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VIRAT ABSENCE,  
GREAT CHANCE FOR  
ENGLAND: BROAD  
12 SPORTS

## Delhi Fortress against Farmers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/  
CHANDIGARH

A team of Union Ministers held talks in Chandigarh on Monday evening with farmer leaders to dissuade them from their "Delhi Chalo" march. Meanwhile, authorities in Delhi fortified the border points with neighbouring States and imposed a month-long ban on large gatherings. Massive security arrangements were put in place to prevent the protesting farmers from entering the city on Tuesday. The ministers, including Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal and Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, held the second round of talks with the farmer leaders at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26. Leaders such as Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher were among those present at the meeting, which commenced at around 6:30 pm. At the time of going to press, the meeting was still in progress. During the meeting, the Centre has already assured them that some of their demands will be met. However, sources indicate that the farmer leaders are unwilling to relent until the debt waiver and legal

guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) are fulfilled. The demands accepted by the Centre include granting Rs 10 lakh compensation to farmers injured in Lakhimpur Kheri, cancelling FIRs related to the 2020-21 farmers' agitation, providing compensation and

and paramilitary personnel equipped with anti-riot gear has been implemented. Multiple layers of barricades, concrete blocks, iron nails, and walls of containers have been erected at three border points: Singhu, Tikri, and Ghazipur. Additionally, makeshift jails have been

processions, or rallies, as well as the entry of tractor trolleys carrying people, in the national capital. The Delhi Police has imposed Section 144 for a month in anticipation of widespread tension and "social unrest" due to the farmers' "Delhi Chalo March".



Multi-layered barricading in place at Singhu Border ahead of the scheduled 'Delhi Chalo' march by the farmers in New Delhi on Monday. PTI

jobs for families of farmers killed in the agitation, and improving the quality of seeds across all crops. This also involves revising licences and imposing penalties on companies manufacturing and selling sub-standard seeds. To prevent the farmers from entering the city on Tuesday, massive deployment of police

established at "specific locations" in anticipation of the farmers' "Delhi Chalo" march. The police are also using drones to maintain strict surveillance at border points, an official stated, emphasising that they are fully prepared to handle any law and order situation. There will be a complete ban on gatherings,

In addition to a legal guarantee for MSP, the farmers are also demanding the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pensions for farmers and farm laborers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases, and "justice" for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

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## Soft diplomacy at work: Modi brings back Naval veterans from Qatar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

In a major diplomatic achievement for the country, eight Indian Navy veterans were released by Qatar, 46 days after their death sentences, handed down last October, were commuted to jail terms of varying duration. They were arrested on alleged charges of espionage. However, neither Qatar nor India made the charges against them public. Seven of them returned home early Monday.

The eight nationals are Captains (retired) Navtej Gill and Saurabh Vasisht, Commanders (retired) Purnendu Tiwari, Amit Nagpal, SK Gupta, BK Verma, and Sugunakar Pakala, and sailor Ragesh.

It was learned that Commander Tiwari stayed back in Doha and is likely to return to India soon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be travelling to Doha in Qatar on Wednesday after his visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra announced here on Monday, adding that the Prime Minister had "personally supervised" developments in the case. "Prime Minister Modi had personally supervised this issue. This (the release) is



proof of his leadership and also reflects the strength of India-Qatar ties," the Foreign Secretary said.

While speaking to reporters, Kwatra added, "The Prime Minister has personally and constantly supervised all the developments in this case and has never shied away from any initiatives that would ensure the return of Indian nationals back home."

The announcement about Modi's visit to Qatar came a day after the Gulf nation released eight jailed former Indian naval personnel. "We are gratified by Qatar's decision to release the Indians," Kwatra said.

The Foreign Secretary mentioned that Modi and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, will hold wide-ranging talks to further expand bilateral ties.

The Indians returned 46 days after their death sentences, handed down last October, were commuted to jail terms of varying duration.

Kwatra also expressed gratitude, saying, "We are grateful for their return. We deeply appreciate the decision of Qatar's government and the Amir to release them. We are happy to have seven of those Indian nationals back. The 8th Indian national has also been released, and we continue to work with the Qatari government to see how quickly his return to India would be possible."

In December last year, Prime Minister Modi met Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the sidelines of the COP28 Summit in Dubai and discussed the well-being of the Indian community in

Qatar. This meeting was in the backdrop of Qatar commuting death sentence to jail terms to the eight veterans. National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval played a role in the negotiations with the Qatari authorities in securing the release of the Indians, it was learnt.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Monday India appreciates the decision by the Emir of Qatar to enable the release and homecoming of the Indians, who were arrested in August 2022.

Union Minister Anurag Thakur welcomed the release of eight Navy veterans and said it strengthened the belief in seriousness and the ability of the Modi Government to protect its citizens at any cost. "This homecoming of our Navy veterans is a moment of happiness and this further strengthens our belief in the seriousness and ability of the Modi government to protect its citizens at any cost," Thakur said on X.

"Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi means the guarantee of life, limb and liberty of the people of India across the globe," he said, adding that the veterans were detained "under some false charges". BJP and Congress welcomed the development.

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## Nitish survives trust vote

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
PATNA/NEWDELHI

The newly formed Nitish Kumar-led NDA Government in Bihar won the trust vote in the State Assembly on Monday, amid a walkout by members of the Mahagathbandhan led by RJD leader and former Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav. In the 243-member Bihar Vidhan Sabha, a total of 129 members voted in favour of the motion of confidence. Deputy Speaker Maheshwar Hazari presided over the session as Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary, a member of the RJD, was removed through a resolution. Chaudhary had refused to step down despite his party losing power a fortnight ago. After declaring the motion as passed through a voice vote, Hazari ordered a headcount following a request from Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, which was seconded by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. To facilitate the floor test, Chaudhary was removed with 125 members voting in favour of the no-confidence motion moved against him by the ruling NDA. Only 112 members voted against the motion. Kumar recently abandoned the Mahagathbandhan, of which the RJD was a key constituent, and returned to



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar being greeted by his deputies Vijay Kumar Sinha and Samrat Choudhary after Kumar-led NDA Government in the State won a vote of confidence during the first day of Budget session of the Assembly in Patna. PTI

the NDA fold to form the government with the support of the BJP.

Earlier, participating in the debate on the motion, the JD(U) chief alleged that the RJD indulged in corrupt practices during the party's rule in the State, and the new NDA-led government will initiate a probe into it. Kumar also claimed that during RJD's tenure, several communal riots took place in Bihar. "There was no law and order. The RJD indulged in corrupt practices during its rule (before 2005)... I will get these probed," he said. Speaking in the Assembly, Tejashwi Yadav said he always considered Kumar to be a

"father figure" and wondered what forced him to ditch the Mahagathbandhan and return to the BJP-led NDA. "I always considered Nitish Kumar as 'Dashrath' (a character from the Ramayan). I don't know what reasons forced him to ditch the Mahagathbandhan," he said. The NDA, comprising the JD(U), the BJP, former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM, and an Independent, has a combined strength of 128. However, it received a shot in the arm with three RJD MLAs — Prahlad Yadav, Chetan Anand, and Neelam Devi — walking over to the ruling side.

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## Nyay Yatra shifts gears, turns to Western UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW

In the wake of another Congress-led Opposition INDIA bloc ally, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), all set to partner with the NDA, the Congress has decided to cut short their ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Uttar Pradesh by skipping the western part of the State, which is the stronghold of the Jayant Chaudhary-led RLD. The RLD has been a long-time ally of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and may join hands with the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Though there has been a rift within the RLD leaders and their legislators in the UP Assembly, Jayant has already indicated a switch-over after his grandfather, former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, was conferred with the Bharat Ratna by the Narendra Modi Government last week. Denying that the sudden shift of the RLD towards the BJP has prompted the Congress to leave the western UP region, Congress said the change in the itinerary of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is only due to the UP Board examinations. Uttar Pradesh Congress spokesperson Anshu Awasthi said the duration of the yatra



in UP is being reduced in view of the State board examinations for Classes 10 and 12. The yatra was earlier scheduled to remain in Uttar Pradesh from February 16 to February 26 before entering Rajasthan. However, it will now end on February 21 and enter Madhya Pradesh by skipping western UP. "Setting an example of sensitivity, Rahul Gandhi ji has prioritised public interest on many occasions. Keeping in mind the UP Board examinations starting from February 22, the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will remain in Uttar Pradesh from February 16 to February 21," Awasthi said in a statement issued

here. "Earlier, Rahul Gandhi had cancelled his rallies in Bengal out of concern for the people during the COVID-19 period," the spokesperson added.

Elaborating on the schedule of the yatra in UP, Awasthi said it will enter the state through Varanasi on February 16 and then reach Amethi on February 19 via Bhadohi, Prayagraj, and Pratapgarh. On February 19, Rahul Gandhi will address a public meeting in Gauriganj in the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency, and the yatra will reach Rae Bareilly the next day.

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## Desertions galore, Ashok Chavan quits Congress

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a second major jolt to the Congress ahead of the February 27 Rajya Sabha polls and in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls in the State, Maharashtra's former chief minister Ashok Chavan on Monday resigned from the grand old party. Though Chavan said he had not "thought" about joining the ruling BJP or any other party and would decide on his future course of action in the next couple of days, there were no takers for his statement in the State political circles.

Informed sources close to him said that he might join the BJP and he might be given a ticket by the ruling party to contest the biennial Rajya Sabha polls for six seats, scheduled to be held in the State on February 27.

Following Chavan's resignation, there were speculation within the State political circles that the ruling BJP — which is the single largest Opposition party the Maharashtra Assembly with a strength of 45 MLAs — might use the "services" of the senior party leader to engineer a split in the Congress ahead of and during the Rajya Sabha polls.

The news about Chavan



having quit the Congress surfaced after he called on Assembly Speaker Rahul Narvekar in the morning and submitted his resignation as an MLA. Before long, he took to micro-blogging site "X" and announced that he had quit the Congress.

"I have tendered my resignation as Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from 85-Bhokar Assembly Constituency to the Assembly Speaker Rahulji Narvekar," Chavan wrote on "X". "Today I have resigned from the post of Member of Congress Working Committee of the Indian National Congress Party, membership of Maharashtra Congress Legislature Party and primary membership of the Indian National Congress," the former chief minister added.

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## India emerges as a global wedding destination

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat appeal for destination weddings within the country, more than 42 lakh weddings are expected to be solemnised this marriage season between January 15 and July 15, incurring an expenditure of Rs 5.5 lakh crore. According to estimates from a traders' body, in Delhi alone, more than four lakh marriages are expected in these six months, which would bring business prosperity worth Rs 1.5 lakh crore. A survey conducted by the research wing of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) found that

during the wedding season, it is estimated that about five lakh weddings will have an expenditure of Rs 3 lakh per wedding, while about 10 lakh weddings will cost around Rs 6 lakh each. CAIT national president BC Bhartiya revealed that following the Prime Minister's appeal, destination weddings within the country have gained popularity across all types of weddings.

Furthermore, it is projected that 10 lakh weddings will incur expenses of Rs 10 lakh per wedding, followed by 10 lakh weddings with expenditures of Rs 15 lakhs per wedding. Additionally, 6 lakh weddings are expected to have an expenditure of Rs 25 lakh

each, 60,000 weddings with Rs 50 lakh expenditure per wedding, and 40,000 weddings with expenses exceeding Rs 1 crore. Overall, during this six-month period, about Rs 5.5 lakh crore will circulate through wedding-related purchases in the markets. Last year, around 35 lakh weddings occurred during the wedding season ending on December 14, with expenses estimated at Rs 4.25 lakh crore. The traders' body said that banquet halls, hotels, open lawns, community centres, public parks, farmhouses, and various other wedding venues are fully booked across the country, including Delhi. Besides purchasing accessories



at each wedding, a wide array of services is also in demand, including tent decorators, flower decorations, crockery, catering services, travel

services, cab services, professional welcome groups, vegetable vendors, photographers, videographers, bands, musicians, DJ services,

horses for wedding processions, carriages, lighting, and numerous other services, all expected to thrive during this time.

management and packaging of wedding goods and gift items have emerged as significant business prospects. Notably, the wedding season also provides employment opportunities for a large number of people working in the service sector. "Traders across the country, including Delhi, are optimistic about the current wedding season, which commenced on January 15 and will extend till July 15. During this period, about 42 lakh weddings are expected to take place nationwide, resulting in a substantial capital inflow of about 5.5 lakh crore rupees through wedding-related

purchases and services," the CAIT survey report said. "Before the wedding season, a significant amount of business is conducted in home repairs and painting. Additionally, jewellery, sarees, lehenga-chuni, furniture, readymade garments, clothing, footwear, wedding and greeting cards, dry fruits, sweets, fruits, worship items, groceries, food grains, decoration items, home decor, electrical utilities, electronics, and various gift items are typically in high demand and expected to generate significant business this year," CAIT secretary general Praveen Khandelwal said.

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# Navy veterans on death row in Qatar thank Modi for release

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Amid chants of 'Bharat Mata Aki Jai', the Indian Navy veterans returned to Delhi early Monday morning and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his intervention in the issue.

"It wouldn't have been possible for us to stand here without the intervention of PM Modi. And it also happened due to the continuous efforts of the Government of India," one of the Navy veterans said.

His colleague voiced similar sentiments and said, "We waited almost for 18 months to be back in India. We are extremely grateful to the Prime Minister. It wouldn't have been possible without his personal intervention and his equation with Qatar."

"We are grateful to the Government of India from the bottom of our hearts for every effort that has been made and this day wouldn't have been possible without those efforts," he added.

Dr Meetu Bhargava, Commander Purnendu Tiwari's sister, said her brother had not come home yet but he had been freed and the fam-



ily was very happy. "If my brother had come, our happiness would have been complete," she told PTI Videos in Gwalior while thanking the prime minister, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and the government as well as the Emir. The BJP credited the government for the release of the former Navy personnel asserting that the protection of interests of Indians, wherever they may be, has been a priority of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Union Minister Smriti Irani told reporters that the manner in which the Navy veterans have returned to India is due to the government's special efforts.

Referring to the evacuation of Indians at different points of

time from Ukraine, Sudan and Nepal during crises, Irani said "ghar wapsi" and protection of interests of Indians, wherever they may be in the world, have been Prime Minister Modi's priority.

The release of eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel nearly three-and-a-half months after they were handed down death sentences is a "big diplomatic win" for India, BJP Spokesperson Shazia Ilmi said. "It seemed at one point of time it will be very difficult to make it happen. But they have come back safe and sound. That is great news for every Indian. It shows how much the words of the Indian foreign ministry and Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) matter," Ilmi

said.

"It is a big diplomatic win for India. It shows how India has negotiated so well that we have our Navy veterans back," she said. The Congress expressed relief and happiness at Qatar releasing eight former Indian naval personnel nearly three and a half months after they were handed down death sentences, and it greeted them and their families.

In a post on 'X', Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "The Indian National Congress joins the entire nation in its relief and happiness that the eight former Indian Navy personnel earlier sentenced to death by a court in Qatar have been released and are back home." "It sends its greetings and good wishes to them and their families," he said. Senior Congress leader and former minister of state for external affairs Shashi Tharoor said the release of the Indians was "a huge relief". "It's a huge relief — and a matter of quiet celebration for all Indians — that eight of our compatriots who were sentenced to death in Qatar have been freed & returned home. Congratulations to all those who worked quietly behind the scenes for their release," he said.

# Army Chief on US visit to strengthen, expand bilateral military engagement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Monday left for the US on a four-day visit aimed at exploring ways to further strengthen and expand bilateral military engagement. The Army described General Pande's visit from February 13 to 16 as "significant" and said it underscores deepening military cooperation between the two countries.

He will engage in high-level discussions and interactions with General Randy George, Chief of Staff of the US Army, and other senior American military leaders. "This visit underscores the deepening military cooperation and strategic partnership between India and the United States, aiming to further strengthen defence cooperation and foster stronger bonds between the armies of both nations," the Army said. Highlights of the visit include a prestigious US Army Honour Guard ceremony, a solemn laying of the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Arlington National Cemetery and a comprehensive tour of the Pentagon. These engagements symbolise



the respect and mutual commitment towards global peace and security shared between the two countries, the Army said. "This visit is another milestone in the Indo-US defence relationship, reflecting a mutual desire to enhance military collaboration, exchange strategic perspectives on global threat perceptions, and work together towards future force development and modernisation," it said. "The engagements between General Manoj Pande and senior leadership of the United States Army are poised to yield substantive outcomes, fostering an environment conducive to shared security interests and defence cooperation," it said. Ideas will be exchanged on crucial topics such as the trans-

formation in the Indian Army, global threat perception, future force development and modernisation, and co-development and co-production of initiatives, officials said. These discussions are aimed at sharing insights, ideas, and best practices between the two armies, they said. Pande's itinerary includes a visit to the Army Geospatial Centre at Fort Belvoir, the National Defence University at Fort McNair and interactions with the leadership at Headquarters 1 Corps. He will also engage with units at the forefront of military innovation and strategy, including the Stryker Unit, 1st Multi-Domain Task Force, the first Special Forces Group at Seattle and the Defence Innovation

Unit in San Francisco.

A visit to the California National Guard is also planned, highlighting the comprehensive nature of the visit aimed at exploring avenues for more significant training, co-development and co-production engagements, according to an Army statement.

General George had recently visited India for the Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs Conference (IPACC) that was jointly hosted by the Indian Army and the US Army. The conference was attended by 18 Chiefs of Armies and 12 countries represented by heads of delegations.

During IPACC, General George and General Pande engaged in constructive dialogue, addressing a wide range of issues related to military cooperation.

"The Indian Army and the United States Army share a commitment to peace, democracy, and stability across regions. This tour epitomises the shared values and interests that underpin the partnership between India and the United States, aiming at a future of enhanced cooperation and mutual development in defence and security domains," the Army said.

# BJP Government gave 1.5 times more jobs than previous dispensation: Modi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said his Government has given 1.5 times more jobs in its 10 years than the previous dispensation did in the same duration.

Handing over recruitment letters to government jobs to more than one lakh youngsters via video conference during a Rozgar Mela programme, Modi castigated the previous government for taking an inordinately "long time" to complete recruitment exercises and said it bred bribery.

The prime minister said his government has brought transparency and is working to ensure that recruitment is done in a time-bound manner. Youngsters now believe that they all have equal opportunity and can find a place for themselves in the government system through hard work and talent, he said. The prime minister asserted that the measures taken by his government, be it a scheme for rooftop solar power for one crore homes or the mas-

sive investment in infrastructure, have been creating a lot of employment opportunities. With over 1.25 lakh start-ups, India is the third largest ecosystem in the sector, and youngsters are launching new firms in even smaller cities, he said, adding that it is creating lakhs of jobs.

Modi said 40,000 modern coaches like those used in the Vande Bharat trains will be manufactured and included in normal trains to increase convenience and comfort for passengers. Accusing previous governments of not paying due attention to the railways, he said the entire sector is transforming now.

"They neglected the common people's expectations," Modi said, attacking the previous governments. The prime minister said his government has extended tax rebates to start-ups and has announced a fund of Rs 1 lakh crore for research and innovation.

Highlighting the far-reaching impact of connectivity, Modi spoke of new markets, expansion of tourism, new businesses and the creation of

lakhs of jobs due to this.

"Investment in infrastructure is being ramped up to accelerate development," he said, adding that Rs 11 lakh crore has been earmarked for investment in infrastructure in the recent budget. 'Rozgar Melas' have played a crucial role in enhancing the contribution of the country's young population in nation-building, the prime minister said, adding that a sizeable number of recruits will join the Central Armed Police Forces.

Recruitment examinations in the forces have now begun to be conducted in 13 Indian languages apart from Hindi and English, he said, adding that this will give equal opportunity to candidates. On the occasion, he also laid the foundation stone of phase I of the integrated complex "Karmayogi Bhavan" here. This complex will promote collaboration and synergy among various pillars of 'Mission Karmayogi'. The recruits will be joining the government in various ministries and departments, according to a statement issued earlier.

# Mild heat waves contribute more to mortality than extreme ones, says study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Surprisingly, mild heat waves, despite being more common, contribute more to mortality over time compared to extreme heat waves. This has been revealed by a study conducted in India in ten cities, underscoring the importance of investigating the health risks associated with temporarily elevated temperatures, especially as heat waves are projected to become more common due to climate change.

The research, published in the journal Environment International, analyzed excess mortality with different climate zones over a decade from 2008 to 2019. Surprisingly, the mildest heat waves were found to be the deadliest due to their frequency. Researchers in their study published in journal Environment International called for adjusting heat warning systems to trigger warnings at lower temperatures to protect more people.

They emphasized the need for policymakers to plan for both mild and extreme heat waves to safeguard public health effectively. By selecting the days that were hotter than 95, 97 or 99 percent of all days in the different regions, the researchers led by Jeroen de Bont from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden were able to create different definitions of heatwaves and examine the health risks associated with them. Unsurprisingly, the hottest and longest heat waves, those that were hotter than 99 percent of days and lasted at least

five days, increased mortality the most - by over 33 percent. Heatwaves that were hotter than 95 percent of all days and lasted only one day increased mortality the least - by just over 10 percent.

"This is also because the milder heatwaves were so much more common than the hotter ones. In the end, the most extreme heat waves turned out to cause the lowest number of deaths because they were so infrequent. One consequence of this may be that heat warnings may need to be triggered at lower temperature thresholds to protect more people," said Jeroen de Bont.

The researchers now argue that policymakers and other stakeholders need to understand and plan for both the relatively mild, short and common, and the extreme, long and uncommon heatwaves in order to offer relevant measures to protect public health in the future.

The study suggests that current heat warning systems may need adjustments to trigger warnings at lower temperature thresholds in order to protect more people, given the significant impact of mild heat waves on mortality. Additionally, the researchers emphasize the importance of policymakers and stakeholders planning for both mild, short-duration heat waves and extreme, long-duration ones to implement effective measures to protect public health in the face of increasing temperatures. This comprehensive approach is essential for mitigating the health risks associated with heat waves in the future, the study said.

# Modi meets family of Karpaori Thakur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met family members of former Bihar Chief Minister late Karpoori Thakur, who was bestowed Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian award, last month.

The family members of the prominent socialist leader, led by his son Rajya Sabha member and JD(U) leader Ram Nath Thakur, met the prime minister at his 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence.

"Very happy to meet the family members Bharat Ratna awardee Jananayak Karpoori Thakur ji. Karpoori ji has been the messiah of the backward and deprived sections of the society, whose life and ideals will continue to inspire the countrymen," the prime minister said.

Ram Nath Thakur said he thanked the prime minister for the honour on behalf of his family, on behalf of Bihar and on behalf of the oppressed, Dalits, and backward communities. "It was a joyous moment for us, just like a second Diwali. Crackers were burst and sweets were distributed," Ram Nath Thakur said. He said the prime minister called them a day after the award was announced. He spoke with every family member and invited them to meet him in Delhi, he added. "I felt that the prime minister was one amongst our family," he said. Fondly known as Jan Nayak, Karpoori Thakur served as the chief minister of Bihar from December 1970 to June 1971 and from December 1977 to April 1979.

# Place runway safety teams to curb flight overshooting, DGCA asks stakeholders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

To prevent instances of runway incursions at airports, aviation watchdog DGCA has asked stakeholders to put in place a runway safety team at all airports and adopt technologies to improve situational awareness, among other measures. The Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued a circular in view of the collision of planes due to runway incursion at the Haneda airport in Japan last month. Apart from establishing a runway safety team at all aerodromes and ensuring their effective functioning, the regulator has emphasised on comprehensive training for pilots, air traffic controllers, aircraft maintenance engineers, and drivers operating inside an airport. Air Traffic Controllers (ATCs) should ensure that stop bars are switched on to signal a stop and switched off to indicate traffic may proceed.

In no case, aircraft or vehicles be instructed to cross illuminated red stop bars, DGCA said in a release on Monday. Further, the watchdog said that aerodromes, ATCs and airlines should implement contingency measures to cater to unserviceable stop bars.

Another recommendation is adoption of technological interventions to improve situational awareness, thereby assisting Air Traffic Control (ATC) and other stakeholders to identify the traffic within the manoeuvring area. Other recommendations include ensuring adherence to standard procedures by all



involved personnel/stakeholders, and recognising the influence of human factors on performance, which may contribute to runway incursions.

The rate of runway incursions are decreasing and by ensuring a proactive approach among all stakeholders, the risk of such incidents can be reduced further, according to DGCA. In a fatal incident on January 2, a large passenger plane and a Japanese coast guard aircraft collided on the runway at the Haneda airport and burst into flames. Five people onboard the plane of the coast guard were killed.

The incident happened due to runway incursion by Japanese coast guard's DHC-8 aircraft when Japan Airlines aircraft was in the process of landing.

Following the incident, DGCA undertook a review of its existing requirements and safety measures in place for runway safety and prevention of runway incursions. In August last year, a mishap was averted at the Delhi airport involving two Vistara planes as the air traffic controller inadvertently gave clearance for crossing and take off of two different aircraft on the same runway at the same time before cancelling the take off.

# 97 per cent of migratory fish at risk of extinction: Study

PNS | NEW DELHI

Overexploitation including hunting and fishing, both targeted and incidental has emerged as the greatest threat for many migratory species, surpassing habitat loss and fragmentation, a global report has painted a grim picture of the migratory species world with one in five such species threatened with extinction.

At the same time, 44 per cent have a decreasing population trend, according to the United Nations' first 'State of the World's Migratory Species' report released on Monday. The situation is particularly dire for aquatic ecosystems, where a staggering 97 per cent of migratory fish are at risk of extinction. These fishes are listed for protection under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).



under Appendix I of the convention are threatened with extinction, and 76 per cent have a declining population trend. Eighteen per cent of Appendix II species are globally threatened, with almost half (42 per cent) showing decreasing population trends. The convention's Appendix I lists migratory species which are endangered. Appendix II

lists migratory species "which have an unfavourable conservation status and require international agreements for their conservation and management". The report also identifies 399 globally threatened and near-threatened migratory species (mainly birds and fish) that are not yet listed in the CMS Appendices that may benefit from inter-

national protection. According to CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel, overexploitation (hunting and fishing, both targeted and incidental) emerges as the greatest threat for many migratory species, surpassing habitat loss and fragmentation.

The report said the habitat fragmentation resulting from dams is currently greatest in East Asia, Europe, the Indian sub-continent, North America, and Southern Africa. By-catch of non-target species in fisheries is a leading cause of mortality of many CMS-listed marine species. Other key threats to migratory species include pollution (including light and noise pollution), climate change, and invasive species. Inger Anderson, the Executive Director of the United Nations' Environment Programme (UNEP), said the report is a significant step for-

ward in the development of a conservation roadmap for migratory species. "Given the precarious situation of many of these animals, and their critical role for healthy and well-functioning ecosystems, we must not miss this chance to act — starting now by urgently implementing the recommendations set out in this report," she said.

Action under the Convention is crucial for achieving the global commitments set out in the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework, including commitments to restore and establish well-connected networks of protected areas, halt human-induced extinctions, and ensure that any taking of wild species is sustainable, safe, and legal. Established in 1979, the CMS focuses on bringing countries and stakeholders together to agree on the actions needed to ensure that migratory species survive and thrive.

# Undertake prompt rescue of animals, AWBI urges fire services

ARCHANA JYOTI | NEW DELHI

Expressing concern that there have been frequent instances of birds and animals—both wild and domesticated—trapped in hazardous situations such as building ledges, pits, open drainage, and fire to name a few, the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) has urged all the Chief Fire Services across the States/UTs to undertake prompt compassionate rescue operations so as to ensure well-being of the animals, preventing unnecessary stress and fatalities.

"It is pertinent to mention that each year, a multitude of animals find themselves trapped in precarious locations such as building ledges, pits, open drainage or wells, overhead wires, trees, and other challenging situations," said AWBI chairman OP Chaudhary in his letter written recently to all



the Chief Fire Services across the States.

However, animals and birds, including domesticated pets and wildlife, often suffer and perish due to stress and starvation when not rescued promptly. Lack of skilled rescue workers and equipment further complicates timely rescue efforts.

"It is observed that your department's firefighters are widely acknowledged for their dedication and longstanding history of saving lives, including those of animals," AWBI

Chief said to the fire officials in the letter while referring the Standing Fire Advisory Committee/ Council, constituted by the Union Home Ministry that recommends the provision of special services for rescuing animals, offered free of charge for all types of life rescues.

Besides Chief Fire Services, the AWBI Chief has also written to Chief Wildlife Wardens across the country to ensure their local service units are equipped and prepared to provide proficient animal rescue services, collaborating with animal welfare organizations. Chaudhary also stressed the importance of reporting details of animal lives lost, injured, and rescued, and recommended that the Union Animal Husbandry and Wildlife Departments offer necessary support, including training, to the State Fire Service Departments.

Next hearing on Soren plea against ED on February 27



PTI ■ RANCHI The High Court of Jharkhand on Monday adjourned the hearing on a petition filed by arrested ex-chief minister Hemant Soren against the Enforcement Directorate (ED) till February 27. The court will again hear the plea on that day. It asked the federal agency to file a consolidated affidavit. Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan said they had challenged the arrest of the former chief minister, and the high court allowed their amended application to be submitted. "ED has been directed to give a consolidated reply. The court has fixed February 27 as the date for final disposal. The amendment to our application has been allowed... Now hearing will be on the turn of events (leading to Hemant

Soren's arrest). This is a good indication, now we can place all the facts before the court," Ranjan, Soren's counsel, said. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal argued on behalf of Soren. Additional solicitor general SV Raju appeared on behalf of the central agency. "In our amendment prayer, we have said that the entire process (initiated by the ED against Hemant Soren) is motivated by malice. There was no crime but inquiry was on against a sitting chief minister...ED acted beyond its power. We have challenged the entire proceeding by the ED. It is illegal," the advocate general said. The high court had on February 5 asked the central agency to file its reply on Soren's petition.

INDIA alliance strong despite Nitish exit, claims Ramesh

PTI ■ KORBA

Senior Congress leader Sajiram Ramesh on Monday said the opposition INDIA bloc is strong and all constituents will soon finalise seat sharing for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Addressing a press conference in Barpali village in Chhatisgarh's Korba district, he said Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U) as well as the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) quitting the Congress-led bloc will not have any impact. "INDIA alliance is strong. Nitish ji has done volte-face and RLD is trying to do the same. There were 28 parties in the alliance and two have left. However, discussion is underway with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), DMK, NCP, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and Mamta Banerjee ji over seat sharing (for Lok Sabha polls)," he said. "We are strong and soon seat sharing in different states will be given a final touch," he added. Attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Ramesh said the former spoke about 'one nation, one tax' and 'one nation, one election' but in reality it has become about "one nation, one company" in the last 10 years (of NDA rule).

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (BORDER ROADS & NEC WORKS), PWRD, ASSAM CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-3
PRESS NOTICE
No. CE/NEC/NESIDS/2021-22/01/85
The Chief Engineer, PWD (Border Roads & NEC Works), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from eligible Contractors registered with APWRD Class-I(A) for the project "Construction of Road & Bridge project under North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme for the year 2023-24" in 3 (three) Packages through EPC mode for a tentative cost of Rs. 272.56 Cr. (Rupees Two Hundred Seventy Two Crore and Fifty Six Lakh) only.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

NAME CHANGE
I, SHALINI LAMBAH D/O (Late) Brig. Rajinder Nath Lambah (Retd.) R/o House No. 280, Sector 15 A, Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh (201301), have changed my name from Shalini to Shalini Lambah for all future purposes. PD(273)C

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that JIANUPINDER SINGH S/O LATE SH. NIKRANIAN SINGH R/O C-47/7, SECTOR-11, ROHINI, DELHI-110085. I am attorney of DDA LIG FLAT NO. 71-B, IN BLOCK-BX (BA-21-B) ON FIRST FLOOR, ALONG WITH ONE SCOOTER GARRAGE SITUATED AT JANAKPURI, DELHI-110058, VIDE DDA FILE NO. F32126374/LIG/LA8/H has applied for conversion of the aforesaid flat from leasehold to free hold the original (1) DEMAND LETTER (2) POSSESSION LETTER (3) DDA NOC (ELECTRIC & WATER) (4) SITE POSSESSION SLIP of the above flat have been lost. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in Police Station, New Delhi vide NCR/LR/No-1412702/2024, Dated-05/02/2024. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No.9718290907 within 15days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Dy.Director(LIG) or Director, Vikas Sadan, INA New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This Public Notice has been issued for General Public, under instructions from and on behalf of my client namely Mrs. Rupashree Sengupta wife of Late Arup Sengupta, R/O Y-147, Regency Park-2, DLF Phase 4, Gurgaon, Haryana-122009 and it is hereby informed that Late Sh. Arup Sengupta, who was the co-allocotee of Property bearing Unit No.PH3-50-0602, The Palm Hills, Village Sikhpour, Sector-77, Gurgaon, Haryana, Passed Away on 18/03/2022. He has not left any registered or un-registered Will & is survived by legal heirs Mrs. Rupashree Sengupta & Mr. Arjun Sengupta (Son). That my client Mrs. Rupashree Sengupta wife of Late Arup Sengupta intends to apply for the transfer of the aforesaid property in her own name being the 1st Class legal heir of Late Arup Sengupta after Mr.Arjun Sengupta has will relinquish his rights in favour of Mrs.Rupashree Sengupta. If any person having any claim or interest in the said property may file his/her claim to the undersigned within 21 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Vikas Sangwan Advocate & Solicitors
Office at: Chamber No. 38 & 104, Shaheed Sukhdev Singh Block, Distt. Courts, Gurgaon. Contact: +91-8826283131, 99995 0090

Public Notice
This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Akshai is the GPA Holder of Property Bearing Plot No. 32-A, area measuring 53.7/2 sq. yds. Out of Khassa No. 2/23, situated in the revenue estate of Village Razaapur Khurd MazraHasastal, Delhi State Delhi area. Akshai is also known as Colony G-2, Sai Enclave, Mchan Garden, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi. She acquired the above property through GPA, ATS, WILL, dated 24.04.2023 executed by Mr. Bishambhar Dayal in favour of Mrs. Akshai. Mrs. Akshai intends to transfer the ownership by way of Sale Deed of the aforementioned Property to Mr. Jeeju Yadav & Mrs. Geeta Devi. Subsequently, Mr. Jeeju Yadav & Mrs. Geeta Devi are in the process of mortgaging the said property SMFG India Home Finance Co. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting Law Veritas:North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s):+91120-3101683 / 4562809; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to public at large that my client namely Smt. Ritu Sharma have separated and debarred her son namely Sh. Paras Vats aged about 27 years and her Daughter-In-Law namely Smt. Sanjana Goswami aged about 27 years and they have no right, title, interest, claim to any of the properties possessed or belonging to me, as the said properties both movable and immovable are all, my self-acquired properties in which my son and my daughter-in-law holds no right and claim whatsoever. My said son and Daughter-In-Law has no power or authority to incur any debts on the security of my said property and any person hereinafter giving him any loan or advance shall be doing so entirely on his own risk and responsibility. I, nor my properties, shall in any way be responsible for such debts. Akshay Swami (Advocate) Chamber No.8, Old Lawyers Chamber Supreme Court of India, New Delhi-110001

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE
ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005
Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number, Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession, Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.), Name of Branch. Contains 14 entries for various construction projects in Odisha.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE
ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005
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GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT, ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03
No. CE/DEV/TB/906/2023-24/04
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites Bids on behalf of Governor of Assam for 6 (Six) nos. of Packages for Construction of Road and Bridge projects under SOPD-ODS for the year 2023-24 in Dibrugarh District of Assam amounting to Rs. 4.83 Crores (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT O/O THE CHIEF ENGINEER (EAP) ARRTI CAMPUS, FATASIL AMBARI, GUWAHATI - 25, Email-id: as-ce.asbip@assam.gov.in RFB No.: CE/EAP/ARRBP/III/TENDERS/2024/1

REQUEST FOR BIDS (RFB) E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE - Open Competitive Bidding (Two-Envelope Bidding Process with e-Procurement)

The Government of Assam through Government of India has applied for financing from the World Bank towards the cost of the Assam Resilient Rural Bridges Program (ARRBP) and intends to apply part of the proceeds to the eligible payment under the contract. Bids are invited online from the eligible bidders from India for the following works as detailed in the table below.

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Package no., Name of the work, Approx. Estimated Amount (Rupees in Lakh), Bid security (Rupees in Lakh), Tender Processing fees (INR), Completion Period (month). Contains 14 entries for various bridge construction projects in Assam.

The bidding documents are available online on http://www.assamtenders.gov.in from 15/02/2024 to 16/03/2024. Bidders will be required to register on the website which is free of cost. For submission of the bids, the bidder is required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC). Bids must be submitted online on http://www.assamtenders.gov.in on or before 14:00 Hours on 16/03/2024. Other details can be seen in the bidding document. The method of paying Bid Security, Tender Processing fees as indicated in the table above of this e-procurement shall be required to be submitted online on http://www.assamtenders.gov.in by selecting "Pay Online" option.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Reaping discontent

Both the Cong and BJP accuse each other of remembering farmers only for votes; who is true?

The electoral war cry between the BJP and the Congress is getting only shriller: The latest point of contention is which party has done more for the welfare of villagers, farmers and the poor. With the last sitting of the 17th Lok Sabha behind us and the announcement of election dates likely anytime soon, both the sides are sharpening their attack on each other and portraying themselves as the real benefactor of the marginalised classes. It all started with the Congress making a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Government, accusing them of neglecting the welfare of rural communities, the impoverished and farmers, except during election season. In his counterattack, the Prime Minister touted the Congress' record on rural development and agricultural reforms. The party remembers farmers only at the time of elections, was Modi's charge. The Congress, one of the principal Opposition forces, has a long history of championing the cause of marginalised sections of society. However, the BJP

has made inroads into its territory and the Congress' grip on its core support base has loosened. To support its stand, the BJP argues that initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, which provides direct income support to farmers, demonstrate its commitment to the welfare of rural communities. However, to regain lost ground, the Congress has been vocal in criticising the BJP's farm policies, including the three Bills which were later withdrawn amid huge protests.

With a massive farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' rally scheduled today, the Congress is again accusing Modi of paying lip service to these constituencies while failing to



deliver meaningful change. Though the latest salvo seems timed with the poll dates announcement, the Congress' criticism of the Modi Government's approach to rural and agrarian issues is not new. It has long accused the BJP of pursuing a development agenda that prioritises the urban elite and big business interests over the needs of the rural poor. However, with elections on the horizon, the rhetoric has reached fever pitch. Amid mounting agrarian distress, farmers across the country are protesting against contentious reforms introduced by the Modi Government. The protesters are demanding a legal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP), implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases and justice for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence. The Congress leaders have seized upon this discontent to launch a blistering attack on the Government, alleging that the BJP's pro-corporate policies have exacerbated inequality and widened the gap between the rich and the poor; thousands of farmers still commit suicide every year. The parties may accuse each other of ignoring farmer welfare but the fact is that no one has done enough for the farmers. Their demands may again go unheard today; the bitter truth is everyone remembers farmers only for their votes.

### PICTALK



Visitors pose for photos with a model of rhinoceros at the 37th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, in Faridabad

# Tensions escalate in Bab-el-Mandeb Strait



SANTOSH MATHEW

With recent attacks by Houthi rebels on vessels passing through the strait, the region faces heightened security risks which could disrupt world economy

The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a narrow passage linking the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden, has thrust itself into the international spotlight. Situated on the northern side of the Red Sea lies the renowned Suez Canal, a monumental feat of engineering connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. This vital waterway, spanning approximately 193 kilometres in length and nearly 200 meters in width, serves as a lifeline for global trade and maritime transportation.

However, recent events have cast a shadow over the tranquillity of these waters. The Houthis, a rebel group from Yemen, have launched a series of attacks targeting vessels passing through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. These assaults, primarily aimed at ships with ties to Israel, have sparked concerns over maritime security and the free movement of goods through this crucial chokepoint. In response to these escalating tensions, Operation Prosperity Guardian, spearheaded by the United States, was initiated to safeguard the Bab-el-Mandeb and ensure the unimpeded flow of maritime traffic. Over 20 nations have expressed their support for this initiative, underscoring the collective effort to protect this strategic waterway.

The motives behind the Houthi attacks are rooted in geopolitical complexities, with their actions perceived as retaliation against Israel's military operations in Gaza. Houthi leaders have explicitly stated their intent to target any ship associated with Israel, leading to a spate of attacks on vessels carrying goods to or from the region. The Houthis contend that peace in Gaza is intrinsically linked to stability in the Red Sea, warning of further conflict if hostilities persist.

The significance of the Red Sea extends beyond its immediate vicinity, serving as a conduit for maritime trade connecting Europe to the rest of the world. The Mediterranean Sea, accessed through the Suez Canal, plays a pivotal role in global shipping routes, facilitating trade between continents and enabling vital economic exchange. Traditionally,



ships traversed the African tip to reach their destinations, but the recent turmoil has complicated maritime navigation. With a substantial portion of goods bound for Israel passing through the Suez Canal, disruptions in this route have reverberated across global supply chains. The increased travel distance and associated costs pose significant challenges for shipping companies and commodity markets alike. The strategic importance of the Suez Canal has historical roots, dating back to its inception in the 19th century. However, its relevance has endured through numerous conflicts, including both World Wars, underscoring its status as a linchpin of global maritime trade.

The economic ramifications of disruptions in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait are far-reaching, affecting industries reliant on the timely delivery of goods and materials. Major shipping companies, such as the Mediterranean Shipping Company and Merck and Hapag Lloyd, have suspended operations in the region, exacerbating supply chain disruptions and logistical challenges. Amidst these geopolitical tensions, the concept of the blue economy emerges as a beacon of sustainable maritime development. Championed by advocates of ocean conservation, the blue economy emphasizes the responsible utilization of marine resources for economic growth while



WHILE INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES SHARE A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, DIFFERENCES IN MARITIME POLICIES AND MILITARY OPERATIONS UNDERSCORE THE COMPLEXITIES OF NAVIGATING INTERNATIONAL WATERS

ensuring environmental preservation. India, with its extensive coastline and maritime interests, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of the blue economy. Through initiatives like the Sagarmala project and SAGAR policy, India seeks to bolster its maritime infrastructure and strengthen its naval capabilities to safeguard its maritime interests.

However, divergent perspectives on maritime sovereignty and strategic alliances complicate the geopolitical landscape. While India and the United States share a strategic partnership, differences in maritime policies and military operations underscore the complexities of navigating international waters.

Russia's stance on maritime cooperation underscores the need for inclusive approaches to ocean governance, emphasizing collaboration over competition. As global leaders grapple with the challenges of maritime security and sustainable development, the Bab-el-Mandeb crisis serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of oceanic ecosystems and geopolitical dynamics. In conclusion, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait stands at the intersection of geopolitical rivalries and maritime commerce, symbolizing the challenges and opportunities inherent in our interconnected world. As nations navigate these turbulent waters, cooperation and dialogue remain

essential to ensuring the security and prosperity of maritime nations and the preservation of our oceans for future generations.

### The Future of Maritime Security and Sustainable Development

Looking ahead, addressing the complex issues surrounding maritime security and sustainable development requires concerted international efforts and innovative solutions. The Bab-el-Mandeb crisis serves as a wake-up call for global leaders to prioritise ocean conservation and cooperative strategies to mitigate geopolitical tensions. Investments in technology, such as satellite surveillance and unmanned maritime vehicles, hold promise for enhancing maritime surveillance and response capabilities. Additionally, strengthening legal frameworks and multilateral agreements can foster greater cooperation among nations and promote sustainable ocean governance. Ultimately, the Bab-el-Mandeb crisis underscores the interconnected nature of global maritime challenges and the urgent need for collective action. By working together to address the complex issues facing our oceans, we can build a more resilient and sustainable future for generations to come.

(The author is associate professor at Pondicherry Central University, views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE KILLED BY DOGS?

Sir — This refers to Hiranmay Karlekar's article, "The Killing of a Puppy: Murder Most Foul" (February 10, 2024). A few days ago, a seven-month-old boy was killed by a pack of stray dogs in Bhopal. All stray dogs must immediately be sterilised and kept in an enclosed area to minimise colossal loss of human lives. India has around 20,000 rabies deaths a year which according to the World Health Organisation, "accounts for 36 percent of the world's deaths." Most of the victims of rabies in India are under the age of 15 years.

This fatal disease has been eliminated from many countries. It is a challenging job in a country like India where dogs are allowed to roam freely. Rabies can be eliminated by vaccinating all dogs for a number of years and by sterilising the stray dog population. Bhutan has successfully sterilised and vaccinated its entire stray dog population after pursuing a 14-year-long programme. Bhutan sets an example which India needs to follow. Most of the victims of dog bites and rabies belong to the poor working class of our society who build our roads, bridges and houses for all of us and who serve everything at our door starting from morning newspapers to food packets. It is really perplexing that their deaths evoke little public sympathy and a lukewarm response from the authorities. I love dogs as much as I hate such insensitive attitudes towards poor workers.

Sujit De | Kolkata

### BEYOND GRADES

Sir — Cheating often stems from the intense pressure to excel in India's education system, where success is often equated with academic achievements. This pressure creates a culture where students feel compelled to resort to dishonest means to secure top positions. However, this toxic environment not only fosters unethical behaviour but also leads to severe consequences such as

## Crafting the Olympic medals



It's really astounding and delightful to know that the medals made for the upcoming Paris Summer Olympics are simply remarkable and fantastic. In addition to the customary gold, silver and bronze, each winner's medal will feature a small piece of iron straight from the Eiffel Tower! Small chunks of the iconic tower — the symbol of Paris and France and one of the wonders of the world — have been included in the medals to mark the 100 years since last hosted the Olympic Games. Each and every medal

has at its centre a hexagon of iron from the tower. They all come from pieces removed from the structure during different renovations over the last so many decades. The pieces of metal were carefully preserved, and the organisation in charge of the Eiffel Tower's preservation donated them to the Paris Olympic Committee to create the unique medal designs. Definitely, it would be joy unlimited as medalists will get an unforgettable souvenir of Paris made from this unique metal. The "puddle iron" which has been used to make the tower is a special pure material, which is extremely strong. These special Olympic and Paralympic medals were designed by craftworkers at the famous Chaumet House of Jewellery and it is for the first time in the history of the Games that a jeweller has designed the medals. An out-of-the-box idea by the organisers these medals are definitely a symbol of excellence, a source of motivation, a symbol of ultimate achievement and historically precious.

M Pradyu | Kamur

mental health issues and even suicides among students.

To address this, a comprehensive reform of the education system is crucial, emphasizing holistic development and emotional well-being alongside academic performance. Implementing mentoring programs, stress relief initiatives and mental health awareness campaigns can provide vital support to students, fostering a healthier and more conducive learning environment. By prioritizing student well-being and nurturing individual growth, India can mitigate the underlying causes of cheating and cultivate a generation equipped to thrive in the real world.

Mahi Khandelwal | Ujjain

### FOOD WASTAGE

Sir — The issue of food waste intersects with the stark reality of hunger and malnutrition, particularly evident in the

context of those struggling to afford even two meals a day. With millions worldwide facing food insecurity, the recent suggestion by the Central Government to integrate lessons on food wastage into school curriculums aims to foster awareness among students.

Shocking statistics from the United Nations, revealing that approximately 931 million tons of food were wasted globally in 2019, underscore the urgency of addressing this issue. Despite ample resources, food wastage persists in our country, exacerbating the plight of the hungry and malnourished. This paradox highlights the need for a shift in mindset towards valuing food and combating wasteful practices, especially among those blinded by material wealth.

N Ashraf | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

# Develop skills with experimental learning

Embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the changing world



KIRANJIT SINGH PANNU

In an ever-evolving world, the ability to acquire and adapt skills is crucial for success. While traditional learning methods hold value, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development. By immersing individuals in real-world scenarios, it fosters deeper understanding, boosts knowledge retention, and cultivates essential soft skills.



their attention and encourages a sense of curiosity.

Reflection: A crucial aspect of experiential learning is the reflective process. After engaging in an activity, students are prompted to reflect on their experiences, analyse the outcomes, and connect the practical knowledge gained to theoretical concepts. This reflective phase enhances their critical thinking skills.

Application: Experiential learning encourages the immediate application of knowledge. By directly applying what they have learned in real-world scenarios, students can see the practical relevance of their education, leading to a deeper understanding and retention of information.

### Experiential Learning in Skill Development:

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving: Experiential learning challenges students to think crit-

ically and solve problems on their own. Through hands-on experiences, they learn to analyse situations, make decisions, and adapt to changing circumstances - essential skills for success in both academic and real-world settings.

Teamwork and Communication: Collaborative projects and group activities inherent in experiential learning help students develop strong teamwork and communication skills. They learn to express their ideas, listen to others, and work cohesively towards common goals, mirroring the dynamics of the professional world.

Creativity and Innovation: Hands-on experiences stimulate creativity and innovation by encouraging students to think outside the box. When faced with real-world challenges, students are prompted to generate unique solutions, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and adaptability.

Emotional Intelligence: Experiential learning enhances emotional intelligence by exposing students to diverse situations. They learn to understand and manage

their emotions, as well as empathise with others, preparing them for a more emotionally intelligent and socially aware future.

Long-term Retention: The active involvement and application of knowledge in experiential learning contribute to better retention. Students are more likely to remember and understand concepts that they have personally experienced, as opposed to those learned through passive methods. In the 21st century, where adaptability and a diverse skill set are crucial for success, experiential learning emerges as a powerful tool for skill development in schools. By integrating this pedagogical approach, educators can foster not only a deep understanding of academic concepts but also the critical skills needed for future success. As schools continue to evolve, embracing experiential learning may well be the key to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the rapidly changing world.

(The writer is an educator and expert on education policies; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## STRIVE FOR ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT

Spirituality offers us a methodology to deepen our awareness of the inner being



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

All of us dream of a world without poverty, that is equitable, that respects the dignity of all living beings, and the sacredness of the natural world. There is no doubt that it is an achievable dream, but we all must collectively pave a new way to make it into reality. Over the past two millennia, man has made great strides in almost every field of development as a result of which, today we have achieved a standard of living and scientific development unimaginable even half a century ago. But, if development concerns the betterment of the human being and his relationship with other humans and beings, then one would find that we have come down the wrong path in our quest for material fulfilment. Right? When we discuss development, we usually talk of economic development to meet material needs, measured perhaps through growth in the GNP or GDP. So, is this all that there is to development?

Does economics measure everything? The answer to this is NO, because if we are aiming at all-round development, then it must include not only material progress but social and cultural dimensions as well. It's a fact that cannot be denied that the ideal of development as a continuing process of growth, creation, improvement and positive change has yielded to a reality more frequently marked by destruction, degradation and negativity. In his quest for improving his lot, man first turned to religion, which not only provided an anchor for his life but also answered some of the questions about his existence in this world and his place vis a vis the universal scheme of things. However, with time, religion itself got corrupted by ritualism and the greed for power, thereby making men disillusioned, who then turned to politics, to make their lives better. They sought succour and salvation from political ideologies but to no avail, resulting in their pinning hopes on science. With the aid of



science, much development happened in several fields.

Today as we stand on the threshold of both hope and fear of losing everything, we realise that materialistic progress is a transient solution and hence the effort to establish lasting peace and prosperity for all has to come from an imperishable source. The seed of lasting peace and happiness lies in human values and wisdom, which are both eternal and universal. The need of the hour is that we have to look at our development from a broader perspective than the one we have been adopting so far. Our narrow concept of development can find its roots in a narrow concept of the self that neglects the larger reality of the soul and overlooks the essential unity of the human family. Hence we need to move from an overly materialistic approach to one that includes the broader and deeper realities of human life and experience i.e. the inner world of our thoughts and values and the innate spirituality on which our worth and dignity are based.

Spirituality offers us a methodology to deepen our awareness of our inner being. From this awareness may follow steps to develop or change the self in ways that are conducive to the kind of world we want. Values and spirituality are at the heart of not just who we are but also of the political, social, economic and environmental issues we are facing. Remember! A development that sustains all people depends at least as much on spiritual empowerment as on material progress and prosperity. So let us inject values into our society by effective education in self-awareness, and spiritual principles and realize our dream of a world that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist; views are personal)

## Delink disinvestment from the Budget



UTTAM GUPTA

There is a need for a paradigm shift in the approach to disinvestment; the Government must detach it from budgetary constraints and tackle legacy issues



In a briefing following the presentation of the interim Budget for the financial year (FY) 2024-25 by the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2024, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan stated that the "government no longer views disinvestment - fancy nomenclature for sale of Union government shareholding in central public sector undertakings (CPSUs) - from the perspective of balancing the budget". The statement is out of sync with Sitharaman setting a target of Rs 50,000 crore as proceeds from disinvestment for the FY 2024-25 though it wasn't mentioned in her speech.

If, the government's intent was not to view it as an exercise in balancing the budget - as stated by the finance secretary - then, it made no sense to fix a target. Yet, setting a target for boosting non-tax revenue receipts means that it hasn't shed its age-old stance of linking this exercise with the budget. To plan for garnering resources from the sale of government shares in CPSUs is inherently flawed. This is because unlike tax revenue, which can be projected with a degree of certainty based on the existing tax rate and a reasonable assessment of the growth in nominal GDP, the same cannot be said about proceeds from disinvestment. In this case, a lot depends on the market scenario and, in particular, the perception of investors about the company in which share-sale is contemplated.

In cases where the strategic sale (it reduces the government's holding in the CPSU to below 50 per cent or privatization) is mooted, the Government faces a bigger challenge as apart from a favourable market, it needs bidders with deep pockets. The lengthy and cumbersome process of approval and bureaucratic red tape further undermines the chances of its kicking the ball rolling just around the time when the strategic investors are ready to put in their bets.

The Niti Aayog identifies companies for disinvestment which are then considered by the Core Group of Secretaries on Divestment (CGD), a long-drawn process by itself, which takes it to the Alternative Mechanism (AM) - a group of ministers, including finance, road transport & highways, administrative reforms, etc., - for approval. After AM's approval, the Department of Investment and Public



THE MAJORITY OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR SEVERAL DECADES HAS INGRAINED IN THE BUREAUCRAT A FEELING OF EXERCISING COMMAND OVER THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PSU

Asset Management (DIPAM) moves a proposal for in-principal approval of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).

It is therefore not surprising that the Modi - government has missed its disinvestment targets ever since it started the process in 2015-16 with a particular focus on 'strategic' sales. Only during two years viz. 2017-18 and 2018-19, it achieved the target. That was primarily because, in those years, it had conducted two big-ticket sales of its shares from one CPSU to another. During 2017-18, the government sold 51.11 per cent of its shareholding in Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) yielding Rs 37,000 crore. In the following year, it undertook the sale of its 52.63 per cent stake in the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to the Power Finance Corporation (PFC) yielding Rs 13,000 crore. But, those sales can't be termed as strategic as the purchaser being another CPSU namely ONGC/PFC, the Government continues to have effective ownership over the divested entity viz. HPCL/REC.

For the current FY, while presenting the budget on February 1, 2023, Sitharaman had set a target of Rs 51,000 crore for proceeds of disinvestment. This has since been revised downwards to Rs 30,000 crore. Against this, as of February 1, 2024, the government has raised only about Rs 12,500 crore, and it is unlikely that even the revised divestment target will be met.

At a fundamental level, disinvestment decisions regarding the establishment of the government's shareholding in a PSU is in effect sale of its assets. Therefore, receipts arising therefrom can only be treated as 'capital receipts' (CRs). While preparing the budget, it won't be logical to plan for receipts from this source in the same manner as it is done for revenue receipts (RRs) which are receipts generated from

the day-to-day business activities e.g. dividends on shares held by the government. The government should change the track. It should unequivocally fall in line with what the finance secretary has indicated. It should pursue share sales 'independent' of the budget exercise.

The government's tax revenue is buoyant (for three years in a row since 2021-22, these have exceeded the BE) and it is getting higher dividends from CPSUs as also higher dividends from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and state-run banks. These positive trends should be good enough for managing fiscal deficits. Hence, its budget need not have to depend on proceeds from disinvestment.

The FM has referred to the approach to share sales outlined in her Budget speech for 2021-22. Under it, CPSUs are divided into two broad categories i.e. strategic and non-strategic. The strategic group covers atomic energy, space and defense; transport and telecommunications; power, petroleum, coal and other minerals; and banking, insurance and financial services. The non-strategic category includes all other sectors such as industrial and consumer goods, hotel and tourist services, trading, and marketing.

While, the government wants to sell CPSUs in the strategic sector with the caveat that at least one (and a maximum of four) will be retained in the public sector, it will privatize 'all' undertakings in non-strategic sectors. All loss-making undertakings in the latter category will be closed. However, it needs to unshackle the process from a host of legacy issues.

Foremost, the majority ownership and control by the Government for several decades has ingrained in the bureaucrat a feeling of exercising command over the management of the PSU. Although things have improved under the Modi - dispensation (courtesy of its focus on a

'policy-driven state', and increase in 'transparency'), the basic ingredients remain intact. This mindset has to go.

Second, even after strategic sales, the government wants to remain in the driver's seat. This is amply reflected in a statement in Sitharaman's budget speech for FY 2019-20. She had stated the intent was to change the existing policy from "directly" holding 51 per cent or above in a CPSU, to one whereby its total holding, "direct" plus "indirect", is maintained at 51 per cent. This stance remains intact.

Third, it remains inclined to use CPSUs for achieving other unrelated objectives. For instance, it uses fertilizer PSUs to ensure adequate availability of this politically sensitive agri-input in every nook and corner of the country. This has come in the way of taking up the strategic sale of nine CPSUs in the fertilizer sector (it falls in the non-strategic category) recommended for sale by the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) and Niti Aayog. Despite, the deregulation of petrol and diesel prices way back in 2010/2014, the government continues to regulate their prices.

For this purpose, it rides piggyback on oil PSUs which control over 90 percent of the total sales. For this reason, the strategic sale of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) hasn't happened nearly four years after it was initially mooted in 2019-20.

Fourth, the government wants to use CPSUs to build infrastructure and invest in green transition to meet climate mitigation goals. While the argument is tenable, this doesn't undermine a case for vigorously pursuing strategic sales to maximize asset value besides involving the private sector in achieving climate goals. Modi should remove all legacy obstacles and de-bureaucratize the process of share sale.

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

## Advancing the maxim of 'One Earth, One Health'

Modi's vision of 'One Earth, One Health' rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, reflects India's enduring commitment to universal health

India raising the slogan of 'One Earth One Health' in itself tells how India wants to develop health infrastructure. This philosophy includes holistic health protection and care for all beings - humans, animals and even plants. Apart from this, making medical treatment affordable has also been a top priority of the Government of India. This may surprise many people, but the fact is - only two welfare health schemes - 'Ayushman Bharat' and 'Jan Aushadhi Yojana' have provided more than Rs 1 lakh crore to patients mainly coming from the poor and middle class. Have saved. Ayushman Bharat has not only increased the demand for new hospitals but is also increasing the opportunity to open new hospitals and med-



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

ical colleges. But also creating a new and complete health ecosystem with technology at the centre of operations. These revived efforts for healthcare services have given a big push to the highly potential healthcare sector, which promises to be worth Rs 10 lakh crore in the coming years, if there is proper coordination between the private sector and medical academia. Of course, it would have been even better here if

proper coordination with the state governments had taken care of the primary health centres also. Which perhaps the present ministry has failed to do. Whereas at smaller village health centres the testing facility could be linked to the district hospital.

The focus on technology in healthcare is a huge opportunity for healthcare entrepreneurs, investors and professionals. The allocation of Rs 89,155 crore in the Union Budget 2023-24 has also given new impetus to the sector. There is a clear difference in focus between pre- and post-Covid situations. Springing into action, India focuses not just on treatment but also on wellness. Putting aside the absence of an integrated long-term approach to

health for several decades after independence, it is now better to pursue a whole-of-government approach under PM Modi, rather than confining the subject of health to the health ministry alone. Points towards the future. Keeping in mind the problems of common people, the government has given top priority to affordable treatment. More than 10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras provide affordable medicines to the needy. The PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission is not only giving birth to new hospitals but also creating a new and complete health ecosystem.

There has been a revolution of sorts in the medical education sector in the last 10 years. More than 260 new medical

colleges have been opened, doubling the medical seats in undergraduate and postgraduate medical courses as compared to 2014. However there is a need to change the policy decisions regarding the establishment of medical colleges, and more work needs to be done on how to make India's doors easier for Indian medical students studying abroad. However, in the latest budget, a lot of emphasis has also been given to the nursing sector. 157 nursing colleges around the medical colleges, a major step towards medical human resources. Technologies like 5G are creating new opportunities for startups. Drones are revolutionizing drug delivery and testing services. The medical device sector has seen a growth of 12-14% due to ini-

tiatives like Bulk Drug Park, and Medical Device Park, over Rs 30 thousand crore on PFI schemes. Apart from this, starting courses like biomedical engineering, industry-academia and government collaboration in IITs also has a lot to offer for the sector. However, instead of increasing the infrastructure of primary health centres, we added more to patient care OPD in institutions like AIIMS, while AIIMS remained identified as a research institute and their old contribution to the research sector.

The government's efforts on preventive health care and awareness such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for cleanliness, Ujjwala Yojana for smoking-related diseases, Jal Jeevan

Mission to tackle waterborne diseases, National Nutrition Mission to address anaemia and malnutrition, obesity Focus on grains - Shri Anna, PM Matru Vandana Yojana, Mission Indradhanush, Yoga, Fit India Movement and increasing focus on naturopathy, alternative medicine system including Ayurveda have saved people from diseases. All these measures of the government are the beginning of a new era for the people and also a vision of India regarding health in front of the world. Which can be understood in an earlier address of the Prime Minister.

In which the Prime Minister warmly welcomed health ministers from across the world and representatives from West Asia, SAARC, ASEAN and

African regions. Quoting an Indian scripture which translates to 'Let everyone be happy, let everyone be free from diseases, let good things happen to everyone, and let no one suffer from sorrow', the Prime Minister expressed his vision of an inclusive country. Highlighted and mentioned that India's vision of health was universal even when there were no global pandemics thousands of years ago. He underlined that One Earth One Health follows the same beliefs and is an example of the same idea in action. "Our vision is not limited to humans only. But also a beautiful earth for every living being. That is the Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

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







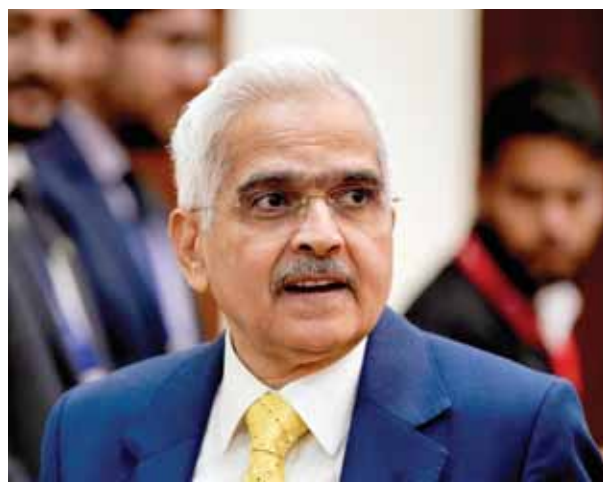
# RBI rules out review of action against Paytm Payments Bank

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday ruled out any review of the central bank's action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), saying the decision was taken after a comprehensive assessment of the functioning of the lender. In a major action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), RBI, on January 31, directed it to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments after February 29. "At the moment let me say very clearly there is no review of this (PPBL) decision. If you are expecting a review of the decision, let me very clearly say there is (going to be) no

review of the decision," Das said at a press conference after the 606th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India. The meeting was addressed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The governor said any decision against entities regulated by the RBI is taken after a comprehensive assessment. While emphasising that RBI is supportive of the fintech sector, Das said it is also committed to protect the interest of customers as well as ensure financial stability. The central bank is expected to soon issue a set of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on the Paytm matter this week. While announcing the action against PPBL, the RBI had said

the direction follows persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns. Earlier on March 11, 2022, the RBI had barred PPBL from onboarding new customers with immediate effect. In its latest action, RBI has asked the Paytm Payments Bank not to take deposits/credit transactions/top-ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, and NCMC cards, among others after February 29, 2024. However, the central bank has allowed credit of interest, cashbacks, or refunds even beyond February 29. Further, withdrawal or utilisation of balances by PPBL customers from their accounts, including savings



bank accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments, FASTags, and National Common Mobility Cards are permitted without any restrictions, up to their available balance. RBI also directed termination of the 'nodal accounts' of One97 Communications Ltd.

One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, holds a 49 per cent stake in Paytm Payments Bank Limited but classifies it as an associate of the company and not as a subsidiary. Gold remains flat; silver jumps Rs 400 New Delhi, Feb 12 (PTT) Gold prices remained steady at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to HDFC Securities. However, silver jumped Rs 400 to Rs 75,400 per kg from its previous close of Rs 75,000 per kg. Meanwhile, the next tranche of Sovereign Gold Bond scheme opened for subscription at a price of Rs 6,263 per gram. The issue is open until February 16. The Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve

Bank, has decided to offer a discount of Rs 50 per gram less than the nominal value to those investors applying online and making the payment against the application through digital mode. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," Saunil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,022 per ounce, down by USD 2 from the previous close. Also, silver was trading marginally higher at USD 22.80 per ounce. Traders avoided directional bets before the outcome of the US consumer inflation data, to be released on Tuesday, which

can provide more insights about the US Federal Reserve monetary policy path, Gandhi added. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, LKP Securities said that the spotlight also turned to the fourth tranche of Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGB), which garnered investor attention. With stable returns fixed at 2.5 per cent, investors were drawn to park their funds in gold, especially amidst prevailing uncertainties in the global and Indian markets. "However, the price of Rs 62,130 per 10 gram may seem unattractive to some investors, particularly considering the delayed hints of US rate cuts, which could potentially support a rise in the dollar and limit the upside for gold prices in the short term," Trivedi said.

# Sensex tanks 523 points on profit taking in banking, metal shares

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex plunged by 523 points on Monday due to profit taking in metal and banking shares amid mixed trends in global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex settled 523 points or 0.73 per cent lower at 71,072.49 as 22 of its components closed in the red and eight in the green. The barometer opened higher and touched a high of 71,756.58 in early trade. However, profit taking in Reliance Industries, metal giants and banking shares dragged the index to a low of 70,922.57 during intra-day trade. The broader NSE Nifty also closed 166.45 points or 0.76 per cent lower at 21,616.05 with 34 of its constituents ending in the red. Metal, banking and select oil shares succumbed to selling while pharma and IT shares bucked the trend. "An uptick in exchange margin requirements caused a decrease in positions, primarily in mid and small caps. Aside from the pharma and IT sectors, selling was widespread, with notable struggles seen in PSU banks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. In the Sensex pack, Tata Steel fell the most by 2.76 per cent, followed by NTPC (2.72 per cent) and SBI (2.26 per cent). Private banks IndusInd, Kotak Bank, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank also declined. In contrast, Wipro, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra and Nestle were among the nine



Sensex stocks that defied the trend. BSE smallcap index fell 3.16 per cent while midcap lost 2.62 per cent and largecap closed 0.90 per cent lower. Among the sectoral indices, utilities saw a steepest fall of 3.60 per cent, followed by realty which declined by 3.01 per cent and power that went down by 2.90 per cent. Industrials fell 2.92 per cent and energy slid 2.80 per cent, while metal declined by 2.73

per cent and oil & gas by 2.56 per cent. Capital goods, commodities, bank and financial services were other laggards. "The premium valuation gap between mid to large caps has notched to its all-time high. Despite a robust economic forecast, corporate earnings are expected to slow due to moderated operating margins. It is going to be a challenge for the broad market to sustain the

premium valuation," Nair added. In the broader market, NHPC dropped 15.81 per cent after it reported a 19 per cent decline in profit for the December quarter. Another power PSU SJVN dropped 20 per cent to hit the lower circuit on BSE. Leading forging manufacturer Bharat Forge tanked 14.04 per cent following the announcement of its quarterly results. "Nifty declined further after a consolidation breakdown on the hourly chart, indicating an increase in pessimism. The daily chart shows the index forming a lower top, signaling diminishing bullish sentiment," Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities said. In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 closed 0.9 per cent higher and China's Shanghai Composite went up 1.28 per cent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.83 per cent. European markets were trading on a mixed note with CAC 40 of France and DAX of Germany rising, while London's FTSE 100 trading with losses. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.50 per cent to USD 81.78 a barrel on Monday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) purchased shares worth Rs 141.95 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. On Friday, Sensex climbed 167.06 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 71,595.49 points while the Nifty gained 64.55 points or 0.30 per cent to close at 21,782.50 points.

# India vegetable oil imports fall 28 per cent in January

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's vegetable oil imports declined by 28 per cent to 12 lakh tonnes in January from a year-ago period, industry body SEA said on Monday. Vegetable oil imports stood at 16.61 lakh tonnes in January 2023. India is a leading vegetable oil buyer in the world. In the first quarter (November-January) of the current oil year, total imports dropped 23 per cent to 36.73 lakh tonnes as against 47.73 lakh tonnes in the same quarter of previous year. According to the Solvent Extractors Association of India



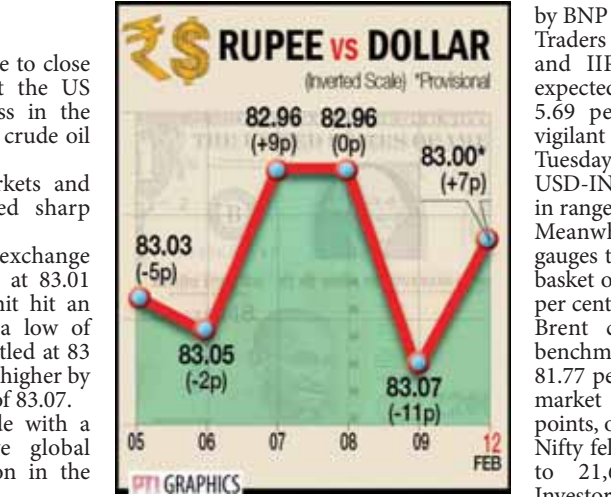
(SEA), about 7,82,983 tonnes of palm oil and 4,08,938 tonnes of soft oil were imported in January this year out of total vegetables oils. As on February 1, total edible oils stock stood at 26.49 lakh

tonnes, down 7.64 per cent from that of the year-ago period, it said in a statement. SEA said prices of edible oils, which are currently low, may go up this year on lower production, global economic issues and supply constraints. The availability of palm oil for edible oil requirements has come down as the two main producers, Malaysia and Indonesia, are diverting it for the production of bio-diesel. This could result in an increase in prices this year, it said. Global palm oil output was seasonally low in January-March 2024, leading to a reduction of stocks both in producing as well as importing countries, it added. India imports palm oil mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia and a small quantity of crude soft oil, including soyabean, from Argentina. Sunflower oil is imported from Ukraine and Russia.

# Rupee rises 7 paise to close at 83 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 7 paise to close at 83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, on softness in the American currency and easing crude oil prices. However, weak domestic markets and foreign fund outflows capped sharp gains, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.01 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 82.98 and a low of 83.02. The local unit finally settled at 83 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 7 paise from its previous close of 83.07. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias, positive global equities and a slight correction in the greenback. "However, any bounce back in crude oil prices amid ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and selling pressure



from foreign investors may weigh on the rupee at higher levels," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan

by BNP Paribas. Traders may take cues from India's CPI and IIP data. "Headline inflation is expected to ease to 5.09 per cent from 5.69 per cent. Investors may remain vigilant ahead of US inflation data on Tuesday," Choudhary said, adding the USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in range of Rs 82.80-83.20. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.04 per cent higher at 104.15. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.51 per cent to USD 81.77 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex declined 523 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 71,072.49. The Nifty fell 166.45 points, or 0.76 per cent, to 21,616.05. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday as they bought shares worth Rs 141.95 crore, according to exchange data.



# Tata Motors ties up with LeadIT for greener future

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors on Monday said it has tied up with the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT), a global alliance launched by governments of Sweden and India at the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019. As a member of LeadIT, the auto major will be able to harness the power of global best practices, influence policy-making, and together with other members strengthen climate action plans, thereby accelerating transition towards net-zero emissions. "Our pledge to attain net-zero emissions across our Passenger Vehicles (PV) business by 2040, and our Commercial Vehicles (CV) business by 2045, is a testament to our commitment to a greener

future," Tata Motors Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer SJR Kutty said in a statement. Joining forces with LeadIT propels the automaker closer to these ambitious goals, facilitating a journey towards sustainable transformation, he added. Sweden's Minister for Climate and the Environment and Co-Chair of LeadIT, Romina Pourmokhtari said the membership signals an important commitment to net-zero from a leading global manufacturer in the supply chain. "Demand signals are crucial for the transformation of our industry. Fostering dialogues and strengthening partnerships in areas where transition challenges need to be addressed is core to achieving reduced climate emissions," she added.

# SpiceJet plans to lay off 1,000 people

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Crisis-hit SpiceJet plans to hand out pink slips to at least 1,000 employees in the coming days as the airline works to significantly reduce costs and streamline operations of its depleted aircraft fleet, officials said on Monday. Faced with financial woes, legal battles and other headwinds, the no-frills carrier might ask more staff to leave as there is excess manpower now compared to the number of planes in service. A final decision on the quantum of layoffs is expected this week, one of the officials in the know said. When contacted, a SpiceJet spokesperson said the airline has initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, for achieving profitable growth but did not

provide any numbers. The airline has around 9,000 employees and is now looking at reducing the strength by 10-15 per cent, the official said, adding that layoffs are necessary to reduce the overall costs and annual savings could be up to Rs 100 crore. A reduction of 15 per cent would mean around 1,350 people will lose their jobs. The second official in the know said that layoffs are expected across departments and the final list is being prepared. People from the management and consultancy are working on chalking out the contours of letting staff leave, and all the departments have been asked to give their inputs, the official added. There was no official comment from SpiceJet on the proposed job cuts. The second official explained that the airline has stopped



operations on certain RCS (Regional Connectivity Scheme) routes and at those stations, there is excess manpower, especially staff with lower salaries. Relocating such people will be a challenge, the official noted. Currently, SpiceJet has a fleet of

little over 30 aircraft apart from 10 planes that are on wet lease. "As part of our turnaround and cost-cutting strategy, following the recent fund infusion, SpiceJet has initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, aimed at achieving profitable

growth and positioning ourselves to capitalise on the opportunities in the Indian aviation industry. "Through this initiative alone, we anticipate an annual saving of up to Rs 100 crore," the airline spokesperson said in a statement. During a meeting with the airline's senior officials last month, SpiceJet Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh emphasised the importance of judicious spending and that he will personally oversee all major expenditures. The carrier will prioritise fleet upgrades, enhance on-time performance and cost-cutting measures will be implemented to streamline operations, according to an internal note last month. SpiceJet, which has undergone multiple ownership changes since inception and is currently helmed by Ajay Singh, is in the

process of raising funds from various investors. On January 26, the carrier announced that it has received Rs 744 crore as the first tranche of the total Rs 2,250 crore proposed to be raised through the issuance of securities on a preferential basis. There were reports that there has been a delay in raising the requisite funds. The airline has also availed funds worth around Rs 1,000 crore under the government's Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) and Singh has committed to infuse Rs 500 crore. In recent times, SpiceJet also witnessed lessors taking legal recourse to take back their leased aircraft due to non-payment of dues. India is one of the world's fastest growing civil aviation markets and the domestic air traffic is on an upward trajectory. However, SpiceJet has been struggling for some time now. In 2023, the carrier flew 83.90 lakh passengers and had a domestic market share of 5.5 per cent.

# Inflation falls to three months low in January

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retail inflation declined to a three-month low of 5.1 per cent in January, mainly due to subdued prices of vegetables, fruits and other food items, according to government data released on Monday. The fall indicates that retail inflation is inching towards the Reserve Bank's comfort level of 4 per cent. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation was on the rise for two straight months after touching a trough of 4.9 per cent in October 2023. In December, it stood at 5.69 per

cent. In January, inflation in the food basket eased to 8.3 per cent from 9.53 per cent in the preceding month. It was at 6 per cent in January 2023, as per the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Food inflation was lower in rural areas at 7.91 per cent compared to 9.02 per cent in the urban centres of the country. The latest data showed that inflation in 'oils and fats', 'pulses and products', 'spices, fruits, and vegetables segments' was lower in January 2024 compared to December 2023.

However, inflation was marginally higher in the 'fuel and light', 'clothing and footwear', 'cereals and products', 'meat and fish', and eggs segments on a month-on-month basis. As per the data, inflation was more than the national average of 5.1 per cent in Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh. The lowest retail inflation in January this year was in Delhi at 2.56 per cent. Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at rating agency Icri, said while

rabi sowing has caught up with last year's level, reservoir storage remains well below the year-ago levels in most regions, continuing to imbue caution in terms of the outlook for the rabi harvest. "We project the CPI inflation to ease below 5 per cent in February-March 2024, and average at 5.3 per cent in FY2024. "Thereafter, we estimate the CPI inflation at 4.6 per cent in FY2025, broadly in line with that of the MPC (Monetary Policy Committee), based on the assumption of a normal monsoon," she said.

# Role of nursing highlighted

PNS ■ KATTANKULATHUR

Speakers at a national conference on Friday said that nurses were at the forefront of healthcare delivery, while stressing on the importance of knowledge transfer in the profession. SRM College of Nursing, SRMIST, hosted the 8th National Nursing Conference on Friday. More than 570 participants including faculty of nursing institutions, staff nurses, Ph.D scholars apart from graduate and post graduate students of nursing from 34 institutions all over India took part in the day-



long conference. While delivering the Chief Guest address, Professor T Samuel Ravikumar, Trauma & Disaster Management Consultant, and former Trauma Centre Coordinator and Head, Emergency Nursing, CMC, Vellore, said nurses were at the forefront of healthcare delivery.



# ENGLAND TEAM LANDS IN RAJKOT

**PTI ■ RAJKOT**

Fresh from a one-week break in their pre-series base Abu Dhabi, the England cricket team on Monday returned to India for the remainder of the five-match rubber against the hosts, which is locked at 1-1 after two games.

The England team landed in the city — venue for the third Test — on Monday evening. After their 106-run loss in Visakhapatnam, the England players opted to utilise the 10-day break between the second and third Test by relaxing and playing golf in Abu Dhabi.

The third Test is scheduled to be held here from February 15. The visiting team will begin training at SCA Stadium from Tuesday morning, while the India players will practice in the afternoon.

A day before their return to India, England were dealt a blow with their frontline spinner Jack Leach ruled out of the remaining three Tests with a knee injury. 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 Basheer for the rest of the tour.

Joe Root is the visitors' fourth spin option behind the three



regular spinners. England prepared for the highly anticipated Test series against India with an extensive conditioning camp in Abu Dhabi instead of arriving in the subcontinent early for practice matches.

The second match ended with a day to spare as hosts India, having lost the series opener, staged a remarkable comeback to level the series 1-1. During the Abu Dhabi camp prior to the series, the England team spent a lot of time

working on ways to tackle the Indian spinners. While they rallied to emerge winners in the opener, the English batters were blown away by Jasprit Bumrah's brilliant exhibition of reverse swing bowling in the first

innings of the second Test before succumbing in a record 399-run chase to a disciplined Indian bowling unit in their second innings. The fourth and fifth Tests will be held in Ranchi and Dharamsala.

# In Virat absence, great chance for England to win series: Broad

**PTI ■ CAPE TOWN**

Former pacer Stuart Broad says the ongoing India-England Test series is the most evenly-matched contest that he has seen between the two sides but the visitors have a strong chance of emerging triumphant as the "fire, passion and competitiveness" of Virat Kohli is missing from the home team's arsenal.

Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the just-concluded SA20, where he was a commentator, Broad said the absence of Kohli due to personal reasons is a downer but the matches so far have been engrossing.

The five-match series is locked 1-1 and the two teams will now square off in the third game in Rajkot, beginning February 15.

"(The) first two matches were very competitive and it is one of the most exciting India-England Test series that I have seen. It is the most level series," he said.

"India won the last Test but England's playing style ('Bazball') is quite effective in India. With Virat not in the team, it is a great opportunity for the England team," he added.

Broad feels Kohli's break has also opened a window of opportunity for the youngsters in the Indian team to make a name for themselves.

"The battle between Virat and England bowlers had been great in the past. (James) Anderson and Kohli's battles are quite famous. It's a shame for the series and the sport that he will be missing," he observed.

"...Virat adds to the quality of any contest because he is such a wonderful player who brings fire, passion, competitiveness and great fan following to the sport. But personal matters always take preference over cricketing matters," he said.

"We saw in the last match when Yashasvi Jaiswal scored a brilliant double century," pointed out the bowler who snared 604 wickets in 167 Tests.

Broad said he is also very happy with the performance of his former new-ball partner James Anderson on



India's unresponsive tracks. Anderson replaced Mark Wood in the second Test at Visakhapatnam and picked up five wickets.

"We saw in the second Test, seamers played an important role with Jasprit Bumrah giving a match-winning performance and Jimmy bowling like that on those pitches.

"Everyone expected that the pitch might spin a little bit more but seamers had a lot more success. Maybe with the moisture in the morning," he said.

"Jimmy is nearing 700 wickets and I know he is someone who always takes wickets in a winning cause," he added about the 41-year-old Anderson, who has claimed 179 Test wickets against India in 68 tests.

Broad and Anderson formed an intimidating pace partnership at the peak of their prowess but he does not believe that they were the last great Test fast bowling pair in the era of T20 cricket. But he did agree that to take more than 1200 wickets together will be difficult for another set of two pacers.

"I don't think we are the last of the great bowling partnership in Test cricket. I think Jasprit Bumrah is an outstanding Test bowler. I don't think our partnership, in terms of wickets we have taken, will get overtaken because of the longevity of our career," he said.

"I certainly think that there will be bowling partnerships that will light up world cricket

in the next few years," he added.

"I grew up watching fast bowling partnerships like Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose, Waqar Younis and Wasim Akram, Darren Gough and Andy Caddick to name a few. I am sure there will be another partnership coming soon."

Describing Test cricket as the pinnacle of the game, the former England captain said a window for the format should be created in which all nations can play at the same time.

"I think the charm of Test Cricket is unmatched. It is a wonderful spectacle. There are many T20 leagues now and a number of World Cups coming around so scheduling is difficult to fit.

"I can certainly see a period where we have a window for Test Cricket where all the nations are playing at the same time, kids watching highlights, talking about the performances of different teams," he said.

He also advised young fast bowlers to balance their training to increase their career span.

"Every bowler should find out what works for him for longevity. I liked running which I found crucial for my injury prevention. Jimmy and I did a lot of heavy weight lifting as well that really helped us.

"It's quite different in Test cricket with 25 overs a day while in T20 it's only four. You don't need much power, just balanced training," he said.

# KL Rahul ruled out of third Test, fails to recover

**PTI ■ RAJKOT**

Senior India batter KL Rahul was on Monday ruled out of the third Test against England after failing to fully recover from his quadriceps strain that forced him to miss the second match in Visakhapatnam.

It is understood that Devdutt Padikkal, the talented Karnataka left-hander who is enjoying a great first class season, will replace Rahul in the squad.

"KL Rahul hasn't yet reported in Rajkot. Ravindra Jadeja, the local boy has linked up with the team. It was always a case of subject to fitness and BCCI medical team is still not confident that he is match fit," a senior BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

The selectors had earlier



named both Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja in the squad subject to clearance from the BCCI's medical team.

In his most recent Ranji Trophy match, the 23-year-old Padikkal scored 151 while the chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar watching his knock from the stands.

Padikkal has been in excellent form this season. Having

started with a 193 against Punjab in the opening game, he struck 103 against Goa.

Besides his exploits in Ranji, Padikkal also scored 105, 65 and 21 in his three innings for India A in the two unofficial Tests against England Lions.

As far as Rahul is concerned, the 31-year-old batter's extended break raises a serious question about

whether the senior India players and the BCCI's medical team are giving proper picture about the injury status of certain players.

"If the BCCI's medical team knew in first place that Rahul's quad injury is as serious as it looks, why in the first place was he kept in provisional squad. And why is the player sending wrong signals by posting videos of his batting on Instagram stories," a senior BCCI official asked.

Another senior player, who was recently told that he would be dropped for his poor form, pulled out on pretext of multiple injuries, something that the board hasn't even mentioned.

The case of Ishan Kishan is even more curious as he hasn't even spoken to his

home state unit on whether he would play a Ranji Trophy match or not.

With Rahul ruled out of the third Test and possibly fourth, the doors could open for Sarfaraz Khan in the middle-order now that Shreyas Iyer has also been dropped.

However, there will be more selection conundrum if Jadeja takes his rightful place in the XI.

Axar Patel has batted well in the two Tests so far and Kuldeep Yadav was the second best Indian bowler in Visakhapatnam after Jasprit Bumrah.

As far as the keeper's slot is concerned, time is running out for KS Bharath with Dhruv Jurel breathing down his neck, but the former could still get one last chance in Rajkot.

## RANJI TROPHY

# Akash scalps 9 wickets to help Railways beat Goa

**PTI ■ SURAT**

Railways left-arm spinner Akash Pandey achieved a rare feat as he took nine wickets for 71 runs in Goa's second innings in a stunning bowling show to single-handedly power his side to a 63-run win in their Ranji Trophy Group C match here on Monday.

Pandey dismissed eight Goa batters on the final day, while taking the wicket of opener Amogh Sunil Desai on Sunday. He bowled 26.2 overs in total in Goa's second innings.

Only two players — Premangsu Chatterjee of Bengal and Pradeep Sunderam of Rajasthan — have picked all 10 wickets in one innings of a Ranji Trophy match. Chatterjee achieved the feat in a Ranji match against Assam in 1957, while Sunderam did the same in a match against Vidarbha in 1985. Chasing 306 for a win, Goa were all out for 242 in 65.2 overs. Railways walked away with six points while Goa got none.

With the win, Railways now occupy fourth spot with 18 points.

With just one round of matches left in the group league, Karnataka, who got three points on the basis of first innings lead in the drawn match against Tamil Nadu in Chennai, are in top spot with 24 points.

Tamil Nadu are in second with 22 points and Gujarat in third with 19.

In Chennai, chasing a target of 355, TN could only manage 338 for 8 in 105 overs. The match ended in a draw and



Karnataka got three points for their first innings lead, while TN had to be satisfied with one point.

Baba Indrajith was run out just two runs short of century, while Pradosh Ranjan Paul and Vijay Shankar chipped in with 74 and 60 respectively. They lost three quick wickets towards the end to fall short of target after beginning the day at 36 for 1.

In Mohali, Gujarat crushed Punjab by 299 runs to walk away with six points on the final day.

Pacer Priyajitsingh Jadeja scalped two more wickets on Monday to complete a fine five-wicket haul for 39 runs as Gujarat shot hosts Punjab for just 111 in 39.4 overs in their second innings.

Chasing a tall target of 411 runs, Punjab produced an insipid batting display as none

of them could reach 20 runs with the highest being 18 by captain Mandeep Singh. Seven of their batters were dismissed without reaching double-digit figures.

Priyajitsingh's pace colleagues Chintan Gaja and Arzan Nagwaswalla took two wickets apiece, while spinner Siddharth Desai got one as the home side batters surrendered meekly.

Punjab were staring at defeat after beginning the day at 40 for 4 and Gujarat completed the formalities in 25.4 overs on Monday.

**BRIEF SCORES:**  
**In Surat:** Railways 297 & 208 beat Goa 200 & 242 in 65.2 overs (Suyash Prabhudessai 67; Akash Pandey 9/71) by 63 runs.  
Railways 6 points; Goa 0 point.  
**In Chennai:** Karnataka 366 &

139 drew with Tamil Nadu 151 & 338 for 8 in 105 overs (Baba Indrajith 98, Pradosh Ranjan Paul 74, Vijay Shankar 60; Vijaykumar Vyshak 3/71). Karnataka 3 points (for 1st innings lead); Tamil Nadu 1 point.  
**In Mohali:** Gujarat 339 & 290 for 8 declared beat Punjab 219 & 111 in 39.4 overs (Mandeep Singh 18; Priyajitsingh Jadeja 5/39) by 299 runs.  
Gujarat 6 points, Punjab 0 point.  
**In Chandigarh:** Chandigarh 356 & 359 for 3 declared in 74 overs (Arslan Khan 147, Shivam Bhambri 98, Manan Vohra 74; Sridam Paul 1/39) drew with Tripura 438 & 121 for 3 in 34.4 overs (Bikramkumar Das 58; Arpit Pannu 1/15).  
Tripura 3 points (on basis of first innings lead), Chandigarh 1.

# Kerala crush Bengal, jump to third spot

**PTI ■ THUMBA (KERALA)**

Veteran all-rounder Jalaj Saxena grabbed a match haul of 13 wickets on a rank-turner as Kerala crushed Bengal by 109 runs to taste their first win of the ongoing Ranji Trophy season here on Monday.

The win propelled Kerala (14) to third in the Group B table behind leaders Mumbai (30) and Andhra (25).

This was Bengal's second successive defeat of the season as the last edition's runners-up slipped to sixth spot and their knockout qualification hopes are as good as over. Bengal had endured an innings defeat to Mumbai at home in their previous outing.

The spin-bowling all-rounder Saxena followed up his 9/68 in the first innings to pocket 4/104 as Bengal were bowled out for 339 in their tough chase of 449 runs.

Opener Abhimanyu Easwaran completed his second fifty of the match after Bengal resumed the day on 77/2. But Saxena gave the breakthrough first dismissing Anustup Majumdar (16) and then halted Abhimanyu's patient innings for 65 (119b).

Playing his penultimate match of his career, veteran Manoj Tiwary also became Saxena's victim falling cheaply for 35. Tiwary has announced that he will finally call it a day after Bengal's last league match against Bihar at Eden Gardens from February 16.

Returning to action after a two-month injury layoff, Bengal premier all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed was the lone warrior for as he chipped in with an entertaining 100-ball 80 (8x4, 2x6).

Karan Lal gave him support with a 78-ball 40 in an 83-run alliance for the seventh wicket.

But it was just a formality for the visitors with Basil Thampi (2/8 from 2.4 overs) wiping out the tail, first by effecting the run-out of India Test-bound Akash Deep and then dismissing Shahbaz.

**RAHANE SLAMS FIFTY, MUMBAI LOG 3 PTS:** In Raipur, veteran India batter Ajinkya Rahane struck his first



fifty of Ranji Trophy season, as his 56 not out helped Mumbai bag three points by virtue of their first innings lead over hosts Chhattisgarh.

Resuming the day on 97/1 with an overall 98 run lead, Mumbai declared their second essay on 253/6 as both the skippers, Rahane and Amandeep Khare, agreed for a draw before the tea break.

For the home side, left-arm spinner Ajay Mandal returned with 5/63 but that was not enough to bowl Mumbai out.

The sidelined India batter, Rahane's previous scores in this year Ranji Trophy has been 0, 0, 16, 8, 9 and 1. This was his first fifty in nine innings as the Mumbai skipper scored a 78 against Tripura in the Vijay Hazare Trophy in December last year.

**ASSAM SECURE FIRST WIN OF SEASON:** In Guwahati, Assam also secured their first win of the season, defeating Bihar by nine wickets. Assam now have eight points from six matches, three ahead of bottom-rung Bihar in the eight-team Group B standings.

The day's hero was left-arm spinner Rahul Singh who claimed 5/49 as Bihar were bowled out for 292 following on. It gave Assam an easy target of 95 as the

home side cantered home in 14.2 overs with opener Parvej Musaraf remaining unbeaten on 52, his second fifty of the match.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**In Thumba:** Kerala 363 and 265/6 declared. Bengal 180 and 339; 87.4 overs (Shahbaz Ahmed 80, Abhimanyu Easwaran 65, Karan Lal 40). Kerala won by 109 runs. Points: Kerala 6, Bengal 0.  
**In Raipur:** Mumbai 351 and 253/6 declared (Bhupen Lalwani 59, Ajinkya Rahane 56 not out, Prithvi Shaw 45, Shardul Thakur 31; Ajay Mandal 5/65). Chhattisgarh 350. Match drawn. Mumbai take first innings lead. Points: Mumbai 3, Chhattisgarh 1.  
**In Guwahati:** Assam 405 and 100/1; 14.2 overs (Parvej Musaraf 52 not out). Bihar 207 and following on 292; 121 overs (Piyush Singh 103, Bipin Saurabh 44; Rahul Singh 5/49). Assam won by nine wickets. Points: Assam 6, Bihar 0.  
**In Vizianagaram:** Andhra 261 and 429/9; 145 overs (Ricky Bhui 129, Shaik Rasheed 85, Nitish Kumar Reddy 53 not out, Hanuma Vihari 48; Saurabh Kumar 5/116). Match drawn. Andhra take first innings lead. Points: Andhra 3, UP 1.

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