



Heavy snowfall alert issued for 5 districts, rain likely in most parts of State today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State meteorological centre has issued an orange warning (Alert) regarding the possibility of heavy snowfall likely to occur at altitudes of 3,200 metres and above in Uttarkashi, Rudraprayag, Chamoli, Bageshwar and Pithoragarh districts on Saturday. Thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/hail/gusty wind (40-50 kmph) are likely to occur at a few places in districts of Garhwal region and at isolated places in districts of Kumaon region. The meteorological centre has also issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding the possibility of heavy rain likely to occur at a isolated places in Uttarkashi, Rudraprayag, Chamoli, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh, Dehradun, Tehri, Haridwar and Nainital districts today. Apart from this, light to moderate rain/thunderstorms are likely to occur at most places in the State. Light to moderate snowfall is likely to occur at places situated at altitudes of 2,800 metres and above in the State today. The provisional

State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a generally cloudy sky today. Few spells of light to moderate rain/thunderstorm accompanied with lightning/hail/gusty wind (40-50 kmph) are likely to occur with the likelihood of one or two spells being heavy in some areas. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 20 degrees Celsius and 12 degrees Celsius respectively.

Meanwhile, Dehradun and other parts of the State experienced a cloudy sky on Friday with trace rainfall being reported in some places. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various places were 25.7 degrees Celsius and 12.1 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 27.5 degrees Celsius and eight degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 19.5 degrees Celsius and 6.8 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 14.4 degrees Celsius and 7.6 degrees Celsius in New Tehri. There was trace rainfall reported in Dehradun and New Tehri.

Three-day Vasantotsav 2024 begins at Raj Bhawan

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The governor lieutenant general (ret'd) Gurmit Singh inaugurated the three-day Vasantotsav-2024 at the Raj Bhawan on Friday. Agriculture minister Ganesh Joshi, Tourism minister Satpal Maharaj, the governor's wife Gurmit Kaur and chief secretary Radha Raturi were also present during the inaugu-

providing a fillip to local products.

According to officials, as part of the competition in Vasantotsav, there are 528 participants in the cut flower (traditional) category, 179 in the cut flower (non-traditional), five in cut flower (Divyang), 18 in potted plants (private

Five dead in three separate road accidents

PNS ■ JOSHIMATH/NAINITAL

At least five persons died in three separate road accidents in the State on Friday. Two persons each died in accidents reported in Joshimath and Nainital while one person died in a mishap in Dehradun. Two youths left for Joshimath from Dehradun on February 22 on a leisure trip. According to the police, the duo fell into a deep gorge along with their motorcycle near Selang village

the gorge from where their bodies were recovered on Friday. The Joshimath police sub inspector Sanjay Negi informed that the deceased have been identified as Dhiraj Dhami (22) from Bageshwar and Ritik Rana (24) from Uttarkashi. In Nainital, two persons on a motorcycle died when the vehicle fell about 50 feet down the mountainside near Khupi on the Haldwani-

the doctors declared them dead. The deceased have been identified as Almora residents Rajendra Singh Rawal and Pushkar Singh. They were riding towards Haldwani when the accident occurred. In the third mishap, a Vikram being driven from Raiwala to Doiwala was hit by a car from behind near Lal Tappad Nature Villa. The Vikram overturned due to the collision with the



Police and SDRF personnel retrieve bodies of two riders from a gorge near Joshimath
Pioneer photo

on the way to Joshimath. After their family members lodged a report in the Chamoli police station about them missing, the police traced their mobile phone location and reached

Bhawali highway on Friday evening. The locals informed the police about the accident and the two men were rescued and taken to the Bhawali community health centre where

driver, Doiwala resident Pravesh sustaining serious injuries. He was taken to the hospital where he was declared dead by doctors.

Truecaller launches AI-enabled call recording in India

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Truecaller, the global platform for verifying contacts and blocking unwanted communications, announced the launch of AI-powered call recording in India for iOS and Android platforms. This addition provides users with the ability to record incoming and outgoing calls directly within the Truecaller app, offering a convenient and efficient way to capture and manage important conversations. The company stated that by leveraging cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology, Truecaller empowers users to fully engage in their live conversation without the need to be concerned about taking detailed notes, thereby improving productivity during calls. The integration of AI into the newly launched call recording feature marks a significant leap forward, allowing for a detailed transcription of the entire phone call, along with an AI-generated call summary. Managing director and chief product officer at Truecaller, Rishit Jhunjhunwala said, "We are constantly innovating cutting-edge solutions that enhance communication. We want to give our customers greater control and flexibility in managing their conversations, and the latest addition is also a very valuable tool for both personal and professional purposes." Truecaller's AI powered call recording solution will be available as a part of the brand's premium plan, starting at Rs 75 per month or Rs 529 per year.



ration. Singh released a special postal cover on the thuner plant on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the governor said that the beauty and speciality of flowers in Uttarakhand will help it become a flower State. He expressed confidence that Vasantotsav will also provide encouragement to those involved in agriculture and horticulture while also

nursery), 54 in loose flower, 24 in potted plants (non-floral), 29 in rooftop vegetable production, 19 in cactus and succulents, 14 in bonsai, 12 in terrarium, 19 in hanging pots, two in hydroponic cultivation, 62 in on the spot photography, 34 in honey, 30 in floral rangoli and 762 in painting competition. There were a total of 1,811 participants competing in 15 categories and 53 sub categories in the event.

fles displayed their physical and mental strength with a khukri dance while students of Dev Sanskriti University exhibited various Yoga postures.

The governor also interacted with students from various schools who participated in the painting competition. He also viewed the floral exhibition and sought information at various stalls.

Complete preparation for purchase of Rabi crop by March 31: Arya

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Food and Civil Supply minister Rekha Arya instructed officials to ensure that all preparations for the purchase of the Rabi crop are completed by March 31. The procurement of the Rabi crop will begin on April 1 this year. She said this during a review meeting with the departmental officials here on Friday.

Arya stated that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for wheat has been set at Rs 2,275 for this year, which is higher by Rs 150 compared to the last year. It has also been decided that wheat will be purchased through various agencies including the marketing branch of the Food department, UCE, NCCF, UPCU, NAFED and UKUSS. Further, a total of 265 purchase centres will be in operation this



year, which represents an increase of 44 centres compared to last year, she said. The minister further informed that the target for the wheat crop this year is

basic facilities like drinking water, toilets and others at the centres to prevent any inconvenience for the farmers visiting the centres.

MCD gears up for legacy waste disposal

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) has started the tender process to start biomining on the old trenching ground on Sahasradhara Road to dispose of about five lakh metric tonnes of legacy waste.

The companies that participated in the tender showed the Dehradun municipal commissioner Gaurav Kumar on Friday their presentations about how the waste will be processed through scientific methods as part of the tender process. Kumar said that the corporation has floated tenders regarding the legacy waste disposal of this trenching ground but it was cancelled due to the high rates proposed by the agencies.

The MCD has floated the tender again to choose the best agency to dispose of decades-old waste. He said that the project is expected to be completed with a budget


of about Rs 27 crore that will be sought from the government. The MCD will bear the extra costs of the project. Once the biomining starts, the project is estimated to be completed in 18 months excluding factors like unfavourable weather conditions. Kumar said that MCD is yet to get the district magistrate Sonika's approval to go ahead with this project. He also stated that MCD will work to dispose of Sheeshambada legacy waste in a similar manner.

"The Dehradun Smart City Limited (DSCL) is currently preparing the detailed project report to send it to the State administration for approval. The budget and time to process the waste are kept almost similar to the trenching ground project so far. The tender process will start soon after getting the approval from the government," he added.

**कार्यालय नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश**
Haridwar Road Rishikesh, Distt-Dehradun, Pin-249201
Website : www.nagarinagamrshikesh.com, Email : nprishikesh@gmail.com
Ph : 0135-2430015, 1800313529

ई-निविदा सूचना
नगर निगम ऋषिकेश क्षेत्रान्तर्गत विभिन्न मार्गों/स्थलों में होर्डिंग्स/यूनिफोल, पोल क्योरक पर विज्ञापन प्रदर्शन के कार्य हेतु इच्छुक एवं अनुभवी कम्पनी/फर्मों से ई-निविदा दिनांक 02.03.2024 से 15.03.2024 अपराह्न 03:00 बजे तक दोहरी निविदा प्रणाली (तकनीकी एवं वित्तीय) के माध्यम से आमंत्रित की जाती है। जो तददिनांक को अपराह्न 03:30 बजे निविदा समिति द्वारा ऑनलाईन, कार्यालय नगर निगम ऋषिकेश में खोली जायेगी। ई-निविदा के सम्बन्ध में विस्तृत जानकारी/शर्तें उत्तराखण्ड शासन की वेबसाइट <http://www.uktenders.gov.in> पर दिनांक 02.03.2024 को अपराह्न 03:30 बजे से डाउनलोड तथा कार्यालय नगर निगम ऋषिकेश से प्राप्त की जा सकती है। टेक्निकल बिड खालीफाई करने वाले निविदादाताओं की ही फाइनैसियल बिड खोली जायेगी। इस सम्बन्ध में समस्त सूचनाएं/जानकारी उक्त पोर्टल/वेबसाइट के माध्यम से प्राप्त की जा सकती है।
पत्रांक: 3971/मवनकर-होर्डिंग्स-ई-निविदा/2023-24 (शैलेन्द्र सिंह नेगी)
दिनांक : 01.03.2024 नगर आयुक्त, नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश

NORTHERN RAILWAY							
TENDER NOTICE							
SN	Name of work with its location	App. Cost of the work (In Rs.)	Address of the office from where the tender form has been issued	Bid Security to be deposited (In Rs.)	Completion period of the work	Date & Time for submission of tender & opening of tender	Website Particulars & Address of office
1.	07/Sr/DEE/G/MB/2024:- Electrical work for power supply arrangement for new control building constructed by RVNL at DRM Campus Moradabad.	4476664.40 (Including GST)	Electrical Branch, Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Northern Railway, Moradabad	89500.00	3 (Three) Months	Tender will be received upto 15:00 hrs. and opened at 15:00 hrs. on 26/03/2024	Website www.ireps.gov.in Divisional Railway Manager's office, Northern Railway, Moradabad
Tender Notice No.: 08/2024 Dated: 01.03.2024							
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 680/24							


**BRIDCUL (ब्रिडकुल)**
बिज. रोपवे टनल एण्ड अदर इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर डेवलपमेंट कॉर्पोरेशन ऑफ उत्तराखण्ड लिमिटेड (उत्तराखण्ड सरकार का उपक्रम) पूर्वी में उत्तराखण्ड राज्य अवरुध्तापन विकास निगम लिमिटेड इकाई कार्यालय: अवस्थापना भवन, राजकीय आईटीओआई निरंजनपुर के सामने, गाजरा, सहारनपुर रोड, देहरादून-248001 टेलीफोन-0135-2522941, ई-मेल: pmb@bridcul.ddn@gmail.com, CIN No. U45203UR2008SGC032591

Ref No: 1905/BRIDCUL-233/24 **Dated: 29/02/2024**
E-Tender
NIT No. (BRIDCUL/PU/DDN/2023-24)
On behalf of Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand, MD, BRIDCUL invites E-Tender for the following works from Contractors Empanelled with BRIDCUL in Civil work Category-II (Upto 2 Crore):-

S. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost with GST (In Lac)	Bid Security/ EMD (In Lac)	Cost of Tender Document	Document Download Start Date	Bid Submission End Date	Date of Technical Bid Opening
1.	Construction of Partition work at Dr. Niyanand Sodhi Kendra Building at Doon University Dehradun	67.14	1.34	Rs. 5000/- + 18% GST	01.03.2024	07.03.2024	07.03.2024
2.	Various Renovation works at Doon University Dehradun	138.95	2.78	Rs. 5000/- + 18% GST	01.03.2024	07.03.2024	07.03.2024

The details of e-tender of above work can be obtained directly from website <https://www.uktenders.gov.in> Changes if any will be intimated only through our website <https://www.uktenders.gov.in>.

Project Manager
BRIDCUL

**Office of the Superintending Engineer**
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 1101 / 208C(Yata-'D')-03/2024 **Dated : 01/03/2024**
Very Short Term National Competitive E-Tender Notice
The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" for following works. All other information will be available online from date **02-03-2024** at 5.00 PM onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (in Rs.)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Development work of Patal Rudreshwar cave temple in Champawat district under Manaskhand Temple Mala Mission.	4.12	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	09	Category 'B' & Above for Building works, in any State Govt./ Govt. of India/ Govt. undertaking.
2	Upgradation work of Circuit House building located in Champawat. (in anticipation of sanction)	10.50	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	09	Category 'A' & Above for Building works, in any State Govt./ Govt. of India/ Govt. undertaking.

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, DEHRADUN
Government of India,
Ministry of Finance
(Department of Financial Services)
2nd Floor, Paras Tower, Mazra,
Saharanpur Road, Dehradun,
UK- 248171

PUBLICATION NOTICE
IN O.A. No. 323 OF 2022
SUMMONS UNDER SUB-SECTION (4) OF SECTION 19 OF THE RECOVERY OF DEBTS AND BANKRUPTCY ACT, 1993, READ WITH SUB-RULE (2A) OF RULE 5 OF THE DEBT RECOVERY TRIBUNAL (PROCEDURE) RULES, 1993 AS AMENDED FROM TIME TO TIME)

Dy. No. 157/2024 **Dated : 20.02.2024**
ICICI Bank Ltd.
V/s
Anil Bansal & Ors.

To,
1. Anil Bansal S/o Jivan Lal Bansal, Enfield Line Anshikh, Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, UK- 248198.
2. Alok Bansal S/o Jivan Lal Bansal, Enfield Line Anshikh, Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, UK- 248198.
3. Avnish Kumar S/o Jivan Lal Bansal, Enfield Line Anshikh, Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, UK- 248198.
4. Manisha Bansal W/o Alok Bansal, Enfield Line Anshikh, Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, UK- 248198.
5. Sushma Bansal W/o Anil Bansal, Enfield Line Anshikh, Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, UK- 248198.
6. Sangeeta Bansal W/o Avnish Bansal, Enfield Line Anshikh, Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, UK- 248198.
7. Jivan Lal Bansal S/o Sita Ram Bansal, Enfield Line Anshikh, Vikas Nagar, Dehradun, UK- 248198.
8. M/s Durga Dal Mill, Office Address: Line Jeevanganh, Vikasnagar, UK- 248198.
through Prop. Defendant No.1 Anil Bansal.

Whereas the above named Applicant Bank has instituted OA No. 323 of 2022 against you for recovery of debts of Rs. 3,38,88,979.35/- in which Hon'ble Tribunal was pleased to issue Summons/Notice U/S 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts and Bankruptcy Act, 1993 and was listed before the Hon'ble Presiding Officer on 14.02.2024.

Whereas, it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by way of this publication directing you to appear in person or through your duly authorized agent or legal practitioner before the Tribunal on **03.04.2024**. Further, you are required to show cause as to why the relief(s) prayed for in OA should not be granted and to file reply, if any, in your defence in a paper book form in sets and produce all the documents and affidavits under which your defence or claim for set off, counter claim, in this Tribunal personally or through your duly authorized agent or legal practitioner within 30 days from the date of the publication of this notice. Take notice that in case of default of your appearance on the specified day and time before the Tribunal, the case shall be heard and decided in your absence. Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this the 20th day of February, 2024.

By order of Tribunal
Registrar
Debts Recovery Tribunal
Dehradun

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS PUBLIC NOTICE

The Date of birth of Abhinav Uniyal S/o Amar Dev Uniyal has been mistakenly mentioned as 09.12.2011 the Date of birth of Abhinav Uniyal should be understood and read 09.09.2012 Instead of 09.12.2011

The Date of birth of Akshara Uniyal D/o Amar Dev Uniyal has been mistakenly mentioned as 02.12.2009 the Date of birth of Akshara Uniyal should be understood and read as 02.12.2010 Instead of 02.12.2009

I have changed the name of my son from Vyom Agarwal to LAKSHIT AGARWAL. In future, my son should be known and educated by the new name of Lakshit Agarwal. Abhishek Agarwal S/o Pradeep Agarwal R/O Herbertpur, Vikasnagar Dehradun.

PUBLIC NOTICE
That my father's name is recorded in Naval records as (old name) S.D. Chaubey That, I have changed my father's name from (existing name) S.D. Chaubey. To (new Name). Shyam Datt Chaubey (As Per Aadhar Card) That, both Names pertains to one and same person. Gopal Chaubey S/o Shyam Datt Chaubey Residing At (Address) Vill- Mankote, PO-Udera, Distt.- Bageshwar, Uttarakhand-263642

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Two arrested in minor's suicide case

Harassment by accused may have pushed girl to suicide

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police on Friday arrested a man and his driver under the Child Labour Prohibition Act 1986 in connection with alleged suicide of a minor girl in his house in Dehradun's Race Course area. The CCTV footage and other evidence showed

Thursday morning allegedly hanged herself in the house where she worked as a full time house help.

Her parents claimed that she was killed by the owners but according to the SSP, the post mortem report showed suicidal hanging to



that they harassed the girl which possibly pushed her to commit suicide, the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said. A teenage girl on

be the cause of death. Further, there was nothing in the report that indicated that the victim was going through any kind of physical abuse or sexual assault.

SCPCR seeks investigation report from police in minor's suicide

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) has asked the police to provide a comprehensive investigation report regarding the alleged suicide by a minor girl employed as a house help

Furthermore, she requested for counselling to be provided to the family without delay. Commenting further about such incidents, Khanna said that the incidence of cases in the State, some of which



in Dehradun. The SCPCR chairperson Geeta Khanna said this during her visit to the family of the victim. Khanna added that after learning of the incident, she talked to the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh and corresponded with him through a letter asking him to take strict action against those involved in the case. Further, she met the victim's family after notifying the police. During her interaction with the family, they expressed their intent to defer performing the last rites of the victim until they have reviewed the post mortem report, she said. Khanna added that she conveyed her commitment to the family by asserting that stringent action will be taken against the guilty. She urged the police to promptly submit the investigation report to the commission.

involve child labour, is escalating at a concerning pace. The commission has come across numerous instances of child labour and successfully rescued the victims. Economic factors often drive parents to push their children into such activities. To prevent future occurrences, she suggested that the police should organise awareness drives for children and parents to inform them about their rights. Additionally, it should be made mandatory for all domestic workers, whether in hotels or residential areas, to undergo verification at the nearest police station. Khanna also stressed the importance of regular monitoring by the police based on these verifications. The commission will always be vigilant for similar incidents in the future, ensuring that strict action is taken, she said.

Five women arrested in Haldwani riot case

Accused identified from CCTV footage & other evidence

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police on Friday arrested five women accused in connection with the Haldwani riot. The police have so far arrested 89

after identifying them with the help of CCTV footage and evidence gathered during the investigation. He said that the police are consis-

illegally on the government's land. The SSP said that the police have so far seized several weapons, cartridges and shells from 84 accused who



accused for their alleged connection with the violence.

The Nainital senior superintendent of police Prahlad Narayan Meena said during a Press conference in Haldwani on Friday that the five accused have been identified as Salma (50), Shahnaz (45), Reshma (45), Soni (39) and Shamsheer (25). The police arrested these women

tently working to arrest all culprits involved in the Vanbhulpura violence in Haldwani that killed at least seven people, injured over 100 persons and led to property damage worth over Rs two crores.

The violence occurred on February 8 when authorities demolished a madarsa and a namaz site allegedly built

were involved in the riot. The alleged mastermind of the riot Abdul Malik is currently under police custody (PCR) till March 6.

The police have received crucial information regarding the case from Malik and his recently arrested son Abdul Moed. The police are proceeding in the case accordingly, he added.

Transport department issues notices to Ola & Uber

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Transport department on Friday issued notices to Ola and Uber for allegedly operating in the State without a valid license. The department also appealed to the operators operating vehicles under these companies to halt the operation to avoid penalties. The regional transport officer (Enforcement) of the Dehradun division Shailesh Tiwari said that the department is getting strict against plying of vehicles under app-based aggregators like Ola, Uber and Rapido.

He said, "According to the Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines 2020 issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, the applicant shall not integrate any driver or represent himself as an aggregator unless he holds a valid license issued by the respective State government. The State government's rules also clearly state that no person shall act as an aggregator unless he has obtained a license issued by the licensing authority." However, these aggregators

have been operating in the State without valid licenses for the past many years. The number of vehicles plying under these app-based aggregators has increased manifold in recent years.

As informed by Tiwari, there are at least about 500 such vehicles that operate under Uber and Ola but none are operating as per the rules. He also said that the department will soon start taking action against such operators and appealed to them to not operate under such companies that are not validated at the State level.

He said that if these companies will get valid licenses from the department, it will also help passengers regarding their complaints about the service. Tiwari said that if Uber and Ola fail to comply with the rules within the stipulated time, the department will impose a penalty up to Rs one lakh as per section 193 of the Motor Vehicles Act for the violation of section 93 of the MV Act, 1988.

Minister orders action after death of 2 pregnant women in Tehri

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Taking stern note of the death of two pregnant women who were referred from the Community Health Centre (CHC) at Chaund in Tehri, the Health minister Dhan Singh Rawat has directed the director general of health services to take immediate action against the doctors whose negligence caused the incident.

The minister has also directed the Health DG that the department should ensure biometric attendance of doctors and other staff in all the government health centres of the State. He said that negligence at any level in the treatment and care of the patients will not be tolerated.

Rawat said that it has come to the light that two pregnant women were not given treatment in the CHC at Chaund in Tehri which reflects gross negligence and dereliction of duty. He said that the doctors were not present on duty due to which the pregnant women were referred to the higher cen-

tre. Both the women died. Rawat said that a regular doctor and one contractual doctor were found to be absent from duty without permission and the DG has been directed to take punitive action against them.

The minister said that the salary of the doctors, nursing officers, pharmacists and other staff of the centres will be linked with their attendance in the biometric system. The issue of death of the pregnant women was raised by Pratapnagar MLA Vikram Singh Negi in Vidhan Sabha on Thursday. The minister informed the house that there are nine sanctioned posts of medical officers in Chaund CHC and three doctors are posted there. He said that a gynaecologist will be deployed for three days in a week on rotational basis at this CHC. Rawat assured that the State will soon receive the services of 350 bonded medical officers. These doctors will be deployed in remote and mountainous areas, he said.

CM hands over appointment letters to Social Welfare Dept officials

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami handed over appointment letters to 35 assistant social welfare officers and three hostel superintendents of the Social Welfare department at his residence on Friday. These candidates have been selected by the Uttarakhand Subordinate Services Selection Commission (UkSSSC). Congratulating the newly appointed officers the CM said that the process of appointments to the vacant posts in different departments is going on in the State. The CM said that a campaign is underway to fill all the vacant posts in different departments of the State government. Exhorting the newly appointed officers to remain disciplined, the CM said that by adhering to discipline one can work in a better way and ensure that the eligible beneficiaries are covered under the social welfare schemes. The CM said that the officers can fulfil the principle of Antyodaya (welfare of the last person on the social ladder) by



doing their work efficiently. He said that the State government has put control over the copying mafia by bringing a stringent law. Those involved in the crime of cheating and copying in the competitive examina-

tion have been put behind the bars. He claimed that the recruitment examinations are being held in a transparent manner in the State and now only bright and capable candidates are succeeding in the

examinations.

Secretary Brijesh Kumar Sant, officiating director GR Nautiyal, deputy director Vasudev Arya and others were present on the occasion.

Assembly session in Dehradun exposes fissures in Congress on Gairsain

GAJENDRA SINGH NEGI ■ DEHRADUN

The fissures within the State unit of the Congress on the summer capital of the State Gairsain were on display during the budget session of the Vidhan Sabha held in Dehradun from February 26 to 29. While the organisation of

instead of the summer capital, the Congress legislators were conspicuous by their indifference towards the emotive issue of Gairsain inside the Assembly.

The Congress legislature party (CLP) raised the issues

Tilakraj Behed stated in the house that the long-pending issue of permanent capital of the State should be resolved and Dehradun should be made the permanent capital of Uttarakhand. Though a red faced Congress quickly distanced itself from Behed's comment, it exposed the fissure lines in the party over the sensitive issue of Gairsain.

The State unit of the party led by the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Mahara organised a symbolic session of the State

and members of civil society in the symbolic session in Gairsain on February 27. The symbolic session was successful with issues including land laws, Agnipath scheme, unemployment, Ankita Bhandari murder case and corruption in government offices being discussed in it. Former chief minister and senior Congress leader Harish Rawat also held a silent protest in Gandhi Park against the decision to hold the budget session in Dehradun on February 26. Rawat attacked the government for running away from Gairsain and reminded that the Vidhan Sabha had passed a resolution during his tenure as CM that the Assembly's budget session would be organised in Gairsain.

With the State unit of the Congress and former CM Rawat strongly raising the Gairsain issue outside the Assembly it was expected that the Congress legislature party would corner the gov-

ernment on the issue inside the Assembly during the budget session. However the Congress legislators appeared unconcerned about Gairsain. It is believed that the divisions within the CLP over Gairsain came as a hurdle in the way of Congress raising the issue in the Assembly. Notably, some Congress MLAs had signed the letter in which a request was made that the budget session should not be held in Gairsain in view of the cold weather.

When contacted, the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Assembly Yashpal Arya said that he raised the issue of Gairsain during his speech on the address of the governor. On Behed's statement that Dehradun should be made the permanent capital of Uttarakhand, Arya said that it could be Behed's personal view and added that the stand of the Congress party is clear according to which Gairsain should be made the permanent capital of the State.

CEO directs Excise Dept to check liquor sales and bootlegging in view of LS polls

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In view of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections the chief electoral officer (CEO) BVRC Purushottam held a meeting of the officers of the Excise department on Friday. In the meeting the CEO directed Excise commissioner Prashant Arya to increase the vigilance on the sale and recovery of the liquor in the State. He said that CCTV cameras should be installed at the checkpoints and directed that the Excise department should provide a daily report to his office. Purushottam said that the report on the action against illicit liquor and seizures should be uploaded on the Election Seizure Management System (ESMS) portal on a daily basis.

He said that daily sale data of the last two years should be analysed and any spurt in the sale of liquor should be monitored. On a stern note, the CEO directed that the training of the excise and nodal officers should be completed in the next two to three days. He said the Excise department should



trace the vehicles engaged in transporting illicit liquor and the assistance of police should also be taken. The additional CEO Vijay Kumar

Jogdande, joint CEO Namami Bansal, Pratap Shah and officers of Excise department were present in the meeting.



the Congress party raised the issue of neglect of Gairsain in a forceful manner and attacked the State government for holding the budget session in Dehradun

of corruption, law and order and unemployment in the house but was not as vocal as expected on Gairsain. To make things difficult for the party, the Kiccha MLA

Assembly in Gairsain in an attempt to corner the Pushkar Singh Dhami government on neglect of Gairsain. It also invited members of the INDIA bloc



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Central Bank of India

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NOTICE

Reserve Bank of India vide circular no. RBI/2022-23/168 CO.CEPD.PRS.No.S1233/13-01-018/2022-23 dated 23.01.2023 had advised Banks to execute revised locker agreement with locker customers by 31.12.2023.We have informed our locker customers about the above requirement through SMS/Mail/Letters.

In this regard Central Bank of India seek cooperation of locker customers who have not executed revised locker agreement till now to execute the revised locker agreement without further delay to enable bank to comply with the directions of Reserve Bank of India.

Dy.General Manager (Operations)
Central Office-Mumbai

Date: 29.02.2024

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

SC agrees to hear appeal against HC order on Gyanvapi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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

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

Obesity a new threat to Indian children, says study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Another BRS MP joins BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

Pharmacy council members allege irregularities in recent poll

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

Congress president Kharge targets Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

Auditors should engage with stakeholders to gather input: CAG

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

India must build deep national strengths: Jaishankar

PTI ■ PUNE

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Reconsider Indo, Myanmar border fencing plan: Nagaland to Centre



PTI ■ KOHIMA

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



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

PTI ■ SILCHAR/ KARIMGANJ

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

Will not respond to speculations: Annamalai on contesting LS poll

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

Himanta downplays threat by pro Khalistani leader

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

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



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

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



Another RJD MLA sits with ruling side in Bihar Assembly

PTI ■ PATNA

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

NPP to field 30 candidates for Arunachal Assembly polls

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

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



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

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

Shinde announces implementation of revised NPS

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

Former Sikkim Speaker assaulted, CM condemns

PTI ■ GANGTOK

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



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

Destination Uttarakhand: Leading the way



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

-Pushkar Singh Dhami, Chief Minister, Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand shines as the ultimate wedding destination

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

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

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

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



Triyuginarayan

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

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

Some of the famous places in Uttarakhand host destination weddings including Triyuginarayan, Rishikesh, Joshimath, Shantikunj Haridwar, Golden Temple, Chakrata, Harisi, Dehradun, Kanatal, Mussoorie, Auli, Tehri Lake, Ramnagar, Narendranagar, Brahmatal, Nainital, Almora, Ranikhet, Bhimtal, Ramgarh, Mukteshwar, Ranigang, Naukuchiatal, and Ghorakhal, among others.

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



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

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

Prime Minister Narendra Modi shares a deep-rooted affinity with Uttarakhand, especially Badrinath and Kedarnath, and this is apparent through his multiple visits and visionary endeavours aimed at uplifting these venerated pilgrimage sites. The reconstruction measures, associated with PM Modi's focus on maintaining its spiritual significance, have reformed Kedarnath to its previous glory, drawing pilgrims from across the world.

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

The result of these endeavours by Prime Minister Modi is discernible, with Uttarakhand seeing a revival in spiritual tourism and pilgrimage footfall. The All Weather Road Project, also known as the Chardham Road Project, seeks to link the four Dhams of Uttarakhand, enabling seamless journeys for devotees and visitors alike. Likewise, the Rishikesh Kamprayag Rail Project, with its enterprising timeline and ingenious technique, vows to improve accessibility to Kedarnath and adjacent areas. The importance of Kedarnath and Badrinath surpasses spiritual borders, echoing with believers and nature lovers globally. Situated amidst the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, Kedarnath carries a unique place as one of the 12 jyotirlingas and an essential visit during the esteemed Chardham Yatra. The reconstruction measures, associated with PM Modi's focus on maintaining its spiritual significance, have reformed Kedarnath to its previous glory, drawing pilgrims from across the world.

The recent inauguration of pivotal infrastructure projects by Prime Minister Modi emphasises the continuous renewal measures in Kedarnath. From unveiling the statue of Adi Guru Shankaracharya to observing the progress first-hand, PM Modi's hands-on strategy highlights his dedication to maintaining the sanctity of Kedarnath.

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

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

Boosting spiritual tourism in Uttarakhand through Badrinath and Kedarnath

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

The transformative effect of such enterprises by PM Modi grows beyond infrastructure growth, facilitating inclusive development and sustainable tourism prospects in Uttarakhand. His focus on paramount sectors such as tourism and renewable energy, it brings me happiness to see the significant improvements in infrastructure growth, establishing superior benchmarks for sustainable development. Uttarakhand's aggressive strategy towards harnessing its natural resources and boosting tourism not only strengthens its economy but also showcases its potential on the global level. I wholeheartedly admire the state's relentless dedication to promoting inclusive expansion, and I eagerly foresee its persistent conquest in the years to come," said Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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



Devotees throng Kedarnath Temple to seek divine blessings

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

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

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

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



PM Narendra Modi on his Pithoragarh visit along with CM Pushkar Singh Dhami

of the local people.

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

Scouring Uttarakhand's untapped tourism potential: Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2030

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CM Pushkar Singh Dhami interacting with officials at an MOU event to promote tourism in Uttarakhand



CM Pushkar Singh Dhami on his visit to Corbett National Park

conveniences to enhance the overall visitor experience. With enterprising targets to contribute USD 10 billion yearly to the economy and draw private investment, Uttarakhand seeks to build a sustainable tourism ecosystem. Job prospects and foreign travel visits are anticipated to grow, firming the state's position as an exclusive destination.

The idea is transparent - establish tourist-friendly infrastructure, develop new destinations, and offer world-class experiences. With a dedication to innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity, Uttarakhand arises as a shining light of reliable tourism, tempting tourists worldwide.

PM Modi's 'Vibrant Village Programme' bolsters Uttarakhand's rural economy

PM Modi's enterprising 'Vibrant Village Programme' has arisen as a silver lining for the isolated border villages, marking a transformative period of comprehensive growth and economic upliftment

Spanning across 19 border regions, including Uttarakhand, the programme strives to revive 3,000 villages over a 10-year-long course. It bears an important goal of preventing migration by furnishing fundamental conveniences and promoting socio-economic sustainability. In the infancy stage of the program, 662 villages with a total population of 1,42,000 are being supported by means of an investment of Rs 4,800 crore.

Focus on infrastructure and connectivity growth is one of the key elements of the Vibrant Village Programme.

The allotment of Rs 2500 crore for building roads and improving connectivity will give a boost to economic activities in various villages across the country where the geographical landscape constantly poses difficult challenges. It will foster access to markets, and enhance the overall quality of life for locals.

Along with bolstering the nation's financial stability, the programme also supports the importance of inclusive growth as a cornerstone of India's advancement by prioritising the development of



PM Modi and CM Dhami with local people during their visit to district Pithoragarh

border villages. With the launch of the Vibrant Village Programme, the border villages in Uttarakhand and as well as other states will benefit greatly, eventually steering in a fresh phase of endless possibilities for the rural economy while reflecting the spirit of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas.

Homestays in Uttarakhand: Bridging tradition with modern travel trends

With the advent of the 'work from anywhere' culture, homestays in Uttarakhand provide an ideal setting for the millennials, as well as an idyllic break to those in their golden years

The Government of Uttarakhand is poised to provide the necessary support to proliferate homestays in all districts of the state with a focus on providing alternative sources of employment to the villagers and preventing migration from the original place of dwelling. At present, there are more than 5,000 homestays registered with Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board. The department provides necessary support in terms of marketing and training to the homestay owners. The Government also provides financial support to Homestay owners through the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Greh-Awas (Homestay) Yojana, through which local residents get financial support in rebuilding/renewing rooms to upgrade them for use by tourists.



Meenakshi Sadan Homestay based at Mussoorie under Uttarakhand Government scheme



CM Pushkar Singh Dhami at one of the homestays

Homestays in Uttarakhand have also been recognised by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. In the year 2022, Sarmauli Village in Pithoragarh district was awarded the Best Rural Homestay by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Several initiatives such as the Goat Villages, Serene Village (Tehri Garhwal), and homestays in the Kumaon region have also won accolades. The Government has realised that with increasing awareness about hygiene and, the diverse food habits of travellers, it is essential that the homestays of Uttarakhand constantly upgrade themselves to provide the required services to the tourists. Hence, in addition to developing homestay infrastructure, the Government is also providing training to the local youth in the management and upkeep of these Homestays through professional agencies.

Boosting tourism in lesser-known Uttarakhand destinations The combined initiative by UTDB and IRCCT seeks to highlight the lesser-known treasures of the state

The Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) and Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) have come to a remarkable understanding to further enhance tourism in the picturesque state of Uttarakhand. This endeavour seeks to highlight the lesser-known treasures of the state, like Manaskhand, by launching special tourist trains from different regions of the country. This special tourist train is intended to begin operations in April 2024 and will accommodate up to 500 tourists per journey in Second AC coaches, providing an easy-going travel experience. The tourists will benefit from the numerous extensive excursion packages which will have everything from onboard conveniences to lodging, transportation, and sightseeing, and will be meticulously handled by IRCTC. The endeavour by UTDB and IRCTC seeks to exhibit the vast cuisine of the state during travels, along with generating occupation prospects for residents by giving them an opportunity to work as guides.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

A spot of good news

India's leopard population surges despite facing challenges from humans and Nature

Amid rising environmental and human-animal conflict challenges, India's leopard population has recorded an increase to reach the enviable count of 13,874. This rise underscores the resilience of these magnificent creatures and the success of conservation efforts in our country. Leopards in India inhabit diverse landscapes, from dense forests to even urban areas. However, this proximity to human settlements often leads to conflict as leopards venture into villages in search of food or territory, resulting in attacks on livestock and occasionally on humans. Such encounters pose a significant threat to both leopard populations and human communities. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by altering natural habitats and prey availability. Besides, forest fragmentation, loss of biodiversity and other changes contribute to the stress on leopard populations. Besides, poaching is a lucrative business and many influential people engage in it by employing locals while themselves remaining anonymous; they must be identified and brought to book. Despite these adversities, the surge in India's leopard population can be attributed to various factors, including conservation initiatives and stricter wildlife protection laws.



The Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been actively involved in habitat preservation, anti-poaching efforts and raising awareness among local communities about leopard conservation. Techniques such as camera trapping and satellite tracking provide valuable insights into leopard behaviour, habitat usage and population dynamics, aiding conservation strategies. Community-based conservation approaches have shown promising results. Engaging local communities in conservation efforts fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility in them. To ensure the continued growth of leopard populations, there is a need for concerted Government efforts. Though the rise in leopard population is welcome, it cannot be at the cost of human lives. Awareness campaigns must be launched in leopard-inhabited areas about their behaviour, conservation importance and conflict prevention strategies. Low-cost innovative ways can be employed so that human lives are not lost: In Sundarbans, for example, they wear masks at the back of their heads to dodge the Royal Bengal Tigers. Then there is an immediate need to strengthen habitat conservation efforts, including reforestation, establishment of wildlife corridors and curbing human encroachment into natural habitats. There is also a need to dispel the misconceptions that rural communities are hostile towards animals; they have been living with wild animals for centuries. Law enforcement agencies must rigorously enforce wildlife protection laws to combat poaching, illegal wildlife trade and habitat destruction. Collaborating with international organisations and neighbouring countries to address transboundary conservation issues will also help. We need a new wildlife policy that takes into account the prevailing conditions and balances human-animal interests.

PICTALK



Theyyam artistes perform at Chala Kadankottu Makkam Bhagavathi temple, in Kannur

PTI

Why do Indians do better abroad than in India?

The root cause of this paradox can be attributed to the lamentable state of public education in the country

Regarding global achievements, Indians have left an indelible mark across diverse fields, from technology and entrepreneurship to academia and healthcare. Yet, an intriguing paradox persists – why do Indians often find unparalleled success on foreign lands but encounter unique challenges within their homeland? This thought-provoking question demands immediate attention and the exploration of the multifaceted challenges. Why do Indian minds shine bright internationally, but systemic deficiencies mar the domestic educational landscape?



Well, there lies a critical anomaly – the failure to replicate this success on home soil is primarily due to the state of public education. The EW story "Why Indians Succeed Everywhere Except in India" adeptly dissects the paradox of Indian success on the global stage against a backdrop of domestic struggles, attributing this paradox to the unfortunate state of public education, which is accurate. **Education and Governance:** Thought leaders underscore the symbiotic relationship between the quality of education and the overarching progress of the nation. Recognizing education as a catalyst for effective governance and economic prosperity, it is crucial to position education at the forefront of national development strategies. **The Crisis in Primary and Secondary Education** One cannot help but ponder the intricacies of the connection between education and our nation's destiny. If education is the bedrock upon which a society is built, then what does the current state of our primary and secondary education system is a sad reflection of the systemic challenges faced by graduates and the subsequent migration of talent abroad. **The Brain Drain Dilemma:** While we proudly export our talent to foreign shores, the

numbers reveal a disconcerting truth – a drain on our intellectual capital that could have been harnessed for national growth. Is it a necessary sacrifice or a symptom of deeper issues within our educational framework? A thought-provoking analysis probes the migration patterns of Indian graduates and school leavers to foreign shores, challenging the conventional narrative of brain drain. Balancing the discourse on brain drain by acknowledging the positive impact of the diaspora would bring a more nuanced perspective to the debate. **A Vision for Change: A Unified Call to Action** The portrayal of the emigration of skilled individuals as a loss for India is correct. While the emigration of skilled individuals is sometimes portrayed as a positive development, the reality is that India loses out on valuable talent. India needs a detailed program to reverse this trend, attract exceptional scientists and researchers back home, and invest more in R&D. *(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*



RADHIKA SHRIVASTAVA

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Indian diplomacy: Leveraging soft power

India is strategically positioning itself on the global stage, leveraging soft power elements to deepen diplomatic ties and foster regional stability

In today's geopolitical landscape, the traditional metrics of national power are transforming. Policymakers and diplomats are increasingly recognizing the importance of soft power elements in shaping international relations, shifting their focus from sheer military might to cultural influence and moral authority. India, in particular, has adeptly utilized its cultural assets to assert itself on the global stage. Religion plays a crucial role in shaping politics. As Niall Ferguson has said, "Faith, then, is perhaps as important a component of power as material resources... Faith cannot move mountains. But it can move people." A recent exemplification of India's strategic cultural diplomacy was witnessed in the inauguration of the first Hindu temple in the UAE, presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries. With the inauguration ceremony of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan (BAPS) Mandir, India is set to deepen bilateral ties with the UAE while also having proactive engagement within the region. This event demonstrates a diplomatic approach that, while rooted in faith, culture, and religion, aims to foster cooperation across a spectrum of critical areas, including security, energy, maritime affairs, and infrastructure. The discussions held during the visit focused on enhancing cooperation in various fields, including trade, investment, and security. This isn't the only instance that indicates the changing diplomacy of India with the Gulf. In a triumph for India's diplomatic endeavours, Qatar released eight Indian nationals who had been detained since 2022. The release came after extensive diplomatic efforts by the Indian government, highlighting the effectiveness of India's diplomatic channels in securing the freedom of its citizens abroad. Through meticulous negotiation and strategic dialogue, our government has once again proven its dedication to protecting the interests of



every Indian, no matter where they may be in the world. India's historical and close relations with Qatar were also reiterated by Prime Minister Modi ahead of his visit to Doha. The strong bonds of diplomatic engagement have aided in fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and enhancing regional stability. These diplomacy initiatives by Narendra Modi are not only events to establish closer ties with the Gulf leaders but also strategic plans to accelerate the economic growth of India. India, with long-term economic cooperation with the Middle East, can leverage the Gulf's capital potential while aiding them with defence cooperation. India's cultural diplomacy extends beyond the realm of Hinduism, as evidenced by the Buddhist Circuit, aimed at revitalizing Buddhist heritage sites and boosting tourism in the region. This pilgrimage circuit, introduced under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, covers the four major sacred places according to Buddhist traditions, namely Bodhi Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar, and Lumbini. It is one of India's first transnational tourist circuits. Beginning from the place of birth of Buddha, Lumbini in Nepal, it serves as an initiative of Buddhist Diplomacy (strengthening a nation's soft

PRIME MINISTER
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power with the exchanges of Buddhist ideas, sacred objects and trading relations). Invoking the cultural linkages with the region and the religion of Buddhism, India seeks to overcome the territorial tensions between the two nations by fostering a positive people-to-people tie across the border. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has strategically leveraged Buddhist heritage as cultural assets to strengthen ties with Asian countries. During the Global Buddhist Summit in April 2023, Modi said that the challenges faced by the modern world can be solved by employing the teachings of Buddha. Through his Act East Policy, India has upgraded its strategic relationship with the major countries in the Asia-Pacific while using Buddhism as the cultural link between India and the Southeast Asian countries. Exploring its historical ties to Buddhism, India is not only preserving its cultural legacy but also strengthening its soft power and attracting visitors from around the world. Through these initiatives, India can bolster its image as a flag-bearer of ancient civilizations and traditions. Moreover, ventures like these also contribute towards economic development through tourism. India is trying to create a greater affinity towards Asian coun-

tries while projecting itself as a model of religious tolerance, pluralism and a responsible global nation. Speaking of being a responsible global stakeholder, take for instance our commitment to humanitarian assistance. The recent incident in which the Indian Navy in swift response to the Houthis strike on the merchant ship in the Gulf of Aden, sent the missile destroyer INS Vishakhapatnam shows India's role as a responsible maritime player. Indian diplomacy extends beyond the realm of culture, encompassing strategic engagements and humanitarian efforts. By providing timely humanitarian assistance, India reaffirms its commitment to upholding peace and stability during crises in the international arena. In the realm of diplomacy, every gesture and every interaction holds the power to shape bilateral relations and forge alliances. India's assertive stance in leveraging cultural and public diplomacy reflects its growing influence and engagement on the global stage. Through proactive engagement and strategic partnerships, India continues to strengthen its position as a key player in international affairs, contributing to regional stability and global cooperation. *(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICAL POACHING

Sir — The editorial, 'Himachal crisis' (29-2-24) carries the sentiments of everyone. Of course, this is not the first time the country has witnessed such shabby scenes of one party poaching the elected representatives and the elected representatives belying the mandate of the voters to satisfy their thirst for power and purse. These repeated happenings are nothing but a mockery of democracy. Legislative bodies being converted into a mere market to buy and sell lawmakers project a very shabby image of the democracy being practised in the country. The party engaged in poaching and those who offer themselves to be sold for power or purse also should have some respect for the mandate of the people. If this trend continues the country is likely to fall into the hands of dictators yielding to the concept of 'Might is Right' and the Might will be decided by Money power. It is time to bring legislation to stop elected representatives from crossing the floor just like that for some benefit or the other. If they want to shift their loyalty they should resign their post and contest again to get re-elected. Similarly, the role of money in the election process should also be curtailed to keep democracy alive. Voters should be educated to boycott both the poachers as well as the prey. Leaders speaking about the fight against corruption are being laughed at as nothing else could be more blatant corruption than poaching and yielding. India needs electoral reforms to address these basic issues.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

TAMIL NADU'S CONTROVERSIAL AD

Sir — It is a matter of shame and eyebrow-raising to see the Tamil Nadu Government display an advertisement for the new Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) spaceport in Kulasekarapattinam featuring a rocket with the flag of China. When the mat-

Mission Gaganyaan



PM Modi has announced the selection of four astronauts for the Gaganyaan mission, marking a historic moment as they will be the first Indians to travel to space in an indigenous space vehicle. These astronauts were chosen and selected for the mission four years ago and have undergone extensive training in Russia. Currently, the training programme is underway at the ISRO training centre in India. Before the astronauts set foot in the crew capsule, a humanoid named Vyommitra will be launched on Gaganyaan to ensure safety.

The crew members will be on a three-day mission, reaching a 400km orbit. This achievement serves as an inspiration and aspiration for all 140 crores Indians. The mission not only aims to send four astronauts into space but also to instil pride in every Indian. It represents India's capabilities in human spaceflight, technological development, and scientific advancement, and lays the groundwork for future missions. As Indians, we are expecting further scientific developments in the days to come.

Preetiyukta Mohakud | Bhubaneswar

ter turned controversial the ruling party and its bigwigs came out with excuses and explanations. Is it not the responsibility of the government and its concerned department that came out with this advertisement to scrutinise it before publishing it? The Prime Minister on a visit to this region of the state has lambasted that the ruling party has insulted Indian scientists and the space sector, giving impetus to the BJP to lampoon the state government.

M Pradyu | Kannur

THE SUCCESS OF SAGAR MANTHAN

Sir — The tactfulness of our Indian Security agencies is so impressive in terms of their activeness for their stringent actions, especially for seizing the Nacro products from the Arabian Sea. This time, it was codenamed as 'Sagarmanthan-1'. It is a point of con-

cern as well as appreciation on both nodes. Appreciation because, our Navy is actively vigilant in addressing these concerns, at the same time concerning because India is pumped with such contraband of 3,132 kg which costs around Rs. 2000 crores, as per international market valuation, which is huge and applaudable. We must cherish the alertness of the trio the Gujarat Police, NCB and the Indian Navy. But this very incident raised eyebrows that still in the eye of Narco Dealers and smugglers, the route of the Arabian Sea is fragile and easy to breach. We must not forget the incident of 26/11. Strengthening the eastern and western coast of India is the utmost responsibility of our Naval forces.


Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

CHERISH THE INSTRUCTIONS OF GOD

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




AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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



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

MSP methodology and farmer demands



UTTAM GUPTA

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



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



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


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

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

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

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

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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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

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



Indo-Dutch relations provided fertile ground for this botanical ambassador to take root, inspired by festivals like the 'Amsterdam Tulip Festival' and Srinagar's Tulip Garden. Imported from the Netherlands, these tulips have been lovingly nurtured by skilled gardeners trained by the NDMC's horticulture department. As the sun casts its golden rays upon the city, tulips burst into bloom, transforming every corner into a canvas of nature's masterpiece. From the picturesque avenues of Shanti Path to the vibrant Tulip Festival Garden, each location becomes a testament to the enduring cycle of life and beauty. Engaging citizens through various competitions

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

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

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

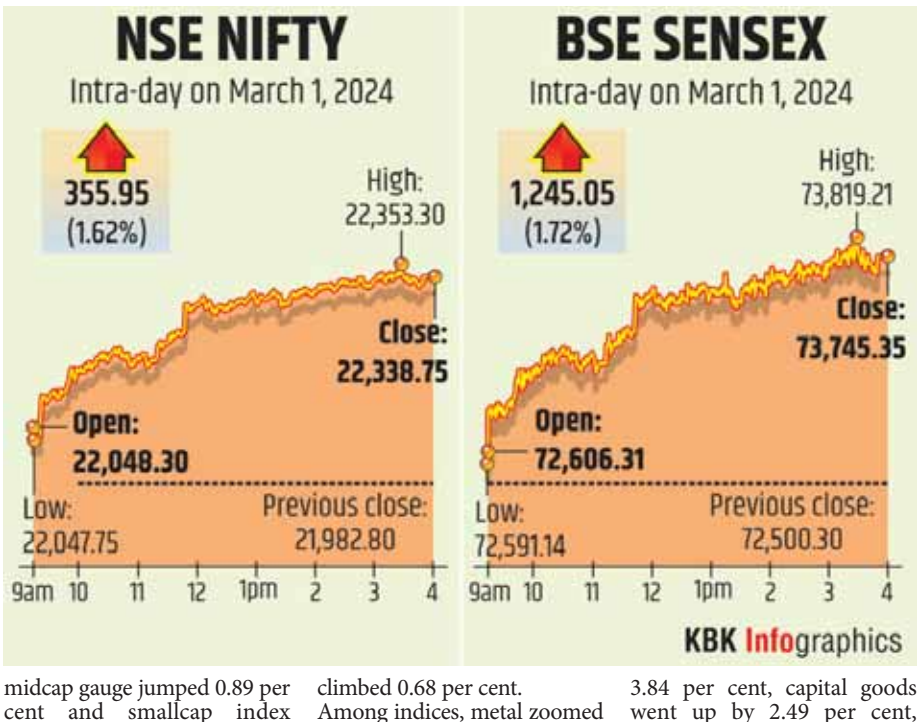
Sensex, Nifty hit record high

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Gold jumps ₹350; silver rallies ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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



Rupee settles 1 paisa lower at 82.90 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

India set to become global semiconductor manufacturing destination: Industry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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





PLAY ON

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

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



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



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



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

Talking Tokyo

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



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



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



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

Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

KAPIL BACKS BCCI STRICTNESS ON DOMESTIC CRICKET

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

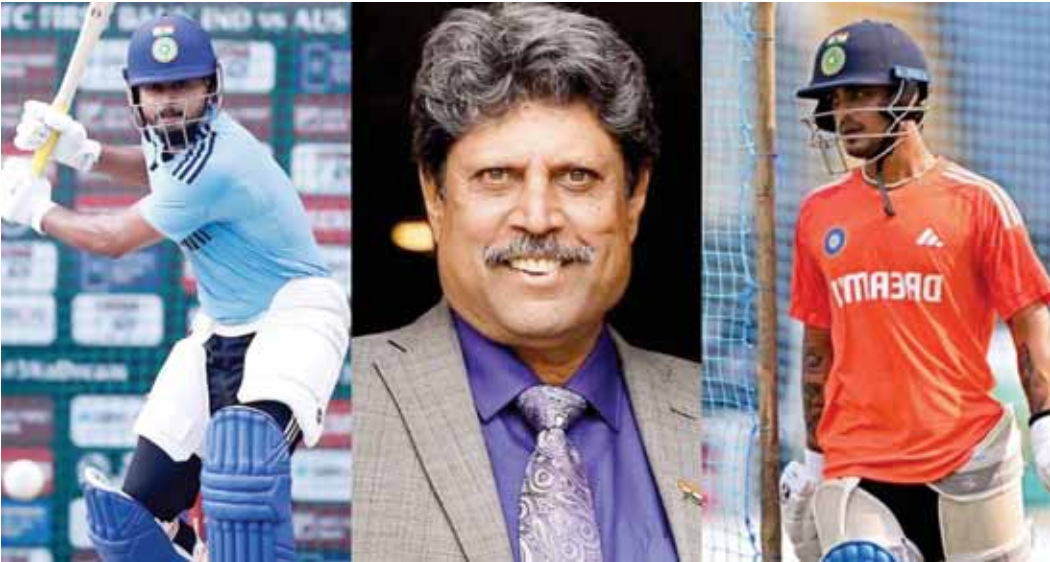
“Yes, few players will suffer, kuch

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He is the new Ravi Ashwin: Vaughan on Bashir

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

Ashwin, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the best off-spinners in the history of Test cricket.

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

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



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

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

the ongoing series.

Vaughan backed England to win the dead rubber in Dharamsala.

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

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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Delhi Capital will next taken on Gujarat Giants on Sunday.



BCCI to conduct women red ball tournament in Pune

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Women’s red-ball cricket will return to India’s domestic calendar after six years when the BCCI conducts a Senior Inter Zonal Multi-Day Trophy in Pune from March 28.

The move comes after the Indian women’s team’s return to Test cricket. The side has played Tests against Australia and England in the recent years. Domestic red ball cricket for women was last held in 2018.

“It is a welcome step taken by BCCI. The national team has started playing Test cricket again and we need the next generation of cricketers to play red ball cricket at the domestic level,” former India pacer Amita Sharma told PTI.

“I would also want red ball to be played at the state level and not just zonal level. Back in the day we had both those events,” she added.

The Maharashtra Cricket Association will be hosting the tournament which will feature six teams, representing East, West, North, South, Central, and North-East zones.

They will be competing in a series of five matches to be played across three days each, which is a day more than the two-day games played in the 2018 season.

The tournament will begin right after the ongoing Women’s Premier League, which ends on March 17.

It will start with the quarterfinals between East Zone and North East Zone and West Zone and Central Zone on March 28 with the semifinals slated on April 3.

Australia 13-2 as New Zealand strikes back late

AP ■ WELLINGTON

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

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

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

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

First, New Zealand needed more than a full session to claim one wicket and end Australia’s first innings. In that time Cameron

Green and Josh Hazlewood put on 116 runs to increase Australia’s total from 279-9 after the first day to 383. Green finished 174 not out. Then New Zealand lost three wickets at 12 and two at 29, was 29-5 before Glenn Phillips’ half century from 41 balls slowed its steady downhill slide.

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

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

“At the end that’s what test cricket is about.”

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

Green went on to reach his century in the last over of the first day and was able to form an heroic last-wicket partnership with Hazlewood which frustrated New Zealand for all of the first session and an additional 20 minutes



before Hazlewood fell for 22.

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

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

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

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

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

striker’s end.

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

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

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

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

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