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RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
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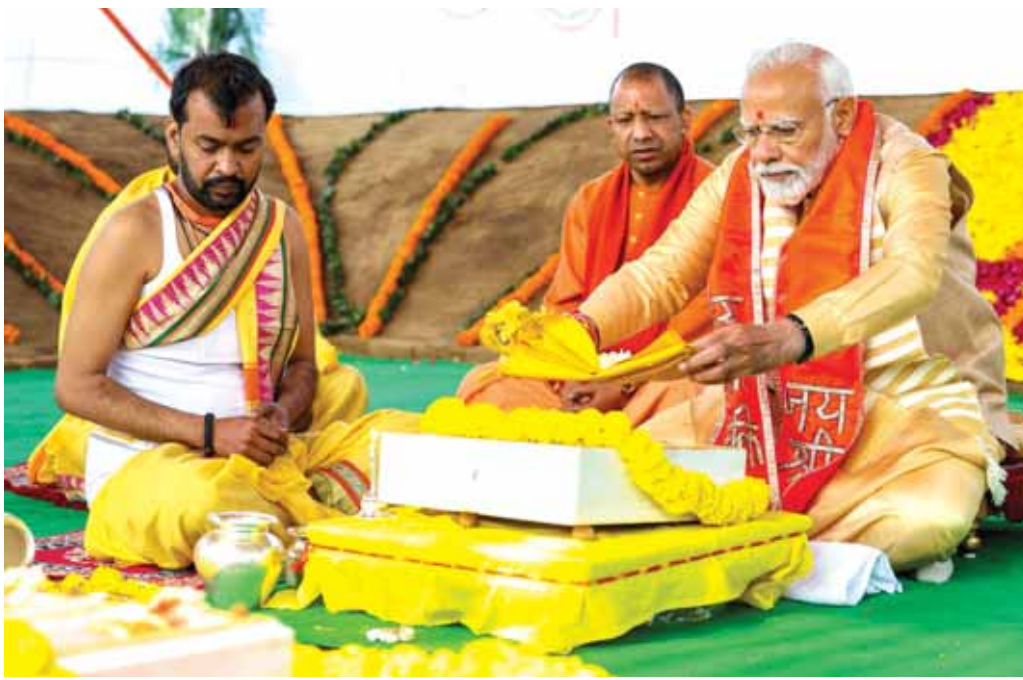


INDIA MOVING FROM ADVERSITY TO VICTORY: MODI

PM hails Yogi for pledge to develop UP into \$1 trillion economy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

India has become a nation moving towards victory from adversity, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday during the foundation stone laying ceremony of Shri Kalki Dham in Sambhal. He congratulated Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for his resolve to develop the State into a \$1-trillion economy, saying that the country will progress only when every State moves forward with big dreams and resolutions like that of UP. Speaking at the inauguration of the fourth edition of the Ground Breaking Ceremony (GBC@IV) organised at Indra Gandhi Pratishthan here, Prime Minister Modi said, "I have full faith in the power of UP and the hard work of the double engine government. I congratulate Yogi ji. Every Indian is proud that UP has decided to become a trillion-dollar economy. My advice to all the political parties of the country would be to leave politics and learn from UP and then enter the field with a similar resolve." The PM launched more than 14,000 projects worth more than Rs 10 lakh crore on the occasion. He also watched glimpses of the changing Uttar Pradesh through films screened at the event. The Prime Minister said the Shri Kalki Dham temple complex, spanning five acre, will take five



Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes part in a puja during foundation stone laying ceremony of Shri Kalki Dham at Anchora Kamboh in Sambhal on Monday

years to complete. It will be constructed using the pink stones of Bansi Pahadpur, similar to the ones used in the Somnath Temple and the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. The temple's spire will be 108 feet high, without the use of steel or iron. It will house ten sanctums, each dedicated to one of Lord Vishnu's avatars. Modi proclaimed the dawn of a new

era, signifying the shift in the wheel of time. Emphasising that it is a time of infinite opportunities for industries in UP, the Prime Minister said, "Exports from UP have doubled in the last few years. UP is the State with the highest number of expressways and international airports in the country. The country's first rapid

rail is running here. A large network of Western and Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridors passes through UP. The river network is also being used for cargo ships. Transportation has become cheaper." The Prime Minister pointed out that seven years ago such a favourable environment for investments and creation of jobs

was unimaginable because of a high crime rate, riots and snatchings, etc. across the State. "Today investment worth billions of rupees is coming into Uttar Pradesh. Work is starting on thousands of projects in Uttar Pradesh. These industries are going to change the face of UP. In the last seven years, a red carpet culture has replaced the red tape culture," he asserted. The Prime Minister said crime rate had dropped significantly in Uttar Pradesh and business culture had flourished with building of trust in the State's capabilities. "There is optimism among all investors who have come here, which is a very positive sign. The double engine Government has shown that if one has the intention to bring about change, no one can stop it from happening," he said. The Prime Minister said there is unprecedented positivity about India all over the world. Referring to the visit to Qatar and the UAE, Modi said every country was confident about India's development. "The whole world is considering India as a guarantee of better returns. It is often seen that when elections are near, people avoid new investments. But, even that belief has fallen apart in Uttar Pradesh today with investors around the world reposing their trust in the government's policies and stability," he added.

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Farmers hold a protest at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border during their 'Delhi Chalo' march, near Patiala district on Monday

Farmers divided over Centre's MSP offer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Hours after holding the fourth round of talks with the Centre, a faction of farmer representatives on Monday said they would mull over the government's proposal to give the guarantee on buying five crops at the minimum support price (MSP) and the Delhi Chalo march shall be put on hold till February 21. However, another faction led by former leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal rejected the proposal, saying, "What we are saying is not a new demand. That was a commitment to us by the Government. We had tried to draw the attention of Government towards those commitments again and again. But the Government showed no seriousness to date..."

The development came after a panel comprising Agriculture and Farmer Welfare Minister Arjun Munda, Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal, and Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai on Sunday proposed the buying of pulses, maize, and cotton crops by government agencies at the MSP for five years after entering into an agreement with farmers. The All Kisan Coordination Committee (AKCC), one of the factions of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), has welcomed the proposal, however saying that the farmer unions are unlikely to accept this proposal due to peer pressure, political ambitions and their "competitive unionism", which is overshadowing interest of the farmers.

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CAPSULE

US vows to veto UN Gaza ceasefire call

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council is expected to vote on Tuesday on an Arab-backed resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, which the United States announced it will veto. Algeria, the Arab representative on the council, put the draft resolution in a final form that can be voted on. Council diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak publicly, said the vote will take place Tuesday morning.

Shivaji's life inspires generations, says PM

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to the Maratha empire founder Shivaji on his birth anniversary on Monday. "Tributes to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on his Jayanti. A visionary leader, fearless warrior, protector of culture and embodiment of good governance, his life inspires generations," he said on X. Modi has often lauded Shivaji for his military and administrative genius.

More AIIMS planned across India

NEW DELHI: After dedicating the Jammu AIIMS to the public on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate five new AIIMS each at Rajkot, Mangalagiri, Bathinda, Raebareilly, and Kalyani to the nation on February 25 from Rajkot at an event.

Mamata biased against women: NCW



National Commission for Women Chairperson Rekha Sharma during a visit to Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district on Monday

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In an alleged "politically motivated statement" that was promptly rejected by the Trinamool Congress, National Commission for Women chairperson Rekha Sharma on Monday charged the Mamata Banerjee Government with curbing women's rights in the State and prescribed President Rule as the only way to restore order in the area. Meanwhile, in a major respite for the Bengal administration, the Supreme Court stayed the proceedings against the top Bengal bureaucrats, including Chief Secretary BP Gopalika, Director General of Police Rajiv Kumar, North 24 Parganas DM Sharad Dwivedi and SP HM Rehman

Sandeshkhali crisis

before a parliamentary Privilege Committee. The apex court also turned down a Public Interest Litigation seeking a court-monitored investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the Sandeshkhali incidents of violence and mass humiliation of women. The Lok Sabha Privilege Committee had earlier issued summons to these officials to appear before it personally on Monday after Bengal BJP president and Balurghat BJP MP Sukanta Majumdar brought charges of ill-treatment against them.

The NCW chairman, who visited river islands of Sandeshkhali to enquire into the alleged reports of mass rape by men of local TMC strongmen Sheikh Shahjahan, Shibu Hajra and Uttam Sardar, said after taking a round of the interior areas, "What I saw is shocking... even after the woman being shamed in mass scale no action is taken and when they go to the police their complaint is not recorded... I am convinced that the incidents do not reflect the situation in Sandeshkhali alone but the entire Bengal." "The women of Sandeshkhali have been harassed... They are scared and the situation here is bad. Women are crying in front of me. I don't think anything will happen here without the President Rule... Today I have copies of 18 complaints, including two rapes and serious molestation... I will submit a report to the President of India accordingly," Sharma, who escorted two of the victims, to the Sandeshkhali Police Station, said. In an apparent reference to Mamata's Sunday comment that a mountain was being made out of a molehill at Sandeshkhali, Sharma said the CM should visit the area not as the Chief Minister but as a common woman to understand what was happening with the women of that area. "She (Mamata) should resign from her post and come here without any post, only then she will understand the pain of the women here... or else she cannot understand their woes," said the NCW chief.

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Kejriwal defies ED summons for sixth time

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, for the sixth time, skipped the Enforcement Directorate's summons that asked him to appear before it for an enquiry in connection with the Delhi Excise Policy case. Terming the summons as "illegal", the AAP said the ED should wait for the court's decision instead of serving the summons on Kejriwal. The agency had earlier this month approached a city court after the Delhi Chief Minister defied its five summonses. Later, informing the media at the Delhi Assembly, Kejriwal said, "We are replying (to the ED) as per the law. Now, the ED has filed a case in the court and they should wait for the decision of the court before issuing any fresh summons," he said. Meanwhile, sources in the ED said the agency has filed a complaint under section 174 of the IPC against Kejriwal for allegedly intentionally disobeying the first three summons issued to him. "The court has taken cognisance of the same, thereby the court has prima facie accepted that Kejriwal has committed an offense for which he is liable to be



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal arrives during the Budget session of the Assembly

prosecuted. The question in front of the court is not about the validity of the summons but the alleged illegal act on the part of Kejriwal of intentionally disobeying the three summonses," sources said. The AAP leadership, including Kejriwal, has alleged that the BJP intends to arrest him to topple his Government in Delhi and dismantle the party. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva claimed that even the court has acknowledged the legality of the ED summonses to Kejriwal and insisted that he should cooperate in the investigation. "According to Article 174 of the IPC, the court acknowledges the summons by the ED. Kejriwal calling it illegal constitutes contempt of court... The issue with him is that he is not able to accept the fact that he was involved in the scam. Investigation agencies are doing their job, and soon Kejriwal will have to unveil the truth in front of the people. The probe agencies are doing their job, and he will also be behind bars like Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh," Sachdeva said.

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Chandigarh mayor quits as SC slams 'horse trading'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Three AAP councillors join BJP on eve of SC hearing

A day before the Supreme Court was scheduled to hear a plea alleging irregularities in the recently held mayoral polls in Chandigarh, BJP leader Manoj Sonkar resigned as Chandigarh mayor and three AAP councillors joined the saffron party on Sunday. Observing that "horse-trading is taking place", the Supreme Court on Monday said it would peruse on Tuesday the ballot papers of the Chandigarh mayoral polls and the entire video-recording of the counting day, and directed the registrar general of the

Punjab and Haryana High Court to depute a judicial officer to bring the records safely to Delhi. Sonkar submitted his resignation to the municipal commissioner, informed Chandigarh BJP president Jatinder Pal Malhotra. The three AAP councillors switching sides to the BJP is set to tip the scales in favour of the BJP whenever fresh mayoral polls are held. Prior to the AAP councillors' shifting loyalty, the BJP had 14 councillors in the 35-member



Chandigarh Municipal Corporation and the AAP had 13. Chandigarh MP Kirron Kher, who is a BJP member, has voting rights as an ex-officio member of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation. The Congress has seven councillors and one the Shiromani Akali Dal has one. The BJP had swept the January 30 Chandigarh mayoral polls in a setback to the Congress-AAP alliance that alleged tampering with ballot papers by the presiding officer.

Sonkar had defeated the AAP's Kuldeep Kumar for the mayor's post, polling 16 votes against his rival's 12. Eight votes were declared invalid. Kumar had later moved the Supreme Court. However, Sonkar resigned from the post subsequently. Kuldeep Kumar, one of the AAP councillors, has moved the top court challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order that has refused to grant any interim relief to the party, which is seeking fresh mayoral polls in Chandigarh.

AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that BJP leader Manoj Sonkar's resignation as Chandigarh mayor shows that they won the elections by using "unfair means". "If the mayor has resigned then it is very obvious that something is suspicious there. It clearly shows that they won the elections by unfair means. This is how they win other elections; if they don't, they buy leaders from the winning party. How will a democratic country function if elections are won unfairly? They (BJP) should let the party that won the elections run the government," said Kejriwal.

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Abdullahs consulted before Article 370 abrogation: Azad

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A fresh round of political slugfest broke out between the top brass of the National Conference and Chairman of the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) Ghulam Nabi Azad over sensational claims made by the former Chief Minister that the father-son duo were consulted before the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution. Azad also claimed the National Conference leaders were seeking appointments to meet central leaders late in the night. Azad made these sensational claims while speaking to a reporter on a private news channel. Soon after the interview was aired on Monday the National Conference stepped out all guns blazing, targeting Azad for stooping so low by making "baseless and senseless allegations". Vice President of the National Conference and former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah vented his ire by posting a hard-hit



ting message on X (Earlier Twitter). Reminding Ghulam Nabi Azad how he begged for a Rajya Sabha seat in 2015, Omar wrote, "Wah bhaji wah Ghulam Nabi Azad, so much bile today. Where is the Ghulam that was begging us for Rajya Sabha seats in J&K as recently as 2015? Omar went on to expose Azad in his post. Omar wrote, "Abdullahs knew about 370" yet we were detained for more than 8 months including under PSA & you were free, the only ex-CM in J&K free after 5th Aug. "Abdullahs meet secretly" yet my father is the one thrown out of his Govt house when he

wasn't MP & you are allowed to keep your ministerial bungalow? "Abdullahs say one thing in Kashmir & another in Delhi" yet the PM cries for you in Rajya Sabha & criticizes us in every speech. Let's not forget the Padma award for which you agreed to leave Congress & help the BJP in Chenab valley. Who is Azad & who is Ghulam, time will tell & people will decide. President of the National Conference Farooq Abdullah, said it was a sad day to see "Azad stooping so low in his political utterances only to remain in the political circuit. A leader like him should not be circulating what he has termed gossip". During his exclusive interaction, Azad also accused Farooq Abdullah of playing the religion card to woo Hindu votes by visiting temples and singing "bhajans". Farooq Abdullah asserted that the NC has stood and will always stand for secularism and said it was time Azad explained the real reason for

breaking away from the Congress and forming his party in Jammu and Kashmir. "He has to clarify actually which side of the fence he was on. He has been enjoying every perk even after ceasing to be a member of the Rajya Sabha. The question is, how?" the NC leader asked. The former Union minister said he, along with several other leaders, held a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of the Centre's August 5, 2019 decision to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special status. "Whatever we have to do, we do it in broad daylight. Why should one ask for time at night...?" Abdullah asked and described Azad's statement as childish and laughable. Reacting to Omar Abdullah's post on X and taking a jibe at Azad, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said: "Did you seriously expect anything else from him? He is an absolute disgrace — actually, always has been!"

Maharashtra Legislature to take up Bill on Maratha quota today

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

At a Special Session convened on Tuesday, both the Houses of the Maharashtra Legislature will debate on a crucial report submitted by the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission (MSBCC) on the social and educational backwardness of the Maratha community and pass a Bill giving reservations to the politically influential community in the state. Being held amid the ongoing fast-unto-death by Shivba Sanghatana leader Manoj Jarange-Patil, the special session — given the enormity of the task on hand — may extend up to two days. At the beginning of the session, Maharashtra Governor Ramesh Bais will address a joint sitting of both the houses of the Maharashtra Legislature. Later on both the Houses will take up condole resolutions. In the debate on the proposed legislation on Maratha reservations that will follow, both the Houses of the State Legislature will deliberate on a report submitted by the MSBCC on the social and

educational backwardness of the Maratha community. Based on a survey covering 2.5 crore families conducted across the state within a span of only nine days, the MSBCC — headed by Justice Sunil Shukre (Retd) — had submitted a report on the Maratha reservations to the Maharashtra government on Friday last. Before the start of the special session, the State Cabinet will deliberate on the MSBCC's report on reservations to the Maratha community. Later on, the Maharashtra government will place it before both the Houses of the State Legislature for a debate. During the course of the debate, the Maharashtra government will introduce a bill for giving reservations to the Maratha community based on the recommendations of the MSBCC. This is the second occasion when the Maharashtra government has gone about the task of according reservations to the Maratha community. It may be recalled that in 2018, a commission headed by Justice (retired) M G Gaikwad had submitted a report to the Maharashtra government on

the backwardness of the Maratha community. Based on that report, the state government had extended reservation to Marathas. However, the decision taken by the state government failed to pass the test in the Supreme Court, as the reservations crossed the 50 per cent cap fixed by the apex court. On Monday when pro-Maratha reservation leader Jarange-Patil's hunger agitation entered 10th day, chief minister Eknath Shinde said: "We are committed to according reservations to the Marathas without disturbing the reservation of OBC or other communities". At the special session, the Maharashtra government will also place details of a parallel exercise — independent of the deliberations by the MSBCC — that it had undertaken to identify the number of Kunbi-Maratha and Maratha-Kunbi community members in the state. On his part, Jarange-Patil had claimed during the course of his ongoing agitation that 57 lakh Kunbi-Maratha and Maratha-Kunbi community records had been found.

AAP blames officers for failure of one time water bill settlement

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP in a resolution passed in the Delhi Assembly on Monday said officers were not implementing orders to realise pending arrears (outstanding bills) regarding water consumption by way of one-time settlement scheme and urged Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena to get these officers implement this hugely pro-people scheme. The resolution also said if the officers do not implement it, they should be suspended. The resolution said residents of Delhi are suffering because of inflated water bills. There are around 27 lakh water connections out of which around 10.6 lakh Customers have pending arrears (Outstanding Bills). Most of these consumers have stopped paying these water bills to Delhi Jal Board (DJB) because they believe that their bills do not reflect their actual consumption of water.

INDUS X summit between India, US begins today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The much-anticipated INDUS-X Summit is scheduled to be held on February 20-21 here, marking a significant milestone in the collaborative efforts between India and the United States in defence innovation, defence ministry said here on Monday. Organised by Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) under the Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence, and Department of Defence (DoD), United States, in conjunction with the U.S.-India Business Council and Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM), the summit aims to be a pivotal event driving strategic technology partnerships and defence industrial cooperation between India and the USA. Since its launch in June 2023 during the State Visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US, the India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) has been at the forefront of expanding bilateral ties in defence innovation. Now, with the INDUS-X Summit, stakeholders from both nations will converge in New Delhi to explore and capitalise on emerging opportunities. The two-day catalyst summit

will feature a dynamic line-up of activities designed to foster collaboration, innovation, and knowledge exchange. From panel discussions and workshops to senior leaders forums and joint challenge winner felicitations, the agenda is packed with insightful sessions aimed at charting the future trajectory of U.S.-India defence relations. Defence innovation stakeholders from across governments, academic and research organisations, investors, defence start-ups, technology incubators, industry associations, and other start-up enablers will come together to develop ambitious initiatives to drive INDUS-X forward. The Joint INDUS-X challenge winners under the IMPACT will be felicitated during the event. The INDUS-X Summit represents a pivotal moment for advancing defence innovation and collaboration between India and the United States, setting the stage for future technological advancements and strategic partnerships, stimulating cross-national science and technology networks, and building the connective issue between domestic entrepreneurs, markets, skilling institutions, government labs, and investment capital, which is critical to building successful innovation ecosystems.

Irani dares Rahul to contest LS polls from Amethi alone

PTI ■ AMETHI

Union Minister Smriti Irani on Monday claimed that deserted streets welcomed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi when he arrived here as part of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and dared him to contest from Amethi alone in the Lok Sabha elections. Both Gandhi and Irani were in the Amethi parliamentary constituency, where the BJP leader had in 2019 humbled Gandhi who is now the MP from Kerala's Wayanad. "Rahul Gandhi considered Amethi as the centre of power but did not provide service, that is why he was welcomed by the deserted streets of Amethi. Congress workers who welcomed Rahul Gandhi did not participate in his yatra due to which the Congress had to call workers from Sultanpur and Pratapgarh," Irani told media-persons. "Amethi's former MP insulted the people of Amethi in Wayanad. Amethi was distressed due to this. Ram Lalla's invitation was rejected by him and his family. Amethi is distressed due to this also," she said.

Explain how profitable Jal Board is now running at loss, Bidhuri asks Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Monday alleged in the Assembly that the Kejriwal government itself sends meaningless bills of the Jal Board to the people of Delhi and then brings a scheme to waive off these bills worth lakhs. Levelling this charge, Bidhuri also said when this scheme is not implemented then the blame is put on the officials. He said the Delhi Government should explain how the Jal Board, which was in profit of Rs 600 crore in 2013, has now gone into loss of Rs 75 thousand crore. During the discussion on the

calling attention motion in the Delhi Assembly, Bidhuri said that how serious the Delhi government is about the Jal Board can be known from the fact that a calling attention motion was presented in the Assembly but in the discussion, the concerned minister of the department and Jal Board Chairperson Atishi is not present. He said media reports said the CAG has investigated the accounts of Delhi Jal Board and given the report for the year 2017-18 to the government, but why has that report not been tabled yet even though the Assembly session is going on. Bidhuri also sought to know as to why has the government not conducted CAG audit after 2016.

DDA plants one lakh tulips

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to exhibit the beauty of tulips in full bloom, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has planted more than one lakh tulips in different parks all over the capital. Incidentally, this is the first time, Delhi outside New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) — the exclusive Lutyen's Zone, is adorned with tulips this spring. NDMC planted four lakh tulips in Lutyen's Delhi. Officials said here on Monday, the DDA has planted these beautiful tulips in areas like Rohini, Dwarka, ISBT Kashmere Gate, Karampura-Rohtak Road, Shalimar Bagh, Mehrauli, GK-I and Vasant Vihar. It is for the first time that Tulips have been planted in parks in these areas of the National Capital.

Scientists developing saliva test for breast cancer screening

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists have developed a saliva test that screens for breast cancer, which is showing promising results in experimental testing, according to a study published Tuesday. The new hand-held device detects breast cancer biomarkers from a tiny sample of spit, say researchers from the University of Florida and National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University in Taiwan, who published their findings in the Journal of Vacuum Science & Technology B. The development of non-invasive, cost-effective, and easily accessible screening tools is of paramount importance given that breast cancer remains a significant global health concern, with early detection being crucial for successful treatment outcomes. Traditional screening methods such as mammography and biopsy can be invasive, expensive, and inaccessible to many populations. "Imagine medical staff conducting breast cancer screening in communities or hospitals," said Hsiao-Hsuan Wan, a UF doctoral student in the Department of Chemical Engineering and the study's

lead author. "Our device is an excellent choice because it is portable — about the size of your hand — and reusable. The testing time is under five seconds per sample, which makes it highly efficient." The new tool works by placing a saliva sample on a test strip, which is treated with specific antibodies that respond to cancer biomarkers. Electrical impulses are sent to contact points on the biosensor device. Signals are measured and translated into digital information about how much biomarker is present. The results are quick and easy to interpret, Wan said. During testing, the device distinguished between healthy breast tissue, early breast cancer, and advanced breast cancer in a small group of 21 women. Their biosensor design uses common components like glucose testing strips and the open-source hardware-software platform Arduino, say the doctors. With being the most common type of cancer in women, breast cancer accounts for 14% of cancers in Indian women. It is reported that with every four minutes, an Indian woman is diagnosed with breast cancer. Breast cancer is on the rise, both in rural and urban India.

INDIA MOVING FROM...

From Page 1
The Prime Minister said for many decades since Independence, the approach of political dispensation towards development was selective, which left a sizable population of the country yearning for basic facilities. "But the double engine Government has changed the old political thinking. We are engaged in making the life of every citizen easier. If life becomes easier, investing and doing business will also be easier," he said. The Prime Minister also discussed in detail the merits of Lakhpati Didi Yojana, PM SVANidhi Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and said that this had increased the purchasing power of the rural and urban middle class. He described the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) as the strength of UP. He also discussed the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme and PM Shram Samman Yojana, mentioning his fondness for the toys of Kashi, his parliamentary constituency. Modi said Uttar Pradesh had the potential to become a tourism hub. "Lakhs of people are coming to Kashi and Ayodhya. This is a golden opportunity for industries related to tourism sector. The upcoming Kumbh in 2025 will be a very important occasion for the economy of UP," he said. Discussing solar energy, the

Prime Minister said the PM Suryaghar Free Electricity Scheme would not only provide free electricity to the countrymen, but would also become a means of earning additional electricity. Lakhs of employment opportunities will be created in this sector in installation, maintenance and supply chain, he added. The Prime Minister also called upon the entrepreneurs associated with food processing sector to take the pledge to make "Make in India" products available on every dining table in the world, with special focus on the superfood millets. "There is a good opportunity for investment in this superfood. The Government wants to make small farmers a big market force. As much as the farmer and the soil will benefit, the enterprises related to food processing will also benefit through its cultivation," he said. Earlier, the Prime Minister inaugurated and visited the exhibition organised by various industry groups here. During this, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, UP Governor Anandiben Patel and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were present with him. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath welcomed and congratulated the prime minister by presenting him an idol of Lord Ganesha. He emphasised that despite facing "invasions" for

centuries, India stands firm, and the sacrifices of generations are bearing fruit. Drawing a metaphor, he likened the construction of the temple to the germination of seeds after a long monsoon, symbolising the fruition of efforts over time. Modi remarked that just as Pramod Krishna is constructing a temple here, he has been entrusted by the divine to build a temple in the form of the nation. He expressed pride in India's position as a global example rather than just a follower. Highlighting advancements in innovation and IT sectors, he emphasised India's emergence as the fifth-largest economy globally and the first country to reach the southern pole of the moon. Operations of "Vande Bharat" and "Namoo Bharat" trains have commenced, with plans for bullet trains underway, symbolising a sense of pride and progress among every citizen. Modi subtly criticised the Opposition, drawing parallels between present-day occurrences and historical narratives. He used the example of Sudama offering rice in a pot, suggesting that if such an event happened today, it would spark controversies and legal proceedings. He also reflected on the emotional experience of witnessing the manifestation of Lord Ram in Ayodhya.

Farmers divided over...

From Page 1
Thousands of protesting farmers are camping at the Punjab-Haryana border. Goyal described the talks as "positive," saying that the farmer leaders raised various concerns during the meeting. Speaking to the media after an over four-hour long meeting at Chandigarh, Goyal said the "innovative" and "out-of-the-box" idea came up during the discussions and the farmer leaders would decide on the government's proposal by Monday morning. Farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal said discussion was held on issues like a law on MSP, implementation of the Swaminathan Commission recommendations and loan waivers. On the Centre's proposal, farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said, "We will discuss in our forums on February 19-20 and take the opinion of experts regarding it and accordingly take a decision." "There will be peaceful protests at Shambhu and

Khanauri borders located along the Haryana entry points till that time. Our decision to go to Delhi is on standby. On February 21 at 11 am, we will move forward peacefully. Till then we will try to present our points in front of the Centre," said Sarwan Singh Pandher, the leader of one of the factions. Meanwhile, the situation at Delhi-Haryana border and Haryana-Punjab borders remained by and large peaceful. Goyal also referred to steps taken by the Narendra Modi-led Government in the farm sector and said that from 2014 to 2024, the Centre acquired crops worth Rs 18 lakh crore at MSP while between 2004 and 2014, crops worth only Rs 5.50 lakh crore were procured at the assured price. "Cooperative societies like the NCCF (National Cooperative Consumers Federation) and NAFED (National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India) will enter into a contract with those farmers who grow tur dal, urad dal, masoor dal or maize for buying their crop at MSP for next five years," said Goyal. "There will be no limit on the quantity (purchased) and a portal will be developed for this," he added. It will save

Punjab's farming, improve the groundwater table, and save the land from getting barren which is already under stress, the minister said. The farmers pointed out that they want to diversify into maize crops but want to avoid suffering losses when the prices drop below the MSP," the Minister added. On the possibility of another meeting with the farmers, Goyal said if they take a decision on Monday, the government will proceed to hold discussions on the same lines as he urged the farmers to call off their protest. However, he underlined that the other demands of the farmers were "deep and policy-driven" and it was not possible to find a resolution without an in-depth discussion. "Elections are coming and a new government will be formed... discussions on such issues will continue," he said. According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, the production of pulses has increased from 163.20 lakh tonne in 2015-16 to 260.6 lakh tonne in 2022-23 and oilseeds from 252.50 lakh tonne to 409.97 lakh tonne during the same period. Further, import of pulses has declined from 58 lakh tonne in 2015-16 to 24.96 lakh tonne in 2022-23.

Kejriwal defies ED...

From Page 1
On Saturday, the Rouse Avenue court granted exemption to Kejriwal from the personal appearance for the day in connection with the complaint filed by the Central agency. The application moved by Kejriwal's counsel stated that the Budget Session of the Delhi Assembly commenced on February 15 and will continue till the first week of March. He will physically appear before the court on the next date of hearing on March 16, it said. Kejriwal was summoned by the ED for the first time on October 30, 2023. The agency asked him to appear before the federal agency for questioning in connection with the alleged irregularities in the now-scraped Excise Policy. However, he skipped the summons after sending a response to the Central agency. He has said the summons issued to him were illegal, politically motivated, and given at the request of the BJP. It is alleged that the Delhi Government's Excise Policy for 2021-22 to grant licences to liquor traders allowed cartelisation and favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge repeatedly refuted by the AAP.

Chandigarh mayor quits as SC slams...

From Page 1
The Congress targeted the BJP, alleging that the entire election episode had exposed it before the public. "Everyone saw what they did. Everyone watched the video of how the presiding officer declared eight votes invalid for mayor's post," said Chandigarh Congress president HS Lucky. The top court, on February 5, rapped Returning Officer Anil Masih, who conducted the mayoral polls, observing that it was obvious that he had defaced the ballot papers and that he should be prosecuted, adding that his action amounted to "murder" and a "mockery" of democracy. A bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud directed the Chandigarh administration on Monday to provide security to the judicial officer, to be appointed by the high court, to ensure the safety of the officer and the records. "We ourselves will look at the records at 2 pm," the bench, also comprising justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said. "Horse-trading taking place," the CJ said while declining a plea that the case on the mayoral polls be heard on some other day instead of Tuesday. Masih appeared before the bench in pursuance of the apex court's direction and was quizzed by the judges over the alleged tampering of certain ballot papers.

Mamata biased against women...

From Page 1
The NCW chairperson's remarks come against the backdrop of recent agitations by women of the North 24 Parganas administrative block against the allegations of large-scale land-grab, forced labour and gangrape of the women by the men of Shahjahan. While Hajra and Sardar were arrested in the wake of a mass upheaval of women which made national headlines, Shahjahan - who is also accused of masterminding the January 4 attack on a team of Enforcement Directorate officials who had gone to raid his house in connection to the multi-crore ration scam that has landed a number of politicians including former State minister Jyotipriya Mallick jail - is still at large.

Schools asked to form panels for surprise bag checks for safety

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to ensure security inside the premises, the schools in the national capital have been directed to constitute committees for a surprise bag check to ensure no student brings any object that may be used to harm other children. "Recently, some incidents have come in the notice of authorities of DoE where students indulge in quarrels and fights in and outside the school premises during school hours. In order to make schools a safe and secure place for all concerned, it is imperative for all schools to implement a streamlined framework for ensuring good safety practices for students, parents and staff. Therefore, all the Heads of Govt., Govt. Aided & Unaided Recognized Private Schools of Delhi are hereby directed to constitute a committee for random/surprise checking of school bags of students in classrooms. Teachers and Heads of Schools must ensure that no student is in possession of any object/material that may be used to harm fellow students," Delhi government's Directorate of Education (DoE) said in an order.



Issuing these orders, the DoE also said schools have been directed to ensure that guards at the gates regularly check students' bags and ensure that CCTVs are functional all the time. According to the Directorate of Education (DoE), some incidents have come to their notice where students got into quarrels and fights in and outside the premises during school hours. All the heads of government-run and private schools in Delhi have been directed to make all possible efforts to ensure the safety and security of students in school premises, the DoE circular said.

"In order to make schools a safe and secure place for all concerned, it is imperative for all schools to implement a streamlined framework for ensuring good safety practices for students, parents and staff," it said. "Therefore, all heads of government and private schools are hereby directed to constitute a committee for random/surprise checking of school bags of students in classrooms and ensure that no student is in possession of any material that may be used to harm fellow students." The heads of schools have also been asked to direct all guards at entry gates to regularly check bags for any unwanted or inap-

ropriate articles so that no untoward incident happens in schools. "Heads of schools should also ensure that CCTVs are installed in the school and are functional all the time. Visitors should not be allowed to enter the classrooms and staff rooms," the DoE said. Delhi Parents' Association president Aparajita Gautam welcomed the move by DoE but questioned how long will the norms be followed on the ground. "It is very a good initiative and I welcome it because it is for students' safety. How will the government schools, that do not have sufficient manpower, implement this?" she posed. Gautam further stated that the Delhi government should bring better measures to ensure students' safety, especially in government schools. Last week, a class 11 student was stabbed to death by three teenagers for allegedly harassing one of them in south Delhi's Neb Sarai area. The three juveniles, including a class 10 student, have been apprehended. Two knives used in the crime have also been recovered, police said.

Serious Constitutional crisis in city, officers refusing to work due to 'threat': Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said a "serious constitutional crisis" has arisen in the national capital as officers are saying they will not work because of alleged "threats and pressure" from the BJP. This problem stems from Delhi not enjoying full statehood and the real power lies with the central government, which is led by a different party, and "that other party does not want that the elected government (of Delhi) does its work", he said during his address in the Delhi Assembly. Kejriwal also said the one-time settlement scheme to rectify water bills is being "obstructed" by some officers. The chief minister alleged that the officers are being threatened to block the one-time settlement scheme for correcting water bills because of pressure from the BJP. Kejriwal also claimed the officers' unwillingness to work has led to a "serious constitutional crisis" in Delhi. He appealed to Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena to call the officers for clearance of the scheme and added that 10.50 lakh families will benefit from this "good scheme". Kejriwal said a large percentage of Delhi's population is a "victim of erroneous, inflated bills".



Explaining the metrics, he said, "We introduced a scheme to solve the problems of the people of Delhi -- a one-time settlement scheme." The chief minister said his government works for the people, and mocked the opposition BJP by claiming that they had "overlooked" the issues of the people and were reduced to three or eight seats in the assembly. Thousands of crores in revenue have "got locked" in this scheme, he said. This scheme is so good, it was passed last June and should have been implemented immediately. It's been eight months but these officers have "refused to do it", he claimed. "Today, the situation is that this scheme has to be brought to the Cabinet. It will get implemented if the Cabinet approves it. For this, the (Delhi) finance secretary has to give his comments," Kejriwal said. The finance secretary, however,

have put it in writing that they will not work. If they do this, how will the government run? Can it run for even two days? Does it behove the Centre and the BJP that an elected government has been brought to such a state?" Kejriwal asked. "And, who all are behind it? The BJP is behind it. The BJP hates the people of Delhi," he alleged. Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Monday alleged in the Assembly that the Kejriwal government itself sends meaningless bills of the Jal Board to the people of Delhi and then brings a scheme to waive off these bills worth lakhs. Levelling this charge, Bidhuri also said when this scheme is not implemented then the blame is put on the officials. He said the Delhi government should explain how the Jal Board, which was in profit of Rs 600 crore in 2013, has now gone into loss of Rs 75 thousand crore. During the discussion on the calling attention motion in the Delhi Assembly, Bidhuri said that how serious the Delhi government is about the Jal Board can be known from the fact that a calling attention motion was presented in the Assembly but in the discussion, the concerned minister of the department and Jal Board Chairperson Atishi is not present.

Hold detailed enquiry into GST tax evasion, LG writes to Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Monday wrote a letter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal "advising" him to ask the Finance Minister to hold a detailed enquiry in alleged GST evasions, and tighten tax administration. Delhi has achieved "inglorious distinction" of recording the highest tax evasion in the

country. In all, 483 "bogus firms" were detected, which accounted for Rs 3,028 crore of tax evasion, Saxena said in his letter. "It is indeed dubious that the capital of the country tops the list of tax evasion amongst all states and Union Territories, with the one on the second place behind Delhi, by as much as Rs 827 crore. This is a serious matter in which the possibility of collusion of officials in

the GST department cannot be ruled out," he wrote in his letter to the Delhi chief minister. Saxena "advised" the chief minister to direct the finance minister to hold a detailed enquiry in the matter and assess the root cause of such tax evasions. "This not only reflects poorly on the state of tax governance in the national capital, but also results in a huge loss to the public



exchequer. This resource could have been meaningfully utilised for investments in public interest," the LG said. The report for the third quarter brings out "shocking" facts about the extent of tax evasion prevailing in Delhi, the LG said referring to the alleged goods and services tax (GST) evasions. "I trust that you will personally take interest in the matter and apprise me of the

efforts being made to tighten the tax administration in the city," he stated. A report of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, released in January, highlighted the issue of "bogus registrations and fake invoices" in the country, he stated. Delhi has gained notoriety for having the highest incidence of Goods and Services Tax (GST) evasion by fraudulent

firms. Officials reported that between October and December 2023, 483 counterfeit firms were uncovered in the capital, implicated in suspected GST evasion totaling Rs 3,028 crore. Delhi ranked third, trailing behind Maharashtra (926) and Rajasthan (507), in terms of the number of counterfeit GST firms identified by authorities during this period.

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
Govt. of India

Where Development Values Nature

Delhi Development Authority

Inauguration

of

Island Fountains

(Sector 1/7 and Sector 2/6)

and

Rejuvenation of Storm Water Channels 2 and 5

at Dwarka

By

Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena

Hon'ble Lt. Governor, Delhi

Guests of Honour

Shri Parvesh Sahib Singh
Hon'ble MP, West Delhi

Shri Ramesh Bidhuri
Hon'ble MP, South Delhi

FOUNTAIN

- ▶ 4 cascade type horse fountains of 12 feet each
- ▶ Redeveloped green areas, barrier free ramps

DATE

Tuesday, 20th February, 2024
Time: 11:30 AM

STORM WATER CHANNELS

- ▶ To provide green and clean environment for walking, jogging, cycling etc.
- ▶ Open air food court, open air theatre, yoga pavilion, children park, and public toilets along the channels
- ▶ Sewerage Interception and treatment
- ▶ Greenways developed along the channels for connectivity of the dwellers
- ▶ River front activities like viewing decks, pergola bridges, check dams etc.

PLACE

Exit Gate No. 1, Dwarka Sector-9, Near by Metro Station, Dwarka, New Delhi

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Modi to launch projects in Jammu today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Jammu on Tuesday to launch multiple development projects, including for education, railway, aviation and road sectors, worth ₹30,500 crore. He will also distribute appointment letters to about 1,500 newly recruited government employees of Jammu and Kashmir and interact with beneficiaries of various schemes as part of the 'Viksit Bharat, Viksit Jammu' programme, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a statement. Among the railway projects that Modi will inaugurate are the railway line between Banihal-Khari-Sumber-Sangaldan (48 km) and the newly electrified Baramulla-Srinagar-Banihal-Sangaldan section (185.66 km). The statement said he will flag off the first electric train in the Valley and the train service between Sangaldan and Baramulla stations. The commissioning of the Banihal-Khari-Sumber-



Sangaldan section is significant as it features the usage of ballast less track (BLT) all along the route providing a better ride experience to passengers, it said. India's longest transportation tunnel T-50 (12.77 km) lies in the portion between Khari and Sumber. The railway projects will improve connectivity, ensure environmental sustainability and boost the overall economic development of the region. In a significant step towards upgrading and developing education and skilling infrastruc-

ture across the country, the statement said, Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of several projects worth about Rs 13,375 crore. The projects include permanent campuses for IIT Bhubaneswar, IIT Tirupati, IIT Jammu, IIITDM Kancheepuram, Indian Institute of Skills (IIS), a pioneer skill training institute on advanced technologies located at Kanpur, and campuses of Central Sanskrit University at Devprayag (Uttarakhand) and Agartala (Tripura). He will also inaugurate three new IIMs in the country -- IIM

Jammu, IIM Bodh Gaya and IIM Visakhapatnam -- besides 20 new buildings for Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and 13 for new Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs) buildings across the country. As part of his government's efforts to provide comprehensive, quality and holistic tertiary-care health services to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the prime minister will inaugurate the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Vijaypur (Samba), Jammu. The institute, whose foundation stone was laid by him in February 2019, is being established under the central government scheme 'Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana'. Established at a cost of over Rs 1,660 crore and in an area spanning over 227 acres, the hospital is equipped with 720 beds, a medical college with 125 seats, a nursing college with 60 seats, an AYUSH block with 30 beds, residential accommodation for faculty and staff, hostel accommodation for UG and PG students and a shopping complex among other facilities.

Among other projects, Modi will lay the foundation stone for a new terminal building at the Jammu airport. Spread over 40,000 sqm, the new terminal building will be equipped with modern facilities catering to about 2,000 passengers during peak hours, will be environment friendly and will showcase the local. During the programme, the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone of important road projects including two packages (44.22 km) of the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra expressway connecting Jammu to Katra and phase-two for four-laning of the Srinagar Ring road. The statement said he will lay the foundation stone for a project to develop CUF (Common User Facility) petroleum depot at Jammu as well. Modi will also inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of several development projects worth more than Rs 3,150 crore for strengthening the civic infrastructure and provisioning of public facilities across Jammu and Kashmir, it said.

Jammu, Visakhapatnam, Bodh Gaya to get IIMs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate campuses of three IIMs — Jammu, Bodh Gaya and Visakhapatnam — and lay the foundation stone of several projects worth over ₹13,000 crore on Tuesday. The projects which will be dedicated include a permanent campus of IIT Bhubaneswar, IIT Tirupati, IIT Jammu, IIITDM Kancheepuram; Indian Institute of Skills (IIS) — a pioneer skill training institute on advanced technologies — in Kanpur; and two campuses of Central Sanskrit University in Uttarakhand's Devprayag and in Agartala, Tripura. "In a significant step towards upgrading and developing education and skilling infrastructure across the country, the prime minister will inaugurate, dedicate to the nation and lay the foundation stone of several projects worth about Rs



13,375 crore," a statement from the Prime Minister's Office said. "He will also inaugurate 20 new buildings for Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV) and 13 new Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs)

buildings across the country. Prime Minister Modi will also lay the foundation stone of five KV campuses, one NV campus and five multipurpose hall for NVs across the country," it added.

Shah to address BJP meetings in Rajasthan, plans to win all LS seats

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will address several BJP meetings in Rajasthan on Tuesday as the ruling party looks to win all 25 seats in the western State in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The BJP had won 24 seats in the 2019 polls while its then ally Rashtriya Lok Satta Party (RSP) had one. The RSP is no longer with the BJP. Party leaders said Shah will focus on three 'clusters', which include three Lok Sabha seats each, of Jaipur, Udaipur and Bikaner during the visit. He will address the election management committee meeting in Bikaner, followed by a meeting of party workers in Udaipur and a get-together of prominent citizens in Jaipur. The Bikaner cluster comprises



Bikaner, Ganganagar and Churu constituencies, and the Udaipur cluster includes Udaipur, Dungarpur and Chhittorgarh seats while Jaipur, Jaipur Rural and Dausa figure in the Jaipur cluster. The BJP has divided Lok Sabha seats across the country into clusters for the upcoming general elections as part of its campaign. As a key party strategist, Shah has been involved with the nationwide programme along with party president J P Nadda.

Kamal's tainted 1984 past dashes his, son hopes to join BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The doors of BJP as of now seem to be closed for top Congress leader Kamal Nath and his son Nakul who had rushed to the national Capital last weekend to join the ruling party at the Centre. While Nath's office dismissed reports of their leaders quitting the grand old party, sources in BJP said Nath is tainted due to the 1984 anti Sikh pogrom and hence the party will not take any chance to hurt the sentiments of the BJP leaders associated with the party in Delhi as well as Punjab and elsewhere. Kamal Nath's confidant Sajjan Singh Verma dismissed reports on Monday of the veteran Congress leader contemplating a switch to the BJP, saying the question of the former Madhya Pradesh chief minister leaving the party, in which he has spent more than 40 years, does not arise.



Verma said Kamal Nath and his son Nakul Nath are both not crossing over to the BJP and asserted that the latter will contest the Lok Sabha polls, likely to be held in April-May, from Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh as the Congress candidate. His remarks came amid growing speculation that Kamal Nath and his Lok Sabha MP son, Nakul Nath, may cross over to the ruling BJP. Talking to reporters after meet-

ing Nath at his residence in the national Capital, Verma said he had a detailed discussion with the Congress veteran, who told him that he would soon hold a meeting in Bhopal for ensuring the success of the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra. "He (Nath) told me that 'I will call all the in-charges of the Madhya Pradesh Congress Committee and discuss the preparations for the Lok Sabha

polls. I asked about the media speculation about him, to which he said why should 'I answer an imaginary question?' Verma said. "I do not think I need to answer such imaginary questions. I did not tell any mediaperson that I am quitting (the Congress) or compromising with the BJP. In that case, I would have given a reply, but why should I answer an imaginary question?" Nath was quoted as asking by Verma.

He said the question of Nath leaving the grand old party does not arise. Nath arrived in Delhi on Saturday afternoon and during his brief interaction with reporters here, he asked them not to get excited. Asked if he is joining the BJP, Nath said, "If there would be any such thing, I would inform you first." A section of BJP leaders have expressed their reservations about Kamal Nath's move to its central leadership. The BJP leaders have been targeting the veteran Congress leader for his alleged involvement in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, even though it was never proven. Delhi BJP leader and Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) secretary Tajinder Bagga took to social and said the "doors of BJP were never open in the past and nor are they now" for Kamal Nath. "Many friends are calling and asking about Kamal Nath. I have told them on the phone and here also I am saying that

the doors of BJP were neither open earlier nor are they now for Kamal Nath. (He is) the murderer of Sikhs and the one who burnt the Gurdwara Rakabganj Sahib of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji. I assure you all that this will never be possible with Prime Minister Modi who is doing so much for the Sikhs," Bagga said in a statement. An astute politician, Nath has worked with three generations of the Gandhi family. In 1979, then prime minister Indira Gandhi described him as her third son. Nath is said to be disgruntled over not getting a Rajya Sabha berth and also, Rahul Gandhi is understood to be upset with him since the Congress suffered a defeat in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly polls late last year. Nath was replaced as the party's Madhya Pradesh unit chief following its rout in the Assembly polls, in which the BJP retained power winning 163 seats in the 230-member House.

Upendra Dwivedi assumes charge as Vice Chief of Army Staff

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi on Monday assumed charge as the Vice Chief of Army Staff, replacing Lieutenant General MV Suchindra Kumar. Dwivedi was serving as the Northern Army Commander in his previous assignment. Lt Gen Dwivedi is the front-runner to become the Army Chief when incumbent General Manoj Pande retires on May 31. Dwivedi paid homage to the fallen heroes at the National War Memorial here and reviewed a guard of honour before taking charge of his new responsibility. Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi has assumed the appointment of the Vice Chief of the Army Staff on 19 February 2024. On assumption of appointment, Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi laid wreath at the National War Memorial and was accorded Guard of Honour at the South Block Lawns. Prior to taking over as the Vice Chief of the Army Staff, Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi was tenanted the appointment of General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command from 2022-2024 in extremely challenging operational environment, an Army statement said here on Monday. An alumnus of Sainik School, Rewa (MP), Dwivedi was commissioned into 18 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles in 1984, a unit he later commanded. The General officer has had a unique distinction of balanced exposure of both Northern and Western Theatres. During his illustrious career spanning across 39 years, he has held command appointments in challenging operational environments, spanning the length and breadth



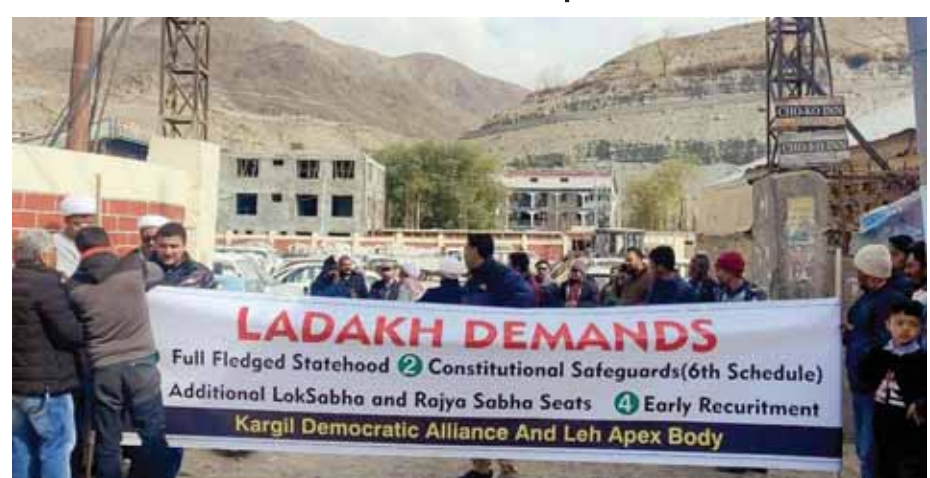
of the country. He commanded his unit in Kashmir Valley as well as in Rajasthan. He has been Sector Commander and Inspector General Assam Rifles in intense Counter Terrorism environment in the North East. Dwivedi commanded the Rising Star Corps with operational role along the Western Borders. He later commanded the prestigious Northern Army from 2022-24 in extremely challenging operational environment along both northern and western borders. During his command, he provided Strategic guidance and Operational oversight for planning and execution of sustained operations along the northern and western borders, besides orchestrating the dynamic Counter Terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir. During this period, he was actively engaged in the ongoing negotiations with China in resolving the vexed border issue. He was also involved in modernisation and equipping of the largest Army Command of Indian Army, where he steered the induction of indigenous equipment as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat. He synergised with people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh for convergent Nation-Building outcomes

and infrastructure development. Besides the challenging command assignments, Dwivedi has tenanted important staff appointments in Headquarters Armoured Brigade, Mountain Division, Strike Corps and Integrated HQ (Army). As Director General Infantry, he had steered and fast-tracked capital procurement of weapons for the three services, leading to significant and visible capability enhancement for our Armed Forces. As Deputy Chief of Army Staff (Information System and Coordination), the General officer gave impetus to automation and absorption of niche technologies in the Indian Army. Being a technology enthusiast, he worked towards enhancing the technical threshold of all ranks in Northern Command and pushed for "Critical and Emerging Technologies" like Big Data Analytics, AI, Quantum and Blockchain-based solutions. He has held instructional appointments to include tenures at Infantry School and Army War College, Mhow. The General officer's two overseas tenures include Somalia, as part of HQ UNOSOM II and Seychelles as Military Advisor to the Government of Seychelles.

Ladakh leaders meet Govt officials to press for Statehood demand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A delegation of leaders from Ladakh held a meeting with the Government's representatives here on Monday to press for their demands, including statehood for the high-altitude region, two Lok Sabha seats and bringing the area under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The 14-member delegation of the Apex Body Leh (ABL) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) met the High Powered Committee (HPC) for Ladakh headed by Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai. The meeting discussed the Ladakh delegation's demands, it was learnt. The demands of the delegation are statehood for Ladakh, two Lok Sabha seats (one for Kargil and one for Leh), job opportunities for the residents of the Union Territory and constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule. Ladakh currently has one Lok Sabha constituency.



Ladakh, which no longer has any Assembly constituency, was earlier part of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. The provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave a special status to Jammu and Kashmir, were abrogated on August 5, 2019 and the erstwhile state was bifurcated into the Union territories of Jammu and Ladakh.

According to the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, Jammu and Kashmir has been made a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly and Ladakh a Union Territory without any Assembly. There were four representatives from Ladakh in the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. The BJP-led Centre assured the delegation from Ladakh in

December last year that it was committed to fast-tracking the development of the Union Territory and meeting the aspirations of the people in the region. The assurance was given at a meeting held with the HPC for Ladakh. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has formed the HPC for Ladakh under Rai's chairmanship with a mandate to

discuss the measures needed to be taken to protect the region's unique culture and language, taking into consideration its geographical location and strategic importance. The HPC has also been formed for the protection of land and employment, measures for inclusive development and employment generation in the region, measures related to the empowerment of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs) of Leh and Kargil and constitutional safeguards that could be provided to ensure the measures and protection as mentioned above. Several organisations of Ladakh were demanding a separate Union Territory for the region for decades and the demand was fulfilled on August 5, 2019. The KDA and the ABL, however, in the recent past protested at different locations, including New Delhi, Jammu and Ladakh, highlighting the four demands.

Modi introduced multi-dimensional disaster management plan: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has introduced a multi-dimensional disaster management plan and under this vision, the government raised prompt response forces and developed early warning systems that helped save millions of lives, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Monday. He also said to build a disaster-resilient country, the prime minister has adopted a zero-casualty approach in India's response to calamities and the disaster response teams now operate as fully professional forces driven by the goal of securing every life.

"PM @narendramodi Ji introduced a multi-dimensional Disaster Management Plan. Under this vision, the Modi govt raised prompt response forces and developed vigilant early warning systems leading to saving millions of lives," he posted on 'X' with the hashtag "Disaster Resilient Bharat". The home minister said powered by the visionary leadership of Modi, the country today can tackle any disaster and due to the government's 'Mission Zero Casualty', even the devastating force of the Cyclone Biparjoy could not take any life. The cyclone hit Gujarat in June last year. "PM @narendramodi Ji harnessed the power of Bharat's youths to build a disaster-resilient nation.

IAF team Sarang set to enthral spectators at Singapore Airshow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Sarang helicopter display team of the IAF is all set to enthral the spectators and visitors to the prestigious Singapore Airshow scheduled to commence there from Tuesday, IAF officials said here on Monday. Giving details, they said after arriving at Singapore on February 12, the Sarang team flying indigenously designed and manufactured Dhruv advanced light helicopters (ALH) conducted its first practice display on Sunday. The team is operating from the Changi airbase of the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF). The Singapore Airshow is scheduled to commence on 20



February 2024. The airshow features a variety of display teams from all across the globe. The show also features leading aircraft and system manufacturers and operators showcasing their products. The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), manufacturer Advanced Light Helicopter (Dhruv), which the Sarang team operates, is featuring in the show for the very first time. However, the first inter-

national display for the Sarang team also happened to be at Singapore for the Asian Aerospace Airshow at Changi Exhibition Center in 2004. The Sarang team is performing a four helicopter display for the audience at the Singapore Airshow this year. The display is designed to highlight the ALH Dhruv's agility and manoeuvrability, as well as the high degree of skills of the IAF pilots flying these machines. The indigenously manufactured ALH and its advanced variants are operated by all the military services of India. The successful induction and operational utilisation of this platform is one of the glowing success stories of self-reliance (Atmanirbharta) in the defence sector.

NE at centre of Modi Government development agenda, says Thakur

Union Minister Anurag Thakur on Monday said that the North Eastern region has been at the centre of developmental activities for the Narendra Modi-led government.



“When we talk about ‘astha lakshmi’, we mean our eight North Eastern states. These eight states are very important for the Modi government,” he told reporters after inauguration of a revamped Regional News Unit of Doodardshan Assam here.

overtime to promote culture and heritage of the region, improve communication network, establish new hospitals and educational institutions. On the NE states, including Assam, hosting the Khelo India University Games, which will have its formal inauguration later in the day in the presence of Thakur, he lauded the power of the region in the sporting arena.

Rajasthan Congress MLA joins BJP Targets former party for snubbing Ram Temple consecration

PTI ■ JAIPUR

In a significant political development, Mahendra Singh Malviya — a four-time Congress MLA and senior leader from Rajasthan's tribal belt — on Monday joined the BJP, saying he sought development for his region and targeting the Congress leadership for refusing to attend the Ram temple consecration ceremony.



leadership will come up in the region, he said. Malviya, who is also a former MP, reached the BJP's state headquarters where he was welcomed by the party's Rajasthan in-charge Arun Singh, state unit chief CP Joshi and other leaders.

world is watching,” he told reporters before a joint press conference at the party office. Malviya, who represented the Bagidora seat in Banswara district, said he was joining the BJP for the development of Vadag region.

740 MLAs, MPs joined BJP in past 10 years, claims JMM

PTI ■ RANCHI

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) on Monday claimed that over the past 10 years, as many as 740 MLAs and MPs have joined the BJP against whom the saffron party had directly or indirectly leveled allegations of corruption.



Taking further dig at the BJP, Bhattacharya said the saffron party had once given slogan of Congress Mukht Bharat and now it is Congress Yukt BJP. “The BJP has adopted the adage ‘either my way or highway’ and Jharkhand is the best example for that. They (BJP) said tribal respect is utmost priority for them but they do not want tribal chief minister. If there is a tribal CM, his place will be in jail,” Bhattacharya said.

Kerala Governor confronts SFI activists holding black flag protests

PTI ■ KANNUR (KERALA)

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan on Monday again stepped out of his vehicle and confronted the activists of the Students Federation of India (SFI) who waved black flags at his convoy at Mattannur town in this district.

“Come...Come...” he told the protesters who were raising slogans against him. Though the police and his security personnel tried to pacify him, Governor Khan was not willing to budge, causing tense moments. Later, his staff and security personnel calmed him down following which Khan got into the vehicle.

APPENDIX IV-A Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property. E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

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PUBLIC NOTICE. My client Mr. Mahkar Bhatti S/o Late Sh. Barraj Bhatti is the owner of built up property having property area measuring 200 sq. yds. 167.22 sq. mtrs. out of Kharsa no. 360m. situated in the area of Shadara Pargana Dadi Tehsil & Distt. Gautam Buch Nagar executed by Mrs. Dhanpal Devi Registered Gift Deed Regd no. 3135 dated 01.02.2024. SR-Sadar G.No.16 the above mentioned property is going to be mortgaged with Fed Bank Financial Services Limited. If any person/bank/financial institution having any claim/right, lien, any objection whatsoever in regard to the undersigned/adv. Vishal Mehra, E-7/3, Karkardoma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under the jurisdiction of registered advt. within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived. Adv. Vishal Mehra, E-7/3, Karkardoma Court, Delhi-110092, Mobile no. 9811215181

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Mahabharat 2.0

LS polls a battle between Modi's development agenda and INDIA bloc's dynastic corruption, says Shah

Echoes of the ancient Mahabharat have begun to reverberate as the nation approaches the general elections. The recent statements by Home Minister Amit Shah, the BJP's chief poll strategist, have delineated contrasting narratives between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of development and the alleged corruption within INDIA, the Opposition alliance. Shah recently likened the current political scenario to the epic Mahabharat, where virtue clashes with vice and honesty with deceit. He positioned Modi as the modern-day Arjun, leading a crusade for progress and national unity, while contrasting the INDIA bloc as a conglomeration of seven dynastic parties (among others) embroiled in the quagmire of corruption. Central to Shah's narrative is Modi steering the nation towards a promising future; the BJP has already championed initiatives aimed at economic growth, infrastructure development and social welfare, presenting India as a global powerhouse. However, Shah's portrayal of the Opposition bloc is in stark contrast: Allegations of corruption, nepotism and governance failure cast a shadow over the credibility and integrity of these parties. Shah's narrative underscores the moral dichotomy between Modi's righteous leadership and the Opposition's purported moral bankruptcy. The juxtaposition of Modi's developmental agenda with the perceived shortcomings of the INDIA bloc sets the stage for a high-stakes political showdown.

Beyond pure rhetoric, however, lies the complex reality of Indian democracy where power dynamics, socio-economic disparities and regional identities intersect to shape the electoral landscape. However, by its own doing, the INDIA bloc is an imploding edifice and it is getting tattered each passing day. The NCP has split in Maharashtra, the AAP has said no to any truck with the Congress in Punjab and literally mocked the 'grand old party' in the Capital by making it a single-seat offer. The blow-hot, blow-cold relationship between the Congress and the ruling TMC, especially after the Sandeshkhali shame hit the headlines, means that Mamata Banerjee would not accommodate the former in Bengal though Rahul Gandhi insists otherwise. While Modi's leadership enjoys widespread support, the Opposition's critique of his policies and governance should not be written off yet. There can be no two opinions about a politician praising his leader sky high but tarring the entire Opposition with the same black brush is not a pertinent thing to do in politics. Moreover, the portrayal of the Opposition as a monolithic entity driven solely by dynastic ambitions oversimplifies the diverse tapestry of Indian politics. As voters weigh competing visions, they are confronted with choices that echo the timeless dilemma of choosing the right set of leaders. Let us face it: The Lok Sabha elections are not a battle of right versus wrong, but the outcome will definitely determine the trajectory and destiny of the nation.

PICTALK



Women carry statues of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on a procession to celebrate his birth anniversary, in Nagpur

The implications of the Supreme Court ruling

As the ruling BJP and other parties grapple with the fallout of the Supreme Court ruling on Electoral Bonds, it may have far-reaching implications for Indian democracy



KALYANI SHANKAR

Indian elections are intricate and complex events that involve millions of voters and multiple political parties. These parties rely heavily on contributions from individuals and corporations to finance their campaigns, as funding is crucial. A lot of black money also circulates during elections. When Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India in 2014, he promised to prevent using illegal money in politics. Three years later, in 2017, he introduced Electoral Bonds that he claimed would increase transparency in political funding. However, some people challenged the secrecy clause and violation of fundamental rights in Court. Recently, the Supreme Court declared anonymous political donations to be invalid. This decision could make it difficult for their campaigns before the 2024 elections.

The Apex Court ruled that "Electoral Bonds" violate citizens' right to access Government information and violate Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. "Information about the funding of political parties is essential for effectively exercising the choice of voting," Chief Justice Chandrachud stressed, emphasizing the importance of open governance. The Government-owned State Bank of India has been ordered to stop issuing these bonds and provide details to the Election Commission of India. A group of five judges made this decision.

This is not good news for most parties, particularly the ruling BJP. Besides the BJP, some other political parties also benefited from the bonds. Judges examined whether the Electoral Bond scheme broke constitutional rules, stopped voters from getting vital information, allowed secret donations while protecting donors' privacy, and threatened democratic processes. Previously, political parties were required to disclose the identities of donors who contributed more than 20,000 rupees. However, electoral bonds allow political parties to report the money received without revealing the donors' identities. These bonds have a range of 1,000 to 10 million rupees.



People must know if political funding is transparent or not. One of the main criticisms is that it's hard to trace where the money comes from when buying these bonds, making it challenging to identify the source of the funds. According to recent ADR data, from 2017 and 2022, the total amount donated by corporations during this period was ₹3,299.85 crore. The BJP received the most significant share of this amount, with a total of ₹3,299.85. The Congress party received ₹406.45 crore, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) received ₹109.5 crore, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) received ₹29.1 crore, and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) received ₹49.7 crore through Electoral Bonds. ADR's report claims that withholding information about political contributions is unreasonable. Taxpayers should know where political parties get their funding. The lack of transparency raises accountability questions. Taxpayers' money is spent printing bonds, and SBI profits from their sales. It claims that taxpayers have the right to know where political parties get their funding. The need for more trans-



IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD HONOUR THE HIGHEST COURT'S RULING, UNLIKE ON EARLIER OCCASIONS. THE COURT HAS DELIVERED ITS VERDICT, AND NOW IT MUST BE PUT INTO ACTION

parency raises doubts about accountability. Taxpayers' money is used to print bonds, and SBI profits from their sale are deemed unfair. The public and opposition parties must be aware of the source of these donations, although the Government can access donor details from SBI. In Parliament, the Government disregarded warnings from major central agencies and opposition Members of Parliament and launched the Electoral Bond Scheme. The Bonds bill was passed as a money bill. Earlier, the Ministry of Law emphasised that the bond scheme should comply with the Representation of Peoples Act 1951. The ECI also opposed it. The Election Commission has registered 2,858 political parties, but only a tiny percentage, just 2.17%, are currently recognised. Some parties may never participate in elections, while others may be involved in money laundering activities. During the 2019 elections, political parties received a record-breaking amount of ₹2,760.20 crore in anonymous donations through Electoral Bonds. This was the highest amount received in 2017-18 and 2018-19. From 2017-18 to 2020-21, 19 political parties redeemed

Electoral Bonds worth approximately ₹6.5 thousand crores. The spending on the last six Lok Sabha elections increased almost six-fold, from ₹9,000 to over ₹55,000 crore in 2019. From 2018 to March 2022, the BJP received 57% of donations, while Congress only got 10%. It is expected that the Government would honour the highest Court's ruling, unlike on earlier occasions. The Court has delivered its verdict, and now it must be put into action. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has reservations about donor confidentiality and retrospective disclosure. They claim that the court order will not affect their chances in the upcoming April-May elections as they aim to secure a third term for PM Modi. To prevent the influence of money in elections in the future, we need regulations for donations, spending limits, public funding, and disclosure. The Government is exploring options for Electoral reform. We have many reports that can help us make better decisions, so we need to look at them again. We must make changes to improve the election system. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CHALLENGES AT WTO MEETING

Sir — The upcoming WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi from 26 to 29 February 2024 presents notable hurdles for India. Primary concerns involve securing a lasting solution for public stockholding in food security, resisting e-commerce rule negotiations, and opposing the intertwining of trade with non-trade issues like labour and the environment. India seeks a balanced approach to defensive and offensive interests, highlighting multilateralism, inclusiveness, and development principles at the WTO.

To navigate these challenges, India can strategically form alliances with groups such as the G33, African Group, and BRICS, fostering a unified stance for increased negotiating leverage. Making concessions, like flexibility in agriculture policies or limited involvement in e-commerce discussions, could facilitate compromise. Additionally, India can emphasise the developmental aspects of its trade policies, aligning them with the WTO's goals and stressing their vital role in economic and social development, all while addressing global trade imbalances.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

THRILLING FINISHES AT RANJI TROPHY

Sir — The current edition of the Ranji Trophy has produced some thrilling finishes, which rekindled nostalgic memories of the great encounters this prestigious Indian domestic cricket tournament witnessed in the past. The Ranji Trophy gave cricket a pan-India impetus, and it is the most coveted one in Indian domestic cricket.

Ever since its inception in 1934, this popular and prestigious tournament has seen several nail-biting encounters and countless sterling performances by star Indian players. With a record 41 wins, Mumbai has dominated the circuit like no other team. Ranji Trophy has been instrumental in building the castle of Indian cricket, on which the laurels of several great names of Indian cricket rest.

And the Jnanpith award goes to...



Celebrated Urdu poet and Bollywood director Gulzar and Sanskrit scholar Rambhadracharya have been selected for the 58th Jnanpith Awards. This award is considered the country's highest literary honour. Gulzar, or Sampooran Singh Kalra awarded for his notable contribution to Urdu literature. Previously he has also received many national and international accolades for his work in the film industry. Rambhadracharya becomes the second person from the Sanskrit genre to be awarded in the his-

tory of this prestigious award. He is one of the four Jagadguru Ramanadacharyas of the Ramananda sect and has held since 1982. He has written more than 200 books and texts including four epics. Awarding Rambhadracharya is one way to show respect to one of the world's oldest languages Sanskrit. Sanskrit is believed to be the mother of many Indian languages, which is now restricted to a very small number of people. According to many linguistic experts footprints of Sanskrit have been found in many languages across the globe like Latin. Revival of Sanskrit literature will help discover philosophical and scientific knowledge in this script and promote our Indic culture. Recognizing Sanskrit scholars and texts will encourage young Sanskrit scholars towards more literary works on this Vedic age language. So India should now recognize and award more to Indian classical languages.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

Whether it gets back the keen fan following that the tournament once enjoyed is something only time and the will of the BCCI can tell. But, if the longest format of cricket has to survive, then the cradle of Indian cricket cannot be overlooked. Like always, it will quietly keep supplying Indian cricket with talent.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

INDIA HAS WON WITH A GOOD MARGIN

Sir — A remarkable win by India by a huge margin in the third Test match in the ongoing Test series of Test matches between India and England will be remembered for making and breaking records. It was yet another scintillating performance by the Indians, which was their biggest-ever win in Test cricket in terms of runs where they improved upon their previous best of 372 win over New Zealand by a 434 runs margin. It was a harmonious blending of a brilliant double tonne by Yashvi Jaiswal with the ruthless counterattack of Ravindra Jadeja that demolished England's batting fortress

within no time as they were bundled out for 122 like a pack of cards. In the process, another milestone was reached when Yashvi Jaiswal also joined the elite club of Vinod Kambli and Virat Kohli, becoming the third Indian to score two consecutive doubles.

The stage was perfectly set for the Indian bowlers, as the cornerstone of India's second innings was very well laid by putting in an enormous total of 430 for 4 declared by Shubman Gill and Yashvi Jaiswal. Their batting prowess offered a perfect opportunity for Jadeja to weave his magic, which he grabbed with both hands by turning the tide in India's favour. Hopefully, this convincing victory will also boost the morale of the Indian cricket team, given how India scripted a resounding victory against England. The next two matches will be decisive, as India leads by a 2-1 margin.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Declare wildlife as national property

The primary culprit behind human-animal clashes is human-induced encroachments and habitat destruction

Animal conflicts have been on the rise in many parts of the country in recent times. The main culprit behind this is the human-induced encroachments and destruction of habitats. In the region surrounding the Western Ghats, especially in the Wayanad and Idukki regions in Kerala, there have been rampant animal attacks taking human lives in recent times. Every time when there is an attack from wild animals, conflict arises between the forest departments and the public. Most of the time, the forest department catches the wild animals and rehabilitates them in deep forests surrounding the state borders between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. If the forest department cannot protect either wildlife or human lives, what is the duty of forest officials? The culprit of all wildlife attacks is human beings themselves. We often forget the scientific fact that we are one among the thousands of other animals inhabiting this planet and act as if we are superior beings. All our developmental activities and policy decisions are made in an



anthropogenic-centric manner. In this, we have neither empathy nor concern towards our fellow species. This is the root cause of all animal conflicts. Animals often establish territories rather than borders in the human sense. These territories serve various purposes, such as mating, foraging, or defending resources. They may mark these territories through scent marking, vocalisations, or physical boundaries like fences or natural landmarks. While these territories may overlap with those of other animals, they're not always fixed or as clearly defined as human borders. Wildlife populations are dynamic and can fluctuate based on various factors such as food availability, climate conditions, and predation pressure. Designating fixed borders for them would not account for these fluctuations and could lead to mismatches between habitat

availability and population sizes. Attempting to designate fixed borders for them would be impractical and not align with their natural behaviour. When they roam in the forest, these animals never check whether they have crossed Kerala, Karnataka or Tamil Nadu. Instead of designating borders, conservation efforts focus on preserving and restoring habitat connectivity, protecting key wildlife corridors, and implementing measures to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts. The whole wildlife area should be protected as national property, and all state forest departments should function in unison. There should be frequent interactions between forest officials of neighbouring states for proper tracking of wild animal movements. They should also evolve mechanisms to provide enough food to animals in their range. They can construct artificial water reservoirs and food resources inside forests for wild animals to feed. When these animals get enough food materials, they may not venture into human dwellings. Involving local communities in conser-

vation efforts fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for wildlife protection. It also provides opportunities for alternative livelihoods, such as eco-tourism or sustainable agriculture, that are compatible with wildlife conservation. Protecting and preserving natural habitats ensures that wildlife populations have sufficient space and resources to thrive without direct competition or conflict with humans. The forest department should also implement early warning systems using technology such as sensor-triggered alarms, camera traps, or drones that can alert forest officials and local communities to the presence of elephants or tigers in the vicinity. Over the years, animals have evolved to a level where they know how to evade humans' protective measures, like electric fences, trenches, or deterrents like chilli smoke. Only a good researcher focusing on animal behaviour could evolve mechanisms to tackle this.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN

THE WISDOM OF DEADWOOD

We must learn to heed past lessons and cultivate a spirit of acceptance



RAVI VALLURI

Aeons ago, an old farmer lived in ancient China. He was once a brawny grazer and a propertied landlord. Because of certain misadventures, and fallacious decisions taken by him in his profession and personal life, the agriculturist fell into bad times.

A man of little use

One fine day, the son got so frustrated by the turn of events that he constructed a wood coffin. Virtually dragging the coffin over to the porch, he commanded his father to get into it. The nonchalant father climbed into the coffin and mentally prepared himself for the end. The son then dragged the coffin to the edge of a high cliff.

The prescient peasant

Just as he was about to drop the coffin, the son heard a light tapping on the lid from inside the coffin. Opening the coffin, he found his father wearing a beatific smile. Looking up to his son he ventured to add, "As I approach the end of my life, in all humility I wish you to do something at my bidding, which in your present mental state you may loath to do." "What is it?" the exasperated son questioned.

"Throw me over the cliff, as you have predetermined," said the father, "but save this sturdy wood coffin. You and your children might require it during trying times."

Learning the lessons

We must accept people and situations as they are. This is a percipient aphorism given to humanity by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in various Art of Living courses. Human beings are plumb judgmental by nature. By dwelling on this sutra, we can trigger efficacious emotions such as compassion and love in the mind.



Another noteworthy and pithy observation by Gurudev is that it is the very nature of human mind to cling on to the coattails of negativity. An individual would be eulogised by his kith and kin, friends, acquaintances, peers and colleagues for his karmic deeds, but one negative act is all that it takes for those very people to drop him like a hot potato.

Normally, antipathetic tendencies arise in individuals singularly on account of two cardinal factors. One, the prana or energy levels are woefully low and second, humans do not live in the present moment and are unable to accept people and situations as they are.

Sagacity of the Deadwood

Yet the father was perspicacious enough to impart wisdom to his son, urging him to think about the financial utility of the wood and how serviceable and handy it would be to the family during vexatious times.

The dead horse theory

Generation after generation of Dakotan Indians have passed on their wisdom, "When you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount." However, modern management and several corporate organisations advocate a different approach to extract work in such a case. It would be prescient to perhaps adopt a stronger whip or change the riders to garner extra mileage. One could even examine the true potential of the animal and set different goals altogether. It would be worthwhile to examine the conditions and mark their performances.

Thus, it is easy to jettison, but a wise one uses the wisdom of supposedly deadwood. This is what the son ought to have done with his father. "A family is a place where minds meet one another. If these minds love one another, the home will be as beautiful as a flower garden. But if these minds get out of harmony with one another it is like a storm that plays havoc with the garden," said Gautama Buddha.

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

Is Ukraine heading for partition?

Western involvement in conflicts like Ukraine serves as a stark reminder of waning efforts and increasing apathy amidst grim realities



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

American conservative journalist Tucker Carlson demonstrated somewhat compelling journalism in his recent interview with Russian President Putin, despite facing severe criticism from proponents of weapons and ideological bravado for Ukraine. In the face of such opposition, Carlson courageously unveiled the hypocrisy surrounding freedom of expression and other noble ethics purportedly championed by Western values, revealing them to be nothing but a hollow dream. During his discourse at the World Government Summit in Dubai this week, subsequent to his interview with Putin, Carlson astutely highlighted a crucial analogy, likening superpowers to responsible fathers. Just as a father intervenes to halt his children's squabbles, irrespective of the underlying causes, so too should a superpower prioritise peacekeeping over political posturing. Regrettably, the prevailing sentiment among US political elites, along with their most trusted friends in Europe, seems indifferent to advocating true power in the global arena.

Despite the contentious nature of the interview, it provided a vital platform for gaining authentic insight into the conflict in Ukraine from the Russian perspective. Putin, appearing rational and contemplative, articulated his stance with a measure of credibility. While some of his claims may have raised eyebrows, his demeanour served to underscore the legitimacy of his position to the American audience. Recognising his role as a patriot working in the interest of Russia, we must interpret his assertions within this context, recognising his commitment to his nation's welfare. However, as noted by geopolitical forecaster George Friedman, Putin's rhetoric serves a strategic purpose, aimed at influencing both domestic and international audiences. His communication strategy prioritises persuasion over absolute truth, leveraging carefully crafted narratives to exert pressure on other governments.

In the wake of Russia's military operations in Ukraine, it becomes increasingly evident that mere factional unification without a mutually acceptable mediator is a futile endeavour. The West, regrettably, has yet to grasp the underlying causes of the conflict, opting instead to pursue narrow political agendas. Resorting to sanctions as the primary tool against Putin reflects a myopic approach devoid of meaningful intervention strategies. Can we truly cite any instance where sanctions have catalysed positive change? On the contrary, they inflict untold suffering on innocent populations without addressing socio-economic issues, perpetuating human suffering rather than alleviating it.

In our recent history, we've witnessed the ebb and flow of nations, with empires rising and falling, borders shifting, and new countries emerging. Yet, amid this dynamic landscape, Ukraine finds itself ensnared in yet another tragic chapter—a story of sovereignty threatened and division looming. Two years after Vladimir Putin authorised a so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine, ostensibly for the purpose of "demilitarisation and denazification," we're witnessing the grim spectre of partition casting its shadow over this once-sovereign nation.

Nearly a fifth of Ukrainian territory now lies under Russian occupation, with pro-Russian enclaves clamouring for separation from the central government. What began



THE IMMINENT QUESTION FOR UKRAINE IS: HOW LONG CAN ZELENSKY EFFECTIVELY BALANCE THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND MILITARY DYNAMICS IN HIS FAVOUR, AND WHAT LIES ON THE HORIZON AFTER HIM?

as an ill-fated offensive has now unravelled into a labyrinth of internal discord, epitomised by the dismissal of esteemed General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, further deepening the nation's woes.

In an essay purportedly penned by a military background, now shoulders the weighty burden of command. His selection underscores the precarious balancing act he must navigate—treading through a landscape marred by political turbulence and grappling with dwindling resources that empower private interests. The imminent question for Ukraine is: How long can Zelensky effectively balance the administrative and military dynamics in his favour, and what lies on the horizon after him?

Meanwhile, on the front lines, the Russian advance continues unabated, with Ukrainian defences buckling under relentless pressure. Cities like Avdiivka teeter on the brink of collapse, their strategic significance magnifying the stakes of the conflict. Ukrainian soldiers, facing overwhelming odds, resort to desperate measures, booby-trapping their own strongholds before retreat. Ukraine's plight serves as a poignant reflection of conflicts that have entangled the West in recent decades, leaving behind indelible scars and haunting legacies for generations to come. Across continents and through the annals of time, from the sun-scorched deserts of Africa to the rugged terrain of the Balkans, the echoes of past conflicts reverberate, reminding us of the enduring human cost of war.

Consider, for instance, the partition of Sudan in 2011—a momentous event hailed as a triumph of self-determination. Yet, beneath the veneer of newfound independence lies a fractured reality, where South

Sudan remains ensnared in the throes of internal strife and humanitarian crises, while Sudan grapples with its own internal challenges. The legacy of the Second Sudanese Civil War, with its staggering death toll numbering in the millions, serves as a blunt illustration of the profound trauma inflicted by conflict.

Similarly, the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s unleashed a maelstrom of violence and upheaval, shattering lives and communities across the region. Beyond the well-documented conflicts in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo, lesser-known tragedies unfolded in the shadows—from the blood-soaked battlefields of Slovenia to the plight of ethnic minorities in newly formed states. Western powers intervened, offering aid and mediation, yet the toll of civilian casualties continued to mount, leaving behind a trail of shattered dreams and fractured identities. The partition of British India in 1947 stands as a graphic depiction of the human toll exacted by geopolitical upheaval. While much attention has been rightfully directed towards the massive violence and displacement that accompanied the creation of India and Pakistan, lesser-known are the stories of communities along the eastern borders, such as Bengal and Punjab, which also bore the brunt of turmoil and mass population movements. Influenced by Western colonial powers, particularly Britain, the partition was a product of colonial policies and decisions that left a devastating legacy of communal violence, resulting in hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of civilian deaths.

Similarly, the division of Korea into North and South following the Korean War exemplifies the enduring legacy of Western interference in Cold War dynamics. While the war and subsequent division are well-documented, lesser-discussed are the ongoing experiences of separated Korean families and the persistent efforts for reconciliation between the two Koreas. Western

powers, particularly the United States, played a pivotal role in shaping the division, with Cold War ideologies driving their support for South Korea. The conflict inflicted significant civilian casualties, with millions of lives lost amidst the crossfire of global power struggles. These instances expose the intricate interplay of geopolitics, colonial legacies, and the often overlooked internal dynamics that shape the destinies of nations. Amidst this complex web of influence, it's glaringly evident how interventions by the West frequently serve self-serving agendas, devoid of genuine comprehension of ground realities. Two years after the war, the spectre of Ukraine's division looms ever larger, threatening to plunge the nation into the abyss of full-scale civil wars.

The scars of history, compounded by external interventions and internal divisions, have brought Ukraine to the brink of fracture, leaving countless communities torn apart and countless lives hanging in the balance. The urgency of the hour cannot be overstated—finding a pathway to a ceasefire and initiating meaningful peace negotiations is not merely a moral imperative but a pressing necessity for the preservation of human lives and the safeguarding of Ukraine's future. Amidst this grim reality, the history of Western involvement in conflicts like Ukraine stands as a sobering reminder. While certain interest groups may pay lip service to Ukraine's plight, their underlying motives often prioritise self-interest over the genuine welfare of the Ukrainian people. In this pivotal juncture, the international community must transcend petty politics and self-serving agendas, uniting behind a shared commitment to peace and stability in Ukraine. When actions diverge from rhetoric, it's imperative to speak truth to power. Without authentic solidarity, trust remains elusive—an all too familiar sentiment in today's world.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist, Views are personal)

Exploitation of visa seekers by agents is rampant

Both the Indian and Italian Governments must address the systemic flaws in the visa application process

When the Internet era started in the 20th century in the world, the people of the world were very happy that with the advent of the Internet era, development would be faster because the work would be done quickly with the facility of computers and the Internet. It was understood that the Internet would prove to be a boon to the entire world. It is understood that everything has two aspects (one positive and the other negative). Keeping this fact in front, the internet facility also has two aspects.



JASWINDER SINGH KAINAUR

consultants and agents. Then those agents charge exorbitant amounts of money to get the job done. The second thing is that the employees of the concerned company/department are arbitrarily collecting thousands of rupees from the people through agents under the guise of the Internet. Even in this free facility provided by the government,

the agents succeeded in getting a thief-hole. Even when governments run such facilities, they are not thoroughly checked later. Through this article, I want to draw the attention of the Governments of India and Italy that if Indians want to go to Italy with any type of Italian visa (tourist visa, work visa, or family visa etc.) after the sponsor papers issued by the Italian government, An appointment has to be taken to deposit papers and pay the visa fee etc. at the Italian Embassy. Earlier the appointments were getting over the phone from Mumbai Centre. Thereafter, it was shifted to email. But these days, it is being taken from the website ([https://visa.vfsglobal.com/in/en/ita/book-an-appoint-](https://visa.vfsglobal.com/in/en/ita/book-an-appoint-ment)

ment). The work of visa paper collection & fee etc. has been awarded to VFS Global Services Pvt. Ltd Company by the Italian Embassy. On checking this website repeatedly, it shows that no slots are available at this moment; please keep checking the site regularly. Hence, educated men like us also cannot get appointments through this site and the validity of the sponsor papers is lost. If one contacts an agent/consultant during the validity of the sponsor papers is lost. If one contacts an agent/consultant during the validity of the sponsor papers is lost. If one contacts an agent/consultant during the validity of the sponsor papers is lost. If one contacts an agent/consultant during the validity of the sponsor papers is lost.



Stadium New Delhi, who demand a huge amount from the people to provide the appointments. Such agents have opened their shops in all the cities of India. It is worth considering that a computer and internet-literate person on repeated visits to the above website finds

that no slot (appointment time) is available, and keeps checking the site continuously. But, the agents are succeeding. It is important to mention here that under the rules of Italy, there is also a facility if the validity of one's sponsor papers is going to expire in 15 days, then at the

(VFS Italy) centre in Delhi. You can go and deposit your papers and visa fees etc. directly without any appointment. But, it is not that easy as a visa application form is also filled along with other documents, which not everyone can fill.

The help of an agent is also required to fill that form. Agents demand 5000 to 9000 rupees just for filling out a one-page form.

If someone goes to their centre in Delhi with their complete documents in the last 15 days, they ask for other documents from them which are not required according to the rules. In this way, the papers submitted directly in the last 15 days do not get a visa. It is written in the reply letter that the visa has been

refused due to the non-attachment of necessary documents. Then one has to take advice from an agent and then they say that the visa is denied only if the appointment does not get through them.

Finally, I would like to write that if the Italian Government wants to continue the process of making appointments on the Internet site instead of phone or email, then it should also give appointments to the common people so that the additional burden of the agent's money does not fall on the people. The governments of India and Italy need to pay attention to this issue.

(The writer is a renowned author and broadcaster, views are personal)

'Over 29k Palestinians killed in Israel-Hamas war

AP ■ RAFAH

More than 29,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, the territory's Health Ministry said on Monday, marking another grim milestone in the deadliest round of violence in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to continue the offensive until "total victory" against Hamas, raising fears that troops will soon move into the southernmost town of Rafah on the Egyptian border, where over half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought refuge from fighting elsewhere. The United States, Israel's top ally, says it is still working with mediators Egypt and Qatar to try to broker another cease-fire and hostage release agreement. But those efforts appear to have stalled in recent days, and Netanyahu angered Qatar, which has hosted Hamas leaders, by calling on it to pressure the militant group.

The Health Ministry said 107 bodies were brought to hospitals in the last 24 hours. That brings the total number of fatalities to 29,092 since the start of the war.

The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its records, but says around two-thirds of those killed were women and children. More than 69,000 Palestinians have been wounded, overwhelming the territory's hospitals, less than half of which are even partially functioning.

The Health Ministry is part of the Hamas-run government in Gaza but maintains detailed records of casualties. Its figures from previous wars in Gaza have largely matched those of UN agencies, independent experts and even Israel's own tallies.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel from Gaza on October 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage.

More than 100 captives were released during a week-long cease-fire in November in exchange for 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Militants still hold around 130, a fourth of them believed to be dead.

Israel responded to the

attack by launching one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history on the besieged enclave, which has been ruled by Hamas since 2007. Israel says it has killed over 10,000 Palestinian militants, without providing evidence. The military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames the high death toll on Hamas because the militant group fights in dense residential neighbourhoods. The military says 236 of its soldiers have been killed since the start of the ground offensive in late October. The war, which shows no sign of ending, has driven around 80 per cent of the Palestinians in Gaza from their homes and has left a quarter of the population starving, according to UN officials.

On Sunday, Benny Gantz, a retired general and a member of Netanyahu's three-man War Cabinet, warned that the offensive would expand to Rafah if the hostages are not freed by the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which is expected to begin around March 10. The month of dawn-to-dusk fasting is often a time of heightened tensions in the region.

Israel has said it is developing plans to evacuate civilians from Rafah, but it's not clear where they would go in the devastated territory, large areas of which have been flattened. Egypt has sealed the border and warned that any mass influx of Palestinians could threaten its decades-old peace treaty with Israel.

The United States says it is still pushing for a truce and hostage-release, and that it would veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire because it conflicts with those efforts. Hamas has said it won't release all of the remaining hostages until Israel ends the war and withdraws from Gaza. It is also demanding the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants.

Netanyahu has rejected those demands, calling them "delusional." In a speech before American Jewish leaders on Sunday, he said pressure should be applied on Qatar, which played a key role in mediating last year's cease-fire and hostage release deal. "Qatar can press Hamas as no one else can."

Palestine accuses Israel of apartheid

Diplomat asks UN court to declare its occupation illegal

AP ■ THE HAGUE

The Palestinian foreign minister on Monday accused Israel of apartheid and urged the United Nations' top court to declare that Israel's occupation of lands sought for a Palestinian state is illegal and must end immediately and unconditionally for any hope for a two-state future to survive. The remarks came at historic hearings into the legality of Israel's 57-year occupation. The case opened against the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas war, which immediately became a focal point of the day — even though the hearings were meant to centre on Israel's open-ended control over the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip and annexed east Jerusalem.

Palestinian Foreign Affairs Minister Riyad al-Maliki told the International Court of Justice that "2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, half of them children, are besieged and bombed, killed and maimed, starved and displaced." "More than 3.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank, including in Jerusalem, are subjected to colonisation of their territory and racist violence that enables it," he added.

International law expert Paul Reichler, representing the

Palestinians, told the court that the policies of Israel's government "are aligned to an unprecedented extent with the goals of the Israeli settler movement to expand long term control over the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in practice to further integrate those areas within the territory" of Israel.

The hearings follow a request by the UN General Assembly for a non-binding advisory opinion into Israel's policies in the occupied territories. Judges will likely take months to issue an opinion.

Israel's representatives were not scheduled to speak but submitted a five-page letter to the court last July that was published after Monday's hearing. In the letter, Israel said that the questions put to the court are prejudiced and "fail to recognise Israel's right and duty to protect its citizens," address Israeli security concerns or acknowledge Israel-Palestinians agreements to negotiate issues, including "the permanent status of the territory, security arrangements, settlements, and borders."

"While the request made to the Court seeks to portray it as such, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a cartoon narrative of villain and victim in

which there are no Israeli rights and no Palestinian obligations," it said. "Entertaining such a falsehood can only push the parties further apart rather than help create conditions to bring them closer together."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement on Monday that Israel does not recognise the legitimacy of the hearings at the International Court of Justice about Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories. "The discussion at The Hague is part of the Palestinian attempt to dictate the results of the political agreement without negotiations," he said. In court, al-Maliki cited the right to self-determination enshrined in the UN charter as he told judges that "for decades, the Palestinian people have been denied this right and have endured both colonialism and apartheid." The Palestinians argue that Israel, by annexing large swaths of occupied land, has violated the prohibition on territorial conquest and the Palestinians' right to self-determination, and has imposed a system of racial discrimination and apartheid. "This occupation is annexation and supremacist in nature," al-Maliki said and appealed to the court to uphold the Palestinian right to self-determination and

declare "that the Israeli occupation is illegal and must end immediately, totally and unconditionally."

After the hearing, al-Maliki said that the court's opinion could increase chances for peace. "This ruling could help both Palestinians and Israelis to finally live side by side in peace, mutual security and dignity," he told reporters.

An unprecedented 51 countries and three international organizations will address the court in the coming days.

Palestinians and leading rights groups argue that the occupation goes far beyond defensive measures. They say it has morphed into an apartheid system, bolstered by settlement building on occupied lands, that gives Palestinians second-class status and is designed to maintain Jewish hegemony from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Israel rejects any accusation of apartheid.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war.

The Palestinians seek all three areas for an independent state. Israel considers the West Bank to be disputed territory, whose future should be decided in negotiations.



The United Nations' highest court with presiding judge Nawaf Salam, left, opening historic hearings in The Hague, Netherlands, Monday. Six days of hearings opened Monday at the top United Nations court into the legality of Israel 57-year occupation of lands sought for a Palestinian state. AP/PTI

Attack by Houthi rebels damages Belize-flagged ship

AP ■ DUBAI

A missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels that damaged a Belize-flagged ship travelling through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait that connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden has forced the crew to abandon the ship, authorities said Monday. Another ship reportedly came under attack as well in the Gulf of Aden.

The Iran-backed Houthis also claimed they shot down an American MQ-9 Reaper drone, something not immediately acknowledged by US forces in the region. However, the Houthis have downed US drones before.

Meanwhile, the US military said it was conducting new airstrikes targeting the rebels, including one that targeted the first Houthi underwater drone seen since they began launching attacks on international shipping in November.

The ship targeted in the Houthi attack on Sunday reported sustaining damage after "an explosion in close proximity to the vessel," the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre reported.

"Military authorities report crew have abandoned the vessel," the UKMTO said. "Vessel at anchor and all crew are safe."

Houthi Brig Gen Yahya Saree issued a statement claiming the attack, saying the vessel was "now at risk of potentially sinking."

"The ship suffered catastrophic damages and came to a complete halt," Saree said. "During the operation, we made sure that the ship's crew exited safely." The private security firm Ambrey reported the British-registered, Lebanese-operated cargo ship had been on its way to Bulgaria after leaving Khorfakkan in the United Arab Emirates.

Ship-tracking data from MarineTraffic.com analysed by The Associated Press identified the vessel targeted as the Rubymar. Its Beirut-based manager could not be reached for comment. The Houthis

EU launches mission to protect ships from Houthis

Brussels (AP): The European Union has launched Monday a naval mission to help protect cargo ships in the Red Sea as attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen continue to threaten maritime traffic, hamper trade and drive up prices. Dubbed Aspidochelone, Greek for "shield," the mission will be run out of Larissa in central Greece — home to the Hellenic Air Force and a NATO headquarters — under the command of Greek Commodore Vasilios Griparis.

The Iranian-backed Houthis have waged a persistent campaign of drone and missile attacks on commercial ships over Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas which began in October.

However, the Yemen-based rebels have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade between Asia, the Middle East and Europe. In response, US and British forces have bombed multiple targets used by the Houthis.

Later also identified the ship as the Rubymar. Ambrey described the ship as being partially laden with cargo, but it wasn't immediately clear what it had been carrying. The ship had turned off its Automatic Identification System tracker while in the Persian Gulf early this month.

Later Monday, the UKMTO and Ambrey said a second vessel came under attack in the Gulf of Aden. Ambrey described the vessel as a Greek-flagged, US-owned bulk carrier bound for Aden, Yemen, from Argentina. Those details, combined with ship-tracking data, identified the vessel as the Sea Champion.

Tribal violence in PNG kills 26

AP ■ MELBOURNE

At least 26 combatants and bystanders were killed in a gunbattle between warring tribes in Papua New Guinea, police said Monday. A tribe, their allies and mercenaries were on their way to attack a neighboring tribe when they were ambushed Sunday in Enga province in the South Pacific nation's remote highlands, Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Acting Superintendent George Kakas said.

Police Commissioner David Manning later described the clash as a "gunbattle between warring tribes." An unconfirmed number of villagers also were killed. Police reinforcements were sent to the scene of the battle, Manning said. "At this point, it's not clear exactly how far we have moved into the conflict there,"

Manning told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "But the intent is to regain control or have a significant presence in that conflict area and then work...our way through our procedures in dealing with this type of incident."

Kakas initially said 53 combatants had died. But security forces later revised the death toll down to 26.

Bodies were collected from the battlefield, roads and the riverside, then loaded onto police trucks and taken to the hospital. Authorities were still counting "those who were shot, injured and ran off into the bushes," Kakas said.

Papua New Guinea is a diverse nation of 10 million mostly subsistence farmers speaking 800 languages. Internal security has become an increasing challenge for its government as China, the United States and Australia seek closer security ties to the

country in a strategically important part of the South Pacific.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his government was ready to assist Papua New Guinea, which is Australia's nearest neighbour and the largest single recipient of Australian foreign aid. "That is very disturbing the news that has come out of Papua New Guinea," Albanese said before the death toll was revised down.

"We remain available to provide whatever support we can in a practical way, of course, to help our friends in PNG," Albanese added. Albanese said Australia was already providing "considerable support" for Papua New Guinea and was helping train the country's police officers.

Tribal violence in the Enga region has intensified since elections in 2022 that maintained Prime Minister James

Marape's administration. Elections and accompanying allegations of cheating and process anomalies have always triggered violence throughout the country.

Enga Gov Peter Ipatas said there were warnings that tribal fighting was about to erupt.

"From a provincial perspective, we knew this fight was going to be on and we (alerted) the security forces last week to make sure they took appropriate action to ensure this didn't occur," Ipatas said.

Ipatas described the violence as a "very, very sad occasion for us in the province and it's a bad thing for the country." Scores of people have died in tribal fighting in the Enga region in the past year.

Port Moresby's Post-Courier newspaper has reported that high-powered firearms used in the recent fighting made it risky for police to enter the battlefields.

Ursula von der Leyen seeking 2nd term as head of EU's Commission

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Germany's Ursula von der Leyen will seek a second term as head of the European Union's powerful Commission in a move that could make her the most significant politician representing the bloc's 450 million citizens in a over a generation. Following five years of leading the 27-nation bloc through multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the first two years of Russia's war in Ukraine, the 65-year-old was put forward by her German Christian Democratic Union party and will only need a further rubber stamp when the party's European umbrella group meets early next month in Bucharest.

The party's leader, Friedrich Merz, said on Monday in Berlin that his German party "unanimously chose Ursula von der Leyen" to be the candidate to stay in her post. She also stands a good chance of extending her reign over the executive Commission since the Christian Democrat-dominated European People's Party is expected to remain the biggest in the legislature following the June 6-9 European elections. She flaunted her progressive credentials early on by pushing through a Green Deal that put



the bloc at the forefront in the global fight against climate change and amounted to a sea change in EU policy. However, with Europe's political mood shifting recently to the right, von der Leyen acknowledged the changes.

"The world is totally different compared to five years ago," she said in her acceptance speech. She was among the most outspoken defenders of Israel since the war erupted with the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel — even as international outrage over the Israeli offensive is growing. Her green credentials also have been sorely dented as she appeared to side with farmers during the past weeks of relentless farming protests throughout the bloc. There has been no wavering though when it comes

to Ukraine, and she has staunchly defended President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as his nation faces two years of Russia's aggression. Beyond pushing for sanctions against Russia, she has equally worked to get financial aid to Kyiv and fought to open EU membership talks with Ukraine.

Overall, it has turned the physician and mother of seven into the most prominent EU Commission president since Frenchman Jacques Delors during the 1990s.

Even if the EPP emerges from the elections as the biggest party, it does not give her an automatic right to extend her posting. The leaders of the 27 member states must approve her, and it is part of a mix of decisions on EU top post, from EU foreign policy chief to parliament president.

After protracted haggling over such posts five years ago, von der Leyen herself came out of the blue to claim the position after receiving critical support of French President Emmanuel Macron. With the continuing war in Ukraine and the possible election of Donald Trump as US president in November, EU leaders will unlikely be prone to experiment too much with the helm of the Commission.

UK watchdog opens probe over Sunak's TV appearance

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's independent media watchdog on Monday opened an investigation into whether impartiality rules were broken during British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's recent television appearance after receiving around 500 complaints from viewers. The Office of Communications (Ofcom) said its probe covers the 'People's Forum: The Prime Minister' programme which aired on 'GB News' last Monday. Under its Broadcasting Code, Ofcom requires a wide range of views to be expressed to ensure impartiality within a political setting. "We have received around 500 complaints about the programme which aired on 'GB News' on 12 February 2024," an Ofcom statement said.

"We are investigating under Rules 5.11 and 5.12 of the Broadcasting Code, which provides additional due impartiality requirements for programmes dealing with matters of major political controversy and major matters relating to current public policy."

Ramaswami is first Gen Z Indian-American running for Georgia Senate seat

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Ashwin Ramaswami has become the first Indian-American from Gen Z to run for a state or federal legislature in the US, indicative of a new breed of young politicians emerging from the community. Ramaswami's parents immigrated to the US from Tamil Nadu in 1990. Generation Z (also known as Zoomers) encompasses those born between 1997 and 2012. "I'm running for (Georgia) State Senate in order to give back to my community. I want to make sure that everyone has the same opportunities that I had growing up," Ramaswami, 24, told PTI in a recent interview.

"I want to make sure we have a new voice, people who are young, who come from unconventional backgrounds in politics because it's really important that we have people



who represent us, not just people who can afford to do it," he said.

A second-generation Indian-American who has built a career in software engineering, election security, and technology law and policy research, is running in the Democratic party for State Senate in District 48 of Georgia. Ramaswami is a Democrat and he is hoping to replace incumbent Republican Shawn Still, who was indicted with former President Donald

Trump for the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol.

If elected, he would be the first Gen Z State Senator in Georgia and the only Georgia state legislator with both a computer science and a law degree. By doing so, he would also break barriers as the first Indian American in the Georgia State legislature.

"Everyone should make sure they have access to a quality education. We want to make sure people have access to jobs and the economy, entrepreneurship and also access to healthcare, reproductive rights and all these issues that matter to us. That's why I've been running," Ramaswami said in response to a question. His parents are both from the IT sector. "My parents both came to the US in the 1990s. They both came from Tamil Nadu. My mom is from Chennai, my dad is from Coimbatore."

TikTok faces EU scrutiny

London: The European Union said on Monday it is investigating whether TikTok has broken the bloc's strict new digital rules for cleaning up social media and keeping internet users safe. The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, said it has "opened formal proceedings to assess" whether TikTok has breached the Digital Services Act, which took effect last year. The DSA is a sweeping set of regulations designed to keep internet users safe online, including requirements to make it easier to flag harmful or illegal content like hate speech, give users alternatives to algorithmic recommendations and ban ads targeted at children. The EU is focusing on whether TikTok is doing enough to curb "systemic risks" that might stimulate "behavioral addictions." AP

S Korea doctors submit resignations in spat with govt

Seoul (AP): Trainee doctors in South Korea began submitting their resignations en masse Monday in protest of a government medical policy, causing reported delays in surgeries and other treatments at hospitals. Doctors' groups and the government have been squabbling over a government plan to increase the number of medical school admissions by 2,000, starting from next year. Health authorities say it's urgent to have more doctors considering South Korea's fast-aging pop-

ulation. They say the number of doctors in the country relative to the size of the population is among the lowest in the developed world.

But doctors' groups say the government must use available resources to raise medical fees and resolve other problems first. Some doctors say raising admissions could result in unnecessary medical treatments because of a competition among doctors and could burden the public health insurance plan. On Monday, trainee doctors at the

country's five major hospitals began submitting letters of resignation before formally walking off their jobs on Tuesday. Their association, the Korea Intern Resident Association, decided on the collective action during an emergency meeting last week.

Seoul's Asan Medical Centre said a number of interns and resident doctors there submitted resignations and that it was trying to reschedule surgeries and other treatments for some patients. Seoul's Severance Hospital

said some of its trainee doctors also handed in resignations and suggested it could rearrange surgery schedules as well. South Korean media reported that hundreds of trainee doctors at other hospitals also submitted resignations. Reports said some hospitals cancelled or put off planned cancer surgeries, child births and other procedures in which trainees assist senior doctors. No major troubles in the country's medical services were immediately reported.

Navalny's widow vows to continue fight against Kremlin

AP ■ MOSCOW

The widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny vowed on Monday to continue his fight against the Kremlin while authorities denied his mother access to a morgue where his body is believed to be held after his death last week at an Arctic penal colony.

Fighting back tears, Yulia Navalnaya accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of killing her husband in the remote prison and vowed to punish him and other alleged perpetrators. She also slammed the authorities, saying they were refusing to hand over the body to Navalny's mother to cover-up his alleged killing, and referred to his alleged earlier poisoning with a Soviet-era Novichok nerve agent.

Russian authorities said that the cause for Navalny's death Friday at age 47 is still unknown. He had been jailed since January 2021, when he

returned to Moscow after recuperating in Germany from poisoning with a Novichok-type nerve agent that he blamed on the Kremlin. He received three prison terms since his arrest, on a number of charges he has rejected as politically motivated. "They are cowardly and meanly hiding his body, refusing to give it to his mother and lying miserably while waiting for the trace of another Putin's Novichok to disappear," Navalnaya said.

She urged Russians to rally behind her "to share not only the grief and endless pain that has enveloped and gripped us, but also my rage."

"Rage, anger, hatred for those who dared to kill our future," she said. "I address you with the words of Alexei, in which I really believe: It's not a shame to do little, it's a shame to do nothing. It's a shame to let yourself be intimidated."

Navalnaya urged all those who mourn Navalny to unite to fulfil his dream of a "beautiful

Russia of the future" so that "the unimaginable sacrifice" he made would not have been in vain. "The main thing that we can do for Alexei and ourselves is to keep fighting," she said. "Stronger, more fiercely and valiantly than we did before. We all need to get together in one strong fist and strike that mad regime, Putin, his cronies, bandits in epaulettes, thieves and killers who mutilated our country."

Navalny's spokesperson Kira Yarmysh said that the Investigative Committee, the country's top criminal investigation agency, informed Lyudmila Navalnaya that the cause of her son's death remained unknown and that the official probe had been extended. "They lie, buy time for themselves and do not even hide it," Yarmysh posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Many world leaders blamed President Vladimir Putin and his government for Navalny's death. On Monday,



EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc was mulling sanctions against Russia. He noted the responsibility for Navalny's death lies with "Putin himself, but we can go down to the institutional structure of the penitentiary system in Russia," to track down those involved and impose asset freezes and travel bans.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov slammed what he described as "boorish" and

"inadmissible" statements by Western leaders who held Putin responsible for Navalny's death. "Those statements can't do any harm to the head of our state, but they certainly aren't becoming for those who make them," Peskov said in a call with reporters.

Yarmysh said that Navalny's 69-year-old mother and his lawyers were not allowed into the morgue in Salekhard on Monday morning. The staff didn't answer

when they asked if the body was there, Yarmysh said. Asked when Navalny's body could be handed over to his family, Peskov responded that the Kremlin was not involved in those proceedings, adding that the official probe was continuing in line with the law.

Navalny's ally Ivan Zhdanov denounced the Russian authorities as "jackeys and liars." "It's clear what they are doing now — covering up the traces of their crime," he wrote on Monday.

Navalny's death has deprived the Russian opposition of its most well-known and inspiring politician less than a month before an election that is all but certain to give Putin another six years in power. It dealt a devastating blow to many Russians, who had seen Navalny as a hope for political change following his unrelenting criticism of the Kremlin.

Nearly 300 people have been detained by police in Russia as they streamed to ad-

hoc memorials and monuments to victims of political repression with flowers and candles to pay tribute to Navalny, according to OVD-Info, a group that monitors political arrests. The US and British ambassadors also mourned Navalny's death at a memorial in Moscow.

Authorities cordoned off some of the memorials across the country and were removing flowers at night, but they kept appearing. Over 50,000 people have submitted requests to the Russian government asking for Navalny's remains to be handed over to his relatives, OVD-Info said.

Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service reported that Navalny felt sick after a walk on Friday and became unconscious at the penal colony in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 kilometres north-east of Moscow. An ambulance arrived, but he couldn't be revived, the service said, adding

that the cause of death is still "being established." Some Russian media claimed that Navalny's body bore bruises, possibly caused by medical attempts to resuscitate him. The reports couldn't be independently confirmed.

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."

In Brussels on Monday, Navalny's widow met with European Union foreign ministers and other EU officials who were considering sanctions against Moscow over Navalny's death.

"By killing Alexei, Putin killed half of me, half of my heart and half of my soul," Navalnaya said in a video statement. "But I still have the other half, and it tells me that I have no right to give up. I will continue the work of Alexei Navalny."

'Govt will scuttle illegal efforts to impeach Muizzu'

PTI ■ MALE

Accusing the Opposition of trying to illegally overthrow Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu's government in less than 100 days in power, a senior minister has said the administration would not allow them to do so unless they cut "every vein in our throats".

The comments by Minister of Islamic Affairs Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed came on Sunday as he was accompanying Muizzu on his first trip to Addu, the second-largest urban area in the Maldives in terms of population. Pro-China Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year.

Saeed alleged that the government is facing challenges from inside and out, and were being bombarded with the relentless spread of misinformation and baseless rumours, The Edition reported. He said that it is the responsibility of the Opposition to hold the government accountable.

However, he said, it is not part of holding a government accountable to attempt to create obstacles for and overthrow a government elected by the people just as it has begun, in a manner that will ultimately cause the most harm to the people themselves.

"They have turned this into a game, it is of great concern that they have gone to the point where they are discussing impeaching a President elected by the people of this country," he said. "They cannot illegally overthrow this government, God willing. They cannot turn this into a sort of twisted game and impeach the President, God willing. They can only do so by first cutting every nerve in our throats, God willing. There is no other way of achieving that," Shaheem asserted.

The country's main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which holds a majority in Parliament, last

month wanted to submit a motion to impeach President Muizzu. However, Muizzu got a respite after the Supreme Court earlier this month ordered the suspension of a recent amendment to Parliament's standing orders that had made it easier for the opposition lawmakers to impeach the president and the vice president.

On January 24, calling India the "most long-standing ally," the MDP and the Democrats expressed concern about the Muizzu government's "anti-India stance."

Meanwhile, the MDP seemed unimpressed with Muizzu's Presidential Address and claimed that most of the points made in President Muizzu's speech were things that had already been initiated by the previous government led by the party.

On the President's estimation that 2 billion tourists will be welcomed to the country this year, MDP's Parliamentary Group (PG) Leader Mohamed Rasheed Hussain dismissed this administration's role in the achievement. He claimed that this increase in tourist arrivals is not the result of the three months the Muizzu administration has been in power, but rather the cumulative work of the previous government throughout and since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It was the MDP government that signed agreements to establish the National Health Laboratory and provide resources to ascertain the quality of medication. Drone delivery of medication was also introduced by the MDP government," he said.

Hussain alleged that although the Constitution stipulates that the status of the country must be clearly and truthfully shared in the Presidential Address, President Muizzu had not done so. He alleged that the President had given false information and confusing rhetoric regarding events of the recent past and the economic status.

Japan hosts conference to support Ukraine reconstruction

AP ■ TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday pledged his country's long-term engagement in Ukraine's reconstruction, calling it a future investment, as Japan stressed its commitment to supporting the war-torn country ahead of the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion.

In his keynote speech at a conference Japan co-organized with the Ukrainian government and business organizations, Kishida said Japanese public and private cooperation will be a long-term partnership based on inclusivity, humanitarianism as well as technology and knowledge. More than 50 cooperation deals were signed by Japanese and Ukrainian government agencies and companies.

Kishida stressed the importance of investment across industries for the future of that country's development and ensuring that the support caters to Ukraine's needs. Support for Ukraine's reconstruction is about "investing in the future," Kishida said. "The war in Ukraine is still going on at this very moment and the situation is not easy. The promotion of economic reconstruction, however, is not only an investment for the future of Ukraine but also investing in Japan

and the whole globe."

Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, who heads headed his country's delegation of more than 100 people, expressed thanks for the encouragement and said that "today is the new start of cooperation between the two countries." He said "Ukraine is not just rebuilding, we are generating new rules of the game, new approaches," he said. All eyes are on Ukraine, and "dictators and potential invaders" are also turning their eyes to see how Russia's violation of the international law is seen and how the world will react to it.

About 300 people and 80 companies are to attend from the two countries, Japanese officials have said. The Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction is co-organized by the Japanese and Ukrainian governments, Japan's powerful business organization Keidanren, and Japan External Trade Organization, or JETRO.

The two sides issued a joint communique, stating Japan's long-term support in helping Ukraine achieve economic stability. The two countries also noted the importance of maintaining tough sanctions against Russia. Japan also announced the start of talks toward revising a bilateral investment



Ukraine PM Denys Shmyhal and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida attend a memorandum of a cooperation exchange ceremony during the Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction at Keidanren Kaikan building in Tokyo on Monday

agreement and easing of travel restrictions for Japanese business visitors to Ukraine. Japan hopes the conference will build momentum for international support for Ukraine as the war drags on and attention has diverted to the

Gaza situation. The conference is largely about reconstruction and investment in Ukraine, but it's also about Japan's national security.

Kishida repeatedly said that "Ukraine today could be East Asia

tomorrow," and it is crucial for Japan to advocate its objection to Russia's invasion and to the one-sided change of the status quo by force. Its support for Ukraine comes amid fear of China's increasingly assertive military actions in the region. "It is extremely important that we demonstrate our solidarity to Ukraine in our uniquely Japanese way," Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told reporters Friday.

Japan's USD 12.1 billion contribution to Ukraine over the past two years is mostly financial and humanitarian as its military equipment provisions are limited to non-lethal weapons, and much smaller compared to USD 111 billion the United States has provided in weapons, equipment, humanitarian assistance.

Japan's government has chosen seven target areas — including removal of mines and debris; improvement of humanitarian and living conditions; farming; biochemical manufacturing; digital and information industry; infrastructure in power and transportation sectors; and anti-corruption measures. Japan, in cooperation with other Group of Seven members, hopes to link the Tokyo conference to a separate Ukraine reconstruction conference to be held in Germany in June.

PTI says independent candidates will join Sunni Ittehad Council

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Reversing its earlier decision, jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf on Monday said that the party-backed independent candidates, who won the February 8 elections, will join the rightwing Sunni Ittehad Council. The party had earlier decided that its members elected to the National Assembly and the Punjab provincial assembly would join Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen (MWM), a Shia party, while those elected in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) would become part of Jamaati-e-Islami (JI), which is a hardline Sunni religious party.

The Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) is an alliance of Islamic political and religious parties in the Muslim-majority country which represents followers of the school of Sunni Islam.

"Our candidates in the

National Assembly, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies will join the Sunni Ittehad Council," Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan said while addressing a press conference along with leaders of the MWM and SIC.

PTI Secretary General Omar Ayub Khan, Information Secretary Rauf Hasan and MWM chief Allama Raja Nasir Abbas and Chairman of SIC Sahibzada Hamid Raza were present. "Our candidates have submitted their affidavits with us and with their consent today we are announcing that PTI-supported independents are joining the Sunni Ittehad Council," he added.

The winning independent candidates had to join a party within 3 days after the notification of the results of the February 8 elections.

Gohar also said the PTI made a "formal agreement"

with the Sunni Ittehad Council and the same would be submitted to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) with a request to allocate the reserved seats according to the party strength and under law. "Therefore, to protect our reserved seats and provide the cover to our members, we have reached a formal agreement under which all our candidates have joined the party and we will present this documentation before the ECP," he said. PTI candidate for the prime minister's post, Omer Ayub Khan, said on the occasion that the decision to join a political party was taken to get the reserved seats. "This is because the quota of reserved seats lies with political parties. Coming together with the Sunni Ittehad Council would increase the PTI's strength in the National Assembly," he said, adding the party would form a government in the centre and

two provinces. He said the priority of the party was to secure the release of incarcerated leaders like Imran Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Parvez Elahi and others. SIC chief Raza and MWM leader Abbas in their remarks pledged support to the PTI.

With the PTI's decision to join a party, which is registered with the ECP, the country moved a step forward to the convening of the National Assembly or the lower house, for its maiden session which should be held by February 29.

Though independent candidates backed by the party won the maximum number of seats in Parliament, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) - have announced that they will form a coalition government after the elections resulted in a hung Parliament.

Thai ex-PM freed from detention, may still face a royal defamation charge

AP ■ BANGKOK

Thai prosecutors said Monday that further investigation is needed to decide whether to bring former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to trial for defaming the monarchy, just a day after he was freed from a prison sentence on other charges he was serving in a hospital.

Thaksin was released on parole Sunday from the hospital in Bangkok where he spent six months serving time for corruption-related offenses. He had been in self-imposed exile since 2008, but returned to Thailand in August last year to begin serving an eight-year sentence. On his return, he was moved almost immediately from prison to the hospital on grounds of ill health, and about a week after that King Maha Vajiralongkorn reduced his sentence to a single year.

Thaksin was granted parole earlier this month because of his age — he is 74 — and ill health, leaving him free for the remainder of his one-year sentence. Thaksin was briefly detained Sunday by police from the Technology Crime Suppression Division as he left Bangkok's Police General Hospital but was allowed temporary release to return home as it was not a working day for the prosecutor's office, Prayuth Bejraguna, a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, said at a news conference on Monday.

The attorney general's office had announced earlier this month it had revived an investigation into whether Thaksin almost nine years ago violated the law against defaming the monarchy, a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Thaksin was originally charged in 2016 with violat-

ing the law for remarks he made to journalists when he was in Seoul, South Korea, a year before that, but the investigation could proceed only after he was presented with the charge in person in the hospital last month, officials said.

Prayuth said Thaksin reported to the attorney general's office on Monday for the charge, also known as lese majeste, and he was granted release on bail by posting a 500,000 baht (\$13,900) bond without conditions beyond those of his parole. The conditions include travel restrictions and reporting himself every month for the remainder of his sentence. Prayuth said the attorney general has taken into consideration Thaksin's statement in his own defense and decided to order a further investigation of his case. He was ordered to return to the office on April 10.

Court slams Kakar for non-appearance in missing Baloch students case

Islamabad (PTI): A Pakistani court on Monday slammed caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar for failing to appear before it for a second time in a case related to several missing Baloch students, warning him that "no one is above the law."

"Caretaker prime minister should not consider coming to court as an insult," Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani of the Islamabad High Court remarked during the hearing. The caretaker prime minister should not go to Karachi for the next hearing, but appear before the court, the IHC judge was quoted as saying by Geo News.

"No one is above the law here," he said, adding that the premier was summoned because he was "accountable." The IHC summoned Kakar again, adjourning the hearing till February 28. This is the second time that the

caretaker PM has failed to appear before the court. In November last year, the court had instructed the government to recover the missing students within seven days. It had noted that in case the authorities failed to comply with the order, Kakar accompanied by his ministers and secretaries for interior and defence would appear in the court on November 29. However, the interim prime minister did not appear in court in November since he was on a foreign visit.

The government made repeated assurances to the court that the students would return home soon, the Express Tribune newspaper reported. The IHC on Feb 13 summoned the country's interim chief executive and his two members due to the failure of the government authorities to recover some missing Baloch students despite

assurances.

As Justice Kayani resumed hearing the petition on Monday regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, he observed, "The purpose of summoning the prime minister was to inquire why the state's premier is failing in his duties."

The commission was established in 2011 to trace missing persons and fix responsibility on the individuals or organisations responsible for it, the Dawn newspaper reported. Resource-rich Balochistan, Pakistan's largest but least populated province, has been wrecked by a long-running separatist insurgency which has seen brutal repression by Pakistani security forces and enforced disappearances.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
MARINE DEPARTMENT
No. MD/ACTS/MWR/16/2023/184 Date: 13.02.2024
E-TENDER CALL NOTICE (E-TCN)
Name of the work: Manning, Maintenance and Commercial Operation of PPA Dry Dock and Other Ancillaries on payment of Licence Fee for a period of 05 (Five) years. **Reserved Price: Rs.13,97,52,584/-** plus GST an applicable for 05 years. Last date & time of Submission of tender through on-line bidding is **15:00 hours on dt.02.04.2024**. For details, please log on to the website: <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.
Sd/- Deputy Conservator,
Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/87/PR/2023-2024 dtd. 19.02.2024

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Stock markets advance for fifth day

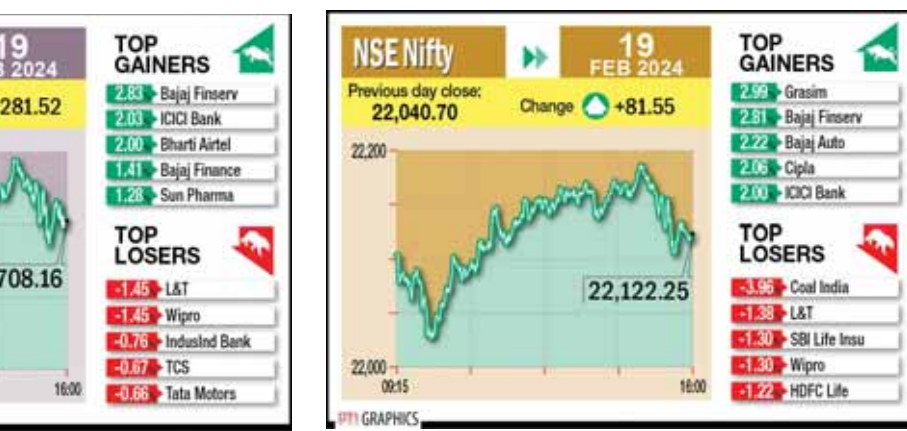
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets closed higher for the fifth consecutive day on Monday with the benchmark Sensex rising 281 points and Nifty scaling its fresh lifetime high driven by gains in financial and FMCG shares. The 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 281.52 points or 0.39 per cent to close at 72,708.16. As many as 17 Sensex shares advanced while 13 closed in the red. After a firm start, the index hit a high of 72,881.93 in day trade.

The broader Nifty closed at its all-time high of 22,122.25 points, up by 81.55 points or 0.37 per cent from the last close. The 50-issue barometer also scaled its intra-day record high of 22,186.65 helped by



gains in pharma, banking and oil shares. As many as 27 Nifty shares posted gains while 23 declined. Key stock indices closed in the green for the fifth straight day on Monday, gaining around 2.3 per cent.



Overall market capitalisation of BSE listed shares surged to Rs 391.69 lakh crore or USD 4.72 trillion, making investors richer by Rs 2.20 lakh crore. Among Sensex shares, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Bharti

Airtel, Bajaj Finance, Sun Pharma, Maruti Suzuki, ITC, and Nestle were the lead gainers. On the other hand, L&T Wipro, IndusInd Bank and TCS and Tata Motors were the lead losers. Vinod Nair, Head of Research,

Geojit Financial Services, said, "Despite an unattractive risk reward, the broader market continued its outperformance in expectation of improvements in private capex and optimism about political stability.

"Benign input costs and expectations of a pickup in rural demand will aid corporate earnings growth." Key Asian markets were mixed. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.8 per cent and Tokyo's Nikkei 225 lost 0.04 per cent while the Shanghai Composite index gained 1.4 per cent. US market are closed on Monday on account of President's Holiday. On Friday, US stocks closed in the red, with all three major indices logging weekly losses, as investors assessed inflation readings and company earnings. On Friday, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) were net buyers as they purchased securities worth Rs 253.28 crore, according to exchange data.



CBDT sets ₹1 lakh ceiling per assessee for old tax demands withdrawal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax department has prescribed a ceiling of Rs 1 lakh per assessee for withdrawal of small tax demands till Assessment Year 2015-16, in accordance with a scheme announced in Budget. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has issued an order giving effect to the 2024-25 Budget announcement by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The CBDT had announced that tax demands for AY 2010-11 of up to Rs 25,000 and for AY 2011-12 to 2015-16 of up to Rs 10,000 will be withdrawn. Tax demands totalling about Rs 3,500 crore will be withdrawn following the announcement. The CBDT order said that such outstanding tax demands pertaining to income tax, wealth tax and gift tax as on January 31, 2024, shall be remitted and extinguished "subject to the maximum ceiling of Rs 1 lakh for any specific taxpayer/assessee".

The limit of Rs 1 lakh would include principal component of tax demand, interest, penalty or fee, cess, surcharge. However, the remission shall not be applicable on the demands raised against the tax deductors or tax collectors under TDS or TCS provisions of the I-T Act. Nangia Andersen India Partner Manesh Bawa said the directive further specifies that this waiver or cancellation does not entitle taxpayers to any claims for credit or refunds. Additionally, the waiver or cancellation will not influence any ongoing, planned, or potential criminal legal proceedings against the taxpayer and does not grant any immunity under any legislation. "Taxpayers are advised to access their online accounts and navigate to Pending Action > Response to Outstanding Demand to verify the status of 'Extinguished Demands' related to them," Bawa said. Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra had earlier this month said that there are about 1.11 crore such disputed tax demands.

BYJU rights issue gets USD 300 million commitment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Elearn major Think and Learn, which operates under BYJU'S brand name, is learnt to have received a commitment of USD 300 million from investors for its ongoing rights issue which will close by the end of February, sources aware of the development said.

BYJU'S floated a rights issue in January to raise USD 200 million at an enterprise valuation in the range of USD 220-250 million which is a 99 per cent reduction in its peak valuation of USD 22 billion. Sources also shared that BYJU'S has offered miffed investors to appoint two independent directors to enhance transparency but only after the rights issue and declaring its financial results for the 2023 fiscal.

"BYJU'S has received a total commitment of around USD 300 million for the rights as on date. Some investors have also suggested increasing the rights issue size but the priority for the company is to close the existing issue successfully," said a source.

The source said that the negotiation is also on with miffed investors for their participation in the rights issue. "BYJU'S is in discussion with miffed investors also. The company expects that they will also invest, otherwise their shareholding will reduce by almost 50 per cent," the source said.

Another source said that BYJU'S has offered to appoint two independent directors on the board to enhance transparency but the appointment can happen only after results for financial year 2023 are declared. "BYJU'S expects to close the FY 2023 financial result in this quarter which will make the company completely compliant with the rules.



Thereafter, the company will look to appoint two independent directors to its board. The proposal is part of ongoing discussion with miffed investors who have called for EGM (Extraordinary General Meeting) on February 23," the source said.

According to a source, the EGM notice has been backed by General Atlantic, Peak XV, Sofina, Chan Zuckerberg, Owl, and Sands, who jointly account for around 30 per cent stake in BYJU'S.

The investors led by Dutch investment firm Prosus in the EGM notice requested the resolution of the outstanding governance, financial mismanagement and compliance issues and the reconstitution of the Board of Directors.

As per the notice, a consortium of BYJU'S shareholders had in July and December requested the board of directors for the meeting but it was disregarded. BYJU'S investors have no voting rights on the CEO or management change as per the shareholder's agreement.

Meanwhile, a representative of one of the investors who have called for an EGM said they expect more investors to join them in the upcoming February 23 EGM after which they will approach the National Company Law Tribunal for reconstitution of BYJU'S board. A query sent to BYJU'S in this regard elicited no immediate response.

India tops list for highest number of passengers at Dubai airport

PTI ■ DUBAI

India emerged at the top spot for the highest number of passengers flying through the Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, with traffic totalling 11.9 million guests, the airport announced on Monday.

According to a statement, the Dubai airport, known as DXB, surpassed not only its own yearly forecast but also pre-pandemic levels of traffic. In 2023, DXB witnessed a surge in passenger numbers, reaching 86.9 million passengers (86,994,365), an impressive year-on-year increase of 31.7 per cent. It was just under a per cent



higher than the passenger numbers recorded in 2019 (86.4 million), the numbers were driven by robust growth in the second half of the year during which the airport recorded a total of 45.4 million guests. With 7.8 million guests,

December was the busiest month in the fourth quarter during which the airport welcomed a total of 22.4 million guests, a year-on-year growth of 13.8 per cent compared to Q4 of last year. Q3 remained the quarter with the highest traffic since 2019

with 23 million guests while August, with 7.9 million guests, was the month with the highest traffic. DXB is currently connected to 262 destinations across 104 countries through 102 international carriers, according to data for 2023. India claimed the top spot among destination countries with traffic totalling 11.9 million guests, followed by Saudi Arabia with 6.7 million guests and the UK with 5.9 million guests. Other country markets of note include Pakistan (4.2 million), the US (3.6 million), Russia (2.5 million), and Germany (2.5 million).

Paytm shares jump 5 per cent, hit upper circuit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of One97 Communications -- owner of the brand Paytm -- jumped 5 per cent in the morning trade on Monday after the crisis-hit fintech company's decision to collaborate with Axis Bank for the continuation of merchant settlements.

Extending its gains in the second consecutive session, the stock of the company climbed 5 per cent each to Rs 358.55 and Rs 358.35 apiece -- also its upper circuit limit -- on the BSE and NSE, respectively.

In the morning trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark gained 185.81 points or 0.26 per cent to 72,612.45, while NSE Nifty rose 0.32 per cent to 22,110.60 points. In a regulatory filing on Friday, One97 Communications said it has shifted its nodal account to Axis Bank from its arm Paytm



Payments Bank. The move will allow continuity of Paytm QR, soundbox, card machine after the March 15 set by the Reserve Bank of India, the filing said. The RBI has advised customers and merchants of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to shift their accounts to other banks by March 15, giving 15 more days to the beleaguered entity to close most of its operations, including deposit and credit transactions, it added.

On Friday, shares of Paytm rose 5 per cent, rebounding after three days of fall amid the company coming under the regulatory scanner for various violations related to its payments bank business. After the Reserve Bank of India action against PPBL for certain violations, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is looking into alleged violations by the entity. Paytm shares have been witnessing intense selling pressure this month after the RBI action. As per a January 31 order of the central bank, PPBL was asked to stop further deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, and National Common Mobility Cards, after February 29. One97 Communications holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL but classifies it as an associate of the company and not as a subsidiary.

Centre not considering cut in import duty on rubber, says official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is not considering any cut in import duty on rubber as of now as the differential between the local and international prices is maintained, a senior official said on Monday. "We have a differential already maintained for the imports that we are getting vis-a-vis the local production. "If you see the local price vis-a-vis international price...So there has been a differential maintained on account of that import duty...So I do not think there is any rethink on reducing import duties as of now," Additional Secretary in the commerce ministry Amardeep Singh Bhatia told reporters here. He was replying to a question about the domestic user industry's demand to cut the duties and that of local

producers against any duty reduction. Tyre makers are one of the major consumers of the commodity. Over 13 lakh rubber growers are there in the country. Kerala accounts for a major chunk of the production, which was 8.39 lakh tonne in 2022-23. Consumption during that fiscal was 13.5 lakh tonne. The gap is bridged by imports from countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia and other southeast asian nations. In order to regulate the import of natural rubber, the government had increased the duty on import of dry rubber to 25 per cent or Rs 30 per kg, whichever is lower from April 30, 2015. The government had also reduced the period of utilization of imported dry rubber under advance licensing scheme from 18 months to 6 months from January 2015.

Rajadhyaksha unable to join 16th finance panel as member

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Artha Global Executive Director Niranjan Rajadhyaksha has expressed his inability to join as a member of the 16th Finance Commission due to personal reasons, the Finance Ministry said on Monday. The Centre had on January 31, appointed four members of the 16th Finance Commission chaired by Arvind Panagariya. Apart from Rajadhyaksha, former expenditure secretary Ajay Narayan Jha and retired bureaucrat Annie George Mathew were appointed as full-time members of the commission. SBI Group Chief Economic Advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh was named a part-time member. "Dr. Rajadhyaksha has expressed his inability to take up this responsibility due to unforeseen personal circumstances," said Ministry.

NITI Aayog pitches for tax reforms, mandatory saving plan, housing plan for elderly

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Government think tank NITI Aayog has pitched for tax reforms, mandatory saving plan, and housing plan for elderly in India, as the population of senior citizens is projected to reach 19.5 per cent of the country's population by 2050.

In a report titled 'Senior Care Reforms in India - Reimagining the Senior Care Paradigm', NITI Aayog said a national portal for senior care must be developed for senior citizens to provide easy access of services to them. "Since the social security framework in India is limited, most seniors depend on the income generated from their savings. Variable interest rates result in the erosion of their income, sometimes even below sustenance levels. "Therefore, a regulatory mechanism is required to set a viable base rate for the interest accrued on senior citizen deposits," the report said.

The report emphasised that giving a further concession to older women will contribute



to their financial well-being. The elderly in India currently comprises a little over 10 per cent of the population, translating to about 104 million, and is projected to reach 19.5 per cent of the total population by 2050. The report also suggested that the government should reassess the reverse mortgage mechanism to increase liquidity for seniors and by making necessary amendments to the current reverse mortgage rules. "Tax and GST reforms, etc, on senior care products (needed) to increase the ease of adoption and safeguard the elderly population from the

financial burden," the Aayog said. Population ageing is a global phenomenon, and the number of people over 60 years of age has been rising rapidly across the world. India, too, is witnessing an exponential growth in the number and proportion of elderly people, coupled with decreasing fertility rate (less than 2.0) and increasing life expectancy (more than 70 years). The report also called for earmarking CSR funds as a contribution to national funds for care provided to the elderly in their facilities.

It also stressed on developing partnerships with the private sector through various PPP models to encourage private medical care at discounted prices to senior persons across the medical care cycle, from consultation to diagnostics to treatment.

Noting that catering to the needs of the elderly population of this size is challenging, the report said it also presents an opportunity for the growth of the senior care industry, which is estimated at USD 7 billion (Rs 57,881 crore). More than 75 per cent of elderly people in India suffer from chronic diseases and these figures indicate the potential of the home-based care market in India. As per the report, the size of the home healthcare market in India was estimated at USD 6.2 billion (Rs 50, 840 crore) in 2020 and it is projected to reach USD 21.3 billion (Rs 1.74 lakh crore) by 2027. The home healthcare market can lead to a 15-30 per cent reduction in infrastructure and operational costs compared to hospital costs for the same treatment, it added.

ITDC looking for business opportunities, says MD

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned India Tourism Development Corporation Ltd is looking for new business opportunities besides strengthening its existing verticals as it seeks to carry forward the momentum of record financial performance of last fiscal, according to its Managing Director M R Synrem. The company which offers hospitality, travel and tour, events and engineering related consultancy services, plans to strengthen its offices in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata with an aim to develop these as regional hubs for its businesses.

"We want not to only expand but whatever we have now to take it a notch further ahead, take it much higher and look at new business opportunities also for ITDC as a company," Synrem told PTI on the sidelines of the launch of the company's new mascot 'Adyant' and a fresh tagline. On the new business opportunities, he said, "We have won a bid for a new duty free shop at the Vizag (Visakhapatnam) airport. We participated in the competitive bid and we have won it. It is a new thing which is coming up very soon." Sharing plans to strengthen India Tourism Development Corporation's (ITDC) regional offices to expand its business, he said at present the staffing at the company's offices in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata is not reasonably strong with only one officer stationed in these regional offices. "As a team we are studying how to develop the regional offices as also a regional hub so that we can take our business there as well. There's not a business that cannot be taken in these places of the well," Synrem said. Citing the example of Ashok Events, which handles events of the Prime Minister, he said, "We are also looking at strengthening the event division so that we can not only take government events in Delhi but also expand our footprint beyond Delhi as well. "There are so many government (departments) and state governments, who are willing to work with PSUs."

BUSINESS BRIEF

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMPARATIVE LAW HELD

AMARAVATI: VIT-AP University School of Law (VSL), VIT-AP University and Birmingham School of Law, University of Birmingham, jointly organised International Conference on Comparative Law: Exploring Convergences, Divergences, and Liminal Spaces at VIT-AP Campus. The 3-day conference deliberated on diverse topics, with discussions on themes such as the "Use of Technology and AI in the Resolution of International Commercial Disputes: Opportunities and Challenges," and "Comparative Public Law and Practices in India." During the inaugural session Justice Ravindra Bhat, Judge Supreme Court of India (Retd), who was the chief guest for the conference, emphasized the significance of comparative law and its importance in the legal system. He described comparative law as the study of differences and similarities among the legal systems of different countries, highlighting its crucial role in the current era of internationalism, economic globalization and democratization.

VANITHA APPOINTED ADMINISTRATOR OF KANCHEEPURAM CENTRAL COOPERATIVE BANK

NEW DELHI: Former Chief Director at the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) and Additional Registrar of Cooperative Societies, R Vanitha, has been appointed as the Administrator of the Kancheepuram Central Cooperative Bank in Tamil Nadu. Known for her expertise in cooperative circles, Vanitha aims to leverage her experience to elevate the performance of the Bank, a key player in Tamil Nadu's banking sector with a business mix exceeding Rs 5,000 crore and 52 branches and affiliated Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS).



World TT Championships

Indian women blank Uzbekistan 3-0

PTI ■ BUSAN
 Indian women's team eased past Uzbekistan while the men endured successive defeats with the loss to South Korea in the World Table Tennis Team Championships here on Monday. Ayhika Mukherjee and Sreeja Akula were rested from the rubber, providing an opportunity to Archana Kamath and Diya Chitale. They both won their respective singles while senior teammate Manika Batra also had it easy against her opponent to make it a 3-0 win for India. Archana defeated Rimma Gufranov 11-7, 11-3, 11-6,

while Manika stormed past Markhabo Magdieva 11-7, 11-4, 11-1. Diya on the other hand faced tough resistance before prevailing over Rozalina Khadjieva 11-6, 10-12, 11-4, 11-6. Having started off their campaign with a 2-3 loss to China, Indian women's team now have secured two wins on the trot to occupy second spot in the Group 1 standings. They will next face Spain in their concluding Group 1 league fixture on Tuesday. They earlier defeated Hungary 3-2. The men's team of veteran Sharath Kamal, reigning



national champion Harmeet Desai and G Sathiyan lost their respective singles to go down meekly in its third group stage tie against third seeds Korea. Harmeet, who is India's top-ranked player at 67, went down to world number 14 Jang Woojin 4-11, 10-12, 8-11. Sathiyan was then brushed aside by world number 16 Lim Jonghoon 5-11, 7-11, 7-11. Sharath managed to put up a fight, taking the second game but couldn't capitalise on the momentum losing 9-11, 11-8, 6-11, 5-11 to Lee San Su. After winning their opening tie against Chile, Indian men lost 1-3 to Poland on Sunday.



Foreign training for paddlers Diya, Swastika approved

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 The Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell has given its go-ahead to paddlers Diya Chitale and Swastika Ghosh to travel to South Korea and Japan for advanced-level training. While Diya will head for Paju-si in South Korea to train under Shin Min Sung, Swastika will be coached by Qiu Jian Xin in Osaka, Japan. The MOC also approved proposals for competition for shuttlers Kiran George and Anupama Upadhaya, doubles women's team of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand and shooter Rudranksh Patil. While Kiran and Anupama will participate in the BWF Orleans Masters, the pair of Treesa and Gayatri along with their coach and physio will head to Germany to compete in the BWF German Open. India rifle shooter Rudranksh will head to Dortmund to compete at the International Saison Start for Shooters (ISAS 2024) events. The MOC also approved proposals of table tennis players Sathiyan Gnanasekaran and Manika Batra for financial assistance for participation in WTT Feeder events. While Sathiyan will head to Beirut, Lebanon to take part in WTT Feeder and WTT Feeder 2 events, Manika, along with her coach, will travel to participate in WTT Singapore Smash followed by 2 WTT Feeder Tournaments in Beirut.

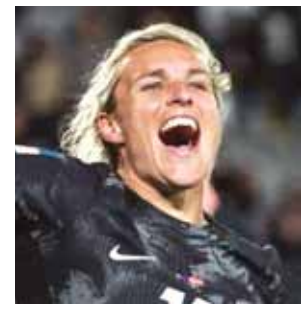


IOC will not change boxing age limit to let Pacquiao compete at Paris Olympics at age 45

AP ■ LAUSANNE
 The International Olympic Committee will not change its rules on age limits to let boxing great Manny Pacquiao compete at the Paris Games. Pacquiao, who retired in 2021, wanted to box at age 45 in the Olympic tournament in Paris where medal bouts will be held in the Roland Garros tennis complex. The IOC said Sunday it wrote to Olympic officials in Philippines explaining the age limit for boxers of 40 will be upheld. The IOC now oversees Olympic boxing after de-recognition of the International Boxing Association governing body. The age limit for Olympic boxing was raised to 40 from 34 in 2013 - a move that would have let Pacquiao try to compete at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. He chose not to at the time when he was also elected to be a senator in his home country. It is unclear if Pacquiao would have tried to earn a place at the Paris Olympics in one of two qualification tournaments that open later this month in Italy and in May in Thailand. The Philippines Olympic body had talked of trying to get a so-called "universality" entry to the Paris Summer Games. These are effectively free passes to events given to countries that have few athletes at the Olympics and typically struggle to qualify on merit. However, the IOC explained Sunday that the Philippines had been too successful to benefit from the scheme. "Universality places are not allocated to (teams) with an average of more than eight athletes in individual sports/disciplines at the last two editions of the Olympic Games," the IOC said. "This is the case for the Philippine Olympic Committee." Pacquiao ended his storied career in September 2021 at age 42 after 72 fights, winning 12 world titles at a record eight different weight divisions.

New Zealand women win Oceania tournament to qualify for Paris Olympics

AP ■ WELLINGTON
 New Zealand will compete in the women's football tournament at the Paris Olympic Games after beating the Solomon Islands 11-1 in the final of the Oceania qualifying tournament on Monday in Apia, Samoa. Hannah Wilkinson, who scored the first goal of the Women's World Cup in New Zealand and Australia last year, was one of four players to score twice for New Zealand. The others were Grace Jale, Indiah-Paige Riley and Katie Kitching. New Zealand led 5-0 at halftime. The final saw New Zealand continue its dominance of a tournament in which it scored 32 goals and conceded two in five matches. New Zealand is the sixth team



to qualify for the Olympic women's tournament after host France, Canada, United States, Brazil and Colombia. Australia and Japan are expected to qualify for the 12-team tournament later this month. New Zealand has played in the Olympic tournament on four previous occasions but has won only two matches, against Cameroon in 2012 and Colombia in 2016.

Hazard leaves fans puzzled with goal celebration dedicated to family parakeet

AP ■ BRUSSELS
 After scoring for Anderlecht in the Belgian league on Sunday, Thorgan Hazard left fans puzzled about his goal celebration. The midfielder celebrated by mimicking a bird flapping his wings after his header put Anderlecht level at 1-1 with Sint-Truidense in the 49th minute, in a game his team went on to win 4-1 to guarantee a spot in the season's playoffs. The 30-year-old Hazard, who joined Anderlecht in September from Borussia Dortmund, said the celebration was a request from his children after one of the family's parakeets passed away. "We had three birds at home, but one passed away this



week," said Hazard, the younger brother of former Chelsea and Real Madrid star Eden Hazard. "Toto was a parakeet we rescued when I was in Dortmund. My children asked me to dedicate a goal for it. They are the ones who choose my celebrations." Anderlecht is Belgium's most successful club but has seen its supremacy challenged in recent years. The club won the most recent of its record 34 Belgian league titles in 2017. Anderlecht is currently in second place in the Belgian league, nine points behind Brussels rival Union Saint-Gilloise.

Real Madrid held to 1-1 draw



AP ■ MADRID
 Spanish league lead reduced after being held to a 1-1 draw at Rayo Vallecano on Sunday, while last-place Almeria made history for the wrong reason by becoming the first team to go 28 straight games without a league win. Almeria drew 1-1 at Granada for its 25th consecutive winless game this season. It also hadn't won its last three matches last season. Madrid was frustrated in its first match since it emerged that Kylian Mbappé will leave Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season, opening the door for another attempt by the Spanish powerhouse to sign the France star. Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti was asked if all the talk about the possible signing of Mbappé had affected his team. "When has this team lacked concentration?" Ancelotti said. "It's tough to say anything bad about this team this season." Joselu put Madrid ahead only three minutes into the match against its southern Madrid rival, but the hosts equalized through a penalty kick converted by Raúl de Tomás in the 27th. The draw moved Madrid six points clear of second-place Girona, which visits fifth-place Athletic Bilbao on Monday. Third-place Barcelona, which won 2-1 at Celta Vigo on Saturday with a stoppage-time penalty kick converted by Robert Lewandowski, was eight points behind Madrid. Fourth-place Atletico Madrid, which routed Las Palmas 5-0 at home Saturday, was 11 points off the lead. It was a disappointing result for Madrid against a Rayo team that had lost three consecutive league matches and hasn't won in seven straight. "We want to win every game, but to win the league you can't lose the games

Hojlund scores early double

AP ■ LUTON
 Rasmus Hojlund scored twice in the opening seven minutes and Manchester United then withstood a spirited fightback to hang on for a 2-1 win at Luton on Sunday and a fourth straight Premier League victory. Hojlund extended his scoring streak to six straight league games when he seized on a defensive howler to net the opener after just 37 seconds - United's quickest away goal in Premier League history. He added the second with a slice of luck as a shot deflected off his chest and into the net to quieten the home crowd at the smallest stadium in the Premier League. That early double made it look like it would be a comfortable afternoon for United, but it was anything but after that. Luton's Kenilworth Stadium - which seats just over 11,000 - was soon raucous again as the hosts responded by dominating the rest of the first



half, and captain Carlton Morris pulled one goal back with a close-range header in the 14th. However, the hosts couldn't capitalize on a number of chances and hit the crossbar in injury time as United clung on for a win that puts it just three points behind fifth-place Tottenham. "We are dropping too deep and we lost a bit of focus maybe because it was so easy in the first 10 minutes," United manager Erik ten Hag said. "We can't afford this especially

and run clear through on goal. The striker calmly rounded goalkeeper Thomas Kaminski before slotting the ball into the empty net. His second goal was even easier, and was probably more luck than skill. The ball fell to Alejandro Garnacho after a corner, and his shot from outside the area was heading wide but struck Hojlund in the chest and bounced into the net. But Luton responded well and was right back in it when Tahith Chong's blocked shot looped toward the net and Morris beat Andre Onana to the ball to head it past the goalkeeper. United was suddenly hanging on as the hosts kept pouring forward, with Casemiro and Harry Maguire both booked for cynical challenges to stop Luton attacks. Casemiro was arguably lucky not to get a second one minutes later and both he and Maguire were taken off by Ten Hag at halftime to avoid either being

sent off. Luton kept pushing forward after the break but that left the hosts vulnerable to counterattacks, and Kaminski had to dive to his left to palm away Marcus Rashford's long-range shot after a quick breakaway in the 57th. Bruno Fernandes then nearly scored on another counter in the 60th as he was able to round the onrushing Kaminski, but midfielder Sambi Lokonga tracked back quickly enough to block his shot into an open net with a sliding challenge. Garnacho then had a similar chance in the 67th, but that time it was Bell's turn to be on hand to thwart his shot. Fernandes missed another chance to extend the lead in the 88th when his shot went just wide, but in the end United didn't need a third goal to see out the win, as Ross Barkley missed Luton's final chance in injury time when his header hit the top of the crossbar.

Do not fret over defeats: Modi to young athletes

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
 Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday advised young athletes of the country not to "fret" over defeats but take them as "opportunities to learn", in a message during the inauguration of Khelo India University Games here. Conveying his best wishes to the athletes, PM Modi complimented them for creating a grand image of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' in Guwahati. Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Shri Anurag



Union Minister for Youth Affairs & Sports Anurag Thakur and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during the opening ceremony of the 4th edition of the Khelo India University Games, in Guwahati, on Monday

is the Ashtalakshmi in the shape of a butterfly, PM Modi said "making a butterfly the mascot in these games also symbolizes how the aspirations of the North East are getting new wings." He emphasised the need to learn from the NorthEast region's rich sports culture. Talking about the nationwide sports initiatives of his government, he said, "I am pleased to witness sports events being organized across every corner of India, from the North to the South and from the West to the East."

Along with the current Khelo India University Games in the Northeast, he mentioned Khelo India Winter Games in Ladakh, Khelo India Youth Games in Tamil Nadu, Beach Games in Diu. Addressing the changing societal perceptions towards sports, Modi emphasised the shift in parental attitudes, noting that parents earlier hesitated to involve their children in sports activities, fearing it would distract them from academics. He highlighted the evolving mindset where parents now take pride in their children's

achievements in sports, be it at the state, national, or international level. "Just as academic achievements are celebrated, we must develop a tradition of honouring those who excel in sports," the PM said in a PIB release. Reflecting on the values instilled through sports, Modi said, "Success in sports requires more than just talent; it demands temperament, leadership, teamwork, and resilience." Thakur informed that the 4th Khelo India University Games will see participation of 4544

athletes from across the country, competing in 18 different venues spread over the north-eastern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Nagaland and Tripura. The athletes will compete in 20 sports disciplines, including athletics, rugby, swimming, badminton, hockey, and football, among others. He also informed that as part of the government's mission of promoting a Fit India, yoga and traditional sports such as Mallakhamb have also been included in the Games.

India unearths talent for future

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Inexperience of India's batting line-up was flagged as a major concern following the shocking loss in the first Test but three games into the five-match series against England, the same fearless bunch has grabbed its chances to give the hosts a comforting 2-1 advantage. Irrespective of what happens in the remaining two games, the series will be remembered for the coming of age of 22-year-old Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has bossed the English bowlers with back to back double hundreds at the top of the order. While growing up, nothing came easy for Jaiswal and after getting his set of opportunities across formats, it is not surprising that the southpaw has shown an insatiable hunger for runs. The way he constructed his innings in Rajkot not only belied his age, it was also a master-class in Test match batting. He was extremely watchful at the start of the innings before deciding to hit sixes at will including three off

the great James Anderson in three different directions. From the team's perspective, another big takeaway from the Rajkot Test was the performance of debutants Sarfaraz Khan and wicketkeeper-batter Dhruv Jurel. "Ye aaj kal ke bacche (these kids of today)," quipped skipper Rohit Sharma, sharing a picture of the trio on his social media account, a day after the record win in Rajkot. In the absence of Virat Kohli and K L Rahul, the middle-order looked extremely vulnerable but after finally getting his big break, Sarfaraz showed he belonged at the biggest stage from ball one and piled on the runs like he did for years in domestic cricket. Indian batters are not known for their sweep shots but in a welcome change, that is how Sarfaraz got most of his runs in the game. He did not play the reverse that often but his conventional sweep and slog sweep off the spinners did fetch him a lot of runs and at the same time, put pressure on the opposition. Jurel's nimble work behind the



stumps was hard to miss and was highlighted with his spectacular run out of in form England opener Ben Duckett in the second innings here. With the bat, his supreme confidence was summed up best when he made a split second decision to play a ramp shot off express pacer Mark Wood and the ball sailed over the ropes. Needless to say, Rohit was a pleased man and was quick to acknowledge the efforts of the inexperienced lot. On purpose, he did not gush over Jaiswal and Co, who have a long future ahead of them. "It's a very good feeling to win a game like that and especially with such a young team as well. (We had) two debutants (Sarfaraz Khan and Dhruv Jurel) and not a lot of Test matches amongst the playing eleven as well. "A lot of credit to these young boys who have come in and showed a lot of character. Looks like they actually belong here and they want to stay here as well," said Rohit after the massive win on Sunday. The opposition, however, was more effusive in praise for

Jaiswal with Duckett calling him a "superstar in the making". For someone who slept in tents at the very same maidans of Mumbai where he practised in the morning, the motivation to get the big runs after innings comes naturally to Jaiswal. "If you see, in India, you work really hard. Even while you go to catch a bus, train or any mode of transport, you have to try really hard. I have done that since my childhood and I know how important every innings is. "That's why I work hard in practice as I know every innings counts. The biggest motivation for me is to play for my country and I know I need to give my 100 per cent," said Jaiswal, who is in the middle of his third Test series having made his debut against the West Indies last year. While Jaiswal has cemented his place in the side with his remarkable consistency, Sarfaraz and Jurel will need to do more in the coming games to earn themselves an extended run.

How Sarfaraz mastered spin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Sarfaraz Khan's dominating performance against England's spinners in just his debut Test was no fluke. It was the culmination of over 15 years of hard work that involved playing 500 deliveries everyday under the watchful eyes of his zealous father Naushad Khan. With two confident half centuries in his debut Test in Rajkot, Sarfaraz has shown that he is here to stay in the Indian team. The 26-year-old got his Test cap after years of toiling in the domestic circuit and also honing his skills at his father's 'Macho Cricket Club'. The hard work and systematic planning of the past few years, especially during the two COVID-19 lockdowns, paid off against the likes of Tom Hartley, Joe Root and Rehan Ahmed in Rajkot. "It has taken playing 500 deliveries per day from off, leg and left-arm spinners across Oval, Cross and Azad Maidans in Mumbai," said a coach who has seen the Mumbaier's growth from close quarters. "...During (COVID) lockdown, he undertook a car journey covering 1600km. From Mumbai to Amroha, Moradabad, Meerut, Kanpur, Mathura and Dehradun, he travelled and played on proverbial 'akhadas' where the ball turns square with one shooting up and few staying down," he added. The Sarfaraz that was manoeuvring the spinners with ease, honed his skills the tough way. The credit for the final product lies not just with Naushad though. Coaches of Bhuvneshwar Kumar (Sanjay Rastogi), Mohammed Shami (Badruddin Sheikh), Kuldeep Yadav (Kapil Deo Pandey), Gautam Gambhir (Sanjay Bhardwaj) and father of India A captain



Abhimanyu Easwaran (RP Easwaran) have also contributed in their little way to make Sarfaraz a finished product. They all arranged for Sarfaraz's net sessions against spinners, especially during the COVID lockdown. "During lockdown, Naushad called me as we are both from Azamgarh and we played club cricket in Mumbai when I was employed with the Indian Navy. So, when he wanted his son to get practice, I felt it's my duty," Kapil Pandey told PTI. "During lockdown, Sarfaraz played Kuldeep a lot at our Kanpur Academy. They did lot of net sessions together. I would arrange T20 matches as that season, Mushtaq Ali T20 was main tournament. "Having grown up playing on Mumbai's red soil, Sarfaraz has the perfect game against spin and uses his feet well," he added. Shami's coach Badruddin also spoke about his part in helping Sarfaraz attain mastery of spin. "Yes, I arranged for his training and nets in Moradabad. No doubt both the father and son worked hard. I arranged for his stay in a hostel and got him to play a number of games." Another coach who has seen Naushad train his sons -- Sarfaraz and India U-19 star Musheer -- spoke about the gruelling training regimen that the two players endured even on non-match days.

Cannot be aggressive all the time: Former England captains slam Bazball

PTI ■ LONDON
Former England captains Nasser Hussain and Michael Vaughan have criticised the team's 'Bazball' approach in the ongoing Test series against India, saying the visitors need to apply themselves based on match situation instead of being guided by a one-dimensional philosophy of aggression. India registered their biggest-ever Test win, annihilating England by 434 runs in the third Test in Rajkot on Sunday. Chasing 557 to win, the tourists were bundled out for 122. The home side leads 2-1 in the five-match series with games left in Ranchi and Dharamsala. "This was the worst defeat under (Ben) Stokes and Brendon McCullum, and one that exposed their method. They cannot take the aggressive at every opportunity, they have to pick their moments," Vaughan wrote in his column for "Telegraph.Co.Uk. Hussain echoed the sentiment. "Bazball is about being attacking but it is also about soaking up pressure," Hussain said on 'Sky Sports'. In contrast, India's Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has two double hundreds in the series so far, Shubman Gill (91) and debutant Sarfaraz Khan played mature knocks in



Rajkot, taking time to settle in before going for their strokes. "They need to look at the way Jaiswal and Shubman Gill played on day three. They soaked up the pressure for 30 or 40 balls, and then they started to get boundaries. "That is what Test batting is about. India have scored 875 runs in 228.5 overs. No one can tell me it's been boring watching India bat here," Vaughan said. Things have gone downhill for England since winning the series-opener in Hyderabad. The visiting team's batters have displayed poor judgement, giving away the advantage to the hosts. "...Surely a defeat this heavy has to be a wake-up call for Ben Stokes and his players. "England make out that everything is positive but they need to be having conversations about how to bat better," Vaughan said. Out-of-form batter Joe Root has been in the eye of the storm for his dismissal in the

third Test. His reverse-scoop off Jasprit Bumrah straight to second slip had sparked a collapse of sorts in the first innings. "The way they played this week has gifted India a victory. I couldn't believe my eyes the way they batted on day three, especially Joe Root's shot," Vaughan said. Hussain, Vaughan and another former captain Alastair Cook questioned the timing of the shot by Root, given that England were trailing by 221 runs. "One thing Joe will look at is the timing of that. (Ravichandran) Ashwin wasn't there, India are down a bowler; (Ravindra) Jadeja is playing off the back of an injury; Bumrah is playing three Tests in a row and there is talk of him needing a rest. "Get Bumrah into his second or third spell, take it deep and then play the shot later in the day," Hussain wrote. Root had played a similar shot with much success

during the Ashes last year. "When he played it to the first ball at Edgbaston, I didn't mind it at all because it was all about how many runs England were going to score that day to set up a game," Cook said on 'Sky Cricket'. "I sent a real message to everyone in the changing room that England's best player is going to take on Australia. Root will be sitting in his room tonight going, 'I think I got that one wrong.'" At the end of day three of the second Test, pacer James Anderson had asserted that England will chase down 332 runs in 60-70 overs only for them to lose by 106 runs. Ben Duckett was as bullish last week, declaring that "the more the better" when talking about targets. "They have to be careful that people around don't think they are smug, or above their station...They are in a bubble. All that matters is their dressing room, and fun. There is a bit more to Test cricket than that. "This England team are hell bent on doing things their way, and saving Test cricket...But ultimately they have to be better than that now. They didn't win in New Zealand, they didn't win the Ashes, and if they carry on like this, they are going to lose in India." Cook and Hussain, however, felt that England are capable of turning it around in the next two games.



Bumrah likely to be rested, fit again Rahul set to be back for Ranchi Test

PTI ■ RAJKOT
Lead India pacer Jasprit Bumrah is likely to be rested, while batter K L Rahul is expected to come back after recovering from a quadriceps injury, in the fourth Test against England beginning February 23 in Ranchi. Bumrah is the leading wicket-taker in the five-match series with 17 scalps and singlehandedly bowled India to victory in the second Test. The hosts led 2-1 in the five-match rubber. "The team will travel to Ranchi tomorrow and Bumrah is likely to be given rest," said a BCCI source while also informing that Rahul is nearing full fitness and should be a part of the squad in Ranchi. The decision to rest Bumrah doesn't come as a surprise considering he bowled 80.5 overs in the first three Tests. As part of workload management, India had also rested Mohammed Siraj in the second Test in

Visakhapatnam before he returned to play a part in India's record 434 run win over the visitors in Rajkot on Sunday. India are well-placed to seal the series in Ranchi but if they are not able to, the home team will desperately need the services of Bumrah for the fifth and final Test in Dharamsala beginning March 7. Rahul, who missed the second and third Test after complaining of pain in his right quadriceps, had reached 90 percent fitness last week, according to an insider. "He is reaching his match fitness and should be available for Ranchi Test," the source added. Rahul was among India's best batters in the opening Test in Hyderabad before going down with the same injury that he suffered during the IPL last year. Since his comeback after four months on the sidelines, the batter has delivered for India across formats.

I do not like word retirement but I am happy in my quiet space: Lanning

PTI ■ BENGALURU
She doesn't like the word "retirement" but former Australia captain Meg Lanning is happy to be in her "quiet" space and follow her passion in franchise-based cricket around the world, including the Women's Premier League. Lanning, who has scored as

many as 3405 runs in 132 matches in her T20I career, announced her retirement from international cricket in November last year. She admirably led Delhi Capitals in the inaugural WPL last year, emerging as the top-scorer in the tournament with 345 runs from nine games. The Capitals lost by seven wickets in the final against

Mumbai Indians. "I don't like the word retirement, but it's been nice to be a little bit quiet, spend time at home, and play some cricket here and there," the 31-year-old batter said in a release issued by DC. "I still love playing, and I've been looking forward to the WPL, so really excited and hopefully can help Delhi win

the title this year." Lanning, who had her first training session with DC in Bengaluru after joining the team over the weekend, spoke highly about the inaugural WPL season and hopes the upcoming edition would be even better. "It's nice to get out here, have a bit of run around. Everyone looks in really good nick.

There is a lot of improvement from everyone, and I'm super excited to see what we can produce this year," she said. "I loved the time last year. Opening the batting with Shafali (Varma) was a lot of fun and it is something I'm looking forward to again this year. "I think as a group, we gelled nicely. It was a very easy

group, nice to hang out on and off the field, we seemed to be able to come together, so it was a lot of fun. I'm sure this year it's going to be much the same." DC will open their 2024 WPL campaign against defending champions Mumbai Indians at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on February 23.

team two days before the tournament, we didn't know about 90% of the players. We didn't know what they did and what they didn't. This year, it was important to know their strengths and weaknesses so that we can play better. The WPL is a short tournament and it's difficult to change things when it's on." Asked if she considers RCB as title contenders, the southpaw said: "We don't want to think too far ahead. We definitely want to do better than last year

and are motivated to do it. The people at our franchise are very nice and have supported us immensely, so more than anything else, we want to win the trophy for them. "The way they backed us even after four losses last season, the conversation revolved around our well-being. So, as players, it is very important that we respect the backing we are getting, and also try to win the trophy for our fans who supported us so much last season."

Our team balance has improved: RCB skipper Mandhana

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
RCB skipper Smriti Mandhana says her team's balance has improved considerably after acquiring new players and it should help them do a better job in the second season of the Women's Premier League (WPL), starting February 23. Royal Challengers Banaglore had endured a tough inaugural season in 2023 as it lost six of the eight matches and finished fourth in five-team

competition. The second season will be played in New Delhi and Bengaluru. RCB had spent close to 2.5 crore to acquire services of many impact players like Elka Bisht (left-arm spinner), Kate Cross (pacer), Georgia Wareham (leg-spinner), Sabbini Meghana (all-rounder), Simran Bahadur (medium-pacer), Sophie Molineux (left-arm spinner) and home-grown talent Shubha Sathesh (all-rounder). "I would definitely want it to be

better than the first season. From RCB's point of view, quite a few players were released and we brought in new players. So, the balance has improved for sure, and we are hoping to live up to our potential," Mandhana told JioCinema. The team had released seven players: Komal Zanzad, Poonam Khemnar, Preeti Bose, Sahana Pawar, Dane van Niekerk, Erin Burns, and Megan Schutt. The stylish batter said playing the domestic season has not



only prepared her well for the upcoming WPL, it also she helped her identify a few good players. "Playing in the domestic season helped me practice well and we saw quite a few girls against whom we've not played previously. I was able to recommend a few names to my franchise after seeing these girls." RCB had released a few members and bought as many as six new players during the WPL auction last December. "Last year, when we joined the

team two days before the tournament, we didn't know about 90% of the players. We didn't know what they did and what they didn't. This year, it was important to know their strengths and weaknesses so that we can play better. The WPL is a short tournament and it's difficult to change things when it's on." Asked if she considers RCB as title contenders, the southpaw said: "We don't want to think too far ahead. We definitely want to do better than last year

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