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THE SECURITY OF INDIANS
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PRADHAN MANTRI: DESH SE KISAN TAK

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Sunday, urged BJP cadres to dedicate the next 100 days to reaching out to new voters and securing their confidence as the party aims to win 400 seats in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

"Today is February 18, and the youth who have reached the age of 18 in this era will vote in the country's 18th Lok Sabha election. In the next 100 days, you need to connect with every new voter, reach every beneficiary, every section, every community, and every person who believes in every religion. We need to gain the trust of everyone," Modi said, addressing the second day of the party's national convention at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan.

In his 65-minute speech, Modi emphasised that he is not seeking a third term to enjoy power but to work for the nation. "If I had thought of my home, it would not have been possible to build homes for crores of people," he said. He highlighted the achievements of the past 10 years, including unblemished governance and lifting 25 crore people out of poverty, as significant feats. "Now the country's dream and resolve will be bigger.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the BJP National Council meeting on its second day at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Sunday

Our dream and resolution are that we have to make Viksit Bharat, and the next 5 years will play an important role in it. In the next 5 years, we have to take a giant leap towards Viksit Bharat," he said. Modi said the nation must

now dream big and make significant resolutions to make India a developed country by 2047. "The first imperative is to ensure the return of the BJP to power in strong numbers," said the Prime Minister, adding that the dreams of crores of women, poor, and youths are his dreams.

"We rid the country of mega scams and terror attacks, and made efforts to improve living standards of the poor and the middle class," the Prime Minister said. "A senior leader once told me I had done enough as PM and CM, I should rest. But I am working for 'rashtraniti', not 'rajneeti'," he said. The Prime Minister said he lives by the ideals of

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and takes inspiration from him. "I am not someone who lives for his own happiness. I am advocating for a third term for the BJP not for political gains, but for the benefit of India. My efforts are dedicated to the people of India. The dreams of Indians are my commitments," Modi said.

Continued on Page 2

Progress in talks amid tension

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

The fourth round of talks between the three Union Ministers — Piyush Goel, Arjun Munda, and Nityanand Rai — and farmer representatives on Sunday, according to sources, made headway, and both sides are believed to form a committee with maximum participation from the protesters for further negotiations on the crisis. Till the reports were being filed, the meeting was underway at a hotel in Chandigarh, and sources said in the last two hours of the meeting, the atmosphere was "friendly". Sources said the farmers' representatives, however, had decided not to budge from their demand, while the Government side decided not to come under undue pressure, and a middle path had to be worked upon. The meeting was amid hundreds of farmers putting up at Shambhu and Khanauri at Haryana Punjab borders. The two sides — Ministers and farmer leaders — had met

earlier on February 8, 12, and 15, but talks remained inconclusive. The meeting started at 8.30 pm and continued until late at night, filing the report. Agriculture and Farmer Welfare Minister Arjun Munda and Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal went to a hotel where Punjab Chief Secretary Anurag Verma and Director-General of Police Gaurav Yadav were present. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also joined the meeting. The farmer leaders who attended the meeting include Jagjit Singh Dallewal, Sarwan Singh Pandher, Surjit Singh Phul, Jaswinder Singh Longowal, Satnam Singh Bargarian, Amarjeet Singh Mohri, Abhimanyu Kohar, Ramandeep Singh Mann, Gurdas Singh Lakadwal, Kurbur Shanta Kumar, Maninder Singh, Malkeet Singh, Sukhdev Singh Bhoj, and Onkar Singh. Ahead of the farmers' meeting with three Union ministers, farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal on Sunday said the Centre should not dilly-dally and accept the demands of

farmers before the model code of conduct comes into force. The situation at the Delhi-Haryana borders remained by and large peaceful while tension prevailed at the two border points - Shambhu and Khanauri. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha also decided to gherao the residences of BJP leaders in Punjab for three days starting from Tuesday. Balbir Singh Rajewal, a leader of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of various farmer unions, said they will stage protests in front of the residences of Punjab BJP leaders, including MPs, MLAs, and district presidents, from Tuesday to Thursday. "We want to tell the Government that it should avoid the policy of dilly-dallying," Dallewal told reporters at the Shambhu border point. If the Government thinks it will continue to hold meetings till the code of conduct is imposed, and then say it cannot do anything as the code is in force... Farmers are not going to return," he said.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

Chhattisgarh prepares Bill to regulate conversion

RAIPUR: Chhattisgarh is preparing to introduce a Bill to regulate religious conversion. The Bill will be presented in the Chhattisgarh Assembly in the coming days, said sources. While the draft is complete, sources said some amendments may be made before its final presentation in the Vidhan Sabha. Under the proposed legislation, individuals wishing to convert to another religion will be required to fill out a form with personal details at least 60 days in advance and submit it to the District Magistrate. The District Magistrate will then request the police to assess the individual's "real intention, reason, and purpose" for conversion.

Jharkhand gives go ahead for caste based survey

RANCHI: Jharkhand Chief Minister Champai Soren has given the go-ahead for a caste-based survey in the State on the lines of the recent exercise in neighbouring Bihar, a senior official said on Sunday. Soren has directed the personnel department to prepare a draft and place it before the Cabinet for approval. If everything goes according to plan, the exercise will begin after the Lok Sabha elections, the official said. "Jiski jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utani Hissedari (bigger the population, bigger the share). Jharkhand is ready," the CM posted on X, indicating the survey.

Fliers to get baggage clearance in 30 minutes



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has directed airlines to ensure that all passengers' baggage is delivered within 30 minutes of a flight landing at an airport. In a communiqué sent to six airlines — Air India, IndiGo, Akasa, SpiceJet, Vistara, Air India Express Connect, and Air India Express — on February 16, the BCAS asked the airlines to implement the necessary measures to ensure timely baggage delivery by February 26. "However, BCAS has directed the airlines to ensure that the

mandated levels are achieved at all airports they serve," it said. This directive follows concerns about the punctuality of baggage delivery and the receipt of complaints through social media and other channels, where passengers reported being victimised by late baggage delivery after landing at the airport. These concerns are outlined in the Service Quality Requirements of the Operation, Management, and Delivery Agreement (OMDA). The OMDA mandates stipulate that the first bag should arrive at the belt within 10 minutes of engine shutdown, with the last bag

arriving within 30 minutes. In an extensive survey conducted across the nation's six major airports, BCAS scrutinised the operations of seven airlines and analysed over 3,600 flight movements along with their baggage delivery processes. According to regulations, airlines are required to ensure the delivery of passengers' baggage within a timeframe of 10 to 30 minutes following the aircraft's engine shutdown. The review revealed that while performance has improved, it still falls short of the mandated standards. BCAS monitored the arrival of baggage at the belts of

six major airports in January 2024 under the instructions of Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. Several regular air passengers have expressed frustration with the prolonged wait to collect their baggage after a long-haul flight, describing it as a tiresome exercise. As per regulations, "airlines are required to ensure the delivery of passengers' baggage within a timeframe of 10 to 30 minutes following the aircraft's engine shutdown." "Since the beginning of the review exercise, the performance of all airlines has been monitored on a weekly basis and has improved but is not in line with the mandates. The mandates require the first baggage to arrive at the baggage belt within 10 minutes of shutting off the aircraft engine and the last bag within 30 minutes of the same," the statement said. "The BCAS has set a deadline of 10 days for airlines to implement the required measures, with a target date of February 26, 2024. Failure to comply with these directives may result in further regulatory action," a MoCA official said. The move by BCAS underscores the importance of enhancing passenger experience and operational efficiency within the aviation industry. By prioritising timely baggage delivery, airlines can enhance customer satisfaction and uphold the highest standards of service excellence.

JADEJA CRACKS ENGLAND



India's Ravindra Jadeja celebrates the wicket of England's Joe Root on the fourth day of the third test cricket match between India and England, at the Niranjan Shah Stadium, in Rajkot, on Sunday

Renowned Jain seer embraces death

PTI ■ RAJNANDGAON

Renowned Jain seer Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj breathed his last on Sunday at Chandragiri Teerth in Dongargarh in Chhattisgarh's Rajnandgaon district after undertaking 'sallekhna'. Sallekhna is a Jain religious practice involving voluntary fasting unto death for spiritual purification, a statement from the teerth said. Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj

attained Samadhi through 'Sallekhna' at Chandragiri teerth at 2:35 am, the statement said. "Maharaj was staying on the teerth in Dongargarh for the last six months and was unwell from the last few days. For the last three days, he was observing sallekhna, a religious practice of voluntarily fasting to death, and had quit intake of food and liquids. According to Jainism, it is a vow taken for spiritual purification," the statement said.

A procession will be taken out at 1 pm on Sunday for people to pay tribute to the departed seer and the final rites will be held in Chandragiri teerth, it added. Ahead of the Chhattisgarh Assembly elections last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Dongargarh, a popular pilgrimage spot, and met Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj on November 5 and took his blessings. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoned the death of a



top religious figure of Jains, and said he will be remembered by the coming generations for his invaluable contributions to society. In a post on X, Modi said, "My thoughts and prayers are with the countless devotees of Acharya Shri 108 Vidhyasagar Ji Maharaj Ji. He will be remembered by the coming generations for his invaluable contributions to society, especially his efforts towards spiritual awakening among people, his work towards poverty alleviation,

healthcare, education and "I had the honour of receiving his blessings for years. I can never forget my visit to the Chandragiri Jain Mandir in Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh late last year. That time, I had spent time with Acharya Shri 108 Vidhyasagar Ji Maharaj Ji and also received his blessings," the Prime Minister said. In his condolence message, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said, "Received the the news of the world revered

and national seer Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Mahamuniraj ji's samadhi at Chandragiri Teerth in Dongargarh. Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, who enriched the country and the world including Chhattisgarh with his dynamic knowledge, will be remembered for ages for his exemplary works for the country and society, sacrifice and penance." "I bow down to the feet of Acharya Shri Vidyasagar ji," he added.

Didi decries attempts to change Constitution

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has warned the people of India against the designs of the powers that be to change the basic structure of the Constitution not only by striking out its "socialist and secular" character but also imposing a presidential form of government. Invited as the key speaker at a debate hosted by a media house at the historic Calcutta Club, Banerjee said: she was against bringing a new constitution. Stopping short of naming Prime Minister Narendra Modi or his saffron Government Banerjee said that attempts were being made to change the "spirits of the Constitution and bulldoze its federal structure. "They want to change the very spirit of the Constitution which stands for justice, liberty, equality, fraternity," Banerjee alleged saying the concept of unity in diversity was being disregarded. "We have to accept the diversity of culture ... its founding



fathers had drafted the Constitution by keeping India's plurality in mind and upheld the spirits of democracy, federalism and secularism in mind ... but if someone says that democracy, federalism and secularism are bad than we cannot accept it," she said. Alleging that India's plurality was under threat she said, "there is an effort to impose one nation one election ... one nation one food and similar things ... this is not acceptable." Saying that there was an attempt to throttle the democracy by subjugating the media

and influencing the judiciary, Banerjee asked "even ten years did you see the media being purchased and the judiciary being pressurized?" The media was being "totally controlled by one particular party which I will not name ... then the judiciary is also being influenced though not all the judges compromise," she said adding, "today if I say something against them then Enforcement Directorate will come to my house ... today it (government) has become off the Agency, for the Agency and by the Agency," because the

powers that be "do not know the meaning of the hard-earned Independence otherwise they would not have suspended 147 MPs in Parliament." She said that in the present system "one man is getting all the publicity ... there is the photograph of the Prime Minister on everything --- from ration card to fertilizer bags to the corona vaccine --- I have seen so many Prime Ministers like Rajiv Gandhi, Manmohan Singh, Narsimha Rao ji, IK Gujral and Deve Gowda ji ... and have even worked with them but have never seen such a hegemony before." Wondering whether plans were being hatched to change the form of Government Banerjee asked "are we going towards the presidential form of Government ... I have apprehensions." She however asserted vouching for her long years of struggle that "there will certainly be an end to this totalitarianism ... I am sure there will be an end to this Hitlerian and Stalinist and Agency raj."

Journey of engineer for justice yields result at 65

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Sixtygenarians and septuagenarians graduating from universities is not a big deal in these days. But the enrollment of 65-year-old Rajan K Paul a civil engineer-turned-lawyer in Kerala High Court on Sunday is a real-life drama and has all the ingredients to make it a bestselling novel. Rajan Paul, born in a poor agricultural family in Ernakulam district had a dream; a dream to become an engineer. He accomplished that feat by passing out with distinction from a leading engineering college with specialization in civil engineering, a branch which was very much in demand during the 1970s and 1980s. He was selected as a junior engineer in the irrigation department of the Kerala Government and thus began his odyssey. Rajan turned out to be a good professional earning encomiums from his superiors as well as policy makers for speedy implementation of projects and expertise in laying canals



through tough terrains. Success was not free. He came under severe pressure from superiors and politicians to give an affidavit against the then minister who is known as a stickler for norms. Rajan blatantly refused all kind of pressures and stood his ground. "Why should I obey the dictate of a deputy superintendent of police to implicate a politician with whom I never had any kind of relations? The Dy S.P threatened me with dire consequences if I do not fall in line," said Rajan.

The police officers are capable of bringing out live rabbits out of empty hats. The investigating officer saw to it that Rajan was suspended on fabricated charges and this case changed his life drastically. "An year-long suspension resulted in me losing out on seniority and the promotion due to me was denied on flimsy grounds," reminisces Rajan. But he did not lose heart and succeeded in dragging the investigation officer to the court. The result was a landmark verdict in favor of Rajan. The

Kerala High Court ruled that the suspension of Rajan was against all laws of the land and ordered that he be promoted with immediate effect. Though the litigation took years, Rajan was promoted to the post of executive engineer. But the interesting result was that Rajan Paul v State of Kerala case found its way to the annals of judiciary. And Rajan's happiness knew no bound as the details of the case found its way to the question paper of the fifth semester examination of the LLB course while he himself was a candidate. From Monday, Rajan would be seen regularly in the Court rooms pleading for the rights of government employees and common man who are condemned to bear the brunt of politicians, bureaucrats and police officers who trap them with fake and fabricated cases. One more "twist" to the story; The former investigating officer who tortured Rajan has to depose before him in at least four cases in a reversal of roles.

BJP national convention amends party constitution

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP's national convention on Sunday amended the party's constitution, allowing its apex organisational body — the Parliamentary Board — to take a decision related to its president, including his or her term and its extension, in "emergency" situations. A proposal to this effect was brought by the party's general secretary Sunil Bansal. The party president is generally elected through organisational polls after a few elections are carried out in at least 50 per cent of its state bodies. The state BJP organisation poll is also contingent upon elections in district bodies and so on. Sources said when the party is busy preparing for assembly or Lok Sabha elections, it is hard to follow the laid down practice for the internal polls. Incumbent president J P Nadda is currently on an extended tenure till June 30 in the view of Lok Sabha polls. Though the party has not elaborated on the details and rationale behind the



amendment, sources said it may have to do with the future appointments of its presidents. The two-day convention, which ended on Sunday, also saw the passage of three resolutions. Some party leaders indicated that several leaders from different parties, including the Congress, may join it in the next few weeks as the BJP looks to achieve its target of winning 370 seats in the elections to 543-member Lok Sabha. A meeting of chief ministers and deputy chief ministers of the BJP was held following the

convention's conclusion and they discussed the details of the party's strategy to win 370 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and governance issues. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nadda also attended the meeting. Later in a post on X, Modi said, "Had an extensive meeting with chief ministers and deputy chief ministers of states where the BJP is serving in government. Discussed ways to further strengthen the growth trajectory of the states so that we can leverage double engine of growth to build a 'Viksit Bharat'."

Buzz over Kamal shift to BJP sparks turmoil within Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BHOAPL/RANCHI

Amid speculation that a Congress heavyweight Kamal Nath is considering joining BJP along with his son, sitting Congress MP Nakul Nath, a potential split in the grand old party looms large as about half a dozen Madhya Pradesh MLAs loyal to Nath arrived in Delhi on Sunday. While the party grapples with the situation in MP, where it suffered a significant defeat in recent Assembly polls, trouble is also brewing in Jharkhand after the Champai Soren-led JMM-Congress coalition council of Ministers was formed last week. Sources in both the BJP and close associates of Nath said they are coordinating a meeting as the ruling party was preoccupied with the two-day national convention that concluded on Sunday. Nath arrived in Delhi with his

son and is attempting to meet the top leaders of the BJP to facilitate their joining. Dismissing speculations as rumours, Congress leader Sajjan Singh Verma claimed that Nath spoke to party leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday afternoon, during which they discussed the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which will soon enter Madhya Pradesh. "The veteran leader has not made any decision on leaving the party. The buzz regarding Nath's switch to the BJP has been created by the media. Nath is focused on the caste equations in the State in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections," Verma told the media after claiming to have met Nath at his residence. Nath, a nine-time Congress MP from Chhindwara and currently an MLA from the seat, is a former Chief Minister who was removed as the party's State president

following the Congress' dismal performance in the November Assembly polls. The MLAs who arrived in the national Capital were not answering calls, with some Congress insiders claiming that Nath loyalist and former State Minister Laxman Ghangoriya was also camping with them in Delhi. This is the second time that the Congress will face a split in MP, as the one led by rebel leader Jyotiraditya Scindia in 2020. Scindia, who is now a Union Minister in the Modi Government, left Congress due to internal factionalism led by Nath. Efforts were made by the Nath camp to garner the support of 23 MLAs so that anti-defection laws wouldn't apply to them, according to party insiders. The Congress has 66 seats in the 230-member Assembly. On the other hand, a section of Congress leaders in Jharkhand are displeased with

the Champai Soren-led JMM Government over the induction of four MLAs as ministers. Twelve MLAs of the party have threatened the Champai Soren Government with boycotting the Jharkhand Assembly session if these Ministers are not replaced by new faces. Eight of these 12 MLAs reached Delhi on Saturday evening to lodge their protest before the party's high command. The JMM-led alliance in the State has 47 MLAs (29 from JMM, 17 from Congress, and one from RJD) in the 81-member Assembly. The disgruntled MLAs expressed their unhappiness over Congress' decision to appoint MLAs Alamgir Alam, Rameshwar Oraon, Banna Gupta, and Badal Patralekh as ministers. The Congress MLAs are also demanding a Minister from each division of the State to cover all five divisions. Additionally, the

legislators are demanding the implementation of the 'one person, one post' rule made by Rahul. CM Soren, who is in the national Capital for a courtesy meeting with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, claimed that the JMM-led alliance in Jharkhand is "strong," and there is no threat to the coalition Government in the State. After meeting Kharge, he told reporters that it was a courtesy meeting with the Congress president after taking charge as the Chief Minister. Jharkhand Congress president Rajesh Thakur, AICC general secretary in-charge of the State Ghulam Ahmad Mir, and Pranav Jha, among others, were present during Soren's meeting with Kharge. When asked about the meeting, Mir also told reporters that it was a courtesy call.

Antidepressant use during pregnancy can influence brain development of child: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Use of antidepressants during pregnancy can influence a child's brain development and increase the risk of mental health disorders later in life, according to a study, published in Nature Communications. It emphasized the importance of involving healthcare professionals in decision-making regarding individualized care for pregnant women, including discussing antidepressant benefits, side effects, and potential non-pharmacological interventions for postpartum depression. Led by researchers at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, the study focused on fluoxetine, a common component of medications like Prozac and Sarafem used to treat depression and perinatal depression, and its effect on the developing prefrontal cortex. Fluoxetine functions by elevating serotonin levels in the brain, prompting the researchers to investigate serotonin's impact on prefrontal cortex development in fetuses. Lead author Won Chan Oh, assistant professor in the Department of Pharmacology at CU Anschutz, explained that while serotonin's role in brain development is recognized, the specific mechanisms influencing the prefrontal cortex remained unclear. Given the prefrontal cortex's crucial role in high-order cognition, the study aimed to

address this knowledge gap. The research, conducted by Oh and Roberto Ogelman, a neuroscience candidate, revealed that serotonin directly affects nascent and immature excitatory synaptic connections in the prefrontal cortex. Disruption or dysregulation of these connections during early development can contribute to various mental health disorders. Oh emphasized that their study provides experimental evidence of serotonin's direct impact on the developing prefrontal cortex when fluoxetine is taken during pregnancy, highlighting the significance of understanding these processes. To investigate further, the researchers studied serotonin deficiency and surplus effects on brain development in mice. They discovered that serotonin not only influences overall brain function but also plays a specific role in shaping individual connections between neurons, crucial for learning and adaptation. The correlation identified in the study holds potential for informing early intervention strategies and developing new therapeutics for neurodevelopmental disorders associated with serotonin dysregulation. The researchers intend to extend their investigation by examining fluoxetine's impact on the developing teenage brain, furthering our understanding of its long-term effects on brain development.

DPAP chief Azad promises land, job right law in JK

PTI ■ JAMMU

Describing the revocation of Article 370 as a "blunder", Democratic Progressive Azad Party chief Ghulam Nabi Azad on Sunday promised a law to provide land and job rights to residents of Jammu and Kashmir if his party comes to power. Seeking support of the electorate in the next assembly elections, Azad said unifying people and ending discrimination and insecurity will be the top priorities of his government. "The revocation of Article 370 (in August 2019) was a blunder. If the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) comes to power, we will work towards reinstating job and land rights so that no outsider can purchase land or secure jobs in Jammu and Kashmir," Azad, a



former chief minister of the erstwhile state, said at a public meeting in Paloura. He emphasised the importance of voting for development and rejecting parties that "sow division in the name of religion". Acknowledging the government's efforts in certain areas, including the restoration of peace to a large extent, Azad said a lot needs to be done for the welfare of all sections of society that have suffered immensely over the past three

decades. "As chief minister for a brief period of two-and-a-half years, I made a lot of effort to improve the living conditions of the people, irrespective of their caste, creed and colour. I never discriminated based on religion," he said. Azad highlighted his track record of initiating projects in both the Jammu and the Kashmir regions, underscoring his commitment to equitable development. The DPAP leader also asserted that after experiencing the performance of various other parties, people should now shift to the DPAP on the basis of his track record. He also reiterated his commitment to prioritising development and employment generation to bring relief to the people.

Progress in talks amid...

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"The Government should find a solution to our demands before the code of conduct comes into force," Dallelwal said. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Home Affairs on Sunday ordered that the suspension of internet services has been extended in certain areas of some Punjab districts, including Patiala, Sangrur, and Fatehgarh Sahib, till February 24. Earlier, internet services were suspended from February 12 to 16 in view of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march. According to the Ministry's February 16 order, internet services will remain suspended in areas falling under Shambhu, Julkan, Passian, Patran, Shatrana, Samana, Ghanaur, Devigarh, and Balbhara police stations in Patiala; Lalru police station in Mohali; Sangat police station in Bathinda; Killianwali police station

Sardulgarh and Boha police stations in Mansa; and Khanauri, Moonak, Lehra, Sunam, and Chajli police stations in Sangrur; and areas under Fatehgarh Sahib police station. The Centre used its special powers under the Telegraph Act of 1885 to suspend internet services in these areas of Punjab. "In exercise of the power conferred by section 7 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 read with Sub-rule 1 of Rule 2 of the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules 2017, and in the interest of maintaining public safety and averting public emergency, it is necessary and expedient to order, the temporary suspension of internet services from 00:00 hrs on February 17, 2024, to 23:59 hrs on February 24, 2024, in the following areas," the order read.

PRADHAN MANTRI...

From Page 1

Modi said he is already getting invitations from foreign countries for July, August and September visits, weeks before the general elections. He said the invitations show the world knows that the BJP will form a government at the Centre for the third time. He said he is the first Prime Minister to raise the issue of toilets and speaks about dignity for women from the Red Fort. "The BJP is bringing together the power of youths, women, farmers and the youth in building a 'Viksit Bharat'," Modi said. "We asked those who were not acknowledged by anyone, and not just that, we have also worshipped them," he said. In the times to come, there will be plenty of opportunities for "our mothers, sisters and daughters", the Prime Minister said. The Prime Minister discussed several initiatives aimed at women empowerment, including programmes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Lakhpati Didis, Self Help Groups, maternity leave policies and Mudra loans to name a few. Modi underscored how the last 10 years have been marked by bold decisions and groundbreaking resolutions. He said, "Issues that lingered for centuries... we showed the courage to resolve them. By constructing the grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya, we

put an end to a wait of 5 centuries. In Pavagadh, Gujarat, the Dharma Dhawaja has been unfurled after 500 years. After 7 decades, we opened the Kartarpur Corridor. After a wait of 7 decades, the nation was freed from Article 370." Furthermore, he said, "Approximately 6 decades later, the new form of the Rajpath, the Kartavya Path emerged. Finally, after 4 decades, the demand for One Rank One Pension was fulfilled. After 3 decades, the country got a new National Education Policy. The need for a new Parliament building, felt for decades, was finally fulfilled by us. Every BJP karyakarta is fortunate to be a part of such numerous accomplishments." Stressing on how a youth-driven India is setting ambitious goals for itself and achieving them today, Modi said, "We are working to host the Youth Olympics in India in 2029 and the Olympic Games in 2036. By 2030, we are working towards the target of Net Zero for our railways. Instead of 2030, we will achieve the goal of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol five years ahead of our target date. India is also formulating policies to achieve the Net Zero target by 2070. This means that in the coming years, our country will witness countless green job opportunities." Highlighting the Congress' track record of being a

source of instability, dynasty politics, corruption, and appeasement, Modi said the Congress lacks a development agenda and a roadmap for the future, and its current actions show a divisive approach based on language or region. Launching a scathing attack on the Congress for not fighting on ideological issues, he said, "The Congress is so demoralised that it has lost the courage for ideological and intellectual Opposition. Therefore, resorting to insults, false accusations against Modi has become their sole agenda." "...Today, the Opposition leaders are also raising slogans of 'NDA sarkar 400 paar'. To take NDA to 400, BJP will have to cross the mark of 370 (seats)," he said. Modi slammed the Opposition, particularly the Congress, saying it lacked the courage to take on the BJP ideologically or on the basis of principles. During his address, he turned emotional and paid his tributes to Jain seer Muni Vidyasagar who breathed his last on Sunday. He said, "Today, I want to pay tribute to Acharya Shri 108 Vidhyasagar Ji Maharaj. After getting information about his death, everyone is deeply saddened. For me, this is a personal loss. I got to meet him and take guidance from him a lot of times. The last time I visited him, I was not aware that I would not be able to have his darshan ever again..."

Kejriwal has kept Delhiites away from Central schemes, says BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI.

Delhi Assembly Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri launched a scathing attack on the Kejriwal Government for not implementing the welfare schemes of the Centre. Speaking on the proposal presented by Home Minister Amit Shah in BJP national convention 'BJP is the country's hope', he said the people of the entire country are taking advantage of the welfare schemes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, but Arvind Kejriwal's Delhi Government is depriving the people of the benefits of those schemes due to narrow politics. Be it the Ayushman Bharat scheme in which manual workers such as tailors, potters, blacksmiths, cobblers, barbers and masons



etc. are given free loan up to Rs 3 lakh, the people of Delhi are not availing the benefits of the schemes, he said. Bidhuri said under the PM Awas Yojana, 4 crore were being provided houses across the country, whereas lakhs of people in Delhi do not have a roof over their heads. Similarly, he said, the farmers of Delhi are deprived of the benefits of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme or the subsidy scheme on agricultural equipment.

Bidhuri thanked Prime Minister Modi for the projects worth crores of rupees given to beautify the capital Delhi. He requested the Central Government to investigate the scams worth thousands of crores of rupees committed by the Aam Aadmi Party government of Delhi and provide justice to the people. Bidhuri, speaking in the presence of Prime Minister Modi, said that on one hand the Kejriwal government has committed scams worth thousands

of crores of rupees which include liquor scam, jal board scam, Sheeshmahal scam, DTC scam etc., on the other hand Modi government by giving projects worth crores of rupees to Delhi is making people's lives easier and simpler. These include National War Memorial, Police War Memorial, Police Headquarters, Kartavya Path, world's largest eco park, third ring road, highways, flyovers, underpasses and one and a half km Tunnel worth Rs 75 thousand crore are also included. He said we also thank the prime minister on behalf of people of Delhi for providing free ration every month to 73 thousand poor people of Delhi, help of Rs 10,000 for the rehabilitation of street vendors, cooking gas connections to thousands of women under Ujjwala scheme and ownership rights of their houses to lakhs of people living in the slums of Delhi.

Repair work in old DJB water pipeline to begin from February 23, says Bharti

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI.

Taking cognisance of the complaints of leakage of water from the pipeline and water logging on Mangal Bazar road in Adarsh Nagar area from the local people, DJB Vice Chairman Somnath Bharti reached Adarsh Nagar Assembly constituency. After a thorough inspection, Bharti said that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has given clear instructions to inspect the areas from where complaints related to water leakage are being received and resolve the problems immediately. The reason for Adarsh Nagar problem is that a 700mm pipeline passes through the area and this was laid here 35 years ago. The leakage has happened in this old pipeline of Delhi Jal Board (DJB), he said. Bharti said that the DJB officials had informed him that the board has issued a tender for repairing the pipeline and the work will start from February 23. The DJB officials told the DJB Vice Chairman that tenders



had been issued for repairing of the pipeline multiple times but there had been no response to them. The reason for zero interest among the bidders towards previous tenders is that some contractors were not paid their dues because of a conspiracy hatched by BJP to halt DJB works. Bharti said that we are looking into that matter separately. Now our effort is to get a suc-

cessful bidder in the current floated tender that will open on the 22nd day of this month and we get the work done here with priority. DJB Vice Chairman said that DJB is striving to stop all kinds of leakages from its pipelines using latest and novel technologies. He said that water is precious for the people who live in Delhi and also for the coming generations. Chief Minister

has given strict instructions that there should be no leakage of water anywhere in the national capital. He has directed us to fix the water leakage problem within 24-hours. The Adarsh Nagar water pipeline leakage will also be fixed without wasting any time. This will end the problem of water logging on the roads of Mangal Bazar and ensure that people do not face any problem in movement.

CBI Press Information Officer Gaur retires

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

R.K. Gaur, who was the backbone of the Central Bureau of Investigation's information wing, has hung his boots after 26 years of service at the agency, officials said. Fondly called Gaur 'Saab', he was the face of the CBI in a number of media briefings, and handled many tricky situations during his service at the agency, which he had joined as an inspector on deputation from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in 1997. He had retired in 2020 as a deputy superintendent of police and press information officer, but the then CBI director Rishi Kumar Shukla, who knew about Gaur's knowledge on the functioning of the central probe agency, asked him to stay and engaged him as a consultant on contract in its media section.

IP University VC gets additional charge of DPSRU

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena has assigned Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University Vice-Chancellor Mahesh Verma the additional charge of the Delhi Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research University (DPSRU), according to an official order. The announcement came after Raj Niwas officials said Saxena had ordered the removal of DPSRU Vice-Chancellor Ramesh Goyal in connection with an alleged scam in recruiting faculty members at the university during 2017-2019. They said Saxena has also approved the removal of Professor Harvinder Popli, the university's registrar, and written to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs for a probe by an external agency into the alleged scam.

"The Chancellor, DPSRU/Lt. Governor, Delhi, is pleased to assign the additional charge of the post of Vice Chancellor of Delhi Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research University (DPSRU) to Prof. Mahesh Verma, Vice Chancellor, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIU) with immediate effect till regular Vice Chancellor of DPSRU is appointed," the order issued by the Delhi government on Saturday read. "No extra remuneration will be paid to Prof. Mahesh Verma for this additional assignment," it added. The LG, who is the chancellor of the DPSRU, has given his nod to filing an FIR against Goyal and six other officers named in a report by the three-member enquiry committee for their alleged involvement.

Road safety programme organised at Connaught Place

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Sunday organised 'Raahgiri Day' at Connaught Place inner circle under the 'Delhi Police Road Safety Week', an official said. "Safety of people is our objective. We organised Raahgiri for everyone to spread awareness about the traffic rules," Deputy Commissioner of Police (traffic) Shashank Jaiswal said. The officer further said despite an increase in traffic, campaigns on road safety and road engineering have proportionally lowered accident rates. The DCP (Traffic) said plays and quiz competitions on road safety were organised to improve awareness of traffic rules. The DCP Traffic the Road Engineering and Research cell makes a data analysis



tries to implement it in road engineering and campaigns. "Children are future of the country. They learn very quickly and can tell their parents if they make any mistakes on the road," the DCP said.

"Message given by a children has more impact on parents. They can tell their parents that not to jump red light crossings. These campaigns are working and death rates compared to the last year have dipped," Jaiswal said.

Partly cloudy skies likely in city today



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The national capital on Sunday recorded a minimum temperature of 8.6 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department. The humidity level was recorded as 92 per cent, according to the IMD. The IMD has predicted partly cloudy sky on Sunday and

rain or thundershowers on Monday. The Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded in the poor category with a reading of 265, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) at 9 am. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered good, 51 and 100 satisfactory, 101 and 200 moderate, 201 and 300 poor, 301 and 400 very poor, and 401 and 500 severe.

All women police posts inaugurated

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena and Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora on Sunday inaugurated two All-Women Police Posts at Khan Market and Shradhdhanand Marg in the city's central area. "I am very happy with this historic step by the Delhi Police. Today, we inaugurated two All-Women Police Posts (AWPPs)," Saxena said and added that more such posts are needed in Delhi. Women victims will now be able to tell their problems freely to women officers and the force will immediately ensure a resolution, he added. Saxena said he asked the Delhi Police to establish AWPPs after its all-women's team was adjudged as the best marching



contingent at this year's Republic Day parade. At present, women account for 15.17 per cent in the Delhi Police and "we remain committed to increasing the strength of women in the police force to 33 per cent as soon as possible", following the vision

of "Naari Shakti", he said. The Delhi Police has already begun the process of direct recruitment, Saxena added. After inauguration, Saxena also monitored the post's functioning. In a statement later, the Delhi Police said these AWPPs are

equipped with all necessary gadgets and trained personnel. Khan Market — known for its cosmopolitan ambience, bustling atmosphere and international appeal — attracts a diverse demographic, including foreign visitors, it said. "It hosts a myriad of restau-

rants, shops and residences. With a substantial influx of foreign delegates, VVIPs and tourists, the market plays a pivotal role in showcasing the vibrancy of New Delhi," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) M Harsha Vardhan said. Sub-inspector Puja Saini has been posted as in-charge of the Khan Market post. She will be supported by nine women officers. The Khan Market post was established in 2016 and it has been central to maintaining law and order, Vardhan said. The post at Shradhdhanand Marg aims to facilitate women complainants by ensuring women police officers' presence. Representatives of the Khan Market RWA (Residents' Welfare Association) were present during the inauguration.

Gate of Chhattarpur station closed for work, says DMRC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Entry and exit facilities at gate no. 2 of Chhattarpur metro station has been closed due to Phase-IV expansion work, a DMRC official said on Sunday. The gate has been closed till the end of the Phase-IV work, the official said. At present, the DMRC is undertaking construction work on 65.2 km of three priority corridors spanning 45 stations under the project 'Janakpuri West-RK Ashram Marg (28.92 km), Majlis Park-Maujpur (12.55 km), which are extensions of the already operational 'Magenta Line' and 'Pink Line', and 'Aerocity-Tughlakabad



(23.62 km) that is being built as a new 'Golden Line', connecting the operational 'Violet Line' and 'Airport Line' from the respective ends. Out of these, 28 km will be underground and the rest shall be elevated. Chhattarpur metro station will become an interchange facility with the upcoming 'Golden

Line', the senior official said. The information on closure of the gate was also shared by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation in a post on X. "Entry/Exit from Gate no. 2 at Chhattarpur Metro station has been closed for Phase 4 expansion work. Passengers are advised to use Gates 1 and 3 for entry/exit purposes," it wrote.

Rehabilitation of Shahdara roads approved

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi PWD Minister Atishi has approved projects for the rehabilitation and strengthening of several roads throughout the Shahdara district. These initiatives aim to offer a more pleasant commuting experience and enhance the overall inter-connectivity, according to a statement on Sunday. The projects will cover nine roads across Shahdara. Approving the projects, Atishi said, "The Kejriwal government's emphasis is on establishing a resilient and secure transportation network following global standards." "The sanctioned road-strengthening projects across Delhi serve as a testament to the Delhi government's dedication to delivering world-class road infrastructure for the city's residents. The strength-



ening of these roads will positively impact thousands of individuals in the area, alleviating congestion and enhancing inter-connectivity from main roads to colonies," she added. The minister said these roads were constructed and upgraded a long time ago, leading to their gradual deterioration. The PWD conducted a thor-

ough assessment of the roads with the assistance of experts and was instructed to initiate the upgrading process, she said. Atishi also stressed on the importance of ensuring minimal disruption to commuters during the construction phase, with a directive to adhere to global standards for high-quality roads.

Red Fort reopens for visitors again

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The historic Red Fort complex, which was closed for visitors about a week ago due to security reasons in view of a farmers' march, has been reopened, official sources said on Sunday. The iconic Mughal-era monument, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in old Delhi, was "suddenly sealed" late Monday night "due to security reasons." "It was reopened a couple of days ago," a source at the Archeological Survey of India told PTI. However, the Red Fort is regularly closed for visitors on Mondays, so they will not get entry inside the complex on February 19. The site was temporarily closed amid a massive deployment of police and paramilitary forces in central Delhi in view of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march. Sources said "no order has been officially issued for reopening"



of the site, adding, it was closed in accordance with police instructions and accordingly reopened. Thousands of farmers are staying put at the Shambhu and Khanauri points of the Punjab-Haryana border with layers of barricades and a large number of security personnel halting their march to the national capital. Besides loan waiver and a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP), farmers of the 'Delhi Chalo' agitation, which entered its sixth day on Sunday, are also demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, and withdrawal of police cases. There was no report of any confrontation between the protesters and Haryana security personnel on Saturday. The farmer leaders have asked the protesters to maintain calm at the borders.

Modi to lay foundation stone of Kalki Dham temple in UP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be on a daylong visit to Uttar Pradesh on Monday during which he will lay the foundation stone of the Shri Kalki Dham Temple in Sambhal district and address a gathering there, according to a statement.

The temple is being constructed by the Shri Kalki Dham Nirman Trust whose chairman is Acharya Pramod Krishnam, who was expelled by the Congress for "anti-party remarks" days after he had met PM Modi and invited him to lay the foundation stone.

The inauguration programme around 10:30 am will be attended by many saints, religious leaders and other dignitaries, said the statement issued on Saturday. Around 1:45 pm, the prime



minister will launch 14,000 projects across Uttar Pradesh worth more than Rs 10-lakh crore at the fourth ground breaking ceremony for investment proposals received during the Uttar Pradesh Global Investors Summit 2023 (UPGIS 2023). The projects relate to sectors like manufacturing, renewable energy, Information

Technology and IT-enabled services, food processing, housing and real estate, hospitality and entertainment, education, among others. The programme will be attended by about 5,000 participants, including industrialists, representatives of top global and Indian firms, ambassadors and high commissioners and other distinguished guests.

Nadda tenure as BJP chief extended till June

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president JP Nadda will continue as the BJP's chief till June this year after the party's national council approved the decision on Sunday. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that BJP national president JP Nadda's tenure has been extended for four months till June 2024. Earlier, the decision was announced by Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah in January.

The announcement about Nadda's extended tenure came on the second day of the BJP's national council meeting in Delhi, where thousands of party members along with top leadership convened to discuss the party's strategy and campaign themes for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Nadda took charge as the BJP working president in 2019 when Amit Shah became a Union Home Minister. In 2020, Nadda took up the full-time party presidency. Under Nadda's tenure as



the BJP president, the BJP registered victories in the Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan. Nadda's extension as BJP national president comes days after he, along with Ashok Chavan, Ashwini Vaishnav, Sudhanshu Trivedi, and L Murugan were nominated to the Rajya Sabha on February 15. JP Nadda was nominated from Gujarat as the BJP dropped Union ministers Parshottam Rupala and Mansukh Mandaviya, who won the 2018 election from the state. Rupala and Mandaviya are likely to be fielded for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

While announcing Nadda's extension, Amit Shah attributed his leadership to the party's high strike rate in Bihar and NDA's stellar electoral victories in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

"Under Nadda's leadership, we had the highest strike rate in Bihar. The NDA won a majority in Maharashtra, won in Uttar Pradesh and our numbers increased in West Bengal. We also registered a landslide victory in Gujarat," Shah said. Earlier, Nadda had said that he had a "firm belief in the strengths and capabilities" of party workers as he called on all BJP members to ensure that the party wins more than 370 seats and NDA crosses 400 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"I have a firm belief in the strengths and capabilities of our karyakartas. We have to make our booths stronger and stronger. We must put all our energies into ensuring that we cross 370 seats and the NDA crosses 400," Nadda had said.

SC to hear Sharad plea challenging EC order on real NCP today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea of Sharad Pawar challenging an Election Commission order recognising the Ajit Pawar-led faction as the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). A bench of Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and KV Viswanathan is likely to hear Sharad plea.

On February 16, the top court had agreed to urgently list the plea after Sharad stated that a whip may be issued by the faction led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit. The veteran leader had sought an urgent hearing of his plea in the wake of twin blows suffered by the group led by him and the consequential fear of facing action for possible violations of whip by his MLAs. Sharad had sought urgent hearing in view of the February 15 order of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker

Rahul Narwekar. Narwekar held that the NCP faction led by Ajit Pawar was the real NCP and that the anti-defection provisions in the Constitution cannot be used to stifle internal dissent.

Prior to this, the poll panel announced on February 6 that the Ajit faction is the real NCP and also allotted the party's 'clock' symbol to the group. The special Maharashtra assembly session is beginning on February 20. Pawar senior, who founded the NCP with former Lok Sabha speaker Purno Sangma and Tariq Anwar in 1999 after their expulsion from the Congress, filed the petition through lawyer Abhishek Jeebaraj. Prior to him, the Ajit faction had filed a caveat in the Supreme Court through advocate Abhikalp Pratap Singh to ensure that no ex-parte order is passed in favour of the Sharad Pawar group if the latter moves the top court.

Ram Mandir in Ayodhya indicates Ram Rajya in India for next 1,000 years: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the BJP's national convention on Sunday passed resolutions including one on the Ram temple in Ayodhya, asserting that this indicated the establishment of "Ram Rajya" in India for the next 1,000 years, amid chants of Jai Shri Ram on the second and final day of the party's national convention. The resolution noted that the temple where a grand consecration ceremony took place last month, has become a temple of "national consciousness" and will play a decisive role in fulfilling the resolutions adopted in building a "Viksit Bharat". The construction of a grand and divine temple of Lord Shri Ram at his birthplace in the ancient holy city of Ayodhya is a historic and glorious achievement for the country. This heralds the establishment of 'Ram Rajya' in

India for the next 1,000 years with the beginning of a new 'Kalachakra', the resolution said.

"This convention of the BJP heartily congratulates the leadership of the prime minister (Narendra Modi) for successfully conducting the consecration of Lord Ram," it added. The resolution noted that the Ram temple is a symbol of India's vision, philosophy and path. "Shri Ram temple has truly become a temple of national consciousness," it said and added that every Indian was happy to see the divine consecration of Lord Shri Ram. On January 22, a new idol of Lord Ram was consecrated at the temple in a consecration ceremony led by Prime Minister Modi. Lakhs of people watched the "pran pratishtha (consecration)" ceremony on television in their homes and neighbourhood temples, becoming part of the historic event.

The resolution said that Lord Ram, Sita and the Ramayana



are present in every aspect of Indian civilisation and culture. "Even in the original copy of the Constitution of India, on the section of fundamental rights, the picture of Lord Shri Ram, Mother Sita and Lakshman ji after returning to Ayodhya after the victory is a proof of the fact that Lord Shri Ram is the source of inspiration for the fundamental rights," it

said. The resolution said that "the idea of 'Ram Rajya' was also in the heart of Babu Mahatma Gandhi". "He used to say that the idea of 'Ram Rajya' is the idea of true democracy. Following the ideals of Lord Shri Ram, the prime minister has implemented the spirit of 'Ram Rajya' in the true sense by establishing good governance

in the country," it added. The values that Lord Ram instilled in his words and thoughts are the inspiration for 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', and the basis of 'Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas', the resolution said. "Under the leadership of the prime minister, India's unity and solidarity have received the power of public participation.

He has raised the morale of the nation with his policies and leadership. Indian cultural, spiritual and historical pride has been restored in the last 10 years," it said. This convention congratulates Prime Minister Modi for making the shared power of heritage and development the identity of new India through his determined efforts and thanks the prime minister for making the whole of India experience the magic of Ram," it added.

The second resolution 'BJP Desh Ki Aasha, Vipaksh Ki Hatasha', proposed by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah mainly focused on the opposition's INDIA bloc and it was seconded by Union Minister Arjun Munda. In the seven-page political proposal, the BJP has alleged that Congress is the mother of instability; Congress is synonymous with bitterness, cunningness, and strategy, strange combination of the INDIA bloc, anti-poor Congress; Congress immersed in cor-

ruption; the divisive politics of Congress; attacks on Indian culture; and opposition of every progressive step by Congress. Congress's insult to the country's constitutional institutions and scientists, Congress's immature and irresponsible politics, and the politics of violence and anarchy by INDIA bloc ensure the downfall of Congress.

"Congress and most of its allies included in the INDIA bloc have been united in the politics of anarchy and violence in the country. Recently, shocking incidents have come to light in Sandeshkhali, West Bengal. The TMC has been continuously trying to suppress the voice of the public by targeting BJP workers in West Bengal. There have been many incidents of murder and violence against BJP workers by the CPI, CPM, and their allies in Kerala," the resolution read. The country still remembers the kind of jungle rule established by Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar. Tribal women, farm-

ers, and common people have had to endure many types of harassment and torture wherever they are in the country. In the name of movement, efforts are made by divisive elements to create an environment of anarchy.

"Wherever, in the name of movement, efforts are made to create an environment of anarchy by divisive elements in the country, Congress and its allies reach there first to add fuel to the fire. We pledge to continue our struggle against this type of negative politics," it said. "It was formed only to oppose Prime Minister Narendra Modi; hence, the alliance has no theoretical or ideological basis. The various parties involved in it contest elections against each other, and in many states, they oppose each other. In Punjab, the Aam Aadmi Party contests against Congress, while in West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress and Congress party contest against each other," it added.

MP first to implement safe tourism destination for women scheme

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Madhya Pradesh, often referred to as the "Heart of India," boasts a rich cultural heritage, with numerous monuments, intricately carved temples, stupas, forts, and palaces can now also take pride in being the only State in the country to implement the central flagship scheme "Safe Tourism Destination for Women."

This initiative is noteworthy as other states are yet to step forward to avail the funds allocated from the Nirbhaya Fund aimed at making tourist destinations safe for women. The Union Tourism Ministry revealed this before a Parliamentary panel recently. Taking exception to the states' apathy, the panel, in its report submitted to Parliament early this month, recommended the Ministry to once again take up the matter with all the other states to submit their proposals under the Scheme aimed to ensure women-friendly tourist hotspots. As per the policy provision, a proposal is submitted to the Central Ministry of Women and Child Development Department under the Nirbhaya Scheme for funding the project.

According to the scheme, the state has to contribute 40% share of the total budget, with the rest coming from the central fund. The Nirbhaya Fund was set up with the idea of helping states ensure infrastructure and ambience where women should feel safe and most comfortable while traveling and enjoying tourist destinations.

While states are yet to use this fund exclusively meant for women empowerment and safe tourist zones, Madhya Pradesh is in the midst of ini-

tiating several steps to ensure employment opportunities for women in the tourism sector. As per officials from the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, UN Women, Women and Child Development, Urban Development and Housing Department, and Police Department have joined hands to create a favorable environment for women by training them and creating awareness about their safety. Officials say the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has formed 20 clusters across 50 tourist spots in the state to train women in different sectors, giving priority to safe destinations for women. "The Board has already trained more than 4000 women and in 2024 plans are afoot to absorb more of them in the hotel and travel industry.

"The Committee recommends that the Ministry should expedite its efforts in obtaining the proposals of various states. This is vital for the success of the scheme and for ensuring the safety of women at tourist destinations across the country and will help in increasing the number of tourists, especially women, to safely undertake such visits," said the parliamentary panel led by MP V Vijayasai Reddy. "It's disheartening that states, despite the availability of funds, are reluctant to utilise them. It's widely recognised that concerns about women's safety in tourist spots hinder their ability to travel independently.

Whether journeying alone or in groups, women often experience unease after sunset due to the limited presence of female staff in tourist areas and the inadequate provision of public facilities," lamented Priyadarshini Biswal, a solo traveler from Bhubaneswar.

Irani four days Amethi visit coincides with Rahul yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Smriti Irani will pay a four-day visit to her parliamentary constituency of Amethi beginning Monday, on a day Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is set to enter the Uttar Pradesh town. Rahul Gandhi had represented Amethi in the Lok Sabha for 15 years before he was defeated by Irani in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. This will perhaps be the only second time since 2019 that the two leaders will be in

Amethi at the same time. They had been in the town at the same time in February 2022 to attend different campaign events in the run-up to the assembly polls.

Irani's representative Vijay Gupta said the minister will be in her constituency for four days, during which she will hold interactions with residents of several villages and attend her house-warming ceremony on February 22. Prior to her election from Amethi, she had promised the electorate that she would build a house in the town and become a resident.



According to Congress leaders, the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will reach Amethi on Monday. Gandhi will hold a road show and public meeting in Amethi town.

The possibility of the two leaders coming face to face is very low, officials in the know of their tentative schedules said. The Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra resumed from Prayagraj on Sunday afternoon after a days break as he had left for Waynad to sympathise with the families of deceased who fell victim if elephants.

Innovative solutions found for detecting dark patterns on e-commerce platforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has received innovative solutions for detecting dark patterns on the e-commerce platforms in the final round of hackathon and will prove to be a major game changer in regulating other online deceptive practices, according to Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh.

The solutions received span a broad spectrum of technologies and approaches, tailored to address 13 specified dark patterns identified by the Consumer Affairs Ministry, an official statement said. "Not only do they alert consumers about some specific dark patterns, they also provide solutions to the government by providing real-time data and identifying other types of emerging dark patterns," the statement said. These projects are designed to enhance digital transparency, empower users, and foster a safer online environment, directly contributing to the hackathon's overarching goal of combating dark patterns, the ministry added. Dark patterns or deceptive



practices used to trick consumers into taking unintended actions such as making purchases, amount to misleading advertisement, unfair trade practices or violation of consumer rights, according to an earlier CCPA order. The order listed 13 such dark patterns.

The Consumer Affairs Ministry in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Varanasi had organised the final round of inter-college competition of 'Dark Patterns Buster Hackathon' on February 17, in which over 500 students from 50 premier engineering colleges participated. "The solutions provided by

participants will not only assist in detecting dark patterns but will be a major game changer in regulating other online deceptive practices such as fake reviews, online traps, misleading advertisements amongst others," the secretary said. He also emphasized the power of artificial intelligence in mitigating dark patterns and encouraged participants to leverage the power of evolving technology while also maintaining the ethical decorum, an official statement said.

The winners will be felicitated on March 15 on the occasion of the World Consumer Rights Day.

Dermatomyositis more frequently diagnosed in women than in men

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Dermatomyositis, a rare condition characterised by muscle inflammation which tragically claimed the life of Suhani Bhatnagar, a child actor known for her role in the movie "Dangal" is primarily triggered by a combination of genetic predisposition, immune system abnormalities, and environmental factors such as high levels of airborne pollution. Health experts have noted that dermatomyositis is more frequently diagnosed in women than in men, with incidence rates reported at 3.98 and 4.68 per 1,000,000, respectively.

According to the National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD), viral infections or underlying cancers may also serve as triggers for dermatomyositis. Air pollution, particularly fine particulate matter (PM2.5), can exacerbate inflammation and oxidative stress in the body, potentially worsening symptoms associated with dermatomyositis. Dr. and Prof. Ramesh Bhat, a senior dermatologist and Head



of Father Muller Research Centre in Mangalore, explained that dermatomyositis manifests with a wide range of severity and symptoms, including muscle weakness, skin rashes, and fatigue. This condition is classified as a connective tissue disease and is believed to stem from an abnormal immune response targeting the body's own tissues. Symptoms of dermatomyositis can vary widely among individuals, but commonly include muscle weakness in areas such as the shoulders, hips, and thighs, as well as characteristic skin changes like rashes on the face, neck, chest, back, and hands. Additional symptoms may include difficulty swallowing, joint pain, fatigue, and shortness of breath. Dr. Bhat emphasized that the pain associated with dermatomyositis

can be intense, to the extent that patients may struggle to perform simple tasks like combing their hair.

In Suhani's case, her father Puneet Bhatnagar shared that she was diagnosed with juvenile dermatomyositis, a form of the condition that affects children. Two months prior to her diagnosis, Suhani began experiencing swelling in her hands, prompting multiple medical consultations until she was ultimately diagnosed and admitted for treatment at AIIMS hospital.

Dr. Bhat further explained that dermatomyositis can also manifest in adults, sometimes being associated with underlying cancers. Treatment typically involves a combination of medications to reduce inflammation and modulate the immune response, along with physical therapy to maintain muscle function and mobility. Despite treatment, dermatomyositis can present ongoing challenges, especially if vital organs are affected. Close monitoring and adherence to treatment plans are crucial for managing the condition and improving the quality of life for affected individuals.

Meghalaya concerns over CAA addressed: Sangma Mamata hails kisan movement

PTI ■ SHILLONG

Concerns of Meghalaya over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act have been addressed as most areas of the state come under the Sixth Schedule, which exempts them from the law, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has said.

In an interview to PTI, Sangma, who heads the National People's Party (NPP), also stressed on the requirement for the Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime in his state, which will restrict the entry of "outsiders".

Expressing concern over the "spillover effect" in Meghalaya if the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) is implemented in other states, he said that "we have just requested the Government of India if we can still have the



"There are enough provisions in the CAA right now to protect us in one way, apart from the cutoff date that they've put and apart from the fact that 99.9 per cent is exempted... All these points are there. But we have still raised our concerns with the Government of India, and we have also asked for the extension of the ILP or any other mechanism that will help us address those concerns," he said.

"We have asked if the non-scheduled areas can also be exempted (from the law)," he said.

Asked about the CAA, which has faced opposition in the state that shares more than 400-km-long border with Bangladesh, Sangma said their concerns have been addressed as it excludes Schedule 6 areas.

an exemption is there, we don't have any concerns. So our concerns have been addressed," Sangma said.

"We have just requested the Government of India if we can still have the ILP... Because whatever happens in other states could have spill-over effect here, we have requested for that. We are happy that the Government of India exempted Meghalaya. We have asked if the non-scheduled area can also be exempted, though it is very very small," he said.

He also mentioned a resolution passed by the state Assembly to extend the ILP to the state.

The Meghalaya Assembly in December 2019 had adopted a resolution for implementing the ILP regime in the state. The ILP is a special permit required by "outsiders" from

other regions of India to enter the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

"Our concerns are that anybody from outside the country is a non-Indian, and illegal immigration is illegal immigration. Citizens coming from other countries would be in a way foreigners coming into our country," he added.

Passed in December 2019 by the Parliament, the CAA grants Indian nationality to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians? from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, who arrived in India till December 31, 2014.

Home Minister Amit Shah has said rules for implementing the CAA will be issued before the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has hailed the farmers' movement in north India to extract the "guarantee" on minimum support price.

Banerjee said that she not only supported and saluted the farmers for the bravery they were showing but also condemned the BJP Government which was bringing down all kinds of atrocities on them.

"I am giving support price to our farmers which is why there is no agitation in Bengal," Banerjee said adding "the BJP Government in the Centre is not giving the guarantee of MSP which is why the farmers are protesting... and this cruel Government is attacking the farmers... I condemn the attacks and salute their bravery." The Opposition Left however wondered why her Trinamool Congress had not sent its peasants' wing to Delhi.

"In Bengal Mamata Banerjee too is guilty of not giving support price to the farmers... if she is so much sympathetic towards them then she should have sent her peasant wing there," CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakrabarty said.

Addressing a crowd at Suri in Birbhum district, Banerjee also alleged that the BJP government was deactivating the Aadhaar cards of people before the upcoming general elections so as to deprive them of the various social welfare schemes floated by her Government. Linking Aadhaar cards with bank accounts are mandatory to draw the benefits of the government schemes.

Addressing a crowd at Suri in Birbhum district Banerjee asked the people to remain cautious about their Aadhaar cards which were being deactivated by the Centre with an ulterior motive.

"They have deactivated several Aadhaar cards, particularly in this State so that the people may not get the benefits of free ration, Laxmir Bhandar and other schemes which you can get through banks," Banerjee said adding however that her Government would in any case continue such schemes.

Calling the land grab and mass rape of the women of Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas a small matter the Chief Minister said the BJP, Left and Congress were trying to cash in on the incident.

SC to hear Siddaramaiah plea against HC refusal to quash FIR against him

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's petition against the high court order dismissing his plea to quash an FIR lodged against him and others in 2022 in relation to a protest march.

A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and Prashant Kumar Mishra is likely to hear the plea of the Congress leader.

He has challenged the February 6 order of the high court that imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on him as well as Congress general secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala, state ministers M B Patil and Ramalinga Reddy, and directed him to appear before a special court on March 6.

The plea of Siddaramaiah has been filed by advocate Rajesh Gulab Inamdar.

The case was registered against the Congress leaders after they took out a march to lay siege to the then chief minister



Basavaraj Bommai's residence in Bengaluru, demanding the resignation of K S Eshwarappa, who was the rural development and panchayat raj minister in the southern state at the time. The agitation was staged after a contractor, Santosh Patil, died by suicide accusing Eshwarappa of demanding 40 per cent commission on a public work in his village.

According to police, the case pertained to blocking roads and causing inconvenience to commuters.

Stating that none of the "quintessential" ingredients of the offences alleged was made out, Siddaramaiah has said in his plea that the proceedings are an abuse of the process of law and will lead to undue harassment.

INDIA Bloc doors open for BSP: Congress

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/PRAVAGRAJ

INDIA bloc's doors are "open" for the BSP and it is up to Mayawati to decide if she wants to join the united front against the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls or not, Congress' Uttar Pradesh in-charge Avinash Pande said on Sunday.

The Congress general secretary said the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) very much wanted the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to join the bloc but Mayawati has already declared that she will go it alone in the Lok Sabha polls.

In an interview with PTI during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the politically-crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, Pande said the Congress is "wholeheartedly" supporting the Samajwadi Party and expressed confidence that a seat-sharing deal for the Lok Sabha polls in the state will be finalised "very soon" with remaining "confusions" dispelled.

He said the Congress-SP combine is in talks with small parties in Uttar Pradesh who would also be joining the INDIA bloc to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, and asserted that everything



finalised," he told PTI.

The Congress general secretary termed the exit of the Jayant Chaudhary-led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) from the INDIA bloc as "very unfortunate" but exuded confidence that with the yatra also going through western Uttar Pradesh later this month, the opposition bloc would draw people's support from there.

Pointing out that a recalibration was needed in seat sharing after the RLD's exit, Pande said, "Whatever discussion we've had so far, definitely there will be some changes now to realign the whole thing and that is why it is taking some time but very soon we will come out jointly with the list of candidates."

Asked whether the BSP could still join the alliance in the future, Pande said, "INDIA bloc very much wanted the BSP to join this bloc but as you know Mayawati ji has already declared she will go it alone."

It is up to her to join the INDIA bloc or not but INDIA bloc's doors are open for Mayawati ji if she wants she can very well join to fight the BJP unitedly."

On Sonia Gandhi announcing that she will not

contest the Lok Sabha elections this time, he said she is still the pillar of the party and nothing has changed by her announcement.

"As you must have read her letter in which she has very categorically mentioned that she is very much part of UP and Raebareli and Amethi and she will continue to support as the family head, she will give the same kind of guidance to the people as she feels Raebareli is her home," Pande said.

He said the Congress workers and leaders want that any of the Gandhi family members should contest from Amethi and Raebareli.

Asked if Priyanka Gandhi could contest from Raebareli, he said, "She is most welcome and that is what everyone is looking for but the decision is for Priyanka ji and Rahul ji to take (to contest from Raebareli and Amethi)."

Rape survivor alleges sexual abuse by judge in Tripura court, probe ordered

PTI ■ AGARTALA

A rape survivor has alleged that she has been sexually abused by a magistrate inside his chamber in a court in Tripura. A three-member panel headed by Dhalai District and Sessions Judge Gautam Sarkar has initiated a probe into the allegation, a senior

advocate said on Sunday. The woman alleged that the incident of sexual abuse took place on February 16 when she went to the chamber of first class judicial magistrate, Kamalpur to get her statement recorded in connection with her rape. In her complaint to the sessions judge, Kamalpur,

the woman stated, "I went to the chamber of the first class judicial magistrate to get my statement recorded on February 16. When I was about to give my statement, the judge groped me. I rushed out of his chamber and informed the lawyers and my husband about the incident." The woman's husband also lodged a separate complaint with the Kamalpur Bar Association over the incident.

Acting on the survivor's complaint, District and Sessions Judge Gautam Sarkar, along with Chief Judicial Magistrate Satyajit Das, visited Kamalpur's additional district and sessions judge's office to investigate the matter.

"The three-member panel headed by the district and sessions judge also met the members of Kamalpur Bar Association on the court premises and sought our point of view on the allegations of the woman. We placed our points before the panel," Shibendra Dasgupta, secretary of the advocate body, told PTI over phone.

Selfie point near LoC in Uri major tourist attraction

PTI ■ URI (KASHMIR)

A selfie point near the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir has become a major attraction for tourists as it allows them to capture the mesmerising beauty of Uri's remote border region and offers a panoramic view of the Jhelum river, officials said here.

The INDIA selfie point provides visitors with an engaging environment symbolising a sense of nationalism in the region, they said.

The army had last year opened 'Kaman Setu', zero-point at the LoC here, for tourists. The selfie point was opened for the public around the Republic Day this year.

The selfie point is the brainchild of artist and RCAF founder Rouble Nagi. It has been positioned strategically along the National Highway-44 and the structure offers a panoramic view of the picturesque Jhelum river, enhancing the pride of the locals as well as the tourists, the officials said.

The army thanked Nagi's foundation which is known for its women empowerment projects. "Her gesture of gifting the structure stands as a testimony to rising nationalism in the valley. The selfie point



was conceptualised with an aim to provide a unique engaging environment for individuals and groups alike," the army said.

Nagi said sculpting the name of the nation through her art installation is a tribute to the sacrifices made by various sections of society for the country's freedom.

"Nothing feels better than sculpting the name of my nation through my art. Proud to install my sculpture #INDIA

UNLF (P) involved in violence in Manipur despite ceasefire: Officials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/IMPHAL

Security agencies have voiced concerns over the escalating violence in Manipur perpetrated by the banned United National Liberation Front (UNLF) despite the armed group signing a ceasefire agreement with the Union Government last November, officials said on Sunday.

Led by Kh Pambai, the UNLF (P) became on November 29, 2023 the first Meitei armed group in the Imphal Valley to enter into a ceasefire agreement with the government and agreed to renounce violence.

However, officials said the group has failed to disclose the number of its cadres who were supposed to be kept in a secure area, and they have not surrendered their weapons either. Reports also indicate the group's members have been setting up camps in the outskirts of areas predominantly inhabited by the Kuki population with an aim to target the tribal, the officials said.

They said that based on the ground reports, security

agencies have observed the UNLF (P) cadres have been engaging in violent activities against both security forces and the general public.

The officials said the cadres were involved in looting arms and ammunition from the 5th India Reserve Battalion (IRB) at Chingarel in Manipur East on February 13. Following this incident, the police arrested six individuals, including two UNLF cadre and the case is now likely to be transferred to the CBI for further investigation.

The recent sightings of UNLF (P) cadres in various areas such as Moirangpurrel, Tumukhong and Itham have raised concerns, with reports indicating they were carrying reconnaissance activities for establishing camps in Moirangpurrel and Itham.

On February 7, 2024, UNLF (P) cadre allegedly opened fire at Moirangpurrel on vehicles heading towards Churachandpur, a district dominated by the Kuki community.

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All the tenders issued by CIL and its Subsidiaries for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on websites of Coal India Ltd. www.coalindia.in/ respective Subsidiary Company (CCL, www.centralcoalfields.in), CIL e-procurement portal <https://coalindiatenders.nic.in> and Central Public Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in> in addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal <https://gem.gov.in>

OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM
COLLECTORATE COMPOUND, RUDRAPUR, DISTT. UDHAM SINGH NAGAR

Letter no. 316/Nivida/53 Date: 17.02.2024

Short Time E-Tender Notice

- Name of the work:- REPAIR & RENOVATION WORKS OF EXISTING BOUNDARY WALL AT COLLECTORATE CAMPUS, RUDRAPUR (UDHAM SINGH NAGAR).
- Estimated Cost - Rs. 64.15 Lakh
- Period of Completion:- 04 Month
- Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal:- 19.02.2024 (15.00 hrs)
- Last date/Time of receipt of bids in the portal:- 28.02.2024 (13.00 hrs)
- Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 29.02.2024 (11.00 hrs)
- Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid :- Er. A.K. Joshi, Project Manager, Collectorate Compound, Rudrapur (Udhm Singh Nagar).
- Tender further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in Project Manager

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (ROADS)
ASSAM, CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-03

No. CE/Commn/Asom Mala 2.0/ 32 /2023-24/ 8

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER (RE-BID)

The Chief Engineer, P.W.D (Roads), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-03 invites re-bid on behalf of the Governor of Assam from approved and eligible contractors registered with PWRD, Assam for "Improvement and Upgradation of Road from Kuthuri-dijju valley (Kuthuri-anjokpani-Dokmoka)- 5th Km DSC Road- Dokmoka town Ch. 0.00 km (Kuthuri) to Ch. 87.00 Km (Dokmoka Town) Part- II (Ch. 47.00 Km to Ch- 87.00 Km) under Asom Mala 2.0 for the year 2023-24" amounting to Rs. 13549.108 Lakhs (approx.) in Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. Details along with packages for the works may be seen from 19.02.2024 at website- www.assamtenders.gov.in and also at the office of the undersigned in the "Communication Branch". Amendment/Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website www.assamtenders.gov.in.

Schemes are not yet sanctioned by the competent authority. In the event of non- sanction of the schemes, the bids may be cancelled and no claim what so ever on this account shall be entertained from the bidders

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M.P. POWER GENERATING CO. LTD. Invites Electronic tenders from Manufacturer/Reputed Supplier/ Contractor, for the supply/works of following items for SGTPS, MPPGCL Birsinghpur.

Sl. No.	MPPGCL TENDER- ID	Particulars	Estimate (In Rs.)	Tender Cost (In Rs.)	E.M.D. (In Rs.)	Last Date of Closing of Online Submission	Due Date of E-Tender Opening
1.	2024 MPPGCL_331347_1	Procurement of 400KV and 220KV Lighting arrester with grading ring and all accessories for PH-I, PH-II & PH-III at SGTPS, Birsinghpur.	44,97,074/-	1000/-	90000/-	30.02.2024	02.03.2024
2.	2024 MPPGCL_331977_1	Procurement of Spares of New Iskmatic modules of ATRS for Unit No. 3 and 4, PH-II at SGTPS, MPPGCL, Birsinghpur.	50,97,600/-	2000/-	102000/-	30.02.2024	02.03.2024
	2023 MPPGCL_317450_2	Procurement of relative shaft vibration pick-up for Unit No. I & II at SGTPS, MPPGCL, Birsinghpur.	12,59,060/-	1000/-	25500/-	29.02.2024	02.03.2024

These tenders are being invited through e-tendering system/For viewing detailed E-NIT, downloading tender documents and participating in Electronic Tender, for any clarifications and/or due date extensions or corrigendum, please visit the website www.mptenders.gov.in regularly/Any clarifications and/or due date extensions or corrigendum shall be issued on the website www.mptenders.gov.in only.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Poll mantra

Modi tells team to seek votes on pro-poor work, development and enhanced global standing

The Lok Sabha elections are likely to be announced anytime now. The BJP, known for its heavy-duty and well-oiled poll machinery, is already ahead of other parties in strategising an action plan. At the recent BJP National Convention, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated a clear strategy for electoral campaign: Focus on the Government's pro-poor initiatives, development agenda and the bolstering of India's global stature. The election pitch underscores the BJP's commitment to addressing the concerns of the common populace. Though many critics would have us believe that the BJP would fight elections on emotional issues such as the Ram temple and the abrogation of Article 370, the Prime Minister has steered clear of these and wants his cadre to go to people with the good work done by his party for the poor and the underprivileged. Throughout his tenure, Modi has championed numerous initiatives aimed at uplifting the marginalised segments: From schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana



to Ayushman Bharat, the Government has prioritised initiatives that directly benefit the underprivileged. By highlighting these efforts, the BJP aims to garner support from a broad spectrum of the electorate. Development remains the cornerstone of the BJP's electoral narrative. Under Modi's leadership, India has witnessed significant strides in infrastructure development, digital connectivity and economic growth. The rollout of initiatives such as Make in India, Digital India and Smart Cities Mission has not only spurred economic activity but also created employment opportunities and improved the quality of life for millions. By showcasing these achievements, the BJP seeks to reinforce

its image as a party committed to fostering progress and prosperity across the nation. Equally significant is Modi's call to leverage India's enhanced global standing as a key electoral plank. There is no denying the fact that India has emerged as a key player in the world arena. Organising the G20 Summit in Delhi was indeed one of the proud moments for the country. India has indeed emerged as a prominent player in international affairs, with Modi actively engaging in diplomatic outreach and forging strategic partnerships with global powers. From initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance to India's role in climate change negotiations, the country's influence on the world stage has grown substantially. By projecting India as a confident and assertive player in global affairs, Modi aims to evoke a sense of national pride and solidarity among voters. However, issues such as agrarian distress, unemployment and social inequality continue to pose significant hurdles to India's development trajectory. The BJP's ability to effectively address these challenges while staying true to its core principles will be crucial in shaping the outcome of the upcoming elections. Ultimately, the success of Modi's strategy will hinge not only on the BJP's ability to articulate its vision but also on its capacity to translate promises into tangible actions that positively impact the lives of millions of Indians.

PICTALK



People stand near umbrellas on display for sale at a roadside during rain, in Srinagar

The security of Indians abroad is paramount



SIDDHARTH MISHRA

The recent data revealing a distressing trend of Indian student deaths abroad underscores the pressing need for heightened awareness and intervention

The year 2024 began with a series of tragic incidents involving some Indians living in the USA, starkly highlighting the vulnerability of persons of Indian origin abroad. Recently an IT executive Vivek Taneja, 41, was killed when he tried to save a female colleague from molestation outside a restaurant in Washington. Vivek became the seventh victim of attacks that took place on Indians in America this year. A spate of incidents of death of Indians living in foreign countries has ensued in the recent past. The government of India had recently informed the Parliament that around 403 incidents of death of Indian students living abroad have been reported since 2018 due to various reasons including natural causes, accidents and medical conditions. The data reveals a disheartening scenario for Indians aspiring to go abroad for various purposes as it showed that 91 Indian students died in Canada, 48 in the UK, 40 in Russia, 36 in the US, 35 in Australia, 21 in Ukraine and 20 in Germany, 14 in Cyprus, 10 each in Philippines and Italy and nine each in Qatar, China and Kyrgyzstan.



Among other factors responsible for the death of Indians abroad, the crimes and attacks upon Indians have emerged as a major cause of concern. The recent incidents of attacks on Indians in America also raise concerns about the probable escalation of xenophobia and hate crimes against immigrants and minority communities in the United States. The attacks highlight the vulnerability of Indian Americans and other minority groups and underscore the need for increased awareness and intervention if the attacks were prompted by hatred and discrimination. These incidents might also be a reflection of the broader trend of racially motivated violence and anti-Asian hate crimes that witnessed a surge in anti-Asian racism and violence especially during and post the COVID-19 pandemic.

The year 2024 has witnessed many consecutive deaths of Indian or Indian-origin students

due to various causes, some of which the cause of deaths is still unclear. These incidents serve as a catalyst for a broader discussion about the challenges faced by Indians living overseas. While the specific details surrounding each death remain under investigation, they collectively underscore the critical need to address the risks and dangers encountered by Indian nationals abroad. As investigations into the recent incidents continue, it is crucial to examine the root causes and systemic issues that contribute to the vulnerability of Indians living abroad. Factors such as racism, xenophobia, inadequate security measures, and cultural misunderstandings are likely to play a role in endangering the lives of Indian nationals overseas. Organizations like the South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) report hate violence against South Asian communities, including Indians, and press for increased measures to address these crimes and enhance community safety. It is likely that systemic racism still continues in various institutional practices and policies, creating a disadvantageous environment for Indians and other minority groups in the USA. Disparities in hiring and promotion practices, unequal treatment within the criminal justice system, and limited



THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA BEARS A SIGNIFICANT RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING THE INTERESTS AND SECURITY OF ITS CITIZENS LIVING ABROAD. THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN UP SUCH MATTERS WITH FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND HAS CONSTANTLY EXPRESSED ITS CONCERNS IN THE PAST

access to quality education and healthcare are probable systemic issues that might require immediate attention. Reports suggest a need for greater awareness and accountability regarding systemic racism, requiring policy reforms and initiatives that promote equity and inclusion as Indian Americans become targets of hate crimes fuelled by racial or ethnic animus resulting in incidents of verbal harassment, vandalism, and physical assaults across the nation. In cases where individuals are found responsible for crimes against Indian nationals abroad, there is a growing demand for extradition and legal accountability. Extradition of guilty persons to India for trial and punishment is essential to ensure justice and deter future crimes. India and the US had signed an extradition treaty in 1997. This treaty outlines the process for extraditing individuals who commit crimes in one country and flee to the other. While the extradition treaty exists, navigating it is usually complex and time-consuming. Delays occur due to lengthy legal processes, gathering evidence, potential appeals etc. The Government of India bears a significant responsibility for safeguarding the interests and security of its citizens living abroad. The Indian gov-

ernment has taken up such matters with foreign governments and has constantly expressed its concerns in the past. Indian consulates in the US and elsewhere must enhance the process of providing assistance to Indian citizens, offer guidance on various issues like legal rights, visa concerns, and emergency support etc. The government must raise awareness about safety concerns and resources available to Indian citizens in foreign lands, including collaborating with community organizations. The Indian government may also consider collaborating with organizations like SAALT to provide support, resources, and advocacy for Indian communities abroad. Consulates can connect Indian citizens with legal resources and provide guidance on navigating the foreign legal system in case of discrimination or hate crimes. Tragedy in the US underscores the urgent need for multifaceted solutions. The death of Indian or Indian-origin individuals in America serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address the safety and security of Indian nationals living abroad. (The author is a Sr Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law, the University of Delhi, research inputs by Shreyansh Gupta; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INSAT-3DS A GOLDEN ACHIEVEMENT

Sir — This refers to the news, that the GSLV rocket carrying the INSAT-3DS meteorological satellite lifts off (Feb 18). Hats off to all ISRO scientists associated with the project on the successful launch of meteorological satellite INSAT-3DS. It will prove to be a milestone for the third-generation weather satellite mission. By analyzing the data obtained from INSAT-3DS meteorological department will be able to conduct R&D on weather-related predictions and disaster warnings. INSAT-3DS will play an effective role in observing the effects of sudden changes in weather on the earth and sea surfaces. The scientists associated with the Indian Meteorological Department and the Ministry of Earth Sciences will evaluate the detailed observations of the weather patterns. The nation feels proud of this golden achievement of ISRO. It is praiseworthy that the Modi government has poured in investment for R&D projects commenced by ISRO.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

PUTIN CRITIC DIES IN PRISON

Sir — After all, at the age of 47, anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny, long the most prominent face of Russian opposition to President Vladimir Putin, was found dead in a prison in Siberia on Friday. Anyone who has tried to confront autocrats, dictators and corrupt administrators has been killed. So far, during Putin's rule, dozens of journalists and political activists have been killed without explanation. Just last August, Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin was killed when his plane crashed. Prigozhin was killed within six months of the rebellion. In comparison to him, Alexei Navalny had a longer time to live. The first attack was done on him in 2017 when after the attack of antiseptic green dye, he started getting chemical burns in one of his eyes. In August 2020, Navalny collapsed on a flight over Siberia and was taken to a hospital in Omsk. That emergency landing saved his life. In

Ashwin's record achievement



In the third Test between England and India in Rajkot, Indian bowler Ashwin dismissed Crawley and scored a record 500 wickets in Test cricket. He is the second Indian bowler to achieve such a feat. Earlier Anil Kumble reached 619 wickets in Tests. Currently, Ashwin's age is 37 years and 152 days. If his form continues, he can play Tests for another two years.

Maybe he can break Kumble's record too. Ashwin bowled a total of 25714 balls to take this wicket.

A few decades ago, Test matches were not as popular as they are now. So famous bowlers Bedi, Prasanna, Chandrasekhar, Salim Durani, and Babu Nadkarni did not get to make such records. Second, it is necessary to get an opportunity to play in Tests. It is necessary to have a good form for that. Moreover, the favour of the selection committee. This fate is not for everyone. So when such world records happen, it is true that they acquire great importance. Now the competition is huge. So proving your quality from it is a difficult task. Now all Indians want Ashwin to get a chance to break Kumble's next record. Good luck to Ashwin for this record. Shantaram Wagh | Pune

Will Priyanka enter Rae Bareilly via Rahul Gandhi's Yatra?



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

Rae Bareilly remains a focal point of intrigue, embodying the rich electoral history and the ever-evolving political landscape of Uttar Pradesh

There were constant speculations that Sonia Gandhi might contest the elections from Medhak, Telangana. Months ago, Telangana Congress had passed a similar proposal and sent it to Delhi. Since the frog had also supported former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in bad times. Because after Amethi was out of control, positive messages were not coming from Rae Bareilly also. That too ever since BJP felt a public wave in entire UP after Ram Mandir Pran Pratistha. Sensing such a situation, senior Congress leaders advised Sonia Gandhi to come from Rajya Sabha. To which Sonia Gandhi also agreed. Since former Congress President Sonia Gandhi's announcement after her Rajya Sabha nomination in Jaipur that she will not contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections from Rae Bareilly, Priyanka Gandhi accompanying her brother for most of the UP part of Rahul Yatra has given rise to speculations that she will contest her Lok Sabha election from Rae Bareilly. Can contest elections from mother's former seat Rae Bareilly. Senior Congress leaders said



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Yatra is likely to join the yatra along with her brother Rahul Gandhi, whose Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will enter Uttar Pradesh via Chandauli on Friday. In an emotional letter to the people of her parliamentary constituency Rae Bareilly, Sonia Gandhi informed them about her decision not to contest the elections from the Congress stronghold. "Whatever I am today is because of you... but due to old age and health, I will not contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections," Sonia Gandhi wrote a day after filing her Rajya Sabha nomination papers from Rajasthan. Thanking the people of Rae Bareilly for their continued support, he wrote, "Our family has very deep roots in Rae Bareilly. I am proud to say that whatever I am today is because of you... I know that you will stand by me and my family in the future as well as

in the past. This gesture strengthens Priyanka Gandhi's Rae Bareilly entry. Sonia Gandhi, who had won from Rae Bareilly in the last four consecutive elections, said. According to the program of the Congress Party, the Congress Yatra will reach Amethi on February 19 and Rae Bareilly the next day. As part of the new route of travel in UP, Rahul will spend six days in the state before entering Madhya Pradesh from Jhansi on February 22, the state will cover parts of Eastern, Central and Bundelkhand regions. Which is politically important. The situation in Rae Bareilly has continuously deteriorated in the last few days. During the UP elections in 2022, the strength of the Samajwadi Party was seen increasing in Rae Bareilly. At the same time, Aditi Singh, who joined the BJP from Congress, won from Rae Bareilly Sadar seat. BJP won for the first time in the Congress fort. Even in the Modi-Yogi wave of 2014 and 2019, the BJP was not successful in conquering the fort of Rae Bareilly. But now the situation in Congress ground is not good. In the review con-

ducted by the top leadership of Congress, questions are being raised about the party's victory on this seat after Sonia Gandhi left the seat. In such a situation, there is confusion on the part of the party leadership about fielding Priyanka Gandhi in the election field. It is believed that the party may change its strategy. It is also being claimed quoting senior leaders that Priyanka Gandhi herself does not want to contest elections from Rae Bareilly. In that situation, it is also being claimed that under the alliance, this seat can also go to SP. Rae Bareilly has been the traditional seat of the Gandhi family and their friends. The electoral history from 1952 to 2014 clearly says that Congress has lost only three times, in the rest big personalities like Firoz Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Sheila Kaul, Arun Nehru, and Satish Sharma have won elections from here. Whereas from the opposition, faces like Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia, Mahipal Shastri, Janeshwar Mishra, and Savita Ambedkar have had to face defeat here. (The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)

featuring underage individuals and leads to the exploitation and abuse of a child. It holds deep implications for the mental health of the child and well-being of society at large.

There existence of multiple stringent laws and penalising provisions across the globe likewise the Budapest Convention punishing all forms of cybercrime, internet threats and child pornography forming European countries along with the U.S. as a member country; INTERPOL maintaining the database and tracking down the offender's details and regulatory norms exist in India against this heinous act is POCSO have the death penalty. Information Technology (IT Act, 2000) provides for explicitly harsh punishment. Instead of all such stringent provisions, still, there is a continuous rise. This brings an ardent appeal to strengthen the legal framework, law enforcement and International cooperation in our genuine fight against child sexual abuse. Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE IN EDUCATION

Discipline shapes individuals, fostering success and resilience



SAKSHI SETHI

The term discipline can be put in different contexts. For some, it can be a way of life and for others, it can be a set of rules by which their life functions. It is one of the ways of aligning the efforts and activities of every individual. Discipline gives every individual a set of rules and regulations to work with. Discipline has always played an integral part in a student's life since they are at the stage of their life where they can be the most flexible version of themselves. Although there is no age bar to following a disciplined life, it is quite possible that a student can get in the best shape physically and mentally when disciplined. Talking about educational institutions, every school or college has a heterogeneous mix of students and teachers need a mix of varied approaches to understand and engage all these types of students within the classrooms. This makes school discipline a robust process.

Discipline values need to be gravitated well to ensure that the teaching-learning process is seamless across the classrooms. Several studies have found that the majority of the factors influencing the learning process come from the school environment such as inadequate material from school, poor seating arrangements in the classroom, student and teacher relaxation canters, poor ventilation and many more. Nowadays, parents strive to raise competent, happy and successful children but it is not an easy task. Children of today need a loving home, but at the same time, they also need to learn boundaries and limits. One must teach their child that actions have consequences be they good or bad.



It should be the duty of parents to always strive to give their children the emotional tools they will need to make good decisions. In today's scenario, by creating a positive learning environment and implementing fair and consistent disciplinary measures, can educational institutions nurture responsible, motivated and successful individuals so that the young learners can or are ready to face the challenges of the future. Everyone has his/her prospect of discipline. Without discipline, the life of a person will become dull and inactive whereas being disciplined will teach them how to behave properly and become responsible adults thereby proving to be a true sign of parental love and care. Remember, giving a badly behaved child a moderate spanking is not the same as hitting people. Whosoever can't see the difference doesn't understand either discipline or the parent. Having control over life gives the learner a sense of relief and satisfaction that triggers immense self-confidence and affects their learning. Being in control can give them enough time to focus on their learning. A disciplined student will never be reluctant to learn new things and is always ready to accept new routines. This opens all the gates for learning and therefore affects the learning patterns of the students. There is no guarantee that a student in discipline is going to achieve all the good things in life. However, one thing that is guaranteed is that if they stumble, they will find ways to get back up. Instead of being angry or disappointed, they will be ready to work harder and achieve their goals. Disciplined student always learns from their missteps and forget if they even happened. This gives them a better chance at trying again instead of feeling guilty about everything.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

Farmers' demands are impractical and unrealistic



UTTAM GUPTA

The farmers want the Govt to withdraw from the WTO and all Free Trade Agreements, which is next to impossible in a globally interdependent world



After three years of hibernation, farmers mostly from Punjab are back on the roads with over a dozen demands from the Union Government. If taken on board, these are sure to spell disaster. The foremost demand is securing legal guarantees for the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of their agricultural produce.

MSP is a 'minimum price' for any crop that the government considers as remunerative for farmers and hence deserving of 'support'. Put into practice in the 1960s under an 'executive order', it was meant to assure farmers that they get at least MSP from selling their produce; that distress sale is avoided. It fixes MSP for 23 crops grown in Kharif and Rabi seasons based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) - a body under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.

The agencies of the government, such as the Food Corporation of India (FCI), buy wheat, rice/paddy, and coarse cereals, from farmers at the MSP. The quantities thus procured are meant for giving to over 800 million beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). At present, the beneficiaries are getting their eligible quota for free. The entire cost of purchase, handling and distribution is borne by the government as a subsidy.

The state agencies such as the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) also purchase other crops such as pulses and oilseeds. Apart from providing support to farmers, this helps maintain the stability of prices for consumers. However, not all crops for which MSP is announced are purchased. The MSP is not backed by any law. But, farmers want a legal guarantee for it. They would want it for all 23 crops for which MSP is currently fixed. The demand could be extended to cover all crops; in fact the entire agricultural produce.

Today, the bulk of farmers' produce is picked up by private traders, processors, aggregators, exporters etc even as government agencies buy only a small portion (over one-third in the case of paddy and wheat and a tiny fraction for other crops). When there is a law on MSP requiring that



ASSURED PURCHASE OF THE BULK OF PADDY AND WHEAT OFFERED FOR SALE BY PUNJAB AND HARYANA FARMERS DE FACTO HAS LED TO INDISCRIMINATE GROWING OF THESE CROPS TO THE POINT OF EXCESSIVE USE OF CHEMICAL FERTILISERS, DETERIORATION OF SOIL QUALITY, DEPLETION OF GROUNDWATER AND SERIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

no purchase can be made at a price less than this minimum, they will all be scared of buying from farmers. Who will take the risk of landing in jail?

The farmers would wish that the Central government direct all the private entities to purchase their crops at MSP. Such an order would be reminiscent of the control and license Raj that existed prior to liberalization and reform initiated in 1991, perhaps even worse than that. This is a preposterous idea. The farmers can't obviously allow their crops to rot in the fields. So, they would expect the government/agencies to pick up their entire produce albeit at MSP - pointing at the 'legal guarantee'. This too is next to impossible.

Even if the purchase by government/agencies is restricted to 23 crops for which MSP is currently fixed, the Centre will have to spend at least Rs 10,00,000 crore which is equivalent to its capital expenditure (this is mainly on building infrastructure) and will consume over 45 per cent of its tax revenue. And, if it were to buy all of the farmers' agri-produce, that would require around Rs 40,00,000 crore out of its annual budget of Rs 45,00,000 crore (2023-24). That leaves a small Rs 5,00,000 crore for all others including defence, security, law and order, wages and salaries, infrastructure, subsidies etc.

The interest payments at around Rs 10,80,000 crore (2023-24) on the Union government's outstanding debt alone are more than double this amount. Mammoth sums are spent on subsidies for agri-inputs such as fertilizers, irrigation, seeds, credit etc. The farmers want this to continue as these help them reduce production costs. With no money left after paying MSP, all this support would cease.

Garnering money to pay for the purchase is only one side of the nightmare. The other has to do with

the wherewithal to carry out purchases on such a monumental scale. The state agencies don't have the infrastructure to handle and store even the 'limited' quantities currently procured by them leading to huge wastages. One shudder at the very thought of their having to buy the entire agri-produce. What would the state agencies do with this stuff?

They can't hang on to it forever. The stock has to be offloaded to private trade sooner rather than later. This will entail huge losses due to sales at below MSP and the cost of handling and carrying it as long as they hold. These losses will have to be paid from the taxpayer's money. And, don't forget India will be taken to task by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the produce picked up by private traders could find its way to the international market distorting trade.

Assured purchase of the bulk of paddy and wheat offered for sale by Punjab and Haryana farmers de facto, has led to indiscriminate growing of these crops to the point of excessive use of chemical fertilizers, deterioration of soil quality, depletion of groundwater and serious environmental problems. To alleviate these, there is a dire need for crop diversification. But, providing a legal guarantee will ensure that it is business as usual; in fact, the trend will aggravate.

From the perspective of consumers also, legal backing for MSP is a bad omen. In view of a sizeable chunk of the crop produce not coming to the market (inevitable when there is no purchase/sale by private entities), there would be acute shortage resulting in an 'astronomical' rise in food prices and inflation. In such a scenario, no measure fiscal or monetary aimed at reining in price rise would work.

The farmers want the government to withdraw from the WTO and all FTAs (Free Trade

Agreements). In a globally interdependent world where India depends 'substantially' and 'inevitably' on international trade and investment to sustain the momentum of its economic activities, withdrawal from these global platforms that set the multilateral rules of trade is unthinkable. During 2022-23, India exported agri-products worth Rs 435,000 crore (US\$ 53 billion) and that goes to help farmers. They use chemical fertilizers which are mostly imported. If, India gets out of these trade agreements, none other than the farmers will be hit.

Apart from having free access to electricity for farming operations, Punjab farmers camouflage high household consumption (including ACs/coolers etc) under use for farming. To prevent misuse, the Centre has proposed reforms such as the installation of smart meters and direct transfer of subsidy by the state government to farmers' accounts instead of the current system of asking power distribution companies or discoms, in short, to supply free of charge and latter claiming reimbursement from the former.

The protestors want the Centre not to pursue these reforms. They want debt waiver - a demand ritually mentioned every time a charter is presented. They also don't want to be held accountable for burning crop residue. They want MGNREGA workers to be deployed for farming and paid a minimum wage of Rs 700 per day. In short, protesting farmers want almost everything that can denude the state exchequer, devastate the economy, affect soil health undermine climate mitigation efforts and yet bring no relief for the majority of the poor/small and marginal farmers. One wonders whether the protestors represent farmers!

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

Cleaning the Ganga: A troubling tale of neglect and impending disaster

With sewage and industrial toxins contaminating its waters, the Ganga, again faces an urgent call to action

The Ganges River, often called 'Ma Ganga,' by devout Hindus holds profound significance in Hindu culture, believed to have divine origins according to sacred texts. However, despite its revered status, the Ganges faces a dire threat - contamination. It's not just a river; it's a lifeline, yet its waters are woefully polluted, threatening the health and well-being of millions.

India's population explosion, coupled with rapid urbanization and industrialization, has turned the Ganges into a dumping ground for toxins, sewage, and industrial waste. The consequences are dire: water unfit even for basic activities like bathing, let alone consumption. The situation is particularly dire in areas like



PRABHA GUPTA

Kanpur and Varanasi, where human activities directly contribute to pollution levels. The scale of pollution is staggering, with reports indicating severe contamination along the river's course. Sewage treatment facilities are inadequate, leading to a massive discharge of untreated waste into the Ganges. Industrial pollution compounds the issue, with tanneries, distilleries, and other industries adding

toxic pollutants to the river. The relentless expansion of population, coupled with the ever-improving living standards and rapid industrial and urban growth, has laid bare the vulnerability of our water resources, with rivers bearing the brunt of this degradation. The illustrious Ganges, despite its revered status, is not immune to this onslaught. The decline in water quality directly affects communities, with certain stretches of the Ganges now deemed unsuitable even for basic activities like bathing. Compounding this issue are the looming threats of global climate change, the melting of glaciers affecting the Ganges' flow, and the adverse impacts of infrastructure projects in its upper reaches, all demanding

a comprehensive and urgent response.

Kanpur, situated in Uttar Pradesh, emerges as a poignant example of this pollution crisis. As one of the most densely populated cities in the state, its residents engage in daily activities like washing clothes, bathing, and even relieving themselves directly into water bodies, exacerbating pollution levels. Following closely behind is Varanasi, another significant contributor to Ganges pollution.

A damning report revealed that 37 out of the 41 locations along the river were plagued by moderate to severe pollution levels. Astonishingly, only the water at the Haridwar Barrage managed to meet drinking water standards,

making it a rare beacon of cleanliness amidst a sea of contamination. This stark reality underscores the urgent need for concerted efforts to preserve and restore the Ganges' pristine waters.

Within the Ganga basin, an astonishing 12,000 million litres per day (MLD) of sewage is generated, yet the current treatment capacity stands at a mere 4,000 mld. This glaring disparity results in approximately 3,000 mld of untreated sewage being discharged directly into the Ganges from towns categorized as Class I and II along its banks. Despite efforts, only around 1,000 mld of treatment capacity has been established to date.

The industrial sector also plays a significant role in polluting the Ganges, accounting

for roughly 20% of the overall pollution volume. However, due to the toxic and non-biodegradable nature of industrial waste, its impact is disproportionately severe.

Tanneries in Kanpur, along with distilleries, paper mills, and sugar mills in the Kosi, Ramganga, and Kali river catchments, collectively add to the pollution burden, affecting water sources relied upon by an estimated 600 million people. Despite efforts to monitor and control pollution, the majority of locations along the river still fail to meet even basic water quality standards. The situation demands urgent action. The Namami Gange program, initiated by the Indian government, represents a significant step towards cleaning up the river. With bil-

ions of dollars allocated to sewage treatment facilities and sewer line construction, it aims to address the root causes of pollution and restore the Ganges to its pristine state.

The success of the Namami Gange program hinges on effective implementation and sustained efforts to combat pollution. Thus far, the Namami Gange program has incurred expenditures exceeding 328 billion rupees (\$3.77 billion), earmarking funds for the establishment of over 170 new sewage facilities and laying down approximately 5,211 kilometres of sewer lines - an expense equivalent to crossing the Atlantic Ocean. This initiative stands as an intriguing litmus test in the worldwide endeavour to purify our water bodies. Indeed, if the challenge

of cleansing a river held sacred by hundreds of millions proves insurmountable, what prospects remain for tackling similar tasks elsewhere?

The Ganges is not just India's river; it's a symbol of hope and spirituality for millions worldwide. Its cleansing is not just a matter of environmental conservation but also a moral imperative. As the world grapples with the consequences of pollution and climate change, the fate of the Ganges serves as a litmus test for our collective commitment to protecting our planet's precious resources. If we fail to clean the Ganges, what hope do we have for the rest of our rivers and seas?

(The writer is a social worker and a business coach; views are personal)

Thai ex-PM Shinawatra gets parole

AP ■ BANGKOK

Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the Southeast Asian nation's most controversial politician for more than two decades, was released on parole early Sunday from a Bangkok hospital where he spent six months serving time for corruption-related offences. The telecoms billionaire was topped in a 2006 coup but voluntarily returned from self-exile to Thailand in August last year and reported to prison to begin serving an eight-year sentence. Critics charged that the 74-year-old Thaksin's early release reeked of a deal that short-circuited justice for political reasons.

Current Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, a leading member of the ruling Thaksin-backed Pheu Thai party, expressed congratulations to his predecessor. Thaksin was seen wearing a neck brace, a sling on his right arm and a surgical mask inside one of the cars in a convoy that left the Police General Hospital just before sunrise. He was accompanied by his two daughters on his way to his residence in western Bangkok. "Thaksin is still believed to wield huge influence, and will still manoeuvre for sure, he will conduct the music behind the scenes," Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political science professor at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, said. "But Pheu Thai has less power than they used to and we'll have to see how he does it." After his return from exile, Thaksin was moved almost immediately to the hospital on grounds of ill health and about a week later, King Maha Vajiralongkorn reduced his sentence to a sin-

gle year. The former leader had won unprecedented electoral support but also influential enemies among Thailand's traditional royalist ruling class during his time in office in 2001-2006. He was accused of corruption and abuse of power as well as disrespect for the monarchy when the military removed him from power in 2006. Thailand's conservative elite, including the army, regarded his populism and brash populist politics as a threat to the royal institution, which they see as a linchpin of Thai society. Even after his ouster, Thaksin's supporters and opponents had continued their struggle for power with violent street fighting, election battles, confrontations in the courts and another coup in 2014 that ousted a government that had been formed by Thaksin's sister.

Last year's elections brought change when the progressive Move Forward party unexpectedly finished first, the first time since 2001 that a Thaksin-backed party failed to top the polls. Move Forward's proposals for reforms to the monarchy and the military resonated with large numbers of younger voters, weary of the army-backed governments that had held power since a 2014 coup. Move Forward was stymied when the military-appointed Senate refused to approve its candidate for prime minister, paving the way for Pheu Thai to form a coalition government including parties linked with the military.

Pheu Thai also softened its longstanding anti-military line and reform proposals it promised during the election campaign. Critics charged the deal included a soft landing for Thaksin upon his return last year.

Over 400 detained as Russia mourns Navalny's death

AP ■ MOSCOW

Over 400 people were detained in Russia while paying tribute to opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died at a remote Arctic penal colony, a prominent rights group reported.

The sudden death of Navalny, 47, was a crushing blow to many Russians, who had pinned their hopes for the future on President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe. Navalny remained vocal in his unrelenting criticism of the Kremlin even after surviving a nerve agent poisoning and receiving multiple prison terms.

The news reverberated across the globe, and hundreds of people in dozens of Russian cities streamed to ad-hoc memorials and monuments to victims of political repression with flowers and candles on Friday and Saturday to pay a tribute to the politician. In over a dozen cities, police detained 401 people by Saturday night, according to



the OVD-Info rights group that tracks political arrests and provides legal aid. More than 200 arrests were made in St Petersburg, Russia's second largest city, the group said. Among those detained there was Grigory Mikhnov-Voitenko, a priest of the Apostolic Orthodox Church — a religious group independent of the Russian Orthodox

Church — who announced plans on social media to hold a memorial service for Navalny and was arrested on Saturday morning outside his home.

He was charged with organising a rally and placed in a holding cell in a police precinct, but was later hospitalised with a stroke, OVD-Info reported.

Courts in St Petersburg have ordered 42 of those detained on Friday to serve from one to six days in jail, while nine others were fined, court officials said late on Saturday. In Moscow, at least six people were ordered to serve 15 days in jail, according to OVD-Info. One person was also jailed in the southern city of Krasnodar and two more in the city of Bryansk, the group said. The news of Navalny's death came a month before a presidential election in Russia that is widely expected to give President Vladimir Putin another six years in power. Questions about the cause of death lingered on Sunday, and it remained unclear when the authorities would release his body to his family.

Navalny's team said Saturday that the politician was "murdered" and accused the authorities of deliberately stalling the release of the body, with Navalny's mother and lawyers getting contradicting information from various

institutions where they went in their quest to retrieve the body. "They're driving us around in circles and covering their tracks," Navalny's spokeswoman, Kira Yarmysh, said on Saturday.

"Everything there is covered with cameras in the colony. Every step he took was filmed from all angles all these years. Each employee has a video recorder. In two days, there has been not a single video leaked or published. There is no room for uncertainty here," Navalny's closest ally and strategist Leonid Volkov said Sunday. A note handed to Navalny's mother stated that he died at 2:17 pm Friday, according to Yarmysh. Prison officials told his mother when she arrived at the penal colony Saturday that her son had perished from "sudden death syndrome," Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service reported that Navalny

felt sick after a walk Friday and became unconscious at the penal colony in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. An ambulance arrived, but he couldn't be revived, the service said, adding that the cause of death is still "being established."

Navalny had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. He has received three prison terms since his arrest, on a number of charges he has rejected as politically motivated. After the last verdict that handed him a 19-year term, Navalny said he understood he was "serving a life sentence, which is measured by the length of my life or the length of life of this regime." Hours after Navalny's death was reported, his wife, Yulia Navalnaya, made a dramatic appearance at the Munich Security Conference.

US to block another cease-fire resolution at UN

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli strikes across Gaza killed at least 18 people overnight and into Sunday, according to medics and witnesses, as the United States said it would veto another draft UN cease-fire resolution.

The US, Israel's top ally, instead hopes to broker a cease-fire agreement and hostage release between Israel and Hamas, and envisions a wider resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pushed back, calling Hamas' demands "delusional" and rejecting US and international calls for a pathway to Palestinian statehood. Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until "total victory" over Hamas and to expand it to Gaza's southern-most town of Rafah, where more than half the enclave's population of 2.3 million

Palestinians have sought refuge from fighting elsewhere.

An airstrike in Rafah overnight killed six people, including a woman and three children, and another strike killed five men in the southern city of Khan Younis, the main target of the offensive over the past two months. Associated Press journalists saw the bodies arrive at a hospital in Rafah. In Gaza City, which was isolated, largely evacuated and suffered widespread destruction in the initial weeks of the war, an airstrike flattened a family home, killing seven people, including three women, according to Sayed al-Afifi, a relative of the deceased.

The Israeli military rarely comments on individual strikes and blames civilian casualties on Hamas because the militants operate in dense residential areas.

The head of the World Health Organisation mean-

while said Nasser Hospital, the main medical centre serving southern Gaza, was no longer able to function after Israel raided the facility late last week.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said a WHO team was not allowed to enter the hospital on Friday or Saturday "to assess the conditions of the patients and critical medical needs, despite reaching the hospital compound to deliver fuel alongside partners." He said there are still about 200 patients in the hospital, including 20 who need urgent referrals to other hospitals.

Israel says it has arrested 70 suspected militants, including 20 who it says participated in Hamas' Oct 7 attack on Israel, without providing evidence. The military says it is looking for the remains of hostages inside the facility and does not target doctors or patients. The war erupted after Hamas burst

through Israel's defences and attacked communities across southern Israel on Oct 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostages.

Militants still hold around 130 hostages, a fourth of whom are believed to be dead, after most of the others were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

The war has killed at least 28,858 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its records. Around 80% of Gaza's population have been driven from their homes and a quarter face starvation.

David Satterfield, the US Middle East envoy for humanitarian issues, said Friday that Israeli strikes on Hamas-run police guarding aid convoys had caused them to halt the escorts, making it "virtually impossible"

to deliver desperately-needed aid because of the threat of criminal gangs. He also said Israel has not presented specific evidence for its claims that Hamas is diverting UN aid.

US OPPOSES ANOTHER CEASE-FIRE RESOLUTION

Algeria, the Arab representative on the UN Security Council, has circulated a draft resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire and unhindered humanitarian access, as well as rejecting the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians. US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said in a statement late Saturday that the draft resolution runs counter to Washington's own efforts to end the fighting and "will not be adopted."

"It is critical that other parties give this process the best odds of succeeding, rather than push measures that put it - and

the opportunity for an enduring resolution of hostilities - in jeopardy," she said.

The US has used its veto on similar previous resolutions with wide international support, and President Joe Biden has bypassed Congress to rush arms to Israel while urging it to take greater measures to spare civilians and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The US, Qatar and Egypt have spent weeks trying to broker a cease-fire and hostage release, but there's a wide gap between Israel and Hamas' demands and Qatar said Saturday that the talks "have not been progressing as expected". Hamas has said it will not release all of the remaining hostages without Israel ending the war and withdrawing from Gaza.

It is also demanding the release of hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including top militants.

'US electoral financing system based on private fundraising, transparency'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON/NEW YORK

America's electoral financing system is based on private fundraising and emphasis on transparency, with a candidate allowed to accept up to USD 3,300 from any individual while the limit for party committees is USD 41,300, according to a top US Federal Election Commission official.

Ellen L Weintraub, Vice Chair of the US's Federal Election Commission, spoke to PTI in an interview taken following the recent landmark ruling by India's Supreme Court to scrap the central government's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" and ordering disclosure of the bond's donors, amount and recipients by March 13.

"We have a system that is based on private fundraising, but public transparency. Most of the money is raised privately, but it does have to be disclosed on a regular basis," Weintraub said. The Federal

Election Commission (FEC) is the independent regulatory agency charged with administering and enforcing the federal campaign finance law.

The FEC, which is led by six Commissioners, has jurisdiction over the financing of campaigns for the US House, Senate, Presidency and Vice Presidency. Unlike the Election Commission of India, the FEC members are political appointees. The current FEC has three members each from the Republican and Democratic parties. Refraining from commenting on the ruling of India's Supreme Court, Weintraub, a Democrat, said that in the US, an individual candidate is allowed to accept up to USD 3,300 from a person for any election.

But this money should not be from foreign nationals, corporations or labour unions but from individual US citizens and Green Card holders. The money is raised in multiple ways, including online, which is quite significant. They raise

money in small increments of USD 3,300. Many times, candidates can go back to the same voters as long as they don't get more than USD 3,300 from any one person from one election, she said. "Then the party committees can separately raise money and their contribution limit is USD 41,300. Again, from individuals not from corporations, not organisations, and certainly not from foreign nationals. And all this money is disclosed. "Anyone who gives more than USD 200; their name, their employer, their occupation, all of that gets disclosed to the candidates on the party committees and then the committees report that to the Federal Election Commission, and we post that information on our website," Weintraub said. According to the latest figures released by the FEC, so far, all the 2024 presidential candidates have in total raised USD 381 million. President Joe Biden, a Democrat, leads the list with nearly USD 90 million, followed by his Republican

predecessor Donald Trump (about USD 80 million).

Indian-American politician Nikki Haley, who is the only other candidate in the race, so far has raised USD 36 million. "Our Supreme Court has held that this kind of transparency is important to having an informed electorate," Weintraub told PTI in response to a question while refraining from commenting on the Indian election fundraising system. "I don't want to give advice to others," she said. "I don't claim that our system is perfect. I think that different countries have evolved different systems. That's fine."

I do think that the transparency that we have is one of the strengths of our system. I'm proud of that aspect of it," Weintraub said. However, several independent think tanks and experts believe that dark money including that coming from lobbying groups and foreign companies is also playing a significant role in electoral financing in the US.



Italian farmers bring a cow in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican prior to Pope Francis' Angelus prayer, Sunday. Farmers across Italy have been protesting to demand changes in European Union farming policies and measures to combat production cost hikes.

Turkiye detains co director after gold mine landslide

Istanbul (AP): Authorities in Turkiye detained on Sunday the director of the company managing a gold mine where a massive landslide in the country's east left nine workers missing, local media said.

A huge landslide engulfed on Tuesday the Anadol Madencilik company's Copler mine in the town of Ilic in Turkiye's mountainous Erzincan province, trapping the workers under tons of rubble, and becoming a potential environmental disaster. The landslide involved a mound of soil extracted from the mine, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya previously said. Cengiz Demirci, Turkiye director and senior vice president of operations at the Denver-based SSR Mining Inc., Anadol's parent company, was detained on Sunday morning. Earlier this week, authorities also detained eight other Copler mine employees as part of the investigation into the disaster, six of whom were formally arrested. Hundreds of search and rescue personnel are still looking for the workers who have been missing for six days so far.

Turkiye's Environment Ministry announced Saturday it was cancelling Anadol's environmental permit and license.

Experts warned the landslide could be an environmental hazard as the soil was laced with dangerous substances, including cyanide, used in gold extraction. They said it may affect the nearby Euphrates River which stretches across Turkiye, Syria and Iraq. The ministry had closed down a stream leading to the river to prevent water pollution.

In 2020, the same mine was shut down following a cyanide leak into the Euphrates, roughly 3 kilometres away. It reopened two years later after the company was fined and a cleanup operation completed. Shares at SSR Mining plummeted over 50 per cent in the wake of Tuesday's disaster. Turkiye has a poor mine safety record. In 2022, an explosion at the Amrasa coal mine on the Black Sea coast killed 41 workers. The country's worst mining disaster took place in 2014 at a coal mine in the municipality of Soma, in western Turkiye, where 301 people were killed.

Trump hawks branded shoes day after \$ 355 mn ruling against him

AP ■ PHILADELPHIA

As he closes in on the Republican presidential nomination, former President Donald Trump made a highly unusual stop on Saturday, hawking new Trump-branded sneakers at "Sneaker Con," a gathering that bills itself as the "The Greatest Sneaker Show on Earth."

Trump was met with loud boos as well as cheers at the Philadelphia Convention Center as he introduced what he called the first official Trump footwear.

The shoes, gold lame high tops with an American flag detail on the back, are being sold as "Never Surrender High-Tops" for USD 399 on a new website that also sells Trump-branded "Victory47" cologne and perfume for USD 99 a bottle. He'd be the 47th president if elected again. The website says it has no



connection to Trump's campaign, though Trump campaign officials promoted the appearance in online posts.

On Friday, a judge in New York ordered Trump to pay a whopping USD 355 million in penalties, finding that the former president lied about his wealth for years, scheming to dupe banks, insurers, and

others by inflating his wealth on financial statements.

That penalty came after Trump was ordered to pay USD 83.3 million to the writer E. Jean Carroll for damaging her reputation after she accused him of sexual assault. With interest payments, Trump's legal debts might now exceed a half-billion dollars — an amount it is unclear he can afford to pay.

Trump's appearance was met with clashing boos from his detractors and chants of "USA!" from supporters who arrived at the sneaker event decked out in Trump gear. The duelling chants made it difficult, at times, to hear Trump speak. Some held signs that read "SNEAKERHEADS LOVE TRUMP" "There's a lot of emotion in this room," Trump said of the reaction, after holding up and showing off a pair of gold shoes, then placing one on each side of his podium.

"This is something that I've been talking about for 12 years, 13 years," he said. As he spoke, the smell of weed occasionally wafted through the room.

A crowd gathered around the stage. Many in the audience said they were not from the city and instead hailed from nearby states and Washington. The attendees skewed younger and more diverse than Trump's usual rally crowds. Trump's campaign is hoping he will be able to win over younger and minority voters, particularly young Black men, in a likely rematch against President Joe Biden in November.

This isn't the first money-making venture Trump has announced since launching his third campaign for the White House in 2022. Trump last year reported making between USD 100,000 and USD 1 million for a series of digital trading cards that portrayed him, through photo editing, in a series of cartoon-like images, including an astronaut, a cowboy, and a superhero. Trump's new

sneaker website says it is run by CIC Ventures LLC, a company that Trump reported owning in his 2023 financial disclosure. A similarly named company, CIC Digital LLC, owns his digital trading card NFTs, or non-fungible tokens.

The website states the new venture "is not political and has nothing to do with any political campaign."

A Trump spokesman did not respond to questions about the event, including whether Trump was paid to attend. The website describes the shoes as a limited-edition, numbered "true collector's item" that is "Bold, gold, and tough, just like President Trump." "The Never Surrender sneakers are your rally cry in shoe form," the description reads. "Lace-up and step out ready to conquer." Among those in the crowd were Jonathon Santiago,

21, and Danae Mitchell, 20, Trump supporters who drove from Monroe County in the northeastern part of the state for the sneaker event. They said they were excited to see the former president and praised how he interacted with the crowd. They also had kind words for the sneakers. "The red bottoms were a really nice touch," Mitchell said.

She shrugged when asked about Trump's legal troubles. "I think it'll be an interesting four years if he's found guilty, but I have no doubt he'll be president," she said.

Also in attendance was a group of "cheer moms" from New Jersey who said they were in town for a cheerleading event and decided to stop by for a chance to see Trump. Karla Burke, 48, said she heard some people booing and making noise, but that most people around her had been supporters.

Pakistan EC forms panel to probe rigging allegations

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
Pakistan's election commission has formed a high-level committee to probe the explosive allegations levelled by a senior bureaucrat that widespread rigging aided by the judiciary and the top election body happened against jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.



Former Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chattha on Saturday alleged that the candidates who were "losing" the elections "were made to win" in the city. He claimed that 13 candidates from Rawalpindi were forcefully declared winners. His remarks came amidst jailed former prime minister Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party began nationwide protests against alleged rigging and stealing of its mandate in the February 8 elections.

"I am taking the responsibility for all this wrongdoing and telling you that the chief election commissioner and the chief justice are also completely involved in this," he was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper. Chattha resigned from his office after "accepting responsibility" for the manipulation of poll results. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has strongly rejected the allegations Chattha has made against the chief election commissioner. It held

an emergency meeting to discuss the commissioner's allegations and formed a high-level committee to probe the allegations. Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja attended the meeting via video link.

In light of the committee's report, the election regulator would decide whether or not the commissioner be tried for contempt. The high-level committee will record the statements of the relevant district returning officers and returning officers and submit its report to the ECP within three days. The newly appointed Rawalpindi Commissioner, Saif Anwar Jappa, rejected all the accusations made by the former commissioner regarding irregularities in the February 8 general elections. He clarified that the commissioner's role in the polls was only for coordination. Emphasising the fairness and accuracy of the recent elections, the District Returning Officer (DRO) for Rawalpindi assured that the elections were conducted with complete transparency and without any external pressure on them.

Meanwhile, a nationwide disruption in social media platform X's service has been observed in Pakistan due to the "escalating unrest and protests" over allegations of election fraud, according to Internet tracking organisation NetBlocks. In a post on X, the organisation added that the disruption took place "following a high-level resignation and public admission of vote manipulation by a senior election official".

Imran Khan's party demands judicial probe

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party on Sunday demanded a judicial commission to probe a senior bureaucrat's allegation that the election body and the top judiciary were involved in vote rigging. Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chattha on Saturday alleged that the candidates who were "losing" the elections "were made to win" in the city. Before resigning from his post, he claimed that 13 candidates from Rawalpindi were forcefully declared winners.

His remarks came as jailed former prime minister Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party began nationwide protests against alleged rigging and stealing of its mandate in the February 8 elections. "I am taking responsibility for all this wrongdoing and telling you that the chief election commissioner and the chief justice are also completely involved in this," Chattha said.

Chattha resigned from his office after "accepting responsibility" for the manipulation of poll results. Senior PTI leader Barrister Gohar Ali Khan on Sunday said that the party was demanding a judicial commission to investigate the claims of 'rigged election results' and share the probe report with the

nation. Gohar said that Chattha's allegations corroborated what the party had been saying all along. "This is the first time a commissioner is raising his voice according to his conscience. He said that he made sure candidates who lost were made to win while those who won were made to lose. This corroborates what we have been saying," he said.

"That is why the PTI demands that a judicial commission be formed and an inquiry be conducted. And not just an inquiry, but those [involved] should be made to join the inquiry," he said, adding that the report of such an inquiry should also be shared with the people. Gohar also stated that the party was not calling for the resignation of Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa.

He alleged that efforts were made to keep the party out of the electoral arena when people, responding to 71-year-old PTI leader Khan's call, went to the polling stations in huge numbers. "We had won 180 seats in the National Assembly, 42 seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly, 115 in Punjab, 16 in Sindh, and four in Balochistan assembly," he said. Gohar added that the PTI had been given one seat in Balochistan, and three were due. "In Sindh, we did not get a single seat, they are all due. In Punjab, around 50 seats are due," he said.

Addressing the press conference, the party's candidate for prime minister, Omar Ayub Khan, said that the PTI would form governments in the centre and the provinces. He said that a judicial inquiry should be conducted involving independent judges. "And those who have been named by the Rawalpindi commissioner should not be a part of this inquiry," Ayub added.

Earlier in the day, a PTI spokesperson demanded that Chief Election Commissioner Raja and Chief Justice Isa tender their resignations following the revelations by Chattha.

Meanwhile, the ECP has launched a probe following the allegations by Chattha, who has now been transferred to the Services and General Administration Department (SGAD) in Lahore. The government has also appointed Anwar Jappa as the new commissioner of Rawalpindi Division, which comprises the districts of Rawalpindi, Attock, Jehlum, Chakwal and Talagang.

The division is popularly known as the 'marsh belt' as the country's military draws its main strength from these districts. Earlier in the day, the party held its parliamentary committee meeting, during

that Pakistan was passing through a very sensitive era as a new parliament was going to be formed soon.

Even after the passage of more than a week, the ECP is yet to notify the victory of most of the independent candidates who have won National Assembly (NA) seats in the general elections. The delay on the part of the ECP to officially notify the results of a majority of the independent candidates has raised concerns among their voters and stakeholders amid political wrangling over the numbers game for the formation of government in the Centre.

Under the election rules, independent candidates have three days to join a political party after official notification of their victory; so far, the ECP has notified results of 154 out of a total of 265 contested National Assembly constituencies, where elections took place on February 8. Independent candidates - a majority backed by the PTI party - won 93 of the 265 National Assembly seats that were contested in the February 8 election. The PTI's two main rivals appear on course to form a coalition government after former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's PML-N and Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's PPP formed a post-poll alliance last week.

PML-N, PPP fail to reach consensus on power-sharing

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
The talks between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party on a power-sharing formula for a coalition government remained inconclusive, though both sides claimed "significant progress" in the discussions, according to a media report on Sunday.

The third meeting between the Contact and Coordination Committees (CCCs) of the two parties, which took place on Saturday, remained inconclusive and both decided to meet again on Monday to finalise the power-sharing formula. A brief announcement issued by the PML-N after the meeting said that there had been "significant progress" in talks with both sides, stressing the need for a "strong democratic government".

"The proposals put forth by both parties were thor-

oughly discussed, and while substantial progress was achieved, further deliberations are required to finalise the matters at hand," a joint statement read. Nawaz Sharif led PML-N has nominated Shehbaz Sharif for the Prime Minister's post.

Independent candidates - a majority backed by former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party won 93 of the 265 National Assembly seats that were contested in the February 8 election. The PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP came third with 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has also agreed to support them with their 17 seats.

To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly.

During Saturday's meeting, the PML-N was represented by Ishaq Dar, Sardar Ayaz

Sadiq, Azam Nazeer Tarar and Malik Muhammad Ahmed Khan, whereas those representing the PPP included former Sindh chief minister Murad Ali Shah, Saeed Ghani, Qamar Zaman Kaira, Nadeem Afzal Chan and Nawab Sanaullah Zehri.

In the last meeting on Thursday, representatives of both parties sought more time to assess the proposals discussed in the first meeting. Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led PPP has assured the PML-N of its support in the government formation and election of the next prime minister on the condition that, in return, it will get key constitutional offices, including that of the president.

The PPP has also announced that despite supporting the PML-N at the centre, the party will not take ministries in the federal Cabinet. Sources said the PML-N had been vigorously trying to

change PPP's minds on the issue of ministries before discussing the constitutional offices. The latter has so far refused to budge.

A PPP office-bearer, privy to the talk on government formation, told the Dawn newspaper that the party has decided to seek the posts of National Assembly (NA) speaker and Senate chairman. But the PML-N appears reluctant and wants to keep the NA speaker's office with it, the PPP leader added.

The PPP has sought top offices in both houses of Parliament as the party feared that under the PML-N, parliament "would not be able to gain its lost prestige".

Sources in the PPP claimed that so far, the party had not finalised the names for the top constitutional and parliamentary offices. They said that besides the present NA speaker, Raja Pervez Ashraf, who is expected to retain the post, ex-

prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who won the NA seat from Multan, also desires the post. The PPP has also asked the PML-N for support in Senate elections for the seat that Gilani would vacate if he is nominated as NA speaker, according to party sources.

Gilani could also be considered for the Senate chairman, but it all depended on the outcome of the ongoing negotiations between the committees. The other issue, the sources said, under discussion was the allocation of development funds for provinces.

They said the PPP wanted assurance from PML-N leadership that it would release development funds to provinces, particularly Sindh, without any hindrance. According to reports, the PPP has asked PML-N to give it "some space" in Punjab as a precursor to any support in the government formation.

PTI supporters clash with police

PTI ■ LAHORE/KARACHI
Supporters of Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party have clashed with police in various cities across the country as they staged protests against alleged rigging in the general elections held on February 8.

In Lahore, supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) gathered outside the Lahore Press Club and the party's jail Road office on Saturday to register their protest, the Dawn newspaper reported on Sunday. The protesters chanted slogans, demanding the restoration of their "stolen mandate". They called for rectified results based on the vote count as per Form 45, prepared at polling stations under the watch of political parties' polling agents.

PTI-backed candidate for NA-128, Salman Akram Raja, was arrested and taken to Racecourse Police Station. He

was later released, the report said. Video clips circulating on social media showed policemen dragging the lawyer as he participated in the protest outside PTI's office on Jail Road.

Ali Ijaz Buttar, another PTI candidate, was also arrested, along with elderly men, women and a child. In many cities of Punjab, police arrived at the protest site even before the demonstrators had gathered and arrested several party leaders, candidates, workers and supporters. They dragged elderly men and women. PTI workers and supporters, who had gathered on the call of party founder Imran Khan, chanted slogans and demanded the restoration of their "stolen" mandate, the Dawn report said.

"If police stop protesters, stay peaceful and stage a sit-in there," he wrote in a post on X. In Karachi, hundreds of PTI workers and supporters gathered outside the Election

Commission of Pakistan's Sindh office in the city's Saddar area. The protesters chanted slogans against the alleged rigging and demanded the judiciary and state institutions to intervene and fix the "flaws" in the results.

The charged crowd, including women and children, carried party flags and danced to the tunes of party songs. They claimed that the mandate of Karachi was "stolen" on Feb 8 and that it could lead to "disastrous repercussions", like damaging the democracy and affecting the parliamentary system. The party's Sindh chapter president, Haleem Adil Sheikh, and other senior leaders addressed the demonstration and vowed to keep raising their voices against the "rigged" elections.

In Peshawar and other areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PTI workers, including the newly elected lawmakers, staged rallies.

China's coast guard to ramp up patrols near Taiwan's Kinmen archipelago

Bangkok (AP): China is stepping up patrols in the waters off the coast of Taiwan's Kinmen archipelago, days after two of its fishermen drowned while being chased by the Taiwanese coast guard, which accused the boat of trespassing. The Chinese coast guard's Fujian division will regularly monitor the waters off the southern coast of the city of Xiamen — a few kilometers from Kinmen — to strengthen maritime law enforcement, said the coast guard's spokesman, Gan Yu, in a statement Sunday.

Fishermen from Taiwan and China regularly sail that stretch of water which has seen a rise in tensions as the number of Chinese vessels — including sand dredgers and fishing boats — have notably increased in the area. Kinmen residents have complained of both the noise and sound pollution from the vessels, as well as losses to their livelihood in fishing. The fishermen's deaths are unusual despite the level of Chinese activity in the waters near Kinmen, which is closer to China than it is to Taiwan's main island. China claims all of self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory. On Wednesday, Taiwan's Coast Guard said two of four Chinese fishermen died after their boat capsized. It said their boat was fishing about one nautical mile away from Kinmen archipelago which Taiwan has claimed as a restricted area. The other two survivors remain in Taiwan's custody. China has issued a furious condemnation and blamed Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party for the fishermen's deaths. It also said that there was no such thing as "restricted" waters.

UK extends visas for Ukrainians

PTI ■ LONDON
The UK government on Sunday extended its visa scheme for war-hit Ukrainians who sought refuge in the country in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, allowing an additional 18-month stay on their current terms. The Home Office said that from early 2025, all those in the UK under one of the Ukraine visa schemes will be able to apply to stay here for an additional 18 months and continue to have the same rights to access work, benefits, healthcare, and education throughout their stay.

This will mean those who came on the first visas under one of the Ukraine visa schemes could now stay in the UK until September 2026. "This new visa extension scheme provides certainty and

reassurance for Ukrainians in the UK on their future as this war continues, and we will continue to provide a safe haven for those fleeing the conflict," said Tom Pursglove, UK Minister for Legal Migration and the Border.

"Almost two years on from the start of this brutal war, over 200,000 Ukrainians and their family members have arrived in Britain. Families across the country have opened their homes and their hearts to the people of Ukraine, showing extraordinary generosity, including offering shelter to those fleeing from the horrors of war," he said.

He said the move shows that the UK and its allies stand in solidarity with Ukraine and "unequivocally condemns [Russian President] Putin's unprovoked, premeditated and

illegal war against Ukraine". In the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict escalation in February 2022, the UK announced three schemes - Homes for Ukraine, the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Ukraine Extension Scheme - to grant visa holders three years leave to remain in the country, which would have meant the first visas were set to expire in March 2025.

The Home Office said the 18-month extension delivers on the government's long-term commitment to Ukraine and comes as the world approaches two years since "Russia's reprehensible full-scale invasion of Ukraine".

"I want to pay tribute to the extraordinary generosity shown by sponsors across the country. The government continues to provide them with 'thank-you' payments in recog-

nition of their support. As more families arrive, we will need more sponsors to come forward. I encourage anyone interested in hosting to check their eligibility and apply as soon as they can," said UK Minister for Housing and Communities, Felicity Buchan.

Since the launch of the Ukraine schemes, the UK says it has offered or extended sanctuary to more than 283,000 Ukrainians. "We appreciate all the help and assistance that our UK friends so generously provide for the temporarily displaced Ukrainians," added Eduard Fesko, Charge d'Affaires at the Embassy of Ukraine to the UK. Under the extension, Ukrainians will be able to make their applications within the last three months of an existing visa.

New Indian envoy visits Northern Province; calls for better connectivity with Sri Lanka

Colombo (PTI): Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha has made his first official visit to Sri Lanka's Northern Province and stressed the need for improved connectivity between the two countries. The newly-appointed Indian envoy completed his three-day maiden visit to the island nation's north on Saturday, the Indian High Commission said in a statement on Sunday.

He participated in diverse engagements during the visit, attesting to the "deep-rooted nature of the bilateral partnership as also India's firm commitment to deepening socio-economic and cultural ties with Northern Province," it said. Jha emphasised connectivity while visiting the Kankesanthurai (KKS) Port and the Talaimannar

Pier and spoke of the need for expeditious resumption of ferry services between the two countries. During his visit to the Palaly Airport, he explored means to strengthen air connectivity through infrastructure development at the airport, the statement said.

In 2023, Sri Lanka sought Indian financial assistance to extend the runway at the Palaly airport after India's Alliance Air began Chennai-Palaly flights. "Underscoring the rich and shared cultural heritage between India and Sri Lanka, the High Commissioner offered prayers at the historic Ram Sethu (Adam's Bridge). He also visited the ancient Thiruketheeswaram temple, which was renovated with grant assistance from the Government

of India," the statement said. In India's endeavour to contribute towards addressing the energy needs of islands off Jaffna, Jha assessed the readiness for early rollout of the Hybrid Renewable Energy Systems Project in Nainativu Island.

The project is being implemented in the Delft, Nainativu and Analaativu Islands of the island nation through grant assistance from India. "With grant assistance of more than SLR 70 billion, Northern Province has been a region of focus in India's multi-dimensional development cooperation partnership with Sri Lanka, and the visit was an opportunity to reiterate India's unwavering commitment to the people of the region," it said.

IAF's Sarang team lined up for flying displays at Singapore Airshow '24

PTI ■ SINGAPORE
The Indian Air Force's Sarang aerobatic team is all set to showcase its spectacular aerobatics manoeuvres at the Singapore Airshow 2024 being held here next week.

The five-day mega gathering from February 20-25 at the Changi Exhibition Centre will witness over 1,000 participating companies from more than 50 countries and regions, organisers Experia said on Sunday.

A team of 71 personnel of the Indian Air Force's (IAF) Sarang Helicopter Display Team will participate in the mega event with five Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) as known as 'Dhruv'.

The "Dhruv" helicopter, designed and conceived by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, is an all-weather, multi-mission capable helicopter. It features rigid, hinge-less rotors making it highly manoeuvrable and suitable

for military roles.

The variant of ALH flown by the Sarang team is ALH MK-I. The other variants are ALH MK-II, and ALH MK-III and the latest variant is ALH MK-IV, an armed version, said the Defence Ministry in announcing the IAF participation at the Singapore show. The Sarang Helicopter Display Team was formed in 2003 and it is noteworthy that their very first international public performance was in 2004, at the Asian Aerospace Show in Singapore itself.

Initially formed and raised as a three-helicopter formation, the Sarang team now boasts of a thrilling five-helicopter display and has performed over 1,200 displays at

more than 385 venues all around the globe.

This year's lineup is extensive, with 90 per cent of the top 20 global aviation companies in attendance; including well-known exhibitors such as Airbus, AVIC, BAE Systems, Boeing, Bombardier, COMAC, Dassault, GE Aerospace, General Dynamics, Honeywell, L3Harris, Leonardo, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Rolls-Royce, RTX, Safran, ST Engineering, Tectron Aviation, and Thales; making the event a truly global gathering.

Moreover, there will be 16 country pavilions, which include China, the Czech Republic and Korea being

there for the first time. Experia Managing Director Leck Chet Lam said, "As the aviation sector returns with a strong growth trajectory, the global platform and vibrant marketplace that Singapore Airshow offers will be critical as the industry seeks the solutions, ideas and partners that will help it navigate the challenges ahead.

"With over 1,000 participating companies and more than 50,000 trade visitors expected, we've been mindful to ensure that our programming also offers attendees the opportunity to engage with industry thought leaders in key discussions and to that end our AeroForum series has been curated to

delve into the areas of advanced air mobility, sustainability as well as international co-operation," he said.

AeroForum, Singapore Airshow's thought-leadership platform, will anchor the event's commitment to sustainability, diving deep into the industry's most pressing issues.

In collaboration with renowned consultancy McKinsey & Company, the Sustainable Aviation Forum brings together two panels of experts including business leads from Airbus, Boeing, Cathay Pacific and Neste to explore the challenges and opportunities of achieving net-zero emissions in the skies.

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation. (Electrical) Section.

Contact No.0240-2333536-40 Office Address: Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation. (Electrical) Section. Town Hall, Aurangabad.431001 Email: contact@aurangabadmahapalika.org

Name of work	Bid Submission End Date
1. Providing Stadium mast with electrification work at National Cricket Stadium, MIDC Chikhalthana. Estimate Amount 5,90,01,389/-	Date. 04.03.2024 Time 5.00 PM

Sd/ Executive Engineer (Electrical) Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation.

Corrigendum
No. SS/CW/Re-tender/60/2024/58 Date : 16th February, 2024
In continuation to the tender No. SS/CW/Re-tender/60/2024/10214 dated 1st February, 2024 published in the portal www.assamtenders.gov.in it is for information of the intended bidders that the modifications have been made due to administrative reasons. Some modification is available in the portal www.assamtenders.gov.in The Other terms & conditions of the tender will remain same.

Sd/-Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom Kahlipara, Guwahati-19

Two full blown semiconductor plants in India soon: Minister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two full-fledged semiconductor fabrication plants are going to come up in India very soon entailing multi-billion dollar investment besides several chip assembly and packaging units, Minister of Electronics and IT Rajevee Chandrasekhar said.

In an interview with PTI, the minister confirmed that the two projects include a USD 8 billion proposal submitted by Israel-based Tower Semiconductors and the other from Tata Group.

"I am happy to share this with you and you are probably the first one I'm sharing this with. In the near term, two full-blown fabs are going to come up in India. These are going to

be multi-billion-dollar fabs in the 65, 40 and 28-nanometer technology and there are going to be a host of other packaging proposals that we are evaluating," Chandrasekhar said. He was responding to a question on USD 8 billion investment proposal submitted by Tower Semiconductors and the status of India's semiconductor roadmap.

The minister said that the project will be approved in the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi if they are not cleared before the upcoming general elections.

"I can safely tell you that the names that you mentioned have submitted these big, very credible, very significant investment proposals. There are other announced proposals by Tata as well in the fab. We



see this happening in a very, very quick short term," Chandrasekhar said.

The government has received four proposals for setting up semiconductor manufacturing plants and 13 for chip assembly, testing, monitoring and packaging (ATMP) units. The proposals are in addition to a Rs 22,516-crore chip assembly plant being set up by US-based memory chip maker Micron in Gujarat.

The minister said India's semiconductor story is very

akin to that of electronics in the country. He said that the government before 2014, the UPA government, ignored electronics and for 75 years, India was a "classic case of missed opportunity" in semiconductors.

"In 2012 Intel wanted to set up a plant here, and they found no support and they walked away. When the prime minister launched this (semiconductor) program in 2020 January, we knew we had to work very fast, and smartly and we had to in essence play catch up for the last 75 years of lost opportunity.

"We have made significant progress in a broad spectrum of areas: semiconductor design, startups, research, talent, packaging and

fabrication," Chandrasekhar said.

According to government data, domestic electronics manufacturing increased over four-fold to Rs 8.22 lakh crore in the last 10 years.

In FY 2013-14, electronics manufacturing was Rs 1,80,454 crore (USD 29.8 billion) and has grown significantly to Rs 8,22,350 crore (USD 102 billion) in FY 2022-23, which is further expected to grow up to Rs 23,95,195 crore (USD 300 billion) by 2026.

Chandrasekhar also wrote a letter to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman before the budget to reduce import duty on electronic components to facilitate the growth of exports from the country.

The minister said he learnt from his former boss and ex-

CEO of Intel Andrew Grove's book, "Only the Paranoid Survive..." "I believe in being paranoid. I believe that as a nation, we should never take our leadership for granted. The letter that I wrote to the finance minister, unfortunately, we mischaracterized like some. In reality, it was a letter that effectively pointed out the big opportunity India had to move from import substitution-led manufacturing, to export-led manufacturing," Chandrasekhar said.

He said the global value chain supply of electronics is shifting from being predominantly based in China to now looking for more hubs.

"India has played a big role in that shift in the last five years. India will play a big role in the coming five years to a decade.

Electronics manufacturing, we were almost absent. To put it in the words of Tim Cook (Apple CEO). Three years ago there were no Apple phones being manufactured in India. We were importing 100 per cent of all mobile phones. Today we are exporting USD 10-12 billion of Apple and Samsung mobile phones," the minister said. He said that the growth has been spectacular.

"Our prime minister's ambition is to get to the top of the peak. So whatever I say pre-budget, whatever our views of the budget, are aimed at taking our success and taking it further. We believe and our prime minister has a clear vision that we want to do USD 300 billion of electronics manufacturing by the year 2026-27," the minister said.



Power consumption grows in April, January this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's power consumption increased 7.5 per cent on-year to 1354.97 billion units (BU) in the April-January period of this financial year, indicating an uptick in economic activities across the country.

Power consumption in the country has increased to 1354.97 billion units (BU) in the April-January period of this financial year, from 1259.49 BU in the April-January period of fiscal 2022-23, according to government data.

It was 1505.91 BU in the entire fiscal year of 2022-23, the data showed.

Experts believe the 7.5 per cent growth in power consumption in the country clearly shows a perk up in economic activities in the first 10 months of this fiscal year. They said power consumption grew in August, September and October, mainly due to humid weather conditions, and a pick-up in industrial activities ahead of the festive season.

Experts are predicting a steady power consumption growth due to improvement in economic activities and cold wave conditions in February. They are of the view that India will have a steady growth in power consumption as well as demand during the current fiscal year.

The National Statistical Office has pegged Indian economic growth at 7.3 per

cent in 2023-24 over and above the provisional growth rate of 7.2 per cent during the last financial year in its first advance estimates released earlier in January.

Power consumption in January rose 5.4 per cent to 133.18 BU, compared to 126.30 BU, the data showed. The peak power demand met -- the highest supply in a day -- rose to 222.32 GW in January 2024. The peak power supply stood at 210.72 GW in January 2023 and 192.18 GW in January 2022.

Experts said that power consumption as well as demand improved in January as mercury fell sharply in the month, especially in North India. The cold wave resulted in increased use of heating equipment like heaters, blowers and geysers which led to increase of power demand as well as consumption.

The power ministry had estimated the country's electricity demand to touch 229 GW during the summer in 2023.

The demand did not reach the projected level in April-July due to unseasonal rains. The peak supply, however, touched a new high of 224.1 GW in June before dropping to 209.03 GW in July. Peak demand touched 238.82 GW in August. In September 2023, it was 243.27 GW. The peak demand was 222.16 GW in October, 204.77 GW in November.

India, UK trade pact talks reviewed at highest level: Sources

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the negotiations for the proposed India-UK free trade agreement reaching an advanced stage, the Prime Minister's Office reviewed the progress of the talks on February 16, sources said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Commerce Secretary Sunil

Barthwal were also present in the meeting, they said. "The talks for the agreement are at a crucial stage now. About three reviews have happened so far at the highest level," they said, adding both countries are working to iron out differences on the remaining issues.

The commerce secretary recently stated that the

negotiations were taking time because "we want" to safeguard India's interest.

"India should commercially gain out of it and we should also be able to safeguard the interest of our farmers, PLI (production linked incentive) scheme goods. So, we are there to see that the deal is a fair deal," he said. So far 13 rounds of talks have been completed

and the 14th round started on January 10. Some of the key issues involved in the pact include customs duty cut on electric vehicles and whiskey and the movement of professionals. Talks are also progressing on the proposed bilateral investment treaty (BIT).

India and the UK launched the talks for a free-trade agreement

(FTA) in January 2022. There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which include goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights.

The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT, and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duties. On the

other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, automobiles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance).

AI backed education, health econtent service launched

PTI ■ KOLKATA

A start-up has recently announced that it will provide curated education, health, and edutainment services targeting specific needs using artificial intelligence.

The start-up platform called Ascend, which is backed by the Accolade Group, claims to be the first knowledge (Knowledge pedia).

"We are the world's first knowledge and, currently, focused on health, education, and edutainment. We are using AI and human intervention to provide targeted, curated services and content for individual requirements, which are not available now. We are trying to tap this space," Accolade Knowledge CEO Monika Lahiri said.

"Our app will deliver AI-backed solutions for the common man, by aggregating and creating curated content tailored to an individual and offer skill development for re-employability," she said.

It is projected that there will be a lot of job redundancy due to the deployment of AI by corporates and businesses, she said.

Another Silicon Valley start-up has tied up with Accolade to spread an AI-powered mobile phone face scanner that can read heart rate, breath rate, blood pressure, and blood sugar in haemoglobin (haemoglobin A1C), in just a minute.

"Beyond these, we can include 20 additional health parameters," said Trust



Global CEO and VC Ananth Subramanian.

Accolade's development center located in Kolkata currently has a manpower of 30 but in a few years, it will reach 300 as the company grows. The company has lined up USD 1 million from the promoters and will raise funds, in future, to scale it up.

"We will have awareness kiosks in metros initially before heading to rural areas to spread the use case," Lahiri said.

"Powered by AI, Accolade will have segments like LearnHub--tailored learning journeys to individual needs and goals. HealthOlogy is an integrated health management system that empowers users to take charge of their well-being," the company said in a statement.

LearnHub section is a game-changer in the learning landscape, it claimed.

"By aggregating courses from top institutions and personalising the experience, we empower individuals to achieve their full potential. Our curated content ignites curiosity, inspires thoughtful action, and entertains audiences across all interests," the company said.

Indian founders engage with Nvidia in Silicon Valley

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian founders of venture capital fund Peak XV met Jensen Huang, CEO of NVIDIA, the undisputed king of advanced chips that are now driving artificial intelligence (AI) applications, at the firm's campus in the Bay Area as part of an AI focused trip.

"We're just scratching the surface when it comes to AI," the venture capital fund said in a post on X and LinkedIn, posting a conversation its managing director Shailendra J Singh had with Sequoia Capital partner Doug Leone.

"AI, like the internet in the 90s, is real, but should be played out over the next 20 years," it said.

This was part of an immersion trip organized by Peak XV as part of the closing of the ninth cohort of Surge, which is Peak XV's scale up program for early stage startups.

In another post, it said: "In the post-GPT era, #AI is now a boardroom topic and top priority for CEOs in every large company around the world. Umesh Sachdev, CEO & Co-founder, Uniphore, one of the largest AI-native enterprise-class companies, speaks to Rajan Anandan at our US immersion week."

Founders who were part of the cohort shared that the tour included a demo of all NVIDIA's solutions and how they fit into various industries and sectors. Jensen Huang also spoke to founders about his journey and the current focus areas for NVIDIA.

NVIDIA has recently made headlines world-wide after their market capitalization rose to USD 1.83 trillion, nudging past Alphabet's USD 1.82 trillion market cap.



Etihad reports 10 per cent rise on pre pandemic levels

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Gulf carrier Etihad has seen strong growth in the domestic market post pandemic and is expected to fly more Indian passengers this year than 2023, which saw around 3-million Indians boarding its flights, a top executive at the airline has said.

The Abu Dhabi-based national carrier, according to its chief revenue and commercial officer Arik De is also a strong "believer" in competition and is not afraid of it.

"Etihad is actually back with a bang in the Indian market. Our numbers are over 10 per cent higher than they were pre-pandemic," De told PTI.

Noting that the airline came back "pretty strongly" in 2023 itself, he said, "we grew capacity by over 40 per cent and then in 2024 we plan to finish the year with around 35-40 per cent further growth."

Moreover, the airline carried around three million Indians last year and this number is obviously set to grow this year as well, he stated.

Emphasising that a 10 per cent capacity growth ahead of pre-pandemic numbers is a strong growth rebound in India for the airline, he said, "passenger volumes are tracking better than that and our planes are full."

It has also expanded its network in India, with the launch of flights to Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala this year.

He also said that Etihad still has capacity to grow and the Indian market might see some more growth coming in terms of the airline's commitment to India going forward.

Etihad, which was an investment partner in the grounded carrier Jet Airways, currently operates 165 weekly frequencies to and from 10 Indian cities.

Etihad has a tie-up with Sharjah-based Air Arabia, which also operates its services to and from India, and along with its partner, it offers 230 weekly flights.

Etihad earlier this month, announced entering into a pact with five-times IPL champion Chennai Super Kings (CSK) to become its official sponsor.

Hybrid mutual funds gather steam

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hybrid mutual fund schemes have been gaining popularity among investors, attracting Rs 20,634 crore in January, marking a 37 per cent surge from the previous month, largely due to their appeal as an alternative investment option post-change in taxation laws for debt funds.

With this, total inflow in the category reached Rs 1.21 lakh crore in the April-January period of the current financial year (FY24).

However, hybrid schemes saw outflow in the same period of the preceding financial year.

Hybrid funds are mutual fund schemes that typically invest in a combination of equity and debt securities and sometimes in other asset categories such as gold.

The category has been attracting regular inflows since April 2023, after a change in taxation for debt funds that kicked off in the same month. Before that, the segment saw a net withdrawal of Rs 12,372 crore in March last year. According to the latest data with the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi), hybrid schemes witnessed an inflow of Rs 20,637 crore in January, which was higher than Rs 15,009 crore inflow seen in December.

The two categories of hybrid funds that attracted most funds during the month under review are arbitrage funds and multi-asset allocation funds.

Out of the Rs 20,637 crore inflow in hybrid funds in January, arbitrage funds witnessed an inflow of Rs 10,608 crore, while for multi-asset allocation funds it was Rs 7,080 crore.

Moreover, around 50 per cent to 70 per cent of the allocation in the hybrid category has been going towards arbitrage funds in the last six months.

"The main reason for the increase in flows in this category is that they are being looked at as an alternative post-change in tax laws.

"Currently, arbitrage funds are sitting at a spread of around 8 per cent making it an attractive investment opportunity, especially on a post-tax basis," Feroze Azeem, Deputy CEO, Anand Rathi Wealth Ltd, said. Besides, the multi-asset category, offering easy diversification, has become the investors' choice.

In terms of folios, the segment added 3.36 lakh hybrid folios in the month under review, taking the total to 1.31 crore, representing a share of 7.7 per cent on the total folios of 16.95 crore.

Hybrid funds appeal more to investors with a moderate or low-risk profile.

Zee alleges Star India of violation of agreement on ICC TV deal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Zee Entertainment Enterprises has alleged that Star India has not acted in accordance with the agreement between them over the sharing of the TV broadcast rights of ICC cricket matches and has sought a refund of Rs 68.54 crore from the Walt Disney-owned firm.

In August, 2022, Zee Entertainment Enterprises had entered into an Alliance Agreement with Star India for a sub-license of TV broadcasting rights of ICC Men's and Under 19 international matches from 2024 to 2027.

Star India has "failed to obtain necessary approvals, execution of necessary documentation and

agreement" and believes that it has "by its conduct breached" the agreement, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) said in the financial statement of its latest December quarter results last week.

The Alliance Agreement was subject to certain conditions such as submission of financial commitment, provision of bank guarantee and ICC approval for sub-licensing from the International Cricket Council (ICC).

"Till date, the company has accrued Rs 72.14 crore for bank guarantee commission and interest expenses for its share of bank guarantee and deposit as per the Alliance Agreement," ZEEL said.

During the quarter ended December 31, 2023 and



subsequently, Star has sent letters to ZEEL through its legal counsel alleging breach of the Alliance Agreement on account of non-payment of dues for the rights in relation to first installment of the

rights fee aggregating to USD 203.56 million (Rs 1,693.42 crore).

Along with this, Star India also sought Rs 17 crore for payment for bank guarantee commission and deposit

interest, ZEEL added.

"Based on the legal advice, the management believes that Star has not acted in accordance with the Alliance Agreement, and has failed to obtain necessary approvals,

execution of necessary documentation and agreements," said ZEEL.

The management also believes that Star by its conduct has "breached the Alliance Agreement and is in default of the terms thereof and consequently, the contract stands repudiated," it added.

ZEEL has already communicated to Star that the Alliance Agreement cannot proceed and sought a refund of Rs 68.54 crore paid to it.

"The Board continues to monitor the progress of aforesaid matters. Based on the available information and legal advice, the management believes that the company has strong and valid grounds to defend any claims," it said.

Disney Star bagged the broadcast rights of all ICC events for four years from

2024 to 2027 for the Indian market from the sport's global governing body.

As per the agreement, ZEEL was supposed to have exclusive television rights for ICC men's events, including the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, which will be played in 2024 and 2026, ICC Men's Champions Trophy (2025), and the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup (2027), along with key ICC U-19 events, it said.

Last month Sony Corp terminated the agreement with ZEEL for the merger of its Indian entertainment business with it. Besides, Sony had also initiated appropriate legal actions to contest the claims of USD 90 million (Rs 748.5 crore) filed by Sony Group before the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC).

More over, around 50 per cent to 70 per cent of the allocation in the hybrid category has been going towards arbitrage funds in the last six months.

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Hybrid funds appeal more to investors with a moderate or low-risk profile.

Badminton Asia Team Championships

Indian women clinch historic gold

PTI ■ SHAH ALAM (MALAYSIA)

Anmol Kharb yet again performed when it mattered, winning the decisive fifth rubber to lead the Indian women to a historic Badminton Asia Team Championships title with a tight 3-2 victory over a depleted Thailand, here Sunday.

The young sprightly group of Indian women's team, led by seasoned PV Sindhu, defied all expectations to come up trumps against two-time bronze medallists Thailand.

"I'm very happy that we bagged the gold medal because this is the first time India are winning the gold at the Badminton Asia Team Championships," Anmol said after the match.

"It is a big thing because history has been scripted here. Yesterday (after the semifinal win) it went crazy in India because beating powerhouses like Japan and China was such a big thing. Today, it will be full-on celebration in India and in the team as well."

"I wanted to play my 100 per cent but there was no pressure on me at all. We were confident of winning the fifth match."

It is the first-ever major title for Indian women in team championships and provides a big boost to the side ahead of the Uber Cup, which is set to be held in Chengdu, China from April 28 to May 5. India had won two



medals in the past with the men's team claiming bronze medals in the 2016 and 2020 editions.

Though like most of the teams in the competition, Thailand were not at full strength, they still had higher-ranked players in their side.

Thailand were without their top two singles players -- world No. 13 Ratchanok Intanon and Pornpawee Chochuwong, who is ranked 16th in the world.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu provided India a confident start, riding on her power and placement to outclass world number 17 Supanida

Katethong 21-12, 21-12 in the first singles and hand India a 1-0 lead.

World No. 23 Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand then dished out another gritty performance to shock the world number 10 pair of Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Pra Jongjai 21-16, 18-21, 21-16 to put India in the driver's seat.

Playing the second singles against world ranked 18 Busanan Ongbamrunphan, expectations were high from Ashmita Chaliha after her stunning win against former world champion Nozomi Okuhara on Saturday.

The Indian, who had defeated Busanan during the Singapore Open in 2022, stayed in the match till 14-14 in the second game but a string of unforced errors thereafter cost Ashmita dearly as she went down 11-21, 14-21 against her experienced rival.

Young Shruti Mishra and Priya Konjengbam, the senior national champions, then lost 11-21, 9-21 to the world number 13 combination of Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard to leave the tie evenly poised at 2-2.

Anmol then shouldered the

responsibility of taking India through once again, producing a dominating 21-14, 21-9 victory over world number 45 Pornpicha Choeikeewong in the deciding third singles.

"It's a big achievement at 17 years old. Now I have to train harder to beat tougher opponents," she said.

Soon after the win, the entire squad got into a huddle to lift Anmol, celebrating the magnificent win at the Setia City Convention Centre.

"It is a great moment for Indian badminton. I give a lot of credit to these youngsters. They displayed great spirit, they were supporting each other and the atmosphere was just like it was when India won the Thomas Cup. So this is a special moment for India," former India coach Vimal Kumar told PTI.

Sindhu vs Supanida

Sindhu opened a 5-1 lead after Supanida struggled with her control in drifty conditions, committing too many unforced errors.

A powerful smash on Supanida's forehand gave Sindhu an 8-2 lead as she kept dictating the terms, moving to a massive 11-4 advantage at the break.

Sindhu played at a good pace and was also far more polished at the net. Soon she was 18-9 up with another lethal jump smash and pocketed the game after her opponent sprayed into the net a

couple of times.

After the change of sides, Sindhu kept hitting the returns at deep corners, making her opponent move back and forth. Supanida continued to make errors as the Indian jumped from 2-2 to 9-2 before entering the break at 11-5. Sindhu kept the pressure on Supanida, producing some beautiful cross-court smashes and was soon up 18-6.

Two diagonal returns gave Sindhu nine match points and she converted on the second chance.

Anmol vs Pornpicha

Playing the decider for the third time in the competition, Anmol recovered from a 3-6 deficit to grab a slender 11-10 advantage at the break.

Anmol's ability to patiently construct the rallies and produce winners helped her as she led 17-13 at one stage.

The Indian made her opponent twist and turn with her angled returns to gain six game points and sealed it comfortably when Pornpicha sprayed into the net.

Anmol continued in the same vein in the second game, moving from 6-5 to 11-5 in a jiffy.

A series of down-the-line smashes took Anmol one point away from win. She grabbed 12 match points with another precise return, which touched the net tape and then the Thai went long again as it was all over.

We can expect a Paris medal from Treasa, Gayatri if they qualify: Vimal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India coach Vimal Kumar is mighty impressed with doubles pair of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand and feels the young Indian combination will be a definite contender for an Olympic medal if they qualify for the Paris Games.

The pairing of the two 20-year-olds played a vital role as India scripted wins over badminton powerhouses like China, Japan and Thailand on successive days en route a first-ever gold medal at the Badminton Asia Team Championships (BATC) here on Sunday.

Treasa and Gayatri stunned world No. 6 Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida from Japan and world No. 10 Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Pra Jongjai of Thailand in the semifinal and final respectively. The duo also beat China's world No. 22 Luo Xu Min and Li Yi Jing in the league stage.

"I give a lot of credit to Treasa and Gayatri for the way they have performed this week. They have done incredibly well. They have a great chance of a medal, if they qualify for the Olympics. We can definitely expect a medal from them," Vimal, who returned to the country after the men's team campaign, told PTI.

Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Gayatri and Treasa are ranked 27th in the world but hold the 14th position in the Olympic Games qualification.

They couldn't play the closing stages of the last season due to an injury to Gayatri, affecting their ranking as they slipped from world No. 16 to 23 in the BWF ranking.

Besides others, the pair is also competing with fellow Indians Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who are currently ranked 11th in Olympic Games qualification.

In doubles, two pairs can qualify only if they are both in the top-8 by the end of April rankings or else the top pair inside world number 16 will make the cut for the Olympic Games.

The BATC offers valuable Race to Paris 2024 ranking points and the Indian duo is going to gain a lot following their superlative show this week.

Another star performer for India was young Anmol Kharb, and Vimal said she reminds him of tennis legend Leander Paes.

Playing in her first major international tournament, the 17-year-old from Faridabad showed maturity way beyond her age as she outwitted higher-ranked opponents in all three deciding fifth rubber against China, Japan and Thailand to seal the wins for India.

"Anmol's fearlessness stands out. She's gritty and her attitude and approach is perfect for team championships. We were always concerned about women's singles, and out of the blue came Anmol. It has been heartening and gives a lot of hope to us," said Vimal, who is the director of the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) in Bangalore.

Pro League matches vital for Paris Olympics preparations: Fulton

PTI ■ ROURKELA

Indian men's hockey team chief coach Craig Fulton on Sunday said the ongoing FIH Pro League matches are vital to his team's preparation for the Paris Olympics scheduled for July-August.

The Indians have so far played four matches in the Pro League out, winning three and losing one against the mighty Australia.

"It (Pro League) gives us 18 games that you are looking in the build up to Paris. So it is important. Whether some teams are putting their strongest teams or not is out of our control," Fulton said during a virtual press conference.

"Everything we are looking forward to is to have more perspective about our game, develop our game with the squad we have.

"We know we can compete in all the games, in different phases we have to do different things and do them better. So the Pro League is really important for now because this is the only competition we have."

India captain Harmanpreet Singh too agreed with his coach.

"These are the major matches we are getting before the Olympics and they are very important for us. We started on a good note but as the coach said from the Australia game we have learnt a lot," he said.

"We will definitely get a lot of advantage by playing these matches. Before the Olympics these are the games we are getting and we had made a good start as well and these matches will definitely help us in Olympics."

India had a tough time against a resilient Ireland on Friday before



securing a narrow 1-0 win in the final quarter. "We played them (Ireland) after a long time, it was a totally different game. We have learnt a lot from

that match. Ball possession was mostly with us but they defended quite deep and we need to work on how to manage that before the next match," Harmanpreet said.

Coach Fulton emphasised on the need to have consistency in their performance.

"Obviously the Australia game was big learning curve for us. We just need to put up a bit more consistent and composure in what we do. The start was good and the finish was good but the competition is strong."

"India have a DNA of attacking hockey, of possession and the Irish have a defensive mindset. Every country has different way of playing because of culture cultural or philosophy. That's the beauty of playing international sport."



AIFF names 23 members squad for Turkish Women's Cup

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The AIFF on Sunday announced a 23-member women's senior team to compete in the Turkish Women's Cup 2024 in Alanya from February 21 to 27.

The team will leave for Turkey on Monday for the tournament in which India had participated twice in 2019 and 2021.

AIFF Acting Secretary General M. Satyanarayan said, "Our Senior Women's National Team are going to play for the first time after the Olympic Qualifiers, which makes the Turkish Women's Cup an important tournament for us."

The players have had a week-long preparation (camp in Bengaluru) before flying off to Turkey." Estonia (February 21), Hong Kong (February 24)

and Kosovo (February 27) are the Blue Tigresses' opponents in the four-team tournament, which will be held in a round-robin format. The title will be won by the table toppers.

The team: Goalkeepers: Shreya Hooda, Elangbam Panthoi Chanu, Monalisha Devi Moirangthem Defenders: Ashalata Devi Loitongbam, Ranjana Chanu Sorokhaibam, Dalima Chhibber, Juli Kishan, Astam Oraon, Shilky Devi Hemam.

Midfielders: Anju Tamang, Sangita Basfore, Karthika Angamuthu, Manisha, Kajol Dsouza, Indumathi Kathiresan.

Forwards: Grace Dangmei, Soumya Gugloth, Karishma Purushottam Shirvoikar, Sandhiya Ranganathan, Sanju, Pyari Xaxa, Kaviya Pakkirisamy, Jyoti.

Khelo India University Games begin

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Khelo India University Games (KIUG), which is being hosted by northeastern states this year, has commenced, organisers said on Sunday.

The games began on Saturday with kabaddi matches at Guwahati's Sarusajai Stadium, they said.

Besides, basketball, malkhamb and women's football matches are being held in different venues in Guwahati on Sunday, while yogasana events are scheduled in Tripura's capital Agartala during the day, as

per fixtures shared by the organisers.

The formal inaugural ceremony, however, will be held on Monday.

Union Minister for Sports and Youth Welfare Anurag Thakur and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma will attend the ceremony, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi will give a video message to the participants.

Apart from Guwahati and Agartala, five other northeastern cities will host the fourth edition of the games, in which 4,500 athletes from 200 universities will take part.

The event will conclude on February 29.

KIUG is a part of the Centre's Khelo India initiative to promote grassroots sports and identify young talents from across the country.

The participants will vie for a total of 262 gold, 263 silver and 297 bronze medals across 20 sports disciplines. Guwahati will host 16 disciplines including athletics, rugby, basketball, volleyball, swimming, badminton, hockey, fencing, kabaddi, women's football, tennis, malkhamb, judo and table tennis.

Defending champ Alcaraz upset by Jarry in Argentina Open semis

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

No. 2-ranked Carlos Alcaraz was upset by Nicolás Jarry of Chile 7-6 (2), 6-3 in the semifinals of the Argentina Open.

Jarry, after the biggest win of his career, will face home crowd favorite Facundo Diaz Acosta in the final on Sunday.

Alcaraz was the defending champion but hasn't looked as sharp and aggressive this week as he was a year ago. The 20-year-old smashed his racket onto the court after his defeat, a rare feature for the Spaniard.



"Congratulations to Nico for this match and good luck for him in the final," Alcaraz said after his defeat. The Spaniard will play next week at the Rio Open tournament in Brazil, also on clay, which he won in 2022 and reached the decider last year. While he hasn't played in a final since August nor won a title since

Wimbledon, this was only Alcaraz's fourth loss on clay in 31 matches since the start of 2023. This was also only his third loss in 49 matches in the same period against players ranked outside the top 20. Jarry was ranked No. 21, and had lost both previous matchups with Alcaraz.

Jarry will play for his fourth ATP singles title, all on clay. He lifted his previous trophies in Bastad 2019, Genoa 2023 and Santiago 2023. The Chilean was also competitive against Alcaraz last year at the Rio Open tournament, but left the court in tears after a defeat in three sets.

Autistic children create record, swim 165 km

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) did not appear to be a setback to a motley group of children who achieved a rare feat of swimming 165 km in the sea from Cuddalore to Chennai recently.

Accompanied by their trainers in boats, as a precaution, the determined 14 children aged 9 to 19 scripted history when they swam the coastal areas in a sea swimming expedition covering an unprecedented 165 kilometers from Cuddalore to Chennai in relay format over 4 days. In the process they created a "world record," Sathish Sivakumar, founder and head coach of Yadhavi Sports

Academy for Special Needs, said.

"I am immensely proud of each child's resilience and determination. This sea swimming expedition by 14 children in the autism spectrum goes beyond a physical accomplishment. It is a symbol of breaking stereotypes and embracing the capabilities of every individual, regardless of neurodiversity," he said.

ASD is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects the people's communication with others. This is caused by differences in the brain. The affected individuals may also have different ways of learning, moving, or paying attention. "Among the participants, three children swam



continuously for 17 km while a girl swam for 10 km at a stretch. They demonstrated that their disability could not be a setback to display their

ability to the world," Tamil Nadu's former Director General of Police C Syledra Babu, who felicitated the children upon their arrival,

said. The young talented swimmers were given medals and certificates in recognition of their remarkable "world

record" in sea swimming expedition covering 165 km, he said. "Today, they proudly stand as testament to the power of perseverance and the ability to break barriers," Sivakumar said.

The awe-inspiring journey commenced on February 1 at Silver Beach, Cuddalore, covering 5 districts, and it captured the hearts of onlookers as these incredible young swimmers navigated the challenging waters, showcasing not only their swimming prowess but also challenging societal perceptions about autism.

The expedition concluded at Marina Beach here on February 4 and they were accorded a warm reception at the finishing point by Syledra Babu, Yadhavi

Sports Academy members, and others.

The expedition aimed to highlight the potential of individuals with autism and to sensitise people on the importance of inclusivity and understanding of such people. The Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu extended its support to the expedition. The successful completion marked a significant milestone in promoting autism awareness and fostering a more inclusive society at a world-level. The children's triumphant return to Chennai Marina was not just the end of a challenging journey; it's the beginning of a new chapter in advocating for inclusivity and empowerment, the organisers said.

Swiatek wins her third straight Qatar Open

AP ■ DOHA

No. 1-ranked Iga Swiatek won the Qatar Open for a third straight year.

Swiatek defeated No. 4 Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan 7-6 (8), 6-2 in the final.

Rybakina led 4-1 but cut her leg in her serving motion and needed medical attention. Swiatek rallied to 4-4. Rybakina broke again for 6-5 and a chance to serve out the set but Swiatek broke back.

In the tiebreaker, the defending champion from Poland missed three set points as the score reached 8-8. But then Swiatek hit a backhand winner and snatched the 90-minute set with a backhand passing shot.

India hammer England by 434 runs in third Test

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Yashasvi Jaiswal's sensational double hundred found harmonious co-existence with the stunning craftiness of five-wicket man Ravindra Jadeja as ruthless India demolished wasteful England by a record 434 runs on the fourth day of the third Test here on Sunday. England resisted their desire to play 'Bazball' but the Indian bowlers led by Jadeja (5/41) were an irresistible force, as they hustled out the tourists for 122 in their second innings while chasing an improbable 557-run target. India, now, lead the five-match series 2-1. This was also India's biggest win in Test cricket in terms of runs, bettering the previous 372-run win over New Zealand at the Wankhede Stadium in 2021. Jaiswal's unbeaten 214 off 236 balls, in which he equalled the highest number of sixes (12) in a Test innings, was the cornerstone of India's second innings total of 430 for four declared, which gave them a massive lead of 556 runs earlier in the day. It was also a perfect platform for Jadeja to weave his magic as England's claims of fancying themselves in big chases through an aggressive approach came to nothing. India's plan of attacking the



wickets took the wind away from the sails of England, whose top order crumbled without any significant contribution. With Jadeja finding ample support from Kuldeep Yadav (2/19), Jasprit

Bumrah (1/18) and Ravichandran Ashwin (1/19), who rejoined the match on this day after attending a medical emergency at home, England found no way out. Ben Duckett (4) ran himself out,

Zak Crawley (11) was trapped leg-before by Bumrah and Jadeja struck twice in quick succession to see the back of Ollie Pope (3) and extended Jonny Bairstow's (4) misery on this tour.

Struggling desperately for runs on this tour, Bairstow was trapped leg-before while trying to sweep Jadeja. England's hero of the win in the first Test, Pope cut one straight to

Rohit Sharma at first slip as Jadeja shook their top-order. After a brief period of resistance, Joe Root (7) missed a sweep with the umpire declaring him out leg-before off Jadeja, and the replays confirmed that the ball would have flicked the top of off-stump. Captain Ben Stokes (15) had a similar fate, missing a sweep off Kuldeep Yadav as England slumped to 50 for six. Ashwin took the field in the post tea session and contributed his bit with the scalp of Tom Hartley. For a while, it seemed England would fold for one of their lowest-ever totals against India, but a late burst from Mark Wood (33, 15 balls, 6x4s, 1x6s) took them to 122 from 82 for eight. But before Jadeja and his horsemen of apocalypse ran through England, Jaiswal and debutant Sarfaraz Khan showcased their brilliance in no little measure. Shubman Gill too displayed his class with a 91 after India resumed the fourth day from 196 for two. The knock combined with his hundred in the previous Test might have brought him considerable time and confidence. But none shone as bright as Jaiswal. Having notched up his overall third century and second of the series, Jaiswal continued with his red-hot form to become the first player to hit 20 sixes in a

series with two more matches left. Jaiswal's six-hitting spree so far has resulted in India bettering their own record of most sixes (48) in a series. The left-handed opener also entered record books to join Pakistan legend Wasim Akram for most sixes (12) for any batter in a Test innings, while resetting the same statistical high for India. Jaiswal joined Vinod Kambli and Virat Kohli as only the third Indian ever to have scored two consecutive double centuries in as many games, while becoming the seventh Indian ever to have scored in excess of 200 in the second essay of a Test. In the process, the 22-year-old Jaiswal also breached the 500-run mark in only the third Test of this series, reaching 545 runs in six innings at an average of 109 with two tons and a fifty. In fact, Jaiswal is now the leading run-scorer in the current cycle of ICC World Test Championship (WTC), going past Australia's Usman Khawaja with 861 runs in seven Tests at 71.75, studded with three centuries and two fifties. But Sarfaraz too gave a shining portent with two fifties in his maiden Test. His unbeaten 68 was laced with class and that customary disdain for spinners, something England will be worrying a lot ahead of the fourth Test beginning in Ranchi from Friday.



Test cricket is tough, but I am determined to make it count: Jaiswal

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Playing an aggressive brand of cricket, Yashasvi Jaiswal has already hit two double hundreds in his nascent career and the young India opener says though Test cricket is "tough" he believes in making it big after getting a start. The left-handed attacking opener scored unbeaten 214 off 236 balls to steer India to a commanding 430 for 4 declared in their second innings, setting England a mammoth target of 557 runs. It was his second double hundred in just six matches, having made his debut against the West Indies in July 2023. Jaiswal also entered the record books by hitting the highest number of sixes (12) by an Indian in a Test innings in the Rajkot Test that India won by a massive 434-run margin. "Test cricket is hard, but I thought that when I'm in there, I need to give my 100 per cent," Jaiswal said after India took a 2-1 lead in the five-match series. "I'm just trying. Whenever I'm set, I try to make it big. Because in Test cricket you never know, when you're playing well you have to make it big." Analysing his double century, Jaiswal said he just

tried to play session by session and also had to overcome a back problem en route the knock. "It was pretty difficult for me because initially I wasn't getting runs. So had to play the session, and get set. That's when I felt I could score runs. After a while my back was not good. I didn't want to go out (of the field) but since it was too much, I went out. Today when I came, I wanted to make sure that I take the game forward and bat till the end," he said. The left-hander said as an opener his job is to give the team a good start. "I felt there was something in the wicket and the ball was hard. For me, it is important for me to give teams a good start so it was important for me to play long," Jaiswal said. "I tell myself whenever I get set, I need to score well because you can get out anytime. My seniors have said to make it count." He was also motivated by the knocks of skipper Rohit Sharma and Ravindra Jadeja in the first innings. "The way Rohit (Sharma) bhai and (Ravindra Jadeja) Jaddu bhai played, that motivated me a lot. Their passion determined me to play session by session. I thought inside the dugout that when I go out there I should also make it count," Jaiswal said.

Dhoni picked as skipper of IPL all time greatest team

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Iconic Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Sunday selected as the leader of IPL's all-time greatest team which was picked to celebrate the success of world's most-popular T20 league which was launched in 2008. The selection panel consisted of former cricketers Wasim Akram, Matthew Hayden, Tom Moody and Dale Steyn. About 70 journalists were also part of the selection process. Australia's fiery David Warner and India's batting mainstay Virat Kohli were chosen as openers while "Universe Boss" Chris Gayle was given the number three spot in batting order. The middle-order consisted of Suresh Raina, AB de Villiers, Suryakumar Yadav and Dhoni, while Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja and Kieron Pollard were the three all-rounders in the 15-member squad. Rashid Khan, wily Sunil Narine and Yuzvendra Chahal formed the spin attack while Lasith Malinga and Jasprit Bumrah were the unanimous choice for the fast bowlers' slots. The marquee tournament will complete 16 years of the first-ever IPL auction on February 20, 2024. In the realm of IPL cricket, few names shine as brightly



as that of Dhoni. Widely regarded as one of the most successful captains in cricket history, his leadership prowess has garnered praise from peers and pundits alike. Speaking exclusively on the 'Star Sports Incredible 16 of IPL' show, former South Africa fast bowler Dale Steyn echoed sentiments shared by many when he hailed Dhoni as the epitome of leadership excellence. "It has to be MS Dhoni. He has won everything -- World Cup, IPL, ICC Champions Trophy," said Steyn.

"He's a leader of men, and you've got a bunch of men here that are all at the highest level of their game, and they need someone who has been there and done that and can manage them extremely well on and off the field, so I will have to go with MS Dhoni," he said. Former Australia cricketer and coach Tom Moody emphasised on Dhoni's remarkable feat. "It has to be MS Dhoni for me, the reason being MS Dhoni has won the title with very good squads and average squads, and that tells

me a lot about the captain and how he can lead a variety of talent in a squad to success. "Rohit Sharma has been a brilliant captain for MI but MI have always had the best squads or up there with the best squads in the IPL since its inception," he said. It wasn't just Dhoni's captaincy prowess that drew praise. Former Australia cricketer Matthew Hayden delved deeper, stating that he has potential to be a coach as well. "It's an obvious choice, it's not a debate over here. It's going to be unanimous amongst the entire Indian community. "Of course, Rohit Sharma, the Hitman, is such an incredible leader as well, so it's a tough choice, but I'm going to pick Dhoni as a Captain and Coach as well. "He started in 2008, Shane Warne was captain and coach, and he took the franchise, the double R's, to a title that year, and I just feel that MS Dhoni can also be a coach," he said. **All-time great IPL squad:** MS Dhoni (C), Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle, David Warner, Suresh Raina, AB de Villiers, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Ravindra Jadeja, Kieron Pollard, Rashid Khan, Sunil Narine, Yuzvendra Chahal, Lasith Malinga and Jasprit Bumrah.

Legendary South African all rounder Mike dies

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Cricket South Africa (CSA) on Sunday mourned the death of one of country's finest all-rounders Mike Procter. He was 77. Procter's career as a fast bowler, capable off-spinner, hard-hitting middle-order batter, and astute captain is etched in the annals of South African cricket history. Beyond his playing days, he served the game in every conceivable role — as a national captain and coach, administrator, selector, commentator, elite ICC match referee, and then dedicated his final years to coaching underprivileged children. Procter was South Africa's coach in the post apartheid era. He played as many as 401 first class games but could only feature in seven Tests due to South Africa's isolation in 1970s and 1980s. "Mike was not just a giant on the field but a beacon of hope and inspiration off it. His commitment to transforming the game, ensuring its growth among all sectors of our population, and mentoring hundreds of underprivileged youngsters in the Durban area, stands as a testament to his character and passion for cricket," said CSA president Rihan Richards in a statement. Procter's achievements, including his remarkable



record of twice taking a hat-trick and scoring a century in the same match, and his world-record six consecutive Currie Cup centuries for Rhodesia as it was then in 1970-71, highlight his extraordinary talent and impact on the game. Despite the sporting boycott against apartheid that limited his Test appearances, Procter's performances remained legendary. He enthralled fans who turned out to watch him perform for Natal, Gloucestershire and Western Province. "Cricket South Africa extends its deepest sympathies to Procter's wife, Maryna, and their children, Greg, Jessica, and Tammy, during this difficult time. "His passing is a great loss to the cricketing world, but his legacy as a player, coach, mentor, and champion of growth and transformation in the game will forever be cherished and remembered," CSA said.

Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur hospitalised after blow to head

PTI ■ DHAKA

Experienced left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman was on Sunday admitted to a local hospital after suffering a hit on his head by Litton Das during a training session ahead of a Bangladesh Premier League match.

The accident occurred while they were participating in the Comilla Victorians' nets at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. Rahman was hit when he was walking back to his bowling mark, and he was immediately given first-aid on the bleeding spot before being taken to the Imperial Hospital here in an



ambulance. However, the subsequent CT scans cleared 28-year-old Rahman of any internal injuries. "During practice, a ball hit directly at the left parietal area (head) of Mustafizur Rahman. There was an open wound at his parietal area and we have worked with compression

bandage to stop bleeding and immediately shifted him to Imperial hospital," a BCB media release stated. The Victorians are scheduled to play Sylhet Strikers in the BPL on Monday, and they are currently placed second on the table with 14 points from nine games behind Rangpur Riders (16 points).

RANJI TROPHY

Saurashtra secure quarters berth after innings win against Manipur

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Saurashtra's veteran left-arm spinner Dharmendrasinh Jadeja bagged his 22nd five-wicket haul as the defending champions scored an innings and 243-run victory against Manipur to move into the Ranji Trophy quarterfinals from Group A here on Sunday. Saurashtra's victory was a foregone conclusion on day two itself when they had reduced Manipur to 55/3 in their second innings on Saturday, and the task was

completed by the 33-year-old Jadeja, who bagged a five-for on day three as the visitors slumped to a big defeat at the Sanosara Cricket Ground. Manipur had made 142 in the first innings batting first, and following that Saurashtra had declared their lone innings at a mammoth 529/6. Manipur then folded up at 144 in 51.5 overs in their second essay to hand over the hosts the victory with a bonus point. Besides Jadeja (5/55), Yuvrajsinh Dodiya (3/51) and India white-ball pacer Chetan



Sakariya (2/28) too contributed the the big win. The difference in class between Saurashtra and Manipur was all too visible from the opening day of the seventh and concluding round of the Ranji league matches. After dismissing Manipur for a paltry 142, with Jadeja taking four wickets, Saurashtra piled up tons of runs with stand-in skipper Arpit Vasavada (148), Prerak Mankad (173) and Cheteshwar Pujara (103) scoring centuries as the home team batters declared at 529/6.

Then, Saurashtra bowlers Sakariya, Jadeja and Dodiya picked up a wicket each in the final session on Saturday to put the hosts in a commanding position. The home team bowlers continued the good work on Sunday bagging the remaining seven wickets. Saurashtra, with 29 points from seven games, are the only team from the Group A so far to have secured a place in the quarterfinals, while Vidarbha (27 points, six games) and Haryana (24, six games) too

are in with a chance to make the grade. A clear picture will emerge at the conclusion of the seventh round of matches on Monday. **Brief Scores:** In Rajkot: Manipur 142 and 144 in 51.5 overs (Ronald Longjam 32, Bikash Singh 64 not out; Dharmendrasinh Jadeja 5/55, Chetan Sakariya 2/28, Yuvrajsinh Dodiya 3/51) lost to Saurashtra 529/6 decl, by an innings and 243 runs. In Jamshedpur: Jharkhand 188 and 269 in 76 overs

(Aryaman Sen 38, Aditya Singh 72; Aniket Choudhary 3/38, Kukna Ajay Singh 3/61) lead Rajasthan 210 all out and 120 for 6 in 51 overs (Mahabaz Lomror batting 30; Shahbaz Nadeem 3/46, Anukul Roy 3/26) by 127 runs. In Delhi: Maharashtra 225 trail Services 430 for 9 in 189 overs (Shubham Rohilla 72, Vineet Dhankhar 43, Rajat Palwal 51, Nakul Sharma 87, Arjun Sharma batting 43; Taranjitsingh Dhillon 4/129, Arshin Kulkarni 2/41) by 205 runs.