



OPINION 6

INDIAN DIPLOMACY:  
LEVERAGING SOFT POWER

WORLD 8

HALEY HAMMERS TRUMP FOR  
BEING ALL ABOUT HIMSELF

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY HIT  
RECORD HIGH

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KAPIL BACKS BCCI  
STRICTNESS ON  
DOMESTIC CRICKET

12 SPORTS

Modi Presides Over  
Lok Sabha Probables



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP National President JP Nadda, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and others during the BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting to finalise the first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, in New Delhi

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) convened a meeting late Thursday night at its Delhi headquarters, with deliberations led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, regarding their first list of candidates running late into the night, suggesting the inclusion of several high-profile leaders in the first list. The CEC members, including Modi, the party's national president JP Nadda, and Union Ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh, deliberated on potential candidates for States like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, and Uttarakhand, among others, to finalise

the nominees. The CEC meeting, which began around 10:30 pm on Thursday, lasted for more than five hours. Before that, Shah and Nadda had met Modi at his residence to hold consultations, sources said. According to sources, the party may announce a list of 100-120 candidates in its first list. The party is likely to announce its candidates on "weak seats" in Uttar Pradesh before the Election Commission releases dates for the Lok Sabha elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP will not contest

from all 80 seats and will reserve some for its potential allies like Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). In the last poll body meet, 56 UP seats were finalised.

The BJP, according to sources, employed a multi-layered and exhaustive process, encompassing public feedback, internal evaluations, and high-level strategic discussions, to select the candidates poised to represent the party in the upcoming electoral battle. Sources said the BJP has harnessed technology to solicit feedback from the grassroots level.



CM inaugurates Ambedkar Bus Terminal

All modern facilities available

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated a state-of-the-art Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Bus Terminal at Baramunda here on Friday.

Patnaik said the bus terminus, which would serve the commuters with all modern facilities, would remain a landmark in development initiatives of the State Government. It is a tribute to the founder of the Indian Constitution BR Ambedkar.

The CM further said the passengers would get airport like amenities here and all fa-



cilities have been made for their comfort.

The terminal has 44 active bus bays while five bays are reserved for city bus services and 111 bays for idle parking.

It has provision for over 100 auto-rickshaws' and 20 taxis' parking spaces along with

space for 85 two-wheeler parking.

The ground floor of the terminal has the facilities of dormitory for passengers, drink-from-tap, a cloak room, pre-paid auto service, ATM and a baby feeding room. The first floor houses other provisions

including a multi-cuisine food-court, an Aahaar Kendra, a Mission Shakti Kiosk, children's play area, a wellness centre, a police outpost, a Control Command Centre, an OTDC Travel Kiosk and a Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Gallery.

CM inaugurates, lays stone for 32 projects

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday inaugurated nine industrial projects and performed groundbreaking ceremony of 23 industrial units through videoconferencing.

These projects with a total investment of Rs 6992.94 crore and employment potential of 24,508 are spread

over the districts of Balangir, Boudh, Cuttack, Ganjam, Jajpur, Jagatsinghpur, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Khordha, Puri, Rayagada, Sambalpur, Subarnapur and Sundargarh.

The projects inaugurated included Bhaskar Steels and Ferro Alloys Private Limited in Sundargarh, Masjh Biofuels Pvt Ltd in Subarnapur, Chalah Infratech

Pvt Ltd in Khordha, Aditya Birla Renewables Limited in Balangir, ABIS Exports Pvt Ltd in Jajpur, Sigma Tubes and Pipes Pvt Ltd in Sambalpur, NK Anand Footwears in Khordha, Mayfair Hotels and Resorts Ltd in Jharsuguda.

"Our industrial portfolio is expanding with the inclusion of new age and employment-intensive sectors such

as green energy equipment manufacturing, textiles, and tourism. The continuous improvement in the Ease of Doing Business ranking of the state, coupled with a business-friendly environment, world-class industrial infrastructure, and highly-sought-after skill development initiatives, has been instrumental in attracting investments to Odisha," the Chief Minister said.



KALIA: Empowering Over 64 Lakh  
Farmers & Landless Agricultural  
Households

DSPL-759



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- Scholarships for KALIA Beneficiaries' Children for Professional and Technical Studies
- Tailored Assistance for Cultivation and Sustainable Living

- Additional Financial Support of ₹ 2000 to 18 Lakh and Above Eligible Landless Agriculture Households
- KALIA Centre: One-stop Resource Centre to Resolve Farming-related Issues



# 1,152 Lecturers, officers join govt service

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As many as 1,152 new Lecturers, officers and staffs joined the Odisha Government service on Friday. An orientation programme for them was organised at the State Convention Centre and the Rabindra Mandap here in the presence of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Out of the 1,152 recruits, 997 are Lecturers in non-government aided colleges, 57 Inspectors of Cooperative Societies, 57 Gram Panchayat Development Officers and 31 district-level Group-C personnel in the Information and Public Relations Department.

The Chief Minister advised all to follow the 5T mantra of

## Non-OTET Gana Sikhyaks' pay hiked

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday announced a hike in the salary of Gana Sikhyaks who have not passed the Odisha Teacher Eligibility Test (OTET).

As per the announcement, their salary was increased from Rs 7,000 to Rs 10,000. This move will benefit as many as 1121 Gana Sikhyaks in the State.

The CM further announced that Gana Sikhyaks who have passed the OTET would be regularised in service as Med Teachers (Ex-Cadre). This would benefit 1,472 Gana Sikhyaks.

This apart, the Assistant Teachers (Ex-Cadre) who have passed the OTET and are not getting annual increment will receive the increment every year. It will benefit 9,520 such teachers.

governance in their workplaces. He said his government has pioneered transformative governance under its 5T ini-

tiative. This initiative has fast-tracked development projects bringing transformation in every sector and empowered ev-

## Law officers' fees hiked by 50%

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government on Friday hiked the daily and retainer fees of non-cadre law officers in various courts by 50 per cent.

This would benefit as many as 1,215 law officers working in different courts across the State.

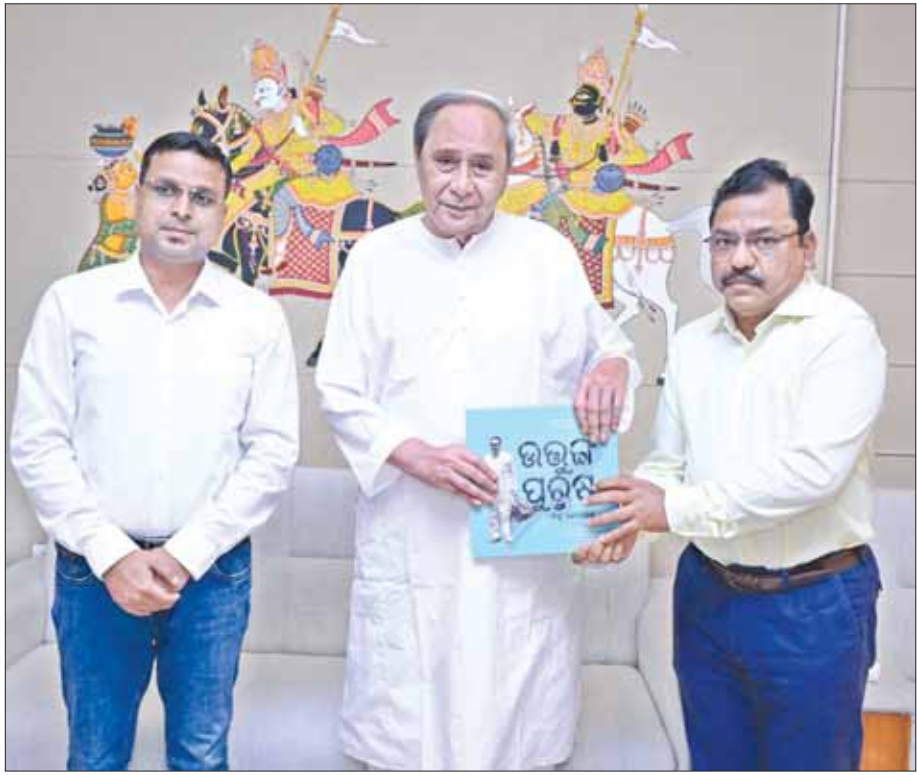
Due to the move, 184 Additional Public Prosecutors will get Rs 1,875 from Rs 1,250 as daily fees. Their retainer fees increased from Rs 8,200 to Rs

12,300.

Similarly, the daily fees of 740 Assistant Public Prosecutors increased to Rs 1,650 from Rs 1,100 and retainer fees to Rs 6,000 from Rs 4,000. The 85 Special Public Prosecutors, who were earlier getting Rs 1,250 daily fee will now get Rs 1,875. Their retainer fees increased to Rs 12,300 from Rs 8,200.

Moreover, 29 Government Pleaders and 113 Assistant Government Pleaders will receive Rs 12,300 as retainer fee.

resulted in the desired transformation, making Odisha one of the fastest-developing States in the country.



Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik releases an Odia version of book "The Tall Man" about Biju Patnaik at the Naveen Niwas on Friday.  
Pioneer photo

## Murmu graces Brahma Kumaris' golden jubilee



PNS ■ CUTTACK

President Droupadi Murmu graced the golden jubilee celebration of Brahma Kumaris here on Friday.

She said many spiritual and religious institutions are working to spread spiritual consciousness in India. Brahma Kumaris are also spreading eternal Indian values like non-violence, peace, harmony, brotherhood and tolerance in India and abroad. The Brahma Kumaris organisation is also working towards publicising yoga and meditation across the

world.

The President said people today think that happiness means only materialistic happiness. "We can attain real happiness only when we limit our material desires," she said.

Murmu said Dharma is a way of life and Brahma Kumaris are making efforts to make people realise their purpose of life.

She said a person need not leave his worldly duties to follow the path of spirituality. By adopting the righteous way of living and helping others, people can be happy and remain peaceful.

## OPCC vice-president Rajat quits party

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a setback to the Congress ahead of the elections, senior leader Rajat Choudhury on Friday resigned from the primary membership of the party with immediate effect.

Choudhury was the vice-president of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC).

"With a heavy heart, I am submitting my resignation with immediate effect. I was working for the party for last 24 years with different positions," Choudhury wrote in the resignation letter.

He had earlier worked as the president of the Youth Congress' Odisha unit from 2014



to 2016 and was later appointed as a general secretary of the OPCC.

"I feel that Congress can't fight against BJD and BJP in Odisha. The party lacks effective strategy for the upcoming elections. It is not conducting any programme against the State Government. I can't compromise, for which I decided to quit the party," he said.

## Robbed by cab driver in Puri, Dutch national seeks govt help

PNS ■ PURI

An elderly man from Netherlands, who has been stranded in Puri for nearly two months, has sought the Odisha Government's help to return to his country after he was reportedly robbed of all cash by a cab driver.

The Dutch national Anthony Von Arkel (72) was not just looted but also hoodwinked by the accused into landing up in Delhi instead of Mumbai on the pretext of reclaiming his lost items. In his appeal to the government, Anthony stated that while his tickets for Nagpur-Qatar-Netherlands has been done for March 15, he has no money to go to Nagpur from Puri.

As per reports, Anthony landed in Bhubaneswar for an Odisha tour on December 18. He then hired a cab and toured



Jajpur, Taptapani, Gopalpur and Chilika before arriving at Puri on January 9. In Puri, he stayed at Hotel Toshali. The next day, as he needed cash and had to convert the foreign currency, he booked a cab bearing number OD-02-BU-8723 and went to Bhubaneswar. After getting the foreign exchange worth Rs 3.87 lakh done, he took the same cab to visit Bhitarkanika and Similipal. However, near Chandbali, Anthony got down to relieve himself. To his utter

shock, he found the bag containing cash empty when he returned. When he questioned the driver, the latter dismissed the allegation.

As Anthony was getting into an argument, the driver somehow pacified him by assuring help and brought him to his relatives' house in a slum in Bhubaneswar where they stayed on January 11 and 12. The driver then took Anthony to his two-storied house in Puri's Baliapanda area and told him that he had received a call from Mumbai to reclaim the missing cash. He then made Anthony board a train to Delhi by assuring him that he was in the next coach, but then fled the scene. When Anthony reached Delhi instead of Mumbai and could not find the driver, he was helped by some Sena Bahini youths and came to Puri via the same

## PM's Principal Secy Mishra at KIIT-KISS

Advocates for Viksit Bharat Vision

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr PK Mishra visited the KIIT and KISS on Friday, where he had an interactive session with the students, emphasising the role of education in achieving the Prime Minister's vision of a developed India by 2047.

During his visit to KISS, Dr Mishra highlighted the importance of women's empowerment and the pivotal role of education in societal and economic development. He emphasized the significance of hard work, team spirit, and the crucial part students play in realizing



ing the dream of Viksit Bharat.

Dr Mishra was accompanied by founder of KIIT and KISS Dr Achyuta Samanta. Samanta praised Dr Mishra for his leadership and for being at the forefront of many trans-

formative policies.

Giving a pep talk to KIIT students under the Knowledge Tree initiative, Dr Mishra praised the institute's remarkable journey and said he was impressed by the inclusive architecture and the diversity of

the student population in the KIIT Group of institutes, which includes many from tribal, backward, and hilly regions, reflecting a commendable effort towards inclusivity and preservation of tribal culture and values.

Talking about the National Education Policy for its aim to develop an education system that provides equitable access to all, Dr Mishra praised KIIT and KISS for working towards making education more inclusive.

Dr Mishra urged students to work hard toward this direction, highlighting the significance of self-reliance, reduction of corruption, casteism, and communalism, and role of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.

## Institute of Physics holds Nat'l Science Day

Live demonstration experiments, lab visits, scientific poster presentations

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Institute of Physics (IOP), Bhubaneswar, commemorated the National Science Day 2024 (NSD-2024) under the theme of "Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat," paying homage to the scientific accomplishments and aspirations of the nation.

This year holds the exceptional significance as the IOP also marks its Golden Jubilee Celebration. In light of the momentous milestone, the IOP was committed to elevating the NSD-2024 event, en-



suring an unmatched experience for all participants and attendees.

As part of the festivities, the IOP hosted an "OPEN DAY" event on February 28, from 10 am to 5 pm, at its premises. The event showcased a diverse array of engaging activities, including live demonstration experiments, laboratory visits, and scientific poster presentations. Students, educators, parents, media representatives, and the general public

were warmly invited to join the day-long activities and immerse themselves in the captivating realm of science.

The event commenced with the inauguration by IOP Director Prof KK Nanda in the presence of Registrar Dr S Sarangi and chairman of NSD-2024 Prof PK Sahu.

Around 1,000 students and educators enthusiastically explored the various stalls, actively engaged in numerous activities.

## Manufacturing Conclave

# 'Odisha best in cost of doing business, facilitation'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

IPICOL and IDCO MD Bhupendra Singh Poonia said Odisha is the best State in the country in cost of doing business and facilitation.

While talking at the Manufacturing Conclave organised by the ASSOCHAM in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday, he said, "Odisha was traditionally considered as a mining and metal based industry State. Now, we are diversifying to other sectors like apparel manufacturing, food processing etc. We are doing excellent in IT and food processing. Cost of labour is competitive and skilling, reskilling is one of the focus areas of our Government. We also giving



wonderful incentives to the industries across sector."

Chairman, Odisha State Development Council at ASSOCHAM, Pankaj Lochan Mohanty highlighted Odisha's impressive manufacturing sector, contributing to 14.42% to

the State GDP, with a remarkable growth rate of 7.82%, surpassing national averages. He noted an influx of Rs 4.74 lakh crore in investments between 2015 and 2022.

Chairman of ASSOCHAM Manufacturing Hub Council,

Eastern Region, Arijit Basu highlighted the steady growth in the Gross Value Added by the manufacturing sector in India, projected to reach US \$266.40 billion in 2024, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 8.21% in the

next five years (2024-2028). He also noted the industrial output, expected to amount to US \$1,360.00 billion in 2024, with an annual production growth rate of approximately 4.7% in 2023.

Addressing the gathering, Senior Director at ASSOCHAM, Perminder Jeet Kaur remarked, "Odisha has given the world some startup leaders who have revolutionized business practices.

The conclave delved into strategic thinking, sustainable initiatives, stakeholder impact and other crucial areas, aiming to propel a vision for advancing the engineering and manufacturing community in the context of globalisation.



# GA Dept freehold policy: DPA main hurdle in success

Residents demand complete waiver

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Cabinet in its meeting held on February 12, has reduced the conversion fee applicable for conversion of leasehold lands to freehold from 10% of the benchmark value of the land to 3% allotted by the General Administration(GA) Department in Bhubaneswar.

This is a forward-looking and people-friendly approach and a step in the right direction for achieving the goal of housing for all. People from

all quarters have greeted the benevolent and pro-people policy of the government.

While this is true, the State Government is still required to solve the main crisis and address to overcome the adverse effect of the primary deterrent factor, the differential premium amount (DPA).

The DPA is the main hurdle for the success pf the freehold policy of the Government. DPA is the difference between the current market price of the land and the premium paid initially at the time of taking the lease of the land by the lessee computed based on the concession availed. This is to be paid over and above the

conversion fee.

DPA is exorbitant as well as totally unaffordable too. Due to the sky touching increase in the price of the land during the last two decades, the magnitude of the DPA has increased exponentially.

As a result, people are required to pay Rs 80 to Rs 120 lakh for conversion of a leasehold land to freehold having a total area in the vicinity of 5 to 10 decimals. DPA has a lion share of the total amount. It constitutes more than 90% of the total fees required to be paid for conversion to freehold.

Thus, reduction of the conversion fee from 10% to 3%

has a marginal effect, being an extremely small fraction of the total requirement. This would not be helpful for achieving the objective outcome of the policy. Because of this, there is a heavy mass discontent.

The resident associations of Bapuji Nagar, Goutam Nagar, Budha Nagar and Buddheswari including a large number of residents from other regions of the capital city had represented to government for complete waiver of the DPA.

Memorandums to this effect were submitted to the Chief Secretary on different dates highlighting the constraints of the people and appealing for waiver of the same

as well prior to the Cabinet Meeting mentioned above.

Subsequently, Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sadangi have also requested the Chief Secretary through letter number MPAS/7066 dated February 14 ,2024 for complete waiver of DPA and other allied problems of the people as contained in the above letter.

Besides, the resident associations including large number of residents of the city have again represented the Chief Secretary for complete waiver of the DPA. However, no decision in this regard has been taken by the government, till date. Notably, the Supreme Court, have clearly opined that

imposition of DPA by the State Government as unconstitutional and beyond their powers. This is in the context of a writ petition filed by the Cuttack Development Authority (CDA) challenging the judgement of the Orissa High Court, The High Court had directed CDA to allow third party transfer of a land by the original lessee allotted to him without charging the DPA as the State Governments or any of its agencies do not have such power to do so.

The Supreme Court upheld the judgement of Odisha High Court and have dismissed the aforesaid writ petition of filed by the CDA.

## INBRIEF

### JANHABI ELECTED ICAI, BBSR CHAIRPERSON (Pix)

Bhubaneswar: The Bhubaneswar branch of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) elected its office-bearers for 2024-25 at a meeting here on Thursday. Janhabhi Deo was elected as chairperson, Mahendra Kumar Sahoo



vice-chairman and Chairman, EICASA, Bhubaneswar. Goutam Lenka, secretary, Pradip Kumar Sahoo immediate past chairman and treasurer, Gagan Bihari Das, MC member, Saswat Tripathy MC member and Ranjan Kumar Prusty, past chairman and MC member. The Managing Committee members resolved to continue their efforts in discharging their duties and responsibilities for the betterment of the fraternity and contribute towards nation building.

### 3 YOUTHS KILLED IN SCOOTER-BIKE CLASH IN M'BHANJ

Baripada: A head-on collision between a scooter and a motorcycle killed three youths near Balijola Chhak under the Badsahi police limits in Mayurbhanj district on Thursday. The deceased were identified as Laxman Singh (20), Akash Singh (15) and Rajen Singh (25). The two vehicles were completely mangled under the impact of the collision. On being informed, police reached the spot, recovered the bodies for postmortem and initiated an investigation into the incident.

### 1 DIES, 30 HURT IN SEPARATE ACCIDENTS IN STATE

Sambalpur/ Brahmapur: A person died and 20 others were injured in two separate road accidents in the State on Wednesday night. In the first mishap, a bus and a truck collided head on near Jamankira in Sambalpur district killing the bus helper and injuring 10 passengers. The bus was en route to Bhadrak from Sambalpur. In another accident, 10 persons were injured when a Bolero they were travelling in met with an accident near Singadapalli under Khallikote block in Ganjam district.

### GOVT OFFICIAL FOUND HANGING IN BOUDH

Boudh: A body of a Junior Engineer at the Water Resources Department was found hanging in his official residence in Boudh district on Thursday. The deceased was identified as Pradip Kumar Ghosh, a resident of Baripada. He was unmarried and staying alone at the Irrigation Colony. It was suspected to be a case of suicide. He had attended a feast at the office on Wednesday. Sources said he was undergoing treatment for psychiatric issues.

### BALESWAR: GIRLS LOCK UP INVIGILATORS FOR MISBEHAVIOUR

Baleswar: Three invigilators were locked up on Thursday for allegedly misbehaving with several girl students on the pretext of checking malpractice during the Plus Two examinations for Chemistry at an educational institution under the Kamarda police station in Baleswar district. This triggered tension in the examination centre and later irate students locked up the invigilators seeking justice. The Jaleswar SDPO and the Kamarda police reached the college and tried to pacify the students. Irate students agitated outside the educational institution demanding arrest of the accused.

### ESI HOSPITAL CLERK HELD TAKING BRIBE IN ROURKELA

Rourkela: The Vigilance police on Thursday arrested a Senior Assistant, Abhiram Sahu, presently working in the ESI dispensary at Jail Road in Rourkela, for demanding and accepting a bribe of Rs 10,000 from an accident-injured man. Sahu accepted the bribe to process the complainant's medical reimbursement claim under the ESI scheme.

## Centurion School of Fisheries approved for B.F.Sc



PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

The Centurion University has announced that its School of Fisheries, located in Paralakhemundi, has received approval from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for its Bachelor of Fisheries Science (B.F.Sc) degree program.

The B.F.Sc degree program at the School of Fisheries offers students a comprehensive curriculum designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in the dynamic field of fisheries management and aquaculture. The program covers a wide

range of subjects including Aquaculture, Fisheries Resource Management, Fish Processing Technology, Aquatic Environment Management, Fish Engineering, Aquatic Animal Health Management, Fisheries Extension, Economics and Statistics.

"We are thrilled to receive ICAR approval for our B.F.Sc degree program," said Prof DN Rao, Vice-President of Centurion University, adding, "We look forward to continuing our mission of training the next generation of fisheries professionals and contributing to the sustainable development of our region."

## In Kandhamal

### Man gets 20-yr RI for raping minor girl

PNS ■ PHULBANI

Fast Track Court Judge Mihir Ranjan Parida on Thursday sentenced a person to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for raping a 15-year old girl in 2017.

The court also directed the convict Saroj Sandha(26) to pay a fine of Rs 20,000. In default, he has to undergo another 10 months' imprisonment.

The accused had kidnapped the victim and kept her in her aunt's house for 15 days in Salaguda village under

Gochhapada police station in Kandhamal district. Later, the victim's father filed a complaint in this connection at the Phiringia police station.

The police registered a case and arrested the accused and forwarded him to court.

The judge pronounced the judgement on the testimony of 11 witnesses and medical report of the victim. The court also asked the District Legal Services Authority to pay compensation to the victim.

Special Prosecutor Banamali Behera appeared in the case from the prosecution side.

## B'swar wife killer gets 5-yr RI

PNS ■ BALESWAR

On Thursday Special Judge and Additional Sessions Judge Biswajit Das convicted a murder accused and awarded him five years of rigorous imprisonment (RI), besides slapping on him Rs 5,000 fine. He would undergo six months more RI in case he failed to pay the fine, the court ordered.

The convict, Madhi Majhi, resident of Khantapara in

Baleswar district, was arrested on the charge of killing his wife, Tikili Singh, by forcefully drowning her in an inebriated state in February 2022, following a complaint from the father of the deceased.

"The accused was convicted under Section 304(II) of IPC and the court pronounced the verdict after examining 12 witnesses and 18 exhibits," said Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Panda.

## Prez Murmu addresses BU convocation

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

President Droupadi Murmu addressed the 25th convocation of the Berhampur University at Bhanja Bihar on Friday.

She said the southern region of Odisha has a very important place not only in the history of Odisha but also in the history of India. This land has also been the birthplace and workplace of many freedom fighters, martyrs and litterateurs.

The President noted that about 45,000 students are getting education in the Berhampur University and its affiliated colleges. She was happy that over 55 per cent of students are girls. Moreover, 60% of the gold



medal winners are girls and half of the researchers, who received doctoral degrees on the day, are also girls.

Murmu said there is no doubt that girls have the

potential to outperform boys if given equal opportunities. "Now, we are moving from the phase of women's development to women-led development," she said.

She told students that convocation is not just a celebration of receiving degrees. They should have a passion for learning throughout their life.

## In Baleswar

### Ponzi firm manager gets 3 years' RI

PNS ■ BALESWAR

On Thursday Special Judge and Additional Sessions Judge Biswajit Das, convicting a manager of a Ponzi firm of Baripada in a cheating case, sentenced him to three years of rigorous imprisonment (RI) and slapped him with Rs 61,000 fine. The court further ordered six months' jail term in case the convict failed to pay the penalty.

According to Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Panda, the convict Nimai Charan Sahu was tried under different sections of IPC including

420,406,120(B) and 4,5,6 of the Prize Chit Money Circulation (banning) Act after depositor Rasmita Mishra lodged an FIR with Baripada Town police in 2013 alleging that the manager of the multi-level marketing company, Utkal Women's Cooperative Society' siphoned off money from the depositors, including her, giving them false assurances of high returns. However, the chit fund company's office at Ward No 14 was closed subsequently, she alleged. "The court after examining 10 witnesses and 18 exhibits awarded the punishment," said Panda.

## Nagarik Manch cleans Pachalingeswar shrine

PNS ■ BALESWAR

On their 490th weekly programme, a 70-member team of the Nagarik Manch, Gopalpur, Baleswar, cleaned the Pachalingeswar Saiva Pitha, picnic spots, bus stand and held an awareness meeting on cleanliness and hygiene.

The act of the volunteers was highly praised by local Sarpanch Purushottam Sethi and Trust Board member Sisir Mishra. The program was

headed by Manch convenor Sudarsan Mohapatra. Girish Dash, Abhiram Sahoo, Kamalkant Das, Harish Jena, Biswambar Dash, Sudhakaht Das, Prashant Das, Manoj Biswal and Sanjukta Dash among others were present.

Notably, the Manch has been taking up the drive since 2014 inspired by the call of PM Narendra Modi. Its members devote at least two hours a week to clean the surroundings of different public places.

## In Bhadrak

### Man gets 20-yr RI for raping minor

PNS ■ BHADRAK

A Special Fast-Track Court on Thursday sentenced a man to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for raping a minor girl. The convict was identified as Mohan Kumar Kundu of Bhagibindha village under the Dhamnagar police station in Bhadrak district.

The convict was also imposed a fine of Rs 20,000; and in default, he has to undergo another six months' imprisonment.

On January 13, 2022, Mohan lured the girl from the same village by giving

her chocolate and other eatables. He had taken the girl to a secluded place on the Reba riverbank near the village and outraged her modesty.

Mohan even threatened the victim with dire consequences in case she disclosed the incident to anyone.

After returning home, the victim narrated her plight to her mother, who next morning lodged an FIR at the Dhamnagar police station. Mohan was arrested two days after the incident and forwarded to court.

# Eco-friendly cooking introduced in tribal hostels

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Heralding a new era of environment awareness and spreading the message right from the school level, the ST&SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare Department has decided to convert all traditional kitchens in its residential schools and hostels to "eco-friendly" ones and stop use of conventional methods of cooking across the State.

Department Secretary Roopa Roshan Sahoo, in a letter to all Collectors, has all the schools, hostels and establishments under the department to adopt the "eco-friendly" campaign and convert all the kitchens to LPG-based cooking environment.

While at present, there are 1,736 schools functioning under the administrative control of the department, there are around 6,000 hostels across including the hostels under Anwesha and Akankhya programmes in which more than 5 lakh ST&SC students have been housed.

The government has consistently taken steps for smooth functioning of the residential facilities by providing better and improved amenities including strengthening of infrastructure. The entitlements of the boarder students have



been expanded by providing winter clothes, casual dresses, improvement in diet, etc.

"Now, this has been decided to add one more improvement, particularly for strengthening the cooking facilities in the institutions while phasing out the conventional methods by LPG so as to ensure a green and healthy alternative in and around the hostel kitchens. During coming two years, i.e., 2024-25 and 2025-26, all the hostels shall have LPG based cooking facilities," added the communication.

During 2024-25 all High Schools (422), Higher Secondary Schools (62), Biju Pattnaik Adarsh Vidyalaya (1), Kalinga Model Residential School (5), Anwesha Hostels (93) are included in the above plan of having "eco-friendly" kitchens which shall include 1,222 hostels wherein 1,76,000 boarders are residing. The remaining schools and hostels shall be covered during 2025-26.

To implement the plan, additional funds have been provisioned in amenities sector in Annual Budget 2024-25 over

and above the fuel charges. The provision of cooking gas chullah, LPG cylinders, fuel, etc., has been incorporated in the entitlements and amenities guidelines.

During first phase of the year 2024-25, all hostels in 50 High Schools, 20 Higher Secondary Schools, 5 KMRS, 1 BPAV and 25 Anwesha Hostels shall be taken up and completed by June 30, 2024. "The selection of specific school and hostel should be decided at district level and communicated to the department," the letter stated.

## Project ODISERV launched in Sambalpur

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Union Minister of Education and Skill Development Dharmendra Pradhan launched the Project ODISERV on Friday in Sambalpur to prepare young graduates of Odisha for employment opportunities in the financial services sector.

Pradhan said that the Project ODISERV would empower the youth of the country, make them more employable and fulfil their aspirations. He also mentioned how NEP 2020 is bridging the gap between education and skilling, creating more synergies and allowing students to acquire job-ready skills along with academic knowledge.



He informed that 1,100 students in Odisha have already been trained under Project ODISERV and a few of them have also received job offers on the day. He congratulated all the candidates who have been placed today. Pradhan expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister, S Narendra Modi, for envisioning of making India's youth future and industry ready. Project

ODISERV is a perfect example of industry-academia collaboration, he added.

Pradhan also mentioned that the 100-hour training program will equip Odisha's youth with crucial skills required in the banking, finance and insurance industries. The training program will boost competencies, increase the employability of Yuva Shakti of Odisha and

prepare a future-ready workforce, he said.

Bajaj Finsery, CMD Sanjiv Baja, said skilling and employment of youths would power the demographic dividend.

Project Odiserv envisages launching the CPBFI programme in 60 colleges of Odisha across 11 cities and 10 districts including Sambalpur, Dhenkanal, Angul, Cuttack, Khordha, Baleswar and Puri.



# 33 per cent RS members have declared criminal cases against themselves: ADR

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Of 225 Rajya Sabha sitting members analysed, 33 per cent have declared criminal cases against themselves while the total assets of these sitting MPs stood at Rs 19,602 crore, according to poll rights body ADR. Also, 31 of them or 14 per cent are billionaires. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) also showed that 18 per cent of these parliamentarians have declared serious criminal cases which include instances of murder and attempted murder. In an analysis conducted by the ADR and National Election Watch (NEW), two Rajya Sabha sitting members have declared cases related to murder under IPC section 302, while four MPs have declared cases related to attempt to murder under IPC Section 307. "Out of the 225 Rajya Sabha sitting MPs analysed, 75 (33 per cent) Rajya Sabha sitting MPs have declared criminal cases against themselves and 40 (18 per cent) Rajya Sabha sitting MPs have declared serious criminal cases," the report said. The analysis also delved into the distribution of these criminal cases across different political parties. "The BJP leads with 23 per cent of its 90 Rajya Sabha members having declared criminal cases against themselves. Congress follows closely behind with 50 per cent of its 28 MPs facing similar charges. The ADR analysis said five (38 per cent) out of 13 Rajya Sabha members from TMC, four (67 per cent) out of six members from RJD, four (80 per cent) out of five MPs from CPI(M), three (30 per cent) out of 10 MPs from AAP, four (36 per cent) out of 11 Rajya Sabha



members from YSRCP and two (20 per cent) out of 10 MPs from DMK have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits. Moreover, when considering serious criminal cases, the trend persists, with significant percentages of MPs from various parties facing such charges. "Ten (11 per cent) out of 90 Rajya Sabha MPs from BJP, 9 (32 per cent) out of 28 Rajya Sabha MPs from Congress, 3 (23 per cent) out of 13 Rajya Sabha MPs from TMC, 2(33 per cent) out of 6 Rajya Sabha MPs from RJD, 2(40 per cent) out of 5 Rajya Sabha MPs from CPI(M), 1(10 per cent) out of 10 Rajya Sabha MPs from AAP, 3(27 per cent) out of 11 Rajya Sabha MPs from YSRCP and 1(10 per cent) out of 10 Rajya Sabha MPs from DMK have declared serious

criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits," the report said. The report said 11 (61 per cent) out of 18 Rajya Sabha members from Maharashtra, 8 (50 per cent) out of 16 MPs from Bihar, 9 (29 per cent) out of 31 MPs from Uttar Pradesh, 6(33 per cent) out of 18 Rajya Sabha members from Tamil Nadu, 6(67 per cent) out of 9 MPs from Kerala and 7(44 per cent) out of 16 MPs from West Bengal have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits. The analysis covers 225 out of 233 Rajya Sabha members, with one seat from Maharashtra vacant and four seats from Jammu and Kashmir undefined. Three MPs were not analyzed due to unavailability of their affidavits. In addition to the criminal background, the analysis also

delved into the asset holdings of Rajya Sabha members. It was found that the average assets per MP stand at a staggering Rs 87.12 crore. Further dissecting the data, the report revealed significant disparities in asset holdings across different political parties. Among major parties, 9 (10 per cent) out of 90 Rajya Sabha members from BJP, 4 (14 per cent) out of 28 Rajya Sabha members from Congress, 5 (45 per cent) out of 11 MPs from YSRCP, 2 (20 per cent) out of 10 Rajya Sabha members from AAP, 3 (75 per cent) out of 4 Rajya Sabha members from TRS and 2 (33 per cent) out of 6 MPs from RJD have declared assets valued more than Rs 100 crore. Among the major parties, the average assets per MP for analyzed MPs are as follows: BJP Rajya Sabha members have average assets of Rs 37.34 crore, Congress MPs have average assets of Rs 40.70 crore, TMC MPs have average assets worth Rs 10.25 crore, YSRCP MPs have average assets worth Rs 357.68 crore, TRS Rajya Sabha members have average assets worth a whopping Rs 1,383.74 crore, DMK Rajya Sabha members have average assets worth Rs 6.37 crore, and AAP Rajya Sabha members have average assets of Rs 114.81 crore. Moreover, the total assets of the analyzed Rajya Sabha sitting members amount to a staggering Rs. 19,602 crore, according to the analysis. When broken down by party, the total assets for analyzed MPs are as follows: BJP MPs have total assets of Rs 3,360 crore, Congress MPs have total assets of Rs 1,139 crore, YSRCP MPs have total assets of Rs 3,934 crore, TRS MPs have total assets of Rs 5,534 crore, and AAP MPs have total assets of Rs 1,148 crore.

# SC agrees to hear appeal against HC order on Gyanvapi

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear an appeal of the Gyanvapi management committee against an Allahabad High Court order which held that lawsuits for "restoration" of a temple where the mosque stands in Varanasi are maintainable. "We will tag this with the main case," a bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said. The plea in the top court was filed by the Anjuman Ittezamia Masjid, the committee which manages the

affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque. On December 19 last year, the Allahabad High Court had dismissed pleas challenging the maintainability of a 1991 suit seeking the "restoration" of a temple at the site where the Gyanvapi mosque stands. The HC had said that the "religious character" of a disputed place can only be decided by the court. It had dismissed five related petitions -- on maintainability and also against a survey of the mosque premises -- filed over the years by the mosque committee and the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board.

# ED arrests man in money laundering case linked to Jal Jeevan Mission in Rajasthan

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday said it has arrested a man named Piyush Jain in connection with its money laundering investigation linked to alleged irregularities in the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Rajasthan. Piyush Jain was arrested on Thursday and a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Jaipur sent him to four days of ED custody, the federal agency said. This is the first arrest by the ED in this case. The money laundering case of

the ED stems from an FIR registered by the anti-corruption bureau (ACB) where it was charged that Padamchand Jain (proprietor of Shree Shyam Tubewell Company), Mahesh Mittal (proprietor of Shree Ganpati Tubewell Company), Piyush Jain and others were "involved in giving bribes to public servants in order to obtain illegal protection, tenders, getting bills sanctioned and covering up irregularities for work executed by them in respect of various tenders received by them from the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED)".

# Obesity a new threat to Indian children, says study

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Indian kids are perched atop an obesity time bomb which has emerged as the predominant form of malnutrition in India with an alarming 12.5 million children aged between five and 19 reported overweight in 2022. Among them, 7.3 million were boys and 5.2 million were girls, according to a global analysis published in The Lancet journal. While this highlights the alarming rise in obesity rates among the younger population, for adults, the situation is equally concerning from bustling cities to rural landscapes. Globally, the total number of children, adolescents, and adults living with obesity has now reached one billion. In India, the obesity rate among women increased from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022,



while among men, it surged from 0.5% to 5.4% during the same period. This substantial increase underscores the need for urgent interventions to address adult obesity in India. Globally, an estimated nearly 880 million adults were living with obesity in 2022 (504 million women and 374 million men), four and a half times the 195 million recorded in 1990 (128 million

women and 67 million men). Combined with the 159 million children living with obesity in 2022, this is a total of over one billion people affected by obesity in 2022. Despite global population growth, 183 million women and 164 million men were affected by underweight in 2022, 45 million and 48 million fewer, respectively, than in 1990. The coexistence of obesity and underweight poses a sig-

nificant challenge for public health systems worldwide, including India. It necessitates a nuanced approach that addresses both ends of the malnutrition spectrum. External factors such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and geopolitical conflicts further exacerbate malnutrition rates by increasing poverty and food insecurity, particularly in vulnerable populations. "There is an urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address obesity and underweight in India, encompassing initiatives focused on promoting healthy lifestyles, ensuring access to nutritious foods, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure," says the report. Socioeconomic disparities and limited access to healthcare and nutritious foods exacerbate the challenge, it added.

# Another BRS MP joins BJP

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Bharat Rashtra Samithi MP B B Patil joined the BJP on Friday in yet another setback to the regional party ahead of the Lok Sabha polls as the country's ruling party looks to boost its tally in Telangana and other southern state. The development came a day after Pothuganti Ramulu, the BRS MP from the Nagarkurnool parliamentary constituency in the state, joined the BJP, which is expected to field the son of the Dalit leader from the seat and Patil from Zahirabad, which he currently represents in Lok Sabha. After the BRS lost the assembly elections recently, a number of its leaders quit the party to join the BJP or the Congress, which is in power in the state now. Two-term MP Patil lauded the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he joined the BJP in the presence of Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the party's Telangana in-charge Tarun Chugh and its OBC morcha chief K Lakshman. On Thursday, Ramulu, his son



Bharat Prasad and some other BRS leaders from had joined the BJP. Patil told reporters Modi has vision for the development of India and that is why the country has seen so much of work in the last 10 years. "He is known as the most trusted leader in the world," he added. He praised the Modi government for the Ram temple construction, the repeal of Article 370, banning the practice of triple talaq, and giving free

Covid vaccines among other issues. "For the development of my parliamentary constituency and Telangana, there is no other option than taking this step. We need funds and work from the Centre. Definitely we got a lot of help from the Modi government," he said. Chandrasekhar said Patil's vote of confidence in Modi's leadership reflects the endorsement the prime minister has from across the country.

# Pharmacy council members allege irregularities in recent poll

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

A section of members within the Pharmacy Council of India's (PCI) Central Council (CC) has voiced concerns over alleged irregularities in the election process leading to the appointment of the current president. Directing their accusations toward Registrar-cum-Secretary Anil Mittal, citing various clauses of the Pharmacy Act, 1948, they have now sought clarification on the perceived discrepancies. The present PCI president is Montu Patel. Mittal, serving as both the administrative head and Treasurer of the Council, is accused of allegedly violating election norms in favor of the incumbent President, who, according to the dissenting members, lacked the prerequisite membership in the Central Council to contest for the top post. The PCI's Central Council, which comprises representatives from diverse entities including the UGC, and Central and State



Governments, serves as the regulatory authority overseeing the pharmacy profession nationwide. Central to the dissenting members' grievances is the alleged dual membership of the current President from both the Union Territory of Daman and Diu and the state of Gujarat, contravening established protocols. They have alleged that election norms have been violated by Mittal in favor of the incumbent President who, according to them, was not even a member of the Central Council, mandatory eligibility

to contest for the top post. "Mital has violated all protocols by allowing such a person to contest the elections whose membership has been doubtful," said Baldev Kumar, a senior pharmacist and a nominated member of the Central Council. Since the election in 2022, we had been constantly seeking reply from the registrar in the matter, but in vain. In the first place, as per section 3(h) of the Pharmacy Act, 1848, Patel is not even a member of the Central Council member which can make him eligible to fight for the post of

President, pointed out Professor S Ramachandra Shetty, Head, Department of Pharmacology, Government College of Pharmacy, Bengaluru in his dissent letter written to the Registrar. "...Further section 31 of the Pharmacy Act 1948 states that "A person who has attained the age of 18 shall be entitled on payment of prescribed fees to have his name entered in the first register if he resides, or carries on business or profession of Pharmacy in the state and if he.... However in the case of Montu Patel, he is not eligible as per the above sections of the Pharmacy Act 1948," said Prof Shetty. Another contentious point he raised was that the union territories of Daman and Diu and Dadar Nagar Haveli were merged and became one union territory. Since section 3 (h) of Pharmacy State mentions that only a person shall represent each state. Under this section Sri Ramanga Lingeshware Rao is already representing the Dadar Nagar Haveli and his membership has not expired, although there is no provision

for the nomination of one more member from the same union territory. Therefore the nomination of Montu Patel does not have any legal standing, he said. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the signing of Annual Performance Assessment Reports (APARs) by the President for the Registrar, a process deemed irregular due to the lack of authorization. The dissenting members have now sought intervention from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Union Health Ministry in the matter and also investigate fraudulent practices, they alleged, were taking place within the PCI under the present PCI President. Members have also written to the Daman and Diu administrator regarding Patel's status as PCI member, seeking clarification on his status. We want a thorough investigation and remedial action to uphold integrity and fairness in PCI's operations, they said. Queries sent via mail by this paper to Mittal regarding the allegations remain unanswered.

# Congress president Kharge targets Centre

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday targeted the Governments at the Centre and in Gujarat over "high suicide rate" in the BJP-ruled State and alleged they have failed to fulfil their promises of creating new job opportunities for youths. He also said the prime minister's "silence on this grave human tragedy in his home state is deafening". He urged the Gujarat government to prioritise the wellbeing and safety of citizens and take action to address the problem that has cast a dark shadow over the state. "It is with grave concern and profound disappointment that I address the distressing revelation brought to light by the Gujarat government regarding the shockingly high suicide rates," he said in a statement. The Congress chief said the latest data presented in the state assembly underscores a harrowing reality that under



the rule of the BJP Government, more than 25,000 lives have been lost to suicide over the past three financial years, with nearly 500 of them being students. He said the statistics paint a grim picture of a populace grappling with despair, hopelessness, and unaddressed grievances. In a State that boasts of progress and prosperity, it is unconscionable that so many citizens have felt compelled to take their own lives, Kharge said. "This is another example of the BJP's double-engine mis-

governance that has already inflicted several anyays (injustice) on the country. Its state and central government have failed to fulfil their promises of releasing and filling job vacancies and creating new job opportunities," he said. "The prime minister's silence on this grave human tragedy in his home state is deafening," the Congress president said. He said Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel's acknowledgment of this crisis is "while condemnable, falls short of addressing the fundamental failures of governance" and the dire need for

concrete action to stem the tide of preventable tragedies. "It is abundantly clear that the current administration has failed in its duty to safeguard the wellbeing of our citizens and address the root causes behind the escalating suicide rates," he said. Kharge also said that the fact that the maximum number of cases emanate from cities like Ahmedabad (3,280), Surat (2,862), and Rajkot (1,287) is a "damning indictment" of the government's inability to provide adequate support and resources to the vulnerable. "I call upon the Gujarat government to prioritise the wellbeing and safety of its citizens above all else, and to take immediate and decisive action to address the escalating suicide rates that have cast a dark shadow over our state," the Congress president said. The Gujarat government earlier this week informed the legislative assembly that more than 25,000 people, nearly 500 of them students, have ended their lives due to vari-

ous reasons in the state during the last three financial years. According to the data shared by the state government on the floor of the House, as many as 25,478 people have committed suicide in different parts of Gujarat during the last three years and of these, 495 were students. In reply to a question by Imran Khedawala (Congress), Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, who also hold the home portfolio, said in a written response that 8,307 people ended their lives in financial year 2020-21, 8,614 in FY 2021-22 and 8,557 committed suicide in FY 2022-23. Among these, the maximum number of suicides was reported in the Ahmedabad city (3,280), followed by 2,862 in Surat city and 1,287 in Rajkot city. Some of the reasons for the suicides, as cited by the government, included mental health matters, love issues, serious illness, family problems, financial crisis and a fear of failure in exams.

# Auditors should engage with stakeholders to gather input: CAG

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

CAG of India Girish Chandra Murmu on Friday said auditors should engage with stakeholders to gather input, address concerns, and promote transparency and accountability. Addressing the three-day International Conference on Strengthening of Grassroots Democracy, he also emphasised on the need to prioritise audit procedures based on identified risks, focusing on areas with the highest potential for fraud, mismanagement, or regulatory non-compliance. "Together we need to advocate transparency and accountability in local government operations, encouraging the adoption of best practices in financial reporting and governance," Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) said on the concluding day of the conference. He also stressed that auditors



need to consider factors such as the size, complexity, and resources of the local government entity when applying auditing standards. Audit, Murmu said, should be familiar with the political, social, and economic context in which the local governments operate to tailor audit procedures and recommendations accordingly. Stakeholder involvement ensures audit findings are relevant, credible, and actionable, he added. "To effectively navigate the complexities of auditing local governments, we need to build

capacity of our auditors as well as the local government employees to enhance their understanding of financial management practices and internal controls," the CAG added. The participating Supreme Audit Institution (SAIs) shared insightful country reports that brought out significant issues and challenges pertaining to the local government accountability frameworks, the CAG said in a release. The conference highlighted collaborative efforts in enhancing transparency, accountability, and good governance at the grassroots level. The insights gained and connections formed are expected to drive positive changes in local governance worldwide. The three-day conference was attended by SAIs of 10 countries — Georgia, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Morocco, Nepal, Oman, Poland, South Africa, and Uganda. India is the host country.



# India must build deep national strengths: Jaishankar

PTI ■ PUNE

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said that in the next 25 years, India must build “deep national strengths” that will drive its transition towards a developed economy and leading power. Flagging the dangers of dependence on a limited number of suppliers, challenges of technology, and “weaponisation of market dominance”, he asserted that the country’s goals and ambitions cannot be determined by “the goodwill of others”. The minister’s recorded video message was played on Thursday during the inaugural event of the 5th Asia Economic Dialogue, a three-day annual geo-economics conference organised jointly by the

Ministry of External Affairs and Pune International Centre. The theme of the conference this year is ‘Geo-economic challenges in the era of flux’. Jaishankar said the present geo-economic challenges fall in three categories — supply chain challenge, technology challenge, and the challenge of “over-concentration stemming from the nature of globalisation”. Whether it is finished products, intermediates or components, the world is dangerously dependent on a limited number of suppliers, he said. “Even as importers, the production centres have built their own sourcing chains. How to introduce greater resilience and reliability is central to de-risking the global economy. All of us need more

options and must work to create them,” he said. The technology challenge is growing by the day given our reliance on technology for more and more aspects of daily life, he said. “The digital era has given it altogether a different connotation because it is so intrusive. It is not just our interests that are at stake, but often the most personal of our decisions and choices. Such an era demands more trust and transparency, but in fact we are seeing the reverse where technology providers are concerned,” he said. “Over-concentrations” which stem from the nature of globalisation are heightened by unpredictability and opaqueness, the minister said. “We discovered this more sharply in the Covid times, but



from time to time we’re also reminded when market dominance is weaponised for the global South and this is

particularly serious given the extent of this dependence,” Jaishankar added. “We all know that this is

matter of comparative economic advantage, if it ever was. We are actually talking about the future of the global order,” he said, adding that there are no easy solutions to the challenges posed by this era. Only greater international cooperation can mitigate unilateral demands and “economic domination of technology assertions”, the minister said. For India, this means moving across broad front domains that contribute to comprehensive national power, and it requires a massive upgrade of our skills base which suggests an environment that promotes start-ups and talent, he said. “It will benefit from ease-to-do-business and modern infrastructure, but most of all it

demands robust manufacturing that alone can provide the foundation for technology development,” he added. “As the most populous country that will be the third largest economy very soon, our goals and ambitions cannot be determined by the goodwill of others. We must build deep national strengths during the ‘Amrit Kaal’ that will drive the transition towards becoming a developed economy and the leading power. This is the vision of the (Narendra) Modi government and our initiatives and programs of the last decade are aimed to this very end,” he said. The Modi government refers to the 25-year period culminating in the nation’s centenary of independence in 2047 as ‘Amrit Kaal’

## Reconsider Indo, Myanmar border fencing plan: Nagaland to Centre



PTI ■ KOHIMA

The Nagaland Assembly on Friday adopted a resolution urging the Centre to reconsider its decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the neighbouring country. The assembly also resolved to appeal to the central government to work out regulations for movement of people across the boundary in consultation with the people inhabiting the border areas, and for suitably bringing in the village council authorities concerned in the entire system of regulations.” The Centre earlier this month ended the FMR, which allows people residing close to the India-Myanmar border to venture 16 km into each other’s territory without visa. The 1643 km stretch of the Indo-Myanmar border is spread over four North Eastern states - Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland. The resolution stated that the Centre’s decision to suspend the FMR and fence the Indo-Myanmar boundary would disrupt the age-old historical, social, tribal, and economic ties of the Naga people living on both sides of the international border. It also said that the measures would cause immense inconvenience to the Naga people living in border areas as a number of people of Nagaland have agricultural land across the border. The resolution moved by Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton was adopted unanimously in the House.



## Flood of development in Barak Valley if NDA retains power: Himanta

PTI ■ SILCHAR/ KARIMGANJ

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday pledged a “flood of development” for Barak Valley if BJP-led NDA retains power at the Centre. He appealed people to elect BJP candidates for the sake of development as he inaugurated and laid foundation for projects worth over Rs 2,000 crore for the three Barak Valley districts at different functions. “Today, projects worth over Rs 2,000 crore have come for Barak Valley. During Congress regime, they would declare special package of Rs 1,000 crore but no one knew where the money went,” Sarma said after the ‘bhumi puja’ of Karimganj Medical College. Referring to Congress legislators, particularly Karimganj North MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha who extended ‘support to the BJP government’, the CM said it is good for the people of the district that leaders have come together. “A lot of work is happening here now. But according to us, lot more needs to be done. If we don’t indulge in any other politics but only do politics of development and ensure victory of BJP candidates, development will be ensured,” Sarma said. More development can be done for Barak Valley if Narendra Modi becomes the prime minister for the third straight term, the BJP leader added.

“People have seen floods triggered by the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers. If a BJP MP is elected from here, they will see a flood of development,” he said. The CM also listed various development and welfare schemes being pursued by his government, and added that he was mooted expanding them to grant more benefits to the people. Providing 97,000 government jobs in a transparent manner, expanding Orunodoi scheme to 27 lakh women, new roads and 16 lakh new houses under PMAY are among the work done by his government since coming to power in May 2021, Sarma added. Earlier in the day, Sarma inaugurated a cancer care unit at Silchar Medical College and Hospital (SMCH) and claimed that the state’s cancer care model is being emulated across the country. “We have inaugurated the cancer care unit here today, which is part of the network of 17 hospitals in the state under a joint initiative of the state government and Tata Trusts,” he said. Three categories of cancer care units are being set up in government-run hospitals under the project, of which the one at SMCH is in category 2, which will provide patients with comprehensive care, Sarma said. “The lone category-1 facility, which will be the apex cancer care hospital, is being opened at Guwahati,” the chief minister said.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai on Friday termed as ‘speculations’, him contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls but said he will abide by any decision the party takes. The former IPS officer said he had no “personal prejudice or any likes and dislikes in BJP”. “Whatever the party tells me I have to obey, that is the nature of the party. Today the party has asked me to complete the state level yatra (En Manna En Makkal) and we have just finished that,” he told reporters here. He said the BJP has “given me some responsibility” to ensure the growth of the party in the state and he was doing that. Apparently referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha contest, he said, “tomorrow morning if the party tells me, do that, I will do that.” “I am not going to respond to speculations. Whatever our

## Will not respond to speculations: Annamalai on contesting LS poll

senior national leadership decides, my duty is to obey and make sure it is implemented on the ground,” the state BJP chief added. To a question on Udhayanidhi’s strident criticism of BJP, indicating it could hardly make any impact in the elections, Annamalai said the state minister is a “failed actor,” referring to the DMK leader’s cinema stint. Udhayanidhi was in politics “with his grandfather (the late M Karunanidhi) and father’s (MK Stalin) name...What social service has he done...Did he help the poor?” Annamalai asked. To a question on the TN BJP greeting Stalin in ‘Chinese’ on his birthday, Annamalai said he



did not find anything offensive about it. “On behalf of @bjptnmediacell, here’s wishing our Honourable CM Thiru @mkstalin avargal a happy birthday in his favourite language! May he live a long and healthy life!” it said, with an

image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP leaders including JP Nadda and Annamalai, besides that of the TN CM with some message in what seemed to be in Chinese. It appeared to an apparent dig at the recent controversy over a

‘China flag’ in a DMK advertisement issued in connection with an ISRO launch complex coming up in the state. Asked about this, Annamalai said DMK leader and MP “Kanimozhi said China is not an enemy country. So, what’s wrong in wishing our Chief Minister in Chinese. That is what our IT wing people have done. I don’t find anything offensive,” Annamalai added. At a rally in Tirunelveli on Wednesday, PM Modi strongly criticised the DMK for being ‘oblivious’ to the nation’s achievements in space sector, after the newspaper advertisement by a state minister on the spaceport kicked up a row over what the BJP claimed had a ‘Chinese flag’.

## Sales tax official, 16 traders booked for ₹175 crore fraud

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A sales tax official and 16 others were booked in an alleged fraud that caused a loss of Rs 175.93 crore to the Maharashtra government, the Anti Corruption Bureau said on Friday. The alleged scam took place between August 2021 and March 2022 at the state Goods and Service Tax (GST) department building in Mazgaon, the official said. “Amit Giridhar Lalage (42), posted as sales tax officer at GST Bhavan with charge of Ghatkopar Zone, Nodal 11 at the time, allegedly conspired with 16 traders who created forged and fake rent agreements and obtained GST numbers,” he said. “These traders did not pay any kind of tax to the state in the form of GST, but submitted 39 applications to get Rs 175.93 crore as tax returns. Lalage deliberately did not verify these claims even though the GST portal showed they were dubious,” he added.

## Himanta downplays threat by pro Khalistani leader

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday downplayed a purported threat by a pro-Khalistani leader, demanding shifting of radical outfit ‘Waris Punjab De’ (WPD) members, including its chief Amritpal Singh, from Dibrugarh central jail to Amritsar. Speaking to reporters, Sarma said, “Why should you be so afraid of Khalistanis? You seem to have been more frightened whereas the threat was for me.” The purported threat was issued by a person who identified himself as Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, head of an unlawful association called ‘Sikhs for Justice’, via recorded messages sent to journalists’ mobile phones. In the message, Sarma was asked to order the transfer of Amritpal Singh and his associates to Amritsar jail, warning of ‘consequences’ if he failed to comply.



It also said ‘Sikhs for Justice’ is filing a case in the United Nations against India. Ten members of the pro-Khalistani outfit, including Amritpal and one of his uncles, have been kept in Dibrugarh central jail since March last year under the National Security Act (NSA), following their arrest from various parts of Punjab as part of a crackdown on the outfit. Similar threats were made to the chief minister in April last year, leading to the state police launching an investigation into the matter. DGP GP Singh said a case had

been registered under appropriate sections of the IPC and the UAP Act at the Special Task Force (STF) police station. He also mentioned that the security arrangements for the CM had been heightened in response to the emerging threat. Last month, electronic devices, including a smartphone, were discovered in the cells of NSA detainees at Dibrugarh Central Jail. Though the DGP did not specify which detainees were involved, it is believed that the items were found in the cells of WPD members.



## Another RJD MLA sits with ruling side in Bihar Assembly

PTI ■ PATNA

RJD MLA Bharat Bind on Friday sat with members of the ruling NDA inside the Bihar assembly, becoming the fifth legislator to have deserted the party in less than a month. Bind, who represents Bhabua in Kaimur district, reached the Vidhan Sabha premises in the post-lunch session with Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, who is also the state BJP president. He entered the House with Murari Gautam, a former minister who had turned his back on Congress a couple of days ago, and the two sat together. The development comes on the final day of the budget session when the House was through with legislative business and taking up private members’ bills. Earlier, RJD MLAs Chetan Anand, Neelam Devi and Prahlad Yadav had switched over to the ruling side, voting against party leader and the then Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary in a no-confidence motion, and supporting the NDA in the trust vote. Besides, on Wednesday, RJD MLA Sangita Kumari, along with Murari Gautam and Siddharth Saurav of the Congress, were felicitated inside the premises by Samrat Choudhary, whom they followed into the assembly hall, and amid thumping of desks in approval by NDA members, they sat beside the ruling coalition MLAs. However, the two Congress MLAs’ disqualification has been sought by the party which has called them “traitors”. The RJD has also said it will approach the Speaker seeking disqualification of its turncoats while warning Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U) and returned to the NDA only last month, that the BJP was now carrying out the proverbial “operation lotus” in Bihar.

## NPP to field 30 candidates for Arunachal Assembly polls

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

The National People’s Party (NPP) will field 30 candidates for the upcoming assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh, party’s state unit president Thangwang Wangham said here on Friday. He said the primary criteria for candidate selection would be their potential for winning. “The main criteria for issuing tickets will be winnability factor of candidates. We will support the BJP government in the state and our chief ministerial candidate will be Pema Khandu,” Wangham told PTI in an exclusive interview. The NPP, led by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, is an ally of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) and extends support to the Khandu government. Wangham outlined the party’s focus on development, youth employment, healthcare, education, and combating the drug menace. He emphasized the goal of creating a drug-free society by raising awareness among addicts about the consequences of narcotics. “We will work for a drug-free society and will reach the addicts to make them aware of the ill effects of narcotics. Addicts should be given a second chance to lead a normal life,” he said adding, drugs are a major cause for illiteracy, unemployment, social restlessness and growth of insurgency, which are the socio-economic and political burdens for the state. Wangham, who was a three-time MLA



from Longding-Pumao constituency but lost the electoral battle in 2019, said his party would work to make society free from drug abuse. He added that the party would also work on productivity and industrial development which is lacking in the state. “Any state or society without productivity is a dumping ground for consumers. There are no central allocations to the industry sector in the state we are entirely dependent on central funds,” he said adding, efforts should be made to set up industrial units to attract central allocations. On February 25, two NPP legislators out of four in the 60-member assembly, along with two Congress MLAs, joined the BJP. Mutchu Mithi from Roing constituency and Gokar Basar from Basar constituency, both from NPP along with Congress MLAs Wanglin Lowangdong

representing Borduria-Bogapani seat and Ninong Ering from Pasighat West joined the saffron party. Responding to recent shifts in political alliances, where two NPP legislators joined the BJP, Wangham said such changes might be due to political dynamics in their constituencies and voter preferences. He asserted that the NPP’s alliance with the BJP through NEDA remains intact and unaffected by these developments. “Their joining BJP will have no impact as NPP has extended support to the BJP government in the state being an ally of the NEDA,” Wangham added. The ruling BJP in the state has 53 MLAs followed by Congress and NPP with two each. There are also three independent members. In the 2019 elections, the NPP had fielded 30 candidates, with five emerging victorious. However, one of its candidates, Tirong Aboh, was killed by suspected militants before the results were declared. Forty-five-year-old Aboh was travelling from Assam’s Dibrugarh to his constituency, when he along with ten others including his son, was killed at 12th Mile, 20km between Khonsa and Deomali road, by armed militants. Meanwhile, the party has released its election manifesto with major emphasis on people-centric political and administrative reforms, excellence in education system, better health policy, a robust agriculture and allied sector, new opportunities for unemployed youth among others.

## Shinde announces implementation of revised NPS

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Friday announced implementation of a revised National Pension Scheme (NPS) for state government employees who joined service from November 1, 2005 onwards. Making a statement in both Houses of the Legislature, Shinde said, as per the decision, if employees opt for the revised pension scheme, they will get 50 per cent of their last salary as pension and dearness allowance, and 60 per cent of this amount as family pension and dearness allowance. The NPS is being implemented in the state from April 1, 2015. There are 13.45 lakh employees in the state and NPS is applicable to 8.27 lakh of them. The state government had set up a committee in March 2023 to make a comparative study of the old pension scheme and the NPS. The committee looked into means of providing sustainable financial relief for employees who joined service on and after November 1, 2005.

## Former Sikkim Speaker assaulted, CM condemns

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Former speaker of Sikkim Assembly and senior Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) leader KN Rai and party spokesperson SK Timshina were assaulted by unidentified men in Namchi district on Friday afternoon, police said. Rai and Timshina were assaulted at Mazi Gaon, Melli, around 2.30 pm. Rai sustained facial injuries in the incident, they added. Soon after the incident, his party, the SDF, strongly condemned the attack and labelled it as a heinous crime and demanded the immediate arrest of the perpetrators. The party submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission, urging it to impose President’s Rule in the state to ensure free and fair Lok Sabha and assembly elections, which are expected to be held simultaneously. Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang said, “I strongly condemn the unpleasant and anti-social act of assault on former speaker Shri KN Rai in Malli, Namchi district today.” “Rai, a respected politician and senior citizen, should never have been subjected to such mis-



treatment,” the CM said and added that strong actions against the perpetrators will be initiated. “Our state thrives on peace and harmony, and such despicable acts will not be tolerated. I urge everyone to uphold peace, unity, and tranquillity, rejecting violence and strife,” Tamang added. CM’s political secretary Jacob Khaling, while expressing his solidarity with the senior leader, assured that action will be taken against all those who are involved. “Murderous assault on a senior leader be it in the ruling or opposition party is condemnable. Such politics of violence is not acceptable in any form,” he said in a Facebook post. BJP Sikkim president DR Thapa also condemned the attack on Rai and Timshina. “Such incidents have no place in a society aspiring for progress,” he said in a press statement.



# Destination Uttarakhand: Leading the way



“Under the visionary leadership of Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are committed to the holistic development of our state, leveraging its natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and immense potential. Through sustainable policies and strategic initiatives, we aim to foster economic growth, improve infrastructure, and enhance the quality of life for all our citizens. Our goal is to make Uttarakhand a model of progress, where tradition meets innovation, and every individual can thrive in a conducive environment for prosperity and well-being.”

—Pushkar Singh Dhami,  
Chief Minister, Uttarakhand

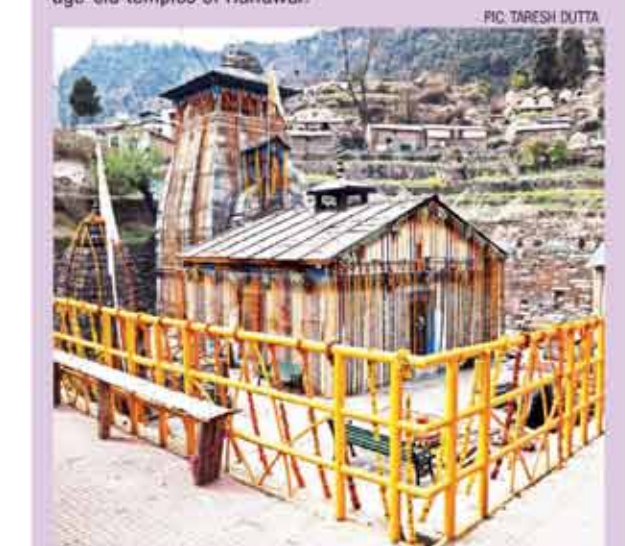
## Uttarakhand shines as the ultimate wedding destination

Under the visionary guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttarakhand is poised to become the next premier destination for weddings worldwide

Uttarakhand, which lies amidst the magnificent Himalayas, is a northern state known for its spiritual importance, spectacular terrains, and rich cultural legacy. Also known as the land of gods – ‘Devbhoomi’, Uttarakhand has forever known as one of the most revered pilgrimage destinations for lakhs of devotees. The state has, however, seen a change in recent years, developing much more than a spiritual destination. In a recent development, Uttarakhand is on the path of emerging as the next best destination when it comes to the world of destination weddings. All thanks to the visionary guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The notion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make Uttarakhand the next best wedding destination reflects the views of numerous who acknowledge the state’s endless prospects. The Prime Minister encouraged the youth to embark upon the campaign ‘Wed in India’ at the inauguration of the Uttarakhand Global Investors Summit in Dehradun back in December 2023. During his address, he urged wealthy families to pick Uttarakhand as the destination for their celebrations.

The distinctive natural magnificence and myriad cultural tapestry depict the charm of Uttarakhand as the perfect wedding destination. From the serene lake of Nainital to the snow-capped mounts of Auli, each part of the state exhibits a feel of charisma and allure. Partners looking for a truly memorable experience can host their marital ceremonies amid the serene lake in Tehri, the beautiful hills of Mussoorie, or the age-old temples of Haridwar.



Triyuginarayan

What makes Uttarakhand a unique destination for weddings is not only its stunning places, but also its rich legacy and lively rituals. Weddings hosted in the state are not simply ceremonies but detailed experiences imbued with ancient traditions and rituals. From the spiritual atmosphere of Rishikesh to the holy flame at Triyuginarayan, every place presents a remarkable glimpse into the state’s cultural tapestry.

Furthermore, the notion of Prime Minister Modi stretches beyond the celebration of togetherness. He looks forward to strengthening the local economy and supporting the denizens of Uttarakhand by encouraging destination weddings in the state. The inflow of visitors and investment prospects will in turn help in generating employment, enriching infrastructure, and promoting overall development.

Some of the famous places in Uttarakhand to host destination weddings include Triyuginarayan, Rishikesh, Joshimath, Shantikunj Haridwar, Golden Temple, Chakrata, Harisi, Dehradun, Kanatal, Mussoorie, Auli, Tehri Lake, Ramnagar, Narendranagar, Brahmatal, Nainital, Almora, Rankhet, Bhital, Ramgarh, Mukteshwar, Ranigat, Naukuchiatal, and Ghoralhal, among others.

The vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make Uttarakhand the best preference for destination weddings is a depiction of everything that makes this state remarkable. Uttarakhand is all set to evolve into a global leader in the tourism sector, as the state moves ahead towards emerging as one of the most favoured wedding destinations. Tourists, adventurers, and entrepreneurs are attracted to the state as it offers the best of yoga retreats, adventure sports, and cultural experiences.



PM Narendra Modi along with Pushkar Singh Dhami, CM, Uttarakhand, visiting Badrinath Dham

The picturesque northern state of Uttarakhand is well-known for its spiritual importance and stunning natural magnificence. Among the various destinations that attract devotees and visitors alike, Badrinath and Kedarnath stand out as emblems of devotion and serenity. At the vanguard of restoring these consecrated places and uplifting their prospect for spiritual tourism is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose relentless dedication and commitment have prompted transformative tasks in Uttarakhand.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi shares a deep-rooted affinity with Uttarakhand, especially Badrinath and Kedarnath, and this is apparent through his multiple visits and visionary endeavours aimed at uplifting these venerated pilgrimage sites. His spiritual reverence for Baba Kedar, exemplified through periodic visits to Kedarnath Dham, highlights his dedication to the spiritual and cultural legacy of the region. The aspirations of PM Modi are much more than only reverence; he foresees a new individuality for Uttarakhand by promoting Badrinath and Kedarnath Dham to international importance.

The most important aspect of this vision of PM Narendra Modi is the complete reconstruction of Kedarnath Dham, an undertaking close to his heart since the beginning of his tenure as the Prime Minister. The wrecking floods of 2013 initiated a revitalised emphasis on revamping Kedarnath, with PM Modi spearheading measures to assure that the reconstruction showcases brilliance and divinity befitting its essence. From building the statue of Adi Guri Shankaracharya to observing the progress first-hand, PM Modi’s hands-on strategy highlights his dedication to maintaining the sanctity of Kedarnath.

Furthermore, strategic endeavours by PM Modi spread beyond Kedarnath to enclose the holistic growth of the

The reconstruction measures, associated with PM Modi’s focus on maintaining its spiritual significance, have reformed Kedarnath to its previous glory, drawing pilgrims from across the world

spiritual infrastructure of Uttarakhand. Projects such as the Badrinath Dham Master Plan modelled after the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, seek to remake Badrinath into a smart spiritual hilltown, portraying the vision of PM Modi for incorporating tradition with modernity. The Delhi-Dehradun Economic Corridor and the Rishikesh Kamprayag Rail Project additionally highlight his dedication to improving connectivity and accessibility to these holy places.

The result of these endeavours by Prime Minister Modi is discernible, with Uttarakhand seeing a revival in spiritual tourism and pilgrimage footfall. The All Weather Road Project, also known as the Chardham Road Project, seeks to link the four Dhams of Uttarakhand, enabling seamless journeys for devotees and visitors alike. Likewise, the Rishikesh Kamprayag Rail Project, with its enterprising timeline and ingenious technique, vows to improve accessibility to Kedarnath and adjacent areas.

The importance of Kedarnath and Badrinath surpasses spiritual borders, echoing with believers and nature lovers globally. Situated amid the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, Kedarnath carries a unique place as one of the 12 Jyotirlingas and an essential visit during the esteemed Chardham Yatra. The reconstruction measures, associated with PM Modi’s focus on maintaining its spiritual significance, have reformed Kedarnath to its one-time glory, drawing pilgrims from across the world.

The recent inauguration of pivotal infrastructure projects by Prime Minister Modi emphasises the continuous renewal measures in Kedarnath. From unveiling the statue of Adi Guri Shankaracharya to inaugurating essential projects like the Saraswati retaining wall and Teerth Purohit houses, the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi signifies a revived dedication to promoting the spiritual legacy of Uttarakhand. His passion

Prime Minister Narendra Modi shares a deep-rooted connection with Uttarakhand, especially Badrinath and Kedarnath, and this is apparent through his multiple visits and visionary endeavours aimed at uplifting these venerated pilgrimage sites

## Boosting spiritual tourism in Uttarakhand through Badrinath and Kedarnath

ate and emotional association with Kedarnath, prominent in his genuine talk, echoes with devotees and strengthens the importance of these religious places.

The transformative effect of such enterprises by PM Modi grows beyond infrastructure growth, facilitating inclusive development and sustainable tourism methods in Uttarakhand. His focus on policy incentives and sectoral priority, especially on tourism and renewable power, has placed Uttarakhand as a beam of sustainable evolution. The advancement of the state in infrastructure expansion and its dedication to utilising natural resources have not only supported the economy, but also presented its prospects on the international level.

The unwavering faith of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Badrinath and Kedarnath has instigated a revival of spiritual tourism in Uttarakhand. By means of far-sighted endeavours and innovative interventions, PM Modi has restored these reli-

gious places, maintaining their sanctity while steering into a new period of prosperity and expansion.

“I extend my sincere congratulations to the Government of Uttarakhand for the incredible accomplishments achieved in recent years. This admirable progress stands as a testament to the sustained enactment of strategic approaches, with a sharp focus on paramount sectors such as tourism and renewable energy. It brings me happiness to see the significant improvements in infrastructure growth, establishing superior benchmarks for sustainable development. Uttarakhand’s aggressive strategy towards harnessing its natural resources and boosting tourism not only strengthens its economy but also showcases its potential on the global level. I wholeheartedly admire the state’s relentless dedication to promoting inclusive expansion, and I eagerly foresee its persistent conquest in the years to come,” said Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Devotees throng Kedarnath Temple to seek divine blessings

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s journey included visits to religious sites like Parvati Kund and Adi Kailash Parvat, depicting the deep-rooted spiritual inheritance of the land and emphasising its possibility for expansion and tourism

## PM Modi’s visit strengthens tourism and socio-economic growth in Uttarakhand

The visit of PM Narendra Modi to Pithoragarh district in October 2023 has memorialised an important landmark in the history of Uttarakhand, along with highlighting the cultural and spiritual richness of the state. The PM’s journey included visits to religious sites like Parvati Kund and Adi Kailash Parvat, depicting the deep-rooted spiritual inheritance of the land and emphasising its possibility for expansion and tourism.

PM Modi initiated his spiritual journey at Parvati Kund, a venerated pilgrimage place enrobed amid the scenic landscapes of Uttarakhand. Attired in traditional local dress, the Prime Minister engaged himself in the spiritual auras, offering devotees with utmost reverence. His participation in the traditions, including playing the power drum and conch shell, demonstrated his respect for the local customs and rituals, resounding with the beliefs

dents, both at Parvati Kund and in the border village of Guri, echoed his compassion and his consideration for their welfare. Engaging with the locals, he listened to their grievances, shared their pleasures, and reaffirmed his government’s commitment to their upliftment. This personal touch endeared him to the individuals as well as facilitated a feeling of belonging and solidarity among them.

In addition to the spiritual essence, the visit of PM Modi also had substantial importance for the socio-economic growth of Uttarakhand. The inauguration and laying of the foundation of development projects worth Rs 4,200 crore in Pithoragarh highlighted the government’s dedication to infrastructure growth and employment generation in the region. These endeavours are aimed at boosting development, improving connectivity, and enhancing the quality of life for the citizens of Uttarakhand.

Moreover, the historic visit of Prime Minister Modi to Adi Kailash Parvat carries huge importance for the tourism sector of Uttarakhand. Being the first Indian Prime Minister to visit this sacred site, PM Modi has attracted awareness to the area’s untapped prospect as a tourist destination. His exploration of the local art, craft, and products, as well as his engagement with the Indo-Tibetan trade center in Guri village, has demonstrated the cultural multiplicity and commercial possibilities of Uttarakhand.

Moreover, PM Modi’s exchange with the residents of the local people.

The visit of the Prime Minister to Parvati Kund was not just a symbolic gesture but also a testament to the dedication to maintaining and encouraging India’s cultural legacy. By performing ‘aarti’ at the Shiva-Parvati temple and meditating before the Adi Kailash peak, PM Modi observed the sacredness of the land and sought blessings for the prosperity and well-being of the country.

Moreover, PM Modi’s exchange with the residents of the local people.

## Scouring Uttarakhand’s untapped tourism potential: Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030

With the introduction of the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030, the state sketches a transformative approach towards recognition at a global level as a diverse tourism hotspot while prioritising sustainable development and inclusive growth

Uttarakhand is famous among tourists for its abundance of natural wonders. Even today, the state holds an untapped potential ready to be utilised. With the introduction of the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030, the state sketches a transformative approach towards recognition at a global level as a myriad tourism hotspot while prioritising sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The main principle of the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030 lies in empowering all stakeholders within the tourism sector, assuring that each contributes to and benefits from Uttarakhand’s journey towards evolution. By means of a suitable framework, the policy seeks to facilitate goals and interests, promoting holistic expansion.

Apart from its traditional essence of a spiritual and wellness destination, Uttarakhand strives to present its multi-faceted allure. From heritage and nature tourism to wilderness adventures and wellness retreats, the state pledges memorable experiences for every visitor. Further, the focus on all-weather tourism, including winter and Alpine ventures, seeks to draw tourists all year long.

Foremost to the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030 is the making of authentic and genuine experiences, leveraging Uttarakhand’s cultural and natural wealth. Tourism clusters and circuits will be designed to present new destinations, catering to various interests and likes.

The Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030 also prioritises sustainability with an emphasis on conserving the state’s environmental and cultural legacy. Measures to preserve natural resources, wilderness, and cultural assets are vital, assuring Uttarakhand stays unspoiled and inviting for future generations.

In line with the digital era, Uttarakhand seeks to fulfill growing visitor anticipations through technology integration. Online platforms will be operated for advertising bookings, and data dissemination, improving comfort and trust for visitors.

Private sector involvement is promoted, with the government encouraging ease of doing trade for hospitality and tourism undertakings. This combined strategy is anticipated to propel innovation and development.

The Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030 also emphasises high-value tourism to minimise adverse effects on the environment and civilisation while spreading benefits to local neighborhoods. The Hub & Spoke model strives for balanced regional growth, improving infrastructure and



PM Narendra Modi along with Pushkar Singh Dhami, CM, Uttarakhand, during their visit to Jageshwar Dham Temple, a part of Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission

## Rekindling religious splendour: Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission

The heart of ‘Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission’ lies in the dedication to reviving and restoring the essence of 48 mythological temples, with a special emphasis on 16 notable ones spread across various districts of Kumaon

Uttarakhand is abode to a number of ancient temples and sacred sites. These temples are spread across the Kumaon area and have served as a source of belief and faith for a long time, attracting believers from various parts of the world.

However, over the course of time, several of these religious places aren’t known to devotees as their magnificence is shadowed by disrepair and a dearth of connectivity. In a favourable turn of events, Pushkar Singh Dhami, CM, Uttarakhand, has acknowledged tremendous cultural and spiritual importance of these temples and has ventured on a visionary initiative known as the ‘Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission’, to restore and rejuvenate these architectural wonders across the state.

The core of this enterprising endeavour lies in the dedication to reviving and restoring the essence of 48 mythological temples, with a special emphasis on 16 notable ones spread across various districts of the Kumaon area. Admired for hundreds of years, these temples are all set to witness a massive transformation, with infrastructural modification plans sought to improve their accessibility and magnificence. CM Dhami’s vision is just not limited to material renovations, but also encloses a holistic strategy that contains enhanced road connectivity, hospitality and lodging services, and conservation measures.

One of the essential elements of the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission is the driving project to improve road connectivity to these venerated sites. The state government has acknowledged the significance of seamless conveyance networks in boosting pilgrimage and tourism and prioritised the building of roads connecting these temples. Along with facilitating the

taking of the mission, as well as highlight the urgency and importance of this initiative in boosting the economic and cultural landscape of Uttarakhand.

MANASKHAND EXPRESS

In a recent development that observes an important landmark in the completion of CM Dhami’s vision, the launch of the Manaskhand Express is nearing its scheduled date. Manaskhand Express is a special train service being launched under the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission that will connect Kolkata to Tanakpur. This upcoming long-route train is scheduled to begin operations on April 15 and will function as a robust connection between the temples of the Kumaon area and devotees from across the nation. The Manaskhand Express will be supported by local and regional transportation services and hospitality arrangements and represents the essence of inclusivity and accessibility that underpins the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission. Furthermore, the Uttarakhand government’s dedi-

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pilgrimage for visitors, enhanced road infrastructure will also make way for more significant economic prospects for the local residents living in these remote locations.

Integration of contemporary conveniences with traditional spirituality is paramount to the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission. This idea of CM Dhami expands beyond just infrastructure expansion; it contains the establishment of a facilitative atmosphere for devotees and visitors alike. The allotment of budgets for the expansion of encompassing locations and the provision of hospitality services highlights the government’s dedication to assuring an unforgettable and enriching experience for tourists.

In his goal of realising this notion, CM Dhami, during his meeting with PM Narendra Modi in January 2024, had requested support for the ongoing work of the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission. In the meeting, CM Dhami presented a detailed proposal summarising the purposes and essentials of the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission. This depicted his resolution to garner the required resources for a successful under-

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FIRST COLUMN

CHERISH THE INSTRUCTIONS OF GOD

The verses of the Bhagavad Gita offer profound insights into life's purpose



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let me start with verse # 3.8 of the Bhagavad Gita, which is, “You should always do your duty. Because action is superior to inaction. Maintenance of the body will also not be possible through inaction.” We all know what our duties are according to time, place and circumstances. We also know that neglecting our duties impacts our maintenance. For example, a student does not pay attention to his studies. What happens subsequently? He finds it hard to maintain himself. For whose benefit was this verse spoken? Let me take another verse, which is very famous. I am referring to verse #2.47, which goes like this, “You have a right only in action, not ever in predetermining fruits. You should not speculate about the fruit of action; your attachment to inaction also should not be there.” For whose benefit was this verse spoken? Do we have any other right except to do our duties? And we must not neglect to do them. As regards the results of our actions, the right to decide them has been kept by God with Himself. The third verse chosen by me is very telling, in which Lord Krishna promises, “People who worship Me with undivided attention, meditating on Me, for these regular practitioners of yoga, I help in getting what one does not have and provide security of what one has.” Verse after verse the Lord is cajoling us to do what will fulfil all our desires, which are according to dharma. God couldn't be a party to anything against dharma. Could He? The fourth verse in this connection is: “Where there is yogeshwara Shri Krishna and where there is Arjuna (meaning us), there will be opulence, victory, wealth and morality.” (18.78) What are our desires generally? That we should succeed in our endeavours. We would if we were aiming for what is according to morality, i.e. dharma. The same is about



wealth. Don't we need enough resources for our maintenance? Not only wealth, there will be 'saubhagya' (good fortune). Who benefits from all these? We do; God doesn't because He is complete in all respects. (3.22) The next verse is about gaining peace and a perfect destination. Lord Krishna instructs, 'In all respects, take My shelter only. By My mercy, you will achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode.' What is it that we lack after gaining material needs, comforts, etc.? It is peace, which is what God is promising. Not only that, God is also assuring eternal abode, which is free from the defects of this material world. How nice it will be to not be subjected to repeated birth and death? God is prepared to grant this also. God is always wanting to give. He has so much to give if we become deserving. Isn't that fair? How do we become deserving? Lord Krishna describes, 'Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me.' (18.65) One may feel that all these activities relate to God. Yes, they do but do they benefit Him? No, far from it; they only purify our existence. And God had to set some conditions to qualify for His special favour. How else was He to reward anyone? Just focus on how easy they are to do. I will take up one more verse, which is, 'Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My grace.' (18.58) This is quite an amazing offer from God. Aren't we all struggling with one problem or another throughout our lives? We do, but our ego comes in the way. We are not prepared to accept that somebody can be superior to us and to such an extent that we have to take His shelter and His alone. (18.66) We would rather suffer but won't do as instructed by God. Do we realise that our acts will benefit the world if we obey God's instructions? We will become better persons by following dharma – the rules for proper behaviour. We will fit in the System created by God, which is required for the creation to exist eternally. *(The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)*

# MSP methodology and farmer demands



UTTAM GUPTA

Questions arise about the rationale and implications of adopting Dr Swaminathan's proposed methodology for MSP calculation



Co-terminus with the legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops, another demand raised by the farmers relates to how the MSP is fixed. They want it to be calculated based on the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) under Dr MS Swaminathan (2006). All along, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) - a statutory body under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare - has been setting MSP at the level of the so-called comprehensive cost or C2 cost. C2 is arrived at by adding three components viz. A2 covers all paid-out expenses, both in cash and in kind, incurred by farmers on seeds, fertilizers, chemicals, hired labour, fuel and irrigation; FL is the imputed value of unpaid family labour; and rental value of owned land and imputed cost that would be incurred on owned fixed capital assets (OFCA), call it to return on assets or RoA. Put simply, MSP is equal to A2 + FL + RoA. It takes care of all the costs incurred by the farmer for growing the crop - both paid out and own - besides including an element of profit i.e. RoA. That is why it is bandied as 'comprehensive'. The formula was used for determining MSP till FY 2017-18. The Government normally accepts recommendations made by CACP. In its fifth report submitted in October 2006, the NCF recommended that MSP should be "at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production". The recommendation did not specifically mention what 'measure of costs' would be used. However, Dr Swaminathan clarified: "When we recommended 50 per cent over costs, we meant complete costs called C2, which includes all assumed costs". Can the clarification given by him many years after the report was finalized and submitted be taken to mean that the Commission had meant it that way? A recommendation emerges from deliberations and is based on consensus among



IN ITS FIFTH REPORT SUBMITTED IN OCTOBER 2006, THE NCF RECOMMENDED THAT MSP SHOULD BE 'AT LEAST 50 PER CENT MORE THAN THE WEIGHTED AVERAGE COST OF PRODUCTION.' THE RECOMMENDATION DID NOT SPECIFICALLY MENTION WHAT 'MEASURE OF COSTS' WOULD BE USED

members. This also applies to a clarification given on an important aspect of the recommendation. That would not have been possible as you can't expect Dr Swaminathan to go back to other members and check. The big question is: Is giving the farmer at least 50 per cent more than the 'C2' costs logical? The purported rationale for giving 50 per cent extra is that she should get a handsome profit after covering all paid-out costs. Profit as it is understood in business parlance is essentially meant to give a return to the owner for her invested capital. In the case of a farmer, her investment in crop growing business is by way of 'land' and 'OFCA' besides her labour. But, remuneration/return for all these is already incorporated under C2. To give a further sweetener (read: 50 per cent profit) over and above these would be illogical. Let us understand this with the help of an example. In the case of paddy, the all-India weighted average A2 cost for the 2017-18 Kharif season, as estimated by the CACP, was Rs 840 per quintal; A2+FL cost: Rs 1,117 per quintal and C2 costs: Rs 1,484 per quintal. In the total cost of Rs 1,484 per quintal, the amount going towards the farmer's income was Rs 644 per quintal (1484-840). Of this, Rs 277 per quintal (1117-840) was for FL and Rs 367 per quintal (1484-1117) for RoA. If one were to go by NCF recommendation as clarified by Dr Swaminathan, the farmer would have to be given Rs 742 per quintal (0.5x1,484) in addition to an income of Rs 644 per quintal already built into C2 thus taking the total to Rs 1386 for each quintal of paddy. This translates to 93 per cent of C2 costs. Taken as a proportion of the revised MSP of Rs 2226 per quintal, this will be 62

per cent. Where does one get such a fantastic return? This is happening because the farmer is being remunerated twice over first under C2 and then a further profit of 50 percent. Furthermore, the way profit is calculated '50 per cent of C2; you end up giving a 'return on return': RoA component under C2 being Rs 367 per quintal, she gets a fortuitous gain of Rs 183.5 (0.5x367). Unequivocally, there is a flaw in the above method. Either, the government should continue with the extant method of using C2 for fixing MSP. On the other hand, if it wants to go for 50 per cent profit, then this should be applied only to the paid-out costs namely A2. In other words, MSP should be set at A2+FL plus 50 per cent of A2. On this basis, in the above example, the MSP would be Rs 1537 per quintal (1117+0.5x840). What did the Modi - government do? In its poll manifesto for 2014, the BJP had promised to implement NCF recommendations on MSP. The announcement in this regard was made by the then Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his Budget speech for FY 2018-19. Later, while replying to a debate in Parliament, Jaitley clarified that 'the production cost would be taken as actual paid A2 plus FL'. In other words, it decided to set MSP at A2+FL plus 50 per cent of A2+FL; it comes to Rs 1675 per quintal (1117x1.5). The formula adopted by the incumbent government also suffers from a flaw to the extent that 'it also adds return on the imputed cost of family labor' which is unjustified. Have received wage/income for the work done on the field, how can a farmer also earn a profit on it? In the above example, this fortuitous amount is Rs 138 per quintal (277x0.5).

Moreover, the very approach of the Dr Swaminathan committee of arriving at a profit by taking a percentage of the cost is susceptible to sharp increases in payments to farmers. With every rupee increase in the cost, farmers' profit will increase by 0.5 rupees. At present, most of the agricultural inputs are subsidized. On fertilizers, there is a massive subsidy (urea is sold at about 1/10th of its cost). If the subsidy is slashed leading to a steep rise in the cost of fertilizers, the formula will give an unwarranted bonanza to the farmers by a corresponding increase in profit. At a fundamental level, profit is meant to reward an entity for the capital invested in any enterprise. This is precisely what was being done before the FY 2018-19. That formula (read: C2 for fixing the MSP) ought to have been continued. The MSP setting exercise suffers from another aberration. The cost of producing a crop varies from place to place depending on the soil conditions, weather, irrigation, price of inputs and so on. However, to arrive at MSP, the CACP takes the 'weighted average' (WA) cost of production. When the price determined in this manner is given to all farmers, those producing at a higher cost stand to lose whereas others with lower cost make a fortuitous gain. Today, the government is trapped in the vicious cycle of having to procure farmers' produce at ever-increasing MSP, now under pressure to pick up 'all of it' at MSP which can denude the exchequer. This, in turn, is because it is trying to substitute the role of the market. It should disentangle from this trap and focus on agri-market reforms which alone can help farmers get a good price. *(The writer is a policy analyst, views are personal)*

# Delhi's floral splendour: A tale of tulips and traditions

## The Delhi Tulip Festival stands as a testament to resilience, beauty and the enduring spirit of life's eternal dance

Nestled within the heart of New Delhi's diplomatic enclave of Chanakyapuri, Shanti Path emerges as a mesmerizing canvas painted with vibrant hues, adorned by a tapestry of tulips in an array of colors - red, white, pink, yellow, and purple. The 'Delhi Tulip Festival', now in its second consecutive year, came to a close on February 21, 2024, having commenced on February 10. Visitors, drawn from distant lands, stood in awe at the spectacle of nature's grandeur, echoing the immortal verses of poets like P. B. Shelley and John Keats. As the festival unfolded, the city's roundabouts and parks, maintained by the New Delhi Municipal Council and the Delhi Development Authority,



RAJDEEP PATHAK

bloomed with the arrival of Spring, welcoming all with renewed grandeur. But what is the story behind these tulips? Originating centuries ago in the ancient lands of Persia, tulips held significance as symbols of love and prosperity. Their journey along the silk routes carried tales of exotic lands and distant horizons, captivating hearts from Istanbul to Amsterdam. It was

in the fields of the Netherlands during the Dutch Golden Age that tulips blossomed into a cultural icon. Despite uncertainty surrounding its introduction to Western Europe, the efforts of individuals like Botanist Carolus Clusius in the late 16th century popularized tulips, leading to the famous 'tulip mania' of the 17th century. By the 19th and 20th centuries, tulip cultivation flourished in the Netherlands, solidifying its position as the world's leading producer. The association between tulips and the Netherlands was further immortalized with the iconic song 'Tulips from Amsterdam' in the 1950s. Intriguingly, it was through diplomatic channels that tulips found their way into the gardens of New Delhi.



Indo-Dutch relations provided fertile ground for this botanical ambassador to take root, inspired by festivals like the 'Amsterdam Tulip Festival' and Srinagar's Tulip Garden. Imported from the Netherlands, these tulips have been lovingly nurtured by skilled gardeners trained by the NDMC's horticulture department.

As the sun casts its golden rays upon the city, tulips burst into bloom, transforming every corner into a canvas of nature's masterpiece. From the picturesque avenues of Shanti Path to the vibrant Tulip Festival Garden, each location becomes a testament to the enduring cycle of life and beauty. Engaging citizens through various competitions

and events, the festival fosters a deeper connection to nature's rhythms and the bonds of community. Sh. Amit Yadav, the NDMC Chairman, revealed that seven types of tulips were planted, with three lakh bulbs sourced from the Netherlands and an additional 40,000 bulbs donated by the Dutch Embassy. From early to late bloomers, each tulip whispers tales of resilience and renewal. This festival not only celebrates beauty but also underscores the importance of stewarding and protecting nature for future generations. The Delhi Tulip Festival epitomizes the fusion of urban elegance and ecological consciousness, enchanting visitors and serving as a beacon for sustainable tourism. Beyond

its aesthetic charm, it stands as a testament to the power of beauty and art in fostering global connections and enhancing a city's allure. As visitors from around the world gather to admire the kaleidoscopic beauty of tulips, the festival becomes a celebration of global heritage, transcending cultural barriers and fostering understanding and appreciation among people of diverse backgrounds. In more ways than one, the festival symbolises the resilience and endurance of nature, standing tall amidst the chaos of urban life. As the curtains draw to a close on the Tulip Festival, the flowers continue to adorn the cityscape with their vibrant hues. Amidst the bustling rhythm of urban life, the tulip

stands as a silent sentinel of hope, its petals a testament to the enduring spirit of life's eternal dance. Today, the tulip serves as a symbol of resilience and endurance, having traversed oceans and centuries to become a cherished emblem of beauty worldwide. While the curtains have been drawn on the Tulip Festival, the flowers continue to stand tall, adorning the cityscape with their vibrant hues. This festival is more than just a local event; it's a part of global heritage, a celebration where visitors from around the world gather to admire the kaleidoscopic beauty of colors spanning far and wide. *(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Sansthan, views are personal)*



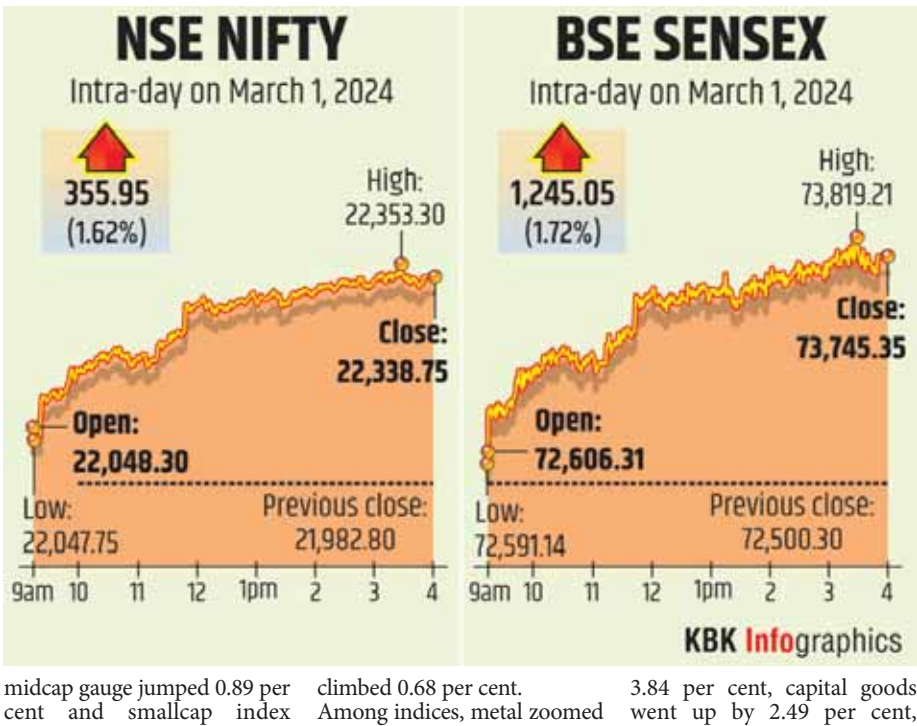
# Sensex, Nifty hit record high

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rallied more than one-and-a-half per cent to hit their lifetime highs on Friday helped by impressive GDP data and fresh foreign fund inflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,245.05 points or 1.72 per cent to reach 73,745.35 — its all-time closing peak. During the day, it zoomed 1,318.91 points or 1.81 per cent to hit a record intra-day high of 73,819.21. The Nifty climbed 355.95 points or 1.62 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 22,338.75. During the day, it soared 370.5 points or 1.68 per cent to reach its intra-day record peak of 22,353.30. A rally in global markets and auto sales numbers added to the positive momentum in the equity markets, analysts said. Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped over 6 per cent

while JSW Steel climbed more than 4 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Titan, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank and Tata Motors were the other major gainers. HCL Technologies, Infosys and Tech Mahindra were the laggards. India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 — the fastest pace in one-and-a-half years. The growth rate in October-December was higher than 7.6 per cent in the previous three years, and it helped take the estimate for the current fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) to 7.6 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday. India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by both domestic

and external demand, a monthly survey said on Friday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023. "Better-than-expected Q3 FY24 GDP and ease in US inflation added buoyancy in both domestic and global markets. As the general election draws closer, stellar economic growth data raised confidence among investors for a pre-election rally. "On the global front, in-line US personal consumption expenditure data and benign Euro zone inflation will influence global central banks to take a dovish view on interest rates," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE



midcap gauge jumped 0.89 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.68 per cent. Among indices, metal zoomed 3.84 per cent, capital goods went up by 2.49 per cent,

bankex climbed 2.48 per cent, auto advanced 2.23 per cent, energy (2.14 per cent), oil & gas (2.14 per cent), commodities (2.12 per cent) and industrials (1.91 per cent). IT and tech were the laggards. A total of 2,387 advanced while 1,451 declined and 109 remained unchanged. In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains. European markets were trading in positive territory. The US markets ended in the green on Thursday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday as they bought equities worth Rs 3,568.11 crore, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30 on Thursday. The Nifty gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to 21,982.80. Global oil benchmark Brent

crude climbed 0.82 per cent to USD 82.58 a barrel. Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE will conduct a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on Saturday to check their preparedness to handle major disruption or failure at the primary site. The special live trading session will have intra-day switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery (DR) site. The exchanges said there will be two sessions — the first from 9:15 am to 10 am on the PR, and the second from 11:30 am to 12:30 pm on the DR site. "Trading members are requested to note that the exchange will conduct a special live trading session with intraday switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery Site (DR) on Saturday, March 2, in equity and equity derivatives segments," BSE and NSE said in separate circulars.



## Indian logistics market to grow at 8.8 per cent annually by 2029

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian freight and logistics market is estimated to grow at 8.8 per cent annually to USD 484.43 billion by 2029 from USD 317.26 billion in 2024 due to technological advancement, as per a report released at logistic fair LogiMAT India. LogiMAT India 2024, the satellite show of Europe's biggest intralogistics exhibition LogiMAT Stuttgart, is organised by Messe Stuttgart India Pvt Ltd on February 28-March 1 at India Expo Mart. According to a statement, the integration of cutting-edge technologies and advancements in intralogistics, automation, warehousing, and transportation management heralds a transformative era for the logistics sector in India. Indian freight and logistics market is poised for remarkable growth. LogiMAT India 2024 projections indicate a surge in market size to USD 317.26 billion by 2024, with a projected CAGR of 8.83 per cent, catapulting it to USD 484.43 billion by 2029. This surge not only signifies robust economic expansion but also holds the promise of substantial job creation and enhanced business scalability, it stated. Together, these developments are set to redefine the logistics landscape, ushering in a new

era of efficiency and innovation. Sachin Patil, MD and CEO of Messe Stuttgart said the transformative potential of new technologies and innovations showcased at LogiMAT India is immense. "We envision these advancements to not only attract substantial investments to India's logistics sector, but also to create a significant number of jobs, driving economic growth and prosperity," he added. Furthermore, these technologies have the potential to scale logistics businesses to unprecedented levels, enabling them to optimise operations, enhance customer service, and achieve greater profitability, the statement said. By leveraging robotics, automation, AI, and other cutting-edge solutions, logistics companies can streamline processes, reduce costs, and stay ahead of the competition in today's dynamic business environment, it pointed out. Messe Stuttgart India Pvt Ltd is the wholly-owned subsidiary of Landesmesse Stuttgart GmbH. With a focus on innovation and technology, the event provides a comprehensive platform for industry professionals to explore the latest trends and advancements in the intralogistics, transportation, warehousing and automation sectors.

## Gold jumps ₹350; silver rallies ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices jumped Rs 350 to Rs 63,320 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid strong trends in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal closed at Rs 62,970 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also rallied Rs 400 to Rs 74,500 per kg, while it settled at Rs 74,100 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,320 per 10 grams, up by Rs 350, taking bullish cues in the overseas market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.



In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,045 per ounce, up by USD 11 from the previous close. Following the release of the Personal Consumption

Expenditure (PCE) price index data, which indicated signs of slowing inflation in the US and raised expectations of a monetary policy rate cut by the Federal Reserve later this year,

Gandhi said. After the release of the data, the yellow metal prices surged to a four-week high, he added. Silver was also up at USD 22.60 per ounce, while it had ended at USD 22.50 per ounce in the previous close. Investors will also look forward to the release of major macro data, including global US manufacturing PMI (January) and ISM manufacturing (February) which will shape the expectations for the Fed's monetary policy rate outlook and further direction for the gold prices, Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said.



## Rupee settles 1 paisa lower at 82.90 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee settled 1 paisa lower at 82.90 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday amid rising crude oil prices in the overseas market and increased demand for the American currency from importers. However, a rally in equity markets and robust domestic macro-economic data supported the local currency and restricted the fall, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.86 and traded in a narrow range of 82.84 and 82.91 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 82.90 (provisional) against the dollar, down 1 paisa from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee settled 2 paise higher at 82.89 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, dipped marginally by 0.02 per cent to 104.07. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the US dollar rose on month-end rebalancing by importers and oil marketing companies. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on improved risk sentiments in the domestic markets following stellar GDP data and positive domestic equities. However, strong US dollar and elevated crude oil prices may cap the sharp upside," Choudhary said. He said the traders may remain cautious ahead of ISM manufacturing PMI and construction

spending data from the US. "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.60 to Rs 83.10." Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, surged 1.26 per cent to USD 82.94 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex climbed 1,245.05 points, or 1.72 per cent, to settle at a new peak of 73,745.35. The Nifty rose 355.95 points, or 1.62 per cent, to close at a record 22,338.75. A monthly survey released on Friday showed India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by domestic and external demand. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023. According to the government data released on Thursday, India's economic growth accelerated to 8.4 per cent in the October-December quarter of this fiscal, mainly due to double-digit growth in manufacturing and a good showing by mining & quarrying and construction sectors. The government's fiscal deficit at Rs 11 lakh crore at January end touched 63.6 per cent of the revised annual target. In the corresponding period last year, the fiscal deficit or gap between the expenditure and revenue was 67.8 per cent of the Revised Estimates (RE) of the Union Budget 2022-23.

## Paytm shares jump 5 per cent; hit upper circuit limit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns and operates Paytm, on Friday, jumped 5 per cent after the company said the board has approved the discontinuation of inter-company pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies. The stock climbed 5 per cent to Rs 425.45 — its upper circuit limit — on the BSE after falling in the past three trading days. Shares of the company had fallen by 5.31 per cent in the last three days. The stock jumped 4.99 per cent to Rs 423.45 — the upper circuit limit — on the NSE. In traded volume terms, 7.97 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 46.64 lakh shares on the NSE during the day. Amid RBI's action on its associate firm, One97 Communications on Friday said the board has approved the discontinuation of inter-company pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies. The move assumes significance as Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) is under the RBI's lens over persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns. In a filing on Friday, One97 Communications said the company and its associate entity, Paytm Payments Bank Limited, have introduced additional



measures to strengthen their approach towards independent operations of PPBL. "As part of this process to reduce dependencies, Paytm and PPBL have mutually agreed to discontinue various inter-company agreements with Paytm and its group entities," the BSE filing said. Also, the shareholders of PPBL have agreed to simplify the Shareholders Agreement (SHA) to support PPBL's governance, it added. The Board of OCL (One97 Communications Ltd) approved the

termination of agreements and amendment of SHA on March 1, 2024. Paytm had announced earlier that it would sign up new partnerships with other banks and take measures to provide seamless services to its customers and merchants. In a regulatory action in January, the RBI barred PPBL from accepting fresh deposits or top-ups in customer accounts, wallets, FASTags, and other instruments after February 29 — a deadline that was later extended to March 15.

## India set to become global semiconductor manufacturing destination: Industry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet's nod to three upcoming semiconductor manufacturing units is a step towards self-sufficiency and makes the country's dream of becoming a global chip making destination achievable, according to industry players. The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved setting up three semiconductor-making units, entailing an investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore, as part of an attempt to cut India's dependence on imports to meet the requirements of chips. According to S P Kochhar, Director General, COAI (Cellular Operators Association of India), the approval for these units which has come under India's Semiconductor Mission is a positive and commendable development. "This is a progressive step for India and the strongly emerging manufacturing ecosystem in the country. We believe this serves as an excellent example for



our nation towards attaining self-sufficiency in line with our prime minister's vision of

'Atmanirbharta' and will further inspire India's goals to become a global manufacturing and supply chain hub"

he said. Kochhar said that with the output from these facilities being poised to benefit various sectors, it is expected to provide a fillip to the 'Digital India' mission through increased technological prowess and advancement of the indigenous industrial ecosystem, besides generating employment and attracting more investments in the country. Chairman of ICEA (India Cellular and Electronics Association) Pankaj Mohindroo said the move will pave the way for setting up more semiconductor fabrication plants (Fab) and outsourced semiconductor assembly and test units (OSAT) in the country. "The emergence of Bharat as a global semiconductor manufacturing destination no longer seems to be a distant dream. By 2027 we will have the FAB and OSAT units producing. By the end of the decade, we may have more than 10 fabs and 20 OSAT units in production besides many semiconductor product companies," Mohindroo said.

## GDP growth in FY24 likely to be within striking distance of 8 per cent: SBI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GDP growth for the current financial year could be within striking distance of 8 per cent, a study by the State Bank of India (SBI) said on Friday, a day after India posted an 8.4 per cent growth in the December quarter, and revised upwards the estimates for the preceding two quarters. "The third quarter GDP numbers jolted the psyche and cognitive framework of most in markets, while sweeping some by a pleasant surprise. Clearly, right policy prisms and perspectives can trump irrational expectations bordering fault lines," SBI said in its research report 'Ecowrap'. It noted that defying all estimates, the economy grew 8.4 per cent in the third quarter of 2023-24 after exhibiting more than 8 per cent growth in the preceding two quarters. The buoyancy in indirect tax mop-up (32 per cent year-on-year growth), gap between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross Value



Added (GVA) growth widened. "For fiscal 2023-24 GDP growth is expected to increase 7.6 per cent and GVA growth by 6.9 per cent... We estimate fourth quarter GDP growth at 5.9 per cent, which we believe is an understatement. Thus it is most likely that FY24 GDP growth could be within striking distance of 8 per cent," the SBI study said. The National Statistical Office (NSO) has revised GDP estimates for the first and second quarters of this fiscal to 8.2 and 8.1 per cent from 7.8 per cent and 7.6 per cent, respectively. With the revisions, the GDP growth during April-December works out to be 8.2 per cent. The SBI report further said with the government's efforts to ensure quality of life for all citizens and stopping leakage of benefits through direct benefit transfer, for the first time the per capita GDP at current prices crossed Rs 2 lakh mark in 2023-24. In constant prices, too, per capita GDP has increased to Rs 1.24 lakh in the current fiscal.





PLAY ON

SHOBORI GANGULI takes an indulgent plunge into a theatrical restaurant pool that proves to be a novel immersive culinary experience

Along the winding fine dining streets of South Delhi's heart and lungs, Mehrauli, you must stop at a place that literally invites you to come in and Play. Yes, Play is all about a delectable indulgence in all things heady about Asian and Mediterranean confluence. I find fusion too limiting a term for the entity Play has created. The unique decor, the theatrical culinary presentation, the awesome open air terrace, everything about Play exudes the kind of warmth you so desire on a frosty winter evening. Of course, in the company of good friends. Standing out in all its opulence at the Qutub Complex, Play has carefully sought to extend the norms of conventional wining and dining to forge a cocktail bar and restaurant with innovation writ large. Kanishk Tuteja, the creative force behind Play, envisions a space where culinary artistry seamlessly meets theatrical elegance. As the founder, he expresses that "Play transcends the traditional definition of a



restaurant — it's a stage for unforgettable experiences. The fusion of diverse flavours, mirrored illusions, and dynamic ambiance invites guests to embark on a journey of luxury and delight at Play, where every moment is meticulously crafted for those who seek the extraordinary." To dwell briefly on the décor, which while being overwhelming is only a part of what Play has on offer, we are informed that the interior design has drawn inspiration from the "theatrical elegance" and "blending" influences of Asian and Mediterranean cultures. Mirrored elements on the walls indeed create mesmerising spatial illusions, promising to cast a magical spell even before the heady spirits and aromatic flavours flow in to gently lure you into wonderland. As explained by Play's General Manager Kunal Kumar, the place promises to remain etched in our memories well beyond the moment of our departure. The special menu crafted by Chef Rishi Prakash for us indeed continues to linger on even now. As I mentioned, the Asian and




Mediterranean confluence of cuisine and culture is Play's signature touch. From specially infused sushi to inventive tapas, each dish has a unique narrative. Chef Bulut's theatrical presentation skills were on full display which elevated the dining experience to another realm altogether. Alongside Play's signature gems Black Cod Miso and the irresistible Baklava, Chef Bulut's mastery of a visually stunning and theatrical presentation certainly made the evening special. The specially crafted menu for us included a Leaks and Chicken soup alongside an option of Vietnamese Banh Pho. We savoured an array of appetizers — Soy Caramel Mushroom, Guaca Beets Tart, a Mock Meat Stir

Fry. The meat eaters were of course treated to an Arabic Lemon Garlic Fish, Char Siu Chicken and a scrumptious Shrimp Avocado Tart. The salads comprised a healthy mix of Moroccan Carrot and Quinoa, with Beet Root Carpaccio. From the Chef's Theatre came Lamb Adana and Cottage Cheese Shish Touk. The main course was a refined amalgamation of Buck Wheat Pancake, Sundried Tomato Barley, Japanese Katsu Curry, Tofu and Chicken Cutlet, and River Sole. For desserts, we literally dug into the Mixed Berry Cheesecake and Chocolate Forest. I and my friends resolved to return for more fun at Play. Highly recommended for an evening or afternoon of guilt-free indulgence.



Talking Tokyo

For a city known for its love for butter chicken, Guppy celebrates a decade of educating Delhiites about Japanese flavours, writes PAWAN SONI





In the hospitality industry, where employee turnover is high, encountering someone who has remained with a group for 15 years and been with the brand since its inception 10 years ago is rare. I had the pleasure of meeting Chef Saurabh Sharan at Guppy, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary. Hailing from a humble background and raised in Bihar, I was intrigued to learn about Chef Saurabh Sharan's journey from Bihar to managing one of Delhi's finest Japanese restaurants. The chef, with a smile, shared that he always remained open to learning. Starting at a junior level, he had the opportunity to work with some of the best chefs, and today, he has risen through the ranks. We began our lunch eagerly. The first one was Yo! Guppy, which had a subtle hint of wasabi with a sour



mix. It was so delightful that we ordered another round. On the culinary front, we began with the fried calamari. I was expecting the typical breaded calamari, but what arrived was a delightful surprise. The calamari was pan-fried a la plancha style, seared in high heat, and served with quality olives, cherry tomatoes, and pepper coulis. Absolutely delicious, though it reminded me more of Spanish tapas. A side of garlic bread would have perfected this dish for me. The salmon tartare is another dish worth trying, with fresh avocado, tobiko for crunch, and umami flavors from bonito mayo. The braised eel on top of pan-fried sushi rice was delightful, though I would have preferred it served in smaller pieces for easier eating with chopsticks. The only disappointing dish on the



menu was the Ramen burger, where the noodles were shaped into a bun. Once a popular trend on the internet and globally, I found the ramen to be overly crispy, and the pork belly, bacon, and tomatoes overloaded the burger. While it may be visually appealing for Instagram, consuming all the ingredients in one bite proved to be a challenge. The meal ended on a sweet note with a deconstructed banoffee cake, featuring toffee sauce and caramelized banana served with fresh cream alongside banana cake. In a world where most brands struggle to survive even a few months, Guppy is celebrating its 10th anniversary. For a city known for its love of butter chicken, Guppy not only serves but also educates many Delhiites about Japanese flavors, becoming a favorite among its patrons. This achievement is truly commendable. Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards



# KAPIL BACKS BCCI STRICTNESS ON DOMESTIC CRICKET

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A few players will suffer, but let it be,” said legendary former India captain Kapil Dev on Friday as he backed the BCCI’s decision to terminate central contracts for lack of commitment to domestic cricket, calling it a much-needed step to protect marquee first-class events like the Ranji Trophy.

Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were on Wednesday excluded from the BCCI’s central contracts after ignoring the board’s diktat to play in the Ranji Trophy. The decision evoked mixed reactions with some former players like Kirti Azad and Irfan Pathan backing the out-of-favour duo.

Kapil refrained from taking names but said the BCCI’s decision to assert the importance of domestic cricket was long overdue.

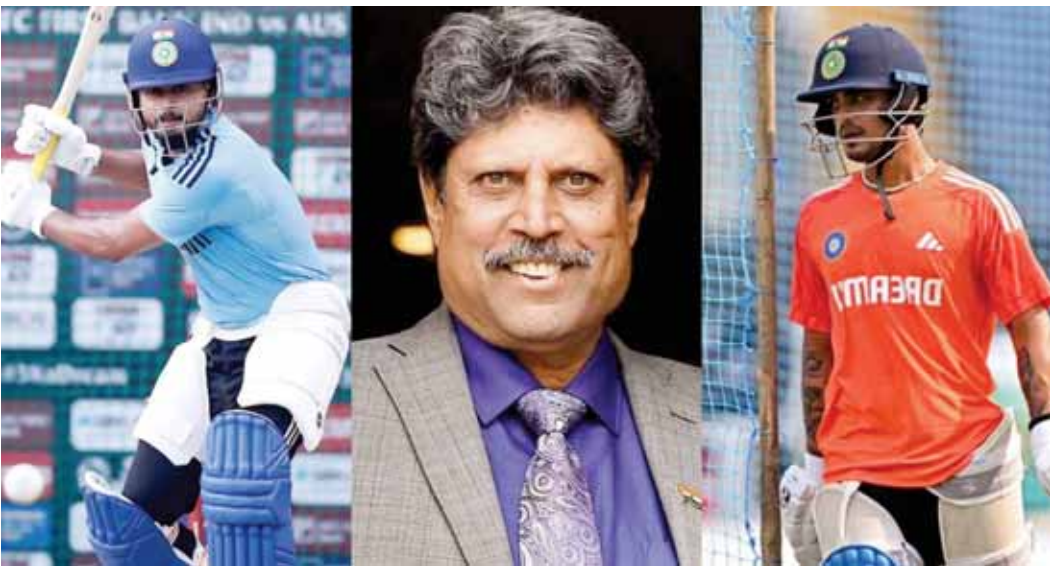
“Yes, few players will suffer, kuch

logon ko tagleef hogi, hone do lekin desh se badhkar koi nahi hai (some people will feel hurt but let it be because nobody is bigger than the country). Well done,” he said.

“I congratulate the BCCI for taking the much needed step to protect the status of domestic cricket. I was sad to see domestic cricket being given the skip by players once they had established themselves in international cricket,” the captain of the 1983 World Cup-winning side observed in his statement.

The BCCI, while announcing the central contracts, urged the players to give due importance to domestic competitions.

The 25-year-old Kishan did not turn up for Jharkhand throughout the team’s campaign in Ranji Trophy despite not being on national duty after leaving the tour of South Africa in December citing personal reasons. He instead focussed on preparing for the IPL



next month for his franchise Mumbai Indians. Iyer, on the other hand, did not make himself available for Mumbai’s Ranji quarterfinal against Baroda after being excluded

from the Indian team after the second Test against England. He, however, has been picked for Mumbai’s Ranji semifinal against Tamil Nadu starting March 2.

“It was high time the message was given and this strong step by the BCCI will go a long way in restoring the prestige of domestic cricket,” he added.

Kapil asserted that it was the duty of established stars to play domestic cricket as they owe their success to their respective states.

“I have always believed in the process of international players making themselves available to play for their respective states. It helps them extend their support to domestic players. Also it is a nice way to pay back for the services rendered by the state association in grooming a player,” he said.

Kapil also expressed his gratitude to the BCCI for enhancing the pension of former cricketers, saying

it has come as a major relief to families of several yesteryear players.

In 2022, the board had announced a hike in the monthly pensions of former cricketers — both men and women.

Former first-class men’s cricketers, who earlier got Rs 15,000 per month are now getting Rs 30,000, while former Test players, who got Rs 37,500, are now getting Rs 60,000.

Women international players, who received Rs 30,000 prior to the revision are now receiving Rs 52,500, while first-class cricketers who retired before 2003 and were getting Rs 22,500 are now getting Rs 45,000.

“I am also happy that the BCCI has increased the pension amount of the players. This was a much needed boost to those whose family depends on the pension received,” added Kapil.



## We are thrilled to have Shreyas in team for Ranji semifinal: Rahane

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane on Friday backed Shreyas Iyer to put the contractual turmoil behind him and deliver a punchy performance for the team in the Ranji Trophy semifinal against Tamil Nadu, beginning here on Saturday.

Shreyas along with Jharkhand’s Ishan Kishan were not considered for the annual central contracts after both the players skipped the Ranji matches in violation of BCCI’s diktat.

Shreyas sat out of Mumbai’s quarterfinal against Baroda here while complaining of back pain.

“He’s an experienced player. His contribution has been amazing whenever he turned up for Mumbai. We are thrilled to have him in our team for the semifinal,” Rahane told the media here at the BKC Ground.

Rahane said Shreyas would not require any extra motivation to do well for Mumbai against TN.

“I don’t think he needs any encouragement or advice. He has always contributed with the bat for Mumbai, and him being around other players in the dressing room will also help the team’s cause,” said Rahane.

However, Rahane himself is waging a personal battle after scoring just 115 runs from six matches at an average of 12.77 with a lone fifty.

But the 35-year-old did not read much into those anaemic numbers.

“It’s just a phase and you have to respect it (not scoring runs). When you’re batting well and scoring runs, it happens consistently. There’s nothing wrong with my batting. I just have to remain positive and back my game and instinct,” he said.

Rahane said he needed to bat freely to get back into his run-scoring ways.

“I just have to go out there and play freely. I feel as a player you have to be confident and respect a phase, move forward and learn whatever you can. You don’t want to go too far ahead,” he added.

Rahane confirmed that opener Prithvi Shaw has recovered from a finger injury which had forced him to bat in the middle-order during the quarterfinal.

“His finger was hurt, that’s why he came down the order. We wanted him to go before Musheer (Khan). But obviously, because of the injection’s effect, he had to go after him,” Rahane said.

Rahane hoped that Shaw, who has made 389 runs from four matches at an average of 64.83, would find his A game against Tamil Nadu.

“Prithvi is really aggressive and he gets those runs very quickly. As a batsman, I don’t think he (has) changed much. He’s hungry to score runs. That’s

what we want from Prithvi. We don’t want him to change his game,” Rahane said.

He said Mumbai will adopt a pressure-free approach in this game.

“We are playing really well. We don’t want to think about the quarterfinal, semifinal or final. It is just another game for us. If we can do that and be in the moment as a team and individuals, it will help us,” Rahane noted.

Rahane was obviously pleased with the hundreds Tanush Kotian and Tushar Deshpande, the No 10 and 11, made in the last outing and said such efforts will add a lot of meat to the whole batting unit.

“Everyone is working really hard, especially the bowlers, with their batting. I think when No. 8, 9, 10, 11, contribute with the bat, it becomes really crucial for the team.

Those guys have worked really hard throughout the season on their batting, you know, those extra 15-20 minutes after they bowl (at nets). It’s paying off.”

Rahane said Kotian has the potential to become an all-rounder.

“I’m happy for Tanush because earlier he has made those crucial 70s, 80s and 90s. But I think the hundred he got is a benchmark (for him). He has the calibre to become a good all-rounder,” Rahane signed off.

## Made some mental adjustments to convert starts into big scores: Shafali



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Big-hitting batter Shafali Verma says she has made minor adjustments to her approach towards the game in the last one year, which is helping her convert good starts into big knocks in the ongoing Women’s Premier League.

Verma struck a half century and stitched a second-wicket stand of 82 runs with Alice Capsey (46) as Delhi Capitals defeated Royal Challengers Bangalore by 25 runs in a WPL match here on Thursday night.

RCB could only muster up 169/9 in their 20 overs, pursuing a 195-run victory target.

“Last time in the WPL, I was getting out in the 30s or 40s. Those knocks taught me a lot. I think because of that, now I want to convert a 30 or 40-run score into a 50 for the team

and for myself,” Verma told ‘Jio Cinema’.

“The main change is a slight adjustment in my mindset and I want to take this forward,” she added.

Verma’s team is currently top of the table with two wins from three matches.

The 20-year-old Verma, who became the youngest to play cricket for India when she debuted as a 15-year-old, also acknowledged the positive impact of playing alongside seasoned Australian Meg Lanning in her WPL team.

“When a very experienced person is standing across from you, your body language changes on its own. Playing with a player like that and building partnerships is a great privilege in my opinion.

“She has changed the game with her batting,” she said.

Delhi Capital will next taken on Gujarat Giants on Sunday.



## He is the new Ravi Ashwin: Vaughan on Bashir

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England captain Michael Vaughan feels England have discovered a “world-class superstar” in young off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, who has the skills to emulate the success of India’s Ravichandran Ashwin.

Despite England’s five-wicket loss in Ranchi, 20-year-old Bashir, playing only his second Test, impressed as he returned with a match haul of eight wickets.

His magnificent performance included a five-wicket haul in the first innings.

Ashwin, on the other hand, is

regarded as one of the best off-spinners in the history of Test cricket.

The senior spinner recently became only the second Indian bowler to snare 500 wickets in the longest format and is set for his 100th Test in Dharamsala next week against England.


“One of the great weeks, celebrating another world-class superstar that we’ve unearthed, Shoaib Bashir. That’s what we’re celebrating. Second Test match, eight wickets, he’s the new Ravi Ashwin, and we’ve unearthed him.

“So, we’re celebrating a new superstar in English cricket,” Vaughan said on Club Prairie Fire’s YouTube channel.

India handed England their first series defeat under coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes after winning the fourth Test in Ranchi to take a 3-1 lead in the ongoing series.

Vaughan backed England to win the dead rubber in Dharamsala.

“They will go with their best XI. It’s going to be cold in Dharamsala and it will suit England. I expect England to win,” Vaughan said.



A-1640


**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
**SUBARNAREKHA IRRIGATION DIVISION NO-4, JHARPOKHARIA**  
**A/P.O:-Sankuchha, Vta:- KM Katta, Dist:-Mayurbhanj**  
Mail id.sidi@division1@gmail.com

**Government of Odisha "a" PROCUREMENT NOTICE**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Corrigendum to Bid Identification No.03/23-24 of S.E.S.I.Division No-4, Jharpokharia**

With reference to the Bid Identification no 03/23-24 of SE,SI Division No-4 Jharpokharia the tender invited for the work at SI No 6 Construction of WBM Road from Rabindra Sethi Minor Canal Culvert to Sudam Sahi at Village Nodhabani under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir in Subarnarekha Irrigation Project with an estimated cost amounting to Rs 6.28 Lakhs is hereby cancelled due to error in uploading.

OIPR-32085/11/0007/2324

Superintending Engineer  
Subarnarekha Irrigation Division No-4,  
Jharpokharia



B-1867

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, CENTRAL (R&B) CIRCLE,**  
**BHUBANESWAR**  
Mail i.d.seccbbsr@gmail.com

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E-procurement Tender Call Notice No.36 of 2023-24

No. 839 (Estg.) Bhubaneswar the 27<sup>th</sup> February-2024

The Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids for two number road works to be received in online bidding, double cover system for construction work as detailed in: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. The details of bid documents will be available in the above website from 5.00 P.M. of 01.03.2024 to 5.00 P.M. of 15.03.2024. The bidders must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate of Class II or III. Bids received online shall be opened at 11.00 A.M. of 16.03.2024 in the Office of the Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar.

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in).

Addendum / Corrigendum, if required, will be available only in the Website.

Sd/-Er.P.K.Mohanty  
Chief Construction Engineer  
Central (R&B) Circle, Bhubaneswar

OIPR-34156/11/0030/2324

I-652

**GOVT. OF ODISHA**

**DEPARTMENT OF PANCHAYATI RAJ & DRINKING WATER  
OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, SADAR, SUNDARGARH**

**Email ID:- orl-brundargarh@nic.in**

**\*NOTICE NO:-01 DATED : 29.02.2024**

Sl. No.			Tender Cost	Class of Contractor
1	Name of Work	Construction of model AWC at bhabanipur,kundrupada	2101650/-	B and C class
		Construction of model AWC at bhabanipur,schoolpada	2101650/-	B and C class
		Construction of model AWC at bundeljhund	2101650/-	B and C class
		Construction of model AWC at talsara bhuyan pada	2155997/-	B and C class
		Construction of model AWC at mirdhapada	2089453/-	B and C class
		Construction of model AWC at Girdeldungri-2	2151869/-	B and C class
		Construction of model AWC at goudpada	2140401/-	B and C class
		Construction of model AWC at gurabasa orampada	2111591/-	B and C class
2	Period of completion	6 months		
3	Date and time of availability of bid documents in the portal	03.03.2024 AT 11:00 A.M		
4	Last date/Time for receipt of bids at the block office.	12.03.2024 Upto 05:00 P.M		
5	Date and time of opening of bid	13.03.2024 AT 11:00 A.M		
6	Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid	Block Development Officer, Sadar, Sundargarh, PIN 770001		

Further details can be seen from the Govt. web site [www.sundargarh.nic.in](http://www.sundargarh.nic.in)

OIPR-19345/11/0004/2324

Block Development Officer  
Sadar, Sundargarh

## Australia 13-2 as New Zealand strikes back late

AP ■ WELLINGTON

The almost comical run out of Kane Williamson for a second-ball duck was one of many setbacks suffered by New Zealand on the second day of the first test Friday as it fell 217 runs behind Australia.

That was until the very end of the day when Australia battled for a second time after passing up the chance to make New Zealand follow on. Tim Southee dismissed Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne to have Australia 13-2 in its second innings after it had led by 204 on the first.

At stumps Usman Khawaja was 5 not out and nightwatchman Nathan Lyon was 6 not out. Lyon was dropped at slip by Tim Southee off the last ball of the day.

Smith was out for a duck to the third ball of the innings, bowled by Southee, and Labuschagne fell to Southee in the fifth over for 2. After falling for 1 in the first innings, it was Labuschagne’s lowest aggregate score in a test in his career. They were the 12th and 13th wickets to fall in the day which mostly had not gone New Zealand’s way.

First, New Zealand needed more than a full session to claim one

wicket and end Australia’s first innings. In that time Cameron Green and Josh Hazlewood put on 116 runs to increase Australia’s total from 279-9 after the first day to 383. Green finished 174 not out.

Then New Zealand lost three wickets at 12 and two at 29, was 29-5 before Glenn Phillips’ half century from 41 balls slowed its steady downhill slide.

New Zealand eventually was all out for 179 in 43.1 overs, a deficit of 204. Phillips made 71 and Matt Henry 42.

“Obviously the way Cam Green played with Hazlewood, they put on a massive partnership and that wasn’t exactly ideal for us wanting to wrap up the tail,” Phillips said. “At the end that’s what test cricket is about.”

New Zealand always will be able to look back and pinpoint where this match began to get away from it. It started on the second day when Australia was 89-4 and Mitch Marsh made a fast 40 in a 67-run fifth-wicket partnership which seemed to energize Cameron Green.

Green went on to reach his century in the last over of the first day and was able to form an heroic last-wicket partnership with Hazlewood which frus-



trated New Zealand for all of the first session and an additional 20 minutes before Hazlewood fell for 22.

This test match is the first in eight years between New Zealand and Australia in New Zealand, has been much anticipated and this match at the Basin Reserve is sold out on all five days.

Watching Australia go from 267-9 on day one when the match was about even to 383 when Australia was totally in charge left fans dispirited.

Tom Latham fell for 5 when New Zealand was 12, changing his decision to leave a ball from Mitchell Starc too late and directing the ball back onto his stumps.

Then disaster. Williamson played a ball from Starc back past the bowler. Will Young at the non-striker’s end turned to watch the ball, then looked up to see Williamson had set off for a run. Young turned to see the ball heading straight to mid off and looked again to see Williamson bearing down on him on a collision course.

As Young swerved to his left, Williamson dodged to his right and the pair collided in mid-pitch as Starc tried to take evasive action. Williamson was stranded as Marnus Labuschagne’s throw hit the stumps directly at the non-striker’s end.

Williamson walked off without looking back. New Zealand had lost two wickets in two balls and that became three in five when Rachin Ravindra drove too freely too early in his innings and sliced the ball directly to Nathan Lyon at point.

Wicketkeeper Alex Carey caught Daryl Mitchell (11) off Cummins from the last ball of the 17th over and Young (9) from Mitch March off the first ball of the 18th as New Zealand slumped to 29-5.

Phillips and Tom Blundell provided New Zealand’s first real period of competitiveness in all of the second day in a partnership of 84 for the sixth wicket. Both played aggressively and runs came quickly.

Phillips reached his third test half century, his second against Australia and his first in New Zealand. But Blundell fell next ball, caught by Travis Head at short leg off Nathan Lyon and the innings sputtered again.

Phillips was out for 71 off 70 balls and Henry took his 42 runs from 34 balls with four sixes as New Zealand briefly looked like avoiding the follow-on. But he holed to Labuschagne off Nathan Lyon with New Zealand still four runs short.