



OPINION 6 INDIAN NATIONHOOD THRIVES AMID DIVERSITY

WORLD 8 TRUMP TRIUMPHS OVER HALEY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

MONEY 10 MARKETS MAY FACE VOLATILITY AMID DERIVATIVES EXPIRY: ANALYSTS

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## MYTH BECOMES REALITY

### Modi Bridges Ancient and Modern India



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated 'Sudarshan Setu', the country's longest cable-stayed bridge of 2.32 km, on the Arabian sea connecting Beyt Dwarka island to mainland Okha in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district. Modi began his day by offering prayers at Lord Sri Krishna temple at Beyt Dwarka. He later inaugurated the four-lane cable-stayed bridge called the 'Sudarshan Setu', which boasts a unique design, featuring a footpath adorned with verses from Srimad Bhagavad Gita and images of Lord Krishna on both sides. The bridge, including 900 metres of central double span cable-stayed portion and a 2.45 km long approach road, has been constructed at a cost of ₹979 crore, as per an official release PTI



Delhi BJP organises a programme in Old Delhi to listen to PM's Mann Ki Baat Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

## Modi urges first time voters to cast ballots in large numbers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the country prepares for general elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged first-time voters on Sunday to cast their ballots in record numbers, emphasising that their maiden vote should be for the country.

In the 110th episode of Mann Ki Baat, Modi announced that the monthly broadcast would not air for the next three months, adhering to political ethics ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

With the general elections expected in April-May, the PM said the possibility of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) being enforced in March, similar to 2019, hinting at the upcoming announcement of the



election schedule next month. The MCC guidelines mandate that Governments refrain from using official events or public-funded platforms for activities that may favor the ruling party.

Modi highlighted the success of the programme in maintaining independence from Government influence over its 110 episodes, emphasising its dedication to the collective strength and

achievements of the country. "Mann Ki Baat is a programme 'of the people, for the people, and by the people,' Modi said.

"However, in line with political ethics, 'Mann Ki Baat' will not be broadcast for the next three months during the Lok Sabha elections," he said

"When we reconvene, it will be the 111th episode," Modi added, noting the significance of the number.

He encouraged first-time voters to participate in large numbers, declaring that the 18th Lok Sabha would symbolise their aspirations. As citizens become eligible to vote at 18, Modi urged youth not only to engage in political activities but also to stay informed about debates and discussions during this period.

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## Farmers stir pause brings respite to commuters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the farmers halted their proposed march towards the national Capital, the Delhi Police on Sunday arranged a pathway for the commuters by removing a portion of blocks at the Singhu and Tikri borders, and authorities in Haryana also restored mobile internet services in seven districts on Sunday.

The services were suspended in Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad, and Sirsa on February 11, and the suspension was extended on February 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, and 24. Officials said no fresh order has been issued to extend the suspension of mobile services in the seven districts.

A senior Delhi Police officer said they are removing a portion of the barrier from Point A to Point B for the commuters. "The deployment of police and paramilitary forces will ensure strict vigil round the clock. Force deployment will stay in place. Vehicle movement will not be allowed for now," he said. On Sunday, the city police removed two huge cement barriers for those commuters who walk towards Delhi using a small passage at the Singhu and Tikri borders.

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## Sandeshkhali continues to simmer

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Continuing his attack on the Mamata Banerjee Government for "perpetrating atrocities on the poor people, including women" of the State of Bengal, Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said on Sunday that Sandeshkhali was just a trailer and that many more regions would rise up in revolt in the times to come.

"Sandeshkhali has just started showing the way like Nandigram did in 2009 and 2011... you will see that in days to come areas like

Jeliakhali, Nyajat, Tushkhali, Hingalganj, and neighboring regions, and then the villages of entire Bengal will rise up in revolt... against the oppression of Mamata and her army of goons led by the likes of Sheikh Shahjahan, who have not only grabbed the lands of the people but also sexually assaulted their women and thrown their men behind bars when they protested," Adhikari said on Sunday, reminding how year after year villagers were not allowed to vote by the TMC goons.

"I can show you how the people of Gosaba, Sandeshkhali, Basanti,

Canning Hingalganj, Diamond Harbour have not been allowed to vote... mostly the Hindus of these areas have been prevented from voting by the goons of Mamata ... the people of Sandeshkhali have openly complained how they have not voted after 2011... now the time of reckoning has come... the people will take revenge for all the sins that have been committed against them... they have united and risen up in revolt," he said. Meanwhile, in a related development, a Central fact-finding team of former bureaucrats and judges was prevented from entering



Sandeshkhali on Sunday, even as the island continued to simmer with women coming out of their houses in large numbers, demanding the arrest of local TMC leader and district board member Shahjahan.

Sources said six members of the fact-finding team, led by former Chief Justice of the Patna High Court L Narasimha Reddy, were stopped by the police at the Bhojerhat area, about 50 km from the Sandeshkhali ferry ghat. The police cited the imposition of Section 144 of the CrPC, refusing them entry into the area.

When the team members attempted to break the police cordon, four of them - Justice Reddy, Raj Pal Singh, Charu Wali Khanna, and Bhavna Bajaj - were taken into preventive custody for alleged breach of peace before being released at the Labazar

police headquarters in Kolkata.

"We were visiting Sandeshkhali, but they stopped us... Police have purposely stopped us and are creating problems for the common people. Police are not letting us meet the victims of Sandeshkhali," Charu Wali Khanna said. Justice Reddy wanted to know "what the police are trying to hide from the rest of the world... what has happened and what has been happening there at Sandeshkhali that the world should not see... there is something seriously wrong here in Bengal."

## AI ensures zero human animal conflict

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a disturbing surge in human-animal conflicts nationwide, the Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh offers a glimmer of hope with no reported loss of human life due to wild animal attacks in the past year. Udanti and Sitanadi are two wildlife sanctuaries combined, covering a total area of 1842.54 square kilometres. It was declared a tiger reserve back in 2009. Officials from the tiger reserve have attributed zero human-animal conflict to proactive measures implemented to mitigate such incidents and ensure the safety of both humans and wildlife. They also credited this positive scenario to leveraging cutting-edge AI



technology, an AI-based app, 'Chhattisgarh Elephant Tracking and Alert', which, they said, has played a crucial role in preventing human-elephant conflicts by promptly alerting people about elephant movements. They explained that this

groundbreaking app has revolutionised the management of human-elephant conflicts by leveraging real-time data and analytics to promptly alert local communities about elephant movements, thereby reducing the risk of potential encounters and minimising conflict situations. "The successful implementation of this technology has not only enhanced public safety but has also contributed significantly to fostering coexistence between humans and elephants within the reserve's vicinity." In addition to technological interventions, the tireless efforts of the anti-poaching team have played a pivotal role in safeguarding the integrity of the reserve, resulting in the arrest of 120 poachers in the past year. These efforts have not only helped

protect vulnerable species but have also contributed to maintaining the ecological balance within the reserve. Through concerted efforts, encroachments on approximately 650 hectares within the reserve have been effectively removed, creating a safer environment for both wildlife and local communities. By preserving vital habitats and preventing wildlife from encroaching into nearby villages, these initiatives have been instrumental in minimising conflicts and promoting harmonious coexistence, said the officials. Despite these commendable achievements, challenges persist, and human-wildlife conflicts continue to pose significant threats nationwide.

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## Banned SIMI member held after 22 years manhunt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested a 47-year-old member of Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) who also allegedly edited a magazine of the banned organisation besides indoctrinating many gullible youths. According to the police, Hanif Sheikh was declared a proclaimed offender in 2002 and has been absconding for the last 22 years. He was nabbed on February 22 from Bhusawal in Jalgaon district in Maharashtra where he was a teacher in an Urdu school under a different identity, they said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Alok Kumar claimed that Hanif was the most notorious and wanted SIMI terrorist who had played pivotal roles in various activities of the proscribed organisation across the country. Police said the SIMI magazine that Hanif Sheikh edited had his name printed as Haneef Hudai. This was the only lead available with the police, making it difficult to trace him, they said.

A case of sedition and under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) was registered against him in 2001 at New Friends Colony police station in the national Capital.



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## Keeping alive the legacy of Sanskrit

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

As one enters the premises of an old but elegant building in Mylapore in Chennai, one is greeted with the hymns, slokas and chanting of songs worshipping Gods, Goddesses and wisdom. Hundreds of students undergo a gurukul style education spread across many classrooms. Their common identity is the customary tuft, veshti, angavastram and the cotton shirt.



Modernity, as practiced in the high profile colleges, is yet to make its presence in this institution which has an aura and halo of a place of worship. A group of ancient Hindu temples surround the college providing it a divine outlook. The visitor is likely to feel that he is in Sage Vasishtha's Gurukula, the alma mater of Lord Ram. A steaming pot of filter coffee, the chanting from the dozens of temples nearby and the ambience of Madras Sanskrit College is what gives life to Mylapore.

It is Madras Sanskrit College, established in 1906 by philanthropists and puritans of Indian tradition whose only passion was to preserve the age old Indian culture in its true form without getting polluted by alien forces. It is a wonder that the institution built from the scratch by V Krishnaswami Iyer, leading lawyer of Madras Bar Association, who went up to become the Member of the Governor's Executive Council, stood the challenges of time and survives till this day as the Sun of

Knowledge despite efforts by the all powerful Dravidian forces to destroy and demolish the college. What started as a Gurukula Patasala, today stands majestically and imparts courses in Mimamsa, Advaita Vedanta, Vyakarana, Sahitya, Jyothisha and Nyaya as well as in all the special branches of study selected by the students. The teaching is in the age old style and resembles intellectual bouts between students and teachers.

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# Modi to now visit WB on March 8 PM launches two Ayush institutes to give boost to holistic healthcare

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will now visit West Bengal on March 8 instead of March 6, party sources said on Sunday. According to a senior BJP leader the Prime Minister would visit Barasat, the district headquarters of North 24 Parganas where he would address a women-specific rally on March 8. "Earlier the Prime Minister was scheduled to visit Barasat on March 6 but as March 8 is the world women's day it has been decided that the rally should take place on that day as a women-specific rally and should be named Nari Shakti Vandana (hailing women power) rally," the BJP leader said.



The revelations from the State BJP's side came on a day when the Prime Minister virtually inaugurated five All India Institutes of Medical Sciences including the one at Kalyani in Nadia district of Bengal. On a floating proposal of a Prime Ministerial visit to Sandeshkhali — a riverine island where the people have risen up in revolt against the Trinamool Congress government following large-scale land grab and sexual assault of

women — the BJP leader that a large number of women might join the March 8 rally. "More than one lakh women including thousands of them from Sandeshkhali would attend the rally on March 8," he said. The dates of other two prime ministerial meetings at Arambagh and Krishnagar in Hooghly and Nadia district are likely remain the same, he said.

too confirmed the date. He had further said that "if the mothers and sisters of Sandeshkhali want then we may take them to the Prime Minister for a meeting," Majumdar said. "If we can bring him here then he will be the first Prime Minister to visit this area since Independence... it will be a big thing and we have already started our preparations in right earnest... only the dates are to be obtained... our cadres and the local people are ready to receive him," BJP leader and MLA Agnimitra Paul. The Trinamool Congress however remained defiant about the Prime Minister's meeting saying, many leaders including Modi would come to Bengal as it was an election year but finally the result would be same. "They have been coming to Bengal during the elections for many years... in 2021 the Prime Minister and an army of senior BJP leaders like Amit Shah, Yogi Aditya Nath and others came to this State as tourists but finally the result was for everyone to see... Bengal and the Bengalis voted for Mamata Banerjee... this time also things will be no different."

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday virtually inaugurated two institutes of the Union Ministry of Ayush, furthering the promotion of holistic healthcare in the country. The Central Research Institute of Yoga & Naturopathy (CRIYN) in Jhajjar, Haryana, and the National Institute of Naturopathy (NIN) titled 'NISARG GRAM' in Pune, Maharashtra, were inaugurated. During the inauguration, the Prime Minister emphasized the government's priority to enhance immunity and disease-fighting abilities, with a focus on nutrition, yoga, Ayurveda, and hygiene to prevent diseases. He highlighted the promotion of both traditional Indian systems of medicine and modern medicine. Additionally, he announced the inauguration of two major hospitals and research centers related to Yoga and Naturopathy in Maharashtra



and Haryana, along with the establishment of a WHO center for traditional medicine in Gujarat. Union Minister of Ayush and Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal joined the event virtually from Kalyani, West Bengal, while Eknath Shinde, Chief Minister Maharashtra, and Union Minister of State for Ayush and Women and Child development Dr. Munjpara Mahendra Bhai joined virtually from Gujarat. At the inaugural event of the 'Central Research Institute of

Yoga & Naturopathy' in Jhajjar, Haryana, Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, along with other dignitaries, participated. He highlighted the global recognition of Yoga and the spread of Indian traditional systems of medicine worldwide. The Central Research Institute of Yoga & Naturopathy in Jhajjar, Haryana, is an apex-level Yoga and Naturopathy research and education facility. It includes a 200-bed hospital with OPD, treatment block, academic block, hostel,

residential block, yoga block, and diet block, built at a cost of Rs 63.88 crore. NISARG GRAM in Pune is a 250-bed hospital with a multi-disciplinary research and extension service center, along with a Naturopathy Medical College for UG/PG/Para Medical Courses. The project, costing Rs 213.55 Crore, includes residential facilities, auditorium, yoga hall, cottages, and the famous Gandhi Memorial Hall. These institutes represent significant milestones in promoting holistic healthcare through traditional healthcare systems. They utilize diverse approaches such as hydrotherapy, massage, clinical nutrition, and yoga therapy to prevent and address emerging healthcare challenges, especially the growing prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). With their state-of-the-art infrastructure and educational programs, these institutes will empower individuals to prioritize their health and well-being.

## Goods train travels without driver for 80 km, probe ordered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

A major rail tragedy was averted early Sunday morning after a 53-wagon goods train, which was halted at Kathua station, traveled a distance of around 80 km without a driver before it was stopped by the railway authorities near Mukerian in Hoshiarpur district of Punjab. A video of the train, reportedly running without the driver, also went viral on various social media platforms prompting the railway authorities to order a high-level probe into the incident.



panic among the railway staff. It is suspected that before stepping out of the driver's cabin the loco pilot and his assistant may have forgotten to pull the hand brake. To prevent any major mishap along the route the railway authorities alerted the railway crossings. While the goods train covered the 80 km long distance it encountered no other train from the opposite direction. The railway authorities, on their tenderhooks, heaved a sigh of relief only after the driverless train was contained at Unchi Bassi station. No damages or injuries were reported in the incident. According to Official sources the officials from the Ferozpur railway division have been entrusted with the responsibility to conduct a probe into the incident.

## Farmers stir pause brings respite to...

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A commuter named Suresh said he commutes to Kundali for work, but due to the barriers, he has to walk an additional distance of more than a kilometre every day. "There is one narrow passage for the commuters through which only one person can go through. But now we got to know that the police are opening the barrier for the people. This will surely ease the problem," Suresh said. The Delhi Police has directed the security personnel deployed at the city's Tikri, Singhu, and Ghazipur border points to stay alert. They also conducted mock drills. Delhi Police officials said the security personnel deployed at the three borders were asked to stay on alert and to keep strict vigil. "Commuters, those coming to Delhi and those going from Delhi to some other places, are facing problems. We have already arranged diversions. But for those who are walking, we have arranged a pathway. This pathway will help commuters to cross the road easily," said the senior

officer. Another commuter, Manoj Kumar, at the Tikri Border said, "I work in Delhi and I have to walk for 1.5 km every day to reach my workplace." Opening the barriers will ensure that the commuters will reach their office on time, he said. The protesting farmers and Haryana police personnel clashed at the Punjab-Haryana border on Friday. The Tikri and Singhu borders are sealed with heavy deployment of police personnel and multi-layered barricades of concrete and iron nails. Two lanes of the Ghazipur border have also been shut with the deployment of multi-layer barricades and police personnel. Protesting farmers from Punjab taking part in the march have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri points of the State's border with Haryana since February 13, when their march was stopped by security personnel. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha are spearheading the "Delhi Chalo" march.

## AI ensures zero human...

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Degradation and fragmentation of the habitat, depletion of the natural prey base, resource use in the wildlife habitat by humans for various purposes such as grazing, fuel-wood collection, grass removal, and exploitation of wild fruits are taking a toll on the symbiotic partnership once shared between them. "Increase in the population of wild animals due to sustained protection and efforts besides changing crop patterns, presence of stray dogs and cattle in forest fringe areas, etc., has led to the rise in human-animal conflict," said a senior official from the Ministry. In fact, at least 18 States across the country are grappling with human-wildlife conflicts. These include Odisha, Jharkhand, Bengal, Karnataka, Assam, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Arunachal Pradesh.

## Kerala BJP leaders look for answers over song faux pas in party padyatra

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Songs demanding the ouster of corrupt and communal BJP Government at the Centre formed the hallmark of Kerala Padayatra which is set to conclude on February 27 at Thiruvananthapuram. What is shocking is that the Padayatra was led by BJP's Kerala president K Surendran. This is just one of the many bloomers that unfolded during the Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram walkathon led by Surendran as a prelude to Lok Sabha election 2024 and shows how pathetic the party is in Kerala despite all round support and help from the Centre.

Thanks to group rivalries and shadow boxing, chances of Kerala having a BJP representative in Lok Sabha after the 2024 elections look bleak. Even hardcore party activists were forced to stay away from the walkathon before it completed half of the distance. Though Surendran remained tight-lipped over the faux pas caused by the song, Prakash Javadekar, the State in charge (prabhari) claimed that it was a mix up and need not be taken seriously. The hopes of an influx of

Christians into the party following the joining of veteran Kerala Congress leader P C George into BJP remain shattered as the State leadership has been cold to the veteran Christian leader's arrival. The attitude of Surendran and union minister V Muraleedharan have dampened the spirit of the minority community. The State leadership of the party, fully under the control of Surendran and Muraleedharan, is against fielding George from Pathanamthitta constituency despite the considerable influence enjoyed by the latter in the region. Muraleedharan, who was denied a Rajya Sabha nomination from Maharashtra has been sent to Kerala to contest from Attingal near Thiruvananthapuram. "Chances of Muraleedharan getting elected from any constituency in Kerala is remote and bleak. To win the election, he has to convince the voters that he is amenable and approachable to them," said a top central leader of the party. Muraleedharan is pitted against V Joy, the CPI(M) district secretary of the capital city. In the 2019 Lok Sabha poll, Adoor Prakash of the Congress, a political lightweight scraped through by a margin of 38,000 votes against an incompetent CPI(M) candidate. "Despite the internal fights between Surendran-Muraleedharan gang unleashed against her, the then BJP candidate Shobha Surendran mobilized 24.66 per cent of the total votes polled, a commendable feat," said a senior BJP leader. There are reports that union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar is being fielded from Thiruvananthapuram as BJP candidate. Though the battle for the capital city may get the image of a battle royale, as the other candidates are Sashi Tharoor (Congress), Panniyar Ravendran of the CPI, chances are that the Left parties would transfer their votes to Tharoor to defeat Chandrasekhar. This has been the practice in Kerala for the last four decades and there won't be any change in the pattern of voting. The only two constituencies which has attracted public attention are Thrissur (where Suresh Gopi is the BJP candidate) and Pathanamthitta (where George is the likely BJP candidate).

## Keeping alive the...

From Page 1

The gurus do not impose the study materials on the students but guild them what to learn and how to learn. "It is for the disciples to select their style of learning," said K Jayanarayanan, Mimamsa Siromani, who besides holding MA, BE, and is an authority on Yajurveda taittiriya kramapati, and Tantra shastram. Jayanarayanan was honoured with the award Mimamsavisarada. Though the modern day liberals and the comrades hold a scorn at Sanskrit language and describe it as anti-modernism, the fact is that only those who specialise in Sanskrit language and the related topics like Advaita Vedanta, Vyakarana, Jyothi Sastra and Jyothisha could grasp the modern science and philosophy with ease. "The modern and ancient systems of education are

capable of rising the understanding power of the disciples. Mimamsa Sasthrum is known as the Uthama Sasthrum by scholars throughout the world. There is no instance of a Sanskrit scholar committing any bloomers or blunders," said Jayanarayanan. What remains unknown to the outside world is that the course syllabus offered at Madras Sanskrit College is sure to put the so called global universities in India and abroad behind a shadow. Sanskrit-Prak Siromani (for beginners), Sanskrit Shiromani-Madhya (equivalent to B A) and Sanskrit Shoromani (equivalent to MA) are the flagship courses of MSC. Students from the States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana clad in traditional veshti, angavastram and shirts are

the hallmarks of the college. At no point of time, students of this college have felt inferior to their counterparts in other colleges. "An integration of modern science, philosophy, Ayurveda and allopathy is what we imbibe through the courses," said students and teaching faculty unanimously. Jayanarayanan disclosed that many youth who were earning five to six lakh rupees per month in IT companies have given up those jobs to escape from the stress and have joined MSC as students and they are all doing quite well. All these happen at a time when a concerted effort is on to destroy the age old Sanskrit education from within and outside. The first question that the faculties ask new girls joining Sri Sankara Sanskrit University in Kerala's Kaladi is whether they continue to be virgins! That's the Marxist style.

## Modi urges first time voter to cast...

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"You should keep in mind that your first vote should be for the country," he said, urging influencers and other prominent personalities to motivate first-time voters. The bigger the participation of the young voters in the electoral process, the more beneficial its consequences will be for the country, the PM said. While sharing several anecdotes from the country, Modi lauded a "Goat Bank" initiative of an Odisha couple which promotes goat rearing at the community level and helps the villagers move towards self-reliance in the field of animal husbandry. In Kalahandi, Odisha, goat rearing is becoming a major means of improving the livelihood of the village people as well as their standard of living, the PM said. In his broadcast, Modi also discussed individuals

working in the field of language. He cited the example of Mohammad Manshah from Ganderbal, Jammu and Kashmir, who has been engaged in efforts to preserve the Gojri language for the past three decades. "He comes from the Gujjar Bakarwal community, which is a tribal community. In his childhood, he had to work hard to study," he said. Days before International Women's Day, Modi also praised 'nari shakti' and said it is reaching new heights of progress in every field. "Great poet Bharatiyar ji said that the world will prosper only when women get equal opportunities. Today, the 'nari shakti' (women power) of India is reaching new heights of progress in every field," the PM said. "Who would have thought until a few years ago that in India, women living in villages would also fly

drones," he said. "But today, this is becoming possible. There is so much discussion about Drone Didi in every village. 'Namo Drone Didi, Namo Drone Didi' is on everyone's lips," he said. The PM also spoke with 'Drone Didi' Sunita from Uttar Pradesh's Sitapur. The 'matrisakti' of the country is playing a significant role in saving Mother Earth, who is suffering from pain and hardships due to chemicals, he said. Similarly, Modi said a Bengaluru company that has created two mobile apps -- Bagheera and Garuda. The Bagheera app monitors the speed of a vehicle and other activities during a jungle safari, while the Garuda app uses artificial intelligence and internet of things to provide real-time alerts when connected to any CCTV, Modi said.

## Attack on Christian priest draws wide condemnation

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A tense atmosphere prevails in Kottayam district following an attempt on the life of a Christian priest by some anti-social elements. The police is tight lipped about the identity of the persons behind the attack except the fact that the trouble makers included some school students. The police have issued stern warning against anybody who spreads the news and related developments through social media. Father George Attuchalil, the assistant vicar of St Mary's Forane Church, Poonjar was physically assaulted by a group of people on Friday afternoon when they drove their motor cycles and cars in breakneck speed in the Church ground. Since a Mass was under progress in the Church, Fr Attuchalil came out of the church hall and requested the vehicle owners to move out till the conclusion of the program. But the group of youngsters took strong objection to the stance of the priest and started assaulting him physically. Meanwhile a member of the group hit the priest from behind with his car and this sent Fr Attuchalil off balance and he collapsed. He was rushed to the hospital by people belonging to the parish as the troublemakers escaped to safety. What makes the incident shocking is the troubled relations between two communi-

ties in the town which has a considerable Christian and Muslim population. It was reported in the vernacular media that the superintendent of police had sent a communication to the authorities about the deteriorating relations between the two communities in the town as many extremist outfits have started operating in Poonjar in a big way. It may be remembered that P C George, former chief whip during the UDF regime and a seven-time legislator from Poonjar, has come under attack by the local community for his stance against the Love Jihad and Narco Jihad. Dr Bhargava Ram, a Hindu activist, demanded that a team of central ministers should undertake a trip to Poonjar for an on-the-spot assessment situation and this would be a morale booster to the Christian community. "The silence from the intellectual and secular camp over the Poonjar incident is disturbing while they have gone overboard on the Manipur issue. Let the Union Government order a thorough probe into this incident as the Kerala Government would not do anything which will upset their vote bank," said Dr Ram. The condition of Fr Joseph Attuchalil is stable according to the hospital where he has been admitted following injuries. The attack on the priest has drawn widespread condemnation from various sects of the Church.

## Banned SIMI member held after 22 years...

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"A local court declared him proclaimed offender in 2002," Kumar said. "A team from the Special Cell was tasked with collecting data, information and other digital footprints about the absconding SIMI cadre, sympathisers and sleeper cells across states. The team extensively visited and collected information from various parts of the country," he said. The information collected by the team helped the Delhi police's special cell to zero in

on Hanif. Following this, a raiding party was formed which laid a trap, the officer said. "Around 2.50 pm on February 22, a person travelling from Mohmadin Nagar to Khadka Road was identified as Hanif. As members of the team began to corner him, Hanif attempted to escape but was arrested after a scuffle," the DCP said. He said Hanif became highly radicalised after coming in contact with SIMI activists and after joining the organisation and he started attending its weekly

programmes and radicalising youths. Hanif was later appointed as the editor of the Urdu edition of the SIMI's magazine in 2001, the police officer said. The DCP added that Hanif was one of the think tank members of Wahadat-e-Islam and played an important role in Maharashtra and other adjoining States. "He was also involved in collecting money under the guise of donations to support and finance the agenda of SIMI as well as Wahadat-e-Islam." After fleeing Delhi in 2001,

Hanif moved to Jalgaon and subsequently to Bhusawal in Maharashtra from where he was arrested, police said. SIMI was first banned in September 2001 and since then the ban has been extended on it by the government. Last month, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) extended the ban against the SIMI for another five years. The organisation was declared an "unlawful association," under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for the first time in 2001.

Announcing the decision on X (formerly Twitter), Union Home Minister Amit Shah said, "Bolstering PM @narendramodi's vision of zero tolerance against terrorism 'Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)' has been declared as an 'unlawful association' for a further period of five years under the UAPA (unlawful activities prevention act). The SIMI has been found involved in fomenting terrorism, disturbing peace and communal harmony to threaten the sovereignty,

security and integrity of Bharat." SIMI has caused problems for the Government and police over the years especially after the organisation split in 2005 into two groups - moderate one led by Shahid Badr Falahi and radical faction led by Safdar Nagori. Its leaders, including Riyaz Bhatkal and Iqbal Bhatkal (now in Pakistan), was formed Indian Mujahideen (IM) in 2006-07 along with Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) to carry out attacks in India, while SIMI started providing logistical support.

# LG asks Kejriwal to implement Centre health scheme

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to provide medical facilities to the poor patients, Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena on Sunday asked the Arvind Kejriwal-headed Delhi Government to implement Ayushman Bharat Health Scheme, also known as Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), in the national Capital. Giving details the officials said the LG flagged intransigence on part of the Delhi Government in clearing the file despite agreeing to do so in 2018 and announcing its implementation in its Budget 2020. He recalled the file invoking Rule 19(5) of Transaction of Business Rules (ToBR) and asked the Chief Minister to implement the Scheme at the earliest for the benefit of poorest of the poor. In a letter dated June 7, 2019, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote to then Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, saying the city gov-

ernment is "offering ten times bigger and comprehensive health scheme". Kejriwal had stated replacing the existing scheme with Ayushman Bharat will be a loss for the people of Delhi. Saxena while disposing the file outlined that the government, despite having given in principle approval for implementation of Ayushman Bharat Scheme way back in 2018 and having announced it even in its budget in 2020, had inexplicably stalled it for merely political reasons. Due to this, depriving lakhs of poor migrants in the city of health services, under AB-PMJAY. He has also outlined the fact that the waiting list for issue of ration card to deserving beneficiaries has applicants waiting since 2018, and in the absence of such document, poor sick patients suffering from serious ailments could not avail of health benefits under other available schemes. "It is crucial to underscore that AB-PMJAY stands as the world's largest health insurance scheme, offering health coverage of Rs. 5,00,000 per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospital care. This extensive program caters to economically disadvantaged and vulnerable families, benefiting

approximately 50 crore individuals. Notably, the scheme is entirely funded by the Government, maintaining a cost-sharing ratio of 60:40 between the Centre and the State," the Lt Governor said in the file noting. Presently, States/UTs have successfully implemented AB-PMJAY and over 25 crore Ayushman Cards have been generated under this scheme.



Only three States/UTs, including NCT of Delhi, have not implemented this scheme thereby denying citizens residing there, access to better healthcare. Delhi accommodates a huge migratory population estimated to 72 lakhs as per SECC Data 2011. Additionally, a significant number of building and Other Construction workers lack a Delhi Voter ID rendering them ineligible to avail benefit under the Delhi Arogya Kosh (DAK) scheme. "It has also been noted that applicants are waiting for issuance of Ration Cards, often required for making them eligible for availing health benefits, since as long as 2018. These patients, who are unable to afford treatment for serious illnesses, are deprived of urgently needed treatment," Saxena stated in the file noting.

Astonishingly, the then Minister of Health gave in-principle approval to the implementation of AB-PMJAY, with a rider that the same be renamed "Mukhya Mantri Aam Aadmi Swasthya Bima Yojna - Ayushman Bharat", as early as August 2018. Subsequently, in October 2018, the Minister on the flimsy pretext, that the decision to rename the scheme have been taken by the Cabinet, it will take the Cabinet to re-decide on it, returned the file back. "Thereafter, the file was put up again to the Minister for a suitable time and date on 01.01.2019, wherein the Minister noted that the same may be put up after his return from tour. However, even as total inaction followed for more than an year, the then Deputy CM/Finance Minister announced in his Budget

speech in February 2020, that the scheme will be implemented in Delhi. Thereafter, despite the Budgetary announcement made by his colleague, the Health Minister, when the file was resubmitted to him in March 2020, returned the file without any comments back to the department. When the department resubmitted the file to the Minister in May 2020, after sitting on it for 04 months, he sent the file back to the department with instructions to put it up after 02 months, citing the on-going COVID pandemic. When the file was resubmitted, as per the directions of the Minister mentioned above, in November 2020, he again returned the file back to the department on 04.12.2020, with directions to put it up again in March 2021, without citing any reason thereof," Saxena said.

practicality is called into question," the AAP government said in a statement. "Urgent appeals are made for the LG to tackle staffing shortages and settle outstanding payments to uphold seamless healthcare to the common people, as demands for accountability need to be ensured through the participation of the Health Secretary in the hospital inspections and meetings called by the Health Minister. It is sad to see that despite spending almost one and half years as LG of Delhi, Mr. Vinay Saxena has no idea about the ground reality of Delhi," it said. "The LG does not know that at most of the hospitals in Delhi, especially GTB Hospital & LBS Hospital and RTRM Hospital, which are situated either at the border of the BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh and the BJP-ruled Haryana, the patient load from these BJP-ruled neighboring States is comparable to the patient load from Delhi in these hospitals." "In certain hospitals like GB Pant Hospital, almost half of the total number of surgeries performed is on patients from states wherein the Ayushman Bharat scheme is operational, like the BJP-ruled states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. It is very sad to see that though the LG is boasting about the Ayushman Bharat scheme, there is practically no success on the ground," it said.

## LG has no idea about ground reality: AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a dig at Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, the AAP Government said he has no idea about the ground reality of Delhi regarding issues being faced with patient data, shortage of staff and private hospital participation in the implementation of the 'Ayushman Bharat Scheme', in the national capital. The AAP Government has requested the LG to ensure that the vacant sanctioned posts of doctors, specialists, nurses and paramedics are filled by UPSC/DSSSB at the earliest and during the interim period these posts are filled on a contractual basis so that all the services in Delhi government hospitals are made functional. "Amidst mounting concerns over the efficacy of the 'Ayushman Bharat Scheme', Delhi's Lieutenant Governor (LG) finds himself under scrutiny for a perceived disconnect from the ground realities plaguing the capital's medical infrastructure. The LG faces calls to address these challenges firsthand. Revelations of ineligible beneficiaries reaping benefits from PMJAY, as exposed by a recent CAG report, further emphasize the pressing need for action. As discrepancies within 'Ayushman Bharat' come to light, including issues with patient data and private hospital participation, the scheme's

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday asked people in Delhi to vote for INDIA bloc candidates in the Lok Sabha polls so that their voices can be heard in Parliament and inflated water bills are waived. Speaking at a protest organised by his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) against inflated water bills here, Kejriwal said on a lighter note that he should be given the Nobel Prize for running the government despite adverse conditions. "In the Lok Sabha elections, you should vote for INDIA bloc candidates from Delhi and send them to Parliament. This will create a protective shield around Delhi and no lieutenant governor will be able to do anything," the AAP national convener said. "I assure you that within 15 days of the Lok Sabha elections and

## Vote for INDIA Bloc in LS polls: CM to Delhiites



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

the win of INDIA bloc candidates, your water bills will come down to zero," he added. The AAP and Congress, allies in the INDIA bloc, have finalised a 4-3 arrangement for Delhi, under which the ruling party will contest four out of the seven parliamentary seats in the national capital. The AAP leader said there are around 11 lakh families who have received inflated water bills. "The AAP government is your government. Had the BJP been in power, it would have disconnected the water supply. Those who feel that you have received inflated water bills, you do not need to pay them." "We made a scheme to settle water bills. BJP people stopped the scheme through the LG. Officers are literally crying and saying they have been threatened with suspension if they bring the scheme to the Cabinet," Kejriwal alleged.

## Court directs Delhi Police to register FIR in molestation case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Police must register an FIR whenever they receive information regarding the commission of a cognisable offence, a court here has observed while directing a Delhi Police official to investigate an alleged molestation. Metropolitan Magistrate Jyoti Nain was hearing a plea filed under Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) section 156(3) (power of magistrate to order investigation) against six people. The court noted that the complainant and her family were attacked by six people on May 13, 2022. According to the plea, one of the accused tore the complainant's clothes and forced himself upon her, but she was saved when the neighbours intervened. Despite filing a complaint, no action was taken by the police, the court said, noting the plea. In an order passed on February 23, the court further noted that police filed an action-taken report (ATR) saying the molestation allegations were not levelled by the complainant. "FIR is a bundle of information for initiation of legal machinery. It is the duty of police offi-



cial to register an FIR whenever they receive information regarding the commission of cognisable offence," the court said. It said in the present case, a police investigation was required as prima facie commission of cognisable offences was disclosed. "There are allegations, which further necessitate the investigation by the police," the court said adding, "The Station House Officer (SHO) of Narela Industrial Area police station is directed to register an FIR against the alleged accused and to conduct the investigation in accordance with law." "This order shall not be treated as a direction to file a charge sheet against the alleged accused. The police shall be at liberty to file a cancellation report in case it finds that no offence has been committed by them," the court added.

## BJP will bring double engine Government in Bengal: Suwendu at JNU



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari is working towards bringing a "nationalist double engine Government" in West Bengal and end the Mamata Banerjee Government's rule in the State. Adhikari made the remark while addressing a panel discussion on political violence in West Bengal at the Jawaharlal Nehru University here. Speaking about the ongoing protests in the Sandeshkhali block of West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, Adhikari accused the ruling All India Trinamool Congress of unleashing violence against Hindus. "Today, Hindus in West Bengal are in danger under the TMC government. The party is changing the demography of the state by letting Bangladeshi migrants infiltrate and settle in the State. Slowly and gradually the present Government will make West Bengal a part of Bangladesh," he alleged. "The BJP is working on building a nationalist double engine Government in West Bengal," he added. The former TMC leader further criticised the alleged sexual violence against women and incidents of land grabbing in the Sandeshkhali block and said the students in JNU should raise their voice against the issue. "JNU is a hub of critical discussions and they (students) should raise their voice against whatever is happening in West Bengal to uproot the complicit Government," he said. The unrest in Sandeshkhali stems from allegations of land encroachment and sexual assault against TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh and his supporters.

## 40,000 people participate in Gurugram Marathon 2024

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Cricketer Shikhar Dhawan flag off the Gurugram Marathon 2024 at the Leisure Valley Ground Sector-29 Gurugram on Sunday. Over 40,000 participated in the Gurugram Marathon 2024 to conquer distances varying from 5km to a full 42.2km. The event witnessed the enthusiastic participation of runners of all ages and skill levels, creating a sense of determination and excitement throughout the city. The first phase of this marathon, organized in four



stages, started at 4:30 am, the full marathon of 42.2 km. After this, the 21.1 km half marathon started at 6:30 am then the third 10 km race began at 7:30 am and the last segment of the marathon was a 5 km run for fun. Speaking during the time marathon, Shikhar Dhawan said, "He is very excited to be

## Two years old girl mauled to death by stray dogs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A two-year-old girl was allegedly mauled to death by a pack of stray dogs in the Dhoobi Ghat area of New Delhi's Tughlaq Lane, police said on Sunday. The alleged incident occurred around 6 pm on Saturday. The child was sitting outside her home when four to five dogs attacked her, dragged her for several metres and mauled her to death, they said. The body was handed over to the girl's family after an autopsy and an investigation has begun, they added. A senior New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) official said "It is a very sad and unfortunate incident. A team of veterinarians visited the spot and it was found that the dogs in



the area are vaccinated and sterilised. The police inquiry will make things clearer." The girl's family claimed that some people feed the stray dogs near the locality and demanded strict action against them. "Around 6 pm, four to five stray dogs suddenly attacked our child, dragged her

for 100-150 metres and mauled her," said Ravi, the victim's uncle. He also claimed that this was not the first stray dog attack in the area. "These same dogs attacked children playing outside their homes, cats and chicken," Ravi said and added that locals repeatedly complained to the

authorities concerned but those were ignored. "We are poor people. When we tried to stop those who feed the dogs, they threatened us with a police complaint," he alleged. The locals also complained about these people to the police but they took no action, Ravi claimed. A senior police officer said, "A police team and forensic experts were sent to the spot after we received information about the incident. The girl was rushed to a hospital where she died during treatment. Further investigation has begun." The alleged incident is the latest in a string of dog attacks in Delhi since the turn of the year. On January 29, a seven-year-old girl suffered more than 15 injuries after allegedly being

attacked by her neighbour's American Bully while playing outside with her friends in Rohini's Sector-25 area. In another incident on January 22, a two-year-old girl was allegedly attacked by a pet dog in northeast Delhi's Vishwash Nagar. A day before that, a seven-year-old boy was injured in northwest Delhi's Mahendra Park area after allegedly being attacked by a Pitbull. In the Shahbad Dairy area, a seven-year-old girl was allegedly attacked by another American Bully when she was playing near her home. In another incident, a Pitbull allegedly snatched an 18-month-old child from her grandfather's lap and mauled her in Burari's Uttarakhand Colony.

## Khattar launches early breast cancer detection initiative

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Chief Minister, Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday inaugurated the 'Savera' programme initiated by the Medanta Foundation in collaboration with the Health Department in Gurugram, aimed at early detection and prevention of breast cancer, a growing concern among women. He emphasised that this groundbreaking initiative marks the first of its kind in the country, focusing on detecting breast cancer in its early stages among women. Under the 'Savera' programme, the help of visually impaired women will be taken for screening for breast cancer. Furthermore, he expressed his intention to expand this program to other districts of the state following its successful implementation.



In the first phase, this program will be implemented in the Civil Hospital of Sector-10 of Gurugram, the Polyclinic of Sector-31 and the Primary Community Center of Wazirabad village in Gurugram. Experts said that cancer is a disease that is diagnosed late, sometimes it is detected in stage 2, stage-3 and sometimes even stage-4 and it affects different parts of the body. Similarly, breast cancer is also one of those cancers that mostly occurs in women living in cities. "Undoubtedly help of disabled women are being taken in the Savera program, who have some deficiencies, but along with this, these individuals possess remarkable qualities, particularly their heightened sense of touch. They will utilize this ability to effectively screen for breast cancer," the CM said.

He further said that visually impaired people have natural tactile sensitivity. The importance of this ability has been understood, tested and used by people associated with the medical world. As they were told that visually impaired sisters can detect breast cancer up to half a centimeter, whereas even a normal doctor can detect it up to one centimeter after examination. These sisters have a very high sensitivity to touch. While sharing information about the steps being taken by the government for the prevention of cancer, the Chief Minister said that National Cancer Institute - AIIMS has been established in Jhajjar district which has 1000 beds. Similarly, he informed that Atal Cancer Care Center has been established in Ambala district for the treatment of cancer patients and cancer treatment and research is also being

done in PGIMM, Rohtak. "Most cases of breast cancer occur in advanced stages. Due to its increasing incidence, timely detection, diagnosis and treatment are of utmost importance. It is our responsibility to empower our patients to take care of their own health. At Medanta, we continuously innovate and innovate. Savera campaign is a step in this direction," said Pankaj Sahni, Group CEO & Director, Medanta. He said after the introduction of the 'Tactile Breast Examination' (TBE) system in India six years ago, visually impaired women were given training on breast diseases and their examination at NAB India Center for Blind Women and Disability Studies. After which they were provided clinical internship for three months under the guidance of Dr. Kanchan Kaur at the Breast Clinic of Medanta Gurugram.

## President to inaugurate Purple Fest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 10 thousand persons with disabilities accompanied by their escorts, will celebrate the much-awaited 'Purple Fest' at Amrit Udyaan in the Rashtrapati Bhawan on Monday to be inaugurated by President Droupadi Murmu. The event aims to promote inclusivity and raise awareness

about disabilities through interactive activities and exhibitions. Talented artists with various disabilities will showcase their skills, breaking down societal barriers and promoting their inclusion. Ministers of Social Justice and Empowerment, along with the Secretary of DEPwD, will grace the one-day event. Organised by the Pt. Deendayal

Upadhyaya National Institute for Persons with Physical Disabilities, the festival will feature fully inclusive and interactive stalls representing organisations dedicated to accessibility and inclusion. Activities include visits to Amrit Udyaan, sessions on 'Know your disabilities', Purple Cafe, Purple Kaleidoscope, Purple Live Experience Zone, and more.



## Book launched

New Delhi: Several bureaucrats, technocrats together penned a book titled 'Turmeric Latte' based on the life and career of former IAS officer M Damodar who served as SEBI chairman almost 16 years ago. The book curated by 1978 batch IAS officer Dr Dinesh Kumar Tyagi was launched on Sunday in the presence of bureaucrats from across the country, including the 1971 batchmates of Damodar who is also credited to revolutionise the banking sectors and the UTI

# Modi launches AIIMS in five States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/GUJARAT

Development was taking place under his government at a rate many times faster than what happened in the past six to seven decades, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday, and emphasised that his guarantee begins from where hope ends from others. He was speaking after inaugurating All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Rajkot in Gujarat, Bathinda in Punjab, Raebareilly in Uttar Pradesh, Kalyani in West Bengal and Mangalagiri in Andhra Pradesh.



Independence, there was only one AIIMS in the country, and that too in Delhi. In the seven decades since Independence, only seven AIIMS were approved but even these were never completed," Modi said in a swipe at previous governments. "But in just 10 days, seven new AIIMS were either inaugurated or their foundation stones laid. That's why I am saying that we are developing the country many times faster than what happened in the last six to

seven decades and are dedicating it at the feet of the citizens," he said. In the past, people from different states used to get tired seeking AIIMS in their areas from the Union government, whereas today modern hospitals and medical facilities like AIIMS are opening one after the other, he said. Asserting that he had fulfilled his guarantee of setting up a large number of AIIMS, Modi said his government had approved 10 AIIMS in the last

10 years. "I had given a guarantee of (setting up) AIIMS to UP's Raebareilly. The royal family of Congress only indulged in politics in Raebareilly, while the work was done by Modi," he said. India managed to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic because of changes in the health care system brought about in the last 10 years, Modi added. "Today in Rajkot we got a glimpse of how the health sector of the world's fifth largest economy should be and what will be the level of health facilities in developed India," he said.

Modi said his government had carried out unprecedented expansion in AIIMS and medical colleges as well as a critical infrastructure network by opening more than one lakh 'Ayushman Arogya Mandirs' in villages, and taking the number of medical colleges to 706 from 308-309 a decade back. The number of MBBS and medical PG seats have increased during this period to more than one lakh and 70,000, respectively, from 50,000 and 30,000, he informed.

The priority of his government was towards prevention of diseases by increasing the capacity to fight them, Modi said. "We have focused on nutrition, Yoga, AYUSH and cleanliness so that diseases can be prevented," he said.

Two hospitals and research centres for Yoga and naturopathy have been inaugurated in Maharashtra and Haryana as part of such efforts, the Prime Minister added. It is the constant endeavour of the Union government to ensure the poor and the middle class get quality medical treatment, he said.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme has helped the poor save Rs 1 lakh crore, while medicines at 80 per cent discount have helped the poor and the middle class save Rs 30,000 crore, he added. The Ujjwala Yojana (to provide clean fuel through LPG connections) has helped poor families save Rs 70,000 crore, he said.

Cheaper data has helped every mobile phone user save Rs 4,000 every month, and tax reforms have helped taxpayers save Rs 2.5 lakh crore, said the Prime Minister.

# PM to lay foundation stone of 553 Amrit Bharat railway stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Monday lay the foundation stone for the redevelopment of 553 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat scheme which includes improving facilities by developing rooftop plazas and city centres at stations. The prime minister will also lay the foundation stone of nearly 1,500 road overbridges and underbridges across different states during a function that will be conducted virtually at more than 2,000 railway stations and function sites, officials said. The prime minister will join the function via video-conferencing.

Modi will also inaugurate the Gomti Nagar station in Uttar Pradesh which has been redeveloped at a cost of around Rs 385 crores, they said. "To cater to the increased future passenger footfall, this station has segregated arrival and departure facilities. It integrates both sides of the city. This centrally air-conditioned station has modern passenger amenities like air concourse, congestion-free circulation, food courts and ample parking space in upper and lower basement," a statement from the prime minister's office said.

The Amrit Bharat stations, spread across 27 states and Union Territories, will be redeveloped at a cost of over Rs 19,000 crores. These stations will act as 'city centres' integrating both sides of a city and will boast of modern passenger amenities such as roof plazas, beautiful landscaping, inter-modal connectivity, a modern facade, kids' play area, kiosks and food courts, it said. The stations will be redeveloped

like open environment and Divyang-friendly and the design of these buildings will be inspired by local culture, heritage and architecture, it said. The prime minister will also lay the foundation stone, inaugurate and dedicate to the nation 1,500 overbridges and underpasses. These will be spread across 24 states and Union Territories, the statement said, adding that the total cost of these projects is around Rs 21,520 crores. These projects will reduce congestion, enhance safety and connectivity, and improve the capacity, and efficiency of rail travel, it said.

# India to add 18 more nuclear power reactors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will add 18 more nuclear power reactors with a cumulative capacity to generate 13,800 MWe of electricity, taking the total share of atomic power in the energy mix to 22,480 MWe by 2031-32. This was announced by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) after Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated two home-built 700 MW nuclear power reactors at Kakrapar in Gujarat last week. Presently, the NPCIL operates 24 reactors with a total capacity of 8,180 MWe. The prime minister dedicated units 3 & 4 of Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS 3 & 4) to the nation on February 22.



The prime minister said the role of nuclear power in electricity generation is going to increase in the 21st century and it was a matter of pride that India is Atmanirbhar in this advanced technology. Modi also visited the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station and took a tour of the Control Room on the occasion. Four nuclear power plants of 1,000 MWe each are being built at Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu with Russian assistance. Four

700 MWe home-built PHWRs are coming up at Rawatbhatta (RAPS 7 & 8) in Rajasthan and Gorakhpur (GHAVP 1 & 2) in Haryana. Ten 700 MWe PHWRs have been sanctioned to be built at GHAVP 3 & 4 at Gorakhpur in Haryana, Kaiga Generating Station 5 & 6 near Karwar in Karnataka, Chutka in Madhya Pradesh (CMPAPP 1 & 2) and four power units at Mahi Banswara in Rajasthan (MBRAP 1, 2, 3 & 4).

# SC to hear Kejriwal plea against HC order upholding summons in defamation case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging a Delhi High Court order which upheld summons issued to him as an accused in a criminal defamation case for retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee in May 2018. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta is likely to hear the matter. In its judgement dated February 5, 2024, the high court had said that reposting alleged libelous content will attract defamation law.

The high court had said a sense of responsibility has to be attached while retweeting content about which one does not have knowledge and added that retweeting of defamatory content must invite penal, civil as well as tort action if the person retweeting it does not attach a disclaimer.

# CBFC regional office in Chandigarh soon, says Anurag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Sunday announced the setting up of a regional facilitation office of the Central Board of Film Certification in Chandigarh, with the objective of promoting ease of doing business for filmmakers of the region. Making this announcement at the closing ceremony of the Chitra Bharati Film Festival in Chandigarh, Thakur said filmmakers of the region can get the facility of screening their films and submission of cuts/modifications without having to go to either Delhi or Mumbai to get a Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) certificate. This move will further strengthen the Punjabi film industry, he said. "I have great faith that the films made in the Punjab region also have great potential. Therefore, the govern-

# Army doctors airlifted by IAF save veteran with timely transplant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A seamless coordination between the IAF, army hospital, and medical team facilitated the successful transplantation, ultimately giving a second chance at life to the recipient, an army veteran awaiting the transplant. The Indian Air Force said on Sunday, an IAF Dornier aircraft was deployed at "short notice" to airlift a team of doctors from an army hospital in Delhi to transport a liver from Pune that saved the life of an army veteran here. The IAF also shared a few pictures of the aircraft and the team of doctors in a post on X social media, formerly known as Twitter. "An IAF Dornier aircraft was activated at short notice to airlift a team of doctors of Army Hospital (R&R), to retrieve a liver from Pune to Delhi during the night on 23 Feb 24. The subsequent transplant surgery helped save the life of a #Veteran. #HarKaamDeshKeNaam #SavingLives," it posted on X.

# India, Japan begin two weeks military exercise in Rajasthan



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further strengthen ties between the two countries, India and Japan on Sunday commenced a two-week military exercise in Rajasthan's Mahajan field firing range to foster deeper cooperation in confronting common security challenges. The exercise 'Dharma Guardian' between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self Defence Force is being conducted under the broad framework of India-Japan strategic cooperation, officials said.

drills and basics of special arms skills." "Tactical drills to be practiced during the exercise will include establishing of temporary operating base, creating an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance grid, setting up mobile vehicle check post, executing cordon and search operations in a hostile village and heliborne operations," the Army said in a statement. An exhibition of weapons and equipment will also be organised to showcase the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative and the growing defence industrial capability of the country, it said.

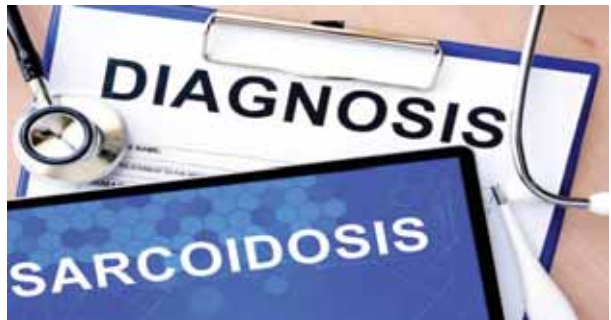
Lt General Togashi Yuichi, the Commanding General, Eastern Army, Japan Ground Self Defence Force, is also scheduled to visit India during the exercise. "Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' will enable the two sides to share their best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting tactical operations," the Army said. "The exercise will also facilitate developing inter-operability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops of both the sides. This will enhance the level of defence cooperation, further fostering bilateral relations between the two friendly nations," it said.

# Scientists develop tool to diagnose inflammatory disease

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists have developed a tool to rapidly and inexpensively diagnose sarcoidosis, a chronic inflammatory disease marked by the growth of tiny lumps called granulomas in the lungs and other organs in the body. The tool, which uses a simple blood test, could allow for selective use of more invasive diagnostic tests often used to identify the disease. The findings were published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine. The research is supported by the National Institutes of Health.

"Currently, diagnosing sarcoidosis isn't a straightforward process, and requires tissue removal and testing with additional screenings to rule out other diseases, such as tuberculosis or lung cancer," said James Kiley, Director of the Division of Lung Diseases at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, part of NIH. "Using a blood test will help diagnose faster, particularly in those organs that are more challenging to biopsy and with less harm to the patient." Though the exact cause of sarcoidosis is unknown, researchers suspect it is an immune disorder triggered by a group of specific antigens, which are generally foreign



substances that incite an immune response in the body. Cutaneous sarcoidosis in India is 10 per cent; however, ACCESS study in the USA reported a higher prevalence of 15.9 per cent. Lofgren and Heerfordt syndromes are considered diagnostic for sarcoidosis (ATS guidelines 2020) but these were not seen in any of the patients in a study in India and none had parotid involvement. Concerningly, the disease may be adding to the development of drug resistance in strains of tuberculosis (TB).

In the United States, an estimated 8-11 people per 100,000 are affected by sarcoidosis each year, according to previous research. To identify antigens and determine which might be linked to sarcoidosis, scientists collected lung fluid samples and blood cells from patients with pulmonary sarcoidosis, then extracted the genetic material. Using a combination of molecular techniques, the researchers homed in on two newly described disease-specific antigen biomarkers that only bind to the antibodies of sarcoidosis positive patients. They next designed a highly specific blood test, which only requires a small amount of

# BRS leader Kavitha asks CBI to withdraw fresh summons

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BRS leader K Kavitha has asked the CBI to withdraw the notice issued to her under Section 41-A of CrPC summoning her for questioning in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case. She was asked to appear before the investigation team at the CBI headquarters here on Monday. In a letter to the CBI, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhara Reddy said the notice to appear at the probe agency's headquarters should be put in abeyance in the light of her pressing onerous engagements coupled with the necessity of her personal presence in the state while the parliamentary elections are underway. "I may request you to firstly revoke or withdraw the sub-



Kavitha said the notice under Section 41A CrPC was in complete contrast to the earlier notice under Section 160 of CrPC which was issued to her on December 2, 2022, and which already stands complied with. "There is absolutely no logic, reason or background forthcoming as to how, why and under what circumstances you have now resorted to Section 41A CrPC," she said. The CBI earlier recorded her statement in December 2022 at her residence in Hyderabad. The Enforcement Directorate has alleged that one of the accused in the case Vijay Nair received kickbacks to the tune of at least Rs 100 crore from a group called South Group (controlled by Sarath Reddy, Kavitha and Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy) on behalf of leaders of the AAP.

# Micro irrigation only solution in command areas: Experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India may have built state-of-the-art dams and canals, but delivering irrigation water to the last mile remains a major issue, thus necessitating the development of micro irrigation in the command area as an only solution for supply side as well as demand side management of irrigation water for the benefit of the small and marginal farmers, experts have said. Anuj Kanwal, Commissioner Irrigation Water Management and Water Use Efficiency, Union Ministry of Jal Shakti highlighted the importance of addressing the last mile connectivity issue in irrigation management and stressed the role of Command Area Work in managing both supply and demand sides of irrigation

water. He also highlighted the opportunity to implement low-cost community irrigation models, benefiting small and marginal farmers. He was speaking at a workshop titled "Command Area Development Through Micro-Irrigation" in Lucknow held at Lucknow held recently to address critical challenges facing the irrigation sector in India, with a particular focus on Uttar Pradesh. Ajith Radhakrishnan, Senior Specialist & Country Coordinator, 2030 WRG (World Bank) was of the view that "Improved water use technologies for farmers - such as micro-irrigation systems - can improve nutrient and energy efficiency by 28% and 30% respectively, and this can be directly translated into considerable water savings. Command areas offer an

opportunity to test and implement low-cost community irrigation models that include on-farm storage and solar-powered pumps benefiting the small and marginal farmers of the State." Looking ahead, Dr. Heera Lal, Chairman and Administrator of Greater Sharda Sahayak Samadash and Special Secretary of the Irrigation and Water Resources Department in the UP Government, announced setting up a technical support unit to coordinate stakeholders and implement pilot projects on the ground, demonstrating a proactive approach to addressing irrigation challenges. Dr. Yogesh Bandhu, Coordinator of the UP Accelerator Program at 2030 WRG (World Bank), highlighted the need for awareness and guidance in implementing micro-irrigation at scale.

# Resolve to give Modi Government third term: Shah to BJP workers

PTI ■ KHAJURAHO

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asked BJP workers to resolve to give the Narendra Modi government a third term at the Centre with more than 400 seats, asserting that the upcoming Lok Sabha polls were about making India a superpower and the world's third-largest economy.

led government at Centre again by winning more than 400 seats. The upcoming Lok Sabha polls are for making Bharat a superpower and the world's third largest economy under Modi's leadership," he told his party workers. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had won from Khajuraho with a margin of about 4.90 lakh votes. The Modi government has completed ten years, but the opposition leaders can't level allegations of a single penny on him, Shah said. Hailing the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya under the Modi government, Shah said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi used to take swipes at him by saying the saffron party claims it will build the temple but will not give people the date of construction. "The temple has been built under the Modi government. The BJP fulfils every commitment made to the public," asserted Shah, considered his party's key strategist. The top BJP leader said the



Congress dragged its feet for years over the Ayodhya temple, but Modi fulfilled the desire of crores of Lord Ram's devotees by performing the 'bhumi puja' of the shrine and then leading its consecration ceremony. He said that Congress and its allies have always insulted and abused Sanatana Dharma. Congress and its allies tried to coin the term "bhagwa terrorism" and they always humiliated Bharatiya culture, he said. "Not only in India, Modi ji has returned recently by inaugurating a grand temple in UAE. Congress people are not tired of humiliating Sanatana Dharma." Giving credit for the party's victory to booth workers, Shah said that the BJP won 27 out of 29 Lok Sabha seats of Madhya Pradesh in 2014 and 28 segments in 2019. He urged them to ensure the BJP's victory on all the seats this time to cross the target of 400 seats in Parliament. The target of 400 seats can't be possible without the booth workers, he said and praised the party organisation in Madhya Pradesh. The BJP fulfils its promises, Shah said citing issues like

abrogation of Article 370 from Kashmir, one-rank, one pension to retired army men, abolishment of triple talaq, 33 per cent reservation to the women in Lok Sabha polls and completion of various temple corridors. Listing out achievements of the party, Shah said the BJP regime at the Centre has ensured 5 kg of free ration monthly to more than 80 crore poor people, provided tapped water to 14 crore families, and given Rs 6,000 annual assistance to 11 crore farmers. The next five years will be the time to lay the foundation of a "great Bharat", he said. Congress let "Alia Malia Jamalia" from Pakistan enter India and carry out attacks and return but Manmohan Singh (then prime minister) didn't pay heed, he said. Shah said that Pakistan made a mistake and launched attacks in Uri and Pulwama. Within ten days, the Modi government carried out a surgical strike and entered the homes of terrorists and killed them, he said. The Union minister said that the Modi government has

carried out several welfare works for farmers and made record purchases of wheat and paddy. "We have solved the problems of farmers one by one. Because of such works, Congress is not visible in the political landscape of the country," he said. Shah said that the Congress government had given Rs 1.99 lakh crore to Madhya Pradesh in ten years while the Modi government gave Rs 7.74 lakh crore in nine years. Besides, projects worth Rs 5.5 lakh crore were given and BJP tried to transform a "BIMARU" state into a developed one", he added. Earlier in the day in Gwalior, Shah asked the BJP workers to strive for polling of 370 additional votes in each booth, compared to the last general polls, to achieve the seat target in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. He was speaking to nearly 400 leaders and workers of the booth management committee of Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior-Chambal cluster comprising four Lok Sabha seats - Morena, Bind, Guna and Gwalior.



## Yogi says paper leak is national sin

BISWAJEET ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has strongly condemned the recent leakage of the UP Police exam paper, denouncing it as an injustice to the aspirations of the state's youth and a matter of national shame. Assuring resolute consequences, he reaffirmed the government's steadfast dedication to upholding transparency and impartiality in all recruitment procedures. Addressing a gathering at Lok Bhavan, where appointment letters were conferred upon approximately 1800 successful candidates from various departments, CM Yogi emphasized the gravity of compromising the dreams of young individuals by unscrupulous elements, branding it as a 'national disgrace'. "We are committed to a policy of zero tolerance towards those who jeopardize the lives and futures of our youth and will handle such elements with severity and decisiveness," declared CM Yogi, underlining the administration's determination to hold the perpetrators accountable. Stressing on the misuse of technology by deceitful entities to manipulate recruitment processes, CM Yogi reiterated the government's resolve to thwart all such endeavors. The Chief Minister's remarks follow initial dismissals by officials regarding the leak, initially deemed as

spurious. However, in the face of escalating protests by thousands of exam takers demanding the cancellation of the exam, the government eventually acceded to their demands. Opposition figures, including SP president Akhilesh Yadav and former Congress president Rahul Gandhi, criticized the state government's management of the situation. Yadav hailed the annulment of the exam as a victory for the candidates while accusing the BJP of orchestrating a ploy to deprive youth of job opportunities. "The BJP government is deceiving unemployed youths under the guise of job offers, but the public can now discern this scheme," remarked Yadav, echoing widespread disenchantment with the government's employment policies. Likewise, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, during her involvement in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra alongside Rahul Gandhi, censured the BJP for its negligent and corrupt governance. Vadra rebuked the BJP's inability to implement effective measures to prevent paper leaks, juxtaposing it with Congress's proposed solutions aimed at safeguarding the future of the youth. The incident has prompted widespread censure of the government's management of recruitment procedures, with demands for stringent measures to uphold the integrity of examinations and ensure equitable opportunities for all aspirants.

## Stalin hands over relief to families hit by heavy rainfall last December

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday handed over financial assistance to members of the fishermen community here, whose livelihood was worst affected by the heavy rainfall and flooding that occurred in December last year. During the record levels of rainfall that hit Tuticorin, Tirunelveli, Tenkasi and Kanniyakumari districts, several lives were lost and many were rendered homeless as normal life came to a standstill at the time. Taking cognisance of the severe damage caused by the rainfall and flooding, Stalin had urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December to release Rs 12,659 crore from the funds of the National Disaster Response Force towards taking up livelihood and permanent restoration works in the affected districts.



In a similar event held in the region, the chief minister also distributed loans to members of women's self-help groups of Tuticorin and Tirunelveli. Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker M Appavu, DMK MP Kanimozhi, Minister for Finance and Human Resources Management Thangam Thennarasu and senior government officials were present on the occasion.

## Peace initiatives have begun to restore peace in State: Manipur CM

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday said peace initiatives have commenced to address ethnic tensions in the state. Emphasising the government's foremost responsibility to safeguard lives, property, and the state's integrity, Singh assured citizens of appropriate security measures in place. "We don't need to panic...I want to assure people that security forces have been appropriately deployed in all the areas to tackle the situation," he said at the Sanarisingi Numit (Players Day) function here. He reiterated the commitment to pursuing peace through dialogue and urged people to trust the government's efforts. To bring about a political solution, the process for peace



and talks has started so that everyone can live in peace. We need to revive our earlier lives." Singh also addressed pressing issues such as drug abuse and demographic shifts, highlighting the government's initiatives to combat drug addiction and maintain demographic balance. "Around 1.5 lakh people out of 30 lakh are drug users. This is the primary reason why the state government announced the war on drugs in 2018," Singh said.

"From 2006 to 2018, some 1,400 new villages have cropped up in the state out of nowhere creating demographic imbalances," he added. Singh reiterated that the state government will identify the illegal immigrants with 1961 as the base year. "We do politics to secure the present and future generation. We want to be very clear. We will fence the borders, cancel Free Movement Regime and identify all illegal immigrants in the state who came after 1961. Its our commitment," he said. Singh also announced that all the gold medalists of the 36th and 37th National Games would be provided with government jobs. He said Wushu player Naorem Roshibina Devi, who won silver at the 19th Asian Games at Hangzhou in China, would be appointed as a DSP.

# Modi ended rule of dynasty, graft, appeasement: HM

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ended the politics of casteism, corruption, appeasement and dynasty that prevailed earlier, ushered in "politics of performance" and raised the stature of Indian passport. Shah paid a daylong visit to Madhya Pradesh, where he encouraged BJP workers in Gwalior and Khajuraho to strive for the party's victory in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and later spoke at an event in Bhopal. Madhya Pradesh has 29 Lok Sabha seats of which the BJP had won 28 in 2019. "After independence, politics of caste, corruption, appeasement and dynasty prevailed. Modiji has finished them off in the last 10 years and set the trend of politics of performance," Shah said in Bhopal. He urged people to make an

analysis of the time under Modi's stewardship and the earlier governments. Naxalism, terrorism and extremism are nearing their end, he asserted. At the moment, the BJP's chief strategist said, the fight is between two groups. "One consists of patriots who want to make the country a developed nation under the leadership of Modi and the other that nurtures dynasties, said, drawing analogies with 'Pandavas and Kauravs'. "(Opposition) INDIA bloc is an alliance of dynastic politics. Sonia Gandhi wants her son to be the PM," he said, adding that NCP founder Sharad Pawar is keen on promoting his daughter. TMC chief Mamta Banerjee wants her nephew as chief minister. RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav and DMK chief M K Stalin also want their sons to become CMs, he said. The upcoming Lok Sabha elections are crucial for the

world's biggest democracy as about 100 crore people will exercise their franchise, he said. Shah said that from the time of Jan Sangh, a forerunner of the BJP, the saffron party has never considered elections as a means of gaining power. "We have accepted elections as a festival of democracy, considering it a medium to reach out to people with our principles and ideology. When we were in power, we considered the elections as a medium to give people the account of our achievements," he said. Referring to Jammu and Kashmir, north-east and Naxal-hit areas, Shah said there has been a 70 per cent decline in violence in these areas, and deaths caused due to terrorism, insurgency and left-wing extremism have reduced by 72 per cent. Theatres have opened in Kashmir after 30 years and the Valley has become "jewel of India". "Two crore tourists from

the country and world have visited Kashmir and enjoyed its beauty in a peaceful atmosphere," he said. "Terrorism, Naxalism and extremism are gasping for breath and they will find it hard to raise their head after one more mandate," he said. The BJP government at the Centre brought 60 crore poor people into the mainstream by providing them with basic amenities like houses, toilets and tap water. Under the Modi government, the country has come out of collective inferiority complex and the respect for India's passport has increased, he said. "After you gave a chance to Modi in 2014, the respect of the country has grown across the world. Seeing the Indian passport, people overseas now ask 'have you come from Modi ka Bharat?'. This is the change that has come in the world for India in the last 10 years," he said.

## Nagpur man booked for duping people of ₹2.8 crore

PTI ■ NAGPUR

A case has been registered against a man for allegedly duping investors of Rs 2.8 crore in a chit fund scheme in Maharashtra's Nagpur district, police said on Sunday. The accused, Ramneet Singh alias Saab Rajinderpal Singh Lamba (34), a resident of Kashmiri Gali, is absconding, an official said. The accused had allegedly duped people by promising them lucrative returns if they invested money every week in a chit fund scheme, he said. The victims invested in the scheme from 2019 to 2022 and handed over the money to the accused, who provided them signed receipts, the official said. When the investors approached the ask 'once the term period ended and demanded their returns, the accused started giving them evasive replies and later threatened them, he said.

## MNF to elect party leaders on March 15

PTI ■ KOHIMA

Mizoram's main opposition party, the Mizo National Front (MNF), will elect party leaders through a poll on March 15. MNF's media cell secretary, Lallenmawia Jongte, on Sunday said that a meeting of the party's nomination committee on the previous day nominated incumbent president Zoramthanga as the official candidate for the top post in the party. Earlier, 80-year-old Zoramthanga had announced that he and party senior vice president Tawnluia have decided to retire from active politics due to old age. He had said that they had also written to the party nomination committee not to nominate them as the official candidates. Nevertheless, the committee has unanimously decided to nominate Zoramthanga as the official candidate for the



president's post again, while Tawnluia's request has been accepted because of his health, Jongte said. The committee has also nominated former health minister Dr R Lalthangliana as the official candidate for the post of senior vice president, while MNF legislature party leader and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Lalthandama Ralte, and former Lok Sabha member Vanlalawma have been nominated for posts of party vice presidents, he said. Former minister Lalruatkima has been nominated as the official candidate for the treasurer post.

## Two Congress MLAs, NPP legislators join BJP in Arunachal

PTI ■ PANAJI

In a boost to the ruling BJP in Arunachal Pradesh ahead of polls, two Congress MLAs and as many legislators from the National People's Party (NPP) joined the ruling BJP on Sunday. The Congress and NPP now have two MLAs each in the 60-member assembly. Senior Congress MLA and former union minister Ninong Ering (Pasihat West seat) and Wanglin Lowangdong (Borduria-Bogapani constituency) joined the saffron party during a function at its headquarters here. NPP's Mutchu Mithi (Roing seat) and Gokar Basar (Basar constituency) also became a part of the BJP at the event, which was attended by Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

## Titwala, Shahad set for facelift under Amrit Bharat scheme: MoS Patil

PTI ■ THANE

The Titwala and Shahad railway stations in the Bhiwandi Lok Sabha constituency of Maharashtra will get a makeover under the Amrit Bharat scheme, Union minister Kapil Patil said on Sunday. The two stations are among several railway stations that will be upgraded under the scheme, said the Minister of State for Panchayati Raj in a

release. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Monday lay the foundation stone for the redevelopment of these 553 railway stations, via videoconferencing, officials have said. The Amrit Bharat stations, spread across 27 states and Union Territories, will be redeveloped at a cost of over Rs 19,000 crore. These stations will act as 'city centres' integrating both sides of a city and will boast of

modern passenger amenities such as roof plazas, beautiful landscaping, inter-modal connectivity, a modern facade, kids' play area, kiosks and food courts, the Prime Minister's Office has said in a release. The stations will be redeveloped as environment and Divyang-friendly and the design of these buildings will be inspired by local culture, heritage and architecture, it said

The scheme encompasses a budget of Rs 25.78 crore for Titwala railway station and Rs 15.47 crore for Shahad station, aimed at enhancing the infrastructure and facilities for commuters, said Patil, who represents the Bhiwandi Lok Sabha seat in Parliament. The upcoming projects also include the construction of railway underpasses and flyovers on the Kalyan-Igatpuri route, he said.

## Assam Minister highlights NE first English daily pioneering role in media

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Minister for Information and Public Relations Pijush Hazarika has praised 'The Assam Tribune' for its pioneering role in the media industry, not only in the region but also across the country. He commended the newspaper's objective and unbiased reporting, stating that it has carved out a

distinct place in the media landscape of India. Hazarika, whose speech was read out in his absence at the launch of the newspaper's mobile app here on Saturday, expressed confidence that the app's introduction would elevate the media organisation to greater heights. He noted the newspaper's adaptation to changing technology, including its

successful presence on social media, which enables it to connect with people from the region living around the world. Assam state information commissioner Bhasakar Mahanta highlighted the increasing importance of infotainment in the media industry and emphasised the significance of digital media in providing news and entertainment.

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that my client Sh. Kabir Suri S/o Sh. Aswini Suri R/o C-619, New Friends Colony, New Delhi-110025 one of the owner of Plot No.619, Block-C, The New Friends CHS Ltd., New Friends Colony, New Delhi-110025, have applied for certified copies & freehold in DDA. The original documents i.e. Perpetual Sub-Lease Deed, C & D Forms And Other Documents of the above said plot has been lost. An LR No. 14747172024 dated 22/02/2024 to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi Police. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/ Phone No. 962519183 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (CS) or Director (CS), Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi-110023. S. Santanam Swaminathan (Advocate) G10 Law (IKSAS) ENR. No. D/286/2022



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Shades of grey

### Do political parties really mean to fulfil poll promises, or is it mere rhetoric to befool voters?

Every election season, political parties can be seen letting loose a long litany of promises — some really genuine, but mostly mere pleasing-to-the-ears rhetoric. These campaign pledges, called poll manifestos or electoral promises or even 'jumlas', are tailor-made to meet local voters' aspirations that season. However, a critical question looms: Is it really feasible for the parties to fulfil these promises? This discourse has gained fresh attention following the Chief Election Commissioner's (CEC) statement emphasising the voters' right to know if these promises can be delivered. The CEC's stance underscores the need for transparency and accountability in the electoral process, with the hope that it will prompt political actors to make promises more responsibly. At the heart of this debate lies a complex interplay of political dynamics, economic constraints, administrative capabilities and societal expectations. While political parties often design their agenda with the intention of securing electoral victory, the practicality of implementing poll promises after getting elected is subject to numerous challenges; mainly the inherent uncertainty and volatility of governance. The political discourse is ever-evolving and parties have to adjust to it, often going back on what they themselves might have vociferously advocated. Besides unforeseen events, economic fluctuations and global dynamics also make it difficult to fulfil poll promises.



What may seem feasible during an election campaign could swiftly become untenable in the face of emerging challenges. The way out? At best, the parties can just declare: "It is our intention; conditions apply." Such an honest declaration does not at least sound as if it

were a done deal. Interestingly, even voters know that certain promises are undeliverable but then they do not have much choice, especially since the rival party is also tomming schemes that cannot be fulfilled. Of course there are unforeseen, serious challenges to genuinely-made pledges but the problem arises when misleading or false promises are deliberately made to capture votes. Worse, the parties know they can get away with it as there are no punitive damages yet for this practice. It is imperative for political parties to adopt a more responsible approach. Instead of succumbing to populist rhetoric, they should prioritise honesty, realism and evidence-based policymaking. Transparency also plays a crucial role in fostering accountability. Voters have the right to be informed not only about the promises made but also about the rationale behind them and the strategy for implementation. Also, robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation should be established to track progress and hold Governments accountable for their party's commitments. Then there is a need for greater public awareness to ensure that electoral promises are scrutinised rigorously. Citizens must actively participate in the democratic process, holding elected representatives accountable for their actions. Those deliberately making false promises must be punished through the ballot box.

### PICTALK



Women devotees offer prayers during the Attukal Pongala festival, in Thiruvananthapuram

PTI

## Revamping India's intelligence network

### There is a pressing need for reforms within India's intelligence framework, addressing coordination deficits and accountability lapses

The imperative for a comprehensive overhaul of India's intelligence framework becomes apparent when considering the existence of 14 intelligence agencies, each with varying and occasionally overlapping responsibilities. These agencies have come into being in response to strategic shifts and past shortcomings. In the aftermath of the 1962 conflict with China, the Director General of Security (DGS) was established within the Intelligence Bureau (IB). Subsequently, following the 1965 war with Pakistan, external intelligence was segregated into a distinct entity, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), which also birthed the Special Bureau aimed at enhancing organisational effectiveness. After the 1999 Kargil conflict, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) were instituted. However, persistent issues stem from the lack of coordination among these agencies. The absence of a Director of National Intelligence or a Coordinating Minister exacerbates this problem.



### Accountability remains a concern.

The intelligence apparatus, entrenched in the colonial-era police structure, grapples with adapting to contemporary challenges. The Intelligence Bureau (IB), primarily oriented towards domestic and political affairs, encounters limitations in counterintelligence endeavours. Despite initiatives like the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), cooperation deficiencies persist. In 2001, a Group of Ministers proposed elevating the IB to the status of the premier Counter-Terrorism agency, culminating in the establishment of MAC and Subsidiary MACs for intelligence amalgamation. Externally, the R&AW, responsible for external intelligence gathering, confronts challenges such as excessive reliance on TECHINT and insufficient development of human intelligence (HUMINT).

While the establishment of the National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) aimed to address technological aspects, issues like overlapping mandates and coordination gaps have arisen. Reform is imperative, commencing with the delineation of contemporary challenges, specialisations, and oversight mechanisms. Concerning oversight, India lacks effective mechanisms for its intelligence agencies. Suggestions include appointing individuals well-versed in operational modalities at a macro level or establishing a National Intelligence Board for monitoring. Apex-level management necessitates enhancement, possibly through the appointment of a full-time intelligence adviser or a Director of National Intelligence under the NSA or MHA. Coordination and tasking, particularly between the Centre and states, remain deficient, necessitating legislative attention. The Intelligence Cycle requires refinement, with a clear demarcation between collection and analy-

sis. Personnel issues. Human intelligence (HUMINT) and technical intelligence (TECHINT) pose distinct challenges. While big data analysis is nascent, considerations regarding privacy and legislative authorization for extensive data scrutiny are paramount. The dearth of skilled manpower for HUMINT is a significant concern, and bolstering military expertise within intelligence agencies is imperative. Although inspired by the ideology of the 5 Eyes, I4C, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, has not been effectively operationalized in the realm of digital warfare. Effectiveness in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency remains a pressing concern. Failures to establish the National Counter-terrorism Centre (NCTC) and inter-agency conflicts underscore the need for a robust system. Ensuring successful prosecutions following counter-terrorism arrests is pivotal. (The writer is an eminent expert-Counter Terrorism in West Asia & Middle Eastern countries, views are personal)



NISHAKANT OJHA

# The aftermath of a controversial election



UMANG KOHLI

### Amid concerns over rising debt and geopolitical tensions, the resilience of Pakistan's political fabric faces its sternest test yet



Pakistan has not given a fractured mandate, on paper, it may seem fractured however the call people have taken is clear. It goes without saying that if 100 independent candidates win, it's no mean achievement for a party that is backing them. The story of what happened in 1968 in Pakistan is often forgotten, in that year, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto brought down the military presidency of Gen Ayub Khan. Pakistan has seen big upheavals in the past and as things stand today another one is brewing for sure. This time against a China-Pak Army selected candidate who will be nominated at the top post, against the will of the people. Most analysts believed Nawaz Sharif was sure to become the PM however why he did not make it to the top slot has to do with how he reacted to situations post-Kargil. Sharif was thrown out in 1999 by General Musharraf, who then led Pakistan's army because he publicly ridiculed the army for apparently keeping him in the dark concerning the Kargil War. Now as they say once bitten twice shy, the Pakistani army always wanted a third person apart from Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan to be the notional head of Pakistan, and they are gunning for one. The Pakistani army used the clout of

Nawaz Sharif (whatever he had) to try and get to power someone they wanted and somehow get rid of Imran Khan. China has had a friendly relationship with the Sharif family so they are fine with someone coming up with Sharif's backing. Now the question is, will the people of Pakistan accept the humiliation of subversion of their mandate? Has the Pakistani army become so weak that it does not hold any sway over the people of Pakistan? Does the US still have control over the Pakistani Army and what they do to influence elections in Pakistan? Would a coalition Government that lacks popular support be able to sustain itself? Will there be even more civil unrest in Pakistan in the months to come? Answers to these questions hold the key to what is going to unfold in Pakistan shortly. Things in Pakistan have never been quiet from within, and this election has exposed the hollow belly of the Pakistani electoral system. In most of the constituencies, the election was rigged. Some of the election commission officers have since resigned after admitting to mass-scale rigging. It's almost incomprehensible how

THE US STILL HAS A LOT OF INTEREST IN PAKISTAN, MAYBE BECAUSE OF OLD TIES OR BECAUSE IT'S AN ISLAMIC NATION WITH A DECLARED NUCLEAR WEAPON SYSTEM. WHATEVER IT MAY BE, BUT IT DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE ANY OVERRIDING CONTROL OVER THINGS IN PAKISTAN ANYMORE

a US official spokesperson then has called the election reliable. The so-called results that have been thrown up show that PMLN has 79 seats, and PPP has 54 seats in a 264-seat parliament giving both of them combined a comfortable majority. It'll look like a coalition Government would come up in Pakistan would be devoid of a popular mandate which is likely to fuel unrest in the public even more in the days to come. The mandate of the people seems to be with PTI and with Imran Khan. In this coalition too the two parties joining hands have a little in common and would provide a weak Government ridden by internal friction and lobbying. Under these circumstances, the people of Pakistan are going to feel cheated. In a country that has not a single respected institution in place and has a supreme court that is by and large influenced by vested interests, civil unrest looks around the corner. If this kind of circumstance persists, the balkanisation of Pakistan is not far away, no matter how hard China tries to keep it together. The US still has a lot of interest in Pakistan, maybe because of old ties or because it's an Islamic nation with a

declared nuclear weapon system, whatever it may be but it does not seem to have any overriding control over things in Pakistan anymore. The US does have some control over the Pakistani Army however Pakistani Army seems to have lost all respect in the eyes of the general public in Pakistan. It looks like people are not fearful of the Pakistani Army anymore. It looks like the people of Pakistan would find it hard to digest that their mandate has been subverted. It's a writing on the wall that this new coalition that has taken a good fortnight to form may just fall under its pressure in due course of time. How this new coalition Government would tackle the rising debt crisis would also be interesting to see. In the past Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has made low-brow and irresponsible comments against India, hopefully, he will have matured now and will refrain from jingoism. Sharif brothers are mature politicians, however, they would be under tremendous pressure from China, the US, the Pakistani Army and the people of Pakistan. (The writer is an expert on geopolitics and international Affairs. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### WHO REPORT ON AIR POLLUTION

Sir — The World Health Organisation's report on air pollution has been released recently. According to this year 2020, 32 lakh people will have died due to air pollution. What is even more alarming is that five lakh deaths are of children under the age of five. This news was recently read that there are many causes of pollution in the world. Many people cook on kerosene and charcoal. The number of such is about 2.3 billion. Apart from this, leaves are burnt in many fields, which also causes pollution. The huge number of vehicles and the pollution caused by it is a matter known to all. Even today, many countries in South Asia depend on wood and coal. It is necessary to increase the use of clean fuel to reduce air pollution in the country. It is necessary to increase the use of solar, stove, biogas, LPG natural gas and alcohol fuel. Apart from this, it is necessary to reduce the use of petrol and diesel vehicles and replace them with electric vehicles. The central government is alert about electric vehicles and is thinking and taking action on how their use will increase in the country. Domestic gas is also being used on a large scale in the country, so it seems that all these measures can save you from air pollution. Shantaram Wagh | Pune

### PAROLE REGULATIONS

Sir — Handing and controlling parole to convicts in Indian jails is very contentious, and often misused. Parole is a "promise" or "word of honour" given by the convicts that they will return after a specific period. In special circumstances, it can be a "corrective rehabilitation". In India, the Prison Acts of 1894 and 1900 govern parole rules though they differ slightly across states. The parole, which can be custodial lasting six hours to regular, lasting one month, is monitored by prison officers and applies after the prisoner completes at least one year in prison unless specified by the court. A CAG report had said that parole was

## Karnataka temple tax move draws ire



The Karnataka Government's contentious proposal to impose taxes on Hindu temples has ignited a firestorm of debate, drawing sharp criticism from opposition parties and various religious groups. The bill stipulates that temples with annual incomes exceeding Rs 1 crore must contribute 10% to a Common Pool Fund, while those generating between Rs 10 lakh and

Rs 1 crore should chip in five per cent. Proponents argue that the fund's proceeds will be directed towards the welfare of temple priests and the development of lesser-known C-grade temples. Despite passing through the assembly, the bill faced a decisive rejection in the council, where the opposition commands a majority. Meanwhile, a recent survey sheds light on public sentiment regarding the tax measure. It reveals that 52% of Hindus in Karnataka perceive the tax as discriminatory, while 48% deem it necessary. Furthermore, a significant majority of 62% believe that small temples should be exempt from this taxation. Although the Karnataka Government has refrained from disclosing anticipated revenue figures, experts speculate that the tax could generate up to Rs 1,000 crore annually, underscoring the financial implications and societal divisions surrounding this contentious issue. Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

a "convenient" route of escape for convicts. Following a Delhi High Court verdict that had severely castigated the police for its inability to regulate the whole parole process adequately, serious offenders involved in rape-cum-murder, and those posing a threat to the country's security and those who are not Indian citizens are "strictly" barred from being granted parole by the Government. But a lot more needs to be done and there is a need to impose a foolproof method to prevent prisoners from taking advantage of certain lax provisions still existing in law. Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

### SPORTS CONNECT PEOPLE

Sir — In this rapidly changing time, only a few things keep people close and give them a medium to be connected. One such medium is sports. Sports give the fans a feeling of attachment and affinity. It builds communities that feel the adrenaline rush every time their team moves up on the leaderboard and that shed tears when they are on the losing side. Be it the

nations, franchises, or clubs, they all have a legacy—a legacy that has triumphant victories and tragic defeats that keep the fans close and make them support the team even through the tough times. The Tifosi, for instance, have an undying love for Ferrari, given the glorious legacy the red machine has from the early days of Formula One. Even if the team is struggling on the leaderboard, the passion is still the same as it was during the era of sheer dominance when the likes of Michael Schumacher or Sebastian Vettel raced for "The Prancing Horse."

The reason behind this unwavering support and loyalty is the bond that fans develop with the sport, their heroes, and their triumphs. For those who don't watch sports, all this might just be a waste of time, but for lovers of the game, it is an escape from a tedious and mundane life. It connects people and can be a meaningful way of finding purpose in one's life. Pratyush Tiwari | Ujjain

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## FIRST COLUMN

## BALANCING WORK AND WELL-BEING

It's time to shift from the disciplinary mantra 'act your age' to 'act your wage'



SHAINY SHARMA

In today's cutthroat and challenging work landscape, finding the right balance between professional devotion and personal well-being can be challenging. The modern work culture often encourages its employees to go beyond their potential, leading to exploitation, anxiety and burnout. The internet, social media, Gen Z and millennials with time have gone crazy about the term quiet quitting all over and now a new trend which is considered to be a 'loud quiet quitting' is buzzing everywhere—the notion of Acting Your Wage. It has emerged as a call from the fed-up workers and employees who believe it's a solution to establish boundaries and ensure that employees are neither overworked nor under-utilized. Since the beginning of the digital era (use of cell phones), Gen Z was expected to be available 24x7 in their workplace whereas the older generation worked according to their job timings. Millennials are tech-savvy and cannot stay away from their gadgets.

Acting your wage is a philosophy that revolves around performing only those tasks and duties for which an employee is contracted and compensated and not for taking additional responsibilities without proper recognition or compensation. In layman's language, it means dedicating yourself to the responsibilities explicitly tied to your compensation while avoiding the trap of overextending beyond your job description.

Today, younger workers have an egalitarian mindset—a penchant for social activism and expectations of two-way feedback. They work on a simple theory—what is a job worth? It is not about being complacent or neglecting work responsibilities; instead, the generation believes in recognising the importance of self-care, setting boundaries and preserving energy for long-term productivity and well-being.



It is about recognising an individual's worth and ensuring that the time and effort they devote to their job align with the compensation they receive. Moreover, studies reveal that employees who practice this approach achieve a healthier work-life balance, preserve their energy levels, protect themselves from potential exploitation and most importantly, prevent burnout. Today many employees are taking the initiative to clarify their job roles with their seniors so that a clear understanding of what is expected is ensured and ambiguity is prevented. Also, employees are now practising the art of politely saying 'no' to additional tasks that fall outside their job description and instead actively seeking opportunities for advancement or higher roles that align with their skill set and career. Employers on the other hand, who tend to implement this notion will benefit as, it will enhance employee well-being, increase job satisfaction, improve productivity and most importantly strengthen the work culture. There will be a culture of transparency, fairness and respect within the organization. Organisations who are already providing clear and comprehensive job descriptions to employees, outline their roles and responsibilities, acknowledge and reward them for their contributions, and invest in training and development programmes that will offer them opportunities to grow and advance within the organisation are already away from this notion.

There is no denying the fact that success in any field grows out of learning how to build skills, how to ask for help and how to build capacity in ways that don't even exist. The act of wage is a way to take care of yourself to be stress-free. Remember, one needs to normalise doing the bare minimum at work. An individual signs up for a job. If the employers are not paying extra to do extra tasks, strictly don't do them. It's time to throw the disciplinary line 'act your age' and turn it to 'act your wage'.

(The author is a senior educator, views are personal)

# Indian education system: The quest for perfection



JS RAJPUT

The Indian education system stands at a crossroads, poised between recognition and realisation of its inherent potential



Looking back from the transition point to the third millennium, it could indeed be interesting—and revealing—as to what was the most encouraging achievement in the pivotal sector of education! The most mentioned of the responses to the query from seasoned academics and scholars, as well as the policymakers who had contributed to policy formulation and implementation for three-four decades, referred to the change in social responses from various strata of society.

The most serious impediment was ignorance of the value of education in the lives of the individual and the family. One wonders whether anything more could be expected from a society seriously emaciated for centuries, and subjected to live their lives in abject misery! Social structures that practised exclusion, seriously flawed assumptions on the role of women and its relationship to female literacy, and the excruciating hold of the clergy in deprecating the education of girls were indeed serious handicaps before all those who were assigned to implement the constitutional directive of providing free and compulsory education to all children till they achieve fourteen years of age!

The widely prevalent practice of early marriage, child labour, compulsions to earn daily bread, and the need for extra hands in farms and fields, were also prominent factors that severely impeded the process of enrolment in schools. It may be tough for the millennials to visualise a situation that for decades together, girls' education in India suffered for want of toilets for girls in schools. This is one area that remained neglected all along.

After the Prime Minister of India spoke from the ramparts of the Red Fort about sanitation practices, and the need for immediate reforms, things have

changed, and this deserves appreciation. However, considerable alertness and appreciation of the need are still necessary. Why do I say this? What one learns from personal interactions just cannot always be extricated from data! In 2016, one visited several institutions as a member of the TSR Subramaniam Committee on Education policy. In one of the colleges with an enrolment of around two thousand, a mention was made of the neglect of sanitation, the Director had this to say: Oh, it is too dirty and unhygienic for me to inspect! I mention this for two reasons; first; the systems of education paid little attention to such a significant impediment. Second; even after the universally acknowledged and appreciated movement for sanitation, and its great success, there is much more to be achieved on this front!

We are much better off at this juncture in educational achievements, particularly in the context of girls' participation in education and subsequently in every sector of knowledge, skills, services, defence and the like. What was the most ignored aspect of Indian education during the second half of the 20th century? Some academics and scholars—adherents of negativity included—would like to criticise all that has been done and achieved during this period. Those who are, ideologically unconstrained and capable of taking an objective analytical view express concern about certain aspects that are essential ingredients total the personality development of any individual. This is usually articulated in

every policy and programme, but current education practices get ignored in schools and even certain well-reputed institutions. Moral and ethical aspects of education, education in human values, and similar expressions are regular parts of every education initiative.

We also have the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, who could say "My life is my message"! How many of our present-day leaders—political leaders—could say that with inner conviction and confidence? There are still the old guards and young ones who took Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, Rajagopalachari, Karpuri Thakur, LK Advani, Narendra Modi, and the like as their role models.

A committed work culture, a sound value system, and a pursuit of higher and larger goals in life could only be inculcated in educational institutions and that remains a big challenge before the Indian education system. Our advantage is that we are familiar with how it could be achieved.

Indian education has achieved sufficient recognition and success; within and outside the country. India and its ancient education systems aimed at comprehensive personality development, the comprehension of 'Ekam Sat Viprah Baudha Vadanti', 'Sarv bhut Hite Ratah', 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina', and much more on similar lines. We were privileged that MK Gandhi gave us a practical model of education that focused on enhancing the economic aspect but did not neglect this totality, and wanted the best to be drawn out of out of head,

hand and heart. Sri Aurobindo; and the mother; dwelled in higher echelons of human advancement, apart from what is usually aimed at imparting education.

Our education initiatives and efforts, it must be acknowledged; drifted more towards the acquisition of education for material and physical gains. Education, said the Mother; is not to prepare learners to succeed in life and society but 'to increase his perfectibility!' Addressing the students of the Ashram Schools she said: "Do not aim for success. Our aim is perfection.

Remember you are on the hold of a new world, participating in its worth and instrumental in its creation. There is nothing more important than the transformation. There is no interest more worthwhile." The Mother goes on to delineate it further for our comprehension: "To learn for the sake of knowledge, to study to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself to grow in consciousness, to discipline oneself to become master of oneself, to overcome one's weaknesses, incapacities, and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and vaster, more generous and truer..."

Could anything more need be said on how our schools and institutions could move ahead in pursuit of excellence once they absorb the golden words and the strength of the philosophy behind them?

(The author works in education, social cohesion and religious amity, views are personal)



OUR EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND EFFORTS, IT MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED, DRIFTED MORE TOWARDS THE ACQUISITION OF EDUCATION FOR MATERIAL AND PHYSICAL GAINS

# The impact of amendments to criminal codes on national policing

The implications of amendments to three criminal codes on civil liberties and the integrity of the legal process remain subject to ongoing debate and scrutiny

Parliament has passed three criminal codes, among which the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) seeks to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC). There is one provision in BNSS that seeks to increase the number of days within which police custody (PC) can be sought. When someone is in police custody, it means they are held by the police in a lock-up at the station. On the other hand, judicial custody means they are held in a central jail. The investigating agency gets 24 hours to investigate if they are not able to complete the investigation within that bracket, they must get permission from the magistrate, who can grant custody of the accused for up to 60/90 days,



PRAKHAR BAJPAI

depending on the seriousness of the crime.

However, within this timeframe of 60/90 days, the magistrate is restricted to granting PC for the initial 15 days from the date of arrest, beyond which only judicial custody can be granted. This 15-day limit was extensively discussed in the Anupam Kulkarni v. CBI case, where the Supreme Court ruled that an accused

cannot be held in PC beyond 15 days from the date of arrest and PC in total can be for a maximum of 15 days, which means that PC could be granted by the magistrate in parts for the first 15 days or as a whole.

### Understanding the new law

According to Section 187 of the BNSS, the PC can be granted within the first 40 days (for less serious offences) or 60 days (for more serious offences) after the accused is arrested. The change implies that the prescribed 15-day period of custody can now be split into shorter periods of custody sought over 40 days for offences punishable up to 10 years or 60 days for other offences. This represents a departure from the current practice under Section 167 of

the CrPC, where PC can only be obtained within the initial 15 days. Consequently, concerns have been raised regarding the Government's rationale behind this change, particularly considering the act's aim to prioritise a people-centric criminal justice system. However, further arguments necessitate the examination of two significant cases.

Judgements that led to a paradox: First, in the case of Vikas Mishra v. CBI, where the CBI wanted more time to question Vikas Mishra, who was accused of corruption and conspiracy. Despite being in custody for seven days, he was hospitalised and later released on bail. The CBI argued that they couldn't interrogate him properly during this time. However, Vikas's lawyers cited



the court's ruling that said PC beyond 15 days from the arrest date is not allowed. Nonetheless, the court granted custody to the police and noted that every accused person must respect the investigation and court proceedings and went on to mention that these ways of hindering the pursuit of justice would not be tolerated.

Second, in the case of Senthil Balaji v. The State, the Supreme Court decided that the maximum 15 days PC period can be split into shorter periods over the entire investigation, which can last either 60 or 90 days as against the general rule of granting PC in first 15 days, it also questioned its judgement of Anupam Kulkarni and further, said that

this interpretation needs to be reviewed by a larger bench. By analysing the two judgements passed last year we can conclude that there is a growing inclination towards favouring the investigating agency. Despite the accused attempting to avoid initial PC in the first case due to medical reasons, it's essential to recognise that the accused might exploit the 15-day bar by taking the excuse of loopholes on grounds of a medical emergency.

However, the second case sets a precedent keeping the investigation process at the heart of the criminal justice system which poses a potential series of inconsistencies. Therefore, Section 187 of the BNSS aims to definitively resolve the existing confusion and prevent

future inconsistencies regarding the timeline within which PC can be sought and sets the limit of 40/60 days.

It seeks to find a middle path where the civil liberties of the accused are not exploited as the maximum number of days for which the PC can be granted is still 15 days which now can be granted in parts in 40/60 days and also favours investigating agencies by granting a reasonable time for custodial interrogation, which is crucial for uncovering the truth as denying the investigating agency the opportunity for further interrogation gives an advantage to the accused to disrupt the legal process.

(The writer is a law student; views expressed are personal)

# Trump triumphs over Haley in South Carolina

PTI ■ CHARLESTON

Donald Trump secured a resounding win over his Indian-American rival Nikki Haley in her backyard in South Carolina in the Republican primary, enabling the former US president to move closer to clinching a third straight presidential nomination from his party in 2024.

Refusing to give up, Haley, 52, a two-time former governor of South Carolina on Saturday vowed to take the fight to the Super Tuesday states on March 5 when Republican primaries are scheduled to be held in 21 US states. Trump, 77, has now won every contest that counted for Republican delegates, adding to his previous wins in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and the US Virgin Islands.

The South Carolina primary race was called mere minutes after results were counted. US media outlets said Haley received 39.5 per cent

of the vote in the Palmetto State while Trump 59.8 per cent, giving the former president 44 delegates and just three to the former South Carolina state governor.

A candidate needs 1,215 delegates to bag the party's nomination in the November 5, 2024 presidential election. So far, Trump has won 102 delegates while Haley, the only major contender to the Republican frontrunner, has just 17 delegates.

"This was a little sooner than we anticipated, and an even bigger win than we anticipated," Trump told a crowd at his election night watch party in Columbia shortly after being projected the winner.

Saturday's result now places the onus on Haley, who continued in her concession speech to insist she has no plans to drop out of the race — a move that she said would leave the Republican voters in the upcoming primary states with "a Soviet-style



Republican presidential candidate former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley speaking at an election night event, Saturday in Charleston, S.C. AP/PTI

election with only one candidate.

"There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative. I said earlier this week that no matter what happens in South Carolina, I would continue to run for president," Haley told supporters in Charleston.

"I said earlier this week that no matter what happens in South Carolina, I would continue to run for president. I'm a woman of my word. I'm not giv-

ing up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden," she told her supporters in this historic city, a few blocks away from where she had launched her presidential campaign about a year ago.

"What I saw today was South Carolina's frustration with our country's direction. I've seen that same frustration nationwide. I share it. I feel it to my core. I couldn't be more worried for America. It seems like our country is coming apart. But here's the thing, America will come apart if we make the wrong choices. We need to beat Joe Biden in November," she said amidst cheers from her supporters.

"I don't believe Donald Trump can beat Joe Biden. Nearly every day, Trump drives people away, including with his comments just yesterday. Today, in South Carolina, we're getting around 40 per cent of the vote. That's about what we got in New

Hampshire too.

"I'm an accountant. I know 40 per cent is not 50 per cent. But I also know 40 per cent is not some tiny group. There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative," Haley said, making her case for her to continue her battle against Trump.

"South Carolina has spoken. We're the fourth state to do so. In the next ten days, another 21 states and territories will speak. They have the right to a real choice, not a Soviet-style election with only one candidate.

And I have a duty to give them that choice. We can't afford four more years of Biden's failures or Trump's lack of focus," Haley said. A confident Trump celebrated his victory in Columbia, South Carolina. "There's never been a spirit like this, and I just want to say that. I have never seen the Republican Party so unified," he

told his cheering supporters. Notably, he did not mention Haley in his speech nor did he ask her to drop from the race.

Haley in his speech in Charleston congratulated Trump on his South Carolina victory. Trump, who by now has won all four Republican primaries in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina, exuded confidence that he would defeat incumbent President Biden in November.

"We're going to be up here on November 5, and we're going to look at Joe Biden, and we're gonna look him right in the eye. He's destroying our country and we're gonna say 'Joe, you're fired. Get out. Get out. You're fired,'" Trump said amidst loud applause from his audience. In her speech, Haley criticised both Biden and Trump. "Does anyone seriously think Joe Biden or Donald Trump will unite our country to solve our problems? One of them calls his fellow Americans fascists.

# Sunak warns of 'toxic' culture in UK politics

## Gaza temporary truce in progress: Israeli media

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has warned against a growing toxic culture in politics amid reports of members of Parliament facing security threats over their voting intentions in the House of Commons related to the Israel-Gaza conflict.

The 43-year-old British Indian leader issued a statement on Saturday to condemn the hijacking of protests on the streets of the country by extremists to glorify terrorism. It came as a report in 'The Sunday Times' newspaper claims that three unnamed female MPs have been sanctioned additional security after concerns about their safety.

"The explosion in prejudice and antisemitism since the Hamas attacks on the 7 October [2023] are as unacceptable as they are un-British. Simply put antisemitism is racism," said Sunak in his statement.

"Legitimate protests hijacked by extremists to promote and glorify terrorism, elected representatives verbally threatened and physically, violently targeted and antisemitic tropes beamed onto our own Parliament building," he said, with reference to an offensive projection on the Palace of Westminster recently.

"And in Parliament this week a very dangerous signal was sent that this sort of intimidation works. It is toxic for our society and our politics and is an affront to the liberties and values we hold dear here in Britain," he said of the scenes of chaos in the Commons last week over a Gaza ceasefire vote.

While he did not make a reference to it specifically, his intervention came soon after the governing Conservatives suspended party MP Lee Anderson after he claimed during an interview that Pakistani-origin London Mayor Sadiq Khan was under the control of "Islamists".



The Opposition had demanded action over the remarks, which Labour Leader Keir Starmer branded as a "racist and Islamophobic outburst".

"This isn't just embarrassing for the Conservative Party, it emboldens the worst forces in our politics," said Starmer.

The row follows an article by former home secretary Suella Braverman over the weekend that claimed Islamists and extremists were taking charge in all walks of life in Britain, attacked as "extreme rhetoric" by the Opposition parties.

Braverman, sacked from the Cabinet by Sunak last year, was reacting to Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle saying that he had selected certain amendments to a motion related to ceasefire in Gaza in a bid to ensure all options were on the table for MPs to vote on and to protect MPs' safety.

According to 'The Sunday Times' report, UK Security Minister Tom Tugendhat has been working with the Home Office, the police and the parliamentary authorities to significantly enhance the safety and security of MPs. As part of the overhaul, the royal and VIP executive committee (RAVEC), which is responsible for the security of the royal family as well as senior politicians including the prime minister and home secretary, has been brought in to help assess the threat to MPs. "Many MPs are petrified by the abuse they are facing," a senior security source was quoted as saying.

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Mediators are making progress on an agreement for a weeks-long ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and the release of dozens of hostages held in Gaza as well as Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, Israeli media reported Sunday. Israel's War Cabinet met to discuss the proposal late Saturday, but there was no official word on what they had decided. Several Israeli media outlets, citing unnamed officials, said it tacitly approved the deal and that Israel would send a delegation to Qatar for further discussions.

Hamas says it has not yet been involved in the latest proposal developed by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, but the reported outline largely matches its earlier demands for the first phase of a truce. Hamas' top political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was in Cairo last week. Israel is meanwhile developing plans for expanding its offensive to the southern-most city of Rafah, on the

Gaza-Egypt border, where more than half the territory's population of 2.3 million have sought refuge in squalid tent camps, packed apartments and overflowing shelters. Aid groups have warned of a catastrophe and the US and other allies of Israel have said it must avoid harming civilians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he'll convene the Cabinet this week to "approve the operational plans for action in Rafah", including the evacuation of civilians.

A senior official from Egypt, which along with Qatar is a mediator between Israel and the Hamas militant group, said Saturday that the draft cease-fire deal includes the release of up to 40 women and older hostages in return for up to 300 Palestinian prisoners, mostly women, minors and older people.

The Egyptian official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the negotiations, said the proposed six-week pause in fighting would

include allowing hundreds of trucks to bring desperately needed aid into Gaza every day, including the northern half of the besieged territory. He said that both sides agreed to continue negotiations during the pause for further releases and a permanent cease-fire.

The prime minister's office did not respond to a request for comment on the War Cabinet's discussions or the Israeli media reports.

Negotiators face an unofficial deadline of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan around March 10, a period that often sees heightened Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Hamas has said it will not release all of the remaining hostages until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws its forces from the territory, and is also demanding the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including senior militants — conditions Netanyahu has vehemently rejected.

But an earlier proposal from Hamas outlined an initial phase that resembles the

reported draft agreement, indicating the two sides might be able to converge on a temporary cease-fire.

Israel declared war after the October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were released in a cease-fire and exchange deal in November. Around 130 remain in captivity, a fourth of whom are believed to be dead.

Families of the hostages have followed the fits and starts of the negotiations with hope and anguish.

"It feels like Schindler's list. Will he be on the list or not?" Shelly Shem Tov, the mother of Omer, 21, who is held captive, told Israeli Army Radio of her son's chances of being freed in an emerging deal.

Israel responded to the attack with a massive air and ground offensive that has driven around 80 per cent of Gaza's population from their homes, putting hundreds of

thousands at risk of starvation and the spread of infectious disease. The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza says 29,606 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war, two-thirds of them women and children.

The ministry's death toll doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Israel says its troops have killed more than 10,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has devastated the territory's health sector, with less than half of hospitals even partially functioning as scores are killed each day in Israeli bombardment.

At the Emirates Hospital in Rafah, three to four newborns are placed in each of its 20 incubators, which are designed for just one. Dr. Amal Ismail said two to three newborns die in a single shift, in part because many of their families live in tents in rainy, cold weather.

"No matter how much we work with them, it is all wasted," she said.

# Corruption scandals cast shadow over Portugal's general election

AP ■ LISBON

The official two-week campaign period before Portugal's early general election began on Sunday, with the country's two moderate mainstream parties once again expected to collect the most votes but with the expected rise of a populist party potentially adding momentum to Europe's drift to the right. The centre-left Socialist Party and centre-right Social Democratic Party have alternated in power for decades. But they are unsure of how much support they might need from smaller rival parties for the parliamentary votes needed to form a government after the March 10 vote.

Corruption scandals have cast a shadow over the ballot. They have also fed public disenchantment with the country's political class as Portugal prepares to celebrate 50 years of democracy, following the Carnation Revolution that toppled a rightist dictatorship on April 25, 1974. The election is



Socialist Party leader Pedro Nuno Santos, left, and Luis Montenegro, leader of the Social Democratic Party, greet each other before an election TV debate in Lisbon, Portugal. The centre-left Socialist Party and centre-right Social Democratic Party have alternated in power for decades. But they are unsure of how much support they might need from smaller rival parties to form a government after the March 10 vote.

being held after a Socialist government collapsed last November following a corruption investigation. That case brought a police search of Prime Minister António Costa's official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff. Costa hasn't been accused of any crime.

Also in recent weeks, a Lisbon court decided that a former Socialist prime minister should stand trial for corruption. Prosecutors allege that José Sócrates, prime minister between 2005-2011, pocketed around 34 million euros (USD 36.7 million) during his time in power from graft, fraud and money laundering.

The Social Democratic Party has also been tainted by corruption allegations.

During the recent weeks of unofficial campaigning, a graft investigation in Portugal's Madeira Islands triggered the resignation of two prominent Social Democrat officials. The scandal erupted on the same day the Social Democratic Party unveiled an anti-corruption

billboard in Lisbon that said, "It can't go on like this."

A housing crisis, persistent levels of low pay and unreliable public health services are other areas where the records of the two main parties are at issue.

Hot-button topics that have driven political debate and encouraged populist parties elsewhere in Europe, such as climate change, migration and religious differences, have largely been absent in Portugal's campaign. A five-year-old populist and nationalist party called Chega! (in English, Enough!) has made the fight against corruption one of its political banners. "Portugal needs cleaning out," one of its billboards declares. The party's leader, 41-year-old lawyer André Ventura, has been riding in third place in opinion polls and could become a kingmaker if his political influence grows. His party got just 1.3 per cent of votes in a 2019 election, but jumped to 7.3 per cent in 2022. It could collect more than double that this time, polls sug-

gest, if a protest vote materialises. A key question is whether the Social Democrats will end up needing the votes of Chega! to make up a parliamentary majority after eight years in opposition.

The Socialist Party could, as in the past, forge parliamentary alliances with the Portuguese Communist Party or Left Bloc party to take power. Socialist leader Pedro Nuno Santos, his party's candidate for prime minister, is a lawmaker and a former minister for housing and infrastructure. Santos, 46, quit the previous government under a cloud over his handling of bailed-out flag carrier TAP Air Portugal and a dispute over the site of a new Lisbon airport. Luis Montenegro, the 51-year-old Social Democrat leader aiming to become prime minister, has been a lawmaker for more than 20 years. He heads the Democratic Alliance, a grouping with two smaller right-of-centre parties formed for the election.

# Brit Indian doctor's rock band embarks on UK-wide tour

PTI ■ LONDON

A 25-year-old British Indian doctor whose passion for music resulted in a band with some of his fellow medical colleagues has embarked on his first UK-wide tour, with the launch show in London recently proving a sell-out. Gulzar (Gulz) Singh Dhanoya started the indie-rock band named Gulz during his university days as a medical student. It was over the COVID pandemic that the singer-songwriter plucked up the courage to put out some of his musical creations onto the audio streaming service SoundCloud and soon this one-man bedroom project struck a chord with an ever-expanding fan base. The lead singer and songwriter is now busy rehearsing with his four bandmates for their next live gig in Birmingham on March 16.

"How it usually works is that at the moment I go away and think of an idea for a song and it's very bare bones. Then we go into a studio rehearsal room and all of us together kind of think about our parts and we just keep playing it over and over. It's a great way to kind of balance our creative ideas," Gulz told PTI.

While two of his other bandmates are also National Health Service (NHS) doctors like him, two are professionals in other fields which he feels helps bring some flexibility to striking a balance with late-night hospital shifts.

He admits sometimes wondering how they are all able to commit to their music with stressful full-time jobs. "It's a huge commitment. Obviously, the working day is long and then it's fitting in shows and rehearsals and social media

stuff. It's like a second job and one that doesn't realistically pay compared to a 'normal' job. It's very cliché, but it's just because we love it," he said.

Born in Newcastle to a Punjabi father born in India and mother born in Southall, west London, music was a part of Gulz's life from a very young age.

From strains of Mohammed Rafi to Stevie Wonder, his musical influences were an eclectic mix — something that chimes with the kind of tunes he is now creating lyrically and musically.

"I began by sort of writing music that sounds like the music I like and have tried to retain that in some ways. I just try to weave certain themes of my life at the time into the stuff that I'm writing, be it relationships and breakups or just having some fun," he said.

# Tractor protests threaten to derail green farming policies

AP ■ WESTROZEBEKE (BELGIUM)

It was the puddles of green sludge left by the tires of massive tractors in western Belgium's industrial farmlands that drew the attention of biological engineer Ineke Maes. The slime was destructive algae, the result of the excess of chemicals used by farmers to boost their crops, but at a high cost to nature. Maes had hoped the European Union's environmental policies would start to make a fundamental difference by improving exhausted soils.

In recent weeks, some of those tractors moved off the land and onto the roads, blocking major cities and economic lifelines from Warsaw to Madrid and from Athens to Brussels. Farmers were demanding the reversal of some of the most progressive measures in the world to counter climate change and protect biodiversity, arguing

that the rules were harming their livelihoods and strangling them with red tape.

And the impact has been stunning.

The farmers' protests affected the daily lives of people across the 27-nation bloc, costing businesses tens of millions of euros in transportation delays. The disruption triggered knee jerk reactions from politicians at national and EU level: they committed to rolling back policies, some of them years in the making, on everything from the use of pesticides to limiting the amount of manure that could be spread on fields. To environmentalists like Maes, who works for the Belgian Better Environment Federation umbrella group, it would almost be laughable if it were not so depressing.

"In the environmental movement, we joke that we should get tractors ourselves to make a point. Then we would

be competing fair and square. The purpose should be that we get negotiations, and that we get a deal through democratic process — the rules, you know," she said. Reasoned arguments, she says, have been drowned out by the rumble of tractor engines.

And there's no end in sight.

After hundreds of tractors disrupted the EU summit in Brussels early this month at a volume that kept some leaders awake at night, farmers plan to return on Monday. They intend to be there when agriculture ministers discuss an emergency item on the agenda — the simplification of agricultural rules and a decrease in checks at farms that environmentalists fear could amount to a further weakening of standards.

The political noise level from the tractors — not to mention the loads of manure dumped outside official buildings — does get through, offi-

cial said. "That puts a bit more pressure on the ministers inside. So I would believe that ministers will be a bit more — insisting to have concrete results," said a high-level EU official, who asked not to be identified because the meeting has yet to take place.

It is this attitude that drives the environmental lobby and NGOs to distraction: knowing that scientific arguments are too often no match for the rule of the street. As a result, the EU's flagship Green Deal, that aims to make the continent carbon-neutral by 2050, is under threat.

"You really should not lose that long-term view, that vision of the future when you are working on policy," said Maes. "You should not respond to the issues of the day by simply scrapping very important rules that have been seriously discussed, considered, that have been included in environmental impact reports and so on —

# Manhattan residential building kills Indian journo

New York (PTI): A 27-year-old Indian national, who worked as a journalist here, tragically lost his life in a "devastating" fire caused by a lithium-ion battery in an apartment building in Manhattan. Fazil Khan was killed in the fire that broke out in a six-story residential building at 2 St. Nicholas Place in Harlem, Manhattan that left about 17 other people injured.

The New York City Fire Department said that its marshals have determined that the "devastating" fire was caused by a lithium-ion battery.

Khan is a journalist with New York-based media company The Hechinger Report, which is focused on innovation and inequality in education. The Consulate General of India in New York expressed condolences on Khan's death and said it is extending all possible assistance to repatriate his mortal remains to his family in India. "Saddened to learn about the death of 27-year old Indian national Fazil Khan in an unfortunate fire incident in Harlem, NY," the Consulate said in a post on X Saturday.

The Consulate said it is in touch with Khan's family and friends.

"We continue to extend all possible assistance in repatriation of his mortal remains to India," the Consulate said. Khan was a data reporter at The Hechinger Report and according to his profile on X, he was an alumnus of Columbia Journalism School. The Hechinger Report said in a post on X that it learned Saturday that Khan died in a fire in the New York City building where he lived. "We are devastated by the loss of such a great colleague and wonderful person, and our hearts go out to his family.

He will be dearly missed," it said. Firefighters said the fire originated in the building's 3rd floor. At 2:14 pm Friday, the FDNY responded to the 2-alarm fire at 2 St. Nicholas Place in Harlem. Firefighters arrived within minutes to find people on the fire escape.



# Belarusians vote amid opposition calls for poll boycott

AP ■ TALLINN (ESTONIA)

Polls opened Sunday in Belarus' tightly controlled parliamentary and local elections that are set to cement the steely rule of the country's authoritarian leader, despite calls for a boycott from the opposition, which dismissed the balloting as a "senseless farce."

President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand for nearly 30 years, accuses the West of trying to use the vote to undermine his government and "destabilize" the nation of 9.5 million people.

Most candidates belong to the four officially registered parties: Belaya Rus, the Communist Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Party of Labor and Justice. Those parties all support Lukashenko's policies. About a dozen other parties were denied registration last year.

Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who is in exile in neighboring Lithuania after challenging Lukashenko in the 2020 presidential election, urged voters to boycott the elections.

"There are no people on the ballot who would offer real changes because the regime only has allowed puppets convenient for it to take part," Tsikhanouskaya said in a video statement. "We are calling to boycott this senseless farce, to ignore this election without choice."

Sunday's balloting is the first election in Belarus since the contentious 2020 vote that handed Lukashenko his sixth term in office and triggered an unprecedented wave of mass demonstrations.

Protests swept the country for months, bringing hundreds of thousands into the streets. More than 35,000 people were arrested. Thousands were beaten in police custody, and hundreds of independent media outlets and nongovernmental organizations were shut down and outlawed.

Lukashenko has relied on subsidies and political support from his main ally, Russia, to survive the protests. He allowed Moscow to use Belarusian territory to send troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

The election takes place amid a relentless crackdown on dissent. Over 1,400 political prisoners remain behind bars, including leaders of opposition parties and renowned human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022.

The opposition says the early balloting that began Tuesday offers fertile ground for the vote to be manipulated, with ballot boxes unprotected for five days. Election officials said Sunday that over 40% of the country's voters cast ballots during the five days of early voting. Turnout stood at

43.64% by 9 a.m. on Sunday, an hour after polls formally opened, according to the Belarusian Central Election Commission. The Viasna Human Rights Center said students, soldiers, teachers and other civil servants were forced to participate in early voting.

"Authorities are using all available means to ensure the result they need — from airing TV propaganda to forcing voters to cast ballots early," said



Viasna representative Pavel Sapelka. "Detentions, arrests and searches are taking place during the vote."

Speaking during Tuesday's meeting with top Belarusian law enforcement officials, Lukashenko alleged without offering evidence that Western countries were pondering plans to stage a coup in the country or to try to seize power by force. He ordered police to beef up armed patrols across

Belarus, declaring that "it's the most important element of ensuring law and order." After the vote, Belarus is set to form a new state body — the 1,200-seat All-Belarus Popular Assembly that will include top officials, local legislators, union members, pro-government activists and others. It will have broad powers, including the authority to consider constitutional amendments and to appoint election officials and judges.

Lukashenko was believed a few years ago to be considering whether to lead the new body after stepping down, but his calculus has apparently changed, and now few observers expect him to step down after his current term ends next year.

For the first time, curtains were removed from voting booths at polling stations, and voters were banned from taking pictures of their ballots. During the 2020 election,

activists encouraged voters to photograph their ballots in a bid to prevent authorities from manipulating the vote in Lukashenko's favor.

Belarusian state TV aired footage of Interior Ministry drills in which police detained a purported offender who was photographing his ballot and others who created an artificial queue outside a polling station.

Belarus for the first time also refused to invite observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to monitor the election. Belarus is a member of the OSCE, a top trans-Atlantic security and rights group, and its monitors have been the only international observers at Belarusian elections for decades.

Since 1995, not a single election in Belarus has been recognized as free and fair by the OSCE. The OSCE said the decision not to allow the agency's monitors deprived the

country of a "comprehensive assessment by an international body."

"The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate as those who voice dissent or stand up for the human rights of others are subject to investigation, persecution and frequently prosecution," it said in a statement.

Observers noted that authorities have not even tried to pretend that the vote is democratic. The election offers the government an opportunity to run a "systems test after massive protests and a serious shock of the last presidential election and see whether it works," said Artym Shraibman, a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center. "The parliament will be sterile after the opposition and all alternative voices were barred from campaigning. It's important for authorities to erase any memory of the protests."

## Pak EC gears up to hold Prez poll by March 9

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Still struggling to address the rigging allegations after general elections in the country, Pakistan is now gearing up to elect the new president by March 9. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is set to hold an election for the office of the country's president by March 9, two days before the retirement of half of the senators after completing their six-year term, Dawn reported quoting sources.

"The president will be elected by the present senators after setting up of all the four provincial assemblies," a senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) office-bearer said, adding that the election could take place on March 9 or 10.

The six-party alliance, set to form a coalition government at the Centre under the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Shehbaz Sharif, has already announced Asif Ali Zardari as its consensus candidate for the country's top constitutional office.

Zardari previously served as the president from September 2008 to 2013 after the resignation of the military ruler Pervez Musharraf.

Article 41(4) of the Constitution says that "election to the office of president shall be held not earlier than sixty days and not later than thirty days before the expiration of the term of the president in office: Provided that, if the election cannot be held within the period aforesaid because the National Assembly is dissolved, it shall be held within thirty days of the general election to the Assembly."

Since the general elections were held on February 8, the presidential election is required to be conducted by March 9, just two days before the retirement of half of the 100-member Senate.

The sources said the Senate elections were also due in the first week of March, but because of the delay in the general elections of the National and provincial assemblies, the



Senate elections will now be held either in the last week of March or the first week of April which means the upper house will remain dysfunctional and incomplete for some period.

According to a PPP leader, it is because of the upcoming presidential election and to ensure Zardari's win that the party has stopped its two senators, Nisar Khuhro and Jam Mahtab Dahar, from taking the oath as MPAs in the Sindh Assembly.

According to the formula applied for the president's election, the vote of a senator is counted as a single vote, whereas in the Sindh Assembly, one vote will be equal to nearly four votes. In this way, Zardari will get benefit in the presidential elections.

Incumbent President Dr Arif Alvi is already on an extended tenure after completing his five-year term on September 9 last year. Article 44(1) of the Constitution says that the president will hold office for a term of five years from the day he assumes charge, but he continues to hold the office until a successor is chosen.

Dr Alvi is the country's fourth democratically elected president to complete the five-year term. The three presidents before Dr Alvi who completed their full terms were Chaudhary Fazal Elahi (fifth president, from 1973 to 1978), Asif Ali Zardari (11th, from 2008 to 2013), and Mamnoon Hussain (12th, from 2013 to 2018). Therefore, Dr Alvi is the third consecutive president to

have a full term and the first one to have an extended term due to an incomplete electoral college, which comprises the National Assembly, Senate and the four provincial assemblies.

The term-wise data of senators suggests that the PML-N and the PPP stand to lose a large chunk of their members — 69 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively — as they retire on March 11 after completing their terms. But after the February 8 polls, both the PML-N and PPP will be able to add to their tally in the Senate. The PTI, however, will be at a definite disadvantage if it fails to conduct the intra-party elections before the Senate polls, and it may have to depend on the SIC to get representation in the upper house of the parliament. Up until now, the total strength of the Senate has been 100, including 23 members each from the four federating units and four each from erstwhile Fata and Islamabad.

The 23 seats allocated to a province comprise 14 general seats, four reserved for women, four for technocrats and one for a minority member. This time around, though, only 96 members will grace the chamber as the representation of the erstwhile tribal areas will end following their merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the 25th Constitutional Amendment.

This means that the upcoming elections to the Senate will elect 48 new senators — 11 each from all four provinces on general and technocrats' seats, two from Islamabad and two minority members from Punjab and Sindh. At present, the house has 97 members due to the death of PML-N's Rana Maqbool Ahmed and the resignations of PTI's Shaukat Tarin and Anwarul Haq Kakar of the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) after assuming the office of the caretaker prime minister. The term of a senator is six years, but half of them retire every three years, and elections are held for new members, according to Dawn.

## Owais elected Sindh Assembly Speaker, Anthony his deputy

PTI ■ KARACHI

Senior leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party Syed Owais Shah was on Sunday elected as the Speaker of the Sindh province Assembly while the party's Christian face Anthony Naveed was elected as his deputy, becoming the first non-Muslim deputy speaker in the country's history.

Outgoing speaker Agha Siraj Durrani said a total of 147 votes were cast for the post of speaker, of which Shah received 111. His opponent and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan) leader Sofia Shah got 36 votes, Dawn newspaper reported. Nine independent members of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and one member of the Jamaat-e-Islami did not participate in the voting and boycotted the election.

PPP leader and prominent Christian rights activist Anthony Naveed was elected as the deputy speaker of the provincial assembly, becoming the first non-Muslim deputy speaker in the history of Pakistan. Naveed secured 111 votes while MQM-P's Rashid

Khan got 36 votes. Following the win, Naveed took his oath in Urdu and then went up to the speaker's dais to embrace Speaker Shah.

On Sunday, nine PTI-backed independent members of the Sindh Assembly also took the oath, resulting in a total of 157 members taking the oath. Jamaat-e-Islami's member Muhammad Farooq also took the oath, while 3 members of the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) were absent.

With 114 members, the PPP is the largest party in the Sindh Assembly, and MQM-P is the second-largest party with 36 seats. The GDA has 3 members, Jamaat-e-Islami has 1, and there are 9 independent members. On Saturday, several new and young faces, who had won the recent general election in Sindh, were sworn in as lawmakers of the Sindh Assembly. Many members, being first-time lawmakers with no previous parliamentary experience, took their oath in the session chaired by outgoing Speaker Durrani, expressing hope to bring about change.

## Maryam Nawaz files nomination for Punjab CM

Lahore (PTI) ■

Senior PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, on Sunday submitted her nomination papers for the post of chief minister of Pakistan's politically crucial Punjab province. "The nomination papers of Maryam Nawaz Sharif for the Chief Minister of Punjab have been submitted," the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) said in a post on X.

Maryam, the 50-year-old senior vice president of the PML-N, is set to become the first woman chief minister of Punjab province, a province of over 120 million people, as she enjoys the support of the majority in the house. She has already been given security usually provided to the chief minister and she is holding meetings with the top bureaucracy of the province. She is considered to be the political heir of PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif, who surprisingly nominated his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif as his party's prime ministerial candidate.

"The election of Chief Minister Punjab will take place on Monday (tomorrow). The candidates of CM can submit nomination papers on Sunday (today)," Punjab Assembly Secretary Amer Habib said.

## Pakistan plane crash in May 2020 blamed on 'human error'

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan International Airlines plane crash that killed 101 people near the Jinnah International Airport here in May 2020 was a result of "human error" by the two pilots, according to the investigation report on the incident.

The Aircraft Investigation Board (AIB) finally released its report on the reasons for the Airbus 320 failing to land safely at the Karachi airport and instead crashing into a residential neighbourhood near the airport. The board has held the failure of proper judgement while landing by the two pilots as the main reason for the fatal crash in which 101 people, including 99 passengers, lost their lives while two passengers miraculously survived.

Several houses in the neighbourhood and parked vehicles were destroyed and damaged in the disaster. The report said the air traffic controller had four times warned the pilots that they shouldn't land as their altitude was not right. According to the report,

when the pilots first tried to land the aircraft, its engines hit the ground, which led to the system supplying lubricant to the engines shutting down. The report said that "engine failure" eventually led to the crash. The report also held the PIA and the Civil Aviation Authority responsible for not having clear procedures on whether pilots should fast during the month of Ramadan while on duty.

The AIB also noted that after the engine failure, the power supply went off in the aircraft and the last four minutes of the flight were not recorded on the data box. The pilots have also been held responsible for not being in sync with each other when trying to land the plane. Airworthiness documents show that the Airbus A320 had been previously used by China Eastern Airlines from 2004 to 2014, following which it was inducted into the PIA's fleet.

There have been eight recorded incidents of the PIA aircraft crashes between 1965 and 2020.

## 'Delays in Western military aid costing lives'

AP ■ KYIV

Half of promised Western military support to Ukraine fails to arrive on time, complicating the task of military planners and ultimately costing the lives of soldiers, the country's defense minister said on Sunday. Speaking at the "Ukraine. Year 2024" forum in Kyiv, Rustan Umerov said that each delayed aid shipment meant Ukrainian troop losses, and underscored Russia's superior military might. Commemorations to mark the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Saturday brought expressions of continued support, new bilateral security agree-

ments and fresh aid commitments from Ukraine's Western allies. But Umerov said they still needed to deliver on their commitments if Ukraine is to have any chance of holding out against Russia.

"We look to the enemy: their economy is almost 2 trillion dollars, they use up to 15% official and non-official budget (funds) for the war, which constitutes over \$100 billion dollars annually. So basically whenever a commitment doesn't come on time, we lose people, we lose territory," he said.

Umerov and Commander-in-Chief Oleksandr Syrskyi toured front-line combat posts earlier Sunday amid a worsening ammunition shortage and

dogged Russian attacks in the east. They heard from front-line troops and "thoroughly analyzed" the battlefield situation on their visit, Syrskyi said in a Telegram update. He did not specify where exactly he and Umerov went, but said that "the situation is difficult" for Ukrainian troops and "needs constant control" along many stretches of the front.

Ukraine has suffered setbacks on the battlefield, having lost the strategic eastern city of Avdiivka following intense battles this month, and as military aid for Kyiv hangs in the balance in the US Congress.

Syrskyi earlier this month replaced Ukraine's top military commander, Valerii Zaluzhny,

in the most significant shake-up of the top brass since the start of the full-scale war, after a long-expected counteroffensive last summer failed to produce major breakthroughs. Russia still controls roughly a quarter of the country.

Russian shelling and rocket strikes on Sunday continued to pummel Ukraine's south and east, as local Ukrainian officials reported that at least two civilians were killed and a further eight suffered wounds in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson provinces.

A woman was wounded and a railway station turned into a smoldering ruin amid heavy shelling in the eastern city of Kostiantynivka, according to

the head of the municipal military administration. Ukraine's public broadcaster, Suspilne, cited local police as saying that the strikes also damaged an Orthodox church, over a dozen residential buildings and dozens of shops, a post office, schools and local government offices. Russia and Ukraine also continued to trade nightly drone attacks, with Ukraine's air defenses shooting down 16 of 18 Iranian-made Shahed drones launched overnight by Moscow. A Russian drone on Sunday morning struck an unspecified facility in Ukraine's western Khmelnytskyi region, the regional military administration reported without giving details.

## SL to end visa extensions granted to war-hit Russian and Ukrainian tourists

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Thousands of Russians and Ukrainians staying in Sri Lanka on extended visas due to the war have been asked to leave the island nation within two weeks, officials said. The immigration controller has issued a notice to the Tourism Ministry that the Russian and Ukrainian tourists must leave the country within two weeks from February 23 as their visas have lapsed, they said.

However, President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office issued a notice that says he has ordered an investigation as to how the decision to ask them to leave had been made without a cabinet decision to revoke the previous extension of stay.

The President's Media Division said that the Sri Lankan government has not officially decided to revoke the

visa extensions previously granted to these tourists. Russian and Ukrainian tourists had been allowed extended stays in the country due to the war breaking out between the two European countries. Nearly 300,000 Russians and 20,000 Ukrainians have arrived in Sri Lanka since the outbreak of the war in 2022.

However, the number of tourists currently residing on the island nation on extended visas is not available. Authorities said the decision to allow them longer stays was then made because of flight shortages.

Immigration authorities said there have been complaints of abuse of tourist visas by Russian and Ukrainian nationals running illegal businesses, employing foreigners, and deploying payment methods for services bypassing local systems.

## Idaho set to execute long-time death row inmate

AP ■ BOISE (IDAHO)

For nearly 50 years, Idaho's prison staffers have been serving Thomas Eugene Creech three meals a day, checking on him during rounds and taking him to medical appointments.

This Wednesday, some of Idaho's prison staffers will be asked to kill him. Barring any last-minute stay, the 73-year-old, one of the nation's longest-serving death row inmates, will be executed by lethal injection for killing a fellow prisoner with a battery-filled sock in 1981. Creech's killing of David Jensen, a young, disabled man who was serving time for car theft, was his last in a broad path of destruction that saw Creech convicted of five murders in three states. He is also suspected of at least a half-dozen others.

But now, decades later, Creech is mostly known inside the walls of the Idaho Maximum Security Institution as just "Tom," a generally well-behaved old-timer with a penchant for poetry. His unsuccessful bid for clemency even found support from a former warden at the penitentiary, prison staffers who recounted how he wrote them poems of support or condolence and the judge who sentenced Creech to death. "Some of our correctional officers have grown up with Tom Creech," Idaho Department of Correction Director Josh Tewalt said Friday. "Our warden has a long-standing relationship with him. ... There's a familiarity and a rapport that has been built over time."

Creech's attorneys have filed a flurry of last-minute appeals in four different courts in recent months trying to halt the execution, which would be Idaho's first in 12 years. They have argued Idaho's refusal to say where its execution drug was obtained violates his rights and that he received ineffective assistance of counsel. A three-judge panel of the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday rejected an argument that Creech should not be executed because he was sentenced by a judge rather

than a jury.

It's not clear how many people Creech, an Ohio native, killed before he was imprisoned in Idaho in 1974. At one point he claimed to have killed as many as 50 people, but many of the confessions were made under the influence of now discredited "truth serum" drugs and filled with outlandish tales of occult-driven human sacrifice and contract killings for a powerful motorcycle gang.

Official estimates vary, but authorities tend to focus on 11 deaths. Creech's attorneys did not immediately return phone calls from The Associated Press. In 1973, Creech was tried for the murder of 70-year-old Paul Schrader, a retiree who was stabbed to death in the Tucson, Arizona, motel where Creech was living. Creech used Schrader's credit cards and vehicle to leave Tucson for Portland, Oregon. A jury acquitted him, but authorities say they have no doubt he was responsible.

The next year, Creech was committed to Oregon State Hospital for a few months. He

earned a weekend pass and travelled to Sacramento, California, where he killed Vivian Grant Robinson at her home. Creech then used Robinson's phone to let the hospital know he would return a day late. That crime went unsolved until Creech later confessed while in custody in Idaho; he wasn't convicted until 1980.

After he was released from the Oregon State Hospital, Creech got a job at a church in Portland doing maintenance work. He had living quarters at the church, and it was there he shot and killed 22-year-old William Joseph Dean in 1974. Authorities believe he then fatally shot Sandra Jane Ramsamooj at the Salem grocery store where she worked.

Creech was finally arrested in November 1974. He and a girlfriend were hitchhiking in Idaho when they were picked up by two painters, Thomas Arnold and John Bradford. Creech shot both men to death and the girlfriend cooperated with authorities.

While in custody, Creech

confessed to a number of other killings. Some appeared to be fabricated, but he provided information that led police to the bodies of Gordon Lee Stanton and Charles Thomas Miller near Las Vegas, and of Rick Stewart McKenzie, 22, near Baggs, Wyoming.

Creech initially was sentenced to death for killing the painters. But after the US Supreme Court barred automatic death sentences in 1976, his sentence was converted to life in prison.

That changed after he killed Jensen, who was serving time for car theft. Jensen's life hadn't been easy: He suffered a nearly fatal gun injury as a teen that left him with serious disabilities including partial paralysis. Jensen's relatives opposed Creech's bid for clemency. They described Jensen as a gentle soul and a prankster who loved hunting and spending time outdoors, who was "the peanut butter" to his sister's jelly. His daughter, who was 4 when he was killed, spoke of how she never got to know him, and how unfair it

was that Creech is still around when her father isn't.

Creech's supporters, meanwhile, say decades spent in a prison cell have left him changed. One death row prison staffer told the parole board last month that while she cannot begin to understand the suffering Creech dealt to others, he is now a person who makes positive contributions to his community. His execution date will be difficult for everyone at the prison, she said, especially those who have known him for years.

"I don't want to be dismissive of what he did and the countless people who were impacted by that in real significant ways," said Tewalt, the corrections director. "At the same time, you also can't be dismissive of the effect it's going to have on people who have established a relationship with him. On Thursday, Tom's not going to be there. You know he's not coming back to that unit — that's real. It would be really difficult to not feel some sort of emotion about that."

When Creech was sentenced to life in prison, he was serving time for car theft. Jensen's life hadn't been easy: He suffered a nearly fatal gun injury as a teen that left him with serious disabilities including partial paralysis. Jensen's relatives opposed Creech's bid for clemency. They described Jensen as a gentle soul and a prankster who loved hunting and spending time outdoors, who was "the peanut butter" to his sister's jelly. His daughter, who was 4 when he was killed, spoke of how she never got to know him, and how unfair it

# Markets may face volatility amid derivatives expiry: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With no major domestic market-moving event scheduled this week, stock market investors would largely focus on global trends and foreign fund movement, and may face volatility amid monthly derivatives expiry, analysts said.

"We expect volatility to remain high due to the scheduled expiry of February month derivatives contracts. Besides, participants should keep a close watch on the performance of the global indices, especially the US for cues," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Last week, BSE Sensex rose 716.16 points or 1 per cent to close at 73,142.8 points and inched closer to its record high level of 73,427.5.

"Markets remained volatile in the passing week but managed to end with a gain of nearly a per cent. After the initial rise, mixed global cues combined with profit taking in select heavyweights capped the momentum.

benchmark indices, Nifty and Sensex, continued to oscillate in a narrow range till the end and finally settled at 22,212.70 and 73,142.80 respectively," Mishra said.

After the marginal dip, the US benchmark index, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) has resumed the uptrend and also crossed a new milestone of 39,000.

With a strong base of around 38,400, we expect the prevailing tone to continue in the index and that could also help our markets to maintain the positive bias, Mishra added.

Investors are also expected to take guidance from the minutes of the February Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting released by the central bank last week.

The rate-setting panel has hinted a cautious approach towards monetary easing amid uncertainties around inflation outlook.

"On the economy front, almost all MPC members continued to express a cautious approach to monetary easing, given the uncertainties surrounding the inflation outlook," Shrikant



Chouhan, Head Equity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

In the latest bi-monthly policy review held earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India's six-member panel decided to leave the key policy rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the sixth time in a row.

Analysts pointed out that

factors like crude oil prices, rupee movement, quarterly GDP data to be released in India as well as in the US, and monthly global manufacturing PMI data in the coming week will also influence the market sentiment.

With Q3 FY24 results season behind us, the market focus will be on the macro

developments both domestic and international, Chouhan said.

Besides, six IPOs worth more than Rs 3,300 crore will be hitting the stock markets next week, including Platinum Industries and Exicom Tele-Systems public issues which will open for subscription on February 27 and IPO of Bharat Highways

Infrastructure Investment Trust on February 28.

Paytm issue may be reviewed, scrutiny on Byju's progressing well: ICAI By Bishwaswar Malakar

Kolkata, Feb 25 (PTI) Amid the unfolding Paytm Payments Bank Ltd crisis, Institute of Chartered Accountants of India President Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal on Sunday said its financial reporting review board (FRRB) may deliberate on issues of the fintech firm in the near future.

The FRRB of the statutory body is currently conducting a review of the accounts of tech-based education unicorn Byju's over alleged governance concerns, and the exercise is progressing well, the ICAI president said.

"So far, we have not considered it (Paytm issue), but the board meeting of the FRRB will take place in the near future and it will consider appropriate action if required. So far, we have not decided anything as far as this matter is concerned," ICAI President Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal told PTI in an interview.

Newly elected committees, including FRRB, of the ICAI are expected to hold meetings from March onwards, he said.

Notably, the banking sector regulator Reserve Bank of India has already imposed restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank Ltd due to alleged regulatory concerns.

The FRRB may determine whether any scrutiny of the books is necessary over allegations of regulatory lapses and their impact on the payment bank's accounting, he said.

"It is the discretion of the board whom to review and when to do so. It has a robust system," the newly elected ICAI chief said.

Asked whether ICAI was waiting for a complaint regarding Paytm, Agarwal said, "The institute can take cognizance both suo motu and through complaints. In Byju's case, it was suo motu."

Speaking on Byju's, he said that the progress on the board's scrutiny is "going well and the report is expected by the end of this year."

While explaining the FRRB structure, the ICAI chief said, "The board has a three-tier

structure--technical, group, and then finally the board review."

According to him, the FRRB is empowered to review the financial statements of listed companies.

"In cases of gross negligence, we proceed with further investigation. If there are minor issues, we provide advisory guidance," Agarwal said.

Constituted in July 2002, it is an important wing of ICAI that works to bring improvements in financial reporting practices and thereby promote investors' confidence in audited statements.

Meanwhile, investors and the founder of the troubled edutech firm Byju's had locked horns over alleged mismanagement and governance issues.

The investors voted for a leadership change in an Extraordinary General Meeting on Friday and also moved NCLT.

The six investors, who moved the resolutions, hold more than 32 per cent stake in Think & Learn (T&L), the firm that operates the online tuition platform Byju's.

## Government makes efforts to improve soil health

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 8,300 soil testing labs have been set up across the country since 2014-15 as part of the government's efforts to improve soil health and reduce input cost incurred by farmers to grow crops, according to an official.

These are static soil testing labs, mobile testing labs, mini labs and village level soil testing labs.

That apart, the government has also distributed 23.58 lakh soil health cards to farmers free of cost. The move is aimed at promoting balanced use of fertilisers, cut input cost and boost crop productivity.

"The root of farmers' welfare is in the health of soil," a senior government official said.

The government is implementing Soil Health Management & Soil Health Card Schemes under the National Project on Soil Health & Fertility of National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture since the year 2014-15.

Now, these schemes have been merged as Soil Health & Fertility component of Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).

"So far, 23.58 crore soil health cards have been distributed free-of-cost to farmers under the scheme," the official said.

Based on the recommendations on Soil Health Card (SHC), the trainings and demonstrations are conducted to create the awareness among the farmers for adopting the recommendations on judicious use of chemical fertilizers.

So far, 93,781 farmer's trainings, 6.45 lakh demonstrations, 7,425 farmer's melas/ campaigns on soil health card recommendations have been organized across the country, the official highlighted.

Since 2014-15, the official said that a total of 8,272 soil testing labs have been set up across the country.

Out of these, 1,068 are static soil testing labs, 163 mobile soil testing labs, 6,376 mini soil testing labs and 665 village level soil testing labs.

"Total Rs 229.95 crore has been released to states/UTs for soil testing labs under the scheme. Out of this, Rs 83.31 crore has been released to states/UTs for the past five years," the official said.

## IOC, GAIL, ONGC fined for third straight quarter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned oil and gas giants including Indian Oil, ONGC and GAIL (India) have been slapped fines for the third straight quarter for failing to meet listing norm requirements of having the requisite number of directors on their board.

Stock exchanges have fined oil refining and fuel marketing giant Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), explorers Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL), gas utility GAIL, and refiners Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) a cumulative Rs 32.5 lakh, stock exchange filings showed.

In separate filings, the companies detailed the fines imposed by the BSE and NSE for either not having the requisite number of independent directors or the mandated women director in the third quarter ended December 31, 2023, but were quick to point out that appointment of directors was done by the government and they had no role in it.

The companies had faced



fines for the same reason in the previous two quarters as well.

The six PSUs in separate filings said they have been slapped with a fine of Rs 5,42,800 each for the third quarter. While ONGC and its subsidiaries HPCL and MRPL, GAIL and OIL faced fines for not having the required number of independent directors on their board, IOC for not having a woman independent director on its board.

Listing norms require companies to have independent directors in the same proportion as executive or functional directors. They are also required to have at least one woman director on

the board.

For the second quarter, IOC, ONGC, OIL, GAIL, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, HPCL and Engineers India Ltd had faced a fine of Rs 5.42 lakh.

For the latest fine, IOC in the regulatory filing said that "being a government company, the power to appoint directors (including independent directors) vests with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, and hence the non-appointment of women independent director on the Board during the quarter ended December 31, 2023 was not due to any negligence/fault by the company."

Accordingly, IOC said it should not be held liable to pay the fines and the same should be waived-off.

"IOC regularly takes up with ministry for appointment of requisite number of independent directors (including woman independent director) to ensure compliance with corporate governance norms enunciated under SEBI (LODR) as well as the Companies Act," it said, adding, it had in the past received similar notices from the two stock exchanges and its waiver request was granted.

GAIL in the filing said "appointments are outside the purview/control of the GAIL's management." "The non-compliance with regard to the composition of the Board was not within the control of the company and the company has been regularly pursuing with the Government of India (GoI) for appointment of requisite numbers of independent directors to meet the compliance requirements," ONGC said.

The appointment of directors on its subsidiaries HPCL and MRPL too are done by the government.

## Number of M&A deals in India falls in 2023: PwC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of merger and acquisition (M&A) deals during 2023 dropped by 10 per cent on an annual basis to 793, said a PwC India report on Sunday.

However, the total disclosed deal value for M&A declined much steeper at 38 per cent during the year, according to the report titled 'Deals at a glance.'

The report further observed that PE (Private Equity) investments totalled USD 36 billion, marking a substantial 36 per cent drop from 2022.

Despite this decline, the average investment size per deal increased to USD 46 million from USD 42 million in 2022, reflecting a potential shift towards larger opportunities.

While early-stage investments were 53 per cent less compared to that in 2022, the report said, these along with growth-stage investments continued to make up the major share, constituting around 73 per cent of fundings in 2023. On the other hand, buyouts demonstrated resilience with only a 5 per cent decline compared to 2022. This suggests a nuanced landscape, where investors show interest in diverse strategies and larger-scale ventures, even amid an overall decrease in PE investments, the report said.

"In 2023, India resiliently navigated global headwinds, solidifying its appeal to international investors. The economic fundamentals stay strong reflecting investor enthusiasm for the country's expanding economic opportunities and this optimism is also echoed in



PwC's latest CEO Survey. Despite a restrained deal-making environment throughout the year, the deal activity stabilised towards the last quarter leading us to anticipate an upswing in 2024," said Dinesh Arora, Partner & Leader Deals, PwC India.

In calendar year 2023, PwC said the retail and consumer sector emerged as the most active sector with technology finishing up marginally behind for the second consecutive year.

Following closely were the professional services and fintech sectors, which exhibited high activity in terms of volume. Meanwhile, financial services, renewable power, and healthcare dominated in deal value.

Top 10 deals of 2023 included JV buyouts, strategic investments, PE buyouts, and stock mergers and contributed 21 per cent of the total deal value. While PE deals were higher in volume overall, strategic deals dominated the top deals with domestic deals and group-level consolidations as a significant theme, the report said.

PwC is a network of firms in 152 countries with over 3,27,000 people providing assurance, advisory and tax services.

## GST Council may soon clarify tax exemption to RERA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council is likely to soon clarify that Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) will not be required to pay Goods and Services Tax (GST), an official said.

According to the official, RERA, which functions as a regulator as well as facilitator for the realty sector, is covered under Article 243G of the

Constitution dealing with powers, authority and responsibilities of panchayats. RERA was set up in different states to ensure transparency in real estate projects, protect the interest of consumers and to establish an adjudicating mechanism for speedy dispute redressal.

The official said that after discussions with RERA functionaries about the nature

of their function it was decided that GST is not applicable on them. The official further said that RERAs are funded by respective state governments and hence levying GST would mean taxing state governments.

A meeting of GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister and comprising state ministers, is likely to be held before the imposition of Model

Code of Conduct for the general election due in April-May.

The last meeting of GST Council was held on October 7, 2023.

Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said before July 18, 2022, certain services offered by key regulatory bodies in India, including the Reserve Bank, Securities Exchange Board of

India (SEBI), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) network, were not subject to GST.

This exemption was lifted on July 18, 2022, leading to discussions about the tax implications for RERA bodies as well.

"Furthermore, in the residential real estate sector, Input Tax Credit (ITC) is not permissible, which means excluding RERA authorities from GST considerations could potentially reduce expenses for both developers and homebuyers. Consequently, a clarification from GST Council on this matter would be significantly beneficial for the sector," Mohan added.

## V-TAPP 2024 unveiled



Amaravati: VIT AP University, a leading institution in technical education, proudly announced the launch of V-TAPP2024 (VIT AP Technical Fest) today, marking the beginning of a two-day extravaganza that brings together students from various colleges, universities, and institutions.



Neelam Yadav, Manager (PR), POWERGRID was conferred with Media Federation of India Award for the "Best Women Communicator of the Year" at 18th, Media Excellence Awards, 2024 held at New Delhi

## India seeks permanent solution to food security



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will strongly oppose a China-led proposal for an investment facilitation pact besides pressing for finding a permanent solution to public stock holding of grains for food security and protection of the interests of fishermen at the WTO ministerial meeting beginning Tuesday.

The Indian delegation is led by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. The four-day 13th ministerial conference (MC13) will start on February 26 in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Trade ministers of 164 member countries of the World Trade Organisation



(WTO) are meeting against the backdrop of the uncertain global economic situation due to the Red Sea crisis, the Ukraine-Russia war and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The key issue of India's interests at the meeting relates to finding a permanent solution for its minimum support price (MSP) issue for food security,

agricultural reforms, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce moratorium on import duties, dispute settlement, and WTO reforms.

**\*Food security issues**

The public stock-holding (PSH) programme is a policy tool under which the government procures crops like rice and wheat from

farmers at MSP, and stores and distributes foodgrains to the poor.

India stresses the need for PSH for its large, vulnerable population and wants a permanent solution from the MC13. Food procurement, stockholding, and distribution are crucial to India's food security strategy. MSP is normally higher than the prevailing market rates and sells these at a low price to ensure food security for over 800 million beneficiaries. However, the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture limits the ability of a government to purchase food at MSP.

Under global trade norms, a WTO member country's food subsidy bill should not breach the limit of 10 per cent of the value of production based on the reference price of 1986-88. As part of the solution, India has asked for measures like

amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap. Developed nations are of the view that such programmes distort global trade prices of food grains.

**\*Joint Support Initiatives (JSIs) or plurilateral agreements**

India opposes this move being pushed for certain nations. For example, India is strongly opposing efforts of a group of countries led by China to push a proposal on investment facilitation for development agreement at the WTO.

The country has maintained that this agenda falls outside the mandate of the global trade body.

According to experts, the attempt of the group to integrate the proposal into the WTO has systemic concerns for the organisation and it would impact developing nations in

pursuing their interest in future.

**\*Agricultural reforms**

India's stance is to protect farmer livelihoods and ensure equitable market access. However, developed nations are pushing to reduce domestic support and increase market openness irrespective of the fact that they themselves provide large subsidies to their rich farmers.

**\*WTO reforms**

India advocates for inclusive reforms that consider developing countries' interests, against the backdrop of developed nations' proposals for flexible negotiation processes, dropping of decision-making by consensus and the integration of non-trade issues into WTO without consensus.

India supports efforts to improve the working of the WTO but its key pillars like

special and differential treatment for less developed and developing nations, equal voice and dispute settlement mechanism should be retained while undertaking reforms, an official said.

India also seeks a revamp of the Appellate Body to ensure fairness, facing off against the USA's reluctance to do so and EU's proposal for alternate mechanisms.

The US, a frequent participant in WTO disputes, has been obstructing the process due to dissatisfaction with inefficiencies and perceived overreaches by the WTO's judiciary.

**\*Fisheries subsidies**

The members have already reached the first part of the agreement in 2022 under which subsidies will be prohibited for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

**PARA BADMINTON WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS**

# Yathiraj, Pramod, Krishna win gold

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

India's Suhas Yathiraj, Pramod Bhagat and Krishna Nagar capped their impressive run by securing gold medals in men's singles SL4, SL3 and SH6 class respectively at the Para Badminton World Championship here on Sunday.

The world No 3 Yathiraj, a Paralympic silver medallist, outwitted Indonesia's Freddy Setiawan 21-18 21-18 in SL4 final (standing/lower limb impairment/minor) for her maiden world title.

"Gold it is, happy and proud

to be world champion," tweeted the 40-year-old Yathiraj, who hails from Karnataka and is an IAS officer of the 2007 batch of Uttar Pradesh cadre.

Yathiraj, who has an impairment in one of his ankles, is currently the secretary and director general of Youth Welfare and Prantiya Rakshak Dal in the UP government.

Tokyo Paralympic gold medallist Bhagat, who won a gold and two bronze at the Para Asian Games in China, edged out England's Daniel Bethell 14-21 21-15 21-14 in SL3 (standing/lower limb



impairment/severe) final. Bhagat thus completed a hat-trick of crowns after Stoke Mandeville in 2015 and Basel in 2019. He also won a gold medal at 2022 Tokyo and 2009 Seoul edition.

"This win holds a very special place in my heart for various reasons," said the Bihar-born shuttler, one of the six siblings, who was diagnosed with polio when he was five years old.

"First being that I have managed to equal my idol Lin Dan's record of five world championships and second being having been able to retain three consecutive world championships."

Apart from the gold, the 35-year-old also won two bronze medals in men's doubles and mixed doubles along with Sukant Kadam and Manisha Ramadass respectively. The three medals took his tally to 14, which includes 6 gold, 3 silver, 5 bronze across categories.

In SH6 category (standing/short stature), Krishna Nagar, a Paralympic gold medal winner, also emerged champion after prevailing 22-20 22-20 over China's Lin Naili in another men's singles final.

In women's singles SU5 (standing/upper limb

impairment), Manisha Ramadass signed off with a silver medal after losing 16-21 16-21 to China's Yang Qiu Xia in the final.

The men's doubles pair of Chirag Baretha and Raj Kumar and women's doubles combination of Rachana Shaileshkumar and Nithya Sre Samathy Sivan settled for a silver each, after losing their respective final matches in SU5 and SH6 categories.

In women's doubles (SL3-SU5) category, Manasi Joshi and Thulasimathi Murugesan also signed off with a silver medal after losing 20-22 17-21 to Indonesian combination of

Leani Ratri Oktilla and Khalimatus Sadiyah in the final.

**Bhagat vs Bethell**

Pramod and Bethell enjoy a healthy rivalry with the England shuttler having won 11 times in 17 meetings. The final turned out to be an exhaustive and tight contest as the duo engaged in a slugfest for an hour and 40 minutes.

"This match with Bethell would be my toughest both mentally and physically. I have not been playing well against Bethell past few months and this was my time to prove doubters wrong."

## Patty wins LPGA Thailand by one stroke

AP ■ CHONBURI (THAILAND)

Local favourite Patty Tavatanakit held off a fast-finishing Albane Valenzuela to clinch the LPGA Thailand by one stroke on Sunday.

The 24-year-old Bangkok native showcased her prowess with a brilliant approach shot to tap in an easy birdie on the final hole to card a final round 67, finishing at 21 under-par-267 at Siam Country Club Pattaya Old Course.

"I'm honestly speechless. I was so nervous today and choked a bit as there are many Thai fans showing up to support me," said Tavatanakit, whose triumph marked her second LPGA victory since her win at the ANA Inspiration in 2021.

"It's a dream come true to win a home tournament in front of my parents."

Tavatanakit has been riding a wave of success, having

triumphed at the Ladies European Tour in Saudi Arabia seven days ago. Ranked 43rd in the world, she joins former world No. 1 Ariya Jutanugarn as the second local champion of this tournament, following Jutanugarn's victory in 2021. Valenzuela, ranked 91st in the world carded a brilliant 63, including an eagle on the fifth hole and seven birdies - six on the back nine - finishing at 20 under-par-268. "I gave it my all out there. I'm proud of my performance," the 26-year-old Swiss said.

Sei Young Kim of Korea, the 2020 Women's PGA Championship winner, closed with a solid 65, ending with a total of 18 under-par-270, tying for third place alongside her compatriot Hye-jin Choi, who posted a 66.

LPGA tournaments are also scheduled over the next two weeks in Singapore and China.

## Knapp makes 11 birdies, seizes control at Mexico Open

AP ■ VALLARTA (MEXICO)

PGA Tour rookie Jake Knapp ran off 11 birdies and seized control of the Mexico Open at Vidanta with an 8-under 63, giving him a four-shot lead going into the final round with a spot in the Masters on the line.

Knapp began the third round in a four-way share of the lead and playing in front of the largest gallery while paired with Alvaro Ortiz of Mexico. He wasted no time making himself the target. Knapp, a 29-year-old from UCLA, stuffed his opening shot into 2 feet and the next one to 4 feet for a birdie-birdie start. Turns out he was just getting warmed up. He closed out the front nine with five birdies over the last six holes for a 28, and no one got closer to him than three shots the rest of the way.

Sami Valimaki of Finland lost momentum on the back nine until finishing with birdie from the collar of the green on the

par-5 18th for a 67, leaving him four shots back.

Knapp was at 19-under 194, and only Valimaki was within six shots of him. Ben Silverman (63), Henrik Norlander (65) and Chan Kim (66) were seven shots behind.

Ortiz, the younger brother of Carlos Ortiz, didn't make a birdie until the 18th hole and had to settle for a 73, leaving him 10 shots out of the lead.

More than the Masters is at stake for Knapp and Valimaki, another PGA Tour rookie who earned his card this year from being among the leading 10 players on the European tour. A victory comes with a two-year exemption, a spot in the remaining five \$20 million signature events and the PGA Championship.

Knapp has spent four years on the Canadian tour and three years on the Korn Ferry Tour, where last year he finished high enough on the points list to earn a PGA Tour card. During lean times, he worked as a



bouncer in a club - it was called "The Country Club" - in Costa Mesa, California, and now appears to have hit his stride.

He contended at Torrey Pines and tied for third, and he's hoping that experience will serve him well in the final round of the Mexico Open.

"I've been playing professional golf for quite a while. I've had some good stuff and some bad stuff," he said. "It will definitely all be a part of it."

Matt Wallace, the other player who shared the 36-hole lead, had a 71 to fall eight behind.

Knapp, with his long, powerful swing, did everything well at the start. He made birdie putts of about 15 feet and 25 feet on the fourth and fifth holes, got up-and-down from a bunker on the par-5 sixth, drove the reachable par-4 seventh and two-putted from about 80 feet and closed out the front nine with a tee shot to 4 feet on the par-3 ninth.

Even when he got in trouble, driving so far left he had to take a penalty drop on the 10th, he escaped with bogey by making a 10-foot putt. He followed that with two more birdies to widen his lead to five shots at one point.

Knapp's short game kept the lead from being even larger. He hit a poor wedge and chip that led to bogey on the par-5 14th hole, and a weak chip from short of the 16th green led to another bogey. But he had no complaints from having so many chances, and converting 11 of them.



## Raphinha stars as Barcelona beats Getafe 4-0

AP ■ BARCELONA

Raphinha made the most of Barcelona by scoring one goal and playing a part in two more to lead a 4-0 rout of Getafe. Barcelona's biggest win since September saw it move past Girona and provisionally claim second place in the Spanish league.

Raphinha opened the scoring in the 20th minute at Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium. The Brazil winger then participated in passing moves to help João Félix and Frenkie de Jong add goals in the 53rd and 61st. Substitute Fermin López rounded it off with a goal in stoppage time.

Leader Real Madrid is five points clear of Barcelona before it hosts Sevilla on Sunday. Girona, which fell into third place, is one point adrift of Barcelona before playing Rayo Vallecano on Monday.

Barcelona had been struggling at its stadium with only one win in its previous three home games, including a 5-3 debacle to Villarreal that prompted coach Xavi Hernández to announce he would not see out the final year of his contract next season.

But after recent stumbles by Girona, the biggest of the two Catalan clubs finds itself in position to at least become Madrid's closest chaser with a third of the season remaining.

Raphinha, a key part of Barcelona's costly rebuild two summers ago, was injured earlier this season and lost his spot in the starting 11 when teenager Lamine Yamal broke out as the team's next great hope.

"I am especially happy because I was having fewer minutes since coming back from injury, but the most important thing is the win that keeps us alive in the league," Raphinha said. "It is a privilege to compete with Lamine ... Watching Lamine play so well makes me play better. And I am sure that he feels the same way."

Raphinha led Barcelona's attack with his speed down the right side that repeatedly beat Getafe's high back line.

Raphinha latched onto a long

ball by Jules Koundé and slotted a left-footed shot inside the far post to put the hosts ahead.

He had another good chance to score on the break in the 40th, but he fired too high with only the 'keeper to beat.

Getafe threatened to level early in the second half when Luis Milla's long strike hit the post after goalkeeper Marc-André ter Stegen got a touch.

But Barcelona again broke Getafe's pressure when Andreas Christensen charged from his spot as holding midfielder to receive a through ball by Raphinha that played him clear on the right flank. Christensen squared the ball for Felix to finish off.

Raphinha helped make it three when he drew goalkeeper David Soria off the line and laid off for De Jong. De Jong then assisted López for his goal.

Getafe stayed in 10th place. "We insisted on playing with a high back line, but we didn't execute well at any point," Getafe coach José Bordalás said about his team's worst loss of the season. "We even tried moving players into different positions to try to improve, but my team was never itself and never comfortable. We have to forget this game and just move on."

## Paolini defeats Kalinskaya in comeback victory for Dubai title

AP ■ DUBAI

Jasmine Paolini earned her biggest title by defeating Anna Kalinskaya 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 in the Dubai Championships final.

Paolini fought back from a break down in the second and third sets en route to the second WTA singles title of her nine-year tour-level career.

The 26th-ranked Paolini and 40th-ranked Kalinskaya defied a field that started with 16 of the top 20 women, including the top four.

Paolini won her first title in Slovenia in 2021 and lost three finals since then. She lost to Kalinskaya a month ago in the Australian Open fourth round. Saturday's victory assured the Italian of a top 15 debut when the rankings are updated on Monday.

"It's so special. I'm really happy and really surprised," an emotional, smiling Paolini said on court.

"I'm just happy that I believed I could win every match. I remember my first match this week. It was second set, I'd lost the first and was a break down, yet now I'm here winning the title. It's unbelievable."

Paolini trailed 6-4, 3-1. Then she was 4-2 down in the third set. She stopped Kalinskaya serving for the match at 5-4.

Kalinskaya came through qualifying and beat three top-10 players in a row - including No. 1 Iga Swiatek - to reach her first final.

## Gopi wins elite men race in New Delhi Marathon



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Asian champion Gopi Thonakal won the New Delhi Marathon title but missed out the Paris Olympics qualifying time by a big margin here on Sunday.

The 35-year-old Gopi, who had clinched the Asian marathon title in 2017, won the men's elite race covering the distance of 42.195km in 2 hours, 14 minutes and 40 seconds, well outside the Paris Games qualifying time of 2:08:10.

Gopi, who had also won the

title here in the 2017 edition, was below his personal best of 2:13:39. His timing was also below the national record of 2:12:00 which has been standing in the name of Shivnath Singh since 1978.

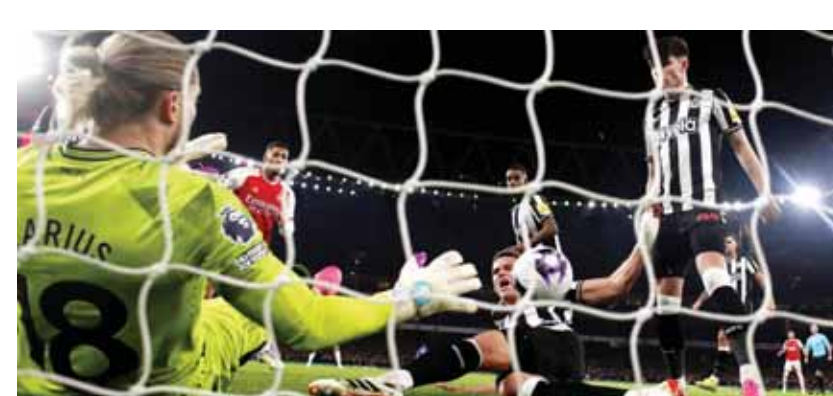
Srinu Bugatha, who won the 2021 edition title, finished second in 2:14:41, while Akshay Saini was third with a time of 2:15:27.

Gopi had earlier admitted that the Paris Olympics qualifying time could be beyond the reach of the Indians.

Ashwini Madan Jadhav won the women's elite race, clocking 2:52:25, while Thakor Nirmaben Bharatjee (2:55:47) and Divyanka Chaudhary (2:57:06) were second and third respectively.

The New Delhi Marathon, which was held under the aegis of the Athletics Federation of India, saw thousands of participants from more than 200 cities, 27 states and several countries in different categories.

The course passed some of the city's iconic landmarks such as Humayun's Tomb, Lodhi Garden and Khan Market.



## Camara hat trick helps Brest win 3-0

AP ■ PARIS

Midfielder Mahdi Camara scored a first career hat trick as Brest won 3-0 at Strasbourg in the French league, keeping this season's surprise front-runner on course to qualify for the Champions League for the first time.

Camara scored twice in the first half for second-place Brest, an unheralded side from a port city in Brittany which has never finished higher than eighth in the top flight.

Camara then coolly converted a penalty in the 60th minute. He was involved in the buildup to the first goal, too.

Camara did well to win the ball near the edge of the penalty area in the 33rd and, after a shot was charged down, he guided the rebound into the right corner from 20 meters with the aid of a slight deflection.

Seven minutes later, the former Saint-Etienne player showed good technique to control a cross from the right and finish neatly. He then sent goalkeeper Alaa Bellaouch the wrong way from the spot.

The win moved Eric Roy's side 10 points behind league leader Paris Saint-Germain and guaranteed staying in second place after Sunday's league games.

Coach Patrick Vieira's Strasbourg slipped to 12th place.

That meant Nantes moved up to 11th on goal difference after earlier winning 1-0 at Lorient, which dropped down to 16th and the relegation/playoff spot in France's 18-team league.

Cameroon defender Jean-Charles Castelletto netted the only goal for Nantes early into the second half after being set up from the left by winger Moses Simon, who was a runner-up with Nigeria at the Africa Cup of Nations earlier this month.

**SUNDAY'S GAMES**

Third-place Nice can close the gap on Brest to one point if it beats last-place Clermont at home.

PSG hosts improving Rennes in the first home game since Kylian Mbappé's decision to leave at the end of the season.

# New era at Man United begins with a loss

AP ■ LONDON

The week started at Manchester United with Jim Ratcliffe completing his purchase of a minority stake and setting out a three-year plan to return the club to the top of English soccer, knocking local rivals Manchester City and Liverpool "off their perch" in the process.

It ended with the team getting mostly outplayed in its own stadium by Fulham - an opponent in the bottom half of the Premier League - and beaten 2-1 to lose ground in the race for Champions League qualification.

Not only did sixth-place United's four-game winning run in the league come to an

end on Saturday, fourth-place Aston Villa beat Nottingham Forest 4-2. That left an eight-point gap between Villa and United after 26 of 38 games.

It remains to be seen if the Premier League will have four or five places in next season's Champions League. Fifth-place Tottenham is three points ahead of United and has a game in hand.

Failing to qualify for the lucrative competition will be a huge blow to United's status, not to mention its finances. It could also spell the end for United manager Erik ten Hag as Ratcliffe looks to raise the standards at the fallen giant.

Dave Brailsford, the sporting director of Ratcliffe-owned INEOS and now on United's board, was in the directors'



box at Old Trafford to see the team concede the deciding goal on a counterattack in the seventh minute of stoppage time. Alex Iwobi tucked home the finish, sealing Fulham's first win at Old Trafford since 2003, with United's players having poured forward seeking a winner after Harry

Maguire's equalizer in the 89th.

"After one defeat, you have to see the bigger picture," Ten Hag said, "and the bigger picture looks very good."

Douglas Luiz scored two of Villa's goals, with Ollie Watkins and Leon Bailey also netting in its first home win of 2024. One of the three defeats at Villa Park this year came at the hands of United.

"If we arrive to game 33 in the same position, we maybe look to Champions League," Villa manager Unai Emery said. "For now it is about being in the top seven positions."

**CITY AND ARSENAL WIN**

With first-place Liverpool not playing in the Premier League this round because of its

involvement in the English League Cup final on Sunday, title rivals Manchester City and Arsenal had a chance to trim the gap to the leaders.

They both took it - and now the top three are separated by just two points.

Second-place City moved one point behind Liverpool by beating Bournemouth 1-0 away, with Phil Foden grabbing the 24th-minute winner from a rebound after Erling Haaland had a shot parried out.

It was Foden's 16th goal of the season in all competitions, already tying the England forward's most in a single season.

"Phil Foden is playing the best football I have seen from him," said City manager Pep

Guardiola, who described his players as "supermen" for coping with a demanding schedule.

"We demand too much of our players but they respond. I know people say they earn a lot of money, but it is too much, honestly. But business must go on and it surprises me every time how we are still there."

Arsenal responded to City's result by dominating Newcastle a few hours later, winning 4-1 at Emirates Stadium to stay a point behind City.

An own-goal by Sven Botman was followed by strikes by Kai Havertz and Bukayo Saka, before Jakub Kiwior glanced in a header for the fourth. Joe Willock, a former Arsenal

player, scored an 85th-minute consolation for Newcastle.

**EVERTON DENIED**

Relegation-threatened Everton conceded an equalizer in the fifth minute of stoppage time to draw 1-1 at Brighton. A victory would have pushed Everton three points clear of the bottom three and ended an eight-match winless run in the league.

Instead, Lewis Dunk headed in Pascal Gross' cross to cancel out Jarrad Branthwaite's opener for Everton at Amex Stadium.

Newly hired Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner's tenure got off to strong start as his team beat next-to-last Burnley 3-0.

# ASHWIN, JUREL, KULDEEP SHINE

## INDIA NEED 192 RUNS TO WIN 4TH TEST AGAINST ENGLAND

PTI ■ RANCHI

Dhruv Jurel's defensive chef-d'oeuvre found a perfect match in the destructive symphony of spin by fifer-man Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav as India seized decisive control of the fourth Test against England at the end of a dramatic third day here on Sunday.

India walked off at the stumps, having chiselled off 40 runs from the 192-run target without losing a wicket.

Rohit Sharma (24 batting) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (16 batting) would be confident of the team mustering the remaining 152 runs without much theatre.

However, it was Jurel who started India's resistive movement with a defiant 90 that came in 149 balls and 211 minutes. It carried the hosts to 307 in their first innings from the overnight 219 for seven.

In their second essay, England just did not have any answers to the questions posed by Ashwin (5/51), his 35th five-wicket haul in Tests, and Kuldeep Yadav (4/22), getting bowled out for a meagre 145.

Opener Zak Crawley (60) was the lone post of fight. It would have been worse for



England without that Crawley fifty before his innings was halted by Kuldeep. Ravindra Jadeja bagged a solitary wicket but it was the key wicket of Jonny Bairstow.

In fact, Crawley was the only English batter to go past 30 as they lost their last seven wickets for just 35 runs with Ashwin and Jadeja weaving their magic.

Introduced late, the left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep struck in his third over when he cleaned up Crawley with a gem of a delivery that skidded through, unsettling

the middle-stump. Crawley was looking in an ominous mood and tore into the Indian attack against the run of play to stretch their overall lead past 150 as Rohit

persisted with Ashwin and Jadeja in the second session. But Kuldeep breathed fire into the attack as he got drift and was at his deceptive best. Having survived through an

umpire's call, England skipper Ben Stokes was castled by Kuldeep with the ball staying low. Bairstow looked in firm control in his 42-ball 30 (3x4) but fell in the first ball after tea when Jadeja exploited the cracks on the pitch to turn it away and the batter drove it straight to short cover. Kuldeep then dismissed Tom Hartley and Ollie Robinson in four balls, before Ashwin raced to his fifth wicket as stumper Dhruv Jurel took a brilliant reflex catch to oust James Anderson.

In the process, Ashwin also became the highest wicket-taker at home for India. He now has 354 wickets from 59 Tests at home, overtaking Anil Kumble's tally of 350 from 63 matches.

'Jurel' in the crown But Jurel's innings might just have ended India's search for a wicketkeeper batter in Tests in the absence of recuperating Rishabh Pant. The 23-year-old from Agra was not only terrific with his glovemannship but exhibited oodles of maturity during that determined fifty as India mounted an incredible fightback, trimming England's first-innings lead to a mere 46 runs. After reaching his maiden fifty in 96 balls, the Rajasthan

Royals' wicketkeeper-batsman shifted gears, taking on English spinners Shaib Bashir and Tom Hartley. Jurel hurried for a single off Hartley to bring up his fifty in an entertaining 40-run stand off just 75 balls for the ninth wicket with Akash Deep (9).

But Hartley denied him a hundred with a quicker delivery that stayed low. Young England off-spinner Bashir completed his maiden Test five-wicket haul, trapping Akash to finish with figures of 5 for 119 in only his second Test.

Jurel and Kuldeep's 76-run partnership for the eighth wicket also rescued India from a precarious position when they were reduced to 177 for seven on the second day.

Under overcast conditions in the morning session, the overnight duo of Jurel and Kuldeep faced a 134-run deficit. Kuldeep showcased superb application on a pitch with variable bounce, playing 131 balls with immaculate defence and effective strike rotation. Kuldeep's determined innings ended when an Anderson delivery that stayed low took a bottom edge and disturbed the timber.



## Irfan lauds Akash for a memorable debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan on Sunday praised Akash Deep for making an immediate impact on his Test debut, with the right-arm seamer producing a three-wicket burst on the first day morning of the ongoing fourth Test against England in Ranchi.

Pathan said that for a fast bowler to make his debut in India is very difficult, but the way Akash bowled and picked up his three wickets, he showed promise of a bright future ahead of him.

"As a batter you want your debut to happen in India but as a fast bowler you dream to have your debut in England, Australia, South Africa or New Zealand," Pathan told PTI on the sidelines of the New Delhi Marathon on Sunday.

"The way he bowled in the first session of the match and to pick up three

wickets is commendable. We can only hope to see Akash's career graph to go up from here," he added.

The former India player also praised opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal for becoming only the fifth from the country to have scored 600 or more runs in a Test series.

"Yashasvi Jaiswal is a very special cricketer, he has very bright future and he will make it big," the former cricketer said.

Pathan, who was at the marathon as chief guest, said India had the potential of becoming a sporting nation.

"To participate in such events is really special. I have always believed that India can become a sporting nation. Twenty thousand people participated here today and everyone was smiling. The people want to be fit and want to participate in such activities, it is always good to see this," he expressed.

## Australia beats New Zealand

AP ■ AUCKLAND

Australia beat New Zealand by 27 runs under the Duckworth-Lewis system in the heavily rain-affected third T20 international Sunday to complete a 3-0 sweep the series and to harden its favoritism for the World Cup later this year.

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner won the toss in his 100th T20 international and sent Australia in, mindful the rain might dictate terms later in the match. It did.

Australia was interrupted three times by rain breaks and finally terminated after 10.4 overs when it was 118-4. New Zealand was set 126 to win in 10 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis system, which seemed a relatively charitable target.

But New Zealand botched the run chase for the second time in three days at Eden Park, unable to conquer Australia's world class attack.

Under the revised rules for the 10-over innings, Australia was allowed five bowlers who could bowl two overs each with a three-over power play.

The young left-armed Spencer Johnson took 1-10 from his two overs, showing why he made \$1.4 million in the IPL auction earlier this year.

Nathan Ellis conceded only 11 from his two overs, Mitchell Starc only 15 and Adam Zampa took 1-20. Ellis bowled four dot balls to New Zealand's biggest hitter, Glenn Phillips, in the fifth over and at the midpoint of its innings New Zealand was 51-2, needing 75 from the last 30 balls.

Australia's bowlers continued to bowl a tight line and length to frustrate the Black Caps



batters and after Ellis bowled the ninth over for the cost of only 8 runs, New Zealand needed 43 off the last over to win.

The honor, or duty, of bowling the last over went to Matt Short who already had contributed for Australia, making 27 off 11 ball, batting at No. 3.

The first ball of the over went for six but the next three balls

were singles, the fifth ball went for two and the last ball for a boundary as New Zealand fell hopelessly short.

"I think I feel most comfortable when I'm playing shots," Short said. "It was a bit of a strange game because of the rain and being off and on.

"The aggressive way is the way we want to play our T20." Credit also goes to wicketkeeper Matthew Wade

who took over the captaincy from Mitch Marsh and led Australia with great tactical insight in tricky conditions.

"Our bowlers were unbelievable today the way they came out and executed," Wade said. "It's as clinical a bowling performance as I've seen from an Australian unit and for Matt Short to come out and bat the way he did is exciting for the future.

"We've got depth in our squad and everyone's enjoying their cricket."

Australia should have been massively disadvantaged by the fact its innings was abruptly ended after only 10 overs when it had been playing for 20. But it already was in a powerful position.

Thanks to Short and to Travis Head, who made 33 from 30 balls, and Glenn Maxwell who made 20 off 9 after being dropped first ball, Australia already was 67-2 after its six-over power play.

New Zealand couldn't match the clinical aggression of the Australian batters. Glenn Phillips and Mark Chapman faced most of the last five overs and simply couldn't find a way to score consistent boundaries against the outstanding Australian attack.

Australia has demonstrated the ability to win in all circumstances in this series, including its thrilling final ball victory in the first match, before an emphatic 72-run win in the second game.

"They're obviously a quality side," Santner said. "Their big three quicks and obviously the power they possess, I guess they showed us (how to play) throughout the series.

"The first one was a close one and I guess we got outplayed the last two.



## England spinner Leach to undergo knee surgery

PTI ■ LONDON

Left-arm spinner Jack Leach is set to undergo a knee surgery on Tuesday after being ruled out of the England's ongoing five-Test tour of India.

Leach, who came into the India series as England's most experienced spinner, took part in only the opening Test at Hyderabad which his side won by 28 runs.

The 32-year-old spinner suffered an injury on the field which caused severe swelling, forcing him to leave the tour after missing the second Test and subsequently returning home.

"I'm going to have an operation to get the rest of the swelling out because it's not budging," Leach was quoted as saying by the BBC.

The report added that the knee injury trouble is the latest for Leach who suffers

from Crohn's disease, having also missed last year's Ashes in England due to a stress fracture in his back. On the tour of New Zealand five years ago in 2019, Leach had also contracted sepsis.

"It was quite an unfortunate one. It was the second ball of the first innings in the field so that whole game I was playing with this knee problem. I obviously knocked it a few times throughout that game and it has just created a long period of recovery," he said.

"I need to get the operation done and then hopefully I can get back to playing cricket. I'd love to have a run of playing cricket and getting into a bit of a rhythm again and hopefully that can happen again once I've got this sorted."

After the conclusion of the India tour, England's next assignment will be the first home Test at Lord's from July 10.

## ICC suspends Hasaranga for two matches, Gurbaz fined match fees

PTI ■ DUBAI

The ICC has suspended Sri Lanka captain Wanindu Hasaranga for two matches and docked a fine of 15 per cent on the match fee of Afghanistan wicketkeeper-batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz for breaching its Code of Conduct during the third T20I in Dambulla.

The global governing body said in a release that Hasaranga has been banned after the spin bowling all-rounder accumulated a total of five demerit points within a 24-month period, which includes his latest breach of the ICC Code of Conduct.

"Sri Lanka's T20I skipper and

second-ranked T20I bowler on the ICC Men's Player Rankings, Wanindu Hasaranga, has been presented with a two-match suspension after his total demerit points reached five within a 24-month period following his latest breach of the ICC Code of Conduct, for which he received a 50 per cent fine and three demerit points," the ICC said in a statement.

The incident involving Hasaranga took place towards the end of the third and final T20I on Wednesday when he approached the on-field umpire Lyndon Hanibal to criticise a decision regarding a full toss delivery not being adjudged a no-



ball. Hasaranga was thus found guilty of breaching the article 2.13 of the ICC Code of Conduct for

Players and Player Support Personnel. The article relates to "personal abuse of a Player, Player

Support Personnel, Umpire or Match Referee during an International Match."

With Hasaranga accumulating five demerit points, it converts to two suspension points, the ICC said.

"This means he will either get a ban for one Test match or two ODIs or T20Is, whichever comes first, for the player or player support personnel.

Consequently, Hasaranga will be suspended from participating in Sri Lanka's first two T20Is against Bangladesh next month," the ICC said.

**Gurbaz penalised** Afghanistan batter Gurbaz too was

penalised for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct in the same match for having violated the article 2.4 of the code, which concerns "disobeying an Umpire's instruction during an International Match."

This has resulted in one demerit point being added to Gurbaz's disciplinary record, which marks his second such offence in a 24-month period and the player accumulating two demerit points.

"The sanction was imposed on Rahmanullah for altering the grip of his bat on the field despite repeated warnings against doing so," the ICC said.

The ICC added that both the players have admitted to the offences and have accepted the sanction proposed by Chris Broad from the elite panel of match referees.

"The charges were brought forth by on-field umpires Lyndon Hannibal and Raveendra Wimalasiri, third umpire Ruchira Palliyaguruge, and fourth umpire Ranmore Martinez," the ICC said.

Sri Lanka won the series 2-1 with Afghanistan sealing a narrow three-run win in the final T20I.

Hasaranga was named the Player of the Series for his all-round show.