



OPINION 6 INDIAN DIPLOMACY: LEVERAGING SOFT POWER

WORLD 8 HALEY HAMMERS TRUMP FOR BEING ALL ABOUT HIMSELF

MONEY 10 SENSEX, NIFTY HIT RECORD HIGH

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KAPIL BACKS BCCI STRICTNESS ON DOMESTIC CRICKET 12 SPORTS

Modi Presides Over Lok Sabha Probables



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP National President JP Nadda, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and others during the BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting to finalise the first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, in New Delhi

The BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC) convened a meeting late Thursday night at its Delhi headquarters, with deliberations led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, regarding their first list of candidates running late into the night, suggesting the inclusion of several high-profile leaders in the first list.

The CEC meeting, which began around 10:30 pm on Thursday, lasted for more than five hours. Before that, Shah and Nadda had met Modi at his residence to hold consultations, sources said. According to sources, the party may announce a list of 100-120 candidates in its first list. The party is likely to announce its candidates on "weak seats" in Uttar Pradesh before the Election Commission releases dates for the Lok Sabha elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP will not contest

the nominees. The CEC meeting, which began around 10:30 pm on Thursday, lasted for more than five hours. Before that, Shah and Nadda had met Modi at his residence to hold consultations, sources said. According to sources, the party may announce a list of 100-120 candidates in its first list. The party is likely to announce its candidates on "weak seats" in Uttar Pradesh before the Election Commission releases dates for the Lok Sabha elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP will not contest



PM QUESTIONS MAMATA ON Maa, Maati, Manush

Apparently setting the election agenda for the BJP in Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday focused on women voters, one of the main electoral bases of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. He expressed regret over the insensitive attitude of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) towards "the better half of the population," citing their handling of the sexually abused women in Sandeshkhali.

Addressing a massive rally in Arambagh, Hooghly district, the Prime Minister, who launched projects worth ₹ 7,000 crore for developing railways, ports, petroleum, and other sectors, criticised the Trinamool Congress Government for protecting an accused of land grab and dishonouring women in Sandeshkhali. He refrained from naming specific politicians but highlighted how leaders from the Congress, the TMC, and the Left parties remained silent on the oppression of women and the poor in Sandeshkhali during meetings held in Patna, Bengaluru, and Mumbai.

Such incidents are usual in these areas... Is this not an insult on the women of Bengal, the great men of the State who created the template of the Independence movement," Modi asked, saying the women of Sandeshkhali and Bengal were hurt and angry and would "avenge their insult in the elections."

The Prime Minister's meeting at Arambagh assumes importance against the backdrop of the party's defeat here in the 2019 general elections by a small margin of about 1,300 votes. Continued on Page 2



Sandeshkhali erupts in celebrations

Holi came a few weeks in advance at Sandeshkhali with the entire riverine island on Thursday virtually getting inundated in abir (vermilion) hours after the news of Sheikh Shahjahan's arrest at Minakhan about 20 miles inland.

Unconcerned about the much-talked about "body language" of Shahjahan — regarded as the unquestioned "don" of Sandeshkhali who doubled up as a powerful Trinamool

Congress leader and a vote and fund manager — post his arrest, the people, particularly women engaged in a premature Holi saying however that this was "not the end of the movement but beginning of it" Shahjahan, the alleged mastermind of attack on a raiding team of Enforcement Directorate officials on January 5 besides the alleged perpetrator of large-scale land grabbing, sexual assault on women and other crimes, was at large for 56 days before being arrested on Thursday. Continued on Page 2

BJP to strengthen alliance, Yogi to revamp Cabinet

Ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is set to maintain good relations with its existing allies by offering them more space in Assam and accommodating them in the Uttar Pradesh Government. Sources said Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath may expand his Cabinet and Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party president Om Prakash Rajbhar may be included in the Cabinet.

India Intent on National Defence

India on Friday sealed five major defence acquisition contracts worth ₹39,125 crore, including the procurement of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles, radars, weapon systems, and aero-engines for MiG-29 jets, as part of efforts to boost the combat capabilities of the armed forces.



These deals will further strengthen indigenous capabilities, save foreign exchange, and reduce dependency on foreign-origin equipment manufacturers in the future," the statement said.

Two separate deals were finalised for the procurement of BrahMos missiles. The first one is for the procurement of BrahMos Aerospace Private Ltd (BAPL) at a cost of ₹19,518.65 crore.

enhances the Navy's combat capabilities. The deal for procurement of RD-33 Aero Engines for MiG-29 aircraft was signed with State-run aerospace giant Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), costing ₹5,249.72 crore. The aero engines, to be produced by the Koraput Division of HAL, will sustain the operational capability of the MiG-29 fleet for its residual service life, fulfilling the Indian Air Force's needs. Continued on Page 2

EC urges parties to maintain decorum

Taking note of the concerning trends and cases of declining levels of political campaign discourse in recent elections, the Election Commission (EC) has urged political parties and their leaders to refrain from seeking votes based on caste, religion, or language.



violation of the Model Code of Conduct will be dealt with sternly by the Commission. Star campaigners and candidates have been put on notice by the EC regarding violations, following previously known methodologies during elections to avoid breaches of the Model Code of Conduct.

Bengaluru Blasted

A bomb blast at a popular eatery in the city on Friday left nine persons injured and police have launched a probe from all angles after it emerged that an earlier suspected gas leak was not the cause of the explosion.



Police suspect that a bag at the eatery with a possible improvised explosive device (IED) could have exploded, even as the NIA and the IB have been apprised of the matter. Officials from the local unit of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) later arrived at the spot.

Yeh Badalta Mausam: India hit by freak weather

India is expected to witness high minimum temperatures in March, sounding alarms for the vital wheat crop, as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicts above-average day and night temperatures from March through May across the nation, attributed to El Niño conditions.

activities and crop growth, particularly for wheat. The minimum or night temperatures are also likely to be above normal over most parts of the country, the IMD said on Friday.



northwest. Normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely to persist over most parts of east and east-central India and some parts of northwest India. During the season (March, April, and May), above-normal minimum temperatures are most likely over most parts of the country.

Niño conditions predicted to continue through the summer season and neutral conditions likely to develop thereafter. The El Niño conditions in 2023 led to patchy and erratic monsoon in 2023, reducing India's foodgrain production by 6.1 per cent in the 2023-24 crop year (July-June).



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a meeting, in Kolkata, on Friday

CPI(M) promoting SFI as criminal mafia force: Arif

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala is promoting and facilitating the growth of its student wing SFI as a criminal mafia force in the State, according to Governor Arif Mohammed Khan. Speaking to media after calling on the parents of J S Sidharth, a second year veterinary degree student, who was lynched by SFI leaders of the Kerala Veterinary and Agricultural Science University at Pookkottu in Wayand district, the Governor said that it was a criminal act committed by the SFI with the blatant support of the CPI(M).

Arif Mohammed Khan also asked the political parties in the State to shun violence and stop supporting criminal activities of students. Sidharth, an apolitical student who was liked by his colleagues in the bathroom of his hostel. Though he was found hanging in the wash room, there were deep wounds and serious injury marks on his body which were inflicted by deadly weapons. The SFI leaders and activists were assaulting him and physically abusing him since 14th February as they found that Sidharth could emerge as a potential threat to their undisputed position as the law makers of the University. It was on 24th February



Sidharth was found dead in his wash room in the hostel building. It took the police seven days to arrest eight students (all SFI leaders) in connection with the unnatural death of Sidharth. According to Sidharth's parents, some of his colleagues had intimidated them that Sidharth was executed by the SFI leaders for not kowtowing to their diktats. "After going through the reports and versions of Sidharth's colleagues, one cannot be blamed for doubting the syllabus followed by the University. It seems the B V Sc students, who are expected to cure and save animals are taught how to cut people into pieces and how to murder the victims without leaving traces of any foul marks," said S Jayasankar, Kerala High Court lawyer and the State's The legal political commentator. There are allegations that a former CPI(M) MLA is behind

the move to save the SFI leaders who were behind the death of Sidharth. Leader of Opposition V D Satheeshan and former Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala accused the CI(M) of other party workers. It is reported that Sidharth was murdered by SFI activists for his 14th February fusion music dance program along with his colleague, a Muslim girl. The incident comes at a time when the CPI(M) is getting ready for the Lok Sabha poll. Early this week the Kerala High Court upheld the verdict by the trial court in sentencing all the CPI(M) leaders to life imprisonment in the T P Chandrasekharan murder case. Chandrasekharan was a Marxist leader who came out of the CPI(M) and launched the RPM in protest against the highhanded behavior of some of the bigwigs in the party.

Daily count of DTC passengers declines, says Economic Survey of Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The average daily count of passengers travelling in DTC buses declined from 33.31 lakh in 2019-20 to 25.02 lakh in 2022-23, while the corresponding figure for cluster buses fell from 17.71 lakh to 16.39 lakh, according to the Delhi Economic Survey 2023-24.

Finance Minister Atishi presented the Economic Survey in the Delhi Assembly on Friday. According to the survey, the average daily passenger count in Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and cluster buses is yet to reach pre-pandemic figures. The report showed that while the bus fleet in DTC has declined from 3,951 in 2017-18 to 3,937 in 2022-23, the cluster bus fleet has grown from 1,744 to 3,293.

According to the Economic Survey, the average daily number of passengers travelling in DTC buses stood at 29.86 lakh in 2017-18. It rose to 30.15 lakh in the next financial year and then to 33.31 lakh in the 2019-20 fiscal.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed due to it, the figures fell to 12.24 lakh in 2020-21. In 2021-22, the figure stood at 15.62 lakh and in 2022-23, 25.02 lakh, it said. The survey showed that the average daily passenger count for cluster buses was 11.65 lakh in 2017-18, 12.24 lakh in 2018-19 and



17.71 lakh in 2019-20. The count stood at 8.51 lakh in 2020-21 and 9.87 lakh in 2021-22. In 2022-23, the figure was at 16.39, according to the survey.

During her address in the Delhi Assembly, Atishi said the government has achieved significant accomplishments in the transportation sector. "Public transportation plays a crucial role in the development of any economy. In this regard, the Delhi government has strengthened its public transport system," she said.

"During 2022-23, the average daily passenger count was 25.02 lakh for DTC buses, 16.39 lakh for cluster buses, and 46 lakh for Delhi Metro. In total, more than 87 lakh passengers use our public transportation systems daily," Atishi said. She said Delhi has a total of 7,582 buses in its fleet, including 1,650 electric ones. "Delhi now has the world's third-largest fleet of electric

buses, after Beijing and Santiago. Through the 'Pink Ticket' initiative, free bus travel has been provided to women. In the fiscal year 2022-23, Delhi women availed free bus travel through the 'Pink Ticket' a staggering 45.44 crore times," the minister added.

According to the Economic Survey, the DTC has incurred a loss of Rs 2,666.25 crore in 2023-24 so far, as compared to Rs 2,687.92 crore in 2022-23. "Till the year 2010-11, the Delhi government used to meet the working losses of the DTC by providing them with a loan. From the year 2011-12, the system has been changed by providing them with grants, instead of a loan, to meet working losses," the report said. During 2022-23, the Delhi government released an amount of Rs 200 crore to the DTC and Rs 200 crore to cluster buses to meet their expenditures on account of free travel for women.

A few able to avail assistive tech due to affordability barriers, says experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Even as there are an estimated 250 million Indians in need of Assistive Technology/Assistive Products (ATs/APs) to address disabilities, aging, or chronic illnesses, just a few are able to avail these vital resources due to barriers such as affordability and accessibility, lamented experts here at an event held to deliberate on ways how to bridge the gap.

Dr. R K Srivastava, former Chairman of the Medical Council of India and ex-Director General of Health Service, emphasised the increasing demand for assistive care solutions, highlighting the significance of these solutions for the elderly, long-term hospital patients, and individuals with congenital or acquired disabilities. This demographic comprises 18% of India's population, indicating a substantial requirement for assistive care products ranging from spectacles to wheelchairs.

Dr. Ashoo Grover, Deputy Director General of the ICMR, echoed similar sentiment, emphasizing evidence-based approaches to bridge the gap between innovative AT products and end-users. "There is a need for collaboration among stakeholders to ensure the availability of customized AT solutions to meet diverse needs," he said at the 8th National Health Writers and Influencers Convention (NHWIC-2024) at AIIMS Delhi here.

Dr. Chandrakant S Pandav, a Padma Shri Awardee and global public health expert known as the 'Iodine Man of India', and a prominent advocate for people with disabilities, shared his personal experiences using a wheelchair and emphasized the lack of societal acceptance and infrastructure faced by the disabled community in India. He called for a change in societal attitudes towards individuals who rely on ATs, urging people to view them as valued members of society. Last year, the ICMR had compiled the National List of Essential Assistive Products (NLEAP) of 380 APs for people with functional impairments. The growing attention towards APs reflects the increasing prevalence of functional impairments among populations worldwide. As societies age, the demand for APs rises, driven by age-related functional restrictions, limitations, or impairments. Moreover, factors such as injuries, mental illnesses, learning disorders, and chronic diseases contribute to the heightened need for APs.

PM QUESTIONS MAMATA on Maa, Maati...

From Page 1

Incidentally Arambagh is also adjacent to Hooghly parliamentary seat presently held by BJP's Locket Chatterjee.

Attacking the TMC, and Congress for failing India and Bengal in development schemes, the Prime Minister said how the Centre had started a number of schemes which had taken off in other States but were being hindered in Bengal.

"Till the TMC Government is there in Bengal no development can take place... They will only promote the criminals and the corrupt," he said, adding how scams worth crores had taken place in teachers' recruitment, ration and many other departments in Bengal.

"Their leaders have gone to jail for perpetrating corruption in teachers' recruitment, cattle smuggling ... Till they are in power no development can take place in Bengal," said the Prime Minister, adding only the BJP can develop Bengal and look after the people's interest as they did in Sandeshkhali. "The TMC is only engaged in corrupt and criminal activities and appeasement politics... Now even the Muslims have decided to leave them," the Prime Minister, who will address yet another meeting at Krishnagar in Nadia district on Saturday, said.

DDA to rejuvenate Mehrauli Archeological Park

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Keeping up with the vision of Delhi LG, VK Saxena's efforts to convert the Capital into a 'City of Heritage', the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) will now be undertaking the work of conservation, restoration, rejuvenation and redevelopment of the Mehrauli Archeological Park, Sanjay Van and Shalimar Bagh, at its own cost, under the overall

supervision of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Ministry of Culture, Government of India. These parks under the ownership of DDA have several ASI-protected monuments, which were hitherto lying in a state of neglect. Sources said an MoU to this effect is set to be signed between DDA and ASI within the next one week. However, basic works like drawing, planning, mobilisation of resources

etc. has already commenced without waiting for a formal MoU, as agreed between DDA and ASI. Following communications between the Lt. Governor, VK Saxena and Union Culture Minister, G Kishan Reddy, wherein the former had requested for handing over these sites to DDA for restoration and redevelopment, the latter has agreed to hand over ASI monuments location in these sites to DDA.

AI workshop organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Acknowledging the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing governance, a large number of ministers and MLAs from diverse departments of the Uttar Pradesh Government attended a capacity-building workshop in the

State capital recently. The aim was to empower participants with essential knowledge and tools in this cutting-edge technology. Chaired by Suresh Khanna, the Finance Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, the workshop received accolades for its proactive approach in leveraging technology for the welfare of Uttar Pradesh.

Minister Khanna reiterated the significance of AI and expressed satisfaction at the substantial turnout of legislators and ministers for the capacity-building workshop. At the workshop, Dr Subi Chaturvedi, AI expert and Chief Corporate Affairs and Public Policy Officer at InMobi, highlighted the transformative potential of AI.

Sandeshkhali erupts in...

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Anita Mal, a homemaker whose husband was forced to leave the village two years ago after he protested against the illegal activities carried out by his goons said, "This is not the end of the struggle as it is the time to rebuild the area ... We will have to remain extremely vigilant because the hyenas of Shahjahan are on the prowl ... They will leave no stone unturned to come back at us again." Recounting her horrors Asima Dhali (name changed) another woman from Jeliakhali said,

"It is not possible for a woman to recount the days when her honour was looted ... But I am doing so ... I am happy at his arrest but I want him hanged." She trembles in anger even as she relates how she was grabbed by her hair and kept locked inside the party office for two days after she refused to desert her husband a CPI(M) activist. She and tens of others smear each other in red or saffron-pink one apparently representing the Left and the other the BJP.

Delhi records minimum temperature of 10.8 degrees C, very light rain likely during day

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The mercury settled at a low of 10.8 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, in Delhi on Friday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The humidity level was recorded at 96 per cent. The IMD has predicted partly cloudy skies and very light rain during the day. Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded in the 'moderate' category at 180 at 9 am, according to Central

Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'.

MODI PRESIDES OVER...

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Using the Namu App, the public was given a platform to voice their opinions on the performance of incumbent MPs, and in a departure from conventional methods, the BJP sought the opinions of the people on the ground by enquiring about the three most popular leaders in each area.

This bottom-up approach, according to the party, aimed to ensure that the candidates resonated with the sentiments and aspirations of the local population. Over the past two years, the BJP has continually sought feedback from its MPs, evaluating their performance and addressing concerns. To further enhance the decision-making process, the BJP reached out to survey agencies to compile comprehensive reports on each parliamentary constituency. They said the first list may have the names of Modi, Shah and Singh from their current seats Varanasi, Gandhinagar and Lucknow respectively besides several Union Ministers, including some

who will be contesting Lok Sabha polls after having served in Rajya Sabha. Scindia's expected seat in Madhya Pradesh is seen as a sure thing since it is his family citadel. Union Ministers Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Bhupender Yadav, Mansukh Mandaviya, Dharmendra Pradhan and Parshottam Rupala are likely to be fielded in the polls. There is a buzz that Chandrasekhar will be pitted against Shashi Tharoor, the three-term incumbent Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram. The sources said three of the four BJP MPs-- Union minister G Kishan Reddy, Bandi Sanjay Kumar and Dharmapuri Arvind-- will be contesting from their current constituencies Secunderabad, Karimnagar and Nizamabad respectively. A large number of those seats that the BJP has targeted for improving its prospects after unsuccessfully contesting those in 2019 may figure in the initial lists of candidates, following the template of recent Assembly polls, the sources said.

EC urges parties to...

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Acknowledging the need to balance freedom of expression with a level playing field, the advisory noted that the commission has been adopting a self-restrained approach in recent rounds of elections, assuming that its notice would serve as moral censure to the candidate or star campaigner. The commission's advisory has formally set the stage for ethical political discourse and aims to reduce clutter in the 2024 General Elections. A methodical approach to MCC violations has been adopted, preparing the ground for civilised campaigning. It urged parties to elevate the level of election campaign to issue-based debate and cautioned against making statements without factual basis or misleading voters. Regarding social media engagement, the advisory emphasised that posts vilifying or insulting rivals, or those of bad taste or below dignity, should not be made or shared. The advisory also covered the use of inappropriate language

against star campaigners of other political parties, false allegations, and unverified advertisements masquerading as news items. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar recently emphasised that political parties should promote ethical and respectful political discourse that inspires rather than divides, promoting ideas instead of personal attacks. The advisory said political party leaders designated as "star campaigners" under Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, deliver speeches during significant political rallies. It is essential to interpret this within the framework of harmonious and purposive construction, as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and statutory provisions of the Act complement each other. Therefore, while enjoying the privileges granted by Section 77, star campaigners also bear the responsibility of upholding the highest ethical standards during election campaigns.

India Intent on...

From Page 1

Manufactured under transfer of technology license from the Russian original equipment maker, the programme will focus on indigenisation of several high-value critical components, enhancing the indigenous content of future repair and overhaul tasks of RD-33 aero-engines. Additionally, a deal with Larsen and Toubro Ltd for procurement of a batch of close-in weapon systems (CIWS) was signed at a cost of Rs 7,668.82 crore. This CIWS will provide terminal air defense to select locations of the country, boosting and encouraging active participation of Indian aerospace, defense, and associated industries, including MSMEs. Furthermore, a contract for procurement of high-power radar systems was signed with Larsen and Toubro Limited at a cost of Rs 5,700 crore. These radar systems will replace existing long-range radars of the IAF with modern active aperture phased array based HPR, featuring advanced

surveillance capabilities. "It will significantly enhance the terrestrial air defence capabilities of IAF with integration of sophisticated sensors capable of detection of small radar cross section targets," the Ministry said. "It will boost to indigenous radar manufacturing technology as it would be first of its kind radar built by the private sector in India," the Ministry said. The signing of the two contracts for procurement of BrahMos missiles followed approval by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) for the acquisition, clearing the way for over 200 supersonic cruise missiles and associated equipment. The procurement will include a mix of BrahMos missiles with ranges of approximately 290 km and the latest extended-range variant with a range of about 450 km. BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd, an India-Russian joint venture, manufactures these supersonic cruise missiles, deployable from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms.

Yeh Badalta Mausam...

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According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), when the daily maximum temperature exceeds the normal maximum temperature by 5°C at a particular location for more than five consecutive days, the condition is known as a heatwave, with the normal period being the 30-year mean (e.g., during 1961-90). "The IMD said night temperatures are likely to be above normal over most parts of the country, except some isolated areas along the Himalayas where normal to below normal minimum temperatures are most likely in March. This could impact agricultural activities and crop growth, particularly for wheat." The country is expected to record above-normal rainfall in March, exceeding 117 per cent of the long-period average of 29.9 mm. India is likely to experience above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures in most parts of the country from March to May. Heatwave conditions are not expected

over north and central India in March. Mohapatra said the prevailing El Niño conditions - the periodic warming of waters in the central Pacific Ocean - will continue through the summer season, with neutral conditions likely to develop thereafter. La Niña conditions, generally associated with good monsoon rainfall in India, are expected to set in by the second half of the monsoon season. The IMD also forecasted that an active western disturbance is expected to impact the Western Himalayan region and northern plains from Friday until Sunday. It recommended that farmers make necessary arrangements for draining out excess water from crop fields to avoid water stagnation in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Punjab. Authorities are advised to provide mechanical support to horticultural crops and staking to vegetables in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and North Rajasthan.

Bengaluru Blasted

From Page 1

Speaking to reporters, he said the injured -- both staff and customers -- are undergoing treatment. Asked whether an IED was used for the blast, he said, "we are checking." "Let's not say anything now itself. The FSL team has come and they are checking. Once they collect (samples from the

spot), we will examine." Divya Raghavendra Rao, Co-Founder & Managing Director of Rameshwaram Cafe told a Kannada news channel the blast occurred in the area where customers wash their hands. A stand is also kept there, where the waste is collected. The explosion was caused from a bag placed by someone from outside, she claimed. A CCTV video of the incident showed an explosion, leading to smoke and panic-stricken customers and others fleeing the place.

The Opposition BJP sought a detailed probe into the matter. "Deeply troubled to hear about the blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bangalore (sic). Praying for a swift recovery of all the injured in the incident. State Government should order a detailed enquiry & spare no efforts in apprehending the perpetrators," BJP state president Vijayendra Yediyurappa said in a post on X. "Callousness" of the Government in downplaying such crimes "is pushing the State into this chaos & proving

to be a safe haven for antisocial elements." "Failure of police intelligence is also evident in this incident. We strongly urge the police to conduct a thorough probe & eradicate these elements from the core without yielding to any political pressures," he demanded. R Ashoka, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly said, "the bomb blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru is yet another glaring example of the deteriorating law and order situation in Karnataka ever

since CM @siddaramiah led @INCKarnataka Govt came to power in the State." While it was initially suspected that a gas leak could have triggered the blast, the fire department ruled out the possibility and said a bag was found at the spot. Subsequently, police were looking into all angles related to the incident. A bomb disposal squad and forensic teams were at the spot. CCTV footage is being scanned to check if there was any suspicious movement in and around the cafe.

"At 1.08 pm today, the fire department received a call about LPG leakage fire in the cafe. When our officers and teams reached the spot, there was no fire or flame. A bag which was lying behind a woman who was sitting with six other customers at the eatery exploded. It is suspected that the explosion could have been caused due to some object in that bag," TN Shivashankar, Director of Karnataka State Fire and Emergency Services department told PTI. It is not clear whose bag it was.

Ruling out about the possibility of any gas cylinder leakage, the officer said, "I along with my team of officers inspected the spot. But there is no sign of any leakage from the gas cylinder. We have checked it. Another LPG gas cylinder inside the kitchen which was used for making tea and coffee also was checked but there is no leakage from it as well. There is no sign of gas leakage from any of cylinders at the spot as per our initial probe." The cafe which is located at Whitefield's Brookfield area, a vibrant neighborhood, a

business centre as well as a tech hub. It is usually crowded with employees from nearby offices during the lunch hours. Edison, an eyewitness said, "I was waiting outside the eatery for my turn when suddenly we heard a loud noise... An explosion. We got scared not knowing what it was. There were around 35-40 people at the eatery. They all started rushing out and there was absolute chaos. They started saying that a cylinder exploded. But we don't know exactly what happened."

City per capita income surges 22 per cent in two years: Economic Survey

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's per capita income increased 22 per cent in two years to Rs 4.61 lakh in 2023-24, registering a growth of 7.39 per cent, over the previous year, according to the Economic Survey of Delhi 2023-24 tabled in the Delhi Assembly on Friday. The Per Capita Income of Delhi at constant prices estimated at Rs 258941 in 2022-23 as compared to Rs 244024 in 2021-22. At the same time, the Capital's outstanding debt of Rs 40017.55 crore as on 31.03.2023, resulting in debt GSDP (gross state domestic product) ratio to 3.94 per cent. The state government had an outstanding debt of Rs 32080.31 Crore in 2013-14, which was equal to 6.48 per cent of its GSDP. Delhi Finance Minister Atishi tabled the Economic Survey of Delhi 2023-24 in the House of Delhi Assembly, that highlighting financial health of the Union Territory. "The ratio of interest payment to revenue receipts also got declined to

5.21 per cent in 2022-23 from the high ratio of 11.20 per cent in 2012-13. This clearly indicates that the debt problem is well under control. Delhi Government received a Small Saving Loan of Rs 3251.22 Crore during 2022-23, as against Rs 5000 Crore received during 2021-22," the report said. While presenting the survey in the state assembly, she said despite obstructions created in the functioning of the city government, Delhi witnessed a rise in per capita income. She said the state budget for the financial year 2024-25 will be presented before the Assembly on March 4. Reading out details, she said the GSDP (gross state domestic product) of Delhi at current prices during 2023-24 is likely to reach Rs 11,07,746 crore, registering a growth of 9.17 per cent over 2022-23. In post-Covid times, our real GSDP grew at 8.76 per cent in 2021-22 and 7.85 per cent in 2022-23, faster than the rest of the country. Delhi's population, constituting 1.5 per cent of

India's total population, contributes nearly 3.9 per cent to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). One of the achievements is the significant surge in Per Capita Income, which rose from Rs 3,76,217 in 2021-22 to Rs 4,61,910 in 2023-24, marking a remarkable 22 per cent increase in just two years. Delhi's per capita income stands at 2.5 times the national average. The Advance Estimate of GSDP of Delhi at current prices during 2023-24 is likely to attain a level of Rs 11,07,746 crore which is at a growth of 9.17 per cent over 2022-23. The Advance Estimate of GSDP of Delhi at constant prices during 2023-24 was recorded at Rs 67,22,47 crore showed a growth of 7.39 per cent over 2022-23. Delhi's economy has a predominant Service Sector with its share of contribution to Gross State Value Added (at current prices) at 85.40% during 2023-24 followed by contribution of Secondary Sector (13.02 per cent) and Primary Sector (1.58 per cent).



Ranjan Dimri

According to report, Delhi has maintained its consistent Revenue Surplus; it increased to Rs 14457 Crore during 2022-23 (Provisional) as compared to Rs 3270 Crore in 2021-22. Delhi's revenue surplus was 1.42 per cent of GSDP during 2022-23 and 0.52 per cent during 2023-24 (BE). "Delhi only gets discretionary grants in lieu of Share in Central Taxes and that too is stagnant at Rs325 Crore since 2001-02. The Normal Central Assistance to NCT of Delhi during 2000-01 was Rs370 Crore and after 22 years, it is

still remained as Rs626 Crore in 2022-23. Further, 'Grants in lieu of Share in Central Taxes' and 'Central Assistance to UTs' have been clubbed in 'Central Assistance to UTs' from BE 2023-24 onwards with a budget provision of Rs951 Crore in 2023-24," the report said. In terms of inflation and unemployment, Delhi has maintained a lower inflation rate compared to the national average, with an inflation rate of 2.81 per cent in 2023. Additionally, the unemployment rate dropped from 6.3 per cent in 2020-21 to 1.9 per cent in 2022-23, showcasing a favourable employment scenario, as per the report. Delhi's fiscal management has also been commendable, with tax collection witnessing an 18 per cent growth during 2022-23. "The city recorded a substantial revenue surplus of Rs 14,457 crores in 2022-23, marking a significant increase from the previous year," the report stated. Delhi gives free electricity, water, health, education, bus rides for women, teeth yatras for elderly, and still has a growing economy with a revenue surplus, the minister said. A recent study conducted by the Department of Economics and Statistics of 3450 households revealed that almost all households benefited from free electricity at some point during the year, with significant percentages availing free water, healthcare, and education services. "61.6 per cent of the households had spent all the money saved due to freebies, while 28.4 per cent invested the money in savings and FDs; and

7.2 per cent planned to spend it soon, 2.8 per cent have lent the extra money to friends," the report stated. The report further claimed that the city government's budget allocation for education has remained the highest across all state governments and Central governments. The report further claimed that the city government's budget allocation for education has remained the highest across all state governments and Central governments. "In 2022-23, we spent 21.1 per cent of our aggregate expenditure on Education, while the average across India was 13.5 per cent. Delhi's Gross Enrollment Ratio and Net Enrollment Ratio are higher than India's average GER and NER. For Senior Secondary classes - the senior most classes in school education, Delhi's GER is 95.01 per cent while it is 57.05 per cent for India, in 2021-22. This means that children not only take admission in school but finish their school education," claimed the Delhi government in its report.

The survey said the total gross cropped area in Delhi reduced to 33069 (estimated) hectares in 2023-24 which was at 35178 hectares during 2012-13. The remaining areas of the Delhi are being used for various other uses such as non-agricultural purposes, forest, fallow land, uncultivable land, etc. The main reasons behind the reduction in agriculture area in Delhi are fast urbanization and the shift in occupational pattern, especially during the last two decades. On the transport sector, the survey report said the daily average passenger ridership in DTC buses was 25.02 lakh, in Cluster buses was 16.39 lakh and 46 lakh passengers in Delhi Metro during the year 2022-23. Cumulatively, more than 87 lakh passengers use our public transport system. 2. As of January 2024, Delhi's total bus fleet comprised 7582 buses, out of which 1650 are electric. Total pink tickets (free bus travel for women) issued over 2022-23 add up to 45.44 crore for DTC and cluster buses.

Eleven medical facilities under construction: Survey

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Eleven structural medical facilities, including new hospitals, are under construction at present in the national capital, while several other existing hospitals are also being upgraded with more infrastructure, according to the latest Economic Survey of Delhi 2023-24 tabled by Finance Minister Atishi in the Delhi Assembly on Friday.



Delhi government is providing preventive, promotive and curative health care services to the citizens of Delhi through 38 multispecialty and super speciality hospitals, 174 allopathic dispensaries, 60 seed primary urban health centres, 521 Aam Aadmi Mohalla Clinics, 30 polyclinics, 55 Ayurvedic dispensaries, 25 Unani dispensaries, 117 homeopathic dispensaries and 46 school health clinics, the report said. "At present, 11 hospitals are under

construction," as per the report, which also mentioned various project details. These 11 projects also include new blocks coming up at hospitals like GTB Hospital and Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya. Hospital projects are underway at Vikaspuri, Jwalapuri, Shalimar Bagh and Sultanpuri. The physical progress of the Vikaspuri hospital project is 45 per cent and the target date of completion is December 31,

2024, the report says. At GTB Hospital in east Delhi, a 1912-bed block is coming up. The physical progress on this project is 82 per cent, the report says, adding, "Work in a stand still position since July 2023. Completion depends on sanction of revised estimate, i.e. 6 months time". Besides, the Delhi government has decided to remodel 15 existing hospitals so as to enhance the number of existing beds as per FAR (floor area ratio) norms. Around 6,000 new beds will be added after completion of remodelling of these hospitals, according to the survey report. These hospitals include the LNJP Hospital, Dr B R Ambedkar Hospital, Ambedkar, Deep Chand Bandhu Hospital and Hedgewar Arogya Sansthan. The report adds that physical work has "not started at all" at Hedgewar Arogya Sansthan. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in October 2020 laid the foundation stone for construction of a towering state-of-the-art 1,500-bed block at LNJP

LoP: Economic Survey is jugglery of numbers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, described the presentation of the Economic Survey in the House by Finance Minister Atishi as mere jugglery of numbers.



Taking a dig at the AAP government, Bidhuri said it is surprising that on the one hand, the Kejriwal government is saying that we are not allowed to work, and on the other hand, claims of historic work are being made. Bidhuri said that per capita income in Delhi has always been higher, while the government is portraying it as its charm. "As far as the benefits to the government are concerned, the Kejriwal government in Delhi is not doing any work for the welfare of the people. Instead of progressing in the matter of Delhi's infrastruc-

ture, it is regressing. Not only are new roads far from being built, but the maintenance of old roads is also not happening, which the Supreme Court had reprimanded the government. Regarding the issues of health and water boards, Atishi has accepted the failure of her government but has blamed the LG. If the government does not make development plans for the people and does not spend, then its revenue will automatically be saved. Bidhuri said that this time the government did not even present the outcome budget, which shows how many schemes of the previous budget have been implemented," the BJP leader said. He said that even in the economic survey, Atishi has targeted the Lieutenant Governor, which is extremely unfortunate. "On one hand, the Kejriwal government claims that it has done work that no other government has done, but on the other hand, it is also crying that it is not allowed to work. Actually, when the account of their failures is demanded, they blame the Lieutenant Governor. The truth is that this is only a propaganda government and it continues to make false claims only through the manipulation of false claims and numbers," he added. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva stated that the economic survey presented today in the assembly by Delhi's Finance Minister Atishi is a routine economic report and has nothing unique in it.

Flyovers, foot bridges likely to get ready soon

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Some flyovers and footbridges are likely to be completed in 2024 that will ease traffic congestion and facilitate pedestrian movement, according to the Delhi Economic Survey 2023-24.



likely to be completed by December 31 this year. The stretch from Sarai Kale Khan to Mayur Vihar Phase-III under this project was sanctioned with an outlay of Rs 1260.63 Crore. An expenditure of Rs 880.11 crore has been incurred till October, 2023. The work is in progress and balance land acquisition of

WTPs capacity improves marginally than last year

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The capacity of water treatment plants in Delhi increased marginally in 2023 in comparison with the year before that, according to the city's Economic Survey. Finance Minister Atishi presented the Economic Survey of the city in the Delhi Assembly on Friday. The capacity of the water treatment plants was 943 MGD (million gallons per day) in 2022. It increased by 0.31 per cent to 946 MGD in 2023, the report stated. It said the Delhi government has ensured free water of up to 20 kilolitres to every household having a metered water connection and around 24.72 lakh consumers have benefitted under this scheme since its inception. According to the report, about 93.5 per cent households of in Delhi now have access to piped water supply. It said the treatment plants produce about



1,000 MGD of water consistently during the summer season. Water is supplied to about 21.5 million people of Delhi through existing water supply networks comprising 15,473-km-long pipelines and more than 117 underground reservoirs (UGRs), it stated. Based on the norm of 60 gallons per capita per day (GPCD), the total requirement of water for Delhi is 1,290 MGD for the estimated population,

of limited surface water sources, frequent pollution in raw water sources at Wazirabad and increase in dependence on groundwater sources, augmentation of new tubewells is planned by blending groundwater with surface water to achieve the permissible limits for drinking purpose, it said. The Delhi Jal Board has 5,169 functional tubewells. In addition, there are 11 functional ranney wells along the Yamuna river. The floodplains of Yamuna and the area adjacent to Najafgarh Lake are being explored for extraction of water on a sustainable basis, the report said. The DJB is carrying out rejuvenation of 64 water bodies, out of which rejuvenation work at 39 water bodies has been completed and tender for 25 more shall be called shortly. Additionally, the work of creation of a water body at Timarpur oxidation pond, Dwarka, Pappankala, Rohini,

Nilothi, revival of Roshanara Lake is currently underway, it said. The aim of the project of rejuvenation of water bodies is to clean the existing water bodies, restore their ecological values and put in management regimes that are sustainable for the long term, the report stated. The water tariff is based on the principle of 'use more pay more'. The current water tariff policy serves as a deterrent for consumers excessively consuming water or wasting water. The DJB has collected Rs 1,294.86 crore during 2022-2023, the report said. The DJB has provided rainwater harvesting in its 594 installations. The rainwater harvesting cell of DJB provides technical assistance to individuals/institutions for providing rainwater harvesting. The DJB has provided the information regarding rainwater harvesting on its website for public facilitation, it said.

Three hurt in scuffle at JNU between ABVP, Left wing groups

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A scuffle broke out at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Thursday night between students belonging to the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and Left-associated groups, including the All India Students' Association (AISA). Three students injured in the melee during the general body meeting (GBM) at the School of Language, Literature and Cultural Studies have been admitted to Safdarjung Hospital. Following the incident, Vice-Chancellor Santishree D Pandit on Friday said strict action will be taken against those involved irrespective of their political affiliation. Pandit said the administration will look into the matter and take strict action. "The JNU (students' union)

elections are conducted by students. It is their responsibility to ensure that it is a peaceful democratic process. The Inter-hostel Administration (IHA) oversees the conduct of the polls. Any complaints by the students' body will be looked into by the IHA. Very strict action will be taken against those found guilty irrespective of their political affiliation," she said. The vice-chancellor also said once the medico-legal cases of students severely injured in the violence are done, the authority concerned will prepare a report and take appropriate action. Pandit warned the students that any act of violence on campus may lead to deferring the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) polls further. In a video widely circulated on social media platform X, a man can be seen thrashing students with a stick. In another

video, a person is seen throwing a bicycle at students. Other purported videos from the incident showed individuals being mobbed and beaten up by a group even as security personnel of the university tried to rescue them. The violence occurred in the university's School of Languages building late on Thursday night. Students from both ABVP and Left-backed groups have filed police complaints against each other. According to police, a physical altercation broke out between members of left-backed groups including All India Students' Association (AISA), Democratic Students' Federation (DSF), Students' Federation of India (SFI) and ABVP with both sides blaming each other for it. JNU students' union (JNUSU) has been preparing for the college polls the preparations of



which have begun. The student union has been conducting GBMs for selecting the election committee members. This process was the major bone of contention between the two groups which escalated into violence. The complaints were registered at Vasant Kunj North police station. A university official said some students have been admitted to Safdarjung Hospital. "We received information about the clashes on the campus at 1.15 am. At least four students were injured. Multiple complaints have been received from both sides. Further inquiry is on," a police officer said. The ABVP said that two students seen in one of the videos beating others with a stick and throwing a bicycle were members of its JNU unit and

claimed that they were trying to defend themselves. On the other hand, Left-backed groups alleged that ABVP members, disgruntled by the selection of the election committee members, attacked JNUSU office bearers and other students. JNUSU Joint Secretary Mohammad Danish, who was presiding the School General Body Meeting along with JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh, claimed that he received threats to his life from ABVP members because of his religious identity. He also alleged that he was held hostage during the meeting. "On the last day of the General Body Meeting at the School of Languages, ABVP resorted to another round of violence at the end of the meeting. Initially attempting to disrupt the selection process for the election committee, the ABVP resorted to violence against students when thwarted by JNU stu-

dents," the Left-backed All India Students' Association (AISA) claimed in a statement. "Accompanied by Kanhaiya Kumar, a student of Japanese MA and the ring-leader of the SL (School of Languages) unit, the ABVP goons were seen wielding rods and targeting and beating common students indiscriminately. They singled out Muslim students and objected to the names of Muslim students being proposed for the election committee," it alleged. The Left students' group claimed their members Shaurya and Madhurima Kundu, both pursuing PhD, and Priyam and Anvesha, students of MA Linguistics, were chased and beaten up by ABVP members. It also accused the JNU administration of shielding the RSS-affiliated student group. The ABVP, in turn, accused the

Left group of foul play in electing the candidates of the election committee and alleged that the politburo chief in the General Body Meeting tried to provide undue advantage to SFI candidates. "In General Body Meeting at the School of Languages, the chief of Politburo unilaterally declared that first election committee candidates who have secured more than two-third of the seats will be automatically declared winners. In the counting process if 100 hands are being raised to support a candidate, then the Politburo chief counts it as 300. "The open rigging in the counting of votes and imposition of self-made rules is a manifestation of autocracy akin to the system of Politburo," the ABVP said in a statement while claiming that its members were injured in the attack by the Left groups.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Of 225 Rajya Sabha sitting members analysed, 33 per cent have declared criminal cases against themselves while the total assets of these sitting MPs stood at Rs 19,602 crore, according to poll rights body ADR. Also, 31 of them or 14 per cent are billionaires. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) also showed that 18 per cent of these parliamentarians have declared serious criminal cases which include instances of murder and attempted murder. In an analysis conducted by the ADR and National Election Watch (NEW), two Rajya Sabha sitting members have declared cases related to murder under IPC section 302, while four MPs have declared cases related to attempt to murder under IPC Section 307.

“Out of the 225 Rajya Sabha sitting MPs analysed, 75 (33 per cent) Rajya Sabha sitting MPs have declared criminal cases against themselves and 40 (18 per cent) Rajya Sabha sitting MPs have declared serious criminal cases,” the report said. The analysis also delved into the distribution of these criminal cases across different political parties. “The BJP leads with 23 per cent of its 90 Rajya Sabha members having declared criminal cases against themselves. Congress follows closely behind with 50 per cent of its 28 MPs facing similar charges. The ADR analysis said five (38 per cent) out of 13 Rajya Sabha members from TMC, four (67 per cent) out of six members from RJD, four (80 per cent) out of five MPs from CPI(M), three (30 per cent) out of 10 MPs from AAP, four (36 per cent) out of 11 Rajya Sabha



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

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

delved into the asset holdings of Rajya Sabha members. It was found that the average assets per MP stand at a staggering Rs 87.12 crore. Further dissecting the data, the report revealed significant disparities in asset holdings across different political parties. Among major parties, 9 (10 per cent) out of 90 Rajya Sabha members from BJP, 4 (14 per cent) out of 28 Rajya Sabha members from Congress, 5 (45 per cent) out of 11 MPs from YSRCP, 2 (20 per cent) out of 10 Rajya Sabha members from AAP, 3 (75 per cent) out of 4 Rajya Sabha members from TRS and 2 (33 per cent) out of 6 MPs from RJD have declared assets valued more than Rs 100 crore.

Among the major parties, the average assets per MP for analyzed MPs are as follows: BJP Rajya Sabha members have average assets of Rs 37.34 crore, Congress MPs have average assets of Rs 40.70 crore, TMC MPs have average assets worth Rs 10.25 crore, YSRCP MPs have average assets worth Rs 357.68 crore, TRS Rajya Sabha members have average assets worth a whopping Rs 1,383.74 crore, DMK Rajya Sabha members have average assets worth Rs 6.37 crore, and AAP Rajya Sabha members have average assets of Rs 114.81 crore. Moreover, the total assets of the analyzed Rajya Sabha sitting members amount to a staggering Rs. 19,602 crore, according to the analysis. When broken down by party, the total assets for analyzed MPs are as follows: BJP MPs have total assets of Rs 3,360 crore, Congress MPs have total assets of Rs 1,139 crore, YSRCP MPs have total assets of Rs 3,934 crore, TRS MPs have total assets of Rs 5,534 crore, and AAP MPs have total assets of Rs 1,148 crore.

SC agrees to hear appeal against HC order on Gyanvapi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Obesity a new threat to Indian children, says study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Another BRS MP joins BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

Pharmacy council members allege irregularities in recent poll

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

to contest for the top post. “Mital has violated all protocols by allowing such a person to contest the elections whose membership has been doubtful,” said Baldev Kumar, a senior pharmacist and a nominated member of the Central Council. Since the election in 2022, we had been constantly seeking reply from the registrar in the matter, but in vain. In the first place, as per section 3(h) of the Pharmacy Act, 1948, Patel is not even a member of the Central Council member which can make him eligible to fight for the post of

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

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

Congress president Kharge targets Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

Auditors should engage with stakeholders to gather input: CAG

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

India must build deep national strengths: Jaishankar

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

The theme of the conference this year is 'Geo-economic challenges in the era of flux'. Jaishankar said the present geo-economic challenges fall in three categories — supply chain challenge, technology challenge, and the challenge of "over-concentration stemming from the nature of globalisation". Whether it is finished products, intermediates or components, the world is dangerously dependent on a limited number of suppliers, he said. "Even as importers, the production centres have built their own sourcing chains. How to introduce greater resilience and reliability is central to de-risking the global economy. All of us need more options and must work to create them," he said. The technology challenge is growing by the day given our reliance on technology for

more and more aspects of daily life, he said. "The digital era has given it altogether a different connotation because it is so intrusive. It is not just our interests that are at stake, but often the most personal of our decisions and choices. Such an era demands more trust and transparency, but in fact we are seeing the reverse where technology providers are concerned," he said. "Over-concentrations" which stem from the nature of globalisation are heightened by unpredictability and opacity, the minister said. "We discovered this more sharply in the Covid times, but from time to time we're also reminded when market dominance is weaponised for the global South and this is particularly serious given the extent of this dependence," Jaishankar added. "We all know that this is



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

provide the foundation for technology development," he added. "As the most populous country that will be the third largest economy very soon, our goals and ambitions cannot be determined by the goodwill of

others. We must build deep national strengths during the 'Amrit Kaal' that will drive the transition towards becoming a developed economy and the leading power. This is the vision of the (Narendra) Modi government and our initiatives

and programs of the last decade are aimed to this very end," he said. The Modi government refers to the 25-year period culminating in the nation's centenary of independence in 2047 as 'Amrit Kaal'.

PTI ■ CHENNAI
Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai on Friday termed as 'speculations', him contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls but said he will abide by any decision the party takes. The former IPS officer said he had no "personal prejudice or any likes and dislikes in BJP". "Whatever the party tells me I have to obey, that is the nature of the party. Today the party has asked me to complete the state level yatra (En Manna En Makkal) and we have just finished that," he told reporters here. He said the BJP has "given me some responsibility" to ensure the growth of the party in the state and he was doing that. Apparently referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha contest, he said, "tomorrow morning if the party tells me, do that, I will do that." "I am not going to respond to speculations. Whatever our senior national leadership decides, my duty is to obey and make sure it is implemented on the ground," the state BJP chief added. To a question on Udhayanidhi's strident criticism of BJP, indicating it could hardly make any impact in the elections, Annamalai said the state minister is a

Will not respond to speculations: Annamalai on contesting LS poll

"failed actor," referring to the DMK leader's cinema stint. Udhayanidhi was in politics "with his grandfather (the late M Karunanidhi) and father's (MK Stalin) name...What social service has he done...Did he help the poor?" Annamalai asked. To a question on the TN BJP greeting Stalin in 'Chinese' on his birthday, Annamalai said he did not find anything offensive about it. "On behalf of @bjptnmediacell, here's wishing our Honourable CM Thiru @mkstalin avargal a happy birthday in his favourite language! May he live a long and healthy life!" it said, with an image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP leaders including JP Nadda and Annamalai, besides that of the TN CM with some message in what seemed to be in Chinese. It appeared to an apparent dig at the recent controversy over a 'China flag' in a DMK advertisement issued in connection with an ISRO launch complex coming up in



Minister in Chinese. That is what our IT wing people have done. I don't find anything offensive," Annamalai added. At a rally in Tirunelveli on Wednesday, PM Modi strongly criticised the DMK for being 'oblivious' to the nation's achievements in space sector, after the newspaper advertisement by a state minister on the spaceport kicked up a row over what the BJP claimed had a 'Chinese flag'.

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PUBLIC NOTICE
It is to inform to the public at large that Mr. Shivamurthy is the owner of the LAND AREA MEASURING 50 SQ. YARDS, SITUATED IN THE VILLAGE JHANDAPUR, PARGANA & TEHSIL DADRI, DISTRICT GAUTAM BUDDH NAGAR U.P. from (1) Mr. Sukra Singh & (2) Mr. Nepal Singh who are owners of the aforesaid property vide Two Sale Deed dated 02.09.1985 (vide Document No. 7201, Volume No. 352/354), Pages. 313-315 on dated 02.09.1985 SR. Dadri & Sale Deed dated 04.12.1991 (vide Document No. 5293, Volume No. 921/919, Pages. 451/97-200 on dated 04.12.1991 SR. Dadri) and same to be finance & mortgage by Capital India Home Loans Ltd. If any person having any type of claim/right/interference over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that said property is free from all type of encumbrances, lien etc. LUCEM LEGAL LLP Office No. B-93B Second Floor Opposite SBI Bank Sector-2, Indira Park, Delhi-110002, Contact: 011-26114393

PUBLIC NOTICE
My clients Mr. Poojaram Kumari W/o Sh. Nirmal Chand is the Owner of a Built-up property bearing H. No. S-299 out of Kharsa No. 0/128/4, Situated in Unauthorized Colony Tajpur Pahar, Badapur, New Delhi-110044 vide registered conveyance Deed Regd. No. 6555 dated -19.10.2022 SR-V Delhi Executed by PM-UDAY. This above-mentioned property is going to be mortgage with Fed Bank Financial Services Limited. If any person/bank/financial institution having any claim/right, lien, any objection whatsoever in regard to above property, should notified to the undersigned/Adv. Vishal Mehra, E-713, Karkardoma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address through registered A/d within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived. Adv. Vishal Mehra, E-713, Karkardoma Court, Delhi-110092; Mobile no. 981125181

OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION, BHOPAL
Water Work Department
Municipal Corporation Rest House, Shyamla Hills, Bhopal
Ph. No. 0755-2701669
NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER
Online tenders are being invited for the following works. The bidder can obtain detailed information and tender documents on website <https://mptenders.gov.in>.
Corrigendum for this NIT shall not be issued separately in newspapers. Corrigendum regarding correction can be seen on the website <https://mptenders.gov.in>

S. No.	NIT No.	Tender ID.	Details of Work	Estimated Cost (INR)	Earnest Money (EMD)	Bid Submission End Date
1.	09/T.Sec./EE/W.W.D./2023-24	2024_UAD-340280	PROVIDING, LAYING, JOINTING TESTING COMMISSIONING, INTERCONNECTION & SHIFTING OF DIFFERENT SIZE D.I. AND H.D.P.E. WATER SUPPLY PIPE LINE FROM SHAITAN SINGH SQUARE TO BANSAL HOSPITAL, BABA NAGAR, VIRASA HEIGHTS TO C.I. SQUARE.	2,71,01,607/-	135508/-	01.04.2024

Executive Engineer (H)
Municipal Corporation, Bhopal
T.N.1728/023/024
No.CE/TB-III/43/2023/PV/15
PRESS NOTICE (Re-Tender)
In cancellation of earlier Press Notice issued vide this office letter No CE/TB-III/43/2023/Pt/8 Dated 17.11.2023 the Spl. Chief Engineer, P.W.D. (Building), (Health & Education) Assam Chandmari, Guwahati-3 on behalf of the Governor of Assam re-invites fresh bids through Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode-I of contract (single stage two-part bidding system) for the following work from eligible contractors having experience of similar nature of work.
Detail of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website i.e. www.assamtenders.gov.in
The bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in

Sl.No.	Name of Work	Bid Value (in Rs.)	Bid Security (in Rs.)	Tender Cost (in Rs.)	Time of completion
1.	Construction of 50 bedded Ayush Hospital at Baksa	14,09,67,741.00	(2% for General, and 1% for Reserved category)	20,000.00	24 months

Note:-
1. All terms and conditions will be as per the bidding document. Press Notice will be a part of bidding document.
2. The Bid Price may be vary at the time of uploading of DNIT for which no claim will be admissible.
Sd/-
Spl. Chief Engineer, P.W.D. (Bldg.) (Health & Education)
Chandmari, Guwahati-3
Janasanyog/C/17159/23/2-Mar-24

INDIAN RAILWAYS
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS
(RAILWAY BOARD)
E-TENDER NO.2024RSI8741TC
Executive Director, Railways Stores(S), Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, Government of India invites e-tender for procurement of 1,59,056 Nos. AAR approved Cartridge Taper Roller Bearings (CTRB) Class E (6"x11") for use on Freight Stock for Indian Railways to RDSO Specification No. AB/RB-40-2016(Rev.2) of June, 2021 & latest amendments.
2.0 The interested tenderers are advised to visit the website <http://ireps.gov.in> for details of the tender and submission of their e-bids.
3.0 No manual offers will be accepted against e-tender.
4.0 Tender will be closed at 15.00 hours on 03.04.2024.
Director, Railway Stores (W), Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India.

KVB Karur Vysya Bank Ltd.
882, East Park Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110 005
Phone : 011-23535016 to 19 | Fax : 011-23535020
Email: karolbagh@kvbmail.com

AUCTION OF JEWELS/GOLD ORNAMENTS
The following persons who has availed loan against pledge of gold ornaments havenot repaid the amount in spite of our demand notices. Therefore, please take notice that if the principal/interest and other charges are not paid on or before 20/03/2024, the pledged ornaments will be publicly auctioned on 20.03.2024 at 4 PM in the bank's premises subject to rules and regulations of Bank. The Bank Reserves right to Cancel/Postpone the auction or any other convenient date without further notice and assigning reasons therefore.

Jewel Loan A/c	Gross weight of the ornaments (in grams)	Net weight of the ornaments (in grams)	Name of the borrower
410195100000148	9.8	6.8	Mr Sundresh
410195100000205	11.3	8.5	Mr Sundresh

Place: Delhi-Karol Bagh | Dated: 29.02.2024 Sd/- Branch Head

KVB Karur Vysya Bank
Branch Address: 3, Ground Floor Sant Nagar, East of Kailash Delhi 110065
Contact No: 01147272212, 01126475565, 9953140658
Email id: eastofkailash@kvbmail.com

SAFE DEPOSIT LOCKER BREAK OPEN PUBLIC NOTICE
The following hirers have availed safe deposit locker facility from EAST OF KAILASH branch and failed to renew the same within the stipulated time, in spite of repeated notices issued to them by The Karur Vysya Bank Ltd. Since the hirers have failed to pay the locker rent dues, we are constrained to break open of the said locker on 16/03/2024, at the concerned branch premises at 11.00 PM.
This Public Notice is to the hirers/legal heirs of the hirers if applicable. Further, The Karur Vysya Bank Ltd has the authority to change the Break Opening Date without any prior notice.

Sr. No	Hirer's Name	Locker no.	Amount due in Rs.
1	GHANSHYAM PANDEY	4105002B035	13808/-
2	PRABHMEET SINGH, MRS. KARNET SAPRA	4105003D006	14750/-
3	ASHOK KUMAR, MRS. NISHA SINGHAL	4105002B023	15222/-
4	AMIT KUMAR	4105003D018	26680/-

Date: 02.03.2024 Sd/-
Place: DELHI Branch Head, Karur Vysya Bank

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, CENTRAL (R&B) CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR
Mail i.d seccbsr@gmail.com
B-1867
E-procurement Tender Call Notice No.36 of 2023-24
No. 839 (Estg.) Bhubaneswar the 27th February-2024
The Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids for two number road works to be received in online bidding, double cover system for construction work as detailed in: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. The details of bid documents will be available in the above website from 5.00 P.M. of 01.03.2024 to 5.00 P.M. of 15.03.2024. The bidders must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate of Class II or III. Bids received online shall be opened at 11.00 A.M. of 16.03.2024 in the Office of the Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal www.tendersodisha.gov.in.
Addendum / Corrigendum, if required, will be available only in the Website.
Sd/-Er.P.K.Mohanty
Chief Construction Engineer
Central (R&B) Circle, Bhubaneswar
OIPR-34156/11/0030/2324

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, CENTRAL (R&B) CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR
Mail i.d seccbsr@gmail.com
B-1867
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Sd/-Er.P.K.Mohanty
Chief Construction Engineer
Central (R&B) Circle, Bhubaneswar
OIPR-34156/11/0030/2324

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, Plot No 23, Shal Tower 3rd Floor, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh Delhi-110005

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET
(See proviso to rule 8(6))
Notice for sale of Movable Assets

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of movable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described movable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Physical Possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Ltd. will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/Co-Borrower/ Guarantors	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price/Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
1.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00034874752 UVPUN00041122284	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET0681 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 58,56,322.60/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
2.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00034889485 UVPUN00041122262	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1063 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 59,54,705.90/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
3.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00034889542 UVPUN00041122306	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1061 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 59,54,705.90/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
4.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00034889700 UVPUN00041122265	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1062 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 59,54,705.90/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
5.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035024940 UVPUN00041122158	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1416 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
6.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035024948 UVPUN00041122149	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1415 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
7.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035024964 UVPUN00041122182	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1419 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
8.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035024971 UVPUN00041122207	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1420 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
9.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035024984 UVPUN00041122134	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1412 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
10.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035025005 UVPUN00041122109	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1413 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
11.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035025012 UVPUN00041122112	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1409 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,66,923.30/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
12.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035025021 UVPUN00041122128	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1410 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
13.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035027693 UVPUN00041122101	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1411 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,61,265.20/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
14.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN0003504044 UVPUN00041122238	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1423 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 61,68,936.10/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
15.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035040543 UVPUN00041122086	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1421 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 61,77,830.90/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
16.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN0003504069 UVPUN00041122220	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1422 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 61,77,830.96/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
17.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN0003504113 UVPUN00041122248	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1424 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 61,76,993.00/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM
18.	Empire Transport Services Ltd (Borrower) M P Enterprises and Associates Ltd, Abhishek Madhukar Pathak (Co Borrower)-LAN No. LVPUN00035025002 UVPUN00041122191	JBM CITY LIFE BUS CNG BS IV AC Registration No.: UP16ET1418 Mfg: 2016	Rs. 60,67,684.80/- as on February 15, 2024	Rs. 13,17,500/- Rs. 1,31,750/-	March 11, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	March 26, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM

The online auction will be conducted on website (URL Link- <https://auctions.cardekho.com/#/>) of our auction agency Car Dekho. The Mortgagors/notice are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till March 22, 2024 before 05:00 PM else these secured assets will be sold as per schedule.
The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit their offer along with the earnest money deposit (refer column E) in a sealed envelope that mentions "Offer for purchase of property" ICICI Bank Limited, Plot No 23, Shal Tower 3rd Floor, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh Delhi-110005 or to our marketing agent Car Dekho- 11th Floor, Tower B, Emaar Digital Greens, Golf Course Ext, Road, Sec-61, Gurugram, Haryana- 122011 on or before March 22, 2024 before 05:00 PM. The marketing agency has also been engaged as auctioneer for proper conduct of auction. Earnest Money Deposit (M/D) should be from a Nationalized/Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at Delhi.
For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Bank Limited on 8584874809/9372730494/8126013708 or Car Dekho at 7701827194.
Tenders which are acknowledged by the Bank/e-auction vendor official and registered before the cut-off time with complete details shall only be considered for auction.
The Authorized Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s
Date : March 02, 2024
Place: Delhi/ NCR
Authorised Officer
ICICI Bank Limited



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A spot of good news

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

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



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

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PICTALK



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

Indian diplomacy: Leveraging soft power



SANTOSH MATHEW

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

In today's geopolitical landscape, the traditional metrics of national power are transforming. Policymakers and diplomats are increasingly recognizing the importance of soft power elements in shaping international relations, shifting their focus from sheer military might to cultural influence and moral authority. India, in particular, has adeptly utilized its cultural assets to assert itself on the global stage.

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping politics. As Niall Ferguson has said, "Faith, then, is perhaps as important a component of power as material resources... Faith cannot move mountains. But it can move people." A recent exemplification of India's strategic cultural diplomacy was witnessed in the inauguration of the first Hindu temple in the UAE, presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries. With the inauguration ceremony of the Bocharanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan (BAPS) Mandir, India is set to deepen bilateral ties with the UAE while also having proactive engagement within the region. This event demonstrates a diplomatic approach that, while rooted in faith, culture, and religion, aims to foster cooperation across a spectrum of critical areas, including security, energy, maritime affairs, and infrastructure. The discussions held during the visit focused on enhancing cooperation in various fields, including trade, investment, and security.

This isn't the only instance that indicates the changing diplomacy of India with the Gulf. In a triumph for India's diplomatic endeavours, Qatar released eight Indian nationals who had been detained since 2022. The release came after extensive diplomatic efforts by the Indian government, highlighting the effectiveness of India's diplomatic channels in securing the freedom of its citizens abroad. Through meticulous negotiation and strategic dialogue, our government has once again proven its dedication to protecting the interests of



every Indian, no matter where they may be in the world. India's historical and close relations with Qatar were also reiterated by Prime Minister Modi ahead of his visit to Doha. The strong bonds of diplomatic engagement have aided in fostering mutually beneficial partnerships and enhancing regional stability. These diplomacy initiatives by Narendra Modi are not only events to establish closer ties with the Gulf leaders but also strategic plans to accelerate the economic growth of India. India, with long-term economic cooperation with the Middle East, can leverage the Gulf's capital potential while aiding them with defence cooperation. India's cultural diplomacy extends beyond the realm of Hinduism, as evidenced by the Buddhist Circuit, aimed at revitalizing Buddhist heritage sites and boosting tourism in the region.

This pilgrimage circuit, introduced under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, covers the four major sacred places according to Buddhist traditions, namely Bodhi Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar, and Lumbini. It is one of India's first transnational tourist circuits. Beginning from the place of birth of Buddha, Lumbini in Nepal, it serves as an initiative of Buddhist Diplomacy (strengthening a nation's soft



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI HAS STRATEGICALLY LEVERAGED BUDDHIST HERITAGE AS CULTURAL ASSETS TO STRENGTHEN TIES WITH ASIAN COUNTRIES

power with the exchanges of Buddhist ideas, sacred objects and trading relations). Invoking the cultural linkages with the region and the religion of Buddhism, India seeks to overcome the territorial tensions between the two nations by fostering a positive people-to-people tie across the border.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has strategically leveraged Buddhist heritage as cultural assets to strengthen ties with Asian countries. During the Global Buddhist Summit in April 2023, Modi said that the challenges faced by the modern world can be solved by employing the teachings of Buddha. Through his Act East Policy, India has upgraded its strategic relationship with the major countries in the Asia-Pacific while using Buddhism as the cultural link between India and the Southeast Asian countries.

Exploring its historical ties to Buddhism, India is not only preserving its cultural legacy but also strengthening its soft power and attracting visitors from around the world. Through these initiatives, India can bolster its image as a flag-bearer of ancient civilizations and traditions. Moreover, ventures like these also contribute towards economic development through tourism. India is trying to create a greater affinity towards Asian coun-

tries while projecting itself as a model of religious tolerance, pluralism and a responsible global nation. Speaking of being a responsible global stakeholder, take for instance our commitment to humanitarian assistance. The recent incident in which the Indian Navy in swift response to the Houthi strike on the merchant ship in the Gulf of Aden, sent the missile destroyer INS Vishakhapatnam shows India's role as a responsible maritime player. Indian diplomacy extends beyond the realm of culture, encompassing strategic engagements and humanitarian efforts. By providing timely humanitarian assistance, India reaffirms its commitment to upholding peace and stability during crises in the international arena.

In the realm of diplomacy, every gesture and every interaction holds the power to shape bilateral relations and forge alliances. India's assertive stance in leveraging cultural and public diplomacy reflects its growing influence and engagement on the global stage. Through proactive engagement and strategic partnerships, India continues to strengthen its position as a key player in international affairs, contributing to regional stability and global cooperation.

(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLITICAL POACHING

Sir — The editorial, 'Himachal crisis' (29-2-24) carries the sentiments of everyone. Of course, this is not the first time the country has witnessed such shabby scenes of one party poaching the elected representatives and the elected representatives belying the mandate of the voters to satisfy their thirst for power and purse. These repeated happenings are nothing but a mockery of democracy. Legislative bodies being converted into a mere market to buy and sell lawmakers project a very shabby image of the democracy being practised in the country.

The party engaged in poaching and those who offer themselves to be sold for power or purse also should have some respect for the mandate of the people. If this trend continues the country is likely to fall into the hands of dictators yielding to the concept of 'Might is Right' and the Might will be decided by Money power. It is time to bring legislation to stop elected representatives from crossing the floor just like that for some benefit or the other. If they want to shift their loyalty they should resign their post and contest again to get re-elected. Similarly, the role of money in the election process should also be curtailed to keep democracy alive. Voters should be educated to boycott both the poachers as well as the prey. Leaders speaking about the fight against corruption are being laughed at as nothing else could be more blatant corruption than poaching and yielding. India needs electoral reforms to address these basic issues.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

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

Mission Gaganyaan



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

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

Preetiyukta Mohakud | Bhubaneswar

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

M Pradyu | Kannur

THE SUCCESS OF SAGAR MANTHAN

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

cern as well as appreciation on both nodes. Appreciation because, our Navy is actively vigilant in addressing these concerns, at the same time concerning because India is pumped with such contraband of 3,132 kg which costs around Rs. 2000 crores, as per international market valuation, which is huge and applaudable.

We must cherish the alertness of the trio the Gujrat Police, NCB and the Indian Navy. But this very incident raised eyebrows that still in the eye of Narco Dealers and smugglers, the route of the Arabian Sea is fragile and easy to breach. We must not forget the incident of 26/11. Strengthening the eastern and western coast of India is the utmost responsibility of our Naval forces.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

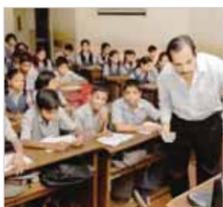
Why do Indians do better abroad than in India?

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



RADHIKA SHRIVASTAVA

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



Well, there lies a critical anomaly — the failure to replicate this success on home soil is primarily due to the state of public education. The EW story 'Why Indians Succeed Everywhere Except in India' adeptly dissects the paradox of Indian success on the global stage against a backdrop of domestic struggles, attributing this paradox to the unfortunate state of public education, which is accurate.

Education and Governance: Thought leaders underscore the symbiotic relationship between the quality of education and the overarching progress of the nation. Recognizing education as a catalyst for effective governance and economic prosperity, it is crucial to position education at the forefront of national development strategies. **The Crisis in Primary and Secondary Education** One cannot help but ponder the intricacies of the connection between education and our nation's destiny. If education is the bedrock upon which a society is built, then what does the current state of our primary and secondary education system say about the trajectory of the world's largest democracy? The ASER surveys unveil a stark truth — a significant portion of our youth lacks even the basic skills expected at their grade level.

It's not just about rote learning or lack of infrastructure; it's a systemic failure that threatens the very foundation of our future. Yet, as we traverse the proposed solutions and underlying assumptions, a more discerning response is required to navigate the intricacies with utmost scrutiny. **Higher Education: A Crisis of Quality** You throw that graduation cap in the air, but does it open doors to a world of opportunities? India is tackling the woes of higher education — the mismatch between degrees and employability. What's the deal with most engineering, arts, science, and commerce graduates being deemed unemployable?

It's time to question the very essence of what higher education institutions are delivering and whether they're preparing graduates for the dynamic job market. The portrayal of India's higher education system is a sad reflection of the systemic challenges faced by graduates and the subsequent migration of talent abroad. **The Brain Drain Dilemma:** While we proudly export our talent to foreign shores, the numbers reveal a disconcerting truth — a drain on our intellectual capital that could have been harnessed for national growth. Is it a necessary sacrifice or a symptom of deeper issues within our educational framework? A thought-provoking analysis probes the migration patterns of Indian graduates and school leavers to foreign shores, challenging the conventional narrative of brain drain. Balancing the discourse on brain drain by acknowledging the positive impact of the diaspora would bring a more nuanced perspective to the debate. **A Vision for Change: A Unified Call to Action** The portrayal of the emigration of skilled individuals as a loss for India is correct. While the emigration of skilled individuals is sometimes portrayed as a positive development, the reality is that India loses out on valuable talent. India needs a detailed program to reverse this trend, attract exceptional scientists and researchers back home, and invest more in R&D. (The writer is an educator; views are personal)

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FIRST COLUMN

CHERISH THE INSTRUCTIONS OF GOD

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let me start with verse # 3.8 of the Bhagavad Gita, which is, "You should always do your duty. Because action is superior to inaction. Maintenance of the body will also not be possible through inaction. We all know what our duties are according to time, place and circumstances. We also know that neglecting our duties impacts our maintenance. For example, a student does not pay attention to his studies. What happens subsequently? He finds it hard to maintain himself. For whose benefit was this verse spoken?"

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



wealth. Don't we need enough resources for our maintenance? Not only wealth, there will be 'saubhagya' (good fortune). Who benefits from all these? We do; God doesn't because He is complete in all respects. (3.22) The next verse is about gaining peace and a perfect destination. Lord Krishna instructs, 'In all respects, take My shelter only. By My mercy, you will achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode.' What is it that we lack after gaining material needs, comforts, etc.? It is peace, which is what God is promising. Not only that, God is also assuring eternal abode, which is free from the defects of this material world. How nice it will be to not be subjected to repeated birth and death? God is prepared to grant this also.

God is always wanting to give. He has so much to give if we become deserving. Isn't that fair? How do we become deserving? Lord Krishna describes, 'Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me.' (18.65) One may feel that all these activities relate to God. Yes, they do but do they benefit Him? No, far from it; they only purify our existence. And God had to set some conditions to qualify for His special favour. How else was He to reward anyone? Just focus on how easy they are to do.

I will take up one more verse, which is, 'Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My grace.' (18.58) This is quite an amazing offer from God. Aren't we all struggling with one problem or another throughout our lives? We do, but our ego comes in the way. We are not prepared to accept that somebody can be superior to us and to such an extent that we have to take His shelter and His alone. (18.66) We would rather suffer but won't do as instructed by God. Do we realise that our acts will benefit the world if we obey God's instructions? We will become better persons by following dharma - the rules for proper behaviour. We will fit in the System created by God, which is required for the creation to exist eternally.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

MSP methodology and farmer demands



UTTAM GUPTA

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



Co-terminus with the legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops, another demand raised by the farmers relates to how the MSP is fixed. They want it to be calculated based on the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) under Dr MS Swaminathan (2006).

All along, the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) - a statutory body under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare - has been setting MSP at the level of the so-called comprehensive cost or C2 cost. C2 is arrived at by adding three components viz. A2 covers all paid-out expenses, both in cash and in kind, incurred by farmers on seeds, fertilizers, chemicals, hired labour, fuel and irrigation; FL is the imputed value of unpaid family labour; and rental value of owned land and imputed cost that would be incurred on owned fixed capital assets (OFCA), call it to return on assets or RoA. Put simply, MSP is equal to A2 + FL + RoA. It takes care of all the costs incurred by the farmer for growing the crop - both paid out and own - besides including an element of profit i.e. RoA. That is why it is banded as 'comprehensive'. The formula was used for determining MSP till FY 2017-18. The Government normally accepts recommendations made by CACP.

In its fifth report submitted in October 2006, the NCF recommended that MSP should be "at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production". The recommendation did not specifically mention what 'measure of costs' would be used. However, Dr Swaminathan clarified: "When we recommended 50 per cent over costs, we meant complete costs called C2, which includes all assumed costs".

Can the clarification given by him many years after the report was finalized and submitted be taken to mean that the Commission had meant it that way? A recommendation emerges from deliberations and is based on consensus among



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

members. This also applies to a clarification given on an important aspect of the recommendation. That would not have been possible as you can't expect Dr Swaminathan to go back to other members and check. The big question is: Is giving the farmer at least 50 per cent more than the 'C2' costs logical?

The purported rationale for giving 50 per cent extra is that she should get a handsome profit after covering all paid-out costs. Profit as it is understood in business parlance is essentially meant to give a return to the owner for her invested capital. In the case of a farmer, her investment in crop growing business is by way of 'land' and 'OFCA' besides her labour. But, remuneration/return for all these is already incorporated under C2. To give a further sweetener (read: 50 per cent profit) over and above these would be illogical. Let us understand this with the help of an example.

In the case of paddy, the all-India weighted average A2 cost for the 2017-18 Kharif season, as estimated by the CACP, was Rs 840 per quintal; A2+FL cost: Rs 1,117 per quintal and C2 costs: Rs 1,484 per quintal. In the total cost of Rs 1,484 per quintal, the amount going towards the farmer's income was Rs 644 per quintal (1484-840). Of this, Rs 277 per quintal (1117-840) was for FL and Rs 367 per quintal (1484-1117) for RoA.

If one were to go by NCF recommendation as clarified by Dr Swaminathan, the farmer would have to be given Rs 742 per quintal (0.5x1,484) in addition to an income of Rs 644 per quintal already built into C2 thus taking the total to Rs 1386 for each quintal of paddy. This translates to 93 per cent of C2 costs. Taken as a proportion of the revised MSP of Rs 2226 per quintal, this will be 62

per cent. Where does one get such a fantastic return?

This is happening because the farmer is being remunerated twice over first under C2 and then a further profit of 50 percent. Furthermore, the way profit is calculated '50 per cent of C2; you end up giving a 'return on return': RoA component under C2 being Rs 367 per quintal, she gets a fortuitous gain of Rs 183.5 (0.5x367).

Unequivocally, there is a flaw in the above method. Either, the government should continue with the extant method of using C2 for fixing MSP. On the other hand, if, it wants to go for 50 per cent profit, then this should be applied only to the paid-out costs namely A2. In other words, MSP should be set at A2+FL plus 50 per cent of A2. On this basis, in the above example, the MSP would be Rs 1537 per quintal (1117+0.5x840).

What did the Modi - government do?

In its poll manifesto for 2014, the BJP had promised to implement NCF recommendations on MSP. The announcement in this regard was made by the then Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his Budget speech for FY 2018-19. Later, while replying to a debate in Parliament, Jaitley clarified that 'the production cost would be taken as actual paid A2 plus FL'. In other words, it decided to set MSP at A2+FL plus 50 per cent of A2+FL; it comes to Rs 1675 per quintal (1117x1.5).

The formula adopted by the incumbent government also suffers from a flaw to the extent that 'it also adds return on the imputed cost of family labor' which is unjustified. Have received wage/income for the work done on the field, how can a farmer also earn a profit on it? In the above example, this fortuitous amount is Rs 138 per quintal (277x0.5).

Moreover, the very approach of arriving at a profit by taking a percentage of the cost is susceptible to sharp increases in payments to farmers. With every rupee increase in the cost, farmers' profit will increase by 0.5 rupees. At present, most of the agricultural inputs are subsidized. On fertilizers, there is a massive subsidy (urea is sold at about 1/10th of its cost). If the subsidy is slashed leading to a steep rise in the cost of fertilizers, the formula will give an unwarranted bonanza to the farmers by a corresponding increase in profit. At a fundamental level, profit is meant to reward an entity for the capital invested in any enterprise. This is precisely what was being done before the FY 2018-19. That formula (read: C2 for fixing the MSP) ought to have been continued.

The MSP setting exercise suffers from another aberration. The cost of producing a crop varies from place to place depending on the soil conditions, weather, irrigation, price of inputs and so on. However, to arrive at MSP, the CACP takes the 'weighted average' (WA) cost of production. When the price determined in this manner is given to all farmers, those producing at a higher cost stand to lose whereas others with lower cost make a fortuitous gain.

Today, the government is trapped in the vicious cycle of having to procure farmers' produce at ever-increasing MSP, now under pressure to pick up 'all of it' at MSP which can denude the exchequer. This, in turn, is because it is trying to substitute the role of the market. It should disentangle from this trap and focus on agri-market reforms which alone can help farmers get a good price.

(The writer is a policy analyst, views are personal)

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

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

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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

bloomed with the arrival of Spring, welcoming all with renewed grandeur. But what is the story behind these tulips? Originating centuries ago in the ancient lands of Persia, tulips held significance as symbols of love and prosperity. Their journey along the silk routes carried tales of exotic lands and distant horizons, captivating hearts from Istanbul to Amsterdam. It was

in the fields of the Netherlands during the Dutch Golden Age that tulips blossomed into a cultural icon. Despite uncertainty surrounding its introduction to Western Europe, the efforts of individuals like Botanist Carolus Clusius in the late 16th century popularized tulips, leading to the famous 'tulip mania' of the 17th century.

By the 19th and 20th centuries, tulip cultivation flourished in the Netherlands, solidifying its position as the world's leading producer. The association between tulips and the Netherlands was further immortalized with the iconic song 'Tulips from Amsterdam' in the 1950s. Intriguingly, it was through diplomatic channels that tulips found their way into the gardens of New Delhi.



Indo-Dutch relations provided fertile ground for this botanical ambassador to take root, inspired by festivals like the 'Amsterdam Tulip Festival' and Srinagar's Tulip Garden. Imported from the Netherlands, these tulips have been lovingly nurtured by skilled gardeners trained by the NDMC's horticulture department.

As the sun casts its golden rays upon the city, tulips burst into bloom, transforming every corner into a canvas of nature's masterpiece. From the picturesque avenues of Shanti Path to the vibrant Tulip Festival Garden, each location becomes a testament to the enduring cycle of life and beauty. Engaging citizens through various competitions

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

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

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

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

Navalny, who galvanised oppn to Putin, laid to rest

AP ■ MOSCOW

Under a heavy police presence, thousands of people bade farewell Friday to Alexei Navalny after his funeral in Moscow after his still-unexplained death two weeks ago in an Arctic penal colony. The service followed a battle with authorities over the release of the body of President Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic. His supporters said several churches in Moscow refused to hold the funeral for the man who crusaded against official corruption and organised big protests. Many Western leaders blamed the death on the Russian leader, an accusation the Kremlin angrily rejected.

Navalny's team eventually got permission from the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God Soothe My Sorrows, which was encircled by crowd-control barriers on Friday.

As his coffin was removed from the hearse and taken inside the church, the crowd waiting outside broke into respectful applause and then

chanted: "Navalny! Navalny!" Some also shouted, "You weren't afraid, neither are we!" and later "No to war!"

Western diplomats, including US Ambassador Lynn Tracy, were among those who attended, along with presidential hopefuls Boris Nadezhdin and Yekaterina Duntsova. Both wanted to run against Putin in the upcoming presidential elections and opposed his war in Ukraine; neither was allowed on the ballot.

A photo from inside the church showed an open casket with Navalny's body covered with red and white flowers, and his mother sitting beside it holding a candle.

Navalny's father was also present, but it wasn't clear who else in his family attended. His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, just two days ago addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France; his daughter is a student at the Stanford University, and the whereabouts of his son are unknown.

The politician's closest associates have left Russia under pressure and watched



Workers carry the coffin of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to the Church.

the funeral, which was streamed live on his YouTube channel, from abroad.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov urged those gathering in Moscow and other places not to break the law, saying any "unauthorised (mass) gatherings" are violations.

"Those people who follow what is happening, it is of

course obvious to them that this man is a hero of our country, whom we will not forget," said Nadezhda Ivanova, a Kaliningrad resident who was outside the church with other supporters. "What was done to him is incredibly difficult to accept and get through it."

After the short funeral, a crowd of thousands marched

from the church to the nearby Borisovskoye Cemetery, where the police were also out in force for the burial.

With the casket open, Navalny's parents and others stroked and kissed his body. Meanwhile, a large crowd of supporters gathered at the gates of the cemetery, chanting: "Let us in to say say goodbye!"

The coffin was then lowered into the ground, allies said.

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, spent eight days trying to get authorities to release the body following his Feb 16 death at Penal Colony No. 3 in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 km (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow.

Even on Friday itself, the morgue where the body was being held delayed its release, according to Ivan Zhdanov, Navalny's close ally and director of his Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Authorities originally said they couldn't turn over the body because they needed to conduct post-mortem tests. Navalnaya made a video appeal to Putin to release it so she could bury her son with dignity. At least one funeral director said he had been "forbidden" to work with Navalny's supporters, his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on social media. They also struggled to find a hearse. "Unknown people are calling up people and threatening them not to take Alexei's

body anywhere," Yarmysh said Thursday.

Russian authorities still haven't announced the cause of death for Navalny, who was 47.

Navalny had been jailed since January 2021, when he returned to Moscow to face certain arrest after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning he blamed on the Kremlin.

His Foundation for Fighting Corruption and his regional offices were designated as "extremist organisations" by the Russian government that same year.

His widow accused Putin and Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin of trying to block a public funeral.

We don't want any special treatment — just to give people the opportunity to say farewell to Alexei in a normal way," Yulia Navalnaya wrote on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. In a speech to European lawmakers on Wednesday, she also expressed fears that police might interfere with the gathering or would "arrest those who have come to

say goodbye to my husband".

Moscow authorities refused permission for a separate memorial event for Navalny and slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov on Friday, citing COVID-19 restrictions, according to politician Yekaterina Duntsova said. Nemtsov, a 55-year-old former deputy prime minister, was shot to death as he walked on a bridge adjacent to the Kremlin on the night of Feb 27, 2015.

Yarmysh also urged Navalny's supporters around the world to lay flowers in his honour Friday.

"Everyone who knew Alexei says what a cheerful, courageous and honest person he was," Yarmysh said Thursday. "But the greater truth is that even if you never met Alexei, you knew what he was like, too. You shared his investigations, you went to rallies with him, you read his posts from prison. His example showed many people what to do when even when things were scary and difficult."

'UK's Rwanda deportation plan may cost 500 mn pounds'

AP ■ LONDON

The British government's contentious plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda could cost nearly half a billion pounds, or about \$630 million, plus hundreds of thousands for each deported person, a report said Friday. The National Audit Office report — issued at the behest of parliamentary committees that complained of being in the dark about costs of the plan — provided the most comprehensive cost estimate so far. The Conservative government had earlier only revealed a 290 million pound (\$366 million) commitment, so the new figures opened the plan to wider scrutiny from critics.

"These figures reveal the extortionate bill the taxpayer will have to pay the Rwandan government for an unworkable and inhumane scheme that will not deter people seeking protection on our shores," said Enver Solomon, chief executive of the Refugee Council.

No asylum-seeker has been sent to Rwanda under the plan, which has been blocked by the courts, though the UK government has already paid 220 million pounds (\$278 million) to the government in Kigali under the Economic Transformation and Integration Fund to support the country's growth.

The plan is aimed at deterring unauthorised migrants from making dangerous English Channel crossings in unsafe boats. Under the plan, asylum-seekers would be sent to Rwanda, where their claims would be processed and where they would stay if approved. Human rights groups have attacked the plan as cruel and unworkable. After the Supreme Court blocked the plan as unlawful, Britain and Rwanda signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants and

lawmakers in the House of Commons approved a bill that declared the east African nation a safe country. The bill still needs approval in the House of Lords, where it has run into resistance. The audit showed an extra 100 million pounds would be spent for the partnership through 2026 and 120 million pounds (\$151 million) would go into the fund after 300 migrants are relocated to Rwanda.

In addition, each migrant's plane ticket would cost 11,000 pounds (\$13,900). Another 20,000 pounds (\$25,200) would be paid to Rwanda for each relocated asylum seeker and nearly 151,000 pounds (\$190,000) would be spent over five years for processing costs and living expenses for each person who stays in Rwanda.

"This report reveals the national scandal the Tories have been trying to hide," said Yvette Cooper, a Labour member of Parliament.

"Its shocking analysis shows the costs of the failed Rwanda farce are even higher than previously thought," she added. "In order to send less than 1% of UK asylum seekers to Rwanda on a few symbolic flights, the taxpayer will be forced to fork out over half a billion pounds — with no ability to recover any of the money already sent."

The Home Office defended the plan and said the government would focus on starting flights once the Safety of Rwanda Bill is passed and the treaty between the two nations is in place. "It is vital we respond to illegal migration with bold, long-term solutions," a statement read. "Unless we act, the cost of housing asylum seekers is set to reach 11 billion pounds (\$13.9 billion) per year by 2026. Illegal migration costs lives and perpetuates human trafficking, and it is therefore right that we fund solutions to break this unsustainable cycle."

Veteran British left-wing disruptor wins special election

London (AP): A veteran British political disruptor has won a special election in a town in northern England with a big Muslim minority following a contest that was mired in chaos and controversy and dominated by the war in Gaza. George Galloway, 69, swept to victory in Thursday's contest, winning almost 40% of the vote in the parliamentary seat of Rochdale. In his victory speech, Galloway took aim at Keir Starmer, the leader of the main opposition Labour Party, who according to opinion polls is likely to become Britain's prime minister at the general election this year.

"Keir Starmer, this is for Gaza," he said. "You have paid, and you will pay, a high price for the role that you have played in enabling, encouraging and covering for the catastrophe presently going on in occupied Palestine in the Gaza Strip."

Galloway, a former Labour member of parliament who was expelled from the party in 2003, also declared "Labour is on notice" and a "shifting of the tectonic plates."

Labour said Galloway only won because the party pulled its support for its candidate, Azhar Ali, for suggesting Israel was complicit in Hamas' attack on Oct 7. Without the backing of Labour, Ali ended up coming fourth. Galloway's victory means that from next week, Parliament will once again be home to one of the most eloquent orators from the left wing of UK politics, who will clearly use his position to raise his opposition to Israel's operation in Gaza. "George Galloway is someone who stokes up division and fear," said Ellie Reeves, Labour's deputy national campaign co-ordinator.

B'desh shopping mall fire in kills at least 46

PTI ■ DHAKA

A massive fire that ripped through a seven-storey shopping mall in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka that also housed several illegal eateries killed at least 46 people and injured 22 others, the government said on Friday, in one of the worst infernos to hit the country in recent years. The fire broke out around 9:50 pm on Thursday at a popular restaurant named "Kacchi Bhat" on the first floor of the building, Green Cozy Cottage, and quickly spread to the upper floors that had more restaurants and a garment shop, according to fire service officials.

Health Minister Dr Samanta Lal Sen said around 2 am that 33 bodies were brought to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and 10 others to the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery. Another victim died at the Police Hospital.

The condition of those injured is "critical," he told reporters at a briefing.

"One more person died during treatment in the intensive care unit of Dhaka Medical



ICU this morning. A total of 46 people have died so far," Sen said on Friday.

Currently, 10 people are undergoing treatment at the Sheikh Hasina burn unit and two at DMCH, he said.

Till now, the bodies of 39 people have been identified. Of them, at least 31 bodies of the victims have been handed over to families without an autopsy. Till now, the identities of six bodies remain unknown. The

authorities will hand them over after conducting a DNA test.

The commercial building that was gutted did not have permission for restaurants, The Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported. The building had permission for office use, not restaurants and eateries, according to Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk). But the building housed eight restaurants, a juice bar and a tea and

coffee shop, the report said.

Ashrafur Islam, Town Planner and Director of the Detailed Area Planning (DAP) project of Rajuk, said commercial approval had been taken for the building from one to seven floors. But it was only for office use. There was no approval for restaurants, showrooms or anything else. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is closely monitoring the fire incident at the commercial building, the Health Minister said.

She noted that the multi-storied building had no fire exit. She urged all to follow the rules and regulations while constructing any building.

Hasina said that 46 people died in the Bailey Road fire incident.

"What could be more painful than this," she said. Fire officials said 75 people, including 42 in unconscious state, were taken out of the seven-storey building. Thirteen fire service units were mobilised, the officials said.

The minister, a burn wound specialist, said 22 people are being treated at both health facilities and their con-

dition is "critical".

"The respiratory system of those who have survived so far has been seriously damaged," Sen told reporters at the DMCH.

Doctors said some of the bodies were burned beyond recognition and feared that the death toll could rise.

Witnesses and officials said to escape the fire, people rushed to the upper floors. Many were rescued by firefighters using ladders, they added.

IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun in a press briefing said that 44 people died and 75 had been rescued. Some of the rescued individuals received first aid treatment before returning home safely.

He also said the dead victims included the daughter of a police officer.

Fire Service DG Moin said the 42 unconscious included 21 women and four children.

"It was a dangerous building with gas cylinders on every floor, even on the staircases," he said. He believes the fire originated from a gas leak or stove. The building has only one exit — the staircases, according to him.

Stubb: It took final step into Western community by joining NATO

AP ■ HELSINKI

Alexander Stubb was sworn in Friday as Finland's new president and said the Nordic country has taken "the final step into the Western community of values" by becoming a NATO member. The 55-year-old former prime minister replaced President Sauli Niinistö, who held the job for two six-year terms. Stubb, a conservative, was elected head of state in a narrow February 11 runoff victory against independent candidate and former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto of a left-leaning party. Stubb has held several government posts, including foreign minister, and led the Finnish government in 2014-2015.

He and Niinistö arrived together in high hats at the 200-seat Eduskunta legislature.

Stubb took his oath in Finnish and Swedish, Finland's two official languages, becoming the country's 13th president since it gained its independence from the Russian empire in 1917. Finland joined NATO in April following Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine. It has the military alliance's longest land border with Russia — 1,340 kilometres — and is one of the most active European providers of military and civilian aid to Ukraine.

Stubb said in a speech that "as a result of allying ourselves militarily and joining NATO we have taken the final step into the Western community of values" to which Finland has belonged "in spirit throughout its independence."

"We will see regionalisation of power as well as unholy alliances," Stubb said. "In other words, a kind of an à la carte

world, where allies are cherry-picked. We must remain alert."

The president of Finland, a nation of 5.6 million people, holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy together with the government. The president also commands the military.

Stubb is expected to remain above the fray of day-to-day politics and stay out of domestic political disputes while acting as a moral leader of the nation. The president appoints the prime minister and Cabinet members. Niinistö said in a speech that "there is concern about the future of NATO," and referred to a comment by former US President Donald Trump, the front-runner for the Republican Party's nomination this year, that he once warned a NATO ally that he "would encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they

want" to countries in the alliance that don't spend enough on defence. "The comment they must pay their bills" was probably drafted for domestic use," Niinistö said. "It is high time to awaken to securing the state of peace, in other words, to strengthen ourselves."

Speaking to Stubb, Niinistö said, "I wish you strength and wisdom in these unpredictable times."

Until recently a professor at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, Stubb holds a doctorate in international relations from the London School of Economics.

"Even though the world seems to be in chaos right now, we should not despair," Stubb said. "Fear is the worst possible guiding principle in foreign policy."

Concern over Pope asking aide to read speech aloud for him

Vatican City (AP): Pope Francis, who has been suffering from the flu, asked an aide to read out his prepared speech at a conference in the Vatican Friday, saying he has not yet fully recovered from his latest ailment that has raised concerns about his capacity to continue leading the Roman Catholic Church.

The 87-year-old Pontiff, who was taken to a Roman hospital on Wednesday for diagnostic testing after having to cancel some public audiences, handed his speech to his aide, Mons. Filippo Ciampelli.

"I still have a cold and I get fatigued after reading for a while," he said. Francis, who has been hospitalised three times since becoming pope in 2013, began using a wheelchair and cane to walk after suffering knee trouble last year.

Speaking off the cuff at the opening of the two-day conference, entitled "Man-Woman Image of God - For an Anthropology of Vocations," he blasted what he called "gender ideology" as the "ugliest danger."

"It is very important that this meeting is taking place, this encounter between men and women," he told the audience. "Because the ugliest danger today is the gender ideology...I have asked for studies to be done on this ugly ideology of our time, which cancels out differences and makes everything the same. To cancel difference is to cancel humanity," he said.

The pontiff had cancelled appointments last Saturday and Monday due to a persistent, but "mild flu", but appeared as usual for the Sunday blessing from a window overlooking St Peter's Square.

Haley hammers Trump for being all about himself

PTI ■ VIRGINIA

Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley has hammered her rival Donald Trump for being all about himself as she told enthusiastic crowds here that one more term for her ex-boss would throw the country into another four years of chaos. Haley was addressing two well-attended political rallies on Thursday in Richmond and Falls Church in Virginia, which is one of the 16 states for Super Tuesday.

To earn the party's nomination either of the two candidates — Trump and Haley — need at least 1,215 delegates. After primaries in five States — Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Carolina, and Michigan, Trump has 122 delegates and Haley has 24 delegates in her kitty.

Both her rallies in Richmond and Falls Church were marked with protestors



who were opposed to her candidacy, and many said were supporters of 77-year-old Trump, who is leading the national polls against 52-year-old Haley by more than 64 percentage points, according to Real Clear Politics that monitors all such polls.

Addressing overflowing halls in Virginia, Haley hammered Trump for being all about himself and alleged that

he cares little about the country and its people.

She told the cheering crowd that electing Trump as the president would result in four years of chaos in the US.

"Everybody in the media is trying to figure out 'why does she keep fighting?'" Haley told the crowd in Richmond, VA. "The answer is I'm doing this for my kids, and your kids," she said. Asserting that the admin-

istration of both Trump and incumbent President Joe Biden has worsened the country's economy, she said it's time to have an accountant in the White House, which was greeted with applause from the audience.

The two rallies attracted many Indian Americans in Virginia, which has a significant Indian American population. They said that it's a difference of day and night between her and Trump.

"She's very charismatic, she's clever, she's compassionate. She's a very eloquent speaker, and she said all the right things. She demonstrated leadership today in multiple different ways. And she is without a doubt, the best candidate that's running today," eminent Indian American Suresh Shenoy told PTI. "What I liked about Nikki Haley is she based everything on data and numbers and not subjective like many of the other politicians do? I really

admired her for that. And also the vision that she set for America, I think is just fabulous," said Neena Shenoy after the rallies.

Attending the first rally of Haley, Sachin Chandra from Virginia described it as amazing. "I think she has to beat those two dudes. That's really what it comes down to. She will be awesome for the country and for the world," he said. Haley has clarity of thought and policies. "There's no ulterior motives. It's just what a president should be standing for," he said. The main difference between Trump and Haley is her character, said Shankar Krishna. "She's not afraid to speak the truth. You don't need lies.

She's saying things that take us to the right place and do the right things. Get us out of this deck. A lot of problems in the country that we need to solve, and we need practical American solutions.

Musk sues OpenAI and its CEO Sam

San Francisco (AP): Elon Musk is suing OpenAI and its CEO Sam Altman over what he says is a betrayal of the ChatGPT maker's founding aims of benefiting humanity rather than pursuing profits. In a lawsuit filed at San Francisco Superior Court, billionaire Musk said that when he bankrolled OpenAI's creation, he secured an agreement with Altman and Greg Brockman, the president, to keep the AI company as a non-profit that would develop technology for the benefit of the public.

Under its founding agreement, OpenAI would also make its code open to the public instead of walling it off for any private company's gains, the lawsuit says.

However, by embracing a close relationship with Microsoft, OpenAI and its top executives have set that pact "afire" and are "perverting"

the company's mission, Musk alleges in the lawsuit.

"OpenAI, Inc. has been transformed into a closed-source de facto subsidiary of the largest technology company in the world: Microsoft," the lawsuit filed Thursday says. "Under its new Board, it is not just developing but is actually refining an AGI to maximize profits for Microsoft, rather than for the benefit of humanity."

AGI refers to artificial general intelligence, which are general purpose AI systems that can perform just as well as — or even better than — humans in a wide variety of tasks. Musk is suing over breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty and unfair business practices. He also wants an injunction to prevent anyone, including Microsoft, from benefiting from OpenAI's technology.

Iran votes in first parliament election since 2022 protests

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran on Friday held the country's first parliamentary election since the mass 2022 protests over mandatory hijab laws after the death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, with questions looming over just how many people will turn out at the polls. Iranian officials and even Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have urged the public to cast ballots, but polling stations in the country's capital, Tehran, appeared to see few voters.

Authorities have largely barred politicians calling for any change within the country's theocracy, known broadly as reformists, from running in the election — leaving mostly only a broad slate of conservative or hard-line figures. Iran's economy continues to stagnate under Western sanctions over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program and the country's arming of militia proxies in the Middle East and Russia in its war on Ukraine. Some of

the voters acknowledged the challenges facing the Islamic Republic. "There are many problems; too many problems," said one voter, who just gave her last name, Sajjad. "We are sad, we are sorrowful and we voice our criticism as much as we can. God willing, those responsible (will) start thinking about us, and probably many of them do care."

Khamenei, 84, cast one of the first votes in an election that also will see new members elected to the country's Assembly of Experts. The panel of clerics, who serve an eight-year term, is mandated to select a new supreme leader if Khamenei steps down or dies, underscoring the panel's increased importance, given Khamenei's age.

Khamenei voted before a crowd of journalists in Tehran, his left hand slightly shaking as he took his ballot from his right, paralysed since a 1981 bombing. State television showed one woman nearby weeping as she filmed

Khamenei with her mobile phone. He urged people to vote as soon as possible in the election, saying that both Iran's friends and enemies were watching the turnout.

"Pay attention to this, make friends happy and disappoint the evil-wishers," he said in brief remarks by the ballot boxes. Khamenei's protégé, hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi, repeated that call and urged the public to make "a glorious day for the Iranian nation." Some 15,000 candidates are vying for a seat in the 290-member parliament, formally known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Out of them, only 116 are considered as relatively moderate or pro-reform candidates. Those demanding radical changes are banned or didn't bother to register given widespread disqualifications by authorities.

Parliament terms run for four years, and five seats are reserved for Iran's religious minorities. Under the law, the parliament has oversight over



President Ebrahim Raisi casts his ballot during the parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections in Tehran, Iran on Friday. AP/PTI

the executive branch, votes on treaties and handles other issues. In practice, absolute power in Iran rests with its supreme leader.

Hard-liners have controlled the parliament for the past two decades — with chants of "Death to America" often heard

from the floor. Under Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, a former Revolutionary Guard general who supported a violent crackdown on Iranian university students in 1999, the legislature pushed forward a bill in 2020 that greatly curtailed

Tehran's cooperation with the United Nations nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency. That followed then-President Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal of America from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018 — an act that sparked years of tensions in the Middle East and saw Iran enrich enough uranium at record-breaking purity to have enough fuel for "several" nuclear weapons if it chose. More recently, the parliament has focused on issues surrounding Iran's mandatory head covering, or hijab, for women after the 2022 death of 22-year-old Amini in police custody, which sparked nationwide protests.

The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers. A subsequent security crackdown killed over 500 people, with more than 22,000 detained.

Calls for an election boycott have spread in recent weeks, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate

Narges Mohammadi, a women's rights activist, who called them a "sham."

The boycott calls have put the government under renewed pressure — since its 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's theocracy has based its legitimacy in part on turnout in elections. The state-owned polling centre ISPA hadn't put out election data prior to the vote until Thursday, something highly unusual as their figures typically get released much earlier. Its polling, based on a survey of 5,121 voting-age people, predicted a turnout of 23.5 per cent in the capital, Tehran, and 38.5 per cent nationally. It said the margin of error in the poll was 2 per cent.

Iranian state television showed crowded polling stations but elsewhere, there appeared to be few voters braving the freezing temperatures in Tehran. In one place, a young woman without a hijab and her mother, wearing one, entered the polling station together. There was no comment from

officials or police on hand.

"I accompanied my mother who wanted to vote just to remind authorities about last year's crackdown," said the daughter, who gave her first name, Zohreh. Her mother voted for a relative moderate running in their district, while Zohreh declined to cast a ballot, she said.

Meanwhile, a heavy security presence could be seen just to remind authorities about last year's crackdown," said the daughter, who gave her first name, Zohreh. Her mother voted for a relative moderate running in their district, while Zohreh declined to cast a ballot, she said. Estimates put the voting-age population at 61 million. Polling places will be open until 6 p.m. local time (1430 GMT), though Iran typically extends voting at the last minute. Initial election results are expected as early as Saturday.

Biden urged to withhold Pak govt's 'recognition'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

POLL RIGGING CHARGES

Citing "strong evidence" of election rigging in Pakistan, a group of influential lawmakers, including Muslim legislators, belonging to the ruling Democratic Party has urged US President Joe Biden to withhold "recognition" of a new government in Islamabad until a transparent and credible investigation is conducted.

The February 8 general election, marred by allegations of widespread rigging, in Pakistan, resulted in a hung Parliament with independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party winning more than 90 seats at the 266-member National Assembly. Ex-premier Nawaz Sharif's PML-N bagged 75 seats and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto's PPP got 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) won 17 seats. In a joint letter to President Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the lawmakers expressed concerns about "pre- and post-poll rigging in Pakistan's recent parliamentary elections" and urged the US Congress to "withhold recognition of a new government in Pakistan until a thorough, transparent, and credible investigation of election interference has been conducted."

Islamabad is a long-standing ally of Washington and it is in the interest of the US to ensure that democracy thrives in Pakistan and that election results reflect the interests of the Pakistani people, not the interests of the Pakistani elite and military, the letter sent on Wednesday said.

Since the election resulted in a hung Parliament, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) have struck a post-poll deal along with four other parties to form a coalition government, which may effectively end Khan's chances of returning to power. A party must win 133 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly to form a govern-

ment. PTI has rejected the attempts by the PML-N and the PPP to form a coalition government, warning that robbing its public endorsement by the "mandate thieves" will result in the worst political instability.

"Given the strong evidence of pre- and post-poll rigging, we urge you to wait until a thorough, transparent, and credible investigation has been conducted before recognising a new Pakistani government. Without taking this necessary step, you risk enabling anti-democratic behaviour by Pakistani authorities and could undermine the democratic will of the Pakistani people," the US lawmakers said.

The letter urged Pakistani authorities to release anyone who has been detained for engaging in political speech or activity and tasked State Department officials in Pakistan with gathering information about such cases and advocating for their release.

It urged the Biden administration to "make clear" to Pakistani authorities that US law provides for accountability for acts that violate human rights, undermine democracy, or further corruption, "including the potential for military and other cooperation to be halted."

The letter noted that before the elections, former prime minister Khan was sentenced to prison terms of 10 years and 14 years on "questionable charges" of leaking state secrets and corruption. Members of his PTI party "were forced" to run as independents and prohibited from using the party symbol on the ballot, "despite consistently polling as the most popular party in the country."

Leading up to the election, PTI members faced police raids, arrests, and harassment. On the day of the election, Pakistani authorities suspended mobile calls and data, making it harder for voters to find polling stations," the lawmakers noted. While the pre-poll rigging efforts rightly received widespread international and

domestic condemnation, attention has now turned to wide-spread allegations of post-poll rigging, they said.

"Concerns arose after delays in reporting final results and early returns showed PTI-backed candidates on a path to victory. Over the coming days and weeks, previously reported vote totals allegedly changed dramatically, while video evidence emerged on social media of purported abuses by security forces and election officials at polling stations, as results were delayed well past legal deadlines," the letter said.

The legislators noted that findings by nonpartisan observers also lend credibility to these concerns. According to the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), which is nonpartisan but has worked closely with election authorities, more than two-thirds of polling sites suffered from the kinds of election law violations that could have enabled changing outcomes of races, they noted, adding that these findings were echoed by other election monitors, human rights organisations, and the nation's media as well.

"This growing body of evidence and diversity of voices has led many of the leading observers, human rights organisations, and media organisations to call for a transparent, credible audit process to verify the true outcome of the election," they emphasised, urging the Biden administration "to show Pakistanis that the US stands with them in their fight for democracy and human rights." According to a report in Pakistan's Dawn newspaper, all 33 signatories are pivotal progressive Democrats essential for securing President Biden's second term.

It noted that influential Muslim lawmakers — Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, and Andre Carson — have also endorsed the "pro-PTI letter". The letter was also signed by Indian-origin Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, the chair-person of the Progressive Caucus.

Barrister Gohar Khan re-elected PTI chairman

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Islamabad (PTI): Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party has announced Barrister Gohar Khan's election for the chairman's post for a second time after the withdrawal of all other candidates from the organisational polls.

The 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was scheduled to hold fresh organisational polls on March 3 after the result of its earlier intra-party election was annulled by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Barrister Gohar, 45, was on Thursday elected as the party's chairman unopposed, becoming the only leader to have been elected to the post twice in the party, Geo News reported. The PTI's candidate for the prime minister's slot, Omar Ayub Khan, was also elected unopposed as the party's central general secretary, the party announced late on Thursday.

Dr Yasmin Rashid, Ali Amin Gandapur, and Haleem Adil Sheikh were elected unopposed to the positions of the party's presidents for Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh, respectively, as no candidate contested against them. Several party leaders had submitted their nomination papers as panels for the intra-party polls, but a majority of them withdrew only two days before the organisational election, the PTI's Federal Election Commissioner Raouf Hasan told the Dawn newspaper.

Hasan said that he had no option but to announce the unopposed winners in the absence of opponents on most seats. The former ruling party will organise an organisational poll in Quetta for the Balochistan president's post.

"The final result of the election will, however, be declared by the Federal Election Commissioner on March 3, 2024, after the election process," read a statement by the party. The party's top post had been lying vacant after the ECP and the Supreme Court declared its intra-party elections conducted in December last year unlawful.

Nawaz Sharif's party leader Sadiq elected Speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, a senior leader from the party headed by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was on Friday elected as the Speaker of the newly-formed National Assembly amidst protests by supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidate beat his rival Amir Dogar, who got only 91 votes amid commotion caused by the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) members. Dogar was backed by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

"Out of a total 291 votes, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has got 199 votes, while his challenger Amir Dogar has got 91 votes, while one vote has been declared as invalid," outgoing Speaker, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, who presided over the session held to elect his successor

through the secret voting system, announced. Sadiq secured 199 votes out of a total of 291 votes cast. Given its position in the Assembly, it was sure that the PML-N-backed candidate would win as the Nawaz Sharif-headed party had tied up with the PPP and other four smaller parties to keep Khan's PTI out of power.

In his final remarks, the outgoing Speaker thanked the House for keeping trust in him. After the election as Speaker, Sadiq was administered the oath of office by Ashraf. Sadiq after donning the special robes of the Speaker announced to organise the election of Deputy Speaker for which Syed Ghulam Mustafa of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was up against Junaid Akbar of SIC. The session for the election of Speaker was marred by ruckus and sloganeering against alleged poll rigging, with the outgoing Speaker,

Ashraf, repeatedly calling for order in the House. "No member can raise slogans, wave placards," he said. "This is the rule, it is necessary to remind you." Despite the Speaker's warning, lawmakers continued with their sloganeering. However, Ashraf succeeded in completing the process smoothly. The SIC lawmakers were protesting the alleged manipulation of the results of elections held on February 8. The election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker will be followed by the election of the prime minister on Sunday.

Khan and PTI have alleged massive rigging in the February 8 polls and accused PML-N and its alliance partners, including Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) of stealing his party's mandate. Independent candidates - a majority backed by Khan's PTI - won 93 National Assembly seats. The PML-N won 75 seats, the PPP

came third with 54 seats while the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) won 17 seats.

Meanwhile, according to the schedule announced on Thursday by the National Assembly Secretariat, the election for the head of the government, i.e. the prime minister, would be held on Sunday. The PMN-L and PPP alliance has nominated former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif as their nominee. Given the voting pattern on Friday, Shehbaz Sharif is set to become the prime minister for a second time. He held the post from April 2022 till August 2023 when fresh elections were announced.

The election for the new President will take place on March 9. PPP leader and former Pakistan president Asif Ali Zardari is expected to be re-elected to the post after a gap of nearly 11 years.

Pakistan's new president to be elected on March 9; Zardari frontrunner

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The polling to elect Pakistan's new President will be held on March 9, the election commission announced on Friday, a position that former president Asif Ali Zardari is almost certain to win again after nearly 11 years. The new president would replace the incumbent Dr Arif Alvi, whose five-year term ended last year. However, he has continued since the new electoral college was not yet formed.

Alvi's successor could not be elected due to the absence of the National Assembly and provincial assemblies which were dissolved in August 2023 ahead of the February 8 general elections. Members of the federal parliament and provincial assemblies constitute the electoral college which elects the president of the country.

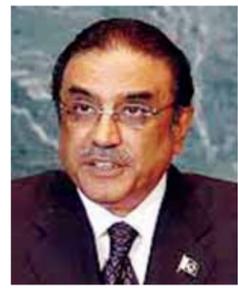
Three weeks after the February 8 elections, the National Assembly and the

four provincial assemblies all have newly elected members. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in a notification, issued the detailed schedule for the presidential election.

The ECP notification said the candidates for the country's top constitutional office can submit nomination papers by March 2 before 12:00 noon. The scrutiny for the nomination papers will be held on March 4. The candidature can be withdrawn the next day.

Afterwards, the commission will publish the list of validly nominated candidates the same day and March 6 has been fixed as the date for retirement. The polling for the next president will be held on March 9 at the National Assembly and all the provincial assemblies from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Zardari, who is a joint candidate of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif-led



Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), is almost certain to win. Thanks to the poor show in the elections, the two parties, along with four smaller parties entered into a post-poll alliance to keep jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party out of power.

Independent candidates - a majority backed by Khan's PTI - won 93 National Assembly seats. The PML-N won 75 seats, the PPP came third with

54 seats while the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) had won 17 seats even as several independents later shifted loyalties and joined the coalition.

The quid pro quo arrangement between PML-N and PPP was that Zardari, 68, would be their joint candidate for the president's post while PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif, 72, would be the prime ministerial candidate, a deal reportedly blessed by the powerful military establishment. Zardari, the husband of slain Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto, previously served as the president from September 2008 to 2013. The other part of the deal was that the daughter of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, would be the chief minister of Punjab province, the home bastion of the Sharifs, while PPP gets to rule Sindh. The opposition parties have so far not nominated anyone against Zardari.

Medevac plane lands in Malaysia where Norwegian king is hospitalised

AP ■ LANGKAWI (MALAYSIA)

A Scandinavian Airlines medical evacuation plane arrived on Friday in Malaysia's northern resort island of Langkawi, where the Norwegian king is in hospital and being treated for an infection. King Harald V, Europe's oldest monarch at 87, was hospitalised after he fell ill during a vacation, the royal palace in Oslo announced on Tuesday. There were no details of his illness. His son, Crown Prince Haakon, has said his father's condition was improving and that he needed rest before being brought back.

Norwegian TV2 said that a Scandinavian aircraft with the tail number LN-RPJ took off from Oslo Airport on Thursday. The Boeing 737-700 airline, which has previously been used as a flying ambulance, landed in Langkawi on Friday. The Norwegian Defence Force reportedly declined to confirm if the plane

will pick up King Harald. Norwegian TV2 said the same aircraft was used last summer for the medical evacuation of patients from Ukraine.

Malaysian national news agency Bernama has reported that Harald was undergoing treatment at the Sultanah Maliha Hospital in Langkawi. It cited unnamed sources as saying he was staying in the hospital's Royal Suite. The hospital declined to comment when contacted by The Associated Press. Prince Haakon said Wednesday the king was in good spirits.

"It is clear that his age means that it is good to treat this properly. They are very good at the hospital," Haakon told Norwegian reporters. "We don't know when he will come home. We will have to decide on that later." The palace said that "no decision has been made regarding his return home."

Earlier, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said



A Scandinavian Airlines medevac plane arrives at Langkawi, where the Norwegian king is being treated for an infection, in Malaysia, Friday. AP/PTI

that "we get worried when our king gets ill and is admitted to hospital, whether in Norway or abroad."

"We should do what we can to contribute to getting the king home as quickly as possible and as healthy as possible," he told Norwegian broadcaster NRK. Two days before his birthday last week, Norwegian news agency NTB said that the king would be undertaking a private trip abroad together with his wife Queen Sonja, without specifying the destination or dates.

The monarch, who has been seen using crutches in recent years, has been repeatedly ill in recent months, raising concern about the head of state's health. In January, the palace said he was on sick leave until Feb 2 because of a respiratory infection. In December, he was admitted to a hospital with an infection and was treated with intravenous antibiotics. He also was hospitalised last August with a fever.

South Korea's Yoon calls for unification

Seoul (AP): South Korea's president lambasted North Korea on Friday over what he called its repressive rule and vowed to achieve a free, unified Korean Peninsula, weeks after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un rejected the idea of peaceful unification and threatened to occupy the South in the event of war. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol spoke on March 1 Independence Movement Day, a holiday marking a 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule.

"Now, we must move toward a free, unified Korean Peninsula," Yoon said in a televised speech. "The North Korean regime relies solely on nuclear weapons and missiles while trapping its 26 million citizens in a quagmire of misery and despair."

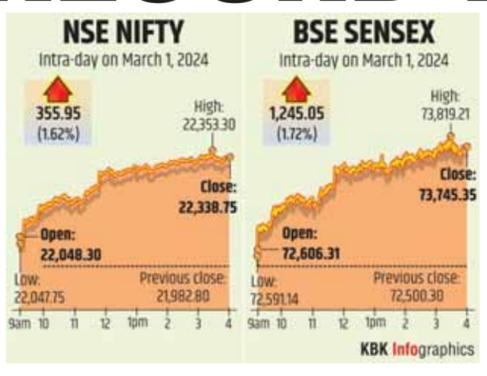
"Unification is precisely what is needed to expand the universal values of freedom and

human rights," Yoon said. "Our unification efforts must become a source of hope and a beacon of light for the people of North Korea." Yoon and Kim's conflicting comments on unification come after Korean animosities have run high for more than two years, with North Korea ramping up missile tests and South Korea expanding military drills with the US in a tit-for-tat cycle. For most of the 70 years since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War, unification was a prized goal of leaders in both Koreas, which are divided by the world's most heavily fortified border. But the prospects for unifying the rich, democratic South and the nominally socialist, authoritarian and poor North any time soon are extremely dim, observers say. Despite extensive US-led sanctions and its own economic mismanagement, North Korea has appeared politically stable.

SENSEX, NIFTY HIT RECORD HIGH

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rallied more than one-and-a-half per cent to hit their lifetime highs on Friday helped by impressive GDP data and fresh foreign fund inflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,245.05 points or 1.72 per cent to reach 73,745.35 — its all-time closing peak. During the day, it zoomed 1,318.91 points or 1.81 per cent to hit a record intra-day high of 73,819.21. The Nifty climbed 355.95 points or 1.62 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 22,338.75. During the day, it soared 370.5 points or 1.68 per cent to reach its intra-day record peak of 22,353.30. A rally in global markets and auto sales numbers added to the positive momentum in the equity markets, analysts said. Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped over 6 per cent while JSW Steel climbed more than 4 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Titan, Maruti, IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank and Tata Motors were the other major gainers. HCL Technologies, Infosys and Tech Mahindra were the laggards. India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 — the fastest pace in one-and-a-half years. The growth rate in October-December was higher than 7.6 per cent in the previous three years, and it helped take the estimate for the current fiscal



(April 2023 to March 2024) to 7.6 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday. India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by both domestic and external demand, a monthly survey said on Friday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023. "Better-than-expected Q3 FY24 GDP and ease in US inflation added buoyancy in both domestic and global markets. As the general election draws closer, stellar economic growth data raised

settled with gains. European markets were trading in positive territory. The US markets ended in the green on Thursday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday as they bought equities worth Rs 3,568.11 crore, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark climbed 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30 on Thursday. The Nifty gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to 21,982.80. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.82 per cent to USD 82.58 a barrel. Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE will conduct a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on Saturday to check their preparedness to handle major disruption or failure at the primary site. The special live trading session will have intra-day switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery Site (DR) at 12:30 pm on the DR site. "Trading members are requested to note that the exchange will conduct a special live trading session with intraday switch over from Primary Site (PR) to Disaster Recovery Site (DR) on Saturday, March 2, in equity and equity derivatives segments," BSE and NSE said in separate circulars.



Gold jumps ₹350; silver rallies ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices jumped Rs 350 to Rs 63,320 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid strong trends in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal closed at Rs 62,970 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver also rallied Rs 400 to Rs 74,500 per kg, while it settled at Rs 74,100 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,320 per 10 grams, up by Rs 350, taking bullish cues in the overseas market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,045 per ounce, up by USD 11 from the previous close. Following the release of the Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) price index data, which indicated signs of slowing inflation in the US and raised expectations of a monetary policy rate cut by the Federal Reserve later this year, Gandhi said. After the release of the data, the yellow metal prices surged to a four-week high, he added. Silver was also up at USD 22.60 per ounce, while it had ended at USD 22.50 per ounce in the previous close. Investors will also look forward to the release of major macro data, including global US manufacturing PMI (January) and ISM manufacturing (February) which will shape the expectations for the Fed's monetary policy rate outlook and further direction for the gold prices, Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said.

Paytm shares jump 5 per cent; hit upper circuit limit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns and operates Paytm, on Friday, jumped 5 per cent after the company said the board has approved the discontinuation of inter-company pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies. The stock climbed 5 per cent to Rs 425.45 — its upper circuit limit — on the BSE after falling in the past three trading days. Shares of the company had fallen by 5.31 per cent in the last three days. The stock jumped 4.99 per cent to Rs 423.45 — the upper circuit limit — on the NSE. In traded volume terms, 7.97 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 46.64 lakh shares on the NSE during the day. Amid RBI's action on its associate firm, One97 Communications on Friday said



the board has approved the discontinuation of inter-company pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies. The move assumes significance as Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) is under the RBI's lens over persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns. In a filing on Friday, One97 Communications said the company and its associate entity, Paytm Payments Bank Limited, have introduced additional measures to strengthen their approach towards independent operations of PPBL. "As part of this process to reduce dependencies, Paytm and PPBL

have mutually agreed to discontinue various inter-company agreements with Paytm and its group entities," the BSE filing said. Also, the shareholders of PPBL have agreed to simplify the Shareholders Agreement (SHA) to support PPBL's governance, it added. The Board of OCL (One97 Communications Ltd) approved the termination of agreements and amendment of SHA on March 1, 2024. Paytm had announced earlier that it would sign up new partnerships with other banks and take measures to provide seamless services to its customers and merchants. In a regulatory action in January, the RBI barred PPBL from accepting fresh deposits or top-ups in customer accounts, wallets, FASTags, and other instruments after February 29 — a deadline that was later extended to March 15.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, P.W.D., GUWAHATI BUILDING CIRCLE-I FANCY BAZAR, GUWAHATI-1

Press Notice
The Superintending Engineer, P.W.D., Guwahati Building Circle-I, Fancy Bazar, Guwahati-1 on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites in electronic tendering system for the work "Construction of School Infrastructure of Panchatirtha Shishu Shankardev Vidhya Niketan at Hajo, Malitola under Panchatirtha Shishu Sankardev Vidhya Niketan Parichalana Samiti, Hajo, Kamrup District under United Fund (State Specific Scheme) during the year 2022-23" with an approximate value of work of Rs.1,50,00,000.00 from APWD Building registered contractor of Class-I (A,B,C), having upto date registration and requisite experience in similar nature of work. Details of the bids may be seen at e-procurement portal website: www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours. The bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in for participating in the bidding process.

Note:-
Any modification of tender may be seen in the P.W.D. portal www.assamtenders.gov.in
Sd/-
**Superintending Engineer, P.W.D.
Guwahati Building Circle-I,
Fancy Bazar, Guwahati-1**

Janasanyog/C/17203/23/2-Mar-24
**Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh**
Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

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

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

PUBLIC NOTICE

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Rekha Juneja, Kamal Juneja, Neelam Paul, B-17/2, 2nd Floor, D/s Ramesh Nagar, Delhi 110015 A/c:- LBDEL00004043981/ LBDEL00005526097	Plot No.21/11, Ground Floor, Block-B-21, Double Storey, Ramesh Nagar, Near Jain Mandir, New Delhi- 110015	29/01/2024 Rs. 48,37,254/- Rs. 6,49,499/-	03/11/2023
2.	Jayanta Dey, House No. 41 Flat No-4, 2nd Floor, Lane No.1, Ignou Neb Sarai South Delhi New Delhi 110068 A/c:- TBGHZ00006134971/ LBGHZ00006148216	Property Document Covering Studio Apt No. 1428, 14th Floor, Kaveri City Centre, C-06 Delta One, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh- 201310. Admeasuring an Area of- 217 Sq. Ft. (Carpet Area), 434 Sq. Ft. (Super Area) & Property Document Covering Studio Apt No.1429, 14th Floor, Kaveri City Centre, C-06 Delta One, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh- 201310. Admeasuring an Area of- 214 Sq. Ft. (Carpet Area), 428 Sq. Ft. (Super Area)	29/01/2024 Rs. 34,58,190/- Rs. 73,483/-	03/11/2023
3.	Aradhana Gupta, Rekha Devi, Flat No 804 Lotus Tower Td Garden, Thada Mode Bhiwadi Distt, Alwar Rajasthan 301001 A/c:- LBGUR00005078128	Flat No E-904, 9th Floor, Tower- E, Terra Elegance Tower E Kharsa No 1289/1025, Situated At Village Khajurvas Tehsil Tijara Distt. Alwar Rajasthan	19/01/2024 Rs. 26,88,809.77/-	03/10/2023
4.	Vinod Kumar Bhasin, Gulshan Kumar Bhasin, Kavita Bhasin, Neha Bhardwaj, House No.17/68 A, Second Floor, Tilak Nagar, New Delhi, 110018 A/c:- LBDEL00005696299/ LBDEL00005696633	Property No-17/68-A, A Second Floor, Without Roof Rights, Right Block 17, Situated at Tilak Nagar, New Delhi- 110018	19/01/2024 Rs. 20,02,536/- Rs. 19,16,360/-	03/10/2023
5.	Rachana Takshak, Sanjay Takshak, House No.984/1, First Floor, Street No.4, Ashok Vihar Phase 1 Haryana Gurgaon- 122001 A/c:- LBGUR00004079625	Flat No-2-1403, 14th Floor, Tower 2, Situated at The Millenia, Sector-37D, Gurgaon, Haryana- 122001	19/01/2024 Rs. 16,28,528/-	14/10/2023
6.	Vazhathuara Velu Prakash, Bindu Prakash, 286 Pocket-D, Phase -II, Mayur Vihar Delhi 110091 A/c:- LBDEL00002391913	Flat No.286, 1st Floor (SFS) Cat-II, Pocket D, Mayur Vihar Phase-II, New Delhi- 110091	19/01/2024 Rs. 14,83,040.67/-	03/10/2023
7.	Sumeet Kumar Dwivedi, Anupma Dwivedi, C-28/6 Dlf, Dilshad Extension Uttar Pradesh Ghaziabad- 201304 A/c:-LBDEL00001857297	Flat No-D-152/6, 2nd Floor, Situated at Village Brahmur Bhopur, Dlf Dilshad Phase, dilshad Extension-II, Pargana Loni Tehsil and District Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201010	19/01/2024 Rs. 11,86,363.9/-	08/09/2023
8.	Anita Negi, Om Prakash, Brijesh Kumar, Wz 1390/10, Nangal Rava Pankha Road Near Delhi- 110046 A/c:- LBDEL00002371119	Flat No.822, 2nd Floor, Pocket-B, PH 2 Grp 2, Janta Flat Sector-16, Dwarka, Delhi- 110075	19/01/2024 Rs. 4,18,404.4/-	03/10/2023
9.	Vipin Kumar, Davender Krishna Devi, Model Town, 245- R Rohtak Haryana- 124001 A/c:-LBDEL00005133691	Plot No-245 R, New Nagar Nigam No. 1396/29, Bata Showroom, Model Town, Delhi Rohtak, Haryana- 124001	19/01/2024 Rs. 58,31,764.05	03/11/2023
10.	Vipin Kumar, Krishna Devi, Plot No-245 R, New Nagar Nigam No. 1396/29, Bata Showroom, Model Town, Delhi Rohtak, Haryana- 124001	Plot No- 245 R, New Nagar Nigam No. 1396/29, Bata Showroom, Model Town, Delhi Rohtak, Haryana- 124001	19/01/2024 Rs. 23,03,279/-	03/11/2023
11.	Anuj Verma, Usha Verma, E-345,mahavir Enclave-3, Street No-75, Uttam Nagar Delhi 110059 A/c:- LBDEL00001978987	Flat No-1 1808, 18th Floor, Avj Heights, Plot No.-GH/12/2, Sector Zeta-I, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh	19/01/2024 Rs. 27,03,514.3/-	30/11/2023
12.	Birendra Kumar, Gurjari Kumari, House No.103/09, M.B Road, Vibhag-1, Sector-1, Pushpa Vihar,malyia Nagar, Near Kendriya Bhandar, South Delhi, New Delhi 110017 A/c:- LBDEL00005237302	Flat No-308, (2BHK Type B) Tower-15, 3rd Floor, Aashiyara, Sector-37C, Village Gadauli Khurd, Tehsil and District Gurgaon, Haryana- 122001	19/01/2024 Rs. 16,85,838/-	06/09/2023
13.	Narendra Singh Gusain, Rekha Narendra Singh Gusain, Flat No. 201, Plot No.105, Palm Villa, Sector 48, Dronagiri, Bokadwira Uran District Raigad, Maharashtra, Navi Mumbai- 400702 A/c:- LBDEL00005679498	Flat No. 401, 4th Floor, On Plot No. 17, Sector 50, Sky Creva, Village Dronagiri, Taluka Uran, District Raigad, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra- 400702	19/01/2024 Rs. 16,36,696/-	30/11/2023
14.	Shailendra Kumar, Rakhi Dhyani, A 86 Hill Apartments, Sector 13 Rohini, New Delhi, 110085 A/c:- LBDEL00002427062	Property Bearing No. 121, First Floor Without Roof Rights, Block-C, Pocket-5, Sector 11, Situated at Rohini Residential Scheme, Rohini, Delhi	23/01/2024 Rs. 30,48,837.45/-	18/11/2023
15.	Sandeep Kumar, Kusum House No. 3334, Kucha Kash Giri, Bazar Sita Ram, Chawri Bazar Delhi 110006 A/c:- LBDEL00005206779	Flat No-M 1503, 14th Floor, Tower-M, In Terra Heritage Located at Alwar Bye Pass Road, Sector-51, Bhiwadi, Rajasthan- 301019	23/01/2024 Rs. 25,94,986.3/-	03/11/2023
16.	Aayush Singh, Daulat Singh, Sadhna Singh, Flat No.G-2, Plot No.862, green Street, Near Gda Market, Sector-5, I.E. Sahibabad, Vaishali,uttar Pradesh Ghaziabad-201010 A/c:- LBGHZ00005188692	Flat No.3J-0606, Tower-3j, 6th Floor (Without Roof Rights), Block-J, Nilaya Greens, Kharsa No.1015, 1023/1M, 1023/2M, and 1023 MI, Village Morta, Raj Nagar Extension, NH-58, Pargana, Jajalabad, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh 200001	23/01/2024 Rs. 24,55,504/-	01/11/2023
17.	Sanjeev Kumar Sachdeva, Sangeeta Sachdeva, Puneet Sachdeva, R/o 2928/4, Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj Central Delhi New Delhi- 110055 A/c:- LBDEL00005559559	Flat No. D5-302, 3rd Floor, Habitat Residences, Tower-D-5, Sector-78, Faridabad, Haryana- 121002	23/01/2024 Rs. 20,08,664/-	05/11/2023
18.	Dhiraj Tyagi, Rajkumar House No.4246, Gali No.7, Rajendra Park, Gurgaon Haryana 122001 A/c:- LBDEL00004326210	Flat No. A-1106, 11th Floor, Tower-A, Solera, Sector-107, Gurugram, Haryana- 122001	23/01/2024 Rs. 17,76,105.94/-	08/11/2023
19.	Shashi Kala, Keshav Kumar, House No.221, 1st Floor, Jalam Mohalla Tuglakabad Village, Near Ramesh Bidhuri Koli, Badarpur South Delhi- 110044 A/c:- LBDEL00004205111	Flat No. T1-204, 2nd Floor, Tower 1, Global Hill View, Sector-11, Sohna, Gurgaon- 122103	23/01/2024 Rs. 12,59,178/-	03/11/2023
20.	Ranjeet Kumar Ghosh, Roly Gupta, U.16/61 Abhinav Associate, Room No.2 First Floor, U. Block, Dlf Phase-3, Gurgaon, Haryana Gurgaon- 122002 A/c:- LBDEL00005270355	Flat N. L-527, 5th Floor, Block/tower L3/ Lotus, Situated At Kharsa No.738/929, Jan Awas Vatika, Village - Rabarka, Tehsil-tijara & Distt. - Alwar, Bhiwadi, Rajasthan	23/01/2024 Rs. 6,72,410/-	29/11/2023
21.	Anand Kumar, Chandravti Devi, Sripal Basant PS Garkha, Mirzapur Saran Post Basant Bihar Saran 841202 A/c:-LBDEL00006476021	Flat No. L/UR-905, 9th Floor, Tower-L, Urban Royale, Situated at NH-24, Urban Homes, Shahpur Bahmetta, Pargana Dasna, Tehsil and District Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh- 201002	23/01/2024 Rs. 6,55,122/-	27/11/2023
22.	Ramesh Kumar, Saroj Sharma, Flat No A-86 Ug-1, Dlf Dilshad Extn-2, Uttar Pradesh Ghaziabad 201005 A/c:- LBGHZ00001396680	Flat No. -UG-1, Plot No. A-86 Mig Dlf, Dilshad Extn.-2, Block-A, Brahmur Alias Bhopura Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh- 201005	23/01/2024 Rs. 6,29,332.94/-	08/11/2023
23.	Janardan Prasad Tiwari, Gayatri Devi Tiwari, RC-18 Sangam Vihar,khara Colony, Indirapuram, Uttar Pradesh Ghaziabad 201010 A/c:-LBDEL00001019090	Flat No.G-2, Ground Floor, Plot No. Second -A/30, Sector-02, Vaishali Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh	23/01/2024 Rs. 3,39,597/-	30/11/2023
24.	Ramesh Chandra, Sangeeta, Flat No.1, Lodhi Road Complex, Opp. Saibaba Temple, New Delhi, Delhi- 110001 A/c:- LBGHZ00001040926	Flat No. F-2, M.I.G, 1st Floor Front Portion (Without Roof Rights), Plot No-5/172, Sector-5, Vaishali, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh	23/01/2024 Rs. 2,88,615.2/-	05/11/2023
25.	Dhanjit Singh, Lakhwinder Kaur, 35 F/1, Sukhdev Vihar, Delhi- 110025 A/c:- LBDEL00005248243/ LBDEL00005785639	Property No. -35, First Floor, Sukhdev Vihar, New Delhi, Delhi-110025	23/01/2024 Rs. 28,09,308/- Rs. 20,34,276/-	03/11/2023
26.	Ravi Chaudhary, Reema Singh, BC-581 Pali Road, Badkai Colony Near Delhi Maszid Haryana Faridabad 121001 A/c:- LBFDB00005819566/ LBFDB00005934551	Flat No. D6-607, 6th Floor, Tower D6, Situated at Habitat Residences, Sector-78, Faridabad, Haryana. (Along With 1 Two Wheeler Parking)	23/01/2024 Rs. 20,94,629/- Rs. 21,634/-	18/11/2023
27.	Rakesh Shah, Rameshwar Sah, R/o E-102, Old Chandarawal, Civil Lines New Delhi- 110054 A/c:- LBDEL00004309910/ LBDEL00005133680	D.D.A.L.I.G Flat No.51, Second Floor, Block-F-18, Pocket-3, Sector- G-8, Narela, Delhi- 110085	23/01/2024 Rs.12,00,810.33/- Rs. 40,241.23/-	03/11/2023
28.	Vikas Jindal, Suman Jindal, Seema Gupta, F-1/41-42 Second Floor, Sector 11 Rohini, Sector 7, North West Delhi, New Delhi, 110085 A/c:- LBDEL00004952273/ LBDEL00005207620	Property Document Covering Property Address-1. Property Bearing No.25, Second Floor (Without Roof Rights), Block & Pocket - F - 1, Sector- 11, Residential Scheme, Rohini, Delhi - 110085 Admeasuring an Area-Plinth Area-48.00 Sq. Mtrs., 1/4th Area of Stilt Parking- 12.00 Sq. Mtrs., Total Plinth Area Under Transfer- 60.00 Sq. Mtrs. & Property Bearing No.26, Second Floor (Without Roof Rights), Block & Pocket- F - 1, Sector- 11, Residential Scheme, Rohini, Delhi - 110085 Admeasuring an Area-Plinth Area-48.00 Sq. Mtrs., 1/4th Area of Stilt Parking-12.00 Sq. Mtrs., Total Plinth Area Under Transfer- 60.00 Sq. Mtrs.	29/01/2024 Rs. 67,31,070.72/- Rs. 12,14,416/-	30/11/2023
29.	Dharmesh Malhotra, Manisha Malhotra, A/54, Queens Park, Juhu Tara Road,santa Cruz (w), Mumbai Maharashtra- 400049 A/c:- LBGUR00001453231	Apartment No.704, 7th Floor, HBTN-tower & Block 2, Unitech Habitat, Plot No. 9 Sector PI-2,alistonia Estate, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh	29/01/2024 Rs. 34,30,278/-	08/10/2023
30.	Satender Prasad, Poonam, House No.471 Block-36, Himmat Puri Mayur Vihar, Phase-I New Delhi, Delhi- 110091 A/c:- LBDEL00002027784	Flat No. 3E-127, 12th Floor, Green View-II, Sahakar Awas Samiti Limited, Situated at Plot No-04, Chrosia Estate, Sector-PI, Greater Noida Gautam Buddha Nagar, Noida Uttar Pradesh-201307	29/01/2024 Rs. 7,63,273/-	08/10/2023
31.	Gaurav Sharma, House No.2D/63A, Behind Durga Bari, National Highway-1 N.I.T, Haryana Faridabad- 121001 A/c:- LBFDB00005941743, LBFDB00006156044	Flat No. 1304, 13th Floor, Tower-1, 11, Type-B, Green Avenue, Situated at Sector 85, Village Khari Kalan, Faridabad, Haryana	02/02/2024 Rs.10,64,747.99/- Rs.98,931/-	05/11/2023
32.	Bal Krishan Dua, 1150, Multani Mohalla, Main Gandhi Nagar Road, Bandh Road, Delhi- 110031 A/c:- LBDEL00001431340	Flat No. T-4, Second Floor, L.I.G., Plot No C-1/2, (With Roof Rights), Residential Colony D.L.F., Ankur Vihar, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.	02/02/2024 Rs. 5,28,402/-	30/11/2023
33.	Anil Aggarwal, Rakhi Aggarwal, F-814 Sector-3 Vaishali, 2nd Floor Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh Ghaziabad 201001 A/c:- LBDEL00001482787	Plot No.1/67, 1st Floor (Without Roof Right), Residential Colony, Situated at Sector-1, "Vaishali" Ghaziabad Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh	02/02/2024 Rs. 3,26,146.2/-	08/11/2023
34.	Seema Gupta, Vikas Jindal, F 1/41 42 2nd Sec 11, Delhi- 110085 A/c:- LBDEL00006072206/ LBDEL00006081331	Property Bearing No.121, Entire Upper Ground Floor (I.E. Ground Floor Above Stilt Floor) Without Roof/ Terrace Rights, Pocket- H-3, Sector- 11, Rohini Residential Scheme, Rohini, New Delhi- 110085 Alongwith Common Entrance, Common Passage & Common Staircase & Lift and Undivided 1/4th Share of Stilt Floor. & Property Bearing No.122, Entire Upper Ground Floor (I.E. Ground Floor Above Stilt Floor) Without Roof/ Terrace Rights, Pocket- H-3, Sector- 11, Rohini Residential Scheme, Rohini, New Delhi- 110085 Alongwith Common Entrance, Common Passage & Common Staircase & Lift and Undivided 1/4th Share of Stilt Floor.	31/01/2024 Rs. 60,90,053/- Rs. 29,81,502/-	30/11/2023
35.	Seema Gupta, Vikas Jindal, F 1/41 42 2nd Floor, Near Veera Devi, Jain Hospital Sec 11, Delhi- 110085 A/c:- LBDEL00005525615	Property Bearing No. 7, Entire First Floor Without Roof/ Terrace Rights, Pocket B-3, Sector-11, Rohini Residential Scheme, Rohini, Delhi 110085 Along With Rights To Common Amenities	31/01/2024 Rs. 27,17,954/-	30/11/2023
36.	Paras Bali, Bhavna Grover Bali, E-188 Ground Floor, Greater Kailash Part-II, South Delhi, 110048 A/c:- LBDEL00002141665	Flat No. C-313, 31st Floor,tower C, Raheja's Revanta Situated at Sector 78, Gurgaon- 122001	31/01/2024 Rs. 81,46,515/-	03/10/2023
37.	Aniruddha Mukherjee, Kakuli Mukherjee, 14/ 357 F/ F Mandir Dda Janta Flats, Madangiri, Dr Ambedkar Nagar, Delhi- 110062 A/c:- LBGUR00003497641	Flat No A-1804, 18th & 19th Floor Oasis Venetia Heights, Situated at Plot No. HRA- 12A Group Housing Sector Surajpur Site C (Extension), Phase II Greater Noida- 201312	31/01/2024 Rs. 1,00,12,030/-	31/05/2018
38.	Buta Ram, Rajni Devi, Plot No. 67/11 Gali No. Sec-52, Wazirabad Gurgaon- 122001 A/c:-L BGUR00003417958	Flat No A-912, 9th Floor Tower-A, Habitat, Situated at Sector 99-A, Gurgaon- 122001 (along With 1 Two Wheeler Parking)	31/01/2024 Rs. 20,11,052.38/-	06/04/2022
39.	Naresh Pal, Seema, C 469 Alpha 1 Greater Noida- 201312 A/c:- LBNOD00005993483	Flat No.J/G-20 Ground Floor, Pandav Nagar, Pocket J Meerut- 250001	31/01/2024 Rs. 15,23,925/-	03/09/2023
40.	Rajesh Kumar, Deepa Upadhyay, Flat No 351 2nd Floor, Pocket 6 Sunrise Apartment, Nasir Pur Dwarka Palam Village Delhi- 110045 A/c:- LBDEL00005118029	Flat No.351, 2nd Floor, Under Dda Janta Category, Pocket 6, Sector 1A Phase-1, Sunrise Apartment, Nasirpur, Dwarka Delhi- 110045	31/01/2024 Rs. 10,39,177.5/-	08/08/2023
41.	Sukant Kumar Panda, Bandita Panda, Flat No.120, 3rd Floor, Pocket-6, Sector-A/10, Near Satyawadi Harish Chander Hospital, Narela, Delhi- 110040 A/c:- LBDEL000030909860	Dda L.I.G Flat No.120, 3rd Floor, Pocket-6, Group-2, Sector-A-10, Narela, Delhi- 110040	07/02/2024 Rs. 15,65,421/-	13/11/2023
42.	Sahjot Singh Bains, Jasbir Kaur, House No.588-R, Jalvayu Vihar, Sector-30, Haryana Gurgaon- 122002 A/c:-LBDEL00003525381	Flat No.1110, 11th Floor, Tower-h, Oxirich Sunskriti, Phase-2, Sector-33, Bhiwadi, District-		



PLAY ON

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

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



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



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



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

Talking Tokyo

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



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



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



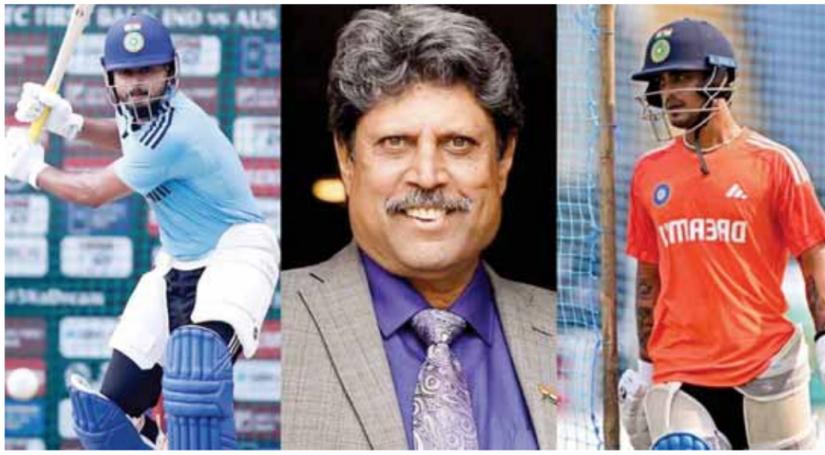
menu was the Ramen burger, where the noodles were shaped into a bun. Once a popular trend on the internet and globally, I found the ramen to be overly crispy, and the pork belly, bacon, and tomatoes overloaded the burger. While it may be visually appealing for

Instagram, consuming all the ingredients in one bite proved to be a challenge. The meal ended on a sweet note with a deconstructed banoffee cake, featuring toffee sauce and caramelized banana served with fresh cream alongside banana cake. In a world where most brands struggle to survive even a few months, Guppy is celebrating its 10th anniversary. For a city known for its love of butter chicken, Guppy not only serves but also educates many Delhiites about Japanese flavors, becoming a favorite among its patrons. This achievement is truly commendable. Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

KAPIL BACKS BCCI STRICTNESS ON DOMESTIC CRICKET

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
A few players will suffer, but let it be," said legendary former India captain Kapil Dev on Friday as he backed the BCCI's decision to terminate central contracts for lack of commitment to domestic cricket, calling it a much-needed step to protect marquee first-class events like the Ranji Trophy. Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were on Wednesday excluded from the BCCI's central contracts after ignoring the board's diktat to play in the Ranji Trophy. The decision evoked mixed reactions with some former players like Kirti Azad and Irfan Pathan backing the out-of-favour duo. Kapil refrained from taking names but said the BCCI's decision to assert the importance of domestic cricket was long overdue. "Yes, few players will suffer, kuch

logon ko taqleef hogi, hone do lekin desh se badhkar koi nahi hai (some people will feel hurt but let it be because nobody is bigger than the country). Well done," he said. "I congratulate the BCCI for taking the much needed step to protect the status of domestic cricket. I was sad to see domestic cricket being given the skip by players once they had established themselves in international cricket," the captain of the 1983 World Cup-winning side observed in his statement. The BCCI, while announcing the central contracts, urged the players to give due importance to domestic competitions. The 25-year-old Kishan did not turn up for Jharkhand throughout the team's campaign in Ranji Trophy despite not being on national duty after leaving the tour of South Africa in December citing personal reasons. He instead focussed on preparing for the IPL



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

from the Indian team after the second Test against England. He, however, has been picked for Mumbai's Ranji semifinal against Tamil Nadu starting March 2. "It was high time the message was given and this strong step by the BCCI will go a long way in restoring the prestige of domestic cricket," he added. Kapil asserted that it was the duty of established stars to play domestic cricket as they owe their success to their respective states. "I have always believed in the process of international players making themselves available to play for their respective states. It helps them extend their support to domestic players. Also it is a nice way to pay back for the services rendered by the state association in grooming a player," he said. Kapil also expressed his gratitude to the BCCI for enhancing the pension of former cricketers, saying

it has come as a major relief to families of several yesteryear players. In 2022, the board had announced a hike in the monthly pensions of former cricketers — both men and women. Former first-class men's cricketers, who earlier got Rs 15,000 per month are now getting Rs 30,000, while former Test players, who got Rs 37,500, are now getting Rs 60,000. Women international players, who received Rs 30,000 prior to the revision are now receiving Rs 52,500, while first-class cricketers who retired before 2003 and were getting Rs 22,500 are now getting Rs 45,000. "I am also happy that the BCCI has increased the pension amount of the players. This was a much needed boost to those whose family depends on the pension received," added Kapil.



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

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Mumbai captain Ajinkya Rahane on Friday backed Shreyas Iyer to put the contractual turmoil behind him and deliver a punchy performance for the team in the Ranji Trophy semifinal against Tamil Nadu, beginning here on Saturday. Shreyas along with Jharkhand's Ishan Kishan were not considered for the annual central contracts after both the players skipped the Ranji matches in violation of BCCI's diktat. Shreyas sat out of Mumbai's quarterfinal against Baroda here while complaining of back pain. "He's an experienced player. His contribution has been amazing whenever he turned up for Mumbai. We are thrilled to have him in our team for the semifinal," Rahane told the media here at the BKC Ground. Rahane said Shreyas would not require any extra motivation to do well for Mumbai against TN. "I don't think he needs any encouragement or advice. He has always contributed with the bat for Mumbai, and him being around other players in the dressing room will also help the team's cause," said Rahane. However, Rahane himself is waging a personal battle after scoring just 115 runs from six matches at an average of 12.77 with a lone fifty.

But the 35-year-old did not read much into those anaemic numbers. "It's just a phase and you have to respect it (not scoring runs). When you're batting well and scoring runs, it happens consistently. There's nothing wrong with my batting. I just have to remain positive and back my game and instinct," he said. Rahane said he needed to bat freely to get back into his run-scoring ways. "I just have to go out there and play freely. I feel as a player you have to be confident and respect a phase, move forward and learn whatever you can. You don't want to go too far ahead," he added. Rahane confirmed that opener Prithvi Shaw has recovered from a finger injury which had forced him to bat in the middle-order during the quarterfinal. "His finger was hurt, that's why he came down the order. We wanted him to go before Musheer (Khan). But obviously, because of the injection's effect, he had to go after him," Rahane said. Rahane hoped that Shaw, who has made 389 runs from four matches at an average of 64.83, would find his A game against Tamil Nadu. "Prithvi is really aggressive and he gets those runs very quickly. As a batsman, I don't think he (has) changed much. He's hungry to score runs. That's

what we want from Prithvi. We don't want him to change his game," Rahane said. He said Mumbai will adopt a pressure-free approach in this game. "We are playing really well. We don't want to think about the quarterfinal, semifinal or final. It is just another game for us. If we can do that and be in the moment as a team and individuals, it will help us," Rahane noted. Rahane was obviously pleased with the hundreds Tanush Kotian and Tushar Deshpande, the No 10 and 11, made in the last outing and said such efforts will add a lot of meat to the whole batting unit. "Everyone is working really hard, especially the bowlers, with their batting. I think with No. 8, 9, 10, 11, contribute with the bat, it becomes really crucial for the team. Those guys have worked really hard throughout the season on their batting, you know, those extra 15-20 minutes after they bowl (at nets). It's paying off." Rahane said Kotian has the potential to become an all-rounder. "I'm happy for Tanush because earlier he has made those crucial 70s, 80s and 90s. But I think the hundred he got is a benchmark (for him). He has the calibre to become a good all-rounder," Rahane signed off.

He is the new Ravi Ashwin: Vaughan on Bashir

PTI ■ LONDON
Former England captain Michael Vaughan feels England have discovered a "world-class superstar" in young off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, who has the skills to emulate the success of India's Ravichandran Ashwin. Despite England's five-wicket loss in Ranchi, 20-year-old Bashir, playing only his second Test, impressed as he returned with a match haul of eight wickets. His magnificent performance included a five-wicket haul in the first innings. Ashwin, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the best off-spinners in the history of Test cricket. The senior spinner recently became only the second Indian bowler to snare 500 wickets in the longest format and is set for his 100th Test in Dharamsala next week against England. "One of the great weeks, celebrating another world-class superstar that we've unearthed, Shoaib Bashir. That's what we're celebrating. Second Test match, eight wickets, he's the new Ravi Ashwin, and we've unearthed him.



"So, we're celebrating a new superstar in English cricket," Vaughan said on Club Prairie Fire's YouTube channel. India handed England their first series defeat under coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes after winning the fourth Test in Ranchi to take a 3-1 lead in



the ongoing series. Vaughan backed England to win the dead rubber in Dharamsala. "They will go with their best XI. It's going to be cold in Dharamsala and it will suit England. I expect England to win," Vaughan said.



BCCI to conduct women red ball tournament in Pune

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Women's red-ball cricket will return to India's domestic calendar after six years when the BCCI conducts a Senior Inter Zonal Multi-Day Trophy in Pune from March 28. The move comes after the Indian women's team's return to Test cricket. The side has played Tests against Australia and England in the recent years. Domestic red ball cricket for women was last held in 2018. "It is a welcome step taken by BCCI. The national team has started playing Test cricket again and we need the next generation of cricketers to play red ball cricket at the domestic level," former India pacer Amita Sharma told PTI. "I would also want red ball to be played at the state level and not just zonal level. Back in the day we had both those events," she added. The Maharashtra Cricket Association will be hosting the tournament which will feature six teams, representing East, West, North, South, Central, and North-East zones. They will be competing in a series of five matches to be played across three days each, which is a day more than the two-day games played in the 2018 season. The tournament will begin right after the ongoing Women's Premier League, which ends on March 17. It will start with the quarterfinals between East Zone and North East Zone and West Zone and Central Zone on March 28 with the semifinals slated on April 3.

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

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Big-hitting batter Shafali Verma says she has made minor adjustments to her approach towards the game in the last one year, which is helping her convert good starts into big knocks in the ongoing Women's Premier League. Verma struck a half century and stitched a second-wicket stand of 82 runs with Alice Capsey (46) as Delhi Capitals defeated Royal Challengers Bangalore by 25 runs in a WPL match here on Thursday night. RCB could only muster up 169/9 in their 20 overs, pursuing a 195-run victory target. "Last time in the WPL, I was getting out in the 30s or 40s. Those knocks taught me a lot. I think because of that, now I want to convert a 30 or 40-run score into a 50 for the team

and for myself," Verma told 'Jio Cinema'. "The main change is a slight adjustment in my mindset and I want to take this forward," she added. Verma's team is currently top of the table with two wins from three matches. The 20-year-old Verma, who became the youngest to play cricket for India when she debuted as a 15-year-old, also acknowledged the positive impact of playing alongside seasoned Australian Meg Lanning in her WPL team. "When a very experienced person is standing across from you, your body language changes on its own. Playing with a player like that and building partnerships is a great privilege in my opinion. "She has changed the game with her batting," she said. Delhi Capital will next taken on Gujarat Giants on Sunday.

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Australia 13-2 as New Zealand strikes back late

AP ■ WELLINGTON
The almost comical run out of Kane Williamson for a second-ball duck was one of many setbacks suffered by New Zealand on the second day of the first test Friday as it fell 217 runs behind Australia. That was until the very end of the day when Australia batted for a second time after passing up the chance to make New Zealand follow on. Tim Southee dismissed Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne to have Australia 13-2 in its second innings after it had led by 204 on the first. At stumps Usman Khawaja was 5 not out and nightwatchman Nathan Lyon was 6 not out. Lyon was dropped at slip by Tim Southee off the last ball of the day. Smith was out for a duck to the third ball of the innings, bowled by Southee, and Labuschagne fell to Southee in the fifth over for 2. After falling for 1 in the first innings, it was Labuschagne's lowest aggregate

score in a test in his career. They were the 12th and 13th wickets to fall in the day which mostly had not gone New Zealand's way. First, New Zealand needed more than a full session to claim one wicket and end Australia's first innings. In that time Cameron Green and Josh Hazlewood put on 116 runs to increase Australia's total from 279-9 after the first day to 383. Green finished 174 not out. Then New Zealand lost three wickets at 12 and two at 29, was 29-5 before Glenn Phillips' half century from 41 balls slowed its steady downhill slide. New Zealand eventually was all out for 179 in 43.1 overs, a deficit of 204. Phillips made 71 and Matt Henry 42. "Obviously the way Cam Green played with Hazlewood, they put on a massive partnership and that wasn't exactly ideal for us wanting to wrap up the tail," Phillips said. "At the end that's what test cricket is about."



New Zealand always will be able to look back and pinpoint where this match began to get away from it. It started on the second day when Australia was 89-4 and Mitch Marsh made a fast 40 in a 67-run fifth-wicket partnership which seemed to energize Cameron Green. Green went on to reach his century in the last over of the first day and was able to form an heroic last-wicket partnership with Hazlewood which frustrated New Zealand for all of the first session and an additional 20 minutes before Hazlewood fell for 22. This test match is the first in eight years between New Zealand and Australia in New Zealand, has been much anticipated and this match at the Basin Reserve is sold out on all five days. Watching Australia go from 267-9 on day one when the match was about even to 383 when Australia was totally in charge left fans

dispirited. Tom Latham fell for 5 when New Zealand was 12, changing his decision to leave a ball from Mitchell Starc too late and directing the ball back onto his stumps. Then disaster. Williamson played a ball from Starc back past the bowler. Will Young at the non-striker's end turned to watch the ball, then looked up to see Williamson had set off for a run. Young turned to see the ball heading straight to mid off and looked again to see Williamson bearing down on him on a collision course. As Young swerved to his left, Williamson dodged to his right and the pair collided in mid-pitch as Starc tried to take evasive action. Williamson was stranded as Marnus Labuschagne's throw hit the stumps directly at the non-striker's end. Williamson walked off without looking back. New Zealand had lost two wickets in two balls and that became three in five when Rachin Ravindra drove too freely too early

in his innings and sliced the ball directly to Nathan Lyon at point. Wicketkeeper Alex Carey caught Daryl Mitchell (11) off Cummins from the last ball of the 17th over and Young (9) from Mitch March off the first ball of the 18th as New Zealand slumped to 29-5. Phillips and Tom Blundell provided New Zealand's first real period of competitiveness in all of the second day in a partnership of 84 for the sixth wicket. Both played aggressively and runs came quickly. Phillips reached his third test half century, his second against Australia and his first in New Zealand. But Blundell fell next ball, caught by Travis Head at short leg off Nathan Lyon and the innings sputtered again. Phillips was out for 71 off 70 balls and Henry took his 42 runs from 34 balls with four sixes as New Zealand briefly looked like avoiding the follow-on. But he holed to Labuschagne off Nathan Lyon with New Zealand still four runs short.