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TAMIL POLITICS: THE RISE OF THALAPATHY VIJAY

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NAWAZ CHANCES OF BECOMING PAKISTAN PM BRIGHTEN

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STOCK MARKETS REBOUND ON BUYING IN BANKING

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SMRITI JUMPS TWO PLACES TO WORLD NUMBER 4 12 SPORTS



## FARMERS UP THE ANTE, DELHI A BATTLE ZONE

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Chaos erupted at the Punjab-Haryana (Shambhu) and Jind borders on Tuesday as protesting farmers began removing barricades. In response, the Haryana Police fired rounds of tear gas and water cannons. Tear gas shells, some dropped from drones, were lobbed by police in the face-off that lasted several hours at the Shambhu border near Ambala in Haryana. The Haryana Police also used tear gas canisters and water cannons against protesters at the Jind district border. The farmers, in their attempts to breach the barricades near the Punjab-Haryana border, were pushed back by the police, who used drones to drop tear gas shells to prevent any escalation. Upon the police firing tear gas shells, protesters swiftly covered them with wet jute bags to mitigate the smoke. Meanwhile the only takeaway from the inconclusive Centre-farmers organisations meetings is that the Union Government has agreed to withdraw the cases against the farmers registered during the 2020-21 agitation. After a five-hour-long meeting in Chandigarh late on Monday, chaired by Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and Arjun Munda, farmer organisations' key demands for a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops



Farmers at Shambhu border (Punjab-Haryana) for their 'Delhi Chalo' march, near Ambala on Tuesday PTI

and pensions for farmers could not make progress, ultimately prompting the striking farmers to march with their Delhi Chalo call. The sources also stated that farmer leaders remained adamant about a legal guarantee for minimum support price for crops and pensions for farmers, which are among their key demands. Additionally, Union ministers are believed to have agreed to provide compensation to any families of farmers who were left out and suffered losses

during the previous agitation. However, Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, who, along with Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal, attended the second round of talks with the farmer leaders, said that a consensus was reached on most issues, and a formula was proposed for resolving some others through the formation of a committee. Munda said enacting a law guaranteeing MSP on crops cannot be rushed without consulting all stakeholders. He urged the protesting farmer groups to engage in structured discussions with the government. "We are still hopeful that farmer bodies will engage in talks... We will endeavour to resolve issues in the coming days," said Union Agriculture Minister.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan witness a transaction made using the JAYWAN card, based on India's digital RuPay credit and debit card stack, in Abu Dhabi, UAE PTI

## From Ayodhya to Abu Dhabi, Modi on a Mandir March

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday thanked UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan for his support and his graciousness in granting the land for the construction of a Hindu temple here, saying it reflects his affinity for India. Modi will inaugurate the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) Mandir, the first Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi, on Wednesday. Modi arrived here earlier in the day and was received at the airport by President Sheikh Mohamed. The two leaders held wide-ranging talks soon after Prime Minister Modi arrived in the UAE. In his opening remarks, Modi said the BAPS temple in Abu Dhabi is an example of

the "President's affinity towards India and his vision for the UAE's bright future." The BAPS Hindu Mandir, located in Abu Mureikah, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway, has come up on around 27 acres of land in Abu Dhabi and the work for the structure has been going on since 2019. The land for the temple was donated by the UAE government. "The construction of the BAPS temple would not have been possible without your support," he said. Modi recalled that in his first meeting with President Sheikh Mohamed, he just mentioned the land for the temple and how he immediately responded to the request. "Such trust and love itself represent the strength of our unique relationship," Modi said.

## Police bandobast clogs Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI / NOIDA/GHAZIABAD/GURUGRAM

Several kilometre-long traffic jams were observed on Tuesday morning on highways connecting Delhi to Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Police implemented measures such as barricades, iron nails, container walls, and concrete slabs to prevent protesting farmers from entering the

national capital. Major border points between Delhi and its satellite towns experienced congestion and diversions in anticipation of a large farmers' march. As barricades were erected at Singhu, Tikri, Noida, and Ghazipur borders, many individuals had to cross the Singhu border between Delhi-Haryana and Delhi-Ghaziabad on foot at the

Alipur and Tikri borders. Bumper-to-bumper traffic was witnessed at Ghazipur, Noida, Ghaziabad, Singhu, Gurugram, and Tikri borders starting from 7 am. Vehicles on the Delhi-Meerut expressway moved at a sluggish pace due to barricades blocking the roads for two to three kilometres. Service lanes were obstructed using concrete barricades,

barbed wire, and trucks, disrupting usual traffic flow in the area. About 100 to 150 police personnel were stationed at the Ghazipur border service road. Some entry and exit gates of select Metro stations near important installations, including Parliament, have been closed as prohibitory orders remain in force. Continued on Page 2

## Ashok Chavan joins BJP, says Congress chapter closed

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid an emerging prospect of an upset for the Congress in the Raj Sabha polls in the State, Maharashtra's former chief minister Ashok Chavan joined the ruling BJP on Tuesday, a day after he quit the grand old party that he had been associated with right from his younger days. In a development that unfolded on expected lines, Chavan, son of former Union Minister and veteran Congress leader SB Chavan, was accorded a warm welcome into the BJP by Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and State party president Chandrashekar Bawankule, at a function held at the State party headquarters in south Mumbai. Though it is more or less certain that the BJP would field Chavan as one of its candidates for the February 27 biennial RS polls, the ruling party did not make any formal announcement. Chavan played down queries about his future role in the BJP. "I have not asked for anything. I will do whatever work is assigned to me," he said. However, Fadnis threw adequate hints about rewarding Chavan whom he described "as a leader of national stature" and said that the latter would be given a "befitting role" in his party. Amid speculation that many Congress NLA and leaders might follow suit and switch sides to the BJP, Chavan joined the BJP along with close aide and former MLC Amarnath Rajurkar. Continued on Page 2

## AAP cuts Congress down to size, offers one seat in Delhi



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In the midst of the political chessboard gearing up for the Lok Sabha polls, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) announced on Tuesday its intention to contest six seats in Delhi, while offering just one to the Congress. This move prompts Delhi Congress president Arvind Singh Lovely to respond, retorting that seat sharing "cannot be decided at press conferences." The AAP becomes the third party to express its stance independently from the Congress, following the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which decided to go it alone, and the JD(U) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), which exited the bloc. This proposition arises despite AAP's assertion that the Congress does not merit even a single seat

based on its performance. Earlier, AAP announced its plans to reveal candidates for the 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab and the lone seat in Chandigarh. "We want to contest six seats in Delhi and offer one to the Congress for the polls based on the recent election vote shares. We are not announcing any candidates for Delhi at the moment, but if seat-sharing talks do not progress swiftly, we will announce candidates for all six seats in Delhi," said AAP's Political Affairs Committee member and Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak at a press conference after the PAC meeting. In the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP secured victory in all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. In the 2019 elections, AAP garnered an 18.1% vote share, securing the third position, while the Congress garnered 22.5% of the votes and

came second in five of the seven Lok Sabha seats. The BJP claimed a 56.5% vote share. Pathak emphasised that based on merit, the Congress party does not deserve even a single seat in Delhi. However, considering the 'dharma of alliance', AAP is offering them one seat in Delhi. "We propose that the Congress party fight for one seat and AAP for six," he reiterated, emphasising their commitment to the opposition grouping INDIA. Pathak mentioned that they have been waiting for over a month for the seat-sharing talks to resume for Delhi, but there has been no communication from the Congress. "There were two official meetings between the Congress and AAP on January 8 and January 12. The discussions took place in a positive atmosphere, but unfortunately, no agreement was reached. "After these two official meetings, there has been no further dialogue in the past month. We were informed that the Congress party's (Bharat Jodo Nyay) Yatra was ongoing, causing a delay. Despite meeting senior Congress leaders during this time, they also seemed unaware of any progress," he explained. AAP has emphasised its bargaining position with the Congress, leveraging its previous strong electoral performance in Delhi, where it secured a majority of assembly seats. Meanwhile, the Congress is striving to regain its influence in the capital, following a series of electoral setbacks in recent times. Continued on Page 2

## Global pilgrims urged to delay Ram Lalla darshan

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

International tourists are being advised to postpone their plans to visit the newly constructed Ram Mandir as hundreds of thousands of devotees from within the country through the temple daily in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya. The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), the national body of the tourism industry, said there has been a significant increase in queries from NRIs and culture-oriented foreigners regarding visiting the much-revered icon site since the praan pratishthaa on January 22, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The Ram Mandir has generated significant interest among overseas Indians, primarily Hindus," Rajiv Mehra, president of IATO and owner of Uday Tours and Travels, told The Pioneer. Though the number of international tourists is currently fragmented, with individuals arriving independently, interest from tourist groups has been observed from countries such as the US, UK, Fiji, Malaysia, Suriname, and the West Caribbean, where third and fourth generations of Indians reside. According to government data, there are more than 30 million NRIs across the globe.



Players in the hospitality sector believe that if strategically tapped, this demographic could boost foreign exchange reserves and generate employment within the country. They emphasised that unlike domestic tourists, the holiday plans of tourists from abroad typically span months. Senior vice president Rajnish Kaistha of the Association agreed, saying that the Ayodhya sector is emerging strongly worldwide as a religious and cultural hub. "With its profound cultural and religious significance, the newly constructed Ram Mandir has become a focal point for Hindus worldwide. NRIs are drawn to experience the spiritual ambience, participate in rituals, and pay homage at this iconic site. As interest grows, NRIs are

considering travel arrangements in Ayodhya and its surroundings," Kaistha, who heads Paradise Holidays (I) Pvt Ltd, echoed Mehra's sentiments. "In fact, in 2022, we promoted Ayodhya as a religious tourism hotspot and took tour operators on familiarisation trips in the region so that they have knowledge about the product before it is ready," he shared. Kaistha added, "On our part, we are also facilitating familiarisation trips for tour operators in the region, ensuring they are well-versed with the destination even before its completion. Presently, we are pausing queries as the initial excitement surrounding Ayodhya's development continues." Continued on Page 2

## Indira, Nargis names omitted from National Film Awards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of rationalising the honours given in different categories for National film awards, the "Indira Gandhi award for best debut film" and the "Nargis Dutt award for best feature film on national integration" have been renamed. The Indira Gandhi award is now titled "Best debut film of a director", while the "Nargis Dutt Award" will now be called the "Best feature film promoting national, social and environmental values".

The "Regulations of 70th National Film Awards 2022" reflects these changes suggested by a committee set up by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to rationalise the honours given in different categories. The changes include an upward revision in the cash rewards, including for the Dadasaheb Phalke award, and several awards being fused. It was learnt the decision to make these changes was ultimately unanimous. Filmmaker Priyadarshan, who is also a member of the panel, told a section of media he gave his final



recommendations in December. "I have made a few recommendations in the technical department like sound," he added. Entries for the National Awards for 2022 closed on January 30. The awards are running a year late because of the pandemic with the National Awards for 2021 being given in 2023. In accordance with the changes suggested by the committee, and included in the Regulations, the "Indira Gandhi award for best debut film of a director" has been renamed "Best debut film of a

director". The prize money, which was earlier split between the producer and the director, will now only go to the director. Similarly, the "Nargis Dutt Award for best feature film on national integration" will now be called the "Best feature film promoting national, social and environmental values". This category also merges award sections for social issues and environment conservation into one. The rationalisation committee was headed by Neerja Sekhar, additional secretary in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. It

included filmmakers Priyadarshan, Vipul Shah, Haobam Paban Kumar, Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) chief Prasoon Joshi, cinematographer S Nallamathu as well as I&B joint secretary Prithul Kumar and the ministry's director (finance) Kamlesh Kumar Sinha. The entries for the 70th edition of the awards, to be held this year, were sought on the basis of recommendations of the committee which reviewed and rationalised the honours. Continued on Page 2

# Many injured as Congress, BJP, CPM workers clash with cops

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

## Sandeshkhali issue



Bengal exploded against torture of peasants and sexual exploitation of their women at Sandeshkhali — a river island in North 24 Parganas — with supporters of Opposition BJP, CPI(M), CPI and Congress on Tuesday fighting pitched battles at different places from Basirhat to Behrmapore to Rampur leaving a bevy of agitators injured. Clashes broke out between the police and BJP supporters when a massive rally led by State party president Sukanto Majumdar reached the SP office at Basirhat where the members of the CPI who had charged in from a different side were engaged in a skirmish with the men in uniform. Stones were pelted from both sides and the police resorted to lath-charge and firing of tear gas shells to disperse the crowd. In the melee a number of saffron workers including Majumdar and his security guards were injured, he said. A number of BJP and Left supporters were arrested, sources said. “We were carrying out a peaceful movement against the torture of women at Sandeshkhali and had come to see the SP here ... but the police without any provocation resorted to lath-charge and firing tear gas shells ... as if this was not enough the

Trinamool Congress supporters and the members of civic police who were stationed at the roof tops pelted stones on us injuring many of our supporters including women,” Majumdar said adding he and his security personnel too were injured in the clash. A senior police official however blamed the BJP for the chaos saying, “they defied Section 144 and tried to force their entry into the SP office ... and when the police resisted they resorted to throwing brickbats following which the police resorted to mild lath-charge to disperse the crowd.” A similar situation erupted 150 miles away at Behrmapore in Murshidabad district where clashes erupted between the police and CPI(M) cadres led by State party secretary Md

Salim. The cops resorted to lath-charge and burst tear gas shells leaving a number of Left workers injured. One of them was severely injured and had to be rushed to a hospital, sources said. The rally was organised by the CPI(M)’s peasant wing All India Kisan Sabha. The third jostling took place at Rampur in North 24 Parganas when the members of the Congress Party were stopped from taking the ferry to Sandeshkhali. Bengal had been on the boil after reports of homemakers being subjected to sexual exploitation by local Trinamool Congress dons of Sandeshkhali came to light a few days ago. Sandeshkhali like many other Sunderban blocks is surrounded by rivers, backwaters and creeks from all sides.

## HC quashes Section 144 in Sandeshkhali

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court on Tuesday expressed dismay at the barbaric incidents of Sandeshkhali before quashing Section 144 of CrPC, earlier clamped by the police administration. This would enable the Opposition parties a free entry in the river islands. In his order the single Bench of Justice Joy Sengupta said that the police could show no justification of the prohibitive orders being clamped throughout Sandeshkhali block. The Court said that such orders could be imposed selective areas where disturbance was taking place and not the entire block. The Judge however, ordered deployment of additional armed police personnel at Sandeshkhali. Earlier the teams of BJP, CPI(M) and the Congress had been stopped by the police to visit the areas on the pretext of prohibitive orders.

# Congress dubs Chavan as coward

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after former chief minister Ashok Chavan quit the grand old party to join the BJP, Maharashtra Congress in-charge Ramesh Chennithala on Tuesday dubbed Chavan as a “coward” who “ran away” from the battlefield and joined hands with the ruling party. On a day when Chavan formally joined the BJP, Chennithala demanded to know if the reason behind the former chief minister joining the BJP was the possibility of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and CBI putting him in the dock. “Did he get scared of ED and CBI knocking on his

doors?,” he asked. Talking to media persons at the Gandhi Bhavan here after a meeting of party leaders, Chennithala said: “We had a discussion with senior leaders today. Ashok Chavan’s resignation will not weaken the Congress party. The party works according to its ideology, people do not accept those who leave the party. The Congress will work more vigorously and win the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections as well.” “The Congress party has given several important posts like Chief Minister to Chavan. Until yesterday, he was in the Congress party, but suddenly he joined the Bharatiya Janata

Party. Ashok Chavan is a coward. He ran away from the battlefield and joined hands with the opposition to betray the Congress,” Chennithala said. “Even if Ashok Chavan may have left the Congress party, no one else would follow his suit. The Congress, under the leadership of Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, will continue to fight vigorously along with its workers, the State Congress- in-charge said. Chennithala expressed confidence that the former chief minister might have resigned from the Congress, no party MLA or leader would follow the latter’s suit. Demanding to know as to what

“injustice” that the Congress had done to Chavan which prompted him to join the BJP, Chennithala said: “Chavan met Mallikarjun Kharge and other senior leaders in Delhi and attended a party meeting next day. Even though the Congress party gave him a chance to lead, he left the party. What injustice did the Congress party do to Ashok Chavan?” Chennithala said that the BJP had levelled allegations of corruption against Ashok Chavan. “Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi had accused him in the Adarsh scam, and today he has joined the BJP, washing himself clean in the BJP’s washing machine,” he said.

# Reports of SRK involvement in release of Indians from Qatar unfounded, says his office

PTI ■ MUMBAI



Matters involving diplomacy and statecraft are best executed by our very able leaders,” Shah Rukh Khan’s office said on Tuesday, dismissing speculation that the star was involved in the release of eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel from Qatar. Qatar on Monday released the Indian Navy veterans who were sentenced to death and whose sentences were commuted to jail terms of varying duration. Seven of them have returned home. Speculation that Shah Rukh, who enjoys massive popularity in Qatar and recently met the country’s prime minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani in Doha during an event, played a role in the release of the jailed Indians was rife on Tuesday. Former MP Subramanian Swamy’s claim in a post on X that the actor had intervened in the matter circulated widely on social media platforms. Shah Rukh was trending on X for much of the day. “Regarding the reports concerning Shah Rukh Khan’s purported role in the release of

India’s naval officers from Qatar, the office of Mr Shah Rukh Khan says that any such assertions of his involvement are unfounded..,” his office said in a statement. “The execution of this successful resolution solely rests with the Indian government officials,” it said, unequivocally denying Shah Rukh’s participation in the matter. “All matters involving diplomacy and statecraft are best executed by our very able leaders,” the statement, also posted by his manager Pooja Dadlani on Instagram, said. “Khan like many other Indians is happy that the naval officers are home safe and wishes them all the best,” it said. The actor, 58, recently attended the Asian Football Club final in Doha, where he was the special guest of honour. The release of the eight Indians comes ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Qatar on February 14-15. They apparently faced charges of espionage but neither Qatari authorities nor New Delhi made the charges against them public.

# Modi is all set to launch BJP poll campaign in JK

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is all set to launch BJP’s aggressive poll campaign in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir by launching a slew of developmental projects including the highest railway bridge over Chenab in Reasi district on February 20. Initially, the Union government was keen on launching the dream project to connect Kashmir with the rest of the country before the imposition of the model code of conduct. However, the timeline of the 272-km Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link project has been rescheduled due to ongoing works between Katra and Sanganal railway stations. The Northern Railways is working overtime to complete the remaining work of signaling, tracks, electrification, and other allied works on the last section. The Prime Minister is scheduled to address a public rally in Jammu on February 20, the minister of state in the Prime Minister’s office, Dr Jitendra Singh said on Tuesday. He was in his parliamentary constituency Udhampur to witness the stoppage of the Katra-Delhi Vande Bharat Express train at the Martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan Railway station. The brief stoppage of the medi-

um-distance superfast express train at Udhampur and Kathua railway stations was introduced to facilitate the people of the area. “We wanted the prime minister to visit J-K before the start of the election code of conduct. His program has been finalised for February 20 during which he will launch various projects and also address a public meeting,” the minister told reporters in Udhampur. Meanwhile, the district authorities in Jammu have already started preparing for the Prime Minister’s visit next week. Maulana Azad sports stadium has been finalised as the venue of the rally. Security has been beefed up in advance and extra security forces have been deployed in and around the stadium premises to maintain tight vigil. According to official sources, the prime minister is scheduled to inaugurate an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) at Vijaypur in Samba, the highest railway bridge over Chenab in Reasi district, Devika project at Udhampur, IIM Jammu and Shahpur-Kandi Dam project. The Jammu and Kashmir Unit of the BJP has also started preparing for the grand welcome of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

# Sonia set to file nomination for Rajya Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress President Sonia Gandhi were amongst the names released by political parties as the candidates for vacant Rajya Sabha berths. Sources in Congress said Sonia Gandhi is set to file her nomination for the Rajya Sabha elections on Wednesday likely opting for the Rajasthan seat currently held by former PM Manmohan Singh. The Congress is comfortably placed to win Rajya Sabha seats from Karnataka, Telangana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. “Sonia Gandhi is likely to be declared as the Rajya Sabha candidate from the party. She is likely to file nomination on Wednesday,” sources said. Party president Mallikarjun

Kharge has held several meetings with Sonia Gandhi in recent weeks as the Congress works to finalise its candidates for Rajya Sabha polls. The Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana PCC reportedly urged the party leadership to nominate Gandhi for the Rajya Sabha seat. Candidates also include the re-nomination of actor turned politician Jaya Bachchan by Samajwadi Party followed by former IAS officer Alok Ranjan and Ramjilal Suman from Uttar Pradesh. Further close aide of Bihar, CM Nitish Kumar who also instrumental in recent realignment of BJP and JDU, Sanjay Kumar, will be the party’s candidate for Rajya Sabha polls from Bihar. The BJP has named state women’s wing chief Dharmshila Gupta and state

vice president Bhim Singh as its candidates from the state. The remaining three seats are likely to be contested by ‘Mahagathbandhan’ which comprises the RJD, Congress and three Left parties. While Congress is yet to announce any candidates for any vacant States, BJP so far has named 16 candidates for the Rajya Sabha polls, including former Union minister R P N Singh and Sudhanshu Trivedi - the only outgoing MP renominated by the party so far. The party is yet to name many candidates including from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Elections for 56 Rajya Sabha seats spread across 15 states are scheduled to be held on February 27, and the last date for filing nominations is February 15. Debashish Samantray and

Subhasish Kuntia on Tuesday filed their nomination papers as the ruling BJD candidate for the February 27 Rajya Sabha elections in Odisha. The three seats will fall vacant in April when the terms of Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw (BJP) and BJD leaders Prasant Nanda and Amar Patnaik will end. BJP on Monday named two candidates for the Rajya Sabha polls in Rajasthan, excluding outgoing MP and Union minister Bhupender Yadav, who is likely to fight the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The party has fielded former state minister Chunnill Garasiya and former MLA Madan Rathore. The BJP is likely to not name several of its ministers, whose term in Rajya Sabha is ending, as it may field them in the general elections, due in April-May.

# Police bandobast clogs Delhi

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The stations affected are: Rajiv Chowk, Mandi House, Central Secretariat, Patel Chowk, Udyog Bhawan, Janpath, Barakhamba Road, Lok Kalyan Marg, and Khan Market.

In Noida, many people use the Ghaziipur border road to travel to Delhi. The affected roads in the region connect the city to Bareilly, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Rishikesh, Dehradun, Mussoorie, Muradabad, and

Nainital. Commuters like Kritika Sharma reported being stuck in traffic jams despite leaving for the office as early as 6 am. Hence, it is advisable to avoid these roads. Additionally, there was a traffic jam on the DND

flyover. A traffic police officer noted that over two lakh people travel between Delhi and Gurugram each day during working hours and recommended commuters to use Metro train services.

# Now AAP cuts Congress to...

From Page 1

“Congress currently holds zero Lok Sabha seats in Delhi and zero seats in the Delhi assembly. Out of 250 wards, the Congress only won 9 seats in the 2022 MCD election. Even based on merit, the Congress party does not deserve a single seat according to available data. However, data alone is not the sole criterion. Out of alliance principles and as a sign of respect, we are prepared to offer one seat to the Congress. We are not announcing candidates today. We hope that seat-sharing talks for Delhi will be finalised soon so that we can begin our work. If no agreement is reached soon, we will announce candidates for the six seats in the next few days and initiate our campaign,” Pathak concluded. In the 2019 general elections, the BJP swept all seven seats in Delhi, with the Congress trailing behind and AAP

finishing third. However, AAP’s subsequent victories in the Delhi Assembly elections and municipal polls, along with its success in dislodging the Congress government in Punjab, have strengthened its position. Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely said Congress is the only party that is highly prepared to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. “Seats for Lok Sabha cannot be decided at press conferences. If compared, we are more prepared than any other party in Delhi this time. When it comes to the party’s performance, everyone knows the results of 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Congress was in second place in five seats,” Lovely said. Speaking about alliance with AAP in Delhi, Lovely reiterated that the Delhi Congress will follow whatever the senior leaders of AICC decide.

# Global pilgrims...

From Page 1

“With the local administration primarily focused on domestic demand management, we are closely monitoring this evolving landscape,” he said. Additionally, we are actively enhancing our product knowledge by planning familiarisation tours on the Ramayana circuit comprising destinations such as Chitrakoot. “NRIs are seeking guidance on travel arrangements, accommodations, and immersive experiences to make their visit to the Ram Mandir and Ayodhya memorable and spiritually fulfilling,” added Teetu Jain, Director of Coterie Tours Pvt Ltd. The Ayodhya airport, now called the Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister last December, will ensure international standard quality for visitors from abroad. The airport aims to cater to around 10 lakh passengers annually. Jain said not only Ayodhya but also the much-sought-after Ram Mandir has put the country on the global map. “This surge of interest reflects a deep connection that Indians living

abroad have to their roots and a desire to partake in the sacred atmosphere of this iconic religious site.” However, a section of tour operators dealing with inbound tourism feels that despite being a significant source of foreign revenue and job creation, the Overseas Promotion and Publicity scheme aimed at encouraging inbound tourists is being neglected. They mentioned that the budget for overseas promotion has been consistently declining over the past two years - from Rs 300 crore to Rs 100 crore, and now to Rs 3 crore in the interim budget, while eight foreign offices have been shut down, as highlighted by a recent Parliamentary panel report. The 15 destinations in the Ramayana circuit are Ayodhya, Shringverpur, and Chitrakoot in Uttar Pradesh, Sitamarhi, Buxar, and Darbhanga in Bihar, Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh, Nandigram in West Bengal, Mahendragiri in Odisha, Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh, Bhadrachalam in Telangana, Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, Hampi in Karnataka, and Nashik and Nagpur in Maharashtra.

# Indira, Nargis names...

From Page 1

Monetary reward for the Dadasaheb Phalke award, which is presented every year to an Indian film personality for their outstanding contribution to Indian cinema, has been increased from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 15 lakh. Besides, the prize money for the Swarn Kamal awards has been increased to Rs 3 lakh and to Rs 2 lakh for Rajat Kamal winners across categories. Earlier, the award money varied from category to category. Swarn Kamal is given in these categories -- best film, debut film, film providing wholesome entertainment, direction and children’s film. Rajat Kamal is given to winners of best feature film promoting national, social and environmental values, all the acting categories, best screenplay, music and other such categories. In another notable change, the award for ‘best animation film’ and ‘best

special effects’ have been clubbed under a new category named “best AVGC (animation, visual effects, gaming and comics) film” with two sub-categories. The “best audiography” category, which had three sub-categories honouring location sound recordist, sound designer and recordist of the final mixed track, will now be known as best sound design. The prize money, which has been raised to Rs 2 lakh from Rs 50,000, will be rewarded to the sound designer. A special jury award has been discontinued but the jury has sole discretion to award two special mentions in the feature film and non-feature film categories of the National Film Awards. In the non-feature film category, some segments have been discontinued while others have been merged together. And a new category for best script has been introduced.

# Ashok Chavan...

From Page 1

Thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, president Jagat Prakash Nadda and the BJP team in the State for welcoming him into the BJP, Chavan said, “In the state, as per traditions of Maharashtra, we all have worked together for public cause.” “I am joining the BJP today to work under the leadership of Modi ji and be part of the development of India and Maharashtra. I have always had development-outlook and worked with a positive approach,” Chavan said. “I will strengthen the BJP and we all will work together to get more seats... I have left the (Congress) party. Some supported me, some criticised me...I am not going to indulge in mudslinging. From today itself, I will work for BJP with the Prime Minister’s goal of ‘sabka saath, sabka vikas,’” Chavan said. On his part, Fadnavis said: “Chavan ji had conveyed to me that he wanted to be in the mainstream and work under the leadership of Narendra Modi. In the coming days, many of the leaders and workers close to him would join us.” Fadnavis said that

Chavan’s entry would give a major boost to the Maha Yuti (NDA) in Marathwada and Maharashtra. Chavan said that the decision to quit the Congress was a “personal” one. “It is true that the Congress has given me a lot...but at the same time, I too have contributed a lot to the Congress. As far as I am concerned, the Congress is a closed chapter,” he said. In a related development, the State Congress is apprehending that the entry of Chavan, who holds influence over a dozen MLAs out of the total 44 MLAs in the State Assembly, into the BJP may have negative fallout on its prospects in the RS polls in which the party would have won one seat in the normal course. Speculation has it that the Congress MLAs close to him may either quit the Congress and join the BJP or cross-vote against the party’s official candidate in the RS polls and in favour of the BJP which is planning to field one additional candidate in addition to the three seats that it is sure to win out of six seats for which the polls are being held.

# Farmers up the ante...

From Page 1

“In the two rounds of discussions, we agreed to many of their demands. However, there was no agreement on certain issues. The talks are ongoing,” Munda explained. He mentioned that the Centre has agreed to address many of their demands that can be fulfilled at the administrative level.

However, a policy guaranteeing an MSP requires a holistic approach, taking into consideration the views of all stakeholders, including State Governments, the minister said. “We need to examine how to formulate a law on MSP and what are the benefits and drawbacks of such a law,” Munda said. The meeting began at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26 around 6:30 pm on Monday and concluded just before midnight. Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-

Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal said the government proposed the formation of a committee to address issues related to legal guarantees for MSP, debt waiver, and the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission’s recommendations. “We will inform our farmers about what happened in the meeting,” he said. “It is our obligation to proceed towards Delhi,” he added when asked about the ‘Delhi Chalo’ march call. In addition to a legal guarantee for MSP, farmers are also demanding the

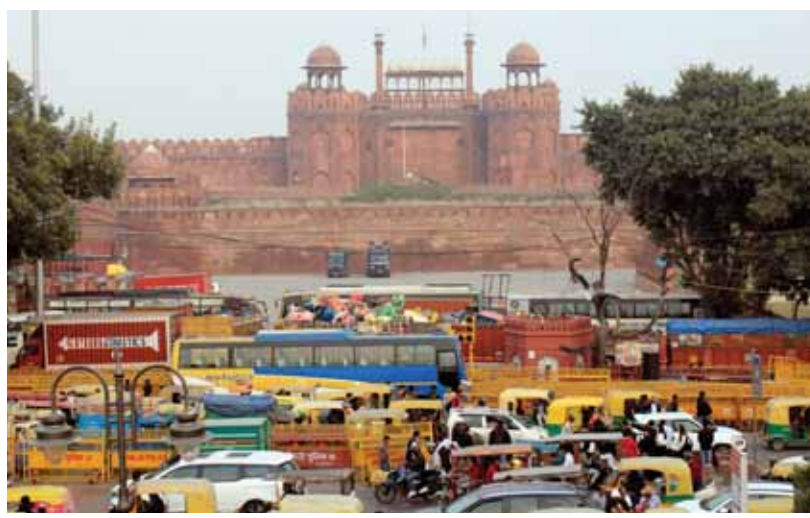
implementation of the Swaminathan Commission’s recommendations, pensions for farmers and farm laborers, farm debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases, “justice” for victims of the Lakhimpur Khairi violence, reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act - 2013, withdrawal from the World Trade Organisation, and compensation for families of farmers who died during the previous agitation, among other demands. Central Delhi has been placed under heavy security cover due to the farmers’ protest, with

personnel in anti-riot gear deployed strategically and metal and concrete barricades regulating access to several key roads, causing hardship to commuters. Some entry and exit gates of select Metro stations near important installations in the area have been shut, as prohibitory orders remain in force. The historic Red Fort complex has been temporarily closed to visitors due to security reasons. After violence erupted at the Shambhu border, the Delhi Police sealed the Tikri border on Tuesday. The border was

closed by blocking movement on both carriageways with five-foot-long cement blocks along with multiple layers of barricades. The Delhi Police also closed all entry and exit points of nearby streets and villages connecting the highway near Tikri Metro Station. However, metro services on the green line are still operational for commuting purposes. Special Commissioner of Police, Law and Order, Madhup Tiwari, visited the Tikri border to inspect the arrangements. “We have allowed traffic movement at the Tikri border until 3 pm.

Now we have allowed emergency services like ambulances and those walking towards Delhi to take the metro. We have foolproof security arrangements,” the Special CP said. On Tuesday, the Haryana police used drones to fire tear gas shells and monitor the protesting farmers. They prevented the mob from reaching near the barricades, pushing them back and deploying tear gas shells using drones to prevent any buildup near the barricades. The protesting farmers made repeated attempts on Tuesday to reach the barricades

near the Punjab-Haryana border set up by the police. Whenever a tear gas shell fired by the police hits the ground, the protestors quickly cover it with wet jute bags to mitigate the smoke. In Delhi, the police stated that the security arrangements are part of “Plan B” to handling any situation in case the protesting farmers, marching towards the national capital from neighboring states of Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, entered the city and attempted to reach Parliament.



Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

# Heavy security in Central Delhi over farmers protest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The central Delhi has been put under a heavy security cover in view of the farmers' protest, with personnel in anti-riot gears deployed strategically and metal and concrete barricades regulating access to several key roads, causing hardship to commuters. Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora visited the Tikri border on Tuesday to inspect the security arrangements put in place in view of the farmers' march to the national capital. Arora was accompanied by Special Commissioner, Law and Order, Madhup Tiwari

and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Jimmy Chiram. According to officials, more than 5,000 personnel of police and paramilitary forces have been deployed in the Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur border areas to maintain law and order. As the Delhi Police prepares to stop protesting farmers from entering the national capital, a senior officer directed personnel on ground that they "need not be defensive" if the agitators show aggression. Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Ravindra Yadav, who visited the fortified

Singhu border this evening, told police personnel and paramilitary jawans deployed there that if the farmers manage to enter Delhi "our whole operation will fail". He told the forces they need to act "logically" and by keeping their safety in mind. "If they are coming aggressively, we have to show more aggression. Then only we can stop them. If they are aggressive, we need not be defensive," he told them using a microphone and loudspeaker. "We have to fire tear gas shells, use lathis (baton) and save ourselves," the senior officer said. "This process may

keep running for a day." The main objective of the police is to stop the farmers from entering Delhi, Yadav said, adding they cannot be allowed to disturb law and order or indulge in violence. According to Delhi police, the security arrangements are part of "Plan B" to deal with any situation in case the protesting farmers, who are marching towards the national capital from the neighbouring states of Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, entered the city and tried to reach Parliament. All Parliament gates have been barricaded and extra

security personnel including from the paramilitary forces deployed around the building. The barricades installed near Parliament have been fitted with barred wire on top. Elaborate security arrangements have also been made at the Lok Kalyan Marg, where prime minister's residence is located, and the residences of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda. Apart from sealing three borders of Delhi -- Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur -- the Delhi Police has put up multiple layers of barricading at various roads leading to the

Parliament and the central part of Delhi. Arrangements have been made at the Vikas Marg -- that connects east Delhi to the central part of the national capital -- to place cement barricades and sand-loaded dumpers at the centre of the road. National Highway-9, heading towards Akshardham from Ghazipur, has been barricaded with cranes and heavy earthmovers. The police intensified the checking of vehicles to identify protestors trying to enter Delhi in commercial or private vehicles. The outer ring road heading

to the Red Fort has also been barricaded as police did not want to any take chances. During their last protest, a group of agitating farmers had barged into the central part of Delhi on January 26, 2021, creating a ruckus on the Republic Day. The Delhi Police on Monday imposed section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) in the entire city and completely secured its borders. Surveillance equipment such as drones and CCTV cameras are being utilised to monitor the border areas. A police officer said section 144 has already been imposed

all around the Delhi barring large gatherings and protests in the city. "If anyone tries to gather or hold any kind of demonstration in the central part of Delhi, they will be dealt with strictly," a police officer said. As precautionary measures, some entry and exit gates of select Metro stations near important installations in central Delhi have been shut. The gate number 1,2 and 5 of central secretariat were among them. The other stations are Rajiv Chowk, Mandi House, Patel Chowk, Udyog Bhawan, Janpath, Barakhamba Road and Khan Market.

## AAP rejects Centre proposal to turn Bawana stadium into makeshift jail



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has rejected the Centre's proposal to convert Bawana stadium into a makeshift jail in view of the farmers' march to the national capital on Tuesday, saying that the demands of the protesting farmers, who are marching towards Delhi despite closed and heavily secured state borders, are genuine and it is a constitutional right of every citizen to peacefully protest. In an order to the chief secretary Naresh Kumar, the Delhi home minister Kailash Gahlot has stated: "The demands of the farmers are genuine. Secondly, it is the constitutional right of every citizen to make a peaceful protest. It is therefore incorrect to arrest the farmers. The central

government should in fact invite them over for talks and try to find a solution of their genuine problems." Gahlot has added that the farmers are "annadata" (cultivator) and treating them in this way by arresting them would be like rubbing salt into their wounds. "We cannot be party to this decision of the central government. Hence, approval cannot be given for converting a stadium into a jail," the order added. In November 2020, during the previous version of 'Dilli Chalo' protest by farmers unions, AAP-ruled Delhi government had denied the permission to allow the Delhi Police to use nine stadiums as temporary jails and detention centres to detain farmers protesting against the three farm laws while arguing that the "Non-violent protest is every Indian's constitutional right." The farmers were later provided space at Burari open grounds to protest where only a small section of tractors had moved. The farmers remained camped at the Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri border points for more than a year until the farm laws were withdrawn by the Union government in November 2021.

## Security, traffic diversions cause hardship to villagers



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As agitating farmers head to the national capital, villagers residing along the border with Haryana are facing inconvenience, with tight security arrangements and traffic diversions making daily commuting difficult. Many are also worried about a possible face-off between protesters and police on the heavily barricaded entry roads. "Farmers are coming from Haryana and Punjab and no locals are involved, but due to such protests we face difficulties doing our business as police do not allow us to open our shops," said Devendra Singh, who runs an eatery near Tikri border Metro station. People are also facing hardships due to traffic

chaos caused by diversions from different routes from Mundka of Delhi towards Haryana. "There are many schools in villages. Children are facing a lot of difficulty in reaching home. If police have diverted traffic, they must deploy someone to manage it as well," said Surender Kumar, a resident of Tikri Kalan village. Farmers started heading towards the national capital from different villages of Punjab and Haryana on their tractor-trolleys, loaded with dry rations, water-proof sheets and mattresses. The multi-layer security arrangements to prevent the entry of protesters in Delhi have restricted the movement of locals. "We have nothing to do with any protest, but to reach home

after work we are asked to show our ID cards at more than three different places," said Raja Ram, who works as a labourer and is a resident of Tikri Kalan. The Delhi Police has been preparing to stop the farmers from entering the national capital as a meeting between the agitating groups and Union government in Chandigarh yielded no results. According to officials, more than 5,000 police personnel, including paramilitary forces, have been deployed in border areas -- Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur -- to maintain law and order. The Delhi Police on Monday enforced section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) in the entire city and completely secured the city's borders. "We are fully prepared to deal with any kind of law and order situation. Multi-layered arrangements are there to stop farmers from entering Delhi," a senior police officer said. Surveillance technologies such as drones and CCTV cameras are being utilised to monitor the border areas. Several farmers associations, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, had called for a protest on February 13 to demand a law guaranteeing Minimum Support Price



## Delhi Metro shuts some gates over security

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro regulated passenger entry and exit at nine stations on Tuesday by shutting some gates in view of the farmers' proposed march to the national capital. The commuters were allowed to enter or exit these stations through other gates. "Official sources said the gates have been shut as part of security arrangements as requested by the Delhi Police. The stations where one or more gates are closed are: Rajiv Chowk, Mandi House, Central Secretariat, Patel Chowk, Udyog Bhawan, Janpath, Barakhamba Road, Lok Kalyan Marg and Khan Market, a senior official said. One gate was closed at Khan Market station, the official added. At Central Secretariat Metro Station, a staffer said around 1 PM that gates no. 1, 2 and 5 were closed due to "security reasons" while gates no. 3 and 4

were functional. A poster has been put up near Automatic Fare Collection (AFC) kiosks leading to exit gates towards the Rail Bhawan roundabout. A massive deployment of police and paramilitary personnel besides multi-layered barricading are in place to seal the national capital borders at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur to prevent the protesting farmers from entering the city during their march. The Delhi Metro later also posted on X, informing passengers that a few gates may be closed as per security instructions. The central Delhi has been put under a heavy security cover in view of the farmers' protest, with personnel in anti-riot gears deployed strategically and metal and concrete barricades regulating access to several key roads, causing hardship to commuters.

## CJI: I will accommodate lawyers stuck in traffic jams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Taking note of the massive traffic jams across the national capital region on account of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march, Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud on Tuesday said he will accommodate lawyers if they are stuck in traffic. If anyone has a problem due to the traffic situation, "we will adjust," a bench comprising the CJI and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra told lawyers at the outset of the day's proceedings.



Farmers from Punjab on Tuesday morning commenced their 'Delhi Chalo' march to press for their demands, after a meeting with two Union ministers over their demands, including legal guarantee to MSP for crops, remained inconclusive. The farmers plan to head to Delhi from the Ambala-Shambhu, Khanauri-Jind and the Dabwali borders. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have announced that more than 200 farmer unions will head to Delhi to press the Centre to accept their demands. The farmers' proposed march has led to massive deployment of police and paramilitary personnel besides multi-layered barricading in Delhi to seal the national capital borders at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur to prevent protesting farmers from entering the city. The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) on Tuesday requested Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud to take action against "erring farmers" for trying to enter Delhi forcibly in a bid to create "nuisance" and disturb the daily life of citizens. Farmers from Punjab commenced their 'Delhi Chalo' march to press their demands, including a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for their crops, after a meeting between their representatives and two Union ministers, remained deadlocked.

# SKM demands MSP, slams police action in letter to PM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding Minimum Support Price for crops, slamming action on the farmers' 'Dilli Chalo' march and accusing the government of trying to "project" division among farmer bodies.

It urged all like-minded farmer organisations to unite and take part in the February 16 Gramin Bharat Bandh called by the central trade unions. The statement comes on a day the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation, spearheaded by SKM splinter group Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha,

faced tear gas shells near Ambala and Jind protesters tried to break past police barricades set up by the Haryana Police to stop them from heading to the national capital. Said the SKM, "Your government and that of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh led by the BJP have resorted to repressive measures on

peaceful protests of farmers and unleashed lathi-charge, rubber bullets and tear gas shells, injuring many and inflict an atmosphere of terror on common farmers." The SKM mentioned their demands including MSP for all crops based on the Swaminathan formula of C2+50 (input cost of capital+50 per cent), legal

guarantee of procurement, debt waiver, no hike in electricity tariff and no smart metres. They also demanded free 300 units power for farming and for domestic use and for shops, comprehensive crop insurance, and a hike in pensions to Rs 10,000 per month among others. "Your ministers have been hesitant to talk with the SKM

while being more interested in talking with other platforms to project that the farmers' movement is divided in order to escape from your constitutional responsibility of solving the problems that distress the farmers," the SKM said. It said the Union government's plans of obstructing and repressing the 'Dilli Chalo'

agitation is regrettable. "The administration has barricaded the borders by erecting concrete barricades, iron nails, barbed wires on the Highways in Punjab border. It has suspended internet, imposed section 144 and created an atmosphere of terror, thus treating protesters as if they are enemies of the country," they said.

## Hundreds of commuters stuck at Ghazipur border

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Arun Singh from Uttarakhnad, on his way to visit his ailing father at a hospital here, was feeling helpless after being stuck for hours in heavy traffic at the Ghazipur border. "I'm travelling from Uttarakhnad to meet my 78-year-old father who has been admitted in the Lok Nayak Hospital... My family and I have been stuck here since 11 am. It is an extremely frustrating situation for us and we feel angry and helpless," Singh said.

Like Singh, hundreds of commuters are stuck at the Ghazipur border which has been fortified with barbed wires, dumpers loaded with sand, and iron spikes to stop protesting farmers from entering the national capital. Families travelling with kids are distressed as children are becoming restless without food and water. Besides, women commuters are facing difficulty in looking for public restrooms amid the heavy traffic. Kanika, another commuter at the border, is tense that she would miss her flight.

## BJP attacks AAP for Question Hour removal, to demand dissolution of House

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP Legislature Party in the Delhi Assembly on Tuesday expressed displeasure that the Question and Answer Hour has been arbitrarily removed in the Budget session starting from February 15 and said the party will meet the President to demand the dissolution of the Assembly. Making this assertion here, Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said even in previous assembly sessions, members were consistently deprived of their constitutional right to ask

questions. The Kejriwal government is running the assembly in a dictatorial and undemocratic manner, he said. In view of this situation, we will meet the President and demand the dissolution of the Assembly because the rationale of the Assembly has ended, and its existence is in danger, Bidhuri said. Before the assembly session, a meeting of the BJP legislature party was held under the chairmanship of Bidhuri in which a resolution was passed that in view of the unconstitutional and

undemocratic attitude of the Kejriwal government, nothing is expected from this government. This government is neither accountable to the Assembly, nor to the opposition, nor to the public. The government has taken away the constitutional right to ask questions from the members of the opposition as well as the ruling party in the Assembly. Members in the Assembly cannot raise any questions on the policies or actions of the government nor can they raise the voice of the people of their area.

## LG nod to hiring 376 retired officials on contract basis

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena has approved engagement of 376 retired officials on contract basis against the vacant sanctioned posts in regular courts for a period of one year or till the posts are filled up, a Raj Niwas official said on Tuesday. Saxena had earlier approved the filling up of 1,251 regular posts in the courts through DSSSB and the process for filling them up is underway. These 376 contractual workers comprise 30 per cent of the total vacant

posts of 1,251, the official said. A total of 112 of them will be recruited as Personal Assistants, 254 Junior Judicial Assistant, and 10 as Peon/Orderly/Dak Peon. The Law Department of the Delhi government submitted that it had received a letter, dated December 7, last year from the Office of Principal District and Sessions Judge (Headquarters), through which it was informed that the direct recruitment process for the vacant posts is underway through Delhi Subordinate Services Selection Board (DSSSB).

# Muft Bijli Yojana to boost solar power

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to boost solar power and sustainable progress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced that his Government is launching the 'PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana' which aims to light up one crore households by providing up to 300 units of free electricity every month. The project would entail an investment of over Rs 75,000 crore, he said.

"In order to further sustainable development and people's wellbeing, we are launching the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana. This project, with an investment of over Rs 75,000 crore, aims to light up 1 crore households by providing up to 300 units of free electricity every month," the prime minister said on X.

From substantive subsidies, which will be given directly to people's bank accounts, to heavily concessional bank loans, the central government will ensure that there is no cost burden on the people, he said. All stakeholders will be integrated to a National Online Portal, the prime minister added.



Modi said in order to popularise this scheme at the grassroots, urban local bodies and panchayats shall be incentivised to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions.

"At the same time, the scheme will lead to more income, lesser power bills and employment generation for people," the prime minister said. "Let's boost solar power and sustainable progress. I urge all residential consumers, especially youngsters, to strengthen the PM — Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana by applying at — <https://pmsuryaghar.Gov.In>," Modi said.

# Two BJP members did not miss single sitting of 17 Lok Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP members Mohan Mandavi and Bhagirath Choudhary have earned the unique distinction of not missing a single sitting of the 17th Lok Sabha, which held a total of 274 sittings during its term. Coincidentally, the two first-term members got seats adjacent to each other in the House.

"I do the job assigned to me with utmost responsibility. I represent Kanker, a tribal region of Chhattisgarh, and had attended the House even during the COVID-19 pandemic," Mandavi said.

According to data shared by PRS Legislative, Choudhary (MP from Ajmer in Rajasthan) and Mandavi clocked a 100 per



cent attendance during the 17th Lok Sabha, which on an average witnessed 79 per cent attendance during its tenure. Mandavi said he and Choudhary had seats next to each other in Lok Sabha. BJP member from Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh Pushpendra Singh Chandel was the most active member in Parliament having participated in 1,194

debates in the 17th Lok Sabha, followed by Kuldeep Rai Sharma (833 debates) from Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The PRS Legislative considers a member taking part in discussion on bills, raising issues during Zero Hour, special mentions and association with issues raised by other members under the category of 'participation in debates'.

BSP member Malook Nagar (Bijnor) participated in 582 debates followed by DMK member D NV Senthilkumar from Dharmapuri (307 debates), RSP member N K Premachandran from Kollam (265), NCP-SCP member from Baramati Supriya Sule (248). Actor-politicians Sunny Deol (BJP) and Shatrughan Sinha (TMC) were among nine Lok Sabha members who did not participate in any debate.

BJP members Ramesh Jigajinagi, B N Bachegowda, Pradhan Baruah, Anant Kumar Hegde and V Sreenivasa Prasad, TMC member Dibyendu Adhikari and BSP member Atul Kumar Singh were the other members who did not participate in debates and discussions in the 17th Lok Sabha.

# Congress condemns BJP for stopping farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday condemned the BJP Governments at the Centre and in States for stopping protesting farmers from marching to Delhi and promised to fulfil their key demand of a law guaranteeing MSP for various crops once the INDIA bloc comes to power.

Supporting the farmers' agitation, the opposition party asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to directly talk to them and provide justice. "Farmer brothers, today is a historic day! Congress has decided to give a legal guarantee of MSP to every farmer on crops as per the Swaminathan Commission.

"This step will change the lives of 15 crore farmer families by ensuring their prosperity. This is the first guarantee of Congress on the path of justice. #KisaanNYAYGuarantee," Rahul Gandhi said in a post in Hindi.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused the Modi government of crushing the voice of farmers after "failing" to fulfil the promises made to them over 10 years. "If Congress comes to power at the Centre (after the Lok Sabha polls), it

will ensure legal guarantee to MSP in the interest of farmers. It is our first guarantee," Kharge said during Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Ambikapur district of Chhattisgarh.

Party general secretary Randeep Surjewala said the Congress supports the farmers' agitation and questioned why authorities were resorting to "dictatorial" behaviour by putting up barricades and converting Delhi into a "police cantonment".

Referring to the barricading and fortification of Delhi borders, he asked whether the central government considered it as an attack from some enemy country. He said the farmers were only demanding the implementation of the promises made to them two years ago during their earlier agitation like a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Price (MSP) and waiving debts.

Surjewala warned that this was "just the beginning" of the stir as only farmers from Haryana and Punjab were participating right now and said soon farmers from across the country would join the agitation.

"Our only demand is that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should directly talk to the farmers and provide them 'nyay' (justice)," he said,



adding that this is what Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi are fighting for. The Congress leader asked whether the farmers did not have the right and freedom to come to the national capital in support of their demands.

"Where should the farmers go if not to the prime minister and the government of the time to seek justice for their rightful demands. What is the government afraid of? Is there an attack on the government by an enemy?" he said.

Thousands of farmers were heading to Delhi on Tuesday from neighbouring states on a call by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to press the Centre to accept their demands, including the enactment of a law to guarantee MSP for crops.

"Barbed wire, teargas from drones, nails and guns... Everything is arranged. The dictatorial Modi government is trying to curb the voice of farmers," the Congress chief said in a post on X. "Remember how the farmer was defamed by calling him 'andolanjevi' and 'parasite' and 750 farmers lost their lives," he said in his post in Hindi.

In 10 years, Kharge said, the Modi government has "broken" three promises of doubling farmers' income by 2022, the implementation of the Swaminathan report and the grant of legal status to MSP.

Extending full support to the farmers' movement, Kharge said the Congress will raise its voice for justice to farmers. "We will not be afraid, will not bow down," Kharge said in his post.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said as part of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Rahul Gandhi today interacted with farmers at Ambikapur Mandi. "It is most appropriate that he do so today, just as farmers — especially from Punjab and Haryana — have marched to New Delhi to protest the non-fulfilment of assurances given to them by the Prime Minister when he withdrew the three black farm laws in November 2021," he said.

The methods that are being used by the Delhi Police and the Haryana Police "to harass the farmers and deter them from exercising their legitimate rights is most undemocratic and is a reflection of democracy, Modi-style", he alleged.



# 23 students bag 100 score in JEE-Main 2024

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Twenty three candidates have bagged the perfect 100 score in the engineering entrance exam JEE-Main 2024 with a maximum of them being from Telangana, the National Testing Agency announced on Tuesday.

Over 11.70 lakh candidates had appeared for the first edition of the crucial exam. Among the candidates who secured an NTA score of 100, seven are from Telangana, two from Haryana, three each from Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, two from Delhi and one each from Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. All of them are males.

According to NTA officials, NTA score is not the same as percentage of marks obtained but normalised scores.

NTA scores are normalised scores across multi-session papers and are based on the relative performance of all those who appeared for the examination in one session, a senior official explained. The marks obtained are converted into a scale ranging from 100 to 0 for each session of examinees, the official added.

According to the officials, a Central Control Room was opened to monitor and facilitate the smooth conduct of the examination on the ground. "2 national coordinators, 18 regional coordinators, 303 city coordinators, 1,083 observers, 150 technical observers, and 162 deputy observers were deployed. Live CCTV Surveillance was planned in all examination centres to curb malpractice in the examination," the official said. "The NTA also made arrangements for live viewing

of remote locations of all examination centres from the Control Room located in the NTA premises of New Delhi. Recording of CCTV Systems was also done," the official added.

Mobile network jammers were installed at all the centres to prevent students from cheating during the exam by using mobile phones or any other electronic device. "The latest 5G jammers were installed at all examination centres for the first time," the official explained.

The examination was held in Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. The exam was also conducted outside India in Manama, Doha, Dubai, Kathmandu, Muscat, Riyadh, Sharjah, Singapore, Kuwait City, Kuala Lumpur, Lagos/Abuja, Colombo, Jakarta, Moscow, Ottawa, Port Louis, Bangkok, and Washington DC. It was conducted in Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong, and Oslo for the first time.

While the first edition of the exam was conducted in January-February, the second edition is scheduled in April. Based on the results of JEE-Mains Paper 1 and Paper 2, the candidates will be shortlisted to appear for the JEE-Advanced exam, which is a one-stop exam to get admission into the 23 premier Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).

After both sessions of JEE (Main)-2024 Examination, the ranks of the candidates will be released taking into consideration the best of the two NTA Scores in accordance with the policy already made.

# SC collegium recommends appointment of 13 additional HC judges as permanent judges

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud on Tuesday recommended appointment of 13 additional judges of three high courts as permanent judges.

The collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and B R Gavai, in a meeting held today recommended the names of Justices Boppana Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Chakravarthi and Tallapragada Mallikarjuna Rao for appointment as permanent judges of the Andhra Pradesh High Court against two existing vacancies.

Additional Judge Justice Duppala Venkata Ramanan's name has been recommended as a permanent judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court against one existing vacancy.

"On February 24, 2023, the collegium of the High Court of Andhra Pradesh



unanimously recommended that the three Additional Judges whose names are set out above be appointed as permanent Judges of that High Court. The Chief Minister and the Governor of Andhra Pradesh

concurrent with the above recommendation.

"A Committee of two judges of the Supreme Court constituted by the Chief Justice of India in terms of the Resolution dated October 26, 2017 of the Supreme Court collegium has assessed the judgments of the above Additional Judges. The Committee has rated the quality of their judgments as 'good,' the collegium said.

In another decision, the collegium has recommended the appointment of 10 additional judges of the Punjab and Haryana High Court as permanent Judges.

The judges whose names have been recommended are — Justices Kuldeep Tiwari, Gurbir Singh, Deepak Gupta, Amarjot Bhatti, Ritu Tagore, Manisha Batra, Harpreet Kaur Jeewan, Sukhvinder Kaur, Sanjiv Berry, and Vikram Aggarwal.

# Share of women receiving transplants rises: Data

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indicating a positive trend, albeit at a slow pace, while over 80 per cent of the 36,640 transplants between 1995 and 2021 were performed on men, the share of women receiving transplants has steadily increased since 2019.

Government data shows that the proportion of female recipients rose from 27.6 per cent in 2019 to nearly 30 per cent in 2022, reflecting a promising shift to inclusivity and gender equity in healthcare access.

The data shared by Minister of State for Health S P Singh Baghel in response to a Lok Sabha inquiry recently reveals that 29,695 transplants were conducted on men compared to 6,945 on women, translating to a ratio of about 4:1.

"However, the share of women receiving transplants increased from 27.6 per cent in 2019 to nearly 30 per cent in 2022," said the Minister.

He was replying to a query posed by YSR Congress Party MP Kuruva Gorantla Madhav who had asked if the government has taken



cognisance of the fact that between 1995 and 2021, four out of five organ recipients have been men in the country and what are the steps taken to address the issue.

In his response, Baghel said the government has implemented the National Organ Transplant Programme under which steps have been taken to raise awareness on organ donation.

In order to narrow down the trend of gender disparity in organ transplants, the Ministry of Health has been conducting regular awareness and sensitisation sessions, he said. However, it is not easy owing

to several socio-cultural factors in the patriarchal societies in countries like India that keep women at a disadvantage when it comes to organ donations.

In fact, Chennai-based urologist Dr Jaishan Philips on X (formerly Twitter) posted that "When a woman is a kidney recipient, the person who donates is usually a sister, mother or daughter. Most women are ready to offer their kidneys to their ailing husbands to save their lives, but the converse seldom happens. Scratch the veneer of democracy and modernity in India and you will find that we

are still a feudal, casteist, misogynistic, and patriarchal community."

As many felt that much is to do with the social conditioning where women are considered as a symbol of sacrifice around whose welfare of the entire family depends.

Dr Sunil Shroff, urologist and managing trustee of MOHAN Foundation, an NGO that promotes and facilitates organ donation talked about a recent report published by the Foundation, echoing the Government's data.

It stated that 80 per cent of live organ donors in India are women, while they constitute only 18.9 per cent of organ recipients. The report is based on a research paper published in the Experimental and Clinical Transplantation Journal in 2021. According to their findings, for every woman who underwent an organ transplant between 1995 and 2021, four men went through the same procedure. That is, of the 36,640 donations during this period, only 6,945 (18.9%) were women recipients.

To ensure that the burden of organ donations does not fall unfairly on women, transplant surgeons suggest cadaver transplants cadaver transplants ie on organs harvested from dead bodies instead of live transplants.



# Integrate Ayush awareness into school curricula, Ministry told

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Appreciating the Union Ayush Ministry for its efforts to establish 12,500 Health and Wellness Centres, now called Arogya Mandirs, which align with the universal health program objectives, a parliamentary committee has urged the Government to follow China's lead in integrating the Ayush system with poverty alleviation initiatives to enhance community engagement.

The committee also recommended integrating Ayush awareness into school curricula, emphasising prevention over treatment to minimise knowledge barriers between Ayush and modern medicine.

In its report "Review of National Ayush Mission in India", presented in Parliament recently, Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare said, "facilitating a dialogue among health providers from various systems becomes imperative for optimising patient outcomes. Substantial reforms in Indian medical education are essential to instil in medical students and practitioners an attitude supportive of the integration of modern medicine and traditional medicine."

Additionally, investing in robust research and development, enhancing educational institutions and promoting awareness will contribute to establishing Ayush as a viable and integral part of the healthcare system, the report stated.

"Physicians from both systems can work together to develop comprehensive treatment plans for patients, considering both Indian and Western medical perspectives," it said.

The committee recommended the ministry ensure there is at least one specialist practitioner in Ayurveda, homoeopathy, yoga or Siddha in these co-located facilities.

"The committee hopes that this initiative may result in integrating the Ayush system of medicine for managing chronic conditions like respiratory ailments, digestive problems, and musculoskeletal disorders," the report said.

The panel also emphasised developing standardised protocols for Ayush interventions, stating that it can ensure data consistency and enable robust clinical research.

Data gathered and generated in centres should be recorded and published.

The committee flagged concerns raised over the high metal content in the Ayush drugs while acknowledging the measures taken by the ministry in pharmacovigilance.

To accentuate these measures, it recommended that the ministry further strengthen regulatory frameworks by developing user-friendly systems for healthcare professionals and consumers to report adverse events related to Ayush medicines. Also, regular post-marketing surveillance of Ayush medicines should be conducted to monitor real-world safety and efficacy. This provides ongoing data for continuous improvement of quality.

Manipur to 'deport' those who came after 1961: CM

PTI ■ IMPHAL 1961 as the base year for determining the "native status" of residents of the state for effective implementation of the inner line permit. "In order to deport illegal immigrants, the foreign country concerned must accept them as their bonafide citizens. If the foreign country does not recognise the immigrants as their citizens, how will they be deported?" Pradip Phanjoubam, a political analyst, told PTI. Naga leader and Forum for Restoration of Peace convenor Ashang Kashar said deportation cannot be done by the Manipur government alone. "Identification of immigrants is crucial. Those who would be identified as illegal immigrants should not have the rights enjoyed by the original inhabitants. For instance, they should not have voting rights," Kashar told PTI. The decision to adopt 1961 as the base year for LLP implementation is a "welcome step towards solving issues confronting the state", Phanjoubam said. "But many of those are living in

the state over several decades. They have become naturalised citizens. In case of deportation, there are legal implications that need to be considered," he said.

Corrigendum In the UFR ad of M/s. Superior Finlease Ltd. which published on 13.02.2024, where in point 8 under Particular should be read as "Earning per Share (of Re. 1/- each)" instead of Earning per Share (of Re. 10/- each). Sorry for this inconvenience.

WITHDRAWAL OF PUBLICATION OF APPENDIX IV-A DATED 08.02.2024 ISSUED UNDER RULE 8(6) READ WITH RULE 9(1) AND PROVISIO THERETO, UNDER THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 ("THE ACT"). Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s), that Appendix IV-A Dated 08.02.2024 published by the undersigned in THE PIONEER - NEW DELHI - ENGLISH and RASHTRIYA SAHARA - NEW DELHI - HINDI, both dated 12.02.2024, in respect of the sale of the Mortgaged Property being MUNICIPAL NO. XVI/936 (NEW) BUILT UP ENTIRE FIRST FLOOR, ENTIRE SECOND FLOOR, ENTIRE THIRD FLOOR WITH ITS TERRACE/ROOF RIGHTS AND ABOVE UPTO SKY, ALONG WITH PROPORTIONATE UNDIVIDED SHARE IN THE LAND, COMPRISED IN KHASRA NO. 2444/1215/1140, GALI No. -2, BLOCK - QQ, SITUATED AT NAIWALA, KAROL BAGH, NEW DELHI - 110006, stands withdrawn with immediate effect, without prejudice to the rights of the undersigned.

Public Notice This is to inform the general public that M/s Raj Industries through its prop. Mr. Ajay Kumar Singh is the sole owner of Property bearing no. 40, area measuring 280.0 sq. mtrs., situated in Block B of Sector 8, NOIDA, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar NOIDA. This ownership was legally acquired through a Transfer Cum Sale Deed dated 07.04.2021 vide doc no. 1956, executed by M/s SS Engineering works. The above said owners have misplaced the Original Transfer cum Sale Deed dated 12-02-2007 Doc. No.72 executed by Mr. Dev Raj Pahja in favour of M/s Alok Udyog. Anyone who finds the above-mentioned documents, kindly handover the same to the Manager of HDFC Bank Ltd. Moti Nagar, M/s Raj Industries through its prop. Mr. Ajay Kumar Singh is currently in the process of mortgaging the aforementioned property with HDFC Bank Ltd. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 7 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 7-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 7-day period by contacting Law Firm: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline: +910120-3101683/456288; e-mail: accounts@vsnl.net

Rungta Irrigation Limited. Regd. Office: 101, Pragati Tower 26, Rajendra Place, New Delhi 110008. Tel: 011-40453330,31,32, E-mail: cs@rungtairrigation.in, Website: www.rungtairrigation.in. CIN : L74899DL1986PLC023934. Statement of Standalone Unaudited Financial Results for the Quarter and Nine Months ended 31-12-2023. (Rs. in Lakhs, Unless Otherwise Stated)

Place : NEW DELHI S/d Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited Authorized officer

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION, RAYAGADA. e-mail:- eephd.rgda.od@nic.in, eephdrgda@gmail.com. NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB) NO. EEPHDYAYAGADA-61 / 2023-24 DT.06.02.2024

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE: SUNDARGARH AT/PO-SANKARA, SUNDARGARH-770020, E-mail address-serw\_sundargarh@yahoo.com. No. Tender Online - RWCCESNG - 54 of 2023-24, Letter No. 445 /Dtd. 12.02.2024. e-Procurement NOTICE

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## The long and short of it

### Rahul Gandhi shortens his Nyay Yatra route as political dynamics change in western UP

Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family, has cut short his Nyay Yatra route in response to the shifting political dynamics in western Uttar Pradesh. The decision to modify his itinerary reflects the nuanced strategy in a rapidly evolving electoral landscape ahead of the general elections. Rahul had launched the Nyay Yatra to reach out to people and highlight the Congress' commitment to social justice, harmony and welfare initiatives. The yatra, spanning several districts, was intended to mobilise support and galvanise party workers for the Lok Sabha elections. Being one of the most populous States, UP was crucial to this yatra. However, RLD leader Jayant Choudhary has thrown a spanner in the works, which has altered the political situation in western UP and prompted Rahul to rethink his approach. The originally planned Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Uttar Pradesh, set from February 16 to February 26 before moving to Rajasthan, has been truncated to avoid the State's western region. The move was



necessitated following indications of a potential alliance between the Rashtriya Lok Dal and the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. RLD chief Jayant Choudhary has seemingly decided to join the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance for the 2024 elections even though there has been no formal announcement to this effect. The UP leg of the yatra will now conclude on February 21, bypassing western UP and transiting into Madhya Pradesh. While the official explanation attributes this change to the UP Board exam schedule, the underlying reason lies in the unexpected alignment shift of the RLD, a constituent of the INDIA bloc, with the BJP. However, it's worth noting that

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav is expected to join the Nyay Yatra in Rae Bareilly district on February 20 and participate in a road show.

For Rahul and the Congress, navigating the complexities of the political scenario in western UP requires a nuanced understanding of local dynamics, grassroots mobilisation efforts and targeted outreach initiatives. While the decision to modify the Nyay Yatra route may represent a tactical adjustment, the broader strategic objectives of the campaign remain unchanged – to mobilise support and energise party cadres. In the run-up to the elections, political parties across the spectrum are intensifying their efforts to woo voters. From high-profile rallies and public addresses to grassroots outreach programmes and social media campaigns, leaders are leaving no stone unturned in their quest for electoral success. The Nyay Yatra was part of this strategy by the grand old party. But as they say, 'politics is the art of the impossible'. As Rahul and other leaders navigate the complex terrain of electoral politics, they must remain attuned to the pulse of the electorate and responsive to shifting political dynamics. The ability to adapt, innovate and connect with voters on issues that matter most to them will ultimately determine the outcome of the elections and shape the future trajectory of Indian politics.

## PICTALK



Devotees light lamps on the occasion of 'Ganesh Jayanti' at Latashil Ganesh Mandir, in Guwahati

PTI

## The profound power of love

### From igniting passion to fostering companionship, love is the driving force behind our deepest desires and aspirations

What could be more important than love? Nothing like love to make life that much more meaningful and worthwhile. It imbues it with that extra and special meaning. Things become that much more precious because you have this person in your life. And because she/he is there, life is truly worth living and you want things to be as close to perfect as possible. Even when one is a positive thinker with a positive outlook on things, love makes it infinitely more so. Love is truly a many splendoured thing. It changes everything. Like every time there is a world shaking or life changing invention. This is akin to that. It makes the world go around. When you hear music you think of the other person. You think of how it would be without her and how lucky you are that she is there. How beautiful that she is there. It works the same way in other art forms. Cinema becomes compelling because of the love story or sometimes the love triangle, a novel creates empathy and becomes a page turner because you want to know



what happens to the love interest, a painting – the nubile nude lying there languorously might be your lover. Opera of course has it as its life blood. It makes the rainbows more intense and the clouds more ethereal – fleecy white clouds scattered at random, the sky more azure blue. A fundamental human need is not to be alone. Which is why solitary confinement is such a feared punishment. And love provides the most special companionship of all. You get up in the morning and you know the other person is there in your life. To complete it. To make the sunsets and the dawns more beautiful. You live not just for yourself but also for another human being who is not your par-

ent and in a different way. Everything you do you think of its implication for the other person too. Your perspective changes as does your thinking and way of relating. The downside is the devastation that follows when one leaves the other which both thought could never happen, not so long ago. Or even the parting for a little while. You miss the other one so much. It's hard to breathe though you may have been perfectly happy before. Half the love songs are about the longing for love. The longing for the loved one when she is not there. No bigger muse than separation for poems and creativity. Falling in love fundamentally changes your life and is a coup de foudre when it is at



NIDHI DALMIA

first sight. "Would you believe in a love at first sight? Yes, I'm certain that it happens all the time. What would you do if I turned off the light, I can't tell you, But I know it's mine..." as the Beatles sang. Love, the essence of life's beauty, infuses existence with profound significance. It elevates moments, rendering them precious with the presence of a cherished companion. Love, akin to a revolutionary invention, alters perspectives, making every aspect of life vibrant. It intertwines with art, music, and literature, enriching them with its essence. Love fulfills the innate human need for companionship, making each sunrise more meaningful. Yet, its departure brings profound sorrow, amplifying the ache of absence. Nonetheless, love's impact is undeniable, transforming lives with its enchanting magic, whether through enduring bonds or fleeting encounters. Love, indeed, remains life's most extraordinary treasure. (The writer is an author and entrepreneur; views are personal)

## Tamil politics: The rise of Thalapathy Vijay

### Thalapathy Vijay, a prominent actor, has ventured into politics with the formation of a party. Can he make a difference in Tamil politics?



KALYANI SHANKAR

Thalapathy Vijay, a prominent Tamil actor, has ventured into politics with the formation of his party, Thamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam. Can he make a difference in Tamil politics?

Tamil superstar Thalapathy Vijay launched his political party, Thamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam, last week. He declared that his party will only contest the 2026 Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu, not the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The question is whether he will succeed.

After the launch of his party, Vijay said, "I have one more film I have signed, and I will finish it and ultimately involve myself in politics. I have been preparing myself for my political journey for a long time. I will devote myself to the people of Tamil Nadu. This is the only way I can give back to my people." This is a typical argument that many politicians use to present themselves as genuine dogooders.

Successful actor-turned-politicians in Tamil Nadu included M.G. Ramachandran, J. Jayalalitha, M. Karunanidhi, C.N. Annadurai, and Captain Vijayakanth. Shivaji Ganesan, Sarathkumar, Napoleon, and S.S. Rajendran was unsuccessful.

MGR had a strong base in the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and got the party votes till he launched AIADMK in 1972. Jayalalitha, on the other hand, was known for her anti-DMK stance and gained popularity on that platform.

Kamal Haasan founded his political party, Makkal Needhi Maiam, in 2018. Unfortunately, his party won no seats in the 2019 and 2021 elections. On the other hand, Vijaykannth showed promise at the start of his political career in 2005 but could not sustain it. He passed away recently. Thalapathy (General) Vijay is a well-known actor from the Udayar community and a Christian. He is rumoured to earn around 150 crores per film and faces little competition from famous actors like Ajith. Rajnikant has declined his political entry after three decades of speculation. Kamal Hassan's party has not picked up.



Vijay plans to run for the position of chief minister in the 2026 Assembly elections. He has sufficient time to gain the public's trust as an alternative to the ruling DMK and AIADMK. His primary opponent in the generational shift is Udayanidhi, a minister and the son of the current chief minister, M.K. Stalin.

Vijay's political party plans to adopt a political philosophy incorporating the ideas of three significant figures. While B.R. Ambedkar advocated for Dalits' rights, Periyar was a well-known social reformer. Kamaraj was an advocate for the backward class. Notably, Vijay has decided not to use the term "Dravida" in his party's name. Vijay aims to win voters' support from different political parties, including the ruling DMK and the primary opposition AIADMK. The others in the race are Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), PMK, Makkal Needhi Maiam, and VCK. He must lure voters from all these parties to win the election.

In the past, Vijay's political support included the India Against Corruption movement in 2011. He also backed the pro-jallikattu protests in



VIJAY PLANS TO RUN FOR THE POST OF CHIEF MINISTER IN THE 2026 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. HE HAS SUFFICIENT TIME TO GAIN THE PUBLIC'S TRUST AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE RULING DMK AND AIADMK

2017. He met with the families of the victims of the Thoothukudi incident in 2018. On the other hand, despite public expectations for decades, Rajinikanth is now out of the picture.

Vijay has an advantage in Tamil Nadu, a state obsessed with films. He is young, a crowd-puller, and his timing is right. Additionally, his Tamil identity gives him an edge over Rajinikanth, whose Marathi roots and BJP/RSS ties have sparked controversy in the Dravidian-dominated state. Vijay's success hinges on his communication skills and how he defines his party's ideology. He must effectively contrast it with the Dravidian doctrine of DMK and AIADMK parties and adopt an aggressive posture.

Vijay must declare which political party he is contesting against. Is it the DMK, AIADMK, or is it the? As a newcomer, his best bet is to oppose the ruling government, the DMK. This strategy worked for J. Jayalalitha, who positioned herself against the DMK and its leader, Karunanidhi. This ultimately led to her success as a politician.

Can Vijay win over rival par-

ties and overcome DMK's anti-incumbency sentiment? DMK and AIADMK have a 50-year history of alternating power with a strong 30% vote base. DMK prioritizes infrastructure, while AIADMK focuses on populist schemes. Vijay's party will impact other players regardless of the election result.

To ensure his success in the 2026 election, Vijay needs to focus on setting up booth committees. Since DMK and AIADMK already have a solid voter base, he needs to motivate his rural supporters to become actual voters.

There's a rumour that his party is getting support from the BJP in exchange for help in 2026. He needs to address it. It's premature to predict what the future holds for Vijay. His success will depend on whether he can build a solid fan base like MGR or N.T. Rama Rao, who both had good political advisers - something Vijay currently lacks. He is yet to build his party. Although the road ahead will be challenging, Vijay can overcome obstacles through hard work and dedication.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BETTER WEATHER AHEAD

Sir — Year 2023 was the hottest year ever. At the same time, due to the monsoon this year, the rainfall was also much less than the average. In Maharashtra, this had a special effect. Many districts in Maharashtra could not reach the average rainfall. Maharashtra has the highest number of dams in the country. But most of the dams could not be filled. So this year in summer its effect is being felt in many places. Water shortage has started in many villages. This year, the effect of El Nino will be felt till June. It is predicted that it will end after that.

Recently, two world organisations have predicted that El Nino, which affects the weather and rainfall around the world, has started to weaken. By August, La Nina conditions may develop. Indian meteorologists have predicted that this year's rainfall will be better than last year's. This news was recently read that most of India depends on monsoon. 70 per cent of India's annual rainfall comes from the southwest monsoon. Its share of the GDP is about 14 per cent. This year it is raining well and this present is pleasing. Also, it is pleasant in terms of the overall economy. It is no problem now to hope that farmers and common people will enjoy this and spend their lives happily.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

### FRACTURED MANDATE IN PAKISTAN

Sir — The mandate given by the Pakistani people in the recent general elections, along with the country's economic difficulties, appears to be derailing the Pakistan Army's intentions. The plan devised by Pakistan's ruling establishment may keep former Prime Minister Imran Khan's followers out of power, who impacted the mandate from within the jail. Still, the entire world has seen Pakistanis' dedication to a healthy democracy. The question is whether Imran can get out of jail soon. Several cases have been withdrawn. Despite political instability, military impediments, internet and social media bans, and legal manoeuvring, the independent candi-

### Navy veterans return home



The release of eight Navy veterans from Qatar marks a significant achievement for India, following extensive diplomatic efforts and legal manoeuvres. After enduring 18 months of uncertainty and legal battles, the veterans are finally returning home, with seven already reunited with their families and the eighth expected to follow suit shortly. This outcome underscores the importance of sustained diplomatic engagement and legal advocacy in resolving complex international disputes. India's proactive approach included expressing deep concern over the ini-

tial death sentence imposed by Qatar's Court of First Instance and promptly exploring all available legal avenues to support the veterans. Diplomatic channels were actively utilized, with high-level meetings held, including discussions with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani during the COP28 summit in Dubai. Additionally, securing consular access to the imprisoned individuals was a crucial step in ensuring their well-being and legal representation.

The decision by Qatar's Court of Appeal to commute the death sentence to jail terms was a pivotal moment in the resolution process, signalling a positive development towards the veterans' eventual release. India expressed gratitude to the Amir of Qatar for his role in facilitating their return home. This successful outcome underscores the importance of persistent advocacy and collaboration in protecting the interests of individuals facing legal challenges in foreign jurisdictions.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

dates sponsored by Imran Khan's party, Tehreek-e-Insaf, are at the forefront.

It is difficult to predict how many independent candidates who won with the PTI's support will stick to their positions and for how long. This is also the opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty. This is why Nawaz Sharif is advocating for democracy and urging all parties to work together. He also mentions valuing the achievements of independents. Undoubtedly, sustained military engagement in Pakistan, as well as a steady deterioration in democratic ideals, have weakened Pakistani democracy.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

### ASHWIN SHINES AGAIN

Sir — The legendary off-spinner from Tamil Nadu, Ravichandran Ashwin did a lot of hard work and reached a stage as a striking force. Generally, spinners mature with age and Ashwin displayed his variety

in bowling to a great measure and foxed the English batsmen in trouble straight-away.

His knack for getting left-hand batsmen wickets is unique and he has maximum scalps of lefties in test cricket. His wicket of Stokes at Hyderabad was a gem of a delivery. Despite a lion-hearted show with both the bat and ball, he received inadequate recognition for his manifold achievements. Ashwin's mesmerizing spells with the ball have at times camouflaged his superb work with the bat. It is a tribute to Ashwin's skill and application to various aspects of the game that he has lasted so long despite tough competition. Now he is on the verge of completing yet another milestone of 500 test wickets in his long and illustrious career as an all-rounder.

Jayanthy Subramniam | Mumbai

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## FIRST COLUMN

## A SILENT REVOLUTION IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE

Quiet quitting is a new phenomenon in the professional realm



SAKSHI SETHI

Today, many of us often stress the importance of leisure but that isn't to downplay the value of earned success and being fully present in the professional world. The workplace is changing due to employees' demands for more freedom and responsibility and a better work-life balance. As a result, many of us have witnessed a surge in concepts like "Bare Minimum Mondays," "Quiet Quitting," "Lazy Girl Jobs", and "The Great Resignation." Nonetheless, these developments have sparked extensive discussion about the ethical implications for the workplace.

Several factors such as lack of trust, lack of consistency, lack of feeling valued, lack of feeling neglected and not being communicated create a sense of disconnection and frustration among employees resulting in a sense of numbness and discontentment in career and eventually seep into personal lives, just as burnout.

The term Quiet Quitting or intense dissatisfaction has taken the world by storm, due to the impact of the pandemic, with many workers beginning to reconsider their priorities and boundaries in the workplace. In the early 2020s, driven largely by social media, the term 'quiet quitting' emerged as a much-publicized trend in the United States and elsewhere.

The term refers to a situation where employees disengage from their jobs or the organization without openly expressing their dissatisfaction or resignation. Instead, they become emotionally detached and disinterested, which leads to reduced productivity, decreased morale



and ultimately a decision to leave the company quietly. It is not always a coordinated or planned move conducted by a group of workers to express their displeasure with the organization's policy rather a subtle form of withdrawal, often overlooked but with significant implications for organizations and individuals alike. There are multifaceted root causes of quitting. Some feel a lack of recognition and reward is the cause, while some blame poor management.

Nowadays, the occurrence has amassed a sizable following on social media and is now seen as a movement. Studies and research have shown that around 59% of workers worldwide are 'quite quitting' estimated to be costing the global economy \$8.8 trillion. Employers must build relationships with their employees so that they can be treated fairly. Being valued at work can prevent employees from experiencing burnout and various health issues arising from being unhappy at their jobs. Employees need to see a clear path to advancement, they may lose motivation and engagement.

Remember every worker, every employee working in the organization has a different circumstance within their workplace. Quiet quitting can lead a few to decreased productivity and creativity and at the same time can also impact mental health, causing stress and dissatisfaction. Addressing these factors requires fostering a workplace culture built on trust, consistency, appreciation, a sense of belonging and effective communication. Only when these psychological needs are met, employees will be more likely to engage with their work, thereby reducing the risk of quitting and turnover. When an employee feels motivated, happy, challenged and optimistic, will they be much more likely to expend additional efforts, work a little harder, stay a little longer and above all carry a positive attitude. People do matter. Don't let them quit.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

## GST needs ADR for dispute resolution



AS MITTAL

The Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism provides a way to resolve disputes between taxpayers and the Government without having to go through formal litigation



The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced to rationalize the indirect tax system in India, thereby creating a common national market for goods and services. This "one nation-one tax" initiative aimed at price rationalisation, promotes ease of doing business and economic growth. The success of this reform is evident from the fact that the number of GST filers has increased by 32% from 10.6 million in April 2018 to 14 million in April 2023, and record revenue collection of ₹1,87,035 crore in April 2023, the highest ever, and ₹1,72,129 crore in January 2024, the second-highest since GST rollout. However, to further strengthen this reform, a time-bound and robust dispute resolution mechanism needs to be put in place in the GST.

**Delay in setting up of Appellate Tribunals:** It has been noticed that even after six and half years of the GST law coming into effect on July 1st, 2017, still the formation of GST Appellate Tribunals is awaited, which is a significant gap in the GST administration. This absence of a tribunal has forced businesses to approach high courts, which is usually a long and expensive process, and it also adds pressure on already overburdened high courts. According to various estimates, over one lakh appeals involving more than Rupees one lakh crore are expected to approach the GST Appeals Tribunals once they become functional. Although the government notified the creation of GST Appellate Tribunals on October 25, 2023, they are yet to become operational. The tribunal will help to efficiently dispose of disputes, and keep litigation in less time, and at a lower cost. From the taxpayer's point of view, even for completely justified tax positions, they have no option but to wait for a remedy. Moreover, the delay in the formation of the Tribunal is leading to an increase in interest burden, delay in genuine refunds, pre-deposit of taxes leading to cash flow challenges, and repetitive show cause notice to cascade disputes. Thus, the immediate formation of GST Appellate Tribunals and expeditious resolution of disputes is the need of the hour.



THE 'VIVAD SE VISHWAS SCHEME 2020' FOR INCOME TAXPAYERS WAS EXPECTED TO RESOLVE A SIGNIFICANT PART OF DIRECT TAX LITIGATIONS WORTH ABOUT ₹4.8 LAKH CRORE BY REMITTING AND WAIVING INTEREST AND PENALTY FOR PENDING DISPUTES

Disputes on an interpretation of the law, unsatisfactory advance ruling mechanism, and revenue-centric approach by tax authorities have led to an increase in litigation. Under GST, disputes arise from differences in tax paid by the assessee and the computation of tax liability by authorities. Such tax disputes can arise due to various reasons during assessment, audit, and/or scrutiny of records/accounts. For example, the rate of tax, a claim of tax exemption, the claim of an input tax credit, incorrect determination of the place of supply, the nature of supply (composite or mixed supply), classification of goods and services, etc. While GST is touted to remedy the proliferation of tax disputes and simplify tax administration, early experiences point to the contrary.

**Revenue-centric approach dented the confidence of taxpayers:** The dispute resolution schemes formulated with the revenue-centric approach, have certain limitations. For example, the 'Sabka Vishwas (Legacy Dispute Resolution) Scheme 2019' resolved around 49,534 Pre-GST and GST cases, involving an amount of ₹24,970 crores, thousands of appeals are still pending, leading to lakhs of rupees being locked. The backlog of around 38,000 Pre-GST, VAT dispute settlement cases in Punjab alone is a matter of concern and the OTS offered in November 2023, to settle these cases, valid until March 31, 2024, is not sufficient.

The 'Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme 2020' for Income taxpayers was expected to resolve a significant part of direct tax litigations worth about ₹4.8 lakh crore by remitting and waiving interest and penalty for pending disputes. The fact that the scheme ended on December 31, 2023, is disappointing, and the announcement of a one-time dis-

puted direct tax demands settlement of up to ₹25,000 and in total of ₹3500 crore in the interim budget is inadequate.

It is high time that a robust one-time GST Amnesty Scheme is introduced to assist bona fide taxpayers who may have committed inadvertent errors during the initial phase of GST. The GST being one of the largest tax reforms, had its gestational issues, and taxpayers and authorities struggled to understand the complexity of the law, aligning internal systems and training personnel. These issues resulted in numerous inadvertent slips, which are now under departmental audits/scrutiny, leading to a flurry of tax demands, interest and penalties. The government needs to take immediate action to address these concerns and ensure that the taxpayers are not burdened with unnecessary litigations and penalties.

**Effectiveness missing in earlier efforts:** The Authority of Advance Ruling (AAR) was established to provide certainty in tax positions in advance, and to reduce litigation. AAR and the Appellate Authority of Advance Ruling (AAAR) are established under the respective State GST Acts. However, it is important to note that the rulings given by the AAR or AAAR may not be accepted by authorities in other states. Additionally, the AAR does not have the power to deal with every aspect of the GST law, such as issues related to 'place of supply', which has been a cause of doubt for many.

It is worth noting that the rulings of the AAR or AAAR are only binding on the applicant who has sought the advance ruling and on the concerned/jurisdictional officer in respect of the applicant. Nevertheless, divergent rulings in different states on the same matters have led to increased litigation.

Therefore, the government and the GST Council should establish a central authority for AAR, which could address the issues related to 'place of supply' and resolve conflicting views of State-level AAR. The revenue-centric approach of the AAR has negatively impacted the confidence of taxpayers. Even in situations where a reasonable interpretation is evident, the ruling has been unfavourable to the taxpayer. Hence, it is essential to restore confidence in AAR, to serve the object and purpose of this progressive move.

**The Way Forward:** The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism provides a way to resolve disputes between taxpayers and the government without having to go through formal litigation. While Advance Rulings can be a form of ADR, the limitations of The Authority of Advance Ruling may result in reducing unnecessary litigation. Additionally, the introduction of the Settlement Commission aims to quickly collect taxes that are unpaid and also offers delinquents a one-time opportunity to come clean, which can substantially reduce the time and cost involved in unproductive litigation. The concept of centralized audit/ investigation should be introduced. Moving forward, once GST Appellate Tribunals become operational, will help to seamless flow of input tax credit for businesses with minimum blockages, efficiently dispose of disputes, reduce litigation time, and lower costs, further strengthening the country's revenue reform and economic growth.

(The author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council; Views expressed are personal)

## Symphony and connection beyond frequencies

This year's theme, 'Radio: A century informing, entertaining and educating,' serves as a strong reminder of radio's prowess in shaping culture and connectivity

In the symphony of technological advancements, amidst fleeting platforms, radio stands as a steadfast beacon, heralding its second century as a revered medium. February 13th, a date enshrined as World Radio Day (WRD) by UNESCO in 2011 and ratified by the UN General Assembly in 2012, annually celebrates this enduring force. This year's theme, "Radio: A century informing, entertaining, and educating," encapsulates its timeless significance. Globally acknowledged, WRD pays homage to radio's multifaceted prowess in technology, science, communication, and the artistry of audio programming. It embodies a century of unwavering service,



RAJDEEP PATHAK

steadfastness, and cultural resonance in an ever-evolving landscape.

Radio's origins trace back to the 1800s, whose power, position and influence are on the surge. Amidst the vast landscape of media, the enduring appeal of radio lies in its ability to transcend time and technological shifts. Its unique blend of immediacy, accessibility, and the power to connect communities has allowed

it to weather the storms of innovation, emerging as a beacon of constancy. Since its inception, radio has undergone a remarkable evolution from the discovery of electromagnetic waves to the sophistication of Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB). Beginning with Hans Christian Oersted's observation of magnetic fields around electric currents in 1820, subsequent milestones include Michael Faraday's confirmation of electromagnetic induction in 1830 and James Clerk Maxwell's theoretical predictions in 1864. Heinrich Hertz's practical demonstration of electromagnetic waves in the late 1880s validated Maxwell's theories. Guglielmo Marconi's pioneering transmissions culminated in the

first transatlantic signal in 1901, revolutionizing communication. Reginald Fessenden's 1906 breakthrough enabled long-distance voice and music transmission, heralding commercial broadcasts. Lee De Forest's 1907 Audion signal detector and Edwin Armstrong's 1918 superheterodyne circuit advanced radio technology. Armstrong's 1933 FM discovery pledged clearer signals, offering a significant improvement over existing AM technology.

The inception of radio as a communication medium, dates back to December 24, 1906, when a crew on a ship in the Atlantic Ocean experienced a groundbreaking moment. Instead of the familiar Morse code clicks, they

heard a human voice and music transmitted wirelessly by the inventor Reginald Fessenden. This marked the birth of sending sound through radio waves, opening up a new era of possibilities. Despite initial setbacks, including the withholding of FM technology by (Radio Corporation of America) RCA's David Sarnoff in favour of television development, radio's popularity soared. Entertainment broadcasting commenced around 1910, with the establishment of the first commercial radio stations such as KDKA (by Westinghouse) in 1920 and WWJ in the same year. The period between the late 1920s and the early 1950s is regarded as the Golden Age of Radio, characterized by a

diverse array of programming that captivated millions of listeners nationwide (USA). From its colonial origins to modern-day significance, India's radio journey is a timeless allure. Post-independence, All India Radio's rise marked a pivotal shift, shaping national identity through iconic programs like 'Binaca Geetmala' and 'Vividh Bharati'. Private FM stations expanded its reach, making radio a ubiquitous presence from rural to urban centers, serving as a vital lifeline and cultural touchstone. Amid technological advancements, radio's essence of informing, entertaining, and connecting endures, reminding us of the power of simplicity and human connection. It stands as a beacon of tradition, inno-

vation, and unity in India's diverse landscape. Furthermore, radio holds a unique power in shaping collective memories. Take, for instance, the iconic program "Binaca Geetmala." Merely pondering the year when a particular song graced the airwaves triggers a cascade of memories linked to that song, accompanied by the mellifluous narration of the esteemed broadcaster, Ameen Sayani. These reminiscences transport us to moments of joy and nostalgia, evoking the social ambience of yesteryears. Beyond its technological and scientific aspects, radio holds a unique position as a conduit for cultural exchange, fostering dialogue, and amplifying diverse voices.

The theme for World Radio Day, "Radio: A century informing, entertaining, and educating," celebrates a timeless legacy, where the ethereal resonance of voices has woven an intricate tapestry of cultural embrace for a century. Radio stands as a steadfast companion, offering not just timely information and entertainment, but also serving as a beacon of education and unity, transcending barriers. Within its sanctuary of sound, negativity finds no haven; instead, the airwaves flourish with warmth and positivity, nurturing weary souls seeking solace in the harmonious embrace of human fellowship.

(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

# Nawaz's chances of becoming Pak PM brighten

## Bilawal Bhutto withdraws from PM race

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a major boost to former Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif's bid to secure a record fourth term, Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Tuesday withdrew from the race, saying his party would support the ex-premier without being part of the government. Despite independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party springing a surprise by winning the most seats in Parliament, questions loom over what the next government of Pakistan will look like five days after the general elections.

None of the three major parties, the PML-N, the PPP, or the PTI have won the necessary seats in the February 8 general elections to secure a majority in the National Assembly and,



Pakistan's former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif gestures during a press conference regarding parliamentary elections, in Lahore, Pakistan on Tuesday. AP/PTI

therefore, will be unable to form government on their own, leading to a hung Parliament.

Addressing a press conference here after the meeting of the PPP's high-powered Central Executive Committee (CEC), held under his leadership, Bilawal has said the reality is that his party does not have a mandate to form a federal government.

"Due to this, I will not be putting myself forward for the candidacy of the prime minister of Pakistan," the 35-year-old former foreign minister said, adding that PML-N and the independents have greater numbers in the Centre.

Bilawal's announcement came hours after former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed that Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif, 74, will become the prime minister for a record fourth time.

"I had said that Nawaz Sharif would become prime minister but we will engage with political parties on the issue of votes and the election of prime minister."

He said that the PPP would help to form a stable government without being part of it. "To that end, the PPP will be willing to support the case of important votes - a candidate of the PM of Pakistan - and issue to issue basis to ensure that the government is formed and political stability is restored," Bilawal said.

Bilawal said he would like to see his 68-year-old father Asif Ali Zardari become the president once again. Zardari, husband of slain prime minister Benazir Bhutto was the president from 2008 to 2013.

"I am not saying this because he is my father. I am saying this because the country is in a huge crisis at the moment and if anyone has the capacity to douse this fire, it is Asif Ali Zardari," he asserted.

In response to a question, Bilawal said all political forces needed to think about the country and end the politics of division. "They must not just think about themselves [...] this way the enemies of the country

minister for the fourth time. And I maintain today that he is going to be the PM for the fourth time," Shehbaz told a press conference.

Bilawal noted that Imran Khan's PTI had refused to form a coalition with the PPP which left the PML-N as the only party that had invited the PPP to join the government.

Khan on Tuesday dismissed the idea of forming a coalition government with any of the main political parties in Pakistan and termed them as the "biggest money launderers" being brought to power.

The 71-year-old Khan, also the founder of PTI, was speaking with journalists at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi. Khan and many of his party colleagues are lodged in jail for many months in connection with convictions in multiple cases.

"There can be no alliance with PML-N, PPP, and MQM," he said, adding that he had directed PTI Information Secretary Raouf Hasan to bring together all parties except the three parties.

The PPP has decided that "we may not be a part of the gov-

ernment but we will engage with political parties on the issue of votes and the election of prime minister."

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In response to a question, Bilawal said all political forces needed to think about the country and end the politics of division. "They must not just think about themselves [...] this way the enemies of the country

would want to benefit from this crisis." "It takes two to tango," he said. To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly. The Election Commission of Pakistan has announced that independent candidates, a majority of them supported by the PTI secured 101 seats, followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 75 seats, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) getting 54 seats, and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) bagging 17 seats. Other parties got 17 seats while the result of one constituency was withheld. Meanwhile, a senior official of Khan's party said it will use the platform of two rightwing religious parties in its bid to form government in the Centre as well as in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. "Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party has decided to join Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) to form the government in the Centre and Punjab and Jamaati-e-Islami (JI) in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa," PTI Information Secretary Hassan said while addressing a press conference.

Hassan said the PTI was redoubling its efforts to make government in the Centre and Punjab. However, it is believed that by joining the two parties, the PTI will not be able to gather enough strength to form either the federal or provincial government in Punjab. PTI can form a government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa even without the support of any other party. In a setback to PTI, a Pakistani court on Tuesday dismissed more than 30 petitions filed by Khan's party-backed independent candidates who challenged the "sham victory" of top PML-N leaders, including former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz.

The Lahore High Court while dismissing the petitions asked the defeated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party-backed candidates to move to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for redressal of their grievances, including alleged rigging of votes in the February 8 general elections.

Nawaz Sharif first assumed power in 1990 but was forced out three years later by corruption allegations — a theme that has dogged his career.

## Lanka to amend Online Safety Act

**Colombo (PTI):** The Sri Lankan Cabinet has decided to amend the Online Safety Act, the government said on Tuesday, after it came under attack for stifling dissent and harming the potential growth of the country's digital economy. However, when it was decided yesterday to go for an amendment, it was not stated which clauses of the Act would be amended, according to a Cabinet note released on Tuesday after Monday's meeting. The legislation, accepted in January, would have led to the establishment of the Online Safety Commission, which would have been empowered to make punitive rulings on offences. A false statement online would be liable, if convicted, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand Sri Lankan rupees. The government on Tuesday said the amendment would now be enacted with representations having been received from the industry and added, "Some of the industry-proposed amendments had been excluded in the process when the Supreme Court recommended amendments were incorporated."

## 'Iran not entirely transparent on its atomic programme'

AP ■ DUBAI

The head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog warned on Tuesday that Iran is "not entirely transparent" regarding its atomic programme, particularly after an official who once led Tehran's program announced the Islamic Republic has all the pieces for a weapon "in our hands". Speaking at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, just across the Persian Gulf, Rafael Mariano Grossi, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, alluded to remarks made this weekend by Ali Akbar Salehi. Grossi noted "an accumulation of complexities" in the wider Middle East amid Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Iran, after the collapse of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, has pursued nuclear enrichment just below weapons-grade levels. Tehran has accumulated enough enriched uranium to build several weapons if it chooses. However, US intelligence agencies and others assess that Iran has yet to begin a weapons program. Israel long has been believed to have its own nuclear weapons program.

Iran is "presenting a face which is not entirely transparent when it comes to its nuclear activities. Of course this increases dangers", Grossi said. "There's loose talk about nuclear weapons more and more, including in Iran recently. A very high official said, in fact, we have everything, it's disassembled. Well, please let me know what you have."

Iran, as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has pledged to allow the IAEA to visit its atomic sites to ensure its program is peaceful. Tehran also agreed to additional oversight from the IAEA as part of the 2015

nuclear deal. Grossi did not identify the Iranian official who made the comment. However, in an Iranian state television show late Sunday, Salehi said that the country had all it needed to build a weapon.

"We have all the (pieces) of nuclear science and technology. Let me give an example," Salehi said. "What does a car need? It needs a chassis, it needs an engine, it needs a steering wheel, it needs a gearbox. Have you made a gearbox? I say yes. An engine? But each one is for its own purpose."

Salehi made a similar comment Saturday. "We have it in our hands," he said then. Since 2022, Iranian officials have spoken openly about something long denied by Tehran as it enriches uranium at its closet-ever levels to weapons-grade material: the Islamic Republic is ready to build an atomic weapon at will. That includes Kamal Kharrazi, an adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who told Al Jazeera that Tehran has the ability to build nuclear weapons but does not intend to do so.

Salehi's comments represent an escalation. He served as the head of the civilian Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran under then-President Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate within Iran's theocracy who reached the 2015 deal with world powers.

The hardening of Iran's position comes as militias it arms in the region — Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels — have launched attacks targeting Israel. The Houthis continue to attack commercial shipping in the region, sparking repeated airstrikes from the US and the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile Tuesday, Iran released footage of a ballistic missile being fired off the Shahid Mahdavi, a container

## Jailed former Thailand PM gets parole

**Bangkok (AP):** Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who last year returned from more than a decade of self-imposed exile to serve a prison sentence for misdeeds committed while in office, has been granted parole and could be released this weekend, the country's justice minister announced Tuesday.

Parole for Thaksin would be a symbol of reconciliation between his populist political party and the country's conservative establishment, a rivalry that defined Thai politics for nearly 20 years and led to two military coups.

Justice Minister Taweewee Sodsong told reporters ahead of the weekly Cabinet meeting in Bangkok that Thaksin qualified for early release because he is in the eligible category of inmates who have serious illnesses, are disabled or are aged over 70. Thaksin is 74 years old.

Taweewee did not confirm the date that Thaksin will be released, but it is widely expected he could be released as soon as this weekend.

He is currently confined to a police hospital in Bangkok where he is serving time for convictions related to corruption and abuse of power while in office, convictions he decried as politically motivated.

Opponents have charged that serving his sentence in a hospital was a special privilege, suggesting that it was part of a deal between his party and the military.

Thaksin had been in exile since 2008, but voluntarily returned to Thailand in August last year and reported to prison to begin serving an eight-year sentence. He arrived back in his homeland the same day as Srettha Thavisin of the Thaksin-backed Pheu Thai party secured the post of Prime Minister with the support of military-linked parties.

He was moved almost immediately to the hospital on grounds of ill health and about a week after that, King Maha Vajiralongkorn reduced his sentence to a single year.

## Indonesia's presidential election has high stakes for US, China

AP ■ JAKARTA

When Indonesians cast their votes on Wednesday for a new president in one of the world's biggest elections, the stakes will also be high for the United States and China and their mounting rivalry in the region. The Southeast Asian nation is a key battleground economically and politically in a region where the global powers have long been on a collision course over Taiwan, human rights, US military deployments and Beijing's aggressive actions in disputed waters, including the South China Sea.

Outgoing President Joko Widodo's foreign policy has avoided criticising either Beijing or Washington, but also rejected alignment with either power. The delicate balancing act has paved the way for substantial Chinese trade and investment for Indonesia, including a USD 7.3 billion high-speed railway that was largely funded by China, while Jakarta has also boosted



Workers arrange ballot boxes prepared for the Feb. 14 election at a stadium in Jakarta, Indonesia, Tuesday. AP/PTI

defence ties and intensified military exercises with the US. These policies would likely continue if election frontrunner Prabowo Subianto, the current defence minister whose vice presidential running mate is Widodo's eldest son, wins, according to analysts.

"The problem for great

powers, however, is that Jakarta is assiduously non-aligned and almost certainly will remain as such regardless of who wins," said Derek Grossman, a senior defence analyst at Rand Corp., a US-based think tank. Subianto adheres to a policy of neutrality and has publicly praised the US and China. He

cited America's historical role in pressuring the Netherlands to recognise Indonesian sovereignty in the 1940s, during a forum in November at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Jakarta. "This is part of history and we cannot forget this debt of honour," said Subianto, who also extolled China's importance to Southeast Asia. "China is a great civilisation. It has contributed a lot and now it is very, very active and contributing a lot to our economy."

Former Education Minister and Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan, a presidential candidate who is trailing Subianto in most independent surveys, said he would shift what he called Widodo's "transactional" foreign policy to one anchored on principles if he triumphs in the elections. "When a country invades another country, we can say this is against our basic values. Even though we are friends, if rights were violated, we can reprimand them," Baswedan told The Associated

Press in an interview last month without saying which country he was alluding to.

Baswedan said human rights and environmental protection should underpin Indonesia's foreign policy. "If we have no values, then there is a cost-benefit relationship, where we will only support countries that are profitable for us," he said.

Marty Natalegawa, a respected former Indonesian foreign minister, expressed hope that the new leaders who would be elected would not only say "we are not picking sides" but "actually contribute in helping create a more stable US-China relations." The US and China have both seen how the emergence of a new leader in the region can threaten their interests. Rodrigo Duterte, after capturing the Philippine presidency on an anti-crime platform in 2016, became one of the most vocal critics in Asia of US security policy while nurturing close ties with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

## Russia puts leader of Estonia on wanted list

AP ■ MOSCOW

Estonia's prime minister has been put on a wanted list in Russia because of her efforts to remove Soviet-era World War II monuments in the Baltic nation, officials said on Tuesday as tensions between Russia and the West soar amid the war in Ukraine.

The name of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas appeared on the Russian Interior Ministry's list of people wanted on unspecified criminal charges, although it was unclear when she was added, according to Mediazona, an independent Russian news outlet. The list includes scores of officials and lawmakers from other Baltic nations.

The move was related to her efforts to remove World War II monuments, other Russian officials said. There was no immediate reaction from Estonian authorities.

Estonia and fellow NATO members Latvia and Lithuania have pulled down monuments that are widely seen as an

unwanted legacy of the Soviet occupation of those countries.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago, numerous monuments to Red Army soldiers also have been taken down in Poland and the Czech Republic, a belated purge of what many see as symbols of past oppression. Moscow has denounced those moves as a desecration of memory of Soviet soldiers who fell while fighting Nazi Germany.

The inclusion of Kallas — who has fiercely advocated for increased military assistance to Ukraine and stronger sanctions against Russia — appears to reflect the Kremlin's effort to raise the stakes in the face of NATO pressure over the war.

It's the first time the Russian Interior Ministry has put a foreign leader on a wanted list. Estonian Secretary of State Taimar Peterkop and Lithuanian Culture Minister Simonas Kairys also are on the list, which is accessible to the public, along with scores of officials and lawmakers from

Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova confirmed that Kallas and Peterkop were on the list because of their involvement in the removal of monuments.

Asked about the move, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was a response to action by Kallas and others who "have taken hostile action toward historic memory and our country."

Russia has laws criminalising the "rehabilitation of Nazism" that include punishing the desecration of war memorials. Russia's Investigative Committee, the country's top criminal investigation agency, has a department dealing with alleged "falsification of history" and "rehabilitation of Nazism," which has ramped up its action since the start of the war, according to Mediazona, which broke the news on Kallas' addition to the wanted list.

Mediazona, which published a long survey of the list, said it also includes scores of

Ukrainian officials and foreign nationals accused of fighting alongside Ukrainian armed forces. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that ridding Ukraine of far-right, neo-Nazi groups is one of the central aims of the war, but he has offered no proof to back his repeated claims that such groups have a decisive voice in shaping Ukraine's policies.

The inclusion of Kallas could also mark an attempt by Moscow to counter last year's arrest warrant against Putin that was issued by the International Criminal Court over the alleged deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. The Interior Ministry's list also includes ICC President Piotr Hofmann.

While it means little in practical terms since contacts between Moscow and the West have been frozen during the conflict, it comes at a time when European members of NATO are growing increasingly worried about how the US election will affect the alliance.

## Russia and West clash over Ukraine

**United Nations (AP):** Russia accused the West on Monday of sabotaging agreements that would have prevented the war in Ukraine — but the US and its allies put the blame squarely on Moscow, saying there is no escaping that President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of its smaller neighbour.

Days before the second anniversary of Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia again put the cause of the war down to the failure to implement the 2015 Minsk agreements, which he blamed on "Kyiv's sabotage" supported by the West.

The agreements aimed to resolve the conflict between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists that flared in April 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support for the separatists in the mostly Russian-speaking industrial east called Donbas.

At Monday's Security Council meeting that Russia called on the seventh anniversary of the signing of the Minsk peace plan brokered by France and Germany, Nebenzia called claims by Ukraine and Western nations that Russia refused to implement the agreements "absolutely baseless."

Had the Minsk agreements been implemented, Nebenzia said "the tragedy that has taken place in Ukraine today would not have happened, a tragedy in which the US and the collective West are complicit as they try to achieve their geopolitical aims at the cost of Ukraine and the lives of its citizens."

US deputy ambassador Robert Wood accused Russia of putting forward "significant myths and disinformation" in its efforts to rewrite history after it invaded a sovereign nation in violation of the UN Charter. "Moscow has called us together today to lament the very violence it began, fuelled and it continues to perpetrate daily," he said.

## Senate passes \$95.3 bn aid package for Ukraine

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Senate early Tuesday passed a USD 95.3 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, pushing ahead after months of difficult negotiations and amid growing political divisions in the Republican Party over the role of the United States abroad.

The vote came after a small group of Republicans opposed to the USD 60 billion for Ukraine held the Senate floor through the night, using the final hours of debate to argue that the US should focus on its own problems before sending more money overseas. But more than a dozen Republicans voted with almost all Democrats to pass the package 70-29, with supporters arguing that abandoning Ukraine could embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin and threaten national security across the

globe. "It's been years, perhaps decades, since the Senate has passed a bill that so greatly impacts not just our national security, not just the security of our allies, but also the security of western democracy," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who worked closely with Republican Leader Mitch McConnell on the legislation.

The bill's passage through the Senate was a welcome sign for Ukraine amid critical shortages on the battlefield. The final vote gained 22 Republicans supporting its passage, while two Democrats, Sens. Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Peter Welch of Vermont, as well as Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent, voted against it. Progressive lawmakers have objected to sending offensive weaponry to Israel.

Yet the package faces a deeply uncertain future in the House, where hardline

Republicans aligned with former President Donald Trump — the front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination, and a critic of support for Ukraine — oppose the legislation.

Speaker Mike Johnson cast new doubt on the package in a statement Monday evening, making clear that it could be weeks or months before Congress sends the legislation to President Joe Biden's desk — if at all.

Still, the vote was a win for both Senate leaders. Schumer noted the strong bipartisan support and projected that if the House speaker brings it forward it would have the same strong support in that chamber. McConnell has made Ukraine his top priority in recent months, and was resolute in the face of considerable pushback from his own GOP conference. Speaking directly to his detrac-

tors in a floor speech on Sunday, McConnell said that "the eyes of the world" were on the US Senate.

"Will we give those who wish us harm more reason to question our resolve, or will we recommit to exercising American strength?" McConnell asked.

Dollars provided by the legislation would purchase US-made defence equipment, including munitions and air defence systems that authorities say are desperately needed as Russia batters the country. It also includes USD 8 billion for the government in Kyiv and other assistance.

In addition, the legislation would provide USD 14 billion for Israel's war with Hamas, USD 8 billion for Taiwan and partners in the Indo-Pacific to counter China, and USD 9.2 billion in humanitarian assistance for Gaza.

The bill's passage followed almost five months of torturous negotiations over an expansive bill that would have paired the foreign aid with an overhaul of border and asylum policies. Republicans demanded the trade-off, saying the surge of migration into the United States had to be addressed alongside the security of allies.

But a bipartisan deal on border security struck by Republican Sen. James Lankford fell apart just days after its unveiling, a head-spinning development that left negotiators deeply frustrated. Republicans declared the bill insufficient and blocked it on the Senate floor.

After the border bill collapsed, the two leaders abandoned the border provisions and pushed forward with passing the foreign aid package alone — as Democrats had originally intended.

## Thai journalists arrested for covering vandalism of temple wall freed on bail

**Bangkok (AP):** Two Thai journalists arrested for reporting on the vandalism of Bangkok temple wall with graffiti criticizing a pro-monarchy law were released on bail Tuesday, a lawyer's group said. The arrests, carried out separately on Monday, nearly a year after the incident, drew widespread criticism and raised concerns from several right groups over the state of media freedom in Thailand.

The Royal Palace police station, which made the arrests, said Nuthaphol Meksohobon, a reporter for the independent online media Prachatai, and Nattaphon Phanphongsanon, a freelance photographer, were charged with collaborating in vandaliz-

ing an historical site. Nuthaphol wrote a story and Nattaphon took a video of the incident, which was widely reported.

The offense is punishable by up to seven years in prison and a 700,000 baht (\$19,600) fine.

The two arrested men have said they were only carrying out their jobs as journalists.

The charges involve a March 28, 2023, incident in which a 25-year-old activist spray-painted an anarchist symbol and the number 112 with a line through it on the exterior wall of the revered Temple of the Emerald Buddha, which is in the Grand Palace complex.



# Israel, Hamas making progress in cease-fire, hostage release talks

AP ■ CAIRO

Israel and Hamas are making progress toward a deal that aims to bring about a cease-fire and free hostages held in the Gaza Strip, according to two officials with direct knowledge of the talks, as key meetings continue Tuesday in the Egyptian capital. Talks are moving forward even after Israel intensified its offensive in the southern Gaza town of Rafah, where 1.4 million displaced Palestinians have fled to seek shelter from fighting elsewhere. Israeli forces rescued two captives held in the town along the Egyptian border in a raid that killed at least 74 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and left a trail of destruction.

A deal would give people in Gaza a desperately needed respite from the war, now in its fifth month, and offer freedom for at least some of the 100 people still held captive in Gaza. With the war grinding on, efforts mediated by Qatar, the United States and Egypt to bring about a deal have been hobbled by the starkly disparate positions of Hamas and Israel. Israel has made destroying Hamas' governing and military capabilities and freeing the hostages the main goals of its war, which was launched after thousands of Hamas-led militants rampaged through southern Israel, killing

1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking roughly 250 people captive. Tens of thousands of Israelis were displaced from destroyed communities. The war has wrought unimaginable destruction in the Gaza Strip, with more than 28,000 people killed, more than 70% of them women and minors, according to local health officials. Vast swaths of the territory have been flattened by Israel's offensive, around 80% of the population has been displaced and a humanitarian catastrophe has pushed more than a quarter of Palestinians in Gaza toward starvation.

South Africa, which has lodged genocide allegations against Israel at the International Court of Justice, said on Tuesday that it filed an "urgent request" with the court to consider whether Israel's military operations in Rafah constitute a breach of provisional orders handed down by the justices last month.

Israel has adamantly denied the allegations and insists it takes every measure to spare civilians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press on until "total victory," and has insisted that strong military pressure will secure the hostages' freedom — an idea his allies say was bolstered by the successful rescue mission. But the rescued hostages, Fernando Marman, 60, and Louis Har, 70, were just

the second and third captives to be freed by the military since the war erupted.

Other Israeli officials have said only a deal can bring about the release of so many hostages.

A deal in late November brought about a brief truce in exchange for the release of about 100 hostages. About 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel were also freed as part of the deal. Israel says about 30 captives are believed to have died or been killed while in captivity, with their bodies still in Gaza. Three hostages were killed erroneously by Israeli forces in December and one female Israeli soldier was freed in a rescue mission in the early weeks of the war.

## BRIDGING THE GAPS

A senior Egyptian official said mediators have achieved what he described as "relatively significant" progress in the negotiations between Israel and Hamas ahead of a scheduled meeting in Cairo on Tuesday of representatives from Qatar, the US and Israel. An Israeli delegation, led by David Barnea, the head of the Mossad intelligence agency, was in Cairo, the official said. He added the meeting would focus on "crafting a final draft" of a six-week cease-fire deal, with guarantees that the parties would continue negotiations toward a permanent cease-fire. A Western

diplomat in the Egyptian capital also said a six-week deal was on the table but cautioned that more work is still needed to reach an agreement. The diplomat said the meeting Tuesday would be crucial in bridging the remaining gaps to get the two sides to agree on a six-week truce and embark on talks for a final cease-fire deal. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to discuss the sensitive talks with the media.

## OUTLINES FOR A DEAL

While the officials did not disclose the precise details of the emerging deal, the sides have been discussing varying proposals for weeks. Israel has proposed a two-month cease-fire in which hostages would be freed in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, and top Hamas leaders in Gaza would be allowed to relocate to other countries. Hamas rejected those terms. It laid out a three-phased plan of 45 days each in which the hostages would be released in stages. Israel would free hundreds of imprisoned Palestinians, including senior militants, and the war would be wound down with Israel withdrawing its troops. That was viewed as a nonstarter for Israel, which wants to topple Hamas before ending the war. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

indicated last week on a visit to the region that there was hope the talks might lead to a deal, and on Monday, President Joe Biden also signalled they were heading closer to fruition. "The key elements of the deal are on the table," Biden said alongside visiting Jordanian King Abdullah II, adding, "there are gaps that remain." He said the US would do "everything possible" to make an agreement happen.

## DEATH TOLL MOUNTS

The signs of progress came despite ongoing fighting. Palestinians were still counting the dead after Israel's hostage rescue mission, with the death toll climbing to 74 on Tuesday. Residents and displaced Palestinians in Gaza were searching through the rubble from Israeli airstrikes that provided cover for the Israeli forces.

Al Jazeera, the pan-Arab broadcaster funded by Qatar, said an Israeli airstrike in Rafah wounded two of its journalists, with one having to undergo an amputation. It identified the wounded as cameraman Ahmad Matar and reporter Ismail Abu Omar. It was unclear when the strike took place and the Israeli military had no immediate comment. While concerns have grown over Rafah because it is sheltering such a massive influx of Palestinians, fight-

ing was continuing throughout the Gaza Strip, with the Israeli military saying troops were battling militants in Gaza's second largest city, Khan Younis, and in central Gaza. It said Tuesday that three soldiers were killed in combat, raising the death toll among troops since the Gaza ground operation began in late October to 232.

## S AFRICA LODGES 'URGENT REQUEST' WITH UN COURT

South Africa says it has lodged an "urgent request" with the International Court of Justice to consider whether Israel's military operations targeting the city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip constitute a breach of the provisional orders the court handed down in the genocide case last month. South Africa made the announcement on Tuesday and said in a statement that it had asked the court to weigh whether Israel's indication that it would launch a ground offensive in Rafah — where 1.4 million Palestinians have fled to escape fighting — represents a "further imminent breach of the rights of Palestinians in Gaza."

The International Court of Justice handed down a preliminary ruling last month in South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza.

## King Charles returns to UK for treatment

**London (AP):** King Charles III returned to London from his country retreat on Tuesday for what is expected to be further treatment following his cancer diagnosis. Charles, 75, and his wife Queen Camilla flew by helicopter to Buckingham Palace from the royals' Sandringham estate in Norfolk, eastern England. The monarch was seen waving to well-wishers as the couple were driven from the palace to nearby Clarence House.

Royal officials announced last week that the king was diagnosed with cancer and will suspend public engagements, though he will continue with state business such as signing papers. They did not disclose what form of cancer he has, but said it's not related to his recent treatment for a benign prostate condition.

# Biden meets with Jordan King Abdullah

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Declaring that "every innocent life lost in Gaza is a tragedy," President Joe Biden welcomed Jordan's King Abdullah II to the White House on Monday for talks on how to end the months-long war and plan for what comes afterward. The meeting with Abdullah comes as Biden and his aides are working to broker another pause in Israel's war against Hamas in order to send humanitarian aid and supplies into the region and get hostages out. The White House faces growing criticism from Arab Americans over the administration's continued support for Israel in the face of rising casualties in Gaza since Hamas launched its October 7 attack on Israel.

"The key elements of the deal are on the table," Biden said alongside the king, though "there are gaps that remain." He



President Joe Biden, center, and first lady Jill Biden, second right, pose for a photo upon greeting Jordan's King Abdullah II, second left, Queen Rania, right, and Crown Prince Hussein, left, on the North Portico of the White House on Monday. AP/PTI

said the US would do "everything possible" to make an agreement happen: a pause to fighting for at least six weeks and the release of the remain-

ing hostages held by Hamas. A senior US administration official said on Sunday that after weeks of shuttle diplomacy and phone conversa-

tions, a framework was essentially in place for a deal. The official said Israeli military pressure on Hamas in Khan Younis over the last several

weeks has helped bring the militant group closer to accepting an agreement.

Abdullah said Biden's leadership was "key to addressing this conflict," as he raised the plight of the tens of thousands of civilians killed and wounded in the fighting.

"We need a lasting cease-fire now," the king said. "This war must end."

Jordan and other Arab states have been highly critical of Israel's actions and have eschewed public support for long-term planning over what happens next, arguing that the fighting must end before such discussions can begin. They have been demanding a cease-fire since mid-October as civilian casualties began to skyrocket.

Biden's stance marks a subtle but notable break for the president, who has continued to oppose a permanent cease-

## 'Societal misalignments could make AI dangerous'

AP ■ DUBAI

The CEO of ChatGPT-maker OpenAI said Tuesday that the dangers that keep him awake at night regarding artificial intelligence are the "very subtle societal misalignments" that could make the systems wreak havoc.

Sam Altman, speaking at the World Governments Summit in Dubai via a video call, reiterated his call for a body like the International Atomic Energy Agency to be created to oversee AI that's likely advancing faster than the world expects. "There's some things in there that are easy to imagine where things really go wrong. And I'm not that interested in the killer robots walking on the street direction of things going wrong," Altman said. "I'm much more interested in the very subtle societal

misalignments where we just have these systems out in society and through no particular ill intention, things just go horribly wrong." However, Altman stressed that the AI industry, like OpenAI, shouldn't be in the driver's seat when it comes to making regulations governing the industry. "We're still in the stage of a lot of discussion. So there's your knowledge, everybody in the world is having a conference."

Everyone's got an idea, a policy paper, and that's OK," Altman said.

"I think we're still at a time where debate is needed and healthy, but at some point in the next few years, I think we have to move towards an action plan with real buy-in around the world." OpenAI, a San Francisco-based artificial intelligence startup, is one of the leaders in the field.

## 'Stop making white people feel guilty about being white'

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's former Home Secretary Suella Braverman has lashed out at a parliamentary group that warned of "racist colonial legacies" as she said it was wrong to make "white people feel guilty". UK-born Braverman, who is of Indian heritage with a Goan-origin father and Tamil-origin mother, writes in "The Daily Telegraph" on Tuesday to defend perceptions of racism in the rural areas of Britain.

It follows a report by Wildlife and Countryside Link, a coalition of voluntary organisations, handed to the all-party-parliamentary group on race and community in the House of Commons.

"Just because there are more white people than non-white people somewhere does not make it racist," the 43-year-old politician writes in the newspaper.

"The UK is a majority white country, so of course there will be many areas where there is very little, and sometimes no, ethnic minority participation. I do not see a problem. Ethnic minority people tend to live in urban areas. Does that make Wembley, where I come from and which is now a majority non-white area, racist because there are

fewer white people who live there? Of course not," she said.

To illustrate her point, she also published a picture of herself on a camping holiday with her Indian-origin family in the 1980s and said not once in 30 years of such holidays did they experience hostility.

The Link report, which triggered her defence of the English countryside, notes: "Cultural barriers reflect that in the UK, it is white British cultural values that have been embedded into the design and management of green spaces and into society's expectations of how people should engage with them."

"Racist colonial legacies that frame nature as a 'white space' create further barriers, suggesting that people of colour are not legitimate users of green spaces."

Braverman countered that to claim that the countryside is racist is one of the most "ridiculous examples" of left-wing identity politics. "It's a symptom of a deeper problem within our society: the urge to constantly view everything through the lens of race or gender, plead victimhood and point the finger at an oppressor... We need to stop making white people feel guilty for being white," she noted.

## Trump asks SC to put off his election interference trial

**Washington (AP):** Former President Donald Trump is asking the Supreme Court to extend the delay in his election interference trial, saying he is immune from prosecution on charges he plotted to overturn his 2020 election loss.

His lawyers filed an emergency appeal with the court on Monday, just four days after the justices heard Trump's separate appeal to remain on the presidential ballot despite attempts to kick him off because of his efforts following his election loss in 2020. "Without immunity from criminal prosecution, the Presidency as we know it will cease to exist," Trump's lawyers wrote, repeating arguments that have so far failed in federal courts. The filing keeps on hold what would be a landmark criminal trial of a former president while the nation's highest court decides what to do. It met a deadline to ask the justices to intervene that the federal appeals court in Washington set when it rejected Trump's immunity claims and ruled the trial could proceed.

The Supreme Court's decision on what to do, and how quickly it acts, could determine whether the Republican presidential primary frontrunner stands trial in the case before November.

There is no timetable for the court to act, but special counsel Jack Smith's team has strongly pushed for the trial to take place this year. Trump, meanwhile, has repeatedly sought to delay the case. If Trump were to defeat President Joe Biden, he could potentially try to use his position as head of the executive branch to order a new attorney general to dismiss the federal cases he faces or even seek a pardon for himself.

The Supreme Court's options include rejecting the emergency appeal, which would enable US District Judge Tanya Chutkan to restart the trial proceedings in Washington's federal court. The trial was initially scheduled to begin in early March.

## Germany's top security official wants easier ways to track right-wing extremist financing

**Berlin (AP):** Germany's top security official said on Tuesday that she aims to make it easier to trace right-wing extremists' financing and plans to set up an "early recognition unit" to detect far-right and foreign disinformation campaigns as early as possible. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser's proposals follow large protests against the far right in Germany in recent weeks. They reflect growing concern after a report said extremists met to discuss deporting millions of immigrants, including some with German citizenship, and that some members of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, whose support has doubled since the country's 2021 election, were present. Germany's domestic intelligence agency

says the number of far-right extremists has been rising. In 2022, it reached 38,800, with 14,000 of them considered potentially violent. The agency's head, Thomas Haldenwang, said the numbers are believed to have risen again last year. Faeser said efforts to shut down extremists' financing have been hampered because financial investigations are limited to "inciting and violence-oriented" movements. She suggested that the law be changed to make a group's "threat potential" grounds for such investigations, and the proceedings should be faster and less bureaucratic. "No one who donates to a right-wing extremist organisation should be able to rely on remaining undiscovered," she said.

**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**  
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Statement of Unaudited Financial Results for the quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2023				
(Amounts in INR millions, except share and per share data, unless otherwise stated)				
Particulars	Quarter ended	Quarter ended	Quarter ended	Year ended
	31 December 2023	30 September 2023	31 December 2022	31 March 2023
	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Audited)
Total Income from Operations	1,053	1,114	813	3,208
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	183	277	(56)	(302)
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)#	183	277	(56)	(302)
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)#	183	278	(58)	(320)
Total Comprehensive Income for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)	183	278	(58)	(320)
Paid up Equity Share Capital	-	-	-	-
Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve)	228	46	(94)	(176)
Net worth	228	46	(94)	(176)
Paid up Debt Capital / Outstanding Debt*	6,892	750	-	-
Debt Equity Ratio*	3.76	0.47	-	-
Earnings Per Share (of Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)				
1. Basic	18,304.30	27,847.30	(5,779.55)	(32,012.26)
2. Diluted	18,304.30	27,847.30	(5,779.55)	(32,012.26)
Debt/Equity Ratio*	3.76	0.47	-	-
Debt Service Coverage Ratio*	11.57	1.04	-	(1.50)
Interest Service Coverage Ratio*	7.65	6.57	-	(1.37)
Current ratio	1.98	1.07	0.91	0.89
Long Term Debt to Working Capital	1.03	2.00	-	-
Bad debts to Account receivable Ratio*	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Current Liability Ratio	0.50	0.87	1.00	1.00
Total Debts to Total Assets Ratio	0.56	0.12	-	-
Debtors Turnover Ratio*	0.31	0.38	0.32	1.25
Inventory Turnover Ratio*	0.72	0.83	1.01	4.11
Operating margin (%)	23%	28%	(4)%	(6)%
Net profit margin (%)	17%	25%	(7)%	(10)%

**Notes :**

1. Ratios have been computed as follows :  
 - Earning per share (Basic & Diluted) = Profit after Tax / Weighted average number of equity shares  
 - Debt Equity Ratio = Debt (Amount due to Debenture Holders) / Equity (Equity share capital + share premium + quasi equity i.e. Short term borrowing)  
 - Interest Service Coverage Ratio = Profit before interest, prior period items, tax, extraordinary items and depreciation / (Total Interest Expense).  
 - Debt Service Coverage Ratio = (Net Profit after taxes + non-cash operating expenses + interest + tax expense) / (Total Interest Expense + Long Term Debt Principal repayments)  
 - Current Ratio = Current Assets/ Current Liabilities  
 - Long Term Debt to Working Capital= Non- Current borrowing including current maturities of Non-current borrowings/ (Current Assets - Current Liabilities excluding current maturities of Non-Current borrowings)  
 - Bad debts to Accounts Receivable ratio= Bad debts / Average Trade receivables and Average unbilled Revenue  
 - Current Liability Ratio = Current Liabilities/ Total Liabilities  
 - Total Debts to total Assets= Total outstanding debts/ Total Assets  
 - Debtors turnover= Revenue from operation/ Average trade receivables and Average unbilled Revenue  
 - Inventory Turnover= Revenue from operations/Average inventories  
 - Operating margin(%) = (Profit before tax + Finance costs - Other income)/ Revenue from operations  
 - Net Profit Margin (%) = Net profit after Tax/ Revenue from Operations  
 - Asset Coverage Ratio = (Total Assets) / Debt (Amount due to Debenture Holders)
2. The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly financial results filed with the BSE Limited (BSE) under regulation 52 of the Listing Regulations. The full format of the quarterly financial results is available on the websites of the Stock Exchange and the Company - <https://renew.com>
3. For the other line items referred in regulation 52(4) of the Listing Regulations, pertinent disclosures have been made to the BSE and can be accessed on the URL <https://www.bseindia.com/>.
4. The company is in the business of operation and maintenance of wind and solar power plants. There is only one segment (business and/or geographical) in accordance with the requirements of IND AS - 108 "Operating Segments".
5. The above financial results of the Company for the quarter and nine months ended 31 December 2023 have been approved by the Board of Directors of the Company at the meeting held on 13 February 2024. The statutory auditors of the company have carried out the limited review of the above unaudited financial results of the Company for the quarter ended 31 December 2023.
6. The statement has been prepared in accordance with recognition and measurement principles laid down in accordance with the Indian Accounting Standard 34 "Interim Financial Reporting" ("Ind AS 34") as prescribed under Section 133 of the Companies Act, 2013 ("the Act") read with Rule 3 of the Companies (Indian Accounting Standards) Rules, 2015 and relevant rules issued thereunder and other recognized accounting practices and policies.
7. Care Rating has assigned long term issuer rating and rating for the outstanding non-convertible debentures of the Company to "CRISIL A+ (CE)" with stable outlook.
8. Previous period figures have been re-grouped / re-classified wherever necessary, to conform to current period's classification.

For and on behalf of the  
**RenServ Global Private Limited** (Formerly known as ReNew Services Private Limited)  
 Place : Gurugram (Sd./-) Sanjay Jagadish Kulkarni  
 Date : 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2024 Managing Director, DIN : 07852390

## Judge orders Elon Musk to testify in SEC probe

**San Francisco (AP):** A judge has ordered Elon Musk to testify for a third time as part of the Securities and Exchange Commission's investigation into his USD 44 billion purchase of Twitter, now called X, in 2022. Magistrate Judge Laurel Beeler issued an order on Saturday giving Musk, his team and the SEC a week to agree on a date and location for Musk's testimony. In a court hearing last December, Beeler said she would issue an order if the two sides couldn't agree on when and where the Tesla and SpaceX CEO would testify. "The parties, at least initially, agreed to a date but ultimately the respondent did not appear and resists the subpoena on the grounds that the SEC's invest-

igation is baseless and harassing and seeks irrelevant information," Beeler wrote in the order in federal court in Northern California. "Also, he contends that the subpoena — issued by an SEC staff member appointed by the SEC's Director of Enforcement — exceeds the SEC's authority because it was not issued by an officer appointed by the President, a court, or the head of a department," as required by the US Constitution, she added.

Beeler said, however, that the court is enforcing the SEC's subpoena and that the testimony is "not unduly burdensome" for Musk. The SEC had given Musk the option to testify in Texas, where he lives.

Office of the Superintending Engineer  
**3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh**  
 Email : [sepwdph@rediffmail.com](mailto:sepwdph@rediffmail.com)

Letter No. : 722 / 962C-03(Yata 'C')/2024 Dated : 13/02/2024

### National Competitive E-Tender Notice

The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" for following works. All other information will be available online from date 16-02-2024 at 5.00 PM onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (₹)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Development work of Haat-Kaika temple in Pithoragarh district under Manaskhand temple series.	9.20	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	12	Category 'A' & higher for Building works, in State Govt./ Govt. of India
2	Development work of Patal Bhuvaneshwar temple in Pithoragarh district under Manaskhand temple series.	4.62	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	09	Category 'B' & higher for Building works, in State Govt./ Govt. of India

# Stock markets rebound on buying in banking

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday on buying in banking, financial services and IT sector stocks. The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 482.70 points or 0.68 per cent to settle at 71,555.19. The gauge moved between the day's high of 71,662.74 and a low of 70,924.30 during intraday. The broader NSE Nifty also soared 127.20 points or 0.59 per cent to close at 21,743.25. As many as 25 stocks of the 30-share barometer settled in green while 11 constituents of Nifty50 closed the session with losses. ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Wipro, Kotak Mahindra Bank and NTPC were among the



major gainers in the Sensex pack. The five stocks that defied the trend included UltraTech Cement, Mahindra &

Mahindra, Titan, Tata Motors and Nestle. BSE smallcap index inched up 0.18 per cent while midcap and largecap indices closed

with a gain of 0.61 per cent each. In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and China's Shanghai Composite settled in the

positive territory while Hong Kong's Hang Seng was in the red. European markets were in the red with CAC 40 of France and DAX of Germany declining 0.32 per cent and 0.62 per cent, respectively. The US market ended Monday's session on a mixed note. Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose 0.78 per cent to USD 82.64 a barrel on Tuesday. On Monday, Sensex settled 523 points or 0.73 per cent lower at 71,072.49 points while the Nifty closed 166.45 points or 0.76 per cent down at 21,616.05 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers as they bought equities worth Rs 126.60 crore, according to exchange data.

# Rupee settles flat at 83 against US dollar

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

The rupee settled flat at 83 against the US dollar on Tuesday, as the support from a rally in domestic equities was negated by a strong greenback overseas and rising crude oil prices. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83 against the dollar, and touched an intraday high of 82.98 and a low of 83.02. The rupee finally settled at 83.00 (provisional), unchanged from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee appreciated 7 paise to close at 83 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, India's industrial production growth slowed to 3.8 per cent in December 2023, mainly due to poor performance of mining and power generation segments, according to official data.



released on Monday. 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. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on positive Asian markets and fresh foreign inflows. However, positive tone in the greenback and rising crude oil prices may cap sharp gains," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst,

Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East after Israel forces launched airstrikes in Rafah may also weigh on riskier currencies. "Traders may take cues from US inflation data. US CPI is expected to cool down to 2.9 per cent from 3.4 per cent in the previous month, while core CPI is expected to cool down to 3.7 per cent from 3.9 per cent. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.80 to Rs 83.20," Choudhary said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent higher at 104.21, ahead of the US inflation report. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.85 per cent to USD 82.70 per barrel.

# India needs to grow at 7, 8 per cent annually to become developed nation by 2047: Former RBI Governor

**PTI ■ HYDERABAD**

India needs to grow at seven to eight per cent annually in order to become a developed nation with USD 13000 per capita income by 2047, former Reserve Bank Governor C Rangarajan said on Tuesday. Asserting that innovation cannot be a single solution to reduce inequalities or poverty, the former Chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council said besides faster growth rate, the country may need social safety nets such as subsidies in kind of cash and basic income. "I would say that the real growth between 7 per cent and 8 per cent will take it closer to the developed economy, because the developed economy by definition shows per capita income of USD 13,000 or



more. India's per capita income is now at USD 2700. That means per capita income will have to increase by five times," he told PTI. According to him, if the exchange rate is kept at a lower level or if the prices go up then nominal income will increase, then India can become a developed nation. "Therefore,

I am saying that the calculation of dollar value of the Indian economy depends upon the real growth, the level of inflation and exchange rate, he added. Raghunath Anant Mashelkar, Former Director General of Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), today delivered ICFAI 13th Foundation Day Lecture While Rangarajan, Chancellor of the University, presided over the function in virtual mode. In his speech, referring to the innovations in technology, Rangarajan opined that model economic growth has been spurred by a rapid and persistent observation of technology. He also said that economists have estimated that one half of the growth experienced by the developed countries in the last one and a half centuries or more has been due to

technology. The former RBI Governor said more and increased attention has to be on increasing the livelihood opportunities for the people at the bottom of the pyramid and technology should focus on innovations that provide the poorer people the facilities that are affordable and accessible. An inclusive innovation leads to affordable access to quality goods and services, which helps create livelihood opportunities for excluded populations on a long-term sustainable basis. And play a huge role in dismantling inequality, Mashelkar said in his address. In his welcome address, L S Ganesh, Vice Chancellor, ICFAI said that innovations are a separate phenomenon and they could be used to tackle the virulent challenge of inequality which the world faces.

# Coal India shares settle 5 per cent higher

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Shares of coal behemoth Coal India settled 5 per cent higher on Tuesday, a day after the state-owned company reported a rise in net profit for the December quarter. The stock of the company jumped 4.67 per cent to close at Rs 453 apiece on the NSE. On the BSE, the Coal India Ltd (CIL) scrip advanced 4.47 per cent to end at Rs 452.40 apiece. In volume terms, 3.56 crore equity shares were traded on the NSE, and 23.02 lakh shares on the BSE during the day. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 482.70 points, or 0.68 per cent, to end at 71,555.19, while NSE Nifty rose 0.59 per cent to close at 21,743.25

points. In a regulatory filing on Monday, CIL reported a 16.9 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 9,069.19 crore for the December quarter. The company's net profit stood at Rs 7,755.55 crore in the year-ago period, the company said. Its consolidated revenue from operations in the October-December period increased to Rs 36,153.97 crore from Rs 35,169.33 crore a year-ago, it added. CIL's consolidated revenue from operations in the October-December period increased to Rs 36,153.97 crore from Rs 35,169.33 crore in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal, registering a growth of 3 per cent.



# Life insurance awareness, adoption rise among urban Indians: Report

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Urban India witnessed remarkable progress in financial readiness, with 3 out of 4 urban Indians now owning life insurance products, according to a report. The Protection Index is at an all-time high of 45 in India Protection Quotient (IPQ) 6.0, up from 43 in IPQ 5.0, reflecting a positive trajectory in the nation's evolving protection awareness and adoption. Max Life Insurance released IPQ 6.0 on Tuesday -- tapping 4,700 respondents across 25 Indian cities -- which also pointed out that life insurance sales through digital mode have increased compared to the last survey. At the same time, life insurance ownership levels increased to 75 compared to 73 (IPQ 5.0). Over a five-year period, the India Protection Quotient has witnessed an impressive 10-point increase, from 35 in IPQ 1.0 to 45 in IPQ 6.0, that reiterates Urban India's

constant journey towards building financial resilience, the report said. In line with previous findings, South India retained its position as the most financially protected zone with a Protection Quotient of 49 points, the report said, adding this was followed by West India, showcasing a marked improvement in financial preparedness from 42 points in IPQ 5.0 to 46 points in IPQ 6.0. North and East zones lagged in financial protection at 41 and 40 points in this edition, respectively. Max Life MD and CEO Prashant Tripathy said over the past five editions, the IPQ has become a true barometer for measuring urban India's financial protection levels. "By including incremental cohorts year-on-year, IPQ has become stronger, bigger, and more inclusive. Today, we are witnessing a remarkable shift in the financial consciousness of this diverse group, with 3 out of 4 urban Indians now owning life insurance," he said.

# Gold ETFs continue to glitter; attract ₹657 crore in January

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Gold Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) attracted Rs 657 crore in January, marking a seven-fold jump compared to the previous month, according to Amfi data. Experts believe that the appeal of the precious metal as a safe haven and hedge against inflation will continue amid ongoing geo-political tensions and higher inflation in the US. The inflow helped inflate the assets under management (AUM) of gold funds by 1.6 per cent to Rs 27,778 crore by

the end of January compared to Rs 27,336 crore at the December-end, the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) data showed. The net flows in Gold ETFs were sharply higher at Rs 657.4 crore in January from Rs 88.3 crore in the previous month, the data showed. The launch of Tata Gold Exchange Traded Fund which garnered Rs 6 crore also aided the growth. With ongoing geo-political tensions and US inflation still higher than the desired number, the appeal of Gold as safe haven and hedge against inflation is expected



to continue, Melvyn Santarita, Analyst at Morningstar Investment Research India, said. "Gold prices in US Dollar terms scaled new highs after going past the USD 2,100 per

ounce mark in early December 2023 but since then has come down gradually. In Rupee terms, gold has done fairly well over the last year but dwarfs in comparison to how equities

have fared. "Given this backdrop, flows in the Gold ETF category have been somewhat patchy. Some investors could be choosing to opt for a risk on approach to investing with the anticipation of a reversal in rate cycle going ahead," he added. In 2023, Gold ETFs witnessed an inflow of Rs 2,920 crore, which was higher than the Rs 459 crore inflow seen in 2022. The attractiveness of gold as a safe haven and a hedge against inflation enhanced significantly in 2023. Rising inflation, subsequent interest

rate hikes, and geopolitical events boosted the demand as investors sought a secure investment option. Gold, with its superlative performance over the last few years, has garnered substantial investor interest and the consistent increase in folio numbers serves as a testament to its attractiveness. During the month, the folio numbers in gold ETFs rose to 49.72 lakh in December 2023 from 49.11 lakh in December 2022. This indicates a growing inclination among investors towards funds related to gold.

# GE Power India reports ₹37 lakh net profit in Q3

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

GE Power India has turned profitable with a marginal net profit of ₹37 lakh in December 2023 quarter, supported by a fall in expenses. It had reported a net loss of ₹139.9 crore in the October-December period of preceding financial year, the company said in an exchange filing on Monday. The company's total income fell to ₹491.2 crore from ₹544.5 crore a year ago. Expenses trimmed to ₹493.1 crore in the reporting quarter from ₹563.9 crore in the same period last fiscal. In a separate statement, the company said December quarter ended with an order backlog of ₹3,437.4 crore, down by 14.5 per cent compared to ₹4,019.7 crore in December 2022. Prashant Jain, Managing Director, GE Power India, said, "In the third quarter of the financial year 2023-24, we continue to see that FGD (flue gas desulfurisation) and Hydro PSP (pumped storage project) opportunities are converting to orders slower than anticipated."

# GeM achieves a milestone

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Conceptualised under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, that aims to foster 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' through digital platforms, GeM has achieved a milestone by recording a Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of Rs 3 lakh crore within just 11 months of the current fiscal year, breaking all previous records. This achievement significantly surpasses the total GMV recorded at the end of the previous fiscal year, which stood at Rs 2 lakh crore. The platform has experienced a notable increase in daily average GMV transactions during this period, rising from Rs 504 crore in FY 22-23 to Rs 914 crore as of February 12, 2024. As of February 12, 2024, GeM directly links over 2 million sellers and service providers across the country with more than 3 lakh government buyers. By digitally integrating all stakeholders in the public procurement process, GeM has eliminated harmful practices like



collusion, corruption, and bribery, thereby enhancing transparency in public finances, said a statement here. The platform currently showcases more than 12,200+ Products and Services categories, catering to the diverse requirements of government buyers nationwide. Over the past 3 years, services procurement on GeM has surged from approximately Rs 66,000 crore in FY 22-23 to over Rs 1,30,984 crore in FY 23-24 (as of February 12, 2024). States like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Delhi have emerged as top procurers on the platform while Panchayati Raj institutions and Cooperatives too have helped earning transactions worth Rs 265 crore conducted by over 70,000 Panchayats and 660+ Cooperatives.

# Revenue growth of auto component industry to moderate to 5-7 per cent in FY25: Report

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Annual revenue growth of leading auto component manufacturing companies will come down to 5-7 per cent in the next fiscal due to moderation in domestic volumes and a drop in exports, rating firm Icrs said on Tuesday. According to Icrs estimates, its sample of 45 auto ancillaries, with aggregate annual revenues of Rs 2.7 lakh crore in FY23, is likely to grow by 9-11

per cent in FY24, driven by healthy domestic demand despite a high base and moderate growth in exports. For FY25, the growth is likely to be relatively lower to 5-7 per cent, with expected moderation in domestic volume growth and a weak outlook for exports, Icrs said. It also noted that capex towards capacity enhancements and technological development resulted in higher investment in FY24, which is likely to

continue in FY25. The industry is estimated to incur a capex of at least Rs 20,000-25,000 crore in FY2025, with incremental investments being towards new product additions, product development for committed platforms, and development of advanced technology, the rating agency stated. The capex would also go into EV components, capacity enhancements and upcoming regulatory changes, it added.

# Walmart sourced goods worth over USD 30 billion from India in last two decades

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Walmart has sourced goods worth over USD 30 billion from the Indian market in the last two decades for its global operations, a company official said on Tuesday. Now the Bentonville-headquartered firm has a goal to triple its sourcing of goods from India up to worth USD 10 billion per year by 2027, said Walmart Inc Executive

Vice President, Sourcing Andrea Albright. Walmart is encouraging MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) and entrepreneurs with proper training and believes that there is a tremendous opportunity to continue to contribute to India's growing economy, she said. The company has been doing business in India for the last 25 years, Albright said. "We have already sourced more than USD 30 billion in



products from India," she said speaking at the Walmart Growth Summit here.

# Paytm shares tank 10 per cent; hits lower circuit limit

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Shares of One97 Communications, which owns the brand Paytm tanked 10 per cent on the exchanges on Tuesday after RBI ruled out any review of the central bank's action against Paytm Payments Bank, saying that its decisions are well thought out. This is the first time that the shares of crisis-hit One97 Communications tumbled below the Rs 400 threshold on both the bourses. The stock tumbled 10 per

cent each to close at Rs 380 and Rs 380.35 apiece — its lower circuit limit as also a 52-week low level — on the NSE and BSE respectively. In volume terms, 1.14 crore equity shares were traded on the NSE, while 15.92 lakh shares were traded on the BSE, during the day. In broader equity markets, the 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark climbed 482.70 points or 0.68 per cent to end at 71,555.19, while NSE Nifty rose 0.59 per cent to close at 21,743.25 points.

The company is building an ecosystem and taking a people-led approach to connect its work across the country. "Investing in high growth markets like India helps us strengthen our relationships with established suppliers, but also developing relationships with new ones to build long-term surety and diversity and global supply," she added. Under its Walmart Vriddhi initiative, which is designed to support MSMEs in modernising, expanding, and reaching their domestic ambitions, the company has trained 50,000 people so far, Albright added. "That is an amazing achievement. We have hit this goal early," she said, adding, "Our focus is to recruit and train new suppliers to fulfil our purchase orders around the world. These orders often lead to the creation of new jobs. It also allows our suppliers to invest back in their local communities."

# Kane, Bayern head to Lazio

**AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)**  
This was meant to be the year that Harry Kane finally won a trophy. The Champions League might be his best chance now. Bayern Munich heads to Lazio in the round of 16 on Wednesday needing to bounce back after a 3-0 loss to Bayer Leverkusen left it five points off the Bundesliga lead. Kane is on track to be a member of the first Bayern team since the 2011-12 season not to win the league. Injuries are weighing Bayern down, coach Thomas Tuchel's tactics are in question and forward Thomas Müller questioned his teammates' mentality in the "nightmare"

Leverkusen loss. Kane has 24 Bundesliga goals already but never came close to a 25th on Saturday. He was shut out of the game as Bayern fell further behind the league leader. Bayern's attack was neutralized by Leverkusen and the entire team had just one shot on goal. There are 13 games left and much can still happen, but Bayern's title hopes now rest on Leverkusen slipping up. Not so easy when Leverkusen is unbeaten in 31 games. That makes Wednesday's game at Lazio all the more important. The Italian team, eighth in Serie A, may not be the hardest opponent Bayern could have faced in the round of 16, but the pressure is on



the players and coach to improve. Left back Alphonso Davies, midfielder Konrad Laimer and forwards Serge Gnabry and Kingsley Coman all remain injured, while goalkeeper Manuel Neuer and right back Noussair Mazraoui were rested Monday before returning to training Tuesday ahead of traveling to Italy. Tuchel defended his tactics after the decision to switch from a back four to a back three for the first time this season backfired. Leverkusen exploited space on Bayern's left flank, where Tuchel had deployed Sacha Boey, usually a right back. Bayern's transfer strategy is also in question after Josip

Stanišić, a Bayern right back on loan at Leverkusen, scored the first goal. The way Leverkusen overwhelmed the central midfield pairing of Aleksandar Pavlović and Leon Goretzka was a reminder that Bayern's season might look different had the club's plans to sign Joao Palhinha from Fulham in September not collapsed at the last minute. Kane reeled off a list of Bayern's attacking faults after the Leverkusen loss. "In the final third we weren't good in one-on-one battles, we weren't good in duels. The final delivery wasn't there today. So a really disappointing day with the ball," Kane said.



## Juventus jeered off field after 1-0 loss

**AP ■ TURIN (ITALY)**  
Losing at Serie A leader Inter Milan can be forgiven, a defeat at home to relegation-threatened Udinese less so. Juventus was booed off the field by its fans on Monday after a 1-0 loss at home to Udinese left its title hopes in tatters. Massimiliano Allegri's side, which lost 1-0 at league leader Inter Milan last week, stayed seven points behind the Nerazzurri, who also have a game in hand. Juventus is only one point above third-place AC Milan.

Lautaro Giannetti's first Serie A goal was enough to hand Udinese only its second win in 14 matches and lift it three points above the drop zone. Juventus forward Arkadiusz Milik missed a number of gilt-edged chances to equalize and also had a goal disallowed. Milik was returning from a suspension and started in place of in-form forward Dušan Vlahović, who was out with a muscle problem. Juventus started brightly but it was Udinese which took the lead in the 25th minute. Thomas Kristensen nodded on Lazar Samardžić's free kick and Juventus defender Alex Sandro's attempted clearance was straight at Giannetti, who fired it in from close range. Milik could have leveled almost immediately but he mishit a cross and sent it woefully wide of the target from point blank range. The Poland forward headed another cross straight at Udinese goalkeeper Maduka Okoye shortly before halftime. Juventus was jeered off the field at the break, and matters didn't improve much after the break. Milik did get the ball in the back of the net in the 58th minute after Adrien Rabiot had nodded on a corner but it was ruled out as Federico Chiesa's corner delivery had crossed the byline.

# Brazil fails to qualify for Paris Olympics

**AP ■ SAO PAULO (BRAZIL)**  
Brazilian soccer fans were already in a funk after a year that saw a string of poor results, a coaching void and a political tug of war at the country's federation. Things got even worse on Sunday after Brazil failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics thanks to a loss to archrival Argentina, meaning the two-time defending champion will not be part of the tournament this summer. "It is sad, but it is more of an embarrassment," striker John Kennedy said after the 1-0 loss. "We should have wanted to win more than we did." Brazil also failed to qualify for the 1992 and 2004 editions of the Olympic tournament, but those blips didn't coincide with a crisis for the senior national team. Brazil is only in sixth place in South American qualifying for the 2026 World Cup and its biggest star Neymar has been out with a serious knee injury since October. Some fans and analysts had hoped 17-year-old striker Endrick - who is set to join Real Madrid this summer - would provide some cause for optimism by showcasing his

talent during the Olympic qualifying tournament. And many supporters had been hoping to see Endrick and the 32-year-old Neymar play together on the Olympic team in Paris and lead Brazil to an unprecedented third straight gold medal. But the Brazilian teenager scored only twice in seven matches in Olympic qualifying. Argentina's World Cup-winning midfielder Thiago Almada netted five. The Olympic soccer tournament features mainly Under-23 players and does not carry nearly the same status as the World Cup or continental championships - such as the Copa America that starts in June - but missing out completely still stings the pride of many Brazilians. Especially those who are viewing Endrick as the country's next big star, and had been expecting him to show that he could help lead the senior team's attack alongside Vinicius Jr. and Rodrygo at the Copa America. Meanwhile, Brazil's senior team will return to action in March in friendlies against England and Spain amid serious concerns about its current form. Last year, Brazil lost a home



match in World Cup qualifying for the first time ever; 1-0 to Argentina at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro. It also lost at Uruguay and Colombia in the South American round-robin competition after two poor performances. New coach Dorival Júnior was

on an interim basis last year. The frustration of seeing Argentina win the World Cup in Qatar as well as the last Copa America has only added to the pressure facing Dorival as he takes up the job - even before Sunday's loss. "Brazil wasted a full year in preparations because we waited

for a top coach (Ancelotti) who had signed no contract with us," said former Brazil left-back Júnior. "We burned a promising coach, Fernando Diniz, just so he could be interim for a year. The time to fix all this for the next World Cup is very short." Rodrigues, the confederation head, is also facing calls for his resignation. He was removed by a Rio de Janeiro court in December due to irregularities in his election but returned weeks later after a ruling from Brazil's top court. His full case is yet to be reviewed. History, though, shows that missing out on the Olympics doesn't necessarily bode ill for the future. The team that failed to qualify for the Barcelona Games in 1992 included Cafu, Márcio Santos and Roberto Carlos, who all went on to win the World Cup. And the squad that missed out on the Athens Games in 2004 included future stars Maicon, Diego and Robinho. "They will have to prove this elimination is no different from those two," said 2002 World Cup winner Vampeta. "There's great players in this team, but they will be judged by whether they can drag the senior team out of the quagmire it is in now."

# Gallagher leads Chelsea recovery

**AP ■ LONDON**  
Conor Gallagher apologized to fans of former club Crystal Palace after scoring twice, including a crucial stoppage-time goal, to help Chelsea recover for a come-from-behind 3-1 win in the Premier League on Monday that ignited the team's hopes of a finish in the European positions. The England midfielder spent a year on loan at Palace two seasons ago, when he scored eight goals and excelled in making late runs into the area. Now he's doing that for Chelsea, steering home an equalizer at Selhurst Park barely 90 seconds into the second half and then putting his team ahead just after 90 minutes had been played with a strike from the edge of the box. "I do love them," Gallagher said when asked how he felt to have inflicted pain on the Palace supporters. "It's sad but you can't beat that feeling. Sorry, Palace fans." Argentina international Enzo



Fernandez secured the points in the fourth minute of added time to leave Palace just five points above the relegation zone and its 76-year-old manager, Roy Hodgson, under more pressure. Chelsea climbed to 10th place in

what remains another disappointing campaign for a club that has spent more than \$1 billion on players over the past two years. Yet it could still end in qualification for the minor European competitions, with seventh-place

Newcastle only two points away. "We are trying our best to keep improving," Gallagher said. "Consistency is the biggest thing for us - there have been games when we've been brilliant and games when we've been terrible." The 24-year-old Gallagher isn't one of Chelsea's many costly recent arrivals - he is a product of the club's youth academy - but is proving to be one of the best-performing players under Mauricio Pochettino, whose own position has come under scrutiny this season. A thumping long-range strike by Jefferson Lerma gave Palace the lead in the 30th minute of a first half when Chelsea was lackluster, failing to register a single shot on target. "It was extremely cruel," Hodgson said, "but the game is about goals and unfortunately we made mistakes which led to goals." "I don't think that is a fair reflection on the way the game was played. I think we deserved to come off with at least one point."

# Deflated India eye better show against mighty Dutch

**AP ■ ROURKELA**  
Their morale hitting rock-bottom after slumping to their fourth defeat, India await another tough contest in the women's FIH Pro League when they take on the undefeated Netherlands here on Wednesday. It has been rough sailing for the Indian women's hockey team of late. After failing to qualify for the Paris Olympics, the side has also been faring poorly in the ongoing Pro League matches in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela. The Savita Punia-led side has played five matches in the Pro League so far, out of which it has lost four and won one. The home team's campaign started with three successive defeats against China (1-2), the Netherlands (1-3) and Australia (0-3) before it beat the USA 3-1. The Indians then slumped to their second defeat at the hands of China (1-2) here on Monday. A herculean task awaits India in their next tie as they are up against the formidable Netherlands, who are leading the standings with 27 points from nine matches. The Indians are currently placed fifth in the nine-team league with just three points from five games. "We haven't got the results we wanted but I believe we have what it takes to put on a good show and get a few points on our side. I think we are playing well in patches so if we can be more consistent, we can definitely go on to win more games," India captain Savita said. The Indian forward line has met with partial success so



far with the likes of Sangita Kumari, Vandana Katariya, Deepika, Navneet Kaur and Salima Tete registering their names on the scoresheet. But it the penalty-corner conversion, which after letting them down in the Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi, is pulling them down further in the Pro League. In the five matches so far, the Indians have earned 21 penalty corners but have failed to find the net even once. On Wednesday, the likes Gurjit Kaur, Deepika and Uditia will have to be really accurate and innovative with set-pieces if India hope to upset the Dutch. The Indians also need to tighten their penalty-corner defence to avoid conceding soft goals. India chief coach Janneke Schopman wants her players to take their chances. "The Netherlands are a quality side but we are not short on talent or ability. We will be patient while keeping the intensity of our hockey high and try to convert any scoring opportunities we have," the Dutch said. After Wednesday's match, the Indian women will play two more games in the Odisha leg of the Pro League - against Australia on February 17 and USA on February 18.

# Guardiola urges Haaland to relax

**AP ■ COPENHAGEN**  
Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola called on Erling Haaland to "relax" and stay positive after being concerned by the prolific striker's on-field demeanor before he scored the first goals of his comeback from injury. Guardiola was critical of his players' body language during the 2-0 win over Everton in the Premier League on Saturday, which saw Haaland score twice in the second half after a frustrating first 45 minutes for the Norwegian. "In that moment, he has to be positive," Guardiola said Monday, a day before Haaland and City take on FC Copenhagen away in the first leg of the Champions League's round of 16. "When he scored a goal, he reacted but he doesn't need to score

because he helps us for many things. He is defined by goals but it is not just scoring a goal. As much it's how he is clapping, encouraging his mates and the first intense press. This is what we need from Erling." Not that the 23-year-old Haaland ever goes too long without scoring. He was the top scorer in his first year in the Premier League with 36 goals last season, and has 40 goals in 35 games in the Champions League. Haaland has just returned from nearly two months out with a foot injury, and scored in his third game back. "If he doesn't score tomorrow, the day after or next week, it's not a big issue," Guardiola said. "He's so strong. It comes from nature. He's coped perfectly because he's so strong mentally. He scores one goal and wants a second and a third."



"You see his numbers at his age. In the Champions League not even (Lionel) Messi or Cristiano (Ronaldo) had these numbers at his age." City won the Champions League for the first time last season at the end of Guardiola's seventh year in charge, completing a treble of major trophies along with the Premier League and FA Cup. Before that, City had lost in the 2021 final to Chelsea, tripped up in the semifinals in 2022, and lost in the quarterfinals for three straight years from 2018. The dominant force in English soccer for the past decade, City - fueled by the riches of its Abu Dhabi

ownership - is now among the most feared teams in Europe and Guardiola believes the best legacy he will leave the club is convincing the players, staff and leadership that it can be the best in Europe. "I had the feeling when I arrived eight years ago that this competition was too much for us," Guardiola said. "Our defeats, our bad moments, our steps to grow up, they have helped us to put us in the position we are in: two Champion League finals and one semifinal in the last three years. "All the organization at the club now believes we can (win the Champions League) and this I believe is the best legacy that we give to the club, to the team. That Man City can compete." On paper, City is the heavy favorite against a Copenhagen team that hasn't

played a competitive match in more than two months during the Danish league's mid-season winter break. To regain some match sharpness, the Danish champions have been playing in the Atlantic Cup - a tournament in the Algarve in Portugal featuring clubs from leagues that aren't currently active. Games against fellow Scandinavian teams Elfsborg, Brøndby and Molde cannot compare to facing the European champions and Guardiola isn't sure what to expect at Parken Stadium on Tuesday - except for a traditionally hostile atmosphere. "I would say they will be starving to compete, hungry, fresh in legs and fresh in mind," he said. "At the same time, I don't know about their rhythm but they have had a lot of time to prepare for the game."

## ICC Women ODI batting rankings

# Smriti jumps two places to world number 4

PTI ■ DUBAI

India opener Smriti Mandhana has jumped two spots to grab the fourth position in the latest ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings for batters. The 27-year-old from Mumbai surpassed South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt, who slumped to fifth place after a lacklustre show in the ODI series against Australia. England's Nat Sciver Brunt, Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu and Australia's Beth Mooney occupy the top 3 positions in the batting chart, which also has India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur static at the 10th place. Mandhana, who is set to represent the Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Women's Premier League, last played ODIs in the bilateral series against Australia. She had made 63 runs at an average of 31.50. In the bowling chart, which is headed by England's Sophie Ecclestone, spinner Deepti Sharma slipped a place to



number four. The Indian, however, moved a place to the fifth spot in ODI allrounder list. Among bowlers, South Africa's Marizanne Kapp has

climbed seven places to take the second position after grabbing four wickets in the last two ODIs against Australia. An all-round performance of

75 and 3/12 in the second match in North Sydney that helped South Africa register their first ever ODI victory over Australia also helped Kapp retain eighth position in

batting and consolidate her top ranking in the list of all-rounders. Kapp increased her points tally from 658 to 668 in the batting rankings and from

388 to 452 in the all-rounders' rankings. Chloe-Tryon is another South Africa all-rounder to gain in the latest weekly rankings update, moving up one place to 20th among batters.

She advanced seven places to 43rd among bowlers and reached the top 10 for all-rounders for the first time. Anneke Bosch (up 13 places to 68th among batters) and Masabata Klaas (up two places to 24th among bowlers) have also gained.

Australia too had several players moving up in the rankings after completing a 2-1 win with all-rounder Tahlia McGrath progressing four places to 30th among batters. Tahlia was named Player of the Match in the final ODI after smashing 44 off 35 balls and claiming 3/23. She also rose five places to 60th among bowlers and to 21st in the list of all-rounders. Alana King (77th in batting and 13th in bowling) and Kim Garth (96th in batting and 28th in bowling) have also made notable progress.



## Stokes has changed cricket in lot of respects: Pope

RAJKOT, FEB 13 (PTI)

England captain Ben Stokes has changed the game of cricket in a "lot of respects", says batter Ollie Pope, as the maverick all-rounder gears up for his 100th Test appearance in a couple of days' time. Stokes, who has carved a niche for himself by playing some of the most outstanding knocks in the history of the sport in high pressure situations, has also produced a fine example of himself as a leader by inventing a new approach to Test cricket known as 'Bazball'.

Having also played a vital role in England's white-ball revival, Stokes is on the cusp of joining the list of players in Test cricket history who have played more than 100 games.

"He has probably changed the game in a lot of respects, he has just got a way of bringing out the very best of him when the team needs it. Even in the Ashes at Lord's, which I remember thinking about 'how does he obviously take it to a new level when all the pressure is on him'," Pope told the media here at the SCA Stadium after England's training session on Tuesday. England will take on India in the third Test from Thursday.

"The amount of times he's done that over his career of 99 Tests so far is unbelievable," Pope said. "It's unbelievable. For anyone to play 100 Tests is an unbelievable achievement. He's obviously had his highs and his lows in his career, but what he's done (since) he's been captain, he's been amazing and there's so many special moments that he can look back on his career," he added. Pope said Stokes' management skills sets him apart from the other leaders.

"I was there in the eleven when he took (on) the captaincy role. He made it pretty clear that I was the man for the No 3 job and that just gave me a lot of confidence," Pope said. "His man management was excellent. He seemed like he's got as much time for everyone in the squad whether that be the physios or the doctors, as he does for his eleven on the pitch as well," the England batter said.

Along the journey, Stokes also has had to manage a knee injury which has kept him away from sharing the bowling workload in the ongoing five-match series. The England captain was seen bowling full tilt on Tuesday afternoon but Pope was categorical in declining that Stokes is preparing to bowl in the remainder of the series. "Not that I know of, I don't think so," Pope said. "He's just getting back to bowling. He's getting his knee right, that's why he had surgery, just to make sure when he is back bowling he's going to be bowling quickly and as well as he can. But I think he's just preparing as a batter," Pope added. Pope said England have put another visa-related episode behind them which hit their squad upon arrival here from Abu Dhabi on Monday evening, with leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed getting temporary clearance for his stay in the country.

## It is not that you will not see rank turners going forward, says Kuldeep

PTI ■ RAJKOT

India spinner Kuldeep Yadav on Tuesday said that rank turners might come into play in the ongoing Test battle against England but admitted that sporting tracks, like the ones seen in the first two games, are "good for cricket". The two sides have assembled here for the third Test starting at the Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) Stadium from Thursday, with the series poised at 1-1.

"Overall, everything is important. The fast bowlers also come into play, like you saw in the last match. So (good wickets) are good for cricket. It is not (the case) that you will not get to see rank turners going forward. Hopefully, in the future you will see (turning tracks)," Kuldeep said while addressing a media conference ahead of India's training session on Tuesday. A depleted India were pushed by an aggressive England, who beat them comfortably in the first Test, but the hosts bounced back in the second. Both the matches were played on pitches that were not predominantly spin-friendly and had something for everyone.

"I have no idea. I haven't played on rank turners. I did not play in the last series (Border-Gavaskar series in February-March last year) at home," he replied when asked why there were no rank turners for the first two Tests.

"I do not know what our approach or thinking would be. It is basically the team management's decision. Obviously, all of you also want to watch good cricket. For good cricket, it's important (that the wickets are good)," he said. Kuldeep chose to side-step when asked whether rank turners should be there or not.

"I do not know that, I enjoy

playing, whenever I get an opportunity to play, whether it is on a flat track or on a rank turner...Batting too is important for us, not just spin bowling," he said. "When we say it is going to be a batting (friendly) wicket, we do not mean that 700-800 runs will be scored here, but it will be a better wicket compared to playing on a rank turner," he said.

### England's approach unusual for Test cricket

Kuldeep admitted that England's aggressive approach with the bat has been unusual to deal with in Test cricket. "...In Test cricket, you are not used to having someone with such an attacking batting approach. But at the same time, you are more involved in the game. As a spinner you are more focused on the game, how you are going to bowl and what your approach will be," he said.

"Sometimes in Test cricket, you are not overly worried if the batter would attack much and you focus on how to dismiss them.

"But here the approach is different, they are in attacking mode so you have to plan on how to restrict them because (if they are) playing more shots, then more opportunities are being created to take a wicket," he added.

### Opportunity for youngsters

India have been depleted further with KL Rahul set to miss the third Test, but Kuldeep said it is an opportunity for young players in the side to prove their mettle. "...That gives a chance to a newcomer who can get the opportunity. I am sure they have done really well in domestic cricket and it is their time to show what they have got. It is good for Indian cricket and for the individuals as well," he said.

## Joseph, Hunter win ICC player of the month awards

PTI ■ DUBAI



Latest pace sensation Shamar Joseph on Tuesday became the first West Indian to win the Men's ICC Player of the Month award for his heroics in the Australia Test series.

Ireland's explosive young batter Amy Hunter claimed the honour in the women's category after her dominance against Zimbabwe.

The ICC revealed the award winners for January on Tuesday after shortlists were announced last week.

Joseph enjoyed a stellar start to his West Indies career. Brought into the side for their Test series against Australia, the 24-year-old made an instant impact, removing Steve Smith with his first ball in international cricket.

His first outing in Test cricket saw him claim five wickets in the first innings in Adelaide, taking the prized wickets of Marnus Labuschagne and

Cameron Green and Smith. However, it will be his efforts in the second Test in Brisbane which will long be remembered.

Defending a modest 216 to prevent an Australian victory in the second innings, Joseph grabbed 7/68 - four of which were bowled - to skittle the home side out eight runs short of the target.

The win saw the West Indies claim a historic 1-1 draw, with Joseph sealing the Player of the Series award for his impressive

and deliver more match-winning performances for the West Indies with the ball; and when required also with the bat."

Hunter is another of the young talents lighting up the international stage. After a subdued ODI rubber to start the month, Hunter followed up with an explosive series of knocks in the T20I series in Harare.

The first T20I match saw the 18-year-old wicketkeeper-batter smash a glittering 101 not out in just 66 balls from atop the order as the away side won by 57 runs.

Hunter hit a further 77 and 42 runs in the second and third outings respectively as Ireland comfortably secured the series win away from home.

Across her three T20Is during the month, her 220 runs came at an impressive strike rate of 144.73, helping her become the first Ireland player to win the award since Arlene Kelly won last August.

## India oldest Test cricketer Dattajirao Gaekwad dies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's oldest Test cricketer and former captain Dattajirao Gaekwad died on Tuesday due to age-related ailments.

Gaekwad, who was the father of former India opener and national coach Aunshuman Gaekwad, was 95. He breathed his last early this morning after battling for life in the ICU of a Baroda hospital for the past 12 days, a source in the family told PTI. He played 11 Tests for India between 1952 and 1961, captaining the national team in 1959 when it toured

England. The right-hander made his debut against England at Leeds in 1952 and his final international game was against Pakistan in Chennai in 1961.

In the Ranji Trophy, Gaekwad represented Baroda from 1947 to 1961. He scored 3139 runs at an average of 47.56, including 14 hundreds. His highest was a 249 not out against Maharashtra in the 1959-60 season.

He became India's oldest living Test cricketer in 2016 after the death of former batter Deepak Shodhan at the age of 87 in Ahmedabad.

## Tamim left out of BCB central contracts list

PTI ■ DHAKA

Out-of-favour Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal has been excluded from the BCB's central contracts list for 2024, putting a question mark on the veteran cricketer's international future.

Former captain Tamim, who had retired from international cricket in July last year, had reversed his decision within 24 hours after Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked him to continue.

Tamim's decision to quit the game was because of his worsening relationship with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan, who had questioned the left-handed batter's professionalism. BCB's move to leave Tamim



out of the central contract list on Monday is an indication he is no longer in their scheme of things for 2024. BCB handed out central contracts to 21 cricketers, out of which Shoriful Islam and new captain Najmul Hossain Shanto got the all-format deals.

Right-arm pacer Taskin Ahmed has been dropped from the Test contract after he reportedly opted out. He has, however, retained his ODI and T20I contracts.

Besides Tamim, Ebadot Hossain, Afif Hossain and Mosaddek Hossain have also been excluded from the

central contracts list.

Towhid Hridoy, Tanzim Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Naeem Hasan and Nurul Hasan are the new entrants in the central contract.

During the meeting, the BCB also approved the salary contracts of 85 first-class cricketers.

Central contracts list: All formats: Litton Das, Shakib Al Hasan, Mehidy Hassan Miraz, Najmul Hossain Shanto and Shoriful Islam.

Tests and ODIs: Mushfiqur Rahim.

ODIs and T20Is: Taskin Ahmed, Towhid Hridoy, Mustafizur Rahman, Hasan Mahmud.

Only Tests: Mominul Hoque, Taijul Islam, Zakir Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Khaled Ahmed, Naeem Hasan.

## South Africa reaches 220 for 6 at stumps on Day 1 against New Zealand

AP ■ HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND)

Rachin Ravindra took three wickets and slammed the brakes on South Africa's scoring to give New Zealand a slight edge Tuesday on the first day of the second cricket test. Ravindra claimed the key middle-order wickets of Zubayr Hamza, Keegan Petersen and David Bedingham and bowled 21 overs at a cost of only 33 runs to swing the day just in New Zealand's favor. New Zealand faced an

unexpected obstacle late in the day when Ruan de Swardt posted his maiden half century and the burly allrounder Shaun von Berg, making his test debut at 37, shared an unbroken partnership of 70 for the seventh wicket. De Swardt was 55 not out and von Berg was unbeaten on 34 as South Africa reached 220-6 at stumps.

On a day of unusual decisions, New Zealand left out regular spinner Mitchell Santner, who took six wickets in the first test, included four seamers and



ended up leaning heavily on Ravindra's left-arm spin.

South Africa captain Neil Brand also made the unexpected decision to bat on winning the toss, becoming only the second captain in the last 11 tests at Seddon Park to do so. The pitch appeared green at first and there was some help early for the seamers as Matt Henry, Will O'Rourke and Neil Wagner shared wickets in the first session. South Africa was 64-3 at lunch. O'Rourke, who claimed his

first test wicket, said "it was pretty challenging, probably a little bit slower than what we were expecting."

Ravindra came into his own after lunch when he helped New Zealand slow South Africa's scoring rate. He bowled his first 13 overs, including six maidens, at a cost of only 15 runs. When he left the attack at the approach of the second new ball, he had taken 3-33 from 20 overs. He came back to bowl the last over of the day. His were key wickets.

Bedingham made 32 and 87 as South Africa's leading scorer in the first test; Petersen made 45 and 16 and Hamza 22 and 36. All made starts again on Tuesday but Ravindra prevented them going on.

Hamza had faced 99 balls and batted 142 minutes for 20 when, frustrated, he tried to slog sweep Ravindra and sliced the ball off the top edge to substitute fielder Santner at backward point.

The pressure New Zealand applied by slowing the scoring rate was crucial. There were

five consecutive maidens heading into the drinks break in the middle session and, as Hamza's innings showed, there was a paucity of scoring chances.

Petersen was 2 when he was caught by Tim Southee at slip, pushing well forward to a ball from Ravindra which turned away. Bedingham's wicket fell in the sixth over after tea for 39. He had batted 2 1/2 hours and appeared to be the biggest threat to New Zealand from the middle order.

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