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NEW DELHI, MONDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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## DELHI BRACES UP FOR FARMERS ONSLAUGHT

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to avoid a re-run of the 2020 Farmers' protest in the Delhi-NCR, the Haryana and the Delhi Police have left no stone unturned to prevent any untoward situation for the farmers' 'Chalo Delhi' protest scheduled to be held on Tuesday. Large cement barricades, nails punched on access roads, suspension of internet and bulk SMS services, and heavy police deployment to block the farmers have been put in place at the borders.

The Centre has invited representatives of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to hold another meeting to discuss their demands on February 12. Three Union Ministers — Piyush Goyal, Arjun Munda and Nityanand Rai, will hold talks with farmers' in Chandigarh. The meeting will be held at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26. Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has accused the Haryana Government of creating a border "between Punjab and India", referring to the concrete blocks, nails and barbed wire placed on some roads to scuttle the farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march. He said the Manohar Khattar-led Haryana Government has placed as much barbed wire at the State's borders with Punjab as there is at the country's border with Pakistan. Khattar, however,



Security personnel deployed at Ghazipur border in view of farmers' Delhi Chalo March, in New Delhi, on Sunday. A large number of farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab are expected to march towards the national Capital on Tuesday

justified the steps taken by his Government to seal the State's borders and stop Punjab farmers from marching towards the national Capital, saying the arrangements are aimed at maintaining law and order. The Delhi Police has issued prohibitory orders under section 144, which bars large gatherings, were imposed in the northeast district and is making every attempt to avoid the unfortunate January 26, 2021 incident wherein protesting farmers clashed with the Delhi Police and

one particular wing of the tractor rally, led by Deep Sidhu, moved to Red Fort causing chaos in the national Capital. Apprehending the disturbance of peace, Haryana has sealed the border with Punjab at Shambhu border on GT Road border (National Highway-44) which falls between Punjab's Patiala and Haryana's Ambala districts, also suspended mobile internet services and bulk SMS in seven districts — Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa — from February 11 to

13. In a notification, the Haryana Government said dogle services provided on mobile phones, will remain suspended and only voice calls would go through. In Sonapat, the district administration has asked fuel pump owners to not fill up bottles or other containers. A 10-litre cap has been introduced for tractors. The administration has warned that providing fuel to those associated with the farmers' protest will attract action.

Elaborate arrangements are in place at the borders in Jind and Fatehabad districts to stop the march. Sources said the Delhi Police are blocking the city's borders with Haryana by placing massive containers. Cranes have been deployed to move these barriers if farmers try to cross into Delhi. In fact, Haryana too has brought in cement barriers to ensure that the protesting farmers cannot enter Delhi. In Delhi, cops are holding drills to practise firing teargas shells if farmers refuse to stop. A video shows the Delhi Police lining up and firing teargas shells in an open area in north Delhi. The exercise, meanwhile, has left local residents in discomfort. Many of them complained of burning sensation in their eyes after the drill. The Delhi Police is also keeping a close watch on social media in the run-up to the protest.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha had announced the 'Delhi Chalo' march by more than 200 farmers' unions on February 13 to press the Centre into accepting several demands, including the enactment of a law to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) for crops, implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, provision of pensions for farmers and farm laborers, forgiveness of farm debts, withdrawal of police charges, and seeking justice for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

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Deserted Janata Dal (United) office ahead of the floor test of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led Government in Patna on Sunday

## All eyes on Bihar Floor test

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ PATNA / NEW DELHI

Ahead of the floor test for the newly aligned Nitish Kumar-led NDA Government on Monday, while political parties were busy keeping their members together through sumptuous meals, antakshari, and indoor games, all eyes are also focused on the role of incumbent Speaker Avadh Bahari Chaudhary, an RJD member, and Jitan Ram Manjhi-led HAM, a constituent of the present Nitish regime. Sources indicate that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar himself is apprehensive of potential cross-voting by some of his party MLAs who have reportedly been unreachable since last week. The JD(U) chief is seemingly facing internal dissent within the party for his frequent changes in stance, treating the party as his personal fiefdom, and his recent decision to replace his close confidant and predecessor Lallan Singh as the chief of JD(U). Another former JD(U) president

and once a close aide to Nitish, RCP Singh, is also aiming to sideline Nitish from Bihar politics entirely. RCP, who was part of Narendra Modi's Cabinet as a JD(U) partner and has now joined the BJP. The Bihar Assembly has a total strength of 243, with the majority mark set at 122. The NDA holds a comfortable majority with 128 seats, comprising 78 from BJP, 45 from JD(U), 4 from Hindustani Awam Morcha, and Independent MLA Sumit Singh. On the other side, led by RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, efforts are underway to "woo" 14 legislators, as the party remains the largest in the Bihar Assembly with 79 MLAs, followed by the Congress with 19, Left parties with 18, and the lone AIMM also in the Mahagathbandhan. Sources indicate that Manjhi had a meeting with an emissary of RJD supreme Lalu Prasad a day earlier, and now he is attempting to exert his influence with four MLAs in his camp, including the former's son, who was sworn in as part of the newly formed Nitish Ministry.

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Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Deputy Chief Ministers KP Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, UP Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana and State legislators during a visit to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on Sunday

## Yogi takes politicians on a spiritual odyssey

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA

In response to the call of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana, MLAs from various political affiliations, barring the Samajwadi Party, ventured on a spiritual odyssey to Ayodhya to pay homage to Lord Ram. Expressing gratitude for the opportunity, the MLAs commended Yogi and Mahana for extending the invitation. "I am overwhelmed to be present at the 'Darbar' of Lord Ram. My dream has come true," Mahana told reporters after his temple visit. He reflected on the evolution of the site, from its humble origins to the grandeur it stands as today. "I never envisioned the temple would be such a majestic structure reflecting our religious and cultural ethos," he said. Accompanied by Ministers and legislators from the ruling coalition,

Opposition members from parties including the BSP, the RLD, and the Congress set aside political disparities to partake in the collective reverence for Lord Ram. Luxurious buses provided by the Transport Corporation facilitated the journey, resonating with the chanting of Ramdhun and adorned with vibrant flowers, creating a serene ambience. Refreshments were provided for comfort, alongside thoughtful tokens of remembrance like diaries, pens, and calendars for each MLA. As flower petals showered the luxurious buses upon arrival in Ayodhya, the journey symbolised a historic milestone, embodying the realisation of a centuries-old dream — the construction of the grand temple of Lord Ram. The unity displayed by the Government and MLAs across the political spectrum was praised as a testament to Yogi's visionary leadership.

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## Modi: Congress anti tribal, Uses them only during elections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHOPAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said he is confident the BJP will cross the 370 seats mark in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, and even the Opposition leaders in Parliament are saying the ruling coalition will get more than 400 seats. He was addressing a public meeting of tribal community members in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district. Modi alleged the Congress was anti-tribal and thought of villages, farmers and the poor only during elections. He said he had got overwhelming love from the people as he visited the temples associated with Lord Ram in the South of the country. Aware of their imminent defeat,

the Congress and its allies are resorting to last ditch-tactics, the PM said, adding that "loot and divide" is the motto of the Congress. "The Congress when it is in power indulges in loot, while out of power engineers divisions (in society) based on language, region and caste," he said here. The Congress has drowned in its own sins and the more it will make efforts to come up the further it will slide down, the PM asserted. It got decimated in the 2023 (Assembly polls) and will be wiped out in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, he said. "The people showed the mirror to the Congress in the Assembly polls. The mood of the nation is similar in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls," Modi asserted. The PM asked voters to ensure



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangu Bhai Patel, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and others at the dedication and foundation stone laying ceremony of various development projects during Janjatiya Sammelan in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh on Sunday

polling of additional 370 votes in each booth, compared to the last elections, for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to win 370 seats, out of the 543 Lok Sabha seats. Even the Opposition leaders in

Parliament are now saying "abki baar 400 paar" for the (BJP-led) National Democratic Alliance (NDA), he said. "I am sure the BJP's lotus symbol will cross the 370-mark on its own," Modi said. The PM said he has not come to Jhabua to campaign for the Lok Sabha elections, but as the "sevak" to thank the people for their overwhelming support in the recent Assembly elections. The BJP recently won the Assembly polls in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh with a thumping majority. "Our 'double engine' Government is working with double speed in Madhya Pradesh," he said referring to the ₹7,550 crore development projects which he launched before addressing the meeting.

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## RAJYA SABHA NOMINATIONS Parties unfold their cards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the elections for vacant seats in the Rajya Sabha scheduled this month, the BJP and the TMC announced their candidates on Sunday. The BJP released a list of 14 candidates for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal. The list includes Sudhanshu Trivedi, and former Congress leader RPN Singh from Uttar Pradesh, with former Haryana BJP

chief Subhash Barala announced as the candidate from Haryana. The Trinamool Congress nominated journalist Sagarika Ghose among its candidates for the biennial polls on February 27. In Uttar Pradesh, besides Sudhanshu Trivedi, former BJP MLA Sadhna Singh, and RPN Singh, the other candidates are Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, Amarpal Maurya, Sangita Balwant, and Navin Jain. RPN Singh, a former Congress leader from the politically important Kurmi caste, joined the BJP in 2022.

The State has the highest number of vacancies with 10 seats. None of the Union Ministers whose terms are ending were named in the list, indicating a strong possibility that many of them will contest the Lok Sabha polls. However, the party is yet to name several candidates. Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, representing Karnataka in the Rajya Sabha, and BJP chief spokesperson and media head Anil Baluni, the outgoing MP from Uttarakhand, have not been nominated.

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## Pak parties intensify efforts to form coalition Government

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

The three main political parties in Pakistan on Sunday intensified their efforts for the formation of a coalition Government after it became clear that the coup-prone country faced a hung Parliament after general elections marred by allegations of rigging. The general elections were held on Thursday, but the unusual delay in the announcement of results vitiated the atmosphere as several parties cried foul and some resorted to protests. Former prime minister and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supreme Nawaz Sharif received the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Saturday for his call for a unity Government to pull Pakistan out of its current difficulties.

## Humans continue to invade sacred forests, their inhabitants

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Pioneer's report published recently that Kerala was fast becoming the graveyard for wild animals is being substantiated by the State's Forest Department, an institution set up to protect jungles and wild animals. The entire population in Wayanad district has demanded a "death sentence" for a wild tusker that killed a 47-year-old man in Mananthawadi, a forest suburb, on Saturday.

Residents insist that the Forest Department should eliminate the elephant, either by shooting it or tranquilising and relocating it to a safer area. However, recent incidents prove that the Forest Department does not have qualified veterinary specialists for tranquilising the elephant. "A few weeks ago, we saw an elephant known as 'Thanneer



Komban' succumbing to a tranquilising shot administered by the Forest Department's veterinary surgeon. No investigation was conducted to determine the cause of the pachyderm's death," said V K Venkitachalam, chairman of the Heritage Animal Task Force, an organisation in Thrissur dedicated to wildlife welfare. Venkitachalam noted that the death of Thanneer Komban, reportedly tranquilised by a Government veterinarian,

could be attributed to outdated tranquiliser. "The tranquilising pistol and drug have expired, and there is no official record indicating the provision of new tranquiliser. Additionally, there is a shortage of qualified veterinarians to tranquilise elephants or other wild animals," he added. The past two months saw a leopard and a wild boar being killed within minutes of receiving tranquiliser shots, which Venkitachalam considers a strange coincidence.

A K Saseendran, Kerala Minister for Forest and wild Life, who celebrated his 78th birthday on January 29 remained incommunicado for hours and ordered the tusker be tranquilised at the earliest and shifted to Muthanga Elephant Camp. However, the Minister was non-committal regarding the mission's timing. Local residents in Mananthawadi, many of whom reside on forest land allocated to them by regional political parties, blamed the Forest Department for the

elephant's intrusion into residential areas. Venkitachalam countered, saying the animals' habitat has diminished due to the Government's concessions to the forest mafia, who distribute forest land at their discretion. "There is a lack of water and vegetation for elephants and other wild animals, prompting them to encroach upon human settlements in search of sustenance. We cannot blame wild animals for their efforts to survive," he said.

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# Senior CPM leader held after violence in Sandeshkhali

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

While Sandeshkhali continued to smolder despite the imposition of Section 144 — in the wake of a public unrest in protest against the alleged tyrannical regime perpetrated by local Trinamool Congress chieftains — the Bengal Police on Sunday arrested senior CPI(M) leader and a former MLA from this region Nirapad Sardar on charges of arson, loot and vandalism.

Sardar an all-India Kisan Sabha member and a CPI(M) committee member was arrested from his son's house at Garia in South Kolkata. His arrest led to massive protests by the Marxists outside the Bansdroni Police Station.

CPI(M) State secretary Md Salim said that Sardar had falsely implicated in the case though he was not present at Sandeshkhali on the days of violence. A BJP leader Bikash Singh too was arrested by the police on Sunday. Sandeshkhali hit the national



headlines in January when hundreds of supporters of local TMC strongman Sheikh Sahjahan attacked a team of Enforcement Directorate officials and members of central forces when they went to raid his house in connection with his alleged involvement in the Rs 10,000 crore ration scam that has landed senior Bengal minister Jyotipriya Mallick in jail. While Sahjahan and his two accomplices Shibu Hajra and Uttam Sardar remained at large the women folk of

Sandeshkhali block — which is an assortment of a group of river islands near the Sunderbans — revolted demanding their immediate arrest. Properties including the farmhouses, poultrys, wine outlets etc of Hajra and Sardar were looted, vandalized and set on fire by the angry locals who complained of forced labour, land-grabbing and even forced sex. Even as the administration snapped the internet service and clamped Section 144 in the area, the police went on an

arresting spree picking up opposition leaders. While the CPI(M) has announced a gherao of all; the police stations on Monday demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Sardar a tribal leader, Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari demanded arrest of Sahjahan and Hajra both of whom are district board members. "Their henchmen not only grabbed lands and looted the properties of the poor hapless Hindus but also they looted their women's honours... first surveyed the villagers and then lifted the women. Kept them for days on end in the TMC parties offices before letting them off... in case of protests their men were beaten up and their limbs were broken... we cannot let this happen... we cannot let the Hindu women's honour be looted like this... we want their arrest," Adhikari on Sunday said giving a call for "Sandeshkhali Chalo" on Monday.

# I will cut my throat before betraying TMC: Abhishek

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee has iterated that he would not let a Maharashtra take place in Bengal by the way of him doing the Ajit Pawar or Eknath Shinde. "There are no factions in the Trinamool Congress. Differences in our approach do not imply personal or political disagreements with Mamata Banerjee," the Trinamool Congress posted on social media quoting Banerjee who is also the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

According to sources the junior Banerjee said that he had no lust for posts. "He said that differences may be there but that is simply difference of opinion and there is nothing personal about it," a senior leader said adding the junior Banerjee had said that "even if the INDIA alliance comes to power in Delhi he will not hanker for ministerial berths." Banerjee is also known to



have said he would prefer to slit his throat than to betray Mamata Banerjee who has created him. "I will cut my throat before betraying my party... I am out and out a Trinamool Congress man and will continue to be so," he said. Speculations had been rife for the past several weeks as Banerjee remained conspicuous by his absence in a number of party programmes including the dharna against

Central deprivation of Bengal. His maintenance of low profile led to rumors that under pressure from the Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation he was gradually drifting towards the BJP and could make adjustments with the saffron party along the lines things happened in Maharashtra where NCP patriarch Sharad Pawar's nephew Ajit Pawar split the party and joined the BJP-led

alliance to become the Deputy Chief Minister of that State. Political grapevine in Bengal speculated that Banerjee could split the TMC after the Lok Sabha polls enabling the BJP to grab power. "It is clear that going by the division of votes and political maturity in Bengal it is not feasible that BJP can come to power through elections if they take place in a free and fare manner... in that case it is possible that after the general elections which is heavily tilted towards the NDA Abhishek Banerjee is forced to join the NDA by splitting the TMC... and all this with the Chief Minister's consent because they do not have the power to save themselves from ED and CBI... the allegations are heavily loaded against them," said a political analyst and an advocate in Calcutta High Court. However, Banerjee's statement tended to put a lid on the issue for the time being it seems.

# Farmers Delhi Chalo march: Cops issue traffic advisory

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi traffic police have issued an advisory for the proposed farmers' Delhi Chalo' march on February 13. The police have advised commuters to plan their journey accordingly and advised to avoid the above borders.

According to advisory, heavy, Commercial Vehicles and trucks going towards Bahadurgarh, Rohtak via Rohtak Road are advised to use Najafgarh Nangloi Road from Nangloi Chowk to enter Haryana via Najafgarh Jharoda Border. Vehicles intending to go towards Bahadurgarh, Rohtak via Rohtak Road may take left turn from PVC Red Light upto Jharoda Nala Crossing - take right turn upto Najafgarh Bahadurgarh Road reaching towards Bahadurgarh. "Take left turn towards Hiranakudna Village - Turn Right Dichaon Kalan Hiranakudna Marg (5 KM) - Dichaon Kalan Village - Nangloi Stand - turn Left Najafgarh Firdi Road - Delhi Gate Stand - Turn Right Chhawla Stand - Turn Right Dhansa Stand - Bahadurgarh Stand - Turn Left Najafgarh

Bahadurgarh Road - Jharoda Village - Jharoda Border reaching towards Bahadurgarh (HR)," it said. The advisory said take Left Turn towards Nangloi Najafgarh Road (13 KM) Nangloi Stand - Turn Left Najafgarh Firdi Road - Delhi Gate Stand - Turn Right Chhawla Stand - Turn Right Dhansa Stand - Turn Right Bahadurgarh Stand - Turn Left Bahadurgarh Road - Jharoda Village - Jharoda Border reaching towards Bahadurgarh (HR). Motorists (cars) coming from Punjab Bagh to take Turn Left from Peeragarhi Chowk up to Najafgarh Road (8 KM) - Turn Right Uttam Nagar Chowk - Dwarika Mor - Tura Mandi - Najafgarh Firdi Road - Turn Left - Chhawla Stand - Turn Right Dhansa Stand - Turn Right Bahadurgarh Stand - Turn Left Najafgarh Bahadurgarh Road - Jharoda Village - Jharoda Border reaching towards Bahadurgarh (HR). Commuters intending to go towards Sonapat, Panipat, Karnal via NH 44 are advised to take exit from Exit 1 (NH-44) Alipur Cut to Shani Mandir, to Palla Bakhtawarpur

Road Y-Point to Dahisara Village Road two lane stretch to MCD Toll Dahisara to Jatti Kalan road to Singhu Stadium to PS Kundali reaching NH-44 towards Sonapat Haryana. Traffic from Delhi going to Ghaziabad through Gazipur border may take: Pushta Road in front of Akshardham temple OR Patparganj Road/Mother Dairy Road OR Chaudhary Charan Singh Marg ISBT Anand Vihar and exit from Maharajpur or Apsara border in UP Ghaziabad. Vehicular traffic going to Haryana through NH-44 may use/divert to Dabur Chowk, Mohan Nagar - Ghaziabad. Traffic coming from Hapur Road GT Road Delhi Meerut Expressway - Dasna - take left turn to Eastern Peripheral Expressway - Rai Cut and reach (NH-44) or Inderpuri Loni - Puja Pavi - Panchlok - Mandola Mussoorie - Khekra (29 KM) - left turn to Eastern Peripheral Expressway - Rai cut (NH-44). Tronica City Marg - Tronica City - take left turn Delhi Dehradun Expressway Mandola Mussoorie - Khekra - left turn to Eastern Peripheral Expressway - Rai cut (NH-44).

# Ancient text unravels mystery of 400 years old stolen idol

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Facing initial challenges in verifying its history for two long years, it was a fortuitous moment of rummaging through the pages of a Tantra Shastra literature from Odisha, proved pivotal. "In the end of the third volume of the book authored by Professor Thomas Donaldson, there were some details and pictures which bore resemblance to the seized antiquity. There was an obscure mention of a deity resembling the stolen statue," recalled the official. Piecing together information provided by the Tantra and Sakta Art of Odisha Pustak, they managed to shed light on the historical and cultural significance of the statue. "We connected our Odisha ASI circle and connected the dots with the FIR registered in the case by the temple priest way back in 2021," recounted an official. He explained that details of the antiquities were not available anywhere, making it a herculean task to identify its origin. However, breakthroughs came through the study of Tantra Shastra literature, particularly the Tantra and Sakta Art of Odisha Pustak.

Learning of the statue's recovery, a team of priests, villagers, and locals from the region visited the customs office in Delhi and identified the idol, confirming its connection to the temple. To expedite its return, the locals, under the guidance of the Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, petitioned the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). "The idol's journey back home was facilitated by the intervention of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), prompted by a heartfelt request from the villagers led by Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who hails from Odisha," said the official. The ASI is now in the process of registering the artifact with all photographs and history to ensure its identification and security. Simultaneously, the State Government has been asked to ensure theft-proof security for the valuable idol, one of the jewels in India's rich cultural heritage. According to the locals, Maa Kotrakshi is a symbol of faith, community spirit, and heritage. Seven months after the theft, the villagers had installed another idol of Maa Kotrakshi.

# Third offshore IIT campus likely to be set up in Lanka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The third offshore campus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) is likely to be set up in Sri Lanka, according to sources. The proposal for an IIT in Sri Lanka was announced last November in the 2024 Budget unveiled by Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who also serves as the finance minister. According to sources, the Sri Lankan government is in touch with IIT Madras for the ambitious project. "A high-level delegation had recently visited the Chennai campus to discuss the future roadmap. The talks are on and the campus is likely to come up in Kandy," a source said. "The delegation also visited the Research Park at the campus and interacted with officials about possible areas of engagement," the source added. The Indian government had announced that opportunities for admission to the IITs in India will be provided to meritorious Sri Lankan students from the 2017-18 academic sessions onwards. If the plan for the Sri Lanka campus comes through, it will

be IIT Madras' second international campus. The institute had last year announced the setting up of an offshore campus in Tanzania's Zanzibar with Preeti Agalyam being appointed the director-in-charge who also became the first woman IIT Director. An MoU, signed last July between India and Tanzania, was the final procedural step that paved the way for the opening of the campus. The institute began functioning in November last year from a temporary campus and is offering two full-time academic programmes — a four-year Bachelor of Science in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence and a two-year Master of Technology in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence. IIT Delhi followed the league and signed a formal agreement with the UAE government to set up a campus in Abu Dhabi. The initial Master's course at the IIT Delhi-Abu Dhabi campus will focus on energy transition and sustainability, reflecting a shared vision between India and the UAE to leverage knowledge for mutual prosperity and global well-being.

# DELHI BRACES UP FOR FARMERS...

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The security forces in Haryana and Punjab are reportedly using tractors to simulate the protest and practise how they will respond. A total of 40 such rehearsal using tractors -- 10 in Haryana, 30 in Punjab -- have been held so far. The road on the Ghaggar flyover at the Shambhu border is shut for traffic movement, with police placing cemented barricades on the road. Barbed wire, sandbags, concrete blocks barricades and other items have been stocked at the Shambhu border. View cutters and frames were also being put up at the flyover. The Ghaggar river bed has also been dug up to prevent farmers from reaching the highway. In Jind, two roads near the Haryana-Punjab border have been shut for vehicular movement and restrictions imposed on two more roads, a police official said on Sunday. In Fatehabad district, police have also put up cemented barricades and spike strips on a Jakhla road to stop protesters from Punjab moving towards Delhi. The Haryana Police on Saturday issued a traffic advisory asking commuters to take alternative routes. In the traffic advisory, police asked commuters going from Chandigarh to Delhi to take alternative routes via Derabassi, Barwala/Ramgarh, Saha, Shahbad, Kurukshetra, or through Panchkula, NH-344 Yamunanagar Indri/Pipli, Karnal. Similarly, passengers travelling from Delhi to Chandigarh have been asked to reach their destination via Karnal, Indri/Pipli, Yamunanagar, Panchkula, or Kurukshetra, Shahbad, Saha, Barwala, Ramgarh, according to the police. The farmers have planned to head to Delhi from the Ambala-Shambhu border, Khanauri-Jind and the Dabwali border. Ambala and Kaithal districts have imposed section 144 of the CrPC, prohibiting the assembly of five or more

people. Police have also been holding meetings with sarpanch of villages and khap panchayats, asking them not to participate in the march. SKM leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal slammed the Haryana Government for making arrangements to stop farmers from going towards Delhi. "We are ready for talks and will never run away from dialogue," he said. On one side, talks are going on with the Centre and on the other hand, the State Government is creating terror, Dallewal said, adding, "What the Khattar Government is doing is unfortunate and condemnable." He said the Government had "promised" a legal guarantee on minimum support price during the stir against the now-repealed farm laws. The farmer leader said the Government had "promised" the withdrawal of cases registered against farmers. Farmers were forced to move towards Delhi as their demands were not accepted by the Centre. "Why is the Government scared? Huge barricading was being done. Is this democracy," Dallewal asked. "If the situation turns bad, it will be the responsibility of the Khattar government," he said in a video message. In 2020, a significant number of farmers from Punjab and nearby areas, notably Ambala, congregated at the Shambhu border, breaching police barricades in an attempt to march towards Delhi. Primarily hailing from Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, these farmers staged a year-long protest at Delhi's border points-Singhu, Tikri, and Ghazipur-against the now-repealed farm laws. The farmer bodies held the first round of meeting with the three Union Ministers on February 8. The leaders of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) Lakhawal in Ludhiana, Punjab, declared on Saturday that they would not participate in the 'Delhi Chalo' protest scheduled for February 13. However, they stated their readiness to oppose any mistreatment faced by farmers during the march.

# All eyes on Bihar...

From Page 1

Sources said the RJD has offered Manjhi a Rajya Sabha seat, a Lok Sabha seat, and two Cabinet berths in case the Tejaswi-led front is supported by him. Manjhi had demanded two berths in the newly formed NDA Cabinet. The former Chief Minister, known as a mercurial leader, was apparently keeping his options open. Manjhi himself has disclosed that an Opposition party had offered him the post of Chief Minister but did not reveal which party did so. Sources also said the NDA alliance is planning to move a no-confidence motion against the Speaker an hour before the trust vote. The Speaker had refused to give in to the ruling alliance's demands and resign from his post, adding that he would only step down based on the results of the floor test. As per the rules, a no-confidence motion can be brought after 14 days [of giving notice to the Secretary of the Assembly] or on the 14th day. Until then, the Speaker remains in his office. Sunday brought worry for all political parties

# Modi: Congress anti...

From Page 1

Pradesh, four in Gujarat and three in Rajasthan. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had won 28 out of 29 Lok Sabha seats in MP, including the six reserved for STs, and all 26 in Gujarat and 25 in Rajasthan. "In the South, women, children and elderly persons have showered countless blessings on me when I visited temples connected to Lord Ram there. I experienced overwhelming blessings," he added. Attacking the Congress further, the PM said the party never thought of tribal development or respecting them when it was in power for a long time, and treated them only as vote banks. "For the BJP, tribals are not a vote bank but the pride and future of the country. Modi guarantees to work

for them," he told the gathering. Only 100 residential schools were opened for tribal children during Congress rule (till 2014), while the figure has now increased by four times, the PM pointed out. No tribal children will be deprived of education, he said. Then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee set up a Ministry for Tribal Welfare, Modi said, adding, "The Congress did not bother about villages and remained worried about their palaces. Now, local Congress functionaries are asking senior leaders how to go about asking for votes against Modi. They are in trouble." The Congress is in shambles and in MP is seeing desertions, the PM said.

# Yogi takes...

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Such camaraderie, observers noted, would be remembered alongside the contributions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Yogi. Reflecting on the pilgrimage's significance, MLAs expressed overwhelming emotions and shared anecdotes of anticipation leading up to the journey. Some lamented the absence of the Samajwadi Party and its leader, Akhilesh Yadav, criticising their decision not to partake in the darshan of Lord Ram. "Samajwadi Party MLAs should have joined us. One cannot view everything through a political prism," remarked Janshakti Party MLA and former Minister Raja Bhaiya. Members from Jayant Chaudhary's Rashtriya Lok Dal were also part of the group, signaling potential

shifts in political alliances ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. In interviews with the media, MLAs from various parties conveyed sentiments of reverence and gratitude. Congress MLA Aradhana Mishra Mona reminisced about her longstanding connection with Awadh, deeming the pilgrimage an auspicious and deeply personal moment. BSP MLA Umashankar Singh commended the government's arrangements, emphasising his party's commitment to secularism and denouncing any politicisation of the pilgrimage. Nishad Party President and Government Minister Sanjay Nishad described the occasion as monumental, underscoring the emotional significance of reconnecting with Lord Ram after many years.

Parties unfold their... From Page 1 Sources said both may be fielded by the party in the Lok Sabha polls. Senior Bihar leader Sushil Kumar Modi's fate also hangs in the balance as his name did not figure among the candidates named by the party. In Bihar, which has six seats, the BJP, in alliance with Nitish Kumar's JD(U), has named Dharmshela Gupta and Bhim Singh. In Chhattisgarh, the BJP has named Raja Devendra Pratap Singh. From Karnataka, it has named Narayana Krishanasa Bhandage; Mahendra Bhatt from Uttarakhand, and Samik Bhattacharya from West Bengal. Elections for 56 seats in the Rajya Sabha are set to take place on February 27, with the votes being counted the same day. Mamata Banerjee-led TMC named four candidates for the Rajya Sabha elections from West Bengal. While the party nominated party leaders Sushmita Dev, Md Nadimul Haque, and Mamata Bala Thakur, it surprised many by announcing well-known journalist Sagarika Ghose as its nominee. According to the current strength of the West Bengal Assembly, four TMC candidates and one from the BJP will be elected to the Rajya Sabha. Haque is a two-time Rajya Sabha MP, having been sent to the Upper House of Parliament for the first time in 2012.

# Humans continue to invade...

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As a token of goodwill, the Government has announced a compensation of Rs 10 lakh for the deceased's family and employment for the widow of the individual killed by the tusker.



# Large gatherings banned in North East Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the proposed farmers' Delhi Chalo March on February 13, the Delhi Police has banned large gatherings in the north east district in the national Capital and tight security is being maintained on all borders of Delhi. To prevent farmers from Haryana and Punjab from reaching the Delhi border, the Delhi Police has started preparations, and large cranes and containers have been placed at the borders. If farmers attempt to enter the Delhi border by crossing Haryana and Punjab in any way, the border will be sealed with cranes and containers. The police conducting exercises to practice firing tear gas shells in case farmers refuse to cease their activities to prevent a repeat of the January 26, 2021 incident, in which protesting farmers clashed with cops on the Capital's streets. There are reports that at least 20,000 farmers with 2,000 tractors are set to enter Delhi day

after tomorrow. These farmers are from Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka. Intelligence agencies fear anti-social elements can enter the agitation and disrupt law and order. "Information has been received that some farmer organisations have given a call to their supporters to gather/march to Delhi on 13th February for their demands of the law on MSP and others. They are likely to sit at the border of Delhi till their demands are met. In order to avoid any untoward incident and to maintain Law & Order, a precautionary Order of section 144 Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, is required to be issued to save the lives and property in the area", Delhi Police said. A large number of farmers from Haryana and Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan are expected to march towards the national capital on Tuesday under their Delhi Chalo March organised by around 200

farmer unions. Cranes have been deployed to move these barriers if farmers try to cross into Delhi. Delhi Police have anticipated that some farmers may use other public transport available, in order to hoodwink, the Delhi Police. According to Delhi Police intelligence estimate, some farmers may also come beforehand and gather outside the homes of VIPs such as the Prime Minister, ministers and BJP leaders. "We have imposed Section 144 of the CrPC (prohibitory orders). Information has been received that some farmer organisations have given call to their supporters to gather/march to Delhi on February 13 for their demands of law on MSP. No one will be allowed to breach law and order situation," according to an order issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Police (northeast) Joy Tirkey. The order said the farmers are likely to sit Delhi borders till their demands are met.



"Keeping in view the kind of behaviour and adamant approach farmers showed during protests in the past, there is a possibility of mobilisation/activities of farmers/supporters from their respective districts to Delhi along with Tractor/Trolleys/Arms. Farmers will also come from Haryana, Punjab, UP, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, MP and other possible area," it said. A precautionary order of section 144 is required to be issued to save life and property in the area, avoid any untoward incident and maintain law and order, the communication said. "There are five different points in the order like — prohibit gathering of general public at all borders between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh and nearby areas in the jurisdictional area of northeast District. Prohibit entering of tractors, trolleys, buses, trucks, commercial vehicles, personal vehicles, or horses etc, carrying pro-

testors in Delhi from Uttar Pradesh. "Order that the northeast district police shall make all efforts to prevent protestors from entering Delhi. Order that no person or protestor shall be allowed to bear arms, including firearms, swords, trishul, spears, lathi, rods and the police shall make all efforts to detain these persons on the spot. Order that any person found to be acting in contravention to this order shall be liable to be punished under section 188 of the IPC," said the DCP. Bracing for the agitation, police are fortifying Delhi's border with Uttar Pradesh and Haryana with barricades and by deploying more than 5,000 security personnel. On Thursday, farmers from Uttar Pradesh went on a sit-in demonstration on the Noida-Greater Noida Expressway as police blocked their protest march to Delhi, resulting in massive traffic chaos. "We are in contact with our

counterparts in Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh to know that how many farmers organisations will join the protest and number of expected people. We have proper arrangements to deal with any law and order situation," said a senior Delhi Police officer. "Proper security plan has already been chalked-out. Borders will have multi-layer security check points. Vehicles entering the national capital will be checked properly. We had already installed barricades at different border of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Police personnel will be in anti-riot gears," said the police officer. According to Delhi Police intelligence estimate, some farmers may also come beforehand and gather outside the homes of VIPs such as the Prime Minister, ministers and BJP leaders. The intelligence report also highlighted that farmers' unions had conducted 40 rehearsals before the scheduled march, out of which 10 were

conducted in Haryana and 30 in Punjab. In Punjab, the majority of the rehearsals were held in the Gurdaspur district. The intelligence report further added that farmers can come to the national capital by car, bike, metro, rail, or bus. Farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka are expected to participate in this agitation. In addition, over 100 meetings have been organised by the farmer organisations in connection with the agitation, the report mentioned. It further added that anti-social elements may participate in this agitation and disrupt law and order. The report also said that some farmers may gather outside the residences of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, and senior BJP leaders before entering Delhi.

# IndiGo plane misses taxiway after landing; runway blocked

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi-bound IndiGo aircraft missed the taxiway after landing at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) on Sunday. The incident led to the blocking of a runway for some 15 minutes. The A320 aircraft went to the dead end of the runway 28/10. This latest episode comes amid a series of incidents in recent days involving the airline. An airline spokesperson said the aircraft from Amritsar to Delhi missed the exit taxiway after landing at the Delhi airport due to low visibility. After missing the designated taxiway, the A320 aircraft, operating flight 6E 2221, went to the dead end of the runway 28/10 at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), the sources in the know said. The plane landed on runway



28/10 at around 8.30 am but could not exit to the designated taxiway. As a result, the runway was blocked for little over 15 minutes, the sources added. They said that a towing tractor towed the aircraft to a parking bay, following which normal operations resumed on the

runway. One of the sources said that after the plane landed at the airport, an air traffic controller asked the pilot to vacate the runway to taxiway K6. However, due to low visibility, the aircraft could not move to the taxiway, the source added.

In a statement, the IndiGo spokesperson said the aircraft missed the exit taxiway due to low visibility. "The aircraft was stopped on the runway and was towed to the parking bay by a tug. IndiGo prioritises operational safety above all else and regrets any inconvenience caused to passengers," the spokesperson said in a statement. IGIA is the country's largest airport and handles around 1,400 flights daily. It has four operational runways. On January 31, chaos erupted at the Delhi airport as passengers protested after IndiGo cancelled a flight to Deogarh, Jharkhand. The angry flyers raised slogans like 'Indigo Chor Hai', questioning the airline's sudden decision. Also last month, cricketer Mayank Agarwal filed a police complaint after drinking 'poisonous liquid' in a Delhi-

bound IndiGo flight. Following the incident, he had to be hospitalised in Agartala. In another episode also in January, pilots of an IndiGo flight from Delhi to Baku were removed from flying duty as the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) launched a probe to find out whether they had taken off without the required air traffic control (ATC) clearance. Around the same time, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) had imposed a fine of Rs 1.2 crore on IndiGo after passengers were seen sitting on the tarmac and eating food while waiting for their delayed flight. In one of the major incidents, a frustrated passenger was caught on camera hitting the pilot of an IndiGo flight while the latter was making an announcement regarding delays.

# Kejriwal to visit Ram Temple with family and Mann today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will be visiting the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Monday. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convenor will be accompanied by his wife and parents. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will also accompany him on the visit to the holy town, which is witnessing heavy footfall since the grand consecration ceremony last month. Kejriwal had earlier said he had not received a formal invitation for the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony that was held on January 22. He had also said he wants to visit the temple with his family and would prefer to go later. Lakhs of people from across the country are visiting the temple since it was opened to the pub-



lic after the consecration ceremony led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Leaders cutting across party lines are also visiting the holy town. Although invited to the consecration ceremony at the temple that took place on January 22, Kejriwal said his preference was to visit the temple later with his parents, wife, and children. Kejriwal had mentioned during the consecration ceremony that

the Delhi government would strive to organise special train services to Ayodhya. The consecration ceremony of Lord Ram Lalla at Ayodhya's temple took place on January 22, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi conducting the rituals alongside a team of priests. Acharya Satendra Das is the chief priest of the Shri Ram Jambhoomi Temple in Ayodhya.

# Centre stalled AAP Government doorstep ration delivery scheme in city, alleges Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP-led Centre has stalled the implementation of the AAP Government's doorstep ration delivery scheme, Delhi Minister and senior AAP leader Atishi alleged on Sunday, appealing to people to vote for her party in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls to fight for their rights in Parliament. Atishi said that if Delhiites also wanted door-to-door ration scheme to be brought in the national capital like Punjab, then vote for Aam Aadmi Party in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, so the party could take the voice of the city to the Parliament and can fight this battle. Addressing a press conference, the minister said that the 'Ghar Ghar Ration' scheme was launched in Punjab on Saturday.



and convenient way for people with ration cards to receive their complete ration at their doorstep," she said. Atishi added that every ration card holder faces many difficulties in procuring the 4 kg wheat, 1 kg atta, and 1 kg sugar allocated to them each month. When they go to collect their ration, the shop is often found closed, or there is a long queue outside. Even when they reach the shop, the shopkeeper misbehaves or claims the ration to be out of stock. It is common for ration card holders to receive incomplete rations. She said, "We have all seen that when someone raises their voice against ration shop malpractices, they are attacked, and goons are unleashed upon them. Ration shops operate like mafias. To eliminate this dictatorship of ration shopkeepers, when the Aam Aadmi Party Government was formed in Delhi, we launched the scheme for home delivery of ration." The AAP leader continued, "But the central government is never able to bear the success of any scheme by the Delhi government. This scheme was launched by the Kejriwal government in 2018 and notified in 2021. However, the Central Government and Delhi LG ensured that this scheme never came into practice. Despite our hard work and efforts, people are still forced to queue up outside ration shops and endure the misbehavior of shopkeepers."

# BJP: AAP Government did not pay attention to Capital villages

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Sunday said here Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government did not pay any attention to the development of villages in nine years. No schools and colleges were opened in the villages, no sewer lines were laid, no roads were developed and expanded, he claimed. Bidhuri made these assertions after spending the entire day with the villagers in Badarpur village on Sunday as per the directions of the party. He will stay there at night also. During this, he spent time with every section of the society and informed them about the welfare and development schemes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Besides, information was also given about the neglect of Delhi rural areas by the



Arvind Kejriwal government in Delhi and the breach of promises made to them. Addressing the residents, he said Kejriwal did not fulfill any of the promises he had made to the farmers and Delhi villagers. Till date, Laldora of villages has not been increased nor has house tax been waived off in villages, despite the fact that he had made such a promise in the

# Delhi CM betrayed Congress as expected: BJP president

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a dig at Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday said here the AAP supremo has betrayed Congress as expected, and in doing so his claim to win all seven seats in Delhi might even surprise Mungerilal. Making this assertion, Sachdeva also said until yesterday, Kejriwal was talking about an alliance with Congress to win one or two seats, now he is claiming to win all 7 alone, making a mockery of himself. Sachdeva said Delhi BJP has been continuously saying since 2013 that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is not a trustworthy person, and the way he has used political colleagues and sidelined them, it would not be an exaggeration to say that an old adage -

There is none amongst whom he hasn't cheated - fits on Kejriwal perfectly. The Delhi BJP President said until now, Kejriwal had been deceiving political colleagues like Kiran Bedi, Prashant Bhushan, Kumar Vishwas, Kapil Mishra, Shazia Ilmi, etc., but now he is deceiving other parties like Congress in the name of the 'Indi alliance'. The Delhi BJP President said they have been saying consistently that Kejriwal will not form an alliance with Congress or any other party. Just two days ago he announced to fight alone in Punjab showing his workers the dream of winning all the 14 seats by contesting alone in Punjab and Chandigarh and today Kejriwal has claimed to contest and win all the 7 seats in Delhi, leaving Congress in shock of contesting alone. Sachdeva said the way

Kejriwal has forced most of his original party members to quit politics, similarly, he has not spared Congress either by surprising announcement to contest all seven seats alone after long alliance talk. Sachdeva said Kejriwal travels across the country, confusing people with his education and health models along with stories of free electricity, but now the people of the country are well aware of the failure of his schemes and will not be misled anymore. He said among the people across the country, the schoolroom scam has exposed his education model while the fake medicines scam has exposed his healthcare model. People have come to know that most of Delhi's electricity consumers, especially those with commercial connections, have to buy the country's most expensive electricity.

# Pragati Maidan tunnel dangerous for passengers: Congress

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress on Sunday said that the BJP Government should be ashamed of the fact that the Pragati Maidan tunnel, constructed at a whopping cost of ₹777 crore, and which the Prime Minister inaugurated with much fanfare, has now turned out to be a monument of shame, as a year after its inauguration, the tunnel has become a "potential threat" to commuters. He said after the glamour of G20, Pragati Maidan Tunnel is now going to prove dangerous for the passengers. Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely on Sunday said that the tunnel was the finest example of the "amritkaal" of the corrupt under the BJP rule, as flawed design and hasty construction of the tunnel, has made it unusable and dangerous. He said that if a prestigious, Centrally-funded project could be so recklessly executed

under the very nose of the BJP Government in the national Capital, what would be the fate of such projects elsewhere in the country? Lovely said that after squandering hundreds of crores of rupees of tax payers money for the construction of the Pragati tunnel, the Public Works Department of Delhi, which was given the job to execute the project, which in turn engaged L&T for the work, was now engaged in a mutual blame game while the commuters suffer. He wondered if there was a design flaw in the project, why wasn't it detected before the construction work began?

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has said coaching in archery, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, chess and the sports disciplines, by "renowned sportspersons" are available at DDA's sports complexes. The authority is operating 16 sports complexes. "While coaching facilities have been available at our sports complexes, not much awareness is there among the general masses," a senior official said. The DDA also issued a statement on Saturday to raise awareness about such coaching facilities. At DDA sports complexes "state-of-the-art facilities and coaching by renowned sports persons are available" in various sports disciplines i.e., aerobics, archery, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, chess, cricket, football, gym-



# Coaching by renowned sportspersons available at sports complexes: DDA

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

nastics, martial arts, muay thai, shooting, skating, squash, table tennis, taekwondo, golf, it said. All facilities are well managed by seasoned professionals for the running and operations of these complexes. The coaching facility is structured and well laid out to ensure the students are able to perform to the required standards and excel as time progresses, the DDA said. The facilities are available to the general public, including both members and non-members of the sports complexes, the urban body said. These facilities are also available to students on payment of nominal charges. Children from the economically weaker section of the society can avail the coaching facilities for free, the statement said. The DDA said it is committed to the 'Khalo India' initiative of the government of India to encourage the spirit of sports among the youth.

# Five juveniles held in Patel Nagar minor stabbing case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Five juveniles have been apprehended in connection with the stabbing of a 17-year-old boy in central Delhi's Patel Nagar area, an official said on Sunday. The incident took place when the boy was returning home after tuition on Friday night. The call about it was received at the police control room at 9:45 pm, police said. The official said that a team was dispatched to the spot and the boy was rushed to a hospital for treatment for stab injuries. He told police that when he was returning home, seven to eight boys thrashed him and stabbed him. Our teams apprehended five minors later," the official said. The official said that during questioning, the accused told



police that they had an argument with the boy a few days ago. "We have recovered the knife used for the crime. An FIR under sections 307 (attempt to murder) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered. Further investigation into the matter is underway," said the officer. The case has been registered at the Patel Nagar police station.



# Modi to distribute one lakh appointment letters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will distribute more than one lakh appointment letters to newly inducted recruits in Central Government departments on Monday via video conferencing. On this occasion, the Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone of Phase-I of the Integrated Complex "Karmayogi Bhavan". This complex will promote collaboration and synergy among various pillars of Mission Karmayogi. Prime Minister Modi will distribute more than 1 lakh appointment letters to newly inducted recruits on February 12 at 10:30 am via video conferencing, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said. The Rozgar Mela will be held at 47 locations across the country and the recruitments are taking place across central government departments, and state and Union Territory governments are supporting this initiative. The new recruits will be joining the government in various



ministries and departments vis-a-vis Department of Revenue, Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Higher Education, Department of Atomic Energy, Ministry of Defence, Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Ministry of Railways, the statement said. The Rozgar Mela is a step towards fulfilment of the commitment of the prime minister to accord highest priority to employment generation in the country, it said.

The mela is expected to leverage further employment generation and provide gainful opportunities to the youth for their empowerment and direct participation in National Development, the statement said. The newly inducted appointees are also getting an opportunity to train themselves through "Karmayogi Prarambhi", an online module on iGOT Karmayogi portal where more than 880 e-learning courses have been made available for 'anywhere any device' learning format, it said.

# PM to witness India UPI services launch in Lanka, Mauritius

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services will be rolled out in Sri Lanka and Mauritius at a virtual ceremony on Monday that will be witnessed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the top leadership of the two island nations. India's RuPay card services would also be launched in Mauritius at the event. Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth and Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe will join Modi at the virtual ceremony, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). "Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe and Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth will witness the launch of Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, and also RuPay card services in Mauritius on February 12 at 1 PM via video conferencing," it said. Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI is an instant real-time payment system to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones. RuPay



is a global card payment network from India, with wide acceptance at shops, ATMs, and online. The launch of the Indian services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius is taking place amid New Delhi's increasing bilateral economic ties with the two countries. "India has emerged as a leader in Fintech innovation and Digital Public Infrastructure. The prime minister has placed a strong emphasis on sharing our development experiences and innovation with partner countries," the MEA said in a statement. It said given India's robust cultural and people-to-people linkages with Sri Lanka and

Mauritius, the launch will benefit a wide cross-section of people through a faster and seamless digital transaction experience and enhance digital connectivity between the countries. "The launch will enable availability of UPI settlement services for Indian nationals travelling to Sri Lanka and Mauritius as well as for Mauritian nationals travelling to India," it said. "The extension of RuPay card services in Mauritius will enable Mauritian banks to issue cards based on RuPay mechanism in Mauritius and facilitate usage of RuPay card for settlements both in India and Mauritius," it added.

# Modi pays tribute to Pandit Deendayal



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday paid tributes to Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, a key party ideologue, on his death anniversary, saying he showed the path to take the country forward by keeping the Indian culture and heritage at its centre. These have become an inspiration in building a developed India as well, Modi posted on X. Upadhyaya, an RSS functionary, was among the founding members of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the BJP forerunner. His ideas of "antodaya" (uplift

of the most impoverished) and "integral humanism" have often been cited by Modi as an inspiration for his governance model. Upadhyaya died in 1968. Other BJP leaders also paid rich tributes to him, with party president J P Nadda asserting that his values will always be a guiding light for the party. Home Minister Amit Shah said Upadhyaya's life is a giant symbol of serving the nation and devotion towards it. He believed no country can progress by neglecting the fundamental values of its culture, Shah said.

# Expelled Congress leader hints at rift in Gandhi family

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Expelled Congress leader Acharya Pramod Krishnam on Sunday dropped a bombshell indicating of a clear rift in the Congress' first family — the Gandhis. Krishnam who is all set to join BJP said the High Command has a division and that the former party chief Rahul Gandhi has done everything to keep away his sibling Priyanka Gandhi and questioned why the latter has been in the party without any portfolio. He also mentioned the perpetual disrespect to the another stalwart Sachin Pilot who has been batting day in an out to sustain himself in the party led by a reluctant politician like Rahul Gandhi. Krishnam also sought to know why it's now to be one month for the second leg of Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra that Priyanka



has not joined the yatra. "Like Lord Shiv, Sachin Pilot is gulping poison, Pramod Krishnam said adding that, Priyanka Gandhi -- for the first time in the party's history -- was kept as the general secretary without any portfolio. Ask Priyanka Gandhi whether she is happy about it. Ask her why she is not joining Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra. Who is orchestrating all

this because our president (Mallikarjun Kharge) is a rubber stamp," Pramod Krishnam said. Krishnam was expelled from the Congress for six years for indiscipline and anti-party remarks. In the statement issued by Congress general secretary KC Venugopal, the party said, "In view of complaints about indiscipline and repeatedly making statement

against the party, Congress president has approved the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee's proposal to expel Pramod Krishnam for six years with immediate effect." "When I was 16 or 17 years old, I gave my words to Rajiv Gandhi that I would stand with him. Today I am giving my words to PM Modi that I would stand with PM Modi because he is working for the development of the country. Everyone is asking what was my fault — whether me meeting Narendra Modi, Yogi Adityanath or me attending the pran pratishtha ceremony of Ram Temple," Pramod Krishnam said. On being asked whether he would join the BJP, he said he did not know what he would do. "I have faith in God. I will go wherever God takes me. I am with Modi ji because he is with the country," Pramod Krishnam said.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawala said Pramod Krishnam earned Rahul Gandhi's wrath because of his 'strident defence of Priyanka Vadra'. "Congress cannot even tolerate aides of Priyanka now!" Poonawala said adding that when he was in the Congress he alerted Acharya Pramod that 'Priyanka was no better than Rahul' but Acharya chose to remain loyal to Priyanka. Among his anti-party activities, Acharya Pramod criticised the Congress's stand of not attending the pran pratishtha ceremony of Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22 and despite the top leadership declining the invitation, he attended. On the expulsion, he said he was happy that the party freed him. "I wish to Congress party to expel me for 14 years instead of 6 years. Lord Rama was also expelled for 14 years," he said.

# In a first, CAPF constable exam being conducted in 13 regional languages

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time, the constable recruitment examination in the Central Armed Police Forces such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) will be conducted in 13 regional languages apart from Hindi and English. The examination are being conducted from February 10-March 7 and around 48 lakh candidates are appearing in 128 cities across the country, according to an official statement. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the guidance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had decided to conduct



the constable (general duty) examination for recruitment in CAPFs in 13 regional languages in addition to Hindi and English from January 1, 2024. This "historic decision" has been taken on the initiative of the home minister to increase the participation of local youths in the Central Armed Police Forces and to promote regional languages, it said. In addition to Hindi and

English, the question papers will now be prepared in the following 13 regional languages: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, Urdu, Punjabi, Manipuri and Konkani. Constable examination is one of the flagship recruitment tests conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) attracting lakhs of youths from across the country.

# Kharge extends party support to protesting farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday extended his party's support to the farmers who have set on march to Delhi seeking fulfillment of the promises Modi government made to them when they withdrew their year long protest outside the Delhi borders. He congratulated the Punjab farmers for launching the stir for the fulfillment of their demands. Addressing an impressive workers convention organized by the Punjab Congress, Kharge pointed out, Modi had promised so many things to the farmers including guarantee on Minimum Support Price. "What happened to those promises?" he asked. The Congress president accused Prime Minister Modi of calling farmers names and describing them as terrorists and 'andolan jeevies' in a most derogatory manner. Congratulating the people of Punjab, he said, the state was unique as it was only here that both the Jawsans and Kisans are found. He said, in some places there are kisans but no jawsans and in some places there are jawsans but no kisans. But, he remarked, it is only in Punjab we find both Jawsans and Kisans thus a great and unique instance of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's slogan, "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan". But, Kharge regretted, Modi had tried to damage and destroy the both institutions of farming as well as the defence services. He said, while Modi first brought three black laws, then he introduced the Agnipath scheme in the defence services. Substantiating his charge that Modi was anti-farmer, Kharge



disclosed that Rs one lakh crores allocated for the agriculture sector had lapsed as the Modi government did not spend it on agriculture. He disclosed that Rs 40,000 crores was pocketed by the private insurance companies under the 'Fasal Beema Yojana'. Besides, for the first time in independent India's history, farmers were paying tax of Rs 25,000 per hectare. Similarly, Kharge added, the Modi government was not filling about 30 lakh vacancies in various government departments and public sector undertakings. He alleged that Modi does not want the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Classes to get 50 percent jobs. He said, Modi wants the poor to remain poor. He said, the big and huge industries set up under the Public Sector by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were being handed over to one single friend of the Prime Minister. Responding to Modi's question as to what Congress did, Kharge said, "we built dams, brought white and green revolution and set up institutions like the Punjab Agriculture University". He challenged the BJP and Modi to name a single such thing they had done for the country. Taking a jibe at the Prime Minister, he remarked, sometimes Modi flirts off a single train twice, first from South and second time from the north.

# Navy conferences on warship maintenance organised in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



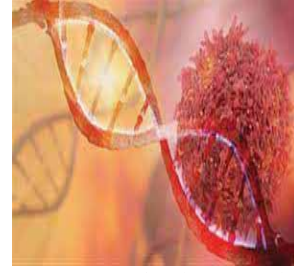
With the objective of maintain its fleet of submarines and warships in top operational condition, Indian Navy's Annual Refit Conference 24 (ARC 24) and Annual Infrastructure Conference 24 (AIC 24) were conducted on February 8-9 at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai, under the Chairmanship of VAdm Kiran Deshmukh, Chief of Materiel, navy officials said here on Sunday. Refit Plans of Indian Naval Ships and Submarines, augmentation of infrastructure to meet the maintenance requirements of the new ships and submarines being inducted, Materiel Cooperation with Friendly Foreign Countries and digital solutions being implemented in enhancing maintenance were discussed. Foreseeable challenges in Maintenance of Indian Navy's platforms and their solutions, including changes at the strategic level required to make refit and repair processes efficient were also deliberated, they said. The Chief of Materiel complimented all Naval Dockyards and Repair Yards for the efforts in successfully ensuring enhanced operational availability of naval assets. He also highlighted the importance of all Logistics and Maintenance Organisations to be more agile by harnessing new technology and efficient work processes, as

also the requirement for modernisation of marine assets and yard infrastructure. During the AIC, progress of various technical and marine infrastructure projects was reviewed by the Chief of Materiel. He emphasised the need to develop 'Future Ready' repair and support infrastructure while modernising and revitalising the existing infrastructure. He expressed happiness with the progress made in the ongoing infrastructure projects and appreciated the completion of various projects in the previous year including the Wet Basin and Refit Jetty at Port Blair. Vice Admiral Sanjay J Singh, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Naval Command, addressing the forum complemented the efforts put in by all concerned in ensuring enhanced operational availability of platforms and emphasised the need to maintain the focus towards supporting heightened operational readiness, upskilling of workforce to develop expertise in new inductions and attention to information security. The conference was attended by delegates from Naval Headquarters, the three Naval Commands, the Tri-Services Command, Director General Naval Projects, Naval Dockyards, Repair Yards and Material Organisations of the Indian Navy.

# Need for expanding oncology services in tier two cities: Experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The increasing incidence of cancer in India, coupled with alarming statistics such as 50 per cent of lung cancer cases occurring in non-smokers and breast cancer affecting every eighth woman, underscores the urgent need to expand oncology services in tier two cities to close the care gap in cancer treatment across the States. On the inaugural day of the two-day IO-CON2024 conference which was held here, top oncologists also highlighted the impact of factors like declining air quality and lifestyle habits on cancer prevalence, emphasizing the importance of enhancing awareness and early diagnosis. Dr. Madhur Garg, the Clinical Director of Radiation Oncology at Montefiore Medical Center in the United States, emphasized the importance of expanding oncology services in tier two cities in India and advocated for a strong public-private partnership to achieve the goal. Dr. Garg also pointed out that doctors are willing to serve in tier two cities, provided there is adequate infrastructure in place to support cancer treatment services. He also acknowledged the positive impact of the central flagship Ayushman Bharat health coverage. "Of the almost 14 lakh new cancer cases diagnosed in India every year, more than 60% get diagnosed in advanced stages which underscores the need for an enhancing the awareness and diagnosis," said Dr. Shubham Garg, Director of Surgical Oncology, IOCI, Fortis Hospital, Noida while Dr Anita Malik, Senior Consultant and Clinical Lead Radiation Oncology at IOCI stressed the



importance of scaling up radiation therapy equipment to meet the increasing demand, calling for greater cooperation between the public and private sectors. Dr. PK Sharma, Executive Director, International Oncology Cancer Institute stressed on the need for a holistic treatment, personalized medicine in oncology leverages molecular testing and comprehensive genomic profiling to develop individualized treatment strategies that consider the unique genetic, molecular, and environmental factors influencing each patient's cancer. In India, there are more than 640 radiation therapy equipment, but because the country is now experiencing a 5-7% annual growth in cancer cases, the number of machines needs to be scaled up to 1400 as per WHO, said the experts. "The infrastructure costs associated with any oncology institution exceed Rs 100 crore, and the cost of radiation devices is at least Rs 25 crore. This calls for sufficient public-private cooperation to make the treatment accessible to the greatest number of people, which is still limited to a set of people," said Dr. Malik. Looking ahead, Dr Rajat Bajaj, Program Director, IOCI emphasized the importance of timely detection and a people-friendly approach in oncology centers and stressed the need for government-private sector cooperation to save more lives.

# Ambitious football for schools plan launched across country

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, in collaboration with All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has launched the ambitious Football for Schools (F4S) programme of FIFA for school students across the country. According to a Press release by the Ministry of Education, the programme aims to significantly broaden the accessibility of football for students, regardless of gender, within the school setting, while seamlessly integrating football-related activities into the education system in collaboration with various stakeholders. Under the programme, on 9th February 2024, 6848 footballs were distributed to 1260 Schools of 17 Districts of Odisha. The footballs were distributed from Nodal district NVS with the presence of local dignitaries from various fields. The kick-off of the distribution of balls was launched by Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on December 2, 2023 from JNV Cuttack, Odisha. Further, the footballs were distributed in the districts of Angul, Dhenkanal and Deogarh in Odisha; and Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat and UT of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu in a phased manner. An MoU was earlier signed between the Ministry of Education, AIFF and FIFA on 30 October, 30, 2022. Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya is the Nodal organization for the F4S programme. Under this programme, more than 11 lakh FIFA footballs are

to be distributed throughout the country in a phased manner. More than 1.50 lakh schools will benefit from this programme. As a part of the programme, to enhance capacity building, recently the department has conducted a master training programme at 3 venues, viz., Sambalpur, Pune and Bengaluru where around 300 physical education teachers/trainees from States/UTs, KVS, NVS and AIFF across India participated with an aim to learn from the best and further use their training and skills as Master Trainers at State level for further capacity building in the field. F4S aims to contribute to the education, development, and empowerment of around 700 million children across the world. It seeks to make football more accessible to both boys and girls by incorporating football activities into the education system, in partnership with relevant authorities and stakeholders. Through the F4S programme, the aim has also been to significantly broaden the accessibility of football for students, regardless of gender, within the school setting, while seamlessly integrating football-related activities into the education system in collaboration with various stakeholders. For fostering partnerships at different levels, the programme wishes to instil a sense of enthusiasm for the sport, laying the foundation for a lasting sports culture that goes beyond individual schools. It will not only introduce the joy of playing football to students but also infuse values of teamwork, discipline, and fitness, contributing to their holistic development.



# Modi has worked to secure respect for India cultural heritage, says Shah

PTI ■ MYSURU

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi with securing respect for India's cultural heritage on the world stage, citing the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the promotion of other key pilgrimage centres as examples. Speaking at 'Suttur Jathra' (fair) event near here, he lauded Modi for promoting the preservation of Yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian

languages, along with making the country secure and prosperous. "Narendra Modi has worked to gain respect for the country's cultural heritage on the world stage. Modiji has worked for the revival of several of our cultural centres such as Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in Kashi, Mahakal Corridor (Mahakal Lok Corridor in Ujjain), and resurrection of Kedarnath and Badrinath Dham," Shah said. Suttur Math on the banks of river Kapila, located



in Nanjangud taluk in this district, is one of the prominent spiritual centres in the state that propagates Veerashaiva/Lingayat faith. Jagadguru Sri Shivarathi Deshikendra Mahaswami of Suttur Math, Union Minister

Prhalad Joshi, former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly R Ashoka, and state BJP President B Y Vijayendra, were among those present at the event. Shah lauded Sri Shivarathi Deshikendra Mahaswami for deciding to open a branch of the Suttur Math in Ayodhya, and start working there. Offering tributes to 12th century social reformer and philosopher Basaveshwara, he also acknowledged the contributions on Suttur

Math and its seers in promoting the welfare of society. "I want to tell Mahaswami that I myself and every worker of the BJP will always respect the contributions of Suttur Math to the society and, in the coming days, will in every way support the efforts to take it forward amidst the people," he added. Mysuru-based sculptor Arun Yogiraj, who chiselled the idol of 'Ram Lalla', consecrated in the newly-constructed temple in Ayodhya, was felicitated at the event.

# 3 dead, 16 injured as speeding milk tanker ploughs into crowd

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Three persons were killed and 16 injured when a speeding milk tanker ploughed into a crowd at Ranipool in Gangtok district, police said on Sunday. A crowd had gathered at the mela ground Ranipool, about 11 km from here, to play tombola when the speeding milk tanker ploughed into them around 7.30 pm on Saturday, the police said. The driver of the tanker has been arrested, they said. All the injured persons were rushed to Central Referral Hospital where doctors declared two persons were

brought dead and one succumbed to injuries at the hospital, they said. Doctors at the hospital said the condition of the five of the injured was "serious". Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Sing Tamang said he was deeply saddened by the tragic accident that occurred in Ranipool. He announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the next of kin of those who died in the tragic accident. "We are committed to providing every possible support during this difficult time. My thoughts are with the injured and their families, and I sincerely pray for their swift recovery," the CM said.

# Assam Cabinet okays Bill to ban magical healing

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam government gave its nod to a bill to prohibit and eliminate practices of "magical healing" in the name of treatment, proposing strong punitive action against the "healers". The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday. Sharing the decisions taken at the meeting on X, Sarma said the cabinet also selected 10 cities/towns for a dedicated sustainable development programme and proposed to bring in reforms in the state municipal cadres. The council of ministers approved the 'Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024'. The proposed bill seeks to "prohibit and eliminate practices of magical healing in the name of treatment of some congenital diseases such as deafness,

dumbness, blindness, physical deformity and autism". "It will prohibit such healing sessions completely and provide strong punitive action against 'healers' extorting the poor and downtrodden people in the name of treatment," the CM wrote on X. For sustainable urban development, concept of ten cities development (Doh Shaheer-Ek Rupayan) will be introduced. The implementation of the concept will be monitored and reviewed by a state-level steering committee. Key components under it include solid waste management, clean and potable water supply, traffic management, urban planning and manpower rationalisation and capacity building. The cabinet approved an amendment of the Assam Municipal Act 1956, through which roles of three state municipal cadres will be defined.

# Maharashtra Cabinet Ministers to visit Ayodhya soon: Fadnavis

PTI ■ MUMBAI/PUNE

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said state cabinet ministers will soon visit Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, where the idol consecration of the Ram Temple took place on January 22. Fadnavis, however, did not share further details. Queried on similar temple disputes in Kashi and Mathura, Fadnavis told reporters an amicable solution within the legal framework would be found the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured the Ram Temple was constructed in Ayodhya (following a Supreme Court verdict). Asserting that Mathura, Kashi and Ayodhya are all sacred places, Fadnavis said after the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, it is natural for people to expect solution to the dispute in Mathura (Krishna



Janmabhoomi) as well. "I believe just as the Ram Temple got constructed due to the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi will also be resolved with harmony and within the framework of the law," the senior BJP leader said. "A new corridor has been built in Kashi Vishwanath. Permission for worship has also been granted there and a conducive environment is being witnessed. In simple

words, all these things are happening with harmony and as per law," said Fadnavis. He was in Pimpri Chinchwad in Pune to attend the Geeta Bhakti Amrit Mahotsav in Alandi in Pune along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Hindu litigants say the Shahi Idgah in Mathura was built on the site believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna. A Krishna temple stands next to the mosque. Also, a court-ordered Archaeological Survey of India report recently suggested that the Gyanvapi mosque Varanasi (Kashi) was built after demolition of a temple there during Aurangzeb's rule. A district court in Varanasi last month ruled that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in a cellar of the Gyanvapi Masjid, a significant development in the legal battle over the mosque adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.



# Ink hurled on banner declaring Ajit Pawar wife as future MP

PTI ■ PUNE

Unidentified persons threw ink on a banner with the photograph of Sunetra Pawar, wife of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar, declaring her as the next Lok Sabha member in Pune district. A video of the incident, which occurred in Karhati village in Baramati taluka, the home turf of the Pawars, has gone viral on social media. Police rushed to the spot and the banner was removed, an official said on Sunday. Notably, the banner declared Sunetra Pawar as an "upcoming MP" and appealed to people to elect her with a huge margin.

Speculation is rife in political circles about the candidature of Ajit Pawar's wife from the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency against the backdrop of a split in the NCP. In a setback to Sharad Pawar, the Election Commission recently recognised the Ajit Pawar-led faction as the real NCP and allotted it the clock symbol. Ajit Pawar's cousin sister Supriya Sule, daughter of Sharad Pawar, is the sitting MP from Baramati. Such posters about Sunetra Pawar's candidature had come up in Baramati in the past also. Baramati assembly constituency is represented by Ajit Pawar.

# Three Bangladeshi women arrested in Tripura

PTI ■ AGARTALA

Three Bangladeshi women and three locals were arrested from Agartala railway station here on Sunday for attempting to board a Kolkata-bound train without valid papers, police said. Upon questioning, the Bangladeshi women failed to produce their passports, said Obaidur Rahman, the officiating in-charge of Agartala GRP police station. Rahman said the Bangladeshi women were arrested under the India Passport Act, while the remaining three individuals, comprising two men and one woman from Tripura's Sepahijala district, were arrested on charges of human trafficking. "Preliminary interrogation revealed that the three Bangladeshi nationals from Dhaka had intentions of traveling to Kolkata. An investigation has started to ascertain the motive of the three women," police added.

# Friends turned foes slug it out in charged up poll battle in Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Friends turned foes — the BJP and AIADMK — are locked in a rancorous war at times becoming personal targeting BJP state chief K Annamalai, in a charged-up political atmosphere in Tamil Nadu ahead of the Lok Sabha election. Anticipating the early announcement of the poll, the ruling DMK has initiated talks with its allies on seat-sharing and is gearing up to bring out its poll manifesto. Though a multi-cornered contest appears imminent, as of now, the political parties barring the DMK and allies are still hazy on alliance. While former Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami sees red at the mention of DMK president and Chief Minister M K Stalin, the loose cannons in his AIADMK devote more

time on personally targeting Annamalai and sustain themselves in the limelight. "Much of their ire is due to the BJP's preference for former Chief Minister O Panneerselvam as a reliable ally than to AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami," a senior BJP leader said. BJP has never been comfortable in the company of ambitious Palaniswami, who in a bid to garner the minorities votes has expressed opposition to the Uniform Civil Code. The AIADMK General Secretary, who severed pol ties with the BJP in September last year, due to Annamalai's aggressive politics, is engaged in forming an alliance under his leadership. Another cause for heartburn for the AIADMK was the shifting of loyalties by 12 of its former legislators



and a MP, recently, to the BJP. A former MLA each from the DMK, Congress and DMDK, too joined the BJP. Ridiculing the former AIADMK Minister D Jayakumar remarked "the Tamil Nadu Governor will invite Annamalai to form the government with those former MLAs."

Further, he likened the BJP state president to a "mud horse" and said Annamalai was creating an illusion that people were joining the BJP. "Those who follow him are likely to disappear when the

mud horse disintegrates in water," Jayakumar claimed. Both the Dravidian majors too have been welcoming a steady trickle of workers from other parties, as it is election time. Though the

Congress, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi and the Left parties too have a presence in certain pockets in the state, they toe the DMK's line. While the ruling DMK is comfortably placed as its alliance is intact, AIADMK and BJP are vying to form an alliance with smaller parties. Other political parties such as the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) and the Pattali Makkal Katchi are yet to decide on an alliance and the options before them are only a few — either the BJP or AIADMK. Parties such as actor Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi

Maam and actor Seeman-led Naam Tamilar Katchi would also be in the fray. "Annamalai's politics of publicity won't work in Tamil Nadu," claimed former AIADMK state Minister Kadambur Raju while Jayakumar, training his guns on Panneerselvam, claimed the latter would join the BJP after the Lok Sabha election. Former AIADMK Minister R B Udayakumar, who appeared to go overboard in his criticism, called Annamalai a "Leghiyam (a traditional thick herbal

medicine that boosts immunity) seller and said the BJP president was a political novice. "Yes, I am Leghiyam trader. I sell the best Leghiyam to banish corruption, rowdiness and anarchy in Tamil Nadu. Those who consume my Leghiyam can see results of a good administration, and good leadership" Annamalai, dismissing Udayakumar as an "invalid currency" retorted while leading his six-month-old En Mann, En Makkal (My Land, My People) yatra, recently.



# Four booked for cheating Navi Mumbai man of ₹17 lakh in share trading fraud

PTI ■ THANE

The cyber police have registered a case against four persons for allegedly cheating a 45-year-old man from Navi Mumbai township in Maharashtra of more than Rs 17 lakh after luring him to invest in share trading, an official said on Sunday. The victim, resident of Nerul area, was promised high returns in the trading. The accused allegedly made the victim invest Rs 17.30 lakh in a fraudulent share

trading scheme from December 5, 2023 to January 28, 2024, the official from cyber police station said. When the victim did not get the returns as promised and the invested amount, he filed a police complaint. The police on Saturday registered a case against four persons under Indian Penal Code Sections 419 (cheating by personation), 420 (cheating) and 34 (common intention) the official said, adding a probe was on into the case.

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**

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Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine

Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine

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**APPENDIX IV-A**

**Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property**

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 29.02.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 28,48,373/- (Rupees Twenty Eight Lakh Forty Eight Thousand Three Hundred Seventy Three only) pending towards Loan Account No. HLLAPDM00296530, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.02.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 09.02.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from Sachin Srivastava (Proprietor, Sky Tone Sale Devices), Madhuri Srivastava and Priyanka Srivastava.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 27,30,000/- (Rupees Twenty Seven Lakh Thirty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 2,73,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Seventy Three Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**

A BUILT - UP PROPERTY ON FIRST FLOOR UP TO THE CEILING LEVEL, AREA MEASURING 86 SQUARE YARDS, BEARING PART OF PROPERTY NO. X-28 (OLD NO. 1531-A), PART OF PLOT NO. C-32, OUT OF KHASRA NO. 386 AND 387 SITUATED IN THE AREA OF VILLAGE ULDHANPUR, IN THE ABADI OF NAVEEN SHAHADARA, ILLAQA SHAHADARA, DELHI - 110032 TOGETHER WITH COMMON PARKING SPACE AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS FOLLOWS:-

EAST : ROAD 24 FEET WIDE NORTH : PART OF PROPERTY WEST : PLOT NO. C-23 SOUTH : PLOT NO. C-33

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

Sd/-  
Authorized officer  
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

Date : 08.02.2024  
Place : DELHI

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The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 1,05,00,000/- (Rupees One Crore Five Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 10,50,000/- (Rupees Ten Lakh Fifty Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**

Property bearing Municipal No. XVI/936 (New) measuring about 79 Sq. Yds. built up entire First Floor, entire Second Floor, entire Third Floor with its Terrace / Roof Rights and above upto sky, alongwith proportionate undivided share in the Land, comprised in Khasra No. 2244/1215/1140, Gali No. - 2, Block - QQ, Situated at Naivala, Karol Bagh, New Delhi - 110006. The said Property is bounded as under:-

North : Gali East : Property No. XVI/934-935  
South : Property No. XVI/939 West : Property No. XVI/937

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

Sd/-  
Authorized officer  
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

Date : 08.02.2024  
Place : NEW DELHI

**APPENDIX IV-A**

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Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 29.02.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 75,58,644/- (Rupees Seventy Five Lakh Fifty Eight Thousand Six Hundred Forty Four only) pending towards Loan Account No. HLLAPPAN00320145, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.02.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 09.02.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from OMBIR, POONAM DEVI, SEEMA and DEEPAK KUMAR (PROPRIETOR, NIRMAL TRADING CO.).

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 40,00,000/- (Rupees Forty Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 4,00,000/- (Rupees Four Lakh only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**

SHOP NO. 1, MOHALLA KALAN, SITUATED IN LUXMI CLOTH MARKET, NR BUS STAND, SONEPAT, HARYANA - 131001.

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

Sd/-  
Authorized officer  
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

Date : 08.02.2024  
Place : SONEPAT

**APPENDIX IV-A**

**Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property**

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 29.02.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 23,49,342/- (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Forty Nine Thousand Three Hundred Forty Two only) pending towards Loan Account No. HLLDMM00285236, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 08.02.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 09.02.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from KUMAR NEHRU, PINKI KUMARI, RSN HEALTHCARE PRIVATE LIMITED (THROUGH DIRECTOR) and TEJ BAHADUR (GUARANTOR).

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 20,00,000/- (Rupees Twenty Lakh only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 2,00,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**

ENTIRE SECOND FLOOR (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) OF FREEHOLD BUILT-UP PROPERTY BEARING PLOT NO. 248, ADMEASURING 25.50 SQUARE METERS, BLOCK/POCKET F-3, SECTOR 16, ROHINI, NEW DELHI-110089 AND WHICH IS BOUNDED AS FOLLOWS:-

EAST : SERVICE LANE 3 METERS NORTH : PROPERTY NO. 247  
WEST : ROAD SOUTH : OPEN

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

Sd/-  
Authorized officer  
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

Date : 08.02.2024  
Place : NEW DELHI





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## An exhilarating term

Parliament adjourns for the last time before LS polls are held and the next Govt assumes office

As both Houses of Parliament have been adjourned sine die one last time before the general elections, it is time to reflect on the Government's achievements, challenges and legacy of the past five years. This period has been marked by significant policy reforms, legislative milestones and moments of both triumph and controversy. The concluding session of Parliament holds special significance as it serves as a crucial juncture for the Government to showcase its accomplishments and for the Opposition to hold the former accountable for its actions. Over the past five years, the Government has introduced a plethora of reforms across sectors, ranging from economy and governance to social welfare and national security. Initiatives such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and ambitious welfare schemes like Ayushman Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have left a deep impact on the nation's socio-economic milieu. However, alongside these successes,



the Government has faced its fair share of challenges and criticism. Issues such as economic slowdowns, agrarian distress, unemployment and social unrest have tested the administration's resolve and elicited strong reactions from both critics and supporters. Debates on contentious issues like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), farm laws and handling of COVID-19 pandemic have dominated parliamentary discourse. Besides, the Government's inability to take timely action to quell Manipur violence would also be a blot on its tenure. As the 17th Lok Sabha is bid farewell, the parliamentarians must assess the overall progress made and identify areas that require further attention. This

introspection is essential not only for the ruling party but for the entire political spectrum to understand the pulse of the nation and address people's aspirations effectively. Beyond legislative achievements, the last five years have witnessed significant shifts in the political landscape with coalition dynamics, rise of regional parties and evolving voter preferences shaping the electoral narrative. The general elections present an opportunity for citizens to voice their verdict on the Government's performance and chart the course for the nation. Moreover, the conclusion of the session marks the beginning of a new chapter in India's democratic journey, where the electorate will exercise its right to choose the next set of leaders to steer the country forward. It is time for political parties to engage in constructive dialogue, present their vision and earn the electorate's trust. In this transitional phase, lawmakers must uphold the principles of democracy, foster inclusivity and prioritise mass welfare. The Government's legacy will be defined not only by its legislative accomplishments but also by its commitment to upholding democratic values, promoting social justice and growth for all. As the nation embarks on the next phase of governance, let us reflect on the lessons learnt and communicate effectively to our would-be lawmaker representatives.

### PICTALK



Children fly kites in a field in the backdrop of the Taj Mahal, in Agra

# Messi confronts China in his own way



BHOPINDER SINGH

China's psychological warfare extends from visa manipulations to Messi's 'snub,' providing a taste of their own strategy in return

Last year, three Indian Wushu players i.e., Nyeman Wangsu, Onilu Tega and Mepung Lamgu, were given stapled visas to travel to China, for the World University Games. All three were proud Indian Arunachalis, and the entire Indian squad pulled out of the competition in protest of the Chinese sleight. It was reminiscent of the 2016 incident when the Manager of the Indian Badminton team, Bamang Tago, was denied a visa to travel to China - he too was an Arunachali! Much earlier in 2011, a 45-team Indian Karate team travelling to China were issued standard visas, except five members who were given stapled visas, again all Arunachalis. Chinese are past masters in psychological warfare and no domain or opportunity is too irrelevant for them to resist partaking a 'ping'. It is culturally part and parcel of their patented 'three warfare' approach where they relentlessly invoke psychological, legal, and public opinion warfare. The recurring bone of contention is the Indian State Arunachal Pradesh which expansionist China falsely claims as so-called 'South Tibet', and therefore shadow boxing on the same. It's the same pressure tactic that it applies with Taiwan and forces its athletes to compete under an unfamiliar name called 'Chinese Taipei', in Olympics and other events. Taiwanese athletes also compete under an alien flag (1981 agreement with the International Olympics Committee led a newly designed white flag with a flower outline around a sun and the Olympic rings in the middle) with an unheard flag-raising song. The Chinese are constantly looking to score a symbolic and psychological 'hit'. Therefore, with such fixation with political posturing and insinuations in everything that it does and imagines, it also leads to hallucinations or perceived indignities whenever it is on the receiving end, deliberately or inadvertently.



The latest issue of a 'non-starter' by the global football superstar, Lionel Messi, whilst in Hong Kong owing to an ostensible 'swollen and painful injury' got doubly compounded by the football icon subsequently playing in Japan, within three days thereafter. The angst against Messi started early with fans booing the 'no-show' on field (which extended to even avoiding interacting with fans or receiving the trophy). The Chinese were not amused and were seen openly questioning the intent of the player and called out what they thought was a 'deliberate and calculated snub'. All hell broke loose when just after a couple of days Messi took to the ground in Japan. As it is, China has major beef with Japan. An indignant Global Times echoed Chinese frustrations in its editorial, "The match in Hong Kong became the only one in Messi's six pre-season friendly matches on this trip where he was absent. The situation... has magnified these doubts and suspicions on the integrity of Inter Miami and Messi himself." The Chinese finally got a flavour of a dish that they so routinely serve, even if Messi who is an Argentine (which little or no sovereign stakes for or against China) is not known to make political points, unlike some other stars. This incident harks back to 2019 when the then Arsenal football club legend Mesut Ozil openly condemned China's treatment of the coun-

PERHAPS THE ONLY TIME THAT MESSI DID COME UNDER POLITICAL SUSPICION WAS WITH HIS PURPORTED MOVE TO SAUDI ARABIA EARLIER, A MOVE RIFE WITH SUSPICIONS OF SAUDIS 'SPORTSWASHING' THEIR MURKY CREDENTIALS BY LURING SPORTSMEN WITH MONEY

try's Uighur minority - the thin-skinned Chinese reacted furiously, and Arsenal club had humiliatedly buckled under pressure, offering meek clarification, "The content published is Ozil's personal opinion. As a football club, Arsenal has always adhered to the principle of not involving itself in politics". The Chinese had flexed muscle and extracted their revenge. For the Chinese, football is particularly important given its global popularity and Xi Jinping's penchant in the same reflecting with its declared aspiration to be a 'soccer powerhouse' with the stated intent of winning the Football World Cup in 2050! Perhaps the only time that Messi did come under political suspicion (indirectly again) was with his purported move to Saudi Arabia earlier, a move rife with suspicions of Saudis 'sportswashing' their murky credentials, by luring sportsmen with money. But Messi didn't move, finally. Despite a long career he has remained steadfastly apolitical and steered clear of political controversies. With a permanent house in Barcelona, Messi took no position on the contentious Catalan-independence issue, given its resonance in Barcelona region. However, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner has somehow never played against England at international level, with whom the Argentinian emotions date back to the 1982 Falkland War and Diego Maradona's infamous 'Hand of God' moment in 1986. In fact, Messi now plays for Inter Miami owned by the English star David Beckham, who had his own 'moment' against rival Argentinians when he kicked their captain Diego Simeone in the crucial FIFA World Cup match of 1998. So, it is extremely unlikely that Messi would be making a political point this late in his career, and especially given the lucrative contracts he has with Chinese conglomerates. If anything, Messi has been in the news for milking his stardom by signing brand endorsements without bothering too much about the brand product or service itself. Incidentally, he had signed up with the now-in-news Byju's as their global ambassador, only to be put on hold when the company started going belly-up. Nonetheless, the Chinese are feeling insulted and aggrieved, Messi's likely innocence and apology notwithstanding. But it is a providential taste of China's own medicine. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### POWER SECTOR WOES

Sir — The government in Andhra Pradesh seems to be under complacency with the pittance of Navarathnas Scheme provided to the poor section. Though the beneficiaries are thankful for the small benefit they are equally upset over the increase in the burden imposed by an increase in the power bill. The functioning of three companies in the power sector seems to be let loose to function the way they want. Inadequate planning by distribution companies results in purchasing power from private players, who dictate unfavorable Power Purchase Agreements. This compels the distribution companies to burden consumers with charges like FPPCA I, FPPCA II, True Up Charge. Government officials' delayed power bill payments, subsidies, and unauthorized payouts of ₹1,400 crores to a private company further strain consumers, leading to unjustified extra charges of ₹500 and an unfair share of system-induced losses. To add to the woes Smart meters are going to be provided to each consumer. Each consumer has to bear the cost of it, which is likely to be around ₹13,000/-. It is to be paid in monthly instalments for a few years. The smart meter lacks consumer benefits, focusing on prepaid and dynamic tariffs that favour private entities. Prepaid setups benefit companies, while dynamic pricing confuses consumers, hindering consumption planning. Reforms prioritize profits over people's well-being, urging the government to prioritize citizens over private interests for a better quality of life. AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

#### INFLATION RISING

Sir — The Reserve Bank of India is trying to control the inflation rate. According to the RBI report, the inflation rate between April and December in the current financial year has been 5.5 per cent. The inflation rate is estimated to be 5.4 per cent during the entire current financial year. The inflation rate is likely to come down in the next financial year, and it may remain at 4.5 per cent.

#### Well-deserved Bharat Ratna



The Bharat Ratna, the Country's highest civilian honour has been given to three distinguished personalities of the country P V Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh and Swaminathan who have made monumental contributions to the nation in different sectors. P V Narasimha Rao the 9th prime minister of India, was a statesman and distinguished scholar of our times. He held the reins of the country during a politically tumultuous time in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when the nation was facing an extremely grave economic crisis and was on the brink of bankruptcy, indeed there were several challenges galore for him, the shattered Economy and several internal security problems, but with his visionary leadership he steered the country through successfully. Narasimha Rao's unmatched legacy secures his pivotal place in Indian history. Chaudhary Charan Singh dedicated his life to farmers' rights, earning the title 'champion of farmers.' A principled socialist, he advocated higher taxes for the wealthy and opposed luxury consumption. MS Swaminathan, a distinguished agricultural scientist, played a crucial role in India's transformation from a food-importing to a self-sufficient, food-exporting nation, earning him the moniker 'father of the green revolution' during challenging times marked by droughts.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bangalore

his trademark hat, pedaled his rickety bicycle, a familiar sight in Baripada. Known for doing God's work, he cared for leprosy patients in a dedicated home on the outskirts. Tragically, Graham Staines and his two sons, Timothy (6) and Philip (10), were burned alive while sleeping in their jeep in a Manoharpur forest. When Dara Singh and his followers had set fire to the vehicle, they woke up and tried to come out. But those fanatics used their long stout sticks to shove them back into the fire, till they died close to midnight of January 22, 1999. His wife Gladys Staines told television reporters, "I forgive those who have killed my husband and my two sons." After his husband's death, she continued to serve leprosy patients and managed to turn his husband's home for those patients into a hospital. Every year, January 22 will come and remind us about the warning signs of religious fanaticism on the road to our evolutionary progress. Sujit De | Kolkata

## Synergise regional and national science academies



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote science through regional media and provide regular updates

Science education in the country is at a crossroads, because of the declining trend among the new generation to pursue a career in Science. Across the country, many brilliant students move towards professional courses that fetch them a good placement soon after their studies. No one will wait 5 or 10 years to get a good placement. Even our policymakers neglect basic science education, forgetting the fact that it's the backbone for building a strong Viksit Bharat. The trend of student exodus to foreign countries is increasing. The public's initial encounter with scientific advancements often occurs through newspapers, television programs, and various other media outlets. The reduction in space or airtime allocated to Science can be viewed as a direct challenge to the field. Many media organisations prioritise commercial considerations when making decisions about content allocation. They may contribute to a lack of public awareness and understanding of scientific concepts, potentially hindering progress in scientific literacy and societal



engagement with Science. This lack of awareness leads to parental pressure on students to move away from science courses. It is where our regional science academies in the country can play a lead role in building a robust scientific force for the future. We have three national science academies in India - the Indian National Science Academy, the Indian Academy of Sciences, and the National Academy of Sciences, India. Even though our National Science Academies are doing their service to promote Science, it doesn't reach every nook and corner of the country. Here, regional science academies come into the picture. Regional science academies can play a crucial role in fostering scientific advancement, education, and collaboration within specific geographic

regions. These academies are well-positioned to address and prioritize issues that are specific to a particular region. They can focus on problems related to geography, climate, biodiversity, and other factors that may vary from one region to another. By bringing together scientists and researchers from a specific region, science academies help build a strong and collaborative scientific community. This facilitates the exchange of ideas, expertise, and resources, fostering a culture of innovation and cooperation. It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote Science through regional language media channels, maintain regular interactions with journalists, and offer science updates. accessible format. Apart from science popularisation activities, many regional academies conduct studies on various topics that could affect the enhancement of Science in society, for example, student exodus to foreign countries, public perception of science and scientific research, etc. Regional academies can offer insights into

the unique challenges faced by their communities and contribute to developing informed policies that address regional needs. Regional science academies can promote diversity and inclusion in Science by supporting underrepresented groups within the region. This contributes to a more inclusive and equitable scientific community. Regional science academies' contributions to nation-building and developing scientific temper are well documented in history. In our journey towards a Viksit Bharat, we should take various regional science academies and the National Science Academies' by affiliating them to the National body. When both academies work with a common goal, it can foster significant advancements in Indian Science. By aligning their efforts and resources, these academies can synergise their strengths, expertise, and networks to tackle scientific challenges more effectively. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## A JOURNEY THROUGH LOSS AND HEALING

The Buddhist approach offers a grounded and rational way to cope with grief



RAVI VALLURI

The doctor was an early riser. Upon waking he hit the gym. He remained fit and in proper shape by maintaining this regimen. The medico was a noted pediatrician, his wife an eminent cardiologist. Unfortunately, their only daughter suffered from a compromised heart condition. The trio had attended a party the previous evening. It was time to drop the daughter to school and the father knocked at the door. But the cherubic girl did not respond. Life was snuffed out; tragedy had struck the family and a pall of gloom descended.

A few weeks back an old aunt had kicked the bucket. It was a double whammy for the family, and they were inconsolable. Several centuries ago, in the time of the Buddha, a woman lost her only child to the cruel hands of fate. In an anguished state she implored the Enlightened One to resuscitate the dead child. Buddha, the compassionate, agreed to perform the miracle. He asked the lady to collect mustard seeds from all the houses of the village which had never seen death or grief. The woman knocked at the doors of all the houses in the village but returned empty handed. Handling grief is a challenging task and only skillful minds can undertake this responsibility.

The doctor couple who could not save their precious child were subsumed into a cesspool of anger, guilt, sadness, pangs of loneliness, numbness, and a yearning for their beloved one. To overcome their grief and desolation, the husband, a moderate drinker, became a quotidian one and his spouse began administering herself sedatives.

Several eminent psychologists like Parker, Arewill and Worden have zeroed in on the point that those suffering from grief, need to move on from the feeling of numbness, pining, depression, a feeling of shock and despair



to the process of recovery. It is important for the grieving to accept the reality of the loss, experience the pain of the departed one, adjust to the environment of living without the deceased person.

Medical science has made rapid advancements such that proper diagnosis, therapy, and counselling along with proper medication can trigger the change agent in the wrecked mind. Alternatively, there are techniques like hypnosis and even providing ECT (in the worst-case scenario) to address the problem.

The Theravada Buddhist traditions have dealt with the subject of handling grief in a dynamic manner. The human mind by the process of strong internal resolution can overcome this vicissitude in life by mindfulness. The process is called Satipatthana.

The emotionally wrought can find solace and succour by becoming aware of the reality about the impermanence of events, happenings, and people. The mind should become strong to accept the reality and look ahead. There are breathing techniques like Vipassana and Sudarshan Kriya which have proven ability to transfigure the mind from a depressed state to a positive one. Both the techniques have been validated by medical science as alternative therapies and have the power to alter the thought process, bringing it to the present moment.

Several grieving souls adopt holistic measures like the breathing techniques mentioned, meditation, pranayama, yoga, chanting of mantras, being in communion with nature or seva to overcome their grief and restore normalcy in their lives. It is the recalcitrant human mind which acts as a deterrent and needs to be tamed. "Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is remaking of life," writes Anne Roiphe.

(The writer is a CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd and is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

## The impact and evolution of IBC 2016



MANOJ KUMAR ANAND

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code IBC of 2016 streamlines insolvency resolution processes and bolstering investor confidence



The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) of 2016 stands as a transformative milestone in recent Indian legislative history. Enacted with the aim of streamlining and expediting the resolution process for distressed businesses, the IBC has had far-reaching implications for India's economic landscape and global standing. In this comprehensive exploration, we delve into the genesis of the IBC, its impact on India's Ease of Doing Business Index, the role of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), and the recent amendments that have further refined and strengthened the framework.

The IBC of 2016 was a response to the urgent need for a comprehensive insolvency regime in India. Prior to its enactment, the country grappled with a fragmented and inefficient system that often led to protracted legal battles and value destruction for all stakeholders involved. Recognizing the critical importance of a robust insolvency framework in fostering economic growth and investor confidence, the Indian government embarked on a journey to overhaul the existing system.

The passage of the IBC in 2016 marked a paradigm shift in India's approach to insolvency resolution. By introducing a unified legal framework that streamlined the resolution process and prioritized creditor rights, the IBC sought to expedite the resolution of distressed assets and maximize value for all stakeholders. Key provisions of the IBC include the establishment of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), as well as the creation of Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs) to facilitate the resolution process.

One of the most significant outcomes of the IBC has been its impact on India's Ease of Doing Business Index. Since the

enactment of the IBC, India's ranking in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index has steadily improved, climbing by another 14 places to 63 in 2019. This improvement can be attributed in large part to the IBC's success in resolving insolvency cases more efficiently and effectively, thereby enhancing the overall business environment in the country.

In particular, India's ranking in resolving insolvency saw a remarkable jump of 56 places to 52 in 2019, marking the highest-ever leap recorded by any country in the history of the World Bank. This significant improvement reflects the positive impact of the IBC in expediting the resolution process, reducing the time and cost involved in resolving insolvency cases, and maximising the value recovered by creditors.

The success of the IBC can also be attributed to the efforts of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), the regulatory authority tasked with overseeing its implementation. Since its inception, the IBBI has played a crucial role in shaping and refining the insolvency framework, issuing regulations, guidelines, and circulars to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the IBC.

In its journey of seven years, the IBBI has introduced six amendments to the IBC, each aimed at further enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the insolvency resolution process. These amendments have addressed various challenges and loopholes in the framework, making it more robust and resilient to emerging

complexities in the insolvency landscape.

One of the key areas of focus for the IBBI has been the regulation of Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs), who play a critical role in the insolvency resolution process. The IBBI has introduced several amendments to the regulations governing IPs and IPEs, aimed at enhancing their role and capabilities in resolving insolvency cases.

For example, the IBBI has introduced amendments to allow IPs to resign from their roles under certain circumstances, thereby addressing concerns about the prolonged tenure of IPs without remuneration. Additionally, amendments have been made to allow IPEs to engage their partners or directors in insolvency assignments, expanding their capacity and expertise in the resolution process.

Furthermore, the IBBI has introduced amendments to streamline the appointment process for IPs by introducing a panel of eligible candidates for appointment by the adjudicating authority. This has helped to expedite the appointment process and ensure a more transparent and efficient resolution process.

In addition to amendments related to IPs and IPEs, the IBBI has also introduced amendments to other regulations governing the insolvency process. For example, amendments have been made to clarify the role of monitoring committees in the resolution process and to streamline the billing process for insolvency professionals. Overall, the amendments introduced by the

IBBI have helped to address various challenges and complexities in the insolvency resolution process, making it more efficient, transparent, and effective. These amendments have further strengthened the IBC and solidified India's position as a leader in insolvency reform.

Looking ahead, the IBBI remains committed to continuously improving and refining the insolvency framework to ensure that it remains responsive to the evolving needs and challenges of the insolvency landscape. By fostering an environment that is conducive to efficient and effective insolvency resolution, the IBBI aims to support India's economic growth and development goals and enhance investor confidence in the country's business environment.

In conclusion, the IBC of 2016 stands as a testament to India's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and enhancing the ease of doing business in the country. Through its robust framework and proactive regulatory efforts, the IBC has contributed significantly to improving India's ranking in the Ease of Doing Business Index and enhancing investor confidence in the country's business environment. With the continued support and efforts of regulatory authorities like the IBBI, India is well-positioned to further strengthen its insolvency framework and drive economic growth and development in the years to come.

(The writer is a chartered accountant and a visiting faculty to ICAI, ICSI; Views are personal)



THE SUCCESS OF THE IBC CAN ALSO BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE EFFORTS OF THE INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY BOARD OF INDIA (IBBI), THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY TASKED WITH OVERSEEING ITS IMPLEMENTATION

## Celebrating women in science: Recognising their achievements

Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers, including gender bias, unequal representation and limited access to opportunities

Yesterday, we celebrated the International Day of Women in Science, a day dedicated to recognising and honouring the achievements of women in the field of science. This annual event serves as a reminder of the invaluable contributions women have made to scientific progress and innovation throughout history. It is an opportunity to highlight their accomplishments, shed light on the challenges they face, and inspire future generations of women to pursue careers in science.

Recently, while presenting the interim Budget 2024, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted that female enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses



VEERENDRA MISHRA

has reached 43 per cent, which is one of the world's highest figures. She said, "Female enrollment in higher education has gone up by 28 percent in ten years. In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43 percent of enrollment—one of the highest in the world. All these measures reflect the increasing participation of women in the workforce." She also mentioned the empowerment of women through entre-

preneurship, ease of living, and dignity, mentioning, "Thirty crore Mudra Yojana loans have been given to women entrepreneurs."

From historic figures like Savitribai Jyotiba Phule, who was the first female teacher of India and founded the first girls' school, to Lady Abala Bose, who was the first Indian woman to study medicine at Madras University, to Kamala Sohanie, the first Indian woman to receive a PhD in a scientific discipline, to Ayyalomasayajula Lalitha, Shaktuntala Devi, who was popularly known as the "Human Computer," women continue to leave an indelible mark on the scientific landscape. Today, women scientists are assuming leadership posi-

tions in groundbreaking projects like Chandrayaan-3 and the Aditya-L1 solar mission, showcasing their continued influence and expertise in pushing the boundaries of scientific exploration.

The Government has taken significant strides to bolster STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, recognising its pivotal role in driving innovation, economic prosperity, and societal advancement. Initiatives like the Vigyan Jyoti Scheme, spearheaded by the Ministry of Science and Technology, are breaking gender barriers by empowering young girls in STEM fields through exposure and mentorship programs. Additionally, programmes like INSPIRE foster innovation

among students through scholarships and research opportunities, while Atal Tinkering Labs nurture creativity and problem-solving skills among school students. The Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan promotes a culture of innovation in schools, bridging the gap between theory and real-world applications. Moreover, the government provides research fellowships and grants, digital learning resources through the National Digital Library, and skill enhancement programmes via Skill India, all aimed at nurturing a skilled workforce and fostering growth in STEM-related industries. These concerted efforts underscore the government's commitment to nurturing a robust ecosystem for scientific inquiry and tech-

nological advancement in the country.

Women in STEM in India have been steadily challenging stereotypes and contributing significantly to various disciplines. Pioneers like Dr. Tessy Thomas, known as the "Missile Woman of India," have shattered glass ceilings in fields traditionally dominated by men. Indian women researchers are excelling in areas like space technology, biotechnology, and mathematics, making remarkable advancements. Additionally, the government's Vigyan Jyoti scheme aims to encourage young girls to pursue STEM education and careers, fostering inclusivity. Women have made groundbreaking strides in diverse scientific domains, ranging from astronomy and biology to

engineering and computer science. Their discoveries, innovations, and leadership have enriched our understanding of the world and advanced technological progress.

Women have played a pivotal role in shaping the scientific landscape, yet their contributions have often been overlooked or undervalued. By celebrating the International Day of Women in Science, we aim to rectify this imbalance and bring attention to the remarkable achievements of women scientists. It is crucial to showcase diverse role models in science to inspire young girls and women to pursue their passions and break down the barriers that still exist in the field. While progress has been made, women in science still face numerous challenges.

Gender bias, a lack of representation, and unequal opportunities persist in many scientific fields. It is essential to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for women in science. By providing equal opportunities, mentorship, and support, we can empower women to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives to scientific advancements. Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers. By encouraging and showcasing the achievements of women in science, we hope to ignite a passion for discovery and innovation in young girls.

(The writer is an IPS officer and the director RACE Lab, Samvedna India, views are personal)



# Egypt threatens to suspend key peace treaty

AP ■ RAFAH

Egypt is threatening to suspend its peace treaty with Israel if Israeli troops are sent into the densely populated Gaza border town of Rafah, and says fighting there could force the closure of the territory's main aid supply route, two Egyptian officials and a Western diplomat said on Sunday. The threat to suspend the Camp David Accords, a cornerstone of regional stability for nearly a half-century, came after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said sending troops into Rafah was necessary to win the four-month-old war against the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Over half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled to Rafah to escape fighting in other areas, and are packed into sprawling tent camps and UN-run shelters near the border. Egypt fears a mass influx of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who may never be allowed to return.



Smoke and explosion following an Israeli bombardment inside the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel, Sunday. The army is battling Palestinian militants across Gaza in the war ignited by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel. AP/PTI

The stand-off between Israel and Egypt, two close US allies, comes as aid groups warn that an offensive in Rafah would worsen the already Netanyahu, in an interview

with ABC News "This Week with George Stephanopoulos", suggested civilians in Rafah could flee north, saying there are "plenty of areas" that have been cleared by the army. He said

Israel is developing a "detailed plan" to relocate them. But the offensive has caused widespread destruction, particularly in northern Gaza, and heavy fighting is still taking place in central Gaza and the southern city of Khan Younis. A ground operation in Rafah could also force the closure of its crossing, cutting off one of the only avenues for delivering badly needed food and medical supplies. All three officials confirmed Egypt's threats, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief reporters on the sensitive negotiations. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries have also warned of severe repercussions if Israel goes into Rafah. "An Israeli offensive on Rafah would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe and grave tensions with Egypt," European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell wrote on X. Israel and Egypt had fought five

times before signing the Camp David Accords, a landmark peace treaty brokered by then-US President Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s. The treaty includes several provisions governing the deployment of forces on both sides of the border. Egypt has heavily fortified its border with Gaza, carving out a 5-kilometre buffer zone and erecting concrete walls above and below ground. It has denied Israeli allegations that Hamas still operates smuggling tunnels beneath the border, saying Egyptian forces have full control on their side. But Egyptian officials fear that if the border is breached, the military would be unable to stop a tide of people fleeing into the Sinai Peninsula. The United Nations says Rafah, which is normally home to less than 300,000 people, now hosts 1.4 million more who fled fighting elsewhere and is "severely overcrowded". Netanyahu said Hamas still has four battalions there. Israel has ordered much of

Gaza's population to flee south with evacuation orders covering two-thirds of the territory, even as it regularly carries out airstrikes in all areas, including Rafah. Airstrikes on the town in recent days have killed dozens of Palestinians, including women and children. Gaza's Health Ministry said Sunday that the bodies of 112 people killed across the territory have been brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours, as well as 173 wounded people. The fatalities brought the death toll in the strip to 28,176 since the start of the war. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and fighters but says most of those killed were women and children. The war began with Hamas' attack into southern Israel on October 7, when Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Over 100 hostages were released in November.

# Israeli drone strike in Lebanon kills 2

AP ■ BEIRUT

An Israeli drone struck a car near Lebanon's southern port city of Sidon on Saturday, killing at least two people and wounding two others, security officials said. The strike came as tensions across the Middle East grow with the Israel-Hamas war, a drone attack last month that killed three US troops in northeastern Jordan near the Syrian border, and attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on vessels passing through the Red Sea. The drone strike near the coastal town of Jadra took place about 60 kilometres from the Israeli border, making it one of the farthest inside Lebanon since violence erupted along the Lebanon-Israel border on October 8. An Israeli security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the target of the strike in Sidon was Hamas official Basel Saleh, who was "injured to an unknown extent".

The official said Saleh was responsible for enlistment of new Hamas recruits in Gaza and the West Bank. Two Lebanese security officials said the strike damaged a car and killed two people. Drone strikes in Lebanon blamed on Israel have so far killed several officials from Hezbollah as well as the Palestinian militant group Hamas. The previous farthest strike was the January 2 attack that killed top Hamas official Saleh Arouri in Beirut. On Saturday night, Israeli forces shelled the southern Lebanese border village of Houla, killing one person and wounding nine as they left a mosque after prayers, state-run National News Agency reported. The attacks in Lebanon came as Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian met in Beirut with Lebanese leaders including the country's caretaker prime minister, parliament speaker and the head of the militant Hezbollah group. Amirabdollahian said that if the US wants to bring stability to the region again, it should work on forcing Israel to end its military operations in the Gaza Strip. He told reporters after meeting his counterpart Abdallah Bouhabib that after four months of war, Israel and its backers had not achieved "anything tangible". In an apparent reference to attacks by Iran-backed fighters in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, Amirabdollahian said that "if American warmongers fail to prevail in the region, then the mechanism and the solution is to stop the genocide, crimes and the war against Gaza and the West Bank". He blasted Washington, saying the US is working on two tracks, one of which is sending weapons to Israel "and participating in the genocide in Gaza" and at the same time speaking about reaching a political solution to the war. The US Central Command announced on Saturday that the US military conducted self-defence strikes against two mobile unmanned surface vessels, four anti-ship cruise missiles, and one mobile land attack cruise missile that were prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea from Yemen. The military said the missiles and an unmanned vessel in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen presented an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region. Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza, imperiling a key route for trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe. The Houthis' media office said the US-led coalition launched three airstrikes on Salif district in the Red Sea province of Hodeida on Saturday. In response, the US and the UK launched several airstrikes on Houthi-held areas across Yemen, including the rebel-held capital of Sanaa. The Houthis held a mass funeral in Sanaa on Saturday for 17 of their fighters who they said were killed in strikes by the US-led coalition, according to the Houthi-run SABA news agency.

# Special counsel report used our son's death to 'score political points': Jill Biden

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US First Lady Jill Biden has come out in defence of her husband President Joe Biden's health and memory and she slammed the special counsel for using their son's death to score political points. Her defence came in response to the voluminous report of Special Counsel Robert Hur in which he said that Biden, 81, "willfully" mishandled classified documents as a private citizen. The special counsel in his report early this week recommended against filing any charges against Biden for misuse of classified documents when he was a private citizen but made scathing observations on his mental health and memory and claimed that the president did not even remember the date of the death of his son.

"The reason I'm writing is because of what else was in the report: Inaccurate and personal political attacks about Joe. Rather than just saying the case was closed, as they have for others, the Special Counsel claimed that Joe "couldn't remember the year his son died." Believe me, like anyone who has lost a child, Beau and his death never leave him," Jill wrote in a mass email to her supporters on Saturday. "I hope you can imagine how it felt to read that attack — not just as Joe's wife, but as Beau's mother. I don't know what this Special Counsel was trying to achieve," she said. Beau Biden, who died of brain cancer in 2015, appears 16 times in the pages of the report prepared by Hur, the special counsel appointed to investigate Biden's handling of classified documents after serving as vice president until 2017. "We should give everyone grace, and I can't imagine someone would try to use our son's death to score political points. If you've experienced a loss like that, you know that you don't measure it in years — you measure it in grief," she said. "May 30th is a day forever etched on our hearts. It shattered me, it shattered our family," she said.

# Al-Shabab claims Somali capital attack

AP ■ DUBAI

The al-Qaida-linked militant group al-Shabab claimed an attack that killed four Emirati troops and a Bahraini military officer on a training mission at a military base in the Somali capital, authorities said on Sunday. The attack on Saturday targeted the troops at the General Gordon Military Base in Mogadishu. Details about the attack and whether it killed others remained scarce Sunday, though Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud offered his condolences to the UAE for the loss of its troops.

Early Sunday, the UAE's state-run WAM news agency reported the killing of three of its troops and the Bahraini officer in a "terrorist act". A fourth later died en route back to the Emirates, WAM reported. WAM released footage of three flag-draped caskets coming off of an Emirati Boeing C-17A Globemaster III at Al Bateen Executive Airport in Abu Dhabi with an honour



guard present. WAM identified the dead as a colonel, two warrant officers and a corporal.

Anwar Gargash, a senior Emirati diplomat, offered condolences to those killed and a quick recovery for the wounded. "No treacherous act will prevent us from continuing the message of security and safety and combating extremism and terrorism in all its forms,"

Gargash wrote on X, formerly Twitter. The military of Bahrain, an island nation in the Persian Gulf off the coast of Saudi Arabia, later acknowledged the death of a major in a statement carried by the state-run Bahrain News Agency. Al-Shabab claimed the attack in a statement online, alleging it killed multiple people involved in the Emirati military effort. It described the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, as an "enemy" of Islamic Shariah law for backing the Somali government in its efforts to battle al-Shabab. Al-Shabab, or "the youth" in Arabic, is a Sunni Islamic extremist group in Somalia born out of that country's years of anarchy following its 1991 civil war. The affiliate of al-Qaida once held Mogadishu. Over time, an African Union-led force, with the backing of the US and other countries, pushed the militants out of Mogadishu. In the years since, al-Shabab has remained a threat as it seeks to overthrow the Western-backed Somali government. Al-Shabab has carried out attacks in neighbouring Kenya as well, since Nairobi provides troops and materiel to the African Union force in Somalia. The US under every president since George W. Bush has launched airstrikes against militants in Somalia, with the number of strikes now exceeding 300, according to

New America, a Washington-based security think tank. The vast majority of those strikes took place under then-President Donald Trump. The US Embassy in Somalia on Sunday condemned what it called a "cowardly attack" against the training mission. "We extend our deepest condolences to the loved ones of those who lost their lives in yesterday's deplorable terrorist attack against UAE military trainers and Somali soldiers valiantly working to advance the nation's stability," the embassy said. Somalia has also been an intense interest for Gulf states, particularly during the Qatar diplomatic crisis that gripped the region for several years and saw four nations including the UAE boycott Doha in a political dispute. Somali troops once seized millions of dollars of Emirati cash from a jet at gunpoint, sparking a diplomatic incident between Mogadishu and the UAE that halted its troop training programme there.

# Trump mocks Nikki Haley for absence of her husband

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Former US president Donald Trump has mocked his Republican rival Nikki Haley over the absence of her husband, who is deployed overseas, drawing a sharp reaction from the Indian-American politician who said the person who disrespects military families has no business being commander-in-chief.

Haley's husband Major Michael Haley, a commissioned officer with the South Carolina National Guard, is currently on a year-long deployment with the 218th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, which is providing support in the Horn of Africa. He deployed in June. The war of words between two Republican presidential candidates started with a Trump rally on Saturday in South Carolina where the 77-year-old former president, seemingly unaware of his deployment, when started questioning his whereabouts.

"Where's her husband? Oh, he's away. ... What happened to her husband? Where is he? He's gone," Trump said at his rally in



Conway in South Carolina, his first visit to the state this year. Haley, 52, the only candidate against Trump in the Republican Party's nomination race, fired back at Trump's comments later on Saturday. "Donald, if you have something to say, don't say it behind my back; get on a debate stage and say it to my face," she told a crowd in South Carolina. "I am proud of Michael's service. Every military family knows it's a sacrifice. I have long talked about the fact that we need to have mental competency tests for [politicians] over the age of 75,"

she said. Trump claims he would pass that — maybe he would, maybe he wouldn't, she said. "But if you mock the service of a combat veteran, you don't deserve a driver's license, let alone to be president of the United States," she said. "Michael is deployed serving the US country, something you know nothing about. Someone who continually disrespects the sacrifices of military families has no business being commander-in-chief," Haley said. Trump's comment on Haley's husband also drew criticism from various quarters. "Only a sick individual would put down a service member who is deployed. This disrespects every military family in our country. It's exactly the chaos we don't need in America," said General (ret) Don Bolduc. In a rare move, Michael Haley fired back at the former president, posting a meme on Twitter reading, "The difference between humans and animals? Animals would never allow the dumbest ones to lead the pack," while mentioning Trump's account in

the caption. Continuing his attack, Trump alleged that Haley is the candidate of globalists and warmongers who want to spend trillions and trillions of dollars on endless wars. "The radical left Democrats want Nikki Haley because they know that she's easy to beat. She's very easy to beat. Haley supports a 23% national sales tax, and she wants to gut Medicare and Social Security..." he said. Earlier, Haley kicked off her "Beast of the Southeast" bus tour with a stop in Newberry. In an interaction with the media, she spoke about her opponents' lack of stamina and stressed the importance of mental competency tests for politicians over the age of 75. Her campaign also distributed examples of the mental competency tests used by medical professionals, demonstrating that it should not be a difficult test for those who are seeking the highest office in the land. "(For months) I have always said that (President) Joe Biden was not going to be president.

# American allies worry US growing less dependable

AP ■ LONDON

As chances rise of a Joe Biden-Donald Trump rematch in the US presidential election race, America's allies are bracing for a bumpy ride. Many worry that a second term for Trump would be an earthquake, but tremors already abound — and concerns are rising that the US could grow less dependable regardless of who wins. With a divided electorate and gridlock in Congress, the next American president could easily become consumed by manifold challenges at home — before even beginning to address flashpoints around the world from Ukraine to the Middle East. French President Emmanuel Macron's recent verdict was blunt: America's "first priority is itself." The first Trump administration stress-tested the bonds between the US and its

allies, particularly in Europe. Trump derided the leaders of some friendly nations, including Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Theresa May, while praising authoritarians such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian leader Vladimir Putin. He has called China's Xi Jinping "brilliant" and Hungary's Viktor Orban "a great leader." In campaign speeches, Trump remains skeptical of organisations such as NATO, often lamenting the billions the US spends on the military alliance whose support has been critical to Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion. Biden, in contrast, has made support for Ukraine a key priority and moral imperative. But Biden's assertion after his election in 2020 that "America is back" on the global stage has not been entirely borne out. Congressional Republicans have

stalled more military aid for Ukraine, while America's influence has been unable to contain conflict in the Middle East. Thomas Gift, director of the Centre on US Politics at University College London, said that whoever wins the presidential race, the direction of travel will be the same — toward a multipolar planet in which the United States is no longer "the indisputable world superpower." Most allied leaders refrain from commenting directly on the US election, sticking to the line that it's for Americans to pick their leader. They are conscious that they will have to work with the eventual winner, whoever it is — and behind the scenes, governments will be doing the "backroom work" of quietly establishing links with the contenders' political teams, said Richard Dalton, a former senior British diplomat.

# Sunak says 'totally up for fight' to win UK general election

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said he is "totally up for the fight" of pitching his policies to the electorate to win another term for the governing Conservative Party as he prepares for a general election expected to take place in the second half of the year. In an interview with The Times this weekend, the 43-year-old British Indian leader said he had reasons to be optimistic because the economy was "pointing in the right direction" and that the "future is going to be better". "At the beginning of this year there is a sense that the country is pointing in the right direction," he told the newspaper. "Because economic conditions have improved, because



the plan is working, you are starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes. I do believe those pressures are starting to ease and that hopefully over the course of this year, we can continue to make even more

progress," he said. In a message as much for the voters as for the rebels within his own Tory ranks, the Conservative leader reiterated his plan to cut taxes for the hardworking people of the country. "It's because those are my values, those are the values of my party. It's one where hard work should be rewarded. And actually, the best way to express that through the tax system is to cut people's taxes so when they are working hard they get to enjoy more of the rewards of that for themselves and their family," he said. "Because economic conditions have improved, because the plan is working, you are starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes," he added.

"I'm totally up for the fight," he said. However, Sunak appeared to echo his Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, who has already sought to temper expectations over the size of any tax cuts in his Spring Budget next month, despite senior Tories publicly indicating they are coming. "None of us ever talk about this stuff before budgets. Other people are. I think they're over-interpreting. What the Chancellor and I have said is that of course, our long-term plan is to cut people's taxes," he said. The Tories continue to lag behind the Opposition Labour Party in surveys, with the Sunak-led government contending with a high rate of anti-incumbency among the electorate.

# King Charles thanks public for support

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's King Charles III on Sunday expressed his "heartfelt thanks" to the British public for their messages of support ever since his cancer diagnosis was revealed by Buckingham Palace this week. The 75-year-old monarch wrote the message from his royal estate at Sandringham in Norfolk, eastern England, in which he also expressed his "lifelong admiration" for the work done by cancer charities. On Sunday, a smiling King Charles also attended church on the estate — the first time since his diagnosis. He briefly waved at photographers as he walked up to St. Mary Magdalene's church holding an umbrella, accompanied by Queen Camilla. He was then greeted by Reverend Canon Dr Paul Williams before going inside. In his message, the King said he was heartened that



his personal experience of the disease had helped shine a light on the tireless care provided by cancer organisations around the world. "I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for the many messages of support and good wishes I have received in recent days," reads the King's message released by Buckingham Palace on Sunday. "As all those who have been affected by cancer will know, such kind thoughts are the greatest comfort and

encouragement," he said. "It is equally heartening to hear how sharing my diagnosis has helped promote public understanding and shine a light on the work of all those organisations which support cancer patients and their families across the UK and the wider world. My lifelong admiration for their tireless care and dedication is all the greater as a result of my own experience," he added. On Monday, Buckingham Palace announced the King had been diagnosed with cancer while undergoing a procedure for an enlarged prostate. In line with the initial announcement, the latest statement also does not reference any further details about what kind of cancer the monarch has been detected with, the type of treatment he is having or what stage the cancer is at. Earlier, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had indicated that the cancer had been

"caught early" as his customary weekly audiences with the King are expected to continue during the treatment. King Charles started his treatment in London before flying out to Sandringham with Queen Camilla, who revealed at an event that her husband was doing "extremely well" since the start of his treatment. The palace has said it will not provide any further details about the diagnosis or the treatment. In an official statement, it said that the King's recent hospital procedure for benign prostate enlargement, a separate issue of concern was noted and subsequent diagnostic tests have identified a form of cancer. The monarch has commenced a schedule of regular treatments, during which time he has been advised by doctors to postpone public-facing duties. However, he will continue to undertake State business and official paperwork as usual.



# Losing candidates backed by PTI challenge Pak poll results

**PTI** ■ ISLAMABAD  
 Pakistani courts have been flooded with petitions by losing candidates who challenged the provisional results in their constituencies within days after the highly polarised general elections in the country, it emerged on Sunday.

Though Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) emerged as the single largest party in the February 8 elections, the number of independent candidates, a vast majority of them backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party, were the single largest block of winners.

The PTI claimed that its supported candidates have won the maximum number of seats but the results were manipulated to deprive it of the majority, and in order to turn the tide, its losing candidates have thronged the courts.

According to a report in the Dawn newspaper, a vast majority of those filing challenges against results are PTI-backed independents, including high-profile politicians

such as former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi and his wife Qaisera, former Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) finance minister Taimoor Jhagra and ex-KP speaker Mahmood Jan, Islamabad-based lawyer Shuaib Shaheen, former Punjab health minister Dr Yasmin Rashid, as well as Rehana Dar, mother of Usman Dar who was in charge of affairs in the PTI government.

In Lahore, the victories of PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, PML-N Attallah Tarar and former defence minister Khawaja Asif were assailed in separate petitions before the high court, which alleged manipulation of Form 47s, which showed consolidated results of every constituency. The petitioners claim that they were successful against their opponents as per the Form 45, showing results of individual polling stations, handed to them.

However, in their absence, their victories were allegedly turned into defeats in the Form 47. The have also alleged collusion in the altering of election results and



demand that the results of Form 47 be prepared according to the Form 45s.

In PP 146 Sialkot, Omar Dar's wife, Ruba Omar, has challenged the election results. According to Form 45, Ruba Omar has won, but she was evidently defeated in Form 47 due to collusion.

Maryam's victory from NA-119 has been challenged by independent candidate Shahzad Farooq, alleging that the presiding officers did not provide Form 45, and the returning officer issued the result in his absence. Farooq claims to have won against Maryam but was defeated due to rigging. PML-N's Atta Tarar's victory from NA-127 has been challenged by Zahir Abbas Khokhar, who claimed that Tarar has lost according to Form 45 but declared himself victorious in Form 47 with evident collusion.

In Karachi, three PTI candidates moved the Sindh High Court, arguing that the election watchdog, Returning Officer (ROs), those who compiled Form 47, and others flouted electoral laws and rigged the entire process.

The challengers include

PTI provincial chief Halem Adil Sheikh, Arsalan Khalid and advocate Khalid Mehmood, who contested in NA-238 (East-IV), NA-248 (Central-II) and NA-231 (Malir-III), respectively.

The PTI Sindh president argued that as per the Form 45 obtained by his election agents from all polling stations, he had a clear lead of around 65,000 votes, but MQM-P's Sadiq Iftikhar was shown as the winner from NA-238 with over 54,000 in the impugned Form 47, while the petitioner was placed on second position with over 36,800 votes. In Islamabad, Mohammad Shuaib Shaheen — a member of Imran Khan's legal team — and PTI's Mohammad Ali Bukhari have assailed their defeats at the hands of PML-N's Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and Independent candidate Raja Khurram Shehzad, respectively. Both the candidates filed the petitions in the IHC, however, the registrar office raised the objection that the petitioner should approach the appropriate forum. Subsequently, the candidates filed the application with the Election

Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The Peshawar High Court will take up petitions filed by nine PTI-backed independents, including six former lawmakers, challenging the provisional election results in their respective constituencies. The hearing will be conducted by a two-member bench consisting of Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Syed Arshad Ali.

The petitioners include former provincial ministers Taimoor Jhagra (PK-79) and Kamran Khan Bangash (PK-82), former deputy speaker of the KP Assembly Mahmood Jan (PK-72), former MNAs Sajid Nawaz Khan (NA-28) and Hamidul Haq (PK-80), former lawmaker Arbab Jehandad Khan (PK-74), former Peshawar district nazim Mohammad Asim (PK-78) and lawyers Ali Zaman (PK-73) and Malik Shahab (PK-75), according to the Dawn report. The legal challenges generally continue to drag on for weeks and months in the courts and don't affect the government formation process. Some of such challenges are also used by candidates as face-saving tactics.

## Russia launches 45 drones as Kyiv continues war cabinet reshuffle

**AP** ■ KYIV  
 Russian forces launched 45 drones over Ukraine on Sunday in a five-and-a-half-hour barrage, officials said, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy continued the reshuffle of his war cabinet as the war enters its third year. In a statement, the Ukrainian air force said it had shot down 40 of the Iranian-made Shahed drones over nine different regions, including on the outskirts of the country's capital, Kyiv.

The five-and-a-half-hour attack targeted agricultural facilities and coastal infrastructure, officials for Ukraine's southern defense forces wrote on Telegram. They said that a strike in the Mykolaiv region had injured one person, sparking a fire and damaging nearby residential buildings.

Another person was injured in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region when a blaze broke out due to falling debris from a destroyed drone,



said the head of the region's military administration, Serhiy Lysak. The strikes come as Zelenskyy continues his shake-up of military commanders in a bid to maintain momentum against attacking Russian forces. Kyiv announced on Sunday that former deputy defence minister Lt Gen Alexander Pavlyuk would become the new commander of Ukraine's ground forces. The post was previously held by Col Gen Olexandr Syrskyi, who was named on Thursday

as the replacement for Ukraine's outgoing military chief, Gen Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

New presidential decrees also named Yurii Sodal, the former head of Ukraine's marine corps, as the new commander of Ukraine's combined forces; Brig Gen Ihor Skibiuk as commander of Ukraine's air assault forces; and Maj Gen Ihor Plahuta as commander of Ukraine's territorial defense forces.

Incoming commander-in-chief Syrskyi has signalled that his immediate goals include improving troop rotation at the front lines and harnessing the power of new technology at a time when Kyiv's forces are largely on the defensive. In a statement on Telegram Saturday, Zelenskyy said that he hoped to "reboot" the upper levels of Ukraine's armed forces with experienced combat commanders. "Now, people who are well-known in the army and who themselves know well what the army needs are taking on new responsibilities," he said.

## Finns vote for a new president

**AP** ■ HELSINKI  
 Voters in Finland are choosing on Sunday between two experienced politicians to be their next president, whose main task will be to steer the Nordic country's foreign and security policy now that it is a member of NATO, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Former prime minister Alexander Stubb, 55, on the centre right, and former foreign minister Pekka Haavisto, 65, from the green left, largely agree on Finland's foreign policy and security priorities.

These include maintaining a hard line toward Moscow and Russia's current leadership, strengthening security ties with Washington, and the need to help Ukraine both militarily and at a civilian level. Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia.

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government, especially concerning countries outside the European Union such as the United States, Russia and China.

The head of state also commands the military — particularly important in Europe's current security environment and the changed geopolitical situation of Finland, which joined NATO in April 2023 in the aftermath of Russia's attack on Ukraine a year earlier.

A politician with the conservative National Coalition Party who led the government in 2014-2015 and earlier held several other Cabinet posts, Stubb took the top spot in the first round of the election on January 28 with 27.2 per cent of the votes and is the favourite to win the presidency.

Haavisto, the runner-up in the first round, was Finland's top diplomat in 2019-2023 and the main negotiator of its entry into NATO. A former conflict mediator with the United Nations and a devout environmentalist, Haavisto took 25.8 per cent of the votes in the first round. This is his third bid for the presidency. He is running as an independent although he is a former leader of the Green League.

In the last days of campaigning tiny differences in style and approach between the candidates have emerged.

## Iran marks 45th anniv of Islamic Revolution

**Tehran (AP)**: Iran marked Sunday the 45th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution amid tensions gripping the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Thousands of Iranians marched through major streets and squares decorated with flags, balloons and banners with revolutionary and religious slogans.

In Tehran, crowds waved Iranian flags, chanted slogans, and carried placards with the traditional "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" written on them. Some burned US and Israeli flags, a common practice in pro-government rallies. Processions started out from several points, converging at Azadi Square. State TV showed crowds in many cities and towns, claiming that "millions participated in the rallies" across the country.

The military displayed a range of its missiles, including the Qassem Soleimani and Sejjil ballistic missiles, and the Sirmorgh satellite carrier at the square where people took selfies with them. During the celebrations, a paratrooper jumped from a plane while displaying a Palestinian flag. There was a heavy security presence in the major cities across the country. The anniversary came a month after a deadly attack by the extremist Islamic State group in the central city of Kerman that left at least 95 people dead during the commemoration for prominent Iranian general Qassem Soleimani whom the US killed in a 2020 drone strike.

Iran has tried to blame the US and Israel for the attack as the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip continued. The Islamic Republic launched missile attacks on Iraq and Syria. It then struck alleged anti-Iran Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl targets in nuclear-armed Pakistan, which responded with its own strikes on Iran, further raising tensions in a region inflamed by the Israel-Hamas war. Earlier in January, a drone attack killed three US troops in Jordan which an umbrella group for Iran-backed factions known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed.

## CEO of major Nigerian bank killed in California helicopter crash

**AP** ■ CALIFORNIA  
 The CEO of one of Nigeria's largest banks was killed on Friday along with his wife and son when a helicopter they were riding in crashed near Interstate 15 in southern California's Mojave Desert.

Herbert Wigwe, chief executive of Access Bank, was among the six people on board when the helicopter crashed shortly after 10 pm. Bamofin Abimbola Ogunbanjo, former chair of NGX Group, the Nigerian stock exchange, was also killed. Their deaths were confirmed by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a former Nigerian finance minister who is now the director general of the World Trade Organization.

"Terribly saddened by the news of the terrible loss of Herbert Wigwe... his wife and son as well as Bimbo

Ogunbanjo in a helicopter crash," Okonjo-Iweala wrote in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. "May the souls of the departed rest in perfect peace."

The death of Wigwe (57) shocked many in Nigeria and in the banking sector where he was widely seen as an industry leader having been involved in two of the country's biggest banks, including Guaranty Trust Bank where he was previously executive director.

Under Wigwe's leadership, Access Bank's assets and presence grew beyond borders in several African countries. His death is "a terrible blow" for Nigeria and Africa's banking industry, Nigerian presidential spokesman Bayo Onanuga wrote on X. "Wigwe had a big vision to make Access Holdings (the parent company) Africa's biggest, with all the unquenchable thirst for acquisitions,"

Onanuga added. Wigwe's interests also spanned the education sector. His private university, founded in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region where he was from, is scheduled to open in September. Last year he said the university was "an opportunity for me to give back to society."

"This is surreal and I am lost for words," Festus Keyamo, Nigeria's minister of aviation and aerospace development, wrote in a post on X. "May Almighty God comfort his aged parents and sibling... his immediate family members, his staff, friends across Nigeria and dependents." The crash happened east of Interstate 15 near Halloran Springs Road and not far from the California-Nevada border. Halloran Springs Road crosses the highway in an area known to travellers for an abandoned gas station with a sign declaring "Lo Gas" and "Eat."

## Hungary president resigns over pardon to man convicted in child sexual abuse case

**AP** ■ BUDAPEST  
 Hungary's conservative president resigned on Saturday amid public outcry over a pardon she granted to a man convicted as an accomplice in a child sexual abuse case, a decision that unleashed an unprecedented political scandal for the long-serving nationalist government.

Katalin Novák (46) announced in a televised message that she would step down from the presidency, an office she has held since 2022. Her decision came after more than a week of public outrage after it was revealed that she issued a presidential pardon in April 2023 to a man convicted of hiding a string of child sexual abuses in a state-run children's home. "I issued a pardon that caused bewilderment and unrest for many people," Novák said on Saturday. "I

made a mistake." Novák's resignation came as a rare episode of political turmoil for Hungary's nationalist governing party Fidesz, which has ruled with a constitutional majority since 2010. Under the leadership of populist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Fidesz has been accused of dismantling democratic institutions and rigging the electoral system and media in its favour.

Novák, a key Orbán ally and a former vice president of Fidesz, served as the minister for families until her appointment to the presidency. She has been outspoken in advocating for traditional family values and the protection of children.

She was the first female president in Hungary's history, and the youngest person to ever hold the office. But her term came to an end after she pardoned a man sentenced in 2018 to more than three years in prison. He was found guilty of pressuring victims to retract their claims of sexual abuse by the institution's director, who was sentenced to eight years for abusing at least 10 children between 2004 and 2016.

"I decided in favour of clemency in April of last year in the belief that the convict did not abuse the vulnerability of the children entrusted to him. I made a mistake," Novák said on Saturday. "I apologise to those I have hurt and to any victims who may have felt I am not standing up for them."

"As head of state, I am addressing you for the last time today. I resign from the office of president of the republic," she said. Also implicated was Judit Varga, another key Fidesz figure who was minister of justice at the time and endorsed the pardon. Varga was expected to lead the

list of European Parliament candidates from Fidesz when elections are held this summer. But in a Facebook post on Saturday, Varga announced that she would take political responsibility and "retire from public life, resigning my seat as a member of parliament and also as leader of the EP list."

At the presidential headquarters in Budapest on Saturday evening, around 200 people gathered in what was originally planned as a protest to call on Novák to resign. After her announcement, attendees said they were happy, but that it wasn't enough to fundamentally change Orbán's system of governance.

"I'm glad that she resigned but I think things aren't solved this way. She's not the main criminal, you've got to look all the way to the top," said Anna Bujna.

## Pope and Milei embrace after pontiff canonises Argentina's first female saint

**AP** ■ VATICAN CITY  
 Pope Francis and Argentine President Javier Milei embraced on Sunday in St. Peter's Basilica, as Argentine faith and politics came together during a Mass to canonise the country's first female saint.

The ceremony to declare Mama Antula a saint marked the first meeting between the Argentine pope and Milei, who once called Francis an "imbecile" for defending social justice. The president, who was seated to Francis' right on the side of the main altar throughout the ceremony, bent over and gave the pope a big bear hug when Francis was wheeled over to him at the end of the service. Mama Antula was an 18th century laywoman

who ministered to the poor and helped keep Jesuit spirituality alive in Argentina after the religious order — to which the pope belongs — was suppressed. Argentines flocked to the canonisation, which turned into something of an Argentine fiesta in Rome. Milei waved to supporters in the pews as he entered the basilica and posed for selfie photos before the liturgy, while Argentine women, in particular, celebrated a saint who defied the norms for women of her time to spread the faith. In his homily, Francis praised Mama Antula as a model of charity and urged the faithful to reach the poor, as Jesus overcame fear and prejudice to touch the wounds of lepers. "How many suffering men and women do we meet on the sidewalks of our cities," he said. "And how many fears, prejudices and inconsistencies, even among those who are believers and call themselves Christians, contribute to wounding them all the more!"

Milei is to meet privately with Francis on Monday, before also having private talks with Italy's far-right Premier Giorgia Meloni and the president. During his campaign, Milei described Francis as an "imbecile" and "the representative of malignance on Earth."

Francis spoke at length with Milei after he was elected in December and has indicated he has forgiven him for the campaign rhetoric. Francis has said he is considering visiting



Argentina later this year in what would be his first trip home since his 2013 election. After arriving in Rome on Friday from Israel, where Milei announced the relocation of the Argentine embassy to Jerusalem, the president visited the Colosseum and the church housing one of Michelangelo's best-known sculptures: a seated Moses. In

an Instagram post accompanying a photo of himself looking at the sculpture, Milei wrote his frequent motto "Long live freedom damn it...!!!"

The president, who describes himself as an anarcho-capitalist, has promised to drastically reduce state spending to shore up a government budget deficit that he says is fuelling inflation, which finished 2023 at 211 per cent.

On Sunday, he appeared firmly engaged in the Mass, making the sign of the cross several times, receiving Communion and burying his head in his hands as he knelt in prayer afterward.

Mama Antula, born María Antonia de Paz y Figueroa, is a figure beloved to Argentines, a woman who left behind a life of privilege to spread Ignatian spirituality across Argentina after the Jesuits were ordered expelled from Spain's colonies. She is held up in particular by Argentine women as a model of strength and independence, at a time when women's options in life included marriage or entering the convent.

"The first female saint — it's an enormous step forward," said Argentine pilgrim Annabella Lopez as she waited for the Mass to begin. "It's a pity it couldn't have happened before, but fine, now women are starting to have more visibility and this is a great step also for the church."

Silvia Corrales, who spearheaded Mama Antula's sainthood process, said she remembered the first met the future

Pope Francis when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires and Mama Antula's candidacy had just cleared an important hurdle in the Vatican.

"I know that he esteems her a lot, like all the Jesuits of Argentina and Uruguay, because they consider her their spiritual mother," Corrales told The Associated Press in the run-up to the ceremony. "They know that she kept the treasure of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius alive in the years they weren't there." But the current archbishop of Buenos Aires, Archbishop Jorge Ignacio Garcia Cuerva, said it would be wrong to think that Mama Antula is only being made a saint now because a Jesuit Argentine pope happens to be running the Catholic Church.



# Market cap of four most valued firms jumps ₹2.18 lakh crore

**LIC, SBI lead gainers**

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Four of the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 2.18 lakh crore in market valuation last week, with Life Insurance Corporation and State Bank of India emerging as the biggest gainers. From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Life Insurance Corporation of

India (LIC) and SBI were the gainers. They collectively added Rs 2,18,598.29 crore in market capitalisation. On the other hand, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC faced erosion from their valuation to the tune of Rs 1,06,631.39 crore. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined by 490.14 points or 0.67 per cent. Market valuation of LIC jumped Rs 86,146.47 crore to Rs 6,83,637.38 crore. The share price of LIC on Monday jumped nearly 6 per cent to hit the Rs 1,000 mark for the first



time. SBI added Rs 65,908.26 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 6,46,365.02 crore. Market valuation of TCS climbed Rs 61,435.47 crore to Rs 15,12,743.31 crore and that of Reliance advanced Rs 5,108.09 crore to reach Rs 19,77,136.54 crore. Shares of TCS jumped 4 per cent on Tuesday, taking its market valuation to above Rs 15 lakh crore. However, market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank declined by Rs 32,963.94 crore to Rs 10,65,808.71 crore. The valuation of ITC eroded by Rs 30,698.62 crore to Rs 5,18,632.02 crore.

Mcap of Bharti Airtel fell by Rs 16,132.15 crore to Rs 6,31,044.50 crore and that of Infosys went lower by Rs 10,044.09 crore to Rs 6,92,980.35 crore. The valuation of ICICI Bank dipped Rs 9,779.06 crore to Rs 7,09,254.77 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever diminished by Rs 7,013.53 crore to Rs 5,69,587.91 crore. In the ranking of top-10 most valued firms, Reliance Industries continued to rule the chart followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, LIC, State Bank of India, Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.



## FPIs infuse over ₹15,000 crore in debt market in February

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continued their bullish stance on the country's debt markets with a net infusion of over Rs 15,000 crore so far this month, on the back of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index along with relatively stable economy. This followed a net investment of Rs 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they infused Rs 25,685 crore. On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out more than Rs 3,000 crore from equities during the period under review. Before this, they withdrew a massive Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

15,093 crore in the debt markets in this month (till February 9). With this, the total investment by FPIs reached over Rs 34,930 crore in 2024. They have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months. FPIs infused Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, Rs 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October. "The Indian debt markets witnessed a reversal in FPI flow trend last year after the announcement of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. This was one of the major drivers for the robust flows from FPIs, along with relatively stable economy," Srivastava said. JP Morgan Chase & Co. In September last year announced that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024. This landmark inclusion is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around USD 20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months. This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the rupee, thereby bolstering the economy, he added. Overall, the total FPI flows in 2023 stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt markets. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market.

## Government examining FDI flow from China in Paytm Payments Services

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The government is examining foreign direct investment from China in Paytm Payments Services Ltd (PPSL), the payment aggregator subsidiary of One97 Communications Ltd, sources said. In November 2020, PPSL had applied for licence with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a payment aggregator under the guidelines on Regulation of Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways. However, in November 2022, RBI rejected PPSL's application and asked the company to resubmit it, so as to comply with Press Note 3 under FDI rules. One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) has investment from Chinese firm Ant Group Co. Subsequently, the company filed the required application on December 14, 2022 with Government of India for past downward investment from OCL into the company in order to comply with Press Note 3 prescribed under FDI guidelines. An inter-ministerial committee is examining investments from China in PPSL and decision would be taken on the FDI issue after due consideration and

comprehensive examination, sources said. Under Press Note 3, the government had made its prior approval mandatory for foreign investments in any sector from countries that share land border with India to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic firms following the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan. A query sent to OCL for comments remained unanswered till the filing of the story. The Reserve Bank last month barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL), an associate company of OCL, from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, and FASTags, among others after February 29, 2024. The Reserve Bank's action against PPBL follows a comprehensive system audit report and subsequent compliance validation report of external auditors. RBI had said that these reports revealed persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns in PPBL, warranting further supervisory action.

## Direct tax collection grows 20 per cent, reaches ₹15.60 lakh crore

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Net direct tax collection so far in current fiscal grew 20 per cent year-on-year to Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 80 per cent of revised budget estimates for full fiscal year. "The provisional figures of direct tax collections continue to register steady growth. Direct tax collections up to 10th February, 2024 show that gross collections are at Rs



18.38 lakh crore, which is 17.30 per cent higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year," Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement. Direct tax collection, net of refunds, till February 10 of FY24 stands at Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 20.25 per cent higher than the net collections in the corresponding period last year. This collection is 80.23 per

cent of the total revised estimates of direct taxes for 2023-24. Refunds amounting to Rs 2.77 lakh crore have been issued during April 1, 2023 to February 10, 2024. Gross revenue collections for Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) also showed a steady growth. Growth rate for CIT was 9.16 per cent while for PIT, it was 25.67 per cent (PIT only).

## Adani Ports secures top position for climate actions

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Sunday said it has secured top position for its climate actions and environmental performance in assessments done by four global rating agencies. The assessments were done by CDP, S&P, Sustainalytics and Moody's. While the company secured 'leadership band' in CDP Climate Assessment 2023, it ranked first on the environmental dimension among 324 companies in the transport and transport



infrastructure sector by S&P Global CSA 2023, a statement said. The company also secured the top rank in the marine ports sector on a low carbon transition rating by Sustainalytics. It also received the 'advanced' rating in Moody's

Energy Transition Rating and the first rank in the overall ESG Assessment and Strategy review in their last update. APSEZ is a part of the globally diversified Adani Group and is the largest port developer and operator in India.

## Jeff Bezos sells nearly 12 million Amazon shares

**AP ■ SEATTLE**

Jeff Bezos filed a statement with federal regulators indicating his sale of nearly 12 million shares of Amazon stock worth more than USD 2 billion. The Amazon executive chairman notified the US Securities and Exchange Commission of the sale of 11,997,698 shares of common stock on February 7 and February 8. The collective value of the shares of Amazon, which is based in Seattle where he founded the company in a garage about three decades ago, is more than USD 2.04 billion.

## Akums Drugs eyes ₹680 crore via fresh issue

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Akums Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd has filed draft papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The initial share-sale is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 680 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 1.86 crore shares by promoters and an existing investor, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Saturday. Those selling shares in the OFS are Sanjeev Jain, Sandeep Jain and Ruby QC Investment Holdings Pte Ltd. The company is looking to raise Rs 136 crore through a pre-IPO placement. If such placement is undertaken, then fresh issue size will be reduced. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to repay debt, fund working capital requirements of the company, pursue inorganic growth initiatives through acquisition and for general corporate purposes. Founded in 2004, Akums is a pharmaceutical contract development and manufacturing organization (CDMO) offering a comprehensive range of pharmaceutical products and services in India and overseas. As of September 30, 2023, key clients of the company include Alembic Pharmaceuticals, Alkem Laboratories, Cipla, Dabur India, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, among others.

## Close to ₹750 crore stuck in projects in Qatar, says Voltas

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Tata Group firm Voltas is facing a major headwind in Qatar as around Rs 750 crore has been stuck due to delays in the realisation of overdue receivables and execution timelines, said its MD and CEO Pradeep Bakshi. In some projects, bank guarantees were "unethically" encashed by some contractors, which was an "uncalled" action to make quick money, derailing the international project business of Tata Group firm in the December quarter, he added. "Unprecedented things are happening in that area, especially in Qatar, wherein, unfortunately, our dues are

not being paid to us timely, and inordinate delays are happening. We have completed the project and handed it over, and despite that, payments are not made," Bakshi told PTI. Voltas has already approached the Indian government for help on the issue and also approached the Embassy in Qatar. MEP (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing) contractor Voltas has completed the projects in Qatar and handed them over as per the contract. However, its bills are not getting certified and paid. "There has to be some basic ethics when you do business with your partners... Unfortunately, our payments are not coming.

## Duty concession on gold major concern in FTA with Peru: GTRI

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Duty concessions on gold, which accounts for 80 per cent of India's imports from Peru, is the most challenging issue for New Delhi under the proposed free trade agreement with the South American nation, a report said on Sunday. Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that gold, a high-value product with low volume, attracts a 10 per cent basic customs duty in India, and even minor tariff concessions could lead to a significant increase in imports. India and the South American nation Peru are negotiating a free trade agreement to promote bilateral trade and

investments between the two countries. In such pacts, two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them, besides easing norms to promote trade in services. The next round of talks is expected to start this week in Lima, Peru. "Tariff concessions on gold, accounting for USD 1.8 billion or 80 per cent of India's imports from Peru in FY23, is the most challenging issue for India," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said. He argued that after tariff concessions under the India-UAE free trade agreement, gold imports from the UAE, India's second-largest gold supplier, doubled in 2023



compared to 2022. "Peru, the fifth-largest supplier to India, could see a similar surge in gold imports if concessions are made," the report said. In 2023, India's global imports of unwrought gold are estimated at USD 43 billion, with Switzerland accounting for 40 per cent of these

substantial trade for FTAs," Srivastava said. He also said that India's bound duty on gold is set at 40 per cent, but the current applied tariff is 10 per cent. "FTAs allow concessions in effective duties and not on bound duty. If the FTA does not include gold, it may not meet the WTO Article XXIV condition for FTAs to have duty cuts on substantial trade," Srivastava said. Peru has a bilateral trade pact with major economies like the US, EU, China, Australia, and Singapore. It also has multi-country agreements with the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, and Mexico) and the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador). These FTAs allow tariff-free imports of most products imported into Peru. imports, it said, adding that given Peru's gold mines, its gold would easily meet any Rules of Origin criteria. "FTAs offer concessions on effective duties rather than on the bound duty. Excluding gold from an FTA would violate the World Trade Organization's Article XXIV, which requires duty cuts on

## Majority of employees feel difficulty in adapting work from office module: Report

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

Among companies encouraging their employees to return to the office, a majority of workers interviewed feel that it will be difficult for them to adapt to this transition, according to a report. There is an apprehension among employees regarding the adaptation to the work-from-office module, and 69 per cent of respondents have expressed concerns about the potential challenges associated with this transition, a report by staffing solutions and HR services



provider Genius Consultants said. However, 25 per cent of employees showcased resilience and confidence in their ability to navigate and adapt to the renewed office environment, it added. The report is based on an online survey among 1,213

employees from October 26 to November 30 across sectors like banking and finance, education, FMCG, hospitality, HR solutions, IT, ITES, and manufacturing. The report also anticipated a potential rise in attrition as a consequence of the work-from-office call. A significant 82 per cent of employees have expressed concerns, citing the increasing availability of work-from-home job opportunities in the market, the report said. This presents the evolving nature of the job market and the need for organisations to

consider and address the preferences and demands of their workforce, it added. On the flip side, 12 per cent of respondents do not perceive attrition as a major concern, signalling a degree of optimism about the benefits of the in-office experience. About 67 per cent believe that work-from-office facilitates the integration of new employees with the larger workforce, serving as a catalyst for instilling organisational values. This perspective highlights the importance employees place on interpersonal connections.

## ONGC Q3 profit falls 14 per cent to ₹9,536 crore

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Sunday reported 14 per cent drop in net profit for the third quarter ended December 31 as oil and gas prices fell. Standalone net profit of Rs 9,536 crore in October-December 2023 (third quarter of 2023-24 fiscal year) was 13.7 per cent lower than Rs 11,045 crore earning in the same period of previous financial year, the company said in a statement. The earning was lower as

price realised for crude oil the firm produced and sold in the quarter fell 6.4 per cent to USD 81.59 per barrel. Gas price too was 24.2 per cent lower at USD 6.5 per mmmBtu. Also contributing to lower profit was a decline in production of crude oil, which is converted into fuel like petrol and diesel at refineries, and natural gas which is used to generate electricity, produce fertilizer, turned into CNG and piped to kitchens for cooking. Crude oil production dropped 3.3 per cent to 5.22 million tonne while gas output was 4.3

per cent lower at 5.12 billion cubic meters. Gross revenue was down 10 per cent at Rs 34,789 crore in Q3. The board of the company approved a second interim dividend of 80 per cent or Rs 4 a share. "The total payout on this account will be Rs 5,032 crore," the statement said. This is in addition to the first interim dividend of Rs 5.75 per share declared last year. ONGC's standalone net profit in the first nine months of the current fiscal fell 24 per cent to Rs 29,767 crore as oil price realised dropped to \$75.55 a barrel from \$97.10.



# Nagal, Ramkumar draw French rivals in opening round of Bengaluru Open

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian ace Sumit Nagal is pitted against Geoffrey Blancaneaux, while wild card entrant Ramkumar Ramanathan will face Maxime Janvier in the men's singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open beginning here on Monday. World ranked 121 Nagal will aim to extend his dominance over French player Blancaneaux, whom he has beaten three times, including in the Australian Open Qualifiers. India No 2 Ramkumar has a 1-1 head-to-head record against Janvier of France and if he clears the first round hurdle, he is likely to run into top-seed Italian Luca Nardi, who has been drawn to meet a qualifier in his opening round. Australian Adam Walton has been seeded third and will open his campaign against



Indian wild card entrant Prajwal Dev. In the doubles main draw, Frenchman Dan Added and Korea's Yun Seong Chung have been given the top billing and will clash with the Australian pair Tristan Schoolkate and Adam Walton. Australia's Christopher Matthew Romios and Poland's Piotr Matuszewski are seeded second and will take on Taipei's Ray Ho and Australia's Calum Puttergill. There are nine Indians in the doubles main draw. N Sriram Balaji and Andre Begemann of Germany will clash with the German duo of Mark Wallner and Jakob Schnaitter. The ATP Challenger event is being organised by Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association at KSLTA Stadium. Qualifying rounds began on Sunday, while the final is scheduled on February 18.



## Man City keeps pressure on Liverpool

AP ■ LONDON

Watch out, Premier League. The competition's most lethal attacking combination is back in tandem. Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne - both recently back from long injury absences - linked up for the clinching goal in Manchester City's 2-0 win over Everton on Saturday in what will be a worrying sight for the defending champions' rivals.

from only its second league loss this season, at Arsenal last weekend, though there might be concerns over the fitness of Trent Alexander-Arnold after the right back came off at halftime with a recurrence of a recent knee injury, when the score was 1-1. "Same area in the knee. Nothing really bad but he felt it again," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said.

SON'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN  
Son Heung-min marked his return for Tottenham after more than a month away at the Asian Cup by creating a dramatic winner against Brighton. Son, whose South Korea team was eliminated in the semifinals on Tuesday, started on the bench for his comeback game, came on at 1-1 and set up Brennan Johnson for a goal in the sixth minute of stoppage time that made it 2-1.

"It's fair to say that we are still a work in progress but we had a world-class player in Son who makes the most difficult ball look simple to set up Brennan," said Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou, whose team jumped above Aston Villa into fourth place.

League partnership has delivered that many goals in this period. "With him, I know I'm going to get it perfect. You know the ball is going to come," Haaland said of De Bruyne, English soccer's king of the assists. "I watch a lot of football and I already saw for many years where he plays the ball, and he hasn't changed anything for the last five years. For me, it was about coming in and finishing those actions."

GUIMARAES DOUBLE  
Bruno Guimaraes continues to be the shining light in a difficult season for Newcastle. The Brazil midfielder scored in each half, including a superb curling shot for the winner, as Newcastle beat Nottingham Forest 3-2 to climb two places to seventh.

Guimaraes' performances have been consistently excellent for Newcastle while, crucially, he has stayed healthy in a campaign that has seen manager Eddie Howe lose player after player to injury. Forest stayed two points and two places above the relegation zone but, like third-to-last Everton, was recently charged with breaching the league's financial regulations and could yet be facing a points deduction. IN-FORM TONEY  
Ivan Toney scored for the third time in four games since his return from a ban for breaching betting regulations as Brentford won 2-0 at Wolverhampton. Last-place Sheffield United won for just the third time this season, 3-1 at relegation rival Luton, and Fulham was the winner by the same score at Bournemouth.

## Qatar win Asian Cup titles after beating Jordan 3-1

AP ■ LUSAIL (QATAR)

Akram Afif dropped to his knees. Pretty soon he was being thrown into the air by his joyous teammates after the forward's hat trick of penalties secured back-to-back Asian Cup titles for Qatar. Afif, the outstanding player of the tournament and leading scorer with eight goals, was nervous when converting his spot kicks in a 3-1 win against Jordan at Lusail Stadium on Saturday.

In front of more than 86,000 fans and with the pressure on, Afif never looked likely to miss from the spot and he sparked wild celebrations with each goal. (I scored) the penalties because of the confidence my teammates had in me. It is not about technique, it is about the feeling that people are behind me - my team," Afif said. He won and converted his first penalty in the 22nd minute. And after Yazan Al Naimat leveled the game in the 67th he struck again from the spot in the 73rd and sealed the win in the fifth minute of stoppage time.



"It was a very difficult game. The tension was high," he said. "Maybe it was not the beautiful football everyone wished for, but everyone remembers the winner."

Like Afif, López was also thrown into the air as part of the celebrations. Despite a difficult buildup after taking over from predecessor Carlos Queiroz, López impressively guided Qatar to a successful defense of the title in 2019. It became the eighth host nation to win the tournament. Afif was undoubtedly the inspiration on the field. "I'm so happy for Akram that he won all the (individual) awards. He deserved to win them," López said.

2022 when exiting the tournament after three straight defeats in the group stage. Even as host and defending champion, Qatar had been an unexpected finalist, let alone winner. Captain Hassan Al-Haydos noted on the eve of the final how critics had expected little of the team ahead of the tournament. How satisfying for him, then, to be draped in the same type of black Qatari ceremonial robe that Messi had worn to lift the World Cup. After the pain of that tournament, here was a

moment of national celebration as the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani handed Al-Haydos the trophy and shortly after there was an eruption of tickertape and fireworks. Earlier, Qatar's Spanish coach, Márquez López slumped in his seat, seemingly exhausted, as he waited out 17 minutes of stoppage time. The exertions of the past month appeared to have taken its toll. He had only been hired in December and Qatar had been beaten 2-1 by Jordan in a friendly in January.

## Inter wins 4-2 at Roma to end De Rossi perfect record

AP ■ MILAN

A sublime second-half performance from league leader Inter Milan saw it win 4-2 at Roma in the teeming rain and end Daniele De Rossi's perfect record. Goals from Gianluca Mancini and Stephan El Shaarawy had given Roma the lead at halftime following Francesco Acerbi's opener for Inter. But the Nerazzurri turned things around immediately after the break with a strike from Marcus Thuram, who also forced an own-goal from new Roma defender Angelino.

## Shankar wins season opening meet in Belgium

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National record holder in high jump Tejaswin Shankar won the top prize in the International High Jump Gala Elmos 2024 athletics meet in Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium with a leap of 2.23 metres. Shankar, competing for the first time since October last year, finished ahead of Greece's Antonios Merlos (2.20 metres) in the World Athletics Indoor Tour Challenger event on Saturday. The 25-year-old, who holds both the men's high jump and decathlon national records, however, could not better his personal best of 2.29m. Shankar is also focusing on decathlon and had won bronze and silver in the discipline in the Asian Championships and Asian Games last year.



Shankar has trained his eyes on a Paris Olympics berth but for that he will have to achieve a qualifying standard of 2.33 metres. The other Indian in fray, Jesse Sandesh finished joint-10th with a jump of 2.09 metres. Shankar will next be seen in action at the Hvezdy v Nehvizdech athletics meet in Nehvizdy, Czech Republic on February 20.

## Jota, Diaz, Nunez score for Liverpool in 3-1 win over Burnley

AP ■ LIVERPOL

Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez - Liverpool's starting front three while Mohamed Salah is out injured - all scored for the Premier League leaders in a 3-1 win over Burnley. The Reds responded to Manchester City's extremely brief return to the league's summit, after its 2-0 victory against Everton hours earlier, with a triumph that tested their mettle even more than their stretched resources. While the three points reestablished Liverpool's two-point advantage, the less-than-convincing nature of victory against the league's next-to-last side was not quite befitting the occasion of the hosts' biggest league crowd of 59,896 after the full opening of the Anfield Road stand. For a time it appeared Liverpool, which was without goalkeeper Alisson Becker



and defender Joe Gomez because of illness as well as the injured Salah, was still suffering a hangover from the defeat at Arsenal last week. It took the familiar right boot of Trent Alexander-Arnold, setting a new mark of 58 for Premier League assists by a defender, and the equally reliable head of Jota to put

them ahead at a corner in the 31st. The sloppy concession of an equalizer, when Dara O'Shea headed in at a corner on the stroke of halftime, posed further problems as did the withdrawal of Alexander-Arnold - only recently returned from a knee injury - at the break. It was the England international's replacement, Harvey Elliott, who set up headed goals for Diaz in the 52nd and Nunez in the 78th to ease the pressure. However, had on-loan Chelsea forward David Fofana been as clinical as he was scoring twice last weekend, then not only would Liverpool be looking up at City but questions would have started to be asked about their ability to match their long-time rivals. Liverpool should have Salah and Dominic Szoboszlai back from injury in the next couple of weeks.

# Paul, Giron advance to Dallas Open final

AP ■ DALLAS

Second-seeded Tommy Paul and unseeded Marcos Giron won in straight sets to set up an all-American final in the Dallas Open. Paul beat No. 3 seed Ben Shelton of the U.S., 6-2, 6-4, and Giron rolled over a seeded opponent again, beating No. 4 seed Adrian Mannarino of France, 6-1, 6-3, in the semifinals. The 30-year-old Giron, who beat top-seeded American Frances Tiafoe in the

quarterfinals, is seeking his first ATP Tour title Sunday in his second trip to a final. Paul's only title came in 2021 in Stockholm. Paul won the final four games of the first set before a break early in the second set held up against the 21-year-old Shelton in the hardcourt event on the SMU campus. Giron took a 4-0 lead in the first set a day after going up 5-0 in a straight-set win over Tiafoe, who was the highest-ranked player in the tournament at No. 14.



The first break of the second set came when Giron made a lunging save with a forehand, then ran down Mannarino's

volley for a backhand crosscourt passing shot and a 5-3 lead. Giron, who hasn't lost a service game in four matches in the tournament, had little trouble closing out the match on his serve. With three victories over seeded opponents, Giron has a chance to surpass his career-best ranking of 49th from 2022, when Giron lost his only previous final in San Diego. Giron reached the semifinals in Dallas two years ago, losing a three-setter to Jensen

Brooksby while having match points. The final two sets went to tiebreakers. "That stuck with me, and that's hard," Giron said. "I have experience. I know what it's like to lose. I know what it's like to win. Having a big win yesterday was awesome, and I'm really, really happy to be able to come back today." Paul reached two finals last year, losing in a grass-court event at Eastbourne and a hardcourt tournament in Acapulco. The 26-year-old Paul

converted three of eight break points against the hard-serving Giron while saving all three break points he faced. The 15th-ranked Paul, who stopped a six-match losing streak against top 20 opponents, had dropped his previous two matches against Shelton, who is No. 16. "Obviously, his serve is unbelievable," Paul said. "These courts kind of help me a little bit. You don't have to jump in quite as high. Kind of kept the ball in my strike zone."



## U-19 WORLD CUP FINAL

# India lose by 79 runs to Australia

PTI ■ BENONI (SOUTH AFRICA)

India's batting lineup misfired when it mattered the most as they suffered a heartbreaking 79-run loss to Australia in the final of the U-19 World Cup here on Sunday.

Opting to bat, Australia first posted 253 for 7, courtesy Oliver Peake's enterprising 43-ball 46 and Harjas Singh's 55 off 64 balls, and then returned to bowl out the five-time champions for 174 in 43.5 overs.

Australia, thus, became four-time champions. Chasing 254, opener Adarsh Singh made a 77-ball 47 but India kept losing wickets at regular intervals to collapse to 122 for 8 in 31.5 overs. Number 8 batter Murugan Abhishek (42 off 46 balls) then played an entertaining knock but it was too little and too late.

The loss brought back memories of Indian senior team's gut-wrenching loss to Australia in the 50-over



World Cup final at home in November last year.

For Australia, seamer Mahli Beardman (3/15) and off-spinner Raf MacMillan (3/43) did most of the damage. Callum Vidler (2/35) and Charlie Anderson (1/42) were the other wicket-takers.

Earlier, Harjas top-scored for Australia with 55, while Weibgen and opener Harry Dixon made 48 and 42 respectively. Later, Peake propped up Australia with his breezy knock.

Raj Limbani was the most successful Indian bowler with figures of 3/38, while Naman Tiwari picked up two wickets for 63 runs in nine overs.

### BRIEF SCORES:

Australia: 253/7 in 50 overs (Harjas Singh 55, Hugh Weibgen 48, Harry Dixon 42, Oliver Peake not out 46; Raj Limbani 3/38, Naman Tiwari 2/63).

India: 174 all out in 43.5 overs (Adarsh Singh 47; Mahli Beardman 3/15, Raf MacMillan 3/43).



## Real show stealer was Boomball, says Ashwin

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Lavishing praise on teammate Jasprit Bumrah, senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said "Boomball" stole the show in the second Test against England and the pacer reaching top of the ICC rankings across three formats is a "Himalayan feat".

Bumrah displayed brilliance with the ball to play a key role in the team's series-levelling 106-run win in the second Test in Visakhapatnam.

He put up a reverse swing master-class in England's first innings that yielded him six wickets (6/45), following it up with a three-wicket haul in their second essay for match figures of 9 for 91.

His performance enabled him to jump to number one in the Test rankings list, becoming the first Indian pacer to achieve the feat. Bumrah has also held the top spot in the ODI and T20 rankings previously.

"The real show stealer was Boomball. Jasprit Bumrah has bowled extraordinarily," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"He is the leading wicket-taker with 14 wickets and also the No.1 ranked Test bowler. The first India fast bowler to achieve number one across all formats. I am

a big fan of his and this is a Himalayan feat."

Ashwin said that the extraordinary vibe and energy on the fourth day of the second Test helped India secure a favourable result. "We came into the fourth day with it all being even-stevens. But our extraordinary vibe, energy and team performance helped us level the series 1-1."

The five-match series will be played across Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Rajkot, Ranchi and Dharamsala and Ashwin noted that most Indian players have not played Test cricket at these venues.

"There's never been a marquee Test series like this in five such venues before. In 2017, we played Australia in Dharamsala and Ranchi and then Pune and Bengaluru. Usually, if there is a 4-5 match Test series at least one or two happen in metro cities."

"Unlike that, this time it's happening in venues that weren't part of World Cup matches."

"For most of the Indian players, these venues are new. There are a lot of players playing in our team who haven't played a first-class or Test match in Vizag stadium. I'm not sure that is possible in any other country. But possible in India as there are so many Test venues."

## Zimbabwe Cricket to restructure after WC qualification woes

PTI ■ HARARE

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) has decided to effect far-reaching changes in both its domestic and development pathway following failure to qualify for the 2023 Men's ODI World Cup and the 2024 Men's T20 World Cup. As a first step, the ZC board, which met on Saturday, decided to appoint 51-year-old former first-class player Walter Chawaguta as the head coach of the senior women's national team and accepted the resignation of U19 men's national team head coach Prosper Utseya.

It also decided to appoint the senior and U19 men's team coaches on an urgent basis. A ZC statement said that the



board had "adopted the comprehensive report presented by a committee of inquiry that was established

to probe Zimbabwe's World Cup qualification failures as well as to review ZC's cricket affairs structure".

The three-member committee was headed by lawyer Lloyd Mhishi. "The three-member

Committee, chaired by Lloyd Mhishi, presented its report to the board after gathering input from various stakeholders, both internal and external... The board resolved to adopt the report in its entirety and to immediately implement the committee's recommendations," the statement added.

Among the recommendations accepted by ZC board are a complete restructuring of the cricket affairs department and its personnel, overhaul of the domestic and development pathway, advertising for the head coach's job for the national senior men's and U19 teams and restructuring of the coaching set-up at first-class level.



## Leach ruled out of remaining three Tests against India

PTI ■ LONDON

England left-arm spinner Jack Leach was on Sunday ruled out of the remaining three Tests against India with a left knee injury, announced the England and Wales Cricket Board.

However, no replacement will be called up for Leach, an indication that England will continue with the spin trio of Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Bashir for the rest of the tour.

Joe Root is the visitors' fourth spin option behind the three regular spinners.

Leach had sustained the injury during England's first Test victory in Hyderabad and missed the second Test in Visakhapatnam as a result.

"He will fly home from Abu Dhabi in the next 24 hours, where the England team has been staying ahead of the third Test in Rajkot, which starts on Thursday (February 15). "Leach will work closely with the England and Somerset medical teams in respect of his rehabilitation," stated the ECB in a media release.

The 32-year-old Leach has taken 126 wickets in 36 Tests, besides being a handy lower-order batter.

## Debutant Sharma completes 10 wickets match haul

PTI ■ THUTHIPET (PUDUCHERRY)

Left-arm spinner Vanshaj Sharma completed a maiden ten-wicket match haul on his debut as Jammu and Kashmir dismissed Puducherry for 67 in their chase of 87 to register a 19-run win in the Ranji Trophy group D match here on Sunday. Resuming at 35 for 7, Puducherry folded in 35.3 overs with the 20-year-old Sharma claiming all the remaining three wickets, returning with figures of 5 for 16 to go with his first innings figures of 5 for 74.



On Saturday, another left-arm spinner Abid Mushtaq notched up a 10-wicket match haul, his second in First-Class cricket. He had taken five for 28 in the second innings, returning with figures of 25-3-64-5 in the first innings.

Mushtaq was adjudged the Player-of-the-match for his exploits at the Cricket Association of Pondicherry (CAP) Siechem ground here. With the win, Jammu and Kashmir continued their unbeaten run and grabbed the third place with 18 points, behind Baroda and Madhya Pradesh. For Pondicherry (15), their hopes of reaching the knockout stage is almost over. Brief Score: J&K 106 and 152 (Sagar Udeshi 3/48) beat Puducherry 172 and 67 all out in 35.3 overs (Damodaran Rohit 17; Vanshaj Sharma 5/16, Abid Mushtaq 5/28) by 19 runs.

## Sunrisers claim back to back SA20 titles

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Sunrisers Eastern Cape won back-to-back SA20 titles after an emphatic 89-run victory over Durban's Super Giants at Newlands here. After topping the group stage, the Sunrisers delivered a clinical performance in the final on Saturday. Half-centuries from Tom Abell (55) and Tristan Stubbs (56 not out) along with contributions from Jordan Hermann and captain Aiden Markram, who both contributed 42, respectively, saw the Sunrisers post a formidable 204/3. The defending champions then bowled out the Super Giants for a paltry 115 in 17 overs. Partnerships were crucial in



the Sunrisers' innings with Hermann and Abell setting up the winning total with a 90-run stand for the second wicket after the early loss of Dawid Malan.

Durban's Super Giants captain, Keshav Maharaj, hit back with a double-wicket over by removing both set batters in

Hermann and Abell. But the Sunrisers showed they had plenty more in reserve with Markram and Stubbs rebuilding the innings before exploding towards the backend with 98 runs off 55 balls. The Sunrisers' bowling has been their strongest discipline

all season and their seamers certainly rose to the occasion on the night.

Dan Worrall (2/15) set the tone upfront again with the dismissal of Quinton de Kock early on before Marco Jansen delivered two hammer blows in the fourth over with the removal of Jon Jon Smuts and Bhanuka Rajapaksa to leave the Super Giants reeling at 7/3. Wiaan Mulder attempted a recovery job with quickfire 38, but that's when Ott Niel Baartman (2/17) delivered the moment of the match.

He had already dismissed Matthew Breetzke, but it was his in-swing that wrapped the dangerous Heinrich Klaasen on the pads first ball that closed the game as a contest.

## Saxena grabs 9/68 as Bengal stare at second successive defeat

PTI ■ THUMBA (KERALA)

Domestic cricket stalwart Lalaj Saxena destroyed Bengal with career-best figures of 9/68 as the visitors found themselves on the brink of a second successive defeat in the Ranji Trophy Group B here on Sunday.

Resuming on 172/8, Bengal managed to add just eight runs to their overnight total with the veteran all-rounder adding two more wickets to his name.

The 37-year-old now has 439 wickets and has 6600-plus runs from 138 matches in first-class cricket.

Despite a substantial lead, Kerala skipper Sanju Samson chose not to enforce follow-on and declared their second essay at 265/6 to set a

massive 449-run target for the visitors.

In reply, Bengal were 77/2 with Abhimanyu Easwaran batting on 33. Bengal had lost their last match against Mumbai at Eden Gardens.

### Khare slams fighting 143, but Mumbai hold edge

In Raipur, skipper Amandeep Khare led from the front with a stellar 143 as Chhattisgarh put up a strong fight, falling just one run short of Mumbai's first innings total of 351.

From 180/4 overnight, Khare, who was unbeaten on 35, showed utmost patience in his composed knock from 211 balls. Mumbai kept taking wickets at one end but Khare stood firm and was the last man to get out. He



struck 14 fours and four sixes. In reply, Mumbai were 97/1 at close on day three. With a lead of 98 runs, Mumbai seemed to be well-placed with

Bhupen Lalwani and Amogh Bhatkal at the crease. Shubham Singh managed the only breakthrough for Chhattisgarh in Mumbai's second innings when he

dismissed Mumbai's first innings hero Prithvi Shaw, five runs short of a half-century. The Indian batter's 159 off 185 balls had powered Mumbai to 351.

### Assam eyeing maiden win of season

Veteran off-spinner Swarupam Purkayastha was the star performer with the ball, securing four wickets for just 11 runs, as Assam bundled out Bihar for 207 to take a huge first innings lead of 198 runs in Guwahati.

Assam were quick to enforce the follow-on and reduced Bihar to 168/3 at close of play on the penultimate day.

Opener Piyush Singh displayed resilience with an unbeaten 79 from 204, steering Bihar in their

second essay. The visitors face a challenging task ahead, trailing by 30 runs as Assam will be eyeing their first win of the season.

Mukhtar Hussain, Rahul Singh and Mrinmoy Dutta picked up wicket apiece for Assam.

### Brief Scores

In Raipur: Mumbai 351 and 97/1; 28 overs (Prithvi Shaw 45, Bhupen Lalwani 40 batting). Chhattisgarh 350; 106.1 overs (Amandeep Khare 143, Shashank Chandrakar 56, Sanjeet Desai 41; Tushar Deshpande 5/121, Royston Dias 2/44). Mumbai led by 98 runs.

In Guwahati: Assam: 405. Bihar 207; 71.5 overs (Paramjeet Singh 53, Bipin Saurabh 39; Swarupam Purkayastha 4/11, Mukhtar

Hussain 3/22) and following on 168/3; 61 overs (Piyush Singh 79 not out, Bipin Saurabh 44; Mukhtar Hussain 1/15, Rahul Singh 1/13). Bihar trails by 30 runs.

In Thumba: Kerala: 363 and 265/6 declared; 64.2 overs (Rohan Kunnummal 51, Sachin Baby 51, Shreyas Gopal 50 not out; Shahbaz Ahmed 3/80). Bengal: 180; 51.1 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 72; Jalaj Saxena 9/68) and 77/2; 20.4 overs (Target: 449) (Abhimanyu Easwaran 33 batting, Sudip Gharami 31). Bengal need 372 runs.

In Vizianagaram: Andhra 261 and 271/5; 92 overs (Ricky Bhui 100 batting, Hanuma Vihari 48, Shaik Rasheed 42 batting; Saurabh Kumar 3/73). Uttar Pradesh 198. Andhra lead by 338 runs.