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Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 39
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY FEBRUARY 9, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



**KOHLI ABSENCE
IS A BLOW FOR
INDIA: HUSSAIN**
12 SPORTS

UNVEILING PRAGATI TUNNEL DEBACLE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A massive controversy has erupted over the six-lane, multi-crore Pragati Maidan Tunnel project, deemed a "potential threat to the lives of passengers" due to issues such as water seepage, poor drainage, and extensive cracks. Negligence in maintenance has exacerbated these problems, leading to significant structural damage necessitating a complete overhaul. On the other hand, the Public Works Department (PWD) and Larsen & Toubro (L&T), which executed the projects, are engaged in a blame game and have issued notices to each other for the flaws. The Delhi Government's agency, PWD, has also asked the construction major L&T, which executed the project, to deposit Rs 500 crore for the flaws. In response, L&T said it has made a counterclaim of Rs 500 crore. According to the PWD, the tunnel is facing myriad issues, and 12 have been recognised. These include leakage, significant cracks in concrete, water accumulation, inadequate drainage, inconsistent kerbstones, missing saucer drains, and unexplained groundwater seepage. Since its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 19, 2022, the 1.3-kilometre-long tunnel of the Pragati Maidan Integrated Transit Corridor Project has experienced repeated closures due to waterlogging. These closures have exposed significant flaws within the



Repairing work at Pragati Maidan Tunnel

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

project, as highlighted in recent notices, prompting concerns about its resilience and long-term viability. In 2023, the tunnel faced multiple closures due to waterlogging, underscoring the urgent need for a comprehensive multi-team safety audit before any potential overhaul. Experts warn that continuous water seepage poses a catastrophic danger to structures constructed of concrete and TMT bars, whether they are high-rises, flyovers, or underpasses. The PWD's notice said that

rectifying design flaws and quality-related concerns requires a substantial overhaul of the entire project, including deficiencies in the transit corridor running along Mathura Road, Bhairon Marg, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, and the underground tunnel connecting Mathura Road to Mahatma Gandhi Marg beneath Pragati Maidan. The PWD also highlighted that L&T failed to complete the tunnel construction on time. The tender for the project was floated in 2017 and the initial deadline for the

launch of the tunnel was set for 2019. However, the tunnel was launched in June 2022. The PWD claims that the major damage to the tunnel resulted from defects in the design of Underpass number 5 near Bhairon Marg. The notice requires L&T to respond by February 18, explaining why action should not be taken against the company for financial and reputational losses. The PWD held L&T accountable under civil and criminal laws for neglecting its responsibility to repair and maintain the

construction, which was supposed to have a design life of 100 years or more. Aimed to ease connectivity between central Delhi with eastern parts of the city and satellite towns of Noida and Ghaziabad, the tunnel is 1.3 km long and has five underpasses linking it to the Integrated Transit Corridor Project. In 2023, the tunnel was closed on multiple occasions due to waterlogging during the monsoon season, said another PWD official.

Centre calls Rahul bluff on PM Modi caste with proof

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday afternoon after he claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not born into an Other Backward Class (OBC) community. Rahul, during his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Odisha, accused the Prime Minister of "misleading" people by identifying himself as an OBC member. In a brief note titled "Facts Regarding Rahul Gandhi's Statement on PM's Caste," the government stated that the Modh Ghanchi caste (and the sub-group to which Modi belongs) "stands included in the Gujarat government's list of socially and educationally backward classes and OBCs." "... After a survey in Gujarat, the Mandal Commission prepared a list of OBCs under Index 91(A), which included the Modh Ghanchi caste. The Indian government's list of 105 OBC castes for Gujarat has also included Modh Ghanchi," the government statement said. Wayanad Lok Sabha MP Rahul remarked that people were being deceived about the Prime Minister's caste, asserting that Narendra Modi, who had confronted the Congress in Parliament a day earlier for allegedly being unfair to marginalised communities, was not born into an OBC family. In fact, Modi, during his Lok Sabha address, criticised the Congress



and the first PM, Jawaharlal Nehru, accusing them of being the biggest hindrance to OBC upliftment. Modi, in his typical fashion, questioned whether the Congress could not recognise the biggest OBC (referring to himself) standing in Parliament. He mentioned a letter from Nehru to the then chief ministers. "Nehruji used to argue that if SCs, STs, or OBCs were given reservation in jobs, government work standards would decline. He even halted recruitment. What Nehruji stated has become like 'set in stone' for the Congress since then. Your mindset can be understood through such examples," the PM criticised. BJP leader Surath Biswal, an OBC, said Rahul Gandhi's statement showed his immaturity. "Modi belongs to the OBC. Congress has to answer why the Gandhi family put the recommendations of Kaka Kalelkar and Mandal Commission [for OBC reservation] in cold storage," he said.

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Metro wall collapse claims life

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Tragedy struck at the Gokulpuri metro station on Thursday when a portion of its wall collapsed around 11 am, resulting in the death of a 53-year-old man. Eyewitnesses described the harrowing scene, noting that it could have been a greater disaster considering that several students gather near it after school for snacks. DMRC has suspended two officials and ordered probe into the incident. "The Government Boys Senior Secondary School is hardly 50 metres from where the collapse took place. The incident occurred around 11 am. If it had happened around 1.30 pm, it could have been even more disastrous, as several students usually gather there to have tea and snacks after school," cab driver Dilshan Khan, who was waiting near the metro station, said. Another eyewitness, Krishan Kumar, said, "We learned that one person died and four others were injured. However, the situation could have been more severe if the incident had occurred around 1 pm." He added that there is a cooking gas cylinder agency adjacent to the metro station. A senior police officer mentioned, "We have diverted traffic near the metro station."

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PM Modi heaps praise on Manmohan Singh

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

After addressing the Congress's first family - Nehru and the Gandhis - consecutively in his Parliament speeches, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had commendable words for his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, who headed the Congress-led government for two successive terms between 2004 and 2014. "I wish to remember Dr Manmohan Singh today; his contribution in the House, with his invaluable thoughts, both as a leader and in the Opposition, has been immense. For such a long time, the way he has guided this House and country, Dr Manmohan Singh will always be remembered for it," Modi said during his speech in the Rajya Sabha. Modi recalled an incident in the old Parliament building during a trust vote against the government, saying, "It was known that the treasury bench would win, but Dr Manmohan Singh came on his wheelchair and cast his vote. This is an example of a member being alert to



his duties," Modi said, bidding farewell to the 68 members scheduled to retire between February and May as per their tenures. The elections to the vacant seats have also been announced for the end of this month. The retiring Rajya Sabha members were also given a farewell on Thursday at Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar's residence. In a sarcastic jibe at the Congress, the

PM thanked Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge for coming out with a "black paper" against his government and referred to it as "kaala teeka" (to ward off the evil eye) amidst the good work being done by his government. The PM referred to the black robes worn by Opposition MPs in the House as a mark of protest and said, "We also saw a fashion parade in the Rajya Sabha when some members came in black clothes. He said the Members who are leaving for a more public platform will hugely benefit from the experience in the Rajya Sabha. "This is a diverse university of six years, shaped by experiences. Anyone who goes out from here goes enriched and strengthens the work of nation-building," he said. Marking the significance of the present moment, he said that the members who are leaving today had the opportunity to be in both the old and the new building, and they are leaving bearing witness to the Amrit Kaal and 75 years of the Constitution.



With police personnel deployed to check vehicles after a protest called by farmers in Noida and Greater Noida, massive traffic jams were witnessed on the Delhi-Noida border on Thursday

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fragile five to fastest growing economy: White Paper chronicles Modi Govt feat

Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government in the last Parliament session before the general elections on Thursday brought a White Paper tearing into Congress-led UPA rule, saying that it had turned the Indian economy into a non-performing one through indiscriminate revenue expenditure, off budget borrowings and pile of bad debts at banks. The 54-page document tabled in Parliament detailed how the Modi Government pull the economy from being counted among the most fragile-five in the world to being the fastest growing and the most attractive

investment destination. Indian economy was on a "road to nowhere" in 2014 because of the multiple wrong turns taken during the 10 years of UPA rule, leaving the onus on the Modi government to deal with the challenges and restore dynamism and optimism in the economy, said the White Paper tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The White Paper, highlighting the economic mismanagement by the UPA government and achievements of the 10 years of NDA rule, comes during the last session of the 17th Lok Sabha ahead of the general elections due in April-May. The paper said, after assuming power in 2014, Modi-led government took "tough decisions" to overcome the "hydra-headed challenges" of runaway fiscal deficit, decision stasis, banking crisis, corruption and scams. The reforms undertaken by



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament

the Modi Government resulted in the transition of India from the league of 'Fragile Five' to the league of 'Top Five' global economies in just about a decade and the economy has been transformed into a far more resilient avatar amidst a challenging global environment, said the White Paper on Indian Economy. It regretted that the UPA government, in its quest to maintain high economic growth by any means after the global financial crisis of 2008, severely undermined the macroeconomic foundations. The banking crisis was one of the most important and infamous legacies of the UPA government. "When our government assumed office, the economy was on a road to nowhere, exhibiting tell-tale signs of deep distress emanating from multiple 'wrong turns' in economic policy," said the White Paper which is likely to be debated in the Lok Sabha on Friday. Sitharaman is expected to reply after a four-hour debate. While presenting the interim budget, she had said that the economy has been put firmly on a high sustainable growth path with all-round development in 10 years.

Continued on Page 2

Jal Jeevan Mission triumph in contaminated habitats

ARCHNA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Under the Central flagship Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) scheme, for the first time, all arsenic and fluoride-hit areas across the States are now covered with Community Water Purification Plants (CWPPs). These structures, though temporary arrangement, have been installed in all 582 arsenic and 420 fluoride-affected habitats, aiming to safeguard the residents from the harmful health effects of contaminated water due to these two elements. Arsenic and fluoride are recognised

worldwide as the most serious inorganic contaminants in drinking water. The CWPPs, especially in arsenic and fluoride-affected habitats, can provide potable water to every household at the rate of 8-10 litre per capita per day (lpcd) to meet their drinking and cooking requirements, said an official from the Department of Water Resources overseeing the JJM scheme. Launched in 2019, JJM's mandate is to make provision of potable tap water supply in adequate quantity, of prescribed quality on a regular and



long-term basis to every rural household by 2024 through Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs), with priority given to contaminated affected regions. However, while habitations in arsenic and fluoride-affected water supply areas have been covered with these CWPPs, the Government continues to strive to make the regions free from other contaminants such as iron, salinity, nitrate, and heavy metals. These zones are yet to be provided with potable water. Since contaminants such as iron, nitrite, and salinity found in various places

contaminate water and threaten the well-being of residents, a Parliamentary panel, in a report submitted to the Lok Sabha on Thursday, sought effective measures for reducing the number of habitations affected by such health hazards, including setting up CWPPs within three months. It said these areas also needed to be covered by temporary measures to provide immediate relief to the remaining population living in 50 per cent of quality-affected habitations. The panel has asked the department to impress upon the States the need to take

measures that could provide an immediate solution, such as mobile water vans/tankers carrying safe and clean drinking water or installation of small water purification dispensers, until all such habitations are provided with piped drinking water from a good quality source, besides taking measures for a permanent solution to the contamination problem under the scheme. According to data available from the Government, most habitations' drinking water sources are contaminated with salinity and iron.

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All photos by Ranjan Dimfi | Pioneer



BANDOBAST TO STOP FARMERS MARCH CHOKES CAPITAL ROADS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Massive traffic jams were witnessed on the Delhi-Noida borders on Thursday due to farmers' protest as police put up pickets and barricades on the border areas. This comes three years after their historic protest on Delhi borders as farmers are gearing up for another round of agitation in the national Capital over a host of issues.

Nagar, Chilla, Bopura, Wazirabad and Kalindi Kunj. Similar snarls were witnessed at Pari Chowk in Greater Noida, with the police saying that they were making efforts to ensure smooth traffic movement. Motorists spent hours in the crawling traffic as the police personnel with heavy equipment were on alert to restrict movement on the road at the Delhi-Noida borders near Mayur Vihar, as the farmers tried to enter the national capital.

Ahead of the protest demonstration by the farmers in Noida and Greater Noida, the Gautam Buddh Nagar Police had already imposed CrPC section 144 for Wednesday and Thursday. At the border, heavy duty bulldozers, backhoe machines, Vikraant logistic vehicles, riot control vehicles and water cannons were parked strategically to

meet any eventuality in case farmers reached there. Riot control vehicles are on the spot and drones are being used to get an all-round view. The police have barricaded the Noida expressway road using trucks and cranes near Dalit Prerna Sthal and blocked two out of three lanes. They are allowing vehicles from only one lane towards Mayur Vihar. Thousands of villagers, including women and elderly, joined the march, to press for their demands for hiked compensation and developed plots in lieu of their land acquired by local development authorities in Noida and Greater Noida in the past. Farmers in Noida and Greater Noida have been protesting since December 2023 with demands for hiked compensation, and developed plots

villages were led by the BKP after they assembled at the Mahamaya Flyover in Noida around 12 pm on Thursday, with a proposed plan to march towards the Parliament. "From Mahamaya Flyover, the farmers shall march towards the Parliament in Delhi to press for our long-pending demands," BKP leader Sukhbir Yadav 'Khalifa' said earlier in the day. Later, a scuffle broke out between several villagers and security personnel as they tried to detain local farmer leaders, including the BKP leader, near the Dalit Prerna Sthal. According to the Delhi Traffic Police, heavy traffic is also expected on the routes connected to Sonia Vihar, Sabhapur, Apsara and Loni borders. Commuters have been asked to avoid or plan their journey accordingly.

A senior Delhi Police officer at the border said that traffic was allowed but, if needed, the road will be blocked completely. "As of now, the Uttar Pradesh Police is dealing with them and hopefully they will not enter Delhi," he said. Long queues of vehicles choked the roads as several two-wheelers and four-wheelers were stuck in the jam at Sarita Vihar, officials said. "I am headed to Agra and cannot change route now because this is the only way which will take me to the highway. It's not clear how much time it will take as the traffic is very slow," said motorist Raj Sharma. A heavy traffic jam was reported on the Delhi-Noida highway as well, officials said. Meanwhile, security has been stepped up in the national capital, especially on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border, in view of

the protests by farmers, officials added. Around 150 farmers have been stopped near the Mahamaya flyover in Noida by the Uttar Pradesh Police, officials said. Alternative traffic arrangements have been made and commuters were advised to avoid certain roads. "Heavy security arrangements have been made in different border entry points in the national capital. No one will be allowed to breach law and order," a senior police officer said. Another police officer said that heavy security forces have already been deployed along with paramilitary forces to maintain law and order. Pickets and barricades were installed on the border areas connecting Delhi-Haryana and Delhi-Uttar Pradesh, he added. According to the Delhi Traffic

Police, heavy traffic is expected on the routes connected to Soniya Vihar, DND, Chilla, Ghazipur, Sabhapur, Apsara and Loni borders on Thursday. Commuters have been asked to avoid or plan their journey accordingly. Ahead of the protests in Noida and Greater Noida, the Gautam Buddh Nagar Police has imposed Section 144 on Wednesday and Thursday. Police also issued a traffic advisory, cautioning commuters against diversions on some routes in the twin cities in view of the farmers' movement on tractors. Farmer groups in Noida and Greater Noida have been protesting since December 2023, with demands for greater compensation and developed plots against their lands acquired by the local development authorities in the past.

Probe metro station wall collapse: Government to DMRC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Thursday directed the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) to constitute a committee of experts to look into the wall collapse incident at the Gokulpuri metro station that claimed the life of a man and left four others injured. Meanwhile, after the incident, DMRC's Managing Director, Dr. Vikas Kumar has issued instructions to all the concerned departments in DMRC to conduct rigorous safety checks across the Delhi Metro network.



24 hours and extend full support to the injured & their families for medical treatment," he said in the post. Gahlot said he has directed the DMRC to constitute a committee of experts which shall inquire into this incident and submit a report within two weeks. "The DMRC shall disburse ex-gratia compensation as per rules within 24 hours. All necessary assistance shall be extended to the injured people and their families to ensure proper medical treatment," read the order. The DMRC announced Rs 25 lakh as compensation for the family of the man who died in the incident. The DMRC announced Rs 5 lakh for the grievously injured and Rs 1 lakh for those who received minor injuries, it stated. It also suspended two of its officials over the incident. In an operational update, the

Delhi metro said the incident at Gokulpuri station was reported at 11:10 am today. Train movement was stopped from 11:12 am to 11:23 am on both the up and down lines between Maujpur and Shiv Vihar section of the Pink Line. "Train services were restored from 11:23 am through single line work between Maujpur and Shiv Vihar, a small section comprising 3 stations only. Normal services were restored with both up and down line working in this section after barricading the affected platform area from 2:53 pm onwards. Gokulpuri station which was closed during this period was also reopened at 2:53 pm with access allowed from Gate-2 and Gate-1 towards affected area remaining closed," said Anuj Dayal, Principal Executive Director Corporate Communications.

Tragedy would have been worse had it struck after school break

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Tragedy struck at the Gokulpuri metro station here Thursday when a portion of its wall collapsed around 11 am, leading to the death of a 53-year-old man. Describing the harrowing scene, eyewitnesses also highlighted that it could have been a greater disaster given that several students gather near it after school for snacks. "The Government Boys Senior Secondary School is hardly 50 metres from where the collapse took place. The incident happened around 11 am. Had it occurred around 1.30 pm, it could have been even more disastrous as several students usually gather there to have tea and snacks after school," cab driver Dilshan Khan, who was waiting near the metro station, said. Earlier in the day, a portion of the wall of the station's elevated platform collapsed and fell on the road below, killing one person and injuring four others. Gokulpuri Metro Station is on the Pink Line of the Delhi Metro. The entire area was cor-

doned off after the incident. Another eyewitness Krishan Kumar said, "We got to know that one person died and four people received injuries. But it could have been more severe if the incident had happened at about 1 pm." He added that there is a cooking gas cylinder agency adjacent to the metro station. A senior police officer said, "We have diverted the traffic near the metro station. We have put barricading and paramilitary forces were deployed to maintain law and order." Another eyewitness Azad Ali said, "It was around 11 am when we heard a loud noise of something falling. We immediately rushed to the spot. One scooter rider got trapped under the debris." Sehzaad Khan said, "I had just reached my shop when it happened. We rushed there to help those who got trapped. One person was seriously injured." The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation announced a compensation of ₹25 lakh for the family of the 53-year-old man who died in the incident.



Newly constructed skywalk inaugurated

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to the beautification drive of the national capital with modern facilities and infrastructure, Delhi Lt Governor (LG) VK Saxena on Thursday here inaugurated the newly constructed skywalk along with the upgradation work of Nehru Place. The entire project was completed in a time span of 4 years at a cost of Rs 75 crore. Ramesh Bidhuri, MP South Delhi and Subhasish Panda, Vice Chairman Delhi Development Authority (DDA), were also present at the inaugural event. Addressing the gathering,

Saxena said the DDA was not only committed to upgradation of the urban areas but also undertaken work for the development of the neglected villages in the National Capital. He complimented the DDA for the upgradation work undertaken at Nehru Place. "The skywalk is appealing and it will add to the beauty of the city," the LG said. He urged people to co-operate in its maintenance, adding that no project can be successful without support of the public. He also asked the Nehru Place Market Association members to give special emphasis on the hygiene and maintenance of the area.

Kejriwal stuck in quicksand of corruption: Thakur

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday hit out at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal saying the person who had raised this voice against graft was now stuck in the 'quicksand of corruption'. Thakur's remarks came after Kejriwal was asked by a Delhi court to appear before it on February 17 on a complaint filed by the Enforcement Directorate for skipping summons in an excise policy-linked case. "How long will Kejriwal escape serious allegations of corruption. Now is the time that he appears before court," Thakur said. The senior BJP leader said Kejriwal should speak the truth in court and not resort to levelling false allegations with the intention to grab headlines in the media. "Those who raised their voice against corruption are now stuck in the quicksand of corruption. Not one, but five notices of the ED have been ignored and now the court had to order him to appear for questioning," Thakur said. He said Kejriwal had the habit of levelling false allegations and later express regret in court.

MCD passes Budget amid ruckus

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst uproar and ruckus, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi House on Thursday passed a budget of Rs 16,683 crore for 2024-25 financial year without a vote amid accusations of corruption against the mayor. The MCD passed the budget estimates for 2023-24 and 2024-25. AAP councillors stood guards at Delhi mayor Shelly Oberoi's podium as she announced the budget, with their BJP and Congress counterparts surrounding it. The house could function for no more than five minutes as Oberoi read the budget above shouts of accusations and hurried out. A total income of Rs 15,686.99 crore and expenditure of Rs 16,683.01 was approved by the House for the 2024-25 fiscal. The budget was passed in absence of MCD Commissioner who was supposed to present the budget followed by a vote. Mukesh Goyal, leader of the House accused the opposition for disruption of the House proceedings consistently over the past year, preventing the functioning of the House since the AAP came to power. Meanwhile, a delegation of Delhi BJP Councillors submitted a memorandum before Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena on the issue.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP National Convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his counterpart of Punjab Bhagwant Mann participated in the protest organised by Kerala Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at Jantar Mantar in Delhi in its fight to protect federalism in the country. Speaking on the occasion, Kejriwal said that the federal structure of the country is the basis of our Constitution and democracy, the BJP sitting at the centre wants to end it. This fight is for all of us to save the federal structure and democracy of the country. He said that he got to know that the funds to the tune of Rs 8,400 crore of Kerala are stuck and other opposition ruled states are also facing the same

Kejriwal, Mann join Kerala protest in city against Centre

problem. "More than Rs 8000 crore funds of Punjab are also stuck. The Punjab government went to the Supreme Court a few days ago that they are not releasing our money. An amount of Rs 5500 crore for rural development fund is not being released. Now the Supreme Court hearing has been fixed for next week and immediately the Central Government calls that let us sit and talk. Will we go to the Supreme Court for every small matter? The Supreme Court is overburdened with cases. Why don't they do their work? To get our funds, we have to sit at



Jantar Mantar. You will be surprised to know that against the collection of Rs 2

lakh crore income tax every year from Delhi, we get only Rs 325 crore for Delhi in a year.

Even the British would not have looted us as much as these people are looting us," Kejriwal said. Kejriwal hit out at the BJP-led Centre, accusing it of waging a war against state governments led by opposition parties. "The governments led by opposition parties represent 70 crore people in the country. The BJP has waged a war against the opposition-ruled states. They have created a India-Pakistan situation with us. The Centre is using all the tactics to harass the opposition governments," alleged Kejriwal who took part in the protest.

DM to be responsible sanitation authority after LG approves plan

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to ensure elimination of hazardous manual cleaning of sewers, septic tanks and drains, Delhi Lt Governor (LG) VK Saxena has approved a Delhi Government proposal to nominate the District Magistrates (DM) as Responsible Sanitation Authority (RSA) in their respective jurisdiction. They will establish emergency

response sanitation units (ERSU) for doing away with dangerous manual cleaning of sewers. Giving details of the decision here on Thursday, officials also said the proposal was submitted to the LG after a delay of almost three years. The LG office received the proposal in the last week of January despite the fact that Government of India and the Prime Minister himself had also reviewed the progress

made on the issue on 02.06.2022, and the Administrative Department, GNCTD submitting a status report in this regard. To effectively address the menace of manual scavenging and addressing the needs of one of the most marginalized sections of the society, a Group of Ministers (GoM), set up by the Government of India in its meeting held on 19.02.2020, had decided that DMs in every district should be designated as

the RSA with the role and responsibility clearly defined as per the provisions of "The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act, 2013. Further, through an e-mail dated 20.05.2022 the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs informed that that the UT Government was bound by directives of the GOM which stated that each District Magistrate/DC will be nominated as the RSA and there will be an ERSU in each district and an additional ERSU in district which caters to only the sanitation needs of any Municipal Corporation within the district.

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI
OFFICE OF THE DY. COMMISSIONER
REMUNRATIVE PROJECT CELL
(25th Floor), Civic Centre, New Delhi-110002
E-TENDER FOR ALLOTMENT OF OFFICE SPACE/SHOPS ON MONTHLY LICENSE FEES BASIS FOR A PERIOD OF 10 (TEN) YEARS AT KRISHNA NAGAR MULTI LEVEL CAR PARKING, NEW DELHI
PRESS NOTICE E-TENDER
E-Bids are invited on behalf of Commissioner, MCD from eligible bidders for allotment of vacant shops/office spaces of MCD at Krishna Nagar Multi Level Car Parking on monthly license fees basis in two bid system (Technical and Financial) for a period of 10 years and extendable further as per RFP/NIT vide Tender NIT No. 2940 dt. 08.02.2024. The Schedule of bids are as follows:-
1. Bid Download Start Date:- 09.02.2024 at 09.00 AM onwards,
2. Pre-bid Meeting:- 16.02.2024 at 3:00 PM Conference Hall at 20th Floor, Civic Centre,
3. Bid submission start date:- 09.02.2024 from 09.00 AM onwards,
4. Last date of Submission of E-Tender:- 29.02.2024 upto 03.00 PM,
5. Opening date of Technical Bids:- 01.03.2024 from 03.00 PM onwards, at R.P. Cell/MCD Dept. 25th Floor, Civic Centre. (For details visit MCDs website: www.mcdonline.nic.in and www.etenders.gov.in. Contact number-011-23227514. Sd/- Assistant Commissioner R.P. Cell/MCD R.O. No.82/DPI/MCD/2023-24

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI
TOLL TAX DEPARTMENT
(E-TENDER NOTICE)
Notice Inviting Offer cum Request For Proposal (RFP)
NIT No: ADC/TT/HQ/MCD/2024/D-894 Dated 07.02.2024
ENGAGEMENT OF A CONTRACTOR BY MCD FOR TOLL & ENVIRONMENT COMPENSATION CHARGE (ECC) COLLECTION AT BORDER POINTS FROM SPECIFIED COMMERCIAL VEHICLES ENTERING DELHI
The MCD invites online technical and financial proposals through <https://etenders.gov.in> from interested developers/ Toll Plaza Operators to collect Toll Tax from specified commercial vehicles, upgrade/modify, operate, and maintain 154 toll plazas/posts/barriers/locations bordering Delhi. In addition to toll collection, the contractor shall also separately collect ECC as per actual basis and deposit the same on weekly basis. The work shall be granted for a period of 3 years. Reserve Price (for Toll amount only): Rs. 847.00 crores annually, Tender Cost Rs.1.00 lakh & EMD = Rs.17.00 crores. Any Firm /Entity in the form of Proprietor/Partnership /Pvt. Ltd. /Ltd. and JV may submit their proposal.
Pre-bid conference - 16.02.2024 at 03:00 PM at Conference Hall at 23rd Floor, Dr. SPM Civic Centre, Minto Road, New Delhi. Submission of Technical and Financial Proposal/Bid through Online mode only available at <https://etenders.gov.in>
Last date of submission of Proposal 29.02.2024 on or before 03.00 P.M. (IST) Date of opening of Technical Bids 01.03.2024 at 03.30 P.M. (IST)
For project background, Broad role of contractor, Eligibility Criteria, Selection Process and any other detailed information please refer NIT & RFP documents uploaded on website <https://etenders.gov.in>.
R.O. No.83/DPI/MCD/2023-24 For Commissioner, MCD

India rubbishes Canada poll interference charge

INDIA On Thursday rejected Canada's allegations of Indian interference in the country's elections as 'baseless' and said 'on the reverse side, it was Canada which has been interfering in India's internal affairs.' Making these assertions here, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, 'We have seen media reports of Canadian Commission inquiring into foreign interferences... we strongly reject such baseless allegations of Indian interference in Canadian elections. It

is not the Government of India's policy to interfere in the democratic process of other countries, in fact, quite on the reverse, it is Canada which has been interfering in our internal affairs,' he said. 'We have been raising this issue regularly with them and we continue to call on Canada to take effective measures to address our core concerns,' he added. An independent commission, set up by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in September last year, probing alleged foreign interference in Canada has asked the Trudeau government to share information about a possible meddling in elections by India.



The commission said in a statement that it had requested the Canadian government to provide documents 'relating to alleged interference by India related to the 2019 and 2021 elections.' Meanwhile, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service in its report has alleged that China sought to 'clandestinely and deceptively influence' its last two federal elections, whilst also naming India as a foreign interference threat. This top-secret briefing report also stated that the Canadian government 'must do more' to fight foreign interference. 'The Foreign Interference activities of the People's

Republic of China are significant, pervasive, and directed against all levels of government and civil society across the country,' the report stated. On the 'foreign interference of India', the report predicted that the problem could worsen and 'we must do more to protect Canada's robust democratic institutions and processes.' India was the only country mentioned in the report aside from China. Although three pages of the report were devoted to India, they were entirely redacted later to just say a single sentence: 'India engages in FI activities.'

Canada worsened in September last year Prime Minister Trudeau told the Canadian Parliament that it was possible the Indian government had a hand in the murder of a Khalistani separatist in Canada in June. Prior to Trudeau's statement, Canada had also 'paused' negotiations with India towards an Early Progress Trade Agreement in late August. India suspended visas issuance to Canadians right after Trudeau's statement but that was restored in November. It also sought 'parity' in diplomatic presence, leading to 41 Canadian diplomats leaving India in October.



Insufficient wage rates under MGNREGA, says Parliamentary Panel

PARLIAMENTARY panel has expressed concerns that the daily wages paid under the flagship rural employment scheme - Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme - are inadequate and not aligned with the rising cost of living, which, it pointed out, may be one of the reasons for death of workers under the scheme. 'The committee finds the range of wages vary from as little as Rs 221 in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, Rs 224 in Arunachal Pradesh, Rs 228 in Bihar and Jharkhand to Rs 354 in the three gram panchayats of Sikkim (Gnathang, Lachung and Lachen), Rs 328 in Nicobar and Rs 311 in Andaman,' said the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj which was tabled in Lok Sabha on Thursday. 'Observing the quantum of wages since 2008, the committee finds the wages inadequate and not in consonance with the rising cost of living. At this juncture, the agricultural labourers and other labourers involved in masonry/ miscellaneous works command a daily wage more than the wage

guaranteed under MGNREGA,' it said. 'Perhaps, one of the reasons for the dearth of workers... May be the insufficiency of the wage rates under MGNREGA,' the panel said. The panel headed by DMK's Kanimozhi also quoted a report of the Anoop Satpathy Committee - a central government committee on minimum wages - which had recommended that the wages under MGNREGA should be Rs 375 per day. 'The need for suitable increase in the wages under MGNREGA has been felt and echoed from various quarters and also highlighted by this committee in its earlier reports,' the committee said, adding that the department of rural development (DoRD) should take a considered view on the issue of suitable increase in the wage rates. The committee said that the method adopted by the Government for calculating wages is obsolete. Presently, the Government notifies the wage rate under MGNREGA using Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPI-AL) and by keeping the wage rates thus obtained on April 1, 2009 or Rs 100, whichever is more, as the base for indexation for the States.

India to replace military personnel in Maldives with civilian technical people

NEW DELHI India has around 80 personnel, including medical staff, to operate three aircraft in the archipelago nation's vast maritime territory, and the 'eviction' of Indian forces had been a core plank of Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu in the lead-up to the presidential elections last year. After the meeting in New Delhi last week, the Maldives had issued a statement claiming that both sides had agreed that India would replace military personnel in one of the three aviation platforms by March 10 and the others by May 10. India had, however, made no mention of withdrawing troops, stating, 'During the meeting, both sides continued their discussions on wide-ranging issues related to bilateral cooperation towards identifying steps to enhance the partnership, including expediting the implementation of

ongoing development cooperation projects.' 'Both sides also agreed on a set of mutually workable solutions to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medvac services (medical evacuation) to the people of Maldives,' the MEA had said



To a question on the aid allocation for the Maldives, Jaiswal said some had interpreted the budgetary allocation as going down, while others have said it has gone up. 'What happens is that a certain amount of money is allocated and, thereafter, there is a phase for revision... So you would see that the budget for the

Maldives, this time, what has been given is 779 crore as against 600 crore which was projected earlier, so it has actually gone up. The new figures will also be revised once we have more details, more clarity on what sort of forward movement is happening,' he said. 'We remain an important development partner, committed development partner for the Maldives,' Jaiswal asserted. It was learnt India is considering several options to replace the military personnel currently in the Maldives to operate two ALH helicopters and a Dornier aircraft that were provided by New Delhi. One option is replacing the military personnel with civilian operators familiar with the two platforms, including retired personnel from the three services with experience of flying and maintaining the aircraft, sources said.

Indian Navy multinational exercise from February 19

NEW DELHI Indian Navy's multi-national exercise, Milan 24, is all set to be organised in Visakhapatnam from February 19-27. Previously, the 11th edition of this exercise was held in February-March 22 in Visakhapatnam under the Eastern Naval Command with the theme 'Camaraderie-Cohesion-Collaboration.' Giving details here on Thursday, navy officials said Milan is a biennial multi-national naval exercise which started in 1995 with the participation of four foreign countries (Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand) in consonance with India's 'Look East policy'. The exercise flourished under the aegis of Andaman and Nicobar Command till its 10th edition. With the growing stature of the exercise and the requirement of a larger staging and hosting base, Visakhapatnam, the City of Destiny was chosen as the preferred venue for future Milan exercises. The city is ideal to host the event owing to various aspects, namely major commercial hub, large port, steep coastal gradient closer to its shores enabling ships to operate closer to the shore and long coastline offering excellent viewing experience for the public. The scenic view from RK Beach in particular, coupled with excellent infrastructure is conducive to hosting various events planned during Milan for the local populace along the shore, such as operational demonstrations and the International City Parade. The forthcoming edition will comprise two phases - the 'Harbour phase' and 'Sea phase'. The harbour phase, aimed to promote cultural sharing amongst the participating nations, would comprise of International Maritime Seminar, International City Parade Maritime Tech Exhibition, Subject Matter Expert Exchange, Milan of Young Officers and various sporting events. During the Sea phase, ships along with aircraft of Friendly Foreign Countries would participate along with the Indian Navy's aircraft and other units. It will involve large-force manoeuvres, advanced air defence operations, anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface operations.

Congress releases black paper

NEW DELHI Today we are bringing out a 'Black Paper' against the government. Whenever PM Modi presents his views in Parliament, he hides his failures. At the same time, when we speak about the failures of the government, it is not given importance. Therefore, we want to bring out a Black Paper and tell the public about the failures of the government,' said Kharge at a Press conference. The 'black paper' were released on a day when the Modi government tabled a white paper in parliament to highlight the economic failures of the UPA between 2004 and 2014. In its 'black paper', the Congress has said that the Modi years have been 'marked

by high rates of unemployment, economic catastrophes such as demonetisation and flawed GST, which has only increased the divide between the rich and the poor and devastated the future of millions of farmers and daily wage workers'. It has highlighted the highest



unemployment rate in 45 years, prices of essential commodities being at an all-time high, and failure to increase MSP for farmers despite a promise to double their income. Terming it 'Modani Raj', the party has also accused the Modi government of 'neutering' investigative agencies despite a promise to eliminate safe havens for economic offenders and facilitating crony capitalism. Under samajik anyay or social injustice, the party has claimed that the last decade has seen 'blatant discrimination and severe oppression against women, SC, STs, OBCs and minorities'. 'Its politics of hatred, polarisation and divide has destroyed

the social fabric of the country,' the document claims. Under rajneetik anyay (political injustice) the Congress has accused the Modi government of remaining silent on China's encroachments on Indian territory, 'undermining the Army with the Agneepath scheme' and targeting opposition with its investigative agencies and 'ending the independence of the media', along with the Election Commission, ED and RBI. Kharge said that the Modi government never talks about the 'biggest issue in the country which is unemployment'. 'They talk about Nehru but don't talk about how many people were given jobs through public sector jobs.'

Males born to obese moms more likely to develop health issues: Study

NEW DELHI Males born to obese women are more likely to be overweight at birth and develop metabolic complications such as non-alcoholic fatty liver diseases and diabetes in later life. The way that male sex hormones activate pathways in the developing liver is partly to blame, as per finding from a new study led by University of South Australia (UniSA) researchers looking at the impact of maternal obesity on fetal liver androgen signalling. Male fetuses of obese pregnant women have different signals that are activated by male sex hormones in the liver, which encourages them to prioritise growth at the expense of their health. UniSA researcher Dr Ashley Meakin said androgens give men their male characteristics and are crucial in their development, but if there are too many, male fetuses grow too large, causing not only problems at birth, but impacting liver function as an adult. Female fetuses exposed to excess testosterone from an obese pregnancy are wired to switch off the androgen pathway in the liver, restricting their growth and lowering the risks of metabolic disorders in adulthood. 'We know there are sex differences in metabolic disorders in later life in response to mater-

nal obesity,' Dr Meakin added. 'Men are more prone to non-alcoholic fatty liver diseases and diabetes as an adult if their mother is obese during pregnancy and their birth weight is above 4 kg (9 lb 15 oz). 'They are genetically wired to prioritise androgens because it supports the development of male characteristics - including size - but too much androgen is bad.' Study lead author Professor Janna Morrison, Head of the Early Origins of Adult Health Research Group at UniSA, says it's a fine balance for women getting the right nutrition in pregnancy to ensure optimal conditions for their unborn child to flourish. Prof Morrison said unless society changes its approach to nutrition, it will be an uphill battle to reduce obesity and associated health issues, from the womb into adulthood. 'As a society, we urgently need to address obesity. If children were taught early on about the importance of healthy eating, it would carry through into adulthood, including during pregnancy, where the right nutrition is so important,' he said. The liver androgen signalling study, recently published in Life Sciences, is among a series of studies by Prof Morrison and colleagues that investigates the impact of maternal under- and over-nutrition on the placenta, heart, lung, and liver.

496 flights cancelled, 8,038 flights delayed due to dense fog in January

NEW DELHI As many as 496 flights were cancelled and 8,038 flights were delayed due to dense fog in January, the civil aviation ministry said on Thursday. In a written reply to Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Civil Aviation V K Singh said DGCA conducts meeting for preparedness of fog/low visibility operations with all stakeholders before commencement of the fog period and also issues instructions. Besides, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued regulations mandating operators to



ensure that all flight crew members should be qualified for take-off, instrument approaches and operations to the lowest CAT-I/II/III minima as applicable, the minister said. CAT-III pertains to operating flights in low visibility conditions.

To a query on whether a large number of domestic and international flights were delayed due to dense fog in the current winter season, Singh replied in the affirmative. 'The total number of flights delayed and cancelled during January 2024 is 8,038 and 496, respectively,' he said in a written reply. According to Singh, the number of pilots trained for CAT-III operations has increased 16 per cent vis-a-vis the total as of October 2023. As of December 2023, there were 6,191 CAT-III trained pilots, including 3,744 commanders and 2,447 co-pilots, the minister added.

India cultural diversity a strength: President

NEW DELHI Inaugurating the 'Vividhata Ka Amrit Mahotsav' with a focus on the North-East at Rashtrapati Bhavan here, President Droupadi Murmu underscored India's cultural diversity as a source of strength and unity. She expressed hope that the event would attract a large audience eager to immerse themselves in the cultural vibrancy of the region. The fest aims to showcase India's rich diversity through seven distinct editions, starting with the North-East. Artists, artisans, performers, and culinary experts from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland,



Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Sikkim have converged to display their talents and traditions through various cultural activities and exhibitions. Open to the public from February 8 to 11, the festival promises a feast for the senses, with cultural performances, art exhibitions, fashion shows, live demonstrations, and food courts.

BJP looking to expand NDA

NEW DELHI The BJP may soon finalise a seat-sharing deal with Jayant Singh-led Rashtriya Lok Dal as the ruling party looks to further strengthen the National Democratic Alliance amid indications that it is open to reviving its ties with former allies such as Telugu Desam Party and the Shiromani Akali Dal. Sources the BJP's alliance talks with the RLD are in an advanced stage. The BJP is willing to offer two Lok Sabha seats, including Baghat which is currently represented by its MP Satya Pal Singh, to the RLD and may also give it a Rajya Sabha seat, they added. The sources said the BJP is working to ensure that the



NDA gets as stronger as possible ahead of the polls so that it realises the target of crossing 400 seats as spoken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Lok Sabha recently. Modi had expressed confidence citing the popular mood that the

BJP alone will definitely get 370 seats in the 543-member House. A lot depends on whether the BJP and its prospective allies agree to an amicable seat-sharing formula but there have been positive developments, the sources added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Modi 3.0

The Prime Minister brims with confidence while outlining the vision for his Govt's third term

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently launched a scathing attack in Parliament on the Congress while articulating the vision of his Government's likely third term in power. Modi's speech not only underscored the ideological differences between his party and the Opposition but also laid out the roadmap for India's future under what has been termed "Modi 3.0". Modi's address in the Rajya Sabha was marked by a vehement critique of the Congress' governance and policies. He highlighted instances of what he deemed as failures and inadequacies during the Congress-led regimes, contrasting them with the achievements of his own Government. Modi emphasised the need for a decisive and proactive administration, taking a swipe at the perceived inertia and indecision of previous Governments. Central to Modi's address was his vision, encapsulating the goals of his Government's third term. It encompassed economic development, social welfare, national security and governance reforms. Modi reiterated his commitment to bolstering India's economy, enhancing infrastructure, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and ensuring inclusive growth that leaves no citizen behind. Since assuming office for the second consecutive term, the Modi-led Government has undertaken several initiatives aimed at realising this vision. These include landmark reforms such as the introduction of GST and initiatives like Make in India and Digital India, which seek to transform India into a global economic powerhouse.



The Government has prioritised infrastructure development through schemes like the Bharatmala Project and Sagarmala, aimed at enhancing connectivity and

facilitating trade and commerce. Modi's emphasis on social welfare is evident in programmes like Ayushman Bharat, which aims to provide affordable healthcare to millions, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which focuses on achieving a hygienic environment. Despite the Government's concerted efforts, challenges persist. The pandemic presented an unprecedented crisis, testing the resilience of India's healthcare infrastructure and economy. While the Government implemented various measures to mitigate the impact, there remains a need for sustained efforts to revive the economy and address the health crisis effectively. Moreover, issues such as unemployment, agrarian distress and social inequality continue to pose significant challenges. Strengthening institutions, fostering innovation and promoting sustainable development are imperative to ensure a prosperous and equitable future for all citizens. The Prime Minister's address served not only as a platform to call out the Opposition but also line up his next Government's agenda. While Modi 2.0 has seen commendable progress in various sectors, challenges loom large, requiring concerted efforts and innovative solutions. As India marches onwards the path of development, the effectiveness of governance and the inclusivity of policies will be pivotal in shaping the nation's destiny under Modi's leadership.

PICTALK



Artists perform during the inauguration of 'Vividhata Ka Amrit Mahotsav', in New Delhi

PTI

We are the stories of our lives!

There are stories all around us. All that is required is a little empathy on our part to patiently listen to people around us

Each one of us lives through stories in life. What is each incident, each event, if not a story in itself? And, when there are stories, then there is an urge to narrate, and an urge to be heard. It could be the silent wail of desperation seeking help; or it could be the desire to be appreciated, to be accepted. The Internet is an interesting place to be at. However, if someone had told me even at the turn of the century the remarkable changes that this virtual entity would bring into our lives, I would have laughed. My story is not about the internet though; but the way it has helped us cope. I read somewhere on the virtual world recently that there are libraries in Denmark, and in 50-odd other countries, where you rent humans for 30 minutes to recount their stories. A quick search on the net revealed that there are at least three human library groups in India on Facebook.

I too started writing on social media a few years back. The sporadic writing



turned into a passion so strong that now I must write something each day. It was my way of overcoming introverted nature. I could express my feelings and emotions without fear of being judged. I was returning home by train recently after attending a literature festival at a university in Gujarat, where I also interacted with young adults during a creative writing workshop on storytelling conducted by me. Almost all the students were from small towns in India. Without exception, all of them had been inspired by someone close. More importantly, I could sense an urge in these young creative minds to write these stories that had

motivated them so much. My co-passengers on the train were two younger persons. One of the persons, probably not older than 19, was to disembark at Kota - the city which has helped many youngsters attain their dreams, but has also seen many unfortunate incidents due to peer pressure that many of our youngsters could not sustain. They too needed someone out there to listen to them. I also presumed that he was studying in Kota. He was not. He was going to meet his younger brother. He had already joined MIT in America. He elaborated upon the full form of MIT in case I did not know. He then showed me his



SANJAY CHANDRA

Instagram profile, which contained a number of pictures of leading politicians from his native state. The boy wanted to talk about his life and wanted to be heard. He had also used the social media to reach out. The other person in the cabin was probably a decade and a half older. He too opened up about his life story. He now runs a successful business in the education sector. When he realised that I was a published author, he told me that he was also working on a manuscript containing memoirs from his life. He strongly felt that he lost three important persons in his life due to him. He too wanted a sounding board. There are many such stories all around us. In fact, all of us are the stories of our life. All that is required is a little empathy on our part, to patiently listen to people around us. This small act may go a long way in redeeming a life! (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

Establishing meaningful educational priorities

The intricate balance between practical demands of commercial relevance and scholarly aspirations within management education reflects the ever-changing nature of academia



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

A lot of management text and advice is common-sensical. It is common sense if one agrees that the basic objective of management is a propulsion of commercial interest. That this proposition may itself be in doubt is another matter altogether. There is no substantial reason to see commerce as the domain of all management activities. If the purpose of management efforts is business management, then to some extent, it can become an extenuative logic because, at least, the assumption there is to focus on the optimization of business.

However, there is business and business; manufacturing can be a business but has a veneer of its own. It does not cover the business of ideas, and the business of ideas can be a specialization of its own, especially when it comes to being focused on education, financial exchanges, the exchange of news, and indeed exchange of money in stock exchanges. Thus, it is that business management has many forms of focus and interest. To cover all of it is difficult in a simple MBA program spread over 1200 to 1300 contact hours. This kind of super specialisation or focus is difficult to achieve. Thus, it is that management education covers a general set of what could be called core areas and then specialisations of a more focused variety.

The lay of the land is so far to create specializations in finance, marketing, and the like; the emphasis on sectors such as Agriculture or Research & Development is yet to gather its range and depth. This is not going to come easy because to create a curriculum, one needs reading material. The reading material is often in the form of books or publications in journals, and this requires research. It also requires a forum for publication, which is in the form of print. Unless there is a definite market for these journals or magazines they cannot survive. Has the touchstone of journals or magazines, like much else, also become commercial? However, what is commercially relevant may not always be



intellectually feasible. Hence, there is a contradiction, if not a hiatus.

Be that as it may, it delays the creation of a critical mass of material, which in its own right is worth publishing, disseminating and preserving. The touchstone again becomes commercial. It is therefore not unusual to find colleges taking a lesser interest in non-commercial areas than in activities that have a commercial overlay. This is not usual, but by the same token, it is not in the best interest of pursuing a scholarly interest.

In fact, it may be arguable that scholastic interest is an endeavour in its own right and is indeed the heart of an educational institution. To sustain this focus requires funds and research orientation. The problem with finding funds or this sort of effort is, of course, the problem of justifying the return on those funds. A one-to-one correlation in such matters is difficult to establish, and it is even more difficult to create a climate of justifying this as a

scholastic effort, which is the foundation of any good educational institution.

It is difficult to argue that worldwide, well-established academic institutions invest a substantial amount of resources in creating this research climate, and their global recognition as institutions of distinction is rooted in precisely this kind of environment.

Such contradictions are common in life.

It is natural to envy the distinctiveness of others, but the same kind of ease does not accompany recognizing what it takes to create that kind of distinctiveness. As the world moves on, the global comparison, especially amongst people who speak a common language, becomes more frequent. Typically, there is a ranking of universities, but the inter-ranking, as in India, is always amongst institutions of the English-speaking world. One rarely sees comparisons between the universities of the English-speaking world with the universities of the Portuguese, Spanish or the

Russian-speaking world. Thus, it is that the word global itself acquires a generalization that does not merit it and creates a misconception about what is indeed truly global.

Like all industries, education as an industry - if it may so be called - has a long way to go before it matures. A realization of this deficiency is difficult to create and even more difficult to disseminate. Gaining recognition of the decision-making power is still a more far-removed matter.

Clearly, education as an endeavour has a long way to go before it can truly be assessed for its long-range value, beyond common-sensical generalisations. The occasion of a national education policy would have been a fit occasion to tackle some of these issues, but then perhaps it will have to await a revision before this is attempted.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)



IN FACT, IT MAY BE ARGUABLE THAT SCHOLASTIC INTEREST IS AN ENDEAVOUR IN ITS OWN RIGHT AND IS INDEED THE HEART OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION. TO SUSTAIN THIS FOCUS REQUIRES FUNDS AND RESEARCH ORIENTATION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIAN COLTS IN THE FINALS

Sir - The Indian Colts exhibited exhilarating qualities of grit and maturity beyond their age to storm into the under-19 cricket World Cup final. The defending champions displayed nerves of steel as they overcame a fighting South Africa, the hosts. They are now the firm favourites to lift the cup; all set to face either Australia or Pakistan in Sunday's final. This will be India's ninth go at the Cup they have lifted a record five times. On Tuesday, the Indian top order looked out of sorts in the chase, as they seemed to wilt under the pressure of playing the big semis, as four of their frontline batsmen were back in the hut with a mere 32 runs on board before Sachin Dhas and Uday Saharan stitched a match-winning partnership of 171 runs for the fifth wicket.

Dhas, in particular, went for the runs from the word go never letting the run-rate climb up. Skipper Saharan, who is in top form, played the second fiddle initially to open up later with some scintillating cover drives. The beauty of their batting lies in the confidence with which they tackled the proteas bowling. Though some late wickets caused anxiety among the Indian ranks, Saharan was there almost till the end to ensure India's place in the final on the same ground. Of course, nothing can be taken away from Raj Limbani and Musheer Khan who kept the host batters on a tight leash. The super-talented and unbeaten Indian youngsters should play their natural game in the finals without being bogged down by the big occasion.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

SOLAR ENERGY

Sir - Solar energy presents a crucial opportunity in the face of rising consumption and costly electricity. With its potential to alleviate the burden of high utility bills while promoting environmental sustainability, it stands as a bea-

India is a diverse country



Some people believe in the theory that as there is one nation so there should be one language, one religion and one election. This is as dangerous in a diverse, federal, democratic country like India as a tree with one branch. We need to banish such one-on-one formula to safeguard our unity in diversity and to protect our parliamentary democracy, secularism and federalism as enshrined in the Constitution of India. Sometimes a tree has been pruned in a bad way turning it into a one-tree-

one-branch. Such a tree loses its balance and more often than not falls flat causing grave accidents in the process. A democratic country is like a tree.

The tree would give us fruits of fundamental rights and welfare if it gets water in the form of debate and dialogue. The tree can keep its balance when all of its major branches - legislature, executive judiciary and other branches - financial, banking, investigative, and educational institutions get the air of transparency and unhindered sunlight of freedom and thus remain healthy. Democracy cannot survive if its institutions are undermined. The most essential of all is the constitution soil. If some toxic elements get mixed with the soil then the democracy-tree will die a slow death. As citizens and custodians of this great democracy, we must remain vigilant and protect the delicate balance that sustains our democratic canopy.

Sujit De | Kolkata

con of hope. The commendable strides towards solar energy, evidenced by our rapidly growing capacity of 73 GW, mark a significant milestone. Despite the looming increase in electricity demand, solar energy remains a cost-effective and readily available alternative to coal and hydroelectric power. By harnessing this abundant natural resource through appropriate means, both urban and rural areas can bask in 24-hour illumination. However, realizing this potential requires government support and widespread adoption by individuals. Through concerted efforts, solar energy can significantly reduce reliance on traditional power sources, making it the most indispensable energy solution of our time.

N Mateeni | Mumbai

EC'S CONTROVERSIAL DECISION

Sir - The recent decision of the EC is vehemently condemnable on the grounds of not recognising the founder of the Nationalists Congress Party, Mr

Sharad Pawar and its coalition. This has directly weakened the political identity of the parties.

The Ajit Pawar faction stole the thunder from Pawar senior as the Election Commission of India recognised them as the true Nationalists Congress Party (NCP) with a clock symbol and awarded the new longer name and party symbol of Nationalists Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar's faction with the symbolic title "Banyan tree" for the Rajya Sabha Elections for six seats in Maharashtra. Splitting and forming has become the latest trend of politics and most frequently parties are claiming into it. Matching with the ideologies of the latter becomes a challenge these days. But the new development could rock the INDIA bloc boat, where Mr Ajit Pawar holds the command.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

GEO-POLITICS IN THE ELECTION YEAR

As the nation gears up for elections, the spotlight shifts towards domestic issues



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

A poll-bound government is likely to highlight the domestic socio-political economy rather than focus on global geopolitics. However, in a world where food on the plate for citizens is dictated by ravaging wars and inimical neighbours, geo politics finds itself through to every conversation, even if it is addressed to a political constituency. In the past week, the entire Indian government has laid out the influence of external factors on the domestic economy and therefore their voting choices.

The successful conclusion of the G20 summit in New Delhi, last September, topped with a joint communique, is the geo-political showpiece that will be used in election rallies by the ruling party members. The build-up to the G20 summit was a careful execution of several events, meetings, conferences and exhibitions criss crossing the entire country. One of the first meetings leading to the G20 summit was in Andamans, where the foreign heads of G20 countries were treated to the scenic beaches in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Several diplomats, this author, spoke to later, had never been to Andamans, neither hoped to set up a vacation in future, had it not been for the diplomatic event.

Going beyond setting up a Bharat culture and diversity tourism pitch, the G20 events were an early roadshow for the Modi government, beginning in December 2022, almost a year and a half ahead of the general elections. Elaborate street decorations, cosmetic and essential lift of meeting venue infrastructure, putting a celebratory appeal to an otherwise boring diplomatic affair, and getting many diverse stakeholders on board, made the Indian G20 presidency closer to the citizens. Almost every taxi driver, hotel owner, local shop owner and person out on a stroll in the venue city would be discussing the G20 summit, with a palpable excitement, similar to a cricket match.



However, the Prime Minister knew Indians wanted more, they were used to a grand extravagant wedding-type spectacle, and he ensured all of it with his state visit to France, followed by the US and finally the grand finale of the G20 summit in New Delhi. The common message away from the twists and language of diplomatic documents, meant for a common citizen was India has arrived at the global stage and the world is eagerly waiting for India's global leadership. Prime Minister, Modi summed it up during his speech on the vote of accounts earlier this week in Lok Sabha, where he counted the G20 summit as one of the key highlights of the government under his leadership for a decade. "He said that the world's views and opinions towards India can be summed up by the success of the G20 Summit. Prime Minister Modi underlined that the whole world is watching the speed of the work of the government as well as its big goals and courage."

Meanwhile, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her sixth consecutive budget (the current one being interim) last week and even though she kept the document and her speech to be a bland vote on accounts (as it should be) she did squeeze paragraphs on the importance of Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITS) for getting fresh investment in the economy. Her speech highlighted "Geopolitically, global affairs are becoming more complex and challenging with wars and conflicts. Globalization is being redefined with reshoring and friend-shoring, disruption and fragmentation of supply chains, and competition for critical minerals and technologies. India assumed the G20 Presidency during very difficult times for the world. The country showed the way forward and built consensus on solutions for those global problems." Even though India is pushing for a multilateral world order, the global agenda has reached the electorate's doorstep in an election year.

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

Nitish embraces BJP to survive in Bihar politics



KS TOMAR

For the INDIA bloc to endure following the upheaval caused by Nitish, Congress must demonstrate flexibility and be willing to make concessions

Nitish Kumar's "Chameleon-like skills have been decoded by columnists and writers in India in a different style but this writer I would prefer to describe the astute Bihar politician as a 'perfect culmination and package' of '3 in 1 rare quality' comprising of 16th-century Italian statesman, Niccolò Machiavelli's thinking "ends justify the means", Charles Darwin theory's ingredient "survival of the fittest" and late George Fernandes's unpredictable nature, which has helped him to become chief minister for 9th record time. Machiavellianism characterizes the view that politics is immoral hence the unscrupulous actions involving deceit, treachery and violence are permissible as an effective means of acquiring and maintaining political power. In the Indian context, a committed socialist, the late George Fernandes was responsible for toppling the Morarji Desai government on July 15, 1979, as he revolted and subsequently resigned along with some ministers thereby ditching Morarji. Interestingly, Fernandes had praised the government in parliament on July 14, 1979, but acted as "Paltu Ram" the next day to ensure the downfall of his government. As a true follower of Fernandes to survival, Nitish has exhibited his talent several times hence even foes including BJP have warmly accepted his comeback though it had declared that doors are shut for "Paltu Ram" after he dumped the saffron party in Bihar to form the government with RJD and Congress 18 months ago.

Congress Party may share Maximum Blame For the current uncertainty in the INDI Alliance. Experts believe that as a PAN India party, it was mandatory for the Congress to stitch the alliance and ensure seat-sharing but it has miserably failed so far. JD(U) supreme, Nitish Kumar has left the alliance in lurch and leaders like Mamata Banerjee and Kejriwal have decided to carve out their "suicidal" independent path. The critics squarely blame Rahul Gandhi also who ought to have rescheduled his 'Nayay Yatra' and supplemented the efforts of Malickarjun Kharge to sort out the differences with alliance partners vis-à-vis seat sharing in the states. Due to ill-health Sonia Gandhi, is not fully active and opted to leave it to Rahul to handle the entire fiasco. Priyanka Vadra's sojourn in America also defies logic especially when she does matter in Congress.

Impact of Nitish's decision to dump I.N.D.I.A Political observers believe that BJP and JD(U) were sailing in the same boat in Bihar which is evident from the slide in the percentage of votes when compared with the 2019(NDA) Lok Sabha and 2020 assembly polls of Maha Gath Bandhan (MGB) in Bihar. BJP and JD(U) had fought the 2019 polls together and polled 23.58% and 21.81% whereas it came down to 19.46% (-2.35%) and 15.39% (-8.19%) in the 2020 assembly elections respectively which could have been the predominant reason of joining the hands to survive and improve the performance in 2024.

Nitish Kumar's decision to ditch the INDI alliance may have serious implications in Bihar as BJP, JD(U) and LJP make a deadly combination for 2024. NDA got 53.25% in 2019 which included BJP (23.58%),



NITISH WILL BENEFIT EQUALLY AFTER JOINING HANDS WITH BJP AS IT HAS PROTECTED HIS CM CHAIR AND PROSPECTS OF BECOMING CM FOR THE TENTH TIME HAVE BRIGHTENED AFTER THE 2025 ASSEMBLY POLLS

JD(U)21.8% and LJP (7.88%). Contrary to it, MGB is left with RJD's 23.11% in 2020 and Congress party's 9.48% thereby reducing it to a minor player in Bihar which has given a big jolt to the INDI alliance.

2nd, JD(U) had won '16 Lok Sabha seats and lost one and BJP won all 17 seats contested by it whereas LJP won all six seats which will directly benefit the saffron party as there were very little chances of winning a larger number of states with the help Chirag Paswan party and smaller groups. 3rd, Nitish will benefit equally after joining hands with BJP as it has protected his CM chair and prospects of becoming CM for the tenth time have brightened after the 2025 assembly polls.

4th, Bihar CM had always found discomfort in the company of the Lalu family which is being investigated by ED for allegations of corruption and Nitish Kumar's chances of facing investigating agencies were not being ruled out, especially in view of chances of Modi returning back to power for 3rd time in 2024.

5th, Nitish can find himself in a safe zone after joining hands with the BJP which has been witnessed in innumerable cases of political adversaries and foes in the states and centre as they were liberated from the scare of ED and other investigating agencies.

6th, Nitish was reportedly upset with the reports of six MPs of his party hobnobbing with BJP and they could have left him in the lurch prior to 2024 because they had won owing to JD(U) and BJP alliance and caste equations in 2019. As things stand today, the chances of their victory had dampened especially after the Ram temple consecration by PM,

Narendra Modi and the impact of Hindutva in Bihar.

7th, JD(U) MPs also recognize the fact that people vote in a different manner in parliamentary polls hence 2020 'assembly elections' yardstick cannot be applied in 2024 as Modi will be the face of NDA who stands at an invincible and indomitable position when compared with any leader in INDI alliance which is yet to declare its PM candidate.

Mamata And Kejriwal are the two villains of the entire fiasco. Political observers give full credit to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata and Delhi CM, Arvind Kejriwal for 'sabotaging' the chances of Nitish Kumar to become convener of the alliance which can be attributed to their personal ambition. One cannot deny the fact that Nitish had worked hard for the past year and met the regional leaders which led to the first successful meeting of I.N.D.I.A in Patna on June 23, 2023, to resolve to oust the BJP in 2024. But when crunch time came, Mamata floated the name of Kharge and Kejriwal supported her proposal which was the result of their joint strategy to keep Nitish at bay they succeeded which amounts to a self-inflicted political wound and it may prove counterproductive in 2024.

Nitish accuses Congress of creating a mess

Nitish Kumar has blamed Congress for the current crisis in INDI but insiders reveal that former CM, Lalu Prasad and his son Tejeshwai also contributed to the present murky state of affairs in Bihar. Father and son, the duo, was in a hurry to capture power through former JD(U) president, Lalan Singh who was shown the door by Nitish. Lalan Singh had

mooted an idea of making Tejashwi CM and started breaking JD(U) which irked Nitish who ensured the removal of Singh and clinched a deal with BJP.

Nitish is primarily focused on survival only. In this backdrop, Nitish Kumar does not care if he will be remembered in Indian history as a "Chameleon", "Paltu Ram" or "Aya Ram, Gaya Ram" because he has implemented Machiavelli's principle to survive in politics and it has also benefited him to stick to chief minister's chair for 9th time after ditching Mahagathbandhan comprising of Congress and Rashtriya Janata dal(RJD) in Bihar. CM has embraced the Bharatiya Janata party which desperately needed him to win a maximum number of seats in 2024. Nitish has a bright chance of acquiring the CM's chair for the 10th time after the 2025 assembly polls provided the BJP is on the receiving end otherwise he should be ready for political burial. BJP believes in the principle of "use and throw" which holds true for those leaders who defected from various parties but lost relevance with the passage of time. But the BJP does take care of those leaders who retain their political relevance and utility like some of Rahul Gandhi's legion who dumped him and joined the saffron party. Analysts opine that INDI Alliance can be saved even after the jolt given by Nitish but it will be possible if Congress adopts an attitude of flexibility and makes sacrifices to accept the dominance of Mamata, Kejriwal etc. in West Bengal and Punjab as well as Delhi respectively.

(The writer is a political analyst and senior journalist; views are personal)

Solar scheme offers free electricity and economic empowerment

The 'Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana' represents a significant step towards sustainable energy adoption, promising not only free electricity but also economic empowerment

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently announced a groundbreaking initiative in her budget speech, confirming that participants in the government's newly unveiled rooftop solar scheme will receive 300 units of complimentary electricity per month. This initiative aims to assist households in saving up to Rs 18,000 annually, with distribution companies ensuring its implementation.

This announcement comes on the heels of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's declaration of the 'Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana' shortly after his return from Ayodhya on January 22. Under this scheme, rooftop solar power systems will be



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

installed in one crore homes, though a specific timeline for achieving this ambitious target was not provided. The scheme arrives at a crucial juncture as the government's goal of installing rooftop solar power plants has not gained significant traction. Despite a target of 40 GW by the end of 2022, only 5.87 GW of rooftop solar projects were installed by May last year, represent-

ing less than 15% of the target.

In alignment with the government's energy transition plans, a substantial portion of the renewable capacity, totalling 292 GW out of 500 GW by 2030, is expected to be solar power. Additionally, the Finance Minister highlighted that the scheme will facilitate the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) by incorporating home charging stations. It is also anticipated to generate entrepreneurship and employment opportunities in the supply, installation, and maintenance sectors. The 'Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana' extends the longstanding rooftop solar energy program, which aimed to contribute 40 GW



to the government's initial target of installing 100 GW of solar capacity by 2022. However, as of the end of 2023, the country's total solar capacity reached 73.3 GW, with grid-connected rooftop systems comprising

only 11 GW, or 15%. Industry experts, including the Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW), suggest that installing solar power on rooftops of 10 million homes could add 20-25 GW of new

capacity. Furthermore, this initiative is expected to lead to savings of about Rs 2 lakh crore for distribution companies over the next 25 years.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana, approximately 10 million households will benefit from the ability to sell surplus electricity to distribution companies. Sitharaman estimated that families could save between Rs 15,000 and Rs 18,000 annually through this project, with the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) Limited serving as the designated nodal agency. The scheme mandates the provision of 300 units of free electricity to low- and middle-income households. After recovering the instal-

lation cost of Rs 80,000 (post-subsidy) for a 2 kW plant in four years, the surplus power generated can be sold to the grid. Distribution companies stand to benefit from reduced infrastructure investment and losses. While the project's implementation faces challenges, including limited panel manufacturing capacity, experts advocate for a focus on practical sectors such as commercial and industrial, where subsidies and clear policies can drive cost reductions. Despite previous shortcomings, the government remains committed to renewable energy targets, including the expansion of e-vehicle infrastructure and the promotion of green growth initiatives.

In conclusion, the 'Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana' signifies a pivotal stride towards a brighter, cleaner future for India. By harnessing the power of the sun, this initiative not only offers free electricity to millions of households but also paves the way for economic prosperity and environmental sustainability. With continued commitment from both the government and citizens alike, India is poised to emerge as a global leader in renewable energy adoption, driving positive change for generations to come. Let us embrace this opportunity to shape a greener, more prosperous tomorrow for our nation and the world. (The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Pakistan general elections marred by sporadic violence

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Counting of votes began in Pakistan following conclusion of the polling on Thursday in an election marred by crack-down on jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan's party, sporadic violence and connectivity issues after the government suspended mobile and internet services to foil suspected terror attacks.

The polling started at 8.00 AM and continued without any break till 5.00 PM. A country-wide public holiday was declared to enable more than 12 crore voters to cast their ballots. The time for voting ended but the people present inside the premises of the polling stations were allowed to cast their votes. The polling percentage is not yet known.

The results of individual polling stations have started to pour in from across the country after the mandatory one hour restriction elapsed. But it may take a couple of hours before the complete result of any constituency is available.

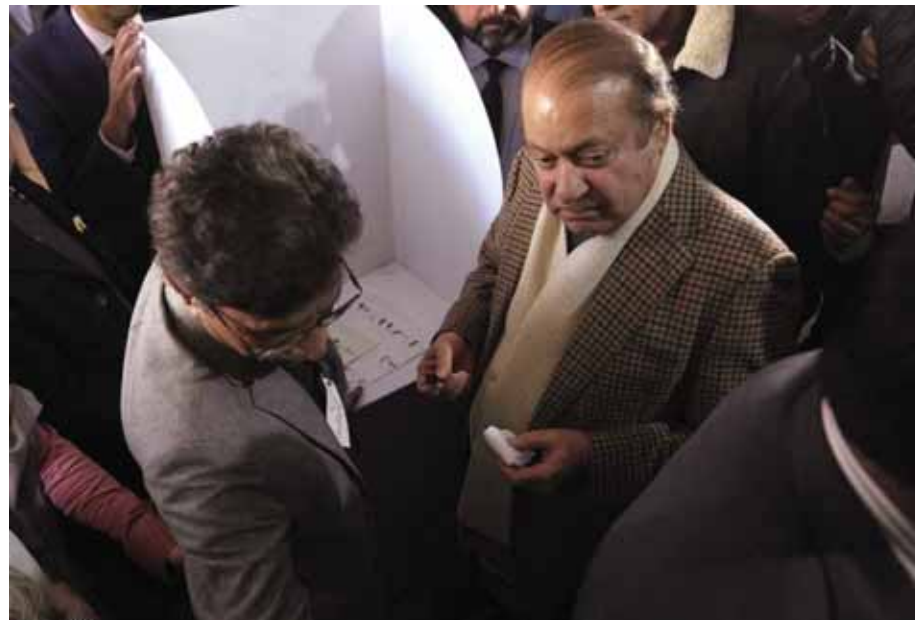
In total 266 National Assembly seats were up for grabs out of 336, but polling was

postponed on at least one seat after a candidate was killed in a gun attack in Bajaur. Another 60 seats are reserved for women and 10 for minorities, and are allotted to the winning parties based on proportional representation. A party must win 133 seats out of 265 being contested to form the next government.

Nawaz Sharif, the 74-year-old three-time former premier who is eying the premiership for a record fourth term, has expressed confidence that his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party would win elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said it has resolved 76 poll-related complaints, which were received throughout the day.

According to the ECP spokesperson Haroon Shinwari, most of the complaints were of a "normal nature" involving confrontations between political workers in different areas which were resolved on the spot.

Soon after the voting started, mobile services in Pakistan were suspended due to the "deteriorating security situation", a day after twin terror



An officer of polling staff helps Pakistan's former PM Nawaz Sharif to mark on ballot paper to cast his vote at a polling station for the country's parliamentary elections, in Lahore, Pakistan, on Thursday

attacks killed at least 30 people in Balochistan province. Despite the suspension of cellular and internet services, a large number of people across Pakistan exercised their right to vote to elect lawmakers for

national and provincial assemblies - on 855 constituencies.

Amnesty International criticised the decision to suspend mobile phone and internet service on the day of election, calling it "a blunt attack on the

rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly".

"Amnesty International calls on the Pakistan authorities to urgently lift the blanket restrictions on access to the

internet," it said in a statement on X. There were reports of the voting process facing delays at certain polling stations across the country.

Four policemen on election duty were killed in a terror attack in Dera Ismail Khan on Thursday. A security officer was killed after gunmen opened fire at soldiers in the Tank area of Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. Nearly 650,000 security personnel have been deployed across the country to conduct peaceful elections. With former prime minister Imran Khan in jail, Sharif's PML-N is tipped to emerge as the single largest party in the elections.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidates are contesting the polls independently after the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the election commission to deprive his party of its iconic election symbol cricket "bat". "Make sure you come out and vote in huge numbers tomorrow," Khan was quoted as saying in a video posted on his X handle on Wednesday.

Khan, 71, and other prominent incarcerated political fig-

ures have cast their votes through a postal ballot from Adiala Jail. Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has congratulated the nation on what he called "successful conduct" of "free and fair" elections.

"I appreciate the efforts of the Election Commission of Pakistan, Interim Provincial Governments, Armed Forces, Civil Armed Forces, Police, law enforcement agencies, election staff, media and all those institutions and individuals who contributed to the conduct of the free and fair elections," he said in a post on X.

Kakar said the high voter turnout is a clear indication of public commitment to shaping the future of the country. "The voices, expressed through the votes, will contribute to the fortification of our democracy, and for that, people of Pakistan deserve every bit of appreciation," he added.

The border crossing with Afghanistan and Iran will also remain closed both for cargo and pedestrians on Thursday due to security reasons.

Pakistan's Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja earlier said that

elections will be held in a peaceful atmosphere. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), a total of 5,121 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly (NA) seats. These include 4,807 male, 312 female and two transgenders. For the four provincial assemblies, 12,695 candidates are in the field including 12,123 males, 570 women and two transgenders. Khan's PTI after falling out with the powerful establishment complained of pressure and lack of space to carry out its campaign. The party has been subjected to a nationwide state clampdown, with hundreds of workers and candidates arrested and released only after quitting the party or withdrawing from the election.

Pakistan's history since 1947 has been riddled with the Army sidelining elected governments. Khan is jailed on corruption charges and is barred from standing. He is serving at least 14 years in prison, having been sentenced in three separate cases in the space of five days last week. He still faces over 140 charges in different cases.

PTI says its polling agents picked by police in Punjab

Lahore (PTI): Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party on Thursday claimed that polling in several areas of Pakistan's Punjab province of Pakistan began on Thursday without the presence of its agents, some of whom were picked by the police to make rigging easier in the elections.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidates are contesting the polls independently after the Supreme Court upheld the decision to deprive his party of its iconic election symbol cricket "bat".

The PTI has alleged that the police removed its polling camps. "At several polling stations in the constituencies, including those of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, his brother Shehbaz Sharif and

daughter Maryam Nawaz the polling even began without the presence of the polling agents of the PTI in Lahore," party leader from Lahore Wasim Ahmad told this correspondent. Besides, only the PML-N polling agents were present when the presiding officers allowed the polling process in Nawaz Sharif's NA-130 Lahore constituency, he said.

He said the police had started picking up its polling agents before they could reach the polling stations. "Through this, the authorities want to ensure that our candidates' polling agents could not get the result of the booth, making it easier for them to rig the election," he said.

The PTI alleges that tactics have been used to prevent their candidates from contesting the election.



People hold their ID cards as they wait for their turn to cast vote outside a polling station during the parliamentary elections in Multan, Pakistan, on Thursday

HC sends back to poll body case of violation of quota for women

Islamabad (PTI): The Islamabad High Court has sent back to the election commission the case of the violation of the five per cent general seats quota for women by political parties in the general elections. Justice Aamer Farooq on Wednesday said general elections on Thursday could not be stopped but directed the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to take action on the complaint as per law after the polls, Dawn News reported.

The Aurat Foundation had filed a petition against the poll body for non-compliance with Section 206 of the Elections Act 2017 which says that a minimum of 5 per cent of general seat tickets be given to women by all political parties in the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies. Pakistan has reserved seats for women to ensure female representation in the legislative process on both national and provincial levels to promote gender equality in governance.

The Aurat Foundation, known for its advocacy for women's rights, highlighted the

violation of the said provision in a letter addressed to CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja ahead of the national polls. "We are dismayed to find that some political parties have not observed the legal requirement under section 206 of the [election] act and section 6 of the Code of Conduct to award a minimum of 5 per cent tickets to women candidates on general seats," the letter said.

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Reprieve for Muizzu as Maldives' SC suspends impeachment amendment

PTI ■ MALE

In a respite for Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, the Supreme Court on Thursday ordered the suspension of a recent amendment to Parliament's standing orders that had made it easier for the opposition lawmakers to impeach the president and the vice president, local media reports said. The constitution declares that an impeachment motion against the president or vice president requires the vote of two-thirds of the members of Parliament. However, the House had recently amended its standing orders to make it easier to submit an impeachment motion by lowering the number of votes required for it. The Attorney General's Office filed the case with the Supreme Court over the amendment on January 28. It also asked for an injunction to suspend the amendment until the court makes a final ruling.

The case was heard by the full bench of the Supreme

Court, Sun.mv, a news portal, reported. Describing the chain of events in the run-up to the development, the report said that the Election Commission had decided against holding by-elections when seven lawmakers resigned from Parliament in November to assume top positions in President Muizzu's administration, saying that the parliamentary elections are to be held soon.

Taking advantage of the situation, the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) - which holds a majority in the Parliament - amended Parliament's standing orders so that vacated seats aren't counted when determining the total number of MPs, the report said.

It meant only 54 votes were required to impeach President Muizzu, instead of the previous 58, as, post the amendment, the total number of MPs would be counted as 80 instead of 87. In January, the MDP and the Democrats announced an alliance to work together in the

Parliament and hence have 56 MPs between them; 43 from the MDP, and 13 from the Democrats.

On January 28, the Attorney General's Office had filed the case, the same day when the MDP-Democrats alliance stalled the approval of three members of President Muizzu's cabinet and clashes broke out in the House between pro-government MPs and opposition lawmakers following differences over the approval of four members of the cabinet.

The next day, on January 29, the MDP had announced that it planned to submit a motion to impeach President Muizzu and that it already started gathering signatures for the same. On Tuesday, the Supreme Court accepted the proposition by the State to annul the amendment to the Parliament Regulations, Edition.mv said. Now, on Thursday, "Justice Azmiralda Zahir, Justice Mahaz Ali Zahir, and Justice Husnu Al Suood found in favour of issuing the

injunction, citing the need to maintain the status quo. But Justice Aisha Shujoon Mohamed and Justice Mohamed Ibrahim found there were no grounds to issue the injunction, citing that the case was submitted a month after the passage of the amendment," Sun.mv reported.

Pro-China Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year. On January 24, calling India the "most long-standing ally," the MDP and the Democrats expressed concern about the Muizzu government's "anti-India stance."

The Maldives' proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the mainland's western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant strategic importance.

Russian politician calling for peace in Ukraine rejected as a presidential candidate

Moscow (AP): Russia's main election authority on Thursday refused to allow a politician opposing Moscow's military action in Ukraine on the ballot for the upcoming presidential election. Boris Nadezhdin, a local legislator in a town near Moscow, was required by law to gather at least 100,000 signatures in support of candidacy. The Central Election Commission declared more than 9,000 signatures submitted by Nadezhdin's campaign invalid, which was enough to disqualify him. Russia's election rules say potential candidates can have no more than 5% of their submitted signatures thrown out. Nadezhdin, 60, has openly called for a halt to the conflict in Ukraine and for starting a dialogue with the West. Speaking at the EC on Thursday, Nadezhdin asked election authorities to postpone the decision and to give him more time to rebut their arguments, but they declined.

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 Indira Gandhi University invites online applications from the eligible candidates for recruitment of various Non-Teaching posts against sanctioned vacant posts. Category-wise number of vacant non-teaching posts along with Advt. Nos., detailed instructions, requisite qualifications, pay scales and modalities for selection are given on the University Website www.igu.ac.in. The link for submission of online application shall be available on the University Website w.e.f. 03.02.2024. The candidates who had already applied against the post of Training & Placement Officer vide Advt. No. 07/2023 need not apply again. However, they can submit their latest updates through hard copy by 04.03.2024 (05:00 p.m.).
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Ukraine shoots down Russian helicopter

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian forces claimed Thursday to have shot down a Russian attack helicopter in eastern Ukraine near the city of Avdiivka, where soldiers are fighting from street to street as Russia's army steps up its four-month campaign to surround Kyiv's defending troops.

Ukrainian soldiers used a portable anti-aircraft missile to take down the Ka-52 Alligator attack helicopter, one of the Russian air force's deadliest weapons, according to Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, the commander of Ukrainian units fighting on the southeastern front line.

The roughly 1,500-km (930-mile) line of contact has shifted little during recent months of wintry weather. But as the war in Ukraine nears its two-year anniversary, Avdiivka has become "a primary focus" of Moscow's forces, the UK

Defence Ministry said in an assessment Thursday. Street-to-street combat is taking place in the city as Ukrainian troops seek to keep open their main supply route amid intense bombardment, the ministry said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

The General Staff of Ukraine's armed forces reported Thursday that its troops had fended off 40 enemy assaults around Avdiivka over the previous 24 hours. That is roughly double the number of daily Russian assaults at other points along the front line. Russia's Pravda newspaper reported Thursday that the Russian army was attempting to cut a key logistics supply route for Ukraine in the village of Lastochkyne, about 6 km (4 miles) west of Avdiivka.

The Russian military has used electronic warfare to take out the Starlink communications system which Ukrainian troops use to communicate, Pravda said.

Ukraine has built multiple defences in Avdiivka, complete with concrete fortifications and a network of tunnels. Despite massive losses of personnel and equipment, Russian troops have slowly advanced since October.

The fight has evolved into a gruesome effort for both sides. It has been compared to the nine months of fighting for Bakhmut, the Ukraine war's longest and bloodiest battle. It ended with Russia capturing the bombed-out, deserted city last May in what Moscow hailed as a major triumph. Both Bakhmut and Avdiivka are located in Ukraine's Donetsk region. Moscow-backed rebels seized part of the region in 2014 and Russia illegally annexed all of it in 2022 with three other Ukrainian regions. Russia wants to capture the entire Donetsk region, where it currently holds just over half of the territory.



LIC becomes fifth most valuable firm as stocks soar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) jumped more than 6 per cent on Thursday, with its market valuation climbing to Rs 6,99 lakh crore, making the firm the fifth most valued company.

The company became the fifth most valued firm by market capitalisation (mcap), beating ICICI Bank. Taking into account the record high of Rs 1,144.45 per share, the company's market valuation reached Rs 7.23 lakh crore. Prime Minister Narendra Modi told Rajya Sabha on Wednesday that the opposition spread rumours about LIC, but today its shares are trading at record-high prices. Reliance Industries is the country's most valued firm with a market valuation of Rs 19,64,044.94 crore, followed by Tata Consultancy Services (Rs 15,13,218.99 crore), HDFC

Bank (Rs 10,66,150.51 crore), Infosys (Rs 7,02,754.66 crore) and LIC (Rs 6,99,702.87 crore). Last month, LIC surpassed State Bank of India (SBI) to become the country's most-valued PSU firm by market valuation. The country's largest insurer was listed in May 2022. The government had sold over 22.13 crore shares, or a 3.5 per cent stake in LIC, through an Initial Public Offering (IPO). The government holds a 96.5 per cent stake in the company. The share price of LIC on Monday jumped nearly 6 per cent to hit the Rs 1,000 mark for the first time. So far this year, the stock has jumped nearly 33 per cent.

RBI decision on interest rate pragmatic: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank's decision to keep the benchmark interest rate stable is pragmatic and will ensure sustainable economic growth, say experts. The RBI Monetary Policy Committee on Thursday decided to keep policy rate unchanged for the sixth time in a row in view of global uncertainty and the need to bring down retail inflation to 4 per cent. Commenting on the monetary policy, Assocham Secretary General Deepak Sood said that while the continued focus on moderating inflation to the target of 4 per cent has to be seen in the overall context of global and domestic challenges, mainly with regard to food prices, RBI's customer-centric approach is laudable. The chamber has described the decision to keep the benchmark policy rates unchanged as pragmatic for sustainable economic growth. Lakshmi Iyer, CEO-Investment & Strategy, Kotak Alternate Asset Managers said no major worries expressed on the inflation front are comforting, but for food price fluctuations — the watch for global cues however continues. "While FY25 inflation forecast is at 4.5 per cent, as per RBI the last mile walk is very crucial, hence the walk towards headline CPI of 4 per cent is key for RBI," Iyer said. Chairman of CII Delhi State Council and MD & CEO of Samtel Avionics Puneet Kaura, said given the prevailing economic and inflationary conditions, the RBI's action aligns with expectations. "This measure, aside from providing support to interest-sensitive industries such as real estate and automobiles, will also notably assist manufacturing and the MSME sector," he said. Ranen Banerjee, Partner and Leader



Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das with Deputy Governors Swaminathan Janakiraman, Michael Debaratra Patra, M Rajeshwar Rao and T Rabi Shankar arrives to deliver the Monetary Policy Statement, at the RBI headquarters in Mumbai

should help infusing liquidity into the banking system. "We continue to believe that in case of a need for the banking system, especially towards the end of the financial year, the RBI may provide liquidity support in a nuanced fashion," Sanyal said. Uttam Tibrewal, executive director, AU Small Finance Bank said RBI's policy was on expected lines with a focus on bringing inflation towards a targeted range of 4 per cent. Monetary policy stance and steady rates over the last year have helped maintain healthy growth momentum while lowering inflationary pressures. "Going forward we believe as inflation nears RBI's 4 per cent goal, space for monetary easing would open up in the coming quarters, to support lower interest rates and credit demand," Tibrewal added. Rohit Arora, CEO and Co-founder, Biz2Credit and Biz2X said the proposal for a principal-based authentication framework in digital payments boosts security and promotes digital financial services adoption, particularly benefiting MSMEs. He also said the decision to maintain the repo rate at 6.5 per cent reflects cautious economic management amidst uncertainties. "This decision reflects the RBI's cautious yet optimistic stance, aligning with a stable interest rate environment and fostering borrower confidence for informed financial decisions," Kaushik Mehta, Founder & CEO of RUloans Distribution, stated. Borrowers, particularly in home and personal loans, may explore options to optimize their financial commitments, such as transferring loans to banks offering lower rates or opting for part payments to reduce EMIs, Mehta said. The next meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is scheduled for April 3 to 5, 2024.

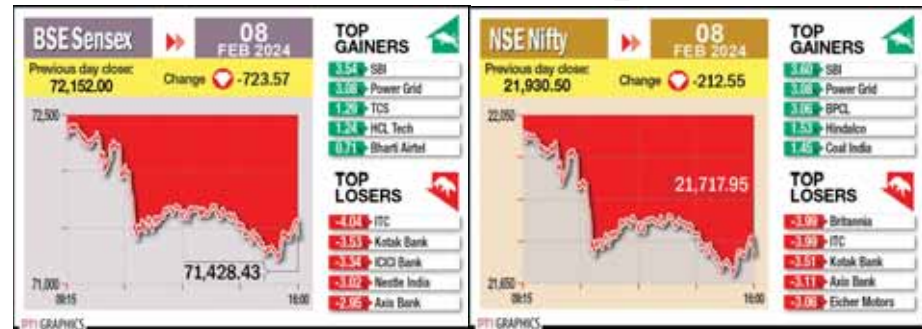
Economic Advisory, PwC India said the MPC decision to keep the policy rate unchanged was expected, but the stance is also kept at the withdrawal of accommodation which is possibly a surprise. "This possibly is explained by the fiscal consolidation with Government projecting a lower deficit than target in FY24 and an aggressive 5.1 per cent deficit target for FY25," he said. "The lower government borrowings and higher international money allocations to India bonds owing to inclusion of India in the JP Morgan Emerging Markets bond index will keep a downward bias on the yields, Banerjee said. The real GDP growth for the next financial year is projected at 7 per cent with Q1 growth at 7.2 per cent, Q2 at 6.8 per cent, Q3 at 7 per cent and Q4 at 6.9 per cent. Sanjay Bhutani, Board Member, Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI) said as inflation remains close to the RBI's upper limit, the decision to hold rates steady is unsurprising.

"However, many sectors, including the capital-intensive and research-driven medical technology industry, eagerly await a potential rate cut later this year," he said. M K Dhanuka, Managing Director, Dhanuka Agritech opined that while the RBI held steady on interest rates this time, continued access to affordable financing remains crucial for Indian agriculture's long-term prosperity. "We hope RBI would soon start lowering policy rates as it would act as a catalyst for such investments, complementing government efforts to promote farm mechanization and address critical agricultural challenges," Dhanuka added. RBI had last raised the repo rate in February 2023 to 6.5 per cent after six consecutive rate hikes aggregating to 250 basis points since May 2022. Siddhartha Sanyal, Chief Economist and Head of Research, Bandhan Bank said amid widespread concerns about liquidity tightness, the RBI's communication suggested that stepping up in government spending

Stock markets tumble 1 per cent

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices BSEsensex and Nifty tanked around 1 per cent on Thursday dragged by selling in banking and auto shares due to increased uncertainty about the timing of interest rate cuts after the RBI's monetary policy decision. Erasing all its early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 723.57 points or 1 per cent to settle at Rs 71,428.43. The barometer slipped into red after the announcement of the RBI monetary policy and hit a low of 71,230.62 thereafter, reflecting a loss of 921.38 points or 1.27 per cent. The Nifty shed 212.55 points or 0.97 per cent to settle at 21,717.95. Rate sensitive banking and financial services, auto, realty and commodity shares remained under pressure while energy and IT shares advanced.



The RBI Monetary Policy Committee on Thursday decided to keep policy rate unchanged for the sixth time in a row in view of global uncertainty and the need to bring down retail inflation to 4 per cent. The RBI also maintained its 'withdrawal of accommodative stance'. Announcing the decision of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said it has decided to keep the policy repo rate

unchanged on the basis of an assessment of the current and evolving macroeconomic situation. MPC also decided to remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns to the target while supporting growth, he said. "Though FY25 GDP growth forecast has improved, the RBI remains vigilant on inflation & banking liquidity. The incomplete transmission of the cumulative 250 bps and

the inflation ruling above the target level add uncertainty about the timing of the interest rate reduction. The ripple effect was seen in the government 10 yr yield, which inched higher. "A large pocket of the market slid into red like FMCG, banks, and auto. FMCG was impacted more by weak Q3 result and downgrade in volume growth, in the near-term, due to weak rural demand," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Sebi mulls framework for FPIs to dispose securities post expiry of registration

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To facilitate ease of doing business for Foreign Portfolio Investors, markets regulator Sebi has proposed allowing such investors to dispose of securities lying in their demat accounts after the expiry of their registration. Under the current rule, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) are required to have a valid registration as long as they hold securities in India. In order to keep their registration valid, they need to pay the registration fee for every block of three years. Non-payment of fees lead to FPI's registration expiring. Further, current rules do not provide for liquidation of securities by FPI after the expiry of their registration and the securities held by such FPI remain frozen in their demat accounts. As on June 30, 2023, there were 55 FPIs, whose registration has expired, holding securities valued at about Rs 3,300 crore in their demat accounts, Sebi noted. In its consultation paper issued on Wednesday, the markets regulator has



proposed to permit FPIs to regularise their account or dispose of securities lying in their demat accounts, after the expiry of their registration. Such an opportunity to regularise the registration has been proposed to be time-bound — within 30 days— and subject to the imposition of certain financial disincentives. This includes the imposition of a late fee of 2 per cent of the registration fee per day. The registration fee for FPIs is currently USD 2,500 for Category I and USD 250 for Category II. Therefore, late fees on a per-day basis in this context will work out to USD 50 for Category I and USD 5 for

Category II FPIs. Further, FPIs with expired registration are currently not permitted to liquidate their holding, Sebi proposed allowing such FPIs to liquidate their holdings within 180 days after the expiry of the 30-day timeline. Additionally, Sebi has proposed measures for dealing with securities blocked in the accounts of FPIs, after the expiry of prescribed timelines for liquidation and guidelines for dealing with securities written-off by the FPIs. On dealing with existing cases of non-compliant FPIs with blocked securities in their accounts, Sebi has recommended a one-time opportunity to be given to such foreign investors for the disposal of securities. FPIs, whose registration has expired before issuance of this framework, should be offered an opportunity to sell the securities lying in their demat accounts, within 180 days from the date of issuance of this framework. This opportunity to dispose of the securities should be without any financial disincentive.

MEWA 2024 to take place in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Aligning with the Prime Minister's vision of promoting indigenous manufacturing through the 'Make in India' initiative and bolstering India's food processing infrastructure, a significant development is on the horizon. A two-day dry fruit exhibition called MEWA 2024 will take place in Delhi. Scheduled for the 16th and 17th of February, MEWA 2024 marks a milestone as the inaugural exposition of its kind in India. Organized under the auspices of Nuts & Dryfruit Council of India, the two-day trade meet will witness participation from over 200 exhibitors representing more than 20 countries, including the USA, Australia, UAE, Chile, Iran, Oman, Argentina, and Afghanistan. This event serves as a pivotal

moment for the nuts and dry fruit trade in India, with a focus on bringing together industry stakeholders to explore collaboration opportunities and leverage the collective strength of the sector. MEWA 2024 aims to provide a platform for Indian buyers, sellers, and industry leaders to engage with international counterparts, highlighting India's growing significance in the global trade landscape for nuts and dry fruits. Initiated by the Nuts & Dryfruit Council of India (NDFCI), MEWA 2024 seeks to consolidate India's fragmented nuts and dry fruit trade under one unified voice. By fostering collaboration and cooperation among industry players, the event endeavors to unlock the full potential of India's rapidly expanding market, benefiting all stakeholders involved.



Centre tightens wheat stock limit for wholesalers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday tightened wheat stock holding norms for wholesalers, big chain retailers and processors to curb hoarding and check price rises. According to the food ministry, traders and wholesalers are now allowed to maintain wheat stock of up to 500 tonnes instead of 1,000 tonnes, while big chain retailers can hold 5 tonnes in each outlet and total 500 tonnes at all their depots instead of 1,000 tonnes. Processors will be allowed to maintain 60 per cent instead of 70 per cent of their monthly installed capacity multiplied by the remaining months till April 2024, the ministry said in a statement. The stock limits on wheat were imposed on June 12, 2023, applicable till March this year in order to manage the overall food security and to prevent hoarding and unscrupulous speculation. The ministry said all wheat stocking entities are required to register on the wheat stock limit portal (https://

evegoils.Nic.In/wsp/login) and update the stock position on every Friday. Any entity which is found to have not registered on the portal or violates the stock limits will be subject to suitable punitive action under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. In case the stocks held by the above entities are higher than the prescribed limit, they will have to bring the same to the prescribed stock limits within 30 days of the issue of the notification. The ministry said officials of both central and state governments will be closely monitoring enforcement of these stock limits to ensure that no artificial scarcity of wheat is created in the country. Meanwhile, the Centre is selling FCI wheat to bulk users via the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) to improve domestic availability and check prices. Out of 101.5 lakh tonne allocated for sale at Rs 2150 per quintal under the OMSS, about 80.04 lakh tonne of wheat has been sold via weekly e-auctions to processors, the ministry said.



Puri praises MEIL Make in India push

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/PANAJI

Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Wednesday commended MEIL's Aatmanirbhar Bharat push at the India Energy Week 2024. MEIL subsidiary, Drillmec's SpA's Made in India HH 150 Automated Hydraulic Workover Rig garnered accolades from the Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas. Inspecting the HH 150 Automated Hydraulic Workover Rig alongside MEIL Managing Director PV Krishna Reddy, the Minister commended MEIL and Drillmec SpA for alignment with Government's vision of 'Make in India'. "Delighted to see the latest generation automatic rig with high safety standards (Drillmec SpA Italy technology) developed with 55% Make in India content by MEIL. 20 of these automated rigs are being given to @ONGC to power India's energy journey! (sic)," Puri said on his social media post. On the occasion Reddy said MEIL is supplying 20 fully automated workover rigs with 55% components of Make in India to the ONGC. "We at MEIL are committed to further building domestic manufacturing capacity, and supplying world-class equipment, to accelerate India's domestic oil and gas exploration- all aligned to the nation's larger goal of achieving an Aatmanirbhar Bharat and energy security," Reddy said in a statement.

Zomato posts ₹138 crore net profit in Q3

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Online food delivery firm Zomato Ltd on Thursday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 138 crore in the third quarter ended December 31, 2023, on the back of accelerated growth of quick commerce and steady performance of its core business. The company had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 347 crore in the same quarter last fiscal. Zomato Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 3,288 crore. It was at Rs 1,948 crore in the year-ago period, it added. Total expenses were higher at Rs 3,383 crore. The same was at Rs 2,485 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, the company said. In a letter to shareholders, Zomato Managing Director & CEO Deepinder Goyal said in the third quarter, the food delivery Gross Order Value (GOV) growth reached back up to 25 per cent Year-on-Year (YoY). "At this point, we expect GOV to continue growing at 20 per cent-plus YoY, and perhaps accelerate further if we see more than expected market share gains and revival in macro consumer demand," he added. On the company's quick commerce vertical Blinkit, he said the GOV growth was at 103 per cent YoY and "continues unabated", while losses continue to decline. In the third quarter of FY24, Zomato said its food delivery business had an adjusted revenue of Rs 2,025 crore. It was at Rs 1,565 crore in the year-ago period. For the quick commerce, adjusted revenue was Rs 644 crore. It was Rs 301 crore in the



year-ago period, the company said, adding that its B2B supplies under Hyperpure clocked adjusted revenue of Rs 859 crore, up from Rs 421 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Goyal said Hyperpure witnessed growth in both the core restaurant supplies business and the relatively newer quick commerce opportunity. "To address a growing need of our restaurant partners, we are now setting up a plant for processing value-added food supplies, including sauces, spreads, pre-cut and semi-finished perishable products, among others. Over time, this has the potential to expand margins and drive higher engagement with our restaurant partners," he added. Rakesh Ranjan, Food and Delivery CEO at Zomato, said the demand environment was muted in the Q3FY24 and that was true even for the broader restaurant industry. "One of the things driving the growth of our food delivery business is the fact that our platform is still underserved from a supply standpoint. The monthly active restaurant base on our platform has grown by 20 per cent-plus (YoY) in Q3FY24. This growth is driven both by new restaurants opening up and our coverage of existing restaurants increasing," Ranjan added. On the possibility of a hike in platform fee, he said it is too early to predict how the platform fee will shape up and the company is "still testing the waters on what works and makes sense here from a long-term perspective." "We will continue to tactically use levers like these to optimise both growth and margin expansion. Most importantly, as we do this, we will also continue to ensure the viability and well-being of each of our stakeholders, our customers, restaurant partners and delivery partners," Ranjan said. Blinkit Founder & CEO Albinder Dhindsa said the growth in quick commerce was largely driven by the robust uptick in demand due to the multiple festivals and occasions in the quarter besides having the right assortment which addressed the most pertinent needs of customers. "While most of the GOV growth was order volume-led, part of it was also driven by an increase in average order value, which continued to benefit from a higher mix of high ASP (average selling price) categories such as electronics, festive needs, among others," he added.

BUSINESS BRIEF

JK PAPER PAT ₹235 CRORE IN Q3
NEW DELHI: JK Paper Ltd recorded a turnover of ₹1,781.65 crore and profit after tax of ₹235.11 crore on consolidated basis for the third quarter. Its board declared an interim dividend of ₹3.50 a equity share of ₹10 each. The record date fixed for the purpose of determining the entitlement is February 16, 2024. "The results have been impacted due to overall drop in sales realisation and substantial increase in wood cost. The selling prices have been under pressure for some time due to rising trend in imports coupled with weaker demand scenario," Harsh Pati Singhania, Vice Chairman & Managing Director.

ONSITEGO ACQUIRES QDIGI SERVICES
MUMBAI: Onsitego, a device-care provider, has acquired Qdigi Services from Quess Corp Ltd, India's leading business services provider. Qdigi provides installation, repair, and maintenance services to leading OEMs like Samsung, Apple, One Plus, Xiaomi etc, and online retailers like Amazon. The acquisition will help Onsitego further enrich its customer service experience and open up new areas of growth such as approaching OEM partners and retailers with new market offerings. The acquisition of Qdigi will further add to our service capabilities and market offerings, said Kunal Mahipal, founder & CEO, Onsitego.

SNEHA OPENS FIVE SHOTS LEAD OVER HITAAASHEE

PTI ■ VIZAG

Sneha Singh carded a 3-under 69 to extend her lead over arch-rival Hitaashee Bakshi to five shots after round two of the fourth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour. Sneha, winner of the Hero Order of Merit last season, registered a hat-trick of birdies on the backnine to recover from two bogeys. Sneha with 70-69 is now 5-under 139 and leads Hitaashee Bakshi (72-72) who had a par round for the second straight day. Hitaashee is even par for two days as Sneha is the only player with under par rounds on both days. The day's amateur star was Zara Anand (74-72), who with three birdies in last four holes rose to Tied third spot alongside Khushi Khanijau (72-74). They are both at 2-over 146. Sneha, who started the day two shots ahead of Hitaashee, birdied the second and the third to get off to a flying start. A bogey on the fourth was repaired with a birdie on the ninth. On the back nine, Sneha seemed to have given away



some ground with back-to-back bogeys on the 10th and the 11th. Yet she fought back strongly with a birdie on the 12th and then three in a row from the 14th to the 16th. Despite closing with a bogey on the 18th she was three-under for the day and once again it was the only under par round of the day. Hitaashee had three birdies against three bogeys. Zara birdied the third but gave away a double bogey on the Par-4 sixth hole as she turned in 1-over. On the back nine she bogeyed the Par-5 14th to go 2-over. However, she rallied with birdies on the 15th, 16th and the 18th and had a bogey in between on the 17th. She carded even par 72. Khushi had three birdies against three bogeys. Jasmine Shekar (74-75) and Ridhima Dilawari (73-77) are fifth and sixth, while four players, Disha Kavery (77-76), Yaalisai Verma (76-77), Rhea Jha (76-77) and Seher Atwal (76-77) are all tied for the seventh spot at 153. The top 20 and ties made the cut in the Rs.10 lakh event and the cut fell at 159.



Shelton cruise to victories, reach Dallas Open quarterfinals

AP ■ DALLAS

Americans Tommy Paul and Ben Shelton cruised to victories to reach the quarterfinals of the Dallas Open. The second-seeded Paul wore down Taro Daniel with long rallies and games on his Japanese opponent's serve in a 6-3, 6-2 win. Shelton, the No. 3 seed, used a dominant serve in a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Michael Mmoh. Daniel saved five break points early in the first set before Paul finally got a break when Daniel ended one of the long rallies on his serve with a forehand into the net. Paul converted the fourth break point in each of Daniel's first two service games in the second set,

getting the second break after one of many long rallies on the Japanese player's serve. Daniel had two break points in the next game, but Paul saved both and went on to hold serve for a 4-0 lead. Shelton, who lost just three points on his serve, went up 3-0 in the first set with a break of Mmoh. The servers had won the first 18 points of the second set when Shelton won three in a row on Mmoh's serve for a break point before going on to break for a 3-2 lead. Shelton, who lost to Novak Djokovic in the semifinals of the U.S. Open last year, broke Mmoh again for a 5-3 lead before the hard-serving left-hander closed out the match at love. It was Shelton's first match of the week on the campus of SMU,

while Mmoh had advanced with a first-round victory. "I was pretty surprised with the level I played at today," said Shelton, who is ranked 16th. "It's always tough when you're around a tournament site for almost a week and kind of sit around waiting for your match." Two seeded players lost in straight sets in early matches. Fifth-seeded American Christopher Eubanks fell to Australia's James Duckworth 7-6 (3), 6-4, while Duckworth's countryman, No. 6 seed Max Purcell, was a 6-4, 6-3 loser against Marcos Giron of the U.S. Top-seeded Frances Tiafoe has his tournament opener Thursday night in the round of 16 against 19-year-old fellow American Alex Michelsen.



From shadows to spotlight: Coach Pierre Sage revives Lyon

AP ■ LYON

Just three months ago, the name Pierre Sage did not ring a bell to soccer fans in France. It does now thanks to a fine start to his managerial career in the French top-flight. Sage took over as coach at Lyon at the end of November following the firings in quick succession of two coaches with good reputations, Laurent Blanc and Fabio Grosso. At the time, the seven-time French champion was bottom of the league, with just one win from 12 matches. A former amateur player, Sage spent most of his coaching career in the shadows. He returned to Lyon last summer as director of the club's academy after a stint as an assistant at second-division club Red Star. Propelled into the limelight after Grosso's departure, Sage has exceeded expectations and guided Lyon out of the relegation zone. Ahead of Sunday's trip to Montpellier, Lyon produced a seventh win in nine matches in all competitions against Lille midweek in the French Cup. Sage made



several changes and his coaching decisions paid off against the northern side. Rayan Cherki was handed a starting role and responded to the call with a goal and an assist. That win followed a convincing 1-0 defeat of Marseille last week. "It's good to string together two good matches in front of our fans, and make them happy," Sage said. "I try to make decisions by being authentic, by being true to values." Sage has been widely credited by his

players for the newfound defensive stability and aggressive style of play the team has developed in less than three months. Lyon rewarded the Sage experiment by taking the "interim" tag off his role. "The coach deserves to stay with us for the very good atmosphere he has created," defender Duje Caleta-Car said. "He brings us a fresh air," striker Alexandre Lacazette added. "Tactically, he's someone who thinks things through a lot. He doesn't give us a lot of information, but it's enough to play good matches." Sage is also making the most of Lyon's signings during the winter transfer window after its summer recruitment was hampered by restrictions imposed by French football's financial watchdog. Nigerian striker Gift Orban scored his first goal against Lille while new signing Orel Mangala was excellent in midfield. In other league matches this weekend, leader Paris Saint-Germain hosts fourth-placed Lille on Saturday ahead of the Champions League round-of-16 tie next week against Real Sociedad.



Athletic Bilbao ends Atletico Madrid 28 matches unbeaten streak

AP ■ MADRID

Athletic Bilbao ended Atletico Madrid's 28-match unbeaten streak at home with a 1-0 win in the first leg of the Copa del Rey semifinals. Alex Berenguer converted a first-half penalty kick to give Athletic the tight victory at the Metropolitan Stadium on Wednesday. Atletico hadn't lost at the Metropolitan since a 1-0 defeat against Barcelona in January last year in the Spanish league. Diego Simeone's team had only two draws since then, both against Getafe in the Spanish league. "It's always tough to win in this stadium, they are always pressing forward and putting you on the defensive," Athletic coach Ernesto Valverde said. "We did a lot of things right to win the match but the ball didn't want to go in," Athletic

midfielder Koke Resurrección said. "They had their chance with the penalty kick and then defended well." The second leg will be on Feb. 29 at Athletic's San Mames Stadium. Athletic beat Atletico 2-0 in a league match there in December. "They got a very good result and we will need to try to find a way to overcome it in order to advance," Simeone said. "It will be difficult, we will need to score two goals and that's not easy. They have a significant advantage." Athletic eliminated Barcelona in the quarterfinals to reach the last four for the fifth straight season. The Basque Country team was runner-up in the Copa in 2019-20 and 2020-21. It last won the competition in 1984. Athletic is the second most successful club in the Copa with 23 titles, eight less than Barcelona. Atletico is playing in the last four of the Copa for the first time in seven seasons and is seeking its first title since 2013. It has 10 Copa trophies. On Tuesday, Mallorca and Real Sociedad drew 0-0 in the first leg of the other semifinal. The return match will be on Feb. 27 at Sociedad's stadium. Mallorca hadn't made it to the final since winning the Copa in 2003. Sociedad defeated Basque Country rival Athletic in the final in the 2019-20 season. The semifinals is the only Copa stage being played in home-and-away matches. The final will be in April in the La Cartuja Stadium in the southern city of Seville.

Century old stadium site in Brisbane no longer favoured by Olympic officials for 2032 Games

AP ■ BRISBANE

The Australian Olympic Committee apparently doesn't like the idea of rebuilding an aging stadium as one of its centerpiece venues for the 2032 Games. Australian Olympic Committee president Ian Chesterman said in a statement Thursday that there are more creative solutions than rebuilding the Gabba, an iconic Brisbane venue, for the Games, and those will be put to a review committee. Named after the suburb of Woolloongabba where the stadium is located, the Gabba in downtown Brisbane was built in 1895 and was last redeveloped in 2005. Former Brisbane mayor Graham Quirk is leading a two-month 2032 Olympic infrastructure assessment review and the Gabba's reconstruction is at the top of the list. Chesterman's comments come after International Olympic Committee vice-president John Coates - a former AOC president - was quoted as saying the review committee should dump the Gabba. "We've put it to the review committee we should abandon the Gabba and we should look for another site for the athletics," Coates told local media. He's proposed the opening

ceremony be held at 52,000-seat Suncorp Stadium, formerly known as Lang Park, and athletics at the 48,000-capacity Queensland Sport and Athletics Centre, the venue for the 1982 Commonwealth Games. Whether the Gabba should be demolished and reconstructed for the 2032 Games has been debated since a plan was released in November. The Queensland state government unveiled a 2.7 billion Australian dollar (\$1.7 billion) Gabba rebuild that would see the stadium demolished, reconstructed and out of action from 2025 to 2030. It would also force Brisbane's Australian Rules football team the Lions and cricket to find a new home. Opponents have called for its reconstruction to not go ahead because of escalating costs after the plan's initial price tag blew out to almost three times the original estimate. In announcing the review in January, Queensland state Premier Steven Miles said he hoped the independent process could create options that are better value for money. Brisbane won the 2032 hosting rights in July 2021. The bid was led by then-premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, who Miles replaced in December when Palaszczuk resigned as the state leader.

FIH Pro League: Indian women aim to turn tide against USA

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Arresting the free-fall after a hat-trick of defeats will be the top-most agenda of Indian women's hockey team as it gears up to face the United States in its fourth FIH Pro League 2023-24 clash here on Friday. Having failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, the Savita Punia-led women's team's performance had gone from bad to worse in recent times. India lost 1-2 to China, followed by another 1-3 defeat at the hands of The Netherlands. The hosts lost their third match on the trot against the formidable Australia, who blanked them 3-0. Reflecting on the team's early setbacks, skipper Savita said: "Our initial matches have posed formidable challenges, but we're a resilient team. Each defeat has fuelled our determination to



learn, adapt, and come back stronger." The upcoming clash against the USA is an opportunity to showcase our true potential and register our first win in the tournament." On the flip side, the USA had a challenging start to the tournament as well, suffering a comprehensive 0-7 defeat against the Netherlands. Subsequent losses of 0-3 to

Australia and 1-3 to China have added to their woes. The American squad, too, will be eager to bounce back in the tournament. The Indian captain knows the significance of earning the first points in the tournament. "Both the teams are hungry for victory, and we are fully aware of the significance of securing our first points."

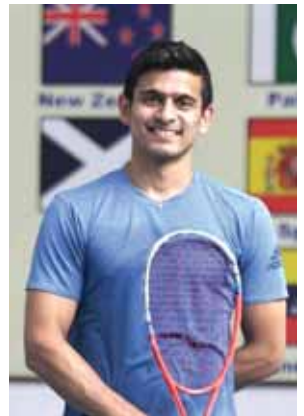
We have analysed our strengths and areas of improvement, and we are ready to implement a strategic approach on the field. Our focus is on playing as a cohesive unit, supporting each other, and executing our game plan effectively." When it comes to their head-to-head record, the USA hold a statistically advantageous position with 10 victories in 16 encounters, while the Indian team has secured four wins, and two matches ended in draws. Speaking on that record, Savita said, "Head-to-head records are historical statistics, but what matters most is the present. We respect our opponents, but our focus is on our game and executing our strategies. The aim is clear - secure our first win in the FIH Pro League 2023-24 and build momentum for the challenges ahead."

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's number one squash player Saurav Ghosal has called for introduction of the sport in schools to "create a huge ecosystem" and recruitment of experts from abroad to train the country's coaches. "Squash should be introduced in the schools, it's a great workout within a rather short span of time. Squash in schools would be great as the kids would be involved, the parents would be involved, and it would create a huge ecosystem for squash," Ghosal said on Wednesday. The first player from the country to win a singles medal at the Commonwealth Games, the 37-year-old Ghosal said that the level

Introduce squash in schools, hire experts to train Indian coaches: Ghosal

today is higher compared to when he started, and that India is very competitive on the world stage. "I started squash more than 25 years ago, the level now is a lot higher and we are extremely competitive on the world stage. The next step is to conquer and dominate at global level," Ghosal said during the merchandise unveiling ceremony of the upcoming Delhi Marathon. "Some of the things that we need to look at is increasing the player base and also



improve the quality of the players. "On the higher performance side we should bring in high-quality coaches (from abroad) so that Indian coaches can learn from them and we can make it sustainable." Ghosal said the people he played alongside for the last many years formed the golden generation of Indian squash and urged his compatriots to remain involved with the sport after retirement. The veteran also expressed delight at squash being

included in the Los Angeles Olympics. **HONOURED TO BE CHOSEN FOR PADMA SHRI: JOSHNA CHINAPPA:** Joshna Chinappa, one of the flagbearers of women's squash in India along with Dipika Pallikal, said that she is honoured to be chosen for the Padma Shri. "I feel honoured to be chosen for the Padma Shri by the central government. I think it has come at the right time and I am very happy that my

efforts have been recognised," she said. Chinappa felt that public adulation and government recognition for sports in the country have increased. "There have been several players - wrestlers, badminton players and the athletes... The way they have become world champions, medalists at the Olympics, I think there is a lot of recognition for athletes from other sports (besides cricket)," She said that squash has been "a big source" of medals for India in the Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games in the last 15 years and the sport has a bright future. Chinappa said that players like Ghosal and Pallikal have laid a very good foundation for squash in India.

KOHLI ABSENCE IS A BLOW FOR INDIA, SAYS HUSSAIN

PTI ■ CHENNAI

A player of the stature of Virat Kohli missing the upcoming Tests against England is a blow not just for the Indian team but also for the series and world cricket in general, feels former skipper Nasser Hussain.

Hussain though supported the Indian maestro for prioritising his private life. Kohli, who withdrew from the first two Tests against England due to personal reasons, is likely to miss the upcoming matches in Rajkot and Ranchi, and remains a doubtful starter for the Dharamsala game too.

The five-match Test series is currently tied at 1-1. "Yeah, well, nothing's confirmed at the moment. There's speculation, whether it's the next two Test matches, they're going to announce their side in the next few hours. Whether it's the next three Test matches, so nothing's confirmed, but it will be a blow. "It'll be a blow for India. It'll be a blow for the series. It'll be a blow for world cricket. It's going to be a special series. It already has been. The first two games have been fascinating," Hussain said on Sky Sports.

Lauding the Indian batter's achievements and contributions to cricket, the former England captain said players such as Kohli deserved to spend some time with family after serving the game with



distinction for over 15 years. "The game needs to look after the likes of Virat Kohli as well. He has been playing international cricket for more than 15 years now, and if he needs a break to be away with family, (to) get some time away from the game, we absolutely wish Virat Kohli all the best,"

Hussain said. "If it means we don't get the mouth-watering possibility of an Anderson versus Kohli contest that we have seen over the years, then so be it. But Kohli and his family and his private life has to come first." Hussain also said that while Kohli is hard to replace, he

expected KL Rahul, who missed the second Test due to pain in his right quadriceps, to return to the playing XI. "Virat Kohli is one of the greatest batters ever to play the game and any series, and any side will miss someone of his stature. It will be a blow for India, but as we

have seen, they have got a very good lot of young batters. "I think, just speculating, KL Rahul, who missed the second game after being brilliant over the last few months, could come back in for India," Hussain added. The third Test will be held in Rajkot from February 15-19,

while the fourth game is in Ranchi from February 23-27. Recently Kohli's close friend and former South African captain AB de Villiers had revealed on his YouTube show that the Indian batting ace is missing in action due to the impending arrival of his second child.

Rehan attributes England spinners success to Stokes leadership

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Exceeding expectations, England's inexperienced spinners have outperformed their seasoned Indian counterparts in the first two Tests, and young Rehan Ahmed attributed it to team environment and Ben Stokes' leadership. The five-match series is level at 1-1 at the moment but, amazingly enough, spin is one area in which the tourists have emerged winners. It is quite remarkable that the trio of Ahmed, Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir have taken more wickets (33) than the formidable group made up of titans such as Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav (23). "That just shows how great the team environment is," Ahmed, 19, was quoted as saying in BBC. "Tommy and Bash, you've seen them come in and not be nervous and that's credit to the team. "The environment and the leadership we have, it does make you kind of forget the players you are playing against - we just focus on what we need to do." Even in terms of economy

rate, the England spin attack is ahead of the Indians. With Stokes and Brendon McCullum at the helm, Ahmed cuts a relaxed figure. "They (Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum) just don't care about how bad things can go. It's always about what good you can get out of it." So if I bowl four bad balls and get a wicket, that's better than bowling 16 good balls in a row," Ahmed said. He became the youngest player to play Test cricket for England when he made his debut at 18 years and 126 days old in Karachi in December 2022, signalling his arrival with a match-turning five-wicket haul in Pakistan's second innings. According to Ahmed, Stokes' astute management skills extends beyond cricket. A teenage British Asian and a practising Muslim in the Bazball surrounding, Ahmed doesn't face any issue getting time off for Friday prayers, even at the expense of training. "I remember a time in Abu Dhabi where there was a team day out on a Friday," said Ahmed.

Secret to our team good performance is team bonding: India U19 Captain

PTI ■ BENONI (SOUTH AFRICA)

The camaraderie in the dressing room has played a significant role in Indian team's dominant run in the U19 World Cup, skipper Uday Sharan said on Thursday and vowed to bring the trophy back home. Defending champions India have not lost a single match in the tournament. They have logged big-margin victories and were not tested till they bumped into hosts South Africa in the semifinals in which they scored a narrow two-wicket win. India have been a force to reckon with in the Under-19 World Cup, reaching the title clash seven times in last nine editions. "It is a dream for all of us to win this tournament. Everyone gets only one Under-19 World Cup and we want to repeat the history. We also want to register our names in history. We are focused on giving our best," Saharan told PTI-Bhasha in an interview.

"I would like to tell the countrymen to continue supporting us like this. We promise to give everything to bring the Cup back." India's power-packed performance in the tournament was highlighted by three 200-plus run margin wins. "The secret to our team's good performance is team bonding. The atmosphere in the dressing room is very friendly. Everyone trusts each other and is ready to help each other. That is why the performance graph has been consistently good," said Saharan, who spent his early days in Sri Ganganagar before shifting to the border town of Fazilka in Punjab. "We are not focusing on rival team, we are concentrating on our own game. We have made a match-by-match strategy and are taking every match seriously," Saharan, who has scored 389 runs in six matches so far, said. Asked if the Indian colt would have revenge on their minds if

they play against Australia since the senior team had lost to them in the ODI World Cup final last year, Saharan said, "I am not thinking anything like that." "We are focusing on our game and we have to give our best. We are playing according to the match conditions. Every match is important because it is the World Cup and all the teams are good." A lot of stalwarts in the senior national team have emerged from the Under-19 World Cup like Mohammad Kaif, Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill and Ravindra Jadeja. Saharan refused comparisons with these stars, saying he won't take pressure of legacy. "I never think about it. I don't think about the past. I just think about how I can give my best for the team and how to get the best out of the team." Chasing a target of 245 runs in the semi-final against South Africa, Saharan pulled the team out of trouble after it had lost four wickets for just 32 runs.

Zee IL T20 gets 46 per cent women viewers: BARC data

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With a reach of 161 million views, a staggering 46 per cent of which being women viewers, Zee Entertainment has announced that the DP World ILT20 league continues to be the world's second most watched franchise-based cricket competition. The tournament garnered an impressive reach of 161 million for its first 18 matches, 56 per cent of the audience being under the age of 30, according to data released by BARC INDIA 2+, TV+OOH, and LIVE+PPL. The company has reported an uptick of 12 per cent among 15+ urban audiences in India compared to the inaugural edition. The time spent on the league, which started on January 19 has surged by an impressive 33 per cent among viewers aged 15 and above in urban India. "This substantial increase in viewing duration emphasizes the league's ability to captivate and retain the



attention of its audience, contributing to a more immersive and rewarding viewer experience," said league's media rights holder ZEE in a statement. The tournament with six teams and 34 matches is being played across three venues in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. The league's six franchise teams include Abu Dhabi

Knight Riders (Kolkata Knight Riders), Desert Vipers (Lancer Capital), Dubai Capitals (GMR), Gulf Giants (Adani Sportsline), MI Emirates (Reliance Industries), and Sharjah Warriors (Capri Global). Some of the world's leading cricketers are taking part in season 2 and they include David Warner, Dasun Shanaka, Rahmanullah

Gurbaz, Sam Billings, David Willey, Sunil Narine, Andre Russell, Alex Hales, Tom Curran, Rovman Powell, Shimron Hetmyer, James Vince, Ambati Rayudu, Corey Anderson, Dwayne Bravo, Trent Boult, Chris Woakes and Martin Gupthill. "We are delighted with the response that the second edition of DP World ILT20 has garnered. It is a

testament of the league's expanding appeal and a growing fan base across India. "The event is escalating global enthusiasm for cricket, and we take immense pride in spearheading this phenomenon," said Rahul Johri, President - Business, South Asia, Zee Entertainment. The star-studded commentary panel of ILT20 include Virender Sehwag, Harbhajan Singh, Rohan Gavaskar, Saba Karim, Nikhil Chopra, Vivek Razdan, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis and Shoaib Akhtar, Alan Wilkins, Simon Doull, Daren Ganga, Danny Morrison and Niall O'Brien, Natalie Germanos, Anjum Chopra, Reema Malhotra. Cricket fans can watch all the action of the T20 league on Zee's 10 linear TV channels: &Pictures, &Pictures HD, Zee Cinema HD, Zee Anmol Cinema, Zee Zest, Zee Ganga, Zee Cinemalu HD, &Flix, &Flix HD, Zee Zest HD and leading OTT platform ZEE5.

Bumrah will be best pacer of T20 World Cup: Philander

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

His ability to hold a line, bowl wicket-taking deliveries without leaking runs along with those lethal yorkers make Jasprit Bumrah the most complete bowler in international cricket, says former South African seamer Vernon Philander, who foresees the Indian outperforming all his contemporaries in this year's T20 World Cup in the Americas. Bumrah on Wednesday became the first Indian pacer to be crowned number one in ICC Test rankings. This was after his magical performance in the second Test against England that yielded nine wickets on a sporting track at Visakhapatnam. Philander, who has played 64 Tests for South Africa with 225 wickets against his name, said

Bumrah doesn't seem to have any chinks in his armour. "Bumrah is the (most) complete bowler at the moment. He has got magnificent skills and he has also learnt the trade of holding a line and length and that is the reason behind his success at the Test level," Philander told 'PTI Bhasha' in an interview on the sidelines of the SA T20 Tournament here. "Initially, he wanted to bowl wicket-taking deliveries all the time and leaked runs but now he has learnt consistency," he pointed out. The T20 World Cup will be held in June across the West Indies and the USA and inaugural champions India would be among the title favourites. Philander said the team will rely heavily on Bumrah as he has become the sort of bowler who can never be written off in



the shortest format. "He swings the new ball, brings the stumps into the play and challenges the batters upfront. He is phenomenal with those change-ups and lethal yorkers and that is the skill set you

want in the T20 World Cup," he explained. "I feel he is going to play a massive part in the tournament and perhaps also be the best seamer," said the veteran

Philander, who is the second fastest ever to reach 50 Test wickets by touching the milestone in just seven games, was also full of praise for Bumrah's pace colleague Mohammed Shami and said

that he "uses his seam beautifully". "...The way he has gone to dominate at the moment is really exciting to see. The plans he had adopted when he came to bowl in South Africa. It is a tough place to bowl and one has to change the mindset from bowling on the flat subcontinental pitches to bowling here," he said. Philander said India seem to have cracked the code as far as producing good fast bowling talent is concerned and a share of the credit goes to former captain Virat Kohli's vision. "Every time India comes here, they seem to be performing better than the previous tour. In the subcontinent, Indian spinners have been winning the games but it's just good to see the Indian team winning in Australia. "That's a very positive sign for

India to produce those sort of bowlers... It is also on the back of great leadership. "Virat Kohli had been a strong leader who was propelling his bowlers to go and learn and get better," said the pacer, referring to India's historic Test series triumph against Australia in 2018-19 under Kohli. Philander enjoyed an excellent record against India at home and took 25 wickets in five Tests (2013 and 2018) at an average of 18. Recalling his face-offs against them, Philander said he considers Kohli the toughest opponent he has ever faced in his career. "For me Virat has been the toughest batsman because of the way he conducts himself. As a bowler, he never gives you an opportunity to settle. From the pure mindset point of view, Virat is a very strong character and as a batsman, he

makes life really difficult for the bowlers," said the 38-year-old. Asked if players, especially bowlers, will be turn up exhausted during the T20 World Cup as it would be happening just after the IPL, Philander said workload management would be the key. "...I feel that you have to manage players as it is a big tournament... You want to make sure that those players get game time but the management of pacers will be the key," he said. He is happy with the good response to SA T20 in South Africa. "It is a wonderfully organised tournament and the quality of cricket is right up there. South Africa Cricket needed this kind of initiative where young players are getting the chance to rub shoulders with the best in the world," he said.