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NEW DELHI, SATURDAY FEBRUARY 10, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹



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BHARAT HONOURS ITS RATNAS

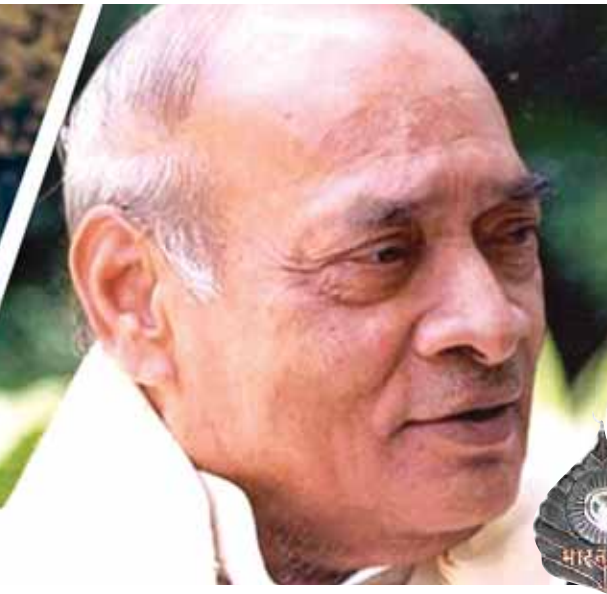
After Advani, now former PMs Charan Singh and PV Narasimha Rao, Science legend MS Swaminathan

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Narendra Modi Government on Friday added three other national luminaries — former Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao, Chaudhary Charan Singh, and agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan — to the list of recipients of the Bharat Ratna awards, bringing the total number of announcements for the nation's highest civilian honour to five within a span of 15 days.

The awards have been conferred upon distinguished personalities, including LK Advani and Karpoori Thakur, which has also changed political alignments ahead of the Lok Sabha polls as the NDA Government is betting on for a hat-trick.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that former Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, as well as agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan, will be honoured with the Bharat Ratna.



pleased to award Bharat Ratna to the three eminent persons. The Modi Government's move to recognise two stalwart politicians who came from non-BJP backgrounds is resonant with political and social messaging. It is expected to boost the BJP's efforts to present itself as a party that represents pan-India interests and aspirations and recognises leading people in different fields. Making the announcements for Rao, whose liberalisation

policies revolutionised the economy, Singh, a champion of farmer causes, and Swaminathan, a globally renowned agricultural scientist, Modi lauded their contributions to the country. The conferring of the highest civilian award to Singh, Rao, and Swaminathan is likely to make a big impact in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, particularly among farmers and Telangana. Today, the politically powerful Jats have the potential of influencing

results in nearly 40 Lok Sabha seats and around 160 Assembly seats, spread across UP, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi. Rao was the Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996 and is known to be the man who heralded the economic liberalisation of India. Singh, a champion of workers and farmers' rights, briefly served as the Prime Minister in 1979. Swaminathan, a renowned scientist, is known as the architect of India's green revolution.

The decision stirred a range of reactions from political figures across party lines, including former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, who said she "welcomes" the announcement of giving the Bharat Ratna to Rao. The Government had earlier named former Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, a champion of backward empowerment, and LK Advani, a founding BJP member credited with charting the course of its rise through the 1990s, for the

country's highest civilian honour. Modi has also sought to send out the message that the ruling BJP, unlike its predecessors at the helm, is not guided by parochial politics in recognising contributions in public life, as the party looks to break new ground during the polls. At five, one more than the four announced in 1999, this is the maximum number of Bharat Ratnas announced for a year. Four of the five awards this year are posthumous.

Advani, 96, is the only one alive. "Narasimha Rao steered India through critical transformations and also enriched its cultural and intellectual heritage," Modi said in his social media posts. Rao's visionary leadership, Modi said, was instrumental in making India economically advanced and laid a solid foundation for its prosperity and growth. "Bharat Ratna to Charan Singh is dedicated to his incomparable contribution to the country,"

the Prime Minister said. "Swaminathan made monumental contributions to the country in agriculture and farmers' welfare," Modi said. He played a pivotal role in helping India achieve self-reliance in agriculture and made outstanding efforts in modernising it, the Prime Minister said.

Singh, a Jat leader from western Uttar Pradesh who was Prime Minister in 1979-80, was one of the pioneers of anti-Congress politics at a time when the party was a hegemonic political force. Congress leader Rao, a Telugu, who was Prime Minister for a full five-year term during 1991-96, is widely recognised for ushering in economic reforms. "It is our Government's fortune that Singh is being honoured with the Bharat Ratna, and it is dedicated to his incomparable contributions to the country," Modi said. Be it as an MLA, as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, or the country's Home Minister, he always sped up the nation-building exercise and also stood strongly against the Emergency, he added. Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had imposed the Emergency in 1975.

Continued on Page 2

Haldwani remains tense

PTI ■ HALDWANI/NEW DELHI

Six rioters were killed in the violence that broke out over the demolition of an illegally built madrasa, officials said Friday as curfew remained enforced in Uttarakhand's Haldwani town.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami visited Haldwani, meeting some of the injured. He termed the violence a "planned attack", and said the stockpiling of arms, stones and petrol bombs suggested this. More than 60 people were hurt Thursday as local residents hurled stones and petrol bombs at municipal workers and the police, forcing many police personnel to seek refuge in a police station which the mob then set on fire.

Seven people, including a journalist, were under treatment Friday at three different hospitals. Three of them were said to be in a serious condition. Others had been discharged. Altogether, six "rioters" were killed, Superintendent of Police (City) Harbans Singh told PTI. Uttarakhand DGP Abhinav Kumar on Friday said action under the stringent National Security Act will be taken against those who attacked police personnel and indulged in arson and vandalism in Haldwani. Haldwani's Banbhoolpura area looked deserted even on Friday.

Global record of voters in Lok Sabha 2024



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Three times the population of the United States, which means 96.88 crore Indians, are enrolled to exercise their franchise to choose the next government at the Centre in the forthcoming general election. "The largest electorate in the world 96.88 crore are registered to vote for the forthcoming general elections in India," the Election Commission (EC) said. Over 2.63 crore new electors have been included in the electoral roll, with about 1.41 crore being women, surpassing the newly-enrolled male voters (1.22 crore) by over 15 per cent, according to the EC. There has been a six per cent increase in registered voters since 2019, when the last Lok Sabha polls were held. According to data shared by the EC, 1.85 crore voters have been identified as above 80 years of age, while the total number of "centenarians" stood at 2.38 lakh. The poll body considers those who are 80 years and above as senior citizens. As of February 8,

Uttar Pradesh has the maximum number of voters at 15.30 crore, while Lakshadweep has over 57,000 registered voters. Of the total voters, 49.72 crore are male and 47.15 crore are female. Over 10.64 lakh advance applications were received from those above 17 years of age for enrollment in the voters' list. People who are not yet 18 will automatically receive their voter identity cards once they attain the age of voting if they apply in advance. The poll body reported that the gender ratio also increased from 940 in 2023 to 948 in 2024. The number of third-gender voters increased from 39.68 thousand in 2014 to a little over 48,000. Simultaneously, more than two crore young electors, spanning the 18-19 and 20-29 year age groups, have been added to the electoral roll. The number of third-gender voters is 48,044. According to EC data, during the verification process, names of 1,65,76,654 deceased, permanently shifted, and duplicate electors

have been deleted from the voters' list. This includes 67,82,642 deceased voters, 75,11,128 permanently shifted or absent voters, and 22,05,685 duplicate voters.

After months of intensive Special Summary Revision 2024 (SSR 2024) exercises and in preparation for the General Elections 2024, the Election Commission of India has published the electoral rolls in all States/UTs across the country, with January 1, 2024, as the qualifying date. This also includes the successful completion of the revision of electoral rolls in Jammu & Kashmir and Assam, following the delimitation of constituencies.

"Over 2.63 crore new electors have been included in the electoral roll, out of which around 1.41 crore are female electors, surpassing the newly enrolled male voters (1.22 crore) by over 15 per cent. The Electoral Roll gender ratio has surged positively, indicating the growing role of women in shaping the democratic fabric of the nation," said the EC. "Special Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs) were appointed at the constituency level to facilitate youth enrollment directly from educational institutions, fostering greater civic engagement among the younger populace," it said. "A commendable effort has been made to support Persons with Disabilities (PwD) by flagging around 88.35 lakh PwD electors in the electoral roll database, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity on polling day," it added.

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Murder in Mumbai

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Hours after Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Abhishek Ghosalkar was shot dead during a Facebook live interaction with people in north Mumbai, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) targeted the BJP-led Government on Friday by going to town with the photographs of the alleged

killer Mauris Noronha alias Mauris Bhai with top leaders, including Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and former Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari. Amid appeals by Government not to politicise the murder of Abhishek Ghosalkar, the Opposition MVA charged that there was a breakdown of law and order in the State.

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Pakistan in turmoil

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan former premier Nawaz Sharif on Friday urged rival political parties to join hands to form a stable coalition Government to rebuild Pakistan, saying all institutions should together play a positive role in bringing the cash-strapped country out of its difficulties.

Addressing the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supporters at the party's central secretariat here, 74-year-old Sharif said his party respects the mandate of all parties, including the independent candidates backed by jailed former premier Imran Khan's party.

Continued on Page 2

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One time settlement scheme for faulty water bills soon: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In order to bring relief to more than 10 lakh consumers receiving inflated water bills, the Delhi Government will soon bring a 'One Time Settlement' Scheme for recasting faulty water bills in the national capital, which will help in unlocking Rs 1,400 crore revenue for the Delhi Jal Board. Once the proposal receives a green signal from the Cabinet, this scheme is expected to benefit almost 40 percent of consumers in Delhi who are currently facing the issue of inflated water bills. The AAP government said that under this scheme, a new bill with re-casted amount will be generated and sent to the consumer.

Consumers can accept the one-time settlement and pay the new bill thereby clearing all previous arrears in one go. The water bill will be waived off for those consumers who have a consuming pattern of less than 20 KL. Addressing a press conference, Delhi Finance Minister Atishi said the problem of faulty water bills is huge with people raising the issue even at public events in front of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. The faulty water bills of consumers will be re-casted as per median reading of the past years. Bills will be re-casted on the basis of two "OK readings" in the previous one year. For those consumers who are unable to produce two "OK



readings" in the past year, reading will be calculated on the basis of the last 5 years. If the problem of faulty meters or bills exceeds 5 years then the bill will be re-casted on the basis of consumption pattern of the neighborhood of the consumer. "There are many reasons for

the Covid-19 pandemic. "Now, around 40 per cent consumers have not been paying their bills. This is also impacting revenue of the DJB. The one-time settlement scheme is expected to earn a revenue of around Rs 1,400 crore to DJB. For availing the scheme, each consumer would require a functional meter. The scheme has been passed by the Delhi Jal Board in its board meeting," she said. Urban Development Minister Saurabh Bhargava has directed that this scheme should be presented before the Cabinet for approval soon. "It is expected to bring the scheme before the Cabinet within 10 days. After Cabinet approval, consumers will get recasted bills

from the next billing cycle and they will get four months to pay their dues," she said. In the last two days, the problem of faulty water bills was raised at two events where Kejriwal was present. He had assured people that the government was working to address the issue and come up with a scheme to settle the bills. Past arrears and Late Payment Surcharge (LPSC) added to the current bills was one of the main reasons for the high water bills. This resulted in more than 10,000 complaints during October - November 2022 in the Delhi Jal Board portal itself. All these have resulted in faulty water bills due to which many consumers have stopped paying their water bills.

Benefit of schemes Kejriwal brings never reach public: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Friday said here due to the fast running meters and corruption of officials of the Delhi Jal Board, lakhs of water consumers have been burdened with pending bills for many years. Sachdeva said Delhiites have seen that for the past few years, the Arvind Kejriwal government brings a scheme for the settlement of water bills before every election, but the benefits never reach the public. The BJP chief said most of these bills belong to properties whose

owners have sold them and now it is a disputed amount that new property owners do not want to pay. Similarly, there are disputes over bills of many industrial consumers who have closed down their industries. When ministers of the Kejriwal government hold press conferences, they show dreams of settling a bill of 1 lakh in a lump sum for 7-8 thousand, but when consumers go to the offices of the Water Department, they are asked for amounts ranging from 40,000 to 60,000, which discourages consumers from settlement, he claimed.

LG sanctions CBI probe against Tihar former officer for aiding Jain in extortion

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has sanctioned a CBI Inquiry under Prevention of Corruption (POC) Act, 1988, against Raj Kumar, then Superintendent of Jail No. 4, Tihar Jail, for aiding former Delhi Minister and AAP Leader, Satyendar Jain in allegedly extorting Rs. 10 crore from Sukash Chandrashekar, who was then also lodged in Tihar Jail. Raj Kumar allegedly helped the high profile extortion racket being run from Tihar Jail, which extorted and received money from Chandrashekar, as protection money, so as to enable him to live peacefully and comfortably in jail. The matter is being investigated by the CBI and the request for prosecution sanction had come to the LG, who is the competent authority in the matter, through the Directorate of Vigilance (DoV), GNCTD. Ex-jail Superintendent Raj Kumar have been accused of extorting a large sum of money from "high profile prisoners", including conman



Sukash Chandrashekar in exchange for protection in jails. The Tihar jail is under the AAP government's jurisdiction. CBI is probing the charges made by Sukash that Jain had extorted and received Rs 10 crore from Sukash Chandrashekar in various tranches during 2018-21 either personally or through his accomplices, including Raj Kumar, as protection money so as to enable Sukash to live peacefully and comfortably in different jails of Delhi (Tihar, Rohini and Mandoli). Raj Kumar was a close associate of Sandeep Goel and aided him in extorting money from Chandrashekar and even himself tried to extort money from the conman through

Farmers back to sit in protest after failed march to Parliament

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after an unsuccessful bid to march to the Parliament, protesting farmers were Friday back outside offices of local authorities in Noida and Greater Noida for a sit-in. The protestors, led by the Bharatiya Kisan Parishad (BKP), said they will continue the protest as before and once again attempt to march to Delhi after the Budget Session of Parliament is over. Their decision came after a meeting with police and the district administration, which, they said, did not yield any outcome. The meeting, however, yielded no result. Bracing for another agitation by farmers, police are fortifying the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh and Delhi-Haryana borders with barricades and deploying more than 5,000 security personnel, a senior police officer said here on Friday. On Thursday, thousands of farmers from around 100 villages of Noida and Greater Noida on Thursday took to the streets seeking hiked compensation for lands acquired by the government, bringing traffic to a standstill in several parts of



Delhi-NCR as they made an unsuccessful bid to march towards Parliament. Several farmer associations, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, have called for another protest on February 13 to demand a law guaranteeing a minimum support price (MSP), one of the conditions they had set when they agreed to withdraw their agitation against the now repealed farm laws in 2021. Besides a legal guarantee for an MSP, the farmers are also demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pensions for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiv-

Traffic advisory issued for routes to be affected by World Book Fair

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Friday issued a traffic advisory on the routes likely to be affected due to the World Book Fair at Pragati Maidan in central Delhi, officials said. New Delhi World Book Fair 2024 is being organised at Pragati Maidan from February 10-18. The book fair is likely to attract around 25,000 to 30,000 visitors on each day and on weekends, it could rise to around 40,000 per day, it said. Traffic congestion is expected due to the fair at Mathura Road, Bhairon Marg, Ring Road, Shershah Road and Purana Quila Road, the traffic advisory said. Motorists are requested to avoid these roads to ensure hassle-free journey accordingly, it stated. The traffic police said that entry of visitors will be from gate number 4 and 10. There would be no entry of visitors from gate number 5-B, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Entry for exhibitors will be from gate number 1, 5B and 10. Entry for ITPO officials will be from gate number 9, 10 and 1, they said. To ensure smooth traffic management in the area of Pragati Maidan, no vehicle will be allowed to halt or park anywhere on Mathura Road and Bhairon Marg, and no vehicle of visitors will be allowed to be parked on Shershah Road, Purana Quila Road, Bhagwan Das Road and Tilak Marg, the advisory said. Vehicles found parked on the above roads shall be towed away and prosecuted as per Motor Vehicle Act. Towed vehicles would be parked in traffic pit in front of Bhairon Mandir, Bhairon Marg, it said. People are requested to avail public transport to reach Pragati Maidan. Those travelling by metro may get down at Supreme Court Metro Station and enter through gate number 10. People may also deboard at Mandi House Metro Station and walk, the advisory stated. Visitors are advised to park their vehicles in basement parking number 1, Bhairon Mandir parking, Bhairon Road, Delhi Zoo Parking, ITPO and exit near gate number 8, ITPO, the advisory stated.

DMRC orders inspection of all elevated stations along Pink Line

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's managing director on Friday issued directions to inspect the parapets installed at all elevated stations on the Pink Line, officials said on Friday. The development came a day after a portion of a wall of the elevated Gokulpuri Metro Station in northeast Delhi collapsed killing a person and injuring four others. DMRC's Managing Director Vikas Kumar on Friday held a detailed review meeting regarding the Gokulpuri incident with the heads of concerned departments. "The MD issued directions that the parapets installed on the Pink Line of the DMRC at all the elevated stations should be inspected in detail to avoid such incidents," said Anuj Dayal, principal executive director, Corporate Communications, DMRC. "In case, any corrective action

is required at any station, the same should be carried out after making a detailed method statement depending upon the situation at the concerned sites," Dayal said. Any fixes required at the stations should cause minimum inconvenience to the passengers and the general public, Dayal said, adding that all necessary safety precautions should be adequately taken. An internal review has already been initiated by the DMRC. The MD also visited the Gokulpuri Metro Station last evening with other senior officials to personally take stock of the situation, he added. The DMRC on Thursday announced a compensation of Rs 25 lakh for the family of the 53-year-old man who died in the Gokulpuri incident. The department declared Rs 5 lakh compensation for the grievously injured and Rs 1 lakh for those who received minor injuries.

Pension amount of retired DTC employees deposited: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday announced that the pension amount of retired DTC employees, pending for nearly one-and-a-half years, has been deposited in their accounts. The move is likely to impact over 20,000 retired employees of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC). The chief minister acknowledged that the pensioners were experiencing problems in getting their pension, and rued about how the BJP-led centre interferes in the working of the Delhi government. "I know that many of you are annoyed. Anger arises only from those close to us, and your anger is justified. From the last one to one-and-a-half years, you are facing troubles in receiving your pensions," Kejriwal said in a video message on X. The Chief Minister stated that he holds himself responsible for all the griev-



ances of retired DTC employees. In 2015, our government was formed, he said, and recalled how even before that the retired employees had to face a lot of hardships to get their pension. "The previous government said that if the DTC employees want a pension, then the DTC should generate its funds. The DTC could not generate funds since it didn't have funds," Kejriwal said. "Since we assumed power, we started giving you pension from the Delhi Government's budget. And since the DTC employees were receiving their pensions each month without any interruptions. For the last one to one-and-a-half years, you are facing troubles and I seek your apology," he added. Kejriwal said that they called a special assembly session to increase the budget for pension. "Keep faith in me. As long as Kejriwal is there, he'll not let your pensions stall. He will ensure you receive your entire pension. It may be delayed by a month or two since we do not have complete power," Kejriwal said.

Gaon Chalo Abhiyan will prove to be milestone in boosting vote share: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday said its Gaon Chalo Abhiyan will prove to be a "milestone" in increasing its vote share, with lakhs of party workers reaching out to the voters across all villages in the country under the campaign seeking their support in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Addressing a press conference here, BJP national general secretary Dushyant Gautam said the party has formed 12 lakh 'tolis' (teams) of its workers to drive the campaign across all villages falling under 12 lakh units created by the party in rural India to achieve its goal. The BJP has also appointed 12 lakh workers as its convensors to ensure proper implementation of the party's poll strategy in their respective units, he said. As many as 12 lakh party workers have been assigned to monitor and oversee the implementation of the party's campaign in coordination with



their respective teams, Gautam said, adding they will camp in their respective units to ensure effective implementation of the party's poll strategy under the campaign. "During their 'pravaas', these party workers will reach every voter, every household," he told reporters at the BJP headquarters here sharing details of the campaign. Gautam said the party's Gaon Chalo Abhiyan, which started on February 4 to conclude on February 11, will continue till

the Lok Sabha elections are held. BJP president JP Nadha had launched a workshop of the party workers last month ahead of the launch of the party's 'Gaon Chalo Abhiyan'. "This Abhiyan will prove to be a milestone with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president JP Nadha setting the target of increasing the party's vote share to 10 per cent in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections," Gautam said. "With this campaign, we will reach at least 36 crore voters," he added.

Will open as many schools in city as number of summons sent: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said providing quality education is his government's goal and asserted that he will open as many schools in the city as the number of summons sent to him by probe agencies. After laying the foundation stone of a government school building in Mayur Vihar Phase III, Kejriwal alleged that the BJP-led Centre has unleashed all its probe agencies against him as though he was the "biggest terrorist" of the country. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader has been asked to appear before a city court on February 17 in connection with a complaint case filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED)

against him. Kejriwal has skipped five summonses issued against him by the federal agency for questioning in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam. The chief minister asserted that providing quality education to all children will eradicate poverty within a generation and said his government is opening schools after schools in Delhi to achieve that goal. The condition of the government schools in the national capital and education was hopeless earlier and the children of poor people had no future, he claimed. "We have opened so many magnificent schools since the AAP government was formed in Delhi. Several new schools have been inaugurated recently, including in Burari, Rohini

and Palam, in which 1.5 lakh children will get education," he said. Everyone will get free and quality education in Delhi, the chief minister said, adding that new school buildings are being built replacing the old ones. The new schools will have the best infrastructure, including laboratories, libraries, elevators and activity rooms, he said. "We are fulfilling Dr (BR) Ambedkar's dream of providing education to all children," Kejriwal said. He said two years ago, his government proposed a scheme for doorstep delivery of ration but the Centre did not allow it. "They obstructed it through the LG. But we are going to do doorstep delivery of ration in Punjab from Saturday," the AAP leader said.

NDMC to hold two days Tulip Festival from today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) is organising 2nd Edition of its Tulip Festival this year from February 10-21 in the lawns of Shanti Path, Chanakypuri here after the success and appreciation from the large public of different walks of life last year. The Tulip festival will include a series of events like Tulip Walk to witness an exhibition on Tulips for the general public and flower lovers, Photo Competition for the actively engaged with the beauty of flowers and a Music Event for the music lovers in the background of flowers, officials said here on Friday. The Tulip Walk will be held on the Lawns of the Shantipath on Saturday. The NDMC is also organising a photography competition on the Tulip beautification and invites photography



enthusiasts to click pictures of planted tulips and participate in the Photography Contest. The Rules and Regulation for the photography competition is available at NDMC website. The NDMC will judge the three best pictures everyday and upload the three best photos of the day on its social media platforms. At the conclusion of the photography competition, the best judged photograph will be awarded. The NDMC will also organize Tulip Indo-Dutch Music event

and gardens, NDMC Headquarters, Windsor Place roundabout, the vicinity of the V i c e President's Bungalow, 11 Murti, and significant stretches of Shanti Path underscoring N D M C ' s commitment to enhancing New Delhi's beauty, positivity, and overall experience. The tulips are showcasing its beauty in eight distinct colors - white, yellow, red, pink, orange, purple, black and yellow-red transforming these spaces into captivating visual spectacles in the NDMC area.

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SECRETARY

BJP hails Centre for giving Bharat Ratna to three icons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday hailed the Centre's decision to confer the Bharat Ratna on former Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh as well as agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan, saying it shows that the Narendra Modi Government appreciates people's contributions rising above party lines.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said it is a testament to the nation's profound sense of gratitude towards the great souls. "Bharat Ratna to Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao is a befitting tribute to the legendary statesman who shaped the history of our nation with an iconoclastic vision, intellect, and statesmanship. The contributions of PV Narasimha Rao Ji in navigating our economy safely through one of the most turbulent times to an era of inclusive progress will always be remembered.

"As we celebrate the versatile leadership of PV Narasimha Rao Ji, I also express my heart-

felt gratitude to PM Shri @narendramodi Ji for the decision to honour the political and intellectual giant with the most prestigious award," Shah wrote on X. He also said he was extremely happy that Charan Singh is being honoured with Bharat Ratna.

He said Singh, who was dedicated to farmers throughout his life, did many works for the welfare of farmers. "Chaudhary Sahab remained dedicated to preserving democratic values throughout his life and he fought the Emergency boldly. Through his decisions, he told the entire country that a farmer's son can take decisions ranging from the country's livelihood to policy. I express my gratitude to the Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji for honouring crores of farmers and hardworking people of the country through the honour of Chaudhary Sahab," he said in another post in Hindi.

On Swaminathan, Shah said an academician par excellence, his quests not only led to ground breaking research works but also shaped numerous brilliant minds to contin-



ue the legacy. "Honouring the illustrious Dr MS Swaminathan Ji with the Bharat Ratna is a testament to our nation's profound sense of gratitude towards the great souls who laid the foundation of its progress. Our history remembers Swaminathan Ji as a rare genius whose scientific prowess accomplished the Herculean task of leading our nation from an era of food crisis to food security... On this momentous occasion, I thank PM Shri @narendramodi Ji for the historic decision to adorn our icon with the highest civilian award," he said in another post.

In a post on X, BJP president J P Nadda said, "I join our fel-

low countrymen in celebrating the inspiring leadership and legacy of P V Narasimha Rao Garu as he is being conferred the Bharat Ratna. I offer my sincere gratitude to PM Narendra Modi ji for this decision." He said Rao had deftly anchored the Indian economy through one of its worst crises and opened the doors for rapid economic progress. He was a visionary statesman who possessed profound intellect and "contributed immensely towards securing our national interests".

The BJP chief congratulated the government for its decision to honour Chaudhary Charan Singh with the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, and said the work done by the former prime minister for the all-round progress of farmers and the agricultural sector is "unforgettable".

"...He is a true representative of our social and cultural values. He fought to protect democracy during the Emergency. Many political parties created from his political legacy are today strengthening and enriching our democracy," Nadda said. He expressed his gratitude to Modi for "this historic decision dedicated to his contribution in nation building and salute Chaudhary Charan Singh ji." Nadda said the decision to confer the Bharat Ratna on Swaminathan is a "fitting tribute to his legacy".

"His monumental efforts in the field of agricultural research helped millions of people escape the clutches of hunger and poverty. His contribution to furthering the scope of innovation for the betterment of the people is an inspiration to our scientific community," the BJP chief said, expressing gratitude to Modi for "bestowing" the honour on him.

Leaders cutting across party lines welcome announcement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Leaders cutting across party lines welcomed the announcement of Bharat Ratna for P V Narasimha Rao, Chaudhary Charan Singh and M S Swaminathan on Friday and said they deserved the honour.

The Congress too welcomed the decision to confer Bharat Ratna on former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Charan Singh and Green Revolution pioneer M S Swaminathan, saying they were, are and will always be "Bharat ke Ratna" as their contribution was unprecedented.

Congress leader Rajeev Shukla, however, said the BJP-led Centre is honouring Rao, while it has also brought a "white paper" on the economy

during the Government of Manmohan Singh, who was the Finance Minister under Rao.

"We welcome the announcement, they deserve it. P V Narasimha Rao has made an immense contribution in improving the country's economy, Manmohan Singhji was in his cabinet.

On one hand, they are giving Bharat Ratna to Narasimha Rao, on the other, they are bringing a white paper against the government of Manmohan Singh, who had implemented the economic reforms brought by Rao," Shukla said.

Baghpat MP Satya Pal Singh called Chaudhary Charan Singh a "messiah" for farmers. "Chaudhary Charan Singh was a messiah for farmers. I thank Prime Minister Modi on behalf of the karmabhoomi of Singh. I also welcome the

honour given to P V Narasimha Rao and M S Swaminathan. This government is giving recognition to those who were ignored by the previous governments," he said.

Janata Dal (United) MP Rajeev Ranjan Singh described the recipients of the country's highest civilian honour as "gems" of India.

"They are gems of India who have been given Bharat Ratna. Not just the three names announced today, Karpuri Thakur and L K Advani, whose names were announced some days ago, all of them are gems," he said.

However, the Opposition party also attacked the BJP-led government, saying it is "silent" on giving a legal status to a minimum support price on crops to farmers based on the Swaminathan formula.

PV's daughter hails PM for recognition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's daughter and BRS MLC Vani Devi on Thursday appreciated Prime Minister Narendra Modi for seeing beyond party lines in recognising the late Congress leader with the Bharat Ratna, and said that although the award has come "slightly" late, it's ok because it is the highest civilian honour.

Narasimha Rao belongs to the whole nation, she said. "Everyone is happy. He is not only a son of Telugu soil but he belongs to the whole nation," she said.

Narasimha Rao, who became Prime Minister when the country was facing tough times, implemented reforms that were recognised by the whole world, she said.

The Prime Minister from the Congress had initiated reforms and found permanent solutions to problems in sectors as varied as economy and external affairs, she said.

Commending Prime Minister Modi's gesture of awarding the Bharat Ratna to a stalwart of an opposition party, Vani Devi said "Beyond parties, recognising PV and conferring Bharat Ratna shows the good values, manners of our Prime



Minister?"

She, however, pointed out that the award could have come sooner. "Though there is a slight delay, it's ok. Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian honour. Telangana people are very happy over Bharat Ratna being conferred upon Narasimha Rao.

"The family members are overwhelmed. We are very excited," she added.

The BRS MLC also lauded the previous government of her party led by former Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, for having celebrated the birth centenary of Narasimha Rao on a grand scale.

Narasimha Rao was the first leader from the southern states to become Prime Minister, she recalled. She said she was getting calls from Maharashtra and Odisha as he was elected as a Member of Parliament from those States.

Dhankhar takes serious note of TMC MP raising voice in House

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday took serious note of TMC member Saket Gokhale's raising his voice in the House and warned him against repeating the "indecorous" behaviour. The Chairman fell short of naming the TMC member when he kept raising his voice in the house during question hour and asked TMC floor leader Sukhendu Sekhar Ray to see him in his chamber during the day.

Gokhale had asked a supplementary question on overcrowding of trains and steps taken by the government to increase the capacity of trains. However, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told him that his supplementary question did not pertain to the question since it was related to the implementation of Kotipalli-Narasapur railway project, and asked him to take an orientation course instead.

"I request your kind self to have an orientation course for the honourable member because when a supplementary question has to be asked, that has to be related to the questions," the minister said.

Gokhale took offence to these



remarks of Vaishnav and started raising his voice.

"Mr Gokhale, your conduct is ignoble, indecorous, against rules. Your party leaders need to enlighten you," the chairman said, asking Sukhendu Sekhar Ray to speak.

"I am extremely pained. It is expected of the floor leader to enlighten the young member. If he makes it a habit day in and day out, force my hands. This is not a mileage matter.

"Mr Ray, I strongly appeal to you to take up the matter in your parliamentary party, take up the matter with your leadership. I have the highest regard for all political parties. I want this house to make the government accountable but you can't be a part of the shouting brigade and that is also getting into an absolutely irrational approach," the chairman said.

Ray in his response said the question raised by his party member may not be related to the main question, but the minister could have said that since it is not related to the question he is not answering.

"Instead, he in his excitement said he should take an orientation course. I am not supporting what my member has said."

The Chairman said, "I would urge Mr Sukhendu Sekhar Ray to make it convenient to see me in the chamber today. I take a very serious view of the matter."

Dhankhar said such conduct should not be repeated so that the public pays up is not misperceived.

Meanwhile, Gokhale said the Centre was "imposing" Hindi

over English and other regional languages in government business, holding that this was against the federal structure.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour, Gokhale demanded that English must be used for government business. The TMC member pointed out that, at the start of the current Budget session of the Meghalaya assembly, it was announced that the Governor would deliver his address to the House in Hindi. The BJP leaders in Meghalaya supported this announcement, saying Hindi is our national language, he said. Gokhale said the official language of the state of Meghalaya is English.

Gokhale said the government has recently passed three new criminal laws in Parliament and these laws have been given very complicated Hindi names. He urged that English must be used for government business that extends to all of India, including non-Hindi speaking states.

After his remarks, Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar told Gokhale that he has taken oath under the Constitution. The Chairman said Article 351 of the Constitution provides that it shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language.

PM Modi surprises MPs with impromptu lunch at Parliament canteen

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday made an unexpected gesture that pleasantly surprised his fellow Members of Parliament. During a seemingly ordinary day at the Parliament canteen, PM Modi invited some MPs belonging to different parties to join him for an impromptu lunch at the Parliament canteen, creating an atmosphere of camaraderie and informality rarely seen in the halls of power.

The menu was a testament to Modi's preference for simple, vegetarian fare—a preference he has maintained even during his travels, as evidenced by his choice of dishes like Harees (wheat) and dates salad during his visit to the UAE. At the Parliament canteen, the spread included wholesome Indian staples such as rice, daal, khichdi, and til ka laddoo, all served at a modest cost of Rs 29.

The lunch was not just about food; it was an opportunity for cross-party dialogue and personal interaction with the Prime Minister.



"Am not going to punish you at all, come with me," PM Modi was quoted as saying to the MPs.

PM Modi also discussed the significance of the Abu Dhabi temple project, for which he laid the foundation stone in 2018, highlighting India's soft power. The casual and cordial nature of the meeting left a lasting impression on the MPs, with one remarking on the good gesture and another expressing how it didn't feel like sitting with the Prime Minister, but rather a more relaxed and approachable figure.

BJD leader Sasmit Patra, RSP leader N K Premachandran, TDP's K Ram Mohan Naidu, BSP's Ritesh Pandey and some BJP leaders, including Union minister L Murugan and Heena Gavit, were with Modi as they had lunch together.

iPhone attack issue: Submit phone, cooperate in investigation, Vaishnav tells Opposition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnav on Friday urged the Opposition to submit their phones and cooperate in investigation to find the truth over Apple allegedly sending a message to them about "state-sponsored hackers" trying to attack their iPhones.

Making this assertion in the Rajya Sabha, he also said the government is bringing laws and is taking other steps to make social media platforms more accountable for any slanderous content posted on their platforms.

Replying to supplementaries during the Question Hour in the Upper House, Vaishnav asserted that only making allegations regarding alleged hacking will not work and there must be cooperation with the law enforcement agencies.

He was responding to Priyanka Chaturvedi (Shiv Sena UBT) who said that on October 30 last year, she along with other Opposition MPs had received an SMS and email from Apple with a message that said "state-sponsored attackers may be attacking your iPhone".

"In relation to that, I had written a letter to the minister on the same day on the issue. It has been nearly four months, but there has been no reply," Chaturvedi said.

Vaishnav said if anyone feels that there is a problem in their phone, India has a very robust institutional mechanism through CERT-In, which is a highly technical organisation,



absolutely purely technical organisation for technical examination.

"You please give your phone. I have said openly, in public through a press conference that if any honourable member or any honourable citizen of the country has any issue related to any hacking of their phone or something, kindly submit your phone, kindly share that information, kindly share the details, we will get it technically examined," the minister said.

"It can't be that only allegations are made. If allegations are made, then you have to cooperate with the law enforcement agencies, the structure and the system. One way doesn't work," he further said.

The minister reiterated that he has requested the same through a press conference and in the Upper House itself when the Post Office Bill was discussed. The government is bringing laws and is taking other steps to make social media platforms more accountable for any slanderous content posted on their platforms, he said.

The minister, who was responding to supplementaries during question hour, said the government is amending inter-

mediary rules for social media to tackle the menace of misinformation and deep fake.

"Yes, we are amending the intermediary rules. The reason for that is the deep fake issues have come up in a very big way," the minister told the house. He added, "With the spread of misinformation and deep fakes, we must take strict and urgent action to ensure that this menace is removed. So we are amending the intermediary rules. We are coming up with provisions where there is a significant responsibility bestowed on the social media platforms so that they can detect deep fakes, they can detect misinformation and take early action." He said most of the social media platforms are already moderating a lot of content and these sites are no longer a pure platform they were 30 years back.

Entire global regulatory body is reaching a matter, a consensus on the matter, Vaishnav said, and urged the members of the house too to develop some sort of consensus on the need for more responsibility from social media portals for what they allow on their platforms. "We are creating an institu-

Parliament clears historic J&K ST quota and two other Bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Parliament on Friday cleared a Bill to add four groups including Paddari and Pahari in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir with the Rajya Sabha passing it. The House approved the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which adds two other communities — Gadda Brahmin and Koli — to the Scheduled Tribes list.

The Upper House also cleared the Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Castes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024 which adds two other communities — Gadda Brahmin and Koli — to the Scheduled Tribes list.

The Upper House also cleared the Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Castes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024 by voice vote.

The Lok Sabha had cleared the bills earlier this week.

The Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 seeks to provide reservation to Other Backward Classes in panchayats and municipalities in Jammu and Kashmir and bring consistency in the local body laws of the Union territory with the provisions of the Constitution. Currently, there is no provision for reservation of seats for OBCs in panchayats and municipalities in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024, adds Valmiki community as a synonym of Chura, Balmiki, Bhangi, and Mehtar communities in the list of Scheduled Castes in Jammu and Kashmir. The bill seeks to amend the



Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Castes Order of 1956, which lists the castes deemed to be Scheduled Castes in Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

The three bills were taken simultaneously for discussion and passage in the Upper House.

Replying to the discussion on the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Minister of Tribal Affairs Arjun Munda said the bill seeks to give justice to the communities who were demanding ST status for long. "The scrapping of Article 370 has allowed us to bring these laws," he noted.

Replying to the Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityananda Rai said the government has taken several steps for the welfare of the OBCs in the Union territory and this amendment is another step in that direction.

There are three main amendments to the bill. Firstly, the bill ensures reservation for OBCs in panchayats and municipal

White Paper on economy white lie paper, alleges Congress



The Congress on Friday alleged that the Modi Government's white paper on the economy was a "white lie paper", and asserted that it should have come out with such a document on issues such as unemployment, demonetisation, border tensions and Manipur.

Former Union Minister and Congress Lok Sabha MP Manish Tewari called the White Paper brought by the government a "political manifesto", adding that the UPA enacted Acts like the Right to Information, Right to Education, Right to Food and MGNREGA that strengthened the social, political and economic foundation of the country.

Participating in a debate on the White Paper presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman comparing the UPA and NDA regimes, Tewari said she should talk about the achievements of her government instead.

"Tewari called the White Paper a 'political manifesto', and said that was proved by its timing ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

In black and white

The Centre's White Paper calls the UPA regime a 'lost decade' over its economic mismanagement

As promised, the Modi Government is out with a White Paper on the fiscal mismanagement in the UPA era, labelling it a "lost decade". It points to various policy lapses, including economic imprudence, red tape and sluggish reforms, which purportedly stunted economic growth and left a legacy of unresolved structural challenges. With statistical analyses and historical comparisons, the paper paints a picture of the contrast between the perceived stagnation under the UPA rule and the strides made under the current administration. Indeed, the incumbent Government has done well on many counts. The Modi Government's economic achievements include significant reforms such as the implementation of GST, initiatives to improve ease of doing business, and financial inclusion programmes like Jan Dhan Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. Infrastructure development schemes like Bharatmala and Sagarmala, along with digital initiatives under Digital India, have aimed to modernise and connect the nation. Efforts to attract foreign investment, promote startups and focus on rural development through schemes like PMAY and PMKSY have also been notable. These measures collectively reflect the Government's commitment to fostering inclusive economic growth, innovation and development, although challenges such as unemployment and agrarian distress persist. However, the Opposition Congress swiftly responded with a 'black paper', countering the Government's claims and highlighting what it deems as the failures of the incumbent regime. The 'black paper' accuses the Government of exacerbating economic inequalities, neglecting social welfare programmes and presiding over a period of economic downturn characterised by job losses, agrarian distress and inflationary pressures. It seeks to challenge the narrative of economic prosperity propagated by the ruling party, emphasising instead the lived hardships of ordinary citizens. Indeed, economic distress has been palpable across various segments of society during the Modi regime. While the Government touts ambitious initiatives such as 'Make in India' and 'Digital India', the ground reality for many remains one of job scarcity, underemployment and wage stagnation. The agrarian sector, often hailed as the backbone of the Indian economy, continues to face challenges ranging from being rain-dependent to mounting debt burdens, driving many farmers to despair and destitution. Despite the Government stimulus packages, the impact of the recent pandemic lingers, with many struggling to rebuild their livelihoods. This being an election year, such allegations and counter-allegations were expected and, in fact, would become more scathing in the coming weeks. The sad part is that each side would amplify the other's follies while overstating one's achievements. In this cacophony, it is imperative for policymakers to listen to people's concerns, address their grievances and chart a path towards inclusive and sustainable development. Meanwhile, the voters are well advised to use their discretion.



The Pioneer reported on February 5, 2024, a shocking act of cruelty in which a child living in a high-rise building in Gaur City in Greater NOIDA, Uttar Pradesh, threw a puppy down from a height, killing it. Neither the adult who was allegedly with him, nor any of the passers-by, stopped him. A People for Animals (PFA) volunteer, Surabhi Rawat, has filed a FIR against unknown persons perpetrating the horrendous act. Registered by the Greater NOIDA police, it calls for the child's appearance before a juvenile court and an assessment of his mental state. The Pioneer report quotes PFA trustee, Ambika Shukla, expressing concern about the child's lack of feeling, and saying, "It reveals a psychopathic tendency that must be dealt with urgently lest we find a monster in our midst. Those who hurt and abuse animals set a dangerous example that can lead to tragic consequences..." She is right, and it is not just a dangerous example but a very dangerous indication. The Pioneer report quotes PFA trustee, Ambika Shukla, expressing concern about the child's lack of feeling, and saying, "It reveals a psychopathic tendency that must be dealt with urgently lest we find a monster in our midst. Those who hurt and abuse animals set a dangerous example that can lead to tragic consequences..." She is right, and it is not just a dangerous example but a very dangerous indication.

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PICTALK



Devotees take a holy dip in the Ganga river during the annual religious 'Magh Mela' festival, in Prayagraj

The killing of a puppy: Murder most foul



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

The heartless and brutal killing of a puppy by a child in Greater NOIDA must cause serious concern and introspection

The Pioneer reported on February 5, 2024, a shocking act of cruelty in which a child living in a high-rise building in Gaur City in Greater NOIDA, Uttar Pradesh, threw a puppy down from a height, killing it. Neither the adult who was allegedly with him, nor any of the passers-by, stopped him. A People for Animals (PFA) volunteer, Surabhi Rawat, has filed a FIR against unknown persons perpetrating the horrendous act. Registered by the Greater NOIDA police, it calls for the child's appearance before a juvenile court and an assessment of his mental state. The Pioneer report quotes PFA trustee, Ambika Shukla, expressing concern about the child's lack of feeling, and saying, "It reveals a psychopathic tendency that must be dealt with urgently lest we find a monster in our midst. Those who hurt and abuse animals set a dangerous example that can lead to tragic consequences..." She is right, and it is not just a dangerous example but a very dangerous indication.



Christopher Hensley write, "Since the late 1970s, the FBI has considered animal cruelty to be a possible indicator of future serial murder. The FBI documented the connection between cruelty to animals and serial murder following a study of 35 imprisoned serial murderers. The convicted murderers were asked questions regarding their childhood cruelty toward animals. More than half of the serial murderers admitted to hurting or torturing animals as children or adolescents." One tortures or hurts animals or humans out of cruelty, the primary cause of which is hatred, conscious or subconscious. Hatred can be directed against individual human beings or animals, the latter in general or particular species thereof. Hatred can target groups of people because of their ethnicity, religion, ideological or political beliefs or caste. Hatred causes not only crimes like murder or assault against individuals but rioting against groups of people or, in the worst instance, genocide, as by Pakistan in Bangladesh during the latter's struggle for liberation from Islamabad's colonial rule in 1971. The child, who murdered the puppy, seems to be growing up in an environment awash with hatred. The Pioneer report



A SOCIETY, WHERE HATRED AND ANGER ARE WIDESPREAD, CAN BE THE SEEDBED OF A SINISTER IDEOLOGY LIKE NAZISM BESIDES PRODUCING A LEADER LIKE HITLER AND A PEOPLE READY TO RESPOND TO HIS FULMINATIONS

quotes Surabhi Rawat as saying, "In the same society, just days ago, a person intentionally crushed a puppy under his vehicle. Another puppy was found dead in suspicious circumstances, possibly poisoned. An autopsy will be conducted. The reason for such brutal actions against puppies is the hatred spewed on the society's WhatsApp group. Kids nowadays have phones and get easily influenced by adults who indulge in fear-mongering and spread hatred towards stray animals throughout the day." The child here may not turn into a serial killer or a criminal of any other kind. It is, however, not just a question of what he becomes. The conduct of the passers-by, who did nothing to stop him or perhaps even tacitly approved of his action, is worrying. It reflects an insensitivity to cruelty and a disinclination to face the consequences of intervening or even undergoing the exertion involved in the process. All this is a part of a mindset that has prevented action that, at global and national levels, might have aborted the rise of dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. It would be worthwhile here to recall pastor Martin Neimoller's famous words. "First they came for the Communists/ And I did not speak out/

Because I was not a Communist. "Then they came for the Socialists/ And I did not speak out/ Because I was not a Socialist "Then they came for the trade unionists/ And I did not speak out/ Because I was not a trade unionist. "Then they came for the Jews/ And I did not speak out/ Because I was not a Jew "Then they came for me/ And there was no one left/ To speak out for me." One needs to speak out against cruelty to animals which is rooted in hatred. A society, where hatred and anger are widespread, can be the seedbed of a sinister ideology like Nazism besides producing a leader like Hitler and a people ready to respond to his fulminations. The result in Germany was a political order like the Third Reich marked by concentration camps and genocide of Jews. Hence, one needs to remember the words of the German philosopher Theodor Adorno, "Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals." (The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Report on malnourished children



As per the report, more than 5.70 lakh children in Gujarat are malnourished, the Gujarat assembly was informed on Wednesday, by the government. In the set of questions raised by Congress MLAs during question hour, women and child development

minister Bhanuben Babariya said of the 5.70 lakh malnourished children in the state, nearly 4.38 lakh children are underweight, while 1.31 lakh fell in the 'severely underweight' category. The highly urbanised district of Ahmedabad accounted for the highest number of malnourished children (56,941), followed by tribal-dominated Dahod (51,321), Banaskantha (48,866), Panchmahal (31,512), Kheda (28,800), Surat (26,682) and Bhavnagar (26,128). Babariya stated in written replies, providing data until end-2023. In one year, as many as 9,634 malnourished children were added in Kheda district, which was the highest in Gujarat. Kheda was followed by Ahmedabad (3,516 children), Bharuch (1,584) and Valsad (1,335). With this Gujarat government has failed to save its children who are dying of hunger. Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

possible which can mitigate the terrorism in the union territory of India. SK Khosla | Chandigarh

POWER SHORTAGE IN MAHARASHTRA

Sir — This year the seasonal rainfall in Maharashtra is less than the average, and many dams and lakes in Maharashtra have not been able to fill their full capacity. The capacity of the Koyana dam is 105 TMC, but only 90 TMC of water was stored in that dam, out of which 67.50 TMC of water is used for power generation. This year, due to the lack of water in the dam, 9 to 10 TMC of water will be reduced for power generation, as a result of which, there are signs of a reduction in power generation of about 250 to 300 Megawatts. In other parts of the state, there are hydropower plants also, due to lack of water, power generation will be reduced. The total electricity generation in the state is 13 thousand 152 MW, of which 9540 MW is thermal, 3688 MW is hydroelectric, and 672 MW is wind energy, considering the electricity demand of

the state, it is 17 to 23 thousand Megawatts. The state gets about 4 to 10 thousand megawatts of electricity from other states or the National Grid. Looking at all these statistics, there is still a huge scope for solar energy. You get this electricity from the heat of the sun. But to achieve this, a large amount of expenditure is required, even today, solar energy is being used on a large scale in many hospitals, hotels, schools, offices, municipal corporations and municipalities, and village panchayats. If it is manufactured at a low cost, it is likely to be used on a large scale. At present, a large amount of electricity is generated on coal in the country. But this stock also has limits day by day. Therefore, when its use will not be permanent, emphasis should be placed on increasing the use of solar energy in the future. For this, there is a need to reduce its production cost at the government level. Shantaram Wagh | Pune

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I-T Act clause triggers a row in MSME sector

The recent addition of clause 'h' to Section 43B of the Income Tax Act has stirred up considerable debate within India's MSME sector



HIMA BINDU KOTA

The latest insertion of the new clause 'h' to Section 43B of the Income Tax Act is making quite some feathers in the MSME sector in India. According to this clause, an MSME enterprise needs to be paid for the goods bought from it within 15-45 days of the purchase to claim a deduction in the assessment year 2024-25. This means that the rule of Section 43B of allowing certain deductions on actual payments has been extended to payments due to MSMEs and the period for these MSME payments is as specified in Section 15 of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 (MSME Act). As of now, the applicability of this new clause will be effective from April 1st, 2024. In case of non-payment by 31st March 2023, the unpaid sum will be added to the income of FY 2023-24. The MSME sector has metamorphosed itself into a prominent sector contributing significantly to the country's economic growth in many ways including, employment generation and



integrating itself into the overall industrial development by associating with large industries as their auxiliary partners. According to the 73rd round of the National Sample Survey conducted by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation during 2015-16, India has 633.88 lakh MSMEs involved in various economic activities and generating a sizable 11.10 crore jobs. One of the long-plaguing problems of MSMEs has been untimely payments leading to choked cashflows. With the insertion of this new clause, the Government hopes to resolve this perplexing problem. One estimation suggests that the annual total delayed payments to the MSME sector stand somewhere between Rs. 10.5 - 11.0 lakh crore. **Applicability** Type of enterprises - Section

43B(h) applies only to enterprises, i.e., to entities engaged in either Manufacturing or Service sector. **Period** - This section is applicable from the FY 2023-24 or the assessment year 2024-25 onwards. It is, however, not applicable to any payment outstanding to MSMEs as of 31.03.2023. **Type of expenses** - Section 43B(h) is not applicable for the outstanding payments to suppliers of raw materials as the purchase of raw materials is not considered as a business expenditure for this section. **Deductions** - By incorporating the new clause 'h' in Section 43B, business expenses will be allowed as deductions only in the year of payment. This is a departure from this section where the expenses are allowed as deductions on payment on or before the filing of the income tax return. So as long as the payments are made to MSME suppliers within the financial year, i.e., before 31st March, the deductions will be allowed in that financial year. **Impact on Business** This will surely make their

cash flow healthier. However, there may be adverse impacts as well. Companies may not want to be in an unavoidable situation of adhering to the 15-45 days payment cycle and may start switching from MSMEs to medium to large corporations as their suppliers. There is still a large grey area as to how these transactions would work. **The way forward** The government may want to consider allowing time to buyers to make payments to MSMEs till the time of filing returns as it is permitted in other clauses of Section 43B. Extension of the payment time from 15 or 45 days to at least 60 days will give a breath of relief to a lot of businesses. Additionally, it would be a tedious task for both business owners and auditors to identify MSME suppliers and scrutinise the actual payment dates. The Government should consider extending the implementation date by one year to facilitate better understanding and smoother implementation. (The writer is a business consultant; views are personal)

AYURVEDA IN JAN AUSHADHI SCHEME

Sir — The Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Yojana has benefitted millions of people in search of quality alternative medicines at a reasonably low price. However, These generic medicines available at the Jan Aushadhi stores belong only to the Allopathic group and the patients opting for Ayurvedic treatment have to purchase the medicines from retail outlets mostly at a high price which either costs heavily or the patient shifts to allopathy unwillingly. The Union Government which has shown its intent to promote Ayurveda must add Ayurvedic medicines to the ambit of the Jan Aushadhi scheme. The medicines manufactured may also be consumed at Government Hospitals and dispensaries in addition to their availability at Jan Aushadhi stores. The Ayurvedic consultants at the Ministry of AYUSH can suggest a list of commonly used medicines which can be produced under strict quality control and cover all important classical formulations. Jai Prakash Gupta | Ambala

TARGET KILLING IN KASHMIR

Sir — Two migrant workers from Amritsar were shot dead in Srinagar on 7 February despite the claim by the ruling dispensation that there is a marvelous improvement in the terrorist activities in the state. As usual, political leaders condemned the killings calling it 'barbaric' and a 'dastardly attack'. The government has been making tall claims daily that peace, progress and development prevailed in J&K as also in the Naxalite-affected areas of Chhattisgarh where three CRPF personnel were killed and 15 injured in an encounter with Maoists in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on 30 January. Besides, Manipur has still been boiling since May 2023. The government should urgently enforce confidence-building measures and start a political process in J&K through dialogue with all stakeholders as soon as



FIRST COLUMN

CONFLUENCE OF SOCIAL SERVICE WITH SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality, culture and social service converge with the right people at helm



PRABHA GUPTA

Rarely do we witness a convergence of spirituality, service, and culture for the betterment of humanity. However, as they say, there is always a time for everything. Such a convergence of spiritual heads on a single platform is even rarer. The Geet Bhakti Amrit Mahotsava, a spiritual extravaganza, saw the esteemed presence of spiritual gurus and intellectuals like Swami Shri Govind Dev Giriji Maharaj, Sri Sri Ravishankar, Sudhanshuji Maharaj, Shrimati Rajshreeji Birla, Sadhvi Ritambharaji, Respected Shri Chinna Jiyar Swamiji Maharaj, and Baba Satyanarayanji Maurya. Notably, Baba Ramdev and Yogi Adityanath are to grace the occasion.

Geeta Bhakti Amrit Mahotsava stands as a unique amalgamation of spirituality, rich Indian culture, patriotism, and devotion. The event witnessed the divine spectacle of an 81 Kundiya Mahayaga performed by 2500 Vedic acharyas, alongside Harikirtan, constant chanting of sacred scriptures, and Bhagwat Katha. Over 450 artists showcased Mahanatyas performances on the epic Ramayana and the tradition of Indian saints. This spiritual festival pays tribute to the divine Vedic heritage, rich Indian culture, and devotion.

What distinguishes this event is its strong emphasis on social causes. The Geeta Pariwar organised the Matrishakti Conference to underscore the significance of women in society and our fundamental responsibility to respect and empower them. The conference witnessed insightful deliberations on women's empowerment. The Baghwad Katha commenced with the resonating chants of "Shri Ram Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram," uniting all present at the Geeta Bhakti Amrit Mahotsava in Devachi Alandi. Twelve women achievers from diverse fields, dedicated to the social upliftment and empowerment of society, were honored during the event. Govind Giriji Maharaj remarked, "Today, as we honor these twelve remarkable women, let us recognise their valuable efforts and unwavering commitment to the welfare of society, reflecting the essence of our cultural legacy."



Sharing his thoughts, Sri Sri Ravishankar stated, "You have united the saint community of Bharat through knowledge, and this knowledge is none other than that of the divine Lord Krishna. Your celebration, the Geeta Bhakti Amrit Mahotsava, is not a coincidence but a divine arrangement." Devotees immersed themselves in the soul-stirring chants of the Bhagwad Gita path which was an essential part of the Geet Bhakti Amrit Mahotsava. An enlightening Dnyaneshwaropasna session took place, where Govind Giriji Maharaj imparted profound knowledge to his disciples by venerating Jnaneshwar Mauli and reflecting upon his teachings. A positive atmosphere enveloped the event as the rich Guru-shishya tradition was revived through Vedshastra Samvad. Vedic scholars from across the nation emphasized the significance of spreading wisdom through this age-old tradition.

The spiritual event was graced by the esteemed presence of revered spiritual guides and intellectuals, including luminaries such as Jagadguru Shankaracharya, Swami Vijayendra Saraswati Ji Maharaj and Anandamurti Guru Ma. Govind Giriji Maharaj expressed, "The Geeta Bhakti Amrit Mahotsava has been a journey of spiritual awakening and enlightenment. It's an honor to witness the divine teachings of Shrimad Bhagwad Gita in the land of Alandi." He further noted the intellectual wisdom of Shri Dhirendrakrishna Shastri Ji Maharaj and the universal appeal of such spiritual knowledge among the youth, evident in the enthusiastic following of devotees.

(The author writes on issues of social issues and development, views are personal)

Iranian Revolution's success secrets

How did western intelligence agencies pave the way for Iranians to stand irreversibly against the pro-western leader?



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

The Iranian Revolution is completing 45 years this week. The Western alliance remained oblivious to the profound resentment brewing among the Iranian populace towards their final monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Embracing an illusion of unshakeable authority, Pahlavi championed his "White Revolution" as a symbol of progress, positioning Iran as an inspiration of Western liberalism and economic advancement. However, beneath the facade of prosperity, discontent festered, unbeknownst to many outside observers. Ascending to power at the youthful age of 21, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi inherited a legacy shaped by his father, Reza Shah Pahlavi, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. Presenting himself as a contemporary incarnation of Cyrus the Great, Pahlavi orchestrated a grand spectacle in 1970 at the ancient ruins of Persepolis, aiming to impress global leaders and assert his dynastic legitimacy. Yet, as he revelled in adulation, the populace endured poverty and repression, obscured by the tactics of the Iranian secret police and the support of the US-backed intelligence apparatus, SAVAK, highlighting the growing chasm between perception and reality. Despite the Shah's efforts to bolster his legitimacy through lavish displays of power, the elaborate festivities only served to underscore the decadence and detachment of his regime, hastening its eventual downfall.

In the mid-1970s, however, mounting public discontent reached a tipping point, compelling the Shah to offer apologies for his regime's excesses. Yet, these gestures failed to appease the swelling tide of mass protests, culminating in the seismic upheaval of the Islamic Revolution. The revolution's aftermath witnessed the swift collapse of the Shah's reign, marking the end of a monarchy that had endured for millennia. This monumental event exposed the limitations of Western intelligence and intervention, reshaping the geopolitical terrain of the 20th century.

In August 1978, despite the escalating unrest, the CIA infamously concluded that "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation." Figures like Alan Dulles and Richard Bissell grappled with the moral ambiguity of clandestine operations, revealing the intricate power dynamics at play in global affairs. In reality, the animosity directed towards Iran stems not from any genuine political ideology, but rather from the relentless pursuit of control over the oil industry. The concocted narrative surrounding this issue is often branded by the CIA as 'Black Propaganda'.

The 1953 coup, orchestrated by Western powers including the United States and the United Kingdom against Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, exemplifies manipulative tactics employed to safeguard Western interests. Operation Ajax, as it was known, set a precedent for similar interventions in other countries, including Guatemala, Chile, Brazil, and Greece. However, this successful coup, aimed at preserving Western dominance in the region, sparked widespread opposition and laid the groundwork for Iran's subsequent revolutionary fervour under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership. It underscores the deceptive facade of Western foreign policy, which often masks imperial ambitions with the rhetoric of democracy and liberty, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and subjugation.



ASCENDING TO POWER AT THE YOUTHFUL AGE OF 21, MOHAMMAD REZA SHAH PAHLAVI INHERITED A LEGACY SHAPED BY HIS FATHER, REZA SHAH PAHLAVI, THE FOUNDER OF THE PAHLAVI DYNASTY

Before Mossadegh's premiership, Iran's oil industry was firmly under British control through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's monopoly. The nationalization of this asset in 1951 significantly weakened British interests in the region, revealing strategic miscalculations. Rohan Butler's suppressed analysis offers crucial insights into the complex blend of political, economic, and strategic factors behind the crisis. The fervent political milieu preceding the nationalization and the subsequent coup in 1953 has made it one of the most scrutinized events in Iranian-Western relations. Mossadegh, central to this narrative, symbolizes resistance against autocracy and foreign intervention, his collapse was seen as the moment when Iran's democratic aspirations were thwarted, paving the way for the reinstatement of autocratic rule under Western patronage.

In this context, the Iranian Revolution marks a pivotal moment not only in Iran's modern history but also in the geopolitics of West Asia, as it overthrew the monarchy and established the Islamic Republic. While its broad contours are well-documented, exploring lesser-known aspects of the revolution reveals its complexity and lasting significance. A diverse coalition of secularists, nationalists, liberals, and leftists united to express long-suppressed grievances against the Shah's despotic rule, culminating in widespread discontent and his eventual ousting. Despite its success, the revolution left lingering resentment towards Western powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, perceived as backers of the Shah's regime. This suspicion of foreign interference continues to shape Iranian attitudes, while the revolution's influence extended beyond Iran's borders, inspiring Islamic movements and revolutions in neighbouring countries and reshaping the Middle East's geopolitical dynamics. The charismatic leadership and religious authority of Ayatollah Khomeini played a pivotal role in galvanizing popular support for

the revolution, while the participation of bazaar traders, a powerful economic class, amplified its momentum. The Iranian Revolution serves as a nuanced case study, highlighting the complex socio-political dynamics inherent in revolutionary movements. Religious ideology played a central role in mobilizing and legitimizing political dissent, underscoring its potent influence in effecting societal change. The revolution's aftermath underscores the importance of inclusive governance, warning against the marginalization of dissenting voices, which can lead to authoritarianism and sectarian strife. Its far-reaching repercussions underscore the interconnectedness of global politics and the imperative of respecting national sovereignty to avoid unintended consequences.

Decades after the Iranian Revolution, Iran continues to grapple with its profound and multifaceted legacy, both internally and externally. This pivotal event serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring impact of revolutionary fervour on the socio-political structure, showcasing its transformative potential alongside its enduring complexities. Iran's foreign policy is deeply rooted in its cultural and psychological heritage, characterized by a complex blend of pride, victimization, and a steadfast commitment to independence.

Iranians draw upon their rich cultural legacy, tracing their heritage back to ancient civilizations like Zoroastrianism, which shaped major world religions. Yet, they also harbour collective memories of centuries of foreign oppression and exploitation, including imperialistic endeavours by the West that overthrew Iran's democracy. This historical backdrop profoundly influences Iran's perception of foreign powers, particularly the United States, which is often viewed through the lens of economic and strategic interests rather than genuine support for democratic principles. In navigating Iran's foreign relations, it's imperative to understand the intricate interplay of cul-

tural, historical, and geopolitical factors that shape its policies. Iran's complex relationship with the Western world, spanning centuries of engagement and confrontation, underscores the nuanced nature of its foreign policy decisions. From the Safavid dynasty's establishment of Twelver Shiism to European powers' economic and strategic interests during the Qajar dynasty, Iran's historical legacy continues to inform its interactions with the international community, highlighting the importance of historical context in understanding contemporary foreign relations.

The Iranian Revolution offers a nuanced study of power dynamics in history, where victories can sow the seeds of future resistance. Despite facing formidable challenges, Iran has experienced remarkable advancements across various sectors over time. Statistics from UNESCO demonstrate significant improvements in literacy rates and life expectancy, showcasing the nation's commitment to education and healthcare. Additionally, Iran's economic panorama has undergone substantial growth, with the nation ascending in global rankings and witnessing remarkable expansion in sectors like space technology.

The revolution's triumph over Western-backed forces not only reshaped Iran's domestic political structure but also reverberated across the globe, inspiring similar movements and challenging Western dominance. Unfortunately, many Western strategists and policymakers are quick to jump to conclusions with their preconceived notions, potentially contributing to the turmoil in the Red Sea and the chronic disasters in West Asia, spanning from Palestine to Syria and beyond. The essence of revolution, however, as emphasized by Lu Xun in his writings, lies in its purpose: to ensure people can live, rather than face death.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and worked as a communications consultant for the Government of Sri Lanka. Views are personal)

Women's participation is vital for effective peace-building

The perilous circumstances faced by women in conflict zones cannot be overstated, especially during the ongoing Gaza turmoil

Once a UN Peacekeeping Commander observed that 'it has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict'. The current situation in Gaza amply proves it, as the death toll rises above 25,000, and more than 17, 000 women and children lost their lives (January 24). Almost two mothers die every hour. It is indeed a place where 'womanhood is denied', rued a Palestine-based civil society organisation (MIFTAH). The UNICEF, called it the 'most dangerous place to be a child', when over 1.1 million children are threatened by conflict, malnutrition, and diseases. While, the prolonged war in Ukraine since 2022, has raised the number of refugees to 5.6



ARCHANA DATTA

million, and internal displacement (IDP) to about 7.7 million, 60% of whom are women (UN). Many studies on peace and warfare contend that any conflict, civil or armed, is 'gendered', which affects women and men in starkly different ways. Researchers have said that in a situation of unrest when political structures and economic systems break down, it heightens women's vulnerability, rein-

forces existing inequalities and places women and girls at high risk for gender-based violence (GBV) (Oxfam, Bushra and Lopez 1994 et al). The Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Denis Mukwege, lamented that 'we are far away from drawing a red line against the use of sexual violence in war and conflict, and GBV is still a weapon of war'. While, social scientists expressed concern that in conflict zones, sexual offences against women are often 'trivialised', and a heinous crime like rape is normalised as an 'inevitable outcome of war'.

The UN's 2022 report on sexual violence in conflict zones said that 'sexual violence is used as a tactic to dehumanise and displace populations'. Even in post-war situations,

when there is the apparent absence of violence or negative security, the culture of violence against women doesn't end or bring in positive peace, and 'it continues and even increases after men return from the battlefield' (Tursheh and Twagirumariya 1998). A three-country study in post-conflict Iraq, in conflict-ridden Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Yemen, an area of open conflict, found that women and girls, in all such calamitous situations, face 'deep gender inequalities and all-out adverse impacts'.

Women also bear the brunt of huge internal displacement (IDP) in the wake of conflict and violence. In 2020, at least 21 million women and girls were uprooted within their countries, two-thirds of them

were from Africa and the Middle East. In South Asia, women make up 42 to 52 per cent of refugees. Nearly one million women have been displaced since the war began in October in Gaza.

In the post-conflict situation, 'women experience greater impoverishment, being the first to be laid off in wage employment in the public sector, which has led to the feminisation of the informal sector', disclosed a study. The lack of essential services such as health care, including sexual and reproductive health services, also makes them more vulnerable to unplanned pregnancy, maternal mortality and morbidity, sexual and reproductive injuries and sexually transmitted infections. While girls face obstacles in accessing

education. The UN's 'women, peace and security', report, 2023, said that 'more than 600 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected countries in 2022, a 50 per cent increase since 2017'. Even, the political violence targeting women increased by 50 per cent in conflict-affected countries (2020 - 2022). While, civil conflicts have more than doubled, from 30 in 2001 to 70 in 2016, mostly in least developed countries. When the world needs greater humanitarian aid more than ever before, the global military spending rose to USD 2.2 trillion in 2022, and this diversification of priorities 'is setting back both gender equality and global peace', rued the UN Women.

Many feminists argued that in

conflict and post-conflict scenarios, a gender perspective must be integrated into the reconstruction and redevelopment plans. So far, 'male norms and behaviours have been taken as the human norm' (Skelsbaek and Smith 2001:1). The application of international humanitarian law also requires an understanding of the gendered harms caused by armed conflict. In terms of the longevity of a peace agreement, women's participation increases it to at least two years (20%), and 15 years (35%), and also makes it 64% less likely to fail. Yet, women's participation in formal peace processes (1992-2019), on average, was just 13 per cent as negotiators, 6 per cent as mediators, and 6 per cent as signatories in major

peace processes. In active United Nations-led or co-led peace processes, in 2022, it was 16%, going down from 19 per cent in 2021 and 23 per cent in 2020. While, in 2022, only 6 out of 18 peace agreements (33 per cent) included provisions referencing women, girls, and gender, and they are plateauing between 20 to 35 per cent each year. Now, when the world is on the verge of more turmoil and discord, greater and meaningful participation of women is critical for broadening the perspective on conflict management, more inclusive political resolutions, and effective peace-building strategies.

(The author is former Director General, Doordarshan and All India Radio, views are personal)

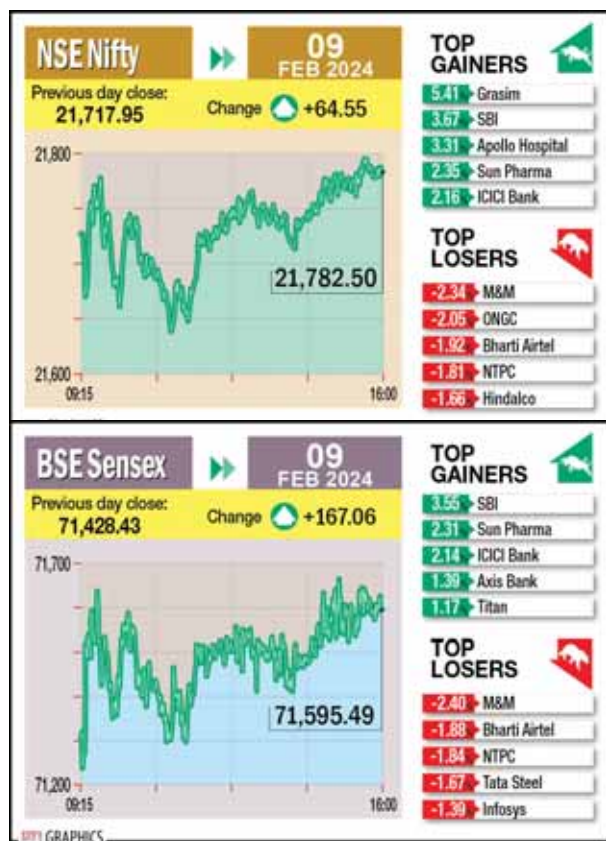
Uncharacteristic of NBFCs to seek bank licences: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Reserve Bank Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao on Friday said it is uncharacteristic of non-bank lenders to seek bank licences when they are already enjoying some regulatory advantages. Addressing a conference on non-bank finance companies (NBFCs) organized by CII, Rao also hit out at certain microlenders for "misusing" the liberty offered by the regulator on interest rates, and charging high rates. "Why not think of bank licences for at least a few of them, especially these NBFCs who have spent ten years, met the compliance requirements, have proved themselves," Bajaj explained using an analogy that an NBFC licence is like a learner's licence before an entity graduates to become a universal bank which can access the cheap deposits. Specifically responding to this request, Rao said universal



par with universal banks, and NBFCs enjoy some advantages. "NBFCs have evolved as niche companies serving specific economic functions, and it is uncharacteristic of them to demand becoming like a bank," Rao said. Interestingly, the remarks came right after the speech of Bajaj Finserv's Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Bajaj in which he said NBFCs have grown and become more "solid" courtesy the stronger regulation and supervision by RBI. He said RBI is very clear in not allowing more NBFCs to accept deposits, and pointed out that not a single new licence has been granted, and the number of deposit-accepting NBFCs has reduced from over 200 to only 26 now.

especially in the upper layer, are much more calibrated, but are not certainly at par with the regulations applicable to banks," Rao said. Meanwhile, he also highlighted the regulator's disenchantment with the microfinance companies for charging high interest rates, stating that RBI is "not oblivious" to such practices. "Some of the MFIs have increased their margins disproportionately under the new regime. We are not oblivious to the misuse of the freedom provided to the microfinance sector and some of the irresponsible practices, some of these entities (are practising) and more such instances do put pressure to act on these entities," Rao said. He added that there have been a lot of comments from the government officials as well on the issue of high interest rates and asked for an "introspection" by the sector participants. In 2021, RBI had given full freedom to entities on interest rates to be charged for microloans by lifting the interest rate cap of 24 per cent put earlier. Rao also asked NBFCs to reduce the reliance on bank loans for their funding requirements by undertaking a diversification of their base to other market instruments. He also said the high growth of over 33 per cent on a compounded annual growth basis in the personal loan segments over the past five years for NBFCs, as against a 15 per cent growth in the overall assets under management was among the reasons due to which RBI increased the risk weights on unsecured loans late last year. Bajaj also requested for a liquidity line at par with a bank which can help an NBFC in situations of stress and also harmonization in regulations for entities which might be overseen by multiple watchdogs like RBI, Irdai and Sebi.



Paytm shares fall over 15 per cent in 2 days

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns the Paytm brand, tanked over 15 per cent in two days as investors again turned to dump the stock. Extending its previous day's decline, the stock tanked 6.09 per cent to settle at Rs 419.85 on the BSE. During the day, it dived 8.67 per cent to Rs 408.30. Shares of the company dropped 6.15 per cent to Rs 419.15 on the NSE. During the day, the stock tumbled 8.20 per cent to Rs 410. In two days, the stock fell 15.48 per cent, eroding Rs 4,870.96 crore from its market valuation on the BSE. Shares of One97 Communications Ltd fell 10 per cent to hit lower circuit limit on Thursday, after a two-day rally in the stock fizzled out. One97 Communications stock price had climbed 10 per cent on Wednesday and rebounded over 3 per cent on Tuesday after three days of sharp fall. From February 1-5 (three days of trading), the company's stock tumbled over 42 per cent, wiping out Rs 20,471.25



crore from its market valuation, following the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) crackdown. On January 31, the RBI ordered Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, a restricted bank that can take deposits but cannot lend, to not take any further deposits or conduct credit transactions or carry out top-ups on any customers accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, and cards for paying road tolls after February 29. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said there are no systemic worries and the action on Paytm was driven by a "lack of compliance" on the



EESL inks ₹500 crore pacts with State bodies, industry partners

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State-owned Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) has inked initial pacts worth Rs 500 crore with key state bodies and industry partners at the India Energy Week, to formulate a framework for longstanding collaboration in key areas of energy efficiency. Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, Leh (LAHDC), and Vidhya Pratishtan have partnered with EESL, the company said in a statement on Friday. The MoUs with the two entities, valued at Rs 300 crore and Rs 200 crore, respectively, focus on crucial aspects of energy efficiency, including lighting, clean cooking, space

heating, renewables, e-mobility, cooling, and consultancy. According to the statement, the EESL, a joint venture of public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Power, has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) worth Rs 500 crore with key state bodies and industry partners at the India Energy Week 2024. The focus of the MoUs signed during the event is to formulate a framework for longstanding collaboration in key areas of energy efficiency. These agreements lay the foundation for executing projects that implement energy-efficient measures across various facilities, regions, and communities. The MoU with LAHDC includes space heating solutions across various locations in the Union Territory of Ladakh, using innovative heat pump technology. This is a follow-up to the recent signing of the company's MoU for the distribution of 2,000 induction cookstoves in Ladakh, which demonstrates EESL's commitment to comprehensive energy solutions in the region. Vishal Kapoor, Chief Executive Officer, EESL, said in the statement, "Through these partnerships, we are setting the groundwork for transformative projects that will significantly contribute to India's journey towards an energy-efficient future."

Sensex gains 167 points on buying in bank shares, Reliance

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark Sensex closed higher by 167 points in a volatile trade on Friday driven by buying in ICI Bank, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 167.06 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 71,595.49. During the day, it hit a high of 71,676.49 and a low of 71,200.31. The broader Nifty rose by 64.55 points or 0.30 per cent to 21,782.50 with 27 of its shares closing in the green and 23 in the red. Stock markets took a breather after Thursday's slide and ended marginally higher on gains in banking and FMCG shares, analysts said. On the other hands, metal telecom and power shares came under selling pressure. "After a volatile session, the market ended on a positive note, aided by a rebound in banking stocks after yesterday's sell-off. Mid and smallcap indices bled the most as the sentiment on the broader indices remains vigilant due to their rich valuation," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge fell by 1.36 per cent and midcap index declined 0.82 per cent. Among the indices, oil & gas went lower by 1.97 per cent, metal fell by 1.62 per cent, telecommunication (1.45 per cent), utilities (1.36 per cent), industrials (1.21 per cent) and power (1.10 per cent). Bankex, FMCG, financial services, consumer durables and healthcare were the gainers. On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark declined 490.14 points or 0.67 per cent, and the Nifty dipped 71.3 points or 0.32 per cent. In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended in the green on Thursday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,933.78 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark fell by 723.57 points or 1 per cent to settle at 71,428.43 on Thursday amid uncertainty about the timing of interest rate reduction after the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy decision. The Nifty declined by 212.55 points or 0.97 per cent to 21,717.95.

Forex reserves jump to USD 622.469 billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India's forex reserves jumped by USD 5,736 billion to USD 622.469 billion for the week ended February 2, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. In the previous week, the overall reserves had increased by USD 591 million to USD 616.733 billion. In October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed them to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year. For the week ended February 2, the foreign currency assets, a

major component of the reserves, increased by USD 5.186 billion to USD 55.331 billion, as per the data of RBI. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased by USD 608 million to USD 48.088 billion during the week, RBI said. Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 58 million to USD 18.19 billion, the central bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was unchanged at USD 4.86 billion in the week.



Tata Power net profit rises to ₹1,076 crore in Q3

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Tata Power on Friday posted a marginal increase of 2 per cent in its consolidated net profit at Rs 1,076 crore in December 2023 quarter. Its consolidated net profit was Rs 1,052 crore in the quarter ended on December 31, 2022, a company statement showed. Total revenues also rose to Rs 14,841 crore in the quarter from Rs 14,339 crore in the same period a year ago. Praveer Sinha, CEO and Managing Director, Tata Power, said in the statement, "Our core businesses continue to perform well and have helped the Company clock its 17th consecutive PAT (profit after tax or net profit) growth quarter." Our consistent performance shows strong fundamentals of excellence in operational performance and project execution capability, he noted. As the country witnesses a surge in power demand, Tata Power is well positioned to capitalize on the growth momentum with its cutting-edge, customized and cost-effective clean and green energy solutions, he said. The company stated that better realisation in the core business segments, consisting of generation, transmission & distribution, and renewables, helped grow its profit. The PAT during nine-month period of FY24 (April to December) grew to Rs 3,235 crore as against Rs 2,871 crore in the same period of previous financial year. During April-December 2023, the company's revenue grew to Rs 45,286 crore, an all-time high for the said period, it stated. As on December 31, 2023, the company's operational capacity stood at 4,270 MW in the renewables segment, generating 6,031 MUs (million units) of green power. Another 4,752 MW of projects under TPREL (Tata Power Renewable Energy) and 4,120 MW of projects under TPSSL (Tata Power Solar Systems) are under execution, thus taking the total clean energy capacity to over 10,000 MW in the next 12-24 months. The company is on an accelerated growth trajectory of transitioning to green energy and aiming for around 70 per cent of capacity from non-fossil-based fuels by 2030. Tata Power is a leading integrated power company and a part of Tata Group. The company has a diversified portfolio of 14,453 MW, spanning across the entire power value chain — from renewable and conventional energy generation to transmission & distribution, trading, storage solutions and solar cells and module manufacturing. Tata Power has 5,593 MW of clean energy generation, which constitutes 39 per cent of its total capacity.

Centre released ₹15,948 crore to sugar mills in last 5 years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The centre has released about Rs 15,948 crore under different schemes in the last five years till January 31 to various sugar mills to improve their liquidity for clearing cane price dues of farmers, Parliament was informed on Friday. Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel said the central government, with a view to improve liquidity of the sugar mills enabling them to clear cane price dues of farmers, has announced these schemes in the last five years. These schemes include the creation and maintenance of a buffer stock of 30 lakh tonne of sugar with effect from July 2018 to June 30, 2019; scheme for defraying expenditure towards internal transport, freight, handling, and other charges on the export of sugar season 2018-19; and assistance to sugar mills season 2019-20 to facilitate the export of sugar. A scheme for providing assistance to sugar mills for expenses on marketing costs including, handling, upgrading and other processing costs, and internal transport and freight charges for sugar season 2020-21, 2019-20 and 2018-19 was also announced. "Under these schemes, a sum of about Rs 15,948 crore has been released to various sugar mills of the country in last five financial years including the current financial year till January 31, 2024," Patel said in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha. She said that the export of sugar (raw, refined and white sugar) has been placed under a restricted category.

In 2022-23, sugar exports stood at 63 lakh tonne. This fiscal, no export has happened. In a separate reply, she said that the government has initiated an exercise to create a new online platform to connect exporters with various stakeholders, including Indian Missions abroad, export promotion councils, and other partner government agencies. It would help provide information such as the details of various trade events being organised and provide information on various Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). Replying to a question on FTA, she said that imports of wines and vermouth (a kind of aromatic fortified) from Australia stood at USD 8.9 million during the January-December 2023 as against USD 10 million in the same period of 2022. India-Australia Economic Cooperation Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA) came into effect from December 29, 2022.



₹5077 crore FDI reported by companies operating in defence sector: Government

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) worth Rs 5077 crore has been reported by companies operating in the defence sector, the defence ministry said in Lok Sabha on Friday. The data was provided by Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt while replying to a question. The defence industry sector was opened up in May 2001 for private sector participation, he said. "The FDI limit in the defence sector was enhanced in 2020 up to 74 per cent through the automatic route for companies seeking new defence industrial licence and up to 100 per cent by the government route wherever it is likely to result in access to modern technology," Bhatt said. "So far, Rs 5077 crores worth of FDI has been reported by companies operating in the defence sector," he added. The minister said the government also promotes co-development and co-production of niche defence technologies with foreign original equipment manufacturers to encourage FDI in the defence sector. To a separate question, he said the defence ministry has signed a contract with the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) on December 20 for procurement of six next generation off-shore patrol vessels for Indian Coast Guard (ICG) at a total cost of Rs 1614 crore.

BUSINESS BRIEF

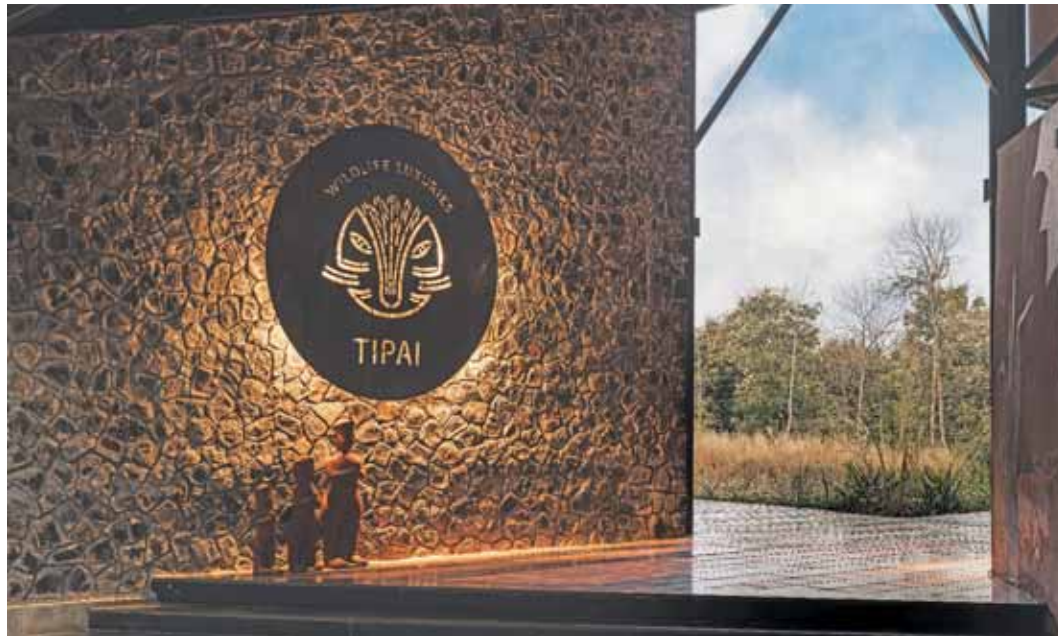


A Metro Train Model was presented to President Droupadi Murmu by Vikas Kumar, Managing Director, DMRC during her visit to the Delhi Metro system on February 7, 2024

PFC Q3 NET PROFIT RISES 20 PER CENT
NEW DELHI: Power Finance Corporation posted over 20 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 6,294.44 crore in the December quarter, on the back of higher revenues. The company's consolidated net profit was Rs 5,241.10 crore in the quarter ended on December 31, 2022. Total income in the quarter rose to Rs 23,593.40 crore from Rs 19,662.65 crore in the same period a year ago. Owing to concentrated resolution efforts, consolidated net NPA (bad loans) has reached its lowest level at 0.86 per cent during April-December 2023 from 1.15 per cent in the same period a year ago. Gross NPA also declined significantly by 78 basis points from 3.91 per cent in the nine-month period of the last fiscal to 3.13 per cent in April-December 2023. The board, in its meeting approved the declaration of a second interim dividend at the rate of 35 per cent, of Rs 3.50 per equity share, subject to deduction of TDS, on the face value of the paid-up equity shares of Rs 10 each for FY 2023-24.



34-acre luxury nature resort on the fringes of Tipeswar forest in Nagpur is a celebration of low-impact construction, finds **SHARMILA CHAND**



BESPOKE LUXURY IN THE WILD

A comfortable three hour drive from Nagpur and I was in front of the stunning vista of tall trees enveloping forest villas. This is 'Tipai by Wildlife Luxuries', nestled amid the virgin forests of Tipeswar Wildlife Reserve. Spanning in 34 acres, the resort sets an example of ultimate luxury blending seamlessly with eco-friendly measures. An initiative of sustainability-conscious entrepreneur, Keyur Joshi, the co-founder and COO of MakeMyTrip, Tipai has been built with minimal impact on fragile ecosystems. Each of the 11 forest villas and four pool residences speak a story of unique aesthetics. "Core to the design of Wildlife Luxuries is localisation, whether it was the techniques used, the material that was built with, or the people who contributed to the building process—they were all of this land," tells Joshi, with a well deserved sense of pride. "Working closely with the Institute of Village Sciences in Wardha, located 80 kms from the site, the architects researched various possibilities of low-impact construction. Instead of importing labour, the neighbouring village folk were trained in rammed earth construction and stone masonry. The vaulted roofs were made of terracotta tiles made by local potters. Working with a permaculturist, the land was rejuvenated with natural vegetation, strategically located water bodies and a robust rainwater harvesting system to reduce the impact on fragile ecosystems."

"WHEN WE STARTED BUILDING THIS 15-VILLA PROPERTY, WE DECIDED TO USE WHATEVER IS AVAILABLE IN THIS PLACE. IT WAS AN INTERESTING CHALLENGE FOR US. WE ALSO WANTED TO KEEP IT CHEMICAL AND PLASTIC FREE. WE LOOKED AT WHAT THE VILLAGES AROUND US WERE DOING IN TERMS OF CONSTRUCTION. WE USED RAMMED EARTH AND STONES TO BUILD THE VILLAS. WHEN IT CAME TO FURNITURE, WE DID THE SAME THING AND MADE THEM WITH WHAT WAS LOCALLY AVAILABLE"
— **KEYUR JOSHI, Founder, TIPAI**



"THE WOMEN IN MY KITCHEN OFTEN DON'T REALISE THAT THE EVERYDAY THINGS THEY COOK ARE WORTH SERVING IN A RESTAURANT — AND I WANT TO CHANGE THAT"
— **CHEF AMNINDER SANDHU, F&B Founding Partner**

DÉCOR & DESIGN
I am truly fascinated by a stunning blend of classical aesthetics and modern functionality that redefines luxury and eco-tourism. Symbolic of sustainability, every corner exudes an ethos of unparalleled craftsmanship and finesse. Whether it's the large swallow nest lamps hanging from cross-beamed ceilings, or experimental Chandigarh chairs set at a large dining table, tiled floorings, terracotta art and wooden decks; local leaves, dried, pressed and framed on the walls; one gets the strong ethnic vibe of the place. Enter your room and you will

notice recycled furniture and how painstakingly the vaulted ceilings have been made. The colorful Indian durries lend an ambiance of cheer, warmth and sophistication. The sheer curtains with leafy motifs pay homage to the region's sensibilities as these represent the local unique leaf block-printing method and hand-printing technique. From the special packages of tea to the toiletries, a standout feature is the meticulously curated every detail for Tipai exclusively, by small boutique brands who share the brand's values for sustainability, quality and fairness.

Says Ariane Thakore Ginwala, the principal designer for Tipai, "We've tried to retain the land as much as possible and reduce the use of concrete to make our land better. By planting trees and incorporating biomass in the process, we've made our soil richer. Sustainable, conscious luxury is the new travel. The true essence of luxury lies in handcrafted products, made slowly and with intention. We spent a lot of time selecting responsible brands to stay true to our vision. As you can see, our basins are handmade, the small batches of chocolates are from homegrown brands and so on."

AN ODE TO NATURE AT A GLANCE!

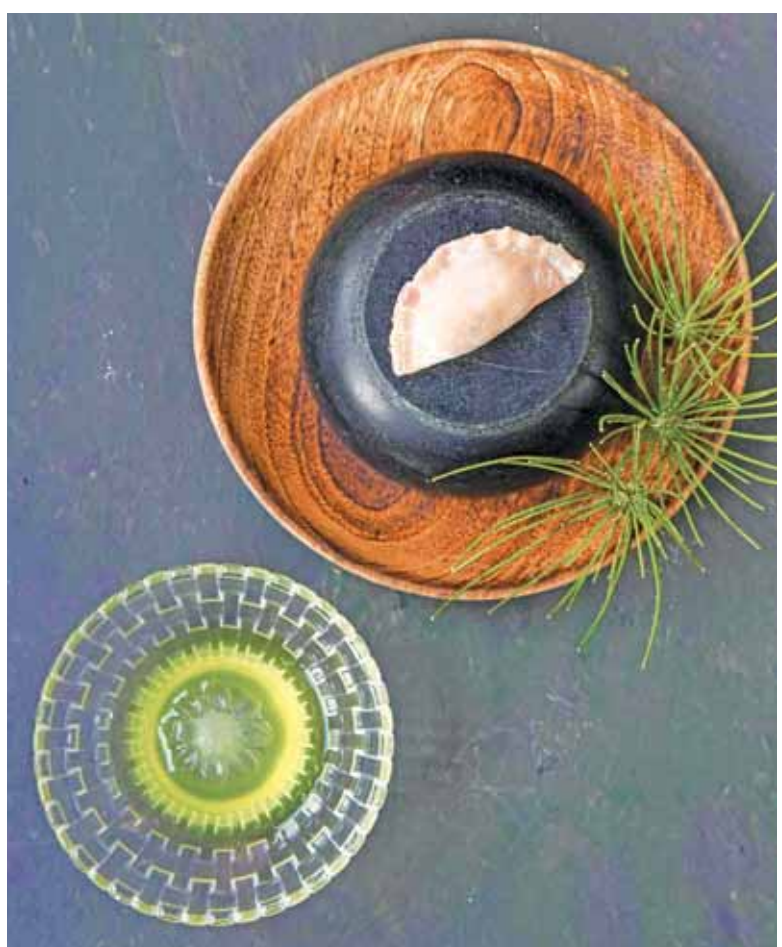
The celebration of the forest, the land and its people make Tipai a thriving biodiversity getaway. Right from safari visits to the forest, to identifying birds or picking the ingredients from the resort farm for your meal, every activity has an osmotic relationship with nature. Over five years, more than 300 species of shrubs and trees have been planted in and around the resort, which today attract a plethora of birds and deer. "In the summer the Palash trees bloom defying the arid heat, then rains make Tipai a blooming lush green, that turns a lighter shade as winter falls. The scenery changes dramatically across the seasons, and so does the produce from our food forest - nourishing both humans and animals that call this quiet wildscape home. Frequent visits by deer and a surge in the variety of birds and insects tells us we are doing something right," adds Joshi with a smile.

THE FOOD AT TIPAI
Made with produce from the kitchen garden and organic farms within the region, F&B at Tipai is a true celebration of this land. The food is hyperlocal, from the produce to the flavours and those who grow, cook and craft this experience - they are all of this land. It is heartening to see that at the heart of the three restaurants is a deep desire to empower women; not just through employment, but by helping them see the beauty and power of the everyday things they do. The chutney they grind on a sil batta, the flatbreads they cook on coals, the instinctive understanding of flavour - the kitchen at 'Palaash', dinner only restaurant, is almost entirely run by women. While you savour the flavours of regional cuisines from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh at Palaash, the menus at 'Perch' and 'Wadi' travel the world. Sipping tea under a gazebo, enjoying picnic by the river, indulging in sundowners by your private plunge pool, all this and a lot more along the fringes of a dense forest known for its Bengal tigers; make Tipai a destination worthy of your bucking list. While there is plenty to do here, you also have an opportunity to set aside the itinerary, just hit the pause button and do nothing.

— *Writer is an independent journalist who writes on travel, food and lifestyle*

A CULINARY VOYAGE

Set sail on a flavorful odyssey where ingredients are infused with inspiration, people and diverse cultures



Pullman New Delhi Aerocity is gearing up to host an extravagant dining experience in partnership with the esteemed restaurant, Ekaa, promising a feast for the senses. Nestled within the historic charm of Fort, Mumbai, Ekaa is renowned for its contemporary approach to dining, offering patrons a culinary adventure like no other, complete with an experiential menu and a carefully crafted narrative centered around ingredients. Named after the Sanskrit word meaning 'One,' 'Unique,' or 'Matchless,' Ekaa shines a spotlight on seasonality and quality produce, all while incorporating innovative cooking techniques that challenge traditional culinary norms. Stepping into the vibrant ambiance of Café Pluck, guests will be greeted by Head Chef Niyati Rao, who brings her joyful touch of minimalism to every dish. Here, art and flavor converge seamlessly, with ingredients taking center stage in an elegantly understated setting. During the two-day pop-up event,



diners will have the opportunity to sample signature dishes from Ekaa, each with a unique twist inspired by culinary traditions from around the world, including The Kingdom of Siam, The Kingdom of the Tzars, The Kingdom of the Aztecs, The Kingdom of the Marathas, and more. Ekaa's menu, hailed as a gourmet masterpiece, showcases chef-interpreted creations that draw inspiration from seasons, cultures, and personal journeys, promising an unforgettable dining experience.

PULLMAN AEROCIT NEW DELHI

Trendiest destination in Aerocity, Pullman New Delhi is in close proximity to the IGI Airport and within driving distance from business hubs of Gurgaon & New Delhi. It is a combination of 670 Suites & Rooms under one roof along with a state-of-the-art convention space with 16 meeting rooms and one of the largest ballrooms in Delhi NCR. The hotel offers an array of food & beverage options with 6 innovative outlets that draw the best of international and local culinary specialties. Leisure facilities include a spa, a fully-equipped health club and an outdoor swimming pool.



Indulge in a 10-course menu at Café Pluck, where each dish unfolds as a delightful adventure accompanied by captivating storytelling. But the culinary journey doesn't stop there. Elevate your experience by pairing these delectable delights with a carefully curated selection of signature beverages, expertly chosen to complement the unique flavors of each dish, adding an extra layer of indulgence to your dining affair. Guests can immerse themselves in this culinary extravaganza at Café Pluck, where a multitude of delightful experiences await, promising an unforgettable fusion of art, flavor, and storytelling.

Iyer unlikely to be picked for last three Tests

After complaining of groin and back stiffness

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shreyas Iyer is unlikely to be picked in the India squad for the remainder of the Test series against England after complaining of stiffness in his back and groin. Iyer has had recurring troubles with his back and had also undergone a surgery last year. The 29-year-old made 35, 13, 27, 29 in the opening two Tests and was guilty of not capitalising on starts. "He has complained of stiffness and back issue," a BCCI source told PTI. India are already reeling with injuries to key players K L



Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja. Star batter Virat Kohli had missed the first two Tests due

to personal reasons and is unlikely to be available for the games in Rajkot and Ranchi as well. The selectors are yet to announce the squad for the last three Tests but they could do that on Friday. On Monday, India bounced back to level the five-match series with a 106-run victory in Visakhapatnam. England, who have flown back to Abu Dhabi before the third Test in Rajkot beginning February 15, won the series opener by 28 runs. India will be assemble in Rajkot on February 11 and England are expected to reach there a day after.

Bumrah tips helped me become a better bowler, says Naman

AP ■ BENONI (SOUTH AFRICA)

India U19 player Naman Tiwari wants to bowl the fastest ball in the world by drawing inspiration watching videos of former greats and following the advice of pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah. Left-arm pacer Naman, 18, who is grabbing headlines in the ongoing U19 World Cup here, has found the tips he received from Bumrah at the NCA working magic, and is now looking forward to the title clash against Australia on Sunday. Lucknow boy Naman has troubled rival batters with his yorkers and speed, grabbing 10 wickets so far, with a four-wicket haul against Ireland.



"I started playing cricket as a batsman but I was not getting many chances. That's why I started bowling at an academy in Lucknow. Since I am left-handed, I became a left-arm fast bowler," he said. Naman's father is an LIC agent and the pressure to focus on academics was immense given his middle-class background. But his heart was in cricket. "Papa always told me to focus on studies. I was in seventh standard and wanted to play cricket. I asked my father to give me three years' time to prove myself in cricket. My family is very happy with my success today," said Naman. "Papa calls me every evening. Seeing them (family) happy makes me feel very good that I did not disappoint them," he said. Naman's aim is to become a lethal fast bowler and play Test cricket for India. "One day I want to bowl the fastest ball in the world. I also want to play the World Cup with the senior team. But, for now, I have to focus on performance. I want to continuously improve my game because the challenges will be even bigger in the future and I will have to prepare my base to face them," he said. Happy with the team's performance so far in the U19 World Cup, Naman said that it is the result of team effort. "So far, the performance of all the players has been very good. Especially in the semifinals against South Africa, we showed tremendous spirit. I am very happy with the way we are playing and will try to maintain this momentum in the final also," he said. "Although I like all formats, I find Test cricket the most challenging. That's where the real test of a bowler lies and I want to become a good Test cricketer in the future," said the youngster.

Padikkal 151 helps Karnataka finish 288/5 on Day 1 against TN

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Opener Devdutt Padikkal continued his red-hot form, slamming an unbeaten 151, his third Ranji Trophy hundred this season, as Karnataka reached 288 for 5 on the opening day of their Group C match against Tamil Nadu here on Friday. Electing to bat, the visitors lost skipper Mayank Agarwal (20) early, with just 35 runs on the board. Agarwal was making his comeback as he missed the last game against Railways after accidentally consuming some liquid on-board a flight that caused burning sensation in his mouth and throat. Padikkal then joined forces with opener Ravikumhar Samarth (57), constructing a 132-run partnership for the second wicket and took their side to a position of strength. The stand was broken after Ajith Ram knocked over Samarth. While Karnataka lost the third wicket at 226, Padikkal went strong, clearing the long-on boundary quite regularly to bring up his sixth First-Class ton. Hardik Raj, unbeaten on 35, is giving company to Padikkal at stumps. For TN, spinner R Sai Kishore has bagged three wickets so far. In another tie in Chandigarh, skipper Manan Vohra's fine knock of 134 acted as a cover in an otherwise toiling day for Chandigarh against Tripura.

I made a terrible mistake, shared false info on Kohli: A B de Villiers

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Former South Africa captain A B de Villiers has said that he "made a terrible mistake" by sharing "false information" about the personal reasons that have forced star India batter Virat Kohli to take a break from international cricket, insisting that he has no idea "what's happening there". On his Youtube channel a few days ago, de Villiers had claimed that Kohli opted out of the first two Tests of the ongoing home series against England due to the impending arrival of his second child with actor wife Anushka Sharma. On Thursday night, he backtracked on that statement in



an interaction with select media on the sidelines of the ongoing SA T20 here. "Family comes first, it's priority as I said on my Youtube channel. I also made a terrible mistake at the same time, sharing false information that was not true at all," de Villiers, who is the brand ambassador of the event, said. "I just think that whatever is best for Virat and his family comes first, no one knows what's happening there. All I

can do is wish him well. Whatever the reason is for this break, I really hope he comes back stronger and better, healthy and fresh and ready to take on the world," he added. Kohli is unlikely to play any part in the ongoing series. **Look forward to seeing SKY at T20 World Cup** De Villiers also spoke about international cricket in general during the interaction. The original Mr 360 degree, who could hit the ball to just about any corner of the ground, de Villiers said he is eager to see Surya Kumar Yadav's performance in the T20 World Cup, where he feels, India would be one of the strongest contenders.

Kashmir differently abled cricketers shine

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amir Hassan had to learn quite early in life that left is right for him. He didn't really have a choice. Fingers of his right hand had to be amputated when he was just an infant after burn injuries caused by an accident deteriorated into severe infection. But life wasn't done testing him. As if being forced to become a southpaw wasn't enough, he also had to grow up the hard way in Tarzoo Village, just three kilometres from



Sopore town in Kashmir valley which earned fame for its apple orchards and notoriety for being militancy-infested during the '90s. Being the eldest child in his family, he gave up education to help his father, who worked in those picturesque apple orchards. What he never gave up was his cricketing ambition.

"Infrastructure is a problem in Kashmir. I daily walk three kilometres from my village for practice. As far as disturbances were concerned, I never got perturbed by them," the left-arm pacer, who is part of the national cricket team for the differently-abled, told PTI during an interaction here. The side has done exceptionally well in the past few years winning the 2019 and 2023 World Cup for the differently-abled, and then beating England in a bilateral T20 series last month. The

achievements become all the more significant given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 disruption. "From childhood, all I wanted to do was to play cricket. I would go for training and come back home. I never indulged in any gossip or activity that would disturb my focus," said Aamir, who idolises former pacer Irfan Pathan and the first J&K player to represent India, all-rounder Parvez Rasool. Now in his early 20s, Aamir is the leading seamer of team,

having played the two World Cups and the recent series against England where he got five wickets in five games. Not only Aamir but national vice-captain Wasim Iqbal and batter Majid Magray, both of whom hail from Anantnag, and Jaffer Bhatt (batter) from Srinagar are shining examples of how cricket for the specially-abled has picked up in the valley. Aamir practised bowling while playing with abled-bodied boys of his village and that helped him stay a cut above the rest when it came

to competing against other physically challenged cricketers. "You know when National Schools (Championship) was held years ago, I played under Abdul Samad's captaincy, the guy who plays for Sunrisers Hyderabad," Aamir said with a lot of pride. Ravikant Chauhan, the secretary of the Differently-abled Cricket Council of India (DCCI), which has been recognised by the BCCI, gave an insight into the growth of cricket in the State.

Bayern Munich trio set to return ahead of key game

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich is set to welcome back three players to its squad to play at title rival Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga on Saturday, but goalkeeper Manuel Neuer remains an injury doubt. Bayern is two points behind league leader Leverkusen, which is unbeaten in 30 games in all competitions this season. This game is "the moment to put the cards on the table" in the title race, Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel said Friday, adding that he expects Leverkusen will get support from "neutral fans" across Germany who are keen to see Bayern's 11-year run of league titles come to an end. Tuchel said he plans to have central defender Kim Min-jae back after he reached the Asian Cup semifinals with South Korea, and that defender Dayot Upamecano and midfielder Joshua Kimmich are expected to be in the squad after recovering from injuries.



Upamecano has been out with a hamstring injury and Kimmich with shoulder problems since both were hurt in Bayern's 1-0 win over Union Berlin on Jan. 24. Tuchel recalled how Upamecano returned from another injury last year and scored the opening goal in a statement win over Borussia Dortmund. Tuchel said a decision would be taken on Neuer's fitness after training Friday after the goalkeeper missed training earlier this week with an unspecified problem. Backup Sven Ullreich would step in if Neuer can't play, Tuchel added.

England do all work only to not win much: Vaughan

AP ■ LONDON

Former skipper Michael Vaughan is worried England will become a side that doesn't win much despite putting in the hard yards, adding that the team's batting unit needs to strike a balance between playing aggressive and traditional cricket to succeed in India. Since adopting the 'Bazball' approach, England have enjoyed a good run but the same no-holds-barred approach has also cost them several matches and series, including the Ashes last year. "England have become a difficult team to criticise too much because they are so good to



watch. Every game they play has us all absolutely gripped, and they have improved massively under Ben Stokes," Vaughan wrote in

his column for "The Telegraph". "However, I do worry that they might become a team who do all this great work only to not actually win very much. They didn't win the Ashes when they should have done and now they have let India back into a series when they still have a load of big names, including Virat Kohli, to come back." England had taken a 1-0 lead in the five-match series in India but Ben Stokes and his men let the hosts draw parity in the second Test as all their batters, barring Zak Crawley, were unable to get big scores. "England will not win the series if they bat the way they did in Visakhapatnam. I actually

think the batsmen need to take a leaf out of the bowlers' book. With ball in hand, they have been quite traditional at times, aggressive at others, and they have gone up and down the gears in terms of how attacking their fields have been." England had pulled off a dramatic 28-run win in the series opener on the back of vice-captain Ollie Pope's epic second-innings knock of 196 and left-arm spinner Tom Hartley's seven-wicket haul in the second innings. "The young spinners have been fantastic but, for me, James Anderson's brilliant performance shows that they have to get another seamer, probably Ollie Robinson, in the side with him," he said.

Pospisil gets wild card for Bengaluru Open

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Former top-30 Canadian tennis star Vasek Pospisil, whose career has been hit by a spate of injuries, was on Friday handed a wild card entry in the singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open Challenger event. Pospisil had won the 2014 Wimbledon doubles title with American Jack Sock and also made the singles quarterfinal at the grass court major in 2015. The 33-year-old was ranked as high as 25 in singles in 2014 and fourth in the ATP doubles chart the following year. He also has a victory over the then World number one, Andy Murray in 2017. Indian conditions are not alien to Pospisil, who has competed in the country thrice



at the Chennai Open, the ATP 250 event that was moved to Pune before going off the calendar. "I'm really excited to be in India again, and I'm very grateful to the event organisers for giving me the opportunity. I love the energy of this country and the people here so I'm hoping to have a great week," said Pospisil, who is making a comeback and

is now ranked 816. Pospisil has had to contend with a few injuries in his career that pegged him back. He had to battle a back injury in 2019 for which he had to undergo surgery, and then faced an elbow issue in 2022 but is determined to bounce back. Sunil Yajaman, Tournament Director said, "Vasek Pospisil has always been one of the finest players on the Tour. He is an inspiration and it's nice he has chosen to be in Bengaluru. His life story and achievements speak for themselves." "His presence adds strength to the field and makes the event more competitive. I am sure the Sporting fans of Bengaluru would enjoy watching Vasek and all the budding players of the city would look forward interacting with him and get motivated."

Anger over Messi absence in Hong Kong game spreads

AP ■ HONG KONG

The organizer of a much-hyped soccer match that intended to showcase Lionel Messi in Hong Kong said Friday it would offer a 50% refund following days of backlash from angry fans and the government over the absence of the World Cup winner. The grievances from Hong Kong fans stemming from Messi staying on the bench for the full 90 minutes in the game against a local team due to a groin injury earlier this week

has spread to mainland China after the Argentina star put in a 30-minute game appearance in Tokyo in Inter Miami's latest exhibition match in Asia on Wednesday. Over the past two days, many social media users in mainland China expressed their disappointment over Messi's no-show, with China's state-run newspaper, the Global Times, publishing an editorial that said the impact of the controversy surrounding the football star "has far exceeded the realm of sports."