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## Shree Jagannatha Puri Heritage Corridor

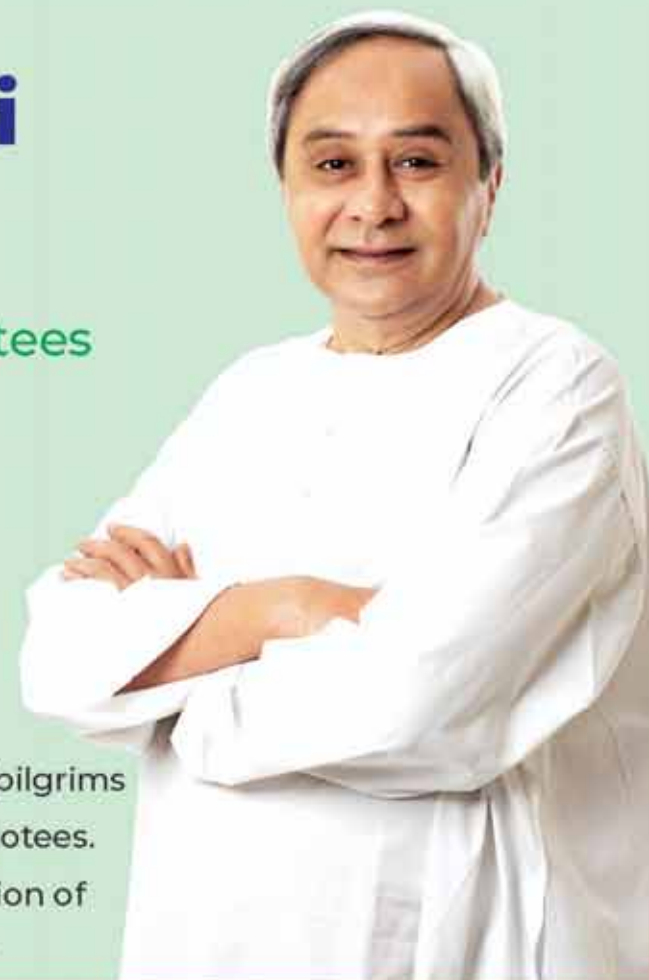
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- 10-meter Antar (Inner) Pradakshina: For the ceremonial procession of deities year-round and use by the general public for parikrama.





In city

# Man kills wife, spends 3 days with corpse

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Police on Thursday arrested a man who allegedly killed his wife and spent three days with her body at Tarini Nagar in the Maitri Vihar area of the capital city. As per reports, the couple and their two children were living at Tarini Nagar. They would often quarrel. As per sources, on Monday, they had an argument. The scene turned violent when the

man lost his cool, picked up a wooden plank and started beating his wife till she collapsed to the ground. When he realised what he had done, he sent his two children to a neighbour's house and spent three days with her wife's body. Not seeing the couple going out for work, the neighbours grew suspicious. They started enquiring about the reason. They could smell a

stench emanating from the house and asked the man about the reason. With no option left, he confessed before the neighbours. Later, on being informed, a team from the Maitri Vihar police station along with a scientific team reached the spot and arrested him. They sent the body for postmortem. Police have launched a probe to ascertain the reason leading to the mishap.

# CM launches Online Incentive Mgmt System

New district websites also inaugurated

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Embarking on a new era of e-governance in Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday inaugurated an Online Incentive Management System (OIMS) developed by the Odisha Computer Application Centre (OCAC). The OIMS portal facilitates submission of application by entrepreneurs to get their incentives sanctioned under Odisha's IT, Electronics, Data Centre, BPO and Semicon-



ductor Manufacturing and Fables Policies. The OIMS will provide multiple advantages over physical application submission such as easy submission of application and uploading of documents, single window portal facility, error-checks for applications and message alerts. It also relies on a series of security procedures to prevent any unauthorised access. With the help of this portal,

a company will be able to submit its application any day during the week, 24 hours a day. The portal facilitates real-time tracking of application status and notifies the applicants with e-mail/ SMS on submission of application as well as in various levels of processing. The CM said this is perhaps the first time any State has created a platform for incentive management for IT/ electron-

ics industries in a faceless manner through an online platform. The Electronics & Information Technology Department, in collaboration with NASSCOM and other industry bodies, intends to conduct hands-on training programmes for IT/ ITeS/ electronics establishments on the usage of this portal. The CM also inaugurated new district websites which have been developed under the robust 'Standardised Website Framework' (SWF) in line with the CM's transformational 5T initiative. Currently, all 30 district portals have been developed within this framework, aiming to present a unified face of Odisha and deliver an integrated web experience for citizens across all government websites. The CM said his government's initiative to launch new websites for all the 30 districts underpinned by the Standard Website Framework is another step in the State's technological transformation. The district portal has been deployed in the State Data Centre, and its home page can be accessed at <https://district.odisha.gov.in/>. Links to all the districts have been provided through the portal.

## CM unveils modern edu complex in M'giri

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday inaugurated a modern educational complex at Badapada in the Swabhimana area of Malkangiri district. The complex is built over an area of seven acre at a cost of around Rs 19 crore. More than 1,000 students from Classes-I to XII will be imparted education at the complex, which has state-of-the-art facilities. The aim is to prepare the students for their future by providing them with all modern facilities. Apart from smart classrooms, the complex is

equipped with a special e-library with 3,000 books, a tribal corner, an activity room, an NCC room, a computer lab, an ICT Smart Learning Centre, a science lab and a hostel to accommodate 200 boys. There is a separate girls' hostel to accommodate 500 students. Speaking on this occasion, the CM said Malkangiri occupies a special place in his heart and he always loves to launch new projects in the district. All major welfare programmes including the cheap rice scheme, Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) and LAccMI bus were first launched in the district, he said.

## BJD, BJP consider Odisha people 'fool': Cong

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Amid talks of a BJP-BJD alliance for the 2024 elections, the Congress on Thursday targeted both parties over the seat-sharing issue. Taking a dig at both BJD and BJP, Campaign Committee chairperson of Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) Bijay Kumar Patnaik said, "BJD and BJP are considering people of Odisha 'fool'. They think that people will accept whatever these two parties will do here in the State." "However, people watch and know everything. They know who is running to Delhi again and again. Both BJD and BJP have been together since long. The BJD had opposed the no-confidence mo-

tion against BJP on the Manipur violence. This indicated that both are 'anti-women' governments," Patnaik said. Last week, the Congress had performed 'Annaprāsana' of 10 'scam' babies born from the "BJD-BJD secret wedding." The party alleged that the BJP and BJD gave birth to 10 children following their union. The children are mining scam, chit fund scandal, inflation, crimes against women, exploitation by middlemen, irregularities in government schemes, acquisition of tribal land, power issues and sale of government jobs. A few weeks ago, the Congress had organised a symbolic wedding between the BJD and BJP to expose their alleged nexus.

## Entrepreneurship, Rural Dev Conclave at IIT-BBS

1K NSS students take oath to become job creators

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The two-day 'Entrepreneurship and Rural Development Conclave 2024,' organised at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bhubaneswar, ended on Tuesday. The conclave, organised in association with Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, IIT Ropar and ERDC, had elaborate discussions on the importance of entrepreneurship and rural development among the youth of the nation. During the concluding ceremony, around 1,000 NSS



students from different professional and technical institutions and universities were administered the oath of being job creators rather than being job seekers. Director, IIT Bhubaneswar, Prof Shreepad Karmalkar interacted with the students and highlighted the elements of an entrepreneurial mindset. He pointed out the similarities and differences between research and entrepreneur mindsets and discussed the value for money in detail, and advised the students to learn

about how wealth is created. Delivering the keynote address, National Head, ERDC Chetan Sahore said that the solution to unemployment is entrepreneurship. He shared how the Central Government, State Government and educational institutions are working in tandem to enhance the scope for entrepreneurship. He emphasized on the creation of an ecosystem for the students to develop ideas to provide solutions to the problems of the rural India and the community around them.

Speaking on the occasion, Regional Director, NSS Sarita Patel focused on the social values of India, which need to be revived to achieve real development through economic growth. Founder, EasyGov and Empower Panchayat Amit Shukla mentioned the significance of developing the skills, while Dayanidhi Urmaliya from National Advisory Board, ERDC on Rural Entrepreneurship spoke on rural development for achieving the target of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

## IIT-BBS takes up tailoring training for women

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

While the world is all set to celebrate International Women's Day with the theme 'Inspire Inclusion,' as an encouraging display of women empowerment and community inclusion, the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA) Team of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar initiated a tailoring training initiative for the women of the institute's adopted villages. The initiative was launched on March 1 in Kansapada and



Podapada villages. Led by Dr Seema Bahinipati (Coordinator-UBA, IIT Bhubaneswar), Dr Madhusmita Dash (Faculty Theme Leader of Digital Awareness), ward member Kansapada village and village residents of Kansapada and Podapada villages were also

women with valuable tailoring skills under the guidance of a local trainer from Kansapada village at the tailoring centre named Binayak Tailoring Centre. As many as 16 enthusiastic female students gathered at Kansapada Primary School, where UBA provided five sewing machines and essential accessories. Dr Rajakumar Guduru (Faculty Theme Leader of Digital Awareness), ward member Kansapada village and village residents of Kansapada and Podapada villages were also

present during the inauguration. Following the launch and registration, the six-month-long tailoring training classes commenced from March 4. Apart from imparting practical skills, the initiative seeks to foster a sense of community and self-reliance among women participants in the village. Kabita Nayak, one of the participants of the training programme, said, "For us, this initiative is an opportunity for economic independence and personal growth."

## Dacoity bid foiled in city; 5 held

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The Infocity police busted a notorious dacoity gang from near a playground in the Patia area of the city when the gang was planning to loot a liquor shop. Police arrested five persons in this connection. The arrested were main accused SK Islam alias Kadam and his four associates Romy Nayak, Kartik Behera, Jitendra Samal and K Sibaji. Kadam is a history-sheeter and there are as many as 48 criminal cases pending against

him in different police stations of the State capital and outside. "Kadam used to commit crimes after being released from jail custody on bail. He is involved in several crimes such as dacoity, snatching and theft. We have seized two crowbars, a knife, a liquor bottle, and several contraband items from the possession of the arrested persons," a senior police official said. The gang members used to reside in rented houses in different localities of the city and commit crimes, police said.

## MoU by SSEPD Dept Hearing-impaired to be skilled in hospitality sector

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) Department has taken initiative to impart skill training for hearing-impaired youths in hospitality sector. 150 youths in five batches will be trained through the Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition. The institute, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism, will provide necessary skill training for the

purpose, as envisaged in an MoU with the Department. Principal Secretary, SSEPD Department Bishnupada Sethi said that necessary skill training to PwDs will open more vistas for gainful employment in hotel and hospitality sector. The State Government gives importance on creating more employment opportunities among PwDs, he said. In the presence of senior officers, Special Secretary SSEPD Dilip Kumar Ray and institute Principal Sharada Ghosh were signatories.

## SOCIAL CANVAS

# Bauxite mining-hit areas of Odisha still on edge

Tribal residents denied entitlements despite wealth created by corporate houses

The second most used metal in the world after steel is aluminium. It is also called the 'metal of the future.' Aluminium comes from alumina and alumina comes from bauxite. The mineral year book of IBM says the per capita consumption of aluminium in India is 2.5 kg, which is below the world average of 8 kg. South Korea, Bahrain, Germany, Italy and China consume over 25kg as per the technology vision document 2035. There has been an increasing demand for aluminium for metallurgy, chemicals, aerospace, railway, defence, solar, automobile, cement, refractories, abrasive, steel and petrol industries, raw materials in construction of buildings and roads, electrical power transmission, machinery, equipment, packing and furniture etc. It will be more in demand with global economic growth. China alone contributes more than 55 percent of the world alu-



MANAS JENA

minium production. The international price of aluminium per kg is 2.60 USD. The total bauxite reserve of the world was estimated at 32 billion tonnes by the USGS and is located in countries including Australia, Guinea, Vietnam, Jamaica, Brazil, China, and India. The world production of bauxite was 368 million tonnes in the year 2020. As per mineral index data base, India's reserve was 4,958 million tonnes. India is the 6th largest bauxite producing country. Odisha emerged as the leading

producer State, accounting for about 76 percent of the total production during 2021. Odisha's south-west part alone accounts for 42 percent of the country's bauxite resources followed by Chhatisgarh, AP, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and MP. The production of bauxite in the year 2020-21 was 20,468 tonnes extracted from 144 mines. The share of the public sector was more than 50 percent and mostly Nalco is the leading producer, having a 36 percent share in the total production. The production value of bauxite in 2021 was Rs 1,667 crore out of which Odisha's share was Rs 1,233 crore. The production of bauxite and its refinery, smelter to produce aluminium have created scope for employment for thousands of people. As per IBM data, bauxite mining alone employs about 7,000 people. The Government, along with mineral royalty, corporate tax, host of other taxes, also gets profits from public sector companies such as Nalco and OMC engaged in mining and other works. Private companies such as Utkal Alumina International have mines in Rayagada. It has a lease period up to 2048. Vedanta Resource Limited has an alumina refinery at Langigada

and aluminium smelter at Jharasuguda. Through disinvestment move it has taken over BALCO in Korba of Chhatisgarh. The company has won a bid to mine bauxite in Kalahandi and Rayagada. These companies have already access to coal mines for thermal power plants. The mineral-based economy with a global market pays benefits to lease holders, stockists, traders, exporters, transporters, business people and many others who are directly or indirectly connected to the bauxite, alumina and aluminium sector. But this huge, well-grown global bauxite market is not sharing the development with the people in mineral bearing areas to improve their economic condition while they are uprooted from their habitation and primary sources of livelihood. The south-west bauxite belt of Odisha, with 95 percent of the bauxite resources of the State, covers mostly the poorest districts of Odisha such as Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Bolangir, Bargarh, Kondhamal, Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Maurbhanj. The State Government has made a number of agreements with companies for bauxite mining, refineries, smelters and captives to be op-

erated in different parts of the State for which the supply of bauxite is required. Social and environmental audits from mining areas such as Jharasuguda, Angul and Keonjhar show a backlash of mining that contributes to increased vulnerability among the locals, especially the historically marginalised sections who are defenceless in fighting the State and corporate houses in defence of their rights and basic entitlements. The districts with bauxite reserves are mostly inhabited by a majority of the ST population along with SCs and other marginalised sections whose primary source of livelihood is hills, forest-NTFP, river, agriculture and animal husbandry. Some areas enjoy the status of 5th schedule having more than 50 percent of the ST population but their social and human development indicators show that nothing has substantially changed, especially in the sources of livelihood of the majority of the population, including health, education and quality of life. Even with special budgetary provision of sub-plan approach, these areas remain backward. The undivided Koraput districts is placed among the poorest districts of the country and Malkangiri district is on the top in the list of the poorest with huge

malnutrition problem, child death, distress migration and middle age diseases. There is a higher rate of poverty and a higher percentage of people are below the poverty line, which is higher than the State average and STs and SCs are more prone to high poverty level in comparison to other social groups of the State. Land alienation and denial of land titles to the early settlers of these areas remain an unfinished task. The traditional rights of the locals over land, forest-FRA and other resources have not been recognized. Out of total 10 States having 5th scheduled areas, 9 States have made PESA rules. Though Odisha has half of the geographical areas in 5th scheduled and about one-fourth of the total population belonging to tribals, it has not yet made PESA rules that gives power to the locals. Many of the mega projects in south-west Odisha have not brought any major change in the lives of the locals. Rather many families have lost their traditional livelihood and are not suited to accommodate the new kinds of job opportunities being created by mining and industries through affirmative action policy and training on skill development. The proper rehabilitation

of the displaced families and growing pollution is still a major issue of almost all mining and industrial areas of the State. Environmental laws have not been followed, such as EIA and public hearings. The people are not democratically consulted over rehabilitation and resettlement and their opinions are not being considered by elected representatives of the ruling parties. Social activists and others concerned are branded as anti-development and their concerns for human rights and environmental issues are being undermined and viewed as anti-industry. Mining has pushed the inclusive development debate to the periphery and the concern for the poor, marginalised and affected people has not become part of democratic debate on the economic development of the State. The people of these areas also witnessed extra judicial killing of hundreds of innocent people being victimised and trapped in false cases without an impartial trial. In the plea of fighting Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), many innocent people suffered in the hands of police and paramilitary forces, such as OAPF, CRPF, BSF, SOG and CoBRA. (manasbbsr15@gmail.com)





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PRESIDENTIAL CHOICES  
MAKE VETERANS RUEFUL

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HINDUPHOBIA ON THE RISE IN  
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**NATION 5**  
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SCIENTIFIC LEARNING, SAYS MODI

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## State hikes employees, pensioners' DA by 4%

Skilled workers' wages also increased

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Just ahead of the general elections, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced a 4% increase in Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (TI) for government employees and pensioners.

The government announced

release of 4% additional dose of DA and TI in favour of its employees and pensioners, respectively, enhancing the rate from 46% to 50%. The enhanced DA and TI will be paid retrospectively from January 2024.

More than 4.5 lakh government employees and 3.5 lakh pensioners will be benefited from the move.

The Chief Minister also announced an enhancement in daily wages of unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and highly-

skilled workers.

The minimum daily wages for unskilled and semiskilled, skilled and highly-skilled workers were increased to Rs 450, Rs 500, Rs 550 and Rs 600, respectively. Lakhs of workers engaged in government and private sectors will benefit from the decision.

The present daily wages of the unskilled and semiskilled, skilled and highly-skilled workers are Rs 352, Rs 392, Rs 442 and Rs 502, respectively.

## Black leopard spotted in Sundargarh

NALINI SAHU  
BHUBANESWAR

The State Forest Department on Thursday confirmed the presence of a black tiger in the Garjan hill area under the Dhanu Baunsa Reserve Forest region in Sundargarh district.

The confirmation came days after Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF-Wildlife) Susanta Nanda asserted the presence of black leopards in various forests of Odisha.

As many as 25 trap cameras were installed in the reserve forests as part of the tiger census exercise in 2023. The last time a black leopard was sighted in the same reserve forest was in 2018.



The department said it has decided to focus on measures to ensure the safety of the spotted black leopard.

Sundargarh Assistant Conservator of Forest Sanjib Panda said, "Pictures of a black leopard were captured in one of the cameras."

Further, the department has

started an investigation to check if there are other tigers in the reserve forest.

Two days ago, PCCF Nanda had posted, "During the tiger counting, we got evidence of black leopards at three places. Besides, we have other evidence about the presence of black leopards in other places."

## Uncertainty still over any BJD-BJP alliance

Hours after declaring to fight polls alone, BJP State chief deletes tweet

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Uncertainty still loomed large on Thursday over a BJD-BJP alliance as both the parties remained reticent over the issue.

BJP State president Manmohan Samal in the morning told reporters that his party would go to the polls alone, but he changed his voice an hour later. He said the BJP central leaders would take a

final call on the Odisha affair.

The jubilation that followed the solo fight announcement by Samal faded when he deleted his tweet on his official X handle. In his tweet, he had categorically stated that the BJP would fight the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections alone and form the next government in the State.

On Thursday, BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik convened a meeting of senior BJD leaders with regard to election preparations.

"The CM took stock of our election preparations. He also gave us some suggestions and advice on how to put up a better show this time," said BJD vice-

president Debi Prasad Mishra.

BJD MLA Sambit Routray said there was no discussion from the side of his party on forging an alliance with the BJP.

"Have you heard from any of our spokespersons about forging an alliance? We have enough strength to fight the polls and form government for a sixth consecutive term," said Routray when asked to react to Samal's statement.

Sources said both BJD and BJP leaders held secret parleys for a possible seat-sharing arrangement. However, the talks did not advance much as both parties were bent on fighting from more number of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats.

## Temp to rise by 2 to 4 degree in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The mercury is gradually rising in the State from the coastal parts to the interiors.

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here on Thursday predicted a further rise of 2 to 4 degree Celsius in the temperature in the next one or two days.

As per the IMD, a cloudless sky coupled with dry air is aiding the temperature rise over the skies.

On the other hand, there is a possibility of rain in some districts including the interior Odisha and the coast of the State under the influence of a Western Disturbance.

The Western Disturbance is likely to aid nor'wester in some

parts of the State on March 16 and 17 as well.

The IMD has issued a Yellow warning for Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts on March 16 and Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts on March 17. Following the nor'wester rain, the temperature is predicted to fall by 2 to 3 degree Celsius.

## Odia girl to pursue LLM at premier USA institute



Gets pat from CJI

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

An Odia girl has received laurels from several quarters for bagging offers from at least five prestigious law schools in the USA to pursue her LLM.

Pragya Samal, daughter of Ajay Samal of Sunapal village in Jajpur district, has received offers from Columbia Law School, Chicago Law School, Michigan Law, Carey Law School and Berkeley Law School in the United States, media reports said.

The law schools have also offered scholarship to Pragya. Berkeley Law School has offered her a scholarship of \$ 30,000 and Michigan Law School offered \$ 50,000.

Her father Ajay has been

working as a cook at the Supreme Court of India since 1996. Now, Ajay is serving at the residence of Justice Augustine G Masih.

Pragya had completed her LLB degree from a private law school at Noida. She had been awarded with the gold medal for topping the merit list.

She is now working as a research associate at the Centre of Research and Planning in the Supreme Court. She had joined the apex court as a law clerk after completing her LLB.

Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud and other judges of the Supreme Court invited Pragya and her parents for breakfast on Wednesday. The judges felicitated Pragya's parents with shawls and gifted three books with the autographs of the CJI and other justices of the apex court to her.



DSPL-853

## FROM HOCKEY AND FOOTBALL TO ATHLETICS

### Odisha is Transforming India's Sports Infrastructure

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- Odisha has gained global recognition by hosting two Hockey World Cups
- A prominent organizer of International Football Matches
- The inauguration of the AIFF-FIFA Academy by FIFA's Chief of Global Football Development, Arsène Wenger, marks a significant development in football in Odisha



OIPR-15001/13/0820/2324

Information & Public Relations Department



# Rs 10-cr fraud: Pvt firm director gets 7-yr RI ‘2024 to be “least-accident” year for Paradip Port’

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The OPID Court in Baleswar on Thursday awarded seven-year rigorous imprisonment (RI) to the director of a private company for allegedly cheating as many as 500 people of Rs 10 crore. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 3.4 lakh on him.

The accused was identified as Babu Singh Kushwaha, director and promoter of Auroxa Deal Multitrade (OPC) Pvt Ltd.

Similarly, up-line members Sarat Kumar Nayak and Pravat

Ranjan Das were also held guilty and sentenced to undergo five years' RI and slapped a fine of Rs 1.25 lakh on each.

As per the order of the court, on default of fine all the convicts would undergo further imprisonment of one year each. Further, the company represented through Khushwaha was found guilty and sentenced to pay a fine of Rs 2 lakh.

As per reports, the case was registered pursuant to an enquiry conducted by the EOW on a petition filed by Chandra

Kanta Dash and others against the company and its director on the allegation of duping as many as 500 gullible depositors of more than Rs 10 crore under a false promise of high returns on their deposits and investment in different schemes launched by the company.

The company is registered with ROC, Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, dealing in different commodities.

The company had floated various lucrative schemes and packages under which products like LED TV, smart TV,

trolley bag, mixture grinder, LED smart fan are being offered to the public under direct selling with high returns having cash back offers like 10% matching income and bonus for enrolling investors downline. The company had its activities mainly in Baleswar and Bhadrak districts and their peripheral areas.

During investigation, Kushwaha was arrested from Gwalior while Nayak and Das were arrested from Baleswar. Two charge-sheets had been filed in the case on June 8, 2022 and December 12, 2023.

## 53rd Safety Week concludes

PNS ■ PARADIP

The 53rd National Safety Week being observed by Paradip Port Authority came to an end on Wednesday with Chairman, PPA PL Haranadh lowering the National Safety Week Flag at an event held at Gate No. 4, in presence of Deputy Chairman, Nilabhra Dasgupta, Additional Assistant Director, Inspectorate Dock Safety Soma Sekhar Bajaramath along with other



HODs and PPA officials and various stakeholders.

Chief guest Haranadh said, “We must be aware about safety practices,” and stressed on imparting proper practical trainings.

A 23km wide arterial concrete road has been developed

inside harbour area. First time among Major Ports, one mechanised road sweeping machine has been engaged inside harbour on a trial basis. Inside colony area, lighting improvement is being undertaken, so that it will be well lit within next two months,said

Haranadh and hoped that, like previous year, this year will also be “least accident” year as far as port working area is concerned. Guest of honour, Deputy Chairman, PPA Nilabhra Dasgupta said each employee must be the flag bearer of safety culture.

## Looted Dutch tourist returns home from Puri Police nab accused taxi driver

PNS ■ PURI

The Dutch tourist, who was stuck in Puri for over a month after he was allegedly looted of his valuables by a cab driver, has returned home.

The victim Anthony Van Arkel went to Nagpur on Thursday; and from there, he would catch a flight to the Netherlands on Friday morning. The district administration reportedly made all the arrangements for his return.

The administration has assured Arkel to courier all his stolen belongings to him and transfer the money that was stolen from him.

As per reports, Arkel was looted by the taxi driver during his visit to the pilgrim town in January. The accused allegedly decamped with cash worth Rs 6 lakh, a diamond ring and a camera.

Arkel was rendered penni-



less ny the theft. After his police complaint, the district administration put him at a shelter home, 'Niladri Nilay'.

However, after around a month of stay, he contacted the media and narrated his ordeal. He pleaded to the administration to nab the thief and help him return home, following which he was shifted to the OTDC Pantha Nivas in Puri for better accommodation.

The accused driver Sagar Mallik was finally apprehended by police from outside the State. He is currently being interrogated by police after the victim identified him in a TI parade.

## Set up NODC on lines of WODC: Navajyoti Writes to letter to CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Congress leader Navajyoti Patnaik has urged CM Naveen Patnaik to set up the Northern Odisha Development Council (NODC) on lines of the Western Odisha Development Council (WODC), for the development of northern parts of the State which are still languishing under backwardness.

With its expansive coastline, substantial mineral reserves, vast agricultural lands, and vibrant tribal culture, the northern region holds immense promise as a potential economic powerhouse for Odisha. Regrettably, the lack of adequate infrastructure, prevalent skill gaps, and insufficient investment have stymied its growth trajectory, resulting in elevated unemployment rates and a decline in the living standards of its population, he said in a letter to the CM.

He sought investment in digital capability building, processing industries, textile mills, tourism, education,

mining, sustainable manufacturing, clean energy and airport connectivity.

He said that the youth be equipped for the emerging future of work by establishing digital capability centre in every district headquarters, processing units for local produce like betel leaves (Pan), modern machinery and technologies, along with Government support through credit and tax breaks, to create thousands of jobs for local youths, developing religious circuits and starting a major cultural festival to attract visitors, laying focus on bridging learning gaps and equipping youth with relevant ICT skills, creating a mineral extraction value chain by setting up processing units and manufacturing equipment for the mining sector and operating an airport in Rasgopindpur under the UDAAN scheme for better connectivity with northern Odisha.

"By establishing a dedicated NODC and focusing key investments, we can create jobs, unlock economic potential, and bridge the development gap within Odisha," he stated.

## OHEPEE, BU hold 4 workshops

### Joined by experts

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR

The OHEPEE, Government of Odisha and Berhampur University jointly organised four workshops from March 5 to 10.

The workshops on "Research Methodology: Tools and Practices" were conducted basically on two themes i.e., 'Research

Philosophy and Ethics', and 'Academic Writing'.

Also, different practice sessions were conducted.

About 158 research scholars of Berhampur University registered and participated in the four workshops while each workshop witnessed 24 sessions (theory, practice, hand-on session on various tools and techniques of identified sub-themes).

The event also included feedback sessions and an ex-

amination (evaluation test) on last day of the workshop to evaluate the performance / learning outcomes of the participants.

The inaugural ceremony was graced by the Vice Chancellor, Prof Geetanjali Dash. Prof Sushil Kumar Dutta, Visiting Professor, Assam Don Bosco University, graced the event as the chief guest. The event also witnessed the presence a large number of other dignitaries including Prof Sushant Kumar

Baral, Chairman, PG Council; Prof Sudhakar Patra, Director of IQAC; and Dr B Anjan Kumar Prusty, coordinator.

Dr Apoorva Behera introduced the guests.

VC Prof Dash felicitated the chief guest while Dr Kusha Kumar Nayak proposed vote of thanks. A large number of eminent professors, scientists, academicians from different universities / institutes were invited to deliver their presentations and motivated the scholars.

## Leaders share success mantras at TEDx Talks

### Organised by IIM Sambalpur

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Under the programme, TEDx Talks by IIM Sambalpur, distinguished speakers shared their vision and insights under the theme 'One More (S)mile,' which delved into the true nature of success and appreciated its continuous process. Principal Commissioner of Income Tax, Sambalpur Dr Sarita Mishra Kolhe graced the event as the chief guest.

The leaders from the distinct sectors shared their wisdom and success mantras. They included Nikhil



Chandwani, a bestselling author and social influencer; Namita Tiwari, a visionary marketing leader and business strategist; Mrinal Chakraborty, a master NLP and hypnotherapy trainer; Dr Surakshith Battina, a renowned cosmetic

gynecologist; Devan Bhalla, a trailblazing marketer; and Ankur Chaturvedi, AVP at Emami Ltd. and a certified ESG expert.

The event also featured speakers such as Sradhanjali Samantaray, a former captain

of the Indian Senior National Women's Football Team; Cdr Ranjan Bhattacharya, Commander in the Indian Navy and a weapons specialist; and Anmol Ankita, a student icon of Odisha, who delivered a speech in Sansad Bhavan.

## ‘Odias need to be self-reliant in all spheres’

### Shastriya Odia Bhasha Divas held at CUO

PNS ■ KORAPUT

The Central University of Odisha (CUO), Koraput, marked the Shastriya Odia Bhasha Divas with fervor and enthusiasm at its Subaneda campus, on March 11.

The Department of Odia Language and Literature held a seminar titled "Odia Bhashara Shastriya Manyata O Amara Dayitwa," which attracted distinguished scholars and intellectuals.

CUO Vice-Chancellor Prof Chakradhar Tripathi inaugurated the event. Former Principal of Upendranath College, Baleswar, Dr Ramakant Behera delivered the keynote address,



while Dean of the School of Languages Prof NC Panda attended as a distinguished guest.

Head of the Department of Odia Language and Literature Dr Rudrani Mohanty extended a warm welcome and provided insights into the programme's agenda.

In his address, Prof Tripathi underscored the significance of self-reliance for Odisha's progress in all spheres. He advocated for the introduction of Diploma and Certificate programmes in the Shastriya Odia language for non-Odia speakers to promote its wider adoption.

Dr Behera shed light on the

classical foundations of the Odia language during the event. Furthermore, he advocated for embracing linguistic diversity while ensuring the preservation of Odia's distinct identity.

Prof Panda eloquently portrayed the essence of Shastra and language, drawing parallels from the Vedas.

## PPA holds International Women’s Day



PNS ■ PARADIP

The Paradip Port Authority (PPA) in association the Paradip Ladies' Club commemorated International Women's Day with the theme "Invest in women: Accelerate progress," at the Officers' Club here.

PPA Chairman PL Haranadh said that as the port is slated to become India's No.1 major port in cargo throughput I the current fiscal, the working women of Team PPA have significantly contributed in this regard.

In the Indian society, imparting quality education to young girls is most important for its upliftment. Working Women Cell of PPA has been actively addressing the women related issues. Stressing on the health of women employees, he emphasised on a special camp for cancer screening and to avail the facilities of newly launched Mobile Medical Unit.

PPA Deputy Chairman Nilabhra Dasgupta said that mother being the building block of every human being, now a day's women folk are leading in various spheres of life.

PPA has been achieving success because of significant contribution of its working women employees.

Eminent cardiologist Dr Shilpa Vinayak Gadad spoke on cardiac health and dietician Swati Mohapatra explained nutrition therapy for stress management. They were felicitated on the occasion for their outstanding contribution in their respective fields.

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman, also felicitated women officers and employees of the PPA who have excelled in their respective fields in the current fiscal. A major attraction of the event was dance performance by specially-abled girl children of Jagruti school.

## Dead girl branded by kin to resurrect her

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

In a shocking incident, family members of a dead girl child reportedly branded the body with hot metal in an attempt to resurrect her at Purandapur village under the Turamunga police limits in Keonjhar district.

As per reports, Tankadhar Maharana, a resident of the village, faced the tragic loss of both his daughters, Lipi and Itishree, due to complications

from diarrhoea. Itishree died when she was being taken to the District Headquarters Hospital while Lipi succumbed to the illness during treatment at the hospital.

In a desperate attempt to bring the younger girl back to life, Tankadhar and his family members resorted to branding her.

Upon receiving reports of the incident, police reached the village and initiated an investigation.

# PMAY-U: Solutions for India’s urban housing issues

Rapid urbanisation in India has given rise to a pressing housing crisis, significantly impacting low-income households. The Technical Group on Urban Housing Shortage, operating under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), has shed light on the severity of the situation. Between 2012 and 2017, the group estimated a staggering shortage of 18.78 million urban houses. This figure alone underscores the magnitude of the housing deficit, revealing the inadequacy of the existing infrastructure to meet the burgeoning urban population's accommodation needs.



SN TRIPATHY

Even more alarming is the subsequent revelation by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). Their report in

2018 disclosed a disturbing 54% surge in urban housing shortages, catapulting the deficit to a staggering 29 million. This sharp escalation within a relatively short timeframe underscores the urgency for comprehensive and immediate action to address the crisis.

The implications of such housing shortages extend beyond mere numbers; they encapsulate the struggles and challenges faced by millions of low-income families striving for basic shelter. The repercussions encompass the lack of physical dwelling spaces and the associated issues of inadequate sanitation, compromised health conditions, and

limited access to education and employment opportunities.

The Interim Budget 2024-25 emphasizes the 'Housing for All' agenda by launching a scheme to assist deserving sections of the middle class living in rented houses, slums, chawls, and unauthorized colonies in acquiring their own homes. The flagship PMAY-Urban scheme has received a significant allocation of Rs 26,170 crore, marking an 18% increase over the previous fiscal year.

As of January 29, 2024, 118.63 lakh houses had been sanctioned under PMAY-U, with 80.02 lakh houses completed. The scheme comprises

four verticals: In-situ slum redevelopment (ISSR), credit-linked subsidy for housing (CLSS), affordable housing in partnership (AHP), and enhancement and construction of beneficiary houses (BLC).

Despite progress, several factors limit the PMAY-U's potential to achieve its goals within the stipulated time frame. ISSR, crucial for addressing slum dwellers' housing needs, faces legislative difficulties, limited private sector participation, and inadequate civil society involvement. Furthermore, the interest rate subvention for housing loans for economically weaker sections (EWS) needs to be in-

creased, leading to affordability concerns and exclusion from the housing market.

Complications in urban planning, outdated land development regulations, and opaque beneficiary selection processes contribute to inadequate land supply and high land prices. Private sector engagement remains lukewarm, hindering the effective implementation of PMAY-U. Moreover, the lack of local capacity and technical expertise results in the underutilization of funds.

Urgent steps are needed to unlock PMAY-U's full potential. Legislative hindrances and

bureaucratic delays must be addressed, with a focus on slum redevelopment. Subsidy amounts, especially under ISSR, require upward revision. A participatory approach involving scheme beneficiaries is essential for meaningful implementation. Collaboration with financial sector regulators and planned private sector involvement are crucial. Reflecting on past lessons can guide the development of effective policies to house the growing urban population, particularly those with low incomes.

A multifaceted approach is imperative to mitigate the crisis. Policymakers must con-

sider innovative solutions such as sustainable urban planning, affordable housing initiatives, and community-driven development projects. Collaboration between Government bodies, private enterprises, and non-profit organisations is crucial to ensure a holistic and effective strategy. By tackling the housing crisis head-on, India can pave the way for inclusive urban development, fostering a healthier, more resilient society for all its citizens.

(The writer, who is based at Brahmapur, is a former Professor of Economics, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune)



# Goal to make India hub for scientific learning, says Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his goal was to make India a premier hub for scientific learning by drawing in global best practices and sharing its knowledge and experiences with the world. "The coming years until 2047 is a period that is crucial to realise our vision of building a strong, self-reliant nation, where the scientific community in particular, especially our youth, will play a defining role," the Prime Minister said in a message to a report encapsulating the scientific achievements of the past decade. The report -- "A Decade of Science: Technology Panorama for Atmanirbhar Bharat" was compiled by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Union Government and NGO Foundation for Advancing Science and Technology (FAST India) -- and released by Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh on Thursday. The report highlights India's sustained efforts in science and technology, particularly in fields such as infrastructure, defence, energy sector and



heavy industries. "Be it investing in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence, deep sea and space exploration, Chandrayaan-3's landing on South Pole of the Moon, leadership in vaccine development during the pandemic, or commitment to expand renewable energy -- all such efforts showcase our continuing journey towards self-reliance," Modi said. The prime minister said India's scientists have carried out ground-breaking research across diverse spheres, while its tech ecosystem provides innovative solutions to global challenges. He said the government has also implemented far-reaching reforms in the education sec-

tor to instill a scientific temperament among the youth as well as promote inquiry-based learning. Principal Scientific Adviser Ajay Kumar Sood said the report examined the efforts in S&T across various domains such as capability-building, energy, exploration, public service, agriculture, livestock and biotechnology, and health. From development of radars and air defence systems that were deployed during the Balakot airstrikes to India's strides in vaccine development and achievements in 4G/5G telecom networks, the report seeks to capture the march of the country in the field of science and technology.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The concept of simultaneous elections has been featured in many reports and studies since 1983, essentially implying a return to the previous practice of conducting polls concurrently, the high level panel on "one nation, one election" has noted. The panel led by former president Ram Nath Kovind submitted its report to President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday, recommending simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha and state assemblies as the first step followed by synchronised local body polls within 100 days. "The concept of simultaneous elections has been featured in many reports and studies, essentially implying a return to the previous practice of conducting elections concurrently. In its inaugural Annual Report in 1983, the Election Commission of India advocated the idea of conducting simultaneous elections for both the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies," the report said. The Law Commission studied the various issues involved in the conduct of elections and recommended in its reports of 1999, 2015 and 2018 (draft) the adoption of the practice of



simultaneous elections to free citizens, political parties and government authorities from the encumbrance of asynchronous elections. "In 2002, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution recognised the bane of separate elections and urged for the restoration of simultaneous elections. The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice made a thorough study of the issues involved in holding of elections in 2015 and recommended that simultaneous elections will be necessary to enable India to move on to the path of high economic development," the report said. "The Committee, in its report on the 'Feasibility of holding simultaneous elections to the House of the People (Lok

Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies," acknowledged several reasons supporting the idea of conducting elections simultaneously," it added. In January 2017, NITI Aayog formulated a working paper titled "Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The What, Why and How," exploring the prospect of holding concurrent elections for the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies. "The document examined current constitutional provisions and the financial and logistical considerations associated with simultaneous elections and formulated a framework for the implementation of such synchronized electoral processes. The desirability of conducting simultaneous elections is underscored on various grounds, as indicated in these reports," it said.

# 28 no confidence motions moved in LS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 28 no-confidence motions have been moved in the Lok Sabha till now, as disclosed by a high-level panel deliberating on the prospect of 'one nation, one election'. The panel's findings also shed light on the occurrence of seven instances where Lok Sabha found itself in a state of deadlock. Proposing a solution to these challenges, the high-level panel led by former president Ram Nath Kovind suggested that in scenarios of a hung House or a vote of no confidence, fresh elections should be conducted to constitute a new Lok Sabha. Historical data highlighted in the report indicates that the highest number of no-confidence motions in Lok Sabha were moved during 1961-70, totalling 12, followed by six such motions during 1971-1980. In stark contrast, from 2000 to 2023, merely three no-confidence motions were recorded. To tackle these issues, the panel has put forth a comprehensive mechanism. This proposed

framework entails a constitutional amendment fixing Lok Sabha's tenure at five years from its inaugural meeting. Should dissolution occur before the term's completion, fresh elections will be held, and new Lok Sabha will serve out the remainder of the previous term. Echoing the structure of Lok Sabha, the state legislative assemblies will also operate on a fixed five-year term from their inaugural meeting. Dissolution would prompt fresh elections, with the new legislative assembly serving until Lok Sabha's term concludes. Further, the proposal suggested conducting mid-term elections to fill vacancies in municipalities and panchayats, ensuring seamless governance until the subsequent general elections. Implementing these proposed reforms necessitates constitutional amendments and the panel proposed amendments to Article 83 and Article 172 of the Constitution would regulate the tenures of Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies, respectively.

# INDIA Bloc guided by corruption ideology, fuelling anti national agenda: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday accused the opposition INDIA Bloc of being guided by corruption, mis-governance and fuelling anti-national agenda, asserting he stands for rooting out corruption and appeasement. His ideology is ensuring the country's welfare through people's welfare, the Prime Minister said at a programme here attended by the beneficiaries of PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi scheme, under which loan is given to street vendors. Targeting the opposition alliance which has united in the national capital to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, he said they have come together on the agenda of "abusing" him day and night. The Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress have joined hands in Delhi where all seven Lok Sabha seats are held by the BJP. Modi said the PM SVANidhi scheme has been a big boost to the lakhs of families of street vendors who were never paid any "attention" by previous governments. They used to suffer insults and ran from pillar to post as they hardly got



loans from banks and had to obtain capital at exorbitant interest rates, he said. "Modi ki guarantee" has ensured that they can get loans from banks at simple rates," he said. Over 62 lakh persons have been given loans of about Rs 11,000 crore, he said. The BJP government at the Centre has been working to improve the lives of the poor and middle class in the national capital, he said, adding that it has been making honest efforts to ease traffic and curb pollution in Indian cities. Over 1,000 electric buses have been deployed in Delhi, he said, and highlighted the expansion of expressways around the city's periphery and increase in its Metro network. The prime minister also laid the foundation stone of two additional corridors of Delhi Metro's Phase 4 during the programme.

# Centre revises flexible scheme for recruitment, promotion of scientists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has revised a flexible complementing scheme related to the recruitment and promotion of scientists in different Central Government departments, according to an official order. The move was necessitated considering the evolving advancement in the field of science and technology, and the requests of the various central government ministries and departments in this regard. Based on the recommendations of the sixth Central Pay Commission (6th CPC), the flexible complementing scheme (FCS) for scientists, that existed in some of the scientific ministries/departments of the government of India, was modified and instructions on modified flexible complementing scheme (MFCS) were issued by the Personnel Ministry in September 2010. These guidelines are not applicable to Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Departments of Atomic Energy and Space, where the scientists are governed by another scheme called merit based promotion scheme. "Subsequent to the issue of these guidelines, a need was felt



for enhancing the educational qualifications in the MFCS by several ministries/departments in order to recruit scientists as per their work function and detailed deliberations were held on the issue," an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said. Keeping in view that the field of science and technology is evolving, the requests of the various ministries/ departments have been examined and suitably incorporated in the revised scheme, it said and issued a revised FCS. "Provisions of revised FCS would be effective from July 1, 2024," the order issued to all central government departments/ministries said. In order to obviate future concerns relating to interpretation regarding educational quali-

cations or inclusion of new disciplines, the revised scheme provides for setting up of an inter-ministerial committee under Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) with Secretary, Department of Science and Technology as member and secretary of the concerned ministry/departments as the co-opted member, it added. All scientific ministries/departments presently implementing MFCS and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology shall initiate action for incorporating the provisions of the revised FCS by amending the provisions of relevant recruitment rules so that recruitment rules are brought in conformity with the provisions of the revised FCS, the order dated March 13 said.

# BJP targeting young, first time voters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP is targeting young and first-time voters with engaging short videos centred around the Modi government's initiatives in a variety of sectors including education, health, communication and start-ups, party leaders said on Thursday. The ruling party is using social media extensively to reach the young voters and recently launched a website (pehlaavtomodiko.Bjp.Org) as part of its campaign to engage with them and seek their support during the polls, the schedule of which is expected to be announced soon. The campaign emphasises on the message that the lives of Indian youths have improved under the 10 years of the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a party leader said. Among the campaign highlights are policies like 'Startup India' which has led to the country now having more than one lakh start-ups and over 100 unicorns; the National Education Policy that seeks to revamp educational landscape; and the establishment of 390 new

universities, seven IIMs, seven IITs and 15 AIIMs over the past 10 years. The campaign claims that India's sporting arena has been "transformed" by initiatives like 'Khelo India' and 'Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)'; while expressways, 'Vande Bharat' trains, trans-harbour links are reshaping the country's infrastructure. The nation, it says, has seen a 2,300 per cent growth in its solar power capacity in the last 10 years while the successful hosting of the G20 summit is an example of India's elevated status in global affairs. The 'Chandrayaan 3', 'Mangalyaan', and 'Aditya' L1 space missions also find a mention to highlight the country's space-tech achievements besides the advent of UPI and 5G technology which has changed India's digital landscape, party leaders associated with the campaign said. Initiatives like six-month paid maternity leave, 33 per cent reservation in Parliament and 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' have been cited as examples of the government's commitment to gender equality and women empowerment.

# Sudha Murty takes oath as Rajya Sabha MP

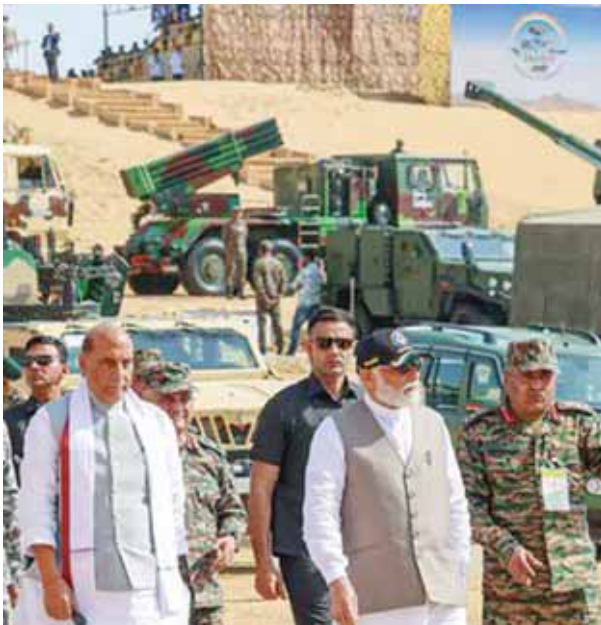
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Engineer-turned-philanthropist Sudha Murty on Thursday took oath as Rajya Sabha MP in the presence of her husband N R Narayana Murthy. Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar administered the oath in his chamber in Parliament House. Leader of the House Piyush Goyal was also present on the occasion. Murty, 73, the former chairperson of Infosys Foundation and the author of several books, mostly for children, was nominated to the Rajya Sabha on International Women's Day last Friday. She is also renowned for her contribution to Kannada and English literature and is a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Bal Sahitya Puraskar, the Padma Shri (2006) and the Padma Bhushan (2023). Murty, who was the first woman engineer to have worked with TELCO, is famously known to have provided the seed capital of Rs 10,000 from her emergency funds to her husband to start Infosys, which now has a market cap of over USD 80 billion. Her daughter Akshata is married to British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

# Bharat Shakti gives message of India strength to adversaries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Synergised military exercise 'Bharat Shakti' at Pokhran showcasing indigenously manufactured weapons has given a "strategic message to the adversaries" about the combat potential of India's armed forces, sources in the defence establishment have said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the exercise involving the three Services and underlined country's march towards attaining self-reliance in defence and said Pokhran has become witness to the trinity of India's 'aatmanirbharta', belief and self-pride. The three Services in a 50-minute thrilling display showcased the prowess of indigenous defence equipment. Tejas light combat aircraft(LCA), Arjun main battle tank(MBT) and ALH Mk-IV besides K-9 Vajra and Sharang artillery gun systems exhibited their combat capabilities. Platforms like Pinaka satellite system and a swarm of drones left the audience spellbound. Prime Minister Modi in his address on the occasion said "the roar of aircraft mid-air, and valour displayed on ground during Bharat Shakti exercise is the call of a 'new India' (naye Bharat ka aavhan hai)". "The live fire and static dis-



play have given a strategic message to the adversaries about the combat potential of our armed forces in terms of capability and capacity," a source in the defence establishment said. The exercise was organised under the aegis of the Indian Army. The synergised demonstration of indigenous defence capabilities during 'Bharat Shakti' is a "testimony to its commitment towards modernisation through indigenisation," the sources said. Roars of LCA Tejas and ALH Mk-IV filled the air while Main Battle Tank Arjun, K-9

Vajra, and T-90 Bhisma tanks, and Dhanush and Sharang artillery gun systems ruled the firing ranges on the ground. Pinaka rocket system in action drew huge cheers from the crowd. The exercise showcased India's military prowess and integrated multi-domain operations of the three services and the "shock and awe" impact that the armed forces seek to achieve in an operational situation with manoeuvre and fighting capabilities. "Exercise 'Bharat Shakti' not only displayed the indigenous defence capability of the armed forces, it also dis-

played the integration and jointness that is being achieved in various aspects like communications, training, inter-operability and logistics," the source added. Coordinating actual fire and manoeuvre drills by various arms and services is essential requirement of such large-scale exercises, which gives "first-hand experience of dealing with such issues in actual battles". All these activities also include, move of large number of equipment and weapon pieces for firing and display, which involves "coordination with other two services at the highest level", sources in the military establishment said. While efforts are in place and extensive plans are being made to "orchestrate integration and bring jointness among the services", 'Bharat Shakti' epitomises these efforts and highlights the contributions of the Indian Army towards achieving the much-awaited integration, they said. The exercise showcased an array of indigenous weapon systems and platforms as a demonstration of the prowess of a rising India, premised on the nation's 'Atmanirbharta' initiative, the sources added. For live fire demonstration, the efforts by the Army as being the lead service, "are visible". Starting with meticulous planning in utilising the available resources in Pokhran

for integrated firing which can be attributed to "battle space management akin to actual operations", they said. Synergy in ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), firepower and communications was evident during the conduct, another source said. "Air space management in coordination with the Indian Air Force is also a critical requirement in battle where various air assets of the Army and the Air Force would be using the air space simultaneously which needs clear demarcation of boundaries, identification drills and fool proof communication systems," the source added. While live firing was "awe-inspiring", static display of various equipment and weapons in the display arena gave a "holistic view of indigenous platforms of the armed forces, they said. Equipment and weapons on display included various drone systems and counter-drone systems, simulators, communication systems, radar systems, multi-mode hand grenade (MMHG), 3D-printed bunkers, artificial intelligence-based satellite imagery analysis system, among others were on display. "Bharat Shakti" also signalled to the world military community to subscribe to the large defence manufacturing potential possessed by the India," the source said.

# Yoga Day this year with theme Yoga for Women Empowerment to help people reach full potential

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the theme 'Yoga for Women Empowerment' for this International Yoga Day to be observed on June 21, India is embarking upon a year long mission to empower the country's half of the population to help reach their full potential with the physical and mental benefits of the practice. "Yoga is a comprehensive instrument for empowering women, encompassing their physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being," Rajesh Kotecha said adding that "Empowered women take on roles as leaders, educators, and advocates for change, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment across society." Speaking at the Yoga Mahotsav-2024, held here to mark the 100-day countdown to the 10th edition of International Day of Yoga (IDY), Kotecha said that the aim of holding the mega event is to propel Yoga into a widespread movement with a focus on women's well-being and promoting global health and peace. The Ayush Ministry has actively supported studies on various conditions affecting women, including PCOS/PCOD, stress management, and the like, to focus on women's health irrespective of their age or condition, promoting women's empowerment through evi-



dence-based research, he said at the event, attended by Joint Secretary, Ayush, Kavita Garg, DDG Ministry of Ayush, Satyjit Paul, Advisor (Ayurveda), Ministry of Ayush, Vaidya Manoj Nesari, Chairman, National Commission of Homoeopathy, Dr. Anil Khurana, and Director Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY). Vijaylakshmi Bhardwaj among others. Hansaji Jayadeva, Director of The Yoga Institute, Mumbai emphasized the enduring value of good actions, stating that they are the best currency that sustains us forever. She highlighted the importance of accepting people as they are and finding joy in understanding them, rather than letting oneself be disturbed by the actions of others. During her address at the panel discussion on "Yoga and Women Empowerment: Different Dimensions" Dr. Tanuja Nesari, Director, All

India Institute of Ayurveda, Delhi underscored the symbiotic relationship between Yoga and Ayurveda. "While Yoga embodies the spiritual essence of Ayurveda, Ayurveda encapsulates the physical aspect of Yoga, portraying them as complementary aspects of holistic wellness. ..." She stressed the necessity of integrating Ayurveda and Yoga within healthcare practices to ensure comprehensive well-being and pointed out the efficacy of Yoga breathing techniques and a Sattvic diet in maintaining mood balance, managing menopausal symptoms, irregular periods, and reducing anxiety. Dr. HR Nagendra, Chancellor, SVYASA University, Bengaluru highlighted the challenges posed by modern lifestyle disorders as well as non-communicable diseases which can be effectively tackled by integrating Ayush healthcare, and particularly, yoga into our daily lives.



# Synchronising polls

The Kovind panel report will spur governance and deepen the democratic rubric

The submission of a much-awaited report on the feasibility and practicality of simultaneous elections across the nation has reignited discussions across the political spectrum. The 18,626-page report, finalised by a committee under the chairpersonship of former President Ram Nath Kovind, has recommended simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, followed within 100 days by concurrent local body elections. To this end, at least five Articles of the Constitution would need amendment. While simultaneous elections offer potential benefits, several considerations and challenges merit attention. The main proposals make it clear that in cases of a hung House or no-confidence motion sailing through, fresh polls may be held for the remainder of the five-year term. The first simultaneous polls would entail Assembly tenures aligning with the Lok Sabha elections, and the Election Commission would create a unified electoral roll and voter ID cards in collaboration with State Election Commissions for all polls. The concept of ‘One Nation, One Election’ has been a subject of debate for quite some time now. Its backers feel it is necessary to reduce the frequency of polls, and that it will spawn several other advantages, including enhanced and continued governance, decreased expenditure, minimal life disruptions and social cohesion, besides providing stability.



By aligning the electoral cycles, the Governments can focus more on policymaking and implementation rather than perpetually being in campaign mode. However, the opponents are concerned about logistical challenges, constitutional implications and potential dilution of regional issues in electoral discourse. Addressing concerns related to federalism and democratic principles while ensuring the synchronisation of electoral cycles poses a formidable challenge. Even if the recommendations are accepted, it would be a long road to actualisation of ‘One Nation, One Election.’ Besides, simultaneous elections might dilute the regional narrative, leading to a focus primarily on national issues. The Kovind panel’s report provides insights into mitigating this risk and preserving the essence of federalism within the framework of simultaneous elections. Also, elections incur substantial costs for the exchequer; simultaneous elections could potentially reduce this financial burden. However, the initial investment required for synchronisation, including infrastructure development and voter education, needs careful consideration. The analysis of financial implications will influence the decision regarding the feasibility of this reform. It would indeed be a good idea to reach a political consensus as every party is a stakeholder. The implications of this report extend beyond administrative efficiency to encompass constitutional, political and financial dimensions. As stakeholders await the findings and recommendations, it is imperative to engage in constructive dialogue to address concerns and chart a path forward that upholds the democratic ethos while enhancing the effectiveness of governance.



Members of Toda tribal community during the celebrations of temple festival at Mallikorai Mund, in Ooty

# Scientists play key role in a nation’s progress

In times of crisis, society instinctively turns its gaze towards the scientific community, seeking solace and solutions amid turmoil

The public always looks at the scientific community whenever they are in dire straits. Farmers seek help from agriculture scientists when serious pests affect their crops, or there is a drastic decline in productivity. Similarly, the public looks to medical scientists for help whenever a pathogen attacks humans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen how, every day, the ordinary person eagerly looked at research work from various labs. Covid-19 reinstated the common man’s confidence in scientists. The current generation that has overcome the COVID-19 catastrophe is deeply indebted to scientists for their lives. Even though there are hundreds of scientific fields, agriculture and health care are close to the day-to-day affairs of ordinary people, and hence, scientists working in these areas need to communicate directly to the public. Scientists working in other fields like communication engineering, space research, civil engineering etc, though highly relevant to the day-to-day life of commoners, never come in direct contact with



them. Whenever humanity is in disarray, scientists bring glee and a ray of hope through their discoveries. In many parts of the world, scientists also create confusion because of conflicts of interest and interference from policymakers. It’s an open secret that most of the food products available in our market are adulterated, and in some cases, they contain toxic substances. Even scientists working in industries will secretly admit it, but they are not allowed to publish the results or speak publicly. Most of the scientific work related to pesticides, drugs etc is linked with industry, and none of the industries will support a genuine scientist. Industries may influence the design of research studies to ensure outcomes align with their objectives. There is always a conflict between proponents of mod-

ern medicine and traditional systems of medicine. Many scientists blatantly state that Ayurvedic or Homeopathic drugs have side effects, forgetting the fact that all modern medicines have severe side effects. Scientists should strive to be impartial in pursuing knowledge and understanding of the natural world. This dedication to objectivity is fundamental to the scientific method, which relies on systematic observation, experimentation, and analysis to uncover truths about the universe. However, scientists, like all humans, are susceptible to personal beliefs and biases that may subtly influence their work. These biases can affect everything from the questions scientists choose to investigate to the interpretation of their findings. Furthermore, external factors such as funding sources, societal pressures, and political climates can also influence scientific research. Research funding, in particular, plays a significant role in shaping the scientific agenda, as scientists often rely on grants from government agencies, private foundations, or industry sponsors

to support their work. The priorities of these funding sources may align with particular agendas or interests, potentially influencing the direction and focus of research. Societal pressures and political influence can also distort scientific results. Despite these challenges, the scientific community is committed to upholding certain principles of objectivity, transparency, and peer review to ensure the integrity of scientific research. While scientists may not always be entirely free from bias, these principles help to minimise the impact of personal beliefs and external influences on the scientific process. The scientific community can maintain public trust and credibility by upholding these standards. Moreover, scientists should proactively engage with societal concerns, prioritising research that tackles urgent issues like public health, and social inequality. If scientists lose public trust, society will be in disarray. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

# Presidential choices make veterans rueful

The United States finds itself in a peculiar predicament where the choice between Biden and Trump feels more like picking the ‘less bad’ option

The United States of America has a strange conundrum of choosing the ‘less bad’ Presidential option amongst geriatrics in Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump. One concerned set of constituents is the fraternity of retired service personnel (from US Armed Forces) or simply, Veterans. Given the size and scale of the standing US Armed Forces and the accompanying global deployments, it is unsurprising that the Veterans community is over 18 million strong. As the US has had a consistent history of ongoing combat duties, Veterans evoke an emotional and hallowed position in the American consciousness. The longstanding American norm of walking up and shaking the hands of a Veteran by saying, “Thank you for your services” is a sacred culture that exemplifies the hallowed position afforded to Veterans, across the partisan and societal divide. Of the 46 US Presidents to date, an unprecedented 31 had done military service testifying to the image of the ‘Uniform’, in public reverence. At one time, ‘Uniform’ was considered a political millstone for prospective Presidency. Sadly, it is a normalcy on the decline. Today neither of the two Presidential candidates i.e., Trump or Biden, fit the bill on this score. On the contrary, Biden does himself no good by defending his five-student draft deferments, whereas Donald Trump is infamous for his five conscription deferments, during the Vietnam War. In recent times, even the likes of Bill Clinton and George W Bush (with his specious service with the Air National Guard) were criticised for lack of experience. The implicit fear was that as the Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces, a President bereft of Military Service would be unversed and unempathetic to the institutional realities and Veteran concerns. George H.W. Bush was the last US President to serve in combat. While the campaign spiel and competitive claims by both the contesting candidates towards Veterans in the 2024 Presidential Elections will bear prominence,



the fact is that neither of the two is seen as genuine representative of the realm. While Biden has routinely invoked the Military Service of his late son, Beau Biden, to burnish his militaristic association, it remains an artful contextualization as Beau’s service was that of Judge Advocate General in Iraq for a year – later, Beau had died owing to brain cancer. Many Veterans have questioned Biden’s sincerity like the incident of the Air Force Veteran accosting Biden at an event, “I’m an Air Force veteran. I’m here with an Army veteran. We are just wondering why we should vote for someone who voted for a war and enabled a war that killed thousands of our brothers and sisters, countless Iraqi civilians.” However, even though Republicans always enjoyed a historical bias in terms of Veteran traction, given its conservative and overtly ‘nationalistic’ moorings, Trump is not exactly in the mould of Dwight Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, George HW Bush etc., Trump’s Republicanism is more anchored in the commercial sensibilities of its affluent elites, as opposed to martial traditions of Military families that breed reserves of selfless character. Therefore, Trump has had to appropriate the apolitical institution of the Armed Forces with his misplaced

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AMERICA’S FUTURE AS A SUPERPOWER IS PREDICATED ON ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ‘ARMED FORCES’ AND THEIR ASSOCIATED DOMAIN OF VETERAN AFFAIRS, YET NEITHER OF THE CONTESTANTS DEMONSTRATES A FAMILIAL OR TOPICAL URGENCY TOWARDS THE VETERANS

commentary of ‘My Generals, walk at Lafayette Square etc., and suchlike unwarranted usurpations. Ironically, he has even poooh-pooohed the Veterans with utter disdain whenever his instincts have taken over. Trump’s former Chief of Staff, John Kelley, has confirmed Trump’s apathy, “A person that thinks those who defend their country in uniform, or are shot down or seriously wounded in combat, or spend years being tortured as POWs are all ‘suckers’ because ‘there is nothing in it for them.’ A person who did not want to be seen in the presence of military amputees because ‘It doesn’t look good for me’. Even Trump’s contempt for ‘Gold Star’ Military families owing to their faith or dislike for rivals like the revered Senator John McCain (distinguished Veteran) or even his purported query about a wounded Army Captain at an event with a query, “Why do you bring people like that here?” and added for the measure, “No one wants to see that, the wounded” reflects the real amorality of Trump. Even Trump’s Defence Secretary and legendary warrior, General James Mattis who was eventually, ‘the last adult in the room’, testified to the inadvertent bluster that was postured as faux ‘muscularity’ in Trump’s drumming

and demeanour. Mattis the proud and apolitical Veteran had mustered all the correctness that he could manage in his resignation note when he suggested that Trump needed a Defense Secretary ‘whose views are better aligned to yours’ – suggesting that no professional, balanced or self-respecting individual could align with an unhinged Trump. Veterans who served partisan governments, couldn’t possibly see individual leaders as bigger entities, than the Constitutional morality of the land. Today both Biden and Trump attempt to profess more sensitivity, care, and concern for the Veterans, and like the choice generally, it is yet another case of a ‘less bad’, rather than ‘good’ choice. America’s future as a Superpower is predicated on its commitment to the ‘Armed Forces’ and their associated domain of Veteran Affairs, yet neither of the contestants demonstrates a familial or topical urgency towards the Veterans. Therefore, partisanship aside, many Veterans feel that their service has been taken for granted and they have no better choice. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**BIDEN AND TRUMP FACE OFF**  
Sir — This is concerning the article “The US presidential race intensifies” (March 13, 2024). The process of presidential elections in America in November has progressed to the point where it is almost clear that President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump will face off again. The Super Tuesday results showed them to be far ahead of their opponents, and the next day, Nikki Haley eliminated all questions by stating that she was postponing the campaign to become the Republican nominee. The US presidential elections will feature only the same candidates for the second time in a row, a first since 1956. Second, both candidates are elderly. Two-thirds of those polled in February believed Biden was no longer old enough to work for the government. Nearly half of the respondents expressed the same way about Trump. The serious allegations against former President Trump are also making these elections unique. It is unclear when the court will rule on these charges. Everyone’s attention is focused on what will happen if the court rules against Trump before the election. These claims are also fueling intense resentment on both sides during a presidential race. While Biden has branded Trump as a threat to America’s very survival, Trump continues to claim victory in the 2020 elections. Leaving aside these internal challenges, neither candidate’s victory would result in a significant shift in America’s foreign policy. Aside from modest efforts to balance the Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars, America now has few options. On the other hand, America’s future posture will be heavily influenced by the desire to contain China’s growing aggression. Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

**PROTECTING RIVERS**  
Sir — Though rivers are national assets, there is little awareness among the people about ways to preserve their purity and utility. Besides being indispensable for day-to-day use, including agricultural purposes, they serve as a great inland mode of trans-

**China’s hollow claims**  
  
which will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang in India’s territory. The world’s longest twin-lane tunnel will ease pressure on the existing infrastructure, specifically the Balipara-Chariduar-Tawang road, which faces issues from landslides, snow, and heavy rainfall. The road link is expected to help India shore up defence along the nuclear-armed neighbours’ 3,500-kilometer Line of Actual Control (LAC). India and China have also been locked in a border standoff in the eastern Ladakh region since 2020 when a deadly hand-to-hand clash broke out. China’s tactic of laying illegal claims on the territories of its neighbours is a well-known fact. Thus, objections raised by it are hollow as long as India develops the regions well within its boundaries. N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

portation that can bolster trade and commerce. Biodiversity would have been a thing of the past but for the rivers. The river system, of course, is Earth’s highest biological diversity zone. International Day of Action for Rivers aims at spreading awareness through campaigns on the importance of rivers and their protection. Only about ten per cent of the river basins in the world are protected. Dams, encroachments and deforestation have threatened their very existence. Therefore, saving and celebrating rivers cannot be overstated. Campaign against the construction of dams is an integral part of “saving rivers” because preserving free-flowing rivers is the key. It is indisputable that “water is for all.” That said, it is every citizen’s responsibility to keep the nation’s rivers clean and pollution-free devoid of dump and industrial wastage. A country’s rivers cannot be allowed to become sites for garbage and sewage disposal. River management, river pollution and river conservation are three areas that have seized the attention of experts. More than thirty countries come together on the International Day of Action for Rivers to take stock of the international rivers, and ways to upkeep them. Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

**ENFORCE LAWS ON PLASTIC MISUSE**  
Sir — Despite knowing the harmful effects of plastic, the government is not serious about enforcing laws against its rampant use. People also turn a blind eye to the plastic menace. They have become accustomed to the use-and-throw culture, and don’t bother to carry shopping bags. Users don’t even think twice before throwing a plastic bag perhaps because it comes cheap. Do we ever think about how thick the plastic bag given to us in shopping malls is? About 15 per cent of all garbage is plastic; only 50 per cent of it is recycled. Despite being long-lasting, plastic bags are thrown away after a single use. Plastic remains in the earth for a long time, cutting air and water supply to the soil, and tremendously affecting the growth of plants. It reduces the water-retaining capacity of the soil. In the monsoon, plastic gets collected in drains and blocks the passage of water which causes waterlogging and floods, which in turn give rise to water-borne diseases. Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

TEPA DEAL IS A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement is a game changer



India signing a low-hanging trade agreement with four European countries, earlier this week, marks a new chapter in the policy outlook going forward. For starters the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), India managed to close with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member countries (comprising of Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein) is a first of its kind with developed countries from the Western world.

It would be worth mentioning that India has been trying to sign trade agreements (FTAs) with the Western world, particularly the larger European Union, the UK and in the long run with the US for several years. However, all of these negotiations, which tend to get extremely complex, when dealing with Western nations, due to divergences in priorities, failed to fructify into something meaningful, in decades. India's external economic policy outlook, for a very long, including the early years of PM Narendra Modi's government, prioritised the domestic sector, over a more integrated new world trade-based economy. This had also raised concerns about the current government's priorities being too protectionist, which in plain English meant providing artificial government shield to, often, inefficient domestic manufacturing, leading to high-cost, low-quality products and services for the domestic market.

India had also walked out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement (one of the largest multilateral trade agreements among ASEAN members and Australia, China, Japan, South Korea etc) after multiple rounds of negotiations, citing a disproportionate advantage to China in the agreement. This left little room for the Indian economy to grow and get more investments, create fresh employment and provide the necessary fillip to exports, however, things began to change during the second term of PM Modi beginning in 2019.



At a time when the global chorus started shifting to being more protectionist, i.e. trying to save their domestic industry, as a result of the Covid Pandemic, the Ukraine war and tensions in West Asia, India managed to sign two early harvest trade agreements with UAE and Australia in record time. This was a signal to the world that India is willing to negotiate at the trade table (being the fifth largest economy serves as a good bait) and get further integrated with the global economy, of course, on terms that are mutually beneficial for all participating partners. India is currently in deep negotiations with the UK for signing an FTA, whose final signing was being tuned up as another feather in the current government's economic successes, however, it will have to wait longer for eco-political reasons.

The UAE trade agreement had also opened doors for India to negotiate a similar deal with the Gulf Cooperation Council (where UAE is also an influential member) but the West Asian crisis may delay the negotiations. It may be mentioned here, that, the Oman FTA has a definite stellar output record from the commerce ministry. Coming back to the TEPA, commerce minister Piyush Goyal during the announcement underscored "The agreement will give a boost to Make in India and provide opportunities to young & talented workforce. The FTA will provide a window to Indian exporters to access large European and global markets."

TEPA heavily relies on a nearly \$100 billion investment commitment from the EFTA members in a fifteen-year window, which could serve as an important benchmark and a template for signing similar deals with other developed nations. India and the EU have taken several steps to arrive at some sort of a free trade agreement, albeit, negotiating with 27 member countries' union may be slightly more complex. The message from India, which has tasted high growth years, despite several setbacks from global headwinds, is clear, the domestic market is open for business and Indian exporters are confident to win the world.

*(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)*

# India, Mauritius forge strategic ties

The joint inauguration of India-assisted projects on the Agalega island of Mauritius marks a significant milestone in the strategic partnership between the nations



The joint inauguration of India-assisted projects such as an airstrip, community development projects and a jetty in the Agalega island of Mauritius shows the increasing concern over the need to change the existing — and also evolve a new — strategic approach to not only enhance economic and commercial cooperation but also ensure strategic surveillance and security of Indian Ocean Area. The virtual Conference between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritius PM Pravind Jugnauth is a new cornerstone in building up close cooperation through multiple projects such as the India-assisted Aushadhi scheme (providing high-quality medicines) commercial and economic cooperation, humanitarian relief assistance and joint patrolling. This also fulfils the main thrust of the Indian Foreign Policy principle: "Neighbourhood First Policy" and Mauritius's multiple needs in health, security and economic areas. The Indo-Mauritius coordination is a step forward to add a new country to India's new strategic vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in Region) Besides, it also brings an important fact to light that India and Mauritius need to diversify their strategies to counter the challenges both face from Pakistan and China.

The war between Russia and Ukraine, the spreading tentacles of transnational terrorism and the over-ambitious mission of Chinese dominance across the globe have created serious problems for international security. While the world is still grappling with the deadly spikes of war and terror, the issue of sea security is taking the forefront of global politics. The Leading Realist in IR John Mearsheimer once conceded that states always seek to maximise their power and prowess to achieve security. Realism also contends that states prioritise maintaining their security and status quo power over aggressive expansion, focusing on balancing against threats rather than seeking dominance. It provides a theoretical rationale for comprehending the complex rigmarole in the fluid power equations and how the changing dynamics of Asia particularly around IOA shape India's defence strategies. There is an increasing tendency of actors in International relations to cluster around the powerful one in the system. China's expansionist mission has vindicated Raymond Aron's observation correctly. Aron once conceded that "The two most typical models are called multipolar and bipolar: either the chief actors, whose forces are not too unequal, are relatively numerous, or, on the contrary, two actors dominate their rivals to such a degree that both become the centre of a coalition and the secondary actors are obliged to situate themselves about the two "blocs", thus joining one or another, unless they have the opportunity to abstain. Intermediary models are possible, depending on the number of chief actors and the degree of equality or inequality of forces among the chief actors". These are changing times and many changes have occurred in International relations recently. Sharing and working on a common strategic vision and a combined approach to ensure mutual economic prosperity and approaching through a multi-layered and multilateral strategy if the situation demands is going to dominate the world order in the coming days. What is required is to develop a fresh perspective for a more mature reliance on international cooperation between nations to



enunciate a new strategy of retaliation, threatening a severe response to any attempt to destabilise the order.

In this direction To counter the increasing tentacles of Chinese aggressiveness endangering India's Maritime Security through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), deployment of Naval bases in the IOC areas, Naval base in Djibouti, construction of Gwadar Port to help Pakistan, its policy of Strings of Pearls through which China is encircling India by enhancing strategic partnerships with IOR countries India has reached out to its neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius and had a defence strategy of developing coastal Radar System between these countries. Besides, it has already started a Fusion system to provide information related to the security of the Indian Ocean Region. The recent procurement of an India-Russia Joint Venture BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile for the Indian Navy and aero-engine for MIG-29 Jets for the Indian Air Force are major initiatives to enhance India's defence capabilities.

India has also developed a Necklace of Diamonds Strategy and is establishing the Changi Naval Service Base in Singapore, CHABAHAR PORT IN IRAN AND PORTS IN MYANMAR AND OMAN

ty and protecting economic interests.

The increasing support and agreement about limiting climate change issues and opening up gateways for renewable energy and development in technological know-how along with channelising the sources of power generation and creating a mechanism to withstand any sudden threat posed by BRI (Belt and Road Initiatives) augur well for peace and prosperity of all the member countries. There has always been a series of extremely good relationships between India and its neighbouring countries about trade share having crossed a decent landmark during the last half a decade which was way more than expected.

The recent efforts by India to protect IOA's security through cooperation with Mauritius would further boost and cement their ties and create a genuine environment for stabilising economic growth, (along with ensuring the free flow of goods and services) strategic security, prosperity, stability and combating sudden challenges arising due to climate change and maritime and border threat. Further, the panel discussion focusing on "The Quad Squad: Power and Purpose of the Polygon," during early 2023 provided another step towards solving the expansionist plans.

The member countries showed their commitment to support Pacific Island countries with regional institutions through cooperation in several areas along with the terror such as climate change, resilient infrastructure, and maritime security to strengthen the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The role of India's leadership in finalising the IORA in India-Pacific areas was greatly appreciated and became even more important due to its impeccable reputation. Further negotiation may lead to the creation of a strategic mechanism to provide a shield against maritime security,

piracy, drug trafficking, armed robbery, terrorism, international crime, smuggling and cyber threats unleashed by any non-state actor as well. This may also accelerate maritime-friendly ties and bolster security around the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific areas which have lately become areas of concern.

Hence, a collaborative partnership among the nations around the Indian Ocean Area through equity and access to those who are in need at the time of unprecedented crisis may show the level of insight in empowering and motivating people across the board towards extending a helping hand and saving lives. Besides, the pursuit towards the promotion of their well-being would lead to tremendous effort towards enhancement of the overall development scenario in India and neighbouring countries. The sum and substance of the idea is to ensure that the New structural Thinking and orientation changes through a fresh perspective and a framework for key demands while maintaining a synergy among various stakeholders to negotiate even on the issues of different perspectives.

Since then, cooperation among Quad Group countries has set a new road map through diplomatic endeavours towards building a new apparatus for the management of terrorism. Foreign relations are operated through efficient diplomacy and diplomacy is all about the right gestures cooperation and coordination at times of crisis. India is indeed a leading partner in this regard. India is a mature democracy and its leaders are capable of cashing in on any opportunity and strategy that's a combination of tactful strength and resilience.

*(The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav award, is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)*

# Remembering Johan Galtung: A pioneer in peace research

## A visionary thinker and dedicated peace activist, Galtung has left an indelible mark on our understanding of conflict resolution

The world of peace research and conflict resolution mourns the loss of one of its most influential figures, Johan Galtung, who passed away on February 17, 2024. Johan Galtung, born in Oslo, Norway, in 1930, was not just a visionary thinker but also a prolific writer and dedicated peace activist whose legacy continues to reverberate within the field today.

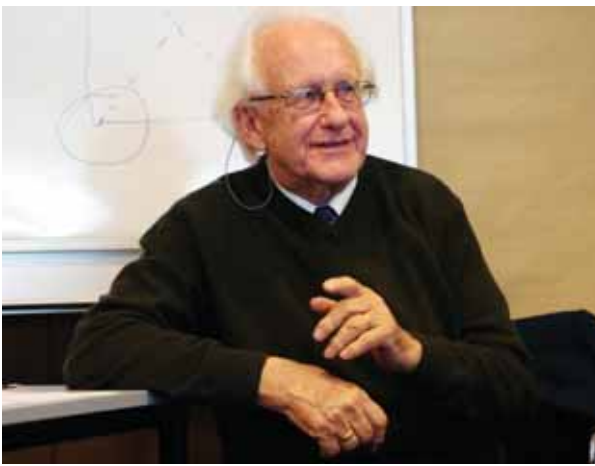
Growing up amidst the turmoil of World War II, Galtung's experiences deeply influenced his worldview and spurred his lifelong dedication to understanding and resolving conflicts. He devoted his career to exploring innovative approaches to peacebuilding, drawing from



diverse disciplines such as sociology, psychology, political science, and economics. Galtung's pivotal contributions to peace research led to the establishment of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) in 1959. PRIO served as a pioneering interdisciplinary hub, fostering collaborative research endeavours aimed at comprehensively understanding conflict origins and

developing effective strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. His leadership at PRIO facilitated the exchange of methodologies and ideas among scholars globally, nurturing a vibrant intellectual community dedicated to advancing peace. Initiatives like the Transcend Network for Peace, Development, and Environment exemplified Galtung's commitment to fostering dialogue and cooperation among scholars, policymakers, and grassroots activists worldwide. Throughout history, leaders and activists have emphasised the transformative power of collaborative efforts in promoting peace and non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-

violent resistance mobilised millions during India's independence movement, showcasing the potential for collective action to bring about profound social and political change. Similarly, Nelson Mandela's emphasis on reconciliation and collaboration across racial divides in South Africa led to initiatives like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, aimed at healing past wounds through dialogue and understanding. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's advocacy for the African philosophy of Ubuntu further emphasised the importance of recognising our shared humanity in promoting peace and justice. More recently, figures like Malala Yousafzai have cham-



pioned education as a tool for peace, inspiring a global movement to ensure every child's right to education and opportunity. One of Galtung's enduring

contributions is his concept of "structural violence," which highlights the underlying structural causes of violence such as poverty, inequality, and discrimina-

tion embedded within societal structures. This concept remains relevant today, as issues like racism and global economic disparities continue to fuel conflicts worldwide. Galtung's advocacy for non-violent conflict resolution continues to inspire peacebuilders and activists worldwide. His emphasis on dialogue, empathy, and cooperation offers practical tools for building sustainable peace in today's conflicted world.

Contemporary movements for social justice and human rights, such as Black Lives Matter, draw inspiration from Galtung's ideas about the power of non-violent resistance and grassroots mobilisation to challenge

systemic injustice. In reflecting on Galtung's legacy, we must draw upon his teachings to develop innovative approaches that promote peace, justice, and human dignity for all.

His profound impact on education and social transformation persists beyond his passing, serving as a guiding light for future endeavours in the pursuit of a more peaceful and just world. As Galtung himself said, "Peace is not a fixed state, but a process that requires constant attention and effort." It is up to each of us to contribute to this ongoing work.

*(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Sansthan, views are personal)*



# US soil being used for terrorist activities against India: Community leaders tell DOJ and FBI

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A group of eminent Indian Americans in Silicon Valley has held a special meeting with senior officials of the Department of Justice, FBI and police and told that the US soil is being used for terrorist activities against India. The group held the meeting with senior officials of the Department of Justice, FBI and local police this week on increasing hate crimes against Hindus in California. During the meeting, Indian Americans expressed their displeasure and dissatisfaction that the law enforcement agencies in the US have not been able to take any action against those who are espousing terrorism activities in India, according to multiple persons present in the meeting. The meeting to address the challenging issue of the rise in

hate crimes against Hindu and Jain places of worship was held at the initiative of community leader Ajai Jain Bhutoria. It was attended by about two dozen eminent Indian Americans. Vincent Plair and Harpreet Singh Mokha from the Department of Justice's Community Relations Service along with FBI officials and those from the police departments of San Francisco, Milpitas, Fremont and Newark attended the meeting. The sudden increase in hate crimes against Indian Americans in general and the Hindus in particular is causing a lot of fear and anxiety in the community, said the Indian Americans after the meeting which was closed to the press. There is a fear in the community right now. The Khalistan people park trucks outside schools, and Indian grocery stores and intimidate young

Indian Americans. Several community members expressed their anger that the law enforcement agencies have not been able to take any action against those people, including those who tried to burn the Indian consulate in San Francisco, and are openly threatening Indian diplomats and giving open calls for terrorist incidents in India. Some of the members present in the meeting told PTI that senior law enforcement officials said that they were not aware of the Khalistan movement in the US and wanted the Indian Americans to help them raise awareness about these terrorist groups in the US. They also said that they have not been able to take action because of a lack of resources and funds and that they have other top priorities. This meeting was a crucial moment as we united to con-

front the recent surge in hate crimes targeting Hindu places of worship. I brought together Indian community leaders, DOJ, FBI, and law enforcement officials from Milpitas, SF, Fremont, and Newark. In the last four months, over 11 temples in the Bay Area alone have been attacked, vandalised, and defaced with hateful graffiti. The fear in our community is palpable, but our collective resolve is stronger than ever," Bhutoria said. "We delved into safeguarding places of worship and tackling hate crimes, notably those involving Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) Khalistani supporters targeting Hindu Temples, displaying disturbing banners in front of schools and corporate establishments. In our discourse, we explored the prospect of organising a Protecting all Places of Worship Forum (PPOW) with the DOJ," said Sikh leader

Sukhi Chahal. Chahal said he personally underscored the significance of addressing the provocative and threatening video messages from SFJ pro-Khalistan separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannu. "I urged FBI and DOJ officials to earnestly consider the potential repercussions of Mr Pannu's statements on peace, harmony, and India-US relations. It is paramount that we collectively work to mitigate the impact of such hateful messages, which have the potential to disturb societal tranquility and radicalise the youth," he said. Following the meeting, it was agreed that a working group will be formed under the guidance of the US Department of Justice that will actively pursue safety measures at places of worship and systemic reporting of any unwanted act. The working group would have

representations from various sections of the Indian community. The community leaders expressed concerns that the police were not of much help to them in either addressing this increasing fear or stopping terror activities from the US against India. When pressed on the issue of Khalistan, the law enforcement officials said that they don't understand the context and they need to be educated on this matter. One of the Indian Americans told the FBI that the Khalistan leaders are openly threatening to blow up Air India planes and they openly carry messages around targeting Hindus. Another Indian American said that the FBI is not contradicting the claims by some of the Khalistan leaders that the FBI is supporting them, one of the participants said.

# Hinduphobia on the rise in the US, says Congressman

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US of late has seen a rise in Hinduphobia which needs to be fought because there is no place for hatred in this country, Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar has said, as he joined a group of Hindu leaders and organisations seeking to fight this growing hate crime against the community. Representatives of various Indian American groups met on Wednesday at the US Capitol during a meeting organised by HinduAction. "We see a lot of Hindu phobia. We see California SB403 (the bill banning caste discrimination), and that's just the beginning. The attacks on our temples and attacks on Hindus all over the world. That is one of the reasons why I decided to form the Hindu Caucus," Thanedar said. "For the first time in the United States Congress, we have a Hindu Caucus. Number of initiatives we are taking to ensure that people have religious freedom to practice their religion the way they want to and not be, we need to fight this phobia, bigotry, and hatred. Because there should be no place for hatred in America, no place for hatred against people's religious rights. And so that's what we are focusing on in Congress," Thanedar, a Democrat, said. Suhag Shukla from the Hindu American Foundation said that college campuses in particular are experiencing rampant anti-Hindu bias and hate. She also listed out some of the major incidents of hate crime against the Hindu community in the US. "Just in the past two years we've seen a spike in anti-Hindu incidents," she said. There's unfamiliarity and there is complacency amongst law enforcement, she said. "The perpetrators that have been caught on video with all the temple attacks that I've

mentioned, all of the street attacks that I've mentioned, the statements that are made during the commission of the attacks, the nature and content of the graffiti all point to the Khalistan movement," she said. "When there are people from within the Sikh community who are speaking out against this movement, they've been physically attacked," Shukla said. Referring to SB403, she said there is institutionalised discrimination. Silicon Valley-based entrepreneur Sunder Iyer, a victim of targeted hate, told the participants that he learned that a civil rights agency can racially profile and violently stereotype Indian Americans. "I respectfully ask the members of Congress to allocate a budget within the Department of Justice to investigate the California Civil Rights Department and for the greater good of America. An agency that does not represent the truth harms all Americans. Several of my colleagues at Cisco and many other companies across California will be willing to give testimony. They must not live their lives in fear and their voices must not be suppressed," Iyer said. An increase in recent attacks on the temples is emotionally very disturbing to the executives of the temple and community at large, said Tejal Shah of the Hindu Temple Empowerment Council. Temple Priests face mental anguish, shock and trauma, she said. Observing that perpetrators of many of those attacks have not been found, Shah said in one case the police resisted registering a report. She listed out attacks on some of the temples. Later a joint declaration by HinduAction and Namaste-Shalom Multifaith Alliance urged the Congress to formally recognise rising anti-Hindu hate through a resolution.

# Zardari assures Xi of closer ties

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's newly-elected President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday promised his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping that he would work closely with him to deepen the all-weather strategic partnership with Beijing and in the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Zardari, the husband of late Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto was elected as the 14th President of Pakistan on Saturday, becoming the only civilian president of the coup-prone country for a second time. Responding to Xi's congratulatory message to him on his re-election as the President of Pakistan, Zardari said, "Our solid friendship serves as an anchor for regional peace, stability and development." He emphasised that Pakistan and China shared a unique bond forged in the crucible of history and nurtured by mutual respect, understanding, and

common views on all global issues. Zardari expressed his commitment to "working closely with the Chinese President to deepen practical cooperation, strengthen the all-weather partnership, and foster a shared community for the benefit of the two countries." "Pakistan and China were not merely neighbours, but iron-clad brothers fully committed to the success of our All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership." Zardari noted with satisfaction that Pakistan and China had made significant progress in the diverse fields of bilateral cooperation, particularly in developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He said President Xi's support would remain instrumental in achieving the CPEC's continued development and meeting the two peoples' shared objectives of progress and prosperity. In his message to Zardari on Sunday, soon after his re-election, Xi said "China and

Pakistan are good neighbours, good friends, good partners and good brothers, adding that the two countries' iron-clad friendship is a choice of history and a precious treasure of the two peoples." President Xi said that "the two countries have in recent years maintained close high-level exchanges, supported each other on issues concerning their respective core interests and major concerns, achieved fruitful results in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and maintained a high level of development of bilateral relations." The USD 60 billion CPEC is a 3,000-km Chinese infrastructure network project under construction in Pakistan. It connects strategic Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, giving Beijing an opening to the Arabian Sea. India is opposed to the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

## Arrest warrants of Nawaz Sharif's sons cancelled

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a major relief to ex-Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif's family, an anti-corruption court on Thursday cancelled the permanent arrest warrants against his two sons, who recently returned from the UK after a seven-year self-imposed exile. Hassan Nawaz and Hussain Nawaz left the country in 2018 after they were named in the 2016 Panama Papers scandal. They faced charges in cases related to the Panama Papers but never appeared before the courts, which declared them absconders. The brothers returned to Pakistan on Tuesday after an Islamabad anti-corruption court suspended the perpetual arrest warrants against the two until Thursday, clearing the last hurdle for their safe return to the country.

# PPP wins four of the six seats in Senate bypoll

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) got the lion's share in the Senate by-elections on Thursday by winning four of the six seats in the polls held to fill the vacant seats in the upper house of Parliament. The polling for the six Senate seats in the National Assembly, Sindh and Balochistan provincial assemblies began at 9 am and ended at 4 pm. The seats had fallen vacant when the senators were elected as members of National or provincial assemblies in the general elections held on February 8. Article 223 of the Constitution bars dual membership. The National Assembly lawmakers voted to elect one senator while the members of Balochistan and Sindh elected three and two senators respectively. Former prime minister Yusuf

Raza Gilani, who was a joint candidate of the newly-formed eight-party ruling coalition, won in the National Assembly, polling 204 of the 301 votes cast, while his rival Sunni Ittehad Council's Ilyas Mehrban got only 88 votes. Nine votes were rejected during the vote count. Gilani is expected to become the Senate Chairman of the ruling coalition.

The PPP also won two seats from Sindh for which polling was held in the Sindh Assembly. Jam Saifullah Khan Dharejo and Muhammad Aslam Abro were elected by obtaining 58 and 57 votes respectively. Nazeerullah and Shazia Sohail of the Sunni Ittehad Council got four votes each. One vote was rejected.

The total strength of the Senate is 100, including 23 members each from the four federating units, and four each from the erstwhile tribal region and Islamabad.

# Israel says it plans to direct Palestinians out of Rafah

AP ■ TEL AVIV

The Israeli military said on Wednesday it plans to direct a significant portion of the 1.4 million displaced Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip's southernmost town of Rafah toward "humanitarian islands" in the centre of the territory ahead of its planned offensive in the area. The fate of the people in Rafah has been a major area of concern of Israel's allies — including the United States — and humanitarian groups, worried an offensive in the region densely crowded with so many displaced people would be a catastrophe. Rafah is also Gaza's main entry point for desperately needed aid. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said a Rafah offensive is crucial to achieve Israel's stated aim of destroying Hamas following the militants' October 7 attack in which about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and around 250 taken hostage and brought into Gaza. Israel's invasion of Gaza has killed more than 31,000, according to Gaza health officials, left much of the enclave in ruins and displaced some 80 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people. Israel's chief military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said moving those in



Rafah to the designated areas, which he said would be done in coordination with international actors, was a key part of the military's preparations for its anticipated invasion of Rafah, where Israel says Hamas maintains four battalions it wants to destroy. Rafah has swelled in size in the last months as Palestinians in Gaza have fled fighting in nearly every other corner of the territory. The town is covered in tents. "We need to make sure that 1.4 million people or at least a significant amount of the 1.4 million will move. Where? To humanitarian islands that we will create with the international community," Hagari told reporters at a briefing. Hagari said those islands would provide temporary housing, food, water and other necessities

to evacuated Palestinians. He did not say when Rafah's evacuation would occur, nor when the Rafah offensive would begin, saying that Israel wanted the timing to be right operationally and to be coordinated with neighbouring Egypt, which has said it does not want an influx of displaced Palestinians crossing its border. The US has been firm with Israel over its concerns about Rafah, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that Washington had yet to receive from Israel its plans for civilians there. "We need to see a plan that will get civilians out of harm's way if there's a military operation in Rafah," he told reporters in Washington after convening a virtual ministerial meeting on Gaza aid with officials from the UN, the EU, Britain. Cyprus,

Qatar and the UAE. "We've not yet seen such a plan." At the start of the war, Israel directed evacuees to a slice of undeveloped land along Gaza's Mediterranean coast that it designated as a safe zone. But aid groups said there were no real plans in place to receive large numbers of displaced there. Israeli strikes also targeted the area. More than 31,270 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and most of its 2.3 million people forced from their homes, Gaza's Health Ministry says. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. Israel blames the civilian death toll on Hamas because the militants fight in dense, residential areas. The military has said it has killed 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence. Meanwhile, fighting continued across Gaza. An Israeli strike on Wednesday hit a food distribution site in southern Gaza run by UNRWA, the UN agency that works with Palestinian refugees, killing one staff member from the agency and wounding 22 others. The death brings to 165 the number of workers for the agency killed during the past five months of fighting, according to UNRWA.

# UK tightens definition of extremism to counter right-wing, Islamist extremists

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government on Thursday issued a new "more precise" definition of extremism in response to increased threats since the October 2023 Hamas terror attacks in Israel and to protect liberal democratic principles against extreme right-wing and Islamist extremists. Extremism in the UK is now defined as the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to: negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in the first two categories. The previous definition, introduced in 2011 under the government's Prevent strategy, defined extremism as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and belief". UK Levelling Up and Communities Secretary Michael Gove said the update was needed to safeguard the UK as a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy

"success story", which is stronger because of its diversity. "But our democracy and our values of inclusivity and tolerance are under challenge from extremists. In order to protect our democratic values, it is important both to reinforce what we have in common and to be clear and precise in identifying the dangers posed by extremism," said Gove. "The pervasiveness of extremist ideologies has become increasingly clear in the aftermath of the 7 October (2023) attacks and poses a real risk to the security of our citizens and our democracy. This is the work of extreme right-wing and Islamist extremists who are seeking to separate Muslims from the rest of society and create division within Muslim communities," he said. "They seek to radicalise individuals, deny people their full rights, suppress freedom of expression, incite hatred, and undermine our democratic institutions," he added. The minister said the new measures will ensure that the government does not inadvertently provide a platform to those setting out to subvert democracy and deny other people's fundamental rights. He also indicated it marks the first in a series of measures to tackle extremism and protect British democracy.

The new definition is not statutory, does not create new powers and has no effect on the existing criminal law of the country, but instead applies to the operations of the government itself. It will be used by ministerial departments and officials alongside a set of engagement principles to ensure they are not "inadvertently" funding or legitimising groups or individuals who attempt to advance extremist ideologies. Since the October 2023 Hamas terror attacks in Israel, the government said concerns have been raised about the "wide-ranging risk of radicalisation". The Community Security Trust recorded 4,103 antisemitic incidents in the UK since the attacks in 2023, an increase of 147 per cent compared to 2022, and Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) recorded a 335 per cent increase in anti-Muslim hate cases in the last four months. As indicated by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in Parliament on Wednesday, the aim is to ensure the government has the tools it needs to effectively counter extremism. A new counter-extremism centre of excellence has been established in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to provide leadership for the cross-government counter-extremism community, ensure

consistent application of the definition and engagement standards, and take the lead on producing strategic assessments of extremism. The government said the new unit will draw on the expertise of the Commission for Countering Extremism as well as counter extremism policy fellows to ensure the "very best academic insight" in shaping the anti-extremism approach. The new definition, which draws on independent reviews, clarifies extremism involves advancing or promoting an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, a high bar that only captures the most concerning of activities. It is not about silencing those with private and peaceful beliefs and will it affect free speech, which will always be protected, the government reiterated. "The threat to Britain from extremists includes those who may not use violence directly yet target our core values, so it is welcome that this updated definition includes those who seek to undermine or replace liberal democracy. Greater clarity in defining extremism can underpin a concerted approach across civil society to protect our country," said Lord John Walney, UK's Independent Adviser on Political Violence and Disruption.

# Indian tourists shun Maldives; industry feels the pinch: Reports

PTI ■ MALE

Indian tourists, who used to flock to the Maldives, are now shunning the island nation and its tourism industry is already feeling the pinch of declined revenue, prompting calls for mending the fence with New Delhi. India has slipped to sixth position in 2024 compared to being a topper in visitor numbers in 2023, prompting voices from the local tourism industry to flag the danger for the tourism-dependent economy of the archipelagic country in the Indian Ocean.

A full-blown backlash was directed at the Maldives following derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media by three Maldivian officials after Modi posted photos and video of the pristine Lakshadweep Islands on India's west coast on January 6 on his X handle. According to the Maldives Tourism Ministry statistics, over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, out of which more than 2,09,198 visitors were Indians followed by Russians (2,09,146) and China (1,87,118). The number of Indian visitors

was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 while over 2.11 lakh Indians flew to the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited that country during that period. India occupied the sixth spot in tourist arrivals in 2024, the Ministry's statistics showed, compared to the consistent first spot since 2020 with Indian tourists visiting the island nation even during the pandemic time. Till about 10 days ago, the Ministry data showed that

tourist arrivals from India as of March 2 was 27,224, which is a 33 per cent decline compared to last year when the corresponding number stood at 41,224. The local tourism industry is worried about the development and already flagged caution. Explaining how India plays a vital role in sustaining tourism-related receipts to the state during off-peak season, a news portal Sun.mv said: "Indian travellers have a counter-travel pattern to European travellers; meaning Indian visitors frequent to the Maldives during hot seasons, which coincides with a

drop in European market arrivals. In other words, India is the most significant 'filler' for the Maldives tourism off-peak season." It further reported on Tuesday, how, tourism industry experts and analysts have highlighted the adverse impacts of dwindling Indian arrivals to the Maldives, while some have forecast estimated losses north of USD 1.8 billion to USD 2 billion. "Travel agencies and operators relying on Indian arrivals report a revenue decline of 80 per cent — a dangerous prospect," the report said.

Quoting an official from 'Let's Go Maldives', a prominent travel agency, the portal said, the Indian traveller market consists of multiple demographics and segments from affluent to budget travellers and India is a large summer market. "Without India, the occupancy rate is impacted negatively. This makes it a crucial market for us," the official added. It is not just the Indian passport holders that have boycotted the Maldives but "the arrival of affluent and wealthy Indian-origin travellers from other nations as well has declined, which too

indicated the contribution of the Indian market in Maldives tourism, the news report said quoting a prominent travel agency, Travel Connection Maldives' CEO Mohamed Mirshad. Authorities are hoping that the resumption of direct flights between Hanimaadhoo International Airport in Maldives and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala state of India would bring back some more visitors from India. "This is the most opportune moment for the island nation to mend fences with its ally. It is

also logical that the smaller countries are in need of security and safety ensured by their larger allies. Any conduct to the contrary would not result fortuitously for the Maldives, as evident with the current tourism industry statistics and revenues," Sun.mv said. "Arrogance will not benefit us, it would damage the sensitive economy of the country even further. True wisdom lies in accepting one's own weaknesses and strengths, and the reality that we live in to avoid any future brunt," it added.



# Seven more Nepalese citizens serving Russian Army killed

Total number of deaths 19, says Nepal's foreign ministry

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Seven more Nepalese citizens serving the Russian Army in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war have died in the last week, taking the total number of deaths to 19, the foreign ministry said on Thursday. Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs latest update on the toll came two days after Deputy Prime Minister Kaji Shrestha asked Russia to share a list of Nepalese citizens serving the Russian Army in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war but stressed that complications remained in bringing them back from the war zone. He also met the Russian Ambassador to Nepal Aleksei

Novikov on Tuesday over the matter when the latter called on him. In a statement issued on Thursday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the deaths of seven more Nepali nationals who were fighting from the Russian side in the Russia-Ukraine war. "With the deaths of 7 more Nepalese citizens with the Russian Army, the total number of such cases have touched 19," said the statement. The ministry said that the deaths of Nepali nationals in the Russian Army come even as the Nepal government has banned the recruitment of Nepali nationals in foreign armies except for those coun-

tries with whom Nepal has signed a traditional agreement. The ministry has extended heartfelt condolences to the families of those killed in Ukraine. The ministry said it has once again requested the Russian government to provide compensation to the kin of deceased soldiers, to provide treatment to those injured in the war and to repatriate those recruited illegally into the Russian Army. Nepal government has placed top priority on the works relating to repatriating those Nepalese nationals who have been recruited into the Russian Army, the ministry said. Hundreds of Nepali citizens are

reported fighting for the Russians against Ukraine. A small number of Nepali citizens are serving in the Ukrainian Army too, but both conflicting nations have not shared the details with the government of Nepal. On March 7, Shrestha held a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and raised the concerns of the Nepali side. Shrestha also reportedly said that he wants to visit Russia and take stock of the condition of the Nepali nationals in Russia. He said he is keen to know how Nepali nationals were duped and brought to Russia and talk to Russian officials to resolve the issue.

# Report claims Yemen's Houthis have a hypersonic missile

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim to have a new, hypersonic missile in their arsenal, Russia's state media reported on Thursday, potentially raising the stakes in their ongoing attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways against the backdrop of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The report by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency cited an unnamed official but provided no evidence for the claim. It comes as Moscow maintains an aggressively counter-Western foreign policy amid its grinding war on Ukraine. However, the Houthis have for weeks hinted about "surprises" they plan for the battles at sea to counter the United States and its allies, which have so far been able to down any missile or bomb-carrying drone that comes near their warships in Mideast waters. The Houthis' main benefactor, Iran, claims to have a hypersonic missile and has widely armed the rebels with the missiles they now use. Adding a hypersonic missile to their arsenal could pose a more-for-



midable challenge to the air defense systems employed by America and its allies, including Israel. "The group's missile forces have successfully tested a missile that is capable of reaching speeds of up to Mach 8 and runs on solid fuel," a military official close to the Houthis said, according to the RIA report. The Houthis "intend to begin manufacturing it for use during attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as against targets in Israel." Mach 8 is eight times the speed of sound. Russia has maintained close ties with Iran, relying on Iranian bomb-carrying drones to target Ukraine. Russian state media, particularly its Arabic-language services, have closely reported on Yemen's yearslong

civil war that pits the Iran-backed Houthis against forces of the internationally backed Yemeni government, supported by a Saudi-led coalition. Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds higher than Mach 5, could pose crucial challenges to missile defence systems because of their speed and maneuverability.

The danger from a hypersonic missile depends on how maneuverable it is. Ballistic missiles fly on a trajectory in which anti-missile systems like the US-made Patriot can anticipate their path and intercept them. The more irregular the missile's flight path, such as a hypersonic missile with the ability to change directions, the more difficult it becomes to intercept. China is believed to be pursuing the weapons, as is America. Russia claims it has already used them on the battlefield in Ukraine. However, speed and maneuverability isn't a guarantee the missile will successfully strike a target. Ukraine's air force in May said it shot down a Russian hypersonic Kinzhal missile with a Patriot battery.

# 50 migrants feared dead in Mediterranean Sea

AP ■ MILAN

Survivors rescued from a deflating rubber dinghy in the central Mediterranean Sea have reported that some 50 people who departed Libya with them a week ago perished during the journey, the humanitarian rescue group SOS Mediterranee said Thursday. The European charity's ship Ocean Viking spotted the dinghy with 25 people on board Wednesday. Two were unconscious, and were evacuated by the Italian military for treatment. The other 23 were in serious condition, exhausted, dehydrated

and with burns from fuel on board the boat. SOS Mediterranee spokesman Francesco Creazzo said that the survivors were all male, 12 of them minors with two of those not yet teenagers. They were from Senegal, Mali and The Gambia. Creazzo said the survivors were traumatised and unable to give full accounts of what had transpired during the voyage. Humanitarian organisations often rely on accounts of survivors when pulling together the numbers of dead and missing at sea, presumed to have died. The UN International

Organisation for Migration says 227 people have died along the perilous central Mediterranean route this year through March 11, not counting the new reported missing and presumed dead. That's out of a total 279 deaths in the Mediterranean since January 1. A total of 19,562 people arrived in Italy using that route in the period. The survivors said the boat departed Zawiya, Libya with 75 people on board, including some women and at least one small child. The motor broke sometime after departure, and they had been adrift.

# Denying same-sex marriage is unconstitutional: Japanese HC

AP ■ TOKYO

A Japanese high court ruled Thursday that denying same-sex marriage is unconstitutional and called for urgent government action to address the lack of any law allowing for such unions. The court does not have the power to overturn the current marriage law, which has been interpreted to restrict marriage as between a man and a woman. Government offices

may continue to deny marriage status to same-sex couples unless the existing law is revised to include LGBTQ+ couples, or a new law is enacted that allows for other types of unions. The Sapporo High Court ruling said that not allowing same-sex couples to marry and enjoy the same benefits as straight couples violates their fundamental right to have a family. A lower court issued a similar ruling earlier Thursday, becom-

ing the sixth district court to do so. But the Tokyo District Court ruling was only a partial victory for Japan's LGBTQ+ community calling for equal marriage rights, as it doesn't change or overturn the current civil union law that describes marriage as between a man and a woman. Five previous court decisions in various districts said Japan's policy of denying same-sex marriage is either unconstitutional or nearly so.

# Rare protest by Chinese official media against police crackdown

PTI ■ BEIJING

In a rare show of defiance, Chinese media on Thursday protested against the attempts by police to block the coverage of a suspected gas leak explosion at an eatery in the country's north, which killed seven people and injured 27 others.

The blast that rocked a fried chicken shop in Yanjiao township in the city of Sanhe, near Beijing, on Wednesday is suspected to have been caused by a gas leak. As Chinese official media and foreign journalists rushed to cover the explosion, which killed two people and injured 27 others, they were forcibly prevented by local authorities from the scene, raising a rare controversy over the country's press restrictions.

A journalist with state broadcaster CCTV was interrupted while reporting live from the scene of the blast. The journalist was seen surrounded by several uniformed police officers who blocked the camera and shouted about the potential danger at the scene, according to a video that circulated online.

The video of the report was no longer available on CCTV's website as of Thursday, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post newspaper reported.

In another video, reporters were seen surrounded by a group of uniformed police officers asking them to leave the scene.

A reporter with state-run China Media Group — of which CCTV is a division — was heard saying, "We three reporters are shoved by a dozen people".

The state-run All China Journalists Association objected to the official crackdown, saying that officials should not "simply and brutally obstruct journalists in the normal performance of their duties for the sake of controlling public opinion". The association urged officials to make it easier for media to conduct on-site

interviews when reporting emergencies.

The police crackdown against media was seen as an attempt by the local officials to downplay the coverage, fearing reprisals as last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered steps to curb occurrences of recurring incidents of burning fires due to various causes and protect people's lives and property and social stability. As the videos of media protests went viral on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, akin to X, local authorities on Thursday issued a statement saying they were "deeply remorseful" and apologised to the journalists, the Post report said. The media protest against the official crackdown also figured in the Chinese foreign ministry briefing, as many foreign journalists were reportedly prevented from covering the evening.

When questioned on restrictions imposed on journalists, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said local officials have issued a statement on the incident. China welcomes foreign journalists conducting reporting activities under the law and is willing to facilitate if the media faces any problems, Wang said. Fire and gas explosions have been taking place almost every month, prompting President Xi to order the concerned agencies to take pre-emptive measures.

Fifteen people were killed and 44 others injured in a building fire in Nanning city in China last month, while 39 were killed and nine others injured in a building fire that broke out in Xinyu city in east China's Jiangxi Province on January 24.

Fatal fires in China are not uncommon due to lax enforcement of building and safety standards.

# Denmark plans to expand military draft to women

AP ■ COPENHAGEN (DENMARK)

Denmark wants to increase the number of young people doing military service by extending conscription to women and increasing the time of service from 4 months to 11 months for both genders, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Wednesday. "We do not rearm because we want war. We are rearming because we want to avoid it," Frederiksen told a press conference. She said the government wants "full equality between the sexes". Denmark currently has up to 9,000 professional troops on top of the 4,700 conscripts undergoing basic training, according to official figures. The government wants to increase the number of conscripts by 300 to reach a total of 5,000.

The country is a member of the NATO alliance and a staunch supporter of Ukraine in its war against Russia's invasion. Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen stressed that "Russia does not pose a threat

to Denmark". "But we will not bring ourselves to a place where they could come to do that," Lokke Rasmussen said. All physically fit men over the age of 18 are called up for military service, which lasts roughly four months. However, because there are enough volunteers, there is a lottery system, meaning not all young men serve. In 2023, there were 4,717 conscripts in Denmark. Women who volunteered for military service accounted for 25.1 per cent of the cohort, according to official figures. Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said the new system would require a change in the law, which he said will happen in 2025 and take effect in 2026. The security policy situation in Europe "has become more and more serious, and we have to take that into account when we look at future defence", Lund Poulsen said. "A broader basis for recruiting that includes all genders is needed," he said, adding it will create "a more versatile and more complete defence".

# Four, including three Indians, arrested trying to enter US illegally from Canada

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Three Indian nationals are among four people arrested in Upstate New York after they jumped off a moving freight train coming from Canada in their bid to enter the US illegally. US Border Patrol agents arrested the four, including a woman, on March 12. The investigation concluded that all four people were undocumented non-citizens. Border Patrol

agents assigned to the Buffalo Station spotted four people jumping off a moving freight train on the International Railroad Bridge in the city of Buffalo. The men left the woman who became immobile due to an injury and were caught shortly after a foot pursuit. The injured woman received first aid from Erie County Sheriff's deputies and U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers (CBP). After treatment, the woman was trans-

ported by ambulance to a local medical centre. Border Patrol agents were able to identify that the woman and two men were from India and the third man was from the Dominican Republic. The three men are being processed for removal and detained in Batavia Federal Detention Facility awaiting a deportation hearing for charges under Sections 212 and 237 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, a media release said.

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76155/12/2834/2023/33639 Dated CHD :- 3/13/2024C-234/24

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REGISTRAR

RO 25885 Dated 14-03-2024

# NKorea's Kim test drives new tank, orders troops to prepare for war

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un joined troops training on a new tank model and drove one himself, state media reported on Thursday, as his rivals South Korea and the US wrapped up their annual military exercises. It's the third time Kim was reported to have observed military exercises since the start of the 11-day South Korean-US drills, which he views as rehearsals for an invasion. That's a less provocative option than missile tests. North Korea has intensified launches since 2022 and ramped up belligerent rhetoric this year. At the tank drills Wednesday, Kim praised the country's latest tank as "the world's most powerful" and told his troops to bolster their "fighting spirits" and complete "preparations for war", according to the official Korean Central News

Agency. The other two drills he inspected recently were dedicated to artillery firing and maneuvering exercises. The tank was first unveiled during a military parade in 2020, and its rolling during Wednesday's drill indicates that it's ready to be deployed, South Korean experts say. Photos of the tank released by North Korea shows it has a launch tube for missiles, a weapons systems the former Soviet Union already operated in the 1970s. The new tank could pose a threat to South Korea, said Yang Uk, an analyst at Asan Institute for Policy Studies, but it remains to be seen whether it can be mass produced. The North's Defense Ministry last week threatened "responsible military activities" in reaction to the South Korea-US military drills, which involved a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the num-

ber conducted last spring. The US and South Korea have been expanding their training exercises in a tit-for-tat response to the North's weapons testing spree. Concerns about North Korea's military preparations have deepened since Kim vowed in a speech in January to rewrite the constitution to eliminate the country's long-standing goal to seek peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula and cement South Korea as its "invariable principal enemy". He said the new constitution must specify North Korea would annex and subjugate the South if another war breaks out. Kim's moves signal "North Korea's fundamental change on its South Korea policy, beyond just rhetoric," as the North's previous push for inter-Korean unity had allowed it to make a steadfast call for the removal of US troops in South Korea, a senior South Korean presidential official said.

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# Hitaashee keeps 10 shot lead at Hero WPGT

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Hitaashee Bakshi managed to hang onto a 10-shot lead despite carding a three-over 75 in the third round of the sixth leg of Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Thursday. Playing at the Gary Player layout, Hitaashee after 64-66 couldn't produce the kind of birdie fests she had conjured up on the first two days. But at 11-under 205, she was still 10 shots clear of the field in the Rs. 25 lakh event. Gaurika Bishnoi (70) had the best and the only under par round of the breezy third day and at 1-under 215 was tied second alongside former Order of Merit winner, Vani Kapoor (75) at the DLF Golf & Country Club. Last week's winner, Amandeep Drall (76) was fourth, while Queen Sirikit bound amateur Vidhatri Urs (73), also the winner of the opening leg this season, was tied fifth with amateur teammate Zara Anand (74). Jasmine Shekar (73), Riya Yadav (79), Khushi Khanijau (78) and amateur Janneya Dasannjee (77) were occupying the seventh to tenth spots. Hitaashee, who was in unstoppable form last two days, began with three pars and then a double bogey on



Par-5 fourth. She made up one shot on the next hole, the Par-3 fifth, but after two more pars, she dropped back-to-back bogeys on the eighth and ninth. On the back nine, a bogey on 13th was compensated by a birdie on 18th for a round of 75, yet she holds a massive lead going into the final day. Bishnoi had an up-and-down round with five birdies but also gave away three bogeys for a 70, the best card of the day. She shared the second place with Vani, whose 75 did not have any birdies. She double bogeyed the Par-4 sixth and bogeyed the seventh. Amandeep had three bogeys on the front nine and her solitary gain of the day came on the Par-4 13th, but she also closed with double bogey on the Par-5 18th for a 76. Vidhatri and Zara, who will be part of the Indian Golf Union's team at the Queen Sirikit Cup next week in New Zealand, shot 73 and 74 respectively. Vidhatri had two birdies against three bogeys, while Zara had two birdies and a bogey on the front nine and a birdie on the 10th at which point she was 2-under for the day. She then dropped shots on the next four holes from the 11th to 14th for a 74.



## Malik stays in fourth place in Cape Town

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

India's Tvesa Malik carded a three-under 71 to stay in tied fourth place after the second round of the Standard Bank Ladies Open here. Tvesa, who shot 1-under 73 on the first day at the Par-74 course, was four-under for two rounds with one more day to go. A multiple winner on her domestic Pro Golf Tour in India and a winner in South Africa last month, Tvesa is four shots behind the first round leader Kylie Henry of Scotland. After a first round 69, Kylie added a 71 to be 8-under 140. Tvesa made good use of the Par-5s, as three of her six birdies came on them. Tvesa opened the second day with a bogey, but hit back fast with three birdies between the third and the sixth and added three pars to turn in 2-under. On the back nine, Tvesa birdied the Par-5s on the 11th and the 14th to get closer to the top before she was pulled back by bogeys on the 15th and the 17th. A closing birdie was a good way to end the day as she aims for another good finish in South Africa. South African duo Cassandra Alexander (74-69) and Gabrielle Venter (74-69) shot identical scores for the second day running and moved into shared second place at 5-under 143. Tvesa, French golfer Emie Peronnin (73-71) and England's Florentyna Parker (73-71) were tied fourth at 4-under 144. The top 30 and ties make the cut, which was projected at 3-over 149. The field this week includes all three winners on the Sunshine Ladies Tour this year with Kylie Henry, Tvesa Malik and Helen Kreuzer. They have been joined by Kiera Floyd, Gabrielle Venter, Nicole Garcia, Cara Gorlei, Tandi McCallum, Nadia van der Westhuizen and Stacy Bregman. The 54-hole tournament carried a purse of 600,000 and is the fourth event of the schedule for this year. The tournament will also play a key role in determining the overall Sunshine Ladies Tour Order of Merit champion, with the winner here earning an historic exemption in the Sunshine Tour's new Waterfall City Tournament of Champions to be played in May. All winners from the 2024 Sunshine Ladies Tour will also be exempt into the event.



## Højgaard, Paul confirm participation at Hero Indian Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Denmark's Rasmus Højgaard and Yannik Paul of Germany have confirmed their participation for the Indian Open golf tournament beginning March 28. Rasmus, who turns 23 on Tuesday, will be seeking more silverware to his already growing collection when he tees off at the USD 2.25 million event. He already has four wins on the DP World Tour to his name. Rasmus will be making his debut at the tournament, which will be played at the DLF Golf and Country Club, and will hope to mark his birthday month with a fifth career win on the DP World Tour. Currently 75th in the world rankings, the Dane will be one of the highest-ranked players in the field, his career-best rank being 63rd. He is coming off a glorious start to 2024 with Top-10s in three successive starts in Ras Al Khaimah, where he was second, and then T-8 in Bahrain and T-6 in Qatar. Before that, he was an identical T-11 at the Hero Dubai Desert Classic and the Dubai Invitational. His first win at the 2019 AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open (part 2020 season) made him the third youngest to win a title in the DPWT and he added to that by winning the 2020 ISPS Handa UK Championship, 2021 Omega European Masters and the 2023 Made in Himmerland. A win at the Hero Indian

Open would bring Rasmus closer to getting into the Top-10 of the DP World Tour rankings for 2024, which could earn him a card into the PGA Tour and join his brother Nicolai. Incidentally, his twin brother Nicolai played last year here and finished T-32. Another popular name confirming his entry will be Paul, who turned 30 last week. The one-time DP World Tour, Paul, who made his Indian Open debut last year, came within a whisker of his second win on the Tour, after starting with a brilliant 65 on the first day. Even though Paul was unable to add to his tally of wins in 2023, he had a superb season with two runner-up finishes, one third place and four other Top-10 results. Paul, who broke through into Top-100 of the world, is now just outside at 112th. All top Indian stars, led by the 2015 winner, Anirban Lahiri, will be seen in action at the 4-day 72-hole event. The tournament, now in its 57th edition, will carry a record prize purse of USD 2.25 million and will be a part of the Asian Swing bringing added benefits for the Swing Champion. It will be the second of five events comprising the Asian Swing as part of the new-look 2024 Race to Dubai. The tournament will see 144 players compete for the trophy. The winner will receive a handsome USD 382,500, the runner-up picking up USD 247,500 and the third-place finisher pocketing USD 141,750.

## Switzerland calls up Sierro, Kutesa

AP ■ BERN (SWITZERLAND)

Switzerland rewarded midfielder Vincent Sierro and winger Derek Kutesa for standout seasons with their first squad calls on Thursday. The Swiss have European Championship warm-up games at Denmark and Ireland this month. Sierro is having a career year at age 28 captaining Toulouse in the French league, and the 26-year-old Kutesa has starred for Servette, his hometown team in Geneva, which is chasing a first Swiss league title for 25 years. National coach Murat Yakin also recalled defenders Silvan Widmer of Mainz, Kevin Mbabu of Augsburg and Becir Omeragic of Montpellier. Yakin acknowledged on Thursday that team spirit was part of his thoughts for a



fresh look to the squad. The former national team defender was retained for Euro 2024 in Germany after widespread reports of tensions with senior players during the qualifying games.

Captain Grant Xhaka is set to extend his national team record 121 appearances when Switzerland travels to play Denmark on March 23 and Ireland three days later. Xhaka's move in the offseason to Bayer Leverkusen after seven years at Arsenal has coincided with the German club going on a record unbeaten run and closing on a first-ever Bundesliga title. Three Bologna players - Remo Freuler, Dan Ndoye and Michael Aebischer - were selected in a standout season for the Italian club which is fourth in Serie A and set for the first qualification in 60 years for the European Cup or Champions League. At Euro 2024, Switzerland has been drawn in Group A to play Hungary on June 15, Scotland on June 19 and host Germany on June 23.

## Lille midfielder Bouaddi looks to follow in Hazard footsteps

PTI ■ PARIS

When Eden Hazard visited his former club Lille during a French league game last weekend, it was a timely reminder of what the northern club did so well in the past. Turning young players into future stars. Next in line could be Ayyoub Bouaddi, a 16-year-old midfielder who has caught the eye and is being touted as Lille's best prospect since Hazard. Hazard joined Lille's academy as a youth, made his league debut two months before his 17th birthday, then helped the club win the French league and cup double in 2011. A high-profile move to Chelsea turned him into a global star. Hazard won the English Premier League and the Europa League twice during a spell where the Belgium

midfielder was voted player of the year by his peers. At his peak, the attacking midfielder with lightning-quick feet and match-winning ability was among the world's best players. So last Sunday, Lille inaugurated a new playing field at its vast Domaine de Luchin training complex, and named it "Eden Hazard" in his honor. It's where Bouaddi hopes to tread his way to the top. Bouaddi joined Lille's academy three years ago and, just three days after his 16th birthday, became the youngest player to appear in a European game in a Europa Conference League match last October against KI Klaksvik. Lining up with him that day for Lille was 18-year-old Amine Messoussa in attack, underlining the faith coach Paulo Fonseca has in young players.

## Sharath continues giant killing spree

BEATS WORLD NO 22 TO MOVE TO SINGAPORE SMASH QUARTERFINALS

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Veteran Indian table tennis player Sharath Kamal continued his giant killing run in the Singapore Smash by defeating world number 22 Omar Assar of Egypt to enter the quarterfinals here on Thursday. A day after he upset world number 13 Darko Jorgic of Slovenia, Sharath recorded a comfortable 11-4, 11-8, 12-10 win over Assar in the round of 16 of the USD 1.5 million event. World number 88 Sharath, who reached the main draw after winning the qualifiers, had it easy against the Egyptian in the first two rounds, but Assar put up a good resistance in the third round. Sharath made a few mistakes midway, and his opponent cashed in to deuce. However, the Indian paddler grabbed the opportunity to win the last two crucial points and advance to another upset.



In the quarterfinals, the 10-time national champion will face Felix Lebrun of France for a place in the medal rounds. "I would say that it was all because of the way we had prepared for the World Championships in Korea (Busan). Secondly, the confidence we have gained after the teams qualified for the Paris Olympics," Sharath said. Sharath had made early first-

round exits in the opening two editions of the tournament. "Honestly, I didn't expect it to go so far in the (Singapore) Smash event because it has not happened before. I had to go through the qualification rounds, and to do what I did was excellent. I am immensely happy about it, especially my fitness part and focus," he added. The trailblazing Indian player had come from behind to

shock Jorgic 8-11 11-6 11-8 11-9 in the round of 32. In the first round of the main draw, the Chennai-based player had blanked World No. 31 Chilean Nicolas Burgos 3-0 (11-5, 11-4, 11-6). **SHARATH'S OLYMPIC CHANCES SWELL:** The stellar run will boost Sharath's chance of sealing a berth in the singles event of the Paris Olympics with his rankings set to drastically improve. India can send only two entries in the singles event and Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) will take the final call considering the individual rankings. Currently, Harmeet Desai (64) and Manav Thakkar (83) are the top two Indians in the men's section. Sharath is likely to overtake them when the rankings are updated next week. The Indian men's and women's teams have already scripted history by qualifying for the Olympic for the first time.

## Sindhu goes down to An Se Young

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

An error-prone PV Sindhu suffered a straight-game defeat to her nemesis An Se Young of Korea in the women's singles second round at the All England badminton Championships here on Thursday. Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, seemed to be in good touch as she fought hard against the world No. 1 Korean but failed to curb her mistakes as she slipped to a 19-21, 11-21 loss in their 42-minute clash. It was the Indian's seventh successive loss to the indomitable An Se Young, who had become the first Korean woman singles player to win the World Championships last year. The Korean won in Malaysia and France this season, while Sindhu is on a comeback trail after recovering from a left knee injury. The Indian tried to attack but her 22-year-old opponent looked in a different league as she varied the pace of the rallies and used her repertoire of strokes well to come up

trumps. For Sindhu, things went downhill after the break in the second game as errors kept piling up. Sindhu was up 4-1 but An Se Young started reading the game better and slowed down the rallies. She kept sending the tosses and clears, waiting for errors from Sindhu, who invariably sent the shuttle wide and long. Soon the Korean was 9-6 up. She committed two unforced errors before charging to the net to put one away and when Sindhu faltered at the net it was 11-8 in favour of Young. Sindhu kept the attack, producing a backhand push and a cross smash. The Korean, however, stayed solid in her defence to move to 13-10 and then 15-11 with another precise smash. Sindhu tried to charge to the net and target her rival's body but Young's instinct helped her to survive twice as she sent the shuttle away. From 13-17, Sindhu fought back to



16-17. But Young again pulled away with two points before grabbing four game points with a forehand drop. Sindhu pounced one at net and then

produced a tight smash on her rival's forehand to stay alive. The Korean then slipped during a rally as Sindhu made it 19-20.

However, just in time, An Se Young sent a backhand sailing over Sindhu's head to the backline to seal the opening game. The second game started on a tight note before An Se Young opened up a three-point lead. While Sindhu struggled to get winners, Young kept varying the pace and sending everything back. Another cross court smash took the Korean to 9-4. She grabbed a five-point lead at the interval with another incredible cross court net shot. Frustration was piling for Sindhu as she wasted a video referral after going long by a big margin and dumped into net twice next as the Korean led 15-9. Another backhand and a forehand return went to net as it became 10-18. Two more unforced errors from the Indian helped An Se Young grab nine match points. She sealed the match with another lovely return at the front court.













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# Mumbai clinch Ranji Trophy for 42nd time

## BEAT VIDARBHA BY 169 RUNS IN FINAL

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Domestic heavyweights Mumbai ended their eight-year barren run to lift a record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title here on Thursday, beating a resolute Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of a thoroughly engrossing summit clash.

The fate of the final — Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history — here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win.

The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.

Wadkar led the fight for his side with his first century of the year which also helped him cross the 600-run mark this season. Dubey brought up only the second fifty of his first-class career.

Together, they forged the longest stand of the innings,

consuming 255 balls in 194 minutes from day four until a little after the resumption of the second session on the final day.

Wadkar fell shortly after play

resumed — leg before off Tanush Kotian (4/95) — and once the pair was broken, it all ended in a jiffy for the visitors who have now lost the Ranji Trophy final for a third time

after winning two titles. Tushar Deshpande continued to employ the short ball to dismiss Dubey (65 off 128 balls, 5 x4s, 2x6s) and Aditya Sarwate, who missed the

majority of the game owing to a back spasm. While Kotian cleaned up Yash Thakur (6) for his fourth wicket, Dhawal Kulkarni signed off from all forms of

cricket with the final wicket of the game in the form of Umesh Yadav for a fairytale ending. Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane praised Vidarbha for

their gritty display before lifting the trophy and rightly so.

For a team which paid a heavy price for a poor first-innings score — 105 to concede a 119-run lead in response to Mumbai's 224 — Vidarbha showed resilience to gave a fine account of themselves in the second innings.

Mumbai began the final day hoping to break the sixth-wicket stand between Wadkar and Dubey early but their wait only extended since the batters overcame all challenges that the hosts threw at them.

With the pace bowlers not being able to trouble the batters, Mumbai hopes were pinned on their spinners but their own error cost Rahane's side early on.

Kotian appealed for a bat-pad catch at silly point against Dubey in the 101st over of the innings but the appeal was turned down.

In a show of desperation, Mumbai went for the DRS intervention which confirmed the ball had not grazed the bat and was also going to miss the leg stump.

Kotian then found an outside edge off Wadkar's bat which fell close to Rahane.

Mumbai's frustration was evident when Kulkarni held his ground at the end of his follow through after being

declined a leg-before appeal against Dubey.

Kulkarni made some gestures and even exchanged a few words with the umpire but replays confirmed that the ball had pitched outside the leg-stump.

Dubey was also lucky when Kotian pinned him in front of the wickets but Mumbai could not get it overturned since they had no reviews left.

The Vidarbha batter continued to ride his luck, getting another decision in his favour when replays showed the ball had missed his bat and gloves off Shams Mulani.

Wadkar completed his century shortly after lunch but once he was dismissed, the rest of the batting collapsed soon after.

**Brief scores**  
**Mumbai:** 224 & 418  
**Vidarbha:** 105 & 368 in 134.4 overs (Atharva Taide 32, Aman Mokhadde 32, Karun Nair 74, Akshay Wadkar 102; Tanush Kotian 4/95) by 169 runs.

### AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Phulbani, Dist. Kandhamal on 13-3-2024, I Trinath Diga, aged about 75 years, s/o late Asina Diga, village Sanagadu, PO Rasimendi, PS Phulbani sadar, Dist. Kandhamal, Odisha, declared that I am a retired defence employee vide Army No. 13830738N/Rank SEP. In my service book my name is wrongly written as Trinath Pradhan and my cast is also wrongly written as Scheduled Tribe, sub caste Kandha. My caste is Schedule Caste, sub caste Pana. Trinath Diga and Trinath Pradhan is one and same person. My wife's name is also wrongly written as Timi Devi instead of Timi Diga. date of DOB of Timi Diga is 20-01-2054. I swear this affidavit in order to produce before the competent authority of Indian Army to record my name as Trinath Diga, my caste as Schedule Caste, sub caste Pana, and my wife's name as Timi Diga in my service book.

Sd/-  
Trinath Diga

## Pant resilience, mental strength was quite something: Medical staff that worked with

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The medical staff that nursed Rishabh Pant back to full fitness after the horrifying car crash in 2022 has raved about the resilience and mental strength shown by the cricketer, saying he persevered through a "frustrating" recovery process.

Pant is set for his cricketing return in the IPL on March 23 when he will captain Delhi Capitals against Punjab Kings in Mohali.

"I feel very close to normal," Pant told 'bcci.tv' with a radiant smile.

It seemed far fetched 15 months ago when he suffered multiple injuries in the crash. However, it has come true thanks to the expert care he got from the likes of Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, Director, Centre for Sports Medicine, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital in Mumbai, and some dedicated staff at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru.

Pardiwala remembered how arduous Pant's recovery journey was.

"As surgeons and as doctors, it's very important for us to inform our patients, their family and all the stakeholders of the actual status of the injury. Rishabh's mother was with him. She was very concerned whether he would ever be able to walk again,"

Pardiwala said.

"I told her that 'this is such a critical injury and we will definitely aim for him to get back to competitive cricket. But that's going to be a long-drawn process.'"

However, Pardiwala was left astonished when he saw Pant's confidence as he entered the recovery phase.

"When I told Rishabh 18 months, he said 'okay, I am going to show you I can do it in 12 months,'" he said.

Pant stayed true to his words as he put in the hard yards at the NCA during his recuperation.

"When I started walking without crutches, that was a high point. Then started jogging a little bit, that was a high for me, then started batting, then started keeping as I took joy in everything," said the 26-year-old.

But each of those baby steps had to be taken with utmost care because of multi-level complexities.

Pardiwala said the complex knee injury, the trauma following the accident and Pant's own frustration at being away from the cricket field had to be dealt with in an effective manner.

"For any surgeon, knee dislocation is one of the worst injuries because everything breaks. You need to get back the stability, you need to get back the shock absorption capability," he said.

## MCA DOUBLES PRIZE MONEY

### Mumbai team to receive additional ₹5 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The triumphant Mumbai team will receive an additional Rs 5 crore for its unprecedented 42nd Ranji Trophy title after the state cricket association doubled the prize purse on Thursday.

Mumbai won a record-extending 42nd Ranji title after beating Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of the summit showdown at the Wankhede Stadium.

"MCA President Amol Kale and Apex Council has decided to double the Ranji Trophy prize money. The MCA will pay additional sum of Rs 5 crore to the winning Mumbai Ranji Trophy team," a statement from MCA secretary Ajinkya Naik read.

"It has been a great year for the MCA as the association has won 7 titles and we have made it to knockout stage in all age groups in BCCI tournaments."

Mumbai ended an eight-year wait to lift a record-extending title here, getting the better of a resolute Vidarbha.

The fate of the final -- Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history -- here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Mumbai head coach Omkar Salvi, who was appointed to

the post last year, lauded MCAs move to double the prize money considering that lot of players don't have full-time jobs these days. "For all the players, nowadays, there are very less institutions which provide jobs. For youngsters, there is also a lot of lure towards franchise cricket (where) there is also a lot of money," Salvi said.

"The BCCI is taking that step and raising that money along

with that, the MCA taking that step forward to equal that amount is a great help for the players who don't have some jobs or some earnings. "It is definitely an inspiration (and) it should be intrinsic -- the monetary help will give them that security and it will definitely stabilise them mentally and financially so that they can give more to the game," he added.

On the final day, Vidarbha

captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win.

The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.



**OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, JALESWAR**  
Tel. No. 06781-686407  
E-mail: [jaleswarcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:jaleswarcouncil@gmail.com)  
Address: Near Tahsil Office, Jaleswar, 756008

Ref. No. 1431

Date 11.03.2024

C-318

E-Procurement Notice

Bid Identification No - JM\_14\_2023\_24

Notice Inviting to Detailed Tender Call Notice

**Name of the work:-** "Privatisation of Sweeping of roads, cleaning of drains & Bush uprooting in both sides of roads and lifting of Municipal Solid Waste separately Wet & Dry Waste including other waste to the identified Micro Composting Centre (MCC) / Material Recovery Facility (MRF) Landfill Site/ Disposal Centers located at different places from W.No-1 to W.No-17 within the Jaleswar Municipality area"

**Cost of DTN** :- The Cost of Tender documents is 20,000/-

**EMD** :- 1% of the total yearly estimated cost.

**Period of contract** :- 1 year (from 01.05.2024 to 30.04.2025)

**Start Date of Sale/download of DTN** :- 11.00 A.M. of dt.14.03.2024

**Last Date of receiving pre-bid Queries** :- Upto 5.00 P.M. of dt.17.03.2024

**Last Date of Receipt of Tender** :- Upto 5.30 P.M. of dt.15.04.2024

**Date of pre bid meeting** :- 11.00 A.M. on dt.18.03.2024 (In the Office Chamber of the Executive Officer, Jaleswar Municipality)

**Date of Opening of Technical Bid** :- 11.00 A.M. on dt.16.04.2024

**Date of opening of Financial Bid** :- 11.00 A.M. on dt.20.04.2024

**Further Details can be seen/ downloading from e-procurement portal i.e.** <https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in/nisgep/app>

**Executive Officer**  
Jaleswar Municipality

OIPR-13126/11/0031/2324

OIPR-13126/11/0031/2324



**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, SUKINDA, JAJPUR**  
(PANCHAYATI RAJ & DRINKING WATER DEPARTMENT)  
**'E' PROCUREMENT NOTICE NO.2894 /DATE. 11.03.2024**  
**ONLINE e-TENDER NO.05/SUKINDA 2023-24**

1.

Name of the work

:Construction of Meeting Hall at Langulabaha High School, Bandhagaon GP

2.

Total No of work

:01 No. of work

3.

Estimated Cost (approx.)

: As per DTCN

4.

Period of Completion

: As per DTCN

5.

Class of Contractor

: As per DTCN

6.

Others details as follows:

a) Procurement Officer : Block Development Officer, Panchayat Samiti, Sukinda, Jajpur.

b) Availability of tender online :15.03.2024 at 05.00 PM to 24.03.2024 up to 5.00 PM & submission bid.

c) Last date & time seeking of tender clarification. :23.03.2024 up to 5.00 PM

d) Opening of Tender :01.05.2023 at 11.30 AM

Further details can be seen from the Govt. website:tendersodisha.gov.in

Block Development Officer,  
Sukinda, Jajpur

OIPR-19325/11/0001/2324



**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER, GHUMSUR NORTH DIVISION**  
Bhejiput, Bhanjanagar, Ganjam, Odisha, Pin - 761126  
Tele/Fax - 06821-241008, E-mail : [dfoghumsumnorth@gmail.com](mailto:dfoghumsumnorth@gmail.com)

MM-512

**CORRIGENDUM TO TENDER CALL NOTICE**

**E-Procurement Bid Identification No.GH(N)-BNJ-F.E & C.C-02/2023-24**

**MODIFICATION OF CRITICAL DATES**

The tender vide Bid Identification No. GH (N)-BNJ-F.E &C.C-02/2023-24 is hereby partially modified as follows:

7. Last date/ time for receipt of bids in the portal :- Up to 05.00 P.M. of 16.03.2024.

8. Date of opening of bid documents :- At 05.30 P.M. of 16.03.2024.

OIPR-08033/11/0012/2324

**Divisional Forest Officer,**  
**Ghumsur North Division.**