



WORLD 5

TALIBAN DIKTAT LEAVES AFGHAN
WOMEN SCARED: UN

MONEY 6

CENTRE RAISES FCI
AUTHORISED CAPITAL

SPORT 8

YASHASVI ROCKS ENGLAND,
INDIA IN CONTROL

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KAMAL DRAWS IN KAMAL, CONGRESS WILTS

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI/BHOPAL

In an interesting political development, Kamal Nath, one of the remaining tallest leaders of the Congress owing allegiance to the Nehru-Gandhi legacy, is all set to join the BJP along with his son Nakul, a sitting Congress MP, in a couple of days. Sources said both Kamal and Nakul have scheduled a meeting with BJP functionaries on Sunday evening as the ruling party leaders are busy in the two-day national convention being held in the national capital.

The grand old party's latest and biggest jolt in a fortnight comes after the exodus by Ashok Chavan, who joined the BJP, and Milind Deora, who switched sides to Shiv Sena; the duo had also been rewarded with Rajya Sabha berths a day earlier.

Several-time Union Minister, Chief Minister, and holder of prominent party positions since the late 1970s, Kamal will share the saffron cadre with his once-upon-a-time bête noire Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, as the former was responsible for undermining the Maharaja's foothold in Madhya Pradesh, ultimately leading to the fall of the last Congress-led Kamal Nath Government after Scindia quit the Congress to join the BJP.

On Saturday evening, after the



father-son duo reached Delhi, Kamal Nath's son Nakul Nath dropped the Congress logo from his bio on social media.

Nakul's move has added fuel to rumours of him and his father certainly defecting to the BJP. The bio of Nakul Kamal Nath on X now identifies him only as a Member of Parliament, Chhindwara (MP).

In a brief interaction with the media after arriving in Delhi,

Kamal Nath said that if there were any such thing, he would inform the media first. Asked if he is joining the BJP, Kamal Nath said, "If there were any such thing, I would inform you first." When further pressed by the media if he was not denying a possible switch, he said, "It is not about denying, you are saying this, you people are getting excited. I am not getting excited, this side or that side, but if there were any such thing, I would inform you first."

Nakul is the MP from Chhindwara, the pocket

borough of Kamal Nath, who had represented the constituency nine times in the past. In the 2019 general elections, the BJP won 28 of the 29 Lok Sabha seats, except Chhindwara.

Kamal Nath, the sitting MLA from the Chhindwara seat, was removed as MP Congress chief in the wake of the Congress' crushing defeat at the hands of the BJP in the last Assembly elections.

He is said to be disgruntled over not getting a Rajya Sabha berth, and also Rahul Gandhi has been opposed to him since the party

lost the Assembly elections late last year.

Though speculation about Kamal Nath's shift has been going on for the last few days, they got a fresh boost on Friday when Madhya Pradesh BJP president VD Sharma said Nath and his son are welcome in the BJP if they are unhappy with Congress' decision to boycott the Ram Temple consecration event held in Ayodhya.

"Kamal Nath and his son are welcome in BJP if they are unhappy with their party's decision to boycott the Ram Temple inauguration last month and if they want to join the saffron party to serve the country and society under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi," Sharma told reporters in Bhopal.

However, Nath's colleague in the party and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijaya Singh rubbished the rumours and dubbed them a "media creation."

Nath stood behind the Congress like a rock during the bad patch when the government led by him was toppled by Jyotiraditya Scindia after joining the BJP in March 2020.

Nath and Digvijay have the best rapport with the Gandhis, and Singh said that Kamal Nath, who started his political innings with the Nehru-Gandhi family, could never leave the party.

TEJAS WINS EQUESTRIAN NATIONAL CROWN



Tejas in Bengaluru with Tiens Key

Modi promises to return!



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and Piyush Goyal, BJP national president JP Nadda, veteran BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi and others during the BJP National Council meeting at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Saturday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Setting the target for the BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said winning 370 seats would be a true tribute to its key ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

The Prime Minister said, "370 is not merely a number for the BJP. It symbolises a profound sentiment. Mookerjee made the ultimate sacrifice for the abrogation of Article 370 to

preserve our nation's unity and integrity. As a true tribute to him, the BJP should secure victory in 370 seats." Addressing BJP office-bearers at the commencement of the two-day meeting of the party's national convention at Bharat Mandapam, Modi urged every party worker to focus on polling booths in the next 100 days, the period within

which the upcoming Lok Sabha polls are likely to conclude. He stressed the need to ensure at least 370 more votes for the party at every polling station compared to the 2019 elections. In a social media post later, Modi said, "Addressed the @BJP4India National Office Bearers. Complimented every Party Karyakarta for their exceptional efforts to

serve people. Discussed ways to deepen our party's grassroots level connect across all sections of society. Over the last decade, BJP has made a mark as a party of development and good governance. Our schemes, initiatives, and reforms have transformed several lives."

Briefing the press on the Prime Minister's address to the office-bearers, BJP general secretary Vinod Tawde said Prime Minister Modi has asked party members to keep in mind that the "lotus" (its poll symbol) will be its candidate at every seat it will contest and to work to ensure its victory. Tawde added that the party will launch a campaign to reach out to beneficiaries of various Central Government schemes from February 25 to March 5. Tawde said the Prime Minister told the meeting that the Opposition will engage in "tu tu-main main" (petty squabbling), unwarranted, and divisive issues, but they must not be distracted and remain focused on their development agenda.

Farmers continue with their journey

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As the Centre considers establishing a panel involving all stakeholders to address the ongoing farmers' protest and discuss issues, farmer leaders on Saturday demanded that the Centre bring an Ordinance to provide a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP), amid protests in Punjab by farmers. This demand comes a day before the fourth round of talks between farm leaders and Union ministers regarding their various demands.

Sources within the government said that a proposal to form a committee is likely to be presented during the fourth-round meeting with farmers' representatives on



Farmers at the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border during their 'Delhi Chalo' protest, near Patiala district

Sunday. The proposed committee will address various issues, including MSP, and may also seek nominations of representatives from farmer organisations for discussions.

Notably, farmer unions did not take part in the high-powered committee on MSP set up by the government in 2021. Union Ministers Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal, and

Nityanand Rai will meet with farmer leaders on Sunday for the fourth round of talks. The two sides previously met on February 8, 12, and 15, but those discussions remained inconclusive.

In another development, a mahapanchayat was held at Sisauli in Muzaffarnagar, where the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) led by Rakesh Tikait announced that farmers will stage dharnas in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Uttarakhand on February 21. A resolution to this effect was passed in the mahapanchayat. "If the government does not accept farmers' demands, farmers will launch a tractor march to Delhi in the last week of February," he said.

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Wellmark Bokaro and Apollo Hospitals Partner to Unveil Cutting-Edge Superspeciality OPD Clinic and Tumor Board

R SHARMA ■ Bokaro

The healthcare landscape in Eastern India witnessed a historic moment as Wellmark Hospital Bokaro, in association with Apollo Multispeciality Hospitals Limited, Kolkata, unveiled its highly anticipated Superspeciality OPD Clinic and Tumor Board. The inauguration ceremony, which took place at Hotel West Inn, Bokaro Steel City, Jharkhand, was a testament to the region's commitment to advancing medical care. Led by Dr. Satish Kumar, Chairman of Wellmark Hospital, the inauguration marked a significant leap forward in addressing the healthcare needs of the community. Dr. Kumar's vision and leadership underscored the hospital's commitment to delivering top-tier medical services to the residents of Bokaro and its surrounding areas. The highlight of the event was the Tumour Board segment, which showcased a stellar lineup of oncology specialists renowned for their expertise in tackling a diverse array of cancers. Led by esteemed physicians Dr. Joydeep



Ghosh, Dr. Tanweer Shahid, and Dr. Tapas Kumar Kar, the Tumour Board session offered attendees invaluable insights and personalized care, setting a new standard in cancer treatment accessibility at Bokaro. In parallel, the Robot-Assisted Minimally Invasive Cardiac Surgery (MICS) OPD showcased the unparalleled expertise of Dr. Sushan

Mukhopadhyay, a distinguished cardiothoracic and robotic surgeon. The addition of Dr. Mukhopadhyay's expertise to Wellmark Hospital's roster of specialists represents a significant stride forward in fulfilling the healthcare needs of the community. In a resounding affirmation of the critical role played by awareness

and early detection in healthcare, experts gathered at Inaugural session reiterated the mantra: "Awareness is the key, and early detection can save lives." This simple yet profound message encapsulates the essence of proactive healthcare and underscores its potential to make a tangible difference in communities. Also Doctors collectively emphasized the pivotal role of health education and awareness in fortifying the region's medical infrastructure. Overall this joint venture will surely help in bridging the gap between metropolitan medical centers and regional healthcare facilities. As the event concluded, Attendees at the event expressed admiration for the collaborative efforts of Wellmark Hospital and Apollo Multispeciality Hospitals, Kolkata, in bringing world-class medical care closer to home. The initiative was lauded as a significant step forward in addressing the healthcare needs of the community and ensuring that individuals receive the best possible treatment without having to travel long distances and in an affordable way.

Trainee-Teacher Parliament formed in Samarpan Deep B Ed College



PNS Ranchi

The election for the Trainee-Teacher Parliament 2024 at Samarpan Deep B. Ed College was conducted by Leena Kumari, courtesy the Student Welfare Committee of the college, for the session 2023-25 here on Saturday. Trainees were selected on the post of Secretary of Discipline, Workshop and Seminar, Cultural, Magazine, Library, Art and Craft, Cleanliness, Sports, NSS Voluntary along with Lakshmi Priya - President, Secretary - Abhilasha Kumari Archi. Oath was also administered to all the selected trainees by Secretary Naval Kishore Gupta. The stage was coordinated by Anand Kumar

Bhagat and Sajit Kumar Mahato. In making this program successful, College Chairman Abhishek Singh, Secretary Naval Kishore Gupta, Treasurer Vikas Poddar, Management Committee members Jitendra Prasad, Vishal Singh and Shailendra Singh along with Principal in-charge Dashrath Mahato, Assistant Professor Kanhai with Anand Kumar Bhagat, Shashi Kumari Tirkey, Leena Kumari (Programme Incharge), Wasif Shah, Kanhaiya Lal Keshari, Achyutananda Mishra (Programme Member), Harjeet Kaur, Ritu Jaya Karketta, Shalini Sinha, Anil Sahu, Dinesh Mahato and Shivraj Bhagat had special contributions directly and indirectly.

Young Indians pen MoU with XITE College

PNS ■ Jamshedpur

CII Young Indians (Yi) has formally entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with XITE College Gamharia, marking a collaborative effort to offer students opportunities for engagement in various activities and initiatives. The primary goal is to establish a platform where college students can not only conceptualize but also contribute to realizing the vision of a developed



nation. Under the Yuva platform, Yi members actively involve students in diverse initiatives that they conceptualize, plan, and execute. This MoU is antici-

pated to strengthen the Industry-Institute Partnership, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship. As part of the agreement, Yi will extend opportuni-

ties for XITE students to actively participate in activities and initiatives of their own conception. Additionally, students will have the chance to engage in Yi Chapter events, both in Jamshedpur and other cities. The MoU was officially signed by Dr. (Fr.) Mukti Clarence, Vice Principal of XITE College Gamharia, and Harsh Agarwal, Chair, along with Saurav Agarwal, Co-Chair, of the YUVA Vertical within the Young Indians, Jamshedpur Chapter.

Jharia Division introduces environmentally friendly Paste Filling Technology for Mine Safety

PANKAJ ■ Dhanbad

The Jharia Division of Tata Steel recently commissioned an environment friendly Paste Filling Pilot Plant with a capacity of 10 M3/h to fill voids using self-leveling flowable paste made from fly ash, cement, and additives. The Plant was inaugurated by D B Sundara Ramam, Vice President, Raw Materials, Tata Steel, in the presence of Sanjay Rajoria, General Manager, Jharia Division, Tata Steel, and Dr. Prashant, Senior Principal Scientist, CSIR-CIMFR at Digwadih Colliery of the company. This marks the first in India where Tata Steel is exploring this technology for coal mine void backfilling. Filling unapproachable coal voids poses a significant challenge for coal miners, leading to safety concerns in and around underground collieries.

Unlike the current sand slurry backfilling method that leads to borehole choking, segregation, and heaping issues during filling of unapproachable coal voids, the paste filling technology achieves higher efficiency through its self-leveling and controlled spreading of cemented fly ash paste. The paste of different composition and flow properties will be pumped into the empty voids below the railway line at Digwadih Colliery. The success of this trial will pave the way for the development of mobile setups to fill voids of more than 1 km in length at the current site, and potential applications at production and mine fire sites. This technology not only offers an environmentally friendly alternative to river sand for mine backfilling but also aims to enhance safety in unapproachable voids beneath railway lines, highways, and permanent struc-

tures, situated above underground collieries. Developed through collaboration between Tata Steel, CSIR-Central Institute of Mining and Fuel Research (CSIR-CIMFR) and IIT-Kharagpur, this technology shows promising prospects for future applications. Among others present at the inauguration were Narendra Kumar Gupta, Chief (Jamadoba Group), Mayank Shekhar, Chief (Sijua Group), Rajesh Chintak, Chief HRBP (Raw Materials), Dr. Veerendra Singh, Principal Scientist (Research and Development), Tata Steel, and Dr. Santosh Kumar Behera, Senior Scientist, CSIR-CIMFR, Dhanbad. Filling unapproachable coal voids poses a significant challenge for coal miners, leading to safety concerns in and around underground collieries. Currently, there is no efficient technology available to address this issue.

Research Methodology Session on Humanities at XITE College

PNS ■ Jamshedpur

The Department of English at XITE College organized a comprehensive session on Research Methodology focused on Humanities. Sudipa Mukherjee, Assistant Professor from the Department of English at Netaji Subhas University, served as the resource person for the event. Attendees included students from the Department of English at XITE College, along with distinguished guests: Dr. (Fr.) Mukti Clarence, Dr. Swati Singh, Prof. Stuti Rag, Prof. Anjali Jha and Prof. Akinchan Xaxa. The session, held from 9:30 am to 11:30 am, aimed to equip participants with essential tools and techniques for conducting research in the humanities. Ms. Mukherjee provided a comprehensive overview of research methodologies pertinent to the field, emphasizing their relevance and application in humanities research. Key topics covered included literature review methodologies, qualitative



and quantitative data collection methods, analysis techniques tailored to humanities research, and ethical considerations unique to the discipline. Through engaging presentations and interactive discussions, participants gained valuable insights into the nuances of conducting research in the humanities. The session fostered a collaborative environment where attendees had the opportunity to exchange ideas, ask questions, and share their experiences. Mukherjee's expertise coupled with the active partici-

pation of attendees enriched the learning experience, enabling a deeper understanding of research methodologies specific to humanities disciplines. In conclusion, the Research Methodology session on Humanities at XITE College provided a platform for students and faculty to enhance their research skills and broaden their intellectual horizons. Such initiatives underscore the college's commitment to promoting academic excellence and fostering a culture of scholarly inquiry within the humanities domain.

MP Jayant Sinha Honoured with 'Sansad Maharatna Puraskar 2024'



AVINASH ANJAN ■ HAZARIBAG

MP Hazaribag Co-Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance Jayant Sinha has been awarded the 'Sansad Maharatna Puraskar 2024' for being the best parliamentarian and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance headed by him has been awarded the 'Sansad Maharatna Award 2024' for his excellent performance for 5 years. This is a matter of pride for entire Jharkhand including Hazaribag and Ramgarh that Jayant Sinha was honored with this award. During this, Jayant Sinha expressed his gratitude to the Chairman of the Jury Committee, Union Minister of State for Law Arjun Ram Meghwal and Vice Chairman, former Election Commission Chairman T S Krishnamurthy. Jayant

Sinha has had a very good performance as an MP in the Lok Sabha and the Finance Committee headed by him. While representing Hazaribag Lok Sabha, he has been raising many important issues related to the region and the nation in all the sessions of the House. In the last 5 years, he has presented 13 private member bills related to national interest in the House. Around 1,000 questions have been raised in the House since 2019. Debated on 24 topics and drew the attention of the House on 54 important issues under Zero Hour and 29 under Rule 377. Also, his attendance has been almost 100 percent. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, headed by Jayant Sinha, presented reports on important topics in 5 years, on the basis of which the policies of the Central Government were made.

NPU to hold massive exams for different sessions of UG

PNS ■ DALTONGANJ

Nilamber Pitamber university here has announced its exam schedules for UG semester 4 session 2021 -24 and UG semester 2 NEP session 2022 - 26. Giving this information the university controller of exams M K Deepak said "In UG semester 4, 19,131 students are expected to take this examination."

session 10am to 1pm. Both the exams will commence from February 28." Following the decision of the examination board which is the highest body for exams, the NPU has scrapped 'home centre' provision for these two exams, to start with. Deepak said "There is not going to be any home centre now. Centres of the exams are shuffled." As an example of shuffling of the examination centres students of the BSM college Bhavnathpur in Garhwa district will take their exams at Nagar Untari based college affiliated

with this university and so on and so forth said the university controller of exams. Sources said the exam department of the NPU is in neck break speed to hold as many exams as possible before the ECI comes out with poll schedule as then poll training for teachers and non teaching personnel will begin and again when days will be closer to polling, college buildings and premises will be taken over by the administration to shelter temporarily security forces for the conduct of the poll. Conduct of any exams during such a hectic period of pre voting will not be any possibility.

Bokaro Sector-3 Community Building Transformed into Steel Club and Recreation Center

PNS ■ Bokaro

The Sector-3 community building in Bokaro Steel City, previously operated by BSL, has undergone an upgrade and is now being developed as a Steel Club and Recreation Center with a fresh look. The newly renovated Steel Club, equipped with modern facilities, was inaugurated on February 17th by newly elected DIC BSL Bearendra Kumar Tiwari. Present at the occasion were other senior officials, including Director (Finance & Accounts) Suresh Rangani, Director (Personnel & Administration) Rajan Prasad, Director (Mines) Jaydeep Dasgupta, Chief General Manager (Personnel) Hari Mohan Jha, Chief General Manager (Town Administration) Kundan Kumar and other dignitaries. The revamped Steel Club and Recreation Center now



feature a spacious multipurpose hall on the ground floor, along with a stage already present for indoor games and other activities. Additionally, on the ground floor, separate rooms for indoor games

such as table tennis, chess, carrom, a reading room stocked with books, newspapers, and magazines, a fitness center, and a yoga center have been added. The first floor of the Steel Club also houses a large

hall with four rooms, suitable for various events and programs. Facilities such as two basketball courts and an international standard indoor badminton court are provided within the premises of the Steel

Club and Recreation Center. Plans are also underway to introduce a swimming pool facility in the near future. Furthermore, the Steel Club and Recreation Center are set to host the four-day Inter-Steel Plant Kabaddi Championship for the session 2023-24. The inauguration of the championship was carried out by Bearendra Kumar Tiwari in the presence of other senior officials. Teams from various steel plants including BSL, Rourkela Steel Plant, ISP Bumpur, Bhilai Steel Plant, Alloy Steel Plant, RINL Visakhapatnam, Tata Steel, Durgapur Steel Plant, and Salem Steel Plant are participating in the competition. Tiwari encouraged the participating teams to enjoy the spirit of the competition with sportsmanship. The first match of the Kabaddi Championship will be held between Tata Steel and Bhilai Steel Plant on February 18th, with the final scheduled for February 19th.

SAIL CSR conducts whole day celebrations at Resham village



PNS ■ Ranchi

A team of SAIL CSR conducted whole day recreational celebrations at Resham Village of Block Angara. The day started with the 9th consecutive year Van Rakshabandhan where the villagers tied knots on the trees to mark their determination to protect the felling of trees. SAIL chose this village to evince her appreciation towards the unflinching commitment of Resham villagers to guard the 175 acres of contiguous forest near Getalsod dam for the last 37 years from land and wood shylocks. The occasion was marked by the presence of Block officers, Elected representatives of Angara Block, the JSPLS, angrawadi and health workers, NGOs, around 200 students of Govt. Middle schools, their guardians and common vil-

lagers. Ayush Doctors also were present for a befitting medical camp for the villagers. After the breakfast, 12 different sports events were organized for the boys, girls of different categories, for women folk and for the men too. He winners were felicitated by attractive prizes by track suit tops etc. 400 saplings of grafted mango, jamun and jackfruit saplings were distributed to the village folks in view of their commitment to the flora of the locality. Also distributed were school bags for around 200 children. The football gears were distributed to the boys and girls team. A team from the block had a stall coaxing family planning drive to the villagers. Lunch was cooked by villagers themselves. Children organised many cultural programs with colourful dresses. All

activities were sponsored by SAIL CSR. The SAIL team was represented by Ujjwal Bhaskar, Chief of Communications; Dr. GM Chowdhury, DGM; Rahul Srivastava, Nodal Officer (CSR), Navneet Bedia and Pankaj from Union. The hosts from Resham Banadag villages were Pankaj Tirkey, Planning officer, Deepa Oraon, President (Angada Panchayat), Hare Krishna (Ex principal of school), Mahadeo & Suresh Oraon from Banadag Conservation Committee, Bhagtu Oraon and Anand Kachhap from Resham Committee. Committee members Kishun, Phulchand, Balchand, Krishna, Sanchi, Ravi, Sukra, Parmeshwar Mahato, Sanjay, Sohrai, Mahendra, Parna & Shrawan. The program was conducted by Premchand and Shankar.

Disgruntled Congress MLAs leave for Delhi to meet party seniors

Eight legislators fly to Delhi, despite Basant Soren's efforts to pacify them

PNS ■ Ranchi

Eight Congress MLAs today left for Delhi to meet AICC functionaries after the same faces for ministerial positions were repeated in the State government in the swearing ceremony held on February 16. Before leaving, these MLAs met the JMM Leader and Minister in the State Government, Basant Soren at Hotel Raso in Ranchi. After this meeting which lasted for about half an hour, the Congress MLAs reached the airport and left for Delhi. After the departure of eight MLAs, two more Congress MLAs will go from Ranchi to Delhi on Sunday. Before leaving for Delhi, Congress' Mahagama MLA, Deepika Pandey Singh said that all the MLAs are united and have informed the Congress High Command about their demands. She said that some solution will definitely be found to remove the displeasure of the MLAs. She further said that until the solution to the problem is found, the Congress MLAs will



Congress MLAs during a meeting over replacement of Cong Ministers in Champai Soren Cabinet, at a city based hotel in Ranchi on Saturday. PNS

remain in Delhi. At the same time, she refused to say anything on the question of withdrawal of support. On the question of one post and one leader, she said that all these things have been placed before the high command. Whatever instructions come from the party, we will follow it.

Bermo MLA Anup Singh said that all the MLAs are going to Delhi to meet the high command leaders. He said that there is resentment but it is still difficult to tell for what reasons. On the question of Basant Soren reaching Raso Hotel, he said that meeting Basant is not an inexplicable incident.

He belongs to a family that is an important part of the coalition government. He said that we know two families, the Congress family and the Soren family. He said that the coalition government is running on the basis of this so it becomes necessary to meet him. He said that whatever problem there is, he will put it before the high command.

MLA Irfan Ansari said that all the MLAs will meet the high command in Delhi. He said that whatever instructions they get from the high command, they will be able to share the same information with the media. At present, it would not be appropriate to tell anything about the angry MLAs and their stand. However, at first he refused to tell that he was going to Delhi.

There are 12 MLAs in which Jamtara MLA Irfan Ansari, Barhi MLA, Uma Shankar Akela, Bermo MLA, Kumar Jaimangal, Mahagama MLA, Deepika Pandey Singh, Khijri MLA, Rajesh Kachhap, Chakradharpur MLA, Sona Ram Sinku, Simdega MLA, Bhushan Bada, Barkagaon MLA, Amba Prasad were present in the hotel. Jharia MLA, Purnima Neeraj Singh is out of Ranchi. Ramchandra Singh and Naman Viksal Kongari are not present in Ranchi as Kongadi has gone to their respective areas. MLAs who do not live in Ranchi reached the airport directly. Mandar MLA, Shilpi Neha Tirkey was also not present in the meeting.



Director General Home Defense Corps-cum-Fire Service Anil Palta meets Chief Minister Champai Soren at his official residence in Ranchi on Saturday. PNS

Additional forces deployed in Nagdi after communal tension



PNS ■ Ranchi

A large number of police forces have been deployed in Nagadi area near the Capital city after communal tension in the area on Friday night. During the immersion of idols after Saraswati Puja on Friday evening, two groups clashed with each other. After this, Section 144 was imposed in the area. Senior police and district administration officers are camping in the area. The administration has appealed to people for cooperation to control the situation and asked to avoid rumours. Officials informed that over 500 police personnel have been deployed in Nagdi Bazaar, where markets and shops are closed. During the immersion of Saraswati idols on Friday evening, a group of people had an argument with the people participating in the procession in Nagdi. After this, stone pelting started from both the sides. Within no time the

situation became tense. As soon as the information was received, Ranchi Deputy Commissioner, SSP, City and Rural SP reached there and took stock of the situation. Two police personnel and other people were also injured in stone pelting by both the groups. However, it took more than half an hour for the police force and officers to control the situation. After the deployment of police force, Section 144 was imposed in the area. According to reports, following a dispute between two groups, some local youth have been accused of throwing stones at the immersion procession. There are reports of two police personnel and some other people being injured. Ranchi Deputy Commissioner Rahul Kumar Sinha said that the matter will be investigated and the police will arrest the miscreants involved in it. However, there was no information about any arrest and the situation was under control till Saturday evening.

4 mutilated bodies, including 1-yr-old child found on Railway Track



Police suspect witchcraft practice

PNS ■ Jamshedpur

In a tragic incident in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district, four individuals were brutally murdered in Tunguwas Tola of Nurda village, accused of witchcraft. The victims included a woman, two children aged eight months and one and a half years, and a man. The bodies were callously thrown on the tracks between Kendposi and Talaburu railway stations, shocking local residents who discovered them on a Saturday morning. Upon police arrival, initial suspicions of suicide were dispelled when the woman's brother-in-law identified the victims. The bodies, found in a mutilated condition due to a passing train, were tied in

sacks before being discarded on the tracks. The identity of one male victim remains unknown. This heinous crime highlights the grave consequences of baseless accusations related to witchcraft, shedding light on the urgent need for awareness and intervention to prevent such tragedies in the future. The victims, suspected to be from a single family, included a 28-year-old woman, a 30-year-old man, a one-year-old baby boy, and a two-and-a-half-year-old baby girl. The bodies of the children were found together, while the bodies of the adults were discovered separately, approximately two kilometers apart. Train services were abruptly halted upon the discovery of the bodies, causing disruptions until they were removed. Both local police and railway authorities swiftly responded to the scene, transporting the bodies to the Chakradharpur sub-divisional hospital for postmortem examinations. Senior divisional commercial manager, Gajraj Singh, confirmed the resumption of train services following the removal of the bodies. The incident, which occurred around 2:30 am, has prompted a joint investigation by railway police and local law enforcement to unravel the details of this harrowing incident. "The cause of death is yet to be ascertained. We are investigating whether it was a case of multiple suicides, accidental deaths, or a barbaric act of mass murder," stated a spokesperson from the local police. The bodies of the children were found together, while the bodies of the adults were discovered separately, approximately two kilometers apart. Train services were abruptly halted upon the discovery of the bodies, causing disruptions until they were removed. "We responded immediately to the scene after being alerted by a train driver. The bodies have been shifted to the Chakradharpur sub-divisional hospital for postmortem examination," said the railway police. Senior divisional commercial manager confirmed the resumption of train services following the removal of the bodies. "Train movement on the third line was affected due to the four bodies lying on the track. But now the train movement through the line has resumed," said Singh. The incident, occurring around 2:30 am, has prompted a joint investigation by railway police and local law enforcement to unravel the details of this harrowing incident.

Rains likely in State from Feb 21



PNS ■ Ranchi

Weather in Jharkhand is likely to change once again with forecast of rain in many districts of the state from February 21. The temperature will also increase. The information was given by the Indian Meteorological Centre in Ranchi on Saturday. The minimum temperature in the state may increase by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius during the next 3 to 4 days. According to the Centre, there will be fog or mist in the morning on 18th and 19th February.

The sky will be clear later. The weather will be dry. There may be partly cloudy sky on 20th February. The weather will be dry. According to the Centre, there is a possibility of light rain at isolated places in the north-eastern part of the state on February 21. It is likely to affect Deoghar, Dumka, Dhanbad, Giridih, Godda, Jamtara, Pakur and Sahibganj districts. According to the Centre, there is a possibility of light rain at isolated places in the state on February 22. Similarly, on February 23, light to moderate rain is expected in some places in the state.

Firing incident at posh area in Ranchi

PNS ■ Ranchi

After a clash between two groups outside the Ruin House in Morhabadi of the State Capital a person of one group fired a bullet at another group. The incident happened late Friday night. An FIR has also been lodged at Bariatu police station regarding the firing incident. Bariatu Police Station incharge, Suresh Mandal informed that some youths had come to Ranchi from Dhanbad to celebrate the birthday of Ruin Bar and Restaurant located at Morhabadi Ground. "Some youths from Kanke Road, Ranchi were already present in the restaurant. Then there was a clash between the two parties over some issue and in the heat of the moment, firing was done from one side. There was an atmosphere of chaos at the spot for some time. However, no one was shot in this firing. The reason for the dispute in the party is not clear," he added.

Provide crops damage records caused by hailstorm: DC

PNS ■ Ranchi

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Ranchi, Rahul Kumar Sinha, on Saturday, instructed all the zonal officers to provide records related to crop damage caused to farmers due to hailstorm that occurred on February 14. Sinha said that under the natural disaster (hailstorm) identified by the Government of India, records related to crop damage caused to farmers due to hailstorm should be made available so that they can be compensated. Giving instructions in this light, the DC said that by creating a Help Desk in their respective zones, receiving applications for crop damage due to hailstorm, assessing the damage, preparing related proposal records and sending it to the Deputy Collector, Land Reforms, Sadar. Please ensure to send through Bundu Ranchi by February 20. Meanwhile, Sinha issued prohibitory orders for Engineering Services (P) Examination 2024



organized by Union Public Service Commission, New Delhi on February 18 in the first shift from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon and in the second shift from 02:00 pm to 05:00 pm. The examination is to be held at various centers till noon. To conduct the examination in a

malpractice-free environment and maintain law and order at these examination centres, the Deputy Commissioner-cum-District Magistrate, Ranchi and the Senior Superintendent of Police, Ranchi, have deputed magistrates along with police forces and police officers. Students appearing for the examination and their parents may try to disrupt law and order by crowding the examination centres. In view of this apprehension, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Sadar, Ranchi, using the powers conferred under Section 144 of the CrPC, has issued a prohibitory order within a radius of 200 meters of these examination centres. The prohibitory orders are gathering of five or more people at one place, using any kind of loudspeaker, carrying any kind of weapon like gun, rifle, revolver, bomb, gunpowder etc., carrying any kind of weapon like -Carrying sticks, bows, arrows, spears etc. and organizing any kind of meeting or public meeting.

AJSU Party demands CBI probe in JSSC-CGL paper leak case

Party members stage protest at Raj Bhawan

PNS ■ Ranchi

In the JSSC - CGL paper leak case, AJSU party today said that the scam should be investigated not by SIT but by the CBI. The party also held a one-day demonstration in front of Raj Bhawan demanding investigation and other demands. After the demonstration, AJSU submitted a memorandum to the Governor. Many students and candidates along with hundreds of AJSU members from all the districts of the state took part in this demonstration. AJSU State President Om Verma said that the party has been vocally raising all the issues related to rights and interests of students. In the JSSC-CGL paper leak case, party president Sudesh Kumar Mahato had demanded a high-level inquiry into the paper leak case in the special session of the Assembly, after which the government hastily formed an SIT. State General Secretary of AJSU Vishal Mahato said that the government has ruined the future of the youth of the state with its wrong policy. The government, which has made a deal for the employment rights of the youth for Rs 27 lakh, is boasting of never bowing down. They have sold not only their jobs but also the dreams and hard work of millions of youth like us. The youth will bow them down and remove them from power.



AJSU party workers stage a protest against the JSSC-CGL paper leak case, near Raj Bhawan in Ranchi on Saturday. PNS

He said that AJSU launched a phased agitation regarding the JSSC-CGL paper leak issue so that lakhs of students of the state get justice. Under this, a signature campaign was organized at all the college/university headquarters on 12th February, a torch procession and demonstration on the evening of 13th February, a letter was handed over to all the Deputy Commissioners on 15th February demanding a CBI investigation. A one-day protest was organized in front of Raj Bhawan today. In the demonstration, Principal General Secretary of AJSU Party Ram Chandra Sahis, Central Chief Spokesperson Dr. Devsharan Bhagat, Central Spokesperson Sudhir Yadav, Central General Secretary Ravi Shankar

Maurya, Ranchi University President Abhishek Shukla, Nilambar Pitambar University President Abhishek Raj, Vinoba Bhawe University President Anurag Bhardwaj Deva. Mahato, Kolhan University President Hemant Pathak Dharamraj Pradhan, Sido Kanu University President Nirmal Mandal, all District Presidents Student Union - Jamal Gaddi, Deepak Dubey, Vishal Yadav, Vijay Mahato, Phool Singh Badaik, Ravindra Thakur, Shanu Kumar, Vishal Prajapati, Amit Yadav, Tanveer Many students including Hasan, Vinod Rajak, Janaki Mahato, Suraj Kushwaha, Tapas Mahato, Kunal Kishore Thakur, Mukesh Kumar, Kundan Chandravanshi participated.

A little friction between judiciary, executive good: Former SC judge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Former Supreme Court judge Sanjay Kishan Kaul on Saturday said a little bit of underlying friction between the judiciary and the executive is good to maintain checks and balances in a democracy. Addressing a function to confer the Sansad Ratna Awards on parliamentarians, Justice Kaul said the checks and balances of a democracy were enunciated in the Constitution which provides for an administration, a legislature and the court. “Since we have a democracy based on the first past the post concept where most governments would be having less than 50 per cent of the votes, the court plays an important role in maintaining a check and balance on the system,” he said. Justice Kaul, quoting a former chief justice, said “a little bit of underlying tension is good. If things are very hunky-dory between the judiciary and the



executive, then we have a problem”. Telangana Governor Tamilsai Soundarajan, National Commission for Backward Classes Chairman Hansraj Ahir, Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra Teni also addressed the function. As many as 12 parliamentarians and three parliamentary committees were conferred with the Sansad Ratna Awards by a Chennai-based NGO Prime Point Foundation here

on Saturday. The Sansad Ratna awards were conferred upon Sudhir Gupta (BJP), Shrikanth Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena), Sukanta Majumdar (BJP), Kuldeep Rai Sharma (Congress) and Amol Kolhe (NCP). The Sansad Maha Ratna awards given once in five years for consistent performance in the 17th Lok Sabha was conferred upon N K Premachandran (RSP), Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

(Congress), Bidyut Baran Mahato (BJP), and Heena Gavit (BJP). The Sansad Utkrisht Maha Ratna awards were given to Supriya Sule (NCP), Shrirang Appa Barne (Shiv Sena) and Bhartruhari Mahtab (BJD). The three awardees received the Sansad Maha Ratna Awards and were honoured for their exemplary performance in the 17th Lok Sabha as well. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture chaired by P C Gaddigoudar (BJP), Finance, chaired by Jayant Sinha (BJP) and the Transport and Tourism Committee presently chaired by Vijayasai Reddy (YSR Congress) and former chairman T G Venkatesh (BJP) were conferred with the Sansad Maha Ratna awards. The committees were honoured for their consistent contributions based on sittings and the reports presented by them, relying on the data commensurate with the term of 17th Lok Sabha.

AI driven Aarogya-Doctor on Wheels attends to 13,000 remote area patients

First of its kind service attends to patients in far flung areas in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Overcoming barriers of distance, cost, and specialist availability, Aarogya-Doctor on Wheels, a first of its kind state-of-the-art, Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven free Mobile Telemedicine Clinic has attended free-of-cost nearly 13,000 remote area patients, mainly women from the far-flung regions of Udhampur-Kathua-Doda Lok Sabha constituency in Jammu Kashmir. Ordinarily, a metro hospital will cost a patient very heavily and may take two to three weeks’ time. This type of free telemedicine mobile camp solves all the problems especially for those having weak socio-economic background, said Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh, who represents the Udhampur parliamentary constituency. “Here, the patient attended by



the Mobile Telemedicine Clinic is screened, thoroughly investigated and then the consultation is obtained from the concerned super-specialist doctors in one of the leading hospitals in metros like Hyderabad and Bengaluru with whom an arrangement has been tied up for the purpose,” explained the Minister at an interaction with media here. He further said, “Aarogya-Doctor on Wheels’ functions on the latest methodology

wherein a patient can narrate his illness or complaint in his native language and the AI Doctor understands the language and responds to the patient in the same language. This hi-tech clinic is presently operated in Dudu Basantgarh in the upper reaches of Ramnagar block of Udhampur under the 4th phase from 17th January 2024, said the Minister. Its huge success will inspire other similar initiatives elsewhere across the country as

well, he asserted adding that this free telemedicine facility overcomes the problems of ‘Accessibility, Availability and Affordability’. For the convenience of patients, the prescribed medicines are also being provided free of cost and in addition, medicine kits containing commonly used drugs are being distributed across the constituency free of cost to all the families in general, Dr Jitendra Singh informed. The first phase of this facility covered more than 60 villages in the far-flung Gandoh area of district Doda where it spent three months. The second phase was conducted along the Zero Line villages of the International Border, and the third phase was held in the upper reaches of Bilawar, where such healthcare facilities are either not available or inadequately available, informed the Minister.

CDSCO asks inspectors to maintain list of spurious drugs

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Taking proactive steps to enhance surveillance of drugs and cosmetics sold in the market, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has asked drug inspectors across States to maintain a centralised monthly list of spurious and “not-so-standard quality (NSQ)” drugs, to be published on its website so that they can be promptly recalled and public awareness raised to prevent their further use. In its guidelines issued recently, the CDSCO’s noted that the current list of NSQ and spurious drugs is not regularly updated, and crucial information regarding the distributors



from where samples are obtained is not shared. However, it is important that sufficient quantities of samples are collected and forwarded to the laboratory so that all the parameters are tested and re-tested, if any required by laboratory before issuing of NSQ test report, as per the document. These guidelines aim to cover a wide variety of products and

locations, including rural and tribal areas, by preparing monthly and annual sampling plans. Each drugs inspector, in consultation with their controlling authority, will prepare these plans to ensure optimal coverage of their jurisdiction. The CDSCO emphasized the importance of collecting sufficient samples and promptly forwarding them to laboratories for testing. “Additionally, a

centralised list of wholesale and retail outlets associated with spurious products will be prepared and publicized to discourage the purchase of medicines from these outlets. By addressing gaps in surveillance and implementing robust sampling protocols, the CDSCO aims to enhance consumer confidence and protect against the risks posed by sub-standard products. The apex drug regulator, under the Union Health Ministry, said that currently most sampled drugs are from big brands and collected from urban or suburban locations only. Moreover, the majority of sampled drugs are from big brands and urban or suburban locations, neglecting rural and

interior areas where the quality of drugs may differ. “From the past trends it is observed that there is no defined methodology for sample selection and location of sampling etc and was done randomly with the individual knowledge of drug inspectors,” the document stated. “This guideline is mainly focused to utilize available information and identified risks for selection of sample and location to cover vast variety of drugs, cosmetic and medical devices moving in the market from manufacturing facility, wholesale outlet, retail outlet, government distribution channel etc. In urban, suburban, and rural locations,” it stated.



JD(U) leader Rajiv Ranjan Singh with others during a meeting with ‘One Nation, One Election’ Committee Chairperson and former President of India Ram Nath Kovind

Railways to start train service between Banihal, Sangaldan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Indian Railways will start the much awaited ‘dream’ train services on the Banihal-Khari-Sumber-Sangaldan section, a 48.1-kilometre-long significant segment of the country’s most ambitious Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link project, on February 20. Sources in the Ministry of railways said the Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to inaugurate the section by virtually flagging off a train from Sangaldan. The Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project is one of the most ambitious Himalayan railway projects post Independence and with this direct train service between Srinagar with Kanyakumari is not a distant dream now. The USBRL project seeks to integrate the Kashmir Valley with the Jammu region and the national rail network, spanning a total length of 272 kilometres out of which 161 kilometres have already been commissioned. According to the railways, the Banihal-Khari-Sumber-Sangaldan section, which was constructed at a cost of Rs 15,863 crore, is ready for operation and the existing train services from Baramulla to Banihal will now be extended up to Sangaldan, a town near the district headquarters of Ramban. “It features 16 bridges -- 11 major ones, four minor ones



and one road overbridge. More than 90 per cent of this section is in tunnels, with a total of 11 tunnels covering 43.37 kilometres, including the country’s longest transportation tunnel, T-50, stretching 12.77 kilometres in the Khari-Sumber section,” a senior official associated with the project said. “Spanning the challenging terrain of the Pir Panjal ranges, the USBRL aims at establishing an all-weather, comfortable and economically-feasible transportation network, connecting remote Himalayan areas with the rest of the country. For safety and rescue, there are three escape tunnels with a combined length of 30.1 kilometres. Additionally, the section includes 30 curves spanning 23.72 kilometres. To further enhance passenger safety and comfort, several advanced features have been incorporated, such as ballastless tracks and canted turnouts (a first for the Indian

Railways),” explained a project director of the railways. Besides, CCTV monitoring and state-of-the-art tunnel-safety technology, including ventilation and firefighting systems, are some of the other added safety features. So far as electrification is concerned, the Baramulla-Srinagar-Banihal-Sangaldan section of the USBRL project, which spans 185.66 RKM (route kilometres) and serves 19 railway stations, is complete, the sources said. “Constructed for Rs 470.23 crore, with electrification, it is possible to operate the state-of-the-art Vande Bharat trains in the section. Other noteworthy features include 25-KV OHE inside the longest operational tunnel (tunnel T-80 in the Banihal-Quazigund section), specialised equipment for high-altitude operations and 132/33-KV traction substations at altitudes exceeding 1,600 MSL,” added the official.

Cotton candy under FSSAI scanner over toxic chemicals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Fluffy texture, vibrant colours, and sweet flavor made Cotton Candy, also called ‘Buddhi ke Baal’ a popular choice among young ones and adults alike across the country, but it has now come under the scanner of the Food Safety Standard Authority India (FSSAI) following reports of detection of cancer causing chemicals recently in Tamil Nadu which has now banned its sale. Puducherry was the first State to prohibit the sale of Cotton candy. More States may follow the suit as sources in the top food regulator body soon all the food inspectors across the States will be asked to pick the samples to test its content. They said that the laboratory test results on Cotton candy that were seized by state health officials during the crackdown in Chennai Marina Beach and Besant Nagar beaches when it was being sold last week showed that they contain Rhodamine-B, a cancer-causing chemical. It has raised alarms among the authorities, highlighting the importance of ensuring the safety and quality of such treats to protect the health of children who enjoy them. The test results showed that it has a chemical called ‘Rhodamine B’ that was used in matches and incense sticks. The harmful chemicals were mixed to produce vivid pink



and green hues. Usually, the chemical is used to dye clothes, which can lead to liver failure, the officials said. A chemical compound, Rhodamine B, also known as RhB, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH.gov) after entering the body with food, has a distributed effect on cells and tissues. Prolonged consumption of RhB-contaminated food can cause cancer or liver damage. Its presence in excess can lead to poisoning-like conditions. The officials said that they are taking steps to address these concerns and safeguard the well-being of young consumers, emphasizing the need for vigilance in monitoring food products aimed at children. “The presence of such harmful substances underscores the importance of stringent food safety regulations and underscores the need for

thorough testing and monitoring to ensure the well-being of consumers,” said the official. A few weeks ago, the Puducherry government also banned its sale. Tamilisai Soundararajan, Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry had taken to her personal Instagram handle to urge people not to buy cotton candy, particularly for kids, as it contains toxic chemicals. “People should be aware that food items having colour additives must not be given to children,” she said in the video. Cotton candy is also called ‘fairy floss’ and ‘Buddhi Ke Baal’ is made from sugar syrup, then spun through a small hole, which are collected on a stick and is then served as a cotton candy. Made in different colours, this dish is eaten with great taste and is said to be very light in weight.

India to review ties with Greece during Greek PM visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India and Greece will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral ties and explore ways to further strengthen strategic partnership during Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis two-day state visit to India from February 21. It will be the first visit to India by a head of state of Greece to India after a gap of 15 years. Announcing his schedule, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Saturday “Prime Minister Narendra Modi and PM Mitsotakis will hold bilateral discussions and Prime Minister Modi will also host a lunch banquet in honour of the visiting dignitary.” India-Greece relations were elevated to ‘strategic partnership’ during Modi’s visit to

Greece in August last year. Mitsotakis will be the chief guest and keynote speaker at the Raisina Dialogue in the national capital, MEA said adding the Greek prime minister will be accompanied by senior officials and a high-powered business delegation. “Prime Minister Mitsotakis’s visit is expected to further strengthen and deepen the strategic partnership between India and Greece,” the MEA said. Mitsotakis will also visit Mumbai before returning to Athens. India-Greece relations are based on shared cultural values, commitment to foster economic growth, collaboration in the fields of security and defence, shipping, maritime and marked by convergence on regional and global issues. The two countries have also been cooperating closely in various multilateral forums, MEA said.

Shah pays tribute to Karpoori

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday paid tributes to socialist icon and former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur on his death anniversary and said he worked for the rights of the backward people and women throughout his life. The government last month had announced the country’s highest civilian award Bharat Ratna for Thakur. In a post in Hindi on X, Shah said Thakur set highest standards of honesty and sacrifice in his social life. Thakur worked for the rights of backward people and women throughout his life and carried out important works to make education system accessible to all, he said. Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought into light the works of Thakur by honouring him with the Bharat Ratna.

Young Dangal star Suhani tragically passes away at just 19

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Suhani Bhatnagar, a young life filled with promise, talent, and potential cut short far too soon. At just 19, Suhani had already made a significant mark in the world of cinema with her portrayal of young Babita Phogat in the critically acclaimed Amir Khan’s film “Dangal.” The news of her untimely demise was confirmed by a close relative to the media.

Suhani, who died on February 16, was cremated at the Ajrona crematorium in Sector-15, Faridabad on Saturday, according to reports. Although the specific details surrounding her death were not elaborated upon, reports suggest that the reason is said to be fluid accumulation throughout her body. Some time ago, Suhani had an accident, which resulted in a fracture in her leg. The medications she took during treatment had such a side

effect on her that slowly her body began to accumulate fluid. She was admitted to Delhi’s AIIMS hospital for quite some time but despite medical intervention, she succumbed to her condition on February 16th, having been admitted on February 7th. Hailing from Faridabad, Suhani gained prominence for her role in “Dangal,” a biographical drama depicting the journey of wrestler Mahavir Phogat and his daughters’ rise to success in the sport. Suhani portrayed the



younger version of Babita Phogat, while Zaira Wasim

played the young Geeta. The film, directed by Nitesh Tiwari

and starring Aamir Khan as Mahavir Phogat, received widespread acclaim for its powerful storytelling and performances. Despite her promising career in acting, Suhani had temporarily stepped away from the lime-light to focus on her studies. The sudden loss of Suhani Bhatnagar has left the film industry and her fans in shock and sadness, as they remember her as a talented young actress with a bright future ahead. Netizens at the social platforms like X expressed their

grief saying “so young, gone too soon.” Aamir Khan Productions, in a social media post, expressed deep sorrow over Suhani’s passing, highlighting her talent and integral role in the film. Similarly, director Nitesh Tiwari mourned her death, describing her as a vibrant and joyous individual. “We are deeply saddened to hear about our Suhani passing away. Our heartfelt condolences to her mother Poojaji and the entire family. Such a

talented young girl, such a team player, ‘Dangal’ would have been incomplete without Suhani.” Suhani, you will always remain a star in our hearts. May you rest in peace,” Aamir Khan Productions said in the post on X. The film’s director Nitesh Tiwari also mourned the death. “Suhani’s passing away is absolutely shocking and heartbreaking. She was such a happy soul, so full of life. My deepest condolences to her family,” he said in a statement.

Navalny's mother is still waiting for his body

AP ■ MOSCOW

Alexei Navalny's spokesperson confirmed Saturday that the Russian opposition leader had died at a remote Arctic penal colony and said he was "murdered," but it is unclear where his body is.

An official note handed to Navalny's mother stated that he died at 2:17 pm local time Friday, Kira Yarmysh said. She added that an employee of the prison colony said that Navalny's body was taken to the nearby city of Salekhard as part of a probe into his death. She demanded that his body be handed over to his family.

When a lawyer and Navalny's mother visited the morgue in Salekhard, it was closed, Navalny's team said, writing on their Telegram channel. The lawyer called the morgue and was told that Navalny's body is not there, his team said.

"We demand that Alexey Navalny's body be handed over to his family immediately," Yarmysh wrote on X, previously Twitter. The cause and the circumstances

of Navalny's death Friday remain largely unclear.

Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service reported that Navalny felt sick after a walk and became unconscious at the penal colony in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 kilometres (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. An ambulance arrived, but he couldn't be revived. The cause of death is still "being established," it said.

Maria Pevchikh, head of the board of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, said that the opposition leader would "live on forever in millions of hearts."

"Navalny was murdered. We still don't know how we'll keep on living, but together, we'll think of something," she wrote on X.

Arrests continued Saturday after more than 100 people were detained in various Russian cities Friday when they came to lay flowers in memory of Navalny at memorials to the victims of Soviet-era purges, according to OVD-Info, a group that monitors political repression in Russia.



The tributes were removed overnight, but people continued trickling in with flowers on Saturday. In Moscow, a large group of people chanted "shame" as police dragged a screaming woman from the crowd, video shared on social media showed.

More than 10 people were detained at a memorial in St Petersburg, including a priest who came to conduct a service for

Navalny there.

In other cities across the country, police cordoned off some of the memorials and officers were taking pictures of those who came and writing down their personal data in a clear intimidation attempt.

Navalny had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow to face certain arrest after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin. He was later convicted three times, saying each case was politically motivated, and received a sentence of 19 years for extremism.

After the last verdict, Navalny said he understood he was "serving a life sentence, which is measured by the length of my life or the length of life of this regime."

The news of Navalny's death comes less than a month before an election that will give President Vladimir Putin another six years in power.

It shows "that the sentence in Russia now for opposition is not merely imprisonment, but death," said Nigel Gould-Davies, a former British ambassador to

Belarus and senior fellow for Russia & Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

Hours after Navalny's death was reported, his wife, Yulia Navalnaya, made a dramatic appearance at a security conference in Germany where many world leaders had gathered.

She said she was unsure if she could believe the news from official Russian sources, "but if this is true, I want Putin and everyone around Putin, Putin's friends, his government to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family and to my husband."

US President Joe Biden said Washington doesn't know exactly what happened, "but there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something Putin and his thugs did."

The Kremlin bristled at the outpouring of anger from world leaders, with Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying as "inadmissible and outrageous," noting that medics haven't issued their verdict on the cause of Navalny's death.

Ukraine withdrawing from Avdiivka

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's military chief said early Saturday that he's withdrawing troops from the city of Avdiivka in eastern Ukraine, where outnumbered defenders have battled a Russian assault for four months.

The timing is critical as Russia is looking for a morale boost ahead of the second anniversary on Feb 24 of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the March presidential election in Russia.

In a short statement posted on Facebook, Ukrainian commander Col Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi said he had made the decision to avoid encirclement and "preserve the lives and health of servicemen".

The commander-in-chief added that troops were moving to "more favourable lines".

"Our soldiers performed their military duty with dignity, did everything possible to destroy the best Russian military units, inflicted significant losses on the

enemy in terms of manpower and equipment.

"We are taking measures to stabilise the situation and maintain our positions," the statement read. The withdrawal came a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday made another trip to western Europe, hoping to press his country's Western allies to keep providing military support.

It was Syrskyi's first major test since being appointed as Ukraine's new army chief last week.

In his previous position as commander of Ukraine's ground forces, he faced criticism for holding on to the city of Bakhmut for nine months, a siege that became the war's longest and bloodiest battle and cost Ukraine dearly, but also served to sap Russia's forces.

In recent days, reports emerged that Ukrainian troops in Avdiivka faced a deteriorating situation.

Rodion Kudriashov, deputy commander of the 3rd Assault

Brigade, said Friday that Ukrainian troops were still holding out against the onslaught of about 15,000 Russian soldiers, but he expected the situation would "soon become critical".

"The enemy is trying to penetrate our defence and in some places to bypass our positions," he told The Associated Press.

The 3rd Brigade said on its social media account Friday that its soldiers were at the huge Avdiivka Coke Plant. Russian warplanes have been dropping about 60 bombs a day, relentlessly shelling the area and launching assaults with armour and infantry, the brigade said.

A video showed dense black smoke over the factory, said to be caused by burning fuel oil reservoirs. The post said: "Poisonous smog spreads all over the plant."

Russian media reported the Kremlin's forces were making extensive use of plane-launched glide bombs, which fly at a shallower angle, to batter Ukrainian positions.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said on Thursday that Russian forces were beginning to overwhelm Ukrainian defences in the eastern city. He said Avdiivka is at risk of falling to Russia, a development he blamed "in very large part" on the fact that Ukrainian forces are running out of artillery ammunition.

The United States is Ukraine's biggest single supporter but some \$60 billion for Kyiv is being held up by political disagreements among American lawmakers.

Heavily fortified with a web of tunnels and concrete fortifications, Avdiivka lies in the northern suburbs of Donetsk, a city in a region of the same name that Russian forces partially occupy. Capturing Avdiivka could be a timely boost for Moscow and serve as a possible springboard for Russia to drive deeper into the region. Fewer than 1,000 people remain in the city, according to the Donetsk regional governor, Vadym Filashkin.

Pakistan's CEC, Chief Justice involved in poll-rigging, alleges bureaucrat

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A senior Pakistani bureaucrat on Saturday alleged that the chief election commissioner and the chief justice were involved in poll-rigging in the recent election as he resigned from his post, taking the "responsibility for all this wrongdoing".

Former Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Ali Chattha's remarks came amidst jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party began nationwide protests against alleged rigging and stealing of its mandate in the February 8 elections.

Speaking to reporters at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Chattha said the candidates who were "losing" the elections "were made to win".

"I am taking the responsibility for all this wrongdoing and telling you that the chief election commissioner and the chief justice are also completely involved in this," he was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper.

Chattha resigned from his office after "accepting responsibility" for manipulation of poll results, it said.

He said "stabbing the country in its back does not let" him sleep.

"I should be punished for the injustice I have done and others who were involved in this injustice should also be punished," Chattha said.

The former bureaucrat said there was "pressure" on him to the extent that he contemplated suicide but then resolved to present matters before the public.

"It is my request to the entire bureaucracy to not do anything wrong for all these politicians," he said.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has strongly rejected the allegations Chattha has made against the chief election commissioner.

In a press statement, it said, "The Election Commission of Pakistan strongly rejects the allegations levelled by the Commissioner Rawalpindi on the chief election commissioner or the election commission and the official of the election commission never issued any instructions regarding changing the election results to the Commissioner Rawalpindi.

"Neither is the commissioner of any division ever appointed as a District

Returning Officer, Returning Officer or Presiding Officer nor do they ever play a direct role in the conduct of elections."

However, it said that the matter would be investigated.

Punjab's caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has also ordered an "impartial probe" into the allegations made by Chattha.

Taking notice of the claims in a statement, he directed that a "high-level committee" be constituted to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

"An independent inquiry of the allegations will be held," Naqvi asserted, adding that the facts will be brought forward. Following Chattha's press conference, police reached the venue and arrested him. He has been shifted to an unknown location by the security officials.

Sunak urges Conservatives to come together to beat Opp

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Saturday made a direct appeal to voters to stick with his plan to turn things around as he made a plea for the Conservative family to come together to beat the Opposition Labour Party in a general election later this year. Writing in "The Daily Telegraph" a day after bruising double defeats in by-elections that saw the governing Conservatives lose two of parliamentary strongholds, the 43-year-old British Indian leader reiterated a previous claim that the results were down to voter apathy and low turnout.

Sunak urged the electorate to back him and support his party in the general election because by then he expects his plan for the country will be delivering the goals he had set out. "The Conservative family must come together to defeat Labour and

ensure a brighter future for our country," Sunak wrote.

"I know that the last year has not been easy. I understand why people feel exhausted with politics. I get why people choose to stay at home rather than come out in a by-election that won't change the government," he said and added, "But later this year, we will have a general election that will decide who governs our country. I am confident that by then we will have made more progress that the plan will be delivering the security and opportunity that people crave."

This direct plea to the voters comes amid some tough political times for the British Prime Minister, who is under pressure from within his party to change course before it is too late.

Drawing a clear divide between his leadership and that being proposed by Labour Leader Keir Starmer, Sunak asserted that his opponent had no



plan and would take the country backwards.

He said: "A vote for anyone other than the Conservatives will just help Starmer. The reason we will stick to the plan and the reason I, unlike Keir Starmer, am willing to make difficult decisions to address the long-term problems our country faces is because a strong economy is the bedrock upon which a successful country is built. "The choice at the election later this year will be between this Conservative vision for Britain and a Labour Party that would just take us back to square

one." He sought to spotlight some of his successes, such as halving inflation since he took charge in October 2022 and lowering taxes, even as he admitted that progress on his other pledges such as slashing illegal migration and cutting National Health Service (NHS) waiting lists has been slow. "Delivering the change our country needs means taking difficult long-term decisions and sticking to the plan. Keir Starmer and the Labour Party can't say what they would do because they do not have a plan ... But it's not just the fact that Labour doesn't have a plan for the economy that threatens our progress. They would also make life more expensive and more burdensome for business," he cautioned. The strong by-election impact of the far-right Reform UK, formerly Brexit Party, has led to the right wing of his party pushing Sunak to get tougher on issues such as immigration.

Imran's party begins nationwide protests

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

Authorities on Saturday imposed prohibitory orders here in Pakistan's capital as jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party began nationwide protests against alleged rigging and stealing of its mandate in the recent elections.

Criticising the outcome of the polls, which saw the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party-backed independent candidates emerging as the largest group by winning over 90 National Assembly seats, the PTI announced holding country-wide "peaceful protests" against what it termed "record-high rigging".

The protests began with a march in Wana in South Waziristan of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The party has decided to sit in the Opposition in Parliament.

"The PTI has called for country-wide protests against the unprecedented, massive, brazen rigging in general elections 2024, where PTI's win of 180 National Assembly seats

and a two-thirds majority in the parliament, was cut down to half," the party said in a statement. "The 2024 elections would be remembered in the country's history due to the scale of rigging," PTI spokesperson Raouf Hasan said.

The Islamabad police have said that section 144 is in force in the city and the security is on "high alert", as the PTI is set to begin its countrywide protests, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Without directly referring to protests, it said that there could be increased traffic near the F9 park and urged the public to avoid "unnecessary travel" on the nearby routes.

The police said that special forces of the Counter Terrorism Department had been deployed on patrol to deal with any emergency. "Patrolling has been increased across the district while checking has been tightened at checkpoints," it added. The police in Islamabad dug up a ditch near the Lahore Press Club to stop the PTI protest. A heavy contingent of police was deployed there to thwart the PTI protest.

Meanwhile, Punjab Police clamped down on PTI leaders and workers in Lahore who were protesting against "massive rigging" in the elections.

Police arrested Imran Khan's lawyer Salman Akram Raja and scores of PTI women who gathered on Jail Road on the call of the jailed premier to protest against the massive rigging in the elections that deprived the PTI of at least over 90 National Assembly seats.

A heavy contingent of police gathered outside the PTI office on Jail Road and baton-charged the party workers protesting against the rigging. TV footage showed the police manhandling the PTI women workers and bundling them into police vans.

Known lawyer and Khan's counsel Salman Akram Raja was also arrested.

Khan's PTI is not the only party that has voiced its concerns over the February 8 polls, as the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), and others have also complained of rigging during the elections.

Taliban leader among 7 held in Pakistan

PTI ■ LAHORE

Police in Pakistan's Punjab province on Saturday claimed to have foiled a major terror plot by arresting seven terrorists, including a key Taliban commander.

The spokesman for the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Pakistan's Punjab Police said that it conducted several intelligence-based operations in different districts of the province and arrested seven suspected terrorists with weapons, explosives and other prohibited materials.

He said that Husnain Moaviya, a key commander of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had been arrested in Bahawalpur, some 400kms from Lahore.

Other arrested militants belonged to banned organizations — TTP, Al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

Taliban diktat on clothing, guardians leave Afghan women scared: UN

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Afghan women feel scared for unsafe leaving their homes alone because of Taliban decrees and enforcement campaigns on clothing and male guardians, according to a report from the UN mission in Afghanistan.

The report, issued Friday, comes days before a UN-convened meeting in the Qatari capital is set to start, with member states and special envoys to Afghanistan to discuss engagement with the Taliban and the country's crises, including the human rights situation. The Taliban — which took over Afghanistan in 2021 during the final weeks of US and NATO withdrawal from the country — have barred women from most areas of public life and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed despite initial promises of a more moderate rule.

They are also restricting

women's access to work, travel and health care if they are unmarried or don't have a male guardian, and arresting those who don't comply with the Taliban's interpretation of hijab, or Islamic headscarf.

The UN mission's report, published Friday, said the decrees are being enforced through arrest, harassment and intimidation. Women said they increasingly fear going to public spaces owing to the threat of arrest and the "long-lasting stigma and shame" associated with being taken into police custody.

Over half of the women interviewed for the report felt unsafe leaving the house without a male guardian, or mahram. Risks to their security and their anxiety levels worsened whenever a new decree was announced specifically targeting them, the report said.

Women who went out with a mahram felt safer but noted the stress from depending on another person to accompany

them. Some said their male guardians chided them for "wasting time" if they wanted to visit certain shops or stray from a route limited to performing basic necessary tasks.

This undercut chances to "enjoy even micro-moments of stimulation or leisure" outside the home, said the report.

Some women said that male relatives were also afraid and reluctant to leave the home with female relatives, as this would expose them to Taliban harassment. A spokesman from the Vice and Virtue Ministry, the Taliban's morality police that enforces such decrees, said it was "nonsense and untrue" that women are scared to go to the shops.

"There is no problem for those sisters (women) who have observed hijab," said Abdul Ghafar Farooq. "As women are naturally weaker than men, then Shariah (Islamic law) has called mahrams essential when traveling with them for the sake of their dignity and respect."

Trump spared 'corporate death penalty'

AP ■ NEW YORK

A New York judge on Friday spared the ex-president that worst case punishment as he ruled in a civil case alleging Trump fraudulently misrepresented financial figures to get cheaper loans and other benefits.

Still, Trump got slammed hard, facing big cash penalties, outside supervision of his companies and restrictions on his borrowing.

In a pretrial ruling last year, the same judge threatened to shut down much of the Republican presidential front-runner's business by calling for the "dissolution" of corporate entities that hold many of his marquee properties. That raised the specter of possible fire sales of Trump Tower, a Wall Street skyscraper and other properties.

But New York Supreme Court Judge Arthur Engoron called off the dissolution.

Instead, he said the court would appoint two monitors to oversee the Trump Organization to make sure it

doesn't continue to submit false figures.

"It's a complete reversal," said real estate lawyer Adam Leitman Bailey. "There's a big difference between having to sell your assets and a monitor who gets to look over your shoulders."

In his ruling, Engoron banned Trump from serving as an officer or director in any New York corporation for three years, prohibited him from taking out loans with New York banks and said his company and other defendants have to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in fines.

Here is how the decision is likely to impact his business:

CASH DRAIN: This is possibly the worst hit from the ruling.

Trump and his businesses were told they would have to pay \$355 million for "ill gotten gains." Trump's sons, Eric and Donald Trump Jr., who help run the business, were ordered to pay \$4 million each. Trump's former chief financial officer was ordered to pay \$1 million, for a total judgment of \$364

million.

The penalties will slam Trump's finances at a moment he is facing other steep legal bills stemming from several criminal cases. Trump separately was hit with \$88 million in judgments in sexual abuse and defamation lawsuits brought by writer E. Jean Carroll.

It gets worse.

Trump is also required to pay interest from the dates when he received benefits from his alleged fraud. That so-called pre-judgement interest adds another \$100 million to Trump's bills, according to New York's attorney general.

NO TRUMP PROPERTY FIRE SALE: The judge's summary ruling in September was vague in exactly what he meant by a "dissolution" of Trump businesses. But several legal experts told The Associated Press that in the worse case it could have led to a sale of not only of his New York properties, but his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, a Chicago hotel and condo building, and several golf clubs, including ones in

Miami, Los Angeles and Scotland.

One of Trump's lawyers, Christopher Kise, called that potential outcome a "corporate death penalty."

Not even the New York attorney general, who filed the lawsuit against Trump, had asked for a "dissolution."

THREE-YEAR BAN: The ban on Trump serving as an officer or director for a New York corporation suggests a big shakeup at the Trump Organization, but the real impact isn't clear. Trump may be removed from the corner office, but as an owner of the business his right to appoint someone to act on his behalf has not been revoked.

"It's not that he can't have influence at these enterprises," said University of Michigan law professor William Thomas. "He just can't hold any actually appointed positions."

Thomas added, however, much depends on how the monitor will handle Trump's attempt to run his company by proxy. "He might want to walk in the office and tell them what

to do, but there will be push-back," he said. "It could limit the avenues through which he can exert control."

BUSINESS LOANS: Trump is also banned from getting loans from New York-chartered banks, a potentially devastating blow given so many major lenders are based in the city. Luckily for Trump, he has cut his debt by hundreds of millions in recent years and so won't need to refinance as much. He also has pushed out the maturity of many loans still on the books by several years.

The impact on funding for future businesses could be crushing, though. Without access to banks, he may be forced to use cash to finance new ventures, something that real estate moguls are loath to do and that won't be easy given his cash payments.

Still, only banks appear banned in the ruling, leaving Trump free to borrow from fast-growing alternative financiers, the private equity and hedge funds that make up the so-called shadow banking world.

Centre raises FCI authorised capital

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has increased the authorised capital of state-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) from Rs 10,000 crore to Rs 21,000 crore to enhance the operational capabilities and fulfill its mandate effectively, the Food Ministry said on Saturday. FCI is the central government's nodal agency that undertakes procurement of foodgrains at a minimum support price (MSP) to protect the interest of farmers. It also maintains strategic stocks and distributes the grains under different welfare schemes. "The increase in authorised capital is a significant step towards enhancing the operational capabilities of FCI in fulfilling its mandate



effectively," the ministry said in a statement. FCI resorts to cash credit, short-term loan, ways and means etc. To match the gap in the fund requirement. The increase in the authorised capital will reduce the interest burden, decrease the economic cost and ultimately

affecting the government subsidy positively, it said. With this infusion of capital, the FCI should also embark upon modernizing its storage facilities, improving transportation networks, and adopting advanced technologies. These measures are essential

not only for reducing post-harvest losses but also for ensuring efficient distribution of food grains to consumers, it added. The Centre provides equity to the FCI for working capital requirement and for creation of capital assets. The FCI is undertaking a comprehensive

initiative to create an integrated IT system, leveraging existing internal and external systems. Through the e-office implementation FCI is making efforts towards a paperless office culture. These initiatives of integrated IT solutions serving as the

core operational software for FCI, should provide a single source of information and streamline functions with a common digital backbone. According to the ministry, the FCI has taken several steps to enhance its efficiency including construction of cement roads, roof maintenance, illumination, and weighbridge upgradation. Besides, it has also purchased lab equipment and developed a software platform for quality checking. The government's dual commitment to MSP-based procurement and investment in FCI's operational capabilities signifies a collaborative effort towards empowering farmers, fortifying the agricultural sector, and ensuring food security for the nation, it said.



Power Grid unfazed by proposed O&M norms changes by CERC

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Power Grid Corporation (POWERGRID) expects "no impact" from proposed changes in Operation & Maintenance (O&M) charges norms by Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), a top company official said. The official said the company was in discussion with the regulator. Draft regulations suggest altering the prior 75:25 (substation vs transmission line) O&M cost distribution to 65:35 ratio, increasing transmission line charges while decreasing substation charges. Chairman and Managing Director Ravindra Kumar Tyagi claimed "net impact is almost zero," with overall O&M charges maintained. "They have added one more element, 'reactor'. Earlier, we were not incurring any O&M charges for reactors. Now, reactor charges have been added per MVAR (Mega Volt-Ampere Reactive), similar to transformer charges per MVA capacity, such as Rs 20 lakh or so per

MVA. Therefore, those charges have been added. The net impact is negligible almost zero, we are going to receive the same O&M charges as before", he told investors in an analyst call. Speaking regarding Return on Equity (ROE), proposed norms suggest existing assets at 15.5 per cent and setting 15 per cent for new projects after April 1, 2024, he said discussions were on with the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) and power grid was optimistic that final norms won't adversely affect the company's revenue or profitability. The company was aiming to cross capex of Rs 10,000 crore in the current fiscal. "Our capex in Q3, on a consolidated basis is Rs 3,444 crore, and for nine months it is Rs 7,690 crore. We are hopeful that this capex will be almost Rs 10,000 crore plus," he said. Power Grid's consolidated income during the December 2023 quarter was Rs 11,820 crore. During the quarter, net profit rose 10 per cent YoY to Rs 4,028 crore.

Cutting China out of trade will be historic mistake: Wang Yi

AP ■ MUNICH

China's foreign minister told a gathering of international security policy officials Saturday that trying to shut China out of trade in the name of avoiding dependency would be a historic mistake. Wang Yi spoke at the Munich Security Conference. Host Germany wants to avoid over-reliance on trade with an increasingly assertive China and diversify its supply of key goods in an approach it calls "de-risking." That's in line with the approach of other industrial powers in the Group of Seven, which has stressed that it doesn't seek to harm China or thwart its development. Beijing has criticized the strategy. "Today ... More people have come to realize that the absence of cooperation is the biggest risk," Wang said through an interpreter. "Those who attempt to shut China out in the name of de-risking will make a historical mistake." "The world economy is like a big ocean that cannot be cut into isolated lakes," he added. "The trend toward economic



globalisation cannot be reversed. We need to work together to make globalisation more universally beneficial and inclusive." Wang also renewed China's pushback against allegations of forced labour in the western Xinjiang region, where it is accused of running labour transfer programmes in which Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities are forced to toil in factories as part of a longstanding campaign of assimilation and mass detention. He complained of "fabricated information from different parties" and asserted that the aim is "to stop the development of China."

Hyderabad sees 1 pc fall in house registration

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Hyderabad region has witnessed a 1 per cent annual fall in registrations of residential properties in January to 5,411 units, according to Knight Frank. As many as 5,454 housing units were registered in January 2023 across the Hyderabad residential market, which includes four districts namely Hyderabad, Medchal-Malkajgiri, Rangareddy and Sangareddy. The data covers transactions of both primary (first sale) and secondary (resale) markets. As per the data compiled by real estate consultant Knight Frank India, the total value of properties registered during January stood at Rs 3,279 crore, which is 24 per cent higher year-on-year, indicating a movement towards sale of higher value homes. In January 2024, 47 per cent housing properties registrations were in the price range of Rs 25-50 lakhs. Properties priced below Rs 25 lakh constituted 15 per cent of the total registration numbers. The consultant highlighted that the share of sales registrations for properties costing Rs 1 crore and above



has increased to 14 per cent in January 2024, as compared to 8 per cent in January 2023. Properties registered in January 2024 were largely concentrated in the range of 1,000 - 2,000 square feet, accounting for 71 per cent of registrations. There was a moderation in demand for smaller homes (below 1,000 square feet), with registrations for this category falling to 16 per cent during January 2024, from 19 per cent in January

2023. However, properties larger than 2,000 square feet saw an increase in demand, with registrations rising to 13 per cent during January 2024, from 9 per cent in January 2023. On a district-level, Rangareddy emerged as the leading contributor to registrations in January 2024, capturing 43 per cent of the total market share. Medchal-Malkajgiri came in second with 42 per cent share.

Hyderabad district accounted for 15 per cent of the total registrations in January 2024. During January 2024, the weighted average prices of transacted residential properties witnessed a sharp annual increase of 14 per cent. Among the districts, Rangareddy experienced the sharpest increase of 12 per cent year-on-year (YoY), while Hyderabad and Medchal-Malkajgiri experienced an increase of 11 per cent and 5 per cent YoY, respectively. "The Hyderabad residential market displayed a promising start to 2024, characterised by a stable property registration momentum and a notable uptick in demand for high-quality homes in January," said Shishir Baijal, Chairman and Managing Director, Knight Frank India. This is reflected not just in the growth in price level but also the aspirational drive of homebuyers towards upgrading to higher value properties, he said. "Developers, too, are actively keeping pace with these trends, demonstrating adaptability to meet the evolving preferences of discerning buyers," Baijal said.

Bandhan Bank to collect revenues of Bengal govt

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Private lender Bandhan Bank on Saturday said that it has been authorised by the West Bengal government to collect tax and non-tax receipts on its behalf. The mandate will enable the bank to collect revenues through the Government Receipt Portal System (GRIPS). By virtue of this mandate, people will be able to pay various taxes like property tax, motor vehicle tax and professional tax using this portal, the



lender said. The bank will soon be integrating itself with the West Bengal government to operationalise the payment collection process. Debraj Saha, head-government business, Bandhan Bank said West Bengal is among the top three markets for Bandhan Bank. The bank has over 1,700 transaction outlets in the state, he said. GRIPS is an online internet-based platform for making various tax and non-tax payments to the West Bengal government.

Banks to review their empanelled advocates

New Delhi: Banks will conduct periodical review of the performance of empanelled advocates at debt recovery tribunals and rationalise the cases assigned to them based on performance, the finance ministry said on Saturday. This is part of the issues discussed at a conference of Chairpersons of Debt Recovery Appellate Tribunals

and Presiding Officers of Debt Recovery Tribunals chaired by Department of Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi. The meeting was also attended by senior officers from the public and private sectors banks; CEO, IBA; and senior officers from the Ministry of Finance and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI). PTI

BUSINESS BRIEF

SECL CMD GETS BUSINESS LEADER AWARD

New Delhi: SECL Chairman and Managing Director Prem Sagar Mishra has been awarded "Business Leader of the Year Award" for the second consecutive year. Under the leadership of Mishra, the company has achieved the fastest coal production of 150 MT in its history Promoting sustainable development, this year the company has planted more than 10 lakh saplings, the highest in Coal India. Two days ago, he was honoured with "CEO with HR Orientation Award" for HR-centric management.



CMD DR. PREM SAGAR MISHRA HONOURED WITH "BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR (PSU) AWARD" AT THE 22ND EDITION OF BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR AWARD

NILEKANI'S GROUP INITIATIVE

New Delhi: New Delhi: Bachpan Manao, Badhte Jao, an initiative of Nandan & Rohini Nilekani's and Shankar Maruwada's EkStep Foundation aimed to educate about, and celebrate, the abundance of the early childhood years, launched an engaging film across social media platforms and 1,000+ screens of PVR across the country titled 'Celebrate Childhood. Keep Growing'. The short film follows a group of adventurous children as they explore nature during a hill-climbing adventure, embracing their natural curiosity. A grantee of Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies under EkStep Foundation, Bachpan Manao, Badhte Jao is championing the importance of holistic development of children by ensuring ample opportunities for exploration and growth through play, especially during the critical first eight years of life.



MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (Building & Electric)

Tel.No (0240) 2333536-40

Address: Municipal Corporation Chhatrapati Sambhajanagar, Executive Engineer (Building & Electric)

Fax.No.(0240)-2331213

Head office : Town Hall Pin 431001 E-Tender Call AMC (For Help): Cell No. 9764999592

No/AMC/Dy.Eng/Drg.-Bldg./627/2024 Date 17/02/2024

Sr. No	Work Name	Last Date of Tender Submission
1	Development work of various Smashanbhumi in Chh. Sambhajanagar. (Civil work). (Tender Amount Rs.7.83,36,782/-)	03/03/2024

Note 1. For the above stated work is available on web site www.mahatenders.gov.in

Sd/-
Executive Engineer (Building & Electric)
Municipal Corporation Chhatrapati Sambhajanagar.

UJJAIN SMART CITY LIMITED

Mela Office, Kothi Road, Ujjain (M.P.) Ph. 0734-2525856

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

No. USCL/266 Tender ID: 2024_UAD_334094_1 Date:- 17.02.2024

Ujjain Smart City Limited Invites Interested parties for "Guinness World Record for The Largest Display of Oil Lamps Deepotsav "Shiv Jyoti Arpanam 2024" (5th-9th April, 2024) In Ujjain Madhya Pradesh". Interested bidders may purchase and submit their proposals online at www.mptenders.gov.in.

Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 1,00,000/-
Cost of Document	Rs. 10,000/-
Probable Amount of Contract	NA
Pre Bid Meeting Date	26.02.2024
Last date for submission of Technical and Financial Bid (Online)	02.03.2024 up to 17:00 Hrs

For more details, please visit <https://www.mptenders.gov.in>. Any Corrigendum or amendments shall be published on this website only.

For, Ujjain Smart City Limited

Himachal proposes no fresh tax

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Saturday presented the annual state Budget of Rs 58,444 crore for 2024-25 with focus on the agriculture and rural sectors, and announced an increase in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for milk. The government did not propose any new tax for the next fiscal. Presenting his second state Budget, Sukhu, who also holds the finance portfolio, announced a hike in MSP of cow milk from Rs 38 to Rs 45 per litre and buffalo milk from Rs 47 to Rs 55 per litre. Himachal is the first state to give MSP on milk, he said. The rural-oriented Budget focused on strengthening farming and animal husbandry sectors, besides announcing steps to make the state self-reliant. He said liabilities of all milk cooperative societies will be waived off and Rs 150 crore will be spent on strengthening infrastructure for milk

procurement and its processing. The revenue receipts and expenditure are estimated at Rs 42,153 crore and Rs 46,667 crore, respectively, implying that the estimated revenue loss will be Rs 4,514 crore. The fiscal deficit was estimated at Rs 10,784 crore that was 4.75 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). Of every Rs 100 expenditure, Rs 25 would be spent on salaries, Rs 17 on pension, Rs 11 on interest, Rs 9 on loan repayment, and Rs 10 on grants to autonomous institutions and only Rs 28 would be spent on other activities an capital works. Reiterating his resolve to make a green state by 2026, Sukhu announced Rajiv Gandhi Prakritik Kheti Yojana, under which 36,000 farmers -- 10 farmers from every panchayat -- will be trained in natural farming techniques. Universal cartons will be introduced for apple packaging, and horticulture tourism will be encouraged, he added. Announcing 4 per cent

additional Dearness Allowance (DA) for government employees from April 1, 2024, he said arrears of revised pay scales will be paid to employees and pensioners in a phased manner. The DA increase will put an additional financial burden of Rs 580 crore on the state exchequer. Blaming the previous BJP government of financial mismanagement, Sukhu said the debt burden of the state has mounted to Rs 87,788 crore.

Sukhu said a sum of Rs 22,406 crore was due to Himachal from the Centre. This, he said, included a proposal of Rs 9,906 crore post-disaster need assessment sent to the Centre, Rs 4,500 crore due from Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) as power arrears, and Rs 8,000 crore employees' contribution under the National Pension Scheme (NPS). He said the state government announced a special package

of Rs 4,500 crore for disaster-affected people after last year's monsoon, and added that the Centre had not given the state any special package. Sukhu said the state government will introduce new policies to promote startups, encourage sportspersons, besides making HP a prominent destination for filmmakers and to put a tab on illegal mining activities. Other announcements included setting up of the first

modernised de-addiction and rehabilitation centre at Kandaghat in Solan district, appointment of 6,000 nursery teachers, and monthly review meeting of schools. He also said 327 old diesel buses will be replaced with electric buses and vehicle scrap centres will be established in the state. The CM also announced increasing the daily wages of MGNREGA workers by Rs 60 from Rs 240 to Rs 300 per day and increase the honorarium of functionaries of panchayati raj institutions and urban local bodies. The government proposed to increase MLA discretionary grant from Rs 13 lakh to Rs 14 lakh and 'Vidhayak Kshetra Vikas Nidhi Yojana' from Rs 2.10 crore to 2.20 crore. Himachal Pradesh Transformation Cell and Sustainable Development Goals Coordination Centre will be set up in the planning department to give suggestions to accelerate the development based on best practices and monitoring and evaluation of the development programmes, Sukhu said.

INDIAN WOMEN ENTER MAIDEN FINAL

PTI ■ SHAH ALAM (MALAYSIA)

India kept alive hopes of winning a first-ever gold in Badminton Asia Team Championships after the women shuttlers progressed to their maiden final with a 3-2 win over two-time former champions Japan in a thrilling semifinal here on Saturday. The world No. 23 pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, world No. 53 Ashmita Chaliha and 17-year-old Anmol Kharb registered stunning wins in the first doubles and second and deciding singles to take India through to the summit clash. India will face Thailand in the final on Sunday. India had won two bronze medals in men's team event in the 2016 and 2020 editions. Though Japan were without their world No. 4 Akane Yamaguchi, the world No. 7 pair of Yuki Fukushima and Sayaka Hirota and world No. 8 combination of Mayu Matsumoto and Wakana Nagahara, they were still a formidable side, making it tough for India. Returning from a long injury layoff, Sindhu had enjoyed wins against China's Han Yue and Hong Kong's Lo Sin Yan Happy but she couldn't produce her best against the left-handed Aya Ohori, going down 13-21, 20-22 in the first singles to peg India back. Treesa and Gayatri, playing the first doubles, dished out a superlative performance to outwit world No. 6 Nami



Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida 21-17, 16-21, 22-20 in a 73-minute contest as India drew level at 1-1. Up against former world champion Nozomi Okuhara, who is currently ranked 20, the left-handed Ashmita produced an aggressive game, using her overhead cross

drops and jump smashes to good use, to record a shocking 21-17, 21-14 win to hand India a 2-1 lead. With Tanisha Crasto suffering a niggle, Sindhu then paired up with Ashwini Ponnappa but they couldn't get across the world No. 11 pair of Rena Miyaura and Ayako

Sakuramoto, losing 14-21, 11-21 in 43 minutes. With the five-match rubber evenly poised at 2-2, Anmol was handed the responsibility of taming world No. 29 Natsuki Nidaira, and the Indian once again lived up to the expectation, claiming a 21-14, 21-18 win in 52 minutes.

"Our girls are doing magic, they were excellent today," former India coach Vimal Kumar, who is with the Indian team in Malaysia, told PTI. "I will give a lot of credit to Gayatri and Treesa and also Ashmita for pulling out of the matches. It was an outstanding performance from Ashmita,

she outclassed Okuhara, she raised her game to another level. "Young girl Anmol also showed that we can depend on her going forward. When you do well in team championships, it shows they can handle pressure and I am really impressed with her. This

is special moment for Indian badminton." **ASHMITA VS NOZOMI:** Ashmita managed to draw out errors from Nozomi and also played some delectable backhand drives and forehand cross hits to open up a 11-9 lead after an initial battle in the opening game. Nozomi clawed back at 12-12 but the Indian broke the run of play with a nice over-the-head drop and a backhand return and then a couple of straight smashes helped her to stay ahead. The Indian pushed one to the back and then Nozomi hit wide as Ashmita grabbed four game points with a jump cross smash and sealed it when the Japanese's back hand went to net. After the change of sides, Ashmita fell 2-7 behind but she soon stepped up the pace and entered the break with a 11-9 cushion. Ashmita's angled returns and leap smashes created trouble for Nozomi as the Indian continued to accumulate points. Eventually, a stiff return on Nozomi's forehand handed the Indian seven game points and she converted in the second chance. **ANMOL VS NATSUKI:** The Saina-like Anmol looked in control against Natsuki, using her drops and slices to lead 11-7 at the mid-game interval and then moved to 17-12. She grabbed six game points after Natsuki went wide and sealed it after winning a well-constructed rally.

In the second game, the duo was locked 6-6. Natsuki made two unforced errors and Anmol produced two precise returns at the forehand corner to be 11-9 at the break. On resumption, the Indian moved to 15-10. However, Natsuki chipped away at the lead, making it 15-16 at one stage. A precise return at the forehand corner helped Anmol to stay ahead. But the Japanese produced a cross court smash and with Anmol going long the scores were levelled at 17-17. However, Natsuki committed four unforced errors thereafter as Anmol sealed the match. In the final, India will have their task cut out against Thailand, who are without world No. 13 Ratchanok Intanon and world No. 16 Pornpawee Chochuwong. Their singles will be spearheaded by world no. 17 Supanida Katethong and world no. 18 Busanan Ongbamrungphan. Supanida has troubled Sindhu in the past but the Indian will have to pull out of her match, while Ashmita will fancy her chances against Busanan and Anmol will be expected to fight it out against world no 45 Pornpicha Choeikeewong. Doubles remain Thailand's strength with world No. 10 pair of Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai, and world No. 13 Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard in their ranks.



Yuvraj shoots 67 in Malaysia

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Playing his first full season on the Asian Tour, Yuvraj Singh Sandhu turned in a fine round of 4-under 67 to move up to tied 12th place after three rounds at the Malaysian Open here on Saturday. The Chandigarh player who gained a card through the Asian Development Tour had five birdies against one bogey in his 67 after rounds of 70-64 on the first two days. Three of his five birdies came on par-5s, and his lone dropped shot came on the Par-4 13th. As Yuvraj rose, SSP Chawrasia added a 68 to get to 11-under and T-20 with rounds of 69-65-68. Veer Ahlawat, the first round co-leader dropped to T-28 as he carded 70 in the third round and is now 10-under, while Honey Baisoya (70-66-70) at 7-under is T-56 and S Chikkarangappa (69-66-73) is

T-66. Canadian Jared Du Toit, 28, who graduated from the Asian Tour Qualifying School last month, shot a fine nine-under-par 62 to take the third-round lead in the USD 1 million event. His tournament total of 17-under gives him a one-stroke lead from joint-overnight leader Australian Kevin Yuan, who fired a 68, the same score as John Catlin from the United States, who is one shot further back - in the curtain raiser for the Asian Tour's 2024 season. Spain's David Puig fired a 62 and is tied for fourth place, three off the lead, with Korean Bio Kim and Deyen Lawson from Australia, who both shot 66s, and England's Steve Lewton, in with a 68. The other co-leader at the start of the day Khavish Varadan from Malaysia slipped back with 72 and is five off the pace, along with compatriot Ervin Chang, who carded a 69.

Tiger Woods withdraws from Riviera

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Tiger Woods returned to the PGA Tour and lasted only 24 holes, withdrawing Friday from the Genesis Invitational with flu-like symptoms and dehydration after hitting his tee shot on the seventh hole at Riviera. Rob McNamara, his longtime associate and vice president of TGR Ventures, said Woods felt flu symptoms Thursday night that worsened when he woke up. "He had a little bit of a fever and was better during the warm-up, but then when he got out there and was walking and playing, he started feeling dizzy," McNamara told a PGA Tour official. "Ultimately, the doctors are saying he's got potentially some type of flu and that he was dehydrated. He's been treated with an IV bag and he's doing much, much better, and he'll be released on his own here soon." Woods left Riviera about two hours after he withdrew, sitting in the front seat of a red SUV as it departed. He was 1-over par for the round - 2 over for the tournament - and projected just outside the cut when he asked for a cart and was driven off the course by a rules official. He has been walking slowly and looked drained of energy playing the front nine. "He obviously wasn't himself, just didn't look right. Saw that before the round started," said Gary Woodland, who played in the same group with Woods along with Justin Thomas. "Obviously, everything's better with him there and for him for his first tournament back and he couldn't come out and finish the way he wanted to, that sucks for all of us." Woodland said he noticed Woods being quieter than normal, though they all were



trying to make sure they were among the top 50 to make the cut. "I feel bad for him. He wasn't right," Woodland said. "He definitely was trying to fight through it and I hope he's all right." The 48-year-old Woods still managed to create quite a spectacle at Riviera. An ambulance and a ladder truck from the Los Angeles Fire Department were parked outside the clubhouse, presumably waiting for Woods. PGA Tour officials said IV fluid bags were needed and there were none at Riviera, so the paramedics had to deliver them. Photographers and media crowded near the ambulance next to a 6-foot high hedge raised cameras and mobile phones when there was movement, except the trucks were leaving without Woods. On the golf course, there was a steady stream of spectators headed for the exit. Woodland and Thomas approached the ninth green surrounded by only a few hundred fans. Woods had not played an official event since the Masters last April, withdrawing in the

middle of the rain-delayed third round. He played the unofficial Hero World Challenge in December against a 20-man field with no cut, and the 36-hole PNC Championship with his son, Charlie. Woods now has played six official tournaments since returning from a February 2021 car crash in Los Angeles that shattered bones in his right leg. He has pulled out of three of them - the 2022 PGA Championship after 54 holes, the 2023 Masters when he didn't return Sunday morning to complete the third round. Woods had said he hoped to play one tournament a month through the major season. He had said Thursday he was experiencing back spasms, which led to his shank on the final hole when he started the tournament with a 72. Along with playing, Woods is the tournament host of the Genesis Invitational that is run by his TGR foundation. His week in Los Angeles began with plenty of hype - the launch of his new apparel line with TaylorMade Golf and his first PGA Tour start of the year.

Modest start for Tvesa in Dimension Ladies golf



PTI ■ GEORGE (SOUTH AFRICA)

India's Tvesa Malik had a modest start to 2024 as she carded 6-over 78 and was two shots off the projected cut line at the Dimension Data Ladies Pro-Am golf on the Sunshine Ladies Tour in South Africa on Saturday. She is lying tied 26th. Tvesa, who is trying to get back to the Ladies European Tour, had only two birdies a day at the Outeniqua course, one of the two courses over which the event is being played. Tvesa, a multiple winner on her domestic Women's Pro Golf Tour, will need a good second round to make the cut in the opening event of the season in South Africa. The venue was hit by bad weather including torrential downpour. Ana Dawson was the only golfer to finish under-par after the first round. The golfer from the Isle of Man, played the Outeniqua course in one-under-par 71 and ended the opening day one stroke ahead of another three international golfers who finished on level-par. The bunch in second place included Germany's Carolin Kauffmann, Scotland's Kylie Henry and Englishwoman Lauren Taylor. Henry and Taylor both took on the Montague course that is rated as being more difficult. Kiera Floyd and Lejan Lewthwaite are the leading South Africans, tied in fifth place on one-over-par with Alexandra Swayne of the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Anmol is brave and intelligent: Gopichand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Anmol Kharab is a fearless and intelligent player and her emergence is refreshing for Indian badminton, gushed chief National coach Pullela Gopichand after the teenager's impressive show at the Asia Team Championships. The 17-year-old from Faridabad humbled world number 29 Natsuki Nidaira in the deciding fifth match against Japan, a win that carried India into first-ever final in the prestigious tournament. Anmol, who won the senior national champion in December 2023, had also notched up a thrilling three-game win over China's Wu Luo Yu on Wednesday in their group match. This is her first major international assignment. "I think the result of the two matches is a testimony that she can beat top players. To take the pressure on and show that kind of nerve, it is very refreshing. She is fearless. The kind of strokes that she plays, it all come naturally to her," Gopichand told PTI. "She is reading the game well, you can see her intelligence. She played beautifully. Of course, opponents will read her game in time and that's where she needs to rework on her mistakes but she has been phenomenal. "She fought really well and she is naturally brave and intelligent." Indian women team had a phenomenal run this week, defeating China, Hong Kong and Japan to enter their first-ever final and Gopichand was also gung ho about the

performance in the Continental championship. "To beat China and Japan, I don't think many teams can say that, so really happy. There is great energy in the dug out and it showed literally during the match. "Before this tie, if you would have told me that (Nozomi) Okuhara would be beaten and we will make a comeback after Sindhu's loss, I would have said little chance but it has been a great run so far. "The match against China was a fantastic win. The morale was high in general. Good to see Gayatri (Gopichand) and Treesa (Jolly) pulling out the match and the way Anmol played it was amazing. Ashmita's was also a fantastic win." After PV Sindhu suffered a shock defeat in the opening match, doubles pair of Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly produced a 21-17 16-21 22-20 win over world no. 6 Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida to bring India back into the five-match rubber. "Shida and Matsuyama are a top pair, and Treesa and Gayatri had to work hard, it was close and tough match. They have beaten China and Japan in two solid matches. After losing at India Open, to comeback and win, I mean this will do them a lot of good." India will face Thailand in the summit clash and Gopichand feels the singles matches will be key. "They have top doubles teams, so doubles will be tough but we have edge in singles and we are again counting on Anmol. So, God willing, we will win tomorrow. It is another tough match."

Jordan disqualified from Riviera

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Jordan Spieth signed for the wrong score on Friday at the Genesis Invitational and was disqualified for the first time in the 263 tournaments he has played on the PGA Tour. Spieth owned up to the mistake in a post on X. "Today, I signed for an incorrect scorecard and stepped out of the scoring area, after thinking I went through all procedures to make sure it was correct. Rules are rules, and I take full responsibility," he wrote. Spieth, who won an NCAA title with Texas at Riviera, said he loves the course as much as any on the PGA Tour and "it hurts to not have a run at the



weekend." Spieth was within three shots of the lead at the turn in the second round at Riviera until he dropped three shots as Patrick Cantlay, playing in his group, began to pull away. Spieth made double bogey on the 18th hole for a 73, leaving him 10 shots behind. But he signed for a 3 on the par-3 fourth hole when he actually made a 4, leading to the disqualification. Spieth had missed the green to the left, chipped to about 4 feet and lipped out. That leaves 51 players in the field for the weekend at Riviera. The signature event had a 36-hole cut to top 50 and ties, and anyone within 10 shots of the lead.

Chris Hoy undergoing cancer treatment

AP ■ LONDON

Six-time Olympic champion Chris Hoy says he has been diagnosed with cancer and that he felt "forced" to reveal the news. The 47-year-old former track cyclist star said he was diagnosed with the disease last year and that he is currently undergoing treatment, including chemotherapy, adding that it is "going really well" and he currently feels "fine." Writing on his Instagram account on Friday, Hoy said: "For the sake of my young fam-

ily, I had hoped to keep this information private but regrettably our hand has been forced." He gave no further details or the type of cancer he has. The Scottish cyclist, originally from Edinburgh, asked for privacy following the announcement. Hoy won his first Olympic medal, a team sprint silver, at Sydney in 2000. He won gold in the 1-kilometer track time trial at Athens in 2004 and added to his gold medal total by winning three more at Beijing four years later and two at London in 2012.



YASHASVI ROCKS ENGLAND, INDIA IN CONTROL

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Yashasvi Jaiswal's dream season just got better as he singlehandedly seized the initiative from England with a sizzling century, putting India in complete control at the end of third day's play in the third Test. Jaiswal's (104 retired hurt off 133 balls) second ton of the series was beautifully complemented by Shubman Gill (65 batting, 120 balls), who curbed his natural aggression as India ended the day at 196 for 2 in 51 available overs. The left-handed opener, who will be torch-bearer of Indian batting for the next decade, scored his third Test hundred in only seventh Test appearance before the blazing blade was brought to a halt by back spasms that forced him to retire. The Jaiswal-Gill pair added 155 runs in quick time with the former giving the English team a test of its own medicine with nine fours and five sixes, the best being the imperious pull off Jimmy Anderson. The overall lead swelled to 322 by stumps, after Indian bowlers made a splendid comeback, getting last five England wickets for only 29 runs with visitors being bowled out for 319. Mohammed Siraj (4/84 in 21.1 overs) was the man of the match with his yorkers to tail-enders while Kuldeep Yadav (2/77 in 18 overs) compensated brilliantly for Ravichandran Ashwin's unfortunate withdrawal with two quick wickets in the morning session.



However it was Joe Root's indiscreet reverse ramp off Jasprit Bumrah which Jaiswal pounced with less than a second's reaction time that turned the tables. "That shot was not on and it became a turning point," Siraj said at post-match press conference. Rohit Sharma's captaincy was spot-on and the manner in which he tweaked Jasprit Bumrah's field position at long-on to get Ben Stokes dismissed off Ravindra Jadeja (2/51) spoke volumes about his acumen. On Sunday, India would be

looking to take a lead of at least 425 if not 450 and have at least 125 overs to bowl out England. With no Ashwin available, India would need a cushion of more overs on a deck that is still good for batting. **JAISWAL JAZZ:** Jaiswal's onslaught continued despite England frenetically changing their bowling and fielding plans but none worked enough to stop the Indian opener. Having spotted a vacant off-side field, Jaiswal brought out two reverse sweeps off Rehan Ahmed for fours. However, his charge was halted only after England brought

back Mark Wood for a short-ball play yet again in the game with a packed leg side field. Unfazed with England's deployments, Jaiswal dealt in singles once into his 90s and brought up his third century of fledgling career with a four off Wood. However, the left-handed opener had to retired hurt close to the end of the play for being unable to deal with back spasms. Jaiswal not only took the wind out of England's aspirations but also consolidated India's grip on the contest, having lost Rohit Sharma (19) cheaply in

the second session. At the other end, Gill put behind the disappointment of the first-innings duck with a fifth half-century, countering England's ploy of a packed on-side field with up to six fielders placed and Wood bowling into his body. India's task was to preserve wickets and build their lead, given the amount of time left in the game and surface here being benign so far. Additionally, Rohit's early dismissal with their overall lead not being big enough would have provided some concerns but all that was

banished by the pair of Jaiswal and Gill with their unbeaten 155-run stand for the second wicket.

KULDEEP'S RIPPER: Kuldeep, who was hit for plenty by Ben Duckett on second day, found his mojo, bowling splendidly through the first session of the day which kept a leash on England, while also accounting for Jonny Bairstow with an unplayable delivery. Bairstow moved deep into the crease but was pinned in front of the wickets with one that turned sharply into him from outside the off. Bumrah then accounted for Root (18) for the ninth time in 21 innings, as former skipper's shocking dismissal - a reverse ramp to second slip - once again exposed the bizarreness of the ultra aggressive approach. Having struggled to score freely in the first session, England resorted to go all-out post lunch but the play backfired horrendously. Jadeja had Stokes (41) caught by Bumrah who was placed a bit straighter at long-on, forcing the batter to adjust his stroke. Jadeja also had Tom Hartley stumped for his second wicket. For Ben Foakes, a delivery from Siraj slowed a little bit off the surface for an easy grab for Rohit at mid-on. The India pacer wasted no time in cleaning up tail-enders Ahmed and Anderson to bring up a four-for, with England rolling over for 319 from 290/5 at lunch.

Ashwin out of 3rd Test as mother ill

PTI ■ RAJKOT

India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin on Friday withdrew from the ongoing third Test against England as he flew back to Chennai to attend to his ill mother. BCCI provided an update on the development but did not mention that the medical issue relates Ashwin's mother. However, BCCI President Rajeev Shukla posted on X that it's off-spinner's mother, who has fallen sick. "Ravichandran Ashwin has withdrawn from the Test squad, effective immediately due to a family medical emergency. In these challenging times, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the team fully supports Ashwin," BCCI said in a media release. "The BCCI extends its heartfelt support to the champion cricketer and his family. The health and well-being of the players and their loved ones are of utmost importance. The Board requests respect for the privacy of Ashwin and his family as they navigate through this challenging time," the statement added further. A few minutes later, Shukla posted on X, "Wishing speedy recovery of mother of @ashwinravi99. He has to rush and leave Rajkot test to Chennai to be with his mother." BCCI secretary Jay Shah said, "The Board and the team will continue to provide any



necessary assistance to Ashwin and will keep the lines of communication open to offer support as needed. Team India appreciates the understanding and empathy of the fans and media during this sensitive period." India will play the remainder of the third Test with 10 men and four specialist bowlers. It is understood that Ashwin might not be available for the remaining two Test matches in Ranchi (Feb 25-29) and Dharamsala (March 7-11). As far as off-spin bowling replacement is concerned, team already has Washington Sundar in its ranks. The other possible replacements, outside the squad are veterans Jayant Yadav and Jalaj Saxena along with young Pulkit Narang.



Shooters sweat over Olympic selection trials in Patiala

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than 150 shotgun shooters are sweating over their participation in crucial national Olympic trials later this month in Patiala in the wake of the farmers' agitation and the restrictions imposed on interstate travel. The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) has convened two meetings but they have not yet altered the venue or the dates for the third selection trials because of several issues, including a "packed calendar" and the impending "announcement of the general elections". The scores in the selection trials, to be held at the Moti Bagh Gun Club Ranges in Patiala from February 25 to March 2, "will be considered for selection of teams for Paris Olympic Games", an NRAI statement had said on January 22. Several shotgun shooters PTI spoke to said carrying arms and ammunition by road will be a nightmare. Besides, airfares to Chandigarh have gone through the roof because borders have been sealed due to the farmers' agitation. NRAI secretary-general Sultan Singh when asked if the federation will be able to organise the trials in Patiala given the circumstances said, "That is a very difficult question. But do we have an option, considering the (shooting) calendar, elections... I'm running against the wall." On whether the trials could be shifted to the Jagatpura range in Jaipur or the Karni Singh range in Delhi, he said the Tughlakabad range would be an issue because of the upcoming Para Shooting World Cup from March 6-15. The Para Shooting World Cup at the Karni Singh Ranges has 24 Paris Paralympic quota places up for grabs and 500 para shooters from 52 countries are competing. "If I shift it (trials) anywhere else, then the northern people have a problem going to south (India) and south people have a problem going to north (India). Shooters in Chandigarh will then ask, 'how do we reach Jaipur'," said Singh. "We've already had two

meetings, but what is the solution? I can't even postpone the trials because of a packed calendar, and if the elections are announced, then the code of conduct will also come into play... Then there can be no shipment of ammunition, no weapons can be carried," he added. "We are totally seized of the matter, but we have no choice," he said. "I am more than welcome to any suggestions that might come up," he added. However, a top shooter told PTI on condition of anonymity that both Jaipur and even the shooting range in Bhopal would be better options compared to Patiala given the scenario. "The paramilitary forces at the borders will ask for a whole lot of documents... For what purpose we are carrying such large quantities of arms and ammunition. Then, the flights to Chandigarh have become very expensive as people are avoiding roads," he said. Another shooter said, several shooters recently travelled by road to Bhopal for the second round of Olympic selection trials. "Besides, when the NRAI talks about shooters from the south, that is only a miniscule number and they also mostly reside and train in Delhi. Most of the shotgun shooters are from Delhi and adjoining areas. So where is the problem to shift the venue," he said. Another shooter said, the code of conduct that might come into force once the general elections are announced does not apply to sports shooters. "We are exempted from depositing our weapons we use for sports purposes. I have never heard of shooting sports activity getting affected due the code of conduct," he added. A trap shooter added that the Para World Cup commences on March 6 at the Karni Singh range here, while the Olympic selection trials conclude in Patiala on March 2. "Why can't we have the trials in Delhi itself where there are far better lodging and boarding facilities and our trials will end much before the Para World Cup begins," he said.

Sachin visits bat making unit in Kashmir



PTI ■ SRINAGAR

A cricket bat manufacturer in the Sangam area here was in for a pleasant surprise when Sachin Tendulkar and his family visited his manufacturing unit on Saturday. Tendulkar, accompanied by wife Anjali and daughter Sara, stopped by at a unit in Charsoo on the Srinagar-Jammu highway and interacted with the workers there.

"We were busy making bats when a vehicle stopped at our gate. We were pleasantly surprised to find the Little Master and his family," Mohammad Shaheen Parray, owner of MJ Sports, told PTI over phone. Parray said Tendulkar checked the quality of the bats made of Kashmir willow. "He stroked a few bats and was quite pleased with the quality.

Tendulkar said he had come to compare the Kashmir willow bats with those made of English willow. "We requested him to lend his voice in support of the local bats," Parray said, adding the batting maestro promised to support the Kashmir willow bats. Parray said Tendulkar spent an hour at the manufacturing unit and interacted with a small bunch of fans.



Indian team wears black armbands in memory Gaekwad

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Indian players wore black armbands in the memory of former captain Dattajirao Gaekwad on the third day of the ongoing third Test against England here on Saturday. Dattajirao, who played 11 Tests for India between 1951 and 1962, died on February 13 after

remaining hospitalised for 12 days. At 95, he was India's oldest living Test cricketer. Dattajirao was the father of former India batter and coach Anshuman Gaekwad. "Team India will be wearing black arm bands in memory of Dattajirao Gaekwad, former India captain and India's oldest

Test cricketer who passed away recently," the BCCI said in a statement shortly before the third day's play got underway here at the Niranjan Shah Stadium. A right-handed batter, who could bowl both medium pace and leg-break, Dattajirao was India's captain during the 1959 tour of England.

RANJI TROPHY

Mumbai thrash Assam in Ranji match

PTI ■ MUMBAI

All-rounder Shardul Thakur's match haul of 10 wickets was complemented by Shivam Dube's counter-attacking century as Mumbai finished their group B Ranji Trophy league engagements with a resounding innings and 80 run win against Assam inside two days. The 41-times champions Mumbai have been at their ruthless best this season, capping five wins, four of them with bonus points to top the Group B standings with massive 37 points. They had already qualified before the last match and the final game was more of a warm-up before the semi-finals. Thakur claimed 8-1-31-4 to add to his 6/21 in the first innings as Assam were folded for 108 in 33 overs with Mumbai wrapping the issue inside two days. Mumbai encountered a solitary loss — against Uttar Pradesh — from seven matches this season, while against Chhattisgarh they bagged three points with a first innings lead. Mumbai's nearest rival Andhra have 25 points with their last league round fixture against Kerala in progress. Dube, who had completed his second century in four innings on day one, ended his innings for 121 off 140 balls that included 11 fours and five sixes. Dube now has two fifties and two centuries in six innings since his return to his state side from national duty. Shams Mulani also chipped in with a quickfire 47-ball 31 that took Mumbai's first innings to



272, giving them a 188-run first innings lead. Assam in their second essay were rocked early by new ball bowler Mohit Avasthi (2/10) who removed both their openers on single digit scores. Tushar Deshpande (2/37) and Tanush Kotian (1/5) then kept chipping away wickets before Thakur wrapped the tail in his four-wicket burst. **ANDHRA EYEING QF DESPITE KERALA FIGHT-BACK:** At Vizianagaram, visitors Kerala put up a strong fightback to post 258/3 in reply to Andhra's 272 allout. But despite being in the backfoot, Andhra are set to finish second to join Mumbai in the last-eight. Skipper Sachin Baby was unbeaten on 87, in company of Akshay Chandran (57) at stumps on day two. Earlier opener Rohan Kunnummal scored 61, while Krishna Prasad got out for 43. Abhimanyu slams double ton India A regular Abhimanyu Easwaran struck 200 not out to put Bengal's in driver's seat in their match against Bihar at Eden Gardens. Easwaran hit 23 boundaries in

his unbeaten knock of 200 (291 balls) as Bengal declared on 411/5 with a big first innings lead of 316. Bihar were 32/1, trailing Bengal by 284 at close on day two. But this performance is little too late for Bengal who are already out of the quarters reckoning having endured two losses. For Easwaran, who has been found wanting in big matches, this was his third first-class double hundred, first since his career-best 233 for India A against Sri Lanka A in May 2019. Easwaran also got two reprieves en route to his double century, first he was dropped on 152 and then survived a catch off a no ball on 185. Bengal skipper Manoj Tiwary scored 30 in what was seemed to be his final innings of his two-decade long career. The veteran of 147 first-class and 169 List A matches was trapped lbw by Bihar spinner Ashutosh Aman. The 38-year-old, who is also a junior minister of sports in Bengal cabinet, had announced earlier that he would call it quits after this match.

Tamil Nadu pack off Punjab top-order after posting 435

PTI ■ SALEM (TAMIL NADU)

Tamil Nadu took firm control of their Ranji Trophy Group C match by packing off the Punjab top-order after big hundreds by Baba Indrajith and Vijay Shankar powered the hosts to 435 in their first innings here on Saturday. Punjab were 141/4 at stumps on the second day, trailing by 294 runs. Batting on 88 overnight, Shankar duly reached his century with the help of 12 fours and a six, while Indrajith went on to make 187 in 295 deliveries after resuming the day on 122. Indrajith, who added 281 runs for the fourth wicket, found the fence 10 times and cleared it once. During their marathon association, both Indrajith and Shankar did a lot of running, relying a lot on the singles and twos to keep the scoreboard ticking. However, Tamil Nadu's lower-order batters failed to contribute significantly to their total after the dismissal of Shankar to off-spinner Jassinder Singh with the score reading 388 for five. TN skipper Sai Kishore

chipped in 20 before the home team's first innings came to an end in 131.4 overs. Off-spinner Sukhwinder Singh was the most successful bowler for Punjab, finishing with figures of 4/99 in 31 overs. There were two wickets apiece for Jassinder Singh and all-rounder Abhishek Sharma, who bowls left-arm spin. In reply, at least three Punjab batters looked to have settled down nicely before losing their wickets. Prabhsimran Singh was dismissed for 24, while Anmolpreet Singh and

Nehal Wadhwa got out after doing all the hard work, for 41 and 43 respectively. At stumps, Mandeep Singh and wicketkeeper Anmol Malhotra were batting on 18 and 3 respectively.



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कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, रायगढ़ (छत्तीसगढ़)

क्रमांक./2383/ लो.क.वि./न.पा.नि./2024

रायगढ़ दिनांक 16.02.2024

॥ ई-प्रोक्वोरमेंट निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना ॥

नगर पालिक निगम, रायगढ़ द्वारा निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु ऑनलाइन (Online) निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है :-

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उपरोक्त निर्माण कार्यों को निविदा की सामान्य शर्तें, थ्रोरर राशि, विस्तृत निविदा विज्ञापित, निविदा दस्तावेज व अन्य जानकारी ई-प्रोक्वोरमेंट वेब पोर्टल <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> से डाउनलोड की जा सकती है।

“स्वच्छ पर्यावरण के लिए वृक्षरोपण करें एवं प्लास्टिक का प्रयोग न करें”

कार्यालयन अभियंता न.पा.नि. रायगढ़

"We shall not cease from
exploration, and the end of
all our exploring will be to
arrive where we started
and know the place for the
first time"
— TS Eliot



TRAVEL BUG



The year 2024 is all about transformative travel, and powered with lifestyle resolutions and more awareness for wellness, we embark on a life-changing journey through the snowy hilltops of Gabala, Azerbaijan. **BY NIVI SHRIVASTAVA**

REJUVENECER, REINICIAR, ACTUALIZAR
UN TRANSFORMADOR
DE RETIRO



If you've ever wondered how many days would you survive without tea or coffee, completely sugar-free meals, and with just one gram of salt in the entire day, you need to try out the Chenot detox. On a self-exploration wellness journey in peak winters, I find myself in one of the most breathtaking landscapes of Gabala, Azerbaijan. Covered in layers of fresh snow, the surrounding white vistas and a cold frozen lake welcome me to a retreat set in a winter wonderland straight out of a mystical fairytale.



ROAD TO RENOVATION

Although being a travel and food writer it is hard to not indulge, I look forward to following the three-day advanced detox program in the Chenot Palace Gabala, without giving in to the temptations. The biggest challenge is to resist the sugar and salt withdrawals, but once the body gets in sync and the therapies begin it won't seem so rigorous I am told. In the luxurious wellness center, each guest undergoes a comprehensive health evaluation followed by a bespoke tailored program, where they are guided by certified medical and wellness professionals to fine-tune their metabolism and physical strength. As I embark on this exciting journey of wellness, I am set to test my endurance with a strict nutritional diet, medically supervised fitness, and rejuvenating therapies for aligning mind and body. The daily wellness activities form an integral part of the retreat's holistic approach. From yoga and meditation to specialized fitness programs, guests are immersed in a diverse range of activities that cater to the body, mind, and soul. From aromatic hydrotherapies to invigorating mud baths in warm water beds, lymphatic massages, and light therapies for sound sleep and relaxation, the treatments allow guests to reconnect with their inner selves. Personalized nutrition takes center stage as well, with tailored diets focusing on caloric density, nutritional value, and preparation methods to purify and rebalance the body.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A standout feature of the retreat is the full-board meal plan, featuring a healthy diet enriched with healing non-alcoholic beverages. Crafted in alignment with the Chenot philosophy, the culinary offerings are not just a treat for the taste buds but also contribute to the overall well-being of guests. Each meal is a harmonious blend of flavors and nutrients, reinforcing the idea that food is not just sustenance but a vital component of holistic health. From steamed and baked vegetables paired with interesting sauces, buckwheat risottos, muesli soaked in almond milk, fiber-rich salads, and delicious blends of gastronomic delight - each meal was savoured in luxurious dining

and consisted of approximately 800 calories per day. A lack of salt and sugar was substituted with some healthy toppings of paprika, curry mix, and turmeric powder for those who craved more textures. One of the highlights of my stay was the exclusive masterclass with the in-house Chef Ramiz Bayramov, where I had the



opportunity to participate in a cooking class and learned some simple yet effective ways to whip up some healthy dishes without extra calories. Following the culinary experience was undoubtedly the



hardest part of the program, but it made me realize that the taste buds can be re-programmed by making mindful dietary choices, and that's something I wish to follow beyond the retreat.

HOLISTIC HOLIDAYS

From the carefully curated treatments designed to revitalize, traditional spa therapies to cutting-edge techniques, think of this as a sophisticated approach to vitality customized for every participant. As the wellness industry is witnessing an unprecedented rise beyond physical exercise and aesthetic pursuits, trends that help in pursuit of "longevity" and "anti-aging" are significantly gaining attention among elite travellers. One notable trend shaping the wellness landscape is the rise of holistic escapes. This trend reflects a growing preference for well-being experiences among travellers, blending luxury with health-focused activities in natural settings. Henri Chenot, the visionary behind Chenot Group, leads the charge in the trend of proactive scientific wellness. This approach focuses on prevention

and adaptation, leveraging innovation, technology, and precision medicine to enhance overall well-being. The emphasis on a proactive stance towards health embraces this movement with specialized programs like three-day, seven-day, and 14-day advanced detox packages, catering to diverse individual needs. Speaking about the rise in interest in wellness retreats and rejuvenation holidays, Rishad Sharifov, General Manager of Chenot Palace Gabala, shares an insightful perspective. He mentions, "A growing awareness of well-being is putting a stronger spotlight on individual health. Whether in trends, travel, or daily routines, the key is maintaining a constant dedication to wellness; we not just offer temporary escapes but inspire guests to incorporate enduring insights into their lives."



SNOW AND SOLITUDE

In the state-of-the-art wellness facility, it's easy to lose the sense of time and after all the daily fitness activities and therapies, we had the luxury of leisure. Being fond of water activities, I spent most of my free time practicing aqua aerobics and swimming in the heated pool that overlooked the snow-capped mountains afar. And, to catch the sunset I did not forget to take a long walk on the cobbled pathways, where tangerine skies reflected beautifully in the still waters of the frozen lake. On other days, a cozy time in the Moroccan-styled mosaic hamam was just the perfect way to relax or one can mull over life in the steam and sauna sessions and come back with a clear head. For those seeking an adventurous touch to their wellness journey, an outdoor excursion to the Tufandag Ski Resort is also very popular. Nestled in the picturesque mountains surrounding Gabala, this thrilling trip adds an element of excitement to



the overall experience. The crisp mountain air and the adrenaline-pumping activities at the resort complement the serenity of the wellness retreat, creating a perfect balance between tranquility and adventure.

TO MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH, YOU NEED TO EXERCISE ALMOST EVERY DAY - 30 MINUTES IS RECOMMENDED, THAT'S WHAT I PERSONALLY DO - AND YOU NEED TO EAT RIGHT
—DENISE AUSTIN

FUNGUS IGNORE AT YOUR PERIL

In recent years, fungal infections have been on the rise. This trend is expected to persist, driven by several factors including rising temperatures creating favourable conditions for fungal growth and spread, besides the misuse of over-the-counter drugs and ointments among others. ARCHANA JYOTI highlights its widespread impact through various studies.

Sachi, a 45-year-old housewife, has been experiencing discomfort and embarrassment due to a persistent fungal nail infection which started with discoloration and thickening of the nails on her right foot, gradually spreading to the other foot. Over time, her nails became brittle and began to emit a foul odor. Sachi, also experienced occasional itching and pain around the infected nails. The fungal infection has made it difficult for the mother of two to wear open-toed sandals during warmer months, affecting her confidence, particularly in social settings where she felt judged for the appearance of her nails.. Initially, she tried over-the-counter antifungal creams and ointments, but they provided only temporary relief. After consulting a dermatologist, she was prescribed oral antifungal medications along with topical treatments for the infection called 'Athlete's Foot'. However, despite adhering to the treatment regimen diligently, progress was slow, and complete eradication of the infection seemed elusive. Dealing with a chronic fungal infection is taking a toll on her mental health besides financial strain. But Sachi's case is not the only one in the country; millions are battling with this fast emerging menace. A recent study conducted by experts from Indian teaching hospitals and The University of Manchester says over fifty million individuals in India are affected by serious fungal diseases, with approximately 10 per cent facing potentially dangerous mould infections. The study, published in the journal Open Forum Infectious Diseases, presents an estimate that approximately 4.4 per cent of India's population, which

Most common fungal diseases

- **Fungal nail infections :** Common infections of the fingernails or toenails.
- **Vaginal candidiasis:** Caused by the yeast Candida, also called a "vaginal yeast infection."
- **Ringworm:** A common fungal skin infection that often looks like a circular rash.
- **Candida infections of the mouth, throat, and esophagus:** Caused by the yeast Candida, also called "thrush".
- **Fungal eye infections:** Rare infections that can develop after an eye injury or after eye surgery.
- **Sporotrichosis:** Caused by the fungus



- **Sporothrix**, which lives throughout the world in soil and on plants.
- **Mycetoma:** Caused by certain types of bacteria and fungi found in soil and water, typically in rural regions of Africa, Latin America, and Asia.
- **Healthcare-Associated Fungal Meningitis:** Rare life-threatening fungal infection that causes swelling of the areas around the brain and spinal cord.

equates to around 57 million people, are likely impacted by these fungal conditions. The research draws from an analysis of data from over 400 published academic articles. **Key findings from the study:** **Prevalence among Women:** Vaginal thrush, or yeast infection, affects around 24 million women of reproductive age, with recurrent episodes being common. **Impact on Children:** Hair fungal infections, known as tinea capitis, affect a similar number ie 24 million school-age children. This condition can cause painful infected scalps and often results in hair loss. **Mortality Contributors:** Mould infections affecting the lungs and sinuses are identified as major

contributors to mortality, affecting over 250,000 individuals. **Chronic Conditions:** The study also highlights chronic fungal conditions such as chronic aspergillosis, which affects approximately 1,738,400 individuals, and serious allergic lung mould diseases, impacting around 3.5 million people. **Eye and Skin Infections:** Over 1 million individuals are thought to have potentially blinding fungal eye diseases, while nearly 200,000 suffer from mucormycosis, commonly referred to as 'Black mould'. The global study using data from 80 countries including India has said that the annual total of mortalities from such ailment is now estimated at 3.75 million, a figure that doubles previous estimates, and outnumbers

WHO'S AT RISK?

Fungal infections can affect anyone, but certain groups are more vulnerable than others. People with weakened immune systems, such as those undergoing cancer treatment or organ transplant recipients, are particularly susceptible to fungal infections. In addition, people with chronic conditions such as diabetes, HIV, or asthma are also at increased risk. The elderly are also more likely to develop fungal infections, as are young children and infants. In some cases, fungal infections can spread from person to person, particularly in healthcare settings. Hospital-acquired fungal infections can be particularly dangerous, as these strains of fungi are often resistant to multiple drugs.

deaths from malaria six-fold and from tuberculosis three-fold. Dr. Animesh Ray, the lead author of the study and affiliated with AIIMS Delhi, underscores the significance of the findings, stating that the total burden due to fungal diseases is substantial but often underappreciated. He sounds alarm saying that the number of individuals affected by fungal diseases significantly exceeds those impacted by tuberculosis in India. Candida -- another type of fungal infection -- is becoming a serious problem in intensive care, complex surgical patients, diabetes, cancer and renal failure, as well as premature babies. The researchers estimate that about 1.57 million people suffer from Candida bloodstream infection or

invasive candidiasis with 9,95,000 (9.9 lakh) deaths (63.6 per cent), each year. Co-author of the study, Professor Denning from The University of Manchester and Global Action For Fungal D acknowledges the progress made in diagnostic capabilities. However, he emphasizes that fungal diseases continue to pose a significant threat to public health, leading to considerable morbidity and mortality. He also notes the existence of large parts of India with limited diagnostic capabilities, which underscores the need for further improvements in this regard. The study concludes that addressing the challenge of fungal diseases in India requires continued efforts to enhance diagnostics, raise awareness, and implement effective strategies to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of these diseases on affected individuals and communities. Dr. Ravinder Singh Chauhan, MS (ENT) Director, Delhi Center for ENT & Allergic Diseases sheds light on fungal infection of the oral cavity. "Candidiasis (also known as oral thrush) is one of the most common fungal infections of the mouth (oral cavity). It is generally seen in patients with poor oral hygiene, uncontrolled diabetes, those taking steroids for long durations for other diseases, or suffering from other immunocompromising diseases." On symptoms, he said, patients suffering from candidiasis develop white patches in the mouth or on the tongue and back of the throat. It is easily treatable if diagnosed early. If anyone has the above symptoms, they should visit an ENT specialist, said Dr Chauhan. "Patients suffering from diabetes should keep their

blood sugar under control and maintain oral and dental hygiene." Experts say, climate change is also contributing to the rise of fungal infections. As temperatures rise, fungi are able to thrive in new environments and infect new hosts. In addition, extreme weather events such as hurricanes and floods can create conditions that are ideal for fungal growth and spread.

Take the case of Athlete's Foot, caused by the fungus Trichophyton. It typically manifests as itchy, red, and cracked skin between the toes and on the soles of the feet, says Dr Richa Chaudhary, Consultant Dermatologist, Skin & Hair by Dr Gangwani Clinic, Paschim Vihar, Delhi.

"Superficial fungal infections, often affecting the skin, hair, and nails, are common yet manageable dermatological conditions. 'Athlete's foot' is a prevalent and contagious condition, scientifically termed tinea pedis, primarily targets the feet. It thrives in warm and damp environments such as locker rooms, swimming pools, and common showers. "The hallmark symptoms of athlete's foot encompass itching, burning sensations, and the development of red, scaly patches between the toes or on the soles. In severe cases, there can be cracking of skin or appearance of itchy pus-filled blisters, delay in the healing of the cracked skin leading to discomfort and pain. The infection can also spread to the toenails, causing thickening and discoloration.

"Maintaining proper foot hygiene/avoiding shared personal items, such as towels and shoes, regularly changing socks, opting for moisture-wicking materials, and allowing shoes to air out between uses can significantly reduce risk of contracting the fungus," says the doctor.

In extreme cases, or persistent or severe infection it is essential to seek professional medical advice as prescription strength antifungal medication may be required, she says.

DOCTORSPEAK

CHILDHOOD CANCER EARLY DETECTION IS KEY



DR GAURI KAPOOR
Medical Director (Pediatric Hematology & Oncology), Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute & Research Centre, Niti Bagh, Delhi

Childhood cancer, while rare (affecting about 50,000 children in India annually), requires a specialized, multidisciplinary approach to achieve both good cancer outcomes and a high quality of life. There are some misconceptions when it comes to cancers in children versus cancer in adults. It is important to understand that childhood cancer is unique and quite different in behaviour and response to treatment. Their cancers respond well to treatment and when diagnosed early are highly curable. Conditions like Acute Lymphoblastic leukaemia and lymphomas have excellent cure rates. In the high income countries childhood cancer cure rates are excellent, to the tune of more than 80%. However, more than 80% of childhood cancer cases occur in low and middle-income countries where access to care is very variable and cure rates are as low as 20-40%. Hence the WHO has launched a global initiative worldwide to improve cure rates to at least 60% worldwide and India is also aligned with it. Early diagnosis and proper treatment are crucial for successful outcomes. This is

why raising awareness among caregivers, healthcare workers, and the wider community is critical. There is a need to extend support to those suffering from childhood cancer, including their families and caregivers, and the survivors. There is a lot of stigma attached to the word cancer and it is important to come forward to challenge this stigma and fight against it and give the childhood cancer survivors all the support they need in society so that they can fulfill their dreams. Hence we need to identify the challenges associated with early diagnosis, and proper treatment and work together to find solutions so that all children may have access to optimum care.

HEALTH NEWS

AIIMS Delhi, Univ of Liverpool MoU for research in head & neck cancer

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi and University of Liverpool have entered into a collaboration for "AIIMS Liverpool Collaborative Centre for Translational Research in Head and Neck Cancer – ALHNS". It will impact the care of patients with head and neck cancer by combining resources at both institutions in order to develop joint research and education programmes. It is expected to enhance the quality of research and education. The ALHNS also aims to have commonly articulated



strategic goals in order to deliver cutting edge medical innovation and personalised cancer treatments, said a release issued by the Health Ministry.

NCI, AIIMS Jhajjar celebrates fifth foundation day

On the occasion of the 5th Foundation Day of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) of AIIMS Jhajjar, Union Health Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya said that the way the institute has progressed over the last 5 years, is a testament to the skill and dedication of the doctors, nurses and other health workers involved in the day-to-day functioning of the institute. NCI Jhajjar registers average daily over 500 OPD patient footfall and over 60 cancer patients every OPD day.

It also registers a weekly average of 800-1,000 sessions of radiation therapy, while chemotherapy day care admissions had surpassed 30,000 in 2023. iT boasts of state-of-the-art modular operation theatres where an average of 80-100 onco surgeries are conducted weekly. Recently new oncology and Yoga facilities, focusing on both cure and care of patients have been started. It also provides spiritual cancer care, physiotherapy, psycho-oncology and oncology survivorship services.

Fortis Hospital Noida starts robotic surgery for prostate cancer cure

A robotic-assisted radical prostatectomy was successfully performed for the first time in Noida on a 67-year-old patient at Fortis Hospital Noida. Conducted under the medicos team led by Dr. Piyush Varshney, Additional Director of Urology at Fortis Hospital, the patient was discharged from the hospital just four days post-surgery. As per a study published in Science Direct titled Epidemiology of Prostate Cancer in India, prostate cancer is the second

most common cause of cancer and the sixth leading cause of cancer death among men worldwide. "Due to rapid migration from rural to urban areas, which is quickly changing lifestyles, more cases of prostate cancer are being reported. This surgery method, called robotic-assisted radical prostatectomy, is a big leap in medical science and a blessing for patients. It offers minimal invasive options for patients and shortens the recovery period," said the doctor..

Heart blockage of 50-year-old cured with ayurvedic therapy at AIIA Delhi

A 50-year-old auto driver, who was diagnosed with 95% blockage in his left anterior descending artery (LAD) after he suffered a heart attack two years ago, has been completely cured with the help of ayurveda for nearly 4 months at All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA), Delhi. His angiography showed a non-calcified plaque in segment 6 causing 85-90% occlusion and the RCA showed a calcified

plaque in segment 1 causing 5-10% occlusion. Assistant professor, Dr Divya Kajaria, Department of Kaya Chikitsa, AIIA, said: Kumar was provided Virechana, one of the Panchkarma therapies, followed by oral medicines for three months. He was admitted in the hospital for 15 days and then given three months of medication. Now he has 0-5% occlusion in both LAD and RCA, which is normal.

COMBATING CHILD OBESITY

Protecting Minds from Food Advertising

In a world inundated with advertisements promoting unhealthy foods to kids, The Health Pioneer delves into the WHO-UNICEF toolkit, a measure to help steer impressionable young minds away from the path of obesity

Picture a bustling cityscape, where billboards loom large, and television screens flicker with enticing images of sugary snacks and fatty treats. For too long, these advertisements have preyed upon the vulnerability of children, shaping their preferences and influencing their eating habits in ways that can have lifelong consequences. No doubt, in a world where children are bombarded with advertisements promoting unhealthy foods, the WHO-UNICEF toolkit stands as a beacon of hope. Crafted through a collaborative effort between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), this toolkit represents a concerted effort to protect the health and well-being of the youngest members of our society. The document suggests practical strategies and evidence-based recommendations, providing a roadmap for enacting meaningful change. These policies are not merely

suggestions but essential safeguards, grounded in a commitment to protect the rights of every child. But the journey is far from over. As the toolkit finds its way into the hands of policymakers around the globe, there is a renewed sense of urgency. With childhood obesity rates on the rise and the impact of food marketing becoming increasingly pervasive, the time for action is now, assert health experts. Dr. Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety at WHO, says, "Aggressive and pervasive marketing of foods and beverages high in fats, sugars, and salt to children is responsible for unhealthy dietary choices." Agrees Dr GV Basavaraja President, Indian Academy of Pediatrics. "Young minds, characterized by curiosity and susceptibility to suggestions, become targets of advertisers, who have been investing significant resources to ensure that their products capture the attention of this demographic. "Despite the potential harm to



their health, children often find themselves drawn to these products, creating a concerning link between advertising and unhealthy consumption patterns," he says. There are numerous studies that have established connection between childhood obesity and exposure to advertising. "This issue demands our attention, in the light of the staggering increase in childhood obesity cases by 11 million, since 2000, he said in his article published in the latest issue of journal Indian Pediatrics. Dr Basavaraja continues, "the implications of this extend

beyond physical health, affecting education, quality of life, and have psychological consequences. Overweight and obesity are the major risk factors for a broad range of noncommunicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders and cancer." According to a recent study, obesity affects 380 million children and adolescents worldwide. Low and middle-income countries are the most affected worldwide. If current trends persist, India will contribute approximately 11% of the global burden of child obesity by 2030. India faces a

triple burden of malnutrition, stunting, wasting, and micronutrient deficiencies along with an increase in childhood overweight and obesity. The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, conducted in 2019-21), found that 3.4% of children under five are now overweight compared with 2.1% in 2015-16. The numbers may seem small, but Dr Arjan de Wagt, chief of nutrition at Unicef in India, says that "even a very small percentage can mean very large numbers because of the size of the Indian population." Unicef's World Obesity Atlas for 2022 reveals that India is predicted to have more than 27 million obese children, representing one in 10 children globally, by 2030. It ranks 99th on the list of 183 countries in terms of preparedness to deal with obesity and the economic impact of overweight and obesity is expected to rise from USD 23 billion in 2019 to a whopping USD 479 billion by 2060.

Dr Basavaraja stresses that on promotion of and implementation of WHO-UNICEF tool actively. "Our duty goes beyond treatment – we must prioritize prevention, so as to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations."

The IAP has also stressed on many of these issues in its previous guidelines on junk foods, he reminds. Measurement of body mass index (BMI) as well as waist circumference should be routinely inculcated in clinical practice. Parents and children have always been a single unit in pediatrics, so educating them of the impending risks is essential for curbing this disease. Need for a balanced diet and all its components should also be explained in detail to the family. "To effectively address the challenge of balancing child rights and content regulation, we need to navigate a delicate balance between protecting the rights of children and imposing restrictions on content," concludes Dr Basavaraja.

Modi’s diplomacy brings UAE closer to India

Since ascending to the position of Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi has embarked on a remarkable journey, marked by seven visits to the United Arab Emirates since 2015. His tenure signifies a profound shift in diplomatic engagement, as no Indian Prime Minister had graced the shores of the UAE in three decades prior to his tenure. A pivotal moment unfolded when President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, formerly the Prince of the Monarchy alongside his five distinguished brothers, warmly welcomed PM Modi at Abu Dhabi Airport during his maiden visit to the UAE in 2015. This historic encounter heralded a new era of bilateral relations, symbolising the strengthening bonds between the two nations at the highest echelons of leadership. In the realm of diplomacy, the synergy between Narendra Modi and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan has blossomed into an extraordinary bond, propelling the relationship between India and the United Arab Emirates to unprecedented heights. Responding to the fervent appeal of the Indian community, Modi sought the consent of Zayed Al Nahyan to construct a Hindu temple in the heart of Abu Dhabi. Without hesitation, the leader not only granted his approval but also allocated a sprawling 22 acre, chosen by the community. Thus, amid the tranquil expanse of Abu Dhabi’s Abu Mureikha area, emerged the UAE’s hand-carved Hindu temple, boasting Nagara-style

architecture adorned with breathtaking sculptures crafted from pink sandstone and white marble. Its grand inauguration, presided over by Modi in a captivating evening ceremony on February 14 served as a poignant symbol of cultural reverence and mutual respect. The auspicious occasion coincided with the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22, imbuing the Indian diaspora with a profound sense of unity and pride both at home and abroad. During Modi’s recent sojourn to Abu Dhabi on February 13 and 14, the strategic collaboration between the two nations was further cemented with the signing of a landmark treaty, following the trailblazing Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) of 2022. This momentous accord precipitated a remarkable 16 per cent surge in bilateral trade during the fiscal year 2022-23, while also solidifying the UAE’s position as the fourth-largest foreign direct investment (FDI) contributor to India. Against this backdrop, the inauguration of the BAPS temple stands as a testament to the enduring friendship between the UAE and India, symbolising a harmonious convergence of cultural heritage and shared values, epitomising the UAE’s unwavering commitment to global harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. In a transformative stride towards educational collaboration, the inauguration of IIT Delhi’s



campus in Abu Dhabi represents yet another milestone in the burgeoning partnership between the two nations. With classes commencing on January 29, 2024, for its inaugural batch, this monumental achievement underscores a shared commitment to fostering excellence in higher education and fostering a culture of innovation and research. Signed into fruition through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on July 15, 2023, the rapid establishment of the campus reflects the indomitable spirit of cooperation and mutual ambition. Modi’s unwavering dedication to educational advancement was palpable during his earlier visits to the UAE, where he laid the foundation for this transformative initiative. Embodying a shared vision

for knowledge exchange and human capital investment, the campus serves as a beacon of progress, heralding a new era of collaboration in cutting-edge technology and research. Together, these initiatives underscore a shared commitment to fostering a dynamic partnership rooted in mutual respect, innovation, and progress, paving the way for a brighter future characterised by global cooperation and sustainable development. Envision a transformative educational landscape, sculpted by the wisdom of the Radhakrishnan Commission report, which illuminates the path towards global excellence in higher learning, particularly in the realms of management and technology. Embracing this vision, our pioneering education policy unfolds with resplendent ambition, aimed at erecting

international bastions of knowledge affiliated with esteemed institutions such as the IITs, IIMs, and AIIMs. Witness the awe-inspiring spectacle of IIT Madras casting its scholarly gaze upon the shores of Zanzibar, while IIT Delhi’s illustrious presence graces the skyline of Abu Dhabi. Furthermore, the noble aspiration to extend the mantle of education beckons as plans materialise for another distinguished outpost of IIT Madras in the verdant landscape of Sri Lanka. As we chart this illustrious journey, the aspirations and exigencies of the region stand as guiding beacons, shaping every facet of our curriculum and courses, ensuring a bespoke educational experience that resonates with the heartbeat of our communities. Barely two moons have waxed and waned since the resplendent conclusion of

COP 28 in the radiant city of Dubai, where the clarion call to liberate ourselves from the shackles of fossil fuel consumption resounded with unanimous fervour. Behold the intrinsic symbiosis between electric power and our very existence, intertwined with the fabric of our livelihoods, as industrial growth unfurls its majestic wings, fueled by the tempestuous currents of power consumption. Yet, amid this epoch of progress, the spectre of greenhouse gas emissions looms ominously, a harrowing testament to the heedless march of industrialisation, which has cloaked our planet in a shroud of warmth, rising by an imperceptible yet perilous 1.2 degrees Celsius. Behold, then, the catastrophic ballet of nature’s fury, as the warming embrace of the oceans and earth catalyses a tempestuous crescendo of sea surges, floods, landslides, and droughts, weaving a tapestry of despair across the globe. Henceforth, the clarion call for change echoes with unyielding resonance, beckoning us to cast aside the yoke of coal, oil, and gas, and embrace the verdant pastures of renewable energy. Behold the alchemy of progress, as the crucible of innovation kindles the flames of hope, birthing technologies that harness the elemental fury of nuclear fusion, the luminous promise of green hydrogen, and the celestial dance of solar and wind energy. Yet, amid this symphony of progress, a lamentation arises, for the bounteous fruits of alternative energy remain

tantalisingly beyond our grasp, ensnared by the tendrils of inadequate research and finance. Thus, let us cast our gaze towards the radiant shores of Abu Dhabi, a beacon of hope and innovation, where the leviathan of progress strides forth, fuelled by the boundless ingenuity of human endeavor. Gather, then, beneath the auspices of the inaugural programme at IIT Delhi’s hallowed Abu Dhabi campus, where the Master of Technology in Energy, Transition, and Sustainability stands as a testament to our unwavering commitment towards a greener tomorrow. Let us behold with reverence the vanguard of progress, as students, sponsored by the custodians of oil and gas, embark upon a journey towards enlightenment and empowerment. For in the crucible of knowledge, we shall forge a future teeming with possibility, where the economies of Abu Dhabi and her Gulf brethren shall transcend the shackles of fossil fuel dependency, ushering forth a new era of prosperity and sustainability. Behold, then, the emerald tapestry of transition and sustainability, unfurling beneath the hallowed halls of IIT Delhi, where the sacred rites of research and innovation converge, illuminating the path towards a brighter, greener future for generations yet unborn.

(The writer is retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force) Karnataka)

In the realm of diplomacy, the synergy between Narendra Modi and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan has blossomed into an extraordinary bond, propelling the relationship between India and the United Arab Emirates to unprecedented heights



BK SINGH

PERSPECTIVE

Can Iran control its proxy Houthis?

Amid escalating tensions in West Asia, the dynamics between Iran, Houthis, and international powers have profound implications. As conflicts rage from Gaza to Yemen, the interplay of geopolitical interests, regional alliances, and economic stakes underscores the complexities of the situation and its far-reaching consequences



PREMANAND MISHRA

Since the war in Gaza has Sescalated, Houthis are retaliating by burning and attacking commercial shipments connecting Europe and Asia in the Indian Ocean. Houthis have asserted that their response sends a clear message: Palestinians are not alone, and they will take revenge on Israel. At the same time, the Western world, led by the United States and supported by twenty other countries, has sent a stern warning to Houthis and Iran, saying that blocking, attacking, and burning commercial ships violates international laws and adversely affects the economies of Asia and Europe. The US’ reaction is also about preserving its prestige as the global police, which has been declining over the past decade. However, its unconditional support for Israel’s actions in Gaza, in response to Hamas’s terrorist activity on October 7 last year, has yielded little success. The US officially acknowledges that Gaza has been devastated, resulting in the death of thousands of Palestinians, mostly women and children. Israeli actions have failed to achieve their central objective of destroying Hamas as a terrorist organisation. However, the transformation of Gaza into a battleground has brought shame upon humanity. The recent declaration at the International Court of Justice has further embarrassed American leadership and its continual support of Israel. The US’ frequent use of veto power has rendered the UN Security Council’s status irrelevant. The pursuit of peace and security seems distant, especially with the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine overshadowing it. Israel’s relentless actions in Gaza have further undermined the legitimacy of the United Nations. The American leadership bears



the burden of discrediting the UN shamelessly. The military actions against the Houthis carry multiple implications, with the most prominent being perceived as the United States and Israel’s confrontation with Iran. For Iranians, proxies such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Houthis across the Arab world symbolise an axis of resistance and represent a deeply ingrained belief that any coercive structure will face retaliation, framing it as a battle against "oppressors." Amid the crisis, India’s engagement with Iran and China’s official request for Iran to restrain the Houthis signify more than just a clash between the US, Israel, Iran, and Russia. The global economy and the disruptions to the supply chain, amid conflicts ranging from Ukraine to Gaza, have significant implications for countries that have refrained from taking sides. The brief summary of Houthis’ actions in the Gulf of Aden has been both impactful and exasperating. The ongoing crossfire has failed to dissuade Houthis, despite Yemen enduring a decade-

long civil war since the Arab uprising, resulting in the loss of millions of lives. While last year’s reconciliation between Saudis and Iranians temporarily curbed Houthi aggression, their recent actions carry far-reaching repercussions, posing threats to the national interests and security of numerous countries. The larger question now remains: can Iran stop the Houthis, and will they heed Tehran’s calls? The fact is, Houthi actions have been perceived collectively as Iranian manoeuvres using proxies against the US and Israel. The decline of US power in the region and the rise of Iranian proxies have emboldened Iran to pursue its goals. The strategic planning behind Hamas’s actions on October 7 suggests that Tehran and Iran’s de facto leader, Khamenei, were discontented with the Abraham Accords and the normalisation between Israel and Arab countries. The Palestinian pretext has played into Iran’s hands. Iran now asserts itself as more powerful and accepted by the larger Arab world, which similarly

opposes normalization. However, the recent Houthi attacks go beyond the traditional calculus of Iranian proxy actions against the US. The crisis runs much deeper than the typical narrative suggesting that Iran controls Houthis similarly to Hezbollah and even Hamas. The relationship between Iran and Houthis is complex and requires a thorough reevaluation of both parties. Iran has two centres of power, with a theocratic regime under Ayatollah Khamenei wielding more influence than President Raisi. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which train and oversee proxies, operate primarily under Khamenei’s authority. Similarly, Houthis function more as strategic allies than conventional proxies. While Iranian proxies are supervised, supported, and influenced by Khamenei’s IRGC, Houthis pursue agendas beyond Tehran’s control, including those beyond Khamenei’s influence. It is undeniable that Houthis have received support from Iran and the IRGC, but their dependence on them is less significant compared to

Hamas and Hezbollah. Houthis are the product of civil wars and cycles of violence, positioning themselves as rulers of a divided Yemen. Their response extends beyond Israel’s actions in Gaza; the more the US-led axis bombs Sana’a, the more Houthis will grow like a phoenix. They have three major objectives, some aligned with Iran and some differing. With the ongoing horror inflicted by Israel in Gaza and US-led actions in Yemen, Houthis are gaining legitimacy in the region and beyond, attracting radicalised new recruits and sending a message to the larger Arab world that their cause is a holy war. Secondly, Houthis seek official recognition akin to the Taliban in Afghanistan; their belligerence has garnered global attention, and any move towards normalisation will likely occur through dialogue, similar to the Doha Agreement, which would grant them political legitimacy. Thirdly, they aim for acceptance in the Arab and Muslim world as a moral and religious force fighting for Palestinians, rather than

being viewed solely as an Iranian proxy. Iran has indeed played a significant role in shaping and aiding the growth of Houthis, similar to its involvement with Hezbollah and Hamas. Despite the peace agreement brokered by China with Saudi Arabia, Houthis have ceased firing missiles into Saudi territory, and Saudi efforts to defeat them have been unsuccessful. However, the Tehran-Houthi alliance transcends mere Shia narratives, despite historical and ideological ties with Iran. Houthis aspire to establish a civil state rather than adhere to a theocratic regime, and they are open to integrating Yemen’s Sunni population. Additionally, Houthis’ war economy does not solely rely on Tehran for economic support, contrary to popular belief. Instead, it thrives on various illicit activities in the Bab-el-Mandeb area, including ransom, looting, and the mobilisation of oil money, amounting to an estimated \$2 billion. The Houthis’ strategic partnership with Iran serves Iran’s chokepoint strategy to sustain its economy, with Iran controlling the Persian Gulf and utilising the Bab-el-Mandeb route to supply arms to Hamas and support Houthis’ control over the area. However, beyond this arrangement, the Houthis sustain themselves through their own means, including potential arms supplies from North Korea. Lastly, Houthis themselves are not inclined to become mere proxies of Tehran; they exhibit a multi-aligned stance rather than strictly adhering to a proxy role. One significant impact Tehran has had on Houthis is the support provided by Hezbollah and IRGC forces for drones, missiles, and guerrilla training. While Tehran could potentially exert control over Houthis, they have their own objectives and

may not simply submit to Iran as a proxy, despite their alignment. It is highly likely that Houthis would resist Tehran’s influence, but this depends on how much pressure Khomeini and the IRGC can exert. Houthis have claimed that they only target ships flagged by the US and its allies, but the international commercial shipping industry is more intricate and risky. These risks translate into increased costs, including higher insurance premiums for commercial ships. Moreover, many shipping companies do not fly flags of specific countries, undermining the distinctions Houthis have been claiming. The world is unprepared for an alternative route due to the high costs involved, particularly as economies are already strained by the conflict in Ukraine. India and China have approached Tehran to rein in Houthis, whose actions disrupt trade between Europe and Asia, accounting for over 40 per cent of global trade. The stakes of the situation are greater than they may initially appear, and while Tehran stands to gain strategically, it cannot risk disrupting its relations with China, India, and beyond. The challenge lies with the centres of power in Tehran, which have tended to prioritise ideology over pragmatism in foreign policy decisions. Ultimately, the decision rests with Khamenei as to how far Houthis will be allowed to proceed and whether they will acquiesce on all fronts. Responses may vary; Houthis may temporarily halt their actions but are unlikely to cease until they achieve their objectives, which align with those of Iran but are more akin to a strategic partnership than a mere proxy relationship.

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