



MUMBAI CLINCH  
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12 SPORTS

# Former IAS officers named Election Commissioners

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The decks are cleared for the announcement of Lok Sabha elections schedule after former IAS officers Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu were on Thursday appointed as Election Commissioners completing the quorum of the election watchdog which was necessitated due to the sudden resignation of Arun Goel as the lone EC last week. The Nirvachan Sadan was left with only Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar while one was already vacant and with the two appointments, now the body is complete to take the call to announce the poll schedule. Sources said general elections can be announced on Friday following which the model code of conduct will come into effect. The Legislative Department of the Ministry of Law and Justice issued a notification announcing the appointments. "In exercise of powers conferred by section 4 of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 (Act No. 49 of 2023), the President is pleased to appoint Gyanesh Kumar, IAS (Retd) and Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, IAS(Retd) as Election



Former IAS officers Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu

Commissioners in the Election Commission of India, with effect from the date they assume charge of their office," the Ministry of Law and Justice said in the notification. Kumar and Sandhu are 1988-batch officers of the Indian Administrative Service and belonged to the Kerala and Uttarakhand cadres, respectively. A high-level panel headed by

Prime Minister Narendra Modi picked retired IAS officers Kumar and Sandhu as the new Election Commissioners. Interestingly before the official notification, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha and senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury disclosed the names of both the new appointees. Sandhu served as the Chief

Secretary of Uttarakhand while Kumar a 1988-batch Kerala cadre IAS officer, retired as Union Secretary for Cooperation, a Ministry headed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He also served in the Union Home Ministry, where he handled the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir as well as the implementation of the Supreme Court's Ayodhya verdict. In 2014, as the Resident Commissioner of Kerala in

Delhi, he was deputed by the State Government to evacuate 46 nurses stuck in Erbil in war-torn Iraq. The operation was successful with the evacuation of 183 Indians, 70 from Kerala, from Iraq. Kumar, an IIT-Kanpur graduate, is a postgraduate in economics from the Harvard University. Goel had abruptly resigned from his position last week and the reasons for his resignation remain unknown.

Another Election Commissioners, Anup Pandey, retired on February 15. Addressing reporters at his residence soon after the meeting ended, Chowdhury said, "I was just called for formality. The names had already been decided." The Congress leader further said six names came up before the panel for the selection of the two ECs and the names of Sandhu and Kumar were finalised by a majority of members of the high-powered panel. He, however, said the Chief Justice of India should have been part of the selection panel and there was no clarity on how six names were shortlisted from 212 candidates that are said to have come before the search committee headed by the Law Minister.



Ram Nath Kovind, chairman of the High-Level Committee (HLC) on 'One Nation, One Election', presents the report to President Droupadi Murmu, in New Delhi, on Thursday. Union Ministers Amit Shah and Arjun Ram Meghwal, DPAP leader Ghulam Nabi Azad are also seen PTI

## Kovind panel bats for simultaneous polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former President Ram Nath Kovind led high-level 'One Nation, One Election' poll panel on Thursday recommended simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the first step followed by synchronised local body polls within 100 days. The 18,000-page report submitted to President Droupadi Murmu by Kovind and committee members said simultaneous polls will spur development and social cohesion, deepen "foundations of democratic rubric" and help realise the aspirations of "India that is Bharat". Kovind was accompanied by other panel members, including Home Minister Amit Shah, former Finance

Commission chairman NK Singh, former Lok Sabha secretary general Subhash Kashyap, former leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, when he went to submit the report to the president at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Shah termed the recommendation of the committee as "a historic day" for the country's democratic system. The report is an outcome of extensive consultations with stakeholders, experts and research work of 191 days, since its constitution on September 2, 2023, a statement said. The committee recommended that fresh elections could be held to constitute a new Lok Sabha in the event of a hung House or a no-confidence motion, or any such event.



## Maharashtra to build guest house in Srinagar

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the first-ever initiative taken after the President's 2019 order abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution that gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, the Maharashtra Government has approved a proposal to construct a State guest house on a 2.5 acre plot of land in Ichgam taluka of Badgam district near Srinagar airport in the Union Territory. At its weekly meeting presided over by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, the State Cabinet approved a proposal to purchase 20 kanals (2.5 acres) worth ₹8.16 crore identified by the Union Territory administration's Revenue department for the construction of a State guest in Ichgam taluka near Srinagar Airport. The Union Territory administration on Thursday accorded sanction for the allotment of the identified 2.5 acres to the Maharashtra Government after the State Government on Wednesday go-ahead to a proposal to purchase land for the purpose from the Union Territory administration. Confirming the allocation for the allotment of land, the Jammu and Kashmir Revenue



department said on Thursday, "Sanction is hereby accorded to the transfer of Shamlat Deh (Mehfooz Kahcharie) land measuring 20 kanals under Survey No 576 min situated at estate Ichgam, Budgam, in favour of Maharashtra state in terms of Rule 310 of General Financial Rules, 2017, on payment of transfer value of ₹8.16 crore, which is ₹40.80 lakh per kanal for construction of Maharshtra Bhawan."

It may be recalled that in June last year, Shinde had urged the administration of Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir to provide a plot of land for the construction of a 'Maharashtra Bhavan' to boost ties between the people

of his State and UT. Shinde, while on a tour of Kashmir during the first week of June 2023, had called on Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and made a formal proposal. In his letter, Shinde had told the Lt Governor that in view of the growing tourism and cultural exchanges, plus enhancing economic and social ties, such an institution will be beneficial to people on both sides. He had also said the Maharashtra Bhavan in Srinagar will not only provide accommodation facilities to tourists from this state, but provide a glimpse of the state, its rich arts, culture and cuisine for the people of Jammu & Kashmir.

## Electoral bonds data uploaded

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the State Bank of India (SBI) filed compliance affidavit in the Supreme Court, saying it has furnished details of electoral bonds to Election Commission of India (EC), the Election Commission on Thursday disclosed the details on their website in two parts as 'Disclosure of Electoral Bonds submitted by SBI'. The poll body has uploaded electoral bonds data as shared by the SBI, on its website "as is where is basis". According to the data uploaded by the poll panel, the buyers of electoral bonds include Grasim Industries, Megha Engineering, Piramal Enterprises Torrent Power,

Bharti Airtel, DLF Commercial Developers, Vedanta Ltd, Apollo Tyres, Lakshmi Mittal, Edelweiss, PVR, Keventer, Sula Wine, Welspun, Sun Pharma are among donors to parties using electoral bonds. The other donors include A B C India Limited, Acropolis Maintenance Services Private Limited, Arihant Enterprises, Essel Mining and Inds Ltd, Highstreet Cruises and Entertainment Pvt Ltd, Innocent Merchant Pvt Ltd, Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd, Merlin Recreation Pvt Ltd, Muthoot Finance, PHL Finvest, Piramal Capital and Housing Finance, Renuka Investment and Finance, Skyworld Developers LLP, Bellway International Co, Gujarat



Fluoro Chemical Ltd, Cavalier Transporters, Keventer Food Park Infra, Keystone Realtors and others. There was no record of Adani Group or Reliance Industries — the two major business conglomerates. According to the EC's data, the

political parties that redeemed electoral bonds include the BJP, Congress, AIADMK, BRS, Shiv Sena, TDP, YSR Congress, DMK, JDS, NCP, Trinamool Congress, JDU, RJD, AAP, JDU, RJD, AAP, SP, J & K National Conference, BJD, Goa Forward Party,

Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party and the Samajwadi Party. The data showed Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, JMM, Sikkim Democratic Front, Jana Sena Party were also among recipients of electoral bonds. The data pertains to purchases of bonds of three denominations — ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore — dating back to April 12, 2019 and reveals purchases by companies as well as individuals. Details about electoral bonds purchased from April 12, 2019 to January 11 have been made public. The polling body has uploaded details of denominations of electoral bonds encashed between April 12, 2019 and January 24. Continued on Page 2

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising instances of fatal or serious pet dog attacks, at least 23 breeds of 'ferocious' dogs, including Pitbull, Rottweiler, Terrier, Wolf Dog, and Mastiff, have been shortlisted by the Centre for a complete ban on their sale, import and breeding as pets. This means that the general public is now barred from keeping these ferocious dogs. The list of banned dog breeds includes — Pitbull Terrier, Tosa Inu, American

## 23 ferocious dog breeds banned amid spike in attacks

Staffordshire Terrier, Fila Brasileiro, Dogo Argentino, American bulldog, Boerboel, Kangal, Central Asian Shepherd Dog, Caucasian Shepherd Dog, South Russian Shepherd, Tornjak, Sarplaninac, Japanese Tosa and Akita, Mastiffs, Rottweiler, Rhodesian



Ridgeback, Wolf dogs, Canario, Akbash dog, Moscow Guard dog, Cane Corso, and every dog of the type commonly known as a 'Ban Dog'. "...The above dog breeds, including crossbreeds, shall be prohibited for import, breedings, selling as pet dogs and other purposes,"

said a letter dated March 12 written by the Union Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying to Chief Secretaries of all States and UTs while directing them to sterilise these breeds of dogs, which have already been kept as pets, to prevent further breeding. The department said it has received representations from citizens, citizen forums, and Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs) to ban some of the breeds of dogs from being kept as pets and other purposes.

## Sheep missing mystery solved, leopards cleared of charges

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

An attempt by certain vested interests in Kasaragod district to portray leopards and tigers as the culprits behind sheep and goat disappearance falls flat, as it has been proven that domesticated animals are actually stolen by humans. Images from CCTV cameras have confirmed that men lure goats with biscuits, and the unsuspecting animals fall prey to this trap. Brothers Abbas and Abdul Hameed of Kumbala village in Kasaragod were in for a shock as they lost 14 goats which they sent for grazing in the periphery of a neighbouring forest. The goats disappeared over a

period of four months and their complaint to Kumbala police evoked no response other than the routine reply that the matter was being probed. But the brothers, whose livelihood depended on the income from selling goat milk and slaughterhouses, took it as a challenge and pursued the matter. Villagers were of the opinion that the goats were flicked away by the leopards from the forest. But there were no pug marks to establish the complicity of the wild animals in the robbery. Abbas and Hameed checked all the video images they could collect from the CCTVs in the region and they came across a boy feeding one of their goats with biscuits and leading it away from the group.



The brothers sent these images to the WhatsApp groups which were picked up by Muneer, a sheep owner from Uppala village. He informed the brothers that a boy

resembling the one in the CCTV image had tried to steal his sheep and he overpowered him and handed over to the local police. The Uppala Police had details of

the boy's mother who had submitted her Aadhaar and phone number to get the boy released from the police station. She had told the police that the boy had a soft corner for goats and that's why he was seen feeding the animal with biscuits. Abbas, Hameed, and Muneer, along with the Uppala Police, surrounded the residence of the boy in Karnataka's Brahmapur village. From there, they arrested the boy, his mother, and Zakka Fullah, a partner in the crime. They also took into custody 70 goats from the residence, all of which were kidnapped using biscuits as bait. Rafeek, the kingpin of the crime is missing and a hunt is on to nab him.

"Blaming wild animals like leopards and tigers for the disappearance of domesticated animals has become a routine affair in this region. This time we could prove that the wild animals had no role in this crime because there was no evidence linking them to the kidnapping of goats," said Sukumar Periyachoor, a former principal of Government higher secondary school and a wildlife enthusiast. But the 14 goats taken away by the boy remain a mystery as none of the animals seized from Brahmapur village belonged to the stable of the brothers. The landscape and the modus operandi remind one of the cowboy films of the 1960s sans the sheriff and bounty killers.

### NEWS BREAK

#### Petrol, diesel prices cut by ₹2

NEW DELHI: Petrol and diesel prices were cut by ₹2 per litre each as state-owned oil companies ended a nearly two-year-long hiatus in rate revision, just hours before the general election schedule was announced. See Page 10

#### Setback to Sisodia

NEW DELHI: In another setback to AAP leader Manish Sisodia, the Supreme Court on Thursday rejected his curative petition challenging the apex court's decision rejecting his bail plea in the Delhi excise policy scam case.

# GUEST COLUMN

## Youth voters- the champions of change



Neeraj Chopra

Sportspersons serve the nation through their dedication, perseverance and teamwork. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to wear the national colours, whether at home or abroad. But as sportspersons, and young Indians, a part of the world's most vibrant democracy, there is another privilege we aspire to- that of voting.

Elections are the bedrock of democracy, granting citizens the vital privilege to elect their representatives. However, this right is not passive; it is a duty, especially incumbent upon the youth, to actively engage in the electoral process. Historically, young people have spearheaded societal change and their involvement in elections is crucial. Strengthening democracy requires the active participation of youth at every stage, from voter registration to grassroots campaigning.

The first-time voters bring fresh perspectives and champion ideals such as transparency and inclusivity. The energy and tech-savvy nature of a young voter inject dynamism into the electoral landscape, fostering accessibility and responsiveness to citizens' needs. Youth play a pivotal role in holding elected officials accountable, utilising social media to amplify voices and advocate for issues that resonate with the public, thereby safeguarding democracy's integrity and vitality.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "The future depends on what you do today". As the wheels of democracy turn once again, gearing up for the upcoming general election in India in 2024, it is imperative to underscore the pivotal role that the youth play in shaping the destiny of the nation. In his monthly radio programme "Mann Ki Baat," Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the importance of youth participation in the electoral process, highlighting the Election Commission's "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye" campaign aimed at first-time voters. He lauded India's youth for their vigour and enthusiasm, urging them to actively engage in voting as it directly impacts the nation's

future.

Urging first-time voters to participate in record numbers, he stressed their crucial role in shaping the country's destiny. PM Modi called upon influencers across various sectors to join the campaign and motivate young voters, recognising their influential role in driving societal change. Amidst the electoral fervour, he urged the youth to not only participate in political activities but also stay informed about ongoing discussions and debates.

The Election Commission of India is spearheading the "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye" campaign aimed at fostering universal enlightened participation of youth in elections. Union minister Anurag Thakur launched the campaign anthem, symbolising the nation's commitment to encouraging young voters to exercise their democratic right. The anthem, a part of the voter awareness initiative, embodies the spirit of PM Modi's call for greater youth participation in the electoral process. Youth across the country are embracing this anthem as a clarion call to encourage their young friends to pledge to vote.

The initiative is also witnessing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) conducting comprehensive voter awareness activities nationwide and stressing the value of voting for a more representative democracy. Whereas HEIs are hosting physical events, online competitions are also being organised on the MyGov platform, including blog writing, podcasts, debates, and more, to encourage creativity in content creation. Workshops, seminars, flash mobs and voter pledge drives are further engaging and educating students on the electoral process, with NSS volunteers and institution clubs actively participating in the campaign.

Responding to the Prime Minister's appeal, influencers from across various platforms, including Instagram, YouTube and the entertainment industry are actively supporting the campaign, motivating the first-time voters. Prominent names from across all corners of the country, who have made a mark in spheres like sports, entertainment, business and industry, have come together to spread the message far and wide.

My fellow sportspersons like Jasprit Bumrah, Ravichandran Aswin, Mo-

ammed Siraj, Avani Lekhara, Saikhom Mirabai Chanu, film personalities like Anil Kapoor, Prosenjit Chatterji, Raveena Tandon, Rana Daggubati, Kailash Kher, Shreya Ghoshal, industry leaders such as Ritesh Agarwal, BVR Mohan Reddy and several Padma awardees have participated in this campaign, turning it into a 'national movement' of voter awareness.

This 'people's movement' underscores the collective power of voices of the youth and the importance of their active participation in shaping the country's democratic landscape. Let's unite in embracing this responsibility and celebrating the strength of our collective voices. Let us rise to the challenge, let us raise our voices, and let us empower others to do the same.

As athletes, we are champions of track and field; but as youth, we are 'champions of change'. For in the game of democracy, every vote counts and every voice matters.

*(The author is an Indian track and field athlete and reigning Olympic and world champion in men's javelin throw. Views expressed are personal)*

## Students protest against SRT campus & Garhwal university administration

PNS ■ NEW TEHRI

Student leaders at the Swami Ram Teerth campus of HNB Garhwal University protested against what they alleged is the questionable functioning of the campus authorities. They raised the issue of biometric attendance and other issues while protesting against the university authorities.

The student leaders at the campus in Badshahi Thaul said that the university administration had assured in writing last year that the inter-faculty cultural competition will be held in the campus in Tehri. However, the said competition is being held in Srinagar. Student leaders locked the main gate and various faculties in the campus on Thursday in protest. The protesting students said that not honouring its written assurance to hold the inter-faculty cultural competition at the SRT campus in Badshahi Thaul given last year, the university administration is organising the



competition at Srinagar in Pauri district. The students further said that biometric attendance is being demanded on campus to improve the academic system. However, this demand of the students is being ignored by the authorities. As a result, the teaching faculty members reach the campus on times convenient to them, the students alleged. They further alleged that the university vice chancellor had

not visited the SRT campus in Badshahi Thaul even once. The students are suffering the repercussions of the apathetic attitude of the campus director, they claimed. The campus director AA Baurai explained to the students that programmes are not being organised in the campus due to budgetary limitations. Talks between the campus administration and the students continued till late in the evening.

## Complete Smart City project works by June: Agarwal

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Urban Development minister Prem Chand Agarwal directed officials to complete the smart road, sewerage and drainage works being executed under the Smart City project by

buses are also operating in the city. He said that 24 smart water ATMs have been established and one national flagpole has been erected at Dilaram Chowk. Further, 120 smart waste ve-

rected project officials to ensure quality of work while also completing the tasks on time.

He noted that delay in approval to standards for con-



June. Reviewing the project with officials on Thursday, he expressed satisfaction at the execution of the project so far.

The minister noted that 16 projects had been completed in 10 wards of Dehradun city under the Smart City project. These include construction of seven smart toilets, crèche building and construction of modern Doon library in addition to which 30 electric

hicles have been handed over to the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun and Jal Sansthan. Stating that the project works on Parade Ground and Paltan Bazaar have been completed, he said that the work of installing smart water metres is nearly complete. Work on the smart road, sewerage and drainage is being carried out at a swift pace, he said, while directing officials of the executing agencies to complete these works by June this year. Agarwal di-

struction of the green building under the project had caused a delay in this work, while directing officials to complete this project. Stating that Char Dham Yatra is about to resume in the near future, he stressed that the Smart City project works should be completed on time. Dehradun Smart City Limited CEO and Dehradun district magistrate Sonika and other officials were present in the meeting.

## Food Safety department gears up to check entry of adulterated food items

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand Food Safety department has directed authorities concerned to stay vigilant in interstate border areas to prevent entry of adulterated food items in districts ahead of Holi. The demand for dairy products, sweets and namkeen sees a rapid increase during festive seasons due to which many people sell substandard items in the market. Most of the adulterated items like Paneer, Mawa and milk are supplied to the State from neighbouring States to meet the demand during the festive season. Considering this, all food inspectors and officials concerned have been directed to ensure no such food items enter the State to prevent their sale in the market ahead of Holi, the designated officer of the department GC Kandwal said. He told The Pioneer that all district in-charges have formed teams to conduct regular checking of food items sold in commercial establishments in their respective areas. Many district officials have already started the checking drive. "The department has also directed all district in-charges to identify such establishments that can potentially sell adulterated items

ahead of Holi to earn quick profits. After identifying them, the officials will take samples of the items and take further action accordingly," Kandwal said. On the question of delay of the test results of the collected samples of food items, he said that the department will ensure that the districts get test results sooner to ensure strict action against the offenders. Kandwal said that the department will mainly focus on the adulteration of products like Paneer and Mawa as these are in high demand during Holi. The district officers have also been instructed to conduct workshops with confectioners and others concerned to raise awareness about consequences of buying and selling adulterated food items legally as well as health wise. The consumption of adulterated food items can cause severe health issues and the department is taking all possible measures to prevent the sale of such items in Uttarakhand, he added.

## Higher Education Dept to recruit 117 Yoga trainers for Govt colleges

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Higher Education department will recruit 117 Yoga trainers for the government colleges of the State. The department has started the process of recruitment. These Yoga trainers will be appointed for a period of 11 months and they will be paid a sum of Rs 300 per day (maximum Rs 18,000 per month).

The trainers will be appointed for the next academic session. The applicant for the post Yoga trainer should have a post graduate or equivalent de-

gree in Yoga, Yoga sciences, Yoga education or Yoga health. The candidates having one year PG diploma from any recognised university or reputed institute can also apply for the post. Apart from educational qualification the applicant must have minimum two years experience in Yoga education and training. The applicants should compulsorily register at rojgarprayag portal (rojgarprayag.uk.gov.in). The department will constitute an interview committee to select the candidates. The

list of selected candidates will be sent to an outsource agency which will appoint the Yoga trainers for a period of 11 months.

The Higher Education minister Dhan Singh Rawat said that the students of the government colleges will be given Yoga training to make them healthy and fit as per the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020. He said that the department has started the process of recruitment of Yoga trainers on outsource.

## UKPSC releases recruitment advertisement for 189 posts

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Ahead of the announcement of the dates of the Lok Sabha elections, the Uttarakhand Public Service Commission (UKPSC) has invited applications for 189 posts of Provincial Civil Services (PCS).

In the recruitment advertisement the applications have been invited for 10 posts of Sub Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) and 17 Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs). Apart from them, recruitment will also

be done to the posts of finance officers, assistant commissioners in State Tax department and officers in the Education and Panchayati Raj departments.

The secretary of the UKPSC Girdhari Singh Rawat said that applications have been invited for 189 vacant posts in 13 departments.

The commission will also start the interview process of the PCS exam-

**THE PIONEER**  
**CLASSIFIEDS**  
**PUBLIC NOTICE**

I have lost my high school original marksheet (Roll No 7678734, Index No 1224237/182 passing year 2022) and pass certificate somewhere. Varun Mangal, S/o Satish Kumar Mangal, R/o 14 Himlok Enclave, near ITBP, GMS Road, Dehradun, Uttarakhand Mob. 9410393367

I, Army No. JC-473278X NB/SUB ROTAN SINGH F/o TARUN SINGH (existing name), VILL.-DALAUTA, POST- DALAUTA, TEH- CHHATA, DIST- MATHURA, UTTAR PRADESH -281404 declare that in my army record, my son's incorrect name TARUN SINGH has been recorded whereas as per his Aadhar No. 432800678124 correct name is TARUN SINGH SISAUDIYA.

In my Army Record my Daughter's name is mistakenly recorded as RUPALI SINGH whereas her correct name is RUPALI SINGH CHANDEL as mentioned in all other documents. ARMY No. 2998631Y EX/NK HARINARAYAN SINGH R/O WING NO 4 PREMNAGAR DEHRADUN UTTARAKHAND. vide IN-UK 1102282008231V Affidavit-14.03.2024 before Dehradun.

In my Army Record my Daughter's name is mistakenly recorded as SAPNA whereas her correct name is SAPNA NEGI as mentioned in all other documents. ARMY No. JC 531529KH/CAPT KARAN SINGH R/O PHASE 2 PANCHACHULI ENCLAVE KAILASHPUR MEHUWALA MAFI DEHRADUN UTTARAKHAND. vide IN-U 10614172576594V Affidavit 14.03.2024 before Dehradun.

In my Husband Service record my name is mistakenly recorded as SANGITA DEVI whereas my correct name is SANGEETA DEVI as mentioned in other all documents. Army no. 4084369M HAV KUSHAL SINGH R/O GANESH PURAM APER NAKROUNDA DEHRADUN UTTARAKHAND. vide IN-UK 10917197569351V Affidavit 14.03.2024 before Dehradun.

I have changed my name from MUKESH KUMAR (Old Name) to MUKESH KUMAR NAUTIYAL (New Name). In future I should be known as MUKESH KUMAR NAUTIYAL (New Name) S/o- Sh. Prem Lal Nautiyal, Lower Tunwala, Chaktonwala Grant, Dehradun-248005, Uttarakhand.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

In the army records of my son Army No 14704759N NK LACHHMAN SINGH my name is mistakenly entered as KHARAK SINGH whereas my correct name is KHADAK SINGH KHATRI. My correct name KHADAK SINGH KHATRI should be updated in my son's army records. Khadak Singh Khatri, S/o Bhoop Lal, address PO Ashok Ashram Chhilyon, Dumet, Tehsil Vikasnagar, Dehradun Uttarakhand-248125

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**GRIHUM HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED**  
(formerly known as Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited)  
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**DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002**

You the below mentioned Borrowers/ Co-borrowers/ Guarantors have availed Home loans/Loans against Property facility (ies) by mortgaging your Immovable properties/ies from Grihum Housing Finance Limited (formerly known as Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited) as the name Poonawalla Housing Finance Limited changed to Grihum Housing Finance Limited with effect from 17 Nov 2023 (Previously known as Magma Housing Finance Limited and originally incorporated with name of GE Money Housing Finance Public Unlimited Company) herein after referred as Secured Creditor". You defaulted in repayment and therefore, your loan/s was classified as Non-Performing Assets. A Demand Notice under Section 13(2) of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Asset and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 for the recovery of the outstanding dues set on last known addresses however the same have returned un-served. Hence the contents of which are being published herewith as per Section 13(2) of the Act read with Rule 3(1) of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 as and by way of Alternate Service upon you. Details of the Borrowers, Co-borrowers, Guarantors, Securities, Outstanding Dues, Demand Notice sent under Section 13(2) and Amount claimed there under are given as under

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower, Co-Borrower, Guarantor and Loan Amount	Details Of The Secured Asset	Demand Notice Date	Amount Due in Rs.
1.	Omkar, Reeta Omkar Loan Amount: Rs. 1250000/- Loan No: HF/0173/H/21/100084	All That Piece & Parcel Of Khata No 61 Part Of Kharsa No 273, Situated At Vill Rahimpur Pargana Bhagwanpur Tehsil Roorkee Distt Haridwar Adm. 1254 Sq.ft. Gall No 10, Shivpuram East Pin Code- 247667 Bounded By:- East:- 15ft Road, West:- Plot Of Other, North:- Property Of Shivkumar Tyagi, South:- Plot Of Usha Chauhan.	07/03/2024	Rs. 1366001 (Rupees Thirteen Lakh SixtySix Thousand One Only) together with further interest @ 21.5% p.a till repayment.
2.	Anees Ahmed, Babli Anees Ahmed Loan Amount: Rs. 1000000/- Loan No: HF/0173/H/21/100183	All That Piece & Parcel Of Part Of Kharsa No 84 Private Plot No 31-H, Situated At Shamim Sabri Colony, Vill- Piran Kaliyar Chak Partham, Pargana And Tehsil Roorkee Distt Haridwar Adm. 800 Sq.ft. Pin Code- 247667 Bounded By:- East:- Plot Of Dr Umar Kureshi, West:- 19ft Road, North:- Plot Of Other, South:- Plot Of Sartaj Hussain.	07/03/2024	Rs. 1054574 (Rupees Ten Lakh FiftyFour Thousand Five Hundred SeventyFour Only) together with further interest @ 15.5% p.a till repayment.
3.	Injar, Rashida, Mushayada Loan Amount: Rs. 1930000/- Loan No: HF/0540/H/21/100145	All That Piece & Parcel Of Kh No 1030M, Mohalla Mohd Gauri, Kasba Gangoh, Pargana Gangoh Tehsil Nakur, Saharanpur Pin. 247341 Adm. 77.8 Sq.mtrs. Pin Code- 247341 Bounded By:- East:- Gangoh Bypass Road, West:- House Of Ishrat, North:- House Of Shahid, South:-	07/03/2024	Rs. 2068346 (Rupees Twenty Lakh SixtyEight Thousand Three Hundred FortySix Only) together with further interest @ 17% p.a till repayment.

You the Borrower/s and Co-Borrower/s/Guarantors are therefore called upon to make payment of the above-mentioned demanded amount with further interest as mentioned hereinabove in full within 60 days of this Notice failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to take action under the act to enforce the above mentioned securities. Please Note that as per Section 13(1) of The Said Act, You are in the meanwhile, restrained from transferring the above-referred securities by way of sale, lease or otherwise without our consent.

DATE: 15/03/2024, PLACE: UTTARAKHAND  
Authorised Officer GRIHUM HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED (Formerly Known As Poonawalla Housing Finance Ltd)

# Clean mobility transformation policy approved by Dhami cabinet

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In a major step towards improving public transport and phasing out old and polluting vehicles from the roads, the State government has formulated the Uttarakhand clean mobility transformation policy. The draft of the policy was approved in the meeting of the State cabinet chaired by chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami at the secretariat on Thursday. Informing about the decision, secretary Shailesh Bagauli said that the owners of the diesel operated city buses and Vikrams will be provided capital subsidy for scrapping or changing the vehicles to CNG or any clean (non polluting) fuel.

He said that two options will be provided to the city bus operators according to which 50 per cent capital subsidy (maximum of Rs 15 lakh) of the ex-showroom price will be provided for scrapping their old vehicle and purchase of new 25 to 32 seater CNG bus. The other option will include a capital subsidy of 40 per cent (maximum Rs 12 lakh) provided on surrender of permit without scrapping the old vehicle and purchase of a new CNG bus (25-32 seat). In this option of not scrapping the vehicle the Transport department will issue No



Objection Certificate to the owner for operating his old vehicle in any other State.

The policy also entails a similar benefit of granting 50 per cent capital subsidy (maximum Rs 15 lakh) for scrapping old vehicles and purchasing new 25-32 seat CNG bus. Similarly 40 per cent capital subsidy (maximum Rs 12 lakh) to Vikram operators will be given for opting to purchase new CNG vehicles without scrapping the Vikram.

In another decision the cabinet approved the plan to amend the regulation of Van Panchayats in the State. Bagauli said that the amendments will help in encouraging eco tourism and making the Van Panchayats economically and administratively

more powerful. The cabinet also approved the plan to transfer 0.9530 hectare land from the Municipal Corporation of Haridwar (MCH) to the Haridwar Roorkee Development Authority (HRDA) for construction of Unity Mall in Haridwar.

The cabinet gave its nod to the creation of 18 new posts of personal assistants and counsellors in the family courts in the districts of Bageshwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Rudrapur, Uttarkashi and Pithoragarh.

In other decisions, the cabinet approved the amendments in Sanskrit education service regulation and seniority regulation in the personnel department.

# U'khand Govt hikes DA of employees by four per cent

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In an attempt to win over the Employees ahead of the Lok Sabha elections the Uttarakhand government has accepted their demand of increasing the Dearness Allowance (DA) by four per cent. The employees and pensioners will now get 50 per cent DA of their basic salary. The decision will benefit about two lakh employees and 1.25 lakh pensioners of the State government.

The revised DA would be applicable from January 1 this year. The employees would receive the arrear of the increased salary for the period of January 1 to February 29, 2024 in cash while from March the increased DA will be given with the salary. The order for increase in the DA of the employees and pensioners was released by the secretary Dilip Jawalkar on Thursday after the approval by the chief minister

Pushkar Singh Dhami.

The order would be applicable to all employees of the State government, aided teaching institutes, workers of the local bodies and the recipients of the University Grants Commission (UGC) scales. However the order will not be applicable to the judges of High Court (HC), Chairman and Members of Uttarakhand Public Service Commission (UPSC), Civil/Family Pensioners of local bodies and Public Undertaking Corporations in respect of whom separate orders will have to be issued by respective departments.

The increase in the DA would put an additional burden of about Rs 550 crore on the State exchequer. The salaries of the employees would witness an increase of Rs 1000 to Rs 8,000 after the increase in DA.

# Dhami inaugurates Delhi-Pithoragarh air service

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami formally inaugurated the Delhi-Pithoragarh air service of the Alliance Air from his camp office here on

strengthen air connectivity in the border district of Pithoragarh.

He said that at present it takes about 12 to 15 hours

to travel from Pithoragarh to Delhi and the air service will reduce the travel time to only one hour. He said that the service will also help in increasing the number of tourists visiting Pithoragarh. The CM said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi top priority is being accorded to the development of the border areas and the air service in the State is getting extended with the help of the Union government.

The Delhi-Pithoragarh air service will operate regularly between T-3 terminal of the Delhi airport and Naini Saini airport of Pithoragarh from the month of April. The fare of the service would be about Rs 7,000 per passenger.

Secretary Shailesh Bagauli, additional secretary C Ravishankar, station manager of Alliance Air Arti Sharma and others were present on the occasion.



Thursday. Speaking on the occasion he said that the long standing demand for an air service to Pithoragarh has now been fulfilled. He said that the air service will

help in increasing the number of tourists visiting Pithoragarh. The CM said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi top priority is being accorded to the development of the border areas and the air service in the State is getting extended with the help of the Union government.

# Police arrest CM's former personal secretary for fraud

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police arrested the former personal secretary of chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Prakash Chandra Upadhyay on charges of fraud. His accomplice Saurabh Vatsa was also arrested by Rajasthan police in Bhilwara in a fraud case registered there. They both had allegedly duped a man of about Rs 52 lakh in the name of giving him the tender of supplying medicines to government hospitals in Uttarakhand, the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said.

He informed that the complainant Ram Kewal from JR Pharmaceuticals in Haridwar's SIIDCUL had registered a complaint in Dehradun against Upadhyay and his accomplices for duping him of about Rs 52 lakh. Considering this, the police started an investigation and arrested Upadhyay late on Wednesday in Dehradun.



Singh claimed that Upadhyay confessed to duping the man. According to him, his accomplice Vatsa brought the complainant to him on the pretext of giving him the tender of supplying medicines to government hospitals across the State. "Both accused made a fake information memo with

the signature of Vatsa.

They gave the complainant the memo and a bill of about Rs 52 lakh in the name of various expenditures. This convinced the victim that he had received the tender so he allegedly handed over the money to the accused," Singh said. He informed that Upadhyaya will be presented before the court soon. It is pertinent to mention here that many cases of fraud worth crores of rupees are registered against Upadhyay and his accomplice Vatsa.

They are accused of fraud in the name of providing tender for government related works. The SSP said that the police are investigating all the cases registered against both the accused and others.

# Bus operators thank CM for providing subsidies to buy clean fuelled vehicles

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The city bus union president Vijay Vardhan Dandriyal expressed his gratitude to the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami for the approval of Uttarakhand Clean Mobility Transformation Policy 2024. The Transport department will encourage city bus and

Vikram operators to purchase environmentally friendly electric and CNG fuelled vehicles through subsidies.

The city bus union had sent a written appeal to the CM about three years ago regarding the same issue

which was finally approved by the government in the cabinet meeting on Thursday, Dandriyal said. He said that city bus operators were feeling pressured financially to convert their vehicles into eco-friendly buses or buy a new one but this decision has provided them relief.

# DM directs survey of Govt buildings in subsidence affected Joshimath

PNS ■ JOSHIMATH

The Chamoli district magistrate Himanshu Khurana has directed departmental officials to start a survey soon of their departmental buildings and estates located in the red zone of land subsidence affected Joshimath. This will be followed by shifting of the said buildings. The district magistrate issued this direction while chairing a meeting with departmental officials on disaster risk reduction on Thursday. Khurana said that in case of departmental buildings and estates damaged by subsidence, the departments concerned should select land for shifting their buildings and estates while also preparing a detailed project report on the same. He directed the sub divisional magistrate to hold a meeting with officials of all departments and prepare a plan for the relocation of the buildings and estates of the departments. Regarding the affected families in the



red zone, the DM said that option letters should be provided to them for rehabilitation. He also reviewed the drainage and sewerage works, toe erosion and construction of GIS sub centre while issuing necessary instructions to the officials concerned. Khurana stressed that there should be no complacency in the shifting of the government buildings and estates. The Chamoli superintendent of police Rekha Yadav, chief development officer Abhinav Shah and other departmental

officials were also present in the meeting.

It is pertinent to mention here that while the authorities are focusing on shifting both the government buildings and residents from the subsidence affected parts of Joshimath, the native residents have maintained that they will not be relocated far from Joshimath as their ancestral lands, socio-cultural links, businesses and livelihoods are all based in Joshimath.

# Vehicular pollution affects children the most on roads

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Air pollution caused by vehicles that run on diesel and petrol affects children of about 2.5 feet height the most due to heavy concentration of pollutants at the lower level on roads, the secretary of Regional Transport Authority (RTA) Sunil Sharma said. He said

elders as they consider it normal with time, said Sharma.

He also said that parents should also not push their children to sit in crowded Vikrams or auto rickshaws during school time to save a few rupees as it can severely



this during a workshop conducted by the regional transport office of Dehradun division in Uttaranchal Press Club on Thursday. Sharma, who is also Dehradun RTO (Administration), along with the RTO (Enforcement) Shailesh Tiwari interacted with locals, media and people from organisations and answered their queries regarding public transport, vehicular pollution and traffic violations, among others.

The RTA secretary said that air pollution caused by vehicles affects children of about 2.5 feet height the most due to high concentration of pollutants at lower level. Since adults are taller, they do not inhale concentrated pollutants in air like a child. The children often fail to communicate this to the

ly affect their health. Though authorities regularly take action against such violations, it is usually the parents who allow children to sit in already full vehicles, he added. Sharma said during the session that the Transport department is working on promoting electric vehicles to minimise the level of vehicular pollution in the plain districts. Responding to a question regarding electric vehicles being expensive compared to regular vehicles, Tiwari said, "Yes, electric vehicles used to be expensive earlier but with the development in technology with time, they cost about the same as petrol or diesel fuelled vehicles. Several people are registering their electric bikes, electric scooters and

# MCD submits report to DM on alleged fake registration of sanitation workers

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) handed over the report to Dehradun district magistrate Sonika on Thursday regarding the alleged scam in the registration of fake sanitation workers under Mohalla Swachhata Samiti. The corporation had given about 10 to 12 sanitation workers to

Jharna Kamthan to investigate the matter. The committee conducted physical inspections and found some irregularities.

They also reportedly failed to find the listed sanitation workers during the physical verification process. The district administration had sought a report from MCD



every ward under the committee to carry out works like sweeping and other tasks on a regular basis.

The corporation issued a Rs 15,000 salary for each worker via the committee. However many claimed that the committee headed by the respective councillors has not been paying the same salary to every worker. Many people including several sanitation workers alleged that there are several irregularities regarding information about sanitation workers listed under the committee. When this matter reached the DM in January, she formed a committee under the Dehradun chief development officer

on the matter regarding several points. The corporation's sanitation section submitted the final report to the DM on Thursday morning. On the question about the content of the final report, the chief municipal health officer Dr Avinash Khanna said that the report has been handed over to DM and the committee concerned and now only they can issue any official statement about it.

The CDO confirmed that the administration had received the report on Thursday morning. However, she added that the committee will first analyse the report for about a week after which further action will be taken accordingly.



Garbage dumped by citizens on Chander Road in Dehradun, below a board requesting people not to dump garbage at the site under CCTV surveillance  
Mangesh Kumar/Pioneer photo

**JM FINANCIAL ASSET RECONSTRUCTION COMPANY LIMITED**  
Corporate Identity Number: U67190MH2007PLC74287  
Registered Office Address: 7th Floor, Cnergy, Appasaheb Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025  
T: +91 22 6630 3030 F: +91 22 6630 3223, www.jmfinancialarc.com

**DEMAND NOTICE**  
Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd have assigned a pool of Loan (including below mentioned Loans) together with underlying security interest created therefor along with all the rights, title and interest thereon under Section 5 (1) (b) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 ("SARFESI ACT") vide an assignment agreement dated March 29, 2023 ("the Assignment Agreement") in favour of JMFARC (JM) (herein referred as Assignee). The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of (JM) assignee. Under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to JM, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to JM by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Description of secured asset (immovable property)
(LC No. 09700006670 of Dehradun Branch) Mohammed Abdul Hassain (Borrower) Forhana Begum Barlaskar (Co Borrower 1) Syed Fahad (Co Borrower 2)	20-01-2024/ Rs. 1,60,77,765.58/- (Rs. One Crore Sixty lakh Seventy Seven Thousand Seven Hundred Sixty Five Only and Fifty Eight Paise) NPA (04-01-2019)	Unit No. C-02 Gf Resizone Residency, Mayur Vihar Sahstradhara Road Dehradun Dehradun Uttarakhand:- 248001
(LC No. 09700006777 of Dehradun Branch) Ashiq Ali (Borrower) Rabia Najma (Co Borrower 1)	20-01-2024/ Rs. 1,18,76,530.58/- (Rs. One Crore Eighteen lakh Seventy Six Thousand Five Hundred Thirty Only and Fifty Eight Paise) NPA (04-10-2019)	Unit No. C-G04 Resizone Residency, Mayur Vihar, Dehradun Dehradun Uttarakhand:- 248001

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to JM as aforesaid, JM shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of JM. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Date: 15-03-2024  
Place: Uttarakhand

Sd/- (Authorised Officer)

JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

## 28 no confidence motions moved in LS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

## Centre revises flexible scheme for recruitment, promotion of scientists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

## BJP targeting young, first time voters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

## Sudha Murty takes oath as Rajya Sabha MP

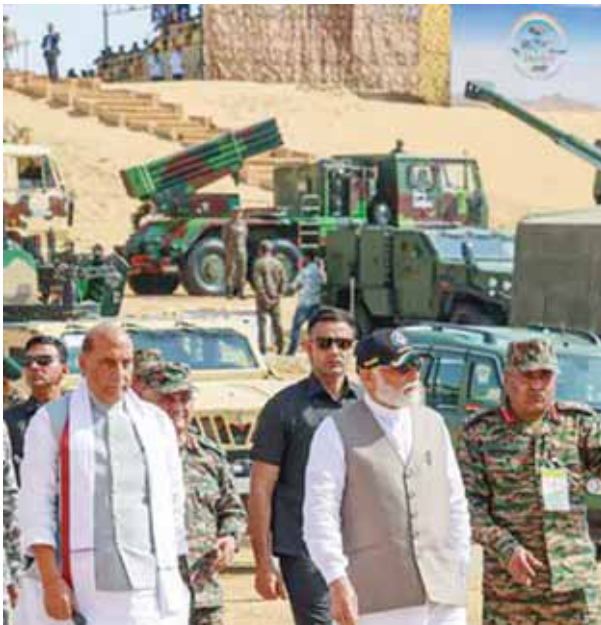
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

## Bharat Shakti gives message of India strength to adversaries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

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

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

# Hope peace will return soon: Manipur CM

## Meitei, Kuki MLAs have met twice

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said talks have been initiated to resolve the conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities in the state. Speaking at a programme here, Singh emphasised the importance of resolving conflicts through dialogue and political engagements. He mentioned that legislators from both the communities have met twice, indicating progress in the peace process. “Valley MLAs have met Kuki legislators twice. A team consisting of the chairman of the hill areas committee has also been meeting both Kuki and Naga civil societies. I



hope peace will return soon,” he said. Singh acknowledged the unfortunate loss of innocent lives since violence broke out in the state on May 3 last, but expressed optimism about achieving peace. He said deployment of state security forces in vulnerable areas has helped reduce violence. Singh also noted that displaced persons from various areas have started returning to their homes. “Deployment of state security forces in almost all vulnerable areas is almost done. With God’s grace, news of violence has subsided and displaced persons of Phoubakchao, Dolaithabi, Sugnu and Serou have started returning to their native places,” he said. Manipur has remained

gripped by recurring bouts of violence since ethnic clashes between two communities first erupted in May last year. Altogether 219 people have been killed since then. The clashes have occurred over a number of grievances that both sides have against the other, however, the flashpoint of the crisis has been a move to give Meiteis Scheduled Tribe status, which has since been rolled back and an attempt to turf out tribals living in protected forest areas. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur’s population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts.



## If they interfere with right to life of poor, they do not have right to live: Yogi on mafias

PTI ■ AMBEDKAR

Mar 14 (PTI) Mafias don’t have the “right to live” if they “interfere” with the right to life of the poor, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Thursday. Addressing a function in Ambedkar Nagar to inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of projects worth Rs 2,122 crore, the chief minister alleged that before the BJP government in the state, mafias would encroach the lands of the poor and stopped them from celebrating their festivals. “Can any mafia encroach over the land of the poor today? Can anyone harass our daughters? They know that if they harass any daughter, ‘Yamraj’ will treat him at the next road intersection,” Adityanath said. “Tell me if the ongoing treatment of mafias is correct or not? Do you support it or not?” he asked the crowd gathered at the function. Adityanath said it was because of the “double engine government” that the mafias in UP were receiving this “treatment”. The mafias were “creatures reared and brought up” by previous governments that served as their leaders’ source of income, he said. “But we said that these

creatures don’t have the right to live if they interfere with the right to life of the poor. Their right to live will be snatched from them and they will be ended if they interfere,” the chief minister said. Over 180 alleged criminals were gunned down in encounters in the state in the six years of Yogi Adityanath government from 2017 to 2023, as per data by state police. According to the data, more than 10,900 police encounters have taken place in the state during this period. In these encounters, 23,300 alleged criminals were arrested and 5,046 were injured. The chief minister also targeted the Samajwadi Party in his address. “A war is going on between chacha and bhatija there. The family gets busy with ‘vasooli’ (recovery) whenever any recruitment is announced,” said Adityanath, in an indirect dig at SP president Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle and party leader Shivpal Singh Yadav. “There were governments in the country (centre) before 2014 and in UP before 2017 who thought only about themselves and their families. But PM Modi has said that all 140 crore people of the country are his family.”



## Taxi driver who robbed Dutch tourist in Odisha arrested

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha police arrested an absconding taxi driver who allegedly robbed a 72-year-old tourist from the Netherlands in January, an officer said on Thursday. Following the robbery, Anthony Von Arkel had to stay at a shelter home for beggars for over a month before the state government rescued him and provided food and accommodation. The driver, who was absconding after allegedly robbing the tourist on the way from Bhubaneswar to Bhitarkanika on January 9, was arrested on Wednesday, Puri Superintendent of Police Pinak Mishra said. With the help of the Puri administration, Anthony began his return journey from Puri on Thursday. He will go to Nagpur in Maharashtra, from where he will return to the Netherlands via Qatar on March 15, officials said. “I am very grateful to the government, media and social activists, who helped me. The government has provided me with food and accommodation,” the tourist told media persons before leaving for Maharashtra on Thursday. With help from the Puri administration, he will go to Nagpur, from where he will return to the Netherlands via Qatar on March 15, officials said.

# Defamation complaints filed against Palaniswami, Annamalai

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Defamation complaints have been filed before a sessions court, against AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami and BJP state president K Annamalai for their statements against Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin relating to alleged distribution of drugs in TN. In his complaints filed separately on Thursday, City Public Prosecutor G Devarajan sought to punish the duo for offences under section 499 and 500 IPC (Defamation). Devarajan, in his complaint submitted that Palaniswami, the state Leader of Opposition in a recent press meet made

defamatory statements against the CM, intending to harm the reputation of Stalin in respect of his conduct in the discharge of his public functions. He said while the chief minister has taken various steps towards ‘Drug-free Tamil Nadu’, the present defaming statement of the accused falsely links him to the alleged distribution of contrabands by aiding drug peddlers. Devarajan said in fact, the Chief Minister, in course of discharging his public function, gave the call to eliminate narcotic drugs from the state at a meeting in 2022, pursuant to which numerous measures were taken, as was evident from the Policy Note



2023-2024 of the Department of Home, Prohibition and Excise, Government of Tamil Nadu. He said the defamatory statements of the accused strike

at the very core of ethical governance and public trust, tarnishing the reputation of the esteemed office and undermining the principles of justice and integrity.

# Houses of those who tampered with recruitment exams raided: UP CM

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said those involved in recruitment exams leaks have been given a “fitting lesson” and their “houses were raided and properties confiscated”. Distributing appointment letters to 39 sub-divisional magistrates (SDMs), 41 deputy superintendents of police (DSPs) and 16 treasurer/account officers selected by the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission at his official residence, Adityanath said that the selection was completed in record time. “For the first time, any commission and board has completed the selection process in just nine months. The selection process was completely fair and transparent without any recommendation or interference. “Those who tried to tamper with the integrity of the examination suffered the



consequences. Their houses were raided and properties confiscated. The government has decided to teach all those who play with the future of the youth a fitting lesson,” the chief minister was quoted as saying in an official statement. Adityanath said the overall perception of the state changes when the government works with honesty. “You must have seen that those who faced an identity crisis in the state earlier, proudly say today that they belong to Uttar Pradesh. The transformation

has been facilitated by the government’s decision-making process,” he said. Addressing the newly selected candidates, the chief minister said, “You have 30 to 35 years to serve the public and to seek their blessings for a bright future.” He urged the newly selected candidates to discharge their role as the engine of the government. “Today, technology has improved a lot. By the time you come to the field, we will have succeeded in digitising all the

revenue functions. Even after this, cases of revenue-related disputes will arise. In such a situation, to settle these matters, you will have to stay in your tehsil and focus. Also, the pendency of such matters will have to be resolved in a time-bound manner,” he said. The chief minister added, “Our responsibility should be to provide justice to the underprivileged people. We should stand with them. The role of deputy SP is essential in maintaining law and order and resolving revenue-related matters. They must regularly visit the police station and watch every activity including preparation of the charge sheet. Expressing confidence in the newly selected candidates, he said, “You will take forward the pace of work of the state government with honesty. Also, keep in mind the interests of the public and make quick decisions so that you come out with an image of an officer of good administration.”

## Uplift of youth, women, workers, farmers key for happy society: Gadkari

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said that youth, women, workers and farmers are essential for a happy society, and stressed the need for their uplift. He was speaking after inaugurating a Multi-Modal Logistics Park at Sindi dry port in Maharashtra’s Wardha district and flagging off the trial of rail terminal services there. The Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways said thousands of trucks will arrive at the Sindi dry port and goods will be sent on rakes to Bangladesh via Haldia in West Bengal. “They will not go to JNPT (Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust), Mumbai,” he said. The minister said the dry port, located in the state’s Vidarbha region, will generate nearly 1 lakh jobs and several employment and business opportunities. The Maharashtra government has given Rs 1,200 crore for

the project, while JNPT has given Rs 600 crore, he said. This will help create industrial clusters, cold storages, godowns and pre-cooling plants. Gadkari, whom the BJP has renominated for Nagpur for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, said the government is working to make Sindi dry port the logistics capital of the country. Highlighting the various development works done by the central and state governments, he said, “If we want to make our society happy, then uplift of youth, women, workers and farmers is important.” Youth should get employment, women should be empowered and get equal rights, workers should get proper wages, while farmers should get good prices for their produce, said Gadkari. “All this requires value addition,” he said, urging entrepreneurs in Vidarbha to come forward and invest in the region.

## Nitish, Rabri among 11 elected unopposed to Bihar Legislative Council

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was on Thursday declared elected unopposed to the state legislative council for a fourth consecutive term. Besides Kumar, 10 candidates from different parties, who had stood in the biennial polls to 11 seats of the legislative council, were declared elected unopposed on the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers. Kumar reached the Vidhan Sabha secretariat to collect his certificate, accompanied by close aide Rajiv Ranjan Singh ‘Lalan’, whom he succeeded as JD(U) president, and Deputy CMs Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, both from ally BJP. Others who got elected to the Upper House include former chief minister Rabri Devi (RJD), state minister Santosh Suman (HAM) and former minister Mangal Pandey (BJP).

## BANGALURU WATER WOES

# Citizens in tech capital get innovative to tackle worst crisis

PTI ■ BENGALURU

From exploring work from home (WFH) option and shifting to a place with better water facilities and taking bath on alternate days--citizens of India’s tech capital are trying every possible thing to deal with an unprecedented water crisis that has gripped the city. The woes have become a serious issue of concern for Bengealureans , especially in Whitefield, KR Puram, Electronic City, RR Nagar, Kengeri and CV Raman Nagar. Those staying in high rise apartments with water harvesting facilities are also now dependent on tankers for drinking water and many restrictions have been imposed. Eateries in Bengaluru are mulling over use of disposable cups, glasses and plates to avoid excess use of water. Posters with catchy slogans -- “no rain no water,” “water

water everywhere but not a drop to drink”, “conserve water”, among others have been put up at many schools and building associations. Educational institutions are also feeling the pinch. Recently, a coaching centre in the city asked its students to attend classes online due to an ‘emergency’ for a week. Similarly, a school on Bannerghatta Road was also closed, asking students to attend classes online just like they did during the covid pandemic. Meanwhile, some residents of a layout in KR Puram have come up with plans to take bath on alternate days, order food twice a week instead of cooking at home, and restricting water supply to their tenants. People say they are forced to pay more for the tanker water, although the rates have been capped by the government. With temperature rising, it is difficult to avoid a daily shower but they are left with no option but to take bath on

alternative days, said Sujatha, also a resident of KR Puram. “What to do? I have two school going children, plus we have to manage household chores. Clean vessels, cook food, wash clothes....So, we have started using paper plates, that way we have cut down on our water usage. And we order food twice a week. Since we can afford to do that, we are doing it and we are using the washing machine only once in a week now,” she said. Deficit rains last year is being blamed for people’s plight. “We do have facilities for rain water harvesting in our apartment but then we hardly got any rains last year. So, despite having facilities, we could hardly store any water. Now we have been asked by the building association to use water judiciously and one way of doing it was, we have been restricted to water supply at specified intervals,” Shobha, a homemaker living in an high end apartment in Kengeri, said.



Lakshmi V, an IT professional living in Singasandra, has been requesting her firm to allow WFH option so that she and her family can temporarily shift to her native place in Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu until the situation becomes better. “Since the past few weeks we have been experiencing severe water shortage in our area. I have two kids and since

we require more water, we have bought a drum to store water. Our apartment is providing water twice a day. There are four borewells in the premises but water is available only from two of them.” Last week, it became a huge problem for her as even the water tanker suppliers weren’t taking the apartment manager’s call and it further

led to commotion with residents struggling for water. This led to arguments with the building association. “If the situation persists, we are thinking of seeking a work from home option. We are planning to move to our native place in Tamil Nadu temporarily till rain arrives here,” she said. To create awareness and educate children about the water crisis, building associations and schools have started putting up posters in their premises explaining them about the urgent measures to conserve water. “We have started having more discussions about water crisis, climate change, what can be done to curb global warming and carefree usage of water. Lakes and borewells drying up is a major issue of concern and we discuss that...We need to have such discussions from early on in classes so that students are aware and become responsible citizens. We need to catch them young,” said

Rekha Sharma, a science teacher at a private school in the Whitefield area. Some residents in areas of KR Puram and Whitefield said they have already started looking to shift to a place with 24 hour water availability. Krishna, a software engineer living in KR Puram for the last few years said he has never faced such a water crisis. The apartment maintenance charge has gone up by Rs 1,000 due to dependence on water tankers. “I have started looking for a new house; might have to pay more rent but anything for better water supply,” he said. Some malls in the city have also given access to employees of high end shops and buildings in the water affected areas to use their toilets in case of emergency, according to locals. “Most of our borewells have gone dry and we are dependent on water tankers. If there is no rain around Ugadi festival (next month), then we will have to make

alternative arrangements,” Karnataka State Hoteliers Association president Chandrashekar Hebbar told PTI. The government is taking a slew of measures to address the situation. Civic authorities have decided to fill up the drying lakes with 1,300 million litres per day of treated water to replenish groundwater sources in the city, where about 50 per cent of the borewells have dried up. The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) will also install filter borewells and construct water plants using an innovative technology near the restored lake beds to supply water after testing, the civic agency officials said. This initiative has been taken up in association with Indian Institute of Science (IISc), BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar said. This is expected to add about 20-30 MLD of water into the system.

# Synchronising polls

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

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



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

## PICTALK



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

# Scientists play key role in a nation’s progress

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

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



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

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

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

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

# Presidential choices make veterans rueful

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

The United States of America has a strange conundrum of choosing the ‘less bad’ Presidential option amongst geriatrics in Democrat Joe Biden and Republican Donald Trump. One concerned set of constituents is the fraternity of retired service personnel (from US Armed Forces) or simply, Veterans. Given the size and scale of the standing US Armed Forces and the accompanying global deployments, it is unsurprising that the Veterans community is over 18 million strong. As the US has had a consistent history of ongoing combat duties, Veterans evoke an emotional and hallowed position in the American consciousness. The longstanding American norm of walking up and shaking the hands of a Veteran by saying, “Thank you for your services” is a sacred culture that exemplifies the hallowed position afforded to Veterans, across the partisan and societal divide.

Of the 46 US Presidents to date, an unprecedented 31 had done military service testifying to the image of the ‘Uniform’, in public reverence. At one time, ‘Uniform’ was considered a political millstone for prospective Presidency. Sadly, it is a normalcy on the decline. Today neither of the two Presidential candidates i.e., Trump or Biden, fit the bill on this score. On the contrary, Biden does himself no good by defending his five-student draft deferments, whereas Donald Trump is infamous for his five conscription deferments, during the Vietnam War. In recent times, even the likes of Bill Clinton and George W Bush (with his specious service with the Air National Guard) were criticised for lack of experience. The implicit fear was that as the Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces, a President bereft of Military Service would be unversed and unempathetic to the institutional realities and Veteran concerns. George H.W. Bush was the last US President to serve in combat. While the campaign spiel and competitive claims by both the contesting candidates towards Veterans in the 2024 Presidential Elections will bear prominence,

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



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



BHOPINDER SINGH

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

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BIDEN AND TRUMP FACE OFF

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

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

### PROTECTING RIVERS

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

### China’s hollow claims



China’s protest against PM Narendra Modi’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh is a continuation of its desperate attempts to lay illegal claim on Arunachal Pradesh, the integral and inalienable part of India. China can’t stomach Modi’s inauguration of strategically significant Sela Tunnel

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

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

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

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

### ENFORCE LAWS ON PLASTIC MISUSE

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

Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TEPA DEAL IS A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement is a game changer



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

# India, Mauritius forge strategic ties

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



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

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



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

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

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

ty and protecting economic interests. The increasing support and agreement about limiting climate change issues and opening up gateways for renewable energy and development in technological know-how along with channelising the sources of power generation and creating a mechanism to withstand any sudden threat posed by BRI (Belt and Road Initiatives) augur well for peace and prosperity of all the member countries. There has always been a series of extremely good relationships between India and its neighbouring countries about trade share having crossed a decent landmark during the last half a decade which was way more than expected. The recent efforts by India to protect IOA's security through cooperation with Mauritius would further boost and cement their ties and create a genuine environment for stabilising economic growth, (along with ensuring the free flow of goods and services) strategic security, prosperity, stability and combating sudden challenges arising due to climate change and maritime and border threat. Further, the panel discussion focusing on "The Quad Squad: Power and Purpose of the Polygon," during early 2023 provided another step towards solving the expansionist plans. The member countries showed their commitment to support Pacific Island countries with regional institutions through cooperation in several areas along with the terror such as climate change, resilient infrastructure, and maritime security to strengthen the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The role of India's leadership in finalising the IORA in India-Pacific areas was greatly appreciated and became even more important due to its impeccable reputation. Further negotiation may lead to the creation of a strategic mechanism to provide a shield against maritime security,

piracy, drug trafficking, armed robbery, terrorism, international crime, smuggling and cyber threats unleashed by any non-state actor as well. This may also accelerate maritime-friendly ties and bolster security around the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific areas which have lately become areas of concern. Hence, a collaborative partnership among the nations around the Indian Ocean Area through equity and access to those who are in need at the time of unprecedented crisis may show the level of insight in empowering and motivating people across the board towards extending a helping hand and saving lives. Besides, the pursuit towards the promotion of their well-being would lead to tremendous effort towards enhancement of the overall development scenario in India and neighbouring countries. The sum and substance of the idea is to ensure that the New structural Thinking and orientation changes through a fresh perspective and a framework for key demands while maintaining a synergy among various stakeholders to negotiate even on the issues of different perspectives. Since then, cooperation among Quad Group countries has set a new road map through diplomatic endeavours towards building a new apparatus for the management of terrorism. Foreign relations are operated through efficient diplomacy and diplomacy is all about the right gestures cooperation and coordination at times of crisis. India is indeed a leading partner in this regard. India is a mature democracy and its leaders are capable of cashing in on any opportunity and strategy that's a combination of tactful strength and resilience.

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

# Remembering Johan Galtung: A pioneer in peace research

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

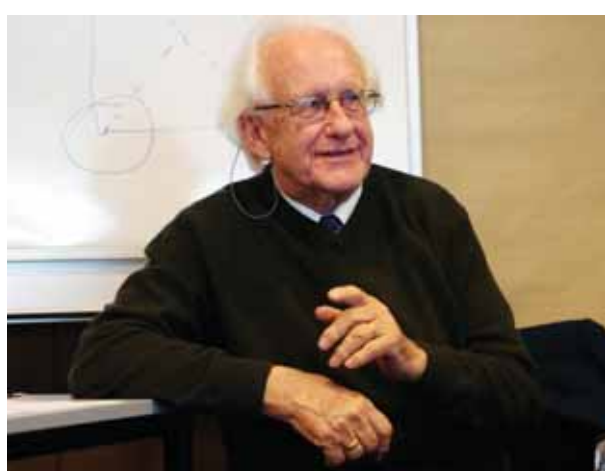
The world of peace research and conflict resolution mourns the loss of one of its most influential figures, Johan Galtung, who passed away on February 17, 2024. Johan Galtung, born in Oslo, Norway, in 1930, was not just a visionary thinker but also a prolific writer and dedicated peace activist whose legacy continues to reverberate within the field today. Growing up amidst the turmoil of World War II, Galtung's experiences deeply influenced his worldview and spurred his lifelong dedication to understanding and resolving conflicts. He devoted his career to exploring innovative approaches to peacebuilding, drawing from



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

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

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



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

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

tion embedded within societal structures. This concept remains relevant today, as issues like racism and global economic disparities continue to fuel conflicts worldwide. Galtung's advocacy for non-violent conflict resolution continues to inspire peacebuilders and activists worldwide. His emphasis on dialogue, empathy, and cooperation offers practical tools for building sustainable peace in today's conflicted world. Contemporary movements for social justice and human rights, such as Black Lives Matter, draw inspiration from Galtung's ideas about the power of non-violent resistance and grassroots mobilisation to challenge

systemic injustice. In reflecting on Galtung's legacy, we must draw upon his teachings to develop innovative approaches that promote peace, justice, and human dignity for all. His profound impact on education and social transformation persists beyond his passing, serving as a guiding light for future endeavours in the pursuit of a more peaceful and just world. As Galtung himself said, "Peace is not a fixed state, but a process that requires constant attention and effort." It is up to each of us to contribute to this ongoing work.

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

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Hinduphobia on the rise in the US, says Congressman

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

# Zardari assures Xi of closer ties

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

## Arrest warrants of Nawaz Sharif's sons cancelled

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

# PPP wins four of the six seats in Senate bypoll

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

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

# Israel says it plans to direct Palestinians out of Rafah

AP ■ TEL AVIV

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MALE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Seven more Nepalese citizens serving Russian Army killed

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

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

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

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

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

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

# Report claims Yemen's Houthis have a hypersonic missile

AP ■ DUBAI

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



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

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

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

# 50 migrants feared dead in Mediterranean Sea

AP ■ MILAN

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

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

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

# Denying same-sex marriage is unconstitutional: Japanese HC

AP ■ TOKYO

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

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

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

# Rare protest by Chinese official media against police crackdown

PTI ■ BEIJING

In a rare show of defiance, Chinese media on Thursday protested against the attempts by police to block the coverage of a suspected gas leak explosion at an eatery in the country's north, which killed seven people and injured 27 others. The blast that rocked a fried chicken shop in Yanjiao township in the city of Sanhe, near Beijing, on Wednesday is suspected to have been caused by a gas leak. As Chinese official media and foreign journalists rushed to cover the explosion, which killed two people and injured 27 others, they were forcibly prevented by local authorities from the scene, raising a rare controversy over the country's press restrictions. A journalist with state broadcaster CCTV was interrupted while reporting live from the scene of the blast. The journalist was seen surrounded by several uniformed police officers who blocked the camera and shouted about the potential danger at the scene, according to a video that circulated online. The video of the report was no longer available on CCTV's website as of Thursday, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post newspaper reported. In another video, reporters were seen surrounded by a group of uniformed police officers asking them to leave the scene. A reporter with state-run China Media Group — of which CCTV is a division — was heard saying, "We three reporters are shoved by a dozen people". The state-run All China Journalists Association objected to the official crackdown, saying that officials should not "simply and brutally obstruct journalists in the normal performance of their duties for the sake of controlling public opinion". The association urged officials to make it easier for media to conduct on-site

interviews when reporting emergencies. The police crackdown against media was seen as an attempt by the local officials to downplay the coverage, fearing reprisals as last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered steps to curb occurrences of recurring incidents of burning fires due to various causes and protect people's lives and property and social stability. As the videos of media protests went viral on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, akin to X, local authorities on Thursday issued a statement saying they were "deeply remorseful" and apologised to the journalists, the Post report said. The media protest against the official crackdown also figured in the Chinese foreign ministry briefing, as many foreign journalists were reportedly prevented from covering the evening. When questioned on restrictions imposed on journalists, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said local officials have issued a statement on the incident. China welcomes foreign journalists conducting reporting activities under the law and is willing to facilitate if the media faces any problems, Wang said. Fire and gas explosions have been taking place almost every month, prompting President Xi to order the concerned agencies to take pre-emptive measures. Fifteen people were killed and 44 others injured in a building fire in Nanning city in China last month, while 39 were killed and nine others injured in a building fire that broke out in Xinyu city in east China's Jiangxi Province on January 24. Fatal fires in China are not uncommon due to lax enforcement of building and safety standards.

# Denmark plans to expand military draft to women

AP ■ COPENHAGEN (DENMARK)

Denmark wants to increase the number of young people doing military service by extending conscription to women and increasing the time of service from 4 months to 11 months for both genders, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Wednesday. "We do not rearm because we want war. We are rearming because we want to avoid it," Frederiksen told a press conference. She said the government wants "full equality between the sexes". Denmark currently has up to 9,000 professional troops on top of the 4,700 conscripts undergoing basic training, according to official figures. The government wants to increase the number of conscripts by 300 to reach a total of 5,000. The country is a member of the NATO alliance and a staunch supporter of Ukraine in its war against Russia's invasion. Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen stressed that "Russia does not pose a threat

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

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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**REGISTRAR**


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

AP ■ SEOUL

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

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

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


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**REGISTRAR**

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# Markets rebound on buying in IT stocks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rebounded 335 points and Nifty closed above the 22,100 level on Thursday on the back of buying in IT shares and metal shares as broader markets recovered from previous day's sharp losses. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 335.39 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 73,097.28. During the day, it jumped 602.41 points or 0.82 per cent to 73,364.30. The NSE Nifty gained 148.95 points or 0.68 per cent to 22,146.65. From the Sensex pack, HCL Technologies, Infosys, Wipro, Bharti Airtel, Larsen & Toubro, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy

Services and Asian Paints were the major gainers. Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, JSW Steel, State Bank of India and Tata Steel were among the major laggards. The broader markets also staged a smart recovery, with the BSE Smallcap gauge jumping 3.11 per cent and midcap index climbing 2.28 per cent. Wholesale inflation rate declined marginally to 0.2 per cent in February compared to 0.27 per cent in the preceding month despite a slight uptick in the food basket. "The market was able to recover half of last trading day's sell-off as leverage based square-off neutralised it, while institutional buying sustained the buoyancy.



"Domestic economic data (WPI) eased to four-month low at 0.2% YoY in February, bringing ease to upcoming CPI trajectory, a relief for

future rate cuts. The broader market is outperforming the headline indices, taking advantage of mid and smallcap as a bargaining strategy," said Vinod Nair,

Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Fitch Ratings raised India's economic growth forecast to 7 per cent for the next fiscal year on the back of strong

domestic demand and sustained level of business and consumer confidence. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,595.06 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the green while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Wednesday. The BSE benchmark index tanked 906.07 points, or 1.23 per cent, to settle at 72,761.89 on Wednesday. The Nifty plummeted 338 points, or 1.51 per cent, to 21,997.70. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.76 per cent to USD 84.67 a barrel.



## Wholesale inflation declines to 0.2 per cent in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wholesale inflation rate declined marginally to 0.2 per cent in February compared to 0.27 per cent in the preceding month despite a slight uptick in the food basket. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was in the negative zone from April to October and had turned positive in November at 0.26 per cent. The inflation in February 2023 was 3.85 per cent. "The annual rate of inflation based on all India WPI number is 0.20 per cent (provisional) for the month of February 2024 (over February 2023)," the commerce and industry ministry said in a statement on Wednesday. Food inflation moved up marginally to 6.95 per cent in February from 6.85 per cent in January, data showed. Inflation in vegetables was 19.78 per cent, up from 19.71 in January. The WPI inflation in pulses was at 18.48 per cent in February compared to 16.06 in January.

The data showed that inflation in the "fuel and power" segment contracted further by 1.59 per cent in February against a deflation of 0.51 per cent in January. The prices of manufactured products, too, declined 1.27 per cent compared to 1.13 per cent in January. While WPI is a key macro data suggesting the price producers get in the wholesale market, the inflation measured by movement in Consumer Price Index (CPI) reflects retail prices and forms the basis for the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy actions. Earlier in the week, the government had released CPI data, which showed that retail inflation in February stood at 5.09 per cent and remained within the RBI's comfort zone of 6 per cent for the sixth month in a row. The February, WPI print, too, was almost unchanged compared to the January number of 5.1 per cent, though the data showed prices of certain items in the food basket had firmed up.



## Blue Star to invest ₹250 crore in next fiscal

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Leading home appliances company Blue Star will invest Rs 250 crore in the next financial year to raise the manufacturing capacity of room air conditioners at its Sri City facility in Andhra Pradesh, an official said here on Thursday. The company now has a production capacity of 10 lakh room air conditioners across its various manufacturing facilities, including the Sri City unit. "Plans are there to raise the manufacturing capacity to 1.8 million units in the near future," Blue Star Managing Director B Thiagarajan told reporters here. "The present manufacturing capacity at Sri City will be added by three lakh units next fiscal, for which an amount of Rs 250 crore will be spent," he said. The company intends to garner a market share of 15 per cent in the room AC segment, for which there is a need to have products at various price points, he said. Presently, the market share of the company is 13.75 per cent, Thiagarajan said. The AC maker will also expand its distribution network across the country. Blue Star, which earned a revenue of Rs 8,000 crore in the last fiscal, aims at a turnover of Rs 9,500 crore at the end of the current financial year, he said. "The market for room ACs is at its infection point and is poised to grow exponentially. The industry size is expected to more than double by 2030," he said. The present market size of room ACs in the country is approximately 10 million

## NTPC crosses 400 billion units power generation in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned NTPC on Thursday said its electricity generation has crossed 400 billion units (BU) this fiscal year. In FY23, the company had generated 399.3 BU, a company statement said. According to the statement, till March 13 of FY24, NTPC coal stations recorded a plant loading factor (PLF or capacity utilisation) of 77.06 per cent. During the fiscal year, the company recorded the highest ever single-day generation of 1,428 MU (million units) on September 1, 2023. NTPC has an installed capacity of 75.4 GW, while 18 GW capacity including 5 GW renewables is under construction. The company is committed to



achieving 60 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2032. NTPC has also ventured into various new business areas including e-mobility, waste-to-energy, green hydrogen solutions and participated in the bidding for power distribution of Union Territories. It is India's largest integrated power utility, contributing 1/4th of the power requirement of the country.

## Gold rises ₹250; silver jumps ₹1,700 per kg

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 250 to Rs 66,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a rally in precious metal prices in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 65,950 per 10 grams in the previous close. Silver also surged Rs 1,700 to Rs 77,000 per kg. In the previous trade, it had ended at Rs 75,300 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 66,200 per 10 grams, up by Rs 250 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,169 per ounce, up by USD 9 from the previous close. Gold prices recovered from a recent low and moved higher during the European trading session on Thursday due to a pullback in the US dollar and safe-haven buying, Gandhi added. Silver also quoted higher at USD 24.92 per ounce, and it had settled at USD 24.22 per ounce in the previous trade. "Investors look forward to today's US data, such as the Producer Price Index (PPI), weekly



job data, and retail sales, to gauge the direction of precious metal prices," Praveen Singh, Associate VP of Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. Investors closely monitor these indicators for further insights into the health of the economy and potential shifts in the US monetary policy, which can affect the demand for safe-haven assets like precious metals.

## Cyber attack, data breach among top risks for businesses in India: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cyber attacks and data breaches are the top business risks for organisations in India, according to the 2023 Global Risk Management Survey. Cyber attacks and data breaches were placed seventh in the 2021 business risks survey. Global professional services firm Aon collected inputs from around 3,000 risk managers, c-suite leaders, treasurers, talent professionals, and other executives from 61 countries and territories to identify the most pressing business challenges. The biennial survey said that India's dependency on technology is likely to increase with the widespread adoption of digital infrastructure like the Unified Payments Interface, Aadhaar, and Open Network for Digital Commerce.



"With increasing digitisation, cybercrimes continue to become rampant with costs and complexities associated with such breaches forcing organisations to look at risk mitigation and transfer mechanisms to better manage cyber risks," the survey noted. Business interruption and failure to attract or retain top talent were marked as the second and third biggest risks facing organisations in India, respectively. "There is a compelling need

for Indian businesses to leverage advanced data analytics and experts to understand and manage the dynamics of integrated risks," said Nitin Sethi, Chief Executive Officer of Talent Solutions in India at Aon. Failure to meet customer needs, rapidly changing market trends, supply chain disruptions, and personal liabilities were marked down the list as other critical challenges for businesses in India.

## Rupee falls 1 paisa, ends at 82.82 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 1 paisa to settle at 82.82 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid a strong greenback against major rivals overseas and rising crude oil prices. However, a firm trend in domestic equity markets supported the local currency and restricted the fall, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened slightly weak at 82.84 and witnessed an intra-day low of 82.89 and a high of 82.82 against the greenback during the session. The local unit finally settled at 82.82 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of just 1 paisa from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee declined 1 paisa to settle at 82.81 against the US dollar.

## Electric mobility scheme shows Government thrust on EV: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Rs 500 crore Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme 2024 shows the government's continued thrust on vehicle electrification as it is indispensable on a long-term basis to fortify the case for an EV ecosystem, industry experts said on Thursday. Ministry of Heavy Industries has announced the new scheme to promote e-mobility in the country with an outlay of Rs 500 crore for four months beginning April 2024. The new scheme is for 2-wheelers and 3-wheelers. Commenting on the government's decision, Srikumar Krishnamurthy, Senior Vice President and Co-Group Head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA said the scheme is a favourable move towards the acceleration of the electrification pace in the

country. "The EMP scheme reflects the government's continued thrust on vehicle electrification, although the quantum of subsidy is seen lower in line with expectations," he said. ICRA expects the penetration levels of e-2w and e-3w (excluding e-rickshaws) to reach 6-8 per cent and 14-16 per cent, respectively in fiscal 2024-25, he added. Ayush Lohia, CEO, Lohia opined that the scheme offers a significant opportunity to expand the market and contribute to the growth of the electric vehicle industry. "With subsidies of up to Rs 25,000 for small three-wheelers and Rs 50,000 for large ones, the scheme is expected to drive increased demand for three-wheelers and two-wheelers," he said.

## R2R to launch IPO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Routes 2 Roots (R2R), a Delhi-based non-profit NGO with a global reach, is launching its Initial Public Offering (IPO) on the NSE's Social Stock Exchange. This will be an important entry in the newly created Social Stock Exchange (SSE) where Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) instruments, have been introduced for Non-Profit Organizations (NPO's). As part of its commitment to social impact, Routes 2 Roots extends an invitation to investors to participate in this unique IPO. The primary objective of this offering is to aid the recovery of two critical Border States, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, which have recently faced the brunt of floods and landslides. The funds raised will be utilized to install smart panels, NGO's cultural digital interactive program and K12 educational e-books, in hundred schools across these states, in all the 25 districts. This will benefit lakhs of students in getting quality educational tools at par with any other public school. With an initial issue size of Rs. One crore, the IPO invites a minimum subscription of Rs. Two lakhs (and then in multiples of Rs. 50,000) from corporates, business houses, firms and institutions. This IPO is not for individuals. Founded in 2004, Routes 2 Roots has established itself as a leader in the non-profit sector, diligently working to disseminate culture, art, and heritage across India and beyond. The NGO's commitment to digital education is evident through its 'Digital Learning of Performing Arts' program, initiated in 2016, providing free live interactive classes encompassing 20 disciplines of Indian art, culture, and heritage. It stands out as the largest provider of Art and Culture education in digital and hybrid modes, setting up smart classrooms equipped with digital panels and e-books in rural India.

# Iconic Air India building with numerous firsts gets new owner

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Standing on the land reclaimed from sea for more than five decades now, Air India building in the country's commercial capital in the 1970s had people queuing up just to have the experience of using an elevator. Designed by New York-based architect John Burgee matching the aspirations of J R D Tata, the 23-storey building was among the first in those days to have elevators, neon signage on top and two levels of basement parking to name a few facilities. The building had "numerous firsts" is how a retired senior official of erstwhile Air India put it on Thursday as he recalled his more than two decade-long stint there. And the neon signage on top of the building that displayed Centaur, the logo of Air India which was later replaced after the merger of Indian Airlines,

was also a key attraction in the 1970s as not many structures boasted of such an element. The building, constructed on the state government's land, is among the many commercial high-rises to come up on the Southern tip of the land reclaimed from sea that was developed as the city's business district Nariman Point. With its central location, the iconic building, which completed 50 years in June 2020, also provides an expansive view of the Marine Drive from Nariman Point up to Malabar Hill. On Thursday, the central government announced approving the transfer of the Air India building in Mumbai to the Maharashtra government for a consideration of Rs 1,601 crore. Former executive director of erstwhile Air India Jitender Bhargava, who had worked out of the building for over 20

years, on Thursday told PTI that the building had "numerous firsts" and added that the board room was on the 23rd floor. Centralised air conditioning facilities and elevators with piped music were among the other attractions. When Burgee designed the building, it was one of its kind at that time in 1970. Bhargava, whose office was on the 20th floor of the building during the period from 1989 to 2010, said that when the building was opened, people used to come to have the experience of taking the elevator from the ground floor to the first floor, which housed the airline's booking office at that time. There is also an auditorium and cafeteria, among other facilities at the building, where around eight floors were occupied by Air India, he recalled. During the Gulf boom in the 80s, job seekers used to flock to the Air India booking



counter. As many as 400 people would be visiting the place to book flight tickets to various Gulf countries, a retired airline official told PTI. According to Godrej archives, the Air India building was among the first few high-rises to be constructed on the new stretch of the reclaimed land. The building had its share of cinematic moments as many Bollywood movies have featured it in various scenes.

During its more than five-decade-long existence, the building, also earthquake-resistant, was rocked by a bomb blast in 1993. The iconic building in many aspects also reflects the development journey of Mumbai and even as a link between the past and the present. In its archive Volume 2, Issue 1 dated April-May 2014, Godrej said that back in the 1920s, when the post-war

boom put great stress on land, the Development Directorate proposed the Backbay Reclamation Scheme. "The pier at the southern end of Block II, near Colaba, was completed in 1960 and named Nariman Point, after the firebrand Khurshed Framji Nariman, a whistle-blower who brought to light financial misappropriation by the British Government," it added. It also said that a construction boom in the following decade saw this region spurting many commercial high-rises. Some of the first few high-rises to be constructed on this new stretch of land were the headquarters of Air India and Indian Express. "Interestingly, Godrej fabrications can be found on both these buildings. While 1,502 windows were supplied and fitted in the Air India building, at the Express Towers, false ceilings with trapezoid perforations made possible by the skills of the

Panchals were installed, along with aluminium frame," as per the archive. While Tata Group took over Air India in January 2022, the airline's non-core assets, including land and buildings, were transferred to AI Assets Holding Company Ltd (AIAHL). The non-core assets valued at Rs 14,718 crore were transferred to AIAHL after it was set up in 2019 by the government as a precursor to the sale of Air India for holding the debt and non-core assets of the then national carrier. "GoI has approved transfer of Air India building, Mumbai of AI Assets Holding Company Ltd (AIAHL) to Government of Maharashtra (GoM) at consideration of Rs 1,601 cr. GoM has agreed to waive dues of Rs 298.42 cr, which would have been otherwise payable by AIAHL to GoM for this transaction," DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said in a post on X.

# Hitaashee keeps 10 shot lead at Hero WPGT

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

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



Par-5 fourth. She made up one shot on the next hole, the Par-3 fifth, but after two more pars, she dropped back-to-back bogeys on the eighth and ninth. On the back nine, a bogey on 13th was compensated by a birdie on 18th for a round of 75, yet she holds a massive lead going into the final day. Bishnoi had an up-and-down round with five birdies but also gave away three bogeys for a 70, the best card of the day. She shared the second place with Vani, whose 75 did not have any birdies. She double bogeyed the Par-4 sixth and bogeyed the seventh.

Amandeep had three bogeys on the front nine and her solitary gain of the day came on the Par-4 13th, but she also closed with double bogey on the Par-5 18th for a 76.

Vidhatri and Zara, who will be part of the Indian Golf Union's team at the Queen Sirikit Cup next week in New Zealand, shot 73 and 74 respectively. Vidhatri had two birdies against three bogeys, while Zara had two birdies and a bogey on the front nine and a birdie on the 10th at which point she was 2-under for the day. She then dropped shots on the next four holes from the 11th to 14th for a 74.



## Malik stays in fourth place in Cape Town

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

India's Tvesa Malik carded a three-under 71 to stay in tied fourth place after the second round of the Standard Bank Ladies Open here. Tvesa, who shot 1-under 73 on the first day at the Par-74 course, was four-under for two rounds with one more day to go.

A multiple winner on her domestic Pro Golf Tour in India and a winner in South Africa last month, Tvesa is four shots behind the first round leader Kylie Henry of Scotland.

After a first round 69, Kylie added a 71 to be 8-under 140. Tvesa made good use of the Par-5s, as three of her six birdies came on them. Tvesa opened the second day with a bogey, but hit back fast with three birdies between the third and the sixth and added three pars to turn in 2-under. On the back nine, Tvesa birdied the Par-5s on the 11th and the 14th to get closer to the top before she was pulled back by bogeys on the 15th and the 17th.

A closing birdie was a good way to end the day as she aims for another good finish in South Africa. South African duo Cassandra Alexander (74-69) and

Gabrielle Venter (74-69) shot identical scores for the second day running and moved into shared second place at 5-under 143.

Tvesa, French golfer Emie Peronnin (73-71) and England's Florentyna Parker (73-71) were tied fourth at 4-under 144.

The top 30 and ties make the cut, which was projected at 3-over 149.

The field this week includes all three winners on the Sunshine Ladies Tour this year with Kylie Henry, Tvesa Malik and Helen Kreuzer. They have been joined by Kiera Floyd, Gabrielle Venter, Nicole Garcia, Cara Gorlie, Tandi McCallum, Nadia van der Westhuizen and Stacy Bregman.

The 54-hole tournament carried a purse of 600,000 and is the fourth event of the schedule for this year.

The tournament will also play a key role in determining the overall Sunshine Ladies Tour Order of Merit champion, with the winner here earning an historic exemption in the Sunshine Tour's new Waterfall City Tournament of Champions to be played in May.

All winners from the 2024 Sunshine Ladies Tour will also be exempt into the event.



## Højgaard, Paul confirm participation at Hero Indian Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Denmark's Rasmus Højgaard and Yannik Paul of Germany have confirmed their participation for the Indian Open golf tournament beginning March 28. Rasmus, who turns 23 on Tuesday, will be seeking more silverware to his already growing collection when he tees off at the USD 2.25 million event. He already has four wins on the DP World Tour to his name. Rasmus will be making his debut at the tournament, which will be played at the DLF Golf and Country Club, and will hope to mark his birthday month with a fifth career win on the DP World Tour.

Currently 75th in the world rankings, the Dane will be one of the highest-ranked players in the field, his career-best rank being 63rd. He is coming off a glorious start to 2024 with Top-10s in three successive starts in Ras Al Khaimah, where he was second, and then T-8 in Bahrain and T-6 in Qatar. Before that, he was an identical T-11 at the Hero Dubai Desert Classic and the Dubai Invitational. His first win at the 2019 AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open (part 2020 season) made him the third youngest to win a title in the DPWT and he added to that by winning the 2020 ISPS Handa UK Championship, 2021 Omega European Masters and the 2023 Made in Himmerland. A win at the Hero Indian

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

## Switzerland calls up Sierro, Kutesa

AP ■ BERN (SWITZERLAND)

Switzerland rewarded midfielder Vincent Sierro and winger Derek Kutesa for standout seasons with their first squad calls on Thursday. The Swiss have European Championship warm-up games at Denmark and Ireland this month.

Sierro is having a career year at age 28 captaining Toulouse in the French league, and the 26-year-old Kutesa has starred for Servette, his hometown team in Geneva, which is chasing a first Swiss league title for 25 years. National coach Murat Yakin also recalled defenders Silvan Widmer of Mainz, Kevin Mbabu of Augsburg and Becir Omeragic of Montpellier. Yakin acknowledged on Thursday that team spirit was part of his thoughts for a



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

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

## Lille midfielder Bouaddi looks to follow in Hazard footsteps

PTI ■ PARIS

When Eden Hazard visited his former club Lille during a French league game last weekend, it was a timely reminder of what the northern club did so well in the past. Turning young players into future stars. Next in line could be Ayyoub Bouaddi, a 16-year-old midfielder who has caught the eye and is being touted as Lille's best prospect since Hazard.

Hazard joined Lille's academy as a youth, made his league debut two months before his 17th birthday, then helped the club win the French league and cup double in 2011. A high-profile move to Chelsea turned him into a global star. Hazard won the English Premier League and the Europa League twice during a spell where the Belgium

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

## Sharath continues giant killing spree

BEATS WORLD NO 22 TO MOVE TO SINGAPORE SMASH QUARTERFINALS

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

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



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

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

shock Jorgic 8-11 11-6 11-8 11-9 in the round of 32. In the first round of the main draw, the Chennai-based player had blanked World No. 31 Chilean Nicolas Burgos 3-0 (11-5, 11-4, 11-6).

**SHARATH'S OLYMPIC CHANCES SWELL:** The stellar run will boost Sharath's chance of sealing a berth in the singles event of the Paris Olympics with his rankings set to drastically improve. India can send only two entries in the singles event and Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) will take the final call considering the individual rankings. Currently, Harmeet Desai (64) and Manav Thakkar (83) are the top two Indians in the men's section. Sharath is likely to overtake them when the rankings are updated next week. The Indian men's and women's teams have already scripted history by qualifying for the Olympic for the first time.

## Sindhu goes down to An Se Young

PTI ■ BIRMINGHAM

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

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



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

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

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

# Mumbai clinch Ranji Trophy for 42nd time

BEAT VIDARBHA BY 169 RUNS IN FINAL

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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



first-class career. Together, they forged the longest stand of the innings, consuming 255 balls in 194 minutes from day four until a little after the resumption of

the second session on the final day. Wadkar fell shortly after play resumed — leg before off Tanush Kotian (4/95) — and once the pair was broken, it all

ended in a jiffy for the visitors who have now lost the Ranji Trophy final for a third time after winning two titles. Tushar Deshpande continued to employ the short ball to

dismiss Dubey (65 off 128 balls, 5 x4s, 2x6s) and Aditya Sarwate, who missed the majority of the game owing to a back spasm. While Kotian cleaned up Yash

Thakur (6) for his fourth wicket, Dhawal Kulkarni signed off from all forms of cricket with the final wicket of the game in the form of Umesh Yadav for a fairytale ending.

Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane praised Vidarbha for their gritty display before lifting the trophy and rightly so. For a team which paid a heavy price for a poor first-innings score — 105 to concede a 119-run lead in response to Mumbai's 224 — Vidarbha showed resilience to gave a fine account of themselves in the second innings. Mumbai began the final day hoping to break the sixth-wicket stand between Wadkar and Dubey early but their wait only extended since the batters overcame all challenges that the hosts threw at them. With the pace bowlers not being able to trouble the batters, Mumbai hopes were pinned on their spinners but their own error cost Rahane's side early on. Kotian appealed for a bat-pad catch at silly point against Dubey in the 101st over of the innings but the appeal was turned down. In a show of desperation, Mumbai went for the DRS intervention which confirmed the ball had not grazed the bat and was also going to miss the leg stump. Kotian then found an outside

edge off Wadkar's bat which fell close to Rahane. Mumbai's frustration was evident when Kulkarni held his ground at the end of his follow through after being declined a leg-before appeal against Dubey. Kulkarni made some gestures and even exchanged a few words with the umpire but replays confirmed that the ball had pitched outside the leg-stump. Dubey was also lucky when Kotian pinned him in front of the wickets but Mumbai could not get it overturned since they had no reviews left. The Vidarbha batter continued to ride his luck, getting another decision in his favour when replays showed the ball had missed his bat and gloves off Shams Mulani. Wadkar completed his century shortly after lunch but once he was dismissed, the rest of the batting collapsed soon after.

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

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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

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

Pardiwala remembered how arduous Pant's recovery journey was.

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

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

However, Pardiwala was left astonished when he saw Pant's confidence as he



entered the recovery phase.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The triumphant Mumbai team will receive an additional Rs 5 crore for its unprecedented 42nd Ranji Trophy title after the state cricket association doubled the prize purse on Thursday. Mumbai won a record-extending 42nd Ranji title after beating Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of the summit showdown at the Wankhede Stadium.

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

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

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

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

Mumbai head coach Omkar Salvi, who was appointed to the post last year, lauded MCA's move to double the prize money considering that lot of players don't have full-time jobs these days.

"For all the players, nowadays, there



are very less institutions which provide jobs. For youngsters, there is also a lot of lure towards franchise cricket (where) there is also a lot of

money," Salvi said.

"The BCCI is taking that step and raising that money along with that, the MCA taking that step forward

to equal that amount is a great help for the players who don't have some jobs or some earnings.

"It is definitely an inspiration (and) it should be intrinsic -- the monetary help will give them that security and it will definitely stabilise them mentally and financially so that they can give more to the game," he added.

On the final day, Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session on the last day after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win. The team was eventually bowled out for 368 in a contest that ebbed and flowed with Vidarbha frustrating the hosts for long periods of play on the last two days.

## RCB kick starts pre tournament camp, Kohli expected to join in next few days

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore began their pre-tournament camp without their numero uno Virat Kohli, who might take a few more days to join before the team starts its IPL campaign against reigning champions Chennai Super Kings on March 22.

Most of the domestic players joined the camp under the guidance of new head coach Andy Flower and Director of Cricket Mo Bobat and they went through the paces on the opening day of the camp on Wednesday.

While skipper Faf du Plessis was in attendance along with West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph, Kohli, easily



the biggest 'Box Office' in Indian cricket, is yet to hit the straps after a paternity break that ruled him out of the marquee five-Test series

against England.

"Kohli is expected to join in the next few days," a BCCI source, who is tracking developments within IPL

teams, told PTI.

Kohli might make his first appearance for the franchise during 'RCB Unbox', a high-profile annual event held at the Garden City in which fans get a glimpse of their favourite stars.

As RCB started their training session, skipper Du Plessis told the team it was lucky to have Flower as its coach.

"I think he's an incredible coach. So I feel team is very lucky to have him, kind and big hearted man," Du Plessis was quoted as saying on RCB 'Bold Diaries'.

Flower, on his part, said: "New chapter to write in RCB story, we have been given the chance to write and it is a privilege, something to be very excited about."

## Former Lankan cricketer Lahiru injured in accident

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Former Sri Lanka cricketer Lahiru Thirimanne sustained minor injuries after a road accident, leading to his hospitalisation in Trippane, Anuradapura, local media reported on Thursday.

According to a report in 'Ada Derana', the 34-year-old Thirimanne was admitted to Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital "with minor injuries sustained in the accident".

Anuradapura is a major city, located about 205km from national capital Colombo.

"Police mentioned that the car in which Thirimanne was travelling had collided with a

lorry arriving from the opposite direction at around 07.45 a.m. This morning," it stated.

"Three other individuals travelling in the car, the driver of the lorry and another person have been injured and hospitalised."

Thirimanne appeared in 44 Tests for Sri Lanka, scoring 2088 runs, including three hundreds.

He played 127 ODI for the island nation, scoring 3164 runs in all. He also played 26 T20 Internationals for Sri Lanka.

Thirimanne last played for Sri Lanka in 2022 before announcing his retirement the next year.

## Domestic umpiring standards under scanner after CK Nayudu Trophy howler

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The dubious dismissal of Karnataka opener Prakhar Chaturvedi in the recent Col. CK Nayudu Trophy U23 final against Uttar Pradesh has raised concerns about the standards of umpiring in domestic matches.

The unsavoury incident happened in Karnataka's first innings after Chaturvedi played a pull against UP pacer Kunal Tyagi well away from his body.

The ball, which took a rather healthy edge off Chaturvedi's bat, moved further away from stumper Aaradhya Yadav who had to make a full-length dive to his left to make the collection.

But the ball rolled out of Yadav's gloves before he could complete the catch even as the wicketkeeper thudded on to the ground.

However, the on-field umpire upheld the appeal for caught behind much to the dismay of batter Chaturvedi, who made 33

and 86 in Karnataka's maiden victory in the tournament which came by virtue of their first innings lead here at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

"Yes, it was a clear case of not out as I later saw the clippings. The ball came out of UP wicketkeeper's hands before he completed the catch. The umpire should not have given it out," a former First-Class umpire told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"It is important to maintain top standards because these junior tournaments are stepping stones for several budding cricketers. Imagine how bad that boy (Chaturvedi) would have felt after spending close to an hour at the crease, only to get out like that.

"Also, umpiring standards have a direct relation with the overall quality of a match," he said.

So, how can one ensure consistency and high level of accuracy in domestic umpiring?

"The BCCI has laid out some



strict parameters in the umpires' selection process and many state associations themselves have umpires associations working hard to ensure a good level of officiating.

"But I feel former cricketers should be encouraged to take up umpiring as they know the game closer than anyone else. We have had S Venkataraghavan, Peter Willey, David Shepherd and Dickie Bird who were excellent umpires as they leaned on their experience from their playing days," he added.

Recently, former India batter Manoj Tiwary had lashed out at poor standards of umpiring in domestic cricket.

Another former First-Class batter said instances of umpires making childish mistakes were quite common in domestic circuit.

"It is quite common, especially in junior cricket. But in one Ranji (Trophy) match, I was hit on my hips and the umpire gave that out leg before. I was 48 then. I

brushed it aside, thinking that mistakes can happen to anyone.

"But in the next innings, when I was batting on 45, the same umpire gave me out caught behind off a left-arm spinner when my bat was tucked safely behind my pads while leaving the ball. Even the silly point fielder could not hide his surprise," he noted.

There have been initiatives like the umpiring academy in Nagpur to better the standards but the lack of continuity has been the bane.

"Those were good ideas but somehow did not take off as expected. There is an ICC online course too for the umpires.

"But beyond all these, the board should increase remuneration for umpires and should also ensure that First-Class umpires officiate at state level or even some local matches so that there is no gap between the assignments and they remain sharp," the umpire detailed.