



OPINION 6
THE BOYCOTT
AT DOHA

WORLD 8
NETANYAHU SEEKS OPEN-ENDED
CONTROL IN GAZA

MONEY 10
SHAREHOLDERS
VOTE TO OUST BYJU

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Lok Sabha poll dates likely after March 13



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission is expected to announce the dates for the Lok Sabha elections after March 13. As part of the ongoing preparations for the General Elections and concurrent Assembly polls in select States, the Chief Election Commissioner is currently engaged in successive visits to these regions.

States like Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim are gearing up for simultaneous Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls.

In 2014, the Election Commission announced the schedule for the nine-phased Lok Sabha elections on March 5, and the results were

declared on May 16. In 2019, the poll panel announced the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections on March 10, and the results were declared on May 23.

Sources indicate that senior officials of the Election Commission of India are actively engaged in regular meetings with the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of different States to address potential issues ahead of the elections. The focus is on practical challenges such as the transportation of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), the deployment of security personnel, and maintaining vigilance along state borders.

Also, sources mentioned that the Central Board of Secondary Examination

(CBSE) Class 10 board examination will end on March 13, freeing up many teachers and school buildings for election duties. A team from the EC is also expected to visit Jammu & Kashmir on March 13.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar will meet representatives from as many as nine political parties, including the Dravidian majors, to discuss issues regarding conducting the poll. He will hold a review meeting with the district collector and superintendents of police. The CEC will also meet with the CEOs of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala, as well as officials from enforcement agencies, before wrapping up his meetings with the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary and the State DGP.

Earlier, a team from the EC reviewed preparations with the Chief Electoral Officer of Bihar, the State police chief, and other agencies including Excise Department, DRI, ED, I-T, Forest Department, Postal Department, among others. During the meeting, the EC said that enforcement agencies have been instructed to take strict action against the use of money power during elections.

Modi envisions India in his 3rd term

RAMESH K SINGH ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi rallied supporters in Varanasi on Friday, outlining his vision for the prospective third term of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), promising a transformation that would propel India to become the world's third-largest economy.

Addressing an enthusiastic crowd at the Banas Dairy Complex, PM Modi pledged to secure all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, asserting that the NDA's return to power would elevate India's stature across economic, social, strategic, and cultural fronts.

Highlighting the strides made during his tenure, PM Modi emphasised India's ascent from the 11th to the 5th largest economy globally over the past decade, with ambitious plans to further climb the rankings in the next five years.

Amid applause, he launched a scathing attack on Opposition leaders, implicitly referencing Congress scion Rahul Gandhi's recent remarks targeting local youths. Modi condemned what he termed as "frustrated" leaders resorting to divisive tactics due to dwindling political fortunes, accusing them of peddling dynasty, appeasement, and caste-based politics.

Assuring accelerated developmental initiatives, PM Modi underscored the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being presented a memento by UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during dedication ceremony of Kashi Complex of Banas Dairy Plant in Varanasi on Friday. (Right) Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute to Sant Ravidas during his 647th birth anniversary celebrations



expansion of Digital India, infrastructure upgrades including modernised railway stations, and the introduction of transformative projects like Vande Bharat, Amrit Bharat, and Namo Bharat trains.

He pledged to harness the potential of eastern India, envisioning the region as a vital engine for national growth.

The unveiling of the first phase of the Varanasi-Aurangabad six-lane highway and plans for the Varanasi-

Ranchi-Kolkata Expressway underscored the government's commitment to bolster connectivity and regional development.

Reflecting on past promises fulfilled, Modi highlighted the success story of Banas Dairy as a beacon of job creation and economic prosperity. He announced plans to extend benefits to neighboring districts, unveiling initiatives aimed at fostering agricultural growth

and rural prosperity across Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Accompanied by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Minister Brijesh Pathak, and other dignitaries, PM Modi bestowed a slew of projects worth ₹13,202.07 crore upon Purvanchal, including Varanasi. From infrastructure to cultural initiatives, the Prime Minister's visit epitomised a blend of developmental zeal and strategic political messaging, resonating with the electorate ahead of the crucial state elections.

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister paid homage at the

Ravidas Temple, underlining the government's commitment to honour the legacy of Sant Ravidas and uplift marginalised communities.

The symbolic gesture, coupled with a focus on inclusive growth and empowerment, served to galvanise support while underscoring the administration's unwavering dedication to social justice.

In a culmination of his visit, PM Modi interacted with scholars at BHU, underscoring the importance of education and knowledge in India's journey towards prosperity.



Centre set to get the show on the road



four-lane highways is 16 per cent," he said, adding that the construction of four-lane and above roads now stands at two-and-a-half times the annual achievement of FY'14. Jain said the ministry is also confident of awarding highway projects worth ₹10,000 crore by March end.

The NH network increased by 60 percent from 91,287 km in 2014 to 1,46,145 km in the year 2023, government data showed. The length of four lanes and above NH increased by 2.5 times from 18,387 km in 2014 to 46,179 km in November 2023, the secretary said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) is set to achieve a record-breaking milestone with the construction of the highest-ever four-lane and access-controlled high-speed highways, reaching an ambitious road construction target of 13,000 km by the end of this fiscal year.

"In 2020-21, we witnessed the highest-ever road construction of 13,327 km compared to 4,260 km in 2013-14. As of January this year, we have already completed 7,600 km of roads, and we anticipate reaching a level of 12,800-13,000 km by the end of March," said Anurag Jain, Secretary of MoRTH, during a press conference on Friday.

The Ministry aims to construct between 12,000 km and 13,000 km of national highways in 2023-24, slightly below the target of 13,813 km. The ministry constructed 10,237 km of National Highways in the 2019-20 financial year, 13,327 km in 2020-21, 10,457 km in 2021-22, and 10,331 km in 2022-23. As of the end of January 2024, the ministry has completed the construction of 7,685 km.

"We are optimistic about completing 4,500-5,000 km in the remaining two months, which will help us achieve anywhere between 12,000 and 13,000 km in the current financial year. This will be the second-best achievement," Jain said. The Secretary said the current financial year will see the highest-ever construction of four-lane roads and the highest-ever speed or access-controlled highways, with capacity augmentation pegged at 9,500 km, which will be a record for the ministry.

"Up to January 2024, we have seen a 10 per cent year-on-year growth, while the increase in construction of

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HC clears way for regularisation of daily wage, ad hoc & contractual employees

PNS ■ NAINITAL

Disposing of the petition challenging the 2013 manual of the government for regularisation of employees, the Uttarakhand High Court has upheld the regularisation of daily wage, ad hoc and contractual employees regularised before December 4, 2018. As per the manual, the other daily wage or contractual employees will have to serve for 10 years before regularisation. The division bench of chief justice Ritu Bahri and justice Alok Verma gave this direction while hearing the petitions of Nainital district resident NS Bisht, Haldwani resident Himanshu Joshi and others. It is pertinent to mention here

that the High Court had stayed the implementation of the 2013 manual on December 4, 2018, ordering a stay on the regularisation of daily wage workers in government departments, corporations and other government bodies. The process of regularisation of such employees was on hold since then. According to the petitioners, their interests were being affected as employees were being regularised in government departments and other government bodies without any selection process. In line with Supreme Court directions in the Uma Devi versus Karnataka State, the State government made the employees

regularisation manual in 2011 under which it was decided that employees who had worked for 10 or more years on daily wage, ad hoc or contract basis would be regularised. However, such employees in the new departments formed after creation of Uttarakhand could not be brought under the ambit of this manual. The government issued a new manual in December 2013 under which such employees who had completed five or more years in service in December 2008 were eligible for regularisation. On the demand of various petitioners, the government amended the period to 10 years.

Journalist, author & poet Jaskiran Chopra no more

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Veteran journalist, author and poet Jaskiran Chopra breathed her last in Dehradun on Thursday night. According to her family members, she experienced discomfort on Thursday night and passed away due to cardiac arrest while being taken to the hospital. She was 57. A prolific writer, she had authored half a dozen books on subjects ranging from her memories of Dehradun as it was, collection of poetry and Hindi cinema to author Ruskin Bond. A regular contributor to The Pioneer where she had worked as a special correspondent, her fortnightly column 'Blank Verse' was appreciated for many years by readers of the Dehradun and



Chandigarh editions of this newspaper. She had last written a piece on Amrita Pritam's nazm 'Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu' which the poet had written in November 1947 while she was on a train from Dehradun to Delhi. She had been suffering from health issues related to diabetes for

some time but was looking forward to resuming sending articles more frequently to this newspaper. Having worked in and contributed articles to various prominent newspapers and a national news agency, she was also known for her love for Dehradun, art, culture and poetry. She had also taught mass communication students in Doon University for some years. Despite health issues in recent months, she continued to attend various literary and poetry events and gatherings. Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, members of the media fraternity, writers and prominent citizens have expressed deep grief at her demise.

Training session starts for preparation of Holi herbal colours

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A seven-day training session on the preparation of herbal colours ahead of Holi commenced on Friday. The training is being provided to several women of self help groups to prepare safe and environmentally friendly Holi colours that will also provide them employment opportunities. The Janaki Devi Educational Welfare Society is providing this seven-day training under the Entrepreneurship Development Programme of the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) in the Ram Colony of the city. The city mission manager of the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) Vijaypal Singh Negi inaugurated the event on Friday. The president of the body organising the event Kavita Chaturvedi said that the main objective of this training programme is to give the women here some skills and prepare at least 50 kilogrammes of herbal Holi colours in seven days. The women will have to attend the training every day to ensure they learn everything required to make herbal colours. Negi also said on the occasion that the Holi festival is around the corner and women can earn a livelihood by learning skills in this training with dedication and devotion.

Patanjali Gurukulam student wins medal in UP's boxing competition

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Class VIII student of Haridwar-based Patanjali Gurukulam, Urvashi bagged the bronze medal in the three-day Uttar Pradesh State women's boxing championship hosted by the Uttar Pradesh Boxing Association that commenced on February 20 in Bulandshahr. The school's office bearers further said that Urvashi had taken part in the



championship under the 43-46 kg weight sub-junior girls category and added that the school was going all-out to hone sporting skills in its students to enable them make their mark in national and international sports competitions.

Regular cycling good for health- Dhasmana

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The president of Swami Rama Himalayan University, Vijay Dhasmana flagged off a health awareness cycle rally from the university campus on Friday. The programme was organized by the National Medical Organization (NMO). The rally, with the theme 'Health Service to Nation Service' began at the Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences (HIMS) campus. Speaking on the occasion Dhasmana emphasized the benefits of cycling for health and praised the efforts of NMO in organizing the event. The rally aimed to raise awareness about health issues caused by lifestyle diseases.

Take effective action to check rising human-wildlife conflict: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has expressed serious concern at the continuing incidents of human-wildlife conflict in the State. He has directed the Forests secretary and the chief wildlife warden to prepare an effective work plan to check the rising incidents of attacks on people by tigers and leopards in different parts of the State. He said that the department must remain alert 24 hours in conflict affected areas. A quick response team of trained departmental personnel should be sent immediately to areas from where human-wildlife incidents are reported. He further instructed that solar fencing should be erected on the boundary between villages and jungles to prevent wild animals from venturing into human habitations. Dhami said that it has been seen that for some time now the Forest department is helpless in preventing human-wildlife conflict in different parts of the State. A long-term plan should be made considering this, in order to prevent such incidents. Trained veterinary officers should be posted 24 hours in areas affected by human-wildlife conflict. The CM said that the existing rescue centres are already packed with rescued leopards and tigers, leaving no space for other captured big cats. A work plan should be made without delay to tackle this problem, he said. It is pertinent to mention here that last month the CM had held an emergency meeting with senior officials and had directed the chief wildlife warden to contact the officials concerned of other States

regarding the possibility of shifting leopards and tigers from Uttarakhand's rescue centres to zoos and rescue centres in other States. With no progress having been made in this direction so far, Dhami once again directed officials to initiate action in this direction. He further said that in case of a human-wildlife conflict incident, the police and administration are responsible for the law and order at the local level. No negligence will be tolerated in such cases, he stressed. The CM also directed officials to prepare a scheme for 100 per cent facilitation of toilets and cooking gas connections in villages adjoining forests so that the people do not venture into the jungle. It is pertinent to mention here that there have been at least a dozen incidents of big cats attacking humans in different parts of the State in recent months. At least three women were killed by a tiger in the Dhela range of Corbett tiger reserve, after which a tiger was recently tranquilised and captured by the Forest department. Similarly, incidents of human-leopard conflict have also been on the rise in recent months in different parts of the State.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS PUBLIC NOTICE

I, BALA DEVI (existing name) M/o Army No. 16018143L HAV PRADEEP SINGH, Vill. - Lakhlan, Post-Lakhlan, Teh. - Rajgarh, Dist.-Churu, Rajasthan- 331023, do hereby declare that in my son's army record, my incorrect name BALA DEVI has been mentioned, whereas as per my Aadhar No. 809158605454 correct name is Rajbala.

I, DEVENDRA SINGH SEKHAWAT (Existing Name) F/o Army No-18007253M L/HAV VIPAN SINGH, Vill.- Umraw Singh Kapura, POST -Nunhata, Teh.- Bhind, Dist.-Bhind, M.P.-477001 do hereby declare that in my son's army record my incorrect name DEVENDRA SINGH SEKHAWAT has been mentioned whereas as per my Aadhar No 303593521666 correct name is DEVENDRA SINGH RAJAWAT.

In my Army records my mother's name is mistakenly recorded as JASHODA DEVI, DOB-01.07.1944 whereas my mother's correct name is KAMLA DEVI DOB-07.02.1938 as mentioned in other all documents. ARMY No.JC 342428M SUB SURENDRA SINGH R/O VILL. PALI P.O. JAKHETI PAURI GARHWAL UTTARAKHAND vide IN-UK 06800044475141W Affidavit 23.02.2024 before Dehradun.

I, No-4083078A. Hav Bhuwan Chandra. R/o Krishna Vihar. Smithnagar Akrishna Grant, Dehradun, Uttarakhand 248007 hereby declare that name of my son wrongly entered in my service records as Priyansu Devrari. Whereas his correct name is PRIYANSHU DEVRARI as per Aadhar Card & Educational Certificate.

In my Husband's service records my name is mistakenly recorded as SUMAN whereas my correct name is SUMAN DEVI as mentioned in all other documents. Army no 1476814W EX HAV MOHAN KUMAR R/O VIJAYPUR NAYA GAON GARHICANT DEHRADUN UTTARAKHAND vide IN-UK06767059470625W Affidavit 23.02.2024 before Dehradun.

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कुमाऊँ मण्डल विकास निगम लिमिटेड
(उत्तराखण्ड सरकार का प्रतिष्ठान)
ओक पार्क हाउस, नैनीताल-263001
पञ्चांक : 4799 / 10 - निर्माण / 23-24 दिनांक : 23.02.2024
अति अल्पकालीन ई-निविदा सूचना
ई-निविदा :-
1- जनपद चम्पावत के लोहाघाट में गैस गोदाम, बाउन्डीवाल, चौकीदार क्वार्टर इत्यादि का निर्माण कार्य।
(उपरोक्त ई-निविदा से सम्बन्धित सूचना दिनांक 26.02.24 से www.uktenders.gov.in से एवं निगम वेबसाईट www.kmvn.in में देखी जा सकती हैं। निविदा में किसी भी प्रकार का संशोधन निगम वेबसाईट www.kmvn.in के माध्यम से ही किया जायेगा।) **महाप्रबन्धक (नि०)**

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Corrigendum
Sub: Tender notice no: 299-DRM-MB-23-24 date 22.02.2024
The above noted tender is to be opened on 18.03.2024 In this tender name of work should be read as **Provision of combined 100 KLD sewage treatment plant/Effluent treatment plant at Divisional railway hospital/MB in the section of SSE/W/North colony/MB under ADEN/HQ/MB instead of Heavy Repair/ improvement of existing washing lines of MB depot, other terms and condition will remain same.**
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GRIHUM HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED
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REGISTERED OFFICE: 602, 6th FLOOR, ZERO ONE IT PARK, SR. NO. 79/1, GHORPADI, MUNDHWA ROAD, PUNE 411036

DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002

You the below mentioned Borrowers/ Co-borrowers /Guarantors have availed Home loans/Loans against Property facility (ies) by mortgaging your Immovable properties/ies from Grihum Housing Finance Limited (formerly known as Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited) as the name Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited changed to Grihum Housing Finance Limited with effect from 17 Nov 2023 (Previously known as Magma Housing Finance Limited and originally incorporated with name of GE Money Housing Finance Public Unlited Company) herein after referred as Secured Creditor. You defaulted in repayment and therefore, your loan/s was classified as Non-Performing Assets. A Demand Notice under Section 13(2) of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Asset and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 for the recovery of the outstanding dues sent on last known addresses however the same have returned un-served. Hence the contents of which are being published herewith as per Section 13(2) of the Act read with Rule 3(1) of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 as and by way of Alternate Service upon you.

Details of the Borrowers, Co-borrowers, Guarantors, Securities, Outstanding Dues, Demand Notice sent under Section 13(2) and Amount claimed there under are given as under

SR. NO.	NAME OF THE BORROWER, CO-BORROWER, GUARANTOR AND LOAN AMOUNT	DETAILS OF THE SECURED ASSET	DEMAND NOTICE DATE	AMOUNT DUE IN RS.
1.	RAVINDRA KUMARI LOAN AMOUNT: RS.825000/- LOAN NO: HF/0034/H/20/100502	All That Piece & Parcel Of Khata Khatauni No 00131 Khasra No 310 Mauza Danadalkhaund Pargana Parwadoon District Dehradun Pin 248001 Adm.33.45.Sq.Mtrs. Pin Code- 248001 Bounded By:- East:- Plot Of Other, West:- Plot Of Other, North:- 25ft Wd Road, South:- Plot Of Other.	07.02.2024	Rs.664671.42/- (Rupees Six Lakh Sixty Four Thousand Six Hundred Seventy One Paise Forty Two Only) together with further interest @ 15%p.a till repayment.
2.	VIRENDRA, DHARAMVEER, GULSHAN, SAPNA, JYOTI VIJ. PREM KUMAR LOAN AMOUNT: RS.800000/- LOAN NO: HM/0034/H/18/100294	All That Piece And Parcel Of Khata No.34 Khasra No. 97min, Situated At Mauzaadullapur, Pargana Pachhawa Doon, Tehsil Vikasnagar, Dehradun Adm. 160.3Sq.Mtrs. City Of-Dehradun, Near Sanatan Mandir, Kedarpuram, Uttarakhand-248001 East By:- Land Of Mr. Rijwan, West By :-15 Ft. Road, North By:-Land Of Mr. Prem Kumar, South By:- Land Of Mr. Mujibur Rehman.	07.02.2024	Rs.967692.72 (Rupees Nine Lakh Sixty Seven Thousand Six Hundred Ninety Two Paise Seventy Two Only) together with further interest @ 15%p.a till repayment.

You the Borrower/s and Co-Borrower/s/Guarantors are therefore called upon to make payment of the above-mentioned demanded amount with further interest as mentioned hereinabove in full within 60 Days of this Notice failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to take action under the act to enforce the above mentioned securities. Please Note that as per Section 13(13) of The Said Act, You are in the meanwhile, restrained from transferring the above-referred securities by way of sale, lease or otherwise without our consent.

PLACE: DEHRADUN
DATE: 24.02.2024

Authorized Office For Grihum Housing Finance Ltd
(Formerly Known As Poonawalla Housing Finance Ltd)

National Financial Reporting Authority
7th- 8th Floor, Hindustan Times House
18-20 K.G. Marg, New Delhi-110001

NFRA invites applications from officers/officials of All India or Central Civil Services/ officers of State Government & Union Territory Governments/officers of RBI/Public Sector Banks/Government Financial Institutions/Regulatory Bodies/Public Sector Undertakings/Autonomous and Statutory Bodies/Other Government Institutions/ Armed Forces, as applicable in terms of the respective Vacancy Circulars dated 22.01.2024, for appointment in NFRA on the following posts:

(i)	Executive Director -	01 post
(ii)	Personal/ General Assistant (Grade I) -	03 posts
(iii)	Personal/ General Assistant (Grade II) -	03 posts
(iv)	Personal/ General Assistant (Grade III) -	04 posts
(v)	Senior Private Secretary -	02 posts
(vi)	Private Secretary -	01 post
(vii)	Driver -	02 posts

on deputation or short-term contract basis or on deputation/re-employment, as may be applicable as per details given on its website : <https://nfra.gov.in>. Interested and eligible officers/officials may apply accordingly in stipulated format through proper channel on or before two months from date of publication of This advertisement in Employment News.

CBC 07122/12/0003/2324

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SERVICES CENTRES AUTHORITY
(Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India)

F.No.24/IFSCA/Vacancy notification/2020-2021

2nd and 3rd Floor, Pragya Tower, GIFT City, Gandhinagar Gujarat

February 20, 2024

International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) is a statutory unified regulatory body under the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India established by an Act of Parliament to develop and regulate the financial products, financial services and financial institutions located / performed in the International Financial Services Centres in India. The Authority invites applications from eligible Indian citizens for filling up of following posts on Deputation basis. The place of posting is GIFT City, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

S.N	Name of the Post	Stream	posts	Payscale
1.	Assistant General Manager (Officer Grade C)	Insurance Operations Human Resources Management Enforcement Finance and Accounts Investment funds Development Legal	01 01 01 01 01 01 01	Rs. 77950-2850(3)- 86500-3100(2)-92700- 3300(4)-105900-EB- 3300(2)-112500- 3550(1)-116050 (13 years)
3.	Total number of vacancies		07	

2. The candidates willing to apply for the above posts are requested to refer www.ifsca.gov.in for detailed vacancy notification, service benefits and the eligibility criteria in terms of age, qualification and experience etc., The last date for receipt of application along with requisite documents by post is 28.03.2024 by 6.00 PM.

General Manager
Dept. of General Administration

CBC 15228/12/0006/2324

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, DEHRADUN
Government of India, Ministry of Finance, Deptt. of Financial Services
2nd Floor, Paras Tower, Mazra, Saharanpur Road, Dehradun, UK-248171
BEFORE THE RECOVERY OFFICER-II, DRT, DEHRADUN

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE Date 06.02.2024

Public at large is hereby informed that under mentioned property will be sold by E-auction sale on **04.04.2024** in the under mentioned case for recovery of amount outstanding on "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS" and "AS IS WHATEVER BASIS" & prospective bidders may apply for auction till **01.04.2024 up to 4.00 P.M.**

Title of the Case & R.C. No.		Amount Recoverable
Uco Bank V/s Mohd. Amjad & Anr RC No. 326/2020	Rs. 21,82,394/- plus interest @ 8.85 % p.a. Simple interest yearly w.e.f. 14.06.2019 & other charges as per R.C. Drawn in O.A. No. 267/2019.	

Date of Auction: 04.04.2024 **Last Date for Bids: 01.04.2024 upto 04.00 P.M.**

Lot No.	Reserve Price	EMD amount	Bid Increase amount	Time of Auction
1	Rs. 25.00 Lacs	Rs. 2.50 Lacs	Rs. 1.00 Lacs	01:00 P.M to 02:00 P.M.

(With each extension of 5 minutes duration every time if a bid is placed in the last 5 minutes of the closing time or such extended time of auction.)

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTIES TO BE SOLD:

Lot No. 1. Residential Property bearing Khata no. 333/249, Khasra no. 606, admeasuring area 55.25 sq. mtr. situated at Mohalla Kitwara, Jwalapur, Haridwar, Uttarakhand in the name of Mrs. Yasmeen W/o Mr. Mohd. Amjad.

TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. The auction will be conducted by way of e-auction and bidding shall take place through "Online Electronic Bidding" through the website <https://drt.auctiontiger.net>. of M/s E-Procurement Technologies Ltd. (Auction Tiger) on 04.04.2024 between 01:00 P.M to 02:00 P.M. with extension of 5 minutes duration after 02:00 P.M. if required.

2. The Properties shall not be sold below the reserve price fixed here under:

(a) The interested bidders are required to deposit EMD along with documents PAN Card, Identity Proof, Address Proof etc., and in the case of company, copy of resolution passed by the Board Members of the Company or any other documents claiming representation/attorney of the company also, latest by 01.04.2024 before 4.00 PM in the office of the Recovery Officer, DRT, Dehradun and thereafter they shall be eligible to participate in the e-auction to be held from 01:00 P.M to 02:00 P.M. on 04.04.2024. In case, bid is placed in the last 5 minutes of the closing time of the auction, the closing time will automatically get extended for 5 minutes.

(b) The EMD shall be deposited by way of demand draft only favouring "Recovery Officer, Debts Recovery Tribunal, Dehradun", in the office of the Recovery officer, Debts Recovery Tribunal, Second Floor, Paras Tower, Saharanpur Road, Dehradun.

(c) The relevant details for participation in the process of the e-auction are furnished hereunder for the information of the prospective bidders/participants & general Public.

Name of the service provider : e-procurement technologies ltd.

Portal of service provider : <https://drt.auctiontiger.net>

Helpline numbers : +91-79-68136880/881837/842, 09265562821, 09265562818, 09265562819

Email ID of Service provider : support@auctiontiger.net

Portal of e-auction : <https://drt.auctiontiger.net>

For further detail contact: Office For The Recovery Officer, Debts Recovery Tribunal, Dehradun contact No. 0135-2974077 and for property inspection contact Mr. Rajeev Kumar, Senior Manager, UCO Bank Sadhu Bela Marg, Haridwar, Uttarakhand.

3. The amount by which the biddings are to be increased shall be Rs. 1,00,000/- in the event of any dispute arising as to the amount of bid, or as to the bidder, the lot shall at once be again put up to auction.

4. The unsuccessful bidder shall take EMD directly from the Office of Recovery Officer, DRT, Dehradun Immediately on closure of the e-auction sale proceeds.

5. The successful/highest bidder shall have to prepare Demand Draft/Pay Order for 25% of the bid/sale amount after adjusting the EMD, favouring "Recovery Officer, Debts Recovery Tribunal Dehradun or through NEFT/RTGS to Current Account No. 7360878086, Indian Bank, ISBT Dehradun Branch, Dehradun, IFSC Code- IDIB000D557" by next bank working day i.e., by 04:00 PM with this Tribunal failing which the EMD shall be forfeited.

6. The successful/highest bidder shall deposit through Demand Draft/Pay Order favouring "Recovery Officer, DRT, Dehradun" or through RTGS to Current Account No. 7360878086, Indian Bank, ISBT Dehradun Branch Dehradun IFSC Code- IDIB000D557", the balance 75% of the sale proceed before the recovery Officer, DRT, Dehradun on or before 15th day from the date of auction of the property, exclusive of such day or if the 15th day be Sunday or other holiday, then on the first office day after the 15th day along with poundage @ 2% up to Rs. 1,000/- and @ 1% on the excess of such gross amount over Rs. 1,000/- in favour of Registrar, DRT, Dehradun. (In case of deposit or balance amount of 75% through post, the same should reach the Recovery Officer as above).

7. In case of default of payment within the prescribed period, the property shall be re-sold, after the issue of fresh Proclamation of Sale. The deposit, after defraying the expenses of the sale, may, if the undersigned thinks fit be forfeited to the Government and the defaulting purchaser shall forfeit all claims to the property to any part of the sum for which it may subsequently be sold.

8. The highest bidder shall be declared to be the purchaser provided that the amount bid by him is not less than the reserve price. It shall be in the discretion of the undersigned to decline/acceptance of the highest bid when the price offered appears so clearly inadequate as to make it inadvisable to do so.

9. The property shall remain open for inspection by prospective bidder on any bank working day after 03:00 P.M. The Facilitation Officer, Mr. Rajeev Kumar, Senior Manager, UCO Bank Sadhu Bela Marg, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, will make necessary arrangement for inspection by the prospective bidders.

10. The property is being sold on "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS" and "AS IS WHATEVER" BASIS. The outstanding dues if any, of any authority on the property/Properties shall be borne by the auction purchaser/purchasers a part from bid amount.

11. There is no updated details of revenue/encumbrance or claim against the properties in the knowledge of undersigned at this stage. However, prospective bidders are advised to make their own due diligence w.r.t. dues of electricity/water/house tax bills or any other encumbrance etc., in their own interest, before deposit of EMD.

12. The successful bidder shall bear charge/fee for conveyance, registration fee, stamp duty, etc.

13. The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all offer(s) or adjourn/postpone the sale without assigning any reason thereof subject to the provisions of the Second Schedule to the Income Tax Act, 1961.

14. The sale shall be subject to confirmation by Recovery Officer-II, Debts Recovery Tribunal, Dehradun which can be cancelled for any reason or without assigning any reason.

15. The Recovery Officer is empowered to add any part or take out any part of the property from the auction proceedings at any stage.

16. The particulars specified in the annexed schedule have been stated to be correct to the information of the undersigned but the undersigned shall not be answerable for any error, mis-statement or omission in this proclamation.

Recovery Officer-II, DRT, Dehradun

Many companies setting up plants in Uttarakhand after investors summit: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has said that after the successful hosting of the global investors summit - 2023 many companies have set up their industrial units in the state. He said that one of the objectives of the summit was to create employment opportunities for the youth in the State. The CM was addressing a programme after inaugurating a new plant of the Dixon Technologies (India) Private Limited at Selaqui here on Friday. He said that Dixon is a leading company in the manufacturing of electronic equipment in the country. Dhami said that the company will create new employment opportunities in the State. The CM said that the youngsters are increasingly turning to self employment opportunities and are becoming employment givers.

The CM said that the State government is committed to fulfill the dreams of the youngsters and ensure justice to their talents. The CM averred that the State enacted stringent anti-copying law and took strict action against the culprits of the recruitment scams. He said that at present the process of recruitment to 7,000 posts is underway and soon recruitments to thousands of posts will start. Dhami said that the



State government is committed to provide employment and create self employment opportunities for the youth with the help of its special single window system. The government has also set up a foreign employment cell to provide employment opportunities outside the State. The CM informed that the State government is also creating a Rs 200 crore venture fund for promoting start-ups. This fund will help the young entrepreneurs. The CM skill development and global employment

schemes have been approved by the cabinet.

An application on the Apuni Sarkar portal has been developed to create a database for the youngsters interested in overseas employment.

The CM averred that the State government is undertaking every effort to increase employment in the State. He claimed that by providing employment to youngsters Uttarakhand will become a model for other States because

employment solves many problems.

The chairman of the Dixon Technologies (India) Limited Sunil Vachani said the factory is the fourth plant of the company in the State. Dixon has 23 factories in the country and it employs more than 27,000 employees.

MLA Sahdev Singh Pundir, Industry secretary Vinay Shankar Pandey and others were present on the occasion.

NSE's Project Gaurav to encourage research in higher education: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has said that the State government has undertaken many innovative measures for qualitative improvement in higher education in the State. He was speaking in a programme organised on the occasion of launching the Project Gaurav of National Stock Exchange (NSE) for skill development of the students and youth at his residence on Friday. The CM also distributed scholarships under the CM higher education research encouragement scheme on the occasion.

He said that these schemes will provide a new direction to higher education in the state and help in qualitative improvement of higher education. The CM said that even though Uttarakhand is a small State it encourages research by providing grants to the schol-



ars. He said that high quality research not only creates an identity for the scholar and the institution, it creates new opportunities for humanity. Research transcends the boundaries of states and countries and is helpful for the entire world. He said that an agreement was reached with the NSE during the Mumbai road show of the Global Investors Summit and it will now become a game changer. The CM said that a memorandum of understanding has

been signed with the NSE to give impetus to the initiative.

The MoU is a step in the direction of using opportunities in the banking and financial sectors. The CM opined that with the help of NSE Uttarakhand can convert its students engaged in higher studies into a human resource. The agreement with the NSE will also help in attaining in depth knowledge of the share market. The students will also get better knowledge of the

economy with which they will be able to get with the Project Gaurav of NSE.

Speaking on the occasion the Higher Education minister Dhan Singh Rawat said that Uttarakhand has undertaken many innovative steps in the field of higher education which are establishing the state as a model for others. He said that agreement with NSE

is an important step in the direction of proper usage of the opportunities in the banking and financial sector. In the programme the officers of the department informed that a sum of 3.66 crore has been sanctioned as grant to 44 research proposals under the CM higher education encouragement scheme and distribution of the research grant. The secretary higher education Shailesh Bagoli and CEO of NSE Ashish Chauhan also addressed the programme.

Rain and snowfall likely in mountain districts today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State meteorological centre has forecast that very light to light rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at isolated places in Uttarkashi, Chamoli and Pithoragarh districts today. Further, very light to light snowfall is likely at places situated at altitudes of 3,000 metres and above in these districts. The meteorological centre has also issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding the possibility of ground frost likely to occur at isolated places in the mountainous areas of the State. Apart from this, dry weather is likely to prevail in the remaining districts of the State on Saturday.

The provisional State capital Dehradun is likely to witness a mainly clear sky. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 23 degrees Celsius and seven degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

Meanwhile, the minimum temperatures dipped a few notches below normal in Dehradun and other parts of the State on Friday. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various places on Friday were 23.8 degrees Celsius and 6.5 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 25.3 degrees Celsius and 4.9 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 11.4 degrees Celsius and -0.7 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 13 degrees Celsius and 0.3 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.

The minimum temperature in Dehradun and Pantnagar was three degrees below normal while both the maximum and minimum temperatures were four degrees below normal in Mukteshwar. The maximum temperature was five degrees below normal while the minimum was six degrees below normal in New Tehri.

DM imposes section 144 from Feb 26

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district magistrate Sonika has imposed section 144 in a radius of 300 metres around the Vidhan Sabha building to maintain peace and order during the Assembly session starting from February 26. She said that section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) will remain in effect till the end of the Assembly session and violation of the order will be punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). As per the order, sharp-edged weapons like firearms, sticks, hockey sticks, swords or any other objects like stones or bricks that can be used for violence will not be allowed within a radius of 300 metres of the

Vidhan Sabha building till the end of the Assembly session. No person shall use any object made of firecrackers and gunpowder on the roads and crossroads in the said area. Activities like slogan shouting, use of loudspeakers and making provocative speeches that might disturb communal sentiments or mislead the public will be prohibited in the said area too. The gathering of more than four people will also remain prohibited till the end of the Assembly session. Violation of this order will be a punishable offence under section 188 of IPC as per the DM's order.

Budget should focus on increasing income sources: Joshi

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Former secretary of Uttarakhand Congress Mahesh Joshi has said that the state government should focus on increasing sources of income in the upcoming budget 2024-25. He said that the fiscal deficit is consistently increasing which is negatively affecting the economy of the State. Joshi opined that the tourist spots in the state should be upgraded for increasing income from tourism. Similarly, religious tourism also holds potential for the State. The Congress leader said that the work on hydropower generation should be done to fulfill the potential in the field and make the State a 'power State'. He said that the agriculture and horticulture sectors should be promoted and the budget should have provision for increasing self employment opportunities for women.

Police start investigating NGO for allegedly funding Haldwani riot

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Nainital police on Friday issued a notice identifying the role of an NGO in funding the Vanbhulpura violence in Haldwani. The NGO was allegedly involved in funding the violence in Vanbhulpura on February 8 that occurred over the demolition of illegally built Madarsa and resulted in the death of seven people and injured over 100 persons. A video went viral in the past two days in which a young man who is allegedly associated with the said NGO is distributing money among people. People speculated on social media that the location shown in the video is Vanbhulpura. Considering the notice issued by the police on Friday, it appears that the police also suspect the connection of the said NGO with the violence. The police's notice states that a video is being circulated on social media platforms in which a youth can be seen purportedly distributing money to the people in the Vanbhulpura area. Police are investigating in

this regard. It further stated that the police have provided information related to the NGO's account number, registration number and PAN number to the Income Tax department and other agencies concerned. The departments concerned are taking necessary action in this regard. Besides this, the notice stated that the police are also identifying those donating to the NGO named Hyderabad Youth Courage. The police have started to seize the account and registration number of the said NGO. The police will also take action against those taking money illegally, supporting rioters, distorting facts and posting misleading facts on social media platforms. The police appealed to everyone to not donate any money to such NGOs. The officials said that all claims are being investigated with the help of the departments concerned. The police are gathering the evidence and will take further action accordingly, they added.

Education department to merge low enrollment girls schools with GICs

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State government has decided to merge such Government Inter College (GIC) and Government Girls Inter College (GGIC) where the student enrolment is less. A decision in this regard was taken in a meeting of the officers of the Education department chaired by the minister Dhan Singh Rawat on Friday. The minister said that the proposals for merger of many GICs and GGICs from different districts have been received by the department. He said that GICs and GGICs with less student enrollment will be merged. Rawat added that the opinion of the teachers will also be taken on the issue of merger of the cadre of the teachers of the GICs and GGICs.

The minister also directed that the service regulations of the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) should be revised and made as per the standards of the government of India. On a stern note the minister direct-

ed that the teachers deployed in the DIETs should be sent back to their original schools so that the studies are not affected there. Rawat directed that the textbooks should be dispatched to the schools before the start of the new academic session and said that the officers should prepare a plan for this. The plan of distribution of the textbooks should also be monitored properly.

In the meeting the minister also gave orders for strengthening facilities in the primary, upper primary and middle schools. He said that vocational courses should commence in 100 schools and ordered that smart and virtual classes should start without delay in the schools.

The meeting was attended by Education secretary Ravinath Raman, director general of Education Banshidhar Tiwari, additional secretary Ranjana Rajguru, director of Primary Education RK Uniyal and others.

Police to install CCTV cameras in 43 locations for interstate and border checks during LS elections

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand police will install CCTV cameras in 43 locations for interstate and border security checking ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the additional director general of police (Crime, Law and Order) and the State police nodal officer for the election, AP Anshuman said. He informed that there are 97 vulnerable locations in border areas of the State out of which, 54 locations have CCTV cameras installed.

These cameras will soon be installed in the remaining locations. Besides this, the police will also demand 1,800 mobile sets and 900 walkie-talkies from the administration to ensure proper and continuous communication during elections, especially in remote areas with mobile phone network issues. He informed that the police have also started making postal ballot arrangements for police personnel deployed on duty during the elections. "We encourage each police personnel to vote despite being on duty. Over 18,000 police personnel of the State are currently expected to be deployed on election duty. We have made postal ballots for about 14,000 personnel and the remaining will be completed soon," he added.

The ADG said that each district police will soon start the seizure programme to seize illegal weapons that can become potential threats during elections and cause disruption in law and order. Besides this, the deposition process of weapons by arms license holders will also commence soon in all districts to hold a peaceful election.

He informed that there are about 5,000 arms license holders across the State as per the current data most of which belong to plain districts.

Besides this, the police are also conducting a drive to arrest all accused with a reward on their head. The police are continuously working to nab culprits smuggling illegal liquor. The intensity of arrests is expected to increase after the Flying Squad Team (FST) becomes active in each district after the announcement of election dates.

It will carry out drone surveillance to monitor such activities that will be

banned after the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct, ADG said. The police will also seek about 25,000 personnel from the central government to hold peaceful elections. "We may or may not get less than the said numbers of personnel as other States must have demanded the same too. However, the State police are ready and are taking all possible measures to ensure safe and peaceful elections," he added.



Govt. of India, Dept. of Space
Indian Space Research Organisation
Indian Institute of Remote Sensing
Construction & Maintenance Division
4, Kalidas Road, PB No. 135, Dehradun- 248001

e-Tender Notice Date : 22.02.2024

On the behalf of the President of India, on-line item rate tenders are invited for the following work.

Sl. No.	Nature of Work	Approx. Cost (in ₹)	Period during which the tender document can be Purchased	Last date for BID submission
1.	NIT No. : IIRS/CMD/33/2023-24 Construction of Random Rubble Masonry wall under the execution of Slope Protection works at North Eastern Slope at IIRS Campus Dehradun.	24,95,000	From 1800 Hrs. on 26.02.2024 to 2300 Hrs. on 10.03.2024	13.03.2024 upto 1430 Hrs.

Detailed NIT, eligibility criteria, EMD and bidding document etc., can be viewed/purchased from www.tenderwizard.in/ISRO portal. All amendments, time extension, clarifications etc., will be uploaded on website and will not be published in newspapers. Bidders should regularly visit website to keep themselves updated. The Hindi version of the e-Tender Notice is available on the website www.iirs.gov.in.

Dy. Head, Construction & Maintenance Division



Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005


Whereas
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Uttaranchal Packaging Pvt Ltd/ Puran Chand Bhatt/ Harish Bhatt/ Bhagwati Puran Chand Bhatt/ Rajendra Prasad Bhatt/ 053305003840/ 053355000031	Address 1: Plot No.36 Sector 7 Khasra No. 411 (IE Pantnagar Village Kalyanpur District Udham Singh Nagar) Udham Singh Nagar, Address 2: Flat No.005, Ground Floor, Ganges Tower, Block C Omaxe Riviera, Pant Nagar, Plot No. B, Intergrated Industrial Estate, Pantnagar, Comprising of Khasra Nos.75, 76, 77/1, 77/2, 83/1/2, 84/1/2, 85/1/2, 94/1/1, Village Bhura Rani, Tehsil Rudrapur, District Udham Singh Nagar Udham Singh Nagar/ February 21, 2024	August 18, 2023 Rs. 1,86,47,569.00/-	Udham Singh Nagar

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: February 23, 2024
Place: Udham Singh Nagar

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited



POSESSION NOTICE [SECTION 13(4)] (For Immovable property)

Clement Town, Dehradun (2444)

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the Canara Bank Scholars Home Branch under Securitization And Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (Act 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued a Demand Notice dated 15.12.2023 calling upon the borrower

Sl No	Branch & Name of the Borrower/ Guarantor	Date of Demand & Possession Notice	Liabilities	Description of Immovable Property
1.	Branch : Clement Town Borrower : M/s- Wellness Wings Pvt. Ltd., 3rd 01 Shivangi Complex Majra Road, Near Punjab and Sindh Bank, Majra, Dehradun Uttarakhand- 248001, Director/Borrower- Smt. Laxmi Aggarwal W/o Sh. Ravi Gupta, Address 1: House No. 197, Dharampur, Dehradun Uttarakhand- 248001, Address 2: Gali No. 5 Pawan Vihar, Near Jain Degree College, Malikpur Road, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, Shri Ravi Gupta (Director)/Guarantor/Mortgagor, S/o- Shri Anand Kumar Gupta, Address 1: House No. 197, Dharampur, Dehradun Uttarakhand- 248001, Address 2: Gali No. 5 Pawan Vihar, Near Jain Degree College, Malikpur Road, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh.	Date of Demand Notice 15.12.2023 Date of Possession Notice 20.02.2024	Rs. 26,44,733.56 + Future Interest w.e.f. 01.12.2023 + Expenses Recoveries on/after 15.12.2023 A/c Nos. 2444261010235, 2444755000005 and 170002030894	Name of the title holder: Shri Ravi Kumar Gupta RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY : EMT of all Residential Land Khat Khatauni No. 175 (Fasli 1399 to 1404) bearing Khasra No. 162 measuring area 96.65 Sq.mtr. situated at Mauza Arkedia Grant Pargana Central Doon, Dehradun. BOUNDARIES:- East-Land of others, S.M. 52 feet, West- Property of Shri Arun Gupta, S.M. 20 feet, North-25 feet wide Road, S.M. 20 feet, South- Land of others, S.M. 20 feet

Date: 23.02.2024 **Place : Dehradun** **AUTHORIZED OFFICER, CANARA BANK**

Jaishankar cautions against China mind games

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

As tension persists at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) for the last three years, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday here cautioned against Beijing's "mind game" to restrict India-China issues under the bilateral framework and said New Delhi must not forgo its rights to harness other factors in the world to get better terms on an "equilibrium" in the relations. He said arriving at an equilibrium and maintaining it is going to be one of the "biggest challenges" for India-China ties even as he asserted that the immediate issue at hand was Beijing's departure from laid down norms triggering the border row in eastern Ladakh. Making this point in an interactive session at the Raisina Dialogue, Jaishankar cautioned against China's "mind game" to restrict the issues



under the bilateral framework and said India must not forgo its rights to harness other factors in the world to get better terms on an equilibrium. On the economic front, the external affairs minister said there would be a period when the Chinese economy will be flattening out and India will be growing and referred to projections by Goldman Sachs that suggested that by 2075, both countries could end up as USD 50 trillion plus economies. Jaishankar said India should be confident enough to "leverage" the

international system to create the "best possible outcome". His remarks came when asked whether there would be a settling point between China and India and would the two countries finally find an equilibrium or a balance in their frosty relations. "Here is the immediate issue which is: From the late 1980s, we had an understanding on the border precisely because it suited both of us. Now there was a departure after almost 30 years. A departure on their side in terms of how they behaved on the border. And there was a pushback

from our side," he said. "I think arriving at an equilibrium, then maintaining those and refreshing those is going to be one of the biggest challenges for both countries. It is not going to be easy," he noted. The external affairs minister said "mind games" will be played which would be that it is "just between the two of us". "The other 190 odd countries do not exist in our relationship. That will be the mind game which will be played. I do not think we should play it," he said. "Because if there are other factors out there in the world which can be harnessed by me to get better terms on an equilibrium, then why should I forgo that right," he said. "Today, when I say think through your own solution, do not give another country, which is clearly a competitive country, a veto over our policy choices. Unfortunately, in the past that has happened from time-to-time," he said.

Talking about the two economies, Jaishankar said the Chinese started off "earlier and much more intensively and robustly" than India did. "But it is in the nature of things that at some stage everybody flattens out. So there will be a period when they will be flattening out and we will be growing," he said. "I am not in denial of what the numbers today suggest. But if one looks for an example in Goldman Sachs predictions which is that we will both really by around 2075 end up as USD 50 trillion plus economies and will be the two closest to each other," he said. "The international version of that issue will be -- if both of us are moving vis-a-vis each other and vis-a-vis the world, how do we construct an equilibrium; that There will be occasions when one or the other would want to do something to press home a particular advantage and the other would resist it," he said.

President, PM condole demise of Manohar Joshi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI



President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Friday condoled the death of former Maharashtra Chief Minister Manohar Joshi. He was also Lok Sabha Speaker from 2002 to 2004. In her condolence message, President Murmu said Joshi endeared himself to people and was loved by leaders cutting across party lines. "Sad to learn about the demise of Shri Manohar Joshi, a veteran leader who had served as Lok Sabha speaker and Maharashtra chief minister. In his long public life, Shri Joshi endeared himself to people, earned admiration for his sharp wit and intellect and was loved by leaders cutting across party-line. My heartfelt condolences to his family members and fol-

worthy contributions as a Union Minister." During his tenure as the Lok Sabha speaker, Modi said, Joshi strove to make parliamentary processes more vibrant and participative. "Manohar Joshi Ji will also be remembered for his diligence as a legislator, having had the honour of serving in all four legislatures. Condolences to his family and supporters. Om Shanti," he said. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said Joshi established the best parliamentary traditions during his tenure as Speaker. "I express my condolences on the demise of former Lok Sabha Speaker and senior politician Shri Manohar Joshi. Enriching democratic values, he established the best parliamentary traditions," Birla said on X. Due to his distinctive and fair style of running the House, he had the respect of leaders of all parties, Birla recalled.

Talking for early discharge of Indians working as Russian Army support staff, says MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Amid reports that some Indians are working as support staff for Russian forces in the ongoing Ukraine conflict zone, India on Friday said it was in touch with Moscow for early "discharge" of Indians working as support staff to the Russian Army, and urged its nationals to stay away from the conflict zone in Ukraine. The comments by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal came following a report that some Indians are working as support staff to the Russian Army in the conflict zone. "We are aware that a few Indian nationals have signed up for support jobs with the Russian Army," Jaiswal said. He said the Indian embassy in Moscow has regularly taken up this matter with the relevant Russian authorities for their "early discharge".

"We urge all Indian nationals to exercise due caution and stay away from this conflict," he said. This reaction came after reports indicated that dozens of Indians were allegedly duped into military service in Russia. The unsuspecting Indians were promised support jobs but were ultimately enlisted in the Russian army, receiving misleading translations of documents and undergoing military training against their initial understanding. "We are aware that a few Indian nationals have signed up for support jobs with the Russian army. The Indian Embassy has regularly taken up this matter with the relevant Russian authorities for their early discharge. We urge all Indian nationals to exercise due caution and stay away from this conflict," said Jaiswal. The family of one of the men, Sufiyan from Hyderabad, along with All India Majlis-E-

Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Asaduddin Owaisi, on Wednesday sought the intervention of the Centre and the External Affairs ministry to secure the safe evacuation of the trapped Indian nationals and take stringent action against the fraudulent agents responsible. Imran, Sufiyan's brother, revealed the deceptive tactics employed by agents associated with Faisal Khan, who runs a YouTube channel named 'Baba Vlogs'. The unsuspecting men were allegedly promised support jobs but were ultimately enlisted in the Russian army. With nine Indian men reportedly within the Ukrainian borders, facing danger and injuries, the distressed families seek help from the Centre. Owaisi formally wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, seeking intervention to bring back the affected Indians.

Russia a power with enormous tradition of Statecraft: Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Russia is a power with an enormous tradition of statecraft and it is turning more towards Asia or non-West parts of the world, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Friday, delving into current geopolitical developments and their fall-outs. Jaishankar's comments came days after he said India has had a "stable" and "very friendly" relationship with Russia, and that Moscow never hurt New Delhi's interests. In an interactive session at the Raisina Dialogue here on Friday, Jaishankar, replying to a question on Moscow's growing proximity with Beijing, said it makes sense to give Russia multiple options and that railroading it into a single option and criticising it for that would be like a self-fulfilling



prophecy. "I think it makes sense to give Russia multiple options. If we railroad Russia into a single option and say that's really bad because that's the outcome, then you are making it a self-fulfilling prophecy," he said. "Today it is important for other countries, especially in Asia to engage Russia," Jaishankar said. "Russia is a power with an enormous tradition of state-

craft. Such powers would never put themselves into a single relationship of an overwhelming nature. It would go against their grain," he said. The external affairs minister was asked to comment on intensification of ties between Russia and China and whether India was uncomfortable with it. "What's happened today with Russia essentially is that a lot of doors have been shut to Russia and the West. We know

the reasons why. Russia is turning more to Asia or to parts of the world which are not West," he said. The external affairs minister suggested that policies of the West are bringing Russia and China closer. "It's kind of funny -- on the one hand you have people who set policies (and) bring the two together and then you say beware of them coming together," he said. Jaishankar's comments came days after he said India has had a "stable" and "very friendly" relationship with Russia, and that Moscow never hurt New Delhi's interests. The ties between India and Russia remained strong notwithstanding the ongoing Ukraine conflict. India's import of Russian crude oil has gone up significantly despite increasing disquiet over it in many Western countries. In his remarks, Jaishankar also

highlighted India's G20 presidency and how it ensured induction of the African Union as a permanent member of the grouping. He noted that if the G20 could be expanded, the permanent membership of the UN Security Council can also be increased. "When the sort of smoke clears and people look back on this G20, it will surely be recognised for the fact that the African Union's membership was agreed upon," he said. The external affairs minister also highlighted India's foreign policy priorities including combating terrorism and attempting to ensure inclusive global welfare. It could be millets, it could be yoga, it could be solar energy, it could be combating terrorism, it could be black money. You today see an India, which is really pushing and trying to get itself and its ideas on the global stage, he said.

Modi to inaugurate world largest grain storage plan in cooperative sector pilot project today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Aligning with the Centre's vision of "Sahakar se Samridhi," Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday will inaugurate "World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector" pilot project at 11 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) across 11 states at an event here, a move aimed to fortify food security and fostering economic development in the country. Additionally, the Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for 500 more PACS nationwide for construction of godowns and other agri infrastructure such as warehouses, custom hiring centers, PUs, and fair price shops among others under the mega grain storage scheme. The aim is to ensure farmers



get modern grain storage facilities at the block level through PACS, which will strengthen food security, and empower the farmers by enabling them to realize better crop prices. The monumental project which has been approved with a financial outlay of more than Rs 2,500 crore, is supported by NABARD and

spearheaded by the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), an autonomous financial institution for cooperatives in the country. The scheme is being implemented through convergence of various existing schemes like the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), Agriculture Marketing

Infrastructure (AMI), etc. to enable PACS participating in the project to avail subsidies and interest subvention benefits for undertaking infrastructure development, the statement said. NABARD has developed the National Level Common Software for this project, tailored to meet the diverse needs of PACS across the country. Onboarding of 18,000 PACS on ERP software has been completed, marking a significant milestone in the project's implementation, according to the statement. A senior official from the Ministry said that over the next five years, India is poised to enhance its storage capacity to 215 million tonnes with the establishment of a widespread network of grain storage facilities at the PACS level. Currently, India's storage capacity stands at 145 mil-

lion tonnes, despite an annual food grain output exceeding 300 million tonnes. This shortfall in storage infrastructure leads to significant food grain losses each year due to inadequate storage facilities. At the same time, modernizing PACS through comprehensive computerization will foster multipurpose PACS, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and retail outlets. Already, a trial run of the ERP software has commenced in 15,783 PACS spanning 27 States and Union Territories (UTs), marking a significant milestone in the project's implementation. This trial phase serves to assess the functionality and effectiveness of the software in real-world settings, paving the way for its full-scale deployment.

Nation must become industrially strong, self reliant in aerospace: IAF Deputy Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI



Air Force and representatives of various leading defence industry firms. "Every nation wants to become self-reliant, 'atmanirbhar'. And we are seeing that... After these two wars happening around us in the world, it is becoming more and more important," Air Marshal Dixit said. His remarks come in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel-Hamas conflict. He emphasised the need for

'atmanirbharta' in the IAF and the challenges that the force faces at present as it forges ahead. "We have to become industrially strong, full spectrum self-sufficiency is required in defence, especially in the aerospace sector," the deputy chief of the air staff said. He also shared a historical aspect of manufacturing of IAF aircraft in India in the 1950s and the force's journey in the realm in the decades that followed. "Today, the situation has become such that if a user doesn't come forward and drive this whole gamut of 'atmanirbharta', I don't think it is going to be successful," he added. Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM) and air force think-tank Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) are also co-organisers of the event.

India, Oman agree to cooperate in field of archives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India and Oman have "agreed to cooperate" in the field of archives during a visit by a delegation of the National Archives of India to the Gulf country on February 21-22, the Culture Ministry said on Friday. In a statement, the ministry said the members of the Indian delegation, led by NAI Director General Arun Singhal, were shown around various sections and divisions of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) of Oman. In bilateral discussions with NRAA chairman Hamad Mohammed Al-Dhawayani, Singhal dwelt upon the historical ties between India and Oman and informed him about the existence of a large number of records pertaining to Oman in the NAI as well as in other



repositories of India, NAI officials said. As a gesture of goodwill, Singhal handed over "a list of 70 select documents pertaining to Oman" that are available in the NAI in Delhi. These documents cover a period from 1793 to 1953 and deal with a wide range of subjects, they said. Also, 523 pages of copies of records were handed over to the NRAA chairman, covering several important subjects such as "change of Omani Flag from

red to white (1868); succession of Sayyid Faisal bin Turki as ruler of Oman after the death of Sultan Sayyid Turki (1888); official visit of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman to the Viceroy in India (1937); and the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between the Republic of India and the Sultan of Muscat and Oman signed on the 15th March 1953 at Muscat (English, Hindi and Arabic versions)," the statement said.

Scientists engineer synthetic human antibody to neutralise deadly neurotoxin in snake venom

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking development having potential to significantly benefit India which is grappling with a high number of snakebite cases, scientists have engineered a synthetic human antibody capable of neutralising a deadly neurotoxin found in the venom of over 200 dangerous snake species worldwide. This achievement, published in the journal Science Translational Medicine, marks the first application of a strategy previously used for screening antibodies against HIV and COVID-19 to create a venom-neutralizing antibody for snakebite treatment. Senji Laxme, a PhD student at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru, emphasized the novelty of this approach, which was conducted in collaboration with scien-



tists from the US-based Scripps Research Institute. The goal is to develop a universal antibody solution that can provide broad protection against venom from various deadly snakes, including cobras, king cobras, kraits, and black mambas. Snake venom, a potent mixture of compounds targeting nerve cells and tissues, causes thousands of deaths annually and disables many more world-

wide. Traditional treatment methods, such as antivenom sourced from animals injected with venom, face challenges due to variations in venom compositions and adverse immune reactions. India bears the brunt of snakebite incidents, with an annual average of 58,000 fatalities, comprising over half of the global total of 81,000-138,000 deaths. Kartik

Sunagar, Associate Professor at IISc and joint corresponding author of the study, highlighted the limitations of current antivenom production methods, which involve injecting snake venom into equines and collecting antibodies from their blood. However, this process yields antibodies against microorganisms, which are not therapeutically relevant, with less than 10 percent of antivenom vials comprising antibodies targeted towards snake venom toxins. However, the synthetic antibody developed by the research team targets a conserved region in the core of a major toxin called the three-finger toxin (3FTx) present in elapid venom. Despite variations among 3FTxs produced by different elapid species, the antibody strongly binds to various 3FTxs. Extensive testing identified an

antibody capable of binding strongly to various 3FTxs, including those from the Taiwanese banded krait, monocol cobra from Eastern India, and black mamba from sub-Saharan Africa. Animal experiments demonstrated the efficacy of the synthetic antibody, with mice injected with the toxin-antibody mixture surviving beyond the 24-hour observation window and appearing completely healthy. In India, Karnataka government has become the first state to declare snakebite a notifiable disease across all its 31 district health facilities in the wake of increased incidents of snakebite in the State. The World Health Organization (WHO) designated snakebite as a neglected tropical disease in 2017 and set a goal to reduce its global impact by 50 percent by 2030.

Modi to inaugurate Gujarat first AIIMS in Rajkot on February 25

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate Gujarat's first All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Rajkot on February 25, State Health Minister Rushikesh Patel said on Friday. This will be one of the five AIIMS to be dedicated to the nation by the prime minister from Rajkot on February 25, the minister said.

While the out-patient department (OPD) of the super-speciality hospital near Para Pipaliya village on the outskirts of Rajkot city is already operational, Modi will inaugurate the in-patient department (IPD), Patel told reporters in Gandhinagar. Modi laid the foundation stone



for Rajkot AIIMS through video-conferencing in December 2020.

“Spread across 201 acres, Rajkot AIIMS is a world-class hospital with 720 beds, including ICU and super-speciality beds. On February 25, the prime minister will

patients so far.

As per a government release, the prime minister will arrive at Rajkot AIIMS on Sunday afternoon and address a rally at the Race Course ground in the city later in the evening. He will take part in a kilometre-long roadshow from the old airport to the venue of the public rally, it stated.

During the function, the prime minister will also virtually inaugurate four other newly-built AIIMS, located in Mangalagiri (Andhra Pradesh), Bathinda (Punjab), Rae Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), and Kalyani (West Bengal), Patel said.

The five super-speciality hospitals, including the one in Rajkot, have been built by the Centre at a cost of Rs 6,300 crore, he said.

Apart from this, Modi will inaugurate and perform ground-breaking for projects of Rs 48,000 crore of different state and Central departments, such as NHAI, Railways, Energy and Petrochemicals, Road and Building, Ports and Health and Family Welfare, the minister said.

Of these, projects of Rs 35,700 crore are for Gujarat, while the remaining are for other states, he said.

The prime minister will launch key projects, including power generation projects in Kutch, ground-breaking for the new Mundra Panipat crude-oil pipeline project, new cardiology hospital in Vadodara and doubling of the Rajkot-Surendranagar railway line, among others, Patel said.

In a first, Assam Assembly conducts ballot voting on resolution

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

For the first time in its history, the Assam Assembly on Friday witnessed voting with ballot paper while deciding the fate of a private member's resolution brought in by Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi.

The resolution on irrigation system was rejected by just nine votes.

Out of 77 MLAs in the BJP-led alliance, the government garnered 39 votes. On the other hand, 30 votes were polled in favour of the resolution from 47 opposition MLAs, including five Congress members with allegiance to the government.

Earlier, the resolution was put to voice vote and Speaker Biswajit Daimary said the resolution was rejected.

Gogoi and other opposition members, including Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia, however, claimed that the ruling party did not have the numbers during the voice vote and demanded proper voting.

Daimary then adjourned the House for 10 minutes, saying that voting would take place and the Assembly Secretariat would require time to prepare for the polling on the resolution.

However, the House resumed after 30 minutes. During this half-an-hour, BJP MLA Diganta Kalita was seen doing a headcount of the ruling side on a piece of paper. Gogoi was also seen going to almost every member with folded hands.

As soon as the House met, the Speaker again conducted a voice vote with a higher number of treasury bench MLAs this time and announced rejection of the resolution.

However, the entire opposition



protested this and said that Daimary had already announced a vote and the decision should not be altered. The Speaker then accepted their demand, ordered locking of the House doors and asked Assembly Principal Secretary Hemen Das to conduct the poll. Das then explained the process to the legislators.

Accordingly, the House staff distributed ballot slips to every member, who ticked in their choices and deposited the same in the ballot box. Deputy Leader of Congress Legislature Party Rakibul Hussain appealed to the Speaker to allow the Chief Whip of the parties to see the votes of their MLAs according to the Anti-Defection Law.

Immediately after this, Congress MLAs Kamalaksha Dey Purkayastha and Basanta Das, who recently announced to “support the government” without leaving the grand old party, silently walked out of the House while the voting was undergoing. The Principal Secretary and his colleagues counted the votes on his table inside the House and submitted the result to the Speaker.

“As per the result sheet, ayes received 30 votes, nays got 39 and there was zero abstain. As nays received higher votes, the resolution is rejected,” Daimary said.

The resolution sought to make Assam a 12-month cultivating state by supplying water to the fields at all times. When contacted, three retired principal secretaries of the Assam Assembly told PTI that neither government nor private resolutions have gone to the extent of ballot voting while deciding their acceptance or rejection.

“In most of the cases, it is decided by a simple voice vote. On some rare occasions, some resolutions have seen raising of hands by the members while deciding their fates. However, ballot voting never took place in case of rejection of a resolution,” a former principal secretary said. Officially, the BJP's strength in the 126-member Assam Assembly is 61, while its allies UPPL has seven MLAs and AGP has nine.

In the opposition camp, the Congress' strength is 27, AIUDF has 15 members, BPF has three and CPI(M) has one MLA. There is one Independent legislator also.

LS campaign message should convey DMK regime protects all: Stalin

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Friday said the party's Lok Sabha campaign theme should be simple and easy-to-understand, conveying to the people that the DMK regime protected all the people, and that this should be articulated through the achievements of the government.

Stalin, also the president of the ruling DMK, exuded confidence that his party and allies would emerge victorious in all the 39 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state and also in the lone segment in neighbouring Puducherry. Addressing DMK's district secretaries and constituency observers virtually, Stalin said the party's election related work is going on in a fast-paced manner.

The Parliamentary constituency-wise meetings, titled 'Stalin's voice to retrieve rights', have been a big success, he said, and lauded office-bearers for their work. Stalin urged party functionaries to conduct the poll campaign in a simple manner after understanding every single scheme of the state government.

“The campaign should be in an easy-to-understand fashion, letting people understand that it is our (state) government that is protecting all members of a family,” he said.

The reference is to a string of welfare schemes including the fare-free bus travel for women and the achievements made by the DMK regime which Stalin said should be articulated in the campaign.



The Chief Minister has often said that every person has been benefited in one way or the other by way of the DMK regime's welfare initiatives.

“In the 39 constituencies in Tamil Nadu and in the lone segment of Puducherry, only we are going to win and there is not even an iota of doubt about it. That victory must be on a grand scale,” he said.

The meet decided to launch from February 26, the party's door-to-door poll campaign 'Stalin's voice in every household' (Illanthorum Stalinin Kural).

Party workers will visit every house to trounce the BJP and the AIADMK, which has an 'indirect alliance' with the saffron party and ensure that the party chief Stalin's voice is heard in Delhi, a resolution said.

The focus area of the campaign will be the achievements of the Dravidian model of governance in three years (2021-24), the highlights of the Tamil Nadu budget 2024-25 and the BJP-led Centre's 'injustice' to Tamil Nadu, the Tamil language and the Tamil people.

Lok Sabha preparations: Amit Shah to visit MP tomorrow

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah will visit Madhya Pradesh on Sunday to review the party's preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, a functionary said.

He will visit Gwalior and interact with more than 400 leaders and workers from Morena, Bhind, Guna and Gwalior Lok Sabha seats, MP BJP media chief Ashish Agrawal told PTI on Friday.

At 3pm, he will address a public meeting in Khajuraho, where the Samajwadi Party will field its candidate as part of the agreement in the



Congress-led opposition bloc INDIA.

In the evening, Shah will interact in Bhopal with prominent citizens and experts as well as families that have benefited from schemes of the state and Union governments.

Party functionaries said Shah's visit will concentrate on ensuring the BJP wins all 29

seats from MP, and also work on the plan to get at least 370 votes more per booth in the 2024 polls when compared to the last general elections.

In the 2019 polls, the BJP won 28 seats, while the Congress emerged victorious in Chhindwara, a stronghold of former chief minister Kamal Nath.

His son Nakul Nath was elected as MP from Chhindwara.

The BJP is making concerted efforts to win the seat, with Chief Minister Mohan Yadav visiting the area recently and inducting several hundred Congress workers into the ruling party.

CEC begins review of preparedness for Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, accompanied by senior officials of the Election Commission of India, on Friday commenced his two-day review of Tamil Nadu's preparedness for the Lok Sabha elections.

He is set to meet representatives of as many as nine political parties, including the Dravidian majors, discuss issues related to conducting the elections and also hold a review meeting with district collectors and superintendents of police later in the day. The CEC will also be meeting the chief electoral officers of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala besides officials from the



enforcement agencies, before wrapping up his meeting with the Tamil Nadu chief secretary and state DGP.

DMK Organisational Secretary R S Bharathi, who represented the ruling party at the meeting today, told reporters that the

party expressed concern and doubts over the sequencing of the VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) in the EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) as this may lead to errors. The DMK's ally, CPI(M), too expressed concern that the

VVPAT could be manipulated if it is connected to the control unit. The party's State Secretary K Balakrishnan demanded the re-sequencing of the three units of electronic voting machines, namely the control unit, the ballot unit and the VVPAT. He said it must be ensured that voters' choice exercised in the ballot unit went into the control unit of the EVM where it is recorded, and only then routed to the VVPAT. In a release here, Balakrishnan said he favoured a single-day poll. AIADMK leader and former state minister D Jayakumar told reporters here that his party sought the deployment of additional central forces for the smooth conduct of the election in Tamil Nadu.

Students molested inside bus: Maharashtra child rights panel holds meet

PTI ■ THANE

The Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MSCPCR) on Friday held a meeting in connection with the molestation of students of a Thane school by a bus attendant. The incident took place on February 20 when students had gone to a mall in the Ghatkopar area of Mumbai in a private bus.

MSCPCR chairperson Susieben Shah held a meeting with the school management, police officers investigating the case as well as representatives of the Education Department of Thane Municipal Corporation and Women and Child Welfare Department.

“Even if the contract for organizing a trip by the school is given to a private company, the entire responsibility rests with the school management. Therefore, an inquiry will be conducted to check what the school management did to fulfil its responsibility. The commission will also look into the need for the victims to get proper counselling,” Shah said. Shah said she will visit the school on Monday and meet teachers, parents and children. The attendant of the bus was arrested on Wednesday. So far, six persons have been relieved of their duties by the school management.

Over 400 retirees in Rajasthan yet to get OPS benefits after a year of paying dues

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Around 450 employees of the state-run Rajasthan Financial Corporation are yet to start getting money under the Old Pension Scheme even after 7-8 months of depositing the required money.

According to a departmental order, most of the retired employees had deposited a lump sum amount each by September first week — the last deadline given by the government for inclusion in the OPS that allowed one to get a retrospective pension from April 2023.

The first deadline for depositing the money was July 2023.

“Even after seven months, most of the files are stuck due to the lackadaisical approach of officials involved in processing the applications. Forget about arrears, so far, only 60 pension payment orders have been issued,” RFC Pensioners Association President Narsi Lal Meena said.

“For the last two months, not a single pension payment order has been issued,” he said.

Meena said that most of the retired employees had a tough time arranging money — around Rs 30-40 lakh each —

after years of retirement. Some had to break their FDs and empty their savings to deposit the money to get the pension, he said.

An official familiar with the development said that the top management has issued instructions for speedy processing of the applications, especially those who have genuine reasons.

The official said that with the appointment of a new executive director (admin) and executive director (finance) in the recent administrative reshuffle, the application process will be done expeditiously.

Heavy snowfall in higher areas of Arunachal, 70 tourists rescued

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Around 70 people, including tourists and locals, have been rescued from Sela Pass following heavy snowfall in the higher reaches of Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh, a defence spokesperson said here on Friday.

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) went beyond its mandate of keeping the roads open for traffic and carried out the operation to evacuate approximately 70 tourists and locals stranded at the Sela Pass, he said.

The incident took place when some vehicles got stranded at

the Pass on the night of February 22/23 and the BRO mobilised its men and equipment to rescue them.

The team braved out the chilling cold with temperatures going below -10 degree celsius to save precious lives throughout the night and were able to move them to safety by Friday morning, the spokesperson said.

BRO's Project Vartak has deployed men and personnel round-the-clock at not only Sela Pass, but other important roads in the region as well to keep it accessible for traffic at all times, the spokesperson said.

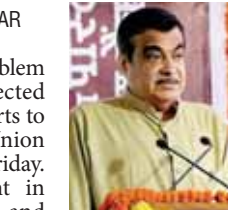
Water scarcity key issue of Latur, elected representatives must work on it: Gadkari

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Water scarcity is a major problem in Latur and elected representatives must take all efforts to come up with a solution, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said on Friday. He was speaking at an event in Ahmedpur for inauguration and launching of nine projects in Dharashiv and Latur districts.

These comprise six highway projects costing Rs 3,946 crore in Latur and three costing Rs 122 crore in Dharashiv.

“Water scarcity is a key problem of Latur. Elected representatives must take up issues



related to it on priority. While coming here, I saw a river that had gone completely dry. If embankments or small weirs were made with empty fertiliser bags, it would have supplied water all day to nearby wells,” he pointed out.

Latur is known for its soybean cultivation and good roads will help farmers take the produce to markets easily, he said.

The projects that were inaugurated include the four laning of Chakur-Ausa and Chakur-Loha sections.

The length of the national highway in Latur was 124 kilometres till 2014, while it was now 510 kilometres, he said.

TN college celebrates contribution of students in building rocket component for ISRO

PTI ■ CHENNAI

A private engineering college in Salem district is celebrating the contribution of its students, who built a critical component of the GSLV-F14 rocket which was used in the recent successful launch of a weather satellite by ISRO.

The Bengaluru-headquartered space agency had successfully launched the INSAT-3DS satellite on February 17 from the spacecraft of Sriharikota near Chennai. The SonaSPEED (Sona Special Power Electronics and Electric Drives) division of the Sona College of Technology, Salem



about 320 kms from Chennai developed the critical magnet stepper motors in the mixture control actuator, which were used in the cryogenic stage of the launch vehicle. The Geosynchronous Launch

Vehicle (GSLV) is a three-stage rocket, with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage. “The mixture control actuator helps mix liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen in precise combination for a perfect lift-off,” a press release from the college said on Friday.

The components were tested ahead of the launch by scientists of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

“Sona research team rigorously followed the process in the design and manufacture of this critical piece of equipment,” Sona College of Technology Principal SRR Senthil Kumar said.

Religious apartheid

Karnataka’s proposal to tax several Hindu temples smacks of discrimination

In a move reminiscent of the historically partisan practice of jizya, the Congress Government in Karnataka has proposed a plan to collect funds from Hindu temples as a form of tax. Understandably, the move has sparked a controversy and reignited debates over the treatment of Hindu places of worship and whether these are being unfairly targeted. While some argue that the move is a necessary step to ensure the upkeep of Hindu religious institutions and support the livelihoods of the priests involved, others see it as discriminatory and belonging to a regressive era when non-Muslims were subjected to jizya, a special tax. While the proposed tax is not explicitly religious in nature, its resemblance to jizya has not gone unnoticed and critics view it as a form of economic discrimination. One of the primary concerns raised by the move's opponents is the selective targeting of Hindu places of worship as similar demands are not being made of other religious institutions, such as mosques or churches. This asymmetry has led



to accusations of bias and favouritism on the part of the Government. If the aim is to genuinely improve facilities at religious places, it should be even-handed and not selective. Our Constitution is clear about religious freedom and equality and all Governments across the country must comply with that. Arguing that it is a matter of fiscal responsibility, however, the tax proponents point to the vast wealth accumulated by some temples. They reason that it is only fair for these temples to contribute to the broader welfare of society. Additionally, they contend that the funds collected will be used for the benefit of the community, including the preservation of cultural heritage and the support of religious practitioners. The proposal has sparked widespread outrage among certain segments of the Hindu population, which sees it as an encroachment on their religious freedoms and an attempt to undermine their heritage. For many Hindus, temples are not just places of worship but symbols of their cultural identity. Any attempt to impose financial burdens on these institutions is viewed as an attack on their way of life. Moreover, the Government's involvement in the financial affairs of temples raises broader questions about the separation of religion and State. By exerting control over the finances of Hindu religious institutions, the Govt risks overstepping its boundaries. In this light, it is essential for the policymakers to tread carefully and consider the implications of their actions. While temple maintenance and priest welfare are undoubtedly important issues, these must be addressed in a manner that respects the rights and sensitivities of all citizens. Ultimately, the debate over the temple tax in Karnataka raises fundamental questions about religious freedom and the role of the State in religious affairs. Meanwhile, it is crucial for all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and seek solutions upholding the principles of fairness; only then can we ensure that our society remains true to its values of pluralism and tolerance.



Youth employment: From seekers to innovators

Active participation in Govt schemes and emphasis on entrepreneurship offer promising avenues towards a brighter future for India’s rural youth

In 2023, India experienced a notable surge in unemployment rates, impacting both rural and urban areas. Particularly concerning was the rise in urban unemployment, escalating from 8.5% in October to 9.3% in November and further climbing to 10.1% in December, mirroring levels from a year prior. This surge has undeniably heightened stress among the younger generation, actively seeking job opportunities, with thousands applying for each available position. In the age of technology, however, a paradigm shift is encouraged—from job seekers to job providers. The youth grappling with unemployment challenges are urged to redefine their goals and leverage their potential and skills. Sayyed Toiba Kousar, a 22-year-old resident of the border district Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir, emphasises the transformative role technology can play in the employment landscape. Through the strategic use of technology, the younger generation can not only secure employment but also venture into



becoming job providers. Azhar Ali, a 24-year-old cricket enthusiast, underscores the importance of effective facilities for skill enhancement. He believes that with the provision of adequate facilities, the youth can excel in their respective fields, significantly contributing to societal and national development. Azhar contends that timely access to essential facilities is crucial for the younger generation to play a more impactful role in the country's progress. Muhammad Waqar, a 22-year-old, advocates for a focus on sports activities at the school level to divert youth from addictive behaviours and guide them towards establishing self-employment opportunities. Ajaz Hussain, aged 27, emphasises creating opportunities aligned with children's interests to inspire

self-reliance, benefiting both the individual and the country. Rashid highlights the importance of parental involvement in identifying and nurturing their children's interests, guiding them towards the numerous opportunities available today in areas such as sports, the internet, singing, dancing, art, painting, photography, and sculpture. In the current scenario, various skill-related schemes are being implemented by both central and state governments across India. Notably, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), operated by the Ministry of Rural Development, stands out as one of the most effective projects. This initiative focuses on promoting self-employment and supporting rural individuals, especially economically disadvantaged young men and women. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Jammu and Kashmir State Rural Livelihood Mission (JKSRLM) oversees the implementation of NRLM, aiming to integrate the poor into self-help groups and connect them with self-employment opportunities.

The primary goal of JKSRLM is to reach 66% of the rural population in 125 blocks of Jammu and Kashmir, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities to uplift them from poverty and enhance their standard of living. The Indian government has initiated various poverty alleviation schemes to improve the quality of life for the poor. It is crucial for the youth to actively engage with and benefit from these government schemes, fostering self-reliance in employment matters and contributing to societal development. To ensure the success of these schemes, relevant departments should actively provide information and guidance, encouraging their 100% implementation and timely achievement of goals. By embracing the shift from job seekers to job providers, youth can play a vital role in shaping a more prosperous and self-sufficient future for themselves and the nation. *(The writer is from the Poonch district of J&K. He writes on socio-economic development challenges of his community; views are personal. Charkha features)*



SOHAIL ALI

The boycott at Doha

The Taliban’s obscurantist mindset and their harbouring of terrorist organisations pose a serious threat to Muslim countries

Given the obscurantist and misogynistic mindset of the Taliban, it is hardly surprising that they boycotted the conference, hosted by the United Nations, to discuss the humanitarian crisis facing Afghanistan, and cooperation on the human rights issue. They spurned the UN's invitation saying that they would attend only if they alone were officially representing Afghanistan, as inclusion of other groups would jeopardise progress. This exclusivist mindset, which reflects their intolerance of the existence of any organisation that does not share their obscurantist Islamist worldview, and does not owe allegiance to them, is at the core of their rejection of democracy, and advocacy of an Islamist theocracy manifest in their designation of Afghanistan as an Islamic Emirate, run according to the dictates of mullahs. The Taliban are unlikely to have realised that they have shot themselves in the foot by boycotting the conference held in Doha on February 18 and 19 under the chairmanship of the UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres. Besides the special envoys of 25 countries, members of Afghanistan's civil society and women's groups, it was attended by representatives of the European Union (EU), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). By not attending the conference, the Taliban have only perpetuated their isolation in the world. They obviously do not seem to mind that since humanitarian assistance continues to come in for the sake of the country's people suffering from natural disasters like floods and earthquakes as well as the violence stalking the country. The OIC's role was outlined by Ambassador Tarig Ali Bakheet, special envoy of organisation's secretary-general. During his interventions, Bakheet recalled his organisation's commitment to support Afghanistan and engage in a constructive dialogue with the country's de facto authorities [Taliban] "on issues and topics included in the relevant resolutions of the [OIC's]



Council of Foreign Ministers. In this regard, he reviewed OIC efforts in providing humanitarian assistance, sending scholars delegations, and holding a conference on women's rights in Islam hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." Ambassador Bakheet was referring to the international conference on "Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment" (November 6 to 8, 2023), organised by the OIC's general secretariat and hosted by Saudi Arabia. It included in its Final Declaration 20 recommendations highlighting the rights that Islam gave to women and the status of women in Islam. These also addressed the challenges and opportunities pertaining to the realisation of women's rights and enhancement of their role across all fields and at all levels of society. The conference also produced "The Jeddah Document on Women's Rights in Islam" which, as stated by OIC's secretary-general, Hissein Ibrahim Taha, in his address at the conference's closing session, would serve as an intellectual and practical reference document that could be adopted by legislative bodies and human rights organizations in member states and all Muslim societies when considering the

IF THE OIC AND THE MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE SERIOUS ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS, THEY MUST WORK OUT TOUGH ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SANCTIONS THAT WOULD COMPEL THE TALIBAN TO CHANGE THEIR POLICIES IN THIS REGARD

rights of Muslim women. It will be submitted for adoption at the forthcoming Islamic Summit, scheduled to be held in Gambia at the end of this year, and subsequently presented to all relevant international fora. He hoped that those doubting Islam's fairness toward women would consider women's rights as set out in this document, and not on the basis some isolated social practices in some Muslim societies that in no way reflect the sublime vision and universality of Islam and its teachings. Taha's not-so-veiled rejection of the Taliban's views on women's rights in the last sentence above, will not please the mullahs running Afghanistan. Nor will they be amused by his affirmation that women's empowerment issues would remain high among the OIC's priorities, and that the OIC would launch and support numerous efforts and initiatives to elevate the status of women in Muslim societies. Taha's words carry a special significance as he spoke in Saudi Arabia where, under the leadership of the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, significant steps have been taken to improve women's position. Women can now attend sporting events, need not wear the abayah, a long, loose-fitting, garment covering the entire body,

except the face, hands and feet, in public, and can get driving licenses and can go to work, study or run errands without male escorts. While women demanding more freedom are treated harshly and much more remains to be done, the gains have been considerable compared to the situation earlier. One can be certain that the Taliban would not change their views. Bigots dig their heels deeper and deeper the more people reject their creed. If the OIC and the Muslim countries are serious about women's rights, they must work out tough economic and political sanctions that would compel the Taliban to change their policies in this regard. They must also take measures to compel the Taliban to act against terrorist outfits like a Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) active in Afghanistan. The former is targeting Pakistan and the latter Iran. Given, however, their obscurantist creed, and determination to impose their version of sharia law globally, there is no reason why they will not strike other countries in future, particularly the Muslim ones they consider as apostatic. *(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEMOCRACY UNDER THREAT?

Sir — As per a report the Congress Party on Thursday alleged that democracy is being "murdered" in the country after microblogging platform X voiced disagreement with the Centre's order to block accounts and posts related to the ongoing farmers' protests. Congress MP Rahul Gandhi claimed the public knows that the government has "murdered democracy" and will give a strong answer. Rahul Gandhi asked "If farmers ask for MSP, shoot them. Is this the mother of democracy? When the youth ask for appointments, refuse to even listen to them this is the mother of democracy? If a former governor tells the truth, send the CBI to his house. Is this the mother of democracy?" Freeze the bank account of the most prominent opposition party. Is this the mother of democracy? Section 144, internet ban, sharp wires, tear gas shells is this the mother of democracy? Be it media or social media, suppressing every voice of truth — is this the mother of democracy?" the Congress leader Gandhi said. According to sources The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology had ordered social media platforms to temporarily block 177 accounts linked to the farmers' protests at the request of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Farmers from across the country have been protesting to press the Centre for their demands, including a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops and farm loan waivers. **Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai**

PASSPORT OFFICE WOES

Sir — It is observed that a huge gathering above five hundred applicants including aged and mothers carrying just born babies are standing in queue, outside the office on Thursday i.e. open day, to get solve the problems of passports to be issued at RPO, Secunderabad. Moreover over the area traffic police lift the vehicles parking outside the said office. The concerned authorities of the passport

Two legendary figures depart



India has lost two of its most illustrious and influential personalities, Fali S Nariman and Ameen Sayani, who left behind a legacy of excellence and innovation in their respective fields of law and radio. Fali S Nariman was a renowned jurist and senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India. He was involved in several landmark cases that shaped India's constitutional law and judicial system. He was a champion of civil liberties and the independence of the judiciary. He resigned as Additional Solicitor General to protest against the Emergency in 1975, the only law officer to do so.

office should provide the same facility i.e. open day at all passport offices of Hyderabad to solve the aroused problems instead of a single door at Secunderabad. Thus the applicants can reach their nearest office and the rush at a single door will also be diluted. The concerned area traffic police should also provide sufficient parking places instead of lifting and imposing huge penalties on applicants. Hope the area Corporator, MLA, Concern Minister and the authorities of passport offices and traffic police will take necessary action soon and will provide mental and physical relaxation to the applicants. **Arif Hussain | Secunderabad**

ODISHA TO IMPROVE SPORTS INFRA

Sir — The Odisha government has decided to renovate Barabati Stadium in Cuttack. The Barabati stadium is one of the oldest stadiums in the state. This stadium has witnessed many national and international sporting events in the past. Barabati Stadium is also known to be the

He received several awards and honours, including the Padma Vibhushan, the Gruber Prize for Justice, and a nomination to the Rajya Sabha. He was also an avid reader, writer and speaker on various topics of law, politics and culture. Ameen Sayani was the iconic radio presenter and host of the popular radio show Binaca Geetmala, which ran from 1952 to 1994 on Radio Ceylon. He revolutionised Indian broadcasting with his signature greeting, "Behno aur Bhaiyo", and his warm and friendly style of hosting. Nariman and Sayani were both Parsis who belonged to Mumbai and made their mark on the national and international stage. They were both respected and admired by their peers and fans for their passion, integrity and innovation. They were both involved in the mission of nation-building and inspiring generations to fight for a just society. They will be dearly missed by their family, friends and fans. May their souls rest in peace. **Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh**

hub of cricket in Odisha. To revive Odisha's cricketing history and groom young cricket aspirants in the state, it was necessary to redevelop it. A Sports complex having world-class facilities for other sports will also be built along with the new stadium. A few days back a cricket stadium in Sambalpur was also decided for renovated. After Hockey and Football, Odisha is now investing in the cricketing ecosystem and infrastructure. This move will assist youths in the state who want to make a career in sports. The developed sports infrastructure will make Odisha a hub for many national and international sporting events. The development of sports in the state will boost the economy as well. Odisha has already hosted the Hockey World Cup and FIFA World Cup and in its way to becoming the sports capital of India. **Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal**

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE STRESS BEHIND THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Teachers have alarming rates of burnout and attrition worldwide



College degrees, good education and satisfying jobs are all things that people generally strive for. Teaching is one of the most visceral jobs most people will ever experience. Teachers since ages have proven to be vital because they shape the lives of students and help them develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the world.

It is interesting to note that many people today believe the stereotype that teaching is a stress-free job. It is the only profession that gets summers and weekends off. Moreover, it is typically a job that people only do because they cannot do anything else. The adage those who can, do; those who can't, teach is widely believed. However, the reality is that there is a great amount of stress associated with this type of profession.

There is no denying the fact that the teaching profession is emotionally, physically and mentally exhausting. Many teachers across the world are experiencing teacher shortages. As per the latest survey, it was found that almost 50% of the new teachers who join with super excitement, passion and a dream to take on the world quit within the first five years of teaching, which begs the question: why do so many of them leave after going through years of college for this profession? Without enough teacher, one cannot successfully educate their children. Moreover, the most disturbing part is that the education system relies on massive amounts of unpaid labour. According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the average teacher works for 52.5 hours a week, over 30% more than they are contracted for. Multiple surveys declare uncertainty, workload, negative perception about the job, concern for others' well-being, health struggles and playing multiple roles have hampered school teachers' mental health and well-being.



Not only this, research also indicates that burnout contributes to high attrition rates among educators. Making teachers work beyond their contracted hours and not paying for it; giving them five hours or less per week to plan for 30 hours of instructions, grading and providing feedback on assignments for almost 200 students on an average, analysing data, contacting parents, attending meetings, preparing teaching materials, expecting teachers to implement new initiatives, programs and practices without proper training, completing administrative tasks, expecting teachers to differentiate and individualise instructions for a class with 30+ students and above all blaming teachers for all education-related issues despite not including teachers in decision making of education-related issues prove out to be a few reasons for teacher burnout. The constant turnover rate of teachers, lack of interest in teaching and lack of commitment to the profession continue to be a major concern for school systems all over the nation. Stress has become a common characteristic of teachers and with the increased amount of accountability, teachers play a significant role in students and schools resulting in poor classroom engagement and ultimately low student achievement.

To be an effective educator, all teachers need to maintain their psychological well-being. For an ordinary human being not related to this profession, a teacher is a person who is working around 1800 hours a year, whereas in reality, they are the ones who are working around 2300 hours a year on average which shows that approximately 550 hours are unpaid working.

Remember, the teachers cannot effectively accomplish all necessary tasks only during their contract hours. The growing concern is the psychological well-being of teachers not only at the school level but also at the college level.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

Farmers demand MSP protection

The imperative need for a legislation-backed MSP grows ever more urgent, promising stability and prosperity for the backbone of India's economy



The resurgence of protests by farmers has brought attention to their longstanding struggle for sustainable profitability in the agricultural sector. Although their demands are diverse, their primary request is for a legal guarantee for MSP (Minimum Support Prices). Farmers believe that the government has not shown genuine interest in effectively implementing MSP, which has led to distrust, frustration, and the need for a legal guarantee. These issues have forced them to leave their homes and farms and take to the highways in protest, resulting in the death of three farmers a couple of injuries, and disruption of normalcy that has affected the commuters and business activities.

In September 2020, the government introduced three controversial farm laws that were met with widespread protests and demands for their repeal. While the laws were eventually repealed in November 2021, there has been no interim report from the Committee on MSP formed to address farmers' concerns. This delay in decision-making perpetuates uncertainties in the agricultural sector and undermines the effectiveness of the present MSP as a stabilizing force.

MSP was introduced in 1966-67 to ensure food security amid food scarcity. Despite broad political support for a legal guarantee for MSP, successive governments have failed to formalize this issue, leaving the agricultural sector in a state of uncertainty. However, it is high time to address the weakening of the decades-old MSP policy, remove the complexities surrounding its legislation, and recognise the potential benefits of legalising MSP to fuel the wholesome growth of the agriculture sector, which is the country's lifeline. The Modi government has demonstrated its commendable ability to revamp decades-old mechanisms with various robust reforms such as the amendments to Indian Penal Codes and the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, and now they must take bold steps to address this pressing issue.

Why farmers asking for legal guarantee: The MSP is an administered advisory price for 23 crops and is determined annually by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) as a key government intervention to insulate farmers from price volatility when the market prices fall below the MSP as well as of consumers against corrupt manipulative market inflation and maintains food security. It has been in existence in India for more than five decades. Why, then, are farmers asking for a legal guarantee? Only 6% of farmers benefit from MSP, and it procures just 11% of total agricultural output in the country, according to the latest available NITI Aayog data.

Over 90 % of crops are sold at prices that are 20-30% lower than the declared MSP, leading to average losses of Rs 20,000 per acre and about Rs 10 lakh crore annually for farmers. A study by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that Indian farmers have been suffering losses since 2000 due to ineffective policies. The report revealed that Indian farmers lost Rs 45 lakh crore during 2000-2017 due to low prices.

Misconceptions in legalising: The legalisation of MSP has been hindered by exaggerated claims about its fiscal costs.



LEGALISING MSP FOR A WIDER VARIETY OF CROPS ENSURES THAT THE BENEFITS OF PRICE STABILITY ARE NOT LIMITED TO SPECIFIC SEGMENTS OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY

These claims have misled successive governments, and it is essential to clarify that legalising MSP does not entail the government procuring all agricultural produce. The apprehensions over excessive fiscal requirements are unfounded and should not prevent the legalisation of MSP.

To make MSP a legal guarantee, necessary amendments are needed in the Agricultural Produce & Livestock Market Committee (APMC) Act by incorporating a clause that 'auction of farm produce in APMC's markets is legally not permitted below the declared MSP prices'. The apprehensions on the operation of MSP legal guarantee are that most of the sales of farm produce are not in APMCs, and traders may boycott the purchases of farm produce. The government does not have physical and economic resources to purchase, store, and market the procured farm produce, which is an irrational argument. Government intervention is necessary only when market prices fall below MSP, and it does not require the procurement of the entire marketable surplus.

The potential boycott of farm produce in places MSP legal regimes by the traders is an irrational argument because the commodity's supply is tight against the demand for farm produce. First, this was also evident from the fact that the government could manage to procure only 26 million tonnes of wheat at MSP against the target of 44.4 million tonnes fixed for the 2023 season. Second, the government's expenditure on procurement and imports of farm produce like edible oil and pulses, and on procurement of food grains on MSP in 2022-23, has already surpassed Rs 5 lakh crore and Rs 2.28 lakh crore, respectively. Claims that the MSP legal guaran-

tee will create fiscal disasters for India are baseless. According to government estimates, the MSP values of the total production of the 23 crops worked out to be around Rs 17 lakh crore, and some studies worked out to be around Rs 10 lakh crore. Furthermore, only 70% of the farm produce comes to markets as a marketable surplus, and farmers' families consume the rest for household purposes. The MSP legal guarantee will cost the government about Rs 5 lakh crore if traders or big corporations engaged in processing boycott the APMC's markets, which is an unlikely scenario. It is time to dismiss the misconceptions surrounding the legalisation of MSP and focus on the merits of providing a legal guarantee for MSP. Merits of legalising MSP: Farming is inherently risky, influenced by factors such as weather conditions, pest attacks, and market dynamics. By establishing a legally binding framework for minimum floor prices across all crops, will mitigate the current challenges and safeguard farmers from unpredictable fluctuations in the prices of their produce.

However, the government has proposed buying cotton, maize, tur, urad and Masur for five years directly from the farmers at the MSP without any quantitative limit. Notably, these crops are grown outside Punjab and Haryana, the home states of the protesting farmers. From this, can it infer that small pulses growing farmers all over the country stand to benefit? Legalising MSP for a wider variety of crops ensures that the benefits of price stability are not limited to specific segments of the farming community. Small and marginal farmers cultivating diverse crops can access the protective shield of MSP, contributing to inclusive agricultural growth, and playing a pivotal role in ensuring food security for the

nation by maintaining a stable production environment for key staples, contributing to the overall food security of the country.

A legal framework enables the government to conduct strategic operations in domestic and international markets. By selling procured produce at minimal markups during times of higher market prices, the government can manage inflation surges, ensuring price stability for consumers.

MSP reduces the vulnerability of farmers to market fluctuations, ensuring a minimum income for their produce. Farmers can navigate uncertainties more confidently, knowing that the government is legally bound to intervene when market prices fall below the MSP. A guaranteed MSP leads to increased rural income. This, in turn, stimulates the rural economy by boosting demand for goods and services, creating a positive ripple effect in various sectors.

The way forward: Policymakers can pave the way for a more secure and prosperous future for farmers by dispelling misconceptions and addressing concerns. Replacing the decades-old and inefficient MSP policy with a legislatively guaranteed MSP offers a comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. It not only ensures consistent implementation but also promotes diversification, inclusivity, and economic resilience, contributing to the wholesome well-being of farmers and the prosperity of the rural economy. This will help to fuel the dream of a 'Viksit Bharat'.

(The author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council; Views expressed are personal)

The enduring legacy of Ameen Sayani, the radio icon

Sayani's influence extended far beyond the confines of the studio, earning him a place in the hearts and minds of millions

In the melodic realm of post-independence, India emerged a captivating voice that transcended mere broadcasting to become a cherished companion for countless listeners for almost four decades. With the resounding greeting, "Namaskar bhaiyon aur behno, main apka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon," Ameen Sayani forged an indelible connection through the airwaves, beckoning listeners to join him on a journey of music and camaraderie. This golden voice of radio passed into eternity on February 21, 2024, in Mumbai. He was 91. His voice, emanating from vintage radio sets, possessed a captivating charm, diverging from the seriousness of his



peers. Ameen Sayani's pioneering radio show, starting as a modest segment on Radio Ceylon, swiftly became a cultural sensation in the 1950s. From Binaca Geetmala to Hit Parade and Cibaca Geetmala, his presentation remained timeless, bridging simplicity and connection, resonating with ordinary hearts. Geetmala transcended borders, captivating audiences across Asia and East Africa

and fostering unity through Hindi film melodies. With 90 million listeners, it has evolved into a cherished tradition, binding families over enchanting tunes.

They were not merely a fleeting waltz through the sonic realms; it was a timeless symphony, a melody that lingered in the hearts of generations. With the gentle caress of nostalgia, it continued its melodious journey, spanning the years from 1952 to 1994, a testament to its enduring charm and universal appeal. And like a phoenix rising from the ashes of bygone eras, it experienced resurgences in the dawn of new millennia, revivals in 2000-2001 and 2001-2003, each breathing new life into its hallowed name.

Beyond the airwaves, Ameen Sayani's unparalleled contribution as a voiceover artist echoes through the annals of time, with over 54,000 radio programmes and approximately 19,000 jingles to his credit — a testament to his lasting impact on the hearts and minds of a nation. Bhajan Samrat, Anup Jalota while sharing his thoughts with me on hearing the news of Ameen Sahab's demise said that he was one of the pioneers in the field of entertainment in broadcasting media and the texture of his voice captivated many people. "Today many of the anchors try to copy his texture and finesse", he said, adding, "It was almost a miracle that any song that Ameen Sahab would announce in his Binaca Geetmala, would go on

to become a hit. Phrases like "Aawaz ke duniya ke doston", and "Bhaiyon aur Beheno" were introduced by him which people are using today and trying to establish themselves. He was very mild in his behaviour and very gentle. "Listening to Ameen Sayani's iconic radio show, 'Binaca Geet Mala,' with my siblings was a cherished ritual in our household," reminisces Dr Sumitra Guha, a renowned classical vocalist and recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademy award. "The mesmerising voice of Ameen Sayani filled our hearts with joy, as we eagerly awaited the melodious tunes of legendary playback singers like Lata Mangeshkar. His captivating narration and the golden era of Bollywood music left an indelible mark

on my soul. It was truly a magical time, enhanced by the charm of our beloved host." Writer, social activist and President of the Guild of Services, Meera Khanna shares her memories of growing up listening to Ameen Sayani. She says, "With the passing away of Ameen Sayani it is as if a precious memory of childhood has slipped away. The 'Binaca Geetmala' which he hosted in his amazing voice was an integral part of a childhood when television had not invaded homes. Gathered around the radio or with the transistor stuck to the ear Ameen Sayani invited you to float on the melody or foot tap to the rhythm of the most popular Hindi film songs. Thus, every week Ameen Sayani was the friend who vis-

ited with a bouquet of melody rhythm and poetry. Millions in this country will remember with the nostalgia of the times when pleasures were simple and radio hosts made you feel good about our world." Smita Vats, Founder and President of ITIHAAS (Indian Traditions Heritage and Society) kept it simple when she said, "My memories are just of his voice... diction, and metre while reading and talking. All lost now, as no one speaks well these days." Throughout his illustrious career spanning decades, Sayani epitomised innovation and authenticity. Amidst evolving media landscapes, he championed radio's timeless ability to unite communities. Beyond the airwaves, Sayani's magnetic charisma

made him a sought-after emcee, infusing every event he hosted with enchantment. Veteran journalist and author, Khushwant Singh eloquently captured Sayani's significance, saying, "Ameen Sayani wasn't just a radio presenter; he was a storyteller whose voice painted vivid images in the minds of his listeners." In the words of the man himself, "This is Ameen Sayani, signing off with the hope that you'll join me again next week, same time, same station." As we bid farewell to this titan of the airwaves, his voice and legacy will long be cherished. Farewell Ameen Sahab!

(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Netanyahu seeks open-ended control in Gaza

AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

Israel seeks open-ended control over security and civilian affairs in the Gaza Strip, according to a long-awaited postwar plan by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It was swiftly rejected Friday by Palestinian leaders and runs counter to Washington's vision for the war-ravaged enclave.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented the two-page document to his security Cabinet late Thursday for approval. Deep disagreements over Gaza's future have led to increasingly public friction between Israel and the United States, its closest ally. The Biden administration seeks eventual Palestinian governance in Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank as a precursor to Palestinian statehood, an outcome vehemently opposed by Netanyahu and his right-wing government. Netanyahu's plan envisions hand-picked Palestinians in Gaza adminis-

tering the territory. Separately, cease-fire efforts appeared to gain traction, with mediators to present a new proposal at an expected high-level meeting this weekend in Paris. The US, Egypt and Qatar have been struggling for weeks to find a formula that could halt Israel's devastating offensive in Gaza, but now face an unofficial deadline as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan approaches. In Gaza, Israeli airstrikes in the centre and south of the territory killed at least 68 Palestinians, including children and women, overnight and into Friday, health officials and an Associated Press journalist said. Another 24 bodies remained trapped under the rubble. Fidaa Ashour, whose sister was killed in a strike early Friday in the city of Rafah in southern Gaza, said "the world does not feel what we are enduring." At a hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, relatives wept over bodies laid out in burial shrouds in the



A Palestinian holds the body of a child killed in the Israeli bombardments of the Gaza Strip in front of the morgue to pray over them at Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah on Friday.

AP/PTI

courtyard, and a man cradled a dead infant.

The overall Palestinian death toll since the start of the war rose to more than 29,500, with close to 70,000 people wounded, Gaza health officials said. The death toll amounts to close to 1.3% of Gaza's popula-

tion of 2.3 million.

NETANYAHU'S VISION

Netanyahu's plan, while lacking specifics, marks the first time he has presented a formal postwar vision. It reiterates that Israel is determined to crush Hamas, the militant

group that overran the Gaza Strip in 2007. Polls have indicated that a majority of Palestinians don't support Hamas, but the group has deep roots in Palestinian society. Critics, including some in Israel, say the goal of eliminating Hamas is unattainable.

Netanyahu's plan calls for freedom of action for Israel's military across a demilitarized Gaza after the war to thwart any security threat. It says Israel would establish a buffer zone inside Gaza, which is likely to provoke US objections.

The plan also envisions Gaza being governed by local officials who it says would "not be identified with countries or entities that support terrorism and will not receive payment from them". It's not clear if any Palestinians would agree to such sub-contractor roles. Over the past decades, Israel has repeatedly tried and failed to set up hand-picked local Palestinian governing bodies. The Palestinian Authority,

which administers pockets of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Friday denounced Netanyahu's plan as "colonialist and racist," saying it would amount to Israeli reoccupation of Gaza. Israel withdrew its soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but maintained control of access to the territory. The Biden administration wants to see a reformed Palestinian Authority govern both Gaza and the West Bank as a step toward Palestinian statehood. It has sought to chip away at Netanyahu's resistance by holding out the prospect of the normalisation of ties between Israel and Arab powerhouse Saudi Arabia.

THE WAR DRAGS ON

Israel declared war on Hamas on Oct 7, after the militants stormed into southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were freed in a weeklong cease-fire in late

November. Since the start of the war, 29,514 Palestinians were killed in Israel's offensive and close to 70,000 were wounded, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Friday. Two-thirds of those killed have been women and children, said the ministry, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

Israel says it has killed at least 10,000 Hamas fighters, without presenting details. It holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties because the group operates and fights from within civilian areas. The United States has repeatedly urged Israel to do more to avoid harm to civilians, but the daily number of deaths reported in Gaza appears to be relatively constant. The Israeli offensive has inflicted immense suffering in Gaza. About 80% of the population have been displaced, infectious diseases run rampant and hundreds of thousands of people are facing hunger.

Hamas leader leaves Egypt after cease-fire talks

Beirut (AP): Hamas says its political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, has left Egypt after holding talks with Egyptian officials about a possible cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and an exchange of hostages held by the militants for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel. The statement released early Friday by Hamas did not say whether Haniyeh's talks with Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel about ways of ending the war, a hostage deal and the flow of aid to Gaza were successful or led to a breakthrough. The talks in Cairo came ahead of a high-level meeting expected over the weekend in Paris, where international mediators will present a new proposal. The United States, Egypt and Qatar have been struggling for weeks to find a formula that could halt Israel's devastating offensive in Gaza, but now face an unofficial deadline as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan approaches.

Israel seeks a phased deal, including a temporary pause in fighting in exchange for the release of some of the roughly 100 hostages still held by militants since the brutal October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel. Israel has vowed to keep fighting until Hamas is crushed. Hamas initially demanded to end the war, now in its fifth month, before hostages can be released. Hamas has said that it would release the Israeli hostages in return for the all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Israel rejected that demand, and mediators have been working on a new deal.

During Hamas' October 7 attack on southern Israel, militants killed about 1,200 people and took some 250 hostages. Roughly half of the hostages were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

About 100 hostages remain in captivity, in addition to the bodies of 30 others who were killed on October 7 or died in captivity. Israel's subsequent offensive in Gaza has killed more than 29,000 Palestinians and driven some 80 per cent of the territory's 2.3 million people from their homes. Most heeded Israeli orders to flee south, and around 1.5 million are packed into Rafah near the border with Egypt.

4 die, 14 missing after apartment fire in Spain

AP ■ VALENCIA (SPAIN)

As firefighters and scientific apolice Friday began inspecting the interior of two residential towers that were destroyed by fire in the eastern Spanish city of Valencia, killing four people, questions abounded as to how the fire spread so rapidly. Authorities said 14 people were still missing following the blaze at the complex Thursday. Valencia Mayor Maria José Catalá said that the danger of the 14-story building collapsing and the intense heat from the fire initially prevented emergency workers from getting in to search for possible survivors.

The fire started Thursday evening and quickly engulfed the buildings. Experts said that the building's polyurethane cladding may have contributed to the fire's ferocity. The vice-president of the Valencia College of Industrial and Technical Engineers, Esther

Puchades, who once inspected the building, told the state news agency Efe that when the material "is heated it is like plastic and it ignites".

She said it was the first fire of its type in Spain, but that other blazes involving the material have been similarly destructive in the United Kingdom and China.

The June 2017 fire at Grenfell Tower in London, which also had polyurethane cladding, caused more than 70 deaths. Catalá said the cause of the fire was still not known and it was too early to comment on reports that suggested materials used in construction might have contributed. Puchades said polyurethane was no longer widely used in buildings without extra safety measures to offset its flammability. The complex in Valencia was finished in 2009. In a promotional video, the now bankrupt construction company Fbex boasted that it used a new alu-

minum-based material as part of its façade.

Fifteen people were treated for injuries and five remained Friday in city hospitals, including four firefighters. All were said to be stable.

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez visited the scene, promising support for those affected and expressing gratitude to firefighters and military personnel who worked to extinguish the blaze.

It was not immediately known how many people were in the two buildings when the fire broke out, but dozens are believed to have lost their homes and belongings. The complex had some 140 apartments. The Valencia regional government declared three days of mourning and announced financial aid to cover accommodation, clothing and food. Residents were housed overnight in hotels or in the homes of relatives and neighbours, authorities said.

Trump's lawyers call for dismissal of classified documents case

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Former President Donald Trump urged a Florida judge to dismiss the criminal case charging him with illegally retaining classified documents, claiming in part that presidential immunity protects him from prosecution even as that sweeping argument has so far failed in federal appeals courts in a separate case.

In one of a slew of motions attacking the case brought by special counsel Jack Smith, Trump's lawyers late on Thursday echoed arguments that were roundly rejected by a federal appeals court this month in his 2020 election interference case in Washington. Trump has asked the US Supreme Court to intervene in that case as the Republican presidential primary front-runner seeks to delay the trial until after the November election. Trump's lawyers wrote that the classified



documents charges turn on his alleged decision to designate the papers as "personal" records under the Presidential Records Act, and argued that he cannot be prosecuted since that was an "official act" made while he was still in the White House. Washington's federal appeals court in its decision this month was unsparing in its repudiation of Trump's novel claim that former presidents enjoy absolute immunity for actions that fall within their official job duties.

But Trump's lawyers argued that the appeals court's decision was wrong, telling US District Judge Aileen Cannon she should not follow the court's "poorly reasoned decision" in the classified documents case.

In other court filings late Thursday, Trump's lawyers argued that Attorney General Merrick Garland's appointment of special counsel Smith to investigate the former president was "unlawful" and grounds for dismissing the documents case. They also are attacking the law Trump is accused of violating as "unconstitutionally vague" as applied in his case.

The case accuses Trump of illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate and obstructing government efforts to retrieve them. A June 2023 indictment charging him with dozens of felony counts alleges investigators found boxes of sensitive docu-

ments recklessly stored at Mar-a-Lago in spaces including a ballroom, a bathroom and shower, his bedroom and a storage room.

Prosecutors have said the documents he stowed, refused to return and in some cases showed to visitors risked jeopardizing not only relations with foreign nations but also the safety of troops and confidential sources. They've also accused Trump of asking a staffer to delete camera footage at his Florida estate in an effort to obstruct the federal investigation into his records.

The case is currently scheduled to go to trial in May, but Judge Cannon has pushed back multiple other deadlines and signaled an openness to revisiting the trial date during a pivotal pretrial conference set for March. It's one of four criminal cases the former president is facing as he vies to reclaim the White House in November.

Rape, sexual violence in Sudan's ongoing conflict may amount to war crimes: New UN report

AP ■ GENEVA

The UN human rights office said in a new report on Friday that scores of people, including children, have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence in the ongoing conflict in Sudan, assaults that may amount to war crimes. Sudan plunged into chaos in mid-April when clashes erupted in the capital, Khartoum, between rival Sudanese forces — the country's military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and a paramilitary faction known as the Rapid Support Forces, under the command of Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

The fighting quickly spread across the African country, especially urban areas but also the restive western Darfur region, and has so far killed at least 12,000 people and sent over 8 million fleeing their homes, the report said.

The report, which covers a period from the outbreak of the fighting up to December 15, documents abuses in a country that has been largely inaccessible to aid groups and rights monitors recently, clouding the impact of a conflict that been overshadowed by wars in places like Gaza and Ukraine.

The report found that at least 118 people had been subjected to sexual violence, including rape — with many of the assaults committed by members of the paramilitary forces, in homes and on the streets.

One woman, the UN said, "was held in a building and repeatedly gang-raped over a period of 35 days."

The report also pointed to recruitment of child soldiers on both sides of the conflict.

"Some of these violations would amount to war crimes," said UN human rights chief Volker Türk, calling for

prompt, thorough and independent investigations into alleged rights abuses and violations.

The report is based on interview of more than 300 victims and witnesses, some conducted in neighbouring Ethiopia and Chad where many Sudanese have fled, along with analysis of photographs, videos, and satellite imagery from the conflict areas.

The ravages of the war, beyond the period examined, are continuing, the UN said.

The UN cited video that emerged last week from the country's North Kordofan State showing men wearing Sudanese army uniforms carrying severed heads of members of the rival paramilitary faction.

"For nearly a year now, accounts coming out of Sudan have been of death, suffering and despair, as the senseless

conflict and human rights violations and abuses have persisted with no end in sight," Türk said.

"The guns must be silenced, and civilians must be protected," he added.

Speaking from Nairobi, Kenya, by videoconference to the UN briefing in Geneva on Friday, Seif Magango, a regional spokesman for the UN human rights office said that "the number of people displaced (in Sudan) has now crossed the 8 million mark, which should concern everyone."

Earlier in February, UN Secretary-General António Guterres told reporters that there is no military solution to Sudan's conflict and urged the rival generals to start talking about ending the conflict.

He stressed that continued fighting "will not bring any solution so we must stop this as soon as possible."

Angry French farmers with tractors back to Paris for another protest

AP ■ PARIS

Angry farmers were back to Paris on their tractors Friday in a new protest demanding more government support and simpler regulations, on the eve of a major agricultural fair in the French capital. Dozens of tractors drove peacefully into a neighbourhood on the capital's west side carrying flags from Rural Coordination, the farmers' union that staged the protest. The protesters then posed with their tractors on a bridge over the Seine River with the Eiffel Tower in the background.

The latest protest comes three weeks after farmers lifted roadblocks around Paris and elsewhere in the country after the government offered over 400 million euros (USD 433 million) to address their grievances over low earnings, heavy regulation and what they describe as unfair competi-



tion from abroad. "Save our agriculture," the Rural Coordination said on X, formerly Twitter. One tractor was carrying a poster reading: "Death is in the field."

The convoy temporarily slowed traffic on the A4 highway, east of the capital, and on the Paris ring-road earlier on Friday morning. French farmers' actions are part of a broad-

er protest movement in Europe against EU agriculture policies, bureaucracy and overall business conditions.

Farmers complain that the 27-nation bloc's environmental policies, such as the Green Deal, which calls for limits on the use of chemicals and on greenhouse gas emissions, limit their business and make their products more expensive than

non-EU imports.

Other protests are being staged across France as farmers seek to put pressure on the government to implement its promises.

Government officials have held a series of meetings with farmers unions in recent weeks to discuss a new bill meant to defend France's "agricultural sovereignty." Will to be debated at parliament this spring.

The government's plan also includes hundreds of millions of euros in aid, tax breaks and a promise not to ban pesticides in France that are allowed elsewhere in Europe, which French farmers say puts them at an unfair disadvantage. French President Emmanuel Macron is to visit the Paris Agricultural Fair, on Saturday where he is planning to have a "big debate" with farmers, supermarket CEOs and members of environmental groups, his office said.

ISIS bride loses appeal to regain British citizenship

PTI ■ LONDON

Shamima Begum, the London-born Bangladeshi-origin woman, who fled the UK as a 15-year-old schoolgirl to join the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist network, on Friday lost yet another legal bid to regain her British citizenship and return to the UK from Syria. Previously in 2022, the UK Supreme Court upheld the decision to bar the now 24-year-old from returning to the UK. After a series of legal battles, Begum lost a challenge at the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) in February last year and then took her case to the Court of Appeal. However, the appeal judges unanimously agreed with the special tribunal's decision and turned down the appeal. "Ms Begum may well



have been influenced and manipulated by others but still have made a calculated decision to travel to Syria and align with ISIL [ISIS]," said Judge Dame Sue Carr, delivering the verdict in London.

Begum, who is in a refugee camp in northern Syria, was represented at her appeal by barrister Samantha Knights who had argued that the government had failed to consider legal duties owed to a potential victim of trafficking. The

UK Home Office stressed that the main focus of the case was around national security.

The British government has maintained Begum could seek a Bangladeshi passport given her heritage but her family has argued that she is British and has never held Bangladeshi citizenship.

Last year, the specialist tribunal had accepted then Home Secretary Sajid Javid's conclusion that revoking her British citizenship was "an integral part of the overall national security assessment carried out by the Security Service" and therefore not a matter for the court.

Begum, referred to as an ISIS bride for marrying a Dutch member of the terror network in Syria, gave birth to three children — all of whom later died.

'Indian-origin student in US died due to acute alcohol intoxication'

New York (PTI): An 18-year-old Indian-origin University of Illinois student, who was found dead last month, died due to hypothermia and acute alcohol intoxication with prolonged exposure to extremely cold temperatures significantly contributing to his death, authorities have said. Akul B Dhawan was found dead outside the campus building around 11 am on January 20. Arrow Ambulance, Urbana Fire Department and the University of Illinois Police Department were dispatched to the location after they received a report of an unresponsive male on a porch.

An autopsy that was performed on January 23 confirmed Dhawan's death was due to hypothermia. "Acute alcohol intoxication and prolonged exposure to extremely cold temperatures significantly contributed to his death," Champaign County Coroner Stephen Thuney said.

Thuney ruled the death accidental. A report in WANDTV.com said that according to the University of Illinois Police Department's investigation, Dhawan had met with friends at approximately 9 pm on January 19 and had consumed alcohol. At approximately 10 pm, they said Dhawan and his friends went to a local club in Urbana.

"Security video showed him consuming more alcohol before the group returned to the club," the report cited police as saying. University police said Dhawan's friends re-entered the club between 11:25 pm and 11:29 pm while Dhawan stayed outside.

Private US company lands first commercial spacecraft on Moon

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A private American company has scripted history by landing the first commercial spacecraft on the Moon as well as the first US vehicle on the Earth's only natural satellite in more than 50 years, joining earlier feats by India, Russia, the US and China.

Built by Intuitive Machines, the lander — named Odysseus — touched down on the Moon at around 6:23 p.m. ET on Thursday, making it the first American spacecraft on the Moon since the Apollo 17 mission in 1972.

"Today, for the first time in half a century, America has returned to the Moon," Bill Nelson, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator said



after Intuitive Machines, a Houston-based company, landed its Odysseus robot near the lunar south pole.

The lander carries a bounty of NASA scientific instruments, "and bearing the dream of a new adventure in science, innovation and American leadership in space, well, all of that aced the landing of the lifetime," Nelson said. "What we

can confirm, without a doubt, is our equipment is on the surface of the Moon, and we are transmitting." Flight Director and Chief Technology Officer Tim Crain announced amidst cheers among his colleagues and others across the country as there were some tense moments before the landing on the Moon.

As the spacecraft made its final descent, mission controllers lost contact with it, as was expected to occur, NBC News reported. "After troubleshooting communications, flight controllers have confirmed Odysseus is upright and starting to send data. Right now, we are working to downlink the first images from the lunar surface," Intuitive Machines said, announcing the historic feat.

US, EU pile new sanctions on Russia

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The United States and the European Union are piling new sanctions on Russia on the eve of the second anniversary of its invasion of Ukraine and in retaliation for the death of noted Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny last week in an Arctic penal colony. The US Treasury Department plans Friday to impose more than 500 new sanctions on Russia and its war machine in the largest single tranche of penalties since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

They come on the heels of a series of new arrests and indictments announced by the Justice Department on Thursday that target Russian businessmen, including the head of Russia's second-largest bank, and their middlemen in five separate federal cases. The European Union announced Friday that it is imposing sanctions on several foreign companies over allegations that they have exported dual-use goods to Russia that could be used in its war against Ukraine.

The 27-nation bloc also said that it was targeting scores of Russian officials, including "members of the judiciary, local politicians and people responsible for the illegal deportation and military re-education of Ukrainian children."

"The American people and people around the world understand that the stakes of this fight extend far beyond Ukraine," President Joe Biden said in a statement announcing the sanctions.

"If Putin does not pay the price for his death and destruction, he will keep going. And the costs to the United States — along with our NATO Allies and partners in Europe and around the world — will rise," Biden said.

The US specifically was to target individuals associated with Navalny's imprisonment a day after Biden met with the opposition leader's widow and daughter in California.

It was also hitting "Russia's financial sector, defense industrial base, procurement networks and sanctions evaders

Ukrainians live in agony, uncertainty

Kyiv (AP): Iryna Reva stares at her phone, replaying the last video her 25-year-old son Vladyslav sent her from the front line before the volunteer soldier disappeared 19 months ago in a battle with Russian forces in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

Reva is one of the thousands of Ukrainians desperately seeking news of loved ones who have disappeared in the two years since Russia's full-scale invasion began. According to Ukraine's National Police, more than 30,000 people have been reported missing in the last 24 months. "Up to this day, I am searching for my son," Reva said. "He is alive to me. Regardless of the circumstances, there is no evidence that he has perished."

The last time Reva spoke to her son, she begged him not to take part in a battle the next morning. "Don't go, say your arm hurts," she told him over the phone.

"Mom, I'm sorry. I love you very much," Vladyslav replied. "I'm going into battle. I don't know if I'll be back. I'll be out of touch. Pray," were his last words to her. The missing include soldiers like Vladyslav lost on the battlefield, but also civilians and children who have vanished in a variety of circumstances. For many relatives, the agonising uncertainty and relentless search for answers has already gone on for two years with no end in



A Ukrainian soldier takes his position on the frontline near Klischchiivka the Donetsk region, in Ukraine on Friday

AP/PTI

sight. Inna Usenko left her hometown of Mariupol on a business trip the day before the war began in 2022. She lost contact with her brother, Herman Sikorskyi, on March 1 as Russia laid siege to the eastern city and thousands of civilians were trapped. Several weeks later, a Russian airstrike hit the house where he had lived. "I don't know what to think, whether he's alive or not," she said. "I understand perfectly well that if I were there, he would have come to me, and maybe something would have been different, so I feel guilty all the time."

In an attempt to find her brother, Usenko filed a missing person's report with the occupation authorities, the Russian Federation and the Russian

Red Cross. From her home, which is now in Spain, she came to Ukraine to file a police report and provide DNA to Ukrainian authorities. Despite the efforts, neither side was able to provide her with any information. "I would like, of course, to believe that he is alive," Usenko said, adding that the uncertainty not only drains her but also affects close friends, relatives and his children. The International Committee of the Red Cross says since February 2022 its team has been contacted more than 100,000 times by families searching for their loved ones. "That doesn't mean a hundred thousand missing people. But this gives you an idea of just the amount of suffering that this creates on both sides," Achille

Després, a spokesperson at the ICRC in Kyiv, said.

For relatives looking for information, the official search often begins with submitting a DNA sample. Andrii Levytskyi, head of forensics at the National Police's main investigation department, said more than 18,000 DNA samples of relatives of servicemen and civilians have been collected and processed.

DNA is a vital part of establishing the status of the missing person, especially if they are military. Even if fellow soldiers said they witnessed a soldier killed in battle, it's not enough to confirm the death, said Petro Yatsenko, the head of a press office at the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs.

"Until we have the body, until we have DNA analysis, this person will have the status of missing," he said. He said they have had cases in which soldiers were found wounded in captivity, despite testimony from their comrades that they were killed in battle. Over the past two years, numerous volunteer projects have arisen to aid in the search for missing people, often serving as a last resort for relatives who receive no official information from authorities. Mariia Reshetova, who runs the Search for the Missing project under the Kateryna Osadcha Foundation, said they have around 1,000 open cases and have already closed hundreds.

public once they are published in the EU's official journal, which should be a matter of days. The bloc said the companies "have been involved in the circumvention of trade restrictions," and it accuses others of "the development, production and supply of electronic components" destined to help Russia's armed forces.

Some of the measures are aimed at depriving Russia of parts for pilotless drones, which are seen by military experts as key to the war.

PML-N candidates' victory notified from Islamabad

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's election commission on Friday notified the victories of three candidates from Nawaz Sharif's PML-N in the federal capital, delivering a fresh blow to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party, which had challenged the original poll results.

Backed by the 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, three losing candidates - Amir Mughal, Shoaib Shaheen and Mohammad Ali Bukhari - had petitioned in the Islamabad High Court (IHC), alleging manipulation of the results.

On Wednesday, the IHC suspended poll result notifications issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) from NA-46, NA-47 and NA-48, putting on hold the success of three candidates of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, who had won respectively on the three seats.

While Anjum Aqeel Khan and Chaudhry won on the PML-N tickets, Raja Khurram Nawaz won as an independent candidate and joined the party after his victory. After hearing the parties on Friday, the elec-

toral watchdog restored the order suspended by the IHC and issued the notification announcing the victory of the three candidates, Geo News reported.

"Now the Commission, after hearing the parties, has finally disposed of the petitions filed by Mr Aamer Masood, contesting candidate NA-46 ICT-I, Mr Shoaib Shaheen, contesting candidate NA-47 ICT-II, and Syed Muhammad Ali Bokhari, Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Ch. Azhar Mehmood contesting candidates NA-48 ICT-III, in light of the order passed by the Hon'ble Islamabad High Court," the ECP said.

Earlier, the three PTI-backed losing candidates had challenged the election results before the ECP on February 10, and the commission issued a status quo order. However, on February 11, the ECP also issued the notification that declared Khan, Chaudhry, and Nawaz as returned candidates.

Speaking to media outside the ECP, PML-N-backed Chaudhry slammed his rivals for creating controversy over the election results. "We are ready for a political battle," he was quoted as saying. Chaudhry accused the PTI of

fraudulent activities and misguiding the high court and advised the party not to fight against the state.

Independent candidates backed by the PTI won more than 90 seats in the National Assembly in the February 8 general election. The PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP came third with 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has 17 seats. To form a government, a party must win 133 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly.

However, the PML-N and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a new coalition government, which may effectively end former prime minister Khan's chances of returning to power. PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif has been nominated as the prime minister candidate, while PPP's Asif Ali Zardari is for the president's office.

On Wednesday, the PTI rejected the attempts by two of its arch-rivals to form a coalition government, warning that robbing its public endorsement by the "mandate thieves" will result in the worst political instability.

IMF ready to work with new govt; mum on Imran's demand

Washington/Islamabad: The IMF is looking forward to working with the new government in Pakistan, a top official has said while keeping mum on jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's demand that the global lender should conduct an "audit" of the election results before approving any new loan for the cash-strapped country. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan on Thursday said he will write to the International Monetary Fund, demanding the Washington-based institution stop its support to Pakistan where his political rivals, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party, were on the verge of forming a coalition government with a "stolen mandate."

The 71-year-old former prime minister's message from jail was conveyed through Barrister Ali Zafar, who met him in the Adiala Jail Rawalpindi where he has been incarcerated since last year after being convicted in corruption and other cases.

The IMF is looking for-

ward to engaging with Pakistan's new government on policies to ensure "macroeconomic stability and prosperity" for the country, Julie Kozack, the head of the Communications Department of the IMF said, while maintaining silence on any communication to the organisation from jailed former premier Khan on the outcome of the February 8 polls in the country. During the press conference in Washington on Thursday, Kozack was asked about whether Pakistan was on track to secure the third tranche of the stand-by agreement reached in June 2023 and also if the IMF would entertain any letter by Khan calling for investigations into election irregularities.

"We look forward to work-

ing with the new government on policies to ensure macroeconomic stability and prosperity for all of Pakistan's citizens. And I am going to leave it at that," Kozack said.

She said that on January 11, the IMF Executive Board approved the first review of the Stand-By Arrangement, with Pakistan that brought total disbursements under the Stand-By Arrangement to USD 1.9 billion. "The Stand-By Arrangement is supporting the authority's efforts to stabilise the economy and to, of course, with a strong focus on protecting the most vulnerable," she said. Talking of the fiscal conditions of Pakistan, she said that during the tenure of the interim government, the authorities had "maintained economic stability".

Return Navalny's body to family, authorities urged

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russians including Nobel Prize-winning journalist Dmitry Muratov and ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov have released videos calling on Russian authorities to return the body of opposition leader Alexei Navalny to his family, a week after his death in an Arctic penal colony.

Navalny's mother said on Thursday that she has seen her son's body and that she is resisting heavy pressure to agree to a secret burial away from the public eye. Lyudmila Navalnaya said investigators allowed her to see her son's body in the city morgue. She said she repeated her demand to have Navalny's body returned to her and protested what she described as authorities trying to force her to agree to a secret burial.

"They are blackmailing me. They are setting conditions where, when and how my son should be buried," she said Thursday in a video statement from the Arctic city of Salekhard. "They want it to do

it secretly without a mourning ceremony." Navalny's spokesman, Kira Yarmysh said on X, formerly Twitter, that his mother was also shown a medical certificate stating that the released videos calling on Russian authorities to return the body of opposition leader Alexei Navalny to his family, a week after his death in an Arctic penal colony.

Nadya Tolokonnikova, who became widely known after spending nearly two years in prison for taking part in a 2012 protest with the band Pussy Riot inside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, also released a video. "We were imprisoned for allegedly trampling on traditional values. But no one tramples on traditional Russian values more than you, Putin, your officials and your priests who pray for all the

murder that you do, year after year, day after day," Tolokonnikova said.

"Putin, have a conscience, give his mother the body of her son," she added. Navalny, Russia's most well-known opposition politician, suddenly died in an Arctic prison last week, prompting hundreds of Russians across the country to stream to impromptu memorials with flowers and candles. The Russian authorities have detained scores of people as they seek to suppress any major outpouring of sympathy for President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe before the presidential election he is almost certain to win. Across the ocean in San Francisco Thursday, US President Joe Biden met with Navalny's widow Yulia Navalnaya and 20-year-old daughter Dasha, expressing "condolences for their devastating loss."

"To state the obvious, he was a man of incredible courage," Biden said after the meeting. "It's amazing how his wife and daughter are emulating that."

Imran, wife move lower court against 'un-Islamic marriage' case verdict

Islamabad (PTI): Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi on Friday separately moved a lower court challenging the verdict in the "un-Islamic" marriage case in which they were jailed for seven years and their marriage in 2018 declared illegal. Earlier this month, a trial court sentenced Khan, 71, and his wife Bushra Bibi, 49, to seven years in jail and imposed a Rs 5,00,000 fine on each for "contracting marriage during the 'iddat' (period of waiting)" in a case filed by Bibi's former husband Khawar Maneka in November last year.

The district and sessions court will mark the former first couple's appeals on Friday, Geo News reported. Bushra Bibi filed her appeal at the court through her lawyers seeking annulment of the trial court's decision, the report said.

The third spouse of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party founder petitioned that the judgment delivered by civil judge Quadrattullah on February

3 was against the facts, while the indictment issued against her in the case on January 16 was also illegal. The petition said that the plea of jurisdiction was rejected without assigning any reason and that the civil court did not conduct the trial properly.

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
(Garden and Tree Authority)

Tel. No.(0240) 2333536-40
Fax No.2040-2331213

Address:- Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Municipal Corporation
Head Office:- Town Hall, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar 431001 (Maharashtra)
E-Mail ID:- uidssmt.csma@gmail.com

No. CSMC/Garden Section/1168/2024
Dated :- 17/02/2024

S.No	Work Name	Final Date of Tender Submission
1.	Construction Multipaly System In CSMC Main Gardens. Amount Put to Tender:- Rs.84,44,76,029/-	Date :- 04/03/2024 5 PM
Note:- Tender Notice is Published on Website www.mahatenders.gov.in		

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Municipal Corporation

CORRIGENDUM

No. SS/CW/SMO/LIFT/50/2024/148
In continuation of the tender No. SS/CW/SMO/LIFT/50/2024/140 dated 16th Feb 2024 invited for the work, "Design, fabrication, supply, installation and commissioning of passenger lift (8 person) including civil & structural works for construction of New Lift Structure at the State Mission Office (G+4 storey), Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19", the following changes will be effective:

Clause ref. with page no. in the tender document	Present clause	Modified clause
Short Notice Inviting tender, page-3 of IFB	Time of completion – 45 days	Time of completion – 90 days
Short Notice Inviting tender, page-3 of IFB	Last date & time for submission of tender : 23-02-2024	Last date & time for submission of tender : 27-02-2024
National/ local competitive bidding, page-2 of IFB	Last date & time for submission of tender : 23-02-2024	Last date & time for submission of tender : 27-02-2024
Calender of events, page-4 of IFB	Last date & time for submission of tender : 23-02-2024	Last date & time for submission of tender : 27-02-2024
Page-5 of IFB	Time of completion – 45 days	Time of completion – 90 days
Clause no. 8 of Appendix-I, page 28	The bids will be opened at the Office of the Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 at 1500 hours on 23-02-2024	The bids will be opened at the Office of the Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 at 1500 hours on 27-02-2024

Sd/- Executive Director
Samagra Shiksha, Assam
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/CF/5863/23/24-Feb-24

Buddhist monks among 100 held in Sichuan over dam protests

Beijing (PTI): Chinese security officials have arrested more than 100 Tibetan Buddhist monks and local people in the southwestern Sichuan province to quell protests against the construction of a massive dam that would submerge six Buddhist monasteries and force the relocation of two villages, a media report said.

In a rare act of defiance, residents have taken to the streets of Wangbuding township of Dege County in the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture since February 14 to oppose the plan to build the 2,240-megawatt Gangtuo hydropower station on the Drichu River (Jinsha in Chinese). The dam is located on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, one of China's most important waterways, Radio Free Asia reported on Thursday.

The protests started on February 14, when at least 300 Tibetans gathered outside the Dege county town hall to oppose the dam's construction, defying strict controls on public gatherings and extensive surveillance by authorities in Sichuan and Tibet regions. The detentions reportedly occurred in the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, an area with a large population of ethnic Tibetans.

Some of the arrested protesters required hospitalisation due to rough treatment, the report said. Police used water cannons, pepper spray and tasers to subdue the protesters.

Videos of protests showed monks prostrating before the officials, pleading with them not to resort to demolition when they inspected Yena and Wonto monasteries in prepara-

tion for their destruction.

The USD 4.6 billion Yebatan hydropower station, the largest hydropower project in the upper reaches of the Jinsha River, exceeded 100 metres in December last year, achieving a major milestone, state-run Global Times reported earlier. The total installed capacity of the power station is expected to reach 2,240 megawatts after completion, with a maximum dam height of 217 metres. It is the tallest hyperbolic arch dam project under construction in China, according to the report.

The protesting locals were particularly distraught over the construction of the hydroelectric dam, as it would destroy six monasteries, including the Wonto Monastery, which includes ancient murals that date to the 13th century, the RFA report said.

Office of the Managing Director
Uttarakhand Co-Operative Dairy Federation Ltd.
Mangal Parao, Haldwani - 263139 (Nainital) Uttarakhand
पत्रांक : सी-4921/सुशीलीधाम/निविदा पीएचएडएफ/2023-24 दिनांक: 23/02/2024
E-Tender Notice No.: 33(1-2)/UCDF/P&I/2023-24, Date- 23.02.2024

Following E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned, from experienced and financially sound Authorized Manufacturers/Dealers/Firms for the following works so as to reach this office on or before 01.03.2024 upto 5.00 PM. The Tender will be opened on 02.03.2024 at 11:00 AM.

S.No.	Name of Work
1.	Supply of fodderseed.
2.	Supply of various food grade flavors in powder forms.

Tender fee, EMD and other related details can be seen on E-tender portal. Detailed Tender documents may be downloaded/uploaded from E-tender portal <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>.
Administrator Managing Director

THE MAHARAJA BHUPINDER SINGH PUNJAB SPORTS UNIVERSITY, (MBSPSU), PATIALA
Mahindra Kothi, Near Fountain Chowk, Patiala-147001

TENDER NOTICE
The Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Punjab Sports University, Patiala invites bids from reputed software Design/Website Design/Website Development / Portal Design, firms for making a website for The Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Punjab Sports University, Patiala. The sealed bids (Technical and Financial) both in separate sealed envelopes i.e. double develop system as per prescribed format must be submitted upto 06-03-2024 upto 4:00 PM. The details of the tender will be available on the University website <https://mbpspu.ac.in> on 24th Feb 2024. Important Note: In case of any query bidders can contact office during working hours. Detail terms and conditions are given on <https://mbpspu.ac.in>
-Sd/-
Registrar

NA/12/22297/2023/32822 Dated CHD :- 2/23/2024

NEW DELHI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
Office of the Executive Engineer (E)
RDSS Division, Electricity Department, New Delhi Municipal Council,
Room No. - 1705, 17th Floor, Palika Kendra, New Delhi: 110001
Office Tel.:- 011-41501389 Extn. 3705

3RD CALL E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
Name of Work:- Request for Proposal/Bid (RFP)/RFEB for appointment of PMA for "Consultancy Services for Assisting and Supporting in Project Management to NDMC for Implementation of (i) Smart System Metering Work (DT and Feeder Metering) and (ii) Implementation of Loss Reduction Infrastructure Works under Phase-I of RDSS, Gol".

Tender Value :- Rs.4,83,00,000/-

Tender ID No. :- 2024_NDMC_1

Date of Release of tender through e-procurement solution : 21.02.2024

Pre-Bid Meeting (In the O/ C/E(E-II), Palika Kendra, ND) : 28.02.2024 at 1500 Hrs

Last date/time for receipt of tenders through e-procurement : 07.03.2024 at 1500 Hrs

Date/time for opening of Bid through e-procurement: 07.03.2024 at 1530 Hrs

Further details can be seen at <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in> and <https://www.ndmc.gov.in/tenders.aspx>
Note:- To participate in e-tender in NDMC registration with application services provider NIC is mandatory.
Executive Engineer (E) RDSS

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot
Sadiq Road, Faridkot-151203 Ph. 01639- 256232, 256236

E-TENDER NOTICE
E-tenders are invited for the procurement of following items upto 09.03.2024.
1) Automated Blood Culture System Machine. 2) Tilt Table Test Machine 3) High End Digital Mammography Machine 4) High End DEXA Scan Machine 5) CRR7 (Continuous Renal Replacement Therapy Machine 6) 3 Tesla MRI Machine.

E-tenders are invited for the procurement of following items upto 16.03.2024
1) Lab material for GGSMCH 2) procurement of Ophthalmology equipments (Silt Lamp & Perimeter) at GGSMCH 3) Rate contract for supply of Chemotherapy supportive Drugs/Surgical material at GGSMCH 4) Signing rate contract of TKR implants.

Terms and conditions can be downloaded from <http://eproc.punjab.gov.in>. The tenders will be accepted in E-Tender mode only. Bidder can also download tender notification and document from the University website i.e. www.bfuhs.ac.in
Registrar

00/12/207/2023/32775 Dated CHD :- 2/23/2024

Shareholders vote to oust Byju

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than 60 per cent of shareholders of edutech Byju's on Friday voted for removal of founder CEO Byju Raveendran and his family over alleged "mismanagement and failures" at what was once India's hottest tech startup, but the company dug in its heels, calling the voting done in the absence of founders as "invalid".

Prosus - one of the six investors who had called the extraordinary general

meeting (EGM) - in a statement said "shareholders unanimously passed all resolutions put forward for vote.

"These included a request for the resolution of the outstanding governance, financial mismanagement and compliance issues at Byju's; the reconstitution of the board of directors, so that it is no longer controlled by the founder of T&L; and a change of leadership of the company."

Raveendran and his family stayed away from the EGM,



calling it "procedurally invalid."

However, the outcome of the vote at the EGM will not be applicable until March 13, when the Karnataka High Court will next hear Raveendran's plea challenging the move by certain investors to call the EGM.

The High Court on Wednesday had refused to stay the EGM, called by shareholders collectively holding more than 32 per cent stake in Think & Learn (T&L) - the firm that operates

Byju's, but any resolution passed shall not be given effect till the next date of hearing.

Raveendran and family own 26.3 per cent in the company. Byju's in a statement, issued even before the EGM results were declared, said it "firmly declares that the resolutions passed during the recently concluded EGM -- attended by a small cohort of select shareholders - are invalid and ineffective. The passing of the unenforceable resolutions challenges the rule of law at worst."

NPCI to help Paytm UPI users migrate to banks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank has asked the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to examine the possibility of migrating Paytm Payments Bank customers using the UPI handle @paytm to 4-5 other banks, in a bid to prevent any disruptions in the payment ecosystem.

On Friday, the central bank came out with additional steps for the benefit of customers, wallet holders and merchants who are availing banking services from Paytm Payments Bank, which has been barred from accepting deposits and credits after March 15, 2024.

As per the website of Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), it has 30 crore wallets and 3 crore bank customers.



NPCI, an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India, is an initiative of RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) for creating a payment and settlement infrastructure in India.

As the PPBL cannot accept further credits into its customer accounts and wallets after March 15, 2024, certain additional steps have become necessary to ensure seamless digital payments by UPI customers using @paytm handle operated by the bank, and minimise concentration risk in the UPI system by having multiple payment app providers, the RBI said in a statement.

"NPCI has been advised by the RBI to examine the request of One97 Communication Ltd (OCL) to become a Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP) for UPI channel for continued UPI operation of the Paytm app, as per the norms," it said.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL), which owns the Paytm brand, holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL.

RBI further said that in the event of NPCI granting TPAP

status to OCL, it may be stipulated that '@paytm' handles are to be migrated in a seamless manner from PPBL to a set of newly identified banks to avoid any disruption. "No new users are to be added by the said TPAP until all the existing users are migrated satisfactorily to a new handle," it added.

"For seamless migration of '@paytm' handle to other banks, NPCI may facilitate certification of 4-5 banks as Payment Service Provider (PSP) Banks with demonstrated capabilities to process high volume UPI transactions. This is in line with NPCI norms for minimising concentration risk," RBI said.

Also, for the merchants using PayTM QR Codes, OCL may open the settlement accounts with one or more PSP Banks (other than Paytm Payments Bank), the Reserve Bank said.

It further said the migration of UPI handles is applicable only to such customers and merchants who have a UPI handle '@Paytm'. For others who have a UPI address or handle other than '@Paytm', no action is required to be taken by them.

RBI again asked the customers, whose underlying account/wallet is currently with Paytm Payments Bank, to make an alternative arrangement with other banks well before March 15, 2024.

Rupee falls 8 paise to close at 82.93 a dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and depreciated by 8 paise to close at 82.93 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking a strong American currency and muted trend in domestic equities.

Forex traders said the Indian currency depreciated as foreign fund outflows weighed on the rupee.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.87 and finally settled at 82.93 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 8 paise from its previous close.

During the day, the rupee witnessed a range-bound movement. It saw an intra-day high of 82.84 and a low of 82.96 against the American currency.

On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 82.85 against the US dollar. The Indian rupee depreciated on Friday on dollar demand from importers. Elevated crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee, said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on positive global equities and soft US dollar. However, any bounce back in crude oil prices may cap sharp upside. Geopolitical



tension in the Middle East may put pressure on rupee at higher levels," Choudhary said, adding that USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.60 to Rs 83.10.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.05 per cent up at 104.00.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, was trading 1.33 per cent lower to USD 82.56 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex declined 15.44 points, or 0.02 per cent, to settle at 73,142.80 points. The Nifty fell 4.75 points, or 0.02 per cent, to 22,212.70 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday as they sold shares worth Rs 1,410.05 crore, according to exchange data.

Sensex edges lower, Nifty settles flat

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty edged lower in a volatile trade on Friday, reversing early gains due to selling in IT and select banking shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex slipped 15.44 points or 0.02 per cent to close at 73,142.80 points with 17 of its constituents closing in the red and 13 in the green.

The index opened higher but later slipped into losses due to profit-taking by investors. The barometer oscillated between a high of 73,413.93 and a low of 73,022 during the day.

The broader Nifty of NSE closed lower by 4.75 points or 0.02 per cent at 22,212.70 points as gains in FMCG, pharma and financial shares were offset by losses in IT and private bank shares.

The 50-share barometer scaled a record high of 22,297.50 in intra-day trade.

"Nifty opened higher but failed to sustain the morning momentum, leading to a closing at the day's low due to profit booking," Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst,



LKP Securities, said.

Among Sensex shares, HCLTech, Asian Paints, Maruti, JSW Steel, TCS, SBI, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the major losers.

On the other hand, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, L&T and Wipro were the major gainers.

"The domestic market paused momentarily today after reaching another record high earlier in the day, driven by positive signals from global markets," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The capital goods and industrial sectors showed strength, supported by advancements in



manufacturing and services.

BSE Midcap advanced 0.25 per cent while Smallcap rose by 0.53 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, BSE Oil & Gas dropped by 0.81 per cent, BSE Metal by 0.33 per cent, BSE Energy by 0.36 per cent and Bankex 0.29 per cent.

On the other hand, BSE Industrials spurred by 1.22 per cent, Telecommunications by 1.52 per cent, Capital Goods by 1.18 per cent, and Consumer Durables 0.76 per cent.

Reliance Industries rose by around 1 per cent to hit a 52-week high intra-day. Its arm Reliance Jio Financial Services soared by more than 14.5 per cent to hit a year's high level,

taking its market valuation to more than Rs 2 lakh crore.

Global markets were mostly higher following sharp overnight gains in US markets driven mainly by stunning December quarter results by technology company Nvidia.

The Shanghai Composite index added 0.6 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng was unchanged. Tokyo's markets were closed for a holiday.

Germany's DAX, the CAC 40 in Paris and FTSE 100 in London rose up to 0.1 per cent.

In the domestic market, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) were net sellers on Thursday as they offloaded securities worth Rs 1,410.05 crore.

Renewable Energy to rise to 170 GW by March 2025: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's installed Renewable Energy (RE) capacity, excluding large hydro plants, is estimated to increase to 170 GW by March 2025 from a level of 135 GW in December 2023, rating agency ICRA said on Friday.

"ICRA estimates that the rise in the RE capacity over the next five-six years is estimated to enhance the share of RE plus large hydro in the all-India electricity generation from about 23 per cent in FY24 to around 40 per cent in FY30," ICRA said in a statement.

Given the intermittency associated with RE generation, the availability of Round The

Clock (RTC) supply from RE sources remains important, it stated.

This can be made possible through the use of wind and solar power projects complemented with energy storage systems, it suggested.

According to the statement, ICRA expects the installed RE capacity, excluding hydro energy, in India to increase to about 170 GW by March 2025 from 135 GW as of December 2023.

Thereafter, the capacity addition is likely to be supported by the significant improvement in tendering activity in the current fiscal with over 16 GW projects bid so far, and another 17 GW bids



underway by central nodal agencies, it stated.

This is in line with the 50 GW annual bidding trajectory announced by the Government of India in March 2023, it noted.

Girishkumar Kadam, Senior Vice-President and Group Head, Corporate Ratings,

ICRA, said in the statement that the tariffs discovered in the RE-RTC tenders remain higher as against the standalone solar and wind energy tenders, with recent RTC bid tariffs seen in the range of Rs 4-4.5 per unit, mainly on account of the cost associated with the storage

component and higher share of wind energy component expected.

Further, based on the prevailing capital cost of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Pumped Hydro Storage Projects (PSP), the viability of the RTC projects remains relatively better with the use of PSP capacity, he said.

Nonetheless, the supply chain challenges in the wind energy segment could pose challenges for execution of RTC projects, he said.

As per ICRA, the sharp decline in solar PV cell and module prices, abeyance of the Approved List of Module Manufacturers (ALMM) order

till March 2024 and the timeline extension approved for solar and hybrid projects, is expected to lead to an improvement in RE capacity addition to 18 GW to 20 GW in FY24 from 15 GW in FY23. This, along with the growing project pipeline, is likely to support the scale-up in capacity addition to 23-25 GW in FY25, as per ICRA estimates, mainly driven by the solar power segment.

However, it stated that challenges remain on the execution front with respect to delays in land acquisition and transmission connectivity, which could hamper the capacity-addition prospects

GSTN to share data with RBI frictionless credit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has permitted GST Network to share data about GST-registered businesses, based on their consent, with the Reserve Bank's 'Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit'.

The move will help entities get loans faster on the basis of shared Goods and Services Tax (GST)-related information.

The platform, created by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) subsidiary Reserve Bank Innovation Hub, is intended to enable seamless flow of necessary information to lenders to help in disbursing credit.

In a notification, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has said "the Central Government, on the recommendation of the Council, notifies 'Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit' as the system with which information may be shared by the common portal based on consent..."

The platform has been developed for the operation of a large ecosystem of credit, to ensure access of information from various data sources digitally.

The financial service providers and multiple data

service providers can converge on the platform using standard and protocol driven architecture, the notification said.

Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said with appropriate consent from the supplier/recipient, GSTN is empowered to disclose specific details submitted in the GST registration application, along with data from outward tax returns, monthly and annual tax returns, and invoice registrations.

"This arrangement ensures that borrowers cannot withhold any transactional information provided to lenders or the government portal. It enhances credit efficiency by minimising costs and the time required for processing. "Moreover, lenders gain access to authenticated monthly sales and purchase data directly from government-sanctioned sources, allowing for a more accurate and timely assessment of credit risk," Mohan said.

GST filings will become a crucial factor for businesses seeking to obtain credit and leverage government-sponsored credit programmes in future, Mohan added.

Tata sells ₹650 cr residential plots in Bengaluru

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Tata Housing has sold plots worth Rs 650 crore in its recently launched residential project in Bengaluru.

In a statement, the company on Friday said it has sold all inventories in the first phase of its project, Raagam, achieving revenue of over Rs 650 crore within one week of its launch.

"With 576 plots sold and a total area of 9 lakh square feet, the project's overwhelming response reflects the robust demand for premium residential offerings in Bengaluru's real estate market," it said.

The project is part of township 'Tata Carnatica' in Devanahalli, North Bengaluru.

Tata Housing Development Company Ltd is a subsidiary of Tata Realty and Infrastructure Ltd.

Tata Housing currently has more than 33 projects with a total development potential of over 51 million square feet spread across major cities in India, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

Tata and Tata Housing are registered trademarks of Tata Sons Private Ltd.

World Bank needs to reinvent: NK Singh



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The World Bank needs to reinvent and restructure itself so as to become 'better, bolder and bigger' and harness private capital on the strength of its own balance sheet, said N K Singh, Co-Convenor, Expert Group on MDB Reforms.

The World Bank should also look at the possibility of tapping pension funds to increase its capital base and its capacity to fund development projects in developing nations.

"Bretton Woods was the first one, it certainly needs to be reinvented, restructured and recreated. But there is no substitute for multilateral

cooperation. And that's why better, bolder and bigger," Singh said at a panel discussion at the Raisina Dialogue, 2024.

A high-level expert group, led by N K Singh and former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, was set up by the G20 under India's presidency.

In its report, the group had proposed a 30-point roadmap to reform Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and triple their lending by 2030, which includes attracting private investors and introducing pooled portfolio guarantees.

Currently, there are 17 MDBs, including Asian Development Bank, African

Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Inter-American Development Bank.

Bretton Woods institutions, including the World Bank and IMF, were set up for funding reconstruction activities post World War II.

The expert group had said that MDBs would need USD 3 trillion each year between now and 2030. Of this, USD 2 trillion can come from domestic resource mobilisation.


Out of the balance of USD 1 trillion, USD 500 billion could come from the private sector and USD 500 billion could come through official development financing.

Addressing the discussion, titled 'Democratic Dollars: Can the Planet Reclaim the Bretton Wood', Singh said the money has to come from shareholders, as well as the private sector.

However, the World Bank's track record to be able to use its balance sheet to harness private capital has been disappointing, Singh said.


"I would say if the World Bank needs recapitalisation, shareholders have to put in more money, but equally the World Bank needs to harness its ability to attract private capital and improve on its record," he added.

BUSINESS BRIEF




POWERGRID ACQUIRES TWO TRANSMISSION PROJECTS

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited has acquired two Project Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) viz. Sikar Khetri Transmission Limited and Bidar Transmission Limited on 09 th February 2024 for the Transmission System Projects for evacuation of power from REZ in Rajasthan (20GW) under Phase-II Part D Phase I and Solar Energy Zone (2500 MW) in Bidar, Karnataka respectively after competing with various private sector players and emerging as successful bidder in Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) process.



GLOBAL MEET ON MATERIAL CHEMISTRY AT SRM

The Department of Chemistry at SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattakulathur organised the 8th International Conference on Recent Advances in Material Chemistry recently. This three-day conference was organised in association with Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), France and University Gustave Eiffel, France. The idea of ICRAMC-2024 was to provide an excellent platform for the world's Material Scientists to share the latest developments in the area of Materials Chemistry.



VIT-AP UNVEILS V-TAPP 2024

VIT AP University announced the launch of V-TAPP'2024 on Friday, marking the beginning of a two-day extravaganza that brings together students from various colleges, universities, and institutions. Dr Buddha Chandrasekhar, Chief Coordinating officer, AICTE, Ministry of Education, Government of India and Vithal



MEGHALAYA A SYMPHONY OF LIFE AND NATURAL BEAUTY

Every moment in Meghalaya is a step into a world where nature and culture coexist in perfect harmony. It's a place where the clouds meet the earth, and the heart meets the soul, leaving an indelible mark on all who venture into its embrace writes
GYANESHWAR DAYAL.
PANKAJ KUMAR
captured a glimpse of the abode of clouds with his roving eye



With its captivating landscapes and rich cultural heritage, Meghalaya is a destination that beckons the adventurous spirit and the nature lover alike. Pankaj Kumar takes a whirlwind tour of the state to capture a glimpse of the abode of clouds. Nestled in the northeastern part of India, Meghalaya, aptly named the "abode of clouds," is a state that mesmerises visitors with its enchanting landscapes, warm people, and unique cultural treasures. Renowned for its lush greenery, cascading waterfalls, and vibrant traditions, Meghalaya is a paradise for nature enthusiasts and cultural explorers alike.

Meghalaya's natural beauty is unparalleled, offering a breathtaking panorama of rolling hills, dense forests, and meandering rivers. The state is blessed with an abundance of rainfall, contributing to its luxuriant greenery and earning it the distinction of being one of the wettest places on Earth. The picturesque landscapes come alive with a vibrant mix of flora and fauna, making Meghalaya a haven for biodiversity.

Waterfalls, such as the Nohkalikai Falls, plunge



dramatically from towering cliffs, creating a spectacle that leaves visitors in awe. The living root bridges, a testament to the harmonious coexistence between nature and humans, are iconic to the region. These intricate bridges, crafted from the aerial roots of the ancient rubber trees, showcase the indigenous wisdom of the Khasi and Jaintia tribes.

Meghalaya is not only a haven for nature lovers but also a place where the warmth of its people adds an extra layer of charm. The locals, known for their friendliness and hospitality, embrace visitors with open arms. The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia communities contribute to the



state's rich tapestry of cultures, and their traditions are reflected in everyday life.

The indigenous communities of Meghalaya are proud of their heritage and are eager to share their customs with visitors. Engaging in conversation with the locals provides a glimpse into their way of life, from traditional music and dance to folklore that has been passed down through generations.

One of Meghalaya's most fascinating features is its living root bridges, which exemplify the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. The Khasi and Jaintia tribes have mastered the art of training the aerial roots of the *Ficus elastica* tree to form sturdy and durable bridges over rivers and streams. These bridges, some of which are centuries old, are a testament to sustainable living and the ingenious use of natural resources.

Meghalaya's markets are vibrant hubs of commerce where local women play a crucial role in selling a variety of products. The bustling markets showcase the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of Meghalaya's women. From handmade crafts and traditional textiles to fresh produce and local delicacies, the markets are a treasure trove for those seeking authentic experiences and unique souvenirs.

The markets also serve as social spaces where visitors can interact with the locals, learn about traditional cooking methods, and sample indigenous cuisines. This exchange of cultures adds to the richness of the Meghalayan experience.

Meghalaya, with its mesmerizing landscapes, warm people, and unique cultural treasures, stands as a testament to the incredible diversity India has to offer. Whether exploring the lush greenery, marvelling at the living root bridges, or engaging with the locals in vibrant markets.



INDIA DISCOVERS NEW PACE OPTION IN AKASH

PTI ■ RANCHI

India unearthed a fresh pace talent in debutant Akash Deep but veteran Joe Root single-handedly kept England afloat with a tenacious hundred that shunned 'Bazball' for a more conservative approach as the visitors opened to 302 for 7 on the opening day of the fourth Test here on Friday.

At stumps, the 33-year-old Root was unbeaten on 106 and had used up 226 deliveries during his classical Test knock. Giving him company at the other end was Ollie Robinson (26) as England staged a decent recovery from the early jolts given by Akash Deep.

The 27-year-old Bengal pacer, who hails from Bihar, picked up three wickets in his 17 overs, marking yet another confident debut for the home side in the ongoing series.

He made life miserable for England's top-order with the new ball, grabbing the top-three in 10 balls as the visitors lost half of their side in the first session. But Root decided to drop anchor after that, reverting to his natural style of playing the waiting game. The move got him and England the desired results as he struck his first century in 15 innings.

With the sun playing hide and seek during the fog end of the day, the Yorkshire man hit the



ENGLAND REACH 302/7 AT STUMPS

three-figure mark for the 31st time in his Test career, striking a classy cover-drive off Akash Deep. It took him 219 balls to get there and the former skipper did not show much emotion, fully aware that his job was not yet done. A record 10 of his 31 Test centuries are against India and the latest one came at just the right juncture.

England are reeling from back-to-back losses in Visakhapatnam and Rajkot to trail the five-match series 1-2. He hit nine fours in his innings and was a picture of determination, noticeably

avoiding the sweep shot due to the variable bounce of the pitch.

The absence of rested pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who had dismissed Root thrice in this series, also gave the Englishman some breathing space. He was happy to play the spinners on the back-foot and slice the field.

His biggest ally in England's splendid recovery was wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes (47 off 126 balls). The visiting side went through the second session without losing a wicket for the first time in the

series.

The duo took their time and frustrated India by adding 86 runs in the post-lunch session when the wicket flattened out. Post tea, Mohammed Siraj (2/60) gave the much-needed breakthrough dismissing Foakes three runs short of his half-century, caught by Ravindra Jadeja at short mid-wicket. The dismissal ended a 113-run sixth wicket partnership.

Siraj also dismissed Tom Hartley (13 off 26 balls) with a brilliant delivery that exhibited late movement off the pitch,

crashing into the off stump.

Hartley had earlier narrowly avoided a catch by the second slip following an edge that didn't carry. Instead, it went past Yashasvi Jaiswal and reached the boundary rope.

He departed after scoring 13, which included a powerful six off Ravichandran Ashwin over long-on. Ashwin got the scalp of Jonny Bairstow, who made a quick-fire 38 off 35 balls.

STUNNING DEBUT FOR AKASH DEEP: Earlier, India's good run with debutants continued as pacer Akash Deep, the fourth newcomer for the hosts in this series, showed promise for this level.

Bowling one of the finest maiden spells in a Test debut — 7-0-24-3 — Akash Deep dismissed Ben Duckett (11), Ollie Pope (0) and Zak Crawley (42) in 10 deliveries while bowling from the dressing room end.

The pacer, who came through the ranks playing domestic cricket in Bengal, hit the deck hard in a sensational display during the first hour's play after Ben Stokes opted to bat.

He, however, had to wait a bit for his maiden Test wicket.

In his second over of the day, he uprooted Crawley's off-stump that cartwheeled a couple of metres but the celebration was short-lived as he was found guilty of overstepping.

Root century was due: Crawley

PTI ■ RANCHI

England opener Zak Crawley on Friday said that a century from Joe Root was long due and the veteran batter's unbeaten 106 on Day 1 of the fourth Test against India was a "phenomenal" knock under the circumstances.

After losing half of the side at lunch for 112, England rode on Root's determined 106 not out to end day one on 302 for 7 in the fourth Test against India here.

"He (Root) is unbelievable. We fully expected him to get a good score at some point in this series; he was due, he's the best player we've ever had and he played phenomenally today," said Crawley after the day's play.

"He deserves everything he gets, he works so hard at his game and he always comes good."

Root was in the middle of a lean patch and his highest score before Friday's knock in this series was 37.

"He's probably the only bloke in our team who could have done that knock; he's that good, he's our best player and he's stepped up when we needed him to.

"We needed him to get a score and he got a score like he's done for so many years now, he's a phenomenal player," said Crawley who made run-a-ball 42 at the top of the order.

Root first got a fine ally in



wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes who contributed a valuable 47 runs in a century-plus stand.

"It was tricky with the fields they were setting but we just always talk about the present, and the situation required a bit more caution with that kind of pitch and the variable bounce and that's what they delivered."

"At other times, we counter-punched but they played it perfectly and read it well," he said.

Regarding the pitch, Crawley said, "It was nipping a lot and nipping quickly. It felt like you

had to throw a counter-punch, you couldn't really sit there like those boys did later on in the day. "I expected variable bounce from the look of those cracks. It certainly did less and less as that opening spell went on. I got out still fairly early but it looked like it wasn't bouncing anywhere near as much or as quickly as earlier on against seam.

"It got harder against the spin, it will continue to break up. It might be a new-ball wicket, hopefully it is when we bowl but the I think the spin's only going to get harder," he added.



India women eye victory against Hong Kong in Turkish Cup

PTI ■ ALANYA (TURKEY)

Having played determined football to get the better of Estonia in their opening match, India would be looking forward to another successful outing when they face Hong Kong in the Turkish Women's Cup here on Saturday.

The 4-3 victory against Estonia was the first-ever for a senior Indian women's national team against an European side, and it would have raised the morale of the Chaoba Devi-coached side in the four-team round-robin tournament.

This will be India's fifth encounter against Hong Kong, ranked 79th in the FIFA rankings, and India would be buoyed by the fact that they have won all four previous games, netting 11 goals, while the opponents have managed just two. In their most recent clash, a friendly in 2019, India won by a solitary goal courtesy Pyari Xaxa, who also found the net in India's victory against Estonia in the ongoing tournament.

India currently lead the table

with three points and a goal difference of plus one, while Hong Kong are at the bottom having yet to open their account and a goal difference of -1 after losing 0-1 to Kosovo.

Coach Chaoba Devi said Hong Kong had made a marked improvement since they last played in 2019 and her team would not underestimate the opponents.

"We played against Hong Kong a while ago, but they have shown significant improvement since then. We watched their recent match against Kosovo, where they put up a good fight despite losing by only one goal," said Chaoba Devi on the eve of the match.

"So, we can't underestimate them. We need to focus on our finishing, as we could have scored more goals in our first match against Estonia if our finishing was better. Today, we will do some finishing drills in our training to prepare for the Hong Kong match and ensure the girls are ready to perform well. It's our time to win this tournament," added Chaoba Devi.

Australia beat New Zealand in 2nd T20, win series

AP ■ AUCKLAND (NEW ZEALAND)

Adam Zampa took four for 34 as Australia rolled New Zealand for 102 in 17 overs to win the second Twenty20 International by 72 runs Friday and take an insurmountable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The Australians will head towards the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and United States in June with more confidence after a comprehensive series win over New Zealand which is the world's second-ranked team.

Australia won the first match by six wickets with a four off the last ball and the third match between the teams is at Eden Park on Sunday.

"It was a great win for Australia," captain Mitch Marsh said. "Our backs were against the wall and we thought we were probably 50 runs short."

"But, the way our bowlers came out and performed was outstanding. All of our teams over the last 12 months have been backed into a lot of corners and we've managed to find a way to get out



of them. Tonight was another example of that."

Australia looked to have fallen short of a competitive total when it was bowled out for 174 in 19.5 overs after being 72 for one at the end of the six-over power

play.

Opener Travis Head blasted 45 from 22 balls including five sixes to give Australia a fast start as it battled after losing the toss. But, Lockie Ferguson took four for 12 and Ben Sears two for

29 as the New Zealand seamers turned things around and provoked a sustained collapse of the Australian innings.

Australia lost six wickets for 59 runs in the last 9.5 overs.

New Zealand's batting was depleted by the loss of Rachin Ravindra just before the start of play with a slight knee injury and Devon Conway suffered a thumb injury keeping wicket and was taken to hospital for X-rays. He returned to the ground when it was found there was no fracture.

Conway still was unable to bat and his opening partner Finn Allen had to take the gloves for the first time in his international career.

Regardless of injuries, New Zealand collapsed in the face of outstanding Australian fast bowling on a fast and bouncy wicket.

Allen hit a six from the third ball of the first over and was out to the last ball, walking down to a good-length ball from Josh Hazlewood which he edged onto his stumps.



Bhagat, Kadam reach Para Badminton World Championship semifinals

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadam on Friday reached the semifinals of the Para Badminton World Championship to assure themselves of at least a medal here.

Bhagat defeated France's Mathieu Thomas 21-15, 21-17 to set up a semifinal clash with compatriot Manoj Sarkar.

Kadam got the better of Nigeria's Chigozie Jeremiah Nnanna 21-13, 21-11. He will take on Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan in the semifinal.

In mixed doubles, the Indian pair of Bhagat and Manisha Ramdass defeated Japan's Taiyo Imai and Noriko Ito 21-11, 16-21, 21-18 to seal their place in the semifinal.

They will take on the Indonesian pair of Fredy Setiawan and Khalimatus Sadiyah in the last-four.

In the men's doubles quarterfinals, Bhagat and Kadam will take on the French pair of Guillaume Gailly and Mathiew Thomas.

In other matches, Kumar Nitesh defeated Thailand's Mongkhon Bunsun in the quarterfinals to set up a last-four clash against Daniel Bethell of England.

AC Milan, Roma, Marseille, Benfica advance to Europa League round of 16

AP ■ MILAN

AC Milan advanced to the round of 16 in the Europa League despite a 3-2 loss at Rennes in the second leg of their playoff.

Milan, which won 3-0 at the San Siro last week, eliminated its French opponent on a 5-3 aggregate score on Thursday.

The Italian powerhouse, a seven-time European champion, has never won the second-tier Europa League or its predecessor, the UEFA Cup.

Midfielder Benjamin Bourigeaud's hat trick put the hosts up three times with Milan quickly answering twice.

Bourigeaud netted the opener in the 11th minute with a fierce right-footed shot from over 20 meters to beat goalkeeper Mike Maignan.

Forward Luka Jovic canceled it out 10 minutes later with a header off a cross by captain Theo Hernández.

Bourigeaud made it 2-1 early in the second from the penalty spot but Rafael Leão equalised

after four minutes on a fine solo effort.

Bourigeaud sent Maignan the wrong way with another spot kick to make it 3-2.

The eight runners-up in the Europa League group stage played the eight third-place teams from the Champions League group stage in the playoffs.

The eight winners will take on the Europa League's group winners, who qualified directly for the round of 16. They are Liverpool, West Ham and Brighton from the Premier League, as well Leverkusen, Atalanta, Villarreal, Rangers and Slavia Prague.

The draw is scheduled for Friday.

Nicola Zalewski converted the decisive spot kick for Roma to prevail 4-2 in a penalty shootout over Feyenoord to qualify for the next round.

Early in the game, captain Lorenzo Pellegrini found the net from the edge of the area to tie it a 1-1 after Santiago Giménez's fifth-minute header



gave the Dutch team a 1-0 lead and silenced more than 67,000 fans at Stadio Olimpico. The teams also drew 1-1 in the opening leg in Rotterdam.

Marseille's new coach Jean-Louis Gasset made a victorious debut after he was appointed Tuesday to replace Gennaro Gattuso.

Geoffrey Kondogbia and

substitute Ismaïla Sarr sealed a 3-1 win for Marseille over Shakhtar Donetsk with a goal each in the second half.

Marseille advanced on a 5-3 aggregate score.

Earlier, Marseille striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang netted his 31st career goal in the Europa League to break the competition record and level

the tie after Georgiy Sudakov converted from the spot.

Sporting was held 1-1 at home by Young Boys but advanced 4-2 overall.

Two-time European champion Benfica held host Toulouse 0-0 to progress 2-1 on aggregate.

Michael Gregoritsch completed a 3-2 comeback victory for Freiburg over Lens nine minutes into extra time to send the Bundesliga team to the next round.

Indrit Tuci and forwards Lukáš Haraslin and Jan Kuchta scored in the second half as Sparta upset 10-man Galatasaray 4-1 in Prague and qualified for the next phase 6-4 on aggregate.

Their goals came after Kaan Ayhan received a straight red card in the 68th minute. At Baku, Nariman Akhundzade scored in stoppage time of the three-goal extra time to give 10-man Qarabag a spot in the round of 16 in a European competition for the first time at the expense of Braga with a 6-5 aggregate victory.

Diksha, Pranavi in top five after first round in Morocco

PTI ■ RABAT (MOROCCO)

Diksha Dagar and Pranavi Urs got off to a great start, carding a fine two-under 71 each to lie tied fifth after the opening round of Lalla Meryem Cup on the Ladies European Tour here.

The two Indian golfers, who had Top-25 finishes in the Magical Kenya Ladies Open, suffered a double bogey each, but did well to birdie three of the five Par-5s that this course has. Starting from the 10th, Diksha birdied the 12th and the 16th, but also dropped shots on the 13th and 18th for an even par stretch.

On the second nine, the front side of Royal Golf Dar es Salam, Diksha was in full flow with birdies on the second, third, fifth and eight, before a double bogey set her back on the closing ninth.

Pranavi was off to a flier with four birdies in first six holes but a bogey on 17th and a double on 18th meant she was just 1-under after her first nine.



She had one bogey on first and two birdies on the fifth and the eighth for a 71.

Mexico's Maria Fassi showed off her explosive power and fine form during the opening round, firing a flawless eight-under 65 to lead by three shots on the Par-73 golf course.

The 25-year-old, who represented Mexico at the Tokyo Olympics, started on the 10th and picked up three birdies within the first five holes. At the turn, the LPGA player fired up her flatstick to roll in three consecutive birdies before rolling in another two on holes five and eight.

Home favourite Ines Laklalech got the crowds fired up with a phenomenal first round of five-under-par. Spain's Teresa Toscano, who earned her LET card through Q School in December, sits one shot behind Laklalech on four-under-par.

Fellow Spaniard Marta Martin, winner of the 2023 Amundi Czech Ladies Challenge on the LET Access Series (LETAS) sits in fourth on three-under-par.

There is a nine-way tie for fifth place and that includes the two Indians — Diksha and Pranavi, and the 2023 LET Order of Merit winner Trichat Cheenglab.