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INDIAN NATIONHOOD THRIVES AMID DIVERSITY

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SENSEX SURGES OVER 500 POINTS

LUCKNOW, FRIDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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

TEMPLE TAX SPARKS OUTCRY

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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka Government's move to collect funds from temples in the form of tax has not gone down well with the Opposition BJP. Red-flagging the Bill on the issue of Hindu places of worship being a soft target for the Congress, the BJP charged the ruling party with trying to fill its "empty coffers" with temple money. A related Bill was passed on Wednesday.

Taking exception to the move, BJP State president BY Vijayendra said, "Corrupt, inept Loot Sarkaar with its penchant for anti-Hindu ideology in the guise of secularism, has cast its evil eyes on the temple revenues."

"Through the Hindu Religious Endowments amendment act, it is trying to siphon-off donations as well as offerings from Hindu temples and religious institutions in order to fill its empty coffers," he said in a post on 'X.'

The Shivamogga MLA said the government plans to "gobble" up 10 per cent of the temple revenue exceeding Rs 1 crore and 5 per cent of those below Rs 1 crore. "This not only reflects the deplorable condition of this government, but also shows its abject hate towards Hindu Dharma."

Temple funds should be dedicatedly utilised for renovation of temples and to facilitate work beneficial to devotees, rather than diverting it for other purposes, which would be an injustice and betrayal of people's religious beliefs, the BJP State chief said.

Why only Hindu temples are targeted for revenue, leaving out other religions, is a question raised by millions of devotees, he said.

"Instead of grabbing the devotees' money, government can install donation boxes so that the concerned citizens can help this penniless Govt boost its revenue as a gesture of goodwill," he stated.

Defending the move as aimed at ensuring welfare of different sections, the Congress sought to turn the tables on its rival saying the saffron party had effected an amendment in 2011 to seek funds from high-income Hindu shrines.

The Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Bill was passed in the State Assembly on February 21.

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

Transport and Hindu Religious Endowments Ramalinga Reddy told reporters that the provision was not new but has existed since 2003. He also said an amendment was brought by the then BJP Government in 2011 to collect funds from high income group temples.

Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Act 1997 came into force on May 1, 2003 and provisions were made for Common Pool Fund under Section 17 of the said Act, he explained.

Common Pool Fund was implemented in the year 2003 itself. Section 17 of the Act was amended in 2011 to collect funds from high income group temples so as to aid temples with lesser income under the said fund.

The Rajya Dharmika Parishad, a committee to improve the temple management for the benefit of pilgrims, is authorised to utitlise Common Pool, he said.

According to him, there were 3,000 C-Grade temples in Karnataka, which have an annual income of less than Rs 5 lakh from where the 'Dharmika Parishad' gets no money. Temples earning between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 25 lakh were classified as B-grade temples, from where 5 per cent of the gross income had been going to the committee since 2003.

Continued on Page 8

File Photo

Bengal Fire Rages on

Sheikh Shahjahan still missing

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Sandeshkhali erupted once again on Thursday amid the visit of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes team, which received a plethora of complaints of land grab and torture on Adivasi people, including trafficking of their women. Hundreds of women from Jhupkhali, a hamlet in the Bermajur area adjacent to Sandeshkhali, armed with bamboo sticks, attacked and torched the properties of Sheikh Siraj, the brother of Trinamool Congress strongman and one of the prime accused in a land-grab and molestation case Sheikh Shahjahan, alleging that thousands of bighas of their lands had been forcibly occupied, sold via impersonation, and converted into fisheries.

The incident took place hours after Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar left the riverine island at the mouth of the Sunderbans after an overnight stay in the area, during the visit of the NCST team led by its vice-chairperson, Ananta Nayak. "Whatever I have seen and heard makes me feel like crying... it should not have taken place in a democratic country... I spoke to the villagers, and they (Sandeshkhali residents) have mentioned the name of a political leader. We will include it in our report. We have received more than 23 complaints so far," Nayak said, adding that the findings of the team would be compared with the ground report before submitting it to President Droupadi Murmu.

A woman, while describing her woes to the members of the visiting team, narrated how "no complaints of my missing daughter have been registered till now... she went missing seven years ago... when we went to the Sandeshkhali Police Station, they asked us to get a written recommendation from Sheikh Shahjahan." Another woman said how her land was occupied and converted into a Trinamool Congress party office "just because I am a CPI(M) worker," while most of the others said how their lands had been grabbed and sold via impersonation.

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

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

CAPSULE

CBI searches Satya Pal Malik premises

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

US to reduce visa wait time for Indians

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

Modi says Opposition thrives on negativity

PTI ■ MEHSANA/AHEMDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday targeted the Congress, saying it continues to live in negativity and is not ready to leave the path of hatred even when the grand Ram temple has been built in Ayodhya. He said his Government is making efforts to improve the lives of people from all sections of society.

"The aim of Modi's guarantee is changing the lives of people at the last rung in society," he said.

On one hand temples are being built in the country, the government is also building pucca houses for crores of poor people, the PM said.

"This is the time when whether it is the work of God or work of the country, both are happening at a fast pace," he said. "We will carry out development work and preserve our heritage," he added.

The PM was addressing the public after inaugurating the Valinath Mahadev temple in Gujarat's Mehsana district. He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of various projects costing more than Rs 8,350 crore.

Modi said for a long time in Independent India, the Congress created a conflict and enmity "between development and heritage." "If anyone is to be blamed for this, it is the same Congress which ruled the country for decades. These are the same people who made even a holy place like Somnath (temple) a cause of controversy," he said.

The Congress did not even show the desire to hoist a religious flag at the Pavagadh temple in Gujarat's Panchmahal district, and for decades linked the Sun temple at Modhera with vote bank politics, he said.

"These are the same people who raised questions about the existence of Lord Ram and created hurdles in the construction of his temple. And today, when a grand temple has been constructed at (Lord Ram's) birthplace, when the entire country is happy with it, the people who live in negativity are not leaving the path of of hatred," he said. The PM also attended the consecration ceremony of Valinath Dham Temple.

"Gujarat also has many symbols of ancient civilisation of India. These symbols are very important not only to understand history but also to connect the coming generations with their roots. That is why it has been the effort of our government to preserve and develop them as world heritage," he said.

Continued on Page 8

PM reaches Varanasi, to launch several projects today

PTI ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived here this evening and will launch a number of development projects on Friday and address public meetings, officials here said.

He will participate in a prize distribution programme Friday for the winners of Sansad Sanskrit Pratiyogita at the Banaras Hindu University, they said.

At 11.15 am, the prime minister will perform a 'pooja' and have a 'darshan' at the Sant Guru Ravidas Janmasthali before attending a function at 11.30 am to commemorate the 647th birth anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas.

An official statement said that in the afternoon, the PM will attend a public function where he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for multiple development projects worth more than Rs 13,000 crore in Varanasi, his parliamentary constituency.

To further enhance Varanasi's road connectivity, Modi will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of multiple road projects, including the four-laning of the Ghargra-Bridge-Varanasi section of National Highway 233 and the four-laning of the Sultanpur-Varanasi section of National Highway 56.

To provide impetus to industrial development in the region, he will also inaugurate an HPCL LPG bottling plant in Sewapuri, Banas Kashi Sankul milk processing unit at UPSIDA Agro Park Karkhiyaon, various infrastructure work at the UPSIDA Agro Park, Karkhiyaon, and silk fabric printing common facility centre for weavers.

For the famous textiles sector of Varanasi, Modi will lay the foundation stone of a National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in Varanasi. It will strengthen the education and training infrastructure of the sector, the statement said.

Augmenting the health infrastructure in Varanasi, the prime minister will lay the foundation stone of a new medical college. He will also lay the foundation stone of the National Centre of Ageing at Banaras Hindu University.

The prime minister will also inaugurate the Sigra Sports Stadium Phase-1 and District Rifle Shooting Range.

At the Sant Guru Ravidas Janmasthali temple at Seer Govardhanpur near the Banaras Hindu University, the prime minister will inaugurate a newly-installed statue of Sant Ravidas in the adjoining Ravidas Park.

He will inaugurate various development works around Sant Ravidas Janmasthali, worth about Rs 32 crore, and lay the foundation stone for Sant Ravidas Museum and beautification of the park, worth about Rs 62 crore, the statement said.

Freedom of Speech or Expression?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology finalised its emergency blocking orders against 177 social media accounts and posts linked to the farmers' protests, social media giant X (formerly Twitter) on Thursday said it disagrees with these actions in accordance with freedom of speech and expression but will "withhold the accounts and posts in India."

Elon Musk, owner of X, has said the platform has received orders from the Indian Government to block certain accounts and links. Failure to comply could result in potential penalties for the platform and its employees, including significant fines and imprisonment.

This marks a new flashpoint in the escalating tensions between the social media platform and the Indian Government, with the former having sued the Centre over content-blocking orders in 2022. The ruling last year, however, went against the company. Nevertheless, the Centre is yet to respond to the allegations.

Opposition parties allege that democracy is being "murdered" in the country after the microblogging platform X voiced disagreement with the Centre's order to block accounts and posts related to ongoing farmers' protests.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi questioned, "If farmers ask for MSP, shoot them — is this the mother of democracy? When the youth ask for an appointment, then refuse to even listen to them — is this the Mother of Democracy?"

Continued on Page 8

Jumbo Shankar in Delhi Zoo ready for mate from Dubai

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

Initially, there were plans to bring a female elephant from South Africa, but talks could not materialise due to technical and logistic glitches. Now, officials have identified Dubai Safari Park as the potential source to bring an African female elephant for Shankar.

Shankar is not alone in this predicament; at the Mysuru zoo, Rambo, another African bull elephant in his 20s, has been solitary since 2016 following the death of its sire, Timbo.

African elephants, the largest land mammals, differ from Asian elephants. Sources indicate that of the three female elephants, one may be sent to Mysuru Zoo to accompany Rambo. However, plans are still being finalised.

Having lived solitarily for the past two decades, concerns have arisen regarding their mental health, prompting efforts to find suitable companions to ensure their well-being and facilitate procreation. Reports have indicated instances of Shankar exhibiting aggression and self-injury, particularly during the "musth" phase. As social creatures, elephants become distressed when alone and lacking companionship.

Zoo officials previously attempted to mate Shankar with Asiatic elephants, but without success. While elephants often heed their mahouts, there have been instances of aggression resulting in fatalities among handlers.

"Discussions regarding bringing female elephants from Dubai are in preliminary stages. We intend to bring at least three elephants. We approach this potential pairing with cautious optimism, recognising the importance of ensuring compatibility and a smooth transition for the female elephants from Dubai. Plans are being made for careful introductions and acclimatisation to prioritise the well-being of the animals," said the sources. With its extensive logistical capabilities and commitment to environmental stewardship, IOC's involvement marks a pivotal moment in Shankar's quest for companionship.

As part of its corporate social responsibility and conservation efforts, IOC has already taken initiatives by adopting rhinoceroses in various zoos across India. In fact, the rhinoceros serves as IOC's brand ambassador.

Shankar has been housed singly and separately from the Asian elephants at the zoo since 2001 when the female African elephant brought from Zimbabwe passed away.

Shankar was a one-year-old calf when it arrived at the Delhi zoo from Zimbabwe in 1998 as a diplomatic gift. Weighing up to 6,000 kgs and measuring up to 3.3m at the shoulder, the African Elephant is the world's largest land mammal.

PRPB invites proof from candidates

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's action on allegations of paper leaks in the State Police Constable Recruitment Examination, the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board (UPPRPB) has sought proof from the candidates. The UPPRPB has asked the candidates to submit evidence of the paper leak till 6:00 pm on February 23.

Candidates can submit their proof regarding paper going viral before the examination, on the website uppbpb.gov.in issued by Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board. Many candidates in UP have alleged that the papers of the UP Police Constable Recruitment Examination held on February 17 and 18 were leaked. Not only this, there has been a lot of uproar after Sunny Leone's picture was printed on a student's identity card. After this Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, taking this matter seriously, ordered the formation of an inquiry committee to investigate it.

As per the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi, UP Police Recruitment and Promotion Board Chairperson Renuka Mishra has formed an investigation committee under the chairmanship of ADG Ashok Kumar Singh. This committee will investigate the complaint of paper leaks, irregularities in paper printing, late arrival of paper, Sunny Leone's admit card issue. Further action will be taken based on the information found in the investigation report.

PAPER LEAK

The Police Recruitment and Promotion Board has now also sought representations from the candidates along with proof. Candidates can submit their evidence regarding papers going viral before the examination, on the website uppbpb.gov.in issued by Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board. If the evidence is found true in the investigation, then further action will be taken.

Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board (UPPRPB) has initiated a comprehensive investigation into the alleged paper leaks on February 17 and 18. They issued a statement confirming their preliminary findings, indicating that miscreants exploited Telegram's edit feature to disseminate false claims of paper leaks for fraudulent purposes. The UPPRPB assured the public that they, along with UP Police, are actively monitoring these cases and conducting a thorough probe. They emphasised that the ongoing examination process is being conducted securely and without disruption.

It may be mentioned that Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav had raised questions regarding the police recruitment exam paper leaks. While sharing several news of paper leaks, he targeted the Yogi government and said, "The news of paper leak of all sessions of UP Police Recruitment Examination 2024 is spreading with screenshots on social media, due to which lakhs of unemployed youth are angry. Like other previous examinations, this time also the fear of paper being leaked in the name of providing employment is coming true and is coming out in the form of news."

Former president of Congress, Rahul Gandhi during his ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra also prominently raised the issue of paper leaks including in the police recruitment exams and accused the Uttar Pradesh government of playing with the future of youths.

Students stand in queue as they wait to enter the examination centre at Kalicharan Inter College in Lucknow. The UP Board's High School and Intermediate examinations started on Thursday. At many centres the children were accorded a warm traditional welcome with flowers and chocolates to ease their stress. There are 134 examination centres in Lucknow, including 14 government, 63 non-government, and 56 aided schools. On the first day, out of a total of 56,473 candidates who had registered for the High School examinations, 53,580 were present in the first shift while 2,853 were absent. In the second shift, 126 examinees were absent. In the Intermediate examination, 1,105 of the 33,207 registered candidates played truant. Pioneer

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NOTICE

My property No. EWS-O-220 Yojna-1, Keshav Puram, Awas Vikas Kalyanpur's Possession Letter is lost. Whose Cr. No.- 14259, Dated-22.11.2006. Any use of this will be illegal. Manorama Verma W/o Late Ramdas Verma, 104/294, Sisamau, Kanpur.

NOTICE

I have changed my name Mo Farook Ali to Farook khan for all future Perpose, Farook khan s/o Israj Khan R/O Gajpati khera, Raibareli

NOTICE

I AURANGZEB AHMAD S/O PARVEZ AHMAD R/O 726 2nd L I G Bargadwan Chuda Meal Vikas Nagar Colony Gorakhpur Uttar Pradesh 273007 have changed my name to AURANG AHMAD.

NOTICE

I ASHISH KUMAR PAL alias ASHISH KUMAR S/O SHISHU PAL R/O 18E/11 Dadbauli-1 Udyog Nagar Kanpur Nagar Uttar Pradesh 208022 have changed my name to ARAV PRATAP SINGH.

NOTICE

I HARJAS RAHEJA S/O JAGJEET SINGH RAHEJA R/O Flat No-204 C-822 Mega Park View Appt Mahanagar Lucknow Uttar Pradesh 226006 have changed my name to HARJHAS RAHEJA.

NOTICE

I have changed my elder Son's name YUG to ADAMYA SINGH SAAHAS and my younger Son's name HiM to ADBHUT SINGH SAAHAS for all future purpose. Alok Ranjan S/o sri shyam Roop Banwari , R/o- H·N·MDL-21 Sector-L Aliganj Lucknow

WANTED

आवश्यकता है।
मदरसा आइडियल गर्ल्स स्कूल, मिश्रपुर कुर्सी रोड, लखनऊ
कनिष्ठ सहायक– 01 पद, आयु न्यूनतम 18 वर्ष, शैक्षिक योग्यता
(क) आलिम अथवा इण्टर अथवा समकक्ष प्रमाण–पत्रः
(ख) मौलवी स्तर का प्रमाण–पत्र उर्दू/अरबी/फारसी सहितः
(ग) सी0सी0सी0 (कोर्स आफ कम्प्यूटर कन्सेपट) प्रमाण–पत्र जो एन.आई.ई.एल.ई.टी. (नेशनल इंस्टीट्यूट आफ इलेक्ट्रानिक एण्ड इन्फारमेशन टेक्नोलोजी) द्वारा कम्प्यूटर आपरेशन में प्रदत्त हो और हिन्दी/अंग्रेजी में 25/30 शब्द प्रति मिनट टाइप की गति आवश्यक है। पुनरीक्षित वेतन मैट्रिक्स लेवल 3 में वेतन 21700–69100
नोटः– उपरोक्त पद हेतु आवेदन पत्र विज्ञापन के प्रकाशन तिथि के 21 दिवस के अंदर प्रबन्धक इरम एजूकेशनल सोसाइटी, सी–ब्लाक इन्दिरा नगर, लखनऊ–226016 को प्राप्त हो जाने चाहिए। अंतिम तिथि के बाद प्राप्त आवेदन पत्रों पर कोई विचार नहीं किया जाएगा। साक्षात्कार की तिथि सूचित कर दी जाएगी। इस हेतु कोई यात्रा भत्ता देय नहीं होगा।
काबलियत/अर्हता मदरसा बोर्ड एक्ट व नियमावली 22 जुलाई 2016 के मुताबिक होगी।
प्रबन्धक

NOTICE

I have changed my name from SAGEER AHMAD KHAN To SAGEER AHMAD for all future purposes, SAGEER AHMAD S/O ZAMEER AHMAD KHAN R/O 96/16 COLONEL GANJ, Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh - 208001

NOTICE

I Have Changed My Name Spelling From MOHAMMAD ALI LARI To MOHD ALI LARI. S/O MOHAMMAD AMIR LARI R/o 129/20-21 IDEAL CAMPUS CHANDRA NAGAR LAL BANGLA, KANPUR NAGAR

NOTICE

मकान स.126 बी फ्रेंड्स कॉलोनी इटावा का आवंटन पत्र वास्तव में कहीं खो गए है जिसकी डीड स. 509 दिनाँक 17.3.1966 है जिसका प्रयोग अवैध माना जाएगा, यतींद्र नाथ दुबे पुत्र सत्य नारायण दीक्षित निवासी मकान स. 126 बी फ्रेंड्स कॉलोनी तुलसी नगर इटावा उ.प्र.

NOTICE

In ICSE Registration of my son Abhinav Sachan the correct spelling of myself & my wife are Pratipal Singh and Usha Devi. In school documents this is wrongly written as Pratipal Singh Sachan & Usha Sachan. In future may we be known by our correct names. Pratipal Singh s/o Shiv Narayan 61/1347 MLIG Arraa Bingawan Kanpur.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from AYSHA NOORI to AYESHA NOORI QADRI W/O MOHD SHARIK. In future I shall be Known as AYESHA NOORI QADRI W/O MOHD SHARIK 97/172 TALAQ MAHAL, Kanpur UP

NOTICE

Hereby this is declare that I want to change my name from Anruddha kumar to Anuruddh kumar. Anuruddh kumar s/o Rambharose residence admapur Rohli kannauj

NOTICE

It is informed that before marriage, my name was Pooja Sharma, son of Jagdish Prasad Sharma, which after marriage has become Pooja Anand Agnihotri, wife of Anand Agnihotri, hence I should be known and recognized by this name. Pooja Anand Agnihotri Wife Anand Agnihotri Resident-137 Gram and Post Khiron District – RaeBareli

NOTICE

Names of my father and mother in my highschool (2021) and intermediate (2023) marksheets (Unique ID 7462488) have wrongly been mentioned as Muhammad Javed and Shabana. Their correct names are Mohammad Javed and Shabana Farid respectively. Mohammad Zaid

'India promoting traditional medicine'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Union Minister of AYUSH and Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, on Thursday said that India was positing itself at the centre of the global stage, particularly for the promotion of a traditional system of medicine. One Earth, One Family, One Health is our course of action while prevention, curation and rehabilitation are sources to keep us healthy as a society. Having to develop the temperament and eagerness to promote traditional medicines globally from going local to vocal and vocal to global is the vision we are carrying with us, he claimed.

Speaking at the 3rd International Exhibition and Conference on AYUSH and Wellness sector – International Arogya 2024 – organised by FICCI, jointly with the Ministry of AYUSH, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Sonowal said, by 2047, India aimed to become the number one developed nation in the world, demonstrating the power it possess for the next 25 years.

"I believe that the International Arogya 2024 will be highly significant and will provide substantial impetus to the future course of action for the health and wellness sector. Now, India can witness the available resources within the country, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has already recognised Indian capabilities and resources, establishing their extension office in Jamnagar, Gujarat, and moving from Geneva. We have more than 170 countries practising traditional systems of medicine, while India is the first country to establish a particular distinction," he added. Minister of State for AYUSH and Women and Child Development, Dr Munjapara Mahendrabhai, while addressing the event, said, "For the past decade, the Ministry of AYUSH has spearheaded transformative initiatives in the AYUSH sector, reshaping India's traditional medicine landscape."

Since its inception in 2014. The AYUSH Ministry has undertaken several initiatives like signing MoUs with 24 countries while collaborating with traditional medicines and homoeopathy. In 34 countries AYUSH Ministry has established 39 AYUSH information cells and introduced a grid regional health care system along with 22 key digital initiatives for demonstrating its dedication to technology integration.

UP's Minister of State for AYUSH, Food Security and Drug Administration Dayashanker Mishra stated, "With the aim of providing better healthcare facilities to the people, 4,000 small and large hospitals have been established in Uttar Pradesh. Currently, 11 hospitals with 50 beds are providing services, and 14 new hospitals are under construction in various district headquarters. While an AYUSH University is being established in Gorakhpur, 19 government medical colleges are operational, and two new ones are being built. Additionally, 86 private medical colleges and 300-400 pharmacy and nursing colleges are committed to providing simple and easy healthcare services to the people."

Mystery shrouds death of contractor working with real estate firm

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A contractor working with a real estate company was found dead under mysterious circumstances in PGI police station area on Thursday.

Identified as Vikas Kumar Mishra of Ekta Nagar in the area, the deceased was a native of Bhaguwa district in Bihar. As per reports, he left his house in the morning without informing anyone in the family. Wife Madhu Mishra said she was searching for her husband and was told about the recovery of a body at the railway tracks in Daluana village in PGI area. She reached the spot and identified the body. However, sub-inspector Rajit Kumar Mishra, who is investigating the case, said Vikas was hit by a train. "The team recovered a PAN card in the name of Vikas Kumar Mishra from the deceased's pocket and later, the body was identified by his wife Madhu Mishra," a police spokesman said. The deceased has also left behind two children.

Meanwhile, police apprehended a 26-year-old man on Wednesday for allegedly stalking a woman motivational speaker when the latter was attending a function in Hazratganj. The accused is said to be a model into advertisement business and son of a prominent hotelier. According to police, the accused was so obsessed with the motivational speaker that he got her itinerary to ensure his presence there. On many occasions, he flew to different locations from Mumbai. The police said the organiser of the function called them after the accused created a awkward moment for the motivational speaker in Dalibagh, Hazratganj. The accused was booked under Section 151 of CrPC (criminal breach of peace).

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR
Ph.D. Admission- Feb-2024
Online applications are invited for admission to Ph.D. -Feb. 2024 for employees of State Govt., Govt. of India and employees working on posts aided by the Govt. of Punjab in various courses latest by 4-3-2024. For details consult University website **www.gndu.ac.in.**
Director of Research
NA/12/22261/2023/32768
Dated CHD :- 2/22/2024

UP to showcase Buddhist heritage at Thailand event

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Tourism announced its participation in the upcoming Buddha Bhoomi programme scheduled to take place in Thailand from February 23 to March 3. This initiative aims to bring into spotlight the rich Buddhist heritage of Uttar Pradesh, inviting tourists and investors alike to explore the sacred sites and investment opportunities within the state.

A special pavilion has been set up by the Uttar Pradesh Tourism department at the event dedicated to the significant Buddhist sites in the state associated with Lord Buddha. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore these revered locations and learn about the available tourist facilities, with the goal of attracting more tourists and potential investors.

Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh underscored the abundance of Lord Buddha and Buddhism-related sites within Uttar Pradesh, emphasising the importance of disseminating information about these sites both at national and international level. This initiative not only seeks to boost tourism but also aims to create employment opportunities for locals.

The pavilion will offer visitors books related to Lord Buddha, travelogues, discussions, and cultural programs. Additionally, short films depicting renowned Buddhist sites such as Kushinagar, Sarnath, Shravasti, and Kapilvastu will be showcased, providing attendees with a comprehensive insight into the state's rich Buddhist heritage.

"Uttar Pradesh is home to many Buddhist pilgrimage sites, including Devdah which was Lord Buddha's maternal home, Kapilavastu where Siddhartha spent the first 29 years of his life, Sarnath where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon, Shravasti where he spent 25 rainy seasons, and Kaushambi where he visited after enlightenment. Sankisa is the place where Lord Buddha descended from heaven. Devgarh and Lalitpur are the pilgrimage centres for Buddhists and Kushinagar is the place where Lord Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana," a tourism official said.

The state attracts a significant number of devotees and tourists from countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Japan, Korea, China, The Himalayan Region and many others, making it a prime destination for Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism.

"With its unparalleled Buddhist heritage, Uttar Pradesh stands as a symbol of Buddhist tourism in India, offering a unique blend of spirituality, culture, and history. The state looks forward to welcoming a large number of visitors from around the world to explore and experience the sacred sites and cultural richness it has to offer," he added.

Ex-MLA accused of ₹2.52-cr fraud

Lucknow (PNS): Former MLA of Samajwadi Party Indal Rawat was accused of usurping Rs 2.52 crore of a real estate company with which he had signed an agreement for construction of a 6-storey building on a land that did not belong to him. The case was registered with the Gomti Nagar police only after company's managing director Rajesh Pandey moved court. Pandey took court's shelter due to the dilly-dallying tactics employed by police. He had given the complaint at Gomti Nagar police station on January 3 and also sent a letter to the office of police commissioner, Lucknow.

Pandey alleged that Rawat, who was an MLA from Malihabad constituency from 2012 to 2017, met the managing director of Raj Infra Housing Pvt Ltd and offered to develop a 6-storey residential building on his land in Batha Sabauli village in the area in 2014.

Thereafter, a contract was signed between Rawat and the company, but it was declared null and void due to lack of required amount/value of revenue stamps. Later, the contract was registered on payment of Rs 42.08 lakh as stamp fee.

Pandey said he paid Rs 49 lakh to Rawat. "The company also paid Rs 55 lakh in cash and Rs 1.48 lakh through RTGS to Rawat. It later surfaced that the land had been purchased by a housing society and the contract done by Rawat was null and void legally and that Rawat had no ownership on the land," Pandey stated in the FIR.

"He first opted for dilly-dallying tactics and then said he would get his name included in the revenue records. Later, he threatened to kill me," Pandey alleged. A case has been registered in this connection.

UPSIDA
कार्यालय वरिष्ठ प्रबन्धक (वि0), विद्युत खण्ड-प्रथम,
उ0प्र0 राज्य औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण
ए-1/4, लखनपुर, कानपुर 208024
शुद्धिपत्र
एतद् द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि दिनांक 01.02.2024 को समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशित औद्योगिक क्षेत्र शाहजहाँपुर में विद्युत कार्यों से सम्बन्धित निविदा संख्या (2024_SIDC_888833_1) तथा औद्योगिक क्षेत्र लखीमपुर खीरी में विद्युत कार्यों से सम्बन्धित निविदा संख्या (2024_SIDC_889099_1) जो दिनांक 03.02.2024 से दिनांक 21.02.2024 तक अपलोड की जानी थी एवं दिनांक 22.02.2024 को खोली जानी है, अपरिहार्य कारणों से अब उक्त आमंत्रित निविदाओं में निविदा प्रपत्र अपलोड करने की अवधि दिनाँक 29.02.2024 तक विस्तारित की जाती है। यह निविदाएं अब दिनांक 01.03.2024 को अपरान्ह 16:00 बजे खोली जायेगी। शेष नियम व शर्तें यथावत रहेंगी।
वरिष्ठ प्रबन्धक (वि0), उ0प्र0रा0औ0वि0प्रा0, कानपुर

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Tender Notice Reference No. GNDU/GEN/03-25/2024
The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsar invites online bids for the following:

Sr. No.	Item	Quantity
1	Allotment of Canteens	11
2	Allotment of Shops	12

Closing date & Time: **14/03/2024 at 5:00 PM**
For details log onto: **www.eproc.punjab.gov.in**
Note: Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only
Assistant Registrar (General)
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
NA/12/22237/2023/32740 Dated CHD :- 2/22/2024

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav
TENDER NOTICE
Divisional Railway Manager (Signal & Telecommunication)/Northern Railway/ Lucknow division/Lucknow, for and on behalf of President of India invites **E-tenders** in **Single packet system** for the under noted work:
Tender No.: 106-Sig-Tender-21-2023-24
Name of Work: Linking of Data logger with Control Office Application (COA) at Six stations (BSB, JNU, BBK, ML, AY & MBDP) of Lucknow division of Northern Railway.
Approximate Cost : Rs.55,84,407.84/-
Cost of tender form: NIL
Earnest Money: Rs. 1,11,700.00/-
Completion period: 100 days.
Last date & time of Submission of tender document: 15.03.2024 at 15:30 Hrs.
Website particulars and notice board location where complete details of tender can be seen: "http://www.ireps.gov.in" Office of the Sr. DSTE, DRM office Complex/Northern Railway, Lucknow
- The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. **"http://www.ireps.gov.in"** for participating in the e-tender system.
- For all terms and conditions please refer tender document.
- No manual offers are acceptable.
- Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable online through net banking or payment gateway only.

No.: 106-Sig-Tender-21-23-24 Dated: 22.02.2024 586/24
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NCPCR directs FIR against Darul Uloom Deoband over fatwa

New Delhi (PTI): The apex child rights body NCPCR has issued directive to the Uttar Pradesh government to register an FIR and take legal action against Darul Uloom Deoband, a renowned Islamic educational institution, following the discovery of alleged objectionable content on its website.

In a letter addressed to the senior superintendent of police (SSP) of the Saharanpur District, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Chairperson Priyank Kanoongo highlighted the commission's concern regarding a fatwa published on the Deoband's website. The fatwa in question discusses the concept of 'Ghazwa-e-Hind' and allegedly glorifies "martyrdom in the context of India's invasion".

"This fatwa is exposing children to hatred against one's own country and eventually causing them unnecessary mental or physical suffering," said Kanoongo in the letter, emphasising the alleged violation of Section 75 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. The NCPCR, invoking Section 13(1) of the CPCR Act, 2005, emphasised the potential for such content to incite hatred against the nation.

Referring to legal precedents, including the case of Kanhaiya Kumar vs the State of NCT of Delhi, the commission underlined the gravity of expressions that could be construed as an offense against the state. Furthermore, the letter noted the commission's previous attempts to address similar concerns with the district administration in January 2022 and July 2023. Despite these efforts, no action has been taken thus far, the NCPCR said and asserted that the district administration could be held responsible for any adverse consequences resulting from the dissemination of such content. In light of these developments, the NCPCR directed the initiation of legal proceedings against Darul Uloom Deoband under the IPC and the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

LDA to sell 146 flats, over a dozen plots

Lucknow (PNS): The Lucknow Development Authority is set to sell more than a dozen residential and commercial plots in various parts of the city, along with 146 flats in Vasant Kunj on Hardoi road, totalling over Rs 1,200 crore.

The registration for the property sale will be conducted online and will be open to buyers from February 24. The online registration will continue on public holidays and will close on March 4, as announced by Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi on Thursday.

The process of allotment will commence on March 7, with possession being granted within a month through a lottery system. Those interested in purchasing commercial plots will need to bid double the market price.

Tripathi stated that the commercial plots are expected to yield higher returns than anticipated, contributing to increased revenue for the exchequer, which is nearly depleted. There is still significant demand for commercial plots, and buyers are willing to pay higher prices for them.

C-1810
Tel/Fax – 06852 – 250740
e-mail –ecphkrp@nic.in
ecphkrp@gmail.com
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
P.H. DIVISION KORAPUT
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA "e" procurement Notice
e-procurement Notice for 2023-24
Bid Identification No.SE,P.H.KPT-13 of 2023-24 Dt.15.02.2024

1.	No. of the works	1 no
2.	Estimated Cost	Rs.603.03 lakh (Approx.)
3.	Period of completion	9 months
4.	Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal	From 11.00 A.M. of 23.02.2024 to 05.00 P.M. of 06.03.2024
5.	Last date / time of receipt of bids in the portal	05.00 P.M. of 06.03.2024
6.	Date & time of opening of bids	11.00 A.M. of 07.03.2024
7.	Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid	Superintending Engineer, P.H. Division, Koraput

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal "https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in"
OIPR-13008/11/0021/2324
Superintending Engineer
P.H.Division, Koraput

India will be world's 3rd largest economy in Modi's 3rd term: CM

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that India was making rapid strides in development in the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, becoming the fifth largest economy in the world, leaving behind Britain which ruled the country for two centuries, and now it was set to become the third largest economy in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term.

Speaking at the inauguration of the new Income Tax Department building, Yogi said that Uttar Pradesh was keeping pace with the growth in the national economy, adding that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Per Capita Income of the state had doubled in the past seven years.

The chief minister along with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary inaugurated the newly-constructed building of the Income Tax Department in Gorakhpur on Thursday.

The chief minister remarked: "Uttar Pradesh has the best infrastructure, with the CD ratio reaching around 60 per cent, up from 45 per cent. The goal for the next fiscal year is to increase it to 65 per cent."

He added that the number of individuals filing income tax returns in the state has also increased, pointing out that while 1.45 lakh people filed returns in 2014, presently that number has reached 12 lakh. Banks have also shown utmost interest in contributing to Uttar Pradesh's development, he asserted.

The chief minister mentioned that the government is simplifying processes for taxpayers, emphasising that the money received from taxpayers is crucial for the country's development. He said that the prime minister had pledged to make India a developed nation by the year 2047 and fulfilling this commitment would require citizens to play a significant role.

He emphasised that understanding one's role and fulfilling it diligently is essential for achieving the goal of a developed India. He mentioned that citizens also have a responsibility to willingly pay their taxes, as without funds, the development of better infrastructure would not be possible.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath presenting a model of Chandrayaan to a student in Gorakhpur on Thursday

He further highlighted the transformative impact of various financial inclusion campaigns, such as the Atal Pension Yojana, Jeevan Jyoti Yojana, Mudra Loan Yojana, PM SVANidhi Yojana, and BC Sakhi, benefiting people on a broad scale.

He acknowledged the crucial contribution of the Indian government and the finance ministry in implementing these schemes.

Highlighting the success of the fourth edition of the groundbreaking ceremony (GBC@IV) held in the state, the chief minister said that it had touched new heights under the leadership of the prime minister. Yogi mentioned that when he first proposed hosting an investors' summit after becoming the chief minister, he was told that the state could receive an investment of only Rs 20,000 crore because people had little trust in the government.

"Today, Uttar Pradesh is free from riots and there is no lawlessness or hooliganism in the state. The positive outcomes of these find reflection in the Global Investors Summit and the groundbreaking ceremony," he added.

Chief Minister Yogi said that today marked the completion of one month of the Pran Pratishtha of Lord Ram in Ayodhya. "In this one month, 62 lakh to 65 lakh devotees have visited the place. During the development of Ayodhya, those businessmen who had some doubts regarding rehabilitation have been rehabilitated. Today, those very businessmen testify that after the Pran Pratishtha, their business has increased by 30 to 50 times," he said, adding that there is both faith and livelihood in the changing Uttar Pradesh.

Welcoming Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who visited Gorakhpur for the first time, Chief Minister Yogi said that his region of eastern Uttar Pradesh had been globally renowned since ancient times for its spiritual and cultural heritage. "Gorakhpur is the meditation place of Guru Gorakhnath, and 90 kilometres away is the birthplace of Lord Buddha and 50 kilometers away is his Mahaparinirvana site," said.

"Just 25 kilometres from Gorakhpur is the Mahaparinirvana site of Sant Kabir in Maghar, and 150 kilometres away is the birthplace of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, while 200 kilometres away is the Kashi Vishwanath Dham," he added.

Chief Minister Yogi, praising the work of Nirmala Sitharaman, stated that the finance ministry plays a crucial role in the country's development. As the finance minister and previously as the defence minister, Nirmala Sitharaman has made significant contributions, including towards the construction of the Defence Industrial Corridor in Uttar Pradesh. The Defence Industrial Corridor, developed in six nodes with investment, has taken steps towards self-reliance in the defence sector, he added.

On this occasion, Chief Minister Yogi mentioned that efforts were being made to dedicate the Ganga Expressway connecting western Uttar Pradesh to eastern Uttar Pradesh to the nation before the Prayagraj Kumbh.

'UP NUMBER ONE IN MANY WAYS'

Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had changed the mindset of the people of the country and under his leadership, not only was the economy advancing, but comprehensive welfare programmes were also ongoing.

Speaking at the inauguration of the new building of the Income Tax Department in Gorakhpur, Pankaj Chaudhary commended Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for transforming Uttar Pradesh.

He said the state, which was previously considered a riot-prone and a BIMARU state, where people were unwilling to come or invest, had now become number one in various aspects under Chief Minister Yogi's leadership.

"The state excels in food production, sugar production, milk production, infrastructure, and more on a national level. Recently, in the fourth edition of the groundbreaking ceremony, Uttar Pradesh has launched projects worth Rs 10 lakh crore out of the Rs 40 lakh crore memorandums of understanding signed at the Global Investors Summit," he added.

Praising Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Chaudhary said that despite the increase in tax rebates, tax collection had increased under the finance minister's leadership.

The welcome address was given by Central Board of Direct Taxes Chairman Nitin Gupta and the vote of thanks was proposed by Devendra Singh Chaudhary, Principal Chief Income Tax Commissioner of Eastern Uttar Pradesh region. On this occasion, UP cabinet minister Surya Pratap Shahi, MP Ravi Kishan Shukla, Kamlesh Paswan, Central Board of Direct Taxes member Pragya Sahay Saxena and many officials and dignitaries of the Income Tax Department were present.

During the programme, the chief minister and the Union finance minister distributed the model of Chandrayaan to the students of classes 7 and 8 of council schools and blessed them for a bright future.

Yogi a dynamic CM in true sense: Sitharaman

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman offering prayers at Gorakhnath temple in Gorakhpur on Thursday

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday described Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath as a dynamic chief minister in the true sense of the term. Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the new Income Tax Department Building during her maiden visit to Gorakhpur, Sitharaman emphasised the significance of the word "dynamic" in the context of Chief Minister Yogi saying, "Please correct my number if it's wrong, Mr Chief Minister. There are 75 districts in the state and there are 52 weeks in a year. Yogi ji visits each of Uttar Pradesh's 75 districts at least once, if not twice, within the span of 52 weeks."

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was also present at the event. Highlighting Chief Minister Yogi's tireless efforts in traversing the state like a well-oiled engine, tirelessly working in every district, she further underscored the futility of seeking appointments with him in Lucknow, suggesting instead to meet him wherever he may be during that week.

Regarding her first visit to Gorakhpur, Sitharaman said, "First impression is the best impression and I found Gorakhpur more beautiful than I had ever imagined."

The finance minister said that the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi guarantees inauguration of all the projects whose foundation stone was laid. She mentioned four major projects of eastern Uttar Pradesh to substantiate her point.

The finance minister elaborated that the foundation stone of the fertiliser factory and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) of Gorakhpur were laid in July 2016 and both were inaugurated in December 2021.

"Similarly, the foundation stone of the Regional Medical Research Centre of the Indian Council of Medical Research in Gorakhpur was laid in 2018 and it was inaugurated in December 2021. The Saryu Canal Project, pending since 1978, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi in December 2021. This project is providing irrigation facilities to 29 lakh farmers living in 6,200 villages of nine districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh. With the commencement of this project, irrigation of 14 lakh hectares of land has become easier," she pointed out.

FM OFFERS PRAYERS AT GORAKHNATH TEMPLE

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, during her maiden visit to Gorakhpur, also visited the globally renowned Gorakhnath temple and offered prayers. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath welcomed her on her visit and provided her a guided tour to the temple complex. Sitharaman visited the temple after participating in the inauguration ceremony of the Income Tax Department's building,

After the temple tour, CM Yogi, in his meeting room, provided detailed information to Nirmala Sitharaman about the Nath sect, the history of the Gorakhnath temple, the Guru tradition, and shared insights about Mahant Digvijaynath and Mahant Avaidyanath. In the meeting room, Finance Minister Sitharaman also received the prasad of the temple. On this occasion, the chief minister also presented her the prasad of Shri Ram Lalla Pran Pratishtha ceremony.

'Investment a prerequisite for a developed country, state'

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, said that investment was a prerequisite for a developed country and state, adding that industrial development was a natural outcome of good governance as well as prevalence of rule of law.

Addressing a gathering at a function organised in Sector 13 of Gorakhpur Industrial Development Authority (GIDA) after gifting 20 projects worth Rs 1,040 crore to the authority, Yogi said that the double-engine government aimed to build a "developed India" under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The GIDA projects include launch of the Rs 650 crore Kalesar Residential Township Scheme, laying of foundation stone of SD International's plastic recycling and food packaging container unit with an investment of Rs 300 crore as well as inauguration/laying of foundation stones of 18 development projects worth Rs 90 crore.

Chief Minister Yogi also distributed enrollment certificates to five students of the Skill Training Centre of National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) on the occasion.

He said: "To fulfill this resolution of a developed India, Uttar Pradesh needs to be developed, and for this, Gorakhpur needs to be developed. Industrial investment is a prerequisite for fulfilling this resolution of a developed country, state, and district."

The chief minister added that the industrial development and creation of employment opportunities being witnessed in the state are the result of better law and order, good governance and election of good public representatives, emphasising that, "When intentions are good, results are also good."

Emphasising that GIDA was touching new heights, the chief minister said that the Gorakhpur Link Expressway project was expected to be completed soon, providing two routes to travel to Lucknow. He expressed the need for developing this region as an industrial cluster, highlighting the efforts made in recent years.

The chief minister mentioned investments made in GIDA by companies such as Varun Beverages, Cayan Distilleries, CP Milk, Tatva Plastics, Central

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the foundation-laying ceremony of SD International's unit in Gorakhpur on Thursday

Warehousing Corporation, India Autowheels, Balaji Processors, Rungta Industries, Kapila Krishi Udyog and Singh Paper Projects. He said that these investments were expected to create job opportunities for around 5,000 youths.

Additionally, the chief minister pointed to the development of other industries in the GIDA area, including a garment park on 25 acres, a plastic park on 88 acres, and the construction of a flat factory at a cost of Rs 34 crore. He said that the government was also going to build an industrial township in Dhuriyapar on 5,500 acres.

Furthermore, the chief minister said that there was a proposal for setting up a new cement factory for which land had already been shown to the investor.

The chief minister pointed out that as many as four crore pucca houses have been provided to the poor across the country since Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the announcement in this regard in 2014, soon after becoming the prime minister for the first time. In Uttar Pradesh, 56 lakh houses have been given to the poor, he added.

"Along with the Gorakhpur Development Authority, GIDA has also taken forward steps for those who are willing to get housing by paying their money. Houses will be available for every category of people in GIDA's Kalesar Housing Project," he added.

Chief Minister Yogi highlighted the importance of attractive packaging of products in enhancing its market value and thanked the directors of SD International for setting up the new unit in the packaging sector.

Speaking of various developments in Gorakhpur, the chief minister said, "The city is transforming into a 'New Gorakhpur'. Kalesar to Jangal Kauria bypass was earlier a dream, but presently it is a reality. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has been built in Gorakhpur and BRD Medical College has been upgraded. The fertiliser factory has started and four universities have been established in Gorakhpur."

He further mentioned that the government has recently approved a veterinary college for Gorakhpur, which will later be transformed into a university. "Atal Residential School has been established in Sahjanwa, and a Sarvodaya School has been set up in Harpur. In every area, something new is happening," he added.

Chief Minister Yogi mentioned that the practical skills of the youths are being honed through the Skill Development Training Centre established by NIELIT in GIDA, which will help then secure jobs.

He also highlighted that the National Education Policy includes provisions for both traditional courses and skill development. Youths completing their education will have a job waiting for them upon graduation, he added.

The chief minister said that along with ensuring development, the government was also respecting the faiths of people, referring to the consecration of Lord Shri Ram's idol in his grand temple in Ayodhya after a gap of centuries. He urged everyone to visit Ayodhya and seek the blessings of Lord Shri Ram.

Member of Parliament Ravi Kishan Shukla also spoke on the occasion.

FORM NO.5

DRT/LKO

Debts Recovery Tribunal, Lucknow
(Jurisdiction- Part of U.P.)
600/1, University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir
Lucknow-226007

Summons For Filling reply & Appearance By Publication
OA No. 1078/2023
(Summons to defendant under Section 19 (4) of the RECOVERY OF DEBTS AND BANKRUPTCY ACT, 1993, read with Rules 12 and 13 of the Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules, 1993)

BANK OF INDIA .....**APPLICANT**
Nirala Nagar C & P Branch, Lucknow
Versus
M/s. M.A. APPARELS & OTHER.. **DEFENDANTS**

To,
1. **M/s M.A. Apparels,** a partnership firm having it's principal place of business at 13/44, River Colony, Prag Narain Road, Lucknow-226001. (defendant no. 1)
2. **Shri Asif Ali Khan** adult son of Late Yusuf Ali, R/o F-396, Rajajipuram, Lucknow-226017. **(Partner)**. in his personal capacity and as heir and legal representative of deceased guarantor Mrs. Yasmin Khan. (defendant no. 3)
3. **Shri Arsh Khan** adult son of Sri Asif Khan R/o F-396, Rajajipuram, Lucknow- 226017. **(Partner)** in his personal capacity and as heir and legal representative of deceased guarantor Mrs. Yasmin Khan. (defendant no. 7)

.....**DEFENDANTS**

In the above noted application you are required to file reply in paper Book Form in Two sets along with documents and affidavits (if any), personally or through your duly authorized agent or legal practitioner in this Tribunal, after serving copy of the same on the applicant or his Counsel/duly authorized agent after publication of the summons, and thereafter to appear before the Tribunal on **20.08.2024** at **10:30 A.M.** failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence.

Registrar
Debts Recovery Tribunal, Lucknow

'Government committed to doubling income of farmers, ensuring safety of women'

Lucknow (PNS): Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for increasing the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of sugarcane for the season 2024-25.

Taking to social media platform X on Thursday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath wrote that the government was committed to doubling the income of farmers. In this regard, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Union cabinet has decided to increase the fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane by eight per cent, setting it at Rs 340 per quintal for the 2024-25 season, he added.

The chief minister Yogi further wrote, "Thank you, prime minister ji, for the commendable decision taken for the farmers' welfare."

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the Union cabinet's decision to extend the ongoing 'Umbrella Scheme' for women's safety for the next two years.

He wrote on his official 'X' handle: "The Union cabinet has allocated Rs 1,179.72 crore to continue the 'Umbrella Scheme' for 'Safety of Women' from 2021-22 to 2025-26. Heartfelt thanks to PM Modi for ensuring the safety and dignity of our 'Matrishakti.'"

It is noteworthy that under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Central Cabinet has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs to continue the 'Umbrella Scheme' for 'Safety of Women' from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

Akhilesh to join Cong yatra in Agra, Priyanka in Moradabad

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav will join Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Agra on February 25. This was confirmed by SP spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary on Thursday. The Congress had once again invited Akhilesh Yadav to participate in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Agra, Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee spokesman Anshu Awasthi disclosed here on Thursday.

Awasthi said that UPCC president Ajay Rai along with UP coordinator of the yatra, PL Punia met former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh Yadav, and requested him to join the last leg of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in UP, especially after the two parties had reached on an alliance for coming parliamentary elections. The Congress and Samajwadi Party on Wednesday announced to contest the Lok Sabha elections together in UP with the grand old national party contesting 17 seats and SP 63. The SP has given one seat to the Chandrashekhar Azad led party. Earlier, Akhilesh did not join the yatra either in Amethi or Rae Bareli as promised by him. The SP chief asked Congress to first finalise an alliance with his party before he joined the yatra with Rahul.

The yatra will resume from Moradabad on the morning of February 24 and thereafter cover Sambhal, Aligarh, Hathras and Agra districts, culminating in Dholpur in Rajasthan on Sunday.

The Congress said that the yatra would remain suspended from February 26 to March 1 to enable Rahul Gandhi to fulfill his long-standing commitment to deliver two special lectures at his alma mater Cambridge University in the UK on February 27 and February 28, and also to enable him to attend other important meetings in New Delhi. The yatra will resume from Dholpur on March 2.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is set to join the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in her in-laws' native town Moradabad on Saturday and will be part of it for the remainder of its Uttar Pradesh leg over the weekend, sources said on Thursday. The Congress general secretary will join the yatra when it resumes from Moradabad on Saturday and will remain with the yatra during its leg in western Uttar Pradesh, sources said.

इंडियन बैंक Indian Bank
इलाहाबाद ALLAHABAD
Zonal Office Lucknow, New Building, 2nd Floor, Hazratganj, Lucknow-226001,
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DEMAND NOTICE

NOTICE U/S 13 (2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized officer of **Indian Bank (Erstwhile Allahabad Bank)** Issued Demand Notices under Section 13 (2) of SARFAESI ACT 2002 to the Borrower's/Guarantor's herein below mentioned, Consequent upon the dispatch of such Notices through Post And returned Bank undelivered from the Borrower's/Guarantor's addresses. Through this Publication they are hereby called upon to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of publication of said notice failing which the bank will take the possession of the immovable and movable property will sell it through the process in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 8 & 9 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Sl. No	Name & Address of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/Date of Demand Notice	Outstanding Amount / Date of NPA	Description of the Property
Branch : Aliganj			
1.	**1. Sri Sandeep Kumar Vimal S/o Sri Ram Swaroop (Borrower/Guarantor), Add-1:** 441/29/24 Rastogi Nagar Balaganj Lucknow-226003 **Add-2:** Plot No.10 Khasra No.246 Village Bhuhar Haiderganj Lucknow **2. Smt Bitola Devi W/o Sri Ram Swaroop (Mortgagor/ Guarantor), Add-1:** 441/29/24 Rastogi Nagar Balaganj Lucknow-226003 **Add-2:** Plot No.10 Khasra No.246 Village Bhuhar Haiderganj Lucknow **Sri Sandeep Kumar Vimal and Smt Bitola Devi (Guarantor), Add-1:** 441/29/24 Rastogi Nagar Balaganj Lucknow-226003 **Add-2:** Plot No.10 Khasra No.246 Village Bhuhar Haiderganj Lucknow **Date of Demand:15.02.2024**	**Rs. 4,94,283/-** as on 15.02.2024 + interest & other charges / **Date of NPA: 05.11.2023**	Immovable property situated at Plot No.10, measuring area 57.762 Sq mtr(600Sq ft). situated at Khasra No.246 Bhuhar, District- Lucknow ,Sale deed executed on 05.09.2014, at Bahi No 1, Zild No-9838 pages from 369 to 390, S.No 9622 registered at Sub-Registrar V, Lucknow in name of Smt BitolaDevi W/o Sri Ram Swaroop, **Boundaries- North-** Plot No 9, **South-** Plot No.11C, **East-** Plot no 19, **West-** 18mt Wide Road

Date: 23.02.2024 **Place: Lucknow** **Authorised Officer Indian Bank (erstwhile Allahabad Bank)**

IIT-K, Conlis Global sign MoU for licensing of new tech

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Conlis Global Inc for licensing of an innovative new technology that promotes bone healing and regeneration. Conlis Global Inc is a biotechnology company based in Canada that helps to bring products from R&D to the market. The MoU was signed by Prof Tarun Gupta, Dean of Resources and Development IIT-K, and Dr Sumrita Bhat, CEO, Conlis Global Inc. at IIT-K in the presence of Prof S. Ganesh, Director, IIT-K, Prof Ankush Sharma, professor in charge, Startup Incubation and Innovation Centre (SIIC), IIT-K, Prof Ashok Kumar, Department of Biological Sciences & Bioengineering, IIT Kanpur, and Dr Raman Koul, Chief Technology Officer, Conlis Global Inc.

Prof S Ganesh highlighting the importance of this MoU said, "The licensing of this novel technology developed in-house that promotes bone healing and regeneration to Conlis Global is yet another significant milestone in the R&D endeavour of the Institute. It is a testament to the high quality of research at IIT-K that brings real and practical benefits to people. This innovative technology is a prime example of how we can make a real difference and we are excited to see how this technology will help people, not just in India but worldwide. I congratulate Prof Ashok Kumar and his team". CEO of Conlis Global Inc Dr Sumrita Bhat expressed enthusiasm about the potential impact of this technology, "We are thrilled to partner with IIT-K to bring this innovative solution to the market. It represents a significant step forward in treating bone and joint disorders and we look forward to taking this to market to benefit patients worldwide." Prof Tarun Gupta said, "The signing of the MoU with Conlis Global is an important landmark in our efforts to build a bridge between research and development and taking a product from the lab to the commercial stage and into the market. This will inspire us to continue to work on supporting research in various domains and helping our engineers, scientists and other talent to bring their dreams into fruition."

The technology, "Nano Hydroxyapatite-Based Porous Polymer Composite Scaffolds for Bioactive Molecule Delivery in Musculoskeletal Regeneration" has been developed by Prof Ashok Kumar and his team from the Department of Biological Sciences and Bioengineering at IIT-K. Prof Ashok Kumar said, "The technology facilitates bone regeneration in a biocompatible manner by acting as a carrier for bone-active biomolecules, delivering them directly to the site of an implant. The material is a promising approach for reconstructing and repairing bone defects while addressing the drawbacks and complications associated with technologies that are available in the market at present." The novel Nano Hydroxyapatite based Porous Composite Scaffolds is biodegradable and has osteoinductive (bone healing process) and osteopromotive (material for new bone growth) properties for bone regeneration. They are highly biocompatible resulting in good cell material interaction with osteoblast cells (cells responsible for mineralisation of bone during bone formation and bone remodelling), exhibiting a high mechanical strength and interaction between the polymer network and the solvent.

These functionalised scaffolds can be used as fillers in large size bone defects, without compromising the connectivity and structural defects, oxygen and blood circulation thereby enhancing tissue formation, mineralisation and rapid defect healing. It can also be used as bone substitute, overcoming autograft limitations. The primary objective of the invention is to overcome the drawbacks of the existing remedies, other alternatives have been associated with infection and immune related complications. Henceforth, this technology provides an approach for the delivery of bone active molecules, antibiotics or any other drug for combating the bone pathologies, reconstruction of irregular bone defects and for dental applications as well.

Carbon capture plant to be set up: ED

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

NTPC Vindhyachal with the highest installed capacity, is taking another step towards environmental conservation this year by establishing a carbon capture plant. This plant is expected to be the country's first to capture carbon dioxide emitted from a power plant and convert it into useful methanol, which will be utilised in the boiler operations of the plant. Executive Director (ED) of Vindhya Project E Satya Phani Kumar gave this information while addressing regional media representatives at Vindhyachal.

Kumar emphasised that the station is dedicated not only to electricity production but also to rural development, the welfare of displaced persons and environmental conservation. He highlighted the project's excellence in electricity production, achieving 89 per cent PLF (Plant Load Factor). Kumar outlined the extensive afforestation programme undertaken by the project for environmental conservation in and around the area in collaboration with the Forest Development Corporation, district administration and voluntary organisations.

He noted the significance of planting over 26 lakh trees as on date as a crucial step towards environmental protection. Managing the 100 per cent utilisation of fly ash generated from the plant poses a significant challenge, which the station is committed to addressing. To facilitate this, the project is establishing an ash bricks plant, which will produce bricks utilised within the project and residential premises initially, with plans for larger-scale implementation upon successful operation.

Regarding the welfare of underprivileged and rural development, various programmes are being conducted, aiming to empower women in rural areas and enhance their skills under the aegis of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Kumar emphasised that these initiatives are resulting in social and economic uplift in rural areas, directly benefiting the residents.

In response to queries about coal availability during the upcoming summer and monsoon seasons, Kumar assured that coal availability is being monitored. He assured continuous coal supply, even during peak seasons, with substantial coal reserves currently available.

During the event GM (Human Resources), Prabir Kumar Biswas, provided an overview of the programme's various activities. Detailed presentations were given by AGM (EMG) SP Yadav and Senior Manager (HR) Kamna Sharma outlining the projects and activities undertaken for the welfare of the affected regions and displaced persons.

Highlighting the Girl Empowerment Mission Programme, a pilot project of Vindhyachal, which effectively organises annual one-month training for fifth grade female students from surrounding government schools, Kumar stated that NTPC Vindhyachal bears all expenses. Media representatives expressed satisfaction with the responses provided by Executive Director E Satya Phani Kumar during the Q&A session. In the end gratitude was expressed by AGM (HR) Rakesh Arora.

PMG distributes certificates, passbooks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Postmaster General (PMG) of Varanasi Region Krishna Kumar Yadav distributed 'Mahila Samman Savings Certificate' to women and 'Sukanya Samriddhi Account' passbook to girls and wished them a bright future at a programme organised at Mahmoorganj sub-post office here on Wednesday. Yadav said Sukanya Samriddhi accounts of 3.40 lakh girls have been opened in the Varanasi region, while accounts of all eligible girls up to 10 years of age in about 1,000 villages have been opened and covered as 'Sampoorna Sukanya Samriddhi Gram'.

The PMG said for the convenience of the people, all customer-oriented services like mails, money remittance, savings, insurance, IPPB, Aadhaar, CSC, passport, Ganga Jal, QR code based digital payment are available in post offices under one roof. Superintendent of Post Offices (Varanasi West Division) said Mahmoorganj sub-post office was operating in the premises of Varanasi Cantt head post office since 2016 in the absence of unavailability of its own office and due to this, the customers here were facing problems. Once again, with the reshifting of the post office to Mahmoorganj area, all the facilities will be available to the customers. Assistant Director RK Chauhan, Assistant Superintendent Inderjit Pal, postal inspector Dilip Pandey, Manjeet Kumar, Postmaster (Mahmoorganj) Satish Kumar, SP Gupta and many officers, employees and local people were present.

RELEASED: Under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, river ranching was done at Sant Ravidas Ghat in the Ganga river organised by the National Fisheries Development Board, Hyderabad on Wednesday. Through this efforts are being made to conserve fish and maintain environmental balance in rivers. On the occasion 2.5 lakh fingerlings of Indian Major Carp, Rohu, Catla, Nain were released in the river.

KDA holds camp for allottees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) organised a mutation camp at its premises from 11 am to 2 pm on Wednesday. Of the total 59 applicants, most of the applications were disposed of in the camp itself. Vice-Chairman/DM Rakesh Kumar Singh said the mutation camp will now be organised every Wednesday. He said any laxity on the part of officers and employees will not be tolerated. Applicant Sushil Tripathi of Barra-2 said he had been visiting the KDA for the mutation of his property since November 2021. Every time he was refused on some pretext or the other. This was for the first time that officials heard his problem and directed to resolve the issue, he said. Ravindra Sahu of Kakadeo said he had been visiting to KDA since August 2013 for getting the advertisement of mutation published. The officials kept on dilly dallying the issue every time, he claimed. He said he was very upset for the past four months. Now in the camp organised on Wednesday, an assurance was given to get his work done soon. Likewise, Hari Prasad Kushwaha of Geeta Nagar said the mutation was not done despite the availability of a will. He had been visiting the KDA for the past several days. Now after attending the camp, how much time it will take to get his problem to be solved, he said. Maximum 16 cases of mutation had come from Zone 2 followed by 14 (zone 1), 7 (zone 3) and 5 (zone 4). Additional Secretary Dr Gudakesh Sharma directed all the zonal in charge and employees to dispose of mutation cases on time. OSD Sat Shukla, Ravi Pratap Singh, Ajay Kumar, Brijendra Upadhayay and Law Officer/PRO SB Rai were present at the camp.

MISHAP: Himanshu Tewari (17) of Kulkuwan, to appear in High School examination, was killed by a speeding truck on the Jhansi-Mirzapur national highway near Nahdaura village in Mahoba on Thursday morning. Irate villagers blocked the highway. SDM and CO got it lifted by assuring to initiate stern penal action against the guilty truck driver.

Meanwhile a building caught fire in Civil Lines locality under Kotwali police station area late on Wednesday night. The fire brigade rushed to the spot and controlled the fir.e However, no casualty was reported in the incident.

TOURNAMENT: The three-day 23rd All India Sir Padampat Singhania Memorial Bridge Tournament will be organised at the Kamla Club here from February 23 to 25. Addressing mediapersons, organising secretary Jitendra Awasthi said a large number of top players of national repute had confirmed their participation in this tournament carrying a total cash prize of ₹2.97 lakh. Total 26 pairs will participate in 13 tables. They will play total 25 rounds of six boards per round.

Constable commits suicide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A constable posted at the Dhoomanganj police station allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself here on Thursday. However, why he took this step is not clear. On getting information, police officers reached the spot ad reviewed the situation. The family members have been informed about the incident. The forensic team was called.

Ghanshyam Yadav (28), originally a resident of Shikohabad police station area of Firozabad, was a constable in UP Police. He was posted at the Dhoomanganj police station. He was deployed here only two months ago and lived in a rented room in Harwara locality near the police station. Other constables of the police station also lived in the nearby rooms.

Constable Ghanshyam had returned to his room after doing night duty on Wednesday. When fellow policemen came to wake him up on Thursday morning, the door did not open. After about two hours, they went again and called him and still did not get any response. Somehow they peeped inside and found the cop hanging from the ceiling.

Dhoomanganj Station House Officer Rajesh Kumar Maurya said that till now no suicide note has been recovered from the room.

ARRESTED: A case of kidnapping of minors from Prayagraj and selling them in Andhra Pradesh has come to light. The Shahganj police under Kotwali police station of Prayagraj Commissionerate arrested four members, including a woman of the gang involved in kidnapping and selling children, and recovered a child safely on Thursday. The arrested woman has confessed that the deal for this two-year-old child was fixed for ₹3 lakh. She confessed that three months ago she had sold a one-and-a- half-month old girl for ₹3.30 lakh. Before that she had sold a three-month- old girl for ₹1.80 lakh. She told the police that these two girls have been sold with the consent of their parents. The arrested members of the gang were identified as Bulaki Balmiki of Kalyani Devi Park, Prayagraj, Suresh Yadav, of Nurulla Road, Shalu Balmiki and Gudiya alias Julie of Dhoomanganj, Prayagraj. Meanwhile the Dhoomanganj police arrested a history-sheeter Dhananjay alias Monu Yadav and sent him to jail here on Thursday.

Procession in protest against 'paper leak'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A large number of aspirants took out a procession on Thursday in protest against the alleged leak of RO-ARO and police recruitment examination paper. Accompanied by the members of the Samajwadi Chhatra Sabha, they gheraoed the office of the district magistrate demanding cancellation of both the examinations.

They sent a memorandum to the President through the district magistrate. National general secretary of Samajwadi Lohia Vahini, Akhilesh Gupta alleged that the BJP government is playing with the future of the students. If the review officer (RO), assistant review officer (ARO) and Uttar Pradesh Police recruitment exams are not cancelled with immediate effect then we will be forced to carry out a massive agitation.

Former AUSU leader Adil Hamza said the double engine government has 'betrayed' the youth and unemployment is at its peak. The BJP government is bent on playing with the future of students. If the aforesaid examinations are not cancelled, then this fight will be made nationwide, he added. National vice-president of Samajwadi Chhatra Sabha, Ajay Singh 'Samrat' and others were present.

BODY FOUND: The body of a 16-year-old boy, Ramprasad, was found hanging just a day before he was to appear in the High School examination of UP Board. The incident took place in Koro village on Wednesday night. The police have conducted a 'panchnama' and handed over the body to the family members.

Study affirms higher NI ancestry among Lakshadweep population

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Lakshadweep, is an archipelago comprising 36 islands nestled in the Southeastern Arabian Sea, has long intrigued researchers due to the ambiguity surrounding its human settlement timeline. There is a lack of comprehensive archaeological records for these Islands. Currently, 68,000 people live on this island, speaking mainly Malayali. The genetic origin of these people has not been known so far. Therefore, nine scientists from five institutions in India have made a high-resolution genetic study on the people of 10 islands. This study was co-led by Prof Gyaneshwer Chaubey of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Prof Mustak of Mangalore University and Dr Niraj Rai of Birbal Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP, Lucknow). This groundbreaking study has now employed high-resolution biparental single-nucleotide polymorphic markers (nearly 5.5 lakh genetic markers) to meticulously reconstruct the population history of Lakshadweep Islands. When did the first humans reach these islands, and what is their ancestry? We undertook a long-standing question in this study, said Prof Chaubey, who supervised the study. The particular analysis focused on four key aspects: Ancestry components of Lakshadweep populations; Their relation with East, West Eurasia, and South Asia; The number of founding lineages; and Putative migration from Northern India, given the closer paternal ancestry link to North Indian populations.

With the novel high-resolution data in the present analysis, we observed a common origin and single primary migration of the population belonging to the remaining nine islands, said Prof MS Mustak, who collected samples from the Lakshadweep Islands. "We observed a closer genetic affinity with the Indian sub-continent, their split and limited gene flow; thus, these populations are an example of a 'Model Island Archipelago' where geographical separation due to natural conditions has facilitated the effect of genetic drift and restricted the gene flow among the islands," said Dr Niraj Rai from BSIP Lucknow. The study results affirmed a relatively higher North Indian (NI) ancestry among the Lakshadweep population, closely aligning them with South Asian populations. Surprisingly, a single founding population was identified, which had settled on this island by 1740AD, said Dr Prajjval Pratap Singh from BHU and the first author of this study.

The North Indian ancestry among the Lakshadweep Islands population is due to the regular movements of North Indian traders, conquerors and religious spread since the Mauryan period, said archaeologist Dr Sachin K Tiwary, who is not involved in this study. These findings provide valuable insights into the intricate interactions between ethnic groups and their genetic contributions, illuminating the complex tapestry that makes up the Lakshadweep population, said Prof Chaubey.

Mera Gram Gyan Kendra inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The DST Mera Gram Gyan Kendra established by the Department of Extension Education, Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) was inaugurated for Damdipur and Paranapatti villages under Cholapur block by the Director of the Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS), BHU Prof SN Sankhwar here on Thursday.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, Prof Sankhwar, shedding light on the diverse applications of computers in the village environment, emphasised their significance for children and farmers. The visionary perspective shared by Prof Sankhwar aimed to empower the local community through technological advancements. Principal Investigator of the project, Prof Kalyan Ghadei (Head, Department of Extension Education, Institute of Agricultural Science, BHU), expressed his views on the holistic approach towards village livelihood development. Prof Ghadei highlighted the integration of innovative techniques such as mushroom farming, fishery and goat farming to bring about sustainable progress in the region. His insights underscored the potential of technology in transforming traditional practices and boosting economic growth. The event also witnessed the presence of Dr Virendra Kamalwanshi (Associate Professor Department of Agricultural Economics, Institute of Agricultural Science).

The gram pradhans of both Damadipur and Paranapatti villages were also present, symbolising the local government's endorsement of the project and its commitment to the welfare of the community.

IIT Kanpur-mentored IIS inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated the Indian Institute of Skills (IIS) Kanpur, an institute mentored by IIT Kanpur (IIT-K) at the National Skill Training Institute (NSTI), Kanpur. The event was attended by dignitaries, including Member of Parliament (MP) Satyadev Pachauri, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Surendra Maithani, General Manager of HAL Kanpur, Ajay Kumar Shrivastava, Principal Secretary Vocational Education and Skill Development Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh M Devraj, Regional Director, Regional Directorate of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, JD Masilamani along with a representative of Dassault Aviation and faculty members of IIT-K. To train and upskill the youth in emerging technologies, IIT Kanpur and IIS Kanpur entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in November 2023, wherein IIT-K agreed to mentor IIS for the next five years. The MoU was signed in the presence of Union Minister of Education, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan. IIT Kanpur's role includes mentoring the development of laboratory infrastructure at IIS Kanpur, designing a suitable course curriculum based on the laboratory system, aiding in the recruitment process of faculty members and technical experts, offering joint certificate and diploma courses approved by both institutes and establishing the Centre for Deep Skill Training and Research (CDSTAR) at IIT-K to complement the training at IIS Kanpur. To further enhance experiential learning and create a fusion of skill and knowledge between the students of IIS and IIT-K, there will be at least six deep-skill laboratories housed at the Centre for Deep Skill Training and Research at IIT-K. It will include Noise and Vibration Lab, Advanced Control Systems Lab, Advanced Robotics Lab, Semiconductor Packaging Lab, Medical Imaging Lab and Drug and Pharma Lab. IIT Kanpur will integrate the skilled professionals from IIS to the entrepreneurship ecosystem at the SIIC and Technology Park of IIT-K. Director, IIT-K, Prof S Ganesh, said, "It is a matter of pride for IIT Kanpur to be associated with IIS Kanpur as a mentor. Inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the collective vision of nurturing excellence in skill development, the Institute will chalk a new path to Viksit Bharat. As a mentor institution, we are committed to providing consistent direction and support to IIS Kanpur, facilitating the development of a professional workforce capable of driving India's advancement and innovation on a global scale."

Regional Director, Regional Directorate of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, UP, JD Masilamani, said, "This marks a major milestone in our journey towards encouraging skill development and entrepreneurship in India. Through the mentorship of esteemed institutions like IIT Kanpur, I believe we can empower individuals with the necessary skills to thrive in the ever-evolving landscape of industry and innovation. This partnership represents the synergy between academia, industry and government, laying the foundation for a sklled and prosperous nation." HAL Chair Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Prof Bishakh Bhattacharya, will lead the team from IIT-K as professor in charge, along with a core team comprising Dr Abhilash Patel, and Dr Soumya Ranjan Sahoo from Department of Electrical Engineering and Dr Keval S Ramani, Dr Virkeshwar from Department of Mechanical Engineering as co-coordinators. Subsequently, more faculty members from IIT-K will join this endeavour. Prof Bhattacharya said, "It is an immense honour to lead our team in shaping the vision of the IIS, Kanpur. Together, we aim to empower individuals with the expertise needed to thrive in today's rapidly evolving technological landscape." The foundation stone for IIS, Kanpur was laid by the PM Narendra Modi on December 19, 2016. Spread across an area of 16,000 square metre, the building is now ready for laboratory development at the NSTI complex. This complex will house at least 12 state-of-the-art laboratories related to skill development under the following four major categories such as Machining and Manufacturing, Digital Technology, Information Technology and Special Purpose Technology.

Competitions held under ABSS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS), essay writing, painting and painting competitions on the topic of '1947 Ka Viksit Bharat, Viksit Railway' were organised recently in 33 local schools near Ghazipur City, Mau, Belthara Road, Salempur, Khurasan Road, Bhatni and Kaptanganj stations of Varanasi Division, North Eastern Railway (NER), falling in UP. The students enthusiastically took part in these competitions and out of 3,261 students, 99 participants were declared as first, second and third winners.

Similarly, same competitions were also organised in 38 local schools near Ekma, Masrakh, Siwan, Mairwan and Thawe stations of same Varanasi division in Bihar in which out of 2,382 students, 114 participants were selected as the first, second and third winners. These competitions were organised under the direction of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava and Senior Divisional Personnel Officer (SDPO), Sameer Paul. The winners of these competitions will be awarded/ honoured at local events during the main function. Keeping in mind the vision 'New India' of the Central government, the work of redevelopment of railway stations is being carried out at a rapid pace to provide world class travel facilities keeping in view the needs of the next 50 years in Indian Railways. In this sequence on February 26, under the ABSS, the foundation stone of redevelopment of 554 railway stations and 1,500 railway over bridges (ROBs)/ underpasses (RUBs) will be laid/inaugurated/ dedicated to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi through video conferencing.

Brahmos boost for Navy firepower okayed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

With the objective of further bolstering the Navy's firepower, the Government has given the nod for a Rs 20,000 crore deal to procure 200 Brahmos supersonic missiles. The contract is likely to be firmed up in next few days.

The nod for the mega deal was given by Cabinet Committee on Security(CCS) on Wednesday, sources said here on Thursday. Brahmos is joint venture between India and Russia and the supersonic missiles are manufactured within India.

The induction of Brahmos missiles will shore up Indian Navy's arsenal. The missiles deployed on warships are used for anti-ship and attack operations.

This highly sophisticated missile can be launched from ships, submarines, fighter jets and from land. Indian Army and Navy have already inducted the Brahmos missiles over the last few years.

Given its proven capabilities, the Philippines has inked a deal for procuring Brahmos missiles from India in a deal worth 375 million dollars. The first set of these missiles will reach the Philippines in March, it was learnt.

The Brahmos missile can accurately strike a target at sea and land at a range of more than 300 kms. Specifically designed for naval

deployment, this weapon can be launched in a vertical or inclined mode from a stationary or moving maritime platform, engaging targets at stand-off ranges on sea or land.

In 2016, as India became a member of the Missile Technology Control Rregime(MTCR), India and Russia are now planning to jointly develop a new generation of BrahMos missiles with 800 km range and an ability to hit protected targets with pinpoint accuracy. Plans are to eventually upgrade all missiles to a range of 1,500 km.

Meanwhile, the CCS approval for Brahmos missile acquisition comes days after the defence ministry approved a proposal to procure nine maritime surveillance aircraft for the Indian Navy and six maritime patrol aircraft for the Indian Coast Guard.

The proposed acquisition involves the construction of 15 maritime patrol planes, which will be based on C-295 transport aircraft that are being manufactured in India in a joint venture between Tata Advanced Systems and Airbus. The estimated value of these projects stands at Rs 29,000 crore.

The transport aircraft would be equipped with the required radars and sensors and turned into a maritime patrol plane by the Defence Research and Development Organisation's Centre for Airborne Systems (CABS).

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

PTI ■ JANJGIR

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

Sounding the poll bugle at a rally at Janjgir in the BJP-ruled state, he also hit out at the Congress, accusing it of delaying the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya for 75 years. "The coming (Lok Sabha) elections will decide the future of the country. These elections are to make India a completely developed nation, and to make Bharat Mata (Mother India) a Vishwa Guru (world teacher)," the senior BJP leader said. The BJP won ten out of 11 Lok Sabha seats in the state in 2014 and nine in 2019, Shah noted, adding that in the recent assembly elections people voted his party to power with a thumping majority.

"The incompetent (Congress) government neither controlled Naxalism, nor did it ensure justice to the people. It committed corruption and did injustice to the people, who then ousted it from power," Shah said. Among other things, the Modi government provided tap water connections to 60 crore poor people in the country including 38 lakh households in Chhattisgarh in the last ten years, he said. The Vishnu Deo Sai-led BJP government in the state has completed 30 percent of "Modi ki guarantee" (BJP's poll promises) so far, the Union minister claimed. Modi himself is a guarantee, and he should be elected once again so that India becomes the third largest economy in the world, Shah said.

"Chhattisgarh is Lord Ram's Nanhihal (place of one's mother's parents). But the Congress did not resolve the 550-year-old (Ram Mandir) issue in the last 75 years. But Modi solved it and performed consecration of Ram Lalla (lord Ram's idol) in Ayodhya," he added.

Jaishankar to begin South Korea, Japan visit from March 5

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will embark on a four-day visit to South Korea and Japan beginning March 5 to hold talks with his interlocutors on key bilateral, regional and global issues, including the challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

Jaishankar's visit to the Republic of Korea and Japan, two of India's major partners, will impart further momentum to bilateral exchanges and set the agenda for future cooperation, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

The external affairs minister will first travel to Seoul on a two-day visit where he will co-chair the 10th India-South Korea Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) along with his Korean counterpart Cho Tae-yul.

Jaishankar is expected to meet with Korean dignitaries, heads of think tanks and Indian community, the MEA said, announcing the visit.

India's Special Strategic Partnership with South Korea has expanded to diverse areas of cooperation, which include trade, investments, defence, education and technology among others.

"The JCM is expected to comprehensively review the entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and explore avenues for further strengthening it," the MEA said in a statement.

"It will also provide an opportunity for the two sides to exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," it said.

In the second leg of his trip, Jaishankar will visit Japan from March 6 to 8. In Tokyo, Jaishankar will attend the 16th India-Japan Foreign Ministers Strategic Dialogue along with his Japanese counterpart Yoko Kamikawa.

"The two ministers are expected to discuss issues of bilateral, regional and global importance, and exchange views on cooperation for a free, open, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific," the MEA said.

"India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership has further deepened in the last decade in areas such as defence and digital technologies, semiconductor supply chains, clean energy, high speed rail, industrial competitiveness and connectivity," it said.

The MEA said Jaishankar's visit and meetings in Tokyo will provide strategic guidance to the "functional cooperation" between the two countries in these areas. He is expected to interact with business leaders, think tanks and academia, building upon strong cultural and people-to people ties.

Centre to continue scheme for women safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

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

A meeting of the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

approved the proposal of the Ministry of Home Affairs for the continuation of the implementation of the umbrella scheme on "Safety of Women" at a total cost of Rs 1,179.72 crore from 2021-22 to 2025-26, an official release said.

Of the total project outlay of Rs 1,179.72 crore, an amount of Rs 885.49 crore will be provided by the MHA from its own budget and Rs 294.23 crore will be channelised from the Nirbhaya Fund. The safety of women in a country is an outcome of several factors, such as stringent deterrence through strict laws, effective delivery of justice, redressal of complaints in a timely manner and easily accessible institutional support structures to the victims, the release said.

Stringent deterrence in matters related to offences against women has been provided through amendments in the IPC, the CrPC and the Indian Evidence Act. In its efforts towards women safety, the Centre, in collaboration with the states and Union territories, has launched several projects. The objectives of these projects include strengthening mechanisms in the states for ensuring timely intervention and investigation in the cases of crime against women and higher efficiency in the investigation and crime prevention in such matters.

The Centre has proposed to continue a number of projects under the umbrella scheme for "Safety of Women".

These are Emergency Response Support System 2.0, upgradation of the central forensic sciences laboratories, including the setting up of the National Forensic Data Centre, strengthening DNA analysis and cyber-forensic capacities in the state forensic sciences laboratories (FSLs).

PARAKH to adopt global standards for national assessment survey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Conducting the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and the Foundational Learning Study (FLS), aiming to adopt international standards to further refine assessment methods and expanding stakeholder capacity building are among the plans of national assessment regulator PARAKH for 2024.

Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development (PARAKH), which completed its first year this month, is tasked with framing assessment guidelines for all boards to help remove disparities in the scores of the students enrolled with different state boards.

"As it moves into its second year, PARAKH is focused on preparing for the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and the Foundational Learning Study (FLS) in 2024, aiming to adopt international standards to further refine the assessment methods and expand stakeholder capacity building," said Amit Sevak, CEO of the US-based Educational Testing Service (ETS).

ETS, which conducts key tests such as TOEFL and GRE, is the technical partner of the National Council for Education Research (NCERT). It was chosen for setting up the regulatory platform and assisting PARAKH in achieving the goals. "The initiative's roadmap promises continuous improvement of educational assessments, aiming to inspire the evolution of India's education system to meet global standards," Sevak said.

The last year saw PARAKH establishing a comprehensive framework for student assessment across India's school boards, conducting the First State Educational Achievement Survey (SEAS) that involved more than 84 lakh students in literacy and numeracy assessments across 19 languages, thus setting a new precedent for educational surveys in India.

The NAS, which assesses the competencies developed by students at the grade levels of third, fifth and eighth, is conducted every three years.

The FLS is a school-based performance-assessment module. Selected samples of children from a chosen grade are assessed by a test administrator in a one-on-one setting where each child responds to a set of questions administered orally. Several foundational literacy skills, including oral-language comprehension, phonological awareness, decoding, reading comprehension and oral-reading fluency with comprehension, are assessed as part of the exercise.

For foundational numeracy, number identification and comparison, number operations, multiplication and division facts, measurement, fractions, patterns and data handling are included.

"Earlier this month, PARAKH made a presentation showcasing the roadmap for improvement in the learning outcomes, based on competency-based assessment envisaged in the NEP-2020. It includes creating an equivalence amongst all state school boards and for this, an interface has been created with the boards and respective state governments and SCERTs," said Sanjay Kumar, School Education Secretary. "The successful conduct of the state achievement survey in 2023 was discussed and its preliminary results were shared. I am sure that transformation in assessment processes, along with equivalence in state school boards, would manifest itself in the NAS learning outcome scores," he added. The report of the state achievement survey is yet to be released.

Indrani Bhaduri, who heads PARAKH, said, "Learning assessments need to be made meaningful and relevant for the students and this can happen only through a participatory approach."

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Normalisation of scores for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG is likely to be done away with this year, with the National Testing Agency (NTA) planning a rejig of the crucial examination for its third edition, according to top officials.

The examination, which is spread over a month, is likely to be conducted in a shorter duration as the agency is contemplating a hybrid mode, including OMR sheets and a computer-based test. The move will also ensure that most of the students get a chance to take the examination in a city of their choice.

"The NTA is working on the possibility of conducting papers with a large registration in the OMR mode. This will help us choose a large number of schools as test centres. This will ensure that the students will get a centre within their town or city and do not have to travel to faraway places," University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar said.

"Adopting the pen-and-paper mode for subjects with a large registration and a computer-based test for papers with a smaller registration will ensure that the CUET-UG can be conducted in a shorter duration unlike in the last two years. The hybrid mode promotes equal opportunities for all, ensuring that geographical constraints do not hinder the students' educational aspirations in rural and remote areas," Kumar said.

He said conducting the exam for a subject on a single day will eliminate the need for normalisation of scores. "For the last two years, we had to conduct the test for the same paper over a period of two or three days in our endeavour to provide the first-choice centre to the students as much as possible. But this year, by adopting the OMR mode, a large number of centres will be available at schools and colleges, enabling us to conduct the test across the country on the same day.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday took serious exception to the arrest of a TV journalist in West Bengal and appealed to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to ensure the media is not crushed in the state.

Addressing a press conference here, Thakur called the journalist's arrest unfortunate. "It is my request to Mamata Banerjee that such thing should not happen again," Thakur told reporters.

"Freedom of press is the right of media and it should not be crushed. This is my appeal to Mamata Banerjee," he added.

Santu Pan, a journalist with Republic Bangla, was arrested from Sandeshkhali late on Monday evening. Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24-Parganas district has been tense with a large number of women in the locality accusing Trinamool Congress strongman Shajahan Sheikh and his supporters of "land-grab and sexually assaulting" them under coercion.

Sheikh has been absconding since January 5 when a mob attacked Enforcement Directorate (ED) officers during a raid at his residence in connection with an alleged ration scam. Two of Sheikh's aides, who along with others were booked under charges of gang rape and attempt to murder, have been arrested.

Thakur launches portals to revolutionise media landscape

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Minister of Information and Broadcasting Anurag Singh Thakur here on Thursday launched four transformatory portals that promise to revolutionize the media landscape in India. They include Press Sewa Portal, Transparent Empanelment Media Planning and e-Billing System, Navigate Bharat Portal and National Register for Local Cable Operators(LCOs).

These initiative are aimed at ensuring ease of doing business by fostering a more conducive business environment for Newspaper publishers and TV channels, enhance transparency and efficiency in government communication, provide easy access to authentic Government videos and create a comprehensive database of LCOs enabling the Government to streamline regulatory processes in the cable television sector in future.

Addressing the audience present on the occasion, Thakur remarked today, India is viewed as an attractive destination for investment, with global companies eager to establish businesses there.

He recalled Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on transformative governance and

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

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

He further said the success of platforms like the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) reflect the government's efforts to create a level playing field for MSMEs and small businesses. He added that Prime Minister Modi's leadership has not only focused on economic reforms but also on fostering a mindset transformation, recognizing entrepreneurs as partners in national development.

This approach has led to increased wealth creation, job opportunities, and higher incomes, benefiting the country's overall welfare and development.

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

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PAPER WITH PASSION

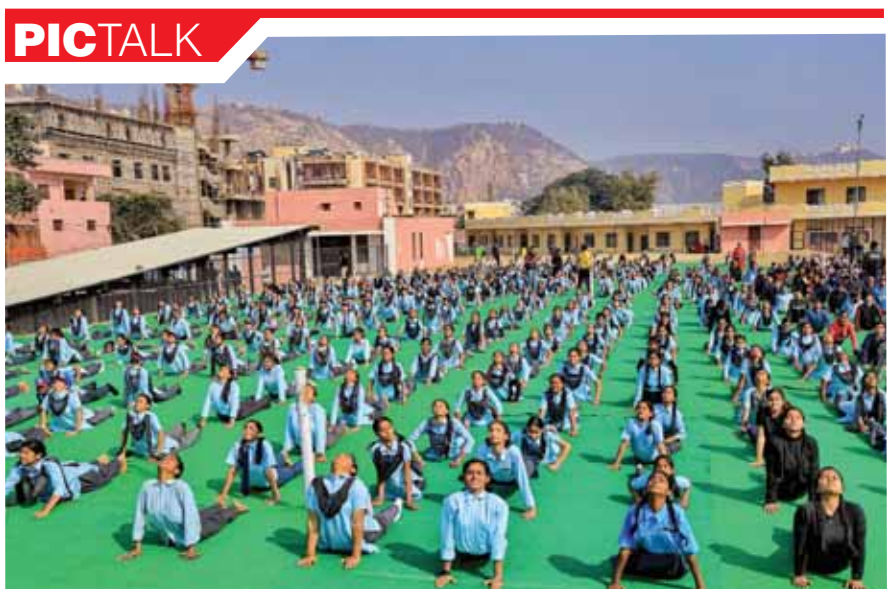
Modi with a message

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

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

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

PICTALK



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

Indian nationhood thrives amid diversity

VINAYSHIL **GAUTAM**

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

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

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

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

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

The Dravidian leadership has in the last seventy-five years then been in power in that part of India for several decades, though not always continuously.

Similarly, the exclusionist identity sought by some of the DMK ideologues has had on various occasions to be moderated because they have been in power. Notwithstanding long patches of time, not much significant progress has been made in the implementation of some of the components of the DMK ideology, such as it may be. The ideological component itself has undergone a major split with an exclusivist ideology for DMK being considerably whittled down in the birth of All India Anna Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK). M.G. Ramachandran was the major proponent of the AIDMK version. Jayalalithaa was a key supporter. They linked up with the Dravidian Movement with all Indian processes. How it panned out is another story and fit enough for another discussion.

More to the point, it is important to realise that similar identity quests or some version thereof have been witnessed in the North Eastern States, Jammu & Kashmir State, parts of Andhra Pradesh, and a few other pockets of the southern Indian peninsula. This is a very understandable process. By and large, it has been contained within the constitutional framework. At times the divergent point of view has been espoused by neighbouring states of the Deccan peninsula or between the Deccan States and the Central Government at New Delhi over many matters including the distribution of river waters.

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

Notwithstanding these differences, Indian nationhood has endured and might even be seen as having gone from strength to strength. It is this resilience which is, also, the hallmark of Indian nationhood. This is not to deny the fact that once in a while, offensive or extreme statements are made, some of which are avoidable, though sometimes understandable.

The long and short of it is the ability of people to work together despite differences and different articulations.

More to the credit of everyone concerned is the urge on the part of most people to evoke the Indian Constitution whenever need be and not practice brinkmanship. The time is here to ensure that these practices of healthy debate and the setting of shared perspectives become a regular habit and a part of the national methodology of dialogue and discussion.

Sometimes when extreme statements are made and some new thinking seems to arise, there is nothing wrong with that either, only that the model of integrative thinking would have to show far more resilience than it is many times currently showing.

This text has looked at the vantage point of collective cohesion. It is not as if there are no dangerous signs that need to be tackled, but that attempting to tackle them sensibly and systematically is necessary. It is this institutionalisation of handling dissent and allowing seemingly alternative perspectives to live peacefully with each other that will be the touchstone on which much of the future of Indian nationhood will continue to flourish.

In an era where subtle dissent becomes a part of covert political strategy, much care needs to be exercised. The number game can have dangerous manifestations. There is no substitute for good sense and integrity of thought, deed, and follow-up.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

Ayurveda: Seek balance of tridoshas for wellness

KANISHKA **SRIVASTAVA**

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

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

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

changes, herbal remedies, yoga, and meditation.

One of the key strengths of Ayurveda is its emphasis on prevention rather than cure. By addressing the root cause of disease rather than merely treating symptoms, Ayurveda empowers individuals to take charge of their health proactively. Through practices such as daily self-care routines (Dinacharya), seasonal detoxification (panchakarma), and mindful eating habits, Ayurveda cultivates resilience and strengthens the body's natural defences, reducing the likelihood of illness.

Moreover, Ayurveda recognises the interconnectedness of all aspects of existence - from the food we eat to the environment we inhabit. This holistic perspective underscores the importance of living in harmony with nature and aligning our lifestyle choices with its rhythms. By promoting sustainable living practices and environmental awareness, Ayurveda not only fosters personal health but also contributes to the well-being of the planet as a whole.

Ayurveda expert Vicram Sharma, Director of Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan emphasises the importance of maintaining balance among the three elements—Vata, Pitta, and Kapha—to ensure fitness. "Imbalances in these elements lead to diseases and advocated for Ayurveda's ancient wellness system, particularly pertinent in today's times when unhealthy dietary choices, lifestyle habits, and indulgence in alcohol and smoking disrupt this equilibrium." He said this in his address at Gurugram's Wellness Carnival. It was organised to create awareness about the importance of health and wellness. A wellness carnival was recently organised at Cybercity Gurugram.

In the face of modern challenges such as chronic stress, pollution, and sedentary lifestyles, Ayurveda offers invaluable insights into maintaining vitality and balance. Its integrative approach acknowledges the role of mental and emotional factors in health, emphasising practices that promote mental clarity, emotional resilience, and spiritual well-being.

While Western medicine excels in acute care and crisis intervention, Ayurveda excels in promoting longevity, enhancing vitality, and restoring equilibrium. Integrating Ayurvedic principles into mainstream healthcare can lead to a more comprehensive and patient-centred approach, bridging the gap between traditional wisdom and modern science.

By embracing its principles of balance, harmony, and interconnectedness, individuals can cultivate resilience, vitality, and well-being on all levels - physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. As we strive to navigate the complexities of modern life, Ayurveda serves as a guiding light, reminding us of the profound wisdom inherent in nature.

(The writer is a business consultant; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM PAYS TRIBUTE TO VIDYASAGAR JI

Sir — India is truly blessed with so many noble saints, intellectuals, and spiritual persons who have dedicated their entire lives to the welfare of mankind. Renowned Jain seer Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj was one of the greatest saints of our time who attained Samadhi "Sallekhana", saddening us. He was the most renowned saint in the Digambar Jain community. He took sallekhana, a Jain religious practice involving voluntary fasting until death, for spiritual purification.

PM Narendra Modi is paying tribute to this great saint. He will be all the more remembered by the generations to come for his invaluable contributions to society, especially his efforts towards spiritual awakening among people. His notable work was towards poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, and more. His life exemplified the core principles of Jainism, embodying its ideals through his actions and teachings. Today, the world over, fundamental elements are fighting, but the teachings of Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj to mankind have become even more relevant; they should be followed by all of us to enrich the lives of human beings and promote peace and harmony. We should all strive to live coherently to shape a new era of national and social integration. Education was very close to his heart. He was a true tapas, whose life was dedicated to the ideals of Bhagwan Mahavir. He will always be remembered for his rich contribution to society.

Ramesh G Jethwani | *Bengaluru*

DANGERS OF PLAYING VIDEO GAMES

Sir — The British Medical Journal has recently given information about the dangers of video games, especially in this research, in which scientists from the World Health Organisation were also involved. A total of 50,000 people were surveyed in video games using headphones, earbuds, and headphones. Also, the music venue has a definite effect on the ear and reduces the ability to hear. An international research team reviewed 14 studies conducted by nine countries in this regard. North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, Asia, Australia, etc. were included in these nine countries. It is necessary to discourage children from playing video games. If not, a generation of young children will go deaf. This is a very sensitive subject. Parents should pay proper attention to their children and ensure that they do not watch those video games. It is necessary to tell the children about the consequences of this in various schools.

Shantaram Wagh | *Pune*

NIFTY AT ALL-TIME HIGH

Sir — Indices moved up for a fifth consecutive session, with the Nifty hitting a fresh all-time high amid mixed global cues. Benchmark Sensex spurted by 349 points while Nifty scaled a fresh lifetime high on the sixth straight day of gains on February 20, driven by buying in banking and select FMCG shares. The broader market outperformed the frontline indices.

Everything looks favourable, be it the strong macroeconomic fundamentals or the robust retail inflows. Both upstream and downstream oil companies benefit from a robust up-cycle in oil and gas markets and stable crude prices, which have boosted volumes and marketing margins, said Siddhartha Khemka, head of retail research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services. Reflecting broader investor bullishness, the 50-share index surged to a record high of 21,654.75 on intense buying in the metal, commodity, auto and banking sectors.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | *Mumbai*

Sandeshkhali crisis

The recent upheaval in Sandeshkhali, West Bengal, marked by allegations of sexual assault, land grabs, and political clashes, demands immediate attention. The state government's tendency to dismiss these accusations as political manoeuvres must give way to a genuine commitment to justice. While some commendable arrests have been made, holding accountable those in power implicated in these crimes is essential. With the Supreme Court rejecting a CBI or SIT investigation, the onus now falls on Mamata Banerjee's government to prioritise citizens' well-being over political considerations, ensuring transparency and decisive action to restore trust.

Amidst the turmoil, concerns over authoritarianism arise with the arrest of a journalist, emphasising the need to safeguard the freedom of the press. The dismissal of widespread fear and systematic abuse by the government does not instil confidence in a thorough inquiry. Mamata Banerjee must demonstrate the same dedication to justice she exhibited in opposition, addressing these grave issues transparently. Acknowledging the plight of women prisoners and taking decisive action against sexual violence as a political tool is imperative for rebuilding trust and integrity in the government's response to the Sandeshkhali crisis.

Amarjeet Kumar | *Hazaribagh*

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FIRST COLUMN

GREEK PM'S VISIT BOLSTERS HISTORIC TIES

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

KUMARDEEP **BANERJEE**

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

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

This week's visit by the Greek PM has put the relationship under ample spotlight it deserves. When some of Greece's neighbours in Europe had made not-so-friendly statements on some of the most recent policy developments in India such as the "Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)/National Register of Citizenship (NRC), Abrogation of Article 370, Reorganisation of the new Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, and Judgement on Ram Janam Bhoomi, etc. Greece had officially stated that it is an internal affairs matter of India. Greece and India have reciprocally supported each other for a reformed UN reflecting the current realities with a permanent seat for each other in the UN security council. As per a Ministry of External Affairs booklet released in 2023, just ahead of the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Athens, Greece, "voted for India's candidature to UNSC for 2021-22. It supported India at the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008, and 2016, MTCR, WASSENAAR arrangements, and Australia Group.

Greece supported India's candidature for ICJ, ITLOS, IMO, Postal Operations Council (POC), World Heritage Committee and the position of External Auditor of the IAEA for the term 2022-27 and various other international bodies." Similarly, in Jammu and Kashmir, internal security concerns particularly arising out of state-funded terrorist activities, Greece has been on India's side. Greece supports many of India's concerns in the larger European Union bilateral. India interestingly has held several rounds of discussions with the EU trade representatives, to hammer out a free trade agreement. Although with elections in India around the corner, a complicated, trade agreement with the EU with several moving parts looks difficult. However, to have preferential voices in the EU, with member nations like France and Greece, Italy, looking at India favourably, is always welcome. Some of the unfavourable comments India received from EU member countries, post former, not taking a Western approach towards long-standing ally Russia, are likely to fade away with India developing closer bilateral partnerships in the region.

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

A saga of resilience and adaptation

BKP **SINHA**

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

Embark on a journey through a mystical forest, where trees, the ancient storytellers, whisper tales of survival against the backdrop of ever-evolving landscapes. These silent guardians of nature stand tall and firm, their leaves rustling with tales of time. They bear witness to the rise and fall of civilizations, endure natural calamities, and adapt to our planet's shifting climate.

Indeed, trees are nature's superheroes, their power lies in their remarkable adaptability. Like shapeshifters, they ingeniously tweak their structure, physiology, and even their regeneration mechanisms to thrive in varied habitats.

India, with its diverse climates and landscapes, is home to a spectacular array of tree species. Each species, intricately woven into its habitat, embodies a unique journey of evolution and survival. Among these, Conifers stand out, particularly in the cool, windswept mountain regions. Unlike their deciduous counterparts, who shed their leaves with the changing seasons, Conifers wear their emerald attire year-round. Their foliage retains vital nutrients, helping them thrive in nutrient-deficient mountains.

As winter swathes the land in the snow, Conifers with their needle-like leaves stand poised to seize any fleeting warmth and bask in the sun's shy smile. Their ability to adjust their metabolism and lower their energy needs enables them to survive extended periods without photosynthesis. Conifers, with their evergreen nature, play a pivotal role in combating climate change. Even during the cold months when many trees stand bare, Conifers continue their silent vigil, actively absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Unfazed by winter's chill, they tirelessly continue to purify the air, showcasing their importance in our ecosystems.

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

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

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

Under their bark, Conifers harbour a complex network of tissues, including the xylem and phloem, which transport water, nutrients, and sugars throughout the tree. However, during harsh winters, the sap, a life-sustaining fluid, faces the threat of freezing, which could severely damage the cell walls. But nature, in its infinite wisdom, has equipped these trees with a remarkable defence mechanism. Both deciduous and evergreen trees can osmotically move water out of their living cells into their intercellular (non-living) spaces. This strategic relocation of water confines the freezing process to these non-living zones. Also, the sap due to its higher sugar concentration transforms into a thick syrup that acts as an antifreeze. This transformation reduces the internal freezing point of each cell and enhances its resistance to freezing. Thus, by employing these strategies, Conifers protect their living cells from ice rupture, ensuring the tree's survival through the harshest winters.

Conifers, particularly those in the Pinaceae family, are in a constant battle against formidable adversaries like bark beetles and their symbiotic microorganisms. Their defence mechanism is a sticky resin that seeps from their bark, serving both as a shield and a sword in their fight for survival. This resin forms a barrier that slows the movement of freezing air molecules, a feature that is especially beneficial in dry climates or during droughts as it helps preserve the tree's vital moisture. Moreover, the stickiness of the resin traps infiltrating insects, while its chemical composition deters or even exterminates these invaders, thereby ensuring the tree's continued growth and survival. However, climate change and invasive species are disrupting this balance, posing new challenges for these tenacious trees.

Unlike broadleaf trees with large vascular conduits that foster high growth rates and rapid leaf turnover, conifers possess narrow tracheids in their vascular system. The slender shape of these tracheids only allows tiny bubbles to form, which quickly dissolve back into solution, effectively averting freeze-thaw embolisms. Such embolisms occur after a long, cold winter when the vascular system thaws and air bubbles form. In broadleaf trees, these bubbles can grow large and struggle to dissolve back into solution, leading to an embolism. However, Conifers' narrow tracheids prevent this from happening, making them mountain marvels.

As we descend from the high altitudes towards the equator, we witness a captivating shift in the botanical world. The reign of conifers gracefully passes the baton to the broadleaf trees. These trees, preferring warm and moist climates, become the stars of tropical and subtropical regions, thriving in valleys blessed with fertile and humid soils.

Broadleaf trees, unlike conifers with exposed seeds on cone-like structures, protect their seeds within fruits. This strategy shields the seeds from harsh weather and predators, thereby improving the likelihood of successful germination and ensuring the continuation of the broadleaf lineage. During the dry season, these trees shed their leaves to conserve water and energy, a survival strategy akin to an investor offloading costly assets in times of scarcity. This process, known as abscission, involves specialised cells at the stem base acting like microscopic scissors, severing the leaf connection. However, before the leaves fall, the tree reclaims vital nutrients, storing them in the branches. When spring arrives, these stored nutrients fuel new leaf growth, transforming the landscape into a vibrant green canvas. While the botanical narrative often portrays conifers as inhabitants of frigid heights, they also demonstrate resilience in unexpected environments. Consider regions with high rainfall and poor water retention due to sandy or rocky soils. These challenging environments might seem inhospitable for most vegetation. Yet, in these very landscapes, Conifers, equipped with needle-like foliage and a waxy coating, defy expectations and adapt to thrive in water-deficient soils. Their presence attests to life's remarkable adaptability, reminding us that nature's stories are often far more surprising and nuanced than we initially imagined.

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

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

Upholding the essence of agriculture amidst market pressures

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

SUKHDEV **SINGH**

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

Agriculture is a springboard to food security, rural development, cultural heritage and landscape preservation and, thus, requires mechanisms to safeguard it from the post-industrial market economy founded on the principles of profit rather than the exchange of goodwill and well-being. The market creates a conflict between the economic and social objectives of agriculture. It is for the social objective of 'food security' and the livelihood of farmers that justify the Indian farmers' protest for a legal guarantee on minimum support price. The system of minimum support price introduced in 1966 to help India fight the food deficit has been a productive driver for development and food safety for the Indian population; a system to determine minimum support price has evolved through the years which yet needs improvement and support.

At present, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), Government of India calculates the paid-out costs on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired human and machine labour, and leased-in land rent etc (A2) and the imputed value of unpaid family labour (FL), and adds 50% of its total to recommend minimum support price (MSP) for Cereals (Paddy, Wheat, Barley, Jowar, Bajra, Maize and Ragi), pulses (Gram, Arhar/Tur, Moong, Urad and Lentil), oilseeds (Groundnut, Rapeseed/Mustard, Toria, Soybean, Sunflower Seed, Sesamum, Safflower Seed and Nigerseed), Copra, De-Husked Coconut, Raw Cotton, Raw Jute and Sugarcane every year. Then, keeping in view the production costs, fair remuneration for farmers affordability for consumers and the market conditions, the CACP recommendation is approved by the parliament of India to notify the MSP before the sowing season. In its recommendation, the CACP does not consider the 'Swaminathan National Commission for Farmers' recommendation fully to include capital assets and the rentals and interest forgone on owned land which the protesting farmers demand.

Another cause for farmers' protest is the demand for legislation providing farmers 'the Right to Sell at MSP' which the CACP itself had suggested in its price policy report 2018-19.

The farmers are demanding the same legal entitlement for their produce insulating it against the market pressures of 'demand and supply' as the markets can be subject to manipulation by the private traders and corporations, a concern shared by the CACP in its 2018-19 report.

The crops are unlike industrial production that can be controlled with resilience to market pressures; the cropping patterns are not so easy to shift. The biological nature of agricultural produce makes it vulnerable to unpredictable and uncontrollable weather conditions, pests and diseases on the one hand, and its 'all at once' yield makes it vulnerable to the market players if left for itself to guard. To enhance its resilience to the negative market pressures, a legal guarantee for MSP is required.

Unlike the corporate, the small farmers can not store and service 'value addition'; they have to sell the entire yield immediately. So, it is reasonable for the farmers to expect a guaranteed MSP announced by the government.

The legal guarantee for MSP is not about the procurement of the entire crop by the government but about its purchase at a price not less than the minimum remunerative price declared by the government itself. In the absence of a legal guarantee, the traders purchase the agricultural produce at prices lower than the MSP, yet they sell it to the consumers at prices much higher than the MSP without passing on the benefit to the consumers.

Agriculture produce is for survival while all other industrial or service products are for additional comfort. To keep the farmers growing sufficient for the people to survive, it is well within the reasonable sense for the government to compensate the gaps in case 'demand and supply' forces the sale of crops at prices lower than the MSP following the principle it employs in its intervention to support the corporate failures.

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

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

Centre ready for talks: Thakur to agitating farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur has said that the Centre is ready for talks with protesting farmers who are our "brothers" and "annadaatas", asserting that the Modi government has taken various steps to ensure higher income for farmers. Meanwhile the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has asked Rs one crore as compensation to the death of the farmers at Khanauri border and also demanded Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, and state home minister Anil Vij be booked for the "murder" of a protesting farmer on the Punjab-Haryana border and announced a tractor march next week. It said farmers will take out tractor marches on highways on February 26 and hold an All India All Kisan Mazdoor Mahapanchayat at Ramlila Maidan in Delhi on March 14.

Speaking to media persons the Minister said "we were ready for talks earlier and are ready even today and will be ready to discuss their issues even in future." Thakur highlighted various steps taken by the Modi government to double farmers' income and achieve higher growth in the agriculture and allied sectors.He said the government has doubled the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and increased the procurement by more than two times.

"About the Cabinet decision to hike Fair & Remunerative Price for sugarcane for the season 2024-25 by 8% to Rs 340 per quintal, the Minister said "India is paying the highest price for sugarcane in the world. And the price fixed is 107% higher than the A2 plus formula for sugarcane. A2 includes all the expenses incurred by the farmers for buying chemicals, fertilizers,

seeds and hired labour, while A2 + FL covers actual cost incurred plus implicit cost in the form of family labour.

The Minister also drew comparison of the highest MSP paid to farmers during 10 years of NDA government than during the previous 10 years of UPA Government. Shri Thakur said the Modi Government has spent Rs 18.39 lakh crore in the last 10 years on procurement of wheat, paddy, oilseeds, and pulses as against Rs 5.5 lakh crore by the UPA regime.

About fertilizers the Minister said "despite the increase in the prices of fertilizers across the world, we did not allow the prices of fertilizers to increase for the farmers. Government of India gave subsidy up to Rs 3 lakh crore, to ensure that fertilizers are made available to farmers at reasonable rates.

The SKM, which spearheaded the 2020-21 farm agitation against the now-repealed farm laws, announced that the farmers will observe a 'black day' on Friday to mourn the death. Subhkaran Singh, 21, a native of Bathinda, had died Wednesday amid clashes between Haryana Police and Punjab farmers.

Speaking to reporters here, SKM leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said a case of murder should be registered in the death of the farmer at Khanauri border and his family be given Rs 1 crore in compensation. The SKM after a meeting here said farmers will take out tractor marches on highways across country on February 26 and hold a Mahapanchayat in Delhi on March 14.

It said the farmers on Friday will burn effigies of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and his Haryana counterpart Anil Vij to condemn the police action.

Farmers leader Sarwan Singh Pandher also demanded registration of a murder case against those responsible for the death of a protesting farmer at the Khanauri border point of Punjab-Haryana.

Pandher also said the Punjab government should take action against the Haryana paramilitary force personnel for allegedly damaging 25-30 tractor-trolleys after entering into the state's territory. Pandher said the Punjab government should take action against the Haryana personnel for allegedly damaging 25-30 tractor-trolleys after entering into the state's territory.

Farmers leaders had on Wednesday put the march on hold for two days after a farmer's death, who was later identified as Subhkaran Singh, saying they would decide their next course of action Friday evening.

Russian skier dies in Gulmarg avalanche

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU

A Russian Skier was killed while seven others including a local guide were safely rescued by the Gulmarg Ski Patrol of the Tourism Department, J&K, and jawans of the J&K Police immediately after an avalanche hit Khilan Marg on Afarwat Peak in famous ski destination Gulmarg on Thursday afternoon.

According to official sources, a group of seven Russian skiers along with a local guide were hit by an avalanche late Thursday afternoon in the ski resort of Gulmarg. One skier sustained minor injuries but is in stable condition and is receiving treatment at a local hospital.

A large number of skiers including foreign nationals arrived in Gulmarg following a fresh spell of snowfall to enjoy the skiing.

The rescue teams pressed helicopter services to locate the trapped skiers with the help of local guides stranded in the higher reaches. The rescue teams rushed additional troops to carry out searches and managed to rescue the group of six Russian skiers along with their guide.

According to the spokesman of the J&K government, A collaborative effort between the Gulmarg Ski Patrol of the Tourism Department, J&K and J&K Police resulted in the successful rescue of a group comprising six Russian skiers and one local guide following an avalanche at the higher reaches of Gulmarg, known as Army Ridge.

Despite the valiant efforts of the rescue team, one Russian skier tragically lost his life due to the avalanche. "Our thoughts and condolences are with the family and friends of the deceased during this difficult time", the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, the ongoing sporting events of the 4th Khelo India Winter Games remain unaffected by the incident. The local authorities issued a fresh advisory to remain alert in the wake of a fresh avalanche. The Russian Skiers were currently admitted to the local hospital and receiving all necessary medical treatment, the government spokesman said.

JK start up policy approved

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU

Administrative Council (AC) which met here under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha approved J&K start-up policy 2024-27 in supersession to the Start-up Policy notified in the year 2018. The policy has the objective of setting up 2000 new startups in Jammu & Kashmir in the next 5 years.

Rajeev Rai Bhatnagar, Advisor to the Lieutenant Governor; Atal Dulloo, Chief Secretary; Mandeep Kumar Bhandari, Principal Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor attended the meeting.

According to an official spokesman of the UT government, "The government of Jammu & Kashmir will set up a Venture Capital Fund of Rs. 250 Crores and will infuse a maximum of Rs. 25 Crores as an initial fund to this venture capital fund".

The venture capital fund so created shall invest primarily in recognized start-ups of Jammu & Kashmir.

The department may also work out a mechanism to facilitate allotment of land to start-ups having good potential for growth.

The Administrative Council also approved the development of seven new Industrial Estates in the UT of J&K spread over 5290 kanals of land for an amount of Rs. 304.51 Crores.

The estimated investment in these seven new Industrial Estates is Rs. 8700.16 Crores with an employment potential of 28376 persons. These 7 new Industrial Estates are situated at Banderpora Budgam, Sempora Medicity, Srinagar, Bhagthali, Kathua, Karandi, Samba, Trenz, Shopian, Hariparigam Tral Pulwama and Khunmoh, Pantha Chowk Srinagar.

SC gets Ayush Holistic Wellness Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday got its own 'Ayush Holistic Wellness Centre' within its premises, offering judges and staff access to comprehensive holistic care addressing physical, mental, and emotional health needs.

The newly established Ayurveda center within the premises of the Supreme Court will provide a range of traditional Ayurvedic treatments and therapies tailored to enhance physical vitality and promote mental and emotional balance. From personalized wellness consultations to therapeutic massages, yoga sessions, and meditation practices, the center will offer a holistic approach to health that integrates ancient wisdom with modern-day needs.

It was inaugurated by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud in the presence of Companion Judges of the Supreme Court of India, Sarbananda Sonowal, Cabinet Minister for Ministry of Ayush and Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and Dr. Munjpara Mahendrabhai Kalubhai, Minister of State for

Ministry of Ayush and for Ministry of Women And Child Development,.

Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary and other senior officers of the Ministry of Ayush, Prof.(Dr.) Tanuja Nesari, Director and other senior faculty members of All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) were also present at the occasion.

On the occasion CJI DY Chandrachud said, " I am a proponent of Ayurveda and holistic lifestyle. We have over 2000 staff members, and we must look at a holistic pattern of living, not just for the judges and their immediate families but for the staff members too..."

"The AIIA has extended its centres at many places like LABSNA, Safadarjung, IIT, etc.in the same way we have one more add on which is a holistic and integrated centre for the Judiciary, Judges and other staff of the Supreme Court, it is like we are now at your doorstep. Under one umbrella we are providing all the facilities of Ayurveda," said Prof. Dr Tanuja Nesari, Director AIIA.

On the occasion, an MoU regarding establishing, operationalizing and providing expert services at the Ayush Holistic Wellness Centre was also signed between the Supreme Court and the AIIA.

Congress chief Kharge given Z plus security

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has been granted Z-plus security across the country by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The decision was taken by the home ministry early this month based on the threat perception of Kharge, the sources said. Commandos of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) will provide the Z-plus security to Kharge on all India basis, the sources said.

As president of the principal opposition party, Kharge is expected to tour across the country extensively in the run-up to the general elections as well as during the polls and the decision to enhance his security cover was taken keeping in view this fact, the sources said.

Kharge will now be covered by a security blanket of about 30 CRPF commandoes round the clock in three shifts. This cover also includes a bulletproof vehicle, pilot and escort.

The Z-plus is the highest category security provided to a person of high threat perception in India.

There are four categories of VIP security Z plus, Z, Y and X -- depending on the threat perception analysis by the Intelligence Bureau.

The prime minister is provided the highest security cover by the Special Protection Group.

Former prime minister Manmohan Singh, former Congress presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi are covered under the Z-plus security with CRPF commandos.

The CRPF is well suited for handling the task, the sources said. After a major security review by the Modi government in 2019, 1,300 commandos were freed as the Centre removed or scaled down the security cover of as many as 350 politicians and former and present lawmakers.

Modi says Opposition thrives on negativity

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He said only last month, traces of civilisation dating back to 2,800 years were found in Vadnagar in Mehsana district. Vadnagar is the hometown of PM Modi.

A similar ancient Indian heritage was found at Dholavira in Gujarat. "These are India's pride, and we are proud of this rich past," Modi said. Every effort being made in the new India is towards creating a heritage for the coming generations, whether it is the new and modern roads or railway tracks, he said.

Amid farmers' protest on the borders between Punjab and Haryana, Modi on Thursday said his Government was giving priority to every aspect linked to villages and also focusing on improving the lives of small farmers through various schemes and initiatives.

He said strengthening the rural economy was necessary to achieve the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India). The PM was addressing a gathering of nearly one lakh people, mostly cattle-rearers and farmers, at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera area of Ahmedabad on the golden jubilee celebration of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which owns the 'Amul' dairy brand. Referring to the BJP government's ambitious plan of creating 10,000 FPOs or Farmer

Producer Organisations, Modi said his Government was on a mission to turn small farmers into "agri entrepreneurs and exporters". In his address, he listed many schemes meant for farmers and village-dwellers, such as Micro ATMs, GOBARdhan scheme and Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samridhi Kendras. "With Micro ATMs installed in villages, cattle-rearers don't have to go far to withdraw cash. We are also planning to give RuPay credit cards to cattle-rearers. As a pilot project, we have launched that scheme in Banaskantha and Panchmahal districts here," he said. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that India's soul rests in her villages. Therefore, in order to create Viksit Bharat (developed India), we must have a strong rural economy, he added.

"We are giving priority to each and every aspect of villages and our focus is on improving the lives of small farmers, on improving the health of livestock and how farmers get more income through allied activities such as fishing and bee-keeping. That is why we have decided to give Kisan credit cards to fishermen and cattle-rearers too," he said.

Modi said his Government also gave seeds that are capable of fighting the effects of climate change. To protect livestock from the deadly foot-and-mouth disease, his government has launched a free vaccination drive for cattle at a cost of Rs 15,000 crore and nearly 60 crore jabs were already given, he added.

"We have also set up Kisan Samridhi Kendras across the country so that farmers get scientific solutions to their problems near their villages. We are also making arrangements to help farmers in making organic fertilisers," he said.

Referring to solar panel installations in fields and setting up of bio-gas plants which in turn produce bio-fertiliser from cow dung, the PM said his government wants to turn "anna data" into "urja data" and "uvarak data" (food grain growers into producers of energy and fertilisers).

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

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

As the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday served a fresh summons on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in its excise policy money laundering probe asking him to appear before it on February 26, the AAP has linked the summons with the victory in Chandigarh mayoral polls. It also claimed that the AAP convener will be arrested in the next three to four days if the party enters into a seat-sharing agreement with the Congress for the Lok Sabha polls.

Delhi Cabinet Minister and senior AAP leader Atishi claimed that the CBI was going to issue a notice to Kejriwal either on Saturday or Sunday. "Since the news of discussion on alliance between the AAP and the Congress being in the final stage is circulating, AAP leaders have received messages that Kejriwal will be arrested if AAP enters into a seat-sharing agreement with the Congress," she claimed.

Kejriwal has skipped ED summons six times till now since the first one on

November 2. The ED had recently filed a fresh complaint before a local court against Kejriwal for disobeying its summons in this case. The court listed the matter for further hearing on March 16 as it exempted Kejriwal from personal appearance last week.

"The ED has sent the seventh illegal summons to Kejriwal. We have raised legal questions about all the summonses sent so far by the Enforcement Directorate, questioning the basis for these summonses to the Chief Minister. However, ED has not replied to any of our queries', Atishi said.

The Supreme Court saved democracy in Chandigarh, and to take revenge for that, the BJP has once again sent Arvind Kejriwal an illegal summons, she added.

The Delhi BJP has slammed Kejriwal and Atishi for spreading lies over the ED's summons.

Leader of the Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri accused Kejriwal of making a mockery of democracy. If he is honest, why is he afraid of ED's summons," Bidhuri questioned.

Reacting to the statement, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that not only Atishi but the entire AAP is aware that the mastermind behind the liquor scam is Arvind Kejriwal, and he will be arrested some day. Sachdeva described Atishi's statement as a reflection of the frustration of the AAP and said that no supporter of the BJP will be intimidated by a beaten coalition.

Kejriwal's name has been mentioned multiple times in charge sheets filed by the ED in the case. The ED had claimed in its charge sheet that the AAP used "proceeds of crime" to the tune of about Rs 45 crore in its Goa election campaign.

Freedom of Speech...

From Page 1

According to sources, the Ministry of Electronics and IT has ordered social media platforms to temporarily block 177 accounts linked to farmers' protests upon the request of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

"The Indian government has issued executive orders requiring X to act on specific accounts and posts, subject to potential penalties including significant fines and imprisonment. In compliance with the orders, we will withhold these accounts and posts in India alone; however, we disagree with these actions and maintain that freedom of expression should extend to these posts," X said in a statement.

The social media platform noted that a writ appeal challenging the Indian government's blocking orders remains pending and called for the order to be made public to enhance transparency. "Due to legal restrictions, we are unable to publish the executive orders, but we believe that making them public is essential for transparency. This lack of disclosure can lead to a lack of accountability and arbitrary decision-making," X added.

Temple tax sparks outcry

From Page 1

The Dharmika Parishad had been getting 10 per cent revenue from those temples whose annual gross income was above Rs 25 lakh since 2003.

"Now what we have done is we have made it free from paying to Dharmika Parishad if the income is up to Rs 10 lakh. We have made provisions to collect five per cent from temples whose gross income is between Rs 10 lakh and less than a crore. 10 per cent will be collected from temples whose income is above Rs 1 crore. All this amount will reach the Dharmika Parishad," Reddy said.

The Minister said there are 40,000 to 50,000 priests in the State whom the State Government wants to help.

"If the money reaches Dharmika Parishad then we can provide them insurance cover. We want their families to get at least Rs 5 lakh if something happens to them. To pay the premium we need Rs 7 crore to 8 crore (annually)," he explained.

The Minister said the Government wants to provide scholarships to children of temple priests, which would require Rs 5-6 crore per year and housing facilities for C group priests and temple employees.

"This entire amount will benefit the temple priests only, many of whom are in poor condition," he said.

Government sources said the purpose behind the Bill is to provide facilities and safety to pilgrims within the jurisdiction of Group 'A' temples.

A district level and State high-level committee will be constituted to scrutinise, review and submit the proposals regarding the construction and maintenance of buildings, roads and tunnels, electricity supply and maintenance, water supply and sanitation, construction of recreation centres and libraries to provide necessary facilities to pilgrims and to provide safety to pilgrims within the jurisdiction of Group "A" Temples, they added.

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

Israeli strikes in Gaza kill 48

Fears mount over humanitarian crisis

AP ■ RAFAH

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

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

But Benny Gantz, a former military chief and defense minister, repeated his pledge that unless Hamas agrees to release the remaining hostages, Israel will launch a ground offensive into Gaza's southernmost town, Rafah, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins around March 10.

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

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

Earlier this week, the World Food Program had to halt food deliveries to northern Gaza because of increasing chaos. "Diseases are rampant. Famine is looming," they said, adding that aid workers are facing "shelling, death, movement restrictions and a breakdown of civil order." They called for the opening of more entry points for aid to Gaza – including in the north — security assurances of safe passage for distribution and a release of hostages.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Houthi missile attack sets ship ablaze in Gulf of Aden

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over Israel's war against Hamas.

They have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor.

Despite a month of US-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. This week, they seriously damaged a ship in a crucial strait and downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars. The Houthis insist their attacks will continue until Israel stops its combat operations in the Gaza Strip, which have enraged the wider Arab world and seen the Houthis gain international recognition.

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ PARIS

Russian forces threatened to shoot down French pilots patrolling in international airspace over the Black Sea, signals of increasingly aggressive behaviour from Moscow as its invasion of Ukraine struggles to make headway, France's defense minister said Thursday. The minister, Sébastien Lecornu, didn't give specific details about the French flights or aircraft involved in the threatened shoot-down. But he said Russia is returning to a "particularly aggressive" posture reminiscent of the former Soviet Union's behaviour during the Cold War.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Biden calls Putin 'crazy SOB'

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

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

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

Speaking to donors at a private San Francisco home Wednesday as part of a three-day California swing to raise money for his 2024 reelection campaign, Biden also said he was astounded by recent comments made by his likely Republican challenger.

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

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

"I mean, if I stood here 10, 15 years ago and said any of this, you'd all think I should be committed," he said. "It astounds me."

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

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

Knife attack at German school injures 5, suspect arrested

AP ■ BERLIN

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

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

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

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

Farmers from EU countries join protest

AP ■ PRAGUE

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

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

The farmers also complain about low prices for their products and say grain and other agriculture products coming from Ukraine and Latin America negatively affect the market.The farmers met their colleagues from neighbouring Germany, Poland and Slovakia at a number of border crossings. Farmers from 10 EU countries, ranging from Central Europe to the Baltics and the Balkans, were participating in the protest, organisers said.

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

Albanian Parliament approves deal to hold migrants for Italy

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

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

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

The agreement, signed in November between Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, is part of Meloni's efforts to share the burden of addressing migration with other European countries.

The Parliament, dominated by Rama's left-wing Socialist Party, voted 77 to zero to approve the deal, with 63 members of parliament marked not present. Most of the conservative opposition, which refused to participate, sat in the hall and tried to disrupt the vote with whistles. The president will also issue a decree as the final step of approval.

Rama himself was not present at the vote. A group of 30 lawmakers attempted to block ratification by appealing to the Constitutional Court, but in late January the court said a deal could go ahead. Conservative lawmakers have repeatedly disrupted voting since October to protest the Socialist government.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Those picked up within Italy's territorial waters, or by rescue ships operated by non-governmental organisations, would retain their right under international and EU law to apply for asylum in Italy and have their claims processed there. Rama has said that Albania stands beside Meloni in a sign of gratitude on behalf of Albanians who found refuge in Italy and "escaped hell and imagined a better life" following the collapse of communism in Albania in the 1990s.

Italy has sought help from other EU nations to handle the increasing number of arrivals. Data from Italy's Interior ministry showed that migrant arrivals in Italy jumped 50 per cent in 2023 from the previous year.

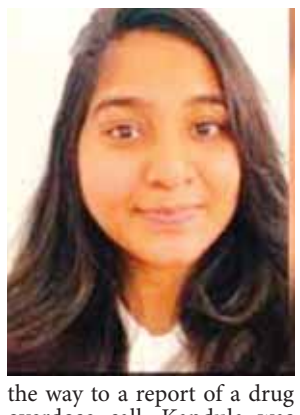
Jaahnavi's killers will not face criminal charges

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Auderer, who was not involved in the January collision, was captured in the video saying, "But she is dead" and laughing while on the phone.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dave was responding to a "priority one" call at the request of the Seattle Fire Department, according to the Seattle Police Department. According to the police report, the officer was responding to a report of a drug overdose.

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

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

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

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

Sensex surges over 500 points

Nifty scales new high on bullish sentiments

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stocks staged a strong recovery on Thursday, with Nifty notching up a fresh all-time high and Sensex surging over 500 points as investors went on a buying spree in IT, technology and automobile stocks.

After volatility persisted for most part of the session, the benchmark indices rebounded in the last one hour of trading amid improving domestic macroeconomic indicators and positive global cues, including impressive earnings from the US technology space.

The 30-share benchmark Sensex soared 535.15 points or 0.74 per cent to close at 73,158.24 points. As many as 22 Sensex constituents closed in the positive territory and the index touched an intra-day high of 73,256.39 points.

The broader Nifty climbed 162.40 points or 0.74 per cent to hit its highest-ever closing level of 22,217.45 points.

During intraday trade, the index touched the peak of 22,252.50 points and 25 Nifty constituents ended the session with gains.

Nifty recorded its previous lifetime peak at 22,196.95 points on February 20. "The domestic market staged a recovery from the day's low, buoyed by positive PMI data from the Eurozone and an impressive earnings report from US tech stocks.

"The broader market showed resilience as India's economic activity continued to expand in February, with both service and manufacturing PMI improving. Consequently, it resulted in outperformance in discretionary stocks and capital goods," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

BSE midcap index gained 0.92 per cent, largecap index climbed 0.81 per cent and smallcap index rose 0.54 per cent.

In the Sensex pack, HCLTech rose the maximum by 3.12 per cent, followed by ITC which gained 2.73 per cent and M&M went up 2.61 per cent. TCS climbed 2.44 per cent.

Bellwether auto stock Maruti gained 1.79 per cent, while Tata Motors rose 1.20 per cent.

Tech Mahindra, Wipro, L&T and Maruti were among the other major gainers.

"Nifty made a fresh record high on February 22 negating the bearish development of the previous session. It could now proceed towards 22,280 and later 22,810. On falls, it could take support at 22,011. Participants remain unsure about the direction of the market due to sharp intraday movements in the markets on either side," Deepak Jasani, Head Retail Research at HDFC Securities, said.

Among sectoral indices, BSE Auto gained the maximum by 1.85 per cent, followed by IT which rose by 1.83 per cent and Capital Goods which went up by 1.80 per cent.

BSE Teck rose 1.59 per cent, while industrials climbed 1.50 per cent and power ended 1.38 per cent higher.

However, stocks of all major banks closed in the red with IndusInd Bank falling 1.87 per cent, HDFC Bank dropped 1.28 per cent, Kotak Mahindra Bank declined 1.11 per cent and SBI slipped 0.73 per cent.

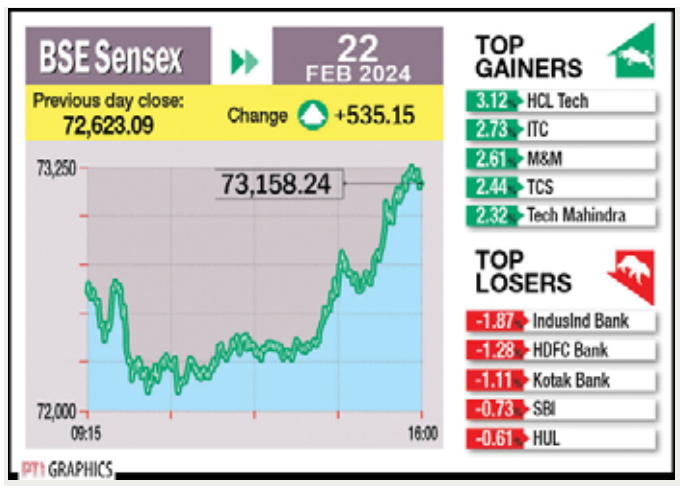
BSE Bankex was the only index that ended with a marginal loss of 0.04 per cent. "We are witnessing the banks trading at higher valuations than their historical median barring two large banks; HDFC Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank.

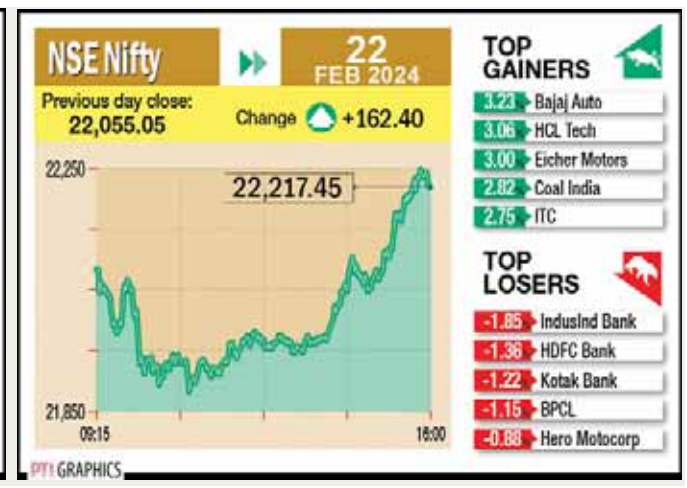
"The sharp correction in these two banks led to valuation comfort and earning upgrades is likely to bring investor sentiment back. Hence, we are optimistic on HDFC Bank with a current valuation of around 2.7x Price to book," Ajit Kabi, Research Analyst at LKP Securities, said.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 surged more than 2 per cent to all-time high to hit its 1,989 level. Hang Seng of Hong Kong and China's Shanghai Composite also ended with sharp gains.

European stocks were also mostly trading in the green.

On Wednesday, US stocks finished mostly higher after minutes of the US Federal Reserve's January meeting showed most policymakers were concerned about the risks of cutting interest rates early.





Sugar firms stocks settle 3 per cent lower

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Sugar companies settled 3 per cent lower on Thursday after the government announced a hike in the minimum price that mills have to pay to sugarcane growers for the 2024-25 season starting October.

The scrip of Rana Sugars declined 2.86 per cent to close at Rs 25.44 apiece on the BSE, Mawana Sugars at Rs 102.07, Shree Renuka Sugars at Rs 48.96, Dalmia Bharat Sugar and Industries at Rs 402, EID Parry (India) at Rs 630.60.

Also, Triveni Engineering & Industries went lower by 0.73 per cent to settle at Rs 347.90 apiece, Dhampur Sugar Mills at Rs 248.95 and KCP Sugar & Industries Corp at Rs 41.75 per piece on the exchange.

On the other hand, shares of Rajshree Sugars & Chemicals rallied 8.22 per cent to end at Rs 80.60 apiece, and Balrampur Chini Mills gained 0.45 per cent to finish at Rs 382.45 each on the BSE.

The 30-share BSE Sensex index jumped 535.15 points or 0.74 per cent to close at 73,158.24.

On Wednesday, the government announced a hike in the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP), the minimum rate that mills need to pay to sugarcane growers. The FRP has been increased by Rs 25 to Rs 340 per quintal for the 2024-25 season starting October.

The decision to increase the FRP was taken at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

This is the highest FRP for sugarcane announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government since coming to power in 2014. This is the second time that the Modi government has increased the FRP by Rs 25 per quintal in one go.

"This decision of the central government is going to benefit more than 5 crore sugarcane farmers (including family members) and lakhs of other persons involved in the sugar sector," an official statement said on Wednesday.

Vodafone Idea board to meet to consider fundraising proposal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom operator Vodafone Idea (VIL) on Thursday said its board will meet on February 27 to consider fundraising proposals.

In a statutory filing, VIL said the board of directors will consider and evaluate all proposals for "raising of funds in one or more tranches by way of a rights issue, further public offer, private placement including preferential allotment, qualified institutions placement or through any other permissible mode and/or combination".

The fundraising could be through equity or debt instruments, the BSE filing said.

The capital raise could be by way of issue of equity shares or by way of any instruments including "securities convertible into equity shares, Global Depository Receipts, American Depository Receipts or bonds including foreign currency convertible bonds, convertible debentures, warrants, and/or non-convertible debentures including non-convertible debentures along with warrants, which may or may not be listed".

"... The Board of Directors of Vodafone Idea Limited will be held on Tuesday that is 27 February, 2024, to consider and evaluate any and all proposals for raising of funds in one or more tranches...," it said.

Earlier today, Billionaire industrialist and Aditya Birla Group chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla had underlined the Group's firm commitment to the cash-strapped telco and asserted that efforts are on to rope-in external investors.

On how soon such investors could be onboarded, Birla told PTI "we are making good progress but can't put in a timeline."

"We remain very committed to Vodafone Idea, and like we have said in public domain, efforts are on to get outside investors," he had said speaking at a conference here to mark the launch of the Group's decorative business.

Vodafone Idea saw its net loss narrow to Rs 6,986 crore for the December 2023 quarter, helped by Rs 755.5 crore one-time exceptional gain, while the average revenue per subscriber improved for the ailing telco.

VIL's net loss stood at Rs 7,990 crore in the year-ago period.

For the debt-laden telco - which has been struggling to keep up with the larger rivals like Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel in the hugely competitive Indian telecom market - the revenue from operations remained nearly flat at Rs 10,673.1 crore year-on-year.

During the company's Q3FY24 results, Vodafone Idea CEO Akshaya Moondra had said: "We remain engaged with various parties for fundraising to make required investments for network expansion, including 5G roll-out."

Farm community gives mixed response to increase in sugarcane FRP

PTI ■ BAGHPAT/MEERUT (UP)

The farm community in western Uttar Pradesh has given a mixed response to the government's decision to increase Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane to Rs 340 per quintal.

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday decided to hike the minimum price that mills have to pay to sugarcane growers by Rs 25 to Rs 340 per quintal for the 2024-25 season starting October.

This is the highest FRP for sugarcane announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government since coming to power in 2014. Dismayed over the decision, Baghpat District President of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Bhanu) Pratap Singh Gurjar said the government has forgotten its own promise.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi had himself promised to give MSP of Rs 450 per quintal to cane during a public rally in Meerut in 2014 elections," he claimed.

"We (farmers) are also consumers. The government should also remember this. We also have to buy petrol, diesel, fertilizer, seeds etc. All these things are becoming expensive. MSP on sugarcane should be increased on the basis of farmers' costs. If the allowance of government employees increases on the basis of inflation, then why is it not done for farmers? We urge the central government to reconsider its decision on the price for sugarcane," Gurjar added.

Gurwant Singh, a sugarcane farmer of Shahjahanpur district, called the FRP rise "meagre."

"The increase in FRP of sugarcane by Rs 25 might look like a big decision but is very meagre to what actually is required. The cost of farming has almost doubled in the past few years. The government should at least increase the FRP by Rs 70 per quintal so that farmers could recover their investment," he said.

On the other hand, National Secretary of Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and senior farm leader of West UP, Raj Kumar Sangwan, while talking to PTI in Meerut, said the Centre has taken the decision keeping in mind the plight of the farmers. "This increase will provide relief to farmers."

He also said that considering the way costs are increasing, the FRP could have been increased further.

Meerut District President of Bharatiya Kisan Union (Arajnaitik) Anurag Chaudhary also welcomed the move.

"The decision of Government of India to increase the FRP of sugarcane by Rs 25 is good. But the central government must ensure that farmers in UP get this benefit."

Rupee rises 13 paise to close at 82.83 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 13 paise to close at 82.83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, tracking the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and positive domestic equities.

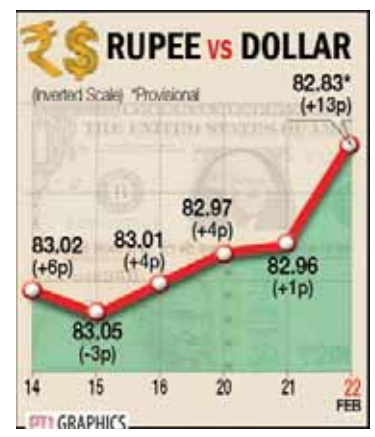
Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices weighed on the local unit and restricted a sharp uptick.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 82.94 against the greenback. It hit an intraday high of 82.83 during the day.

The domestic unit finally settled at 82.83 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 13 paise from its previous close of 82.96.

The Indian rupee appreciated on Thursday on weak US dollar and mixed-to-positive domestic markets, said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, a surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains. The US dollar declined on rise in risk appetite in global markets and positive European markets ahead of PMI data from Eurozone and Germany.

Analysts attributed the retreating dollar index to the US Federal Reserve's minutes that reflected policy makers' cautious approach, ebbing the possibility of interest rate cuts in the immediate future.



"The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) minutes released on Wednesday were slightly hawkish," Choudhary said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.31 per cent lower at 103.68. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.37 per cent to USD 83.34 per barrel.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the weak tone in the US dollar and positive global markets. However, rising global crude oil prices and geopolitical tension in the Middle East may limit the gains in the rupee. "Traders may watch out for manufacturing and services PMI, weekly unemployment claims and existing home sales data from the US. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.60 to Rs 83.10," Choudhary added.

On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex advanced 535.15 points, or 0.74 per cent, to 73,158.24. The Nifty rose 162.40 points, or 0.74 per cent, to hit an all-time high of 22,217.45.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Wednesday as they purchased shares worth Rs 284.66 crore, according to exchange data.

Solar installations fall 44 per cent in 2023, says report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has reported a 44 per cent fall in solar installations at 7.5 gigawatt in 2023 due to land acquisition-related issues, research firm Mercom Capital said on Thursday.

According to the US-based research firm's latest report, a total of 13.4 gigawatt (GW) solar capacity was installed in the country in 2022.

As of December 2023, the cumulative installed solar capacity stood at 72 GW. Of which utility-scale projects accounted for 85.4 per cent, and rooftop solar accounted for 14.6 per cent, the report said.

"In 2023, large-scale solar installations fell 51 per cent to 5.8 GW from 11.7 GW in 2022. Extensions granted to several large-scale projects and delays primarily due to land (acquisition) and transmission (connectivity) issues impacted capacity additions during the year. Large-scale solar accounted for 77.2 per cent of annual solar capacity additions, and rooftop solar contributed 22.8 per cent," it said.

Rajasthan followed by Karnataka, and Gujarat were the top three states for cumulative large-scale solar capacity, accounting for 54.8 per cent of installations in the country as of December 2023.

India's large-scale solar project pipeline stood at 105.3 GW, with another 70.6 GW of projects tendered and pending auction, the report said.

Country's installed renewable energy capacity, including large hydropower projects, stood at 179.5 GW, accounting for 42 per cent of the overall power mix at the end of December 2023.

Solar energy projects accounted for 48.5 per cent of all new power capacity installed last year.

As of December 2023, solar energy accounted for 16.9 per cent of India's total installed power capacity and almost 40.1 per cent of the total installed renewable energy capacity.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bharat Highways InvIT, an infrastructure investment trust, on Thursday said it will launch its Rs 2,500 crore Initial Public Offering (IPO) on February 28.

The InvIT's maiden public issue will conclude on March 1 and the price band has been set at Rs 98-100 per unit for the issue, Bharat Highways InvIT said in a statement.

Proceeds from the issue will be utilised to provide loans to the Project SPVs (special purpose vehicles) for repayment of their outstanding loans.

Bharat Highways InvIT is an infrastructure investment trust established to acquire, manage, and invest in a portfolio of infrastructure assets in India and to carry on the activities of an infrastructure investment trust under Sebi's InvIT rule.

Its initial portfolio consists of seven road assets, all operating on HAM (Hybrid Annuity Model) basis, in Punjab, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh consisting of about 497.292 km of constructed and operational roads.

Additionally, the InvIT has entered into an agreement with G R Infraprojects Ltd (GRIL) after which GRIL granted a right of first offer to the InvIT to acquire certain of its road assets.

About 75 per cent of the issue size has been reserved for Qualified Institutional Bidders (QIBs) and 25 per cent for Non-institutional Investors (NIIs). Investors can bid for a minimum of 150 units in one lot and in multiples of 150 units thereof.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

This came after the brothers failed to pay the fine imposed on them by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in July last year in a case concerning the flouting of disclosure norms.

In two separate attachment notices issued on Tuesday, the markets watchdog has ordered the attachment of bank, demat accounts, and mutual fund folios of the Wadhawans to recover the pending dues.

The pending dues of Rs 10.6 lakh each from Wadhawans comprise the initial penalty amount, interest, and recovery cost, it added.

In July 2023, the regulator imposed a penalty of Rs 10 lakh each on Wadhawans, who were promoters of DHFL (now known as Piramal Finance), for flouting disclosure norms.

Kapil Wadhawan was the Chairman and MD of DHFL, while Dheeraj Wadhawan was a non-executive director of the company. Both of them were on the board of DHFL.

The order came after Sebi conducted an investigation into the transfer of shares held by DHFL in DHFL Pramerica Life Insurance (erstwhile DLF Pramerica Life Insurance) to its wholly owned subsidiary DHFL Investments and other related transactions.

The investigation period was from February-March 2017. Sebi observed that the brothers were responsible for providing inadequate information in the postal ballot notice by the firm.

As per the attachment notices, Sebi said there is sufficient reason to believe that the defaulter may dispose of the amounts in the bank accounts and securities in the demat accounts and "realisation of the amount due under the certificate would, in consequence, be delayed or obstructed". Accordingly, the regulator asked all banks, depositories, and mutual funds not to allow any debit from the account.

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

Mbappé chasing milestones in French league before summer exit

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappé has 12 matches left to play in the French league. Twelve matches left to set new records in a league he has dominated for years.

The star striker is leaving Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season when his contract expires. He is widely expected to sign a lucrative deal with Real Madrid, the club he dreamt of playing for when he was a kid.

Since his debut with Monaco at age 16 in December 2015, Mbappé has scored 185 league goals, making him one of the top 10 marksmen in Ligue 1 history.

It's impossible for the 2018 World Cup winner to catch Delio Onnis, the league's all-time leader with 299 during the 1970s-80s. But Mbappé, who has 21 goals this season, has a chance to reach 200.

At 25, Mbappe is already PSG's all-time best scorer, with 244 in all competitions. He will set another record if he finishes as the league top scorer for a sixth consecutive time. He currently shares the record with Onnis, Carlos Bianchi and Jean-Pierre Papin.

PSG has dominated French football since Qatari owners took over in 2011, and is on track for a record-extending 12th league title. It hosts Rennes on Sunday with a 13-point lead over second-placed Brest.

MOUNIE SUSPENDED: Brest, the surprise of the season, will be without striker Steve Mounié for the next two games.

Mounié was suspended for his red card last week for elbowing a defender during a 1-0 win against Marseille. He will miss facing Strasbourg on Saturday then Le Havre.

Since coming back from two goals down to stun last season's runner-up Lens on the opening day of the season, Brest has been living a fairy tale and has dreams of qualifying for the Champions League for the first time. Brest has a best league finish of eighth.

NURSING MORALE WOUNDS: With Gennaro Gattuso gone, Marseille takes on Montpellier under new coach Jean-Louis Gasset. Some might say it's good timing, since Gasset is a former Montpellier player and coach. He was born there and knows the club inside out.

Stuck in ninth place, Marseille needs to win to avoid getting distanced in the race for European spots. Gasset said his first task was to give players their confidence back to ensure the team stops conceding from individual errors.

"The mind is 80% of the performance," Gasset said. "They're professionals, they need to do a bit more. When you take goals like that, it's not because of the tactical systems. We have to reassure the players. That's how I started to work with them."

The 70-year-old Gasset was appointed less than a month after getting fired by Ivory Coast. He faced questions about his age during his inaugural news conference in Marseille this week.

"Speaking of the greats," Gasset said, "do people ask the question about (Arsene) Wenger, (Alex) Ferguson, (Raymond) Goethals? I'm not comparing myself to them. But age is the age in your head.

Gauff beats Pliskova to reach Dubai quarterfinals

Swiatek, Rybakina also advance

AP ■ DUBAI

Coco Gauff rallied from a slow start and a second-set argument with the chair umpire to beat Karolina Pliskova 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 and reach the quarterfinals of the Dubai Championships.

The third-seeded Gauff ended Pliskova's 11-match winning streak.

The 19-year-old American built a 4-2 lead in the second set before a lengthy back-and-forth with chair umpire Pierre Bacchi. Gauff complained to Bacchi that he called her serve at deuce out only after Pliskova returned it into the net.

Gauff had to repeat her first serve and went on to hold for a 5-2 lead.

The U.S. Open champion said the argument "fueled" her.

"It's OK. It's just one point. That happens in tennis. Players make mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes," Gauff said in her on-court interview. "It kind of went upward from there for me."

Gauff will next face Anna Kalinskaya after the Russian beat ninth-seeded Jelena Ostapenko 6-4, 7-5.

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek advanced to the last eight by beating two-time Dubai champion Elina Svitolina 6-1, 6-4.

Fourth-seeded Elena Rybakina had a tougher time reaching the quarterfinals. She outlasted Magdalena Frech 7-6 (5), 3-6, 6-4.

Swiatek will next play sixth-seeded Qinwen Zheng, who eliminated Anastasia Potapova 6-3, 6-2. Rybakina has a quarterfinal match against Jasmine Paolini. The Italian defeated eighth-seeded Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-2.

The other quarterfinal match is seventh-seeded Marketa Vondrousova against Sorana Cirstea.

Abhay, Ramit move up in style in premier PSA events

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rising Indian squash player Abhay Singh stormed into the quarterfinals of the Goodfellow Classic, a USD 9000 Challenger Tour event in Toronto.

The top-seeded Abhay, a former national champion and ranked No 66. In the world, beat Canadian wild card Elliott Hunt 11-6, 11-3, 11-9 in the second round on Wednesday, following a bye in the first.

Elsewhere, India's top-ranked player Saurav Ghosal lost in the opening round of the World Tour Platinum Windy City Open in Chicago, going down to home favourite Timothy Brownell 11-13, 2-11, 11-3, 14-12.

However, Ramit Tandon carried forward the Indian challenge with a 11-7, 8-11, 11-1, 11-7 win over Hungarian Farkas Balazs in the first round.

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

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

João Fonseca became the first player born in 2006 to win an ATP tour-level match when the 17-year-old Brazilian beat seventh-seeded Arthur Fils 6-0, 6-4 at the Rio Open.

Fonseca defeated the No. 36-ranked Frenchman in front of raucous fans at the clay court tournament in Rio de Janeiro. He knelt on the court in tears to celebrate. "This is where I belong. I want to be in these huge stadiums," said Fonseca, who won the U.S. Open boys singles title last year. "Now it is all about focusing on the process." The Brazilian, currently ranked No. 655, is expected to jump about 200 positions after beating Fils. Fonseca said he is yet to decide whether he will play tennis for an American university later this year.

"For now I am very focused in the pro-tour, I want to get to the top," said Fonseca. "That is going to be a personal decision with my family, I won't make it public now,."

His opponent in the round of 16 will be Christian Garin of Chile.

Fonseca's victory brought some new energy for local fans, who saw three of the title favorites crash out Tuesday.

Carlos Alcaraz abandoned his match against Brazil's Thiago Monteiro due to an ankle injury; three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka lost to Argentina's Facundo Díaz Acosta in straight sets; and Chile's Nicolás Jarry was knocked out by Germany's Yannick Hanfmann in three sets.

Fourth-seeded Francisco Cerúndolo of Argentina advanced to the quarterfinals by beating Spain's Albert Ramos-Viñolas 6-2, 6-1. Rain later postponed to Thursday the match between second-seeded and defending champion Cameron Norrie against Chile's Tomás Barrios Vera for a place among the last eight.

Squad woes continue for Real Madrid

AP ■ MADRID

Coach Carlo Ancelotti has to deal with two more absences to an already depleted squad when Spanish league leader Real Madrid hosts Sevilla this weekend.

Ancelotti won't be able to count on suspended midfielder Eduardo Camavinga and defender Dani Carvajal on Sunday.

Carvajal was sent off last Sunday at the end of the team's 1-1 draw at Rayo Vallecano, while Camavinga received his fifth yellow card to prompt an automatic suspension.

Madrid has a six-point lead over second-placed Girona, which hosts Rayo on Monday. Madrid is eight points ahead of third-placed Barcelona and 11 points ahead of fourth-placed Atletico Madrid.

Five Madrid players remain out injured, including Jude Bellingham with a sprained ankle and defender Antonio Rüdiger because of a thigh injury. Nursing long-term knee ligament injuries are goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and central defenders David Alaba and Éder Militão.

Ancelotti has been improvising using midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni as a central defender in recent matches. Lucas Vazquez is expected to replace Carvajal on Sunday, and Luka Modric will likely play in Camavinga's place in the midfield.

Madrid chose not to add any defenders during the winter transfer window. Ancelotti said the players he had were enough to make up for the absence of the injured players.

The good news for Ancelotti is left back Ferland Mendy will be back from suspension at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Sevilla, sitting in 15th place, drew at Valencia 0-0 in the previous round after two consecutive victories helped it move away from the relegation zone.

Grateful and proud, says Anush after claiming Olympic quota

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

He moved to Germany as a 17-year-old to chase his Olympic dreams and equestrian Anush Agarwalla is filled with pride and gratitude after becoming the first ever Indian to fetch a dressage event quota place in this year's Paris Games.

The 24-year-old from Kolkata, who won an Asian Games bronze last year, was three years old when he started riding and at 17, he decided that equestrian would be his calling in life.

He secured a Paris Olympic quota in dressage based on his good performance in four FEI event -- Wroclaw, Poland (73.485 per cent), Kronenberg,

Netherlands (74.4 per cent), Frankfurt, Germany (72.9 per cent), and Mechelen, Belgium (74.2 per cent). The quota belongs to country and a final decision on who will represent India will be taken after trials.

"I feel very grateful and proud of this achievement. Being the first Indian ever to secure an individual quota in dressage at the Olympic Games is very special," Agarwalla told PTI Video.

The celebrated Fouaad Mirza had represented India at the 2020 Tokyo Games and before him, Imtiaaz Anees (Sydney 2000), Indrajit Lamba (Atlanta 1996), Jitendrajit Singh Ahluwalia, Hussain Singh, Mohammed Khan and Darya Singh (all Moscow 1980) competed at the Summer Games.

However, they all participated in eventing and Agarwalla will compete in dressage, in which the horse and rider perform a series of movements in a bordered arena. The horse is required to remain within the enclosed area while performing.

Porto beats Arsenal 1-0 with stoppage time goal

AP ■ PORTO

Wenderson Galeno came through for Porto with the final whistle about to blow. Now, Arsenal needs to rally to return to the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time since 2010.

Galeno scored deep into stoppage time to give Porto a 1-0 win in the first leg of the round of 16 on Wednesday. The English team will need a victory in the return leg in London on March 12 to make it back to the last eight of Europe's elite club competition.

Galeno broke the deadlock with a right-footed shot into the far corner four minutes into added time. His strike from outside the area came in what was supposed to be the final minute of stoppage time at the Estadio do Dragao.

"I think the credit for that goal goes to the whole team, for what they did in the 90 minutes," Galeno said. "We played well, we defended well, we left all our energy on the pitch. We will try to replicate in London what we achieved here. We will try to stay solid and give our best, as we always do." The Brazilian forward, who had hit the post in the first half, was named the man of the match.

"When it's 0-0, you look up at the clock and it's 93 minutes gone, if you aren't going to win the game then don't lose it," Arsenal midfielder Declan Rice said. "Maybe have the bit of savviness about us to stay in and get a draw in a tough stadium against a tough opponent. They caught us on the counter and he's stuck one in the top corner which is really disappointing."

Porto was mostly in control and kept Arsenal from having any attempts on target. The English side was coming off five consecutive wins in which it scored 21 goals in total.

"A lot to play for in the second leg," Rice said. "We're really positive as a group, we've had such a good start to 2024 that we're not going to let this get us down.

"We have to change our approach in the home leg and give it absolutely everything," he added. "Even though we're a goal down, it's a nice goal to aim for when we can change it around in the home leg."

Porto was eliminated in the round of 16 last season. The Portuguese team is trying to reach the quarterfinals for the first time since 2021.

"It was a good game, a Champions League game," Porto coach Sérgio Conceição said. "Our opponents had more of the ball, but Porto were always more dangerous."

Arsenal, making its first Champions League appearance since 2016-17, failed to get past the round of 16 in seven consecutive tries from 2011-17. It has lost its last seven first-leg matches in the last 16. Arsenal beat Porto at this stage when it last advanced in 2010.

Porto was without Iranian striker Mehdi Taremi because of a right thigh injury.

High profile coaching departures leave three iconic clubs scrambling for replacements

AP ■ LONDON

First it was Jurgen Klopp making the bombshell announcement he is leaving Liverpool. Then it was an exhausted Xavi Hernandez declaring his intention to quit his beloved Barcelona. This week, Bayern Munich and Thomas Tuchel made it known they'll be parting ways.

That's three of Europe's iconic soccer clubs needing a new coach at the end of the season.

And that's three high-profile soccer strategists soon to be joining the ever-growing list of acclaimed, title-winning managers out of work.

Forget the upcoming summer transfer window, when Kylian Mbappe will likely be making his move to Real Madrid and Manchester United might be initiating a squad overhaul under its new soccer leadership.

The biggest offseason intrigue might just center around the movements of a bunch of unemployed super-coaches in an unusually turbulent period at the top end of the European game.

Indeed, it's not just Klopp, Xavi and Tuchel who'll be without a job. The past month also saw Jose Mourinho fired by Roma, which hired an interim coach in Daniele De Rossi on a six-month deal and is expected to appoint a more experienced leader in the summer.

Zinedine Zidane is waiting for the right job to tempt him back into the game, nearly three years after the end of his second spell at Madrid. Antonio Conte, a league title winner in England and his native Italy, is plotting a comeback in the summer after more than a year away from the dugout. Former Bayern coach Hansi Flick has been out of work since getting fired by Germany in September. Julian Nagelsmann, Flick's replacement on the national team, only has a deal through this year's European Championship so will also be on the market.

Just imagine the chaos if Pep Guardiola announces he is done after eight years at Manchester City. Who knows, if City successfully defends the Champions League and wins an unprecedented fourth

straight English Premier League, Guardiola might think he has little more to achieve.

Meanwhile, spicing things up even further is the growing status and reputation of Xabi Alonso, widely regarded as the next big thing in soccer coaching. Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen team has been a revelation this season and appears ready to wrest the German title from Bayern, which has won the Bundesliga for 11 straight years. That's made him a wanted man, with Liverpool, Barca and Bayern all reportedly interested in his services. One thing's for sure - it's highly unlikely Leverkusen will be able to keep hold of him. It appears to be just happenstance that three of Europe's leading teams find themselves in the same predicament with their coaches, with three months still to play this season.

The pressures of the job have taken their tolls on both Klopp and Xavi, but in different ways. Klopp said he was worn out after such a long time (nine years) in the role - he compared himself to a sports car whose tank needle has gone down - while Xavi, who has been in charge at Barca for only a little over two years, cited mental fatigue and an "unpleasant" atmosphere at a club that has been weighed down by financial turmoil.

Tuchel is less than a year into his time at Bayern and his departure seems to be mostly down to bad results, which have raised the prospect of the club's first season without a trophy in 12 years.

Klopp, the oldest of the trio at age 56, is the only one leaving fully on his own terms and says he won't return to soccer management for at least a year. That would be the same length of sabbatical taken by Guardiola after leaving Barcelona in 2012.

"Sometimes you feel you need to breathe," Guardiola said. "You need to take a break, take a step back."

The City manager knows exactly what Xavi is going through. "We cannot compare the pressure in England to Spain, in my experience. It's a thousand times higher and tougher there than here," he said.

"Here, for the managers, it's a real place to be, of course. A lot of games, six press conferences a week, every three days you have a game, it's a lot. But the pressure you feel in Barcelona is not comparable to another club."

Given the financial situation at the Camp Nou and Bayern's struggles this season, Liverpool might be the most alluring destination. Klopp is bequeathing a deep and richly talented squad, with a number of youngsters starting to blossom. He could yet leave Liverpool as the Premier League champion, which would be some way to go out.

As it stands, Xavi and Tuchel are unlikely to be departing with such a flourish and they'll be eager to make amends at new clubs to repair their slightly damaged reputations - unless, of course, one of them wins the Champions League.

Where they wind up is anyone's guess, with the competition for the biggest coaching jobs in European soccer having rarely been so fierce.

INDIA EYE 17TH SERIES WIN ON TROT AT HOME

PTI ■ RANCHI

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah's absence is a concern but an assertive and adaptive India will have the edge against England's seemingly depth-less 'Bazball' approach when the two sides clash in the potentially series-deciding fourth Test beginning here on Friday.

From the dry heat of Rajkot to the much cooler confines of Ranchi, the temperature shift would be the only soothing factor for the Englishmen who have let it slip against the resilient hosts and are trailing 1-2. Eyeing a 17th series win on the trot at home, India have been near invincible since the shock defeat to Alastair Cook's England in 2012. After that, India have won a staggering 38 out of 47 Tests, and have lost just thrice (two each versus Australia and England) when challenges on home turf.

Captaining a depleted batting line-up in the absence of Virat Kohli, KL Rahul and an out-of-form Shreyas Iyer, Rohit Sharma has found answers from the young guns, whose performance has been the biggest takeaway from the series so far.

Whether it is Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has maintained an impressive average of 109 with a total of 545 runs, or Sarfaraz Khan, who ended his prolonged wait for a Test debut with a blazing 66-ball 62 in Rajkot, or Shubman Gill, gradually settling in at No.3, India's next generation of batters are showcasing how a seamless transition happens.

As for replacing Bumrah, who has been the top wicket-taker (17) of the series which was expected to be dominated by spinners, it could well be India's Achilles' heel in Ranchi. Bumrah has been rested after bowling a little more than 80 overs in the three gone-by Tests.

His reverse-swing mastery on day two of the Vizag Test during a six-wicket burst, was the biggest contributing factor in the 106-run win that levelled the series 1-1.

On a docile Rajkot wicket too, Bumrah made in-roads giving India crucial breakthroughs.

Keeping in mind the seaming conditions in Dharamsala for the fifth Test and the hectic IPL season ahead, Bumrah has been given a break, making Mohammed Siraj the sole experienced pacer in the line-up. It will be a toss-up between Bengal duo of Mukesh Kumar and an uncapped Akash Deep for the second pacer's slot in Ranchi.

Fresh from his career-best 10-wicket haul in Ranji Trophy, Mukesh is not only more experienced but also partnered Bumrah in the Vizag Test. He, however, bowled just 12 overs taking one wicket across both innings. It remains to be seen whether the Indian think-tank will take the gamble of giving another debut cap or persist with Mukesh, who has been average at best.

History suggests that the JSCA Stadium pitch will suit a plan featuring two seamers and three spinners. But England's assessment of the conditions has been that four spinners and one seamer attack would be ideal. "It's an interesting pitch...There are a few cracks, very platey and looked a bit crusty, the top layer, One half is good, and the other has a lot of platey cracks," England vice-captain Ollie Pope had said after the team checked in here on Thursday.

That may bring Shoaib Bashir into the picture to go alongside Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and part-timer Joe Root. Root has more overs (107) under his belt than runs (77) in this series.

India, on the other hand, have preferred the conventional two-pacer-three-spinner combination and it's unlikely that Axar Patel would be recalled. The team is expected to stick to Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja. Historically, the Ranchi pitch has proven deceptive for the visiting teams.

In the last Test here in 2019, South Africa were blown away by the duo of Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav, who shared 10 wickets between them, as against the eight by the spin trio of Ashwin, Jadeja and Shahbaz Nadeem.

"It has never been a rank-turner. The pitch would be beautiful for batting for first two days and would assist spin from day three. History should repeat itself," the local groundsman told PTI.

For the 'Bazball' inspired England, the win in Hyderabad has become a distant memory and a repeat of 2021 looks likely when India bounced back to win the four-Test series 3-1. The record 434-run thrashing in Rajkot has triggered criticism of England's so-called aggressive 'Bazball' approach. It seems to have found a match in India after tasting success against New Zealand, South Africa and Pakistan and Australia to an extent.

The go-for-strokes style might have helped the likes of Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett, who swung his bat around for a stunning 153 in Rajkot, but it has also doomed the likes of Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow.

Root was seen as their main batter to cope with the spin challenge but the way he reverse scooped to Bumrah at Rajkot summed up the disarray he is in.

The desperation to find a way out can be judged from skipper Ben Stokes expediting his rehab from a knee injury by opting to bowl at the nets ahead of the fourth Test.

SQUADS:

INDIA: Rohit Sharma (C), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Devdutt Padikkal, R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep.

ENGLAND: Ben Stokes (C), Rehan Ahmed, James Anderson, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Shoaib Bashir, Harry Brook, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ben Foakes, Tom Hartley, Jack Leach, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Joe Root, Mark Wood.

ENGLAND AIM FOR REDEMPTION IN 4TH TEST

Rathour praises Indian young guns

PTI ■ RANCHI

The astonishing, inspiring and quick success of youngsters like Yashaswi Jaiswal and Sarfaraz Khan at the highest level is a good advertisement for the country's robust domestic circuit which has made them "cricket smart" who can handle Test match pressure, reckons India's batting coach Vikram Rathour. Jaiswal is just six-Test old but the 22-year-old Mumbaikar already has two double hundreds under his belt. His expressive and fearless batting against a strong England side has earned him praise from the pundits of the game and fans alike.

His Ranji teammate Sarfaraz too has made a confident start to his Test career, scoring pacy half-centuries in both his innings in Rajkot on debut.

Sarfaraz had scored a monumental 439-run knock as a 12-year-old in a 2009 Harris Shield match, hinting at a bright future.

"It is good for the team but it's better for them. Once you get to this level and start playing Test cricket, everything said and done, there are nerves, there is some pressure, but if you get a good start, nothing better than that," Rathour said on the eve of the fourth Test against England.

"And the young players who have come in the team have got a good start and it feels good. They have cricket intelligence in them, which is again a great sign. It's a great message, coming from Indian domestic cricket, that the new players are cricket smart."

Their performances have come at a time when Virat Kohli is not part of the gruelling five-match home series, KL Rahul could play only one game and Shreyas Iyer has been dropped for lack of form. "It is tough to miss key players, it's better for the team if everyone is available but a series like this is a good opportunity for the young players, who have played on these wickets to establish themselves.

"There is always belief that our domestic cricket is so strong, you are pretty assured that whoever comes has come through after doing good. We don't know what is going to happen when KL Rahul, Virat Kohli come back in. That is not a concern at the moment."

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

PTI ■ RANCHI

Bowling full tilt at nets raised hopes of Ben Stokes rolling his arms over in the fourth Test against India but the England captain on Thursday preferred to keep the suspense over his availability as a bowler here.

Due to issues with his knee, Stokes has been playing only as a batter since the second Ashes Test last June.

However, he was seen bowling extensively at the nets on the eve of the fourth Test.

Asked about the possibility of him bowling in the match, Stokes said, "Nah, I think it's maybe, maybe not."

Stokes said going in with two pacers is the best option for England, forcing them to include the tall Ollie Robinson in the playing XI, even though the Ranchi track is likely to assist the spinners.

"Bringing Robbo (Robinson) in gives us good options, especially looking at this wicket," Stokes said at the pre-match media interaction.

"I feel like the spin will be assisted, but I also feel having two seamers gives us a good chance purely because of Ollie Robinson's release height and his relentlessness with his areas."

The 30-year-old Robinson, who last played in the Ashes, has come at the expense of Mark Wood, while Shoaib Bashir replaced leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed. "You look at the player Mark is, especially with the ball, you want someone like that operating at 100 per cent.

"His number one skill is how fast he bowls and the effort he put in last week was monumental. You want to be able to keep players like that on the field operating at that level. "We do like to look at the pitch two days out and one day out, because that's how we like to pick our XIs. You want to give yourself some idea or some indication about what XI you think is going to give you the best chance.

"Looking at that, I think there is going to be assistance for spin, but I think also it looks like someone like Bash (Bashir), who releases the ball from such a high release point, the extra bounce that he gets, we feel, is going to bring us more into the game."

'DON'T PREJUDGE THE PITCH TOO MUCH': Stokes added spice to the talks on Ranchi pitch, saying he has not seen anything remotely like the 22-yard strip here in the past. But he also stated that it's not fair to have "preconceived ideas" about the pitch. "We get asked about the pitch and we give our opinion, but that doesn't mean we are going in with too many preconceived ideas. The pitch could be as flat as a pancake, who knows. "If it is, we will adapt to that. If it does more than we think it will, we will adapt to that as well. We won't let those conversations seep into what we do." England have retained old warhorse James Anderson who is seven shy of reaching the landmark 700 wickets and become the first pacer to achieve the feat.

The 41-year-old has bowled 73 overs in two matches in the series and taken six wickets.

"If you're a young fast bowler, Jimmy Anderson is the one person who you want as your role model. Not only the amount of wickets he's got but the fact that he can keep going at his age.

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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The second edition of the Women's Premier League, beginning here on Friday with a high-profile match between defending champions Mumbai Indians and runners-up Delhi Capitals, will be optimistic about meeting its existential purpose of giving a wider platform to promising home-grown talents.

The foreign stars glittered brightly in the inaugural edition held in Mumbai, and the Indians will be hoping to hog some of the limelight this year as the tournament takes a multi-city format shape with New Delhi being the other host city.

While Capitals' skipper Meg Lanning, who has now retired from international cricket, took the Orange Cap last year for the highest run-getter, the Purple Cap went to Hayley Matthews of Mumbai for taking 16 wickets.

Amid this surge of overseas players, the Indian cricketers generally struggled for consistency and impact in the previous year, but now some of the young domestic stars will eye this WPL with genuine hope.

Let's take Shreyanka Patil of Royal Challengers Bangalore as a case in point. During WPL 2023, she was a wide-eyed young cricketer who was awestruck to rub shoulders with some of the finest names in women's cricket.

She played seven matches, but the spotlight was understandably on players such as Smriti Mandhana or Ellyse Perry or Sophie Devine.

But in the last 10 months or so, Patil has built a place of her own. She earned her maiden India cap in both Test and ODIs in December last year, besides making her mark in the Caribbean Premier League for the Guyana Amazon Warriors.

In this interim, the 21-year-old has also added more arrows to her quiver in the form of power-hitting at the death overs.

Shami ruled out of IPL, to undergo ankle surgery

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior pacer Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of next month's Indian Premier League owing to a left ankle injury, for which he will undergo a surgery in the UK, a BCCI source told PTI on Thursday.

The 33-year-old, who is not part of the ongoing Test series against England, last played for India in the ODI World Cup final against Australia in November.

"Shami was in London in last week of January to take special ankle injections and he was told that after three weeks, he can start light running and take it from thereon.

"But the injection hasn't worked and now the only option left is surgery. He will shortly leave for UK for surgery. IPL seems out of question," a senior BCCI source said on the condition of anonymity.

Shami, who was one of the architects of India's stupendous World Cup campaign with 24 wickets, played through pain as he had problems with his landing but didn't let it affect his performance.

Shami, who was recently conferred with the Arjuna Award, has 229 Test, 195 ODI and 24 T20 wickets in his decade-long career.

Kaun hai tumhara bowler? Tendulkar plays gully cricket in Kashmir

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

He aptly called it a "match made in heaven" as Sachin Tendulkar pleasantly surprised a bunch of youngsters playing gully cricket in Uri, turning his bat upside down at one point just to give the boys a shot at dismissing him.

On his maiden trip to Jammu and Kashmir, Tendulkar got down from his SUV when he saw some young boys playing cricket on the road with a cardboard carton and an empty oil can as their stumps. "Cricket and Kashmir: Match made in heaven," posted Tendulkar on X along with a short video in which he can be seen facing nine balls, watched in awe by the locals.

His wife Anjali can also be seen smiling in the clip which starts with Tendulkar asking the boys, "Hum Khelein? (Shall we play?)." "Kaun hai tumhara bowler (Who is your bowler)?" he probed further as he gripped a bat.

Dressed in a brown jacket Tendulkar, who retired from cricket in 2013, played nine deliveries, hitting straight drives and also a scoop shot.

There was also an attempted paddle sweep before he turned the bat upside down and jokingly stated, "Ye out karna padega (you will have to dismiss me)."

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Defending champions Chennai Super Kings will take on Royal Challengers Bangalore in the 2024 IPL season-opener in Chennai on March 22, the BCCI announced Thursday while unveiling the schedule for the first 17 days of the popular T20 league. The roster for the remaining matches will be announced once the dates for the upcoming general elections are announced early next month.

During the period from March 22 to April 7, a total of 21 matches will be played across 10 cities, with each team playing a minimum of three matches and a maximum of five.

As in the past, the BCCI will work closely with government and security agencies, following all necessary protocols and advisories related to the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections in India, the apex cricket body said in a statement.

"Once the dates for the 18th Lok Sabha elections are announced, the Board will review and address any issues pertaining to the schedule of the first two weeks.

"Subsequently, the BCCI will work in tandem with local authorities to finalise the schedule for the remainder of the season, taking into account the polling dates," the BCCI said. The general elections are expected to be held in April-May.

Only in 2009, the IPL, in its entirety, was held overseas (South Africa) while the 2014 edition was partially held in the UAE due to the general elections.

However, in 2019, the tournament was held in India despite the elections.

The first weekend will feature two double headers, beginning with the Punjab Kings hosting the Delhi Capitals on March 23, followed by the Kolkata Knight Riders hosting the Sunrisers Hyderabad in the day's second game.

On March 24, the action will shift to Jaipur, where the home team Rajasthan Royals will face the Lucknow Super Giants. Sunday evening will witness the home team Gujarat Titans, the 2022 champions and finalists of the last season going head-to-head with five-time winners Mumbai Indians.

Having chosen to play their first two home matches in Visakhapatnam, the Delhi Capitals will host the Chennai Super Kings on March 31 in the port city and will then face the Kolkata Knight Riders at the same venue on April 3.

As per the format, 10 teams are divided into two groups of five.

In the group stage, each team plays 14 games facing the other four sides in their group two times each (home and away basis, four teams in the other group once, and the remaining team two times.

Hardik Pandya will be leading Mumbai Indians for the first time, having replaced Team India's all-format skipper Rohit Sharma.

New Zealand's young sensation Rachin Ravindra will be participating in his maiden IPL following his grand success in the ODI World Cup last year.

CSK talisman Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who has led his team to five IPL titles, has not played any competitive cricket since their triumphant campaign last year.

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