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RANCHI, SATURDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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# Lok Sabha poll dates likely after March 13



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission is expected to announce the dates for the Lok Sabha elections after March 13. As part of the ongoing preparations for the General Elections and concurrent Assembly polls in select States, the Chief Election Commissioner is currently engaged in successive visits to these regions.

States like Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim are gearing up for simultaneous Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls.

In 2014, the Election Commission announced the schedule for the nine-phased Lok Sabha elections on March 5, and the results were

declared on May 16. In 2019, the poll panel announced the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections on March 10, and the results were declared on May 23.

Sources indicate that senior officials of the Election Commission of India are actively engaged in regular meetings with the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of different States to address potential issues ahead of the elections. The focus is on practical challenges such as the transportation of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), the deployment of security personnel, and maintaining vigilance along state borders.

Also, sources mentioned that the Central Board of Secondary Examination

(CBSE) Class 10 board examination will end on March 13, freeing up many teachers and school buildings for election duties. A team from the EC is also expected to visit Jammu & Kashmir on March 13.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar will meet representatives from as many as nine political parties, including the Dravidian majors, to discuss issues regarding conducting the poll. He will hold a review meeting with the district collector and superintendents of police. The CEC will also meet with the CEOs of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala, as well as officials from enforcement agencies, before wrapping up his meetings with the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary and the State DGP.

Earlier, a team from the EC reviewed preparations with the Chief Electoral Officer of Bihar, the State police chief, and other agencies including Excise Department, DRI, ED, I-T, Forest Department, Postal Department, among others. During the meeting, the EC said that enforcement agencies have been instructed to take strict action against the use of money power during elections.

# Modi envisions India in his 3rd term

RAMESH K SINGH ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi rallied supporters in Varanasi on Friday, outlining his vision for the prospective third term of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), promising a transformation that would propel India to become the world's third-largest economy.

Addressing an enthusiastic crowd at the Banas Dairy Complex, PM Modi pledged to secure all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, asserting that the NDA's return to power would elevate India's stature across economic, social, strategic, and cultural fronts.

Highlighting the strides made during his tenure, PM Modi emphasised India's ascent from the 11th to the 5th largest economy globally over the past decade, with ambitious plans to further climb the rankings in the next five years.

Amid applause, he launched a scathing attack on Opposition leaders, implicitly referencing Congress scion Rahul Gandhi's recent remarks targeting local youths. Modi condemned what he termed as "frustrated" leaders resorting to divisive tactics due to dwindling political fortunes, accusing them of peddling dynasty, appeasement, and caste-based politics.

Assuring accelerated developmental initiatives, PM Modi underscored the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being presented a memento by UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during dedication ceremony of Kashi Complex of Banas Dairy Plant in Varanasi on Friday. (Right) Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute to Sant Ravidas during his 647th birth anniversary celebrations

expansion of Digital India, infrastructure upgrades including modernised railway stations, and the introduction of transformative projects like Vande Bharat, Amrit Bharat, and Nammo Bharat trains.

He pledged to harness the potential of eastern India, envisioning the region as a vital engine for national growth.

The unveiling of the first phase of the Varanasi-Aurangabad six-lane highway and plans for the Varanasi-

Ranchi-Kolkata Expressway underscored the government's commitment to bolster connectivity and regional development.

Reflecting on past promises fulfilled, Modi highlighted the success story of Banas Dairy as a beacon of job creation and economic prosperity. He announced plans to extend benefits to neighboring districts, unveiling initiatives aimed at fostering agricultural growth

and rural prosperity across Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Accompanied by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Minister Brijesh Pathak, and other dignitaries, PM Modi bestowed a slew of projects worth ₹13,202.07 crore upon Purvanchal, including Varanasi. From infrastructure to cultural initiatives, the Prime Minister's visit epitomised a blend of developmental zeal and strategic political messaging, resonating with the electorate ahead of the crucial state elections.

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister paid homage at the

Ravidas Temple, underlining the government's commitment to honour the legacy of Sant Ravidas and uplift marginalised communities.

The symbolic gesture, coupled with a focus on inclusive growth and empowerment, served to galvanise support while underscoring the administration's unwavering dedication to social justice.

In a culmination of his visit, PM Modi interacted with scholars at BHU, underscoring the importance of education and knowledge in India's journey towards prosperity.

## CAPSULE SANDESHKHALI FLARES UP AGAIN

Even as the Sandeshkhali unrest showed all the signs of evolving similarly to the Nandigram movement, the mass protest continued in the North 24 Parganas block, this time spreading rapidly to neighbouring villages. On Friday, new areas of violence erupted at Belmajur and Tebhaga More, where hundreds of villagers blocked roads and set fire to wooden blocks after being attacked by armed men associated with Sheikh Shahjahan.

## Unrly farmers face punitive damages

The Haryana Police has initiated proceedings to seize the assets of farmers who damaged public property during their "Dilli Chalo" protest. However, hours after announcing that action would be taken under the National Security Act (NSA), the Haryana Police said the NSA will not be invoked against the farmers.

## Former LS Speaker Manohar Joshi dies

Veteran Shiv Sena leader Manohar Joshi, who had risen from being a corporator of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to the post of Maharashtra chief minister and then went onto become the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, passed away at a private hospital here early hours of Friday.

# Centre set to get the show on the road



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Road & Highways (MoRTH) is set to achieve a record-breaking milestone with the construction of the highest-ever four-lane and access-controlled high-speed highways, reaching an ambitious road construction target of 13,000 km by the end of this fiscal year.

"In 2020-21, we witnessed the highest-ever road construction of 13,327 km compared to 4,260 km in 2013-14. As of January this year, we have already completed 7,600 km of roads, and we anticipate reaching a level of 12,800-13,000 km by the end of

March," said Anurag Jain, Secretary of MoRTH, during a press conference on Friday.

The Ministry aims to construct between 12,000 km and 13,000 km of national highways in 2023-24, slightly below the target of 13,813 km. The ministry constructed 10,237 km of National Highways in the 2019-20 financial year, 13,327 km in 2020-21, 10,457 km in 2021-22, and 10,331 km in 2022-23. As of the end of January 2024, the ministry has completed the construction of 7,685 km. "We are optimistic about completing 4,500-5,000 km in the remaining two months, which will help us achieve anywhere between 12,000 and

13,000 km in the current financial year. This will be the second-best achievement," Jain said.

The Secretary said the current financial year will see the highest-ever construction of four-lane roads and the highest-ever speed or access-controlled highways, with capacity augmentation pegged at 9,500 km, which will be a record for the ministry.

"Up to January 2024, we have seen a 10 per cent year-on-year growth, while the increase in construction of four-lane highways is 16 per cent," he said, adding that the construction of four-lane and above roads now stands at two-and-a-half times the annual achievement of FY'14. Jain said the ministry is also confident of awarding highway projects worth ₹10,000 crore by March end. The NH network increased by 60 percent from 91,287 km in 2014 to 1,46,145 km in the year 2023, government data showed. The length of four lanes and above NH increased by 2.5 times from 18,387 km in 2014 to 46,179 km in November 2023, the secretary said.

# For BJP, Bullet Train to chug in Modi 3.0

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ MUMBAI

The BJP is all set to showcase the ambitious Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train as the success story of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term at the Centre in August 2026 as the party is confident of returning to power.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told *The Pioneer* that a section of about 50 km of the high-speed corridor will be thrown open to the public in August 2026. Vaishnaw said that the Surat-Bilimora section on the 508-km-long corridor between



Construction work at the Bandra Kurla Complex Station, a key component of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail corridor. Photo by Deepak Kumar Jha

Mumbai and Ahmedabad could be operational by July-August 2026. "The other sections will be

opened one after the other thereafter," he said. Vaishnaw made these statements during a site visit

where the tunnelling process was initiated for the 21 km long India's first underground/undersea tunnel as part of the bullet train project. He also visited to assess the progress for the underground stations at Bandra-Kurla Complex and Shilphata in Maharashtra.

"Challenges involved multiple controlled blasting with sufficient noise and air pollution prevention measures so as to cause minimal disturbance to the environment and population in the adjoining areas," Vaishnaw said.



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# XLRI celebrates stellar placement season with Rs 75 lakhs as highest offer

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Setting new benchmarks in management education, XLRI Jamshedpur and XLRI Delhi NCR have triumphantly secured 100% placements for the graduating class of 2022-24 across their esteemed two-year PGDM (BM) and two-year PGDM (HRM) programmes, with all 503 students receiving job offers in the final recruitment process.

The median salary offered to the batch stood at INR 28 lakhs per annum with the top 10th and 25th percentile average being INR 51.66 lakhs and INR 42.98 lakhs per annum, respectively. The average salary offered to the batch stood at INR 29.89 lakhs per annum with the

highest domestic offer of INR 75 lakhs per annum from the BFSI sector. There were 65 new recruiters. The top domains based on the roles offered were Consulting, ITES and Sales & Marketing.

Accenture Strategy, Amazon, Asian Paints, Bajaj Auto, Boston Consulting Group, HCL, HUL, Ola, PwC, Reliance and Tata Steel made the highest number of offers among the regular recruiters. 33.39% of the students received Pre-Placement Offers. New final recruiters included Air India, Godrej Properties, Ola, Shree Cements, Tata Electronics among others.

This placement process unfolded in two phases. Initially, the Lateral Recruitment Process (LRP)



catered to candidates with prior work experience, offering them positions above the entry level. Subsequently, the Campus Recruitment Process (CRP) was implemented,

wherein candidates were considered without regard to their previous work experience. A total of 154 recruiting entities participated, extending 519 domestic and 1 inter-

national offer, which included 65 new recruiters. Notably, pre-placement offers (PPOs) were extended to 33.39% of the cohort, reflecting the exceptional performance of

these students during their Summer Internships. Candidates from both the Jamshedpur and Delhi NCR campuses were involved in this comprehensive placement endeavour.

Father S George, Director, XLRI congratulated and appreciated all the students for this achievement. He said "We take immense pride in nurturing students poised to assume significant leadership roles within India's corporate landscape as conscientious leaders. It brings us immense joy to declare that, against the backdrop of challenging market dynamics, XLRI has accomplished 100% placement with resounding success. This remarkable achievement stands as a validation from the corporate

sector of the pertinent, management-focused education we consistently offer our students. Such a noteworthy achievement serves as evidence of our students' robust capacity to adapt to the evolving trends within the industry as the next generation of business leaders. Additionally, it reflects the dedication of our esteemed faculty, who guide, shape, and support their journey. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to all the recruiting organizations that engaged with and hired our students."

The top segments based on roles offered were Consulting, ITES, E-Commerce, Sales & Marketing and General Management. Consulting firms extended offers to 26%

of the candidates. ITES, E-Commerce, Sales & Marketing constituted 20% and 17% of the roles offered to the students respectively. Accenture Strategy, BCG, Amazon, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Steel and Bajaj Auto made the highest number of offers. Other top and legacy recruiters include but not limited to Aditya Birla Group, Asian Paints, Bain & Company, ITC, IndigoEdge, JP Morgan Chase & Co., McKinsey, P&G and TAS. New recruiters include Accenture Technology Consulting, BMW, ClearTax, DE Shaw, Godrej Properties, L'Oreal, Michael Page, Ola, Philip Morris, Simpl, StrategyTech Advisors, Sutra Management Consulting, and Thoucentric to name a few.

## Bokaro extends warm welcome to new DC

R SHARMA : BOKARO

Bokaro welcomed Jadhav Vijaya Narayan Rao as its new Deputy Commissioner. Jadhav's appointment signals a significant step forward for the region. Hailing her as a beacon of progress and empowerment, the community expressed high hopes for her tenure. As she embarks on her new journey, she has delineated her priorities, emphasizing the efficient execution of welfare programs in rural regions and fostering collaboration between private entities and local urban authorities to promote transparency in governance.

Speaking on her vision for the district, Deputy Commissioner Jadhav emphasized the importance of bringing government schemes directly to the people, ensuring equitable access for all residents. Her dedication to inclusive governance aims to uplift the most marginalized sections of society, ensuring that every individual receives their rightful benefits. Notably, the new DC gained widespread recognition during her tenure as the Sub-Divisional Officer in Giridih, earning the moniker "Steel Lady" for her fearless crusade



against illegal mining traders and slaughterhouses. As Bokaro looks forward to a new era of progress under her strong leadership justifying women empowerment in true sense, Jadhav's appointment stands as a testament to the growing role of women in driving positive change and development in society. Her dedication to inclusive and transparent governance serves as an exemplary model for the generations to come, instilling hope and empowerment among all residents of the district, renowned as the industrial hub of the nation.

## Bokaro MLA inaugurates renovation work at Sadar Hospital

PNS : BOKARO

MLA Biranchi Narayan inaugurated the renovation work of the Sadar Hospital building, costing approximately 2 crore 35 lakh rupees.

Legislator Narayan underscored the pivotal role of the renovation efforts at Sadar Hospital, stressing its critical importance in bolstering the healthcare infrastructure for the local community. He emphasized that the upgrades signify a concerted effort to improve healthcare services and accessibility, ultimately benefiting the well-being of residents in the area.

Under the renovation project, damaged walls of the hospital will be repaired, and glass will be installed on all doors and windows of the hospital. Modern wards will be constructed, and restroom facilities will also be built.



Also several rooms lack gates, and some windows are without glass. The restroom gates are in poor condition, and some are experiencing water shortages. This has caused inconvenience to patients and staff. The hospital will undergo a complete modernization to address these issues.

Further the damaged tiles in the premises will be replaced, and the rooms will be standardized. The doctors'

chambers will also be organized.

Present at the inauguration were the Deputy Director of Sadar Hospital, Arvind Kumar, Mihir Singh, Sanjay Tyagi, Mathur Mandal, Harishchandra Singh, Rakesh Kumar Madhu, Baidhnath Prasad, Mahendra Prasad, Mahendra Kumar, Prakash Kumar, Krishna Mohan Jha, Alok Verma, Sanju Mehta, and others.

## Bear hurts tribal in PTR

PNS : DALTONGANJ

Bear has grievously injured a tribal identified as Lakkan Korwa, 40, under the Kutku range of the tiger reserve Palamu. P K Jena deputy director north division PTR said Korwa has been shifted to RIMS Ranchi on Thursday

after his primary treatment at the community health centre at Bhandarya and at the Sadar Hospital Garhwa.

bear has badly injured his face. His muscles are damaged, said the doctor V K Rajak of the community health centre at Bhandarya who had first examined him

on Thursday.

Korwa was given an anti rabies shot and some loose stitches just to save his blood veins being infested with the virus.

At Sadar Hospital Garhwa he was given a shot of immunoglobulin, said a surgeon Dr Amit Kumar.

## BNMH clinches best hospital award

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR:

In a significant achievement, Brahmanand Narayana Multispecialty Hospital (BNMH) located in Tamolia, Jamshedpur, has been honored with the prestigious title of "Best Hospital in the City." The announcement came at a distinguished event held in Mumbai, recognizing BNMH's outstanding contributions to healthcare.

Vineet Raj, the Facility Director of BNMH, issued a press communique on Friday, expressing the hospital's elation and gratitude for this remarkable recognition. He stated, "This award is a testament to our unwavering commitment towards providing exceptional health services to the community. It reflects the collective efforts of our dedicated team, strong leadership, and the trust of the communities we serve."

The accolade signifies the hospital's continuous efforts to uphold the highest standards of healthcare. Vineet Raj conveyed heartfelt appreciation to the exceptional employees of BNMH, acknowledging their dedication and hard work as instrumental in achieving this milestone. He emphasized that this achievement reinforces their commitment to maintaining excellence in healthcare.

"We owe this success to the unwavering support of our community and the tireless efforts of our healthcare providers. This recognition motivates us to continue our mission of serving our patients with the utmost care and compassion," Vineet Raj added. The Best Hospital Award is a recognition of BNMH's exceptional healthcare services, the trust it has garnered from the community, and its commitment to providing top-notch medical care. The hospital looks forward to furthering its impact on healthcare in Jamshedpur and continuing its legacy of excellence.



# Westland Books announces the pre-order of Broken Promises: Caste, Crime and Politics in Bihar by Mrityunjay Sharma

A riveting account of arguably the most controversial era in the post-Independence history of any state in India

PNS : RANCHI

Westland Books announced the pre-order of its new book Broken Promises: Caste, Crime and Politics in Bihar by Mrityunjay Sharma. The book topped the bestsellers chart on Amazon.in within 48 hours of opening up for pre-order. Broken Promises is a deeply researched, eye-opening account of Bihar's socio-political history, esp. the nineties.

Speaking about the premise of the book, author Mrityunjay Sharma said, "Growing up in undivided Bihar, I frequently found myself pondering over the consistent negative portrayal of the state in the news. The explanations I encountered seemed overly simplistic. Bihar stands out as one of the most intricate socio-political states in India, moulded by a multitude of factors. This



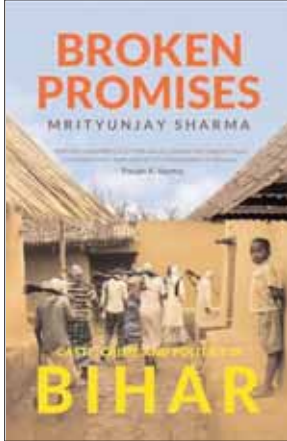
book offers readers a chance to explore the socio-political landscape of Bihar, delving into the events that have influenced its contemporary state. It sheds light on the reality of navigating through the tumultuous and highly controversial 1990s, a decade that played a defining role in shaping Bihar into what it is today."

Speaking about the book, Minakshi Thakur, Publisher - Indian Literature, Westland Books said, "Mrityunjay

Sharma's book on Bihar is an incisive account of the systematic erosion of a glorious legacy. A state, which was once at the heart of highly evolved empires that advanced art, scientific and spiritual practices, fell prey to a highly divisive caste system and short-sighted governments in independent India. Broken Promises is a timely book on Bihar, whose volatile politics all eyes will be on, in the lead up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections."

The book tells the story of Bihar's plunge into an abyss of crime, corruption and economic ruin during the tumultuous decade of the 1990s, often referred to as the 'Jungle Raj' years. How did a land, once the cradle of civilisation, devolve into a byword for the worst of India as described by The Economist in 2004?

Mrityunjay Sharma traces the post-Independence socio-



politics of Bihar and the momentous events leading up to the '90s: the unravelling of long-standing Congress governments, the rise of OBC assertion with Lohiaite politics, the JP movement that put the spotlight on young leaders like Lalu Yadav and Nitish Kumar, Karpoori Thakur's reservation formula, the rise

of Naxal movements and the entry of socialist governments. 10 March 1990, the day Lalu took oath, was one of hope for millions in the state battered by poverty, caste atrocities and inequality. The political triumph of Lalu, a vociferous champion of the marginalised, as a reaction to centuries of oppression and the promise of upliftment and inclusion, ironically, worsened the socio-economic disparities in the state, accompanied by grave misgovernance, flourishing crime syndicates and caste armies, and the centre-staging of formidable bahubalis in politics.

Deeply engaging and richly insightful, Mrityunjay Sharma's Broken Promises is not just a book about Bihar for Biharis. It is an eye-opening account of a large and socially complex participant in India's democracy, any shift within which sends ripples across national politics.

Born and raised in undivided Bihar, Mrityunjay Sharma is a first-generation entrepreneur and social activist. An engineering graduate from BIT Mesra, Ranchi and an MBA from XLRI Jamshedpur, Mrityunjay worked in various senior HR roles at Asian Paints before moving to the hinterlands of Chhattisgarh, where he worked with the then chief minister Dr Raman Singh on developmental issues. He subsequently moved to his home state of Jharkhand to work at the grassroots. Sharma is the co-founder of Ranchi-based start-up bioffe.com. He also runs a social initiative called Kartayapath to teach mathematics to underprivileged children and is a visiting faculty at several institutes, including the IIMs.

## MeraPashu360: Building a doorway to rural e-commerce with cattle feed



PNS : RANCHI

MeraPashu360 is emerging as a game-changer orchestrating doorstep delivery in rural India within a remarkable 24-hour timeframe. Founded by three visionary batchmates from IIT Madras (2005 batch), this startup is quietly revolutionizing rural landscapes in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi via their online platform and proprietary distribution.

MeraPashu360 has introduced an online marketplace that allows farmers to order dairy inputs especially cattle feed at the click of a button and receive doorstep delivery. The company stands at the forefront of transforming the way the dairy farmer community accesses quality checked & affordable inputs from the convenience of their home, marking a pivotal moment in the region's economic development. The startup recognizes the immense potential of the untapped rural market. "While there is a race to serve urban consumers faster through quick commerce, the rural consumer is not even getting essentials delivered at their doorstep. Quality checked dairy inputs are necessary for farmers to ensure



health & productivity of their cattle", says Niket Agrawal, Co-founder and COO of MeraPashu360. With a keen understanding of the fact that a substantial percentage of rural household income in India is spent on dairy and agricultural inputs, MeraPashu360 has strategically chosen the right category to start with. By providing an online platform for dairy farmers to order cattle feed with just a click, the startup not only streamlines the delivery process but also addresses the challenges faced by farmers in accessing essential and quality-checked dairy inputs. This initiative is not just about cattle feed; it's a stepping stone towards a comprehensive rural e-commerce platform that caters to the diverse needs of farmers across various categories.

Using the MeraPashu360 mobile app is a straightforward and user-friendly process. Once you've downloaded the app from the app store, you can easily create an account by providing basic details. After logging in, farmers can navigate through the app's intuitive interface to explore the range of cattle feed products available. The app allows users to select the

desired quantity and type of feed with just a few taps. Once the order is placed, users can choose their preferred payment method, which includes options like online payments or cash on delivery. The innovative aspect of MeraPashu360 lies in its doorstep delivery service, ensuring that the ordered cattle feed is efficiently dispatched and reaches the farmer's location. Recent data highlights a significant surge in internet users in rural areas, with a substantial increase in smartphone adoption. According to a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), rural India witnessed a 45% growth in internet users in the last year, reaching a total of over 300 million users. Additionally, the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) reports a rising trend in digital payments and online transactions in rural regions, emphasizing the increasing comfort with technology among rural consumers. The ongoing government initiatives, such as BharatNet and the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana, further underscore the conducive environment for digital inclusion in rural India.

## Saryu Roy demands apology from BJP Bengal

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

East MLA Saryu Roy has strongly criticized BJP officials for derogatory remarks against Bengal IPS Jaspreet Singh, labelling him as a Khalistani while carrying out his duties in Sandeshkhali. Saryu expressed his disapproval, stating that the Leader of Opposition in Bengal has demeaned the Sikh community within the Bengal cadre during their duty.

Addressing the issue, Roy asserted that if an IPS officer is unjustly labelled as a



Khalistani, an immediate retraction and apology to the nation are warranted. He called upon the central leadership to provide clear instructions in this matter. Roy emphasized that making racist remarks, even in the

heat of political excitement, is unacceptable. Such comments pose a threat to the unity and integrity of the country.

Welcoming Saryu's stance, Satnam Singh Gambhir, the East India President of All India Sikh Students Federation, expressed gratitude and thanked him for standing against the derogatory remarks. His call for an apology reflects a commitment to fostering a more inclusive and respectful political discourse, irrespective of differences in opinion or ideology.



BUDGET SESSION

Rs 4,981 crore Supplementary Budget tabled in House

PNS : RANCHI

The Budget Session of the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly commenced on Friday, with finance minister Rameshwar Oraon tabling the supplementary budget for the third time. Oraon presenting the supplementary budget said that the session focused on discussing important allocations and priorities for the state's development. To address urgent needs and strengthen key sectors, a supplementary budget of Rs 4,981 crores was presented in the assembly.

The House will have a discussion on the supplementary budget with the annual budget of the Champai Soren government will be presented on February 27. Earlier, the budget session of



Chief Minister Champai Soren speaks during the first day of the Budget Session State Assembly in Ranchi on Friday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

Jharkhand Assembly commenced today. The session will have seven working days and conclude on March 2. February 24th and 25th will observe Saturday and Sunday as holidays.

Discussions on the third supplementary budget will take place on Monday, February 26th. The budget for the financial year 2024-25 will be presented in the Assembly on February 27th.

Oraon tabled the Rs 4,981 crore third supplementary budget amid ruckus created by the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party. Displaying pamphlets demanding a CBI probe into Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) Combined Graduate Level (CGL) examination paper leak, the opposition MLAs trooped into the well after the House assembled for the day.

soon as the House assembled for the seven-day assembly session, BJP legislators and AJSU MLA Lambodar Mahto trooped into the well, seeking a CBI probe into the leak of the JSSC Combined Graduate Level (CGL) examination paper on January 28. The state government has formed a special investigation team (SIT) to carry out a probe.

The examination body was in the news this year after the JSSC paper leak. JSSC CGL 2023 was scheduled on 28 January 2024. However, the question paper was leaked even before the examination was conducted.

On February 6, the Jharkhand government announced the constitution of a special investigation team (SIT), to probe the leakage case.

Few days back, former Director General of Police (DGP) Neeraj Sinha, who was appointed as Chairman of the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC), resigned from his post citing personal reasons. The JSSC chairman had resigned from the post when the examination body was facing investigation into the leakage of combined graduate-level examination



BJP MLAs stage a protest on the first day of Budget Session of State Assembly in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

question papers. Leader of Opposition Amar Bauri said, "The state government brought a law to prevent cheating in job examinations. Despite this, such a major paper leak took place. So, we

demand a CBI probe into the paper leak case".

Speaker Rabindra Nath Mahto urged the agitating legislators to go back to their seats saying these issues will be taken up during the ses-

sion but MLAs kept protesting. The Speaker told the House that there would be seven sittings during the session, in which the budget for the 2024-25 fiscal will be tabled. The Speaker also introduced and congratulated two new ministers--Basant Soren and Deepak Birua--in the House who became ministers in Champai Soren cabinet expansion recently.

House after about 40 minutes of proceedings including obituary references was adjourned till February 26. The members observed silence in memory of personalities like eminent jurist and veteran advocate Fall Sam Nariman, legendary radio announcer Ameen Sayani, former Maharashtra Chief Minister Manohar Joshi and Ustad Rashid Khan.

CEO holds meeting with Urban administrators to raise voting percentage



CEO K Ravi Kumar holds a meeting with officials at his office in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

Administrators of all categories of urban bodies under the state participated in the meeting convened with the administrators of all the urban bodies at the headquarters level today as per the predetermined program in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand. In the meeting, ongoing preparations for the Lok Sabha elections in urban areas were reviewed. In the meeting, a strategy was made by taking suggestions from the administrators of all the urban bodies to increase the voting percentage in the cities and everyone was also made aware of the relevant guidelines of the Election Commission in this regard.

On this occasion, Chief Electoral Officer, K Ravi Kumar said that in the last general elections, the voting percentage of urban bodies

has been less as compared to rural areas. We have to work to make the voters of urban areas aware and convey the importance of voting to them, along with this we also have to work in a planned manner towards accessible voting so that any voter gets the opportunity to vote without any inconvenience. He said that the municipal body workers are in constant touch with the urban citizens, hence an action plan has been made to convey election related information and importance of voting directly to the common urban citizens through them.

In the meeting, along with administrators of civic bodies, Director of State Urban Development Agency, Amit Kumar, Ranchi Municipal Commissioner, Amit Kumar also made detailed suggestions for increasing the voting percentage in urban areas.

Dozens of suggestions were received like making

arrangements for free parking around the polling booths on the day of voting, creating door to door awareness by municipal body workers, spreading election related messages through civic body vehicles. During this period, a program of mutual dialogue and discussion was also organised. In which the Electoral Registration Officers of the urban areas were asked what kind of cooperation they expect from the civic administration, while the civic administrators were asked whether they would like to get help from the level of District Election Officers or Chief Electoral Officer office. What kind of coordination and cooperation do you expect?

The Chief Electoral Officer appealed to everyone that this time everyone's best efforts are expected to increase the voting percentage in the urban areas of the state.

During the meeting, administrators of all the municipal bodies of the state, apart from electoral registration officers of urban areas, Additional Chief Electoral Officer Neha Arora, Joint Secretary Subodh Kumar, OSD Geeta Choubey, Under Secretary Devdas Dutta, Deputy Electoral Officer Headquarters Sanjay Kumar and officials and personnel of the Chief Electoral Officer's office were present.

Hindalco defeats media in friendly match

PNS : RANCHI

In the friendly cricket match between Media XI and Hindalco XI held at Mecon Stadium, Ranchi on Friday, Hindalco XI won by 6 wickets. Even though the Hindalco team won this match which was full of ups and downs, Media XI won everyone's hearts with their play. On behalf of the media, HT Bureau Chief Vishal Kant contributed 47 runs while batting brilliantly. He was given the Best Batsman Award for his brilliance. On behalf of Hindalco, Ashish Upadhyay won the man of the match award by scoring 43 runs and taking 2 wickets. ETV Bharat's Rajesh Kumar Singh was awarded the Best Bowler award for his brilliant bowling while Anupam Sheshank, editor of The Pioneer, was awarded the Best Fielder award for his excellent fielding. Chasing 161 runs, the Hindalco team won thanks to the brilliant partnership of Rajeev Kishore and Ashish

Upadhyay. On behalf of Hindalco, Rajiv Kishore contributed 24 runs, Manpreet Bhatia contributed 23 runs, Ashish Upadhyay contributed 43 runs, Sanjay Srivastava contributed 13 runs.

Earlier, the 20-20 match was inaugurated by Prabhat Khabar editor Vijay Pathak and Hindalco's corporate communication head Charu Gaunyal by blowing up the balloon. The media team won the toss and batted first and set a target of 161 runs. In reply, Hindalco won due to its excellent batting.

On behalf of Hindalco, Bijesh Jha, Vivek Mishra, Vinodanand Thakur, Mirajul Haq, Mohd Ghazi, Ajay Srivastava, Charu Gaunyal, Kashmir Kadambane made valuable contributions. Dhamarveer Sinha, Madhukar Anand, Vishalkant, Vinay Chaturvedi, Sarthak Chaturvedi, Jaideep Deoghariya, Anupam Sheshank, Diwakar Tiwari and Satyajit Sinha performed brilliantly.



Cabinet nod to 125 units of free electricity to consumers 29 agendas were approved in Cabinet meeting

PNS : RANCHI

The State Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Champai Soren was held in Jharkhand Ministry on Friday. In this, 29 proposals have been approved by the Cabinet. These proposals are included among the proposals which have been approved by the Cabinet. Now 125 units of electricity will be available free in Jharkhand instead of 100. As many as 29 lakh consumers of the state will benefit from this.

The Champai Soren government has given approval regarding this. After the order of Jharkhand High Court, the government will give benefits to 102 employees of three engineering colleges of Bihar. It was taken over at the time of divided Bihar. The Cabinet has approved the Bokaro International University Bill 2024. 24 posts were created for Jharkhand Bhawan Delhi.

Approval of amendment in Jharkhand Building Bylaws was given. Government's agreement with BIT Mesra approved in 2025. 225 bedded 6 barracks will be built in Deoghar Police Line. Now 4G posh machines will be provided in Public Distribution System shops instead of 2G.

In today cabinet meeting other agendas which were approved included, approval of three judicial posts for Bagodar Sub-Divisional Court of Giridih, approval of 6 posts



Chief Minister Champai Soren during first day of Budget Session State Assembly in Ranchi on Friday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

in Chakradharpur Court in Chaibasa Judicial Division, amendment in Jharkhand Building Bylaws 2016, extension of the period of agreement signed with BIT Mesra in the year 2017, amendment in Jharkhand State Police Sub Inspector Appointment Rules, ex-post approval of the proposal to convene the budget session. Approval of Rs 42 crore for 6 barracks in Deoghar Police Line was given. The cabinet also gave its nod for approval of allowances to Jharkhand Judicial Service personnel. The cabinet also gave its nod for providing tablets to 40 crore Sahiya workers in which the government will spend Rs 114 crore.

Nod for creation of 131 posts in Palamu Government Engineering College was also

made. The Palamu Government engineering college is facing acute staff shortage. This will side the staff crunch. Approval of Rs 75 lakh for solid waste management of Majhiyan Municipal Council was also made.

Revision of rate for giving smart to Anganwadi Sevika and Parvekshika under Mission Saksham Anganwadi Scheme was also made.

Government will provide 4G POS machines to PDS shops, purchase expenditure will be Rs 63 crores, annual expenditure will be Rs 28 crores in maintenance, purchase will be made for 27 thousand PDS shops. Rs 320 crore will be spent for new dairy plants in Giridih and Jamshedpur and milk powder plant in Hotwar.

AP Singh is new State Finance Commission Chief

PNS : RANCHI

Jharkhand State Finance Commission has been constituted. Retired IAS Amarendra Pratap Singh has become the Chairman of the commission. Associate Professor of Saint Xavier College, Ranchi, Harishwar Dayal has been made a member. Jharkhand Governor, CP Radhakrishnan made the appointment on Friday.

Governor of Jharkhand, CP Radhakrishnan, in the

light of the proposal received from the State Government for the formation of the Fifth State Finance Commission under Article 243-I read with Article 243-Y of the Constitution of India and Section 114 (1) of the Jharkhand Panchayat Raj Act 2001.

Singh has been appointed Chairman of the Fifth State Finance Commission. The members of the fifth State Finance Commission will be Harishwar Dayal.

It is noteworthy that the Finance Commission in Jharkhand was completely inactive for a long time. There was no Chairman and members in the commission. In the light of the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Mamta Verma has directed the states to fulfill the conditions set for continuation of the grant by March 2024. In the letter sent by the Joint Secretary, it was said that the



Finance Ministry had issued an operational guideline for

giving grants on July 14, 2021 and June 2, 2022.

Governor felicitates NCC cadets

PNS : RANCHI

Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan today honoured a total of 37 NCC cadets of Jharkhand state who participated in the Republic Day Camp-2024 organized in New Delhi at Raj Bhawan. While interacting with the cadets on this occasion, he said that these cadets of ours represented and brought glory to the state with their hard work and dedication. He said that those officers also deserve congratulations, who worked tirelessly for the NCC cadets. The Governor said that NCC is playing an important role in giving direction to the youth of our country through its various activities. NCC is also active towards social service activities like blood donation, literacy, tree plantation, Swachh Bharat Mission, environment protection and disaster management. NCC is an excellent organization for the youth to develop their personality and contribute to the progress of the country. It inculcates in them a sense of discipline, leadership and patriotism, which are essential qualities for any citizen. He said that only a disciplined person can achieve success in his life.



The Governor said that he was also associated with NCC. Since its inception, NCC has been playing an important role in building the character of our youth and inculcating in them a sense of duty towards the nation. After joining NCC, a change can be seen in the lives of many youth who previously lacked a disciplined life, but they became disciplined and responsible citizens after joining this organization. Major General A.S. Bajaj, ADG, Bihar and Jharkhand Directorate and other dignitaries were present at the ceremony.

JJMP Area Commander surrenders before Police

PNS : RANCHI

Latehar Police has got another big success. SP Anjani Anjan and his team along with CRPF have succeeded in getting the surrender of a Zonal Commander and an Area Commander of the JJMP militant organization. Those who surrendered include the names of JJMP zonal commander and militant carrying a reward of Rs 10 lakh, Manohar Parhiya alias Vimlesh Parhiya and Area Commander, Deepak Kumar Bhuiyan alias Kundan, on Friday.

They surrendered before Palamu Inspector General of Police Rajkumar Lakra, CRPF Palamu Zone Deputy Inspector General of Police, Pankaj Kumar and SP Anjani Anjan. Lakra presented bouquets and shawls to both the militants and congratulated them for coming into the mainstream of society. He said that according to the surrender policy of the Jharkhand government, both will be provided the facilities provided by the government.



Police personnel handling over cheque to the members of (CPI) Maoists during their surrender under Operation Octopus launched in collaboration with 'Nayi Disha' in Chatra on Friday. PNS

Manohar Parhiya alias Vimlesh Parhiya told that he along with some boys of his village had joined the CPI Maoist organization in the year 2004. Later he left CPI Maoist organization in 2010 and joined JJMP organization in 2011. He was made Sub Zonal Commander in the year 2012. When zonal commander Upendra Singh

Kharwar surrendered before the police in the year 2018, he was made the zonal commander. A total of 13 cases are registered against Manohar Parhiya in various police stations of Latehar and Palamu. Deepak Kumar Bhuiyan alias Kundan told that he had joined JJMP in the year 2018 at the behest of Manohar Parhiya. A case

is registered against Deepak in Satbarwa police station.

On the occasion Anjan said that the influence of Maoists in Latehar district has reduced compared to earlier. "Latehar Police is continuously taking action against small organizations TSPC and JJMP. On November 20, 2022, three JJMP militants were killed in an encounter with the police and JJMP militants. This has weakened the JJMP organization. Many commanders and members of JJMP have surrendered. Among these, Sub Zonal Committee member Kamlesh Singh alias Mukesh Singh alias Nana Ji, Area Commander Raghunath Singh Kherwar, Satyendra Oraon alias Abhimanyu and Sanjay Prajapati have surrendered. Whereas sub zonal committee member and JJMP militant Birbal Oraon alias Sushil Oraon alias MLA carrying a reward of Rs 5 lakh and many other JJMP militants have been arrested by the police and sent to jail," he added.

SBPS students shine at SOF IMO 2023-24



The students of SBPS, Ranchi exhibited outstanding performance at SOF International Mathematical Olympiad 2023-24. Abhyudith Aditya of Std. I secured the 1st rank at the school level, 1st rank at the Zonal, Regional and International levels and got International Gold medal, medal of distinction and a certificate of outstanding performance along with a gift worth Rs 1000. He exhibited the essential competencies of problem-solving skills, logical reasoning, mathematization, analytical thinking, precision, accuracy, and time management which led to his achievement. Bal Avaneesh Srivastava of Std. I got the medal of distinction with certificate of distinction and zonal excellence along with a gift worth Rs 500. 9 students received medals of distinction, certificates of distinction and zonal excellence. 48 students were accorded with gold medals of excellence.

SCS students selected for Inspire Award Scheme

Three students of Surendranath Centenary School namely, Rudranshi Dey of class VI, Vansh Bhatia and Kashika of class VIII have been selected under the 'Inspire Award Scheme' for the year 2023-24. These students will be given Rs 10,000 each to prepare their models. Feeling proud over the success of the children, Principal Samita Sinha said that such kinds of awards inspire students to foster innovative and creative thinking through science and technology to meet their societal needs.





# Jaishankar cautions against China mind games

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

As tension persists at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) for the last three years, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday here cautioned against Beijing's "mind game" to restrict India-China issues under the bilateral framework and said New Delhi must not forgo its rights to harness other factors in the world to get better terms on an "equilibrium" in the relations. He said arriving at an equilibrium and maintaining it is going to be one of the "biggest challenges" for India-China ties even as he asserted that the immediate issue at hand was Beijing's departure from laid down norms triggering the border row in eastern Ladakh. Making this point in an interactive session at the Raisina Dialogue, Jaishankar cautioned against China's "mind game" to restrict the issues



under the bilateral framework and said India must not forgo its rights to harness other factors in the world to get better terms on an equilibrium. On the economic front, the external affairs minister said there would be a period when the Chinese economy will be flattening out and India will be growing and referred to projections by Goldman Sachs that suggested that by 2075, both countries could end up as USD 50 trillion plus economies. Jaishankar said India should be confident enough to "leverage" the

international system to create the "best possible outcome". His remarks came when asked whether there would be a settling point between China and India and would the two countries finally find an equilibrium or a balance in their frosty relations. "Here is the immediate issue which is: From the late 1980s, we had an understanding on the border precisely because it suited both of us. Now there was a departure after almost 30 years. A departure on their side in terms of how they behaved on the border. And there was a pushback

from our side," he said. "I think arriving at an equilibrium, then maintaining those and refreshing those is going to be one of the biggest challenges for both countries. It is not going to be easy," he noted. The external affairs minister said "mind games" will be played which would be that it is "just between the two of us". "The other 190 odd countries do not exist in our relationship. That will be the mind game which will be played. I do not think we should play it," he said. "Because if there are other factors out there in the world which can be harnessed by me to get better terms on an equilibrium, then why should I forgo that right," he said. "Today, when I say think through your own solution, do not give another country, which is clearly a competitive country, a veto over our policy choices. Unfortunately, in the past that has happened from time-to-time," he said.

Talking about the two economies, Jaishankar said the Chinese started off "earlier and much more intensively and robustly" than India did. "But it is in the nature of things that at some stage everybody flattens out. So there will be a period when they will be flattening out and we will be growing," he said. "I am not in denial of what the numbers today suggest. But if one looks for an example in Goldman Sachs predictions which is that we will both really by around 2075 end up as USD 50 trillion plus economies and will be the two closest to each other," he said. "The international version of that issue will be -- if both of us are moving vis-a-vis each other and vis-a-vis the world, how do we construct an equilibrium; that There will be occasions when one or the other would want to do something to press home a particular advantage and the other would resist it," he said.

# President, PM condole demise of Manohar Joshi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI



President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Friday condoled the death of former Maharashtra Chief Minister Manohar Joshi. He was also Lok Sabha Speaker from 2002 to 2004. In her condolence message, President Murmu said Joshi endeared himself to people and was loved by leaders cutting across party lines. "Sad to learn about the demise of Shri Manohar Joshi, a veteran leader who had served as Lok Sabha speaker and Maharashtra chief minister. In his long public life, Shri Joshi endeared himself to people, earned admiration for his sharp wit and intellect and was loved by leaders cutting across party-line. My heartfelt condolences to his family members and fol-

worthy contributions as a Union Minister." During his tenure as the Lok Sabha speaker, Modi said, Joshi strove to make parliamentary processes more vibrant and participative. "Manohar Joshi Ji will also be remembered for his diligence as a legislator, having had the honour of serving in all four legislatures. Condolences to his family and supporters. Om Shanti," he said. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said Joshi established the best parliamentary traditions during his tenure as Speaker. "I express my condolences on the demise of former Lok Sabha Speaker and senior politician Shri Manohar Joshi. Enriching democratic values, he established the best parliamentary traditions," Birla said on X. Due to his distinctive and fair style of running the House, he had the respect of leaders of all parties, Birla recalled.

# Talking for early discharge of Indians working as Russian Army support staff, says MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Amid reports that some Indians are working as support staff for Russian forces in the ongoing Ukraine conflict zone, India on Friday said it was in touch with Moscow for early "discharge" of Indians working as support staff to the Russian Army, and urged its nationals to stay away from the conflict zone in Ukraine. The comments by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal came following a report that some Indians are working as support staff to the Russian Army in the conflict zone. "We are aware that a few Indian nationals have signed up for support jobs with the Russian army. The Indian Embassy has regularly taken up this matter with the relevant Russian authorities for their early discharge. We urge all Indian nationals to exercise due caution and stay away from this conflict," said Jaiswal. The family of one of the men, Sufiyan from Hyderabad, along with All India Majlis-E-

"We urge all Indian nationals to exercise due caution and stay away from this conflict," he said. This reaction came after reports indicated that dozens of Indians were allegedly duped into military service in Russia. The unsuspecting Indians were promised support jobs but were ultimately enlisted in the Russian army, receiving misleading translations of documents and undergoing military training against their initial understanding. "We are aware that a few Indian nationals have signed up for support jobs with the Russian army. The Indian Embassy has regularly taken up this matter with the relevant Russian authorities for their early discharge. We urge all Indian nationals to exercise due caution and stay away from this conflict," said Jaiswal. The family of one of the men, Sufiyan from Hyderabad, along with All India Majlis-E-

Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader Asaduddin Owaisi, on Wednesday sought the intervention of the Centre and the External Affairs ministry to secure the safe evacuation of the trapped Indian nationals and take stringent action against the fraudulent agents responsible. Imran, Sufiyan's brother, revealed the deceptive tactics employed by agents associated with Faisal Khan, who runs a YouTube channel named 'Baba Vlogs'. The unsuspecting men were allegedly promised support jobs but were ultimately enlisted in the Russian army. With nine Indian men reportedly within the Ukrainian borders, facing danger and injuries, the distressed families seek help from the Centre. Owaisi formally wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, seeking intervention to bring back the affected Indians.

# Russia a power with enormous tradition of Statecraft: Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Russia is a power with an enormous tradition of statecraft and it is turning more towards Asia or non-West parts of the world, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Friday, delving into current geopolitical developments and their fall-outs. Jaishankar's comments came days after he said India has had a "stable" and "very friendly" relationship with Russia, and that Moscow never hurt New Delhi's interests. In an interactive session at the Raisina Dialogue here on Friday, Jaishankar, replying to a question on Moscow's growing proximity with Beijing, said it makes sense to give Russia multiple options and that railroading it into a single option and criticising it for that would be like a self-fulfilling



prophecy. "I think it makes sense to give Russia multiple options. If we railroad Russia into a single option and say that's really bad because that's the outcome, then you are making it a self-fulfilling prophecy," he said. "Today it is important for other countries, especially in Asia to engage Russia," Jaishankar said. "Russia is a power with an enormous tradition of state-

craft. Such powers would never put themselves into a single relationship of an overwhelming nature. It would go against their grain," he said. The external affairs minister was asked to comment on intensification of ties between Russia and China and whether India was uncomfortable with it. "What's happened today with Russia essentially is that a lot of doors have been shut to Russia and the West. We know

the reasons why. Russia is turning more to Asia or to parts of the world which are not West," he said. The external affairs minister suggested that policies of the West are bringing Russia and China closer. "It's kind of funny -- on the one hand you have people who set policies (and) bring the two together and then you say beware of them coming together," he said. Jaishankar's comments came days after he said India has had a "stable" and "very friendly" relationship with Russia, and that Moscow never hurt New Delhi's interests. The ties between India and Russia remained strong notwithstanding the ongoing Ukraine conflict. India's import of Russian crude oil has gone up significantly despite increasing disquiet over it in many Western countries. In his remarks, Jaishankar also

highlighted India's G20 presidency and how it ensured induction of the African Union as a permanent member of the grouping. He noted that if the G20 could be expanded, the permanent membership of the UN Security Council can also be increased. "When the sort of smoke clears and people look back on this G20, it will surely be recognised for the fact that the African Union's membership was agreed upon," he said. The external affairs minister also highlighted India's foreign policy priorities including combating terrorism and attempting to ensure inclusive global welfare. It could be millets, it could be yoga, it could be solar energy, it could be combating terrorism, it could be black money. You today see an India, which is really pushing and trying to get itself and its ideas on the global stage, he said.

# Modi to inaugurate world largest grain storage plan in cooperative sector pilot project today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Aligning with the Centre's vision of "Sahakar se Samridhi," Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday will inaugurate "World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector" pilot project at 11 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) across 11 states at an event here, a move aimed to fortify food security and fostering economic development in the country. Additionally, the Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for 500 more PACS nationwide for construction of godowns and other agri infrastructure such as warehouses, custom hiring centers, PUs, and fair price shops among others under the mega grain storage scheme. The aim is to ensure farmers



get modern grain storage facilities at the block level through PACS, which will strengthen food security, and empower the farmers by enabling them to realize better crop prices. The monumental project which has been approved with a financial outlay of more than Rs 2,500 crore, is supported by NABARD and

spearheaded by the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), an autonomous financial institution for cooperatives in the country. The scheme is being implemented through convergence of various existing schemes like the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), Agriculture Marketing

Infrastructure (AMI), etc. to enable PACS participating in the project to avail subsidies and interest subvention benefits for undertaking infrastructure development, the statement said. NABARD has developed the National Level Common Software for this project, tailored to meet the diverse needs of PACS across the country. Onboarding of 18,000 PACS on ERP software has been completed, marking a significant milestone in the project's implementation, according to the statement. A senior official from the Ministry said that over the next five years, India is poised to enhance its storage capacity to 215 million tonnes with the establishment of a widespread network of grain storage facilities at the PACS level. Currently, India's storage capacity stands at 145 mil-

lion tonnes, despite an annual food grain output exceeding 300 million tonnes. This shortfall in storage infrastructure leads to significant food grain losses each year due to inadequate storage facilities. At the same time, modernizing PACS through comprehensive computerization will foster multipurpose PACS, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and retail outlets. Already, a trial run of the ERP software has commenced in 15,783 PACS spanning 27 States and Union Territories (UTs), marking a significant milestone in the project's implementation. This trial phase serves to assess the functionality and effectiveness of the software in real-world settings, paving the way for its full-scale deployment.

# Nation must become industrially strong, self reliant in aerospace: IAF Deputy Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI



Air Force and representatives of various leading defence industry firms. "Every nation wants to become self-reliant, 'atmanirbhar'. And we are seeing that... After these two wars happening around us in the world, it is becoming more and more important," Air Marshal Dixit said. His remarks come in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel-Hamas conflict. He emphasised the need for

'atmanirbharta' in the IAF and the challenges that the force faces at present as it forges ahead. "We have to become industrially strong, full spectrum self-sufficiency is required in defence, especially in the aerospace sector," the deputy chief of the air staff said. He also shared a historical aspect of manufacturing of IAF aircraft in India in the 1950s and the force's journey in the realm in the decades that followed. "Today, the situation has become such that if a user doesn't come forward and drive this whole gamut of 'atmanirbharta', I don't think it is going to be successful," he added. Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM) and air force think-tank Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) are also co-organisers of the event.

# India, Oman agree to cooperate in field of archives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

India and Oman have "agreed to cooperate" in the field of archives during a visit by a delegation of the National Archives of India to the Gulf country on February 21-22, the Culture Ministry said on Friday. In a statement, the ministry said the members of the Indian delegation, led by NAI Director General Arun Singhal, were shown around various sections and divisions of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) of Oman. In bilateral discussions with NRAA chairman Hamad Mohammed Al-Dhawayani, Singhal dwelt upon the historical ties between India and Oman and informed him about the existence of a large number of records pertaining to Oman in the NAI as well as in other



repositories of India, NAI officials said. As a gesture of goodwill, Singhal handed over "a list of 70 select documents pertaining to Oman" that are available in the NAI in Delhi. These documents cover a period from 1793 to 1953 and deal with a wide range of subjects, they said. Also, 523 pages of copies of records were handed over to the NRAA chairman, covering several important subjects such as "change of Omani Flag from

red to white (1868); succession of Sayyid Faisal bin Turki as ruler of Oman after the death of Sultan Sayyid Turki (1888); official visit of the Sultan of Muscat and Oman to the Viceroy in India (1937); and the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between the Republic of India and the Sultan of Muscat and Oman signed on the 15th March 1953 at Muscat (English, Hindi and Arabic versions)," the statement said.

# Scientists engineer synthetic human antibody to neutralise deadly neurotoxin in snake venom

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking development having potential to significantly benefit India which is grappling with a high number of snakebite cases, scientists have engineered a synthetic human antibody capable of neutralising a deadly neurotoxin found in the venom of over 200 dangerous snake species worldwide. This achievement, published in the journal Science Translational Medicine, marks the first application of a strategy previously used for screening antibodies against HIV and COVID-19 to create a venom-neutralizing antibody for snakebite treatment. Senji Laxme, a PhD student at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru, emphasized the novelty of this approach, which was conducted in collaboration with scien-



tists from the US-based Scripps Research Institute. The goal is to develop a universal antibody solution that can provide broad protection against venom from various deadly snakes, including cobras, king cobras, kraits, and black mambas. Snake venom, a potent mixture of compounds targeting nerve cells and tissues, causes thousands of deaths annually and disables many more world-

wide. Traditional treatment methods, such as antivenom sourced from animals injected with venom, face challenges due to variations in venom compositions and adverse immune reactions. India bears the brunt of snakebite incidents, with an annual average of 58,000 fatalities, comprising over half of the global total of 81,000-138,000 deaths. Kartik

Sunagar, Associate Professor at IISc and joint corresponding author of the study, highlighted the limitations of current antivenom production methods, which involve injecting snake venom into equines and collecting antibodies from their blood. However, this process yields antibodies against microorganisms, which are not therapeutically relevant, with less than 10 percent of antivenom vials comprising antibodies targeted towards snake venom toxins. However, the synthetic antibody developed by the research team targets a conserved region in the core of a major toxin called the three-finger toxin (3FTx) present in elapid venom. Despite variations among 3FTxs produced by different elapid species, the antibody strongly binds to various 3FTxs. Extensive testing identified an

antibody capable of binding strongly to various 3FTxs, including those from the Taiwanese banded krait, monocol cobra from Eastern India, and black mamba from sub-Saharan Africa. Animal experiments demonstrated the efficacy of the synthetic antibody, with mice injected with the toxin-antibody mixture surviving beyond the 24-hour observation window and appearing completely healthy. In India, Karnataka government has become the first state to declare snakebite a notifiable disease across all its 31 district health facilities in the wake of increased incidents of snakebite in the State. The World Health Organization (WHO) designated snakebite as a neglected tropical disease in 2017 and set a goal to reduce its global impact by 50 percent by 2030.



# Modi to inaugurate Gujarat first AIIMS in Rajkot on February 25

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate Gujarat's first All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Rajkot on February 25, State Health Minister Rushikesh Patel said on Friday. This will be one of the five AIIMS to be dedicated to the nation by the prime minister from Rajkot on February 25, the minister said.



for Rajkot AIIMS through video-conferencing in December 2020. "Spread across 201 acres, Rajkot AIIMS is a world-class hospital with 720 beds, including ICU and super-speciality beds. On February 25, the prime minister will

inaugurate 23 operation theatres, 30-bed AYUSH block and 250 beds of IPD. The remaining beds will be made available gradually," Patel said. The hospital was built at the cost of Rs 1,195 crore, he said, adding that the OPD has already served nearly 1.44 lakh

patients so far. As per a government release, the prime minister will arrive at Rajkot AIIMS on Sunday afternoon and address a rally at the Race Course ground in the city later in the evening. He will take part in a kilometre-long roadshow from the old airport to the venue of the public rally, it stated. During the function, the prime minister will also virtually inaugurate four other newly-built AIIMS, located in Mangalagiri (Andhra Pradesh), Bathinda (Punjab), Rae Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), and Kalyani (West Bengal), Patel said. The five super-speciality hospitals, including the one in Rajkot, have been built by the Centre at a cost of Rs 6,300 crore, he said.

Apart from this, Modi will inaugurate and perform ground-breaking for projects of Rs 48,000 crore of different state and Central departments, such as NHAI, Railways, Energy and Petrochemicals, Road and Building, Ports and Health and Family Welfare, the minister said. Of these, projects of Rs 35,700 crore are for Gujarat, while the remaining are for other states, he said. The prime minister will launch key projects, including power generation projects in Kutch, ground-breaking for the new Mundra Panipat crude-oil pipeline project, new cardiology hospital in Vadodara and doubling of the Rajkot-Surendranagar railway line, among others, Patel said.

## LS campaign message should convey DMK regime protects all: Stalin

PTI ■ CHENNAI



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Friday said the party's Lok Sabha campaign theme should be simple and easy-to-understand, conveying to the people that the DMK regime protected all the people, and that this should be articulated through the achievements of the government. Stalin, also the president of the ruling DMK, exuded confidence that his party and allies would emerge victorious in all the 39 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state and also in the lone segment in neighbouring Puducherry. Addressing DMK's district secretaries and constituency observers virtually, Stalin said the party's election related work is going on in a fast-paced manner. The Parliamentary constituency-wise meetings, titled 'Stalin's voice to retrieve rights', have been a big success, he said, and lauded office-bearers for their work. Stalin urged party functionaries to conduct the poll campaign in a simple manner after understanding every single scheme of the state government. "The campaign should be in an easy-to-understand fashion, letting people understand that it is our (state) government that is protecting all members of a family," he said. The reference is to a string of welfare schemes including the fare-free bus travel for women and the achievements made by the DMK regime which Stalin said should be articulated in the campaign.

## Lok Sabha preparations: Amit Shah to visit MP tomorrow

PTI ■ BHOPAL



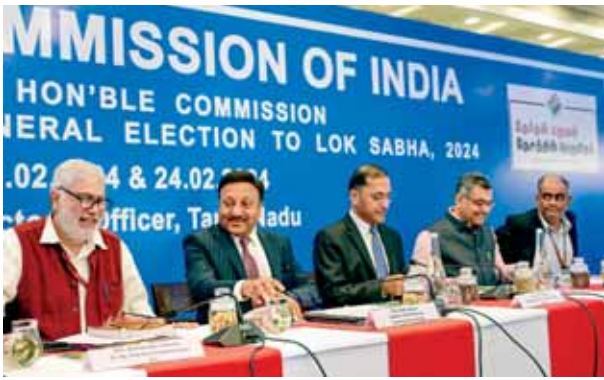
Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah will visit Madhya Pradesh on Sunday to review the party's preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, a functionary said. He will visit Gwalior and interact with more than 400 leaders and workers from Morena, Bhind, Guna and Gwalior Lok Sabha seats, MP BJP media chief Ashish Agrawal told PTI on Friday. At 3pm, he will address a public meeting in Khajuraho, where the Samajwadi Party will field its candidate as part of the agreement in the

Congress-led opposition bloc INDIA. In the evening, Shah will interact in Bhopal with prominent citizens and experts as well as families that have benefited from schemes of the state and Union governments. Party functionaries said Shah's visit will concentrate on ensuring the BJP wins all 29

seats from MP, and also work on the plan to get at least 370 votes more per booth in the 2024 polls when compared to the last general elections. In the 2019 polls, the BJP won 28 seats, while the Congress emerged victorious in Chhindwara, a stronghold of former chief minister Kamal Nath. His son Nakul Nath was elected as MP from Chhindwara. The BJP is making concerted efforts to win the seat, with Chief Minister Mohan Yadav visiting the area recently and inducting several hundred Congress workers into the ruling party.

## CEC begins review of preparedness for Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ CHENNAI



Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, accompanied by senior officials of the Election Commission of India, on Friday commenced his two-day review of Tamil Nadu's preparedness for the Lok Sabha elections. He is set to meet representatives of as many as nine political parties, including the Dravidian majors, discuss issues related to conducting the elections and also hold a review meeting with district collectors and superintendents of police later in the day. The CEC will also be meeting the chief electoral officers of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala besides officials from the

enforcement agencies, before wrapping up his meeting with the Tamil Nadu chief secretary and state DGP. DMK Organisational Secretary R S Bharathi, who represented the ruling party at the meeting today, told reporters that the

party expressed concern and doubts over the sequencing of the VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) in the EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) as this may lead to errors. The DMK's ally, CPI(M), too expressed concern that the

## In a first, Assam Assembly conducts ballot voting on resolution

PTI ■ GUWAHATI



For the first time in its history, the Assam Assembly on Friday witnessed voting with ballot paper while deciding the fate of a private member's resolution brought in by Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi. The resolution on irrigation system was rejected by just nine votes. Out of 77 MLAs in the BJP-led alliance, the government garnered 39 votes. On the other hand, 30 votes were polled in favour of the resolution from 47 opposition MLAs, including five Congress members with allegiance to the government. Earlier, the resolution was put to voice vote and Speaker Biswajit Daimary said the resolution was rejected. Gogoi and other opposition members, including Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia, however, claimed that the ruling party did not have the numbers during the voice vote and demanded proper voting. Daimary then adjourned the House for 10 minutes, saying that voting would take place and the Assembly Secretariat would require time to prepare for the polling on the resolution. However, the House resumed after 30 minutes. During this half-an-hour, BJP MLA Diganta Kalita was seen doing a headcount of the ruling side on a piece of paper. Gogoi was also seen going to almost every member with folded hands. As soon as the House met, the Speaker again conducted a voice vote with a higher number of treasury bench MLAs this time and announced rejection of the resolution. However, the entire opposition

protested this and said that Daimary had already announced a vote and the decision should not be altered. The Speaker then accepted their demand, ordered locking of the House doors and asked Assembly Principal Secretary Hemen Das to conduct the poll. Das then explained the process to the legislators. Accordingly, the House staff distributed ballot slips to every member, who ticked in their choices and deposited the same in the ballot box. Deputy Leader of Congress Legislature Party Rakibul Hussain appealed to the Speaker to allow the Chief Whip of the parties to see the votes of their MLAs according to the Anti-Defection Law. Immediately after this, Congress MLAs Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Basanta Das, who recently announced to "support the government" without leaving the grand old party, silently walked out of the House while the voting was undergoing. The Principal Secretary and his colleagues counted the votes on his table inside the House and submitted the result to the Speaker. "As per the result sheet, ayes

received 30 votes, nays got 39 and there was zero abstain. As nays received higher votes, the resolution is rejected," Daimary said. The resolution sought to make Assam a 12-month cultivating state by supplying water to the fields at all times. When contacted, three retired principal secretaries of the Assam Assembly told PTI that neither government nor private resolutions have gone to the extent of ballot voting while deciding their acceptance or rejection. "In most of the cases, it is decided by a simple voice vote. On some rare occasions, some resolutions have seen raising of hands by the members while deciding their fates. However, ballot voting never took place in case of rejection of a resolution," a former principal secretary said. Officially, the BJP's strength in the 126-member Assam Assembly is 61, while its allies UPPL has seven MLAs and AGP has nine. In the opposition camp, the Congress' strength is 27, AIUDF has 15 members, BPF has three and CPI(M) has one MLA. There is one Independent legislator also.

## Bank loan fraud: ED raids SP leader's Gorakhpur house

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The sleuths of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday raided the Gorakhpur residence of Samajwadi Party leader Vinay Shankar Tiwari, son of former minister and mafia of eastern Uttar Pradesh Harishankar Tiwari. Sources confirmed that the ED also raided the Lucknow and Delhi residences of the SP leader. A case of money laundering is already registered against Vinay Shankar Tiwari and others in a Rs 750 crore bank fraud case. Recently his property was also confiscated. Reports said that a team of Bank of India, Lucknow had come to Gorakhpur three years ago regarding the bank loan taken by Vinay Shankar Tiwari and his company and returned after assessing his properties. Later the bank filed a report and in 2020, the case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for probe. In 2021, the Enforcement Directorate registered a money laundering case against former MLA Vinay Shankar Tiwari and others in the Rs 750 crore fraud case. The agency's Lucknow-based regional office had filed an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act against

the former MLA from Chillupar (Gorakhpur) and Lucknow-based Gangotri Enterprises. The ED registered this case against Vinay Shankar Tiwari, his wife Rita, Gangotri Enterprises and others on the basis of CBI's FIR. The CBI had conducted raids in Lucknow and Noida after registering a complaint in the case. The alleged fraud was committed against a consortium of banks led by the Bank of India, and was said to be worth Rs 754.25 crore. According to the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), the firm M/s Gangotri Enterprises Limited and others have taken a loan of Rs 1,129 crore from seven different banks. The owners of these firms are former MLAs and their relatives. Most of the bank accounts have become non-performing assets (NPAs). Bank accounts are also being closed. In this case, the DRT had issued summons against 33 persons, including former MLA Vinay Shankar Tiwari, on July 1, 2019, and then sought answers from M/s Gangotri Enterprises Limited and other defendants at different times. According to the case which reached the DRT, Vinay Shankar Tiwari and others have taken the maximum loan from the Bank of India. Action is going on in this matter.

## Students molested inside bus: Maharashtra child rights panel holds meet

PTI ■ THANE

The Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MSCPCR) on Friday held a meeting in connection with the molestation of students of a Thane school by a bus attendant. The incident took place on February 20 when students had gone to a mall in the Ghatkopar area of Mumbai in a private bus. MSCPCR chairperson Susieben Shah held a meeting with the school management, police officers investigating the case as well as representatives of the Education Department of Thane Municipal Corporation and Women and Child Welfare Department. "Even if the contract for organizing a trip by the school is given to a private company, the entire responsibility rests with the school management. Therefore, an inquiry will be conducted to check what the school management did to fulfil its responsibility. The commission will also look into the need for the victims to get proper counselling," Shah said. Shah said she will visit the school on Monday and meet teachers, parents and children. The attendant of the bus was arrested on Wednesday. So far, six persons have been relieved of their duties by the school management.

## Over 400 retirees in Rajasthan yet to get OPS benefits after a year of paying dues

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Around 450 employees of the state-run Rajasthan Financial Corporation are yet to start getting money under the Old Pension Scheme even after 7-8 months of depositing the required money. According to a departmental order, most of the retired employees had deposited a lump sum amount each by September first week — the last deadline given by the government for inclusion in the OPS that allowed one to get a retrospective pension from April 2023.

The first deadline for depositing the money was July 2023. "Even after seven months, most of the files are stuck due to the lackadaisical approach of officials involved in processing the applications. Forget about arrears, so far, only 60 pension payment orders have been issued," RFC Pensioners Association President Narsi Lal Meena said. "For the last two months, not a single pension payment order has been issued," he said. Meena said that most of the retired employees had a tough time arranging money — around Rs 30-40 lakh each —

after years of retirement. Some had to break their FDs and empty their savings to deposit the money to get the pension, he said. An official familiar with the development said that the top management has issued instructions for speedy processing of the applications, especially those who have genuine reasons. The official said that with the appointment of a new executive director (admin) and executive director (finance) in the recent administrative reshuffle, the application process will be done expeditiously.

## Heavy snowfall in higher areas of Arunachal, 70 tourists rescued

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Around 70 people, including tourists and locals, have been rescued from Sela Pass following heavy snowfall in the higher reaches of Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh, a defence spokesperson said here on Friday. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) went beyond its mandate of keeping the roads open for traffic and carried out the operation to evacuate approximately 70 tourists and locals stranded at the Sela Pass, he said. The incident took place when some vehicles got stranded at

the Pass on the night of February 22/23 and the BRO mobilised its men and equipment to rescue them. The team braved out the chilling cold with temperatures going below -10 degree celsius to save precious lives throughout the night and were able to move them to safety by Friday morning, the spokesperson said. BRO's Project Vartak has deployed men and personnel round-the-clock at not only Sela Pass, but other important roads in the region as well to keep it accessible for traffic at all times, the spokesperson said.

## Water scarcity key issue of Latur, elected representatives must work on it: Gadkari

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Water scarcity is a major problem in Latur and elected representatives must take all efforts to come up with a solution, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said on Friday. He was speaking at an event in Ahmedpur for inauguration and launching of nine projects in Dharashiv and Latur districts. These comprise six highway projects costing Rs 3,946 crore in Latur and three costing Rs 122 crore in Dharashiv. "Water scarcity is a key problem of Latur. Elected representatives must take up issues



related to it on priority. While coming here, I saw a river that had gone completely dry. If embankments or small weirs were made with empty fertiliser bags, it would have supplied water all day to nearby wells," he pointed out. Latur is known for its soybean cultivation and good roads will help farmers take the produce to markets easily, he said. The projects that were inaugurated include the four laning of Chakur-Ausa and Chakur-Loha sections. The length of the national highway in Latur was 124 kilometres till 2014, while it was now 510 kilometres, he said.

## TN college celebrates contribution of students in building rocket component for ISRO

PTI ■ CHENNAI

A private engineering college in Salem district is celebrating the contribution of its students, who built a critical component of the GSLV-F14 rocket which was used in the recent successful launch of a weather satellite by ISRO. The Bengaluru-headquartered space agency had successfully launched the INSAT-3DS satellite on February 17 from the spaceport of Sriharikota near Chennai. The SonaSPEED (Sona Special Power Electronics and Electric Drives) division of the Sona College of Technology, Salem



about 320 kms from Chennai developed the critical magnet stepper motors in the mixture control actuator, which were used in the cryogenic stage of the launch vehicle. The Geosynchronous Launch

Vehicle (GSLV) is a three-stage rocket, with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage. "The mixture control actuator helps mix liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen in precise combination for a perfect lift-off," a press release from the college said on Friday. The components were tested ahead of the launch by scientists of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram. "Sona research team rigorously followed the process in the design and manufacture of this critical piece of equipment," Sona College of Technology Principal SRR Senthil Kumar said.



# Religious apartheid

Karnataka’s proposal to tax several Hindu temples smacks of discrimination

In a move reminiscent of the historically partisan practice of jizya, the Congress Government in Karnataka has proposed a plan to collect funds from Hindu temples as a form of tax. Understandably, the move has sparked a controversy and reignited debates over the treatment of Hindu places of worship and whether these are being unfairly targeted. While some argue that the move is a necessary step to ensure the upkeep of Hindu religious institutions and support the livelihoods of the priests involved, others see it as discriminatory and belonging to a regressive era when non-Muslims were subjected to jizya, a special tax. While the proposed tax is not explicitly religious in nature, its resemblance to jizya has not gone unnoticed and critics view it as a form of economic discrimination. One of the primary concerns raised by the move's opponents is the selective targeting of Hindu places of worship as similar demands are not being made of other religious institutions, such as mosques or churches. This asymmetry has led



to accusations of bias and favouritism on the part of the Government. If the aim is to genuinely improve facilities at religious places, it should be even-handed and not selective. Our Constitution is clear about religious freedom and equality and all Governments across the country must comply with that. Arguing that it is a matter of fiscal responsibility, however, the tax proponents point to the vast wealth accumulated by some temples. They reason that it is only fair for these temples to contribute to the broader welfare of society. Additionally, they contend that the funds collected will be used for the benefit of the community, including the preservation of cultural heritage and the support of religious practitioners. The proposal has sparked widespread outrage among certain segments of the Hindu population, which sees it as an encroachment on their religious freedoms and an attempt to undermine their heritage. For many Hindus, temples are not just places of worship but symbols of their cultural identity. Any attempt to impose financial burdens on these institutions is viewed as an attack on their way of life. Moreover, the Government's involvement in the financial affairs of temples raises broader questions about the separation of religion and State. By exerting control over the finances of Hindu religious institutions, the Govt risks overstepping its boundaries. In this light, it is essential for the policymakers to tread carefully and consider the implications of their actions. While temple maintenance and priest welfare are undoubtedly important issues, these must be addressed in a manner that respects the rights and sensitivities of all citizens. Ultimately, the debate over the temple tax in Karnataka raises fundamental questions about religious freedom and the role of the State in religious affairs. Meanwhile, it is crucial for all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and seek solutions upholding the principles of fairness; only then can we ensure that our society remains true to its values of pluralism and tolerance.

## PICTALK



# Youth employment: From seekers to innovators

Active participation in Govt schemes and emphasis on entrepreneurship offer promising avenues towards a brighter future for India’s rural youth

In 2023, India experienced a notable surge in unemployment rates, impacting both rural and urban areas. Particularly concerning was the rise in urban unemployment, escalating from 8.5% in October to 9.3% in November and further climbing to 10.1% in December, mirroring levels from a year prior. This surge has undeniably heightened stress among the younger generation, actively seeking job opportunities, with thousands applying for each available position. In the age of technology, however, a paradigm shift is encouraged—from job seekers to job providers. The youth grappling with unemployment challenges are urged to redefine their goals and leverage their potential and skills. Sayyed Toiba Kousar, a 22-year-old resident of the border district Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir, emphasises the transformative role technology can play in the employment landscape. Through the strategic use of technology, the younger generation can not only secure employment but also venture into



becoming job providers. Azhar Ali, a 24-year-old cricket enthusiast, underscores the importance of effective facilities for skill enhancement. He believes that with the provision of adequate facilities, the youth can excel in their respective fields, significantly contributing to societal and national development. Azhar contends that timely access to essential facilities is crucial for the younger generation to play a more impactful role in the country's progress. Muhammad Waqar, a 22-year-old, advocates for a focus on sports activities at the school level to divert youth from addictive behaviours and guide them towards establishing self-employment opportunities. Ajaz Hussain, aged 27, emphasises creating opportunities aligned with children's interests to inspire

self-reliance, benefiting both the individual and the country. Rashid highlights the importance of parental involvement in identifying and nurturing their children's interests, guiding them towards the numerous opportunities available today in areas such as sports, the internet, singing, dancing, art, painting, photography, and sculpture. In the current scenario, various skill-related schemes are being implemented by both central and state governments across India. Notably, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), operated by the Ministry of Rural Development, stands out as one of the most effective projects. This initiative focuses on promoting self-employment and supporting rural individuals, especially economically disadvantaged young men and women. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Jammu and Kashmir State Rural Livelihood Mission (JKSRLM) oversees the implementation of NRLM, aiming to integrate the poor into self-help groups and connect them with self-employment opportunities.

The primary goal of JKSRLM is to reach 66% of the rural population in 125 blocks of Jammu and Kashmir, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities to uplift them from poverty and enhance their standard of living. The Indian government has initiated various poverty alleviation schemes to improve the quality of life for the poor. It is crucial for the youth to actively engage with and benefit from these government schemes, fostering self-reliance in employment matters and contributing to societal development. To ensure the success of these schemes, relevant departments should actively provide information and guidance, encouraging their 100% implementation and timely achievement of goals. By embracing the shift from job seekers to job providers, youth can play a vital role in shaping a more prosperous and self-sufficient future for themselves and the nation. (The writer is from the Poonch district of J&K. He writes on socio-economic development challenges of his community; views are personal. Charkha features)



SOHAIL ALI

# The boycott at Doha

The Taliban’s obscurantist mindset and their harbouring of terrorist organisations pose a serious threat to Muslim countries

Given the obscurantist and misogynistic mindset of the Taliban, it is hardly surprising that they boycotted the conference, hosted by the United Nations, to discuss the humanitarian crisis facing Afghanistan, and cooperation on the human rights issue. They spurned the UN's invitation saying that they would attend only if they alone were officially representing Afghanistan, as inclusion of other groups would jeopardise progress. This exclusivist mindset, which reflects their intolerance of the existence of any organisation that does not share their obscurantist Islamist worldview, and does not owe allegiance to them, is at the core of their rejection of democracy, and advocacy of an Islamist theocracy manifest in their designation of Afghanistan as an Islamic Emirate, run according to the dictates of mullahs. The Taliban are unlikely to have realised that they have shot themselves in the foot by boycotting the conference held in Doha on February 18 and 19 under the chairmanship of the UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres. Besides the special envoys of 25 countries, members of Afghanistan's civil society and women's groups, it was attended by representatives of the European Union (EU), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). By not attending the conference, the Taliban have only perpetuated their isolation in the world. They obviously do not seem to mind that since humanitarian assistance continues to come in for the sake of the country's people suffering from natural disasters like floods and earthquakes as well as the violence stalking the country. The OIC's role was outlined by Ambassador Tarig Ali Bakheet, special envoy of organisation's secretary-general. During his interventions, Bakheet recalled his organisation's commitment to support Afghanistan and engage in a constructive dialogue with the country's de facto authorities [Taliban] "on issues and topics included in the relevant resolutions of the [OIC's]



Council of Foreign Ministers. In this regard, he reviewed OIC efforts in providing humanitarian assistance, sending scholars delegations, and holding a conference on women's rights in Islam hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." Ambassador Bakheet was referring to the international conference on "Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment" (November 6 to 8, 2023), organised by the OIC's general secretariat and hosted by Saudi Arabia. It included in its Final Declaration 20 recommendations highlighting the rights that Islam gave to women and the status of women in Islam. These also addressed the challenges and opportunities pertaining to the realisation of women's rights and enhancement of their role across all fields and at all levels of society. The conference also produced "The Jeddah Document on Women's Rights in Islam" which, as stated by OIC's secretary-general, Hissein Ibrahim Taha, in his address at the conference's closing session, would serve as an intellectual and practical reference document that could be adopted by legislative bodies and human rights organizations in member states and all Muslim societies when considering the



IF THE OIC AND THE MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE SERIOUS ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS, THEY MUST WORK OUT TOUGH ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SANCTIONS THAT WOULD COMPEL THE TALIBAN TO CHANGE THEIR POLICIES IN THIS REGARD

rights of Muslim women. It will be submitted for adoption at the forthcoming Islamic Summit, scheduled to be held in Gambia at the end of this year, and subsequently presented to all relevant international fora. He hoped that those doubting Islam's fairness toward women would consider women's rights as set out in this document, and not on the basis some isolated social practices in some Muslim societies that in no way reflect the sublime vision and universality of Islam and its teachings. Taha's not-so-veiled rejection of the Taliban's views on women's rights in the last sentence above, will not please the mullahs running Afghanistan. Nor will they be amused by his affirmation that women's empowerment issues would remain high among the OIC's priorities, and that the OIC would launch and support numerous efforts and initiatives to elevate the status of women in Muslim societies. Taha's words carry a special significance as he spoke in Saudi Arabia where, under the leadership of the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, significant steps have been taken to improve women's position. Women can now attend sporting events, need not wear the abayah, a long, loose-fitting, garment covering the entire body,

except the face, hands and feet, in public, and can get driving licenses and can go to work, study or run errands without male escorts. While women demanding more freedom are treated harshly and much more remains to be done, the gains have been considerable compared to the situation earlier. One can be certain that the Taliban would not change their views. Bigots dig their heels deeper and deeper the more people reject their creed. If the OIC and the Muslim countries are serious about women's rights, they must work out tough economic and political sanctions that would compel the Taliban to change their policies in this regard. They must also take measures to compel the Taliban to act against terrorist outfits like a Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) active in Afghanistan. The former is targeting Pakistan and the latter Iran. Given, however, their obscurantist creed, and determination to impose their version of sharia law globally, there is no reason why they will not strike other countries in future, particularly the Muslim ones they consider as apostatic. (The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DEMOCRACY UNDER THREAT?

Sir — As per a report the Congress Party on Thursday alleged that democracy is being "murdered" in the country after microblogging platform X voiced disagreement with the Centre's order to block accounts and posts related to the ongoing farmers' protests. Congress MP Rahul Gandhi claimed the public knows that the government has "murdered democracy" and will give a strong answer. Rahul Gandhi asked "If farmers ask for MSP, shoot them. Is this the mother of democracy? When the youth ask for appointments, refuse to even listen to them this is the mother of democracy? If a former governor tells the truth, send the CBI to his house. Is this the mother of democracy?" Freeze the bank account of the most prominent opposition party. Is this the mother of democracy? Section 144, internet ban, sharp wires, tear gas shells is this the mother of democracy? Be it media or social media, suppressing every voice of truth — is this the mother of democracy?" the Congress leader Gandhi said. According to sources The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology had ordered social media platforms to temporarily block 177 accounts linked to the farmers' protests at the request of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Farmers from across the country have been protesting to press the Centre for their demands, including a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops and farm loan waivers. Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

### PASSPORT OFFICE WOES

Sir — It is observed that a huge gathering above five hundred applicants including aged and mothers carrying just born babies are standing in queue, outside the office on Thursday i.e. open day, to get solve the problems of passports to be issued at RPO, Secunderabad. Moreover over the area traffic police lift the vehicles parking outside the said office. The concerned authorities of the passport

## Two legendary figures depart



India has lost two of its most illustrious and influential personalities, Fali S Nariman and Ameen Sayani, who left behind a legacy of excellence and innovation in their respective fields of law and radio. Fali S Nariman was a renowned jurist and senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India. He was involved in several landmark cases that shaped India's constitutional law and judicial system. He was a champion of civil liberties and the independence of the judiciary. He resigned as Additional Solicitor General to protest against the Emergency in 1975, the only law officer to do so.

office should provide the same facility i.e. open day at all passport offices of Hyderabad to solve the aroused problems instead of a single door at Secunderabad. Thus the applicants can reach their nearest office and the rush at a single door will also be diluted. The concerned area traffic police should also provide sufficient parking places instead of lifting and imposing huge penalties on applicants. Hope the area Corporator, MLA, Concern Minister and the authorities of passport offices and traffic police will take necessary action soon and will provide mental and physical relaxation to the applicants. Arif Hussain | Secunderabad

### ODISHA TO IMPROVE SPORTS INFRA

Sir — The Odisha government has decided to renovate Barabati Stadium in Cuttack. The Barabati stadium is one of the oldest stadiums in the state. This stadium has witnessed many national and international sporting events in the past. Barabati Stadium is also known to be the

He received several awards and honours, including the Padma Vibhushan, the Gruber Prize for Justice, and a nomination to the Rajya Sabha. He was also an avid reader, writer and speaker on various topics of law, politics and culture. Ameen Sayani was the iconic radio presenter and host of the popular radio show Binaca Geetmala, which ran from 1952 to 1994 on Radio Ceylon. He revolutionised Indian broadcasting with his signature greeting, "Behno aur Bhaiyo", and his warm and friendly style of hosting. Nariman and Sayani were both Parsis who belonged to Mumbai and made their mark on the national and international stage. They were both respected and admired by their peers and fans for their passion, integrity and innovation. They were both involved in the mission of nation-building and inspiring generations to fight for a just society. They will be dearly missed by their family, friends and fans. May their souls rest in peace. Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

hub of cricket in Odisha. To revive Odisha's cricketing history and groom young cricket aspirants in the state, it was necessary to redevelopment it. A Sports complex having world-class facilities for other sports will also be built along with the new stadium. A few days back a cricket stadium in Sambalpur was also decided for renovated. After Hockey and Football, Odisha is now investing in the cricketing ecosystem and infrastructure. This move will assist youths in the state who want to make a career in sports. The developed sports infrastructure will make Odisha a hub for many national and international sporting events. The development of sports in the state will boost the economy as well. Odisha has already hosted the Hockey World Cup and FIFA World Cup and in its way to becoming the sports capital of India. Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

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FIRST COLUMN

THE STRESS BEHIND THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Teachers have alarming rates of burnout and attrition worldwide



SAKSHI SETHI

College degrees, good education and satisfying jobs are all things that people generally strive for. Teaching is one of the most visceral jobs most people will ever experience. Teachers since ages have proven to be vital because they shape the lives of students and help them develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the world.

It is interesting to note that many people today believe the stereotype that teaching is a stress-free job. It is the only profession that gets summers and weekends off. Moreover, it is typically a job that people only do because they cannot do anything else. The adage those who can, do; those who can't, teach is widely believed. However, the reality is that there is a great amount of stress associated with this type of profession.

There is no denying the fact that the teaching profession is emotionally, physically and mentally exhausting. Many teachers across the world are experiencing teacher shortages. As per the latest survey, it was found that almost 50% of the new teachers who join with super excitement, passion and a dream to take on the world quit within the first five years of teaching, which begs the question: why do so many of them leave after going through years of college for this profession? Without enough teacher, one cannot successfully educate their children. Moreover, the most disturbing part is that the education system relies on massive amounts of unpaid labour. According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the average teacher works for 52.5 hours a week, over 30% more than they are contracted for. Multiple surveys declare uncertainty, workload, negative perception about the job, concern for others' well-being, health struggles and playing multiple roles have hampered school teachers' mental health and well-being.



Not only this, research also indicates that burnout contributes to high attrition rates among educators. Making teachers work beyond their contracted hours and not paying for it: giving them five hours or less per week to plan for 30 hours of instructions, grading and providing feedback on assignments for almost 200 students on an average, analysing data, contacting parents, attending meetings, preparing teaching materials, expecting teachers to implement new initiatives, programs and practices without proper training, completing administrative tasks, expecting teachers to differentiate and individualise instructions for a class with 30+ students and above all blaming teachers for all education-related issues despite not including teachers in decision making of education-related issues prove out to be a few reasons for teacher burnout. The constant turnover rate of teachers, lack of interest in teaching and lack of commitment to the profession continue to be a major concern for school systems all over the nation. Stress has become a common characteristic of teachers and with the increased amount of accountability, teachers play a significant role in students and schools resulting in poor classroom engagement and ultimately low student achievement.

To be an effective educator, all teachers need to maintain their psychological well-being. For an ordinary human being not related to this profession, a teacher is a person who is working around 1800 hours a year, whereas in reality, they are the ones who are working around 2300 hours a year on average which shows that approximately 550 hours are unpaid working.

Remember, the teachers cannot effectively accomplish all necessary tasks only during their contract hours. The growing concern is the psychological well-being of teachers not only at the school level but also at the college level.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

# Farmers demand MSP protection

The imperative need for a legislation-backed MSP grows ever more urgent, promising stability and prosperity for the backbone of India's economy



AS MITTAL

The resurgence of protests by farmers has brought attention to their longstanding struggle for sustainable profitability in the agricultural sector. Although their demands are diverse, their primary request is for a legal guarantee for MSP (Minimum Support Prices). Farmers believe that the government has not shown genuine interest in effectively implementing MSP, which has led to distrust, frustration, and the need for a legal guarantee. These issues have forced them to leave their homes and farms and take to the highways in protest, resulting in the death of three farmers a couple of injuries, and disruption of normalcy that has affected the commuters and business activities.

In September 2020, the government introduced three controversial farm laws that were met with widespread protests and demands for their repeal. While the laws were eventually repealed in November 2021, there has been no interim report from the Committee on MSP formed to address farmers' concerns. This delay in decision-making perpetuates uncertainties in the agricultural sector and undermines the effectiveness of the present MSP as a stabilizing force.

MSP was introduced in 1966-67 to ensure food security amid food scarcity. Despite broad political support for a legal guarantee for MSP, successive governments have failed to formalize this issue, leaving the agricultural sector in a state of uncertainty. However, it is high time to address the weakening of the decades-old MSP policy, remove the complexities surrounding its legislation, and recognise the potential benefits of legalising MSP to fuel the wholesome growth of the agriculture sector, which is the country's lifeline. The Modi government has demonstrated its commendable ability to revamp decades-old mechanisms with various robust reforms such as the amendments to Indian Penal Codes and the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, and now they must take bold steps to address this pressing issue.

Why farmers asking for legal guarantee: The MSP is an administered advisory price for 23 crops and is determined annually by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) as a key government intervention to insulate farmers from price volatility when the market prices fall below the MSP as well as of consumers against corrupt manipulative market inflation and maintains food security. It has been in existence in India for more than five decades. Why, then, are farmers asking for a legal guarantee? Only 6% of farmers benefit from MSP, and it procures just 11% of total agricultural output in the country, according to the latest available NITI Aayog data.

Over 90 % of crops are sold at prices that are 20-30% lower than the declared MSP, leading to average losses of Rs 20,000 per acre and about Rs 10 lakh crore annually for farmers. A study by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that Indian farmers have been suffering losses since 2000 due to ineffective policies. The report revealed that Indian farmers lost Rs 45 lakh crore during 2000-2017 due to low prices.

Misconceptions in legalising: The legalisation of MSP has been hindered by exag-



LEGALISING MSP FOR A WIDER VARIETY OF CROPS ENSURES THAT THE BENEFITS OF PRICE STABILITY ARE NOT LIMITED TO SPECIFIC SEGMENTS OF THE FARMING COMMUNITY

gerated claims about its fiscal costs. These claims have misled successive governments, and it is essential to clarify that legalising MSP does not entail the government procuring all agricultural produce. The apprehensions over excessive fiscal requirements are unfounded and should not prevent the legalisation of MSP.

To make MSP a legal guarantee, necessary amendments are needed in the Agricultural Produce & Livestock Market Committee (APMC) Act by incorporating a clause that 'auction of farm produce in APMC's markets is legally not permitted below the declared MSP prices'. The apprehensions on the operation of MSP legal guarantee are that most of the sales of farm produce are not in APMCs, and traders may boycott the purchases of farm produce. The government does not have physical and economic resources to purchase, store, and market the procured farm produce, which is an irrational argument. Government intervention is necessary only when market prices fall below MSP, and it does not require the procurement of the entire marketable surplus.

The potential boycott of farm produce in places MSP legal regimes by the traders is an irrational argument because the commodity's supply is tight against the demand for farm produce. First, this was also evident from the fact that the government could manage to procure only 26 million tonnes of wheat at MSP against the target of 44.4 million tonnes fixed for the 2023 season. Second, the government's expenditure on procurement and imports of farm produce like edible oil and pulses, and on procurement of food grains on MSP in 2022-23, has already surpassed Rs 5 lakh crore and Rs 2.28 lakh crore, respectively. Claims that the MSP legal guaran-

tee will create fiscal disasters for India are baseless. According to government estimates, the MSP values of the total production of the 23 crops worked out to be around Rs 17 lakh crore, and some studies worked out to be around Rs 10 lakh crore. Furthermore, only 70% of the farm produce comes to markets as a marketable surplus, and farmers' families consume the rest for household purposes. The MSP legal guarantee will cost the government about Rs 5 lakh crore if traders or big corporations engaged in processing boycott the APMC's markets, which is an unlikely scenario. It is time to dismiss the misconceptions surrounding the legalisation of MSP and focus on the merits of providing a legal guarantee for MSP. Merits of legalising MSP: Farming is inherently risky, influenced by factors such as weather conditions, pest attacks, and market dynamics. By establishing a legally binding framework for minimum floor prices across all crops, will mitigate the current challenges and safeguard farmers from unpredictable fluctuations in the prices of their produce.

However, the government has proposed buying cotton, maize, tur, urad and Masur for five years directly from the farmers at the MSP without any quantitative limit. Notably, these crops are grown outside Punjab and Haryana, the home states of the protesting farmers. From this, can it infer that small pulses growing farmers all over the country stand to benefit? Legalising MSP for a wider variety of crops ensures that the benefits of price stability are not limited to specific segments of the farming community. Small and marginal farmers cultivating diverse crops can access the protective shield of MSP, contributing to inclusive agricultural growth, and playing a pivotal role in ensuring food security for the

nation by maintaining a stable production environment for key staples, contributing to the overall food security of the country.

A legal framework enables the government to conduct strategic operations in domestic and international markets. By selling procured produce at minimal markups during times of higher market prices, the government can manage inflation surges, ensuring price stability for consumers.

MSP reduces the vulnerability of farmers to market fluctuations, ensuring a minimum income for their produce. Farmers can navigate uncertainties more confidently, knowing that the government is legally bound to intervene when market prices fall below the MSP. A guaranteed MSP leads to increased rural income. This, in turn, stimulates the rural economy by boosting demand for goods and services, creating a positive ripple effect in various sectors.

The way forward: Policymakers can pave the way for a more secure and prosperous future for farmers by dispelling misconceptions and addressing concerns. Replacing the decades-old and inefficient MSP policy with a legislatively guaranteed MSP offers a comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. It not only ensures consistent implementation but also promotes diversification, inclusivity, and economic resilience, contributing to the wholesome well-being of farmers and the prosperity of the rural economy. This will help to fuel the dream of a 'Viksit Bharat'.

(The author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council; Views expressed are personal)

# The enduring legacy of Ameen Sayani, the radio icon

Sayani's influence extended far beyond the confines of the studio, earning him a place in the hearts and minds of millions

In the melodic realm of post-independence, India emerged a captivating voice that transcended mere broadcasting to become a cherished companion for countless listeners for almost four decades. With the resounding greeting, "Namaskar bhaiyon aur behno, main apka dost Ameen Sayani bol raha hoon," Ameen Sayani forged an indelible connection through the airwaves, beckoning listeners to join him on a journey of music and camaraderie. This golden voice of radio passed into eternity on February 21, 2024, in Mumbai. He was 91. His voice, emanating from vintage radio sets, possessed a captivating charm, diverging from the seriousness of his



RAJDEEP PATHAK

peers. Ameen Sayani's pioneering radio show, starting as a modest segment on Radio Ceylon, swiftly became a cultural sensation in the 1950s. From Binaca Geetmala to Hit Parade and Cibaca Geetmala, his presentation remained timeless, bridging simplicity and connection, resonating with ordinary hearts. Geetmala transcended borders, captivating audiences across Asia and East Africa

and fostering unity through Hindi film melodies. With 90 million listeners, it has evolved into a cherished tradition, binding families over enchanting tunes.

They were not merely a fleeting waltz through the sonic realms; it was a timeless symphony, a melody that lingered in the hearts of generations. With the gentle caress of nostalgia, it continued its melodious journey, spanning the years from 1952 to 1994, a testament to its enduring charm and universal appeal. And like a phoenix rising from the ashes of bygone eras, it experienced resurgences in the dawn of new millennia, revivals in 2000-2001 and 2001-2003, each breathing new life into its hallowed name.

Beyond the airwaves, Ameen Sayani's unparalleled contribution as a voiceover artist echoes through the annals of time, with over 54,000 radio programmes and approximately 19,000 jingles to his credit — a testament to his lasting impact on the hearts and minds of a nation. Bhajan Samrat, Anup Jalota while sharing his thoughts with me on hearing the news of Ameen Sahab's demise said that he was one of the pioneers in the field of entertainment in broadcasting media and the texture of his voice captivated many people. "Today many of the anchors try to copy his texture and finesse", he said, adding, "It was almost a miracle that any song that Ameen Sahab would announce in his Binaca Geetmala, would go on

to become a hit. Phrases like "Aawaz ke duniya ke doston", and "Bhaiyon aur Beheno" were introduced by him which people are using today and trying to establish themselves. He was very mild in his behaviour and very gentle. "Listening to Ameen Sayani's iconic radio show, 'Binaca Geet Mala,' with my siblings was a cherished ritual in our household," reminisces Dr Sumitra Guha, a renowned classical vocalist and recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademy award. "The mesmerising voice of Ameen Sayani filled our hearts with joy, as we eagerly awaited the melodious tunes of legendary playback singers like Lata Mangeshkar. His captivating narration and the golden era of Bollywood music left an indelible mark

on my soul. It was truly a magical time, enhanced by the charm of our beloved host." Writer, social activist and President of the Guild of Services, Meera Khanna shares her memories of growing up listening to Ameen Sayani. She says, "With the passing away of Ameen Sayani it is as if a precious memory of childhood has slipped away. The 'Binaca Geetmala' which he hosted in his amazing voice was an integral part of a childhood when television had not invaded homes. Gathered around the radio or with the transistor stuck to the ear Ameen Sayani invited you to float on the melody or foot tap to the rhythm of the most popular Hindi film songs. Thus, every week Ameen Sayani was the friend who vis-

ited with a bouquet of melody rhythm and poetry. Millions in this country will remember with the nostalgia of the times when pleasures were simple and radio hosts made you feel good about our world." Smita Vats, Founder and President of ITIHAAS (Indian Traditions Heritage and Society) kept it simple when she said, "My memories are just of his voice... diction, and metre while reading and talking. All lost now, as no one speaks well these days." Throughout his illustrious career spanning decades, Sayani epitomised innovation and authenticity. Amidst evolving media landscapes, he championed radio's timeless ability to unite communities. Beyond the airwaves, Sayani's magnetic charisma

made him a sought-after emcee, infusing every event he hosted with enchantment. Veteran journalist and author, Khushwant Singh eloquently captured Sayani's significance, saying, "Ameen Sayani wasn't just a radio presenter; he was a storyteller whose voice painted vivid images in the minds of his listeners." In the words of the man himself, "This is Ameen Sayani, signing off with the hope that you'll join me again next week, same time, same station." As we bid farewell to this titan of the airwaves, his voice and legacy will long be cherished. Farewell Ameen Sahab!

(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Snruti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



# Netanyahu seeks open-ended control in Gaza

AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

Israel seeks open-ended control over security and civilian affairs in the Gaza Strip, according to a long-awaited postwar plan by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It was swiftly rejected Friday by Palestinian leaders and runs counter to Washington's vision for the war-ravaged enclave.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented the two-page document to his security Cabinet late Thursday for approval. Deep disagreements over Gaza's future have led to increasingly public friction between Israel and the United States, its closest ally. The Biden administration seeks eventual Palestinian governance in Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank as a precursor to Palestinian statehood, an outcome vehemently opposed by Netanyahu and his right-wing government. Netanyahu's plan envisions hand-picked Palestinians in Gaza adminis-

tering the territory. Separately, cease-fire efforts appeared to gain traction, with mediators to present a new proposal at an expected high-level meeting this weekend in Paris. The US, Egypt and Qatar have been struggling for weeks to find a formula that could halt Israel's devastating offensive in Gaza, but now face an unofficial deadline as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan approaches. In Gaza, Israeli airstrikes in the centre and south of the territory killed at least 68 Palestinians, including children and women, overnight and into Friday, health officials and an Associated Press journalist said. Another 24 bodies remained trapped under the rubble. Fidaa Ashour, whose sister was killed in a strike early Friday in the city of Rafah in southern Gaza, said "the world does not feel what we are enduring." At a hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, relatives wept over bodies laid out in burial shrouds in the



A Palestinian holds the body of a child killed in the Israeli bombardments of the Gaza Strip in front of the morgue to pray over them at Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah on Friday.

AP/PTI

courtyard, and a man cradled a dead infant.

The overall Palestinian death toll since the start of the war rose to more than 29,500, with close to 70,000 people wounded, Gaza health officials said. The death toll amounts to close to 1.3% of Gaza's popula-

tion of 2.3 million.

## NETANYAHU'S VISION

Netanyahu's plan, while lacking specifics, marks the first time he has presented a formal postwar vision. It reiterates that Israel is determined to crush Hamas, the militant

group that overran the Gaza Strip in 2007. Polls have indicated that a majority of Palestinians don't support Hamas, but the group has deep roots in Palestinian society. Critics, including some in Israel, say the goal of eliminating Hamas is unattainable.

Netanyahu's plan calls for freedom of action for Israel's military across a demilitarized Gaza after the war to thwart any security threat. It says Israel would establish a buffer zone inside Gaza, which is likely to provoke US objections.

The plan also envisions Gaza being governed by local officials who it says would "not be identified with countries or entities that support terrorism and will not receive payment from them". It's not clear if any Palestinians would agree to such sub-contractor roles. Over the past decades, Israel has repeatedly tried and failed to set up hand-picked local Palestinian governing bodies. The Palestinian Authority,

which administers pockets of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Friday denounced Netanyahu's plan as "colonialist and racist," saying it would amount to Israeli reoccupation of Gaza. Israel withdrew its soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but maintained control of access to the territory. The Biden administration wants to see a reformed Palestinian Authority govern both Gaza and the West Bank as a step toward Palestinian statehood. It has sought to chip away at Netanyahu's resistance by holding out the prospect of the normalisation of ties between Israel and Arab powerhouse Saudi Arabia.

## THE WAR DRAGS ON

Israel declared war on Hamas on Oct 7, after the militants stormed into southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 hostages. More than 100 hostages were freed in a weeklong cease-fire in late

November. Since the start of the war, 29,514 Palestinians were killed in Israel's offensive and close to 70,000 were wounded, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Friday. Two-thirds of those killed have been women and children, said the ministry, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count.

Israel says it has killed at least 10,000 Hamas fighters, without presenting details. It holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties because the group operates and fights from within civilian areas. The United States has repeatedly urged Israel to do more to avoid harm to civilians, but the daily number of deaths reported in Gaza appears to be relatively constant. The Israeli offensive has inflicted immense suffering in Gaza. About 80% of the population have been displaced, infectious diseases run rampant and hundreds of thousands of people are facing hunger.

## Hamas leader leaves Egypt after cease-fire talks

**Beirut (AP):** Hamas says its political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, has left Egypt after holding talks with Egyptian officials about a possible cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and an exchange of hostages held by the militants for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel. The statement released early Friday by Hamas did not say whether Haniyeh's talks with Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel about ways of ending the war, a hostage deal and the flow of aid to Gaza were successful or led to a breakthrough. The talks in Cairo came ahead of a high-level meeting expected over the weekend in Paris, where international mediators will present a new proposal. The United States, Egypt and Qatar have been struggling for weeks to find a formula that could halt Israel's devastating offensive in Gaza, but now face an unofficial deadline as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan approaches.

Israel seeks a phased deal, including a temporary pause in fighting in exchange for the release of some of the roughly 100 hostages still held by militants since the brutal October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel. Israel has vowed to keep fighting until Hamas is crushed. Hamas initially demanded to end the war, now in its fifth month, before hostages can be released. Hamas has said that it would release the Israeli hostages in return for the all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Israel rejected that demand, and mediators have been working on a new deal.

During Hamas' October 7 attack on southern Israel, militants killed about 1,200 people and took some 250 hostages. Roughly half of the hostages were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

About 100 hostages remain in captivity, in addition to the bodies of 30 others who were killed on October 7 or died in captivity. Israel's subsequent offensive in Gaza has killed more than 29,000 Palestinians and driven some 80 per cent of the territory's 2.3 million people from their homes. Most heeded Israeli orders to flee south, and around 1.5 million are packed into Rafah near the border with Egypt.

# 4 die, 14 missing after apartment fire in Spain

AP ■ VALENCIA (SPAIN)

As firefighters and scientific apolice Friday began inspecting the interior of two residential towers that were destroyed by fire in the eastern Spanish city of Valencia, killing four people, questions abounded as to how the fire spread so rapidly. Authorities said 14 people were still missing following the blaze at the complex Thursday. Valencia Mayor Maria José Catalá said that the danger of the 14-story building collapsing and the intense heat from the fire initially prevented emergency workers from getting in to search for possible survivors.

The fire started Thursday evening and quickly engulfed the buildings. Experts said that the building's polyurethane cladding may have contributed to the fire's ferocity. The vice-president of the Valencia College of Industrial and Technical Engineers, Esther

Puchades, who once inspected the building, told the state news agency Efe that when the material "is heated it is like plastic and it ignites".

She said it was the first fire of its type in Spain, but that other blazes involving the material have been similarly destructive in the United Kingdom and China.

The June 2017 fire at Grenfell Tower in London, which also had polyurethane cladding, caused more than 70 deaths. Catalá said the cause of the fire was still not known and it was too early to comment on reports that suggested materials used in construction might have contributed. Puchades said polyurethane was no longer widely used in buildings without extra safety measures to offset its flammability. The complex in Valencia was finished in 2009. In a promotional video, the now bankrupt construction company Fbex boasted that it used a new alu-

minum-based material as part of its façade.

Fifteen people were treated for injuries and five remained Friday in city hospitals, including four firefighters. All were said to be stable.

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez visited the scene, promising support for those affected and expressing gratitude to firefighters and military personnel who worked to extinguish the blaze.

It was not immediately known how many people were in the two buildings when the fire broke out, but dozens are believed to have lost their homes and belongings. The complex had some 140 apartments. The Valencia regional government declared three days of mourning and announced financial aid to cover accommodation, clothing and food. Residents were housed overnight in hotels or in the homes of relatives and neighbours, authorities said.

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Former President Donald Trump urged a Florida judge to dismiss the criminal case charging him with illegally retaining classified documents, claiming in part that presidential immunity protects him from prosecution even as that sweeping argument has so far failed in federal appeals courts in a separate case.

In one of a slew of motions attacking the case brought by special counsel Jack Smith, Trump's lawyers late on Thursday echoed arguments that were roundly rejected by a federal appeals court this month in his 2020 election interference case in Washington. Trump has asked the US Supreme Court to intervene in that case as the Republican presidential primary front-runner seeks to delay the trial until after the November election. Trump's lawyers wrote that the classified



documents charges turn on his alleged decision to designate the papers as "personal" records under the Presidential Records Act, and argued that he cannot be prosecuted since that was an "official act" made while he was still in the White House. Washington's federal appeals court in its decision this month was unsparing in its repudiation of Trump's novel claim that former presidents enjoy absolute immunity for actions that fall within their official job duties.

But Trump's lawyers argued that the appeals court's decision was wrong, telling US District Judge Aileen Cannon she should not follow the court's "poorly reasoned decision" in the classified documents case.

In other court filings late Thursday, Trump's lawyers argued that Attorney General Merrick Garland's appointment of special counsel Smith to investigate the former president was "unlawful" and grounds for dismissing the documents case. They also are attacking the law Trump is accused of violating as "unconstitutionally vague" as applied in his case.

The case accuses Trump of illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate and obstructing government efforts to retrieve them. A June 2023 indictment charging him with dozens of felony counts alleges investigators found boxes of sensitive docu-

ments recklessly stored at Mar-a-Lago in spaces including a ballroom, a bathroom and shower, his bedroom and a storage room.

Prosecutors have said the documents he stowed, refused to return and in some cases showed to visitors risked jeopardizing not only relations with foreign nations but also the safety of troops and confidential sources. They've also accused Trump of asking a staffer to delete camera footage at his Florida estate in an effort to obstruct the federal investigation into his records.

The case is currently scheduled to go to trial in May, but Judge Cannon has pushed back multiple other deadlines and signaled an openness to revisiting the trial date during a pivotal pretrial conference set for March. It's one of four criminal cases the former president is facing as he vies to reclaim the White House in November.

# Rape, sexual violence in Sudan's ongoing conflict may amount to war crimes: New UN report

AP ■ GENEVA

The UN human rights office said in a new report on Friday that scores of people, including children, have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence in the ongoing conflict in Sudan, assaults that may amount to war crimes. Sudan plunged into chaos in mid-April when clashes erupted in the capital, Khartoum, between rival Sudanese forces — the country's military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and a paramilitary faction known as the Rapid Support Forces, under the command of Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

The fighting quickly spread across the African country, especially urban areas but also the restive western Darfur region, and has so far killed at least 12,000 people and sent over 8 million fleeing their homes, the report said.

The report, which covers a period from the outbreak of the fighting up to December 15, documents abuses in a country that has been largely inaccessible to aid groups and rights monitors recently, clouding the impact of a conflict that been overshadowed by wars in places like Gaza and Ukraine.

The report found that at least 118 people had been subjected to sexual violence, including rape — with many of the assaults committed by members of the paramilitary forces, in homes and on the streets.

One woman, the UN said, "was held in a building and repeatedly gang-raped over a period of 35 days."

The report also pointed to recruitment of child soldiers on both sides of the conflict.

"Some of these violations would amount to war crimes," said UN human rights chief Volker Türk, calling for

prompt, thorough and independent investigations into alleged rights abuses and violations.

The report is based on interview of more than 300 victims and witnesses, some conducted in neighbouring Ethiopia and Chad where many Sudanese have fled, along with analysis of photographs, videos, and satellite imagery from the conflict areas.

The ravages of the war, beyond the period examined, are continuing, the UN said.

The UN cited video that emerged last week from the country's North Kordofan State showing men wearing Sudanese army uniforms carrying severed heads of members of the rival paramilitary faction.

"For nearly a year now, accounts coming out of Sudan have been of death, suffering and despair, as the senseless

conflict and human rights violations and abuses have persisted with no end in sight," Türk said.

"The guns must be silenced, and civilians must be protected," he added.

Speaking from Nairobi, Kenya, by videoconference to the UN briefing in Geneva on Friday, Seif Magango, a regional spokesman for the UN human rights office said that "the number of people displaced (in Sudan) has now crossed the 8 million mark, which should concern everyone."

Earlier in February, UN Secretary-General António Guterres told reporters that there is no military solution to Sudan's conflict and urged the rival generals to start talking about ending the conflict.

He stressed that continued fighting "will not bring any solution so we must stop this as soon as possible."

# Angry French farmers with tractors back to Paris for another protest

AP ■ PARIS

Angry farmers were back to Paris on their tractors Friday in a new protest demanding more government support and simpler regulations, on the eve of a major agricultural fair in the French capital. Dozens of tractors drove peacefully into a neighbourhood on the capital's west side carrying flags from Rural Coordination, the farmers' union that staged the protest. The protesters then posed with their tractors on a bridge over the Seine River with the Eiffel Tower in the background.

The latest protest comes three weeks after farmers lifted roadblocks around Paris and elsewhere in the country after the government offered over 400 million euros (USD 433 million) to address their grievances over low earnings, heavy regulation and what they describe as unfair competi-



tion from abroad. "Save our agriculture," the Rural Coordination said on X, formerly Twitter. One tractor was carrying a poster reading: "Death is in the field."

The convoy temporarily slowed traffic on the A4 highway, east of the capital, and on the Paris ring-road earlier on Friday morning. French farmers' actions are part of a broad-

er protest movement in Europe against EU agriculture policies, bureaucracy and overall business conditions.

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

non-EU imports.

Other protests are being staged across France as farmers seek to put pressure on the government to implement its promises.

Government officials have held a series of meetings with farmers unions in recent weeks to discuss a new bill meant to defend France's "agricultural sovereignty." Will to be debated at parliament this spring.

The government's plan also includes hundreds of millions of euros in aid, tax breaks and a promise not to ban pesticides in France that are allowed elsewhere in Europe, which French farmers say puts them at an unfair disadvantage. French President Emmanuel Macron is to visit the Paris Agricultural Fair, on Saturday where he is planning to have a "big debate" with farmers, supermarket CEOs and members of environmental groups, his office said.

# ISIS bride loses appeal to regain British citizenship

PTI ■ LONDON



Shamima Begum, the London-born Bangladeshi-origin woman, who fled the UK as a 15-year-old schoolgirl to join the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist network, on Friday lost yet another legal bid to regain her British citizenship and return to the UK from Syria. Previously in 2022, the UK Supreme Court upheld the decision to bar the now 24-year-old from returning to the UK. After a series of legal battles, Begum lost a challenge at the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) in February last year and then took her case to the Court of Appeal. However, the appeal judges unanimously agreed with the special tribunal's decision and turned down the appeal. "Ms Begum may well

have been influenced and manipulated by others but still have made a calculated decision to travel to Syria and align with ISIL [ISIS]," said Judge Dame Sue Carr, delivering the verdict in London.

Begum, who is in a refugee camp in northern Syria, was represented at her appeal by barrister Samantha Knights who had argued that the government had failed to consider legal duties owed to a potential victim of trafficking. The

UK Home Office stressed that the main focus of the case was around national security.

The British government has maintained Begum could seek a Bangladeshi passport given her heritage but her family has argued that she is British and has never held Bangladeshi citizenship.

Last year, the specialist tribunal had accepted then Home Secretary Sajid Javid's conclusion that revoking her British citizenship was "an integral part of the overall national security assessment carried out by the Security Service" and therefore not a matter for the court.

Begum, referred to as an ISIS bride for marrying a Dutch member of the terror network in Syria, gave birth to three children — all of whom later died.

# 'Indian-origin student in US died due to acute alcohol intoxication'

**New York (PTI):** An 18-year-old Indian-origin University of Illinois student, who was found dead last month, died due to hypothermia and acute alcohol intoxication with prolonged exposure to extremely cold temperatures significantly contributing to his death, authorities have said. Akul B Dhawan was found dead outside the campus building around 11 am on January 20. Arrow Ambulance, Urbana Fire Department and the University of Illinois Police Department were dispatched to the location after they received a report of an unresponsive male on a porch.

An autopsy that was performed on January 23 confirmed Dhawan's death was due to hypothermia. "Acute alcohol intoxication and prolonged exposure to extremely cold temperatures significantly contributed to his death," Champaign County Coroner Stephen Thuney said.

Thuney ruled the death accidental. A report in WANDTV.com said that according to the University of Illinois Police Department's investigation, Dhawan had met with friends at approximately 9 pm on January 19 and had consumed alcohol. At approximately 10 pm, they said Dhawan and his friends went to a local club in Urbana.

"Security video showed him consuming more alcohol before the group returned to the club," the report cited police as saying. University police said Dhawan's friends re-entered the club between 11:25 pm and 11:29 pm while Dhawan stayed outside.

# Private US company lands first commercial spacecraft on Moon

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A private American company has scripted history by landing the first commercial spacecraft on the Moon as well as the first US vehicle on the Earth's only natural satellite in more than 50 years, joining earlier feats by India, Russia, the US and China.

Built by Intuitive Machines, the lander — named Odysseus — touched down on the Moon at around 6:23 p.m. ET on Thursday, making it the first American spacecraft on the Moon since the Apollo 17 mission in 1972.

"Today, for the first time in half a century, America has returned to the Moon," Bill Nelson, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator said



after Intuitive Machines, a Houston-based company, landed its Odysseus robot near the lunar south pole.

The lander carries a bounty of NASA scientific instruments, "and bearing the dream of a new adventure in science, innovation and American leadership in space, well, all of that aced the landing of the lifetime," Nelson said. "What we

can confirm, without a doubt, is our equipment is on the surface of the Moon, and we are transmitting." Flight Director and Chief Technology Officer Tim Crain announced amidst cheers among his colleagues and others across the country as there were some tense moments before the landing on the Moon.

As the spacecraft made its final descent, mission controllers lost contact with it, as was expected to occur, NBC News reported. "After troubleshooting communications, flight controllers have confirmed Odysseus is upright and starting to send data. Right now, we are working to downlink the first images from the lunar surface," Intuitive Machines said, announcing the historic feat.



# US, EU pile new sanctions on Russia

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The United States and the European Union are piling new sanctions on Russia on the eve of the second anniversary of its invasion of Ukraine and in retaliation for the death of noted Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny last week in an Arctic penal colony. The US Treasury Department plans Friday to impose more than 500 new sanctions on Russia and its war machine in the largest single tranche of penalties since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

They come on the heels of a series of new arrests and indictments announced by the Justice Department on Thursday that target Russian businessmen, including the head of Russia's second-largest bank, and their middlemen in five separate federal cases. The European Union announced Friday that it is imposing sanctions on several foreign companies over allegations that they have exported dual-use goods to Russia that could be used in its war against Ukraine.

The 27-nation bloc also said that it was targeting scores of Russian officials, including "members of the judiciary, local politicians and people responsible for the illegal deportation and military re-education of Ukrainian children."

"The American people and people around the world understand that the stakes of this fight extend far beyond Ukraine," President Joe Biden said in a statement announcing the sanctions.

"If Putin does not pay the price for his death and destruction, he will keep going. And the costs to the United States — along with our NATO Allies and partners in Europe and around the world — will rise,"

The US specifically was to target individuals associated with Navalny's imprisonment a day after Biden met with the opposition leader's widow and daughter in California.

It was also hitting "Russia's financial sector, defense industrial base, procurement networks and sanctions evaders

# Ukrainians live in agony, uncertainty

**Kyiv (AP):** Iryna Reva stares at her phone, replaying the last video her 25-year-old son Vladyslav sent her from the front line before the volunteer soldier disappeared 19 months ago in a battle with Russian forces in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

Reva is one of the thousands of Ukrainians desperately seeking news of loved ones who have disappeared in the two years since Russia's full-scale invasion began. According to Ukraine's National Police, more than 30,000 people have been reported missing in the last 24 months. "Up to this day, I am searching for my son," Reva said. "He is alive to me. Regardless of the circumstances, there is no evidence that he has perished."

The last time Reva spoke to her son, she begged him not to take part in a battle the next morning. "Don't go, say your arm hurts," she told him over the phone.

"Mom, I'm sorry. I love you very much," Vladyslav replied. "I'm going into battle. I don't know if I'll be back. I'll be out of touch. Pray," were his last words to her. The missing include soldiers like Vladyslav lost on the battlefield, but also civilians and children who have vanished in a variety of circumstances. For many relatives, the agonising uncertainty and relentless search for answers has already gone on for two years with no end in



A Ukrainian soldier takes his position on the frontline near Klischchiivka the Donetsk region, in Ukraine on Friday

AP/PTI

sight. Inna Usenko left her hometown of Mariupol on a business trip the day before the war began in 2022. She lost contact with her brother, Herman Sikorskyi, on March 1 as Russia laid siege to the eastern city and thousands of civilians were trapped. Several weeks later, a Russian airstrike hit the house where he had lived. "I don't know what to think, whether he's alive or not," she said. "I understand perfectly well that if I were there, he would have come to me, and maybe something would have been different, so I feel guilty all the time."

In an attempt to find her brother, Usenko filed a missing person's report with the occupation authorities, the Russian Federation and the Russian

Red Cross. From her home, which is now in Spain, she came to Ukraine to file a police report and provide DNA to Ukrainian authorities. Despite the efforts, neither side was able to provide her with any information. "I would like, of course, to believe that he is alive," Usenko said, adding that the uncertainty not only drains her but also affects close friends, relatives and his children. The International Committee of the Red Cross says since February 2022 its team has been contacted more than 100,000 times by families searching for their loved ones. "That doesn't mean a hundred thousand missing people. But this gives you an idea of just the amount of suffering that this creates on both sides," Achille

Després, a spokesperson at the ICRC in Kyiv, said.

For relatives looking for information, the official search often begins with submitting a DNA sample. Andrii Levytskyi, head of forensics at the National Police's main investigation department, said more than 18,000 DNA samples of relatives of servicemen and civilians have been collected and processed.

DNA is a vital part of establishing the status of the missing person, especially if they are military. Even if fellow soldiers said they witnessed a soldier killed in battle, it's not enough to confirm the death, said Petro Yatsenko, the head of a press office at the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs.

"Until we have the body, until we have DNA analysis, this person will have the status of missing," he said. He said they have had cases in which soldiers were found wounded in captivity, despite testimony from their comrades that they were killed in battle. Over the past two years, numerous volunteer projects have arisen to aid in the search for missing people, often serving as a last resort for relatives who receive no official information from authorities. Mariia Reshetova, who runs the Search for the Missing project under the Kateryna Osadcha Foundation, said they have around 1,000 open cases and have already closed hundreds.

# PML-N candidates' victory notified from Islamabad

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's election commission on Friday notified the victories of three candidates from Nawaz Sharif's PML-N in the federal capital, delivering a fresh blow to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party, which had challenged the original poll results.

Backed by the 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, three losing candidates - Amir Mughal, Shoaib Shaheen and Mohammad Ali Bukhari - had petitioned in the Islamabad High Court (IHC), alleging manipulation of the results.

On Wednesday, the IHC suspended poll result notifications issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) from NA-46, NA-47 and NA-48, putting on hold the success of three candidates of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, who had won respectively on the three seats.

While Anjum Aqeel Khan and Chaudhry won on the PML-N tickets, Raja Khurram Nawaz won as an independent candidate and joined the party after his victory. After hearing the parties on Friday, the elec-

toral watchdog restored the order suspended by the IHC and issued the notification announcing the victory of the three candidates, Geo News reported.

"Now the Commission, after hearing the parties, has finally disposed of the petitions filed by Mr Aamer Masood, contesting candidate NA-46 ICT-I, Mr Shoaib Shaheen, contesting candidate NA-47 ICT-II, and Syed Muhammad Ali Bokhari, Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Ch. Azhar Mehmood contesting candidates NA-48 ICT-III, in light of the order passed by the Hon'ble Islamabad High Court," the ECP said.

Earlier, the three PTI-backed losing candidates had challenged the election results before the ECP on February 10, and the commission issued a status quo order. However, on February 11, the ECP also issued the notification that declared Khan, Chaudhry, and Nawaz as returned candidates.

Speaking to media outside the ECP, PML-N-backed Chaudhry slammed his rivals for creating controversy over the election results. "We are ready for a political battle," he was quoted as saying. Chaudhry accused the PTI of

fraudulent activities and misguiding the high court and advised the party not to fight against the state.

Independent candidates backed by the PTI won more than 90 seats in the National Assembly in the February 8 general election. The PML-N won 75 seats while the PPP came third with 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) has 17 seats. To form a government, a party must win 133 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly.

However, the PML-N and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have agreed on a power-sharing deal to form a new coalition government, which may effectively end former prime minister Khan's chances of returning to power. PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif has been nominated as the prime minister candidate, while PPP's Asif Ali Zardari is for the president's office.

On Wednesday, the PTI rejected the attempts by two of its arch-rivals to form a coalition government, warning that robbing its public endorsement by the "mandate thieves" will result in the worst political instability.

# IMF ready to work with new govt; mum on Imran's demand

**Washington/Islamabad:** The IMF is looking forward to working with the new government in Pakistan, a top official has said while keeping mum on jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's demand that the global lender should conduct an "audit" of the election results before approving any new loan for the cash-strapped country. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan on Thursday said he will write to the International Monetary Fund, demanding the Washington-based institution stop its support to Pakistan where his political rivals, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party, were on the verge of forming a coalition government with a "stolen mandate."

The 71-year-old former prime minister's message from jail was conveyed through Barrister Ali Zafar, who met him in the Adiala Jail Rawalpindi where he has been incarcerated since last year after being convicted in corruption and other cases.

The IMF is looking for-

ward to engaging with Pakistan's new government on policies to ensure "macroeconomic stability and prosperity" for the country, Julie Kozack, the head of the Communications Department of the IMF said, while maintaining silence on any communication to the organisation from jailed former premier Khan on the outcome of the February 8 polls in the country. During the press conference in Washington on Thursday, Kozack was asked about whether Pakistan was on track to secure the third tranche of the stand-by agreement reached in June 2023 and also if the IMF would entertain any letter by Khan calling for investigations into election irregularities.

"We look forward to work-

ing with the new government on policies to ensure macroeconomic stability and prosperity for all of Pakistan's citizens. And I am going to leave it at that," Kozack said.

She said that on January 11, the IMF Executive Board approved the first review of the Stand-By Arrangement, with Pakistan that brought total disbursements under the Stand-By Arrangement to USD 1.9 billion. "The Stand-By Arrangement is supporting the authority's efforts to stabilise the economy and to, of course, with a strong focus on protecting the most vulnerable," she said. Talking of the fiscal conditions of Pakistan, she said that during the tenure of the interim government, the authorities had "maintained economic stability".

# Return Navalny's body to family, authorities urged

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russians including Nobel Prize-winning journalist Dmitry Muratov and ballet star Mikhail Baryshnikov have released videos calling on Russian authorities to return the body of opposition leader Alexei Navalny to his family, a week after his death in an Arctic penal colony.

Navalny's mother said on Thursday that she has seen her son's body and that she is resisting heavy pressure to agree to a secret burial away from the public eye. Lyudmila Navalnaya said investigators allowed her to see her son's body in the city morgue. She said she repeated her demand to have Navalny's body returned to her and protested what she described as authorities trying to force her to agree to a secret burial.

"They are blackmailing me. They are setting conditions where, when and how my son should be buried," she said Thursday in a video statement from the Arctic city of Salekhard. "They want it to do

it secretly without a mourning ceremony." Navalny's spokesman, Kira Yarmysh said on X, formerly Twitter, that his mother was also shown a medical certificate stating that the released videos calling on Russian authorities to return the body of opposition leader Alexei Navalny to his family, a week after his death in an Arctic penal colony.

Nadya Tolokonnikova, who became widely known after spending nearly two years in prison for taking part in a 2012 protest with the band Pussy Riot inside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, also released a video. "We were imprisoned for allegedly trampling on traditional values. But no one tramples on traditional Russian values more than you, Putin, your officials and your priests who pray for all the

murder that you do, year after year, day after day," Tolokonnikova said.

"Putin, have a conscience, give his mother the body of her son," she added. Navalny, Russia's most well-known opposition politician, suddenly died in an Arctic prison last week, prompting hundreds of Russians across the country to stream to impromptu memorials with flowers and candles. The Russian authorities have detained scores of people as they seek to suppress any major outpouring of sympathy for President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe before the presidential election he is almost certain to win. Across the ocean in San Francisco Thursday, US President Joe Biden met with Navalny's widow Yulia Navalnaya and 20-year-old daughter Dasha, expressing "condolences for their devastating loss."

"To state the obvious, he was a man of incredible courage," Biden said after the meeting. "It's amazing how his wife and daughter are emulating that."

# Imran, wife move lower court against 'un-Islamic marriage' case verdict

**Islamabad (PTI):** Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi on Friday separately moved a lower court challenging the verdict in the "un-Islamic" marriage case in which they were jailed for seven years and their marriage in 2018 declared illegal. Earlier this month, a trial court sentenced Khan, 71, and his wife Bushra Bibi, 49, to seven years in jail and imposed a Rs 5,00,000 fine on each for "contracting marriage during the 'iddat' (period of waiting)" in a case filed by Bibi's former husband Khawar Maneka in November last year.

The district and sessions court will mark the former first couple's appeals on Friday, Geo News reported. Bushra Bibi filed her appeal at the court through her lawyers seeking annulment of the trial court's decision, the report said.

The third spouse of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party founder petitioned that the judgment delivered by civil judge Quadrattullah on February

3 was against the facts, while the indictment issued against her in the case on January 16 was also illegal. The petition said that the plea of jurisdiction was rejected without assigning any reason and that the civil court did not conduct the trial properly.

**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR**  
**MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**  
(Garden and Tree Authority)

Tel. No. (0240) 2333536-40  
Fax No. 2040-2331213

Address:- Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation  
Head Office:- Town Hall, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar 431001 (Maharashtra)  
E-Mail ID:- uidssmt.csmc@gmail.com

No. CSMC/Garden Section/1168/2024  
Dated :- 17/02/2024

S.No	Work Name	Final Date of Tender Submission
1.	Construction Multiplay System In CSMC Main Gardens.	Date :- 04/03/2024 5 PM
Amount Put to Tender:- Rs.44,76,029/-		
<b>Note:-</b> Tender Notice is Published on Website <a href="http://www.mahatenders.gov.in">www.mahatenders.gov.in</a>		

Sd/-  
Executive Engineer  
Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar  
Municipal Corporation

**CORRIGENDUM**

No. SS/CW/SMO/LIFT/50/2024/148  
In continuation of the tender No. SS/CW/SMO/LIFT/50/2024/140 dated 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2024 invited for the work, "Design, fabrication, supply, installation and commissioning of passenger lift (8 person) including civil & structural works for construction of New Lift Structure at the State Mission Office (G+4 storey), Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19", the following changes will be effective:

Clause ref. with page no. in the tender document	Present clause	Modified clause
Short Notice Inviting tender, page-3 of IFB	Time of completion – 45 days	Time of completion – 90 days
Short Notice Inviting tender, page-3 of IFB	Last date & time for submission of tender : 23-02-2024	Last date & time for submission of tender : 27-02-2024
National/ local competitive bidding, page-2 of IFB	Last date & time for submission of tender : 23-02-2024	Last date & time for submission of tender : 27-02-2024
Calender of events, page-4 of IFB	Last date & time for submission of tender : 23-02-2024	Last date & time for submission of tender : 27-02-2024
Page-5 of IFB	Time of completion – 45 days	Time of completion – 90 days
Clause no. 8 of Appendix-I, page 28	The bids will be opened at the Office of the Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 at 1500 hours on 23-02-2024	The bids will be opened at the Office of the Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 at 1500 hours on 27-02-2024

Sd/- Executive Director  
Samagra Shiksha, Assam  
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

**Janasanyog/CF/5863/23/24-Feb-24**

# Buddhist monks among 100 held in Sichuan over dam protests

**Beijing (PTI):** Chinese security officials have arrested more than 100 Tibetan Buddhist monks and local people in the southwestern Sichuan province to quell protests against the construction of a massive dam that would submerge six Buddhist monasteries and force the relocation of two villages, a media report said.

In a rare act of defiance, residents have taken to the streets of Wangbuding township of Dege County in the Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture since February 14 to oppose the plan to build the 2,240-megawatt Gangtuo hydropower station on the Drichu River (Jinsha in Chinese). The dam is located on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, one of China's most important waterways, Radio Free Asia reported on Thursday.

The protests started on February 14, when at least 300 Tibetans gathered outside the Dege county town hall to oppose the dam's construction, defying strict controls on public gatherings and extensive surveillance by authorities in Sichuan and Tibet regions. The detentions reportedly occurred in the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, an area with a large population of ethnic Tibetans.

Some of the arrested protesters required hospitalisation due to rough treatment, the report said. Police used water cannons, pepper spray and tasers to subdue the protesters.

Videos of protests showed monks prostrating before the officials, pleading with them not to resort to demolition when they inspected Yena and Wonto monasteries in prepara-

tion for their destruction.

The USD 4.6 billion Yebatan hydropower station, the largest hydropower project in the upper reaches of the Jinsha River, exceeded 100 metres in December last year, achieving a major milestone, state-run Global Times reported earlier. The total installed capacity of the power station is expected to reach 2,240 megawatts after completion, with a maximum dam height of 217 metres. It is the tallest hyperbolic arch dam project under construction in China, according to the report.

The protesting locals were particularly distraught over the construction of the hydroelectric dam, as it would destroy six monasteries, including the Wonto Monastery, which includes ancient murals that date to the 13th century, the RFA report said.

**Office of the Managing Director**  
**Uttarakhand Co-Operative Dairy Federation Ltd.**  
Mangal Parao, Haldwani - 263139 (Nainital) Uttarakhand

प्रांक : सी-4921/बुधरीसीदीपा/निविदा पीएचडीडी/2023-24 दिनांक: 23/02/2024  
**E-Tender Notice No.: 33(1-2)/UCDF/P&I/2023-24, Date- 23.02.2024**

Following E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned, from experienced and financially sound Authorized Manufacturers/Dealers/Firms for the following works so as to reach this office on or before 01.03.2024 up to 5.00 PM. The Tender will be opened on 02.03.2024 at 11:00 AM.

S. No.	Name of Work
1.	Supply of fodder seed.
2.	Supply of various food grade flavors in powder forms.

Tender fee, EMD and other related details can be seen on E-tender portal. Detailed Tender documents may be downloaded/uploaded from E-tender portal <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>.  
Administrator Managing Director

**THE MAHARAJA BHUPINDER SINGH**  
**PUNJAB SPORTS UNIVERSITY,**  
(MBSPSU), PATIALA  
Mahindra Kothi, Near Fountain Chowk, Patiala-147001

**TENDER NOTICE**

The Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Punjab Sports University, Patiala invites bids from reputed software Design/ Website Design/ Website Development / Portal Design, firms for making a website for The Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Punjab Sports University, Patiala. The sealed bids (Technical and Financial) both in separate sealed envelopes i.e. double envelop system as per prescribed format must be submitted upto **06-03-2024 upto 4:00 PM**. The details of the tender will be available on the University website <https://mbpspu.ac.in> on **24th Feb 2024**. Important Note: In case of any query bidders can contact office during working hours. Detail terms and conditions are given on <https://mbpspu.ac.in>

-Sd/-  
Registrar

NA/12/22297/2023/32822 Dated CHD :- 2/23/2024

**NEW DELHI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL**  
Office of the Executive Engineer (E)  
RDSS Division, Electricity Department-II, New Delhi Municipal Council,  
Room No. 1705, 17th Floor, Palika Kendra, New Delhi: 110001  
Office Tel. :- 011-41501389 Extn. 3705

**3RD CALL E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE**

Name of Work:- Request for Proposal/Bid (RFP)/RFB for appointment of PMA for "Consultancy Services for Assisting and Supporting in Project Management to NDMC for Implementation of (i) Smart System Metering Work (DT and Feeder Metering) and (ii) Implementation of Loss Reduction Infrastructure Works under Phase-I of RDSS, GoI".

Tender Value :- Rs.4,83,00,000/-  
Tender ID No. :- 2024\_NDMC\_1

Date of Release of tender through e-procurement solution :- 21.02.2024  
Pre-Bid Meeting (In the O/o CE(E)-I, Palika Kendra, ND) :- 28.02.2024 at 1500 Hrs  
Last date/time for receipt of tenders through e-procurement :- 07.03.2024 at 1500 Hrs  
Date/time for opening of Bid through e-procurement: 07.03.2024 at 1530 Hrs

Further details can be seen at <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in> and <https://www.ndmc.gov.in/tenders.aspx>  
Note: - To participate in e-tender in NDMC registration with application services provider NIC is mandatory.  
Executive Engineer (E) RDSS

**Baba Farid University of Health**  
**Sciences, Faridkot**  
Sadiq Road, Faridkot-151203 Ph. 01639- 256232, 256236

**E-TENDER NOTICE**

E-tenders are invited for the procurement of following items upto 09.03.2024.

1) Automated Blood Culture System Machine. 2) Tilt Table Test Machine 3) High End Digital Mammography Machine 4) High End DEXA Scan Machine 5) CRRT (Continuous Renal Replacement Therapy Machine 6) 3 Tesla MRI Machine.

E-tenders are invited for the procurement of following items upto 16.03.2024

1) Lab material for GSGMCH 2) procurement of Ophthalmology equipments (Slit Lamp & Perimeter) at GSGMCH 3) Rate contract for supply of Chemotherapy supportive Drugs/Surgical material at GSGMCH 4) Signing rate contract of TKR implants.

Terms and conditions can be downloaded from <http://eproc.punjab.gov.in>. The tenders will be accepted in E-Tender mode only. Bidder can also download tender notification and document from the University website i.e. [www.bfhs.ac.in](http://www.bfhs.ac.in)

Registrar

00/12/207/2023/32775 Dated CHD :- 2/23/2024



# Shareholders vote to oust Byju

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

More than 60 per cent of shareholders of edutech Byju's on Friday voted for removal of founder CEO Byju Raveendran and his family over alleged "mismanagement and failures" at what was once India's hottest tech startup, but the company dug in its heels, calling the voting done in the absence of founders as "invalid".

Prosus - one of the six investors who had called the extraordinary general

meeting (EGM) - in a statement said "shareholders unanimously passed all resolutions put forward for vote.

"These included a request for the resolution of the outstanding governance, financial mismanagement and compliance issues at Byju's; the reconstitution of the board of directors, so that it is no longer controlled by the founder of T&L; and a change of leadership of the company."

Raveendran and his family stayed away from the EGM,



calling it "procedurally invalid."

However, the outcome of the vote at the EGM will not be applicable until March 13, when the Karnataka High Court will next hear Raveendran's plea challenging the move by certain investors to call the EGM.

The High Court on Wednesday had refused to stay the EGM, called by shareholders collectively holding more than 32 per cent stake in Think & Learn (T&L) - the firm that operates

Byju's, but any resolution passed shall not be given effect till the next date of hearing.

Raveendran and family own 26.3 per cent in the company. Byju's in a statement, issued even before the EGM results were declared, said it "firmly declares that the resolutions passed during the recently concluded EGM -- attended by a small cohort of select shareholders - are invalid and ineffective. The passing of the unenforceable resolutions challenges the rule of law at worst."

# NPCI to help Paytm UPI users migrate to banks

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

The Reserve Bank has asked the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to examine the possibility of migrating Paytm Payments Bank customers using the UPI handle @paytm to 4-5 other banks, in a bid to prevent any disruptions in the payment ecosystem.

On Friday, the central bank came out with additional steps for the benefit of customers, wallet holders and merchants who are availing banking services from Paytm Payments Bank, which has been barred from accepting deposits and credits after March 15, 2024.

As per the website of Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), it has 30 crore wallets and 3 crore bank customers.

NPCI, an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India, is an initiative of RBI and Indian Banks' Association (IBA) for creating a payment and settlement infrastructure in India.

As the PPBL cannot accept further credits into its customer accounts and wallets after March 15, 2024, certain additional steps have become necessary to ensure seamless digital payments by UPI customers using @paytm handle operated by the bank, and minimise concentration risk in the UPI system by having multiple payment app providers, the RBI said in a statement.

"NPCI has been advised by the RBI to examine the request of One97 Communication Ltd (OCL) to become a Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP) for UPI channel for continued UPI operation of the Paytm app, as per the norms," it said.

One97 Communications Ltd (OCL), which owns the Paytm brand, holds a 49 per cent stake in PPBL.

RBI further said that in the event of NPCI granting TPAP



status to OCL, it may be stipulated that '@paytm' handles are to be migrated in a seamless manner from PPBL to a set of newly identified banks to avoid any disruption. "No new users are to be added by the said TPAP until all the existing users are migrated satisfactorily to a new handle," it added.

"For seamless migration of '@paytm' handle to other banks, NPCI may facilitate certification of 4-5 banks as Payment Service Provider (PSP) Banks with demonstrated capabilities to process high volume UPI transactions. This is in line with NPCI norms for minimising concentration risk," RBI said.

Also, for the merchants using PayTM QR Codes, OCL may open the settlement accounts with one or more PSP Banks (other than Paytm Payments Bank), the Reserve Bank said.

It further said the migration of UPI handles is applicable only to such customers and merchants who have a UPI handle '@Paytm'. For others who have a UPI address or handle other than '@Paytm', no action is required to be taken by them.

RBI again asked the customers, whose underlying account/wallet is currently with Paytm Payments Bank, to make an alternative arrangement with other banks well before March 15, 2024.

# Rupee falls 8 paise to close at 82.93 a dollar

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and depreciated by 8 paise to close at 82.93 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, tracking a strong American currency and muted trend in domestic equities.

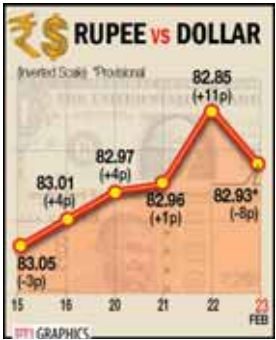
Forex traders said the Indian currency depreciated as foreign fund outflows weighed on the rupee.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.87 and finally settled at 82.93 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 8 paise from its previous close.

During the day, the rupee witnessed a range-bound movement. It saw an intra-day high of 82.84 and a low of 82.96 against the American currency.

On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 82.85 against the US dollar. The Indian rupee depreciated on Friday on dollar demand from importers. Elevated crude oil prices also weighed on the rupee, said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on positive global equities and soft US dollar. However, any bounce back in crude oil prices may cap sharp upside. Geopolitical



tension in the Middle East may put pressure on rupee at higher levels," Choudhary said, adding that USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.60 to Rs 83.10.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.05 per cent up at 104.00.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, was trading 1.33 per cent lower to USD 82.56 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex declined 15.44 points, or 0.02 per cent, to settle at 73,142.80 points. The Nifty fell 4.75 points, or 0.02 per cent, to 22,212.70 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Thursday as they sold shares worth Rs 1,410.05 crore, according to exchange data.

# Sensex edges lower, Nifty settles flat

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty edged lower in a volatile trade on Friday, reversing early gains due to selling in IT and select banking shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex slipped 15.44 points or 0.02 per cent to close at 73,142.80 points with 17 of its constituents closing in the red and 13 in the green.

The index opened higher but later slipped into losses due to profit-taking by investors. The barometer oscillated between a high of 73,413.93 and a low of 73,022 during the day.

The broader Nifty of NSE closed lower by 4.75 points or 0.02 per cent at 22,212.70 points as gains in FMCG, pharma and financial shares were offset by losses in IT and private bank shares.

The 50-share barometer scaled a record high of 22,297.50 in intra-day trade.

"Nifty opened higher but failed to sustain the morning momentum, leading to a closing at the day's low due to profit booking," Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities, said.

Among Sensex shares, HCLTech, Asian Paints, Maruti, JSW Steel, TCS, SBI, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the major losers.

On the other hand, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, L&T and Wipro were the major gainers.

"The domestic market paused momentarily today after reaching another record high earlier in the day, driven by positive signals from global markets," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The capital goods and industrial sectors showed strength, supported by advancements in manufacturing and services.

BSE Midcap advanced 0.25 per cent while Smallcap rose by 0.53 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, BSE Oil & Gas dropped by 0.81 per cent, BSE Metal by 0.33 per cent, BSE Energy by 0.36 per cent and Bankex 0.29 per cent.

On the other hand, BSE Industrials spurred by 1.22 per cent, Telecommunications by 1.52 per cent, Capital Goods by 1.18 per cent, and Consumer Durables 0.76 per cent.

Reliance Industries rose by around 1 per cent to hit a 52-week high intra-day. Its arm Reliance Jio Financial Services soared by more than 14.5 per cent to hit a year's high level, taking its market valuation to more than Rs 2 lakh crore.

Global markets were mostly higher following sharp overnight gains in US markets driven mainly by stunning December quarter results by technology company Nvidia.

The Shanghai Composite index added 0.6 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng was unchanged. Tokyo's markets were closed for a holiday.

Germany's DAX, the CAC 40 in Paris and FTSE 100 in London rose up to 0.1 per cent.

In the domestic market, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) were net sellers on Thursday as they offloaded securities worth Rs 1,410.05 crore.



# Renewable Energy to rise to 170 GW by March 2025: ICRA

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

India's installed Renewable Energy (RE) capacity, excluding large hydro plants, is estimated to increase to 170 GW by March 2025 from a level of 135 GW in December 2023, rating agency ICRA said on Friday.

"ICRA estimates that the rise in the RE capacity over the next five-six years is estimated to enhance the share of RE plus large hydro in the all-India electricity generation from about 23 per cent in FY24 to around 40 per cent in FY30," ICRA said in a statement.

Given the intermittency associated with RE generation, the availability of Round The Clock (RTC) supply from RE sources remains important, it stated.

This can be made possible through the use of wind and solar power projects complemented with energy storage systems, it suggested.

According to the statement, ICRA expects the installed RE capacity, excluding hydro energy, in India to increase to about 170 GW by March 2025 from 135 GW as of December 2023.

Thereafter, the capacity addition is likely to be supported by the significant improvement in tendering activity in the current fiscal with over 16 GW projects bid so far, and another 17 GW bids underway by central nodal agencies, it stated.

This is in line with the 50 GW annual bidding trajectory announced by the Government of India in March 2023, it noted.

Girishkumar Kadam, Senior Vice-President and Group Head, Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said in the statement that the tariffs discovered in the RE-RTC tenders remain higher as against the standalone solar and wind energy tenders, with recent RTC bid tariffs seen in the range of Rs 4-4.5 per unit, mainly on account of the cost associated with the storage component and higher share of wind energy component expected.

Further, based on the prevailing capital cost of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Pumped Hydro Storage Projects (PSP), the viability of the RTC projects remains relatively better with the use of PSP capacity, he said.

Nonetheless, the supply chain challenges in the wind energy segment could pose challenges for execution of RTC projects, he said.

As per ICRA, the sharp decline in solar PV cell and module prices, abeyance of the Approved List of Module Manufacturers (ALMM) order



till March 2024 and the timeline extension approved for solar and hybrid projects, is expected to lead to an improvement in RE capacity addition to 18 GW to 20 GW in FY24 from 15 GW in FY23. This, along with the growing project pipeline, is likely to support the scale-up in capacity addition to 23-25 GW in FY25, as per ICRA estimates, mainly driven by the solar power segment.

However, it stated that challenges remain on the execution front with respect to delays in land acquisition and transmission connectivity, which could hamper the capacity-addition prospects

# GSTN to share data with RBI frictionless credit

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The government has permitted GST Network to share data about GST-registered businesses, based on their consent, with the Reserve Bank's 'Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit'.

The move will help entities get loans faster on the basis of shared Goods and Services Tax (GST)-related information.

The platform, created by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) subsidiary Reserve Bank Innovation Hub, is intended to enable seamless flow of necessary information to lenders to help in disbursing credit.

In a notification, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has said "the Central Government, on the recommendation of the Council, notifies 'Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit' as the system with which information may be shared by the common portal based on consent..."

The platform has been developed for the operation of a large ecosystem of credit, to ensure access of information from various data sources digitally.

The financial service providers and multiple data

service providers can converge on the platform using standard and protocol driven architecture, the notification said.

Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said with appropriate consent from the supplier/recipient, GSTN is empowered to disclose specific details submitted in the GST registration application, along with data from outward tax returns, monthly and annual tax returns, and invoice preparations.

"This arrangement ensures that borrowers cannot withhold any transactional information provided to lenders or the government portal. It enhances credit efficiency by minimising costs and the time required for processing. "Moreover, lenders gain access to authenticated monthly sales and purchase data directly from government-sanctioned sources, allowing for a more accurate and timely assessment of credit risk," Mohan said.

GST filings will become a crucial factor for businesses seeking to obtain credit and leverage government-sponsored credit programmes in future, Mohan added.

# Tata sells ₹650 cr residential plots in Bengaluru

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Realty firm Tata Housing has sold plots worth Rs 650 crore in its recently launched residential project in Bengaluru.

In a statement, the company on Friday said it has sold all inventories in the first phase of its project, Raagam, achieving revenue of over Rs 650 crore within one week of its launch.

"With 576 plots sold and a total area of 9 lakh square feet, the project's overwhelming response reflects the robust demand for premium residential offerings in Bengaluru's real estate market," it said.

The project is part of township 'Tata Carnatica' in Devanahalli, North Bengaluru.

Tata Housing Development Company Ltd is a subsidiary of Tata Realty and Infrastructure Ltd.

Tata Housing currently has more than 33 projects with a total development potential of over 51 million square feet spread across major cities in India, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

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# World Bank needs to reinvent: NK Singh



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The World Bank needs to reinvent and restructure itself so as to become 'better, bolder and bigger' and harness private capital on the strength of its own balance sheet, said N K Singh, Co-Convenor, Expert Group on MDB Reforms.

The World Bank should also look at the possibility of tapping pension funds to increase its capital base and its capacity to fund development projects in developing nations.

"Bretton Woods was the first one, it certainly needs to be reinvented, restructured and recreated. But there is no substitute for multilateral cooperation. And that's why better, bolder and bigger," Singh said at a panel discussion at the Raisina Dialogue, 2024.

A high-level expert group, led by N K Singh and former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, was set up by the G20 under India's presidency.

In its report, the group had proposed a 30-point roadmap to reform Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and triple their lending by 2030, which includes attracting private investors and introducing pooled portfolio guarantees.

Currently, there are 17 MDBs, including Asian Development Bank, African

Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Inter-American Development Bank.

Bretton Woods institutions, including the World Bank and IMF, were set up for funding reconstruction activities post World War II. The expert group had said that MDBs would need USD 3 trillion each year between now and 2030. Of this, USD 2 trillion can come from domestic resource mobilisation.

Out of the balance of USD 1 trillion, USD 500 billion could come from the private sector and USD 500 billion could come through official development financing.

Addressing the discussion, titled 'Democratic Dollars: Can the Planet Reclaim the Bretton Wood', Singh said the money has to come from shareholders, as well as the private sector.

However, the World Bank's track record to be able to use its balance sheet to harness private capital has been disappointing, Singh said.

"I would say if the World Bank needs recapitalisation, shareholders have to put in more money, but equally the World Bank needs to harness its ability to attract private capital and improve on its record," he added.

## BUSINESS BRIEF



**POWERGRID ACQUIRES TWO TRANSMISSION PROJECTS**

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited has acquired two Project Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) viz. Sikar Khetri Transmission Limited and Bidar Transmission Limited on 09 th February 2024 for the Transmission System Projects for evacuation of power from REZ in Rajasthan (20GW) under Phase-II Part D Phase I and Solar Energy Zone (2500 MW) in Bidar, Karnataka respectively after competing with various private sector players and emerging as successful bidder in Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) process.



**GLOBAL MEET ON MATERIAL CHEMISTRY AT SRM**

The Department of Chemistry at SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattakulathur organised the 8th International Conference on Recent Advances in Material Chemistry recently. This three-day conference was organised in association with Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), France and University Gustave Eiffel, France. The idea of ICRAMC-2024 was to provide an excellent platform for the world's Material Scientists to share the latest developments in the area of Materials Chemistry.



**VIT-AP UNVEILS V-TAPP 2024**

VIT AP University announced the launch of V-TAPP'2024 on Friday, marking the beginning of a two-day extravaganza that brings together students from various colleges, universities, and institutions. Dr Buddha Chandrasekhar, Chief Coordinating officer, AICTE, Ministry of Education, Government of India and Vithal





MEGHALAYA

A SYMPHONY OF LIFE AND

NATURAL BEAUTY

*Every moment in Meghalaya is a step into a world where nature and culture coexist in perfect harmony. It's a place where the clouds meet the earth, and the heart meets the soul, leaving an indelible mark on all who venture into its embrace* writes

**GYANESHWAR DAYAL.**

**PANKAJ KUMAR**

*captured a glimpse of the abode of clouds with his roving eye*



With its captivating landscapes and rich cultural heritage, Meghalaya is a destination that beckons the adventurous spirit and the nature lover alike. Pankaj Kumar takes a whirlwind tour of the state to capture a glimpse of the abode of clouds. Nestled in the northeastern part of India, Meghalaya, aptly named the “abode of clouds,” is a state that mesmerises visitors with its enchanting landscapes, warm people, and unique cultural treasures. Renowned for its lush greenery, cascading waterfalls, and vibrant traditions, Meghalaya is a paradise for nature enthusiasts and cultural explorers alike.

Meghalaya’s natural beauty is unparalleled, offering a breathtaking panorama of rolling hills, dense forests, and meandering rivers. The state is blessed with an abundance of rainfall, contributing to its luxuriant greenery and earning it the distinction of being one of the wettest places on Earth. The picturesque landscapes come alive with a vibrant mix of flora and fauna, making Meghalaya a haven for biodiversity.

Waterfalls, such as the Nohkalikai Falls, plunge



dramatically from towering cliffs, creating a spectacle that leaves visitors in awe. The living root bridges, a testament to the harmonious coexistence between nature and humans, are iconic to the region. These intricate bridges, crafted from the aerial roots of the ancient rubber trees, showcase the indigenous wisdom of the Khasi and Jaintia tribes.

Meghalaya is not only a haven for nature lovers but also a place where the warmth of its people adds an extra layer of charm. The locals, known for their friendliness and hospitality, embrace visitors with open arms. The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia communities contribute to the



state’s rich tapestry of cultures, and their traditions are reflected in everyday life.

The indigenous communities of Meghalaya are proud of their heritage and are eager to share their customs with visitors. Engaging in conversation with the locals provides a glimpse into their way of life, from traditional music and dance to folklore that has been passed down through generations.

One of Meghalaya’s most fascinating features is its living root bridges, which exemplify the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. The Khasi and Jaintia tribes have mastered the art of training the aerial roots of the *Ficus elastica* tree to form sturdy and durable bridges over rivers and streams. These bridges, some of which are centuries old, are a testament to sustainable living and the ingenious use of natural resources.

Meghalaya’s markets are vibrant hubs of commerce where local women play a crucial role in selling a variety of products. The bustling markets showcase the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of Meghalaya’s women. From handmade crafts and traditional textiles to fresh produce and local delicacies, the markets are a treasure trove for those seeking authentic experiences and unique souvenirs.

The markets also serve as social spaces where visitors can interact with the locals, learn about traditional cooking methods, and sample indigenous cuisines. This exchange of cultures adds to the richness of the Meghalayan experience.

Meghalaya, with its mesmerizing landscapes, warm people, and unique cultural treasures, stands as a testament to the incredible diversity India has to offer. Whether exploring the lush greenery, marvelling at the living root bridges, or engaging with the locals in vibrant markets,



# INDIA DISCOVERS NEW PACE OPTION IN AKASH

PTI ■ RANCHI

India unearthed a fresh pace talent in debutant Akash Deep but veteran Joe Root single-handedly kept England afloat with a tenacious hundred that shunned 'Bazball' for a more conservative approach as the visitors hobbled to 302 for 7 on the opening day of the fourth Test here on Friday.

At stumps, the 33-year-old Root was unbeaten on 106 and had used up 226 deliveries during his classical Test knock. Giving him company at the other end was Ollie Robinson (26) as England staged a decent recovery from the early jolts given by Akash Deep.

The 27-year-old Bengal pacer, who hails from Bihar, picked up three wickets in his 17 overs, marking yet another confident debut for the home side in the ongoing series.

He made life miserable for England's top-order with the new ball, grabbing the top-three in 10 balls as the visitors lost half of their side in the first session. But Root decided to drop anchor after that, reverting to his natural style of playing the waiting game. The move got him and England the desired results as he struck his first century in 15 innings.

With the sun playing hide and seek during the fog end of the day, the Yorkshire man hit the



three-figure mark for the 31st time in his Test career, striking a classy cover-drive off Akash Deep. It took him 219 balls to get there and the former skipper did not show much emotion, fully aware that his job was not yet done. A record 10 of his 31 Test centuries are against India and the latest one came at just the right juncture.

England are reeling from back-to-back losses in Visakhapatnam and Rajkot to trail the five-match series 1-2. He hit nine fours in his innings and was a picture of determination, noticeably

avoiding the sweep shot due to the variable bounce of the pitch.

The absence of rested pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who had dismissed Root thrice in this series, also gave the Englishman some breathing space. He was happy to play the spinners on the back-foot and slice the field.

His biggest ally in England's splendid recovery was wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes (47 off 126 balls). The visiting side went through the second session without losing a wicket for the first time in the

series.

The duo took their time and frustrated India by adding 86 runs in the post-lunch session when the wicket flattened out. Post tea, Mohammed Siraj (2/60) gave the much-needed breakthrough dismissing Foakes three runs short of his half-century, caught by Ravindra Jadeja at short mid-wicket. The dismissal ended a 113-run sixth wicket partnership.

Siraj also dismissed Tom Hartley (13 off 26 balls) with a brilliant delivery that exhibited late movement off the pitch,

crashing into the off stump. Hartley had earlier narrowly avoided a catch by the second slip following an edge that didn't carry. Instead, it went past Yashasvi Jaiswal and reached the boundary rope.

He departed after scoring 13, which included a powerful six off Ravichandran Ashwin over long-on. Ashwin got the scalp of Jonny Bairstow, who made a quick-fire 38 off 35 balls.

**STUNNING DEBUT FOR AKASH DEEP:** Earlier, India's good run with debutants continued as pacer Akash Deep, the fourth newcomer for the hosts in this series, showed promise for this level.

Bowling one of the finest maiden spells in a Test debut — 7-0-24-3 — Akash Deep dismissed Ben Duckett (11), Ollie Pope (0) and Zak Crawley (42) in 10 deliveries while bowling from the dressing room end.

The pacer, who came through the ranks playing domestic cricket in Bengal, hit the deck hard in a sensational display during the first hour's play after Ben Stokes opted to bat. He, however, had to wait a bit for his maiden Test wicket.

In his second over of the day, he uprooted Crawley's off-stump that cartwheeled a couple of metres but the celebration was short-lived as he was found guilty of overstepping.

# Root century was due: Crawley

PTI ■ RANCHI

England opener Zak Crawley on Friday said that a century from Joe Root was long due and the veteran batter's unbeaten 106 on Day 1 of the fourth Test against India was a "phenomenal" knock under the circumstances.

After losing half of the side at lunch for 112, England rode on Root's determined 106 not out to end day one on 302 for 7 in the fourth Test against India here.

"He (Root) is unbelievable. We fully expected him to get a good score at some point in this series; he was due, he's the best player we've ever had and he played phenomenally today," said Crawley after the day's play.

"He deserves everything he gets, he works so hard at his game and he always comes good."

Root was in the middle of a lean patch and his highest score before Friday's knock in this series was 37.

"He's probably the only bloke in our team who could have done that knock; he's that good, he's our best player and he's stepped up when we needed him to.

"We needed him to get a score and he got a score like he's done for so many years now, he's a phenomenal player," said Crawley who made run-a-ball 42 at the top of the order.

Root first got a fine ally in



wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes who contributed a valuable 47 runs in a century-plus stand.

"It was tricky with the fields they were setting but we just always talk about the present, and the situation required a bit more caution with that kind of pitch and the variable bounce and that's what they delivered.

"At other times, we counter-punched but they played it perfectly and read it well," he said.

Regarding the pitch, Crawley said, "It was nipping a lot and nipping quickly. It felt like you

had to throw a counter-punch, you couldn't really sit there like those boys did later on in the day.

"I expected variable bounce from the look of those cracks. It certainly did less and less as that opening spell went on. I got out still fairly early but it looked like it wasn't bouncing anywhere near as much or as quickly as earlier on against seam.

"It got harder against the spin, it will continue to break up. It might be a new-ball wicket, hopefully it is when we bowl but the I think the spin's only going to get harder," he added.



# India women eye victory against Hong Kong in Turkish Cup

PTI ■ ALANYA (TURKEY)

Having played determined football to get the better of Estonia in their opening match, India would be looking forward to another successful outing when they face Hong Kong in the Turkish Women's Cup here on Saturday.

The 4-3 victory against Estonia was the first-ever for a senior Indian women's national team against an European side, and it would have raised the morale of the Chaoba Devi-coached side in the four-team round-robin tournament.

This will be India's fifth encounter against Hong Kong, ranked 79th in the FIFA rankings, and India would be buoyed by the fact that they have won all four previous games, netting 11 goals, while the opponents have managed just two. In their most recent clash, a friendly in 2019, India won by a solitary goal courtesy Pyari Xaxa, who also found the net in India's victory against Estonia in the ongoing tournament.

India currently lead the table

with three points and a goal difference of plus one, while Hong Kong are at the bottom having yet to open their account and a goal difference of -1 after losing 0-1 to Kosovo.

Coach Chaoba Devi said Hong Kong had made a marked improvement since they last played in 2019 and her team would not underestimate the opponents.

"We played against Hong Kong a while ago, but they have shown significant improvement since then. We watched their recent match against Kosovo, where they put up a good fight despite losing by only one goal," said Chaoba Devi on the eve of the match.

"So, we can't underestimate them. We need to focus on our finishing, as we could have scored more goals in our first match against Estonia if our finishing was better. Today, we will do some finishing drills in our training to prepare for the Hong Kong match and ensure the girls are ready to perform well. It's our time to win this tournament," added Chaoba Devi.

# Australia beat New Zealand in 2nd T20, win series

AP ■ AUCKLAND (NEW ZEALAND)

Adam Zampa took four for 34 as Australia rolled New Zealand for 102 in 17 overs to win the second Twenty20 International by 72 runs Friday and take an insurmountable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The Australians will head towards the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and United States in June with more confidence after a comprehensive series win over New Zealand which is the world's second-ranked team.

Australia won the first match by six wickets with a four off the last ball and the third match between the teams is at Eden Park on Sunday.

"It was a great win for Australia," captain Mitch Marsh said. "Our backs were against the wall and we thought we were probably 50 runs short.

"But, the way our bowlers came out and performed was outstanding. All of our teams over the last 12 months have been backed into a lot of corners and we've managed to find a way to get out



of them. Tonight was another example of that."

Australia looked to have fallen short of a competitive total when it was bowled out for 174 in 19.5 overs after being 72 for one at the end of the six-over power

play.

Opener Travis Head blasted 45 from 22 balls including five sixes to give Australia a fast start as it battled after losing the toss. But, Lockie Ferguson took four for 12 and Ben Sears two for

29 as the New Zealand seamers turned things around and provoked a sustained collapse of the Australian innings.

Australia lost six wickets for 59 runs in the last 9.5 overs.

New Zealand's batting was depleted by the loss of Rachin Ravindra just before the start of play with a slight knee injury and Devon Conway suffered a thumb injury keeping wicket and was taken to hospital for X-rays. He returned to the ground when it was found there was no fracture.

Conway still was unable to bat and his opening partner Finn Allen had to take the gloves for the first time in his international career.

Regardless of injuries, New Zealand collapsed in the face of outstanding Australian fast bowling on a fast and bouncy wicket.

Allen hit a six from the third ball of the first over and was out to the last ball, walking down to a good-length ball from Josh Hazlewood which he edged onto his stumps.



# Bhagat, Kadam reach Para Badminton World Championship semifinals

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadam on Friday reached the semifinals of the Para Badminton World Championship to assure themselves of at least a medal here.

Bhagat defeated France's Mathieu Thomas 21-15, 21-17 to set up a semifinal clash with compatriot Manoj Sarkar.

Kadam got the better of Nigeria's Chigozie Jeremiah Nnanna 21-13, 21-11. He will take on Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan in the semifinal.

In mixed doubles, the Indian pair of Bhagat and Manisha Ramdas defeated Japan's Taiyo Imai and Noriko Ito 21-11, 16-21, 21-18 to seal their place in the semifinal.

They will take on the Indonesian pair of Fredy Setiawan and Khalimatus Sadiyah in the last-four.

In the men's doubles quarterfinals, Bhagat and Kadam will take on the French pair of Guillaume Gailly and Mathew Thomas.

In other matches, Kumar Nitesh defeated Thailand's Mongkhon Bunsun in the quarterfinals to set up a last-four clash against Daniel Bethell of England.

# AC Milan, Roma, Marseille, Benfica advance to Europa League round of 16

AP ■ MILAN

AC Milan advanced to the round of 16 in the Europa League despite a 3-2 loss at Rennes in the second leg of their playoff.

Milan, which won 3-0 at the San Siro last week, eliminated its French opponent on a 5-3 aggregate score on Thursday.

The Italian powerhouse, a seven-time European champion, has never won the second-tier Europa League or its predecessor, the UEFA Cup.

Midfielder Benjamin Bourigeaud's hat trick put the hosts up three times with Milan quickly answering twice. Bourigeaud netted the opener in the 11th minute with a fierce right-footed shot from over 20 meters to beat goalkeeper Mike

Maignan.

Forward Luka Jovic canceled it out 10 minutes later with a header off a cross by captain Theo Hernández.

Bourigeaud made it 2-1 early in the second from the penalty spot but Rafael Leão equalised after four minutes on a fine solo effort.

Bourigeaud sent Maignan the wrong way with another spot kick to make it 3-2.

The eight runners-up in the Europa League group stage played the eight third-place teams from the Champions League group stage in the playoffs.

The eight winners will take on the Europa League's group winners, who qualified directly for the round of 16. They are Liverpool, West Ham and



Brighton from the Premier League, as well Leverkusen, Atalanta, Villarreal, Rangers and Slavia Prague.

The draw is scheduled for Friday.

Nicola Zalewski converted the decisive spot kick for Roma to

prevail 4-2 in a penalty shootout over Feyenoord to qualify for the next round.

Early in the game, captain Lorenzo Pellegrini found the net from the edge of the area to tie it a 1-1 after Santiago Giménez's fifth-minute header

gave the Dutch team a 1-0 lead and silenced more than 67,000 fans at Stadio Olimpico. The teams also drew 1-1 in the opening leg in Rotterdam.

Marseille's new coach Jean-Louis Gasset made a victorious debut after he was appointed Tuesday to replace Gennaro Gattuso.

Geoffrey Kondogbia and substitute Ismaila Sarr sealed a 3-1 win for Marseille over Shakhtar Donetsk with a goal each in the second half.

Marseille advanced on a 5-3 aggregate score.

Earlier, Marseille striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang netted his 31st career goal in the Europa League to break the competition record and level the tie after Georgiy Sudakov converted from the spot.

# DIKSHA, PRANAVI IN TOP FIVE AFTER FIRST ROUND IN MOROCCO

PTI ■ RABAT (MOROCCO)

Diksha Dagar and Pranavi Urs got off to a great start, carding a fine two-under 71 each to lie tied fifth after the opening round of Lalla Meryem Cup on the Ladies European Tour here.

The two Indian golfers, who had Top-25 finishes in the Magical Kenya Ladies Open, suffered a double bogey each, but did well to birdie three of the five Par-5s that this course has.

Starting from the 10th, Diksha birdied the 12th and the 16th, but also dropped shots on the 13th and 18th for an even par stretch.

On the second nine, the front side of Royal Golf Dar es Salam, Diksha was in full flow with birdies on the second, third, fifth and eight, before a double

bogey set her back on the closing ninth. Pranavi was off to a flier with four birdies in first six holes but a bogey on 17th and a double on 18th meant she was just 1-under after her first nine.

She had one bogey on first and two birdies on the fifth and the eighth for a 71.

Mexico's Maria Fassi showed off her explosive power and fine form during the opening round, firing a flawless eight-under 65 to lead by three shots on the Par-73 golf course.

The 25-year-old, who represented Mexico at the Tokyo Olympics, started on the 10th and picked up three birdies within the first five holes. At the turn, the LPGA player fired up her flatstick to roll in three consecutive birdies before rolling in another two on holes five and eight.

# AFFIDAVIT

I, Md. ISLAM ANSARI, S/o - Md. Azmat Ansari, Resident of Village- Near Masjid-E-Fatima, Dipa Toli, Pundag, P.O - Pundag, P.S. - Jagarnathpur, Distt - Ranchi, Markhand, 834004. That in the Aadhar Card (2297 6230 3057 ) my name is mentioned as MD. ISLAM ANSARI. my name is mentioned as MD. SHEIKH ISLAM in Canara Bank Branch, A/c No - 2869101000087 and my name is mentioned as MD. ISLAM ANSARI in Canara Bank, A/c No. - 5366101000773. That the both name MD. SHEIKH ISLAM and MD. ISLAM ANSARI are the same person. Vide Affidavit No. 485, dated -16 February 2024.