



OPINION 6
CHINA'S DRIVE TO
EXPAND MARITIME INFRA

WORLD 8
BIDEN AND TRUMP MARCHING
TOWARD THEIR NOMINATIONS

MONEY 10
ALIGN TO VIKSIT BHARAT
GOALS: FM TO INDIA INC

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RAJYA SABHA HIT BY CROSS VOTING

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI

The Congress suffered a major setback in the Rajya Sabha elections held in three States on Tuesday, with party legislators in Himachal Pradesh ensuring victory for BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan, leading to the embarrassing loss of senior Congress leader and two-time Upper House member Abhishek Manu Singhvi. There was a tie with 34 votes each for Mahajan and Singhvi, but a lottery proved lucky for the BJP nominee. Other States, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, also reported large-scale decisive cross-voting in favour of the BJP in UP and in favour of the Congress in Karnataka, which sent three Congress MPs and one BJP member to the council of States. Polling was held for 10 seats in Uttar Pradesh, four in Karnataka, and one seat in Himachal Pradesh. On February 20, 41 candidates, including BJP chief JP Nadda, former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, and Union Ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw and L Murugan, were elected unopposed to the Upper House. The elections for one vacant seat from HP through a large number of cross-voting on Tuesday now indicate troubles ahead for the majority Congress Government in the State. Large scale cross-voting in favour of BJP saw the saffron party winning eight seats in

the Rajya Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, while the Samajwadi Party (SP) could win only two seats. For the BJP, the winners included Choudhary Tejveer Singh, Amarpal Maurya, Sangeeta Balwant, Sudhanshu Trivedi, Sadhna Singh, Nadeem Jain, RPN Singh and Sanjay Seth. Jaya Bachchan and Ramji Lal Suman were winners from the SP. The third SP nominee Alok Ranjan lost the poll.



According to the numbers in the Assembly, seven candidates of the BJP and two from the SP were certain to win. The contest was mainly between BJP's eighth nominee Sanjay Seth and SP's third candidate Alok Ranjan. As many as seven SP MLAs voted for the BJP candidates. The saffron party also received support from the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party, RLD, the lone BSP MLA and one of the two Congress

legislators. Earlier, the SP chief whip in the Assembly Manoj Pandey resigned from his post and declared his support for the BJP. The other SP legislators, who voted for the BJP nominees, included Rakesh Pandey, Abhay Singh, Vinod Chaturvedi, Pooja Pal, Rakesh Pratap Singh and Ashutosh Maurya. Those who made it to the Upper House from Karnataka are former Union Minister Ajay Maken, G C

elections, which were marred by cross-voting. The BJP suffered a setback when one of its MLAs — S T Somashekar — voted for Maken, the other — Shivaram Hebbar — abstained. Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu before the poll alleged that five to six Congress MLAs were "kidnapped" and whisked away by the CRPF and the Haryana Police. There is a buzz now after that

In Bihar, JD(U)'s Sanjay Kumar Jha, BJP's Dharmshila Gupta and Bhim Singh, Manoj Kumar Yadav and Sanjay Yadav (both RJD) and Akhilesh Prasad Singh (Congress) were declared winners. TMC's Sushmita Dev, Sagarika Ghose, Mamata Thakur and Md Nadimul Haque and Samik Bhattacharya (BJP) were declared winners from West Bengal. Union Minister Murugan, Valmiki Dham Ashram head Umesh Nath Maharaj, Kisan Morcha's national vice president Banishal Gurjar, and Madhya Pradesh BJP's women wing president Maya Naroliya bagged four seats for the BJP in Madhya Pradesh while Ashok Singh of the Congress also got elected unopposed.

Trinamool Congress (4), YSR Congress (3), RJD (2), BJD (2) and NCP, Shiv Sena, BRS and JD(U) one each. From Rajasthan, Sonia Gandhi was elected unopposed so were BJP's Chunnillal Garasiya and Madan Rathore. All the six candidates from Maharashtra — BJP's Chavan, who joined the party only last Tuesday after quitting the Congress, Medha Kulkarni and Ajit Gopchade; Shiv Sena's Milind Deora, who also resigned from the Congress last month, Praful Patel (NCP) and Chandrakant Handore (Congress) were elected unopposed. In Bihar, JD(U)'s Sanjay Kumar Jha, BJP's Dharmshila Gupta and Bhim Singh, Manoj Kumar Yadav and Sanjay Yadav (both RJD) and Akhilesh Prasad Singh (Congress) were declared winners. TMC's Sushmita Dev, Sagarika Ghose, Mamata Thakur and Md Nadimul Haque and Samik Bhattacharya (BJP) were declared winners from West Bengal. Union Minister Murugan, Valmiki Dham Ashram head Umesh Nath Maharaj, Kisan Morcha's national vice president Banishal Gurjar, and Madhya Pradesh BJP's women wing president Maya Naroliya bagged four seats for the BJP in Madhya Pradesh while Ashok Singh of the Congress also got elected unopposed.

Continued on Page 2

Union Ministers to contest 2024 Lok Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Coal and Mines Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday hinted that Nirmala Sitharaman and S Jaishankar may contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Sitharaman and Jaishankar are two of the most eloquent Ministers of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet. Presently, Sitharaman is a Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka, and Jaishankar from Gujarat. However, it has not been decided yet as to where they will contest from, he added. "More or less it is final that they (Sitharaman and Jaishankar) will contest the Lok Sabha elections. It has not been decided yet from where they will fight, whether it is in Karnataka or some other state," Joshi, who holds the Coal and Mines portfolio, said. When questioned if the Union Ministers will contest from Bengaluru, Joshi said he cannot answer it since nothing has been finalised yet. Sitharaman joined the BJP in 2008 and served as the national spokesperson of the party till 2014. She became a



junior Minister after Modi became the Prime Minister of the country. The same year she became a member of the Rajya Sabha from Andhra Pradesh. Sitharaman has served as the Defence Minister of the country between 2017 and 2019. Jaishankar is a career diplomat. In 2015, he served as the Foreign Secretary. In 2019, he was inducted into Modi's Cabinet. He was also nominated to the Rajya Sabha. Over the years,

he has attained popularity on social media due to his staunch defense of the Indian foreign policy on international forums. On Saturday, the BJP held the core group meeting of five States at the party headquarters in New Delhi. The meeting was led by BJP National President JP Nadda, in the presence of Home Minister, Amit Shah and Organisation General Secretary, BL Santosh. The meeting was held in phases, which saw discussion for the preparations of Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.



Weeding out physical files, Centre shreds paper work

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has been able to free up a huge 372 lakh sq feet space by weeding out millions of old files from its offices and in turn earned a revenue of ₹1181 crore in the last three years ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged the Ministries to do so as part of the massive cleanliness campaign. Of the total files weeded out, the maximum number of physical files was weeded out in the Ministry of Home Affairs (40500), followed by

the Ministry of External Affairs (25734) and Ministry of Personnel (3363). The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) report showed that a total 82176 physical files have been weeded out from the Central Government offices during the cleanliness drive conducted at 4563 offices and 17.02 lakh square feet space freed this year January. The Government generated ₹18.18 crore through scrap disposal. The report mentioned that 1,54,319

Physical files were reviewed. MHA was top in the list which freed space up to 14.55 lakh sq ft, followed by Ministry of Coal (77614 sq ft). Of the total revenue earned from scrap disposal, the Ministry of Railway was top in the list with ₹5.29 crore, followed by MHI of ₹5.11 crore. As per data, the Ministry of Railway and Department of Post were among the top two Ministries where maximum number of premises were cleaned.

Continued on Page 2

AAP announces Delhi Lok Sabha candidates



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took the lead on Tuesday to announce four Lok Sabha candidates from Delhi, including three sitting MLAs, while the major partner Congress of the INDIA alliance is mulling over the candidature for the remaining three constituencies of the total of seven, which not very long ago were held all by the Congress. Delhi Jal Board (DJB) vice chairman and MLA from Malviya Nagar, Somnath Bhatti, has been named from the New Delhi parliamentary seat, currently represented by Meenakshi Lekhi from the BJP. The AAP has nominated Mahabal Mishra, a former Congress MP, for the West Delhi seat. He unsuccessfully contested the 2014 and 2019

Lok Sabha elections against BJP's Parvesh Verma. The 70-year-old leader had quit the Congress years ago and will be contesting the seat with a high number of Purvanchali voters. Son of a safai karmachari, Kuldeep Kumar, sitting MLA from Kondli, will be AAP's candidate from East Delhi. The constituency is currently represented by BJP's Gautam Gambhir. The AAP has fielded Tughlakabad MLA Sahi Ram Pahalwan from the South Delhi seat. The constituency is currently represented by BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri. In Haryana, the AAP has fielded former Rajya Sabha MP Sushil Gupta

from Kurukshetra. The AAP had already announced its three candidates for Assam and two for Gujarat. The names were announced days after the party finalised its seat-sharing pact with the Congress for five States. The candidates' names were declared after AAP's Political Affairs Committee (PAC) meeting at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Tuesday. The committee is the highest decision-making body of the party, headed by AAP supreme leader Kejriwal. AAP national general secretary (Organisation) Sandeep Pathak announced the candidates' names at a Press conference.

Continued on Page 2

SC lashes out at Patanjali

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The entire country has been "taken for a ride," the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while restraining till further orders Patanjali Ayurved, a company co-founded by yoga guru Ramdev and dealing in herbal products, from advertising or branding products meant for treating diseases. The top court is hearing a plea of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) alleging a smear campaign by Ramdev against the vaccination drive and modern medicines. On November 21 last year, the counsel representing the company had assured the court that "henceforth there shall not be any violation of any law(s), especially relating to advertising or branding of products manufactured and marketed by it and, further, that no casual statements claiming medicinal efficacy or against any system of medicine will be released to the media in any form". The top court had then cautioned the company against making "false" and "misleading" claims in advertisements about its medicines as cure of several diseases. During the hearing on Tuesday, the top court referred to the statement given by the counsel representing Patanjali Ayurved before it in November last year and said it was "bound down" to such assurance by the court.

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Continued on Page 2

Quartet to reignite Indian Space Odyssey after 40 years

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Group Captains Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Angad Pratap, Ajit Krishnan and Wing Commander Shubanshu Shukla have been designated as the astronauts of India's manned mission to space Gaganyaan, scheduled for next year. They were presented before the nation and "winged" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a special function held at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday. Before being introduced to the nation, the Prime Minister held a review meeting with the scientists and engineers of ISRO about India's preparedness for the country's first-ever manned

mission. "They are not just four names or four human beings; they are the four powers that are going to take the aspirations of 140 crore Indians to space. An Indian is going to space after 40 years. This time, the time is ours, the countdown is ours, and the rocket is also ours," said Modi while addressing Team ISRO after giving astronaut wings to the four Test Pilots. The Prime Minister made a special request to the media in the country. "These astronauts are still undergoing rigorous training and physical exercises. We have to ensure that their preparations do not get disturbed or disrupted because of publicity, hence please leave them alone until



GROUP CAPTAIN PRASANTH BALAKRISHNAN NAIR



GROUP CAPTAIN AJIT KRISHNAN



GROUP CAPTAIN ANGAD PRATAP



WING COMMANDER SHUBHANSHU SHUKLA

community that India would soon have its own Space Station, and the country's target was to reach Venus by 2035. In an announcement that drew a thundering ovation, Modi said the day is not far off when Indian astronauts would land on the Moon. "The next Chandrayaan Mission will see the Indian space vehicle bringing samples of rock, sand, etc., collected from the lunar surface," said Modi. The Prime Minister said the last ten years saw ISRO launching 400 satellites and the number of space startups surpassing 200. The four astronauts were selected after a series of strenuous physical tests and have been undergoing training at space

institutes in Russia and India for the last four years. Along with the announcement of the names of the astronauts, the Prime Minister dedicated to the nation the country's first semi-cryogenic integrated engine and stage test facility, giving a boost to ISRO's semi-cryogenic stage development. "It is a dream come true for ISRO as the GenNext semi-cryogenic engine stage would bring down the cost of space accessibility and also power the Mark-III Launch Vehicles to deploy heavy communication satellites into Geostationary Orbit, which is 36,000 km away from Earth's surface," said Dr R Purushothaman Nair, former ISRO scientist.

Fire breaks out at LNJP hospital, 50 evacuated

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Around 50 people, including patients and staff members, at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain (LNJP) Hospital in Central Delhi were evacuated after a fire broke out in the seven-storey emergency block building, an official said on Tuesday. No one was injured. Chief of Delhi Fire Services Atul Garg said they received a call about the blaze from the hospital at around 10.18 pm on Monday. A total of 10 fire engines were immediately pressed into service. The fire broke out due to a short circuit in the OPD main casualty ward. It took almost an hour to extinguish the blaze completely, he said. Around 50 people, including patients and hospital staff, were evacuated, Garg said. According to police, the fire broke out on the third-floor emergency ward. They rushed to the spot and flames were



found in a shaft of cables on the third and fourth floors. Fire tenders were provided a clear passage up to the emergency ward. Police and hospital staff evacuated the patients from the ground floor. The fire was soon extinguished. No one was injured, a senior police officer said. A senior doctor at the LNJP Hospital said, "It would have been a major accident had our staff not been alert." "The fire broke out on the third floor of the seven-storey emergency block building, and our staff responded to the fire

ED issues eighth summons to Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for the eighth time for questioning in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. Kejriwal, the national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), has now been asked to depose at the agency's headquarters here on March 4, they said. Kejriwal on Monday skipped the seventh summons issued to him in the case, saying he would appear before the agency if a court ordered him to do so. A city court, approached by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) over Kejriwal skipping its summons, has listed this matter for further hearing on March 16. The ED, while issuing the eighth summons, rejected the contention that a fresh notice for Kejriwal's attendance was wrong as the matter was sub-judice. The agency believes



that the local court has prima facie held Kejriwal guilty of "disobeying" the earlier notices issued to him in this case, warranting the eighth summons. BJP leader Manoj Tiwari on Tuesday reacted to the summons issued to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal under the excise policy case, saying that he was surprised as to why the Enforcement Directorate was giving so many chances to the AAP national convener. "If someone is questioned in a case, and the one who is accused thinks that they cannot give answers, it proves that they are guilty and is accepting it," Tiwari said.

Kejriwal's name has been mentioned multiple times in the charge sheets filed by the ED in the case. Kejriwal and his party have alleged that the summonses issued by the ED were "illegal". "They want us to break the alliance. Their message basically is that we should quit the alliance," he said, claiming there were informal messages to that effect from different quarters. AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh apart from communications in-charge of the party Vijay Nair have been arrested in this case by the ED till now. The ED had claimed in its charge sheet that the AAP used "proceeds of crime" to the tune of about Rs 45 crore in its Goa election campaign. The agency is also expected to file a fresh supplementary charge sheet in the case and may name the AAP as a "beneficiary" of the alleged kick-backs that were generated through the excise policy.

Traffic cops to get beat areas to tackle road congestion

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The traffic police in Delhi is planning to convert the duty-point areas of its personnel into beat areas in an attempt to reduce congestion on roads, officials said on Tuesday. A senior police officer said they are planning to try it out as a pilot project at some important road inter-sections of the city. A duty point is a specific area assigned to a traffic police personnel, whereas the area under a beat is wider. "We are planning to change the duty-point areas of the traffic personnel into beat areas. We are planning to introduce it as a pilot project. We will first target the main areas or places where traffic congestion is an issue. With this, the traffic police personnel can go to any area in their beat, which is wider than the duty point, in order to remove traffic con-

gestion as and when required," the officer said. Traffic is one of the major issues Delhiites face everyday. Since the force is busy at Delhi's border points in view of an ongoing farmers' protest, the plan is likely to be launched next month, the officer said. The officer further said this is being done for a better management of the traffic system in the national capital and ensure a smooth flow of vehicular movement. In 2022, the Delhi Police had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with FM radio stations to air live updates about traffic congestions and diversions to commuters in the national capital. Under the MoU, information regarding traffic is taken from the ranges and forwarded to the public relations officer to further pass it on to the FM stations.

Flight delayed for five hours after IGIA receives hoax threat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Kolkata-bound Spicejet flight was delayed for more than five hours on Tuesday after the Delhi airport received a threat message about explosives being hidden in the passengers' luggage, official sources said. A woman carrying an infant has been detained by security agencies for questioning in the case, the sources said. The flight, SG-8263, was scheduled to depart around 5:40 am but it was allowed to leave only after 11:30 am after the security agencies completed an anti-sabotage check and repeat frisking of check-in and cabin baggage of the travellers and crew, they said. The airport duty manager at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport received an email around 5:20

am that "there is a safety issue" on the said flight and that "somebody was taking explosion goods in bags and luggage" onboard, a senior official said. The message was immediately flashed across and a bomb threat assessment committee comprising various security agencies and airport officials was convened. The aircraft was sent to be parked at an isolation bay at the airport, the official said and added that after a complete re-check and scanning of luggage, the said message was declared a hoax and the flight was allowed to depart. A woman passenger along with a infant was later intercepted at the terminal area and the security agencies have detained them for questioning. Someone linked to them is suspected to have sent the email, the sources said.

Sports complex at Qutab Garh village inaugurated

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday inaugurated a Delhi Development Authority (DDA) sports complex at Qutab Garh village, which has been adopted by him to develop as a model village, officials said. The foundation stone of the sports complex was laid in October last year and the entire project has been completed at a cost of Rs 2.5 crore, an official statement said. The DDA, in a post on X, said, "Hon'ble @LtGovDelhi, Sh. VK Saxena inaugurated #DDA Sports Complex in Qutabgarh Model Village, Delhi along with Hon'ble MP Sh. @hansrajhansHRH. The complex has extensive amenities like volleyball, badminton, & kabaddi courts for male & female, an open gym & jogging tracks," it wrote. The sports complex also includes an extended air-conditioned multipurpose hall of about 216 square metres, the statement said.



"Sports play an important role to keep us fit. Realising this, the prime minister launched the 'Fit India' movement in 2019 so that fitness becomes an integral part of our daily life. The movement has become a huge success. I am confident that many players from Qutabgarh will represent India at the international level and bring laurels and medals for our country," Saxena said. Appreciating the role of DDA in transforming Qutabgarh, the LG said that he aims to build a

sports complex in every village in Delhi. "I want children to get advanced training in various sports facilities, and both Indian Oil and Indian Army have agreed to provide experienced coaches and soon we will get to see advanced coaching facilities as well," the LG said. The DDA has played a pivotal role in building sports infrastructure and promotion of sports in the national capital. At present, DDA has 16 sports complexes, three mini sports

complexes, two public golf courses, 17 swimming pools and 40 multi-gyms, an official statement said. Meanwhile, centres of excellence are also in progress in many sports like wrestling, weightlifting, boxing, judo, kabaddi, tennis, shooting, football, and hockey in various sectors of Dwarka along with a centre of excellence in aquatics in Sector 33 Rohini. A public golf course is also being developed at Sector 24 Dwarka, it said.

LG gives nod to revision of allowances of judicial officers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has given his nod for implementation of the Supreme Court direction for revision of allowances for judicial officers in Delhi on the basis of the recommendations of the Second National Judicial Pay Commission (SNJPC). Saxena approved the proposal of the Law Department in this regard and it has now been sent to the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, for its concurrence as per laid down rules, officials said here on Tuesday. The Supreme Court in its judgment dated 04.01.2024 in writ petition (C-643/2015) titled - All India Judges Association vs Union of India & Others -- had accepted the recommendations of the



SNJPC with respect to the allowance of judicial officers/retired judicial officers of Delhi Judicial Services (DJS) and Delhi Higher Judicial Service (DHJS). The apex court in its judgment had set the deadline of February 29, 2024 for all States and Union Territories for disbursements on account of arrears of salary, pension and allowances due and payable to judicial officers, retired judicial officers and family pensioners.

Three days Dilli Durbar 2024 held at Rajghat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Sufi Syed Riyazuddin Schishty, Gaddi Nahsin - Dargah Ajmer Sharif and Founder Chairman of Ajmer Global Sufi Foundation, also the Patron-in-Chief, Dilli Durbar festival, has expressed gratitude to the Government of India for their unwavering support towards the Dilli Durbar 2024 held at Gandhi Darshan Museum, Rajghat, New Delhi on February 23, 24 and 25. During this three-day celebration of Spirituality and Love, the launch of the book "The Divine Light" authored by Syed Adil Husain Chishty marked a significant moment. The book encapsulates the teachings and life of Khwaja Gharib Nawaz (HA), an apostle of peace and harmony, emphasising the value of serving all with unconditional love, peace, and understanding across different faiths and cultures. This festival, aimed at reflecting the spirituality of India, has garnered widespread acclaim and serves as a beacon of communal harmony and interfaith dialogue. This initiative aligns strongly with the vision of "Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat" envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Dilli Durbar initiative, fostered by the spirit of communal harmony and interfaith dialogue, has seen participation from various religious leaders representing diverse faiths and traditions. It is a profound journey that celebrates the rich spiritual ethos of our nation, drawing inspiration from the teachings and philosophy of the great Sufi/Bhakti spiritual traditions, thereby exemplifying the unity in diversity that is intrinsic to India.

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EAM calls for reforms of outdated global structures

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The conflict in Gaza is of “great concern” and the humanitarian crises arising out of it require a sustainable solution that gives immediate relief to those most affected, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday while calling for reforms of “outdated” global structures to effectively address geopolitical challenges. In a virtual statement at the 55th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Jaishankar called for urgently making multilateral frameworks fit to respond to current global realities by fixing systemic flaws in the current institutions. He said it would be in collective interest and responsibility to work together in the UN and outside to find lasting solutions to geopolitical chal-

lenges. “For this to happen, it is vital that we first recognise that for multilateralism to be credible, effective and responsive, it is now high time to reform outdated structures and fix systemic flaws, and urgently make multilateral frameworks fit for the purpose, reflecting current global realities,” the external affairs minister said. India has been pressing for reforms in the UN, especially the UN Security Council. In his remarks, Jaishankar expressed deep concern over the situation in Gaza. At the same time, referring to the October 7 terror attack on Israel by Hamas, he asserted that “terrorism and hostage taking” are unacceptable. “The conflict in Gaza is of great concern to us all. The humanitarian crises arising from conflicts require a sustainable solution that gives immediate relief to those most

affected,” Jaishankar said. “At the same time, we must be clear that terrorism and hostage taking are unacceptable. It also goes without saying that international humanitarian law must always be respected,” he added. Jaishankar said it is vital that the conflict does not spread within or beyond the region. “And efforts must also focus on seeking a two-State solution where Palestinian people can live within secure borders,” he said. Israel has been continuing with its military offensive in Gaza as part of its retaliation to the unprecedented attack on Israeli cities by Hamas on October 7 last year. Hamas killed around 1,200 people in Israel and abducted more than 220, some of whom were released during a brief ceasefire. More than 27,000 people have been killed in Gaza in the



Israeli offensive, according to the Hamas-run authorities in Gaza. In his remarks at the UNHRC, Jaishankar said India’s civilisational values emphasise that the world shares “one earth, we are one family and we have one future.” This Indian approach is defined more by how much “we are alike than by our differences” and that many are

impacted by the choices made by even a few, he said, adding that this interconnectedness means that genuine dialogue is the only way to find solutions is not just an imperative, but in fact, inevitable. “It is, therefore, in our collective interest, and responsibility, to work together in the UN and outside to find lasting solutions to geopolitical challenges,” he said.

The external affairs minister said India’s approach to human rights is rooted in its democratic principles and pluralistic ethos. “Our Constitution guarantees protection of civil and political rights and provides for progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights,” he said. “Our society and polity are anchored by our institutional strengths of an independent judiciary, robust media and vibrant civil society,” Jaishankar said. He said these values have continued to inform India’s policies, domestically and globally. “And therefore, I believe, we have much to contribute,” he added. Referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the external affairs minister said 2024 is an important year for India’s democracy, with nearly 96 crore voters gearing up to

exercise their right to vote. “This is not merely a political exercise but a celebration of democracy, a festival where every voice resonates and every vote counts,” he said. “In a world where the principles of democracy are constantly tested, India stands as a beacon of hope and resilience, showcasing the power of the people to shape their collective future,” he said. Jaishankar said the multiple crises facing the world have highlighted the glaring global inequities. “Naturally then, it was with a sense of exceptional responsibility that we took up G20’s presidency last year. On India’s initiative, the African Union became a permanent member of the G20,” he said. The external affairs minister said the G20 New Delhi leaders’ declaration put forth solutions on a range of domains, such as digital public infra-

structure, climate action, reforming international financial institutions, women-led development, education and AI (artificial intelligence), to name a few. “As the world’s most populous nation and fifth-largest economy, India always stands ready to share our experiences and expertise with those who wish to benefit from it,” he said. Jaishankar said India’s development cooperation that spans the globe is guided by the priorities of its partners and it creates local capacities and adheres to fiscal responsibility and transparency. “India has been at the forefront of lending a helping hand when it is most needed. We demonstrated this during the Covid pandemic, also as first responders in disaster emergencies like in Türkiye and Syria last year, and when Sri Lanka experienced a severe economic crisis,” he said.

Campaign to encourage first time voters to vote launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Centre on Tuesday launched a national campaign to encourage first-time voters to exercise their franchise and make the poll process more participative. The Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Union Ministry of Education launched a jingle — “Banega Desh Mahan, Jab Vote Karenga Hum” — aimed at about 1.85 crore first-time voters in the country who are eligible to vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. “Let us make our electoral process even more participative. I call upon people from all walks of life to spread the message, in their own style, among first time voters,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X, using the #MeraPehlaVoteDeshKeLiye hashtag. “As the nation gears up for its biggest festival of democracy, I urge all of you to join the #MeraPehlaVoteDeshKeLiye campaign and encourage young voters to exercise their democratic right,” Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said he has directed all higher education institutions in the country to conduct comprehensive voter awareness activities on their campuses from February



28 to March 6 to galvanise youth power, emphasise the value of voting and make informed choices. The prime minister, in his “Mann Ki Baat” radio address, had said the campaign focused on encouraging first-time voters to participate in the electoral process in large numbers. “Bharat is proud of its youth power that is full of passion and energy and the more the youth participate in the electoral process, the better the results will be for the country,” the prime minister had said. India has nearly 1.85 crore first-time voters in the 18-19 age group who are eligible to vote in the Lok Sabha elections, likely to be held in April-May. “The main objective of the initiative is to engage and encourage young voters to come out and vote and to convey the importance of voting for the larger good of the nation,” an official said.

Designated spaces shall be identified in universities/colleges/higher education institutions where activities related to voter awareness will be undertaken by respective institutions. The initiative will witness both on-ground physical events and online competitions on the MyGov platform, an official statement said. Various activities, including competitions on blog writing, podcasts, debate, essay writing, quizzes, extempore and Battle of Bands, will be conducted to show creativity in content creation. Interactive workshops and seminars emphasising the value of voting and understanding the electoral process, etc, will also be organised at the institutions. The National Service Scheme and its volunteers will lead the programme in educational institutions, with activities documented on the MyGov portal for wider dissemination.

Task force formed to tackle health challenges faced by medical students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
In response to the growing concern surrounding the mental health challenges faced by medical students, particularly depression and suicide, the National Medical Commission (NMC) has finally formed a national task force comprised of 15 members. It is headed by Dr BM Suresh, a distinguished Professor specialising in Psychiatry at National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS). “Recognising the urgent need for intervention, an office order was issued on February 21 to establish the task force in the wake of concerning prevalence of depression and suicide among medical students,” said an official from the NMC. Terming the much-awaited move a need of the hour, Federation of Resident Doctors’ Association (FORDA) FORDA general secretary Dr Sarvesh Pandey said we have been drawing the attention of the government towards this disturbing trend which doesn’t behave well for the health of our health system. He cited the National Medical Commission (NMC) data spanning from 2018 to 2022 which shows a staggering 64 MBBS students and 58 PG students tragically lost their lives to suicide, alongside a significant number who left their educational programs during



this period. Dr. Smita Deshpande, senior psychiatrist and former head of the Centre of Excellence in Mental Health, ABVIMS- Dr. RML Hospital, Delhi hoped that the panel will take holistic approach in the matter. The consequences of untreated mental health issues among medical students are far-reaching. “Not only mental health issues impact the individual’s personal well-being and quality of life, but they can also affect academic performance, clinical competence, and professional development. “Moreover, untreated mental health issues can have long-term implications for the future healthcare workforce, potentially leading to decreased job satisfaction, increased rates of burnout, and even attrition from the profession,” she said. The NMC official said that all the issues concerning the health issues will be dwelled intensely. “The scope of the task force involves a comprehensive

review of existing literature and data pertaining to mental health and suicides among medical students, aiming to identify underlying factors and trends. Furthermore, the task force is mandated to propose evidence-based strategies aimed at enhancing mental health support systems and preventing suicides within the medical student population. The task force will also conduct field visits to medical colleges where incidents of suicides have been reported to study challenges faced by medical students at the ground level, allowing the task force to tailor its recommendations accordingly. The panel will submit its recommendations by May 31, 2024. It will serve as a roadmap for policymakers, educators, and healthcare professionals to implement targeted interventions and systemic reforms aimed at improving the mental health of medical students, said the official.

Driverless train incident: Both driver, station master at fault, says probe report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
A preliminary probe into the incident of the driverless running of a freight train for about 70 km from Kathua (Jammu) to Uchi Bassi Station (Punjab) in Jammu Tawi-Pathankot section has suggested that both the driver as well as the station master failed to fulfil their responsibilities. The joint probe report, signed by five senior railway officials, has recorded the statements of various persons involved in the incident and described the turn of events which point to dereliction of duties on the part of the driver and the station master of Kathua. Divisional Railway Manager of the Firozpur division, under which the Kathua-Jammu Tawi section comes, has suspended six railway officials based on the preliminary probe and ordered a detailed investigation. The report said the loco pilot in his statement submitted that besides stabilising the engine and three wagons of the train by applying hand brakes, he also placed two wooden wedges before the wheels of the loco so that it couldn’t move. The report added that, however, when the train was stopped at Uchi Bassi the concerned station master carried out an inspection which

was video recorded and found that the wagons’ handbrakes were not in applied position. It further noted that the station master of Kathua, who was on duty, did not stabilise the train properly from 6.05 am to 7.10 am. Railway officials said that as per norms, the station master has to check if the brakes are properly applied and take other measures to ensure that it would not move. According to the report, it was a divisional material train (DMT) which is used to carry railway materials for construction and other purposes. It was stationed at Kathua junction with 53 wagons and it had no brake van (guard’s coach). The report said that at 5:20 am, the control room told the station master to tell the driver to take the train to Jammu but the driver refused as the train didn’t have any guard’s coach as well as a guard. The control room, as per the report, asked the driver to shut down the train, be relieved of his duties and take a train to go to Jammu. The driver handed over the keys to the station master around 6 am and left for Jammu. The report suggested that the train remained unmanned from 6 am to 7:10 am before it started moving on its own due to a down gradient.

Army inducts desi modular bridge to boost capability

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The Indian Army on Tuesday here inducted a 46-metre indigenously designed and manufactured modular bridge thereby giving a boost to bridging capability of the force’s engineers. The induction ceremony took place at the Manekshaw Centre here in the presence of Army chief General Manoj Pandey and senior officials of the Army and Larsen and Toubro (L&T). “Over the next four years, a total of 41 sets, valued at Rs 2,585 crore, will be progressively inducted. The first set was inducted on Tuesday,” a senior official said. These “game-changing bridges” have been designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and produced by L&T as a DRDO-nominated production agency. The modular bridge is a “mechanically-launched single-span, fully-decked 46-metre assault bridge, enabling the Army to overcome obstacles, such as canals and ditches, with ease. It will augment the crucial bridging capability of the Indian Army’s engineers as these bridges are highly mobile, rugged, and designed for quick deployment and retrieval, aligning with the fast-paced nature of mechanised operations,” the official said. The induction of the modular

bridge also highlights India’s prowess in designing and developing advanced military equipment” and underscores the country’s commitment to “Aatmanirbhar Bharat” and self-reliance in defence production, the Army said. The contract for the procurement of the modular bridges was signed with L&T in February 2023. Each set of the modular bridge consists of “seven carrier vehicles based on 8x8 heavy mobility vehicles and two launcher vehicles based on 10x10 heavy mobility vehicles”, the Army said. These bridges can be employed over various types of obstacles like canals and ditches with quick launching and retrieval capabilities. The equipment is highly mobile, versatile, rugged and capable of keeping pace with wheeled and tracked mechanised vehicles, it added. The modular bridges will replace the manually-launched medium girder bridges (MGBs) that are currently being used in the Army. The indigenously designed and manufactured modular bridges shall have many advantages over the MGBs, such as an increased span, less time for construction and mechanical launching with retrieval capability, officials said. The acquisition of these bridges not only enhances the Army’s operational effectiveness, but also showcases India’s growing prominence in defence technology and manufacturing, they said.

Household expenditure survey election inspired document: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Targeting the Centre for releasing an “election-inspired” Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday demanded a census be conducted soon for accurate information, insisting it should also incorporate a caste survey. The Opposition party’s reaction came after the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), functioning under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, released data on household consumption expenditure for 2022-23 on Saturday. Kharge said that after 10 years of “deep sleep”, the Modi Government has finally come out with an “election-inspired” survey on public expenditure and income. “The Modi government has made an unsuccessful attempt to pat itself on the back in the survey. We have only one demand, for correct information, the Census of 2021 should be done as soon as possible and a caste census should be a part of it. The Congress party will definitely get it done as soon as its government is formed,” the Congress chief added. Kharge said if everything in the country was so shiny as is being shown in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, why the poorest five per cent of rural India was spending only Rs 46 daily.



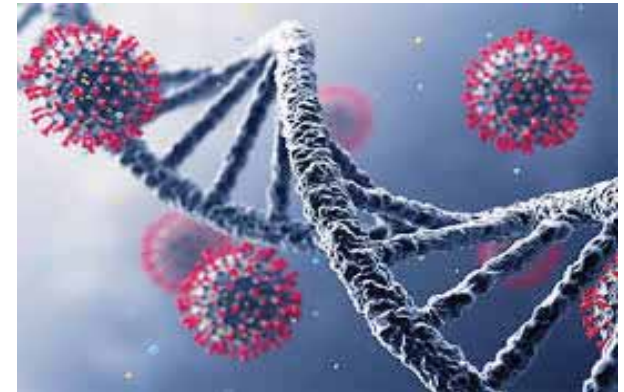
“Why did the poorest five per cent of families get the least benefit from government schemes – only Rs 68/month? Did the capitalist friends get the remaining benefits? “Why is the monthly income of farmers less than the average income of rural India? Why has the fuel expenditure of rural families reduced by only 1.5 per cent while the Modi government continues to boast of the success of the Ujjwala scheme,” the Congress leader asked. According to Kharge, experts say the government can change the criteria for measuring food inflation data from this survey. “Is this not an attempt to hide back-breaking inflation with fake data,” he asked. Kharge claimed that the surprising thing is that the nomination of this Household Consumption Expenditure Survey should have been the 69th Round or the 70th Round, but which round is this survey named after, that has deliberately been kept ambiguous. This has been done so that manipulation of data goes undetected, he alleged.

Former SC judge appointed chairperson of Lokpal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Former Supreme Court judge F A M Khanwilkar was appointed as the chairperson of the anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal on Tuesday, nearly two years after the post fell vacant. The Lokpal has been working without its regular chief after Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose completed his term on May 27, 2022. Justice Pradip Kumar Mohanty, a judicial member of the Lokpal, is currently the acting chairperson. President Droupadi Murmu is pleased to appoint Justice Ajay Manikrao Khanwilkar as the chairperson of the Lokpal, according to a communique issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Justice Khanwilkar retired from the Supreme Court in July 2022. Retired justices Lingappa Narayana Swamy, Sanjay Yadav and Ritu Raj Awasthi have been appointed as judicial members of the anti-corruption ombudsman, it said. Sushil Chandra, Pankaj Kumar and Ajay Tirkey will be non-judicial members, the communique stated. These appointments will take effect from the dates they assume charge of their respective offices, it added. The chairperson and members of the Lokpal are appointed by the President after obtaining the recommendations of a Selection Committee having the prime minister as its chairperson.

Covid impacted lungs more severely in Indians: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI
Once energetic and vibrant, Pradeep Tewari, a seasoned journalist never anticipated that the Covid virus, which has partially damaged his lung, could be so profound and life-altering. Despite eventually recovering from the acute phase of the illness, Tewari continues to grapple with debilitating scars in the lung tissue and persistent respiratory symptoms. As a result, he finds himself feeling trapped by his own body, unable to fully participate in family gatherings or official events or even complete simple tasks like climbing stairs or taking a short walk without gasping for breath. But the inability to lift his small daughter in his arms due to his weakened lungs is one of the most distressing feelings he experiences. Tewari shares that it’s heartbreaking to see her reach out, expecting to be held, only to be met with his physical limitations. Tewari’s case serves as a poignant example that reflects in the findings of a recent study conducted by doctors from the Christian Medical College, (CMC) Vellore to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on lung function. The researchers examined 207 individuals, showcasing substantial impairment in lung function, exercise capacity, and quality of life among recovered individuals. It revealed a high prevalence of respiratory symptoms among Indians who recovered, even after a mean of over two months following



acute illness, with shortness of breath reported in 49.3 per cent and cough in 27.1 per cent of the cohort. The study is published in the journal PLOS Global Public Health. “It is clear from the study that lung function is affected more in the Indian population compared to data from other countries across every category of disease severity,” said study lead researcher D J Christopher, professor of pulmonary medicine at CMC Vellore, while comparing data from Europe and China. An Italy-based study, for instance, found dyspnoea or shortness of breath present in 43 per cent and cough in less than 20 per cent of the subjects. The corresponding figures from a Chinese study were also lower than those seen in the Indian study. In terms of comorbidities, Christian Medical College (CMC) Vellore researchers found 72.5 per cent of individuals reporting underlying health conditions such as diabetes mellitus, systemic hypertension, and chronic lung diseases.

However, Christopher said none of the study subjects had features of active TB at the time of recruitment to the study. “This study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive post-recovery care and preventive measures to address the long-term health implications of Covid-19 on lung health and overall well-being. This also indicates that there is an anticipated rise in respiratory diseases, including interstitial lung disease (ILD) and lung cancer, among Covid-19 survivors. As he battles with Long Covid impacts which have partially damaged his lungs and left him disabled in many ways, Tewari now hopes that the study will serve as a wake-up call for the Government to focus its attention to the plight of the patients suffering with Long Covid-19. “There is a need for comprehensive post-recovery care and monitoring as essential services to address these long-term health challenges being faced by patients like us. There is a need to mitigate the risk of lasting lung function impairment,” he says.

North, south divide created narrow political gains: Rajnath

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM The BJP is not a north-centric party and the north-south binary has been created by the opposition parties for "narrow" political gains...



gains and immediate electoral gains, these people, in the name of discrediting BJP, also put a question mark on the national integrity of India," he said.

"In Gujarat, we have a government for almost 30 years. If we talk about the states of southern India, we have had our government in Karnataka for a long time. Presently we are the second largest party in West Bengal, Odisha and Karnataka. Our vote share is continuously increasing in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala," Singh said.

"Therefore, the allegation that BJP is only a party of north Indians is factually completely wrong. For narrow political

former Indian sailors who were given death sentences in Qatar got pardoned from there and one of them is from Visakhapatnam," he said. Singh also rejected allegations that the BJP is a communal party.

BJP will win 11 of 14 LS seats in Assam: Himanta

PTI ■ GUWAHATI



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday exuded confidence that the BJP will win 11 of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the upcoming polls. He said the saffron party will also "try to secure the 12th seat" in the state.

Asked about the number of seats the BJP is likely to win in the Lok Sabha polls in the state, Sarma said, "We are sure to win decisively in 11 constituencies, while we will try our best to bag another seat". Sarma led a 100-km motorcycle rally from Kareng Chapori in Dhemaji to Majuli, riding a motorcycle himself, before participating in a series of programmes that included the distribution of land documents and the launch of development initiatives in the world's largest river island.

NOTICE

The general public is hereby informed that my client Sanjay Kumar Khanna s/o late Shri Ved prakash Khanna Address C-4/91 Santa Vihar New Delhi-110076 I want to declare that I am not related with...

Vikas Sharma & Associates Supreme court of India & Delhi High Court B-14 Plot No-A-38 Madhu Vihar Delhi-92

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Table with 5 columns: S. No., Registration No., Type of Vehicle, Model, Earnest Money. Lists various vehicles for sale.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Information is given to general public at large that my client Mr. Pradeep Kumar s/o Mr. Kamal Singh owner of Single Storey House measuring area 54 Sq. Yd. or say 46 Sq. Mt., situated in Village Barouli Vastupur...

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Notice is hereby given that my client (interpol) is in process to purchase the Plot no. 44, Area measuring 228 sq. yds. forming part of Kharsa no. 112/71/2, 14/2, 17/1, 14/1, 17/2, 17/3 Situated at Maupa Ballabgarh (Krisna Colony), Tehsil Ballabgarh District, Faridabad, Haryana (availing loan from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd from Sh. Hari Kishan, whereas the acquired the same...

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that Mrs. Manju Jain W/o Mr. Subhash Chand Jain, is the owner of the Built-up Property bearing No. 14-43, area measuring 79 Sq. Yds. i.e. 58.52 Sq. Mtrs. with Road/Franchise rights, out of Plot No. 58, Killa No. 23, Situated in the Abadi of Jagat Ram Park, Laxmi Nagar, in the area of village Kiureli Khas, Ilaha Sahabada, Delhi-110092, by virtue of Gift Deed dated 07.08.2018, regd. doc. No. 4668. The above-said property is to be financed & mortgaged with my client i.e. Axis Finance Limited and she is the absolute owner of the property...

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given pursuant to Section 108 and 110 of the Companies Act, amended (hereinafter referred to as the "Act") read together with Rule 20 and Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 ("the Rules"), (including any modification(s) or re-enactment(s) thereof for the time being in force), Secretarial Stan...

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PUBLIC NOTICE

The 'cut-off' date for the purpose of ascertaining the eligibility of members to avz e-voting facility is Friday, February 23, 2024. The members whose name is record register of members of the company or in the register of beneficial owners maintain depositories as on cut-off date shall only be entitled to avail the remote e-voting I...

Place: Rampur Date: 27.02.2024 Rajee (Company Secretary & Compliance)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client (interpol) is in process to purchase the Plot no. 44, Area measuring 228 sq. yds. forming part of Kharsa no. 112/71/2, 14/2, 17/1, 14/1, 17/2, 17/3 Situated at Maupa Ballabgarh (Krisna Colony), Tehsil Ballabgarh District, Faridabad, Haryana (availing loan from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd from Sh. Hari Kishan, whereas the acquired the same...

NOTICE

This is to inform you that medical records department of Ram Lal Kundan Lal Orthopedic Hospital & R.K. Maternity Home, Pandav Nagar, Delhi-110092 is going to dispose off the OPD & IPD medical records files (Patient case sheet) from 1st January, 2011 to 31st December, 2015 if anyone has any issue or concern with these medical record files or case sheet kindly contact MRD or Hospital management with seven working days. Tel: 011-43188000/1099 Mobile: 9811699123

PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (2) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

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

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

PUBLIC NOTICE

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

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

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

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Date : February 28, 2024 Place : Gurgaon Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Young dreams

Modi exhorts first-time voters to fulfil their aspirations by building a developed India

India, with one of the youngest populations in the world, boasts of a dynamic workforce brimming with energy, innovation and creativity. The demographic advantage of having a large number of citizens under 35 presents it with a golden opportunity to propel itself towards great economic, social and technological progress. Harnessing the power of its youth brigade, India can emerge as a global powerhouse, charting a path of sustainable development and prosperity. But channelling the youthful energy is most important as it cuts both ways. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to first-time voters is pertinent. Beyond just casting their vote, it is about understanding the nation's political dynamics and making an informed decision. Modi's assertion that the youth possess the "maximum right to shape India" resonates deeply with the aspirations and potential of millions of young Indians. With the vision of a developed India aligning with the dreams of its youth, the call carries profound significance as the nation navigates through a transformative phase. The empowerment of first-time voters symbolises the shifting dynamics of political engagement, where their voice is increasingly recognised as pivotal in shaping development policies. Modi's emphasis on the pivotal role of youth in nation-building underscores the recognition of their energy, creativity and ambition as indispensable assets for progress.



By acknowledging the aspirations and dreams of the youth, the Prime Minister not only acknowledges their power but also instils a sense of responsibility in them. Moreover, Modi is calling for action, urging the youth to actively participate in the democratic process. Also, his emphasis on youth empowerment extends beyond electoral participation to encompass skill development, entrepreneurship and innovation. Through initiatives such as Skill India, Start-up India and Digital India, the Government has endeavoured to create an enabling ecosystem that nurtures the talents and ambitions of the youth, equipping them with the tools to contribute meaningfully to the nation's progress. However, realising the vision of a developed India requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders, including the Government, civil society and the private sector. It demands inclusive policies that address the diverse needs and aspirations of the youth, irrespective of their socio-economic background or geographic location. It also necessitates investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure and employment generation. The Government, for its part, must keep the youth at the forefront while formulating policies and giving maximum leverage to them. As the nation marches forward, it is imperative that the aspirations and potential of the youth are harnessed effectively, ensuring a brighter and prosperous future.

PICTALK



Divyangjan (persons with disability) during a 'Purple Fest' at the Amrit Udyan, in New Delhi

China's bid to expand maritime infrastructure



PADMALOCHAN DASH

Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and the String of Pearls strategy, China aims to extend its maritime influence, raising questions about its long-term objectives

China's expansive push into larger maritime domains has emerged as a significant global concern. This is particularly evident in its construction and takeover of maritime infrastructure across strategic locations, most prominently in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the South China Sea, and the largely Indo-Pacific. The surge in its naval activities, along with the aggressive acquisition of vital maritime assets beyond its strategic limits, has compelled nations to dissect Beijing's long-term expansive objectives.

China's intention: China's much-calculated ambitious plans for maritime expansion are evident, particularly when examining the modus operandi of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments. These investments aim at enhancing China's maritime reach and linkages in all directions, which go hand in hand "by the intent of crafting a global power imbalance." Much attached to this intention is its String of Pearls strategy - which is aimed at encircling and containing the littoral South Asian countries and dictating their maritime trade and naval support networks.

Littoral States into Client States: Amongst its expansion motifs into South Asia, the transformation of the small states into client states remains the foremost-of-late Maldives has fallen into this trap. Concern remains, as the latter will act as a buffer zone around India's maritime strategic space and serve China's naval expansion in the IOR.

Maritime infrastructure: In the IOR, China is doing extra-territorial heavy investments into maritime infra. The intention is to take over others' critical assets while tactically positioning itself in crucial maritime zones. To further its access and reach to others' maritime zones that once remained distant is now getting closer to China using the creation of support networks in the littoral states through diverse investments.

Global Stability: The implications of China's maritime goals, particularly infrastructure control, require further examination. China's hybrid strategy of expand-



ing its naval growth and infrastructure acquisition demonstrates its ambition to reshape the global maritime landscape to its capacious encroachments. China's proactive acquisition of marine infrastructure, especially in the IOR, has become a major contention in global geopolitics.

China intends to gain control of critical marine infrastructure via a variety of initiatives. Several naval projects have been proposed, including port expansion, drone submarines, air-to-air refuelling, specialised missile systems, carrier-based stealth aircraft, and underwater drones. The intention, beyond doubt, is to bring its naval force to a formidable presence by keeping control over critical maritime infrastructure.

The Response: In response to China's extraterritorial garnishment, global players must urgently devise a comprehensive plan. The major stakeholders must come to the interest of the small littoral states. The focus should be on countering China's strategic procurement and control over the maritime expanse and infra in these contested regions.

The role of India: as the Net Security Provider in the region, India must have a long-term underpinned perspective -



IN RESPONSE TO CHINA'S EXTRATERRITORIAL GARNISHMENT, GLOBAL PLAYERS MUST URGENTLY DEVISE A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. THE MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS MUST COME FORWARD TO DEFEND THE INTEREST OF THE SMALL LITTORAL STATES

that keeps the potential consequence of China's escalating expansion - clear spelt. By remaining aligned with these perspectives, India can make the major players critically aware of the Chinese motives and align them with the task. The singular agenda must be, by remaining adhered to the established maritime laws and conventions, there must be a coordinated and proactive response arrangement put into action before the IOR region exasperates into a conflict zone.

Alternative Supply Chain: As nations cope with the escalating challenges posed by China's maritime motives that centre on infrastructure control, a united front to contain this must be imperative. Countries must push back against the BRI; and, alternatives to the BRI, such as Japan's "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" and "India's Security and Growth for All" must be pursued as alternatives. While Australia, the EU, Indonesia, Japan, and the U.S. are implementing strategies to counterbalance China's maritime ambitions, India's effort must be to bring them to these alternative initiatives and collaborate with them to the realisation of a full-scale "Alternative Global Supply chain Alliance"-keeping in attention both the civil-

ian and military purpose. **Multi-modal partnership mechanism:** Global cooperation is essential to contain China's assertion and control over extra-territorial maritime zones and infrastructures. Further to contain its ulterior expansion motives, vigilance in maritime affairs must be consolidated.

Necessary multi-modal-partnership mechanisms must be in place to protect the critical maritime infrastructures, assets and activities, where India can play a key role. India, while maintaining its strategic autonomy also needs to cooperate with non-residential maritime powers to cultivate the required response considerations. To the effectiveness of the multilateral security framework in place; things like diplomatic initiatives, military strategies, supply chain initiatives and multilateral cooperation must remain pivotal.

Net Security Provider: To carefully achieve this, measures to demystify the complexities presented by China's assertive projection, providing better alternatives with a non-zero-sum partnership platform for the aggrieved nations, must be India's priority.

(The writer works with an independent think tank; Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HEROIC ACTS OF AN ELDERLY COUPLE

Sir — No words of appreciation will be enough for the brave act of an elderly couple Shanmugaiiah and Kurunthammal in Tenkasi district, Tamil Nadu when they ran a few meters on the railway track in the wee hours, defying their age, and prevented a major train accident by warning the loco pilot of an obstruction on the tracks near the Bhagavathipuram railway station.

The couple's act is a heartwarming reminder of the indomitable spirit that often emerges in times of crisis. They remind us that heroism is not the preserve of the young or the powerful, but resides in the will to make a difference, regardless of one's age and physical prowess. The elderly couple's courageous act shows that the spirit of humanity burns brightly even in the darkest hours.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

DEPORTATION FROM RUSSIA

Sir — The recent death of an Indian worker in the Russian war zone has brought to light the indifferent attitude prevailing among certain segments of society in India. This unfortunate incident has the potential to strain the relationship between India and Russia. Additionally, the deportation of 100 young Indians who were serving as helpers in the Russia-Ukraine war zone is a matter of grave concern, especially for individuals from poor and marginalised families who rely on such employment opportunities for financial support.

These workers are often bound by contractual agreements, with minimum terms of one year and no provision for leave or early exit before six months. Despite the promise of lucrative monthly salaries and bonuses, the risks associated with working in a war zone are substantial. While workers undergo psychometric tests and are briefed about the dangers before deployment, the nature of their duties can vary significantly, from frontline combat to support roles as porters. It is worth noting that the

Adieu, Pankaj Udhas



Pankaj Udhas, the esteemed maestro of ghazal and playback melodies, bid adieu to this mortal coil on February 26, 2024, at the age of 73, thereby concluding a chapter of unparalleled musical artistry that transcends temporal bounds. Born on May 17, 1951, in the quaint environs of Jetpur, Gujarat, he embarked upon his mellifluous odyssey in the realm of music at a tender age, imbibing the essence of classical melodies under the tutelage of revered maestros. His migration to the bustling hub of Mumbai in

1976 marked the commencement of a resplendent career in the cinematic sphere. Debuting as a playback virtuoso in the cinematic opus "Kamna" in 1979, he ascended to the pinnacle of fame with his stirring rendition of "Chitthi Aayi Hai" in the cinematic magnum opus "Naam" in 1986, thereby etching his name in the annals of cinematic history.

Beyond his illustrious musical odyssey, Udhas was a paragon of benevolence, championing noble causes such as cancer awareness, thalassaemia eradication, and education for the underprivileged masses. As the luminary founder of the Parents Association Thalassaemic Unit Trust, his philanthropic endeavours illuminated the lives of myriad souls. Survived by his beloved consort Farida and cherished progeny, Nayaab and Reva, Udhas shall forever be enshrined in the hallowed annals of musical lore, an embodiment of timeless musical virtuosity and humanitarianism.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

recruitment of individuals from various countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, by the Russian Army for similar purposes underscores the political manoeuvres at play. This trend also sheds light on the alarming unemployment rates in India. In light of these developments, it is imperative for the Ministry of External Affairs and embassy authorities to prioritise the protection of Indian citizens abroad. Efforts should be made to dissuade individuals from pursuing high-risk professions overseas and to ensure their safety and dignity are preserved. Furthermore, India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict should be carefully evaluated in the context of its citizens' well-being and security.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIAN TEAM ON A WINNING SPREE

Sir — Winning is a habit and Team India continues its winning spree in India. This is the 17th successive series win for India at home. The true colours are well and

truly maintained at the home level. The spin combination is a striking force as we come across squaring and winning a series after being in the dumps. As we are worried about the toss and pitch the real interest revolves around DRS as several balls hit below knee level and even the umpires are in a fixed reading of the trajectory.

We run around victory and winning is a habit after all. If Jadeja fails then Ashwin will be a kingpin in our home pitches. Ashwin has more than 350 home wickets out of his 507 wickets. Cricket is a competitive game where the stakes are very high. We win regularly at home and that provides us a platform for going up to the World Test Championship where we fail miserably. We could not win the ICC Trophy in the recent past despite calling our team number one. That is where we need to work hard.

CK Subramanian | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Tourism takes Indo-Russian ties a notch higher

Moscow rolls out the red carpet to greet Indian tourists, inviting them to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of culture, history and hospitality



DIVYA BHATIA KAAL

In recent years, the Indo-Russian friendship has discovered new avenues of expression, with tourism emerging as one of the most promising. Moscow, the vibrant capital of Russia, has been spearheading this endeavour by actively engaging with Indian travellers and fostering meaningful collaborations to enhance tourism between the two nations. Moscow's journey toward becoming a global tourism hub has been characterized by strategic initiatives aimed at partnering with international stakeholders.

"Our objective," states Bulat Nurmukhanov, Head of the International Cooperation Division of the Moscow City Tourism Committee, "is to position Moscow as a leading global destination. We are particularly optimistic about India due to our long-standing cultural ties and the traditionally cordial relations shared between Indians and Russians." Furthermore, Russia's reputation as a friendly country with clean environments and hospitable people makes it a top choice for Indian tourists. Moreover, Moscow's afford-



ability, especially for budget travellers, and the reasonable airfare to the city further enhance its appeal. Moscow's success in attracting a diverse array of tourists, including a notable surge from emerging markets like India, underscores its significance. Nurmukhanov acknowledges India's importance, attributing targeted marketing initiatives and improved accessibility as driving forces behind the influx of Indian visitors. "India represents a significant source of tourism growth for Moscow," he affirms. To cater to the specific needs of Indian travellers, Moscow has implemented a multifaceted approach encompassing promotional campaigns, cultural exchanges. Collaborations with Indian travel agencies and hospitality stakeholders, along with leveraging international platforms to showcase Moscow's

attractions to Indian audiences. A significant stride towards facilitating travel from India has been the introduction of electronic visas for select countries, including India. The role of electronic visas in streamlining the visa application process.

"Moscow remains committed to furthering international cooperation and enhancing its appeal as a global tourism hub," says Nurmukhanov. Despite its age, Moscow continues to evolve while maintaining its charm in an ever-changing world. The statistics speak volumes about Moscow's growing allure for Indian tourists. Last year alone, over 60,000 visitors from India explored Moscow—a remarkable year-on-year increase of 25%. This positive momentum fuels optimism for the future, with plans to enhance infrastructure and reinstate flight connections between Moscow and various Indian cities.

Moscow's dedication to fostering inclusive and sustainable tourism growth extends a warm invitation to travellers from India and beyond to discover the rich cultural heritage and vibrant atmosphere

of the Russian capital. With its dynamic approach and unwavering commitment, Moscow is poised to cement the Indo-Russian friendship through the lens of tourism. In conclusion, Moscow's proactive efforts in engaging with Indian travellers, coupled with strategic initiatives and enhanced accessibility, underscore its commitment to fostering inclusive and sustainable tourism growth.

With a remarkable surge in Indian visitors and plans for further infrastructure improvements, Moscow stands poised to solidify the Indo-Russian friendship through tourism. The city's dedication to showcasing its rich cultural heritage and vibrant atmosphere extends a warm invitation to travellers from India and beyond.

(The writer is a freelance writer and a social media influencer; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

MATERIALISTIC SPIRITUALISM

A true spiritualist remains untouched by temptations and is a living example of purity



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

The recent web series shedding light on the life of a renowned spiritual preacher has not only captivated audiences worldwide but has also ignited a profound contemplation about the authenticity of spiritual figures and the intertwining of spirituality with materialism. It also raised a lot of questions that were until now merged in people's minds. It made people question their beliefs and reevaluate the faith and the trust they place in spiritual figures, often referred to as Gurus. There is no doubt that there are some people who have an intense love for spiritualism, but the brand of spiritualism that they promote may not be entirely rooted in pure spirituality. Instead, it appears to carry undertones of materialism. No doubt, these spiritual figures engage themselves in spiritual practices and persuade others also to have spirituality in their life but still their mind is tied in knots of materialism. They dedicate their time and energy to propagate spirituality and uphold high ideals, but their manners and methods and their hopes and aspirations reflect some special kind of materialism.

It is true that despite advocating for soul consciousness and encouraging others to relinquish body consciousness, these souls find themselves entangled in the webs of material desires. And while doing so, they often target individuals with financial means, hoping to utilise their resources for a greater cause. While on the surface, their efforts may seem altruistic, a closer look reveals that they have a hidden desire for personal glory and praise. They hold big congregations and mass gatherings where people in large numbers come to listen to their discourse and to have community dining. But the purpose of holding these mass-scale programmes is not to spread waves and vibrations of spirituality but to have a large number of people who remain in their fold.



Thus, they have a desire for fame and material abundance. So, in this sense, they are protagonists of materialistic spiritualism. Such people start their spiritual careers by just being seekers of truth or being simple spiritual practitioners. As they march forward on the spiritual path, people begin to praise and adore them for their noble intent, simple life and spirituality and start offering them money, materials and lands, as a result of which these spiritual practitioners get bitten by the money bug. The allure of grand titles and high epithets, coupled with ceremonies meant to honour and felicitate them, further entangles them in the trappings of materialistic spiritualism.

Navigating the path of spirituality, as depicted in this narrative, is likened to walking on tiles that may occasionally slip beneath one's feet. Hence one has to be very cautious in one's gait. Because, one may, sometimes, see the self surrounded by flatterers and flippants and, at other times, by those who want some special favours by offering fat purses, costly gifts, big bouquets or high-flown words of praise. This environment can fuel the hunger for fame, power, and honour, testing the authenticity of their spiritual journey. However, a true spiritualist remains untouched by these temptations and stands as a living example of purity amidst the challenges of the world—like a lotus blooming in the mud. At the same time, it should also be noted that genuine spirituality does not necessitate a complete rejection of worldly aspects such as money, building projects, or events. Instead, the essence lies in cultivating a spirit of sacrifice and renunciation, avoiding an insatiable desire for transient and hollow worldly pursuits. Needless to say, one must look after one's health and have necessary things but at the same time, one must lead a simple life and must not stretch things out of the controllable limit.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Gender bias in electoral politics is a global issue



ARCHANA DATTA

Despite Haley's accomplishments, Trump's triumph underscores a deeper societal phenomenon influencing voters' perceptions of male versus female candidates



Donald Trump has won the South Carolina primary, defeating Nikki Haley, the last major Republican candidate in the race for Presidential nomination. On the eve of the poll, one of the South Carolinian Republican supporters in her home State, reportedly commented that 'yes, Ms. Haley did some fine things as governor, but, Donald Trump is the man', which perhaps reflected the predominant public mood. Now, is this a case of a perceptible preferential bias among voters in favour of male candidates compared to female candidates?

'Many voters seem to use gender as one of the ways to evaluate candidates, predict a candidate's beliefs and competency — and use it as a shortcut for information about the candidates — and these subtle biases in some electoral contests, put a candidate at a disadvantage because of his or her gender', said Kira Sanbonmatsu, a political science professor, Ohio University, who authored a 2000 study on 'gender and voter's preferences'. A study of French parliamentary elections across different polling stations found that votes for women are lower in municipalities with more traditional gender-role attitudes (Barbançon and Sauvagnat, 2019).

However, a 2018 research contended that 'gender, through which men and women identify with masculinity and femininity with sets of roles, traits and ideals, strongly conditions the impact of sex on the voting pattern, but, it differs from case to case, depending on where one places oneself on a masculinity/femininity continuum'. Many men, who do not strongly identify with hyper-masculinity, are equally or more liberal than women on various issues, while, many highly feminine women with very tra-



ditional gender identities, are more conservative on some issues, and thus, gender cannot be automatically treated as a 'first-order' or 'meta' identity, the study added.

There is also a competing view that 'gender is not a strong pull on the vote or political attitudes, and that there are few male-female gaps in attitudes in voting' (Amanda Bittner, University of Newfoundland Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, Queens University, 2017).

A study in Spain, after it adopted a law in 2007, that obliged political parties to include at least 40% of women on every list for every election, didn't find any evidence that it had either worsened women's relative electoral performance or voters' lower electoral support for exogenous reasons (Bagues and Campa, 2020). Nevertheless, in the 2018 midterms in the USA, sex and gender did play a prominent role, leading to large partisan gaps between men and women in casting their ballots. While, a study in India revealed that a 'woman voter' is more likely to vote for a male candidate than a man to vote for a woman, as it is more about perception of society, than the candidates' suitability.

Sadly, women's under-representation in electoral politics is a reality! World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Report, underlined that so far only 25% of a hypothetical 100% gender gap has been closed in women's political participation. Many political

Scientists explained the gap from the angle of supply and demand constraints, as there is a shortage of potential candidates and a lower appeal of women politicians in electoral battles. Several socioeconomic and cultural barriers keep women away from politics and create a higher opportunity cost of running for elections (Fox et al., 2001). Women also tend to be less in number in professions that become a conduit for a political career (Welch, 1977, Clark, 1994). Studies also mentioned the 'ambition deficit', as many women, despite having the requisite professional and economic credentials, often shy of entering competitive politics (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007 & Fox and Lawless, 2004).

Family and relational considerations dissuade many of them, as recent research in Sweden found that female politicians in mayoral positions experienced a significant increase in the likelihood of divorcing their partner (Folke and Rickne, 2020). On the other hand, 'women are routinely demotivated by being told that they do not belong here, signifying a structured system of oppressive gender hierarchy in politics'. Sexism among party leaders is also rampant, more so, if they are aware of voters' bias against women, as a votes-maximising strategy.

While, India witnessed an increasing turnout of women voters, in the 2019 election, but, the number of women candidates remained less than 9 per cent.

Those who did get party tickets, mostly, have family political connections or are 'dynastic' politicians. The gender quota at PRIs 'hasn't created much larger candidacy responses at the state level'. However, a study (Bhalotra et al. 2018), analysing electoral data over three decades (1980-2007) found that a woman's electoral victory leads to an 18.5 percentage point higher probability of having a woman as a major party candidate in the next election.

Now, as of November 2021, gender quotas have been adopted in 132 countries, either in the form of voluntary party or compulsory legislative quotas. A study (1995-2012) disclosed that such measures enhanced women's representation from 11 percent to 21 percent. Some critics argued that it is 'anti-democratic', and 'manipulates voters' choices', while, a section of women's rights activists claimed, they are 'disrespectful in the assumption that women cannot get seats on their own, and are often negatively labelled as 'quota women'. Nevertheless, it brought women in many least-developed countries like Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania to the political front, and increased their substantive representation on issues that are traditionally seen as gendered.

India has already passed the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023, its implementation cannot be put off to an uncertain date!

(The author is former Director General, Doordarshan & All India Radio, views are personal)

Political funding: Not just transparent, it should be clean too

There is a necessity to enhance the current system's transparency in alignment with the directives of the Supreme Court

The decision of the Supreme Court on electoral bonds is a legal process and there is no point in making any special comments on the same. But the first thing that deserves consideration in this regard is why the system of electoral bonds was introduced in the first instance. Political parties have the right to collect donations and do not have to pay any income tax on the funds so collected. Those who receive money in the form of donations are expected to provide information about the same to the Election Commission. Earlier, information about the money received through bank cheques or drafts was available, but there was a complete lack of transparency regarding cash receipts.



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

It is a fact that the presence of black money has been prevalent in the politics and electoral process of our country, and the solution to this problem has been under discussion for a long time. Before the introduction of electoral bonds, big cash collection was legal and now it's not.

Due to black money, funders continued to take unfair advantage of the political parties and their governments.

This situation was a serious challenge to our political system. In this background, by introducing the system of electoral bonds, an attempt was made to stop the problem of black money and discourage the same.

In the year 2017, the system of electoral bonds was first introduced by the Government of India, in which provision was made that electoral bonds can be purchased by any person or institution and can be given to any party. The parties redeem the electoral bonds within a stipulated period. In this system, there has been no provision to make public the information as to how much donation has been given by which person or institution to which party through electoral bonds. The Supreme Court has

objected to this provision and has said that there should be proper transparency in the transactions of election donations.

The court has instructed the State Bank of India to stop the issuance of electoral bonds. The main objection of the Supreme Court is regarding transparency. We should understand that there was a huge lack of transparency in the system that was in place before the advent of electoral bonds and the way political parties raised money. Besides, there was also the problem of what is the source of money of the people who are giving huge amounts of cash. It was impossible to find out who had given cash to the political party in question and whether there was any quid pro quo,

that is, whether an undue advantage had been given to that person or firm donating to the political party.

The number of registered political parties in our country is in the hundreds. In such a situation, it is not possible to have a central repository of wealth and to provide an equal share to all the parties. Moreover, the ideologies of the political parties are also different. Suppose someone has to donate and feels that the ideology and programmes of some party are based on narrow thinking and are harmful to the country. They would not like to donate to that party. If all parties receive equal funding, then forming a party will become a business.

If the Supreme Court believes that it should be transparent-

ly known how much money has been given by which person or institution to which party, then this is an interpretation of the law and should be taken positively.

We have many examples in the past where the government did not accept the decisions of the Supreme Court and passed laws in the Parliament, nullifying the court's rulings. Additionally, there have also been instances when amending laws have been passed accepting the main points of court orders and incorporating them into the law. Since the government still needs time to understand and interpret Supreme Court decisions.

It seems that there is a need to make the present system more transparent and in tune with the objections of the Supreme

Court, and the government can present a revised draft before the Parliament. But this cannot be done immediately. The journey of the nation continues. In this journey, laws are formed, amended and also abolished, with changing circumstances. There is no need to consider this electoral bond issue from a short-term perspective.

Since this decision is of the Supreme Court of India, the country and the government have to be respected, but it must be understood that the system of electoral bonds has been a progressive step towards dealing with the use of black money in elections. The provision of electoral bonds was made during the tenure of this government, hence this government will have to see

that a revised system is brought in compliance with the objections and instructions of the Supreme Court.

The purpose of any system or legislation is that there should be no interference of economic and muscle power in the democratic process of our country and there should be clean and fair elections.

While making amendments to the law about political funding, we need to ensure that we may not revert to the old system of cash receipts by political parties which would allow corruption in public life and even the play of muscle power and the use of illicit money and money received from unethical activities.

(The writer is a professor at PGDAV College, University of Delhi, views are personal)

Court indicts Imran Khan, wife in graft case



AP ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

An accountability court in Pakistan on Tuesday indicted Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the 190 million pounds Al Qadir corruption case...

The Al-Qadir Trust case pertains to the settlement of 190 million pounds, which the UK's National Crime Agency sent to Pakistan after recovering the amount from Pakistani property tycoon Malik Riaz Hussain.

Khan was arrested in the same case from the premises of the Islamabad High Court on May 9, 2023. His arrest sparked violent protests across the country...

In December, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) initiated an investigation against Khan, his wife, and others regarding the alleged acquisition of hundreds of canals of land under the name

Malik Riaz Hussain to use the amount to partly settle a fine of about Rs 450 billion imposed by the Supreme Court some years ago.

Hussain, his son Ahmed Ali Riaz, Mirza Shehzad Akbar, and Zulfi Bukhari are also among the suspects in the case, but instead of joining the investigation and subsequent court proceedings, they absconded and were subsequently declared as proclaimed offenders.

Khan was ousted through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022. More than 150 cases have been registered against him since his ouster from power.

IMRAN-PARTY-PROTEST Imran Khan's party gives nationwide protest call against poll 'rigging' on Mar 2

Imran Khan's party gives nationwide protest call against poll 'rigging' on Mar 2. Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party on Tuesday announced a country-wide protest on Saturday against the alleged rigging in the February 8 elections...

Addressing a press conference after meeting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan in Rawalpindi's high-security Adiala jail where he is currently incarcerated, the party's Secretary General and its candidate for the prime minister's slot, Omar Ayub reiterated "large scale" rigging in the polls.

He said the PTI would protest in courts and assemblies across the country.

'Alvi's stonewalling of new Parliament session justified'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan on Tuesday said President Dr Arif Alvi's decision to not summon the newly-elected National Assembly for its first session was justified since his party's mandate in the elections was stolen.

The president on Monday rejected the summary from the caretaker parliamentary affairs ministry to summon the first session of the newly elected National Assembly session on February 29 and maintained that all reserved seats be allocated before the summoning of the session in which newly-elected members of the National Assembly will take oath.

According to constitutional provisions, the meeting of the National Assembly must be convened within 21 days of the elections, and February 29 is

the mandated date under Article 91.

Alvi, inclined towards the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, was a senior member of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party before the cricketer-turned-politician made him the country's President in 2018.

In a conversation with journalists at the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, the PTI party founder said his party won the February 8 general elections but it was being denied its due share of the reserved seats.

"There is no greater theft than stealing the public's mandate," he said.

"May 9 was used to end the party. The party did not end due to oppression but became the strongest party," said 71-year-old Khan.

Speaking about the letter he plans to write to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the cricketer-turned-politician said it was being termed a "treason".

The Punjab [Assembly]

not being able to meet party leaders ever since.

"A letter will be sent to the IMF after consultation with the party leaders today."

Khan says he will write to the Washington-based global lender not to provide additional loans to cash-strapped Pakistan unless the IMF holds an audit of the February 8 general elections. Meanwhile, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) top leader Senator Ishaq Dar said President Alvi was "once again" trying to violate the Constitution by refusing to summon the NA session.

"The Constitution is clear: the National Assembly session should be summoned within 21 days of the elections. The president could have called the session on February 26, 27, and 28," he said. Khan's party on Tuesday said that no provincial assembly session could be called without notifying the reserved seats, a day after the assemblies of Punjab and Sindh were summoned and the chief ministers were sworn in.

Pak EC holds open hearing of SIC's plea on reserved seats' allocation

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's election commission on Tuesday held an open hearing on a petition by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party-backed Sunni Ittehad Council seeking the allocation of its share of reserved seats, according to a media report.

Candidates of 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) fought as independents after the party could not directly participate in the February 8 elections due to the non-allocation of its iconic electoral symbol - the cricket bat.

To receive the PTI's share of reserved seats for women and minorities in the national and provincial assemblies, the winning independent candidates backed by the party joined the rightwing Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) - an alliance of Islamic political and religious parties in the Muslim-majority country which repre-

sents followers of the school of Sunni Islam. In total, 266 National Assembly seats were up for grabs out of the 336.

Another 60 seats are reserved for women and 10 for minorities, and are allotted to the winning parties based on proportional representation.

A five-member bench of the Election Commission of Pakistan on Monday held an open hearing on the SIC's plea seeking allocation of reserved seats, and the counter-pleas filed against it, the Dawn newspaper reported. The bench, headed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja, heard petitions by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Azam Nazeer Tariq, Pakistan Peoples Party's Farooq Naik and PTI-backed SIC's counsel Gohar Khan and Ali Zafar, before adjourning the hearing till Wednesday.

China's sacked foreign min Qin Gang resigns

Beijing (PTI): In a surprise move, former Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang, who went missing after he was unceremoniously sacked last year, resigned from China's national legislature ahead of its key annual session next week.

The NPC statement said Qin has not been dismissed or expelled from the NPC but resigned, according to a report by Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

Qin, 57, regarded as a close confidant of President Xi Jinping, was dismissed in July in a big political surprise just after seven months in office.

Later, the NPC passed a resolution sacking Qin and reappointing his predecessor Wang Yi who is also the Director of the ruling Communist Party's Foreign Affairs Commission.

This is the first time Qin's name figured in the form of his resignation from the NPC, regarded as a technical requirement. He was rumoured to have been sacked for an extramarital affair.

The announcement of Qin's resignation also coincides with the removal of the sacked former Defence Minister Gen. Li Shangfu from the Central Military Commission (CMC) - the overall high command of the Chinese military reported by Xi Jinping, the Post headed.

Zelensky in Saudi to push for peace

AP ■ DUBAI

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday with plans to visit the kingdom's powerful crown prince to push for a peace plan and the return of prisoners of war from Russia.

In message on X, formerly Twitter, Zelensky said that Ukraine continued to "rely on Saudi Arabia's ongoing active support" in pushing forward with what has been described as a "Peace Formula" to end the full-scale invasion, which marked its second anniversary over the weekend.

Zelensky has presented a 10-point peace formula that, among other things, seeks the expulsion of all Russian forces from Ukraine and accountability for war crimes - at a time when the two sides are fighting from largely static positions along a roughly 1,500-km

(930-mile) front line. Such ideas are rejected out of hand by Moscow.

"The second topic is the return of POWs and deportees," Zelensky wrote. "The kingdom's leadership has already contributed to the release of our people. I am confident that this meeting will also yield results."

The state-run Saudi Press Agency said that Zelensky arrived at Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport and was met by government officials.

Over the last several years, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has sought to position himself as a potential mediator to end the war between Ukraine and Russia - even as Riyadh remains closely aligned with Russia on energy policies through the OPEC+ group of countries.

In May, Zelensky traveled to Saudi Arabia for a meeting of Arab leaders and also met then with Crown Prince Mohammed. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar - all neighbours on the

Yellen urges world leaders to 'unlock' frozen Russian Central Bank assets

Washington (AP): Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday offered her strongest public support yet for the idea of liquidating roughly USD 300 billion in frozen Russian Central Bank assets and using them for Ukraine's long-term reconstruction.

"It is necessary and urgent for our coalition to find a way to unlock the value of these immobilised assets to support Ukraine's continued resistance and long-term reconstruction," Yellen said in remarks in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where Group of 20 finance ministers and central bank governors are meeting this week.

"I believe there is a strong international law, economic, and moral case for moving forward. This would be a decisive response to Russia's unprece-

dent threat to global stability," she said.

The United States and its allies froze hundreds of billions of dollars in Russian foreign holdings in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Those billions have been sitting untapped as the war grinds on, now in its third year, while officials from multiple countries have debated the legality of sending the money to Ukraine. More than two-thirds of Russia's immobilised central bank funds are located in the EU.

Using the assets to help Ukraine "would make clear that Russia cannot win by prolonging the war and would incentivise it to come to the table to negotiate a just peace with Ukraine," Yellen said.

Arabian Peninsula - have been involved with prisoner exchanges since the war broke out in 2022.

Macron: Western troops on ground in Ukraine not 'ruled out' in future

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron said Monday that sending Western troops on the ground in Ukraine is not "ruled out" in the future after the issue was debated at a gathering of European leaders, as Russia's full-scale invasion grinds into a third year.

Macron cited the need to solidify security to head off any Russian attacks on additional countries in the future. Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia as well as much larger Poland have been considered among possible targets of future Russian expansionism.

All four countries are staunch supporters of Ukraine. Estonia's foreign minister said earlier this month that NATO has about three or four years to strengthen its defenses.

In video speech, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky called on the leaders gathered in Paris to "ensure that Putin cannot destroy our achievements and cannot expand his aggression to other nations."

The United States was represented at the Paris meeting by its top diplomat for Europe, James O'Brien, and the U.K. by Foreign Secretary David Cameron. European nations are worried that the US will dial back support as aid for Kyiv is teetering in Congress.

They also have concerns that former US President Donald Trump might return to the White House and change the course of US policy on the continent.

The Paris conference comes after France, Germany and the U.K. recently signed 10-year bilateral agreements with Ukraine to send a strong signal of long-term backing as Kyiv works to shore up Western support.

Newborns in Japan at new low, while fewer couples marry

AP ■ TOKYO

The number of babies born in Japan last year fell for an eighth straight year to a new low, government data showed on Tuesday, and a top official said it was critical for the country to reverse the trend in coming half-dozen years.

The number of marriages fell by 5.9 per cent to 489,281 couples, falling below a half-million for the first time in 90 years - one of the key reasons for the declining births. Out-of-wedlock births are rare in

Japan because of family values based on a paternalistic tradition. Surveys show that many younger Japanese balk at marrying or having families, discouraged by bleak job prospects, the high cost of living that rises at a faster pace than salaries and corporate cultures that are not compatible with having both parents work. Crying babies and chil-

dren playing outside are increasingly considered a nuisance, and many young parents say they often feel isolated. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters on Tuesday that the ongoing declining birth rate is at "critical state".

The period over the next six years or so until 2030s, when the younger population will start declining rapidly, will be the last chance we may be able to reverse the trend," he said.

"There is no time to waste." Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has called the low births "the biggest crisis Japan faces," and put forward a package of measures that have included more support and subsidies mostly for childbirth, children and their families.

Tender Notice Reference No.: PGSC/ADMIN/Architect/2024/1 Puspaha Gujral Science City invites online bids for the following: Sl. No. Item Quantity 01 On-line Digitally signed open e-tenders under two Bid System are invited from the reputed Architects/ Architectural firms of Indian origin having requisite experience and financial capability for providing comprehensive Architectural Engineering services to Puspaha Gujral Science City, Kapurthala.

verka THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD. SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022. EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66 Notice Inviting Tender e tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Align to Viksit Bharat goals: FM to India Inc Markets rebound on gains in index heavyweights

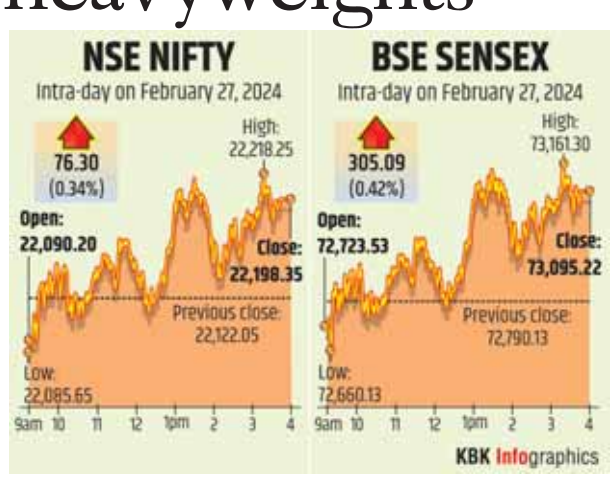
PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday exuded confidence that India Inc will align itself to the developmental goals of the nation with an objective of making the country a developed nation or 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 on the 100th anniversary of independence. Sitharaman said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has clearly indicated that the goal of Viksit Bharat is to be attained to provide the future generations a better India. Addressing a session on 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047: Viksit Bharat & Industry', organised by Ficci, the minister said that industry's role is critical in achieving the goal by 2047. "You were with India during the freedom struggle, you built industry and capacity despite the colonial pressure... So Indian industry has always kept that spirit up and against terrible odds kept moving along on national interest. "I can't see how they will be left out in this game of building a developed India by 2047. So it should be natural to India's industry to align itself with India's developmental interests, and after all industry will be



the first contributor as much as the first beneficiary..." the minister said. The finance minister also assured the industry that reforms will continue in the third term of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government. The new government will be formed after the general elections due in April-May and the BJP is confident that Prime Minister Modi will return to power with a greater majority. Sitharaman said that India has moved up to become the fifth largest economy and is on the way to become the third largest

factor, without which we will not be able to scale up and bridge the gap with those who are still aspiring to move forward," the minister said. Sitharaman also told the gathering that the government is focussing on areas like space and artificial intelligence (AI). "We have emphasised that India should become a global hub for AI and we will set up centres of excellence for the same," she said, adding, a great leap forward has been made in logistics. Whether it is logistics, agriculture productivity or tourism, India has immense potential and government is committed to its policy. "That is why the prime minister is confident that in the third term we will be the third largest economy. It's because of the push which he likes to give in these areas, not just fiscal, but legislative and other measures as well," the minister said. Renewable energy has better prospects for not just solar or wind, but the government is also looking at renewing its commitments to hydroelectric power, she said, and added that in green hydrogen and green ammonia, big investments are happening in India.

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday following buying in index major Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Motors and Sun Pharma amid mostly firm global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 305.09 points or 0.42 per cent to settle at 73,095.22. The index was hit by volatility in the first half of the session but gains in index heavyweights helped the barometer end two sessions of losses. During the day, the Sensex jumped 371.17 points or 0.50 per cent to a high of 73,161.30. Snapping its two-day falling streak, the broader Nifty ended 76.30 points or 0.34 per cent up at 22,198.35. Among the Sensex firms, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, IndusInd Bank, Power Grid, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, JSW Steel and Tata Steel were the major gainers. On the other hand, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank and NTPC were among the laggards. "Markets rebounded from 2-



session losses as selective buying in frontline stocks aided recovery from early weakness. There is no major trigger and investors are taking cues from global markets. As we approach F&O expiry day on Thursday, volatility will begin to kick-in as traders will rollover their positions to next expiry day," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. "The hopes for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and the drop in crude oil prices supported the sentiment," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.25 per cent and the midcap index dipped 0.10 per cent. Among the indices, realty jumped 1.02 per cent, consumer durables climbed 1.01 per cent, teck (0.85 per cent), capital goods (0.79 per cent), IT (0.76 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.45 per cent). Commodities, financial services, telecommunication, utilities and oil & gas were the laggards. In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the green while Seoul ended lower.

Circumventions of rules a generic problem in AIFs

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Sebi's Whole Time Member Ananth Narayan on Tuesday said circumvention of regulations is an industry-wide and generic issue with the Alternate Investment Fund ecosystem. Narayan stressed that the capital markets regulator wants to learn from the industry and work in close collaboration with it to frame the rules going ahead. Speaking at an event organised by industry body IVCA here, Narayan said a recent consultation paper is an attempt on the same and added that Sebi has already decided to make some relaxations like equity pledging by an AIF to borrow in the case of an infrastructure company. However, Narayan made it clear that when it comes to circumventing regulations like evergreening of loans or foreign exchange management, Sebi will have to act. He said the estimate of 40 funds involving investments of over Rs 30,000 crore circumventing norms is a "conservative" one, and actual numbers are far higher. "Structure to circumvent has been an industry-wide problem. You can argue about whether it is endemic or one-



off, we think it is more than one-off. It's definitely a generic issue we are grappling with," Narayan told the audience largely composed of fund managers. It can be noted that the RBI has also come up with a regulation increasing the provisioning for banks' investments in AIFs over fears of the route being used for evergreening of loans. Industry veteran Srin Srinivasan from Kotak Alternate Asset Managers said the RBI's move has put the sector in a "tizzy" and many public sector banks are not honouring the capital calls now. He also feared that the insurance watchdog Irdai is also mulling a similar move on the lines of RBI. Narayan asked the industry to take up its concerns with the respective regulators, and also explained the workings as per the consultation paper launched by Sebi in January.

said. Stressing the need for dialogue between the industry and the regulator, Narayan said, "You understand what our concerns are. Either you give us an alternative that works, or explain to us how you tweak the proposal you have so that it works for you. If you want to be like a baby, and say this doesn't work and life is unfair to me, we won't make progress. Neither will you, nor will I." He said the overall interactions between the AIF industry and the regulator have gone up in the last year and also assured the industry that Sebi will not take more than one month to clear an AIF proposal by March this year. The commitments for AIFs have risen 44 per cent to over Rs 10 lakh crore in 2023, he said, adding the actual investments have also gone up. However, the share of actual investments has been at less than 65 per cent of the commitments, he said, adding that Sebi would like to explore this aspect more. "We are seeing a series of valuations that are kind of stale and remain the same for a long period of time. Sometimes more than a year, sometimes a couple of years. We are also seeing a sharp drop in valuations as a fund comes close to its maturity," he said.



Roche launches multiple sclerosis treatment drug in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Roche Pharma India on Tuesday launched a drug for the treatment of Multiple Sclerosis (MS), expanding its neurology portfolio to cater to unmet needs of patients grappling with the disease. The company has introduced Ocrevus (Ocrelizumab) which is the first and only approved disease modifying therapy for both Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis (RRMS) and Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis (PPMS). Patients on Ocrevus have the highest persistence and superior adherence to treatment because of its twice yearly (once every six months) dosing which is preferable for

Maruti inks pact for dealer financing solutions



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Maruti Suzuki India on Tuesday said it has inked an initial pact with Union Bank of India for dealer financing solutions. The tie-up enhances the comprehensive inventory funding options for over 4,000 Maruti Suzuki sales outlets across the country, the auto major said in a statement. Boasting formidable efficacy, streamlined administration, and a long-term safety record, Ocrevus instils fresh optimism in individuals grappling with this formidable neurological condition, he added. The majority of individuals are diagnosed with multiple sclerosis between the ages of 20 and 40, making the disease a leading cause of non-traumatic disability in younger adults. "We proactively align our efforts in meeting the evolving demands of customers and the market," he added. The company's partnership with Union Bank of India since 2008,



Gold flat at ₹62,950 per 10 grams; Silver declines by ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Gold prices remained flat at Rs 62,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday, according to HDFC Securities. Silver, however, declined by Rs 400 to Rs 74,200 per kilogram. In the previous trade, silver ended at Rs 74,600 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at Rs 62,950 per 10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," said Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities, HDFC Securities. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading higher at USD 2,034 per ounce from USD 2,031 per ounce in the previous trade. "Gold prices traded in a choppy range on Tuesday amid mixed global cues. Pullbacks in the US dollar and Treasury yields provided support for gold prices, while expectations of a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war reduced safe haven demand," Gandhi added. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,034 per ounce, up by USD 3 from the previous close, he added. Silver was marginally down at USD 22.65 per ounce from USD 22.75 per ounce in the previous trade.

Single fund manager for funds to reduce costs: Expert

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Markets regulator Sebi's proposal of allowing mutual fund houses to have a single fund manager to oversee commodity and foreign investments is aimed at reducing the cost of managing the fund, a top official of Anand Rathi Wealth said on Tuesday. Sebi, on Friday, came out with a consultation paper proposing measures to support ease of doing business for Mutual Funds (MFs). In the draft paper, the regulator suggested appointing a single fund manager for domestic and overseas/commodity funds, relaxation of nomination requirement for joint holders and streamlining of prudential norms for passive schemes with respect to exposure to a single issuer within the AMC's group companies. This came after the Finance Minister in the FY24 Budget made an announcement to simplify, ease and reduce cost of



compliance for participants in the financial sector through a consultative approach. "The appointment of a single fund manager for domestic and overseas/commodity funds is intended to reduce the cost of managing the fund," Anand Rathi Wealth Ltd Deputy CEO Feroze Azeez said. Sebi noticed that the appointment of dedicated fund managers leads to

additional costs for Asset Management Companies (AMCs) in terms of employing two fund managers. Moreover, AMCs already hire research analysts tracking assets classes such as at each sector level, irrespective of the same being a domestic or overseas investment. Therefore, the current provision with respect to dedicated fund manager could be eased. On proposed easing of rules on nomination front, Azeez said relaxation of nomination requirements for joint holders is beneficial as it simplifies the process of nomination by allowing the surviving member to become the nominee. This streamlines the transmission process and reduces hassle in such situations. Later, the last surviving member can assign a nominee. Additionally, Sebi has suggested changes to simplify rules for passive funds like Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs) and index funds.

Godrej Appliances expects 20 per cent sales growth in summer

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Homegrown white goods on Tuesday said it expects at least a 20 per cent growth in sales of air conditioners and refrigerators during the summer season. The city-based company is the fourth largest air conditioner brand with 0.7 million units sales and the fifth when it comes to refrigerators with 1.8 million sales in the country. "We expect the summer to be scorching this year after an extended winter and this should help us clock at least 20 per cent uptick in volume for both ACs and refrigerators. "Last year, our AC sales more than doubled," Kamal Nandi,

executive vice president and business head at the Godrej Appliances told PTI here on Tuesday. He was speaking on the sidelines of the launch of its new range of wood-finish and nature-inspired refrigerators and air conditioners. Nandi said he expects at least 10 per cent of incremental volumes to come in from these new products which will command a 5 per cent premium over its existing products. While its ACs (Air Conditioners) are priced Rs 35,000-45,000 depending on the tonnage, its refrigerators are priced in the Rs 25,000-35,000 range depending on the volume capacity. The new range of products will be manufactured at its Shirwal plant near Pune.



RK Swamy to launch IPO on March 4

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Integrated marketing services firm RK Swamy Ltd is set to float its initial public offering on March 4. The initial share sale will conclude on March 6 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on March 1, according to the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP). The company's proposed Initial Public Offering (IPO) comprises a fresh issue of shares aggregating up to Rs 173 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 87 lakh equity shares by selling shareholders, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP). Those offering shares in the OFS are Srinivasan K Swamy, Narasimhan Krishnaswamy, Evanston Pioneer Fund L.P, and Prem Marketing Ventures L.P. RK Swamy Ltd. Funds raised through the fresh issue would be used for setting up a digital video content production studio, establishing new customer experience centres and computer-aided telephonic interview centres as well as for general corporate purposes.

Firms to dole out 10 per cent average salary hike this year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Companies in India are expected to dole out an average of 10 per cent salary increase this year, with automobile, manufacturing and engineering sectors anticipated to witness the highest hikes, says a survey. The survey, conducted between May and August 2023, gathered data from 1,474 companies, covering more than 6,000 job roles and representing more than 21 lakh employees. It focused on salary trends across various industries, with individual performance, organisational performance and posi-



tion in salary range being the top three factors determining increments. The median merit salary increments in India are expected to reach 10 per cent in 2024, which was on top of a 9.5 per cent increase in 2023, the survey said. In India, it said the rate of voluntary attrition has shown a gradual increase from 12.1 per cent in 2021 to 13.5 per cent in 2022. "The half-yearly data for 2023 indicates a slight increase in attrition compared to 2022, suggesting a continuing upward trend in voluntary attrition each year, which is also being reflected in other parts of the world, including Brazil, China, Australia, and Japan," Mercer said. Manse Singh, Rewards Consulting Leader for Mercer in India, said the projected salary increments highlight both confidence and optimism in the Indian market, driven by robust economic indicators and a thriving business landscape. The continuous focus on AI and automation has propelled key industries like automobile, manufacturing & engineering and life sciences into a new phase of growth, Singh added.

Boulter, Saville among opening day winners

AP ■ SAN DIEGO

Katie Boulter of Britain and Daria Saville of Australia scored decisive wins Monday in the rain-interrupted opening round of the Cymbiotika San Diego Open.

Boulter earned her first win over Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko in four career matchups, 6-3, 6-1, in one hour and 11 minutes.

"I know how tough she can be to play against," said Boulter, who collected her 10th victory over a top-50 opponent. "I've never won against her before. I knew today was going to be an absolute battle. I just came out and tried to compete and do the best I could. I don't think either of us played our best tennis, but sometimes it's about finding a way, and I did that."

The 36th-ranked Tsurenko was indeed playing some of her best tennis earlier this month in Doha, Qatar, where she stunned sixth-ranked Ons Jabeur in the second round. However, the 34-year-old was unable to take the court for her round-of-16 matchup with Naomi Osaka due to a right elbow injury. On Monday, she had eight double faults and won just four of 21 second-serve points.

Saville continues to charge back toward the top 100 after experiencing a series of injury setbacks. The 29-year-old upset 58th-ranked Lin Zhu for the second time in 2024, 6-3, 6-3. She also defeated the Chinese baseliner in January on her way to the semifinals in Hobart, Australia.

CYMBIOTIKA SAN DIEGO OPEN



"I definitely had to run a lot today," said Saville, who converted all four of her break-point opportunities against Zhu. "But that's basically my game. I'm glad that I took opportunities

when I could, took my own chances and made it happen." It was the third win in as many days for Saville, who came through the qualifying rounds.

"I always think that qualifiers are pretty dangerous," she said. "I've had some of my best runs from playing qualifying."

German qualifier Jule Niemeier beat Varvara Gracheva of France in their first-ever matchup, 6-3, 6-0, in just 54 minutes. Former No. 1 Caroline Wozniacki, the 2018 Australian Open champion, will make her tournament debut on Tuesday night against Anna Blinkova.



Dybala has first hat trick for Roma in win over Torino

AP ■ ROME

Paulo Dybala scored his first hat trick for Roma as the home side beat Torino 3-2 in Serie A on Monday. On a day that Chris Smalling started for Roma for the first time since September, Dybala took all the plaudits. It was Dybala's first club hat trick since October 2018, when he was with Juventus. Roma stayed sixth, while Fiorentina rose to seventh after beating Lazio 2-1. Lazio dropped to eighth, and Torino remained 10th. Dybala got the opener from the penalty spot three minutes before halftime and Duvan Zapata equalized for

the visitors two minutes later when he headed home a corner kick from the left. Dybala score a splendid second goal after 58 minutes, swerving a 30-yard shot low past goalkeeper Vanja Milinkovic-Savic. The Argentine striker capped a fine performance when he worked a neat one-two with substitute Romelo Lukaku and slotted home from a tight angle. Smalling's substitute, Dean Huijsen, conceded an own goal at the end. Later, Fiorentina hit the woodwork four times and missed a penalty but still managed to win from a goal down against Lazio in

Florence. Lazio took the lead seconds before halftime when Luis Alberto took Matteo Guendouz's pass and shot low into the net to end a flowing move. The 19-year-old Michael Kayode equalized for Fiorentina 16 minutes into the second half with his first goal of the season. Nicolas Gonzalez saw his penalty come back off the post midway through the second half but one minute later the home side went ahead. Lazio keeper Ivan Provedel could only parry a shot from Andrea Belotti and Giacomo Bonaventura followed up to give Fiorentina the lead.

Kim returning after 12 years to LIV?

AP ■ RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA)

All signs point toward Anthony Kim ending his 12-year absence by playing the LIV Golf event in Saudi Arabia, with the latest indication a video tease from Greg Norman on Monday. Kim was a raw talent who broke the country club image in golf with his belt buckles and bling, winning three times on the PGA Tour and playing in one Ryder Cup in 2008 at Valhalla, where he secured a spirited win over Sergio Garcia. He rose as high as No. 6 in the world. The 30-second clip on X showed vague images of Kim, now 38, accompanied by Norman posting, "He oozes incredible talent. The world has seen it in the past and now it is an honour as Commissioner of LIV Golf to give the opportunity for this star to be reborn." This followed initial reports from Golf.Com in January that Kim was gearing up for a potential return, a

post on X from an account called Flushing It (the first to report Jon Rahm leaving for LIV in December) over the weekend that Kim had agreed to terms with Saudi-funded LIV and a story on Golf Channel citing sources confirming the move. A LIV Golf spokeswoman said in an email there would be "nothing official" on Monday. Kim is expected to play as a wild card - meaning he would not be affiliated with any of the 13 teams - at LIV Golf Jeddah that begins Friday in Saudi Arabia. Kim last competed in May 2012 at the Wells Fargo Championship, where he shot 74 and walked straight to his car and left. He ruptured his Achilles tendon getting ready for 2013 season, and then had a herniated disk. In a 2015 interview with The Associated Press - his most recent interview - he said his injuries included a rotator cuff, labrum, spinal fusion and his hand, and that



he had gone through at least six surgeries. He also said he was getting monthly payments from an insurance policy that cost "well into the mid-six figures" when he took it out in 2010 in case of injury.

LIV Golf has two individual players this year. Hudson Swafford has a deal to play in all 13 tournaments, while Laurie Canter played in the first two events. Kim grew up in Los Angeles and

played at Oklahoma before turning pro in 2006. He won at Quail Hollow (Wells Fargo Championship) and Congressional (AT&T National) in 2008, and his last win was the Houston Open in 2010. He had a thumb injury that year that kept him from being chosen for the Ryder Cup team. Kim was particularly spunky in his lone Ryder Cup in 2008, beating Garcia a 5-and-4. Stewart Cink, who turns 51 in May, and J.B. Holmes are the only players from that U.S. Team who still have full status on the PGA Tour. Kim also played in the Presidents Cup at Harding Park in 2009. Robert Allenby accused Kim of partying all night in San Francisco the night before singles, sharing the story after Kim had recorded a 5-and-3 victory over him. LIV Golf events are 54 holes with no cut, and most of the top players have been signed to lucrative deals to join the league.



Long serving Hockey India CEO Elena resigns

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fresh turmoil hit Hockey India on Tuesday when its long-serving CEO Elena Norman resigned from her position owing to non-payment of dues for the past few months, sources in the national federation told PTI. The Australian held the post for nearly 13 years and had not been paid for the last three months. Norman's resignation comes days after the chief coach of the Indian women's hockey team Jannette Schopman who claimed that she was not valued and respected by the national federation. Norman's resignation is another setback for the body, which did not give the exact reason for her departure in the official statement. However, a top source said Norman was upset about "non-payment of her dues for the last three months." "She was also unhappy with the work environment," the source added. HI president and former India captain Dilip Tirkey, while accepting Norman's resignation, expressed his gratitude towards the Australian. "Not only as the President of Hockey India but also as a former player and avid hockey enthusiast, I want to formally acknowledge and extend my sincere gratitude for her remarkable contributions over the last 12-13 years," Tirkey said in a statement. "Her dedication and efforts have played a pivotal role in propelling Hockey India and Indian hockey to the commendable position they hold today. I wish her great success in all her future endeavours." During the time she held the

top job, the country's men and women's teams achieved career-best world rankings. A historic bronze-medal finish by the men's team at the Tokyo Olympic Games, ending a 41-year medal drought, was also a major accomplishment. The women also finished at an unprecedented fourth in the quadrennial showpiece. Norman served a major part of her stint with HI when former international hockey federation (FIH) chief Narendra Batra was the president of the national body. During her tenure, HI hosted two consecutive editions of FIH Men's World Cup in 2018 and 2023, two Junior Men's World Cup in 2016 and 2021 and also hosted five editions of the now-discontinued Hockey India League (HIL), a franchise-based league. Besides, HI also hosted several international hockey events including the Champions Trophy, World League Finals in 2015 and 2017, Olympic Qualifiers in 2019 and 2024 as well as the Hockey Pro League home games during her tenure. "Elena was also at the forefront of bringing women's hockey to limelight, providing them equal facilities as the men's hockey team, including cash awards recognising standout performances in international events through the Hockey India Annual Awards," said a Hockey India statement. "She was particularly instrumental in the success of the women's team that qualified for the 2016 Rio Olympics, a historic feat as the team qualified for the first time and participated in the Olympics after 36 years," the statement added.



Olsson in hospital with brain condition

AP ■ HERNING (DENMARK)

Sweden midfielder Kristoffer Olsson has been hospitalized with an acute brain condition after suddenly losing consciousness at home, his Danish club FC Midtjylland said Tuesday. Olsson is on a ventilator in Aarhus University Hospital, the club said, while a team of Denmark's leading medical experts work to make a diagnosis and begin the correct course of treatment. Midtjylland said the 28-year-old Olsson lost consciousness on Tuesday last week and was transferred to the hospital, where he is surrounded by his immediate family and members of staff at Midtjylland. "Olsson is affected by an apparently acute disease

related to the brain, which is not caused by self-harm of any kind, nor is the cause due to external factors," the club said. Midtjylland said it was "forced" to release the information about Olsson because of "increasing rumors" about his absence from the team. "Everyone at FC Midtjylland is of course deeply affected by Kristoffer's sudden illness and our thoughts and full support go to Kristoffer and his family," the club said. Olsson has played 47 times for Sweden, most recently against Estonia in November. He joined Midtjylland in 2022 for a second spell, having previously played for Anderlecht in Belgium, Krasnodar in Russia, AIK in Sweden and in the youth teams at English club Arsenal.

F1 great Lewis kept his Ferrari move quiet

AP ■ BAHRAIN

Formula 1 great Lewis Hamilton kept his Ferrari move so closely guarded that he didn't even tell his parents until the day it was announced. The British driver rocked the F1 world when it was announced on Feb. 1 he was joining the Italian manufacturer next year, despite signing a new contract with Mercedes last summer. "I didn't speak to anybody. I didn't tell my parents till the day of it being announced. So, no one knew," Hamilton told a BBC podcast. "I really wanted to do it for myself. Ultimately, I had to find out what would be the best for me." It then emerged that the two-year deal penned with Mercedes and announced last August was actually for one year with an option for a second year, which Hamilton did not take. Hamilton informed Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff of his decision to leave only the day before breakfast at Wolff's home. They have become close friends over the years after Hamilton joined Mercedes from McLaren in 2013. The 39-year-old Hamilton and Michael Schumacher have a record seven F1 titles



each, and Hamilton is the outright leader with 103 race wins and 104 pole positions. Hamilton has spoken in the past of the lure of racing with Ferrari, where Schumacher won five of his world titles. "I mean, the opportunity just popped up and I was like, OK, I've got to think for a second," Hamilton said. "(But) I didn't have a lot of time to think and I had to

just go with my gut feeling and I decided to take the opportunity." Hamilton begins his last season with Mercedes on Saturday at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix. His last win was at the Saudi Arabian GP in the penultimate race of the 2021 campaign, where Max Verstappen won the first of his three straight titles with Red Bull.

Indian pro boxer Neeraj to take on Jake

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian professional boxer Neeraj Goyat will take on Jake Paul in a mega card this year after a bitter war of words on social media with the American pugilist who is also a youtuber. The two engaged in a dramatic face-to-face encounter on the streets of Puerto Rico recently and challenged each other. "Both of them are slated to fight in a mega card soon," read a statement from Goyat's promoters. Paul has appeared in nine professional fights in his career, winning eight of them. Goyat is more experienced having fought



24 bouts, 18 of them being victories. The feud started when 32-year-old Goyat accused Paul of using a translator application to abuse him in a regional Indian language. "Jake Paul, I'm the man of my word. I'm here. I'm in your country. I'm here in your town. I'm here in your gym, man. Now abuse... You using translate application and you abusing in Indian language. Now abuse," declared Goyat. Before the face off in Puerto Rico, Goyat had been consistently issuing challenges to Paul. In response, Paul had implied that the Indian lacked interest in engaging in a physical bout.

STATE UNITS AGREE WITH ROHIT HUNGER COMMENT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India skipper Rohit Sharma's assertion that Test opportunities should be only for those who show hunger for the format found resonance with state associations grappling with youngsters desperate to make a name in white-ball cricket but reluctant to grind it out in first-class games. With the advent of IPL, the club vs country debate has been raging for years now and Rohit's stern statement came at a time when two established names in Indian cricket — Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan — ignored a BCCI diktat to play Ranji Trophy quarterfinals, focussing instead on their IPL preparations. "Jin logon ko bookh hai, hum unhi logon ko mauka denge (We will give opportunities to only those who are hungry)," Rohit declared on Monday after a series-clinching win

over England in the fourth Test in Ranchi. "Agar hunger nahi hai to unko khila ke koi matlab nahi hai (There's no point in playing those who don't have the hunger)," he said. The hunger that he spoke about was there for everyone to see in young guns like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Akash Deep and the more established Shubman Gill, all of whom sparked at various stages of the series against England. But Rohit did make a point about the unnamed ones who don't seem to have that fire in the belly. "I concur with the Indian captain. There should be hunger in younger cricketers to play the longest format," Abhilash Khandekar, president of Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association, told PTI. It is for those that the BCCI issued a directive earlier this month asking centrally-contracted cricketers to be



available for Ranji engagements. Several representatives from state associations admitted that Rohit was not off the mark when he said those who are not up for it should not be considered for the toughest

format. But they also feel that a system needs to be in place so that such a situation never arises. "Ranji Trophy cannot be taken lightly by any player, it is the backbone of Indian cricket. It is the most important

tournament in domestic cricket. This should be followed up in other formats in domestic cricket," Khandekar said. Another official, who did not wish to be named, went to the extent of saying that Ranji

Trophy ran the risk of "a slow death if it was not made mandatory for top players to compete." State units see the parent body's move as a case of better late than never. "I complement BCCI for this

decision of compelling players to play for their state in Ranji Trophy. I see it as a case of better late than never, this is going to help domestic cricket in a big way," said Khandekar. In the recent past, the Indian batters have been found vulnerable on turning tracks at home. Former India captain Dilip Vengsarkar believes if elite players turn up for their respective states in Ranji Trophy whenever available, it would only make them better players of spin. "Playing Ranji is very important. It helps you play spin better on Indian wickets, your overall skills are improved. And when you play foreign teams, it becomes easier (to face spin)," said Vengsarkar, himself a great player of spin. "I feel it is a player's wish whether to play Ranji or not. If he doesn't want to play, we have enough in India to choose from, they will play

and establish themselves. No one is bigger than the game. No one is indispensable," he said. In Kishan's absence from the ongoing series, Dhruv Jurel made the most of the opportunity by coming up with two brilliant under-pressure knocks in only his second Test. Like the MPCA chief, a state unit official proposed another step to rein in players who ignore red-ball cricket. "This was a much needed step and should have been taken earlier. If an India player is regularly featuring in Ranji Trophy, it acts a massive motivator to the younger players in the squad. "I would also want the BCCI to empower state units to ban those players who don't play Ranji Trophy. If a senior is dropped for once, the juniors would not dare to ignore their red ball commitments for T20 cricket," said a state unit official requesting anonymity.

We did not have a chance in hell of competing with India: Stokes

PTI ■ RANCHI

Skipper Ben Stokes expressed pride in how England have fought toe to toe with India despite not having "a chance in hell of competing" with the hosts in the ongoing series. India registered a five-wicket win in the fourth and penultimate Test to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series against England, who suffered their first Test series defeat under the leadership of captain Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum. "3-1 doesn't look great, but the way in which we've come at India is what I'm most proud of," Stokes told British media. "We didn't have a chance in hell of even competing with India. But even today (Monday), that wasn't an easy win for India, and I think they would admit that," he added. In the fourth Test, England tried to fashion a fight-back before India crossed the line on the fourth day in Ranchi. Chasing 192, India slipped to 120/5, before Shubman Gill and Dhruv Jurel stitched a 72-run unbroken partnership. "This young, inexperienced team has been successful over the past two years, but coming to India is a completely different beast, something that this team has not been exposed to." "The way in which we have reacted to everything, even being on the wrong end of three results, is something I'm incredibly proud of." The visitors had started off with a thrilling win in the opener but the hosts have come back strongly taking the



next three fixtures in an emphatic manner. "I'm very proud of the way every player has thrown everything at India. No one has ever taken a backward step," Stokes said. England have let slip several promising opportunities in the series. Their batters have displayed poor judgement, giving away the advantage to the hosts. Opting to bat first, England had a first-innings lead of 46 but weren't able to capitalise on it as they were bowled out for just 145 in their second essay, undone by the Indian spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja. Stokes conceded that the Indian spinners' skill in those conditions made it "nigh-on impossible" to play with their attacking game. "Looking back at when we had

our chance to bat yesterday, cricket is always skill against skill. Ashwin, Jadeja and Kuldeep and the conditions we found ourselves in against them was very, very challenging. "When India have a sniff in conditions like that, any team is going to find it hard to not only keep the scoreboard ticking but rotate the strike. You've got to give them a lot of credit for the way in which they bowled in very favourable conditions. On this occasion, their skill was better than ours yesterday. "When you've got three world-class spinners operating in conditions like that, you know you're going to be up against it. That period yesterday after lunch was the game. "Nothing is impossible, I wouldn't say that. But it was nigh on impossible to operate how we wanted to," he added.

McCullum buoyed by Bairstow effort

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ollie Robinson's Test future is in doubt after a disappointing outing in Ranchi but England head coach Brendon McCullum has backed the out-of-form Jonny Bairstow to make an impact in Dharamsala, where he will play his 100th game. Bairstow is the only English batter yet to play a significant knock in the Test series against India. The rubber is already out of England's reach but runs from Bairstow's bat will be more than welcome. His highest score in eight innings thus far is 38, which came in the first innings of the Ranchi Test. "It'll be really emotional for him," said McCullum in an interaction with the UK media in reference to Bairstow's landmark game. "Everyone knows Jonny's story. He is quite an emotional char-



acter at times and big milestones like that do mean a lot to him. (In this match) he walked taller, looked stronger, had that presence and that real Jonny Bairstow swagger to him. When he has that you kind of feel he's never too far away." Talking about pacer Robinson, who had a forgettable first outing in the series, the New Zealander said: "Everything he did leading into the Test match suggested we'd see not just the Ollie Robinson we'd seen previ-

ously but a better version of it. "For one reason or another it didn't quite work out for him. Obviously he's not just as disappointed as everyone else, he's the most disappointed out of everyone." Robinson went wicketless in the 12 overs he bowled in the first innings and was not used in the second essay. India have handed England their first series loss in the Bazball era but the head coach remains optimistic about the future.

"There's times in games where we haven't quite screwed down our method just yet. We've lost here, didn't win the Ashes (2-2), but we're a better team than 18 months ago and we've got an opportunity in the next 18 months to do some special shit. "We'll keep chiselling away at those rough edges. It's not a bad time to be coach of the England team," he said. He was all praise for rookie spinners Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir who exceeded expectations with a combine tally of 32 wickets in the first four Tests. Hartley in fact is the leading wicket taker in the series with 20 scalps. "It will be a slight frustration of ours if they weren't given opportunities at county level. There's a very real possibility that might be the case but without wanting to dictate to counties because they have their own agendas as well.



Shami undergoes ankle surgery, set to miss IPL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior India pacer Mohammed Shami has undergone a successful surgery on his left achilles tendon, which rules him out of next month's Indian Premier League and possibly the T20 World Cup in June. The 33-year-old, who last played for India in the ODI World Cup final against Australia on November 19, went under the knife in the London on Monday, as reported by PTI last week. Shami, who is eager to "get back on my feet soon" stares at a recovery time of a minimum of three months. The IPL is slated to be played from March 22 to May 26 followed by the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and USA. "Just had a successful heel operation on my achilles tendon! Recovery is going to take some time, but looking forward to getting back on my feet," Shami tweeted, along with several pictures of him in the hospital, on X on Monday. Shami, who was one of the architects of India's stupendous ODI World Cup campaign with 24 wickets, had played through pain as he had problems with his landing but didn't let it affect his performance. He had flown to London in January to take special ankle injections. However, the medication didn't work and the fast bowler had to opt for a surgery.

New Zealand fast bowler Neil Wagner retires from test cricket

AP ■ WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND)

The hard-working and durable New Zealand fast bowler Neil Wagner has announced his retirement from test cricket at 37. South Africa-born Wagner played 64 tests for New Zealand and will finish fifth on New Zealand's list of all-time test wicket-takers with 260 at an average of 37. The left-arter likely was not going to be included in New Zealand's lineup for the first test against Australia, starting at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on Thursday and decided to retire from the five-day game. Wagner made his test debut in 2012 and was a key figure in one of New Zealand's most successful eras, helping the team win the inaugural World Test Championship in 2022. He moved from South Africa to New Zealand in 2008 and quickly established himself in first-class cricket with Otago



province. In recent years Wagner pursued a sort of leg theory of continual short-pitched bowling which was contentious among some fans but invariably produced results. New Zealand won 34 of the 64 tests in which he played. His strike rate of 52 is bettered only by Richard Hadlee among New Zealand bowlers who have taken more than 100

wickets. One of Wagner's most notable performances was in bowling New Zealand to a one-run win over England after following on at the Basin Reserve last year. Wagner took 4-62 including the final wicket of James Anderson which fell with England one run short of a winning total. "It's been an emotional week," Wagner said Tuesday. "It's not easy to step away from something you've given so much to and got so much out of, but it's now time for others to step up and take this team forward. I've enjoyed every single moment of playing test cricket for the Black Caps and am proud of everything we've been able to achieve as a team." Wagner played under several New Zealand captains who all knew they could throw the ball to him when in need of a breakthrough or simply of someone to bowl for long periods. "Neil's numbers are phenomenal but I don't think we can underestimate his contributions to the team when the chips were down and he found a way to create a wicket," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said. "His accuracy, execution and tenacity has been instrumental in many of our great test victories and he will always be remembered for his lion-hearted nature.

RANJI TROPHY

Vidarbha crush Karnataka

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Vidarbha completed a 128-run hammering of Karnataka to cruise to the Ranji Trophy semifinal, riding on splendid four-wicket hauls by Harsh Dubey and Aditya Sarwate here on Tuesday. It was a memorable win for the hosts here at the VCA Stadium at Civil Lines as Vidarbha came from behind on the final day to stop Karnataka in their tracks with a flurry of wickets. Chasing a massive 371 to win, Karnataka had laid the foundation when they closed at 103 for one at stumps on the fourth day, but a spectacular batting collapse on the fifth day morning undid all their hardwork. With 268 more to win and nine wickets in hand, Karnataka would have backed themselves to cross the line but Dubey and Sarwate ran through their batting line-up to deliver a huge win for Vidarbha. Inside the first hour's play, Karnataka lost the fulcrum of their batting unit including skipper Mayank Agarwal (70), Nikin Jose (0) and Manish Pandey (1) in a short span, with Sarwate (22-0-78-4) account-



ing for each of them. Aneesh KV tried to stabilise the innings from one end but the No. 3 batter was run out for 40, which dealt a body blow to Karnataka's hopes of winning the game. Aneesh had added 40 runs for the sixth wicket with Hardik Raj (13) to lead recovery. Dubey (13.4-1-65-4) then got into the act to run through Karnataka's lower order, starting with the key wicket of Raj, following it up with the dismissal of wicketkeeper-batter S Sharath for 6. The pair of Vijay Kumar Vyshak (34) and Vidwath Kaverappa (25) tried to delay the inevitable

with a 33-run stand but Dubey kept chipping away with wickets to complete a fine four-wicket haul. Karnataka were shot out for 243 in pursuit of 371 and were thus crushed out of the race to the semifinals. Vidarbha have joined Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the semifinal round. For his seven-wicket haul in the game, Sarwate was named the player of the match. **BRIEF SCORES:** Vidarbha 460 & 196 beat Karnataka 286 & 243 in 62.4 overs (R Samarth 40, Mayank Agarwal 70, Aneesh KV 40; Harsh Dubey 4/65, Aditya Sarwate 4/78) by 128 runs.

Shreyas named in Mumbai squad for semifinal against Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Middle-order batter Shreyas Iyer was on Tuesday named in Mumbai's 16-member squad for the Ranji Trophy semifinal against Tamil Nadu starting on March 2. Mumbai qualified for the semifinals after their quarterfinal clash against Baroda ended in a draw at the BKC Ground, with the 41-time champions making it to the final four on the basis of first-innings lead. Lacking big runs and struggling with a back-related issue again, the 29-year-old Iyer was not named in India's squad for the last three Tests against England. Iyer, subsequently, also missed Mumbai's quarterfinal match along with all-rounder Shivam Dube. The timing of Iyer pulling out of the key Ranji clash coincided with BCCI secretary Jay Shah announcing that a directive will be issued to players to compul-



sorily play domestic matches. While Dube is on the mend having suffered a side strain issue, Iyer has recovered completely and will be available for the semifinal against Tamil Nadu. **Mumbai squad:** Ajinkya Rahane, Shreyas Iyer, Prithvi Shaw, Bhupen Lalwani, Amogh Bhatkal, Musheer Khan, Prasad Pawar, Hardik Tamore, Shardul Thakur, Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotian, Aditya Dhumal, Tushar Deshpande, Mohit Avasthi, Royston Dias, Dhawal Kulkarni.