

**NATION 5**  
HAND OVER GYANVAPI  
STRUCTURE TO HINDUS: VHP

**WORLD 7**  
ISRAEL PRESSES ON WITH  
WAR AGAINST HAMAS

**SPORT 12**  
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



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

PTI

MPs and MLAs attended by 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 vent their anger and announced to go it alone in the Lok Sabha polls this year.

*Continued on Page 6*

## 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 Suvendu 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 6*



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 6*

## 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 6*

## 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 6*

## 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 commandos of the CRPF took over the responsibility from the lethargic wing of the State Police.

*Continued on Page 6*

# 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 Baijyant 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.



# Robbers storm factory, hold workers hostage

## Decamp with goods worth ₹75 lakh



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Over a half a dozen masked robbers struck at a transformer factory on Dewa road in UPSIDC area in Chinhat on the intervening night of Friday and Saturday. They decamped with 6,500 kg of copper coil, relay gas cylinders worth Rs 75 lakh after holding the workers hostage. They also took away a worker's mobile phone and the uniform of a security guard. The factory is close to Upton police outpost whose incharge was quizzed by senior officers.

DCP, East, Ashish Srivastava, who along with a team, reached the scene, said the robbers entered the factory by climbing the boundary wall. Their aides drove in the truck inside and plundered the goods before fleeing the scene. "The robbers held the employees and workers at the gun-point as most of them were asleep. The robbers then locked them in a room and loaded the copper coils in the truck," he said.

Those held hostage were identified as Ram Adhaar, Vikram Kashyap, Nitish Kumar, Vimal Kashyap, Ajeet Singh Kashyap and Chauthi Yadav. Factory owner Sanjeev Agrawal said the dacoits went about their business for a couple of hours and loaded the truck which they brought with



Police officers carrying out investigations at the factory which was struck by robbers on the intervening night of Friday and Saturday

Pioneer

goods before speeding off the scene. Agrawal denied reports that the dacoity took place over an enmity. "I have had no enmity with any one," he told mediapersons. Police suspected the role of some insiders.

The lack of CCTV cameras in or around the factory hampered the investigation. "Police are banking on their network of informers to lay their hands the robbers," sources said.

Meanwhile, in an incident of road rage, a milk vendor was thrashed in Gomti Nagar Extension. Police are searching for the accused, identified as Vishal Awasthi, Akshay, Raj and Aditya.

The victim, Sandeep Pal of Chhota Bharwara, is recuper-

ating at a hospital. In his complaint, Pal said he was going to supply the milk in his van when he found the area near PS lawn crowded. "I asked the youths present there to clear the way for the van but they picked a fight with me. However, others intervened and the issue subsided. The next day, I was intercepted by some youths when I was passing by a desi liquor shop in the area. The accused were armed with hockey sticks and bats. They attacked me without any provocation. They also broke the window panes of the van and damaged the vehicle. They also threatened to kill me while fleeing the scene," the victim alleged.

# Patriotic fervour marks R-Day celebrations

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh echoed with the spirit of patriotism and unity as Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath led the state in celebrating the 75th Republic Day on Friday. The day commenced with CM Yogi unfurling the national flag at his official residence, where he highlighted the monumental journey of India's democracy. He paid homage to the foundational pillars of the nation, including Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Rajendra Prasad, and Dr BR Ambedkar.

Yogi called upon citizens to reflect on India's achievements and to recommit themselves to the nation's progress.

The celebrations continued at Vidhan Bhavan, where Governor Anandiben Patel joined CM Yogi in hoisting the national flag. A vibrant parade followed, showcasing the rich cultural heritage and organisational prowess of Uttar Pradesh. The parade featured impressive displays by the Indian Army and various security forces, along with captivating cultural performances by students from different schools.

Lucknow Metro also celebrated the Republic Day at the Administrative Building and Transport Nagar Depot. UPMRC MD Sushil Kumar unfurled the national flag. A blood donation camp was organised at the Transport Nagar Depot. Officers and employees took part in the drive and donated blood.

Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences also celebrated Republic Day with Director Prof RK Dhiman unfurling the tricolour.

At Lucknow University, Vice-Chancellor Prof Alok Kumar Rai unfurled the national flag. Earlier, he was given a guard of honour by NCC cadets.

At St Joseph School (Bajaj Group), founder-chairperson Pushplata Agarwal greeted the students, teachers and parents, while MD Rajesh Agrawal and Seema Agrawal unfurled the tricolour. A bhandara was also organised on the occasion.

SKD Academy also celebrated Republic Day across its branches with the participation of management officials, teach-



ers, and students. Director, SKD Group, Manish Singh unfurled the national flag at Vrindavan branch. Cultural programs were organised in all the branches where students presented patriotic songs, poems, and dances.

At Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, the programme was presided over by Vice-Chancellor Sanjay Singh. Major General (ret'd) Ajay Kumar Chaturvedi was the chief guest on the occasion.

Avadh Girls' Degree College also celebrated Republic Day with zeal and enthusiasm. The tricolour was unfurled by principal Bina Rai. Cultural programmes were also organised on the occasion.

At Unity PG College, chairman Justice Imtiyaz Murtaza unfurled the national flag,

while students delivered speeches on 'Viksit Bharat' and also presented patriotic songs.

Social organisation Bahujan Bharat activists emphasised the importance of upholding the Constitution and said that it ensures the rights of the marginalised and oppressed communities.

The national flag was unfurled at the headquarters of the organisation. President of the organisation and former IAS officer Kunwar Fateh Bahadur extended his greetings to the citizens. He urged people from disadvantaged and marginalised communities to take a pledge to uphold the principles of secularism, socialism, and democratic republic as enshrined in the Constitution of India. "It is through the Constitution that the

oppressed, marginalised, and women have gained freedom, equality, and the right to expression," he said. He also underlined the rights granted to Dalits, backward classes, and minority communities by the Constitution to ensure their safety and well-being.

General secretary of the organisation Chintamani said it is imperative for the people of Bahujan society to stand with pro-constitutional parties to protect the Constitution.

Republic Day festivities were also organised at Samar Vihar Colony in Lucknow. The celebration included the participation of underprivileged children residing around the colony. The children took part in various sports events and colorful programmes. Former councilor Girish Mishra, BJP


Mandal president Sachin Vaishya, and Samar Vihar Welfare Association president KS Abbot felicitated the children for their participation in the programme.

## BOYS' ANGLO BENGALI INTER COLLEGE

Students of Boys' Anglo Bengali Inter College, Sunderbagh, showcased their excellence at the UP State Republic Day Parade held on Friday. The boys' contingent, exhibiting precision and coordination, marched past with commendable vigour, drawing admiration from the spectators. Simultaneously, the girls' contingent, adorned in vibrant attire, took part in the flag march, symbolising unity and national pride.

The participation of Boys' Anglo Bengali Inter College students not only highlighted their dedication to serving the nation but also underscored the institution's commitment to fostering values of discipline and patriotism among its students. The event witnessed by dignitaries and citizens alike served as a reminder of the importance of upholding the principles of democracy and unity, reflecting the spirit of the Republic Day celebrations across the state. The college administration and staff expressed their pride in the students' exemplary performance, emphasising the significance of such opportunities in nurturing leadership qualities and instilling a sense of responsibility among the youth. "Overall, the participation of students in the UP State Republic Day Parade showcased their unwavering dedication and contributed to the spirit of national pride and unity," principal AK Kirti said.





NOTICE

In service records of my Husband JC-806474Y Sub Devender Singh Gautam, My name Chitra Lekha Gautam recorded which is incorrect, My correct name is Chitra Lekha Singh should be mentioned therein. R/O Plot No.21, Post C.O.D. Rampuram, Shyam Nagar, Kanpur U.P.-13

NOTICE

I, Tajinder Singh Soni, son of Charan Singh, residing at 32 Sarai Durvijayganj, Lucknow, Formally declare the disassociation of my middle son, Preetpal Singh Soni, from all my property due to his behavior. He has been evicted, and we have severed all relations. No family member bears any responsibility for his actions.

NOTICE

Original allotment letter dated 15-01-1985 of my property No-14, Block-F, Scheme -MIG Gujaini (KUPD) Kanpur has been lost some where. Any use of the same shall be illegal. Shripal S/O Ram Swaroop Pal R/O 178-A Saraimita, Panki, Kanpur

NOTICE

I Bimala Chaturvedi Spouse of Anil Kumar Shukla Resident of 47, Near MDM School Gandhi Gram Kanpur 208007 have Changed My Name from Bimala Chaturvedi to Vimala Shukla as Per Affidavit dated 12-10-2006.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Abdul Vahab To Abdul Wahab for all future purpose, Abdul Wahab S/O Abdul Sattar R/O 89/148-B, Bansmandi Kanpur

NOTICE

I, Attin Agarwal S/O Shashi Kant Agarwal R/O H No. 90 N Block Kidwai Nagar Kanpur Nagar. I have lost My Highschool original Marksheet and Pass certificate Index No is T/474/003 passing Year 1993 done by Council For The Indian School Certificate Examination New Delhi.

# Two men taking job-seekers for a ride land in STF net

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force claimed to have nabbed a man his aide for duping people on the pretext of facilitating them government jobs. The gullible job-seekers fell in the trap and lost money to the tune of crores.

As per reports, Bhanu Pratap Singh of Gomti Nagar Extension, and his aide Satendra Kumar Pathak of Indiranagar ran out of luck after their office (Gram Vikas Agricultural Cooperative Society Limited) in Vibhuti Khand came on police radar.

The police came to know that youths were called to the said office and money was taken from them on the pretext of government jobs. They also provided fake appointment letters to the gullible youths. The police also came to know that the accused had opened offices in other parts of the city and defrauded several people.

The STF raided the office in Vibhuti Khand and rounded up Bhanu Pratap Singh and Satendra Kumar Pathak.

A file was found placed on the table with 'District Employment Office, Pilibhit' written on it. There was also a monogram of Uttar Pradesh Government. Several fake documents were kept inside the file. The accused reportedly owned up to their crime and they were arrested. They said they would impress upon people by showing them their establishment, wealth and SUVs. Bhanu pretended to be a senior government officer while Satendra would lavish praise on him in front of the gullible job-seekers. In this way, they would take money from the job-seekers and provide them fake appointment let-

ters. The involvement of two more accused — Bhanu Pratap Dixit of Deoria and Himanshu — has also surfaced in the investigations and efforts are being made to nab them too. The police also recovered five mobile phones, two cars, several documents and blank cheque books from the possession of the accused.

## SIGNATURE OF INVEST UP CEO FORGED

Administrative officer, Invest UP, Hargovind Singh lodged a complaint against unidentified accused for forging the signature of the CEO in a letter sent to the Industrial Development Authority (Gautam Buddha Nagar) CEO, asking him to take quick measures in allotment of land and inform the department about the action taken. The fake letter was obtained through an investor, RP Singh, interested in land allotment. Singh said his son Anubhav got the letter through one Bhupinder Singh, who is employed with the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority, Gautam Buddha Nagar.

Bhupinder said he got the letter from Sanjay Khanna, who is a representative of AG Industries. He said Khanna has switched off his mobile phone.

The AG Industries had signed on two MoUs in which Anil Gupta signed as investor. "On contacting Anil Gupta, he refused to have any information about the letter which was sent by the CEO of Invest UP. The said letter was never issued by the CEO office of Invest UP. It is a fake letter and someone forged the signature to circulate it with an aim to earn profit fraudulently," the complainant said.

# New UP moving ahead in all sectors: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congratulating the award winners who were felicitated at Raj Bhawan, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that a new Uttar Pradesh of new India is moving ahead in all sectors.

He was speaking after felicitating different personalities in various fields as part of UP

Diwas celebrations.

"The Constitution of India has always stood the test of time and as a result, the country is making its policies and organising programmes, showcasing its strength. UP Diwas is a day to take these memories forward," the chief minister said. "It should be a matter of pride for us that 12 personalities from Uttar Pradesh have

won Padma awards on the occasion of Republic Day," Yogi said, expressing gratitude to the prime minister and president.

Governor Anandiben Patel said that the journey since the implementation of the Constitution has been exceptional. "I am happy that we are celebrating UP Diwas and Republic Day. Ayodhya has recently witnessed the Pran

Pratishtha ceremony. UP is the Janmabhoomi of Lord Ram and Krishna and is the land of Buddha as well as Yamuna," she said.

"In the last five years, UP has made a mark in all the fields. I am happy that personalities who have brought laurels to the country and the state have been felicitated," she added.

## Kisan Mela at CIMAP on January 30, 31

Lucknow (PNS): CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants is organising the two-day annual Kisan Mela which is likely to be attended by CM Yogi Adityanath, director Dr Prabodh Kumar Trivedi told mediapersons on Saturday. The fair, to be organised on January 30 and 31, is expected to witness the participation of about 5,000 farmers from more than 21 states. Representatives of aroma and herbal industry, 15 institutes, women self-help groups and entrepreneurs will also be participating in the fair.

Two new herbal products, CSIR Aroma Mission mobile app and a booklet on the institutional elite varieties of medicinal and aromatic plants will also be released.

# RLD leader meets Shankaracharya

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Rashtriya Lok Dal national spokesperson Anil Dubey on Saturday met Jyotish P e e t h a d h i s h w a r Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwara n a n d Saraswati Ji. Dubey said the Shankaracharya was critical of the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya as said as the temple was not constructed completely the Pran Pratishtha was not in accordance with the rules of Sanatan dharma.

Dubey's visit to the seer who gained popularity by criticising the Ram Lalla idol's

consecration, is likely to attract a debate in political circles again over the consecration which the Rashtriya Lok Dal had earlier termed as a Bharatiya Janata Party function. The Rashtriya Lok Dal leader said he met the seer to seek his blessings.

Dubey said the Shankaracharya told him that the Indian society was facing innumerable challenges in the present day.

Dubey said he received the blessings of the Shankaracharya which would pave the way for the welfare of the party and society.

# 2 held with fake currency notes

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A team of Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) arrested two persons for smuggling fake Indian currency notes of Rs 97,500 face value from Bangladesh to Uttar Pradesh via West Bengal on Saturday.

Those arrested were identified as Chandan Sainik and Deepak Kumar, both natives of Pratapgarh district. They were arrested from Varanasi on a tip-off. "The duo confessed to bringing the fake currency notes from Bangladesh and circulating them in UP and Delhi. The notes seized from their possession were of Rs 500 denomination," the ATS said in a press release.

The police said Deepak Kumar had earlier been sent to jail by Pratapgarh police in a case of ganja smuggling while Chandan Sainik was jailed twice for ganja smuggling and vehicle theft.

ATS recovered six smart-phones, fake currency notes and air tickets from West Bengal from the duo. The police said that other members of the gang were being traced.

Meanwhile, the Maharajganj district police arrested a man on Saturday for murdering his wife, Sangeeta (28). Police said that after killing Sangeeta with a sharp-weapon, the accused, Arvind (32), surrendered himself to the local station. Preliminary investigations revealed Sangeeta had left her husband and was staying at another place. On Friday, Sangeeta and Arvind fought over some issue and when the verbal duel escalated, Arvind murdered his wife in a fit of rage.

# CDRI ex-director Dr Nitya Anand passes away

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Former director of Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI) Dr Nitya Anand, a doyen among scientists and another city icon, passed away at the age of 100 on Saturday morning. Known for his contribution in the area of drug discovery, he was the father of Dr Soniya Nityanand, vice-chancellor of KGMU and director of RMLIMS.

Dr Nitya Anand was the director of CDRI in Lucknow from 1974 to 1984. He had joined CDRI (Medicinal Chemistry division) in 1951. He got his BSc degree from Lahore in 1943 and his MSc degree in chemistry from St Stephens College in 1945.

In 1948, Anand was awarded a PhD degree in organic chemistry in Mumbai. He

received his second PhD at Cambridge University. He was a postdoctoral researcher at Harvard in 1958.

In 2005, Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) appointed him as chairman of its scientific committee. In 2012, he was awarded the Padma Shri and has won several awards during his lifetime.

Director of Centre of BioMedicinal Research Alok expressed grief over Dr Nitya Anand's demise and said he was like an extended family.

"I have grown up seeing him and it is a great loss for me as a person, and for the scientific community in general. He was instrumental in bringing about the policies for the generic pharmaceuticals in this country. He helped establish the Pharmacopoeia Commission, which is an insti-



tution in itself," Dhawan said. "Dr Nitya Anand was instrumental in setting up CBMR, where I am the director now. He persuaded Dr Mahesh Bhandari, who was the

director of SGPGI at that time, to bring in new technologies so that people could detect disease at an early stage," he added.

Indian Institute of Toxicology Research (IITR) director Dr Bhaskar Narayan said, "We have lost one of the great doyens because he was from the CSIR family. His contribution to CSIR is huge, especially for CDRI. We have lost a father figure and mentor in science," he said.

CIMAP director Prabodh Trivedi said Dr Nitya Anand was a visionary scientist and institute builder.

NBRI director Dr Ajit Kumar said Dr Nitya Anand was a father figure to all the CSIR laboratories of Lucknow.

CDRI director Dr Radha Rangarajan said Dr Nitya Anand's passing is a huge loss for all of us.



# Khelo Uttar Pradesh Centres to be set up in all blocks: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a major announcement, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Saturday that ‘Khelo Uttar Pradesh Centres’, similar to Khelo India Centres established in every district by the Government of India, would be set up in each block of Uttar Pradesh.

He added that the funding for this initiative will be determined in collaboration with the Sports department.

During a prize money distribution programme and the issuance of appointment letters to players in Uttar Pradesh at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan, the chief minister stated that the state government has already decided to appoint players who can dedicate their time after games as coaches at Khelo UP Centres with a fixed honorarium. Emphasising the importance of having competent coaches at the block level, he expressed confidence that this approach would lead to further improvement in the performances of players at the national and international events.

On this occasion, the chief minister distributed prize money of Rs 62 crore to 189 outstanding players of Uttar Pradesh who won medals and participated in the 19th Asian Games 2022, 4th Para Asian Games 2022, and 37th National Games 2023. Additionally, appointment letters were presented to seven medal-winning players for positions, such as deputy superintendent of police, district youth welfare officer, and passenger/goods tax officer.

Highlighting the transformative changes in the sports environment over the past decade, Chief Minister Yogi remarked, “The state government has diligently worked towards realising the prime minister’s vision, creating a



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath giving appointment letter to Parul Chaudhary. Union minister Anurag Thakur also seen in the picture

new platform to channelise the energy of the youth.”

Highlighting Uttar Pradesh’s significant contribution to sports, he said that 16 per cent of the country’s population resided in the state, and its athletes had secured an impressive 25 per cent of the medals in the Asian Games.

Acknowledging the achievements of the sports persons in the National Games, he expressed that this event has been organised to further enhance their skills.

“On the occasion of Uttar

Pradesh Diwas on January 24, we honoured all our personalities. On January 26, the Laxman Awards and Rani Lakshmbai Awards were presented to the personalities who performed brilliantly in sports at Raj Bhavan,” he added.

Yogi remarked further: “Rs 62 crore was allocated to 189 players while appointment letters were presented to seven players today. This exemplifies the positive impact of effective leadership. In the past, people had to pay bribe to get jobs whereas today, the govern-

ment not only provides employment, but also financial support. Recognising distinguished individuals is a matter of national prestige, contributing to the restoration of our country’s honour and glory.”

In addition, there are plans to increase incentives for sports and players. Uttar Pradesh stands out as the leading state in the country, having provided jobs to over 500 players through the issuance of appointment letters. These positions range from deputy superintendent of police roles

to recruitment in the police force.

Chief Minister Yogi emphasised the need for arrangements to support para-players, stating, “We can also give appointments to these medal-winning players. These are our personalities, who with their abilities, have increased the pride of the country and the state.” Addressing young players, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted the abundance of opportunities available and the government’s commitment to honour and support those who

## Thakur lauds exceptional accomplishments of athletes

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In a ceremony resonating with pride and determination, Union Sports Minister Anurag Singh Thakur lauded the exceptional accomplishments of athletes, emphasising their pivotal role in enhancing the nation’s prestige.

The event, held to honour medalists of various sports disciplines, also witnessed heartfelt appreciation extended towards Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for his unwavering support to sports and athletes.

“Before 2014, newspapers in the country were saturated with tales of scams. Today, however, the narrative has shifted significantly. Discussions about scandals have faded, replaced by the triumphant stories of our medal-winning athletes,” Thakur said, highlighting the transformative journey of Indian sports over the past decade.

Thakur acknowledged the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose commitment to sports is evident in the threefold increase in the sports budget. He further lauded the efforts undertaken in Uttar Pradesh to bolster the sports ecosystem, enabling athletes to hone their skills amidst world-class facilities. This concerted effort, he noted, played a pivotal role in the historic achievement of

securing 107 medals at the Asian Games. Addressing the athletes, Thakur expressed admiration for their resilience and determination, emphasising that their victories mark not just milestones but the dawn of a new era in Indian sports. “Your achievements serve as a beacon of inspiration for aspiring athletes across the nation,” he added.

Speaking on the commitment of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath towards sports development in Uttar Pradesh, Thakur expressed confidence in the state emerging as a frontrunner in sporting excellence.

“Yogi ji’s vision for Uttar Pradesh is clear, and it is incumbent upon all of us to realise his dream,” he asserted.

Highlighting the transformative journey of Uttar Pradesh, Thakur underscored its evolution from a state marred by unrest to a fertile ground for nurturing Olympic contenders.

“Under Yogi ji’s leadership, Uttar Pradesh has witnessed a remarkable turnaround, emerging as a powerhouse of talent,” he remarked, emphasising the symbiotic relationship between state support and athletes’ dedication.

### MEDALISTS REWARDED

The ceremony also saw the felicitation of medal-winning athletes, with cash rewards

and prestigious appointments announced as a token of appreciation for their exemplary achievements. Notable among the recipients were:

**Bronze Medalists (Rs 75 lakh each):** Kiran Baliyan Seema Poonia, Gulveer Singh, Arjun Singh, Abbad Ali, Khushboo  
**Silver Medalists (Rs 1.5 crore each):** Ajay Kumar Saroj, Karthik Kumar, Puneet Kumar, Neeraj, Nitish Kumar, Arvind Singh, Prachi Vantika Agarwal.  
**Gold Medalists (Rs 3 crore each):** Parul Chaudhary, Deepti Sharma, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Akhil Shivran, Arjun Deshwali.

### PARA ASIAN GAMES AWARDEES

**Bronze Medalists (Rs 75 lakh each):** Pushpendra Singh, Shreyans Trivedi.

**Silver Medalists (Rs 1.5 crore each):** Pradeep Kumar, Simran, Zainab Khatoun, Suraj Singh.

**Gold Medalists (Rs 3 crore each):** Suhas LY, Praveen Kumar.

**Athletes granted appointment letters:** Deepti Sharma (Cricket), Deputy SP; Parul Chaudhary (Athletics), Deputy SP; Akhil Shivran (Shooting), Deputy SP; Arjun Deshwali, Deputy SP; Puneet Kumar, District Youth Welfare Officer, Prachi, District Youth Welfare Officer; Arjun Singh, Passenger, Goods Tax Officer.

Welfare Minister Anurag Thakur, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, and other ministers.

## Akhilesh leaves 11 seats for Congress

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, on Saturday, announced that the Congress will contest 11 seats in Uttar Pradesh in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The UP Congress has, however, rejected the seat-sharing agreement announced by Akhilesh Yadav, saying the party has not accepted the deal. It said this was the decision of Akhilesh Yadav and not of the Congress.

UP Congress Committee president Ajay Rai said, “Seat-sharing talks with the Samajwadi Party are underway in a very cordial atmosphere and results of the negotiations would be announced soon. The decision on seat-sharing will be taken by the Mukul Wasnik committee constituted by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.”

“Our cordial alliance with Congress is off to a good start with 11 strong seats. This trend will move forward with the winning equation. INDIA bloc and ‘PDA’ strategy will change history,” SP president Akhilesh Yadav said.

Uttar Pradesh has 80 Lok Sabha seats, the highest in the country. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party and its ally Apna Dal (Sonelal) had won 62 out of the 80 seats, while the Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party alliance had won 15 seats. The Congress could only win one seat.

Party sources had earlier

## SP chief weighing options before taking final call

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amidst the turmoil in fledgling Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance that started from West Bengal and later engulfed Bihar, all eyes are set on the future course of action of Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav. Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress has walked out of the alliance while Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, on whose initiative the INDIA bloc comprising 28 parties was forged, has gone back to Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday struck a conciliatory note towards the INDIA bloc. He is weighing his options before taking a final call. In the last five years, Akhilesh Yadav has toed Mamata Banerjee in

national politics and he is expected to walk out of the INDIA bloc. On Friday, wading into the political turmoil in Bihar, Akhilesh said that Nitish Kumar could have become prime minister had he stood strong with the INDIA bloc. Akhilesh Yadav said “anyone can be considered for the post of prime minister” in the alliance, suggesting that Nitish Kumar could have been a contender with the right backing. Yadav’s remarks came in the wake of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar dumping INDIA bloc and reviving ties with the BJP. Nitish Kumar is expected to take oath as chief minister for the unprecedented ninth time on January 28.

Expressing disappointment with Nitish Kumar’s U-turn, Akhilesh Yadav averred that he nevertheless wanted the Janata Dal (United) chief to remain

within the INDIA bloc. “Nitish Kumar took the initiative and formed the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance,” he said.

“Congress should have come forward,” he said, in another salvo at the party while it contends with unhappy alliance partners, like the Trinamool Congress and Aam Aadmi Party. He criticised the Congress and asserted that had the party taken the initiative, the current situation could have been averted.

When asked about the possibility of campaigning alongside Congress MP Rahul Gandhi in the upcoming elections, Yadav remained non-committal, stating that “only time would tell” whether such a collaboration would materialise. Akhilesh Yadav clarified that he was not vying for the prime minister’s office.

that Congress needs to show in discussing and engaging with the INDIA bloc parties is missing,” the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh noted. Akhilesh Yadav’s seat-sharing announcement came just a few days after the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab rejected alliance with Congress for the 2024 polls.

## BJP appoints Baijayant Panda in-charge of Uttar Pradesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has initiated a revamp of its organisational structure, with a focus on key states. In Uttar Pradesh, which has the largest number of Lok Sabha seats, the BJP has appointed Baijayant Panda as the in-charge, signaling a strategic move to strengthen its position in the crucial battleground.

Panda, a prominent figure within the BJP who hails from Odisha, serves as the national vice-president and spokesperson of the party. With his extensive experience in politics, including his tenure as a Lok Sabha member from Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) before joining BJP in 2019, Panda brings valuable insights to his new role as the in-charge of Uttar Pradesh.

**PANDA, WHO HAILS FROM ODISHA, SERVES AS THE NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT AND SPOKESPERSON OF THE PARTY**

The BJP has expressed unwavering confidence in its prospects in Uttar Pradesh, affirming its intention to secure victory in all 80 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state. This bold assertion underscores the party’s commitment to consolidating its stronghold in the region. Panda’s appointment follows a strategic pattern observed in the organisational framework of the BJP. Dharmendra Pradhan, who

hails from Orissa like Panda, was previously appointed as in-charge for UP assembly elections in 2022, highlighting the party’s reliance on leaders with regional roots to spearhead the crucial campaigns.

In addition to Panda’s appointment, the BJP has strategically assigned key roles to five leaders from Uttar Pradesh across various states. Former UP minister Shrikant Sharma has been appointed as the election in-charge for Himachal Pradesh, while national vice-president Laxmikant Bajpai will oversee Jharkhand. Rajya Sabha MP Dr Radha Mohan Das Aggarwal has been entrusted with the responsibility of Karnataka, former minister Mahendra Singh of Madhya Pradesh, and MP Vijaypal Singh Tomar of Odisha.

## Government developing Devarghat in Sultanpur

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a significant move towards fostering inclusive development of Uttar Pradesh, the Yogi Adityanath government has commenced the rejuvenation process of Devarghat located on the banks of river Gomti in Sultanpur.

The government has approved Rs 28.86 crore for the project out of which Rs 10.10 crore has already been released.

A detailed project plan has been prepared for the construction of bridges and pathways leading to Devarghat as well as installation of safety measures at the ghat. The Public Works Department has started preparations in this regard while all the necessary procedures are being followed by the Bridge

Corporation to commence the rejuvenation process of the ghat. Sultanpur is known as the place of Maharaj Kush, son of Lord Shri Ram. Previously, the Yogi government had carried out the beautification of the famous Sita Kund Ghat, known as the resting place of Mother Sita, and the makeover plan of Devarghat is part of that effort.

The work of rejuvenating Devarghat in Sultanpur will be overseen by the chief engineer (development) and the head of the Public Works Department. The completion of these construction works will not only enhance the beauty of the ghat, but also improve the connectivity of the Akbarpur-Kadipur-Chanda-Patti-Delhupar road (State Highway Number 128). It will also resolve traffic relat-

ed issues facing commuters using this road.

According to the order issued by the Yogi government to the Public Works Department and UP State Bridge Corporation Limited, the renovation works have to be carried out in accordance with the rulebook of the Uttar Pradesh government.

Additionally, specific responsibilities for the various aspects of work related to this project, including standardisation, quality control and inspection, have been assigned to the chief engineer of the Public Works Department.

The chief engineer will have to ensure that all the processes are completed without errors within the specified time frame.

## Elderly man gored to death by bull

**Bareilly (PTI):** A 75-year-old man died here after he was knocked down by a stray bull and repeatedly trampled by the animal which also gored his horns into his stomach, police said on Saturday. Taking serious cognisance of the matter, District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar ordered immediate action in the matter. Following his instructions, an FIR was lodged against Bareilly Municipal Corporation’s veterinary welfare officer on Friday, officials said. He also

instructed that all stray animals in Bareilly be shifted to a shelter outside the city within three days. The incident took place around 8 am on Wednesday when Krishnanand Pandey was out for a walk in the Central Estate Colony here, they added. The entire episode was captured on a CCTV camera. The footage showed the bull running towards Pandey and knocking him down. It kept repeatedly trampling the elderly man before inserting his horns into his

stomach, killing him on the spot.

However, the bull kept hitting him and the body kept rolling on the road. It moved away only after a crowd gathered there. The stray animal also tried to attack other passersby, the footage showed. The deceased’s son Akshay Pandey, posted as Deputy Manager at Punjab National Bank, Civil Lines branch, said his father used to work as a manager at a sugar mill in Pilibhit and was residing with them since his retirement.

## 3 killed in road accidents

**Shahjahanpur/Etah (PTI):** Three people lost their lives in different road accidents due to fog in Uttar Pradesh, police said. Due to dense fog in the Shahjahanpur district, a tractor-trolley overturned under a culvert, due to which two farmers riding on it died on the spot, a police official said on Saturday. SP Ashok Kumar Meena said that after selling potatoes in the market, the two farmers, Narveer (28) and Neeraj (30), residents of Chapra under Mirzapur police station area, were going back to their village in a tractor-trolley on Friday night, when it fell from the road on the culvert on the Kola Road due to fog.

Meanwhile in Etah, an 18-year-old youth riding a bike died, while two others including his uncle, were injured after it hit an electric pole due to dense fog near ITI College, located on the Nidhauri Road, police said on Saturday.

## Manisha Mandir honours super senior citizens

**Lucknow (PNS):** On the occasion of Republic Day, Dr Sarojini Agrawal, founder of Manisha Mandir, a voluntary social service organisation serving since 1988, honoured senior citizens above the age of 80 years.

Those honoured with the ‘Super Senior Citizen Samman’ included Prof Ramcharan Tripathi (former Vice Chancellor of Swaraj Vidyapeeth), Justice (Retired) Vishnu Sahay (former acting Chief Justice), Shri Jaiprakash Sharma (retired Air Force officer), Daya Chaturvedi (musician), Pratibha Mittal (environmentalist), Rajeshwari Rai (social worker) and Maya Devi.

Along with this, youths working for the happiness and welfare of senior citizens were also honoured. They included Gaurav Chhabra, Prashant Chaturvedi and Ayush Kumar.

Dr Sarojini Agrawal called upon everyone to join the Manisha Mandir organisation



and serve the needy people as per their ability and capability.

On this occasion, Manisha Mandir president Niraj Agrawal said the organisation was established in 1988 by Dr Sarojini Agrawal in the memory of her daughter Manisha for the uplift of destitute girls.

About 800 destitute girls have got the opportunity to study in various schools under her guidance. Many girls were adopted at a young age by

needy people and many girls also got married while staying in the organisation. From 2014, scholarships are being given for higher education to economically handicapped but brilliant girls of society. Now there is a plan to make Manisha Mandir as the centre and work in the surrounding rural areas also.

Manisha Mandir was awarded the National Child Welfare Award by the Government of India in the

year 2006 for the work done for the welfare of the girl child.

In 2010, then President Pratibha Patil awarded Dr Sarojini Agrawal with the Rajiv Gandhi Manav Seva Award for her contribution in this field. Manisha Mandir wants to contribute towards mental health. Free facilities are being provided by it for the education and personality development of children belonging to deprived classes. Bio-well camera is being installed in Manisha Mandir which will measure the energy of various body parts and indicate the health condition. It also wants to work for people affected by Parkinson’s and dementia. Free yoga is conducted by Manisha Mandir every day and facilities of naturopathy and meditation are also offered by it.

On the occasion of Republic Day, ‘Nakshatra Vatika’ was also inaugurated by planting Parijat sapling in the premises of Manisha Mandir.



# 75th Republic Day celebrated with patriotic fervour

PNS ■ VARANASI

Patriotic fervour gripped this holy city of Lord Shiva on the occasion of the Republic Day on Friday. Various programmes were organised at different parts of the city and the main function was held at the Police Lines where Uttar Pradesh Labour and Employment Minister Anil Rajbhar unfurled the tricolour and took the salute of the parade. The children of different schools presented cultural programmes.

Speaking on the occasion, Rajbhar said that due to the sincere efforts of the present government, India had achieved the distinction of becoming the world's fifth economy by surpassing Britain and was also moving forward towards its resolve to become the world's third economy by 2027.

At the end, he gave certificates and prizes to the winners, including some police personnel. The PAC 48th Battalion stood first in the parade while Mahila Police finished second. In cultural programmes, children of Primary School Benipur got the first place while Atal Residential School secured the second position.

Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, Divisional Commissioner Kaushal Raj Sharma, Commissioner of Police Ashok Mutha Jain, District Magistrate S Rajalingam, ACP S Chinappa, Chief Development Officer Himanshu Nagpal and many



UP Minister Anil Rajbhar honouring a police officer during the Republic Day function in Varanasi on Friday

Pioneer

others were also present.

Besides, the divisional commissioner unfurled the national flag at his office, the district magistrate at the Rifle Club and the chief development officer at Vikas Bhawan.

In Banaras Hindu University, the day started with the unfurling of the tricolour by Vice-Chancellor Prof Sudhir Kumar Jain at Malaviya Bhawan. Later, he received the Guard of Honour by NCC cadets at the Amphitheatre Ground, the venue of the main programme in BHU.

The VC presented awards to meritorious students, NCC cadets, and employees of the university. Paridhi Sharma (MSc Statistics), Institute of Sciences, was presented the Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma

Gold Medal, while Arpita Chaubey from Dharmagang department of the Faculty of Sanskrit Vidya Dharam Vigyan, received the Mahamana Sanskrit Award and Roshan Maurya of Physical Education department, the Major SL Dar Gold Medal. Vishal Kumar Singh, Army Wing, 89 UP Battalion NCC, BHU, also received the Major SL Dar Gold Medal.

The employees who received awards include Letha Ajay, Director's Office, Institute of Science, Suraj Lal, Faculty of Performing Arts, Babu Lal, Department of Plant Physiology, Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Ratan Lal, Registrar Office, and Baijnath Prasad, Sir Sunderlal Hospital.

In Banaras Locomotive Works, the day was celebrated with enthusiasm and presentation of various colourful cultural programmes at Central Sports Grounds. The programme started with the unfurling of the national flag by the General Manager Basudev Panda, who inspected the parade by the teams of Railway Protection Force, St John's Ambulance Brigade, Civil Defence, Bharat Scouts and Guides. In his address, Panda said that a record 324 locomotives, including 280 WAG-9, 40 WAP-7 and 4 WDG3A (NRC) were manufactured by BLW till the month of December. "This is the highest construction of any year from April to December. BLW has manufactured 51 electric locos in June

2023, which is the highest ever loco production in any single month. In this financial year, we have achieved the target of manufacturing 460 locomotives," he said.

The general manager also congratulated the Inspector General/Principal Chief Security Commissioner of RPF, BLW Ranveer Singh Chauhan, for being awarded the President's Police Medal this year.

In the Republic Day function at North Eastern Railway Mini Stadium, Divisional Railway Manager (Varanasi Division) Vineet Kumar Srivastava honoured 11 employees who made significant contributions to railway safety and security by showing their devotion to duty.

ADRM (Infra) Roshan Lal Yadav, ADRM (Operations) RK Singh, Chief Project Manager (Gati Shakti) Kaushalesh Singh, Chairperson of Divisional Women Welfare Organisation Monica Saxena and many others were also present. Besides, Postmaster General of Varanasi Region Krishna Kumar Yadav unfurled the national flag at Varanasi Cantonment Head Post Office. On the occasion, postal department personnel were also honoured for their commendable services. Chief Medical Officer Dr Sandeep Chaudhary did the same at his office in Kabir Nagar area. The Republic Day functions were also organised at several educational institutions and departments.

## Maurya calls for unity, integrity

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya unfurled the tricolour at Reserve Police Line in Prayagraj on the occasion of Republic Day on Friday. He took salute of the parade and honoured the UP Police officers and employees with medals and awards.

Paying tributes to the freedom fighters, Maurya talked about the schemes of the Central and state governments and urged those present on the occasion to take a pledge for unity and integrity.

Republic Day was celebrated with patriotic fervour at government and non-government offices across the city. Amar Shaheed Chandrashekhar Azad Park was decked up for the occasion. A cross-country race was also flagged off at the park. Cultural programmes were also organised there. Floral tributes were paid to Netaji at Subhash crossing and his spirit of sacrifice and patriotism was remembered.

The national flag was also unfurled at Allahabad University, Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prof Rajendra Singh Rajju Bhaiya State University, Allahabad High Court, Basic Education Council, police headquarters, Secondary and Higher



Education Council, AG office, UP Board office, Municipal Corporation, Prayagraj Development Authority, etc.

Republic Day was also celebrated in the camps of Kalpvasis and saints at Magh Mela. There was a huge crowd at the Sangam bank. People also assembled in large numbers at Bade Hanuman temple.

A group of devotees from Himachal Pradesh, who are on a tour of India, reached Sangam area on Friday and took a holy dip. They also celebrated Republic Day and met the saints.

Meanwhile, Mayor Umesh Chandra Ganesh Kesarwani unfurled the flag in the premises of Prayagraj Municipal Corporation. A singing programme was presented by the students of Mahila Shilpa Bhavan. Republic Day was celebrated with grandeur at the North Central Railway

Headquarters in Prayagraj. To begin with, the tricolour was unfurled by General Manager Ravinder Goyal. He inspected the parade of Railway Protection Force, Bharat Scouts & Guides, and St John Ambulance Brigade. He also awarded 18 railway personnel for their outstanding performance. Addressing the gathering, the GM said: "NCR has completed 20 years of its constitution. It has evolved as an important constituent of Indian Railways and has been playing the role of prime movers of the nation by connecting northern India to southern, eastern and western parts of the country."

Republic Day was also celebrated at the Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE). General Manager Ashok Kumar Verma unfurled the national flag and congratulated all the officers and employees.

## Tourism projects beautify Kashi, increase number of tourists

PNS ■ VARANASI

A total of 87 tourism development projects worth Rs 171.30 crore have not only beautified and revamped the face of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency Varanasi but also increased the flow of tourists.

Some of these tourism projects have already been completed, while others are nearing the final stage.

Since ancient times, Kashi has been famous for its culture, religion, spirituality and heritage but, moving on the path of overall development, today the 'Varanasi model' has become a topic of discussion in the world. Deputy Director of Tourism department, Rajendra Kumar Rawat, said that in the last 10 years, 37 tourism development works had been completed at a cost of Rs 59.42 crore whereas 50 others worth Rs 111.88 crore were under construction.

The tourism sector in Kashi has received full support by both the Central and the state governments in gaining new momentum through new tourism development works. By drawing a blueprint for the

overall and systematic development of Kashi, the Yogi Adityanath government is rapidly putting the city on the world tourism map. The beautification of the streets of Kashi, also known as the City of Streets, has been done in a modern way. The ghats have been beautified and made convenient for the devotees apart from the development and restoration works of many religious pilgrimages, including Markandey Mahadev Temple, Sarang Nath Pond, Shultankeshwar Temple, Ganga ghats and other temples.

Besides, according to Rawat, the Panchkoshi Yatra route and temples falling on the way have been beautified. Apart from this, light and sound show and Buddha theme park in Sarnath, public convenience works at the birthplace of Sant Ravidas, Gurudham temple, operation of cruise boat, tourism information centre at Lal Bahadur Shastri Airport, beautification works of Narsingh Math, Sankuldhara Math, Rajghat, Maa Bhadrakali temple, changing rooms at ghats etc have also been completed. He also disclosed that under the scheme of overall

tourism development, construction work of Pawanpath for Kashi Char Dham Yatra, Dwadash Aditya Yatra, Nav Durga, Asht Bhairav, Nav Gauri, Vinayak, Dwadash Jyotirlinga and tourism development work of five paraos (stoppages) of Panchkoshi Yatra is being done under the project. Similarly, the work of temples, ponds etc, centres of ancient faith in the rural areas of Rohania, Pindra, Shivpur and other areas, classical ghats in Ramnagar, Chandravati, the birthplace of Jain Tirthankar Chandra Prabhu, tourism development of Sarang Nath temple of Sarnath, and Manikarnika Ghat are also in progress. The work of tourism development and beautification of Sattua Baba Ashram is also going on. On the other hand, upgradation of tourist house at Parade Kothi and Rahi tourist accommodation house, surface parking on Manari Road, beautification and renovation of Sant Ravidas Park, statue of Nishadraj at Teliana Ghat, Mandvi Kund and Ganesh temple, helipad and many other works of tourism development are in the final phase, he added.

## Youths urged to take inspiration from Vivekananda, Gandhi

PNS ■ KANPUR

The 75th Republic Day was celebrated at National Sugar Institute in Kanpur on Friday. The building was decked up with tricolour lights, balloons and flowers. Prayers were offered to Goddess Saraswati and floral tributes were paid to Mahatma Gandhi. The tricolour was unfurled and security staff took part in the parade. Director Prof Narendra Mohan unfurled the national flag and exhorted the youth to take lessons from the lives of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. "Positive frame of mind, loyalty, zeal to learn and selfless discharge of duties are important to get success in life," he said.

The director also gave away prizes to the staff members for their exemplary work and contribution in making the campus clean and green. Prizes were also given away to the winners of various competitions organised during the Vigilance Awareness Week. 'Swachhata' trophy was given away to hostel warden Sanjay Chauhan. A cultural programme was also organised in which patriotic songs were presented.

Meanwhile, NTPC, Dibiyapur, organised Republic Day celebrations with fanfare. Chief General Manager Jasbir Singh Ahlawat unfurled the national flag. He shed light on the salient works and strategies of NTPC. There were beautiful exhibits based on different themes by Little Kingdom School, CISE/Fire, Kendriya Vidyalaya, St Joseph, Human Resource-CSR and Helmet



(Clockwise from top) NSI director Prof Narendra Mohan paying tributes to Mahatma Gandhi; GM of NTPC (Auraiya) Jasbir Singh Ahlawat addressing the gathering on Republic Day; KDA secretary Shatrohan Vaishya unfurling the national flag; and children taking part in R-Day celebrations at SPSEC

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Baba, Deokali Mandir, Auraiya. Children of Little Kingdom, Gyandee Literacy, Bal Bhavan, Jagriti Mahila Mandal, St Joseph School and Kendriya Vidyalaya took part in a cultural programme. Twelve employees were given away 'GM Meritorious' prizes. Contract workers were also awarded.

Sir Padampat Singhania Education Centre also celebrated the 75th Republic Day with

patriotic fervour on Friday. Principal Bhawna Gupta unfurled the national flag and saluted the efforts of national leaders who formulated and drafted the Constitution of India and helped build an independent, republican nation. School captain Sampoorna Rastogi also extended his greetings on the occasion and urged his school mates to join hands for a cleaner, brighter, healthier and prosperous India.

Meanwhile, Kanpur Development Authority organised Republic Day celebrations with fanfare and enthusiasm. Secretary Shatrohan Vaishya sung the national song along with officers and employees. He also paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi, former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. A cultural programme was also organised on the occasion.

Members of Inner Wheel Club of Kanpur Vidushi distributed tea and biscuits among the underprivileged people in Kidwai Nagar on the occasion of Republic Day on Friday. Secretary Saba Yunus, president Manisha Shukla, Seema Verma, Ruchi Agarwal, Manju Awasthi, Anita Nigam, Rashmi, Manju Nigam and Akanksha Shukla were the coordinators of the programme.

## Guj food titilates taste buds



PNS ■ VARANASI

Gujarati Food Festival was organised by Gujarat Tourism to celebrate the rich and diverse tastes of authentic Gujarati cuisine at Hotel Dharohar here on Saturday.

The venue was decorated with vibrant displays of Gujarati food culture, setting the stage for a flavourful exploration and the guests savoured an extensive array of traditional Gujarati snacks, including Mini Handvo, Patra, Khandvi, Dhokla, Khaman, Fulwadi, Batata Wada and Methina Gota. Each bite was a mosaic of flavours, reminiscent of the bustling markets and lively streets of Gujarat.

The main course presented an opulent spread, showcasing the diverse textures and tastes intrinsic to Gujarat's culinary heritage. From the refreshing Kobj no Sambhari to the comforting Falbhari and Bajri no Rotlo, every dish presented the culinary variety of Gujarat. The guests also relished dishes such as Sev Tameta nu Shak, Lasaniya Bataka, Ringan no Olo, Val, Mag ni Lachko Dal, Bhareli Dungal nu Shak, Gujarati

Kadhi, Rajwadi Kadhi, Bhat, Vagharelo Rotlo, Kachumber, Papad, Masala Chhachh and Athanu, amid delightful conversations. The food festival showcased a delectable assortment of tempting traditional Gujarati desserts, including Churma na Ladu, Lapsi, Anguri Basudi, Rajbhog Matho, Dudhi no Halvo and Sukhdi. Each sweet indulgence encapsulated the essence of Gujarat's rich sweet traditions, leaving an enduring and delightful aftertaste.

Varanasi Airport Director Punit Gupta, UP Tourism Deputy Director RK Rawat, Tourism Welfare Association president Rahul Mehta, Varanasi Tourism Guild secretary Anil Tripathi, IATO UP Chapter head Sushil Kumar, Varanasi Tourism Guild vice-president Jitendra Singh, IITFC UP Chapter president Vikram Malhotra, and IITFC secretary Ankit Singh Maurya were among the guests. Captivating videos showcased the intricate preparation of each dish, adding an immersive touch to the vibrant evening and taking the participants through a vivid journey of Gujarat's culinary history.

## Sanatan inter-sect conference today

Varanasi (PNS): On the 125th establishment anniversary of Ramakrishna Mission, a one-day 'Sanatan Dharmiya Antar-Sampraday Sammelan' (Sanatan religious inter-sect conference) will be organised in the premises of Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram at Luxa here on the occasion of Magh Krishna Tritiya Tithi Samvat 2080 (accordingly dated January 28) at 9 am.

According to ashram president Swami Vishwamanand, in the present context, it is necessary to integrate the various traditions and sects of Sanatan dharma to face the global challenges and this can be possible only through mutual coordination.

According to him, the theme of the conference itself is coordination and harmony among different sects of Sanatan dharma.

Programme organiser Swami Shastravidanand said that religious leaders of 12 major sects of Hindu religion would address the conference, organised in four sessions.

In the inaugural session, the chief speaker will be Swami Nikhileshwaranand, the president of Ramakrishna Math, Rajkot, Gujarat and famous orator (speaker) while the guest of honour will be Shankaracharya Swami Narendranand Saraswati of Urdhvamnaya Sumerupith. In the concluding session, the chief speaker will be Acharya Mahamandaleswar Swami Pranab Chaitanya Puri.

## Youth taking part in Tiranga Yatra dies of electrocution

Prayagraj (PNS): A youth participating in the 'Tiranga Yatra' on the occasion of Republic Day died of electrocution after having come in contact with a high-tension line late in Dabhaon Sanai area under Naini Kotwali police late on Friday evening. The mishap occurred when the participants were having a refreshment break at a tea shop. Adarsh (20) of Madakaini, Maduka Upahar (Naini) was carrying a flag, which touched the high-tension line and he suffered a powerful electric shock. A stampede-like situation ensued and Adarsh was rushed to a hospital, but he died on the way. A bike mechanic, Adarsh was the third among five siblings.

Meanwhile, 11 people were injured when a speeding truck hit a bus carrying pilgrims on the national highway under Handia police station on Saturday. Five of the injured were admitted to SRN Hospital as their condition was critical. A bus carrying around 40 pilgrims had left for pilgrimage from Maharashtra. After dargah, worship and tour of Pashupati Nath, Ayodhya,

Gangasagar and Kashi, the bus was coming to Prayagraj with devotees when a speeding truck coming from behind crashed into it on the national highway in Handia. SHO Suresh Singh said that on the receipt of information, police rushed to spot and sent all the injured to a hospital. However, he said, the condition of five injured pilgrims was critical, they were referred to SRN Hospital. The errant truck driver managed to flee after the accident leaving the truck on the spot. The truck has been impounded and a search has been launched to arrest the driver.

Meanwhile, a woman going to Sirsa on foot to take a bath in the Ganga was crushed to death by an unidentified vehicle near Barsait drain on Meja Road-Konhar Marg on Friday morning. She died on the spot. The victim was identified as Urmila Devi (50), wife of late Lalle Ram of Bhatauti (Jorari Ka Tara) under Meja police station. Meja Road police outpost in-charge Vikas Singh said the body was sent for post-mortem and an FIR was registered against the driver of the unknown vehicle.

## Lecture on digital marketing held

Varanasi (PNS): A guest lecture on 'Is Digital Marketing the only requisite for effective promotion in today's world' was organised by the Institute of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University (IM-BHU) on Saturday. The chief guest of the session was distinguished speaker Ravil Thakur, general manager (digital marketing), 20 Cubes Logistics. He was welcomed by institute's Director Prof SK Dubey and Dean Prof HP Mathur.

Addressing the session, Thakur spoke about his experience in the corporate indus-

try as marketer and his role in strategising traditional marketing and how it switched post pandemic using new tools like pop-up ads in digital marketing. He also provided insights of how to choose between marketing strategies based on business requirements and providing tailor-made solution as per requirements and introduction of term phygital (physical-digital) marketing in the pandemic era.

He discussed the switch in marketing spending from traditional to digital campaigns and how it was important for

understanding the nature of business before allocation of spending patterns.

The session was attended by Dr Shashi Srivastav Chakraborty, Student Advisor, and Dr VK Laheri.

Meanwhile, the first day of the 'Finding the Leader in You' (FLY) workshop at IM-BHU was conducted by Dr Viraj Vora. He did various activities with the students which included Voice and Motion, Toll Playing etc. Dr Vora made the students practice writing corporate emails and effective corporate communication.

## Cricket tournament: MBA team victorious

Kanpur (PNS): The MBA team of agri-business management department emerged victorious in the cricket tournament which concluded at CSA University here on Friday. The tournament which started on National Youth Day (January 12) witnessed the participation of 12 teams from different departments. The final was played on Republic Day between MBA and PhD teams. The MBA team won by 13 runs and was given a cash prize of Rs 10,000 along with the trophy by Vice-Chancellor Dr Anand Kumar Singh. The runners-up walked away with Rs 5,000 and a trophy. Kuldeep (MBA) was adjudged the 'Man of the Match', while the 'Man of the Series' honour was bagged by skipper Arjun Rana of PhD team.





# 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 Vishvanatha 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 Shivalinga 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 seamless and hassle free air travel which is purely voluntary.

"Consent of passenger is pre-requisite 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 yatis, 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 yatis, 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.



# Modi champions unity with call for One World, One Family, One Future

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted a host of measures taken by his government on Saturday to assert that it has empowered the youth and women, emphasising that a developed India will fulfill their dreams. “You are the architect of a developed India,” he told youngsters at the annual NCC-PM rally at the Cariappa Parade Ground. PM Modi witnessed a cultural programme and presented the Best Cadet Awards. He also flagged off the Mega Cyclothon by NCC Girls and the Nari Shakti Vandan Run (NSRV) from Jhansi to Delhi. The Prime Minister pointed out that the rally is strengthening the spirit of “one world, one family, one future”. He mentioned that in 2014, there were cadets from 10 countries in this rally; today, the number has gone up to 24.

Noting that the historic 75th Republic Day was dedicated to Nari Shakti,

Modi said that the country showcased the strides made by the daughters of India in every walk of life. He praised the cadets who were awarded on the occasion and acknowledged the Cycle groups from Vadodara and Kashi, mentioning his being an MP from both places.

Recalling the times when the role of women in society was limited to cultural arrangements and organisations, the Prime Minister said that the world today is witnessing the daughters of India proving their mettle in every field, be it land, sea, air, or space. The number of women in Central security forces has doubled in the last 10 years, Prime Minister Modi said, and added that states are also being encouraged to follow a similar path.

Modi outlined his vision for India's youth, emphasising their pivotal role in shaping the nation's future over the next 25 years. Speaking from the heart, Modi declared,



“This transformative era, the upcoming 25 years, will not only witness the creation of a developed India but will primarily benefit the youth, not Modi.”

Highlighting the youth as the primary beneficiaries of India's development journey,

the Prime Minister remarked, “The biggest beneficiaries of this era are young individuals like you.” He underscored the significance of continuous hard work, saying, “It will be imperative for all of you to consistently strive for excellence.”

“A digital revolution has been taking place, benefiting the creativity of the youth the most,” he said. A decade ago, people were struggling for 2G and 3G infrastructure, while now, 5G and optical fiber networks are reaching every village, Modi added.

In a swipe at previous dispensations, he mentioned that they deliberately neglected the development of border villages, referring to them as the last villages of the country. Modi said that his Government has taken up their development in a

significant way, and these villages will emerge as prominent tourist centres. He noted that these villages are now seen as the “first villages” of the country. The Government has launched a “vibrant village” programme for their development, he added.

The Prime Minister said India now has the third-largest start-up ecosystem, with over 1.25 lakh start-ups and more than 100 unicorns. He mentioned that lakhs of youngsters are getting quality jobs in these firms, asserting that the digital economy will become the new strength and identity of India's young power. “A worthy government makes decisions in the present while keeping future possibilities in mind and has its priorities clear,” he said.

India has now become the second-biggest mobile phone manufacturer and importer, making it more affordable for the country's youth, he added. Modi said that his government has also ensured

mobile data is available at a very affordable rate. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was also present at the event.

“The event includes a cultural program on the theme ‘Amrit Kaal Ki NCC,’ showcasing the contribution and empowerment of the Amrit Peedhi,” the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a release. PMO mentioned that in the true Indian spirit of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”, more than 2,200 NCC cadets and young cadets from 24 foreign countries are taking part in this year's rally. The event included a cultural programme on the theme “Amrit Kaal Ki NCC”, showcasing the contribution and empowerment of the Amrit Peedhi. As special guests, more than 400 Sarpanches of the Vibrant Villages and more than 100 women belonging to various self-help groups from different parts of the country will also attend the NCC PM Rally.

# Very much part of INDIA Bloc at national level: TMC

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Saturday asserted that its leader, Mamata Banerjee, has never indicated a departure from the Opposition bloc INDIA at the national level, despite recent announcements of the party's decision to contest the Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal alone.

On the ongoing speculation surrounding TMC's stance within the opposition front, spokesperson Kunal Ghosh emphasised that Banerjee only advocated the party's solo participation in the Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal owing to “unreasonable demands” from the Congress.

“Mamata Banerjee has



never said that we are not part of the opposition bloc in India. The name ‘INDIA’ for the opposition front was coined by our party supremo herself. We have only stated our intention to contest alone in Bengal due to unjustified demands

from the Congress and utterances of its state president Adhir Chowdhury,” Ghosh stated.

This clarification comes amid the backdrop of an impasse over seat-sharing between TMC and Congress,

with Banerjee's recent announcement of TMC's decision to go solo in Bengal.

In response, the Congress adopted a conciliatory tone, acknowledging Banerjee's significance within the opposition alliance INDIA, and expressing optimism about resolving the seat-sharing deadlock. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, on Thursday, expressed hope for a solution to the impasse.

Banerjee, while affirming TMC's commitment to the opposition alliance on Wednesday, clarified that the party would remain a part of the ‘INDIA’ bloc at the national level, indicating that strategic decisions would follow post-elections.

# NCC volunteers join fight against blood disorders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Setting an exemplary initiative among their peers across the country, several volunteers of National Cadet Corps (NCC) from Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have joined forces to help spearhead the Government's National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission (NSCEM) aiming to eradicate sickle cell disorder by 2047.

A pilot campaign was launched recently at the initiative of Major General Ajay Kumar Mahajan, Additional Director General in the two States, NCC Directorate involving NCC volunteers organizing various activities, including rallies, distribution of awareness materials, street plays,



and guest lectures by medical specialists. At least 1654 cadets participated in the campaign led by Lt (Dr) Chandra Bahadur Singh Dang, Associate NCC officer 1 MP CTR NCC, Ram Krishna Dharmarth Foundation University, highlighting the cadets' crucial role in spreading awareness and fostering a collective effort towards elimination of the blood disorder.

“With a mission to eliminate sickle cell & thalassemia disorder by 2047, the NCC cadets

have joined the forces to raise awareness and engage communities in the fight against the genetic disorders like sickle cell and thalassemia in the country,” said Lt (Dr) Dang.

“As envisioned by our Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government is committed to eliminate the disease before India celebrates its Amrit Kaal in 2047. We hope NCC Cadets from other States too will join the campaign and help eliminate these deadly genetic disorders,” he added.

In 2023, Modi had launched the NSCEM in Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh.

Lt (Dr) Dang added that around 5614 cadets of Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Raipur etc group in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh directorate participated at rallies, distributed awareness material, and held street plays among others.

“The programmes were in keeping with the Mission's aim of creating awareness in this direction among the masses, especially in tribal regions by ensuring Jan Bhagidari among others,” said Lt. (Dr) Dang who is also associated with Global Research and Welfare Society. The idea is to counter misconceptions among masses and bring them on board to develop a truly participative ecosystem for eliminating the disease, he added.

# RFID registration to begin soon: Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board

PTI ■ JAMMU

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board will start the RFID registration, which helps in managing long queues and chaotic conditions during peak rush, at Katra railway station soon, an official said on Saturday.

“Safety, convenience and ease of the devotees visiting the shrine remains the top priority of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB). Soon RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) registration will be started at Katra railway station which helps in managing long queue and chaotic conditions during peak rush,” Chief Executive Officer Anshul Garg said.

He said that several counters will be set up at the railway station for registration.

Garg, who is taking forward various development works to make pilgrims the best experience for the devotees coming from across the world, said, “The Board is also planning a laser show at Banganga based on Mata Ki Kahani for the pilgrims adopting conventional routes for the pilgrimage.”

In addition, holding areas are being developed at Adhkuwari having the capacity to accommodate about 2500 to 3,000 pilgrims at any point in time, the official said and added this will provide ease and comfort to the devotees besides ensuring effective crowd management.



Garg said the construction of a new Vaishnavi Bhawan, which can accommodate 300 pilgrims on a daily basis is bound to give a new shape and structure to the comforts and convenience of the pilgrims visiting the holy shrine.

“The building with a timeline of 18 months once completed shall have provisions for Bhojanalya coupled with washrooms, aimed at making the stay quite pleasant and congenial,” he added.

Garg said that based on the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Ujjain Mahakaleshwar Dham and Golden Temple, the illumination of façade by digital-led controlled, multi-coloured LED lights will be a permanent feature from the coming chaitra navratri at Darshni Deodi, Adhkuwari and main Bhawan.

These lights will reflect the grandeur of the shrine, he added. Garg underscored that Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has in its endeavor been developing and continually upgrading the pilgrim-centric facilities and with the deter-

mined efforts and blessings of Mata Vaishno Devi, the pilgrimage to the holy cave shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi had set a remarkable record in 2023 by witnessing the arrival of 95.22 lakh pilgrims, marking the highest number in the past decade.

He added that emphasis has been laid on yatra management for which adequate arrangements have been meticulously executed by the Board. “These include Skywalk at Mata Vaishno Devi Bhawan and the remodeled Parvati Bhavan which has proven to be instrumental in managing the surge in pilgrims. Besides, with the enlargement of the Atka area, the sitting capacity has been enhanced and every month about 20,000 to 25,000 pilgrims are able to attend the morning and evening prayers,” Garg said.

With the commencement of third langar facility at Bhairon Ji after Tarakote Marg and Sanjichhat, now about 8,000 to 10,000 pilgrims are availing free meals per day on the track, he added.

# Scientists find protein that can help prevent, control dengue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists have found a protein in the Aedes aegypti mosquitoes that could one day help prevent and control the infection from dengue virus. Dengue virus — from the genus flavivirus — causes dengue fever in humans and is spread from a bite of an infected female Aedes aegypti mosquito.

In 2023, over 5 million cases of dengue fever were reported globally. Currently, there is no specific treatment for dengue fever and the only dengue vaccine available, namely Dengvaxia, is for children who have previously been infected with dengue virus and living in areas where dengue is common.

The team from the National University of Singapore (NUS) revealed the structure and function of a pupal cuticle protein found in the exoskeleton — a hard covering that supports and protects the bodies of some types of invertebrate animals, especially arthropods — of Aedes aegypti mosquitoes.

The findings, which were published in Protein Science, suggest the potential of this cuticle protein as a target for developing innovative methods to control dengue virus infection.

“The findings indicate that pupal cuticle protein is a



potential target for developing inhibitors or antibodies to control dengue virus infection,” said Professor J Sivaraman, from the Department of Biological Sciences under the NUS Faculty of Science.

“These insights contribute to understanding the molecular dynamics of mosquito-virus interactions and open avenues for novel antiviral strategies,” he added.

Previous research has found that cuticle proteins from Aedes aegypti play a part in blocking infection of mosquito-borne viruses, such as Zika virus and West Nile virus, by interacting with the proteins on the surface of these viruses.

To begin exploring the role of the cuticle protein in inhibiting dengue virus infection, the NUS scientists employed a technique known as Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) spectroscopy which uses a powerful magnetic field to analyse the molecular structure of the cuticle protein, and found that the protein takes on a disordered structure.

# Bihar political...

From Page 1

However, the son of the late Ram Vilas Paswan did not disclose the details of his discussion with Shah and Nadda regarding political developments in the State.

Paswan and Upendra Kushwaha, who have been politically antagonistic to Nitish Kumar, have been approached by the BJP in the last few days. Paswan played a significant role in the JD(U)'s poor performance in the 2020 Assembly polls, leading to strained relations with the BJP before Kumar severed ties and allied with the RJD in 2022. BJP allies are concerned that Nitish Kumar's presence in the NDA may reduce their share of seats in the polls.

On Saturday, Nitish attended a few scheduled public programmes, while his deputy CM from the alliance partner RJD, Tejashwi Yadav, remained conspicuously absent. The attendees, however, included senior BJP leader and Union Minister Ashwini Kumar Choubey.

While the JDU, which was on a defensive note until a day earlier, maintained that the INDIA alliance is intact with the JDU as its major partner, on Saturday, it categorically held Congress responsible for the turn of events. TMC and AAP have also expressed their displeasure and announced plans to go it alone in the Lok Sabha polls this year.

JDU political adviser and spokesperson KC Tyagi told reporters in Delhi that the grand alliance government in Bihar is on the verge of collapse. He accused a section of the Congress leadership of repeatedly “insulting” Nitish Kumar. On the other hand, the Congress stated that their party chief, Mallikarjun Kharge, made several attempts to speak to Nitish Kumar, but each time it was conveyed that the CM was busy.

Both existing Mahagathbandhan partners, the RJD and the Congress, engaged in extensive deliberations over the course of action to be followed in the event of Nitish Kumar calling off the alliance and returning to the BJP-led NDA. Leaders of the RJD also gathered at the residence of national vice-president and former chief minister Rabri Devi, who shares her government bungalow with Tejashwi Yadav, her son, and husband Lalu Prasad, who is the party president.

RJD, with 79 MLAs, is the single largest party in the Assembly and leads the Mahagathbandhan, which includes the Congress and three Left parties. The Mahagathbandhan falls eight members short of the majority in the assembly if Nitish Kumar's JD(U) pulls out.

# Akhilesh offers 11...

From Page 1

Elaborating on the developments, the chief spokesperson of the Samajwadi Party, Rajendra Chaudhary, said, “We (Samajwadi Party) have offered 11 seats to them (the Congress) so that there is a respectable mutual coordination among us, and together we can defeat the BJP”.

Chaudhary also mentioned that the party's top leadership is in continuous contact with the Congress. He clarified that the number of seats offered, currently standing at 11, is not expected to increase in the future.

“We have allocated 11 seats to the Congress in Uttar Pradesh and seven seats to the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), making it a total of 18 seats. The Samajwadi Party plans to contest 62 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha election,” said the chief spokesperson of the SP.

In the current Lok Sabha, the Samajwadi Party holds three seats, while the Bahujan Samaj Party has 10 MPs. Sonia Gandhi is the lone Congress MP from the state, representing the Rae Bareilly constituency. The Apna Dal (Sonelal) has two MPs, and the BJP has 64 MPs from the state.

# Amit Shah meets...

From Page 1

Paswan insists that his faction should be given six seats, including Hajipur that his father had held eight times, and where Paras is the incumbent MP. Kumar's return has put Paswan in a corner, since his politics has

been centred around confrontation with the Bihar Chief Minister in the past four years.

He had walked out of the NDA in 2020 Bihar Assembly election and his party fielded several candidates against JD(U).

Speaking to reporters after the meetings with top BJP leaders, Paswan said that his party will take a “final stand” only after Nitish Kumar makes the formal announcement.

“We have shared our concerns, which have become more serious, in view of the

events in Patna over the last few days. Both Nadda and Shah have assured that all the issues we have flagged will be dealt with. So far, the situation is positive in the NDA. Our final stand will be clear in the coming days,” he said.

Paswan told media he would first wait to see whether the JDU president joins the BJP-led alliance or not before finalising his party's stand on the matter. Son of the late Ram Vilas Paswan however did not reveal what Shah and Nadda told him about political developments in the state.

# INDIAN NAVY...

From Page 1

“We are pleased to confirm that all crew on board the Marlin Luanda are safe and the fire in the cargo tank has been fully extinguished,” Traffigura said. “The vessel is now sailing towards a safe harbor.”

The ship, managed by a British firm, is carrying the Russian naphtha bound for Singapore, the company said. It described the flammable oil as being purchased below the price caps set by G7 sanctions placed on Russia over its ongoing war on Ukraine. It wasn't clear what environmental impact the attack had caused.

Houthi military spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree claimed the attack on the Marlin Luanda in a prerecorded statement late Friday, describing it as a “British oil ship.” He insisted such attacks would continue.

# Congress...

From Page 1

“That is why the BJP is trying to do too much. The BJP can't do that with us. We don't get scared. We will chase them away. We will take care of the BJP,” he said.

The DMK and the Congress, who are partners in the Tamil Nadu government, are set to hold the first round of formal seat-sharing talks for the 2024 Lok Sabha election in Chennai on Sunday. Kanappan said, “As far as the INDIA bloc is concerned, our leader spoke about it even a day back. Congress is a big and old party. I'm not denying that. But they have lost their strength.”

# CPI(M) goons attack...

From Page 1

Interestingly, earlier this week, Union Minister of State V Muraleedharan had said that the life of Governor Arif Mohammed Khan was in danger and that his security needed to be increased.

The attack on the Governor on Saturday is being viewed as a consequence of the speech he delivered during the Republic Day Parade in Thiruvananthapuram, where he called for a cessation of political and external interferences in institutions of higher learning to maintain their autonomy.

A disgruntled Vijayan, popularly known as Karana Bhoothan, was observed walking away once the function concluded.

Later in the day, Education Minister V Sivankutty and the party's State secretary MV Govindan were deployed by Karana Bhoothan to confront the Governor, which they did with finesse.

The duo urged the Centre to abolish the post of Governor, deeming it an inconsequential position. Student wing leader of the CPI(M) PM Arsho blamed the Governor for Saturday's incident. “Arif Mohammed Khan does not possess the qualities to be the Governor of this State.



# CHINESE DIPLOMAT URGES WASHINGTON NOT TO SUPPORT TAIWAN INDEPENDENCE

AP ■ BEIJING

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told US national security adviser Jake Sullivan that Washington should stand by a commitment not to support independence for Taiwan, during their high-level talks in the Thai capital, the Chinese foreign ministry said Saturday.

Wang said that Taiwan's recent election didn't change the fact that the island is part of China and the biggest challenge in U.S.-China relations is the issue of "Taiwan independence," according to a statement from the ministry.

US President Joe Biden has said he does not support Taiwanese independence, but

U.S. law requires a credible defense for Taiwan and for Washington to treat all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern."

Wang also said that both sides should use the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries this year as an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and treat each other as equals, rather than adopting a condescending attitude.

Both sides should "be committed to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation, building a correct way for China and the US to interact," the statement quoted Wang as saying.

Wang and Sullivan met in Bangkok on Friday and Saturday, with statements from both governments hailing their discussions as "candid, substantive and constructive." The two previously met on the Mediterranean island nation of Malta and in Vienna last year before a high-profile meeting between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in November.

During the November talks, both sides showcased modest agreements to combat illegal fentanyl and reestablish military communications, keeping the relationship from getting any worse. But the meeting failed to resolve any of their major differences, many

of which have international implications.

In a White House statement on Saturday about the meeting, Sullivan stressed the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and in recent years has shown its displeasure at political activities in Taiwan by sending military planes and ships. Earlier on Saturday, Taiwan's defense ministry said China had sent more than 30 warplanes and a group of navy ships toward the island during a 24-hour period, including 13 warplanes that crossed the midline of the Taiwan Strait — an unofficial

boundary that's considered a buffer between its territory and the mainland.

Taiwan has said six Chinese balloons either flew over the island or through airspace just north of it, days after the self-governing island elected Lai Ching-te as the new president. Lai's Democratic Progressive Party largely campaigned on self-determination, social justice and a rejection of China's threats.

Apart from cross-strait issues, the officials also touched on other issues, including Russia's war against Ukraine, the Middle East, North Korea, the South China Sea, and Myanmar, the White House said.

Sullivan highlighted that although Washington and Beijing are in competition, both sides have to "prevent it from veering into conflict or confrontation," it added.

Both sides agreed that the two presidents would keep regular contact, provide strategic guidance on bilateral relations and promote exchanges between the U.S. and China in different areas and levels, the Chinese ministry said. Both sides will start a joint working group on anti-drug cooperation in the near future and hold the first meeting of the China-U.S. dialogue mechanism on artificial intelligence this spring, it added.

# No evidence of POWs killed in Russian plane crash: Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

Officials in Ukraine said Russia has provided no credible evidence to back its claims that their own forces shot down a military transport plane carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war who were to be swapped for Russian POWs.

The Ukrainian agency that deals with prisoner exchanges said late Friday that Russian officials had "with great delay" provided it with a list of the 65 Ukrainians who Moscow said had died in the Wednesday plane crash in Russia's Belgorod region. Ukraine's Coordination Staff for the Treatment of Prisoners of War said relatives of the named POWs were unable to identify their loved ones in crash site photos provided by Russian authorities. The agency's update cited Ukraine's military intelligence chief, Kyrylo Budanov, as saying that Kyiv had no verifiable information about who was on the plane.

Belgorod region posted a video Wednesday that showed a plane falling from the sky in a snowy, rural area, and a huge ball of fire erupting where it apparently hit the ground.

Kyiv has neither confirmed nor denied that its forces downed a Russian military transport plane that day, and Russia's claim that the crash killed Ukrainian POWs could not be independently verified. Earlier Friday, Mykola Oleshchuk, Ukraine's air force commander, described Moscow's assertion as "rampant Russian propaganda."

Ukrainian officials earlier this week confirmed that a prisoner swap was due to happen Wednesday but said it was called off. They said Moscow did not ask for any specific stretch of airspace to be kept safe for a certain length of time, as it has for past prisoner exchanges.

An International Committee of the Red Cross spokesperson in Ukraine urged Russia on Friday night to return the bodies of any POWs who might have died in the plane crash. In a live interview with the US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Red Cross Media Relations Officer Oleksandr Vlasenko also remarked that "very little time" had passed between the initial reports of the incident and Moscow declaring it was ready to return the bodies of the Ukrainian POWs.

While Ukraine and Russia regularly exchange the bodies of dead soldiers, each trade has required considerable preparation, Vlasenko said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called for an international investigation into the crash. Russia has sole access to the crash site.

Social media users in the

# Trump ordered to pay \$83.3m in defamation case

AP ■ NEW YORK

A jury awarded USD 83.3 million to E. Jean Carroll on Friday in a stinging and expensive rebuke to former President Donald Trump for his continued social media attacks against the longtime advice columnist over her claims that he sexually assaulted her in a Manhattan department store.

The award, when coupled with a USD 5 million sexual assault and defamation verdict last year from

It was the second time in nine months that a civil jury returned a verdict related to Carroll's claim that a flirtatious, chance encounter with Trump in 1996 at Bergdorf Goodman's Fifth Avenue store ended violently. She said Trump slammed her against a dressing room wall, pulled down her tights and forced himself on her.

In May, a different jury awarded Carroll USD 5 million. It found Trump not liable for rape, but responsible for sexually abusing Carroll and then defaming her by claiming she made it up. He is appealing that award, too.

Trump is also awaiting a verdict in a New York civil fraud trial, where state lawyers are seeking the return of USD 370 million in what they say were ill-gotten gains from loans and deals made using financial statements that exaggerated his wealth.



Carroll, 80, clutched her lawyers' hands and smiled as the seven-man, two-woman jury delivered its verdict. Minutes later, she shared a weepy three-way hug with her attorneys.

She declined comment as she left the Manhattan federal courthouse, but issued a statement later through a publicist, saying: "This is a great victory for every woman who stands up when she's been knocked down, and a huge defeat for every bully who has tried to keep a woman down."

Trump had attended the trial earlier in the day, but stormed out of the courtroom during closing arguments read by Carroll's attorney. He returned for his own attorney's closing argument and for a portion of the deliberations, but left the courthouse a half hour before the verdict was read.

"Absolutely ridiculous!" he said in a statement shortly afterward. "Our Legal System is out of control, and being used as a Political Weapon."

As for Trump's ability to pay, he reported having about \$294 million in cash or cash equivalents on his most recent annual financial statement, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. Testifying at his civil fraud trial last November, he Trump boasted: "I have very little debt, and I have a lot of cash." Trump skipped the first Carroll trial. He later expressed regret for not attending and insisted on testifying in the second trial, though the judge limited what he could say, ruling he had missed his chance to argue that he was innocent. He spent only a few minutes on the witness stand Thursday, during which he denied attacking Carroll, then left court grumbling "this is not America."

# Israel presses on with war against Hamas

AP ■ RAFA (GAZA STRIP)

Two women and a man were killed early on Saturday in what witnesses said was an Israeli airstrike on a home in the southernmost part of Gaza, as Israel pursued its military offensive against the Palestinian enclave.

The strike came less than a day after the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza. As part of its binding ruling, the top United Nations court asked Israel for a compliance report in a month, meaning the military's conduct will be under increasing scrutiny.

The court stopped short of ordering a cease-fire, but the orders its judges issued were in part a stinging rebuke of the army's conduct so far in Israel's nearly 4-month-long war against Gaza's Hamas rulers. Friday's decision came in a case brought by South Africa, which alleged Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian territory's

people, a charge Israel vehemently denies.

The war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85 per



cent of a population of 2.3 million people. It was triggered by an unprecedented Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7 in which militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took about 250 hostages.

The overall Palestinian

death toll in the war rose to 26,257 as of Saturday, with 174 deaths over the past day, the Health Ministry in Gaza said. The ministry does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count, but has said

about two-thirds are women and children. It said the total number of wounded surpassed 64,000.

Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, saying the militants embed themselves in buildings used by civil-

ians. Israel says its air and ground offensive in Gaza has killed more than 9,000 militants.

Bilal al-Siksis, who lost his wife, a son and a daughter in Saturday's strike in Rafah, a town on Gaza's border with Egypt, said the decision by the world court meant little since it did not stop the war.

"No one can speak in front of them (Israel). America with all its greatness and strength can do nothing," he said as he stood beside the pile of rubble and twisted metal that was once his home. "What can people do, who have no power or anything?" He said his family was asleep when their residence was struck. Rafah and its surrounding areas are crammed with more than 1 million people after the Israeli military ordered civilians to seek refuge there from the fighting elsewhere in the territory. Despite those orders, the designated evacuation areas have repeatedly come under airstrikes, with Israel saying it would go after militants as needed.

# ICJ ruling vindicated us: SA Prez Ramaphosa

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

President Cyril Ramaphosa has said the International Court of Justice's ruling has vindicated South Africa's unprecedented decision to charge Israel of genocide during its military offensive against Hamas in Gaza and marked an important first step in its quest to secure justice for the Palestinians.

The top UN court on Friday stopped short of ordering a ceasefire in Gaza but demanded that Israel try to contain death and damage in its military offensive. South Africa, which brought the case, had asked for the court to order Israel to halt its military operations against Hamas militants. The top UN Court court decided not to throw out genocide charges against Israel for its military offensive in Gaza, as part of a preliminary decision in the case.

In a national TV broadcast on Friday evening, Ramaphosa said the ruling of the International Court of Justice is "a victory for international law, for human rights, and above all, for justice."

"The court has concluded that pursuant to Article 9 of the (1948 Genocide) Convention, it has jurisdiction to adjudicate our application. The effect of the order that the ICJ has granted today is that there is a plausible case of genocide. This follows the unprecedented action taken by South Africa to take another country to the International Court of Justice," he said.

The president said the ICJ ruling marked an important first step in South Africa's quest to secure justice for the people of Gaza.

"Some have told us to mind our own business. Others have said it was not our place. And yet it is very much our place, as people who know too well the pain of dispossession, discrimination, and state-sponsored violence.

"We are also a people who were the victims of the crime of apartheid. We know what apartheid looks like. We experienced and lived through it. Sadly, many people died and were exiled like

our beloved leader Oliver Tambo and others, others were jailed, like the father of our democracy (Nelson Mandela) and others were maimed," Ramaphosa said.

He said, "We, as South Africans, will not be passive bystanders and watch the crimes that were visited upon us being perpetrated elsewhere. We stand on the side of freedom for all. We stand on the side of justice"

The war between Israel and Hamas began on October 7 after Hamas' attack in which around 1,200 Israelis were killed.

Since then, Israel has been continuously attacking Gaza with the country's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressing that they will continue its war till victory is achieved despite "international pressure". Since Israel started bombarding the Gaza strip, some 26,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to the Gaza health authority.

Paraphrasing a statement by Nelson



Mandela made 30 years ago when he was elected South Africa's first democratically elected president, Ramaphosa said, "We say again today, never, never and never again shall it be that acts of genocide are perpetrated with impunity as we, the international community look on."

The president said he firmly believed that following this judgment there should now be a more concerted effort towards a ceasefire.

"Negotiations should commence on a permanent two-state solution, to enable Israel and Palestine to live side by side as independent states," he said as he thanked those in the international community who had supported South Africa's application to the ICJ.

"We will not waver in our commitment to the Palestinian people and their quest for self-determination. Our own painful history obliges us to do no less. We thank the International Court of Justice for upholding its role of achieving justice, promoting peace, preventing genocide and holding those guilty of genocide accountable," Ramaphosa said.

# Pak seeks \$2 billion loan from China

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Cash-strapped Pakistan has sought financial assistance of USD 2 billion from its close ally China for a year, according to a media report on Saturday.

Carretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar, in a letter, has requested his Chinese Premier Li Qiang to roll over the debt as soon as the deposit time for the loan from China is completed on March 23.

In his letter, Kakar expressed gratitude to China for its financial assistance to Pakistan during its economic crisis as the cash-strapped country has secured a safe deposit of a total of USD 4 billion in loans from China, reducing the country's mounting pressure on external debt payments and stabilising its foreign exchange reserves, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Earlier this month, the UAE rolled over Pakistan's maturing loan of USD 2 billion. Apart from the UAE, Saudi Arabia has deposited USD 5 billion with the State Bank of Pakistan.

Following the loan rollover by the UAE, the interim government requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to dispatch a new mission this month for talks for the last loan tranche of USD 1.2 billion. The IMF's next mission is critical for not only securing the last loan tranche but also for beginning negotiations for a new long-term programme.

While speaking to a private TV news channel recently, former finance minister Ishaq Dar said in case his party – the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)

– won the elections and formed the government, the decision about the new IMF programme would be made at the earliest. Dar, the four-time finance minister of the country, added that in case his party decided not to enter the IMF programme, it would immediately start implementing the belt-tightening measures.

The IMF has made new adjustments in its fresh staff-level report about the available financing to Pakistan.

The Washington-based lender has increased the projection of budget support loans to USD 3 billion but cut the project financing to USD 3.7 billion for this fiscal year. The overall external financing requirements have been reduced to a little under USD 25 billion with minor downward adjustments in the current account deficit projections, the report said.

The report suggested the global lender had made a minor adjustment of USD 575 million in its current account deficit projection in comparison with July's estimates.

The IMF has now projected the deficit at USD 5.7 billion or 1.6 per cent of the GDP – an estimate that appeared on the higher end. Pakistan is in economic ruin and awaiting a monumental financial default without long overdue structural reforms sought by global creditors such as the IMF and the World Bank, along with bilateral partners like China and the UAE. The primary reason behind Pakistan's economic woes is its staggering debt levels, which, as of 2023, amount to nearly USD 125 billion owed to external creditors, with approximately one-third to China.

# Sharif's party to focus on revival of Pak's economy

PTI ■ LAHORE

Focus on bringing Pakistan's economy back on track, the message of peace to India, a vow to combat climate change, and zero-tolerance towards terrorism are the highlights of the manifesto unveiled by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's party on Saturday.

With less than two weeks before the February 8 general elections, Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) manifesto promises to send a "message of peace" to other countries, including India, on the condition that New Delhi revert its August 2019 action on Kashmir, Dawn.com reported, quoting the manifesto.

The manifesto also vows to combat the impacts of climate change and a "zero-tolerance policy" towards terrorism, it said.

Released at a special event here in the provincial capital of Punjab, the PML-N later shared the detailed manifesto titled 'Pakistan ko Nawaz do' on its official X account.

If voted to power, the party vowed to provide the public with cheap and increased electricity as well as speedy development. Its promises include a 20 to 30 per cent reduction in power bills, a 15,000 megawatt-increase in electricity production, and a 10,000 MW production of solar energy," the Dawn newspaper reported.



Revelers march during a traditional carnival to celebrate the departing winter and forthcoming spring in the village of Hanry, Czech Republic on Saturday. The carnival is part of a centuries old tradition called the Shrovetide Procession which takes place in Eastern Bohemia near the end of winter and before Christian Lent. Experts trace the event, also known as Masopust, with its vibrant colors and archaic masks to pre-Christian paganism, then common in the area.

AP/PTI

# Tuvalu's PM loses his seat in crucial poll

AP ■ SYDNEY

Prime Minister Kausea Natano reportedly lost his seat in parliament in elections on the tiny Pacific island nation of Tuvalu.

The election for the 16-seat parliament, which could have implications for China, Taiwan and Australia, saw eight new-

comers win seats, according to Radio New Zealand. The report couldn't be independently confirmed. Tuvalu, with just over 11,500 people, is one of the smallest nations in the world. But the election has gained international attention because Tuvalu, a British colony until 1978, is one of only 12 countries that have

official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, the self-governing democratic island that China claims as its territory.

Natano is a supporter of Taiwan. Another contender for the top job, the reelected Finance Minister Seve Paeniu, has said he wants to review Tuvalu's relationships with both Taiwan and

China.

The elections come as China, the United States and others wrangle for influence in the strategically crucial region. But China has been putting pressure on supporters of Taiwan. Nauru, for instance, another small Pacific nation, recently switched its support from Taiwan to China.

# Gunmen kill 9 on Iran-Pak border area

AP ■ TEHRAN

Unknown gunmen on Saturday shot to death nine people in the southeastern part of Iran that borders Pakistan, media reports said.

A report by the semi-official Mehr news agency said the shooting took place in a home near the town of Saravan, in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province. It added that the victims were not Iranian.

No official news outlet reported the shooting and no group has yet taken responsibility for the attack.

HalVash, an advocacy group for the Baluch people, shared images online that appeared to be bodies of victims and said three more people were wounded. It said they were Pakistani nationals and identified four of them, saying all the victims were workers at an auto repair shop.

Last week, Pakistan launched retaliatory strikes on the same area, allegedly targeting militant hideouts, an attack that killed at least nine people.

The strikes followed Iran's attack Tuesday on Pakistani soil that killed two children in the southwestern Baluchistan province.

The tit-for-tat attacks appeared to target two Baluch militant groups with similar separatist goals on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border. The two countries have accused each other of providing safe haven to the groups in their respective territories.

On Friday, media reports said both nations' ambassadors resumed activities in each other's capital that were idled following the attacks.



"People take different roads seeking fulfilment 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 LAKSHIYA

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



Tilla 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 questioningly 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 Shaikat 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

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.

# 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.

## 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.



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.



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.

India's current tariff duty structure on medical device imports is very high. This high customs duty regime adversely impacts the costs of medical devices which contradicts the government's efforts to provide low-cost healthcare available to the masses through schemes like the Ayushman Bharat program (PMJAY). Therefore, we request the government that for products where the ability to import substitutes is still some time away, the customs duty rate should be reduced

## DOCTORSPEAK

### TIPS TO KEEP YOUR NEWBORN SAFE DURING WINTER

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.

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.



DR RAGHURAM MALLAIAH  
Senior Director Neonatology,  
Fortis la Femme, New Delhi

## 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.

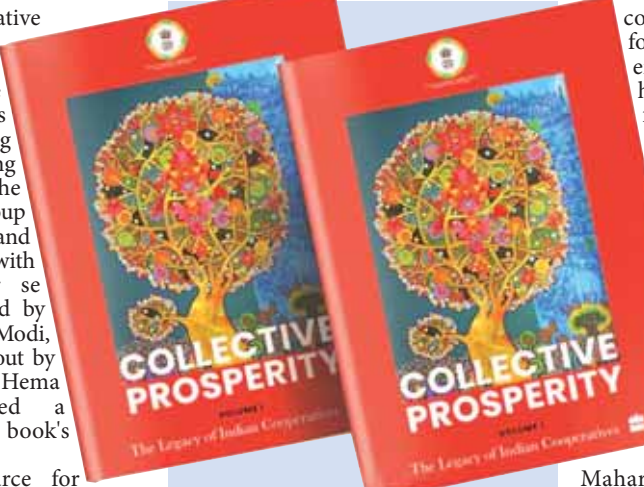
The volume is the maiden effort by the institute highlighting the best practices in the sector to help the other aspirants to take a cue.

One is therefore little surprised, as we delve into its pages, we embark on a journey treasured 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 Cooperativm 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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Author: Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of  
Cooperative Management team  
Pages: 217 | Price: ₹799

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 their 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-Balochistan 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-Balochistan 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 Anwar 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.

(The writer is a Senior Faculty at the Department of Political Science in the School of Liberal Education, Galgotias University, Greater Noida.)

**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**



BK SINGH

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)





**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

Human mind is driven by sense of relativity, which makes you look at the same issue in different perspectives, sometime even strikingly opposite. That puts you in a comparison mode when you start weighing and judging to form your individualistic perception. That varies from person-to-person according as indwelling thought construct in mind developed during a long stretch of time in the past. That makes each being unique, reflecting varying mind traits – desire trends, likes, dislikes, prejudices, passions, and such habit tendencies. That induces each unitary mind conduct a particular way. Being in comparison mode breeds in sense of divide, which remains the cause of all internal and societal conflicts. Internal conflicts coupled with desire element often leads to such unseemly and untimely acts as would cause failures and frustrations, and thereby self-invited

praises, and sufferings in life. Amidst all the conflicting views, we are to make choices, an exclusive human privilege. For, all other species are bound by their predetermined nature, with no scope for making any exception. They go by their instinct. They can't judge whether their actions are right or wrong. So, the law of Karma doesn't apply to them. Human beings on the contrary are bound by cause-effect chain. For, whenever choice comes into play, the probability of its use and misuse becomes equal. And there is no scope for having a free lunch in this life. We will have to own up responsibility for the choices made and actions thereto, and bear with its consequences – good or bad – which runs in succession. To overcome this vulnerability, human beings are also empowered with the faculty of discriminate intelligence. Applying which, you can dispassionately analyse,



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 birth's 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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# 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 tweakers 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.



## India A beat England Lions by innings and 16 runs

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

A fine all-round performance powered India 'A' to an innings and 16-run win over England Lions in the second 'unofficial Test' here on Saturday.

The win also helped the hosts take an unassailable 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

The hosts dismissed England Lions for 321 in their second innings with Arshdeep Singh (2/62) and Yash Dayal (1/37) claiming the wickets of overnight batters Ollie Robinson (85) and Tom Lawes (32) respectively to complete the win.

Starting the day at 304/8, England Lions' resistance lasted just 5.2 overs as Arshdeep had Robinson caught by wicketkeeper Upendra Yadav in the 88th over.

Lawes added 14 runs to his overnight score of 18 before Dayal got rid of him with Akash Deep taking the catch.

Sarfraz Khan was adjudged the Player of the Match for his 161-run knock which steered India 'A' to 489 in their first innings. Devdutt Padikkal too flourished with the bat, making 105.

Left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar was the other star performer as he claimed his 22nd five-wicket haul to put India 'A' on the cusp of the win. Akash Deep snapped six wickets in total to contribute to the team's cause. The first unofficial Test ended in a draw. The two teams will face off in the third and final match starting February 1.

Brief Scores:  
England Lions 152 and 321 all out in 90.2 overs (Ollie Robinson 85, Tom Lawes 32; Saurabh Kumar 5/104, Akash Deep 2/57).

# 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 some pills towards the fag end of the day, and Mhambrey attributed it to cramps.

## Australia needs 156 runs to beat West Indies

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 Cameroon 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 Cameroon 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.

# 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.

## U-19 WORLD CUP

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, Rayaan 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 Saatheesh.

## Aryna beats Zheng 6-3, 6-2 to clinch back to back Australian Open titles

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Aryna Sabalenka clinched back-to-back Australian Open titles with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Zheng Qinwen on Saturday in a one-sided women's final. The No. 2-seeded Sabalenka broke Zheng's serve in the second game and took the first set in 33 minutes. She broke again to start the second set and maintained her dominance throughout against the No. 12-seeded Zheng.


"It's been an amazing couple of weeks. It's an unbelievable feeling right now," Sabalenka said in the trophy presentation. "As usual,



my speech is going to be weird - it's not my super power."

Only two things slowed down Sabalenka's progress Saturday to her second Grand Slam singles title.

The 25-year-old Sabalenka improved to two wins in three Grand Slam finals, all in a span of 13 months. She beat Elena Rybakina a year ago for the title in Australia.



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