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RAHUL STILL
FEELING SORE WHILE
BATTING IN NETS
12 SPORTS

Congress Faces Himachal Freeze

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A worried Congress hurried on Wednesday to save its Government in Himachal Pradesh amid dramatic developments, including a resignation announcement by high-profile Minister Vikramaditya Singh and the suspension of 15 BJP MLAs by the Speaker. The party engaged in a damage control exercise to prevent the possible loss of a State ruled by the party just weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge despatched three observers — Bhupesh Baghel, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, and D K Shivakumar — to Shimla, indicating that the party could take some “tough steps”. The crisis was triggered by Tuesday’s cross-voting by six Congress MLAs in the Rajya Sabha election for the lone seat from Himachal Pradesh. The party has now sought the disqualification of these MLAs from the Assembly, and the matter was heard by Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania who reserved his order.

The suspended BJP MLAs, including the Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Thakur, initially refused to leave the House, apparently to stall the Assembly from passing Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh



Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla during a meeting with Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly Jai Ram Thakur and BJP MLAs, at Raj Bhavan, in Shimla, on Wednesday

PTI

Sukhu’s Budget through voice vote. The BJP demanded voting on the Budget, believing it would reveal that the Congress had lost its majority in the State Assembly.

The House later passed the Finance Bill by voice vote with no BJP member present. The Speaker then adjourned the Session sine die. Chief Minister Sukhu dismissed speculation that he was resigning, stating, “Neither the high command, nor anyone else has asked me for resignation,” Sukhu said.

Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi was defeated by BJP’s Harsh Mahajan on

Tuesday through a draw of lots, after the two candidates bagged 34 votes each.

The result meant that the Congress, which had come into power in the State just 14 months ago, winning 40 seats in the Assembly, had failed to reach the halfway mark.

The BJP won 25 seats in the House of 68 in 2022. There are three Independent MLAs, who were believed to be with the ruling Congress until the cross-voting crisis erupted.

Early morning, Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur led a delegation to Raj Bhavan to meet Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla to ensure that the

Finance Bill was passed only through a division.

Late in the evening, the Congress observers began their interaction with party MLAs. Congress general secretary Jai Ram Ramesh said Kharge had asked the observers and AICC in-charge for the State Rajeev Shukla to speak to all MLAs, including those who are disgruntled, and submit a comprehensive report to him soon.

“The Congress will not hesitate to take tough steps as the party is our priority and will not let the people’s mandate be betrayed in

Himachal Pradesh,” Ramesh said at the AICC Press conference in the national Capital.

Earlier in the morning, Himachal Pradesh Public Works Minister Vikramaditya Singh announced he was quitting the council of ministers and would submit his resignation to the chief minister and the Governor. It was not immediately clear whether he had done so.

Singh, whose mother is Himachal Congress president Pratibha Singh, said, “There have been attempts to humiliate and undermine me from some quarters, and despite reservations, I supported the Government.” He is the son of Virbhadra Singh, a former Chief Minister who died in 2021.

The family has in the past hinted that Virbhadra Singh’s legacy has not been honored by the party. Pratibha Singh has also expressed discontent with the manner in which Sukhu has run the State. Vikramaditya Singh said the 2022 Congress campaign was run in his father’s name. “There was no poster, or hoarding or banner which did not carry his picture,” he said. But after the victory, when the matter of putting up his statue came up, the Government failed to decide the location. “It is not a political but an emotional thing for a son,” he said.

Continued on Page 8

BJP in Election Mode, Selects 100 Candidates

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday brainstormed over the party’s probable candidates in several States for the Lok Sabha elections, a day before its Central Election Committee is expected to meet to finalise the names for the first list of about 100 party nominees. The list will have names of candidates from seats in States like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Sources said Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president JP Nadda held separate meetings with party leaders from several States, including Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand among others. Similar meetings with leaders from Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana have been held so far.

While the lists of names in 2019 were released only after the Election Commission had announced the election schedule, it is going to be different this time as the BJP looks to follow the template seen during the latest round of Assembly polls in five States when it named its candidates, especially in the seats the party had lost five years earlier, before the announcement of dates.

The first list, party sources



said, is expected to be 100 candidates which include the names of heavyweights like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shah, Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Smriti Irani, Nirmala Sitharamana, S Jaishanker and Bollywood super star Akshay Kumar about whom grapevine in the party has it that he may be fielded from the prestigious New Delhi Parliamentary constituency.

Other candidates from the spheres of sports and education sector are also doing the rounds and the party is completely tight lipped to reveal names being discussed as of now. Party sources also said to keep the NDA constituents in good humour

and a few minority candidates could also be fielded. Modi is the MP from Varanasi, a constituency he has won twice and is likely to contest for third consecutive time. He was elected with a huge margin of 3.37 lakh votes in 2014 and had increased it to 4.8 lakh in 2019.

Amit Shah had contested the 2019 election from Gandhinagar, a seat that had been held by BJP veteran LK Advani until then.

The first list for the 2019 elections had also included Modi and Shah, who was then the party’s national president and had made his Lok Sabha poll debut from Gandhinagar.

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NEWS BREAK

CBI summons Akhilesh

NEW DELHI: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned Samajwadi Party president and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav as a “witness” to record his statement on Thursday in illegal mining cases registered five years ago. The cases pertain to the issuance of mining leases in alleged violation of e-tendering process.

Modi slams DMK, Congress for dynastic politics

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■
CHENNAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday literally tore into allegations made by the DMK-led Tamil Nadu Government that the Central Government was not offering any welfare measures to the people in the State and was putting spokes on the Dravidian land’s progress. The DMK Government is blocking all welfare projects being introduced by the Central Government for Tamil Nadu. What the DMK and its alliance partners

including the Congress were doing is creating rift among the people, said the Prime Minister while addressing a mammoth rally organised by the BJP at Thoothukudi.

“In the past we saw a Chief Minister struggling hard to coronate his son as Chief Minister. Now we are seeing the son working to anoint his son as the Chief Minister of the State,” said Modi without naming the late patriarch M Karunanidhi, his son and present Chief Minister M K Stalin and the latter’s son Udhayanidhi. “The DMK and the Congress have only one



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated during a public meeting in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday

PTI

agenda and that is to perpetrate dynastic politics,” said the Prime Minister.

The DMK had committed a faux pas by putting pictures of Chinese rockets in the billboards erected across the venue to make the people know that the space center coming up at Kulasekharapattinam was a project initiated by the State.

“They do not know that India has mastered the design and development of high

power launch vehicles which would be launched from the new space station,” lambasted the Prime Minister.

Modi listed various development and infrastructure projects implemented by the Center for the welfare of Tamil Nadu. “Five years ago, only 21 lakh people had drinking water connection at their homes in Tamil Nadu. However, this count has increased to one crore now.

Continued on Page 8

Largest ever offshore drug seized Unwavering support for Rahul Gandhi in Wayanad



Indian Navy personnel show 3300 kgs contraband (3089 kg charas, 158 kg Methamphetamine, 25 kg Morphine) seized from a vessel in a joint operation with Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian security agencies have seized the largest-ever offshore consignment of drugs, weighing 3,300 kilos, and arrested five foreigners

from a dhow in the Arabian Sea off the Gujarat coast.

The joint operation, codenamed ‘Sagarmanthan-1’, was carried out by the Navy, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), and the Gujarat Police.

The boat reportedly sailed from an Iranian port.

The value of the contraband was estimated to be between ₹1,300 crore and ₹2,000 crore in the international market.

Union Home Minister

Amit Shah hailed the operation as a “historic success” and a testament to his Government’s “unwavering commitment to making our nation drug-free.” “Pursuing PM Modi’s vision of a drug-free Bharat, our agencies today achieved the grand success of making the biggest offshore seizure of drugs in the nation.

In a joint operation carried out by the NCB, the Navy, and the Gujarat Police, a gigantic consignment of 3,132 kg of drugs was seized. This historic success is a testament to our Government’s unwavering commitment to making our nation drug-free.

“On this occasion, I congratulate the NCB, the Navy, and the Gujarat Police,” he said.

Continued on Page 8

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A vast majority in Wayanad, Kerala, wants Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to contest from the Lok Sabha constituency in the upcoming poll.

In 2019, Rahul won from the constituency with an impressive margin of 4.32 lakh votes, polling 64.94 per cent of the total votes cast in the election. All his challengers were left humbled, losing their security deposits in a one-sided contest.

Wayanad, situated atop the



Western Ghats, is a traditional Congress bastion, leaving no doubt about Rahul’s prospects in the upcoming election. Despite his commitments as the party’s top national leader, he has remained active in the

constituency. Interestingly, none of the voters with whom The Pioneer interacted could recall the names of the two candidates who had contested against Rahul in the 2019 polls.

Even hardcore CPI (M) supporters want Rahul to run from Wayanad in this election. “The constituency gained international attention because of Rahul’s decision to contest from here. Although the constituency is yet to receive any major projects, it has faced discrimination under the CPI (M)-led Government in Kerala. Moreover, whenever there was an emergency, Rahul promptly attended to the constituency,” said Rajendran, a CPI (M) supporter.

Continued on Page 8

India bears brunt of climate change wrath

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2023 brought forth a concerning reality for India, as every State and Union Territory experienced extreme weather events at least once, disrupting life, livelihoods, and the economy as resources were diverted to tackle flooding or extreme heat, volatile conditions driven by climate change. These occurrences were not sporadic; rather, they persisted for approximately 318 out of 365 days, revealing

a disturbingly recurrent pattern of climatic disruptions.

In what should be considered a climate change warning to India, the toll on human life was grave, with 3,287 recorded deaths attributed to these extreme weather events. Additionally, the devastation extended to the animal kingdom, with a staggering 1.24 lakh animal deaths reported. The agricultural sector, vital for the nation’s food security, bore a heavy brunt, with 2.21

million hectares of crop area suffering damage, leading to significant economic losses.

This widespread impact, detailed in the independent think tank Centre for Science and Environment’s “State of Environment 2024” report, underscores the severity of the challenges posed by climate change. The report said the climate-vulnerable country experienced extreme weather on 86 percent of days from January to September. State-wise, Himachal Pradesh emerged as the most heavily



File Photo

affected zone, enduring extreme weather conditions for 149 days, closely followed by Madhya Pradesh with 141 days.

Kerala and Uttar Pradesh also faced prolonged periods of extreme weather, each recording 119 days of such events.

The widespread nature of these occurrences is further underscored by the fact that eight States experienced over 100 days of extreme weather. The temperature increase was driven by human-caused

climate change and boosted by the natural El Niño weather phenomenon.

The types of extreme weather varied, with heavy rains, floods, and landslides occurring on 208 days, while lightning and storms were prevalent for 202 days. Heatwaves persisted for 49 days, cold waves for 29 days, and cloudbursts were recorded on nine days, contributing to localised instances of intense precipitation.

Continued on Page 8

Very excited and grateful for this opportunity: Wing Cdr Shukla

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■
LUCKNOW

Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla, who is amongst the four astronauts selected for the prestigious manned Gaganyaan mission, says that he looks up to Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma, the first Indian to travel in space in 1984.

The young fighter pilot, who has done Lucknow proud, interacted with "The Pioneer" on how excited he feels about the mission.

Talking about his selection for the prestigious mission, Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla said that the selection was made some time back and the four who were selected had been training for quite some time now.

"As a personal experience, if you ask me, it took some time to sink in but I was very excit-

ed and grateful for this opportunity which came my way. The initial feeling was nothing much because we were very busy at that time but gradually the feeling sank in. Overall, if I have to describe the feeling then excitement would be the right word for it," he said.

When asked what made him apply for the mission, he said, "The opportunity opened up in 2019 when the prospect of becoming an astronaut was available. It was there on the horizon. There was no thought from my side and as soon as I heard that there was an opportunity I just applied for it, probably because it was something unknown. It's kind of a dream of every kid that someday he would wear a suit and fly through space. This was the kind of feeling I had when I

heard the news. There was no deliberate thought about why I should apply and why I was just excited about the opportunity being available in our country and that is why I applied," he said.

About the general fitness regime which he followed that might have helped in his selection, he said, "It is important to be fit to be selected as an astronaut. It has to be a disciplined life. You have to regularly keep doing exercises and keep the aerobic and anaerobic systems of your body fit as it is the requirement of the job. It is a very regular regime and we have to feel fit for performing the role we have been chosen for," he said.

When asked whether they followed yoga for mental fit-



ness, he said that all the aspects of fitness were covered and they practiced physical fitness as well as yoga. "It is a regular feature of our daily routine," he added.

Asked to comment on whether there was any apprehension regarding the mission, he said, "No, I have no

apprehension. It is a complex undertaking and very few countries in the world have done so far. If there is anything which is complex and unknown there are attached risks but I would say that we have to be very rational about them and we have to accept those risks and mitigate them as much as possible. If we do that correctly, beyond that there is no cause of apprehension," he said.

Talking about his experiences in Lucknow as a young boy, he said that he had fond memories of the city. "I have graduated from the CMS, Aliganj, Lucknow and throughout I studied in the same school. There was no specific event that triggered my joining the NDA (National Defence Academy) and one

thing led to another. The opportunities presented themselves and I was ready to take them and this took me up the ladder step by step," he said.

His hobbies include reading non-fiction, weight training and recently he has picked up astro photography after being selected because he is intrigued by it. He admits that his family is very happy with his selection.

"The people who are close to you are happy when you undertake the mission. They also remain a little worried. They had some apprehensions initially but when they understood how this was going they were excited about it," he added. He said the training would continue till the mission was accomplished.

Wing Commander Shukla

can be described as a calm person who does not get perturbed by what's going around him. "I think that is also a prerequisite for the mission because you have to be cool headed and calm to tackle the situation as they present themselves. Anywhere in the world the selection of an astronaut comprises physical, medical and psychological evaluations. All these aspects are checked," he said.

Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla was born in Lucknow, on October 10, 1985. He is an alumnus of NDA and was commissioned on June 17, 2006 in the fighter stream of the Indian Air Force. He is a fighter combat leader and a test pilot with approximately 2,000 hours of flying experience. He has flown

a variety of aircraft including Su-30 MKI, MiG-21, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Dornier, An-32 etc.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
HARBOUR WORKS DIVISION No.1
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE
e-TCN No. CE/HNDV/ACCTS-22/1162, dtd. 20.02.2024
Name of the work: Cleaning of debris from Roads, berms, backup space & disposal of dredged materials from Port area i.e. from Gate No.4 area to MPB junction to NQ-I via CO, SQ and EQ area, connecting Road from T-Junction to New IGB in RDHP area and 3-B road (4 lane) leading from IDP to Wagon Tipler (one year). Put to tender value: Rs.1,27,11,447.66 plus GST as applicable. Last date & time of submission of tender through online bidding is 18.03.2024 up to 17:15 Hrs. For details, please log on to the Website: <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.
Sd/- Executive Engineer, Harbour Works Division No.1, Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/91/2023-2024 dtd.27.02.2024

COURT NOTICE
CITATION (BY ADVERTISEMENT)
(Chapter XXX, Rule-21)
IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT ALLAHABAD ORIGINAL JURISDICTION TESTAMENTARY AND INTESTATE JURISDICTION
TESTAMENTARY CASE NO. 06 OF 2023 IN THE MATTER OF THE GOODS OF
Late Shiv Pati wife of Late Basant Lal R/o Meerapur Taluka Ahamadpur Asrauli, Fatehpur Ghat, Tehsil Sadar, Manauri, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh -211008
Deceased
Raja Ram Singh Petitioner
WHEREAS an application has been made by Raja Ram Singh son of Late Basant Lal R/o Meerapur Taluka Ahamadpur Asrauli, Fatehpur Ghat, Tehsil Sadar, Manauri, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh-211008, for the probate of the will (or Letters of Administration to the estate) of Late Shiv Pati deceased, who died at Meerapur, Post-Manauri, Allahabad on 24.07.2022, AND WHEREAS, the 22nd day of April, 2024 has been fixed for hearing of the said application.
THIS CITATION is issued calling upon all persons claiming to have any interest to come and see the proceedings if they think fit before the grant of probate (or Letters of Administration).
Given under my hand and the seal of the Court this 27th day of February 2024.
Deputy Registrar, High Court, Allahabad

the pioneer
CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I, ARCHANA Yadav w/o Late Raghvendra Kumar Yadav, EX-CHEAC, Service no. 192192-AR/o B-696, Panki, Kanpur Nagar have changed my daughter's name from ANKU YADAV (existing name of daughter as per POR/Service documents) to ANUSHRI (Proposed/Adopted new name) for future reference.

NOTICE

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM RASHMI DUBEY TO RASHMI PANDEY. IN FUTURE I SHALL BE KNOWN AS RASHMI PANDEY. RASHMI PANDEY D/o S. P. PANDEY, 119/9-A, GANDHI GRAM, KANPUR-208007

NOTICE

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM YASMEEN RIZVI TO YASMEEN ZAIDI. IN FUTURE I SHALL BE KNOWN AS YASMEEN ZAIDI. YASMEEN ZAIDI W/o ZAFAR ABBAS RIZVI, 17/86-2 NAWAB COMPOUND, THE MALL, KANPUR.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from GULSAD to GULSAD ALI. In future I Shall be known as GULSAD ALI. GULSAD ALI S/o Manjur Ali, Lotath Meja Road, Meja Khas, Prayagraj

NOTICE

मैंने अपने पुत्र का नाम Samradh Verma से बदलकर Samridh Verma रख लिया है। भविष्य में उसे Samridh Verma के नाम से जाना जाए। Samridh Verma S/o Satyendra Verma, Add-83A/70 Juhi Khurd Hamirpur Road Kanpur-208014

NOTICE

KDA Allotment Letter No. D/1063/JS-2 dated 03/09/1997 in favour of Mrs. Geeta Malviya & Possession Letter is actually lost, Geeta Malviya W/o Madan Gopal Malviya, R/o- 57 Q-Block, Rajeev Puram, Kakadeo, Kanpur.

NOTICE

In the service record of my son No.4585872y NK-ANAND KUMAR Unit-21 MAHAR C/O 56APO my name is wrongly written as NEELAM DEVI while my correct name is NEELAM TIWARI. Hence, from now my name will be known and written as NEELAM TIWARI only. Neelam Tiwari W/O Shri Bacchan Lal R/O VIII. Pirthipur, Pargana-Manwa, Tehseel-Sidhauli, District-Sitapur

NOTICE

Notice
I, Mohd Faisal Khan, would like to inform the general public that I have lost my original sale deed of chain deed bearing serial no. 2065 dated 11-08-1987, book no. 1, Jild no. 675, pages 401 to 402 and Gata no. for the property is 1339 अति Add. Village, Kursi Teh Fatehpur Distt Barabanki. If anyone finds it. Kindly contact me at 9935116677 within 15 days from the date of issue of this ad.

High drama in LNN House

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uproarious scenes and high drama were witnessed in the Lucknow Nagar Nigam House which was convened on Wednesday to discuss the solid waste management issue of the city.

The House witnessed a walkout by Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh following allegations levelled against him by a corporator.

The corporators were expressing their views on the newly-selected Hyderabad-based company for solid waste management, including door-to-door collection of garbage, when the municipal commissioner walked out of the House after Ram Naresh Rawat, a corporator from the Bharatiya Janata Party party alleged that the nagar nigam had accepted an "offer" to select the company.

Calling it a personal comment on him, Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh said that he would not tolerate the allegation and walked out of the House.

Many corporators tried to stop Singh and Mayor Sushma Kharakwal asked the corporator Ram Naresh Rawat to leave the House for making such a remark. When Ram Naresh Rawat did not leave the House after the mayor repeatedly gave the directions, he was physically forced to leave the House and the mayor thereafter adjourned the House for 20 minutes.

Several corporators pointed out that the Hyderabad-based company which had been selected was tainted.

Corporator Mamata Chaudhary from the Congress, while pointing out at the credentials of the company, said that it had been fined and blacklisted and was embroiled in several corruption charges. "Is it all there in black and white then what is the meaning of bringing it to Lucknow for garbage collection and solid waste management?" she asked.

The corporators raised their concern about how the company was likely to operate in the city of Lucknow. "The company is saying they will cover 500-600 houses at one time for door-to-door garbage collection which is not possible and away from ground reality. The maximum that they can cover is 200-250 houses," said one corporator.

Another corporator said that they were not going to be misled by the tall claims of the company. "We get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and start getting complaints from the general public that the garbage has not been picked up from several points. We face so many problems," he added.

Yet another corporator questioned how the company was going to operate in the narrow lanes and roads of the older part of the city.

"We have no resources to go and clean the garbage in the narrow lanes. These always

remain dirty despite the fact that the old part of Lucknow forms the major tourist spot," he said.

Yet another corporator said that only the main roads were counted as far as cleaning was concerned and no importance was given to the lanes. He also raised the same concern regarding the rural areas which come within the municipal limit.

"There are 88 villages which have been added within the municipal limits but the garbage is not collected there. The Eco Green could not collect the garbage, saying that there was no diesel for the vehicles collecting the garbage. Whom will we turn to in this new company if the garbage is not picked from our area," he said. The corporators also raised the issue of finances, saying that the company which had been selected was demanding a payment within 21 days failing which an interest of nine per cent would be levied.

"How is the corporation going to manage such a high payment of money?" the corporators questioned.

Answering the queries of the corporators, chief executive officer of the Hyderabad-based company, Masood Malik, refuted the allegations made by the corporators. He said that the company was not blacklisted.

"A notice was given for blacklisting the company but we have fought a case against it and won the case," he said,

adding that he was ready to share the documents for the same.

Also clarifying the issue that their company was banned, the CEO said that only a company which was a shareholder had been banned and they had no connections with it.

Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh gave details of how the company would work.

Regarding the question raised by the corporators that one vehicle would cover 500 houses, Singh said that this was an initial plan. "It is up to them to cover 200 or 300 houses and use any number of vehicles. In narrow lanes, hand carts will be operated," he said.

On the issue of payment of the company, he said that interest on non-payment for work was levied by all big companies. He also informed the House that on Eco Green they used to spend Rs 10-15 crore per month but on this company they would be spending Rs 13 crore. He said that the company would be assessed for its door-to-door collection of garbage in three months after which it would be given the task of cleaning roads which were 60 feet wide.

The municipal commissioner also informed the House that the nagar nigam would be getting Rs 90 crore from the Rs 150 crore allocated fund from the 15th Finance Commission and it would be spent where it was required.

3,077 Anganwadi workers get letters

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday that the number of Anganwadi centres in the state had doubled over the past seven years.

Handing over appointment letters to 3,077 newly selected Anganwadi workers in a programme organised as a part of Mission Rozgar at Lok Bhavan, the chief minister emphasised the pivotal role of Anganwadi workers in reducing maternal and child mortality rates over the past seven years.

Highlighting data from the National Family Health Survey, Chief Minister Yogi noted a considerable decline in maternal and infant mortality rates. "The maternal mortality rate in the state was 285 per lakh in 2014, and it has come down to 167 per lakh whereas the infant mortality rate, which was 48 per thousand in 2014, has reduced to 38 per thousand," he

added.

Additionally, he laid the foundation stones of 1,459 new Anganwadi centre buildings across 31 districts, being built at a cost of Rs 173 crore.

The chief minister said, "Today, the double-engine government is providing 'hot-cooked meals' to children through women's self-help groups and Anganwadi workers."

Praising the dedication of Anganwadi workers, ANMs and ASHA workers during the global pandemic, the chief minister said, "These field workers were tasked with screening the COVID-infected people as well as providing them medicines. This proactive approach significantly contributed to the state's success in containing the spread of the virus."

"Today, there are no deaths due to encephalitis in the state, a testament to the diligent efforts of our field workers.

Their exemplary work has become a benchmark for the nation," he added.

He said that Anganwadi workers were like 'Maa Yashoda'.

"Just as Maa Yashoda cared for Lord Shri Krishna, Anganwadi workers are tirelessly caring for thousands of children across every Anganwadi centre in the state," he said. Reflecting on the transformative journey of Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that despite the same departments and people, the state had undergone remarkable changes over the past seven years, with significant advancements witnessed across various fields, evident to all.

"The double engine government is developing quality recipe centres at every block level through Anganwadi centres and women self-help groups within the state. In the first phase, 204 such centres

will be developed. This will provide employment to thousands of people. Moreover, this initiative will ensure the availability of nutritious and high-quality food in Uttar Pradesh, marking a significant stride towards improving nutritional standards in the state," the chief minister pointed out.

He underscored the crucial role of Anganwadi workers in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India), emphasising that their efforts were vital for maintaining healthy childhoods.

"A healthy childhood paves the way for healthy youth, enabling society to fully harness its talent and potential," he added. Women Welfare and Child Development Minister Baby Rani Maurya, Minister of State for Women Welfare and Child Development Pratibha Shukla, along with other dignitaries and Anganwadi workers attended the programme.



More Akbarnagar structures razed

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

More than two dozen temporary as well as permanent houses and 10 shops were razed to ground on the third day of the demolition drive at Akbarnagar here on Wednesday.

The Allahabad High Court has given permission to the Lucknow Development Authority to pull down the structures of those people in Akbarnagar who have not approached the court seeking relief against the drive.

Meanwhile, the High Court on Wednesday rejected the petitions of two dozen traders of Akbarnagar that were clubbed together. They had approached the High Court to seek a stay against the demolition drive.

LDA Vice Chairman Indramani Tripathi, who reached Akbarnagar at 10:30 am and addressed the dwellers for about 15 minutes. He said the development authority had been given a free hand to demolish the unauthorised houses/shops of those who had not sought relief from the High Court. He assured the dwellers that the properties of those who had moved the High Court would not be harmed at any cost.

Meanwhile, several women of Akbarnagar and its adjoining areas came on the streets on Wednesday in protest against the demolition drive. They shouted slogans against the administration and the LDA. However, they were dispersed by the women cops deployed there. No one was injured. A group of Akbarnagar dwellers met the district magistrate and protested the 'atrocities committed on the poor by pulling down their dwellings and shops'. The district magistrate gave a patient hearing and advised them to approach the court.

Property dealer shot at in BKT

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Gun-wielding assailants shot at a property dealer over a land related dispute after chasing him for over a furlong in a field in Bakshi Ka Talab police station area on Wednesday.

The villagers rushed the property dealer to the Trauma Centre of King George's Medical University where he is undergoing treatment.

The police have arrested one of the assailants and are interrogating him.

The victim, Anand Yadav, of Bannaur village of BKT, is a property dealer and works near Kotwa village. Police investigation revealed that on Wednesday he along with a buyer of Jankipuram, Tarun, and his friend Naseem had gone to show a plot on the border of Jankipuram and BKT.

Meanwhile, Ravi Rawat, of

Sairpur, Rajveer Yadav of Lahangpur and Luvkush resident of Mubarakpur also reached with their five friends by Honda City car and Scorpio SUV. An altercation started between both the parties regarding the plot. The accused beat Anand and opened fire on him.

As he ran to save his life, the assailants chased him and pinned him down in the field owned by Vipin Rajput and started beating him. After that Ravi fired a bullet at his chest but Anand brought his hand forward and the bullet hit his hand instead of the chest. As Anand fell unconscious, the assailants fled, thinking he was dead.

Anand told the police that Rajveer, Lavkush and Ravi had attacked him to kill him. DCP (North) Abhijeet R Shankar said that Anand had been admitted to the Trauma

Centre and three police teams had been formed to nab the assailants.

He said property related dispute appeared to be the reason for the attack.

PAINTER ENDS LIFE: A painter ended his life at the house of his relative in the SGPGI police station area on Wednesday.

As per reports, the man, identified as Sunil Singh aka Rohit Singh (36) of Sushant Golf City was staying at the house of one of his relatives in Ramtola locality of SGPGI area and worked as a painter.

On Wednesday, he was found hanging from the ceiling with a nylon rope tied around his neck. The incident came to light when the residents did not see him resuming his daily chores and informed his relatives. His nephew Nand Lal of Telibagh filed a complaint with

the police. The police sent the body for autopsy.

DUPED: A man was duped of Rs 3.12 lakh in an online fraud in Vikas Nagar police station area on Wednesday.

Reports said the victim, Shamsad of Vikas Nagar, got a call in which the caller offered him a chance to earn while working from home and he fell into the trap. A further conversation with the caller convinced him that the job offer was genuine. He was asked to give rating to the hotels and was told that a link for the work would pop up on his WhatsApp.

"I was promised attractive refunds for clicking the links and rating the hotels. They then made me invest money to get an attractive refund and this way they took Rs 3.12 lakh in the name of investment and refused to refund it with the dividends," he said.

Government of Odisha
Office of the Chief Construction Engineer,
Rural Works Circle, Sambalpur.
E-mail Id serwircirclesbp@yahoo.com
Bid Identification No. Road Tender Online RWCSBP-69/2023-24 No: 863 Dated: 26.02.24
The Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Sambalpur on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites online percentage rate Bid from experienced & eligible bidders for Transferred Road Improvement Programme (TRIP) for the year 2023-24.
1 Name of work : Transferred Road Improvement Programme (TRIP) for the year 2023-24.
2 No of works : 01 No details as per DTGN.
3 Estimated cost : Approximately Rs. 979.73 lakhs
4 Class of Contractor. : "A" and 'Special'
5 Cost of tender paper and mode of deposit. : Rs. 10,000/- per set. (to be deposited On-line) in favour of concerned Executive Engineer.
6 Mode of submission of tender : Tender should be submitted only On line in website [\(http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in\)](http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in).
7 EMD and mode of deposit : 1% of estimated cost of the work to be remitted online as mentioned in DTGN.
8 Summary of key dates are provided below :

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender on-line for bidding	Last date & time for seeking clarification	Date & Time of opening of tender		
		From	To	Technical Bid	Financial Bid	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Chief Construction Engineer Rural Works Circle, Sambalpur	Road Tender Online RWCSBP-69/2023-24	04.03.2024 From 11.00 A. M.	18.03.2024 Up to 05.00 P.M.	15.03.2024 Up to 5.00 P.M.	19.03.2024 at 11.00 AM	Will be intimated later

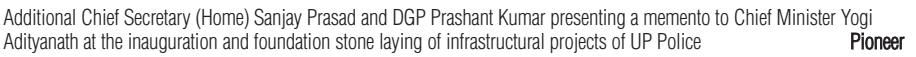
*Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal [\(http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in\)](http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in).
* Subsequent modification/ corrigendum/Addendum if required shall appear in website only.
* The amount put to bid is exclusive of GST.
* Bidder should inspect the road before bidding and quote his rate accordingly.
OIPR-25091/11/0105/2324
Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Sambalpur

RS poll defections bolster BJP hold on oppn bastions

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PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In parallel developments, the BJP's concerted efforts to gain ground in Ambedkar Nagar, Ayodhya, Prayagraj and Jalaun signify an intensifying electoral battleground in Uttar Pradesh as the political landscape continues to evolve, setting the stage for a fiercely contested 2024 Lok Sabha election.



shubham

SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CO. LTD.

Corporate Office : 425, Udyog Vihar Phase IV, Gurgaon-120215 (Haryana)
Ph : 0124- 4212530/31/32, E-Mail: customercare@shubham.co website : www.shubham.co

NOTICE U/S 13(2) OF SECURITISATION & RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT 2002 (HEREINAFTER CALLED 'ACT')

It is brought to your notice that your loan account has been declared as NPA by secured creditor Shubham Housing Development Company Limited having its registered office at 608 - 609, 6th Floor, Block - C Ansal Imperial Towers, Connaught Center, Naraina Vihar, New Delhi - 110028, (herein after called 'SHDFCL') and you are liable to pay **total outstanding against your loan to SHDFCL**. You are also liable to pay future interest at the contractual rate on the aforesaid amount together with incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. Therefore, we hereby call upon you to discharge in full your liabilities to SHDFCL within 60 days from the date of this notice failing which SHDFCL will be empowered to exercise the power under Section 13(4) of the ACT. **The details of borrowers and secured assets are as under:**

S. No.	Loan Account No. Borrower(s) Name	Applicant Address	Demand Notice Amount & Date	Secured Asset
1.	OLK02205000005047769, Durgesh Mourya, Meena Maurya	C/33, Rajgar Vikas Nagar Near Baba Hardware, Lucknow Uttar Pradesh - 226022	Rs. 16,88,437/- 8/20/2024	Plot number 70, Kharsa Number 2/10 2/11, 2/14, 2/15 & 2/16, Kuma Under Kalyanpur Yojna Pargana, Tehsil & District Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226001
2.	OLKW1903000005018294, Priyanka Mishra, Somil P Lal	Phoenix Mall Uppal Main Sector - B - L D A Company Mall Road Behind Peadality Hotel, Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226012	Rs. 7,74,545/- 8/20/2024	House Unit No.20 constructed on Minjumia of Kuma No. 512, SA Village Banthara Sikandarpur, Pargana- Bijnaur Tehsil- Sarojil Nagar, Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226001
3.	OKAN1811000005016307, Mohd Kashi, Farida Sultana	Gr. 03, Malda Bazar Meeston Road Near Kotwali Chouraha Kanpur Dehat Uttar Pradesh -208001	Rs. 11,17,193/- 8/20/2024	Ground Floor of House No. 39/50, Situated at Malda Bazar Kanpur Nagar Kanpur Dehat Uttar Pradesh -208001
4.	0VRN2112000005041475, Santosh Kumar Yadav, Lalji Yadav, Indrawati Devi, Manoj Kumar Yadav	Gali No. 6, Krishna Nagar Colony Samne Ghat Larka Bhagwanpur Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh -221005	Rs. 40,38,588/- 2/02/2024	House on Arazi No. 437, Mauza- Bhagwanpur, Pargana- Dehat Amanat, Tehsil & Distt- Varanasi Uttar Pradesh -221005
5.	0ALB1809000005014940, 0ALB2112000005042197, Bhawnt Kumar, Neeta Devi	36/45C, Bell Road Jagram Charauna New Katra Near Shagun Guest House, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh -211002	Rs. 7,86,748/- 8/20/2024	House No. 31, Old Thespar 36/45 Present No. 54/45, Situated at Mohalla Naya Katra Pargana & Tehsil Sadar & Distt. Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh -211002

PLACE: GURGAON,
DATE: 28-02-2024

AUTHORIZED OFFICER,
SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE COMPANY LTD.

Country's largest fish market in Chandauli to be ready by July

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The country's largest state-of-art wholesale fish market in Chandauli will be ready by July this year. The three-storey building of this fish market being constructed in 10,000 square metres at a cost of ₹61.86 crore will provide all fish related businesses under one roof and 1,500 people will get direct and indirect employment, informed Chandauli District Magistrate (DM) Nikhil Tikaram Funde.

Once badly affected by Naxalite activities, this agrarian-dominant trans-Ganga district is now changing its identity through setting up of industry and export of agricultural products, especially Kala Chawal. The district is also known as 'Rice Bowl' for production of quality varieties of rice. The under construction fish market will have an international level ultra modern

facility and its construction is expected to more than double the income of persons involved in commercial breeding of fish or pisciculture in this belt of Purvanchal (eastern UP). There will be many facilities in this market, including a fish restaurant, conference hall for training, processing unit etc. The construction of the state-of-the-art wholesale fish market is almost 50 per cent complete and its work will be completed by July, the DM said. "In its fish-shaped building, there will be facilities for fish farming methods, marketing, technology, export and cooking and eating of many types of fish dishes and this will be the first of its kind ultra modern building for fisheries related business in the country, in which there will be wholesale and retail market of fish," Funde said, adding that seeds, feeds, fodder, medicines, cold storage, museum and other equipment will

all be available under one roof. "New technologies being used around the world regarding fish farming will be displayed in the modern exhibition hall. A conference hall will also be built in the building, where training and seminars etc for fishermen will take place. The building will also have a fish processing unit. There will be an exclusive fish restaurant on the third floor on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model where the taste of many types of fish dishes can also be enjoyed," Chandauli DM said. According to him, the building will be centrally air conditioned and there will be special arrangements for solid and liquid waste management. Besides, guest houses will also be built for traders and truck drivers, he said.

Chandauli's Assistant Director of Fisheries Ravindra Prasad said currently there are about 2,000 fish farmers in

Varanasi, Chandauli, Ghazipur and Jaunpur districts of Varanasi division who are working on a large scale. "More than 5,000 families are directly and indirectly associated with this business. With the construction of this modern fish market, there will be a change in the situation and economic prosperity of the fish farmers of the entire Purvanchal and the people associated with it," he said.

Prasad said there will be more than 111 shops in the market, in which 81 shops are being constructed in the wholesale building and 30 shops are being constructed in the retail building. "With the construction of this building, employment opportunities will be available on a large scale in Purvanchal. Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) will be formed to increase the economic income of farmers along with fishing business," he added.

MoU to advance telemedicine facilities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Gangwal School of Medical Sciences and Technology (GSMST) at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (IIT-K), and the Department of Medical Health and Family Welfare, Government of Uttar Pradesh, announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to revolutionise healthcare delivery and advance telemedicine facilities in the state through the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The MoU was signed by Ranjan Kumar, Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, Government of Uttar Pradesh, and Professor Sandeep Verma, Professor-In-Charge, GSMST, IIT-K, in the presence of Brajesh Pathak, Deputy Chief Minister, Prof S Ganesh, Director, IIT-K, Mayankeshwar Sharan Singh, UP Minister of State of Parliamentary Affairs, Medical Education, Medical and Health, Family Welfare, Mother and Child Welfare, Partha Sarthi Sensharma, Principal Secretary, Department of Medical Health



and Family Welfare, Prof Amitabha Bandyopadhyay and Prof Nisheet Srivastava from IIT-K. Director Prof S Ganesh, said, "The partnership between the GSMST of IIT-K and the Uttar Pradesh Government will enhance healthcare delivery by integrating AI into telehealth and point-of-care diagnostics. We can bridge gaps and improve accessibility in healthcare by implementing AI-driven solutions. Using AI and machine learning to analyse data and predict population-based needs and outcomes will improve healthcare delivery efficiency and effectiveness. This partnership demonstrates

our shared determination to drive positive change and propel UP towards a healthier, more prosperous future."

Professor-In-Charge, GSMST, Prof Sandeep Verma, said, "This transformative journey with the Department of Medical Health and Family Welfare, Government of UP will see IIT-K leveraging its expertise in AI to innovate the delivery of healthcare and transform the landscape for the people of Uttar Pradesh. This partnership will pave the way for a future where AI-driven solutions redefine patient care and accessibility."

The MoU outlines several

key areas of collaboration, including anchoring telemedicine hubs and enhancing the quality of tele-medicine services, implementing AI-based solutions to address population health impact, developing point-of-care diagnostics to drive programme improvements, conducting competency-based capacity building for health cadres and utilising database predictions and analysis for informed decision-making. This will help the department to make optimal use of the UP Digital Health Stack (UP-DHS) and ensure that every citizen of the state, wherever they are, will be able to access healthcare when needed. In UP, UP-DHS is making significant strides in implementation, with foundational NHS elements deployed across all health administrative units and the rollout of essential healthcare applications well underway. IIT-K is delighted to embark on this partnership and looks forward to a fruitful collaboration that will significantly enhance healthcare delivery and positively impact the lives of citizens across UP.

Fibrosan camp organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A liver clinic and fibrosan test camp was organised in the auditorium room of Central Hospital, Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) here on

Wednesday. Principal Chief Medical Officer (PCMO) of BLW Dr Devesh Kumar inaugurated the check-up camp. A total of 124 people benefited from this camp by getting their liver checked.

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to **Indiabulls Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd. [CIN : U67110MH2006PLC305312]** ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which lies with the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on **30.03.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M.**, for recovery of **Rs. 12,07,832/- (Rupees Twelve Lakh Seven Thousand Eight Hundred Thirty Two only)** pending towards **Loan Account No. S055XXXI [Old Loan Account No. HHEKAN00479262]**, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till **26.02.2024** with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. **27.02.2024** along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from **ADVESH SINGH @ AWADHESH SINGH (PROPRIETOR, M/S SUDHA ENTERPRISES), JYATISHNA SINGH @ JYOTSNA SINGH, YOGESH SINGH and SUDHA DEVI**.
The old Loan Account bearing No. **HHEKAN00479262** along with all right(s), title(s), interest(s), underlying security(ies), pledge(s) and / or guarantee(s), including the Immovable Property, has been assigned by Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. ("IHFL") to and in favour of the Secured Creditor acting as a Trustee of Indiabulls ARC-XXXI Trust vide Assignment Agreement dated **21.08.2023** and the same has been renumbered by the Secured Creditor as **S055XXXI**.
The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be **Rs. 75,00,000/- (Rupees Seventy Five Lakh only)** and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be **Rs. 7,50,000/- (Rupees Seven Lakh Fifty Thousand only)** i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
BUILDING NO. 124-A/155 ADMEASURING AREA 75 SQ. YARDS EQUIVALENT TO 62.7 SQ. MTRS. HAVING QUARTER NO. 13, BLOCK NO. 11 SITUATED AT GOVINDGAR, KANPUR (UTTAR PRADESH). THE SAID PROPERTY IS BOUNDARY AS FOLLOWS:-
EAST : BUILDING NO. 124-A/154, QUARTER NO. 12
WEST : BUILDING NO. 124-A/156, QUARTER NO. 14
NORTH : 15 FEET WIDE LANE
SOUTH : 50 FEET ROAD
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullsarc.com; For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Sd/-
Date : 27.02.2024 **INDIABULLS ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANY LTD.**
Place : KANPUR **TRUSTEE OF INDIABULLS ARC- XXXI TRUST**

PANCHAYAT SAMITI OFFICE JHARSUGUDA
i-644
Tender Call Notice
No- 663 Date- 26.2.2024

The Block Development Officer, Jharsuguda invites sealed tenders on percentage rate basis for 1(One) No of project. The sale of bid documents will be available in website of Jharsuguda www.jharsuguda.nic.in from dt-01.03.2024 to 15.03.2024 and receipt of the bid documents starts from dt-01.03.2024 to 15.03.2024 up to 5.00PM on all working days in the office of the Panchayat Samiti, Jharsuguda. The bid will be opened on dt-16.03.2024 at 3.30PM. Intending class "B" and "A" contractors may visit website of Jharsuguda www.jharsuguda.nic.in for details information.

Block Development Officer Jharsuguda
OIPR-19363/11/0008/2324

नगर विकास सहकारी बैंक लि०, हरदोई
नीलामी स्थल : नगर विकास सहकारी बैंक लि. 162, रेलवेगंज, हरदोई, फोन : 05852-235110
नीलामी/बिक्री सूचना

वित्तीय परिसम्पत्तियों के प्रतिभूतीकरण एवं पुर्ननिर्माण और प्रतिभूति हित प्रवर्तन अधिनियम 2002 के अन्तर्गत बैंक के प्रभाराधीन अवल परिसम्पत्ति की बिक्री। नगर विकास सहकारी बैंक, लि०, हरदोई के प्राधिकृत अधिकारी के रूप में अघोहस्ताक्षरीकर्ता ने वित्तीय परिसम्पत्तियों के प्रतिभूतीकरण एवं पुर्ननिर्माण और प्रतिभूति हित प्रवर्तन अधिनियम-2002 की धारा 13(4) के अन्तर्गत निम्नलिखित सम्पत्ति का सांकेतिक कब्जा ले लिया है। सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि बैंक की बकाया राशि की वसूली के लिए निम्नलिखित खाते में प्रभारित सम्पत्ति की नीलामी वित्तीय परिसम्पत्तियों के प्रतिभूतीकरण एवं पुर्ननिर्माण और प्रतिभूति हित प्रवर्तन अधिनियम-2002 के अधीन "जैसा है जहाँ है" तथा "जैसा है जो भी है" के आधार पर आयोजित की जायेगी।

ऋणी का नाम एवं पता - 1. मै० छोटेलाल ब्रिज फिन्ड, पार्टनर-प्रेम सागर विमलेश कुमार एवं अशोक कुमार या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला जिला-हरदोई
2. अशोक कुमार पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला, जिला-हरदोई, 3. प्रेम सागर पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला, जिला-हरदोई, 4. कृष्ण कुमार पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला जिला-हरदोई, 5. विमलेश कुमार पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला जिला-हरदोई।

सम्पत्ति का मालिक- कृष्ण कुमार पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला, जिला-हरदोई, अशोक कुमार पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला, जिला-हरदोई, प्रेम सागर पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला, जिला-हरदोई, विमलेश कुमार पुत्र श्री छोटेलाल या० भीरीघाट पो० कछीना तह० सण्डीला, जिला-हरदोई।

1. सम्पत्ति का विवरण- Khata No. 00366 Gata No. 26 ग्राम समसपुर एरिया 1.0990 हे० स्थिति-समसपुर परगना बालामऊ सण्डीला-हरदोई आरक्षित मूल्य -रु०. 38,00,000.00 (अठतीस लाख मात्र) धरोहर धनराशि-10 प्रतिशत आरक्षित मूल्य का अर्थात रु० 3,80,000.00 (तीन लाख अस्सी हजार मात्र) नीलामी की तिथि व समय-07.03.2024 दोपहर 12.00 बजे से अपराह्न 3.00 बजे तक।

2. सम्पत्ति का विवरण- Khata No. 00444 Gata No. 1470 एरिया 0.2260 हे० स्थिति ग्राम पतसेनी बाहर नगर पालिका परिषद् परगना एवं तहसील सण्डीला-हरदोई आरक्षित मूल्य-रु०. 36,00,000.00 (छत्तीस लाख मात्र) धरोहर धनराशि-10 प्रतिशत आरक्षित मूल्य का अर्थात रु० 3,60,000.00 (तीन लाख पचास हजार मात्र) नीलामी की तिथि व समय-07.03.2024 दोपहर 12.00 बजे से अपराह्न 3.00 बजे तक।

3. सम्पत्ति का विवरण- Khata No. 00476 Gata No. 1467 एरिया 0.2260 हे० ग्राम पतसेनी बाहर नगर पालिका परिषद् परगना एवं तहसील सण्डीला-हरदोई आरक्षित मूल्य-रु० 8,00,000.00 (आठ लाख मात्र) धरोहर धनराशि-10 प्रतिशत आरक्षित मूल्य का अर्थात रु० 80,000.00 (अस्सी हजार मात्र) नीलामी की तिथि व समय-07.03.2024 दोपहर 12.00 बजे से अपराह्न 3.00 बजे तक।

4. सम्पत्ति का विवरण- Khata No. 00443 Gata No. 1468 एरिया 0.0760 हे० ग्राम पतसेनी बाहर नगर पालिका परिषद् परगना एवं तहसील सण्डीला-हरदोई आरक्षित मूल्य -रु० 8,00,000.00 (आठ लाख मात्र) धरोहर धनराशि-10 प्रतिशत आरक्षित मूल्य का अर्थात रु० 80,000.00 (अस्सी हजार मात्र) नीलामी की तिथि व समय-07.03.2024 दोपहर 12.00 बजे से अपराह्न 3.00 बजे तक।

1. बकाया राशि जिसकी वसूली के लिए सम्पत्ति बेची जा रही है- रु० 27,85,369.00 (सत्ताइस लाख पचासी हजार तीन सौ उन्वत्तर मात्र) + दिनांक 31.12.2012 से ब्याज, खर्च, लागत प्रभार इत्यादि।

2. बकाया राशि जिसकी वसूली के लिए सम्पत्ति बेची जा रही है- रु० 8,54,522.00 (आठ लाख चौवन हजार पाँच सौ बाईस मात्र) + दिनांक 31.03.2011 से ब्याज, खर्च, लागत प्रभार इत्यादि।

3. बकाया राशि जिसकी वसूली के लिए सम्पत्ति बेची जा रही है- रु० 15,53,003.00 (पन्द्रह लाख तिरपन हजार तीन सौ मात्र)+ दिनांक 31.12.2012 से ब्याज, खर्च, लागत प्रभार इत्यादि।

4. बकाया राशि जिसकी वसूली के लिए सम्पत्ति बेची जा रही है- रु० 1,42,150.00 (एक लाख बयालीस हजार एक सौ पचास मात्र) + दिनांक 30.06.2014 से ब्याज खर्च, लागत प्रभार इत्यादि।

सूचना दिनांक : 27.02.2024 **स्थान : हरदोई** **प्राधिकृत अधिकारी**

नीलामी की शर्त : नगर विकास सहकारी बैंक लि०, 162, रेलवेगंज, हरदोई (उ.प्र.) शाखा से प्राप्त कर सकते है।

Pratidana Initiative: BHU receives ₹10 lakh donation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is instituting two new scholarships for the students of Chemistry. The university has received a donation of ₹10 lakh under the Pratidana Initiative to establish these scholarships, slated to be awarded from the next academic session. Madan Mohan Kayastha and his wife Santosh Kayastha have made the donation to start the scholarships. Kayastha is an alumnus of BHU and had did his MTech in Industrial Chemistry in 1951. The alumnus and his wife had also made a donation of ₹20 lakh in the month of December last year to institute four schol-

arships of ₹5 lakh each, two for Chemistry and two for Law. The donation was made in the memory of their parents.

V-C Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain, during an interaction with the donors at his official residence on Wednesday, expressed gratitude for their commitment towards the BHU and the spirit of giving back to the society. He said their attachment with the university and the students is remarkable.

Director, Institute of Science, Prof Sanjay Kumar hailed the initiative of Kayastha family to start new scholarships in BHU. Dean, Faculty of Science, Prof SM Singh mentioned that the scholarship will encourage excellence and com-

petitiveness among students. Prof Maya Shankar Singh, Head, Department of Chemistry, also praised the donors for their endeavour to support the cause of science.

Madan Mohan Kayastha expressed that it was a momentous occasion for him and his family that BHU has acknowledged their gesture of support and regard in form of donation. He hoped the scholarships will help students in pursuing education. Joint Registrar (University Advancement) MK Pandey said the remarkable contribution of Kayastha and his wife will act as a beacon of hope for those seeking knowledge and striving for excellence. RK Bordia and Charu Bordia were also present.

'Complete poll preparations on time'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In view of the upcoming Lok Sabha general elections, District Magistrate/District Election Officer (DM/DEO) S Rajalingam, while presiding over a meeting with the AROs and officers in charge appointed for election work at the Commissionerate auditorium here on Tuesday, instructed the

officers concerned to complete all preparations on time as per the responsibilities assigned for election work.

He said data feeding of personnel should be ensured as per the guidelines of the Election Commission (EC). "Necessary arrangements should be completed at all the booths. Besides, proper voter awareness programmes should be organised and adequate number of Static Surveillance Teams (SSTs) and Flying Surveillance Teams (FSTs) should be formed and their training etc should be done," DM said, adding that besides the checking places of SST teams should also be marked. He directed the officers to review route chart of polling places assembly-wise and arrange for adequate vehicles for election work, postal ballots etc apart from preparation of stationery, videography, mapping of vulnerable booths and all other arrangements. On the occasion, Chief Development Officer/ In-charge Personnel Himanshu Nagpal and others were present.

PM's proposed visit to Prayagraj on March 2 postponed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposed visit to Prayagraj on March 2 has been postponed for now. Now PM will not come here on March 2. However, the pandals etc which were being built on the Parade Ground have not been removed. It is believed that a new programme for PM's visit to Prayagraj will be released.

No new date has been announced yet for the PM's programme. Due to the post-

ponement of PM's programme, UP CM Yogi Adityanath's visit here has also been postponed. The CM was to scheduled come here on Wednesday to take stock of the preparations for PM's programme. The PM was to inaugurate the Control and Command Centre of the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC) here. Besides, he also had to address a public meeting in the Magh Mela area. It is being said that now PM's programme in Prayagraj can be held after March 4.

Atiq's 'benami' property worth ₹7 cr detected

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Commissionerate Police has detected another benami property worth ₹7 crore of slain gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed. This precious land with area of about 500 square yards is located in GTB Nagar of Kareli. The police have started action to confiscate it under the Gangsters Act.

On April 20, 2006, he had got the deed of this land in his favour. According to sources, when the police gathered information about this property, it was found that Atiq had purchased this land from Mansoor Alam of GTB Nagar. This land belonged to Alam Cooperative Housing committee and Alam was then its secretary. When inquired, he told that it was a housing committee. It is alleged that when Atiq came to know about it he said first 500 square yards of land should be given in his name, otherwise he will not allow the committee to do any work. Sources further said in its sale deed, the total government property was shown as ₹23.76 lakh, while the sale price was mentioned as ₹14.85 lakh. DCP (Nagar) Deepak Bhukar said this property has been acquired through crime. Action has been initiated to confiscate it under Section 14 (1) of the Gangsters Act.

APPEAL TO CM: The Life Insurance Corporation of India officer, Vimal Tiwari, who went missing 40 days ago

has not been found yet. Wife Chetna and daughters are scared of the possibility of something untoward happening to him. His wife has appealed to UP CM Yogi Adityanath for help. On the basis of wife's complaint, the police registered an FIR against Dharmendra Nishad, who worked with Vimal. But no clue has been found yet. It is alleged that on the night when Vimal Tiwari went missing, Dharmendra had called him to his hotel. Civil Lines SO Amit Tiwari said a search is underway to trace Vimal. His call details are also being extracted and the suspect is also being questioned in this connection.

THEFT: Thieves made off with jewelry and cash worth lakhs of rupees from a house located in Bahadurganj under Kotwali police station.

Reports said that Vandana Pandey and her husband Amitabh Pandey lodged a report of theft at the police station here. They said the family members were sleeping in the house. On waking up in the morning, when Vandana reached the room on the upper floor, she found all the stuff scattered there and cupboard open. Vandana raised an alarm and called her neighbours too. The jewellery kept in the cupboard and about ₹2 lakh cash was found to be missing. Vandana called on Dial 112 at and informed the police about the theft. The police are investigating the case.

Customers on top priority: Tripathi



The Indian Bank organised its high network customers' meeting at its zonal office on Wednesday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Indian Bank organised its high network customers' meeting on Wednesday in which Area General Manager, Lucknow, Pankej Tripathi, held discussions with customers on different issues. He also apprised them of bank's new services and schemes. In this meeting, the bank mainly apprised its customers/entrepreneurs of present commercial schemes of corporate finance and appealed to rope in more and more new customers, on the occasion the bank also felicitated the high network customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Area General Manager Pankej Tripathi said, "Our customers

are on top priority for us and we are committed to improving our services for them. We are announcing the new schemes and services to meet their requirements". Kanpur Zonal Chief Vivek, Deputy Zonal Chief Kapil Bhatia, assistant general manager of Mid Corporate Branch Ankur Jaiswal and other officers were present.

CELEBRATED: The National Science Day was celebrated with fervour and enthusiasm at the Christ Church College on Wednesday.

The occasion was marked by the unveiling of the logo of the Physics Society, named 'Pragyan', symbolising the purest form of wisdom and understanding.

Som Goenka elected chairman of KMA



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Som Goenka, Managing Director of Goldiee Masale, has been elected unopposed the Chairman of the Kirana Merchant Association (KMA) at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held at its Nayaganj office. The post of chairman was created for the first time in the association.

Awadhesh Bajpai was elected the president for the fourth consecutive term. Alankar Omar, Vishwanath Gupta (Raju Makhana) and Anuj Kumar Gupta were unanimously elected the senior vice-president, publicity secretary and treasurer

respectively. President Awadhesh Bajpai said till now there was no post of chairman in the association. But this time, the post of chairman was specially created for the Managing Director of Goldiee Masale Som Goenka. Chairman, Dada Nagar Cooperative Industrial Estate Vijay Kapoor, Managing Director of Goldiee Masale Group Surendra Kumar Gupta and traders of Kirana Bazar were present on the occasion. They congratulated Som Goenka and Awadhesh Bajpai and all other office-bearers and appealed to them to work for the welfare of traders and society.

Videograph LS voting process, BJP urges EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday urged the Election Commission to videograph the voting process at all polling stations during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections and set up booths in complexes housing high-rise buildings.

In a memorandum, the BJP also urged the poll panel to consider reforming the

approval process for political parties' media content to make it faster, allowing them adequate time to plan their campaign.

It also requested the Election Commission to ensure there is no ambiguity in the rule pertaining to putting flags and making wall paintings by party workers at their homes during polls. "There should be clarity on this," they demanded.

A BJP delegation compris-

ing Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and party national general secretary Arun Singh met the poll panel with the demands.

"The BJP keeps making efforts to see how the entire poll process could be made more and more transparent and the voters' involvement in the elections be further increased.

Our delegation made some requests to the EC (in this regard)," Vaishnaw told



reporters after the meeting at the Election Commission.

He said the BJP delegation urged the poll panel to set up booths at high-rise apartment complexes in urban areas as much as possible so that maximum eligible voters at such residential buildings could exercise their franchise.

"Our second request was that video recordings be done at 100 per cent polling booths (during the elections)," Vaishnaw said.

At present, videography is done at 50 per cent polling booths only, he said, adding that 100 percent coverage of the polling booths will ensure proper documentation of everything happening there and it will increase people's faith in the country's vibrant democracy.

Over 12 lakh polling stations will be set up across the country for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, according to the Election Commission.

Vaishnaw said the BJP delegation also made some request with regards to operational issues.

"We requested for beginning reforms in the process of granting approval to the media content of political parties.

The approval process should be made faster so that every political party gets enough time to present their views and mould their campaign," he told reporters.

BJP-led NDA likely to get RS majority in April

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is likely to get a majority in the Rajya Sabha in April this year once the remaining six vacancies under the nominated category are filled and those newly elected take oath. According to data available with the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, the BJP, which currently has 94 members, gained two seats in the Upper House in the just concluded elections, pushing its own strength to 96.

The strength of NDA, which at present has 113 members, will cross the half-way mark of 123 in the 245-member House in April this year once all nominated members take oath. At present, there are only six MPs who have been nominated by the President of India as members in the Rajya Sabha,



with some having joined the BJP later. There are a total of 12 nominated members in the House.

The data shows that with the support of some independents and nominated members, the NDA which did not have a majority in the Upper House so far will finally achieve the magic figure this April, helping it get crucial legislations passed in the Council of States.

Elections were held on 56 Rajya Sabha seats in 15 states,

in which the BJP won 30 seats, the Congress nine, SP 2, TMC 4, YSRCP 3, RJD 2, BJD 2, and NCP, Shiv Sena, BRS, and JD(U) one seat each.

With the Congress strength going down to 30 seats, the joint Opposition has less than 100 MPs in the Upper House.

Having a majority in the Upper House is very crucial for the ruling dispensation as several key legislations have been stuck in the past due to lack of strength.

Nationwide free genetic testing announced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking move to tackle rare diseases, India's ICMR-National Institute for Research in Reproductive and Child Health (ICMR-NIR-RCH) on Wednesday announced free genetic testing and counselling services nationwide.

The new Genetic Research Centre (GRC) will assess clinically abnormal cases of rare paediatric diseases as well as track origins of undiagnosed genetic disorders. It also aims to facilitate timely therapeutic interventions and provide critical support for both patients and their families.

Rare diseases are typically chronic and progressive medical conditions that pose life-threatening risks to those affected. Out of the 350 million patients suffering from rare disease globally, India alone is home to approximately 72-96 million patients, according to the data Ministry of Health and



Family Welfare (MoHFW).

In India's urban areas, congenital malformations and genetic disorders are the third most common cause of mortality in newborns. With a very large population and high birth rate, and consanguineous marriage favored in many communities, the prevalence of genetic disorders is high in India. The Department of Biotechnology had launched in 2019, the UMMID initiative with an aim to to establish NIDAN Kendras to provide counselling, prenatal testing

and diagnosis, management, and multidisciplinary care in Government Hospitals where in the influx of patients is more, to produce skilled clinicians in human genetics, and to undertake screening of pregnant women and newborn babies for inherited genetic diseases in hospitals at aspirational districts. Under the ICMR project, NIRRCH centre with approval under the PCP-NDT Act based in Maharashtra, plans nationwide services. Dr. Geetanjali Sachdeva, Director, highlights

the transformative impact on vulnerable sections of society. Dr. Shailesh Pande, Head of GRC, stresses raising awareness and enhancing testing accessibility to alleviate the societal burden of rare diseases, aligning with the national goal of universal healthcare access.

While the GRC is currently offering its services in Maharashtra, people with rare diseases from other parts of the country can avail the services, ICMR-NIRRCH said.

"Strengthening access to genetic testing and counselling for rare diseases will pave the way for their early diagnosis and timely intervention, helping improve the health and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable sections of society. This is a revolutionary step that can transform several lives, especially young lives in the country," said Dr. Geetanjali Sachdeva, Director, ICMR-NIRRCH, in a statement.

With no approved treatment for 95 per cent of rare diseases, the diagnosis of rare

diseases is challenging. While early genetic testing is key, diagnosis is conducted through a distinctive blend of clinical and laboratory methods, including cytogenetic, biochemical, and molecular approaches. At present, the centre is providing its services to around 570 families yearly, covering genetic conditions during infancy, childhood, and adolescence, as well as for reproductive difficulties faced by couples.

"Our centre is working to address a critical public health concern. By reaching out to special schools, hospitals and the public, we are striving to raise awareness around rare diseases and enhance uptake of essential testing and counselling. In doing so, we aim to mitigate the societal burden of these diseases and realise the national goal of a healthy society, with universal access to healthcare services," said Dr. Shailesh Pande, Medical Geneticist and Head GRC, in the statement.

Law panel may propose simultaneous polls in 2029

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Law Commission is likely to recommend adding a new chapter to the Constitution on 'one nation, one election' and holding the gigantic democratic exercise of simultaneous polls for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies and local bodies across the country by mid-2029, sources said on Wednesday. The Commission, under Justice (ret'd) Ritu Raj Awasthi, would recommend an amendment to the Constitution to add the "new chapter or part" on simultaneous elections, the sources said.

The panel would also recommend synchronising the terms of legislative assemblies in "three phases" in the next five years so that the first simultaneous polls could be held in May-June 2029 when elections for the 19th Lok



Sabha are due.

The new chapter in the Constitution would include issues related to "simultaneous election," "sustainability of simultaneous elections" and "common electoral roll" for Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, panchayats and municipalities so that the three-tier simultaneous polls could be held together "in one go," they explained. The new

chapter being recommended will have power of non-extant" to override other provisions in the Constitution dealing with terms of assemblies.

The five-year period in which the terms of assemblies will be synchronised will be spread over three phases. The Commission would recommend that the first phase may deal with state assemblies

whose period will have to be curtailed by a few months -- three or six months.

In case a government falls due to no confidence or if there is a hung House, the Commission would recommend constitution of a "unity government" with representatives from various political parties. In case the unity government formula does not work, the law panel would recommend holding fresh elections for the remainder of the term of the House. "Suppose fresh elections are called for and the government still has three years, then polls should be for the remainder of the term -- three years -- to ensure sustainability," a source explained.

Besides the Law Commission, a high-level committee under former president Ram Nath Kovind is also working on a report on how simultaneous polls to

the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, municipalities and panchayats can be held by tweaking the Constitution and the existing legal framework. Along with the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, expected in April-May this year, elections for at least five assemblies are likely to take place, while state polls for Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand are expected later this year.

Bihar and Delhi are scheduled for assembly polls next year, while Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala are scheduled for 2026, and Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Manipur in 2027. As many as nine states may have assembly polls scheduled for 2028 -- Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Karnataka, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana.

India, Germany to cooperate on high technology for military use

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India and Germany have resolved to closely collaborate on high-technology for military use in line with a broader aim to develop defence cooperation as a key pillar of the bilateral strategic partnership.

Besides this issue, ways to further bolster strategic cooperation figured prominently at a meeting of the India-Germany high defence committee that was held in Berlin on Tuesday, defence ministry said here on Wednesday.

Giving details, officials said both the countries are set to carry out joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific, in reflection of their growing defence ties.

The Indian delegation at the talks was headed by Defence



Secretary Giridhar Aramane while the German side was led by State Secretary at German defence ministry Benedikt Zimmer.

"Both sides discussed a range of bilateral security and defence issues, with a focus on developing defence cooperation as a key pillar of the strategic partnership between India and Germany," the defence ministry said.

"They exchanged views on

the regional security situation, discussed likely joint exercises with Germany in the Indo-Pacific, and deliberated on potential defence industrial projects and proposals.

It said both sides emphasised on the need for a closer defence partnership and connecting the defence industries from both sides together.

"Of particular focus was the collaboration in high technology in defence," the ministry said in a statement. The high defence committee meeting follows the visit of German Federal Minister of Defence Boris Pistorius to India last year.

Aramane also interacted with prominent think tank German Institute of International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) in Berlin.

Authorities to comply with guidelines on not requisitioning forest staff for election duty: NGT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has observed that it expects the authorities to comply with instructions regarding not requisitioning forest officers or vehicles for election duty during the Lok Sabha polls. The green panel was hearing a plea seeking directions to all states and Union Territories for implementing the instructions issued by the Election Commission of India, exempting territorial staff of the Forest department and forest vehicles from being requisitioned in the elections. Noting the government-issued documents, a bench of National Green Tribunal Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said, "We find that the circulars in regards to the relief claimed have already been issued by the competent authorities and, unless something contrary exists, these circulars need to be complied with by the concerned authorities."

The bench, also comprising Expert Member A Senthil Vel, underlined that the tribunal's jurisdiction is limited to civil cases raising a substantial question about environmental issues and those for implementing the National Green Tribunal's scheduled acts.

The National Green Tribunal Act provides juris-



diction to the body over several acts, including the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, Forest (Conservation) Act, Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, Environment (Protection) Act, Public Liability Insurance Act, and the Biological Diversity Act. "Since requisite instructions and guidelines have already been issued and concerned authorities are expected to comply with the same while ensuring the smooth holding of the election...", the tribunal said in an order passed on Tuesday.

"Hence, we are of the view that, at this stage, no further direction by the tribunal is required," it added.

The plea, filed by advocate Gaurav Bansal, underlined that a shortage of manpower could destroy the "precious natural resources" of forests. The Election Commission

of India had issued circulars dated February 8 and June 7 last year that exempted certain categories of vehicles, including forest vehicles, and some categories of personnel, including senior forest officials and territorial staff of the Forest department, from being requisitioned for election duty, respectively, the tribunal noted.

It also noted a circular of the Central Empowered Committee dated February 2 that requested all chief secretaries not to requisition for election duty vehicles of wildlife sanctuaries, national sanctuaries and national games parks.

Additionally, a communication was issued by the Uttarakhand government the following day, exempting from the Lok Sabha elections duty Forest department vehicles allotted in various circles and personnel posted at the field level because of forest fires, the bench noted.

Heed WHO warning, Mothers against vaping group urges nations to act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Mothers Against Vaping, a coalition of proactive and concerned mothers, has issued a call to action for South-East Asian nations to heed the World Health Organization's (WHO) warning regarding the rising use of new-age gateway devices like e-cigarettes and vapes, especially among children and youth.

This collective effort aims to combat what they describe as the "escalating vaping crisis" affecting young people.

The WHO's caution against the proliferation of vaping in the region underscores the urgent need to control the spread of e-cigarettes and similar products. Notably, India has taken a proactive stance by enacting the PECA 2019 legislation, which bans all aspects of electronic cigarette products, including production, manufacturing, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage, and advertisement, deeming them illegal within the country.

Dr. Rajesh Gupta, additional director of Pulmonology and Critical Care at Fortis Healthcare, emphasized that claiming e-cigarettes can eliminate nicotine addiction is scientifically inaccurate, given their nicotine content. Furthermore, the use of e-cigarettes can deliver higher doses of nicotine and other harmful



chemicals, posing additional risks to users, especially young people.

Dr. Bhavna Barmi, a Clinical Psychologist and Founder of Happiness Studio, highlights the mental health impacts associated with vaping, including mood and anxiety disorders, suicidal thoughts, and depressive symptoms.

Mothers Against Vaping also drew attention to a survey conducted by the American Heart Association, presented in February 2023.

The findings of the survey revealed a concerning correlation between vaping nicotine and THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the psychoactive component in marijuana and self-reported symptoms of depression and anxiety.

"The long-term consequences of e-cigarettes remain unknown, but studies have already demonstrated serious lung injuries and adverse

health effects associated with their use. Without effective control measures, the widespread prevalence of these new-age devices poses a genuine risk, potentially leaving our future generation with lasting health impairments.

"From causing chemical poisoning in users to jeopardising maternal and foetal health, vaping presents a myriad of physical health risks," said Dr Varuna Pathak, former Professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, Gandhi Medical College. According to a new study, vapers are susceptible to infection by SARS-CoV-2, the virus that spreads COVID-19 and continues to infect people around the world. The researchers from University of California, Riverside said the liquid used in electronic cigarettes, called e-liquid, typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol, vegetable glycerin, and flavor chemicals.

India, Nepal foreign secretaries hold talks, review bilateral ties



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and his Nepalese counterpart Sewa Lamsal on Wednesday reviewed various key aspects of India-Nepal bilateral ties.

Lamsal is in India in her first foreign visit after assuming charge as Nepal's foreign secretary recently.

"The two foreign secretaries held discussions on the entire range of multifaceted cooperation between India and Nepal and also followed up on the seventh-India-Nepal joint commission meeting," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. The joint commission meeting was co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Nepalese counterpart N P Saud in Kathmandu last month. "The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges

between the two countries and the priority India attaches to its relations with Nepal under its 'Neighbourhood First' policy, and provides an opportunity to further advance our bilateral ties," the MEA said on Lamsal's visit.

Foreign Secretary Lamsal is visiting India to participate in the eighth Asia Economic Dialogue being jointly convened by the MEA and Pune International Centre on Thursday in Pune.

Nepal is important for India in the context of its overall strategic interests in the region, and the leaders of the two countries have often noted the age-old "Roti Beti" relationship.

The country shares a border of over 1,850 km with five Indian states -- Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Landlocked Nepal relies heavily on India for the transportation of goods and services.

FIRST COLUMN

BUILDING BRIDGES WITH EMPATHY


It is incumbent upon us to ensure that every student receives vital lessons in empathy



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

After being constantly taunted for her height, skin colour and academic performance by her fellow students for months, a 12-year-old girl cut her wrists in an attempt to end her mental agony. Fortunately, she was saved. But a 16-year-old student of Class 10, who jumped off the top floor of the apartment building he was living in, did not survive. It was his letter to his mother in which he wrote that the school had killed him, that revealed the shocking details of bullying he was subjected to and the school's failure to stop it. While several steps have been taken to put an end to bullying, penal action can only be a temporary deterrent and not a long-term solution especially in the present milieu of hyped social media, freely available toxic content and, peer pressure.

If children are taught to engage empathetically, can it inculcate feelings of respect, dignity and compassion for all? Project Empathy, an endeavour to bring empathy education into school curricula, believes being empathetic can nurture emotionally and mentally strong human beings. When young students understand the importance of living in harmony with one another, the 'walls of division' between them transform into 'walls of friendship'. Contrary to popular belief, empathy can be taught. While 50% of our empathic capacities are genetically inherited, research shows that the rest can be learnt. This is the biggest reason why empathy must be taught at a young age. Over the last five years, Project Empathy led by educationist Vibha Lakhera, introduced this concept and developed activities and stories that acknowledge, recognize and identify emotions and broaden the discussion around emotional health and well-being of every student.



Empathy education helps to enrich the emotional vocabulary of students and build their emotional and mental resilience. Introduced in about six schools mainly army schools like the Army Rifles Public Schools in North India and Kashmir and Alok Bharati Public School in Delhi, the project has been able to reach out to over 1500 students. Importantly, teachers, who lay the foundation for their values, have been recognized as critical to the success of teaching empathy.

This resource book for teachers draws from the education system and best practices in schools in Denmark and Finland, two countries among the top three happiest countries in the world according to the United National Happiness Report. Put together by Lakhera and veteran development journalist Usha Rai, the interesting manual explains the neuroscience of empathy with the help of psychologists and brain scientists sans any jargon. The mirror neurons, which light up when a person feels an emotion like sadness or joy, respond in the same way when this person sees another person also demonstrating the same kind of feelings or actions. This empathic reaction helps to understand and share experiences.

The manual also explains the types of empathy-cognitive, emotional and compassionate while differentiating between sympathy and empathy. Stories centred on children and their emotions have been innovatively used to provide practical guidelines on how to diffuse tensions, reduce stress, and strengthen understanding of each other's differences. At present, empathy is not included in teacher training programmes. Only a handful of schools have taken the initiative to introduce the concept of empathy education. There is a need to encourage all students to consider different perspectives and viewpoints. Only by being empathetic, can they understand and acknowledge differences of opinion and resolve conflict situations.

(Swapna Majumdar is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are expressed are personal)

Nawaz Sharif's strategic move or military script?



KS TOMAR

Nawaz's decision to step aside from the race for premiership in Pakistan and nominate his brother Shehbaz instead has sparked intense debate



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Nawaz's critics allege that the stage was set for 'mass scale rigging' to help him become PM, but the game plan went haywire as independents supported by Imran from jail won a majority of the seats and Nawaz's party PML-N could not get even a simple majority, which shattered the dream of Nawaz

lively and geo-political issue is being debated worldwide, especially in Pakistan which pertains to the 'mysterious' decision of three-time prime minister, Nawaz Sharif to Suo moto opt out of the race for premiership and subsequently nominate his younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif for the top slot though he was a favourite of powerful military, obviously current army chief, Asim Munir, who had scripted the entire episode to enthrone him.

Foreign policy experts say that it was on the analogy of former PM, Imran Khan who was saddled in the chair due to the open patronage of Ex-Army chief, Qamar Javed Bajwa but both fell apart owing to fighting for supremacy. It was a paradox and a typical case of a "servant" challenging the authority of the "Master" which may happen in this dispensation also but Nawaz as a "shadow PM" may not permit it as he has had the bitter experience of being ousted by the army from the post in 2018.

Analysts are convinced that owing to compelling circumstances, Ex PM, Nawaz played his cards well hence the choice fell on his brother which will also ensure the continuity of "Family Rule" in Pakistan. Yet, another addition will be Maryam Nawaz who is poised to become chief minister of the most important province of Punjab.

2nd, the army had meticulously planned to keep Imran Khan out of the political process hence more than 150 cases were registered against him by the previous regime and courts handed him the punishment in three cases which exceeded 24 years.

3rd, due to Imran's tirade against the army, Nawaz was brought to Pakistan last year from self-exile in London which preceded the Supreme Court's decision in 2018 to sentence him to ten -years imprisonment and a fine of \$10.6 million in a corruption case related to Panama papers of illegal properties abroad. He was disqualified and hence fled to London to fight his battle.

Nawaz's brother Shahbaz headed the government in Pakistan which ensured the adoption of a bill in parliament on June 25, 2023, which limited the lifetime disqualification of lawmakers to 5 years.

It was meant to pave the way for the return of his elder brother to resume his political activities in Pakistan.4th, Nawaz's critics allege that the stage was set for "mass scale rigging" to help him to become PM but the game plan went haywire as independents supported by Imran from jail won a majority of the seats and Nawaz's party PML-N could not get even simple majority which shattered the dream of Nawaz who was averse to heading a minority government.

5th, Nawaz nominated Shehbaz because he had experience in heading coalition governments and was a flexible politician who could take partners along .6th, Nawaz would have found it difficult in parliament as Imran's loyalists were ready with a lot of ammunition to put him on the mat on corruption whereas Shehbaz is better placed so far. Finally, Nawaz and the army chief are on the same page which may help the new government to appease the sentiments and fulfil the aspirations of the people who are facing the problem of survival.

It will be the most difficult task of the Shehbaz government to implement the harsh preconditions of IMF which had released USD 710 million second tranche of a USD 3 billion loan to the cash-strapped country to stabilize its debt-ridden economy. Shehbaz's previous government had successfully negotiated with the IMF to procure the "bailout Package" which needs to be clinched. The IMF had saved Pakistan from economic collapse as Pakistan's reserves stood at \$7.8 billion as of Nov. 18, 2023, barely enough to cover imports for a month.

The people are reeling under inflation which has touched to the level of 30% and prices of essential commodities are beyond the capacity of consumers. The floods had caused losses of billions and thousands of lives were lost hence the new PM will have to take care of rehabilitation tasks which are in disarray.

The floods had caused tremendous losses of USD 3.3. trillion in June-October,2022 besides killing 1839 people which must be uppermost in the priorities of the new government as victims are still craving relief and rehabilitation tasks which seem to be in disarray.

China has treaded cautiously and did not touch the sensitive issue of rigging whereas the United States and EU demanded an investigation into the allegations. China has come to the rescue of Pakistan several times but the cost has been beyond the imagination of this poor country. China's debt policy has entrapped Pakistan which has procured a heavy loan and the Chinese investment has risen \$65 billion in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by 2022. China has already acquired control of Gwadar Port on 16 May 2013 which may be retained instead of a lease guarantee in future.

Originally valued at \$46 billion, the value of China Pakistan Economic Corridor had been worth \$62 billion as of 2020. India and the US are opposed to BRI hence Nawaz will have to tread cautiously to keep China in check to save his country from the debt trap policy.

China will be looking for the security protection of its projects in Pakistan hence it may develop cordial relations with the Shehbaz government. Experts say that the United States wanted to see the back of Imran who had accused it of conspiring with the army to oust him from power. It has got history of having direct ties with army generals hence it may find it easy to deal with the new government. India can expect Nawaz to influence Shehbaz to take the initiative to start dialogue with India which has already created its space in the world arena and economic ties can help the beleaguered people of this poor country.

The new coalition government is bound to be weak hence delivery expectations on domestic and international fronts must be based on logical conclusions and limitations of new dispensation in Pakistan.

(The writer is a journalist and political analyst, views are personal)

A roadmap for comprehensive socio-economic inclusion

The interim Budget for 2024 emerges as a crucial instrument for steering the nation towards inclusive development

As is the case with multiple developing economies across the world, India is faced with wealth inequality, unemployment, existing and persisting gaps in healthcare infrastructure and delivery, and environmental concerns. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index based on data from 2021/22 finds that 16.4 % of India's population lives in poverty with 4.2% facing severe poverty.

The Regional Human Development Report 2024 by UNDP finds that the top 10% of the population controls 65% of the nation's total wealth, underlining stark wealth inequality. The consequences are multi-dimensional – it negatively impacts upward intergenerational mobility and



NAGHMA MULLA

lowers the rate of economic growth.

Lack of jobs has been an area of concern for the country for decades now. While the current unemployment rate for January 2024 is 6.8, unemployment amongst educated youth is concerning. The State of Working India 2023 by Azim Premji University reveals that over 42% of India's graduates under 25 were unemployed in 2021-22.

Marked by a distinct urban-rural divide, gaps in healthcare services and infrastructure are a major obstacle for people in small towns and rural areas. A large part of India's population suffers from inaccessibility to quality healthcare – leading to delayed treatments and high out-of-pocket expenditure.

A United Nations report emphasises that approximately 75% of healthcare infrastructure, medical personnel, and other health resources are predominantly located in urban regions, home to merely 27% of the overall population. The impact of climate change and disasters on both people and the economy has been devastating. India experienced uninsured losses of \$32.94 billion from natural disasters between 2018 and 2022. The ramifications of human loss are even more grave and are evident in the 55.9 million displacements from 237 disasters mapped between 2018 – 2022. The interim budget addresses these issues in a big way.

It presents a comprehensive roadmap for national progress, meticulously designed to touch upon critical facets of development such as women empowerment, job creation, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation. It aims to address the needs and aspirations of diverse social groups—'Garib' (the poor), 'Mahilayen' (women), 'Yuva' (youth), and 'Annadata' (farmers). This inclusion is notable as it envisages the significance of marginalised social groups in achieving a Viksit Bharat – a developed India by 2047 – marking a century of India's independence.

The budget prioritises support for the 'Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises' (MSME) sector with necessary finances, technologies, and training to enhance global competitiveness. The rooftop solarization policy is set to offer employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in technical and supply sectors.

Additionally, the establishment of a separate Department for Fisheries and the expansion of the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) underscore efforts to double production and exports in the fisheries sector, aiming to create 55 lakh new jobs and drive inclusive economic progress. A significant step is the focus on provisions for the inclusion of low-income groups and women. Initiatives like the disbursement of 30 crore Mudra Yojana loans to women entrepreneurs and financial support to 78 lakh street vendors under PM-SVANidhi emphasise the government's focus on enhancing work-force participation and providing earning avenues that drive upward mobility.

The SHG model of development has also proved to be successful – enabling nearly 10 million women to achieve annual incomes of over INR 1 lakh. Capitalising on this success, the goal has been expanded to elevate the target from 2 crore to 3 crore 'lakhpati didis', showcasing a commitment to women's economic empowerment. The budget made notable health sector announcements. The focus on preventive healthcare through the provision of cervical cancer vaccinations for young girls and the integration of various maternal and child health schemes indicate a push towards addressing the specific health needs of vulnerable groups.

The expansion of the Ayushman Bharat scheme to extend healthcare benefits to approximately 1.5 million ASHA workers and Anganwadi workers acknowledges the crucial contribution of these frontline health workers to primary healthcare services. Leverage existing hospital structures for the establishment of more medical colleges, addresses both – the healthcare professional shortage and the surging demand for medical education. This builds on the initiative from April 2023, when the government approved the establishment of 157 nursing colleges, allocating INR 1,570 crore, with the central government contributing INR 1,016 crore. The budget also provides a concrete pathway to achieving a net-zero economy by 2070. Key measures include funding for offshore wind energy, coal gasification projects to lessen reliance on fossil fuels, support for the electric vehicle ecosystem, and incentives for bio-mass collection. The budget also promotes bio-manufacturing for eco-friendly materials and climate resilience in the blue economy.

(The author is a prominent voice on social issues; views are personal)

PM Modi to launch ₹1.64 lakh crore projects from Begusarai

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In his first visit to Bihar after Chief Minister Nitish Kumar joined hands with the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on March 2 launch nation-wide projects worth over Rs 1.64 lakh, nearly Rs 29,000 crore of it focussed on the state.

The projects to be launched Begusarai are related to multiple sectors including oil, gas, fertiliser and railways.

Official sources said the 39 of these projects, which will be either inaugurated or kick-started with the foundation laying ceremony, are in the oil and gas sector, and 10 in the railways. Six new trains will also be flagged off.

Modi will also inaugurate the revived the Barauni fertiliser plant which will not only boost urea's domestic production but also generate employment opportunities, they added.

The prime minister has over the past few weeks launched numerous projects, worth lakhs of crores of rupees, in education, health, rail and infra sec-



tors as he seeks to emphasise on his government's pro-development credentials in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls.

He has often highlighted that the speed and scale of work the country has been seeing is unprecedented.

It also jives with his agenda of making a "Viksit Bharat" (developed India) by 2047 and the assertion that the return of his government to power for a third term is essential for the development journey to continue.

The launch of projects from Bihar, with many of them meant for the poor state, is expected to burnish the BJP-

JD(U) alliance's pro-development agenda at a time the opposition bloc led by RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav has sought to appropriate the plank.

Yadav has claimed that it was his presence as deputy to Nitish Kumar which was responsible for giving employment to tens of thousands of youngsters before the JD(U) joined hands with the BJP, an assertion dismissed contemptuously by the chief minister.

The rail projects, an official said, will be mostly focussed on north Bihar, the more densely populated and impoverished region. However, the rail min-

istry has more trenches of projects coming up in the state and they will be catering to its other regions.

Over Rs 10,000 crore of the rail budget for this year is meant for the state, the official said.

In the petroleum sector, officials said, Modi will launch a total of 39 projects costing Rs 1,49,823 crore. He will inaugurate 29 projects with a capex of Rs 89,000 crore and lay the foundation of 10 projects with an outlay of more than Rs 60,000 crore.

Modi will dedicate to the nation "first oil" from the KG Basin and flag off first crude oil tanker, Swarna Sindhu, from the ONGC Krishna Godavari deep-water (around 1443 Meter) project to Mangalore, Karnataka, marking a historic achievement, they said.

It promises to significantly reduce India's dependency on energy imports. This project is likely to increase ONGC's total oil and gas production by 11 percent and 15 percent respectively, they said.

MNREGA wages not paid for two years, claims Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Continuing her diatribe against the BJP Government Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has once again brought deprivation charges against the Centre alleging how New Delhi had withheld lawfully earned wages of 59 lakh people of Bengal who would go to vote in the general elections. She said her Government would any way start paying the money to the unpaid workers.

Iterating that the people of Bengal were not beggars but "self-respecting citizens" known for fighting for their rights Banerjee alleged how the Centre had not paid MNREGA wages for more than two years to the workers who gave their labour under the 100-days' work scheme.

The Chief Minister was addressing a crowd at Khatra in Bankura district in Jangalmahal mostly inhabited by the tribal people. Attacking the powers

that be for dividing the people in the name of religion and issuing 'food fatwa' on the people, Banerjee said, "they are telling you not to eat fish or meat or egg... they are closing non-vegetarian shops... but I want to ask who are they to impose such directions as what a person should eat and what a person should not eat... food habits go with culture."

Alleging that the Government was trying to convert the character of tribal lands she vowed not to allow anyone to usurp or change the character of tribal holdings. "There is an effort to change the character of tribal lands which is illegal... but I will never allow the tribal land to be changed," Banerjee said accusing the BJP of taking votes of the tribal people but doing nothing for them. She also alleged how the Centre had stopped the OBC scholarship adding her Government was giving scholarships to all the sections of people irrespective of their castes.

ECI to deploy CAPF in strife torn Bengal from March 1

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

As though the Sandeshkhali turmoil was not enough; there is more 'bad' news for the Mamata Banerjee Government. The Election Commission of India is sending some advance battalions of central forces to Bengal well before the declaration of the general elections. According to ECI sources 100 companies of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) will be sent to the State on March 1. This is two days ahead of the visit of the full bench of the ECI. The forces will comprise 20 companies of CRPF, 50 companies of BSF and 10 companies each from ITBP, SSB and CISF.

Further on March 7, a day ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tour of Bengal the ECI will send another 50 companies of central forces, sources said. Out of these 50 companies 30 companies will come from BSF, whereas 10 will come from CRPF and 5 each

from SSB and RPF, sources said.

The forces will not only start area domination but also get and understanding of the geographical and administrative area of the places they will so be deployed, sources said adding this will reduce dependence on the local police that often mislead the forces or take meandering routes to reach the places of occurrences, this delaying action.

This year, the ECI has decided to deploy the most number of central forcers to Bengal which will get 922 companies of CAPF.

This, in view of intermittent complaints of political unrests and murders --- particularly during the elections --- for the past several years.

Incidentally the Calcutta High Court had during last year's panchayat elections directed a reluctant State Election Commission to seek and deploy 82,000 central force personnel.

Two Muslim Conference factions in JK banned over terror charges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The government Wednesday banned two factions of the Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir for five years for their anti-India and pro-Pakistan propaganda, and asking people to refrain from taking part in elections.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is determined to uproot terrorism, and anyone involved in unlawful activities will face dire consequences.

"Striking terror networks with undiminished vehemence, the government has declared the Muslim Conference Jammu & Kashmir (Sumji faction) and Kashmir (Bhat faction) as Unlawful Associations.

"These outfits have been engaging in activities against the

sovereignty and integrity of the nation," Shah wrote on 'X'.

On Tuesday, the government extended the ban imposed on the Jamaat-e-Islami, Jammu Kashmir (JeI), by another five years for continuing activities that pose a threat to the security of the nation.

In a notification on Wednesday, the Union Home Ministry said the Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir- Sumji faction (MCJK-S), chaired by Ghulam Nabi Sumji, is known for its anti-India and pro-Pakistan propaganda and its members have been involved in supporting terrorist activities and providing logistical support to terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir. The leaders and members of MCJK-S have been involved in raising funds through various sources including from Pakistan and its proxy

organisations for perpetrating unlawful activities, including supporting terrorist activities and sustained stone-pelting on security forces in Jammu and Kashmir, the notification said.

Besides, the home ministry said, the MCJK-S has constantly asked the people of Kashmir to refrain from taking part in elections and thereby targeted and hampered the very basic constitutionally recognised fundamentals of Indian democracy.

The MCJK-S and its members by their activities show sheer disrespect towards the constitutional authority and constitutional set up of the country, it said, adding they have been indulging in unlawful activities, which are prejudicial to the integrity, sovereignty, and security of the country. The MCJK-S is also involved in promoting, aiding and abetting secession of Jammu and



Kashmir from India by involving in anti-national and subversive activities; sowing seeds of dis-affection amongst people; exhorting people to destabilise law and order; encouraging the use of arms to separate Jammu and Kashmir from the Union of India; and promoting hatred against established government by giving clarion call to boycott

elections on multiple occasions in Jammu and Kashmir.

The home ministry said the central government is of the opinion that if there is no immediate curb or control of unlawful activities of the Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir (Sumji faction), it will use this opportunity to continue with the anti-national activities which are detrimental to the territorial integrity, security and sovereignty of the country.

The group will also continue advocating the secession of Jammu and Kashmir while disputing its accession to the Union of India and continue propagating false narrative and anti-national sentiments among the people there with the intention to cause disaffection against India and disrupt public order, the notification said.

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by subsection (1) of the section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967), the central government hereby declares the Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir (Sumji faction) (MCJK-S) as an unlawful association," it said.

The ban will continue for five years, it said. In a separate notification, the home ministry said Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir-Bhat faction (MCJK-B), chaired by Abdul Ghani Bhat, have been indulging in unlawful activities, which are prejudicial to the integrity, sovereignty and security of the country. The home ministry said the MCJK-B has linkages with banned terrorist organisations and has supported terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and its members have been indulging in generating feelings of hatred and disaffection against India to separate Jammu and Kashmir from Union of India.

The leaders and members of the MCJK-B have been involved in raising funds through various sources including from Pakistan and its proxy organisations for perpetrating unlawful activities, including supporting terrorist activities, sustained stone-pelting on Security Forces in

Jammu and Kashmir.

The MCJK-B by giving clarion call to boycott elections on multiple occasions, has also attempted to subvert the will of people and democratic process in Jammu and Kashmir, the notification said.

It said the group is also involved in promoting, aiding and abetting the secession of Jammu and Kashmir from India by involving in anti-national and subversive activities; sowing seeds of dis-affection amongst people; exhorting people to destabilise law and order; encouraging the use of armed struggle to separate Jammu and Kashmir; and promoting hatred against established government.

Considering these facts, the central government declares the Muslim Conference Jammu and Kashmir (Bhat faction) (MCJK-B) as an unlawful association for five years, the home ministry said.

Six national parties declare total income of ₹3,077 core in current fiscal: ADR report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The six national parties have declared a total income of nearly Rs 3,077 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal, with the BJP getting the maximum share of around Rs 2,361 crore. According to the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), the ruling BJP's income constitutes 76.73 per cent of the total income of the six national parties during FY 2022-23.

The Congress declared the second highest income at Rs 452.375 crore, which forms 14.70 per cent of the total income of the six national parties. Besides the BJP and the Congress, BSP, AAP, NPP and CPI-M have declared their income.

The BJP, Congress and AAP collected 49.09 per cent or Rs 1,510.61 crore of national parties' total income from donations through electoral bonds for FY 2022-23. The BJP received Rs 1294.15 crore through electoral bonds, while the Congress received Rs 171.02 crore and AAP Rs 45.45 crore. Citing data shared by the SBI in response to its RTI, the ADR said electoral bonds worth Rs 2,797.356 crore were redeemed by parties in FY 2022-23. Fifty-four per cent or Rs 1510.62 crore of this has been redeemed by national parties.

Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, the BJP's income increased by 23.15 per cent or Rs 443.724 crore from Rs 1,917.12 crore in to Rs 2,360.84, the ADR said. The income of National People's Party (NPP) -- the only party from the northeast to have the national party status -- increased from Rs 47.20 lakh during FY 2021-22 to Rs 7.562 crore during FY 2022-23, a rise of 1,502.12 per cent or Rs 7.09 crore.

The AAP's income increased by 91.23 per cent (Rs 40.631 crore) from Rs 44.539 crore during FY 2021-

22 to Rs 85.17 crore during FY 2022-23. Between the 2021-22 fiscal and 2022-23 fiscal, the income of the Congress, CPI(M) and BSP decreased by 16.42 per cent (Rs 88.90 crore), 12.68 per cent (Rs 20.57 crore) and 33.14 per cent (Rs 14.50 crore) respectively, it noted, citing their records submitted to the Election Commission.

It also said the BJP declared a total income of Rs 2360.844 crore during FY 2022-23, but spent only 57.68 per cent, which comes to Rs 1,361.684 crore of the total income. The Congress' total income was Rs 452.375 crore while it spent Rs 467.135 crore, with its expenditure for that year exceeding its total income by 3.26 per cent. The CPI(M)'s total income was Rs 141.661 crore while it spent Rs 106.067 crore -- 74.87 per cent of its income. Similarly, the AAP's total income was Rs 85.17 crore while it spent Rs 102.051 crore -- its expenditure for that year exceeding its total income by 19.82 per cent. Given the anonymity provided to donors by the scheme, it was seen that Electoral Bonds emerged as the most popular mode of donations to National Political parties for FY 2021-22 as well. "Only 4 National Parties (BJP, INC, NCP and AITC) have received Donations through Electoral Bonds (Rs 1811.9425 cr), wherein the identity of the donor is not disclosed to the public.

Of the Regional parties that have submitted their audit reports, 10 Regional Parties (DMK, BJD, BRS, YSR-Congress, JDU, SP, AAP, SAD, MGP and TDP) have declared receiving donations through Electoral Bonds worth Rs 852.88 cr in FY 2021-22. During 2022-23, out of the 6 National parties, only 2 Parties (INC - Rs 125.7676 cr and CPI(M) - Rs 11.031 cr) declared receiving a total income of Rs 136.7986 cr from Sale of Coupons", it said.

Congress Faces Himachal...

From Page 1

"The Congress party had made promises to the people, and we owe the responsibility to fulfill those promises, and I would decide my future course of action after consulting my supporters," he added.

In the Assembly, chaos ensued when the House met in the morning.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan moved a motion seeking the suspension of BJP MLAs for allegedly disrespecting the Speaker. The motion was adopted by voice vote, and the Speaker axed 15 MLAs.

The BJP members, however, refused to leave. The Speaker then adjourned the House till 12 pm. Meanwhile, a group of six Congress and three Independent MLAs, who had spent Tuesday night at a guesthouse in Panchkula in BJP-run Haryana after voting against the Congress candidate, were back in the House. They were flown back in a helicopter.

As these MLAs entered the House, BJP members greeted them by thumping their desks. They also raised the slogan, "Jai Shri Ram, Ban Gaya Kaam".

On Tuesday, Sukhu had claimed that the MLAs had been "abducted" by the Haryana Police and the CRPF.

Unwavering support for Rahul...

From Page 1

Another CPI (M) worker pointed out that if the Congress-led Opposition wins the 2024 polls, Rahul would be the automatic choice as the Prime Minister, and Wayanad would have the distinction of being the constituency represented by the Prime Minister.

The CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front had allocated the constituency to the CPI, the poor cousin of the former, since there were no takers from the Marxist party itself. The CPI, described as the ideological giants among the global Communist movements, has fielded Anie Raja, wife of the CPI's all India general secretary D Raja.

India bears brunt...

From Page 1

Of particular concern was the duration of these extreme weather events, with India enduring 123 consecutive days of such conditions between June and September 2023. This prolonged exposure underscores the significant long-term implications for infrastructure, livelihoods, and ecosystem resilience.

The detailed analysis provided by the report offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of extreme weather events in India in 2023, emphasising the critical need for proactive measures to address their impacts and build a more resilient society in the face of ongoing climate change.

Climate experts warn that it has now been confirmed that global warming exceeded 1.5°C across the 12-month

period between February 2023 and January 2024.

This followed 2023 being declared the warmest year on record.

The United Nations also sounded an alarm that 2023 is set to be the hottest ever recorded.

It demanded urgent action to rein in global warming and stem the havoc following in its wake. The UN's World Meteorological Organisation pointed out that 2023 had shattered a whole host of climate records, with extreme weather leaving "a trail of devastation and despair".

"It's a deafening cacophony of broken records," said WMO chief Petteri Taalas. "Greenhouse gas levels are at a record high. Global temperatures are at a record high. Sea level rise is at a record high. Antarctic sea ice is at a record low," he said.

leaders said on Wednesday.

The names of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and former leader Sushma Swaraj's daughter Bansuri Swaraj were among the probables from the New Delhi seat apart from sitting MP Meenakshi Lekhi, a senior Delhi BJP official said.

Largest ever offshore...

From Page 1

The unregistered fishing boat was intercepted on Tuesday morning in the Arabian Sea, approximately 60 nautical miles from the Indian coast and along the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). The Navy deployed its P81 long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft and marine commandos onboard a warship and helicopters.

Providing details of the operation on Wednesday, the Navy stated, "In a successful coordinated operation at sea, the Indian Navy, in coordination with the Narcotics Control Bureau, apprehended a suspicious dhow carrying almost 3,300 kg of contraband (3,089 kg charas, 158 kg Methamphetamine, 25 kg Morphine) - by far the largest in terms of quantity in recent times."

Based on the input from the P-81 long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft on a surveillance mission, Indian Navy mission-deployed ships

were diverted to intercept the suspicious dhow engaged in contraband smuggling, navy officials said.

"The seizure of drugs from the dhow, which is by far the largest in terms of quantity, was possible through the collaborative efforts of the Indian Navy's mission-deployed assets with the NCB. The contraband, along with the apprehended boat and crew, has been handed over to the Law Enforcement Agencies at an Indian port, PM 27 Feb 24," they said.

"The coordinated response of the Indian Navy with Law Enforcement Agencies is reflective of our resolute stance against narcotics trafficking in India's maritime neighborhood," the Navy statement added.

The NCB in Delhi said the joint team of agencies "busted yet another international drug trafficking network and effected the highest-ever offshore seizure (by quantity) in the country".

The five people arrested

from the boat are suspected to be either Iranian or Pakistani nationals. No documents of nationality have been recovered from them, a senior NCB officer said. The official did not specify the cost of the contraband. In the international market, one kg of charas is priced at Rs 7 crore. The NCB said in New Delhi almost 3,300 kg of contraband that includes 3,110 kg of charas or hashish, 158.3 kg of crystal Methamphetamine, and 24.6 kg of suspected heroin have been recovered from packets that bore the stamp of 'Ras Awad Goods Co, produce of Pakistan.'

The source of the drugs is found to be the Chabahar Port in Iran, the agency said.

NCB director-general S N Pradhan told reporters during a Press conference in Delhi that the cache could be estimated to be worth anything between Rs 1,300-Rs 2,000 crore in the international market.

Modi slams DMK, Congress...

From Page 1

About 40 lakh women in Tamil Nadu have got a gas cylinder facility. Whenever India grows, Tamil Nadu grows," said the Prime Minister. He said the DMK was indulging in hate politics. "Some people are politicising Hindi and Tamil languages. However, the Union

Alliance.

For the 2024 polls, the BJP has identified 160 seats that the party deems weak and thus organised early campaigning and public contact programmes over the past one year.

The meeting on Uttar Pradesh was attended by Shah and saw the participation of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath,

Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, and Minister Dharampal Singh, among others.

In the 2019 election, the BJP had won 62 of the State's 80 seats. There was also a discussion on the 42 seats of the West Bengal where the BJP is keeping a close eye on 35 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats.

Trump defeats Nikki in Michigan primary

Biden wins Democratic primary

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Voters handed decisive victories to US President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump in their respective parties' presidential primaries in Michigan on Tuesday, increasing the chances of a 2020 rematch between the two leaders in the race for the White House in 2024.

Trump easily defeated his main rival, Indian-American Nikki Haley, winning yet another early contest and additional delegates - bringing him one step closer to being able to formally secure the Republican Party's nomination in November.

When the last reports came in, Haley had received 26.5 per cent of the votes as against Trump's massive 68.2 per cent. US media outlets projected



that 77-year-old Trump would sweep the Michigan primary with more than 40 per cent of the votes against 52-year-old Haley. Trump's win further shuts the door on former South Carolina Governor Haley's hopes of building momentum ahead of next week's Super Tuesday contests, when more than one-third of the Republican Party's delegates are at stake.

Trump has previously won the Iowa caucuses, New Hampshire primary, caucuses in Nevada and the U.S. Virgin

Islands, and South Carolina primary. He needs 1,215 delegates to formally secure the nomination.

Trump reached the Michigan Republican Watch Party Tuesday night shortly after the race was called in his favour.

"I just want to thank everybody. This was a great day," he said, pointing to the state's autoworkers, saying Democrats "destroyed the autowork business," but vowed to "bring it all back into Michigan" if elected.

"I can tell you this

November cannot come fast enough," Trump said. "We have the worst president in history—the most incompetent and the most corrupt president, and we can't let this continue," Trump said, attacking his Democratic Party rival.

"So that day, November 5th, and January 20th is when we take over," Trump said, referring to Election Day and Inauguration Day. "We're going to make America great again, greater than ever before," Trump said, amidst applause from his supporters.

Trump has won 119 delegates while Haley has just 22. To receive the Republican Party's presidential nomination, one should get the backing of 1,215 delegates.

Meanwhile, Biden, 81, coasted to another victory in the state, marking his fourth primary victory in four tries. He has won 177 delegates from the four victories. Biden, who does not have any known rivals, has to win 1,968 delegates to get the Democratic Party's nomination.

Reacting to his victory, Biden said, "I want to thank

every Michigander who made their voice heard today. Exercising the right to vote and participating in our democracy is what makes America great.

"Four years ago, it was Michigan's diverse coalition that came together to reject Donald Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) extremism and sent me and Kamala to the White House," he said in a statement.

"For all of this progress, there is so much left to do. Donald Trump is threatening to drag us even further into the past as he pursues revenge and retribution," Biden said.

Meanwhile, the results in Michigan further solidified the positions of Trump and Biden as frontrunners in their respective parties.

Republicans will formally name their presidential candidate during a national convention in July. Democrats will have their convention in August.

However, a key feature of the Democratic primary in Michigan, which has a significant Muslim population, as

around 13.25 per cent of Biden's Democratic voters cast ballots for the "uncommitted" as part of their protest against the president for his handling of the Israel-Palestine war.

Strong opposition to Biden's support for Israel's war in Gaza against Hamas militants led some Democrats to call for voters to select "uncommitted" instead of casting a vote for the incumbent president.

Supporters of the effort for "uncommitted" ballots in Michigan said they were hoping for 10,000 such votes, a level that was easily surpassed. With nearly 99 per cent of the ballots counted, there were already more than one lakh "uncommitted" votes.

The movement picked up the support of Rep. Rashida Tlaib, who announced her public opposition to supporting Biden ahead of her home state's primary. "I was proud today to walk in and pull a Democratic ballot and vote uncommitted. We must protect our democracy. We must make sure that our government is about us, about the people," Tlaib said in a video.

Turkish drones kill three in Syria

Beirut(AP): Turkish drone strikes in northeastern Syria on Wednesday killed at least three members of a local Christian force and wounded others, including civilians, a Kurdish official and a Syrian opposition war monitor said. Also on Wednesday, in the southern Syrian city of Sweida, security forces opened fire at protesters angry over the country's worsening economy as they tried to break into the offices of President Bashar Assad's ruling Baath Party. A 52-year-old man was shot in the chest and later died of his wounds.

There was no immediate comment from Ankara on Wednesday's airstrikes. Turkey has been attacking Kurdish fighters in Syria for years but attacks on the fighters from the country's Christian minority have been rare.

The force that was targeted, the local Christian Syrian police known as Sutoro, works under the US-backed and Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration

of North and East Syria.

Siamand Ali of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces told The Associated Press that the Turkish drones initially hit three Sutoro vehicles near the northeastern town of Malikiyah. When a fourth vehicle, a pick-up truck, arrived at the scene to retrieve the casualties from the strike, it also came under attack, he said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said three Sutoro police members were killed, as well as one civilian. The Observatory said the attack was the latest of 65 such strikes so far this year in northeastern Syria that have killed 18 people, mostly Kurdish fighters. Turkey often launches strikes against targets in Syria and Iraq it believes to be affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK — a banned Kurdish separatist group that has waged an insurgency against Turkey since the 1980s.

Israel-Hamas war: No imminent deal despite Biden's Gaza ceasefire signal

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel and Hamas on Tuesday played down chances of an imminent breakthrough in talks for a cease-fire in Gaza, after US President Joe Biden said Israel has agreed to pause its offensive during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan if a deal is reached to release some hostages. The president's remarks came on the eve of the Michigan primary, where he faces pressure from the state's large Arab American population over his staunch support for Israel's offensive. Biden said he had been briefed on the status of talks by his national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, but said his comments reflected his optimism for a deal, not that all the remaining hurdles had been overcome.

In the wake of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, Israel's air, sea and ground campaign in Gaza has killed tens of thousands of people, obliterated large swaths of

the urban landscape and displaced 80% of the battered enclave's population.

Israel's seal on the territory, which allows in only a trickle of food and other aid, has sparked alarm that a famine could be imminent, according to the United Nations.

With UN truck deliveries of aid hampered by the lack of safe corridors, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and France conducted an airdrop of food, medical supplies and other aid into Gaza on Tuesday. At a beach in southern Gaza, boxes of supplies dropped from military aircraft drifted down on parachutes as thousands of Palestinians ran along the sand to retrieve them.

But alarm is growing over worsening hunger among Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians.

Two infants died from dehydration and malnutrition at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza City, said the spokesman

for Gaza's Health Ministry, Ashraf al-Qidra. He warned that infant mortality threatens to surge.

Dehydration and malnutrition will kill thousands of children and pregnant women in the Gaza Strip," he said.

The UN Population Fund said the Al Helal Al Emirati maternity hospital in Gaza's southernmost town of Rafah reported that newborns were dying because mothers were unable to get prenatal or postnatal care. Premature births are also rising, forcing staff to put four or five newborns in a single incubator.

Most of them do not survive, it said, without giving figures on the numbers of deaths. Now the prospect of an invasion of Rafah has prompted global alarm over the fate of around 1.4 million civilians trapped there. Talks to pause the fighting have gained momentum recently and were underway Tuesday. Negotiators from the United States, Egypt

and Qatar have been working to broker a cease-fire that would see Hamas free some of the dozens of hostages it holds in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners, a six-week halt in fighting and an increase in aid deliveries to Gaza.

The start of Ramadan, which is expected to be around March 10, is seen as an unofficial deadline for a deal. The month is a time of heightened religious observance and dawn-to-dusk fasting for hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world. Israeli-Palestinian tensions have flared in the past during the holy month.

"Ramadan's coming up, and there has been an agreement by the Israelis that they would not engage in activities during Ramadan as well, in order to give us time to get all the hostages out," Biden said in an appearance on NBC's "Late Night With Seth Meyers" that was recorded Monday.

Houthi rebels suspected in new rocket attack off Yemen coast

AP ■ DUBAI

A rocket exploded late Tuesday night off the side of a ship travelling through the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen, authorities said, the latest suspected attack to be carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels. The attack comes as the Houthis continue a series of assaults at sea over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip and as the US and its allies launch airstrikes trying to stop them.

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre, which oversees shipping in the Mideast, reported the attack happened about 110 kilometres off the coast of the Houthi-held port city of Hodeida. The rocket exploded several miles off the bow of the vessel, it said.

"The crew and vessel are reported to be safe and are proceeding to next port of call," the UKMTO said.

The private security firm Ambrey reported that the ves-

sel targeted appeared to be a Marshall Islands-flagged, Greek-owned bulk carrier in the area at the time. Another ship, a Panama-flagged, Emirati-owned chemical tanker was nearby as well, Ambrey said.

The Associated Press could not immediately identify the vessels involved.

The Houthis typically take several hours to claim their assaults and have not yet done so for the assault late Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the US military's Central Command said an American and an allied warship shot down five Houthi bomb-carrying drones in the Red Sea on Tuesday night.

The drones originated "from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and (it was) determined they presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and to the US Navy and coalition ships in the region," Central Command said in a statement.

Since November, the rebels

have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

Despite over a month of US-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. Last week, they severely 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.

The Houthis, a Zaydi Shiite group, seized Yemen's capital in 2014 and have battled a Saudi-led coalition since 2015. Their Zaydi people ran a 1,000-year kingdom in Yemen up until 1962.

‘Navalny’s funeral on Friday’

AP ■ MOSCOW

The funeral of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died earlier this month in a remote Arctic penal colony, will take place on Friday in Moscow after several locations declined to host the service, his spokesperson said. His funeral will be held at a church in Moscow's southeast Maryino district on Friday afternoon, Kira Yarmysh said on ednesday. The burial is to be at a nearby cemetery. Navalny died in mid-February in one of Russia's harshest penal facilities. Russian authorities said the cause of his death at age 47 is still unknown, and the results of any investigation are likely to be questioned abroad. Many Western leaders have already said they hold Russian President Vladimir Putin responsible for his death. Yarmysh spoke of the difficulties his team encountered in trying to find a site for a "farewell event" for Navalny. Writing on X, formerly known as Twitter, she said most venues



Yulia Navalnaya, widow of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny addresses the European Union's parliament on Wednesday.

said they were fully booked, with some "refusing when we mention the surname Navalny", and one disclosing that "funeral agencies were forbidden to work with us". Ivan Zhdanov, the director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said the funeral was initially planned for Thursday -- the day of

Putin's annual address to Russia's Federal Assembly -- but no venue would agree to hold it then. "The real reason is clear. The Kremlin understands that nobody will need Putin and his message on the day we say farewell to Alexei," Zhdanov wrote on Telegram. Shortly after the announcement of the funeral plans, Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, addressed European lawmakers in Strasbourg. Speaking at the European Parliament, she confirmed that her husband would be buried on Friday and expressed fears that the police might interfere. "I'm not sure yet whether it will be peaceful or whether police will arrest those who have come to say goodbye to my husband," she said.

At some points appearing tearful amid applause from lawmakers but largely resolute, Navalnaya said her husband's death "showed everyone that Putin is capable of anything, and that you cannot negotiate with him".

UK stepping up lawmakers' security as tensions flare over Israel-Hamas war

AP ■ LONDON

The British government said on Wednesday that it is stepping up security for lawmakers after politicians reported threats and intimidation connected to the Israel-Hamas war. The Home Office said a 31 million-pound (USD 40 million) fund will give every lawmaker a "dedicated named police contact" and provide money for those facing threats to pay for private security protection.

The government said some of the money will go more broadly to protecting Britain's "democratic processes from intimidation, disruption or subversion" ahead of a general election later this year. The fund includes money for extra police patrols in areas where tensions are high.

Divisions over the conflict in Gaza have convulsed British politics, with some lawmakers saying they fear for their safety after receiving threats over their positions on the war. Reports of both antisemitic and anti-Muslim abuse in Britain have soared since Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel, which triggered Israel's invasion of Gaza.

A debate last week in the House of Commons on whether to call for a cease-fire descended into chaos amid allegations the speaker of the house had bent parliamentary rules in response to pressure from pro-Palestinian activists.

Conservative lawmaker Mike Freer has announced he is stepping down because of abuse and death threats linked to his support for Israel. Freer said an arson attack on his office in December was the "final straw". He said the money announced on Wednesday was only "dealing with the symptom" rather than "going to the root cause" of why people feel emboldened to attack politicians. "Security is welcome," Freer told Times Radio. "But frankly, unless you get to the root cause, then you're just going to have a ring of steel around MPs. And our whole style of democracy changes." British lawmakers have a tradition of meeting

regularly with constituents in their local communities, but security has been tightened after several attacks in the last decade. In 2016, Labour lawmaker Jo Cox was killed by a far-right extremist, and Conservative David Amess was murdered in 2021 by an attacker inspired by the Islamic State group.

In 2017 an Islamic State-inspired extremist killed four people with a vehicle on Westminster Bridge before stabbing a police officer to death at the gates of Parliament. Two years later, in 2019, a neo-Nazi pleaded guilty to plotting to kill a Labour lawmaker. Anti-war activists claimed the government was trying to stifle protest and lumping peaceful demonstrators in with violent extremists.

Home Secretary James Cleverly called on pro-Palestinian demonstrators to halt the mass protests that have drawn hundreds of thousands of people to central London almost weekly to call for a cease-fire in a conflict that has killed close to 30,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Israel says Hamas killed 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, and abducted roughly 250, in the October 7 attack. The protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful, though there have dozens of arrests over signs and chants allegedly supporting Hamas, a banned organization in Britain. Jewish organisations and many lawmakers say the mass marches have created an intimidating atmosphere for Jewish Londoners — though members of the Jewish community have been among those on pro-cessa-fire marches. "I genuinely don't know what these regular protests are seeking to achieve," Cleverly told the Times of London. "They have made their position clear, we recognise that there are many people in the UK that hold that position. We respect that, but the UK government's position is a disagreement with that for very practical, well thought-out reasons".

S Korean, US troops to begin major exercises next week

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean and US troops will begin their expanded annual military drills next week in response to North Korea's evolving nuclear threats, the two countries said on Wednesday, a move that will likely enrage North Korea because it views its rivals' joint training as an invasion rehearsal.

In recent months, North Korea has inflamed animosities on the Korean Peninsula with fiery rhetoric and continued missile tests. While it's unlikely for North Korea to launch full-blown attacks against South Korea and the US, observers say the North could still stage limited provocations along the tense border with South Korea.

On Wednesday, the South Korea and US militaries jointly announced that the allies will conduct the Freedom Shield exercise, a computer-simulated command post training, and a variety of separate field training, from March 4-14.

Col. Lee, Sung-Jun, a spokesperson for South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the allies' drills are designed to bolster their joint capabilities to prevent North Korea from using its nuclear weapons. He said the allies are to carry out 48 field exercises this spring, twice the number conducted last year, and that this year's drills would involve air assault, live-firing and bombing training.

"Our military is ready to

punish North Korea immediately, strongly and to the end in the event of its provocation, and we'll further strengthen our firm readiness through the upcoming drills," Lee said.

North Korea didn't immediately respond to the drills' announcement. North Korea has reacted to previous major South Korea-US military drills with its own missile tests.

North Korea has sharply intensified its weapons testing activities since 2022 in part of its efforts to expand its nuclear and missile arsenals. This year, the North already conducted six rounds of missile tests — five of them reportedly involving cruise missiles — and other weapons launches. Experts

say North Korea believes a bigger weapons arsenal would allow it to pressure the US and South Korea more effectively to make concessions like sanctions relief when diplomacy resumes. They expect North Korea to ramp up its testing activities and other provocations this year as both the US and South Korea head into major elections. South Korea and the US have responded to the North's testing spree with expansions of their bilateral military drills and trilateral exercises involving Japan. US and South Korean officials have repeatedly warned that any nuclear attack by North Korea against them would spell the end of the North's government led by Kim Jong Un.

Bharti Enterprises chief Sunil Bharti Mittal knighted by King Charles III

PTI ■ LONDON

Bharti Enterprises Founder and Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal on Wednesday became the first Indian citizen to be conferred an honorary Knighthood by Britain's King Charles III "for services to UK and India business relations". In a list of honorary British awards unveiled by the UK Cabinet Office, Mittal receives a KBE under the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire — one of the highest honours conferred by a British monarch.

The 66-year-old entrepreneur said in a statement that he was "deeply humbled" by the gracious recognition from King Charles.

"The UK and India have historical relations, which are

now entering a new era of increased cooperation and collaboration. I remain committed to working towards strengthening the economic and bilateral trade relationships between our two great nations," Mittal said. "I am thankful to the government of the UK, whose support and keen attention to the needs of business has been critical in making the country an attractive investment destination," he said. The KBE, conferred for a pre-eminent contribution in any field of activity, is awarded in an honorary capacity to foreign nationals. While the Knighthood conferred on UK nationals gives them the title of Sir or Dame, non-UK nationals awarded the honour add KBE (or DBE for women) after

their name.Previous Indian recipients of the Honorary KBE include Ratan Tata (2009), Ravi Shankar (2001) and Jamshed Irani (1997), conferred by the late Queen Elizabeth II. The investiture ceremony will be conducted by the British High Commissioner to India at a later date, when he will formally hand over the royal insignia to Mittal.The honour recognises Bharti Enterprises' work within the India-UK space, including with the UK government in the field of satellites. Sunil Bharti Mittal led the revival of OneWeb (now Eutelsat), leading a consortium with the UK government and other strategic investors to offer satellite broadband services globally, a company statement notes.

"This is because, leaving aside any such unlawfulness, it is highly likely that the outcome for the claimant would not have been substantially different," he said. The bulk of the court proceedings were held in private because of the confidential nature of evidence over security measures. The case goes back to February 2020, following a decision by the Executive Committee for the Protection of Royalty and Public Figures (RAVEC) – delegated by the UK Home Office on security – to review the senior royal's security profile. The UK government had told the court the case should be dismissed because RAVEC was entitled to conclude that Prince Harry's protection should be "bespoke" and considered on a "case-by-case" basis given his lack of full-time royal duties in the country.

Semiconductor manufacturing in India next big space: MeitY Secy

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Domestic manufacturing of semiconductors is the next big space and many companies are expected to venture into this segment, a senior MeitY official said on Wednesday adding that a USD 2 billion digital economy is what India seriously needs.

S Krishnan, Secretary of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), while speaking virtually at the India Digital Summit (IDS) 2024 said the digital economy is expected to grow at a faster pace in the next few years.

“Semiconductors is the other big space. More companies are likely to come into the space...Our interest in semiconductors is open,” he said adding that in the next 5-10 years semiconductor manufacturing in the country is expected to come up in a big way.

About 20 lakh people are employed in the electronics manufacturing sector in the country and the government would like these jobs to go up to about 45 lakh, he added.

“We expect the digital



economy to really grow at an increasing pace in the next few years. A USD 2 billion digital economy is what India seriously needs,” Krishnan said. When asked about governance, hygiene and compliance with law for digital economies, Krishnan pointed out that regulators, much like the public, recognized the necessity of regulation.

While balancing consumer protection and diverse requirements, regulations are thoroughly examined to ensure safeguarding of user information, he said.

In the tech sphere, consistent collaboration among regulators was crucial, he added.

Similarly, maintaining ongoing dialogue with companies on various IT aspects is essential, Krishnan stated adding that the second key aspect involves formulating regulations to ensure compliance.

On the proposed Digital India legislation, he said efforts were being made to enhance it with additional elements. The ministry is exploring ways to address a significant issue related to the idea and understanding of ideas, where different forms of control are in place, he said.

Some of these controls occasionally generate issues, emphasizing the need for regulation, Krishnan said.

Markets tumble due to selling in Reliance, banks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex tanked more than 1 per cent while Nifty declined below the 22,000 level on Wednesday due to selling in index heavyweight Reliance Industries and bank stocks amid weak global market trends.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 790.34 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at 72,304.88 with 26 of its constituents ending in the red and four in the green. During the day, it tanked 872.93 points or 1.19 per cent to a low of 72,222.29.

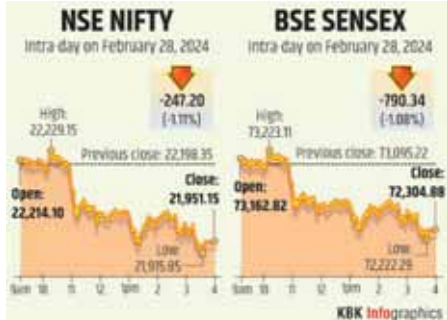
The Nifty slumped 247.20 points or 1.11 per cent to settle at 21,951.15. As many as 46 Nifty shares closed with losses while four advanced.

Among the Sensex firms, Power Grid fell the most by 4.43 per cent due to profit booking by investors. Reliance Industries dropped around 2 per cent, contributing 185.59 points to the slide. IndusInd Bank, Maruti, Wipro, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra and UltraTech Cement were the biggest laggards.

Hindustan Unilever, Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services and Bharti Airtel were the gainers. “Indian markets were jittery mirroring weak global markets. Global investors are awaiting the key US economic data like personal consumption expenditure, in anticipation of good forecast there is a fear that Fed rate cut maybe delayed. Turmoil in China’s property sector further impacted the Asian market trend,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined by 1.94 per cent and midcap index went lower by 1.82 per cent.

All the indices ended lower. Utilities fell by 2.82 per cent, oil & gas declined 2.19 per cent, really tanked 2.12 per cent, telecommunication



dipped 1.92 per cent, services (1.89 per cent) and commodities (1.85 per cent).

Shares of debt-laden Vodafone Idea plummeted around 14 per cent after the fundraising announcement by the company failed to lift investors’ sentiment.

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, the owner of the Paytm brand, fell 5 per cent to hit a lower circuit limit.

A total of 2,963 stocks declined while 881 advanced and 77 remained unchanged.

In Asian markets, Seoul settled with gains while Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended mostly higher on Tuesday.

The BSE benchmark climbed 305.09 points or 0.42 per cent to settle at 73,095.22 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended 76.30 points or 0.34 per cent up at 22,198.35.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.90 per cent to USD 82.90 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,509.16 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addresses during the 'Bhoomi Pujan' and foundation stone laying ceremony of residential complex 'Hongirana' for the Income Tax officers and staffers, in Bengaluru

PTI

Bengaluru tax payers are giving us buoyancy: FM

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday hailed Bengaluru tax payers for their contributions in building a strong and ‘Viksit Bharat’, and said the Department of Revenue is running its entire national faceless income tax assessment scheme from Karnataka’s capital city.

Speaking after laying the foundation stone for the upcoming complex “HONGIRANA” for Income Tax officers and staff here, she said the tax payers of Bengaluru have been absolutely giving us the buoyancy, and thanked all individual and corporate taxpayers in this region for making sure for building a strong and ‘Viksit Bharat’.

“Your contribution is relentless. There has never been a dip. So thank you very much Bengaluru for keeping that momentum up”, she said.

Sitharaman also emphasised the investments that the Central government is making in Bengaluru.

She noted that the Government has brought about the entire faceless system for income tax assessment and ease of doing business to ensure that tax assessees are not harassed and do not have

the perception that discretion of the officer who they have to to go and sit and talk to will make their tax payment difficult.

She said the Department’s entire central processing centre — the digital processing unit which governs the entire country — is located in Bengaluru, driving the income tax system for the whole nation. The faceless system was a big step forward in ease of doing business.

“So money doesn’t go away from Karnataka. It comes back as well and comes back not just like that...Yes it comes back for roads, it comes back for connectivity, it comes back for metro, it comes back for rail, it comes back for the suburban railway system, It comes back for Mangaluru port, it comes back for the ‘Kalyana’ Karnataka (region) and so on”, Sitharaman said.

“But specifically, I want to highlight the fact that Department of Revenue’s entire national faceless scheme runs from Bengaluru and you can imagine therefore, the scale of investment which would have happened for that...I am very happy and proud the manpower is also from Bengaluru and they run the whole system for the country,” the Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka said.



Vodafone Idea shares tumble 14 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of debt-laden Vodafone Idea Ltd on Wednesday plummeted 14 per cent after the company’s fundraising announcement failed to lift investors’ sentiment.

The stock plunged 13.99 per cent to settle at Rs 13.65 on the BSE. During the day, it tanked 14.93 per cent to Rs 13.50.

It fell 13.88 per cent to settle at Rs 13.65 on the NSE. During the day, it slumped 14.82 per cent to Rs 13.50 — its lower circuit limit.

The company’s market capitalisation (mcap) eroded by Rs 10,806.71 crore to Rs 66,447.95 crore.

Struggling telecom firm Vodafone Idea on Tuesday said its board has approved raising up to Rs 20,000 crore in equity from promoters and other investors by June as it looks to shore up finances for the much-delayed 5G rollout and strengthening 4G services.

The debt-laden firm, where the government also holds just over 33 per cent equity stake, plans to raise Rs 45,000 crore through a mix of equity and debt with hopes of matching services offered by rivals Jio and Bharti Airtel that could arrest subscriber churn.

The fundraising, when it happens, will also arm Vodafone Idea with firepower to improve competitive positioning in the Indian telecom market, where it trails larger rivals Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel, by a wide margin.

Vodafone Idea has been fighting a desperate battle for survival -- it has a debt of Rs 2.1 lakh crore, is reporting quarterly losses, and is haemorrhaging subscribers month after month.

AI Express aims 40 per cent increase in flights

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Low cost carrier Air India Express plans to operate 40 per cent more flights in the next financial year as well as start services to Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, sources said on Wednesday.

The Tata Group-owned airline — which is in the process of merging AirAsia India, now rebranded AIX Connect — is expanding its fleet and expects to complete the acquisition of 50 white tail Boeing 737 Max aircraft by December this year, the sources close to the development said.

At least 13 of these 50 planes

have already been inducted into its fleet. Currently, it operates 350 flights daily and has a fleet of 69 planes.

Generally, a white tail aircraft means that it was actually meant to be delivered to another carrier by the manufacturer. In this case, another source in the know said the planes that are being taken by Air India Express were originally for a foreign carrier, which decided not to go ahead with the order amid pandemic woes.

Going forward, the sources said the airline will focus more on consolidating its operations on the domestic routes and will not be adding many



destinations locally. Services will be introduced in few international routes, including Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In the next fiscal, the carrier plans to operate 40 per cent more flights as the fleet will also be expanded, the sources

said. More number of flights and services to new destinations will be introduced during the upcoming summer and winter schedules.

Summer schedule starts from late March to late October and winter schedule commences from late October

India super rich allocate 32 per cent of their wealth in housing properties

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s super rich have allocated 32 per cent of their wealth in residential properties in the country and overseas, Knight Frank said in a report on Wednesday.

As per real estate consultant Knight Frank’s The Wealth Report 2024, 32 per cent of India’s Ultra-High-Net-Worth Individuals’ (UHNWIs) wealth is allocated towards residential real estate asset class.

Nearly 14 per cent of their residential portfolio is allocated outside India. UHNWIs are individuals with a net worth of USD 30 million and above.

On an average, an Indian UHNWI owns 2.57 homes while a sizable 28 per cent have rented out their second homes during 2023, the report said.

According to Knight Frank, about 12 per cent of the country’s UHNWIs plan to buy a new home in 2024. A similar percentage of wealthy individuals in India purchased a new home last year.

Globally, 22 per cent of the ultra-wealthy are expected to purchase a home in 2024.

Knight Frank India Chairman and Managing Director Shishir Bajjal said, “The prime residential assets continue to be the mainstream



investment avenue for ultra-wealthy individuals in the country.”

Separately, the report noted that Mumbai ranked 8th on Knight Frank’s Prime International Residential Index (PIRI) index in 2023 as compared to the 37th rank in 2022, driven by 10 per cent year-on-year growth in terms of annual luxury residential price rise.

This jump has marked a place for Mumbai in the top 10 leading luxury residential markets. Manila (26 per cent growth) leads the rankings while last year’s frontrunner Dubai (16 per cent) slipped one spot.

The Bahamas (15 per cent) comes in the third place with Algarve and Cape Town (both 12.3 per cent) completing the top five.

Among other Indian cities, Delhi ranked 37th and show-

cased a rise of 4.2 per cent year-on-year in 2023 as compared to the 77th rank in 2022.

Bengaluru stands at the 59th rank compared to 63rd in 2022 recording a 2.2 per cent year-on-year increase in 2023.

“The outlook for 2024 remains bright as Mumbai with a 5.5 per cent prime price growth forecast, ranks second among the 25 cities globally. As we navigate the complexities of the global market, India’s emergence as a prime destination for luxury real estate investment is undeniable,” Bajjal said. Of the 100 luxury residential markets tracked, 80 recorded positive to neutral annual price growth.

Asia-Pacific (3.8 per cent) pipped the Americas (3.6 per cent) to the title of the strongest-performing world region, with Europe, the Middle East, and Africa trailing (2.6 per cent).

India retail sector to reach USD 2 trillion in next decade: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s retail sector is expected to grow at 9-10 per cent to reach USD 2 trillion in the next decade with the country’s consumption story continuing to remain strong with steady growth, according to a report. Yet, organised retailers would need to sustain performance and continue to grow shares as the sector is going through key shifts impacting the pace and shape of growth, said the report by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Retailers Association of India (RAI).



While income growth remains steady, and consumers are optimistic about personal income outlook, consumers are increasingly looking to spend on “experiences” or save more through newer or nascent vehicles, it said. “The Indian retail sector will more than double in size to USD 2 trillion in the next

LTIMindtree, IBM, IIT Madras team up for innovation in quantum computing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

LTIMindtree, a global technology consulting and digital solutions company, on Wednesday said it has joined the IBM Quantum Network to explore innovations in quantum computing.

LTIMindtree will collaborate with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras, which is also an IBM Quantum Innovation Centre, to advance

the quantum innovation ecosystem, the company said.

“This move is a strategic step toward LTIMindtree helping their customers benefit from the transformative value of quantum computing technologies,” the company said. LTIMindtree will have access to IBM resources, including IBM’s global fleet of quantum computing systems over the cloud, software, and associated expertise.

Aan Chauhan, Chief Techno-

logy Officer, LTIMindtree, said the collaboration with IBM and IIT Madras is an important step towards a future where quantum computing could help solve more complex problems faster and more efficiently.

“It positions us to expedite our customers’ journey towards realizing the immense value of quantum computing, readying them to leverage these advanced technologies for transformative solutions,” Chauhan added.

Airtel switches to recycled PVC SIM cards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel, one of India’s leading telecommunications service providers, in partnership with IDEMIA Secure Transactions, today announced that it has switched from virgin plastic to recycled PVC SIM cards.

This is in line with the company’s commitment to encouraging the adoption of circular business practices. IDEMIA Secure Transactions, a division of IDEMIA Group, is a leading provider of payment and connectivity solutions for financial institutions, mobile network operators and automotive manufacturers. An industry first in India, Airtel is the only telecommunications service provider to switch to recycled plastic SIM cards.

With this migration, the generation of over 165 tonnes of virgin plastic will be limited which will further reduce the generation of over 690 tonnes of CO2 equivalent in one year. Pankaj Miglani, Director — Supply Chain, Bharti Airtel, said, “We are delighted to announce yet another first as we continue to lead the Indian telecom industry.

Tata firm Agratas to set up UK biggest EV battery factory

PTI ■ LONDON

Agratas, Tata Group’s global battery business, on Wednesday confirmed that it will build Britain’s biggest electric vehicle battery manufacturing facility in Somerset, south-west England. The so-called ‘giga’ factory, announced last year, will be built on the Gravity Smart Campus near Bridgwater in Somerset with a community-first approach, involving locals to learn more about and be a part of the project.

The company said the 40 GWh factory is set to contribute almost half of the projected battery manufacturing capacity required for the UK automotive sector by the early 2030s. “Our multi-billion-pound investment will bring state-of-the-art tech-



nology to Somerset, helping to supercharge Britain’s transition to electric mobility whilst creating thousands of jobs in the process,” said Tom Flack, CEO of Agratas.

“We care deeply about the communities we operate in, so it’s imperative to us that we work with, and listen to, our new neigh-

bours as we build our factory in Somerset. That’s why we’ll be holding an event for local residents very soon, so we can share more about our plans and introduce our team to the community,” he said.

Agratas said it will work closely with local and regional partners, including Somerset Council, Bridgwater and Taunton College, and the wider Gravity Smart Campus, to deliver bespoke education and training programmes in the region, creating local jobs for local people. The factory itself will create up to 4,000 new high-skilled green tech jobs in the area, with thousands more expected to be created in the UK supply chain. Residents living near the site of the future gigafactory campus are set to receive a leaflet through the post this week followed by regular updates on the site’s progress.

Preliminary works on the site are in progress, with piling to establish the factory’s foundations set to start in the coming months. Construction will be completed in phases, with battery production set to begin in 2026.

Disney, Reliance to merge India media operations

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Walt Disney Co and Reliance Industries on Wednesday announced signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a Rs 70,000 crore behemoth.

Reliance and its affiliates will hold a 63.16 per cent stake in the combined entity that will house two streaming services and 120 television channels. Disney will hold the remaining 36.84 per cent stake, the companies said in a statement. Reliance has also agreed to invest at closing Rs 11,500 crore into the joint venture to give it muscles to fight rivals such as Japan’s Sony and Netflix.

Disney+Hotstar has seen its paid subscriber base decline from around 55 million to about 40 million in the first quarter of this financial year because of Reliance’s Jio Cinemas winning exclusive rights for live sports. The combined entity will have the largest OTT subscriber base and close to 120 channels in the country.

Media ventures of Reliance are currently housed in Network 18, which owns TV18 news channels as well as a plethora of entertainment (under the ‘Colors’ brand) and sports channels. Besides, NW18 has stakes in moneycontrol.Com, bookmyshow and also publishes magazines. It also owns the

news channels CNBC/CNN. Reliance separately owns a movie production arm - JioStudios - and majority stakes in two listed cable distribution companies, Den and Hathway.

Disney+Hotstar was launched in India in 2020, post the acquisition of the entertainment assets of 21st Century Fox at a valuation of USD 71.3 billion, thereby taking over the operations of Star India and Hotstar. It housed entertainment and cinema channels such as StarPlus and StarGold as well as sports channels like Star Sports. While Disney+Hotstar rapidly increased their subscriber base initially with the streaming rights of cricket

matches (IPL, World Cup), it lost the bid for the digital streaming rights in 2023-27 cycle, which was won by Reliance-backed Viacom18 for USD 720 billion, 12.92 per cent higher than what Star India had paid on an average per match value. Nita Ambani will head the joint venture while Uday Shankar will be the vice chairperson. “Reliance Industries Ltd (and its affiliate) Viacom 18 Media Pvt Ltd and The Walt Disney Company today announced the signing of binding definitive agreements to form a joint venture that will combine the businesses of Viacom18 and Star India,” the statement said.

Turmoil in Indian hockey

HI head Tirkey, secretary Bhola deny rift in joint statement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey and secretary general Bhola Nath Singh on Wednesday denied outgoing CEO Elena Norman's assertion of a rift between them, saying that they are "united" and working in the best interest of the sport.

Norman resigned on Tuesday and in an interview to PTI she alleged that there was factionalism in the body. The 49-year-old Australian suggested that Tirkey and Singh were at loggerheads and also complained of a difficult work environment.

In a joint statement, Tirkey and Singh rejected Norman's claims.

"Recently there have been statements by outgoing officials published in the media, claiming that there are divisions within the organisation. This is not correct. We remain united in working together, and as always in the best interest of the sport," the two said.

"Hockey India is an autonomous and professional body dedicated to the



development of Indian hockey. Our primary objective as an organisation has been and continues to remain the welfare and progress of the sport of hockey and our athletes."

Norman's resignation was the second blow to HI in the last few days after the Indian women's hockey team coach Janneke Schopman resigned,

also complaining of a difficult work environment. Schopman had accused HI of giving step-motherly treatment to women's hockey.

Tirkey and Singh said HI has always treated all teams and players equally and also claimed to have built an environment of equality in the organisation.

"We have built our ethos

around equity and equal opportunities right from the grassroots levels across states as well as on a national level," their statement read.

"In this spirit, our entire focus remains on growing our talent, ensuring all hosted events are conducted with utmost professionalism and our national teams are receiving the best support to

support their performance at the global stage."

Norman began her tenure as the federation's first CEO back in 2011 with Narinder Batra as the head. After resigning, she stated that it was difficult for her to continue given the bickering inside HI.

"There are two factions in Hockey India. There is

(President) Dilip Tirkey and I and there is (Secretary) Bholanath Singh, (Executive Director) Cdr. R K Srivastava and (Treasurer) Sekar J Manoharan," she said.

"There are guys who want power and then there is (HI President) Dilip (Tirkey) who is a nice guy, only after betterment of Indian hockey," she explained.

Tirkey and Singh said their focus is now on rebuilding the women's team, which failed to qualify for the Olympics, and helping the men's side that is due to compete in the quadrennial showpiece in Paris this year.

"We will continue in this pursuit of excellence and rebuild the women's team with a fresh approach to providing the right infrastructure and training to enhance their performance," they stated.

"In addition to this, we are cognisant of this being an Olympic year and are dedicated to aide the National Men's Team with the required support to stand on the podium yet again in the forthcoming Olympic Games in Paris this year."



Logan heads into 2nd F1 season stronger

AP ■ BAHRAIN

Even before Logan Sargeant finished his rookie Formula 1 season, a set of expectations were given to the American on what he needed to do to keep his ride at Williams. It still took until December for Williams to confirm Sargeant would get a second season. He was the last driver finalized for this year's 20-car grid.

But he enters the new season - it starts this weekend in Bahrain - already ahead of schedule.

"First and foremost, I've asked him to surprise the world in terms of his physical fitness, his approach and his performance," Williams team principal James Vowles said.

"We've changed quite a bit with him across the winter period, his trainer is different, his training programs are completely different. You should see he's a much more confident person and he carries that well."

Sargeant delivered on Vowles' ask by adding a little more than 11 pounds to his frame during the offseason - muscle that should help the Floridian with car handling a year after he was consistently outperformed by teammate Alex Albon.

Sargeant scored just one point all of last year and it didn't come until the U.S. Grand Prix, five races before the end of the season. Albon, meanwhile, scored 27 points across the season and was ranked 13th in the final driver standings.

"I wasn't physically in the place I need to be and I've done everything I can to get on top of that. For example, I'm five kilos heavier than I was at the end of last year, and I feel much more healthy and much more ready to go," Sargeant said.

"I feel like a different man, I feel like physically I am in the best shape I've ever been. And I believe in the condition I'm in now, and will continue to get to, will be simply just helping me feel more comfortable in the car and extract performance."

Sargeant is the first American to race in F1 since Alexander Rossi in 2015 and his underwhelming rookie season did little to build a fanbase in the lucrative United States market that hosted a series-high three races last year.

But Williams last year had a car that was difficult to drive and both he and Albon were forced to adapt. Albon believes this year's FW46 will be easier for Sargeant to handle.

"Logan will have that experience now into this year, I don't think it'll be so much of a learning curve for him," Albon said.

"I personally believe that the car's going to be a bit easier to drive. Our car was very unique. I spent two years refining a very strange driving style, which for someone coming into the car for the first time, without any prior F1 experience, is difficult."

"It was very easy to overdrive the car. I think naturally the car's going to go towards him as in a bit less on a knife edge and more usable," Albon continued. "So I think what you're going to see is a guy with a lot more experience and a car that should be more usable and that will in itself bring performance."

Vowles agreed that this year's car should help both Albon and Sargeant as Williams tries to become competitive again.

"We should have a car that is more suiting to both drivers," Vowles said. "I'm hoping that we've got rid of some of these really nasty effects from last year, but that will also make a platform for him where he should be able to grow much quicker than he did in 2023."

Vowles has also tried to relieve some of the pressure on Sargeant by telling him to follow the same guidelines that helped him earn a second season with Williams.

"What I've asked him to do is to approach the first few days of driving the car with caution again, the same way he did at the end of last year, build up into it and don't try and rush into success," Vowles said.

"That's the confidence I placed in him. That's why he's back in the car. I need him now to not go back to his old ways of trying to extract too much from himself and from the car too quickly, but rather approach things progressively."

Sargeant goes into this year much more confident after a season that he admitted took a physical toll on him. He needed the extra work as F1 prepares for a record 24 races this year. "The offseason has been such a good opportunity for me to take a step back and look at myself from mental, emotional and physical standpoint where I need to do improve, where I need to get better," Sargeant said.

"I learned that I need to manage myself much better. I let myself get very drained throughout the season and I let that affect me off the track, which ultimately brings it onto the track."

OLYMPICS

Anju says Parul among ones to watch out for

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Athletics Federation of India vice-president Anju Bobby George on Wednesday said Asian Games gold-winning steeplechase runner Parul Chaudhary is among the ones to watch out for at this year's Paris Olympics where she expecting more than one medal in javelin throw.

So far, nine Indian track-and-field athletes have qualified for the Games in July-August with defending gold-medallist Neeraj Chopra and Kishore Jena making the cut in javelin throw.

Chaudhary shot into limelight with a gold in the 5000m and a silver in 3000m



steeplechase events of the Hangzhou Asian Games last year. The 28-year-old is the first Indian to clock less than nine minutes in the 3000m women's steeplechase.

"A bunch of athletes are performing really well in the international arena from athletics. We are aiming for three (medals) in javelin," she told PTI Video on the

sidelines of Bharat Sports Science Conclave in New Delhi on Wednesday.

"Then we have long jumpers, we have triple jumpers, steeplechase runner Parul Chaudhary is among the ones to watch out for but a lot cannot be predicted about the Olympics," she added.

A legend in her own right, who won a trailblazing world championship bronze in long jump, George said she is mighty pleased with how technology has been incorporated to improve training of athletes. "A game-changer I can say, nothing was like this in our time, the changes that are happening in Indian sports, and sports science is playing a big role in

every athlete's career.

"Every athlete is challenging his body, he needs recovery and treatment, and it was not there in India (in the past), but now we are aiming for the Olympics. We are talking about sports science, doping issues, recovery and training, so it is a game changer I can say," she said.

The other Indian athletes to have qualified for the Paris Games so far are Avinash Sable (men's 3000m steeplechase), Akashdeep Singh, Vikas Singh and Paramjeet Singh Bisht (men's 20km walk), Priyanka Goswami (women's 20km walk), and Murali Sreeshankar (men's long jump).

Vekic, Yastremska are among those advancing in Cymbiotika San Diego Open



AP ■ SAN DIEGO

Croatia's Donna Vekic and Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska were among those moving into the second round of the Cymbiotika San Diego Open.

Vekic, a finalist here in 2022, beat local wildcard Katherine Hui, 7-5 6-2 in her WTA Tour singles

debut on Tuesday. A Santa Fe Christian School graduate now playing on the collegiate level at Stanford, Hui is the reigning US Open girls' singles titlist.

A first-time major semifinalist last month at the Australian Open, Yastremska had to dig deep in outlasting American Caroline Dolehide, 6-4 5-7 6-1. The 23-year-old

was up a set and a break only to have her opponent force a decider. Yastremska overcame nine double faults in the two-hour, eight-minute matchup.

German veteran Tatjana Maria, 36, advanced when eighth seed Leylah Fernandez retired with a left shoulder injury trailing 0-4 in the second set. It marks the third consecutive year the 21-year-old Canadian, a US Open finalist in 2021, has failed to reach the second round in San Diego.

Czech Katerina Siniakova, a doubles titlist here last year with countrywoman Barbora Krejickova, beat Japanese qualifier Mai Hontama 6-3 6-1, in one hour and 13 minutes. Australian wild card Taylah Preston was a 6-4 4-6 6-1 winner over Poland's Magdalena Frech.

Liverpool injury list worsens

AP ■ LIVERPOOL (ENGLAND)

Liverpool's injury crisis keeps on getting worse.

Ryan Gravenberch is the latest name to be added to an ever-lengthening list of players unavailable to the Premier League leader, while Wataru Endo is a doubt for Wednesday's FA Cup fifth round match against Southampton.

Gravenberch sustained an ankle injury in the first half of Sunday's English League Cup final triumph against Chelsea and was taken off on a stretcher. Endo left Wembley Stadium on crutches and wearing a protective boot. "We need miracles with a few players," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said Tuesday.

"I don't want to rule them

out for too long. But it is touch and go with a lot of players who were not available for the final: Darwin (Nunez), Mo (Salah), Dom (Szoboszlai) - we have to see what they can do."

Gravenberch has ligament damage that will keep him out for at least two games, Klopp said. Trent Alexander-Arnold, Thiago Alcantara and goalkeeper Alisson Becker are other key players Klopp has had to do without in recent weeks. Yet Liverpool remain in contention for a quadruple of trophies after Sunday's 1-0 win against Chelsea.

The Merseyside club is one point ahead of Manchester City at the top of the table and still competing for the FA Cup and the Europa League.

Haaland scores five goals in Man City 6-2 rout

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Erling Haaland looks determined to make up for lost time.

The Norway striker scored five goals to power Manchester City into the quarterfinals of the FA Cup in a 6-2 win against Luton on Tuesday.

It was his eighth hat trick in a season-and-a-half with City and the second time he has scored five in a single game for the club.

Perhaps more significantly, it was evidence that Haaland is fully back up to speed after recently returning from a foot injury that ruled him out for more than a month between December and January.

"My fitness is getting back to its best finally," he said.

"I feel good. It's an amazing feeling."

Haaland had scored only

three goals in seven appearances since making his comeback on January 31.

By his remarkable standards, that represented a relative drought, but he looked back to his devastating best at Kenilworth Road with a first-half hat trick and two more after the break. Four of those goals came from assists by Kevin De Bruyne, who has also missed large parts of the season through injury.

"It's a pleasure playing with him," Haaland said.

"I think we know what we both want from each other, we look at each other and it clicks well."

Mateo Kovacic added a sixth for City, while Jordan Clark struck twice for Luton.

Haaland was denied a possible double hat trick when he was replaced by Julian Alvarez in the 77th minute. It was the second



time City manager Pep Guardiola substituted the striker after scoring five goals, having taken him off during the 7-0 rout of RB Leipzig in the Champions League last year.

Haaland now has 27 goals in all competitions for the

season after scoring 52 in his first year at the club.

His performance and linkup play with De Bruyne will also fuel the belief City can emulate last season's treble of trophies when it won the Premier League title, FA Cup and Champions League.

"We're coming. Exciting times (are) ahead," Haaland said.

The forward completed his hat trick after 40 minutes, having opened the scoring in the third and adding a second in the 18th.

Clark pulled one back for

Luton in the 45th and made it 3-2 with another seven minutes after halftime.

But Haaland quickly extended City's lead with further goals in the 55th and 58th. Kovacic completed the scoring with a long range effort in the 72nd.

NEWCASTLE SURVIVES

Newcastle avoided a potential upset at Blackburn but needed penalties to overcome the second-division team.

Goalkeeper Martin Dubravka pushed away Dominic Hyam's spot kick at the end of the shootout to secure a 4-3 win on penalties after the game had finished 1-1 through extra time.

Anthony Gordon fired Newcastle ahead in the 71st at Ewood Park, but the lead only lasted eight minutes when Sammie Szmodics leveled for Blackburn.

Saudi-backed Newcastle has endured a troubled season in the league and currently sits 10th in the standings after a fourth-place finish last year.

But victory over Blackburn means it is still in contention to win its first piece of major domestic silverware since the FA Cup in 1955.

LEICESTER ADVANCES

Abdul Fatawu fired Leicester to a 1-0 win over Premier League team Bournemouth with a stunning extra time goal.

Substitute Fatawu struck in the 105th - curling a shot into the top corner from the edge of the area.

Leicester won the Cup in 2021 but has slumped since then and was relegated to the second division last season. It is aiming to bounce straight back up and showed its credentials with the win at Bournemouth.

RAHUL STILL FEELING SORE WHILE BATTING IN NETS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior India batter K L Rahul is unlikely to feature in the fifth and final Test against England in Dharamsala as he continues to feel sore in his right quadriceps.

Rahul became unavailable after the series-opener in Hyderabad in January but as per BCCI, he was 90 per cent fit before the third Test in Rajkot earlier this month.

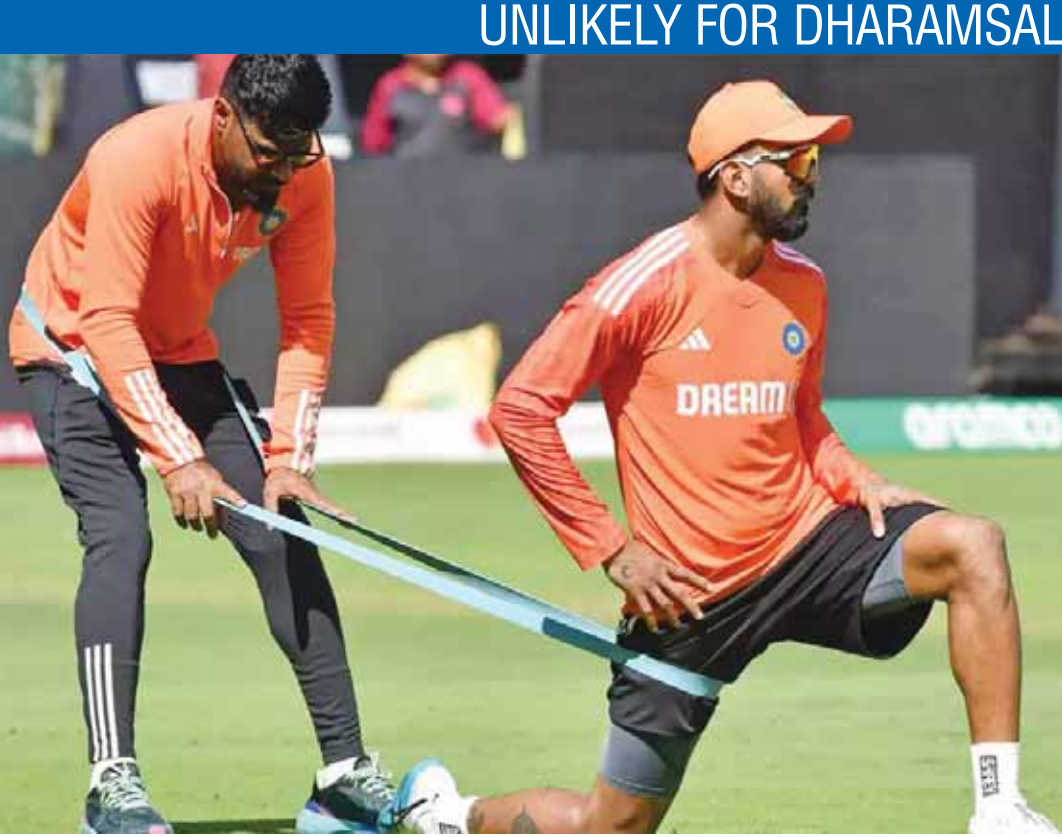
Rahul has now travelled to London to get an expert opinion on his injury and with the series in the bag, the Indian team management will not take the risk of playing him in the Dharamsala Test beginning March 7.

He needs to be fully fit before the IPL where he will lead Lucknow Super Giants and is expected to bat in the middle order to bolster his chances of making the India squad for the T20 World Cup in the USA and the Caribbean.

"It is more to get an expert opinion (travel to London). He experiences a bit of pain (right quadriceps) while batting. It is to ensure that he recovers fully as he is a player that team needs long-term.

"There is so much competition coming his way -- IPL, he could also be in the T20 World Cup mix. Then we have some important Test series against New Zealand, and Australia later in the

UNLIKELY FOR DHARAMSALA TEST



year. So, it is better to give him time to recover properly than rushing him," an IPL source told PTI.

It is the same quadriceps injury that had sidelined Rahul for almost four months last year.

Having got injured during the IPL, Rahul returned to action with the Asia Cup in September and made instant impact. In the more recent Test tour of South Africa, Rahul was the only century maker from India in the drawn series.

His absence from the final Test means Rajat Patidar will remain with the squad but the MP batter can't be sure of his place in the playing eleven, having aggregated only 63 runs in six innings.

There is a possibility that Patidar will make away for Devdutt Padikkal in Dharamsala.

BUMRAH SET TO RETURN: India's premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who was rested for the Ranchi Test, is expected to lead the attack at the HPCA Stadium. The series is sealed but every Test match offers crucial World Test Championship points and Bumrah can play a big part in the cooler climes of Dharamsala.

India are second in the standings with five wins, two losses and a draw. New Zealand lead the table with a winning percentage of 75 but they have only played four Tests.



Jaiswal rises to 12th in ICC Test rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's latest batting sensation IYashasvi Jaiswal advanced towards a top-10 spot in the ICC rankings for Test batters by climbing three spots to 12th while his compatriot Dhruv Jurel leapfrogged 31 places to 69th on Wednesday.

Jaiswal, who started the series in 69th position, continues his ascent to the top after scores of 73 and 37 in the fourth match of India's ICC World Test Championship series against England in Ranchi. Player of the Match Jurel's scores of 90 and 39 has jumped a whopping 31 places while former England captain Joe Root is back in the top three.

Root, a formerly top-ranked batter, struck an unbeaten 122 in the first innings in Ranchi to move up two places to third position. He also moved up three spots to fourth among all-rounders.

Senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's five-wicket haul in the second innings has helped him narrow the gap with top-ranked Jasprit Bumrah to 21 rating points at 846 after the fast bowler was rested for the Ranchi Test.

Wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav moved up 10 places to

the 32nd spot and England's Shoaib Bashir, who climbed 38 places to 80th, have also attained career bests.

Opener Zak Crawley entered the top 20 for the first time after scores of 42 and 60, while a bunch of spinners have also prospered in the latest weekly update.

The T20I Rankings see Australia batter Travis Head move into the top 20 for the first time after scores of 24, 45 and 33 in the series against New Zealand.

Tim David's quickfire 31 off just 10 balls in the first match see him move up six places to 22nd and past the 600-point barrier for the first time in his career. The top six bowlers are unchanged, with Josh Hazlewood the only new one in the top 10 after finishing with figures of 4-1-12-1 in Auckland.

In the ODI rankings, the biggest mover has been Namibia's Bernard Scholtz, whose hauls of four for 31 against Nepal and two for 15 against the Netherlands in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 Tri-Series in Kirtipur have lifted him to 11th position and 642 ratings points, the highest position and points tally ever achieved by a Namibia player in ODI cricket.

Muzumdar looks to create fast bowlers pool from WPL

PTI ■ BENGALURU

With just seven months left for the Women's T20 World Cup to begin in Bangladesh, India head coach Amol Muzumdar is keen to identify and build a pool of fast bowlers from the on-going Women's Premier League.

The Indian pace unit looks a bit thin after the retirement of legendary Jhulan Goswami and moving on from veteran Shikha Pandey.

Currently, the Indian pace bowling is marshalled by Renuka Singh, Pooja Vastrakar, Titas Sadhu and Amanjot Kaur.

"Four fast bowlers played the last series (against Australia). I want to create a pool of fast bowlers (from the WPL). It makes a lot of difference if you strengthen the bowling attack," Muzumdar was quoted as saying ESPNcricinfo. "I would want another pool of 20-25 players to create a bench



strength for the Indian team," he added.

The ninth edition of the Women's T20 World Cup will be held in September-October in Bangladesh.

Muzumdar had taken over as India coach last year ahead of home series against England and Australia.

While India won the Tests against the visitors, they lost the T20I and ODI series.

Muzumdar was also delighted to see frontline Indian batters such as Shafali Verma, S Meghana and Richa Ghosh among runs ahead of the marquee event later this year. "There is an upscale movement in India's batters. The confidence from those two series against England and Australia is on display (here) because of how they performed there."

The former Mumbai batsman was also chuffed to see the presence of mind Sajana Sajeevan showed while carrying Mumbai Indians to a victory over Delhi Capitals with a last-ball six. "Sajana's six gives you an idea of the depth in Indian cricket," said Muzumdar.

Conway out, Ravindra in for New Zealand ahead of 1st test against Australia

AP ■ WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND)

Devon Conway has been ruled out but Rachin Ravindra has been cleared to play for New Zealand in the first cricket test against Australia starting at the Basin Reserve on Thursday.

Conway suffered a thumb injury while keeping wicket in the second Twenty20 international between the teams on Friday last week. While initial scans suggested there was no fracture, additional tests in Wellington in recent days have found there is damage to Conway's left thumb.

Conway will have further tests later in the week. Meantime, Will Young open the batting with Tom Latham in Conway's place.

Henry Nicholls, who was dropped from the New Zealand team ahead of its two recent tests against South Africa - both victories - has been recalled to provide reinforcement for the batting lineup.

"It's disappointing for Devon to be ruled out on the eve of an important match," New Zealand coach Gary Stead said.

"He's a class player batting at the top of the order for us and I know he was really looking forward to this series."



Ravindra missed the second and third Twenty20s against Australia with a slight knee injury but is fit to play from Thursday. He scored a maiden double century in the first innings of the first test against South Africa. Daryl Mitchell is also available after missing the South Africa series with a foot injury.

Captain Tim Southee said New Zealand will settle on its match lineup after assessing conditions at the Basin Reserve where the pitch usually is green at first but good for batting. New Zealand will decide whether to go into the match with four

seamers or to include spin-bowling allrounder Mitchell Santner.

New Zealand left Santner out of its lineup for the second test against South Africa at Hamilton, using four seamers.

"I think in hindsight, we probably got that wrong the way that the pitch did behave," Stead said. "We've certainly got Mitch Santner here as that option and we'll certainly consider him as well."

Australia captain Pat Cummins has named an unchanged starting XI for the test. Cummins confirmed Wednesday there would be "no surprises" in the starting XI, with Australia picking the same team that lost to the West Indies in the second test in Brisbane last month.

"It's always nice to have a full contingent to pick from," Cummins said. "I doesn't feel like we need to reinvent the wheel."

The two-test series against Australia will be one of the few occasions New Zealand has a faced a full-strength Australia lineup. New Zealand and Australia only rarely meet in test series and Australia at times has not fielded its best team. New Zealand currently is first and Australia third in World Test Championship standings.



Renuka set tone for RCB by controlling Powerplay: Molineux

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Renuka Singh has managed to control the Powerplay period by providing early breakthroughs and stopping run-flow with her swing bowling which played a significant role in RCB winning both its games, says team spin all-rounder Sophie Molineux. Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) are sitting on top of the table with four points. Mumbai Indians (+0.488) also have four points but they are placed second behind RCB who have better NRR of +1.665.

RCB had restricted Gujarat Giants to 107 for seven on Tuesday night with Renuka returning impressive figures of 4-0-14-2. RCB then overhauled the target in 12.3 overs to log their second win on the trot.

"Renuka has been incredible in both games and playing against her for India, she's just so reliable and it's great to be on the same team as her. She swings the ball beautifully at the front and I think she's really set the tone for us in both games," Molineux said.

In their opening game against UP Warriorz, Renuka did not dismiss any batter but conceded only 14 runs in her 3 overs. RCB had edged UPW by just two runs to begin the tournament with a thrilling win. "To be able to control the

powerplay is a big thing in T20 cricket and she's done that twice now and I can see her continuing to do that," the Australian cricketer said.

Role clarity for every player and adaptability is part of the RCB approach under coach Luke Williams.

In their opening match against UPW, the RCB opted for swing from one end and spin from the other, while against GG, Renuka Singh and her pace colleague Sophie Devine bowled in tandem up front.

Molineux, who took three wickets herself after Renuka's new-ball burst, said her team has flexibility.

"In T20 cricket as a bowler you need to be really clear on what your strengths are and what you can bring to the team. And I think Luke and all the staff have been really clear with each bowler with what their roles are going to be and also at the same time be willing to adapt like we did today.

"We had a completely different look to our powerplay where we were really pace-heavy. So yeah, I think that's all a part of T20 cricket, especially just being really clear on your own individual plans and where that fits in with the team and being able to change on the fly," Molineux said.

RCB will take on third-placed Delhi Capitals in their next match on Thursday.

Zaheer was someone I used to watch a lot: Anderson

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

James Anderson, England's greatest fast bowler with an unparalleled longevity and nearly 1000 international wickets, says he has learned a few elements of pace bowling, including reverse swing, from Indian great Zaheer Khan.

At 41, Anderson continues to lead the England attack and is two short of becoming the first fast bowler in the history of the sport to breach the 700-wicket mark.

Spin legends Muttiah Muralitharan and the late Shane Warne are the only bowlers with 700 plus wickets in Test cricket.

"For me, Zaheer Khan was someone I used to watch a lot to try and learn from. How he used the reverse swing, how he covered the ball when he ran into bowl, that's something I

tried to sort of develop on the back of playing against him quite a few times here," Anderson told JioCinema.

Zaheer, one of India's finest seamers, played his last Test in 2014 when Anderson was at the top of his game.

Among the current lot of Indian pacers, Anderson is most impressed by Jasprit Bumrah's ability, calling him a "great exponent" of reverse swing.

Asked about Bumrah's match-winning performance in the second Test against England, Anderson said, "With someone of his quality you expect that standard from him. You know that reverse swing can play a big part in India and he's a great exponent of it. He's got good pace and is very accurate, very consistent.

"That yorker we saw to Ollie Pope, he's got that up his sleeve

as well. It's not a fluke that he's got to number one in the world. He's a world-class bowler and from our point of view we weren't surprised that he put up a performance like that."

The seasoned Englishman added, "There are not many better bowlers than Bumrah, Shami and Siraj. They're world-class bowlers. You put Ishant Sharma in there as well, and that's a really strong bowling attack."

Anderson's longevity in the game can be ascertained by the fact that his current England teammates such as Shoaib Bashir and Rehan Ahmed were not even born when he made his Test debut way back in 2002.

Having played 186 Tests and 194 ODIs over the last 22 years, Anderson's desire to be competitive remains intact.



On comparing his longevity to other sporting legends, Anderson said, "Yeah, I guess you do look at things like that, but to be honest, I just go with the feel of me and my body. I don't feel like I'm 41 years and 200 days old. You know, I still feel young.

"I can keep up with the young guys in training. I can still bowl the speeds that I want to, I can still deliver the skills that I want to. So, for me that's the most important thing. Age is just a number and it's pretty irrelevant from my thought process."

When the discussion turned to reverse swing, Anderson said the art remains relevant even in an age dominated by T20 cricket.

"I don't think it's dying. Because of the growth of white-ball cricket in recent times, the focus has moved to

change of pace and different deliveries like yorkers, and things like that. "But for me, in Test cricket, we've seen throughout this series already that swing can play a big part."

"The way Bumrah's bowled, I think, has been amazing to watch. That reverse swing spell in the second Test was one of the best you'll see. For me, I think there's still people out there wanting to learn the skills and it's not easy to do."

With star batter Virat Kohli skipping the ongoing Test series due to personal reasons, Anderson said he missed bowling to the Indian maestro with he had had some fascinating duels.

"You always want to play against the best players. And it's been a shame that he's not been a part of the series. We have had some great battles over the years."