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**SPORT 8**  
POPE DEFIES INDIA WITH GRITTY HUNDRED

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# Bihar political pot red hot

## Nitish set to get BJP support as CM

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ PATNA/NEW DELHI

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday is set to make his second political volte-face in less than three years, with a highly-placed source close to the JD(U) president saying the CM is likely to tender his resignation by Sunday morning and same day by evening likely to take Oath as CM again in the BJP combined NDA Government. Sources in Bihar Government said offices like the secretariat have been asked to remain open on Sunday "in view of hectic activity expected during the day" that may see the installation of a new government with the BJP's support. Before submitting his resignation, Nitish will hold a customary meeting of the legislature party, the source added.

While former Union Minister and senior BJP leader Radha Mohan Singh met Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar at Patna, Home Minister Amit Shah dropped all his out of Delhi schedule due to the political instability in Bihar. A meeting of State BJP executive comprising party's MPs and MLAs attended by



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, along with Union MoS Ashwani Kumar Chaubey, offers prayers at Brahmeshwar Temple in Buxar on Saturday

PTI

Union Ministers, sitting MPs were held at Patna and sources said BJP MLAs and MPs will meet again at 10 am at the party office in Patna to further chalk out the strategy. Nitish on Saturday attended

few public programmes scheduled but his deputy CM from alliance partner RJD, Tejashwi Yadav, remained conspicuous by his absence. The attendees, however, included senior BJP leader

and Union Minister Ashwini Kumar Choubey. While the JD(U) which used to be on a defensive note till a day earlier saying that INDIA alliance is intact with JD(U) its major partner, on Saturday

categorically held Congress responsible for the turn of events as TMC and AAP also has also vented their anger and announced to go it alone in the Lok Sabha polls this year. *Continued on Page 2*

## Amit Shah meets Chirag Paswan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On a day marked by the escalating political turmoil in Bihar, which gained momentum towards a change leading to the cancellation of all scheduled events for Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday, Chirag Paswan, the president of the Lok Janshakti Party (Ramvilas), a major player in Bihar politics, met with Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda. The purpose of the meeting was to seek assurance that Chirag Paswan's presence in the BJP-led NDA in Bihar would not be diminished in light of the return of Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) president Nitish Kumar.

Shah's scheduled visit to Telangana on Sunday and his late-evening arrival in Kolkata for a two-day political tour of West Bengal has been cancelled, according to government sources. Union Tourism Minister and BJP State president G Kishan Reddy said that Shah's tour was cancelled due to emergency



work. During his visit, Shah was supposed to hold meetings with party leaders and functionaries in Karimnagar, Mahbubnagar, and Hyderabad. "We have now been informed from New Delhi that the Home Minister will not be able to visit Bengal this time," said a member of the West Bengal BJP State committee. The committee member added that Shah was originally scheduled to arrive in Kolkata on Sunday, with a packed itinerary for two days. He was scheduled to have an organisational meeting at Barasat in North 24 Parganas district to discuss the organisation affairs in

the four Lok Sabha constituencies in the district. In Kolkata, he was scheduled to hold an organisation meeting with the top State BJP leadership to take stock of the preparations of forthcoming Lok Sabha polls. During the tour he also was scheduled to hold a public rally at Mecheda in East Midnapore, which is the native district of Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari. Lok Janshakti Party, before the split between Paswan and his uncle Pashupati Nath Paras had fought on six seats in 2019 Lok Sabha polls. *Continued on Page 2*



In this photo provided by the Indian Navy on Saturday, a view of the oil tanker Marlin Luanda on fire after an attack, in the Red sea. The crew aboard a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker hit by a missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels is battling a fire onboard the stricken vessel sparked by the strike

AP/PTI

## INDIAN NAVY ON RESCUE MISSION

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The crew aboard a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker hit by a missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels extinguished an hours long fire onboard the stricken vessel Saturday sparked by the strike, authorities said.

The attack on the Marlin Luanda further complicated the Red Sea crisis caused by the Iranian-backed rebels' attacks over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The tanker carried Russian-produced naphtha, a flammable oil, drawing Moscow further into a conflict that so far it had

blamed on the U.S. The Marlin Luanda burned for hours until being extinguished on Saturday, said Trafigura, a Singapore-based trading firm. Its crew of 25 Indian nationals and two Sri Lankans were still trying to battle the blaze sparked by the missile strike, it said. No one was injured by the blast, it added.

The Indian Navy is assisting in firefighting efforts. The Navy said that its guided missile destroyer, INS Visakhapatnam, was deployed in the Gulf of Aden in response to a distress call from the oil tanker on the night of January 26.

"The firefighting efforts onboard the distressed Merchant Vessel are being augmented by the NBCD team along with firefighting equipment, deployed by INS Visakhapatnam to assist the crew onboard the MV," the Navy said in a statement. Early Saturday, US Forces conducted a strike against a Houthi anti-ship missile that was aimed at the Red Sea and prepared to launch, the US Military's Central Command said. That attack came after the USS Carney, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, had to shoot down a Houthi missile targeting it. *Continued on Page 2*

## Congress finds cold comfort in SP and DMK



AGENCIES ■ CHENNAI

The internal rift within the INDIA Bloc is deepening, with a DMK Minister in Tamil Nadu launching a fresh attack on ally Congress. The Minister alleged that the Congress is more concerned about securing seats for itself in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, neglecting the collective interests of the coalition. Acknowledging that the Congress is a "big and old party", DMK Minister Raja Kannappan said it has "lost its strength". "As far as the Congress is concerned, they run the party only to get seats. What is the use of that? They don't run the party thinking they should work hard or do good for the people. But when elections come closer, they will come. This doesn't work amongst the people," he has said at an event to pay tribute to the martyrs of the language struggle in Puducherry. *Continued on Page 2*

## Akhilesh offers 11 seats, Congress to take call

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As Nitish Kumar's AJD(U) prepares to leave the INDIA bloc and rejoin the BJP-led NDA, the Samajwadi Party announced on Saturday that it has offered 11 Lok Sabha seats to the Congress in Uttar Pradesh. Akhilesh asserted that their alliance is "off to a good start". Yadav said in a post in Hindi on X, "Our cordial alliance with the Congress is off to a good start with 11 strong seats. This trend will move forward with the winning equation. The INDIA team and PDA (Picchda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) strategy will change history." However, UP Congress president Ajay Rai mentioned that the decision on the matter will be taken by his party's national leadership. *Continued on Page 2*

## CPI(M) goons attack Kerala Governor

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The entire State of Kerala, except for hardcore Marxists, was in for a shock as alleged goons, claimed to be activists of the CPI(M), attempted to physically assault Governor Arif Mohammed Khan on Saturday. The Governor was travelling in his car from Thiruvananthapuram to Kollam when CPI(M) activists intercepted his car and began hitting the windshield and bonnet. When the Governor exited the car, the assailants escaped to safety. The initially silent police eventually persuaded the Governor to return to the car, but he requested a chair from a roadside vendor, sat on the pavement, and contacted the office of Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Addressing reporters at the scene, Arif Mohammed Khan said that the series of attacks carried out on him by CPI(M) activists over the last few months were allegedly orchestrated by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. "I don't have a problem with them waving black flags at me and raising slogans against me. However, when they attack the official car in which I travel, the situation becomes dangerously serious," said the Governor.



Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan stages a sit-in protest at a tea shop at Nilamel against the police's alleged failure in preventing black flag protests by the Students Federation of India (SFI), in Kollam district, on Saturday

PTI

K Ramkumar, the octogenarian lawyer and human rights leader, described the attack on the Governor as improper and illegal. "The Governor is the Head of the State as well as the First Citizen of the State. If the Government fails to provide foolproof security to its own head, what should we understand about the intention of the council of ministers? This Government

has failed in its Constitutional responsibilities, and it is an unconscionable failure," Ramkumar told The Pioneer. Within hours of the attack on the Governor, the home ministry upgraded his security cover to that of Z Plus, and the commands of the CRPF took over the responsibility from the lethargic wing of the State Police. *Continued on Page 2*

# BJP announces its Election Prabharis

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP on Saturday appointed election in-charges and co-in-charges for 23 States and Union Territories in preparation for the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections. In the crucial Hindi heartland State of Uttar Pradesh, which sends 80 MPs to the Lok Sabha, the party has named former Rajya Sabha MP Bajajant Panda as its State in-charge, while party's IT cell head Amit Malviya has also been rewarded with a post as he was appointed co-in-charge for West Bengal.

Former Maharashtra minister Vinod Tawde has been named as the party's in-charge for Bihar amid ongoing political

developments in the state, where Nitish Kumar is likely to switch over to the NDA. BJP Rajya Sabha member and former Jharkhand unit chief Deepak Prakash will be the co-in-charge, according to a party statement. Former Union Minister Prakash Javadekar has been appointed to oversee the southern State of Kerala, while BJP national secretary Arvind Menon has been appointed as the election in-charge for Tamil Nadu. These appointments were made by BJP president JP Nadda in anticipation of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. This comes two days after the release of the campaign theme song and video, "Tabhi toh sab Modi ko chunte hain." BJP Rajya Sabha member and



former Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb has been designated as the election in-charge for Haryana. BJP leader Surendra Nagar will serve as the co-in-charge for elections in the state. Former Bihar minister and BJP's in-charge for West Bengal,

Mangal Pandey, has been appointed as the election in-charge for the state. BJP leaders Amit Malviya and Asha Lakra will serve as the co-in-charges. Nadda has appointed Mahendra Singh, an MLC in Uttar Pradesh and a former State minister, as the

BJP's election in-charge for Madhya Pradesh. Singh is recognised as a significant force behind the saffron party's outstanding victory in the 2016 Assam Assembly Elections. Satish Upadhyay will serve as the co-in-charge for the State. Upadhyay has previously held positions as the president and vice president of the state BJP in Delhi. Former Gujarat chief minister and BJP in-charge for Punjab, Vijay Rupani, has been appointed as the election in-charge for the State, with Narinder Singh, a BJP national secretary, as co-in-charge. Rupani will also oversee the election in Chandigarh. The BJP has designated former Uttar Pradesh minister Shrikant Sharma as the election in-charge

for Himachal Pradesh, with Sanjay Tondon serving as the co-in-charge. Rajya Sabha member and national general secretary Radha Mohan Das Agrawal will be the election in-charge for Karnataka, and Sudhakar Reddy will serve as the co-in-charge. BJP co-in-charge for political affairs in Jammu and Kashmir Ashish Sood has been appointed as the election in-charge for Goa. Gujarat MLA Purnesh Modi has been designated as the election in-charge for Daman and Diu, with Dushyant Patel as the co-in-charge. Party leader Ashok Singhal has been appointed as the election in-charge for Arunachal Pradesh. Y Satya Kumar, a BJP national secretary and in-charge for political affairs in Andaman and

Nicobar, has been named the election in-charge for the Union Territory. BJP national general secretary Dushyant Kumar Gautam has been appointed as the election in-charge of Uttarakhand. BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh, who is also the party's in-charge for political affairs in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, has been named as the election in-charge for both Union Territories. The party's Rajya Sabha member from Uttar Pradesh, Vijaypal Singh Tomar, will serve as the in-charge for elections in Odisha, while Chhattisgarh MLA Lata Usendi will be the co-in-charge. Nirmala Kumar Surana, the BJP's in-charge for political affairs in Puducherry, has been given charge of elections as well.





# Hand over Gyanvapi structure to Hindus: VHP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Saturday claimed the ASI survey report has "reconfirmed" that the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi was constructed after demolishing a "magnificent temple" at the site and demanded that the structure be declared a Hindu temple and handed over to the community. It also demanded that Hindus be permitted to offer "sewa puja" to the 'Shivlinga' found in the "so-called Wazukhana area" at the disputed site. "The evidence collected and the conclusions provided by the ASI do prove that the religious character of this place of worship existed on the 15th day of August, 1947, and as at present is of a Hindu Temple," VHP working president Alok

Kumar said in a statement. "Thus, even as per Section 4 of the Places of Worship Act, 1991, the structure should be declared as a Hindu temple," he also demanded. The VHP also called upon the Intezamia Committee that manages the mosque to agree to "respectfully shift" the Gyanvapi mosque to another appropriate place and to hand over the original site of Kashi Vishwanatha to the Hindu society. "The VHP believes that this righteous action shall be an

important step towards creating amicable relations between the two prominent communities of Bharat," Kumar said. The VHP's demands came after the ASI survey report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex was made public two days ago, with the lawyer representing the Hindu litigants claiming that the mosque was built after demolishing a pre-existing temple. "Hand over the Gyanvapi structure to Hindus," Kumar said.

He claimed the evidence collected by ASI "reconfirms that the mosque had been constructed after demolishing a magnificent temple". A part of the temple structure, particularly the western wall, is the remaining part of the Hindu temple, he further claimed. The ASI report also proves that parts of the pre-existing temple including pillars and pilasters were reused with modifications to extend the span of the mosque and in the construction of the 'sahan', he added. "The Shivlinga in what was called the 'wazukhana' leaves no doubt that the structure does not have the character of a mosque. The discovery of the names including the Janardana, Rudra and Umeswara in the inscriptions found in the structure are the tell-tale evidence of this being a temple," Kumar claimed.

# Happy that work is underway on One Nation, One Legislative platform: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said he was happy that Parliament and State Legislatures were working towards realisation of the goal of 'one nation, one legislative platform'. Addressing the 84th All India Presiding Officers' Conference (AIPOC) virtually, the PM also rued that some political parties defend their members even if they violate the rules of the House, and warned that it did not augur well for Parliament and state legislatures. "In 2021, during discussions with you, I spoke about 'one nation, one legislative platform.' I am happy that our Parliament and state legislatures are now working towards this goal through E-Vidhan and Digital Sansad platforms," the prime minister said. Led by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla a total of 26 Presiding Officers

participated in the inaugural session. Notably, the 'one nation, one legislative platform' project aims at making available the proceedings of all legislatures on a single digital platform. The image of a legislature depends on the conduct of its members, the prime minister stressed. "There was a time when, if any member in the House broke the rules and action was taken against that member, senior members of the House would talk to him so that in future he did not repeat the mistake and break the rules of the House. Inaugurating the Conference

at Mumbai, Birla expressed concern over incidents of indiscipline, disruption of proceedings and unparliamentary conduct in the legislatures affecting their credibility. Birla noted that there is enough space to give voice to dissent in the democratic system, therefore, disruption should not be used as a tool of protest and dissent. Stressing on innovation, Birla suggested that new and innovative methods of working should be promoted in legislatures so that the democratic institutions can better perform their responsibility of monitoring

the executive and people's faith in these institutions will enhance. Referring to the role of parliamentary committees in democracy, Birla noted that parliamentary committees play a vital role in shaping laws and policies in the present perspective. Parliamentary Committees are actually 'mini Parliaments' and they review these laws, policies and programs on behalf of the Parliament and make them more useful to the public, he added. Maharashtra Chief Minister, Eknath Shinde; Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Harivansh; Speaker of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, Rahul Narwekar, Deputy Chairperson, Maharashtra Legislative Council, Dr. Neelam Gorhe and Deputy Speaker, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, Narahari Sitaram Jirwal graced the Inaugural Session and addressed the distinguished gathering.

# Collect data for Digi Yatra with fliers consent: Scindia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday said Digi Yatra is purely voluntary for air passengers and personnel at airports have been directed to collect data for the application only with the consent of passengers. There have been complaints that biometric data for Digi Yatra were being gathered from passengers without their consent and the issue was flagged to the minister by Rajya Sabha member Saket Gokhale. Digi Yatra, which provides for contactless, seamless movement of passengers at various check points at airports based on Facial Recognition Technology, is available at a minimum 13 airports for domestic passengers. In response to the member, Scindia has said that the issue was examined and "airport operators have been advised to sensitise Digi buddies on consent taking process and keeping use of Digi Yatra completely voluntary". To support passengers with the use of Digi Yatra, services of individuals called Digi buddies have been made

available at the airports. The minister, in a letter dated January 24, told Gokhale that Digi Yatra is a voluntary process for contactless, seamless and hassle free air travel which is purely voluntary. "Consent of passenger is prerequisite for taking face biometric on kiosk based registration. Further, the data is automatically purged from the airport system after 24 hours of departure of the flight," Scindia said in the letter, a copy of which has been shared by Gokhale on social media platform X. The data shared by a passenger for Digi Yatra is stored in an encrypted format. For availing the service, a passenger has to register his or her details on

DigiYatra app using Aadhaar-based validation and a self image capture. In the next step, the boarding pass has to be scanned and the credentials are shared with the airport. At the airport e-gate, the passenger has to first scan the bar-coded boarding pass and the facial recognition system installed at the e-gate will validate the passenger's identity and travel document. Once this process is done, the passenger can enter the airport through the e-gate. The passenger will have to follow the normal procedure to clear the security and board the aircraft. Digi Yatra Foundation, a not-for-profit company, is the nodal body for Digi Yatra.

# Modi to inaugurate Diamond Jubilee celebrations of SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Diamond Jubilee celebration of the Supreme Court on Sunday. Unveiling the 75th year of the Supreme Court, Prime Minister Modi will launch citizen-centric information and technology initiatives that include Digital Supreme Court Reports (Digi-SCR), Digital Courts 2.0 and a new website of the apex court, according to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). He will also address the gathering on the occasion. The Supreme Court held its inaugural sitting on January 28, 1950. Prime Minister Modi will inaugurate the Diamond Jubilee celebration of the Supreme Court of India on January 28 at 12 noon at the Supreme Court auditorium, the statement said. The Digital Supreme Court Reports (SCR) will make Supreme Court judgments available to citizens free of cost and in the electronic format, it said. The key

features of Digi-SCR are that all 519 volumes of Supreme Court reports since 1950, covering 36,308 cases, will be available in the digital format, bookmarked, user-friendly and with open access, the statement said. The Digital Courts 2.0 application is a recent initiative under the e-Courts project to make court records available to judges of district courts in the electronic form. This is coupled with the use of artificial intelligence for transcribing speech to text on a real-time basis. Prime Minister Modi will also launch the new website of the Supreme Court which will be in a bilingual format in English and Hindi, and has been redesigned with a user-friendly interface, according to the statement. This would be followed by the sitting of a Ceremonial Bench of the SC in the CJI Court at 3:30 pm.

# Congress launches donate for Nyay crowdfunding campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The Congress on Saturday launched a 'Donate for Nyay' crowdfunding campaign for the ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra under which people will get a Rahul Gandhi-signed letter or merchandise in return for their donation. Launching the campaign at the AICC headquarters here along with Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said the idea behind this initiative and the earlier wider crowdfunding campaign of the party, 'Donate for Desh', was not to get money but to motivate workers. Under the party's 'Donate for Nyay' campaign, any person who donates Rs 670 or more will get a T-shirt signed by Rahul Gandhi as a gift, Maken said. "Those who donate Rs 67,000 or more will get a 'Nyay Kit' which will contain a T-shirt, bag, band, badge and sticker," he said. "For anything that one donates, he or she will get a letter signed by Rahul ji and a certificate of donation," said Maken, flanked by Ramesh, joint treasurer Vijay Inder

Singla and Congress minority cell head Imran Pratapgarhi. He said that under the party's 'Donate for Desh' crowdfunding campaign launched on December 18 last year, Rs 20 crore has been collected. Within two hours of launching the 'Donate for Nyay' campaign, Rs 2 crore had been collected, the Congress treasurer said. Asked about funds collected through the crowdfunding campaign being lower than expectations, Maken said, "We can't contest elections by raising money through our workers. If someone thinks we will get all our funding for the elections through this crowdfunding, he is wrong and this is something we did not intend." It is much more than the

crowdfunding by any other political party as both the AAP and the BJP had started it but they could not reach even Rs 1 crore. "You cannot undermine the efforts of 3 lakh Congress people who have given money. The idea is not to get money, the idea is to motivate the workers. Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will be going through one part of the country. The rest of the party workers in other parts will be able to participate by giving Rs 67," he said. So, it is a political platform and not a money generation programme, Maken stressed. The Rahul Gandhi-led yatra is on a two-day break from January 26 to 27 and will restart from West Bengal's Jalpaiguri on Sunday.

# Ensure smooth Yatra passage through Bengal, Kharge writes to Mamata

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Apprehending trouble by miscreants during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in West Bengal, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has written to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee seeking appropriate directions to ensure its smooth passage through the State and safety of the yatri, including Rahul Gandhi. In his letter, Kharge expressed fear that some miscreants may try to show the state administration in bad light or disrupt the yatra, as had happened in some neighbouring states. He said the Congress has embarked on the "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" from Manipur to Maharashtra to spread the message of justice to heal and unite the nation. Kharge said Rahul Gandhi, who is leading this yatra had earlier walked from Kanyakumari to Kashmir in the Bharat Jodo Yatra, has always maintained that the yatra serves a larger purpose of uniting people who stand divided today by the BJP in the name of religion, caste and creed and to ensure that the weakest are assured of justice social, economic and political. "That is why the yatra has remained apolitical and attracted crores of people across India cutting across all sections of the society who identify with a strong, progressive and secular 'INDIA for All' he said. The Congress president said

the Bharat Jodo Yatra went across the country without any untoward incident and culminated in a rally in Kashmir. "However, some miscreants targeted the current Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in your neighbouring states. This has been done on political instigation but our cadre faced it bravely. "Now the yatra is passing through Bengal over the next few days. I have been made aware that again some miscreants may foment trouble for the yatra. I am not sure if intention may be to show the state administration in bad light or to disrupt the yatra," Kharge wrote. "I am writing to request you that you may kindly issue

appropriate directions to ensure smooth passage of the yatra through Bengal and ensure safety of the yatri, including Shri Rahul Gandhi. "I am aware that the Gandhi family and you share very cordial relations, and you would ensure that all security concerns would be addressed adequately. However, I thought it would be best if I personally write to you requesting for the same," the Congress president said. Kharge has earlier spoken to Banerjee soon after she announced that the Trinamool Congress would contest the elections alone and efforts are on to have a tie-up with her party and the Congress. The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entered West Bengal in Cooch

Behar Thursday morning and after a two-day break would restart from Jalpaiguri with a padayatra. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the yatra will then proceed to Siliguri and Gandhi will address a public rally there. On January 29, the yatra will reach Araria in Bihar and will remain in Bihar's Araria, Purnia and Kishanganj on January 30, where Gandhi will address rallies and padayatras. On January 30, the yatra will return to West Bengal at night and will be in Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum districts on January 30 and 31, after which it will go to Jharkhand, Ramesh said. He said as some exams are going on in Siliguri, the padayatra will start at 2 pm instead of in the morning. "Kharge ji has spoken to West Bengal Chief Minister and have given him invitation to her to join the yatra. We feel that going by her statement, her target is the BJP and she is fighting against BJP. The Congress also wants to defeat the BJP are on the same page. "The Congress wants that West Bengal chief minister should participate in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and we will welcome her. She should take out some time for the yatra," Ramesh said. "The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi all respect Mamata ji. And they know that of we have to defeat communal forces and it is important that she should be a partner of the opposition alliance," he said.

# Minister Pradhan reviews preparations for 7th edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday reviewed the preparations for the seventh edition of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Pariksha Pe Charcha'. "Pariksha Pe Charcha has become an annual tradition, that exam warriors, parents and teachers all look forward to, to overcome anxiety and come out with their best. There is excitement amongst everyone for the interaction with the Prime Minister, at PPC 2024, for the most-sought after interaction of the year," Pradhan said on Friday. "Pariksha Pe Charcha" (PPC) is an initiative led by Prime Minister Modi to address the stress associated with examinations and promote a celebratory approach towards life, aligning with the larger movement of 'Exam Warriors'. Organised by the Ministry of Education, 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' has been engaging students, parents, and teachers for the past six years. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fourth edition was held

online, while the fifth and sixth editions returned to the town-hall format. A total of 31.24 lakh students, 5.60 lakh teachers, and 1.95 lakh parents participated in the previous year's edition. "The current 7th edition recorded a remarkable 2.26 crore registrations on the MyGov portal, highlighting widespread enthusiasm among students nationwide," Pradhan said. Scheduled on January 29, the event will be held in a town-hall format at the Bharat Mandapam. Two students and a teacher from each State and Union Territory, along with winners of the Kala Utsav, have been invited. A hundred students from Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) will attend for the first time. An online MCQ competition on the MyGov portal from December 11, 2023, to January 12, 2024, determined participants based on their submitted questions. Selected participants will receive a Pariksha Pe Charcha kit, including the "Exam Warriors" book by the prime minister and a certificate.

# Niti Aayog identifying key sectors for transforming India into global manufacturing hub

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the Government aims to make India a USD 30 trillion economy by 2047, its premier think tank Niti Aayog has decided to reach out to experts to help identify key sectors that have the potential to transform the country into a Global Manufacturing Hub. "With its favourable demographics, skilled workforce, and increasing economic growth, India can attract significant investments and become a preferred destination for manufacturing. In view of this, research studies are proposed to be undertaken by industry vertical on identifying the key sectors for India to become a global manufacturing hub," said an official from the Niti Aayog. As per the Request for Proposal issued recently, the studies will focus on analyzing various factors, including future trends in manufacturing, industrial capabilities, infrastructure, policy framework, and market potential, to determine the sectors that offer the most significant opportunities for India's manufacturing growth. The researchers have been asked to study around 12 sectors which they feel that can be exploited to boost the investments. Among others, the study should give details on identification of key sectors in India with high growth

potential for manufacturing considering the value of product, manufacturing efficiency and global demand. Also, assessment of the existing industrial capabilities, infrastructure, and other factors of production in the identified sectors has also been sought. "Assessing the infrastructure requirements, including transportation, logistics, power supply, and digital connectivity, for each identified sector; examining the policy framework, including regulatory environment, tax structure, trade agreements, and ease of doing business, relevant to manufacturing in India," needs to be factored in while submitting the studies. The experts will also have to suggest global market trends, competitive landscapes, and export potential for the selected sectors. The move comes amid various reports stating India has the potential to become a Global Manufacturing Hub, and by 2030 it is expected to add more than US\$ 500 billion annually to the global economy. As per FICCI president Anish Shah, India's manufacturing sector will transform into a global powerhouse in the next five years, aligned with the country's goal of reaching a USD30 trillion GDP by 2047. India can become a manufacturing hub for the world and that is going to drive manufacturing growth faster, he had said.







# Pope defies India with gritty hundred

## England make 316/6 on Day 3

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Ollie Pope transformed the RGI Stadium into a gladiatorial fighting arena with a doughty hundred as England reached 316 for six to temporarily resist India's push for a win on the third day of the first Test here on Saturday.

Pope (148 batting) and Rehan Ahmed (16 batting) were guarding England's second innings fort at close and the visitors are now 126 runs ahead of India, an unimaginable position at the dawn of the day.

India were bowled out for 436 in their first innings after building a lead of 190 runs. It was quite remarkable how Pope, who generally resembles a cat on a hot tin roof in these conditions, mustered fortitude and technical perfection to defy the Indian bowlers, who were primed to finish the match on day three itself, reducing England to 163 for five.

But Pope and Ben Foakes (34) milked 104 runs for the sixth wicket alliance to keep India at bay, stretching the match into the fourth day.

It wasn't that Pope had complete command in the middle as spinners on occasions beat him for turn and pacers deceived him outside the off-stump. There was even a reprieve for him on 110 when Axar Patel grassed a fairly straight



chance at backward square leg off Ravindra Jadeja when the batter attempted a reverse sweep.

But the 26-year-old Essex man found a way to push those distractions away from his thoughts to build on

individual and the team's score.

Pope, whose main source of runs were sweeps and reverse sweeps, duly completed his first Test hundred, fifth in his career, against India off 154 balls, leading England's

recovery act.

It was a massive effort from a batter who had just 384 runs from nine Tests against India at an average of 24 with a highest of 81 before this innings.

However, credit should also

be given to Foakes for playing a mature hand to support Pope in his venture.

The wicketkeeper-batter is one of better players in this England line-up against spin, as he can read the tweekers off their hands and off the

pitch.

The Surrey batter who averages 40 in Asia in Tests, put all those abilities into use here to battle Indian spinners for 108 minutes across two sessions as England fought tooth and nail to stay alive in

the Test. The Indian bowlers too looked clueless in the face of this unexpected confrontation from their rivals.

However, the burgeoning stand came to a close when left-arm spinner Axar Patel managed to slip a low grubber past Foakes' defence to rattle his woodwork.

But before that fight, England resembled a rudderless ship in a storm against a set of brilliant Indian bowlers.

Pacer Jasprit Bumrah found some relevance for himself amidst the dominance of spinners to jettison Joe Root and Ben Duckett to inflict early jolts.

Bumrah managed to sneak an in-ducker past Ben Duckett (47, 52 balls) from the length as the batter was culpable of playing around the ball, while another incoming delivery that kept low gave little chance to Joe Root (2) while hitting his knee rolls.

Soon, the old firm of R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja joined the party. Jadeja was the first to get into the act in the post-lunch session, getting rid of Jonny Bairstow (10).

Bairstow negated a ball that turned away from him quite solidly, but the next one from Jadeja went straight and his decision to shoulder arms had a fatal effect on his stint in the middle.

But there was more magic in store as Ashwin got the

number of England captain Ben Stokes for the 12th time in Test cricket.

After getting tied down by three maidens in a row by the off-spinner, the left-hander tried to release the pressure going for a forward press but the ball spun past his bat to rattle the stumps.

Stokes' bewildered face spoke volumes about Ashwin's mastery over his craft, especially angles.

Before their bowlers made some early inroads into the England line-up, India had a mildly disappointing 54 minutes in the morning session after resuming from overnight 421 for seven.

Jadeja could not bring up a much-anticipated fourth Test hundred, falling leg before to Root.

The left-hander went to front foot to defend a length delivery on off-stump, and the ball took a good amount of turn to hit his pads. Umpire Chris Gaffaney raised his finger as Jadeja opted to review the call.

The ball seemed to have taken a deflection off his bat but the replays remained inconclusive and the third umpire went with the on-field umpire's decision to give the batter out leg before.

In the very next ball, Root castled Bumrah and Ahmed cleaned up Axar as Indian innings came to a quick end, losing their last three wickets without adding any runs.



## All weather Bumrah ability to get reverse swing leaves Root, Mhambrey gushing

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Amid the focus on spinners, pacer Jasprit Bumrah on Saturday made a statement of his skills bagging two crucial wickets that helped India keep pace with England on the third day of the first Test here.

In a dazzling display of skill and ability to extract reverse swing, Bumrah dismissed Ben Duckett and Joe Root in the middle session of the day.

India's bowling coach Paras Mhambrey was stating the obvious when he rated Bumrah as an all-weather bowler.

"Bumrah was bowling very well and was moving the ball both ways. That's the quality he has. He is a special bowler and we have seen what he can do in overseas conditions.

He has not played much (Test) cricket in India. Every time he turns up, he gives his best. It's pure skills," he said.

Mhambrey, however, said Bumrah's influence percolates to the dressing room too as one of the lead thinkers.

"The dressing room conversations he has, the energy he brings on to the field...he is a part of the discussion when the captain and support staff are around, he's right there with all suggestions," said Mhambrey.

Root was all admiration for Bumrah's impressive skill sets and said his dismissal was a big moment in the context of this Test match.

"It's what you'd expect from a Test match, and a big moment in the game. I was disappointed not to



get through it (Bumrah's spell). You know that for four or five overs he will charge in and throw everything at us.

So, you recognise that as a big moment in the game. One of my frustrations was to not still be there at the back end of it, but he's a quality bowler with a huge

amount of skill and pace," said Root.

The former England captain was also excited at the prospect of keeping his on-field rivalry with Bumrah throughout this five-match series.

"So, 1-0 to him, although 1-1 actually as I got him out earlier.

I'm sure that this battle will continue throughout the series," he added.

Later, Mhambrey also allayed any concerns over Bumrah's fitness.

The pacer was seen taking mesh pills towards the fag end of the day, and Mhambrey attributed it to cramps.



## Australia needs 156 runs to beat West Indies

### Reaches 60-2 on Day 3 of day night test

AP ■ BRISBANE (AUSTRALIA)

West Indies made early inroads through its pace and made Australia work hard for the first time in its dominant test summer during the day-night test match at the Gabba on Saturday.

Australia lost its recently named test player of the year Usman Khawaja (10) and Marnus Labuschagne (5) to end Day 3 at 60-2, still needing 156 runs to make a clean sweep of its test summer that saw them rout Pakistan 3-0 and beat the West Indies by 10 wickets inside three days in the first test at Adelaide.

West Indies wasted numerous opportunities to swell its lead beyond 215 runs as it got bowled out for 193 in the last session after No. 11 batter Shamar Joseph had to retire hurt when he injured his right toe off a searing Mitchell Starc yorker. He was adjudged leg before wicket while negotiating Starc's toe-crushing yorker only to see the bowler had over-stepped.

Josh Hazlewood picked up 3-23 with his impeccable bowling and

Nathan Lyon grabbed 3-42 with Starc and Cameron Green picking up one wicket apiece.

Shamar Joseph walked off in lot of pain and might not be able to bowl in the remainder of the test match, but Alzarri Joseph provided West Indies an early breakthrough when Khawaja edged the pacer down the legside.

Justin Greaves then squared up Labuschagne with a brilliant back-of-the-length delivery as Kevin Sinclair snapped a superb diving catch in the second slip.

Steven Smith, who is yet to make an impression in his new role as an opener after the retirement of David Warner, was unbeaten on 33 with Cameron Green negotiating the last half an hour, not out on 9.

On an oppressively hot and humid day, West Indies lost the initiative through careless batting and some smart catching by the Australians.

The tourists were progressing well at 148-4, ahead by 170 runs, when first innings half-century-maker Kavem Hodge was sharply run-out by Travis Head.

## U-19 World Cup

# Unbeaten India take on struggling USA

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

Having already sealed a super six berth, record five-time champions India will be expected to breeze past USA in their final group game of the U-19 World Cup here on Sunday.

India beat Bangladesh and Ireland in their first two games and will top the group if they win against a struggling USA, a squad full of Indian Americans. The American outfit come into the game after losing both their games to Ireland and Bangladesh.

While Bangladesh did put the Indian batters under a bit of pressure, the Uday Saharan-

led side hardly put a foot wrong against the Irishmen.

The top three teams from group A and B, and, from C and D, qualify for the super six.

Left-arm pacer Naman Tiwari has been impressive upfront while left-arm spinner Saumy Pandey has got the ball to turn and has been the pick of the bowlers with seven wickets in two games.

Number three Musheer Khan showed a lot of promise with a hundred against Ireland, and like his elder brother Sarfaraz, would be looking to pile on the runs.

Opener Arshin Kulkarni would want to get a big score



under his belt going into the next stage, having made 7 and 32 in the earlier games.

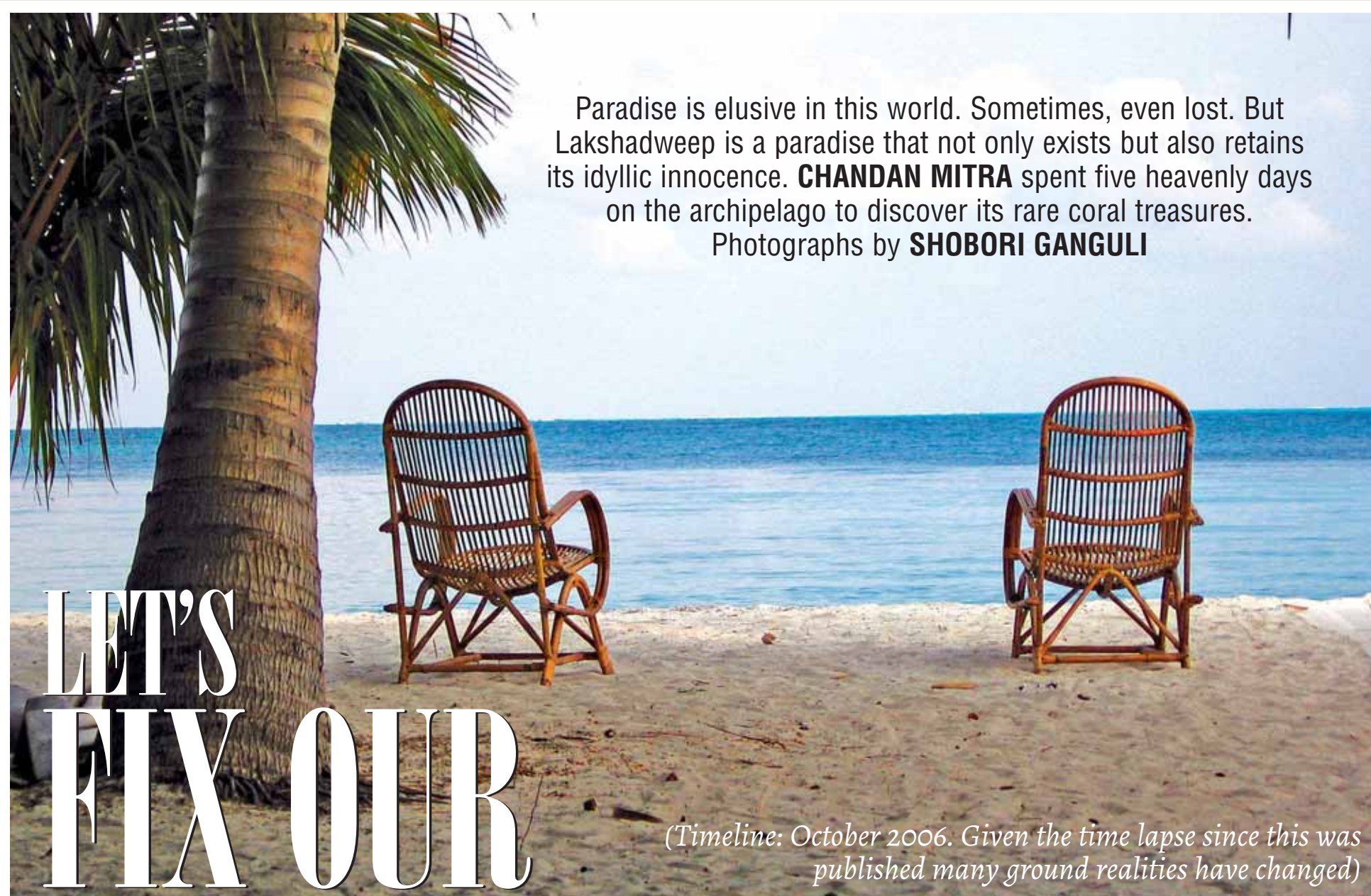
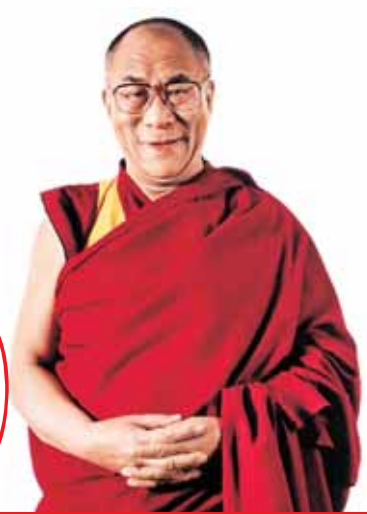
Skipper Saharan has led from the front with back-to-back fifties and would want to cash in against a weaker team like the USA. Sachin Dhas has played the role of a finisher well by getting the big hits towards the end of the innings. It will be India's third consecutive game at Mangaung Oval. USA will have to punch above their weight to trouble the Indians.

Their batting let them down in the first two games and were all out for 105 against Ireland. Squads: India: Arshin Kulkarni, Adarsh Singh,

Rudra Mayur Patel, Sachin Dhas, Priyanshu Moliya, Musheer Khan, Uday Saharan (c), Aravelly Avanish Rao, Saumy Kumar Pandey, Murugan Abhishek, Inness Mahajan, Dhanush Gowda, Aaradhya Shukla, Raj Limbani and Naman Tiwari USA: Amogh Arepally, Rayaayn Bhagani, Aaryan Batra, Khush Bhalala, Prannav Chettipalayam, Arya Garg, Siddarth Kappa, Bhavya Mehta, Aarin Nadkarni, Manav Nayak, Parth Patel, Rishi Ramesh (c), Utkarsh Srivastava, Ateendra Subramanian, Aryaman Suri. Reserves: Arjun Mahesh, Ansh Rai, Aryan Satheesh.



"People take different roads seeking fulfillment and happiness. Just because they're not on your road doesn't mean they've gotten lost"  
— Dalai Lama



Paradise is elusive in this world. Sometimes, even lost. But Lakshadweep is a paradise that not only exists but also retains its idyllic innocence. **CHANDAN MITRA** spent five heavenly days on the archipelago to discover its rare coral treasures. Photographs by **SHOBORI GANGULI**

# LET'S FIX OUR

(Timeline: October 2006. Given the time lapse since this was published many ground realities have changed)



# LAKSHIYA



**T**illa couple of years ago when asked where I planned to spend the New Year, I would promptly reply "Somewhere the mobile doesn't work". It has become increasingly difficult to locate such a place, although I did manage to herald 2006 at a resort near Ranaqpur in Rajasthan where the mobile, somewhat unexpectedly, did not catch the signal. I thought it would be the same when I planned a trip to Lakshadweep this year. As it transpired, connectivity is no longer an issue even in these far-flung islands that lie between 300 and 500 kms west of the Kerala coast. I had been told that BSNL provides a cellular service to Agatti, the island that has the archipelago's only airfield. What is instantly striking about Lakshadweep is its pristine serenity, untouched by civilisation. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, globally celebrated for creating the world's most famous fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, also wrote a gripping novel, *The Lost World* — an imagined account of a plateau in the wilds that survived the ravages of man and time to remain home to prehistoric species that were lost to the rest of the world. Purely fictional, it chronicles Sir Doyle's vivid imagination that can be traced to modern-day science fiction films like Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. A snorkeling or scuba diving expedition in the marine wilds of Lakshadweep would have definitely spurred the author's powers of imagination. If the phrase "out of this world" could truly be applied to a place very much a part of our Earth, it must be the bountiful marine life throbbing with vitality and variety all along the coral reefs of Lakshadweep's myriad islands. The sheer remoteness of this group of 62 islands, only 10 of which are inhabited, has allowed pristine marine life to prosper in splendid isolation. The sheer tranquility of the tiny islands encircled by emerald blue lagoons and peopled more by swaying coconut palms than humans, makes for a therapeutic holiday for metro rat-racers. A place of exquisite natural beauty, spellbinding tranquility, rich in an

astonishing array of marine life, Lakshadweep is now face-to-face with a crucial decision about its future. Which way should it go? Should it emulate the example of its southern cousin, Maldives, which has become one of the world's most sought after destinations with tourism emerging as the backbone of its economy? Or, should Lakshadweep resist the temptation of mindless prosperity, choosing instead to retain its millennial lifestyle quaint but comfortable? It's a tough call. Lakshadweep is not too easily reached. There is only a 15-seater Dornier turbo-prop aircraft of Indian Airlines that aerially connects the island to Kochi on the Kerala coast. The plane commutes between Kochi and Agatti six days a week and is the lifeline of the Union Territory Administration and its officials. There is also the option of taking the ferry, a daily service that connects different islands to the mainland, covering the 404-km distance between the UT's headquarters at Kavaratti and Kochi. Adventurous travellers sometimes hire private boats for inter-island travel: We were told on Kadmat island that some people left for Bangaram at 2 am, intending to make it to the tourist resort by 7 in the morning. Journeys by such motorised boats are exciting; we were ferried to Bangaram from Agatti this way, but it could prove a trifle dangerous if the seas are choppy. One should not forget that Lakshadweep lies directly on the route of the monsoon as it advances towards the Indian Peninsula from the centre of the Indian Ocean. Having spent four magnificent days in these quaint islands, my understanding of marine life and empathy for ecology has multiplied manifold. I cannot ever forget that momentary glimpse of a turtle, which I suddenly found staring at me questioning as it bobbed up from below while I was swimming in the lagoon at Bangaram. It seemed to ask what right I had to invade its privacy without so much as by your leave! It was the same feeling I got diving deep in the lagoon off Kavaratti as thousands of enchantingly multi-hued fish swarmed around me. I put out my palm at some of them;

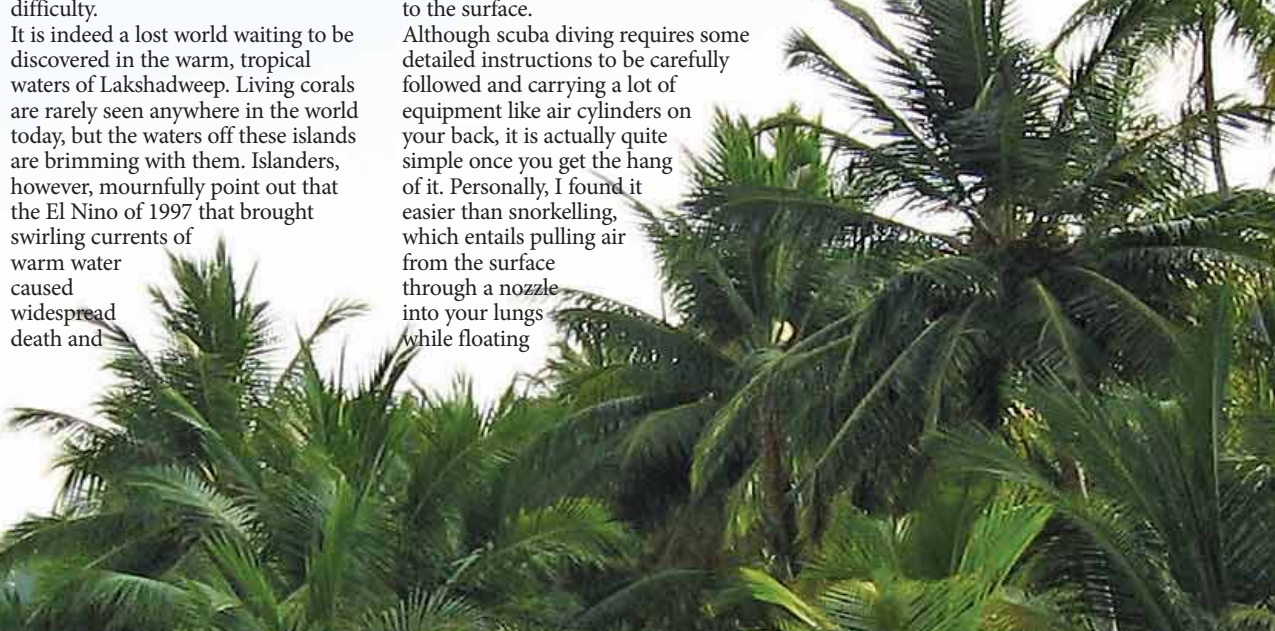
“A PLACE OF EXQUISITE NATURAL BEAUTY, SPELLBINDING TRANQUILITY, RICH IN AN ASTONISHING ARRAY OF MARINE LIFE, LAKSHADWEEP IS NOW FACE-TO-FACE WITH A CRUCIAL DECISION ABOUT ITS FUTURE. WHICH WAY SHOULD IT GO? SHOULD IT EMULATE THE EXAMPLE OF ITS SOUTHERN COUSIN, MALDIVES, WHICH HAS BECOME ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST SOUGHT AFTER DESTINATIONS WITH TOURISM EMERGING AS THE BACKBONE OF ITS ECONOMY? OR, SHOULD LAKSHADWEEP RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF MINDLESS PROSPERITY, CHOOSING INSTEAD TO RETAIN ITS MILLENNIAL LIFESTYLE QUIANT BUT COMFORTABLE? IT'S A TOUGH CALL

innocently, they came towards me assuming I was offering food and darted away furiously upon realising there was no meal on offer. Being first-timers, we did not risk diving or snorkelling in the deep seas beyond the coral reef, although diving instructors everywhere assured us that even those (like my wife Shobori) who could not swim had nothing to worry once a life jacket was worn. Apparently, the walls of coral that constitute the reef offer fantastic glimpses of marine life. After a couple of days familiarising with the idiom of deep-sea diving, it's worth stepping into the open sea beyond the reef. At Bangaram, we snorkelled close to the reef on which a ship had run aground 70 years ago. The sights we saw were reminiscent of underwater documentaries you watch on Discovery or National Geographic. Apart from thousands of small, colourful fish, many giant-sized fish have also made the wrecked hull of the ship their home, elegantly sashaying in and out of the protection it offers. A visit to the shipwreck at Bangaram is highly recommended as the water is shallow and one can always stand up in case of any difficulty. It is indeed a lost world waiting to be discovered in the warm, tropical waters of Lakshadweep. Living corals are rarely seen anywhere in the world today, but the waters off these islands are brimming with them. Islanders, however, mournfully point out that the El Nino of 1997 that brought swirling currents of warm water caused widespread death and

destruction of corals. "It's only now that the corals are regenerating once again. But it will take decades, provided there is no other ecological disaster, for corals here to regain their earlier vitality," a diving instructor said at Kadmat. Interestingly, it could be dangerous at times to provoke live coral. Clamp-corals, for instance, close their apparently inert mouths tight if you happen to put your finger into them. Unless uprooted (which means killed), it isn't possible to make them let go. Moral of the story: Let sleeping corals lie. Similarly, the multifinned Lionfish can release sufficient poison if touched, to disable a human arm for around three hours. A good diving instructor is one who points to all these facts of underwater life even as he expertly guides you through the depths. We had to learn sign language to communicate underwater even for snorkelling. Making an 'O' by joining your thumb and forefinger is an exclamation of joy, putting your palm out and shaking it as if indicating 'so-so' actually conveys you are not okay, while the thumbs up sign means you aren't comfortable and wish to go up to the surface. Although scuba diving requires some detailed instructions to be carefully followed and carrying a lot of equipment like air cylinders on your back, it is actually quite simple once you get the hang of it. Personally, I found it easier than snorkelling, which entails pulling air from the surface through a nozzle into your lungs while floating

close to the surface. While diving, on the other hand, once you are in water, buoyancy ensures you don't feel the weight of the air cylinders; in fact, a belt studded with metal weights has to be worn so that you can reach the sea floor to get the best view of fish, corals, turtles and even octopuses. The Government-run Dolphin Dive Centre at Kavaratti boasts some of the best trainers, with Sikandar, Taha and Shaukat making us feel comfortable in no time. For the less adventurous, there is the option of travelling into the sea in glass-bottomed boats. I had done that in Maldives and Mauritius, but having experienced the real thing now, that seems rather amateurish. Our first halt in Lakshadweep was at Bangaram, reached by a 90 minute flight to Agatti from Kochi and thereafter another 90 minutes by boat. The day we arrived, the Pawan Hans chopper, the lifeline between the islands, got grounded due to a technical snag. Hence the boat-ride, which in fact, we quite enjoyed. Bangaram is Lakshadweep's most frequented destination, mainly because of a much publicised resort comprising 29 thatched cottages. Running for 17 years it now provides a model for similar development of other uninhabited islands. The Government facility, the Dak Bungalow with four independent cottages, shares the beach with this resort.

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**BUDGET EXPECTATIONS 2024-2025**

**DOCTORSPEAK**

**TIPS TO KEEP YOUR NEWBORN SAFE DURING WINTER**

**ULTIMATE GOAL HEALTH FOR ALL**

Ahead of the budget, the HEALTH PIONEER catches up with the stakeholders in the Indian Pharma/Health sectors to get a glimpse of their wishlist. The Interim Budget will be presented on February 1, 2024.



Winter months can be harsh for everyone, especially for newborns. These delicate little beings require extra care and protection to ensure their safety and comfort during the cold weather. Here are some essential pointers to follow when it comes to your little ones.



**DR RAGHURAM MALLAIAH**  
Senior Director Neonatology, Fortis la femme, New Delhi

In India, it is a common practice to over wrap or over clad babies during the winter months. However, it is important to remember the golden thumb rule – dress your baby in one layer of clothing more than what you are wearing, regardless of the season. This ensures that they are adequately warm without the risk of overheating. Room Temperature: Maintaining the right room temperature is crucial for your baby's well-being. Resist the temptation to keep the room excessively warm as overheating can be more dangerous than the cold. Aim for an ambient room temperature of around 22-23 degrees Celsius, which most babies find comfortable. If you decide to use room heaters, do so sparingly. Avoid keeping them on for extended periods and limit their usage to specific tasks such as bathing, changing clothes or diapers, or during exceptionally cold spells. Continuous use of heaters can lead to dry skin, irritation of breathing passages, and even discomfort in their eyes. Winter air tends to be dry and arid, which can cause discomfort for your baby. Consider using a humidifier to add moisture to the air, making it easier for your little one to breathe and ensuring a comfortable environment. Keeping your baby's vaccinations up to date is crucial, especially during the winter months. Vaccinations protect your baby from dangerous respiratory infections that are more prevalent during this time of the year. Consult your pediatrician to ensure your little one receives the necessary vaccinations. Practicing good hygiene is essential to minimize the transmission of viruses during winter. Regularly wash your hands before handling your baby, and avoid taking them to crowded places where the risk of contracting infections is higher. Breastfeeding provides your baby with both hydration and protection against infections. It is essential to continue breastfeeding during winter months to ensure your little one stays healthy and well-nourished. Cold weather can cause dryness and discomfort for your baby's delicate skin. Use baby moisturizers to keep their skin hydrated and prevent dryness. Contrary to some beliefs, it is perfectly safe to continue giving your baby oil massages and warm baths even during winters. Just remember to keep the bathroom warm and cozy, ensuring your little one enjoys a soothing experience. A warm bath and massage before bedtime can promote better sleep as well. If your baby develops a fever or cough, which are more common in winters, it is important to consult a paediatrician immediately. Prompt medical attention will help identify and address any potential health concerns. Winter may pose challenges for newborns, but by following these guidelines, you can provide them with the extra protection they need. Remember, your little bundle of joy deserves a safe and comfortable winter experience. Stay attentive, prioritize their well-being, and cherish the precious moments with your newborn during this beautiful season.

Expectations from the healthcare sector in a budget are significant, particularly in the context of public health and well-being. Industry players share some common expectations:



**DR ANIL GULATI**  
Chairman and CEO, Pharmazz

The pharmaceutical industry in India has seen unprecedented growth in recent years and has to be prepared for increased growth in the coming years. It will be necessary to improve manufacturing quality while reducing costs. Innovation is essential to industry growth; therefore, the adoption of novel technologies to discover drugs from new chemical entities needs to be incentivized. In this upcoming budget, the government could advance policies that promote improved drug manufacturing quality and modernize regulations to aid new drug discoveries.



**DR ANSHUL GUPTA**  
Director, of Medical & Haemato-Oncology, Medanta Hospital, Lucknow

In 2023-24, the Union Health Ministry had allocated Rs 89,155 crore. This was an increase of 13% over revised estimates for 2022-23. So it is but natural that in the current fiscal, we expect the Government to further increase the health budget allocation so as to improve health care facility in the country. The proposed areas where this budget allocation should be done are:

- The health insurance coverage under Ayushman Bharat scheme should be revised / increased for cancer patients as the cancer care including cancer drugs and supportive care are expensive and the patients despite being the scheme's beneficiary could not afford the anti cancer care.
- For patients having their personal health insurance, additional benefits (over and above existing) under section 80 C should be given.
- Non-Governmental organizations including private hospitals and institutes should also be made eligible for Government funding for research projects.

**KEY DEMANDS**

**NATHEALTH:** Healthcare Federation of India, an organisation that involves leading healthcare service providers, medical technology providers (devices & equipment), diagnostic service providers and other stakeholders is seeking:  
**INCREASING HEALTH BUDGET ALLOCATION:** India's public healthcare spending remains low, at only around 1.6-1.8 % of GDP, insufficient to tackle the magnitude of healthcare challenges. NATHEALTH recommends increasing budget allocation to 2.5% of GDP to augment the social insurance schemes, boosting healthcare reforms and infrastructure and fast-tracking digital health services across India.  
**RATIONALIZATION OF GST:** Although increased budget allocation has been a longstanding request from the sector, there remains another persistent issue concerning the healthcare credit chain through GST. Indirect tax-

ation and lack of input credit for providers poses a significant challenge for the healthcare industry. NATHEALTH strongly recommends outlining a reform agenda in the Finance Bill aimed at restructuring the healthcare GST framework.  
**BOOSTING THE VALUE CHAIN:** The focus should remain on augmenting local capabilities to extend care to the most remote areas, while concurrently emphasizing the localization of the value chain. Additionally, harmonizing global best practices necessitates integrated budget allocations for effective execution as well safeguards for quality and patient safety.  
**BOOSTING MEDICAL VALUE TRAVEL:** Medical value-added services and Travel is expected to be USD 10 billion. To further aid the growth of this segment the issue of MAT credit needs immediate government attention. It is

crucial for individuals to benefit from exports. This move will give them an opportunity to offset it. It will create a more significant value proposition to focus on MVTs and boost capacity.  
**SEPARATE BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR SKILLING AND CAPACITY BUILDING OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS:** While the government announced the establishment of 157 new nursing colleges in the previous budget, strengthening health workforce situation in India is one such area that needs continuous government and policy focus. India's doctor-to-patient ratio is lower than WHO recommended threshold. NATHEALTH recommends that the government should allocate funds for training and development programs for doctors, nurses, and allied healthcare workers, putting special emphasis on digital learning stack and smart certification standards.

streamlining bureaucratic procedures, and fostering industry-academia collaboration can stimulate domestic manufacturing. This approach should align with global standards and ensure a stable regulatory environment to attract investments.



**PAVAN CHOUDARY**  
Chairman of the Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI)

In recent years, the Medical Device industry has benefited hugely due to noteworthy initiatives by the government, such as the National Medical Device Policy (NMDP), the Promotion of Research & Innovation in the Pharma-MedTech sector (PRIP) scheme, the establishment of medical device parks and elevation of branding and promotional strategies for the growth of the sector. That said we must also be cognizant of the nuances of the medical device sector which comprises mechanical and engineering complexities. Unlike other sectors, most medical devices have a high value but are produced in low volumes. It may therefore not be economically viable to manufacture all devices in a single geographical area. Even countries with highly developed medical manufacturing hubs like the USA, Japan, Germany, etc. also rely on imports to cater to the healthcare needs of their country.



**RAJIV NATH**  
Forum Coordinator, Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AIMeD)

As per GTRI report of August 2023, the Indian medical devices industry can expand from USD 12 billion to USD 50 billion by 2030, reducing import reliance to 35% and boosting exports to USD 18 billion. Supporting policies are needed so that Indian Medical Devices Industry can make quality healthcare accessible and affordable for the common masses, aim to place India among the top five medical devices manufacturing hubs worldwide and help end the 80-85 per cent import dependence forced upon us and an ever-increasing import bill of over 63,200 Crore.

- We have the following Budget recommendations to cut down the ever-increasing import bill:
- Increase in Custom Duty to a nominal 10%-15% Duty and a predictable tariff policy
  - Correction of Inverted Duty by levying Health Cess of 5% custom duty on balance Medical Devices (this was not earlier applied to all HS Codes). Cess is used for Ayushman Bharat.
  - Trade Margin Capping by monitoring MRP of Imports (if over 10 - 20 times of CIF)
  - Income Tax benefits for project investments in Medical Devices Manufacturing.



**CHANDRA GANJOO**  
Group Chief Executive Officer, Trivitrion Healthcare

import bill of over Rs 63,200 crore, it's crucial for the government to catalyze domestic manufacturing. This not only reduces the financial strain but also propels India towards self-reliance in medical technology. The industry advocates for a comprehensive strategy: incentivizing R&D and indigenous production, streamlining regulatory processes for faster product approvals, and enhancing infrastructure and skills. Tax incentives for investment in advanced technology,

- Artificial Intelligence based software should be installed in the areas of paramedical services such as pathology, radiology etc.
- Separate budgetary allocation should be made for organ transplant patients across the country as transplant is a niche area where Government financial assistance is meager.



**DR MAYANK SOMANI**  
CEO & Managing Director, Apollomedica

As we look ahead to the 2024 Budget, we foresee major advancements in fortifying the hospital industry. The Budget is not merely a fiscal plan but

an opportunity to shape a robust, inclusive, and technologically advanced healthcare ecosystem. The healthcare ecosystem anticipates increased funding for healthcare and pharma, emphasizing innovation, R&D, and digitalization. Expectations include favorable policies, reduced taxes on high-end equipment, and incentives for Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model hospitals which will help leverage the private sector expertise to improve public health services. Encouragement for health insurance promotion is sought, with a focus on extending benefits to non-metro areas through strategic hospital projects. The industry looks forward to comprehensive measures supporting advancements, accessibility, and sustainability in healthcare delivery.

The MedTech industry in India holds high expectations from the Budget. With an alarming 80-85% dependence on imports, resulting in a massive

**BOOK REVIEW**

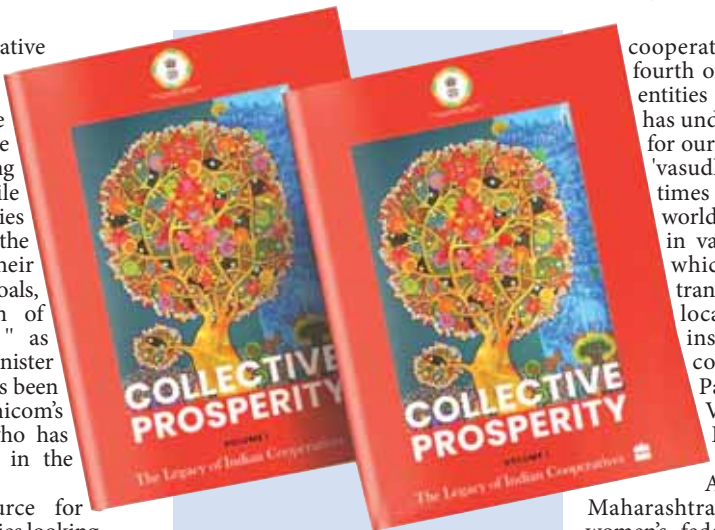
**Fostering Collective Prosperity Through Cooperatives**

This coffee table book is not just a collection of stories but a testament to the resilience, empowerment, economic growth, and social embeddedness achieved by cooperatives across India. It also serves as a guidepost for the future as India strives to become a global leader

BY ARCHANA JYOTI

The coffee table book 'Collective Prosperity: The Legacy of Indian Cooperatives', is all about recognizing and celebrating the achievements of Indian cooperative societies over the 75 years, taking readers on a tour of as many successful cooperatives from diverse sectors. Recently unveiled by Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah in the national capital, the book is compiled by Pune-based Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management (Vamnicom), a national institute under the aegis of the National Council for Cooperative Training (NCCT) and promoted by the Union Cooperation Ministry. The volume is the maiden effort by the institute highlighting the best practices in the sector to help the other aspirants to take a cue. One is therefore little surprised, as we delve into its pages, we embark on a journey treaded by historic cooperatives to the likes of India Coffee House, lesser known gems Looms of Ladakh to the Uralungal Labour Cooperative and iconic ones including Amul, IFFCO, Krishak Bharati Cooperative and National

Consumer Cooperative Federation (NCCF) to name a few. Spread throughout the landscape of the country, these entities are silently working to bring prosperity while opening new opportunities for the individual and for the group to reach their individual and common goals, aligned with the vision of "Sahakar se Samridhhi" as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as also has been pointed out by Vamnicom's Director Hema Yadav who has played a significant role in the book's preparation. It is a valuable resource for individuals and communities looking to actively participate in cooperative endeavors. The remarks of Union Cooperative Secretary Gyaneshwar Singh in his Foreword rightly emphasize the significance of the Indian cooperative system which is one of the biggest in the world particularly in supporting agriculture and allied sectors with almost 30 crore members forming the backbone of the rural ecosystem serving mainly



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small and marginal farmers, landless labourers, handloom weavers, fishermen, rural and urban poor, SCS, STs and other backward classes. It needs to be mentioned here that India is home to staggering 8.5 lakhs such

cooperatives- comprising one-fourth of the total number of such entities in the world. Cooperation has undoubtedly been a way of life for our forefathers who advocated 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam' from times immemorial. Some of the world's best known cooperatives in various sectors are in India which are continuously transforming the lives of our local communities. For instance, Asia's first cooperative sugar factory, Padmashri Dr Vithalrao Vikhe Patil Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Limited is at a small village Pravaranagar, Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. Similarly, India's first women's federation, the Gujarat State Women's SEWA Co-operative Federation Limited was formally established with an aim to support its members in capacity-building for management, marketing and policy and advocacy interventions with key stakeholders. The Dhundi Solar Pump Irrigators' Cooperative Enterprise (SPICE) established in 2016 at Dhundi, in Anand district, Gujarat is the world's first-ever

enterprise to use solar power to run their irrigation pumps while SWaCH is country's first wholly-owned cooperative of self-employed waste collectors in Pune, Maharashtra. Kerala-based AYCOOPS is India's first cooperative media production house in the cooperative sector which, unlike the traditional cooperatives, operates like a start-up New-age Eco-friendly Cooperatives. Commendably, these cooperatives belong to different parts of the country, which is an indicator of a fair distribution of development across the land even though a lot still remains to be done in this respect. For instance, as the book extends its reach to highlight cooperative hospitals in India, it is revealed that most of them are located in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. This calls for spreading in populated States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha to fill the widening demand-supply gap in the sector. In tough times like those during the Covid-19 crisis when the entire world was swept by economic slowdown painting a gloomy future, AMUL, MILKFEED, NAFED, MARFED, and other organizations provided necessary services

to the people and the farmers despite the supply chain being disrupted by the lockdown. The narrative also touches upon the significance of cooperative banks, exemplified by the Saraswat Bank, and health cooperatives, providing a holistic view of the diverse roles cooperatives play in India's economic and social landscape. The impact of cooperatives on poverty alleviation, food and nutritional security, social integration, and employment generation is acknowledged, portraying them as social instruments of development, complimented by the recent initiatives of the Ministry to fortify the sector's growth. For instance, by expanding the scope of cooperative activities and integrating them into various facets of the economy, the aim is to create a dynamic ambience that resonates with the aspirations of the younger generation while drawing their energy and ideas. In essence, this compact collection not only shines a spotlight on the past achievements of Indian cooperatives but also serves as a guidepost for the future, as India strives to become a global leader. No doubt, the cooperative sector can be a springboard propelling India towards 'Atm Nirbharta' (self-reliant).

# Balochistan trapped in geopolitical flames of Pakistan, Iran

The Baloch crisis once again came to the limelight this month. It all happened because of cross-border military strikes by Pakistan and Iran in each other's territories. However, the military intervention in their neighbours' boundaries is largely termed as simply targeting Baloch terror targets. What surprises the international community is that, with a bloody war between the state of Israel and Hamas entering more than three months since October 7 last year, the emerging conflicts between Iran and Pakistan might trigger a new zone of tension in Asia. Iran launched a missile attack on Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan on January 16. Iran attacked the alleged strongholds of the militant group called Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) in Baluchistan. Precisely, a wider war in West Asia does not guarantee security to Iran. However, it may happen that Tehran gets some temporary outlets to flex its military muscles and warn its counterparts at the same time. The day before the strikes on Pakistan, Iran also launched ballistic missiles at Syria and Iraq. Sources confirmed that Iran was only targeting anti-Iran groups and active spy bases for Israeli forces in these countries. Meanwhile, Washington is trying to prevent Iran-backed Houthi attacks on ships passing through the Red Sea. This occurred shortly after the Israel-Hamas war started, with the aim of stopping ships heading towards the ports in Israel. The Houthi rebels, who now control more than half of Yemen and the capital city of Sanaa, are a Shia Muslim group fighting against the Saudi-UAE sponsored Hadi Government in exile since 2011, at the onset of the historic Arab Spring. Their conflict with the Saudi-backed Yemeni Government has brought them closer to Iran. However, it is not entirely accurate to say that the Houthis are direct proxies of Iran, as they are largely dominated and guided by



locally defined interests. The Houthis are attacking ships in the Red Sea as retaliation against Israel's ongoing war against the Palestinians. Pakistan's retaliatory military strike inside Iranian territory has heightened regional tension in West and Central Asia. Pakistan states that it conducted military strikes in Sistan and Baluchistan provinces of Iran solely to target the bases of two Baloch terror groups and their camps. The separatist groups that the Pakistan Army focused on were the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) based in these areas. According to reports from Iranian media houses, the Pakistani operation resulted in the deaths of nine people, including women and children. However, Islamabad claims that it targeted and killed a few Baloch terrorists. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry officials have asserted that they have already informed Iran about the presence of Baloch separatists and their activities in the country, but no actions have been taken against the

rebels so far. Consequently, Pakistan justifies its military actions in Sistan and Baluchistan provinces of Iran. What do these separatists want? The main aim of the Baloch separatist groups is to break their province away from Pakistan. This separatist insurgency has been ongoing for more than 75 years since 1948. To them, the central government based in Islamabad exploits their resources, and in return, the Baloch people are not adequately rewarded. Initially, BLF cadres targeted gas projects, infrastructural projects, and central security agencies, but now they have expanded their operations beyond Baluchistan. They also attack Chinese projects and their workers in the province, despite the security guarantee offered to China by the Pakistan military. Baluchistan has a long history of resistance and is not aligned with what Islamabad and Rawalpindi do. It is the largest province of Pakistan located in the western part, possessing significant resources both in reserve and in use. Unfortunately, it is the

least developed area of the country, comprising almost 44 per cent of the total landmass of Pakistan. However, the reality is that most of its lands are arid and largely uninhabited. It has a distinct cultural and historical identity within and outside Pakistan. Its people are spread across three sovereign nations today — Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. Thus, the problem lies in the coordination and realisation of these three nations about the future of the Baloch people and their continued struggle to maintain their distinct regional identity. The very identity of Baluchistan stems from the Baloch tribe, which has inhabited the area for centuries. Nearly 10 million Baloch people reside in the region, encompassing lands in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. The majority of them live in Baluchistan, with some residing in the Sindh province of Pakistan. Although clear data is not readily available, historically, areas traditionally claimed as indigenous lands by the Balochs were either occupied

or under the control of the Persians and the British Empire. The real tragedy is that the southeastern part of Iran and the western areas of Pakistan, where the Baloch people inhabit, are the most impoverished parts of both countries. Another potential threat on both sides of the border is that they live in a porous and dangerous territorial tract, which automatically facilitates unhindered movements of the ordinary Baloch people and especially their separatist groups. Of course, strict surveillance systems are installed by Iran and Pakistan in these borderlands. The crucial question is whether the Baloch people will receive justice. A high-handed military, known as the "Deep State" of Pakistan and often referred to as a "state within a state", is well aware of the intricacies of the issue. Politicians in that country will likely play a minimal role in resolving the Baloch crisis. For decades, it has been the all-powerful Rawalpindi that has dominated the Baloch

dialogue. The relationship between the Baloch people and the ruling military and political elite of Pakistan has been fraught for a long time. For over two decades, Pakistan has been engaged in fighting Baloch insurgents. Islamabad frequently blames Indian intelligence agencies for funding and monitoring terror groups and their activities in Baluchistan. The Government of Pakistan has even presented documents to the UN regarding India's alleged support for Baloch separatists in Pakistan. However, Delhi vehemently denies any involvement in Baluchistan. Clearly, Baluchistan and its people's desire for a homeland are misunderstood by successive regimes in Islamabad. For the Pakistani military and the majority of its elites, Baluchistan is seen as a dark war zone. Mere Chinese investments in the province, under the banner of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of Xi Jinping's vast Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), will not be sufficient to quell the separatist tendencies among the Baloch insurgents. Since 2022, the Baloch people living in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province have faced particular issues from Iranian authorities and security services. The main reason behind this is that many of its residents participated in a nationwide protest against the death of a young woman in police custody named Mahsa Amini. She became a victim of Iran's religious police for not wearing the veil in public places. While the protest gained international attention, authorities cracked down heavily on the protesters and selectively targeted groups like the Baloch in Iran. According to Amnesty International's report, security forces killed about 80 people on September 30, 2022, in the city of Zahedan in Sistan-Baluchistan Province. This incident gained global

recognition as Black Friday. Currently, the Israel-Hamas war is taking a troubling turn. The reality is that Iran and its proxies must be stopped without any delay. Simultaneously, Israel must facilitate immediate dialogue to prevent further hostilities in Palestinian territories. As of now, more than 24,000 Palestinians have lost their lives since the offensive against Hamas began in October. It is time for Washington to convince Tel Aviv to draw a thin red line and come to the negotiating table. Otherwise, considering the ongoing unrest in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen involving major world powers, West Asia should not be pushed further into a wider war. Despite fears of the Iran-Pakistan conflict escalating into a new war zone and spreading to South Asia, both countries are currently maintaining a calibrated response. Now, Iran has its hands full on many fronts — fighting ISIS at home, backing Hamas and the Houthis in two foreign lands, and, above all, sponsoring its proxies across West Asia to counter the US and its allies. On the other hand, Pakistan is in a dire economic situation. It is facing a significant threat from its homegrown Islamic jihadist factory and engaging in constant frontier battles with once-friendly Taliban forces. The ruling mullahs in Afghanistan are literally shaking its caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar until the new election results are out. Hopefully, both nations will understand their limits and control their military might for now to avoid a larger regional catastrophe. In the midst of this, the genuine concerns of the Baloch people, spread across three neighbouring countries, should not be sidelined.

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**The Baloch crisis has recently gained global attention due to cross-border military strikes between Pakistan and Iran. The Baloch people's identity is rooted in the Baloch tribe, with a history of resistance. Amid geopolitical complexities, the Baloch people's desire for justice remains a significant challenge in the region**



MAKHAN SAIKIA

## PERSPECTIVE

# Human impact on earth's vital systems

**In the throes of a climate crisis, the convergence of El Niño, surging global temperatures, and human-induced factors paints a dire picture. With El Niño intensifying impacts worldwide, from disrupted weather patterns to water shortages, urgent collective action is paramount**

The European Union's climate monitor announced on Tuesday that 2023 is globally the warmest year on record, and the average global temperature is 1.48 degrees Celsius higher than the average temperature recorded in the second half of the 19th century. The Indian Meteorological Department had previously declared on the eve of the New Year that 2023 was the second warmest year in India, following 2016. Last year, i.e., 2023, missed breaking the 2016 record by 0.07 degrees Celsius. Climate scientists and researchers express no surprise that unabated emissions of greenhouse gases are the cause for the warming trend reaching new highs. Furthermore, these numbers indicate an acceleration of the planet's warming. Carlo Buontempo, Director of the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service, stated during the news briefing, "When scientists combine their satellite readings with geological evidence of the climate's more distant past, 2023 appears to be among the warmest years in at least 100,000 years." El Niño and La Niña are climate patterns in the Pacific Ocean that influence climate conditions worldwide. While La Niña benefits India, El Niño creates warmer winters and drier, hotter summers. While 2022 was a La Niña year, 2023 was an El Niño year. The weather pattern, especially between July and December 2023, was heavily impacted by El Niño

conditions, resulting in a rainfall deficit across the country. The impact of El Niño conditions in 2023 will also be felt in 2024, at least in the first quarter of the year. The deficient rainfall has led to nearly half-empty reservoirs across the country, thereby impacting Rabi crops like wheat, potato, etc., and a drop in production is predicted. El Niño occurs every 2 to 7 years, lasting for nearly 9 to 12 months. El Niño conditions are likely to continue until the first quarter of 2024. Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said, "The onset of El Niño will greatly increase the likelihood of breaking temperature records and triggering more extreme heat in many parts of the world and the ocean." During La Niña years, cold sea surface temperatures (SST) in the eastern Pacific and warm temperatures in the west create a strong east-to-west SST gradient, and the wind blows strongly from east to west. In El Niño years, the eastern Pacific is warmer than normal, and the western Pacific tends to be cooler, with a rainfall deficit over Indonesia and Australia. The El Niño pattern weakens the east-to-west SST gradient and further weakens the wind. It enhances warming in the east and cooling in the west, which is critical for the development of El Niño. Despite El Niño, we experienced heavy monsoons in the northwestern part of the country and the Western Himalayan States that breached infrastructure and

disrupted the lives and livelihoods of local communities. National and international tourists also faced the brunt. Raghu Murtugudde, a professor of atmospheric and oceanic science and earth system science at the University of Maryland, explained in one of his columns the cloud bursts and unprecedented rainfall in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Gujarat, and Rajasthan during June 2023. His analysis revealed that the El Niño pattern was superimposed by global warming, producing a relatively flat east-west SST gradient, resulting in constructive interference and heavy downpour in the region. The professor further adds that there are few examples of this pattern and phenomenon of constructive interference between global warming and El Niño, and hence it is not fully understood. Researchers at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune have found, in their studies, that an increased level of tiny pollution particles known as sulfate aerosols contributes to intensifying El Niño conditions and further decreasing rainfall. These aerosols result from the increased levels of sulfur dioxide emissions, especially in South Asian countries. Regarding the issue of depleted reservoir levels, the agencies responsible for water supply to municipalities, towns, and cities face a

tightrope walk in managing resources during the summer months. They must navigate conflicts between the requirements for drinking water, crop irrigation, and power production. The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewage Board (BWSSB) have already expressed concerns about the upcoming summer and have urged the Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited, Water Resources Department Karnataka, to prioritise water requirements for Bengaluru city and reserve it at the KRS and Kabini reservoirs. Currently, both reservoirs have 30 tmcft of water, and BWSSB has requested the reservation of 12 tmcft to maintain the present level of water supply at 1450 MLD. It is understood that several other agencies across the country have expressed similar concerns to their respective governments. While the plains in north India are experiencing cold temperatures, states in the Western Himalayan region, such as Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, are facing a deficiency in snowfall and dry weather. The winter rains that were previously experienced are absent this year, adversely affecting crop production. Agriculture in these regions relies on rainfall, and farmers are currently in distress. Gulmarg, an international tourist destination renowned for its snow-covered landscapes and white-peaked mountains during this time of year, has lost its charm. The

hills in the background appear barren, dampening the enthusiasm of tourists. Adventure sports like skiing, typical during this season, are also absent. Chilling climate is crucial for the production of crops such as wheat, peas, and potatoes, as well as for the flowering and fruiting of apples. Apples significantly contribute to the economy of the farming community, as well as that of the states and Union Territory. This year's winter temperatures have been nearly 3 degrees Celsius higher than last year, and in the absence of the chilling climate, agricultural and horticultural crops are suffering. To attain the appropriate chilling climate, apple farmers have been abandoning their farms and relocating to higher altitudes, establishing new farms for nearly two decades. This process incurs environmental and economic costs. The twigs from old plantations are burned, akin to stubble burning by farmers in Punjab and Haryana, leading to a surge in the Air Quality Index—a health hazard for the community due to the inhalation of poisonous gases trapped in the lower atmosphere. When vertical circulation of air is restored, these gases escape into the upper atmosphere, increasing the concentration of carbon dioxide equivalent. The more carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, the greater its impact on our lives and livelihoods. The Himalayas are often referred to as the "water

tower," and all rivers originating there are sustained by the melting of snow. In El Niño years, there is a deficiency in snowfall, which ultimately depletes the flow of water in streams, tributaries, and rivers. This has the potential to impact life in regions along the foothills of the Himalayas. The dryness of the climate and the deficiency of rainfall and snow lead to prolonged forest fires in the hill region. As the planet warms, forests are subjected to frequent and destructive fires, creating a vicious cycle: the more the warming, the more the forest fires. Forest fires constitute a double whammy; the destruction of trees in the fire results in a loss of the carbon sequestration potential of the forests, and the burning releases more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Forest burning also adversely affects flora and fauna, with the young regeneration of many tree species disappearing, leading to the degradation and fragmentation of forests. Damage is inflicted on reptiles, amphibians, as well as the cubs and young ones of large mammals. Another disturbing trend is observed in the Himalayas, where anthropogenic pressures on Oak forests have led to their degradation and subsequent replacement by pine forests. A study by Uma Shankar Singh of Vanashakti NGO in Nainital forests, published in "The Applied Biology and Chemistry Journal," reveals that Oak, an important component of hill

forest ecosystems with the potential to conserve water, is being replaced by pine forests. This is an irreversible and undesirable change in the ecosystem, and forest managers are held responsible for hastening the process. The author concludes that temperatures are rising rapidly, and rainfall is receding in Nainital, thereby impacting its flora and fauna. The impact of warming on Earth's boreal forests, which encircle the northern reaches of the planet just south of the Arctic treeless Tundra, covering areas such as Alaska, Canada, Scandinavia, and Siberia, has been studied by Ronny Rotbarth and others from Wageningen University. As the planet warms, these forests are shrinking. Vast expanses of forests pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and use it to grow roots, trunks, and leaves, enriching the soil with carbon when the trees decay. Studies using satellite data reveal evidence of tree cover in some pockets of the region north of the tree line, but there are no expansions in other pockets. In the southern, hotter, and drier regions, tree growth has been reduced, and trees have been killed as a result of the planet's warming. There is thus a net loss of tree cover in these forests. Wildfires and logging account for additional loss in the southern region of boreal forests.

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



BK SINGH



**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week heralds a promising phase for financial advancement. Anticipate travel, primarily for work-related reasons, but be ready for some unexpected challenges. You might face delays or financial issues, like trouble with bank transactions, which could be frustrating. However, your resilience and problem-solving skills will see you through these hurdles. Professionally, new opportunities are on the horizon, potentially elevating your career. In your personal life, exciting proposals, possibly romantic or even life-changing, may emerge. Those feeling disheartened will experience a surge of positivity. For couples, this period strengthens bonds, bringing joy and deeper understanding. As the week wraps up, keep an eye on your spending. The temptation to splurge on gifts, fragrances, or a picturesque getaway might be strong, but balancing your budget is key.

**Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Fuchsia**  
**Lucky day Saturday**



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week, you're set to experience a period of significant abundance and creativity. Your innovative ideas and resourcefulness will shine, greatly benefiting your personal and professional life. Your dedication to your family's well-being is evident, and your efforts will be met with appreciation and cooperation, especially in family discussions where your input will be crucial. Financially, the period looks promising, opening doors to potential investments in property or business expansion. For those with children, there may be exciting opportunities for them, like educational pursuits abroad or significant career advancements. However, towards the week's end, it's wise to exercise caution. Be aware of potential conflicts or misunderstandings, possibly fueled by others' envy. It's advisable to steer clear of any activities that could be deemed controversial or unethical, to maintain your positive trajectory.

**Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Jade Green**  
**Lucky day Tuesday**



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

In times of difficulty, remember that challenges often bring growth and learning. This week might bring feelings of rejection, sadness, or a sense of betrayal. While these experiences are tough, they are essential for personal development. Without such trials, life would lack depth and meaning. Midweek, you might find yourself seeking answers in solitude, striving to rise above immediate desires and emotions. This period of introspection is crucial for overcoming external chaos. It's a time to discover inner strength and resilience, proving to yourself that you can overcome any obstacle. If you're grappling with feelings of betrayal and doubting your capacity to love again, embrace this challenge with an open heart. Remember, even when the skies are grey, the sun is always waiting for its moment to shine through.

**Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Coral**  
**Lucky day Monday**



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week, you'll be engaged in lively social gatherings, with a focus on entertaining those close to you. Your energy will be high, driven by interactions with family and friends, and you might even reconnect with an old friend. You'll experience a sense of joy and creativity, and there will be a harmonious balance at home. Your loved ones will be doing well, and your personal health and finances are looking up. However, be cautious towards the week's end. Challenges may arise, particularly in your closest relationships, and could impact your well-being. It's important to stay mindful and take care of yourself. Embracing a sense of inner calm and spiritual connection can help you navigate these challenges. Remember, it's better to be proactive in maintaining harmony than to fix issues later.

**Lucky number 20 | Lucky colour Tangerine**  
**Lucky day Monday**



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, you are endowed with an innate ability to persevere and excel. Your objectives are crystal clear, and your resolve to meet them is unwavering. Exceptional communication abilities will be your strongest suit, aiding you in reaching impressive heights professionally. Your robust inner strength will provide a sense of security and invigorate you. If you're involved in business ventures, expect substantial gains. Financially, it's a promising time with timely returns and profitable transactions. Relationships, be they professional partnerships or personal bonds, are likely to be harmonious, with support coming from family and influential figures in your life. Fortune seems to be on your side. Those in romantic relationships might need to exercise patience. This period calls for self-reflection. Instead of holding back your feelings, embrace openness and adaptability, approaching situations with maturity.

**Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Mustard**  
**Lucky day Thursday**



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

You're entering a phase where taking a step back for some self-care is essential. Embrace this opportunity to rejuvenate both physically and mentally. Be prepared for a scenario where clarity emerges, revealing a significant truth. Stay observant, as such revelations can be pivotal in overcoming challenges that might otherwise lead to prolonged uncertainty. As the week progresses, a shift towards a more positive outlook is likely. You'll find yourself contemplating a new venture. This is your moment to shine – your capabilities are perfectly aligned to initiate and see through this exciting journey. There's also a hint of new beginnings in your personal life, possibly relating to family expansion. This surge of fresh energy and creativity is a powerful force. Embrace it fully and channel it towards maximizing your potential and seizing new opportunities.

**Lucky number 4 | Lucky colour Mauve**  
**Lucky day Friday**



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

In the coming period, individuals born in late spring will experience a significant shift, leading to professional growth such as salary increases and recognition. The clarity in goals will drive focused progress, marking a time of reaping rewards for past efforts. Midweek, a surge of energy, creativity, and generosity will be evident, alongside a pursuit of deeper, spiritual fulfillment. This phase also strengthens familial ties, especially with siblings, and fosters better understanding in business partnerships. Those in corporate roles may anticipate favorable changes like promotions or desired relocations. It's a prime time for harnessing and utilizing innate talents effectively. Additionally, this period encourages a balance between material success and personal well-being. Acts of kindness and charity will not only benefit others but also enrich your own life experience.

**Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Burgundy**  
**Lucky day Friday**



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

You may encounter a period of emotional challenges, potentially leading to personal growth. Embracing these challenges can transform them into a source of strength, preparing you for future hurdles. Remember, true bravery emerges from confronting and overcoming fear. When opportunities arise, embrace them with confidence and determination. This is a pivotal moment to pursue your aspirations with renewed vigor, setting aside any uncertainties. Should you feel dissatisfied with your current achievements or if your efforts seem less impactful than anticipated, consider reevaluating your strategies. Exploring alternative approaches could steer you towards a more fulfilling path. As the week progresses, keep an eye out for promising developments in your financial or professional life, as there is a possibility of encountering beneficial prospects.

**Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Jade Green**  
**Lucky day Sunday**



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

Embrace the inner light that you've previously overlooked. Trust in your abilities and in the unseen forces that guide you. The power of belief can turn dreams into reality. Feel the surge of inspiration and strength within, a strength that grows in moments of vulnerability. This is a time of spiritual liberation and transformation. Let go of outdated perspectives and welcome a fresh outlook. Your intuition is heightened, guiding you toward the fulfillment of your deepest desires and aspirations. This period marks the beginning of new connections brimming with potential, paving the way for profound joy and affection. Open your heart to the transformative energy of love. Your sensitivity and spirituality are heightened, resonating with a deep emotional and intuitive understanding. Revel in this harmonious phase of personal growth and emotional fulfillment.

**Lucky number 3 | Lucky colour Lavender**  
**Lucky day Thursday**



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week, you may find yourself grappling with inner turmoil, particularly at night, as concerns about the future and well-being of younger family members weigh on your mind. Expect some delays in resolving these issues. Additionally, the health of an elderly female relative might require your attention. For women, this period may bring heightened emotional sensitivity, possibly linked to natural physiological changes. Engaging in yoga or meditation could be beneficial, helping to strengthen mental resilience and providing the courage to face these challenges. As the week concludes, you'll likely experience a shift in perspective, heralding the start of a new chapter. This transition enables you to move past current emotional complexities and make significant, positive life decisions.

**Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Aquamarine**  
**Lucky day Wednesday**



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, your inner strength and clarity of purpose are your guiding forces. Embracing both your aspirations and fears, you integrate them into your being, emerging more resilient. Your confidence in your capabilities is evident, enabling you to effectively navigate various aspects of life, balancing rationality with emotion, and thought with action. Your objectives are well-defined, reminding everyone that mere wishing is futile without decisive action. The key to success lies in not just the desire to create, but in the capability to do so. As you step out to pursue your goals, your determination sets the stage for everything to align according to your vision. Remember, you are the architect of your destiny; your life is a reflection of your choices and efforts.

**Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Violet**  
**Lucky day Wednesday**



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

Amidst a hectic life, it's easy to overlook the richness that surrounds you, focusing instead on unfulfilled desires. True fulfillment often lies in appreciating what you already possess. Embracing gratitude for these blessings is key to contentment. This week, prepare for significant shifts in your routine. These changes are linked to life's unpredictable nature and your understanding of it. Adapting to these shifts depends on your readiness to accept and understand them. A highlight of this period is the potential merging of two unique paths. This could manifest as a romantic, friendly, or professional partnership, requiring mutual adjustments. The success of this union relies on clear intentions and sincerity, offering a stable foundation amidst life's changes.

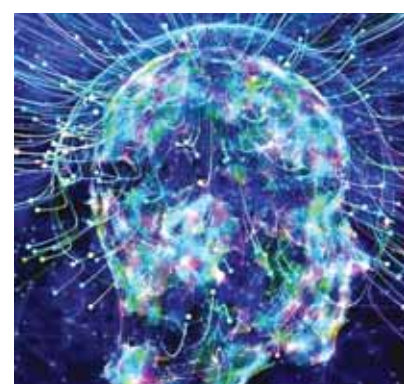
**Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Turquoise**  
**Lucky day Sunday**

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**ASTROTURF**  
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

# Shed fear and face the challenge head on



see things in the right perspective due, and pick up the most appropriate lead. The irony, however, is that more often our ego consciousness identifies itself with inherent tendencies. And is tempted to passionately pursue them, as if that would be its end game. It doesn't let

discriminatory faculty come into play. We, thus, miss the opportunity to discriminate between 'what we wish' and 'what is right', and with obvious consequences. But here again, if we remain alert to keep our discriminatory ability in active mode, we could turn choice option into an asset, for which we seldom remain conscious. For, it also offers the opportunity to reflect upon our own inherent tendencies, identify, and acknowledge them. Following which, we could take corrective initiatives with the aid of fresh educative inputs. That by itself is enough to make us conduct reasonably well. In the process, we also become aware of our unique potential, which if honed further, we could come out with our best. The paradox, however, is that caught up with the usual run of life, we seldom care to use the choice option to our advantage. We then remain slave to our habit

tendencies. And when we meet failure, we find it convenient to cover up our inadequacy with the call of destiny. A couple of months back someone having met with failure in business came asking: "Sir, having tasted success in my business venture, I opened a new branch. But it collapsed following pandemic. What wrong I did in my previous life that I was so fated. I am under heavy debt, not knowing how to come out of this trap. Future looks gloomy. Kindly guide." Well, once you make a choice, the consequences thereof, stretches on for long. Be focused to the business in hand, work out ways to improve earning. It may take little more than 2 years to get out of debt trap. But rest assured, you will finally make it. Now, in so far as the cause of your failure is concerned, there is no fun in relating it to past births' doing. The present offers the answer. You can't entirely blame yourself. Even the best of

astrologers could not foresee pandemic happening, which brought the whole world to a standstill. The mistake on your part is that you delayed your closure. Also, you raised the business with other's investment without matching equity of yours. More important now is to be well geared up to meet the present challenge. You, however, seem to be dispirited. For, the sense of fear and insecurity writ large in your construct has raised its head following your failure. Shed fear. And then immense potential within, as would Jupiter's beneficial aspect on mind signifying Moon, and Mercury identified with intelligence, will come into full play. And with time, you will come out of your problem. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272. Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com

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