



**OPINION 6**  
TAMIL NADU: THE POWER STRUGGLE INTENSIFIES

**WORLD 9**  
PAKISTAN EC DISMISSES NAWAZ REVIEW PLEA

**MONEY 10**  
MARKETS RISE FOR THIRD STRAIGHT DAY

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA  
Late City Vol.34 Issue 46  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable



# the pioneer

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY FEBRUARY 16, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

www.dailypioneer.com



**SARFARAZ KHAN SCORES 62 ON DEBUT**  
12 SPORTS

## Electoral Bonds Unconstitutional: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a landmark verdict delivered ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Supreme Court scrapped the Electoral Bonds scheme of anonymous political funding, terming it "Unconstitutional" and ordering disclosure of the names of the purchasers, value of the bonds and their recipients. Holding that the 2018 scheme was "violative" of the Constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression and right to information, a five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud did not agree with the contention that it was meant to bring about transparency and curb black money in political funding. Ordering closure of the scheme forthwith, the top court also directed the State Bank of India, the authorised financial institution under the scheme, to submit by March 6 the details of electoral bonds purchased since April 12, 2019, till date to the Election Commission, which will publish the information on its official website by March 13. "The Electoral Bond scheme and the impugned provisions to the extent that they infringe upon the right to information of the voter by anonymising contributions through electoral bonds are violative of Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression) of the



Constitution," said the Bench, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. The top court also directed the SBI to share details, including the "date of purchase of each electoral bond, the name of the purchaser of the bond and the denomination of the electoral bond purchased." "SBI shall submit the details of political parties which have received contributions through Electoral Bonds since the interim order of this court dated April 12, 2019 till date to the ECI. SBI must disclose details of each Electoral Bond encashed by political parties which shall include the date of encashment and the denomination of the electoral bond," the Bench said.

On April 12, 2019, the apex court had issued an interim order directing that the information about donations received and donations which will be received must be submitted by political parties to the EC in a sealed cover. The court ordered that uncashed Electoral Bonds, which are within the validity period of 15 days, shall be returned by the political party or the purchaser to the issuing bank which in turn shall refund the amount to the purchaser's account. The CJ said, "The electoral bond scheme, the proviso to section 29C(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1951 (as amended by section 137 of Finance Act 2017), section 182(3) of the Companies Act (as amended

by section 154 of the Finance Act 2017), and section 13A(b) (as amended by section 11 of Finance Act 2017) are violative of Article 19(1)(a) and Unconstitutional." It said the deletion of a provision in the Companies Act permitting unlimited corporate contributions to political parties was "arbitrary and violative" of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution. Holding that information about funding to a political party was essential for a voter to exercise their freedom to vote in an effective manner, the Bench said the scheme does not fulfil the least restrictive means test. "The Electoral Bond scheme is not the only means for curbing black money in

electoral finance. There are other alternatives which substantially fulfill the purpose and impact the right to information minimally when compared to the impact of electoral bonds on the right to information," the CJ said. "The huge political contributions made by corporations and companies should not be allowed to conceal the reason for financial contributions made by another section of the population: a student, a daily wage worker, an artist, or a teacher. When the law permits political contributions and such contributions could be made as an expression of political support which would indicate the political affiliation of a person, it is the duty of the Constitution to protect them," it said. The Court added, "At this juncture, the close association of money and politics which has been explained above needs to be recounted. Money is not only essential for electoral outcomes and for influencing policies, it is also necessary for true democratic participation." The Court further observed, "However, to not grant the umbrella of informational privacy to political contributions only because a portion of the contributions is made for other reasons would be impermissible. The Constitution does not turn a blind eye merely because of the possibilities of misuse."

## Farmers start Rail Roko in Punjab as talks falter

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Farmers in Punjab began their four-hour "rail roko" stir by squatting on rail tracks at some locations, causing inconvenience to passengers on Thursday even as the third round of meeting between the Centre and farmers' organisations in Chandigarh went on till late at night. There were no reports of clashes between farmers and Haryana security personnel at the two Punjab and Haryana border points — Shambhu and Khanauri — on the third day of the protest. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar criticised the "method" adopted by Punjab farmers to press their demands, suggesting that they were attempting to march to Delhi like an army on the offensive. Amid a standoff between protesters and security personnel at two border points of Punjab and Haryana, three Union Ministers and representatives of the farmers' unions held a discussion in Chandigarh on Thursday night. Union Agriculture and Farmer Welfare Minister Arjun Munda, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, and Minister of State



Members of various organisations block railway tracks at Rajpura as they stage 'rail roko' protest in support of farmers agitating at Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border, in Patiala, on Thursday

for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai represented the Centre in the meeting over farmer unions' demands, including a law guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. At the meeting, farmers' leaders were adamant about the legal guarantees of the MSP. Before the Central Ministers arrived, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann reached the venue to be part of the meeting. The previous two rounds of dialogue on February 8 and 12 remained inconclusive. "The Punjab Government could have stopped farmers. If they did not stop, then

there must be some understanding there and 'Delhi wale' say they are with the farmers' movement," Khattar said, in an apparent reference to the Aam Aadmi Party. "It is not right to comment but their (farmers') behaviour suggests that they have some kind of support," he added while responding to a question on AAP's involvement in the farmer's 'Delhi Chalo' call. Supporting farmers' demand is one thing, but favouring this kind of agitation sends the wrong message," the Chief Minister said. *Continued on Page 2*

## INDIA Bloc jolted again, Farooq says NC will go solo



MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

National Conference president and sitting Member of Parliament from Srinagar, Farooq Abdullah, stirred controversy on Thursday by declaring that his party would go "solo" in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the Union Territory, thereby abandoning the Opposition INDIA bloc. Thus far, the TMC, the AAP, and the JD(U) have distanced themselves from the INDIA bloc before engaging in conclusive seat-sharing talks. Farooq's announcement has severely weakened the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) in Jammu and Kashmir, leaving the People's Democratic Party, CPI, CPI(M), and Awami National Conference in a difficult position. Earlier, in response to a specific question about the status of seat-sharing talks, Dr

Abdullah unequivocally said that the National Conference would contest the polls based on its own merits without forming alliances with other political parties. "As for seat-sharing, I want to clarify that the National Conference will contest the elections based on its own strength. There is no room for debate on this matter," Dr Abdullah asserted. However, shortly after Farooq's announcement, his son and party vice president, Omar Abdullah, issued a strong clarification, asserting that the National Conference remained a member of the INDIA bloc. He said, "We continue to remain a member of the INDIA bloc." At the same time, Omar firmly clarified that no formal talks have occurred with the Congress party regarding the seat-sharing formula. However, there have been informal dialogues, and there is potential for further discussion. He stressed, "Our commitment to the INDIA alliance remains intact, despite the recent departure of founding members." He added, "We are not among those leaving. We will continue our discussions with the Congress party and hope to reach a seat-sharing understanding." *Continued on Page 2*

## PM Modi conveys gratitude to Qatar for veterans release

PTI ■ DOHA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday thanked Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani for the release of eight Indians, previously on death row, even as the two leaders held extensive talks that set the stage for taking the bilateral ties to a higher level, especially in the spheres of investment, energy and new technology. After the talks at the majestic Amiri Palace in this Qatari capital city, Modi described his meeting with the Emir as "wonderful" and said the bilateral ties are growing "stronger and stronger" and both the nations are looking forward to collaborating in futuristic sectors that will benefit the planet. Modi arrived here last night from the United Arab Emirates in his second visit to Qatar which came days after Doha released the Indians in a major relief to New Delhi. Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said at a media briefing that the talks focused on expanding cooperation in key areas, increasing convergence on regional issues, examining partnership in third countries, and viewing the overall ties from a strategic perspective rather than a transactional one. The two leaders also spoke about the need for strategic investments and strategic partnerships in the domain of energy and to proceed beyond

the buyer-seller relationship in this field. Prime Minister Modi also thanked the Emir for his support for the welfare of the Indian community in the Gulf nation, he said. "The Prime Minister thanked the Emir for his support for the welfare of the Indian community, and in this regard, expressed his deep appreciation to the Emir for the release of eight Indian nationals of Al-Dahra company. We are extremely gratified to see them back in India," Kwatra said. Seven out of eight Indians had returned to India on Monday after Qatar freed them. The Navy veterans were on October 26 given death sentences by Qatar's Court of First Instance. The Court of Appeal in the Gulf nation on December 28 commuted the capital punishment and sentenced them to jail terms for varying durations. The former Indian Navy personnel apparently faced charges of espionage, but neither the Qatari authorities nor New Delhi made the charges against them public. Kwatra said Modi's "very successful visit" has set the stage for taking ties to a much higher level in a range of areas and exploring engagement in new areas such as space, technology and innovation. "Had a wonderful meeting with HH Sheikh @TamimBinHamad. We reviewed the full range of India-Qatar relations and discussed ways to deepen



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in Doha on Thursday

cooperation across various sectors. Our nations also look forward to collaborating in futuristic sectors which will benefit our planet," Modi said on 'X'. "My visit to Qatar has added new vigour to the India-Qatar friendship. India looks forward to scaling up cooperation in key sectors relating to trade, investment, technology and culture. I thank the Government and people of Qatar for their hospitality," he said. "India and Qatar ties are growing stronger and stronger," Modi said in another post along with photographs of the ceremonial welcome accorded to him in Doha. Modi was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Amiri Palace on his arrival this morning. Thereafter, both sides held delegation-level and restricted talks. The MEA said the Modi-Hamad discussions covered a wide array of topics including economic cooperation, energy partnership, space collaboration, urban infrastructure, cultural bonds and people-to-people ties. "The Prime Minister thanked the Amir for taking care of the over eight lakh strong Indian community in Qatar and conveyed India's commitment to further expanding and deepening bilateral cooperation with Qatar. He invited Amir to pay an early visit to India," it said. *Continued on Page 2*

## NDMA tailors heat solutions for vulnerable communities

ARCHNA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As India prepares for intense heat waves ahead, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has, for the first time, begun crafting heat mitigation solutions tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups such as street vendors, slum dwellers, traffic policemen, and construction workers. This initiative comes amid concerns that the existing Heat Action Plans have failed to prioritise these marginalised populations, who bear the brunt of the heat, as highlighted by the

Centre for Policy Research, a think tank. With February 2023 recorded as the warmest month since 1901 and the situation likely to worsen this year and beyond, Heat Action Plans have become a significant tool to prepare for the onslaught of global warming. The world also experienced extreme heatwaves the previous year, with reports indicating that the number of hot days lasted for 280 days between March and May in India. Indeed, the impact of heatwaves on traffic cops, construction workers, and vendors is significant, as they are often among the most

exposed to scorching temperatures and harsh working conditions. To ensure these vulnerable groups are not overlooked, the National Disaster Management Authority recently held a two-day national workshop on Management Interventions and Mitigation Strategies for Heat Wave. For the first time, representatives from these segments were invited, allowing their lived experiences to be noted to help design heat mitigation solutions that address their concerns. Additionally, district collectors from



selected districts also shared their experiences in implementing HAPs. "By actively involving these frontline workers in the planning process, we are ensuring that their voices are heard and their experiences are taken into account. This collaborative approach not only enhances the effectiveness of heatwave preparedness efforts but also fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among those most directly affected," said an official from the NDMA. As they perform physical labour during the hottest hours of the day, these

workers can provide firsthand accounts of the difficulties they encounter, including heat-related illnesses, dehydration, and fatigue. Their input is crucial for developing comprehensive heatwave preparedness plans that address their specific needs and concerns, added the official. For instance, consider the case of traffic cop Harish Chaudhary (name changed). Last year, as the sun beat down relentlessly, he was stationed at one of the city's busiest intersections, where traffic congestion was a daily occurrence. Throughout the day, he endured the harsh

conditions, with the heat intensifying with each passing hour. Insights from individuals like him can inform strategies for ensuring their safety and well-being, such as providing adequate shade, hydration facilities, and scheduling breaks during the hottest parts of the day, in addition to offering training on recognising and managing heat-related illnesses. Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister of Earth Sciences, highlighted the escalating frequency and intensity of heatwaves in recent years, exacerbated by climate change, in his inaugural address. *Continued on Page 2*











www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Modi maxes his maxim

PM takes 'Minimum Govt, Maximum Governance' pitch to Dubai, says trust in Govt at all-time high

Reiterating his administration's commitment to the principle of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance,' Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stressed upon the significant strides made in streamlining bureaucracy and fostering Indian public's trust in governance. Speaking at Expo 2020 in Dubai, Modi underscored the transformative reforms undertaken by his Government to enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability in India's governance framework. The concept of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' encapsulates the philosophy of promoting lean and efficient governance structures while maximising the delivery of public services. Since assuming office, Modi has consistently advocated for reducing bureaucratic red tape, simplifying administrative processes and leveraging technology to empower citizens and businesses alike. During his address in Dubai, the Prime Minister highlighted several key initiatives aimed at realising this vision, including the implementation of Goods and



Services Tax (GST), the introduction of the Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) scheme and the push for digitalisation across various sectors. These reforms, he emphasised, have not only facilitated ease of doing business but also led to greater inclusivity and equitable distribution of resources. One of the most significant achievements cited by Modi was the marked increase in people's trust "in recent years" in the Government. He attributed this trust to his Government's unwavering commitment to serving the interests of all sections of society, coupled with its relentless focus on delivering tangible results. Through proactive outreach and citizen engagement initiatives, the Modi-led

NDA Government has fostered a sense of ownership and participation among the populace, thereby strengthening the social contract between the State and its citizens.

Modi's address in Dubai comes at a crucial juncture when India seeks to position itself as a global leader in trade, investment and innovation. The Expo 2020 Dubai, with its theme of 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future,' provides an ideal platform for India to showcase its economic prowess and technological advancements to the world. In an era marked by geopolitical uncertainties, the assurance of a responsive and accountable Government is paramount for attracting foreign investment and fostering sustainable growth. However, while lauding the progress made under the 'Minimum Govt, Maximum Governance' paradigm, Modi also acknowledged the need for continuous adaptation and refinement. He emphasised the importance of staying agile and responsive to evolving challenges, whether they be economic, social or technological in nature. Indeed, Prime Minister Modi's address in Dubai reaffirmed India's commitment to the principles of efficiency, transparency and accountability in governance. As the world looks towards a future defined by innovation and collaboration, India stands poised to lead the way with confidence and conviction. Good luck, Mr Prime Minister!

### PICTALK



Devotees blow conches on the opening of the first stone-built Hindu temple in the Middle East, in Abu Mureikha

## Tamil Nadu: The power struggle intensifies



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

RN Ravi, the Governor of Tamil Nadu, refuses to read State Government's speech which was critical of Central Government, ignites political tension

For the first time in the history of Tamil Nadu, a Governor refused to read the speech prepared by the State Government at the beginning of the 2024-2025 session of the Legislative Assembly and this has opened yet another battlefield in the ongoing war of nerves between the Chief Minister and the Raj Bhavan.

Every year, the parliament as well as the legislative assemblies begin their budget sessions with speeches to be delivered by the President and the respective Governors of the States concerned. The speech to be delivered by the President is prepared by the Government of India in the case of the joint session of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha while it is the State Governments that prepare the speeches of the Governors. By and large, these speeches do not evoke much controversy though the State Government may be administered by the party rival to the one that governs the Centre. This year saw Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan skipping the speech prepared by the CPI(M) led Government and just reading out the last two sentences which left Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his comrades flabbergasted. The reasons behind the Governor's action are explanatory. The speech prepared by the Chief Minister's Office was a charge sheet against the Centre. The LDF Government blamed the Centre for all the economic woes faced by the State and indicted the union finance minister for "throttling" the funds meant for the State.

The speech prepared by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin's office went one step further. While "blaming" the Centre for not allowing the State to raise finance from non-governmental agencies, the Tamil Nadu Government had incorporated the declaration that the State would not implement the Citizenship Amendment Act enacted by the Centre. There is a ridiculous statement that the granting of citizenship to anybody is the prerogative of the Centre while the State administration has no role in it.



The speech also blamed the Centre for not giving enough financial package to the State to address the problems arising out of rains and hailstorms in the months of November and December. But what we saw during the floods was the soldiers of the Disaster Relief Forces deployed by the Centre working round the clock to save the victims from flood and waterlogging. The sailors and aviators of the Indian Navy and Coast Guard too were pressed into service by the Centre to help the people from floods.

Though it is known to all policymakers and politicians in Tamil Nadu that the State has to bear the brunt of recurring floods, the State Government has failed to take proper action to avoid such disasters. The stormwater drains in all cities like Chennai, Coimbatore, Salem, Madurai etc are in a pathetic state. The State administrations in Tamil Nadu and Kerala have left it to the Centre to take whatever solution is needed to address this issue which happens to be the prerogative of the State. The white paper presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman gives a lie to all the charges made by Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The summer of 2024 is going to be severe and the Tamil Nadu Government is getting ready to wage a "war" against Karnataka for more water



THE CONSTITUTION HAS NOT SAID THAT THE GOVERNOR SHOULD BE SERVILE TO THE CHIEF MINISTER AND THE MEMBERS OF HIS COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

from Kaveri. If the water level in Karnataka's reservoirs is low, what that State should do is anybody's guess. Stalin has done nothing to resolve the perpetual water scarcity in Tamil Nadu though the State has a more than 1,000 km long coastline. It is possible to build desalination plants along the East Coast with which the entire water requirements of Tamil Nadu could be met. But the Dravidian major has done nothing other than get some resolutions passed in the legislative assembly and sent the same to the Centre.

A Governor who profoundly disagrees with the State government should not stay in office," says a pro-CPI (M) newspaper. The issue is should the Governor read out any trash material given to him by the State Government? The Governor is the representative of the Centre and he has work to do. The only drawback against RN Ravi is that he was appointed by the BJP Government at the Centre. The designs and intentions of the DMK as well as the Lefts are very clear. The Constitution has not said that the Governor should be servile to the Chief Minister and the members of his council of ministers. Articles 153 to 164 deal with the appointment of the Governor and his responsibilities. If the Governor feels that the legislation enacted by the State

Legislature is not in synchronization with the Constitution, he will send it back to the Government for review/reconsideration. If the Government is adamant that it would not budge, then the Governor has every right to withhold the Bill and seek legal advice from his lawyers at the Centre. This is what Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan said when the ruling CPI(M) wanted to appoint party cadres as vice-chancellors and faculties in the State's universities. The Supreme Court verdict declaring null and void the appointment of the vice-chancellors has vindicated the Governor's contention that the selection was in violation of all norms specified by the UGC. Interestingly, a book "Indian Constitution" by Dr M V Pylee, constitutional expert and former vice chancellor of Cochin University says that if a difference of opinion erupts between the Governor and the council of ministers, the Governor's decision would prevail. Moreover, the ministry does not have the power to decide what the Governor should or should not do. This book was published by the Kerala Government's own State Institute of Languages! This is the 17th revised edition published in 2020! (The writer is a special correspondent for The Pioneer; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### REVIVE READER ENGAGEMENT

Sir — In newspapers, a column "Reader's correspondence" is published. This column has been going on for the last so many decades and people love to go through this column first while sipping their morning coffee. Readers express their thoughts, reactions and the crux of the problem faced by society in daily routine. Presently, some newspapers are closed as they could not survive tough competition in the print media and some of them closed their reader's correspondence column without a valid reason.

Thus, the reason behind closing the backbone news dailies is not known. So the readers cannot express their thoughts through the print media and do much-needed social needs to the society. It is requested that resume the Letters to the Editor Column in newspapers and give pride of place to the readers without seeing caste, creed and religion and avoid publishing one set of personal letters all the time.

Jayanthi CK Manaiam | Mumbai

#### BCCI PRIORITISES DOMESTIC CRICKET

Sir — It refers to BCCI's new instructions to its players to play a certain number of Ranji Trophy games to be eligible for the forthcoming IPL. BCCI has hit the nail on its head because this action was much needed, as players seem to have taken the board for granted. We have had so many instances where a player picks and chooses the format and gives royal ignorance to the domestic cricket, Ranji Trophy. Ideally, when they are not representing the country, they should go back to domestic cricket and play red-ball cricket rather than preferring to play money-minting IPL. It is high time that representing the country must take precedence over IPL. No player should take his place for granted in the national team and it has to be earned through hard grind.

Bal Govind | Noida

#### UPI goes beyond India



Unified Payments Interface (UPI), introduced by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in 2016, has emerged as a transformative force in the realm of digital finance. By facilitating real-time fund transfers between bank accounts via mobile devices using unique UPI IDs or QR codes, UPI has revolutionized the way individuals and businesses conduct transactions in India. With over 10 billion transactions and a total value of? 15.7 lakh crore recorded in August 2023 alone, UPI has solid-

ified its position as a cornerstone of the country's fintech ecosystem. Its remarkable growth trajectory is exemplified by its market size, which surged from \$50 billion in 2021 to an estimated \$150 billion by 2025, highlighting its immense potential to drive financial inclusion and economic growth.

Beyond its domestic success, UPI has also expanded its reach internationally, establishing partnerships with local banks and payment platforms in countries like Singapore, Bhutan, and the UAE to facilitate cross-border transactions. This global expansion underscores India's leadership in fintech innovation and its ability to leverage technological advancements for international collaboration and financial connectivity. Moreover, the recent launch of UPI services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, following its introduction in France, further enhances the accessibility and convenience of cross-border payments, enhancing the travel experience for Indians and international travellers while showcasing India's fintech prowess on the global stage.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

#### TRAINING FOR LAWYERS

Sir — When judges have judicial academies to be trained in salient features of law, why not the lawyers? was an apt query by the Supreme Court bench of Justices Bela Trivedi and Pankaj Mittal. A young lawyer's "knowledge" in submitting a bail petition, without a summoning order, rightly disturbed the court. The top court's observation is a wake-up call for a profession that once enjoyed unquestionable reverence but has had several questions asked about its ethics and professionalism over the years. Young lawyers who emerge from smaller places are often thrown into the vast sea of legal professionals without proper hands to guide them. They are often found wanting in courtroom etiquettes and decorum. Barring senior lawyers who have a reputation to

maintain, and a handful of old timers, many young lawyers suffer from paucity of drafting skills and presentation acumen. Evolving changes in law and jurisprudence only mean they have to keep abreast of the latest developments because their advancement in the legal profession hinges on favourable court verdicts. Therefore, a successful lawyer is an amalgamation of impeccable courtroom behaviour and outstanding arguing skills that can impress the judges. Also, transparency and accountability are not commodities to be compromised at all.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Memories of forgotten time linger on!

In a life that is running at an increasingly frenetic pace, each one of us needs a pressure relief valve from time to time

There was a time in our lives, during our childhood and adolescence, not so long back, though now it seems a lifetime away, when cities had not grown.

We lived in a then upcoming locality in a state capital. Each Saturday we would walk to another adjoining upcoming locality for a weekly visit to the temple. Crossing a few empty fields, skipping alongside our parents, the temple seemed too far from our home; but it was fun. I have vainly tried to revisit those empty fields during my recent visits to the city, and the distance between the two colonies also does not appear too long. However, the memory - when it chooses to surface - always brings a smile to my face.

A few years later, we shifted to another city. Each weekend morning, few of us youngsters would venture beyond our homes. It was all agriculture land around the island that we called colony. We would walk through those fields lovingly planted with seasonal vegetables by the farmers. The tangy taste



of the tomatoes - those were not the hybrid variety - still tingles my palate.

I have faint memories of the first few years of my life. My grandparents lived deep inside a lane in a small town in North India. Numerous sweets and savoury shops abutted on both sides of the lane. Aroma of the fresh delicacies would be wafting and teasing our taste buds. Each morning we would wake up to sumptuous sweets and savouries that my grandfather would have brought home.

There were a few years till my adolescence when trains were still hauled by steam engines. Most of our travels during summer holidays were in second class, that

too unreserved compartments - probably those were the only ones affordable to the middle class at the time. There were no bars in the windows. We could stick our necks far out of the windows with the sole purpose of getting a few pieces of coal entangled in our hair, and then plucking those out with a glee that only children are capable of.

There were days when we would lie face up on grass and stare wide-eyed at the wonders of nature as also those created by humans. The condensation trail of a jet flying overhead was a sight to behold. But who could beat the shapes that passing clouds could assume! The shapes could be

as fantastic as our yet developing brains could conjure. In a life that is running at an increasingly frenetic pace, each one of us needs a pressure relief valve from time to time.

It is at times like these, that my lost, but fond memories surface, to grant me that moment of bliss in my own solitude. These are my endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin all rolled into one. I have met several persons in my life. While most of the happy ones are only too eager to delve into their past to narrate memories, even those going through personal crisis come up with pleasant memories when gently nudged.

Those visions from the past may not solve the current problems; but they do help in working towards finding a solution. All of us need that gentle prodding from time to time. Don't we owe it to ourselves to be that gentle push in someone's life! (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA



## FIRST COLUMN

## MODI'S TOUR SIGNALS A GEOPOLITICAL SHIFT

Modi's visit to UAE and Qatar would assert India's position in the region



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in UAE and Qatar earlier this week, underscoring the importance of the region in India's growing interests in the geo-political strategic outcomes from Arabia. This land masses west of the India ocean, and, especially UAE hadn't seen a visit by an Indian Prime Minister in more than three decades, till Narendra Modi decided to refocus. For nearly three decades before 2015, these nations on the other end of the Arabian Sea had been a distant place for Indian political leadership, occasionally grabbing domestic headlines for the wrong reasons, even though a sizeable chunk of the Indian diaspora was toiling away mostly in labour intensive jobs, sending precious hard foreign currency back to their villages in India. However, the importance of the region especially strategically important countries such as UAE as a key balancing power in West Asia was lost to the foreign policy makers of the time. The Indian prime minister's seven official visits to the UAE in a decade and reciprocal visits by UAE president Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan in a similar timeline, underscore the seriousness both sides have attributed to nurturing, this relationship. It was in August 2015 when PM Modi visited UAE on the invitation of then crown prince Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, which was the foundation of this ever-greening relationship. The joint statement released, stated "The visit of an Indian Prime Minister to UAE after 34 years marks the beginning of a new and comprehensive strategic partnership between India and UAE in a world of multiple transitions and changing opportunities and challenges."

In recent decades, UAE's economic progress has been one of the global success stories, transforming the nation into a regional leader and a thriving international centre.



India's rapid growth, modernization, and skilled workforce position it as a key player in the global economy. The robust economic partnership between India and the UAE, upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2015, culminated in the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

This was one of the first CEPAs or bilateral trade agreements India entered with any country with significant economic clout, in decades and a statement released last year on the first anniversary of the CEPA implementation highlighted the positive impact it had on exports in labour-intensive sectors such as 'Mineral Fuels; Electrical Machinery (particularly telephone equipment); Gems & Jewellery; Automobiles; Essential Oils; Other Machinery; Cereals; Other Agri Products; and Chemical Products. The CEPA with UAE proved to be a template for a similar trade agreement India managed to sign with Australia in the same year. However, another key element of the strategic partnership between India and UAE was the close cooperation on defence, security, and counter-terrorism measures outlined during the 2015 visit. The two sides had in 2015 pledged to "Coordinate efforts to counter radicalization and misuse of religion by groups and countries for inciting hatred, perpetrating and justifying terrorism or pursuing political aims. Denounce and oppose terrorism in all forms and manifestations, wherever committed and by whomever, calling on all states to reject and abandon the use of terrorism against other countries, dismantle terrorism infrastructures where they exist, and bring perpetrators of terrorism to justice. And Work together to control, regulate and share information on the flow of funds that could have a bearing on radicalization activities cooperate in interdicting illegal flows and take action against concerned organizations. Prime minister's visit this week which could be his last during his current tenure, signifies the importance of West Asia in India's geo-political and geo-economic approach for the 21st Century.

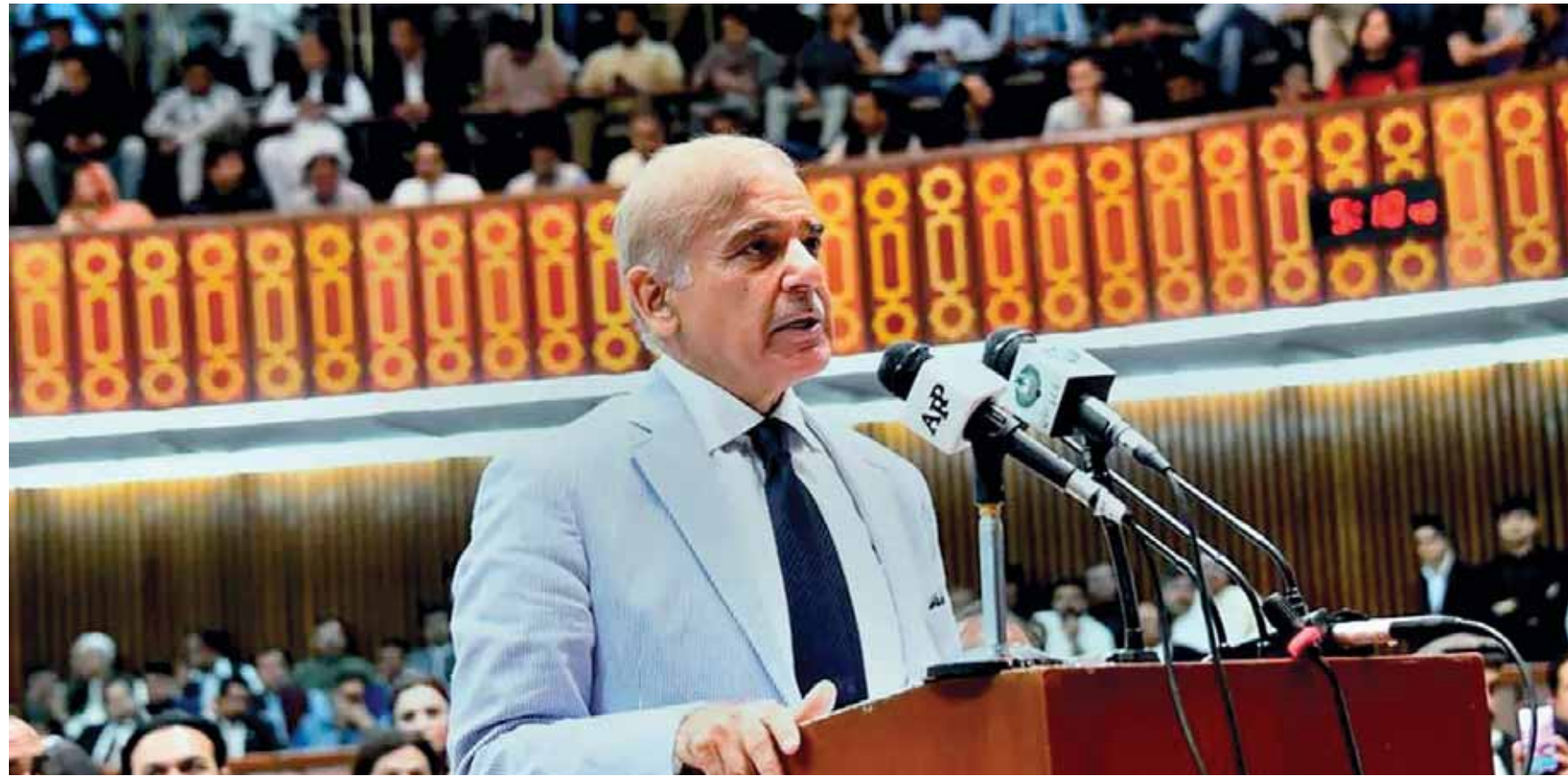
(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

## History repeats itself in Pakistan

Shehbaz Sharif emerges as the 'selected' PM candidate amidst elections scripted by the military to ensure PML-N's success, echoing past patterns



KS TOMAR



As per the amended version of the famous quote of American humorist and writer, Mark Twain history repeats itself but, at times in Rhymes, holds true in a stereotyped manner to the outcome of polls in Pakistan which is evident from the decks cleared for Shehbaz Sharif to become prime minister of Pakistan and the army has executed full proof strategy through the process of selection.

The results of the 2024 general elections in Pakistan had been a novella or saga scripted by the super-powerful army to ensure the success of Nawaz Sharif's party, PML-N which is identical to the previous elections held in 2018 to enthroned Imran Khan in the post of prime minister of Pakistan. Owing to this predominant factor of supremacy of the army and 'mind-set of people', none will question the "selection" of Shehbaz in this country which has got tradition and history of being ruled by the army indirectly by proxy for decades and directly for 33 years ranging from 1958-1971, 1977-1988 and 1999 to 2008).

It was also an illusion that democracy was restored for the rest of the period as the military had a hundred per cent dominance in domestic and international affairs as 'selected prime ministers' always acted as symbolic public figures. Now the cat is out of the bag and the outcome of the polls in Pakistan is in consonance with the expectations and estimation of the entire world besides the people of this beleaguered country.

**Unexpected Drama Unfolds:** Amidst the volatile and uncertain political scenario, in a surprise move, three-time PM, Nawaz Sharif has nominated his younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif for the post of PM which will enable him to rule by "Proxy" and confirm the post of chief minister of Punjab for his daughter, Maryam Nawaz. Experts say that Nawaz has tried to kill two birds with one stone thereby keeping the scope of the Pakistan Peoples Party's



NAWAZ WILL BE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT AND HE MAY MAKE CONCERTED EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURS, INCLUDING INDIA, WHICH WAS MENTIONED BY HIM IN HIS VICTORY SPEECH

chances to join the government as Bilawal Bhutto chairman of the party has declared to support the PML-N government from outside. Bilawal may bargain with PML-N to nominate his father, Asif Ali Zardari for the post of the president which may lead to a change of equations. 2nd, it will pave the way for the rehabilitation of his daughter Maryam and PML-N Information Secretary as CM of the most important province, Punjab. The coalition government will comprise various parties including PML-N, PPP, MQM, PML-Q, BAP etc. which will have a strength of 152 as against the required tally of 133 in the house of 265 which may go up to 169 after the addition of nominated members.

**Ties with India to improve:** Nawaz will be in the driver's seat and he may make concerted efforts to improve the relations with neighbours including India which was mentioned by him in his victory speech. A cursory look at Indian PM, Narendra Modi's attempts to have cordial relations with Pakistan shows that he had attempted to normalize the relations when he made a sudden trip to Lahore on Dec 25, 2015 and wished happy birthday to Pakistan EX PM Nawaz who turned 66. Prior to it, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had visited Pakistan in 2004 who will be credited for bringing a thaw in relations with Islamabad.

As per the principle of diplomacy, dialogue must continue even if enemy governs the ties between two nations. India may resume the talks if Pakistan shows sincerity and comes out of Kashmir phobia. Experts are unanimous over the attitude of Chinese President Xi Jinping who is having animosity

towards democratic set up whereas the United States will feel ease at the continuation of democracy in Pakistan. Modi even attended the marriage reception of Nawaz's granddaughter, Merun Nisa in Dec 2015 at Jati Umrah outside Lahore but the army disapproved of these initiatives and hence sabotaged the same.

In this backdrop, the situation is different now as the army and Nawaz seem to be on the same page which may yield positive results. Army's ISI wing will have to shed its' policy to support terrorists in indulging in violence in Kashmir. Nawaz is expected to come out of Kashmir's phobia and focus on economic issues which can act as guiding principles to his brother, Shabaz. Shehbaz and Asim duo will yell at the US administration. Imran Khan will be remembered for directly accusing America of ensuring his defeat in Parliament in April 2022 which brought Shehbaz Sharif to power. Imran had quoted a secret diplomatic cable to prove his allegation which was at variance with the stand of the army. Imran also took cudgels against the powerful army which cost him the PM chair especially when he won the election with the help of the military.

The track record shows that the US administration always had a close relationship with the Pakistan army which will be true to the current set-up also. Army will fully support Shehbaz to improve ties with the US which may help Pakistan to get more financial assistance from the IMF. Army Chief, General Asim had visited the US to lobby for getting a financial bailout package from the IMF. Army had been instrumental in

the installation of Shehbaz after orchestrating the downfall of Imran in 2018 which witnessed cordial relations between ex-PM and army chief, Asim Muneer. Nawaz will be the guiding force to cement the ties with the army and ensure the success of the coalition government.

**Unequal Playing Field:** It is a paradox and none will doubt that the present elections in Pakistan were a reflection of an unequal playing field especially when Imran Khan, a strong contender and popular leader was eliminated from the electoral process under a well-planned conspiracy. Imran's loyalists say that the army played a predominant role in giving the PM chair to Nawaz Sharif on the plate who has preferred to rule by proxy. Imran was disqualified and convicted in several cases to put him in jail which made his party, PTI, rudderless. The election commission snatched its symbol of Bat to put it in a disadvantageous position.

Analysts opine that Pakistan is poised for another spell of pain, mess and chaos as Imran's supporters have won in big numbers and are bound to create problems for the Shehbaz government. They may continue their tirade against the army and demand the release of their leader from jail. India should not expect some tangible result from such an unstable and fragile government though Ex-PM Nawaz and the army are on the same page hence there are chances of change in dynamics in diplomacy but let us wait and watch.

(The writer is a political analyst and has six years experience of in foreign posting in a neighbouring country; views are personal)

## Lakshadweep has strategic importance and tourism potential

China has invested heavily in Sri Lanka and also now in Maldives. This compels us to look at Lakshadweep with a fresh sense of urgency

Lakshadweep-Maldives-Chagos group of islands are actually the tops of a vast undersea mountain (Chagos-Laccadive) Range in the Indian Ocean. Lakshadweep has 36 islands that are located 400 km to the west of the nearest coast. The islands have a total land area of 32 sq km but add to a 400,000 sq km Exclusive Economic Zone to India as 200 nautical miles astride the nearest land area is economic zone of that country as per the international maritime law. Possession of these islands away from the mainland provides a strategic, military and political advantage to India.



UMANG KOHLI

Of Communication that pass through the 'Nine Degree Channel'. The channel is used by all ships shuttling to and from Europe, the Middle East, West and South East Asia and also the Far East. It's thus essential that these islands are given due infrastructure so that they can be hubs of tourist and commercial activity in the years to come. So the question now is how do we get the infrastructure built

and add on to the integration of the islands with the mainland? Should an Integrated Tri-service unit come up in Lakshadweep in the years to come, with a suitable component of the Coast Guard? Should we add on to the existing infrastructure or just start building a new set-up altogether? Should we concentrate on tourism aspects initially or go for a multi-dimensional approach to development straight away? Are the people of Lakshadweep on board for a rapid pace of development? These questions need to be answered before we can make tall claims of disturbing the Apple Cart of some third country. Lakshadweep islands can be used as a launch pad during

symmetric and asymmetric conflicts and hence must have the basic infrastructure to support a Tri-service setup to include a multipurpose airport and a proper dockyard. Lakshadweep Islands can also then be used as a vantage point to monitor any movement of vessels in the Arabian Sea. These islands would play a key role in controlling the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) during conflicts/crises due to their close proximity to many choke points.

For now, the basic infrastructure exists in bits and pieces. Tourism requires ample accommodation and sustainable infrastructure to facilitate comfortable stays, which right now is limited as compared to the potential increase we

envisage in the years to come. Obviously, Mumbai is a major feeder point for all foreign and domestic tourists. Cruise lines like Cordelia provide accommodation at sea and access to tourists as well. This kind of tourism model could be very effective and sustainable without adversely affecting the land and population of Lakshadweep. The cruise line right now acts as a major feeder of tourists to Lakshadweep. More such cruise lines are a must to boost the economy of Lakshadweep and also to establish trade routes further South.

Adding on to the existing infrastructure is always the first step of development, though obviously, new projects would come in some time. Private public partner-

ship in this regard could be very helpful. Education of locals also needs to be a priority for them to be able to interact with tourists in both Hindi and English. Small helipads in all ten islands that are inhabited would facilitate fast movement between the islands and could be used as air taxis by the tourists, further adding to the charm of Lakshadweep. These helipads would also be handy for setting up an anti-drone grid, so essential for the protection of these islands. They could help in times of Tsunami and medical emergencies as well. Suitable communication means along with numerous satellite communication channels need to come up on an urgent basis. The islands have no petrol pumps and maybe

that is good, for subsidized electric vehicles must be provided to locals which would be very effective there. Since the distances to be travelled are short, the range barrier of electric vehicles won't be an issue. So a multidimensional approach to development along with a push to tourism for Lakshadweep and Andaman may go a long way in consolidating India's position in the Indian Ocean. China has interests in the Indian Ocean and has invested heavily in Sri Lanka and also now in Maldives. This compels us to look at Lakshadweep with a fresh sense of urgency. It would be prudent if we educate the population of the mainland about the overall importance of these islands. Each island in

the Indian Ocean needs to be protected and integrated with the mainland.

Lakshadweep is India's Strategic Sentinel, Maritime and Trade Route Guardian. The current 'Maldives political row is a spark that should propel us to take steps to develop India's maritime muscle. A well-orchestrated use of these islands would go a long way in helping India establish itself as a major economic and military player. Make no mistake that the ten inhabited islands of Lakshadweep act as ten fingers of India in the Indian Ocean. These fingers give us a long arm to help us build up resources, beyond our imagination.

(The writer is an expert on international relations; views are personal)









# Bajrang urges UWW to reimpose suspension on WFI

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Olympic medallist Bajrang Punia on Thursday urged world governing body UWW to reimpose suspension on Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), saying reinstating the Sanjay Singh-led body has again put wrestlers under "threat and harassment".  
The United World Wrestling (UWW) on Tuesday lifted the provisional suspension imposed on WFI but with a condition: the national federation must provide written guarantees ensuring no discriminatory action against the protesting trio - Punia, Sakshi Malik, and Vinesh Phogat.  
"This decision has again put Indian wrestlers under threat and harassment by WFI members," Punia wrote in his letter, shared on his social media handle 'X'.  
UWW had suspended WFI in August 23 for not holding elections on time. After numerous hurdles, WFI finally held its polls and Sanjay Singh

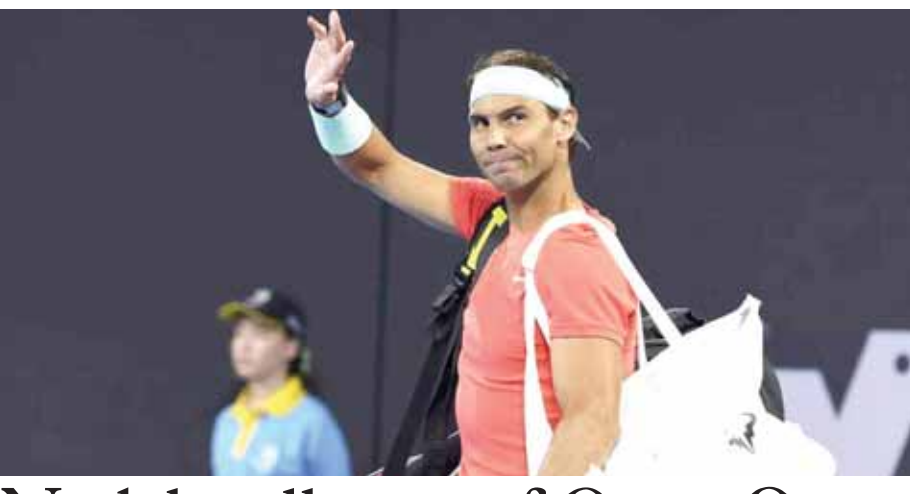


was elected President.  
"We wrestlers request you kindly support Indian athletes against unfair practices and harassment through various means. Indian wrestlers are looking up to you for justice and their rights to fair and safe play."

"We are hopeful that you will consider our request to support clean and fair sports activities in India and take necessary actions against the WFI." Punia sent a copy of the letter to Sports Minister Anurag Thakur.  
The Tokyo Games bronze

medallist reminded UWW that the Indian Sports Ministry had on December 27 last year suspended WFI, citing "serious anomalies within days of taking charge."  
In response to the suspension, MYAS took proactive measures by forming an Ad

Hoc Committee to oversee and manage wrestling activities.  
"Despite these efforts, the suspended WFI members allegedly continued to make "blatant decisions and conduct sporting activities without any recognition from sports ministries, all under the same leadership."  
"Wrestlers all over India have lost trust and belief in functioning of Wrestling Federation of India. Because of this MYAS took diligent steps and issued a circular dated January 7, 2024.  
"Even after this they have publicly issued statements against wrestlers and Ad Hoc Committee. This elected body is still being run by same individual and their allies who have serious charges against them and MYAS also took the same in consideration while suspending the body," he added.  
Punia, Malik, and Vinesh Phogat had led a protest former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, demanding his arrest over sexual harassment allegations.



# Nadal pulls out of Qatar Open

**AP ■ DOHA (QATAR)**  
Rafael Nadal put off his return to the tennis tour because he isn't yet healthy enough to play, announcing that he will sit out next week's Qatar Open.  
"I would have loved to play in Doha, where the tournament team, as well as the amazing Qatar fans have always supported me greatly. Unfortunately I am not ready to compete and I won't be able to come to Doha where I really

wanted to be and play again after that unforgettable win in 2014," Nadal wrote on social media. "I will focus on keeping working to be ready for the exhibition in Las Vegas and the amazing Indian Wells tournament."  
The 37-year-old Spaniard is scheduled to participate in an exhibition match with Carlos Alcaraz on March 3, then head to Indian Wells, California, for the hard-court tournament there next month.  
Nadal played in three matches

at the Brisbane International in early January — his first competitive action in nearly a full year — but then pulled out of the Australian Open and hasn't been back since.  
He hurt his hip flexor during the Australian Open in 2023, and eventually needed surgery, missing the rest of last season. Nadal has indicated this year might be the last of his career, and he's pointed to the French Open — where he won 14 of his 22 Grand Slam titles — as his focus.

# Nagal battles past Wong, moves into quarterfinals

**PTI ■ BENGALURU**  
Sumit Nagal was put through his sternest test yet by Coleman Wong but the second seeded Indian had enough grunt in him to fight past the Hong Kong man to enter the quarterfinals of the Bengaluru Open here on Thursday.  
Nagal won 6-2 7-5 after an hour and 46 minutes of intense battle.  
But the beginning belied the struggles awaited Nagal in the later stages of the match.  
Nagal continued the pattern of earning an early break when he went up 2-0 in the opening set. But it was not all smooth sailing as the 26-year-old had to battle past from 0-30 down in the very next game to hold his serve.  
Nagal got another break in the eighth game to bag the first set 6-2.  
But the 19-year-old Wong had more fight in him in the second set.  
After the first four games went by serve, the Hong Kong player broke Nagal in the fifth game, and it was the first time he



Indian dropped his serve in this tournament.  
Wong found his serves and ground shots going during this passage, as Nagal looked a tad perplexed by the unexpected fightback.  
However, the world No. 98 broke back in the sixth game itself to restore the parity at 3-3, though it was more the result of his rival committing a couple of unforced errors.  
In the seventh game, Nagal found himself 0-40 down as Wong pulled out a couple of fine winners on either flank of the court.  
But Nagal lifted his game by a notch at this moment to make it a deuce and a couple of points

later he managed to hold the serve to go 4-3 up. The Indian star received a brilliant chance to close out the game in the 10th game when he went up 40-15 on Wong's serve.  
But Wong saved both the match points, hammering an ace down the middle first and followed it up with another bazooka serve that Nagal failed to retrieve from his backhand.  
Wong eventually held his serve when Nagal drove a backhand into the net.  
But Nagal did not miss his third match point which came in the 12th game.  
Up 40-30, Nagal was pushed to a corner by Wong's strong volley, but the former champion found enough space to squeeze in a forehand cross court winner to finally walk off the court with a relieved smile on his face.  
Results (Singles, Pre-Quarterfinals): Sumit Nagal (2) beat Coleman Wong 6-2, 7-5; Stefano Napolitano (7) beat Vasek Pospisil 6-4 4-6 6-4; Moez Echargui beat Enrico Dalla Valle 6-2 6-2; Adam Walton (5) beat Gauthier Onclin 6-2 6-2.

# English clubs financial power detailed in UEFA review of European soccer economy

**AP ■ GENEVA**  
The financial power of English soccer was detailed in a UEFA report Thursday analyzing the record 24 billion euros (\$25.75 billion) economy of top-tier clubs across Europe.  
The 20 Premier League clubs' total revenue of 6.5 billion euros (\$7 billion) in 2022 was almost equal to the next two richest leagues combined - Spain's La Liga and Germany's 18-team Bundesliga each had about 3.3 billion euros (\$3.54 billion).  
Those 20 Premier League clubs combined had as much revenue as all 642 clubs in the 50 countries outside the big five leagues of England, Spain, Germany, Italy and France, UEFA said.  
Closing the gap on English clubs' spending power had been cited in 2021 as a reason why clubs in Spain and Italy pushed hardest for the breakthrough Super League project that failed.  
UEFA's annual review of club



finances suggested the industry has recovered from "lingering pandemic impacts" of the COVID-19 outbreak that shut down European soccer in 2020.  
It predicted total revenue topping 26 billion euros (\$27.9 billion) in the 2023 financial year fueled by broadcast deals, commercial sponsorships and ticket sales. The top 20 revenue-earning clubs are set to get almost half

that income in European soccer and about half of those clubs are likely to be English.  
English clubs also accounted for 764 million euros (\$820 million) of the collective pre-tax losses of 3.2 billion euros (\$3.43 billion) by European clubs in 2022.  
Still, UEFA said it saw positive signs from the first financial reports posted by clubs in 2023 with wage inflation slowing.

UEFA noted American investors' continuing "appetite for investment in European clubs," and they were involved in seven of the 15 foreign takeovers at top-division European clubs in 2023.  
**RICHEST CLUBS:** Clubs with most revenue were the two Spanish giants and two state-backed clubs.  
Real Madrid led with 841 million euros (\$902 million); Abu Dhabi-backed Manchester City, the Champions League winner, had 836 million euros (\$897 million); Barcelona was on 815 million euros (\$874 million); Qatar-backed Paris Saint-Germain had 807 million euros.  
PSG was the most expensive team to watch, according to UEFA. The average matchday spend by fans on tickets and hospitality prices was 140 euros. Only Juventus and Tottenham also had fans paying average matchday prices above 100 euros.  
**ENGLAND DOMINATES:**

Nine of the top-20 earning clubs in Europe by revenue were English, including Brighton which had income of 264 million euros. That was just 13 million euros less than Serie A champion Napoli.  
The 20 English clubs collectively ranked No. 1 in Europe for most revenue, most domestic broadcast rights sales, most UEFA prize money from European competitions and most matchday ticket revenue. Spain ranked second in most metrics.  
The average revenue of a Premier League club — 323 million euros — was almost 10 times more than the average club in the seventh-richest league, the Netherlands.  
The money flowing into England fuels its popularity with international investors and so it ranked No. 1 in Europe with 16 of the 20 clubs having "at least one foreign shareholder." It was seven of 20 clubs in Spain.

# Ronaldo scores first goal of 2024

**AP ■ RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA)**  
Cristiano Ronaldo scored his first goal of 2024 to give Al-Nassr a 1-0 win over fellow Saudi Arabian club Al-Fayha in the first leg of the Asian Champions League's round of 16.  
Ronaldo broke the deadlock in the 81st minute by playing a neat one-two with former Inter Milan midfielder Marcelo Brozovic, who lifted his return pass over the Al-Fayha backline from the edge of the box for Ronaldo to run onto and flick a lob past the goalkeeper with a first-time shot.  
The 39-year-old Ronaldo has now scored a club goal in 23 straight calendar years, going back to 2002. Al-Nassr is looking for a first continental title, with the second leg



played next Wednesday.  
Saudi Arabia has four teams that reached the knockout round, which is split into two geographic zones until the final. Four-time winner Al-Hilal travels to Iran to take on Sepahan on Thursday while Al-Ittihad meets Navbahor of Uzbekistan.

Earlier on Wednesday, Al-Ain of the United Arab Emirates drew 0-0 with Uzbekistan's Nasaf Qarshi.  
In the eastern zone, Thailand's Bangkok United scored in injury time to complete a comeback from two goals down to draw 2-2 against Yokohama F. Marinos of Japan.  
Elber put Yokohama ahead after 18 minutes and Kota Watanabe added a second six minutes later. Bangkok hit back through Nitipong Selanon and then Palestinian international Mahmoud Eid leveled in the second minute of added time.  
In an all-South Korean game, Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors defeated Pohang Steelers 2-0 with a goal in each half from Hernandes and Ahn Hyeon-beom.

# Woods is wearing many hats at Riviera

**AP ■ LOS ANGELES**  
Tiger Woods is wearing a lot of hats at the Genesis Invitational — one of them featuring a new logo — without a lot of clarity on the state of his game or the future of the PGA Tour.  
Woods joined the PGA Tour board last summer and has been involved in negotiations that led to Strategic Sports Group becoming a minority investor in a deal worth as much as \$3 billion. Still unclear is where that leaves the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia, the financial backer of LIV Golf.  
"Ultimately we would like to have PIF be a part of our tour and a part of our product," Woods said Wednesday at Riviera.  
"Financially, we don't right now. And the monies that they have come to the table with, and what we initially had agreed to in the framework agreement, those are all the same numbers. Anything beyond this is going to be obviously over and above."  
As for his game, Woods said his speed is not the same with a 48-year-old body that includes a fused lower spine and a fused right ankle.  
"I built this golf swing the last few years... Based on my hands and what that feels like," he said. "What that looks like, sometimes it doesn't look pretty, but I can still hit the ball flush."  
That hasn't translated at Riviera, the course he has played the most times as a pro (12) without winning. The short answer on why is that he's never putted well here.  
But he was clear when it came to launching his new "Sun Day Red" brand with Nike. Asked what would become of his "TW" logo from Nike that he often wore on the front of his cap and back of his shirt, Woods said he doesn't get that back.  
"I don't want it back. I've moved on," he said. "This is a transition in my life. I've moved on to Sun Day Red' and we're looking forward to building a brand that elicits excitement."  
The other hat — host of the Genesis Invitational — requires little commentary. Riviera has been one of the premier stops on the PGA Tour for 60 years, and now it is a signature event that offers a \$20 million purse.  
The player-hosted events — Riviera, the Arnold Palmer Invitational and Memorial — award \$4 million to the winner (compared with \$3.6 million for other signature events), though it also comes



with a 36-hole cut to the top 50 and ties, and anyone within 10 shots of the lead.  
The field is as strong as any this side of a major. The course has held up remarkably well despite two "atmospheric rivers" that dumped heavy rain on Los Angeles.  
The course, a rectangular piece of property between the tony Brentwood neighborhood and Sunset Boulevard, is a haven for pure iron players and Woods has long been among the best.  
But he has only three top 10s at Riviera, and only one serious chance at winning, finishing two shots behind Ernie Els in 1999. Most telling about Woods and Riviera was the end of 1999 and early 2000. Woods had 10 out of 11 starts on the PGA Tour when he either won or finished second. The exception was Riviera. He tied for 18th.  
"I have traditionally not putted well here," he said. "I've driven it well here. There are small greens and traditionally throughout my entire career my iron game has been pretty good, but I have never really gotten hot with the putter at this course."  
His health is good enough that he hopes to play at least once a month through the majors. The Genesis Invitational is his first PGA Tour-sanctioned event since the Masters.  
Woods was walking fine (the shoes are prototype TaylorMade, but he abandoned the Nike swoosh after his February 2021 car crash in Los Angeles). He began his pro-am with Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen and Los Angeles Angels outfielder Aaron Hicks by holing a 12-foot eagle putt on the first hole.  
He talks about a "W" being nice, but that's

always the case. Since his last PGA Tour victory in Japan at the end of 2019, only once has Woods finished closer than 15 shots of the winner. That was at Torrey Pines in 2020, when he was six shots behind.  
"In talking to him over the offseason, he was as enthusiastic as I've ever heard him," Notah Begay III said from the PGA Tour Champions event in Florida. "He understands what his limitations are. Ten years ago, 15 years ago, there were no limitations on Tiger Woods. Now he understands, and that's fine. He's not the longest... But he's way above average. So it's just kind of like, can he piece it together at the right time? We'll see."  
Woods still attracts a big crowd, and that's expected when the tournament starts Thursday. "I'm just happy to see the man not limping as much," Max Homa said. "It's pretty amazing what he brings to an event with his presence on the golf course... You have less people watching you play golf, but there are more people watching golf, which is cool."  
He still ruffles golf to the point this is one week the chatter about all the top players being divided among the PGA Tour and LIV Golf gets overshadowed.  
Woods said the deal with SSG and ongoing negotiations with the PIF include "different models for pathways back" - a reference to the potential of LIV players rejoining the PGA Tour.  
"What that looks like, what the impact is for the players who have stayed and how we make our product better going forward, there is no answer to that right now," he said.

# Klinsmann job in jeopardy

**AP ■ SEOUL**  
Korean Football Association officials have recommended Jurgen Klinsmann be fired as head coach of the South Korean national team after an Asian Cup semifinal exit and reports of infighting among star players.  
Klinsmann was already under heavy criticism after South Korea's upset 2-0 semifinal loss to Jordan last week and pressure intensified following media reports of a spat between captain Son Heung-min and young star Lee Kang-in during the tournament.  
At an Asian Cup campaign review at KFA headquarters in Seoul, the eight-member National Team Committee talked to Klinsmann via video conference from his home in the United States, before reaching its findings.  
"For a number of reasons, we concluded that Klinsmann would no longer be able to show his leadership as head coach of the national team," the KFA's Technical Director Hwangbo Kwan said. "We will report our conclusion to the KFA." The final decision will be made by KFA chairman Chung Mong-gyu.  
The incident involving the players resulted in Son facing Jordan and then returning to



England to play for Tottenham Hotspur with a dislocated finger. Lee, who plays for Paris Saint-Germain, apologized on Wednesday on social media.  
"I have caused great disappointment to fans who always support our national team. I am really sorry," Lee wrote on Instagram. "I should have set an example and listened to older teammates. I'd like to apologize to many people who must be disappointed in me."  
Hwangbo during the meeting added that Klinsmann, who

has refused to stand down ahead of World Cup qualifying games next month, had said that the infighting affected the performance of the players against Jordan.  
"There were opinions that Klinsmann failed to show his resolve to find new talent and that he failed to grasp internal conflict or mood among squad members," Hwangbo said.  
As well as his leadership and tactical skills, Klinsmann has been unpopular with fans for refusing to base himself in South Korea, in contrast to

previous foreign coaches. Klinsmann won the World Cup as a player and had success as coach of the German and U.S. Teams before taking on the role in South Korea.  
"Some committee members said the coach has not shown willingness to watch players in person and identify talent," Hwangbo said. "Also, there were opinions that Klinsmann has been disrespectful toward the Korean public by not spending enough time in the country." Chung, the KFA chairman, has also been criticized for the performance of the national team, his hiring of Klinsmann in February of last year and for his leadership. There were protestors outside KFA House in Seoul on Thursday holding banners calling for Chung also to go.  
One of those protesting, 28-year-old Shin Seung-chul, said he wanted Klinsmann and KFA president Chung Mong-gyu to "take responsibility for this situation and resign."  
Kang Min-gu, a 50-year-old soccer fan, said it was up to the soccer federation and coaching staff to help players reconcile differences.

# Rohit, Jadeja lead India robust recovery against England

3rd Test: Sarfaraz khan scores 62 on debut



**PTI ■ RAJKOT**  
Skipper Rohit Sharma and Ravindra Jadeja dropped anchor on a benign track to lead a robust recovery for India, steering the hosts to 185/3 at tea on the first day of the third Test against England here on Thursday.  
With Rohit (97 batting) bringing up his 17th Test fifty, first of the series, in a shared first session between the two opponents, Jadeja (68 batting) followed his captain's feat in the second session with his 21st half-century. Rohit and Jadeja cashed in on a batting-friendly surface here at the Niranjan Shah Stadium, which had provided early troubles to India's youngsters in the first session. Sarfaraz (62 off 66) was going all guns blazing before Jadeja misjudged a call for a quick single, leading to a run out at the non-striker's end.  
India were left reeling at 33 for three in the first hour's play having lost Yashasvi Jaiswal (10), Shubman Gill (0) and Rajat Patidar (5), but Rohit and Jadeja rebuilt the innings.  
Rohit and Jadeja opted to grind it out in the morning session and impose themselves in the afternoon without taking any undue

risks to put on 152 runs for the fourth wicket so far. Rohit was one hit away from his 11th ton in the format and certainly a timely one given the circumstances. He has faced 154 balls with 11 fours and two sixes. On the other hand, Jadeja went about his business with consummate ease to reach a resolute 68 not out from 126 balls with six boundaries and one six.  
The dashing all-rounder found the gaps on a packed leg-side field and his immaculate running between the wickets was the stand-out aspect of his knock. Jadeja had fielders standing close to his bat and even on the leg side, but the local favourite displayed excellent use of his wrists to work the ball around for singles and doubles.  
As the pitch flattened out under the sun to provide nothing in terms of assistance for the English bowlers, the visitors were forced to work with their field settings and try different angles with their bowling. But nothing seems to have worked out.  
For more than one spell, express pacer Mark Wood, who rocked India twice early, barraged Rohit with a deep fine leg and deep square leg in place.



## Tears, hugs and joy as Sarfaraz, Jurel make India Test debuts

**PTI ■ RAJKOT**

Emotions ran high in the Indian team's huddle this morning when domestic batting star Sarfaraz Khan and wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel were handed their Test caps on debut, before the start of play for the third Test against England here on Thursday.  
A consistent performer on the domestic circuit for Mumbai, Sarfaraz has been in contention for national selection for a long time but the 26-year-old has had to wait for his chance to break into the Indian Test side.  
Having received his maiden India call-up earlier in the series, Sarfaraz was in line for debut ever since India lost the services of KL Rahul for this Test and also given that his Mumbai teammate Shreyas Iyer lost his spot and Virat Kohli is unavailable.  
On the other hand, with a sparky average nearing 47 with the bat, Uttar Pradesh's Jurel became the obvious pick for the wicketkeeper-batter's spot after KS Bharat failed to make the most of the opportunities with the bat.  
The two youngsters got their names engraved on the rich roster of India's Test cricketers with Sarfaraz becoming the 311th player and Jurel the 312th.  
The right-handed Sarfaraz was presented his cap by former India captain and most successful Test bowler Anil Kumble.  
"Sarfu, really proud of you, the way you have come through. I am sure your dad and your family will be extremely proud of what you have been able to achieve. I know you have done all the hard work," Kumble, also the former national coach, said in the team huddle.  
"There were some disappointments but despite that, all the runs you have scored through the domestic season — well done to you. I am sure you will have lots of wonderful memories today. (This is the) start of a long career, only 310 people have played before you, and this is for you. Good luck," he added.  
Sarfaraz was later seen showing his India cap to his father and coach Naushad Khan who was overwhelmed with emotions and broke down.  
Sarfaraz was also seen wiping off his wife's happy tears at the venue.  
Former India wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik shared interesting anecdotes and statistics while making his speech during the cap presentation to Jurel.  
"Coming from Agra, moving to Noida at a very young age, your mother being with you... all the tough things that must have happened in the journey, there must have been so many people through that journey who would have really helped you. I am sure all of them would be watching today," he said.  
"You must have played a lot of matches in different colours, mainly blue, but there is something divine and pure about wearing the whites and representing India in Test cricket. It is the toughest format of the game, it is relentless but there is tremendous satisfaction that comes when you do well in this format," Karthik added.  
Karthik said doing well in Test cricket is paramount for every cricketer and wished Jurel to have success like his teammate Rinku Singh.  
"Your dad is watching today who is your biggest hero and he will be really proud and happy like everybody else are," he said.  
"Everybody's journey is different and what you have done in this short duration of time and achieved... let us take an example, Rinku Singh, who has been your roommate for sometime now and (also) your housemate," Karthik revealed.  
"He has done some special things in the last six months and may you do special things as well," the former India stumper added.  
Karthik pulled up some numbers to highlight how rare it is to get to play Test cricket for India.  
"Not many have played this format - I tell you that in the last 10 years — as a commentator I took up some stats: 65 people have played T20s, 56 have played ODIs but just 30 have managed to play 'Test cricket'," he said.  
"This is the toughest form and very hard to get in. What you have achieved is really special and may you stay here long and do really well," Karthik added.

## Dravid to remain India head coach till T20 World Cup

**PTI ■ RAJKOT**

Rahul Dravid will continue to remain in the position of India's head coach till the upcoming T20 World Cup in June this year, confirmed BCCI secretary Jay Shah. Dravid's contract ended after the ODI World Cup final last year, but he was asked to continue in his role along with other support staff for the December-January tour to South Africa without finalising the tenure.  
But Shah said he held an initial talk with Dravid here before arriving at the decision to retain the former captain's services till the ICC showpiece to be held in the West Indies and the USA.  
"After the (2023) World Cup, Rahul bhai had to leave for the South Africa tour immediately. We did not get to meet in between which finally happened today,"



Shah said here on the sidelines of the renaming function of the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium on Wednesday night. "Why are you worried about a contract for

such a senior person like Rahul Dravid? Rahul bhai will remain the coach in the T20 World Cup," Shah asserted.  
However, Shah indicated that they will hold a few more rounds of discussions ahead of the marquee event.  
"I will speak with him whenever there is time, there are back-to-back series happening right now. They were in South Africa, then there was a (T20I) series against Afghanistan (at home) and now England. We did not get to speak in between at all," he added.  
Shah said the IPL franchises will have to comply with workload management guidelines set by the BCCI for the centrally contracted players.  
"This is the BCCI's mandate. The BCCI is the supreme body and whatever it decides the franchises will have to follow - we are above the franchises," he said.



## UK club cricketer Rizwan gets lengthy ban for match fixing attempts in Abu Dhabi League

**PTI ■ DUBAI**

UK-based club cricketer Rizwan Javed was on Thursday banned for 17-and-a-half years from all cricket for making various attempts to fix matches during the Abu Dhabi T10 League in 2021.  
"Rizwan Javed has received a lengthy ban from cricket for his repeated and serious attempts to corrupt professional cricketers," ICC General Manager Integrity, Alex Marshall said in an ICC statement.  
"The sanction imposed should send a strong message to other corrupters trying to target cricket at any level and demonstrates that any attempt to corrupt cricket will be strongly dealt with."  
Abu Dhabi T10, approved by Emirates Cricket Board (ECB), was launched in 2017. Rizwan is among eight players and officials charged by the ICC on behalf of the ECB in Bangladesh last year.  
Bangladesh all-rounder Nasir Hossain was also named

## How Guru Gary using cricket to keep slum kids away from drugs

**PTI ■ CAPE TOWN**

Notorious for drugs and crime and afflicted by large-scale poverty, the Khayelitsha township here is better known for being one of the biggest slums on the planet. But World Cup-winning coach Gary Kirsten is attempting to change the image for good through cricket.  
The idea struck him when he returned to his home here after guiding India to a World Cup title in 2011.  
"When I came back from India, I wanted to have a look at cricket in our poorest neighbourhoods in Cape Town," Kirsten recalled in an interview with PTI.  
He ended up touring Khayelitsha, situated 30km south-east of Cape Town and considered one of the most unsafe areas where a majority of the inhabitants still live in shacks.



"I took a tour of the area with local school authorities and found that no cricket was happening which disappointed me a lot. I thought of this centre and we started with two concrete nets in two schools and then included three more schools," Kirsten said.  
What ultimately shaped up was the Catch Trust Foundation, originally called the Gary Kirsten Foundation, in 2014

helping me keep my body and lungs fit. I see myself as a future South African player," said 15-year-old Lukhlo Malong, a trainee spinner whose parents work as domestic helps. "Talent is universal, opportunity is not, reads the guiding principle of the foundation with the stated goal being to create sporting ecosystems in low-income areas.  
The foundation has been operating at five schools in Khayelitsha and claims to have worked with over 1000 kids in 5-19 age bracket. A strong women's team has also emerged and some girls of them have managed to reach the provincial representation level.  
"I take motivation from Virat Kohli as he inspires me to work hard and keep going. I want to play for South Africa one day," said Malong, spelling out his dreams for a better life on the back of a sporting career.

**AP ■ HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND)**

## New Zealand is 40-1 after Day 3

Chasing 267 to beat South Africa in 2nd cricket test



David Bedingham made a maiden century Thursday to bat an under-rated South Africa lineup to a 266-run lead over New Zealand on the third day of the second cricket test.  
New Zealand lost Devon Conway with one ball left in the day's play and was 40-1 at stumps, still 226 behind with two full days remaining. Conway fell lbw to off-spinner Dane Piedt on the fifth ball of the 14th over, only seconds before the scheduled end. Tom Latham was 21 not out.  
While Bedingham was at the crease on the way to a career-best 110 and during a 98-run partnership with Keegan Peterson (43), a Proteas team which had been written off before its tour began was in control

of the match, setting a difficult chase for New Zealand.  
South Africa is without most of its leading players who stayed at home to play in a domestic Twenty20 league. After losing the first of two tests by 281 runs, it looked in danger of becoming the first Proteas team to lose a test series against New Zealand.  
Bedingham has given South Africa hope of avoiding that record. But the lead he worked so hard to create ended up much smaller than he hoped as South Africa lost its last six wickets for 33 runs.  
That was due to tall fast bowler Will O'Rourke who took 5-34, the best

innings run chase at any ground in New Zealand is 345 by the West Indies at Eden Park, Auckland in 1969.  
The 227 New Zealand still needs to win will be demanding on a pitch at Seddon Park which will take turn over the last two days, and Piedt showed just before stumps. Piedt took a career-best 5-89 as South Africa bowled out New Zealand for 211 in its first innings in reply to 242.  
In an action-packed start to the final session on Thursday, Petersen fell just two runs short of a century partnership with Bedingham. He was brilliantly caught by Phillips at gully from the bowling of Matt

Henry. Ruan de Swardt (1) top-scored for South Africa with 64 in the first innings but was bowled around his legs by Phillips as he attempted to sweep.  
Bedingham reached his century from 127 balls and then was out, chopping a ball from O'Rourke directly to Phillips in the gully. O'Rourke was the only New Zealand bowler Thursday who troubled the South Africa batters with bounce.  
Neil Wagner pursued his usual leg theory but took only 1-42 from eight overs and Tim Southee once again went wicketless, having taken only one wicket in the series.  
Piedt was caught by Southee at short mid-on from Phillips' bowling and O'Rourke was wrapped up the innings, dismissing Shaun von Berg (2) and Dane Paterson (7).