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INDIA BOUNCE BACK AGAINST ENGLAND 12 SPORTS

# Narendra Modi's Clarion Call for 2024

BJP ONLY POLITICAL PARTY TO DELIVER ON IDEOLOGY, MANIFESTOS AND GUARANTEES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed confidence on Monday that the NDA would secure more than 400 seats, and the BJP would win at least 370 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. Modi said that he was convinced the Opposition parties had lost the courage to contest elections and had resolved to stay on the Opposition benches for a long time. "I can gauge the mood of the nation; it will definitely give the NDA more than 400 seats and the BJP at least 370 seats," the Prime Minister said in response to the debate in the Lok Sabha on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address. These changes are mainly for maintaining tense consistency and ensuring clarity in the expression of ideas. He mentioned that the government's third term was not too far away. "At most, 100-125 days remain," he remarked, referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. "Abki baar," Modi declared, and BJP members joined him in unison, saying, "400 paar." "Even Kharage ji is expressing the same sentiment," Modi added, referring to Congress president Mallikarjun

Kharage's statement in the Rajya Sabha. He emphasised that the NDA's third term would witness significant decisions and lay the foundation for the next 1,000 years. Prime Minister Modi criticised the Congress, targeting its dynastic politics and asserting that it had a golden opportunity to function effectively as an opposition but failed in that capacity. He highlighted that some Opposition leaders were eager to change their parliamentary seats, while others were contemplating a move to the Rajya Sabha. "I appreciate the resolution the Opposition has made. Every word in their speeches has affirmed my confidence, as well as the confidence of the nation, that they are determined to remain in the Opposition for a significant period," Modi said, placing the blame on the Congress for the current state of the Opposition. "For several decades, you occupied the treasury benches, but now you have resolved to stay in the Opposition benches for several more decades. The people will bless you and keep you there. You will attain greater heights and soon be observed in the public galleries of the House," the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi replies to the 'Motion of Thanks' on the President's address in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament on Monday PTI

Prime Minister declared. Modi pointed out that the Budget Session presented a valuable opportunity to propose constructive suggestions, but the Opposition members have missed a significant chance. "You have left the country disillusioned. Leaders have changed, but the same tune persists," he remarked.

"The Opposition could have conveyed a message to the people in an election year," Modi said, stressing that the Congress bore responsibility for the current state of the opposition. "The Congress had a golden opportunity to function effectively as an Opposition but failed in that role. Despite the presence of other young

leaders in the opposition, they were not allowed to speak, possibly out of fear that it might overshadow a particular individual," Modi remarked, seemingly referring to Rahul Gandhi. The Prime Minister further noted that the Congress might soon have to "shut shop" due to its persistent attempt to launch the same

product repeatedly. "It is election time, and you should have put in more effort, introduced something new, and conveyed a message to the people. However, you failed miserably. Allow me to impart this lesson to you," Modi expressed. In the Lok Sabha, he added, "The Congress party bears responsibility for the current

state of the Opposition. Despite having the opportunity to function effectively as a formidable opposition, the Congress failed to fulfill its responsibilities over the last ten years." On Monday, Modi expressed confidence that India would become the third-largest economy in the world during his "third" tenure. He said that during his "third term," the government would make a "significant decision" and lay the foundation for a prosperous India for the next 1,000 years. Modi also took a swipe at the Congress, mentioning that in the interim Budget of 2014, the then Finance Minister had projected that it would take three decades (until 2044) for India to become the third-largest economy. He accused the 2014 Congress government of losing the ability to dream big, saying, "I pity their thinking." The Congress, he claimed, would have taken at least 100 years to achieve what this government has accomplished in the last ten years. Modi remarked that neither Jawaharlal Nehru nor Indira Gandhi had faith in the ability of the people. "I have confidence in the strength of the people of India," he emphasised, noting that in the

first term (2014-19), the NDA government rectified the shortcomings of the previous Congress-led government. "In the second term (2019-24), we laid the foundation of a new India, and in the third term, we will progress towards 'Vikshit Bharat' (Developed India)," he added. Discussing the government's initiatives, Modi mentioned the introduction of GST, promotion of digitalisation, completion of pending schemes, and the abolition of over 40,000 compliances. He also highlighted that about 25 crore people have emerged from poverty, and the EPFO data indicate the addition of 18 crore new subscribers. India has now become a hub of innovation, research, and manufacturing, and Modi stressed the need to achieve self-reliance in green energy and lead in semiconductors, as these initiatives would create quality jobs. The prime minister expressed hope that the semiconductor sector would attract substantial investments in the coming years, and in that domain, India would contribute significantly. Efforts are underway to skill people to prepare them for Industry 4.0. Discussing inflation, he pointed out that it used to be in double digits during the Congress era.

## Biggest error by Congress after 1975

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on the Congress' first family — the Gandhis — Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Monday said that with the family members "boycotting" Lord Ram, it is indeed the end of the road for them in Uttar Pradesh. Neither Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, nor their kin would ever dare to enter the electoral fray in the State, which has been the undisputed bastion of the Nehru-Gandhi family for decades. With speculation suggesting that Sonia, Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party and the longest-serving Congress president, may enter the Rajya Sabha, and considering that Rahul, who already faced defeat in the 2019 elections, is still pursuing seats in southern India, Thakur said, "Unke kadam ab ladakhadane lage hain" (they are literally stumbling now). This comes after their disrespectful stance towards Ram, a symbol of Hinduism, and it is now well-known that they harbour affinity towards Babri Masjid. "The Gandhis are no longer suitable for electoral contests. Look at their diminishing public outreach, regardless of their numerous journeys. They are against Lord Ram.

This is the second-largest mistake Congress has made since 1975 (Emergency)," Thakur told The Pioneer. While Sonia has represented Rae Bareilly for several terms, was represented by Rahul until 2019 when he was defeated by Smriti Irani. Sources indicate that while Sonia has the option to enter the Rajya Sabha, Rahul will again contest from his current Lok Sabha constituency in Wayanad, Kerala. Former Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and other family members like Sanjay Gandhi have been elected to the Lok Sabha from Uttar Pradesh. Elaborating on the deteriorating public perception towards the country's oldest party, Thakur said his statement can be affirmed and corroborated given the present state of affairs in the three states they are currently governing. "They are facing challenges in Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and the recently won Telangana. They came with a lot of pomp and show, and very soon, the popularity of the governments in these states is declining, along with a lot of infighting within. However, these issues are only going to help the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections and contribute more to the targets set by my party, led by Prime

Minister Narendra Modi," Thakur, who now holds the Information and Broadcasting portfolio, further said. He added that while Congress and its alliances are widely synonymous with corruption and a loss of credibility, the BJP is the only party that has lived up to realising its manifesto and, above all, its ideology. Thakur reminded that members of the Opposition, led by Congress, are either in jail or on bail, be it Sonia, Rahul, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, leaders of Mamata Banerjee's party, and others. "With full conviction, I can say that led by PM Modi, the BJP is perhaps the only party in the world that has met its ideology, and we have never played truant on this part like several other political parties. Modi is a big name now universally, and whatever the party has said since its inception has been almost achieved, and now we are working to meet the people's expectations," Thakur added. On the preparedness for the Lok Sabha polls, Thakur said while it is being coordinated by the party, he was pleased to share that the BJP is working on strategic alliances, and more professional people are venturing to join the party. Continued on Page 2



## India Breathless at Grammy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian music struck a chord at the 2024 Grammy Awards with five Indian musicians, including tabla maestro Zakir Hussain and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia, picking up the coveted prize at a glittering ceremony in Los Angeles. While Hussain was India's big winner with three Grammys, Rakesh Chaurasia picked up two. Singer Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopal and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram, Hussain's collaborators in the fusion group Shakti, won one Grammy each at the event held at the Crypto.Com Arena Sunday night. Shakti won the 2024 Grammy Award for best global music album for "This Moment". The album features the four Indians as well as its founding member, the legendary British guitarist John McLaughlin. Continued on Page 2

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## Ayodhya opens its arms to global tourism

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ AYODHYA

Just under a kilometre from the revered Ram Janmabhoomi site, where the new Ram Temple was opened to the public on January 22 in Ayodhya, Dinesh Yadav finds himself grappling with the challenges of setting up his Domino's pizza shop. Despite having opened it recently, he is experiencing brisk business. "On the first day, I did around Rs 5,000 in business, and on the second day, it was Rs 4,500. We will do well," Yadav



told this reporter. Domino's is the first fast-food chain outlet to have emerged in the vicinity of the Ram Temple. Yadav said, "We started in a

hurry. This shop is very small, and construction work is still ongoing. We cannot cater to customers in large numbers from here. Although we

opened our shop on January 28, we are already looking for a bigger space." On the other hand, about 8 km from the Ram Temple, Awadh Kumar Verma, who oversees operations at Pizza Hut in Mall of Awadh, regrets the missed opportunity to have a shop near the Ram Temple. "Pizza Hut opened this shop around three months ago when the consecration dates were announced. But now, we are looking for a shop on Ram Path because the crowd is jamming that area. Continued on Page 2

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# CAA will be implemented soon: Adhikari after meeting Shah

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader on Monday met Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman before iterating once again that Citizenship Amendment Act was going to be implemented anytime soon. Adhikari who met Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman — and demanded a probe into the alleged Rs 2 lakh crore scam mentioned in the CAG reports — said though CAA was not on the agenda of his meeting it was going to be implemented soon. Adhikari was also to meet Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar. Adhikari who was summoned to the national Capital on an urgent basis, said, that the “CAA will be implemented soon,” reminding “a Government that can abrogate Article 370 can also enforce CAA ... ‘Modi hai to Mumkin hai (where there is Modi everything is possible),” and adding CAA was however not on the agenda of his meeting with the top leaders of his party. The CAA --- which has been dismissed by the Opposition



parties as “redundant law framed with ulterior motives” --- is aimed at providing citizenship to the Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Parsis and other minorities who had to flee the neighbouring Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan till December 31, 2014. Adhikari refused to divulge what transpired in his meeting with the Home Minister saying, “I won’t share the topic of discussion but you will soon get to see things when actions follow in the days to come.” When asked to comment on whether he was urgently called to Delhi to discuss the roadmap to the elections, the Bengal LoP who was flanked by two MPs Soumitra Khan and Locket Chatterjee said, “you will soon see the actions, reactions and the roadmap that was discussed.” On his discussion with the Finance Minister Adhikari

said that he had asked for an investigation into the Rs 2 lakh crore scam stated in the CAG reports. “I met the Finance Minister and complained against the State Government ... I mentioned about the scam that has taken place and mentioned in the CAG reports ... I told Nirmala ji to act on the reports ... there must be financial discipline when you running a Government ... you running a Government in such a manner that you have to take a loan of Rs 6 lakh crore ... there is a need to investigate the matters ... I have demanded an investigation and requested the Finance Minister to first audit and then release the funds because there is no financial discipline,” he said. Before Adhikari, Bengal BJP leader and minister Shantanu Thakur had earlier twice claimed that the CAA would happen soon. In fact he went a step forward claiming, “CAA is going to be implemented in another week’s time,” adding, “the Matuas and those others refugees who had to migrate to India in the wake of persecution will soon get their citizenship and their fate will no longer hand in balance.”

## Mamata to skip One Nation, One Election meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

In a sudden development, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday called off her trip to Delhi where she was supposed to take part in a meeting on “One Nation One Election”. The visit was called off on account of the on-going Budget Session, she claimed. Senior Trinamool Congress MPs Sudip Bandopadhyay and Kalyan Banerjee would attend the meeting in her place. Curiously the Chief Minister had a couple of days ago announced from a public meeting that she would make a short apolitical visit to Delhi — “only to take part in the meeting on One Nation One Election and nothing else,” before making clear once again as to what she thought of the formula which she called an “absurd” idea.

# Jarange Patil threatens to go on hunger strike over quota issue

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Buoyed by the Shinde dispensation's recent decision to accept his demand for expanding the scope of Kunbi OBC certificates for Marathas, Shivba Sanghatana leader Manoj Jarange-Patil on Monday threatened to go on a fresh hunger agitation from February 10 to demand speedy implementation of a draft rules for the Maratha reservations. Talking to media persons in his home village of Antarwali Sarathi in Jalna district, Jarange-Patil said: “I will go on an indefinite hunger strike from February to demand immediate implementation of the expanded Kunbi OBC certificate rules”. It may be recalled that on January 27, the Maharashtra government had decided to issue a gazette notification with rules aimed at easing and expanding the scope for offering Kunbi OBC certificates to Marathas. These certificates will entitle them to apply for government jobs and admissions in educational institutions as OBCs, who are entitled for 27 per cent reservations in the state. Miffed with what he said that “a handful of 10-20 disgruntled people who have ‘taken supari’ (Contract) to speak against and attack me on social media,



conducted over the past several months. “This, I am sure, would touch 60 lakh. It has taken 75 years to do it,” he said. “As many as 36 lakh caste certificates have been issued... But, what we want is the speedy implementation on multiple issues,” he said. In a related development, the opposing OBCs groups -- who have not taken kindly to the state government's decision to carve out benefits for Maratha community in the name of Kunbi OBCs ---have also threatened to intensify their agitation. The OBC groups' decision to intensify their agitation came after the ruling Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar) Minister Chhagan Bhujbal disclosed how he had ‘quit’ his ministerial post way back on November 16, and his resignation letter was still lying with the Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Bhujbal, whose resignation as state Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Minister has not been accepted, has taken a hard stand against his own government. Bhujbal has gone on record saying that “there is a discrimination against OBCs in the state” and that the last OBC Elgar Mahasabha at Ahmednagar would prove to be a seed for bigger revolution in the state.

## Western Railway busts ₹21 crore fake recruitment scam

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The vigilance team of the Western Railway (WR) has busted a fake recruitment racket under which an accused had allegedly defrauded as many as 300 candidates to the tune of a staggering ₹21 crore through false job promises. Acting on a tip-off, the WR's vigilance team uncovered “a fake racket that had defrauded more than 300 candidates of about ₹21 crore. “The team had been chasing this fake racket for 3 months”. WR chief spokesperson Sumit Thakur said that a trap was set to nab the culprit with the help of an outsider and two proxy candidates, in which ₹20,000 was transferred to the culprit through Google Pay. The trap was aimed at meeting the culprit at Mumbai Central Station for payment of further instalment. “At around 14.00 hrs on Friday, the culprit was finally nabbed at the porch of Mumbai Central Station,” Thakur said. The WR investigations have revealed that the accused had collected ₹9-10 lakh per candidate. The accused was allegedly making fake documents with the help of a person based in Kolkata.

# BJP RS MP seeks abolition of Places of Worship Act, 1991

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Monday saw members raising issues pertaining to road safety and accidents, demolition of place of worship and a demand for abolition of the Places of Worship Act, 1991. Harnath Singh Yadav (BJP) demanded the immediate abolition of the Places of Worship Act, 1991, alleging the law impinges on the religious rights of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists provided under the Constitution. During the Zero Hour mention in Rajya Sabha, he also claimed the law is harming communal harmony in the country. “Places of Worship Act is completely illogical and unconstitutional. It takes away the religious rights of Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains under the Constitution. “It is also damaging communal harmony in the country. Therefore, I urge the government to immediately repeal this law in the interest of the nation,” the senior BJP leader said. The legislation prohibits conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947.



This law, Yadav contended, violates the principles of equality and secularism provided in the Constitution. He also pointed out that the law prohibits judicial review. Raising the matter of road safety during the Zero Hour, Fauzia Khan (NCP) said installation of dash cams in vehicles should be made mandatory to address concerns related to accidents and promote responsible driving practices. The NCP member said there have been instances of protests against the strict provisions regarding hit-and-run cases in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaces the colonial-era Indian Penal Code (IPC). “One key aspect that deserves attention in the wake of these stringent measures is the prominence of dash cams. Dash cams have emerged as a valuable tool that can provide con-

crete evidence in the event of a road accident,” she said. Khan said most countries in the world have adopted dash cams on a large scale. Making the use of dash cams mandatory for manufacturers aligns with the objective of collecting reliable evidence, ensuring transparency, and facilitating a fair legal process. The NCP MP said today seat belts, seat belt beeps, and so on have been made mandatory for manufacturers. Imran Pratapgarhi (Congress) voiced concerns over “unconstitutional actions” take by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) by removing old structures in Delhi. The DDA, he said, was illegally removing historical buildings and structures, including a mosque. In his Zero Hour mention, V Vijayasai Reddy (YSRCP) made a demand for withdrawal of the draft de-reservation policy proposed by the University Grants Commission (UGC). Citing data on professors and assistant professors in central universities, Reddy expressed surprise that the UGC has recently issued draft guidelines on de-reserving the vacancies meant for SCs, STs and OBCs. “This is this is very much unconstitutional and unwarranted,” he said.

# Delegation of 24 religious leaders meets PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A delegation of 24 religious leaders under the aegis of Indian Minorities Foundation met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday and said later that they wanted to send out the message of interfaith unity in India to the outside world. The delegation, representing Sikh, Jain, Christian and Parsi communities, included Imam Umer Ahmed Ilyasi, chief imam of the All India Imam Organisation, and Bhikkhu Sanghasena, founder president of Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre. “Delighted to meet a delegation of religious leaders in Parliament today. I thank them for their kind words on the development trajectory of our nation,” the Prime Minister said in a post on X, sharing some pictures of the meeting. “Our castes, customs, religions, prayer methods might be different, but our biggest religion as a human is that of humanity. We all live in the same country. We are all Bharatiya. Come let us strengthen our country. Our country is our top priority. Together we have to take our nation forward. Today, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is



closer to becoming a ‘Vishwaguru’ again, and we all have to work together for that to happen... These visuals from the new Parliament building are proof of the changing times for our country...”, said all minority religious leaders after meeting with PM Modi in the new Parliament building. Founder of the Indian Minority Foundation, Himani Sood said that the foundation took a contingent of 24 religious leaders to the New Parliament. We met the Prime Minister and the Vice President. “A narrative is being created that our nation is not one and that all religions do not stand together. We want to send a message to the world that we stand together, that we support the governance of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and that together we strive to take our country to the

goal of ‘Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat’...They visited the new Parliament building, blessed it, and prayed for a third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi,” she said. Goswami Sushil of Bharatiya Sarv Dharma Sansad was also part of the delegation whose members praised Modi for his leadership after the meeting. “We wanted to give the message that humanity is the biggest religion. We live in India and we are Indians. We have to make the country stronger. We also have given the message that we all are united,” Ilyasi said. Sanghasena said it was a historic moment to have visited the new Parliament building and have a brief interaction with Prime Minister Modi and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

# Imperative for Government to make governance citizen centric, efficient, transparent: President

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday said here it is imperative for government departments to make the governance system citizen-centric, efficient and transparent. She was addressing officer trainees of the 31st batch of the Probationers Training Course at the Arun Jaitley National Institute of Financial Management in Haryana's Faridabad. These officers from the Indian Civil Accounts Service, Indian Defence Accounts Service and the Indian P&T (Finance and Accounts) Service had called on Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. imperative for government departments to make the use of technology and make the governance system citizen-centric, efficient and transparent,” President Murmu said. She was addressing officer trainees of the 31st batch of the Probationers Training Course at the Arun Jaitley National Institute of Financial Management in Haryana's Faridabad. These officers from the Indian Civil Accounts Service, Indian Defence Accounts Service and the Indian P&T (Finance and Accounts) Service had called on Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

## 12 rat hole miners get ₹50,000 cheque each

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Twelve rat-hole miners, who gained international fame after rescuing 41 workers trapped in the collapsed under-construction tunnel in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi in November last year, were each awarded ₹50,000 in cheque at an event held in New Delhi on Sunday. While handing over the cheques to the rat-hole miners, Jamia Cooperative Bank Chairman Mirza Qamarul Hasan Beg said they risked their lives to save others, and hence, the bank decided to give them the MFH Beg Memorial Awards and cheques during its founder's day celebration.

# Biggest error by...

From Page 1 “We are having fairly good business, but getting a shop there would really set the cash counter ticking,” he said. Pizza Hut is prepared to exclusively serve vegetarian food in Ayodhya. “It is banned in Ayodhya. Though we are eight km from the main temple and outside the Panch Kosi Parikrama Marg, we do not serve non-veg food items here. The menu is an ‘all veg’ affair,” he said, adding “Once we get a place in Ayodhya city, we will continue to serve vegetarian items.” He mentioned the necessity to open a shop at Ram Path, emphasising that the sooner, the better. Ayodhya is a no-liquor and no-meat zone where mutton and alcoholic drinks are prohibited inside the Panch Kosi marg. “We have offers from big food chain outlets to set up their shops in Ayodhya. We welcome them with open arms, but there is only one restriction: they should not serve non-veg food items inside the Panch Kosi,” said Vishal Singh, a government official in Ayodhya. The Panch Kosi Parikrama is a 15-kilometre pilgrimage circuit around Ayodhya, visiting sacred sites linked to the Ramayana. Singh mentioned that some

# Ayodhya opens its arms to...

outlets, renowned for their non-vegetarian food items, have established their units outside the 14 Kosi Parikrama Marg - a decision deemed justifiable. “KFC has set up its unit on the Ayodhya-Lucknow highway because we do not allow non-vegetarian food items here. We are ready to provide space even to KFC if it decides to sell only vegetarian items. However, as its speciality is chicken, there is a firm no from our side,” he said. Ayodhya would not be the first city where serving non-veg and alcohol is strictly prohibited within the city area. Even in Haridwar, liquor and mutton are forbidden within the city, leading to food chain outlets serving non-veg items like KFC being situated on the Haridwar-Roorkee highway. According to estimates, the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is expected to attract a traffic of 10-12 lakh people per week until Ram Navami on April 17. The number of visitors to the town is anticipated to remain high even after that. Officials affirm that the food chain conglomerate has projected a business of over 100 crore, a feasible expectation given the influx of pilgrims coming to have a darshan of Lord Ram in

Ayodhya. Sharad Kapoor, President of the Faizabad Hotel Association (FHA), noted a change in the character of the devotees coming to Ayodhya in the last seven days. He said, “In the first few days, we had people from neighbouring districts who came to have a darshan, but now people from other parts of the state are also coming to Ayodhya.” “As these people are coming from different parts of the country, they are well-versed with pizzas and burgers. Therefore, food chain outlets famous for pizzas and burgers are making a beeline to set up their shops in Ayodhya now,” Kapoor said. Kamlesh Srivastava, BJP city president of Ayodhya, mentioned that 311 Aastha Special Trains will bring devotees from across the country for the darshan of Balak Ram. The administration is making arrangements so that they can get food to their taste. “Therefore, they are inviting big food chains here,” he said. The Ayodhya Development Authority has plans to set up a food plaza at Chaudhary Charan Singh Ghat. The construction work has started, and the outlets are expected to be ready by mid-February, Srivastava added.

From Page 1 “This Moment”, which was released to critical acclaim in June 2023, is the group's first studio album in more than 45 years. Besides his award for Shakti, Hussain won two other awards -- the best global music performance for “Pashto” and best contemporary instrumental album for “As We Speak”. The best global music performance category had eight nominees, including “Abundance In Millets”, a song by Falu and featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi, “Shadow Forces” by Arooj Aftab, Vijay Iyer, and Shahzad Ismaili, and “Alone” by Burna Boy. Rakesh Chaurasia, nephew of legendary flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia, won two Grammys as part of the ensemble of American banjo player Bela Fleck and American bassist Edgar Meyer for “Pashto” and “As We Speak”. In a post on X, the prime minister praised the five artists for making India proud at the Grammys, saying their “exceptional talent and dedication to music” had won hearts worldwide. “... These achievements are a testament to the hard work you keep putting in. It will also inspire the new generation of artists to dream

# India Breathless at...

big and excel in music,” Modi said. “Without love and music we are nothing,” Hussain said in his award acceptance speech for “Pashto”, one of the 12 songs in the fusion album “As We Speak”. “Thanks to the Academy, thanks to all these great musicians for giving us this beautiful (live) music today... Families are here and without them, we are nothing. Without love, music, harmony, we are nothing,” the veteran percussionist said. This is not the first win for Hussain at the awards organised by the US-based Recording Academy. He earlier won Grammys, across categories and in solo capacity as well as in collaborations, in 1991, 1996 and 2008. In 2008, six Indians -- Rahman, H Sridhar, PA Deepak, Gulzar, Tanvi Shah, and Hussain -- won the Grammys across categories. Rakesh Chaurasia said he was “happy and honoured” to bring two Grammys home to India. “More than the joy I felt for myself, the pride of winning it as an Indian musician ranks higher. To win two Grammys on my first ever nomination definitely makes it sweeter,” he told PTI. The musician thanked Hussain for being an

inspiration, saying that it was Hussain who introduced him to Fleck and Meyer. The “As We Speak” team -- Hussain, Meyer, Fleck and Chaurasia -- were also nominated for best instrumental composition. Mahadevan, who took the stage alongside Rajagopalan and Selvaganesh, gave a shout-out to McLaughlin and Hussain. While McLaughlin gave the ceremony a miss, Hussain was backstage as he had won another Grammy. “We miss you John ji. Zakir Hussain, he just had another Grammy today. Thank you boys, God, family, friends and India. We are proud of you, India,” said Mahadevan in the speech, dedicating the win to his wife Sangeeta. Rajagopalan thanked the Recording Academy for the recognition. AR Rahman, who won two Grammys for “Slumdog Millionaire” in 2008, shared a group selfie with Hussain, Mahadevan and Selvaganesh on Instagram. “It’s raining Grammys for India... Congrats Grammy winners #ustadzakhirhussain (@shankarmahadevan) (@3grammys), (@shankarmahadevan (first Grammy) and @selvaganesh (first Grammy)” the music composer captioned his post. Three-time Grammy winner Ricky Kej, who also attended the ceremony, called 2024 the year of India at the

Grammys. Kej, based out of Bengaluru, won his third Grammy last year for the album ‘Divine Tides’. “Wowwww... This is truly India's year at the Grammys!!! Wowwww.. Rakesh Chaurasia, Shankar Mahadevan, Ganesh Rajagopalan, Selvaganesh Vinayakram and Ustad Zakhir Hussain.. India is truly shining!!! Thrilled!!!! 5 Indians win in a single year!:-) #GRAMMYS2024,” he wrote. In a separate post, Kej hailed the triple wins for Hussain and the double feat for Rakesh Chaurasia. “. And Ustad Zakir Hussain, the living legend, creates history by winning 3 Grammys in one night!!! Rakesh Chaurasia wins!!! This is a great year for India at the Grammys... And I am blessed to witness it. #RecordingAcademy #indiawinsatgrammys,” he added. Other nominees in the best global music album were “Ephianias” (Susana Baca), “History” (Bokanté), “I Told Them...” (Burna Boy) and “Timeless” (David). Nominees in the best contemporary instrumental album segment included “On Becoming” by House Of Waters, “Jazz Hands” by Bob James, “The Layers” by Julian Lage, and “All One” by Ben Wendel.

# Noida Extension to get Metro rail soon

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA

The Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) on Monday approved a detailed project report (DPR) for expanding its network to Noida Extension with an interchange station on the Delhi Metro's Blue Line, which local residents have been waiting for nearly a decade. The plan proposed 11 stations on a 17.43-km route with a cost of Rs 2991.60 crore, NMRC Managing Director Lokesh M said.



Noida) was presented before the NMRC's Board for approval. The plan proposed 11 stations on a 17.43-km route with a cost of Rs 2991.60 crore, NMRC Managing Director Lokesh M said. "The importance of the project is due to the proposed interconnectivity of the existing operational Aqua Line to the DMRC's Blue Line at Sector-61 station and benefiting the commuters of Noida, Greater Noida West area and Greater Noida area with faster and direct connectivity towards Noida and Delhi and vice versa," Lokesh said. "The DPR for this project was

approved by the NMRC Board today. Now, the DPR will be processed for approval of the Government of Uttar Pradesh and the government of India," the senior IAS officer, who is also the CEO of Noida Authority, said. The Noida Sector-61 station will serve as an interchange station between the NMRC's Aqua Line and the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's Blue Line, the officer added. Local residents have been protesting with demand for metro service for years and seamless connectivity with the Blue Line in Noida.

# Delhi Police notice on poaching claims has no mention of FIR, says Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said the Delhi Police Crime Branch's notice to him over his allegations that the BJP was attempting to "poach" AAP MLAs has no mention of any FIR and asserted that the country will not progress by such "theatrics".

The Minister said those who offered bribes to the AAP MLAs to join the Bharatiya Janata Party are the same who poached the MLAs to topple the elected governments in various states and who sent the Crime Branch officers to his residence. "Is this a secret? Everyone knows it," he said. "They are asking which people approached to buy the MLA of Aam Aadmi Party. If this is hidden from anyone; the whole world knows that there is only one party in this country which is buying everyone. Those who broke the government in Goa and formed their own. The one who broke Shiv Sena in



Maharashtra, the one who toppled the government in Karnataka, the one who tried to topple the government in Rajasthan, and the one who sent Crime Branch officers are the ones behind this. What is the point in asking about it (their names)." And it was simply a letter, no FIR, nothing, added the chief minister. Talking to reporters on the sidelines of an event, Kejriwal said that the Delhi Police officers were made to indulge in "theatrics" by their "political bosses", which was quite "insulting" for them. A team of Delhi Police's Crime Branch also visited Delhi min-

ister Atishi's home over the MLA poaching allegations and served her a notice on Sunday. Kejriwal received the notice on Saturday. Speaking about the political situation in Jharkhand, Kejriwal said that the arrest of a sitting chief minister "was not right". Former Jharkhand Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate last week in an alleged money-laundering case. "Arresting a sitting chief minister was wrong. They waited for 48 hours to see whether the Jharkhand government would topple but JMM MLAs did not break. Whatever is happening

in the country is not good for democracy," he added. Earlier, Kejriwal met the pilgrims leaving for Tirupati under the Mukhyamantri Teerth Yatra Yojana and urge them to pray for the country and the people of Delhi. He participated in a Bhajan Sandhya and interacted with senior citizens departing for Tirupati. "I am very happy that you all are going to Tirupati today. You should pray for your families, the people of Delhi and for the peace and prosperity of the country," he said. Kejriwal said they draw inspiration from Shriyash Kumar to run the pilgrimage scheme. "I am a son of Delhi and the people of Delhi are my family. My duty is to take senior citizens for pilgrimage," he added. This is the 89th train departed under this plan from Delhi on Monday, carrying 780 elderly pilgrims to Tirupati Balaji. Prior to this, a devotional evening for the pilgrims was organised at Thyagaraj Stadium, where Kejriwal met with pilgrims.

# BJP, AAP targeting each other on social media

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and the AAP are indulging in a war of words not only in newsrooms and press conferences, but are also engaged in targeting each other on multiple issues on social media by using memes and posters. While the BJP uses the repeated notices of ED to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to target AAP, the ruling party of Delhi targets the saffron party accusing it of unleashing central agencies like the ED and CBI on opposition leaders. AAP has been using hashtags like VoteChorBJP to attack it over alleged "cheating" in Chandigarh mayoral polls while also putting out posts reading, "Galli galli mein shor hai, BJP vote chor hai". Another video posted on X by AAP shows two men armed with sticks coming out of a van and going to a shopkeeper saying, "We have come from ED. Show us the black money". In response, the shopkeeper takes out a saffron scarf, wears it around his neck, and says, "I joined the BJP yesterday."

# City Government planning to offer free travel facilities to third gender

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government is planning to offer free travel to people belonging to the third gender in Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and cluster buses. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday announced the Delhi government will offer free travel to people belonging to the third gender in DTC and cluster buses.

He said a proposal for this will soon be passed by the Cabinet and the scheme implemented. "In our society, people belonging to the third gender are subjected to humiliation. This should not happen as they too are human beings and have the right to equality," the chief minister said in a post in Hindi on X. "The Delhi government has decided that they will get to travel for free in state-run buses. Soon, this will be passed by

the Cabinet and implemented. I have full faith that people of the transgender community will be greatly benefited by this move," he added. Women are already provided free travel on these buses in the national capital. The free travel scheme for women began in October 2019. Earlier in the day, a senior Delhi transport department official said, "Women are already provided free travel in Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and cluster buses oper-



ated by the Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System Limited (DIMTS). We plan to extend the facility of free travel to people from the third gender too." The official said that the social welfare department of the Delhi government has data on people belonging to the third gender in Delhi which will prove helpful for the scheme. Those looking to avail the benefit of this scheme will have to furnish certificates

issued by the revenue department, the senior official added. In April last year, the Delhi High Court asked the city government to decide on a representation to legally recognise the transgender community as the third gender in bus tickets issued by the DTC. The Delhi government's women and child development department had approved various measures for transgender people,

including the addition of a "third gender" category in job application forms and the setting up of monitoring cells to protect them from abuse. The measures were approved following an advisory by the National Human Rights Commission to ensure the welfare of the category. The population of the transgender community in Delhi, according to the Census 2011, was 4,213. Officials said only 1,176 were enrolled as voters.

# HC upholds summons issued to CM in criminal defamation case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday upheld summons issued to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as an accused in a criminal defamation case for retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee in May 2018, saying that reposting alleged libelous content will attract defamation law. The high court said a sense of responsibility has to be attached while retweeting content about which one does not have knowledge and added that retweeting of defamatory content must invite penal, civil as well as tort action if the person retweeting it does not attach a disclaimer. "This court is of the view that rigours of Section 499 (defamation) of IPC will be attracted prima facie in case a person retweets/ reposts the alleged defamatory remarks or content, for the purpose of the general public to see, appreciate and believe," Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma said. The high court, while refusing to quash the trial court's 2019 order summoning Kejriwal, said when a public figure tweets a defamatory post, the ramifications extend far beyond a mere whisper in someone's ears.



"In social media, where information travels at lightning speed and has the potential to reach a global audience, the act of tweeting transforms the communication into a form of public publication. The audience, in this context, is not restricted to those physically present or within immediate earshot but encompasses the vast and diverse online community. "In the digital age, the boundaries of 'publication' have expanded, and the implications of defamation are heightened due to the potential of widespread dissemination," it said. It added that unlike physical injury, which may be localised and limited in scope, virtual injury can have far-reaching and long-lasting effects. The court said the law with regard to posting of a defamatory content by way of retweeting or reposting is still not settled and is evolving.

It said if the act of retweeting or reposting is allowed to be misused as it is still considered to be a vacant grey area of law, it will encourage people with ill intentions to misuse this vacant field of law and conveniently take a plea that they had merely retweeted a content. "In addressing a democratic community, it is crucial to emphasise that freedom of speech, while a fundamental right, does not grant individuals the licence to inflict harm or tarnish the reputation of others," it said. In rendering equal protection, the court said it must balance the right of free speech with the need to prevent unjust harm to reputation and injurious falsehood of a statement will definitely invite defamation and loss of reputation. At times, it is difficult to erase the reputational injury from public memory, as the tweets may be deleted but perceptions are difficult to be deleted from the minds of the community, it said. The court said the use of cyberspace has seen rapid development and the users, for the purpose of posting their content even by way of retweeting, should remain conscious of a keen sense of danger in this new technological method of spreading information.

# Remove plastic, save environment campaign launched in Capital



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The "Remove Plastic, Save Environment" campaign was launched in New Delhi at 10:30 am on Monday. The initiative, under the leadership of Shobha Vijender, founder president of Sampurna, commenced at District Park Sector 9, Rohini, specifically in the vegetable and fruit market adjacent to Vinoba Kunj Apartment. Before the launch, Vijender, along with Smita Kaushik, MCD Councillor, and former MCD Councillor Chitra Aggarwal, addressed the gathering, raising awareness about the harmful effects of plastic bags. Students from NK Bagdodia School, RWA members, students of Rukmani Devi Institute, and Sampurna volunteers actively participated in

the campaign, with Rohini residents enthusiastically joining the cause. Visitors to the market were attracted to and actively engaged with Sampurna's campaign, receiving appreciation. Vijender emphasised the use of cloth bags, and participants in Sampurna's campaign, including children whose slogans of "No, No Plastic" resonated powerfully, involved the nearby crowd. Sampurna operates on a five-point agenda to save the environment, with cloth bags being a key aspect. Volunteers distributed these bags to vegetable vendors, reaching hundreds of people with this resolution. Dr Vijender said the representatives of the vegetable and fruit market assured Sampurna that they would no longer use plastic bags.

# Sharpshooter of Neeraj gang held after brief gunfight

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested a suspected sharpshooter of the Neeraj Bawana gang following a brief gunfight near southeast Delhi's Karni Singh Shooting Range. The accused has been identified as Aheesaan Ali, a resident of Ambedkar Nagar. His associate Neeraj managed to escape, police said. "On February 2, we received a tip that two sharpshooters of the Neeraj Bawana gang would come from Faridabad to the Karni Singh Shooting Range," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Rajesh Deo said. A raiding team near Karni Singh Shooting Range was dispatched to the spot and the two suspected criminals on a motorcycle were intercepted around 8.30 pm, Deo said. "When the police team signalled them to stop, the pair attempted to escape. They tried to turn the motorcycle around but lost control and fell," he said. Neeraj, who was riding pillion, escaped into the nearby forest area under the cover of darkness. However, he left his firearm behind, the officer



said. The other criminal, Ali, then brandished his firearm and fired at the police. The shot struck the bullet-proof jacket of a head constable. The police team retaliated by firing a warning shot in the air, he added. When Ali attempted to fire another shot, the police team fired at his leg and he lost balance and fell, the police said. "Swiftly, the police party overpowered him and his identity was revealed as Aheesaan Ali," Deo said. He suffered a minor injury on his leg and has been admitted to a hospital, the senior officer said. "Ali revealed affiliations with the Neeraj Bawana gang. The police have started an investigation and a manhunt has been launched to nab the other," he added.

# Minor girl stabbed to death in Gurugram

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A 14-year-old girl was stabbed to death under the Sector-40 Police Station area in Gurugram, police said. The victim was identified as Rekha, a native of Nepal. While the accused has been identified as Ram Bahadur alias Ramu, who is still at large. The deceased's father Giani Thapa told the police that he along with his family member used to reside in Indira Vikas Colony in Gurugram. Ram Bahadur alias Ramu from Nepal also lived on rent in his neighbourhood. He considered his daughter Rekha as his niece. The accused used to give her money and food. It is alleged that about six months ago, Ramu had accused the girl of stealing mobile and cash. There was an altercation between them regarding this matter. During this, Ramu threatened Giani to kill one of his family members. After this, he along with his family shifted to another place, but Ramu also came to the same place, the complainant told the police.

# Just 6 CT scan machines in Delhi Government hospitals: HC miffed

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi High Court on Monday expressed anguish that there are only six CT scan machines in all Delhi government hospitals for three crore citizens and stressed the need to ramp up infrastructure and fill vacancies in the health sector. The high court pointed out that people are losing lives because they are not being attended to at government hospitals due to a shortage of facilities and staff. A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora noted that Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, in a status report, has admitted that there are a lot of shortcomings, including shortage of doctors, paramedics and medicines, and also given his suggestions.

Bharadwaj, who inspected several government hospitals, claimed that whenever he convened meetings with hospital staff, Delhi Health Secretary SB Deepak Kumar remained absent. However, Kumar, who was present in the court, denied the allegations and said he attended all the meetings. "I have accompanied the minister in various hospitals and, wherever I have not been able to go, I informed him and sent my OSD (Officer on Special Duty) or some other officials with him. I have always been there in the meetings and the minister's minutes of meetings will show my presence," Kumar submitted. There are 39 hospitals run by the Delhi government. Bharadwaj, in the status report filed through Santosh Kumar Tripathi -- the Delhi govern-

ment's standing counsel -- said the existing hospitals, which have been functional for decades, have vacancies of more than 33 per cent of the total sanctioned strength for doctors (more than 75 per cent sanctioned posts are vacant in some specialties) and more than 20 per cent of the total sanctioned strength of paramedics, leading to under-utilisation of the existing infrastructure. The report said the minister wrote to Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena on January 2, urging him to further request the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and direct the Services department to expedite the selection and appointment of doctors and paramedics. He also requested Saxena to direct the Health and Family Welfare department to take



necessary steps for hiring doctors and paramedics against the vacant sanctioned posts on a contractual basis for a period of one year or till regular incumbents join through UPSC/DSSSB (Delhi Subordinate Services Selection Board), whichever is earlier. The court was hearing a PIL initiated on its own in 2017 concerning the issue of non-availability of ICU beds and ventilator facility in government hospitals. In January, the court was told that a man died after being denied treatment by three Delhi government and one central government hospitals on various pretexts, including non-availability of ICU/ventilator bed or CT scan. The victim was stated to have been taken to the Jag Pravesh Chandra Hospital, Guru Teg

Bahadur Hospital and the Lok Nayak Hospital and the Centre's Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. The court asked the health secretary how the authorities plan to ramp up hospital infrastructure. "There are six CT scan machines in all government hospitals for the whole of Delhi, which has a population of three crore. How can you have just six CT scan machines for a population of three crore? Infrastructure needs to be ramped up many times. How are you going to augment it, it can't be done overnight?" the bench said, adding that enough consideration has not been paid to the health sector for a long time. The court said that while the health secretary claimed that all six CT scan machines are functional, affidavits have been

given by two institutions in a different matter saying these are not fully functional. "They say it has been lying in a state of dysfunction for a very long time. Your officers are not briefing you properly. We sitting in this court know they are not functioning properly and there are frequent breakdowns in the machines. How come you don't know about it?" it asked. The court said it does not wish to enter any blame game and added that there may be historical reasons for it as the infrastructure has not been ramped up for many years. "No one should try to pass the buck and, if there is any challenge, it should be taken head-on. When three crore people are looking up to us, we should not say there is some squabbling going on between us. You should not convey that impression, then it becomes very dif-

icult to deal with the challenge, so all parties should behave maturely," it said. It said judges are not cut out from society and they also know how machines provided by the government function. "You have to ramp up your infrastructure, this can't happen that you don't have a CT scan machine in a cancer hospital. You have to improve manpower," it said. The bench, which said it intends to set up a committee to look into the shortcomings and consider the suggestions of various authorities and give a report to the court, asked the various departments involved in the matter to give their reports and suggestions by February 9. The court also asked the health secretary to look into the issue of the large number of vacancies.

# Protest in Rajya Sabha over skipped question

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Monday witnessed brief protest by the Opposition members when question number 18 related to the aviation sector was skipped inadvertently by Deputy Chairman Harivansh during the Question Hour. Jaya Bachchan (SP), Deepender Singh Hooda (Congress) and other opposition members sought to know the reasons for skipping question number 18 and taking up question number 19 related to Polavaram irrigation project. The deputy chairman said it happened inadvertently but the opposition members were not convinced. Then Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhanekar asked the members to calm down and told them the question number 18 will be taken up after question 19. "Please take your seat. I have already indicated that after I am through with Question 19, I will take up this issue. ...I will try to find a way out," Dhanekar said. He also said



Jaya Bachchan is a very senior member and if she has a sentiment that is bound to be serious to him. After the completion of question 19, the chairman took up question 18 related to the aviation sector and said it could not be taken up due to "certain technical situations". Dhanekar also mentioned that he was "slightly hurtful" when some references were made about the deputy chairperson who has "more stunning qualities and independence than I have and respect for all members". He further asked opposition members to forget if they have any hard feelings. Stating that she has high regard

for the deputy chairperson and not said anything about him, Jaya Bachchan said she has the right to ask questions and would not take it lightly when other members (from the ruling party) ask me to sit down. "Treat us with respect," she urged and added if the chair had told us a question cannot be taken due to certain problems, members would have understood as they are not schoolchildren. Then Dhanekar said "no one will disagree with this sentiment" and asked members of both ruling and treasury benches to follow good manners and direct their concerns through the chair and not inter-se.

# Parliamentary Panel urges Government to work to depoliticise UN terror sanctions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India should make persistent efforts to ensure "de-politicisation" of the United Nations Security Council's sanctions regime on the listing of terrorists and terror entities, a parliamentary standing committee report said on Monday. It also noted that India remains a recruitment target for global terror groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The report by the panel on external affairs came against the backdrop of China blocking the listing of a number of Pakistan-based terrorists by the United Nations Security Council's sanctions committee. The committee noted that the problem of terrorism in India is largely sponsored from across the border as terrorist outfits are provided safe havens, material support, finance and other logistics by Pakistan's spy agency ISI to carry out terrorist activities. The committee was of the firm view that terrorist attacks in the country can only be curbed by dismantling all terrorist networks and safe havens. It recommended that an action plan or mechanism may be



worked out at the earliest for effective sharing of resources, capacity enhancement and pooling of available expertise of the central agencies as well as coordinated global efforts to root out terrorist networks in the "neighbouring countries". The report said India should play a prominent role in evolving measures in collaboration with the international community to prevent the spread of radicalisation and extremist ideology. It said the government should work in close coordination with the Financial Action Task

Force (FATF) and other bodies to bring about qualitative improvement in the regulatory capacity so that terrorist entities do not get new opportunities for financing terrorism. The committee said effective implementation of the UN Security Council's sanctions regime can be a major tool in countering the activities of terrorists and terrorist groups by restricting their travel and suppressing their funding avenues. On the need for "de-politicisation" of the sanctions regime, the committee said an evidence-based listing and delist-

ing mechanism with greater transparency would be effective in combating terrorism. In the report on "Countering Global Terrorism at Regional and International levels", the committee headed by PP Chaudhary urged the government to make persistent efforts at the UNSC to achieve it. The report mentioned that Pakistan's spy agency ISI has close links with terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and Indian Mujahideen (IM), and provides them safe havens,

material support, finance and other logistics to carry out terrorist activities in India. It said India remains a recruitment target for global terror groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS that are operating in South Asia. "These groups are active in cyberspace and radicalising the vulnerable population to conduct terror attacks," it said. The committee noted that global terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda are highly dependent on encrypted messaging platforms for instructions to carry out attacks, revival of their sleeper cells and use of virtual currencies like bitcoins for terror financing. It urged the government to initiate vigorous campaigns for collective action against these terrorist groups to prevent them from building capabilities to carry out terrorist attacks and disturb global peace and security. The committee said it is of the view that a multifaceted approach involving the active participation of stakeholders including global cyber security and law enforcement organisations at regional and international levels is imperative to counter global cyber terrorism.

# Modi to open Energy Week in Goa today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate India Energy Week 2024 in Goa on Tuesday and also dedicate to the nation the permanent campus of the National Institute of Technology apart from laying foundation stones for various projects costing more than Rs 1,330 crore. Modi will also address Viksit Bharat, Viksit Goa 2047 programme. The PM will inaugurate the ONGC Sea Survival Centre at Betul village in South Goa at 10:30 am and inaugurate India Energy Week. He will participate in the Viksit Bharat, Viksit Goa 2047 programme at Fatora in the afternoon, as per a release issued by the Prime Minister's Office. The Energy Week will be India's largest and only all-encompassing energy exhibition and conference expected to be attended by around 17 energy ministers from different countries. "Achieving 'aatmanirbharta' (self-reliance) in energy requirements has been a key focus area of the prime minister. In yet another step in this



direction, India Energy Week 2024 will be held from February 6 to 9 in Goa," the PMO said. It will be India's largest and only all-encompassing energy exhibition and conference, bringing together the entire energy value chain, and will serve as a catalyst for India's energy transition goals. The PM will hold a roundtable with Global oil & gas CEOs and experts, the release said. Encouraging and fostering

startups and integrating them into the energy value chain will be an important focus for India Energy Week 2024. It is expected to witness the participation of around 17 energy ministers from different countries, 35,000 plus attendees and more than 900 exhibitors, it stated. The Energy Week will have six dedicated country pavilions - Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, the UK and the USA. A special Make

in India pavilion is also being organised to showcase innovative solutions which Indian MSMEs are spearheading in the energy sector. The newly built-up NIT Goa campus has various facilities including complexes for various wings, hostels, a health centre, staff quarters, an amenity centre, a sports ground and other utilities to cater to the needs of students, faculty and staff of the institute. The prime minister will

also dedicate the new campus of the National Institute of Watersports to the people. "The institute will introduce 28 tailor-made courses aimed at fostering the development of watersports and water rescue activities catering to both the public and the armed forces," the release said. Modi will also inaugurate a 100 TPD Integrated Waste Management Facility in south Goa which has been designed for the scientific treatment of 60 TPD wet waste and 40 TPD dry waste, while also featuring a 500 KW solar power plant that generates surplus electricity. He will lay the foundation stone for Passenger Ropeway, along with associated tourism activities, connecting Panaji and Reis Magos in North Goa. "The foundation stone for the construction of a 100 MLD water treatment plant in south Goa will be laid by the PM," as per the release. He will distribute appointment orders to 1,930 new government recruits across various departments under Rozgar Mela and also hand over sanction letters to beneficiaries of various welfare schemes.

# DRDO carries out trials of Abhyas high speed expendable aerial target

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully carried out flight trials of high-speed expendable aerial target 'Abhyas', Defence Ministry said here on Monday. Giving details, defence ministry officials said four flight trials of High-speed Expendable Aerial Target (HEAT) - Abhyas were successfully carried out from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur in Odisha during January 30 to February 02. The trials were conducted with four different mission objectives in a revised robust configuration using a single booster designed by Advanced Systems Laboratory, Hyderabad to provide reduced launch acceleration. The objectives like safe release of booster, launcher clearance and attaining the required end of launch velocity were achieved. During the flight trials, various parameters like required endurance, speed, manoeuvrability, altitude and range were successfully validated.



Designed by DRDO's Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), Abhyas offers a realistic threat scenario for practice of weapon systems. It is designed for autonomous flying with the help of an auto pilot indigenously made by the ADE. It has Radar Cross Section, Visual and Infrared augmentation system required for weapon practice. It has a laptop-based Ground Control System with which the aircraft can be integrated and pre-flight checks, data recording during the flight, replay after the flight and post-flight analysis can be carried out. Abhyas requires minimum logistics and is cost effective compared to imported equivalents. The systems tested recently were realised through Production Agencies - Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Larsen and Toubro (L&T) Defence. With identified production agencies, Abhyas is ready for production. The system has export potential and can be offered to friendly countries. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has congratulated the DRDO, the Armed Forces and the Industry for the successful flight trial. The development of this system will meet the requirements of aerial targets for the Armed Forces, he said.

Such moves before notification of retail price is blatant and violate the extant provisions of law, said the sources. They said that an exception has been taken in the matter and all the pharmaceutical makers have been directed to refrain from such practice and to ensure strict compliance with the extant provisions of law. The communication to all the drug manufacturers, industry and stakeholders further pointed out that, "Otherwise, NPPA would be constrained to initiate penal action against the defaulting manufacturers under the provisions of DPCO (Drugs Prices Control Order), 2013 and Section 7 of Essential Commodities Act, 1995." As per the provisions, all the Form-1 applications are examined by NPPA and if found in order, the retail prices are fixed by the authority in accordance with the extant provisions. The retail prices so fixed by the Authority are notified in the official gazette. In addition, to promote the ease of doing business, NPPA ensures that all the Form-1 applications are processed and disposed of in a time-bound manner, said the Authority. The Section 7 of the Essential Commodities Act specifies the penalties if any person contravenes any order in the matter such as supply, distribution etc., of essential commodities.

# Hindu Kush region on brink of collapse, scientists sound alarm

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Hindu Kush Himalaya region, a biosphere which is arguably the world's most important "water tower", is on the brink of collapse, scientists have sounded alarm bells amid calls for bold action and urgent finance to prevent nature loss in the region. Around 241 million people live in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, of whom 31 per cent are food insecure. The issue was deliberated at a global meet where more than 130 global experts convened in Kathmandu, Nepal. The occasion was the Third Lead Authors meeting of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) nexus assessment to examine the linkages between food and water security, health, biodiversity and climate change. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) issued the call as they described the speed and scale of losses in nature and habitat in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, which stretches 3,500 kilometres and spans eight countries -- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan -- as catastrophic. It harbours the highest mountain ranges in the world. "It is almost too late," ICIMOD Deputy Director General Izabella Koziell told delegates to the IPBES meeting. "Four of the world's 36 glob-



al biodiversity hotspots are in this region. Twelve of the global 200 ecoregions, 575 protected areas, 335 important bird areas -- those figures speak for themselves. Yet we are in an accelerating crisis, despite the efforts of everyone here and many in the international community. Seventy per cent of the original biodiversity has been lost over the last century," she said. "The declines in nature across this region are so advanced and accelerating so fast they now pose a threat to the lives of not just animal and plant life, but also human societies," said IPBES author and ICIMOD Ecosystems Specialist Sunita Chaudhary. "This is a region that must be urgently prioritised for investment -- to fund the fight to reverse nature loss and species extinction. Worldwide we are seeing a huge uptick in invest-

ments in ecosystem restoration and a growing recognition of the role that nature plays in human survival. We must ensure that funding to the Hindu Kush Himalaya (region) rises at an exponential rate before these fragile and crucial ecosystems collapse," she said according to reports. As per experts, consequences of the loss of Hindu Kush Range are huge such as the river system including those in eastern and north-eastern India which are set to suffer. Also, water availability in the Ganges, Indus and other river basins in the Hindu Kush region is set to increase in the short term and decrease in the long term while natural hazards like floods and landslides are projected to increase over the coming decades and cascade the impacts on the ecosystem

# EC enforces zero tolerance on kids use in poll campaigns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) instructed political parties and candidates on Monday to refrain from involving children in any form of election campaign, including the distribution of posters and pamphlets or sloganeering, ahead of the crucial 2024 Lok Sabha polls. In an advisory sent to parties, the poll panel conveyed its "zero tolerance" towards the use of children in any manner during the electoral process by parties and candidates. The EC's directions come just two months ahead of the 2024 general elections, during which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third straight term at the Centre. "Political parties are explicitly directed not to engage children in any form of election campaign. This includes rallies, slogan shouting, distribution of posters or pamphlets, or any other election-related activity. Political leaders and candidates should refrain from using children for campaign activities in any manner. This prohibition extends to actions such as holding a child in their arms, carrying a child in a vehicle or in rallies. Additionally, the use of children to create the semblance of a political campaign is strictly prohibited. This includes their use in poems, songs, spoken words, display of insignia of political party/candidate, exhibiting ideology of political party, promoting achievements of a political party, or criticising opponent political parties/candidates," said the EC. In a letter to all Chief Electoral



Officers of States and Union Territories, Principal Secretary (EC) SB Joshi said that the Commission has always strongly objected to the use of children in any way in election-related work and has issued instructions in this regard from time to time. "The Election Commission of India has directed that no child should be involved in the election process by political parties and election officials. It is clarified to obviate any doubt that all political leaders/candidates should not use children for campaigns/canvassing/rallies/yatras, etc, in any manner, including holding a child in their arms, carrying a child in their vehicles, or making a child a part of election campaigns/rallies, etc. Furthermore, the use of a child to create a semblance of a political campaign, either by spoken words/poems/songs, display of the insignia of a political party/candidate, exhibiting the ideology of a political party, promoting the achievements of a political party, or criticising the opponent political parties/candidates shall not be resorted to," Joshi mentioned in its communiqué to CEOs. Nevertheless, the mere presence

of a child accompanied by their parent or guardian in proximity to a political leader, who is not engaged in any election campaigning activity for the political party, will not be considered a violation of the guidelines, as noted. "All political parties and candidates are obligated to ensure strict compliance with the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, as amended by the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016. The directives from the Commission also emphasised the Hon'ble Bombay High Court in its Order dated 4th August 2014 in PIL No. 127 of 2012 (Chetan Ramlal Bhutada Vs. State of Maharashtra and others). The court stressed the importance of ensuring that political parties do not allow the participation of minor children in any election-related activities," said the EC. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has consistently emphasised the pivotal role of political parties as key stakeholders of the EC. He urges them to become active partners in upholding democratic values, especially in view of the forthcoming parliamentary polls.

# NPPA warns drug firms against fixing prices of medicines on their own

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

To check the overpricing of the medicines, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), the top drug pricing regulator, has warned companies of the penalty for entering the market with new drugs, and fix prices on their own. Penalty includes imprisonment or a fine or both, based on the nature of the violation. "The companies which launch new drugs, either a new combination or new strength and/or dosage, need to get prices fixed and notified by the drug price watchdog based on the current provisions. Then only they can enter the market," said sources in the Authority. The move to streamline the drug pricing system came after it was found that some companies were launching new drugs immediately after they got approval from the NPPA. The authority has fixed ceiling prices for 700 scheduled formulations based on the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM), 2022 and retail prices for 2,607 non-scheduled formulations under DPCO, 2013 till December 31, 2023. The Authority, shot off an office memorandum to all manufacturers, industry associations and all stakeholders, pointed out that it has been observed by the office that in some cases, the applicants - the manufacturers or the marketers - are launching new

drugs immediately upon filing of Form-1 application with the NPPA, without waiting for fixation and notification of the retail price. Such moves before notification of retail price is blatant and violate the extant provisions of law, said the sources. They said that an exception has been taken in the matter and all the pharmaceutical makers have been directed to refrain from such practice and to ensure strict compliance with the extant provisions of law. The communication to all the drug manufacturers, industry and stakeholders further pointed out that, "Otherwise, NPPA would be constrained to initiate penal action against the defaulting manufacturers under the provisions of DPCO (Drugs Prices Control Order), 2013 and Section 7 of Essential Commodities Act, 1995." As per the provisions, all the Form-1 applications are examined by NPPA and if found in order, the retail prices are fixed by the authority in accordance with the extant provisions. The retail prices so fixed by the Authority are notified in the official gazette. In addition, to promote the ease of doing business, NPPA ensures that all the Form-1 applications are processed and disposed of in a time-bound manner, said the Authority. The Section 7 of the Essential Commodities Act specifies the penalties if any person contravenes any order in the matter such as supply, distribution etc., of essential commodities.

# Modi to address BJP rally in TN

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address a massive rally on February 25 in Tamil Nadu's Palladam in Tiruppur district, where state BJP chief K Annamalai's 'En Mann En Makkal' (My Land, My People) yatra will conclude. Annamalai on Monday said that ahead of the PM's visit, BJP's national president J P Nadda would also address a rally in Chennai on February 11. The BJP state chief is set to conclude his tour of all 234 assembly constituencies in the state at Palladam Assembly constituency.



Modi will address the meeting in which about 10 lakh cadres and members of the public are expected to participate," Annamalai told reporters here. Expecting a massive gathering, seats would be arranged for five lakh persons, Annamalai, who has been leading the yatra since it was flagged off by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in July 2023, said. The aim of the yatra was to cover all 234 assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are announced. Asked if he would contest the Parliamentary elections, Annamalai replied, "I will contest if the party's parliamentary board says so. My present task is to tour the state and strengthen the party." Inaugurating the BJP's election office in Aminjikarai here in the presence of the in-charges of the Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu, Aravind Menon and P Sudhakar Reddy, and other senior leaders, he said the party machinery has already been activated and that the 2024 Lok Sabha elections would be "historic."

"Tamil Nadu will contribute in a big way to ensure that Modi returns as Prime Minister for the third straight time," he told reporters. Speaking of what he learned from the yatra, he said he believed that people in Tamil Nadu, irrespective of their party allegiance, had realised that the upcoming elections would be about making a choice for India's growth, and that this would translate to votes for the BJP. "So, you will see a lot of voting in favour of Modi from TN, as well," Annamalai said. On the prospects of reviving the NDA in Tamil Nadu, he said talks were on with G K Vasan-led Tamil Maanila Congress and that a clear picture on the parties keen on forging ties with the BJP would emerge before the end of this month.

# In His name: UP Budget invokes idea of Ram Rajya

**PNS ■ LUCKNOW**  
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Monday that the state budget for 2024-25 was dedicated to Lord Ram and was for "lokmangal" (public welfare). "Ram Lalla epitomises the well-being of people; he is present right from the inception to the conclusion of the budget. The new UP is all about celebration, industry and hope and the budget is the document for comprehensive and balanced development of UP," the chief minister said. "Today's UP budget is dedicated to Lord Ram and is for 'lokmangal'. The highlight of this budget is that it restricts the budget deficit to norms under Fiscal



Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act limit of 3.5 per cent to 3.46 per cent. This budget includes fiscal discipline along with the government's vision of safety, development and good governance," he said. "This is the State's largest budget of over Rs 7.36 lakh crore. Today UP's economy

is the second biggest in the country. We adopted reforms and checked tax evasion to achieve this. UP is a revenue-surplus state now. This budget is also the 'Pink Budget', with a focus on 'Matri Shakti' and women-empowerment schemes in the state," he said. Addressing a press conference following the presentation of the UP budget 2024-25 in the state assembly, the chief minister said that Lord Shri Ram epitomises the well-being of people, asserting his presence right from the inception till the conclusion of the budget. Yogi articulated that the new budget offers a perfect roadmap for comprehensive and balanced development of the state, aligning with the aspirations of its populace.

# Gujarat Assembly passes resolution hailing PM for Ram temple event

**PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR**  
A resolution lauding Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the successful consecration ceremony at the new Ram temple in Ayodhya was unanimously adopted by the Gujarat Assembly on Monday during the ongoing budget session. It thanked Modi for carrying out a "historic cultural duty that will be remembered for millennia". The resolution, moved by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, was passed unanimously as besides the BJP MLAs, members of the opposition Congress as well as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) extended their support to it. Extending his party's support, senior Congress MLA Arjun Modhwadia reminded the House it was then-PM Rajiv Gandhi who allowed foundation stone laying ceremony at the site, where the temple has come up in Ayodhya, way back in 1989. Umesh Makwana (AAP) also supported the BJP move and said a hospital and a college should be built in the campus of the temple, where Ram Lalla's idol was consecrated on January 22 in a landmark event led by Modi. Chief Minister Patel said he was feeling happy and proud



to come up with a historic resolution. He said thanks to the efforts of Modi, Hindus, who were waiting for 500 years for such an event, were able to consecrate Ram Lalla into the grand temple in the Uttar Pradesh town. "The people of Gujarat became emotional for a moment when on January 22, Narendrabhai Modi, the son of Gujarat and the respected former leader of this House (referring to his stint as CM), performed the consecration ('pran pratistha') of Lord Ram. This was a moment of pride and honour for the people of Gujarat. It was Narendrabhai who was also the 'sarathi' (charioteer) of the historic Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya (launched by BJP stalwart L K Advani)," said Patel in his address. Good governance in India means administrative systems established by Lord Ram. Ayodhya of that time set an example for the world by establishing an administration based on public interest and welfare of people which was an ideal form of governance by Shri Ram, the CM said. He maintained that though invaders and foreign regimes destroyed India's culture and traditions, people managed to reconstruct the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya through constitutional means because of the sacrifices made by lakhs of devotees over centuries.

**1, Karamjit Jaiswal, S/o. Late Shri Ladli Parshad Jaiswal, (PAN No. AAGPJ4934Q), R/o. Farm No. 6, The Green, Rojokri, New Delhi - 110038 do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that Karamjit Jaiswal and Karamjit Singh Jaiswal is the name of one and the same person.**

**LOST & FOUND**  
10 payment receipts in favour of Rajiv Hasija R/o Adarsh Nagar Delhi-33 Lost at Adarsh Nagar on 20/01/2024. All payment receipts are of builder Parsvanath Landmark Developers Pvt Ltd dates 25/02/2010/051741/ Rs 500000, 03/03/2010, 05/1742, HS 500000/05/03/2010/051743, Rs 500000, 08/03/2010/051744, Rs 516640, 14/06/2010, 870446, Rs 4616660, 17/01/2011/887616, Rs 600000 22/05/2012, 999297 Rs 1326698 30/05/2012/944298, Rs 1363950 29/09/2012/005645, Rs 13042057 31/01/2013/503520, Rs 4616639.64 For property address flat no T-17-701, tower T-17 Parsvanath La Tropicana Near DMRC Depot, Kityber Park, Magazine Road Civil Lines New Delhi 110054.

**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar (U.P.)  
Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in

**E-TENDER NOTICE**  
E-Tender are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & http://etender.up.nic.in. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

- 40/DGM(Jal)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-II/2023-24, D/o Village (P/L 300 mm dia Sewer Line in Village-Chhajjarsi, Sector-63), Noida. Cost Rs. 52.15 Lacs
- 41/DGM(Jal)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-II/2023-24, Strengthening of Sewerage Replacement of Old Choked and Damaged Sewer Line at A-68 Sector-57 to Green Belt Sector-55, C-63 to C-68 Sector-57 & C-67 to C-71, Sector-58), Noida. Cost Rs. 81.25 Lacs
- 42/DGM(Jal)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-II/2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Two year annual repairing of PVC, AC/CI Water Lines, Repairing of Sluice valves, Reflex valves, C/o Chambers & Replacement of Old Choked Water Lines at different locations in Sector- 121, 122 & Village-Parthla Khanjerpur & Garhi Chaukhandi), Noida. Cost Rs. 53.49 Lacs
- 44/DGM(Jal)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-II/2023-24, M/o Water Supply (Two years annual repairing of PVC, AC/CI Water Lines, Repairing of Sluice valves, Reflex valves, C/o Chambers & Replacement of Old Choked Water Lines at different locations in Sector- 121, 122 & Village-Parthla Khanjerpur & Garhi Chaukhandi), Noida. Cost Rs. 53.49 Lacs
- 45/DGM(Jal)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-II/2023-24, Village Maintenance & Development (Two year annual repairing & Cleaning of Manholes & Changing the damaged Sewer Lines at different locations in Village- Parthla Khanjerpur, Sorkha & Garhi Chaukhandi), Noida. Cost Rs. 76.53 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date:- 19.02.2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date:- 20.02.2024 at 11.00 AM.

(B)  
21/S.M.(JAL-II)/E.T./2023-24, Maintenance of Sewerage (Desilting of Deep Sewer Line by Super Sucker Machine in Sector-116 & 117 and Newly activated area Sector-75 & 79), Noida. Cost Rs. 96.91 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date:-12.02.2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date:- 13.02.2024 at 11.00 AM.

**Dy. General Manager (Jal), Noida**

**CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA**

**APPENDIX IV-A**  
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 11.03.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 19,58,526/- (Rupees Nineteen Lakh Fifty Eight Thousand Five Hundred Twenty Six only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLDMT90321897, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 23.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 24.01.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from PARVEEN, ANITA BANSAL and PB GLOBAL WORLD.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 15,00,000/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,50,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Fifty Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**  
FLAT NO. F-1, HAVING BUILT - UP AREA OF 364 SQ.FT., FIRST FLOOR FRONT LHS. PLOT NO. B-5/10, DLF ANKUR VIHAR, LONI, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH - 201102.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 31.01.2024  
Place : GHAZIABAD

Authorized Officer  
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

**APPENDIX IV-A**  
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 26.02.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 24,24,275/- (Rupees Twenty Four Lakh Twenty Four Thousand Two Hundred Seventy Five only) pending towards the Loan Account No. HHLNDD00428582, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 31.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 01.02.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from SANDEEP and SAVITA.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 13,60,000/- (Rupees Thirteen Lakh Sixty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,36,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Thirty Six Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**  
FLAT NO. S. F-2 (M. I. G) ON SECOND FLOOR (RIGHT HAND FRONT SIDE) WITH ROOF RIGHTS, HAVING TOTAL AND COVERED AREA OF 500 SQUARE FEET I.e. 46.45 SQUARE METERS, CONSTRUCTED UPON PLOT NO. F-13, "S.L.F VED VIHAR", VILLAGE LONI, PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI, DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, GHAZIABAD - 201102, UTTAR PRADESH. FLAT NO. S. F-2 IS BOUNDED AS FOLLOWS:-  
EAST : ROAD 9 METER WIDE  
WEST : PLOT NO. S. F-3 (L.I.G)  
NORTH : FLAT NO. F-12  
SOUTH : COMMON PASSAGE AND FLAT NO. S. F-1 (L.I.G)

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 31.01.2024  
Place : GHAZIABAD

Authorized Officer  
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

**APPENDIX IV-A**  
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**DETAILS OF BORROWERS AND OUTSTANDING AMOUNT**

SR. NO.	CUSTOMER NAME	LOAN A/C NO.	AMOUNT OUTSTANDING (IN RS.)	DATE OF RECALL NOTICE	GROSS WEIGHT	NET WEIGHT
<b>B.O.: ASHOK VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
1	SHIKHA MINGLANI	XXXXXXXXXX1828	₹ 559,820.00	09/11/2023	176.600	163.700
<b>B.O.: DLF, GURGAON [HR]</b>						
2	SAIF ALI	XXXXXXXXXX2187	₹ 53,800.00	25/08/2023	20.000	19.500
<b>B.O.: GREATER NOIDA [UP]</b>						
3	RAJ KUMAR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXX4393	₹ 163,413.00	29/09/2023	50.900	48.400
<b>B.O.: JYOTI NAGAR DEL DL</b>						
4	RAJEEV KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXX6787	₹ 29,512.92	28/07/2023	9.800	9.400
5	MUSKAN	XXXXXXXXXX7106	₹ 63,050.00	28/08/2023	22.400	21.600
<b>B.O.: LAJPAT NAGAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
6	LAXMI NARAYAN	XXXXXXXXXX0306	₹ 114,682.70	09/11/2023	42.000	40.100
<b>B.O.: MAYUR VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
7	SUNNY KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXX4045	₹ 56,790.24	25/08/2023	23.400	22.430
8	DANAVIR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXX2512	₹ 94,043.00	28/10/2023	26.300	25.520
<b>B.O.: NOIDA [UP]</b>						
9	ANIMESH ADITYA	XXXXXXXXXX4077	₹ 42,716.00	28/12/2023	16.100	15.100
<b>B.O.: ROHINI, DELHI [DL]</b>						
10	VISHWAS	XXXXXXXXXX6014	₹ 94,500.00	09/11/2023	28.100	27.100
<b>B.O.: SECTOR 16, FARIDABAD [HR]</b>						
11	ARCHANA PANDEY	XXXXXXXXXX9505	₹ 27,136.00	28/12/2023	8.300	7.890
<b>B.O.: SHALIMAR BAGH, DELHI [DL]</b>						
12	SADHANA DEVI	XXXXXXXXXX8785	₹ 37,102.15	28/07/2023	11.500	10.850
<b>B.O.: SWASTHYA VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
13	DHRUV CHAUHAN	XXXXXXXXXX6262	₹ 36,373.00	28/10/2023	11.500	10.700
<b>B.O.: VAISHALI, GHAZIABAD [UP]</b>						
14	SATISH PRSHAD	XXXXXXXXXX3388	₹ 42,000.00	28/12/2023	14.100	13.600
<b>B.O.: VIKASPURI, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
15	JAGAN NATH	XXXXXXXXXX3084	₹ 37,509.89	28/12/2023	9.900	9.400
16	HARSHIT AHUJA	XXXXXXXXXX8469	₹ 406,061.00	28/12/2023	121.300	112.500

AXIS BANK LTD. HAS THE AUTHORITY TO REMOVE/ACTION/CHANGE THE AUCTION DATE WITHOUT ANY PRIOR NOTICE. AUCTION WILL BE HELD ONLINE [HTTPS://GOLD.SAMIL.IN](https://gold.samil.in) BETWEEN 12.30 PM TO 03.30 PM. FOR DETAILED TERMS AND CONDITIONS, PLEASE LOG INTO GIVE WEBSITE [HTTPS://GOLD.SAMIL.IN](https://gold.samil.in)

PLACE: DELHI & NCR  
DATE: 06.02.2024

SD/-, AUTHORIZED OFFICER,  
AXIS BANK LTD.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
This is to inform that my client (1) Mr. Surinder Singh Mohan S/o. Shri Baldev Singh Mohan and (2) Mr. Haninder Kaur W/o. Shri Surinder Singh Mohan Both R/o H. No. 163, Deep Nagar, Jalandhar, Punjab-144005 out of their own free will and consent do hereby disown and cede their real son and daughter-in-law namely Mr. Samardeep Singh Mohan and Mrs. Simranjeet Kaur Bharaj along with their children from all their moveable and immovable assets (including Delhi & Jalandhar) and have severed all their relations with them since there were numerous unfortunate events of disobedience, disrespectfulness, misconduct, which is beyond their control and supervision that have deeply hurt their family values and wellbeing. Anyone Dealing with them will do so at their own risk and cost, they will not be responsible for their any acts or deeds as they have no relation with them.

SAHIL ARORA (ADVOCATE)  
Office No.107, First Floor, M.S. Chambers, Aruna Park, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I, Rishi Kumar Sharma S/o Shri Brij Lal R/o House No. 387, New Mandi, Old Housing Board Colony, Sirsa Haryana - 125055, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare my name is Rishi Kumar Sharma & Rishi Kumar is same person, my correct name is Rishi Kumar Sharma future for all purpose.

PD(262)A

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**

**CHANGE OF NAME**

**AXIS BANK LTD.**

**PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION OF PLEDGED ASSETS BEING GOLD ORNAMENTS**

THE BORROWERS, IN SPECIFIC AND THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT PUBLIC AUCTION OF THE GOLD ORNAMENTS PLEDGE IN THE BELOW ACCOUNTS IS PROPOSED TO BE CONDUCTED BY THE AXIS BANK AT THE BELOW MENTIONED BRANCH. THE BELOW MENTIONED BORROWERS HAS AVAILED THE CREDIT FACILITY FROM THE AXIS BANK LIMITED AGAINST THE PLEDGE OF GOLD ORNAMENTS ("GOLD LOAN FACILITY") IN FAVOUR OF THE BANK TOWARDS THE SECURITY. THE DEMAND NOTICES WERE ISSUED TO THE BORROWERS/GUARANTORS CALLING UP THE BORROWERS/GUARANTORS TO PAY THEIR OUTSTANDING AMOUNT TOWARDS THE GOLD LOAN FACILITY. AS THE BORROWERS/GUARANTORS HAVE FAILED TO REPAY THE OUTSTANDING LOAN AMOUNT, THE BANK IS CONSTRAINED TO INVOKE THE PLEDGE AND PROPOSED TO CONDUCT AN E-AUCTION SALE OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED IN SCHEDULE OF PROPERTY HEREUNDER ON 16.02.2024 AT 12.30 PM TO 03.30 PM ON "AS IN WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS", "WHATEVER THERE IS" AND "NO RECOURSE BASIS".

**DETAILS OF BORROWERS AND OUTSTANDING AMOUNT**

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<b>B.O.: ASHOK VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
1	SHIKHA MINGLANI	XXXXXXXXXX1828	₹ 559,820.00	09/11/2023	176.600	163.700
<b>B.O.: DLF, GURGAON [HR]</b>						
2	SAIF ALI	XXXXXXXXXX2187	₹ 53,800.00	25/08/2023	20.000	19.500
<b>B.O.: GREATER NOIDA [UP]</b>						
3	RAJ KUMAR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXX4393	₹ 163,413.00	29/09/2023	50.900	48.400
<b>B.O.: JYOTI NAGAR DEL DL</b>						
4	RAJEEV KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXX6787	₹ 29,512.92	28/07/2023	9.800	9.400
5	MUSKAN	XXXXXXXXXX7106	₹ 63,050.00	28/08/2023	22.400	21.600
<b>B.O.: LAJPAT NAGAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
6	LAXMI NARAYAN	XXXXXXXXXX0306	₹ 114,682.70	09/11/2023	42.000	40.100
<b>B.O.: MAYUR VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
7	SUNNY KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXX4045	₹ 56,790.24	25/08/2023	23.400	22.430
8	DANAVIR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXX2512	₹ 94,043.00	28/10/2023	26.300	25.520
<b>B.O.: NOIDA [UP]</b>						
9	ANIMESH ADITYA	XXXXXXXXXX4077	₹ 42,716.00	28/12/2023	16.100	15.100
<b>B.O.: ROHINI, DELHI [DL]</b>						
10	VISHWAS	XXXXXXXXXX6014	₹ 94,500.00	09/11/2023	28.100	27.100
<b>B.O.: SECTOR 16, FARIDABAD [HR]</b>						
11	ARCHANA PANDEY	XXXXXXXXXX9505	₹ 27,136.00	28/12/2023	8.300	7.890
<b>B.O.: SHALIMAR BAGH, DELHI [DL]</b>						
12	SADHANA DEVI	XXXXXXXXXX8785	₹ 37,102.15	28/07/2023	11.500	10.850
<b>B.O.: SWASTHYA VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
13	DHRUV CHAUHAN	XXXXXXXXXX6262	₹ 36,373.00	28/10/2023	11.500	10.700
<b>B.O.: VAISHALI, GHAZIABAD [UP]</b>						
14	SATISH PRSHAD	XXXXXXXXXX3388	₹ 42,000.00	28/12/2023	14.100	13.600
<b>B.O.: VIKASPURI, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
15	JAGAN NATH	XXXXXXXXXX3084	₹ 37,509.89	28/12/2023	9.900	9.400
16	HARSHIT AHUJA	XXXXXXXXXX8469	₹ 406,061.00	28/12/2023	121.300	112.500

AXIS BANK LTD. HAS THE AUTHORITY TO REMOVE/ACTION/CHANGE THE AUCTION DATE WITHOUT ANY PRIOR NOTICE. AUCTION WILL BE HELD ONLINE [HTTPS://GOLD.SAMIL.IN](https://gold.samil.in) BETWEEN 12.30 PM TO 03.30 PM. FOR DETAILED TERMS AND CONDITIONS, PLEASE LOG INTO GIVE WEBSITE [HTTPS://GOLD.SAMIL.IN](https://gold.samil.in)

PLACE: DELHI & NCR  
DATE: 06.02.2024

SD/-, AUTHORIZED OFFICER,  
AXIS BANK LTD.

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
NOTICE INVITING TENDER  
Name of Work and its location: 30-Elect-44-T-R1-23-24-E3 Electrical work in connection with Repairing, Operation & CAMC of addressable Fire Alarm System at Rail Bhawan for three years.

Approx. Cost of the works in Rs. 59.88 Lacs

Address of the office: Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

Bid Security: Rs. 119800.00

Date & time of submission of tender: 04.03.2024, 12.00 Hrs.

Opening of tender: 04.03.2024, 12.00 Hrs.

Website & notice board: www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 384/24

**APPENDIX IV-A**  
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 26.02.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 15,20,018/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakh Twenty Thousand Eighteen only) pending towards the Loan Account No. HHLVAS00183085, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 31.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 01.02.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from AMIT CHOPRA, ANSHU CHOPRA, PREM CHAND and NARENDER KUMAR.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 7,25,000/- (Rupees Seven Lakh Twenty Five Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 72,500/- (Rupees Seventy Two Thousand Five Hundred only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**  
FLAT NO. F-3, FIRST FLOOR LIG, PLOT NO. E-52, BLOCK - E, S.L.F VED VIHAR, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH - 200111.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date : 31.01.2024  
Place : GHAZIABAD

Authorized Officer  
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

**Public Notice**  
This is to inform the general public that Sh. Jatn Ratta & Sh. Harsh Ratta are the owners of Plot No. 860/2023 situated in a colony known as Kirti Nagar New Delhi 110015. This legal ownership was established through relinquishment deed vide No. 860/2023 dated 24.05.2023 executed by Smt. Geeta Ratta in favour of Sh. Jatn Ratta & Sh. Harsh Ratta. Sh. Jatn Ratta & Sh. Harsh Ratta intend to transfer the ownership by way of Sale Deed to the concerned party, i.e. Sh. Singha Ahuja. Subsequently, Sh. Singha Ahuja in the process of mortgaging the said property with Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07 days will not be considered. For more details, please contact the undersigned or the interested party. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting: Law Services: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301. Landline(s): +91120131416183 / 4162809; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

**FROM No. 1 DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL (Area of Jurisdiction-Part of Uttar Pradesh)**  
600/1, University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow-226 007

**DRC No. 282/2023**  
NOTICE UNDER RULE 2 OF SECOND SCHEDULE TO THE INCOME TAX ACT, 1961 READ WITH SECTION 29 OF THE RECOVERY OF DEBT D



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## An egalitarian society

Uttarakhand Cabinet clears UCC final draft, paves the way for historic implementation of an old dream

In a momentous decision, the Uttarakhand Cabinet has approved the final draft of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), marking a historic moment for the State and the nation as a whole. Uttarakhand is poised to become the first State in India since Independence to implement UCC. This development holds profound implications for the socio-legal landscape of the State and is rooted in a historical context that spans the evolution of legal frameworks in India. The UCC concept traces its roots back to the framers of the Indian Constitution, who envisioned a legal framework that would promote equality and justice among diverse communities. However, implementing it has been a long-standing challenge, given the diverse religious and cultural practices prevalent in the country. The directive principles in the Constitution, under Article 44, encourage the enactment of a UCC, but its realisation has been delayed for various reasons. Uttarakhand's move to implement the UCC is a stride towards harmonising personal



laws across religions. The UCC's implementation has been marred in controversy as many influencers felt that it would infringe upon the religious rights of minority communities who have a very different set of religious tenets than the majority Hindu community. However, it would be fostering equality on many counts. One of the primary objectives of the UCC is to promote gender equality by standardising laws related to marriage, divorce, inheritance and other personal matters.

The UCC's implementation in Uttarakhand is expected to provide women with equal rights and opportunities, irrespective of their religious affiliations. This move towards legal uniformity is intended to simplify the legal framework and ensure equal protection under the law to every Indian, regardless of their religious background. However, as India is a diverse nation, the UCC's implementation may inadvertently bump into deeply ingrained cultural and religious practices. Besides, critics contend that it could lead to the erosion of personal freedom, particularly in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance. The biggest issue is that the enforcement of UCC, especially without adequate consensus and understanding, may lead to social unrest. Communities may feel marginalised or excluded if their distinct legal traditions are not adequately represented in the uniform code. It has the potential to create divisions rather than fostering the unity that the UCC aims to achieve. The complexities involved in reconciling different legal traditions and ensuring a seamless transition could lead to legal ambiguities, confusion and unintended consequences. The Government must allow a fair debate to assuage the fears of the minorities. There are concerns that the implementation of UCC might disproportionately affect minority communities. It remains to be seen how the UCC is implemented on the ground in Uttarakhand. It should be seen as a pilot project and work in progress rather than a definitive move.

### PICTALK



Folk artists from Gambia, Tunisia and Ethiopia during the Surajkund International Crafts Mela, in Faridabad

## Interim Budget shows fiscal discipline and prudence

The Finance Minister has not only demonstrated fiscal restraint and prudence in the election year but also balanced the Interim Budget in favour of common man

Although an interim budget was presented in the Parliament on February 1, 2024, with only a few months left for the upcoming general elections, general expectation was there about some populist announcements could be made in this budget. But the finance minister has not only shown fiscal restraint but also showed prudence.

In the last budget, the fiscal deficit was estimated to be 5.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Some analysts believed that since nominal GDP would be low this year, the fiscal deficit could be higher than estimated. However, the revised estimate of fiscal deficit shows the same to be only 5.8 per cent of GDP. This indicates that the government has tried to keep the deficit low by exercising fiscal prudence. The reason for this is that the government is getting sufficient revenue. Due to the intensified economic activities in the country, there has been an unprecedented increase in collections from Goods and Services Tax (GST), Personal Income Tax, Corporate Income Tax etc. The govern-



ment had estimated that the revenue growth would be 10.7 per cent, but this growth rate has been nearly 15 per cent. Due to booming revenue, despite the increase in expenditure, the fiscal deficit has remained low. For the next financial year, the government estimates that this deficit will be only 5.1 per cent.

The opposition alleged that the government has been increasing the debt burden, but in the interim budget, the gross and net borrowings have been kept at Rs 14.1 lakh crore and Rs 11.74 lakh crore only. This means that next year the government will borrow less than the current year. In view of the fact that the government keeps borrowing more and more, year after year, it is unprecedented that it is going to be less next year. It's notable that since 2020-21, when the central government's debt-GDP

ratio climbed to 61 per cent due to Covid-19 COVID-19 crisis, this ratio has been constantly declining and is likely to reach 56 per cent in 2024-25. It is noteworthy, that reduction in fiscal deficit also reduces the risk of inflation. Its effect may be that rating agencies are likely to improve India's rating; and therefore, investors will be attracted more to India. In general, from the point of view of fiscal management and management of the economy, no one, not even the opposition, can say that this is a populist budget.

We have been able to take our economy out of the five most fragile economies of the world in 2014, to the fifth largest economy of the world, striving to be the third largest economy in the next three years. The credit also goes to this government for bringing the economy, out of the negative GDP growth of 2020-21 and bringing it to the world's fastest-growing large economy of the world. India's progress is seen in all dimensions of the economy- technology, industry, agriculture and service sector. Capital expenditure has consistently

been increasing in the last 4 years and in 2024-25 also it will continue this time a provision has been made to spend Rs 11.11 lakh crore, up 11.1 per cent compared to the current year. Public welfare schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana and many other schemes were implemented. This has been taken forward in this interim budget also. Construction of 2 crore additional rural houses; The program to make 2 crore more women Lakhpati Didi, work has been done to take forward the programs already running. In addition program has also been launched to provide free electricity to one crore people through rooftop solar. The budget proposes an 11.1 per cent increase in capital expenditure, through which roads, rail and other types of infrastructure will be built. It can be said that while demonstrating the spirit of the interim budget, the finance minister has presented a document that reflects fiscal restraint and takes forward the welfare schemes. (The writer is a professor at PGDAV College, University of Delhi, views are personal)



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

## Innovative Budgets: From Pitt to Modi

With increased tax collection, drafting the Budget becomes smoother, allowing for the announcement of welfare measures and infrastructure allocations in the recent presentation



PRAFULL GORADIA

Budgets will come and go. Most are deficit, though a few are surplus. And the odd one is interim, while most are annual. Others are about continuity and change, as Prime Minister Modi has said. But none are like the budgets of William Pitt the Younger, who became Britain's Prime Minister at the age of 24, remaining in the same job for 22 years until he died at the post, fighting Napoleon Bonaparte.

Pitt's budgets were not only surplus, but surplus with a vengeance for, his objective was to build up such a large surplus in the British treasury that the United Kingdom could live off the interest earned on the wealth of the treasury. The British people, in such an eventuality, would not have to pay tax ever again. William Pitt was well on the way to achieving his objective when the Napoleonic wars intervened and Britain had deployed her troops as well as ships to prevent Europe from being overrun by the conquering French emperor.

The best economists have not appreciated the mighty contributions of demonetization, followed by the Goods and Services Tax (GST). This was accompanied by the direct taxpayer and his assessor being freed of the need for a physical interface. An academician seldom pays these taxes on any comparable scale and therefore, it is understandable that he doesn't quite appreciate the impact of these measures. Only the taxpayer and evader can realize what the ongoing impact of these steps is. Owing to the highly complex chain of modern production processes and the many agencies and actors involved in the chain, there will be a number of payers of taxes at various levels. Their numbers and identities are visible to every functionary of the tax department on the computer. Escaping or evading tax, therefore, has become progressively difficult.

The higher the tax collection, the easier it is for the finance minister to draft the Budget. In the recently presented Budget, it was therefore possible to announce a slew of welfare measures. As well, there are allocations for



infrastructural expenditure. The outlay for defence, particularly the production of equipment and technological innovation, is a noteworthy feature of this Budget. If there is any single aspect that stands out, it is the government's confidence that it has performed more than well enough to win the forthcoming election and that there is no need to either induce or tempt the voters to vote for the party whose government is ruling the country.

There need not be any offer of freebies—or 'revdis' as the Prime Minister calls them—like free laptops and bicycles, which has been a frequent occurrence in the past. It is relevant to point out that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) need not be overstressed; at best, it is reflective of the size of the economy and not its quality. In fact, the basket of total taxes collected is far more important than the total money spent by the State. The total debt of the State, central as well as state governments is more important than many other figures and statistics. Yet, this is seldom talked about and is never a part of the Budget. Quite a few of our states are probably on the

PITT'S BUDGETS WERE NOT ONLY SURPLUS, BUT SURPLUS WITH A VENGEANCE, FOR HIS OBJECTIVE WAS TO BUILD UP SUCH A LARGE SURPLUS IN THE BRITISH TREASURY THAT THE UNITED KINGDOM COULD LIVE OFF THE INTEREST EARNED ON THE WEALTH OF THE TREASURY

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### EMBASSY STAFF ARRESTED FOR SPYING

Sir — As per the report the man identified as Satendra Siwal (27) arrested for spying, is a resident of Shahmahiuddinpur village in Hapur and was posted as a multi-tasking staff member at the Indian Embassy in Moscow, said ATS additional director-general Mohit Agarwal. Siwal allegedly spied for the ISI and passed on vital information regarding the strategic activities of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian military establishment to his handlers across the border. "He was under surveillance for the past six months and was arrested upon his return to Hapur after taking leave from the embassy in Moscow."

The ATS chief added that Siwal had been working at the Indian Embassy in Moscow since 2021 as an India-based security assistant (IBSA). Siwal is accused of sharing classified information related to the Army establishment and documents about the embassy's foreign office. Siwal, who was called by the ATS Meerut field unit and interrogated as per the rules, could not give satisfactory answers and confessed to his crime during the interrogation, an official ATS statement said. An FIR has been registered against Siwal at ATS police station, Lucknow, under section 121A of the IPC (waging war against the country) and the Official Secrets Act 1923, the statement said.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

#### BHARAT RATNA FOR LK ADVANI

Sir — The Government has done a commendable job by conferring the country's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna to the veteran leader L K Advani, in recognising his exceptional and distinguished service to the nation, who has had a long and impactful political career in India, and he had played a monumental role that led BJP from two seats in 1984 Lok Sabha election to the ruling at the centre since 2014. He started his work as a grassroots worker and toiled his way to the top as BJP President and Deputy Prime Minister of India and distinguished himself in all posi-

#### EVs as Government vehicles



To conserve the environment, the state government has laid great stress on all the government vehicles to be electric. Therefore, the vehicle policy has been changed as per the approval given by the finance department. Permission has been given to buy a vehicle of any price to the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, and Governor. Cabinet Ministers and Chief Secretaries can also buy electric cars for up to

25 lakhs Advocate General, Chief Information Commissioner Maharashtra Public Service Commission Upper Chief Secretary Principal Secretary, can buy electric cars for up to Rs 20 lakhs as per their choice State Information Commissioner, Member of Maharashtra Public Service Commission, 17 lakhs to the State Service Rights Commissioner and 12 lakhs to the State Level Heads of Departments, Divisional Commissioners, Inspector General of Police, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and 9 lakhs to the Collectors, Chief Executive Officers of Police. Giving electric vehicles to all at the government level is a matter of great praise. Even today in many cities people are showing a preference for electric cars instead of petrol and diesel. These changes are welcome. The prices should also be low so that consumers can buy electric vehicles easily.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

tions he held, L K Advani's decades-long service in public life has been marked by an unwavering commitment to transparency and integrity, setting an exemplary standard in political ethics," for this, he is admired for his extensive work across party spectrum and in particular the public in the country.

This is a well-deserved honour for an extraordinary leader, statesman and most respected statesman of our times who has always thought of a larger interest for his country and honouring L K Advani with the Bharat Ratna has further elevated his esteem in public standing.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

#### GREEN INITIATIVE

Sir — In this year's interim budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman elaborated on the details of the Suryodaya scheme that was mooted by the Prime minister after Ram temple consecration at Ayodhya. Under this scheme, the central government aims to install rooftop solar panels in one crore households. The beneficiaries of this scheme will get free electricity of up to 300

units per month. Due to this, the households will be able to save up to 15,000 to 18,000 in a year. This scheme will not only help lower middle-class people get cheaper electricity but also help to produce more green energy. India needs to transfer its energy dependency to renewable energy from non-renewable energy to meet its net zero carbon emission by 2070.

Due to climate change and its impact on the global south, it's important for developing India to produce more green energy. This step will be a major leap towards an eco-friendly and sustainable India. Other than this union government also introduced the blending of fuels in a phased manner and electric bus services for public transport in the budget. These steps are the need of the hour as increasing dependency on non-renewable energy can lead to serious climate hazards. Now the stakeholders must ensure that this should be implemented properly on the ground.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## FIRST COLUMN

## BUILDING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

The crucial role of discipline in education and parenting



SAKSHI SETHI

The term discipline can be put in different contexts. For some, it can be a way of life and for others, it can be a set of rules by which their life functions. It is one of the ways of aligning the efforts and activities of every individual. Discipline gives every individual a set of rules and regulations to work with. Discipline has always played an integral part in a student's life since they are at the stage of their life where they can be the most flexible version of themselves. Although there is no age bar to following a disciplined life, it is quite possible that a student can get in the best shape physically and mentally when disciplined.

Talking about educational institutions, every school or college has a heterogeneous mix of students and teachers need a mix of varied approaches to understand and engage all these types of students within the classrooms. This makes school discipline a robust process. Discipline values need to be gravitated well to ensure that the teaching-learning process is seamless across the classrooms.

Several studies have found that the majority of the factors influencing the learning process come from the school environment such as inadequate material from school, poor seating arrangements in the classroom, student and teacher relaxation centers, poor ventilation and many more.

Nowadays, parents strive to raise competent, happy and successful children but it is not an easy task. Children of today need a loving home, but at the same time, they also need to learn boundaries and limits. One must teach their child that actions have consequences be they good or bad. It should be the duty of parents to always strive to give their children the emotional tools they will need to make good decisions.



In today's scenario, by creating a positive learning environment and implementing fair and consistent disciplinary measures, can educational institutions nurture responsible, motivated and successful individuals so that the young learners can or are ready to face the challenges of the future.

Everyone has his/her prospect of discipline. Without discipline, the life of a person will become dull and inactive whereas being disciplined will teach them how to behave properly and become responsible adults thereby proving to be a true sign of parental love and care. Remember, giving a badly behaved child a moderate spanking is not the same as hitting people. Whosoever can't see the difference doesn't understand either discipline or the parent. Having control over life gives the learner a sense of relief and satisfaction that triggers immense self-confidence and affects their learning.

Being in control can give them enough time to focus on their learning. A disciplined student will never be reluctant to learn new things and is always ready to accept new routines. This opens all the gates for learning and therefore affects the learning patterns of the students. There is no guarantee that a student in discipline is going to achieve all the good things in life. However, one thing that is guaranteed is that if they stumble, they will find ways to get back up. Instead of being angry or disappointed, they will be ready to work harder and achieve their goals. Disciplined student always learns from their miss steps and forget if they even happened. This gives them a better chance at trying again instead of feeling guilty about everything.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

## The conundrum of fertiliser pricing

The fact is that non-urea fertilisers, in practice, have consistently remained under regulatory control



UTTAM GUPTA



In an office memorandum dated January 17, 2024, the Department of Fertilisers (DoF) has issued detailed guidelines for the evaluation of "reasonableness" of the MRPs (maximum retail price) for all non-urea fertilizers covered under the Nutrient Based Scheme (NBS). To be effective from April 1, 2023, the guidelines prescribe maximum profit margins that will be allowed for fertilizer companies - 8 per cent for importers, 10 per cent for manufacturers and 12 per cent for integrated manufacturers (those producing finished fertilizers as well as intermediates such as phosphoric acid and ammonia). The admissible profit margins will be calculated as a percentage of their "total cost of sales", which covers the cost of production (landed cost in case of import), administrative overheads, selling and distribution overheads, and net interest and financing charges. Deduction for the dealer's margin will be allowed to the extent of 2 per cent of the MRP for di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and muriate of potash (MOP), and 4 per cent for all other fertilizers covered under the NBS (there are 20 grades of such fertilizers carrying nitrogen or 'N', phosphate or 'P' and potash or 'K' nutrient in different proportions). Companies earning "unreasonable profit", i.e. over and above the stipulated percentages, in a financial year (April-March) or FY will have to refund the same to the DoF by October 10 of the following FY. If they don't return the money within the said time limit, "an interest @12 percent per annum would be charged on a pro-rata basis on the refund amount from the next day of end of FY (i.e. in case of FY 2023-24, the interest would be charged from April 1, 2024)". The unreasonable profits would also get adjusted against subsequent fertilizer subsidy payments by the government. The guidelines require fertilizer companies to "self-assess" unreasonable profits, based on the cost auditor's report along with audited cost data approved by their board of directors. This report and data have to be furnished to the DoF by October 10 of the following fiscal year. The DoF will then scrutinize the "reasonability of MRPs", as submitted by the companies, "by 28th February for each completed previous FY (i.e. for FY 2023-24 by 28th February 2025)".



THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE. WHEN IT GIVES A SUBSIDY TO THE SUPPLIER, IT EXPECTS THE LATTER TO PASS ON THE BENEFIT TO THE FARMER BY REDUCING THE SUBSIDY AMOUNT FROM THE COST OF THE SUPPLY

Following this scrutiny, the DoF will finalize a report on unreasonable profits earned, if any, to be recovered from the companies. All controls on non-urea fertilizers including controls on their pricing were removed way back in 1992 allowing the individual companies selling them to fix their prices based on market forces. Then, how come the government controls their MRPs? To make fertilizers affordable to the farmers, the Centre has all along asked manufacturers/importers to deliver all fertilizers at low MRP unrelated to the cost of production/import and distribution which is higher. The excess cost over MRP is reimbursed as a subsidy to the manufacturers/importers. Before the 1991 economic crisis, suppliers of all fertilizer types got subsidy payments on a 'firm-specific' basis. Put simply, each firm got a subsidy equal to 'the cost incurred by it minus MRP'. In 1991, when the government sought the help of the IMF/World Bank, the latter insisted on the elimination of fertilizer subsidies within three years. Pursuant to this, effective from August 25, 1992, the then PV Narasimha Rao-led government removed controls on non-urea fertilizers even while retaining controls and subsidies on urea. Sans subsidy support, suppliers of non-urea fertilizers were forced to increase their MRP steeply which led to debilitating effects on their use by the farmers. Faced with a huge backlash, within a little over one month i.e. from October 1, 1992, the government restored the subsidy calling it 'ad-hoc concession'. Unlike the earlier dispensation when there were as many subsidy rates as the number of firms, post-October 1, 1992, it was a single 'uniform' concession for all. The concession for domestic manufacturers was higher than the concession allowed to importers. Moreover, with subsidies back, price controls were resurrected. Until the end of

FY 1996-97, these controls were exercised by state governments. Since 1997-98, the Union government fixed the selling prices. Although, through an order dated August 28, 1998, the Union government allowed manufacturers/importers the freedom to fix prices, this was withdrawn in less than a month, through another order dated September 23, 1998. The 'ad-hoc concession' Scheme for non-urea fertilizers along with price controls (albeit indirect) continued till March 31, 2010. Effective April 1, 2010, the government introduced the Nutrient Based Scheme (NBS). Under NBS, it pays a fixed per-ton subsidy on each of these fertilizers, linked to their nutrient content or specific percentage of N, P, K and sulphur (S). This time again, it gave manufacturers and importers freedom to fix selling prices. This freedom too was short-lived as beginning FY 2012-13, controls were back. In a DoF office memorandum dated June 25, 2015, on "Implementation of NBS policy for P&K Fertilizers and revision in NBS rates for 2015-16", Clause 5 required companies to submit certified cost data as directed by the DoF from time to time and report the MRP of P&K fertilizers regularly. Further, Clause 6 of the memorandum required them to print MRP along with applicable subsidy on fertilizer bags clearly. Any sale above printed MRP will be punishable under the Essential Commodities Act (ECA). In view of the above, despite de jure decontrol effectuated more than three decades ago (1992), the selling prices of non-urea fertilizers have been under control barring a brief period of two years (2010-11 and 2011-12) and two months (August 25 - September 30, 1992, and August 28 - September 23, 1998). Against this backdrop, the

guidelines issued through the DoF office memorandum dated January 17, 2024, should come as no surprise. The moot question is: Why despite decontrol, the government control their prices? The answer is simple.

When it gives a subsidy to the supplier, it expects the latter to pass on the benefit to the farmer by reducing the subsidy amount from the cost of supply. So, it wants to look at the cost and make sure that MRP equals 'cost minus subsidy' say 'X'. If MRP is higher than X, then the price is considered unreasonable and action as mentioned in the January 17, 2024 memo will follow. But, there is a flaw in this approach. To unravel this, let us look at some numbers.

Today, the subsidy on DAP is around Rs 18,000 per ton. Assume, that firm A incurs the cost of Rs 45,000 per ton whereas for firm B, the cost is Rs 40,000 per ton (due to its higher efficiency in production and distribution). Going strictly by DoF's formula, 'A' should fix MRP at Rs 27,000 per ton whereas 'B' should charge only Rs 22,000 per ton. What if 'B' also fixes MRP at Rs 27,000 per ton? DoF could be treated as 'unreasonable'!

The problem with controls is: that these don't reward efficiency or penalize inefficiency. Already, Urea which is de jure under control and each firm gets unit specific subsidy suffers from this flaw. The NBS scheme for non-urea fertilizers is also being administered in the same manner. Such a system is also prone to nepotism and corruption.

The government should control all fertilizers and let all manufacturers and importers compete with each other to deliver plant nutrients at competitive prices. The subsidy should be given directly to the 'needy' farmers only using DBT mode.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

## Policies and politics are vital for air pollution mitigation

Air pollution policy-making proves to be a complex endeavour, intricately entwined with political will and narratives

Like all environmental challenges, policymaking for air pollution control is also contingent on the political will behind solving it. Transcending political and administrative boundaries, toxic air affects one and all near the emission sources and along the air trajectory. From making its way into the political manifesto before major elections to interstate actions on emission control becoming contentious during acute exposure episodes, political will on air pollution dwindles as opposed to its environmental salience. Facts and figures that should ideally guide a policy process in mitigation of the problem of deteriorating air quality along northern Indo-Gangetic Plains (IGP) are often encapsulated within the



DISHA SHARMA

bigger political narratives. Thus, there is a strong need to understand the political narratives that follow air pollution. Moreover, the recent politicizing of the issue across the NCR with different stakes by regional ruling parties has rekindled the need to have guidance from an apolitical, scientific ombudsman. The recent remarks that toss Haryana against Punjab, solely due to its proximity, are sym-

bolic of how political narratives can supersede the scientific facts and logical understanding of the problem and slow the pace of mitigation. Data clearly indicates that the incidents of stubble burning in Punjab far surpass those in Haryana. For instance, ISRO reported that Punjab had roughly ten times and fourteen times the incidents of stubble burning in Haryana in 2021 and 2022, respectively. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that winds play a crucial role in carrying particles from biomass burning in Punjab to Delhi (and beyond) (Krishna & Beig, 2018; Kanawade et al., 2016). Such misconstruing of facts has often resulted in poorly formed regulations and failure to create robust measures to

curtail stubble fires in the state of Punjab. From setting up bio-energy plants that use stubble to the adoption of bio-decomposer technology, no proposed solution has abated the issue. Attention is often diverted from the incapacity or lack of willingness to execute data-backed interventions with adequate implementation support, a recurring trend seen in various administrations that have assumed power in recent years. Even when contingent pollution issues receive ample attention, external factors can exert influence. This is evident in the political statements made during the time of Diwali, some opposing the taken discourse and a few accepting it as a plausible measure. While there is clear evidence that the burst-

ing of firecrackers contributes to the worsening of air pollution, two distinct camps exist debating the degree of contribution of crackers to air pollution. The motivation for the latter is often rooted in religious beliefs associated with bursting firecrackers, emphasising the need to be mindful of the social and cultural realities influencing societal challenges like air pollution in the IGP. In all fairness, the air pollution challenge is undeniably complex, causing multiple problems for policy-makers. Firstly, it has evolved from being a purely natural science challenge to a social science challenge, necessitating a deep understanding of the multiple stakeholders involved. Air pollution policy decisions must

also account for their impact on different stakeholders while ensuring consensus across groups. For instance, the exemption of women in a scheme like Odd-Even is tricky. Second, determining the appropriate time for action is another key problem, given that several state governments in India face sharp resource constraints. For instance, Delhi typically issues stringent emergency measures after air quality concentrations become threatening. Thirdly, the selection of measures lies in identifying the optimal point for the state to intervene in the entire process. This critical decision influences the policies pursued and the evidence required to convince decision-makers. Amidst this pandemonium,

the role of the Supreme Court as an apolitical and scientific ombudsman becomes relevant. It not only acknowledges a research-backed understanding of air pollution underpinned by scientific evidence but also categorically reprimands state governments for blame games, calls out policy efforts for gimmickry, and issues orders for immediate actions for the greater good. As air pollution strains the delicate balance of India's federal and electoral democracy, the Supreme Court emerges as a champion safeguarding the rights (or, in this case, the lungs!) of the people. It offers a semblance of objectivity and urgency in addressing this challenge. The presence of narratives surrounding a critical policy challenge is inevitable. After all, admitting

fault, fixing accountability and ensuring implementation is not commonplace in political issues. Unfortunately, policy-makers often get deeply entangled in these narratives, ignoring the challenge, which is dangerous. The passionate discourse stalls the adoption of corrective measures and diverts public attention from the actual issue. Air pollution's seasonal nature creates conducive conditions for the proliferation of such narratives, as each stakeholder looks for those who can defend their interests in a tangled web of conflicting interests. (The writer is an air pollution expert at UN ESCAP and visiting faculty at the CPRG. The research inputs are from Arjun Kumar Singh; views are personal)

# Senators release a US\$ 118 b package for Ukraine and Israel

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Senators on Sunday released a highly anticipated USD 118 billion package that pairs border enforcement policy with wartime aid for Ukraine, Israel and other US allies, setting off a long-shot effort to push the bill through heavy skepticism from Republicans, including House Speaker Mike Johnson.

The proposal is the best chance for President Joe Biden to resupply Ukraine with wartime aid — a major foreign policy goal that is shared with both the Senate's top Democrat, Sen. Chuck Schumer, and top Republican, Sen. Mitch McConnell. The Senate was expected this week to hold a key test vote on the legislation, but it faces a wall of opposition

from conservatives.

With Congress stalled on approving USD 60 billion in Ukraine aid, the US has halted shipments of ammunition and missiles to Kyiv, leaving Ukrainian soldiers outgunned as they try to beat back Russia's invasion.

The new bill would also invest in US defense manufacturing, send USD 14 billion in military aid to Israel, steer nearly USD 5 billion to allies in the Asia-Pacific, and provide humanitarian assistance to civilians caught in conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

"The United States and our allies are facing multiple, complex and, in places, coordinated challenges from adversaries who seek to disrupt democracy and expand authoritarian influence around the

globe," Schumer said in a statement.

In a bid to overcome opposition from House Republicans, McConnell had insisted last year that border policy changes be included in the national security funding package. The bill would overhaul the asylum system at the border with faster and tougher enforcement, as well as give presidents new powers to immediately expel migrants if authorities become overwhelmed with the number of people applying for asylum.

However, in an election-year shift on immigration, Biden and many Democrats have embraced the idea of strict border enforcement, while Donald Trump and his allies have criticized the proposed measures as insufficient. Republicans have also been

reluctant to give Biden a political win on an issue they see as one of his biggest vulnerabilities.

They have argued that presidents already have enough authority to curb illegal border crossings — a stance that would ensure immigration remains a major issue in the presidential election. But at the same time, House Republicans have also pushed for their own, stricter version of border security legislation.

Johnson, a Republican of Louisiana, told NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday that he had tried to involve House Republicans directly in the Senate's negotiation, but was rebuffed.

He added he was unaware of the bill's details, but thought the solution to border problems

should be a House proposal of headline immigration measures.

"What we're saying is you have to stem the flow," Johnson said. He also made it clear that he — not Trump — would decide whether to bring the bill to the floor if it passes the Senate.

But in a further sign that Johnson is resistant to the Senate package, he indicated Saturday that the House will vote on a separate package of USD 17.6 billion of military aid for Israel — a move that allows House Republicans to show support for Israel apart from the Senate deal.

Still, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, an Arizona independent who negotiated the border proposal, told CBS' "Face the Nation" that the legislation would be

"realistic, pragmatic, and the strongest solution to our border crisis in my lifetime."

"I feel confident that when our bill passes the Senate and gets to the House, members of the House, including Speaker Johnson, will have had ample opportunity to read, understand the bill and ask questions," Sinema said.

The border proposal, which took months to negotiate, is aimed at gaining control of an asylum system that has been overwhelmed by historic numbers of migrants coming to the border. The bill proposes an overhaul to the system with tougher and quicker enforcement measures.

If the number of illegal border crossings reaches above 5,000 daily for a five-day average, an expulsion authority

would automatically kick in so that migrants are sent back to Mexico without an opportunity to make an asylum claim. If the number reaches 4,000, presidential administrations would have the option of using the expulsion authority.

Biden, referencing the authority, has said he would use it to "shut down the border" as soon as the bill is signed into law.

White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said Sunday that Johnson has "continued to tie himself in knots to delay border security, delay crucial investments in the fight against fentanyl, and delay Border Patrol hiring — as a host of his House Republican colleagues openly state that they only oppose the bipartisan border deal because of former President Donald Trump." At the state level,

Republican governors have considered sending National Guard troops to the border. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who again led a group of more than a dozen other GOP governors to the southern border near Eagle Pass on Sunday, has been cheered on by those in his party over his extraordinary showdown with the Biden administration regarding immigration enforcement.

The bill would allot USD 20 billion to immigration enforcement, including the hiring of thousands of new officers to evaluate asylum claims, as well as hundreds of Border Patrol agents. Some of that money would go to shelters and services in cities across the US that have struggled to keep up with the influx of migrants in recent months.

# Zelenskyy signals shakeup of Ukraine's military leadership

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he is thinking about dismissing the country's top military officer as part of a broader leadership shakeup, a possibility that has shocked the nation fighting a war to end Russia's invasion and also worried Ukraine's Western allies.

Meanwhile, four people were killed and at least one was injured in a Monday afternoon strike over the city of Kherson in southern Ukraine, the head of the local military administration said.

Zelenskyy confirmed in an interview with Italian broadcaster RAI TV released late Sunday that he was thinking about removing Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the popular commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces. He said he was contemplating the move to ensure the country remained led by individuals who are "convinced of victory" against

Russia.

"A reset, a new beginning is necessary," Zelenskyy said. The review is "not about a single person but about the direction of the country's leadership."

"I'm thinking about this replacement, but you can't say here we replaced a single person," Zelenskyy said. "When we talk about this, I mean a replacement of a series of state leaders, not just in a single sector like the military. If we want to win, we must all push in the same direction, convinced of victory. We cannot be discouraged, let our arms fall. We must have the right positive energy."

Zelenskyy's comments were his first acknowledgement of Zaluzhnyi's possible firing. The potential ouster of the general already has caused an uproar in Ukraine and delighted the Kremlin as the war approaches its second anniversary.

Zaluzhnyi is widely respected among Ukrainian service members and considered a

national hero. He is credited with stalling Russia's full-scale invasion in the early days of the war and expertly pushing back Moscow's troops.

Kyiv Mayor Vitalii Klitschko criticized the possibility of Zaluzhnyi's firing, saying it was due to the general's leadership that "many Ukrainians truly trust the armed forces."

"Today is a moment when politics might prevail over reason and country's interests," Klitschko said on social media. The mayor of Ukraine's capital city has been a vocal critic of Zelenskyy. The presidency in turn has accused Klitschko's office of inefficiencies.

It is unclear who might replace Zaluzhnyi and if his successor would command the same level of respect from Ukraine's troops and foreign defence leaders. His firing could risk degrading morale at a critical time in the war.

According to Ukrainian and Western media reports,

Zelenskyy asked Zaluzhnyi to resign last week, but the general refused. Zaluzhnyi has not commented publicly on the reports. Tensions between him and the president have been rising since a much anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive, which was launched in June with the help of an array of Western weapons, failed to produce major territory gains in Russian-occupied areas, disappointing allies.

Ukraine now is grappling with ammunition and personnel shortages while Russia is on the offensive, mounting relentless attacks. The need for a broad mobilization to beef up the number of Ukrainian troops has reportedly been one of the areas of disagreement between Zelenskyy and Zaluzhnyi.

Zelenskyy said at the end of last year that he had turned down the military's request to marshal up to 500,000 people, demanding more details about how the mobilisation would be organized and paid for.

# Forest fires in Chile claim over 112 lives over 3 days

AP ■ SANTIAGO (CHILE)

Firefighters wrestled Sunday with massive forest fires that broke out in central Chile two days earlier, as officials extended curfews in cities most heavily affected by the blazes and said at least 112 people had been killed. The fires burned with the highest intensity around the city of Viña del Mar, where a famous botanical garden founded in 1931 was destroyed by the flames Sunday. At least 1,600 people were left without homes.

Several neighborhoods on the eastern edge of Viña del Mar were devoured by flames and smoke, trapping some people in their homes. Officials said 200 people were reported missing in Viña del Mar and the surrounding area. The city of 300,000 people is a popular beach resort and also hosts a well-known music festival during the southern hemisphere's summer.

On Sunday morning, Chilean President Gabriel Boric visited the town of Quilpé, which was also heavily affected by the fires and reported that 64 people had been killed. Late Sunday, Chile's Forensic Medicine Service updated the confirmed death toll to 112 people.

Boric said the death toll could rise as rescue workers search through homes that have collapsed. Some of those arriving in hospitals were also in critical condition.

Rodrigo Mundaica, the governor of the Valparaíso region, where Viña del Mar and other affected cities are located,



Locals embrace each other amidst debris and burnt-out houses after forest fires reached their neighborhood in Vina del Mar. AP/PTI

ed, said Sunday he believed some of the fires could have been intentionally caused, echoing a theory that had also been mentioned Saturday by Boric.

"These fires began in four points that lit up simultaneously," Mundaica said. "As authorities we will have to work rigorously to find who is responsible."

The fires around Viña del Mar began in mountainous forested areas that are hard to reach. But they have moved into densely populated neighborhoods on the city's periphery despite efforts by Chilean authorities to slow down the flames.

On Saturday, Boric said that unusually high tempera-

tures, low humidity and high wind speeds were making it difficult to control the wildfires in central Chile, which have already burnt through 8,000 hectares (30 square miles) of forest and urban areas.

Boric flew over some of the areas burned by the fires Sunday and visited a school that has been turned into a shelter for the displaced. He said that a presidential vacation home on the shores of Viña del Mar that is surrounded by large gardens would be temporarily converted into a leisure center for the children of families affected by the fires.

The president declared two days of national mourning. "All of Chile is suffering," Boric said. "But we will stand

up once again." Officials asked people in areas affected by the fires to evacuate their homes as quickly as possible, while those farther from the fires were told to stay at home in order to facilitate the transit of fire engines and ambulances.

Curfews were declared in Viña del Mar and the neighboring cities of Quilpé and Villa Alemana as part of an effort to prevent looting.

The fires broke out during a week of record high temperatures in central Chile. Over the past two months, the El Niño weather pattern has caused droughts and high temperatures in western South America that have also increased the risk of forest fires.

# Putin to visit Turkey over grain export

AP ■ ISTANBUL

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit Turkey soon, the Turkish foreign minister said late Sunday. It would be Putin's first trip to a NATO country since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told the A Haber private TV channel that Putin's meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will

focus on a new way to allow Ukrainian grain exports through the Black Sea.

He did not mention a date for the visit, but Turkish media has reported that Putin will come on February 12.

The International Criminal Court last year issued an arrest warrant against Putin over the alleged deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, greatly limiting his opportunity to travel abroad. Turkey, like Russia, is not a party to the

court, allowing Putin to visit without fear of arrest.

Turkey has sought to maintain good ties with both Russia and Ukraine, its Black Sea neighbours. While declining to join Western sanctions on Moscow, it has also backed Ukraine's territorial integrity and provided arms to Kyiv.

"The previous grain deal worked within a certain mechanism. Now it has been seen that there is a possibility of going with a different mechanism," Fidan said, referring to the previous deal that lasted a year before Russia withdrew in July. At the time, Russia said the deal would be suspended until demands to get Russian food and fertilizer to the world are met. Turkey helped the United Nations broker that accord to provide safe passage from Ukrainian ports.

Fidan said Erdogan would also discuss with Putin security in Syria and energy cooperation.

# Irish, UK leaders in N Ireland to mark end of political deadlock

AP ■ LONDON

The leaders of the UK and Ireland went to Belfast Monday to meet Northern Ireland's newly revived government and bask in a good-news moment after two years of political crisis.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Irish counterpart Leo Varadkar were visiting the new administration at Belfast's Stormont Castle as its ministers met for the first time. The ministers wasted no time before pressing London for more money to patch up Northern Ireland's creaking public services.

Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly appointed a power-sharing government on Saturday after a two-year hiatus sparked when the main British unionist party walked out in February 2022.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) boycotted the administration to protest post-Brexit trading arrangements that it said undermined Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom. The party was coaxed into returning last week after the UK promised to eliminate most checks on goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK.

Under power-sharing rules established as part of Northern Ireland's peace process, the administration in Belfast must include both British unionists and Irish nationalists. The UK and the Republic of Ireland both have roles as guarantors of the peace. The new administration is



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak visits Air Ambulance Northern Ireland at their headquarters in Lisburn, Northern Ireland. AP/PTI

led by First Minister Michelle O'Neill of Sinn Féin, the party allied with the Irish Republican Army during Northern Ireland's decades of violence known as "The Troubles." Her appointment was historic, marking the first time an Irish nationalist, who aspires to take Northern Ireland out of the UK and unite it with the republic, has held the post.

In practice, nationalists and unionists will continue to govern in uneasy balance. The post of deputy first minister — held by Emma Little-Pengelly of the DUP — is officially equal to the first minister, and neither can govern without the other.

The DUP boycott left Northern Ireland's 1.9 million people without a functioning administration to make key decisions as the cost of living soared and backlogs strained the creaking public health sys-

tem.

The UK government has agreed to give Northern Ireland more than 3 billion pounds (USD 3.8 billion) as part of an incentive to restore the government. Already, the Belfast administration says it's not enough.

Little-Pengelly said the ministers in Belfast would be "seeking to ensure the UK government provides sufficient funding in a package to fulfill its promises on public sector pay."

Chris Heaton-Harris, the UK's Northern Ireland secretary, said the package was "ample for the time being." "I believe the new set of ministers are completely capable of running their public finances perfectly well with the fair and generous funding package we've given them," he told the BBC.

# Myanmar forces fighting ethnic group flee into Bangladesh

AP ■ DHAKA

Nearly a hundred members of Myanmar's Border Guard Police have fled their posts and taken shelter in Bangladesh during fighting between Myanmar security forces and an ethnic minority army, an official of Bangladesh's border agency said Monday.

Shariful Islam, spokesperson for Border Guard Bangladesh, said by phone that the Myanmar forces entered Bangladesh over last two days to escape fighting with the Arakan Army in Myanmar's Rakhine state bordering Bangladesh.

They entered Bangladesh through the Tombru border in Bandarban district, he said.

"In total 95, Myanmar troops are there now," he said. "They have been disarmed and taken to safe places." Since Saturday, gunshots could be heard coming from the Myanmar side of the border, local media reported.

The Arakan Army is the well-trained military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority seeking autonomy from the central government and has been attacking army outposts in the western state since mid-November.

It is part of an alliance of ethnic minority armies that launched an offensive in late October, gaining strategic territory in the country's northeast bordering China. Its success was widely seen as a major defeat for the military government, which seized power in February 2021 from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and is now embroiled in a wide-ranging civil war.

# UK Opp attacks 'VIP access' for Infosys due to Sunak family link

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK's Opposition Labour Party has claimed Infosys was effectively granted "VIP access" after a media report alleged the software services major was promised help to grow in Britain due to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's familial connection with co-founder Narayana Murthy.

A 'Sunday Mirror' report based on a freedom of information (FOI) request said Trade Minister Lord Dominic Johnson discussed the UK operations of Infosys during a meeting at the company's offices in Bengaluru during a visit last April.

A readout of the meeting reportedly said Lord Johnson "made clear that he was keen to see a bigger Infosys presence in the UK and would be happy to do what he could to facilitate that."

"After the Tories handed billions in taxpayers' cash to cronies for duff PPE (personal protective equipment), the public will wonder why an outfit so personally close to Rishi Sunak appears to have been granted this VIP access. There are serious questions to answer," Labour's shadow minister Jonathan Ashworth told the newspaper.

Sunak's wife, Akshata Murthy, has a 0.91 per cent stake valued at around GBP 500 million in the IT business co-founded by her father and received millions in dividends in the past financial year.

A "steering brief" for the meeting is reported to have said that it "would be good to reassure them on the prospects for the UK economy and remind them of the support that we can provide through DBT [Department for Business and Trade]."

Lord Johnson is said to have outlined to the Infosys executives, whose names were redacted in the FOI documents, the advantages for the multinational as a result of the UK's high-potential individual visa scheme. "The investment minister regularly meets businesses and international investors, including a range of Indian businesses, to champion the UK as an investment destination and secure commitments worth billions of pounds. That engagement drives investment across the UK, creating thousands of high-quality jobs and boosting the UK economy," said a DBT spokesperson.

Infosys has been approached for a reaction over these latest claims, coming in the wake of some Opposition murmurings around Infosys seeking visa benefits to accrue from the proposed India-UK free trade agreement (FTA).

# UN warns Europe of a new influx of Sudanese migrants

AP ■ NAIROBI (KENYA)

Europe may have to deal with a new flow of Sudanese migrants if a cease-fire agreement isn't signed soon between Sudan's warring sides and relief efforts aren't strengthened, the head of the United Nations refugee agency said Monday.

The Europeans are always so worried about people coming across the Mediterranean. Well, I have a warning for them that if they don't support more refugees coming out

of Sudan, even displaced people inside Sudan, we will see onward movements of people towards Libya, Tunisia and across the Mediterranean," Filippo Grandi said. "There is no doubt."

More than 9 million people are thought to be internally displaced in Sudan, and 1.5 million refugees have fled into neighbouring countries in 10 months of clashes between the Sudanese military, led by Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces, a power-

ful paramilitary group commanded by Gen Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

The conflict erupted last April in the capital, Khartoum, and quickly spread to other areas of the country.

Grandi said several countries neighbouring Sudan — Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Ethiopia — have their own "fragilities" and will be unable to give refugees enough assistance.



# Imran, Qureshi to perform prison labour: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan and ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi despite being high-profile prisoners will have to perform their prison labour inside the compound, according to a media report.

Both the leaders were convicted by a special court for a 10-year jail term in the cipher case and have been imprisoned in Rawalpindi's high-security Adiala Jail, where their trial was held.

Khan, 71, and Qureshi, 67, are being kept separately as high-profile prisoners - in their capacity as a former prime minister and foreign minister, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Khan is the founder chairman of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) while Qureshi is the vice chairman of the party.

Both the leaders are availing the facilities provided to inmates in a better-class prison similar to the ones they had before their conviction including access to an exercise machine, it said.

According to sources, the two men have been given two sets of prison uniforms according to the jail manual. However, as the PTI founding chairman's trial is underway in other cases, it has not been made mandatory for him to wear the prison uniform.

The two inmates will also perform their prison labour inside the compound as per the written order.

Quoting sources, the report said that high-profile prisoners could not be kept in jail factories, kitchens, hospitals, gardens, etc, among ordinary inmates. Therefore, they will be kept there in their compound for maintenance work or any other task assigned by the jail administration.

Both prisoners can prepare their own food according to the assigned class. They can also eat prepared food according to the jail manual.

Similarly, Khan's wife Bushra Bibi, who has been convicted in the Toshakhana (gift repository and Iddat cases), has been assigned a female police staff headed by a lady assistant superintendent each from Attock and Multan.

The police officers will be stationed in two shifts 24 hours a day at the couple's Bani Gala residence, which has been declared a sub-jail.

Male officers of Adiala Jail have been posted on the outer boundaries of the Bani Gala residence and Islamabad police are responsible for the security around it.

According to the sources, the 49-year-old former first lady is being provided breakfast, lunch and dinner by the prison administration according to the jail manual. However, they added that as Bushra

was not in a regular prison, but incarcerated in a sub-jail, she could not be provided with the facility of an exercise machine.

The sources said that since Khan and Qureshi were arrested and imprisoned in jail before conviction, that time would also be counted in their punishments.

Two days earlier, a court sentenced Khan and his wife to seven years imprisonment in an "un-Islamic" marriage or Iddat case.

Last week, the PTI founding chairman and his wife were sentenced to 14 years imprisonment in the Toshakhana case.

Separately, Khan and Qureshi were handed down a jail term of 10 years in the cipher case last week as well, according to the paper.

The cipher case pertains to a piece of paper, purported to be a diplomatic cable — the cipher — that Khan had waved at a public rally on March 27, 2022, and naming the US, had claimed that it was 'evidence' of an "international conspiracy" to topple his government.

The case was filed against Khan and Qureshi on August 15 last year by the Federal Investigation Agency, which accused both of violating the secrecy laws while handling the cable sent by the Pakistan embassy in Washington in March 2022. Khan and Qureshi have also been barred from politics for five years.

# El Salvador's Nayib Bukele heads for re-election as president

AP ■ SAN SALVADOR

Voters in El Salvador appeared to give Nayib Bukele a second term as president, but a troubled vote tally delayed results in an election that for many hinged on the tradeoff of curtailed civil liberties for security in a country once terrorised by gangs.

Problems with the vote count stalled the effort late Sunday with ballots from only 31 per cent of polling places tallied, a percentage that remained stuck in place on the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's preliminary results website Monday morning.

Early on Monday, the electoral authority released a statement referring to "multiple actions that have hampered the development of the transmission activities of preliminary results" and the lack of the paper used to print out the vote tallies at polling places.

It called on the boards charged with tallying the votes at each polling place to switch to a contingency process that included tallying votes by hand, taking photographs or scans of those manual tallies and turning them into the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

When the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's digital tally stopped late Sunday, Bukele had 83 per cent of the vote, far ahead of his nearest competitor's 7 per cent for the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. The electoral site updating the count crashed shortly before midnight.

That did not stop a jubilant Bukele from declaring a historic margin of victory before



electoral authorities had released even the first preliminary figure Sunday evening. Later, standing on the balcony of the National Palace, he said that the country had made history. "Why are there so many eyes on a small (Latin) American country?" he asked thousands of supporters. "They're afraid of the power of example."

"Salvadorans have given the example to the entire world that any problem can be solved if there is the will to do it," he said. The self-described "world's coolest dictator" appeared on his way to victory after enjoying soaring approval ratings and virtually no competition. That came despite concerns that Bukele's government has slowly chipped away at checks and balances in his first term and accusations that he dodged a constitution-

the government has arrested more than 76,000 people — more than 1 per cent of the Central American nation's population. The assault on the gangs has spurred accusations of widespread human rights abuses and a lack of due process, but violence has plummeted in a country known just a few years ago as one of the most dangerous in the world.

Sara Leon, 48, was among throngs of people who flocked to El Salvador's previously gang-controlled downtown to celebrate. When she was 23, Leon risked her life to migrate from El Salvador to the United States with her 6-year-old daughter.

"If the gangs saw a cute girl, they abducted her, abused her and killed her," she said. "I didn't want that to happen to my daughter."

She returned to her homeland in October because of the "state of emergency." She said she now plans to buy a home here and hopes her daughter who has since moved to Toronto will be able to return.

"He is a genius," she said of Bukele, tearing up when asked what his administration has meant. "If he's a dictator, may we have a dictator for 100 more years." Bukele's popularity has also drawn eyes from across the region, and he and party are increasingly looked to as a case study for a wider global rise in authoritarianism.

Throughout his presidency, Bukele has been accused of taking undemocratic steps that concentrated power in his hands, something observers have worried will only grow with Sunday's election.

Under a "tate of emergency" approved in March 2022,

# Ahead of Feb 8 election, Pak EC begins delivery of ballot papers

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

With the general election in Pakistan just days away, the delivery of 260 million ballot papers across 859 National Assembly and provincial assembly constituencies has started after taking into account some last-minute candidacy-related petitions, according to a spokesperson of the election commission.

The February 8 elections are taking place for 336 seats in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, along with four provincial assemblies.

About 18,000 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

The printing of the ballot papers was completed at three government presses, with some papers necessitating reprinting following court decisions on candidacy-related petitions, The Express Tribune newspa-

per reported on Monday, quoting the spokesperson of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

This time around, 2,170 tonnes of paper was utilised for the printing process, a substantial increase from 2018. The increased number of ballot papers, totalling 260 million, reflects a 40 million increase from the previous election.

"Despite limited time and challenges, the ECP fulfilled its responsibility, by completing the printing of ballot papers on time," the spokesperson said.

"The process of delivery of ballot papers has started all over the country and it will be completed by Monday," the spokesperson added.

To address any complaints relating to the elections, the ECP has also established the Central Control and Monitoring Centre, which has received 221 complaints of various nature, and 198 of them have been addressed, officials said.

# Most polling stations in Balochistan 'sensitive'

**Karachi (PTI):** About 80 per cent of the polling stations established for Thursday's general elections in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province have been declared "sensitive" or "highly sensitive" by the authorities.

Of the total 5,028 polling stations in Balochistan, only 961 (approx 19 per cent) are designated as normal, Balochistan's Interior Minister Zubair Jamali said, expressing serious concerns about the potential security challenges in the province during the polls.

While 2,337 polling stations have been declared "sensitive", 1,730 are classified as "highly sensitive", he said.

Jamali said given the recent terror incidents in Balochistan with attempted strikes on security forces, installations, government servants and civilians, security on the polling day would be very tight.

Balochistan's caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai on Sunday announced that internet services would be temporarily suspended in areas with polling stations marked as "sensitive" on the day of the election in the province.

In a statement, the minister said social media platforms could be utilised by terrorists for communication purposes on polling day. To mitigate this risk, access to the internet would be restricted in various areas, including Turbat, Macch, and Chaman.

Jamali said the government, establishment and security forces carried out an extensive survey of all polling stations to categorise them for the elections.

# Jan best fund-raising month for Nikki Haley

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley, the only challenger left against former president Donald Trump, has raised a massive USD 16.5 million in January, despite the Indian-American politician coming third and second in the two primaries so far.

The USD 16.5 million in January includes USD 11.7 million from grassroots supporters, which added 69,274 new donors. This is Haley's best fundraising month and more than she raised in the first, second, and third quarters of 2023, a campaign release said. "While Donald Trump

blows USD 50 million of his donors' money on his legal cases, Nikki Haley has been focused on talking to voters and saving our country," said Haley national spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas.

"Hundreds of thousands of Americans are supporting Nikki's campaign because they don't want two grumpy old men and all their chaos, confusion, and grievances. They want a strong, conservative leader who will save this country," Perez-Cubas said.

Haley, the 52-year-old former two-term Governor of South Carolina, has refused to quit the race for the 2024 White House. The next major

primary is scheduled to be held in her home state of South Carolina later this month.

Since the Republican presidential race officially became a one-on-one matchup between her and Trump, the Haley campaign has been inundated with support from low-dollar, grassroots donors all across the country, the statement said. The large number of new donors is a testament to Haley's staying power and growing support among the vast majority of Americans who don't want a "Biden-Trump rematch," it said.

Axios, which broke the news first, said this massive fund-raising matters because

the Haley campaign has the money to keep her long-shot presidential bid alive, even as many leaders in her party have called for the GOP primary to come to an end.

Haley raised USD 17.3 million during the fourth quarter, her public FEC filing shows, more than double the USD 8.2 million she raised during the quarter before that, Axios reported. Haley had USD 14 million in cash on hand at the end of 2023. Comparatively, Bernie Sanders had USD 18.1 million in cash on hand during the same period of the 2020 campaign, while President Joe Biden had USD 8.9 million, it said.

# Hungary's parliament stalls Sweden's bid to join NATO

AP ■ BUDAPEST

Lawmakers from the party of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán boycotted an emergency session of parliament on Monday where a vote was scheduled to place Sweden's bid to join NATO on the legislative agenda, adding to 18 months of delays that have angered Hungary's allies.

The governing Fidesz party, which holds an absolute majority in parliament, has stalled Sweden's bid since July 2022, alleging that Swedish politicians have told "blatant lies" about the condition of Hungary's democracy.

After Turkey's parliament voted to approve Sweden's accession in January, Hungary became the last of the military alliance's 31 members not to have done so, leading its allies to pressure the nationalist government to hold a vote without delay. Orbán told NATO

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg last month that he would urge his party to ratify the bid "at the first possible opportunity."

Monday's session in parliament was supported by six opposition parties, but Fidesz lawmakers didn't attend, scuttling the attempt to place a vote on the legislature's schedule.

Several ambassadors from NATO member countries attended the proceedings, including US Ambassador David Pressman. In brief comments to the media following the session, Pressman said that the United States looks forward to "watching this closely and to Hungary acting expeditiously."

"Sweden's NATO accession is an issue that directly affects the United States' national security and affects the security of our alliance as a whole," he said. "The prime minister pledged to convene parliament to urge parliament to act at its

earliest opportunity. Today was an opportunity to do that."

A bipartisan group of US lawmakers last week called on Orbán to immediately ratify Sweden's bid, saying patience with Hungary is "wearing thin" as it continues to delay its approval.

In a separate statement, US Sen Ben Cardin, a Maryland Democrat and chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, raised the prospect of imposing sanctions on Hungary for its conduct, and called Orbán "the least reliable member of NATO."

Following the session on Monday, Agnes Vadai, a lawmaker with the liberal Democratic Coalition party, said that Orbán's conduct has "put Hungary into a very humiliating position," and that there was "no reason" for his government to have blocked Sweden's NATO membership.

# Blogger given suspended death sentence in China

**Beijing (AP):** A Chinese court gave a suspended death sentence to a China-born Australian democracy blogger on Monday. The Australian government, which has repeatedly raised his case over the years, said it was appalled.

Yang Hengjun was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. Such sentences are often commuted to life in prison after the two years. "The Australian Government is appalled," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement. "This is harrowing news for Dr Yang, his family and all who have supported him."

Yang, a former Chinese diplomat and state security agent who became a political commentator and writer of spy novels in Australia, was detained on Jan 19, 2019, when he arrived in the Guangzhou from New York with his wife and teenage stepdaughter.

**Public Notice**  
This is to inform the general public that Smt. Ajita Rai is the owner of Plot No. 58/19 B area measuring 35.117 sq. mtrs. out of Khassra No. 58/19 situated in Surya Kunj Jharoda Kalam Road Najafgarh New Delhi 110043. She acquired the above property through Conveyance Deed (P.W. Jdya) dated 16.12.2023 vide doc. No. 2023/174912 executed by P.OI through DDA in favour of Smt. Ajita Rai. Smt. Ajita Rai is currently in the process of contacting the aforementioned property with SMFG India Home Finance Co. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. 4-4/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s): +91120-3101683 / 4622809; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
To be known to all: ANITA SINGHAL W/O LATE SH. ARUN KUMAR SINGHAL R/O FLAT NO 60-C, SECOND FLOOR, POCKET-A, GIB ENCLAVE, NAND NAGRI, DELHI-110093 allotted/misused of DDA MIG FLAT NO 60-C, SECOND FLOOR, POCKET-A, NAND NAGRI, DELHI-110093 has applied for certified copy & conversion from leasehold to freehold in DDA. The original document i.e. NOC for Obtaining Meter and Electric Connection of the above said flat has been lost. An FIR/INCR/LR No. 1405632/2024 dt. 03/02/2024 to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone No. 9543396667 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (Housing)-MIG or Director (H)-MIG, Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi-110023. Naveen Aggarwal (Advocate) Cl. No. M-7, Near SBI, Westam Wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-11

**verka**  
Inviting e Auction for the purchase of following items through NCDFI Portal. The Punjab State Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation Ltd, Chandigarh procuring item i.e. Freezer on wheel (200 ltr.&100-110 ltr.) for the period of one year through e Auction at NCDFI e-Market across Punjab from 3 PM on 12.02.2024. Interested suppliers/vendors are invited to register and participate in above said e-auction through [www.ncdfimarket.com](http://www.ncdfimarket.com) portal. For registration: Contact: + 91 9998019608; +91 9978601585 Help Desk: +91-2692-288388 E Mail: [contracts\\_pack@ncdfimarket.com](mailto:contracts_pack@ncdfimarket.com), [virender.choudhary@nemlin.in](mailto:virender.choudhary@nemlin.in), [divakar.juneja@nemlin.in](mailto:divakar.juneja@nemlin.in). NA/12/1752/2023/32035 Dated CHD :- 2/5/2024

**JASCH INDUSTRIES LIMITED**  
Regd. Off. : 502, NDM-II, NSP, Pitampura, Delhi - 110034 CIN NO. L24302DL1985PLC383771  
Website : [www.jaschindustries.com](http://www.jaschindustries.com), Email : [accounts@jasch.biz](mailto:accounts@jasch.biz)

**Extract of Reviewed Ind AS Financial Results for the Quarter and Nine Months Ended on 31st December 2023.**  
( Standalone Financial Results under Regulation 47 (1)(B) of Listing Regulations )  
(₹ in Lakh)

Sl No	Particulars	Standalone					
		Quarter Ended		Nine Months Ended		Year Ended	
		31.12.23	30.09.23	31.12.22	31.12.23	31.12.22	31.03.23
		Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited	Audited
<b>Important Note: Post-demerger data for the Quarter ended on 31-12-23 may not be comparable with pre-demerger data of other columns*</b>							
1	Total Income from Operations.	4682.76	6052.98	5854.18	16389.29	18155.59	23694.82
2	Profit before Interest, Depreciation & Taxes (EBITDA)	556.40	802.08	651.03	2402.54	2103.57	3110.13
3	Net Profit for the Period (before Tax and Exceptional Items)	459.07	684.97	539.27	2074.82	1805.49	2702.49
4	Net Profit for the Period before Tax (after Exceptional Items)	459.07	684.02	539.20	2073.86	1800.26	2697.26
5	Net Profit for the period after Tax (after Exceptional Items)	341.33	507.86	395.16	1542.02	1337.51	1994.60
6	Total Comprehensive Income for the period ((Comprising Profit) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	341.33	507.86	395.16	1542.02	1337.51	1994.60
7	Equity Share Capital	679.80	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00	1133.00
8	Reserves	4891.11	11064.16	9180.76	4891.11	9180.76	9855.64
9	Earnings Per Share (of ₹10/- each) Basic & Diluted:	5.02	4.48	3.49	13.61	11.81	17.60

**Notes :**  
1) \*Financial results of the quarter and cumulative period ended on 31-12-2023 may not be comparable with the other quarter/periods. Financial results for the quarter ended on 31-12-23 are post-demerger data. Data for the cumulative period ended on 31-12-2023 is a mix of post-demerger (one quarter) and pre-demerger (two quarters). Data in all other columns is pre-demerger data.  
2) The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly and nine monthly financial results filed with BSE under Regulation 33 of SEBI (Listing Obligations & Disclosures Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the aforesaid results is available on the website of the BSE i.e. [www.bseindia.com](http://www.bseindia.com) and also on the website of the Company i.e. [www.jaschindustries.com](http://www.jaschindustries.com)  
3) The financial results of the Company have been prepared in accordance with Indian Accounting standards (Ind AS)  
4) Figures for the previous periods have been regrouped, wherever necessary, to conform to the current period's classification.

**Sonipat, 03.02.2024**

**For Jasch Industries Ltd.**  
**sd/- (Jai Kishan Garg) Chairman**

# Surge in Chinese tourists to Maldives

PTI ■ MALE

Amidst a diplomatic row between the Maldives and India, Chinese tourists have overtaken Indian holidaymakers visiting the archipelago nation, according to official figures released here on Monday.

According to official statistics from the Maldivian Ministry of Tourism, as of February 4, China, with 23,972 tourists occupied the number one slot (11.2 per cent market share in 2024); it was on the number three spot in 2023.

India, which was on the number 1 slot in 2023, has slipped down to 5th position as

of Sunday with 16,536 tourists (7.7 per cent market share in 2024) coming to this island nation.

The development could be a fallout of a full-blown backlash directed at the Maldives following the derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media by three Maldivian ministers after Modi posted photos and video on X of his visit to the pristine Lakshadweep Islands on India's west coast earlier in January.

Soon after the remarks against Modi went viral, hundreds of social media users, including celebrities, protested

with calls to boycott tourism in Maldives and instead explore domestic destinations. Several social media users and even some travel companies claimed Indians are cancelling their scheduled trip to the Maldives following the diplomatic row.

Soon after taking oath as the President of Maldives on November 17, Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, formally requested India to withdraw 88 military personnel from his country by March 15, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi.

In the presidential runoff

held in September last year, Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

During his visit to Beijing in January, President Muizzu met Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang and discussed ways to increase the number of tourists from China to his tourism-dependent country, including increasing the number of direct flights between the two countries.

China on January 31 said it has worked out a "comprehensive mutual visa cooperation" agreement with 23 countries, including the Maldives.

# Various measures taken to boost economy: FM



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To bring down the debt burden, the government has taken various measures like increasing the tax revenue buoyancy, enhancing the public expenditure effectiveness, commitment to reducing fiscal deficit and augmenting the productive efficiency, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday. In addition to strengthening the financial system, the government has more than doubled its effective capital expenditure from Rs 6.57 lakh crore in 2020-21 to Rs 13.71 lakh crore and Rs 14.97 lakh crore in 2023-24 (BE) and 2024-25 (BE), respectively, to crowd in private investments, she said in the Lok Sabha. The government's emphasis on increasing capital expenditure will not only boost the investments, but also return a higher GDP growth to lower the debt burden, she said. Simultaneously, she said, the state governments have been incentivised to increase their capital spending through measures like 50-year interest-free capex loans and front-loading of tax devolution instalments. Various other measures like reduction of the corporate tax rate, liberalisation of foreign direct investment, and enhancement of ease of doing business have created supportive conditions for sustained growth in private investment, she said.

As a result, the overall investment rate in the economy consolidated at 29.2 per cent of GDP in 2022-23 and further improved to 29.8 per cent in 2023-24 as per the advance estimates by NSO, she said. Impacted by COVID-19, the debt to GDP ratio increased to 89.6 per cent at the end of the pandemic year 2020-21. After a sharp rise in government debt in 2020-21 on account of the revenue shortfall and additional spending requirements due to the pandemic, the general government debt relative to GDP has gradually declined over the last two years to reach around 81 per cent at the end of March 2023 (provisional), she said. Buoyant revenue collection, rebalancing of spending from revenue to capital expenditure and robust real GDP growth in the post-pandemic years have led to a decline in the government debt relative to GDP, she added. Replying to another question, Sitharaman said more than 46.15 crore loans amounting to Rs 27.38 lakh crore have been sanctioned to the borrowers under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) as of January 26, 2024. Complaints with regard to the implementation of PMMY are redressed in consultation with respective banks. The complaints received at the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) are also being taken up with respective banks for redressal within the prescribed timelines, she said. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has been successful in increasing banking penetration to promote financial inclusion across the country, she said in a separate reply. A total of 51.61 crore Jan-Dhan accounts with a deposit balance of Rs 2,17,218 crore have been opened as of January 17, 2024, under PMJDY, the minister said. Of the total, 28.60 crore (55.5 per cent) Jan-Dhan accounts belong to women, and about 34.41 crore (66.8 per cent) PMJDY accounts have been opened in rural and semi-urban areas.

# Indian Energy Exchange total trade volume grows 26 per cent



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Energy Exchange's (IEX) total trade volume rose 26 per cent year-on-year to 10,893 million units in January 2024. It had recorded 8,639 million units (MU) trade volume in January 2023, the power exchange said in a statement. IEX achieved the highest-ever total volume in January at 10,893 MU, including 9,137 MU from the conventional power market segment, 236 MU from the green market segment, and 15.20 lakh RECs (equivalent to 1,520 MU) it added. In the Day-Ahead Market (DAM), the traded volume was 5,540 MU compared to 4,893 MU in January 2023, an increase of 13.2 per cent. The Real-Time Electricity Market (RTM) volume increased 13 per cent year-on-year to 2,380 MU in January from 2,102 MU in the same month last year.

The Green Day-Ahead Market (G-DAM) recorded 210 MU volume during the month, with a weighted average price of Rs 5.87 per unit. The segment saw participation from 189 market participants during the month. The Green Term-Ahead Market (G-TAM) achieved 26 MU volume in January 2024, with an average monthly price of non-solar - Rs 6.57/unit. A total of 15.20 lakh RECs (equivalent to 1,520 MU) were traded in the trading sessions held on January 10 and January 31, at a clearing price of Rs 360/REC (renewable energy certificate). This is the highest REC volume in the current financial year. IEX is India's leading electricity exchange providing a nationwide, automated trading platform for physical delivery of electricity, renewable energy and certificates, including renewable energy certificates as well as energy saving certificates.



# Gold declines ₹150; silver plunges ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices declined Rs 150 to Rs 63,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak global cues, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had ended at Rs 63,500 per 10 grams. Silver also plunged Rs 400 to Rs 75,500 per kilogram, while it had closed at Rs 75,900 per kg in the previous trade. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,350 per 10 grams, down by Rs 150, taking bearish cues from the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,024 per ounce, down by USD 15 from the previous close. Also, silver was trading lower at USD 22.45 per ounce. Gold traded lower as the dollar and yields jumped after a strong US non-farm payrolls data which created some uncertainty about the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy path this year, Navneet Damani, Senior VP of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

# Stock markets settle lower on fag end selling

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex fell back by 354 points on Monday due to selling in index major Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and Maruti amid weak trends from Asian and European markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 354.21 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 71,731.42 on fag-end selling. During the day, it hit a high of 72,385.93 and a low of 71,602.14. The Nifty fell by 82.10 points or 0.38 per cent to close at 21,771.70. Sensex and Nifty has gained around 0.7 per cent in the previous session. After a flat opening, benchmark indices moved in a narrow range before a sharp fall in the final hour. FMCG, telecom, financials and IT shares were on



the back while pharma, auto and energy shares advanced. "The Indian market witnessed a sharp fall during the final hours of today's trading. The robust US job data for January indicates that the expected rate cuts from the Fed in the com-

ing year may be less imminent. "This is reflected in the recent sharp climb in US bond yields to above 4% levels, which prompted investors to book profit from the post interim Budget rally amidst elevated valuations," Vinod Nair, Head of

Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. The current drop in crude prices, provides support and restrains the decline, Nair added. Among the Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel, Maruti, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Titan, Hindustan Unilever, JSW Steel, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries were the major laggards. Tata Motors jumped nearly 6 per cent after the company on Friday reported a two-fold jump in net profit at Rs 7,100 crore for the December quarter. Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Mahindra and Mahindra, Tata Steel, NTPC and Tata Consultancy Services were the other gainers. "Indications are in favour of consolidation to continue and

expect Nifty to respect the 21,450-21,600 zone, in case the profit taking extends," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said. In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the green while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were quoting marginally lower. The US markets ended in positive territory on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.53 per cent to USD 76.92 a barrel. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 70.69 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 440.33 points or 0.61 per cent to settle at 72,085.63 on Friday. The Nifty went up by 156.35 points or 0.72 per cent to 21,853.80.

# Rupee falls 8 paise to settle at 83.06 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 8 paise to settle at 83.06 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as strengthening American currency overseas and negative sentiment in the domestic equity markets weighed on the local unit. However, the downward trend in the global crude oil prices supported the domestic unit and restricted its decline, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83.03 against the dollar and traded in the narrow range of 83.00 to 83.07. The local unit finally settled at 83.06 (provisional) against the greenback, down 8 paise over its previous close. The rupee settled flat at 82.98 against the dollar on Friday. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six

currencies, was trading 0.33 per cent higher at 104.12. Analysts said the US dollar gained strength after macro-economic data showed steady growth in the world's largest economy, while investors were keeping a close watch on the Reserve Bank's monetary policy decision to be announced later this week. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.14 per cent to USD 77.22 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex fell 354.21 points, or 0.49 per cent, to 71,731.42 points. The Nifty dipped 82.10 points, or 0.38 per cent, to 21,771.70 points. A monthly survey released on Monday showed India's services sector growth rose to a six-month high in January as new business expanded at a faster pace amid buoyant demand from domestic and external clients.

# GST detect 14,597 tax evasion cases from April to December

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GST officers are using data analytic and artificial intelligence tools like Business Intelligence and Fraud Analytics to identify risky taxpayers suspected of passing or availing fake input tax credits, Parliament was informed on Monday. In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said a total of 14,597 cases of Goods and Services Tax (GST) evasion have been registered by central tax officers during April-December 2023. A maximum number of such cases was registered in Maharashtra (2,716), followed by Gujarat (2,589), Haryana (1,123) and West Bengal (1,098). "Various data analytic and artificial intelligence tools such as



NETRA (Networking Exploration Tools for Revenue Augmentation), BIFA (Business Intelligence and Fraud Analytics) & ADVAIT (Advanced Analytics in Indirect Taxation) are being used to identify risky taxpayers, suspected of passing or availing fake input tax credit, including in the State of Andhra Pradesh," Chaudhary

said. GST intelligence officers have detected fake input tax credit (ITC) cases worth Rs 18,000 crore in April-December of the current fiscal and arrested 98 fraudsters/ masterminds. Based on the feedback received from the field formations, these tools are updated/modified from time to time, he added. Chaudhary said the GST registration process has robust checks in the form of physical verification of premises and Aadhar authentication. The said checks have enabled in early detection of fraudulent registrations and also curbed fraudulent registrations to a great extent. In Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry a pilot on risk-based biometric-based Aadhaar authentication is being carried out for registration applications.

# Airtel posts 54 per cent rise in Q3

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel on Monday posted a 54 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 2,442.2 crore in the December quarter, mainly on account of growth in high value customers. Airtel prepaid mobile customers are required to pay at least Rs 155 for about a month-long service as the company had raised rates by 56 per cent in January 2023. Bharti Airtel Managing Director Gopal Vittal has indicated a need for further increase in mobile services rates. Return on investment made by the company is still low at 9.4 per cent. The company had registered a profit of Rs 1,588.2 crore in the year-ago period, a regulatory filing said on Monday. Despite devaluation of African currencies during the period, the consolidated revenue from operations during the third quarter of the ongoing fiscal grew 5.8 per cent to Rs 37,899.5 crore from Rs 35,804.4 crore in the year-ago period. "Revenue from India business sustained its momentum and grew sequentially by 3 per cent, while consolidated revenue was impacted by the devaluation of



the Nigerian Naira and Malawian Kwacha," Bharti Airtel Managing Director Gopal Vittal said in a statement. The total customer base of Bharti Airtel grew about 8 per cent on a year-on-year basis to 55.1 crore in the December quarter with India customer base growing to 39.7 crore, up 7.5 per cent. The telecom firm's Africa customer base grew 9.1 per cent to 15.17 crore while its customer base declined marginally to 30 lakh. India revenue of Airtel grew 11.4 per cent year-on-year to Rs 27,811 crore during the quarter. Its Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) -- a key parameter for telecom operators growth -- in

the country increased 7.7 per cent to Rs 208 from Rs 193 a year ago. "We remain on course with our strategy of premiumisation that helped us add 7.4 million 4G/5G customers and exit the quarter with an industry-leading ARPU of Rs 208. Even at this ARPU, our return on capital employed, however, continues to be low at 9.4 per cent. To ensure industry health, tariff repair is extremely critical," Vittal said. Bharti Airtel's capital expenditure during the quarter stood at Rs 9,274 crore, comprising Rs 7,756 crore in India and Rs 1,515 crore in Africa. "We rolled out around 12.3k towers in the quarter to further strengthen our network cover-

age and provide seamless connectivity. We have rolled out about 45k towers in the last 12 months to ensure coverage and connectivity in rural as well as urban areas," Airtel said. The company said it added 2.82 crore 4G/5G data customers to its network over the last year and its average data usage per data customer stood at 22 GB per month. In India, Airtel 4G and 5G customer base increased 13 per cent on a year-on-year basis and 3.1 per cent on quarter-on-quarter basis to 24.49 crore account for 73.3 per cent of its total customer base. Bharti Airtel India mobile data usage increased 8.2 per cent on year-on-year basis and 1.2 per cent quarter-on-quarter to 22 GB per customer per month during the quarter under review. The home business of Airtel, which comprises fixed broadband line service, grew 23 per cent on a year-on-year basis. The fixed broadband service customer base of Bharti Airtel in India grew 29.2 per cent to about 73 lakh, however, APRU declined 6.5 per cent to 583. The net debt of Bharti Airtel declined marginally to Rs 2.02 lakh crore from Rs 2.09 lakh crore a year ago.



# Paytm shares fall for 3rd day

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

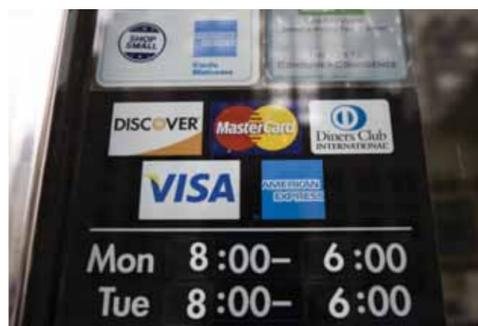
Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns Paytm brand, fell by another 10 per cent to hit its lower circuit limit, as investors continued to dump the stock following the RBI's crackdown. The stock tanked 10 per cent to Rs 438.35 -- its lowest trading permissible limit for the day -- on the BSE. It plummeted 9.99 per cent to hit its lower circuit limit of Rs 438.50 on the NSE. In three days, the stock has tumbled over 42 per cent, wiping out Rs 20,471.25 crore, from its market valuation. The regulator last week ordered Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, a restricted bank that can take deposits but cannot lend, to not take any further deposits or conduct credit transactions or carry out top-ups on any customers accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, cards for paying road tolls after February 29. Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) is an associate of One97 Communications Limited (OCL). One97 Communications holds 49 per cent of the paid-up share capital (directly and through its subsidiary) of PPBL. Vijay Shekhar Sharma has a 51 per cent stake in the bank. While users have the option to switch to other wallets, and FASTag services etc being provided by other vendors, Paytm management has said that PPBL is in discussion with RBI to comply with their direction for continuing the business. Paytm sees an impact of Rs 300-500 crore on its annual operational profit.

# Americans have saddled themselves with credit card debt

AP ■ NEW YORK

While the US economy is broadly healthy, pockets of Americans have run through their savings and run up their credit card balances after battling inflation for more than two years. Experts worry that members of these groups -- mostly lower- and middle-income Americans, who tend to be renters -- are falling behind on their debts and could face further deterioration of their financial health in the year ahead, particularly those who have recently resumed paying off student loans. "The US economy is currently performing better than most forecasters expected a year ago, thanks in large part to a resilient consumer," wrote Shernette McCloud, an economist with TD Economics, in a report issued on Wednesday. "However, more recently that spending is increasingly being financed by credit cards."

Americans held more than USD 1.05 trillion on their credit cards in the third quarter of 2023, a record, and a figure certain to grow once the fourth-quarter data is released by Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Next month. A recent report from the credit rating company Moody's showed that credit card delinquency rates and charge-off rates, or the percent of loans that a bank believes will never be repaid, are now well above their 2019 levels and are expected to keep climbing. These worrisome metrics coincide with the average interest rate on a bank credit card of roughly 21.5 per cent, the highest it's been since the Federal Reserve started tracking the data in 1994. "Overall, the consumer is credit healthy. However, the reality is that there are starting to be some significant signs of stress," said Silvio Tavares, president and CEO of VantageScore, one of the coun-



try's two major credit scoring systems. Most analyses of Americans' financial health tend to tell a tale of two consumers. On one side are the roughly two-thirds of Americans who own their homes and those who've invested in the stock market and done substantially well. They generally had the savings cushion necessary to weather high inflation. Delinquency rates on single-family homes remain

at near historic lows and home prices have continued to climb. But for the rest of America, things are looking rough. "You have these noticeable pockets of consumers -- mostly middle- and lower-income renters who have not benefited from the wealth effect of higher housing prices and stock prices -- who are feeling financial stress and that's driving up these delinquency levels. They've been hit very hard by

inflation," said Warren Kornfeld, a senior vice president at Moody's, in an interview. Kornfeld, who co-wrote a report last week looking at the climbing levels of delinquencies, expects them to keep climbing this year. Consumers' financial health could play a big role in the 2024 election. President Joe Biden is running in part on his efforts to bring down costs for US families. Republicans counter that Biden is to blame for higher costs in the first place. One way to gauge this bifurcation of the American economy is by looking at the results of some major credit card companies. The customers of Capital One, Discover Financial and Synchrony have historically been those with lower credit scores, while American Express typically serves the wealthiest and well-to-do. At Synchrony Bank, the largest issuer of retail co-brand cred-

it cards, the charge-off rate jumped from 3.5 per cent to 5.6 per cent in a year. Meanwhile, roughly 4.7 per cent of Synchrony customers are 30 days or more behind on their bills, which is also up from a year ago. Discover's customers are carrying USD 102 billion in balances on their credit cards, up 13 per cent from a year earlier. Meanwhile, the charge-off rates and 30-day delinquency rates have climbed. Executives say they can see the impact of inflation. "Think about a consumer that makes USD 50,000 a year," said John Green, Discover's chief financial officer, at an investor conference in December. "When inflation outpaces your wage growth, they're making choices in terms of what they're going to spend, what bill they're going to pay and what they're going to frankly put on their table." Inflation peaked at 9.1 per cent in June 2022 and is now

slightly above 3 per cent. But the costs of many goods and services remains elevated. A loaf of bread that cost USD 1.54 in December 2020 cost USD 2.02 at the end of last year, and a gallon of gas has risen from an average of USD 2.17 to USD 3.29 in the same timeframe, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics. Renters in particular have felt the pinch. The median rent for a property with up to two bedrooms has jumped from USD 1,424 at the end of 2020 to USD 1,713 at the end of last year, according to realtor.com. VantageScore's Tavares worries that the recent reintroduction of student loan payments could more acutely impact these customers in their ability to repay their debts. "Folks are scrambling to pay these obligations that they haven't had to pay in three years, and it's hitting exactly the demographic we are talking about here: the younger folk, less affluent folk," Tavares said.



## LADAKH WOMEN SKATE TO HISTORIC GOLD

PTI ■ LEH

It was a mixed day for hosts Ladakh in the Khelo India Winter Games as they won a first-ever gold in the women's short track 1600m relay at the NDS sports complex here while the men's ice-hockey team went down 0-4 against a powerful ITBP in a semi-final match. The second semifinal between favourites Army and Himachal Pradesh was a rather one-sided affair. Army won 10-2. Konchok Namgail (three) and Rigzin Norbuo (two) were the main scorers for

the winners. Maharashtra added two more skating golds to take their total tally to three but Karnataka continue to lead the standings with four. Maharashtra's gold medals on Monday came in the men's short track (1600m) relay and the mixed short track relay over the same distance. Ladakh won the silver in the mixed team race. Maharashtra's domination in the relays was never in question because their skaters have more silver and bronze medals (13) out of a possible 22. Eleven

skating gold medals have been decided in the Games so far. Ladakh's historic gold in women's short track came like a breath of fresh air on another cold day. It's been snowing overnight but the NDS groundstaff did a good job to prepare the rink for the skating competition. The Ladakh quartet of Skarma Tsultim, Insha Fatima, Tasnia Shamim, Padma Angmo responded beautifully clocking 3:55.80 to relegate Maharashtra (4:17.12) to the second place by a decent margin.

## India face Nepal after loss to Bangladesh

PTI ■ DHAKA

Smarting from a disappointing 0-1 defeat to Bangladesh, India eye full points in their next game against Nepal in the U-19 Women's SAFF Championship, to be played here on Tuesday. India conceded an injury-time goal to leave the field empty handed against the hosts on Sunday. Despite the Young Tigresses delivering a strong performance against the home team, the match appeared destined for a draw. However, in the closing moments, Bangladesh emerged successful once again over India. "We entered the match with confidence, expecting a victory, but a minor error cost us the game. Despite a number of attempts on goal, our own mistakes stopped us from capitalising on those opportunities. While our defence was solid, our focus remained on attacking," said Neha. "Our strategy was to leverage our strengths, but unfortunately, we fell short. Bangladesh proved to be faster, and we knew they had

### U-19 WOMEN SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP



a lot of speed, and regardless of my effort in the first half, my shot from the left turned into a low strike, missing the goal. Although we executed good crosses, they went unconverted," she added. The challenge for the Indian players would be to quickly put behind this loss and focus on the next game here at the

BSSSMK Stadium. In the previous SAFF U-19 Women's Championship 2019, India secured a victory over Nepal with a solitary goal before advancing to face Bangladesh in the final. A similar scenario will unfold if India secure either a draw or a win against Nepal. Meanwhile, Haryana's Neha

found her way into football under the influence of Renu, who also comes from her locality and is a striker in the senior national women's team. Drawing inspiration from forward Manisha Kalyan, Neha said, "I aspire to challenge Manisha. Di someday, who is my idol."

## Singapore to again review F1 race contract terms

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The Singapore government on Monday said it will again review the terms of the annual Formula 1 race, which came under scrutiny after the arrest of former Indian-origin transport minister Subramaniam Iswaran on corruption charges. The government also said it has asked the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) to conduct an audit of the 2022 Grand Prix. Minister-in-charge for Trade Relations Grace Fu informed about the decision in Parliament on Monday. Though Fu did not give more details in the house, she added, "Members will understand that I cannot say more on this at this point." Fu also evaded her reply by saying she cannot deal with questions that relate to matters which may have to be dealt with during Iswaran's trial. Members of Parliament had filed several parliamentary questions on the F1 race after the former Indian-origin transport minister was arrested on corruption charges. The case against the former minister, who was also the Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations, is ongoing. Iswaran, 61, was arrested by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) in July 2023 and released on bail. On January 18, he was slapped with 27 charges, comprising two counts of corruption, 24 counts of obtaining items from someone he had business dealings with as a public servant and one of obstructing the course of justice. He is accused of obtaining items such as tickets to musicals and football matches from billionaire hotelier Ong Beng Seng. The value of the items in the 27 charges is worth more than SGD 380,000. Both Iswaran and Ong were leading the annual F1 race in



Singapore. Replying to Leader of the Opposition and Workers' Party chief Pritam Singh's question on which agency is reviewing the F1 deal, Fu said the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) is leading the review and may involve other agencies. "It is not appropriate for us to speculate or prejudice the outcome of the proceedings. I will answer in so far as it is possible to do so," Channel News Asia quoted Fu as saying. Associate Professor Jamus Lim, from the opposition Workers' Party, also asked about the government's contracts with Ong Beng Seng's companies, while some MPs asked if there had been any non-compliance with processes. Fu said the STB had in 2007 signed a contract with the Singapore GP to organise the F1 night race in Singapore. The tourism board renewed this contract three times - in 2012, 2017 and 2022. The contract is currently in its fourth term, which will end in 2028. The MTI said on January 18 that the terms of all the agreements were considered carefully by the government and there was "nothing to suggest as of now that either the F1 contracts or other contracts were structured to the disadvantage of the government." Fu added, "Whilst we will review any government contracts to safeguard

Singapore's interest, we remain committed to the F1 Singapore Grand Prix. Preparations for the 2024 race have started." Meanwhile, Singapore Parliament will wait for Iswaran's court case on corruption charges to conclude before deciding if a Committee of Inquiry (COI) is needed, Leader of the House Indraneel Rajah said on Monday. Iswaran's pre-trial conference is scheduled for March 1, according to a report by The Straits Times. Indraneel said in her speech on Monday that a COI is appointed to look into matters, including accidents involving death, serious injury or serious property damage, and incidents that may endanger public safety, public health or the management of a ministry. "The purpose of a COI is to investigate something with a view of finding out how it happened," the Singapore daily quoted Indraneel as saying. "In this case, the CPIB has investigated the matter. Based on the investigation, the Attorney-General's Chambers took the view that there is a basis for criminal charges to be brought against Iswaran. "Determination of criminal offences is a matter for the court, which is currently dealing with the case." Iswaran had resigned from the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) and had stepped down as transport minister as well as a Member of Parliament.

## Messi global tour with Inter Miami has been very messy

AP ■ TOKYO

It's all been very messy. We're talking about Lionel Messi and Inter Miami's global tour of exhibition games where the main show has been Argentina's 2022 World Cup-winning captain. The matches are about promotion and marketing, hoping to build a new brand by using stars like Messi and Uruguayan Luis Suarez. Instead, the tour is getting mostly bad PR, and results that have not been much better in matches that have stretched from El Salvador, through Dallas, into Saudi Arabia, and then Hong Kong on Sunday. The next stop is Tokyo's National Stadium on Wednesday against Vissel Kobe, a wrap-up match on February 16 in Florida against Newell's Old Boys - Messi's boyhood club in Argentina, and the club that might be his final destination before retiring. Inter Miami has been

outscored 12-7 through five games and won only once. And that was Sunday in Hong Kong, where a 4-1 victory over the local team was overshadowed by angry fans holding up signs demanding a refund and booing since neither Messi nor Suarez played - both out injured and ageing. Messi is 36 and Suarez is 37, and both are more and more subject to nagging injuries. "The marketing hype in promoting the event to global fans creates high expectations, coupled with government subsidy of the event," John Grady, a sports law professor at the University of South Carolina, told The Associated Press. "This also raises the expectations that marquee players will appear as advertised." Even though fans know the games are for practice, and meaningless in the standings, they still choose to pay high prices and attend. As the phrase goes in Latin - caveat emptor, or "let the buyer



beware." "As more football teams recruit elite talent with large followings, including on social media, it creates a situation where non-appearance causes fan outrage and results in a public relations headaches,"

Grady added. Inter Miami coach Gerardo Martino apologized for Messi's absence after Sunday's Hong Kong match. Fans who saw practice on Saturday at least saw the Argentina captain in a kick-around, with

Miami co-owner David Beckham also on the field. "We understand the disappointment of the fans for the absence of Leo (Messi) and Luis Suarez," Martino said. "We understand a lot of fans are very disappointed and we ask for their forgiveness. We wish we could have sent Leo and Luis on for at least a while but the risk was too big." Messi came on for the last seven minutes in the 6-0 loss at Al-Nassr - one of the two matches in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - as Inter Miami prepares for its MLS season opener on February 22. It's anyone's guess if Messi will play on Wednesday in Japan, and if so, how much. Martino will certainly be under pressure to use him some, but Messi is sure to have the final say. Inter Miami is to practice on Tuesday on the outskirts of Tokyo with snow in the forecast. Wednesday calls for sunny skies, but temperatures at game time are around freezing.

## Niemann outlasts Sergio on 4th extra hole

AP ■ PLAYA DEL CARMEN (MEXICO)

### LIV GOLF MAYAKOBA



Joaquin Niemann outlasted Sergio Garcia just after sunset Sunday in the season-opening LIV Golf Mayakoba, making a 12-foot birdie putt from the fringe on the fourth hole of a playoff with the green-lit by a large video screen. "It was super dark," Niemann said "I think it probably helped me just not being so picky on picking my spot and just looking at the hole, getting a feeling and just get it there. It was the best way to end it up. I wanted to make a putt on the last one to win." Niemann won his first LIV Golf title two days after opening with a 12-under 59 - and after having two penalty strokes tacked onto his second-round score Sunday morning for taking incorrect relief on a drop from a cart path on the 13th hole. "I'm pretty happy that the day ended up this way, especially how the morning started," Niemann said. "I think dinner is

going to taste a little bit better than breakfast. The penalty strokes left the 25-year-old Chilean two shots ahead entering the final round. He closed with a 70, paring the final two holes to match Garcia at 12-under 201 at El Camaleon. Garcia parred the final three holes of regulation in a 66. "I wasn't feeling great. My swing is still not feeling great," Garcia said. "To be able to hang in there as much as I did and almost

win without feeling very comfortable at all is a positive." Niemann had putts to win on the par-4 18th in regulation and again on the first two extra trips down the hole, then survived on the third playoff hole when Garcia missed a 10-foot birdie try. The winner got a break in the first playoff hole when his drive struck a right-side tree and ended up in the rough. "I got lucky on the first playoff hole," Niemann said. "I think that shot right there got me back from that two-shot penalty that I had this morning. I kind of took it that way." Rather than finish Monday, Niemann and Garcia decided to play a fourth extra hole in the fading light, and Garcia gave Niemann a big opening when he left his approach from the fairway well right in deep rough. The 44-year-old Spanish player's flop shot raced by the right edge, and Niemann followed with the winner in the longest playoff in the Saudi-funded league's three-year history.



## Baez lifts Argentina past Kazakhstan

AP ■ ROSARIO (ARGENTINA)

Argentina reached the Davis Cup Finals group stage by eliminating Kazakhstan 3-2 in the best-of-five-match qualifying round when Sebastian Baez erased two match points and came back to edge Dmitry Popko 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (6) on Sunday. Belgium, the Czech Republic and France also wrapped up victories Sunday, while Chile and Peru were in action at night. Baez is a 23-year-old who is currently ranked a career-high No. 25. He reached the third round of the Australian Open last month before losing to eventual champion Jannik Sinner. Popko, 27, is ranked No. 338 and has failed in 16 attempts to qualify for a Grand Slam tournament. Popko was in position to get Kazakhstan past 2016 Davis Cup champion Argentina, just one point away from winning while ahead 6-4 in the concluding tiebreaker. But from there, Baez grabbed the match's last four points. Belgium clinched its spot in the next round with a 3-1 victory over Croatia that was sealed when Zizou Bergs beat Duje Ajdukovic 6-1, 7-5 on Sunday. Bergs also won the opening singles match Saturday against 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic. The Czech Republic eliminated Israel 4-0, and France beat Taiwan by the same score.

## 2026 World Cup final will be played at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey

AP ■ NEW YORK

The 2026 World Cup final will be played at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, beating out Texas and California for soccer's showcase game. FIFA awarded the July 19 championship to the \$1.6 billion venue, which opened in 2010, the culminating match of an expanded 48-nation, 104-game tournament that will be spread across three nations for the first time. Located about 10 miles from Manhattan, MetLife was promoted by both New York and New Jersey, where the stadium was built in the Meadowlands marshes. The land of Bruce Springsteen, Jon Bon Jovi and Frank Sinatra will be the focal point of the globe on that Sunday, when either Lionel Messi's Argentina will try to win its second straight title or a successor will emerge. "It will be a celebration of our diversity and our values," New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said in a telephone interview. "The

bigger picture is what leads up to it and what we leave behind for the decades to come." FIFA made the announcement Sunday at a Miami television studio, allocating the opener of the 39-day tournament to Mexico City's Estadio Azteca on June 11 and the finale to the home of the NFL's New York Jets and Giants. Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones had lobbied for the final to be at his AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. "The competition was dealing with the perception of the coastal, of a New York, or a Los Angeles," he said. "If this were totally being played to just America and the United States, that wouldn't have been such a formidable thing to overcome. But internationally, that's formidable to overcome." All games from the quarterfinals on are being played in the United States. Semifinals are on July 14 at AT&T; and the following day at Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta.



Quarterfinals are at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, on July 9, at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, the following day, and at Arrowhead Stadium in

Kansas City, Missouri, and Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida, on July 11. The third-place game will be at Hard Rock on July 18. The U.S. Team will train in

suburban Atlanta ahead of the tournament and open at SoFi on June 12. The Americans play seven days later at Seattle's Lumen Field and finish the group stage at SoFi on June 25.

Since reaching the semifinals of the first World Cup in 1930, the U.S. has advanced to the quarterfinals just once, in 2002. "It's about making our nation proud," American coach Gregg Berhalter said. "One way to really grow the game and to change soccer in America forever is to perform well and do something that no U.S. Team has ever done before." Seventy-eight of 104 matches will be played in the U.S., with 13 games each in Mexico and Canada, and there as many as six matches a day. AT&T will host a tournament-high nine matches. There will be eight each at MetLife, SoFi and Mercedes Benz; seven apiece at Hard Rock, Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, and NRG Stadium in Houston; and six apiece at Lumen, Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia, Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Missouri, and Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. FIFA officials did not publicly

explain their site-decision process. Philadelphia's final match will be a round-of-16 meeting on July 4, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Philadelphia's Citizens Bank Park hosts baseball's All-Star Game, likely on July 14. Santa Clara is the only U.S. Site that will not host a game after the new round of 32. AT&T will host two round-of-32 matches. FIFA expanded the World Cup from 32 to 48 nations, increased matches from 64 and announced the 16 sites in 2022. Murphy learned of the decision while at a watch party in a MetLife Stadium suite. He was not discouraged by a British tabloid report on Jan. 17 that said the final would be at AT&T. "We did everything we could to put our head down, focus on the job at hand, kind of push out the noise, and that turned out to be a winning formula," Murphy said.

# INDIA BOUNCE BACK AGAINST ENGLAND

**PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**  
Indian bowlers won an engrossing battle against England's firebrand batting for a series-levelling 106-run victory in the second Test here on Monday, blunting 'Bazball' with their resilience in a roller-coaster contest.  
England began day four at 67 for one, chasing a record target of 399. They were bowled out for 292 in the extended afternoon session.  
The visiting team's no holds barred approach, which has largely been successful, did not work on this occasion as India picked up nine wickets over the course of two sessions to bounce back in the five-match series.  
The third Test will be played in Rajkot from February 15. "You know winning a Test in these conditions is not easy. (I) wanted our bowlers to step up and they did that," said an elated India skipper Rohit Sharma.  
Only Zak Crawley's (73 off 132 balls) strategy of mixing aggression worked before the collective efforts of Jasprit Bumrah (3/46), R Ashwin (3/71), Axar

Patel (1/75) and Kuldeep Yadav (1/60) yielded the desired results for the hosts who were under pressure going into day four.  
Bumrah picked up the Player of the Match honours for his overall haul of nine wickets in the game, ahead of young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who scored a crucial 209-run knock in India's first innings.  
"He (Bumrah) is a champion player for us," reiterated Rohit. After James Anderson claimed that India were nervous while batting in the second innings and did not know a safe target to counter 'Bazball', England walked the talk on Monday and went ballistic.  
"Coming into this last innings, (we) had full belief in ourselves that we'll chase it down," England skipper Ben Stokes said at the end of the game.  
His team would have been better served taking a cue from Crawley, who saw out an intense morning spell from Bumrah before going for his strokes.  
Night-hawk Rehan Ahmed (23) wanted to smash his first ball of the day out of the park while Hyderabad Test hero Ollie Pope (23) and Joe Root



(16) were pushing their luck, frequently attempting sweeps and reverse sweeps on a pitch with variable bounce. The visitors managed to make 127 runs in the opening session but the loss of five wickets effectively sealed their

fate. When skipper Ben Stokes (11 off 29 balls) got run out via a brilliant direct hit from Shreyas Iyer post lunch, there was no coming back for England. But Ben Foakes (36) and Tom Hartley (36) frustrated the

visitors with a 55-run partnership for the eighth wicket. Hartley could have been Ashwin's landmark 500th wicket but the TV umpire overturned the on-field decision of a catch as the ball

had ballooned after hitting the batter's arm and not the glove. However, Rohit and Co. Were not convinced with the DRS showing umpire's call for LBW. Since the appeal was only for a catch and not LBW, the umpire's call for the latter was

not considered. At stroke of lunch, Kuldeep Yadav dismissed Crawley while Bumrah trapped Jonny Bairstow (26) in front to deal a massive blow to England, who slipped to 194 for six at the break. Crawley, by far the best batter on show, was adjudged LBW off Kuldeep with a close DRS call.  
On the sixth ball of his first over, Kuldeep got one to turn back in from middle stump. It seemed the ball was going down leg but DRS showed that it was hitting the leg-stump. India's standout bowler in the game, Bumrah, bowled his heart out in the two-hour session.  
For someone who was operating in four-over spells, Bumrah bowled one extra in his opening burst before returning towards the end of the session to send back Bairstow. He also cleaned up Hartley to end the game.  
Root and Pope perished while going for their strokes. Root, in particular, would be disappointed with his effort as he danced down the track and went for a wild slog without getting to the pitch of the ball to be caught at short third

man, giving Ashwin his 499th wicket. While Axar Patel found Rehan's pads with a straighter one, Pope offered a sharp catch to Ashwin and the Indian skipper made no mistake in pouncing it.  
Crawley's play in the first session stood out. He was patient enough to leave balls in Bumrah's opening spell and when the champion fast bowler did for a full ball, the England opener was quick to put it away with a straight bat. His cover and straight drive off Bumrah were the standout strokes of his innings. When Axar was bowling his first spell, India were a tad defensive and had both long off and long on in place for Rehan, who was promoted to bat at number three before stumps on day three.  
Pope played a sweep, flick and stepped out to Axar in the same over for three boundaries.  
Root, who had missed the last two sessions on Sunday due to an injured right little finger, was in full attack mode with his first two scoring shots being reverse sweep for four.



## Our bowling attack is in transition: Bumrah

**PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**  
Mohammed Shami and Ravichandran Ashwin are in the twilight of their Test careers and Jasprit Bumrah on Monday acknowledged that he is now the link between the old order and the new as Indian Test bowling enters a transition phase.  
The 30-year-old is one of Indian cricket's greatest ever match-winners and someone who has made it to India's 'Fab-Five' list of pacers along with the legendary Kapil Dev, the fiery Javagal Srinath and the two artistic exponents of reverse swing in Zaheer Khan and Shami.  
Being the second fastest Asian pacer to reach 150 wickets in his 34th game, Bumrah knows that he is the leader of the pack and has to guide the likes of Mukesh Kumar and Avesh Khan (in dug-out) at this juncture in Indian cricket.  
"We're going through a transition so I feel it's my

responsibility to help them in any way I can," Bumrah, who got 'Player of the Match' for his nine-wicket haul in the 106-run win over England in the second Test here, said at the post-match presentation ceremony.  
He has played very less Test cricket in India but has staggering statistics on pitches not traditionally conducive for fast bowling. In six Tests he has played in India, Bumrah has 29 wickets.  
"As I said before, I don't look at numbers. As a youngster, I did that and it made me excited. But now it's an added baggage as you are already playing for India," he said.  
The in-swinging yorker that bamboozled an in-form Ollie Pope has been the talk of the town and Bumrah said, "As a youngster, that is the first delivery I learned (yorker)."  
"I used to think that it is the only way to get wickets. I had seen the legends of the game. Waqar, Wasim and even Zaheer Khan."

## Kishan needs to start playing to be considered for selection: Dravid

**PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**  
Ishan Kishan needs to decide when he will start playing "some form of cricket" and then only can he be considered for national selection, head coach Rahul Dravid said on Monday addressing queries on his prolonged break from both international and domestic cricket.  
A regular member of the Indian team across formats not so long ago, Kishan has been missing from action since he asked for a break in the middle of the South Africa tour in December citing personal reasons. He last turned up for India in November and has not

featured for Jharkhand in ongoing Ranji Trophy. After the series levelling win over England, Dravid tried to clear the air over Kishan's absence once again.  
"There is way back for anyone and everyone. I don't want to go on labouring about the Ishan Kishan point. Have tried to explain this as best as I can, the point was he had requested a break, we were happy to give him the break," said Dravid in the media interaction.  
"Whenever he is ready, I didn't say he has to play domestic cricket, I said whenever he is ready, he needs to play some cricket and come back. The choice is his. We are not



forcing him to do anything," Dravid didn't seem to be amused with the queries and also made it team management's stance clear on the issue.

Considering KS Bharat's ordinary run with the bat in the ongoing series against England, India could do with Kishan's services. Rishabh Pant

has not yet fully recovered from the injuries he suffered in a horrific car accident in December, 2022. Besides K S Bharat, Dhruv Jurel was also part of the first two Tests.  
"We are in touch with him, it is not that we have not been in touch. He has not yet started playing right so at the moment it is not something we can consider. Because you know he maybe he is not ready. He decides when he wants to be ready. We have got options with Rishabh injured and stuff. I am sure the selectors will weight all options," he said.  
Bharat himself would agree he could have done better with the bat

Dravid was satisfied with the way Bharat kept in the first two Tests but could not say the same about his batting. He mistimed a half tracker to be caught at mid-on in the second innings and has not done much with the bat so far in the series.  
"Disappointed is a strong word (for Bharat). I would not use that word. At times, young players do take time to develop. They grow at their own pace. Yeah I mean as a coach, you want players to grab the opportunities. His keeping has been good, he will also agree that he could have done better with the bat," added the head coach.

## I was nervous in second innings: Gill

**PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**  
India batter Shubman Gill on Monday admitted that the pressure of failing to score big in the last few innings made him nervous when he came out to bat in the second innings of the second Test against England here.  
Gill, following disappointing performances in the opening Test in Hyderabad and the first innings of the second Test here, finally got the monkey off his back by hitting a century (104) to help India win by 106 runs.  
"Honestly, I'll sum it up in just one line: My heartbeat playing the first ball and playing my last ball was the same. My heartbeat was the same throughout my (second) innings. That's how nervous I was feeling," said Gill, speaking to the host broadcaster.  
"That's what I was actually talking to Rahul (Dravid) sir this morning when the England team was batting, it

(heartbeat) was quite weird... I've never experienced anything like that. It was something different that I experienced yesterday," said Gill, who did not come out to field on Monday due to a thumb injury he suffered while fielding on the second day. Gill, who scored 23 and 0 in the opening Test which India lost by 28 runs, said it was not the "outside pressure" that was bothering him but the expectation he had from himself that was weighing on his mind.  
"Obviously, not being able to score runs in the previous matches... And it was not only the expectations you know that are outside, but the expectations that I had for myself.  
"And, I was also disappointed with the way I got out in the first innings here and in the



first Test in Hyderabad. So all the expectations, I was just a bit disappointed with myself, maybe that was the reason (for

the nervousness)". On whether the negative publicity on social media was playing on his mind and

making him nervous, Gill said it did not matter to him.  
"I don't read the newspapers, I don't really go on social media to try and look for what people are saying there. If you are not doing well, I don't expect someone to tell me I'm not doing well. I know myself I'm not doing well. More than anything else, it was my own personal disappointment," he said.  
On his muted celebrations following the century, Gill said he had scored a double-ton, he certainly would have celebrated. The customary bow he takes after reaching a landmark was missing and it was not lost on the spectators.  
"I missed out on a big one yesterday. I didn't feel like the job was done, so I didn't like celebrating like that. I thought once I get a double hundred or a 150 I'll celebrate.

"In the first Test, I was trying to take a bit safer approach and and, maybe, that's not the way I've grown up playing my game. And this Test match was all about me trying to play how I feel like playing and that's what I told myself."  
Gill lauded Yashasvi Jaiswal's double century in the first innings here.  
"New people coming in are all so fearless, and it is so much fun to watch them, especially when he is batting. The way he approaches his game, it's just fun to watch. And it's not wild swinging; it is very calculated. He knows when to take the risk, he knows when to put the bowler under pressure."  
He also agreed that T20 had made Test cricket more entertaining.  
"Yeah, it definitely has played a role because batters are more fearless in playing their shots. They are not worried about playing the big shots, there is no fear."

## RANJI TROPHY

### Jharkhand pulverise Manipur

**PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR**  
Jharkhand completed a comprehensive victory by an innings and 102 runs here on Monday to clinch seven points in their Elite Group A match of the Ranji Trophy on Monday.  
Jharkhand dominated the game through the course of play on all four days as they dismissed Manipur for a paltry 170 in the first innings and took a massive 334-run lead as they piled up 504/5 declared.  
There was no change in fortunes with the bat for Manipur in the second essay despite skipper K Langlonyamba Meitan's 88, as they folded for 232 to hand Jharkhand a victory with a bonus point here at the Keenan Stadium.  
Keishangbam faced 157 balls and hit 12 fours and a six to delay the inevitable but no other Manipur batter could resist for long, with Jharkhand's Pankaj Raunak returning 4/22 from his 14.3 overs.  
In another match, Rajasthan earned three points by virtue of first-innings lead of a mere 41 runs as they played out a draw against Vidarbha at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur.  
In reply to the hosts Rajasthan's total of 432 for which they consumed more than 130 overs, Vidarbha kept them on the field for about similar time duration, facing 125.3 overs to make 391.  
Karun Nair struck a 258-ball 112 with 12 fours to top score for Vidarbha while skipper and



wicketkeeper-batter Akshay Wadkar made 59 and Yash Rathod scored 81.  
For Rajasthan, left-arm spinner Manav Suthar was the pick among the bowlers with 5/133 in almost 40 overs.  
**BRIEF SCORES:**  
**At JAMSHEDPUR:** Manipur 170 and 232 in 93.3 overs (Langlonyamba Meitan Keishangbam 88; Pankaj Raunak 4/22) lost to Jharkhand 504/5d by an innings and 102 runs.  
**POINTS:** Jharkhand 7, Manipur 0.  
**At JAIPUR:** Rajasthan 432 drew with Vidarbha 391 in 125.3 overs (Yash Rathod 81, Karun Nair 112, Akshay Wadkar 59; Manav Suthar 5/133).

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Delhi produced yet another inept batting performance on Monday to end up with a single point against Baroda in a Group D match, thereby dashing hopes of a knock-out qualifications in this year's Ranji Trophy.  
After Baroda declared their first innings at 435 for 9, Delhi starting the day at 113 for 4, and they were all-out for 177. Adding insult to injury, Baroda skipper Vishnu Solanki enforced the follow-on and Delhi crawled to 68 for 1 in 34 overs when the two captains decided to shake hands. Delhi are now placed seventh in Group D with eight points from five games and two left -- one away against Himachal Pradesh and one at home against Odisha. Baroda are through to knock-outs with 23 points from five games.  
Delhi need to ensure that they get the first innings lead against HP in the Dharamsala match in order to avoid relegation, which would be a first in their history.  
In a weather-affected match, Delhi could have easily

### Delhi stay second from last



prevented Baroda from getting a first innings lead on a docile track which would have at least given them psychological advantage.  
However, there was distinct lack of application from Delhi's young batting line-up as six wickets fell for 64 runs in little under 21 overs.

Ajit Seth (3/39 in 14 overs), a medium pacer, who till last year had played for India, got three wickets while left-arm spinner Bhargav Bhatt (3/18) quickly wrapped up the tail. Once Ayush Badoni (44) nicked one to Shivalik Sharma in the slips off Seth, there was no resistance from other

Former India U-19 captain Yash Dhull, whom many considered as the next big batting talent from Delhi, came in at No. 9 as he had scratched his knee and lower abdomen while fielding.  
He however came out to open in the second innings when the match as a contest was all but over.  
**BRIEF SCORES**  
**In DELHI:** Baroda 435/9 dec. Delhi 177 in 56.2 overs (Ayush Badoni 44, Jonty Sidhu 40, Atit Seth 3/39, Bhargav Bhatt 3/18) & (f/o) 68/1 in 34 overs (Yash Dhull 39 not out).  
**POINTS:** Baroda 3; Delhi 1  
**In CUTTACK:** Odisha 322 and 201 (Govinda Poddar 46, Gourav Yadav 3/48, Sagar Udeshi 4/45).  
**Puducherry** 284 and (Target 240) 175/8 (Paras Ratnaparkhe 72, Biplab Samantray 2/28). Odisha 3. Puducherry 1.  
**IN JAMMU:** J&K 168/2 vs Uttarakhand. J&K 1. Uttarakhand 1.  
**IN DHARAMSALA:** Himachal Pradesh 169 and 42/5 (Anubhav Agarwal 4/6).  
**Madhya Pradesh** 217 (Venkatesh Iyer 72).