the couple. With their help, the villagers are moving towards self-reliance in the field of animal husbandry.

“I feel very happy to see that successful professionals in various fields are adopting novel methods to make small farmers empowered and self-reliant. Their efforts are going to inspire everyone,” he said. Notably, the couple was awarded with ‘Brands of Odisha Pride of India’ organised by the Sambad Group in January this year.

Matric question leak

Student Cong demands minister resignation

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Student Congress led by its president Yasir Nawaj on Sunday gheraoed the residence of School and Mass Education Minister Sudam Marndi demanding his resignation alleging leak in the HSC Examination’s English question paper.

The agitators also burnt effigies of the Chief Minister and the concerned minister.

The Class-X examinations are important for the career of students. But in the tenure of Naveen Patnaik Government, the question papers are



always leaked before the examinations. It is highly unfortunate that question papers are being circulated in the social media before the examinations. Question paper leaks have occurred in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts, Nawaj said.

The government is playing with the career of students. The School and Mass Education Minister is inefficient. He should immediately resign. Stringent action should be taken against those who are involved in the question paper leak, demanded Nawaj.

Boat gets stranded in Chilika again

PNS ■ KHORDHA

A motorboat carrying more than 30 passengers got stuck in the Chilika lake on Sunday after its engine developed some technical snag.

As per reports, the boat was ferrying passengers from Jahnikuda to Satapada. Apart from the passengers, there were

many two-wheelers on board. Efforts were on for the rescue passengers and vehicles.

Notably, residents of as many as 92 villages near the lake have to face a lot of hardships and struggles in their daily communication to earn their livelihoods. To reach the mainland, the villagers have to cross five km through the lake

which has always remained a risky affair. During storms and mechanical problems, the boats often get stuck inside the lake.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has recently announced to build two big bridges over Chilika under the Bharatmala project.

Baleswar: 2 die in car-truck collision

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Two persons were killed on the spot as a car by which they were travelling had a head-on collision with a truck near a bridge at Kuruda on the National Highway under the Sadar police station in Baleswar district on Sunday.

The deceased were identified as Srikanta Panda of Oupada and Mayadhar Raj of Nilagiri in the district.

According to sources, the car was on its way from Baleswar town towards Kuruda and the truck was coming from the front when the mishap took place.

“Both the vehicles were passing the bridge at high speed. Drivers of the two ve-



hicles lost control over the wheels and the car and truck collided with each other,” a local said.

The truck driver fled from

the spot soon after the accident. Getting information, the Sadar police reached the spot and seized the bodies and sent them for postmortem.

IIT BBS to hold first-ever CSR Conclave on Feb 27

On theme ‘Uniting for a Sustainable Impact’

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The CSR Cell of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bhubaneswar is all set to hold its first-ever CSR Conclave on February 27.

The theme of the conclave is ‘Uniting for a Sustainable Impact’. It will witness keynote speeches by distinguished industry leaders, CSR experts, and policymakers.

President and Group Head-CSR, Education and Head (Corporate Communication),

Jindal Steel and Power Limited, Dr Prasanta Kumar Hota will grace the occasion as the chief guest.

Convener of the Odisha CSR Forum BK Mishra will also join as a plenary speaker in the conclave. Panel discussions on ‘Uniting for Sustainable Impact: A Corporate Perspectives on CSR’ and ‘Collaboration for Social Impact’ will be a part of the programme, wherein industry leaders in the field of CSR and representatives from NGOs, academia, and Government agencies will deliberate on the greater objectives of CSR through a collaborative approach. The conclave will also

have a workshop session featuring paper presentations by representatives of different institutions.

Informing about the conclave, Professor-in-Charge, CSR Cell, IIT Bhubaneswar and Convener of the programme, Prof Naresh Chandra Sahu said, “The CSR Conclave will serve as a platform for thought leaders, industry experts, academicians, and CSR enthusiasts to converge, exchange ideas, and collaborate towards driving meaningful change. This is expected to provide a stage for industry leaders to join hands with change-makers and sustainability experts.”

In city

Fake Navy official held for blackmailing girl

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A youth was arrested by police on Saturday for allegedly sexually exploiting a girl in Bhubaneswar on the pretext of marriage by posing as an official of the Navy.

The accused was identified as Soumya Ranjan Mishra. As per reports, Mishra, who is a native of Jagatsinghpur district, had created a profile on a matrimonial website where he claimed himself to be a Navy officer posted in Mumbai.

After coming across Mishra’s profile, the girl’s family approached him and he also showed interest in her profile. It was alleged that Mishra developed intimacy with the girl and recorded some pictures and videos of their private moments.

Later, Mishra started blackmailing the girl, who even alleged to have paid him Rs 50,000 for not uploading the



pictures and videos on social media.

However, the accused uploaded obscene pictures and videos on social media.

Based on the complaint filed by the girl’s family, the Mahila police arrested the accused and seized a mobile phone from his possession.

Birmaharajpur now NAC

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Sunday announced that Birmaharajpur in Subarnapur district would be converted into a Notified Area Council (NAC). Notably, the Chief Minister

had on Saturday already announced the formation of 34 new NACs.

With the conversion of Birmaharajpur as an NAC, the number of new NACs has reached 35. Birmaharajpur is a sub-divisional headquarters of Subarnapur.

Rains to continue in State till Feb 29

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With a trough now running from Chhattisgarh to north Tamil Nadu across Vidarbha and interior Karnataka, rainfall and thundershowers are very likely in Odisha districts till February 29, the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here said on Sunday.

No major change is likely in the minimum (night) temperature at many places over the districts of the State during next four to five days. The

highest maximum temperature of 35 degree Celsius was recorded at Malkangiri and Titilagarh and the lowest minimum temperature of 15.5 degree was recorded at Phulbani in Kandhamal district.

On Monday, light to moderate rain or thundershower is very likely to occur in the districts of Nuapada, Bargarh, Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Balangir, Subarnapur, Angul, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Boudh, Sambalpur, Deogarh and dry weather is very likely to prevail in the rest districts.

Matric Exams irregularities

ABVP gheraoes minister’s residence



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) staged a demonstration here on Sunday alleging mismanagement in the High School Certificate (HSC) Examinations in the State.

The agitators marched towards the official residence of School and Mass Education Minister Sudam Marndi and

tried to gherao it. They raised slogans against the minister and showed black flags.

However, the activists were prevented by police while trying to break the security barricades. Some of the agitators were detained by police.

The protestors also sought answers from the minister about the reason behind the English question paper leak

and demanded a high-level inquiry into the incident.

“The English question paper was leaked before the examination in Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts at 8.36 am and went viral through WhatsApp. Later, it was revealed that the same question paper was prepared for the examination during all the examinations,” said a leader of the agitators.

Transgender’s death in Jagannath shrine

NHRC issues summons to Puri Collector

For physical appearance on March 18

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on February 12 issued summons to the District Magistrate (DM), Puri, u/s 13 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, for appearance before it on March 18 along with requisite additional report related to death of a 36-year-old transgender after falling from the 30 feet high Gumuta of Jagannath shrine at Puri on May 1, 2022.

If the requisite reports be received on or before 11.3.2024, the personal appearance of the authority shall stand dispensed with, stated the Commission in its report. Acting on a petition filed by civil rights lawyer and activist

Radhakanta Tripathy, the NHRC passed such an order.

The deceased transgender Balaram Rout of Nimapara jumped from the Gumuta of the Puri shrine and later succumbed to his grievous injuries. It was alleged that the fatal incident happened on account of failure and negligence of police and inaction on part of the Social Justice Department and the Temple Administration which amounts to serious violation of human rights.

The Commission observed that the matter is pending for want of additional report in light of comment dated 14.02.2023 of the complainant wherein he made a submission that the deceased was deprived of benefits of social welfare schemes of the State Government while after his death, his family members did not receive any compensation

or rehabilitation.

A request was further made to seek compliance report on preventive, punitive, welfare and compensatory measures for transgenders living in the State in the interest of justice and human rights. Vide proceedings dated 25.08.2023 and a reminder was issued to the DM, Puri, Odisha for filing of additional report in light of complainant’s comments. But no additional report was sent.

As a result, the Commission on December 15 issued a final reminder to the DM, Puri. The Commission observed that despite direction/reminders, the District Magistrate of Puri failed to submit any report even till date. Taking a serious view of the same, the Commission directed its Registry to issue summons to the DM, Puri, for appearance before the Commission.

Anshuman joined BJD for personal gains: Cong

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

1 criticising former MLA of Rajnagar and former Kendrapada Congress president Anshuman Mohanty for joining BJD, newly appointed ad hoc president of Kendrapada District Congress Committee, Lokanath Moharathy said Anshuman did it all for his personal gains.

“Anshuman has sidestepped the loyalty and ideology of the Congress that had become a saviour for his late father Nalini Mohanty and also for himself. He should have not done this,” said Moharathy.

Notably, around thousands of Congress activists, includ-




ing several PRI members and former PRI members of Rajnagar and Pattamundai blocks and Pattamundai municipality, led by former MLA Anshuman, joined the ruling BJD. He was welcomed in the party as his late father Nalini had played a big role in the formation of BJD and Bijubabu’s regime. The BJD leaders stated that the development work of Rajnagar and Pattamundai would pick up pace with the team work of Anshuman and Dhruva Sahu.

Meanwhile, speculations are rife that Anshuman might get



the BJD ticket to contest from Kendrapada Lok Sabha seat in the ensuing poll-2024 for which he has joined BJD.






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DSPL-719

Bahanaga train tragedy

NHRC seeks ATR from Rlys, Odisha Govt

Concerning shortcomings in reports submitted by both

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■
BALESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought a detailed Action Taken Report (ATR) from the Chairman, Railway Board, Government of India and Chief Secretary, Odisha after finding certain shortcomings in the reports submitted by

both the authorities in the NHRC on the Bahanaga triple trains accident.

Pursuant to the notice of the NHRC, they had submitted certain replies. The petitioner, lawyer and activist Radhakanta Tripathy in his rejoinder pointed out certain aspects and sought for clarification.

The report of Railways and State of Odisha stated that some dead bodies could not be identified but disposed of with DNA preserved. The family members of the deceased except a few were compensated

and the case has been transferred to CBI for further investigation.

The tragic train accident occurred on June 2.

Petitioner Tripathy, however, alleged that the rights of the deceased and victims were violated by the State Government and Railways on various aspects.

Requesting for in-depth analysis and an independent and impartial investigation of the incident, Tripathy sought for compensation to the family members of the deceased,

dignified farewell of the bodies and compensation with proper medical care to the injured ones with death, injury certificates on the spot for various purposes including for claiming insurance and service benefits.

Tripathy in his rejoinder pointed out the difference in number of deaths submitted by the State and by the Railways. The family members of the unidentified bodies could have been contacted from the details of train tickets and DNA could have been

verified. If they travelled without a ticket what the TTE and RPF were doing during the journey. The bodies were not handled properly. The transfer of bodies to Delhi AIIMS puts question mark on the efficacy of Odisha hospitals including the AIIMS, Bhubaneswar. After NHRC intervention, 28 bodies were cremated at Bhubaneswar. The NHRC sought a detailed report on the aspects pointed out by Tripathy within six weeks.

Funds crisis

Welfare bodies face closure threat in J'suguda

They operate under DMF, dist admn

RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■
JHARSUGUDA

A crisis looms over the utilisation of District Mineral Fund (DMF) in Jharsuguda as 12 vital organisations, operating under MoUs with DMF and the District Administration, face closure due to a lack of grants in the last two years. These organisations, providing es-

sential services for mental patients, helpless individuals, detoxification centers, old age homes, and more, are on the brink of shutting down.

Despite representatives repeatedly seeking payment from the district Collector, bureaucratic delays persist, and the current administration appears indifferent to the issue.

Unpaid bills totaling over Rs 4.69 crore for six people forum organizations and Rs 1.59 crore for six NGOs pose a severe financial threat.

SEHEDA organization's head, Anandini Padhi, highlighted the financial strain, expressing concern over the organization's future.

District Social Security Officer Gopalaxmi Hota acknowledged the delay, citing bureaucratic hurdles. If these organizations close, over 200 officials could lose their jobs, and uncertainties about employee retention and inmate relocation add to the urgency for the district administration to resolve the funding crisis promptly.

BSF busts Maoist dumps in,Malkangiri

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI

BSF personnel on Saturday unearthed several Maoist dumps in the Silakota forest in Malkangiri district during a search operation.

“The multiple Maoist dumps were buried under trees located closely at a distance of four meters from each other. The area was located at a distance of around 300 meters in the

jungle from the connecting road between Bapanalli and Silakota village along the reserve forest,” the BSF said.

During the search operation, the BSF personnel recovered three pressure cookers, 24 gelatine sticks, cordex and bundles of electric wire from the dumps.

The BSF said the area earlier was a stronghold of Maoists and their sympathisers.

“The Maoist outfits would keep IEDs, arms and IED-making materials at isolated places to be used against security forces and police operating in these areas,” the BSF said.

Earlier on Friday, security personnel had seized a huge quantity of explosive materials after an exchange of fire with a group of Maoists in a forest in the Paikmal area of Bargarh district.

Banjyotsna Book Fair ends in Phulbani

PNS ■ PHULBANI

The 14th Book Fair of Banjyotsna Sahitya Parishad ended here. At the valedictory function, Phulbani MLA Angad Kahar attended as the chief guest and thanked everybody for the success of the event.

Journalist Jitendra Sahu from Bhubaneswar was guest of honour while eminent columnist and researcher Srirang Nayak joined as the chief speaker and presented the ancient heritage of Phulbani to the people. Prashant Kumar Behera, president of the parishad, presided over, while general secretary Dr Kanhucharan Satapathy conducted the programme.

Prizes were distributed among the successful contestants of various



competitions. A voluntary blood donation camp was organised in which a total of 70 units of blood were collected. Secretary Prashant Kumar Behera and Manoj Kumar Choudhury of Phulbani Blood Donation Committee,

Umesh Prasad Patra and V Loknath Raju, Jagannath Raju and other members of Team Humanity Kandhamal assisted in the blood camp. Blood Bank Officer Dr Jaydeep Ghosh was present. Sujit Kumar Behera gave the vote of thanks.

Luminaries join Youth Pharma Fest, Medical Expo

Hosted by Dadhichi College of Pharmacy

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Dadhichi College of Pharmacy, Cuttack hosted the 2nd edition of the Youth Pharma Festival on the theme “Changing Healthcare Environment and the Role of Pharmacist” and 4th Edition of Odisha Medical Expo (exhibition of medical devices



and pharmaceuticals) from February 23 to 25.

The three days event had twelve concurrent sessions, plenary session, one round

table discussion, question and answering session and workshop besides the inaugural and valedictory sessions, which offered opportunities

Mahanagar Mahotsav begins at B'pur

Even to last till March 3

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The 12th Mahanagar Mahotsav organised by the Mahanagar Sanskritika Parishad kicked off on February 23 being inaugurated by Brahmapur MP Chandra Sekhar Sahu. The event being held at Khallikote University stadium will continue till March 3.

One of the core objectives of the Mahotsav is to create and conserve the rich cultural heritage of south Odisha, said Parishad president and scribe Narayan Mahankud. He said the handicrafts and agricultural products of the region will be displayed

during the event.

Brahmapur MLA Bikram Panda is the chairman of the Organising Committee of the fest. A Pustak Mela will be organised as a part of the event, apart from cultural events and competitions. People of the region who have excelled in different domains at the national and international level will be felicitated every evening.

Celebrities both from the State and outside have been invited to showcase their talents which include Ollywood designer Jeet Jaggit, fashion director Karishma Khan, actor Raj Mahapatra, MIQH Mrs India Ishanka and showstopper Ashish Panda among others.

Garib Sena dubs BJP, BJD anti-people

PNS ■ NUAPADA

The Garib Sena, an organisation of marginalised people of Nuapada district, held meetings of its workers at Tarbod and Argen villages of Komna block. When workers from Tarbod, Jatgarh, Palsipani, Darlipada, Maniguda and Sialilati Panchayats attended the meeting at Tarbod, members of

Bhela, Agren and Rajna attended the meeting held at Agren.

Various problems of the district were discussed and the members criticised both the BJD and BJP Governments for their anti-people activities. The members expressed their opinion on how to strengthen the organisation. They decided to hold a mass movement against the Government in

the coming days. They also formulated strategies to be adopted during forthcoming general elections.

The meetings were chaired by advocate Hari Kuldeep. Sena convenor Rabi Mangaraj, Gadadhar Majhi, Khushi Jagat, Bhojaram Bagarti, Khirsindhu Meher, Sushant Jagat, Sundar Chinda and Narsingh Podha were present.

India's rooftop solar scheme can be a game changer

BINAYA BHUSAN JENA
LABANYA PRAKASH

In India's energy landscape, the domestic segment of India's power sector emerges as a significant player, responsible for 26% of electricity consumption and indirectly contributing approximately 9% of the country's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Yet, despite strides in achieving universal electricity access, the quality of power supplied to households often falls short, particularly in the summer season. This conundrum calls for innovative solutions that not only enhance energy reliability but also align with the nation's ambitious green energy transition goals.

Although India has focussed on rooftop solar since 2015, it failed to realize its true potential – the key challenge is the heavy upfront capital requirement. Recognizing the imperative for change, the Government of India has introduced a rooftop solar scheme, fortified with subsidies aimed at encouraging the widespread adoption of solar power among households. Subsidies will be the key driver as it will unburden the heavy upfront capital requirement to buy a rooftop solar system. At its core, the adoption of rooftop solar systems promises a dual benefit—an elevation in the quality of electricity supplied to homes and significant cost savings for consumers.

Imagine a scenario where

households experience uninterrupted power, a rarity in several areas of India. Rooftop solar systems have the potential to offer a reliable source of electricity round the clock. The integration of rooftop solar systems will allow people to operate their businesses for an extended period of time without power cut disruption, particularly those businesses that need electricity to operate.

It also contributes to an enhanced quality of life for those deprived of adequate living standards. From improving education and household activities to providing access to entertainment and essential services like mobile charging, solar energy serves as a transformative force for a better



quality of life.

The financial incentives provided under the rooftop solar scheme further sweeten the deal. With estimated annual savings ranging from Rs 15,000 to Rs 18,000, households stand to reap substan-

tial economic advantages by embracing solar energy. Beyond mere savings on electricity bills, the surplus power generated by these systems can be sold back to electricity distribution companies, paving the way for

an additional source of income for households.

However, the benefits of rooftop solar extend beyond individual households. This transition holds the promise of reducing the burden on the Government's coffers by minimizing cross-subsidies currently provided to domestic consumers. Moreover, by decentralising energy production, rooftop solar systems contribute to a more resilient and sustainable energy infrastructure, less susceptible to disruptions.

From a broader perspective, the widespread adoption of rooftop solar systems represents a significant stride toward mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. By reducing reliance on fossil fuels and embracing renewable energy sources, India can

tangibly progress towards its climate mitigation targets. The cumulative impact of these individual actions culminates in a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector, further bolstering India's commitment to combating climate change.

Indeed, the rooftop solar scheme encapsulates a win-win scenario, where climate mitigation objectives harmonize seamlessly with Government policies and household finances. As India charts its course towards a greener future, initiatives like these serve as pillars of sustainability, fostering a holistic approach to energy transition. This shift towards renewable energy sources contributes significantly to India's broader climate miti-

gation goals, positioning the nation as a leader in sustainable development.

However, there are logistical challenges such as grid integration and storage capacity remain paramount to ensuring the seamless integration of rooftop solar into the existing energy infrastructure. Collaborative efforts between policymakers, industry stakeholders, and community organizations are essential to surmounting these hurdles and unlocking the full benefits of solar energy.

(Dr Jena is Professor of Sustainability and Chairperson of FMS at National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT); Prakash is doctoral scholar at XLRI, Jamshedpur)

Resolve to give Modi Government third term: Shah to BJP workers

PTI ■ KHAJURAHO

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asked BJP workers to resolve to give the Narendra Modi government a third term at the Centre with more than 400 seats, asserting that the upcoming Lok Sabha polls were about making India a superpower and the world's third-largest economy. Addressing about 23,000 booth-level workers of the party at Khajuraho, the Union minister also claimed "the Congress means corruption and corruption means Congress". Opposition INDIA bloc partners Samajwadi Party and Congress have announced a tie-up for the Lok Sabha polls in MP, with the Akhilesh Yadav-led outfit set to contest in Khajuraho, bordering Uttar Pradesh, and support the grand old party in the remaining 28 constituencies in the state. Shah said the Congress during its 10-year tenure (between 2004 and 2014) had indulged in scams worth Rs 12 lakh crore. "Resolve to form the Modi-

led government at Centre again by winning more than 400 seats. The upcoming Lok Sabha polls are for making Bharat a superpower and the world's third largest economy under Modi's leadership," he told his party workers. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had won from Khajuraho with a margin of about 4.90 lakh votes. The Modi government has completed ten years, but the opposition leaders can't level allegations of a single penny on him, Shah said. Hailing the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya under the Modi government, Shah said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi used to take swipes at him by saying the saffron party claims it will build the temple but will not give people the date of construction. "The temple has been built under the Modi government. The BJP fulfils every commitment made to the public," asserted Shah, considered his party's key strategist. The top BJP leader said the



Congress dragged its feet for years over the Ayodhya temple, but Modi fulfilled the desire of crores of Lord Ram's devotees by performing the 'bhumi puja' of the shrine and then leading its consecration ceremony. He said that Congress and its allies have always insulted and abused Sanatana Dharma. Congress and its allies tried to coin the term "bhagwa terrorism" and they always humiliated Bharatiya culture, he said. "Not only in India, Modi ji has returned recently by inaugurating a grand temple

in UAE. Congress people are not tired of humiliating Sanatana Dharma." Giving credit for the party's victory to booth workers, Shah said that the BJP won 27 out of 29 Lok Sabha seats of Madhya Pradesh in 2014 and 28 segments in 2019. He urged them to ensure the BJP's victory on all the seats this time to cross the target of 400 seats in Parliament. The target of 400 seats can't be possible without the booth workers, he said and praised the party organisation in Madhya Pradesh. The BJP fulfils its promises, Shah said citing issues like

abrogation of Article 370 from Kashmir, one-rank, one pension to retired army men, abolishment of triple talaq, 33 per cent reservation to the women in Lok Sabha polls and completion of various temple corridors. Listing out achievements of the party, Shah said the BJP regime at the Centre has ensured 5 kg of free ration monthly to more than 80 crore poor people, provided tapped water to 14 crore families, and given Rs 6,000 annual assistance to 11 crore farmers. The next five years will be the time to lay the foundation of a "great Bharat", he said. Congress let "Alia Malia Jamalia" from Pakistan enter India and carry out attacks and return but Manmohan Singh (then prime minister) didn't pay heed, he said. Shah said that Pakistan made a mistake and launched attacks in Uri and Pulwama. Within ten days, the Modi government carried out a surgical strike and entered the homes of terrorists and killed them, he said. The Union minister said that the Modi government has

carried out several welfare works for farmers and made record purchases of wheat and paddy. "We have solved the problems of farmers one by one. Because of such works, Congress is not visible in the political landscape of the country," he said. Shah said that the Congress government had given Rs 1.99 lakh crore to Madhya Pradesh in ten years while the Modi government gave Rs 7.74 lakh crore in nine years. Besides, projects worth Rs 5.5 lakh crore were given and BJP tried to transform a "BIMARU" state into a developed one", he added. Earlier in the day in Gwalior, Shah asked the BJP workers to strive for polling of 370 additional votes in each booth, compared to the last general polls, to achieve the seat target in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He was speaking to nearly 400 leaders and workers of the booth management committee of Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior-Chambal cluster comprising four Lok Sabha seats - Morena, Bhind, Guna and Gwalior.



Yogi says paper leak is national sin

BISWAJEET ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has strongly condemned the recent leakage of the UP Police exam paper, denouncing it as an injustice to the aspirations of the state's youth and a matter of national shame. Assuring resolute consequences, he reaffirmed the government's steadfast dedication to upholding transparency and impartiality in all recruitment procedures. Addressing a gathering at Lok Bhavan, where appointment letters were conferred upon approximately 1800 successful candidates from various departments, CM Yogi emphasized the gravity of compromising the dreams of young individuals by unscrupulous elements, branding it as a 'national disgrace.' Singh reiterated that the state government will identify the illegal immigrants with 1961 as the base year. "We do politics to secure the present and future generation. We want to be very clear. We will fence the borders, cancel Free Movement Regime and identify all illegal immigrants in the state who came after 1961. Its our commitment," he said. Singh also announced that all the gold medalists of the 36th and 37th National Games would be provided with government jobs. He said Wushu player Naorem Roshibina Devi, who won silver at the 19th Asian Games at Hangzhou in China, would be appointed as a DSP.

spurious. However, in the face of escalating protests by thousands of exam takers demanding the cancellation of the exam, the government eventually acceded to their demands. Opposition figures, including SP president Akhilesh Yadav and former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, criticized the state government's management of the situation. Yadav hailed the annulment of the exam as a victory for the candidates while accusing the BJP of orchestrating a ploy to deprive youth of job opportunities. "The BJP government is deceiving unemployed youths under the guise of job offers, but the public can now discern this scheme," remarked Yadav, echoing widespread disenchantment with the government's employment policies. Likewise, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, during her involvement in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra alongside Rahul Gandhi, censured the BJP for its negligent and corrupt governance. Vadra rebuked the BJP's inability to implement effective measures to prevent paper leaks, juxtaposing it with Congress's proposed solutions aimed at safeguarding the future of the youth. The incident has prompted widespread censure of the government's management of recruitment procedures, with demands for stringent measures to uphold the integrity of examinations and ensure equitable opportunities for all aspirants.

Stalin hands over relief to families hit by heavy rainfall last December

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday handed over financial assistance to members of the fishermen community here, whose livelihood was worst affected by the heavy rainfall and flooding that occurred in December last year. During the record levels of rainfall that hit Tuticorin, Tirunelveli, Tenkasi and Kanniyakumari districts, several lives were lost and many were rendered homeless as normal life came to a standstill at the time. Taking cognisance of the severe damage caused by the rainfall and flooding, Stalin had urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December to release Rs 12,659 crore from the funds of the National Disaster Response Force towards taking up livelihood and permanent restoration works in the affected districts.



In a similar event held in the region, the chief minister also distributed loans to members of women's self-help groups of Tuticorin and Tirunelveli. Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker M Appavu, DMK

MP Kanimozhi, Minister for Finance and Human Resources Management Thangam Thennarasu and senior government officials were present on the occasion.

Peace initiatives have begun to restore peace in State: Manipur CM

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday said peace initiatives have commenced to address ethnic tensions in the state. Emphasising the government's foremost responsibility to safeguard lives, property, and the state's integrity, Singh assured citizens of appropriate security measures in place. "We don't need to panic...I want to assure people that security forces have been appropriately deployed in all the areas to tackle the situation," he said at the Sanarisingi Numit (Players Day) function here. He reiterated the commitment to pursuing peace through dialogue and urged people to trust the government's efforts. "To bring about a political solution, the process for peace



and talks has started so that everyone can live in peace. We need to revive our earlier lives." Singh also addressed pressing issues such as drug abuse and demographic shifts, highlighting the government's initiatives to combat drug addiction and maintain demographic balance. "Around 1.5 lakh people out of 30 lakh are drug users. This is the primary reason why the state government announced the war on drugs in 2018," Singh said. "From 2006 to 2018, some

1,400 new villages have cropped up in the state out of nowhere creating demographic imbalances," he added. Singh reiterated that the state government will identify the illegal immigrants with 1961 as the base year. "We do politics to secure the present and future generation. We want to be very clear. We will fence the borders, cancel Free Movement Regime and identify all illegal immigrants in the state who came after 1961. Its our commitment," he said. Singh also announced that all the gold medalists of the 36th and 37th National Games would be provided with government jobs. He said Wushu player Naorem Roshibina Devi, who won silver at the 19th Asian Games at Hangzhou in China, would be appointed as a DSP.

Kashmir part of India, has been part of India, and will remain part of India: Farooq

PTI ■ BENGALURU

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah on Sunday asserted that Kashmir is, was and will continue to remain a part of India, while speaking at an event here. Delivering the valedictory speech at the 'Constitution and National Unity Convention-2024', the Lok Sabha MP from Srinagar raised concerns about the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) ahead of Lok Sabha polls and expressed hope that the Election Commission will ensure that people are given a "true election". "I bring you all good wishes from my people. Kashmir is a part of India, has been a part of India, and will remain a part of India," Abdullah said. However, he added that the diversity of the nation needs to be protected for it to become strong. "Religion does not divide us, religion unites us. There is no

religion which is bad, it is we who practice it badly. If we want to move forward, the only way forward is to stand by each other, face the challenges that this nation faces together, and fight those evils that want to divide us," he said. Claiming that the Constitution is under threat today and that everyone needs to work together to ensure that it remains strong, the former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister said, "If we do not do that, we will regret it in the days to come. Like we regret today this machine (EVMs), that came many many years ago." "Today we don't trust this machine because it is doctored and people who vote, they don't see their vote there. I hope the Election Commission will take due regard to this and see to it that people are given a true election, whatever people want, that should be given to



them. I hope it happens. Otherwise time will come when there is nothing like a Constitution, nothing like the diversity that we have," he added. In his address, CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said that efforts are on to change the secular democratic character of India into a fascistic "Hindutva Rashtira" character espoused by the RSS, whose society will be based on 'Manusmriti' and on the basis of caste

oppression and hierarchies. "We had left them behind in history when we adopted this Constitution, they (BJP) are now trying to take us back into the darkness of history, while we want to take India into the brightness of the future. So this is a battle between those who want to take India backwards and those who want to take India forward," he added. Yechury alleged that the central government and the Prime Minister are bent on destroying the nation and the Constitution and they should be removed from office and defeated. "To save India therefore, we will have to convert this Amrit Kaal as the Amrit Kaal of the people, all Indian patriots have to join together and will have to fight to restore — our country, our character, our pride and our individuality and equality, with everybody else," he added.

Nagpur man booked for duping people of ₹2.8 crore

PTI ■ NAGPUR

A case has been registered against a man for allegedly duping investors of Rs 2.8 crore in a chit fund scheme in Maharashtra's Nagpur district, police said on Sunday. The accused, Ramneet Singh alias Saab Rajinderpal Singh Lamba (34), a resident of Kashmiri Gali, is absconding, an official said. The accused had allegedly duped people by promising them lucrative returns if they invested money every week in a chit fund scheme, he said. The victims invested in the scheme from 2019 to 2022 and handed over the money to the accused, who provided them signed receipts, the official said.

MNF to elect party leaders on March 15

PTI ■ KOHIMA

Mizoram's main opposition party, the Mizo National Front (MNF), will elect party leaders through a poll on March 15. MNF's media cell secretary, Lallenmawia Jongte, on Sunday said that a meeting of the party's nomination committee on the previous day nominated incumbent president Zoramthanga as the official candidate for the top post in the party. Earlier, 80-year-old Zoramthanga had announced that he and party senior vice president Tawnluia have decided to retire from active politics due to old age. He had said that they had also written to the party nomination committee not to nominate them as the official candidates. Nevertheless, the committee has unanimously decided to nominate Zoramthanga as



the official candidate for the president's post again, while Tawnluia's request has been accepted because of his health, Jongte said. The committee has also nominated former health minister Dr R Lalthangliana as the official candidate for the post of senior vice president, while MNF legislature party leader and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Lalthangdam Ralte, and former Lok Sabha member Vanlalazawma have been nominated for posts of party vice presidents, he said.

Two Congress MLAs, NPP legislators join BJP in Arunachal

PTI ■ PANAJI

In a boost to the ruling BJP in Arunachal Pradesh ahead of polls, two Congress MLAs and as many legislators from the National People's Party (NPP) joined the ruling BJP on Sunday. The Congress and NPP now have two MLAs each in the 60-member assembly. Senior Congress MLA and former union minister Ninong Ering (Pasighat West seat) and Wanglin Lowangdong (Borduria-Bogapani constituency) joined the saffron party during a function at its headquarters here. NPP's Mutchu Mithi (Roing seat) and Gokar Basar (Basar constituency) also became a part of the BJP at the event, which was attended by Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

Titwala, Shahad set for facelift under Amrit Bharat scheme: MoS Patil

PTI ■ THANE

The Titwala and Shahad railway stations in the Bhiwandi Lok Sabha constituency of Maharashtra will get a makeover under the Amrit Bharat scheme, Union minister Kapil Patil said on Sunday. The two stations are among several railway stations that will be upgraded under the scheme, said the Minister of State for Panchayati Raj in a release. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Monday lay the

foundation stone for the redevelopment of these 553 railway stations, via videoconferencing, officials have said. The Amrit Bharat stations, spread across 27 states and Union Territories, will be redeveloped at a cost of over Rs 19,000 crore. These stations will act as 'city centres' integrating both sides of a city and will boast of modern passenger amenities such as roof plazas, beautiful landscaping, inter-modal connectivity, a modern facade, kids' play area, kiosks



and food courts, the Prime Minister's Office has said in a release.

The stations will be redeveloped as environment and Divyang-friendly and the

design of these buildings will be inspired by local culture, heritage and architecture, it said. The scheme encompasses a budget of Rs 25.78 crore for Titwala railway station and Rs 15.47 crore for Shahad station, aimed at enhancing the infrastructure and facilities for commuters, said Patil, who represents the Bhiwandi Lok Sabha seat in Parliament. The upcoming projects also include the construction of railway underpasses and flyovers on the Kalyan-Igatpuri route, he said.

Assam Minister highlights NE first English daily pioneering role in media

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Minister for Information and Public Relations Pijush Hazarika has praised 'The Assam Tribune' for its pioneering role in the media industry, not only in the region but also across the country. He commended the newspaper's objective and unbiased reporting, stating that it has carved out a distinct place in the media landscape of India.

Hazarika, whose speech was read out in his absence at the launch of the newspaper's mobile app here on Saturday, expressed confidence that the app's introduction would elevate the media organisation to greater heights. He noted the newspaper's adaptation to changing technology, including its successful presence on social media, which enables it to connect with people from the region living around the world.

Assam state information commissioner Bhaskar Mahanta highlighted the increasing importance of infotainment in the media industry and emphasised the significance of digital media in providing news and entertainment. The introduction of the mobile app, in partnership with Google, is expected to enhance the newspaper's reach and provide fact-checked news and information to its audience.

Modi launches AIIMS in five States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/GUJARAT

Development was taking place under his government at a rate many times faster than what happened in the past six to seven decades, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday, and emphasised that his guarantee begins from where hope ends from others. He was speaking after inaugurating All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Rajkot in Gujarat, Bathinda in Punjab, Raebareli in Uttar Pradesh, Kalyani in West Bengal and Mangalagiri in Andhra Pradesh.

At the function held in Rajkot, the Prime Minister also dedicated to the nation various development works costing Rs 48,000 crore, including more than 200 health care infrastructure projects costing Rs 11,500 crore in 23 States and Union Territories.

“Modi’s guarantee begins from where hope ends from others,” he asserted, adding that even the country was saying this looking at the pace of development.

“For 50 years after



Independence, there was only one AIIMS in the country, and that too in Delhi. In the seven decades since Independence, only seven AIIMS were approved but even these were never completed,” Modi said in a swipe at previous governments.

“But in just 10 days, seven new AIIMS were either inaugurated or their foundation stones laid. That’s why I am saying that we are developing the country many times faster than what happened in the last six to

seven decades and are dedicating it at the feet of the citizens,” he said.

In the past, people from different states used to get tired seeking AIIMS in their areas from the Union government, whereas today modern hospitals and medical facilities like AIIMS are opening one after the other, he said.

Asserting that he had fulfilled his guarantee of setting up a large number of AIIMS, Modi said his government had approved 10 AIIMS in the last

10 years. “I had given a guarantee of (setting up) AIIMS to UP’s Raebareli. The royal family of Congress only indulged in politics in Raebareli, while the work was done by Modi,” he said.

India managed to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic because of changes in the health care system brought about in the last 10 years, Modi added.

“Today in Rajkot we got a glimpse of how the health sector of the world’s fifth largest economy should be and what will be the level of health facilities in developed India,” he said.

Modi said his government had carried out unprecedented expansion in AIIMS and medical colleges as well as a critical infrastructure network by opening more than one lakh ‘Ayushman Arogya Mandirs’ in villages, and taking the number of medical colleges to 706 from 308-309 a decade back.

The number of MBBS and medical PG seats have increased during this period to more than one lakh and 70,000, respectively, from 50,000 and 30,000, he informed.

The priority of his government was towards prevention of diseases by increasing the capacity to fight them, Modi said.

“We have focused on nutrition, Yoga, AYUSH and cleanliness so that diseases can be prevented,” he said.

Two hospitals and research centres for Yoga and naturopathy have been inaugurated in Maharashtra and Haryana as part of such efforts, the Prime Minister added.

It is the constant endeavour of the Union government to ensure the poor and the middle class get quality medical treatment, he said.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme has helped the poor save Rs 1 lakh crore, while medicines at 80 per cent discount have helped the poor and the middle class save Rs 30,000 crore, he added. The Ujjwala Yojana (to provide clean fuel through LPG connections) has helped poor families save Rs 70,000 crore, he said.

Cheaper data has helped every mobile phone user save Rs 4,000 every month, and tax reforms have helped taxpayers save Rs 2.5 lakh crore, said the Prime Minister.

PM to lay foundation stone of 553 Amrit Bharat railway stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Monday lay the foundation stone for the redevelopment of 553 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat scheme which includes improving facilities by developing rooftop plazas and city centres at stations.

The prime minister will also lay the foundation stone of nearly 1,500 road overbridges and underbridges across different states during a function that will be conducted virtually at more than 2,000 railway stations and function sites, officials said. The prime minister will join the function via video-conferencing.

Modi will also inaugurate the Gomti Nagar station in Uttar Pradesh which has been redeveloped at a cost of around Rs 385 crores, they said. “To cater to the increased future passenger footfall, this station has segregated arrival and departure facilities. It integrates both sides of the city. This centrally air-conditioned station has modern passenger amenities



like air concourse, congestion-free circulation, food courts and ample parking space in upper and lower basement,” a statement from the prime minister’s office said.

The Amrit Bharat stations, spread across 27 states and Union Territories, will be redeveloped at a cost of over Rs 19,000 crores. These stations will act as ‘city centres’ integrating both sides of a city and will boast of modern passenger amenities such as roof plazas, beautiful landscaping, inter-modal connectivity, a modern facade, kids’ play area, kiosks and food courts, it said. The stations will be redeveloped

as environment and Divyang-friendly and the design of these buildings will be inspired by local culture, heritage and architecture, it said.

The prime minister will also lay the foundation stone, inaugurate and dedicate to the nation 1,500 overbridges and underpasses. These will be spread across 24 states and Union Territories, the statement said, adding that the total cost of these projects is around Rs 21,520 crores.

These projects will reduce congestion, enhance safety and connectivity, and improve the capacity, and efficiency of rail travel, it said.

India to add 18 more nuclear power reactors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will add 18 more nuclear power reactors with a cumulative capacity to generate 13,800 MWe of electricity, taking the total share of atomic power in the energy mix to 22,480 MWe by 2031-32.

This was announced by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) after Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated two home-built 700 MW nuclear power reactors at Kakrapar in Gujarat last week.

Presently, the NPCIL operates 24 reactors with a total capacity of 8,180 MWe. The prime minister dedicated units 3 & 4 of Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS 3 & 4) to the nation on February 22.

KAPS-4 was connected to the western power grid on February 20, two days ahead of PM Modi’s visit to Kakrapar. KAPS 3 & 4 (2 X 700 MW) are the largest indigenous Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR) with advanced safety features comparable to the best in the world, the NPCIL said.

“These reactors have been designed, constructed, commissioned, and operated by NPCIL, with the supply of equipment and execution of contracts by Indian industries/ companies, reflecting the true spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat,” the NPCIL said.



The prime minister said the role of nuclear power in electricity generation is going to increase in the 21st century and it was a matter of pride that India is Atmanirbhar in this advanced technology.

Modi also visited the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station and took a tour of the Control Room on the occasion.

Four nuclear power plants of 1,000 MWe each are being built at Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu with Russian assistance. Four

700 MWe home-built PHWRs are coming up at Rawatbhata (RAPS 7 & 8) in Rajasthan and Gorakhpur (GHAVP 1 & 2) in Haryana.

Ten 700 MWe PHWRs have been sanctioned to be built at GHAVP 3 & 4 at Gorakhpur in Haryana, Kaiga Generating Station 5 & 6 near Karwar in Karnataka, Chutka in Madhya Pradesh (CMPAPP 1 & 2) and four power units at Mahi Banswara in Rajasthan (MBRAPP 1, 2, 3 & 4).

SC to hear Kejriwal plea against HC order upholding summons in defamation case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging a Delhi High Court order which upheld summons issued to him as an accused in a criminal defamation case for retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathie in May 2018.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta is likely to hear the matter. In its judgement dated February 5, 2024, the high court had said that reposting alleged libelous content will attract defamation law.

The high court had said a sense of responsibility has to be attached while retweeting content about which one does not have knowledge and added that retweeting of defamatory content must invite penal, civil as well as tort action if the person retweeting it does not attach a disclaimer.

CBFC regional office in Chandigarh soon, says Anurag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Sunday announced the setting up of a regional facilitation office of the Central Board of Film Certification in Chandigarh, with the objective of promoting ease of doing business for filmmakers of the region.

Making this announcement at the closing ceremony of the Chitra Bharati Film Festival in Chandigarh, Thakur said filmmakers of the region can get the facility of screening their films and submission of cuts/modifications without having to go to either Delhi or Mumbai to get a Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) certificate.

This move will further strengthen the Punjabi film industry, he said.

“I have great faith that the films made in the Punjab region also have great potential. Therefore, the govern-

ment has decided to set up a CBFC facilitation office in Chandigarh so that the process of getting certification becomes easier and the process of film completion becomes faster,” Thakur said. The minister said in a statement, “From feature films to documentaries and short films to serials, Indian cinema today is capturing every colour of life on its canvas and making local stories global.”

It does not matter what language a film is being made in, it will always have takers as long as the content is interesting, Thakur said.

“Today, India is being viewed as a content hub and we are becoming the preferred country for both shooting and post production for international films. Parallely, our own content is getting a lot of praise across the world,” he added. The Union minister also spoke about the initiatives being taken by the government to make theatre more accessible for specially-abled fans.

Army doctors airlifted by IAF save veteran with timely transplant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A timely intervention and seamless coordination between the IAF, army hospital, and medical team facilitated the successful transplantation, ultimately giving a second chance at life to the recipient, an army veteran awaiting the transplant. The Indian Air Force said on Sunday, an IAF Dornier aircraft was deployed at “short notice” to airlift a team of doctors from an army hospital in Delhi to transport a liver from Pune that saved the life of an army veteran here. The IAF also shared a few pictures of the aircraft and the team of doctors in a post on X social media, formerly known as Twitter.

“An IAF Dornier aircraft was activated at short notice to airlift a team of doctors of Army Hospital (R&R), to retrieve a liver from Pune to Delhi during the night on 23 Feb 24. The subsequent transplant surgery helped save the life of a #Veteran. #HarKaamDeshKeNaam #SavingLives,” it posted on X.

India, Japan begin two weeks military exercise in Rajasthan



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In an effort to further strengthen ties between the two countries, India and Japan on Sunday commenced a two-week military exercise in Rajasthan’s Mahajan field firing range to foster deeper cooperation in confronting common security challenges.

The exercise ‘Dharma Guardian’ between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self Defence Force is being conducted under the broad framework of India-Japan strategic cooperation, officials said.

It is an annual exercise and conducted alternatively in India and Japan. The contingent of both sides comprises 40 personnel each. The Japanese contingent is being represented by troops from the 34th Infantry Regiment and the Indian Army contingent is being represented by a battalion from the Rajputana Rifles, the officials said.

“The aim of the exercise is to foster military cooperation and enhance combined capabilities to execute joint operations,” the Indian Army said. The exercise will focus on “high degree of physical fitness, joint planning, joint tactical

drills and basics of special arms skills.”

“Tactical drills to be practiced during the exercise will include establishing of temporary operating base, creating an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance grid, setting up mobile vehicle check post, executing cordon and search operations in a hostile village and heliborne operations,” the Army said in a statement.

An exhibition of weapons and equipment will also be organised to showcase the ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ initiative and the growing defence industrial capability of the country, it said.

Lt General Togashi Yuichi, the Commanding General, Eastern Army, Japan Ground Self Defence Force, is also scheduled to visit India during the exercise. “Exercise ‘Dharma Guardian’ will enable the two sides to share their best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting tactical operations,” the Army said.

“The exercise will also facilitate developing inter-operability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops of both the sides. This will enhance the level of defence cooperation, further fostering bilateral relations between the two friendly nations,” it said.

Scientists develop tool to diagnose inflammatory disease

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Scientists have developed a tool to rapidly and inexpensively diagnose sarcoidosis, a chronic inflammatory disease marked by the growth of tiny lumps called granulomas in the lungs and other organs in the body.

The tool, which uses a simple blood test, could allow for selective use of more invasive diagnostic tests often used to identify the disease. The findings were published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine. The research is supported by the National Institutes of Health.

“Currently, diagnosing sarcoidosis isn’t a straightforward process, and requires tissue removal and testing with additional screenings to rule out other diseases, such as tuberculosis or lung cancer,” said James Kiley, Director of the Division of Lung Diseases at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, part of NIH. “Using a blood test will help diagnose faster, particularly in those organs that are more challenging to biopsy and with less harm to the patient.” Though the exact cause of sarcoidosis is unknown, researchers suspect it is an immune disorder triggered by a group of specific antigens, which are generally foreign



substances that incite an immune response in the body. Cutaneous sarcoidosis in India is 10 per cent; however, ACCESS study in the USA reported a higher prevalence of 15.9 per cent. Lofgren and Heerfordt syndromes are considered diagnostic for sar-

coidosis (ATS guidelines 2020) but these were not seen in any of the patients in a study in India and none had parotid involvement. Concerningly, the disease may be adding to the development of drug resistance in strains of tuberculosis (TB).

BRS leader Kavitha asks CBI to withdraw fresh summons

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BRS leader K Kavitha has asked the CBI to withdraw the notice issued to her under Section 41-A of CrPC summoning her for questioning in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case. She was asked to appear before the investigation team at the CBI headquarters here on Monday. In a letter to the CBI, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhara Rao said the notice to appear at the probe agency’s headquarters should be put in abeyance in the light of her pressing onerous engagements coupled with the necessity of her personal presence in the state while the parliamentary elections are underway. “I may request you to firstly revoke or withdraw the sub-



ject notice as it appears to be sent by invoking Section 41A CrPC while not being aware or conscious of the earlier notice sent under Section 160 CrPC,” she said.

A notice under Section 41A of CrPC is issued to a person against whom a “reasonable suspicion” exists that the person had committed a cognizable offence. Section 160 of the CrPC pertains to summoning a witness.

Kavitha said the notice under Section 41A CrPC was in complete contrast to the earlier notice under Section 160 of CrPC which was issued to her on December 2, 2022, and which already stands complied with.

“There is absolutely no logic, reason or background forthcoming as to how, why and under what circumstances you have now resorted to Section 41A CrPC,” she said. The CBI earlier recorded her statement in December 2022 at her residence in Hyderabad. The Enforcement Directorate has alleged that one of the accused in the case Vijay Nair received kickbacks to the tune of at least Rs 100 crore from a group called South Group (controlled by Sarath Reddy, Kavitha and Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy) on behalf of leaders of the AAP.

Micro irrigation only solution in command areas: Experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India may have built state-of-the-art dams and canals, but delivering irrigation water to the last mile remains a major issue, thus necessitating the development of micro irrigation in the command area as an only solution for supply side as well as demand side management of irrigation water for the benefit of the small and marginal farmers, experts have said.

Anuj Kanwal, Commissioner Irrigation Water Management and Water Use Efficiency, Union Ministry of Jal Shakti highlighted the importance of addressing the last mile connectivity issue in irrigation management and stressed the role of Command Area Work in managing both supply and demand sides of irrigation

water. He also highlighted the opportunity to implement low-cost community irrigation models, benefiting small and marginal farmers. He was speaking at a workshop titled “Command Area Development Through Micro-Irrigation” in Lucknow held at Lucknow held recently to address critical challenges facing the irrigation sector in India, with a particular focus on Uttar Pradesh.

Ajith Radhakrishnan, Senior Specialist & Country Coordinator, 2030 WRG (World Bank) was of the view that “Improved water use technologies for farmers – such as micro-irrigation systems – can improve nutrient and energy efficiency by 28% and 30% respectively, and this can be directly translated into considerable water savings. Command areas offer an

opportunity to test and implement low-cost community irrigation models that include on-farm storage and solar-powered pumps benefiting the small and marginal farmers of the State.” Looking ahead, Dr. Heera Lal, Chairman and Administrator of Greater Sharda Sahayak Samadash and Special Secretary of the Irrigation and Water Resources Department in the UP Government, announced setting up a technical support unit to coordinate stakeholders and implement pilot projects on the ground, demonstrating a proactive approach to addressing irrigation challenges. Dr. Yogesh Bandhu, Coordinator of the UP Accelerator Program at 2030 WRG (World Bank), highlighted the need for awareness and guidance in implementing micro-irrigation at scale.

Shades of grey

Do political parties really mean to fulfil poll promises, or is it mere rhetoric to befool voters?

Every election season, political parties can be seen letting loose a long litany of promises — some really genuine, but mostly mere pleasing-to-the-ears rhetoric. These campaign pledges, called poll manifestos or electoral promises or even ‘jumlas’, are tailored to meet local voters’ aspirations that season. However, a critical question looms: Is it really feasible for the parties to fulfil these promises? This discourse has gained fresh attention following the Chief Election Commissioner’s (CEC) statement emphasising the voters’ right to know if these promises can be delivered. The CEC’s stance underscores the need for transparency and accountability in the electoral process, with the hope that it will prompt political actors to make promises more responsibly. At the heart of this debate lies a complex interplay of political dynamics, economic constraints, administrative capabilities and societal expectations. While political parties often design their agenda with the intention of securing electoral victory, the practicality of implementing poll promises after getting elected is subject to numerous challenges; mainly the inherent uncertainty and volatility of governance. The political discourse is ever-evolving and parties have to adjust to it, often going back on what they themselves might have vociferously advocated. Besides unforeseen events, economic fluctuations and global dynamics also make it difficult to fulfil poll promises. What may seem feasible during an election campaign could swiftly become untenable in the face of emerging challenges. The way out? At best, the parties can just declare: “It is our intention; conditions apply.” Such an honest declaration does not at least sound as if it



were a done deal. Interestingly, even voters know that certain promises are undeliverable but then they do not have much choice, especially since the rival party is also tomming schemes that cannot be fulfilled. Of course there are unforeseen, serious challenges to genuinely-made pledges but the problem arises when misleading or false promises are deliberately made to capture votes. Worse, the parties know they can get away with it as there are no punitive damages yet for this practice. It is imperative for political parties to adopt a more responsible approach. Instead of succumbing to populist rhetoric, they should prioritise honesty, realism and evidence-based policymaking. Transparency also plays a crucial role in fostering accountability. Voters have the right to be informed not only about the promises made but also about the rationale behind them and the strategy for implementation. Also, robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation should be established to track progress and hold Governments accountable for their party’s commitments. Then there is a need for greater public awareness to ensure that electoral promises are scrutinised rigorously. Citizens must actively participate in the democratic process, holding elected representatives accountable for their actions. Those deliberately making false promises must be punished through the ballot box.

PICTALK



Women devotees offer prayers during the Attukal Pongala festival, in Thiruvananthapuram

PTI

Revamping India’s intelligence network

There is a pressing need for reforms within India’s intelligence framework, addressing coordination deficits and accountability lapses

The imperative for a comprehensive overhaul of India’s intelligence framework becomes apparent when considering the existence of 14 intelligence agencies, each with varying and occasionally overlapping responsibilities. These agencies have come into being in response to strategic shifts and past shortcomings. In the aftermath of the 1962 conflict with China, the Directorate General of Security (DGS) was established within the Intelligence Bureau (IB). Subsequently, following the 1965 war with Pakistan, external intelligence was segregated into a distinct entity, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), which also birthed the Special Bureau aimed at enhancing organisational effectiveness. After the 1999 Kargil conflict, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) were instituted. However, persistent issues stem from the lack of coordination among these agencies. The absence of a Director of National Intelligence or a Coordinating Minister exacerbates this problem.



Accountability remains a concern.

The intelligence apparatus, entrenched in the colonial-era police structure, grapples with adapting to contemporary challenges. The Intelligence Bureau (IB), primarily oriented towards domestic and political affairs, encounters limitations in counterintelligence endeavours. Despite initiatives like the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), cooperation deficiencies persist. In 2001, a Group of Ministers proposed elevating the IB to the status of the premier Counter-Terrorism agency, culminating in the establishment of MAC and Subsidiary MACs for intelligence amalgamation. Externally, the R&AW, responsible for external intelligence gathering, confronts challenges such as excessive reliance on TECHINT and insufficient development of human intelligence (HUMINT).

While the establishment of the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) aimed to address technological aspects, issues like overlapping mandates and coordination gaps have arisen. Reform is imperative, commencing with the delineation of contemporary challenges, specialisations, and oversight mechanisms. Concerning oversight, India lacks effective mechanisms for its intelligence agencies. Suggestions include appointing individuals well-versed in operational modalities at a macro level or establishing a National Intelligence Board for monitoring. Apex-level management necessitates enhancement, possibly through the appointment of a full-time intelligence adviser or a Director of National Intelligence under the NSA or MHA. Coordination and tasking, particularly between the Centre and states, remain deficient, necessitating legislative attention. The Intelligence Cycle requires refinement, with a clear demarcation between collection and analy-

sis. Personnel issues. Human intelligence (HUMINT) and technical intelligence (TECHINT) pose distinct challenges. While big data analysis is nascent, considerations regarding privacy and legislative authorization for extensive data scrutiny are paramount. The dearth of skilled manpower for HUMINT is a significant concern, and bolstering military expertise within intelligence agencies is imperative. Although inspired by the ideology of the 5 Eyes, I4C, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, has not been effectively operationalized in the realm of digital warfare. Effectiveness in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency remains a pressing concern. Failures to establish the National Counter-terrorism Centre (NCTC) and inter-agency conflicts underscore the need for a robust system. Ensuring successful prosecutions following counter-terrorism arrests is pivotal. (The writer is an eminent expert-Counter Terrorism (in West Asia & Middle Eastern countries, views are personal)



NISHAKANT OJHA

Pakistan has not given a fractured mandate, on paper, it may seem fractured however the call people have taken is clear. It goes without saying that if 100 independent candidates win, it’s no mean achievement for a party that is backing them. The story of what happened in 1968 in Pakistan is often forgotten, in that year, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto brought down the military presidency of Gen Ayub Khan. Pakistan has seen big upheavals in the past and as things stand today another one is brewing for sure. This time against a China-Pak Army selected candidate who will be nominated at the top post, against the will of the people. Most analysts believed Nawaz Sharif was sure to become the PM however why he did not make it to the top slot has to do with how he reacted to situations post-Kargil. Sharif was thrown out in 1999 by General Musharraf, who then led Pakistan’s army because he publicly ridiculed the army for apparently keeping him in the dark concerning the Kargil War. Now as they say once bitten twice shy, the Pakistani army always wanted a third person apart from Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan to be the notional head of Pakistan, and they are gunning for one. The Pakistani army used the clout of

Nawaz Sharif (whatever he had) to try and get to power someone they wanted and somehow get rid of Imran Khan. China has had a friendly relationship with the Sharif family so they are fine with someone coming up with Sharif’s backing. Now the question is, will the people of Pakistan accept the humiliation of subversion of their mandate? Has the Pakistani army become so weak that it does not hold any sway over the people of Pakistan? Does the US still have control over the Pakistani Army and what they do to influence elections in Pakistan? Would a coalition Government that lacks popular support be able to sustain itself? Will there be even more civil unrest in Pakistan in the months to come? Answers to these questions hold the key to what is going to unfold in Pakistan shortly. Things in Pakistan have never been quiet from within, and this election has exposed the hollow belly of the Pakistani electoral system. In most of the constituencies, the election was rigged. Some of the election commission officers have since resigned after admitting to mass-scale rigging. It’s almost incomprehensible how



THE US STILL HAS A LOT OF INTEREST IN PAKISTAN, MAYBE BECAUSE OF OLD TIES OR BECAUSE IT’S AN ISLAMIC NATION WITH A DECLARED NUCLEAR WEAPON SYSTEM. WHATEVER IT MAY BE, BUT IT DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE ANY OVERRIDING CONTROL OVER THINGS IN PAKISTAN ANYMORE

a US official spokesperson then has called the election reliable. The so-called results that have been thrown up show that PMLN has 79 seats, and PPP has 54 seats in a 264-seat parliament giving both of them combined a comfortable majority. I’ll look like a coalition Government would come up in Pakistan would be devoid of a popular mandate which is likely to fuel unrest in the public even more in the days to come. The mandate of the people seems to be with PTI and with Imran Khan. In this coalition too the two parties joining hands have a little in common and would provide a weak Government ridden by internal friction and lobbying. Under these circumstances, the people of Pakistan are going to feel cheated. In a country that has not a single respected institution in place and has a supreme court that is by and large influenced by vested interests, civil unrest looks around the corner. If this kind of circumstance persists, the balkanisation of Pakistan is not far away, no matter how hard China tries to keep it together. The US still has a lot of interest in Pakistan, maybe because of old ties or because it’s an Islamic nation with a

declared nuclear weapon system, whatever it may be but it does not seem to have any overriding control over things in Pakistan anymore. The US does have some control over the Pakistani Army however Pakistani Army seems to have lost all respect in the eyes of the general public in Pakistan. It looks like people are not fearful of the Pakistani Army anymore. It looks like the people of Pakistan would find it hard to digest that their mandate has been subverted. It’s a writing on the wall that this new coalition that has taken a good fortnight to form may just fall under its pressure in due course of time. How this new coalition Government would tackle the rising debt crisis would also be interesting to see. In the past Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has made low-brow and irresponsible comments against India, hopefully, he will have matured now and will refrain from jingoism. Sharif brothers are mature politicians, however, they would be under tremendous pressure from China, the US, the Pakistani Army and the people of Pakistan. (The writer is an expert on geopolitics and international Affairs. The views expressed are personal)



UMANG KOHLI

The aftermath of a controversial election

Amid concerns over rising debt and geopolitical tensions, the resilience of Pakistan’s political fabric faces its sternest test yet



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHO REPORT ON AIR POLLUTION

Sir — The World Health Organisation’s report on air pollution has been released recently. According to this year 2020, 32 lakh people will have died due to air pollution. What is even more alarming is that five lakh deaths are of children under the age of five. This news was recently read that there are many causes of pollution in the world. Many people cook on kerosene and charcoal. The number of such is about 2.3 billion. Apart from this, leaves are burnt in many fields, which also causes pollution. The huge number of vehicles and the pollution caused by it is a matter known to all. Even today, many countries in South Asia depend on wood and coal. It is necessary to increase the use of clean fuel to reduce air pollution in the country. It is necessary to increase the use of solar, stove, biogas, LPG natural gas and alcohol fuel. Apart from this, it is necessary to reduce the use of petrol and diesel vehicles and replace them with electric vehicles. The central government is alert about electric vehicles and is thinking and taking action on how their use will increase in the country. Domestic gas is also being used on a large scale in the country, so it seems that all these measures can save you from air pollution. Shantaram Wagh | Pune

PAROLE REGULATIONS

Sir — Handing and controlling parole to convicts in Indian jails is very contentious, and often misused. Parole is a "promise" or "word of honour" given by the convicts that they will return after a specific period. In special circumstances, it can be a "corrective rehabilitation". In India, the Prison Acts of 1894 and 1900 govern parole rules though they differ slightly across states. The parole, which can be custodial lasting six hours to regular, lasting one month, is monitored by prison officers and applies after the prisoner completes at least one year in prison unless specified by the court. A CAG report had said that parole was

Karnataka temple tax move draws ire



The Karnataka Government’s contentious proposal to impose taxes on Hindu temples has ignited a firestorm of debate, drawing sharp criticism from opposition parties and various religious groups. The bill stipulates that temples with annual incomes exceeding Rs 1 crore must contribute 10% to a Common Pool Fund, while those generating between Rs 10 lakh and

Rs 1 crore should chip in five per cent. Proponents argue that the fund’s proceeds will be directed towards the welfare of temple priests and the development of lesser-known C-grade temples. Despite passing through the assembly, the bill faced a decisive rejection in the council, where the opposition commands a majority. Meanwhile, a recent survey sheds light on public sentiment regarding the tax measure. It reveals that 52% of Hindus in Karnataka perceive the tax as discriminatory, while 48% deem it necessary. Furthermore, a significant majority of 62% believe that small temples should be exempt from this taxation. Although the Karnataka Government has refrained from disclosing anticipated revenue figures, experts speculate that the tax could generate up to Rs 1,000 crore annually, underscoring the financial implications and societal divisions surrounding this contentious issue.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

a "convenient" route of escape for convicts. Following a Delhi High Court verdict that had severely castigated the police for its inability to regulate the whole parole process adequately, serious offenders involved in rape-cum-murder, and those posing a threat to the country’s security and those who are not Indian citizens are "strictly" barred from being granted parole by the Government. But a lot more needs to be done and there is a need to impose a foolproof method to prevent prisoners from taking advantage of certain lax provisions still existing in law.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

SPORTS CONNECT PEOPLE

Sir — In this rapidly changing time, only a few things keep people close and give them a medium to be connected. One such medium is sports. Sports give the fans a feeling of attachment and affinity. It builds communities that feel the adrenaline rush every time their team moves up on the leaderboard and that shed tears when they are on the losing side. Be it the

nations, franchises, or clubs, they all have a legacy—a legacy that has triumphant victories and tragic defeats that keep the fans close and make them support the team even through the tough times. The Tifosi, for instance, have an undying love for Ferrari, given the glorious legacy the red machine has from the early days of Formula One. Even if the team is struggling on the leaderboard, the passion is still the same as it was during the era of sheer dominance when the likes of Michael Schumacher or Sebastian Vettel raced for "The Prancing Horse." The reason behind this unwavering support and loyalty is the bond that fans develop with the sport, their heroes, and their triumphs. For those who don’t watch sports, all this might just be a waste of time, but for lovers of the game, it is an escape from a tedious and mundane life. It connects people and can be a meaningful way of finding purpose in one’s life. Pratyush Tiwari | Ujjain

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FIRST COLUMN

BALANCING WORK AND WELL-BEING

It's time to shift from the disciplinary mantra 'act your age' to 'act your wage'



SHAINY SHARMA

In today's cutthroat and challenging work landscape, finding the right balance between professional devotion and personal well-being can be challenging. The modern work culture often encourages its employees to go beyond their potential, leading to exploitation, anxiety and burnout. The internet, social media, Gen Z and millennials with time have gone crazy about the term quiet quitting all over and now a new trend which is considered to be a 'loud quiet quitting' is buzzing everywhere- the notion of Acting Your Wage. It has emerged as a call from the fed-up workers and employees who believe it's a solution to establish boundaries and ensure that employees are neither overworked nor under-utilized. Since the beginning of the digital era (use of cell phones), Gen Z was expected to be available 24x7 in their workplace whereas the older generation worked according to their job timings. Millennials are tech-savvy and cannot stay away from their gadgets. Acting your wage is a philosophy that revolves around performing only those tasks and duties for which an employee is contracted and compensated and not for taking additional responsibilities without proper recognition or compensation. In layman's language, it means dedicating yourself to the responsibilities explicitly tied to your compensation while avoiding the trap of overextending beyond your job description. Today, younger workers have an egalitarian mindset- a penchant for social activism and expectations of two-way feedback. They work on a simple theory - what is a job worth? It is not about being complacent or neglecting work responsibilities instead, the generation believes in recognising the importance of self-care, setting boundaries and preserving energy for long-term productivity and well-being.



It is about recognising an individual's worth and ensuring that the time and effort they devote to their job align with the compensation they receive. Moreover, studies reveal that employees who practice this approach achieve a healthier work-life balance, preserve their energy levels, protect themselves from potential exploitation and most importantly, prevent burnout. Today many employees are taking the initiative to clarify their job roles with their seniors so that a clear understanding of what is expected is ensured and ambiguity is prevented. Also, employees are now practising the art of politely saying 'no' to additional tasks that fall outside their job description and instead actively seeking opportunities for advancement or higher roles that align with their skill set and career. Employers on the other hand, who tend to implement this notion will benefit as, it will enhance employee well-being, increase job satisfaction, improve productivity and most importantly strengthen the work culture. There will be a culture of transparency, fairness and respect within the organization. Organisations who are already provide clear and comprehensive job descriptions to employees, outline their roles and responsibilities, acknowledge and reward them for their contributions, and invest in training and development programmes that will offer them opportunities to grow and advance within the organisation are already away from this notion. There is no denying the fact that success in any field grows out of learning how to build skills, how to ask for help and how to build capacity in ways that don't even exist. The act of wage is a way to take care of yourself to be stress-free. Remember, one needs to normalise doing the bare minimum at work. An individual signs up for a job. If the employers are not paying extra to do extra tasks, strictly don't do them. It's time to throw the disciplinary line 'act your age' and turn it to 'act your wage'.
(The author is a senior educator, views are personal)

Indian education system: The quest for perfection



The Indian education system stands at a crossroads, poised between recognition and realisation of its inherent potential



Looking back from the transition point to the third millennium, it could indeed be interesting—and revealing—as to what was the most encouraging achievement in the pivotal sector of education! The most mentioned of the responses to the query from seasoned academics and scholars, as well as the policymakers who had contributed to policy formulation and implementation for three-four decades, referred to the change in social responses from various strata of society. The most serious impediment was ignorance of the value of education in the lives of the individual and the family. One wonders whether anything more could be expected from a society seriously emaciated for centuries, and subjected to live their lives in abject misery! Social structures that practised exclusion, seriously flawed assumptions on the role of women and its relationship to female literacy, and the excruciating hold of the clergy in deprecating the education of girls were indeed serious handicaps before all those who were assigned to implement the constitutional directive of providing free and compulsory education to all children till they achieve fourteen years of age! The widely prevalent practice of early marriage, child labour, compulsions to earn daily bread, and the need for extra hands in farms and fields, were also prominent factors that severely impeded the process of enrolment in schools. It may be tough for the millennials to visualise a situation that for decades together, girls' education in India suffered for want of toilets for girls in schools. This is one area that remained neglected all along. After the Prime Minister of India spoke from the ramparts of the Red Fort about sanitation practices, and the need for immediate reforms, things have



OUR EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND EFFORTS, IT MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED, DRIFTED MORE TOWARDS THE ACQUISITION OF EDUCATION FOR MATERIAL AND PHYSICAL GAINS

changed, and this deserves appreciation. However, considerable alertness and appreciation of the need are still necessary. Why do I say this? What one learns from personal interactions just cannot always be extricated from data! In 2016, one visited several institutions as a member of the TSR Subramaniam Committee on Education policy. In one of the colleges with an enrollment of around two thousand, a mention was made of the neglect of sanitation, the Director had this to say: Oh, it is too dirty and unhygienic for me to inspect! I mention this for two reasons; first; the systems of education paid little attention to such a significant impediment. Second; even after the universally acknowledged and appreciated movement for sanitation, and its great success, there is much more to be achieved on this front! We are much better off at this juncture in educational achievements, particularly in the context of girls' participation in education and subsequently in every sector of knowledge, skills, services, defence and the like. What was the most ignored aspect of Indian education during the second half of the 20th century? Some academics and scholars—adherents of negativity included—would like to criticise all that has been done and achieved during this period. Those who are, ideologically unconstrained and capable of taking an objective analytical view express concern about certain aspects that are essential ingredients total the personality development of any individual. This is usually articulated in


every policy and programme, but current education practices get ignored in schools and even certain well-reputed institutions. Moral and ethical aspects of education, education in human values, and similar expressions are regular parts of every education initiative. We also have the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, who could say "My life is my message"! How many of our present-day leaders—political leaders—could say that with inner conviction and confidence? There are still the old guards and young ones who took Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, Rajagopalachari, Karpuri Thakur, LK Advani, Narendra Modi, and the like as their role models. A committed work culture, a sound value system, and a pursuit of higher and larger goals in life could only be inculcated in educational institutions and that remains a big challenge before the Indian education system. Our advantage is that we are familiar with how it could be achieved. Indian education has achieved sufficient recognition and success; within and outside the country. India and its ancient education systems aimed at comprehensive personality development, the comprehension of 'Ekam Sat Viprah Baudha Vadanti, 'Sarv bhut Hite Ratah', 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina', and much more on similar lines. We were privileged that MK Gandhi gave us a practical model of education that focused on enhancing the economic aspect but did not neglect this totality, and wanted the best to be drawn out of out of head,

hand and heart. Sri Aurobindo; and the mother; dwelled in higher echelons of human advancement, apart from what is usually aimed at imparting education. Our education initiatives and efforts, it must be acknowledged; drifted more towards the acquisition of education for material and physical gains. Education, said the Mother; is not to prepare learners to succeed in life and society but 'to increase his perfectibility'! Addressing the students of the Ashram Schools she said: "Do not aim for success. Our aim is perfection. Remember you are on the hold of a new world, participating in its worth and instrumental in its creation. There is nothing more important than the transformation. There is no interest more worthwhile." The Mother goes on to delineate it further for our comprehension: "To learn for the sake of knowledge, to study to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself to grow in consciousness, to discipline oneself to become master of oneself, to overcome one's weaknesses, incapacities, and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and vaster, more generous and truer..." Could anything more need be said on how our schools and institutions could move ahead in pursuit of excellence once they absorb the golden words and the strength of the philosophy behind them?
(The author works in education, social cohesion and religious amity, views are personal)

The impact of amendments to criminal codes on national policing

The implications of amendments to three criminal codes on civil liberties and the integrity of the legal process remain subject to ongoing debate and scrutiny

Parliament has passed three criminal codes, among which the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) seeks to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC). There is one provision in BNSS that seeks to increase the number of days within which police custody (PC) can be sought. When someone is in police custody, it means they are held by the police in a lock-up at the station. On the other hand, judicial custody means they are held in a central jail. The investigating agency gets 24 hours to investigate if they are not able to complete the investigation within that bracket, they must get permission from the magistrate, who can grant custody of the accused for up to 60/90 days,



PRAKHAR BAJPAI

depending on the seriousness of the crime. However, within this time-frame of 60/90 days, the magistrate is restricted to granting PC for the initial 15 days from the date of arrest, beyond which only judicial custody can be granted. This 15-day limit was extensively discussed in the Anupam Kulkarni v. CBI case, where the Supreme Court ruled that an accused

cannot be held in PC beyond 15 days from the date of arrest and PC in total can be for a maximum of 15 days, which means that PC could be granted by the magistrate in parts for the first 15 days or as a whole. **Understanding the new law** According to Section 187 of the BNSS, the PC can be granted within the first 40 days (for less serious offences) or 60 days (for more serious offences) after the accused is arrested. The change implies that the prescribed 15-day period of custody can now be split into shorter periods of custody sought over 40 days for offences punishable up to 10 years or 60 days for other offences. This represents a departure from the current practice under Section 167 of



the court's ruling that said PC beyond 15 days from the arrest date is not allowed. Nonetheless, the court granted custody to the police and noted that every accused person must respect the investigation and court proceedings and went on to mention that these ways of hindering the pursuit of justice would not be tolerated.

this interpretation needs to be reviewed by a larger bench. By analysing the two judgements passed last year we can conclude that there is a growing inclination towards favouring the investigating agency. Despite the accused attempting to avoid initial PC in the first case due to medical reasons, it's essential to recognise that the accused might exploit the 15-day bar by taking the excuse of loopholes on grounds of a medical emergency. However, the second case sets a precedent keeping the investigation process at the heart of the criminal justice system which poses a potential series of inconsistencies. Therefore, Section 187 of the BNSS aims to definitively resolve the existing confusion and prevent future inconsistencies regarding the timeline within which PC can be sought and sets the limit of 40/60 days. It seeks to find a middle path where the civil liberties of the accused are not exploited as the maximum number of days for which the PC can be granted is still 15 days which now can be granted in parts in 40/60 days and also favours investigating agencies by granting a reasonable time for custodial interrogation, which is crucial for uncovering the truth as denying the investigating agency the opportunity for further interrogation gives an advantage to the accused to disrupted the legal process.
(The writer is a law student; views expressed are personal)

Trump triumphs over Haley in South Carolina

PTI ■ CHARLESTON

Donald Trump secured a resounding win over his Indian-American rival Nikki Haley in her backyard in South Carolina in the Republican primary, enabling the former US president to move closer to clinching a third straight presidential nomination from his party in 2024.

Refusing to give up, Haley, 52, a two-time former governor of South Carolina on Saturday vowed to take the fight to the Super Tuesday states on March 5 when Republican primaries are scheduled to be held in 21 US states. Trump, 77, has now won every contest that counted for Republican delegates, adding to his previous wins in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and the US Virgin Islands.

The South Carolina primary race was called mere minutes after polls closed. After results were counted, US media outlets said Haley received 39.5 per cent

of the vote in the Palmetto State while Trump 59.8 per cent, giving the former president 44 delegates and just three to the former South Carolina state governor.

A candidate needs 1,215 delegates to bag the party's nomination in the November 5, 2024 presidential election. So far, Trump has won 102 delegates while Haley, the only major contender to the Republican frontrunner, has just 17 delegates.

"This was a little sooner than we anticipated, and an even bigger win than we anticipated," Trump told a crowd at his election night watch party in Columbia shortly after being projected the winner.

Saturday's result now places the onus on Haley, who continued in her concession speech to insist she has no plans to drop out of the race – a move that she said would leave the Republican voters in the upcoming primary states with "a Soviet-style



Republican presidential candidate former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley speaking at an election night event, Saturday in Charleston, S.C. AP/PTI

election with only one candidate."

"There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative. I said earlier this week that no matter what happens in South Carolina, I would continue to run for president. I'm a woman of my word. I'm not giv-

ing up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden," she told her supporters in this historic city, a few blocks away from where she had launched her presidential campaign about a year ago.

"What I saw today was South Carolina's frustration with our country's direction. I've seen that same frustration nationwide. I share it. I feel it to my core. I couldn't be more worried for America. It seems like our country is coming apart. But here's the thing. America will come apart if we make the wrong choices. We need to beat Joe Biden in November," she said amidst cheers from her supporters.

"I don't believe Donald Trump can beat Joe Biden. Nearly every day, Trump drives people away, including with his comments just yesterday. Today, in South Carolina, we're getting around 40 per cent of the vote. That's about what we got in New

Hampshire too. "I'm an accountant. I know 40 per cent is not 50 per cent. But I also know 40 per cent is not some tiny group. There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative," Haley said, making her case for her to continue her battle against Trump.

"South Carolina has spoken. We're the fourth state to do so. In the next ten days, another 21 states and territories will speak. They have the right to a real choice, not a Soviet-style election with only one candidate."

And I have a duty to give them that choice. We can't afford four more years of Biden's failures or Trump's lack of focus," Haley said. A confident Trump celebrated his victory in Columbia, South Carolina. "There's never been a spirit like this, and I just want to say that. I have never seen the Republican Party so unified," he

Manhattan residential building kills Indian journo

New York (PTI): A 27-year-old Indian national, who worked as a journalist here, tragically lost his life in a "devastating" fire caused by a lithium-ion battery in an apartment building in Manhattan. Fazil Khan was killed in the fire that broke out in a six-story residential building at 2 St. Nicholas Place in Harlem, Manhattan that left about 17 other people injured.

The New York City Fire Department said that its marshals have determined that the "devastating" fire was caused by a lithium-ion battery.

Khan is a journalist with New York-based media company The Hechinger Report, which is focused on innovation and inequality in education.

The Consulate General of India in New York expressed condolences on Khan's death and said it is extending all possible assistance to repatriate his mortal remains to his family in India. "Saddened to learn about the death of 27-year old Indian national Fazil Khan in an unfortunate fire incident in Harlem, NY," the Consulate said in a post on X Saturday.

The Consulate said it is in touch with Khan's family and friends.

"We continue to extend all possible assistance in repatriation of his mortal remains to India," the Consulate said.

Khan was a data reporter at The Hechinger Report and according to his profile on X, he was an alumnus of Columbia Journalism School. The Hechinger Report said in a post on X that it learned Saturday that Khan died in a fire in the New York City building where he lived. "We are devastated by the loss of such a great colleague and wonderful person, and our hearts go out to his family."

He will be dearly missed," it said. Firefighters said the fire originated in the building's 3rd floor. At 2:14 pm Friday, the FDNY responded to the 2-alarm fire at 2 St. Nicholas Place in Harlem. Firefighters arrived within minutes to find people on the fire escape.

Sunak warns of 'toxic' culture in UK politics

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has warned against a growing toxic culture in politics amid reports of members of Parliament facing security threats over their voting intentions in the House of Commons related to the Israel-Gaza conflict.

The 43-year-old British Indian leader issued a statement on Saturday to condemn the hijacking of protests on the streets of the country by extremists to glorify terrorism. It came as a report in 'The Sunday Times' newspaper claims that three unnamed female MPs have been sanctioned additional security after concerns about their safety. "The explosion in prejudice and antisemitism since the Hamas attacks on the 7 October [2023] are as unacceptable as they are un-British. Simply put antisemitism is racism," said Sunak in his statement.

"Legitimate protests hijacked by extremists to promote and glorify terrorism, elected representatives verbally threatened and physically, violently targeted and antisemitic tropes beamed onto our own Parliament building," he said, with reference to an offensive projection on the Palace of Westminster recently.

"And in Parliament this week a very dangerous signal was sent that this sort of intimidation works. It is toxic for our society and our politics and is an affront to the liberties and values we hold dear here in Britain," he said of the scenes of chaos in the Commons last week over a Gaza ceasefire vote.

While he did not make a reference to it specifically, his intervention came soon after the governing Conservatives suspended party MP Lee Anderson after he claimed during an interview that Pakistani-origin London Mayor Sadiq Khan was under the control of "Islamists".



The Opposition had demanded action over the remarks, which Labour Leader Keir Starmer branded as a "racist and Islamophobic outburst".

"This isn't just embarrassing for the Conservative Party, it emboldens the worst forces in our politics," said Starmer.

The row follows an article by former home secretary Suella Braverman over the weekend that claimed Islamists and extremists were taking charge in all walks of life in Britain, attacked as "extreme rhetoric" by the Opposition parties.

Braverman, sacked from the Cabinet by Sunak last year, was reacting to Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle saying that he had selected certain amendments to a motion related to ceasefire in Gaza in a bid to ensure all options were on the table for MPs to vote on and to protect MPs' safety.

According to 'The Sunday Times' report, UK Security Minister Tom Tugendhat has been working with the Home Office, the police and the parliamentary authorities to significantly enhance the safety and security of MPs. As part of the overhaul, the royal and VIP executive committee (RAVEC), which is responsible for the security of the royal family as well as senior politicians including the prime minister and home secretary, has been brought in to help assess the threat to MPs. "Many MPs are petrified by the abuse they are facing," a senior security source was quoted as saying.

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Mediators are making progress on an agreement for a weeks-long ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and the release of dozens of hostages held in Gaza as well as Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, Israeli media reported Sunday. Israel's War Cabinet met to discuss the proposal late Saturday, but there was no official word on what they had decided. Several Israeli media outlets, citing unnamed officials, said it tacitly approved the deal and that Israel would send a delegation to Qatar for further discussions.

Hamas says it has not yet been involved in the latest proposal developed by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, but the reported outline largely matches its earlier demands for the first phase of a truce. Hamas' top political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was in Cairo last week. Israel is meanwhile developing plans for expanding its offensive to the southern-most city of Rafah, on the

Gaza-Egypt border, where more than half the territory's population of 2.3 million have sought refuge in squalid tent camps, packed apartments and overflowing shelters. Aid groups have warned of a catastrophe and the US and other allies of Israel have said it must avoid harming civilians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he'll convene the Cabinet this week to "approve the operational plans for action in Rafah", including the evacuation of civilians.

A senior official from Egypt, which along with Qatar is a mediator between Israel and the Hamas militant group, said Saturday that the draft cease-fire deal includes the release of up to 40 women and older hostages in return for up to 300 Palestinian prisoners, mostly women, minors and older people.

The Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, said the proposed six-week pause in fighting would

include allowing hundreds of trucks to bring desperately needed aid into Gaza every day, including the northern half of the besieged territory. He said that both sides agreed to continue negotiations during the pause for further releases and a permanent cease-fire.

The prime minister's office did not respond to a request for comment on the War Cabinet's discussions or the Israeli media reports.

Negotiators face an unofficial deadline of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan around March 10, a period that often sees heightened Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Hamas has said it will not release all of the remaining hostages until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws its forces from the territory, and is also demanding the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including senior militants — conditions Netanyahu has vehemently rejected.

But an earlier proposal from Hamas outlined an initial phase that resembles the

reported draft agreement, indicating the two sides might be able to converge on a temporary cease-fire.

Israel declared war after the October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were released in a cease-fire and exchange deal in November. Around 130 remain in captivity, a fourth of whom are believed to be dead.

Families of the hostages have followed the fits and starts of the negotiations with hope and anguish.

"It feels like Schindler's list. Will he be on the list or not?" Shelly Shem Tov, the mother of Omer, 21, who is held captive, told Israeli Army Radio of her son's chances of being freed in an emerging deal.

Israel responded to the attack with a massive air and ground offensive that has driven around 80 per cent of Gaza's population from their homes, putting hundreds of

thousands at risk of starvation and the spread of infectious disease. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza says 29,606 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, two-thirds of them women and children.

The ministry's death toll doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Israel says its troops have killed more than 10,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has devastated the territory's health sector, with less than half of hospitals even partially functioning as scores are killed each day in Israeli bombardment.

At the Emirates Hospital in Rafah, three to four newborns are placed in each of its 20 incubators, which are designed for just one. Dr. Amal Ismail said two to three newborns die in a single shift, in part because many of their families live in tents in rainy, cold weather.

"No matter how much we work with them, it is all wasted," she said.

Corruption scandals cast shadow over Portugal's general election

AP ■ LISBON

The official two-week campaign period before Portugal's early general election began on Sunday, with the country's two moderate mainstream parties once again expected to collect the most votes but with the expected rise of a populist party potentially adding momentum to Europe's drift to the right. The centre-left Socialist Party and centre-right Social Democratic Party have alternated in power for decades. But they are unsure of how much support they might need from smaller rival parties for the parliamentary votes needed to form a government after the March 10 vote.

Corruption scandals have cast a shadow over the ballot. They have also fed public disenchantment with the country's political class as Portugal prepares to celebrate 50 years of democracy, following the Carnation Revolution that toppled a rightist dictatorship on April 25, 1974. The election is



Socialist Party leader Pedro Nuno Santos, left, and Luis Montenegro, leader of the Social Democratic Party, greet each other before an election TV debate in Lisbon, Portugal. The center-left Socialist Party and center-right Social Democratic Party have alternated in power for decades. But they are unsure of how much support they might need from smaller rival parties to form a government after the March 10 vote.

being held after a Socialist government collapsed last November following a corruption investigation. That case brought a police search of Prime Minister António Costa's official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff. Costa has not been accused of any crime.

Also in recent weeks, a Lisbon court decided that a former Socialist prime minister should stand trial for corruption. Prosecutors allege that José Sócrates, prime minister between 2005-2011, pocketed around 34 million euros (USD 36.7 million) during his time in power from graft, fraud and money laundering.

The Social Democratic Party has also been tainted by corruption allegations.

During the recent weeks of unofficial campaigning, a graft investigation in Portugal's Madeira Islands triggered the resignation of two prominent Social Democrat officials. The scandal erupted on the same day the Social Democratic Party unveiled an anti-corruption

billboard in Lisbon that said, "It can't go on like this."

A housing crisis, persistent levels of low pay and unreliable public health services are other areas where the records of the two main parties are at issue.

Hot-button topics that have driven political debate and encouraged populist parties elsewhere in Europe, such as climate change, migration and religious differences, have largely been absent in Portugal's campaign. A five-year-old populist and nationalist party called Chega! (in English, Enough!) has made the fight against corruption one of its political banners. "Portugal needs cleaning out," one of its billboards declares. The party's leader, 41-year-old lawyer André Ventura, has been riding in third place in opinion polls and could become a kingmaker if his political influence grows. His party got just 1.3 per cent of votes in a 2019 election, but jumped to 7.3 per cent in 2022. It could collect more than double that this time, polls sug-

gest, if a protest vote materialises. A key question is whether the Social Democrats will end up needing the votes of Chega! to make up a parliamentary majority after eight years in opposition.

The Socialist Party could, as in the past, forge parliamentary alliances with the Portuguese Communist Party or Left Bloc party to take power. Socialist leader Pedro Nuno Santos, his party's candidate for prime minister, is a lawmaker and a former minister for housing and infrastructure. Santos, 46, quit the previous government under a cloud over his handling of bailed-out flag carrier TAP Air Portugal and a dispute over the site of a new Lisbon airport. Luís Montenegro, the 51-year-old Social Democrat leader aiming to become prime minister, has been a lawmaker for more than 20 years. He heads the Democratic Alliance, a grouping with two smaller right-of-centre parties formed for the election.

Brit Indian doctor's rock band embarks on UK-wide tour

PTI ■ LONDON

A 25-year-old British Indian doctor whose passion for music resulted in a band with some of his fellow medical colleagues has embarked on his first UK-wide tour, with the launch show in London recently proving a sell-out. Gulzar (Gulz) Singh Dhanoya started the indie-rock band named Gulz during his university days as a medical student. It was over the COVID pandemic that the singer-songwriter plucked up the courage to put out some of his musical creations onto the audio streaming service SoundCloud and soon this one-man bedroom project struck a chord with an ever-expanding fan base. The lead singer and songwriter is now busy rehearsing with his four bandmates for their next live gig in Birmingham on March 16.

"How it usually works is that at the moment I go away and think of an idea for a song and it's very bare bones. Then we go into a studio rehearsal room and all of us together kind of think about our parts and we just keep playing it over and over. It's a great way to kind of balance our creative ideas," Gulz told PTI.

While two of his other bandmates are also National Health Service (NHS) doctors like him, two are professionals in other fields which he feels helps bring some flexibility to striking a balance with late-night hospital shifts.

He admits sometimes wondering how they are all able to commit to their music with stressful full-time jobs. "It's a huge commitment. Obviously, the working day is long and then it's fitting in shows and rehearsals and social media

stuff. It's like a second job and one that doesn't realistically pay compared to a 'normal' job. It's very cliché, but it's just because we love it," he said.

Born in Newcastle to a Punjabi father born in India and mother born in Southall, west London, music was a part of Gulz's life from a very young age.

From strains of Mohammed Rafi to Stevie Wonder, his musical influences were an eclectic mix – something that chimes with the kind of tunes he is now creating lyrically and musically.

"I began by sort of writing music that sounds like the music I like and have tried to retain that in some ways. I just try to weave certain themes of my life at the time into the stuff that I'm writing, be it relationships and breakups or just having some fun," he said.

AP ■ WESTROZEBEKE (BELGIUM)

It was the puddles of green sludge left by the tires of massive tractors in western Belgium's industrial farmlands that drew the attention of biological engineer Ineke Maes. The slime was destructive algae, the result of the excess of chemicals used by farmers to boost their crops, but at a high cost to nature. Maes had hoped the European Union's environmental policies would start to make a fundamental difference by improving exhausted soils.

In recent weeks, some of those tractors moved off the land and onto the roads, blocking major cities and economic lifelines from Warsaw to Madrid and from Athens to Brussels. Farmers were demanding the reversal of some of the most progressive measures in the world to counter climate change and protect biodiversity, arguing

that the rules were harming their livelihoods and strangling them with red tape.

And the impact has been stunning.

The farmers' protests affected the daily lives of people across the 27-nation bloc, costing businesses tens of millions of euros in transportation delays. The disruption triggered knee jerk reactions from politicians at national and EU level: they committed to rolling back policies, some of them years in the making, on everything from the use of pesticides to limiting the amount of manure that could be spread on fields. To environmentalists like Maes, who works for the Belgian Better Environment Federation umbrella group, it would almost be laughable if it were not so depressing.

"In the environmental movement, we joke that we should get tractors ourselves to make a point. Then we would

be competing fair and square. The purpose should be that we get negotiations, and that we get a deal through democratic process — the rules, you know," she said. Reasoned arguments, she says, have been drowned out by the rumble of tractor engines.

And there's no end in sight.

After hundreds of tractors disrupted the EU summit in Brussels early this month at a volume that kept some leaders awake at night, farmers plan to return on Monday. They intend to be there when agriculture ministers discuss an emergency item on the agenda — the simplification of agricultural rules and a decrease in checks at farms that environmentalists fear could amount to a further weakening of standards.

The political noise level from the tractors — not to mention the loads of manure dumped outside official buildings — does get through, offi-

cials said. "That puts a bit more pressure on the ministers inside. So I would believe that ministers will be a bit more — insisting to have concrete results," said a high-level EU official, who asked not to be identified because the meeting has yet to take place.

It is this attitude that drives the environmental lobby and NGOs to distraction: knowing that scientific arguments are too often no match for the rule of the street. As a result, the EU's flagship Green Deal, that aims to make the continent carbon-neutral by 2050, is under threat.

"You really should not lose that long-term view, that vision of the future when you are working on policy," said Maes. "You should not respond to the issues of the day by simply scrapping very important rules that have been seriously discussed, considered, that have been included in environmental impact reports and so on —

and that have also been democratically approved in that way."

Yet ahead of Monday's farm protest and meeting of agriculture ministers, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, for many the most powerful EU politician, insisted that she "remains fully committed to delivering solutions to ease the pressure currently felt by our hard-working farming women and men."

Von der Leyen's change in emphasis comes ahead of the June 6-9 elections, when a good showing by her Christian Democrat group, the European People's Party, will be key to keeping her at the helm of the all-powerful Commission. As her party has swayed toward putting farmers and industry first, so has she.

"It is a bit difficult putting a pin on Mrs. von der Leyen," said Jutta Paulus, a Green member of the European Parliament.

Belarusians vote amid opposition calls for poll boycott

AP ■ TALLINN (ESTONIA)

Polls opened Sunday in Belarus’ tightly controlled parliamentary and local elections that are set to cement the steely rule of the country’s authoritarian leader, despite calls for a boycott from the opposition, which dismissed the balloting as a “senseless farce.”

President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand for nearly 30 years, accuses the West of trying to use the vote to undermine his government and “destabilize” the nation of 9.5 million people.

Most candidates belong to the four officially registered parties: Belaya Rus, the Communist Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Party of Labor and Justice. Those parties all support Lukashenko’s policies. About a dozen other parties were denied registration last year.

Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who is in exile in neighboring Lithuania after challenging Lukashenko in the 2020 presidential election, urged voters to boycott the elections.

“There are no people on the ballot who would offer real changes because the regime only has allowed puppets convenient for it to take part,” Tsikhanouskaya said in a video statement. “We are calling to boycott this senseless farce, to ignore this election without choice.”

Sunday’s balloting is the first election in Belarus since the contentious 2020 vote that handed Lukashenko his sixth term in office and triggered an unprecedented wave of mass demonstrations.

Protests swept the country for months, bringing hundreds of thousands into the streets. More than 35,000 people were arrested. Thousands were beaten in police custody, and hun-

dreds of independent media outlets and nongovernmental organizations were shut down and outlawed.

Lukashenko has relied on subsidies and political support from his main ally, Russia, to survive the protests. He allowed Moscow to use Belarusian territory to send troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

The election takes place amid a relentless crackdown on dissent. Over 1,400 political prisoners remain behind bars, including leaders of opposition parties and renowned human rights advocate Ales Bialiatiski, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022.

The opposition says the early balloting that began Tuesday offers fertile ground for the vote to be manipulated, with ballot boxes unprotected for five days. Election officials said Sunday that over 40% of the country’s voters cast ballots during the five days of early voting. Turnout stood at



43.64% by 9 a.m. on Sunday, an hour after polls formally opened, according to the Belarusian Central Election Commission. The Viasna Human Rights Center said students, soldiers, teachers and other civil servants were forced to participate in early voting. “Authorities are using all available means to ensure the result they need — from airing TV propaganda to forcing voters to cast ballots early,” said

Viasna representative Pavel Sapelka. “Detentions, arrests and searches are taking place during the vote.”

Speaking during Tuesday’s meeting with top Belarusian law enforcement officials, Lukashenko alleged without offering evidence that Western countries were pondering plans to stage a coup in the country or to try to seize power by force. He ordered police to beef up armed patrols across

Belarus, declaring that “it’s the most important element of ensuring law and order.” After the vote, Belarus is set to form a new state body — the 1,200-seat All-Belarus Popular Assembly that will include top officials, local legislators, union members, pro-government activists and others. It will have broad powers, including the authority to consider constitutional amendments and to appoint election officials and judges.

Lukashenko was believed a few years ago to be considering whether to lead the new body after stepping down, but his calculus has apparently changed, and now few observers expect him to step down after his current term ends next year.

For the first time, curtains were removed from voting booths at polling stations, and voters were banned from taking pictures of their ballots. During the 2020 election,

activists encouraged voters to photograph their ballots in a bid to prevent authorities from manipulating the vote in Lukashenko’s favor.

Belarusian state TV aired footage of Interior Ministry drills in which police detained a purported offender who was photographing his ballot and others who created an artificial queue outside a polling station.

Belarus for the first time also refused to invite observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to monitor the election. Belarus is a member of the OSCE, a top trans-Atlantic security and rights group, and its monitors have been the only international observers at Belarusian elections for decades.

Since 1995, not a single election in Belarus has been recognized as free and fair by the OSCE. The OSCE said the decision not to allow the agency’s monitors deprived the

country of a “comprehensive assessment by an international body.”

“The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate as those who voice dissent or stand up for the human rights of others are subject to investigation, persecution and frequently prosecution,” it said in a statement.

Observers noted that authorities have not even tried to pretend that the vote is democratic. The election offers the government an opportunity to run a “systems test after massive protests and a serious shock of the last presidential election and see whether it works,” said Artiom Shraibman, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center. “The parliament will be sterile after the opposition and all alternative voices were barred from campaigning. It’s important for authorities to erase any memory of the protests.”

Pak EC gears up to hold Prez poll by March 9

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Still struggling to address the rigging allegations after general elections in the country, Pakistan is now gearing up to elect the new president by March 9. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is set to hold an election for the office of the country’s president by March 9, two days before the retirement of half of the senators after completing their six-year term, Dawn reported quoting sources.

“The president will be elected by the present senators after setting up of all the four provincial assemblies,” a senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) office-bearer said, adding that the election could take place on March 9 or 10.

The six-party alliance, set to form a coalition government at the Centre under the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Shehbaz Sharif, has already announced Asif Ali Zardari as its consensus candidate for the country’s top constitutional office.

Zardari previously served as the president from September 2008 to 2013 after the resignation of the military ruler Pervez Musharraf.

Article 41(4) of the Constitution says that “election to the office of president shall be held not earlier than sixty days and not later than thirty days before the expiration of the term of the president in office: Provided that, if the election cannot be held within the period aforesaid because the National Assembly is dissolved, it shall be held within thirty days of the general election to the Assembly.”

Since the general elections were held on February 8, the presidential election is required to be conducted by March 9, just two days before the retirement of half of the 100-member Senate.

The sources said the Senate elections were also due in the first week of March, but because of the delay in the general elections of the National and provincial assemblies, the



Senate elections will now be held either in the last week of March or the first week of April which means the upper house will remain dysfunctional and incomplete for some period.

According to a PPP leader, it is because of the upcoming presidential election and to ensure Zardari’s win that the party has chosen its two senators, Nisar Khuhro and Jam Mahtab Dahar, from taking the oath as MPAs in the Sindh Assembly.

According to the formula applied for the president’s election, the vote of a senator is counted as a single vote, whereas in the Sindh Assembly, one vote will be equal to nearly four votes. In this way, Zardari will get benefit in the presidential elections.

Incumbent President Dr Arif Alvi is already on an extended tenure after completing his five-year term on September 9 last year. Article 44(1) of the Constitution says that the president will hold office for a term of five years from the day he assumes charge, but he continues to hold the office until a successor is chosen.

Dr Alvi is the country’s fourth democratically elected president to complete the five-year term. The three presidents before Dr Alvi who completed their full terms were Chaudhary Fazal Elahi (fifth president, from 1973 to 1978), Asif Ali Zardari (11th, from 2008 to 2013), and Mamnoon Hussain (12th, from 2013 to 2018). Therefore, Dr Alvi is the third consecutive president to

have a full term and the first one to have an extended term due to an incomplete electoral college, which comprises the National Assembly, Senate and the four provincial assemblies.

The term-wise data of senators suggests that the PML-N and the PPP stand to lose a large chunk of their members — 69 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively — as they retire on March 11 after completing their terms. But after the February 8 polls, both the PML-N and PPP will be able to add to their tally in the Senate. The PTI, however, will be at a definite disadvantage if it fails to conduct the intra-party elections before the Senate polls, and it may have to depend on the SIC to get representation in the upper house of the parliament. Up until now, the total strength of the Senate has been 100, including 23 members each from the four federating units and four each from erstwhile Fata and Islamabad.

The 23 seats allocated to a province comprise 14 general seats, four reserved for women, four for technocrats and one for a minority member. This time around, though, only 96 members will grace the chamber as the representation of the erstwhile tribal areas will end following their merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the 25th Constitutional Amendment.

This means that the upcoming elections to the Senate will elect 48 new senators — 11 each from all four provinces on general and technocrats’ seats, two from Islamabad and two minority members from Punjab and Sindh. At present, the house has 97 members due to the death of PML-N’s Rana Maqbool Ahmed and the resignations of PTI’s Shaukat Tarin and Anwaarul Haq Kakar of the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) after assuming the office of the caretaker prime minister. The term of a senator is six years, but half of them retire every three years, and elections are held for new members, according to Dawn.

Owais elected Sindh Assembly Speaker, Anthony his deputy

PTI ■ KARACHI

Senior leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party Syed Owais Shah was on Sunday elected as the Speaker of the Sindh province Assembly while the party’s Christian face Anthony Naveed was elected as his deputy, becoming the first non-Muslim deputy speaker in the country’s history.

Outgoing speaker Agha Siraj Durrani said a total of 147 votes were cast for the post of speaker, of which Shah received 111. His opponent and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan) leader Sofia Shah got 36 votes, Dawn newspaper reported. Nine independent members of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and one member of the Jamaat-e-Islami did not participate in the voting and boycotted the election.

PPP leader and prominent Christian rights activist Anthony Naveed was elected as the deputy speaker of the provincial assembly, becoming the first non-Muslim deputy speaker in the history of Pakistan. Naveed secured 111 votes while MQM-P’s Rashid

Khan got 36 votes. Following the win, Naveed took his oath in Urdu and then went up to the speaker’s dais to embrace Speaker Shah.

On Sunday, nine PTI-backed independent members of the Sindh Assembly also took the oath, resulting in a total of 157 members taking the oath. Jamaat-e-Islami’s member Muhammad Farooq also took the oath, while 3 members of the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) were absent.

With 114 members, the PPP is the largest party in the Sindh Assembly, and MQM-P is the second-largest party with 36 seats. The GDA has 3 members, Jamaat-e-Islami has 1, and there are 9 independent members. On Saturday, several new and young faces, who had won the recent general election in Sindh, were sworn in as lawmakers of the Sindh Assembly. Many members, being first-time lawmakers with no previous parliamentary experience, took their oath in the session chaired by outgoing Speaker Durrani, expressing hope to bring about change.

Maryam Nawaz files nomination for Punjab CM

Lahore (PTI): Senior PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, on Sunday submitted her nomination papers for the post of chief minister of Pakistan’s politically crucial Punjab province. “The nomination papers of Maryam Nawaz Sharif for the Chief Minister of Punjab have been submitted,” the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) said in a post on X.

Maryam, the 50-year-old senior vice president of the PML-N, is set to become the first woman chief minister of Punjab province, a province of over 120 million people, as she enjoys the support of the majority in the house. She has already been given security usually provided to the chief minister and she is holding meetings with the top bureaucracy of the province. She is considered to be the political heir of PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif, who surprisingly nominated his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif as his party’s prime ministerial candidate. “The election of Chief Minister Punjab will take place on Monday (tomorrow). The candidates of CM can submit nomination papers on Sunday (today),” Punjab Assembly Secretary Amer Habib said.

Pakistan plane crash in May 2020 blamed on ‘human error’

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan International Airlines plane crash that killed 101 people near the Jinnah International Airport here in May 2020 was a result of “human error” by the two pilots, according to the investigation report on the incident.

The Aircraft Investigation Board (AIB) finally released its report on the reasons for the Airbus 320 failing to land safely at the Karachi airport and instead crashing into a residential neighbourhood near the airport. The board has held the failure of proper judgement while landing by the two pilots as the main reason for the fatal crash in which 101 people, including 99 passengers, lost their lives while two passengers miraculously survived.

Several houses in the neighbourhood and parked vehicles were destroyed and damaged in the disaster. The report said the air traffic controller had four times warned the pilots that they shouldn’t land as their altitude was not right. According to the report,

when the pilots first tried to land the aircraft, its engines hit the ground, which led to the system supplying lubricant to the engines shutting down. The report said that “engine failure” eventually led to the crash. The report also held the PIA and the Civil Aviation Authority responsible for not having clear procedures on whether pilots should fast during the month of Ramadan while on duty.

The AIB also noted that after the engine failure, the power supply went off in the aircraft and the last four minutes of the flight were not recorded on the data box. The pilots have also been held responsible for not being in sync with each other when trying to land the plane. Airworthiness documents show that the Airbus A320 had been previously used by China Eastern Airlines from 2004 to 2014, following which it was inducted into the PIA’s fleet.

There have been eight recorded incidents of the PIA aircraft crashes between 1965 and 2020.

‘Delays in Western military aid costing lives’

AP ■ KYIV

Half of promised Western military support to Ukraine fails to arrive on time, complicating the task of military planners and ultimately costing the lives of soldiers, the country’s defense minister said on Sunday. Speaking at the “Ukraine. Year 2024” forum in Kyiv, Rustan Umerov said that each delayed aid shipment meant Ukrainian troop losses, and underscored Russia’s superior military might. Commemorations to mark the second anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Saturday brought expressions of continued support, new bilateral security agree-

ments and fresh aid commitments from Ukraine’s Western allies. But Umerov said they still needed to deliver on their commitments if Ukraine is to have any chance of holding out against Russia.

“We look to the enemy: their economy is almost 2 trillion dollars, they use up to 15% official and non-official budget (funds) for the war, which constitutes over \$100 billion dollars annually. So basically whenever a commitment doesn’t come on time, we lose people, we lose territory,” he said.

Umerov and Commander-in-Chief Oleksandr Syrskyi toured front-line combat posts earlier Sunday amid a worsening ammunition shortage and

dogged Russian attacks in the east. They heard from front-line troops and “thoroughly analyzed” the battlefield situation on their visit, Syrskyi said in a Telegram update. He did not specify where exactly he and Umerov went, but said that “the situation is difficult” for Ukrainian troops and “needs constant control” along many stretches of the front.

Ukraine has suffered setbacks on the battlefield, having lost the strategic eastern city of Avdiivka following intense battles this month, and as military aid for Kyiv hangs in the balance in the US Congress.

Syrskyi earlier this month replaced Ukraine’s top military commander, Valerii Zaluzhny,

in the most significant shake-up of the top brass since the start of the full-scale war, after a long-expected counteroffensive last summer failed to produce major breakthroughs. Russia still controls roughly a quarter of the country.

Russian shelling and rocket strikes on Sunday continued to pummel Ukraine’s south and east, as local Ukrainian officials reported that at least two civilians were killed and a further eight suffered wounds in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson provinces.

A woman was wounded and a railway station turned into a smoldering ruin amid heavy shelling in the eastern city of Kostiantynivka, according to

the head of the municipal military administration. Ukraine’s public broadcaster, Suspilne, cited local police as saying that the strikes also damaged an Orthodox church, over a dozen residential buildings and dozens of shops, a post office, schools and local government offices. Russia and Ukraine also continued to trade nightly drone attacks, with Ukraine’s air defenses shooting down 16 of 18 Iranian-made Shahed drones launched overnight by Moscow. A Russian drone on Sunday morning struck an unspecified facility in Ukraine’s western Khmelnytskyi region, the regional military administration reported without giving details.

SL to end visa extensions granted to war-hit Russian and Ukrainian tourists

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Thousands of Russians and Ukrainians staying in Sri Lanka on extended visas due to the war have been asked to leave the island nation within two weeks, officials said. The immigration controller has issued a notice to the Tourism Ministry that the Russian and Ukrainian tourists must leave the country within two weeks from February 23 as their visas have lapsed, they said.

However, President Ranil Wickremesinghe’s office issued a notice that says he has ordered an investigation as to how the decision to ask them to leave had been made without a cabinet decision to revoke the previous extension of stay.

The President’s Media Division said that the Sri Lankan government has not officially decided to revoke the

visa extensions previously granted to these tourists. Russian and Ukrainian tourists had been allowed extended stays in the country due to the war breaking out between the two European countries. Nearly 300,000 Russians and 20,000 Ukrainians have arrived in Sri Lanka since the outbreak of the war in 2022.

However, the number of tourists currently residing on the island nation on extended visas is not available. Authorities said the decision to allow them longer stays was then made because of flight shortages.

Immigration authorities said there have been complaints of abuse of tourist visas by Russian and Ukrainian nationals running illegal businesses, employing foreigners, and deploying payment methods for services bypassing local systems.

Idaho set to execute long-time death row inmate

AP ■ BOISE (IDAHO)

For nearly 50 years, Idaho’s prison staffers have been serving Thomas Eugene Creech three meals a day, checking on him during rounds and taking him to medical appointments.

This Wednesday, some of Idaho’s prison staffers will be asked to kill him. Barring any last-minute stay, the 73-year-old, one of the nation’s longest-serving death row inmates, will be executed by lethal injection for killing a fellow prisoner with a battery-filled sock in 1981. Creech’s killing of David Jensen, a young, disabled man who was serving time for car theft, was his last in a broad path of destruction that saw Creech convicted of five murders in three states. He is also suspected of at least a half-dozen others.

But now, decades later, Creech is mostly known inside the walls of the Idaho Maximum Security Institution as just “Tom,” a generally well-behaved old-timer with a penchant for poetry. His unsuccessful bid for clemency even found support from a former warden at the penitentiary, prison staffers who recounted how he wrote them poems of support or condolence and the judge who sentenced Creech to death. “Some of our correctional officers have grown up with Tom Creech,” Idaho Department of Correction Director Josh Tewart said Friday. “Our warden has a long-standing relationship with him. ... There’s a familiarity and a rapport that has been built over time.”

Creech’s attorneys have filed a flurry of last-minute appeals in four different courts in recent months trying to halt the execution, which would be Idaho’s first in 12 years. They have argued Idaho’s refusal to say where its execution drug was obtained violates his rights and that he received ineffective assistance of counsel. A three-judge panel of the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday rejected an argument that Creech should not be executed because he was sentenced by a judge rather

than a jury.

It’s not clear how many people Creech, an Ohio native, killed before he was imprisoned in Idaho in 1974. At one point he claimed to have killed as many as 50 people, but many of the confessions were made under the influence of now discredited “truth serum” drugs and filled with outlandish tales of occult-driven human sacrifice and contract killings for a powerful motorcycle gang.

Official estimates vary, but authorities tend to focus on 11 deaths. Creech’s attorneys did not immediately return phone calls from The Associated Press. In 1973, Creech was tried for the murder of 70-year-old Paul Schrader, a retiree who was stabbed to death in the Tucson, Arizona, motel where Creech was living. Creech used Schrader’s credit cards and vehicle to leave Tucson for Portland, Oregon. A jury acquitted him, but authorities say they have no doubt he was responsible.

The next year, Creech was committed to Oregon State Hospital for a few months. He

earned a weekend pass and travelled to Sacramento, California, where he killed Vivian Grant Robinson at her home. Creech then used Robinson’s phone to let the hospital know he would return a day late. That crime went unsolved until Creech later confessed while in custody in Idaho; he wasn’t convicted until 1980.

After he was released from the Oregon State Hospital, Creech got a job at a church in Portland doing maintenance work. He had living quarters at the church, and it was there he shot and killed 22-year-old William Joseph Dean in 1974. Authorities believe he then fatally shot Sandra Jane Ramsamooj at the Salem grocery store where she worked.

Creech was finally arrested in November 1974. He and a girlfriend were hitchhiking in Idaho when they were picked up by two painters, Thomas Arnold and John Bradford. Creech shot both men to death and the girlfriend cooperated with authorities.

While in custody, Creech

confessed to a number of other killings. Some appeared to be fabricated, but he provided information that led police to the bodies of Gordon Lee Stanton and Charles Thomas Miller near Las Vegas, and of Rick Stewart McKenzie, 22, near Baggs, Wyoming.

Creech initially was sentenced to death for killing the painters. But after the US Supreme Court barred automatic death sentences in 1976, his sentence was converted to life in prison.

That changed after he killed Jensen, who was serving time for car theft. Jensen’s life hadn’t been easy: He suffered a nearly fatal gun injury as a teen that left him with serious disabilities including partial paralysis. Jensen’s relatives opposed Creech’s bid for clemency. They described Jensen as a gentle soul and a prankster who loved hunting and spending time outdoors, who was “the peanut butter” to his sister’s jelly. His daughter, who was 4 when he was killed, spoke of how she never got to know him, and how unfair it

was that Creech is still around when her father isn’t.

Creech’s supporters, meanwhile, say decades spent in a prison cell have left him changed. One death row prison staffer told the parole board last month that while she cannot begin to understand the suffering Creech dealt to others, he is now a person who makes positive contributions to his community. His execution date will be difficult for everyone at the prison, she said, especially those who have known him for years.

“I don’t want to be dismissive of what he did and the countless people who were impacted by that in real significant ways,” said Tewart, the corrections director. “At the same time, you also can’t be dismissive of the effect it’s going to have on people who have established a relationship with him. On Thursday, Tom’s not going to be there. You know he’s not coming back to that unit — that’s real. It would be really difficult to not feel some sort of emotion about that.”

Markets may face volatility amid derivatives expiry: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With no major domestic market-moving event scheduled this week, stock market investors would largely focus on global trends and foreign fund movement, and may face volatility amid monthly derivatives expiry, analysts said.

“We expect volatility to remain high due to the scheduled expiry of February month derivatives contracts. Besides, participants should keep a close watch on the performance of the global indices, especially the US for cues,” Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Last week, BSE Sensex rose 716.16 points or 1 per cent to close at 73,142.8 points and inched closer to its record high level of 73,427.5.

“Markets remained volatile in the passing week but managed to end with a gain of nearly a per cent. After the initial rise, mixed global cues combined with profit taking in select heavyweights capped the momentum.

“Consequently, the

benchmark indices, Nifty and Sensex, continued to oscillate in a narrow range till the end and finally settled at 22,212.70 and 73,142.80 respectively,” Mishra said.

After the marginal dip, the US benchmark index, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) has resumed the uptrend and also crossed a new milestone of 39,000.

With a strong base of around 38,400, we expect the prevailing tone to continue in the index and that could also help our markets to maintain the positive bias, Mishra added.

Investors are also expected to take guidance from the minutes of the February Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting released by the central bank last week.

The rate-setting panel has hinted a cautious approach towards monetary easing amid uncertainties around inflation outlook.

“On the economy front, almost all MPC members continued to express a cautious approach to monetary easing, given the uncertainties surrounding the inflation outlook,” Shrikant



Chouhan, Head Equity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

In the latest bi-monthly policy review held earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India's six-member panel decided to leave the key policy rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the sixth time in a row.

Analysts pointed out that

factors like crude oil prices, rupee movement, quarterly GDP data to be released in India as well as in the US, and monthly global manufacturing PMI data in the coming week will also influence the market sentiment.

With Q3 FY24 results season behind us, the market focus will be on the macro

developments both domestic and international, Chouhan said.

Besides, six IPOs worth more than Rs 3,300 crore will be hitting the stock markets next week, including Platinum Industries and Exicom Tele-Systems public issues which will open for subscription on February 27 and IPO of Bharat Highways

Infrastructure Investment Trust on February 28.

Paytm issue may be reviewed, scrutiny on Byju's progressing well: ICAI By Bishaswar Malakar

Kolkata, Feb 25 (PTI) Amid the unfolding Paytm Payments Bank Ltd crisis, Institute of Chartered Accountants of India President Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal on Sunday said its financial reporting review board (FRRB) may deliberate on issues of the fintech firm in the near future.

The FRRB of the statutory body is currently conducting a review of the accounts of tech-based education unicorn Byju's over alleged governance concerns, and the exercise is progressing well, the ICAI president said.

“So far, we have not considered it (Paytm issue), but the board meeting of the FRRB will take place in the near future and it will consider appropriate action if required. So far, we have not decided anything as far as this matter is concerned,” ICAI President Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal told PTI in an interview.

Newly elected committees, including FRRB, of the ICAI are expected to hold meetings from March onwards, he said.

Notably, the banking sector regulator Reserve Bank of India has already imposed restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank Ltd due to alleged regulatory concerns. The FRRB may determine whether any scrutiny of the books is necessary over allegations of regulatory lapses and their impact on the payment bank's accounting, he said.

“It is the discretion of the board whom to review and when to do so. It has a robust system,” the newly elected ICAI chief said.

Asked whether ICAI was waiting for a complaint regarding Paytm, Agarwal said, “The institute can take cognizance both suo motu and through complaints. In Byju's case, it was suo motu.”

Speaking on Byju's, he said that the progress on the board's scrutiny is “going well and the report is expected by the end of this year”.

While explaining the FRRB structure, the ICAI chief said, “The board has a three-tier

structure--technical, group, and then finally the board review.”

According to him, the FRRB is empowered to review the financial statements of listed companies.

“In cases of gross negligence, we proceed with further investigation. If there are minor issues, we provide advisory guidance,” Agarwal said.

Constituted in July 2002, it is an important wing of ICAI that works to bring improvements in financial reporting practices and thereby promote investors' confidence in audited statements.

Meanwhile, investors and the founder of the troubled edutech firm Byju's had locked horns over alleged mismanagement and governance issues.

The investors voted for a leadership change in an Extraordinary General Meeting on Friday and also moved NCLT.

The six investors, who moved the resolutions, hold more than 32 per cent stake in Think & Learn (T&L), the firm that operates the online tuition platform Byju's.

Government makes efforts to improve soil health

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 8,300 soil testing labs have been set up across the country since 2014-15 as part of the government's efforts to improve soil health and reduce input cost incurred by farmers to grow crops, according to an official.

These are static soil testing labs, mobile testing labs, mini labs and village level soil testing labs.

That apart, the government has also distributed 23.58 lakh soil health cards to farmers free of cost. The move is aimed at promoting balanced use of fertilisers, cut input cost and boost crop productivity.

“The root of farmers' welfare is in the health of soil,” a senior government official said.

The government is implementing Soil Health Management & Soil Health Card Schemes under the National Project on Soil Health & Fertility of National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture since the year 2014-15.

Now, these schemes have been merged as Soil Health & Fertility component of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).

“So far, 23.58 crore soil health cards have been distributed free-of-cost to farmers under the scheme,” the official said.

Based on the recommendations on Soil Health Card (SHC), the trainings and demonstrations are conducted to create the awareness among the farmers for adopting the recommendations on judicious use of chemical fertilizers.

So far, 93,781 farmer's trainings, 6.45 lakh demonstrations, 7,425 farmer's melas/ campaigns on soil health card recommendations have been organized across the country, the official highlighted.

Since 2014-15, the official said that a total of 8,272 soil testing labs have been set up across the country.

Out of these, 1,068 are static soil testing labs, 163 mobile soil testing labs, 6,376 mini soil testing labs and 665 village level soil testing labs.

“Total Rs 229.95 crore has been released to states/UTs for soil testing labs under the scheme. Out of this, Rs 83.31 crore has been released to states/UTs for the past five years,” the official said.

IOC, GAIL, ONGC fined for third straight quarter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned oil and gas giants including IndianOil, ONGC and GAIL (India) have been slapped fines for the third straight quarter for failing to meet listing norm requirements of having the requisite number of directors on their board.

Stock exchanges have fined oil refining and fuel marketing giant Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), explorers Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL), gas utility GAIL, and refiners Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) a cumulative Rs 32.5 lakh, stock exchange filings showed.

In separate filings, the companies detailed the fines imposed by the BSE and NSE for either not having the requisite number of independent directors or the mandated women director in the third quarter ended December 31, 2023, but were quick to point out that appointment of directors was done by the government and they had no role in it.

The companies had faced



fines for the same reason in the previous two quarters as well.

The six PSUs in separate filings said they have been slapped with a fine of Rs 5,42,800 each for the third quarter. While ONGC and its subsidiaries HPCL and MRPL, GAIL and OIL faced fines for not having the required number of independent directors on their board, IOC for not having a woman independent director on its board.

Listing norms require companies to have independent directors in the same proportion as executive or functional directors. They are also required to have at least one woman director on

the board.

For the second quarter, IOC, ONGC, OIL, GAIL, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, HPCL and Engineers India Ltd had faced a fine of Rs 5.42 lakh.

For the latest fine, IOC in the regulatory filing said that “being a government company, the power to appoint directors (including independent directors) vests with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, and hence the non-appointment of women independent director on the Board during the quarter ended December 31, 2023 was not due to any negligence/fault by the company.”

Accordingly, IOC said it should not be held liable to pay the fines and the same should be waived-off.

“IOC regularly takes up with ministry for appointment of requisite number of independent directors (including woman independent director) to ensure compliance with corporate governance norms enunciated under SEBI (LODR) as well as the Companies Act,” it said, adding, it had in the past received similar notices from the two stock exchanges and its waiver request was granted.

GAIL in the filing said “appointments are outside the purview/control of the GAIL's management.” “The non-compliance with regard to the composition of the Board was not within the control of the company and the company has been regularly pursuing with the Government of India (GoI) for appointment of requisite numbers of independent directors to meet the compliance requirements,” ONGC said.

The appointment of directors on its subsidiaries HPCL and MRPL too are done by the government.

Number of M&A deals in India falls in 2023: PwC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of merger and acquisition (M&A) deals during 2023 dropped by 10 per cent on an annual basis to 793, said a PwC India report on Sunday.

However, the total disclosed deal value for M&A declined much steeper at 38 per cent during the year, according to the report titled ‘Deals at a glance’.

The report further observed that PE (Private Equity) investments totalled USD 36 billion, marking a substantial 36 per cent drop from 2022.

Despite this decline, the average investment size per deal increased to USD 46 million from USD 42 million in 2022, reflecting a potential shift towards larger opportunities.

While early-stage investments were 53 per cent less compared to that in 2022, the report said, these along with growth-stage investments continued to make up the major share, constituting around 73 per cent of fundings in 2023. On the other hand, buyouts demonstrated resilience with only a 5 per cent decline compared to 2022. This suggests a nuanced landscape, where investors show interest in diverse strategies and larger-scale ventures, even amid an overall decrease in PE investments, the report said.

“In 2023, India resiliently navigated global headwinds, solidifying its appeal to international investors. The economic fundamentals stay strong reflecting investor enthusiasm for the country's expanding economic opportunities and this optimism is also echoed in



PwC's latest CEO Survey. Despite a restrained deal-making environment throughout the year, the deal activity stabilised towards the last quarter leading us to anticipate an upswing in 2024,” said Dinesh Arora, Partner & Leader Deals, PwC India.

In calendar year 2023, PwC said the retail and consumer sector emerged as the most active sector with technology finishing up marginally behind for the second consecutive year.

Following closely were the professional services and fintech sectors, which exhibited high activity in terms of volume. Meanwhile, financial services, renewable power, and healthcare dominated in deal value.

Top 10 deals of 2023 included JV buyouts, strategic investments, PE buyouts, and stock mergers and contributed 21 per cent of the total deal value. While PE deals were higher in volume overall, strategic deals dominated the top deals with domestic deals and group-level consolidations as a significant theme, the report said.

PwC is a network of firms in 152 countries with over 3,27,000 people providing assurance, advisory and tax services.

GST Council may soon clarify tax exemption to RERA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council is likely to soon clarify that Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) will not be required to pay Goods and Services Tax (GST), an official said.

According to the official, RERA, which functions as a regulator as well as facilitator for the realty sector, is covered under Article 243G of the

Constitution dealing with powers, authority and responsibilities of panchayats. RERA was set up in different states to ensure transparency in real estate projects, protect the interest of consumers and to establish an adjudicating mechanism for speedy dispute redressal.

The official said that after discussions with RERA functionaries about the nature

of their function it was decided that GST is not applicable on them. The official further said that RERAs are funded by respective state governments and hence levying GST would mean taxing state governments.

A meeting of GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister and comprising state ministers, is likely to be held before the imposition of Model

Code of Conduct for the general election due in April-May.

The last meeting of GST Council was held on October 7, 2023.

Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said before July 18, 2022, certain services offered by key regulatory bodies in India, including the Reserve Bank, Securities Exchange Board of

India (SEBI), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) network, were not subject to GST.

This exemption was lifted on July 18, 2022, leading to discussions about the tax implications for RERA bodies as well.

“Furthermore, in the residential real estate sector, Input Tax Credit (ITC) is not permissible, which means excluding RERA authorities from GST considerations could potentially reduce expenses for both developers and homebuyers. Consequently, a clarification from GST Council on this matter would be significantly beneficial for the sector,” Mohan added.

V-TAPP 2024 unveiled



Amaravati: VIT AP University, a leading institution in technical education, proudly announced the launch of V-TAPP2024 (VIT AP Technical Fest) today, marking the beginning of a two-day extravaganza that brings together students from various colleges, universities, and institutions.



Neelam Yadav, Manager (PR), POWERGRID was conferred with Media Federation of India Award for the “Best Women Communicator of the Year” at 18th, Media Excellence Awards, 2024 held at New Delhi

India seeks permanent solution to food security



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will strongly oppose a China-led proposal for an investment facilitation pact besides pressing for finding a permanent solution to public stock holding of grains for food security and protection of the interests of fishermen at the WTO ministerial meeting beginning Tuesday.

The Indian delegation is led by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. The four-day 13th ministerial conference (MC13) will start on February 26 in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Trade ministers of 164 member countries of the World Trade Organisation



(WTO) are meeting against the backdrop of the uncertain global economic situation due to the Red Sea crisis, the Ukraine-Russia war and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The key issue of India's interests at the meeting relates to finding a permanent solution for its minimum support price (MSP) issue for food security,

agricultural reforms, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce moratorium on import duties, dispute settlement, and WTO reforms.

*Food security issues

The public stock-holding (PSH) programme is a policy tool under which the government procures crops like rice and wheat from

farmers at MSP, and stores and distributes foodgrains to the poor.

India stresses the need for PSH for its large, vulnerable population and wants a permanent solution from the MC13. Food procurement, stockholding, and distribution are crucial to India's food security strategy. MSP is normally higher than the prevailing market rates and sells these at a low price to ensure food security for over 800 million beneficiaries. However, the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture limits the ability of a government to purchase food at MSP.

Under global trade norms, a WTO member country's food subsidy bill should not breach the limit of 10 per cent of the value of production based on the reference price of 1986-88. As part of the solution, India has asked for measures like

amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap. Developed nations are of the view that such programmes distort global trade prices of food grains.

*Joint Support Initiatives (JSIs) or plurilateral agreements

India opposes this move being pushed for certain nations. For example, India is strongly opposing efforts of a group of countries led by China to push a proposal on investment facilitation for development agreement at the WTO.

The country has maintained that this agenda falls outside the mandate of the global trade body.

According to experts, the attempt of the group to integrate the proposal into the WTO has systemic concerns for the organisation and it would impact developing nations in

pursuing their interest in future.

*Agricultural reforms

India's stance is to protect farmer livelihoods and ensure equitable market access. However, developed nations are pushing to reduce domestic support and increase market openness irrespective of the fact that they themselves provide large subsidies to their rich farmers.

*WTO reforms

India advocates for inclusive reforms that consider developing countries' interests, against the backdrop of developed nations' proposals for flexible negotiation processes, dropping of decision-making by consensus and the integration of non-trade issues into WTO without consensus.

India supports efforts to improve the working of the WTO but its key pillars like

special and differential treatment for less developed and developing nations, equal voice and dispute settlement mechanism should be retained while undertaking reforms, an official said.

India also seeks a revamp of the Appellate Body to ensure fairness, facing off against the USA's reluctance to do so and EU's proposal for alternate mechanisms.

The US, a frequent participant in WTO disputes, has been obstructing the process due to dissatisfaction with inefficiencies and perceived overreaches by the WTO's judiciary.

*Fisheries subsidies

The members have already reached the first part of the agreement in 2022 under which subsidies will be prohibited for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

PARA BADMINTON WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Yathiraj, Pramod, Krishna win gold

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

India's Suhas Yathiraj, Pramod Bhagat and Krishna Nagar capped their impressive run by securing gold medals in men's singles SL4, SL3 and SH6 class respectively at the Para Badminton World Championship here on Sunday. The world No 3 Yathiraj, a Paralympic silver medallist, outwitted Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan 21-18 21-18 in SL4 final (standing/lower limb impairment/minor) for her maiden world title. "Gold it is, happy and proud

to be world champion," tweeted the 40-year-old Yathiraj, who hails from Karnataka and is an IAS officer of the 2007 batch of Uttar Pradesh cadre. Yathiraj, who has an impairment in one of his ankles, is currently the secretary and director general of Youth Welfare and Prantiya Rakshak Dal in the UP government. Tokyo Paralympic gold medallist Bhagat, who won a gold and two bronze at the Para Asian Games in China, edged out England's Daniel Bethell 14-21 21-15 21-14 in SL3 (standing/lower limb



impairment/severe) final. Bhagat thus completed a hat-trick of crowns after Stoke Mandeville in 2015 and Basel in 2019. He also won a gold medal at 2022 Tokyo and 2009 Seoul edition. "This win holds a very special place in my heart for various reasons," said the Bihar-born shuttler, one of the six siblings, who was diagnosed with polio when he was five years old. "First being that I have managed to equal my idol Lin Dan's record of five world championships and second being having been able to retain three consecutive world championships."

Apart from the gold, the 35-year-old also won two bronze medals in men's doubles and mixed doubles along with Sukant Kadam and Manisha Ramadass respectively. The three medals took his tally to 14, which includes 6 gold, 3 silver, 5 bronze across categories. In SH6 category (standing/short stature), Krishna Nagar, a Paralympic gold medal winner, also emerged champion after prevailing 22-20 22-20 over China's Lin Naili in another men's singles final. In women's singles SU5 (standing/upper limb

impairment), Manisha Ramadass signed off with a silver medal after losing 16-21 16-21 to China's Yang Qiu Xia in the final. The men's doubles pair of Chirag Baretha and Raj Kumar and women's doubles combination of Rachana Shaileshkumar and Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan settled for a silver each, after losing their respective final matches in SU5 and SH6 categories. In women's doubles (SL3-SU5) category, Manasi Joshi and Thulasimathi Murugesan also signed off with a silver medal after losing 20-22 17-21 to Indonesian combination of

Leani Ratri Oktika and Khalimatus Sadiyah in the final.

Bhagat vs Bethell

Pramod and Bethell enjoy a healthy rivalry with the England shuttler having won 11 times in 17 meetings. The final turned out to be an exhaustive and tight contest as the duo engaged in a slugfest for an hour and 40 minutes. "This match with Bethell would be my toughest both mentally and physically. I have not been playing well against Bethell past few months and this was my time to prove doubters wrong."

Patty wins LPGA Thailand by one stroke

AP ■ CHONBURI (THAILAND)

Local favourite Patty Tavatanakit held off a fast-finishing Albane Valenzuela to clinch the LPGA Thailand by one stroke on Sunday. The 24-year-old Bangkok native showcased her prowess with a brilliant approach shot to tap in an easy birdie on the final hole to card a final round 67, finishing at 21 under-par-267 at Siam Country Club Pattaya Old Course. "I'm honestly speechless. I was so nervous today and choked a bit as there are many Thai fans showing up to support me," said Tavatanakit, whose triumph marked her second LPGA victory since her win at the ANA Inspiration in 2021. "It's a dream come true to win a home tournament in front of my parents." Tavatanakit has been riding a wave of success, having

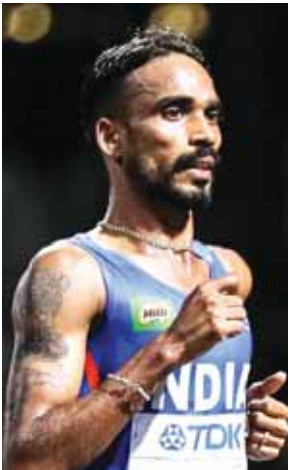
triumphed at the Ladies European Tour in Saudi Arabia seven days ago. Ranked 43rd in the world, she joins former world No. 1 Ariya Jutanugarn as the second local champion of this tournament, following Jutanugarn's victory in 2021. Valenzuela, ranked 91st in the world carded a brilliant 63, including an eagle on the fifth hole and seven birdies - six on the back nine - finishing at 20 under-par-268. "I gave it my all out there. I'm proud of my performance," the 26-year-old Swiss said. Sei Young Kim of Korea, the 2020 Women's PGA Championship winner, closed with a solid 65, ending with a total of 18 under-par-270, tying for third place alongside her compatriot Hye-jin Choi, who posted a 66. LPGA tournaments are also scheduled over the next two weeks in Singapore and China.

Paolini defeats Kalinskaya in comeback victory for Dubai title

AP ■ DUBAI

Jasmine Paolini earned her biggest title by defeating Anna Kalinskaya 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 in the Dubai Championships final. Paolini fought back from a break down in the second and third sets en route to the second WTA singles title of her nine-year tour-level career. The 26th-ranked Paolini and 40th-ranked Kalinskaya defied a field that started with 16 of the top 20 women, including the top four. Paolini won her first title in Slovenia in 2021 and lost three finals since then. She lost to Kalinskaya a month ago in the Australian Open fourth round. Saturday's victory assured the Italian of a top 15 debut when the rankings are updated on Monday. "It's so special. I'm really happy and really surprised," an emotional, smiling Paolini said on court. "I'm just happy that I believed I could win every match. I remember my first match this week. It was second set, I'd lost the first and was a break down, yet now I'm here winning the title. It's unbelievable." Paolini trailed 6-4, 3-1. Then she was 4-2 down in the third set. She stopped Kalinskaya serving for the match at 5-4. Kalinskaya came through qualifying and beat three top-10 players in a row - including No. 1 Iga Swiatek - to reach her first final.

Gopi wins elite men race in New Delhi Marathon



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Asian champion Gopi Thonakal won the New Delhi Marathon title but missed out the Paris Olympics qualifying time by a big margin here on Sunday. The 35-year-old Gopi, who had clinched the Asian marathon title in 2017, won the men's elite race covering the distance of 42.195km in 2 hours, 14 minutes and 40 seconds, well outside the Paris Games qualifying time of 2:08:10. Gopi, who had also won the

title here in the 2017 edition, was below his personal best of 2:13:39. His timing was also below the national record of 2:12:00 which has been standing in the name of Shivnath Singh since 1978. Srinu Bugutha, who won the 2021 edition title, finished second in 2:14:41, while Akshay Saini was third with a time of 2:15:27. Gopi had earlier admitted that the Paris Olympics qualifying time could be beyond the reach of the Indians. Ashwini Madan Jadhav won the women's elite race, clocking 2:52:25, while Thakor Nirmaben Bharatjee (2:55:47) and Divyanka Chaudhary (2:57:06) were second and third respectively. The New Delhi Marathon, which was held under the aegis of the Athletics Federation of India, saw thousands of participants from more than 200 cities, 27 states and several countries in different categories. The course passed some of the city's iconic landmarks such as Humayun's Tomb, Lodhi Garden and Khan Market.



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the finish, sealing Fulham's first win at Old Trafford since 2003, with United's players having poured forward seeking a winner after Harry



bouncer in a dub - it was called "The Country Club" - in Costa Mesa, California, and now appears to have hit his stride. He contended at Torrey Pines and tied for third, and he's hoping that experience will serve him well in the final round of the Mexico Open. "I've been playing professional golf for quite a while. I've had some good stuff and some bad stuff," he said. "It will definitely all be a part of it." Matt Wallace, the other player who shared the 36-hole lead,

had a 71 to fall eight behind. Knapp, with his long, powerful swing, did everything well at the start. He made birdie puts of about 15 feet and 25 feet on the fourth and fifth holes, got up-and-down from a bunker on the par-5 sixth, drove the reachable par-4 seventh and two-putted from about 80 feet and closed out the front nine with a tee shot to 4 feet on the par-3 ninth. Even when he got in trouble, driving so far left he had to take a penalty drop on the 10th, he escaped with bogey by making a 10-foot putt. He followed that with two more birdies to widen his lead to five shots at one point. Knapp's short game kept the lead from being even larger. He hit a poor wedge and chip that led to bogey on the par-5 14th hole, and a weak chip from short of the 16th green led to another bogey. But he had no complaints from having so many chances, and converting 11 of them.



Camara hat trick helps Brest win 3-0

AP ■ PARIS

Midfielder Mahdi Camara scored a first career hat trick as Brest won 3-0 at Strasbourg in the French league, keeping this season's surprise front-runner on course to qualify for the Champions League for the first time. Camara scored twice in the first half for second-place Brest, an unheralded side from a port city in Brittany which has never finished higher than eighth in the top flight. Camara then coolly converted a penalty in the 60th minute. He was involved in the buildup to the first goal, too. Camara did well to win the ball near the edge of the penalty area in the 33rd and, after a shot was charged down, he guided the rebound into the right corner from 20 meters with the aid of a slight deflection. Seven minutes later, the former Saint-Etienne player showed good technique to control a cross from the right and finish neatly. He then sent goalkeeper Alaa Bellaarouch the wrong way from the spot.

The win moved Eric Roy's side 10 points behind league leader Paris Saint-Germain and guaranteed staying in second place after Sunday's league games. Coach Patrick Vieira's Strasbourg slipped to 12th place. That meant Nantes moved up to 11th on goal difference after earlier winning 1-0 at Lorient, which dropped down to 16th and the relegation/playoff spot in France's 18-team league. Cameroon defender Jean-Charles Castelletto netted the only goal for Nantes early into the second half after being set up from the left by winger Moses Simon, who was a runner-up with Nigeria at the Africa Cup of Nations earlier this month.

SUNDAY'S GAMES

Third-place Nice can close the gap on Brest to one point if it beats last-place Clermont at home. PSG hosts improving Rennes in the first home game since Kylian Mbappé's decision to leave at the end of the season.



Raphinha stars as Barcelona beats Getafe 4-0

AP ■ BARCELONA

Raphinha made the most of Barcelona by scoring one goal and playing a part in two more to lead a 4-0 rout of Getafe. Barcelona's biggest win since September saw it move past Girona and provisionally claim second place in the Spanish league. Raphinha opened the scoring in the 20th minute at Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium. The Brazil winger then participated in passing moves to help João Félix and Frenkie de Jong add goals in the 53rd and 61st. Substitute Fermin López rounded it off with a goal in stoppage time. Leader Real Madrid is five points clear of Barcelona before it hosts Sevilla on Sunday. Girona, which fell into third place, is one point adrift of Barcelona before playing Rayo Vallecano on Monday. Barcelona had been struggling at its stadium with only one win in its previous three home games, including a 5-3 debacle to Villarreal that prompted coach Xavi Hernández to announce he would not see out the final year of his contract next season. But after recent stumbles by Girona, the biggest of the two Catalan clubs finds itself in position to at least become Madrid's closest chaser with a third of the season remaining. Raphinha, a key part of Barcelona's costly rebuild two summers ago, was injured earlier this season and lost his spot in the starting 11 when teenager Lamine Yamal broke out as the team's next great hope. "I am especially happy because I was having fewer minutes since coming back from injury, but the most important thing is the win that keeps us alive in the league," Raphinha said. "It is a privilege to compete with Lamine ... Watching Lamine play so well makes me play better. And I am sure that he feels the same way." Raphinha led Barcelona's attack with his speed down the right side that repeatedly beat Getafe's high back line. Raphinha latched onto a long

ball by Jules Koundé and slotted a left-footed shot inside the far post to put the hosts ahead. He had another good chance to score on the break in the 40th, but he fired too high with only the 'keeper to beat. Getafe threatened to level early in the second half when Luis Milla's long strike hit the post after goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen got a touch. But Barcelona again broke Getafe's pressure when Andreas Christensen charged from his spot as holding midfielder to receive a through ball by Raphinha that played him clear on the right flank. Christensen squared the ball for Felix to finish off. Raphinha helped make it three when he drew goalkeeper David Soria off the line and laid off for De Jong. De Jong then assisted López for his goal. Getafe stayed in 10th place. "We insisted on playing with a high back line, but we didn't execute well at any point," Getafe coach José Bordalás said about his team's worst loss of the season. "We even tried moving players into different positions to try to improve, but my team was never itself and never comfortable. We have to forget this game and just move on."

LUKA'S DOUBLE

Luka Romero scored his first goals since joining Almeria on loan from AC Milan last month to help limit Atletico Madrid to a 2-2 draw. Romero canceled out the opener by Ángel Correa with a long strike in the 27th. Atletico's Rodrigo de Paul put the visitors ahead before the 19-year-old Romero struck again in the 64th. The draw at bottom side Almeria left Atletico in fourth place but just three points ahead of Athletic Bilbao. Also, Matija Nastasic's 88th-minute equalizer gave Mallorca a 1-1 draw at Alaves. Valencia's game at Granada was postponed after the visiting team requested not to play in the aftermath of a deadly fire in the eastern city of Valencia on Thursday.

New era at Man United begins with a loss

AP ■ LONDON

The week started at Manchester United with Jim Ratcliffe completing his purchase of a minority stake and setting out a three-year plan to return the club to the top of English soccer, knocking local rivals Manchester City and Liverpool "off their perch" in the process. It ended with the team getting mostly outplayed in its own stadium by Fulham - an opponent in the bottom half of the Premier League - and beaten 2-1 to lose ground in the race for Champions League qualification. Not only did sixth-place United's four-game winning run in the league come to an

end on Saturday, fourth-place Aston Villa beat Nottingham Forest 4-2. That left an eight-point gap between Villa and United after 26 of 38 games. It remains to be seen if the Premier League will have four or five places in next season's Champions League. Fifth-place Tottenham is three points ahead of United and has a game in hand. Failing to qualify for the lucrative competition will be a huge blow to United's status, not to mention its finances. It could also spell the end for United manager Erik ten Hag as Ratcliffe looks to raise the standards at the fallen giant. Dave Brailsford, the sporting director of Ratcliffe-owned INEOS and now on United's board, was in the directors'



box at Old Trafford to see the team concede the deciding goal on a counterattack in the seventh minute of stoppage time. Alex Iwobi tucked home

the finish, sealing Fulham's first win at Old Trafford since 2003, with United's players having poured forward seeking a winner after Harry

Maguire's equalizer in the 89th. "After one defeat, you have to see the bigger picture," Ten Hag said, "and the bigger picture looks very good." Douglas Luiz scored two of Villa's goals, with Ollie Watkins and Leon Bailey also netting in its first home win of 2024. One of the three defeats at Villa Park this year came at the hands of United. "If we arrive to game 33 in the same position, we maybe look to Champions League," Villa manager Unai Emery said. "For now it is about being in the top seven positions."

CITY AND ARSENAL WIN

With first-place Liverpool not playing in the Premier League this round because of its

involvement in the English League Cup final on Sunday, title rivals Manchester City and Arsenal had a chance to trim the gap to the leaders. They both took it - and now the top three are separated by just two points. Second-place City moved one point behind Liverpool by beating Bournemouth 1-0 away, with Phil Foden grabbing the 24th-minute winner from a rebound after Erling Haaland had a shot parried out. It was Foden's 16th goal of the season in all competitions, already tying the England forward's most in a single season. "Phil Foden is playing the best football I have seen from him," said City manager Pep

Guardiola, who described his players as "supermen" for coping with a demanding schedule. "We demand too much of our players but they respond. I know people say, They earn a lot of money,' but it is too much, honestly. But business must go on and it surprises me every time how we are still there." Arsenal responded to City's result by dominating Newcastle a few hours later, winning 4-1 at Emirates Stadium to stay a point behind City. An own-goal by Sven Botman was followed by strikes by Kai Havertz and Bukayo Saka, before Jakub Kiwior glanced in a header for the fourth. Joe Willock, a former Arsenal

player, scored an 85th-minute consolation for Newcastle.

EVERTON DENIED

Relegation-threatened Everton conceded an equalizer in the fifth minute of stoppage time to draw 1-1 at Brighton. A victory would have pushed Everton three points clear of the bottom three and ended an eight-match winless run in the league. Instead, Lewis Dunk headed in Pascal Gross' cross to cancel out Jarrad Branthwaite's opener for Everton at Amex Stadium. Newly hired Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner 's tenure got off to strong start as his team beat next-to-last Burnley 3-0.

ASHWIN, JUREL, KULDEEP SHINE

INDIA NEED 192 RUNS TO WIN 4TH TEST AGAINST ENGLAND

PTI ■ RANCHI

Dhruv Jurel's defensive chef-d'oeuvre found a perfect match in the destructive symphony of spin by fifer-man Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav as India seized decisive control of the fourth Test against England at the end of a dramatic third day here on Sunday.

India walked off at the stumps, having chiselled off 40 runs from the 192-run target without losing a wicket. Rohit Sharma (24 batting) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (16 batting) would be confident of the team mustering the remaining 152 runs without much theatre.

However, it was Jurel who started India's resistive movement with a defiant 90 that came in 149 balls and 211 minutes. It carried the hosts to 307 in their first innings from the overnight 219 for seven.

In their second essay, England just did not have any answers to the questions posed by Ashwin (5/51), his 35th five-wicket haul in Tests, and Kuldeep Yadav (4/22), getting bowled out for a meagre 145. Opener Zak Crawley (60) was the lone post of fight.

It would have been worse for England without that Crawley fifty before his innings was halted by Kuldeep.

Ravindra Jadeja bagged a solitary wicket but it was the key wicket of Jonny Bairstow. In fact, Crawley was the only English batter to go past 30 as they lost their last seven wickets for just 35 runs with Ashwin and Jadeja weaving their magic.

Introduced late, the left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep struck in his third over when he



cleaned up Crawley with a gem of a delivery that skidded through, unsettling the middle-stump.

Crawley was looking in an ominous mood and tore into the Indian attack against the run of play to stretch their overall lead past 150 as Rohit persisted with Ashwin and Jadeja in the second session. But Kuldeep breathed fire into

the attack as he got drift and was at his deceptive best.

Having survived through an umpire's call, England skipper Ben Stokes was castled by Kuldeep with the ball staying low.

Bairstow looked in firm control in his 42-ball 30 (3x4) but fell in the first ball after tea when Jadeja exploited the cracks on the pitch to turn it away and the batter drove it straight to short cover.

Kuldeep then dismissed Tom Hartley and Ollie Robinson in four balls, before Ashwin raced to his fifth wicket as stumper Dhruv Jurel took a brilliant reflex catch to oust James Anderson.

In the process, Ashwin also became the highest wicket-taker at home for India. He now has 354 wickets from 59 Tests at home, overtaking Anil Kumble's tally of 350 from 63 matches.

'Jurel' in the crown

But Jurel's innings might just have ended India's search for a wicketkeeper batter in Tests in the absence of recuperating Rishabh Pant.

The 23-year-old from Agra was not only terrific with his glovesmanship but exhibited oodles of maturity during that determined fifty as India mounted an incredible fightback, trimming England's first-innings lead to a mere 46 runs.

After reaching his maiden fifty in 96 balls, the Rajasthan Royals' wicketkeeper-batsman shifted gears, taking on English spinners Shoaib Bashir and Tom Hartley.

Jurel hurried for a single off Hartley to bring up his fifty in an entertaining 40-run stand off just 75 balls for the ninth wicket with Akash Deep (9).

But Hartley denied him a hundred with a quicker delivery that stayed low.

Young England off-spinner Bashir completed his maiden Test five-wicket haul, trapping Akash to finish with figures of 5 for 119 in only his second Test.

Jurel and Kuldeep's 76-run partnership for the eighth wicket also rescued India from a precarious position when they were reduced to 177 for seven on the second day.

Under overcast conditions in the morning session, the overnight duo of Jurel and Kuldeep faced a 134-run deficit.

Kuldeep showcased superb application on a pitch with variable bounce, playing 131 balls with immaculate defence and effective strike rotation.

Kuldeep's determined innings ended when an Anderson delivery that stayed low took a bottom edge and disturbed the timber.

Irfan lauds Akash for a memorable debut

Australia beats New Zealand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan on Sunday praised Akash Deep for making an immediate impact on his Test debut, with the right-arm seamer producing a three-wicket burst on the first day morning of the ongoing fourth Test against England in Ranchi.

Pathan said that for a fast bowler to make his debut in India is very difficult, but the way Akash bowled and picked up his three wickets, he showed promise of a bright future ahead of him.

"As a batter you want your debut to happen in India but as a fast bowler you dream to have your debut in England, Australia, South Africa or



New Zealand," Pathan told PTI on the sidelines of the New Delhi Marathon on Sunday.

"The way he bowled in the first session of the match and

praised opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal for becoming only the fifth from the country to have scored 600 or more runs in a Test series.

"Yashasvi Jaiswal is a very special cricketer, he has very bright future and he will make it big", the former cricketer said. Pathan, who was at the marathon as chief guest, said India had the potential of becoming a sporting nation.

"To participate in such events is really special. I have always believed that India can become a sporting nation. Twenty thousand people participated here today and everyone was smiling. The people want to be fit and want to participate in such activities, it is always good to see this," he expressed.

AP ■ AUCKLAND

Australia beat New Zealand by 27 runs under the Duckworth-Lewis system in the heavily rain-affected third T20 international Sunday to complete a 3-0 sweep the series and to harden its favoritism for the World Cup later this year.

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner won the toss in his 100th T20 international and sent Australia in, mindful the rain might dictate terms later in the match. It did.

Australia's was interrupted three times by rain breaks and finally terminated after 10.4 overs when it was 118-4. New Zealand was set 126 to win in 10 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis system, which seemed a

relatively charitable target.

But New Zealand botched the run chase for the second time in three days at Eden Park, unable to conquer Australia's world class attack.

Under the revised rules for the 10-over innings, Australia was allowed five bowlers who could bowl two overs each with a three-over power play.

The young left-armer Spencer Johnson took 1-10 from his two overs, showing why he made \$1.4 million in the IPL auction earlier this year.

Nathan Ellis conceded only 11 from his two overs, Mitchell Starc only 15 and Adam Zampa took 1-20.

Ellis bowled four dot balls to New Zealand's biggest hitter, Glenn Phillips, in the fifth over and at the midpoint of its innings New Zealand was 51-2, needing 75 from the last 30 balls.

Australia's bowlers continued to bowl a tight line and length to frustrate the Black Caps batters and after Ellis bowled the ninth over for the cost of only 8 runs, New Zealand needed 43 off the last over to win.

The honor, or duty, of bowling the last over went to Matt Short who already had contributed for Australia, making 27 off 11 ball, batting at No. 3.

The first ball of the over went for six but the next three balls were singles, the fifth ball went for two and the last ball for a boundary as New Zealand fell hopelessly short. "I think I feel most comfortable when I'm playing shots," Short said. "It was a bit of a strange game because of the rain and being off and on. "The aggressive way is the way we want to play our T20." Credit also goes to wicketkeeper Matthew Wade who took over the captaincy from Mitch Marsh and led Australia with great tactical insight in tricky conditions.

"Our bowlers were unbelievable today the way they came out and executed," Wade said. "It's as clinical a bowling performance as I've seen from an Australian unit and for Matt Short to come out and bat the way he did is exciting for the future.

"We've got depth in our squad and everyone's enjoying their cricket."







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