

**OPINION 6**

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**WORLD 8**

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NEW DELHI, FRIDAY MARCH 1, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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## Sandeshkhali Shaitan Shackled

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■**  
BASIRHAT

In an apparent damage-control exercise, the Trinamool Congress expelled Sheikh Shahjahan, the don of Sandeshkhali, a day after his arrest. This action comes about two months after his men attacked a raiding team of Enforcement Directorate officials and, notably, a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arambagh in Hooghly district of Bengal.

Speaking about the decision, TMC MP Derek O'Brien and State Minister Bratya Basu said Shahjahan was suspended from the party for six years and challenged the BJP leadership to take similar action against their leader and MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is accused of assaulting women wrestlers. "There are two types of parties... One type of party talk, talk and talk while the other types like the Trinamool Congress... Walk the talk," O'Brien said.

Basu alleged that, taking advantage of some stray incidents "against which the TMC always takes a truthful decision," the Opposition parties like BJP were out to malign the Government. Alleged to be the "fund manager and rigging expert" of his party in large parts of North 24 Parganas, Shahjahan was arrested on

Wednesday night about two months after he hit the national headlines when his men beat up and seriously injured a raiding team of Enforcement Directorate officials. Apart from masterminding the attack on the ED team, Shahjahan, a Trinamool Congress leader and district board member of North 24 Parganas, is also charged with mass land-grabbing and alleged sexual assault on women in Sandeshkhali and the neighbouring riverine islands of the district.



ADG, South Bengal, Supratim Sarkar, said Shahjahan was arrested late on Wednesday night from the

Minakhan area, adding that he had been forwarded to Basirhat court. The TMC leader has been remanded to 10 days police custody, sources said. A few of his cronies, including local TMC leaders Shibu Hajra, Uttam Sardar, and Ajit Maity, had already been arrested earlier. Earlier, the Calcutta High Court had instructed the police to arrest him without delay. Sandeshkhali has been in the national news after Shahjahan's men attacked the ED on January 5.

Subsequently, after about a month, emboldened by his absence from the area, hundreds of women rose up in revolt, complaining of land grab, sexual assault, and surrounded the local police station. Since then, the area has been on the boil with successive visits of national commissions for women, SCs, and STs, almost all of whom have demanded the imposition of President's Rule in the area. Regarding the TMC leadership's claim that they are the real party with a difference that acts against corrupt members, Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar said, "It is all drama being enacted by Mamata Banerjee... to save her face... Shahjahan had been under TMC's protection for the past two months. The CPI(M) also said Shahjahan was an asset of the TMC and "the party could not afford to expel him... Not only because his goons rig polls, but also because he knows too much about TMC's money laundering." Meanwhile, the ED has moved the court, saying Shahjahan could tamper with the evidence for which the agency had raided his house. The agency could soon seek his custody in the ₹10,000 crore ration scam that has landed senior TMC leader and former Bengal Minister Jyotipriya Mallick in jail.



Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan, accused of sexual violence and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali village, being produced at the Basirhat court, in North 24 Parganas, on Thursday

## BJP suggests names of Lok Sabha Contestants

**RAJESH KUMAR ■**  
NEW DELHI

From External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to late Sushma Swaraj's daughter Bansuri Swaraj, and Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, were among the names that circulated in the BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting on Thursday as the party convened to release its first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Sources said the meeting discussed the seats lost in the 2019 General Elections and the margins of victory and defeat to decide on the various sets of names proposed by the ruling party. Prior to the CEC meeting, a five-hour-long session was held at the Prime Minister's residence at 7 Lok Kalyan Marg, attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the party's national president JP Nadda.

As per the first list to be released Modi will be the obvious contestant from his two term Varanasi constituency, Union Home Minister Amit Shah from Gandhi Nagar, Rajnath Singh from Lucknow, Smriti Irani from Amethi, while former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh



Chouhan from Vidisha, Union Minister Kiren Rijju from Arunachal West, Arjun Ram Meghwal from Bikaner, Gajendra Sekhawat from Jodhpur, Sambit Patra from Puri, Jyotiraditya Scindia from Gwalior, Pratima Bhoumik from Tripura west, Saroj Pandey from Korba, BD Sharma from Khajurao, Ajay Bhatt from Nainital, Ravi Kishan from Gorakhpur, Manoj Tiwari from North East Delhi, Parvish Sahib Singh Verma from West Delhi, Ramesh Bihduri from South Delhi, Annapurna Devi from Koderna, Sunil Kumar from Chattr, Nishikant Dubey from Godda, Arjun Munda from Khunti, Kailash Chaudhary from Barmer, Om Birla from Kota, Rahul Kaswan from Churu, Dushyant Singh from

Jhalawar, CP Joshi from Chittorgarh.

A decision on candidates for the States of Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu has been put on hold. Alliance discussions are in progress in all three States — with Akali Dal in Punjab, Telugu Desam Party and Jana Sena in Andhra Pradesh and the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu. Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Devendra Fanavis, Prakash Javadekar, Mansukhbhai Mandaviya, Pushkar Dhami, Pramod Sawant, Bhupendra Yadav, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Keshav Maurya, Yogi Adityanath and others attended the meeting.

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### NEWS BREAK

#### India blasts Pakistan for raising Kashmir at UNHRC

**UNITED NATIONS/GENEVA:** In a strong retort to debt-trapped Pakistan after it raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at the UN Human Rights Council, India has said it cannot pay any attention to a country which is soaked in red due to the bloodshed from terrorism that it sponsors around the world. First Secretary in the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva Anupama Singh exercised India's Right of Reply at the ongoing high-level segment of the 55th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on Wednesday. India exercised the Right of Reply to respond to Turkiye and Pakistan after the two countries made references to Kashmir in their statements at the high-level segment.

#### Cancellation of protesting farmers visas sought

**Chandigarh:** In a development regarding the ongoing farmers' protest, DSP Ambala Joginder Sharma has revealed that efforts are underway to cancel the passports and visas of individuals allegedly involved in violence. "We have identified involved in violence coming to Haryana from Punjab in the name of farmers' protest. We have identified them with CCTV cameras and drone cameras. We will request the Ministry and embassy to cancel their Visas and passports. Their photos, name and address will be given to the passport office. We are working on canceling their passports", DSP Ambala Joginder Sharma said.

## India's infrastructure friendly GDP Soars to 8.4 per cent



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

India's economic growth accelerated to 8.4 per cent in the October-December quarter of this fiscal, mainly due to double-digit growth in manufacturing and good showing by mining & quarrying and construction sectors. The GDP (gross domestic product) growth was 4.3 per cent in the October-December 2022 quarter, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday. The manufacturing sector's output, as per the gross value added in the third quarter of this fiscal, grew by 11.6 per cent compared to a contraction of 4.8 per cent in the year-ago period. Mining and quarrying grew at 7.5 per cent in the third quarter, up

from 1.4 per cent a year ago. The construction sector kept the growth momentum at 9.5 per cent against the same growth rate in the year-ago period. However, the output of the farm sector declined by 0.8 per cent during the quarter compared to a growth of 5.2 per cent a year ago. The national accounts data showed electricity, gas, water supply, and other utility services segment has grown by 9 per cent year-on-year against an 8.7 per cent rise. The GVA growth in the services sector — trade, hotel, transport, communication and services related to broadcasting — was 6.7 per cent during the third quarter against 9.2 per cent. Financial, real estate and professional services grew by 7.7 per cent in the third quarter over 7.7

per cent earlier. Public administration, defence and other services posted 7.5 per cent growth against 3.5 per cent in the third quarter of the last fiscal. The NSO also released the second advance estimate for the current fiscal and pegged the economic growth at 7.6 per cent against 7.3 per cent estimated in the first advance estimate released in January. "Real GDP or GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in the year 2023-24 is estimated to attain a level of ₹172.90 lakh crore, against the first revised estimates of GDP for the year 2022-23 of ₹160.71 lakh crore. The growth rate of GDP during 2023-24 is estimated at 7.6 per cent compared to the growth rate of 7.0 per cent in 2022-23," the NSO statement said. According to the statement, the nominal GDP or GDP at current prices in 2023-24 is estimated to attain a level of ₹293.90 lakh crore against ₹269.50 lakh crore in 2022-23, showing a growth rate of 9.1 per cent. It stated that the GDP at constant (2011-12) prices in Q3 of 2023-24 is estimated at ₹43.72 lakh crore against ₹40.35 lakh crore in Q3 of 2022-23, showing a growth rate of 8.4 per cent. The GDP at current prices in Q3 of 2023-24 is estimated at ₹75.49 lakh crore compared to ₹68.58 lakh crore in Q3 of 2022-23, showing a growth rate of 10.1 per cent, it stated.

## Congress survives Himachal Tremor

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■**  
NEW DELHI

With Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu taking responsibility for Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi's defeat in the Rajya Sabha polls, Priyanka Gandhi, a member of Congress' first family, once again proved to be the saviour for the party in preserving the Government in the state. After intense deliberations within the party, the nominated central observers, and Priyanka, who serves as general secretary without any specific charge, Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania on Thursday disqualified six Congress MLAs who had cross-voted in the recent Rajya Sabha polls for the lone seat in the state. They had also abstained from voting on Budget in the Assembly, defying a party whip to vote in favour of the Government on the Finance Bill. The ruling Congress had sought their disqualification on this ground. Following the



Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, HP Congress Committee (HFCC) president Pratibha Singh with central observers and others during a Press conference in Shimla on Thursday

disqualification of the rebel legislators, the effective strength of the House has reduced from 68 to 62 while the number of Congress MLAs has shrunk from 40 to 34 and the Government is safe as of now though Opposition Leader Jairam Thakur maintained that the Government will fall any day due to the disgruntled legislators and intense internal fighting. Addressing the media in Shimla, party observers

Bhupinder Hooda, D K Shivakumar said after one-to-one meetings with the Congress MLAs and deliberations with Sukhu and State Congress chief Pratibha Singh, differences have been ironed out. He also said it has been decided to form a coordination committee to sort out all internal matters and no leader would go to the press. The political crisis in Himachal Pradesh was triggered by cross-voting by six Congress MLAs in Rajya Sabha elections.

Continued on Page 2

## India expands footprint in Indian Ocean region

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

India and Mauritius are natural partners in the maritime domain to combat traditional and non-traditional challenges in the Indian Ocean region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday after virtually inaugurating a new airstrip, a jetty and six community development projects in the island nation. The India-assisted projects in Agalega island of Mauritius are seen as significant as they are expected to boost connectivity as well as maritime security and surveillance in the strategic waters in the region. After inaugurating the projects along with Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, Modi

announced that Mauritius will be the first country to join India's Jan Aushadhi scheme, which is an initiative aimed at providing quality medicines at affordable prices. In his remarks, Modi flagged concerns over challenges in the Indian Ocean region and said India and Mauritius are "natural partners" in the maritime domain to deal with them. "Many traditional and non-traditional challenges are emerging in the Indian Ocean Region. All these challenges affect our economy. India and Mauritius are natural partners in the field of maritime security to deal with the challenges," he said at the virtual ceremony. "We are actively working to ensure



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth jointly inaugurate several India-assisted development projects at the Agalega Island in Mauritius, via a video conference, on Thursday

security, prosperity and stability in the Indian Ocean Region. We are cooperating together in all areas like monitoring of exclusive economic zone, joint patrolling, hydrography, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," he said. Modi's comments came amid increasing concerns in New Delhi over China's growing military forays into the Indian Ocean region which is largely considered as the backyard of the Indian Navy. He said the inauguration of the airstrip and jetty at Agalega island will further advance the cooperation. The Prime Minister described Mauritius as an important partner under India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and that the bilateral development partnership has been

an important pillar of the strategic relations. "Our development partnerships are based on the priorities of Mauritius. Be it Mauritius's needs related to EEZ (exclusive economic zone) security, or health security, India has always respected the needs of Mauritius," he said. Modi said the basic objective of India's efforts is to bring about meaningful changes in the lives of common people in Mauritius. "Today holds a special significance for our development partnership. I am extremely happy that today we are seeing the completion of the commitment I had made in 2015. In India these days it is being called 'Modi's Guarantee'," he said. The Prime Minister also talked about the "vibrant, strong and

unique" partnership between India and Mauritius, adding the island nation is New Delhi's special partner under its vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth For All in the Region). "Our relations have gained unprecedented momentum in the last 10 years. We have achieved new heights in mutual cooperation," he said. The inauguration of these projects came weeks after the launch of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) systems and RuPay card services in Mauritius. "We are making history today on the island of Agalega with the inauguration of a new airstrip, a new jetty and several other development projects," Jugnauth said at the event.



# BJP launches campaign to gather Delhiites feedback

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi BJP on Thursday launched a door-to-door campaign for gathering suggestions of the people for its manifesto and seeking their views on 'Viksit Bharat' ahead of Lok Sabha polls. In a press conference, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the campaign will continue till March 15 in which the party workers will visit every household, markets and public places across the city carrying a form and boxes to gather feedback from the people. He said the party workers will also seek suggestions of separate groups like chartered accountants, professionals, sports persons, teachers, professors and theatre actors among others during the campaign. The party workers will provide a small form to the people in which they will write down their suggestions on developed India, a better Delhi and their expectations from Prime Minister Narendra Modi before depositing it in the box. A phone number (9090902024) was also released by the party for the people to give their suggestions

by recording their voice. People can also given their feedback through downloading NaMo app, Sachdeva said. Apart from party workers, social media influencers will also join the campaign, he said. An LED van will also visit different areas of the city to encourage people to give their suggestions for developed India and a better Delhi, Sachdeva said, and added "the manifesto 2024 will be peoples' manifesto based on their expectations". The Delhi BJP president claimed that the party fulfilled 529 of 530 suggestions provided by the people that were included in the manifesto for 2014 Lok Sabha polls. "In 2019, we delivered on 95 per cent or 222 of the 234 suggestions from people included in the manifesto," he said. Sachdeva emphasised on the role of election manifesto saying it was a game changer for the BJP in recent Assembly polls in Chhattisgarh. "In Chhattisgarh, everyone wrote off the BJP but the manifesto did the magic in the assembly polls. Our workers collected suggestions from door to door. The manifesto drafted on suggestions from the people paved



Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva & LOP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on the Viksit Bharat Modi Ki Guarantee Rath address a press conference. Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

the way for the formation of the BJP government in the state," he said. In the press conference, State Secretary Harsh Malhotra, State Media Chief Praveen Shankar Kapoor and Media Relations Head Vikram Mittal were present. Earlier, senior Delhi BJP leaders including Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri discussed the party's preparations for the elections in Delhi. The BJP currently holds all the seven Lok Sabha seats. The process of candidate selection on the seven seats is underway. The Delhi BJP election committee has submitted a list of around 25-30 probabilities to the central leadership for consideration in ticket distribution for the Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. The Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely also said that the party will gather feedback on people's problems in Delhi and added that its manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls is likely to be released in a week. "Though we are contesting on just three seats, we are focusing on making a manifesto for Delhi. This entire exercise will be completed in a

week, after which we will release a people's manifesto," Lovely said. Rahul Gandhi held direct discussions with the common people of Delhi such as labourers, homeless people, teachers, youngsters, women, farmers and RWAs (Residents' Welfare Associations) to get first-hand information about their problems, he added. Through the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Gandhi understood the problems of the common people and took up their issues with the authorities for solutions, the Congress leader said. A manifesto is the soul of any party, it is the vision and a mirror of its thoughts. The Congress has always worked for the welfare of the people and addressed their problems, Lovely further said. He added, "The 50 issues in the Congress' manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections will be based on the five pillars of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra — youth, women, bhagidari, workers and farmers — to give justice to the lower and the middle classes, the downtrodden and exploited sections, industrial workers and contract workers and others."

## LG approves delayed lease deeds for workers housing

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has paved the way for execution of lease deeds between the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) and original allottees of the flats under various Workers' Housing Schemes at Bawana and Narela in North-West Delhi which was initiated almost two decades ago. The LG, who approved the uniform draft lease deed, however slammed the DSIIDC and noted on file that it was baffling to observe that even after a lapse of about two decades since the initiation of the first housing scheme in 2003-2004, the lease format is yet to be finalized. The RGHS-I was initiated in Bawana in 2003-04 and RGHS-II at Narela and Bawana in 2006-07. He said it is disturbing to note that despite explicit instructions of his predecessor in 2019 to explain the reason for delay in execution of lease deeds in respect of workers' housing schemes, the DSIIDC went on to cause another inexplicable delay of approximately 5 years before placing the matter for finalization of lease deed. He directed that no further delay can be allowed in the matter and the entire exercise of execution of lease deeds which would benefit around 5311 allottees has to be undertaken in a time bound manner. The matter pertains to the allotment of flats under various schemes - Rajiv Gandhi Housing Scheme (RGHS)-I (2820 allotments made in 2006-07 to individual industrial workers), RGHS-II (150+405 allotments made in 2014 and 2017 to individual industrial workers), Institutional



Allotment of 384 flats through MoU with Pragati Power Corporation Ltd (PPCL) in 2010, Institutional Allotment of 512 and 1040 flats through MoU with Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) in 2012 and 2015-18. It is important to note that in pursuance of the directions of Supreme Court in 1996, industries running in non-conforming areas in Delhi were relocated to industrial areas ie. Bawana & Narela. In order to provide functional and economical residence to the industrial workers and to avoid clustering of JJ Colony in and around those areas, Low-Cost Housing Schemes were introduced by the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC). Saxena in his noting on file also said, that it was only after the persistence of other organizations like Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and Pragati Power Corporation Ltd (PPCL) who were allotted flats through MoU, that the department was woken up from its slumber and this case reflects a deep sense of apathy and

## BBA student killed by friends, body buried in farmland

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
A 20-year-old BBA student in Greater Noida was allegedly strangled to death by four friends after an argument broke out and buried his body 6 ft deep inside a farmland in Amroha. Three of the accused were arrested on Wednesday evening after a gunfight with the police in Greater Noida in which the trio suffered gunshot injuries on their legs, officials said. The victim and the accused belonged to the Gajraula area in Amroha district, Uttar Pradesh, where the murder took place on Tuesday night, the officials said. The student, who belongs to a business family, was enrolled

for a Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA) degree at a private university in Greater Noida. When he did not return to the university hostel after leaving it on Monday, an FIR was lodged at the local Dabri police station and an investigation was initiated, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Greater Noida) Saad Miya Khan said. "On February 27, the police received information that Bennett University student Yash Mittal had not returned to the hostel since February 26. Immediately, police teams were formed to investigate this case. When CCTV footage was reviewed, it was found that he left the university campus safely in a car while talking to someone

on the phone," Khan said. Later, as part of the probe, call data records were also checked, leading police to some suspects, including his friend Rachit Nagar who told the police about a party in Gajraula where Mittal was invited by his friends, the officer said. During the probe, Rachit Nagar told police that he, Yash Mittal, Shivam Singh, Shubham Singh, Sushant Verma and Shubham Chaudhary, who lived in Gajraula (Amroha), are friends with each other since November 2023," the DCP said. "On February 26, they had called Yash Mittal for the party in Gajraula. He went there during which an

argument broke out between him and others after which he was killed and his body was buried inside a farmland in Gajraula. We recovered the body from the farmland on Wednesday," Khan said. The argument broke out between the accused — all in their late 20s and financially weak — and Mittal, whose family is in the electronics business, after he told them that they were "surviving and having parties on his money", according to a police source privy to the probe. On Wednesday evening, the police here got to know that the accused were in Greater Noida's Dabri area. During a combing operation, a gunfight broke out during which the accused suffered

bullet injuries on their legs, and were later held, police said. The fourth accused — Shubham Chaudhary — is at large and efforts are underway to arrest him, police said. "The accused told the police that they had killed Yash on February 27 but to mislead the police and his family, they sent ransom messages on February 28," DCP Khan said. The police said they have lodged two FIRs against the accused — first for murder, criminal conspiracy, and evidence destruction, and the second after the encounter for an attempt to murder and under the Arms Act. Further legal proceedings in the case are underway, the police added.

## DDA offers temporary house to tunnel rescue hero

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
Hours after razing his house in a demolition drive, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) offered to move Wakeel Hassan, a rat-hole miner who was part of the Silkyara tunnel rescue operation, and his family to a temporary accommodation but he declined the offer. The authority has also clarified that removal of encroachments from its land has been a constant, regular and routine activity of authority, and they were not aware about his contribution in the rescue operation. "However given the contributions made by Hassan in the rescue operation it will still continue with its efforts to provide its help to his family," it said. Northeast Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari on Thursday also assured the miner that he will be given a house under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana very soon. Hassan's house was razed in a demolition drive carried out by the DDA in northeast Delhi's Khajoori Khas area. Several other houses were demolished during the drive. Hassan has earlier said that DDA officials also told him that he would soon be provided a house in the Govindpuri area but he refused to

accept the offer as it was only a "verbal assurance". Standing by its action, the DDA later in a statement said that "in its role as an authority, it cannot allow encroachment on its land or unauthorised constructions in its development areas". The DDA also said Hassan was aware of his house's "status of encroachment" as it had been previously removed in 2016 and was encroached upon again in 2017. Having come to know about the contributions of Hassan in the rescue operation in Uttarakhand, the DDA "extended its hand of support" to the family but it was refused, the DDA said in a statement. The DDA, however, clarified that "at no point of time before or during the demolition exercise, were the DDA officials aware of Hassan's role in the rescue operation in Uttarakhand. On Wednesday, the DDA said the demolition drive was carried out on land that was "part of planned development land". "Late in the evening, when this fact came to light, officials of DDA, after having made alternate arrangements

for shelter to Hassan and his family, went on site and contacted him. "However, Hassan refused to avail any relief measure so offered and demanded a permanent house either at the same location or at any location in the same vicinity. To break the impasse, Senior officers of DDA also intervened and went to the site late at night which was of no avail," the DDA said. Some TV channels showed Hassan and his family sitting and having dinner amid the rubble of what used to be their home. He spent the night on a footpath with his wife and their two children. The family's neighbours provided them with food and other necessary items. "It is again reiterated that the family was in the know of their status of encroachment. Hassan was also aware of his encroachment removed earlier in 2016 and he re-encroached on the land in 2017. However, this was a routine encroachment removal drive and DDA has not targeted any particular individual. Having come to know about the contributions of Hassan in rescue operation of the workers entrapped in Silkyara-Barkot tunnel, DDA extended its hand of support to the family which was not availed," it added.

## The house was razed in demolition drive; he declines offer



Wakeel Hassan, one of the rat-hole miners who was part of the team that successfully rescued 41 workers trapped in Uttarakashi's Silkyara tunnel, at Khajoori Khas. Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

accept the offer as it was only a "verbal assurance". Standing by its action, the DDA later in a statement said that "in its role as an authority, it cannot allow encroachment on its land or unauthorised constructions in its development areas". The DDA also said Hassan was aware of his house's "status of encroachment" as it had been previously removed in 2016 and was encroached upon again in 2017. Having come to know about the contributions of Hassan in the rescue operation in Uttarakhand, the DDA "extended its hand of support" to the family but it was refused, the DDA said in a statement. The DDA, however, clarified that "at no point of time before or during the demolition exercise, were the DDA officials aware of Hassan's role in the rescue operation in Uttarakhand. On Wednesday, the DDA said the demolition drive was carried out on land that was "part of planned development land". "Late in the evening, when this fact came to light, officials of DDA, after having made alternate arrangements

# Two days flower festival from March 2 Shastri Park gets Convention Centre

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has announced a two-day-long flower festival called "Palaash 2024" on March 2 and March 3. The event will be hosted at DDA Greens at Shivaji Marg, Rohtak Road in Delhi. The festival will be inaugurated by Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena. The festival will present a stunning array of flowers, plants, and floral arrangements. Visitors can explore different varieties of flowers from indigenous to exotic, beautifully arranged to create captivating displays. It would be an opportunity for flower enthusiasts to appreciate the beauty and diversity of nature's creations. "Alongside the floral displays, the festival will feature entertainment avenues such as DJ play, ceremonial band performance, interactive selfie points and ride attraction for kids to tickle their hearts. These attractions will be adding vibrancy and



surreal experience to the festival, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the saga of dance, music and joy. To tantalize the taste buds of visitors, the festival will offer a selection of delicacies from our rich street food. From snacks to desserts, attendees can indulge in a culinary journey while enjoying the floral extravaganza. This aspect of the festival always adds a gastronomic dimension, complementing the visual and cultural experiences on offer," the DDA said in a statement. DDA's flower festival is organised annually as an exhibition-cum-competition event amongst all Horticulture Divisions of Delhi Authority, vying for recognition as the foremost custodians of DDA Parks. The objective of the festival is to promote and encourage residents of city to collaborate with DDA towards the betterment of greens, also to foster the passion of horticulture enthusiasts towards the scrupulous upkeep of greens. The

grassroot level workers get an opportunity to display their skills while a healthy competition amongst them is promoted. The event is named Palaash after the flower of Butea monosperma, which blooms in the capital during this time. In February last year, the inaugural flower festival was held at Swarn Jayanti Park Rohini. "The Greens at Shivaji Marg constitute of three parts readily accessible from Shivaji Marg & Rohtak Road. Spanning acres of meticulously manicured grounds, the park offers a respite from the hustle and bustle of city life, inviting visitors to reconnect with nature and rejuvenate their senses. The city residents can experience lush greenery with rich landscaping which features elements like Duck Pond, nurseries, herbal garden, seasonal garden, amphitheatre, open playfields, lawns etc. along with other public amenities," it said.

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday inaugurated the Convention Centre at District Centre at Shastri Park, in north east Delhi. The Convention Centre will serve as a vital hub for public gatherings, cultural, religious activities and marriage functions and will facilitate the general public of the densely populated area of Shastri Park, Seelampur, Gautampuri, Ghonda Chauhan, and Brahmpuri. The total cost of the project is Rs 6 crore. BJP MP Manoj Tiwari, was also present during the event. Speaking at the inauguration, Lt Governor said, "Earlier, people living in the colonies here had to travel long distances for weddings, parties or any other functions, and had to spend a lot of money for the same. He hope that the construction of this convention centre will help a lot in reducing this problem." Saxena further said, people



Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Vinai Kumar Saxena inaugurates the Convention Centre, District Centre, in Shastri Park. Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

living in this part of Delhi should also get all the facilities which residents of other areas of Delhi are getting. "Through DDA, every effort is being made to prepare a development model for Yamuna crossing," he added. The total area of the ground floor of the convention centre is 1928 sqm and it comprises various facilities like multi purpose hall for approx 1000 people with separate toilets for males and females, a restaurant, kitchen and a booking room. Besides, there is a basement of the total area of 2628 sqm. In the recent past, several initiatives have been taken by DDA to provide ease of living to the residents of Delhi. Last year, Utsav Pandals were inaugurated at Dakshinpuri and Dwarka built by DDA, allowing people to book them at economically reasonable prices for their family events. This was a boon for those who are not able to afford expensive hotels and farmhouses.







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Upmanship

Both TMC and BJP rush forth to claim credit for fugitive Sheikh Shahjahan's arrest after 55 days

The arrest of Trinamool Congress strongman Sheikh Shahjahan, who was wanted for the Sandeshkhali infamy involving the charges of gang rape and landgrab, is likely to further muddy political waters in West Bengal and intensify the bitter war of words between the Mamata Banerjee-led State Government and the BJP. On the run for 55 days following a mob attack on Enforcement Directorate officers during a raid at his house on January 5 in a ration scam case, Sheikh was finally taken into custody within 24 hours of the Calcutta High Court stating that the CBI, ED or State police could arrest him. However, the delayed development has opened a can of worms in political circles. While the ruling TMC maintains that Sheikh was apprehended now since the High Court had cleared the ambiguity on a stay on his arrest, the Opposition BJP claims that the accused was being shielded by the police and his arrest was "scripted" because of the "intense pressure brought on the Government by us". As the drama unfolds in West Bengal, one thing remains clear: Sheikh's arrest has ignited a firestorm, with both the main players vying for supremacy in the State's ever-evolving political milieu. While the development has sent shockwaves across the State, the political manoeuvres have understandably quickened as both the TMC and BJP seek to capitalise on the situation, especially since the Lok Sabha elections are very much in sight, and Sandeshkhali and its aftermath could be a game changer for both parties. For the TMC, it presents an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to combating corruption and upholding the rule of law. The party has wasted no time in touting the arrest as



a testament to its dedication to clean governance and accountability. On the other hand, the BJP has seized upon the arrest as evidence of its growing influence in West Bengal's political arena. The party sees it as vindication of its anti-corruption stance and validation of its claims of rampant corruption within the TMC-led Government. However, under the surface lies a deeper struggle for supremacy in the State's tumultuous political arena. The fierce battle for electoral dominance has only intensified with Sheikh's arrest, with each party seeking to leverage the situation to bolster its poll prospects. However, amid the political grandstanding, it is important not to lose sight of the broader implications of the fugitive strongman's arrest. Beyond being a mere pawn in the State's political underbelly, Sheikh's case underscores the pervasive issue of corruption that continues to plague governance in West Bengal. His arrest serves as a stark reminder of the challenges facing the State in its quest for clean and transparent governance, irrespective of political affiliations. Amid the cacophony of competing claims and counterclaims, the true test lies in the ability of Bengal's political class to address the underlying issues of corruption and criminalisation of politics, which continue to undermine the State's progress and development.

## PICTALK



A local artiste with long mustache poses for photos, in Bikaner

## LK Advani: A Ratna of Bharat



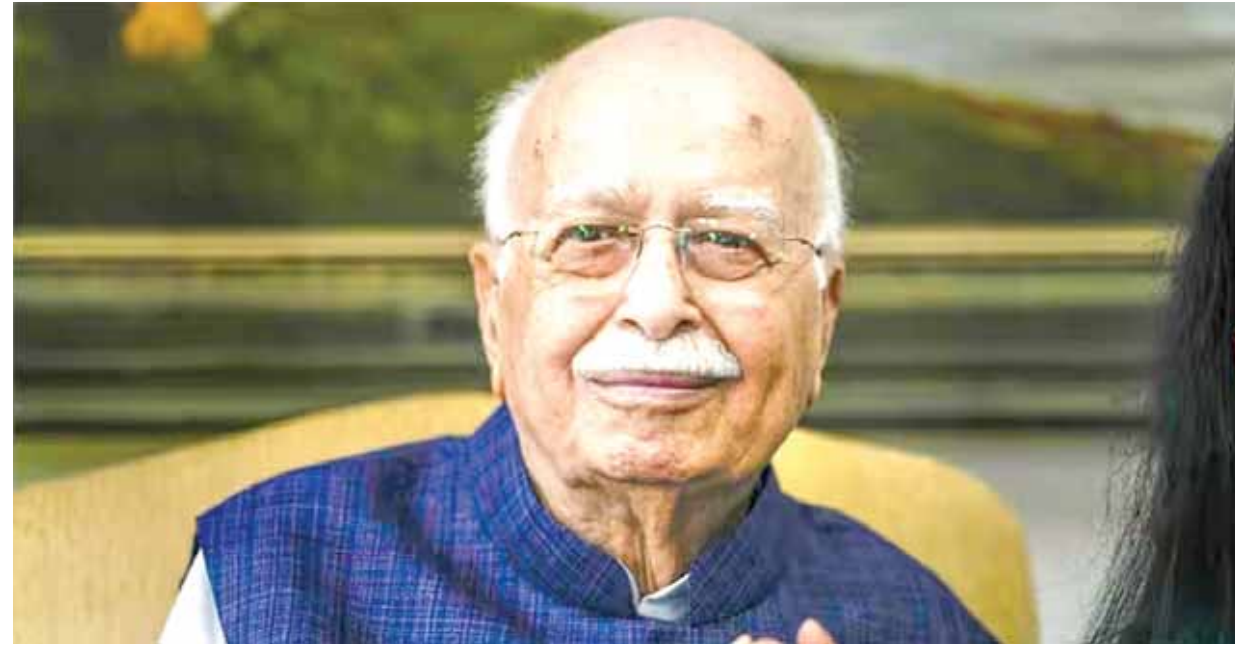
PRAFULL GORADIA

From attacking pseudo-secularism to pan-India moderation, it was as if Advani had given up his yesterday for the sake of the BJP's and the country's tomorrow

The biggest sacrifice Lal Krishna Advani made was to distance himself from the culmination of the Babri edifice at Ayodhya. Understandably, the Hindu public was disappointed; Advani's followers were heartbroken. Many of them went to the extent of alleging that he had let down the cause. For a conscientious leader, this was like cutting his nose and throwing it away. During the spring of 1991, Advani told me that it was Ayodhya that had made him a national figure. Until his leading the Rathayatra from Somnath to hopefully reach the birthplace of Shri Ramchandra—which was intercepted by Lalu Prasad Yadav at Samastipur in 1990—Advani was merely a senior party apparatchik.

It was his taking up the cause of the Ramjanmabhoomi that catapulted him to the gallery of national figures. When, therefore, Advani spoke to the press saying that December 6, 1992, was the darkest day of his life, he knew what he was throwing away. Soon thereafter, accompanied by friends, I called on him at the Irrigation Department's guest house near Jhansi, where he along with a few other senior BJP leaders had been kept under house arrest, following the demolition of the Babri edifice on that fateful day of December 6 that year. Advani told me that after seeing my letter published in the Pioneer, wherein I had in rejoinder to his remark written that "There have been darker days", he knew I had come to protest against his statement. It took him quite a while before he came around to believing my denial. He was right to the extent that I continued to hold the view (which I of course, still do) that the Babri edifice was a baggage of dacoity and had to be confiscated.

Advani then went on to explain: Whatever my explanation, I had to realise that party unity, regardless of anything else, was our uppermost duty. Atalji (Vajpayee) was our seniormost leader, and no party member should differ with him publicly on such a matter of policy. Should party members flagrantly violate their party's



commitment made to the Supreme Court, that the edifice would be safe? Its future was for the court to decide. First, who then would ever again have faith in the word of a BJP leader?

Secondly, the opposing parties would go to town saying that the BJP was a party ridden with factions. Its top leader does not believe in masjid-hunting while one of its chief ministers practices the exact opposite. Thirdly, an upright party is a united party, and we are known as a party with a difference. Becoming a faction-ridden party is not the difference between our aspirations. Fourthly, discipline has been our hallmark. Did the karsevaks at Ayodhya behave in a disciplined way, by going against the leadership and demolishing a place of worship of another community?

In April 1998, I became the party's Member of the Rajya Sabha through a bye-election. Among members generally, it seemed that interest in Ayodhya had waned. The case lay in court without active hearings. When I thought of the vanished edifice, I did wonder whether at that rate



'IF THERE IS TO BE ANOTHER LEADER IN THE FUTURE, HE SHOULD HAVE THE WIDE ACCEPTANCE AND LOYALTY THAT ATALJI COMMANDED. THAT IS WHAT A DIVERSE COUNTRY LIKE OURS NEEDS', ADVANI OPINED

the Congress with a clever leader might just snatch the issue out of the BJP's hands and use it for electoral benefit. How popular the issue was kept becoming clear over and over again.

Meanwhile, many more pilgrims continued to visit the holy city. One day in July 1999, Advani called me to his room in Parliament House for a chat over toast and coffee. He opened up by showering praise on Vajpayee's tactful leadership of a coalition of so many parties with so many different political ideologies ranging from the Shiv Sena on the one hand to the DMK on the other.

There was no doubt that Vajpayee was running a complex government very successfully. Advani was full of praise for his leadership. If there is to be another leader in the future, he should have the wide acceptance and loyalty that Atalji commanded. That is what a diverse country like ours needs, Advani opined. All of us in our party should give up small differences and think of large policy issues. Automatically, such a leader and his party would attract votes as well as an ongoing following.

He went on to say that India's future lies in the integrity of politics. Rather than recommending any shift towards moderation or 'soft secularism', Advani stressed the unity of thought, policy and leadership. By implication, he was asking for a united party under a broadminded leader. He was repeatedly emphatic about parties rather than the party.

Even dynastic parties are not free of factions and breakups, and it is the BJP alone that has admirably avoided going that way. It seemed as though he wanted to give up all he had stood for earlier and espouse a new cause, not only for the BJP but for the sake of the country. As I knew him, I can state that this was no mere shift but a sacrifice. From his eloquence of attacking pseudo-secularism to pan-India moderation, it was as if Advani had given up his yesterday for the sake of the BJP's and the country's tomorrow. It could not have been easy for him, but that is what he is.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Reservations rendered ineffective



The struggle for reservation is carried forward by many castes. A few individuals whip the sentiments of the concerned people and involve them in a struggle by which the individuals gain fame and benefits. Reservations are sought to get admission to educational institutions and to gain jobs in government institutions. But everyone talking about reservations should, first of all, analyse how many vacancies

in government institutions are filled and how many have been recruited permanently on reservations in the last 10 years.

The recruitment in government offices is filled on casual, contingent, daily wage, contract or outsourced basis. Under these systems, reservations have no relevance. Recruitment is carried on only for the top layer posts where reservations have their place. PSUs were recruiting employees under the rules of reservation. Now they are either closed or facing closure. Moreover among the unemployed lot, more than 40% are educated youth. In this background fighting for employment opportunities is all the more important. The present struggles resemble searching for fuel sticks in a desert land. Leaders and followers should think before embarking upon a struggle. Struggling for reservations is struggling for non-existing jobs.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

February 29 aims at achieving "true equity" for those afflicted by rare conditions. Equity in health access, treatment, and social opportunities is crucial for patients with rare diseases. In India, one in twenty suffers from rare diseases. All this said, the biggest difficulty that arises in the management of rare diseases is their treatment, which takes a heavy financial toll on the patients as well as their relatives. Moreover, treatment is long and tiring, so patience and equanimity among all stakeholders can go a long way.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

## THE HUMAN COST OF UKRAINE WAR

Sir — Ukrainian President Zelensky told reporters on February 22, in the second year of the Russian invasion, that Ukraine had lost more than 31 thousand soldiers in the war. The lives of civilians would have been even greater than this. On Monday evening, French President Emmanuel Macron indicated that he was willing to send his troops to Ukraine. But immediately after his statement, almost all EU and NATO member countries distanced them-

selves from Macron's suggestion. All refused to deploy their troops in Ukraine. Whereas just two days ago, US President Joe Biden's views were being read on his social media platform 'X' in which he wrote, "When Putin ordered his tanks to enter Ukraine, he thought the world would bow down. To provide "so that the Ukrainian troops have the necessary weapons and ammunition to defend themselves". The Second World War also ended only when all the Allies entered the field together, otherwise before that the German victory campaign was uninterrupted. Was moving forward. According to the latest data, Ukraine is losing more and more of its territory to Russia. Kyiv is facing a shortage of military equipment as well as trained combat soldiers. In such a situation, if Ukraine has to save its existence, then NATO's soldiers will have to be fielded in the region to fight Russian invaders.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Empowering grassroots innovation for progress

Science and technology stand as the twin engines propelling our nation towards progress, but they must address the needs of society

Science and technology serve as the driving force propelling our nation forward, akin to the wheels of progress. However, the efficacy of these wheels determines the speed of our journey. Since independence, Bharat has experienced significant advancement, largely attributable to strides in scientific innovation undertaken by our scientific community. This progress is evident across various sectors crucial to human life, including agriculture, food, healthcare, infrastructure, and communication. Yet, the translation of scientific innovations into societal benefits often encounters challenges, primarily due to a disconnect between scientific research and grassroots needs. While many innovations originate from peer-reviewed publications, often authored by Western scientists, they may lack relevance to local contexts. Consequently, solutions to everyday challenges remain elusive, despite remarkable achievements in space and technology. This reliance on external sources creates a bottleneck in developing disruptive discoveries



tailored to local needs. Historically, groundbreaking innovations were not solely the domain of trained scientists but also arose from the keen observations and creativity of untrained naturalists.

Preceding the advent of modern science, human civilizations thrived for millennia, leveraging state-of-the-art technologies of their time. Many contemporary innovations find their roots in ancient technologies, underscoring the contributions of our forebears.

However, the contemporary scientific community often falls short in generating truly novel ideas, frequently resorting to replicating concepts from Western literature. This approach results in innovations primarily catering to

industrial needs rather than addressing societal issues. The critical distinction between invention and utility underscores the necessity for originality and societal relevance in innovation.

Grassroots innovators emerge as pivotal agents in bridging this gap, offering solutions rooted in local contexts and addressing specific community needs. These individuals possess an intimate understanding of their environment, enabling them to develop tailored interventions that resonate with the realities of daily life. Their localized approach ensures solutions are not only relevant but also sustainable, addressing root causes rather than superficial symptoms.

By empowering grassroots innovators, communities can leverage their inherent knowledge, creativity, and resourcefulness to solve their challenges. This bottom-up approach fosters ownership and collective responsibility, driving more effective and sustainable solutions. Initiatives such as those facilitated by the National Innovation Foundation-India exemplify the government's

commitment to promoting grassroots innovation and integrating it into the mainstream.

While India has made significant strides in fields like space science, vaccine development, and agriculture, persisting societal challenges necessitate a collaborative approach between scientific institutions and grassroots innovators. Celebrating National Science Day under the theme 'Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat' provides an opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of grassroots innovators. Their selfless dedication to improving their communities exemplifies the spirit of innovation and underscores the potential for transformative change when science aligns with grassroots needs.

In conclusion, the journey of progress propelled by science and technology requires not only scientific excellence but also a deep-rooted connection to societal needs. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN



## FIRST COLUMN

DOMESTIC POLITICS  
AMID GLOBAL AGENDA

India advocates for a balanced voice in shaping a multilateral world order



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

As elections draw closer, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been frequenting India's south more than championing the causes of the global south across available diplomatic platforms. One reason is that his party seems to have a weaker presence down south. Earlier, as a strategic choice, PM Modi chose to inaugurate a Hindu temple in a Muslim country during his last foreign trip in the current tenure. Even as he did so, statements regarding continuity of policies and outlook were subtly delivered when PM Modi confidently told his audience that he already has invitations from several foreign governments for the middle and latter part of 2024, indicating confidence in his potential third term.

A third term for Modi would have wider ramifications for a whole bunch of issues, not to mention foreign policy, given India's rising economic clout and confidence, making it a significant player in global affairs. India is expected to be the third-largest economy after the US and China in PM Modi's next term, which, besides putting a couple of stars on the shoulder, will also mean a heavy lift of responsibilities.

One of the significant achievements for Mr. Modi, particularly during his second term, has been uplifting the India-US relationship and situating it in the Indo-Pacific context. While the India-US bilateral is by far at its strongest ever in history, the two nations have managed to work through several plurilateral platforms, the most important being the QUAD (a grouping of the US, India, Australia, and Japan), each having significant stakes and interests in the Indo-Pacific, while also wary of the dragon in the region, never stopping short of using any overt or covert means to push its assertive agenda.



While some of the world's finest diplomats, policymakers, and think tanks were deliberating on global issues last week, EAM Jaishankar found some time to speak to a whole bunch of policy strategists on the relevance of QUAD and the way forward. EAM highlighted the changing nature of India's foreign policy outlook over the last decade when he mentioned "remarkable changes in India's bilateral relationships with its three Quad partners. With the US, we put behind ideological hesitations of history. With Japan, we gave longstanding goodwill much more practical shape. And with Australia, we actually made a real beginning in seriousness." Even though there hasn't been a QUAD leaders summit since May last year, backroom meetings between foreign ministers from the member countries to discuss issues of regional and global importance haven't taken a backseat. Given the political compulsions, it might be difficult for India to host the QUAD leaders summit this year, as it will be too close to the US elections by the time the new Indian government is in place. However, the significant targets India aims to achieve through the QUAD group, as highlighted by EAM, namely, "it reflects the growth of a multipolar order. Two, it is a post-alliance and post-Cold War thinking. Three, it is against spheres of influence. Four, it expresses the democratizing of the global space and a collaborative, not unilateral, approach. And five, it is a statement that in this day and age, others cannot have a veto on our choices," shall remain in focus. It is this message of continuity of policies that the Indian government is highlighting to the domestic and international audience at a time when instability is the norm for most, including powerful nations in the world.

India has effectively managed the QUAD as a non-military arrangement, unlike NATO, with shared interests of all members in the region. Mr. Jaishankar highlighted in his address, "Among Quad countries, there is a growing comfort in working with each other given the strong consensus we have in our strategic outlooks. India's bilateral partnerships with each of these three Quad countries have also transformed in recent years." The message is clear: India will continue to push for a multilateral world order with a fair share of voice on international forums.

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

## Protests stress need for climate-smart agriculture



KOTA SRIRAJ

There is a pressing need for proactive measures aimed at protecting both farmer livelihoods and national food security



The ongoing farmer protests that began on February 13th have already claimed five lives and resulted in Delhi bearing the brunt of economic losses to the tune of 300 crores as nearly five lakh traders who did regular business in Delhi from adjoining states suspended their businesses given the unrest. Since 2020, farmer protests have unfortunately assumed a regular frequency not only in Delhi and Punjab but across India. According to consultancy firm Verisk Maplecroft estimates, India has accounted for the biggest global share of farmer protests in the past three years.

The farmer protests 2.0 again highlight the fault lines in India's agricultural viability and this time the farmers are demanding conclusive government action. The protesting farmers want a firm minimum support price (MSP) that is backed by a legal guarantee for all crops. Another demand is to implement the recommendations of the MS Swaminathan committee on agriculture which will enable increasing MSP to 50 per cent above the weighted average cost of production. Other demands include better sugar cane prices and a pension of Rs 10,000 a month for every farmer above the age of 60.

The government is engaged in feverish negotiations with the farmer unions to break the impasse. However, a breakthrough achieved may be short-lived, as the government would have only successfully attended to the symptoms and not to the problem itself. India's agri sector contributes only 15 per cent to the GDP but engages 58 per cent workforce. This lopsided proportion is made worse by the fact that 85 per cent of the farmers operate in less than five acres of land half of which in many parts of India may be dry and barren. This translates to low yields, low earnings and high debt and when combined with increasing challenges of climate change on agriculture, the problem assumes a much larger and ominous proportion.

Climate change whether it is unseasonal rain, hailstorms, floods, or drought, India's agri-sector has seen it all. The lingering uncertainty due to environmental issues



BEST FARMING PRACTICES NEED TO BE PROMOTED ACROSS THE SECTOR TO ENSURE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

keeps the farmers on their toes leading to income insecurity and mounting debt. An example is the casualty in the current protests of a marginal farmer whose 8-acre agricultural land had 8 lacs of debt on it, making it virtually impossible for the farmer to pay it off and continue with another crop. Climate change-driven issues such as these have made the farmers demand an MSP law to act as a safety net for the time, effort and risk they invest in farming.

The perennial shortage of water resources is the first symptom of climate change's impact on the agri sector. According to Rainfed Atlas, it is estimated that between 52% and 55% of the farming community have no means of irrigation and are dependent on rain-fed agriculture. But due to climate change temperatures are spiralling and rainfall has become more erratic, with longer dry spells resulting in droughts and shorter periods of more intense rainfall causing floods. This results in a domino effect whereby crop yield is adversely impacted while high CO2 levels cause low nutritional value of crops. This translates to low marketability of the produce therefore causing financial distress and rising debt for the farmers.

The impact of climate change on the agri-sector and the sluggish government response in managing its fallout has come as a double whammy for the farmer community. The lack of robust insulation measures that seek to protect the sector from the vagaries of climate extremes is now having a telling impact on productivity. The cereal crop productivity of most cereals is slated to decrease due to an increase in temperature and CO2 levels, and the decrease in water availability. According to estimates, there will be a projected loss of 10-40% in crop production by 2100 if no climate change adaptation measures are

taken. A one-degree Celsius increase in temperature may reduce yields of major food crops by 3-7%. Given these troubling projections, the government must extricate the agri-sector from the clutches of climate change. This alone can ensure the best interests of farmers, safeguard national food security and protect livelihoods.

An audit of the agri-sector at the micro-level is essential to identify and remove processes that are detrimental to natural resources. This will ensure weeding out of inefficient water-intensive practices and allow optimal use of the precious resource. Similarly, best farming practices need to be promoted across the sector to ensure climate change adaptation and mitigation in the sector. For example, the raised-bed planting of wheat in the Indo-Gangetic plains enables 20-25% savings in irrigation water and also helps in reduced herbicide use. Measures such as these combined with water accounting methodologies can build long-term sustainability, efficiency and resilience of the agri-sector besides immensely benefiting the marginal farmers.

The government must also initiate climate-smart agriculture strategies which aim at adapting agriculture to climate change. This can be done by implementing technologies that help farmers plan crops by considering the climate specifics of their area through easy-to-use apps on their smartphones. This can be done by prioritising botanical research to develop crop species that are more tolerant to water deficiencies and extreme temperatures. Additionally, ecologists can evolve effective soil management methods that reduce the depletion of topsoil, promote carbon sequestration, and reduce chemical application. Advanced farm irrigation technologies can also help proper water saturation levels in the soil, prevent water flooding,

and help avoid top-soil runoff.

The government must focus on specially developed software solutions for agriculture that can help in real-time monitoring of the crops and allow farmers to accurately calculate the required inputs, which reduces costs in the short term and protects nature in the long term. Technology-assisted cover crops for instance can not only help prevent soil erosion, and promote water retention and nitrogen fixation but also serve as organic manure for fodder. Smart agri-software can help farmers implement differentiated applications of fertilisers which can help decrease soil pollution and increase crop nutrient levels. The software can also have in-built weather-related tools that provide timely alerts of extremities, elaborate weather forecasts to schedule farming events and enable prediction of general climate change tendencies by analysing historical weather data.

Currently, the agri-sector problems and farmer grievances are dealt with on a reactive basis; this is evident in the form of chronic farmer agitations that come back every year. The government must realise that a lasting solution is only possible if actual problems, including the impact of climate change on agriculture, are addressed with the participation of all stakeholders of the sector. The collaboration of farmers, policymakers, environmentalists, botanical scientists and technology experts can help chalk out long-term strategies and solutions and ensure a robust agri-sector that is resilient against climate change onslaughts. Farmer protests are a symptom of climate change's impact on agriculture. Protecting the sector from adverse impacts will automatically ensure farmer well-being and prosperity.

*(The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)*

## New India: Roti, kapda, makaan, vigyan and aatmasamman

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has prioritised inclusive growth and sustainable development, empowering every section of society

The Modi government's comprehensive strategy for tackling fundamental aspects of development such as food security (Roti), clothing (Kapda), housing (Makaan), science and technology (Vigyan), and self-respect (Aatmasamman) stands as a remarkable example of effective policymaking. These initiatives have not only brought about socio-economic transformation but have also significantly contributed to the nation's advancement. The Modi government has aimed to uplift and empower every section of society. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India has prioritised inclusive growth and sustainable development. Through numerous flagship



ANIL AGRAWAL

schemes, significant strides have been made towards building a stronger, more resilient India.

As we reflect on the journey of India's transformation over the past decade, it becomes evident that the Roti, Kapda, Makaan, Vigyan, and Aatmasamman initiatives have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's socio-economic landscape. Moving forward, it is imperative to build

upon these foundations and continue striving towards a more prosperous and equitable future for all. Through revolutionary initiatives, the government has aimed to enhance agricultural productivity and bolster the textile industry, thereby encouraging research in science and technology, stimulating economic growth, and creating employment opportunities for Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

A pivotal aspect of the Modi government's initiatives has been the empowerment of Bharat, ensuring self-reliance and dignity for every citizen. This vision extends to promoting social justice, gender equality, and skill development, encapsulating the ethos of "Aatmanirbhar Bharat." Initiatives aimed at uplifting

marginalised communities exemplify the government's commitment to fostering an inclusive society.

**Roti: Transforming Food Security in India**

The Modi government has taken a multifaceted approach to food security, encompassing macro and micro levels. Initiatives like PMGKY and ONORC have bolstered vulnerable groups' food access, provided relief during crises, and built resilience. Prioritising nutrition through POSHAN Abhiyaan demonstrates a commitment to tackling deficiencies.

**Kapda: Enhancing Textiles and Khadi**

The remarkable growth in Khadi's turnover, from Rs. 31,154 crores in 2013-14 to Rs. 1,34,630 crores in 2022-23,

underscores its economic revitalization. This surge in demand has propelled production and employment opportunities, reflecting the government's commitment to nurturing indigenous industries. India's textile exports have increased from \$12 billion in 2010-11 to \$39.2 billion in 2017-18. The textile industry in India is currently a \$75 billion industry and is expected to grow to \$300 billion by 2025-26.

**Makaan: Revolutionising Housing**

In a nation as vast and diverse as India, characterized by historical socioeconomic disparities, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has emerged as a transformative force. This initiative transcends mere housing provision; it catalyses

profound change. Through Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), expansive coverage underscores the unwavering dedication of the Modi government and the vision of converting mere structures into cherished homes and dreams into tangible realities, marking a testament to the government's commitment to the well-being and prosperity of its citizens nationwide. The "Housing for All" scheme represents a multifaceted approach to address the critical issue of housing in India. The Light House Projects (LHPs) stand as a pioneering initiative under the visionary Global Housing Technology Challenge-India (GHTC-India), spearheaded by the Government of India since its launch in 2019.

**Vigyan: Advancing the Space Sector**

India has emerged as a prominent space power in the world, with significant global implications. Chandrayaan-3 hailed as India's lunar triumph, reaffirms India's technological prowess and solidifies its position as a leader in space exploration, paving the way for future lunar endeavours, including human exploration. Aditya-L1, a state-of-the-art coronagraphy spacecraft meticulously crafted by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), embarked on a pioneering mission to explore the mysteries of the sun's atmosphere, particularly focusing on the corona and chromosphere.

**Aatmasamman: Empowering Bharat**

Once an individual has secured all the necessities for a comfortable life, the concept of "Aatmasamman," or self-respect. Beyond material needs, self-respect becomes the cornerstone of emotional and psychological well-being, encompassing a profound sense of dignity, worth, and integrity. Stand Up India Scheme, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme, Skill India Mission, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) have been supportive of empowering numerous sections of society.

*(The author is a Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, views are personal)*



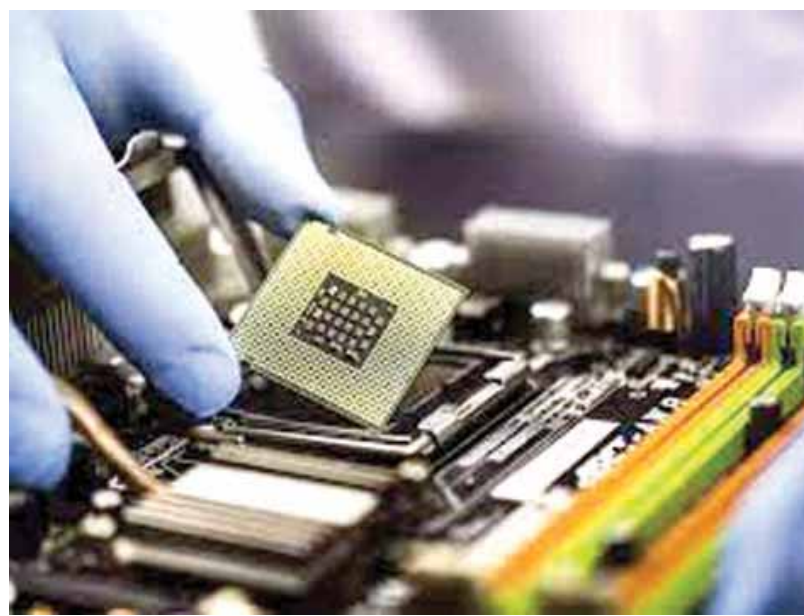




# Cabinet nod to ₹1.26 lakh crore chip making units

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved setting up three semiconductor-making units by firms, including Tata Group and Japan's Renesas, at an investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore as part of an attempt to cut India's dependence on imports to meet requirements of chips. The units which will make chips for sectors including defence, automobiles and telecommunications, will begin construction within the next 100 days, Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters after the cabinet meeting. The three units will be set up under the 'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem' programme that provides government support of up to Rs 76,000 crore. Tata Electronics Pvt Ltd will set up a semiconductor fab in partnership with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp at Dholera in

Gujarat. The plant will have a capacity to produce 50,000 wafers per month and will involve an investment of Rs 91,000 crore. Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Pvt Ltd (TSAT) will set up a semiconductor unit in Morigaon, Assam, at an investment of Rs 27,000 crore. CG Power in partnership with Renesas Electronics Corp and Stars Microelectronics of Thailand will set up a unit in Sanand in Gujarat at an investment of Rs 7,600 crore. In June last year, the Cabinet approved a proposal of Micron for setting up a semiconductor unit in Sanand, Gujarat. The approvals are part of the Modi government's ambitions to make India a chipmaker for the world and cutting reliance on countries like Taiwan. Vaishnaw said the Tata plant at Dholera will produce high-performance compute chips with 28 nm technology for electric vehicles (EV), telecom, defence, automotive, consumer electronics, display and power electronics.



The unit in Assam will have a capacity of 48 million per day for automotive, electric vehicles, consumer electronics, telecom, and mobile phones. The CG power semiconductor unit will manufacture 15 million chips for consumer, industrial, automotive and power applications. "Within a very short time, India's semiconductor mission has achieved four big successes. With these units, the semiconductor ecosystem will get established in India. India already has deep capabilities in chip design. With these units, our country will develop capabilities in chip fabrication. Advanced packaging technologies will be indigenously developed in India with today's announcement," he said adding the three units will generate direct employment of 20,000 advanced technology jobs and about 60,000 indirect jobs. These units will accelerate employment creation in downstream automotive, electronics manufacturing, telecom

manufacturing, industrial manufacturing, and other semiconductor-consuming industries. Construction of Micron's Sanand unit is progressing at a rapid pace and a robust semiconductor ecosystem is emerging near the unit, he said. Tata Electronics' partner PSMC is renowned for its expertise in logic and memory foundry segments. PSMC has 6 semiconductor foundries in Taiwan. Power management chips the two will manufacture are high voltage, high current applications. TSAT semiconductor is developing indigenous advanced semiconductor packaging technologies including flip chip and ISIP (integrated system in package) technologies. Renesas is a leading semiconductor company focussed on specialised chips. It operates 12 semiconductor facilities and is an important player in microcontrollers, analogue, power, and System-on-chip (SoC) products.

## Sebi bans entities for manipulative trades in V Marc India

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Sebi on Thursday barred 12 entities, including promoter of V Marc India Ltd, from the securities market for engaging in a fraudulent scheme to manipulate volumes and price of the company's shares. Additionally, the regulator impounded wrongful gains of Rs 6.38 crore made by some of the entities from the manipulative scheme, according to an interim order. This case primarily deals with

fraudulent and manipulative trading in the scrip of V Marc India Ltd, listed on NSE's SME segment, prima facie orchestrated by the promoter and company management, along with connected parties. In its order, Sebi, prima facie, found that V Marc's promoter and MD Vikas Garg and Sandeep Kumar Srivastava, former Whole Time Director of the company-- engaged the services of Priyesh Kurani to 'operate the market'. It further noted that Kurani, in

turn, in addition to using his own and his connected entities' trading accounts, engaged accounts of persons connected to Garg to manipulate the scrip. Further, Garg and the company management channelled funds through their connected entities to Kurani for executing the fraudulent scheme. The alleged fraudulent scheme was set in motion as soon as the scrip was listed on April 8, 2021. "The impact of this alleged fraudulent scheme is

evident in the manner volumes surged and prices increased after which most of the entities -- PV Manipulators-- as well as the IPO subscribers - exited fully. The shares offloaded were purchased by public shareholders leading to the increase in their numbers as well," Sebi said. Accordingly, Sebi has restrained 12 entities "from buying, selling or dealing in the securities market or associating themselves with the securities market, either

directly or indirectly, in any manner whatsoever until further orders". Apart from Garg, Srivastava and Kurani, the other entities barred by Sebi are -- Sudhir Gupta, Dharini Kurani, Rekha Kurani, Surbhi Aggarwal, Vinod Vilas Sable, Seema Garg, Madhu Srivastava, Jai Kishor Singh and Seema Agarwal. Sebi's examination which covered the period from April 9-30, 2021, was aided by data obtained from the mobile device of Kurani, seized

following the 'search and seizure operation' carried out by the regulator at his residence in May 2022, in the context of investigation into the matter of 'Front Running of Trades of Axis Mutual Fund'. The data from the device, particularly messages exchanged on WhatsApp involving entities referred to in this order, including a copy of a signed agreement between certain entities, has served as important evidence in this case.

## Royalty rates for critical, strategic minerals approved

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the amendment in the MMDR Act to specify the royalty rate on 12 critical and strategic minerals, an official statement said. A decision in this regard was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Ministry of Mines said in a statement. "The Union Cabinet... Approved the amendment of Second Schedule to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) for specifying rate of royalty in respect of 12 critical and strategic minerals," the statement said. The 12 critical and strategic minerals are beryllium, cadmium, cobalt, gallium, indium, rhenium, selenium, tantalum, tellurium, titanium, tungsten, and vanadium, it said. This completes the exercise of the rationalisation of royalty rates for all 24 critical and strategic minerals, the Ministry said. The government notified the royalty rate of four critical minerals, namely glaucinite, potash, molybdenum and platinum group of minerals

on March 15, 2022 and of 3 critical minerals lithium, niobium and rare earth elements on October 12, 2023. As per the statement, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023, which has come into force from August 17, 2023, had listed 24 critical and strategic minerals in Part D of the First Schedule of the MMDR Act. The amendment provided that mining lease and composite licence of these 24 minerals shall be auctioned by the central government. The approval for specification of rate of royalty will enable the Centre to auction blocks for these 12 minerals for the first time in the country. Royalty rate on minerals is an important financial consideration for the bidders in auction of blocks, the statement said. Further, manner for calculation of Average Sale Price (ASP) of these minerals has also been prepared by the Ministry of Mines, which will enable determination of bid parameters, it said. The Second Schedule of the MMDR Act provides royalty rates for various minerals.

## Markets close higher, RIL gains after mega merger

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed with gains on Thursday in a highly volatile trade amid scheduled monthly expiry of derivative contracts. The 30-share BSE Sensex rebounded 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30. During the day, the benchmark oscillated between a high of 72,730.00 and a low of 72,099.32. The broader Nifty of NSE gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to close at 21,982.80. "Domestic benchmark traded near a flat-line trend throughout the session, but some buoyancy emerged by the end of the day. Investors adopted a cautious wait & watch approach on the verge of a heavy economic data week," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. Among Sensex shares, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, Titan, Asian Paints, Nestle and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.



Reliance Industries climbed nearly 2 per cent intra-day before closing more than half-a per cent higher after the company and Walt Disney announced the signing of binding pacts to

merge their media operations in India to create a Rs 70,000 crore behemoth. Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, ITC, Tech Mahindra and Axis Bank were

among the laggards. "Markets traded volatile on the monthly expiry day but managed to end marginally higher," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.84 per cent and smallcap index went up by 0.50 per cent. Among the indices, services jumped 1.46 per cent, power climbed 1.01 per cent, commodities (0.79 per cent), industrials (0.74 per cent), metal (0.74 per cent) and capital goods (0.65 per cent). In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the green. European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended marginally lower on Wednesday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,879.23 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark fell by 790.34 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at 72,304.88 on Wednesday. The Nifty slumped 247.20 points or 1.11 per cent to settle at 21,951.15. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.43 per cent to USD 83.32 a barrel.

## FDI inflows decline in April, December 2023

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows in India declined 13 per cent to USD 32.03 billion in April-December 2023, dragged down by lower infusion in computer hardware and software, telecom, auto, and pharma sectors, according to the latest government data. FDI inflows stood at USD 36.74 billion during the corresponding nine months of the preceding fiscal. Inflows during the October-December quarter of the current fiscal, however, rose by 18 per cent to USD 11.6 billion as against USD 9.83 billion during the same quarter of 2022-23. The total FDI — which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital — declined by about 7 per cent to USD 51.5 billion during the period under review against USD 55.27 billion in April-December 2022, the data from the Department for Promotion of Industry and International Trade (DPIIT) showed. During the nine-month period of this fiscal, FDI equity inflows decreased from major countries, including Singapore, the US, the UK, Cyprus and the UAE. Investments fell significantly from the Cayman Islands and Cyprus to USD 215 million and USD 796 million, respectively, during April-December 2023 as against the two comparative figures of USD 624 million and USD 1.15 billion recorded in the year-ago period. However, inflows increased from Mauritius, the Netherlands, Japan and Germany.

## Protect investors in small, midcap schemes: Sebi to mutual funds

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Capital markets regulator Sebi has asked mutual fund houses to put in place a framework to safeguard investors, who invested in smallcap and midcap schemes, amid a "froth building up" in these categories. Also, the regulator has suggested steps such as restrictions on inflows in these segments, portfolio rebalancing, and laying guidelines to safeguard investors from the first-mover advantage of redeeming investors. This came in the backdrop of strong flow in the small and midcap schemes of mutual funds over the last few quarters. In a communication to Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Tuesday, Sebi asked the industry body to inform trustees of all the mutual fund houses to frame a policy to protect the interest of investors of smallcap and



midcap schemes. "In the context of the froth building up in the small and mid-cap segments of the market and the continuing flows in the small and mid-cap schemes of mutual funds, trustees, in consultation with unitholder protection committees of the AMCs shall ensure that a policy is put in place to protect the interest of all investors," the regulator said. The market regulator said that "appropriate" and "proactive measures" should be taken by Asset Management Companies (AMCs) and fund managers to protect investors.

## Key infrastructure sectors growth slows to 15 months low in January

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The growth of eight key infrastructure sectors slowed to a 15-month low of 3.6 per cent in January, on account of poor performance of sectors like refinery products, fertiliser, steel and electricity, according to the official data released on Thursday. The growth of eight core sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery

products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity — was 4.9 per cent in December. It was 9.7 per cent in January 2023. The previous low level of growth rate was recorded at 0.9 per cent in October 2022. Cumulatively also, the growth rate in the output of these sectors slowed down to 7.7 per cent as against 8.3 per cent in April-January 2022-23. The output growth of

refinery products and fertiliser was in the negative zone. And the pace of increase in the output of coal, steel, and electricity decelerated during the month under review. However, crude oil, natural gas, and cement production recorded positive growth in January. The eight core sectors contribute 40.27 per cent to the country's Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

## Agri-tech startup Otipy joins ONDC to sell fruits, vegetables

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Agri-tech startup Otipy on Thursday said it has joined Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) to sell fruits and vegetables to consumers in Delhi-NCR and Mumbai. In a statement, Otipy said this integration ensures its catalogue is visible on various apps, making it easy to discover and enabling smooth transactions on the growing network. As Otipy onboards ONDC, it is set to expand its customer reach, making its products available to a wider audience through popular ONDC seller apps like Pincode (by PhonePe) and Paytm apps. This move aims to strengthen the brand's presence in Delhi-NCR and Mumbai, the statement said. Moreover, Otipy will also focus on bulk procurement directly from farmers and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).



"As we join the ONDC Network, it helps us in expanding our reach to varied customer segments. Through the network, we not only plan to enrich buyer choices but also elevate the shopping experience, facilitating inclusivity in a dynamic e-commerce landscape," Varun Khurana, Founder and CEO of Otipy, said. "With Otipy on the Open Network, it not only stands to benefit from an extensive reach of the network but also reinforces its commitment to fostering a sustainable and inclusive e-commerce framework." T Koshi, Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer of ONDC, said.

## Cabinet okays ₹75,000 crore rooftop solar scheme

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The government on Thursday approved a rooftop solar scheme, PM-Surya Ghar: Mufti Bijli Yojna, with an outlay of Rs 75,021 crore, to provide up to Rs 78,000 subsidy for the installation of solar plants and 300 units free power for one crore households. Briefing media after the Union Cabinet meeting, I&B Minister

Anurag Thakur informed that approval has been given for the scheme for installing rooftop solar and providing free electricity up to 300 units every month for one crore households. "The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved PM-Surya Ghar: Mufti Bijli Yojana with a total outlay of Rs 75,021 crore for installing rooftop solar and providing free electricity

up to 300 units every month for one crore households," an official statement said. The Prime Minister launched the scheme on 13th February 2024. The scheme provides a central financial assistance (CFA) of 60 per cent of system cost for 2 kW systems and 40 per cent of additional system cost for systems between 2 kW to 3 kW capacity. The CFA will be capped at 3 kW.

At current benchmark prices, this will mean Rs 30,000 subsidy for 1 kW system, Rs 60,000 for 2 kW systems or higher. The households will apply for subsidy through the National Portal and will be able to select a suitable vendor for installing rooftop solar. The National Portal will assist the households in their decision-making process by providing

relevant information such as appropriate system sizes, benefits calculator, vendor rating etc. Households will be able to access collateral-free low-interest loan products of around 7 per cent at present for installation of residential RTS (rooftop solar) systems up to 3 kW. Other Features of the scheme include a Model Solar Village to be developed in each district to act as a

role model for adoption of rooftop solar in rural areas. Besides, Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions shall also benefit from incentives for promoting rooftop solar (RTS) installations in their areas. The scheme provides a component for payment security for renewable energy service company (RESCO) based models as well as a fund for innovative projects in RTS.

# New records, tales of grit emerge

## Khelo India University Games 2023

**PTI ■ GUWAHATI**  
It has been tales of grit and determination at the Khelo India University Games (KIUG) Ashtalakshmi 2023, which comes to an end on Thursday, with new meet records achieved and paths set for future star players of the country. The athletics section boosted of at least four new KIUG records at the events played at the Indira Gandhi stadium here. Pole vaulter M Gowtham of University of Madras cleared the distance of 5m to take home the men's pole vault gold medal. Javelin thrower Jyoti of Chaudhary Devi Lal University, who had won the gold medal in the National Open Athletics meet in Bengaluru in October last year, came up with a throw of 53.16m in her fourth attempt to clinch the women's javelin throw gold, and also set a new meet record. In the women's 800m event, Panjab University's Amandeep Kaur clocked 2:11.27s to clinch the gold

medal with a new Games record, while Vikash of Chandigarh University registered a new Games record in men's 1500 m clocking 3:50.70s to take the gold. Chandigarh University looks poised to top medals tally with 28 golds in its kitty already, followed by Lovely Professional University with 17 golds and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, with 12 golds. The KIUG 2023 were held in 18 venues across seven cities of North East, with Guwahati hosting the opening ceremony which was attended by Union Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Anurag Thakur, among others. More than 4,500 players from over 200 universities competed in this fourth edition of KIUG. The KIUG is a part of the Indian government's Khelo India initiative that was launched in 2016, focussing on promoting grassroots sports and identifying young talents from across the country. For some like Mrinal



Chauhan of Lovely Professional University, a second spot in the Recurve men on debut at the KIUG was no mean feat. With limited financial means

to pursue archery which involves high cost training equipment as his family depends on the earnings of his father's stationery shop, Mrinal's early struggles are

now nearly over. Support through the (Taget Olympic Podium) TOP scheme, a flagship initiative by the ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, meant that he

could take forward his passion, honing his skills at the Tata Archery Academy in Jamshedpur. "TOPS has allowed me to dream bigger, aim higher.

Now, I don't have to be dependent on my father for my financial needs as I get stipend every month," the 20-year-old said, adding that the Games were also a vital preparation for the upcoming trials leading to the Paris Olympics qualification events. Jyoti Kattimai of Karnataka University may have failed to make a podium finish, but her story of fighting tough financial constraints to make this far is an inspiration in itself. With her father working as a scrap dealer and mother as a housekeeping staff in the same sports hostel in Dharwad where Jyoti trains, it has been a tale of long struggle for the 24-year-old. Jyoti's family of eight members (including four sisters) expanded to 13 after two of her elder sisters returned home with their children after a few years of marriage, and the family just about pulling along. She may have had to remain contend with the fifth spot in the 800m for women, but Jyoti hopes to keep on

pursuing her game with her coach Shamla Patil being her biggest support, who also sponsors her university fees. The vital role of coaches in shaping a player or a team cannot be stressed enough, and Bharati Vidyapeeth's rugby team credit their coach for the show they could put up. Coming in as defending champions, the team did not have high hopes for a podium finish as the core of their team that won the gold in Lucknow last year had passed out of the varsity. But the team with almost all new players was marshalled brilliantly by Prashant Arvind Singh, who works as a gym instructor in Mumbai, to clinch the bronze medal here. "It is a big thing for us because we reached here after only 15 days of preparation. We will return next year and win our third gold," said Prashant, who has also represented India at the U-19 level and was part of the silver medal-winning Maharashtra team in the National Games held in Goa last year.

# Athletes to be issued digital certificates: Anurag

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday announced that the government will issue digital certificates to registered athletes across the country, a move which would ensure a transparent account of their participation and performance. The digital certificate will have dates of the athletes' participation in competitions and serve as proof of their achievements. "With athletes at the heart of our progressing and growing sporting ecosystem, the sports ministry has made a crucial decision to promote the

'issuance of digital certificates to athletes," wrote Thakur on "X". The ministry has directed all National Sports Federations (NSFs) to only release merit and participation certificates through the DigiLocker. The minister had first announced his plan to simplify things for athletes and National Sports Federations (NSFs) during the National Sports Day on August 29 last year. On Thursday, the minister said, "Keeping up with our policy of athlete-first, NSFs have been advocated to issue certificates to athletes via DigiLocker, an initiative of



Ministry of Electronics and IT." He said the digital certificates will add a new aspect to sports administration and management of sportspersons. "This decision has been taken

to ensure the accessibility, security and veracity of documents and promote transparency and efficiency in the sports administration of the NSFs. This will further lead to ease of living for our sportspersons across the

nation. "From June 1 this year, only certificates issued by the (sports) federations through DigiLocker shall be valid and no physical certificates issued will be recognised for government and other benefits. We have advised the federations that their affiliated units must also start issuing the certificates through the DigiLocker from January 1 next year," added Thakur. Enumerating the benefits of issuing sports certificates through DigiLocker, Thakur said it will make access and sharing of certificates easy, eliminate the need for

physical copies, provide a secure environment for storing and verifying documents and ensure their integrity and authenticity. This, he said, would streamline the certificate issuance process and reduce administrative burden. "These certificates are proof of the athletes' commitment, effort, and accomplishments in their respective sports, and are currently distributed through outdated and inefficient, conventional methods," he said, adding that NSFs must put in place technology-based tools and solutions to serve the interest of sports, especially athletes.



## Bajrang refuses to appear in selection trials under WFI

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Rejecting the Wrestling Federation of India's invitation to compete in the upcoming national trials, ace Indian wrestler Bajrang Punia has moved an urgent joint petition in the Delhi High Court, seeking a stay on the selection competition here on March 10-11. It has been learnt from reliable sources that Bajrang, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik and her husband Satyawart Kadiyan moved the court on Wednesday and the matter will be heard on Friday. While Bajrang did not confirm filing a petition, he questioned the government's silence on the issues concerning Indian wrestling. The Indian team for the Asian Wrestling Championships Olympic Qualifier in Kyrgyzstan next month will be selected on the basis of the trials at Delhi's IG Stadium. Bajrang told PTI from Russia, where he is training for the last two months, that he has spent a fortune abroad but he won't compete in trials if they are conducted by the Sanjay Singh-led WFI. "I would not spend Rs 30 lakh on my training if I were to not compete in the trials, but how the suspended WFI is conducting the trials? I don't get what the government's compulsion is (on allowing WFI to

conduct trials)?" Bajrang said. "I don't understand how a sports body suspended by the Indian government issue a circular and announce the trials. Why is the government silent? We will appear in the trials only if the ad-hoc panel or the government conducts it. How can a suspended body announce the trials?" he asked. WFI president Sanjay Singh had appealed to the protesting wrestlers to forget the past and appear for the trials. The trio had led a prolonged protest at Jantar Mantar, demanding the arrest of then WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who they had accused of sexual harassment. Bajrang, the Tokyo Olympics bronze winner, said that not just him but Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat will also skip the trials. "This decision to not appear in trials is a joint decision taken by us. We are together in this," he said. PTI tried to reach out Sakshi and Vinesh for confirmation but the former did not return calls and the latter could not be contacted. Asked specifically if they have moved court against the trials, Bajrang denied the development but a source in the WFI confirmed to PTI that four wrestlers have approached the Delhi High Court.

## Manchester Derby can further expose gulf between City and United

**AP ■ MANCHESTER**  
Jim Ratcliffe's determination to bring down Manchester City is abundantly clear. So is his admiration, it seems, for the team he calls "the enemy." Since becoming co-owner of Manchester United last week, Ratcliffe has spoken about the "driven and elite environment" that has been created at City in its Abu Dhabi-controlled regime. He described City's 4-0 win over Real Madrid in last season's Champions League semifinals as "the best football I have ever seen." He was even behind United's recent appointment of one of City's former top executives, Omar Berrada, as the new chief executive in what United said was the first step on a journey "to put football and performance on the pitch back at the heart of everything we do." Ratcliffe acknowledged United was a "long way behind" City. Just how far might be placed into sharp focus this weekend. It's the 192nd Manchester derby on Sunday, pitting two rivals at opposite stages of their modern development: City, the English, European and world club champion, vs.



United, a fallen giant looking to be kickstarted by the riches and passion of a locally born billionaire. Few are giving United a hope in the Premier League clash at Etihad Stadium - privately, maybe even Ratcliffe will not expect a win, either - but his recent investment in United, not forgetting his comments about knocking City and fellow local rival Liverpool "off their perch" within three years, provides the narrative and backdrop to a fixture that, for the most part, has been one-sided in recent years. Take last season's match at the Etihad, for example, where Erling Haaland and Phil Foden scored hat tricks in City's 6-3 thrashing of United. Or this season's match at Old

Trafford, where United was overrun and ultimately humiliated in a 3-0 loss in October. City comes into the derby following a 6-2 win at Luton in the FA Cup highlighted by a five-goal performance by Haaland. United has actually won seven of its nine games in all competitions in 2024 but barely ever convinces, which leaves Ten Hag under permanent pressure. Tellingly, Ratcliffe, in his round of post-takeover interviews, never gave his complete backing to the Dutchman. March will also see United take on its other big foe, Liverpool, in the FA Cup quarterfinals. It's a month of great opportunity for Ten Hag and his players but also one of potential danger, if United was to lose to City - and therefore further jeopardize its Champions League qualification ambitions - and Liverpool. Fifteen points separate second-placed City and sixth-placed United, and that could be 18 by Sunday evening. More important for City is the points gap to leader Liverpool, which stands at one heading into the weekend. Liverpool plays first, away to Nottingham Forest.

## Kostyuk, Saville and Boulter advance to quarterfinals of Cymbiotika San Diego Open

**AP ■ SAN DIEGO**  
Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine, Daria Saville of Australia and Katie Boulter of England advanced to the quarterfinals of the Cymbiotika San Diego Open. Kostyuk continued to build on the form that saw her reach her first major quarterfinal last month at the Australian Open. The sixth seed knocked off the last remaining wild card by beating 18-year-old Taylah Preston of Australia, 6-4 6-3 on Wednesday. For Kostyuk, 21, it was almost like facing a mirror image of herself. "I was playing her for the very first time. She's still very young. She reminds me a little bit of me," said Kostyuk, who finished with 25 winners to 17 unforced errors, including nine double-faults. "I knew I had to fight and grind. It was very close." Preston, who notched her first tour-level main-draw singles win in the opening round against Magdalena Frech, impressed with her natural power and clean groundstrokes. She has jumped from No. 819 to No. 153 in a matter of one year, and will reach yet another career high when the updated WTA rankings are released



on Monday. Saville, a qualifier, saved a match point to overcome Germany's Tatjana Maria in a dramatic 3-hour, 14-minute marathon, 5-7 7-6(2) 6-2. Serving to stay in the match at 4-5, 30-40 in the second set, Saville hammered a crosscourt forehand winner to keep her hopes alive. She eventually forced a third set in a tiebreak. It was anything but a comfortable matchup for the 29-year-old baseliner. "There was no comfort ever, at all," said Saville, who avenged a quarterfinal loss to Maria in Barranquilla in 2023. "I think I kind of experienced today, tonight, probably what I do to players. It was a fun match - only because I won in

the end. But it was a tough battle." The 47th-ranked Maria's unconventional slice-and-dice game repeatedly left Saville scrambling for answers, but the 36-year-old managed to convert only six of her 23 break-point opportunities in taking the loss. "I needed two hours to adjust, three hours," said Saville of facing her crafty veteran foe. "I think I'm going to have to readjust tomorrow, hitting with someone who hits with spin. I hit a lot of balls today. It's going to be really important for me to do the right recovery and get ready for the next round." It marked the fourth win of the week for Saville including the qualifying rounds.

## Praggnanandhaa commits blunder, loses second round match in Prague

**PTI ■ PRAGUE**  
Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa committed a time-pressure blunder as he suffered defeat at the hands of Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran in the second round of Prague Masters Chess tournament here. The defeat ended Praggnanandhaa's impressive 47-game unbeaten streak in Classical Chess. The 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa also lost the top ranking in live ratings among Indians -- a spot reclaimed by the legendary Viswanathan Anand who is

also the brand ambassador of this event. D Gukesh, meanwhile, came up with an impressive performance with black pieces to beat Nguyen Thai Dai Van of Czech Republic while the other three games in the 10-player round-robin event ended in a draw. With seven rounds still to come, Iranian GM Maghsoodloo is sitting pretty on two points, a half point ahead of Gukesh and Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan who played out a draw with India's Vidit Gujrathi. Praggnanandhaa, Gujrathi,



Richard Rapport of Romania and David Navara of Czech Republic share the fourth spot on one point each while Vincent Keymer of Germany and Mateusz Bartel of Poland are on joint eighth spot with 0.5 point in their kitty. Van is the only player yet to open his account. Praggnanandhaa went down fighting from a position he would have easily saved on another day. Playing the black side of a London System, the Indian did not have much trouble in equalizing and Maghsoodloo kept on looking for ways to complicate the

position. At some point in the middle game, Praggnanandhaa even looked better but with the clock ticking away it was not an easy task to finish. Maghsoodloo then had trained his eyes to go for the black king and all he needed was a blunder that created several threats. It was over in 38 moves. Gukesh's perseverance paid off against Dai Van in a reverse Benoni game wherein the latter played white. Gukesh just kept himself in the game by slow and steady improvement right through and his tactic proved right as the Czech player fell

prey and gave up a rook for minor piece. Wasting no time, Gukesh converted to an endgame and found a beautiful finish towards the end to force matters. The game lasted 52 moves. Gujrathi accepted an early pawn sacrifice by Abdusattarov out a Four Knights opening. Playing black, the Uzbek never looked like in any real danger despite the material deficit and in the end drew in just 35 moves. In other games, Bartel Mateusz had an easy game with Rapport while Keymer did not find any

difficulty in signing peace with Navara. In the Challengers section, R Vaishali lost her second straight game against Ediz Gurel of Turkey. Results Round 2 (Indians unless stated): Parham Maghsoodloo (Iran, 2) beat R Praggnanandhaa (1); David Navara (Cze, 1) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 0.5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 0) lost to D Gukesh (1.5); Vidit Gujrathi (1) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattarov (Uzb, 1.5); Richard Rapport (Romania, 1) drew with Bartel Mateusz (Pol, 0.5).

