

OPINION 6 INDIAN NATIONHOOD THRIVES AMID DIVERSITY

WORLD 8 HOUTH REBEL MISSILE SETS CARGO SHIP ABLAZE

MONEY 10 SENSEX SURGES OVER 500 POINTS

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INDIA EYE 17TH SERIES WIN ON TROT AT HOME 12 SPORTS



TEMPLE TAX SPARKS OUTCRY

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Government's move to collect funds from temples in the form of tax has not gone down well with the Opposition BJP. Red-flagging the Bill on the issue of Hindu places of worship being a soft target for the Congress, the BJP charged the ruling party with trying to fill its 'empty coffers' with temple money. A related Bill was passed on Wednesday. Taking exception to the move, BJP State president BY Vijayendra said, "Corrupt, inept Loo Sarkaar with its penchant for anti-Hindu ideology in the guise of secularism, has cast its evil eyes on the temple revenues." "Through the Hindu Religious Endowments amendment act, it is trying to siphon-off donations as well as offerings from Hindu temples and religious institutions in order to fill its empty coffers," he said in a post on 'X'. The Shivamogga MLA said the government plans to "gobble" up 10 per cent of the temple revenue exceeding Rs 1 crore and 5 per cent of those below Rs 1 crore. "This not only reflects the deplorable condition of this government, but also shows its abject hate towards Hindu Dharma." Temple funds should be dedicatedly utilised for renovation of temples and to

BJP accuses Karnataka Government of trying to fill its empty coffers with temple money



File Photo

facilitate work beneficial to devotees, rather than diverting it for other purposes, which would be an injustice and betrayal of people's religious beliefs, the BJP State chief said. Why only Hindu temples are targeted for revenue, leaving out other religions, is a question raised by millions of devotees, he said. "Instead of grabbing the devotees' money, government can install donation boxes so that the concerned citizens

can help this penniless Govt boost its revenue as a gesture of goodwill," he stated. Defending the move as aimed at ensuring welfare of different sections, the Congress sought to turn the tables on its rival saying the saffron party had effected an amendment in 2011 to seek funds from high-income Hindu shrines. The Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Bill was passed

in the State Assembly on February 21. Regarding the Bill, the Government said it was necessary to enhance the amount of common pool fund, include a person skilled in Vishwa Hindu Temple architecture and sculpture in the committee of management of notified institutions and to form district and state-level committees to improve shrines and infrastructure for the safety of pilgrims.

Transport and Hindu Religious Endowments Ramalinga Reddy told reporters that the provision was not new but has existed since 2003. He also said an amendment was brought by the then BJP Government in 2011 to collect funds from high income group temples. Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Act 1997 came into force on May 1, 2003 and provisions were made for Common Pool Fund under Section 17 of the said Act, he explained. Common Pool Fund was implemented in the year 2003 itself. Section 17 of the Act was amended in 2011 to collect funds from high income group temples so as to aid temples with lesser income under the said fund. The Rajya Dharmika Parishad, a committee to improve the temple management for the benefit of pilgrims, is authorised to utilise Common Pool, he said. According to him, there were 3,000 C-Grade temples in Karnataka, which have an annual income of less than Rs 5 lakh from where the 'Dharmika Parishad' gets no money. Temples earning between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 25 lakh were classified as B-grade temples, from where 5 per cent of the gross income had been going to the committee since 2003. Continued on Page 2

Bengal Fire Rages on Sheikh Shahjahan still missing

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Sandeshkhali erupted once again on Thursday amid the visit of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes team, which received a plethora of complaints of land grab and torture on Adivasi people, including trafficking of their women. Hundreds of women from Jhupkhali, a hamlet in the Bermajur area adjacent to Sandeshkhali, armed with bamboo sticks, attacked and torched the properties of Sheikh Siraj, the brother of Trinamool Congress strongman and one of the prime accused in a land-grab and molestation case Sheikh Shahjahan, alleging that thousands of bighas of their lands had been forcibly occupied, sold via impersonation, and converted into fisheries. The incident took place hours after Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar left the riverine island at the mouth of the Sunderbans after an overnight stay in the area, during the visit of the NCST team led by its vice-chairperson, Ananta Nayak. "Whatever I have seen and heard makes me feel like crying... it should not have taken place in a democratic country... I spoke to the villagers, and they (Sandeshkhali residents)



Security personnel outside TMC leader Sheikh Shahjahan's home at Sandeshkhali PTI

have mentioned the name of a political leader. We will include it in our report. We have received more than 23 complaints so far," Nayak said, adding that the findings of the team would be compared with the ground report before submitting it to President Droupadi Murmu. A woman, while describing her woes to the members of the visiting team, narrated how "no complaints of my missing daughter have been registered till now... she went missing seven years ago... when we went to the Sandeshkhali Police Station, they asked us to get a written recommendation from Sheikh Shahjahan." Another woman said how her land was occupied and converted into a Trinamool Congress party office "just because I

am a CPI(M) worker," while most of the others said how their lands had been grabbed and sold via impersonation. A large contingent of police force led by Barasat range DIG Bhashkar Mukherjee rushed to the area and held talks with the locals. "The police have controlled the situation and assured the local people that their issues will be addressed," he said. This was the third team to visit the strife-torn region after the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Commission for Women. Sandeshkhali shot into national news on January 5 when Shahjahan's henchmen attacked and injured a team of Enforcement Directorate officials during a search operation at his house.

CAPSULE

CBI searches Satya Pal Malik premises

New Delhi: The CBI conducted searches at the premises of former Jammu and Kashmir governor Satya Pal Malik and 29 other locations on Thursday in connection with alleged corruption in the Rs 2,200-crore Kiru Hydropower project, officials said. The federal agency started its operation in the morning, with around 100 officers mobilised to swoop down at the 30 locations in Jammu, Srinagar, Delhi, Gurugram, Mumbai, Baghpat, Noida, Patna, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Barmer, Nagaur and Chandigarh, the officials said. "During searches evidence of huge cash deposits, investment in fixed deposits, investment in properties in various cities, digital and documentary evidence, etc. Have been recovered," said the CBI.

US to reduce visa wait time for Indians

New Delhi: The United States is working towards further reducing the wait time for visitor visas for Indians following a decrease of 75 per cent last year, according to US Bureau of Consular Affairs Assistant Secretary Rena Bitter. In an interview with PTI, Bitter noted that today more Indians can travel to the US than in any other time in history. "Last year, the Embassy in India processed 1.4 million visas, explosion of an incredible number... In every category there is no wait time at all except in one area of travel where there is still some wait time and that is people travelling for the first time to the United States for tourism," she said.

Modi says Opposition thrives on negativity

PTI ■ MEHSANA/AHEMDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday targeted the Congress, saying it continues to live in negativity and is not ready to leave the path of hatred even when the grand Ram temple has been built in Ayodhya. He said his Government is making efforts to improve the lives of people from all sections of society. "The aim of Modi's guarantee is changing the lives of people at the last rung in society," he said. On one hand temples are being built in the country, the government is also building pucca houses for crores of poor people, the PM said.

"This is the time when whether it is the work of God or work of the country, both are happening at a fast pace," he said. "We will carry out development work and preserve our heritage," he added. The PM was addressing the public after inaugurating the Valinath Mahadev temple in Gujarat's Mehsana district. He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of various projects costing more than Rs 8,350 crore. Modi said for a long time in Independent India, the Congress



created a conflict and enmity "between development and heritage." "If anyone is to be blamed for this, it is the same Congress which ruled the country for decades. These are the same people who made even a holy place like Somnath (temple) a cause of controversy," he said. The Congress did not even show the desire to hoist a religious flag at the Pavagadh temple in Gujarat's Panchmahal district, and for decades linked the Sun temple at Modhera with vote bank politics, he said. "These are the same people who raised questions about the existence of Lord Ram and created hurdles in the construction of his

temple. And today, when a grand temple has been constructed at (Lord Ram's) birthplace, when the entire country is happy with it, the people who live in negativity are not leaving the path of hatred," he said. The PM also attended the consecration ceremony of Valinath Dham Temple. "Gujarat also has many symbols of ancient civilisation of India. These symbols are very important not only to understand history but also to connect the coming generations with their roots. That is why it has been the effort of our government to preserve and develop them as world heritage," he said. Continued on Page 2

AAP Congress Strategy for 2024 Unclear

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Congress and the Samajwadi Party agreed on seat sharing for the Lok Sabha elections, the AAP is believed to have finalised and sealed the arrangements for Delhi, and the formal announcement can be made anytime. Sources said the Congress and the AAP have agreed on the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, with the AAP contesting on 4 and the Congress on 3. The Congress has also decided to allocate one seat to the AAP in Haryana and two in Gujarat. While the Haryana seat is likely to be either Gurugram or Faridabad, those in Gujarat include Bharuch and Bhavnagar. The AAP will field candidates from the South Delhi, West Delhi, North West Delhi, and New Delhi seats, while the

Congress will contest from the Chandni Chowk, East Delhi, and North East Delhi constituencies, according to sources in the AAP. Prior to this, the AAP had offered the Congress just one out of the seven Lok Sabha seats keeping in mind the 'dharma of alliance'. "Election on a merit basis, the Congress party does not deserve even a single seat in Delhi, but keeping in mind the 'dharma of alliance', we are offering them one seat in Delhi. We propose the Congress party on one seat and the AAP on six seats," AAP MP Sandeep Pathak had said while addressing a press conference. All the seven Lok Sabha seats in the national capital are currently held by the BJP. Former senior party leader Ahmed Patel's son and daughter were contenders for the

Bharuch seat. The Congress is also planning to field at least one Dalit candidate in the national capital. Additionally, the party will field a candidate from the general category and a woman candidate. Meanwhile, the AAP will give up its south Goa constituency for the Congress. Whether the Congress-AAP alliance in Delhi will help break the deadlock in Punjab is not yet clear. An alliance between the AAP and the Congress in Punjab was always going to be tricky given that they are the main rivals in the State as of now, though their tie-up in the Chandigarh mayoral polls managed to be a success. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, which followed the 2017 strong win by the Congress in the Punjab Assembly polls, the Congress won 8 out of the total 13 seats, securing 40.6 per cent of the vote. The Akali Dal and BJP won 2 seats each, with 27.8 per cent and 9.7 per cent of the vote share, respectively.

Freedom of Speech or Expression?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology finalised its emergency blocking orders against 177 social media accounts and posts linked to the farmers' protests, social media giant X (formerly Twitter) on Thursday said it disagrees with these actions in accordance with freedom of speech and expression but will "withhold the accounts and posts in India." Elon Musk, owner of X, has said the platform has received orders from the Indian Government to block certain accounts and links. Failure to comply could result in potential penalties for the platform and its employees, including significant fines and imprisonment. This marks a new flashpoint in the

escalating tensions between the social media platform and the Indian Government, with the former having sued the Centre over content-blocking orders in 2022. The ruling last year, however, went against the company. Nevertheless, the Centre is yet to respond to the allegations. Opposition parties allege that democracy is being "murdered" in the country after the microblogging platform X voiced disagreement with the Centre's order to block accounts and posts related to ongoing farmers' protests. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi questioned, "If farmers ask for MSP, shoot them — is this the mother of democracy? When the youth ask for an appointment, then refuse to even listen to them — is this the Mother of Democracy?" Continued on Page 2

Jumbo Shankar in Delhi Zoo ready for mate from Dubai

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shankar, the solitary 27-year-old African elephant residing at the Delhi Zoo, may soon find companionship from an unexpected source - Dubai Safari Park. Indian Oil Corporation Ltd has stepped forward to facilitate the transportation of a female elephant from Dubai, according to sources at the Delhi Zoo, also known as the National Zoological Park. Initially, there were plans to bring a female elephant from South Africa, but talks could

not materialise due to technical and logistic glitches. Now, officials have identified Dubai Safari Park as the potential source to bring an African female elephant for Shankar. Shankar is not alone in this predicament; at the Mysuru zoo, Rambo, another African bull elephant in his 20s, has been solitary since 2016 following the death of its sire, Timbo. African elephants, the largest land mammals, differ from Asian elephants. Sources indicate that of the three



female elephants, one may be sent to Mysuru Zoo to accompany Rambo. However, plans are still being finalised. Having lived solitarily for the past two decades, concerns have arisen regarding their mental health, prompting efforts to find suitable companions to ensure their well-being and facilitate procreation. Reports have indicated instances of Shankar exhibiting aggression and self-injury, particularly during the 'musth' phase. As social creatures, elephants become distressed when alone and lacking companionship. Zoo officials previously attempted to mate Shankar

with Asiatic elephants, but without success. While elephants often heed their mahouts, there have been instances of aggression resulting in fatalities among handlers. "Discussions regarding bringing female elephants from Dubai are in preliminary stages. We intend to bring at least three elephants. We approach this potential pairing with cautious optimism, recognising the importance of ensuring compatibility and a smooth transition for the

female elephants from Dubai. Plans are being made for careful introductions and acclimatisation to prioritise the well-being of the animals," said the sources. With its extensive logistical capabilities and commitment to environmental stewardship, IOC's involvement marks a pivotal moment in Shankar's quest for companionship. As part of its corporate social responsibility and conservation efforts, IOC has already taken initiatives by adopting rhinoceroses in

various zoos across India. In fact, the rhinoceros serves as IOC's brand ambassador. Shankar has been housed singly and separately from the Asian elephants at the zoo since 2001 when the female African elephant brought from Zimbabwe passed away. Shankar was a one-year-old calf when it arrived at the Delhi zoo from Zimbabwe in 1998 as a diplomatic gift. Weighing up to 6,000 kgs and measuring up to 3.3m at the shoulder, the African Elephant is the world's largest land mammal.

Centre ready for talks: Thakur to agitating farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur has said that the Centre is ready for talks with protesting farmers who are our "brothers" and "annadaatas", asserting that the Modi government has taken various steps to ensure higher income for farmers. Meanwhile the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has asked Rs one crore as compensation to the death of the farmers at Khanauri border and also demanded Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, and state home minister Anil Vij to be booked for the "murder" of a protesting farmer on the Punjab-Haryana border and announced a tractor march next week. It said farmers will take out tractor marches on highways on February 26 and hold an All India All Kisan Mazdoor Mahapanchayat at Ramlila

Maidan in Delhi on March 14. Speaking to media persons the Minister said "we were ready for talks earlier and are ready even today and will be ready to discuss their issues even in future." Thakur highlighted various steps taken by the Modi government to double farmers' income and achieve higher growth in the agriculture and allied sectors. He said the government has doubled the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and increased the procurement by more than two times. "About the Cabinet decision to hike Fair & Remunerative Price for sugarcane for the season 2024-25 by 8% to Rs 340 per quintal, the Minister said "India is paying the highest price for sugarcane in the world. And the price fixed is 107% higher than the A2 plus formula for sugarcane. A2 includes all the expenses incurred by the farmers for buying chemicals, fertilizers,



seeds and hired labour, while A2 + FL covers actual cost incurred plus implicit cost in the form of family labour. The Minister also drew comparison of the highest MSP paid to farmers during 10 years of NDA government than during the previous 10 years of UPA Government. Shri Thakur said the Modi Government has spent Rs 18.39 lakh crore in the last 10 years on procurement of wheat, paddy, oilseeds, and pulses as against Rs 5.5 lakh crore by the UPA regime. About fertilizers the Minister said "despite the increase in the prices of fertilizers across the world, we did not allow the prices of fertilizers to increase for the farmers. Government of India gave subsidy up to Rs 3

lakh crore, to ensure that fertilizers are made available to farmers at reasonable rates. The SKM, which spearheaded the 2020-21 farm agitation against the now-repealed farm laws, announced that the farmers will observe a 'black day' on Friday to mourn the death. Subhakaran Singh, 21, a native of Bathinda, had died Wednesday amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers. Speaking to reporters here, SKM leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said a case of murder should be registered in the death of the farmer at Khanauri border and his family be given Rs 1 crore in compensation. The SKM after a meeting here said farmers will take out tractor marches on highways across country on February 26 and hold a Mahapanchayat in Delhi on March 14. It said the farmers on Friday will burn effigies of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and

his Haryana counterpart Anil Vij to condemn the police action. Farmers leader Sarwan Singh Pandher also demanded registration of a murder case against those responsible for the death of a protesting farmer at the Khanauri border point of Punjab-Haryana. Pandher also said the Punjab government should take action against the Haryana paramilitary force personnel for allegedly damaging 25-30 tractor-trolleys after entering into the state's territory. Pandher said the Punjab government should take action against the Haryana personnel for allegedly damaging 25-30 tractor-trolleys after entering into the state's territory. Farmers leaders had on Wednesday put the march on hold for two days after a farmer's death, who was later identified as Subhakaran Singh, saying they would decide their next course of action Friday evening.



Russian skier dies in Gulmarg avalanche

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU
A Russian Skier was killed Thursday afternoon in a avalanche in the ski resort of Gulmarg. One skier sustained minor injuries but is in stable condition and is receiving treatment at a local hospital. A large number of skiers including foreign nationals arrived in Gulmarg following a fresh spell of snowfall to enjoy the skiing. The rescue teams pressed helicopter services to locate the trapped skiers with the help of local guides stranded in the higher reaches. The rescue teams rushed additional troops to carry out searches and

managed to rescue the group of six Russian skiers along with their guide. According to the spokesman of the J&K government, A collaborative effort between the Gulmarg Ski Patrol of the Tourism Department, J&K and J&K Police resulted in the successful rescue of a group comprising six Russian skiers and one local guide following an avalanche at the higher reaches of Gulmarg, known as Army Ridge. Despite the valiant efforts of the rescue team, one Russian skier tragically lost his life due to the avalanche. "Our thoughts and condolences are with the family and friends of the deceased during this difficult time", the spokesman said. Meanwhile, the ongoing sporting events of the 4th Khelo India Winter Games remain unaffected by the incident. The local authorities issued a fresh advisory to remain alert in the wake of a fresh avalanche. The Russian Skiers were currently admitted to the local hospital and receiving all necessary medical treatment, the government spokesman said.



JK start up policy approved

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU
Administrative Council (AC) which met here under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha approved J&K start-up policy 2024-27 in supersession to the Start-up Policy notified in the year 2018. The policy has the objective of setting up 2000 new startups in Jammu & Kashmir in the next 5 years. Rajeev Rai Bhatnagar, Advisor to the Lieutenant Governor; Atal Dulloo, Chief Secretary; Mandeep Kumar Bhandari, Principal Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor attended the meeting. According to an official spokesman of the UT government, "The government of Jammu & Kashmir will set up a Venture Capital Fund of Rs. 250 Crores and will infuse a maximum of Rs. 25 Crores as an initial fund to this venture

capital fund". The venture capital fund so created shall invest primarily in recognized start-ups of Jammu & Kashmir. The department may also work out a mechanism to facilitate allotment of land to start-ups having good potential for growth. The Administrative Council also approved the development of seven new Industrial Estates in the UT of J&K spread over 5290 kanals of land for an amount of Rs. 304.51 Crores. The estimated investment in these seven new Industrial Estates is Rs. 8700.16 Crores with an employment potential of 28376 persons. These 7 new Industrial Estates are situated at Banderpora Budgam, Sempora Medicity, Srinagar, Bhagthali, Kathua, Karandi, Samba, Trenz, Shopian, Hariparigam Tral Pulwama and Khunmoh, Pantha Chowk Srinagar.

SC gets Ayush Holistic Wellness Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Thursday got its own 'Ayush Holistic Wellness Centre' within its premises, offering judges and staff access to comprehensive holistic care addressing physical, mental, and emotional health needs. The newly established Ayurveda center within the premises of the Supreme Court will provide a range of traditional Ayurvedic treatments and therapies tailored to enhance physical vitality and promote mental and emotional balance. From personalized wellness consultations to therapeutic massages, yoga sessions, and meditation practices, the center will offer a holistic approach to health that integrates ancient wisdom with modern-day needs. It was inaugurated by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud in the presence of Companion Judges of the Supreme Court of India, Sarbananda Sonowal, Cabinet Minister for Ministry of Ayush and Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and Dr. Munjipara Mahendrabhai Kalubhai, Minister of State for



Ministry of Ayush and for Ministry of Women And Child Development, Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary and other senior officers of the Ministry of Ayush, Prof.(Dr.) Tanuja Nesari, Director and other senior faculty members of All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) were also present at the occasion. On the occasion CJI DY Chandrachud said, "I am a

proponent of Ayurveda and holistic lifestyle. We have over 2000 staff members, and we must look at a holistic pattern of living, not just for the judges and their immediate families but for the staff members too." "The AIIA has extended its centres at many places like LABSNA, Safadarjung, IIT, etc.in the same way we have one more add on which is a holistic and integrated centre for the Judiciary, Judges and

other staff of the Supreme Court, it is like we are now at your doorstep. Under one umbrella we are providing all the facilities of Ayurveda," said Prof. Dr Tanuja Nesari, Director AIIA. On the occasion, a MoU regarding establishing, operationalizing and providing expert services at the Ayush Holistic Wellness Centre was also signed between the Supreme Court and the AIIA.

Modi says Opposition thrives on negativity

From Page 1
He said only last month, traces of civilisation dating back to 2,800 years were found in Vadnagar in Mehsana district. Vadnagar is the hometown of PM Modi. A similar ancient Indian heritage was found at Dholavira in Gujarat. "These are India's pride, and we are proud of this rich past," Modi said. Every effort being made in the new India is towards creating a heritage for the coming generations, whether it is the new and modern roads or railway tracks, he said. Amid farmers' protest on the borders between Punjab and Haryana, Modi on Thursday said his Government was giving priority to every aspect linked to villages and also focusing on improving the lives of small farmers through various schemes and initiatives. He said strengthening the rural economy was necessary to achieve the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India). The PM was addressing a gathering of nearly one lakh people, mostly cattle-rearers and farmers, at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera area

of Ahmedabad on the golden jubilee celebration of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which owns the 'Amul' dairy brand. Referring to the BJP government's ambitious plan of creating 10,000 FPOs or Farmer Producer Organisations, Modi said his Government was on a mission to turn small farmers into "agri entrepreneurs and exporters". In his address, he listed many schemes meant for farmers and village-dwellers, such as Micro ATMs, GOBARdhan scheme and Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samridhi Kendras. "With Micro ATMs installed in villages, cattle-rearers don't have to go far to withdraw cash. We are also planning to give RuPay credit cards to cattle-rearers. As a pilot project, we have launched that scheme in Banaskantha and Panchmahal districts here," he said. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that India's soul rests in her villages. Therefore, in order to create Viksit Bharat (developed India), we must have a strong rural economy, he added. "We are giving priority to each and every aspect of villages and our focus is on improving

the lives of small farmers, on improving the health of livestock and how farmers get more income through allied activities such as fishing and bee-keeping. That is why we have decided to give Kisan credit cards to fishermen and cattle-rearers too," he said. Modi said his Government also gave seeds that are capable of fighting the effects of climate change. To protect livestock from the deadly foot-and-mouth disease, his government has launched a free vaccination drive for cattle at a cost of Rs 15,000 crore and nearly 60 crore jabs were already given, he added. "We have also set up Kisan Samridhi Kendras across the country so that farmers get scientific solutions to their problems near their villages. We are also making arrangements to help farmers in making organic fertilisers," he said. Referring to solar panel installations in fields and setting up of bio-gas plants which in turn produce bio-fertiliser from cow dung, the PM said his government wants to turn "anna data" into "urja data" and "uvarak data" (food grain growers into producers of energy and fertilisers).

ED serves 7th summons on Kejriwal, AAP says CM will be arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
As the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday served a fresh summons on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in its excise policy money laundering probe asking him to appear before it on February 26, the AAP has linked the summons with the victory in Chandigarh mayoral polls. It also claimed that the AAP convener will be arrested in the next three to four days if the party enters into a seat-sharing agreement with the Congress for the Lok Sabha polls. Delhi Cabinet Minister and senior AAP leader Atishi claimed that the CBI was going to issue a notice to Kejriwal either on Saturday or Sunday. "Since the news of discussion on alliance between the AAP and the Congress being in the final stage is circulating, AAP leaders have received messages that Kejriwal will be arrested if AAP enters into a seat-sharing agreement with the Congress," she claimed. Kejriwal has skipped ED summons six times till now since the first one on



November 2. The ED had recently filed a fresh complaint before a local court against Kejriwal for disobeying its summons in this case. The court listed the matter for further hearing on March 16 as it exempted Kejriwal from personal appearance last week. "The ED has sent the seventh illegal summons to Kejriwal. We have raised legal questions about all the summonses sent so far by the Enforcement Directorate, questioning the basis for these summonses to the Chief Minister. However, ED has not replied to any of our queries", Atishi said. The Supreme Court saved democracy in Chandigarh,

and to take revenge for that, the BJP has once again sent Arvind Kejriwal an illegal summons, she added. The Delhi BJP has slammed Kejriwal and Atishi for spreading lies over the ED's summons. Leader of the Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri accused Kejriwal of making a mockery of democracy. If he is honest, why is he afraid of ED's summons," Bidhuri questioned. Reacting to the statement, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that not only Atishi but the entire AAP is aware that the mastermind behind the liquor scam is Arvind Kejriwal, and he will be arrested some day. Sachdeva described Atishi's statement as a reflection of the frustration of the AAP and said that no supporter of the BJP will be intimidated by a beaten coalition. Kejriwal's name has been mentioned multiple times in charge sheets filed by the ED in the case. The ED had claimed in its charge sheet that the AAP used "proceeds of crime" to the tune of about Rs 45 crore in its Goa election campaign.

Congress chief Kharge given Z plus security

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Ahead of the Lok Sabha Elections, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has been granted Z-plus security across the country by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The decision was taken by the home ministry early this month based on the threat perception of Kharge, the sources said. Commandos of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) will provide the Z-plus security to Kharge on all India basis, the sources said. As president of the principal opposition party, Kharge is expected to tour across the country extensively in the run-up to the general elections as well as during the polls and the decision to enhance his security cover was taken keeping in view this fact, the sources said. Kharge will now be covered by a security blanket of about 30 CRPF commandoes round the clock in three shifts. This cover

also includes a bulletproof vehicle, pilot and escort. The Z-plus is the highest category security provided to a person of high threat perception in India. There are four categories of VIP security Z plus, Z, Y and X -- depending on the threat perception analysis by the Intelligence Bureau. The prime minister is provided the highest security cover by the Special Protection Group. Former prime minister Manmohan Singh, former Congress presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi are covered under the Z-plus security with CRPF commandos. The CRPF is well suited for handling the task, the sources said. After a major security review by the Modi government in 2019, 1,300 commandos were freed as the Centre removed or scaled down the security cover of as many as 350 politicians and former and present lawmakers.

Freedom of Speech...

From Page 1
According to sources, the Ministry of Electronics and IT has ordered social media platforms to temporarily block 177 accounts linked to farmers' protests upon the request of the Ministry of Home Affairs. "The Indian government has issued executive orders requiring X to act on specific accounts and posts, subject to potential penalties including significant fines and imprisonment. In compliance

with the orders, we will withhold these accounts and posts in India alone; however, we disagree with these actions and maintain that freedom of expression should extend to these posts," X said in a statement. The social media platform noted that a writ appeal challenging the Indian government's blocking orders remains pending and called for the order to be made public to enhance transparency. "Due to legal restrictions, we are unable to publish the executive orders, but we believe that making them public is essential for transparency. This lack of disclosure can lead to a lack of accountability and arbitrary decision-making," X added.

Temple tax sparks outcry

From Page 1
The Dharmika Parishad had been getting 10 per cent revenue from those temples whose annual gross income was above Rs 25 lakh since 2003. "Now what we have done is we have made it free from

paying to Dharmika Parishad if the income is up to Rs 10 lakh. We have made provisions to collect five per cent from temples whose gross income is between Rs 10 lakh and less than a crore. 10 per cent will be collected from temples whose income is above Rs 1 crore. All this

amount will reach the Dharmika Parishad," Reddy said. The Minister said there are 40,000 to 50,000 priests in the State whom the State Government wants to help. "If the money reaches Dharmika Parishad then we can provide them insurance

cover. We want their families to get at least Rs 5 lakh if something happens to them. To pay the premium we need Rs 7 crore to 8 crore (annually)," he explained. The Minister said the Government wants to provide scholarships to children of temple priests, which would

require Rs 5-6 crore per year and housing facilities for C group priests and temple employees. "This entire amount will benefit the temple priests only, many of whom are in poor condition," he said. Government sources said the purpose behind the Bill is to

provide facilities and safety to pilgrims within the jurisdiction of Group 'A' temples. A district level and State high-level committee will be constituted to scrutinise, review and submit the proposals regarding the construction and

maintenance of buildings, roads and tunnels, electricity supply and maintenance, water supply and sanitation, construction of recreation centres and libraries to provide necessary facilities to pilgrims and to provide safety to pilgrims within the jurisdiction of Group "A"

Temples, they added. Union Minister and BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar too slammed the Congress Government in the State over the Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowment Bill and called it a "new low" for the State's ruling party.

Upset over poor sanitation in Burari, LG orders drive

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Delhi Lt Governor (LG) VK Saxena has expressed shock over the condition of unauthorised colonies in Burari and instructed officers to take immediate steps to ensure sanitation and cleanliness and ensure that the timelines informed to him about the completion of the projects are adhered to. These instructions came after Saxena on Wednesday visited Burari, that houses a population of nearly 20 Lakh in as many as 80 unauthorised colonies in North / North-East Delhi and took stock of the situation on ground, officials said here on Thursday. Saxena, who has been

receiving repeated requests from residents of different unauthorised colonies in the capital, to visit their areas and help them address the glaring lack of civic amenities had last visited Kirari on February 10. He will be further visiting such colonies. Walking on foot on various stretches throughout the area, that comprises densely populated residential colonies like Sant Nagar, Nathu Pura, Burari village, Baba Colony, Laxmi Vihar, he was shocked at the lack of basic civic infrastructure and sanitation services that the people are entitled to, in natural course of governance, officials said. The LG was informed that, pending since years, only 70% of the areas had been provided with sewage lines till

now by DJB, and even in these, connections to households were yet to be done. Similarly, out of the 80 colonies in the area, roads had been constructed only in 17 colonies. Even as the main road from Outer Ring Road leading into the area had come up with showrooms of top brands in the country, the road itself was in a pathetic condition due to neglect and disrepair. Apart from dust-filled streets, open drains — choked and overflowing — dotted entire stretch of colonies and garbage from the area was being disposed on the Yamuna floodplain itself, despite the Bhalaswa Landfill site being in close vicinity of the area.



Locals brought to the LG's notice that the sewer lines, being laid on the main road, for years together now, had apparently not taken into account prospective needs of the area, owing to the fact that it was only of 1.5 meter dia, which was insufficient even to meet the existing drainage requirements. Additionally, the delay in the laying of these lines, that entailed open excavated roads, had resulted in the persistent problem of traffic congestion, sand and C&D Waste pollution, apart from being a constant hazard for pedestrians and two-wheelers. Even the supposedly "restored" water body in Burari village, that was shown to the LG, was filled with

sludge and debris, with drains and sewage flowing into it. The LG was visibly upset over the state of roads throughout his route, overflowing sewers, heaps of garbage, broken pavements and dividers in the area. He was anguished that such apathy on part of the government agencies had led to pitiable living conditions in one of the most densely populated areas of the city. People of the area also complained about encroachment of roads by shopkeepers leading to traffic jams at peak hours and the lack of last mile connectivity and absence of DTC bus routes. It was apparent that no concrete efforts had been undertaken by the DJB and I&FC Department to address these issues.



Kejriwal holds meet over water bill, BJP boycotts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called an all-party meeting on Thursday evening to discuss the 'one-time settlement' of water bills in the city. While Delhi Congress leaders Arvinder Singh Lovely and Haroon Yusuf joined the meeting, BJP leaders decided to boycott it, saying that they would join if the 'airflow meter scam' was discussed. According to party officials, the meeting was held at Kejriwal's residence at Civil Lines. During the meeting, Delhi's Water Minister Atishi and Urban Development Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, shed light on the intricacies of the 'One Time Settlement Scheme' for Inflated Water Bills. During this, the Chief Minister said that the absence of the BJP in the meeting indicated their opposition to the scheme, whereas it would waive off the bills of 90 per cent of the people upon its implementation. The Congress reaffirmed its commitment to collaborate with the government in alleviating the burden on Delhiites. Delhi Jal Board Vice Chairman Somnath Bharati was also present. Kejriwal said that the BJP's absence from the all-party meeting indicates their opposition to the 'One-Time Settlement Scheme', which aims to provide relief to lakhs of people in Delhi. "We should expose the BJP in front of the people of Delhi because they are engaging in very dirty politics. If BJP has any suggestions, we will consider them," the CM said. Meanwhile, the Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said that the water bill settlement issue currently prevalent in Delhi is a result of the problems created by the installation of air-flow water meters by the Kejriwal government. "Airflow meter scam is part of larger scam in Delhi Jal Board done by Kejriwal government. We will surely attend all-party meet if

Kejriwal is ready to discuss the entire Delhi Jal Board scam and other scams of Delhi government," Sachdeva said. AAP has been raising the 'one-time settlement' scheme for the past week and also moved a resolution on it in the ongoing Legislative Assembly. According to AAP, the scheme is expected to benefit more than 10 lakh consumers receiving faulty water bills across Delhi. Consumers will be able to settle arrears by paying re-casted bills in one go. The bills will get re-casted in an automated manner. Therefore, customers will not have to individually get their bills rectified at the DJB Offices." All customers availing this scheme will need to get functional meters; this will ensure that they come within the billing ambit of DJB. This scheme is projected to bring in 11.9 lakh people under the fold of DJB. The DJB is expected to unlock a potential of Rs 2500 crores worth revenue. The OTS will provide relief to consumers as well as bring revenue to Delhi Jal Board," the AAP said in a statement. The DJB passed this scheme in its Board Meeting dated 13th June 2023. The scheme was to be brought to the cabinet by the Urban Development Department, which is the parent department of DJB. The Finance Department refused to give its comments. Finally, written directions were given by the Urban Development Minister to the Urban Development Department to present the cabinet note before the council of ministers by 14th February. However, the UD department refused to put up the proposal before the Cabinet saying no comments were received from Finance Department. At the Delhi Assembly, Kejriwal had said, "I request L-G sir... if you just pick up your phone and tell these officers to clear the file, the scheme will be implemented in just three hours..."

Dhankhar to be chief guest at DU 100th convocation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar will be chief guest at Delhi University's 100th convocation ceremony here on Saturday, Delhi University Vice Chancellor Professor Yogesh Singh said here on Thursday adding 1.38 lakh UG-PG students will be awarded degrees. Students and teachers will be seen in Indian cultural attire, and there will be a lot of changes in the degree also, he said. The program will be organized in the Multipurpose Hall located at the Sports Complex of the

University of Delhi. Three books will also be released on this occasion. This time some new things are also going to happen on the 100th convocation ceremony. Giving detailed information about the programme, the Vice Chancellor said this time a change has been made in the convocation attire. Students will participate in the convocation wearing attire as per Indian culture. This time a lot of changes will be seen in the degree also. The Vice Chancellor said the stole for the P.G. students will be turquoise colored handloom fabric with golden border with the University



logo and Shatabdi logo on both the sides. For U.G. students, there will be a yellow colored handloom fabric stole with a golden border with the University logo and Shatabdi logo on both the sides. For Ph.D., D.M. and M.Ch. students of the university, there will be a red colored

handloom fabric stole with a golden border with the University logo and Shatabdi logo on both the sides. He said there will be purple colored stole for the officers while there will be maroon colored stole for the principals and heads of departments. Degrees will have 17 security features. The Vice Chancellor said this time the name of the student's mother has also been printed on the degree. Along with this, colorful photographs of the students will also be printed on the degree. Professor Yogesh Singh said the degree will have 17

different security features like currency notes, due to which it will not be easy to copy it. He said that along with the participants coming to the convocation, one family member has also been allowed to come and food has been arranged for them too. The Vice Chancellor said this time 207 medals/awards will be given in the convocation ceremony, of which 173 will be gold medals and certificates and 34 will be award certificates. He said the total number of students receiving these medals/awards is 167, which includes 110 female and 57 male students.



AAP MLAs paralysed Budget session: LoP Bidhuri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Thursday said the MLAs of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party have paralysed the Assembly during the budget session by coming into the well of the house and create a ruckus. Levelling this charge, Bidhuri also said instead of taking action against them, the Speaker of the Assembly does not even warn them. Bidhuri claimed all this was being done every day as part of a planned conspiracy to save Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal from the ED inquiry. Bidhuri said a week had passed since the beginning of the budget session but the government, accepting its failure, did not present the budget. The budget is not even known yet. Lakhs of rupees are spent by the taxpayers of Delhi on the assembly session but no results are visible, he said. Every day the assembly proceedings begin and then the ruling party MLAs come to the well and start making noise. It never happens in democratic history that the MLAs of the ruling party create a ruckus and adjourn the meeting, Bidhuri said. The Speaker of the Assembly, who gets the opposition MLAs thrown out of the House on small issues, also keeps watching this whole drama silently and does not even warn any MLA to throw him out. After this, the House is adjourned for the next day. This drama has been happening continuously for the last several days, Bidhuri said. He said Kejriwal does not want to appear before the ED for investigation and he has also told the court in this regard that he is busy in the Assembly session while he has not come to the Assembly for many days. The budget session has been deliberately prolonged so that it can avoid ED investigation. The Leader of the Opposition said no serious issue is being discussed in the Assembly session and it is being adjourned after one or two hours of proceedings.

Delhi Assembly condoles farmer death during protest march

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Delhi Assembly on Thursday condoled the death of 21-year-old Shubhakaran Singh during farmers' protest at Khanauri on the Punjab-Haryana border. Reading the condolence message of the House, Speaker Ram Niwas Goel said that the incident at the Khanauri border on Wednesday was "very painful". "The peacefully protesting farmers should be treated calmly and their demands should be seriously considered," he said. Singh was a native of Bhatinda and the lone bread winner of his family. His family owns just two acres of land, said the Speaker, expressing the House's condolences to the family of the deceased farmer. The House also condoled the deaths of eminent jurist Fali S. Nariman and famous radio presenter Amin Sayani and observed a two-minute silence. The proceedings of the Budget Session were adjourned for 25 minutes around 12.20 pm when the ruling AAP MLAs trooped in the well of the House and raised slogans against the BJP accusing it of stalling one-time settlement scheme for recasting water bills. Carrying placards and shouting slogans, they ignored the Speaker's request to allow the proceedings to continue and take their seats. When the House reconvened at 12.45 pm, AAP legislators again came into the well of the House shouting slogans. The Speaker finally adjourned the House till Friday 11 am.

MCD releases pending school funds for uniform, stationery

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has released the pending funds for the purchase of school uniform, stationery and bags for students after an audit report highlighted its failure to disburse the amount since 2016-17, documents reveal. However, the MCD schools have received less funds for nearly 2,73,122 of the total 7.88 lakh students enrolled in the civic body schools, the documents showed without highlighting any reason for the less disbursement. There was no immediate response from the mayor's office, commissioner MCD, and director of the education

department. "The corporation has approved the proposal vide 28/12/23, 31/10/23, and 28/12/23 for allocation of cash subsidy of Rs 300, Rs 1,100, and Rs 120 respectively, per child enrolled in pre-primary to fifth classes in MCD schools for the purchase of stationery, uniform, and school bags for the current year 2023-24," the documents, which shows the amount has been released for just 5,14,878 students, read. Reacting to the development, the Delhi BJP criticised the AAP-led MCD government for releasing the funds for the academic year 2023-24 after the session had ended. "Out of the total number of students studying in municipal schools,

only 5,14,878 students were given funds for school uniforms for the academic year 2023-24 that too in January 2024," the party said in a statement. As per the documents, MCD released the pending funds of Rs 56,63,65,800 for uniform, Rs 15,44,63,400 for notebooks and stationery, and Rs 6,17,85,360 for purchasing school bags for these students across its 12 zones. The civic body has a total of 7.88 lakh students enrolled in its schools. The funds were released for the academic session 2023-24 between December last year and January, 2024. An MCD school principal has written to the civic body regarding receiving funds for

only 45 students while the school strength is 191. In the letter, the principal also raised concern that the received funds are falling short for even the 19 students of the total 64 who have their bank accounts opened. "We are unable to understand out of these 64 which 45 students are to be credited with the uniform fund amount," the letter, dated February 14 addressed to the education department of MCD, read. It further enquired if the funds for the remaining students including the 19 students who did not receive the amount despite having accounts, will be released after an ongoing drive in the school to open bank accounts of students.

HC hands over University Medical College control to Delhi Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Delhi High Court on Thursday paved the way for transfer of the University College of Medical Sciences (UCMS) from the Delhi University to the city government, after it vacated the stay it had ordered on implementation of a Union Cabinet decision of 2005. The court said non-implementation of the Union Cabinet's decision is against public interest and has only served the private interest of the employees of the institution. The high court said this was evident from an incident where an injured patient died as he could not be admitted to Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital due to non-

availability of CT scan machine and ventilator on January 2 after he was turned away by other city hospitals. Established in 1971, UCMS is a government college affiliated to the University of Delhi. It is associated with Delhi government-run Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, which serves as the teaching hospital. The court said the relocation petition highlighted grossly inadequate infrastructure at UCMS because of which patients were not getting critical services. "We are of the considered opinion that the non-implementation of the Cabinet decision at the instance of the petitioners herein (who have a tacit support of respondent no. 4, DU) has acted against public

interest (that is, patients and students) and is only focusing to serve the private interest of the employees and the staff of UCMS," a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora said in a judgment passed on February 19 and made available on court's website on Thursday. The high court dismissed a batch of petitions filed by associations of teaching and non-teaching staff of UCMS challenging various orders passed by the Centre, Delhi government and the Delhi University to implement the Union cabinet's August 25, 2005 decision to bring the UCMS and GTB Hospital under the unified control of the Delhi government. The GTB Hospital is the only



tertiary care hospital run by the Delhi government in Trans-Yamuna area. The bench also vacated its November 16, 2016 interim order staying the Union cabinet's decision. The Delhi government's counsel told the

court that UCMS required an estimated Rs 250 crore budgetary allocation which will be made. A joint secretary in the city government's health and public welfare department has filed an affidavit assuring the court

that additional funds beyond Rs 250 crore will be made available to UCMS and GTB Hospital, if required. "The undertaking of the Joint Secretary with Department of Health and Family Welfare, GNCTD given before this court that all requisite funds required for UCMS will be made available and budget will not be an issue is accepted by this court and taken on record. GNCTD is bound down to the said undertaking," the bench said. The petitioners working at UCMS had challenged the Centre's decision over apprehension that their promotions, seniority, service conditions and timely payment of salary could be adversely affected if the institution is handed over to the Delhi

government. They wanted DU to retain control of UCMS. The court said the tussle between Delhi University and the city government has adversely affected the quality of medical services at GTB Hospital. "The report of the incident (of death of patient on January 2) post investigation has been placed on record by GNCTD and it tells a heart rending tale of death due to denial of medical facilities. The unavailability of the CT scan and its adverse effect on public health is a direct result of an uncalled-for tussle for administrative control over UCMS and GTB Hospital," it said. The court said the petitioners have stalled the implementation of the Centre's decision harming public

interest as the quality of service provided by the hospital has declined. "The caution to be exercised by the constitutional court, while interfering with Cabinet decisions is well settled in the decisions of the Supreme Court. As a matter of rule, this court does not substitute its view in the decision of the government with regard to policy matters and administrative decisions, unless it runs counter to the mandate of the Constitution. "In the matter of policy decision by the Cabinet so long as the infringement of fundamental rights is not shown, the courts have no occasion to interfere and substitute its own judgment for the judgment of the executive," the bench added.

Brahmos boost for Navy firepower okayed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of further bolstering the Navy's firepower, the Government has given the nod for a Rs 20,000 crore deal to procure 200 Brahmos supersonic missiles. The contract is likely to be firming up in next few days. The nod for the mega deal was given by Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on Wednesday, sources said here on Thursday. Brahmos is joint venture between India and Russia and the supersonic missiles are manufactured within India. The induction of Brahmos missiles will shore up Indian Navy's arsenal. The missiles

deployed on warships are used for anti-ship and attack operations. This highly sophisticated missile can be launched from ships, submarines, fighter jets and from land. Indian Army and Navy have already inducted the Brahmos missiles over the last few years. Given its proven capabilities, the Philippines has inked a deal for procuring Brahmos missiles from India in a deal worth 375 million dollars. The first set of these missiles will reach the Philippines in March, it was learnt. The Brahmos missile can accurately strike a target at sea and land at a range of more than 300 kms. Specifically designed for naval



deployment, this weapon can be launched in a vertical or inclined mode from a stationary or moving maritime platform, engaging targets at stand-off ranges on sea or land. In 2016, as India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), India and Russia are now planning to jointly develop a new generation of BrahMos missiles with 800 km range and an ability to hit protected targets with pinpoint accuracy. Plans are to eventually upgrade all missiles to a range of 1,500 km. Meanwhile, the CCS approval for Brahmos missile acquisition comes days after the defence ministry approved

a proposal to procure nine maritime surveillance aircraft for the Indian Navy and six maritime patrol aircraft for the Indian Coast Guard. The proposed acquisition involves the construction of 15 maritime patrol planes, which will be based on C-295 transport aircraft that are being manufactured in India in a joint venture between Tata Advanced Systems and Airbus. The estimated value of these projects stands at Rs 29,000 crore. The transport aircraft would be equipped with the required radars and sensors and turned into a maritime patrol plane by the Defence Research and Development Organisation's Centre for Airborne Systems (CABS).



Ghazwa-e-Hind fatwa puts Darul Uloom in a spot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The apex child rights body National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has issued directive to the Uttar Pradesh government to register an FIR and take legal action against Darul Uloom Deoband, a renowned Islamic educational institution, following the discovery of alleged objectionable content on its website. In a letter addressed to the senior superintendent of police (SSP) of the Saharanpur District, NCPCR Chairperson Priyank Kanoongo highlighted the commission's concern regarding a fatwa published on the Deoband's website. The commission requested an action taken report to be submitted within three days. The fatwa in question reportedly discusses the concept of 'Ghazwa-e-Hind' and allegedly glorifies "martyrdom in the context of India's invasion." "This fatwa is exposing children to hatred against one's own country and eventually causing them unnecessary mental or physical suffering," said

Kanoongo in the letter, emphasising the alleged violation of Section 75 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. The NCPCR, invoking Section 13(1) of the CPC Act, 2005, emphasised the potential for such content to incite hatred against the nation. Referring to legal precedents, including the case of Kanhaiya Kumar vs the State of NCT of Delhi, the commission underlined the gravity of expressions that could be construed as an offense against the state. Furthermore, the letter noted the commission's previous attempts to address similar concerns with the district administration in January 2022 and July 2023. Despite these efforts, no action has been taken thus far, the NCPCR said and asserted that the district administration could be held responsible for any adverse consequences resulting from the dissemination of such content. In light of these developments, the NCPCR directed the initiation of legal proceedings against Darul Uloom Deoband under the Indian Penal Code and the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

Jaishankar to begin South Korea, Japan visit from March 5

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will embark on a four-day visit to South Korea and Japan beginning March 5 to hold talks with his interlocutors on key bilateral, regional and global issues, including the challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Jaishankar's visit to the Republic of Korea and Japan, two of India's major partners, will impart further momentum to bilateral exchanges and set the agenda for future cooperation, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. The external affairs minister will first travel to Seoul on a two-day visit where he will co-chair the 10th India-South Korea Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) along with his Korean counterpart Cho Tae-yul.



Jaishankar is expected to meet with Korean dignitaries, heads of think tanks and Indian community, the MEA said, announcing the visit. India's Special Strategic Partnership with South Korea has expanded to diverse areas of cooperation, which include trade, investments, defence, education and technology among others. "The JCM is expected to comprehensively review the entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and explore

avenues for further strengthening it," the MEA said in a statement. "It will also provide an opportunity for the two sides to exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," it said. In the second leg of his trip, Jaishankar will visit Japan from March 6 to 8. In Tokyo, Jaishankar will attend the 16th India-Japan Foreign Ministers Strategic Dialogue along with his Japanese counterpart Yoko Kamikawa. "The two ministers are expected to discuss issues of bilateral, regional and global importance, and exchange views on cooperation for a free, open, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific," the MEA said. "India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership has further deepened in the last decade in areas such as defence and digital technologies, semiconductor supply chains, clean energy, high speed rail, industrial competitiveness and connectivity," it said. The MEA said Jaishankar's visit and meetings in Tokyo will provide strategic guidance to the "functional cooperation" between the two countries in these areas. He is expected to interact with business leaders, think tanks and academia, building upon strong cultural and people-to-people ties.

PARAKH to adopt global standards for national assessment survey



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Conducting the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and the Foundational Learning Study (FLS), aiming to adopt international standards to further refine assessment methods and expanding stakeholder capacity building are among the plans of national assessment regulator PARAKH for 2024. Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development (PARAKH), which completed its first year this month, is tasked with framing assessment guidelines for all boards to help remove disparities in the scores of the students enrolled with different state boards. "As it moves into its second year, PARAKH is focused on preparing for the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and the Foundational Learning Study (FLS) in 2024, aiming to adopt international standards to further refine the assessment methods and expand stakeholder capacity building," said Amit Sevak, CEO of the US-based Educational Testing Service (ETS). ETS, which conducts key tests such as TOEFL and GRE, is the technical partner of the National Council for Education Research and Innovation (NCERT). It was chosen for setting up the regulatory platform and assisting PARAKH in achieving the goals. "The initiative's roadmap promises continuous improvement of educational assessments, aiming to inspire the evolution of India's education system to meet global standards," Sevak said. The last year saw PARAKH establishing a comprehensive framework for student assessment across India's school boards, conducting the First State Educational Achievement Survey (SEAS) that involved more than 84 lakh students in literacy and numeracy assessments across

19 languages, thus setting a new precedent for educational surveys in India. The NAS, which assesses the competencies developed by students at the grade levels of third, fifth and eighth, is conducted every three years. The FLS is a school-based performance-assessment module. Selected samples of children from a chosen grade are assessed by a test administrator in a one-on-one setting where each child responds to a set of questions administered orally. Several foundational literacy skills, including oral-language comprehension, phonological awareness, decoding, reading comprehension and oral-reading fluency with comprehension, are assessed as part of the exercise. For foundational numeracy, number identification and comparison, number operations, multiplication and division facts, measurement, fractions, patterns and data handling are included. "Earlier this month, PARAKH made a presentation showcasing the roadmap for improvement in the learning outcomes, based on competency-based assessment envisaged in the NEP-2020. It includes creating an equivalence amongst all state school boards and for this, an interface has been created with the boards and respective state governments and SCERTs," said Sanjay Kumar, School Education Secretary. "The successful conduct of the state achievement survey in 2023 was discussed and its preliminary results were shared. I am sure that transformation in assessment processes, along with equivalence in state school boards, would manifest itself in the NAS learning outcome scores," he added. The report of the state achievement survey is yet to be released. Indrani Bhaduri, who heads PARAKH, said, "Learning assessments need to be made meaningful and relevant for the students and this can happen only through a participatory approach."

Centre to continue scheme for women safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has decided to continue its flagship scheme for women safety with an approval of Rs 1,179.72 crore till 2025-26. The Union Cabinet took the decision on Wednesday night in an effort to check incidents of crime against women in the country. According to the latest record of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a total of 4,45,256 cases of crime against women were registered across India in 2022 — almost 51 FIRs every hour on an average. The figure was 4,28,278 in 2021 and 3,71,503 in 2020. A meeting of the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi,



approved the proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs for the continuation of the umbrella scheme on "Safety of Women" at a total cost of Rs 1,179.72 crore from 2021-22 to 2025-26, an official release said. Of the total project outlay of Rs 1,179.72 crore, an amount of Rs 885.49 crore will be provided by the MHA from

its own budget and Rs 294.23 crore will be channelised from the Nirbhaya Fund. The safety of women in a country is an outcome of several factors, such as stringent deterrence through strict laws, effective delivery of justice, redressal of complaints in a timely manner and easily accessible institutional support structures to the victims, the release said. Stringent deterrence in matters related to offences against women has been provided through amendments in the IPC, the CrPC and the Indian Evidence Act. In its efforts towards women safety, the Centre, in collaboration with the states and Union territories, has launched

several projects. The objectives of these projects include strengthening mechanisms in the states for ensuring timely intervention and investigation in the cases of crime against women and higher efficiency in the investigation and crime prevention in such matters. The Centre has proposed to continue a number of projects under the umbrella scheme for "Safety of Women". These are Emergency Response Support System 2.0, upgradation of the central forensic sciences laboratories, including the setting up of the National Forensic Data Centre, strengthening DNA analysis and cyber-forensic capacities in the state forensic sciences laboratories (FSLs).

Normalisation of scores in CUET UG likely to be done away with

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Normalisation of scores for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG is likely to be done away with this year, with the National Testing Agency (NTA) planning a rejig of the crucial examination for its third edition, according to top officials. The examination, which is spread over a month, is likely to be conducted in a shorter duration as the agency is contemplating a hybrid mode, including OMR sheets and a computer-based test. The move will also ensure that most of the students get a chance to take the examination in a city of their

choice. "The NTA is working on the possibility of conducting papers with a large registration in the OMR mode. This will help us choose a large number of schools as test centres. This will ensure that the students will get a centre within their town or city and do not have to travel to faraway places," University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar said. "Adopting the pen-and-paper mode for subjects with a large registration and a computer-based test for papers with a smaller registration will ensure that the CUET-UG can be conducted in a shorter duration unlike in the last two years. The hybrid mode promotes equal

opportunities for all, ensuring that geographical constraints do not hinder the students' educational aspirations in rural and remote areas," Kumar said. He said conducting the exam for a subject on a single day will eliminate the need for normalisation of scores. "For the last two years, we had to conduct the test for the same paper over a period of two or three days in our endeavour to provide the first-choice centre to the students as much as possible. But this year, by adopting the OMR mode, a large number of centres will be available at schools and colleges, enabling us to conduct the test across the country on the same day.

Media should not be crushed in Bengal, Thakur appeals to Mamata

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday took serious exception to the arrest of a TV journalist in West Bengal and appealed to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to ensure the media is not crushed in the state. Addressing a press conference here, Thakur called the journalist's arrest unfortunate. "It is my request to Mamata Banerjee that such thing should not happen again," Thakur told reporters. "Freedom of press is the right of media and it should not be crushed. This is my appeal to Mamata

Banerjee," he added. Santu Pan, a journalist with Republic Bangla, was arrested from Sandeshkhali late on Monday evening. Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24-Parganas district has been tense with a large number of women in the locality accusing Trinamool Congress strongman Shajahan Sheikh and his supporters of "land-grab and sexually assaulting" them under coercion. Sheikh has been absconding since January 5 when a mob attacked Enforcement Directorate (ED) officers during a raid at his residence in connection with an alleged ration scam. Two of Sheikh's aides, who along with others were booked under charges of gang rape and attempt to murder, have been arrested.

Thakur launches portals to revolutionise media landscape

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Minister of Information and Broadcasting Anurag Singh Thakur here on Thursday launched four transformatory portals that promise to revolutionise the media landscape in India. They include Press Sewa Portal, Transparent Empanelment Media Planning and e-Billing System, Navigate

Bharat Portal and National Register for Local Cable Operators (LCOs). These initiatives are aimed at ensuring ease of doing business by fostering a more conducive business environment for Newspaper publishers and TV channels, enhance transparency and efficiency in government communication, provide easy access to authentic Government videos and create

a comprehensive database of LCOs enabling the Government to streamline regulatory processes in the cable television sector in future. Addressing the audience present on the occasion, Thakur remarked today, India is viewed as an attractive destination for investment, with global companies eager to establish businesses there. He recalled Prime Minister



Narendra Modi's emphasis on transformative governance and economic reforms has greatly improved the ease of doing business in India and added that this has led to increased investment from both existing businesses and new entrepreneurs. The startup ecosystem, in particular, has flourished, with a significant increase in the number of startups and unicorns, he stated.

Elaborating on recognition of government's achievements towards improving ease of doing business, the minister said these have been recognized globally, as evidenced by its improved rankings in international indices like the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index and the Logistic Performance Index. He further said the success of platforms like the Government

e-Marketplace (GeM) reflect the government's efforts to create a level playing field for MSMEs and small businesses. He added that Prime Minister Modi's leadership has not only focused on economic reforms but also on fostering a mindset transformation, recognizing entrepreneurs as partners in national development. This approach has led to increased wealth creation, job opportunities, and higher

incomes, benefiting the country's overall welfare and development. Earlier, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Sanjay Jaju during his remarks said these initiatives will help us streamline and increase our engagement with the media. These will foster not just transparency and innovation and help improve the functioning of the departments.

Elect Modi once again to make India Vishwa Guru, says Shah

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday urged the people of Chhattisgarh to elect Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a third term in office to make India a developed nation, and 'Bharat Mata' a 'Vishwa Guru'.



Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah addresses the Vijay Sanikalp Shakraudh rally in Janjgir on Thursday

committed corruption and did injustice to the people, who then ousted it from power," Shah said. Among other things, the Modi government provided tap water connections to 60 crore poor people in the country including 38 lakh households in Chhattisgarh in the last ten years, he said.

Amarnath Yatra service registration reviewed

Authorities here reviewed an action plan for registration of service providers for the upcoming pilgrimage to the holy cave shrine of Amarnath in south Kashmir Himalayas, an official said on Thursday.



Jammu and Kashmir and facilitate the pilgrims in their journey to the holy cave from both the Pahalgam and the Baltal axis each year. Asserting that the labour

department has a significant role in the smooth conduct of the yatra, Singh said as and when the dates for the commencement of the registration process are finalised, the same will be communicated to the service providers.

कुमाऊँ विश्वविद्यालय, नैनीताल ई-निविदा सूचना वर्ष 2024-25 (उत्तर पुस्तिका मुद्रण एवं अंकात्मिका मुद्रण, उपाधि मुद्रण कार्य)

M.P. POWER GENERATING COMPANY LTD. OFFICE OF THE ADDL. C.E. (P&W), SHREE SINGAJI THERMAL POWER PROJECT, Donglala Distt. Khandwa (MP) E-mail id: sepnw.stpp1@gmail.com.

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER Tender Particulars/Tender Number Estimated Cost (Rs.) (including GST) Tender Cost & EMD In Rs. Last date and time for closing of online submission

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 Act, 2002

APPENDIX IV-A Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Properties E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

so that India becomes the third largest economy in the world, Shah said. "Chhattisgarh is Lord Ram's Nanhial (place of one's mother's parents). But the Congress did not resolve the 550-year-old (Ram Mandir) issue in the last 75 years. But Modi solved it and performed consecration of Ram Lalla (lord Ram's idol) in Ayodhya," he added.

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mrs. Usha Devi is the owner of Residential Plot/House No. 2, area measuring 50 sq. yds.

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mrs. Savita Raul is the owner of Residential Plot/House No. 1, area measuring 50 sq. yds.

PUBLIC NOTICE NOTICE is hereby given that Pratibha Singh claims to be owner and in possession of Unit No. 1802, Tower No. 18, 18th Floor, in the complex known as "THE HYDE PARK", Plot No. GH-03, sector-78, Noida, U.P. by virtue of law of inheritance and Noida has issued a mutation letter dated 27.12.2023 in favor of Pratibha Singh after the Death of Om Prakash Singh.

PUBLIC NOTICE General public is hereby informed that We 1. Parveen Arora W/o Late Shri Satish Prakash Arora R/o D-233, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi-110024, 2. (A) Indu Bala Nangia D/o Late Shri Om Prakash Arora, R/o A-16, First Floor, Edifice Green Meadows, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201310 (B) Shashi Guliani, D/o Late Shri Om Prakash Arora, R/o 99, Bakul Bagar Road, Bhawanipalpur, Calcutta-700025 (C) Poonam Arora D/o Late Shri Om Prakash Arora, R/o 181, 2nd Floor, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi-110024 (D) Krishna Durgar D/o Late Shri Om Prakash Arora R/o 75, Duaner S/T 7, 14, Redwood City, CA-94062, United States of America, (E) Yogesh Kumar Chugh S/o Late Shri Om Prakash Arora R/o D-233, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi-110024, 3. (A) Suman Dua D/o Late Shri Krishna Prakash Arora, R/o Sai Nivas, 27/46/1, Jawala Nagar, Main Road, Shahrada, New Delhi-110032, (B) Rachna Datta D/o Late Shri Krishna Prakash Arora, R/o 1222, Jangpura Extension, New Delhi-110014, (C) Deepak Madan S/o Late Shri Krishna Lal Madan & Late Smt. Anita Madan, R/o H.No. 164, Ground Floor, Sector-40, Gurugram, Haryana, (D) Nenu Sothi D/o Late Shri Krishna Prakash Arora R/o 795, New Tilpat Colony, Faridabad, Haryana-121003, (E) Kunal Arora, S/o Late Shri Raman Arora, R/o 58, Jagriti Enclave, New Delhi-110092, (F) Neha Arora, D/o Late Shri Raman Arora R/o 58, Jagriti Enclave, New Delhi-110092, 4. (A) Madhu Mehta W/o Late Shri Sushil Kumar Mehta, R/o 14-B, Shanti Apartments, Sector-13, Rohini, New Delhi-110007, (B) Varun Mehta S/o Late Shri Sushil Kumar Mehta, R/o H-6, Shanti Apartments, Sector-13, Rohini, New Delhi-110007, (C) Preeti Mehta D/o Late Shri Sushil Kumar Mehta, R/o H-6, Shanti Apartments, Sector-13, Rohini, New Delhi-110007, (D) Savita Kapoor D/o Late Smt. Krishna Devi R/o 319, ALPH-2, Parswanath Estates, Near Ryan International School, Greater Noida, U.P. are filing application in L&DO for substitution of the property No. D-233, Lajpat Nagar-2, New Delhi-110024 in the name of 1. Parveen Arora, 2. (A) Indu Bala Nangia (B) Shashi Guliani (C) Poonam Arora (D) Krishna Durgar (E) Yogesh Kumar Chugh (F) Neha Arora, (G) Suman Dua (B) Rachna Datta (C) Deepak Madan (D) Nenu Sothi (E) Kunal Arora (F) Neha Arora, (G) Madhu Mehta (B) Varun Mehta (C) Preeti Mehta (D) Savita Kapoor on the grounds of Court Decree. If there are any objections / claims from the general public on this application, the same shall be communicated to L&DO with supporting documents through registered post or by visiting L&DO at Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi or through an email at idoc@nic.in, within 30 days of publication of this notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mrs. Rehana Parveen W/o Md. Wasim is the owner of Built-up Property Bearing Municipal No. WZ-463, land area measuring 13.80 sq. mtrs. i.e. 62.80 sq. yds. bearing Khata No. 1797 situated in Falls in the limits of Lal Dora (1908-1009) of Village Narana, New Delhi, vide Registered Sale Deed dated 23.10.2023 and in the property chain Original Notarized GFA, ATSI and Will (along with Affidavit) dated 17.11.1995 and same mortgaging the said property with Shubham Housing Development Finance Co. Ltd. (a body having any charge/lien/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given that my client Sagar Rohra & Mr. Jagdish Rohra are in process to purchase the Second Floor (without roof rights) Part of Property bearing No. B-8 measuring 30 Sq. Yds. out of Rectangle No. 4, Kilo No. 25, situated in the colony known as Ashok Gali, New Krishna Nagar, in the revenue estate of Village Khureji Khas, Illaqa Shahdara, Delhi, (availing loan from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd) from Shri. Vasudev, whereas shea vasudev purchased the same Sale Deed dated 7/8/2023 (Doc. No. 7272) executed by Naman Gujral. All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

COURT NOTICE PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (Order 5, Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

IN THE COURT OF SH. RAJ KUMAR TRIPATHI, LD. DISTRICT JUDGE (COMMERCIAL COURT-08), SOUTH-EAST DISTRICT, ROOM NO.39, SAKET COURTS, NEW DELHI. Case No.: CS (COMM)/55/2022 BANK OF INDIA Plaintiff SHARDA V/S DEEL. Mrs. SHARDA ...Defendant W/o Mr. SUNIL KUMAR R/o 494, 3rd Floor, VILLAGE KHAIRPUR, KOTLA MUBARAKPUR, NEW DELHI-110003

WHEREAS you are intentionally evading service of summons it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 4th DAY OF March 2024 the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte. Given under my hand and the seal of the Court, this 14th day of February, 2024.

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 Act, 2002

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY FLAT NO. UG-3, UPPER GROUND FLOOR, M.I.G. REAR LEFT HAND SIDE (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS), AREA ADMEASURING 55.74 SQ. MTR. I.E 600 SQ. FT. COVERED AREA, CONSTRUCTED ON PLOT NO. B-1/153, IN THE COLONY KNOWN AS "DLF DILSHAD EXT.-2", SITUATED AT VILLAGE BHOUPURA, TEH. & DIST. GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH.

PATRONAGE WELFARE AND EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY (REBD.) Regd. Office: Kharsa No. 26/162, Karawal Nagar, Delhi-110094

PUBLIC NOTICE Notice is hereby given that my client Rashmi Mishra & Mr. Deepak Kumar Mishra are in process to purchase the Ground Floor, Back Side Portion (without roof rights) measuring 37.5 Sq. Yds. Part of Property No. RZ-2714-B, part of Kharsa No. 415, situated at Gali No. 29, Tublikaad Extension, New Delhi (availing loan from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd) from Nitesh Dhamija & Mr. Dinesh Chandler Dhamija, whereas they acquired the same vide Relinquishment Deed dated 12/3/2021 (Doc. No. 1374) executed by 1) Mr. Rishabh Dhamija 2) Ms. Hina Dhamija and 3) Mr. Nitesh Dhamija 3) Dinesh Chandler Dhamija all are the legal heirs of late Aruna Dhamija (whereas Aruna Dhamija and Nitesh Dhamija purchased the same vide Sale Deed dated 7-2-17 (doc. No. 387) executed by 1) Mr. Tarun Kumar 2) Mr. Mohd. Irshad and 3) Mr. Noshad Ahmed) All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME I, Mahdi Ali Rizvi, S/O. Mohammed Mehdi Rizvi, R/o. 43-D, DDA Flats, Pocket-12, Jasola Vihar, New Delhi-110025 have changed my name to Ali Mahdi Rizvi for all future purposes. PD(284)A I, Shivarnjini Kaushal D/o Shri Khushwant Kumar Kaushal R/o Chitrakoot Dharm apartments sector-19 Dwarka New Delhi-110075, have changed my name Shivarnjini Kaushal to Shivarnjini Kaushal for all future purposes. PD(285)C I, Pallavi Kandalw Panchbhैया W/o Shri Shekhar Panchbhैया R/o Flat No-2101 Sector-4A, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad, UP-201012 have changed my name from Pallavi Panchbhैया to Pallavi Knadwal Panchbhैया for all future purposes. PD(286)A

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number, Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession, Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.), Name of Branch

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER P.H. DIVISION KORAPUT GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA "e" procurement Notice No-Procurement Notice for 2023-24 Bid Identification No.SE.P.H.KPT-13 of 2023-24 Dt.15.02.2024

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number, Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession, Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.), Name of Branch

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/ guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address, Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced, Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice, NPA Date

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

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ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Modi with a message

The PM's planned visit to Sandeshkhali challenges Mamata, seeks to gain ground in Bengal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned visit to Sandeshkhali on March 7 holds significant implications not only for the BJP's Lok Sabha poll strategy but also for the political fortunes of Mamata Banerjee, the TMC supremo and an important constituent of the INDIA bloc. Sandeshkhali, in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, has emerged as a focal point of political strife due to incidents of alleged sexual abuse and land grab by a TMC leader, Shahjahan Sheikh. Ahead of Modi's visit, the BJP has unveiled a 20-minute documentary highlighting the TMC's alleged atrocities in Sandeshkhali with the apparent aim of pushing Mamata on the defensive. The film features Sandeshkhali women's testimony recounting alleged instances of land grab and sexual assault by Sheikh and his cohorts. The BJP's decision to schedule Modi's visit to North 24 Parganas signals its intent to bolster its support base and make inroads into areas traditionally dominated by the ruling TMC. The timing, just ahead of the elections, underscores the BJP's concerted efforts to sway voters in its favour by exposing the TMC's 'wrongdoings'. Modi's persona and oratory have often been instrumental in galvanising public support, and his presence in Sandeshkhali is likely to energise the BJP cadre and attract undecided voters. Besides, the symbolism associated with Modi's visit cannot be overstated. By highlighting Sandeshkhali, which has witnessed political unrest and clashes, the BJP aims to convey a message of development and security to the residents.

This narrative directly attacks Mamata's leadership, which has faced frequent criticism over law and order issues, and poses to her a formidable challenge. The BJP's relentless campaign, coupled with Modi's visit, threatens to erode TMC's support base in key constituencies. As she seeks to counter the BJP narrative, Mamata's response to Modi's visit will be closely scrutinised. It seems quite likely that the coming weeks would see a surge in BJP attacks on the TMC Government. This is not the first time that the BJP has launched a concerted attack on Mamata but her hold over the State remains more or less unshaken. That said, electoral outcomes are influenced by a multitude of factors beyond high-profile visits and political rhetoric. While Modi's visit may generate momentum for the BJP, the TMC's grassroots outreach, welfare schemes and organisational strength cannot be discarded. Mamata remains a formidable leader with a dedicated support base, especially among certain demographics and rural communities. Moreover, the political landscape in West Bengal is characterised by complex socio-cultural dynamics, where regional identity and issues often play a significant role. The BJP's attempts to make inroads into the State must navigate these intricacies sensitively to resonate with the diverse electorate. How the PM's visit plays out remains to be seen but the attention Sandeshkhali is getting would indeed have one positive outcome: The victims of Sandeshkhali may get justice and Mamata may have to bite the bullet.

PICTALK



Schoolchildren perform Surya Namaskar on the occasion of 'Surya Saptami', in Jaipur

Indian nationhood thrives amid diversity

Despite regional differences and identity quests, the strength of Indian nationhood persists, supported by a dedication to constitutional values and productive conversations



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

There is much talk about the nature of change in all aspects of Indian life, as is natural in changes envisaged at such a large scale. There are bound to be differences of opinion, multiple articulations, and an attempt to project one's point of view. This is how it should be. This is amplified by the Sanskrit dictum "Vade Vade Jayat Tatva Bodhah" (through discussion one arrives at the truth). However, discussion must follow a protocol. This protocol is often unwritten and is a bedrock of any civil society. It has some enduring principles. The first and foremost of which would be that it cannot be and must not be abusive.

The right to civil disagreement in a civil manner is the foundation of a civil society. Thus, it is that mutual respect and agreeing to disagree are required as essential to civil discourse.

One can add to it, for good measure, certain other attributes and certain attributes of the mind. These attributes recognise the need to not only listen but honestly weigh the merits of another person's point of view and have a genuine openness to consider it.

Agreeing to another point of view or modifying one's own in a civil society is not a hallmark of weakness but a source of genuine strength and maturity. Going by these principles, the Indian civil society has an interesting record with significant regional variations. The Dravid school of thought is an interesting example. They are saying in the twenties of this century, roughly the same things they were saying in the thirties of the last century.

The Dravidian leadership has in the last seventy-five years then been in power in that part of India for several decades, though not always continuously. Similarly, the exclusionist identity sought by some of the DMK ideologues has had on various occasions to be moderated because they have been in power. Notwithstanding long patches of time, not much significant progress has been made in the implementation of some of the



components of the DMK ideology, such as it may be. The ideological component itself has undergone a major split with an exclusivist ideology for DMK being considerably whittled down in the birth of All India Anna Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK). M.G. Ramachandran was the major proponent of the AIDMK version. Jayalitha was a key supporter. They linked up with the Dravidian Movement with all Indian processes. How it panned out is another story and fit enough for another discussion. More to the point, it is important to realise that similar identity quests or some version thereof have been witnessed in the North Eastern States, Jammu & Kashmir State, parts of Andhra Pradesh, and a few other pockets of the southern Indian peninsula. This is a very understandable process. By and large, it has been contained within the constitutional framework. At times the divergent point of view has been espoused by neighbouring states of the Deccan peninsula or between the



MORE TO THE CREDIT OF EVERYONE CONCERNED IS THE URGE ON THE PART OF MOST PEOPLE TO EVOKE THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION WHENEVER NEED BE AND NOT PRACTICE BRINKMANSHIP

Deccan States and the Central Government at New Delhi over many matters including the distribution of river waters. Notwithstanding these differences, Indian nationhood has endured and might even be seen as having gone from strength to strength. It is this resilience which is, also, the hallmark of Indian nationhood. This is not to deny the fact that once in a while, offensive or extreme statements are made, some of which are avoidable, though sometimes understandable. The long and short of it is the ability of people to work together despite differences and different articulations. More to the credit of everyone concerned is the urge on the part of most people to evoke the Indian Constitution whenever need be and not practice brinkmanship. The time is here to ensure that these practices of healthy debate and the setting of shared perspectives become a regular habit and a part of the national methodology of dialogue and discussion. Sometimes when extreme statements are made and

some new thinking seems to arise, there is nothing wrong with that either, only that the model of integrative thinking would have to show far more resilience than it is many times currently showing. This text has looked at the vantage point of collective cohesion. It is not as if there are no dangerous signs that need to be tackled, but that attempting to tackle them sensibly and systematically is necessary. It is this institutionalisation of handling dissent and allowing seemingly alternative perspectives to live peacefully with each other that will be the touchstone on which much of the future of Indian nationhood will continue to flourish. In an era where subtle dissent becomes a part of covert political strategy, much care needs to be exercised. The number game can have dangerous manifestations. There is no substitute for good sense and integrity of thought, deed, and follow-up. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM PAYS TRIBUTE TO VIDYASAGAR JI

Sir — India is truly blessed with so many noble saints, intellectuals, and spiritual persons who have dedicated their entire lives to the welfare of mankind. Renowned Jain seer Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj was one of the greatest saints of our time who attained Samadhi "Sallekhana", saddening us. He was the most renowned saint in the Digambar Jain community. He took sallekhana, a Jain religious practice involving voluntary fasting until death, for spiritual purification. PM Narendra Modi is paying tribute to this great saint. He will be all the more remembered by the generations to come for his invaluable contributions to society, especially his efforts towards spiritual awakening among people. His notable work was towards poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, and more. His life exemplified the core principles of Jainism, embodying its ideals through his actions and teachings. Today, the world over, fundamental elements are fighting, but the teachings of Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj to mankind have become even more relevant; they should be followed by all of us to enrich the lives of human beings and promote peace and harmony. We should all strive to live coherently to shape a new era of national and social integration. Education was very close to his heart. He was a true tapas, whose life was dedicated to the ideals of Bhagwan Mahavir. He will always be remembered for his rich contribution to society.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

DANGERS OF PLAYING VIDEO GAMES

Sir — The British Medical Journal has recently given information about the dangers of video games, especially in this research, in which scientists from the World Health Organisation were also involved. A total of 50,000 people were surveyed in video games using headphones, earbuds, and headphones. Also, the music venue has a definite effect on

Sandeshkhali crisis



The recent upheaval in Sandeshkhali, West Bengal, marked by allegations of sexual assault, land grabs, and political clashes, demands immediate attention. The state government's tendency to dismiss these accusations as political manoeuvres must give way to a genuine commitment to justice. While some

commendable arrests have been made, holding accountable those in power implicated in these crimes is essential. With the Supreme Court rejecting a CBI or SIT investigation, the onus now falls on Mamata Banerjee's government to prioritise citizens' well-being over political considerations, ensuring transparency and decisive action to restore trust. Amidst the turmoil, concerns over authoritarianism arise with the arrest of a journalist, emphasising the need to safeguard the freedom of the press. The dismissal of widespread fear and systematic abuse by the government does not instil confidence in a thorough inquiry. Mamata Banerjee must demonstrate the same dedication to justice she exhibited in opposition, addressing these grave issues transparently. Acknowledging the plight of women prisoners and taking decisive action against sexual violence as a political tool is imperative for rebuilding trust and integrity in the government's response to the Sandeshkhali crisis.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

the ear and reduces the ability to hear. An international research team reviewed 14 studies conducted by nine countries in this regard. North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, Asia, Australia, etc. were included in these nine countries. It is necessary to discourage children from playing video games. If not, a generation of young children will go deaf. This is a very sensitive subject. Parents should pay proper attention to their children and ensure that they do not watch those video games. It is necessary to tell the children about the consequences of this in various schools.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

NIFTY AT ALL-TIME HIGH

Sir — Indices moved up for a fifth consecutive session, with the Nifty hitting a fresh all-time high amid mixed global cues. Benchmark Sensex spurred by 349 points while Nifty scaled a fresh life-

time high on the sixth straight day of gains on February 20, driven by buying in banking and select FMCG shares. The broader market outperformed the front-line indices. Everything looks favourable, be it the strong macroeconomic fundamentals or the robust retail inflows. Both upstream and downstream oil companies benefit from a robust up-cycle in oil and gas markets and stable crude prices, which have boosted volumes and marketing margins, said Siddhartha Khemka, head of retail research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services. Reflecting broader investor bullishness, the 50-share index surged to a record high of 21,654.75 on intense buying in the metal, commodity, auto and banking sectors.

Jayanthi Subramanian | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Ayurveda: Seek balance of tridoshas for wellness

Ayurveda's mantra for wellness is 'seek balance.' Its holistic approach offers a timeless roadmap to good health in today's fast-paced world

In an era marked by fast-paced lifestyles, stress-induced ailments, and an increasing reliance on synthetic medication, the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda emerges as a beacon of holistic healing. Originating in the Indian subcontinent over 5,000 years ago, Ayurveda is not merely a system of medicine but a way of life deeply rooted in the balance between mind, body, and spirit. Its holistic approach offers a comprehensive framework for promoting well-being and preventing disease, making it highly relevant in today's fast-changing world.

At the heart of Ayurveda lies the belief that health is a state of equilibrium between the three doshas - Vata (air and space), Pitta (fire and water), and Kapha (earth and water). According to Ayurvedic principles, imbalances in these doshas lead to physical, mental, and emotional disturbances, paving the way for illness. By understanding an individual's unique constitution, or Prakriti, Ayurveda seeks to restore harmony through personalised lifestyle modifications, dietary



changes, herbal remedies, yoga, and meditation. One of the key strengths of Ayurveda is its emphasis on prevention rather than cure. By addressing the root cause of disease rather than merely treating symptoms, Ayurveda empowers individuals to take charge of their health proactively. Through practices such as daily self-care routines (Dinacharya), seasonal detoxification (panchakarma), and mindful eating habits, Ayurveda cultivates resilience and strengthens the body's natural defences, reducing the likelihood of illness. Moreover, Ayurveda recognises the interconnectedness of all aspects of existence - from the food we eat to the environment we inhabit. This holistic perspective underscores the importance of living in harmony with nature and aligning our lifestyle choices with its

rhythms. By promoting sustainable living practices and environmental awareness, Ayurveda not only fosters personal health but also contributes to the well-being of the planet as a whole. Ayurveda expert Vicram Sharma, Director of Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan emphasises the importance of maintaining balance among the three elements—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—to ensure fitness. "Imbalances in these elements lead to diseases and advocated for Ayurveda's ancient wellness system, particularly pertinent in today's times when unhealthy dietary choices, lifestyle habits, and indulgence in alcohol and smoking disrupt this equilibrium." He said this in his address at Gurugram's Wellness Carnival. It was organised to create awareness about the importance of health and wellness. A wellness carnival was recently organised at Cybercity Gurugram. In the face of modern challenges such as chronic stress, pollution, and sedentary lifestyles, Ayurveda offers invaluable insights into

maintaining vitality and balance. Its integrative approach acknowledges the role of mental and emotional factors in health, emphasising practices that promote mental clarity, emotional resilience, and spiritual well-being. While Western medicine excels in acute care and crisis intervention, Ayurveda excels in promoting longevity, enhancing vitality, and restoring equilibrium. Integrating Ayurvedic principles into mainstream healthcare can lead to a more comprehensive and patient-centred approach, bridging the gap between traditional wisdom and modern science. By embracing its principles of balance, harmony, and interconnectedness, individuals can cultivate resilience, vitality, and well-being on all levels - physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. As we strive to navigate the complexities of modern life, Ayurveda serves as a guiding light, reminding us of the profound wisdom inherent in nature. (The writer is a business consultant; views are personal)



KANISHKA SRIVASTAVA



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GREEK PM'S VISIT BOLSTERS HISTORIC TIES

India and Greece are poised to deepen their ties across various sectors



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The visit of Greek (Hellenic Republic (Greece)) Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis this week marks an important chapter in Indo-Greek relations, an ancient bilateral relationship that often gets shadowed in the wider European context. Legend has it that the mighty Greek conqueror Alexander reached the northwestern frontier of the Indian sub-continent some 2500 years ago, fought two mighty kings, but didn't cross the Indus to enter India. However, a diplomatic relationship was established some years down the line, under the Mauryan rule (whose ruler Chandragupta Maurya had a Greek ambassador in his court named Megasthenes).

Cut to contemporary times, Greece established its embassy in India in 1950, however, India took 28 years to start an embassy in Athens. Now a European country, just two and half hours behind Indian standard time, during summer, often featured in many Bollywood films, wasn't still an important ally until last year. During a state visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023, the bilateral relationship was elevated to a strategic partnership. The joint statement released in August 2023 highlighted: "Appreciating the increase in bilateral trade and economic engagement in recent years, the leaders also directed that both sides work to double bilateral trade by 2030. Both leaders reiterated the need for further broadening and deepening bilateral engagements in the fields of defence, shipping, science and technology, cyberspace, education, culture, tourism and agriculture. They took note of the signing of the MOU on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture... Both leaders directed their senior officials to ensure regular dialogue in the areas including political, economic, defence, security and public diplomacy. They also agreed to encourage direct flights between Greece and India."



This week's visit by the Greek PM has put the relationship under ample spotlight it deserves. When some of Greece's neighbours in Europe had made not-so-friendly statements on some of the most recent policy developments in India such as the "Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)/National Register of Citizenship (NRC), Abrogation of Article 370, Reorganisation of the new Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, and Judgement on Ram Janam Bhoomi, etc. Greece had officially stated that it is an internal affairs matter of India. Greece and India have reciprocally supported each other for a reformed UN reflecting the current realities with a permanent seat for each other in the UN security council. As per a Ministry of External Affairs booklet released in 2023, just ahead of the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Athens, Greece, "voted for India's candidature to UNSC for 2021-22. It supported India at the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008, and 2016, MTCR, WASSENAAR arrangements, and Australia Group. Greece supported India's candidature for ICJ, ITLOS, IMO, Postal Operations Council (POC), World Heritage Committee and the position of External Auditor of the IAEA for the term 2022-27 and various other international bodies." Similarly, in Jammu and Kashmir, internal security concerns particularly arising out of state-funded terrorist activities, Greece has been on India's side. Greece supports many of India's concerns in the larger European Union bilateral. India interestingly has held several rounds of discussions with the EU trade representatives, to hammer out a free trade agreement. Although with elections in India around the corner, a complicated, trade agreement with the EU with several moving parts looks difficult. However, to have preferential voices in the EU, with member nations like France and Greece, Italy, looking at India favourably, is always welcome. Some of the unfavourable comments India received from EU member countries, post former, not taking a Western approach towards long-standing ally Russia, are likely to fade away with India developing closer bilateral partnerships in the region. (The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

A saga of resilience and adaptation

Trees, nature's silent guardians, witness the ebb and flow of civilisations, endure natural calamities and adapt to the relentless march of time



B.K. SINHA

Embark on a journey through a mystical forest, where trees, the ancient storytellers, whisper tales of survival against the backdrop of ever-evolving landscapes. These silent guardians of nature stand tall and firm, their leaves rustling with tales of time. They bear witness to the rise and fall of civilizations, endure natural calamities, and adapt to our planet's shifting climate. Indeed, trees are nature's superheroes, their power lies in their remarkable adaptability. Like shapeshifters, they ingeniously tweak their structure, physiology, and even their regeneration mechanisms to thrive in varied habitats.

India, with its diverse climates and landscapes, is home to a spectacular array of tree species. Each species, intricately woven into its habitat, embodies a unique journey of evolution and survival. Among these, Conifers stand out, particularly in the cool, windswept mountain regions. Unlike their deciduous counterparts, who shed their leaves with the changing seasons, Conifers wear their emerald attire year-round. Their foliage retains vital nutrients, helping them thrive in nutrient-deficient mountains. As winter swathes the land in the snow, Conifers with their needle-like leaves stand poised to seize any fleeting warmth and bask in the sun's shy smile. Their ability to adjust their metabolism and lower their energy needs enables them to survive extended periods without photosynthesis. Conifers, with their evergreen nature, play a pivotal role in combating climate change. Even during the cold months when many trees stand bare, Conifers continue their silent vigil, actively absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Unfazed by winter's chill, they tirelessly continue to purify the air, showcasing their importance in our ecosystems.

As spring arrives with its warmth, Conifers are ready to immediately kickstart photosynthesis, thereby facilitating their growth and in times of intense heat, they close their stomata, thereby preserving water and enduring severe droughts. In contrast, broadleaf trees require time to sprout leaves, which delays their photosynthetic activity. This gives conifers an edge in regions with cold winters and dry summers while posing challenges for leafless deciduous trees with limited water supply. Conifers, with their long, thin needles, have adapted remarkably to their often challenging habitats. The needles' minimised surface area, coupled with fewer stomata, smartly reduces water loss. Interestingly, the stomata located deep within the needle structure create air pockets, resulting in less transpiration compared to exposure to moving air.

Their slender shape also prevents snow accumulation, protecting the branches from breakage. The needle's outermost layer, a thick, waxy cuticle, serves as nature's exquisite raincoat, masterfully locking in moisture to ensure the tree's hydration even in the icy grip of winter. This same layer, inclusive of the cuticle, epidermis, and occasionally the hypodermis, also shields the tree from harmful ultraviolet-B radiation. In foggy regions, these needles efficiently condense airborne moisture into droplets. These droplets then merge and fall onto the forest floor, hydrating the trees. Inversely, deciduous trees with their broad leaves hold tiny droplets that evaporate. This gives Conifers a distinct advantage in areas prone to advection fog, where rainfall is scarce.



THE SAGA OF TREE ENDURANCE IS MORE THAN A MERE SHOWDOWN WITH THE WEATHER; IT'S A BATTLE AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND HUMAN-INDUCED SCARS. WHILE SOME SPECIES MAY SUCCUMB TO RESILIENT WARRIORS, PIONEER SPECIES EMERGE

Under their bark, Conifers harbour a complex network of tissues, including the xylem and phloem, which transport water, nutrients, and sugars throughout the tree. However, during harsh winters, the sap, a life-sustaining fluid, faces the threat of freezing, which could severely damage the cell walls. But nature, in its infinite wisdom, has equipped these trees with a remarkable defence mechanism. Both deciduous and evergreen trees can osmotically move water out of their living cells into their intercellular (non-living) spaces. This strategic relocation of water confines the freezing process to these non-living zones. Also, the sap due to its higher sugar concentration transforms into a thick syrup that acts as an antifreeze. This transformation reduces the internal freezing point of each cell and enhances its resistance to freezing. Thus, by employing these strategies, Conifers protect their living cells from ice rupture, ensuring the tree's survival through the harshest winters. Conifers, particularly those in the Pinaceae family, are in a constant battle against formidable adversaries like bark beetles and their symbiotic microorganisms. Their defence mechanism is a sticky resin that seeps from their bark, serving both as a shield and a sword in their fight for survival. This resin forms a barrier that slows the movement of freezing air molecules, a feature that is especially beneficial in dry climates or during droughts as it helps preserve the tree's vital moisture. Moreover, the stickiness of the resin traps infiltrating insects, while its chemical composition deters or even exterminates these invaders, thereby ensuring the tree's continued growth and survival. However, climate change and invasive species are disrupting this balance, posing new challenges for these tenacious trees. Unlike broadleaf trees with large

vascular conduits that foster high growth rates and rapid leaf turnover, conifers possess narrow tracheids in their vascular system. The slender shape of these tracheids only allows tiny bubbles to form, which quickly dissolve back into solution, effectively averting freeze-thaw embolisms. Such embolisms occur after a long, cold winter when the vascular system thaws and air bubbles form. In broadleaf trees, these bubbles can grow large and struggle to dissolve back into solution, leading to an embolism. However, Conifers' narrow tracheids prevent this from happening, making them mountain marvels. As we descend from the high altitudes towards the equator, we witness a captivating shift in the botanical world. The reign of conifers gracefully passes the baton to the broadleaf trees. These trees, preferring warm and moist climates, become the stars of tropical and subtropical regions, thriving in valleys blessed with fertile and humid soils. Broadleaf trees, unlike conifers with exposed seeds on cone-like structures, protect their seeds within fruits. This strategy shields the seeds from harsh weather and predators, thereby improving the likelihood of successful germination and ensuring the continuation of the broadleaf lineage. During the dry season, these trees shed their leaves to conserve water and energy, a survival strategy akin to an investor offloading costly assets in times of scarcity. This process, known as abscission, involves specialised cells at the stem base acting like microscopic scissors, severing the leaf connection. However, before the leaves fall, the tree reclaims vital nutrients, storing them in the branches. When spring arrives, these stored nutrients fuel new leaf growth, transforming the landscape into a vibrant green canvas. While the botanical narrative often portrays conifers as inhab-

itants of frigid heights, they also demonstrate resilience in unexpected environments. Consider regions with high rainfall and poor water retention due to sandy or rocky soils. These challenging environments might seem inhospitable for most vegetation. Yet, in these very landscapes, Conifers, equipped with needle-like foliage and a waxy coating, defy expectations and adapt to thrive in water-deficient soils. Their presence attests to life's remarkable adaptability, reminding us that nature's stories are often far more surprising and nuanced than we initially imagined.

The saga of tree endurance is more than a mere showdown with the weather; it's a battle against environmental challenges and human-induced scars. While some species may succumb, resilient warriors, the pioneer species emerge. These trailblazers, including Albizia, Dalbergia, and the hardy duo of Willows and Birches in temperate climates, act as nature's first responder. They rejuvenate once the chaos subsides, splashing vibrant hues onto landscapes left barren and desolate. However, as the environment stabilises and resources become abundant, climax vegetation, the slower-growing, shade-tolerant species, begins their steady march. Their endurance enables them to replace the swift pioneers, asserting their dominance in the landscape. This transition paints a dynamic picture of movement, upheaval, and significant transformation in the landscape, illustrating the timeless wisdom of the tortoise and the hare: it's not always about the speed, but the resilience and persistence that truly counts in the race for survival. This is nature's beautiful way of reminding us that every player, swift or steady, has a crucial role in the intricate tapestry of life.

(The writer is a former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UP; views are personal)

Upholding the essence of agriculture amidst market pressures

The ongoing farmers' protest underscores the clash between economic and social objectives, particularly regarding the legal guarantee of minimum support prices

The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways, said John F. Kennedy. Agriculture is the mother of all human cultures and all modes of man-made production. Agricultural production and its consumption are primarily guided by values of human existence, health and welfare; the values of the market are superimposed on it. Agriculture, thus, is not only a source of income and livelihood for many farmers but also a way of life and identity. Agriculture is a springboard to food security, rural development, cultural heritage and landscape preservation and, thus, requires mechanisms to



SUKHDEV SINGH

safeguard it from the post-industrial market economy founded on the principles of profit rather than the exchange of goodwill and well-being. The market creates a conflict between the economic and social objectives of agriculture. It is for the social objective of 'food security' and the livelihood of farmers that justify the Indian farmers' protest for a legal guarantee on minimum sup-

port price. The system of minimum support price introduced in 1966 to help India fight the food deficit has been a productive driver for development and food safety for the Indian population; a system to determine minimum support price has evolved through the years which yet needs improvement and support.

At present, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), Government of India calculates the paid-out costs on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired human and machine labour, and leased-in land rent etc (A2) and the imputed value of unpaid family labour (FL), and adds 50% of its total to recommend minimum support price (MSP) for Cereals (Paddy,

Wheat, Barley, Jowar, Bajra, Maize and Ragi), pulses (Gram, Arhar/Tur, Moong, Urad and Lentil), oilseeds (Groundnut, Rapeseed/Mustard, Toria, Soybean, Sunflower Seed, Sesamum, Safflower Seed and Nigarseed), Copra, De-Husked Coconut, Raw Cotton, Raw Jute and Sugarcane every year. Then, keeping in view the production costs, fair remuneration for farmers affordability for consumers and the market conditions, the CACP recommendation is approved by the parliament of India to notify the MSP before the sowing season. In its recommendation, the CACP does not consider the 'Swaminathan National Commission for Farmers' rec-

ommendation fully to include capital assets and the rentals and interest forgone on owned land which the protesting farmers demand. Another cause for farmers' protest is the demand for legislation providing farmers 'the Right to Sell at MSP' which the CACP itself had suggested in its price policy report 2018-19. The farmers are demanding the same legal entitlement for their produce insulating it against the market pressures of 'demand and supply' as the markets can be subject to manipulation by the private traders and corporations, a concern shared by the CACP in its 2018-19 report. The crops are unlike industrial production that can be controlled with resilience to

market pressures; the cropping patterns are not so easy to shift. The biological nature of agricultural produce makes it vulnerable to unpredictable and uncontrollable weather conditions, pests and diseases on the one hand, and its 'all at once' yield makes it vulnerable to the market players if left for itself to guard. To enhance its resilience to the negative market pressures, a legal guarantee for MSP is required. Unlike the corporate, the small farmers can not store and service 'value addition'; they have to sell the entire yield immediately. So, it is reasonable for the farmers to expect a guaranteed MSP announced by the government. The legal guarantee for MSP is not about the procurement

of the entire crop by the government but about its purchase at a price not less than the minimum remunerative price declared by the government itself. In the absence of a legal guarantee, the traders purchase the agricultural produce at prices lower than the MSP, yet they sell it to the consumers at prices much higher than the MSP without passing on the benefit to the consumers. Agricultural produce is for survival while all other industrial or service products are for additional comfort. To keep the farmers growing sufficient for the people to survive, it is well within the reasonable sense for the government to compensate the gaps in case 'demand and supply' forces the sale of crops at

prices lower than the MSP following the principle it employs in its intervention to support the corporate failures. The legal guarantee for all crops in all states can act as an instrument for organic farming and diversification, as the farmers will have no insecurity about price fluctuations. If left unguarded and subject to the 'demand-supply' principle, it may lead to food insecurity and compromise social values inherent in agriculture. Leaving agriculture on the market is neither desirable nor pro-national; it is only pro-corporate and anti-national.

(The writer is a retired professor of Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar and a member of the governing council of INTACH, New Delhi; views are personal)

Israeli strikes in Gaza kill 48

Fears mount over humanitarian crisis

AP ■ RAFAH

Israeli strikes killed at least 48 people in southern and central Gaza overnight, half of them women and children, health officials said Thursday, as European foreign ministers and UN agencies called for a cease-fire, with alarm rising over the worsening humanitarian crisis and potential starvation in the territory.

Tensions were also rising in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where three Palestinian gunmen on Thursday opened fire on morning traffic at a highway checkpoint, killing one person and wounding five others, Israeli police said. A member of Israel's War Cabinet said late Wednesday that new attempts are underway to reach a cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas that could pause the war in Gaza and bring the release of around 130 Israeli hostages held by the militants since their Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. It was the first Israeli indication of new efforts since negotiations stalled a week ago.

But Benny Gantz, a former military chief and defense minister, repeated his pledge that unless Hamas agrees to release the remaining hostages,

Israel will launch a ground offensive into Gaza's southern-most town, Rafah, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins around March 10.

More than half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million is crowded into Rafah after fleeing fighting and bombardment elsewhere in the territory. Israel has said it will evacuate them before attacking. But it is not clear where they would go, with much of the rest of the tiny Mediterranean enclave consumed in combat — raising fears civilian casualties could spiral in an Israeli assault that has already killed more than 29,400 people.

The heads of 13 UN agencies and five other aid groups issued a joint plea for a cease-fire late Wednesday, warning that an attack on Rafah will bring "mass casualties" and could "deal a death blow" to the humanitarian operation bringing aid to Palestinians, which "is already on its knees."

Earlier this week, the World Food Program had to halt food deliveries to northern Gaza because of increasing chaos. "Diseases are rampant. Famine is looming," they said, adding that aid workers are facing "shelling, death, movement restrictions and a break-

down of civil order." They called for the opening of more entry points for aid to Gaza — including in the north — security assurances of safe passage for distribution and a release of hostages.

The foreign ministers of 26 European countries on Thursday called for a pause in fighting leading to a longer cease-fire. They urged Israel not to take military action in Rafah "that would worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation."

Thursday's shooting came at a checkpoint on a West Bank highway where the gunmen opened fire on cars in the morning rush-hour traffic jam. An Israeli man in his 20s was killed and five others wounded, including a pregnant woman.

Security forces killed two of the gunmen and detained the third, police said.

Hamas in a statement Thursday praised the attack in Jerusalem and said it was a "natural response" to Israel's ongoing war in Gaza and raids in the West Bank, and called for more attacks until they can achieve a "fully sovereign" Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The militant group did not claim responsibility for the attack.

Tensions are rising in the West Bank ahead of Ramadan, which in the past has seen increased clashes, often in connection to restrictions imposed on Palestinian worshippers going to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City during the holy month.

Tempers are likely to be even more volatile this year over the Gaza war and spiraling violence in the West Bank.

Since the war began, the Israeli army has carried out near-nightly raids across the West Bank, arresting more than 3,200 Palestinians, including 1,350 it says are suspected Hamas members. Almost 400 Palestinians have been killed during the operations, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Israeli settlers have stepped up attacks on Palestinians, and there have been a number of militant shooting attacks against Israeli civilians. A flurry of seven Israeli strikes hit Rafah early Thursday, one of them flattening a large mosque and devastating much of the surrounding block.

Footage from the scene showed al-Farouq Mosque pancaked to the ground, with its concrete domes tumbled around it and nearby buildings shattered.

Houthi missile attack sets ship ablaze in Gulf of Aden

AP ■ DUBAI

A suspected missile attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels set a ship ablaze in the Gulf of Aden on Thursday as Israel intercepted what appeared to be another Houthi attack near the port city of Eilat, authorities said. The attacks come as the rebels escalate their assaults over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The attack on Thursday in the Gulf of Aden saw two missiles fired, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. It said the unnamed ship was ablaze, without elaborating.

Meanwhile, sirens sounded early on Thursday morning over Eilat, followed by videos posted online of what appeared to be an interception in the sky overhead.

The Israeli military later said the interception was carried out by its Arrow missile defense system.

Israel did not identify what the fire was, nor where it came from. However, the Arrow system intercepts long-range ballistic missiles with a warhead designed to destroy targets while they are in space.



The system "successfully intercepted a launch which was identified in the area of the Red Sea and was en route to Israel," the Israeli military said. "The target did not cross into Israeli territory and did not pose a threat to civilians."

The Houthis did not immediately claim either attack. They typically acknowledge assaults they conduct hours afterward.

Eilat, on the Red Sea, is a key port city of Israel. On October 31, Houthis first claimed a missile-and-drone barrage targeting the city. The rebels have claimed other attacks targeting Eilat, which have caused no damage in the

an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars. The Houthis insist their attacks will continue until Israel stops its combat operations in the Gaza Strip, which have enraged the wider Arab world and seen the Houthis gain international recognition.

On Wednesday, ships in the Red Sea off the Houthi-held port city of Hodeida in Yemen reported seeing an explosion, though all vessels in the area were said to be safe, the UKMTO said. The UKMTO earlier reported heavy drone activity in the area.

The US military's Central Command acknowledged shooting down a Houthi bomb-carrying drone during that time.

US airstrikes separately targeted seven mobile anti-ship cruise missiles and one mobile anti-ship ballistic missile prepared to target ships in the Red Sea, Central Command said.

The US State Department criticised "the reckless and indiscriminate attacks on civilian cargo ships by the Houthis" that have delayed humanitarian aid including food and medicine bound for Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen.

France says, Russian forces threatened to shoot down aircraft patrolling Black Sea

AP ■ PARIS

Russian forces threatened to shoot down French pilots patrolling in international airspace over the Black Sea, signals of increasingly aggressive behaviour from Moscow as its invasion of Ukraine struggles to make headway, France's defense minister said Thursday.

The minister, Sébastien Lecornu, didn't give specific details about the French flights or aircraft involved in the threatened shoot-down. But he said Russia is returning to a "particularly aggressive" posture reminiscent of the former Soviet Union's behaviour during the Cold War.

"A month ago, to give you a very concrete example, a Russian air traffic control system threatened to shoot down French aircraft in the Black Sea when we were in a free international zone where we patrol," he said on RTL radio.

"The behaviour of Russia in 2024 bears no relation to what we saw in 2022 and, obviously, before the aggression in Ukraine," the minister said. "It is explained by the fact that Russia is in difficulty on the battlefield in Ukraine."

A French military spokesman, Col. Pierre Gaudillière, said Lecornu was referring to an incident in mid-November that involved one of France's four giant Airborne Warning and Control System, or AWACS, surveillance aircraft. Gaudillière described the incident as unprecedented for a

French flight in that region.

"It was a French AWACS" flying over international waters in the Black Sea, Gaudillière said. "Through a radio it exchange, it was threatened by the Russians."

"It was a particularly aggressive radio exchange," he added. "It's a first."

French air force pilots regularly patrol on the eastern flank of NATO, part of efforts by the 31-nation military alliance to boost its defenses since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago come Saturday.

The French flights include long-range patrols by its AWACS surveillance aircraft. Flying high above the Black Sea coast, they use their powerful radar and other surveillance gear to peer across to the Crimean Peninsula that was seized from Ukraine by Russia and annexed in 2014. The surveillance flights can spot missile launches, airborne bombing runs and other military activity in the Ukraine conflict.

Russian pilots have at times made clear that they don't like being watched.

In 2022, a Russian fighter jet released a missile near a British air force RC-135 Rivet Joint surveillance aircraft that was flying in international airspace over the Black Sea, Britain's government said.

The United States government released video in March 2023 of a Russian fighter jet dumping fuel on a US Air Force surveillance drone. The drone crashed into the Black Sea.

Biden calls Putin 'crazy SOB'

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

During a fundraiser for his reelection campaign Wednesday night, President Joe Biden called Russian President Vladimir Putin a "crazy SOB" and took aim at former President Donald Trump's comments comparing himself to the Russian opposition leader who died last week in an Arctic prison.

Biden was talking about climate change when he said, "We have a crazy SOB like Putin and others, and we always have to worry about nuclear conflict, but the existential threat to humanity is climate."

Speaking to donors at a private San Francisco home Wednesday as part of a three-day California swing to raise money for his 2024 reelection campaign, Biden also said he

was astounded by recent comments made by his likely Republican challenger.

Trump compared the suspicious prison death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to his own legal troubles in the U.S. Trump was fined \$350 million after a New York judge found he lied for years about his wealth on financial statements in his companies. Trump said the ruling was a form of "communism or fascism."

"Some of the things that this fellow's been saying, like he's comparing himself to Navalny and saying that — because our country's become a communist country, he was persecuted, just like Navalny was persecuted. I don't know where the hell this comes from," Biden said.

"I mean, if I stood here 10, 15 years ago and said any of

this, you'd all think I should be committed," he said. "It astounds me."

"I've been around a long time and I've never quite seen a crowd like this MAGA Republican crowd," Biden added, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. "They seem to have very little moral compass on what is important to people."

During a campaign fundraiser in Beverly Hills on Tuesday night, Biden highlighted his efforts to help middle-class Americans and warned that a win in November for Trump could lead to a nationwide abortion ban, more Republican efforts to undo the health insurance program started during President Barack Obama's administration and more policies that would disproportionately help the wealthy.

Knife attack at German school injures five, suspect arrested

AP ■ BERLIN

Five people were injured in an incident Thursday at a school in the western German city of Wuppertal and a suspect was arrested, police said. The incident took place at the Wilhelm Dörpfeld high school in the city's Elberfeld district. Police said there was no shooting in the incident, German news agency dpa reported, but gave no further information. The Bild newspaper, which didn't name sources, said it was a knife attack.

Police said they deployed large numbers of officers to the scene. They said the suspect was injured.

Wuppertal is a city of some 350,000 people near Duesseldorf and Cologne.



Police and ambulances at the scene of an attack, at the Wilhelm Dörpfeld school, in Wuppertal, Germany, Thursday. AP/PTI

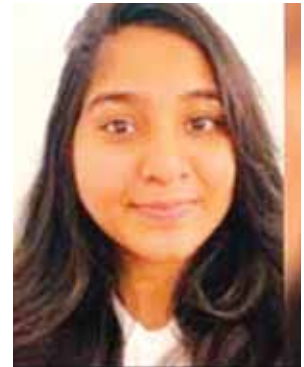
Jaahnavi's killers will not face criminal charges

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Seattle police officer who struck and killed Indian student Jaahnavi Kandula while responding to an overdose call, will not face any criminal charges due to lack of "sufficient" evidence, authorities said.

On Wednesday, the King County Prosecutor's Office said they will not move forward with criminal charges against Seattle Police Officer Kevin Dave, FOX13 Seattle reported. In a statement released Wednesday, the King County Prosecuting Attorney said, "Kandula's death is heartbreaking and impacted communities in King County and across the world."

Kandula, 23, was struck by a police vehicle driven by Officer Dave when she was crossing a street in Seattle on January 23. He was driving 74 mph (more than 119 kmh) on



the way to a report of a drug overdose call. Kandula was thrown 100 feet when she was struck by the speeding police patrol vehicle.

In bodycam footage released by the Seattle Police Department, Officer Daniel Auderer laughed about the deadly crash and dismissed any implication Dave might be at fault or that a criminal investigation was necessary.

King County Prosecuting

Attorney Leesa Manion said that she believes they lack the evidence to prove a criminal case beyond a reasonable doubt, the report added.

"It is the responsibility of the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office to review all available evidence relating to the case involving Seattle Police Officer Kevin Dave and the January 2023 collision death of Jaahnavi Kandula. After staffing this case with senior deputy prosecuting attorneys and office leadership, I have determined that we lack sufficient evidence under Washington State law to prove a criminal case beyond a reasonable doubt."

The statement also said that the prosecutor's office also finds the comments made by Seattle Police Officer Daniel Auderer, recorded on his body-worn video, "appalling and deeply troubling."

Auderer, who was not

involved in the January collision, was captured in the video saying, "But she is dead" and laughing while on the phone.

"She was 26 anyway," Auderer said in the video. "She had limited value."

"Officer Auderer's comments were also unprofessional and undermined the public's trust in the Seattle Police Department and law enforcement in general," said Manion.

"As egregious as Officer Auderer's comments are, they do not change the PAO's legal analysis into the conduct of Officer Dave. It is the Office of Police Accountability that bears the responsibility of disciplinary investigation and proceedings relating to Officer Auderer's comment, not the PAO."

Auderer was pulled from patrol in September 2023 and reassigned to a "non-operational position." Auderer could still be fired after the fallout of

his insensitive comments captured on bodycam.

Auderer's chain of command and the Office of Police Accountability (OPA) found he acted unprofessionally. For that, he faces the highest disciplinary range of nearly two weeks suspension up to termination, according to a disciplinary action report.

Before a final disciplinary decision, Auderer will have the chance to meet with Police Chief Adrian Diaz to disagree.

His disciplinary hearing is scheduled for March 4, K5 News reported.

Seattle local media reported that speed was the cause of the collision, as the speed at which Dave was travelling did "not allow (Kandula) or him sufficient time to detect, address and avoid a hazard that presented itself."

Dave was responding to a "priority one" call at the request of the Seattle Fire Department,

according to the Seattle Police Department. According to the police report, the officer was responding to a report of a drug overdose.

The officer did not have his siren activated continuously. Instead, the officer "chirped" his siren at the intersection. He did have his emergency lights on, according to a previous statement from the police department.

In a memo to Seattle police, prosecutors wrote there was not enough evidence to prove Dave showed "conscious disregard for others safety."

A drug recognition expert responded to the scene and found no impairment in the officer.

Kandula was a graduate student at Northeastern University at the Seattle campus. The university said in January 2023 that they would award her degree posthumously and present it to her family.

Albanian Parliament approves deal to hold migrants for Italy

Tirana (AP): Albania's Parliament on Thursday approved a deal for the country to hold thousands of asylum seekers rescued in international waters by Italy while their applications are processed, despite protests from opposition lawmakers and human rights groups.

Under the five-year deal, Albania would shelter up to 3,000 migrants at any one time. With asylum requests expected to take around a month to process, the number of asylum-seekers sent to Albania could reach up to 36,000 in a year.

The idea of sending asylum seekers outside the EU is controversial. The deal was endorsed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen but has been widely criticised by human rights groups. Albania is currently seeking EU membership.

ment. Gazment Bardhi of the opposition Democrats declined to say anything about the agreement, which they have opposed earlier.

Mesila Doda of the Small Justice, Integration, Unity Party, whose three members voted for the deal, said that "we are talking about a country that always has supported us in our path."

Italy's lower chamber of parliament approved the deal in January, followed by the Senate earlier this month.

Two processing centers will be set up in Albania at a cost to Italy of more than 600 million euros (about USD 650 million) over five years.

The facilities would be fully run by Italy while it fast-tracks their asylum requests. Meloni has said she expects them to become operational by the spring of 2024.

Italy would remain legally responsible for the migrants throughout the process, and would welcome them if they are granted international protection or organize their deportation from Albania if refused.

Those picked up within Italy's territorial waters, or by rescue ships operated by non-governmental organisations, would retain their right under international and EU law to apply for asylum in Italy and have their claims processed there. Rama has said that Albania stands beside Meloni in a sign of gratitude on behalf of Albanians who found refuge in Italy and "escaped hell and imagined a better life" following the collapse of communism in Albania in the 1990s. Italy has sought help from other EU nations to handle the increasing number of arrivals. Data from Italy's Interior ministry showed that migrant arrivals in Italy jumped 50 per cent in 2023 from the previous year.

Farmers from EU countries join protest

AP ■ PRAGUE

Czech farmers were driving their tractors and other vehicles to several border crossings on Thursday to meet their colleagues from neighbouring countries and join forces in their protests against European Union agriculture policies, bureaucracy and overall conditions for their business.

Farmers complain that the 27-nation EU's environmental policies, such as the Green Deal, which calls for limits on the use of chemicals and on greenhouse gas emissions, limit their business and make their products more expensive than non-EU imports.

The farmers also complain about low prices for their products and say grain and other agriculture products coming from Ukraine and Latin America negatively affect the



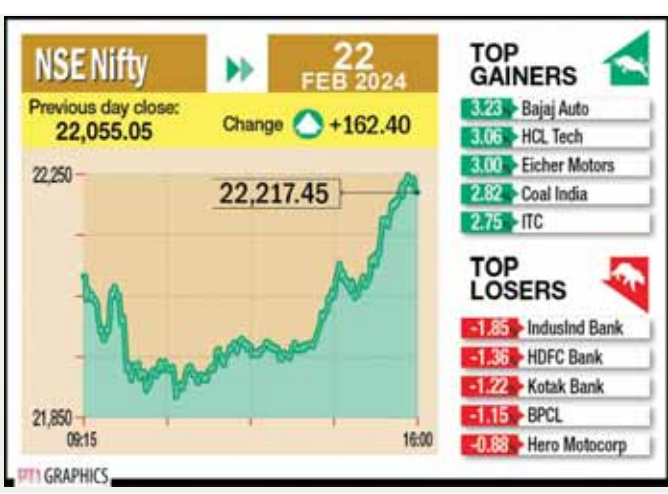
market. The farmers met their colleagues from neighbouring Germany, Poland and Slovakia at a number of border crossings. Farmers from 10 EU countries, ranging from Central Europe to the Baltics and the Balkans, were participating in the protest, organisers said.

The farmers invited Czech Agriculture Minister Marek Vyborny, his Slovak counterpart Richard Takac, and the representatives of farmers from Poland and Hungary to rally at a Czech-Slovak border crossing known as Hodonin-Holic, which was blocked by hundreds of tractors. "We don't protest against the EU, we protest against the wrong decisions by the European Commission," said Andrej Gajdos from the Slovak Chamber of Agriculture and Food.

Sensex surges over 500 points

Nifty scales new high on bullish sentiments

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Stocks staged a strong recovery on Thursday, with Nifty notching up a fresh all-time high and Sensex surging over 500 points as investors went on a buying spree in IT, technology and automobile stocks.
After volatility persisted for most part of the session, the benchmark indices rebounded in the last one hour of trading amid improving domestic macroeconomic indicators and positive global cues, including impressive earnings from the US technology space.
The 30-share benchmark Sensex soared 535.15 points or 0.74 per cent to close at 73,158.24 points. As many as 22 Sensex constituents closed in the positive territory and the index touched an intra-day high of 73,256.39 points.
The broader Nifty climbed 162.40 points or 0.74 per cent to hit its highest-ever closing level of 22,217.45 points.
During intraday trade, the index touched the peak of 22,252.50 points and 25 Nifty constituents ended the session with gains.
Nifty recorded its previous lifetime peak at 22,196.95 points on



February 20.
“The domestic market staged a recovery from the day’s low, buoyed by positive PMI data from the Eurozone and an impressive earnings report from US tech stocks.
“The broader market showed resilience as India’s economic activity continued to expand in February, with both service and manufacturing PMI improving. Consequently, it resulted in outperformance in discretionary stocks and capital goods,”

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said. BSE midcap index gained 0.92 per cent, largecap index climbed 0.81 per cent and smallcap index rose 0.54 per cent.
In the Sensex pack, HCLTech rose the maximum by 3.12 per cent, followed by ITC which gained 2.73 per cent and M&M went up 2.61 per cent. TCS climbed 2.44 per cent. Bellwether auto stock Maruti gained 1.79 per cent, while Tata Motors rose

Bank falling 1.87 per cent, HDFC Bank dropped 1.28 per cent, Kotak Mahindra Bank declined 1.11 per cent and SBI slipped 0.73 per cent. BSE Bankex was the only index that ended with a marginal loss of 0.04 per cent.
“We are witnessing the banks trading at higher valuations than their historical median barring two large banks; HDFC Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank.
“The sharp correction in these two banks led to valuation comfort and earning upgrades is likely to bring investor sentiment back. Hence, we are optimistic on HDFC Bank with a current valuation of around 2.7x Price to book,” Ajit Kabi, Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said.
In Asian markets, Japan’s Nikkei 225 surged more than 2 per cent to all-time high to hit its 1,989 level. Hang Seng of Hong Kong and China’s Shanghai Composite also ended with sharp gains.
European stocks were also mostly trading in the green.
On Wednesday, US stocks finished mostly higher after minutes of the US Federal Reserve’s January meeting showed most policymakers were concerned about the risks of cutting interest rates early.



Sugar firms stocks settle 3 per cent lower

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Shares of Sugar companies settled 3 per cent lower on Thursday after the government announced a hike in the minimum price that mills have to pay to sugarcane growers for the 2024-25 season starting October.
The scrip of Rana Sugars declined 2.86 per cent to close at Rs 25.44 apiece on the BSE, Mawana Sugars at Rs 102.07, Shree Renuka Sugars at Rs 48.96, Dalmia Bharat Sugar and Industries at Rs 402, EID Parry (India) at Rs 630.60.
Also, Triveni Engineering & Industries went lower by 0.73 per cent to settle at Rs 347.90 apiece, Dhapur Sugar Mills at Rs 248.95 and KCP Sugar & Industries Corp at Rs 41.75 per piece on the exchange.
On the other hand, shares of Rajshree Sugars & Chemicals rallied 8.22 per cent to end at Rs 80.60 apiece, and Balrampur Chini Mills gained 0.45 per cent to finish at Rs 382.45 each on the BSE.
The 30-share BSE Sensex index jumped 535.15 points or 0.74 per cent to close at 73,158.24.
On Wednesday, the government announced a hike in the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP), the minimum rate that mills need to pay to sugarcane growers. The FRP has been increased by Rs 25 to Rs 340 per quintal for the 2024-25 season starting October.
The decision to increase the FRP was taken at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
This is the highest FRP for sugarcane announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government since coming to power in 2014. This is the second time that the Modi government has increased the FRP by Rs 25 per quintal in one go.
“This decision of the central government is going to benefit more than 5 crore sugarcane farmers (including family members) and lakhs of other persons involved in the sugar sector,” an official statement said on Wednesday.



Farm community gives mixed response to increase in sugarcane FRP

PTI ■ BAGHPAT/MEERUT (UP)
The farm community in western Uttar Pradesh has given a mixed response to the government’s decision to increase Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane to Rs 340 per quintal.
The Union Cabinet on Wednesday decided to hike the minimum price that mills have to pay to sugarcane growers by Rs 25 to Rs 340 per quintal for the 2024-25 season starting October.
This is the highest FRP for sugarcane announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government since coming to power in 2014.
Dismayed over the decision, Baghat District President of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Bhanu) Pratap Singh Gurjar said the government has forgotten its own promise.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi had himself promised to give MSP of Rs 450 per quintal to cane during a public rally in Meerut in 2014 elections,” he claimed.
“We (farmers) are also consumers. The government should also remember this. We also have to buy petrol, diesel, fertilizer, seeds etc. All these things are becoming expensive. MSP on sugarcane should be increased on the basis of farmers’ costs. If the allowance of government employees increases on the basis of inflation, then why is it not done for farmers? We urge the central government to reconsider its decision on the price for sugarcane,” Gurjar added.
Gurwant Singh, a sugarcane farmer of Shahjahanpur district, called the FRP rise “meagre.”
“The increase in FRP of sugarcane



by Rs 25 might look like a big decision but is very meagre to what actually is required. The cost of farming has almost doubled in the past few years. The government should at least increase the FRP by Rs 70 per

quintal so that farmers could recover their investment,” he said.
On the other hand, National Secretary of Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and senior farm leader of West UP, Raj Kumar Sangwan, while talking to PTI in Meerut, said the Centre has taken the decision keeping in mind the plight of the farmers. “This increase will provide relief to farmers.”
He also said that considering the way costs are increasing, the FRP could have been increased further.
Bharat District President of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Arajnaitik) Anurag Chaudhary also welcomed the move.
“The decision of Government of India to increase the FRP of sugarcane by Rs 25 is good. But the central government must ensure that farmers in UP get this benefit.”

Vodafone Idea board to meet to consider fundraising proposal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Telecom operator Vodafone Idea (VIL) on Thursday said its board will meet on February 27 to consider fundraising proposals.
In a statutory filing, VIL said the board of directors will consider and evaluate all proposals for “raising of funds in one or more tranches by way of a rights issue, further public offer, private placement including preferential allotment, qualified institutions placement or through any other permissible mode and/or combination.”
The fundraising could be through equity or debt instruments, the BSE filing said.
The capital raise could be by way of issue of equity shares or by way of any instruments including “securities convertible into equity shares, Global Depository Receipts, American Depository Receipts or bonds including foreign currency convertible bonds, convertible debentures, warrants, and/or non-convertible debentures including non-convertible debentures along with warrants, which may or may not be listed.”
“... The Board of Directors of Vodafone Idea Limited will be held on Tuesday that is 27 February, 2024, to consider and evaluate any and all proposals for raising of funds in one or more tranches...,” it said.
Earlier today, Billionaire industrialist and Aditya

Birla Group chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla had underlined the Group’s firm commitment to the cash-strapped telco and asserted that efforts are on to rope-in external investors.
On how soon such investors could be onboarded, Birla told PTI “we are making good progress but can’t put in a timeline.”
“We remain very committed to Vodafone Idea, and like we have said in public domain, efforts are on to get outside investors,” he had said speaking at a conference here to mark the launch of the Group’s decorative business.
Vodafone Idea saw its net loss narrow to Rs 6,986 crore for the December 2023 quarter, helped by Rs 755.5 crore one-time exceptional gain, while the average revenue per subscriber improved for the ailing telco.
VIL’s net loss stood at Rs 7,990 crore in the year-ago period.
For the debt-laden telco - which has been struggling to keep up with the larger rivals like Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel in the hugely competitive Indian telecom market - the revenue from operations remained nearly flat at Rs 10,673.1 crore year-on-year.
During the company’s Q3FY24 results, Vodafone Idea CEO Akshaya Moondra had said: “We remain engaged with various parties for fundraising to make required investments for network expansion, including 5G roll-out.”

Rupee rises 13 paise to close at 82.83 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee appreciated 13 paise to close at 82.83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, tracking the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and positive domestic equities.
Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices weighed on the local unit and restricted a sharp uptick.
At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 82.94 against the greenback. It hit an intraday high of 82.83 during the day.
The domestic unit finally settled at 82.83 (provisional) against the dollar,

higher by 13 paise from its previous close of 82.96.
The Indian rupee appreciated on Thursday on weak US dollar and mixed-to-positive domestic markets, said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, a surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains. The US dollar declined on rise in risk appetite in global markets and positive European markets ahead of PMI data from Eurozone and Germany.
Analysts attributed the retreating dollar index to the US Federal Reserve’s minutes that reflected policy makers’ cautious approach, ebbing the possibility of interest rate cuts in



the immediate future.
“The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) minutes released on Wednesday were slightly hawkish,” Choudhary said.
Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.31 per cent lower at 103.68.
Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.37 per cent to USD 83.34 per barrel.
“We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the weak tone in the US dollar and positive global markets. However, rising global crude oil prices and geopolitical tension in the Middle East may limit the gains

in the rupee. “Traders may watch out for manufacturing and services PMI, weekly unemployment claims and existing home sales data from the US. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.60 to Rs 83.10,” Choudhary added.
On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex advanced 535.15 points, or 0.74 per cent, to 73,158.24. The Nifty rose 162.40 points, or 0.74 per cent, to hit an all-time high of 22,217.45.
Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Wednesday as they purchased shares worth Rs 284.66 crore, according to exchange data.

Solar installations fall 44 per cent in 2023, says report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India has reported a 44 per cent fall in solar installations at 7.5 gigawatt in 2023 due to land acquisition-related issues, research firm Mercom Capital said on Thursday.
According to the US-based research firm’s latest report, a total of 13.4 gigawatt (GW) solar capacity was installed in the country in 2022.
As of December 2023, the cumulative installed solar capacity stood at 72 GW. Of which utility-scale projects accounted for 85.4 per cent, and rooftop solar accounted for 14.6 per cent, the report said.
“In 2023, large-scale solar

installations fell 51 per cent to 5.8 GW from 11.7 GW in 2022. Extensions granted to several large-scale projects and delays primarily due to land (acquisition) and transmission (connectivity) issues impacted capacity additions during the year. Large-scale solar accounted for 77.2 per cent of annual solar capacity additions, and rooftop solar contributed 22.8 per cent,” it said.
Rajasthan followed by Karnataka, and Gujarat were the top three states for cumulative large-scale solar capacity, accounting for 54.8 per cent of installations in the country as of December 2023.
India’s large-scale solar project

pipeline stood at 105.3 GW, with another 70.6 GW of projects tendered and pending auction, the report said.
Country’s installed renewable energy capacity, including large hydropower projects, stood at 179.5 GW, accounting for 42 per cent of the overall power mix at the end of December 2023.
Solar energy projects accounted for 48.5 per cent of all new power capacity installed last year.
As of December 2023, solar energy accounted for 16.9 per cent of India’s total installed power capacity and almost 40.1 per cent of the total installed renewable energy capacity.

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Bharat Highways InvIT to float ₹2,500 crore IPO on February 28

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Bharat Highways InvIT, an infrastructure investment trust, on Thursday said it will launch its Rs 2,500 crore Initial Public Offering (IPO) on February 28.
The InvIT’s maiden public issue will conclude on March 1 and the price band has been set at Rs 98-100 per unit for the issue, Bharat Highways InvIT said in a statement.
Proceeds from the issue will be utilised to provide loans to the Project SPVs (special purpose vehicles) for repayment of their outstanding loans.
Bharat Highways InvIT is an



infrastructure investment trust established to acquire, manage, and invest in a portfolio of infrastructure assets in India and to carry on the activities of an infrastructure investment trust under Sebi’s InvIT rule. Its initial portfolio consists of seven road assets, all operating on HAM (Hybrid Annuity Model) basis, in Punjab,

Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh consisting of about 497.292 km of constructed and operational roads.
Additionally, the InvIT has entered into an agreement with G R InfraProjects Ltd (GRIL) after which GRIL granted a right of first offer to the InvIT to acquire certain of its road assets.
About 75 per cent of the issue size has been reserved for Qualified Institutional Bidders (QIBs) and 25 per cent for Non-institutional Investors (NIIs). Investors can bid for a minimum of 150 units in one lot and in multiples of 150 units thereof.

Sebi orders attachment of bank, demat accounts of DHFL former promoters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Markets regulator Sebi has ordered the attachment of bank accounts as well as shares and mutual fund holdings of Dheeraj Wadhawan and Kapil Wadhawan, the former promoters of Dewan Housing Finance Corp Ltd (DHFL), to recover dues totalling over Rs 22 lakh.

This came after the brothers failed to pay the fine imposed on them by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in July last year in a case concerning the flouting of disclosure norms.
In two separate attachment notices issued on Tuesday, the markets watchdog has ordered the attachment of bank, demat accounts, and mutual fund

folios of the Wadhawans to recover the pending dues. The pending dues of Rs 10.6 lakh each from Wadhawans comprise the initial penalty amount, interest, and recovery cost, it added.
In July 2023, the regulator imposed a penalty of Rs 10 lakh each on Wadhawans, who were promoters of DHFL (now known as Piramal Finance), for



flouting disclosure norms. Kapil Wadhawan was the Chairman and MD of DHFL, while Dheeraj Wadhawan was a non-executive director of the company. Both of them were on the board of DHFL.
The order came after Sebi conducted an investigation into the transfer of shares held by DHFL in DHFL Pramerica Life Insurance (erstwhile DLF

Pramerica Life Insurance) to its wholly owned subsidiary DHFL Investments and other related transactions.
The investigation period was from February-March 2017. Sebi observed that the brothers were responsible for providing inadequate information in the postal ballot notice by the firm.
As per the attachment notices,

Sebi said there is sufficient reason to believe that the defaulters may dispose of the amounts in the bank accounts and securities in the demat accounts and “realisation of the amount due under the certificate would, in consequence, be delayed or obstructed.”
Accordingly, the regulator asked all banks, depositories, and mutual funds not to allow

any debit from the account. However, credits have been permitted. In January, Sebi sent demand notices to Dheeraj and Kapil asking them to pay Rs 10.6 lakh each in the case. Also, the regulator warned them of arrest and attachment of assets as well as bank accounts if they fail to make the payment within 15 days.

Mbappé chasing milestones in French league before summer exit

AP ■ PARIS
Kylian Mbappé has 12 matches left to play in the French league. Twelve matches left to set new records in a league he has dominated for years. The star striker is leaving Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season when his contract expires. He is widely expected to sign a lucrative deal with Real Madrid, the club he dreamt of playing for when he was a kid. Since his debut with Monaco at age 16 in December 2015, Mbappé has scored 185 league goals, making him one of the top 10 marksmen in Ligue 1 history. It's impossible for the 2018 World Cup winner to catch Delio Onnis, the league's all-time leader with 299 during the 1970s-80s. But Mbappé, who has 21 goals this season, has a chance to reach 200. At 25, Mbappé is already PSG's all-time best scorer, with 244 in all competitions. He will set another record if he finishes as the league top scorer for a sixth consecutive time. He currently shares the record with Onnis, Carlos Bianchi and Jean-Pierre Papin. PSG has dominated French football since Qatari owners took over in 2011, and is on track for a record-extending 12th league title. It hosts Rennes on Sunday with a 13-point lead over second-placed Brest. **MOUNIE SUSPENDED:** Brest, the surprise of the season, will be without striker Steve Mounié for the next two games. Mounié was suspended for his red card last week for elbowing a defender during a 1-0 win against



Marseille. He will miss facing Strasbourg on Saturday then Le Havre. Since coming back from two goals down to stun last season's runner-up Lens on the opening day of the season, Brest has been living a fairy tale and has dreams of qualifying for the Champions League for the first time. Brest has a best league finish of eighth. **NURSING MORALE WOUNDS:** With Gennaro Gattuso gone, Marseille takes on Montpellier under new coach Jean-Louis Gasset. Some might say it's good timing, since Gasset is a former Montpellier player and coach. He was born there and knows the club inside out. Stuck in ninth place, Marseille needs to win to avoid getting distanced in the race for European spots. Gasset said his first task was to give players their confidence back to ensure the team stops conceding from individual errors. "The mind is 80% of the performance," Gasset said. "They're professionals, they need to do a bit more. When you take goals like that, it's not because of the tactical systems. We have to reassure the players. That's how I started to work with them." The 70-year-old Gasset was appointed less than a month after getting fired by Ivory Coast. He faced questions about his age during his inaugural news conference in Marseille this week. "Speaking of the greats," Gasset said, "do people ask the question about (Arsene) Wenger, (Alex) Ferguson, (Raymond) Goethals? I'm not comparing myself to them. But age is the age in your head."



Gauff beats Pliskova to reach Dubai quarterfinals

Swiatek, Rybakina also advance

AP ■ DUBAI
Coco Gauff rallied from a slow start and a second-set argument with the chair umpire to beat Karolina Pliskova 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 and reach the quarterfinals of the Dubai Championships. The third-seeded Gauff ended Pliskova's 11-match winning streak. The 19-year-old American built a 4-2 lead in the second set before a lengthy back-and-forth with chair umpire Pierre Bacchi. Gauff complained to Bacchi that he called her serve at deuce out only after Pliskova returned it into the net. Gauff had to repeat her first serve and went on to hold for a 5-2 lead. The U.S. Open champion said the argument "fueled" her. "It's OK. It's just one point. That happens in tennis. Players make mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes," Gauff said in her on-court interview. "It kind of went upward from there for me." Gauff will next face Anna Kalinskaya after the Russian beat ninth-seeded Jelena Ostapenko 6-4, 7-5. Top-ranked Iga Swiatek advanced to the last eight by beating two-time Dubai champion Elina Svitolina 6-1, 6-4. Fourth-seeded Elena Rybakina had a tougher time reaching the quarterfinals. She outlasted Magdalena Frech 7-6 (5), 3-6, 6-4. Swiatek will next play sixth-seeded Qinwen Zheng, who eliminated Anastasia Potapova 6-3, 6-2. Rybakina has a quarterfinal match against Jasmine Paolini. The Italian defeated eighth-seeded Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-2. The other quarterfinal match is seventh-seeded Marketa Vondrousova against Sorana Cirstea.

Abhay, Ramit move up in style in premier PSA events



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Rising Indian squash player Abhay Singh stormed into the quarterfinals of the Goodfellow Classic, a USD 9000 Challenger Tour event in Toronto. The top-seeded Abhay, a former national champion and ranked No. 66. In the world, beat Canadian wild card Elliott Hunt 11-6, 11-3, 11-9 in the second round on Wednesday, following a bye in the first. Elsewhere, India's top-ranked player Saurav Ghosal lost in the opening round of the World Tour Platinum Windy City Open in Chicago, going down to home favourite Timothy Brownell 11-13, 2-11, 11-3, 14-12. However, Ramit Tandon carried forward the Indian challenge with a 11-7, 8-11, 11-1, 11-7 win over Hungarian Farkas Balazs in the first round.



Brazil's Fonseca becomes 1st player born in 2006 to win ATP tour match in Rio

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO
João Fonseca became the first player born in 2006 to win an ATP tour-level match when the 17-year-old Brazilian beat seventh-seeded Arthur Fils 6-0, 6-4 at the Rio Open. Fonseca defeated the No. 36-ranked Frenchman in front of raucous fans at the clay court tournament in Rio de Janeiro. He knelt on the court in tears to celebrate. "This is where I belong. I want to be in these huge stadiums," said Fonseca, who won the U.S. Open boys singles title last year. "Now it is all about focusing on the process." The Brazilian, currently ranked No. 655, is expected to jump about 200 positions after beating Fils. Fonseca said he is yet to decide whether he will play tennis for an American university later this year. "For now I am very focused in the pro-tour, I want to get to the top," said Fonseca. "That is

Squad woes continue for Real Madrid

AP ■ MADRID
Coach Carlo Ancelotti has to deal with two more absences to an already depleted squad when Spanish league leader Real Madrid hosts Sevilla this weekend. Ancelotti won't be able to count on suspended midfielder Eduardo Camavinga and defender Dani Carvajal on Sunday. Carvajal was sent off last Sunday at the end of the team's 1-1 draw at Rayo Vallecano, while Camavinga received his fifth yellow card to prompt an automatic suspension. Madrid has a six-point lead over second-placed Girona, which hosts Rayo on Monday. Madrid is eight points ahead of third-placed Barcelona and 11 points ahead of fourth-placed Atletico Madrid. Five Madrid players remain out injured, including Jude Bellingham with a sprained ankle and defender Antonio Rüdiger because of a thigh injury. Nursing long-term knee ligament injuries are goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and central defenders David Alaba and Éder Militão. Ancelotti has been improvising using midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni as a



central defender in recent matches. Lucas Vazquez is expected to replace

Carvajal on Sunday, and Luka Modric will likely play in Camavinga's place in the midfield. Madrid chose not to add any defenders during the winter transfer window. Ancelotti said the players he had were enough to make up for the absence of the injured players. The good news for Ancelotti is left back Ferland Mendy will be back from suspension at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Sevilla, sitting in 15th place, drew at Valencia 0-0 in the previous round after two consecutive victories helped it move away from the relegation zone.

Grateful and proud, says Anush after claiming Olympic quota

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
He moved to Germany as a 17-year-old to chase his Olympic dreams and equestrian Anush Agarwalla is filled with pride and gratitude after becoming the first ever Indian to fetch a dressage event quota place in this year's Paris Games. The 24-year-old from Kolkata, who won an Asian Games bronze last year, was three years old when he started riding and at 17, he decided that equestrian would be his calling in life. He secured a Paris Olympic quota in dressage based on his good performance in four FEI event -- Wroclaw, Poland (73.485 per cent), Kronenberg,

individual quota in dressage at the Olympic Games is very special," Agarwalla told PTI Video. The celebrated Fouaad Mirza had represented India at the 2020 Tokyo Games and before him, Intiaaz Anees (Sydney 2000), Indrajit Lamba (Atlanta 1996), Jitendrajit Singh Ahluwalia, Hussain Singh, Mohammed Khan and Darya Singh (all Moscow 1980) competed at the Summer Games. However, they all participated in eventing and Agarwalla will compete in dressage, in which the horse and rider perform a series of movements in a bordered arena. The horse is required to remain within the enclosed area while performing.



Netherlands (74.4 per cent), Frankfurt, Germany (72.9 per cent), and Mechelen, Belgium (74.2 per cent). The quota belongs to country and a final decision on who will represent India will be taken after trials. "I feel very grateful and proud of this achievement. Being the first Indian ever to secure an



Porto beats Arsenal 1-0 with stoppage time goal

AP ■ PORTO
Wenderson Galeno came through for Porto with the final whistle about to blow. Now, Arsenal needs to rally to return to the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time since 2010. Galeno scored deep into stoppage time to give Porto a 1-0 win in the first leg of the round of 16 on Wednesday. The English team will need a victory in the return leg in London on March 12 to make it back to the last eight of Europe's elite club competition. Galeno broke the deadlock with a right-footed shot into the far corner four minutes into added time. His strike from outside the area came in what was supposed to be the final minute of stoppage time at the Estadio do Dragao. "I think the credit for that goal goes to the whole team, for what they did in the 90 minutes," Galeno said. "We played well, we defended well, we left all our energy on the pitch. We will try to replicate in London what we achieved here. We will try to stay solid and give our best, as we always do." The Brazilian forward, who had hit the post in the first half, was named the man of the match. "When it's 0-0, you look up at the clock and it's 93 minutes gone, if you aren't going to win the game then don't lose it," Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice said. "Maybe have the bit of savviness about us to stay in and get a draw in a tough stadium against a tough opponent. They caught us on the counter and he's stuck one in the top corner which is really disappointing." Porto was mostly in control and kept Arsenal from having any attempts on target. The English side was coming off five consecutive wins in which it scored 21 goals in total. "A lot to play for in the second leg," Rice said. "We're really positive as a group, we've had such a good start to 2024 that we're not going to let this get us down." "We have to change our approach in the home leg and give it absolutely everything," he added. "Even though we're a goal down, it's a nice goal to aim for when we can change it around in the home leg." Porto was eliminated in the round of 16 last season. The Portuguese team is trying to reach the quarterfinals for the first time since 2021. "It was a good game, a Champions League game," Porto coach Sérgio Conceição said. "Our opponents had more of the ball, but Porto were always more dangerous." Arsenal, making its first Champions League appearance since 2016-17, failed to get past the round of 16 in seven consecutive tries from 2011-17. It has lost its last seven first-leg matches in the last 16. Arsenal beat Porto at this stage when it last advanced in 2010. Porto was without Iranian striker Mehdi Taremi because of a right thigh injury.

High profile coaching departures leave three iconic clubs scrambling for replacements

AP ■ LONDON
First it was Jurgen Klopp making the bombshell announcement he is leaving Liverpool. Then it was an exhausted Xavi Hernandez declaring his intention to quit his beloved Barcelona. This week, Bayern Munich and Thomas Tuchel made it known they'll be parting ways. That's three of Europe's iconic soccer clubs needing a new coach at the end of the season. And that's three high-profile soccer strategists soon to be joining the ever-growing list of acclaimed, title-winning managers out of work. Forget the upcoming summer transfer window, when Kylian Mbappe will likely be making his move to Real Madrid and Manchester United might be initiating a squad overhaul under its new soccer leadership. The biggest offseason intrigue might just center around the movements of a bunch of unemployed super-coaches in an unusually turbulent period at the top end of the European game. Indeed, it's not just Klopp, Xavi and Tuchel who'll be without a job. The past month also saw Jose Mourinho fired by Roma, which hired an interim coach



he has little more to achieve. Meanwhile, spicing things up even further is the growing status and reputation of Xabi Alonso, widely regarded as the next big thing in soccer coaching. Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen team has been a revelation this season and appears ready to wrest the German title from Bayern, which has won the Bundesliga for 11 straight years. That's made him a wanted man, with Liverpool, Barca and Bayern all



reportedly interested in his services. One thing's for sure - it's highly unlikely Leverkusen will be able to keep hold of him. It appears to be just happenstance that three of Europe's leading teams find themselves in the same predicament with their coaches, with three months still to play this season. The pressures of the job have taken their tolls on both Klopp and Xavi, but in different ways. Klopp said he was worn out

after such a long time (nine years) in the role - he compared himself to a sports car whose tank needle has gone down - while Xavi, who has been in charge at Barca for only a little over two years, cited mental fatigue and an "unpleasant" atmosphere at a club that has been weighed down by financial turmoil. Tuchel is less than a year into his time at Bayern and his departure seems to be mostly down to bad results, which have raised the prospect of the club's first season without a trophy in 12 years. Klopp, the oldest of the trio at age 56, is the only one leaving fully on his own terms and says he won't return to soccer management for at least a year. That would be the same length of sabbatical taken by Guardiola after leaving Barcelona in 2012. "Sometimes you feel you need to breathe," Guardiola said. "You need to take a break, take a step back." The City manager knows exactly what Xavi is going

INDIA EYE 17TH SERIES WIN ON TROT AT HOME

PTI ■ RANCHI
Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's absence is a concern but an assertive and adaptive India will have the edge against England's seemingly depth-less 'Bazball' approach when the two sides clash in the potentially series-deciding fourth Test beginning here on Friday.
From the dry heat of Rajkot to the much cooler confines of Ranchi, the temperature shift would be the only soothing factor for the Englishmen who have let it slip against the resilient hosts and are trailing 1-2.
Eyeing a 17th series win on the trot at home, India have been near invincible since the shock defeat to Alastair Cook's England in 2012. After that, India have won a staggering 38 out of 47 Tests, and have lost just twice (two each versus Australia and England) when challenges on home turf.
Captaining a depleted batting line-up in the absence of Virat Kohli, KL Rahul and an out-of-form Shreyas Iyer, Rohit Sharma has found answers from the young guns, whose performance has been the biggest takeaway from the series so far.

Whether it is Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has maintained an impressive average of 109 with a total of 545 runs, or Sarfaraz Khan, who ended his prolonged wait for a Test debut with a blazing 66-ball 62 in Rajkot, or Shubman Gill, gradually settling in at No.3, India's next generation of batters are showcasing how a seamless transition happens.
As for replacing Bumrah, who has been the top wicket-taker (17) of the series which was expected to be dominated by spinners, it could well be India's Achilles' heel in Ranchi. Bumrah has been rested after bowling a little more than 80 overs in the three gone-by Tests.
His reverse-swing mastery on day two of the Vizag Test during a six-wicket burst, was the biggest contributing factor in the 106-run win that levelled the series 1-1.
On a docile Rajkot wicket too, Bumrah made in-roads giving India crucial breakthroughs. Keeping in mind the seaming conditions in Dharamsala for the fifth Test and the hectic IPL season ahead, Bumrah has been given a break, making Mohammed Siraj the sole experienced pacer in the line-up. It will be a toss-up between

ENGLAND AIM FOR REDEMPTION IN 4TH TEST



Bengal duo of Mukesh Kumar and an uncapped Akash Deep for the second pacer's slot in Ranchi.
Fresh from his career-best 10-wicket haul in Ranji Trophy, Mukesh is not only more experienced but also partnered Bumrah in the Vizag Test. He, however, bowled just 12 overs taking one wicket across both innings. It remains to be seen whether the Indian think-tank will take the gamble of giving another debut cap or persist with Mukesh, who has been average at best.
History suggests that the JSCA Stadium pitch will suit a plan featuring two seamers and three spinners. But England's assessment of the conditions has been that four spinners and one seamer attack would be ideal.
"It's an interesting pitch... There are a few cracks, very platy and looked a bit crusty, the top layer, One half is good, and the other has a lot of platy cracks," England vice-captain Ollie Pope had said after the team checked in here on Thursday.
That may bring Shoaib Bashir into the picture to go alongside Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and part-timer Joe Root. Root has more overs (107) under his belt than runs (77) in this series.
India, on the other hand, have preferred the conventional two-pacer-three-spinner combination and it's unlikely

that Axar Patel would be recalled. The team is expected to stick to Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja.
Historically, the Ranchi pitch has proven deceptive for the visiting teams.
In the last Test here in 2019, South Africa were blown away by the duo of Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav, who shared 10 wickets between them, as against the eight by the spin trio of Ashwin, Jadeja and Shahbaz Nadeem.
"It has never been a rank-turner. The pitch would be beautiful for batting for first two days and would assist spin from day three. History should repeat itself," the local groundsman told PTI.
For the 'Bazball' inspired England, the win in Hyderabad has become a distant memory and a repeat of 2021 looks likely when India bounced back to win the four-Test series 3-1.
The record 434-run thrashing in Rajkot has triggered criticism of England's so-called aggressive 'Bazball' approach. It seems to have found a match in India after tasting success against New Zealand, South Africa and Pakistan and Australia to an extent.

The go-for-strokes style might have helped the likes of Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett, who swung his bat around for a stunning 153 in Rajkot, but it has also doomed the likes of Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow. Root was seen as their main batter to cope with the spin challenge but the way he reverse scooped to Bumrah at Rajkot summed up the disarray he is in.
The desperation to find a way out can be judged from skipper Ben Stokes expediting his rehab from a knee injury by opting to bowl at the nets ahead of the fourth Test.
SQUADS:
INDIA: Rohit Sharma (C), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Devdutt Padikkal, R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep.
ENGLAND: Ben Stokes (C), Rehan Ahmed, James Anderson, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Shoaib Bashir, Harry Brook, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ben Foakes, Tom Hartley, Jack Leach, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Joe Root, Mark Wood.



Rathour praises Indian young guns

PTI ■ RANCHI
The astonishing, inspiring and quick success of youngsters like Yashasvi Jaiswal and Sarfaraz Khan at the highest level is a good advertisement for the country's robust domestic circuit which has made them "cricket smart" who can handle Test match pressure, reckons India's batting coach Vikram Rathour.
Jaiswal is just six-Test old but the 22-year-old Mumbaier already has two double hundreds under his belt. His expressive and fearless batting against a strong England side has earned him praise from the pundits of the game and fans alike.
His Ranji teammate Sarfaraz too has made a confident start to his Test career, scoring pacy half-centuries in both his innings in Rajkot on debut. Sarfaraz had scored a monumental 439-run knock as a 12-year-old in a 2009 Harris Shield match, hinting at a bright future.
"It is good for the team but it's better for them. Once you get to this level and start playing Test cricket, everything said and done, there is some pressure, but if

you get a good start, nothing better than that," Rathour said on the eve of the fourth Test against England.
"And the young players who have come in the team have got a good start and it feels good. They have cricket intelligence in them, which is again a great sign. It's a great message, coming from Indian domestic cricket, that the new players are cricket smart."
Their performances have come at a time when Virat Kohli is not part of the gruelling five-match home series, KL Rahul could play only one game and Shreyas Iyer has been dropped for lack of form.
"It is tough to miss key players, it's better for the team if everyone is available but a series like this is a good opportunity for the young players, who have played on these wickets to establish themselves."
"There is always belief that our domestic cricket is so strong, you are pretty assured that whoever comes has come through after doing good. We don't know what is going to happen when KL Rahul, Virat Kohli come back in. That is not a concern at the moment."

I think it's maybe, maybe not: Stokes on availability as bowler

PTI ■ RANCHI
Bowling full tilt at nets raised hopes of Ben Stokes rolling his arms over in the fourth Test against India but the England captain on Thursday preferred to keep the suspense over his availability as a bowler here.
Due to issues with his knee, Stokes has been playing only as a batter since the second Ashes Test last June. However, he was seen bowling extensively at the nets on the eve of the fourth Test.
Asked about the possibility of him bowling in the match, Stokes said, "Nah, I think it's maybe, maybe not."
Stokes said going in with two pacers is the best option for England, forcing them to include the tall Ollie Robinson in the playing XI, even though the Ranchi track is likely to



assist the spinners.
"Bringing Robbo (Robinson) in gives us good options, especially looking at this wicket," Stokes said at the pre-match media interaction.
"I feel like the spin will be assisted, but I also feel having two seamers gives us a good chance purely because of Ollie Robinson's release height and his relentlessness with his areas."
The 30-year-old Robinson, who last played in the Ashes, has come at the expense of Mark Wood, while Shoaib Bashir replaced leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed. "You look at the player Mark is, especially with the ball, you want someone like that operating at 100 per cent."
"His number one skill is how fast he bowls and the effort he put in last week was monumental. You want to be able to keep players like that on the

field operating at that level. "We do like to look at the pitch two days out and one day out, because that's how we like to pick our XIs. You want to give yourself some idea or some indication about what XI you think is going to give you the best chance."
"Looking at that, I think there is going to be assistance for spin, but I think also it looks like someone like Bash (Bashir), who releases the ball from such a high release point, the extra bounce that he gets, we feel, is going to bring us more into the game."
'DON'T PREJUDGE THE PITCH TOO MUCH': Stokes added spice to the talks on Ranchi pitch, saying he has not seen anything remotely like the 22-yard strip here in the past. But he also stated that it's not fair to have "preconceived ideas" about the pitch.
"We get asked about the pitch and we

Focus on young Indian stars as WPL 2nd edition starts with Mumbai, Delhi face off

PTI ■ BENGALURU
The second edition of the Women's Premier League, beginning here on Friday with a high-profile match between defending champions Mumbai Indians and runners-up Delhi Capitals, will be optimistic about meeting its existential purpose of giving a wider platform to promising home-grown talents.
The foreign stars glittered brightly in the inaugural edition held in Mumbai, and the Indians will be hoping to hog some of the limelight this year as the tournament takes a multi-city format shape with New Delhi being the other host city.
While Capitals' skipper Meg Lanning, who has now retired from international cricket, took the Orange Cap last year for the highest run-getter, the Purple Cap went to Hayley Matthews of Mumbai for taking 16 wickets.
Amid this surge of overseas players, the Indian

cricketers generally struggled for consistency and impact in the previous year, but now some of the young domestic stars will eye this WPL with genuine hope.
Let's take Shreyanka Patil of Royal Challengers Bangalore as a case in point. During WPL 2023, she was a wide-eyed young cricketer who was awestruck to rub shoulders with some of the finest names in women's cricket.
She played seven matches, but the spotlight was understandably on players such as Smriti Mandhana or Ellyse Perry or Sophie Devine. But in the last 10 months or so, Patil has built a place of her own. She earned her maiden India cap in both Test and ODIs in December last year, besides making her mark in the Caribbean Premier League for the Guyana Amazon Warriors.
In this interim, the 21-year-old has also added more arrows to her quiver in the form of power-hitting at the death overs.

Shami ruled out of IPL, to undergo ankle surgery

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Senior pacer Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of next month's Indian Premier League owing to a left ankle injury, for which he will undergo a surgery in the UK, a BCCI source told PTI on Thursday.
The 33-year-old, who is not part of the ongoing Test series against England, last played for India in the ODI World Cup final against Australia in November.
"Shami was in London in last week of January to take special ankle injections and he was told that after three weeks, he can start light running and take it from thereon."
"But the injection hasn't worked and now the only option left is surgery. He will shortly leave for UK for

surgery. IPL seems out of question," a senior BCCI source said on the condition of anonymity.
Shami, who was one of the architects of India's stupendous World Cup campaign with 24 wickets, played through pain as he had problems with his landing but didn't let it affect his performance.
Shami, who was recently conferred with the Arjuna Award, has 229 Test, 195 ODI and 24 T20 wickets in his decade-long career.



Kaun hai tumhara bowler? Tendulkar plays gully cricket in Kashmir

PTI ■ SRINAGAR
He aptly called it a "match made in heaven" as Sachin Tendulkar pleasantly surprised a bunch of youngsters playing gully cricket in Uri, turning his bat upside down at one point just to give the boys a shot at dismissing him.
On his maiden trip to Jammu and Kashmir, Tendulkar got down from his SUV when he saw some young boys playing cricket on the road with a cardboard carton and an empty oil can as their stumps.
"Cricket and Kashmir: Match made in heaven," posted Tendulkar on X along with a short video in which he can be seen facing nine balls, watched in awe by the locals.
His wife Anjali can also be seen smiling in the clip which starts with Tendulkar asking the boys, "Hum Khelein? (Shall we play?)"
"Kaun hai tumhara bowler (Who is your bowler)?" he probed further as he gripped a bat.
Dressed in a brown jacket Tendulkar, who retired from cricket in 2013, played nine deliveries, hitting straight drives and also a scoop shot. There was also an attempted paddle sweep before he turned the bat upside down and jokingly stated, "Ye out karna padega (you will have to dismiss me)."

Defenders CSK to take on RCB in IPL opener on March 22

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Defending champions Chennai Super Kings will take on Royal Challengers Bangalore in the 2024 IPL season-opener in Chennai on March 22, the BCCI announced Thursday while unveiling the schedule for the first 17 days of the popular T20 league.
The roster for the remaining matches will be announced once the dates for the upcoming general elections are announced early next month.
During the period from March 22 to April 7, a total of 21 matches will be played across 10 cities, with each team playing a minimum of three matches and a maximum of five.
As in the past, the BCCI will work closely with government and security agencies, following all

necessary protocols and advisories related to the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections in India, the apex cricket body said in a statement.
"Once the dates for the 18th Lok Sabha elections are announced, the Board will review and address any issues pertaining to the schedule of the first two weeks."
"Subsequently, the BCCI will work in tandem with local authorities to finalise the schedule for the remainder of the season, taking into account the polling dates," the BCCI said.
The general elections are expected to be held in April-May.
Only in 2009, the IPL, in its entirety, was held overseas (South Africa) while the 2014 edition was partially held in the UAE due to the general elections.
However, in 2019, the



tournament was held in India despite the elections.
The first weekend will feature two double headers, beginning with the Punjab Kings hosting the Delhi Capitals on March 23, followed by the Kolkata Knight Riders hosting the Sunrisers Hyderabad in the day's second game.
On March 24, the action will shift to Jaipur, where the home team Rajasthan Royals will face the Lucknow Super Giants. Sunday evening will witness the home team Gujarat Titans, the 2022 champions and finalists of the last season going head-to-head with five-time winners Mumbai Indians.
Having chosen to play their first two home matches in Visakhapatnam, the Delhi Capitals will host the Chennai Super Kings on March 31 in the port city and will then face the Kolkata

Knight Riders at the same venue on April 3.
As per the format, 10 teams are divided into two groups of five.
In the group stage, each team plays 14 games facing the other four sides in their group two times each (home and away basis, four teams in the other group once, and the remaining team two times).
Hardik Pandya will be leading Mumbai Indians for the first time, having replaced Team India's all-format skipper Rohit Sharma.
New Zealand's young sensation Rachin Ravindra will be participating in his maiden IPL following his grand success in the ODI World Cup last year.
CSK talisman Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who has led his team to five IPL titles, has not played any competitive cricket since their triumphant campaign last year.