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# AYODHYA AND ARTICLE 370 DELIVERED

## PM Modi heads for a larger mandate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After attributing "Kal Chakra" during the consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that the temple would imbue future generations of the country with pride in its heritage. Modi made this statement during his final speech of the 17th Parliament session, coinciding with the passing of a resolution regarding the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of the Ram Mandir. Both Houses, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, were adjourned sine die. Modi said the resolution encompasses "Samvedna", "Sankalp", and "Sahanubhuti", along with the mantra of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas'. The Parliament will continue to inspire its members to leave behind a legacy for future generations and work towards fulfilling the dreams and aspirations of future generations through the collective efforts of all its members," the Prime Minister said. "The resolution on the Ram Mandir passed by the House will empower future generations to take pride in

the values of our country," PM Modi said. Former Union Minister and BJP MP Satya Pal Singh initiated the discussion on the Ram Lalla Pran Pratishtha. The Prime Minister expressed gratitude to all Members of the House for their contributions to the functioning of the 17th Lok Sabha. Modi said the five years of the 17th Lok Sabha were characterised by reform, performance, and transformation, with the country rapidly progressing towards significant changes. "The country has rapidly embarked on significant changes, and all members of the House have made important contributions. Works that people had waited for centuries were accomplished," he said. "For generations, people had dreamt of a unified Constitution, and this House made that possible by removing Article 370," he said, noting that several important decisions were taken during the 17th Lok Sabha. "Several challenges were overcome, and the country was provided with the right direction. These five years have been about reform, performance, and transformation. It is rare to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi

PTI

witness reform, performance, and transformation simultaneously. The country will continue to bestow blessings upon the 17th Lok Sabha," he said. The Prime Minister expressed gratitude to MPs and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. "You (Birla) always maintained a smile on your face regardless of the circumstances. You led this House impartially, and I commend you for it. There

were moments of anger and accusations, but you handled these situations with patience and steered the House wisely," Modi said. Referring to the Covid pandemic, Modi remarked that over the last five years, the "biggest crisis of the century" had been witnessed, and Birla ensured that parliamentary work continued without interruption while upholding

the dignity of the House. There used to be discussions about the need for a new building in earlier times, but the decision of the Speaker made this a reality during the 17th Lok Sabha. Modi mentioned that the ceremonial installation of the 'sengol in the House was also carried out under Speaker Birla's leadership. He noted that the 17th Lok Sabha achieved 97 per cent

productivity. "As we near the end of the 17th Lok Sabha, we resolve to exceed 100 per cent productivity in the 18th Lok Sabha," Modi said. He also praised the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill and the criminalisation of instant triple talaq. Speaking about the resolution, Union Home Minister Amit Shah stated that January 22, the day the

Ram Mandir in Ayodhya was inaugurated, marked the beginning of India's new journey. Shah emphasised that India cannot be imagined without Lord Ram and highlighted the Supreme Court's verdict, which deemed it a manifestation of India's secularism. "22 January was the beginning of a great India... Those who imagine a country without Lord Ram do not understand our country well and they represent the days of colonialism. I want to say that those who don't know their history end up losing their identity... 22 January will be a historic day for years to come... It was the day that fulfilled the hopes & aspirations of all Ram devotees," Amit Shah said. The consecration of the Ram Mandir ended a long agitation since 1528 and a legal fight since 1858, the Union Home Minister added. "A 300-year dream realised under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and PM Modi and the BJP delivered what they promised. No one can understand the history of this country without considering the Ram Mandir movement. Since 1528, every generation has witnessed this movement in some form or

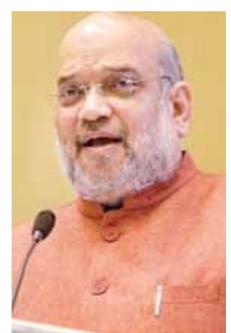
another. This matter remained unresolved for a long time. This dream had to be fulfilled during the Modi government," Shah noted. He also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for observing the 11-day fast before the opening of the Ram Mandir. Regarding PM Modi's leadership, Shah said, "The country chose a sarvgun sampann leader. Prior to PM Modi's leadership, the country lacked direction." The Lok Sabha passed the resolution on the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, with Speaker Om Birla describing the temple's construction as a historic achievement and stating that it will instill the values of hope and unity in future generations. Reading from the resolution at the end of a nearly four-hour-long discussion on "the construction of historic Shri Ram Mandir and Pran Pratishtha of Shri Ramlala" in the House, Birla said that after centuries of waiting, the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has ushered in a new era of good governance and public welfare. Birla, who moved the resolution, noted that the temple symbolises the spirit of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat".

# Amit Shah pledges CAA before LS polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), enacted in 2019, will be implemented before the Lok Sabha elections after issuing the rules in this regard, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Saturday. Saying that the process to grant Indian nationality to the beneficiaries will start soon after, Shah said, "The CAA is a law of the country and its notification will definitely be issued. It will be issued before the polls. The CAA will be implemented before the elections. No one should have any confusion about it." The Home Minister said he wanted to make it clear that the CAA is not a law to snatch anyone's citizenship. "Our Muslim brothers are being misled and instigated (against the CAA). The CAA is only meant to give citizenship to those who came to India after facing persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It is not for snatching anyone's Indian citizenship," he said, adding that the CAA is a

constitutional agenda, signed by the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. "But the Congress had ignored it due to appeasement. The enforcement of the UCC in Uttarakhand is a social change. It will be discussed on all forums and face legal scrutiny. A secular country cannot have religion-based civil codes," he said. Under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the Modi Government wants to grant Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants — Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians — from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who had come to India till December 31, 2014. He said granting Indian citizenship to persecuted minorities of the neighbouring countries was a promise of the Congress leadership too. "When the Partition happened — Hindus, Buddhists, Christians — all wanted to come to India after facing religious persecution there. They (Congress leaders) had promised to give citizenship



to these people saying all of you are welcome. But the (Congress) leaders went back on their word," Shah said. Delayed by over four years, rules for the CAA are a must for its implementation. Officials said rules are ready and the online portal is also in place as the entire process will be online. The applicants will have to declare the year when they entered India without travel documents. No document will be sought from the applicants. The benefits under the CAA will be given to the undocumented

minorities from the three countries. The promise of implementing the controversial CAA was a major plank of the BJP in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in West Bengal. The saffron party's leaders consider it a plausible factor that led to the rise of the BJP in Bengal. According to the Manual on Parliamentary Work, the rules for any legislation should have been framed within six months of presidential assent or seek an extension from the Committees on Subordinate Legislation in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Since 2020, the home ministry has been taking extensions at regular intervals from the parliamentary committee for framing the rules. In the last two years, over 30 District Magistrates and Home Secretaries of nine States have been given powers to grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

# ED books Wankhede on graft charges

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Sameer Wankhede, a 2008-batch IRS officer, and two other NCB officers will soon be summoned by the ED for questioning in the money laundering case. Having found himself in the dock, Wankhede, who had led the investigations in the cruise ship drug bust case as the then NCB's Mumbai's Zonal director, moved the Bombay High Court seeking quashing of the money laundering case registered against him by the ED in 2021 mid-sea drug bust case. Wankhede's petition is likely to be heard by a HC division bench on February 15. The money laundering case registered by the ED is based on an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) against him on the basis of an FIR registered by the CBI in May 2023. On his part, Wankhede chose not to comment on Saturday's development by saying, "Since the matter is subjudice, I do not intend to comment further."

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# Imran Khan has little to offer to Pakistan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

Pakistan's powerful Army chief General Asim Munir on Saturday urged the country's polarised political leadership to form a "unified government of all democratic forces", as he backed ex-premier Nawaz Sharif's plea to his rivals to help form a coalition government after the elections appear to have produced a hung Parliament. Efforts to form a unity government gained momentum after the three-time former prime minister Sharif, who seems to enjoy the backing of the Pakistan Army, appealed to other political parties to join hands.



Springing a surprise, independents backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won the lion's share of 100 seats in the National Assembly in Thursday's election. The group was followed by Sharif's PML-N with 73 seats, PPP with 54, MQM with 17 and 11 other seats going to smaller parties, as the result of 255 seats out of 265 was announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan. To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 in the National Assembly. Election to one seat was postponed after the death of a candidate.

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# NDA will get over 400 seats: Shah

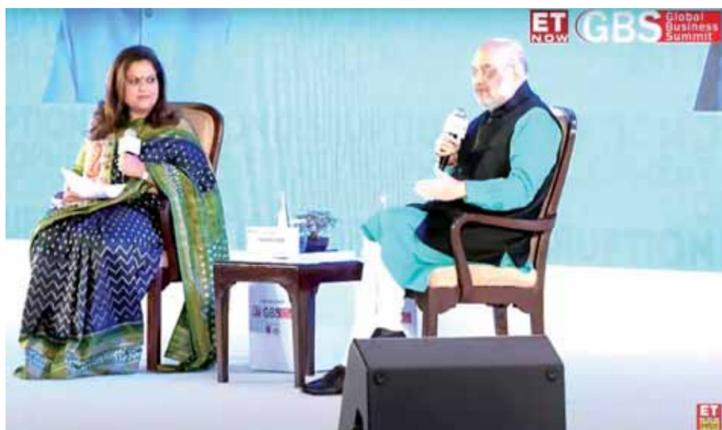
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Saturday the BJP will get 370 seats and the NDA more than 400 in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and form the government for a third consecutive term under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Making these assertions at the ET NOW Global Business Summit 2024, he said there is no suspense over the outcome of the Lok Sabha polls and even the Congress and other opposition parties have realised that they will again have to sit in the opposition benches.

"We have abrogated Article 370 (of the Constitution, which gave a special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir). So we believe that the people of the country will bless the BJP with 370 seats and the NDA with over 400 seats," Shah said.

Asked about the possibility of the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD),



headed by Jayant Choudhary, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and some other regional parties joining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the home minister said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) "believes in family planning but not in politics", giving an indication that more parties may

join the ruling coalition. When pressed further on the SAD, he said, "Talks are going on but nothing has been finalised." Shah said the 2024 polls will not be an election between the NDA and the INDIA opposition bloc, but between development and those who give mere slogans.

Asked about the Bharat Jodo Yatra of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said the Nehru-Gandhi scion has no right to go ahead with such a march as his party was responsible for the country's partition in 1947. On the timing of a white paper tabled by the government in Parliament, Shah said it was

necessary as the country has full right to know what mess the Congress-led United Progressive alliance (UPA) left behind when it lost power in 2014.

"At that time (2014), the economy was in a bad shape. There were scams everywhere. Foreign investment was not coming. Had we taken out a white paper at that time, it would have given a wrong message to the world. "But after 10 years, our government has revived the economy, brought foreign investment and there is no corruption at all. So it is the right time to publish the white paper," he said.

On the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the home minister said the people of the country believed for 500-550 years that the temple should be built at the place where Lord Ram was born. "However, due to the politics of appeasement and citing law and order, the construction of the Ram temple was not allowed," he said.

# Treat displaced PoJK families on par with those settled in J&K earlier: HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Delivering a landmark ruling, the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh has directed the Government of India to treat 5300 displaced families of Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 through their successors/legal heirs settled on J&K alike and equally with 26,319 displaced families settled in erstwhile State and consequently work out one-time settlement rehabilitation package within six months.

The High Court also directed the government to accord the same status and entitlements in their respective favor as held and enjoyed by 26,319 displaced families of PoJK of 1947 settled in the erstwhile State of J&K. Justice Rahul Bharti passed the directions after hearing a set of writ petitions. Justice Rahul Bharti observed, "Now, after the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act, 1956, High Court said, adding

"just by text orientation of one definition in the Act, 5300 displaced families came to be disqualified legally from having any say and status in the State of Jammu & Kashmir notwithstanding their displacement from the princely State". Referring to the decisions and orders of successive Governments of the State of J&K, Justice Rahul Bharti said, "This court has reasons and basis to make a safe inference that the then Governments in J&K intentionally kept the displaced persons of PoJK settled outside out of the purview of relief and rehabilitation package in the exploit of being its domain of decision making admitting of no dictation from Government of India because of constitutional relationship", adding "there was no legal basis but a political motive in keeping the displaced families settled outside J&K to remain out of the purview of the benefits of relief and rehabilitation package".

# Very slow progress in schemes under Tourism Ministry: Panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel has expressed its dismay over the slow progress of projects under the Ministry of Tourism's Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) and Swadesh Darshan schemes in 2014-15. In PRASHAD scheme, out of 45 sanctioned projects, only 20 have been completed, indicating a significant delay, said the panel in a report tabled in Parliament.

The schemes were launched for developing infrastructure at tourist destinations, including religious sites, across the country. "There are a total of 45 sanctioned projects under this PRASHAD scheme out of which only 20 have been completed. Nine projects under this Scheme are still pending completion with only upto 60 per cent progress. There are still 16 projects yet to be developed under this scheme. Considering the fact that this scheme was initiated



in 2014-15, the progress is very slow," said the report. It further noted that all the projects, both completed and ongoing, under PRASHAD have had delays of at least one year. Some projects like the development of Mathura-Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh as Mega Tourist Circuit (Ph-II) and development of Basic facilities at Vishnupad temple, Gaya, Bihar have had a delay of 4 years. "The Committee also observes that some of the Targets in the EFC proposal of October 2021 pertaining to this Scheme have not been achieved," said the report.

The Committee led by MP V Vijayasai Reddy also observed that under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme 1.0 initiated in 2014-15, as of now only 59 of the 76 projects have been completed. "As per the Outcome Budget 2022-23 of the Ministry, all the projects under this Scheme were to be completed by December, 2022. However, 17 projects, i.e. about 22% of the projects under this Scheme are still pending after release of nearly 90% of the overall budget of the Scheme." While appreciating the Ministry's initiatives to take up the matter of selecting 25 tourist sites as pilot projects for formation of a separate police unit in the States/UTs, the panel at the same time also expressed dismay that only 14 States have till date, deployed tourist police in one form or the other. With all eight functioning overseas promotion offices being shut down, the Committee noted that "this would be a setback to the Ministry's plans for global campaigns for promotion."

# MPs hail 17th LS tenure as historic

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Several members of the 17th Lok Sabha on Saturday hailed the tenure as "historic" and recalled Article 370, triple talaq, Ram temple and the new Parliament building as the highlights.

Poonam Mahajan, Mumbai North Central MP, said, "I feel blessed to be an MP in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's era. We can see things happening the way it was never before. The impact on social reforms, economic reforms and reforms with which we can take the farmers, youth and women forward. As many as 25 crore people have come above poverty line, which is the biggest achievement."

Asked what was the highlight when it comes to legislative business, she said, "Article 370 was abrogated. It was connected more with our hearts. Kashmir has suffered many years of bad politics of Congress. Triple talaq bill was about equality for women, that is what we are looking for." "The past five years have been very good. Of course, travel was disrupted in between during COVID but still we managed



and the session went on. It was very very successful. I was part of two Lok Sabhas - 16th and 17th. I met so many people and intellectuals... Became friends beyond party lines and got to learn a lot. I liked being here," Mathura MP Hema Malini said. Asked whether she will contest the forthcoming polls, Malini said, "If the party gives me a chance, I am ready... We are all confident about the third term of the BJP government." Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction) leader Supriya Sule said the roles of being members of treasury or opposition benches are limited

to the House and all MPs are good friends. "We are not only treasury and opposition members but we are also good friends," Patel said, as she walked with Union Minister of State and Apna Dal (Sonelal) MP Anupriya Patel out of the Lok Sabha on the last day of the session.

"Politics and ideologies are on one side and friendships are above that. This is what democracy is," Sule said while Patel echoed her views. Asked about her experience, Sule said, "It was great. There were happy and sad moments. But we will continue to serve the country wherever we are."

On the bill to provide reservation to women, she said, "The bill was passed but no date for implementation has been given... It was a juma." Mahesh Sharma, BJP MP from Noida, said the 17th Lok Sabha entered a new building with a new vision. "There was a resolve to bring India in the category of developed nations from being a developing country. The PM has been the 'Arjun' of the rath of development," he said. Ram Kripal Yadav, BJP MP from Bihta in Bihar, said the 17th Lok Sabha did exceptional work. "Its results will be seen in the form of a massive majority for the BJP in the upcoming elections. Triple talaq, Article 370 and Ram temple in Ayodhya will remain the highlights," he said. North East Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari said it was a historic Lok Sabha. "We saw 'Bhartiya Dand Sanhita' becoming 'Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita'... We will become the third largest economy within next two years. The only painful thing for us was that entire session was washed out twice due to uproar... It was painful for people like us who came to Lok Sabha with faith. But we also saw that there were few bills where we got support from non-NDA members," he said. Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party MP Prince Raj said it was a matter of pride for him to be a part of the House. "There were many different experiences. When I came to the House and delivered my first speech, I was asked how I feel as a young MP. I said I feel like a new student in a new school. Some students are good at studies, some are not. The opposition and the treasury benches sit on different sides. We learn something new everyday from the way exchanges takes place and matters of national interest are raised," he said. North West Delhi MP Hans Raj Hans said despite two years of this Lok Sabha's term being affected by COVID, all necessary bills were passed. "I am fortunate to be a part of this Lok Sabha. I heard two presidents and made new friends with MPs. I had never thought I would get so much love. I am an artist, not politician," he said.

# Medical seats paucity at UG, PG levels warrants urgent attention: Panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With over 20.3 million candidates appearing for NEET Under Graduate and only 11.4 million successfully clearing the exam, and over 2,08,898 candidates competing for just 68,073 postgraduate (PG) seats nationwide, the gap between aspiring medical professionals and available educational opportunities is striking. Calling the situation "a critical issue that warrants immediate attention," the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare in its report "Quality of Medical Education in India" presented in Rajya Sabha noted that the current situation regarding medical



seats both in undergraduate and postgraduate courses is a critical issue that warrants immediate attention. "With an annual influx of approximately 2 million aspiring medical students at UG and only 1/20th available seats, the demand far exceeds the availability of seats, similarly, the number of available seats at PG level is far less than the demand. The Committee acknowledges the urgency of addressing this challenge while maintaining the quality of medical education at its highest standard."

# Imran Khan has little...

From Page 1

Overall, 169 seats are needed to secure a simple majority out of its total 336 seats, which include the reserved slots for women and minorities. Votes are still being counted after the general election which was marred by allegations of rigging, sporadic violence and a countrywide mobile phone shutdown. On Saturday, a statement attributed to Gen Munir said, "Pakistan's diverse polity and pluralism will be well-represented by a unified government of all democratic forces imbued with national purpose."

He said that elections and democracy are means to serve the people of Pakistan and not end in themselves. The powerful Pakistan Army, which has ruled coup-prone Pakistan for more than half of its 75-plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in matters of security and foreign policy. "The nation needs stable hands and a healing touch to move on from the politics of anarchy and polarisation

which does not suit a progressive country of 250 million people. Elections are not a zero-sum competition of winning and losing but an exercise to determine the mandate of the people," it said. The army chief noted that the people of Pakistan reposed their combined trust in the Constitution of Pakistan and it was now "incumbent upon all political parties to reciprocate the same with political maturity and unity." Meanwhile, Khan, 71, in an AI-generated audio-video message on Saturday claimed victory in the general elections. He thanked the people for voting for PTI and also asked them to ensure the sanctity of their votes was not hijacked by the establishment. PTI Central Information Secretary Raouf Hasan said the party had already started the consultation process on its future course of action. However, he added, physical meetings have not been possible since most elected candidates are either in jail or underground.

# BJP outspends Congress by five times, leads in Electoral Bonds

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP has spent five times more than the Congress on elections in 2022-23, while it collected seven times more from electoral bonds during the same period. The BJP spent Rs 1,092.15 crore for poll-related expenses in 2022-23, compared to Congress' Rs 192.55 crore. According to an annual audit report uploaded on the Election Commission's website, the BJP collected Rs 1,294.14 crore from electoral bonds, whereas Congress collected Rs 171.01 crore in the same year. These figures support the Opposition's allegation that the financial instrument is largely favouring the ruling party. The BJP's total contributions stood at Rs 2,120 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal year, with 61 per cent coming from electoral bonds. In 2021-22, the party's total contributions



amounted to Rs 1,775 crore. The audit report reveals that the BJP spent Rs 645.85 crore in 2021-22. Considering the controversial electoral bonds, the BJP collected Rs 1,294.14 crore compared to Congress' Rs 171.01 crore in the same year, lending credence to the Opposition's claim that the financial instrument predominantly favours the ruling party. According to the report, the BJP's total income surged to Rs 2,360.84 crore from Rs 1,917.12 crore, while Congress' income was a mere Rs 452.37 crore. Total expenditure amounted to Rs

1,361.68 crore for the BJP compared to Congress' expenditure of 467.13 crore in 2022-23. Electoral bonds constituted 54 percent of the total income, with Rs 2,120.06 crore coming from donations for the BJP. Income from bank interest was Rs 237.3 crore, up from the previous fiscal's Rs 133.3 crore. Beyond electoral bonds, the BJP augmented its financial reserves through interest, accumulating Rs 237 crore in the last fiscal year, a significant increase from Rs 135 crore in 2021-22. However, the party exercised fiscal prudence in its

expenditure on 'election and general propaganda', reducing spending on aircraft and helicopters from Rs 117.4 crore to Rs 78.2 crore. Additionally, the party allocated Rs 76.5 crore as financial assistance to candidates, a decrease from Rs 146.4 crore in 2021-22. This assistance is categorised under the head 'total payments'. The party concluded the financial year with cash and cash equivalents amounting to Rs 5,424.71 crore, up from Rs 4,456.18 crore in 2021-2022. The Election Commission of India uploaded the annual contribution reports of the BJP and three other recognised national parties on its website. According to the law, political parties are required to disclose details of all donations received above Rs 20,000, including information about donors such as names, PAN card numbers, and addresses.

# MVA demands dismissal of Shinde Government

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In no mood to let go the Eknath Shinde dispensation off the hook in the Facebook live murder case, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Saturday once again roared for the dismissal of the BJP-led MahaYuti government and imposition of President's Rule in Maharashtra. While former chief minister and Shiv Sena (UBT) President Uddhav Thackeray flagged the issue at a news conference, a delegation of the Congress AND Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar) called on Governor Ramesh Bais and submitted a memorandum to the effect, seeking imposition of the President's rule in the state. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Abhishek Ghosalkar was shot

dead during a Facebook live interaction with people at Borivli (West) in north Mumbai on February 18.

In his interaction with the media, Uddhav raised serious doubts into the events leading to the killing of his party colleague Ghosalkar and charged that the MahaYuti had miserably failed to govern Maharashtra effectively. "This government must go. The Shinde government should be dismissed forthwith and President's Rule should be imposed to facilitate fresh Assembly elections in the state," the Sena (UBT) chief said, while alluding to the much-publicised photographs of shady characters with Shinde, former Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, Deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis' wife Amruta Fadnavis and other leaders.

# ED books Wankhede on graft charges

From Page 1

"I will give the appropriate reply in the court at the appropriate time. I reiterate that I have full faith in the Indian judiciary. Satyamev Jayate," Wankhede said. Last year, the CBI booked Wankhede for allegedly demanding Rs 25 crore as a bribe for not framing Aryan Khan in the drugs-on-crime case. The agency had then claimed that the deal was closed for Rs 18 crore and that Wankhede's assets were not proportionate to his known sources of income. The CBI's charge against Wankhede should be seen in the context of the fact that on May 27, 2022, the NCB

had given Aryan Khan a "clean chit" in the much-discussed Cordelia cruise ship drug bust case, citing "lack of sufficient evidence" against him. The CBI booked Wankhede and others for alleged criminal conspiracy (120-B IPC), and threat of extortion (388 IPC) besides provisions pertaining to bribery under the Prevention of Corruption Act on a complaint from the NCB. Apart from Wankhede, the other NCB officers against whom an FIR was registered were: Vishva Vijay Singh, then Superintendent (NCB), Ashish Ranjan, then Intelligence Officer of

Mumbai Zonal Unit (NCB) and two witnesses in the case K P Gosavi and Sanvile D'Souza. Wankhede and others were booked under Sections 7, 7A, and 12 of the Prevention of Corruption Act and sections 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 388 (extortion by threat of accusation of an offence) of the IPC. The CBI had alleged in its FIR that Sameer and other accused named in its FIR had allegedly entered into extort an amount of around Rs 25 crore from the family members of the alleged accused "by threatening them of possession of narcotics substances as per the alleged directions of Wankhede being the supervisory officer". The CBI had also alleged that "a token amount of Rs 50 lakh as bribe was allegedly obtained in furtherance of this conspiracy". It may be recalled that the NCB had arrested Aryan Khan, Arbaaz Merchant, Munmun Dhamecha and five others on October 3, after its officials busted a rave party and seized 13 grams of cocaine, 5 grams of MD (Mephedrone), 21 grams of Charas, 22 pills of MDMA (Ecstasy) and Rs 1.33 lakh in cash from Goa-bound Cordelia Cruises' Empress

ship, off the Mumbai coast. Subsequently, the NCB arrested 12 more persons in connection with the mid-sea rave party. The permanent relief to Aryan in the sensational case came seven months after the Bombay High Court on October 28, 2021 granted bail to him and two others, 25 days after they were arrested in the sensational case. The NCB had given Aryan Khan a "clean chit" on May 27, 2022 in the mid-sea drug bust case, citing "lack of sufficient evidence" against him. The NCB did not name Aryan and five others in the charge-sheet before a special court in the drug bust case on

May 19, 2023. However, the NCB had filed a 6,000-page chargesheet in the Special court against 14 others, including Arbaaz Merchant and Munmun Dhamecha, in the case, before the expiry of the extended deadline for filing of a charge-sheet in the case. The 14 persons who have been charge-sheeted in the case were: Arbaaz Merchant, Munmun Dhamecha, Vikrant Chhokar, Mohak Jaiswal, Ishmeet Singh Chadha, Gomit Chopra, Nupur Satija, Abdul Kadar Shaikh, Shreyas Nair, Manish Rajgaria, Aachit Kumar, Chinedu Igwe, Shivraj Harijan and Okoro Uzeoma.

# Student groups clash at JNU during union polls meet

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A scuffle broke out late on Friday night between RSS-affiliated ABVP and Left-backed groups at the Jawaharal Nehru University campus during a meeting on holding students' union polls, with both sides claiming some of their members were injured. While the warring groups blamed the other side for the ruckus, there was no immediate reaction from the JNU administration.

The student groups clashed during the University General Body Meeting (UGBM) at the Sabarmati Dhaba on the campus to elect members of the Election Commission for the

2024 JNUSU polls. Left-affiliated Democratic Students' Federation (DSF) alleged Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) members obstructed the UGBM by encroaching upon the dias and heckling council members and speakers. In videos shared by both the groups on social media, ABVP and JNU students' union members can be seen arguing, amid shouting and sloganeering as university security personnel try to control the situation.

"In response to the JNU Administration's announcement of the start of the JNUSU elections for 2023-2024, the ABVP has teamed up with the administration to obstruct the

UGBM called by the students and halt the democratic process initiated for the conduct of JNUSU election 2024," the DSF said in a statement. The Students' Federation of India claimed that JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh was attacked by ABVP students and water was thrown at her during the ruckus.

"Aishe Ghosh, president, JNUSU was heckled and shamelessly attacked by ABVP lumps. They can be seen throwing water on a her. Such disgraceful behaviour against a female student of JNU should not be tolerated at any cost," a statement said. Texts and calls to seek a response from Ghosh on the claim did not elicit a



response. The right wing students group alleged ABVP-JNU secretary Vikas Patel was attacked by DSF activists. They said another student, Prashanto Bagchi, was thrashed during the ruckus to settle personal scores. An MA final year student, Prafulla, was attacked with a sharp

weapon, the ABVP alleged. It also claimed a differently-abled student of BA Persian, Divyaprakash, was beaten by students from the left groups because of supporting ABVP. Shifting the blame on the Left groups for the disruption, the ABVP said in a statement, "Today, the all-party organised a University General Body Meeting at Sabarmati ground at 9.30 pm. At first JNUSU had passed casteist slurs to the mic and sound workers as they did not want ABVP to participate in the UGBM.

"The workers felt humiliated and backed off. However, ABVP activists talked to them and influenced them to not take away the mic and sound

system. When the Left-led parties (AISA, SFI, DSF and many more) saw that the UGBM will take place anyhow, they tried to disturb the GBM. However, the ABVP failed all their tactics. At last, they started beating ABVP activists," it added.

The Delhi police said it is in touch with the JNU administration and is probing the matter, while adding that so far the police have only received a complaint from the ABVP. According to a police official, a PCR call was received at the Vasant Kunj North Police Station at 12.30 am. A team of the police reached the university gate but did not enter the campus.

"A PCR call was made by the

security guards from the main gate at 12.30 am. A team went to the gate but did not enter. There was a scuffle in GBM. We are in contact with the JNU administration and examining the matter," the official said. "The ABVP has given a complaint. No complaints (have been received) from the JNUSU side as of now," he added.

A large number of students had gathered at the Sabarmati Dhaba on the campus to cast their vote for electing members of the EC at the UGBM. Earlier in the day on Friday, the JNUSU had collected quorum (signatures from students which is 1/10th of the university's strength) to start the process of UGBM.

## Will contest all 13 LS seats in Punjab: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Saturday reiterated that the party will contest all 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab and one in Chandigarh in the 2024 general election, dismissing the possibility of alliance with its INDIA bloc partner, the Congress party in the State.

The announcement that the AAP will contest all 13 seats in the state and one in Chandigarh was made on Saturday by AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal, who also took a dig at the Congress and said people in Punjab would be hard-pressed to remember any 'good work' that his INDIA ally had done when it ruled the state. Kejriwal's announcement comes days after Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann said that his party would contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections solo. Mann in January had said that there would be no alliance with the Congress for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Further indicating that



there will be no alliance with the Congress in the state, the Delhi chief minister said that his party will announce candidates for all 14 seats in the coming 10-15 days. Speaking at a public event on the doorstep delivery of ration in Khanna, Punjab, Kejriwal said in Hindi, "The Lok Sabha elections will be held in two months... Punjab has 13 seats and Chandigarh has one. In the next 10-15 days, the AAP will

announce its candidates for all 14 seats. I request you to give us your blessings like you did (during the Punjab Assembly election) two years ago, and ensure that the AAP sweeps all 14 seats." The remarks suggest that the ongoing talks between AAP and the Congress over seat sharing haven't made progress. However, Kejriwal's remark indicates that the two parties may face the BJP and SAD in Punjab in a quadrilateral electoral competition. The Delhi chief minister's statement will add to the turmoil in the opposition grouping which is yet to recover from the loss of Janata Dal (United) President Nitish Kumar, who switched to the BJP-led NDA last month. Sources said the AAP's PAC, its highest decision-making body, will meet on February 13 to announce candidates for Haryana, Goa and Gujarat, as it believes that time is running out for them.

Both AAP and Congress traditionally bitter rivals in Punjab and Delhi, had contested the Chandigarh mayoral elections together last month, indicating that they could extend the alliance to the Lok Sabha elections. Taking a dig at the Kejriwal's remarks, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the Congress and "AAP" are two sides of the same coin, both with a history of deceit, having deceived the public and now deceiving each other. "Two years back, you gave your blessings. Out of 117

seats, you gave us 92 seats. You created history in Punjab. Today I again seek your blessing with folded hands. There will be Lok Sabha elections after two months. In Punjab there are 13 (Lok Sabha) seats, one is Chandigarh and there will be 14 seats. "In the coming 10-15 days, the AAP will announce its candidates on all these 14 seats. I request you the way you blessed us two years back, get the party to win all these 14 seats," said Kejriwal while addressing a public gathering in Khanna.

The Delhi chief minister also praised the Bhagwant Mann government, saying it did a "lot of work" in the past two years. "If I ask you today, in 75 years, the Congress ruled for so many years. Tell me one good work the Congress has done. (You) will not remember. If I ask you, Akali Dal ruled for so many years, tell me one good work the Akali Dal has done. (You) will not remember," said Kejriwal as he attacked the rival parties.

## DMRC chief conducts late night inspection of Pink Line stations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) chief Vikas Kumar conducted a late-night inspection of some metro stations on its Pink Line, a day after a portion of a wall collapsed at Gokulpuri station, officials said on Saturday.

A 53-year-old man died and four people were injured in the Thursday morning incident. "The DMRC MD conducted an inspection of some of the metro stations on its Pink Line on Friday night. He spent about 2.5 hours during the inspection and also interacted with staff," a senior official of DMRC said.

Gokulpuri Metro Station falls on the Pink Line which connects Majlis Park and Shiv Vihar Metro Stations. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation on Saturday also posted a photo on X about the night inspection.

"DMRC MD Dr Vikas Kumar went to the elevated stations of



Pink Line on a night inspection to interact with the staff deputised for inspection and maintenance work to enquire about the overall progress of work," it posted.

"In a meeting held yesterday, Dr Kumar held a detailed review regarding the incident at Gokulpuri. Accordingly, all parapet walls installed on the Pink Line at the elevated stations are being inspected in detail to avoid such incidents," the DMRC added in a subsequent post.

The Commissioner for Metro Rail Safety (CMRS) on Friday began an inquiry into the incident, sources earlier said. Following the incident, the DMRC has ordered safety checks across its entire network.

Earlier on Friday, Kumar held a detailed review meeting regarding the incident, with all the heads of the concerned departments. He issued directions that the parapets installed on the Pink Line at all the elevated stations should be inspected in detail to avoid such incidents.

## LG visits Kirari on complaints over acute lack of sanitation, amenities

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking note of complaints from local residents regarding acute lack of sanitation and basic civic amenities in the Kirari area of north-west Delhi, Lt Governor (LG) V K Saxena visited the locality on Saturday to take stock of situation. Giving details here, officials said starting from Bhagwan Mahavir Marg, which connects Kirari from Rohini and Rithala, Saxena visited different locations in Kirari that are prone to severe waterlogging and filled with heaps of garbage, forcing the residents to live in unhygienic living conditions.

Shocked and anguished over the hellish condition that residents of these areas are forced to live in, the LG directed the MCD and other concerned agencies to take immediate steps to improve sanitation in the area within a month. Saxena was visibly peeved at the overflowing sewers, open manholes, heaps of garbage, potholed-dusty roads and broken pavements in the area. He lamented that such apathy on part of the government agencies had led to the pathetic conditions due to which Kirari, which houses nearly 1.5 lakh households and a population of 7-8 lakhs, has remained one of the most underdeveloped parts of the National Capital, officials said.

The LG was informed that a



major part of Kirari was low-lying and hence severely prone to water-logging that forced the people to live in unhygienic conditions due to absence of sewerage system and lack of adequate storm water drainage system. No concrete efforts had been undertaken by the DJB and I&FC Department to address these issues. Similarly, the PWD and MCD had largely left the roads in disrepair, with the civic agency additionally neglecting garbage disposal. Also, a vast extent of nearly 500 acres of open DDA land sur-

rounding Kirari was perennially filled with storm water as no proper drainage system exists in the area. As a result, the water seeps from these land pockets into the adjoining low-lying residential colonies. The situation aggravates during monsoons and a large part of the area remains waterlogged for several days. Saxena directed the DDA to expedite the construction of a 7.2 km drain that has been planned as a long-term solution to waterlogging in the area. He also asked DDA to chalk out a comprehensive drainage plan to ease out the drainage issues in Kirari. As of now, Kirari Suleman Nagar Drain (KSN drain) is the only major storm water drain in Kirari but that is proving insufficient to meet the drainage requirements. In addition to this, agencies including PWD, DJB and I&FC were also directed to expedite the works of remodeling the KSN Drain and other existing drains along the Rohtak Road to address the issue of water-logging.

The LG directed concerned agencies - I&FC, MCD, PWD, DDA and Railways to work in tandem to overcome these perennial issues with long-term solutions. He also asked the MCD and other departments to carry out a massive sanitation drive in the area starting Sunday to bring in a visible change within one month. The Delhi Jal Board was directed to lay and upgrade the sewerage network in Kirari at the earliest.

Notably, Kirari has, over the years, become one of the most densely populated areas, spread over approximately 2,800 acres of geographical area. Prior to the urbanization of the area, most parts of Kirari were used for brick kilns and due to the deep excavation of soil, the area has become a bowl. In the due course, settlements and unauthorized colonies came up on the same surface level which made the area prone to severe water-logging.

## Rahul attacks Centre over glaring flaws in Pragati Maidan tunnel project

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday attacked the Modi government over alleged "glaring infirmities" in the Pragati Maidan tunnel project, saying the "Amrit Kaal" of the corrupt is prevailing. He also criticised the prime minister for focusing more on 'modeling' instead of 'planning' in every development project. Rahul also asserted that agencies like the ED, CBI, and IT are not combatting corruption but democracy. Along with the post, he shared a photo of Modi taken after the inauguration of the tunnel. In a post on X in Hindi, Gandhi said, "The Amrit Kaal' of the corrupt is prevailing in the country." "The Pragati Maidan Tunnel, built at a cost of Rs 777 crore, became unusable in just one year. The prime minister is doing 'modeling' instead of 'planning' on every development project," he said.

"And ED, CBI, IT are not fighting corruption but democracy," the former Congress chief said and shared a photo of Modi after the inauguration of the tunnel. In June 2022, PM Modi had inaugurated the 1.3-km-long tunnel and five underpasses as part of the Pragati Maidan Integrated Transit Corridor Project that aims to ease connectivity between central Delhi with the eastern parts of the city and the satellite towns of Noida and Ghaziabad.



The Delhi government's Public Works Department (PWD) has issued a notice to Larsen and Toubro over the alleged "glaring infirmities" in the project while demanding a "token amount" of Rs 500 crore from the firm and directing it to immediately initiate repair work. Larsen and Toubro has said that they have made a counterclaim of Rs 500 crore against the PWD. The 1.3-kilometre-long tunnel of the Pragati Maidan Integrated Transit Corridor Project has faced recurrent closures due to waterlogging since Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened it on June 19, 2022. These closures have exposed significant flaws within the project, as highlighted in recent notices, raising concerns about its resilience and long-term viability. In 2023, the tunnel witnessed multiple closures due to waterlogging. Experts now believe that a proper multi-team safety audit is required before any possible overhaul. Continuous water seepage can pose a catastrophic danger to any structure made of concrete and TMT bars, whether it's a high-rise, flyover, or underpass.

## NDMC, SPIC MACAY organise 'Music in Park' concert at Nehru Park

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) in association with SPIC MACAY organised first concert of "Music in the Park" series 2024 at Nehru Park, Chanakyapuri on Saturday. Union Minister of State for Culture and External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi was also amongst the audience and appreciated the efforts of NDMC, SPIC MACAY and SRF Foundation to organisation of such type of classical music concert to preservation of our traditional art and culture amongst the youth and general public. She gave thanks to all who associated with such a program in the open out of auditorium and free for all.

According to the NDMC, thousands of audience across the Delhi NCR region mesmerized with wonderful performances by Hindustani Flute Recital by Pandit Nityanand Haldipur, accompanied by Mithilesh Kumar Jha on Tabla. Following him on Sitar, Ustad Shahid Parvez, accompanied by Akram Khan on Tabla performed in "Music in the park". "Thousands of flower lovers also listened to the Music Concert and enthralled on music tunes of the artists. The next Music Concert of 'Music in the Park series 2024' will be on 09th March, 2024 at Nehru Park, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi.

The Music Concert was part of NDMC's series of events to celebrate the spring season in the lush green area of the Heart of the National Capital. New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) is celebrating the spring season with a series of events like Tulip festival, Music in the Park, Flower Festival, Rose Festival and Food Festival," NDMC said.

## New draft policy to relocate logistics infra to outskirts, decongest Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has come up with a draft policy aiming to decongest the city by setting up a network of freight villages and micro-delivery hubs and relocating logistics infrastructure to the periphery of the national capital.

Around 1.93 lakh vehicles enter Delhi and leave the city every day. Out of these, about 79 per cent vehicles have business inside the city like unloading of goods and carrying finished products and commodities to various parts of the country. It is estimated that the goods vehicle traffic will increase to about 5.13 lakh trucks by 2042

in the city, according to the policy document. The 'City Logistics Policy' draft has been put in public domain by the Industries department for having feedback of stakeholders like transporters, logistics agencies, traders and industry before finalising and notifying the policy, officials said.

Urban freight delivery is an important aspect for the functioning of a city but at the same time, it causes various challenges like congestion, pollution and safety issues on the road network. The draft policy recommends setting up three urban consolidation and logistics distribution centers (UCLDCs) or freight villages at the periph-

ery of the city along Delhi-Jaipur, Delhi-Faridabad highways and Delhi-Meerut expressway. The freight villages will be equipped with all modern facilities for handling, storage, sorting, consolidations, and distribution of goods thereby catering to key commodities arriving and leaving Delhi, at peripheral roads. It is estimated that about 70-80 hectares of land is required to develop various facilities at the proposed UCLDCs including improved connectivity through at least 6-lane road for access and egress to and from the highways. The policy suggests the ways to decongest Delhi's city center and relocate logistics infra-



structure to the periphery. The freight hotspots at the city center like wholesale markets, manufacturing areas, industrial areas, and transshipment hubs are critical part of city's economy but lack adequate facilities for loading-unloading spaces, good quality roads to sustain the operational efficiency of the businesses. According to the e-way bill data, it has been identified that some areas like Tughlakabad,

Sarita Vihar, Chandni Chowk, Paharganj, Daryaganj, Wajirpur, Karol Bagh, Naraina, Kirti Nagar, Patel Nagar (110015), and Gandhi Nagar in the city have dominant share of freight traffic movement in the city. The policy recommends implementation of Delhi Master Plan 2041 suggestion of shifting wholesale storage and warehousing activities to Integrated Freight Complexes (IFCs) and proposed UCLDCs in order to decongest the freight hotspots. The freight hotspots will only allow product display centres and micro-warehouses for minimum storage at the freight hotspots, it says. Further, the logistics policy recommends developing of

60-70 micro-delivery hubs across the city in view of growing e-commerce operations in the city. The e-commerce sector is growing rapidly, and evolving continually that tends to increase in the urban freight deliveries. The average trip length for the last mile deliveries is around 5-7 km. E-commerce deliveries requires space for unloading, storing and sorting at locations near to the end consumer for last mile deliveries. Currently, most of the sorting, and loading-unloading activities are happening on the road sides and the footpath in an inefficient operation, it states. It is proposed to develop at least one micro-delivery hub

for 2-3 municipal wards depending upon population density and per capita consumption. On an average it can cover an average last-mile delivery length of 3-5 kilometers. Delhi has 250 wards and approximately requires about 60-70 micro-delivery hubs based on population density and per capita consumption pattern. These micro-delivery hubs will have facilities like storage, last-mile distribution, parking infrastructure and EV charging stations for last mile delivery vehicles. These facilities will be developed as part of local shopping centres, community centres, district centres and shopping malls in the city, the policy document read.

# Modi to inaugurate first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the BAPS mandir, the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, during his two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) starting February 13. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Saturday. Giving details of Prime Minister Modi's schedule, MEA said this will be his seventh visit to the UAE since 2015 and the third in the last eight months. During the visit, Prime Minister Modi will hold bilateral meetings with His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE. The two leaders will discuss ways to further deepen, expand and strengthen the strategic partnership between the countries and exchange views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. Prime Minister will also meet



with His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Defence Minister of UAE. At his invitation, Prime Minister will participate in the World Government Summit 2024 to be held in Dubai as Guest of Honour and deliver a special keynote address at the Summit. The MEA statement said Prime Minister Modi will inaugurate the BAPS Mandir, the first

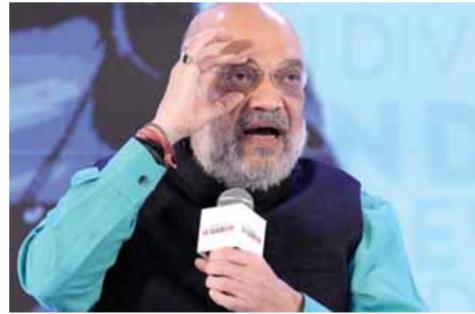
Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi. He will also be addressing the Indian community in the UAE at an event in Zayed Sports city in Abu Dhabi. India and UAE enjoy warm, close and multi-faceted relations underpinned by strong political, cultural and economic linkages. Following the landmark visit of Prime Minister Modi to UAE in August 2015, bilateral relations between the two countries

been elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both countries signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in February 2022 and a Local Currency Settlement (LCS) System in July 2023 to promote the use of Indian Rupee and AED for cross-border transactions. The two countries are among each other's top trading partners with a bilateral trade of about US\$ 85 billion in 2022-23. UAE is also among the top 4 investors in India in terms of foreign direct investments in 2022-23. About 3.5 million strong and vibrant Indian community forms the largest expatriate group in UAE. Their positive and well-appreciated contribution in the development of their host country has been an important anchor of our excellent bilateral engagement with the UAE.

# Shah: Very unfortunate there is debate on caste of PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said it is very unfortunate that there is a debate on the caste of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has a habit of telling lies publicly and repeating those thereafter. Shah also said it was a Congress government in Gujarat that included Modi's caste in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBC) in 1994 and the Centre included the prime minister's caste in its OBC list in 2000. "Modi's caste was listed in Gujarat as OBC on July 25, 1994. At that time, the chief minister of Gujarat was Chhabildas Mehta and the party in power was the Congress. Till that time, Modi had not contested a single election. He used to work for the organisation only. The question of his caste did not come



at all. "Subsequently, the Gujarat government recommended for the inclusion of his caste in the central OBC list. It was finally included in the central OBC list in 2000. At that time also, Modi was not in a position of power -- not an MP, not an MLA nor even a sarpanch. He became the chief minister in 2001. These people have a habit of distorting facts," Shah said at the ET NOW Global Business Summit 2024 here. He said Gandhi has a habit of

telling lies and repeating those thereafter. "As far as Modi's caste is concerned, it is very unfortunate that there is a debate on the caste of a great leader like Narendra Modi. Rahul Gandhi does not know the difference between a caste and a block," he said. The home minister said Modi had said he is an OBC and added that OBC is a block and not a caste. Gandhi was probably not taught this by his teachers, he said. "As far as the caste is con-

cerned, I want to tell the nation that when a question has been raised on the caste of a great leader like Modi, whom the whole world has accepted as a leader, we will have to give the reply. This is democracy," Shah said. Since the Congress has raised the question, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader said he wants to ask the opposition party what has it done for the OBC. "The Kaka Kalelkar report was lying for years. They did not do anything. After that, the Mandal Commission report came. They did not do anything for years. Till the Congress lost power, the Mandal Commission report was not implemented," he said. The home minister said the constitutional recognition to the OBC was given by Modi and it was Modi who constituted the OBC Commission. "It was Modi who brought reservations for the OBC in all central examinations. The Congress has always been an anti-OBC party," he said.

# 'Congress mastered art of ruining accomplishments of previous Governments'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the Congress mastered the art of ruining accomplishments of the previous government as they did while managing inflation during the 10-year UPA regime. She also said there was mismanagement of the economy during 2004-2014 by the Congress-led UPA government. Making these assertions during her reply to a short duration discussion on 'White Paper on Indian Economy' in the Rajya Sabha, Sitharaman said the Modi-led government toiled for 10 years to bring the economy back on track, taking India from 'Fragile Five' to 5th largest economy of the world. She said India is soon going to become the world's third largest economy. Opposition parties walked out of the Rajya Sabha opposing the BJP government's white

paper on the economy, with the CPI(M) also refusing to participate in the discussion on the Ram temple in the House. Sitharaman said the inflation rate was below 4 per cent in the last year of Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, but it remained significantly high during the 10-year UPA regime. "Gur go bar karna inki mastery hai (Congress has mastery of ruining something that has been accomplished)," she said. Giving reasons for coming out with the White Paper now, Sitharaman said a similar exercise earlier would have impacted the confidence of institutions, investors, as well as the people. As an elected government, she said it is imperative to inform the public and Parliament about the true picture of the economy during the UPA regime and efforts taken by the Modi government to revive the economy. In an apparent jibe at the erstwhile National Advisory

Council headed by Sonia Gandhi, the finance minister said India needs a clean and accountable governance, and not governance through extra-constitutional body. Sitharaman highlighted various measures taken by the Modi government to restore the economy back on track. She also said unemployment rate for graduates declined from 17.3 per cent in 2017 to 13.4 per cent in 2023. Members of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) were among those who walked out over the white paper brought by the government in Parliament to compare the state of the economy during the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regimes. Participating in the discussion on the white paper in the Rajya Sabha, CPI(M) member John Brittas said, "Protesting against



the discrimination shown to Kerala, we are walking out. "We are also not party to communalise the political situation," he said on the discussion on the Ram temple, held after that on the white paper. "This is not a white paper. This is an election paper. Selective amnesia and cherry picking. Finance minister (Nirmala Sitharaman) has said 2004-2009 was a good period but she gave the credit to the previous (NDA) government. Strange

enough," the leader of the Left party said. When he was talking about reduction in devolution of funds for Kerala, Finance Minister Sitharaman intervened and said, "I would like to speak out of turn because you are going away. You won't be here to listen to my reply." "I would like to say now... That many of the things he is saying are sprucing up his speech but words which I have not used. So, I still take this liberty in my

reply when the honourable member will not be here. But I am sorry he is taking liberty with my words," she said. On this, Brittas said, "She can make a reply and I can go to the record and see. I will see the video." Tiruchi Siva(DMK) claimed that 700 farmers had died during the agitation against the farm laws that were later withdrawn by the government. Hundreds of people died in front of banks standing in queues to change notes during the demonetisation period, he claimed. He also brought to the notice of the House the poor state of migrant workers during the Covid lockdown. Saket Gokhale(TMC)said, "On behalf of my party, Trinamool Congress, we reject this white paper which not only insults the collective intelligence of Parliament but also seeks to cheat and fool the people of India." Amar Patnaik(BJD)also participated in the discussion

demand more devolution of funds for Odisha. The Congress said the White Paper on the economy was brought by the government to hide the "dark truths" of this country and divert attention from the burning issues of unemployment, price rise, farmers' stress and the state of the economy. Stating this, Congress leader K C Venugopal alleged that the government has used this as a defence for itself by diverting from the issues before the country. He also accused the government of using the Bharat Ratna award for political purposes, even though he welcomed the award to former prime ministers Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh and agriculture scientist M S Swaminathan. Venugopal asked why the finance ministry did not even mention the impact of demonetisation in the White Paper and why it does not make any

mention of unemployment rate, poverty and rupee value in the White Paper on the Indian economy. Senior BJP leader in Rajya Sabha Sushil Modi termed the previous UPA government as the most corrupt regime India has ever seen but the opposition hit back saying common people experience corruption everyday but the current government refuses to see it. Initiating the discussion on 'White Paper on Indian Economy' in the Upper House, Sushil Modi attacked the Congress for economic mismanagement and scams during the 10 years of the UPA rule. He listed out the achievements of the Narendra Modi-led government and reeled out data comparing the progress made during 2014-2024 with that of the UPA regime. Fauzia Khan (NCP) said, "More than calling it a white paper on the Indian economy, I would call it a white paper on the upcoming elections."

# Murmu: Saving tribal lifestyle will help in fighting climate crisis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu said on Saturday the tribal lifestyle offers a solution to the global problem of climate change and called for collective efforts to protect their traditional knowledge. She emphasised the need to learn from tribal communities to live in harmony with nature, especially when the "modernisation race has caused significant harm to the Earth and its natural resources." "In the face of climate change, replicating the tribal lifestyle becomes even more crucial," President Murmu said after inaugurating the "Aadi Mahotsav" at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium here. The festival aims at showcasing the rich diversity of India's

tribal heritage and will run till February 18. President Murmu said tribal people could benefit from new technology, which should be used for sustainable development.

# Opposition slams BJP over deteriorating law & order in Maharashtra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition leaders from Congress and Udhav Thackeray led Shiv Sena has attacked BJP over the deteriorating law and order situation in Maharashtra particularly in Mumbai. While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge attacked the BJP over incidents in Maharashtra where a leader was recently shot dead during a Facebook Live session and the car of a journalist assaulted, alleging that law and order have "collapsed" and "goonda raj"

was being spread under the Eknath Shinde-led government, Shiv Sena (Udhav) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi has written to Home Minister Amit Shah to take immediate steps for restoring a better law and order. Former corporator Abhishek Ghosalkar (40), son of Sena (UBT) leader Vinod Ghosalkar, was shot dead by local businessman and social activist Mauris Noronha during the Facebook Live session on Thursday evening. Noronha later killed himself, according to police. Earlier, BJP MLA Ganpat



Gaikwad shot and injured a local leader of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena at a police station in Ulhasnagar near Mumbai on February 2 over a land dispute and political rivalry.

Also, the car of journalist was attacked on Friday allegedly by BJP workers in Pune while he was travelling to attend an event. In a post on X in Hindi, Kharge said, "Law and order has collapsed under the Maharashtra government formed by the BJP's stealing of mandate." "A politician is being brutally murdered on Facebook Live. An outspoken journalist is being attacked by unruly goons of the BJP-RSS. A BJP MLA is openly shooting at another politician in the police station," Kharge said. The Congress always maintained law and order in Maharashtra and only then the economic development of the state became possible. "But the BJP government

formed with the force of the Enforcement Directorate is playing with the security of the people of Maharashtra by spreading 'goonda raj'" the Congress president said. Chaturvedi who is also a Rajya Sabha member wrote to Union Home Minister to take immediate steps to stop further deterioration of law and order in Maharashtra. "Also in case he isn't aware, making him aware of list of incidents on the state of lawlessness and goondaraj by those who are illegitimately in power. Hope to hear from him soon," Chaturvedi said.

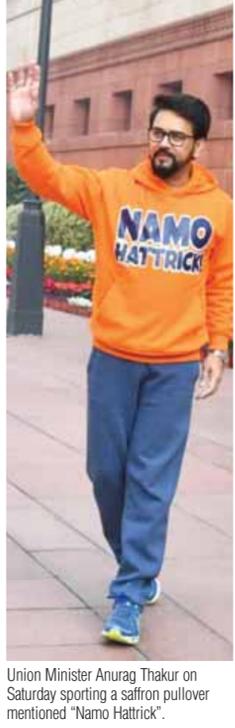
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# Clarify your brands not WHO recommended ORS: Patent body to ORS resembling products

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Notice is hereby given to the public at large that I, Mrs. Rupalli P. Shah residing at 6 Acropolis, 157, S.B.S. Road, Near Colaba Post Office, Mumbai - 400005, Maharashtra, am the exclusive owner of the property bearing Mustatil No. 28, Killa No. 7, measuring 4 Bighas and 5 Biswas, situated in Village Devli, Tehsil Mehrauli, New Delhi. Notice is further given to the public at large that I had entered into an Agreement To Sell dated 27.04.2023 with Mr. Harjeet Singh having address at F-186, Mansarovar Garden, West Delhi, Delhi - 110015 for the sale of land owned by me bearing Mustatil No. 28, Killa No. 7, measuring 4 Bighas and 5 Biswas, situated in Village Devli, Tehsil Mehrauli, New Delhi. Notice is further given to the public at large that as Mr. Harjeet Singh did not comply with the terms and conditions of the Agreement to Sell dated 27.04.2023 and did not perform his part of the contract and tried to delay my payment on frivolous grounds, I terminated the said Agreement to Sell dated 27.04.2023 by way of Legal Notice dated 20.10.2023 and 17.12.2023. The public at large is further warned that no one should deal with said Mr. Harjeet Singh in relation to the above said property. It is further informed to the public at large that now I am at liberty and may proceed to deal with the said property including entering into any transaction with any other party in any manner deemed appropriate by me. Sd/- Mrs. Rupalli P. Shah Date: 11/02/2024 Place: Mumbai

उत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल पर्यावरण भवन, सेक्टर - 19, नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.) // सर्व संबंधित को सूचना // भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय द्वारा जारी ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन, 2006 (स्था-संशोधित) के तहत सर्व संबंधित को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेसर्स शिवाजी उद्योग (आई) प्राइवेट लिमिटेड, प्लॉट नंबर 03 एवं 04 उरला इंडस्ट्रीयल एरिया, जिला रायपुर (छ.ग.) द्वारा Proposed Expansion from Induction furnace, CCM from existing 57600 TPA to 125700 TPA, MS Billets along with Hot Charging based steel Rolling Mill facility from 46000 TPA to 126000 TPA and no increase in existing rerolled steel production capacity of 54000 TPA through existing BRP based rolling mill. Total Rerolled Steel Production capacity will be 180000 TPA के पर्यावरणीय स्विकृति बाबत लोक सुनवाई दिनांक 14/03/2024 को प्रातः 11:00 बजे से स्थल-उरला इंडस्ट्रीज एसोसिएशन भवन के प्रांगण, उरला औद्योगिक क्षेत्र, जिला रायपुर (छ.ग.) में निम्न को गई है। यह भी सूचित हो कि:- 1. लोक सुनवाई के दौरान सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों को फिजिकल / सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन करना अनिवार्य होगा। 2. लोक सुनवाई में सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों द्वारा मास्क का उपयोग किया जावेगा तथा समय-समय पर सेनेटाइजर का उपयोग किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा। 3. लोक सुनवाई स्थल पर सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों की बैठक व्यवस्था कम से कम 02 मीटर की दूरी रखना अनिवार्य होगा। 4. कोरोना वायरस के निरोधक एवं रोकथाम हेतु शासन द्वारा जारी समस्त दिशा-निर्देशों का अखर्रः पालन किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा। ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन, 14 सितम्बर 2006 (स्था-संशोधित) के अनुसार संबंधित व्यक्तियों के अवलोकन/चुन हेतु ड्राफ्ट ई.आई.ए. रिपोर्ट, कार्यपालक सार हिन्दी एवं अंग्रेजी भाषा तथा सी.डी. (साफ्ट कॉपी) डायरेक्टर, भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, जोर बाग रोड, नई दिल्ली, भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, एकीकृत क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, अरण्य भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर - 19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.), कार्यालय कलेक्टर रायपुर, जिला रायपुर (छ.ग.), मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, जिला पंचायत रायपुर, जिला रायपुर (छ.ग.), मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, जनपद पंचायत धरसीवा, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.), आयुक्त, नगर पालिक निगम, बीरगंज, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.), क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, उत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, न्यू ओपिस बिल्डिंग, सिरा रोड नं. 2, टाटाबंध, रायपुर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.) एवं मुख्यालय, उत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, पर्यावरण भवन, सेक्टर - 19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.) में रखी गई है। हस्ता- /- चरय्य सचिव उत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मण्डल, नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, रायपुर (छ.ग.)



ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

It's official now. In line with the directives issued by the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI), the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks (CGPDTM) has made it clear to the manufacturers with trademarks resembling 'ORS' (oral rehydration salts) to clarify that their products are not WHO-recommended ORS. The directives from the top patent body, says, the companies manufacturing energy drinks that have trademarks similar to the term 'ORS' (oral rehydration salts) will have to prominently display that their product is "not an ORS as recommended by the WHO." The move follows complaints regarding misleading marketing of products claiming to be 'ORS' substitutes, despite being medicinal formulations. Effective from April 1, 2024, all Food Business Operators (FBOs) in the manufacturing of products with such brand will have to adhere to these instructions to ensure compliance.



ORS, a drug under Drugs and Cosmetics Rules 1945, is specifically used for treating acute diarrhoea with a composition prescribed by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI). ORS, which comes in a small packet and dissolves in water, and can also be prepared at home is a sort of elixir for kids suffering from life-threatening diarrhoea. A whopping 500,000 children under five die from diarrhoea globally. India accounts for the most global cases of child diarrhoea. Despite earlier directions

from the FSSAI, some companies opposed declaring their products as non-ORS. However, the Delhi High Court's August order and subsequent agreement from CGPDTM supported FSSAI's stance. Following CGPDTM's ruling, FBOs must cease production and recall such products, while also prominently stating on packaging that their product is not a WHO-recommended ORS. Additionally, a disclaimer must clarify the product's true nature.

The product 'ORS' is a drug under Drugs and Cosmetics Rules 1945, which is used for treating acute diarrhoea and has a specific composition prescribed by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI). As per the FSSAI, "The marketing and labelling of the fruit-based beverages etc. in the name of ORS is not only misleading for the ordinary consumers but also harmful for the patients who may consume such products as ORS, especially in case of children suffering from diseases like diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, etc. may have serious health repercussions." With CGPDTM's decision in the matter, the FBOs now will have to stop production of such products from the date of such decision and recall the products available in the market. In the meantime, FBOs will also provide a prominent declaration on their Front-of-Pack either through non-detachable stickers or printing that "The product is NOT a ORS formula as recommended by WHO" or the FBOs may use similar meaning phrases without changing the intent.

# Maryam Sharif's poll victory challenged

PTI ■ LAHORE

The victory of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz in Lahore's National Assembly seats was challenged in the Lahore High Court on Saturday alleging that the top poll body did not follow the correct procedure.

Challenging the victory of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidates in the Lahore High Court (LHC), several losing PTI-backed candidates claimed that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) declared them winners on "bogus" result Form-47 instead of Form-45.

Form 45, commonly referred to as the 'Result of the Count' form, is a crucial record in the Pakistani electoral process which is intended to uphold openness and accountability by documenting and disclosing the outcomes

of the voting procedure at a particular polling station.

A large number of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidates had contested as independents after the ECP had snatched the former prime minister Imran Khan-led party of its iconic cricket bat symbol.

Even when the PTI-backed independents have emerged as the largest lot with over 100 clear wins, the party is expecting at least 50 more National Assembly seats. Sharif, 74, won from NA-130 by securing over 1,72,000 votes against PTI's Dr Yasmin Rashid, who got over 113,000 while his daughter Maryam Nawaz, 50, won from NA-119 securing over 83,000 votes against PTI's Farooq Shahzad, who bagged over 68,000.

One of the petitioners at the LHC, Dr Rashid said she had won the seat against Sharif according to the Form-45, however, the ECP issued



Form-47 declaring the PML-N supreme as successful.

Similarly, Shehzad said Maryam had lost the seat as per polling booth results (Form-45) but "she was declared successful through bogus Form-47."

Another PTI-backed losing candidate challenged the victory of the former prime minister of PPP Yousuf

Raza Gilani at Multan.

Shaher Bano, daughter of former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who is languishing at Adiala Jail Rawalpindi along with PTI founder Khan, also challenged her defeat on similar charges.

PTI secretary Omar Ayub Khan said, "The nation polled around 30 million votes for the PTI-backed candidates" and noted that the nation had shattered several political parties in the election. He instructed all party candidates and polling agents to collect Form-45 and approach the courts to challenge the "rigged results" and emphasised that the results had not yet been consolidated.

Khan's PTI party central Punjab general secretary Hammad Azhar asserted that Nawaz Sharif, along with his brother, family members, and key PML-N leaders, had suffered a massive defeat in the election and said:

"PTI candidates were winning by a significant margin of 50,000 to 1,00,000 votes but were defeated with one stroke of the pen." "We have all the evidence of rigging and several losing candidates are approaching the courts," the PTI leader said.

Meanwhile, Khan's lawyer Barrister Ali Zafar told reporters on Saturday that PTI has won over 150 National Assembly seats but its candidates have been declared successful only on around 100. "We hope that the courts will take up our petitions and we will get at least 50 NA seats back," he said. Incidentally, Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), an independent watchdog monitoring Pakistan elections, too on Saturday highlighted various grey areas in the recently held polls, noting the failure of presiding officers in providing Form 45 to observers at 29 per cent of the polling stations.

# Observers highlight grey areas

PTI ■ LAHORE

PAK POLLS

An independent watchdog monitoring Pakistan elections on Saturday highlighted various grey areas in the recently held polls, noting the failure of presiding officers in providing Form 45 to observers at 29 per cent of the polling stations.

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Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) spokesperson Musarrat Qadeem, quoting the initial report on the election, in a press conference said: "The failure to display copies of Form 45, as required, in 29 per cent of polling stations was a notable oversight." Qadeem also criticised the delay in the release of poll results and the suspension of internet and mobile services on election day. She asserted that the complaints about elections should be addressed.

"The Election Commission must promptly address and resolve candidates' complaints as timely resolution is crucial for maintaining electoral credibility," she added.

Qadeem said the turnout was 48 per cent. "Despite these challenges, over 50 million voters participated in the February 8 elections," she said.

She also said the elections were transparent at the level of polling stations but expressed doubts about fairness at the stage of compiling results by returning officers (ROs).

Qadeem also commended the Election Commission of Pakistan for "holding the elections despite criticism" which showed its resilience. "This election was the country's largest endeavour," she observed.

FAFEN had posted 5,664 observers across the country and reported based on their findings that the Presiding Officers failed to provide Form 45 to observers at 29 per cent polling stations.

The spokesperson said that access was denied at RO offices which hindered the transparent observations monitoring.

She also noted that the margin of rejected votes was higher than the winning margin in 25 constituencies.

FAFEN's findings underscored challenges in the electoral process, urging thorough examination and improvement for future polls.

Several countries, including the US, the UK, and the European Union, showed concern that the Pakistani military had been "rigging" the just-held general elections to "prop up" its candidate and deny the victory secured by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.

Matthew Miller, US State Department spokesperson, said: "We condemn electoral violence, restrictions on the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including attacks on media workers, and restrictions on access to the Internet and telecommunication services, and are concerned about allegations of interference in the electoral process. Claims of interference or fraud should be fully investigated."

# Wheeling & dealing kicks off for coalition govt

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

The wheeling and dealing for the formation of a coalition government in Pakistan have kicked off with major stakeholders engaging in crucial talks after the general elections appear to have produced a hung Parliament.

Efforts to form a unity government gained momentum after former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who seems to enjoy the backing of the powerful military, on Friday appealed to rival political parties to join hands to pull Pakistan out of its current difficulties.

Springing a surprise, independents backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won the lion's share of 101 seats in the National Assembly in Thursday's election.

The group was followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 73 seats,

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with 54, Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) with 17 and other seats going to smaller parties, as the result of 255 seats out of 265 was announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan.

To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 in the National Assembly. Election to one seat was postponed after the death of a candidate.

Overall, 169 seats are needed to secure a simple majority out of its total 336 seats, which include the reserved slots for women and minorities.

Votes are still being counted after the general election which was marred by allegations of rigging, sporadic violence and a countrywide mobile phone shutdown.

Khan, 71, in an AI-generated audio-video message on Saturday claimed victory in the general elections.

He thanked the people for voting for PTI and also asked

them to ensure the sanctity of their votes was not hijacked by the establishment.

PTI Central Information Secretary Raouf Hasan said the party had already started the consultation process on its future course of action. However, he added, physical meetings have not been possible since most elected candidates are either in jail or underground.

He warned that any attempt to derail the people's decision would have "deadly consequences", adding that power-wielders must learn to respect the people's choice.

He said PTI had emerged as a leading political force in the Centre, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, but efforts were underway to manipulate the results in the Centre and Punjab to establish governments of their choice.

"We will exercise all legal and constitutional rights to frustrate all bids to tamper with the election results."

# 'Mobile services curbed to avoid terror attacks'

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan on Saturday expressed surprise over the "negative tone" of some of the statements by the international community about the February 8 elections and observed that mobile services curbs were needed to avoid terrorist attacks during the polls.

The polarised polls, largely peaceful, were held on Thursday, but the delay in the announcement of results became a major irritant for observers monitoring the elections.

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) said in a statement that the country took notice of remarks from certain countries and organisations on the general elections.

"We are surprised by the negative tone of some of these statements, which neither take into account the complexity of the electoral process nor acknowledge the free and

enthusiastic exercise of the right to vote by tens of millions of Pakistanis," the FO said.

"These statements ignore the undeniable fact that Pakistan has held general elections, peacefully and successfully, while dealing with serious security threats resulting primarily from foreign-sponsored terrorism," the statement said.

The statement said some remarks were not even factually correct as there was no nationwide internet shutdown and only mobile services were suspended to avoid terrorist incidents on the polling day.

"The elections exercise has demonstrated that the concerns of many commentators were misplaced," it said.

The FO maintained that Pakistan held the elections as part of its commitment to building a stable and democratic society and while it values constructive advice from friends, making negative commentary even before the completion of the electoral process is neither constructive nor objective.

Pakistan will continue to work towards building a vibrant democratic polity and every election and peaceful transition of power brings it closer to that goal, it said.

"We do this not on account of the concerns expressed by others but because that is the aspiration of our people and the vision of our founding fathers," it concluded.

Cash-strapped Pakistan held elections amid sporadic militant attacks and an unprecedented stoppage of all mobile phone services.

The US State Department said that Thursday's vote was held under undue restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. The European Union has also said it regrets the lack of a level playing field due to the inability of some political actors to contest the elections.

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# Russian drone strike on Kharkiv kills at least 7

AP ■ KYIV

A Russian drone strike on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, killed at least seven people overnight, including three children, Kharkiv region governor Oleh Syniehubov reported on Saturday.

He said the Iranian-made Shahed drone hit civilian infrastructure in the Nemyshlyan district on the city, causing a massive fire that burned down 15 private houses.

Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said more than 50 people had been evacuated and that emergency workers had contained the blaze by Saturday morning.

The Ukrainian air force said air defense systems destroyed 23 out of 31 Iranian Shahed drones launched by

Russia overnight. The drones primarily targeted the north-eastern Kharkiv region and the southern province of Odesa, the statement said.

Odesa regional governor Oleh Kiper said four people were injured there by the overnight drone attacks.

The attacks came in three waves, he said. The first targeted the regional capital — the port city of Odesa. All nine drones were shot down, but the debris damaged port infrastructure and injured one person.

The second and the third waves targeted port infrastructure in the Danube river area, Kiper said. A total of 12 drones were shot down and three people were injured.

Romania's Ministry of National Defence said on

Saturday that Russia carried out overnight drone attacks on Ukraine's river ports of Ismail and Reni, near the border with Romania.

The ministry said that an F-16 jet of the Turkish Air Force was deployed from a Romanian airbase around 1:15 a.m. to carry out "reconnaissance missions" in national airspace to monitor the situation. Text alerts were also issued to residents in two counties adjacent to the attacks.

NATO member Romania has discovered drone debris on its territory several times before, following sustained attacks on Ukraine's port infrastructure as Moscow attempted to disrupt Kyiv's ability to export grain and other produce to world markets.

# Israel continues to pound Rafah

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli airstrikes killed at least 28 Palestinians in Rafah early Saturday, hours after Israel's prime minister said he asked the military to plan for the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people from the southern Gaza city ahead of a ground invasion.

Benjamin Netanyahu did not provide details or a timeline, but the announcement set off widespread panic. More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people are packed into Rafah, many after being uprooted repeatedly by Israeli evacuation orders that now cover two-thirds of Gaza's territory. It's not clear where they could run next.

Word of the invasion plans capped a week of increasingly public friction between Netanyahu and the Biden administration. US officials have said an invasion of Rafah without a plan for the civilian popu-

lation would lead to disaster.

Israel has carried out airstrikes in Rafah almost daily, even after telling civilians in recent weeks to seek shelter there from ground combat in the city of Khan Younis, just to the north.

Overnight into Saturday, three airstrikes on homes in the Rafah area killed 28 people, according to a health official and Associated Press journalists who saw the bodies arriving at hospitals. Each strike killed multiple members of three families, including a total of 10 children, the youngest three months old.

In Khan Younis, the focus of the current ground combat, Israeli forces opened fire at Nasser Hospital, the area's largest, killing at least one person and wounding several, said Ashraf al-Qidra, a spokesman for the Gaza Health Ministry.

He said medical staff are no longer able to move between the

facility's buildings because of the intense fire. He said 300 medical personnel, 450 patients and 10,000 displaced people are sheltering in the hospital.

A RIFT WITH WASHINGTON: The steadily climbing Palestinian death toll — now at almost 28,000 after four months of war, according to Gaza health officials — has contributed to the friction between Netanyahu and Washington.

Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian deaths because it fights from within civilian areas, but US officials have pushed back, calling for more surgical strikes. President Joe Biden said this week Israel's response is "over the top".

Israel says that Rafah, which borders Egypt, is the last remaining Hamas stronghold in Gaza after more than four months of war.

"It is impossible to achieve the goal of the war of eliminat-

ing Hamas by leaving four Hamas battalions in Rafah," Netanyahu's office said on Friday. "On the contrary, it is clear that intense activity in Rafah requires that civilians evacuate the areas of combat."

It said he had ordered the military and security officials to come up with a "combined plan" that included both a mass evacuation of civilians and the destruction of Hamas' forces in the town.

It remains unclear where civilians can go. The Israeli offensive has caused widespread destruction, especially in northern Gaza, and hundreds of thousands of people do not have homes to return to.

In addition, Egypt has warned that any movement of Palestinians across the border into Egypt would threaten the four-decade-old peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. The border crossing between Gaza

and Egypt, which is mostly closed, serves as the main entry point for humanitarian aid.

Rafah had a prewar population of roughly 280,000, and according to the United Nations is now home to some 1.4 million additional people living with relatives, in shelters or sprawling tent camps after fleeing fighting elsewhere in Gaza.

Israel declared war after several thousand Hamas militants burst across the border into southern Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage.

An Israeli air and ground offensive has killed roughly 28,000 Palestinians, most of them women and minors, according to local health officials. Roughly 80 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced, and the territory has plunged into a humanitarian crisis with shortages of food and medical services.

# Indian-origin executive dies after being assaulted in US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

In yet another disturbing incident, a 41-year-old Indian-origin executive died in the US, days after he was assaulted during an altercation outside a restaurant in downtown Washington.

According to investigators, officers responded to the 1100 block of 15th Street Northwest outside Shoto Restaurant around 2 am for an assault on February 2. Once officers arrived, they found Vivek Taneja on the pavement. He was taken to the hospital with life-threatening injuries.

A preliminary investigation found that Taneja and an unknown man were involved in a verbal argument that turned physical, WUSA, a television station in Washington, DC, affiliated with CBS, said.

Taneja was knocked to the ground and hit his head on the pavement.

He died from his injuries at the hospital on Wednesday. Police are now investigating Taneja's death as a homicide.

Taneja was the cofounder

**Taneja was the cofounder and president of Dynamo Technologies, and led Dynamo's strategic, growth, and partnership initiatives, with an emphasis on the federal government contracting arena.**

and president of Dynamo Technologies. According to the company's website, Taneja "leads Dynamo's strategic, growth, and partnership initiatives, with an emphasis on the federal government contracting arena."

Police continue to search for the man who threw the deadly punch. He was captured on surveillance camera.

The Metropolitan Police

Department (MPD) is seeking the public's assistance in identifying and locating a suspect involved in a homicide that occurred on the 1100 block of 15th Street, NW on February 2.

According to MPD documents, officers responded to the location for the report of an assault, where they located an adult male suffering from life-threatening injuries as a result from an assault. He was transported to a local hospital for treatment.

On February 7, the victim succumbed to his injuries.

MPD offers a reward to anyone who provides information which leads to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for each homicide in the District.

Earlier this week, Syed Mazahir Ali, an Indian student was attacked by robbers in Chicago. Earlier, 25-year-old Indian student Vivek Saini was fatally attacked in Georgia state's Lithonia city by a homeless drug addict.

Four other Indian-origin students were reported dead in the US this year.

# Indian trucker charged with drug trafficking

PTI ■ OTTAWA

An Indian truck driver from Canada has been charged with "intent to distribute controlled substances" after he was caught attempting to bring an estimated Canadian dollars 8.7 million worth of cocaine into the US, according to a media report.

Gagandeep Singh was caught by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers after a border canine found the suspected cocaine at a Windsor, Detroit border crossing.

The discovery was made on February 5 at an outbound customs inspection at the Ambassador Bridge in Detroit, according to court documents obtained by CTV News.

The seizure is "consistent with large-scale drug distribution activities," according to the authorities. The CBP officers "selected" a driver — a citizen of India and a resident of Canada — for inspection. According to the criminal complaint, the accused ignored the officers and attempted to continue to the tolls before being stopped just before the tolls by CBP officers.

# Indonesians join final campaign events before presidential poll

AP ■ JAKARTA

The three candidates in Indonesia's presidential election held their final campaign events in front of tens of thousands of people on Saturday, four days before more than 200 million citizens cast their votes in the world's third-largest democracy.

The frontrunner, former special forces general Prabowo Subianto and his running mate, 36-year-old Surakarta mayor Gibran Rakabuming Raka, held their final rally at a Jakarta stadium.

"On February 14, we will all determine the future of our children and grandchildren. ... We strive to bring prosperity to all Indonesian people. We will continue what has been built by previous presidents," Subianto said.

While he is the oldest candidate, Subianto's running mate is the youngest — though his selection provoked controversy as he is the son of the current president. They are pursuing youth support, with social media and video billboard

campaigns featuring Pixar-style animated depictions of themselves. They're meant to soften the image of the gruff-talking former general, who's been accused of past human rights abuses, which he has denied.

Former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan together with his running mate, Muhaimin Iskandar, held their final campaign event at another stadium in the capital.

"Our responsibility is to work together to stop injustice, inequality and bring about change," Baswedan said in front of tens of thousands of residents and the leaders of the political parties who support his race.

Meanwhile, thousands of people dressed in black and white shirts gathered in Central Java province to support the governing party's candidate, Ganjar Pranowo, a former governor of the province, held his final rallies in Surakarta and Semarang, in the area that is vital to his campaign.

Speaking in Surakarta, Pranowo emphasized that he and his running mate



Mohammad Mahfud have listened to the people they met during the campaigns, such as those who questioned the high price of rice.

"A leader cannot be silent if there are screams among the people," Pranowo said.

Nearly 205 million Indonesians, predominantly young people, are eligible to vote in the presidential and legislative elections in the most populous Muslim-majority country in the world.

Even though they have held several massive in-person campaign events, the three contenders mostly campaigned through social media, reflecting increasing internet access even in rural areas.

The presidential election will determine who will succeed President Joko Widodo, serving his second and final term.

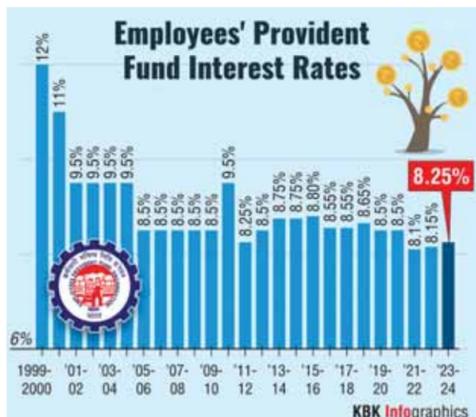
Since mid-October 2023, support for Subianto has continued to increase at the expense of his rivals.

The Indikator Politik Indonesia agency said in its latest survey that it was possible that Subianto and Raka could win outright in the first round, but it was also possible that the election would go to a runoff.

# EPF interest hiked to 3-year high

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
**A**head of general elections, the interest rate paid on employee provident fund was on Saturday hiked to 8.25 per cent for fiscal year ending March 31, the highest in three years.  
 The central board of trustees of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) recommended to the finance ministry for raising the interest rate for nearly 8 crore contributing subscribers, the labour ministry said in a statement.  
 This will be the highest rate of interest for EPF subscribers in the last three years. The previous high was in 2019-20 when 8.5 per cent interest was paid. The rate of payout was maintained at the same level in 2020-21 but in the following year it was cut to 8.1 per cent, the lowest in four decades. (EPF interest rate was 8 per cent in 1977-78).

The interest rate was marginally hiked to 8.15 per cent in 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023).  
 The recommendation for 2023-24 fiscal will now go to the finance ministry and once it agrees to it, the EPFO will credit the rate of interest to the EPF subscribers.  
 India will go to the polls in April-May to elect a new government.  
 According to the labour ministry statement, the decision to hike interest rate for 2023-24 was taken at the 235th meeting of the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of EPFO on Saturday, under the chairmanship of Union Labour & Employment Minister Bhupendra Yadav.  
 "The CBT recommended an annual rate of interest of 8.25 per cent to be credited on EPF accumulations in members' accounts for 2023-24. This interest rate will be officially notified in the government



gazette after approval by the Ministry of Finance. Subsequently, EPFO will credit the approved rate of interest into its subscribers' accounts," it stated.  
 For FY24, the board recommended distribution of Rs 1,07,000 crore to EPF members' accounts on a total principal amount of Rs 13 lakh crore, which was Rs 91,151.66 crore and Rs 11,022 lakh crore, respectively in 2022-23. Total income recommended for distribution is the highest

on record, it said. Compared with the previous financial year, there has been a significant growth, the statement said, adding that the income grew by more than 17.39 per cent, while the principal amount increased by 17.97 per cent.  
 This suggests a healthy financial performance and potentially strong returns for the members, it stated.  
 EPFO has a strong track record of distributing higher income to its members over the years with prudence.  
 The interest rate offered by EPFO tends to be higher compared to other investment avenues available to subscribers, it stated.  
 This indicates confidence in the credit profile of EPFO's investments, as well as its ability to provide attractive returns to its members, it stated.  
 In March 2020, EPFO had lowered the interest rate on

provident fund deposits to a seven-year low of 8.5 per cent for 2019-20, from 8.65 per cent provided for 2018-19. EPFO had provided 8.65 per cent interest rate to its subscribers in 2016-17 and 8.55 per cent in 2017-18. The rate of interest was slightly higher at 8.8 per cent in 2015-16.  
 The retirement fund body had given 8.75 per cent rate of interest in 2013-14 as well as 2014-15, higher than 8.5 per cent for 2012-13. The rate of interest was 8.25 per cent in 2011-12.  
 "CBT-EPFO decided to increase the rate of interest on the request of the employees representatives in the Board, pensioners' SEWA app and launch of industry geo tagging etc, it is a historic decision taken by the newly-constructed CBT-EPFO board," said S P Tiwari, National General Secretary, TUCC & Member, CBT-EPFO.



## RBI warns banks of AI risks

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
**T**he banking sector and players in the space should be mindful of legal and cyber risks, and skill gaps emanating from Artificial Intelligence (AI), RBI Deputy Governor T Rabi Sankar said.  
 "With the adoption of AI and GenAI, laws are to be redefined. Industry needs to note that Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act rules are going to come soon, and banks may be in violation of some of it so it's important to start preparing for it," he said.  
 Addressing the 19th Annual Banking Technology Conference organised by the Indian Banks Association (IBA) in Mumbai on Friday, he called upon banks to think of customer convenience and provide services accordingly.  
 "When rules are made by us, we need to think of making it convenient for customers and keep improving continuously," he said.  
 Every new technology has erased few jobs but created newer ones, he said, adding that skilling and reskilling of the work force is a must.  
 NaBFID Chairman K V Kamath said what he had predicted 20 years ago has come true that banks will look like technology companies offering banking services. There is need for banks to be resilient, adopt cloud-based solutions, Kamath said, adding that competition is the key challenge that banks are facing not just within banks but in the larger financial space.  
 IBA Chairman Atul Kumar Goel said GenAI opens doors to unprecedented opportunities for banking leaders, shaping the future of financial services. Banks are already partnering with fintech companies to bolster their own digital transformation initiatives and keep up with startups that are successfully disrupting the banking industry, Goel, who is also Punjab National Bank MD, said.  
 The future is AI-driven, and the time to transform is now, Goel added.  
 GenAI is poised to revolutionise banking by providing advanced insights into banking services, IBA CEO Sunil Mehta said. Banks will leverage Generative AI to offer highly personalised experiences to their customers, enhancing the overall banking experience, he added.

## NSE Q3 profit rises to ₹1,975 crore

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
**T**he National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Saturday reported an 8 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 1,975 crore for three months ended December 2023. The consolidated income from operations stood at Rs 3,517 crore for the October-December quarter of the current financial year (2023-24), a surge of 25 per cent year-on-year, NSE said in a statement.  
 Apart from trading, the total revenue was also supported by other revenue lines, including listing, index services, data services and co-location facility, the exchange added.  
 During the first nine months of FY24, NSE contributed Rs 28,131 crore to the exchequer, which comprised STT (Securities Transaction Tax) of Rs 23,137 crore, Income tax (Rs 1,490 crore), Stamp duty (Rs 1,456 crore), GST (Rs 1,257 crore) and Sebi charges (Rs 791 crore).  
 On the trading volumes front, cash markets recorded an average daily traded volumes (ADTVs) of Rs 80,512 crore, a growth of 50 per cent on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, equity futures reached an ADTV of Rs 1,31,010 crore, up 18 per cent and equity options ADTVs stood at Rs 56,707 crore, up 28 per cent.  
 On a standalone basis, NSE posted a net profit of Rs 1,377 crore for the third quarter under review compared to Rs 1,568 crore in the corresponding quarter of the preceding year. Its total operating income surged 21 per cent to Rs 3,170 crore for the December quarter from Rs 2,629 crore in the year-ago period.

## NITI plan ready for economic uplift of 4 cities

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
**T**he NITI Aayog has prepared a plan for economic transformation of Mumbai, Surat, Varanasi and Vizag and help India become a developed economy by 2047, its CEO BVR Subrahmanyam said on Saturday.  
 He also said the Aayog plans to prepare economic planning of 20-25 more cities, as they are the centre of economic activities.  
 A vision document is being prepared by NITI Aayog for India to become a developed economy of USD 30 trillion by 2047, and it will be released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.  
 "We used to only prepare urban planning of cities, not economic planning. NITI Aayog has prepared economic planning of Mumbai, Surat, Varanasi and Vizag, for



economic transformation of these cities," Eknath Shinde had held a meeting with NITI Aayog officials during which steps needed to take the GDP of Mumbai

Metropolitan Region (MMR) to USD 300 billion by 2030 were discussed. Subrahmanyam said the Centre had sought views of the country's youth on December 11, to drive its vision for making India a developed nation by 2047. "So far, we have received more than 10 lakh detailed suggestions from youth of India, and we are processing them using artificial intelligence (AI)," he added.  
 This exercise was conducted through universities and other educational institutions. In 2023, NITI Aayog was entrusted with the task of consolidating the 10 sectoral thematic visions into a combined one for Viksit Bharat @2047.  
 The vision encompasses various aspects of development, including economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance, among others.

# BoM grows pan-India

**PTI ■ AHMEDABAD**  
**A**s Bank of Maharashtra moves to expand its pan-India presence, non-Maharashtra regions account for 55-60 per cent of its business compared to 30-35 per cent three years ago, its Executive Director Asheesh Pandey said here on Saturday.  
 Pandey was here to inaugurate the bank's 100th branch for Gujarat in Ahmedabad. The total number of its branches has crossed the 2,400 mark as of December 31, 2023, Pandey said, adding that Bank of Maharashtra aims to add more than 100 new branches during the current quarter.  
 "Three years ago, around 65-70 per cent of our business was concentrated in Maharashtra. Our Board then decided for our bank to open our branches in nearly every district. Since then, we have been opening 200-250 branches annually (in different states).  
 "Now, non-Maharashtra states

account for 55-60 per cent of our business. Our business is growing in Maharashtra, but at the same time, we are growing in states like Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Karnataka, among others, and we are opening zonal offices in various states," he told reporters.  
 From 35 zonal offices three years ago, the number has increased to 46 now, he said. "We are planning to open zonal offices in all territories...In all, we plan to add 100 more branches during the current quarters."  
 "Across the country, BoM has around 2,408 branches, and its



Board has decided that we open more than 200 branches annually. We have taken up the expansion of the bank over the last three years with a decision to remain present in nearly all the districts of the country. We are present in all but 6-7 districts," he said.  
 From 28 zones, the number has risen to 46, as it has expanded its footprints in all the states and six Union Territories. He said BoM remains focused on its effort to increase its business in non-Maharashtra states while at the same time expanding in the state.  
 Out of the bank's Rs 4.34 lakh crore business, Gujarat contributes to around Rs 12,000 crore, he said. "BoM has two zonal centres at Ahmedabad and Surat with a business of Rs 12,000 crore. The bank is working to increase this to Rs 15,000 crore over the next 6-8 months."  
 "In the long term, we want to take it to Rs 20,000 crore," he added. Bank of Maharashtra has reported a 17.89 per cent growth in deposits during Q3 FY24 and 2.04 per cent gross non-performing assets (NPAs) as of December 31, 2023. In terms of net NPAs, it is 0.22 per cent of BoM, the lowest for the banks.

## ESIC medical aid to retired persons with relaxed norms

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
**T**he Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) on Saturday decided to extend medical benefits to superannuated insured persons with relaxed norms.  
 The decision was taken at the 193rd meeting of ESIC under the chairmanship of Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav, a labour ministry statement said.  
 The ESIC approved a proposal to provide medical benefits to the insured superannuating workers who went out of the ESIC Scheme coverage due to exceeding the wage ceiling, if the worker was under insurable employment for at least 5 years before superannuation/ voluntary retirement, it stated.  
 The persons who were in the insurable employment for at least 5 years after April 1, 2012 and superannuated/voluntarily retired on or after April 1, 2017 with wages up to Rs 30,000 per month will be benefited under the new scheme. To augment the service delivery mechanism in North-Eastern states to fulfil the



vision of Act East Policy of the government, the ESIC relaxed the existing norms for establishment of dispensaries, medical infrastructure/ regional/sub regional offices in NE states including Sikkim.  
 To promote holistic wellbeing of ESIC beneficiaries, a new policy on AYUSH 2023 in ESIC institutions was adopted during the meeting.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
 My Client Mr. Dinesh S/O Sh. Balbir is going to purchase Freehold Shop No. 754-755 in Gall. No. 11, having total covered measuring area 123 sq. mtrs., with its roof/terrace rights from situated at Sadar Bazar Delhi-110006 from Smt. Seema Gandhi W/o Late Sh. Shivprakash Gandhi who is owner vide registered Will deed Regd No.1862 dated 31.10.2015. SR-VI-Delhi. The above-mentioned property is going to be mortgaged with Fed Bank Financial Services Limited. If any person/ bank/ financial institution having any claim/right, i.e., any objection whatsoever in regard to the above property, should notified to the undersigned/ Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address through registered advt. within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived.  
 Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092; Mobile no. 9811215181

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
 My clients (1) Mr. Parmal Singh S/O Mr. Sachand (2) Mr. Karan Singh S/O Mr. Sachand (3) Mrs. Munni Devi W/o Sh. Sher Singh are owners of built up property bearing a Residential Plot No. 126, Khasra No. 136/163, Khasra No. 272 (43-0), area measuring 166+166+166+498 sq. yds. situated in the area of Village Sikandarpur Ghosi, Tehsil Haripur, District Gurugram, Haryana vide Three Registered transfer deeds executed by 1) Mr. Karan Singh S/O Mr. Sachand Regd. no. 12982, dated 04.01.2024 SR-wazirabad, 2) executed by Mr. Parmal Singh S/O Mr. Sachand Regd. no. 19790 dated 04.01.2024 SR-wazirabad and 3) Executed by Mr. Abhishek and Mahesh both sons of Mr. Sher Singh Regd. no. 19279 dated 04.01.2024 SR-Wazirabad. The above-mentioned property is going to be mortgaged with Fed Bank Financial Services Limited. If any person/ bank/ financial institution having any claim/right, i.e., any objection whatsoever in regard to the above property, should notified to the undersigned/ Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address through registered advt. within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived.  
 Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092; Mobile no. 9811215181

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
 To Whomever It My Concern This is to bring to common notice that I Neera Sharma W/o Sachin Bhardwaj and Sachin Bhardwaj S/o Ramesh Chandra Bhardwaj of owner of property having details Property No.- Flat No. 1 203 3rd Floor Sector HI BIRD Scouthish Garden Ghaziabad U.P. 201014. Owned by Neera Sharma and Sachin Bhardwaj I have purchased this property duly Regd. at Dac. No. 9674, Vol No. NA, Book No. 1 One Page No. NA Date 23-09-2011 (CSRO-NOIDA-II) Pan No. (BKXP63531). I, Neera Sharma D/o Mangal Sain Sharma Pan No. (BVBFB7906C) 2. Sachin Bhardwaj S/o Ramesh Chandra Bhardwaj Neera Sharma and Nisha Bhardwaj are the same identity from now on they will be known as Neera Sharma and Pan Number is same (Neera Sharma- Nisha Bhardwaj) This is to confirm that we are the absolute owner. If anyone has any disputes, please inform within 15 days to Mr. Ashok Singh Mobile No. 9312309881.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
**TO WHOMEVER IT MAY CONCERN**  
 This is to bring to common notice that I Seema Gupta W/o Manish Gupta is owner in property having details - Two Shops Nos. 85 & 86 Part of Property No. X/3470 Out of Khasra No. 248, New Jain Market, Raghubarpara No. 2, Gandhi Nagar, Delhi-110031 have purchased this property vide Sale Deed Reg. No. 14733 Vol. No. 4824 dated 29/07/2010. I have lost Sale Deed of Kajal Aggarwal W/o. Shivam Sunder Aggarwal in favour of Sonika Jain, Shops No. 86, Part of Property No. 3470 Out of Khasra No. 248, New Jain Market, Raghubarpara No. 2, Gandhi Nagar, Delhi-110031 dated 29/07/2010 Reg. 14734 Vol No. 4828. This is to confirm that we are the absolute owner. If anyone has any disputes, please inform within 15 days to Mr. Ashok Singh Mobile No. 9312309881.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FASHION TECHNOLOGY**  
 (Ministry of Textiles, Govt of India)  
 NIFT Campus, Mithapur Farms, Patna-800001

Applications are invited from interested candidates for filling up various Group C posts of Assistant (Finance & Accounts), Assistant (Admin), Junior Assistant, Lab Assistant, Machine Mechanic, Assistant Warden (Girls), Nurse, Library Assistant and Stenographer Grade III in National Institute of Fashion Technology, Patna campus. For more details, please visit NIFT Patna website <https://www.nift.ac.in/patna/careers>. Last date for filling application form is 27.03.2024.

**Director, NIFT Patna**

**M/S BHARAT BHUSHAN FINANCE & COMMODITY BROKERS LIMITED**  
 (CIN-L67120DL1992PLC049038), Tel No. 011-49800900  
 E-mail: commodity@bharatbhushan.com, Website: www.bbinvestments.in  
 Regd. Office : 503, Rohit House, 3 Tolstoy Marg, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001

**UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER/NINE MONTHS ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2023**  
 (Rs. in Lakhs)

Particulars	Quarter Ended			Nine Month Ended		Year Ended
	31-Dec-23	30-Sep-23	31-Dec-22	31-Dec-23	31-Dec-22	31-Mar-23
1. Total Income from operations	14.87	18.80	15.37	49.93	39.80	58.09
2. Net Profit for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	3.35	10.06	5.34	18.54	13.14	17.23
3. Net Profit for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	3.35	10.06	5.34	18.54	13.14	17.23
4. Net Profit for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	1.38	6.94	1.85	12.22	7.21	11.61
5. Total Comprehensive Income for the period (comprising profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	170.01	78.93	59.28	409.05	73.71	59.88
6. Equity Share Capital	338.04	338.04	338.04	338.04	338.04	338.04
7. Earnings Per Share (Face Value of Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinuing operations)						
- Basic	0.04	0.21	0.05	0.36	0.21	0.34
- Diluted	0.04	0.21	0.05	0.36	0.21	0.34

**Notes:**  
 1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter/Nine Months ended December 31st, 2023 which have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by Board of Directors and filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the offoresaid Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter/Nine Months ended December 31st, 2023 is available on the Stock Exchange website (www.bseindia.com) and on Company's website (www.bbinvestments.in).  
 2. The above financial results were reviewed and recommended by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at their meeting held on 10.02.2024.  
 3. The figures of the previous period have been regrouped/reclassified, wherever considered necessary.

**ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
 Sd/-  
 Vijay Bhushan  
 Director  
 DIN: 0002421

Place : New Delhi  
 Date : 10.02.2024

## JSW, Odisha join hands for ₹40,000 cr EV facility

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
**J**SW Group has signed an agreement with the Odisha government to set up an integrated EV manufacturing facility in the state entailing an investment of Rs 40,000 crore.  
 Once completed, the project will mark JSW Group's foray into the automobile space.  
 As per its homepage, the USD 23 billion Group is into core sectors like steel, energy, cement, infrastructure, paints, ventures, and sports.  
 In a statement, the conglomerate said "it plans to establish an integrated EV manufacturing facility in Odisha, and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Odisha for the establishment of an Integrated Electric Vehicles (EV) And EV Battery Manufacturing Project at Cuttack and Paradip".  
 The project, with an investment of Rs 40,000 crore, will help create over 11,000 jobs, marking a significant growth in employment generation in the state, the Group said.  
 The project consists of a 50 GWH EV battery plant, EVs, lithium refinery, copper smelter and related component manufacturing units.  
 "We are keenly focused on leveraging the opportunities presented by the



foundation of our new venture. This project is a milestone in our journey, reflecting our commitment to the state's development and prosperity. "It's a testament to our belief in Odisha's potential and our dedication to contributing positively to its economic landscape."  
 The project will also spur employment generation in ancillary and support services. It will catalyse MSME development, opening a plethora of opportunities in the auto component supply chain and services sector.

# TOP SEED TIAFOE OUSTED IN DALLAS OPEN QUARTERS

AP ■ DALLAS

Frances Tiafoe can attend his own bobblehead night at the Washington Wizards game if he wants. The No. 1 seed in the Dallas Open was hoping for a conflict. Unseeded Marcos Giron stunned Tiafoe early and rolled to a 6-1, 6-4 victory Friday night to reach the semifinals of the hardcourt event on the SMU campus for the second time in three years. Tiafoe, the highest-ranked player in the field at No. 14, expected to be in Dallas for the semifinals Saturday, when - more than 1,300 miles away - the Wizards will be handing out 10,000 Tiafoe bobbleheads for a game against Philadelphia. Giron's victory in the quarterfinals - his 12th win over a top 20 opponent - freed up his fellow American's calendar. The 30-year-old still seeking his first ATP Tour title lost to Tiafoe 6-2, 6-2 at Indian Wells almost a year ago. "I was excited to play him again," said Giron, who won the first three points on each of Tiafoe's first two service games on the way to a 5-0 lead. "Margins are thin. I knew that I was playing well."



Ben Shelton rallied for a 6-7 (2), 6-4, 6-4 victory over Jordan Thompson, and the third-seeded American will face countryman Tommy Paul in the semifinals. Paul, the No. 2 seed, beat Dominik Koepfer of Germany, 7-5, 6-3. France's Adrian Mannarino, the fourth seed who reached the quarterfinals without

playing a match, faced Australia's James Duckworth in the late match. The winner will face Giron. Shelton saved three break points in the clinching game after doing the same when serving for the second set in a match that didn't even have a break point until the 19th game.

The 21-year-old seeking his second ATP Tour victory won with a forehand that hit the baseline on his second match point. Shelton lost in five sets to Mannarino in the third round of the Australian Open after losing to Novak Djokovic in the U.S. Open semifinals last summer.

"I think any time you can come back and get a win after losing the first set, it's impressive, especially against someone who serves as well as Jordan does," Shelton said. "He presented so many problems today. I had to problem-solve the whole match." After a first set without a break

point, the server won the first three points of the tiebreaker before Thompson's crosscourt winner on a volley with both players at the net for a 3-1 lead. Thompson, the No. 7 seed from Australia, went on to win six straight points for a 6-1 lead and closed out the set two points later when a shot from Shelton sailed long. Shelton earned the first break points of the match when he got three at 3-3 in the second set. He converted the third with a forehand winner on the return of serve, then finally closed out the set on his serve when he converted a third set point after saving Thompson's first three break points of the match. Shelton's best game came at 3-3 of the third set when he had three winners to break Thompson at love. The big-serving left-hander topped 140 mph several times while holding off Thompson in the deciding game. Koepfer committed two unforced errors to help give Paul three set points in the opening set, and Paul finished it off with a deep forehand that forced Koepfer to put another one in the net. Paul closed out the match with a forehand winner on his fifth match point.



## FREESTYLE CHESS

### Gukesh beats Carlsen; joint second after day one

PTI ■ WANGELS (GERMANY)

Grandmaster D Gukesh threw one salvo after another to beat world No. 1 Magnus Carlsen of Norway, Levon Aronian of Armenia and eventually reigning world champion Ding Liren of China on the first day of the Weissenhaus Chess Challenge that got underway here. After a rather sedate start that cost him a full point in the opener against Alireza Firouzja of France, Gukesh was in full swing and ended the day with three points in all out of a possible four and is in joint second place in the rapid section behind Vincent Keymer of Germany who notched up 3.5 points. Nodirbek Abdusattarov also matched Gukesh on points after remaining unbeaten on the opening day while the trio of biggies Carlsen, Firouzja and Fabiano Caruana of the United States are in joint fourth spot with two points apiece in the \$200,000 prize-money tournament. Levon Aronian of the United States, with a lone draw, is sole seventh while surprising-ly Ding Liren is at the bottom after losing all four games. The rapid format has been designed to pick up the pairings for the knockout stage between the same eight players. Whoever finishes first will play against the person finishing last as is the norm in the knockouts. For Gukesh, the highlight of the day was his victory over Carlsen. The middle games arising out of chess 960 or freestyle chess are always almost unknown and, showcasing his skills, Gukesh took his chances in a complicated endgame. Carlsen was not able to concentrate at his best as he made a few inaccuracies to let Gukesh come on top and a further error cost the world number one a piece. The rest was child's play. In the third round, Gukesh was tested by Aronian's Bishop sac-

rifice as early as on move eight but, ignoring the same, Gukesh went for his counterplay in the centre. Aronian lost a piece eventually and it was all over in just 39 moves. Against Ding Liren, Gukesh was at his technical best as he unleashed a rook sacrifice for a minor piece early and Liren found his position to be crumbling soon afterwards. In the complications that ensued, Liren was outdone by Gukesh's precise calculation. The game lasted 37 moves. Earlier in the first game of the day, Firouzja got off to a flier defeating Gukesh but could not keep the same momentum in the remaining games. With three rounds to come in the rapid, it remains to be seen who will play whom in the quarterfinals. Interestingly the quarter, semis and finale will be played under standard time control rules with 90 minutes to each player for forty moves and 30 minutes to finish the game with an increment of 30 seconds per move from move one. All rounds of the knockout stage will have two standard games and in case of a tied result, games of shorter duration will be played to decide the winner.

#### RESULTS

**Round 1:** D Gukesh (Ind) lost to Alireza Firouzja (Fra); Nodirbek Abdusattarov (Uzb) drew with Levon Aronian (Arm); Magnus Carlsen (Nor) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger); Ding Liren (Chn) lost to Fabiano Caruana (USA).  
**Round 2:** Gukesh beat Carlsen; Abdusattarov beat Liren; Firouzja drew with Caruana; Keymer beat Aronian.  
**Round 3:** Aronian lost to Gukesh; Liren lost to Keymer; Carlsen drew with Firouzja; Caruana drew with Abdusattarov.  
**Round 4:** Gukesh beat Liren; Carlsen beat Aronian; Firouzja lost to Abdusattarov; Keymer beat Caruana.

## Dortmund keeps unbeaten run

AP ■ DORTMUND

Donyell Malen scored twice as Borussia Dortmund defeated Freiburg 3-0 in the Bundesliga on Friday and extended its unbeaten start to 2024 to five games. Dutch forward Malen gave Dortmund the lead in the eighth minute with a shot into the top right corner off a pass from Niclas Füllkrug, and scored again in first-half stoppage time on the counter. Füllkrug set up Malen both times and finally marked his 31st birthday with his own goal, heading in at the far post in the 87th. It was his 10th Bundesliga goal and fifth in the last four games. Dortmund stayed fourth but moved level on points with third-placed Stuttgart, which faces Mainz on Sunday. Dortmund has won four games and drawn one this year, conceding just one goal in the process. Freiburg was seventh and has lost three in a row as its



push for European qualification fades. Jadon Sancho, on loan from Manchester United, came off the Dortmund bench in the 88th for a brief cameo after a muscle problem kept him out of last week's 0-0 draw at Heidenheim. Coach Edin Terzic has linked Sancho's fitness issue to his months-long absence from games at United before he returned to Dortmund on loan last month. The game was repeatedly interrupted as fans of both

teams threw tennis balls and other objects onto the field in protest at the German league's plans to sell a stake in marketing and broadcast revenue to an outside investor. The protests caused a 10-minute stoppage in the first half and shorter interruptions in the second. Earlier Friday, a second-division game between Hamburger SV and Hannover resumed after severe disruptions including fans attaching bicycle locks to a goal.

## Metz ends seven games losing streak in draw at Marseille

AP ■ PARIS

Metz snapped a seven-game losing streak in drawing at Marseille 1-1 in the French league and will rue not taking advantage of facing 10 men for more than an hour on Friday. A defeat in Marseille would have equalled Metz's worst losing run and its hopes were raised after 30 minutes when Marseille captain Samuel Gigot was sent off for a professional foul. However, Metz could not make its numerical advantage count. Instead, Cameroon striker Faris Moubagna put Marseille ahead after 56 minutes in his first start since signing from Danish side Bodo/Glimt last month. Matthieu Udol equalized five minutes later for Metz with a brave diving header.



Metz remained third from the bottom of Ligue 1, one point ahead of Lorient and two clear of bottom club Clermont. Only Clermont has fewer goals. Marseille was still unbeaten at

home in the league but it has gone without a win in its last five games and pressure was mounting on Italian coach Gennaro Gattuso. The point lifted it one place into seventh.

AP ■ SCOTTSDALE (ARIZONA)

Nick Taylor matched the course record with an 11-under 60 to finish his first round Friday and shot 70 in the second to match Andrew Novak for the Phoenix Open lead at 12 under. With weather delays pushing the first round into Friday, Taylor returned to complete a record round shared with four others at TPC Scottsdale's Stadium course. That gave him a five-shot lead, matching Jim Gallagher Jr. At the 1993 Tour Championship for the largest 18-hole lead in a PGA Tour stroke-play event since 1983. Taylor got his second round off to a shaky start before two birdies on the back nine moved him back into a tie for the lead with more than half the field still needing to finish Saturday. Novak closed out a 65 in the morning and shot 4-under 31 on the front nine for another 65 in the second round. Maverick McNealy shot 67 to reach 10

## Taylor shoots 60 to match course record, shares Phoenix Open lead with Novak

under and Doug Ghim was 9 under through 16 holes of his second round. Scottie Scheffler was 8 under after a second-round 66 that gives him a shot at becoming the first PGA Tour player to threeppeat at the same tournament for the first time in 13 years. Justin Thomas also was tied with two others at 8 under after a 65. A long weather delay left half the field needing to finish their first rounds and a 90-minute frost delay pushed tee times back even more. The setbacks left most of the field stuck in the middle of their second rounds, with more rain in the forecast on Saturday. Taylor has three career PGA Tour wins, none more memorable than the 2023



Canadian Open. The 35-year-old sank a 72-foot eagle putt to beat Tommy Fleetwood in the fourth playoff hole,

becoming the first Canadian to win his national open in 69 years. Following his record round, Taylor had a 40-minute turnaround before his next tee time and bogeyed the par-4 first hole. He got it back with a birdie on No. 10, but missed a nine-foot birdie putt on the par-5 15th. Taylor two-putted for birdie from 40 feet on the 321-yard 17th hole and saved par on No. 18 after having to lay up from a fairway bunker. Novak missed the cut his first three tournaments of 2024, but finished off a first-round 65 Friday morning and was in the first group on No. 1 for the second round. He had four birdies to shoot 4-under 31 on the front nine, added another on No.

## Ramkumar gets wild card for Bengaluru Open

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Ramkumar Ramanathan, India's second-highest-ranked player, was on Saturday granted a wild card entry into the singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open, starting February 12. Ramkumar, who led India in the recent Davis Cup clash against Pakistan, had lost in the first round of the ongoing Chennai ATP Challenger and the opportunity will give him a chance to do well on home soil. Ramkumar has reached the singles final on the ATP Challenger circuit seven times, winning his lone title in Manama, Bahrain, in November 2021. Interestingly, Ramkumar had



won his seventh and last doubles Challenger title in Bengaluru with compatriot Saketh Myneni, two years back. "I am extremely happy and grateful that Bengaluru Open has granted me the singles main draw wild card. I am looking forward to the tournament. Bengaluru has always been a happy hunting ground for me and I have had many special memories here. "I just want to thank the entire organisation for trusting me. Let the best player win. I am

going to give my best," said Ramkumar, ranked 459. The Bengaluru Open will be the third Challenger tournament of the season for Ramkumar, who made the Nonthaburi event in January through Qualifiers. "Ramkumar is a terrific talent and played a crucial role in ensuring India's victory in Davis Cup Tie against Pakistan recently. He recently Won two ITF M25 World Tennis Tour events in Karnataka on his comeback and we are proud to have him in the Main draw of the Bengaluru Open which he totally deserves. His wild card makes the Indian presence stronger and we wish him the best," Tournament Director Sunil Yajaman said.

# Anger over Messi absence in Hong Kong spreads

AP ■ HONG KONG

An Argentina soccer friendly in China next month was cancelled on Friday in more fallout from Lionel Messi failing to play in a club exhibition match in Hong Kong. World Cup champion Argentina, captained by Messi, last month scheduled a tour of China during the international break from March 18-26. Games were lined up against Nigeria in Hangzhou and Ivory Coast in Beijing. Both opponents are coincidentally meeting in the Africa Cup of Nations final this weekend. But Messi, on tour with his Inter Miami club, outraged fans in Hong Kong when he didn't play against a local selection last Sunday and remained on the bench. Messi said he had a groin injury. But his excuse didn't wash in Hong Kong after he played for 30 minutes on Wednesday in Tokyo against Vissel Kobe. On Friday, the sports bureau in Hangzhou canceled the Argentina-Nigeria friendly. "Because of the reasons known to all, we've learned from supervising

authorities that the conditions are immature for the match to go forward. Now it's been decided that the match will be cancelled," the Hangzhou Sports Bureau announced on its official social media account. An Argentina Football Association official told the Associated Press it was aware the match was suspended and was looking for another venue to play Nigeria. The official spoke on condition of anonymity saying, "It's a sensitive matter." Ivory Coast's friendly with Argentina in Beijing was going ahead as planned, Ivory Coast team spokesperson Anne-Marie N'Guessan told the AP on Friday. Meanwhile, Hong Kong organizers of the club friendly with Inter Miami said they will offer a 50% refund following days of backlash against Messi from angry fans and the city government. 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 soccer superstar has far exceeded the realm of

sports." In an Instagram post on Friday, local organizer Tatler Asia apologized to those who were disappointed by Messi's absence and said it was upset by "the seeming lack of respect shown to the crowd." It reiterated it pleaded with Inter Miami management to urge Messi to explain to the spectators after he learned Messi, who was required to play for 45 minutes unless injured under their contract, would not be playing. "He didn't. The fact that Messi ... Played in Japan on February 7th feels like another slap in the face," it said. The organizers said they were in talks with the city government on how to resolve the issue and details of the refund arrangement would be announced by mid-March. "We will not escape our responsibility as organizers and that is why Tatler Asia will offer all those who purchased match-day tickets from the official channels a 50% refund," it said. Tickets for the game cost up to 4,880 Hong Kong dollars (USD 624) each. In its statement, Tatler Asia said it would refund 56 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 7.2

## ARGENTINA FRIENDLY IN CHINA CANCELLED



million) in total, resulting in a loss of 43 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 5.5 million). Before the refund, its net income stood at 13

million Hong Kong dollars (USD 1.7 million), the organizer said. Tatler Asia on Monday already said it would withdraw an application for funding from the city government for staging the match. In response to the announcement, the Hong Kong government welcomed the arrangement in a statement, calling it as a responsible move. But it said Hong Kong society still has many questions over the incident, especially after seeing Messi play in Japan, and hoped Inter Miami can provide a reasonable explanation to the public. Inter Miami has not immediately responded to the AP's request for comment. After the PR disaster erupted on Sunday, Messi addressed the widespread disappointment by explaining why he did not play in a news conference in Tokyo. He also said it was regrettable he could not play in Hong Kong on Chinese social media platform Weibo. He said in the post that he hoped to return to Hong Kong to play for his fans and go to mainland China to share the joy of football. But his appearance in the Tokyo game on Wednesday intensified the criticism against his absence beyond Hong Kong, where the government sought to use the Sunday game to boost the city's

image as a hub for mega events. On Wednesday, the Global Times said in the editorial that the explanations from Messi and Inter Miami were not convincing and pointed to some speculations about the moves. "One theory is that their actions have political motives, as Hong Kong intends to boost economy through the event and external forces deliberately wanted to embarrass Hong Kong through this incident," it said. "Judging from the development of the situation, the possibility of this speculation cannot be ruled out." Pro-Beijing politicians in Hong Kong also weighed in. Regina Ip, a leading member of the Executive Council, Hong Kong's Cabinet, wrote on X, formerly Twitter: "Messi should never be allowed to return to Hong Kong. His lies and hypocrisy are disgusting." Inter Miami in Japan wrapped up the match's global promotional tour. Inter has won only one of its six games in Central and North America, Saudi Arabia and Asia. The tour wraps up on Feb. 16 in Florida against Newell's Old Boys, Messi's boyhood club from Rosario, Argentina.

# Kohli opts out of remainder of series

## Rookie pacer Akash gets maiden call up

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star batter Virat Kohli has pulled out of the remainder of the Test series against England for personal reasons, the BCCI confirmed on Saturday, ending speculation around premier player's availability for the high-profile contest. Kohli had missed the first two Tests and that he could be unavailable for the remaining three matches was reported by PTI on February 3. "Virat Kohli will remain unavailable for selection for the remainder of the series due to personal reasons. The Board fully respects and supports Mr. Kohli's decision," the BCCI said in a release. Kohli is currently abroad for pressing personal family

matter. The series is locked 1-1 with India winning the second Test in Vizag. The third match is scheduled to start from February 15 in Rajkot. The national selection committee included senior players Ravindra Jadeja and KL Rahul in the squad but their inclusion will be subject to clearance by the BCCI's medical team. Jadeja had injured his hamstring while Rahul had slight right quadriceps niggle. Senior batter Shreyas Iyer, who complained of groin and lower back stiffness has not been picked. However his medical update has not been provided by the BCCI. It is believed that Iyer would have been dropped in any case and his injury made the decision easier for selectors.



The only new face in the 17-man squad is Bengal speedster Akash Deep, who has been rewarded for his consistent show in first-class cricket and in recent India A vs England Lions Test series. Left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar has been released with Jadeja coming back while Mohammed Siraj is back in the squad in place of Avesh Khan.

**SQUAD:**

Rohit Sharma (C), Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, KL Rahul, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar and Akash Deep.



## Bumrah dubbed white ball specialist without even asking him: Shastri

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri always knew that Jasprit Bumrah was "desperate and hungry" to play Test cricket as the pace sensation did not like being stereotyped as a "white-ball specialist". Bumrah is the first Indian pacer to be ranked No. 1 in the ICC Test rankings.



The 30-year-old's pace prowess was on full display as he claimed a remarkable match haul of 9/91, playing a pivotal role in India's series-levelling victory in the Vizag Test. In the process, he also became the fastest Indian to 150 Test wickets. In an interview to former England skipper Michael Atherton, who writes for 'The Times', Shastri remembered his conversation with Bumrah where the pacer had told him playing Test would be the "biggest day" of his life. "I remember my first call to him, it was in Kolkata. I asked him would he be interested in Test cricket. He said that would be the biggest day of his life," Shastri recalled.

remembers white ball averages. They will always remember your numbers in Test cricket." Reflecting on the criticism, Shastri stressed the significance of Test cricket and the enduring legacy it creates. "They know, at the end of the day, no one remembers white ball averages. They will always remember your numbers in Test cricket," he affirmed.

**Saw Kohli as an uncut diamond**

Shastri, who assumed the role of national team director in 2014 and later became the head coach, further reflected on his tenure, emphasising the shift in focus from individual brilliance to team brilliance. Identifying Virat Kohli as an "uncut diamond," Shastri said he saw the potential for the Indian captaincy early on. "There was a lot of individual brilliance but I wanted to see team brilliance. I wanted to win and to make Test cricket paramount and identified an uncut diamond in Virat Kohli. "While (MS) Dhoni was my captain, my eye was on him (Kohli). I told him very early in my second month: 'It'll take time but watch, observe, be ready (for the captaincy)'."

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## WI pace sensation Joseph roped in by LSG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI,

West Indies pace sensation Shamar Joseph, who single-handedly won a Test against Australia last month, was on Saturday roped in by Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) for the upcoming IPL season as replacement for England's Mark Wood. The 24-year-old Joseph destroyed the star-studded Australian batting line-up in their second innings with amazing figures of 7 for 68 to help West Indies notch up a famous win at Gabba, Brisbane, last month to emerge as one of the most sought-after fast bowlers in the world. He will join LSG for RS 3 crore and this will be Joseph's first stint in the IPL. "Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) named Shamar Joseph as replacement for pacer Mark Wood for the upcoming edition of the TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024," the IPL said in a statement. "Joseph will join LSG for INR 3 Crore. The speedster was recently at the forefront during West Indies' Test win at the Gabba. He picked 7 wickets in the 2nd innings to script a historic win in Australia for West Indies."

# India young turks gear up for World Cup glory against Aussies

PTI ■ BENONI (SOUTH AFRICA)

Few careers will get wings to soar while some will fade into oblivion but on Sunday, all those sprightly 18 and 19-year-old Indian boys will leave no stone unturned to win a record sixth ICC U-19 World Cup when they face Australia in the summit clash here. On November 19 last year, an Australian team left Rohit Sharma and his band teary-eyed on a global stage and for the Uday Saharans, Sachin Dhas, Musheer Khans and Saumy Kumar Pandey, beating an Aussie team would certainly be very sweet. "No, we are not thinking about revenge. We are firmly focussed on present and we neither want to dwell on past or look too far ahead," skipper Saharan recently told PTI Bhasha in Benoni. The Aussies have a quartet which could spell trouble for India and they are skipper Hugh Weibgen, opener Harry Dixon, seamers Tom Straker and Callum Vidler, the consistent performers during this edition. India U-19 had beaten Australia in the 2012 and 2018 finals, and will again start favourites during this edition's title match. The Indian team has always been an age-group



**U-19 Final**

powerhouse, thanks to the talent the country produces in hundreds and their ninth global final is a testimony to the system that has been put in place for the last two decades. From 2016, India U-19s have played all the finals, winning the 2018 and 2022 editions while losing in 2016 and 2020. Since Virat Kohli's side won the trophy in 2008, U-19

World Cup has gained a lot of traction and the curiosity value does increase due to live TV coverage and streaming. The U-19 World Cup has presented stars like Yuvraj Singh, Mohammed Kaif, Suresh Raina, Shikhar Dhas, Rohit Sharma, Kohli, Ravindra Jadeja, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal to name a few, who have risen through the ranks. But cold facts will tell us that the list of those who have failed to make it to the top grade after instant stardom is

way bigger. From Reetinder Singh Sodhis and Gaurav Dhiman, back in early 2000s, to Unmukt Chand, Harmeet Singh, Vijay Zol, Sandeep Sharma, Ajitesh Argal, Kamal Passi, Siddharth Kaul, Smit Patel, Ravikant Singh and Kamlesh Nagarkoti, the list goes on. People do tend to forget that senior domestic cricket is a huge step up from the U-19s where bossing the age-group players from other nations, although praiseworthy, isn't a big deal. Truth be told, the current team led by Saharan, didn't initially look like a great outfit as it even failed to enter the final of the U-19 Asia Cup a couple of months back. But here all pieces of the puzzle has fallen in place. Led by Saharan, who is leading the batting charts with 389 runs, the team's performance got better with each match and the only time it has been pushed to a corner in the tournament is the semifinal where it pipped hosts South Africa by a solitary wicket. The jury is still out on how many of them can actually make it big but if there have been two stand-out players, who looked out for bigger things, one is young Maharashtra batter Dhas, who has revelled in the role of a finisher, and left-arm

spinner Saumy Pandey, who has so far taken 17 wickets. Dhas didn't get an IPL contract as he had not yet played any senior level game, hence ineligible for the auction. However, he is one batter who has shown temperament, a pre-requisite for the highest level. Saharan is more of an accumulator while Sarfaraz Khan's younger brother Musheer, who is the second highest run-getter, is also a handy left-arm spinner. Right-arm pacer Raj Limbani and left-arm seamer Naman Tiwari have been effective but are far from ready for the next level. But on Sunday, their best will be more than enough for this level. Teams India: Uday Saharan (C), Arshin Kulkarni, Adarsh Singh, Rudra Mayur Patel, Sachin Dhas, Priyanshu Moliya, Musheer Khan, Aravelly Avanish Rao (WK), Saumy Kumar Pandey (VC), Murugan Abhishek, Inness Mahajan (WK), Dhanush Gowda, Aaradhya Shukla, Raj Australia: Hugh Weibgen (C), Lachlan Aitken, Charlie Anderson, Harkirat Bajwa, Mahli Beardman, Tom Campbell, Harry Dixon, Ryan Hicks (wk), Sam Konstas, Rafael MacMillan, Aidan O'Connor, Harjas Singh, Tom Straker, Callum Vidler, Ollie Peake.

## Australia and CSK: Avnish speaks about Dhoni and 'Yellow Love'

PTI ■ BENONI

He dons the India blue but yellow seems to be the flavour of the season for India U-19 wicketkeeper Aravelly Avnish. And why won't he be? On Sunday, Avnish will be playing the biggest match of his short career, the U-19 World Cup final against the Australians, clad in most iconic yellow jersey in cricket universe. Then it will be time when he himself gets to wear the second most popular yellow jersey and meet the man who inspired him to don the big gloves. It will be his IPL stint with Chennai Super Kings and the legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni that the Hyderabad boy is so looking forward to. The two-and-half months of cricketing education at CSK, getting a chance to interact with Dhoni and picking his brains on all things cricket is certainly on top of his wish-list. "I could not believe that I have been selected by CSK. It took a while to realise that. I was at home that time and our phone was continuously ringing on that day," the 18-year-old told PTI Bhasha at Willmore Park here. For him, post U-19 World Cup final, the sole aim is to make his "Dhoni sir proud." "I want to make Dhoni sir and the CSK family proud. IPL is not in my mind right now. After the final, I will

think about it but it is a dream of every cricketer to be a part of the CSK team and play under Dhoni sir," Avnish told PTI in an exclusive interview ahead of big-ticket game against Australia. "It was really a dream come true moment for me," said Avnish, the son of a software engineer, whose interest for the game developed accompanying his father in watching cricket. Watching cricket on a couch with his father was Avnish's favourite hobby since childhood. The seeds of passionate cricketer was in the Aravelly household back then. "I have always wanted to become a cricketer since childhood. Papa used to watch cricket on TV when I was a kid. I used to sit with him and that's how my interest developed," he said. He can't wait to get started at CSK and excitement knows no bounds thinking about how will he react when he meets Dhoni. "I want to learn about the mindset in pressure situations from him. Like when the team is under pressure and not performing well, how he uses his mind to win matches from those situations. "His WC 2011 final inning. There is so much to learn from him," said Avnish, who made heads turn at the quadrangular series in November.

# Ranji Trophy: Saurashtra in control after Jackson ton

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Saurashtra's middle-order batter Sheldon Jackson followed in senior teammate Cheteshwar Pujara's footsteps, completing his century on day two of their Ranji Trophy Group A tie against Rajasthan to guide the defending champions to a 300-plus total here on Saturday. In reply, the hosts were in dire straits at stumps at 159 for 6. Jackson (116) added to Pujara's century on the opening day to ensure a healthy 328 all out for Saurashtra in 116.5 overs, before veteran left-arm spinner Dharmendrasinh Jadeja and Yuvrajsinh Dodiya

tormented the Rajasthan batters, grabbing three wickets apiece. Rajasthan still trail the defending champions by 169 runs thanks to Jadeja, who returned figures of 3/68 in 23 overs, and Dodiya, who bowled superbly for his three wickets for 62 runs. The morning session belonged to Saurashtra. The 37-year-old Jackson, who is approaching the 7,000-run mark, reached his 21st first-class century after scoring at his overnight resume of 78. Jackson, who had forged a 168-run stand for the fourth wicket with Pujara on Friday, completed his century off 249 deliveries, hitting eight boundaries and four



maximums before he was clean bowled by left-arm spinner Kukna Ajay Singh. Jadeja's 34 later on in the innings saw Saurashtra get past the 300-run mark and put Rajasthan under pressure. For the hosts, Ajay Singh

(5/120) emerged as the most successful bowler, taking his third five-wicket haul in first-class cricket, while left-arm pacer Aniket Choudhary had figures of 4/33. Singh's inability to stem the flow of runs, however, took the sheen

away from his achievement. Rajasthan openers Yash Kothari (9) and Sumit Godara (12) departed cheaply after struggling to negotiate the Saurashtra bowlers and collectively consuming 90-plus deliveries. At 59/3, Rajasthan were in a mess but a 66-run stand between captain Deepak Hooda (36) and Kunal Rathore (33) helped them cross the 100-run mark. The pair's dismissal later in the day virtually ended Rajasthan's hopes of taking a first-innings lead.

lead against Maharashtra after scoring 439 for 6 in 106 overs on day 2, with India player Karun Nair scoring an unbeaten 128 (18x4). Maharashtra's first innings had folded at 208 on the opening day itself with Aditya Sarwate taking three wickets. Vidarbha opener Dhruv Shorey was unlucky to miss a century, getting caught by Kedhar Jadhav off Ashay Palkar at 92, though he and Yash Rathod (42) put together a 111-run partnership to set a solid foundation. Another century partnership (149 runs) between Karun Nair and skipper Akshay Wadkar (90) for the fifth wicket, helped Vidarbha take a massive first-innings lead.

**VIDARBHA DOMINATE MAHARASHTRA**

In Pune, Vidarbha took a huge 231-run first-innings

## Spinners will play key role in upcoming T20 WC: Maharaj

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

South Africa's premier left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj is confident that slow bowlers will play a vital role on flat decks expected to be on offer during the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup in the Americas in June. The ninth edition of the T20 World Cup will be jointly hosted by the West Indies and USA from June 1 to 29 this year. "Spinners will play a crucial role in the upcoming T20 World Cup. Wickets are getting better and boundaries are getting shorter. There is much need for a spinner in

the team to provide control and variety," told PTI in an exclusive interview. "Hopefully, these T20 platforms can give spinners even bigger role to players coming to the international stage," he added. The ace left-arm orthodox spinner, who picked up 14 wickets in nine matches at an impressive economy rate of 4.37 with a four-wicket haul against New Zealand in last year's ODI World Cup in India, is a vital cog in South African team. The 34-year-old feels that key recipe of his success is being a "street smart" cricketer. And he now wants to guide the



next generation of slow left-arm orthodox bowlers in South African ranks. "You have to be street smart to succeed in T20 as a left-arm spinner. Do your homework.

There is a need for any left-arm or right arm or finger spinner to complement each other. "If I can help the youngsters in this art of finger spin, I would like to believe that there will be some sort of motivation for them to continue with it and progress to higher level in international cricket," said Maharaj. Maharaj, a vital member of the Proteas T20 team, feels the shortest format is essential for the growth and development of the game. "I haven't had IPL experience as yet but have been involved in SA20 and it is very good for the game."

## PCB to revisit players' social media policy

PTI ■ LAHORE

The Pakistan Cricket Board is not happy with former skipper Babar Azam and the current national T20 skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi participating on a space with fans conducted on social media platform 'X'. The Q and A sessions on 'X', formerly twitter did confirm the popularity of Babar Azam as his session drew more than 20,000 fans while Shaheen's Q and A session was joined by around 4000 fans. But a source in the PCB said the decision by the two senior players to go ahead with the social media sessions

obviously arranged by their agent had not gone down well with the PCB. "The PCB will look to revisit some of the clauses that the centrally contracted players need to adhere to," the source said. "The clauses covering the social media activities of contracted players are now being reviewed again by the board because it is concerned such public Q and A sessions could result in unnecessary controversies," he said. The PCB and players have been at loggerheads over the usage of social media and the NOCs issues for foreign T20 leagues since last year.

"The end-product of education should be a free creative man, who can battle against historical circumstances and adversities of nature"  
— Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan



## INSPIRING JOURNEY OF AMITAVA MISRA

Marang Pandit revitalises Gobindpur with education, sanitation, and sustainable practices. From dilapidated classrooms to model school, his leadership sparks social transformation in rural West Bengal, WRITES MOUSHUMI BASU

Friendly addressed as "Marang Pandit" (which means a great scholar in Santhali), Amitava Misra is not just the head teacher of a remote primary school in West Bengal's Gobindpur village, but today, he is also the "guardian" to thousands of villagers in the region. Back in April 2006, when then 35-year-old Misra took charge of the school in this tribal village of Purulia district, all he started with were two dilapidated mud-built rooms. A large banyan tree nearby served as the "classroom" under which a handful of children occasionally came to sit. The village lacked electricity and access to drinking water. Without an approach road to the village, a few spells of rain were enough to isolate it from its surroundings. "But these situations did not perturb me as much as seeing villagers accustomed to open defecation, liquor addiction, and ignorance about basic health and nutrition," recalled Misra. However, within the next five or six years, the village made history by becoming one of the "Open Defecation Free" villages in the State with funding from the State Government. Each of the 240 homes in the village had its own toilet. In 2015, UNICEF recognised the village for its best practices in sanitation and hygiene and even produced a documentary film to highlight them. Side by side, the village also received electricity. Tube wells were dug, providing villagers with access to clean drinking water, in addition to the construction of an approach road. The formerly crumbling Gobindpur primary school building was transformed into a solid structure surrounded by a boundary wall. Today, it boasts six classrooms, a library, and four toilets, along with a playground. Winner of numerous teaching awards, including the 2018 National Teachers' Award from the President of India and the State Shiksha Ratna, Misra's most formidable challenge, however, was gaining social acceptance among the villagers and integrating them into the social mainstream. "I started by visiting door-to-door in the village to raise awareness among

FROM AN 'OPEN DEFECATION FREE' STATUS TO 100 PER CENT LITERACY, THE VILLAGE THRIVED. AMITAVA MISRA'S INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS, ECO-CONSCIOUS PRACTICES, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EARNED NATIONAL ACCLAIM, MAKING GOBINDPUR A MODEL OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



The present school building

the villagers about health, hygiene, nutrition, and the importance of education," he said. A handful of village youths were motivated by his initiatives, and together, they established adult education centres in the village. Initially reluctant, the villagers gradually started trickling into these centres, which soon became lively meeting places bustling with ideas and activities. "More village youths came forward, and we organised into various groups," said 27-year-old Suraj Hansda from the village. According to him, these groups became responsible for coordinating with respective State departments and urging them to carry out various works for village welfare and amenities. Misra particularly trained them to provide various services such as distributing oxygen cylinders, food, medicines, masks, sanitizers, and disinfecting villages during the COVID period. According to the 65-year-old village elder Anant Manjhi, teachers had come and gone in the past, but they had hardly made any changes in their lives. "Today, our village is 100 per cent literate; we are aware of the importance of education," he proudly asserted. From sporadic attendance of 15-17 children back in 2006-07, today nearly 200 students from pre-nursery to Class 5 regularly attend the school. Funded by the Sarva Shiksha Mission, with contributions from local community members and also by Misra himself, the school now sustains three part-time teachers,



A modern classroom in the school

mid-day meal cooks, and a gardener. Furthermore, village women are trained in various livelihood options such as aquaculture, livestock rearing, mushroom cultivation, and weaving items out of locally available babui grass to generate additional income in households. "I was touched by the beautiful bond shared between the students and teachers, as well as the involvement of local communities in various school activities," said Proloyendu Bhoumick, District Inspector of Schools (Primary Education). Gobindpur Primary School has emerged as a model school under the Total Literacy Mission (TLM), garnering 18 accolades. Prominent among these are the Jamini Roy Award (2015), the Best School Award in the State (2016), and the National Swachh Vidyalay Puraskar (2017), the latter presented by the then Union Minister of HRD, Prakash



National Teachers' Award event



Fighting plastic pollution with eco bricks



National Level Swachh Vidyalaya Puraskar



The pre-primary students getting a taste of digital learning through digital card & pen

Javadekar, for excellence in water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools. The school operates on solar power (1100 watts), which powers 24 fans, 8 LED bulbs, and other appliances. According to Bhoumick, teaching practices seamlessly blend traditional and modern techniques. The students are proficient in digital learning through projectors and computers. The training begins at the pre-primary level, where children are taught Bangla, English, and Math using digital calendars and pens. The school has hosted exposure visits for over 1000 teachers from different schools in the district, as well as educationists from Japan, in 2019 and 2023. According to the TLM curriculum, the children also engage in nature studies and educational tours. The boundary walls of the school classrooms are adorned with mural art depicting teaching and learning

materials, indigenous culture, wildlife, and forests. "Environment and forests have always been very close to my heart," said Misra. While the children and their parents have planted over 100 species of trees in and around the school campus and in the village, Misra has an innovative idea to combat plastic pollution. "The children have been trained to make eco-bricks from plastic bottles," he said. Plastic throwaway packets are collected from across the village, cut into small pieces, and compressed into these bottles, which, when tightly filled, are sealed together with mortar. These serve as replacements for conventional bricks in the school and the garden. An accomplished writer and poet, Misra has authored 14 books in Bangla and contributed articles to various newspapers on a range of social issues and education.

**WINTER WOES**

**Rise in Ear Infections In Children**

If you notice signs in your child such as fever, excessive crying, poor feeding, trouble sleeping, or other unusual behavior, he/she might be suffering from ear infection. Experts say the ongoing spread of respiratory illnesses during the winter season can be more harmful for younger kids. In 2023, despite the late onset of winter, there has been a rise in the number of ear infections seen among children.



**DR ANUP SABHERWAL**  
ENT Surgeon, Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital

Dr Anup Sabherwal, Senior Consultant. ENT Surgeon, Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital says that respiratory viruses in the air due to which many children endure viral fever are at a high risk of developing ear infections.



Ear infection is the cause of increased particles of virus and bacteria in the environment. Many children are getting infected in a space behind the child's eardrum. The first noticeable symptom of such infection is ear pain. "We advise parents to be more alert on early symptoms detection such as cold, cough, and ear pain to safeguard from infections that can stay longer for weeks. If ear infection remains untreated, it can lead to many problems, including hearing loss, social developmental delay, tearing of the eardrum, and spread of the infection to the brain," he says.

help to get rid of discomfort. However, home remedies should be used as a temporary measure.

Few other measures should be taken care of to avoid ear infection which are as follows

- Teach your child about frequent hand washing to avoid respiratory illnesses.
- Stay updated on your child's vaccination status.
- Breastfeeding can protect your baby against various illnesses, including ear infections.
- Ensure regular cleaning of the ear to prevent from fluid accumulation that can lead to inflammation in the ear causing infection.
- Try to keep your kid's nose clean by using saline nose drops, and steam

**HEALTH NEWS**



**AIIA'S AYURVEDIC CARE HELPS HP NATIVE CONQUER AVASCULAR NECROSIS**

Ashwani Sharma, a resident of Himachal Pradesh, found himself in a challenging battle with Avascular Necrosis, a debilitating condition caused by the death of bone tissue due to inadequate blood supply. For two years, he tried allopathic treatments but in vain. He was suggested hip replacement but he was not keen, high cost being the main reason.

Now, standing on the other side of his ordeal, Ashwani has become a fervent advocate for Ayurveda's potential in treating musculoskeletal ailments. He champions the comprehensive and effective care offered by institutions like the AIIA, urging others facing similar challenges to explore the boundless healing possibilities of this ancient tradition.

However, a friend introduced him to an alternative path of healing at the Delhi-based All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA). In November 2023, Ashwani sought the expertise of Dr. Manoj, a seasoned orthopedic surgeon at the institute. Through meticulous examinations, Dr. Manoj crafted a personalized regimen of Ayurvedic medicines and recommended Panchakarma therapy for a holistic approach to managing the condition.

"In Ashwani's journey, the convergence of modern medicine and timeless Ayurvedic wisdom has not only restored his physical well-being but also ignited a beacon of hope for countless others seeking solace amidst the trials of illness," she added.

Under the compassionate care of Panchakarma expert Pr. Santosh Bhattar, Ashwani underwent a series of rejuvenating therapies tailored to his specific needs. The results were nothing short of miraculous. With each session of Panchakarma, Ashwani felt the burden of pain and stiffness gradually lifting, replaced by a newfound sense of relief and vitality. His mobility improved, his sleep became more restful, and the once-debilitating stiffness that had plagued him for so long

Presently, there are 12,000 standalone health and wellness centres across India which are dedicated to the Ayush system. Through Asha workers, every rural household is being covered and the people are being made aware of the benefits of Ayush.

**AI CAN HELP PREDICT PSYCHOSIS BEFORE IT OCCURS**

Anyone might experience a psychotic episode, which commonly involves delusions, hallucinations or disorganized thinking.

of the participants had been identified as being clinically at high risk of developing psychosis. Using training data, the classifier was 85 per cent accurate at differentiating between people who were not at risk and those who later experienced overt psychotic symptoms. Using new data, it was 73 per cent accurate. This tool could be helpful in future clinical settings, as while most people who experience psychosis make a full recovery, earlier intervention typically leads to better outcomes with less negative impact on people's lives.

However, now the onset of psychosis can be predicted before it occurs, using a machine-learning tool which can classify MRI brain scans into those who are healthy and those at risk of a psychotic episode. An international consortium including researchers from the University of Tokyo, used the classifier to compare scans from over 2,000 people from 21 global locations. About half

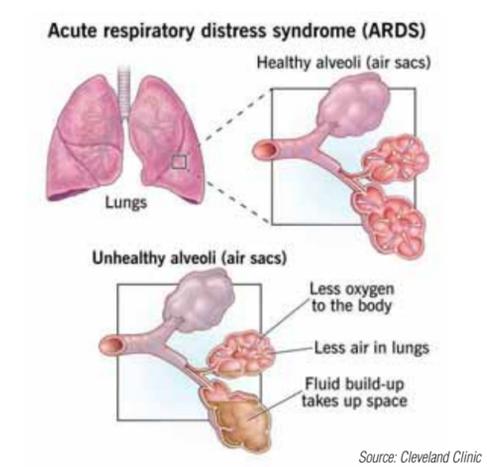
**ARDS NEW CELL THERAPY OFFERS HOPE**



The HEALTH PIONEER shares details of a novel cell therapy that has emerged as a beacon of hope for patients grappling with Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), a severe and often life-threatening condition characterized by widespread inflammation in the lungs

This groundbreaking therapy, heralded as a potential game-changer in critical care medicine, represents a significant stride forward in the ongoing battle against respiratory ailments. Published in the journal Nature Communications, Professor Justin Stebbing of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), a joint senior author of the new study investigating the use of agenT-797, MiNK Therapeutic allogeneic, unmodified invariant natural killer T (iNKT) cell therapy. The iNKT cell therapy has the effect of rescuing exhausted T cells and prompting an anti-inflammatory cytokine response, potentially activating anti-viral immunity to help these patients fight infection as well as to reduce severe, pathogenic inflammation of the lung.

The new research was carried out at three medical centres at Weill Cornell Medicine, New York; The Norton Cancer Center, Louisville; and Providence Saint John's Health Center, Santa Monica. It found that agenT-797, which is also under investigation in cancer trials, could be manufactured rapidly, had a tolerable safety profile, and appeared to have a positive effect on mortality among critically unwell Covid-19 ARDS patients receiving intensive care. The present exploratory trial we are discussing here included 20 mechanically ventilated patients with severe ARDS secondary to Covid-19. Of the 20 patients in the trial, 14 survived (70 per cent) at 30 days (compared to a control group of 10 per cent), and there was an 80 per cent lower occurrence of bacterial pneumonia amongst those



who received the highest dosage of agenT-797, compared to those who received fewer cells. Twenty-one patients were treated overall (the main trial, plus one under compassionate use), which included five who were also receiving veno-venous extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (VV-ECMO), known as 'the most aggressive salvage therapy' for critically ill patients with ARDS. In VV-ECMO, deoxygenated blood is pumped through a membrane lung and returned to the body via a cannula. This trial is believed to be the first immune cell therapy of any type to be used in critically unwell patients undergoing VV-ECMO. Survival of the VV-ECMO cohort was 80 per cent after 30 and 90 days, and 60 per cent after 120 days. This compares favourably to overall survival of 51 per cent for patients with Covid-19

**ARDS AND KIDS**

Most often in children, it is caused by pneumonia, sepsis and aspiration. It is associated with significant morbidity related to secondary infection, prolonged hospital admission, critical illness neuropathy and a reduction in health related QOL. A study has said, childhood survivors of ARDS have a 30% chance of being readmitted to the hospital within one year, with 50% of

those readmissions likely to occur within 61 days of being discharged. Receiving a procedure that opens the windpipe known as a tracheostomy and staying in the hospital longer than two weeks also played a role. The study is published in JAMA Network Open. A deeper analysis excluding the kids with chronic conditions, still showed a longer length of stay was associated with readmission.

**KEY FACT**

**CAUSES, SYMPTOMS, STAGES, EXTENT**

ARDS is a life-threatening lung injury which can also be caused by sepsis, pneumonia and other conditions besides Covid-19. Sepsis is the most common cause of ARDS. It can happen when you have a serious infection in your lungs (pneumonia) or other organs with widespread inflammation. Aspiration pneumonia: Aspiration of stomach contents into your lungs may cause severe lung damage and ARDS. Aspiration is when food, liquid or other substances get into your airway and lungs. Blood transfusions: You're at risk for ARDS if you receive more than 15 units of blood in a short period of time. COVID-19: The COVID-19 virus may develop into severe ARDS. Pancreatitis: Severe inflammation in your pancreas. Major trauma or burns: Accidents and falls may directly damage your lungs or other organs in your body and trigger severe inflammation in your lungs. Inhalational injury: Breathing and exposure to high concentrations of chemical fumes or smoke. Drug overdose: An overdose on drugs like cocaine and opioids. Drowning or near drowning: Drowning causes water to get into your lungs, causing damage.

repair process that your lungs go through to heal. Not all people progress to the third stage, which mainly describes the formation of scar tissue in your lungs and a prolonged need for ventilation. ●ARDS affects about 3 million people worldwide every year. ARDS causes around 10 per cent of all intensive care unit (ICU) admissions. It's the reason at least 25 per cent of people require mechanical ventilation in a hospital setting. ●Those who are already in the hospital due to an injury or illness are most at risk for ARDS. But, just because you're hospitalized, doesn't mean you'll end up in respiratory distress. Some factors that can increase your risk include being older than 65, tobacco use, substance abuse disorder and having lung disease. It tends to develop within a few hours to a few days of the event that caused it, and can worsen quickly. People with ARDS may have to be put in an intensive care unit (ICU) and on a ventilator to help them breathe. ARDS prevents other organs such as your brain, heart, kidneys and stomach from getting the oxygen they need to function. A study has suggested that patients with ARDS and coexisting pulmonary hypertension (PH) are significantly more likely to have longer and more costly hospital stays and to die in hospital than patients with ARDS without PH.

who were treated with just VV-ECMO at the same institution, during the same timeframe. Joint senior author Justin Stebbing, Professor of Biomedical Sciences at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in Cambridge, England, said: "During this small, exploratory study we observed that MiNK's iNKT cell treatment, which is also being advanced for people with cancer, triggered an anti-inflammatory response in ARDS patients.

"Despite a poor prognosis, critically-ill patients treated with this therapy showed favourable mortality rates and those treated at the highest dose also had reduced rates of pneumonia, underscoring the potential application of iNKT cells, and agenT-797 in particular, in treating viral diseases and infections more broadly. "AgenT-797 was manufactured rapidly and as opposed to using patients' own cells, it is 'off-the-shelf' and made from healthy donors' cells. The potential of this therapy to be used across a number of severe infections warrants randomised controlled trials." Dr Marc van Dijk, Chief Scientific Officer at MiNK and co-author of the study, said: "These published findings reinforce the unique power and potential of iNKT cells to mitigate severe acute respiratory distress. "The data demonstrate agenT-797's encouraging survival benefit, ability to help clear secondary infections, and tolerable administration in ventilated patients and those on VV-ECMO support."

"This pioneering approach holds the potential to revolutionize the treatment paradigm for ARDS and pave the way for transformative breakthroughs in critical care medicine," noted the study.

**It's true, happiness doesn't cost much**

ARCHANA JYOTI delves into a captivating study revealing that despite minimal wealth, many Indigenous and local communities worldwide leading a remarkably satisfying lives, challenging the conventional link between happiness and material riches

Against the backdrop of towering forests, rolling hills, and azure skies, many Indigenous people and local communities around the world are leading very satisfying lives despite having very little money, thus painting a portrait of happiness that transcends the boundaries of material wealth. This is the conclusion of a study by the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB) in collaboration with McGill University in Canada, which shows that many societies with very low monetary income have remarkably high levels of life satisfaction, comparable to those in wealthy countries. It suggests that there may be good reasons to question whether this link is universal. While most global polls, such as the World Happiness Report, gather thousands of responses from the citizens of



The results showed that "surprisingly, many populations with very low monetary incomes report very high average levels of life satisfaction, with scores similar to those in wealthy countries," said Eric Galbraith, a researcher at ICTA-UAB and McGill University and lead author of the study. Of course, the results are consistent with the notion that human societies can support very satisfactory lives for their members without necessarily requiring high degrees of

sustainability and human happiness, as they provide strong evidence that resource-intensive economic growth is not required to achieve high levels of subjective well-being. However, the researchers were perplexed that, although they now know that people in many Indigenous and local communities report high levels of life satisfaction, they did not know why. Prior work would suggest that family and social support and relationships, spirituality, and connections to nature are among the important factors on which this happiness is based, "but the important factors may differ significantly between societies or, conversely, that a small subset of factors dominates everywhere. "I would hope that, by learning more about what makes life satisfying in these diverse communities, it might help many others to lead more satisfying lives while addressing the sustainability crisis,"

Galbraith added. Notably, many countries are trying experimenting with this happiness quotient. For instance, Bhutan has a ministry that developed the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, which assesses citizen well-being through regular surveys. The results have become a key tool for planning and evaluating public policies, says researcher Luis Rodriguez Calles. Canada, Australia, France, the United Kingdom and the United Nations too following the suit, as they acknowledge the importance of happiness in public policy development and have started systematically assessing the well-being of their own citizens. And, meanwhile, in this narrative, we are reminded that true happiness lies not in the pursuit of wealth, but in the embrace of community, the appreciation of nature, and the celebration of life's simple joys.

# Myanmar: A nation in turmoil

The Tatmadaw (the Myanmar military) completed its third year of ruling the most impoverished country in the Southeast Asian region this month. The Government of National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, has been out of power since February 2021. It was a silent coup by the junta to remove the popularly elected government from power. However, Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is no stranger to military rule. Its people are accustomed to repressive regimes, widespread poverty, and decades of economic stagnation in the past. With Suu Kyi coming to power in 2015, the situation started to improve, but with the return of the military's control, commoners see no end to their suffering. As the junta falters, Myanmar is moving towards uncertainty. Democracy is deteriorating, as the Opposition is fragmented due to persistent military suppression. Young people are deeply frustrated by the ongoing chaos in the country. Investors, primarily from the West and advanced nations, are concerned about the future of Myanmar. Apart from China, all others, including major investors from Southeast Asian nations, are waiting for the military to relent. However, with Suu Kyi,

Beijing swiftly established new connections and opened up new avenues for engagement. Thus, it can be clearly said that the military takeover in Naypyitaw directly impeded the significant projects initiated by Beijing during the tenure of the NLD Government. Suu Kyi is under house arrest, and her NLD party is in disarray. Most of its top leaders are in hiding, but they are persistently fighting and seeking a path to return to power. The prosecution and inevitable conviction of Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint since the day of the current junta takeover simply indicate a show of strength and frustration. Tom Andrews, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, rightly pointed out by the end of 2021 that these two (Suu Kyi and Win Myint) are "hostages, not criminals." Until their charges are proven, they cannot be labelled as criminals by the military. However, the fact remains that these two high-profile leaders have not been able to air their grievances to the international media and other sources. Indeed, the military's strategy of conducting closed-door courtroom proceedings serves as a major obstacle for the global media to access them. With ethnic militias and



regional groups assuming control in China and some other pockets of the northwest of the country, it sends a worrying signal for the Army. It is evident that the junta is incapable of maintaining full control over the country. Unlike before, this time it is failing to combat the massive resistance forces emerging throughout the nation. Can we anticipate a new dawn with the anti-junta forces and platforms like the National Unity Government (NUG)? Or can only ethnic rebels with breakaway factions of the junta ultimately restore democracy in Myanmar? While the NUG and other anti-junta forces may persist in their movements, displacing the junta from power seems unfeasible for now. The ethnic rebels may

hold the upper hand in some border provinces, but it may not be adequate to prevent the military from initiating operations. It is evident that the military Chief Min Aung Hlaing made a serious miscalculation by ousting the NLD Government from power in 2021. Despite having an elected government in power, the country's military elites and the military in general hold an advantage over civilian administration nationwide. Under the amended Constitution of Myanmar of 2008, the military reserves 25 per cent of seats in Parliament. Additionally, crucial ministries such as Home, Border, and Defence Affairs are led by serving military officers. Furthermore, the military retains the power to

appoint one of the two Vice-Presidents of the country. Considering these constitutional provisions, one can assert that the civilian government of Suu Kyi had limited power and influence within the country's security architecture. Article 59 (f) of the 2008 Constitution prohibits Suu Kyi from running for the office of President due to her "allegiance to a foreign power" (i.e., she was married to a British citizen, and her children are also British citizens). Once more, Article 436 of the same Constitution grants the military the authority to veto any decision in Parliament. Consequently, unless both these articles are amended, Suu Kyi can never occupy the highest constitutional office of the country. Only if the

Constitution is amended will she have an opportunity to become President. To achieve this, the civilian government requires support from 75 per cent of the members in Parliament, backed by a national referendum. So why were the generals concerned? It appears they were apprehensive about her increasing popularity and the electoral mandate she received from the people in the 2020 general election. This prompted the military to level allegations that the election was conducted fraudulently, which the country's election commission vehemently denied. However, it is worth noting that this election office was operating under the control of the Suu Kyi government. Hence, they did not wait for another general election in which she could have potentially secured an even stronger mandate. These generals understand how to wield power, and they acted accordingly in unison. Myanmar has a troubled history, characterised by conflicts, chaos, and military rule. The road ahead for protesters, ethnic rebels, and the military is equally challenging, with an uncertain future looming. Without external intervention, the junta is unlikely to yield. The 2021 military takeover has

extinguished hopes for democracy, raising troubling questions about Myanmar's future. The central question remains: can Myanmar sustain its current situation indefinitely? It appears so, given the Tatmadaw's steadfastness and resistance to change. Public outcry has little impact on the military's architecture and strategies. Now, "unite in solidarity" can guide all anti-junta groups in bringing democracy back to this troubled country. Thwarting the actions of the military may be challenging in the immediate term due to its dual sources of power — both civilian and military. Moreover, Opposition groups changing and occupying fringe territories may require more time to compel the Tatmadaw to relinquish power. It is clear that the Generals' sole agenda is "repression" and nothing else. They refuse to heed calls for peace, negotiation, or dialogue. General Hlaing must not test the patience of his people any longer. Furthermore, he must no longer ignore the growing threat posed by ethnic rebels.

(The writer is a Senior Faculty at the Department of Political Science in the School of Liberal Education, Galgotias University, Greater Noida.)

**Myanmar's resilience amid adversity shines as diverse groups unite against the junta. Despite challenges, hope flickers through collective efforts for democracy, signaling a brighter future ahead.**



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

### Cultural tapestry of Ayodhya

**The homecoming of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya celebrates India's rich heritage, spirituality, and promises economic growth and unity.**

The recent homecoming of Ram Lalla and the ensuing Pran Pratishtha ceremony at Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has stirred the collective soul of the nation, weaving together the threads of a rich tapestry of cultural, historical, and spiritual significance. Ayodhya, the venerable city at the heart of this celebration, echoes with the whispers of centuries, connecting us to the ancient roots of the Vedic civilisation that emerged around 1500 BCE. The Ram Mandir stands as a majestic embodiment of faith, culture, diversity, unity, and history.

It is the realisation of a vision that resonates with the ethos of the Vedic civilisation — a civilisation that laid the philosophical groundwork for the Indian subcontinent over five millennia ago, around 5000-6000 BCE. Historically known as Saketa, Ayodhya has witnessed the ebb and flow of civilisations. In the 6th century, during the heyday of Indian civilisation, Saketa emerged as a pivotal city. Governed by Prasenadi, with Shrivasthi serving as its capital during the time of Buddha, the transformation of Saketa into Ayodhya, intertwined with the narrative of the Ram Mandir, adds layers to the historical depth and cultural richness of the region. The Ram Mandir is not a solitary monument but a bridge connecting the present to the illustrious past.

Its construction draws inspiration from the Vedic scriptures, reflecting a profound connection to the cultural heritage of Bharat. It stands as a symbol of the continuity of values, a testimony to the enduring legacy of a civilisation rooted in spirituality and wisdom. Understanding the significance of Ayodhya and the Ram Mandir is akin to delving into the pages of a historical epic. It is a journey into the soul of the Indian subcontinent, where diverse cultures, languages, and traditions have flourished and evolved. The homecoming of Ram Lalla is a poignant chapter in this ongoing saga, a reclamation of a sacred space embedded in the collective consciousness of a nation.

Our rich cultural and heritage are not mere relics of the past. They are dynamic educators shaping the minds of the present and future. The Ram Mandir, with its spiritual teachings and cultural symbolism, becomes a living institution, offering profound lessons that extend beyond religious boundaries. In today's technologically driven world, the cultural and historical significance of the Ram Mandir can be disseminated globally through modern tools like virtual reality. This integration of ancient heritage with cutting-edge technology allows students of all ages to explore the intricate details of the Ram Mandir and the Pran Pratishtha in immersive and informative ways. Our culture, deeply embedded in the teachings of the Vedas, provides not just a spiritual compass but also a source of education for today's generation. The Ram Mandir, in its magnificence, becomes a living institution to impart the values enshrined in our ancient scriptures, fostering a sense of unity among the diverse States of our country. In a time when the world is becoming more interconnected, appreciating the depth and diversity of our heritage becomes essential. The Ram Mandir, standing tall in Ayodhya, serves as a beacon of unity. It has the potential to unite States, transcend regional differences, and foster a sense of collective identity that goes beyond geopolitical boundaries.

Moreover, the Ram Mandir holds promises for economic growth and development. As a centre of pilgrimage and cultural tourism, it can catalyse economic activities in the region, providing employment opportunities and contributing to the socio-economic fabric of the States. In this way, the magnificence of the Ram Mandir becomes not just a spiritual and cultural symbol but a catalyst for progress and prosperity.

In conclusion, the homecoming of Ram Lalla and the Pran Pratishtha at the Ram Mandir is a celebration of India's heritage, an ode to the Vedic civilisation that continues to shape the destiny of the nation. It is a reminder that our shared past holds the key to a harmonious and prosperous future. As the beautiful Ram Mandir stands on the sacred soil of Ayodhya, it beckons us to appreciate, preserve, and cherish the profound legacy that is our cultural and spiritual heritage. In doing so, it paves the way for a united, enlightened, and prosperous Bharat.

(The writer is a socio-economic analyst, and entrepreneur. The views expressed are strictly her personal)



MONICA B SOOD

## INSIGHT

### FM tackles economic uncertainties

In some of her interviews, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has expressed that uncertainties such as war, attacks on trading vessels, and relations between countries are the biggest challenges to the economy. These uncertainties have the potential to disrupt the supply chain, impact trade and commerce, and increase inflation.

Iran-supported Houthi rebels have been attacking trade ships and oil tankers passing through the Red Sea in solidarity with the residents of Gaza, who have been suffering from the Israeli attack that began on October 7 last year.

Trading communities are dismayed to see freight rates increasing substantially, along with additional burdens related to surcharges. Exporters, hoping for an early resolution of the issue, are even holding back a sizable volume (nearly one quarter) of the consignment scheduled to be traded along this route. This is adding to skepticism and nervousness in the global business community.

The duration of sailing through alternate routes has increased by two weeks, resulting in higher shipping and insurance costs. Furthermore, shortages of containers are inevitable as existing containers are engaged in the journey for longer durations. On the Amsterdam-Asia route, the 0.1 per cent premium in early December 2023 has risen to 0.5 to 0.7 per cent. Nearly 20 per cent of our \$1.1 trillion merchandise destined for Europe, the US East Coast, West Asia, North African countries, and Russia passes through the Red Sea-Suez Canal route. Additionally, 40 per cent of our crude oil comes from Russia through this route.

The US and the UK have organised themselves against Houthi attacks and responded by targeting more than 60 rebel sites in Yemen using missiles and drones. As a result, Yemeni people in the capital, Sana'a, have shown sympathy for the rebels and supported them, indicating that the conflict and disruptions are likely to prolong. Major shipping companies are already avoiding the Red Sea route and diverting merchandise shipping via the Cape of Good Hope to and from several European destinations. Other groups causing disruptions could be equally dangerous; Iraq's

strongest Iran-backed militias say they will continue to target US troops. The US has taken note of this and is preparing to strike, boosting its defenses at the Jordan base and preparing for a wider response to drone attacks.

Meanwhile, the combined response of the US and the UK, which commenced on January 10, has further intensified and targeted 36 Houthi targets in Yemen a few days ago. The uncertainties are not likely to be resolved anytime soon.

The official stance of the Houthis is that they will continue to attack all ships bound for Israel until food and medicine start arriving in Gaza. However, the truth is different; they aim to pressure the Yemeni Government to gain leverage in their domestic conflict. Additionally, they are supported by Iran against the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia; they have attacked ships from more than 30 countries using drones and missiles. While many countries are grappling with the challenge of high shipping costs along the new route, Egypt has acknowledged a 40 per cent decrease in revenue from the Suez Canal route.

Despite being militarily powerful, the Saudis are helpless against the rebels, who have already caused billions of dollars in losses in the past. In September 2019, the Houthis sent 10 UAVs that struck Aramco facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais, Saudi Arabia, resulting in substantial losses in crude oil production for the company.

With shipping costs rising by 40 to 60 per cent, along with corresponding increases in insurance premiums, India's trade may suffer. Our industries require parts from Japan, South Korea, and Europe for manufacturing electronic items, machinery, and cars, among others. The additional transportation costs and disruptions in the supply chain have the potential to impact production domestically. Similarly, Indian petrochemicals, plastics, and chemicals may become more expensive in European markets.

The latest domestic figures suggest a decline in exports of textiles, chemicals, leather, and petroleum products. India has also been affected by high inflation in Western countries and the continuous

postponement of interest rate cuts in those countries. These factors have led to reduced spending, decreased demand, and ultimately, a decline in prices.

Data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry just before the Interim Budget shows that the growth in coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers, steel, cement, and electricity in December 2023 was only 3.8 per cent, compared to the 7.9 per cent registered in November 2023. In fact, crude oil growth had contracted.

At a time when there are uncertainties in trade and commerce, it is logical for the Finance Minister to demonstrate resilience in the area of energy production. The uncertainties in crude oil supply cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. Moreover, as COP 28 has resolved, we need to transition away from fossil fuel consumption. Mindful of this context and building on PM Modi's Ayodhya announcement of rooftop solar for one crore households, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has allocated Rs 10,000 crore as seed money in the Interim Budget and also promised free power of 300 units per month to each individual household. This will result in an annual savings of Rs 15,000 to Rs 18,000 in electricity bills per household.

The scheme is known as the Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana. The scheme also creates opportunities for additional income for households. They will receive payment for the surplus power produced on their rooftops and fed into the power grid, as well as for power consumed by electric vehicle charging stations.

The project will also generate employment opportunities for solar panel and EV charging station installation and maintenance. Most importantly, it will reduce our dependency on crude oil imports, saving foreign exchange, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In response to the Paris Climate Accord, our commitment under our nationally determined contribution is to generate 500 Gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy capacity by 2030, with solar power comprising 292 GW of this target. Data from

the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy suggests that our current solar capacity is 72.31 GW, including 11.08 GW of grid-connected solar rooftop capacity. Thus far, rooftop solar installation has been slow, with our achievement until 2022-23 reaching a mere 5.87 GW against a target of 40 GW. By integrating the Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana with the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, solar rooftop installations are expected to accelerate, and the total solar capacity of 292 GW is likely to be achieved ahead of schedule.

It is heartening to note that the Finance Minister has not included any revidis or freebies in the interim budget. She has imposed very strong fiscal discipline and proposed to bring down the fiscal deficit from 5.8 per cent in 2023-24 to 5.1 per cent in 2024-25, which will have a positive impact on the economy. Government borrowing would decrease, lowering the debt-to-GDP ratio, currently at 83 per cent. Additionally, interest rates would come down, allowing private investors to take advantage of cheaper financing and enhance investment, resulting in more job creation.

Furthermore, the Finance Minister's new definition of "Secularism" makes the Budget more inclusive and sets us on the trajectory of "Viksit Bharat" by 2047. She has linked "Secularism" with the saturation of schemes. Regardless of caste, creed, and religion, beneficiaries under schemes are moving towards saturation, demonstrating real secularism in action.

The critics of the Interim Budget are questioning why there is no indication of an increase in the outlay for social sector schemes related to health and education, as well as a very limited increase of 11.1 per cent in capital outlay compared to the previous financial year. In response, the Finance Minister has maintained that it is not disputed that the health and education sectors require a larger Budget, but there is a maximum absorption capacity by the respective departments of State Governments. These sectors fall under the concurrent list, and it is the prerogative of the States to prioritise the creation of assets and infrastructure. If the provided outlay exceeds the absorption capacity of the state,

**By prioritising renewable energy, Finance Minister Sitharaman shows foresight, aiming to decrease reliance on volatile crude oil imports and combat environmental degradation. It is a step in the right direction towards sustainability.**



BK SINGH

the amount remains unutilised at the end of the financial year. My 38 years of experience working in both State and Central Governments also support the Finance Minister's observation. Often, officers accept additional Budget allocations towards the end of the financial year without any pending bills. This surplus amount becomes available when other units fail to implement all components of a scheme and surrender it in March.

Those who accept the money in the second half of March cannot effectively utilise it. Firstly, the amount is withdrawn from the treasury without creating physical assets, and secondly, even if assets are created in the following one or two months, there will always be questions about their quality and quantity.

(The writer is retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force) Karnataka)



**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

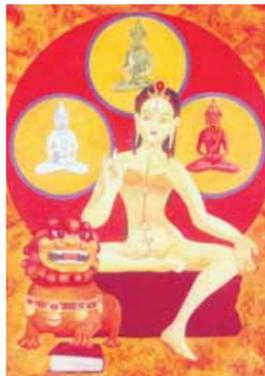
MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

You are creative, diligent, and excel in applying structured approaches to achieve your goals. Expect to shoulder significant responsibilities, embracing hard work and leadership roles. Your efforts are set to yield tangible benefits, particularly in financial terms. However, nurturing stability in your personal connections is essential during this period. Your professional endeavors are likely to expand, through either a new job opportunity, project, or business growth. While you might face mixed reactions from those around you, support will come, often from within your family, though one may be considering travel. With the groundwork you've laid, positive outcomes are on the horizon, warranting a patient and confident wait for the fruits of your labor. This phase also promises the strengthening of friendships, enriching your personal life and professional achievements.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Teal  
Lucky day Sunday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week begins with a journey, signaling a period of progress and the awareness that there's much ground yet to cover. Embrace this phase with optimism and determination, for the welcome awaiting you upon your arrival promises to be grand and celebratory. Some individuals will find themselves in the spotlight, receiving accolades that not only honor their achievements but also inspire continued excellence. This recognition fuels a sense of purpose and the endurance to pursue one's ambitions. However, as the week draws to a close, a challenge to one's self-assurance may arise, potentially hindering creative expression. It's a moment to consider the delegation of responsibilities and to reflect on one's aspirations and the broader vision for one's life, adjusting the course as needed to maintain balance and forward momentum.

Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Brown  
Lucky day Friday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, you're on the brink of discovering a profound connection, setting the stage for a relationship brimming with promise and the potential for deep affection and joy. As you navigate the beginnings of this bond, your emotions may surge, signaling the start of something truly significant. You approach life with a fearless and passionate zest, ready to embrace whatever comes your way. An opportunity for travel presents itself, so it's wise to be mindful and protect your possessions. Your proactive and determined nature ensures you're well-equipped to face any obstacles, offering support and kindness to those around you. Your compassionate spirit shines, as you're always willing to extend a hand to those in need. Additionally, this period may bring about a significant shift in your living situation, marking a time of transformation and growth.

Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Turquoise  
Lucky day Monday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

Currently, you're entering a period marked by an upswing in financial prosperity. Expect an increase in your resources, coming through unexpected channels such as generous gifts or possibly an inheritance. With Valentine's Day around the corner, some may experience significant romantic gestures, including proposals. However, this time also brings challenges for others, as they grapple with profound emotional struggles, including regret and anxiety, which may disrupt sleep and escalate stress. Despite these hurdles, as the week progresses, you'll find a renewed belief in your capabilities, inspiring you to turn aspirations into tangible results. This moment serves as a catalyst for transforming dreams into reality, encouraging you to take decisive steps toward realizing your ambitions.

Lucky number 15 | Lucky colour Orange  
Lucky day Tuesday



**VirGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week heralds a period of significant challenges alongside notable triumphs. Your determination and clarity of purpose propel you forward, equipping you with the resilience and strength needed to surmount any difficulties you encounter. Embodying the essence of a fearless leader, your actions inspire and command respect. Your capacity for leadership is pronounced, as you navigate through adversity with integrity and fairness, motivating those around you to embrace your guidance. This period may also mark a pivotal moment in your professional journey, positioning you at the forefront of a venture or organization. Your adeptness and eloquent communication skills play a crucial role in steering your path toward positive transformation.

Lucky number 19 | Lucky colour Indigo  
Lucky day Tuesday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you might find yourself grappling with feelings of unease and frustration, feeling that despite your diligence, the rewards seem elusive. You're on the cusp of completing a significant phase, standing at the threshold of achieving something meaningful. As the week progresses, expect a shift towards fulfillment and joy, with opportunities for significant personal achievements and the potential for new beginnings, whether in personal wealth, happiness, or relationships. This phase brings a well-deserved respite and contentment, encouraging you to savor the moment of peace and satisfaction. Your confidence and creativity are peaking, propelling you towards the realization of your ambitions. Recognition for your efforts is on the horizon, along with the blossoming of meaningful connections, be they in friendship or love.

Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Coral  
Lucky day Wednesday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

As the season of love approaches, the possibility of romantic gestures, including serious commitments, is on the horizon. However, it's also a period where some might confront lingering emotional challenges, leading to restlessness and heightened stress due to unresolved issues that disrupt peace of mind. Despite these challenges, the coming days bring a renewed sense of self-assurance in your capabilities, encouraging you to take decisive steps toward realizing your ambitions. This moment marks a critical point for transforming aspirations into concrete plans, and dreams into tangible successes, paving the way for a fulfilling journey ahead. You're entering a phase where your financial situation looks promising, with unexpected gains heading your way through means such as generous gifts or possibly an unexpected windfall.

Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Maroon  
Lucky day Wednesday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week unfolds with a flurry of joyous gatherings! You'll find yourself immersed in a series of festive occasions, from heartwarming reunions to splendid celebrations that will leave an unforgettable mark on your heart. These moments, shared with close companions or family, will prompt deep reflection, enriching your inner life. As you indulge in the finer things, embracing every moment of delight, remember the importance of moderation. Amidst the revelry, it's crucial to keep an eye on your spending and temper your desires. This period calls for a careful balance between your emotional well-being and financial health. There's a hidden strength within you, previously unnoticed, waiting to be discovered. Cultivating faith in your capabilities and a higher guiding force will pave the way for these inner treasures to shine through, transforming your perspective and experience.

Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Amber  
Lucky day Saturday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

Embrace gratitude for the myriad of blessings surrounding you, immersing yourself in the joy of shared achievements and gatherings. Your days may be filled with social events, from joyous celebrations to communal gatherings, offering a welcome diversion from daily routines and fostering connections with those dear to you. Your emotions run deep, harboring a unique intensity. As the week progresses, embrace serenity through quiet reflection and mindful practices, which will bolster your resilience. Toward the week's end, you might confront challenges that prompt contemplation about significant changes in your personal or professional life. This period of introspection could reveal that previous viewpoints or methods no longer serve your growth, urging you to release them in favor of new paths that align more closely with your evolving journey.

Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Maroon  
Lucky day Sunday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

At the week's outset, you may encounter emotional setbacks in your romantic engagements, feeling unexpectedly wounded by your partner's actions. This emotional turbulence might initially obscure your perspective. However, as the week progresses, you'll find clarity and resilience, with your capacity for love surprisingly deepened. A rejuvenating energy midweek dispels doubts and negativity, enhancing communication and catalyzing new beginnings. For some, an international professional opportunity could arise, promising significant growth and exploration. This period may also usher in a profound personal transformation, offering insights and clearing pathways previously blocked by significant challenges, empowering you to overcome them with renewed strength. Embrace this transformative journey, as it steers you towards personal fulfillment and professional success.

Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour White  
Lucky day Sunday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, you may find yourself deeply in touch with your feelings, allowing your creativity to soar to new heights. However, there's a tendency to let emotions guide your decisions, potentially leading to aspirations that may seem just beyond your grasp. Some may experience moments of discomfort or restlessness, yet find solace and expression through creative or spiritual endeavors. Be wary of misleading situations or individuals prone to duplicity, as you may encounter situations that test your trust and intuition. Regrets or second thoughts about past decisions might weigh heavily on your mind, leading to restless nights filled with unease. During these moments, the quiet of the night may become a canvas for your worries, making peace and rest elusive as you ponder over the what-ifs.

Lucky number 14 | Lucky colour Lavender  
Lucky day Thursday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

This period marks a joyful transition as recent challenges and rivalries give way to the celebration of achieved objectives. Your efforts are now gaining widespread recognition, whether through grand gestures or more understated nods of approval. It's a sign that you're on a promising path, yet the journey ahead remains expansive. Approach it with optimism and assurance. Financial prudence is advised—careful management of resources will serve you well. Unexpected emotional encounters might arise, bringing new beginnings that enrich your life. These could herald significant personal developments, such as welcoming new family members. Indulge in the joy these moments bring, but remain mindful of your expenditures to ensure a foundation of financial stability and contentment.

Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Teal  
Lucky day Tuesday

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**ASTROTURF**  
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

# Goddess Saraswati, the epitome of learning and wisdom

Greet you all on the solemn occasion of Saraswati Puja due next week. In our annual calendar a day is dedicated in service of Goddess Saraswati, the epitome of learning and wisdom. Why accord so much importance to this occasion? For answer, let us look at the concept underlying this symbology. It needs to be appreciated here that complex dynamics of man and the universe calls for necessary awareness. That alone would help articulate ways and means to steer life in conformity with the design parameters underlying our existence to ensure a smooth run of life. We need to be aware of our individual as well as collective worth and limitations. For, we are all born ignorant and unaware. We, however, are also born with an inherent urge to learn, expand one's reach and evolve. That is why a child is always curious to know everything in their sight, in their natural flow. Thus, begins a process of learning ever since the child begins to respond to suggestions. However, seeing the enormity and complexity of our life mechanism, as also limitations of mind and intellect, it is simply inconceivable to get to know the whole at one go. That evidently calls for a well-articulated step-by-step learning process, as detailed in the following verse from Atreya Samhita: "Janmana Jayate Shudraha; Samskarata dwija uchayate; Vedapathi bhaveta vipraha; Brahma janati iti brahmanaha."

Literally it means that by birth we are all born ignorant; having learnt how to engage with the living world would mean being born the second time; having submitted to learning process, one becomes knowledgeable; and having holistically realised the realities of life, one becomes wise.

It needs to be appreciated that by birth one begins with a clean slate, appar-



ently not carrying any impression of worldly object or experience in mind that could guide them. Although armed with all the faculties of mind to comprehend a thing, or to cultivate a thought, or to act on their own, they do not have any image in mind that may lead them through.

They do not have enough of spoken words stock necessary to describe an object or express their feelings. They are not conversant with the complex dynamics of the world of phenomenon either. They, therefore, would need a lesson in how to engage with the world around. Evidently, they are first taught the civic and moral conduct norms, so that sense of civility and sanity dawns upon them. That qualifies them to relate well with the environment and conduct themselves in an orderly manner. Having been brought up to this level will literally mean being born afresh the second time.

The next course of learning to follow offers exposure to various disciplines vital to our qualitative existence. Here, a reference to the word "Veda" doesn't mean Veda parse. It implies all the acquired treasures of knowledge covering different aspects of life, be they philosophy, medicine, astronomy, warfare, justice. But

before exposure to a particular subject of learning, one had to undergo a mandatory grooming process. Purposely so that character is built, strength of mind is increased, vision and intellect get expanded. The whole process was directed towards the learner getting well-grounded, so as to approach the subject with an open mind without any egotistical pre-conditioning whatsoever. The purpose, obviously, is to invoke the spirit of an honest learner as is usually evident in a curious child. In the process, the learner develops enough of mental and moral control. That enables the learner to put in all acts together to pursue the process in the right spirit following an open enquiry system. The student, thus groomed, qualifies to easily grasp true import of the lessons imparted, both explicit as well as hidden between the lines.

It will not be out of place to mention that in the ancient India's tradition, most

of the knowledge treasures were purposely scripted in formulated language. It was supposedly done so in order that one could have in store, enough of memory implants in the least possible space and words possible. And but for honing one's mental faculty thoroughly well, it would not be possible to see through the truths veiled under the express words. A learner having thus accessed and practiced the entire spectrum of known treasures of knowledge qualifies to become a "Vipra", knowledgeable. One may still not have a comprehensive understanding about the realities of life. For, the knowledge may still be fractioned, depending on what specific discipline one has explored.

The issue continues.....  
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