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DSPL-770

# FINAL CALL FROM PM: KABHI ALVIDA NA KEHNA

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA/  
RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The last meeting of the Council of Ministers of the current Lok Sabha, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, chaired a brainstorming session on the vision document for 'Viksit Bharat 2047' at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan. "Go and win. See you soon," Modi told in the last meeting of the Council of Ministers of the current term. Confident of returning to power post the General Elections in the next couple of months, Modi and his Ministers worked out a 100-day agenda for "immediate steps for quick implementation after the formation of the new Government in May". Government sources said the Ministers discussed a detailed action plan for the next five years. The meeting came a day after the BJP released the first list of its candidates on 195 seats across 16 States, with the next set of lists due in the next couple of days. Several Ministries articulated their ideas in the meeting, which was called after an initiative by the PM personally to understand the

## PM Modi during his last Union Cabinet meeting



vision of his council of Ministers based on which he is to form the next team if voted back, Government sources said. The roadmap for Viksit Bharat is the result of more than two years of intensive preparation by all the

Central Government Ministries and departments. "It involved a whole of Government approach involving all Ministries and wide-ranging consultations with State Governments, academia, industry

bodies, civil society, scientific organisations, and mobilisation of youth for seeking their ideas, suggestions, and inputs. More than 2,700 meetings, workshops, and seminars were held at various levels. Suggestions of more than 20

lakh youth were received," Government officials said. The roadmap for Viksit Bharat has a comprehensive blueprint with clearly articulated national vision, aspirations, goals, and action points. Its goals include areas like economic growth, SDGs, ease of living, ease of doing business, infrastructure, social welfare, etc," the sources said. Several Ministries articulated their ideas in the meeting, which is likely to be the last such get-together before the Lok Sabha polls are announced. The Prime Minister has been convening meetings of the entire Council of Ministers periodically to discuss key policy and governance issues. However, this particular meeting has assumed political significance in light of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, expected to be held in April-May. While the Election Commission is intensively preparing for the polls, likely to be announced early next week, Modi has a tightly packed schedule. He is expected to attend 29 programmes spread across 12 States and Union Territories over the next 10 days.

## Non-Hindus enter Puri temple 9 Bangladeshis detained by police

PNS ■ PURI  
Nine Bangladeshi nationals were detained by the Jagannath Temple's Singhadwar police for their presence in the temple on Sunday. One of the foreigners was a Hindu.

Bangladeshis entered into the temple, the five others were present at the Singhdwar. Puri Additional SP Sushil Mishra said a case has been lodged against the foreigners and enquiries were made about them in the hotel in Puri where they were staying. Questions were raised in the public as regards the security setup in the temple when non-Hindu foreigners could get into the shrine.

## In State Construction workers' pension hiked

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR  
Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Sunday announced a hike in the pension of construction workers in the State. As per the new decision, the construction workers above 60 years of age would now receive Rs 1,000 instead of Rs 500 they used to get earlier. Similarly, the construction workers above 80 years would get Rs 1,200. Ear-

lier they used to get Rs 700. The decision would be implemented from February 2024. Earlier, during the tour of 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman VK Pandian to the districts, the construction workers in various places had brought their pension issue to his notice. The Chief Minister had been apprised about it, following which he decided to hike the pension money.

DSPL-769



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## Modi's visit on March 5 PM to launch projects worth Rs 19,600 cr in Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi would inaugurate/ dedicate to the nation/ lay foundation-stones of multiple development projects worth over Rs 19,600 crore during his visit to Odisha's Chandikhole on March 5, official sources said on Sunday.

The projects relate to sectors including oil and gas, railways, roads, transport and atomic energy.

The PM will inaugurate the Indian Oil Corporation Limited's Mono Ethylene Glycol project in Paradip Refinery which will further help in reducing India's import de-

pendency. He will also inaugurate a 344 km-long product pipeline traversing from Paradip in Odisha to Haldia in West Bengal. In order to augment the import infrastructure on the eastern coast of India, he will also inaugurate a 0.6-MMTPA LPG Import facility at Paradip.

Modi will dedicate four-laning of Singhara to Binjabahal Section of NH-49; four-laning of Binjabahal to Tileibani Section of NH-49; four-laning of Balasore-Jharpokharia Section of NH-18 and four-laning of Tangi-Bhubaneswar Section of NH-16. He will also lay foundation-stone for eight-laning of

Chandikhole-Paradip Section.

Expansion of the railway network will also take place with focus on modernising and extending rail connectivity. Modi will dedicate a 162-km Bansapani-Daitari-Tomka-Jakhapura rail line. It will not only enhance the existing traffic facility's capacity but also facilitates efficient transportation of iron and manganese ores from Keonjhar district to the nearest ports and steel plants.

Inauguration of a CONCOR Container Depot in Kalinga Nagar will be done with an aim to boost domestic and international trade. Foundation-

stone will be laid for an Electric Loco Periodical Overhauling Workshop at Narla, a Wagon Periodical Overhauling Workshop at Kantabanji and upgradation and augmentation of maintenance facilities at Baghuapal. Other railway projects, including flagging off new train services, will also be taken up.

The PM will also inaugurate a 5-MLD-capacity seawater desalination plant at the Odisha Sands Complex of IREL(I) Ltd. This project has been built as part of field applications of indigenous desalination technologies developed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre.

## In State Gross GST collection up 13.64% in Feb '24

### Third highest-ever State GST amounts to Rs 2,295.41 cr

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State has recorded the highest ever collection of gross GST of Rs 5,135.81 crore during the month of February 2024.

The State registered a growth rate of 13.64 per cent in gross GST collection during last month as the gross GST collection was Rs 4,519.35 crore in February, 2023.

The progressive gross GST

collection during the financial year 2023-24 (till February 24) stood at Rs 49,638.64 crore, thereby recording a growth of 11.07 per cent over the corresponding period of financial year 2022-23.

Odisha has also recorded the third highest ever collection of State GST with a collection of Rs 2,295.41 crore during February 2024 against corresponding collection of Rs 1,673.96 crore recorded during February, 2023 registering a phenomenal growth rate of 37.12 per cent, official sources informed.

The progressive collection of State GST up to February

2024 is Rs 21,846.55 crore while the collection during the same period of previous year was Rs 16,710.34 crore. Thus, the State has registered a growth rate of 30.74 per cent in the progressive collection of State GST.

The collection under all Acts monitored by the Commissionerate of CT and GST, Odisha including OGST/ IGST Settlement / VAT and Professional Tax during February 24 is Rs 3,470.75 crore against the collection of Rs 2,765.44 crore during February, 2023 with a growth rate of 25.50 percent.

The progressive collection under all Acts up to February 2024 is Rs 32,807.67 crore with a growth rate of 20.84 percent over corresponding collection up to February 23.

During February 2024, 23.77 lakh of waybills have been generated vis-à-vis 19.86 lakh of waybills generated during February, 2023 recording a growth of 19.69% reflecting the buoyancy in the State economy. Out of the 23.77 lakh e-waybills generated during February 2024, 14.06 lakh were intra-State waybills while 9.71 lakh were inter-State waybills, sources added.

## 'Leaders in BJD feeling suffocated'

### Says Arabinda Dhali after joining BJP

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Jayadev MLA Arabinda Dhali joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday, a day after resigning from the Biju Janata Dal (BJD).

He was inducted into the BJP in the presence of party State president Manmohan Samal, Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi and other senior leaders.

"The leaders in the BJD are feeling suffocated. I remained in the BJD for the last 15 years but did not get satisfaction. The senior leaders are being ignored. The youth leaders, who are dominating the party, are reluctant to accept that



'Old is Gold'. The gold has turned iron in the party," Dhali said after joining the BJP.

Revealing the extent of humiliation in the BJD, he said, "Even as I am the MLA, the BJD is projecting three others for the ticket (in his constituency). I was betrayed. In the past five years, the presence of MLAs, leaders, ministers was hardly felt in the administration."

"There is no freedom and democracy in Odisha. There is

no respect in the BJD. The party is alluring the voters with freebies and welfare programmes. But the conscious voters will give a befitting reply to the party. The party, where I could not stay, nobody else can survive there," he further said.

On the day, former Malkangiri MLA Mukund Sodhi, former IAS topper and writer Dr Hrushikesh Panda and several elected leaders of the BJD also joined the BJP.

## Nua-O Scholarships in 3 more dists

### Next move is to launch Nabin Odisha Magic Card

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As per the direction of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman Kartik Pandian visited Kalahandi, Balangir and Bargarh districts on Sunday and attended a Nua-O Scholarship distribution programme at Dharmagarh in Kalahandi, Titilagarh in Balangir and in Bargarh district where he interacted with students from the respective districts.

Pandian informed that 37,160 eligible students from 80 colleges of the three districts would get their scholarship. Total Rs 36.81 crore has been



sanctioned for the purpose. He distributed scholarship sanction orders to the students.

Pandian said the government's next major initiative would be to cover all the students through the launching of a futuristic Nabin Odisha Magic Card, a points system-based smart card which would engage the youths towards academic development, personality devel-

opment and skill development and reduce the financial burden on parents, create opportunities for career progression and employment.

Online registration portal for this card would be launched on March 5, 2024. All the students, without any income criteria, of the UG and PG courses would be eligible. And the distribution of the card would be on August 15.

## Odisha gets Rs 16K-cr coal royalty

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The coalmining sector has proved to be a big booster for economic growth of the coal-producing State like Odisha. In fact, Odisha has received Rs 16,195.70 crore in shape of royalty on sale price, DMF and NMET.

The State is entitled for 14% of royalty on sale price of coal, DMF @30% of royalty, 2% of NMET from the coal produced by the coal companies and also the private sector.

In case of captive/ commercial mines, the State Government is also entitled to the revenue share offered by the auction holder in transparent bidding process.

Apart from this, the State Governments also benefits

from increased employment, land compensation, increased investment in allied infrastructure like railways, roads and several other economic benefits.

During 2014-2023, total revenue from royalty, DMF and NMET of all coal-producing States through the coal mining sector was Rs 1,52,696 crore.

State-wise, year-wise data for the last five years indicate that the coal mining sector is very significant contributor to the revenue of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Telangana. The compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of the revenue from coalmining during 2014-2023 was healthy 13.80%.

## State Council of Senior Citizens reconstituted

### DMs asked to clear pending apps under NFBS

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Looking at the interest of the senior citizens, the Social Security and Empowerment Persons with Disability (SSEPD) Department has re-constituted the State Council of Senior Citizens under the chairmanship of the SSEPD Minister.

As per notification, the State Council will meet once in every six months. The Council will discuss the strategies for effective implementation of the "Odisha State Policy for Senior Citizens-2016" and "Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior

Citizens Act 2007" and State Rules 2009 and amendment thereof.

The State Council will recommend to the Government measures to be taken to improve the conditions of the senior citizens. It will take measures to develop awareness among senior citizens regarding their rights as envisaged in the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act and Rules.

Besides, the Council will be responsible for overall planning, monitoring and implementation of programmes related to senior citizens in the State.

In the meantime, expressing concern over pending of several applications under National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS), SSEPD Principal Sec-

retary Bishnupada Sethi has asked all Collectors to clear pending applications in their districts soon.

Writing a letter to all Collectors, Sethi said that the National Family Benefit Scheme is an important component of the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) and 24,697 beneficiaries are approved to be covered in Odisha.

Under the scheme, there is a provision of one-time financial assistance of Rs 20,000 through DBT to the dependent family members on the death of the primary breadwinner of a family, he pointed out.

During review of the scheme, it was found that 18,343 applications in different districts are still pending

with various user levels, the Principal Secretary said.

"Needless to mention that NFBS is covered under the Odisha Right to Public Service (ORTPS) Act, 2012, which mandates time-bound delivery of services to the citizens in 30 days," Sethi told the Collectors.

He directed the Collectors to review the pendency and issue necessary instructions to the officials concerned for timely action on applications pending under NFBS as FY 2023-24 is going to end soon.

Out of 18,343 pending applications, highest 1,756 applications are pending in Dhenkanal district, followed by Ganjam district (1,408), Mayurbhanj (1,120), Angul (908), Cuttack (837), and Sundergarh (798).

## BJP to reach out to 1 crore people



### To seek opinion on its poll plank

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Ahead of the elections, the Odisha BJP has initiated a drive to reach out to 1 crore people and to get their suggestions and feedback before preparing its Sankalpapatra (poll plank).

The campaign was launched by BJP State president Manmohan Samal here on Sunday.

Samal said that two vehicles would be deployed in each Assembly constituency to collect

suggestions and views of the people. The vehicles would have boxes for Sankalpapatra.

Besides, the party has issued a toll-free number 9090902024 and the people can send their suggestions and opinions on various issues, he added.

The party intends to seek suggestions and views of the people on how to double up the income of Odisha farmers, how to stop labour migration, steps for women empowerment, chit fund issue and welfare schemes to be taken by the party if voted to power.

## 113 blood units collected at IIT-BBS camp



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar, in collaboration with NGO Sahaya and Capital Hospital, Bhubaneswar organised a mega blood donation camp where 113 units of blood were collected.

Director, IIT Bhubaneswar Prof Shreepad Karmalkar visited the blood donation camp and encouraged the NSS volunteers and blood donors. He underlined the importance of launching a campaign to encourage female students to donate blood and to provide them with appropriate advice

on how to increase their haemoglobin content.

Among others, Dr Suresh R Dash, Professor-in-Charge (Healthcare); Dr Abhimanyu Raju, Medical Officer; Guruprasad Sahoo, Basant Das from IIT Bhubaneswar; Dr Debasis Mishra, Blood Bank Officer and team from Capital Hospital, Bhubaneswar along with Kailash Sarangi and team from NGO Sahaya were present on the occasion. Dr Sivaiah Bathula, Coordinator-NSS, coordinated the camp. The members of faculty, staff, students and residents of the institute participated in the camp.

## HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

# Nariman: The Colossus of Constitutional Jurisprudence

S JYOTIRANJAN

In the annals of Indian legal and constitutional history, Fali Sam Nariman stands as a towering figure, an exceptional jurist and a humanist whose impact on the legal landscape of modern India is immeasurable. His recent demise marks the end of an era, leaving behind a legacy that reverberates through landmark legal verdicts, unwavering moral authority and a commitment to the principles of justice. I had a chance to meet him in a lawyers' conference at Bhubaneswar during February 2010, and what a relish it was to listen to him and get a drop from his unfathomable knowledge in constitutional and corporate laws. Nariman's journey from Rangoon to Bombay, his early legal career,

and his pivotal role in shaping constitutional and corporate laws showcase a life dedicated to upholding the foundations of democracy. Born in Rangoon on January 10, 1929 to Sam Bariyamji Nariman and Banoo Nariman, Fali Nariman's family faced the upheavals of war, eventually seeking refuge in India during World War II. His journey from Shimla to Bombay reflects the resilience and fortitude that would later define his legal career. After completing his law degree from the Government Law College Mumbai in 1950, Nariman embarked on his legal journey in the chambers of the legendary Sir Jamsheji Behramji Kanga.

Nariman's early legal practice coincided with the inception of the Indian Constitution in 1950. He belonged to an era when an



Writer with Nariman in Feb 2010

advocate's stature was measured by contributions to shaping the law rather than the fees he charged. Specialising initially in corporate law, Nariman became a lead counsel in high-profile cases, including the Union Carbide litigation arising from the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy. His admission of a mistake in accepting the brief exemplified a rare humility and commitment to ethical legal practice.

Nariman's legal prowess shone in path-breaking cases like the Golaknath case, TMA Pai Foundation case and Jayalalithaa's disproportionate assets case. His involvement in these cases showed his commitment to constitutional values and the pursuit of justice. Advocating for the right of judges to be appointed only by judges, he later acknowledged the shortcomings of the collegium system but consistently highlighted the imperative of insulating the judiciary from political pressures.

His distinctive voice, clarity of thought and riveting anecdotes made Nariman a centre of attraction in courtrooms. In his later years, he focused extensively on issues related to freedom of expression, constitutional rights and safeguarding the secular fabric of the nation. Nariman's commitment to

these principles was not confined to the courtroom; it transcended into his writings and public engagements.

A prolific writer with a self-deprecating humour, Nariman authored the bestselling biography 'Before Memory Fades'. Reflecting on his journey, he admitted that law was not his first choice as his father aspired for him to join the ICS. However, Nariman's impact on the legal fraternity and Indian democracy is undeniable, earning him numerous awards, including the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan.

Nariman's legacy extends beyond his courtroom victories. In 1975, he displayed an uncompromising rectitude by resigning as Additional Solicitor General during the Emergency, setting a precedent for legal luminaries to uphold principles

over political affiliations. His last book, 'You Must Know your Constitution,' published just months before his demise, serves as a poignant reminder of his concern for the erosion of democratic principles.

Beyond the borders of India, Fali S Nariman made significant contributions to international jurisprudence. Serving on the International Commission of Jurists and chairing it from 1995 to 1997, he led the examination of racial discrimination affecting death penalty awards in the USA. His commitment to fair legal representation and unbiased jury selection underscored his dedication to justice on a global scale.

Nariman's demise marks the end of an era, leaving an epistemic void in the domain of Indian constitutional jurisprudence. His

contributions, spanning over seven decades, have left an indelible mark on constitutional law, corporate law and the pursuit of justice. A man of unfailing warmth, humour and rectitude, Nariman's legacy will continue to inspire generations of legal minds and uphold the pillars of democracy. As we pay tribute to this colossus of Indian law, we celebrate not just his legal victories but his enduring commitment to the principles that form the bedrock of constitutional morality and a just and democratic society.

(The writer is an advocate, Orissa High Court, Addl. Central Government Standing Counsel, CAT, Cuttack Bench, Consulting Editor-Legal Affairs and Public Policy, The Pioneer and a Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law and Media Studies, KIIT University. Views are personal)



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## LAccMi: Leading the Journey to Odisha's Prosperity

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# Rayagada train mishap ‘Loco pilots were watching cricket on mobile’

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday said that the accident involving two passenger trains on October 29, 2023 claiming the lives of 14 passengers occurred as the loco pilot and co-pilot of one of the trains were watching a cricket match on mobile phone.

The accident occurred when the Rayagada Passenger train rammed into the Visakhapatnam-Palasa train from the rear at around 7 pm on the fateful day at Kantakapalli in Vizianagaram district of Andhra Pradesh.



Vaishnaw cited this incident while discussing the implementation of new safety measures in the Indian Railways. "The recent tragedy in Andhra Pradesh underscores the importance of ensuring the full concentration of train operators. We are introducing systems capable of detecting

distractions to ensure that pilots and their assistants remain completely focused on their duty," he said, While the mishap's official report by the Commissioners of Railway Safety (CRS) is yet to be made public, a preliminary investigation conducted by the railway au-

thorities the day after the accident found the driver and assistant driver of the Rayagada Passenger train responsible for the collision. They were found to have disregarded two defective auto signals, resulting in the tragic accident, which claimed their lives as well.

# Badasahi Assembly seat Ex-cop Mallick frontrunner for BJD ticket

Among a dozen of aspirants in race

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Badasahi in Mayurbhanj district has been declared as a reserved MLA seat after delimitation in 2009. As the upcoming simultaneous elections -2024 are approaching, the political barometer of Mayurbhanj district in general and Badasahi in particular is rising high.

As many as a dozen of candidates are eying over the BJD tickets from Badasahi constituency this time. But the political grapevine of the dis-



trict and especially of Badasahi is agog with one popular name Gopabandhu Mallick, whose popularity among the masses, youths and intelligentsia is well felt. Mallick is a former Additional Director General of Odisha Police and is now all poised to contest from Badasahi seat on a BJD ticket. A highly capable police officer

and a recipient of the President Gold Medal, Mallick is also the president of Indian Red Cross Society and president of Blood Bank, Cuttack. He has spent over a decade in the constituency by serving the people of Badasahi as a Good Samaritan by way of involving himself in several pro-people activities. As an important office bearer of Muni Samaj that spreads cultural renaissance like education, yoga, dance, drama and music among the rural masses, Mallick has been playing a pivotal role in spreading education among the people of Badasahi for over the last many years. He has stood the people

of Badasahi in good stead and organised innumerable blood donation camps, eye camps, health camps in serving the people. He has built a small cottage for himself in Badasahi from where he is working for the holistic development of Mayurbhanj. A Biju loyalist to the core and a firm supporter of the ideology of CM Naveen Patnaik, Mallick is an aspirant of a BJD ticket from Badasahi to contest the Assembly poll and serve the people. A political observer from the district told this correspondent that BJD will have a landslide victory from Badasahi if Mallick is given the ticket.

# Jawan shoots self at DRDO camp

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

A jawan reportedly shot himself to death with his service gun at the DRDO military camp in the Mahakalpara area in Kendrapada district late on Saturday night.

The deceased was identified as Rajesh Karan (35) from Tamil Nadu. He had been posted at DRDO at

Kiarabanka in Mahakalpara. According to reports, the jawan killed self with his service gun at around 1.55 am during his duty hours. The reason behind his taking the extreme step was still unclear. Till the last report came in, no comment was received from the DRDO authorities on this matter.

# Bandh held demanding NAC tag to Kujang

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

Demanding NAC status to Kujang, a dawn-to- dusk bandh was held by people from all walks of life including traders associations, bar associations, several socio-cultural organisations and residents on Saturday. The Kujang Sacheten Nagarika Manch (KSNM) had given the call.

The agitators warned of boycotting the upcoming elections and launching dharana in front of Tehsildar office, Kujang until the demand is met.

KSNM convenor Raghunath Sahoo said that the Odisha Government accorded

Notified Area Councils [NAC] status to 35 areas recently. However, there several places, including Kujang, that have been excluded from the list. "The residents of Kujanga area are unhappy as the State Government has ignored awarding NAC status to Kujang. It has been three decades that we have been demanding NAC status. We fulfil all criteria to be recognized as NAC since 2020," he added. Meanwhile, BJP and Congress have targeted the Odisha Government for not giving NAC status to Kujang. They submitted memos to the CM for reconsideration of the demand.

# In Keonjhar 3 get life imprisonment for murder

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Additional District Judge Mamita Das on Saturday convicted three persons in a murder case in Keonjhar district and awarded them life imprisonment.

The three convicts identified as Shiv Munda (25), Rath Munda (20) and Tima Munda (20) of Erendei village of Patna block were ordered to pay a fine of Rs 10,000 each and in default to undergo another six months' imprisonment.

On January 1, 2021, when one Hemant Mahanta of Erendei village went to the Rajabahal Sahi weekly market, the trio attacked him and left

him critically injured.. Then they snatched Rs 4,000 rupees and his mobile phone and fled from the place. A woman, Shantilata, who was present there, was also attacked and she suffered multiple injuries. The injured duo was rushed to a hospital where the doctor declared Hemant dead. Later, Hemant's brother Harishchand lodged a written complaint at the Patna police station. Following which, police arrested the three accused and forwarded them to court. Additional Public Prosecutor Praful Kumar Pote said the court delivered the judgement after hearing the testimony of 19 witnesses.

# Prez Murmu addresses Mahima Cult meeting

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

President Droupadi Murmu on the last day of her four-day Odisha visit addressed a meeting of the Mahima Cult here on Saturday. Paying her respects to Santha Kabi Bhima Bhoi, she said his teachings and ideals have always been a source of inspiration for her.

Murmu said Bhima Bhoi is a unique example of the fact that

high quality literature can be created even without formal education. He has composed many timeless verses. In the works of Bhima Bhoi, social equality and ideals are reflected in the interest of all and they would always remain relevant. She said the Mahima Cult, started by Mahima Gosein, does not discriminate on the basis of caste. Therefore, people from almost all sections

of the society are attracted towards this sect. Bhima Bhoi dedicated himself for bringing equality in the society and spread the philosophy of this cult through his speeches, songs and poems. The President said Bhima Bhoi's teachings and ideals should not be limited to Odisha only. His biography and writings should be translated into different languages and spread

all over India and the world. She said the seats of saints are as sacred as places of pilgrimage and are always been a source of inspiration. Earlier in the day, the President paid tributes to Bhima Bhoi at his birthplace Rairakhol. She also visited Divya Joyoti and Gyan Peeth at Kandhara as well as the temple and ashram of Bhima Bhoi at Kankanapada.

# Pilgrimage scheme Spl train with senior citizens leaves from B'swar

For Agra, Mathura

PNS ■ BALESWAR

A special train carrying passengers, only senior citizens of 60-75 years age from five districts including Baleswar, Bhadrak, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Jajpur district left for Agra-Mathura.

970 pilgrims from these five districts who were shortlisted under the prescribed guidelines of the State Government left for the destination from platform No.1 with 30 escorts after it was flagged off by Tourism and Culture Minister Aswani Patra.



They will be returning on March 7 after visiting the sites. The pilgrims from different rural pockets were lodged at Baleswar and their medical checkup was carried out before their journey started. On the occasion the speakers lauding the initiative of the State Government said since 2016 about 30,000 pilgrims visited different places. Sadar MLA Swarup Das

Remuna MLA SS Parida, OTDC Chairman Lenin Mohanty, programme advisor Durga Samantray and additional secretary Balmukund Bhuyan among others addressed the gathering.

# ‘Ore transportation by rail to hit truckers in K'jhar’

KDTOA holds protest, submits memo

NARESH PATTANAYAK ■ KEONJHAR

Hundreds of truckers of Keonjhar District Truck Owners Association (KDTOA) on Friday staged a rally and demonstration in Keonjhar protesting a proposed rail line project connecting Gandhamardan iron ore mines, Suakati, to Gohaldihi railway siding, under Sadar police station limits.

Taking out a rally followed by a protest meet in front of the Collectorate, they apprehended that if the railway line would function and mineral



transportation would be made by rail, then hundreds of trucks would go idle and thousands of truck owners will lose their livelihood. Directly and indirectly more than one lakh families including garage

owners, motor parts shop owners, dhaba and hotel owners, mechanics, helpers and drivers, are earning their livelihood due to the transportation of ore by road through the use of trucks.

"Truck business is our bread and butter. Thousands of truck owners earn from this business, by transporting minerals. Hence, the Government should stop planning to use railway mode for transporting

the ore," said former secretary KDTOA Pradip Barik. Secretary of KDTOA Suryonarayan Kars said since no one paid heed to the problems of the truck owners, they were forced to stage the pro-

test. Sources said that due to mineral transportation through pipeline, the transportation business through trucks has already been adversely affected. Many have sold their trucks due to not repaying their loans in time and are passing through untold miseries. Ayesha Kanta Pattanayak, a trucker, warned of intensifying the agitation if the proposal to transport ore by rail was not shelved. A team of truck owners met Collector Keonjhar Bishal Singh and handed over a memorandum and Singh is stated to have assured them of taking the appropriate steps to sort out the issue.



# PM Modi to attend Bharat Shakti war game in Pokhran

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Pokhran, Rajasthan on March 12 to witness war game 'Bharat Shakti' showcasing India's operational readiness to meet any challenge and increased use of indigenous made weapons and systems.

The exercise comes at a time when the government has given a big boost to Indian defence industry to achieve self-reliance in developing state of art of weapons for use by the three Services. Efforts are also on to accelerate export of weapon systems to friendly countries.

As regards the exercise, it was learnt Prime Minister Modi may urge the military leadership to develop strategies and tactics suited to Indian conditions security challenges. The top military brass including Chief of Defence Staff(CDS)General Anil



Chauhan will be present at the exercise, it was learnt.

The exercise also test the resilience and integrity of indigenous communication systems and networks to ensure that the enemy in unable to hack into them during hostile conditions.

'Bharat Shakti' exercise will also put to practice ways evolved to enhance synergy

among the three services, sources said.

The mega drill is likely to see participation of Tejas fighter aircraft, K-9 artillery guns, indigenous drones, Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers and short-range missiles. Last year, Prime Minister Modi undertook a sortie in the indigenously designed and manufactured Tejas jet.

# CBI chargesheets seven in Manipur armoury loot case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has filed a charge sheet against seven accused in connection with the looting of arms and ammunition from the Bishnupur police armoury during the Manipur ethnic violence last year, officials said on Sunday.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is probing cases related to the ethnic clashes in Manipur, recently filed its charge sheet before the court of chief judicial magistrate in Kamrup (Metro) in Assam's Guwahati.

The accused named in the charge sheet are Laishram Prem Singh, Khumukcham Dhiren alias Thapka, Moirangthem Anand Singh, Athokpam Kajit alias Kishorjit, Loukrakpam Michael Mangangcha alias Michael, Konthoujam Romojit Meitei alias Romojit, and Keisham Johnson alias Johnson. On August 3 last year, a mob looted more than 300 weapons, 19,800 rounds of ammunition and other accessories from two rooms of the 2nd Indian Reserve Battalion headquarters at



Naranseina in Bishnupur. Around 9,000 rounds of bullets of different calibres, an AK series assault rifle, three 'Ghaatak' rifles, 195 self-loading rifles, five MP-5 guns, 16 9mm pistols, 25 bulletproof jackets, 21 carbines, and 124 hand grenades, among others, were looted by the mob, the officials said.

Barring Laishram Prem Singh and Khumukcham Dhiren alias Thapka, the remaining five have been earlier charge-sheeted by the CBI in looting of police armoury at the Manipur Police Training

Centre (MPTC) at Pangei in Imphal.

This incident took place on May 4 last year, the day ethnic clashes between the majority Meitei community and tribal Kukis broke out in the northeast state. As alleged in the FIR, a mob stormed into the MPTC complex and looted a huge number of arms and ammunition from the armoury.

Moirangthem Anand Singh is alleged to be a former member of the proscribed People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and the Kangleipak

Communist Party (Noyon), while the remaining are believed to be overground workers of valley-based banned terror outfits.

They had earlier been arrested by the Manipur Police in September last year when they were allegedly extorting money by wearing police uniform and carrying sophisticated weapons, the officials said. Their arrest had sparked off a protest that continued for two days.

The five were released following a court order but Singh was picked up by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), placed under arrest and brought to the national capital.

Singh was arrested for allegedly having links with Myanmar-based rebel groups and conspiring to wage war against India by exploiting the current ethnic unrest in Manipur. While Singh is in judicial custody, the fate of the other six was not immediately known.

The Supreme Court in August last year had transferred all CBI cases from Manipur to Assam.

The top court's direction

came during a hearing of a batch of petitions related to the clashes in Manipur. Among the petitioners were two Kuki women whose assault by a mob was recorded on video which went viral later.

Among the slew of measures announced by the apex court were ensuring recording of statements of the victims through video conferencing and also directing the chief justice of the Gauhati High Court to nominate judicial officers above the rank of judicial magistrate (first class) and sessions judge to deal with cases related to the Manipur violence.

The state has witnessed escalating violence since May 3, 2023 with 219 casualties reported after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' in the hill districts protested the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The Meiteis, constituting around 53 per cent of Manipur's population, reside predominantly in the Imphal Valley. The tribals, including Nagas and Kukis, who make up 40 per cent, primarily inhabit the hill districts.

# Two chargesheeted for revival of naxal activities in Bihar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The NIA has chargesheeted two CPI(Maoist) activists, including a politburo member, in a case related to attempts by the proscribed outfit to revive its activities in Bihar's Magadh zone, an official said on Sunday.

The supplementary charge sheet was filed in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) special court in Patna against key politburo member Pramod Mishra alias 'Sohan Da' of Aurangabad district and his associate Anil Yadav alias 'Ankush' of Gaya, the federal agency spokesperson said. The NIA had on February 2 chargesheeted two other persons in the case.

Mishra, also known as Vambiharji, Doctor Saab, Nanardan, Dada and Baba Ji,



and Yadav have been charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the official said.

According to NIA, both have criminal cases registered against them under sections of

the IPC, Explosive Substances Act, Arms Act and the UAPA. "Mishra has 39 cases registered against him in various police stations in Aurangabad and Gaya, in addition to six cases in Jharkhand and two in Kaimur area. Yadav has six cases against him in various police stations

in the districts of Aurangabad and Gaya," the spokesperson said.

The official said investigations have revealed that Mishra was involved in promoting and propagating Maoist ideology, for which he was also recruiting cadres in his area.

He was also raising funds and organising meetings of the old Naxal cadres, the spokesperson said, adding that Yadav, a sub-zonal committee Member and active cadre of the outfit, was involved in raising funds through the collection of levy from brick kiln owners and contractors.

Investigations in the case were initiated by the NIA on September 26 last year and the agency found that these two accused, along with Rohit Rai, Pramod Yadav and other, had conducted a meeting in Mahi

village of Aurangabad on June 8 last year.

"The meeting was aimed at the organisation's revival in Magadh zone and the collection of levy from business establishments, contractors, toll plazas and other such entities for strengthening the CPI(Maoist) activities," the spokesperson said.

Acting on Mishra's directions, according to the official, the remaining three accused and others were engaged in motivating and recruiting more cadres to carry out illegal and violent activities to further their unlawful and nefarious designs and plans.

They were actively promoting the outfit's ideology and carrying out unlawful activities intended to disrupt peace and public order, the spokesperson added.

# Brainstorming session to boost Make in India initiative in defence sector

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking the spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat and 'Make in India' initiative forward, the Department of Military Affairs under the Ministry of Defence, is conducting an intensive brainstorming over the next two days on March 4-5, 2024 between the Service Headquarters and important stakeholders from Department of Defence Production, Defence Industry representatives and other relevant partners.

Giving this information here on Sunday, Defence Ministry officials said the key take-aways of the meeting will

include the implementable way forward derived from consultative and participative processes through high-level deliberations to provide impetus to indigenisation and also devise ways and means to enhance participation of private industry in defence research and development(R&D) and manufacturing ecosystem.

Chief of Defence Staff(CDS) General Anil Chauhan will chair the sessions, while Defence Secretary Girdhar Aramane will deliver the keynote address.

The event covers a wide canvas ranging from identification of challenges and evolving a way ahead to provide impetus to indigenisation

efforts of Armed forces, address sustenance-related issues, invigorate private sector participation in defence R&D and manufacturing ecosystem and most importantly create and enhance Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul facilities for the Armed Forces.

The HQ IDS and SIDM are coordinating the event and it will see the participation of key representatives from MoD, Services, and Industry under one roof to further strengthen the indigenisation efforts.

This will pave the way to formulate a time-bound action plan to give impetus for indigenisation in defence sector.

# Centre ruthless approach towards narco trade has borne results: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Sunday released three videos about the Modi Government's success in dealing with the menace of drugs.

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah sent out a series of posts on X (formerly Twitter) and the videos.

In one of the posts Shah said, "The Modi Government's ruthless approach towards narcotraade has borne effective results. The upshot of this approach is the drastic rise in the number of arrests and seizures."

In another post, Shah maintained, "An invincible anti-narcotics apparatus has been built nationwide through Coordination, Cooperation and Collaboration among governments and agencies under the guidance of Modi Ji. The strategy has resulted in an increased number of drug seizures and cases registered." Shah also said, "A #DrugsFreeBharat is the greatest gift to our future generations. Our nation is speeding to achieve this goal through the detection of drugs, destruction of drug networks, and deten-



tion of culprits while rehabilitating addicts under the leadership of PM Modi Ji."

On account of the multi-pronged efforts made by the Modi government to rein in the illegal drug trade the quantity of narcotics seized increased by almost 100% and the cases registered against those dealing in it increased by 152%.

According to the data released by the Ministry, during the period 2006 to 2013 the number of cases registered was 1257 in number which shot up by 3 times during 2014-2023 to 3755.

The arrests increased by 4 times from 1363 in the 2006-13 period to 5745 in the 2014-23 period. The quantity of seized drugs doubled during the Modi regime to 3.95 lakh

kgs from 1.52 lakh kgs seized during 2006-13. The value of seized drugs jumped 30 times during the Modi government to Rs.22,000 crore from Rs.768 crore achieved in the period 2006-13.

The anti-narcotics agencies also destroyed 12 lakh kgs of drugs worth Rs.12,000 crores during the Modi government. Till June 2023, NCB conducted a financial investigation in 23 cases in which property worth ₹74,75,00,531 was frozen.

In a bid to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a drug-free India the four (04) tier NCORD mechanism was strengthened in 2019 for better cohesion and synergy between the Central and State drug law enforcement agencies.

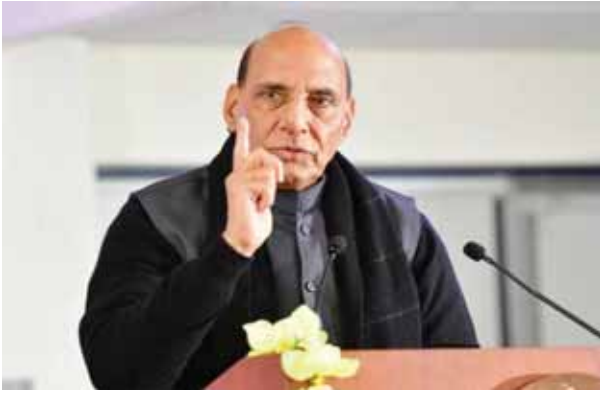
# Rajnath to inaugurate DefConnect 2024 today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to give a boost to indigenous innovation in defence production, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday here will inaugurate 'DefConnect 2024'. The event organised by Innovations for Defence Excellence-Defence Innovation Organisation (iDEX-DIO)will also explore ways to facilitate partnerships to address the evolving security challenges.

Giving details here on Sunday, defence ministry officials said 'DefConnect 2024' represents a significant milestone in the country's defence innovation landscape, bringing together key stakeholders including the Armed Forces, defence industry leaders, start-ups, academia, and policymakers.

The event aims to facilitate meaningful engagements, showcase cutting-edge technologies and is poised to be a transformative platform for fostering collaboration, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the defence sector. The event will attract a large number of innovators and investors from India's leading industries in the defence sector. The iDEX framework allows military per-



sonnel to work with innovators in a co-development model. They serve as end users, nodals and domain experts. This collaboration helps guide innovation and smoothly integrate advancements into existing platforms by leveraging expertise and insights of the end user. Till date, iDEX has launched 10 rounds of Defence India Start-up Challenge (DISC) and 11 rounds of Open Challenges (OC), receiving more than 9,000 applications from individual innovators and start-ups against challenges from the Tri-Services, Defence Space Agency, Defence Public Sector Undertakings, Indian Coast Guard, Border Roads Organisation and other agencies. The event will also witness

an All-Women Panel Discussion on 'Women as Drivers of Change' ahead of International Women's Day on March 08, 2024.

The showcase of cutting-edge technologies developed by iDEX winners is going to be the key attraction for all the visitors. It will offer a unique opportunity to meet iDEX start-ups and understand their innovative technologies.

The iDEX, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018, essentially provides a unified platform for various stakeholders in the defence and aerospace sectors. It acts like an umbrella organisation to oversee technology development and potential collaborations in this specific field.

# Rahul interacted with potential Agniveer recruits: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday attacked the Centre over the Agnipath scheme, alleging that it has "compromised" national security and "severely disrupted" the armed forces' recruitment processes in India.

The Congress' attack came after party leader Rahul Gandhi had an interaction with ex-servicemen, potential Agniveer recruits and the youth whose regular recruitment into the armed forces has been disrupted by the introduction of Agnipath during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Madhya Pradesh.



charge communications Jairam Ramesh in a statement said that Rahul Gandhi had a 40-minute interaction with the three communities on the morning of the 50th day of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

"The Agnipath scheme has compromised national security and severely disrupted the armed forces' recruitment processes in India," he alleged. Ramesh claimed the ex-servicemen have noted that the

scheme compromises national security by demoralising the armed forces and rushing through training for our servicemen in a mere six months. "Potential Agniveer recruits are dissatisfied by the loss of prestige and economic security due to the scheme," he said.

"Finally, there are about 1.5 lakh youths who have completed all formalities for regular recruitment to the armed forces who have not been recruited because of the arbitrary introduction of the Agnipath scheme," Ramesh said.

The Congress leader claimed that as presently designed, the Agnipath scheme is detrimental in all respects and is an "anyay" (injustice) to our ser-

vicemen and to our youth.

"The ex-servicemen and Agniveer recruits have been protesting against the Modi government's policies for several months, having held several demonstrations at the Jantar Mantar in Delhi and taken out a padyatra from Champaran in Bihar to New Delhi," Ramesh said.

"The Agnipath scheme was pushed through without any discussion and consultation as revealed by the former Chief of Army Staff himself in his memoir," he said.

Ramesh further said that Gandhi promised a comprehensive review and appropriate amendments to the Agnipath scheme.

# NGT seeks Centre response on plea seeking to declare Jim Corbett Park as eco sensitive zone

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has sought the Centre's response on a plea seeking directions to declare the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand as an Eco-Sensitive Zone.

The green panel was hearing a plea underlining that such a declaration is vital for protecting and conserving the ecology, wildlife, biological diversity, and the flora and fauna of the national park.

The National Environment Policy of 2006 defines an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) as areas or zones with identified environ-

mental resources having incomparable values that require special attention for their conservation because of their landscape, wildlife, biodiversity, historical and natural values. A bench of National Green Tribunal Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Expert Member A Senthil Vel said, "The original application (OA) raises a substantial issue relating to compliance with the environmental norms."

"Issue notice to the respondents," it added in an order passed last month.

The respondents in the matter include the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and

Climate Change, National Board for Wildlife, National Tiger Conservation Authority, Central Empowered Committee (formed by the Supreme Court), and the states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh along with their principal chief conservators of forests and the district magistrates concerned.

According to the plea by advocate Nandita Bansal, the ministry issued the Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2002, categorically stating that land falling within 10 kilometres of the boundaries of national parks and sanctuaries should be notified as 'Eco-Fragile Zones'.



# Fulfil dream of developed India in next 25 years: Modi to new recruits

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated candidates given the appointment letters for Gujarat Government jobs on Sunday and urged them to help solve problems of the common people and work to fulfil the dream of a developed India in the next 25 years. During a function organised in the state capital Gandhinagar, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel distributed the appointment letters to 1,990 candidates selected

through direct recruitment in various state government departments. In his congratulatory message to the newly-appointed candidates read out at the event, PM Modi said this is an excellent opportunity for them to join the government service and serve the country. “The coming 25 years are very important for our country,” he said. The PM said their priority should be to remove difficulties from the lives of the people, he said. “Your determination and



decisions taken in the interest of the country will strengthen the development of the nation, and this responsibility will also bring new opportunities and challenges for you,” Modi said. “No matter in which department you are appointed, in which city or village you are, you should always keep in mind that your work should help the common people, solve their problems, make their life easy, and fulfil everyone’s dream of building a developed India in the next

25 years,” he said. The PM also appealed to them to continue the process of learning and self-development even after assuming new responsibilities. Chief Minister Patel wished a bright future for the newly appointed candidates and said PM Modi has resolved to build a developed India by 2047 by giving proper opportunities to harness the power of the country’s youth. “Gujarat will take the lead in building a developed India by building a developed Gujarat,” Patel said in his address.

He urged the new recruits to be determined and serve the people sincerely with the mantra of ‘Sauna Saath, Sauna Vikas, Sauna Vishwas and Sauna Prayaasa’ (everyone’s support, development, trust and effort). “After joining the government service, you all also have the opportunity to increase the country’s pride by working with diligence and complete transparency,” Patel said. The CM expressed hope that the new recruits will win the people’s trust by doing exemplary work.



## Five time Odisha MLA Dhali joins BJP day after quitting BJD

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Five-time Odisha MLA Arabinda Dhali on Sunday joined the BJP, a day after resigning from the ruling BJD. Dhali went to the BJP office in Bhubaneswar along with his supporters in a procession, and formally joined the party in the presence of its state president Mannohan Samal and MP Aparajita Sarangi, among others. Former MLA Mukunda Sodi, who also resigned from the BJD, joined the BJP along with Dhali. Addressing the press, Dhali alleged that there was no democracy within the BJD and senior leaders were being neglected. “After feeling suffocated, I left the BJD and joined the BJP, which has internal democracy,” he said. Dhali, the MLA of Jaydev in Khorda district, claimed that the BJP will form the next government in the state by winning more than 100 of the assembly’s 147 seats. He was first elected to the assembly from the Malkangiri seat in a by-election in 1992 on a BJP ticket. He retained the seat for two more terms.

He then joined the BJD, and was elected to the assembly from Jayadev in 2009. He also won the 2019 election from the seat. A law graduate, he served as a minister in the BJD-BJP coalition government led by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. He held portfolios such as Cooperation (2000-2004), and Textiles and Handloom (2000-2002), besides Commerce and Transport (2002-2004). The BJD claimed that Dhali joining the BJP will have no impact on it. “Ahead of elections, it is normal for many political leaders to switch from one party to another. The leaders, whose winning chances are very low and are aware that the party is not going to give them nominations, are leaving the BJD,” senior BJD leader Raj Kishore Das said. Recently, expelled BJD MLAs Pradeep Panigrahy and Prashant Jagdev also joined the BJP. Former Minister Debasis Nayak of the BJD also switched sides. Another expelled BJD leader Rajendra Das, a former MLA, is also likely to join the BJP soon.

## Uddhav targets BJP

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Sunday criticised the BJP, stating that its policy of undermining other political parties is not sustainable. Taking aim at the BJP’s initial Lok Sabha candidate list, which included figures like Kripashankar Singh, previously accused of money laundering, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray expressed surprise at the exclusion of senior leaders like Nitin Gadkari from the list. Singh, who had faced allegations of financial misconduct, was nominated to contest from Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, as announced by the BJP on Saturday. The BJP has not released its candidates for the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra. Thackeray, without directly naming the BJP or Prime Minister Narendra Modi, remarked, “The politics of dismantling opposition parties will not endure...



‘jumla’ should be renamed as ‘guarantee’.” Referring to the list, he highlighted his past collaboration with Union minister Gadkari, who had expedited the completion of the Mumbai-Pune expressway, a project initiated by Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray. Singh’s history includes leading the Mumbai unit of Congress and serving as a Minister of State for Home.

He parted ways with the Congress in 2019 due to disagreements regarding the party’s stance on the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir’s special status by the NDA government. He later joined the BJP in 2021. Responding to Thackeray’s remarks, Singh dismissed them, questioning the political credibility of someone without their own party. “I don’t take remarks of a

person who doesn’t have a political party of his own and did attend office at the Mantralaya for even two-and-half days in his tenure of 2.5 years as chief minister, seriously,” he told PTI. Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut targeted Maharashtra’s Deputy CMs Devendra Fadnavis (BJP) and Ajit Pawar (NCP) over Singh’s inclusion in the BJP list. Raut pointed out Fadnavis’s earlier claims about prosecuting leaders like Ajit Pawar and Kripashankar Singh, raising doubts about the BJP’s governance standards. Regarding the future political landscape in Maharashtra, Raut emphasised the unity between the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) workers to counter the BJP and prevent potential authoritarian rule post-2024. The MVA comprises the Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar and Congress.

## CM: 2023 most successful year for anti drugs operations in Assam

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said 2023 was the most successful year for the state in terms of anti-drugs operations. The chief minister said drugs worth Rs 718 crore were seized over 4,700 arrests made during the period. “The Modi government is deploying a whole-of-government approach to build a #DrugsFreeBharat,” Sarma wrote on X. “In 2023, Assam Police seized drugs worth Rs 718 cr and arrested over 4,700 drug traffickers making it the most successful year for anti-drugs operations in the state,” he added. Sarma also shared a video on the various steps being taken by the central government in the war on drugs. Meanwhile, two persons were



arrested and 500 grams of heroin was recovered from their possession in Guwahati, Sarma said in another post on X. The operation was carried out by the special task force of state police. Two persons were apprehended by the STF after a hot pursuit in Guwahati, Sarma said. “... Search and seizure were conducted on their premises & 34 soap boxes of heroin weighing 500 gm was recovered,” the CM added.

## Modi to inaugurate Howrah Maidan Esplanade

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will next week inaugurate Kolkata Metro Railway’s Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section, touted to be the first transportation tunnel “under any mighty river in India”, a government release said on Sunday. The PM will also inaugurate in Kolkata the Kavi Subhash-Hemanta Mukhopadhyay and the Taratala-Majerhat metro sections, “with a focus on enhancing avenues for ensuring ease of urban mobility”, it said. Modi is scheduled to visit

Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar from March 4-6, the release said. The Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section (East West Metro corridor) has the first transportation tunnel under “any mighty river in India”, said the release. It passes under the River Hooghly, on the east and west banks of which are situated Kolkata and Howrah cities, respectively. Kolkata Metro created history in April 2023, when its rake ran through a tunnel under a river, the Hooghly, for the first time in the country.



Modi will also launch the Kavi Subhash-Hemanta Mukhopadhyay metro section of the Kavi Subhash-Airport line and the Taratala-Majerhat section, which is a

part of the Joka-Esplanade line, the release said. The Howrah metro station is also the deepest metro station in India. The 4.8-km stretch between Howrah Maidan and Esplanade is the second section of the East West Metro corridor between Howrah Maidan and IT hub Salt Lake Sector V. The Esplanade-Sealdah stretch of the East West alignment is awaiting completion. Metro Railway General Manager P Uday Kumar Reddy had earlier said it is targeting June-July this year

to start commercial operation in the entire route of East West alignment. Completion of the project has suffered delays owing to an aquifer burst at Bowbazar in central Kolkata on August 31, 2019, leading to severe ground subsidence, and the collapse of a number of buildings there and two more water leakage incidents at the same site in 2022 during tunneling and construction work. The Salt Lake Sector V to Sealdah stretch of the East-West Metro corridor is commercially operational at present.

Out of the total 16.6 km length of the East West Metro, the underground corridor constitutes 10.8 km between Howrah Maidan and Phoolbagan, with the tunnel under the Hooghly river. The rest of the stretch is elevated corridor. The release said that the Majerhat metro station, on the Taratala-Majerhat section, is a unique elevated metro station across railway lines and platforms. Metro services on the 6.5 km stretch between Joka and Taratala of the Joka-Esplanade project are already operational.

## BJP banking on its sitting MPs in UP

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

After the declaration of candidates on 51 seats by the ruling BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the political picture of the contest in Uttar Pradesh is becoming clear. INDIA bloc partner Samajwadi Party (SP) has so far declared tickets on 31 seats, including Varanasi, which it later withdrew due to the seat-sharing arrangement with the Congress. Amidst party workers’ demand of fielding Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Amethi and Raebareli seats, the Congress is yet to come up with its list. As per the arrangement, the Congress will field candidates on 17 seats while the SP will contest on 63 seats. Apart from Raebareli, Amethi and Varanasi, the other seats on which the Congress will contest include Kanpur City, Fatehpur Sekri, Basgaon, Saharanpur, Prayagraj, Maharajganj, Amroha, Jhansi, Bulandshahr, Ghaziabad, Mathura, Sitapur, Barabanki and Deoria. Sonia Gandhi is currently the MP from Raebareli, while Rahul Gandhi lost his Amethi seat to BJP leader Smriti Irani in 2019 polls. Aiming to retain power at the Centre for the third time in a



row, the BJP banked heavily on its sitting MPs and the party is working on a target to win all the 80 seats in the state. The notable names in the BJP’s first list include Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh from Lucknow, Hema Malini from Mathura, Ajay Mishra Teni from Kheri, Smriti Irani from Amethi, Lallu Singh from Faizabad (Ayodhya) and Mahendra Nath Pandey from Chandauli among others. The new faces in the BJP list included Saket Mishra from Shravasti and Kripa Shankar Singh from Jaunpur. Sitting MP from Ambedkar Nagar Ritesh Pandey, who recently resigned from the BSP and joined the BJP, has also been given a ticket. Saket Mishra, who is a sitting

MLC, is the son of Nripendra Mishra, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple Construction Committee’s chairman and former principal secretary to Prime Minister Modi. Kripa Shankar had quit the Congress to join the BJP. The candidates for Pilibhit and Santapur, which are held by Varun Gandhi and Maneka Gandhi respectively, are yet to be announced. Prime Minister Modi will be seeking re-election from Varanasi for the third time, winning the earlier two elections in 2014 and 2019 from the same seat with a handsome margin of more than 3.71 lakh and 4.79 lakh votes, respectively. Rajnath Singh will also be seeking re-election from Lucknow for the third time after winning it in two

previous elections in 2014 and 2019 comfortably by a margin of 2.72 lakh and 3.47 votes, respectively. The BJP has again reposed faith in Ajay Mishra Teni from Kheri. Mishra had been in the thick of storm in connection with October 3, 2021, violence in which his son Ashish Mishra allegedly ran his car over the farmers protesting in Lakhimpur Kheri. Mishra won the Lok Sabha elections from the Kheri constituency in 2014 and 2019. The BJP has also reposed faith in Smriti Irani for the Amethi seat, regarded as a Gandhi stronghold. Irani had rendered a major blow to the Congress, defeating its then sitting MP Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 elections by a margin of more than 55,000 votes. From Raebareli, though the BJP has not declared any name yet but speculations are rife that it may field SP MLA Manoj Kumar Pandey, who recently resigned as the party’s chief whip in the state assembly and cross voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha polls. The SP has so far released three lists of its candidates and has fielded Dimple Yadav from Mainpuri while Shivpal Yadav has been given a ticket from the Budaun seat.

## Those playing with future of youth will rot in jail for rest of their lives: Yogi

PTI ■ GORAKHPUR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said those playing with the future of the youth in the state will rot in jail for the rest of their lives while the properties of their parents and grand parents will be confiscated. Addressing the students at the Rajkiya Jubilee Inter College ground during the smartphone/tablet distribution event, Adityanath said not only the cities of Uttar Pradesh will be smart, but also the youth of the state with smartphones and smart classes. In the programme, 1,500 students were provided with tablets and 3,000 students received smartphones. The chief minister personally handed tablets to 15 students and smartphones to 10 students. He also laid the foundation stone of Project Alankar worth Rs 17.35 crore in 26 secondary schools and 330 premium smart classrooms to be built at a cost of Rs 7.58 crore in 141 secondary schools. Adityanath handed over the Smart Class Certificate to the principals of four intermediate colleges. He said with the introduction of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Empowerment Scheme



in November 2021, the distribution of smartphones and tablets commenced. The objective is to digitally empower the youth, ensuring that their education remains uninterrupted in potential future pandemics such as COVID-19, he said. Adityanath said that when physical education came to a halt during COVID 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi envisioned fostering connections through technology. In alignment with his vision, Uttar Pradesh has already distributed smartphones and tablets to 20 lakh youths without discrimination and has set the target to give it to two crore youths across the state, he added. The chief minister said the schemes of the central and state governments that are essential for the future and self-reliance of the youth have also been added to these

devices. Empowered with technology, the youth will forge ahead and contribute to realising the vision of a developed India, he said. Adityanath urged the youth to take the pledge to make Uttar Pradesh a leader in Digital India and utilise smartphones to learn about educational programmes and government schemes. The chief minister said that Project Alankar has been initiated to strengthen the infrastructure of dilapidated secondary schools. In Project Alankar, the government provides 100 per cent funding for the government schools and 75 per cent for aided non-government schools, while the school management has to contribute the remaining 25 per cent. Sanskrit schools receive 90 per cent funding from the government under this initiative.

The chief minister also emphasised the importance of maintaining cleanliness and hygiene in schools. “In the new UP of New India, education is undergoing a transformation in line with the National Education Policy, with the government aligning infrastructure accordingly,” Adityanath said. “It is our firm commitment that the youth of UP will stand shoulder to shoulder with their global counterparts. To support youth preparing for competitive exams, the government has facilitated Abhyuday coaching in every district,” he added. Asserting the “country has changed today”, Adityanath said, “Prior to 2014, there was little discourse on topics like youth, faith, prosperity and security. Now, we witness enhanced security, prosperity and the assurance that earning a livelihood also garners respect. Presently, our nation boasts the fifth-largest economy in the world.” Raising the slogan of “Phir ek baar Modi Sarkar”, The chief minister said that forming the Modi government for the third time would lead the country to become the world’s third-largest economy. The goal is to develop every individual and entire India, he emphasized.







FIRST COLUMN


THE MENACE OF A TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENT



SAKSHI **SETHI**

We must resist the allure of toxicity, lest we become complicit in its propagation

The success of any organisation rests on how well and healthy its work environment is. The workplace is a very sensitive place, be it in schools, colleges or business organizations. The employees and workers need to be motivated by their principals and bosses to do their work properly else they get demoralised. However, when a toxic work environment engulfs an organisation, it can have disastrous consequences for both the employees and the organisation at large. A recent study found that around 40 per cent of people in the US have left jobs due to an overly stressed work environment. Workplace violence has existed throughout history. The toxic behaviours have been allowed to fester unchecked. A few influential individuals within the organisation engage in bullying, manipulation, and favouritism, which permeate throughout the company's structure. At the same time, their behaviours create an environment that builds walls and crushes creativity and loyalty. Toxicity in the workplace is a pervasive and serious issue that affects employees at all levels of an organization. At the same time, it is also a combination of dysfunctional behaviours among leaders that causes them to conduct unhealthy organisational practices. Organisational toxicity is driven by disempowering practices, individuals with a mentality of personal entitlement and resistance to change. It is an insidious problem that can be difficult to recognise, yet its effects on the mental and physical well-being of employees can be devastating. When the work environment is toxic, it trickles down. There is no denying the fact that toxic leadership leads to a toxic environment. One of the reasons for toxicity in the work environment is a lack of true diversity and inclusion followed by a lack of effective communication.



Nowadays, new executives have adopted a top-down approach, leaving little room for the honest exchange of ideas and feedback. This has resulted in unheard voices of the employees, leading to a growing sense of alienation and frustration amongst the workforce. Even the teachers and educators in schools and colleges are also the victims of the same. Employees have started to experience emotional responses that include anger, irritability, cynicism, distress, psychological strain, job insecurity, fear and shame. In other words, an atmosphere of behaviour that is more crippling for employees than all other work-related stress put together is created. The toxic work environment encourages a cutthroat competition, where colleagues undermine and sabotage each other, instead of valuing the teamwork. Also, being overworked and overburdened can lead to severe burnout and even cause resentment. Organisations and other workplaces should allow room for creativity for more than meeting a lettered standard. By fostering open communication, promoting empathy and encouraging a supportive culture, organisations can build an environment where employees can thrive thereby leading to increased productivity, creativity, and overall success. Simultaneously, if teachers cannot be diverse—using their individuality, uniqueness and creativity—to diversify the lessons organically, then the entire concept of differentiation is missed. Teachers become teachers because they are creative people who have a desire to share their knowledge with others. Remember, a toxic work environment will tarnish the organisation's reputation. Negative employee experiences spread through word-of-mouth and social media, discouraging potential candidates from joining the organization. It's the individual's peace and sanity that is worth more than dealing with organisations that don't value them enough to stop the bad behaviour. One needs to protect their mental health at work at all costs. Various factors are responsible for brewing a toxic culture, the results of which are catastrophic and can sink the organisation into an abyss of failure.

*(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

The inspiring saga of the Goat Bank



PARAG **ACHARYA**

Despite its significant contribution to the economy, the goat sector largely operates in the informal market, underscoring the need for greater recognition


In a remarkable feat of rural innovation, Kalahandi couple Jayanti Mahapatra and Biren Sahu have earned praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for their groundbreaking agri-tech startup located in the remote Salebhata village. Their unique Goat Bank, recognised in 'Mann Ki Baat,' breaks traditional banking norms, empowering local farmers and uplifting the community's socio-economic status through innovative rural solutions. Goats often referred to as the "ATM" or "poor man's cow," play a pivotal role in India's livelihoods and nutritional security. Their popularity stems from factors such as low capital investment, adaptability, early maturity, prolific breeding, superior chevon quality, and steady returns. Amid changing agro-climatic conditions, goats emerge as the 'Future Animal' for national prosperity. Goat meat commands a premium in the market and goat milk offers therapeutic benefits. Despite constituting 27.80 per cent of the total livestock and contributing significantly to the national economy with annual revenue of Rs 38,590 crores, the goat sector often operates in the informal and untaxed market. The goat, however, deserves serious attention and investment. Contributing 3% of milk, 13.8% of goat meat, and 0.18 million tonnes of skin in India, goats have immense economic potential. As goat farmers strive for financial inclusion, recognising and investing in the goat sector can lead to substantial economic upliftment, making it imperative for the goat to take centre stage in national agricultural and economic planning. Traditionally, successful livestock development strategies have heavily relied on providing credit to empower underprivileged individuals to acquire or replenish their livestock. This not only marks the initial foray into livestock ownership but also serves as a pivotal step towards breaking free from the shackles of poverty, paving the way for a more secure and prosperous life. In the evolution of livestock development strategies, the traditional reliance on credit to empower underprivileged individuals has given rise to an innovative approach embodied by the Goat Bank. Welcome to the innovative realm of the Goat Bank, where farming dreams come alive with a unique twist. Instead of conventional cash, the bank offers aspiring farmers a lifeline in the form of a pregnant female goat. It's not a giveaway; a deal is struck. Deserving farmers receive guidance on scientific goat rearing, along with support for vaccinations, deworming, ear tagging, and premium concentrate feed during pregnancy. In return, farmers commit to caring for the goats and returning six to eight kids to the Goat Bank. The math magic unfolds as goats, with a 7 to 8-month kidding interval, yield two or three kids in each kidding cycle. Over two years, farmers find themselves with an impressive twelve to fourteen kids from just two does. Beyond personal gain, these farmers extend the goat family, nurturing them and, when the time is right, selling them for a lucrative profit. This cycle of goat generosity creates a symbiotic relationship, with benefits flowing from the Goat Bank to the farmers and ultimately reaching the market. It's a win-win scenario, shaping a pathway for sustainable farming practices and economic prosperity. In Maharashtra's Akola district, Naresh Deshmukh's visionary Goat Bank, launched in July 2018, redefines empowerment. Aspiring farmers pay a nominal Rs 1,200 registration fee, entering into a loan agreement to return four lambs within 40 months. This innovative scheme fosters accountability, propelling a sustainable growth cycle. Women participating in goat rearing anticipate significant profits, enabling investments in land, and education, and celebrating life's milestones. In Salebhata village, Kalahandi district of Odisha, the Goat Bank, spearheaded by Jayanti Mahapatra and Biren Sahu, offers needy farmers two adult female goats, hailing from the resilient breeds of native Kalahandi or Black Bengal. During two years, the goats exhibit their prolific nature, birthing impressive 9-10 kids. The bank retains six of these newborns, channelling the rest back to the same families dedicated to goat farming. This sustainable cycle has now woven a network connecting 1,000 farmers across 50 villages. In the undulating agro-climatic expanse of western Odisha, encompassing Kalahandi and Nuapada districts, the author's research illuminates a striking reality: 95% of goats thrive as indigenous, hardy, uniquely adapted to endure temperatures soaring up to 48°C. These robust creatures are meticulously managed in modest holdings under semi-extensive systems, relying solely on roadside grass and tree leaves as their primary sustenance, achieving impressive average adult body weights of 35 kg for males and 30 kg for females. The elegance of this agricultural practice lies in its simplicity, relying on family labour and minimal investment, mainly directed towards veterinary care. Farmers, with negligible expenditure, witness substantial profits. The sale of castrated males after four years commands prices between Rs. 25,000 to 30,000, while females are priced slightly lower. During the Chatar Parab festival (a local festival), prices experience a commendable surge, contributing to an annual income of approximately Rs. 100,000 from goat sales. Through extensive interviews, the author uncovers a burgeoning interest among landless farmers to engage in goat rearing, signalling a desire for expansion. However, these aspiring farmers articulate a need for essential elements like proper housing, quality feed, and a superior breeding buck to unleash the full growth potential of their goat herds. While existing state government schemes provide very good assistance to many goat farmers in this zone, the author still posits that pioneering initiatives like a goat bank have the potential to include more landless, downtrodden farmers in the journey. Such innovative concepts could substantially contribute to the financial stability and prosperity of a broader section of farmers, offering a promising avenue for uplifting native goats and enhancing the overall well-being of the farming community in the area. The success stories from Salebhata village in Kalahandi and Sangavi Mohadi village in Maharashtra illustrate how the Goat Bank is not merely an institution but a catalyst for positive change. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightfully recognises the transformative power of such initiatives, it becomes evident that the goat, often overlooked, deserves centre stage as a species worthy of serious investment. The Goat Bank model showcases a sustainable cycle of growth, from the bank to the farmers and eventually to the market, fostering economic upliftment and financial inclusion. The Goat Bank revolution is not just about goats; it's about changing lives, revitalising rural economies, and creating a blueprint for similar innovations across the country. As more farmers join such schemes and receive the support they need, the potential for further improvement of goat farming practices in native tracts becomes promising. The winds of change are indeed blowing, and the resonant call for serious attention and investment in the goat sector is no longer a distant bleat but a reality that holds the promise of a brighter and more prosperous future for rural India.

*(The writer is a scientist at Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology, Bhawanipatna; views are personal)*

Creating awareness about menstrual rights among men

Menstrual rights encompass not only access to hygiene products but also the eradication of discriminatory practices surrounding this natural biological phenomenon

Menstruation, a natural facet of human existence, has often been cloaked in stigma and silence. As we delve into the stories from Leh, it is crucial to understand the broader context of menstrual rights and the significance of these conversations. Menstrual rights include access to menstrual hygiene products, comprehensive education about menstruation, and the elimination of discriminatory practices associated with this natural biological process. The lack of awareness has fueled a culture of shame and secrecy. In Leh, the conversation around menstruation has undergone a transformative journey. Traditionally, whispers among friends were the primary source of information



QAMARUN **NISSA**

for young girls, making it a taboo subject. However, today, strides have been made, enabling open discussions, particularly between mothers and daughters. In Leh, the celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28th, 2023, is a significant event. The event, exclusively held at a government girls' higher secondary school, reflects a pivotal shift. Surprisingly, on this day, not a

single male presence is noted; only the cameraperson was a man. Why do we think that including men in this conversation isn't important? In Leh, most of the shopkeepers give pads wrapped in newspapers. Wrapping a pad in the newspaper is not a solution; rather, it perpetuates improper handling of menstrual products. There is a need for a more respectful and informed approach to changing societal norms and practices surrounding menstruation. Mutup Dolma, a 17-year-old from Hanu village, which is approximately 200 kilometres from Leh, shares her story about periods. In her hometown, it's not easy to talk openly about menstruation. People feel uncomfortable saying words like "periods" in public, and asking for pads from male shopkeepers is a challenge. When Mutup moved to Leh for school, things changed. In Leh, she could buy pads without feeling awkward because people didn't know her. But in her hometown, cultural norms made talking about periods difficult. Mutup thinks it is very important to have an open conversation. "I got scared when I got my first period," recalled Mutup. It was hard for her to understand what was happening until she talked to her mom. She mentioned, "When sometimes my mom isn't home, it is very difficult to ask for money from my father for menstrual products." Moving to Leh for education made it easier for her to buy menstrual products, but she realised the gap in awareness between urban and rural areas. Hailing from Ibex Colony in Leh, Tsewang Namgyal, a 17-year-old boy, noticed something strange in his science class. Whenever their teacher explained the menstrual cycle, his friends would laugh. When he tried to tell them it was a biological process and shouldn't be mocked, they made fun of him. This laughter affected the girls in their class, making them feel embarrassed. Going back to his village, Tsewang observed that his cousins were hesitant to discuss menstruation due to a lack of awareness. Jigmet Skit, a 19-year-old resident of Skara, Leh, shares her perspective on menstruation. Despite being part of many menstrual awareness programmes in school, she expresses discomfort due to the segregation of boys from these discussions. Jigmet believes that schools should create an open environment like home, fostering learning and awareness rather than perpetuating secrecy. According to Jigmet, the awkwardness in society stems from the practice of hiding menstruation, especially in schools. She emphasises that women should openly share information to eliminate discomfort and encourage discussions about menstrual health. In her experience, when she gets her period, she is not able to go out for 3 days because of the pain, and it becomes difficult when they ask why she is not able to go out; it becomes difficult to answer her friends and even her father due to a lack of understanding. Jigmet hopes that breaking the silence and providing equal awareness will end the societal awkwardness around menstruation. This, she believes, will enable girls to share their problems openly and make it easier for everyone to endure. Abdul Wahid, age 21, a resident of Shenam Leh, reflects on his school days when he and his friends lacked awareness about menstruation. He recalls an incident where they would check girls' bags and laugh at the sight of pads. However, upon moving to Delhi for studies, he noticed a stark difference in people's openness about menstruation. Now, during his visits to Leh, Abdul actively helps his cousin's sister to buy pads, a task he once refused to do during his school days. He emphasises the importance of open conversations about menstruation, highlighting that knowledge about periods enables individuals to assist someone in need during menstruation. Stories from Mutup, Tsewang, Jigmet, and Abdul show the changes and challenges in understanding menstruation. Leh is making progress by celebrating Menstrual Hygiene Day and encouraging discussions. Despite this, there's still a need for better education about periods. Changing cultural norms and ensuring menstrual rights are essential for a society free from shame and secrecy.

*(The writer is the winner of Sanjoy Ghose Media awards 2024; views are personal. Charkha Features)*



# Netanyahu and his top rival clash rocks Israel's war-time cabinet

AP ■ TEL AVIV (ISRAEL)

A top Israeli Cabinet minister headed to Washington on Sunday for talks with US officials, sparking a rebuke from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to an Israeli official, in a sign of widening cracks in Israel's wartime government nearly five months into its war with Hamas.

The trip by Benny Gantz, a centrist political rival who joined Netanyahu's hard-line government in the early days of the war following Hamas' October 7 attack on southern Israel, comes amid deep disagreements between Netanyahu and President Joe Biden over how to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and create a post-war vision for the enclave.

The US was prompted to airdrop aid into Gaza on Saturday after dozens of Palestinians rushing to grab food from trucks were killed last week. The airdrops circumvent what's been a prohibitive aid delivery system, which has been hobbled by Israeli restrictions, logistical issues within Gaza as well as the fighting inside the tiny enclave. Aid officials say the airdrops are far less effective than the aid sent via trucks.

US priorities in the region have increasingly been hampered by Netanyahu's hard-line Cabinet, where ultranationalists dominate. Gantz's more moderate party at times acts as a counterweight to Netanyahu's far-right allies.

An official from Netanyahu's Likud party said Gantz's visit was without authorisation from the Israeli leader. The official said Netanyahu had a "tough talk" with Gantz about the trip and told him the country has "just one prime minister".

An Israeli official said Gantz had informed Netanyahu of his intention to travel to the US and to coordinate messaging with him. The official said the visit is meant to strengthen ties with Washington, to bolster support for Israel's ground campaign and to push for the release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza.

Gantz is set to meet with US Vice President Kamala Harris and national security

## US military aircraft airdrop thousands meals into Gaza

AP ■ WASHINGTON

US military C-130 cargo planes dropped food in pallets over Gaza on Saturday in the opening stage of an emergency humanitarian assistance authorised by President Joe Biden after more than 100 Palestinians who had surged to pull goods off an aid convoy were killed during a chaotic encounter with Israeli troops.

Three planes from Air Forces Central dropped 66 bundles containing about 38,000 meals into Gaza at 8:30 a.m. EST (3:30 p.m. local).

The bundles were dropped in southwest Gaza, on the beach along the territory's Mediterranean coast. The airdrop was coordinated with the Royal Jordanian Air Force, which said it had two food airdrops Saturday in northern Gaza and has conducted several rounds in recent months.

"The amount of aid flowing to Gaza is not nearly enough and we will continue to pull out every stop we can to get more aid in," President Joe Biden said Saturday in a post on the social media site X, formerly known as Twitter.

US Central Command said on X that "the combined operation included U.S. Air Force and RJAF C-130 aircraft and respective Army Soldiers specialized in aerial delivery of supplies, built bundles and ensured the safe drop of food aid." The US airdrop is expected to be the first of many. Three Biden administration officials said the planes dropped the military Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) — shelf-stable meals that contain a day's worth of calories in each sealed package

adviser Jake Sullivan, according to his National Unity party.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised to discuss the dispute with the media.

Netanyahu has tanked in popularity since the war broke out, according to most opinion polls, with many Israelis holding him responsible for Hamas'

— in locations that were thought would provide civilians with the greatest level of safety to access aid. Afterward, the US monitored the sites and was able to see civilians approach and distribute food among themselves, according to the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide additional details that had not been made public.

Biden on Friday announced the U.S. would begin air dropping food to starving Gazans after at least 115 Palestinians were killed and hundreds more wounded in the Thursday attack as they scrambled for aid, the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said.

Hundreds of people had rushed about 30 trucks bringing a predawn delivery of aid to the north.

Palestinians said nearby Israeli troops shot into the crowds. Israel said they fired warning shots toward the crowd and insisted many of the dead were trampled.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said Friday that the airdrops were being planned to deliver emergency humanitarian assistance in a safe way to people on the ground. The United States believes the airdrops will help address the dire situation in Gaza, but they are no replacement for trucks, which can transport far more aid more effectively, though Thursday's events also showed the risks with ground transport.

Kirby said the airdrops have an advantage over trucks because planes can move aid to a particular location very quickly. But in terms of volume,

cross-border raid that left 1,200 people, mostly civilians, dead and roughly 250 people, including women, children and older adults, abducted and taken into Gaza, according to Israeli authorities.

The subsequent fighting has killed at least 30,410 Palestinians, around two-thirds of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health

the airdrops will be "a supplement to, not a replacement for moving things in by ground."

The C-130 is widely used to deliver aid to remote places because of its ability to land in austere environments.

A C-130 can airlift as much as 42,000 pounds of cargo and its crews know how to rig the cargo, which sometimes can include even vehicles, onto massive pallets that can be safely dropped out of the back of the aircraft.

Air Force loadmasters secure the bundles onto pallets with netting that is rigged for release in the back of a C-130, and then crews release it with a parachute when the aircraft reaches the intended delivery zone.

The Air Force's C-130 has been used in years past to air drop humanitarian into Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti and other locations and the airframe is used in an annual multi-national "Operation Christmas Drop" that air drops pallets of toys, supplies, non-perishable food and fishing supplies to remote locations in the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau.

Since the war began on Oct. 7, Israel has barred entry of food, water, medicine and other supplies, except for a trickle of aid entering the south from Egypt at the Rafah crossing and Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing.

The United Nations says one-quarter of Gaza's 2.3 million people face starvation. Aid officials have said that airdrops are not an efficient means of distributing aid and are a measure of last resort.

Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and fighters.

Around 80 per cent of the population of 2.3 million have fled their homes, and UN agencies say hundreds of thousands are on the brink of famine. Critics say Netanyahu's decision-making has been tainted by political considerations, a charge he denies.

## Election for control of Serbia's capital set to be rerun

**Belgrade (AP):** A key vote for control of Serbia's capital, Belgrade — a focal point of widespread fraud reports after last December elections — is to be rerun later this year, officials said Sunday. The announcement follows months of soaring political tensions over claims that the ruling populists of President Aleksandar Vucic orchestrated a fraud in the vote for Belgrade's city assembly. The right-wing Serbian Progressive Party was declared the winner of the December 17 election. But the main opposition alliance, Serbia Against Violence, have insisted they were robbed of a victory in Belgrade and that the parliamentary vote that took place at the same time was also marred by widespread irregularities. The dispute has led to large street protests. It was not immediately clear when the new vote would be held. Sunday marked the formal deadline to form the Belgrade city authorities following the vote in December.

# MQ9-B drone sales to India enters next step

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The sale of 31 MQ9-B SkyGuardian Drones to India is expected to be fast-tracked now that the major hurdle of mandatory 30 days of Congressional notification is likely to pass without any objection from the lawmakers on Sunday, but for the routine procedural matters posed by the upcoming general elections.

The Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified the US Congress in February about the determination of the State Department of a possible Foreign Military Sale to India of 31 MQ-9B Remotely Piloted Aircraft and related equipment for an estimated cost of USD 3.99 billion.

The 31 MQ9-B SkyGuardian Drones itself cost USD 1.70 billion, while the rest of the services including technology and equipment are estimated to cost USD 2.29 billion. In addition to 31 MQ-9B SkyGuardian Aircraft, the proposed deal includes 161 Embedded Global Positioning & Inertial Navigation Systems (EGIs), 35 L3 Rio Grande Communications Intelligence Sensor Suite.



"This sale is necessary in furtherance of the US foreign policy and national security objectives," the notification said.

The next step is for the United States to send a letter of offer and acceptance to India, which under normal circumstances should be considered as a mere formality.

Announced by US President Joe Biden during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington DC in June 2023, all major legal and bureaucratic procedures on the issue have already been cleared from the Indian side including that from the Union Cabinet.

After the letter goes out from the State Department, the next step is for India to give a

formal acceptance letter on the matter to the United States, which is essential for the formal price negotiations between the two countries to begin.

The announcement of the general election, which brings into force the Model Code of Conduct, is unlikely to pose any last legal hurdle.

"Model Code is not applicable to any matter pertaining directly to the defence forces, be it the recruitments/promotions for defence forces, any service matters pertaining to them, defence purchases of any kind, tenders relating to the matter of the defence forces and therefore no reference in such matters need to be sent to the Election Commission," says the Model Code of Conduct issued by the Election Commission of India.

"These instructions shall be treated as standing instructions of the Commission and will be applicable for all elections in future. This may be brought to the notice of all concerned for future guidance," said the Election Commission of India in a letter issued on the issue to the Ministry of Defence on March 27, 2014, in response to a query.

## Medical plane carrying Norway's King Harald V departs Malaysia

AP ■ LANGKAWI

An airplane carrying Norway's King Harald V departed Malaysia on Sunday, a day after he was implanted with a pacemaker. Europe's oldest reigning monarch was hospitalised for an infection during a private vacation on the northern resort island of Langkawi, the royal house said Tuesday. He underwent surgery at the Sultanah Maliha Hospital on Saturday to implant a temporary pacemaker due to a low heart rate, according to the royal house. Norwegian media outlets said Harald travelled to Malaysia with his wife, Queen Sonja, to celebrate his 87th birthday. A Scandinavian Airlines medical evacuation plane, which took off from Oslo on Thursday, arrived in Langkawi on Friday. The Boeing 737-700 aircraft has

previously been used as a flying ambulance. According to FlightRadar24, the same plane departed from Langkawi on Sunday headed for Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, from where it is scheduled to travel onward to Norway.

The Norwegian royal house confirmed Sunday that the monarch has left Malaysia and the plane is expected to arrive in Oslo early Monday.

"Upon arrival in Norway, His Majesty will be admitted to the (Oslo) hospital Rikshospitalet," the royal palace said, adding that Harald would remain on sick leave for the next two weeks, during which Crown Prince Haakon will assume the monarch's duties.

According to Norwegian news agency NTB, which cited information from Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, the king's transport back to

Norway will cost an estimated 2 million Norwegian kroner (USD 190,000), which will be taken from the defense budget.

The aging Norwegian monarch has suffered from frail health over the past few years, and has been admitted to a hospital for treatment on numerous occasions. Harald, who has been seen using crutches, had an operation to replace a heart valve in October 2020 after being hospitalized with breathing difficulties.

Harald has repeatedly said he has no plans to abdicate, unlike his second cousin Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, who stepped down earlier this year.

Harald's duties as Norway's head of state are ceremonial and he holds no political power. He ascended to the throne following the death of his father, King Olav, in 1991.

## Malaysia may renew hunt for missing flight MH370

**Kuala Lumpur:** Malaysia's government said on Sunday it may renew the hunt for missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 after a US technology firm proposed a fresh search in the southern Indian Ocean where the plane is believed to have crashed a decade ago.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke said Texas-based Ocean Infinity has proposed another "no find, no fee" basis to scour the seabeds, expanding from the site where it first searched in 2018.

He said he has invited the company to meet him to evaluate new scientific evidence it has to find the plane's final resting place.

If the evidence is credible, he said, he will seek Cabinet's approval to sign a new contract with Ocean Infinity to resume the search.

"The government is steadfast in our resolve to locate MH370," Loke told a remembrance event to mark the 10th anniversary of the disappearance of the jet. "We really hope the search can find the plane and provide truth to the next-of-kin." The Boeing 777 plane carrying 239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, from the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Beijing, vanished from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014. Satellite data showed the plane deviated from its flight path and was believed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean.

But an expensive multinational government search failed to turn up any clues, although several pieces of debris washed ashore on the east African coast and Indian Ocean islands. A private search in 2018 by Ocean Infinity also found nothing but the tragedy sparked moves to bolster aviation safety. **AP**

# 'Extremist preachers from countries like Pak to be blocked from entering UK'

**London (PTI):** Hate preachers with extremist Islamist views from countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indonesia will be blocked from entering Britain under new plans being drafted by the government, according to a UK media report on Sunday.

The Daily Telegraph reports that the British government is concerned about a "shocking increase" in extremist activity and officials are being deputed to identify the most dangerous extremists from overseas so they can be added to visa warning lists. Under the new plans, those on the list will be automatically refused entry to the UK.

The revelation comes days after British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivered an impassioned speech from the podium at 10 Downing Street in London, warning that the country's democratic and multi-faith values were under threat by extremists.

"We will also act to prevent people entering this country whose aim is to undermine its values," Sunak said in his speech on Friday.

"The Home Secretary has instructed that if those here on visas choose to spew hate on protests or seek to intimidate people we will remove their right to be here," he said.

The British Indian leader had also appealed to demonstrators taking to the streets of the country to protest against the Israel-Hamas conflict to ensure their actions are not hijacked by extremists.

"The time has now come for us all to stand together to combat the forces of division and beat this poison. We must face down the extremists who would tear us apart," he said, warning that "Islamist extrem-

ists and the far right feed off and embolden each other."

Thousands took to the streets for another wave of pro-Palestine protests on Saturday, with the Metropolitan Police making 12 arrests for activities in breach of peace in London.

According to 'The Daily Telegraph' report, an official review by Lord Walney, the government's independent adviser on political violence and disruption, calls on ministers to tackle the growing threat posed by fringe, Left-wing groups that have allied with Islamist extremists at such pro-Palestine marches across the UK.

"One of the conclusions of my review is to look at and understand the threat from anti-democratic far-Left groups, alongside that posed by Islamists and the far right... You are seeing an unholy alliance between far-Left groups and some of the Islamist extremism that has been seen on the marches," he told the newspaper.

Walney's report is with the UK Home Office and is due to be published later this month.

"Extremism has no place in our society and we will not tolerate tactics that set out to intimidate, threaten or cause disruption to the law-abiding majority," a Home Office spokesperson said.

"In recent months, we have also witnessed a small number of protestors display violent and hateful behaviour, and the police have our full support in tackling extremism and hate crime.

We are considering the report's recommendations extremely carefully and will respond in due course," the spokesperson said.

# S Korean doctors hold massive anti-govt rally

AP ■ SEOUL

Thousands of senior doctors rallied in the South Korean capital, Seoul, on Sunday to express their support for junior doctors who have been on strike for nearly two weeks over a government plan to sharply increase the number of medical school admissions. The rally came as the government said it would begin to take steps Monday to suspend the doctors' licenses of nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents for defying government orders to end their walkouts, which have disrupted hospital operations. "The government's absurd medical policy has triggered immense resistance by trainee doctors and medical students, and we doctors have become one," Park Sung-min, a senior member of the Korea Medical Association, said in a speech at the rally. "I'm asking the government: Please, stop the threats and suppression



now." Protesters chanted slogans, sang and held placards criticising the government's plan. There were no reports of violence.

As of Thursday night, 8,945 of the country's 13,000 medical interns and residents were confirmed to have left their work sites, according to the Health Ministry. The government had said they would face minimum three-month license suspensions and indict-

pitals. Senior doctors have staged a series of rallies backing the young doctors but haven't joined the walkouts. If they also launch strikes, observers say that would be a major blow to South Korea's medical service. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo on Sunday urged senior doctors to persuade the striking junior doctors to return to work.

Police said they were investigating five ranking Korea Medical Association officials accused of inciting and abetting the junior doctors' walkouts. Seoul police chief Cho Ji-ho told reporters Sunday that police had raided KMA offices as part of the investigation.

The government wants to increase South Korea's medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current 3,058, to better deal with the country's rapidly aging population.

Officials say South Korea's doctor-to-population ratio is

one of the lowest among developed countries.

But many doctors have vehemently protested the plan, saying medical schools can't handle such a sharp increase in the number of students.

They say the recruitment plan also does not address a chronic shortage of doctors in essential but low-paying specialties like pediatrics and emergency departments. Doctors say adding too many new doctors would also increase public medical expenses since greater competition would lead to excess treatments. Without concrete plans on how to educate the newly added students, "the quality of medical education will plunge endlessly, resulting in a unsafe, low-quality medical service and eventually a collapse of the medical service of the Republic of Korea," Lee Jeong-geun, acting leader of the Korea Medical Association, said at the rally.

## Organised crime attacks on local candidates raise fears Mexico City

AP ■ WAJIMA

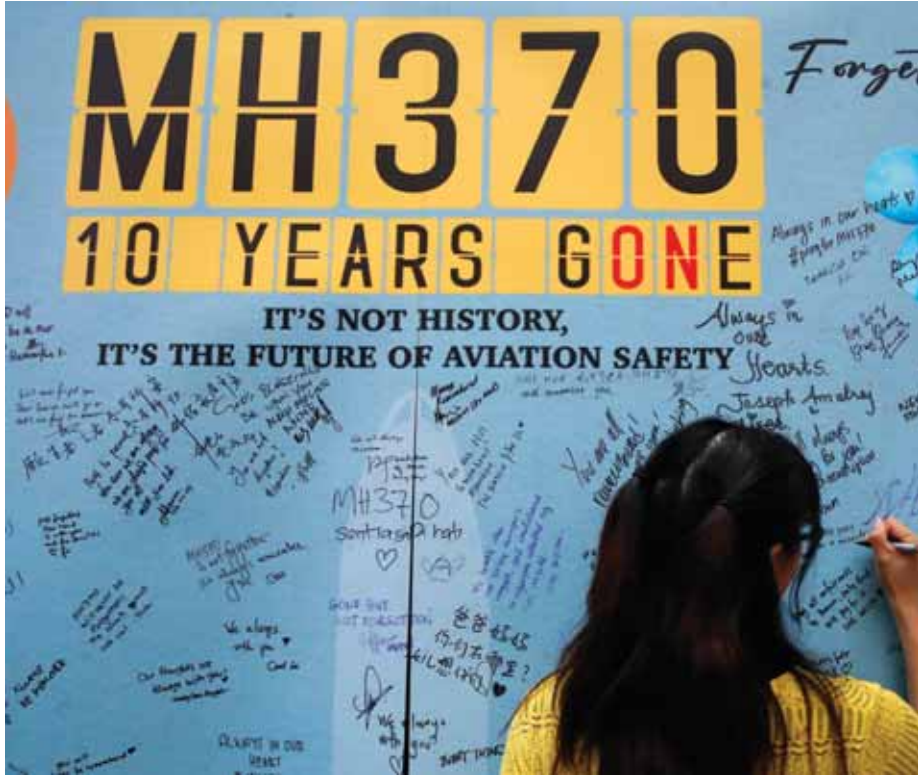
As Mexico prepares for the largest elections in its history, organised crime is once again preying on local candidates across swaths of the country where cartels dominate, raising concerns among experts that these could be Mexico's bloodiest elections ever. Julian Lopez, coordinator for the Citizen Movement party in the southern state of Guerrero, experienced it first hand when rifle-toting gunmen abducted him and two colleagues while they were driving on Feb. 7. The 43-year-old López was beaten, stripped of his possessions, made to kneel near a remote garbage dump and ultimately abandoned in the middle of the night. Two mayoral hopefuls in the town of Maravatón in neighboring Michoacán state were not so fortunate. They were killed by gunmen within hours

of each other Monday. One was from the governing Morena party of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the other from the conservative National Action Party. A third mayoral hopeful from that town was abducted and found dead in November. On Feb. 10, a man running for Congress for the Morena party in the sprawling Mexico City suburb of Ecatepec was fatally shot in the street alongside his brother. He had allegedly received threats from a local union.

A month earlier, on Jan. 5, the local leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party and candidate for mayor of Suchiate, Chiapas, was killed. The same day, in the northwestern state of Colima, a mayoral candidate of the Citizen Movement party in Armeria was shot by gunmen while in his vehicle. López, the candidate in Guerrero, has refused to

travel in armoured vehicles with armed security since his abduction. "How will it look to see a leader moving around the state of Guerrero with armed officials and in armored cars?" he asked. "I don't think that's the way to get closer to the people or promote citizen participation." Thousands of local candidates find themselves in a similar quandary ahead of the June 2 elections, which will occur in all 32 jurisdictions, with more than 20,000 positions up for grabs, making it Mexico's largest election, according to the National Electoral Institute.

While federal authorities offer security details to national candidates, those running for local offices - the ones that drug cartels really want to control - are completely exposed and acutely aware of the optics of running from within a security bubble.



A woman writes well messages on the message board during the tenth annual remembrance event at a shopping mall, in Subang Jaya, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Sunday. Ten years ago, a Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, had disappeared March 8, 2014 while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with over 200 people on board. **AP/PTI**



# Shehbaz becomes Pak PM for second time

## Vows to rebuild economy

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pledging to revive Pakistan's debt-trapped economy and eradicate terrorism, newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said his government would not allow the country to become part of some "great game" and would maintain cordial relations with neighbours based on the principles of equality.

In his victory speech in the National Assembly soon after he was elected as the 24th prime minister and for a second time since 2022, the 72-year-old profusely thanked his elder brother and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif and allies for putting their trust in him and allowing him to head a coalition government after last month's election resulted in a hung Parliament.

While Shehbaz secured 201 votes, his challenger Omar Ayub Khan of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) got only 92 votes in the election held at the newly-elected National Assembly.

Shehbaz said that as no party secured a clear parliamentary majority, it was "the democratic way" that "like-minded parties may form a coalition government".

Following the February 8 marred by allegations of vote rigging, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) headed by Nawaz Sharif, reached a coalition deal with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led by former foreign minister Bilawal Zardari-Bhutto.

This post-poll deal effectively ensured that jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's PTI party would not return to power though independent candidates backed by it won the maximum number of seats in Parliament. Amidst vociferous sloganeering by the members of Imran Khan's party members against alleged "mandate



thieves," Shehbaz warned that Pakistan was facing an alarming debt crisis where even the expenditures of the National Assembly were being paid by borrowing money.

He said that his government would work hard and set a goal to become a member of G20 countries by 2030. The G20 or Group of 20 is an intergovernmental forum of the world's major developed and developing economies.

He said that Pakistan would not become part of any "great game" and his government would increase the number of friends. He pledged to build and improve ties with all leading nations, including its neighbours.

"We will keep ties with neighbours on the basis of equality," Shehbaz said.

Shehbaz, however, raked up the Kashmir issue and equated it with Palestine. "Let's all come together [...] and the National Assembly should pass a resolution for the freedom of Kashmiris and Palestinians," he added. Shehbaz said that his elder brother has never even thought of harming the country, unlike his opponents.

"This is the difference between this leadership and that leadership [...] the entire assembly is witness to the fact that we never thought of the politics of revenge.

"Never was once a pot

broken, nor was any building ever damaged [...] but it shameful that the country saw a day when GHQ, corps commander houses, airfields were attacked on May 9," Shehbaz said, referring to the unprecedented attacks following Khan's arrest in an alleged corruption case last year.

He said that perpetrators of the May 9 riots will not be forgiven, vowing action against all those who were involved in the riots. Shehbaz also promised to end terrorism in the country and address its root causes. He said his government aims to take the National Action Plan (NAP) forward.

In his address, Shehbaz said Pakistan had a big challenge and opportunity before it. "If we come together and decide to change the fate of Pakistan [...] then God willing, we will defeat these challenges and take Pakistan to its rightful position," he said. He said that this job was difficult but not impossible. Shehbaz said that Pakistan is facing an alarming debt crisis where even the expenditures of the National Assembly were being paid by borrowing money.

"But if we decide to do a deep surgery and bring changes in the system, basic reform [...] and I have no doubt that Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari and others will agree that we can either get rid

## More than 100 supporters of PTI protesting vote rigging arrested

PTI ■ LAHORE

More than 100 supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party have been arrested from different parts of Punjab province of Pakistan for staging rallies against alleged vote rigging, police said on Sunday.

On the call of party founder Imran Khan, supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party held protests across Pakistan on Saturday against the alle-ged "massive rigging" in the February 8 general elections. Most arrests took place in Lahore where newly elected Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz ordered a clamp down on the protesting PTI supporters. "Police thrashed and arrested 80 workers and leaders in Lahore. Over 20 have been arrested in Gujrat city. Protests were held in 38 cities of Punjab and the federal capital Islamabad," a PTI spokesperson said on Sunday.

In Lahore, police baton-charged protesters at GPO Chowk and Liberty Chowk. "PTI leaders Mian Shahzad Farooq and Afzaal Azeem Pahat, who contested the election last month against Maryam Nawaz and her uncle Shehbaz Sharif, respectively, were also arrested. Farooq had defeated Maryam but the

Election Commission of Pakistan had changed the result," the spokesperson said. Aftab Bajwa, the former bar secretary of the Supreme Court, was also arrested.

Videos of Khan's supporters being dragged out of cars and beaten for displaying PTI flags were doing the rounds on social media. Punjab police said they arrested those protesters who blocked the road. The service of X, formerly Twitter, also remained disrupted in the country on Saturday and Sunday. The disruption of different social media sites, particularly X, has become an order of the day after the controversy-marred polls.

The PTI has condemned the "brutal" police action to stop the peaceful protest against the massive rigging in elections and stealing the mandate of the people to impose "the mandate thieves" on the nation. PTI Central Punjab General Secretary Hammad Azhar said: "Controversial and fake CM Maryam Nawaz has committed fascism by using the State's machinery against peaceful protesters."

PTI spokesperson Raouf Hasan denounced the "fascist, coercive tactics and the unlawful use of State machinery" to disrupt the peaceful protest across the country against the

theft of the public mandate.

"The nation will not rest till it reclaims stolen mandate from the thieves. The government of mandate thieves is unacceptable," Hasan said.

Hasan said the people came in droves on the call of their beloved leader Imran Khan to protest against poll fraud, which proved that the mandate thieves rode to power on the coattails of the stolen votes. "The erection of unconstitutional obstacles and massive police deployment in the way of protesters clearly shows the level of fear of the fake government of mandate thieves."

Hasan went on to say that the people gave a clear and huge mandate to Khan, however, the clear majority was converted into a minority fraudulently through result manipulation. Hasan made it clear the PTI would strongly resist any attempt to impose the fraudsters on the country.

"We will not accept the fake government formed based on Form 47 fraudulently prepared by the ECP," he said. He emphasised the future of Pakistan was linked with democracy and democratic values and norms. Democracy can only be brought in Pakistan by giving people the constitutional authority of decision-making, he said.

biggest challenge faced by the country. Shehbaz highlighted the burden of debt paying and said that the country was required to pay billions of rupees in interest only.

He highlighted that the energy sector was crumbling due to the accumulating debt owed by the country to the power-producing companies. He also said that state-owned entities like Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) were running into losses worth billions of rupees.

He promised to put the country on the path of devel-

opment. "Though it is easier said than done, we will fulfil our task," he said.

Terming the agriculture sector as the economy's backbone, Shehbaz said that his government would provide subsidies to the farmers. He also promised to bring investment into the country and create economic conditions that would spur economic growth. Shehbaz was first sworn in as Pakistan's prime minister in April 2022, after Imran Khan was dramatically ousted from power in a parliamentary no-confidence vote.

## Shehbaz a favourite of establishment

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Shehbaz Sharif, who is known to be an astute politician and a good administrator, has once again donned the mantle of prime ministership of cash-strapped Pakistan by a quirk of fate and his amicable ties with the powerful establishment in the coup-prone country.

The 72-year-old President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the younger brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, always played the second fiddle to the 74-year-old party supremo, who returned to Pakistan in October last year, in his bid to script history by becoming the premier for a record fourth time in 2024.

However, the outcome of the February 8 elections crushed Nawaz Sharif's dream of becoming the prime minister for the fourth time. The PML-N, which was hoping to form a government on its own, won only 75 seats, trailing behind independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the 336-member National Assembly.

With the election leading to a hung Parliament, the PML-N did not have much of a choice, but to form a coalition government to prevent Khan's PTI from making its bid to return to power.

Nawaz had tasked Shehbaz to negotiate with other like-minded parties on the formation of a coalition government. However, the PML-N party soon realised that there was opposition to Nawaz Sharif's candidacy. Thus, the elder Sharif was left with no choice but to nominate his younger brother as the consensus prime ministerial candidate of the PML-N and the Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) last month.

Party sources say Nawaz was not comfortable heading a coalition government and abdicated his claim for the premier-ship in favour of his younger brother, who seemed to have the blessings of the military. Shehbaz reportedly rejected several offers by the powerful establishment on different occasions to become prime minister

by ditching his brother. He is known for the speedy completion of mega projects, which popularised a new local phrase of 'Shehbaz Sharif speed' for development schemes.

During his two successive tenures as chief minister of Punjab (2008–2013 and 2013–2018), a network of underpasses, overhead bridges and mass transit systems was introduced in the most populous Punjab province and was completed in record time.

Born in September 1951 in a Punjabi-speaking Kashmiri family in Lahore, Shehbaz did his graduation from the Government College University, Lahore. His family emigrated from Anantnag in Kashmir for business and settled in the village of Jati Umra in Amritsar district, Punjab at the beginning of the 20th century before moving to Pakistan.

Shehbaz, who looked after the sprawling family business, hit the political scene in the late 1980s when he was elected as a member of the Punjab Assembly in 1988. Shehbaz served as chief minister of Punjab from 1997 to 1999, when his brother was serving his second term as prime minister but fell out with the military. Following General Pervez Musharraf's coup in 1999 toppling the Nawaz Sharif government, Shehbaz along with the family spent eight years in exile in Saudi Arabia after striking a deal with the then-military ruler.

The family returned to Pakistan in 2007. Shehbaz wore the hat of Punjab chief minister for the second term in 2008 and he won the same slot for the third time in 2013. After then-prime minister Nawaz Sharif was disqualified from holding office in 2017 in the Panama Papers case, the PML-N appointed Shehbaz as its president.

Shehbaz also showed himself as an astute politician when he served as a leader of the opposition from 2018 to 2022 after the PML-N lost to Khan's PTI in the 2018 polls. It was once again quite a tough period for the Sharifs, as the elder Sharif was convicted in two different cases of corruption, along with his daughter, and jailed.

## Xi congratulates new Pak PM

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday congratulated Shehbaz Sharif on his election as the Prime Minister of Pakistan for a second time and hoped that Beijing and Islamabad will continue to deepen their all-weather strategic cooperative partnership under his leadership.

Shehbaz Sharif, who was the consensus candidate of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), was on Sunday elected as the prime minister for the second consecutive term. Shehbaz received 201 votes in the 336-member house while his challenger Omar Ayub Khan of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) secured 92 votes. In his congratulatory message, Xi said he believes that under the leadership of younger Sharif and the new Pakistani government, and with the united efforts of all walks of life in Pakistan, the country will achieve new and

greater accomplishments in the cause of national development and progress.

Xi stressed that China and Pakistan should continue their traditional friendship, strengthen exchanges and cooperation in all fields, jointly build an upgraded version of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), continue to deepen the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and build a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era to bring more benefits for the people of the two countries.

In his victory speech, Shehbaz Sharif vowed to further promote the CPEC projects with China, an all-weather ally. There is a sense of relief among the official circles here that Pakistan, a key ally of China which has been going through grave economic and political crises for the last several years, has an elected government that Beijing could deal with.

China had an uneasy relationship with former prime minister Imran Khan's gov-

ernment which was blamed for the slow pace of USD 60 billion CPEC. Both Shehbaz, his brother and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif are familiar political figures for the ruling Chinese Communist Party as both of them along with the Pakistan military strengthened the all-weather alliance during their tenures. They are also firm backers of the strategic CPEC project.

China has been providing forex loans and rollover of its debt periodically to bail out Pakistan which is facing a severe economic crisis. Recent reports from Islamabad said China has agreed to roll over a USD 2 billion loan due to be paid in March.

Besides Xi, Chinese Premier Li Qiang sent a congratulatory message to Shehbaz, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Shehbaz will be administered the oath of office on Monday at the Presidential mansion, Aiwan-e-Sadr. Shehbaz earlier served as prime minister of a coalition government from April 2022 to August 2023 before Parliament

## Joint session of Parl to elect Pakistan's new prez called on March 9

**Islamabad (PTI):** Newly-elected National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq on Sunday summoned a joint session of the Parliament to elect the next president of Pakistan on March 9, a position that former president Asif Ali Zardari is almost certain to win again after nearly 11 years. In a notification issued today, the speaker summoned the session at 10 am, with Zardari, 68, set to face off against his rival ethnic Pashtun politician Mahmood Khan Achakzai.

Zardari, who is a joint candidate of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), is set to become the president for the second time as he is being supported by the parties that enjoy a majority in the electoral college. He also served as president from 2008 to 2013.

Achakzai, 75, from Balochistan, is the chief of the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party and was nominated by Imran Khan, the jailed leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party. In Parliament, Achakzai would be supported by the Sunni Ittehad Council, the new home of the PTI-backed independent lawmakers.

Their nomination papers were filed in the Islamabad High Court for the presidential elections on Saturday and the scrutiny of the nomination papers will be held on Monday. The new president will replace Dr Arif Alvi, who completed a five-year term last year. However, in the absence of the electoral college required to elect the president, Alvi is still in office. The president is elected by an electoral college comprising members of the Senate, the National Assembly, and the four provincial assemblies.

## Death toll rises from drone strike on Ukrainian port city

AP ■ KYIV

The death toll rose to 10 on Sunday from a Russian drone strike that destroyed an apartment block in Ukraine's southern port city of Odesa the previous day when a local official reported that the body of a third child was pulled from the rubble. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on Western allies to boost Ukraine's air defences in the wake of the deadly attack.

Oleh Kiper, the governor of the Odesa region, said on Telegram that rescue workers on Sunday morning retrieved the remains of a woman and her baby, who appeared "not even a year old".

Kiper added that emergency services continue to comb through the rubble. On Saturday, Ukrainian authorities reported that a months-old baby was among those killed

after falling debris from an Iranian-made drone hit the apartment building — one of eight Russian drones reported by officials. Later that day, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that a second child had also died, and called on Kyiv's Western partners to send more air defence systems.

"Tymofiy was 4 months old. Mark was about to turn 3 years old. My condolences to all of their close ones," Zelenskyy wrote in English on X, formerly known as Twitter. He added that a 3-year-old girl and seven other people were injured in the attack. "Delays in the delivery of weapons to Ukraine, as well as air defence to protect our people, unfortunately result in such losses. ... Ukraine has never requested anything more than what is necessary to protect lives," Zelenskyy wrote.

Russia's defence ministry

reported that 38 Ukrainian drones were intercepted overnight into Sunday over the Crimean peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed from Kyiv in 2014. A bridge that connects Crimea to Russian territory was closed to traffic for about two hours in the early hours. In Moscow, China's special envoy on Ukraine held talks on Saturday evening with senior Russian diplomats in the first leg of a European trip that will also take him to Brussels, Poland, Germany and France, Chinese and Russian state media reported.

In a readout published on Sunday morning, China's foreign ministry said that Special Representative Li Hui and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin agreed that negotiations are the only way to end the fighting in Ukraine. Li's trip, the second since last May, comes as Kyiv

## Pak Senate to take up motion seeking permanent ban on social media sites

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Amidst serious concerns over the continued disruption of the social media platform X in Pakistan for over a fortnight now, a member of the Senate has demanded a permanent ban on all social media due to its negative impact on the younger generation.

Senator Bahramand Khan Tangi, who was recently expelled by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) after he moved a resolution seeking the delaying of the February 8 polls, in the resolution called for a complete ban on all social media platforms, deeming them detrimental to the future of the young generation, Dawn News reported.

The resolution is listed on the agenda of the Senate ses-

sion for Monday. Senator Tangi, who is set to retire on March 11, said: "Social media platforms are adversely affecting the young generation in the country... [and] being used for promotion of norms against our religion and culture, creating hatred among people on the grounds of language and religion."

The resolution notes with concern "the use of such platforms against the interests of the country through negative and malicious propaganda against the armed forces of Pakistan" and calls upon the Senate to recommend to the government to ban Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube to save the young generation from their negative and devastating effects.

The X website has been largely offline since February

17, with occasional service restorations, mainly after former commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chhatta made a statement in front of the media claiming that the "elections were rigged".

Separately, reports said authorities are considering a blanket ban on all Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), prompting the IT and services sector to express concerns that such action could severely harm the cash-strapped country's economy.

A majority of users are using VPNs to access the platform. Numerous posts have been mocking the authorities, including caretaker IT Minister Umar Saif, for using a VPN. Saif uses a VPN as his current location in recent tweets is showing Hong Kong. So far, no authority has

taken responsibility for restricting the services of X, which activists see as a dangerous trend. "This way, those in power are saying that they can ban any platform without any reason or being answerable to anyone," said Nighat Dad, a digital rights activist and member of the UN Secretary General's advisory board on AI.

She added that such a blanket ban on any platform is a violation of fundamental rights, and those in power are not considering the reputation of the country worldwide, especially concerning those who are being invited to invest in Pakistan. Rumours that even VPNs will be banned in the country have rung alarm bells in the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA).

## SL tourism sector sees 122% growth in Jan '24 compared to last year, says minister

PTI ■ COLOMBO

A Sri Lankan minister on Sunday said the country's external sector performance has seen a marked improvement year on year with tourism fetching USD 342 million in January 2024, an impressive 122 per cent jump from last year. Speaking in Ruwanwella, his home constituency, Minister of State for Finance Ranjith Siyambalapitiya was delving into the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's external sector indicators issued mid-week.

Siyambalapitiya said the bank figures show that receipts from tourism had fetched USD 342 million, which is a 122 per cent growth in January 2024 year on year. The inward remittances from Sri Lankan expats in January 2024 had grown by five per cent to USD 488 mil-

lion up from USD 467 million in January 2023. The Sri Lankan rupee, which had seen a massive slump during the unprecedented economic crisis, had appreciated by 14.6 per cent in January of this year.

The foreign reserves had increased to USD 4.5 billion in January up 114 per cent from USD 2.1 billion in January 2023. The economy recorded positive growth in the third quarter of 2023 after six successive quarters of negative growth, Siyambalapitiya said. Sri Lanka in the second quarter of 2022 had declared bankruptcy announcing the island's first ever sovereign default.

Negotiations with the IMF for a bailout began almost immediately and the first tranche of the USD 2.9 billion facility was released in March 2023.

## Kuwait to hold polls on Apr 4, latest round of voting in years of turmoil

AP ■ DUBAI

Kuwait said on Saturday it will hold elections for its national assembly on April 4, its latest round of voting after years of political turmoil. The state-run KUNA news agency made the announcement, citing a decree published by the oil-rich country's official gazette. In February, Kuwait's emir dissolved parliament after a lawmaker reportedly insulted the ruler.

Domestic political disputes have been gripping Kuwait for years — including the overhaul of Kuwait's welfare system — which prevented the sheikhdom from taking on debt. That has left it with little in its coffers to pay bloated public sector salaries, despite generating immense wealth from its oil reserves.

Parliament has been repeatedly dissolved after failing to move forward, with Kuwait's Constitutional Court in 2023 annulling a 2022 decree overturning another such annulment. The country's late emir then annulled that parliament again and held an election for a new parliament, which was annulled with the February decision. Kuwait, a nation home to some 4.2 million people that's slightly smaller than the US state of New Jersey, has the world's sixth-largest known oil reserves.

It has been a staunch US ally since the 1991 Gulf War expelled the occupying Iraqi forces of Saddam Hussein. Kuwait hosts some 13,500 American troops in the country, as well as the forward headquarters of the US Army in the Middle East.



# India on global stage of chip makers in five years: Vaishnaw

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

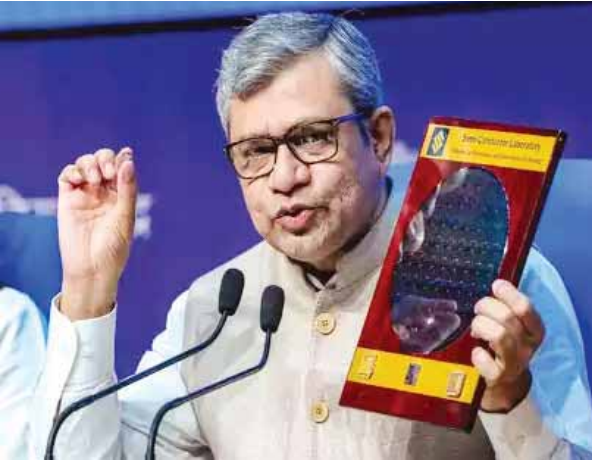
India will, in next five years, join the high-stake global stage of semiconductor manufacturing as it combines unparalleled design capabilities with USD 10 billion of incentives to draw manufacturers to set up new fabs and units that will cut dominance of Taiwan, South Korea and China, said IT and Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

In an interview to PTI, he said India's well-crafted policies are tempting manufacturers to set up new fabs (semiconductor fabrication plants) and pouring investment in related sectors. Semiconductors are an essential component of electronic devices, and are

used in automobiles to computers, mobile phones and even washing machines. India already has factories of best known automobile companies — from Renault-Nissan to Hyundai, computer makers such as Dell, Apple suppliers and electronic makers like Samsung which produce TVs, washing machines and fridges, among others.

Now, India is eyeing to step up the manufacturing value chain with a high-stake semiconductor manufacturing. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's Rs 76,000 crore of incentives have got four players including Micron and Tatas.

Vaishnaw said the country already has roughly one-third of global design talent.



His government is leveraging this and India's geopolitical clout to become an indispensable partner for tech ambitions of the US, which

like other western economies, is looking to decouple their supply chains from China. Beijing's draconian lockdowns had disrupted global chip

supply and sent companies and governments on a hunt for alternative sources of production.

India is offering itself as a democratic and trusted alternative tech hub to China. "People who were earlier thinking when should we go to India or should we go to India...Now they are asking how soon do we go to India...That is the change which is happening. This means, practically every big player would now like to reconsider their investment plans and come to India," he said.

Asked about the timelines when India would aim to be a formidable player rivaling known semiconductor destinations, the minister said "in the coming 5 years, definitely".

Last week, the Cabinet approved proposals to set up three semiconductor plants, including a mega fab by Tata Group, at a cumulative investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore, as India moved to position itself as an international powerhouse in chip manufacturing.

"...It is very important for any developing country, an economy of our size, to have a semiconductor supply chain within the country. We have very strong design capabilities, as a corollary of design capabilities we must have the manufacturing capability also because that is where value gets added further," Vaishnaw explained. The semiconductor plans will make India self-reliant, trigger a multiplier effect on economy and various

industries, create job and spur livelihoods, according to the minister.

"The semiconductor industry is a big multiplier for many more industries — automobiles, electric vehicle, electronics, power electronics, defence — every manufacturing sector requires semiconductors. So having that as a semiconductor value chain within the ecosystem will be pull for all of these," Vaishnaw said.

As per the announcements, Tata Electronics Pvt Ltd will set up a semiconductor fab in partnership with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp at Dholera's special industrial region in Gujarat. The plant will have the capacity to produce 50,000

wafers per month and involve an investment of Rs 91,000 crore.

These chips driven by advanced technology will cater to multiple sectors — power management chips for electric vehicles (EV), telecom, defence, automotive, consumer electronics, display, and power electronics.

The government has also approved a proposal by Tatas to build a greenfield semiconductor assembly and test facility in Jagiroad, Assam. The facility will be built with an investment outlay of Rs 27,000 crore and is expected to generate over 27,000 direct and indirect jobs in the region.

Notably, this will be India's first semiconductor unit in the northeast.

## LIC Housing Finance to raise funds via green bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

LIC Housing Finance, the mortgage arm of insurance behemoth LIC, plans to mobilise funds through green bonds in the coming financial year with an aim to finance environmentally-sustainable housing projects.

"Green financing is something that we will look at the next year and we would deploy the fund for financing green housing projects," LIC Housing Finance MD and CEO Tribhuvan Adhikari told PTI in an interaction.

LIC Housing Finance will have its board meeting on March 7 to consider and approve the borrowing plan for 2024-2025 through loans or issue of redeemable non-convertible debentures, zero couponed bonds, subordinate debt, Tier II bonds or any other means approved by the regulator.

Adhikari said the company hopes to hit the net profit of Rs 5,000 crore-milestone by the end of current financial



year on the back of robust loan demand and expansion in non-core business.

The non-core businesses include Loan Against Property (LAP) and affordable housing finance, he said.

"Affordable housing segment remained strong in tier-2 and tier-3 markets. We remained focused on this segment, as it gives an opportunity to millions of aspiring Indians to own their home with a moderate budget," he said.

In addition to business growth, he said, "our endeavour has been to improve service standards

through ongoing digital transformation of our processes".

With fourth quarter usually being the most important business months for the company, and going by the current trends, he said, "we expect to close this financial year with healthy numbers."

He said, the company has earned a net profit of Rs 3,675 crore in the three quarters and hope to touch the milestone of Rs 5,000 crore by the end of this financial year.

During 2022-23, the biggest housing finance company had earned a net profit of Rs 2,891 crore.

## FM to inaugurate conference of GST enforcement chiefs today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will inaugurate on Monday a conference of enforcement chiefs of all state and central GST officers to tackle tax evasion.

In the conference, Goods and Services Tax (GST) formations will deliberate on combating GST evasion, including examining current challenges and delving into successful methods adopted by central and state tax enforcement officers.

It would also strategise on effective methods to combat fake invoicing, sharing best practices, fostering synergy, and leveraging technology and data.

The conference will also balance ease of doing business and discuss striking a crucial equilibrium between facilitating a smooth business environment and implementing effective and deterrent enforcement measures.



Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman will inaugurate the one-day conference and also deliver the keynote address on March 4, a finance ministry statement said.

Embracing the spirit of cooperative federalism as exemplified by GST, this conference serves as a valuable platform for both Centre and state GST Enforcement authorities to share best practices, foster mutual learning, and collectively strengthen the GST administration, it added.

## Term deposits rise on rising interest rates

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rising interest rates seem to be driving more people to go in for term savings plans as the share of such instruments in total bank deposits increased to 60.3 per cent in December 2023 from 57.2 per cent in March 2023, according to the Reserve Bank data.

On an incremental basis, term deposits accounted for nearly 97.6 per cent of the total deposits during April-December 2023 and the shares of current account and savings account (CASA) deposits went down, said RBI's Quarterly BSR-2: Deposits with Scheduled Commercial Banks - December 2023. "Rising return on term deposits has been driving the compositional shift in bank

deposits: the share of term deposits in total deposits increased to 60.3 per cent in December 2023 from 57.2 per cent in March 2023," it said.

RBI further said that deposits moved to higher interest rate buckets as the share of term deposits bearing over 7 per cent interest rate rose to 61.4 per cent of the total term deposits in December 2023 from 54.7 per cent a quarter ago and 33.7 per cent in March 2023.

It is almost a year that the Reserve Bank has kept the short-term lending rate or repo rate at 6.5 per cent. The benchmark interest rate was last raised in February 2023 to 6.5 per cent from 6.25 per cent due to inflation driven mainly by global developments.

In an off-cycle meeting in May 2022, the Monetary Policy Committee of RBI

raised the policy rate by 40 basis points and it was followed by rate hikes of varying sizes, in each of the five subsequent meetings till February 2023. The repo rate was raised by 250 basis points cumulatively between May 2022 and February 2023.

RBI's quarterly BSR data also showed that nearly two thirds of the incremental term deposits during October-December 2023 were of the size 'Rs 1 lakh to less than Rs 1 crore'. The corresponding share in the previous quarter was 46.5 per cent. Female customers made significant contribution in deposit accretion. Their shares in incremental CASA, term, and total deposits during October-December 2023 were 63.4 per cent, 36.1 per cent, and 40.1 per cent, respectively.

## Tata group will remain committed to its legacy: Chandrasekaran

PTI ■ NEW JAMSHEDPUR

Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran on Sunday said the conglomerate would continue to uphold the legacy of its founder Jamsetji Tata, and remain committed to the principles of integrity, innovation and social responsibility.

Chandrasekaran was addressing a gathering at the Postal Park in Bistupur in Jharkhand's Jamshedpur after paying homage to Jamsetji Tata on his 185th birth anniversary. He was accompanied by Tata Steel CEO and MD TV Narendran.

"Our founder, Jamsetji Tata, envisioned a future where industry would be a force for positive change, and it is with great pride that we continue to uphold his legacy. In this occasion, we



reaffirm our commitment to the principles of integrity, innovation, and social responsibility that have guided us since our inception," Chandrasekaran said.

"We will continue to work together with the community to build a brighter, more prosperous future for Jamshedpur and its residents," he added.

Later, he inaugurated an exhibition at Steelennium Hall at Jamshedpur Works of Tata Steel, where various

departments presented their technology-led initiatives. Various programmes were organised to celebrate Founder's Day across various units of the group.

Chandrasekaran also flagged off green-fuel-powered commercial vehicles of Tata Motors, meant for Tata Steel. The fleet included Prima tractors, tippers and the Ultra EV bus, powered by Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and battery electric technologies, the company said in a statement.

## IFFCO moves NCLT against Triumph Offshore, Swan Energy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IFFCO has moved the NCLT against Swan Energy Ltd (SEL) and their joint venture Triumph Offshore to restrain their JV firm from passing any resolution without its approval and issuing any share/security to the lenders against loans.

Seeking an injunction against any such proposal, IFFCO, in its petition filed before the Ahmedabad bench of the NCLT, alleged that Triumph Offshore is pre-paying the debt, which may result in dilution of its shareholding in the joint venture firm and is detrimental to its interest.

IFFCO has moved the NCLT under sections 241 and 242 of the Companies Act 2013, alleging oppression and

mismanagement.

It has prayed to restrain Swan Energy and Triumph Offshore "from passing any board resolution without the prior written approval of petitioner (IFFCO), with reference to the substitution of the bank term loan with promoters loan or from issuing any shares/security or any instrument convertible into equity in favour of R2 (SEL) or any third party, which may result into diluting shareholder of the petitioner".

Leading fertiliser player IFFCO owns 49 per cent of Triumph Offshore, the joint venture with Swan Energy, established to set up a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU). Swan Energy Ltd (SEL) is the majority partner with a 51 per

cent stake.

Triumph Offshore's board comprises three nominees from Swan Energy, two from IFFCO and two independent directors.

According to IFFCO, Triumph Offshore had tied up with banks to get a term loan of Rs 1,604 crore, out of which SBI sanctioned Rs 500 crore. To secure the loan, the entire equity share capital held by IFFCO was mortgaged with lenders.

IFCO has alleged that Triumph Offshore -- through its nominee directors and two independent directors -- "has worked in cohorts with R2 (SEL) to create a situation wherein R1 (Triumph) has been rendered in a state of financial crisis by using all cash reserves to hastily and

needlessly pre-pay lenders' money".

Moreover, it has also not taken any steps to charter any Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) and the decision were taken by the directors "only to facilitate the intentions" of SEL to ultimately lead Triumph Offshore, where it becomes a necessity to accept the proposal if accepting the loan from SEL to restore JV's capacity to repay bank loans, it added.

It has prayed the National Company Law Tribunal to pass directions to Triumph Offshore and its employees from taking any loan from SEL or its affiliates without its written approval.

IFFCO in its petition submitted that Swan Energy

on September 22, 2023, decided to call an extraordinary general meeting on October 19, 2023, to raise Rs 1,435.50 crore by issuing preferential issue of shares to a foreign entity GCP INAB PTE Ltd, Singapore. The issue price was proposed at around 60 per cent premium to the then market price.

Triumph Offshore called a board meeting with a shorter notice on October 10, 2023, to approve the proposal for making a rights issue of Rs 1,100 crore to SEL for replacing the bank loan with a promoter loan.

The move was opposed by IFFCO's nominee director stating that the said items were part of 'reserved matters'.

## Consumption of paan, tobacco, other intoxicants has increased

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Consumption of paan, tobacco and other intoxicants has increased with people spending a bigger portion of their income on such products in the last 10 years, according to a survey. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23, released last week, revealed that the expenditure on paan, tobacco and intoxicants as a portion of total household spending has increased in rural as well as urban areas.

The data showed that the expenditure on these items has increased to 3.79 per cent in 2022-23 in rural areas from 3.21 per cent in 2011-12.

Similarly, in urban areas, the spending grew from 1.61 per cent in 2011-12 to 2.43 per cent in 2022-23.

The proportion of spending on education has reduced to 5.78 per cent in urban areas in 2022-23 from 6.90 per cent in 2011-12.

In rural areas, this proportion has come down to 3.30 per



cent in 2022-23 from 3.49 per cent in 2011-12.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, conducted the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) from August 2022 to July 2023.

This survey on household consumption expenditure aims at measuring estimates of each household's Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) and its

distribution separately for the rural and urban sectors of the country, for states and Union Territories, and different socio-economic groups.

The survey also stated that spending on beverages and processed food has increased to 10.64 per cent in urban areas in 2022-23 from 8.98 per cent in 2011-12.

In rural areas, it increased from 7.90 per cent in 2011-12 to 9.62 per cent in 2022-23.

The spending on conveyance also rose from 6.52 per cent in 2011-12 to 8.59 per cent in 2022-23 in urban areas.

It also climbed in rural areas from 4.20 per cent in 2011-12 to 7.55 per cent in 2022-23.

According to the study, the MPCE more than doubled during the period from 2011-12 to 2022-23.

The average MPCE at current prices (without imputation) more than doubled to Rs 6,459 in urban areas in 2022-23 from Rs 2,630 in 2011-12.

In rural areas, it jumped to Rs 3,773 in 2022-23 from Rs 1,430 in 2011-12.

## India used car market to touch \$100 billion by 2034: CARS24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian used car market is expected to touch the USD 100 billion-mark in the next ten years on the back of rising disposable incomes and a growing middle class, according to CARS24 Co-Founder and CEO Vikram Chopra.

As per the findings of the Gurugram-based online used car marketplace, there are changes in market dynamics with customers opting for frequent upgrades when it comes to cars.

"According to our internal study, the anticipated growth of the Indian used car market is set to occur at a 15 per cent CAGR, increasing from USD 25 billion in 2023 to USD 100 billion by 2034," Chopra told PTI in an interaction.

The growth trajectory is propelled by various factors unique to the Indian market, including urbanisation and a growing middle class, which is changing consumer preferences and boosting the



demand for affordable mobility solutions, he added.

Chopra noted that when CARS24 began its journey eight years ago, the used car market size stood at around USD 10-15 billion.

"I think, in the last 3-4 years, with different kinds of cars coming up, the market has truly accelerated," he stated.

The car ownership in the country remains low as compared to various developed geographies,

Chopra said.

In the US and China or in Europe, 80-90 per cent of the population has a car while in India only around 8 per cent of the population owns a four-wheeler, he added.

"So we still have a long way to go from here," Chopra said.

Another prominent indicator of the adoption of the used cars trend is the shortened ownership cycle, as the younger generation is opting to sell their cars within 5-6 years of purchase, in stark contrast to the patterns observed two decades ago when vehicles were typically held for 10-12 years, he noted.

"As millennials increasingly opt for more frequent car upgrades, the market is witnessing a consistent inflow of high-quality, aspirational cars," Chopra said.

Further, he noted that the demand for feature-packed SUVs has also surged in the last four years, experiencing significant growth from 30 per cent in FY19 to 59 per cent in the first half of FY24.

### BUSINESS BRIEF

**VIT-AP UNIVERSITY HOLDS MEET**

Institutional collaboration stands as a cornerstone for effective knowledge sharing and collective progress said Prof TG Sitaram Chairman -AICTE. He attended the inaugural session of the Sixth Meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Higher Education Planning Board being organized by Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE) a Statutory Body of the Government of A.P, and hosted by VIT-AP University. Speaking on the occasion Prof Sitaram appreciated the said appreciated AP Government and APSCHE efforts in promoting quality education. He commended the initiative of HEPP making all the top end institutions working together for the cause of higher education. The synergy created when various entities work together not only fosters a culture of collaboration but also accelerates advancements in knowledge across disciplines.

**ORAL CAVITY CANCER AWARENESS EVENT AT SRM**

A record-breaking event of 4,000 students in the age group between 14 and 21 coming together under a single roof for an awareness programme and demonstration of self-examination to detect oral cancer, was held at SRM Kattankulathur Dental College and Hospital last week. The event was organised by the Department of Oral Pathology and Microbiology. The students were taught about the importance and means for "self-detection" of the oral cavity that helped in detecting early signs of oral cancer. The training session was followed by students performing self-examination on them.



# ADITI FINISHES 21ST IN SINGAPORE

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Indian golfer Aditi Ashok finished 21st at the women's World Championship with a final card of 2-under 70 here on Sunday after being in top-10 in the first two days. Aditi had an early bogey, but recovered well with three birdies on the Par-5s on the fifth, eighth and 13th and another one on Par-4 ninth. She dropped a bogey on the closing 18th. Aditi, who was making her debut in the event, shot 72-69-73 in her earlier rounds. Australia's Hannah Green, shot her third straight 67 after 74 start in the first round, to total 13-under and win the title one shot clear of French golfer, Celine Boutier (67). A week ago Aditi was T-31 at



the Honda LPGA. Aditi, a five-time Ladies European Tour winner, is already certain to play her third Olympic Games in Paris this year. Four players, Japanese duo Yuna Nishimura (66) and Nasa Hataoka (69), Korea's Mi Hyang Lee (67) and Canadian Brooke Henderson (68) were tied for third place. Green had a stunning finish as she rolled in three birdies in a row on the last three holes to grab a well-deserved win. The icing on the cake was the 20-foot putt Green holed on the 18th to pip World No. 3 Boutier by one shot. Boutier, who had three birdies on the back nine, failed to make any more in her last three holes.



## Green wins LPGA tournament in Singapore

AP ■ SINGAPORE

Hannah Green made a stunning 30-foot birdie at the final hole to clinch a one-stroke victory over Celine Boutier at the LPGA Tour's Women's World Championship on Sunday. Green made six birdies, three of which came in the final three holes, against a bogey in a final round 67 for a 13 under-par-275 at Sentosa Golf Club. It was the 27-year-old Australian's fourth LPGA title, and first since the JM Eagle LA Championship last year. Boutier (67), who had said on Saturday she was attending Taylor Swift's Singapore concert as a nice way to relax for the final round, seemed destined to win on Sunday as she pulled two strokes clear in

the final stages only for Green to produce some magic of her own to take the win. The 30-year-old Frenchwoman, who won four titles last season including wins at the Women's Scottish Open and the Evian Championship for her first major title, finished at 12 under-par-276. Yuna Nishimura (66) had the equal-best round of the day as her six birdies in a blemish-free final round lifted her to 9-under 279 and into a four-way tie for third with Brooke Henderson (68), Mi Hyang Lee (67) and Nasa Hataoka (69). Overnight leader Ayaka Furue of Japan had a disappointing round of 3-over Sunday as she slipped to a tie for eighth at 7-under 288 in the 66-player, no-cut tournament.

## De Minaur beats Rudd



AP ■ ACAPULCO (MÉXICO)

Alex De Minaur beat Casper Rudd 6-4, 6-4 on Saturday to become the first player to win back-to-back titles in the Mexican Open since 2012. The third-seeded De Minaur won his eighth ATP title to become the fourth player to repeat as champion in Mexico, the first since David Ferrer in 2010-12. The 25-year-old Australian won his 10 consecutive matches in Acapulco to break a four-match losing streak in ATP finals, including Rotterdam earlier this year. "Acapulco is becoming like a second home. I thought that it was impossible to get feel better after what happened last year, but I came back a year later to defend the title and it has been true pleasure," de Minaur said.

The Mexican Open was nearly cancelled because a category five hurricane hit the city four months ago, leaving 52 people dead. The Diamond Zone an oceanfront area replete with hotels and where the tennis arena is located, was devastated. "We (the tennis players) wanted to bring some joy to this wonderful city and I'm sure that Acapulco will shine stronger than ever," added the Australian. The sixth-seeded Ruud missed the chance to win his 11th title in the ATP and his first ATP 500 title. De Minaur took an early break to take a 3-1 lead in the first set and both held their serve for the 6-4 score in the first one. In the second, both players exchanged breaks in the first four games and the Australian got a break in the seventh game to take the lead.

## Six veteran athletes from HP to participate in World Masters Athletics Championships

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR (HP)

Six veteran athletes from Himachal Pradesh, including long distance runner Surinder Singh Dehal of Hamirpur, will participate in the World Masters Athletics Championships to be held in Gothenburg, Sweden from August 13 to 25. The World Masters Athletics

Championships are the biennial championships for masters athletics events held under the auspices of World Masters Athletics for athletes who are 35 years of age or older. "It is a matter of joy for the state. Athletes from HP had performed well and won eight medals in the 44th National Master Athletics

Competition held in Pune from February 13 to 17," Masters Athletics Federation Himachal Pradesh President Ripudaman Kaushik said on Sunday. Dehal (10,000m) and Ashwini Kumar Sharma (1500m and 2000m steeplechase, 800m) will compete in the above 65 years age category.

While Harish Kumar (triple jump), Dwarika Thakur (1500 meters and 5000 meters), Brijlal Thakur (100m and 300m hurdles) have been selected in the 60 above age group. Bhishan Singh Chauhan, who will take part in the discus throw, javelin throw and shot put events, will compete in the above 55 years age group.

## Sainz enjoys racing again in his last F1 season

AP ■ SAKHIR (BAHRAIN)

Carlos Sainz Jr. is having fun driving for the Ferrari again. Sainz said he was relieved to be able to tap into his aggressive side with a series of overtakes, including two close moves on teammate Charles Leclerc, on his way to third place at the Bahrain Grand Prix on Saturday. Sainz's first podium finish since October starts his last season with Ferrari on a high. The record 24-race season means it will be an extended goodbye before Lewis Hamilton takes over his seat next year. Sainz is still seeking a team for 2025. "It wasn't a straightforward and an easy race, but I enjoyed it a lot," Sainz said, adding it was his first race since the Austrian Grand Prix in July



where he felt free to attack for positions without fear of his Ferrari ruining its tyres while following closely behind another car. "I love going racing, and I love going overtaking, being aggressive, attacking. And, with last year's car, it was simply impossible to do that," Sainz said. Bahrain is a stern test of how

well the drivers and cars manage their tyres, Sainz said, so to "do an overtaking, attacking race for me is a relief and it gives me a feeling that we will be able to do this more often this year." "It doesn't mean we will do it every race at all, because I still think one of our strongest parts of our car is qualifying, so I think we will still qualify ahead of what maybe our true position is. But, at least we're not degrading (tyres) and defending like crazy like we were doing last year." Sainz was the only non-Red Bull driver to win a race last year, but his Singapore Grand Prix victory was all about taking care of worn tyres on a rare off day for Max Verstappen. It was one of just three podium finishes all year for the Spanish driver.

## Marta, Katie battle way into San Diego Open final

AP ■ SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA (USA)

Sixth-seeded Marta Kostyuk fought off an early deficit on Saturday to beat top seed Jessica Pegula 7-6(4), 6-1 and reach the final of the San Diego Open. With the surprise comeback, Kostyuk, of Ukraine, moved into Sunday's final where she will face qualifier Katie Boulter, who bested third-seeded Emma Navarro 6-3, 6-1 in the other semi-final match. After Pegula jumped out to a 5-1 lead in the first set, Kostyuk tossed her racquet in disgust twice. But, she regained her composure and went on to capture the next four games, breaking Pegula's serve to knot the score 5-5. Kostyuk then held serve to take a 6-5 lead, before Pegula knotted matters at 6-6. In the tiebreaker, Kostyuk took advantage of several errors by Pegula to claim the first set.



By now under control and surging, Kostyuk broke Pegula's serve to start the second set and then promptly raced to a 5-1 lead. At that point, it was Pegula who took an angry swipe at the court surface with her racquet. With Pegula serving at match point, Kostyuk slammed Pegula's lob in triumph. "I wasn't really happy with the trajectory of my game," said Kostyuk. "I kept trying to do something to change

things. You know, I really don't know the answer to what happened after that." In the first of Saturday's semi-finals, the unseeded Boulter continued her surprising string of upsets with her win over Navarro. Boulter's match against Kostyuk marks her first appearance in a WTA 500 final. Boulter took the first set after twice breaking Navarro's serve. Played in threatening, wind-swept conditions, the match was halted shortly after the first set for 33 minutes by a sudden downpour. Just before the deluge, Boulter held serve in the opening game of the second set. When play resumed, Boulter, of England, eased past Navarro with aggressive baseline shot-making and an onslaught of 24 winners. "When I saw a black cloud coming, I was sort of distracted because it's never easy coming back from a

## Tiger Woods wins Bob Jones Award

AP ■ FAR HILLS (US)

Tiger Woods has been selected to receive the Bob Jones Award, the highest honor from the USGA that recognizes his commitment to sportsmanship and respect for golf's traditions. Woods typically is honored for his performances on the course, where he has won 15 majors among his 82 career victories on the PGA Tour. "This award goes beyond performance,

recognizing the lasting impact of one person's journey that has forever changed the image and growth of golf," said Mike Whan, the CEO of the USGA. "There are very few who stand alongside Tiger Woods in terms of on-course accomplishments, and he is in a class of his own when it comes to the impact he has made on the game and future generations who will play it." Woods was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2022, and he received the



Presidential Medal of Freedom from Donald Trump in 2019. Woods is a nine-time USGA champion, winning three straight U.S. Junior Amateurs, followed by three straight U.S.

Amateurs, and then the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach (2000), Bethpage Black (2002) and Torrey Pines (2008). "Bob Jones was a pillar of our game because of the integrity with which he played it, and I'm truly humbled to receive the award that bears his name and join the many who have received it before me who continue his legacy," Woods said in a statement. Jones won the Grand Slam in 1930 when it was comprised of the U.S. Open, U.S. Amateur,

British Open and British Amateur. He later co-founded Augusta National Golf Club and created the Masters. Off the golf course, Woods launched what now is called the TGR Foundation that emphasizes educational opportunities, along with STEM-based learning at the TGR Learning Lab in California. He also has started a golf course design firm. One of his courses in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, hosted a PGA Tour event last fall.

AP ■ BARCELONA

Vinicius Junior scored twice to lift Real Madrid to 2-2 against Valencia in the Spanish league in his first return to Mestalla Stadium where he was racially abused last season. Jude Bellingham was red-carded after the final whistle when he protested the referee's decision to waive off what would have been the winning goal. The referee said time expired just before Bellingham's last-gasp header. Vinicius struck in the 50th and 76th minutes to wipe out first-half goals by Hugo Duro and Roman Yaremchuk. Last May's racial attack was among the worst the Black player has had to repeatedly endure in Spain. It led to an upswell of support for the Brazil forward and forced soccer authorities to take action, even though the abuse toward him has continued. While there were no immediate reports of more

## Vinicius scores two to earn Madrid draw

racial insults on Saturday, a large group of spectators did chant "Vinicius is stupid" and booed him loudly throughout. After his first goal, Vinicius held up his fist toward the Valencia fans behind the goal. After his equalizer, he cupped his ears as if asking for more from the fans who jeered him. While Valencia banned three fans for life from its stadium after they were identified as having racially abused Vinicius last season, the club has likewise criticized the player and Madrid for what it considers the unfair categorization of its fanbase as predominantly racist. In a short interview with Madrid's club television, Vinicius did not mention the fans and said only that it was "a very difficult game." But on his Instagram account he posted an image of himself

raising his fist after his first goal with the short message "The fight continues." "Vinicius played a very good game," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "He was decisive for us, even though he was more effective in the area than outside it. (Defender Dimitri) Foulquier played a great game defending him, so he had to find his spaces inside the area and he scored two very important goals for us." Madrid leads the league with a seven-point advantage over Girona and a nine-point advantage over Barcelona before they both play games on Sunday. Duro used his head to redirect in what looked like an errant shot by Fran Pérez in the 27th after Federico Valverde lost the ball with a risky pass. Three minutes later,



Yaremchuk intercepted Dani Carvajal's pass back toward his own area, where the Ukraine forward pounced, dribbled around goalkeeper Andriy Lunin and rolled the

ball home. But Madrid was able to grab one back in first-half added time when Carvajal's cross grazed three players before finding Vinicius to push it

home. Vinicius made it even when he headed in a cross from substitute Brahim Diaz. Valencia defender Mouctar Diakhaby was carried off on a stretcher after an apparent leg injury when Aurélien Tchouaméni crashed into him in the final minutes.

### BELLINGHAM SENT OFF

Bellingham, who leads the league with 16 goals, started for Madrid after missing three games with an ankle sprain. The England midfielder was celebrating what would have been a last-gasp header when referee Jesús Gil Manzano signaled it came too late. Surrounded by protesting Madrid players, Gil Manzano showed a red card to Bellingham. Gil Manzano put in his referee report that

Bellingham had "run toward him in an aggressive manner shouting repeatedly" with an expletive in English to describe the goal.

### FIRE VICTIMS

The game was Valencia's first in two weeks after its match in the last round was postponed in respect for the victims of a deadly fire in the Mediterranean city. Both teams formed an honor guard before kickoff for representatives of the victims and security and rescue services and a moment of silence.

### SOCIEDAD LOSES

Real Sociedad lost at Sevilla 3-2 as the Basque Country club continued to struggle before it hosts Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League. Sociedad hosts PSG on

Tuesday needing to overturn a 2-0 first-leg loss in the round of 16. Imanol Alguacil's Sociedad started the season strong, but it has lost five of its last six games across all competitions. It was eliminated from the Copa del Rey semifinals by Mallorca on penalties in front of its fans in San Sebastian this week.

### MAYORAL HURT

Getafe striker Borja Mayoral, who has 15 league goals, had to be substituted late in his team's 3-3 draw with Las Palmas due to an apparent left leg injury. Getafe wasted leads of 2-0 and 3-2. Las Palmas completed its comeback with Munir El Haddadi's decisive equalizer.

### HAIL STORM

Rayo Vallecano's 1-1 draw at home with Cadiz was paused for several minutes in the second half when hail pelted the field during a heavy rainstorm.



# India climb to top spot in WTC standings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Two-time finalists India jumped to the top of the World Test Championship standings, replacing New Zealand in the latest rankings issued on Sunday.

India, who defeated England by five wickets in the fourth Test in Ranchi to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series, replaced the Kiwis with a stronger points percentage of 64.58.

With five wins, two losses and one draw, India have 62 points



in 8 matches, while the Black Caps have 36 from five matches (three wins, two losses) and have a point-percentage of 60.00.

Before the start of the Wellington Test, New Zealand were sitting at the top of the table with 36 points in four games and a points percentage of 75.

But following their massive 172-run defeat, the 2021 WTC champions lost the top spot, slipping to the No 2 position with a points percentage of 60.

Third-placed Australia have closed on the gap after the

Wellington Test, gaining 12 crucial points as they now have 78 points from 11 matches (seven wins, three losses and one draw).

Their points percentage has also increased from 55 to 59.09.

The 2023 champions have the opportunity to surpass New Zealand and move up to the second spot if they win the second and final Test at Christchurch from March 8.

India, meanwhile, take on England in the final match of the five-Test series in Dharamsala from March 7.



## Himanshu hundred gives MP edge over Vidarbha

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Himanshu Mantri showed patience and technical aptitude while constructing a fine hundred to singlehandedly guide Madhya Pradesh to 252 in their first innings against Vidarbha on the second day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Sunday.

Mantri's 126 off 265 balls (13x4, 1x6) helped Madhya Pradesh to gain a small yet significant 82-run lead after beginning the day at 47 for one.

In their second innings, Vidarbha reached 13 for the loss of Atharva Taide at stumps, trailing by 69 runs.

The importance of Mantri's knock, his third hundred of the season, can be gauged from the fact that the next highest score in MP innings was a 30 by Saransh Jain.

But in the morning session, Madhya Pradesh made a steady start through Mantri and Harsh Gawli as the second wicket pair stretched their alliance to 61 as Vidarbha reached 81 for one.

But pacer Yash Thakur (3/51) trapped Gawli (25, 77b) in front of the wicket to snap the stand and Vidarbha lost two more wickets while adding another 12 runs.

Veteran speedster Umesh Yadav (3/40) yorked hosts skipper Shubham Sharma (1) and Thakur won an appeal for leg-before against shuffling Venkatesh Iyer (0).

Vidarbha slipped to an uncomfortable 93 for four but Sagar Solanki (25) gave Mantri solid support as the fifth wicket duo milked 42 runs to steady the ship.

A mix-up with Mantri saw Solanki getting out but a

more solid period followed.

Mantri found another willing partner in Jain as the duo added 73 runs for the sixth wicket, taking MP past Vidarbha's first innings total of 170.

The pitch was eased out a bit as compared to Day 1 but there was enough carry and bounce on the track to keep the bowlers interested.

As the day progressed, spinners too received a bit of turn as left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate and off-spinner Akshay Wakhare posed some questions.

But Mantri had enough skill sets with him to negate those threats - playing the spinners with the turn or standing just outside the crease against the pacers to smother the swing.

Soon, Mantri reached his century with a quick single off Wakhare, and celebrated the moment with a roar.

But just as they were going strong, Jain's hard-handed prod off Wakhare ended with Aman Mokhadde at cover.

Mantri, who received a reprieve on 115, too did not last long as his attempt to sweep Wakhare fetched fatal results.

The ball ballooned off a top-edge and stumper Akshay Wadkar showed fine anticipation to complete the catch diving towards his right.

The Vidarbha innings also folded soon as the last three wickets fell for 21 runs.

**Brief Scores:**  
Vidarbha: 170 and 13/1  
Madhya Pradesh 1st innings: 252 all out in 94.3 overs (Himanshu Mantri 126, Saransh Jain 30; Umesh Yadav 3/40, Yash Thakur 3/51, Akshay Wakhare 2/68).

## Pucovski suffers concussion after taking blow on head



PTI ■ HOBART

Australian batter Will Pucovski suffered a nasty blow on his head and had to be substituted while playing for Victoria in a Sheffield Shield match against Tasmania here on Sunday.

The No. 3 batter retired hurt for 0 after being hit on his helmet to a Riley Meredith bouncer. It was just the second delivery he faced in Victoria's chase of 442 in the second innings.

The 26-year-old, who has experienced several blows to the head with the most recent being in a second XI match in January, was struck on the left side of his helmet after he turned his head to a rising delivery from Meredith.

The blow left him visibly disturbed as he kneeled on the pitch. The medical staff rushed to the centre. He eventually got up and slowly walked off the field, rubbing his eyes.

"Will is currently in the hands of our medical professionals," a Cricket Victoria spokesperson said. "We'll look to provide an update in due course."

Reserve batter Campbell Kellaway came in as a concussion substitute.

Pucovski had returned after the blow in January to score 131 in their Shield match against New South Wales at the SCG last month.

He has also battled "mental health" issues in the past.

"The mental health has been a much bigger issue for me than even the concussions," he told the Vic State Cricket podcast. "I don't fear for my long-term health, it's more the mental health side that's been the tougher part."

The righthander has played one Test against India in January 2021.

## Will New Zealand recall retired Neil for Christchurch Test?

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand might be tempted to recall retired pacer Neil Wagner to the side for the second and final Test against Australia following an injury to fast bowler Will O'Rourke.

The hosts suffered a crushing 172-run defeat in the opening Test here on Sunday and skipper Tim Southee said the door was not shut on Wagner, who had bid a tearful adieu to international cricket last week after taking 260 wickets in 64 Test matches.

The South Africa-born pacer had announced the decision to retire days before the Test series against Australia after learning that he won't feature in the opening game and will be released from the squad for the second Test in Christchurch, starting March 8.

"We haven't had a lot of discussions as yet. We'll see how Will scrubs up. The physio hasn't sort of put a time-frame on it or how bad it is. We'll just wait and see how Will goes over the next couple of days. I'm sure there'll be an update in the next 24 hours," said Southee.

"We obviously have to go on and make a decision on who comes in



and what role we sort of see that playing out in Christchurch.

"(Wagner's) had a great reception here over the last week where he got a couple of moments on the field and obviously he's been a fan favourite for a long time," said the home skipper.

Southee though was sure that pacer Trent Boult, who last played in a Test in June 2022, won't play the second game.

"I don't think his loading is up to it on the back of T20," Southee said.

Southee had requested to be left out of New Zealand's central contract list in August, 2022.

### World's shortest retirement

Meanwhile, Australian skipper Pat Cummins backed Wagner to come out of retirement.

"World's shortest retirement. I mean, why not? If he's your next best bowler that you think is going to perform, then go for it. I've faced him before. It'd be good to see. He's high energy. It's been good fun chatting to him each morning out here, so see how he goes," said Cummins.

Australia have retained the Trans-Tasman Trophy for the 12th successive time after ensuring that they won't lose the series with their victory in the series-opener.

## Vaughan wants England cricket team to adopt Man City manager approach

PTI ■ LONDON

For Michael Vaughan, Pep Guardiola is the best sporting leader in the last 15 years and the former England skipper won't mind if Ben Stokes employs Manchester City manager's approach of never allowing players to take their places for granted.

Vaughan made the statement on the back of England's aggressive "Bazball" strategy under coach Brendon McCullum and Stokes which backfired in the ongoing India tour.

England have already lost the five-match series 3-1 after winning the first Test in Hyderabad.

Vaughan questioned the

approach of England batters and demanded greater accountability from them.

"I often mention Pep Guardiola's approach. In my eyes he's the best sporting leader of this generation, say the last 15 years. He never allows his players to get comfortable. He always keeps them guessing, and they all know they are guaranteed nothing," he wrote in a column for Daily Telegraph.

"If a great sporting leader like Pep has everyone on their toes like that, is it right that an England cricket team that is decent but struggling to crack the next level should be as comfortable as it seems?"

"The whole batting lineup has known week in, week out on this

tour that it will be playing the next game. That is about to change, because after this tour Harry Brook will be back. He has to bat at No 5, because he should be the bedrock of their batting with Joe Root. Does that mean England's statement moment is coming?," he questioned.

Vaughan questioned England's selection policy and said despite losing the series the visitors have a lot at stake to play for in the final Test in Dharamsala beginning March 7.

"Consistency of selection is such a fine balance in team sports. Making people comfortable is right, and England have generally batted well over the last two years.

"There comes a point, though, where when it's your batting that is costing you the biggest series you can't keep sending the same guys out there every week," he wrote.

"The series may have been lost already with a game to spare but a big week looms for England in Dharamsala. There is a massive difference between losing the series 3-2 and 4-1. You have lost either way but 3-2 would show England were right in this series for much of it, and two wins in India is an achievement."

Vaughan said a loss in Dharamsala would be a demoralising result for England. He once again criticised England's batters approach.

"India haven't lost two matches

in a series at home since 2012, on their run of 17 series wins in a row. 4-1 would be a very disappointing end to a disappointing winter, with the World Cup debacle, both white-ball series lost in the Caribbean and even a poor World Cup for the Under 19s," he wrote.

"It's a huge week for a number of England's batsmen. When we think of this England team, we think of their wonderfully dynamic batting. But when you look at why they haven't won any of their last three series, it's down to the batting."

"There never seems to be much scrutiny or noise around England's batsmen. Even last week I chuckled. They lost in Ranchi in large part because

they didn't bat well enough, but there was lots of finger pointing at Ollie Robinson, a bowler who scored an important half-century!"

"He looked well short of a gallop with the ball and dropped a catch but I thought it was ironic that he became a scapegoat. It's classic 'batsmen vs bowlers stuff.'" Vaughan feels when it comes to team selection there should be consistency in the batting order.

"Complacency can be damaging. As a management team, how you approach selection of batsmen and bowlers is obviously different. Fast bowlers, especially, sit out games and are rightly rotated to preserve their bodies," he wrote.

# Shardul led Mumbai rearguard puts Tamil Nadu on mat

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shardul Thakur's sizzling 109 and Tanush Kotian's unbeaten 74 offset R Sai Kishore's six-wicket haul, putting Mumbai in command by powering to a 207-run first-innings lead over Tamil Nadu on the second day of the Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Sunday.

Thakur's sensational counterattacking hundred, featuring 13 fours and four sixes from a mere 104 balls, pulled Mumbai out of doldrums after they were reduced to 106 for seven at one stage.

At stumps, Mumbai were 353 for 9 at stumps against TN's first innings' 146, with Sai Kishore causing the maximum damage.

Sai Kishore (6/97) ran through a chunk of Mumbai's batting line-up, while Shreyas Iyer (3) fell to pacer Sandeep Warrier as Tamil Nadu levelled up with the hosts for the first time in the game.

But Thakur launched a stunning onslaught, putting each of Tamil Nadu bowlers under severe pressure while forging vital partnerships along the way to take Mumbai far ahead in the game.

Thakur teamed up with Hardik Tamore (35) for a crucial 105-run stand for the eighth wicket and took Mumbai further ahead in the company of Kotian, adding another 79 runs for the ninth wicket.

Using his blade to perfection, Thakur was adroit with his hands to pierce gaps at will and did not miss out clearing the field with disdain four times for maximums - one of which also brought up his maiden century across formats.

Thakur, who also struggled with an ankle-related issue along the way, finally fell to Kuldeep Sen (2/65) in the third session, which brought the pair of Kotian and Tushar Deshpande together again after their heroics in the last match.



Coming off a 232-run stand for the 10th wicket in the previous match, Kotian and Deshpande picked from

where they left off to put on another 63-run unbeaten stand for the 10th wicket.

With Deshpande (17 not out)

joining him much later in his innings, Kotian excelled in this innings like a specialist batter, cracking 10 fours from

109 balls to get to 74 not out. If it were not for yet another rearguard from their tailenders, who shone in the

quarterfinal as well, Mumbai would not have ended the day's play with a massive lead, for most of their key batters cut a sorry figure.

On a cloudy morning with breeze sweeping across the field here at the BKC Ground, Sai Kishore's decision to open the bowling in conditions conducive to seamers raised a few eyebrows.

But the Tamil Nadu skipper and leading wicket-taker this Ranji Trophy only validated his move with relentless pressure on the Mumbai batters, delivering a superb 17-6-28-4 in the first session, and took a break only after sending down 22 overs at a stretch.

After nightwatchman Mohit Avasthi (2) was stumped, Sai Kishore ended his counterpart Ajinkya Rahane's 67-ball vigil for a mere 19 (2x4s) by getting him caught at the first slip.

Rahane strode out confidently to defend on the front foot but only to have the

ball kissing the outside edge and being collected by Baba Indrajith at the first slip.

Mumbai's woes compounded when Iyer, pounded by lack of runs and loss of central contract, was cleaned by Tamil Nadu pacer Warrier for a mere three.

But Musheer (55 off 131 balls, 6x4s) continued to take giant strides, shouldering the responsibility of getting runs for his side from the other end. The 18-year-old also made no retorts when Tamil Nadu fielders, both in front and behind him, tried to unsettle him.

However, a lapse in concentration saw Musheer's innings ending prematurely when his backfoot was caught 'on line' at the crease with N Jagadeesan quick in taking off the bails.

**Brief scores:** Tamil Nadu 146 trail Mumbai 353/9 in 100 overs (Musheer Khan 55, Shardul Thakur 109, Tanush Kotian 74; R Sai Kishore 6/97) by 207 runs.