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झारखण्ड सरकार
GOVERNMENT OF JHARKHAND

पलाश
झारखण्ड

सखी मंडल की महिलाओं का
राज्यस्तरीय एक्सपोजर एवं क्षमता संवर्धन शिविर-सह-

महिला महासम्मेलन

मुख्य अतिथि

श्री चम्पाई सोरेन
माननीय मुख्यमंत्री, झारखण्ड

विशिष्ट अतिथि

श्री आलमगीर आलम
माननीय मंत्री, झारखण्ड सरकार

श्री सत्यानंद भोक्ता
माननीय मंत्री, झारखण्ड सरकार

दिनांक : 12 फरवरी, 2024 | समय : 12.30 बजे अपराह्न
स्थान : मोरहाबादी मैदान, रांची

55 हजार महिला सखी मंडलों को आजीविका हेतु
₹825 करोड़
की सहायता और क्रेडिट सपोर्ट का वितरण

श्री चम्पाई सोरेन
माननीय मुख्यमंत्री, झारखण्ड

पलाश (झारखण्ड स्टेट लाईवलीहुड प्रोमोशन सोसाईटी)
ग्रामीण विकास विभाग, झारखण्ड सरकार

Rural students experience city life through Community policing

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Under the Community Policing Program initiated by the District Police, a group of students hailing from remote rural areas affected by militancy, residing within the Gudabandha police station area, were given the opportunity to embark on a tour of Jamshedpur city. This initiative aimed to foster a closer bond between law enforcement officials and the community, while providing the students with exposure to urban life beyond their immediate surroundings.

Details of the Program:The excursion, organized by the District Police, facilitated an enriching experience for the students, allowing them to explore various facets of Jamshedpur city. Accompanied by police personnel, the students visited prominent landmarks, educational institutions, and cultural hubs within the city.

Interaction with Authorities:During the tour, the students had the privilege of meeting with Kishore Kaushal Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) and Rishab Garg Superintendent of Police (SP) (Rural), where they had the opportunity to engage in insightful discussions. These interactions provided the students with valuable insights into the workings of law enforcement agencies and the importance of community engagement in maintaining peace and security.

Impact and Significance: The Community Policing Program not only served as a means to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community but also empowered the students with knowledge and exposure beyond their immediate environment. By fostering such initiatives, the District Police aim to instill a sense of trust, cooperation, and mutual understanding between the police force and the residents of remote rural areas affected by militancy.

The tour of Jamshedpur city under the Community Policing Program proved to be a transformative experience for the students from remote rural areas. It not only broadened their horizons but also strengthened the bond between the police and the community, laying the foundation for collaborative efforts in ensuring peace and security in the region. Such initiatives underscore the proactive approach of the District Police in fostering positive relationships and empowering communities to combat challenges effectively.

Trains Cancelled and Diverted for Developmental Works

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In light of ongoing developmental works in the Adra Division of South Eastern Railway, the following regulatory measures will be implemented: Cancellation of Trains: 08644/08643 Asansol-Adra-Asansol MEMU Special will be cancelled on 15.02.2024 and 17.02.2024. 08665/08666 Bhojudih-Chandrapura-Bhojudih MEMU Special will be cancelled on 16.02.2024. Short Termination/Short Origination of Trains: 08174/08652 Tatanagar-Asansol-Barabhum MEMU Special, scheduled on 13.02.2024, will be short terminated at/short originated from Adra. 18035/18036 Kharagpur-Hatia-Kharagpur Express, journeys on 12.02.2024 and 15.02.2024, will be short terminated at/short originated from Adra. 03594/03593 Asansol-Purulia-Asansol Special, journey on 15.02.2024, will be short terminated at/short originated from Adra. Diversion of Train: 18601 Tatanagar-Hatia Express, scheduled on 12.02.2024, 15.02.2024, and 16.02.2024, will take a diverted route via Chandil-Gunda Bihar-Muri. These regulatory measures aim to facilitate the ongoing developmental works in Adra Division, and passengers are advised to plan their journeys accordingly.

Initiative for Eco, cultural conservation in Bokaro

R SHARMA : BOKARO

Bokaro, February 12, 2024: A remarkable initiative has emerged in Chandankiyari block of Jharkhand's Bokaro district, focusing on the conservation of environment, nature, and culture. Under this initiative, Prem Kumar Sinha and his wife Meera Devi, residents of Sabara village in Chandankiyari block, have constructed a two-acre pond together. Additionally, they have established a beautifully landscaped garden spanning four acres near the pond. This endeavor will not only facilitate the local community but also play a crucial role in environmental conservation. Prem Kumar expressed that the inspiration to build this pond came from his parents, who themselves had built a four-acre garden with their own hands. Through this remarkable initiative, the people of Sabara village will find new enthusiasm in life. Furthermore, with the aim of promoting the culture of water, forest, and land conservation, Prem Kumar organized a wedding ceremony between the pond and the trees. This ceremony lasted for about three days, during which all villagers participated with great enthusiasm.

It is noteworthy that this initiative is a significant step in the conservation of water, forests, and land, especially in states like Jharkhand. Through this initiative, people in rural areas will benefit from greater convenience.

Notably Prem Kumar's son, Indrajit Mahatha, currently serves as a DIG in the Jharkhand government, and he is also inspired to contribute to his father's conservation efforts. His son-in-law, Shashank Shekhar, holds the position of Assistant General Manager in Bokaro Steel ltd, and his younger son-in-law, Devasheesh, serves as an Assistant Commissioner in the revenue department.

Annual Sports Meet 2024 organized for trainees at BSL

R SHARMA : BOKARO

Bokaro Steel Plant (BSL) organized its annual sports competition for approximately 450 trainees, facilitated by the Human Resource Development Department, on February 10th at the Trainees Hostel Ground. The inauguration ceremony saw the presence of several BSL dignitaries, including newly elected DIC Bokaro B.K. Tiwari, Executive Director (Personnel & Administration), Rajan Prasad, Chief General Manager (HRD), Manish Jalota, Chief General Manager (Personnel), Hari Mohan Jha, and Chief General Manager (Town Administration), Kundan Kumar, along with other senior officials.

The event commenced with the inauguration by B.K. Tiwari, Rajan Prasad, and other officials, who released balloons to mark the occasion. Mr. Tiwari encouraged the trainees to participate in the competition with enthusiasm and vigor, emphasizing the importance of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

The competition witnessed participation from BSL's management trainees as well as senior officers from various departments. Events such as the 100m race, 200m race, shot put, discus throw, and tug-of-war were organized for male trainees, while female trainees participated in events like the 50m race, tug-of-war, musical chair, and others.

The program was efficiently managed by Deputy General Manager (HRD), Rajesh Kumar, who also concluded the event by motivating the participants, thereby spreading the message of unity and healthy competition through sports.

CGPC protest march, warns govt not to take anti-Sikh decisions

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Under the leadership of CGPC, Jamshedpur's Sangat and other groups took out a protest march and warned the central government to stop interfering in the affairs of Sikhs and not take anti-Sikh decisions. On Saturday, under the leadership of Sardar Bhagwan Singh, Stree Satsang Sabha, Central Sikh Naujawan Sabha and various groups participated in the anger march and expressed strong protest against the government's decision.

Jamshedpur's Sikh Takht Sri Hazur Sahib Nanded was protesting over the Maharashtra government's decision to reduce the number of members of Sikh organizations in the Gurdwara Management Board.

Chanting Satnam-Waheguru from the Central Gurdwara Management Committee office, wearing black bands as a symbol of protest, the protest march reached the office of the Deputy Commissioner, where in the absence of the Deputy Commissioner, a memorandum was submitted to DRDA Director Jyotsna Singh.

After submitting the memorandum, Central Gurdwara Management Committee (CGPC) chief Sardar Bhagwan Singh, Chairman Sardar Shailender Singh, Gurmeet Singh Tote, Gurcharan Singh Billa and representatives of hundreds of different Gurudwaras strongly protested against this decision of the government.

CGPC President Sardar Bhagwan Singh said that this action of the Maharashtra Government is extremely condemnable and hurts the sentiments of the Sikhs, against which the CGPC will strongly oppose and if necessary, will go to Maharashtra and hold a protest. Bhagwan Singh said that the present central government wants to do politics in the name of religion, which is not acceptable to the Sikhs at all. Taking a jibe at the Central Government, he said that India should be allowed to remain India and it should not be divided in the name of religion. Chairman Sardar Shailendra Singh said that the Act of Takht Shri Hazur Sahib Nanded Management Board has been arbitrarily amended by the Maharashtra Government. The number of nominated members of Shiromani Gurdwara Management Committee has been reduced. The atrocities of Maharashtra government will not be tolerated.

Gurmeet Singh Tote and Gurcharan Singh Billa also strongly condemned the anti-Sikh decision, saying that the Sikh sect cannot tolerate government interference in the management of their holy pilgrimage sites at any cost.

It is noteworthy that the Maharashtra Government has increased the number of nominated members by amending the Takht Shri Hazur Sahib Management Board (Nanded) Act. At the same time, the number of SGPC members in the managerial board has been reduced from four to two. According to the amended bill, the total number of members in the existing board will be 17. Of these, the government will nominate 12 members. Two members will be nominated from SGPC. The remaining three members will be selected through the election process. Earlier the number of members nominated by the government was seven.

Pradhan Bhagwan Singh, Chairperson Shailendra Singh, Gurmeet Singh, Amarjeet Singh, Gurcharan Singh Billa, Narendrapal Singh Bhatia, Nishan Singh, Chanchal Singh, Giani Kuldeep Singh Shergill, Paramjeet Singh Kale, Gurnam Singh, Kulwinder Singh Pannu, Parvinder Singh Sohal, Lakhwinder Singh. , Inderjit Singh, Patwant Singh, Gurcharan Singh Titu, Jasvir Singh, Balwinder Singh, Heera Singh Kalsi, Dalbir Singh, Gurcharan Singh, Ravindra Singh, Balbir Singh, Ranjit Singh Matharu, Amarjeet Singh Gandhi, Hardeep Singh Bhatia, Baldev Singh, Surjit Singh Khushipur, Harminder Singh Mindi, Kamaljeet Singh, Prakash Singh, Harjinder Singh, Sukhdev Singh Bittu, Amrik Singh, Satyendrapal Singh, Gurjeet Singh Pintu, Avinash Singh, Sukhdev Singh Panesar, Satpal Singh, Gurdeep Singh Laddi, Jagdeep Singh, Paramjeet Singh Vicky, Sarabjit Singh, Harvinder Singh Golu, Sukhwant Singh, Jaswant Singh, Kuldeep Singh Giani, Satpal Singh Ghuman, Ravinder Kaur, Kamaljeet Kaur, Dalbir Kaur, Palwinder Kaur, Kamaljeet Kaur Gill, Sukhwant Kaur, Paramjeet Kaur and all Gurdwara Committees, Central Naujawan Sabha. Hundreds of representatives of Central Stree Satsang Sabha, Akali Dal Jamshedpur and other organizations participated.

Peace committee meet in view of Saraswati puja

SURESH NIKHAR : BERMO

In the context of Saraswati Puja, a peace committee meeting was held here on Sunday in the BTPS police station premises under the chairmanship of station in-charge Ramakant Gupta.

Addressing the gathering present in the committee, the station in-charge Ramakant Gupta said that there should be no disturbance of any kind in the puja and put forward your views on conducting the puja peacefully and said that by celebrating the festival with mutual brotherhood, it should give the message of brotherhood and in the same way this area gives the message of mutual brotherhood from time to time, he also said that it will be played completely banned on DJ sound.

In any case immerse the idol on 15th February, if any puja committee wants to extend the puja or do not immerse on 15th then they should take permission from SDO Bermo, police is with you at every step.

Somehow If it is a matter of giving information, there will be complete vigil on the miscreants. He also said that all will be under the surveillance of CCTV cameras. The announcement of the closing of the meeting was made by social worker Jogendra Giri alias Babulal Giri. On this occasion, apart from all the Puja Committee, various People coming from different places expressed their views,

Among the dignitaries, Mukhiya Sangh President Chandradev Ghansi, Jogendra Giri, Akhtar Ansari, Sujayat Hussain, Manjoor Ansari, Maneer Alam, Bhuneshwar Sahu, Bablu Francis, Manzoor Alam, Mukhiya Tapeshwar Mahato, Mukhiya Sudesh Munda, Deepak Rajak and others were in the meeting.

ECR cancels several trains on Daltonganj route

PNS : DALTONGANJ

The east central railway has cancelled a number of pair trains on the Daltonganj route. The important cancellation is Sasaram Ranchi express train. It stands cancelled for its Up and Dn journey from Feb 15 to 23 said the Daltonganj railway station superintendent Umesh Kumar. Again Palamu express train for Patna and back will not come and go from Daltonganj for the same period Feb 15 and 23. It will run on a diverted route.

Rajdhani Express train and Garib Rath train will come and go to/ from Daltonganj but will take a diverted route for the period Feb 15 and 23. However trains like Passenger Shuttle, GDR and BDM passenger trains will remain cancelled for Up and Dn journey from Feb 15 to 23. Umesh Kumar said Barkakana Dehri On Sone passenger train stands cancelled from today Feb 11 till 23.

The cancellations is all due to non interlocking work going on. End

BSL's GM triumphs in Coal India Run 2024

PNS : BOKARO

Krishan Chand, the esteemed General Manager of the Finance & Accounts Department at BSL, has etched his name in the annals of athletic achievement with a stellar performance in the Coal India Run 2024. Chand, known for his leadership acumen in the corporate realm, showcased his physical prowess by completing the grueling 21.1km distance in a commendable provisional time of 2 hours, 7 minutes, and 10 seconds. His remarkable feat not only demonstrates his proficiency in the boardroom but also highlights his dedication to personal fitness and well-being. Despite his demanding professional responsibilities, Chand's commitment to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and pursuing his passion for running is truly commendable. As he crossed the finish line amidst cheers and applause, Chand's achievement resonated not only within the realms of corporate excellence but also in the vibrant tapestry of sportsmanship and athleticism. His exemplary performance serves as a testament to the notion that with determination and perseverance, one can conquer any challenge, regardless of the arena.

Procession for the consecration of the statues of Lord Hanumanji and Vishwakarma

PNS : LOHARDAGA

A grand procession was taken out for the consecration of the statues of Hanumanji and Lord Vishwakarma in the newly constructed Siddhi Vinayak Hanuman Temple near Ajay Park, the old Venus Market of the city. In which about three thousand men, women and teenagers and devotees of various religious and social organizations participated. Which concluded from Hanuman Temple complex via Ajay Park via Barwa Toli, Mahabir Chowk Upper Bazaar, Jama Masjid, Mahatma Gandhi Bir Shivaji Marg New Road and back to the temple complex.

In this sequence, thousands of devotees, especially teenagers and women, danced with piercing applause to the Ram Bhakta tune of the band and DJ. In the procession, priests Chandrashekhar Mishra, Jaishankar Mishra, Pankaj Mishra, Parmanand Mishra and Gopal Mishra along with host Saroj Prajapati, wife Sarita Devi, Deepak Agarwal, wife Piki Agarwal, Mahendra Prajapati, wife Yashoda Devi, Vinay Sharma, wife Jayanti Devi and Ravi Shankar Sharma. Wife Neelam Sharma was walking ahead carrying the idols of Lord Hanuman, Lord Vishwakarma, Shiva Linga etc. A lot of enthusiasm was seen among the devotees regarding the procession. On the third day of Pran Pratishtha, altar immersion, floral tribute, peace water eclipse and Pran Pratishtha program were organized.

During the Shobha Yatra, Temple Committee Chairman Saroj Prajapati Deepak Aggarwal Mahendra Prajapati SDM Amit Kumar, SDPO Shraddha Kerketta, MP representatives Chandrashekhar Prasad, Rajendra Khatri, Ajay Mital, Ajay Prajapati, Indra Prajapati, Pramod Prajapati, Abhishek Sharma, Gudu Gupta, Deepak Gupta. , Anand Sao, Naval Aggarwal, Shiv Prajapati, Ashish Gupta, Suraj Gupta, Manohar Gupta, Pradeep Kumar, Kuldeep Gupta, Vivek Sharma, Rahul Prajapati, Abhishek Sharma, Mohan Raju Gupta, Manu, Kanu, Kiran Devi, Meena Sushma, Rishika, A large number of devotees and dignitaries including Mili attended. A grand Bhandara was organized on the spot for the third consecutive day. In which thousands of devotees took Prasad. In the evening, Aarti Prasad was distributed and bhajan kirtan was organized by the kirtan group. On 12th February, altar immersion, pusanjali and peace water harvesting and on 13th February, Jagran program will be held from 7 pm to night. The organizers of the temple committee have urged the Sanatan people to participate in the religious program and become partakers of virtue.

Felicitation Ceremony at SCS

Surendranath Centenary School organised a felicitation ceremony in their 'Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar' auditorium on Sunday to acknowledge and applaud the achievements of the students who excelled in the CBSE class X and XII - 2022-23 board examination. The occasion was graced by the presence of the Chief Guest, Justice Ananda Sen and the members of the Managing committee. The 51 meritorious students were endowed with certificates of merit and gift vouchers in the presence of their proud parents and teachers. Principal, Samita Sinha extended heartfelt congratulations to the students on their remarkable performance.

Flag-off ceremony held at SBPS

The academic session 2023-24 of Sarala Birla Public School (SBPS), Ranchi was concluded by organizing a flag-off ceremony in the school premises. On this occasion, a special meeting was organized on the topic 'Hard work and self-confidence leads to success'. The meeting was started with a motivational song. After this the students shared inspiring thoughts on the successful completion of the current session. Students representing the school in various competitions were felicitated.

AJSU attacks Soren Govt

AJSU Party, Chief, Sudesh Kumar Mahato has said that the Government running in Jharkhand has spoiled the image of the state. In the situation that has arisen, it is necessary to beautify the state and save its reputation. Also, accountable politics will have to be established. He said these things in the conference of Panchayat and village representatives organized in Pratappur, Chatra. He said that this is the year of farewell for the government. The people of the state have lost faith in the governance. The people who came to power by promising to solve the problem of planning, displacement and making local policy, forgot their promise.

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REAL SHOW STEALER WAS BOOMBALL, SAYS ASHWIN
12 SPORTS

DELHI BRACES UP FOR FARMERS ONSLAUGHT

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Security personnel deployed at Ghazipur border in view of farmers' Delhi Chalo March, in New Delhi, on Sunday. A large number of farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab are expected to march towards the national Capital on Tuesday PTI

In a bid to avoid a re-run of the 2020 Farmers' protest in the Delhi-NCR, the Haryana and the Delhi Police have left no stone unturned to prevent any untoward situation for the farmers' 'Chalo Delhi' protest scheduled to be held on Tuesday.

Large cement barricades, nails punched on access roads, suspension of internet and bulk SMS services, and heavy police deployment to block the farmers have been put in place at the borders.

The Centre has invited representatives of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to hold another meeting to discuss their demands on February 12. Three Union Ministers — Piyush Goyal, Arjun Munda and Nityanand Rai, will hold talks with farmers' in Chandigarh. The meeting will be held at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26.

Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has accused the Haryana Government of creating a border "between Punjab and India", referring to the concrete blocks, nails and barbed wire placed on some roads to scuttle the farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march.

He said the Manohar Khattar-led Haryana Government has placed as much barbed wire at the State's borders with Punjab as there is at the country's border with Pakistan. Khattar, however, justified the steps taken by his Government to seal the State's borders and stop Punjab farmers from marching towards the national Capital, saying the arrangements are aimed at maintaining law and order.

The Delhi Police has issued prohibitory orders under section 144, which bars large gatherings, were imposed in the northeast district and is making every attempt to avoid the unfortunate January 26, 2021 incident wherein protesting farmers clashed with the Delhi Police and one particular wing of the tractor rally, led by Deep Sidhu, moved to Red Fort causing chaos in the national Capital.

Apprehending the disturbance of peace, Haryana has sealed the border with Punjab at Shambhu border on GT Road border (National Highway-44) which falls between Punjab's Patiala and Haryana's Ambala districts, also suspended mobile internet services and bulk SMS in seven districts — Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa — from February 11 to 13.

In a notification, the Haryana Government said dongle services provided on mobile phones, will remain suspended and only voice calls would go through. In Sonipat, the district administration has asked fuel pump owners to not fill up bottles or other containers.

A 10-litre cap has been introduced for tractors. The administration has warned that providing fuel to those associated with the farmers' protest will attract action.

Elaborate arrangements are in place at the borders in Jind and Fatehabad districts to stop the march.

Sources said the Delhi Police are blocking the city's borders with Haryana by placing massive containers. Cranes have been deployed to move these barriers if farmers try to cross into Delhi.

In fact, Haryana too has brought in cement barriers to ensure that the protesting farmers cannot enter Delhi. In Delhi, cops are holding drills to practise firing teargas shells if farmers refuse to stop. A video shows the Delhi Police lining up and firing teargas shells in an open area in north Delhi. The exercise, meanwhile, has left local residents in discomfort. Many of them complained of burning sensation in their eyes after the drill. The Delhi Police is also keeping a close watch on social media in the run-up to the protest.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha had announced the 'Delhi Chalo' march by more than 200 farmers' unions on February 13 to press the Centre into accepting several demands, including the enactment of a law to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) for crops, implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, provision of pensions for farmers and farm laborers, forgiveness of farm debts, withdrawal of police charges, and seeking justice for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence.

Deserted Janata Dal (United) office ahead of the floor test of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led Government in Patna on Sunday PTI

All eyes on Bihar Floor test

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ PATNA / NEW DELHI

Ahead of the floor test for the newly aligned Nitish Kumar-led NDA Government on Monday, while political parties were busy keeping their members together through sumptuous meals, antakshari, and indoor games, all eyes are also focused on the role of incumbent Speaker Avadh Bihari Chaudhary, an RJD member, and Jitan Ram Manjhi-led HAM, a constituent of the present Nitish regime.

Sources indicate that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar himself is apprehensive of potential cross-voting by some of his party MLAs who have reportedly been unreachable since last week.

The JD(U) chief is seemingly facing internal dissent within the party for his frequent changes in stance, treating the party as his personal fiefdom, and his recent decision to replace his close confidant and predecessor Lallan Singh as the chief of JD(U).

Another former JD(U) president and once a close aide to Nitish, RCP Singh, is also aiming to sideline Nitish from Bihar politics entirely. RCP, who was part of Narendra Modi's Cabinet as a JD(U) partner and has now joined the BJP.

The Bihar Assembly has a total strength of 243, with the majority mark set at 122. The NDA holds a comfortable majority with 128 seats, comprising 78 from BJP, 45 from JD(U), 4 from Hindustani Awam Morcha, and Independent MLA Sumit Singh. On the other side, led by RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, efforts are underway to "woo" 14 legislators, as the party remains the largest in the Bihar Assembly with 79 MLAs, followed by the Congress with 19, Left parties with 18, and the lone AIMM also in the Mahagathbandhan.

Sources indicate that Manjhi had a meeting with an emissary of RJD supremo Lalu Prasad a day earlier, and now he is attempting to exert his influence with four MLAs in his camp, including the former's son, who was sworn in as part of the newly formed Nitish Ministry.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Deputy Chief Ministers KP Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, UP Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana and State legislators during a visit to the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on Sunday PTI

Yogi takes politicians on a spiritual odyssey

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA

In response to the call of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana, MLAs from various political affiliations, barring the Samajwadi Party, ventured on a spiritual odyssey to Ayodhya to pay homage to Lord Ram.

Expressing gratitude for the opportunity, the MLAs commended Yogi and Mahana for extending the invitation.

"I am overwhelmed to be present at the 'Darbar' of Lord Ram. My dream has come true," Mahana told reporters after his temple visit.

He reflected on the evolution of the site, from its humble origins to the grandeur it stands as today. "I never envisioned the temple would be such a majestic structure reflecting our religious and cultural ethos," he said.

Accompanied by Ministers and legislators from the ruling coalition, Opposition members from parties including the BSP, the RLD, and the Congress set aside political disparities to partake in the collective reverence for Lord Ram.

Luxurious buses provided by the Transport Corporation facilitated the journey, resonating with the chanting of Ramdhun and adorned with vibrant flowers, creating a serene ambiance. Refreshments were provided for comfort, alongside thoughtful tokens of remembrance like diaries, pens, and calendars for each MLA.

As flower petals showered the luxurious buses upon arrival in Ayodhya, the journey symbolised a historic milestone, embodying the realisation of a centuries-old dream — the construction of the grand temple of Lord Ram. The unity displayed by the Government and MLAs across the political spectrum was praised as a testament to Yogi's visionary leadership.

Modi: Congress anti tribal, Uses them only during elections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHOPAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said he is confident the BJP will cross the 370 seats mark in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, and even the Opposition leaders in Parliament are saying the ruling coalition will get more than 400 seats.

He was addressing a public meeting of tribal community members in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district. Modi alleged the Congress was anti-tribal and thought of villages, farmers and the poor only during elections.

He said he had got overwhelming love from the people as he visited temples associated with Lord Ram in the South of the country.

Aware of their imminent defeat, the Congress and its allies are resorting to last ditch-tactics, the PM said, adding that "loot and divide" is the motto of the Congress. "The Congress when it is in power indulges in loot, while out of power engineers divisions (in society) based on language, region and caste," he said here. The Congress has drowned in its own sins and the more it will make efforts to come up the further it will slide down, the PM asserted.

It got decimated in the 2023 (Assembly polls) and will be wiped out in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, he said. "The people showed the mirror to the Congress in the Assembly polls. The mood of the nation is similar in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls," Modi asserted.

The PM asked voters to ensure polling of additional 370 votes in each booth, compared to the last elections, for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to win 370 seats, out of the 543 Lok Sabha seats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangu Bhai Patel, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and others at the dedication and foundation stone laying ceremony of various development projects during Janjatiya Sammelan in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh on Sunday PTI

Even the Opposition leaders in Parliament are now saying "abki baar 400 paar" for the (BJP-led) National Democratic Alliance (NDA), he said. "I am sure the BJP's lotus symbol will cross the 370-mark on its own," Modi said.

The PM said he has not come to Jhabua to campaign for the Lok Sabha elections, but as the "sevak" to thank the people for their overwhelming support in the recent Assembly elections. The BJP recently won the Assembly polls in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh with a thumping majority.

"Our 'double engine' Government is working with double speed in Madhya Pradesh," he said referring to the ₹7,550 crore development projects which he launched before addressing the meeting.

RAJYA SABHA NOMINATIONS

Parties unfold their cards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the elections for vacant seats in the Rajya Sabha scheduled this month, the BJP and the TMC announced their candidates on Sunday.

The BJP released a list of 14 candidates for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal.

The list includes Sudhanshu Trivedi, and former Congress leader RPN Singh from Uttar Pradesh, with former Haryana BJP chief Subhash Barala announced as the candidate from Haryana.

The Trinamool Congress nominated journalist Sagarika Ghose among its candidates for the biennial polls on February 27.

In Uttar Pradesh, besides Sudhanshu Trivedi, former BJP MLA Sadhna Singh, and RPN Singh, the other candidates are Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, Amarpal Maurya, Sangita Balwant, and Navin Jain. RPN Singh, a former Congress leader from the politically important Kurmi caste, joined the BJP in 2022.

The State has the highest number of vacancies with 10 seats. None of the Union Ministers whose terms are ending were named in the list, indicating a strong possibility that many of them will contest the Lok Sabha polls. However, the party is yet to name several candidates. Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, representing Karnataka in the Rajya Sabha, and BJP chief spokesperson and media head Anil Baluni, the outgoing MP from Uttarakhand, have not been nominated.

Pak parties intensify efforts to form coalition Government

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

The three main political parties in Pakistan on Sunday intensified their efforts for the formation of a coalition Government after it became clear that the coup-prone country faced a hung Parliament after general elections marred by allegations of rigging.

The general elections were held on Thursday, but the unusual delay in the announcement of results vitiated the atmosphere as several parties cried foul and some resorted to protests.

Former prime minister and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo Nawaz Sharif received the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Saturday for his call for a unity Government to pull Pakistan out of its current difficulties.

Humans continue to invade sacred forests, their inhabitants

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Pioneer's report published recently that Kerala was fast becoming the graveyard for wild animals is being substantiated by the State's Forest Department, an institution set up to protect jungles and wild animals.

The entire population in Wayanad district has demanded a "death sentence" for a wild tusker that killed a 47-year-old man in Mananthawadi, a forest suburb, on Saturday.

Residents insist that the Forest Department should eliminate the elephant, either by shooting it or tranquilising and relocating it to a safer area.

However, recent incidents prove that the Forest Department does not have qualified veterinary specialists for tranquilising the elephant.

"A few weeks ago, we saw an elephant known as 'Thanneer Komban' succumbing to a tranquilising shot administered by the Forest Department's veterinary surgeon. No investigation was conducted to determine the cause of the pachyderm's death," said V K Venkitachalam, chairman of the Heritage Animal Task Force, an organisation in Thrissur dedicated to wildlife welfare.

PIONEER EXCLUSIVE

Venkitachalam noted that the death of Thanneer Komban, reportedly tranquilised by a Government veterinarian, could be attributed to outdated tranquiliser. "The tranquilising pistol and drug have expired, and there is no official record indicating the provision of new tranquiliser. Additionally, there is a shortage of qualified veterinarians to tranquilise elephants or other wild animals," he added.

The past two months saw a leopard and a wild boar being killed within minutes of receiving tranquiliser shots, which Venkitachalam considers a strange coincidence.

A K Saseendran, Kerala Minister for Forest and wild Life, who celebrated his 78th birthday on January 29 remained incommunicado for hours and ordered the tusker be tranquilised at the earliest and shifted to Muthanga Elephant Camp. However, the Minister was non-committal regarding the mission's timing.

Local residents in Mananthawadi, many of whom reside on forest land allocated to them by regional political parties, blamed the Forest Department for the elephant's intrusion into residential areas.

Venkitachalam countered, saying the animals' habitat has diminished due to the Government's concessions to the forest mafia, who distribute forest land at their discretion.

"There is a lack of water and vegetation for elephants and other wild animals, prompting them to encroach upon human settlements in search of sustenance. We cannot blame wild animals for their efforts to survive," he said.

CCL's marathon concludes with dazzling success

PNS : RANCHI

The second edition of the Coal India Marathon 2024 organized by Central Coalfields Limited (CCL) on Sunday under the aegis of Coal India Limited (CIL) with dazzling success. About more than 7500 athletes from across the Country participated in the mega event conducted in four categories: 42.198 km of full marathon, 21.098 km of half marathon, 10 km run and a 5 km run.

This was the second officially registered marathon of Jharkhand in which various bureaucrats, defence force personnel and people from all walks of life participated. There were separate categories for women and men. The runners started the marathon from Birsa Munda stadium, Morabadi and after going though Kanke and Pithoria finally returned to the Birsa Munda Stadium. The total prize money for the event was Rs 33.12 Lakhs which was distributed in different categories. The winner of 42 km got Rs 3.3 Lakhs while the half marathon winner in both categories netted Rs 2.2 Lakh. The winner of the 10 km run got Rs 1.1 Lakh.

The full marathon race commenced at 5.00 am and the half marathon race commenced at 5.25 am. The 10 km race started at 5.30 am while the 5 km race began at 8.30 am. The race witnessed the spirited participation of athletes from all regions PAN India, contributing to the tremendous success of this grand event. The event was graced by the esteemed presence of Justice High Court, Jharkhand, SN Pathak, MP Rajya Ssbha, PT Usha, an all time great athelete, Addittional SG, Anil Kumar, Addittional Secretary, MOC, M Nagaraju, Additional Secretary, MoC, Rupinder Brar, Chairman, CIL, PM Prasad ;CMD,CCL, Dr B Veera Reddy, CMD, CMPDIL, Manoj Kumar; Ex-Chairman, CIL, Pramod Agrawal, Director (Personnel), Vinay Ranjan, Director (Marketing), CIL, Mukesh Chaudhary, Director (BD), CIL, Debashish Nanda, CVO ,CIL, Brajesh Kumar Tripathi , Secretary (Mines and Agriculture), Aboobacker Siddique, Secretary (Sports), Manoj Kumar and IPS, Akhilesh Jha.

IPS, YS Ramesh, Director (T/O) CCL, Ram Baboo Prasad, Director (P), CCL, Harsh Nath Mishra ; Director (Finance),CCL and Pawan Kumar Mishra.

There was a sense of jubilation in the air, which was amplified by the loud music, LED screens where the event was streaming live and the amazing arrangement of the organizers. The runners braved the early morning chill to participate in the event and complete the run. The arrangements for the marathon included facilities like a medical point, hydration point, entertainment programs and energy stations. Enthusiasm was electrifying when this group of some of the best runners in the country were enjoying the scenic beauty of Ranchi while competing with each other.

Chairman CIL, PM Prasad stated Coal India Limited is organizing this event to create awareness about the importance of physical fitness amongst the public. CMD, CCL Dr B Veera Reddy said that such events will foster a spirit of sportsmanship, camaraderie amongst the people and the company will continue organizing such events in future. Director (Personnel), CIL, Vinay Ranjan expressed his delight at the successful completion of the event. Rajya Sabha MP, PT Usha have also encouraged the public to participate in the marathon and expressed their delight that the Marathon was being organized in Ranchi. The Athletic federation of India provided the technical support for the event.

Pramod Agrawal also congratulated the organizers for successfully conducting the event and hoped that such events will encourage a new generation of runners in Jharkhand who will make the state and country proud.

The runners who came from different parts of the country were extremely happy with the facilities provided during the marathon and said that Coal India should keep on organizing such events in the future also.

The top rank in the Full Marathon men's 42 km category was secured by Akshay Kumar, who clocked a time of 2 Hr twenty minutes and thirty-eight seconds while Hemant Kumar stood second. In the female category of the full marathon, Sonika from Haryana was first and she completed the run in 2 Hrs forty-four minutes and twelve seconds, while Reenu secured the second position. In the half marathon of 21 km male category, Puneet Kumar bagged the first prize with a timing of One Hr five minute and seventeen seconds while in women category Renu Singh a railway employee from Uttar Pradesh secured the first position.

Over a hundred technical officers from the Athletic Federation of India and Jharkhand Athletics federation along with volunteers and security personnel, emergency medical team, from CCL left no stone unturned to make the event a success. The entire premise and the route was cleaned by the company after the completion of the event.

DLSAs to give free legal aid at police stations

PNS : RANCHI

The fourth state level meeting of District Legal Services Authorities organized by Jharkhand State Legal Services Authority at Nyay Sadan, Jhalsa, for the Chairman and Secretary of all 24 District Legal Services Authorities, concluded today. This training program was completed in five sessions.

Justice Sujit Narayan Prasad, Judge, Jharkhand High Court and Executive Chairman, Jhalsa was the chief guest while Justice Pradeep Kumar Srivastava, Judge, Jharkhand High Court was guest of honour and Justice Arun Kumar Rai was the main speaker.

The Jharkhand State Legal Services Authority (JHALSA) Executive Chairman Justice Sujit Narayan Prasad today asked the DLSAs to strengthen legal services at the pre-arrest, arrest and remand stage.

Addressing the fourth state-level meeting of District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs), he said they focus on providing legal aid at police stations.

During this training programme, the following suggestions/guidelines were given by Honorable Justice Shri Sujit Narayan Prasad, Judge, Jharkhand High Court and Executive President, Jhalsa:

Strengthening legal services at pre-arrest, arrest and remand stage.

1. The District Legal Services Authority should focus on providing legal aid at police stations. Contact numbers of LADCS and panel lawyers should be displayed at appropriate places in each police station.

2. Special drives should be conducted every fortnight in every jail to provide legal aid to undertrials and convicts.

3. The District Legal Services Authority should provide legal aid to those convicts who are entitled for premature release. Proper counselling to convicts after premature release.

4. Assistance to the family members of the convicts and connecting them with every government beneficial schemes.

legal service

Para Legal Volunteers: Appropriate utilization of services of para legal volunteers in legal awareness programs and outreach campaigns. To include them in Lok Adalat, National Lok Adalat and mediation campaign.

Legal Aid Clinic: Legal Aid Clinic to function as per the instructions of NALSA/JHALSA.

JHALSA Activities: Every activity of JHALSA Activity Calendar is to be followed in letter and spirit.

Legal Literacy Clubs: To provide quality legal education to the students of Legal Literacy Clubs. Inclusion of panel lawyers and other renowned speakers in legal literacy classes.

Front Office: It should be equipped with every facility and manned by experienced para legal volunteers and panel lawyers.

15100: To conduct a massive campaign on awareness about NALSA toll free number 15100 to the District Legal Services Authority.

Victim Compensation: To take initiative to the District Legal Services Authority so that the prescribed amount can be distributed to the victim as soon as possible.

J H A L S A / N A L S A Projects/Schemes: Priority campaign to be run by District Legal Services Authority for each scheme of JHALSA/NALSA.

Legal Empowerment Camp: Legal Empowerment Camp should be organized as per NALSA Legal Services Camp module. Beneficiaries must be identified. Special emphasis to be laid on the upliftment of primitive tribes and marginalized people.

Free legal aid to persons living in circumstances of undesirable deprivation: The District Legal Services Authority should be sensitive to the day-to-day incidents of road accidents, natural and man-made disasters, witchcraft etc.

• Mediation: Referral of court cases with due attention by the referral court. Appropriate use of intermediaries.

• District Legal Services Authority to conduct special awareness campaign on pre-institution mediation in commercial dispute cases and to increase pre-institution mediation in commercial matters.

• Rashtriya Lok Adalat: Identification of cases and their pre-conciliation meeting. Special attention to be given to pending cases.

• District Legal Services Authority to organize special Lok Adalat on NI Act cases, motor accident cases, consumer cases etc.

• To focus the prison court on undertrial prisoners who are eligible for release.

• Permanent Lok Adalat: The District Legal Services Authority should ensure that the Chairman, Permanent Lok Adalat liaise with various departments related to public utility services and organize camp meetings at the block/subdivision level so that more applications related to public utility services are received. Be.

• The District Legal Services Authority should utilize all the funds under various heads by the close of the financial year 2023-24.

Executive meeting of JHASA held

PNS : RANCHI

The executive meeting of Jharkhand Administrative Service Association (JHASA) was held on Sunday at Sangh Bhawan. In this meeting convened under the chairmanship of JHASA President Ranjita Hembram, many contemporary issues related to the state administrative service were discussed. General Secretary Rahul Kumar, Joint Secretary Meena, Treasurer Ram Narayan Singh, Media Incharge Sanjay Kumar, Executive Member Jitendra Kumar Pandey also expressed their views in the meeting.

At the executive meeting, it was decided that a felicitation ceremony will be organized by the Sangh for all the members who have recently been promoted from Jharkhand Administrative Service to Indian Administrative Service. On the same day, it has been decided to organize a farewell cum felicitation ceremony for those JHA officers who have retired from JHA during the last one year.

President Ranjita Hembram has also appealed to the district units of JHASA to keep holding JHASA meetings in the districts at regular intervals. This will not only increase coordination among officers but will also improve administrative coordination in the district.

Chairman Hembram said that Jharkhand Administrative Service is a very important service of the state. Due to excessive workload and responsibilities, it is natural for officers to be busy on a daily basis. Despite this, the union will take necessary initiatives from its level to connect the RP officers with various sports activities and cultural activities like art and literature.

Apart from the above mentioned topics, important discussions were also held on many other topics like renewal of membership of members, land for Sangh Bhavan, timely promotion, premier service etc. Issues like convening the meeting of the committee formed on the proposal of premium service, putting it before the union level for time bound promotions against various categories of administrative posts lying vacant were also discussed.

DWA meet on Basant Panchmi theme

PNS : RANCHI

The second General Body Meeting of DWA was held today at IMA hall on the theme of Basant Panchmi (Saraswati Pooja),to celebrate knowledge and creativity.All members clad in yellow the favourite colour of Goddess Saraswati marked the beginning of spring season after the chilly winter.The Chairperson Vinita Sharan and Co-Chairperson cum Founder Jhooma Sarkar extended their warm felicitations to all.The President Shreela Choudhary welcomed the members highlighting the importance of Basant Panchami. The programme began with Saraswati Vandana by Bharati Jha accompanied by Sumita Kumar's beautiful dance performance. Several group dances were also presented bySweta Survi, Purnima Lal, DrRashmi Kumari, Debosmita Shrivastav, Pallavi Sharan, Shivani Sahu, Pallavi Sunil,DrAnu Kumari,Rashmi Agarwal, Purnima Lal, DrKumari Abha,Rina Sah and Rinku Banerjee.The anchoring was done by Neelum Shekhar and Pooam Jha.The other members of the organising team namely Sushma Mishra,Asha Shrivastav, Jaya Sahu ,Anima Pandey,Dr Kumari Abha and Anju Singh entertained the members with fun games.

The Secretary Amrita Baidya proposed the plan for the next charity work. She thanked everyone specially the organisers.

The other members who were present on the occasion included Deepa Chauhan, Dr Arpita Mishra, Rashmi Sinha, Madhu Gupta. Rinku Choudhary, Monidipa Dasgupta, Seema Maheshwari, Sindhu Bhadani, Ranjana Jain, Rukhsana Bano, Debjani Sanyal, Moona Pal, Renu Tiwary, Dr. Priyanka Lamba, Shweta Ranjan, Rashmi Kumar, Dr. Smriti Narain, Anjali Ganesh, Dr Veenu Vandana, Rita Gupta, Manju Singh, Rekha Mishra, Priti Navin, Nirmala Garodia, Arti Singh, Supriya Thakur, Rinku Banerjee, Sakshi Singh, Dr Neha Priya, Kumari Poonam, Pushpa Devi, Balaka Roy, Monideepa Sarkar, Rashmi Bakshi, Sunita Sinha.

IMD alert of thundershowers, lightning for next 72 hours

PNS : RANCHI

Once again a change in weather patterns is expected in Jharkhand. There is a possibility of rain in the entire state including Ranchi on February 12. There is also a possibility of thunderstorm and wind during this period.

The sky will start becoming cloudy from February 11. According to Indian Meteorological Center (IMD), Ranchi, Chief, Abhishek Anand, due to the effect of western disturbance, there are chances of rain once again in the state. He said that during this period, the maximum temperature is likely to fall and the minimum temperature may increase due to which the feeling of cold will increase more.

According to the Meteorological Department, on February 12, apart from West Palamu, Garhwa, Chatra, Koderma, Latehar and Lohardaga of the State, there is a possibility of light and moderate rain at isolated places in Ranchi, Bokaro, Gumla, Hazaribagh, Khunti and Ramgarh. . On Saturday, the maximum temperature of Ranchi was recorded at 23.8 degrees, minimum at 9.2 degrees.

The Meteorological Department has issued a yellow alert regarding thunderstorms due to rain from February 12 regarding which the department has appealed to the people to be cautious as a precaution and not to go out unnecessarily. Talking about the weather in the last 24 hours, there was light rain with thunder at isolated places across the State.

CPI Maoist surrender before Latehar SP

PNS : RANCHI

CPI Maoist carrying a reward of Rs 10 lakh has surrendered before Latehar SP Anjani Anjan on Sunday. The name of the Maoist has been given as Laldeep Ganjhu alias Kaltu alias Kartink.

Addressing a press meet at his office Anjan said that Laldeep had been carrying out Naxalite activities for decades. He said that he was carrying out violent activities by holding the post of zonal commander in the CPI Maoist squad. "A few days ago, the Government had announced a reward of Rs 10 lakh on this. Apart from Latehar district, criminal cases are also registered against Laldeep in Aurangabad and Madanpur districts of Bihar," he added.

Latehar SP also said that Laldeep had joined the Maoist organization in 2004. "He has a 20-year long history of violence. Cases are registered against him in many police stations. Due to continuous police action, Naxalite organizations have weakened in the state. The result of this is that today Naxalite leaders like Laldeep are surrendering," he added. Anjan said, along with this, the surrender policy of the state also contributed to this. Under this, the Government is providing many types of facilities to the surrendered Naxalites, he added. SP said that Laldeep has surrendered after being influenced by the new direction of the surrender policy of the state government. Said that Hemant government had launched a comprehensive campaign on Budha Pahad adjacent to Latehar. At that time also many Maoist leaders and members had surrendered before the police. Since then, the police is continuously running anti-Naxal operations.

"Dristi - Empowering Girls through a Significant Initiative"

PNS : RANCHI

Once again, the student-led organization "Dristi" orchestrated a pivotal event named "Nirbhay Nari." Rooted in the narrative of resilience epitomized by Damini, this initiative was tailored to fortify young girls as they transitioned into adulthood. Held at L.P. Public School in Ranchi, under the esteemed guidance of Principal Shree Vijay Mishra, the event unfolded on February 10, 2024.

Comprehensive in scope, the program encompassed the distribution of essential sanitary products and enlightening discourse sessions conducted by certified professionals. Furthermore, participants were provided with nutritious food packages, ensuring their holistic well-being throughout the event.

Alongside the unwavering commitment of Chapter Lead Samprati, the resounding success of the event owed much to the concerted efforts of the Dristi team, including Aditi, Radhika, Ayush, Nihal, Anupriya, Sneha, Smriti, Harsh, Suruchi, Ayushi, Arpita, Tejal, Ishika, Sharad, Priyanshu, Dipika, Muskan , Abhilasha, Rajvardhan, Shreya and a dedicated cohort of volunteers.

In reflection, the Chapter Lead Samprati Singh emphasized that while educating approx 300 girls on self-awareness marked a commendable start, the organization remained steadfast in its resolve to expand this noble endeavor. Their pledge was to ensure that every young girl was equipped with the knowledge and empowerment necessary to navigate the complexities of adolescence and beyond.

IIM Ranchi Concludes Two-day Transformative Yoga Camp

PNS : RANCHI

The Indian Institute of Management, Ranchi, in collaboration with the Happiness Centre, IIM Ranchi and the Department of Sports Science and Yoga (RKMVERI), Belur Math, concluded a two-day transformative Yoga Camp. The camp's primary goal was to instil the mindset of 'Embrace Yoga: Align Body, Mind, and Spirit.'

The valedictory ceremony, held at the institute, was graced by the esteemed presence of Prof. Deepak Kumar Srivastava, Director, IIM Ranchi, along with Prof. Prasenjit Chakrabarti, Prof. Tanusree Dutta, and Swami Vidyapradananda.

Swami Vidyapradananda, a Ramakrishna Order monk and a Penn State University PhD holder, played a significant role in planning and conducting the camp. More than 250 participants, including students and volunteers, actively engaged in the yoga sessions. Prof. Deepak Kumar Srivastava, in his opening remarks, highlighted the importance of yoga in enhancing concentration and emphasised the need for a focused approach in today's multitasking world. He announced the integration of yoga into the academic curriculum and expressed gratitude to Swami Vidyapradananda. Swami Vidyapradananda, in his address, expressed gratitude for the institute's invitation and shared insights into the scientific planning behind the two-day camp. He appreciated the participants' enthusiasm, urging them to integrate the takeaways from the sessions into their daily lives. The valedictory ceremony included the felicitation of Swami Vidyapradananda, Prof. Arkadeb Dutta, and Prof. Arnab Das, who contributed significantly to the event. Certificates were also awarded to volunteers from RKMVERI for their dedication to organising and regulating the Yoga camp. As a token of appreciation, Swami Ji presented Director Prof. Deepak Kumar Srivastava with a glass painting of Swami Vivekananda, created by one of his students.

The event concluded with a mesmerising performance by volunteers showcasing various yoga postures and balancing techniques. Prof. Prasenjit Chakrabarti expressed gratitude in the vote of thanks, and the ceremony ended with the national anthem, inspiring participants to incorporate regular yoga practice into their lives.

Modi has worked to secure respect for India cultural heritage, says Shah

PTI ■ MYSURU

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi with securing respect for India's cultural heritage on the world stage, citing the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the promotion of other key pilgrimage centres as examples.

Speaking at 'Sutturu Jathra' (fair) event near here, he lauded Modi for promoting the preservation of Yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian languages, along with making the country secure and prosperous.

"Narendra Modi has worked to gain respect for the country's cultural heritage on the world stage. Modiji has worked for the revival of several of our cultural centres such as Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in Kashi, Mahakal Corridor (Mahakal Lok Corridor in Ujjain), and resurrection of Kedarnath and Badrinath Dham," Shah said. Sutturu Math on the banks of river Kapila, located

in Nanjangud taluk in this district, is one of the prominent spiritual centres in the state that propagates Veerashaiva/Lingayat faith. Jagadguru Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswamiji of Sutturu Math, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly R Ashoka, and state BJP President B Y Vijayendra, were among those present at the event. Shah lauded Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswamij for deciding to open a branch of the Sutturu Math in Ayodhya, and start working there. Offering tributes to 12th century social reformer and philosopher Basaveshwara, he also acknowledged the contributions on Sutturu Math and its seers in promoting the welfare of society.

"I want to tell Mahaswamiji that I myself and every worker of the BJP will always respect the contributions of Sutturu Math to the society and, in the coming days, will in every way support the efforts to take it forward amidst the people," he added.

Mysuru-based sculptor Arun Yogiraj, who chiselled the idol of 'Ram Lalla', consecrated in the newly-constructed temple in Ayodhya, was felicitated at the event.

3 dead, 16 injured as speeding milk tanker ploughs into crowd

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Three persons were killed and 16 injured when a speeding milk tanker ploughed into a crowd at Ranipool in Gangtok district, police said on Sunday.

A crowd had gathered at the mela ground Ranipool, about 11 km from here, to play tombola when the speeding milk tanker ploughed into them around 7.30 pm on Saturday, the police said.

The driver of the tanker has been arrested, they said.

All the injured persons were rushed to Central Referral Hospital where doctors declared two persons were brought dead and one succumbed to injuries at the hospital, they said.

Doctors at the hospital said the condition of the five of the injured was "serious".

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Sing Tamang said he was deeply saddened by the tragic accident that occurred in Ranipool. He announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the next of kin of those who died in the tragic accident.

"We are committed to providing every possible support during this difficult time. My thoughts are with the injured and their families, and I sincerely pray for their swift recovery," the CM said.

Assam Cabinet okays Bill to ban magical healing

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam government gave its nod to a bill to prohibit and eliminate practices of "magical healing" in the name of treatment, proposing strong punitive action against the "healers".

The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday.

Sharing the decisions taken at the meeting on X, Sarma said the cabinet also selected 10 cities/towns for a dedicated sustainable development programme and proposed to bring in reforms in the state municipal cadres.

The council of ministers approved the 'Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024'.

The proposed bill seeks to "prohibit and eliminate practices of magical healing in the name of treatment of some congenital diseases such as deafness, dumbness, blindness, physical deformity and autism".

"It will prohibit such healing sessions completely and provide strong punitive action against 'healers' extorting the poor and downtrodden people in the name of treatment," the CM wrote on X.

For sustainable urban development, concept of ten cities development (Doh Shaher-Ek Rupayan) will be introduced.

The implementation of the concept will be monitored and reviewed by a state-level steering committee.

Key components under it include solid waste management, clean and potable water supply, traffic management, urban planning and manpower rationalisation and capacity building. The cabinet approved an amendment of the Assam Municipal Act 1956, through which roles of three state municipal cadres will be defined.

Maharashtra Cabinet Ministers to visit Ayodhya soon: Fadnavis

PTI ■ MUMBAI/PUNE

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said state cabinet ministers will soon visit Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, were the idol consecration of the Ram Temple took place on January 22.

Fadnavis, however, did not share further details.

Queried on similar temple disputes in Kashi and Mathura, Fadnavis told reporters an amicable solution within the legal framework would be found the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured the Ram Temple was constructed in Ayodhya (following a Supreme Court verdict).

Asserting that Mathura, Kashi and Ayodhya are all sacred places, Fadnavis said after the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, it is natural for people to expect solution to the dispute in Mathura (Krishna

Janmabhoomi) as well.

"I believe just as the Ram Temple got constructed due to the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi will also be resolved with harmony and within the framework of the law," the senior BJP leader said.

"A new corridor has been built in Kashi Vishwanath. Permission for worship has also been granted there and a conducive environment is being witnessed. In simple words, all these things are happening with harmony and as per law." said Fadnavis.

He was in Pimpri Chinchwad in Pune to attend the Geeta Bhakti Amrit Mahotsav in Alandi in Pune along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Hindu litigants say the Shahi Idgah in Mathura was built on the site believed to be the birthplace of Lord Krishna. A Krishna temple stands next to the mosque.

Also, a court-ordered Archaeological Survey of India report recently suggested that the Gyanvapi mosque Varanasi (Kashi) was built after demolition of a temple there during Aurangzeb's rule.

A district court in Varanasi last month ruled that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in a cellar of the Gyanvapi Masjid, a significant development in the legal battle over the mosque adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

Ink hurled on banner declaring Ajit Pawar wife as future MP

PTI ■ PUNE

Unidentified persons threw ink on a banner with the photograph of Sunetra Pawar, wife of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar, declaring her as the next Lok Sabha member in Pune district.

A video of the incident, which occurred in Karhati village in Baramati taluka, the home turf of the Pawars, has gone viral on social media.

Police rushed to the spot and the banner was removed, an official said on Sunday.

Notably, the banner declared Sunetra Pawar as an "upcoming MP" and appealed to people to elect her with a huge margin.

Speculation is rife in political circles about the candidature of Ajit Pawar's wife from the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency against the backdrop of a split in the NCP.

In a setback to Sharad Pawar, the Election Commission recently recognised the Ajit Pawar-led faction as the real NCP and allotted it the clock symbol.

Ajit Pawar's cousin sister Supriya Sule, daughter of Sharad Pawar, is the sitting MP from Baramati.

Such posters about Sunetra Pawar's candidature had come up in Baramati in the past also. Baramati assembly constituency is represented by Ajit Pawar.

Three Bangladeshi women arrested in Tripura

PTI ■ AGARTALA

Three Bangladeshi women and three locals were arrested from Agartala railway station here on Sunday for attempting to board a Kolkata-bound train without valid papers, police said. Upon questioning, the Bangladeshi women failed to produce their passports, said Obaidur Rahman, the officiating in-charge of Agartala GRP police station.

Rahman said the Bangladeshi women were arrested under the India Passport Act, while the remaining three individuals, comprising two men and one woman from Tripura's Sepahijala district, were arrested on charges of human trafficking.

"Preliminary interrogation revealed that the three Bangladeshi nationals from Dhaka had intentions of traveling to Kolkata. An investigation has started to ascertain the motive of the three women," police added.

Friends turned foes slug it out in charged up poll battle in TN

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Friends turned foes - the BJP and AIADMK - are locked in a rancorous war at times becoming personal targetting BJP state chief K Annamalai, in a charged-up political atmosphere in Tamil Nadu ahead of the Lok Sabha election.

Anticipating the early announcement of the poll, the ruling DMK has initiated talks with its allies on seat-sharing and is gearing up to bring out its poll manifesto. Though a multi-cornered contest appears imminent, as of now, the political parties barring the DMK and allies are still hazy on alliance.

While former Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami sees red at the mention of DMK president and Chief Minister M K Stalin, the loose cannons in his AIADMK devote more time on personally targetting Annamalai and sustain themselves in the limelight.

"Much of their ire is due to the BJP's preference for former Chief Minister O Panneerselvam as a reliable ally than to AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami," a senior BJP leader said. BJP has never been comfortable in the company of ambitious Palaniswami, who in a bid to garner the minorities votes has expressed opposition to the Uniform Civil Code.

The AIADMK General Secretary, who severed poll ties with the BJP in September last year, due to Annamalai's aggressive politics, is engaged in forming an alliance under his leadership. Another cause for heartburn for the AIADMK was the shifting of loyalties by 12 of its former legislators and

a MP, recently, to the BJP.

A former MLA each from the DMK, Congress and DMDK, too joined the BJP. Ridiculing it, former AIADMK Minister D Jayakumar remarked "the Tamil Nadu Governor will invite Annamalai to form the government with those former MLAs."

Further, he likened the BJP state president to a "mud horse" and said Annamalai was creating an illusion that people were joining the BJP.

"Those who follow him are likely to disappear when the mud horse disintegrates in water," Jayakumar claimed. Both the Dravidian majors too have been welcoming a steady trickle of workers from other parties, as it is election time. Though the Congress, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi and the Left parties too have a presence in certain pockets in the state, they toe the DMK's line.

While the ruling DMK is comfortably placed as its alliance is intact, AIADMK and BJP are vying to form an alliance with smaller parties. Other political parties such as the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) and the Pattali Makkal Katchi are yet to decide on an alliance and the options before them are only a few - either the BJP or AIADMK.

Parties such as actor Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam and actor Seeman-led Naam Tamilar Katchi would also be in the fray. "Annamalai's politics of publicity won't work in Tamil Nadu," claimed former AIADMK state Minister Kadambur Raju while Jayakumar, training his guns on Panneerselvam, claimed the latter would join the BJP after the Lok Sabha election.

Former AIADMK Minister R B Udayakumar, who appeared to go overboard in his criticism, called Annamalai a "Leghiyam (a traditional thick herbal medicine that boosts immunity) seller and said the BJP president was a political novice. "Yes, I am Leghiyam trader. I sell the best Leghiyam to banish corruption, rowdyism and anarchy in Tamil Nadu.

Those who consume my Leghiyam can see results of a good administration, and good leadership" Annamalai, dismissing Udayakumar as an "invalid currency" retorted while leading his six-month-old En Mann, En Makkal (My Land, My People) yatra, recently.

Education transformational mechanism to ensure equality: Vice President

PTI ■ GONDIA

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said education is the most impactful transformational mechanism to bring about equality and cut down inequality.

Addressing a function in Gondia district of Maharashtra, he said young parliamentarians with vision, mission, and talent have a big role to play in building Vikasit Bharat of 2047.

Dhankhar also suggested that "value addition" to farm produce will bring qualitative improvements in the lives of farmers.

"Today, the world is seeing the change in India and the change is imminent when the leader is aware of the ground reality and has the ability to change them. Today, we have the able leadership at the Centre and in the state who are well capable of bringing the change," Dhankhar said.

He said India is fast emerging as a strong nation.

"In 1989 when I became MP for the first time, it was a difficult time for our country. The country had to send its gold reserve by air to Switzerland where it was kept as a mortgage in two banks so that our country`s financial credibility could be sustained," the vice president said.

But the time has changed now and we have overtaken Canada, France, and England to become the 5th largest economy in the world, he added.

"India is currently the fifth largest economy in the world. In the next two to three years, we will move ahead of Germany and Japan," he added.

The function was organized to mark the 118th birth anniversary of Manohar Patel, father of ex-Union minister Praful Pate, who belongs to NCP.

"Education is the most impactful transformational mechanism to bring about equality and cut down inequality. Young parliamentarians with vision, mission and talent have a big role to play in building Viksit Bharat of 2047," the vice president added.

Dhankhar said Gondia is a major centre of rice trade and that he would like to suggest to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde to work on value addition to rice for its marketing.

"I want to tell CM Shinde to do value addition to rice as its main marketing point. For the growth of farmers, value addition to their produce is important. Such changes would bring qualitative improvements in the life of cultivators," he said.

He said Swachh Bharat, gas connections, and tap water connections to every household have become a reality.

Dhankhar also hailed women's reservation and their empowerment.

CM Shinde said Maharashtra is ahead of other states in all the fields and the "double engine" government is making progress.

"Maharashtra will also achieve the goal of becoming a USD 1 trillion economy and contribute to the nation's progress," Shinde said.

Four booked for cheating Navi Mumbai man of ₹17 lakh in share trading fraud

PTI ■ THANE

The cyber police have registered a case against four persons for allegedly cheating a 45-year-old man from Navi Mumbai township in Maharashtra of more than Rs 17 lakh after luring him to invest in share trading, an official said on Sunday.

The victim, resident of Nerul area, was promised high returns in the trading.

The accused allegedly made the victim invest Rs 17.30 lakh in a fraudulent share trading scheme from December 5, 2023 to January 28, 2024, the official from cyber police station said.

When the victim did not get the returns as promised and the invested amount, he filed a police complaint.

The police on Saturday registered a case against four persons under Indian Penal Code Sections 419 (cheating by personation), 420 (cheating) and 34 (common intention), the official said, adding a probe was on into the case.

Bihar Police to send echallans to traffic violators via registered post

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Police have decided to send e-challans to traffic violators via registered post, said a senior officer.

The system of sending e-challans to traffic violators via registered post has been recently introduced in Patna, said Additional Director General (ADG) Traffic, Sudhanshu Kumar.

"Sending e-challans to motorists for violating traffic norms through SMSes is not working properly. That is mainly because of frequent change in mobile phone numbers of offenders. This is the only reason that we have decided to deliver e-challans to traffic violators via registered post", the ADG Traffic told PTI.

"We introduced this system in Patna a few days ago. Now we want to introduce it in all districts. A letter in this regard has already been sent to all district traffic police", he said.

The ADG Traffic said the cost of sending e-challans via registered post could be recovered from the offenders.

"At present, the traffic police is bearing the cost…but we have sought permission from the competent authority for the recovery of the cost of sending challans by registered post from the offenders", said Kumar.

According to figures, on an average 3,000 e-challans/notices are issued daily for traffic violations in Bihar, mostly for over-speeding, signal jumping, not wearing helmets, triple-riding on two-wheelers, talking on the phone while driving, etc.

Analysis of figures (with the traffic police) reveals that not even half of the total traffic e-challans issued in the state per day are paid by motorists. The latest figures (of Bihar Traffic Police) of February 8, 2024, reveal that a total of 2,989 e-challans (of Rs 46.5 lakh) were issued in all 38 districts in the state for different traffic violations. Out of total Rs 46.5 lakh fine, motorists cleared challans of Rs 6.44 lakh only.

"Around Rs. 39.63 lakh amount (fine) of February 8 is pending. Therefore, one can imagine the pendency of payments/fines. This is the reason that we have decided to send penalty notices/e-challans to traffic violators via registered post", said the ADG Traffic.

The state capital tops the list of cities where maximum traffic violations take place. According to official figures, Traffic Police issue around 630 to 650 e-challans for different violations in Patna almost every day. Other cities where maximum traffic violations take place include Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Rohtas, Gaya, Begusarai and Saran.

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the pioneer

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PAPER WITH PASSION

An exhilarating term

Parliament adjourns for the last time before LS polls are held and the next Govt assumes office

As both Houses of Parliament have been adjourned sine die one last time before the general elections, it is time to reflect on the Government's achievements, challenges and legacy of the past five years. This period has been marked by significant policy reforms, legislative milestones and moments of both triumph and controversy. The concluding session of Parliament holds special significance as it serves as a crucial juncture for the Government to showcase its accomplishments and for the Opposition to hold the former accountable for its actions. Over the past five years, the Government has introduced a plethora of reforms across sectors, ranging from economy and governance to social welfare and national security. Initiatives such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and ambitious welfare schemes like Ayushman Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have left a deep impact on the nation's socio-economic milieu. However, alongside these successes,

the Government has faced its fair share of challenges and criticism. Issues such as economic slowdowns, agrarian distress, unemployment and social unrest have tested the administration's resolve and elicited strong reactions from both critics and supporters. Debates on contentious issues like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), farm laws and handling of COVID-19 pandemic have dominated parliamentary discourse.

Besides, the Government's inability to take timely action to quell Manipur violence would also be a blot on its tenure. As the 17th Lok Sabha is bid farewell, the parliamentarians must assess the overall progress made and identify areas that require further attention. This introspection is essential not only for the ruling party but for the entire political spectrum to understand the pulse of the nation and address people's aspirations effectively. Beyond legislative achievements, the last five years have witnessed significant shifts in the political landscape with coalition dynamics, rise of regional parties and evolving voter preferences shaping the electoral narrative. The general elections present an opportunity for citizens to voice their verdict on the Government's performance and chart the course for the nation. Moreover, the conclusion of the session marks the beginning of a new chapter in India's democratic journey, where the electorate will exercise its right to choose the next set of leaders to steer the country forward. It is time for political parties to engage in constructive dialogue, present their vision and earn the electorate's trust. In this transitional phase, lawmakers must uphold the principles of democracy, foster inclusivity and prioritise mass welfare. The Government's legacy will be defined not only by its legislative accomplishments but also by its commitment to upholding democratic values, promoting social justice and growth for all. As the nation embarks on the next phase of governance, let us reflect on the lessons learnt and communicate effectively to our would-be lawmaker representatives.

PICTALK

Children fly kites in a field in the backdrop of the Taj Mahal, in Agra PTI

Messi confronts China in his own way

BHOPINDER **SINGH**

China's psychological warfare extends from visa manipulations to Messi's 'snub,' providing a taste of their own strategy in return

Last year, three Indian Wushu players i.e., Nyeman Wangsu, Onilu Tega and Mepung Lamgu, were given stapled visas to travel to China, for the World University Games. All three were proud Indian Arunachalis, and the entire Indian squad pulled out of the competition in protest of the Chinese sleight. It was reminiscent of the 2016 incident when the Manager of the Indian Badminton team, Bamang Tago, was denied a visa to travel to China - he too was a Arunachali! Much earlier in 2011, a 45-team Indian Karate team travelling to China were issued standard visas, except five members who were given stapled visas, again all Arunachalis. Chinese are past masters in psychological warfare and no domain or opportunity is too irrelevant for them to resist partaking a 'ping'. It is culturally part and parcel of their patented 'three warfare' approach where they relentlessly invoke psychological, legal, and public opinion warfare. The recurring bone of contention is the Indian State Arunachal Pradesh which expansionist China falsely claims as so-called 'South Tibet', and therefore shadow boxing on the same.

It's the same pressure tactic that it applies with Taiwan and forces its athletes to compete under an unfamiliar name called 'Chinese Taipei', in Olympics and other events. Taiwanese athletes also compete under an alien flag (1981 agreement with the International Olympics Committee led a newly designed white flag with a flower outline around a sun and the Olympic rings in the middle) with an unheard flag-raising song. The Chinese are constantly looking to score a symbolic and psychological 'hit'. Therefore, with such fixation with political posturing and insistences in everything that it does and imagines, it also leads to hallucinations or perceived indignities whenever it is on the receiving end, deliberately or inadvertently.

The latest issue of a 'non-starter' by the global football superstar, Lionel Messi, whilst in Hong Kong owing to an ostensible 'swollen and painful injury' got doubly compounded by the football icon subsequently playing in Japan, within three days thereafter. The angst against Messi started early with fans booing the 'no-show' on field (which extended to even avoiding interacting with fans or receiving the trophy). The Chinese were not amused and were seen openly questioning the intent of the player and called out what they thought was a 'deliberate and calculated snub'. All hell broke loose when just after a couple of days Messi took to the ground in Japan. As it is, China has major beef with Japan. An indignant Global Times echoed Chinese frustrations in its editorial, "The match in Hong Kong became the only one in Messi's six pre-season friendly matches on this trip where he was absent. The situation … has magnified these doubts and suspicions on the integrity of Inter Miami and Messi himself." The Chinese finally got a flavour of a dish that they so routinely serve, even if Messi who is an Argentine (which little or no sovereign stakes for or against China) is not known to make political points, unlike some other stars.

This incident harks back to 2019 when the then Arsenal football club legend Mesut Ozil openly condemned China's treatment of the country's Uighur minority - the thin-skinned Chinese reacted furiously, and Arsenal club had humiliatingly buckled under pressure, offering meek clarification, "The content published is Özil's personal opinion. As a football club, Arsenal has always adhered to the principle of not involving itself in politics". The Chinese had flexed muscle and extracted their revenge. For the Chinese, football is particularly important given its global popularity and Xi Jinping's penchant in the same reflecting with its declared aspiration to be a 'soccer powerhouse' with the stated intent of winning the Football World Cup in 2050!

> PERHAPS THE ONLY TIME THAT MESSI DID COME UNDER POLITICAL SUSPICION WAS WITH HIS PURPORTED MOVE TO SAUDI ARABIA EARLIER, A MOVE RIFE WITH SUSPICIONS OF SAUDIS 'SPORTSWASHING' THEIR MURKY CREDENTIALS BY LURING SPORTSMEN WITH MONEY

Perhaps the only time that Messi did come under political suspicion (indirectly again) was with his purported move to Saudi Arabia earlier, a move rife with suspicions of Saudis 'sportswashing' their murky credentials, by luring sportsmen with money. But Messi didn't move, finally. Despite a long career he has remained steadfastly apolitical and steered clear of political controversies. With a permanent house in Barcelona, Messi took no position on the contentious Catalan-independence issue, given its resonance in Barcelona region. However, the eight-time Ballond'Or winner has somehow never played against England at international level, with whom the Argentinian emotions date back to the 1982 Falkland War and Diego Maradona's infamous 'Hand of God' moment in 1986. In fact, Messi now plays for Inter Miami owned by the English star David Beckham, who had his own 'moment' against rival Argentines when he kicked their captain Diego Simeone in the crucial FIFA World Cup match of 1998.

So, it is extremely unlikely that Messi would be making a political point this late in his career, and especially given the lucrative contracts he has with Chinese conglomerates. If anything, Messi has been in the news for milking his stardom by signing brand endorsements without bothering too much about the brand product or service itself. Incidentally, he had signed up with the now-in-news Byju's as their global ambassador, only to be put on hold when the company started going belly-up.

Nonetheless, the Chinese are feeling insulted and aggrieved, Messi's likely innocence and apology notwithstanding. But it is a providential taste of China's own medicine.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

Synergise regional and national science academies

BIJU **DHARMAPALAN**

It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote science through regional media and provide regular updates

Science education in the country is at a crossroads, because of the declining trend among the new generation to pursue a career in Science. Across the country, many brilliant students move towards professional courses that fetch them a good placement soon after their studies. No one will wait 5 or 10 years to get a good placement. Even our policymakers neglect basic science education, forgetting the fact that it's the backbone for building a strong Viksit Bharat. The trend of student exodus to foreign countries is increasing. The public's initial encounter with scientific advancements often occurs through newspapers, television programs, and various other media outlets. The reduction in space or airtime allocated to Science can be viewed as a direct challenge to the field. Many media organisations prioritise commercial considerations when making decisions about content allocation. They may contribute to a lack of public awareness and understanding of scientific concepts, potentially hindering progress in scientific literacy and societal

engagement with Science.

This lack of awareness leads to parental pressure on students to move away from science courses. It is where our regional science academies in the country can play a lead role in building a robust scientific force for the future. We have three national science academies in India -the Indian National Science Academy, the Indian Academy of Sciences, and the National Academy of Sciences, India. Even though our National Science Academies are doing their service to promote Science, it doesn't reach every nook and corner of the country. Here, regional science academies come into the picture.

Regional science academies can play a crucial role in fostering scientific advancement, education, and collaboration within specific geographic regions. These academies are well-positioned to address and prioritize issues that are specific to a particular region. They can focus on problems related to geography, climate, biodiversity, and other factors that may vary from one region to another. By bringing together scientists and researchers from a specific region, science academies help build a strong and collaborative scientific community. This facilitates the exchange of ideas, expertise, and resources, fostering a culture of innovation and cooperation.

It is essential for regional science academies to actively promote Science through regional language media channels, maintain regular interactions with journalists, and offer science updates. accessible format. Apart from science popularisation activities, many regional academies conduct studies on various topics that could affect the enhancement of Science in society, for example, student exodus to foreign countries, public perception of science and scientific research, etc. Regional academies can offer insights into the unique challenges faced by their communities and contribute to developing informed policies that address regional needs.

Regional science academies can promote diversity and inclusion in Science by supporting underrepresented groups within the region. This contributes to a more inclusive and equitable scientific community. Regional science academies' contributions to nation-building and developing scientific temper are well documented in history. In our journey towards a Viksit Bharat, we should take various regional science academies and the National Science Academies' by affiliating them to the National body. When both academies work with a common goal, it can foster significant advancements in Indian Science. By aligning their efforts and resources, these academies can synergise their strengths, expertise, and networks to tackle scientific challenges more effectively.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POWER SECTOR WOES

Sir — The government in Andra Pradesh seems to be under complacency with the pittance of Navarathnas Scheme provided to the poor section. Though the beneficiaries are thankful for the small benefit they are equally upset over the increase in the burden imposed by an increase in the power bill. The functioning of three companies in the power sector seems to be let loose to function the way they want. Inadequate planning by distribution companies results in purchasing power from private players, who dictate unfavorable Power Purchase Agreements. This compels the distribution companies to burden consumers with charges like FPPCA I, FPPCA II, True Up Charge. Government offices' delayed power bill payments, subsidies, and unauthorized payouts of ?1,400 crores to a private company further strain consumers, leading to unjustified extra charges of ?500 and an unfair share of system-induced losses.

To add to the woes Smart meters are going to be provided to each consumer. Each consumer has to bear the cost of it, which is likely to be around? 13,000/-. It is to be paid in monthly instalments for a few years. The smart meter lacks consumer benefits, focusing on prepaid and dynamic tariffs that favour private entities. Prepaid setups benefit companies, while dynamic pricing confuses consumers, hindering consumption planning. Reforms prioritize profits over people's well-being, urging the government to prioritize citizens over private interests for a better quality of life.

AG Rajmohan | *Anantapur*

INFLATION RISING

Sir — The Reserve Bank of India is trying to control the inflation rate. According to the RBI report, the inflation rate between April and December in the current financial year has been 5.5 per cent. The inflation rate is estimated to be 5.4 per cent during the entire current financial year. The inflation rate is likely to come down in the next financial year, and it may remain at 4.5 per cent.

However, the efforts of the Reserve Bank of India and the claims of the government are in their place, but the bitter reality is that the food plate of the common man of the country is still expensive. This inflation is likely to increase further. In other words, the growth rate of our economy has been more than 7.5 per cent. But for the common man, economic development means that he gets relief from inflation and adequate employment opportunities. If inflation is not under control and youth are not getting employment, then the figures of economic progress have no relevance to the life of the common man.

Jahangir Shaikh | *Mumbai*

GRAHAM STAINES' DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Sir — A few days ago, on January 22, residents of Manoharpur, a remote village in Keonjhar district of Odisha observed the 25th death anniversary of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons. Graham Staines had been working with leprosy patients in Odisha since his coming to India in 1965 till his death in 1999. "For 35 years, Saibo, clad in casuals with his trademark hat, pedaled his rickety bicycle, a familiar sight in Baripada. Known for doing God's work, he cared for leprosy patients in a dedicated home on the outskirts. Tragically, Graham Staines and his two sons, Timothy (6) and Philip (10), were burned alive while sleeping in their jeep in a Manoharpur forest."

When Dara Singh and his followers had set fire to the vehicle, they woke up and tried to come out. But those fanatics used their long stout sticks to shove them back into the fire, till they died close to midnight of January 22, 1999. His wife Gladys Staines told television reporters, "I forgive those who have killed my husband and my two sons." After his husband's death, she continued to serve leprosy patients and managed to turn his husband's home for those patients into a hospital. Every year, January 22 will come and remind us about the warning signs of religious fanaticism on the road to our evolutionary progress.

Sujit De | *Kolkata*

Well-deserved Bharat Ratna

The Bharat Ratna, the Country's highest civilian honour has been given to three distinguished personalities of the country P V Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh and Swaminathan who have made monumental contributions to the nation in different sectors. P V Narasimha Rao the 9th prime minister of India, was a statesman and distinguished scholar of our times. He held the reins of the county during a politically tumultuous time in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when the nation was facing an extremely grave economic crisis and was on the brink of bankruptcy, indeed there were several challenges galore for him, the shattered Economy and several internal security problems, but with his visionary leadership he steered the country through successfully.

Narasimha Rao's unmatched legacy secures his pivotal place in Indian history. Chaudhary Charan Singh dedicated his life to farmers' rights, earning the title 'champion of farmers.' A principled socialist, he advocated higher taxes for the wealthy and opposed luxury consumption. MS Swaminathan, a distinguished agricultural scientist, played a crucial role in India's transformation from a food-importing to a self-sufficient, food-exporting nation, earning him the moniker 'father of the green revolution' during challenging times marked by droughts.

Ramesh G Jethwani | *Bangalore*

Send your feedback to:
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FIRST COLUMN

A JOURNEY THROUGH LOSS AND HEALING

The Buddhist approach offers a grounded and rational way to cope with grief

RAVI **VALLURI**

The doctor was an early riser. Upon waking he hit the gym. He remained fit and in proper shape by maintaining this regimen. The medico was a noted pediatrician, his wife an eminent cardiologist. Unfortunately, their only daughter suffered from a compromised heart condition. The trio had attended a party the previous evening. It was time to drop the daughter to school and the father knocked at the door. But the cherubic girl did not respond. Life was snuffed out; tragedy had struck the family and a pall of gloom descended.

A few weeks back an old aunt had kicked the bucket. It was a double whammy for the family, and they were inconsolable. Several centuries ago, in the time of the Buddha, a woman lost her only child to the cruel hands of fate. In an anguished state she implored the Enlightened One to resuscitate the dead child. Buddha, the compassionate, agreed to perform the miracle. He asked the lady to collect mustard seeds from all the houses of the village which had never seen death or grief. The woman knocked at the doors of all the houses in the village but returned empty handed. Handling grief is a challenging task and only skillful minds can undertake this responsibility.

The doctor couple who could not save their precious child were subsumed into a cesspool of anger, guilt, sadness, pangs of loneliness, numbness, and a yearning for their beloved one. To overcome their grief and desolation, the husband, a moderate drinker, became a quotidian one and his spouse began administering herself sedatives.

Several eminent psychologists like Parker, Arewill and Worden have zeroed in on the point that those suffering from grief, need to move on from the feeling of numbness, pining, depression, a feeling of shock and despair

to the process of recovery. It is important for the grieving to accept the reality of the loss, experience the pain of the departed one, adjust to the environment of living without the deceased person.

Medical science has made rapid advancements such that proper diagnosis, therapy, and counselling along with proper medication can trigger the change agent in the wrecked mind. Alternatively, there are techniques like hypnosis and even providing ECT (in the worst-case scenario) to address the problem.

The Theravada Buddhist traditions have dealt with the subject of handling grief in a dynamic manner. The human mind by the process of strong internal resolution can overcome this vicissitude in life by mindfulness. The process is called Satipatthana.

The emotionally wrought can find solace and succour by becoming aware of the reality about the impermanence of events, happenings, and people. The mind should become strong to accept the reality and look ahead. There are breathing techniques like Vipassana and Sudarshan Kriya which have proven ability to transfigure the mind from a depressed state to a positive one. Both the techniques have been validated by medical science as alternative therapies and have the power to alter the thought process, bringing it to the present moment.

Several grieving souls adopt holistic measures like the breathing techniques mentioned, meditation, pranayama, yoga, chanting of mantras, being in communion with nature or seva to overcome their grief and restore normalcy in their lives. It is the recalcitrant human mind which acts as a deterrent and needs to be tamed. "Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is remaking of life," writes Anne Roiphe.

(The writer is a CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd and is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

The impact and evolution of IBC 2016

MANOJ KUMAR **ANAND**

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code IBC of 2016 streamlines insolvency resolution processes and bolstering investor confidence

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) of 2016 stands as a transformative milestone in recent Indian legislative history. Enacted with the aim of streamlining and expediting the resolution process for distressed businesses, the IBC has had far-reaching implications for India's economic landscape and global standing. In this comprehensive exploration, we delve into the genesis of the IBC, its impact on India's Ease of Doing Business Index, the role of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), and the recent amendments that have further refined and strengthened the framework.

The IBC of 2016 was a response to the urgent need for a comprehensive insolvency regime in India. Prior to its enactment, the country grappled with a fragmented and inefficient system that often led to protracted legal battles and value destruction for all stakeholders involved. Recognizing the critical importance of a robust insolvency framework in fostering economic growth and investor confidence, the Indian government embarked on a journey to overhaul the existing system.

The passage of the IBC in 2016 marked a paradigm shift in India's approach to insolvency resolution. By introducing a unified legal framework that streamlined the resolution process and prioritized creditor rights, the IBC sought to expedite the resolution of distressed assets and maximize value for all stakeholders. Key provisions of the IBC include the establishment of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), as well as the creation of Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs) to facilitate the resolution process.

One of the most significant outcomes of the IBC has been its impact on India's Ease of Doing Business Index. Since the enactment of the IBC, India's ranking in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index has steadily improved, climbing by another 14 places to 63 in 2019. This improvement can be attributed in large part to the IBC's success in resolving insolvency cases more efficiently and effectively, thereby enhancing the overall business environment in the country.

> THE SUCCESS OF THE IBC CAN ALSO BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE EFFORTS OF THE INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY BOARD OF INDIA (IBBI), THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY TASKED WITH OVERSEEING ITS IMPLEMENTATION

In particular, India's ranking in resolving insolvency saw a remarkable jump of 56 places to 52 in 2019, marking the highest-ever leap recorded by any country in the history of the World Bank. This significant improvement reflects the positive impact of the IBC in expediting the resolution process, reducing the time and cost involved in resolving insolvency cases, and maximising the value recovered by creditors.

The success of the IBC can also be attributed to the efforts of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), the regulatory authority tasked with overseeing the implementation of the IBC. Since its inception, the IBBI has played a crucial role in shaping and refining the insolvency framework, issuing regulations, guidelines, and circulars to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the IBC.

In its journey of seven years, the IBBI has introduced six amendments to the IBC, each aimed at further enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the insolvency resolution process. These amendments have addressed various challenges and loopholes in the framework, making it more robust and resilient to emerging complexities in the insolvency landscape.

One of the key areas of focus for the IBBI has been the regulation of Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs), who play a critical role in the insolvency resolution process. The IBBI has introduced several amendments to the regulations governing IPs and IPEs, aimed at enhancing their role and capabilities in resolving insolvency cases.

For example, the IBBI has introduced amendments to allow IPs to resign from their roles under certain circumstances, thereby addressing concerns about the prolonged tenure of IPs without remuneration. Additionally, amendments have been made to allow IPEs to engage their partners or directors in insolvency assignments, expanding their capacity and expertise in the resolution process.

Furthermore, the IBBI has introduced amendments to streamline the appointment process for IPs by introducing a panel of eligible candidates for appointment by the adjudicating authority. This has helped to expedite the appointment process and ensure a more transparent and efficient resolution process.

In addition to amendments related to IPs and IPEs, the IBBI has also introduced amendments to other regulations governing the insolvency process. For example, amendments have been made to clarify the role of monitoring committees in the resolution process and to streamline the billing process for insolvency professionals. Overall, the amendments introduced by the IBBI have helped to address various challenges and complexities in the insolvency resolution process, making it more efficient, transparent, and effective. These amendments have further strengthened the IBC and solidified India's position as a leader in insolvency reform.

Looking ahead, the IBBI remains committed to continuously improving and refining the insolvency framework to ensure that it remains responsive to the evolving needs and challenges of the insolvency landscape. By fostering an environment that is conducive to efficient and effective insolvency resolution, the IBBI aims to support India's economic growth and development goals and enhance investor confidence in the country's business environment.

In conclusion, the IBC of 2016 stands as a testament to India's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and enhancing the ease of doing business in the country. Through its robust framework and proactive regulatory efforts, the IBC has contributed significantly to improving India's ranking in the Ease of Doing Business Index and enhancing investor confidence in the country's business environment. With the continued support and efforts of regulatory authorities like the IBBI, India is well-positioned to further strengthen its insolvency framework and drive economic growth and development in the years to come.

(The writer is a chartered accountant and a visiting faculty to ICAI, ICSI; Views are personal)

Celebrating women in science: Recognising their achievements

Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers, including gender bias, unequal representation and limited access to opportunities

VEERENDRA **MISHRA**

Yesterday, we celebrated the International Day of Women in Science, a day dedicated to recognising and honouring the achievements of women in the field of science. This annual event serves as a reminder of the invaluable contributions women have made to scientific progress and innovation throughout history. It is an opportunity to highlight their accomplishments, shed light on the challenges they face, and inspire future generations of women to pursue careers in science.

Recently, while presenting the interim Budget 2024, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted that female enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses has reached 43 per cent, which is one of the world's highest figures. She said, "Female enrollment in higher education has gone up by 28 percent in ten years. In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43 percent of enrollment—one of the highest in the world. All these measures reflect the increasing participation of women in the workforce." She also mentioned the empowerment of women through entrepreneurship, ease of living, and dignity, mentioning, "Thirty crore Mudra Yojana loans have been given to women entrepreneurs."

From historic figures like Savitribai Jyotiba Phule, who was the first female teacher of India and founded the first girls' school, to Lady Abala Bose, who was the first Indian woman to study medicine at Madras University, to Kamala Sohonie, the first Indian woman to receive a PhD in a scientific discipline, to Ayyalasomayajula Lalitha, India's first woman engineer, to Shakuntala Devi, who was popularly known as the "Human Computer," women continue to leave an indelible mark on the scientific landscape. Today, women scientists are assuming leadership positions in groundbreaking projects like Chandrayaan-3 and the Aditya-L1 solar mission, showcasing their continued influence and expertise in pushing the boundaries of scientific exploration.

The Government has taken significant strides to bolster STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, recognising its pivotal role in driving innovation, economic prosperity, and societal advancement. Initiatives like the Vigyan Jyoti Scheme, spearheaded by the Ministry of Science and Technology, are breaking gender barriers by empowering young girls in STEM fields through exposure and mentorship programs. Additionally, programmes like INSPIRE foster innovation among students through scholarships and research opportunities, while Atal Tinkering Labs nurture creativity and problem-solving skills among school students. The Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan promotes a culture of innovation in schools, bridging the gap between theory and real-world applications. Moreover, the government provides research fellowships and grants, digital learning resources through the National Digital Library, and skill enhancement programmes via Skill India, all aimed at nurturing a skilled workforce and fostering growth in STEM-related industries. These concerted efforts underscore the government's commitment to nurturing a robust ecosystem for scientific inquiry and technological advancement in the country.

Women in STEM in India have been steadily challenging stereotypes and contributing significantly to various disciplines. Pioneers like Dr. Tessy Thomas, known as the "Missile Woman of India," have shattered glass ceilings in fields traditionally dominated by men. Indian women researchers are excelling in areas like space technology, biotechnology, and mathematics, making remarkable advancements. Additionally, the government's Vigyan Jyoti scheme aims to encourage young girls to pursue STEM education and careers, fostering inclusivity.

Women have made groundbreaking strides in diverse scientific domains, ranging from astronomy and biology to engineering and computer science. Their discoveries, innovations, and leadership have enriched our understanding of the world and advanced technological progress.

Women have played a pivotal role in shaping the scientific landscape, yet their contributions have often been overlooked or undervalued. By celebrating the International Day of Women in Science, we aim to rectify this imbalance and bring attention to the remarkable achievements of women scientists. It is crucial to showcase diverse role models in science to inspire young girls and women to pursue their passions and break down the barriers that still exist in the field. While progress has been made, women in science still face numerous challenges. Gender bias, a lack of representation, and unequal opportunities persist in many scientific fields. It is essential to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for women in science. By providing equal opportunities, mentorship, and support, we can empower women to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives to scientific advancements. Despite their significant contributions, women in science still face systemic barriers. By encouraging and showcasing the achievements of women in science, we hope to ignite a passion for discovery and innovation in young girls.

(The writer is an IPS officer and the director RACE Lab, Samvedna India, views are personal)

Egypt threatens to suspend key peace treaty

AP ■ RAFAH

Egypt is threatening to suspend its peace treaty with Israel if Israeli troops are sent into the densely populated Gaza border town of Rafah, and says fighting there could force the closure of the territory's main aid supply route, two Egyptian officials and a Western diplomat said on Sunday. The threat to suspend the Camp David Accords, a cornerstone of regional stability for nearly a half-century, came after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said sending troops into Rafah was necessary to win the four-month-old war against the Palestinian militant group Hamas. Over half of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have fled to Rafah to escape fighting in other areas, and are packed into sprawling tent camps and UN-run shelters near the border. Egypt fears a mass influx of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who may never be allowed to return.

Smoke and explosion following an Israeli bombardment inside the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel, Sunday. The army is battling Palestinian militants across Gaza in the war ignited by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel. *AP/PTI*

The stand-off between Israel and Egypt, two close US allies, comes as aid groups warn that an offensive in Rafah would worsen the already

Netanyahu, in an interview with ABC News "This Week with George Stephanopoulos", suggested civilians in Rafah could flee north, saying there are "plenty of areas" that have been cleared by the army. He said Israel is developing a "detailed plan" to relocate them.

But the offensive has caused widespread destruction, particularly in northern Gaza, and heavy fighting is still taking place in central Gaza and the southern city of Khan Younis. A ground operation in Rafah could also force the closure of its crossing, cutting off one of the only avenues for delivering badly needed food and medical supplies.

All three officials confirmed Egypt's threats, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief reporters on the sensitive negotiations. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries have also warned of severe repercussions if Israel goes into Rafah.

"An Israeli offensive on Rafah would lead to an unspeakable humanitarian catastrophe and grave tensions with Egypt," European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell wrote on X. Israel and Egypt had fought five wars before signing the Camp David Accords, a landmark peace treaty brokered by then-US President Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s. The treaty includes several provisions governing the deployment of forces on both sides of the border.

Egypt has heavily fortified its border with Gaza, carving out a 5-kilometre buffer zone and erecting concrete walls above and below ground. It has denied Israeli allegations that Hamas still operates smuggling tunnels beneath the border, saying Egyptian forces have full control on their side. But Egyptian officials fear that if the border is breached, the military would be unable to stop a tide of people fleeing into the Sinai Peninsula.

The United Nations says Rafah, which is normally home to less than 300,000 people, now hosts 1.4 million more who fled fighting elsewhere and is "severely overcrowded". Netanyahu said Hamas still has four battalions there. Israel has ordered much of Gaza's population to flee south with evacuation orders covering two-thirds of the territory, even as it regularly carries out airstrikes in all areas, including Rafah. Airstrikes on the town in recent days have killed dozens of Palestinians, including women and children. Gaza's Health Ministry said Sunday that the bodies of 112 people killed across the territory have been brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours, as well as 173 wounded people.

The fatalities brought the death toll in the strip to 28,176 since the start of the war. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and fighters but says most of those killed were women and children.

The war began with Hamas' attack into southern Israel on October 7, when Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250. Over 100 hostages were released in November.

Israeli drone strike in Lebanon kills 2

AP ■ BEIRUT

An Israeli drone struck a car near Lebanon's southern port city of Sidon on Saturday, killing at least two people and wounding two others, security officials said. The strike came as tensions across the Middle East grow with the Israel-Hamas war, a drone attack last month that killed three US troops in northeastern Jordan near the Syrian border, and attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels on vessels passing through the Red Sea. The drone strike near the coastal town of Jadra took place about 60 kilometres from the Israeli border, making it one of the farthest inside Lebanon since violence erupted along the Lebanon-Israel border on October 8. An Israeli security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the target of the strike in Sidon was Hamas official Basel Saleh, who was "injured to an unknown extent".

The official said Saleh was responsible for enlistment of new Hamas recruits in Gaza and the West Bank.

Two Lebanese security officials said the strike damaged a car and killed two people.

Drone strikes in Lebanon blamed on Israel have so far killed several officials from Hezbollah as well as the Palestinian militant group Hamas. The previous farthest strike was the January 2 attack that killed top Hamas official Saleh Arouri in Beirut.

On Saturday night, Israeli forces shelled the southern Lebanese border village of Houla, killing one person and wounding nine as they left a mosque after prayers, state-run National News Agency reported. The attacks in Lebanon came as Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian met in Beirut with Lebanese leaders including the country's caretaker prime minister, parliament speaker and the head of the militant Hezbollah group. Amirabdollahian said that if the US wants to bring stability to the region again, it should work on forcing Israel to end its military operations in the Gaza Strip. He told reporters after meeting his counterpart Abdallah Bouhabib that after four months of war, Israel and its backers had not achieved "anything tangible".

In an apparent reference to attacks by Iran-backed fighters in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, Amirabdollahian said that "if American wants calm to prevail in the region, then the mechanism and the solution is to stop the genocide, crimes and the war against Gaza and the West Bank".

He blasted Washington, saying the US is working on two tracks, one of which is sending weapons to Israel "and participating in the genocide in Gaza" and at the same time speaking about reaching a political solution to the war.

The US Central Command announced on Saturday that the US military conducted self-defence strikes against two mobile unmanned surface vessels, four anti-ship cruise missiles, and one mobile land attack cruise missile that were prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea from Yemen.

The military said the missiles and an unmanned vessel in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen presented an imminent threat to US Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza, imperiling a key route for trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe.

The Houthis' media office said the US-led coalition launched three airstrikes on Salif district in the Red Sea province of Hodeida on Saturday. In response, the US and the UK launched several airstrikes on Houthi-held areas across Yemen, including the rebel-held capital of Sanaa.

The Houthis held a mass funeral in Sanaa on Saturday for 17 of their fighters who they said were killed in strikes by the US-led coalition, according to the Houthi-run SABA news agency.

Special counsel report used our son's death to 'score political points: Jill Biden

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US First Lady Jill Biden has come out in defence of her husband President Joe Biden's health and memory and she slammed the special counsel for using their son's death to score political points.

Her defence came in response to the voluminous report of Special Counsel Robert Hur in which he said that Biden, 81, "willfully" mishandled classified documents as a private citizen.

The special counsel in his report early this week recommended against filing any charges against Biden for misuse of classified documents when he was a private citizen but made scathing observations on his mental health and memory and claimed that the president did not even remember the date of the death of his son.

"The reason I'm writing is because of what else was in the report: Inaccurate and personal political attacks about Joe. Rather than just saying the case was closed, as they have for others, the Special Counsel claimed that Joe "couldn't remember the year his son died." Believe me, like anyone who has lost a child, Beau and his death never leave him," Jill wrote in a mass email to her supporters on Saturday

"I hope you can imagine how it felt to read that attack — not just as Joe's wife, but as Beau's mother. I don't know what this Special Counsel was trying to achieve," she said.

Beau Biden, who died of brain cancer in 2015, appears 16 times in the pages of the report prepared by Hur, the special counsel appointed to investigate Biden's handling of classified documents after serving as vice president until 2017.

"We should give everyone grace, and I can't imagine someone would try to use our son's death to score political points. If you've experienced a loss like that, you know that you don't measure it in years — you measure it in grief," she said. "May 30th is a day forever etched on our hearts. It shattered me, it shattered our family" she said.

Al-Shabab claims Somali capital attack

AP ■ DUBAI

The al-Qaida-linked militant group al-Shabab claimed an attack that killed four Emirati troops and a Bahraini military officer on a training mission at a military base in the Somali capital, authorities said on Sunday. The attack on Saturday targeted the troops at the General Gordon Military Base in Mogadishu. Details about the attack and whether it killed others remained scarce Sunday, though Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud offered his condolences to the UAE for the loss of its troops.

Early Sunday, the UAE's state-run WAM news agency reported the killing of three of its troops and the Bahraini officer in a "terrorist act". A fourth later died en route back to the Emirates, WAM reported.

WAM released footage of three flag-draped caskets coming off of an Emirati Boeing C-17A Globemaster III at Al Bateen Executive Airport in Abu Dhabi with an honour

guard present. WAM identified the dead as a colonel, two warrant officers and a corporal.

Anwar Gargash, a senior Emirati diplomat, offered condolences to those killed and a quick recovery for the wounded. "No treacherous act will prevent us from continuing the message of security and safety and combating extremism and terrorism in all its forms," Gargash wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

The military of Bahrain, an island nation in the Persian Gulf off the coast of Saudi Arabia, later acknowledged the death of a major in a statement carried by the state-run Bahrain News Agency. Al-Shabab claimed the attack in a statement online, alleging it killed multiple people involved in the Emirati military effort. It described the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, as an "enemy" of Islamic Shariah law for backing the Somali government in its efforts to battle al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab, or "the youth" in Arabic, is a Sunni Islamic extremist group in Somalia born out of that country's years of anarchy following its 1991 civil war. The affiliate of al-Qaida once held Mogadishu. Over time, an African Union-led force, with the backing of the US and other countries, pushed the militants out of Mogadishu. In the years since, al-Shabab has remained a threat as it seeks to overthrow the Western-backed Somali government. Al-Shabab has carried out attacks in neighbouring Kenya as well, since Nairobi provides troops and materiel to the African Union force in Somalia. The US under every president since George W. Bush has launched airstrikes against militants in Somalia, with the number of strikes now exceeding 300, according to New America, a Washington-based security think tank. The vast majority of those strikes took place under then-President Donald Trump.

The US Embassy in Somalia on Sunday condemned what it called a "cowardly attack" against the training mission.

"We extend our deepest condolences to the loved ones of those who lost their lives in yesterday's deplorable terrorist attack against UAE military trainers and Somali soldiers valiantly working to advance the nation's stability," the embassy said. Somalia has also been an intense interest for Gulf states, particularly during the Qatar diplomatic crisis that gripped the region for several years and saw four nations including the UAE boycott Doha in a political dispute. Somali troops once seized millions of dollars of Emirati cash from a jet at gunpoint, sparking a diplomatic incident between Mogadishu and the UAE that halted its troop training programme there.

Trump mocks Nikki Haley for absence of her husband

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Former US president Donald Trump has mocked his Republican rival Nikki Haley over the absence of her husband, who is deployed overseas, drawing a sharp reaction from the Indian-American politician who said the person who disrespects military families has no business being commander-in-chief.

Haley's husband Major Michael Haley, a commissioned officer with the South Carolina National Guard, is currently on a year-long deployment with the 218th Maneuver Enhancement Bridge, which is providing support in the Horn of Africa. He deployed in June.

The war of words between two Republican presidential candidates started with a Trump rally on Saturday in South Carolina where the 77-year-old former president, seemingly unaware of his deployment, when started questioning his whereabouts

"Where's her husband? Oh, he's away. … What happened to her husband? Where is he? He's gone," Trump said at his rally in

Conway in South Carolina, his first visit to the state this year. Haley, 52, the only candidate against Trump in the Republican Party's nomination race, fired back at Trump's comments later on Saturday.

"Donald, if you have something to say, don't say it behind my back; get on a debate stage and say it to my face," she told a crowd in South Carolina.

"I am proud of Michael's service. Every military family knows it's a sacrifice. I have long talked about the fact that we need to have mental competency tests for [politicians] over the age of 75," she said.

Trump claims he would pass that – maybe he would, maybe he wouldn't, she said.

"But if you mock the service of a combat veteran, you don't deserve a driver's license, let alone to be president of the United States," she said.

"Michael is deployed serving the US country, something you know nothing about. Someone who continually disrespects the sacrifices of military families has no business being commander-in-chief," Haley said. Trump's comment on Haley's husband also drew criticism from various quarters.

"Only a sick individual would put down a service member who is deployed. This disrespects every military family in our country. It's exactly the chaos we don't need in America," said General (rtd) Don Bolduc. In a rare move, Michael Haley fired back at the former president, posting a meme on Twitter reading, "The difference between humans and animals? Animals would never allow the dumbest ones to lead the pack," while mentioning Trump's account in the caption.

Continuing his attack, Trump alleged that Haley is the candidate of globalists and warmongers who want to spend trillions and trillions of dollars on endless wars.

"The radical left Democrats want Nikki Haley because they know that she's easy to beat. She's very easy to beat.

Haley supports a 23% national sales tax, and she wants to gut Medicare and Social Security...," he said. Earlier, Haley kicked off her "Beast of the Southeast" bus tour with a stop in Newberry.

In an interaction with the media, she spoke about her opponents' lack of stamina and stressed the importance of mental competency tests for politicians over the age of 75.

Her campaign also distributed examples of the mental competency tests used by medical professionals, demonstrating that it should not be a difficult test for those who are seeking the highest office in the land. "(For months) I have always said that (President) Joe Biden was not going to be president.

American allies worry US growing less dependable

AP ■ LONDON

As chances rise of a Joe Biden-Donald Trump rematch in the US presidential election race, America's allies are bracing for a bumpy ride. Many worry that a second term for Trump would be an earthquake, but tremors already abound — and concerns are rising that the US could grow less dependable regardless of who wins.

With a divided electorate and gridlock in Congress, the next American president could easily become consumed by manifold challenges at home — before even beginning to address flashpoints around the world from Ukraine to the Middle East. French President Emmanuel Macron's recent verdict was blunt: America's "first priority is itself." The first Trump administration stress-tested the bonds between the US and its allies, particularly in Europe. Trump derided the leaders of some friendly nations, including Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Theresa May, while praising authoritarians such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian leader Vladimir Putin. He has called China's Xi Jinping "brilliant" and Hungary's Viktor Orbán "a great leader." In campaign speeches, Trump remains skeptical of organisations such as NATO, often lamenting the billions the US spends on the military alliance whose support has been critical to Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion.

Biden, in contrast, has made support for Ukraine a key priority and moral imperative. But Biden's assertion after his election in 2020 that "America is back" on the global stage has not been entirely borne out. Congressional Republicans have stalled more military aid for Ukraine, while America's influence has been unable to contain conflict in the Middle East

Thomas Gift, director of the Centre on US Politics at University College London, said that whoever wins the presidential race, the direction of travel will be the same – toward a multipolar planet in which the United States is no longer "the indisputable world superpower." Most allied leaders refrain from commenting directly on the US election, sticking to the line that it's for Americans to pick their leader. They are conscious that they will have to work with the eventual winner, whoever it is — and behind the scenes, governments will be doing the "backroom work" of quietly establishing links with the contenders' political teams, said Richard Dalton, a former senior British diplomat.

Sunak says 'totally up for fight' to win UK general election

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said he is "totally up for the fight" of pitching his policies to the electorate to win another term for the governing Conservative Party as he prepares for a general election expected to take place in the second half of the year.

In an interview with The Times this weekend, the 43-year-old British Indian leader said he had reasons to be optimistic because the economy was "pointing in the right direction" and that the "future is going to be better".

"At the beginning of this year there is a sense that the country is pointing in the right direction," he told the newspaper.

"Because economic conditions have improved, because

the plan is working, you are starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes. I do believe those pressures are starting to ease and that hopefully over the course of this year, we can continue to make even more progress," he said. In a message as much for the voters as for the rebels within his own Tory ranks, the Conservative leader reiterated his plan to cut taxes for the hardworking people of the country. "It's because those are my values, those are the values of my party. It's one where hard work should be rewarded. And actually, the best way to express that through the tax system is to cut people's taxes so when they are working hard they get to enjoy more of the rewards of that for themselves and their family," he said.

"Because economic conditions have improved, because the plan is working, you are starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes," he added. "I'm totally up for the fight," he said.

However, Sunak appeared to echo his Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, who has already sought to temper expectations over the size of any tax cuts in his Spring Budget next month, despite senior Tories publicly indicating they are coming. "None of us ever talk about this stuff before budgets. Other people are. I think they're over-interpreting. What the Chancellor and I have said is that of course, our long-term plan is to cut people's taxes," he said.

The Tories continue to lag behind the Opposition Labour Party in surveys, with the Sunak-led government contending with a high rate of anti-incumbency among the electorate.

King Charles thanks public for support

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's King Charles III on Sunday expressed his "heartfelt thanks" to the British public for their messages of support ever since his cancer diagnosis was revealed by Buckingham Palace this week. The 75-year-old monarch wrote the message from his royal estate at Sandringham in Norfolk, eastern England, in which he also expressed his "lifelong admiration" for the work done by cancer charities. On Sunday, a smiling King Charles also attended church on the estate — the first time since his diagnosis.

He briefly waved at photographers as he walked up to St. Mary Magdalene's church holding an umbrella, accompanied by Queen Camilla. He was then greeted by Reverend Canon Dr Paul Williams before going inside. In his message, the King said he was heartened that

his personal experience of the disease had helped shine a light on the tireless care provided by cancer organisations around the world.

"I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for the many messages of support and good wishes I have received in recent days," reads the King's message released by Buckingham Palace on Sunday.

"As all those who have been affected by cancer will know, such kind thoughts are the greatest comfort and encouragement," he said. "It is equally heartening to hear how sharing my diagnosis has helped promote public understanding and shine a light on the work of all those organisations which support cancer patients and their families across the UK and the wider world. My lifelong admiration for their tireless care and dedication is all the greater as a result of my own experience," he added. On Monday, Buckingham Palace announced the King had been diagnosed with cancer while undergoing a procedure for an enlarged prostate. In line with the initial announcement, the latest statement also does not reference any further details about what kind of cancer the monarch has been detected with, the type of treatment he is having or what stage the cancer is at.

Earlier, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had indicated that the cancer had been "caught early" as his customary weekly audiences with the King are expected to continue during the treatment. King Charles started his treatment in London before flying out to Sandringham with Queen Camilla, who revealed at an event that her husband was doing "extremely well" since the start of his treatment. The palace has said it will not provide any further details about the diagnosis or the treatment.

In an official statement, it said that the King's recent hospital procedure for benign prostate enlargement, a separate issue of concern was noted and subsequent diagnostic tests have identified a form of cancer. The monarch has commenced a schedule of regular treatments, during which time he has been advised by doctors to postpone public-facing duties. However, he will continue to undertake State business and official paperwork as usual.

Pak parties intensify efforts to form coalition government

PTI ■ LAHORE/ISLAMABAD

The three main political parties in Pakistan on Sunday intensified their efforts for the formation of a coalition government after it became clear that the coup-prone country faced a hung Parliament after general elections marred by allegations of rigging.

The general elections were held on Thursday, but the unusual delay in the announcement of results vitiated the atmosphere as several parties cried foul and some resorted to protests.Former prime minister and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo Nawaz Sharif received the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Saturday for his call for a unity government to pull Pakistan out of its current difficulties.

Amidst allegations of vote rigging and inordinate delay in announcing the results, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Sunday published the results of 264 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly. The result of one constituency was withheld by the ECP due to complaints of fraud. Election to one seat was postponed after the death of a candidate.

Independent candidates, a vast majority of them backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), won 101 seats in the National Assembly.

They were followed by three-time former Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 75 seats, which technically is the single largest party in Parliament.

The Pakistan Peoples Party of Bilawal Zardari Bhutto got 54 seats, and the Karachi-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) of Urdu-speaking people who migrated from India during the Partition, got 17 seats. Other smaller parties won the rest of the 12 seats.

To form a government, a party must win 133 seats out of 265 contested seats in the National Assembly.

Overall, 169 seats are needed to secure a simple majority out of its total 336 seats, which include the reserved slots for women and minorities which will be decided later based on proportional representation.

The PML-N was leading the push to form the coalition government on the pattern of one it set up after Khan, 71, was removed as prime minister through a no-confidence vote in April 2022. Party supremo Sharif, 74, tasked his younger brother former premier Shehbaz Sharif to hold talks on the issue.

The PML-N leaders on Sunday held a meeting with MQM-P leaders in Lahore.

After an hour-long meeting, they have reached a "principle agreement" to work together in the upcoming government, according to a statement released by Sharif's party.

"We will work together in the interest of the country and public," the statement said, adding that basic points had been agreed upon by the two parties.

MQM-P leader Haider Rizvi earlier told Geo News in an interview that his party would be more comfortable with the PML-N as the "two parties don't compete in Karachi" unlike the PPP or other parties.

PML-N President Shehbaz on Saturday met senior PPP leaders Asif Ali Zardari and his Bilawal on Friday night and discussed the future coalition.

Shehbaz told the party leaders that former president and PPP leader Asif Zardari has demanded the prime minister's slot for PPP Chairman Bilawal and major ministerial portfolios in exchange for support for the PML-N to form the government, sources said.

Party sources added that so far making a coalition with Zardari was the first option the PML-N was exploring but didn't want to give away the slot of prime minister.

Sources claimed the meeting decided that in case the negotiations with the PPP failed, the PML-N would make a coalition government with MQM, JUI-F and other smaller parties, including independents.

They further claimed that in this scenario, the PML-N would make Shehbaz Sharif the prime minister and Maryam Sharif the Chief Minister of Punjab.

"Shehbaz Sharif is the favourite for the PM office for being more close to the military establishment besides the PML-N has more seats in Parliament than the PPP," sources said.

Losing candidates backed by PTI challenge Pak poll results

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan courts have been flooded with petitions by losing candidates who challenged the provisional results in their constituencies within days after the highly polarised general elections in the country, it emerged on Sunday.

Though Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) emerged as the single largest party in the February 8 elections, the number of independent candidates, a vast majority of them backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party, were the single largest block of winners.

The PTI claimed that its supported candidates have won the maximum number of seats but the results were manipulated to deprive it of the majority, and in order to turn the tide, its losing candidates have thronged the courts.

According to a report in the Dawn newspaper, a vast majority of those filing challenges against results are PTI-backed independents, including high-profile politicians such as former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi and his wife Qaisera, former Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) finance minister Taimoor Jhagra and ex-KP speaker Mahmood Jan, Islamabad-based lawyer Shuaib Shaheen, former Punjab health minister Dr Yasmin Rashid, as well as Rehana Dar, mother of Usman Dar who was in-charge youth affairs in the PTI government.

In Lahore, the victories of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz, PML-N Attaullah Tarar and former defence minister Khawaja Asif were assailed in separate petitions before the high court, which allege manipulation of Form 47s, which showed consolidated results of every constituency. The petitioners claim that they were successful against their opponents as per the Form 45, showing results of individual polling stations, handed to them.

However, in their absence, their victories were allegedly turned into defeats in the Form 47. The have also alleged collusion in the alteration of election results and demand that the results of Form 47 be prepared according to the Form 45s.

In PP 146 Sialkot, Omar Dar's wife, Ruba Omar, has challenged the election results. According to Form 45, Ruba Omar has won, but she was evidently defeated in Form 47 due to collusion.

Maryam's victory from NA-119 has been challenged by independent candidate Shahzad Farooq, alleging that the presiding officers did not provide Form 45, and the returning officer issued the result in his absence. Farooq claims to have won against Maryam but was defeated due to rigging.

Russia launches 45 drones as Kyiv continues war cabinet reshuffle

AP ■ KYIV

Russian forces launched 45 drones over Ukraine on Sunday in a five-and-a-half-hour barrage, officials said, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy continued the reshuffle of his war cabinet as the war enters its third year. In a statement, the Ukrainian air force said it had shot down 40 of the Iranian-made Shahed drones over nine different regions, including on the outskirts of the country's capital, Kyiv.

The five-and-a-half-hour attack targeted agricultural facilities and coastal infrastructure, officials for Ukraine's southern defense forces wrote on Telegram. They said that a strike in the Mykolaiv region had injured one person, sparking a fire and damaging nearby residential buildings.

Another person was injured in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region when a blaze broke out due to falling debris from a destroyed drone,

said the head of the region's military administration, Serhiy Lysak. The strikes come as Zelenskyy continues his shake-up of military commanders in a bid to maintain momentum against attacking Russian forces. Kyiv announced on Sunday that former deputy defence minister Lt Gen Alexander Pavlyuk would become the new commander of Ukraine's ground forces. The post was previously held by Col Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi, who was named on Thursday as the replacement for Ukraine's outgoing military chief, Gen Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

New presidential decrees also named Yurii Sodol, the former head of Ukraine's marine corps, as the new commander of Ukraine's combined forces; Brig Gen Ihor Skibiuk as commander of Ukraine's air assault forces; and Maj Gen Ihor Plahuta as commander of Ukraine's territorial defense forces.

Incoming commander-in-chief Syrskyi has signalled that his immediate goals include improving troop rotation at the front lines and harnessing the power of new technology at a time when Kyiv's forces are largely on the defensive. In a statement on Telegram Saturday, Zelenskyy said that he hoped to "reboot" the upper levels of Ukraine's armed forces with experienced combat commanders. "Now, people who are well-known in the army and who themselves know well what the army needs are taking on new responsibilities," he said.

Finns vote for a new president

AP ■ HELSINKI

Voters in Finland are choosing on Sunday between two experienced politicians to be their next president, whose main task will be to steer the Nordic country's foreign and security policy now that it is a member of NATO, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Former prime minister Alexander Stubb, 55, on the centre right, and former foreign minister Pekka Haavisto, 65, from the green left, largely agree on Finland's foreign policy and security priorities.

These include maintaining a hard line toward Moscow and Russia's current leadership, strengthening security ties with Washington, and the need to help Ukraine both militarily and at a civilian level. Finland shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia.

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government, especially concerning countries outside the European Union such as the United States, Russia and China.

The head of state also commands the military — particularly important in Europe's current security environment and the changed geopolitical situation of Finland, which joined NATO in April 2023 in the aftermath of Russia's attack on Ukraine a year earlier.

A politician with the conservative National Coalition Party who led the government in 2014-2015 and earlier held several other Cabinet posts, Stubb took the top spot in the first round of the election on January 28 with 27.2 per cent of the votes and is the favourite to win the presidency.

Haavisto, the runnerup in the first round, was Finland's top diplomat in 2019-2023 and the main negotiator of its entry into NATO. A former conflict mediator with the United Nations and a devout environmentalist, Haavisto took 25.8 per cent of the votes in the first round. This is his third bid for the presidency. He is running as an independent although he is a former leader of the Green League.

In the last days of campaigning tiny differences in style and approach between the candidates have emerged.

Stubb and Haavisto differ in their stance on the hypothetical question of whether Finland would allow the transportation of the alliance's nuclear weapons through its territory. "Nuclear weapons are a strong element of our deterrence and our security. We signed our NATO agreement without any kind of limits," Stubb told The Associated Press during a campaign event just outside the capital, Helsinki, on Saturday. But "we (Stubb and Haavisto) also agree that no one is offering us nuclear weapons ... we don't want any nuclear weapons."

Haavisto said on Saturday that he does not favour nuclear arms being transported via Finland in a crisis situation. His country of 5.6 million makes up a substantial part of NATO's northeastern flank and is the European Union's external border in the north.

"I think there hasn't been any need to transport nuclear weapons to Finland or over Finland. As I've seen during NATO negotiations, the current nuclear policies of NATO are well-established and there is no need of changing them," he said.

Iran marks 45th anniv of Islamic Revolution

Tehran (AP): Iran marked Sunday the 45th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution amid tensions gripping the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Thousands of Iranians marched through major streets and squares decorated with flags, balloons and banners with revolutionary and religious slogans.

In Tehran, crowds waved Iranian flags, chanted slogans, and carried placards with the traditional "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" written on them. Some burned US and Israeli flags, a common practice in pro-government rallies. Processions started out from several points, converging at Azadi Square. State TV showed crowds in many cities and towns, claiming that "millions participated in the rallies" across the country.

The military displayed a range of its missiles, including the Qassem Soleimani and Sejjil ballistic missiles, and the Simorgh satellite carrier at the square where people took selfies with them. During the celebrations, a paratrooper jumped from a plane while displaying a Palestinian flag. There was a heavy security presence in the major cities across the country. The anniversary came a month after a deadly attack by the extremist Islamic State group in the central city of Kerman that left at least 95 people dead during the commemoration for prominent Iranian general Qassem Soleimani whom the US killed in a 2020 drone strike.

Iran has tried to blame the US and Israel for the attack as the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip continued. The Islamic Republic launched missile attacks on Iraq and Syria. It then struck alleged anti-Iran Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl targets in nuclear-armed Pakistan, which responded with its own strikes on Iran, further raising tensions in a region inflamed by the Israel-Hamas war. Earlier in January, a drone attack killed three US troops in Jordan which an umbrella group for Iran-backed factions known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed.

CEO of major Nigerian bank killed in California helicopter crash

AP ■ CALIFORNIA

The CEO of one of Nigeria's largest banks was killed on Friday along with his wife and son when a helicopter they were riding in crashed near Interstate 15 in southern California's Mojave Desert.

Herbert Wigwe, chief executive of Access Bank, was among the six people on board when the helicopter crashed shortly after 10 pm. Bamofin Abimbola Ogunbanjo, former chair of NGX Group, the Nigerian stock exchange, was also killed. Their deaths were confirmed by Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a former Nigerian finance minister who is now the director general of the World Trade Organization.

"Terribly saddened by the news of the terrible loss of Herbert Wigwe ... his wife and son as well as Bimbo Ogunbanjo in a helicopter crash," Okonjo-Iweala wrote in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. "May the souls of the departed rest in perfect peace."

The death of Wigwe (57) shocked many in Nigeria and in the banking sector where he was widely seen as an industry leader having been involved in two of the country's biggest banks, including Guaranty Trust Bank where he was previously executive director.

Under Wigwe's leadership, Access Bank's assets and presence grew beyond borders in several African countries. His death is "a terrible blow" for Nigeria and Africa's banking industry, Nigerian presidential spokesman Bayo Onanuga wrote on X. "Wigwe had a big vision to make Access Holdings (the parent company) Africa's biggest, with all the unquenchable thirst for acquisitions," Onanuga added. Wigwe's interests also spanned the education sector. His private university, founded in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region where he was from, is scheduled to open in September. Last year he said the university was "an opportunity for me to give back to society".

"This is surreal and I am lost for words," Festus Keyamo, Nigeria's minister of aviation and aerospace development, wrote in a post on X. "May Almighty God comfort his aged parents and sibling ... his immediate family members, his staff, friends across Nigeria and dependents." The crash happened east of Interstate 15 near Halloran Springs Road and not far from the California-Nevada border. Halloran Springs Road crosses the highway in an area known to travellers for an abandoned gas station with a sign declaring "Lo Gas" and "Eat".

Hungary president resigns over pardon to man convicted in child sexual abuse case

AP ■ BUDAPEST

Hungary's conservative president resigned on Saturday amid public outcry over a pardon she granted to a man convicted as an accomplice in a child sexual abuse case, a decision that unleashed an unprecedented political scandal for the long-serving nationalist government.

Katalin Novák (46) announced in a televised message that she would step down from the presidency, an office she has held since 2022. Her decision came after more than a week of public outrage after it was revealed that she issued a presidential pardon in April 2023 to a man convicted of hiding a string of child sexual abuses in a state-run children's home. "I issued a pardon that caused bewilderment and unrest for many people," Novák said on Saturday. "I made a mistake." Novák's resignation came as a rare episode of political turmoil for Hungary's nationalist governing party Fidesz, which has ruled with a constitutional majority since 2010. Under the leadership of populist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Fidesz has been accused of dismantling democratic institutions and rigging the electoral system and media in its favour.

Novák, a key Orbán ally and a former vice president of Fidesz, served as the minister for families until her appointment to the presidency. She has been outspoken in advocating for traditional family values and the protection of children.

She was the first female president in Hungary's history, and the youngest person to ever hold the office. But her term came to an end after she pardoned a man sentenced in 2018 to more than three years in prison. He was found guilty of pressuring victims to retract their claims of sexual abuse by the institution's director, who was sentenced to eight years for abusing at least 10 children between 2004 and 2016.

"I decided in favour of clemency in April of last year in the belief that the convict did not abuse the vulnerability of the children entrusted to him. I made a mistake," Novák said on Saturday. "I apologise to those I have hurt and to any victims who may have felt I am not standing up for them."

"As head of state, I am addressing you for the last time today. I resign from the office of president of the republic," she said. Also implicated was Judit Varga, another key Fidesz figure who was minister of justice at the time and endorsed the pardon. Varga was expected to lead the list of European Parliament candidates from Fidesz when elections are held this summer. But in a Facebook post on Saturday, Varga announced that she would take political responsibility and "retire from public life, resigning my seat as a member of parliament and also as leader of the EP list".

At the presidential headquarters in Budapest on Saturday evening, around 200 people gathered in what was originally planned as a protest to call on Novák to resign. After her announcement, attendees said they were happy, but that it wasn't enough to fundamentally change Orbán's system of governance.

"I'm glad that she resigned but I think things aren't solved this way. She's not the main criminal, you've got to look all the way to the top," said Anna Bujna.

Pope and Milei embrace after pontiff canonises Argentina's first female saint

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis and Argentine President Javier Milei embraced on Sunday in St. Peter's Basilica, as Argentine faith and politics came together during a Mass to canonise the country's first female saint.

The ceremony to declare Mama Antula a saint marked the first meeting between the Argentine pope and Milei, who once called Francis an "imbecile" for defending social justice. The president, who was seated to Francis' right on the side of the main altar throughout the ceremony, bent over and gave the pope a big bearhug when Francis was wheeled over to him at the end of the service. Mama Antula was an 18th century laywoman who ministered to the poor and helped keep Jesuit spirituality alive in Argentina after the religious order — to which the pope belongs — was suppressed. Argentines flocked to the canonisation, which turned into something of an Argentine fiesta in Rome. Milei waved to supporters in the pews as he entered the basilica and posed for selfie photos before the liturgy, while Argentine women, in particular, celebrated a saint who defied the norms for women of her time to spread the faith. In his homily, Francis praised Mama Antula as a model of charity and urged the faithful to really touch the wounds of the poor, as Jesus overcame fear and prejudice to touch the wounds of lepers. "How many suffering men and women do we meet on the sidewalks of our cities," he said. "And how many fears, prejudices and inconsistencies, even among those who are believers and call themselves Christians, contribute to wounding them all the more!"

Milei is to meet privately with Francis on Monday, before also having private talks with Italy's far-right Premier Giorgia Meloni and the president. During his campaign, Milei described Francis as an "imbecile" and "the representative of malignance on Earth".

Francis spoke at length with Milei after he was elected in December and has indicated he has forgiven him for the campaign rhetoric. Francis has said he is considering visiting

Argentina later this year in what would be his first trip home since his 2013 election. After arriving in Rome on Friday from Israel, where Milei announced the relocation of the Argentine embassy to Jerusalem, the president visited the Colosseum and the church housing one of Michelangelo's best-known sculptures: a seated Moses. In an Instagram post accompanying a photo of himself looking at the sculpture, Milei wrote his frequent motto "Long live freedom damn it…!!!"

The president, who describes himself as an anarcho-capitalist, has promised to drastically reduce state spending to shore up a government budget deficit that he says is fuelling inflation, which finished 2023 at 211 per cent.

On Sunday, he appeared firmly engaged in the Mass, making the sign of the cross several times, receiving Communion and burying his head in his hands as he knelt in prayer afterward.

Mama Antula, born María Antonia de Paz y Figueroa, is a figure beloved to Argentines, a woman who left behind a life of privilege to spread Ignatian spirituality across Argentina after the Jesuits were ordered expelled from Spain's colonies. She is held up in particular by Argentine women as a model of strength and independence, at a time when women's options in life included marriage or entering the convent.

"The first female saint — it's an enormous step forward," said Argentine pilgrim Annabella Lopez as she waited for the Mass to begin. "It's a pity it couldn't have happened before, but fine, now women are starting to have more visibility and this is a great step also for the church."

Silvia Correale, who spearheaded Mama Antula's sainthood process, said she remembered she first met the future Pope Francis when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires and Mama Antula's candidacy had just cleared an important hurdle in the Vatican.

"I know that he esteems her a lot, like all the Jesuits of Argentina and Uruguay, because they consider her their spiritual mother," Correale told The Associated Press in the runup to the ceremony. "They know that she kept the treasure of the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius alive in the years they weren't there." But the current archbishop of Buenos Aires, Archbishop Jorge Ignacio García Cuerva, said it would be wrong to think that Mama Antula is only being made a saint now because a Jesuit Argentine pope happens to be running the Catholic Church.

Market cap of four most valued firms jumps ₹2.18 lakh crore

LIC, SBI lead gainers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Four of the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 2.18 lakh crore in market valuation last week, with Life Insurance Corporation and State Bank of India emerging as the biggest gainers.

From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and SBI were the gainers. They collectively added Rs 2,18,598.29 crore in market capitalisation.

On the other hand, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC faced erosion from their valuation to the tune of Rs 1,06,631.39 crore.

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined by 490.14 points or 0.67 per cent.

Market valuation of LIC jumped Rs 86,146.47 crore to Rs 6,83,637.38 crore. The share price of LIC on Monday jumped nearly 6 per cent to hit the Rs 1,000 mark for the first time. SBI added Rs 65,908.26 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 6,46,365.02 crore.

Market valuation of TCS climbed Rs 61,435.47 crore to Rs 15,12,743.31 crore and that of Reliance advanced Rs 5,108.09 crore to reach Rs 19,77,136.54 crore.

Shares of TCS jumped 4 per cent on Tuesday, taking its market valuation to above Rs 15 lakh crore. However, market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank declined by Rs 32,963.94 crore to Rs 10,65,808.71 crore. The valuation of ITC eroded by Rs 30,698.62 crore to Rs 5,18,632.02 crore.

Mcap of Bharti Airtel fell by Rs 16,132.15 crore to Rs 6,31,044.50 crore and that of Infosys went lower by Rs 10,044.09 crore to Rs 6,92,980.35 crore.

The valuation of ICICI Bank dipped Rs 9,779.06 crore to Rs 7,09,254.77 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever diminished by Rs 7,013.53 crore to Rs 5,69,587.91 crore.

In the ranking of top-10 most valued firms, Reliance Industries continued to rule the chart followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, LIC, State Bank of India, Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC.

FPIs infuse over ₹15,000 crore in debt market in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continued their bullish stance on the country's debt markets with a net infusion of over Rs 15,000 crore so far this month, on the back of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index along with relatively stable economy.

This followed a net investment of Rs 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they infused Rs 25,685 crore.

On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out more than Rs 3,000 crore from equities during the period under review. Before this, they withdrew a massive Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

"The main trigger for this divergent trend in equity and debt is the high valuation in the Indian equity market and the rising bond yields in the US," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, attributed the outflow from equities to the uncertainty surrounding the interest rate environment, both domestically as well as globally.

According to the data, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 15,093 crore in the debt markets in this month (till February 9).

With this, the total investment by FPIs reached over Rs 34,930 crore in 2024. They have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months.

FPIs infused Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, Rs 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October.

"The Indian debt markets witnessed a reversal in FPI flow trend last year after the announcement of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. This was one of the major drivers for the robust flows from FPIs, along with relatively stable economy," Srivastava said.

JP Morgan Chase & Co. In September last year announced that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024.

This landmark inclusion is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around USD 20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months. This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the rupee, thereby bolstering the economy, he added.

Overall, the total FPI flows in 2023 stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt markets. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market.

Government examining FDI flow from China in Paytm Payments Services

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is examining foreign direct investment from China in Paytm Payments Services Ltd (PPSL), the payment aggregator subsidiary of One97 Communications Ltd, sources said.

In November 2020, PPSL had applied for licence with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a payment aggregator under the guidelines on Regulation of Payment Aggregators and Payment Gateways.

However, in November 2022, RBI rejected PPSL's application and asked the company to resubmit it, so as to comply with Press Note 3 under FDI rules.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL) has investment from Chinese firm Ant Group Co.

Subsequently, the company filed the required application on December 14, 2022 with Government of India for past downward investment from OCL into the company in order to comply with Press Note 3 prescribed under FDI guidelines.

An inter-ministerial committee is examining investments from China in PPSL and decision would be taken on the FDI issue after due consideration and comprehensive examination, sources said.

Under Press Note 3, the government had made its prior approval mandatory for foreign investments in any sector from countries that share land border with India to curb opportunistic takeovers of domestic firms following the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

A query sent to OCL for comments remained unanswered till the filing of the story. The Reserve Bank last month barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL), an associate company of OCL, from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, and FASTags, among others after February 29, 2024.

The Reserve Bank's action against PPBL follows a comprehensive system audit report and subsequent compliance validation report of external auditors.

RBI had said that these reports revealed persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns in PPBL, warranting further supervisory action.

Direct tax collection grows 20 per cent, reaches ₹15.60 lakh crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Net direct tax collection so far in current fiscal grew 20 per cent year-on-year to Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 80 per cent of revised budget estimates for full fiscal year.

"The provisional figures of direct tax collections continue to register steady growth. Direct tax collections up to 10th February, 2024 show that gross collections are at Rs 18.38 lakh crore, which is 17.30 per cent higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year," Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement.

Direct tax collection, net of refunds, till February 10 of FY24 stands at Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 20.25 per cent higher than the net collections in the corresponding period last year.

This collection is 80.23 per cent of the total revised estimates of direct taxes for 2023-24.

Refunds amounting to Rs 2.77 lakh crore have been issued during April 1, 2023 to February 10, 2024.

Gross revenue collections for Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) also showed a steady growth.

Growth rate for CIT was 9.16 per cent while for PIT, it was 25.67 per cent (PIT only).

Adani Ports secures top position for climate actions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Sunday said it has secured top position for its climate actions and environmental performance in assessments done by four global rating agencies.

The assessments were done by CDP, S&P, Sustainalytics and Moody's .

While the company secured 'leadership band' in CDP Climate Assessment 2023, it ranked first on the environmental dimension among 324 companies in the transport and transport infrastructure sector by S&P Global CSA 2023, a statement said.

The company also secured the top rank in the marine ports sector on a low carbon transition rating by Sustainalytics.

It also received the 'advanced' rating in Moody's Energy Transition Rating and the first rank in the overall ESG Assessment and Strategy review in their last update.

APSEZ is a part of the globally diversified Adani Group and is the largest port developer and operator in India .

Jeff Bezos sells nearly 12 million Amazon shares

AP ■ SEATTLE

Jeff Bezos filed a statement with federal regulators indicating his sale of nearly 12 million shares of Amazon stock worth more than USD 2 billion. The Amazon executive chairman notified the US Securities and Exchange Commission of the sale of 11,997,698 shares of common stock on February 7 and February 8. The collective value of the shares of Amazon, which is based in Seattle where he founded the company in a garage about three decades ago, is more than USD 2.04 billion.

Akums Drugs eyes ₹680 crore via fresh issue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Akums Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd has filed draft papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO).

The initial share-sale is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 680 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 1.86 crore shares by promoters and an existing investor, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Saturday.

Those selling shares in the OFS are Sanjeev Jain, Sandeep Jain and Ruby QC Investment Holdings Pte Ltd.

The company is looking to raise Rs 136 crore through a pre-IPO placement. If such placement is undertaken, then fresh issue size will be reduced. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to repay debt, fund working capital requirements of the company, pursue inorganic growth initiatives through acquisition and for general corporate purposes.

Founded in 2004, Akums is a pharmaceutical contract development and manufacturing organization (CDMO) offering a comprehensive range of pharmaceutical products and services in India and overseas. As of September 30, 2023, key clients of the company include Alembic Pharmaceuticals, Alkem Laboratories, Cipla, Dabur India, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, among others.

Close to ₹750 crore stuck in projects in Qatar, says Voltas

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Group firm Voltas is facing a major headwind in Qatar as around Rs 750 crore has been stuck due to delays in the realisation of overdue receivables and execution timelines, said its MD and CEO Pradeep Bakshi.

In some projects, bank guarantees were "unethically" encashed by some contractors, which was an "uncalled" action to make quick money, derailing the international project business of Tata Group firm in the December quarter, he added.

"Unprecedented things are happening in that area, especially in Qatar, wherein, unfortunately, our dues are not being paid to us timely, and inordinate delays are happening. We have completed the project and handed it over, and despite that, payments are not made," Bakshi told PTI.

Voltas has already approached the Indian government for help on the issue and also approached the Embassy in Qatar.

MEP (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing) contractor Voltas has completed the projects in Qatar and handed them over as per the contract. However, its bills are not getting certified and paid.

"There has to be some basic ethics when you do business with your partners... Unfortunately, our payments are not coming.

Duty concession on gold major concern in FTA with Peru: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Duty concessions on gold, which accounts for 80 per cent of India's imports from Peru, is the most challenging issue for New Delhi under the proposed free trade agreement with the South American nation, a report said on Sunday.

Economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that gold, a high-value product with low volume, attracts a 10 per cent basic customs duty in India, and even minor tariff concessions could lead to a significant increase in imports.

India and the South American nation Peru are negotiating a free trade agreement to promote bilateral trade and investments between the two countries.

In such pacts, two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them, besides easing norms to promote trade in services.

The next round of talks is expected to start this week in Lima, Peru.

"Tariff concessions on gold, accounting for USD 1.8 billion or 80 per cent of India's imports from Peru in FY23, is the most challenging issue for India," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He argued that after tariff concessions under the India-UAE free trade agreement, gold imports from the UAE, India's second-largest gold supplier, doubled in 2023 compared to 2022.

"Peru, the fifth-largest supplier to India, could see a similar surge in gold imports if concessions are made," the report said.

In 2023, India's global imports of unwrought gold are estimated at USD 43 billion, with Switzerland accounting for 40 per cent of these imports, it said, adding that given Peru's gold mines, its gold would easily meet any Rules of Origin criteria.

"FTAs offer concessions on effective duties rather than on the bound duty. Excluding gold from an FTA would violate the World Trade Organization's Article XXIV, which requires duty cuts on substantial trade for FTAs," Srivastava said.

He also said that India's bound duty on gold is set at 40 per cent, but the current applied tariff is 10 per cent.

"FTAs allow concessions in effective duties and not on bound duty. If the FTA does not include gold, it may not meet the WTO Article XXIV condition for FTAs to have duty cuts on substantial trade," Srivastava said.

Peru has a bilateral trade pact with major economies like the US, EU, China, Australia, and Singapore. It also has multi-country agreements with the Pacific Alliance (Chile, Colombia, and Mexico) and the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador). These FTAs allow tariff-free imports of most products imported into Peru.

Majority of employees feel difficulty in adapting work from office module: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Amid companies encouraging their employees to return to the office, a majority of workers interviewed feel that it will be difficult for them to adapt to this transition, according to a report. There is an apprehension among employees regarding the adaptation to the work-from-office module, and 69 per cent of respondents have expressed concerns about the potential challenges associated with this transition, a report by staffing solutions and HR services provider Genius Consultants said. However, 25 per cent of employees showcased resilience and confidence in their ability to navigate and adapt to the renewed office environment, it added.

The report is based on an online survey among 1,213 employees from October 26 to November 30 across sectors like banking and finance, education, FMCG, hospitality, HR solutions, IT, ITES, and manufacturing.

The report also anticipated a potential rise in attrition as a consequence of the work-from-office call.

A significant 82 per cent of employees have expressed concerns, citing the increasing availability of work-from-home job opportunities in the market, the report said.

This presents the evolving nature of the job market and the need for organisations to consider and address the preferences and demands of their workforce, it added.

On the flip side, 12 per cent of respondents do not perceive attrition as a major concern, signalling a degree of optimism about the benefits of the in-office experience.

About 67 per cent believe that work-from-office facilitates the integration of new employees with the larger workforce, serving as a catalyst for instilling organisational values.

This perspective highlights the importance employees place on interpersonal connections.

ONGC Q3 profit falls 14 per cent to ₹9,536 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Sunday reported 14 per cent drop in net profit for the third quarter ended December 31 as oil and gas prices fell.

Standalone net profit of Rs 9,536 crore in October-December 2023 (third quarter of 2023-24 fiscal year) was 13.7 per cent lower than Rs 11,045 crore earning in the same period of previous financial year, the company said in a statement.

The earning was lower as price realised for crude oil the firm produced and sold in the quarter fell 6.4 per cent to USD 81.59 per barrel. Gas price too was 24.2 per cent lower at USD 6.5 per mmBtu.

Also contributing to lower profit was a decline in production of crude oil, which is converted into fuel like petrol and diesel at refineries, and natural gas which is used to generate electricity, produce fertilizer, turned into CNG and piped to kitchens for cooking.

Crude oil production dropped 3.3 per cent to 5.22 million tonne while gas output was 4.3 per cent lower at 5.12 billion cubic meters.

Gross revenue was down 10 per cent at Rs 34,789 crore in Q3.The board of the company approved a second interim dividend of 80 per cent or Rs 4 a share. "The total payout on this account will be Rs 5,032 crore," the statement said.

This is in addition to the first interim dividend of Rs 5.75 per share declared last year.

ONGC's standalone net profit in the first nine months of the current fiscal fell 24 per cent to Rs 29,767 crore as oil price realised dropped to $75.55 a barrel from $ 97.10.

Nagal, Ramkumar draw French rivals in opening round of Bengaluru Open

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian ace Sumit Nagal is pitted against Geoffrey Blancaneaux, while wild card entrant Ramkumar Ramanathan will face Maxime Janvier in the men's singles main draw of the Bengaluru Open beginning here on Monday.

World ranked 121 Nagal will aim to extend his dominance over French player Blancaneaux, whom he has beaten three times, including in the Australian Open Qualifiers.

India No 2 Ramkumar has a 1-1 head-to-head record against Janiver of France and if he clears the first round hurdle, he is likely to run into top-seed Italian Luca Nardi, who has been drawn to meet a qualifier in his opening round.

Australian Adam Walton has been seeded third and will open his campaign against Indian wild card entrant Prajwal Dev.

In the doubles main draw, Frenchman Dan Added and Korea's Yun Seong Chung have been given the top billing and will clash with the Australian pair Tristan Schoolkate and Adam Walton.

Australia's Christopher Matthew Romios and Poland's Piotr Matuszewski are seeded second and will take on Taipei's Ray Ho and Australia's Calum Puttergill.

There are nine Indians in the doubles main draw.

N Sriram Balaji and Andre Begemann of Germany will clash with the German duo of Mark Wallner and Jakob Schnaitter.

The ATP Challenger event is being organised by Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association at KSLTA Stadium. Qualifying rounds began on Sunday, while the final is scheduled on February 18.

Man City keeps pressure on Liverpool

AP ■ LONDON

Watch out, Premier League. The competition's most lethal attacking combination is back in tandem.

Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne - both recently back from long injury absences - linked up for the clinching goal in Manchester City's 2-0 win over Everton on Saturday in what will be a worrying sight for the defending champions' rivals.

Liverpool remained in first place after a 3-1 victory over Burnley but City is ominously placed on the leader's shoulder, two points behind with a game in hand, and with its superstar attackers back in the groove.

Make it 12 times that De Bruyne has set up Haaland for a goal since they started playing together at the beginning of last season following the striker's move to England. No other Premier League partnership has delivered that many goals in this period.

"With him, I know I'm going to get it perfect. You know the ball is going to come," Haaland said of De Bruyne, English soccer's king of the assists.

"I watch a lot of football and I already saw for many years where he plays the ball, and he hasn't changed anything for the last five years. For me, it was about coming in and finishing those actions."

And there was something so familiar with the way De Bruyne collected the ball in center-field and deftly slid in Haaland, who bundled his marker off the ball and opened his body to steer home a finish in the 85th minute. It was Haaland's second of the game, after he broke Everton's stubborn resistance in the 71st by pouncing on a loose ball following a corner.

"I like to win this type of game — suffering and knowing how difficult everything is — because we learn the lessons for what's coming," City manager Pep Guardiola said.

City has won six games in a row in the league, and 10 straight in all competitions. Still, Liverpool is holding strong at the top, with Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez - the starting front three while Mohamed Salah is out injured - all scoring at Anfield. Vincent Kompany, the Man City great in charge of Burnley, couldn't do his old club a favor.

Liverpool bounced back from only its second league loss this season, at Arsenal last weekend, though there might be concerns over the fitness of Trent Alexander-Arnold after the right back came off at halftime with a recurrence of a recent knee injury, when the score was 1-1.

"Same area in the knee. Nothing really bad but he felt it again," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said.

SON'S TRIUMPHANT RETURN

Son Heung-min marked his return for Tottenham after more than a month away at the Asian Cup by creating a dramatic winner against Brighton.

Son, whose South Korea team was eliminated in the semifinals on Tuesday, started on the bench for his comeback game, came on at 1-1 and set up Brennan Johnson for a goal in the sixth minute of stoppage time that made it 2-1.

"It's fair to say that we are still a work in progress but we had a world-class player in Son who makes the most difficult ball look simple to set up Brennan," said Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou, whose team jumped above Aston Villa into fourth place.

GUIMARAES DOUBLE

Bruno Guimaraes continues to be the shining light in a difficult season for Newcastle.

The Brazil midfielder scored in each half, including a superb curling shot for the winner, as Newcastle beat Nottingham Forest 3-2 to climb two places to seventh.

Guimaraes' performances have been consistently excellent for Newcastle while, crucially, he has stayed healthy in a campaign that has seen manager Eddie Howe lose player after player to injury.

Forest stayed two points and two places above the relegation zone but, like third-to-last Everton, was recently charged with breaching the league's financial regulations and could yet be facing a points deduction.

IN-FORM TONEY

Ivan Toney scored for the third time in four games since his return from a ban for breaching betting regulations as Brentford won 2-0 at Wolverhampton. Last-place Sheffield United won for just the third time this season, 3-1 at relegation rival Luton, and Fulham was the winner by the same score at Bournemouth.

Inter wins 4-2 at Roma to end De Rossi perfect record

AP ■ MILAN

A sublime second-half performance from league leader Inter Milan saw it win 4-2 at Roma in the teeming rain and end Daniele De Rossi's perfect record.

Goals from Gianluca Mancini and Stephan El Shaarawy had given Roma the lead at halftime following Francesco Acerbi's opener for Inter. But the Nerazzurri turned things around immediately after the break with a strike from Marcus Thuram, who also forced an own-goal from new Roma defender Angeliño.

Alessandro Bastoni sealed the match late on as Inter moved seven points above second-place Juventus. The Bianconeri can cut the gap to four points with a win at home to relegation-threatened Udinese on Monday but will then have played a match more than Inter.

Roma remained a point behind fourth-place Atalanta after De Rossi's first loss.

The former Roma player had won all three of his matches as coach after replacing the fired Jose Mourinho.

The Nerazzurri were without coach Simone Inzaghi on the bench in Rome after he picked up his fifth yellow card of the season in last weekend's win over Juventus.

The suspended Inzaghi watched from the stands as his team took the lead in the 17th minute — with the help of a former Inter player. Former Nerazzurri forward Romelu Lukaku headed away an Inter corner but only as far as Acerbi, who headed it into the back of the net.

However, Roma leveled in the 28th minute when a free kick was floated over the top and Mancini headed it into the bottom right corner from close range.

And Roma turned the match around on the stroke of halftime as a counterattack sent El Shaarawy sprinting into the area and he unleashed a shot which hit the crossbar and the left post before also bouncing off the right post and going in.

Qatar win Asian Cup titles after beating Jordan 3-1

AP ■ LUSAIL (QATAR)

Akram Afif dropped to his knees. Pretty soon he was being thrown into the air by his joyous teammates after the forward's hat trick of penalties secured back-to-back Asian Cup titles for Qatar.

Afif, the outstanding player of the tournament and leading scorer with eight goals, was nerveless when converting his spot kicks in a 3-1 win against Jordan at Lusail Stadium on Saturday.

Just over a year ago it had been Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe who had lit up this spectacular venue in arguably the greatest World Cup final of all time.

On this occasion it was Afif taking center stage and becoming the first player to score a hat trick in the Asian Cup final.

He had been his country's standout performer from the start of the tournament and did not disappoint when it fell to him to produce the decisive moments against Jordan as Qatar became the first back-to-back winner since Japan in 2000 and 2004.

In front of more than 86,000 fans and with the pressure on, Afif never looked likely to miss from the spot and he sparked wild celebrations with each goal.

?(I scored) the penalties because of the confidence my teammates had in me. It is not about technique, it is about the feeling that people are behind me - my team," Afif said.

He won and converted his first penalty in the 22nd minute. And after Yazan Al Naimat leveled the game in the 67th he struck again from the spot in the 73rd and sealed the win in the fifth minute of stoppage time.

Afif had spoken earlier in the tournament of his wish to return to European soccer after spells in Spain and Belgium at the start of his career. His performances, which also earned him the award for the Asian Cup's most valuable player, will likely have caught the attention of clubs far and wide.

While this was a personal triumph for him, it was redemption for Qatar, which had endured a miserable World Cup on home soil in

2022 when exiting the tournament after three straight defeats in the group stage.

Even as host and defending champion, Qatar had been an unexpected finalist, let alone winner. Captain Hassan Al-Haydos noted on the eve of the final how critics had expected little of the team ahead of the tournament.

How satisfying for him, then, to be draped in the same type of black Qatari ceremonial robe that Messi had worn to lift the World Cup.

After the pain of that tournament, here was a moment of national celebration as the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani handed Al-Haydos the trophy and shortly after there was an eruption of tickertape and fireworks.

Earlier, Qatar's Spanish coach, Márquez López slumped in his seat, seemingly exhausted, as he waited out 17 minutes of stoppage time.

The exertions of the past month appeared to have taken its toll. He had only been hired in December and Qatar had been beaten 2-1 by Jordan in a friendly in January.

"It was a very difficult game. The tension was high," he said. "Maybe it was not the beautiful football everyone wished for, but everyone remembers the winner."

Like Afif, López was also thrown into the air as part of the celebrations.

Despite a difficult buildup after taking over from predecessor Carlos Queiroz, López impressively guided Qatar to a successful defense of the title it won in 2019.

It became the eighth host nation to win the tournament.

Afif was undoubtedly the inspiration on the field.

"I'm so happy for Akram that he won all the (individual) awards. He deserved to win them," López said.

Afif was outstanding from the opening game — when he scored two goals in a 3-0 win against Lebanon — to the final, when he completed his hat trick.

He had already forced two saves from Jordan goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila when his run into the box panicked Abdallah Nasib into a clumsy challenge and referee Ma Ning blew for a penalty.

Shankar wins season opening meet in Belgium

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National record holder in high jump Tejaswin Shankar won the top prize in the International High Jump Gala Elmos 2024 athletics meet in Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium with a leap of 2.23 metres.

Shankar, competing for the first time since October last year, finished ahead of Greece's Antonios Merlos (2.20 metres) in the World Athletics Indoor Tour Challenger event on Saturday.

The 25-year-old, who holds both the men's high jump and decathlon national records, however, could not better his personal best of 2.29m.

Shankar is also focusing on decathlon and had won bronze and silver in the discipline in the Asian Championships and Asian Games last year.

Shankar has trained his eyes on a Paris Olympics berth but for that he will have to achieve a qualifying standard of 2.33 metres.

The other Indian in fray, Jesse Sandesh finished joint-10th with a jump of 2.09 metres.

Shankar will next be seen in action at the Hvezdy v Nehvizdech athletics meet in Nehvizdy, Czech Republic on February 20.

Jota, Diaz, Nunez score for Liverpool in 3-1 win over Burnley

AP ■ LIVERPOL

Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez - Liverpool's starting front three while Mohamed Salah is out injured - all scored for the Premier League leaders in a 3-1 win over Burnley.

The Reds responded to Manchester City's extremely brief return to the league's summit, after its 2-0 victory against Everton hours earlier, with a triumph that tested their mettle even more than their stretched resources.

While the three points reestablished Liverpool's two-point advantage, the less-than-convincing nature of victory against the league's next-to-last side was not quite befitting the occasion of the hosts' biggest league crowd of 59,896 after the full opening of the Anfield Road stand.

For a time it appeared Liverpool, which was without goalkeeper Alisson Becker

and defender Joe Gomez because of illness as well as the injured Salah, was still suffering a hangover from the defeat at Arsenal last week.

It took the familiar right boot of Trent Alexander-Arnold, setting a new mark of 58 for Premier League assists by a defender, and the equally reliable head of Jota to put them ahead at a corner in the 31st. The sloppy concession of an equalizer, when Dara O'Shea headed in at a corner on the stroke of halftime, posed further problems as did the withdrawal of Alexander-Arnold - only recently returned from a knee injury - at the break.

It was the England international's replacement, Harvey Elliott, who set up headed goals for Diaz in the 52nd and Nunez in the 78th to ease the pressure.

However, had on-loan Chelsea forward David Fofana been as clinical as he was scoring twice last weekend, then not only would Liverpool be looking up at City but questions would have started to be asked about their ability to match their long-time rivals.

Liverpool should have Salah and Dominic Szoboszlai back from injury in the next couple of weeks.

Paul, Giron advance to Dallas Open final

AP ■ DALLAS

Second-seeded Tommy Paul and unseeded Marcos Giron won in straight sets to set up an all-American final in the Dallas Open.

Paul beat No. 3 seed Ben Shelton of the U.S., 6-2, 6-4, and Giron rolled over a seeded opponent again, beating No. 4 seed Adrian Mannarino of France, 6-1, 6-3, in the semifinals.

The 30-year-old Giron, who beat top-seeded American Frances Tiafoe in the quarterfinals, is seeking his first ATP Tour title Sunday in his second trip to a final. Paul's only title came in 2021 in Stockholm.

Paul won the final four games of the first set before a break early in the second set held up against the 21-year-old Shelton in the hardcourt event on the SMU campus.

Giron took a 4-0 lead in the first set a day after going up 5-0 in a straight-set win over Tiafoe, who was the highest-ranked player in the tournament at No. 14.

The first break of the second set came when Giron made a lunging save with a forehand, then ran down Mannarino's volley for a backhand crosscourt passing shot and a 5-3 lead. Giron, who hasn't lost a service game in four matches in the tournament, had little trouble closing out the match on his serve. With three victories over seeded opponents, Giron has a chance to surpass his career-best ranking of 49th from 2022, when Giron lost his only previous final in San Diego.

Giron reached the semifinals in Dallas two years ago, losing a three-setter to Jenson Brooksby while having match points. The final two sets went to tiebreakers.

"That stuck with me, and that's hard," Giron said. "I have experience. I know what it's like to lose. I know what it's like to win. Having a big win yesterday was awesome, and I'm really, really happy to be able to come back today."

Paul reached two finals last year, losing in a grass-court event at Eastbourne and a hardcourt tournament in Acapulco.

The 26-year-old Paul converted three of eight break points against the hard-serving Giron while saving all three break points he faced.

The 15th-ranked Paul, who stopped a six-match losing streak against top 20 opponents, had dropped his previous two matches against Shelton, who is No. 16.

"Obviously, his serve is unbelievable," Paul said. "These courts kind of help me a little bit. You don't have to jump in quite as high. Kind of kept the ball in my strike zone.

U-19 WORLD CUP FINAL

India lose by 79 runs to Australia

PTI ■ BENONI (SOUTH AFRICA)

India's batting lineup misfired when it mattered the most as they suffered a heartbreaking 79-run loss to Australia in the final of the U-19 World Cup here on Sunday.

Opting to bat, Australia first posted 253 for 7, courtesy Oliver Peake's enterprising 43-ball 46 and Harjas Singh's 55 off 64 balls, and then returned to bowl out the five-time champions for 174 in 43.5 overs.

Australia, thus, became four-time champions.

Chasing 254, opener Adarsh Singh made a 77-ball 47 but India kept losing wickets at regular intervals to collapse to 122 for 8 in 31.5 overs. Number 8 batter Murugan Abhishek (42 off 46 balls) then played an entertaining knock but it was too little and too late.

The loss brought back memories of Indian senior team's gut-wrenching loss to Australia in the 50-over World Cup final at home in November last year.

For Australia, seamer Mahli Beardman (3/15) and off-spinner Raf MacMillan (3/43) did most of the damage. Callum Vidler (2/35) and Charlie Anderson (1/42) were the other wicket-takers.

Earlier, Harjas top-scored for Australia with 55, while Weibgen and opener Harry Dixon made 48 and 42 respectively. Later, Peake propped up Australia with his breezy knock.

Raj Limbani was the most successful Indian bowler with figures of 3/38, while Naman Tiwari picked up two wickets for 63 runs in nine overs.

BRIEF SCORES:

Australia: 253/7 in 50 overs (Harjas Singh 55, Hugh Weibgen 48, Harry Dixon 42, Oliver Peake not out 46; Raj Limbani 3/38, Naman Tiwari 2/63).

India: 174 all out in 43.5 overs (Adarsh Singh 47; Mahli Beardman 3/15, Raf MacMillan 3/43).

Real show stealer was Boomball, says Ashwin

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Lavishing praise on teammate Jasprit Bumrah, senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said "Boomball" stole the show in the second Test against England and the pacer reaching top of the ICC rankings across three formats is a "Himalayan feat".

Bumrah displayed brilliance with the ball to play a key role in the team's series-levelling 106-run win in the second Test in Visakhapatnam.

He put up a reverse swing master-class in England's first innings that yielded him six wickets (6/45), following it up with a three-wicket haul in their second essay for match figures of 9 for 91.

His performance enabled him to jump to number one in the Test rankings list, becoming the first Indian pacer to achieve the feat. Bumrah has also held the top spot in the ODI and T20 rankings previously.

"The real show stealer was BoomBall. Jasprit Bumrah has bowled extraordinarily," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"He is the leading wicket-taker with 14 wickets and also the No.1 ranked Test bowler. The first India fast bowler to achieve number one across all formats. I am a big fan of his and this is a Himalayan feat."

Ashwin said that the extraordinary vibe and energy on the fourth day of the second Test helped India secure a favourable result. "We came into the fourth day with it all being even-stevens. But our extraordinary vibe, energy and team performance helped us level the series 1-1."

The five-match series will be played across Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Rajkot, Ranchi and Dharamsala and Ashwin noted that most Indian players have not played Test cricket at these venues.

"There's never been a marquee Test series like this in five such venues before. In 2017, we played Australia in Dharamasala and Ranchi and then Pune and Bengaluru. Usually, if there is a 4-5 match Test series at least one or two happen in metro cities.

"Unlike that, this time it's happening in venues that weren't part of World Cup matches.

"For most of the Indian players, these venues are new. There are a lot of players playing in our team who haven't played a first-class or Test match in Vizag stadium. "I'm not sure that is possible in any other country. But possible in India as there are so many Test venues."

Leach ruled out of remaining three Tests against India

PTI ■ LONDON

England left-arm spinner Jack Leach was on Sunday ruled out of the remaining three Tests against India with a left knee injury, announced the England and Wales Cricket Board.

However, no replacement will be called up for Leach, an indication that England will continue with the spin trio of Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Basheer for the rest of the tour.

Joe Root is the visitors' fourth spin option behind the three regular spinners.

Leach had sustained the injury during England's first Test victory in Hyderabad and missed the second Test in Visakhapatnam as a result.

"He will fly home from Abu Dhabi in the next 24 hours, where the England team has been staying ahead of the third Test in Rajkot, which starts on Thursday (February 15). "Leach will work closely with the England and Somerset medical teams in respect of his rehabilitation," stated the ECB in a media release.

The 32-year-old Leach has taken 126 wickets in 36 Tests, besides being a handy lower-order batter.

Zimbabwe Cricket to restructure after WC qualification woes

PTI ■ HARARE

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) has decided to effect far-reaching changes in both its domestic and development pathway following failure to qualify for the 2023 Men's ODI World Cup and the 2024 Men's T20 World Cup.

As a first step, the ZC board, which met on Saturday, decided to appoint 51-year-old former first-class player Walter Chawaguta as the head coach of the senior women's national team and accepted the resignation of U19 men's national team head coach Prosper Utseya.

It also decided to appoint the senior and U19 men's team coaches on an urgent basis.

A ZC statement said that the board had "adopted the comprehensive report presented by a committee of inquiry that was established to probe Zimbabwe's World Cup qualification failures as well as to review ZC's cricket affairs structure".

The three-member committee was headed by lawyer Lloyd Mhishi.

"The three-member Committee, chaired by Lloyd Mhishi, presented its report to the board after gathering input from various stakeholders, both internal and external... The board resolved to adopt the report in its entirety and to immediately implement the committee's recommendations," the statement added.

Among the recommendations accepted by ZC board are a complete restructuring of the cricket affairs department and its personnel, overhaul of the domestic and development pathway, advertising for the head coach's job for the national senior men's and U19 teams and restructuring of the coaching set-up at first-class level.

Debutant Sharma completes 10 wickets match haul

PTI ■ THUTHIPET (PUDUCHERRY)

Left-arm spinner Vanshaj Sharma completed a maiden ten-wicket match haul on his debut as Jammu and Kashmir dismissed Puducherry for 67 in their chase of 87 to register a 19-run win in the Ranji Trophy group D match here on Sunday.

Resuming at 35 for 7, Puducherry folded in 35.3 overs with the 20-year-old Sharma claiming all the remaining three wickets, returning with figures of 5 for 16 to go with his first innings figures of 5 for 74.

On Saturday, another left-arm spinner Abid Mushtaq notched up a 10-wicket match haul, his second in First-Class cricket. He had taken five for 28 in the second innings, returning with figures of 25-3-64-5 in the first innings.

Mushtaq was adjudged the Player-of-the-match for his exploits at the Cricket Association of Pondicherry (CAP) Siechem ground here.

With the win, Jammu and Kashmir continued their unbeaten run and grabbed the third place with 18 points, behind Baroda and Madhya Pradesh.For Pondicherry (15), their hopes of reaching the knockout stage is almost over.

Brief Score:

J&K 106 and 152 (Sagar Udeshi 3/48) beat Puducherry 172 and 67 allout in 35.3 overs (Damodaran Rohit 17; Vanshaj Sharma 5/16, Abid Mushtaq 5/28) by 19 runs.

Sunrisers claim back to back SA20 titles

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Sunrisers Eastern Cape won back-to-back SA20 titles after an empathic 89-run victory over Durban's Super Giants at Newlands here.

After topping the group stage, the Sunrisers delivered a clinical performance in the final on Saturday.

Half-centuries from Tom Abell (55) and Tristan Stubbs (56 not out) along with contributions from Jordan Hermann and captain Aiden Markram, who both contributed 42, respectively, saw the Sunrisers post a formidable 204/3.

The defending champions then bowled out the Super Giants for a paltry 115 in 17 overs.

Partnerships were crucial in the Sunrisers' innings with Hermann and Abell setting up the winning total with a 90-run stand for the second wicket after the early loss of Dawid Malan.

Durban's Super Giants captain, Keshav Maharaj, hit back with a double-wicket over by removing both set batters in Hermann and Abell.

But the Sunrisers showed they had plenty more in reserve with Markram and Stubbs rebuilding the innings before exploding towards the backend with 98 runs off 55 balls.

The Sunrisers' bowling has been their strongest discipline all season and their seamers certainly rose to the occasion on the night.

Dan Worrall (2/15) set the tone upfront again with the dismissal of Quinton de Kock early on before Marco Jansen delivered two hammer blows in the fourth over with the removal of Jon Jon Smuts and Bhanuka Rajapaksa to leave the Super Giants reeling at 7/3.

Wiaan Mulder attempted a recovery job with quickfire 38, but that's when Ottniel Baartman (2/17) delivered the moment of the match.

He had already dismissed Matthew Breetzke, but it was his in-swinger that wrapped the dangerous Heinrich Klaasen on the pads first ball that closed the game as a contest.

Saxena grabs 9/68 as Bengal stare at second successive defeat

PTI ■ THUMBA (KERALA)

Domestic cricket stalwart Jalaj Saxena destroyed Bengal with career-best figures of 9/68 as the visitors found themselves on the brink of a second successive defeat in the Ranji Trophy Group B here on Sunday.

Resuming on 172/8, Bengal managed to add just eight runs to their overnight total with the veteran all-rounder adding two more wickets to his name.

The 37-year-old now has 439 wickets and has 6600-plus runs from 138 matches in first-class cricket.

Despite a substantial lead, Kerala skipper Sanju Samson chose not to enforce follow-on and declared their second essay at 265/6 to set a massive 449-run target for the visitors.

In reply, Bengal were 77/2 with Abhimanyu Easwaran batting on 33. Bengal had lost their last match against Mumbai at Eden Gardens.

Khare slams fighting 143, but Mumbai hold edge

In Raipur, skipper Amandeep Khare led from the front with a stellar 143 as Chhattisgarh put up a strong fight, falling just one run short of Mumbai's first innings total of 351.

From 180/4 overnight, Khare, who was unbeaten on 35, showed utmost patience in his composed knock from 211 balls.

Mumbai kept taking wickets at one end but Khare stood firm and was the last man to get out. He struck 14 fours and four sixes.

In reply, Mumbai were 97/1 at close on day three.

With a lead of 98 runs, Mumbai seemed to be well-placed with Bhupen Lalwani and Amogh Bhatkal at the crease.

Shubham Singh managed the only breakthrough for Chhattisgarh in Mumbai's second innings when he dismissed Mumbai's first innings hero Prithvi Shaw, five runs short of a half-century.

The Indian batter's 159 off 185 balls had powered Mumbai to 351.

Assam eyeing maiden win of season

Veteran off-spinner Swarupam Purkayastha was the star performer with the ball, securing four wickets for just 11 runs, as Assam bundled out Bihar for 207 to take a huge first innings lead of 198 runs in Guwahati.

Assam were quick to enforce the follow-on and reduced Bihar to 168/3 at close of play on the penultimate day.

Opener Piyush Singh displayed resilience with an unbeaten 79 from 204, steering Bihar in their second essay.

The visitors face a challenging task ahead, trailing by 30 runs as Assam will be eyeing their first win of the season.

Mukhtar Hussain, Rahul Singh and Mrinmoy Dutta picked up wicket apiece for Assam.

Brief Scores

In Raipur: Mumbai 351 and 97/1; 28 overs (Prithvi Shaw 45, Bhupen Lalwani 40 batting). Chhattisgarh 350; 106.1 overs (Amandeep Khare 143, Shashank Chandrakar 56, Sanjeet Desai 41; Tushar Deshpande 5/121, Royston Dias 2/44). Mumbai lead by 98 runs.

In Guwahati: Assam: 405. Bihar 207; 71.5 overs (Paramjeet Singh 53, Bipin Saurabh 39; Swarupam Purkayastha 4/11, Mukhtar Hussain 3/22) and following on 168/3; 61 overs (Piyush Singh 79 not out, Bipin Saurabh 44; Mukhtar Hussain 1/15, Rahul Singh 1/13). Bihar trails by 30 runs.

In Thumba: Kerala: 363 and 265/6 declared; 64.2 overs (Rohan Kunnummal 51, Sachin Baby 51, Shreyas Gopal 50 not out; Shahbaz Ahmed 3/80). Bengal: 180; 51.1 overs (Abhimanyu Easwaran 72; Jalaj Saxena 9/68) and 77/2; 20.4 overs (Target: 449) (Abhimanyu Easwaran 33 batting, Sudip Gharami 31). Bengal need 372 runs.

In Vizianagaram: Andhra 261 and 271/5; 92 overs (Ricky Bhui 100 batting, Hanuma Vihari 48, Shaik Rasheed 42 batting; Saurabh Kumar 3/73). Uttar Pradesh 198. Andhra lead by 338 runs.

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