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ADITI FINISHES 21ST IN SINGAPORE 11 SPORTS

FINAL CALL FROM PM: KABHI ALVIDA NA KEHNA

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA/ RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

PM Modi during his last Union Cabinet meeting

The last meeting of the Council of Ministers of the current Lok Sabha, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, chaired a brainstorming session on the vision document for 'Viksit Bharat 2047' at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan. "Go and win. See you soon," Modi told in the last meeting of the Council of Ministers of the current term. Confident of returning to power post the General Elections in the next couple of months, Modi and his Ministers worked out a 100-day agenda for "immediate steps for quick implementation after the formation of the new Government in May". Government sources said the Ministers discussed a detailed action plan for the next five years. The meeting came a day after the BJP released the first list of its candidates on 195 seats across 16 States, with the next set of lists due in the next couple of days. Several Ministries articulated their ideas in the meeting, which was called after an initiative by the PM personally to understand the vision of his council of Ministers based on which he is to form the next team if voted back, Government sources said. The roadmap for Viksit Bharat is the result of more than two years of intensive preparation by all the Central Government Ministries and departments. "It involved a whole of Government approach involving all Ministries and wide-ranging



consultations with State Governments, academia, industry bodies, civil society, scientific organisations, and mobilisation of youth for seeking their ideas, suggestions, and inputs. More than 2,700 meetings, workshops, and seminars were held at various levels. Suggestions of more than 20 lakh youth were received," Government officials said. The roadmap for Viksit Bharat has a comprehensive blueprint with clearly articulated national vision, aspirations, goals, and action points. Its goals include areas like economic growth, SDGs, ease of living, ease of doing business, infrastructure, social welfare, etc," the sources said. Several Ministries articulated their ideas in the meeting, which is likely to be the last such get-together before the Lok Sabha polls are announced. The Prime Minister has been convening meetings of the entire Council of Ministers periodically to discuss key policy and governance issues. However, this particular meeting has assumed political significance in light of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, expected to be held in April-May. While the Election Commission is intensively preparing for the polls, likely to be announced early next week, Modi has a tightly packed schedule. He is expected to attend 29 programmes spread across 12 States and Union Territories over the next 10 days. Continued on Page 2

NAFRAT KI DUNIYA CHHODO, SAYS BJP

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In what can be seen as a move to undergo an 'image makeover,' the BJP leadership has made it clear that there is no space for hate speeches that serve as fodder for the Opposition and embarrass the ruling party. The BJP dropped controversial figures like Bhopal MP Sadhvi Pragma Singh Thakur and MPs Parvesh Singh Verma and Ramesh Bidhuri from Delhi, as well as Jayant Sinha from Hazaribagh, Jharkhand. Pragma was removed due to her comments on killed ATS chief Hemant Karkare and Godse, while Parvesh and Bidhuri were sidelined for hate speeches disturbing communal harmony. These leaders have courted controversies with their remarks inside and outside Parliament. Hours before the announcement of the first list, Sinha opted out of the Lok Sabha polls, anticipating that he would not be given a ticket this time. This sends a clear message that the BJP is more 'image conscious' than ever as it faces the might of the INDIA alliance, a conglomeration of 31 political parties. In Bhopal, the BJP has replaced Pragma with Alok Sharma.



During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Pragma gained prominence as one of the 'giant killers,' securing victory over Congress stalwart Digvijaya Singh by an impressive margin of 3,64,822 votes. Despite her electoral success, Pragma's tenure has been marred by controversies. Pragma, who is an accused in the 2008 Malegaon bombings case, was out on bail on health grounds and attempted various means like playing kabaddi and attending garba nights to stay away from controversy. Continued on Page 2

Dr Harshvardhan Bids Farewell to Politics



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister and senior BJP leader Dr Harsh Vardhan on Sunday announced his decision to quit politics to return to his roots (medical profession), after an illustrious electoral career spanning over three decades. This came a day after the BJP announced its first list of candidates for Lok Sabha polls, dropping two-term MP Harsh Vardhan from Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha seat and naming Praveen Khandelwal

as its candidate instead. In a post on X, he said he is returning to his ENT clinic at Krishna Nagar. Sources said Vardhan was denied ticket from Chandni Chowk due to non-performance, mismanagement during Covid-19 and disconnect from locals and party karyakartas. Vardhan was replaced by Mansukh Mandaviya in mid-2021 during the height of the Covid-19 crisis. He was removed from the council of Ministers as part of a reshuffle. "After over thirty years of a

Bhojpuri actor Pawan opts out of Asansol

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Bhojpuri singer-actor Pawan Singh withdrew his name from the Lok Sabha poll contest for the Asansol seat in West Bengal on Sunday, a day after the BJP named him as its candidate for the constituency currently represented by Trinamool Congress's Shatrughan Sinha.

In a post on X, Singh thanked the BJP leadership for his candidature but added that he would not be able to contest from Asansol "due to some reason". Though he did not specify the reason behind his decision, his candidature had drawn criticism from the TMC, which is in power in West Bengal. Continued on Page 2

glorious electoral career, during which I won all the five Assembly and two parliamentary elections that I fought with exemplary margins, and held a multitude of prestigious positions in the party organisation and the Governments at the State and Centre I finally bow out to return to my roots," his post read. "I move on, I really can't wait. I have promises to keep .. and miles to go before I sleep !! I have a dream .. and I know your blessings shall always remain with me . My ENT clinic at Krishna Nagar too awaits my return," he added. Vardhan said he was grateful for the opportunity to defend his fellow citizens during times of crisis. He credited his success to the support of his party workers, supporters, and leaders. "Service to mankind was my motto when I joined MBBS in GSVM Medical College, Kanpur fifty years back with a desire to help the poor and needy. A swamyamsewak at heart, I have always been an ardent admirer of Deen Dayal Upadhyay's Antodaya philosophy of striving to serve the last man in the queue. It was at the insistence of the then RSS leadership that I jumped into the electoral fray." Continued on Page 2

INDIA Bloc kickstarts in Patna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/NEW DELHI

The Opposition Bloc INDIA virtually sounded the bugle for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls on Sunday when top leaders, including Rahul Gandhi of the Congress, converged in Bihar's Capital for a mammoth rally. Those who addressed the gathering included RJD supremo Lalu Prasad, former Bihar Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav, and Samajwadi Party president and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, who stated, "great thrones are shaken when enthusiastic youngsters come together (jab joshile naujawan mil jaate hain, bade bade takht hil jaate hain)". Rahul, who had flown down from Madhya Pradesh, taking a break from his 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra',



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge with party leader Rahul Gandhi, RJD chief Lalu Prasad, party leader Tejashwi Yadav, Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav and other Opposition leaders during 'Jan Vishwas Rally', in Patna, on Sunday

spoke before AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, and returned for the mass outreach programme. Left leaders like Sitaram Yechury, D Raja, and Dipankar Bhattacharya, general secretaries of CPI(M), CPI, and CPI(ML) respectively, were also present as part of the stakeholders of the INDIA Bloc. The rally attracted a huge crowd, with many supporters of the RJD

reaching the city on Saturday night and putting up tents erected at various places where sumptuous meals were on offer. People had started pouring into Gandhi Maidan since early morning, and despite the heavens opening, most of them stayed until the rally concluded in the evening. The former Congress president made a brief, about 15-minute-long, speech and charged the Narendra Modi Government at the Centre with "working for only two-three super-rich people and neglecting Dalits and backward classes who comprise 73 per cent of the population". Kharge, after whom the 'Jan Vishwas Maha Rally' was signed off by RJD president Lalu, lambasted Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for his recent volte-face. Continued on Page 2

Weather change woes grip India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/SHIMLA

As winter starts to recede in almost parts of India, rain and hailstorm have gripped several regions, with the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) predicting thunderstorms and light to moderate rainfall over the next few days in several States due to formation of western disturbance. An avalanche hit a village in Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul and Spiti district in the wee hours of Sunday, obstructing the flow of Chenab and triggering an alert in the adjoining area. Heavy snow and rainfall in Himachal Pradesh in the past two days have triggered over half a dozen avalanches and landslides, leading to closure of over 500 roads, including five



national highways. So far no casualty has been reported in any of the avalanches. As many as six persons died in separate lightning strike incidents in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana as rain and hailstorms lashed parts here. Flow of Chenab river was obstructed following an avalanche at Dara Waterfall near Jasrat village in Lahaul and Spiti. The district, located at a high altitude, reported heavy snowfall in the past 24 hours. "Intense spell of rainfall/snowfall is likely to continue over Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand and moderate thunderstorm/hailstorm activity over East Uttar Pradesh, Bihar & Sikkim on today and significant decrease thereafter. Continued on Page 2

Elephantine problem hits Kerala this festive season

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

It is the Pooram season in Kerala and Pooram, the Malayalam word for 'festival of festivals,' is celebrated with great gaiety and exuberance in temples, both big and small. This is the time of year when expatriate Malayalees visit their hometowns to partake in the Pooram festivities in their villages. The two indispensable elements of these Poorams are caparisoned elephants and Panchavadyam/Thayambaka, a fusion of percussion instru-

ments played by more than a hundred artists, while the tuskers wave their ears and tails in appreciation of the music. As the Pooram season gains momentum, a debate ensues among Pooram enthusiasts and animal rights activists regarding the cruelty inflicted upon elephants. There was a time when festivals in Aarattupuzha and Thrissur featured hundreds of elephants adorned with Alavattam, Venchamaram, and umbrellas of varying colours and shapes.

However, as the number of domesticated elephants has decreased, the hiring of elephants for Pooram has become a costly proposition. "There are just 500 domesticated elephants in Kerala as owners of the pachyderms are finding it difficult to rear elephants. Kerala is in need of more elephants as the Forest Department has stopped trapping elephants from forests," said Rameshan, an elephant lover based in Palakkadu, whose tea shop is dotted with pictures of hundreds of ele-



phants. Rameshan says there can be no temple festivals without elephants. "It is a tradition dating back to hundreds of years," said Ramesh. V K Venkitachalam, chairman, Heritage Animal Task Force, is waging a battle against deploying elephants for temple festivals. "The cruelty meted out to these elephants by their mahouts and owners put human beings to hang their heads in shame. Elephants are made to stand from 7 am to 9 pm without

any break and that too in scorching sun. There is no hard and fast rule that temple festivals should have elephants," said Venkitachalam. He pointed out that three to four tuskers were killed while they were being tranquilised and called for a probe into the affair. The daily rent for an elephant to be paraded in the Pooram varies from ₹1,00,000 to ₹1,50,000. This is in addition to the transportation charge as there are rules that the tuskers should be ferried in trucks

from its place of residence to the temple and back. "It is true that there is severe shortage of elephants in the State. Laws should be amended to make elephant rearing a viable business," Ramesh. Noted ecologist and animal rights activist Dr Nanditha Krishna of CPR Environmental Education Centre, Chennai, is of the opinion that the scriptures do not mention about deploying elephants during Temple Festivals. Continued on Page 2

Good Government priority is to serve people: Yogi

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR
 Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, said that a good government's priority was to serve people. He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, stating that the double-engine government focuses on both development and the welfare of the poor, ensuring prosperity along with security, livelihood and respect for faith. The chief minister performed the bhoomi-pujan and laid the foundation stone of the first veterinary science college of eastern Uttar Pradesh at Tal Nador, Gorakhpur. The construction of this college, to be built on 80 acres, will cost around Rs 350 crore.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Yogi said in the previous governments, people were troubled by goons and mafia and only a few benefited from the schemes, while the majority of the public kept watching helplessly. He emphasised that under the current government, everyone was benefiting from the schemes without any discrimination. The chief minister mentioned that under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the strength of the new India is resonating worldwide. "Such a government has never been seen before, and it is essential to understand this and support the Modi government once again in the upcoming Lok



Sabha elections, realising the slogan of 'Abki Baar, Chaar Sau Paar', he stated. Chief Minister Yogi assured the people that the veterinary science college being built at Tal Nador would be transformed into a university in the future, making Gorakhpur home to

five universities. He mentioned that the college will not only focus on animal healthcare but also undertake breed improvements. "Fisheries related programmes will also be taken forward here. The college aims to provide education for aspiring veterinarians, offering them a new platform to build their careers," he added. The chief minister explained that the design of the college is inspired by the vision of King Shalihar of Shrivasthi, who, in the third century, composed the Shalihar Samhita and contributed to the prosperity of the livestock sector. He further mentioned that Dakshinanchal, which remained underdeveloped for a long time, is now progressing

rapidly under the double-engine government. An international stadium will soon be built in this area, along with Varanasi four-lane road and the College of Veterinary Sciences. The municipal corporation is planning to establish a 50-acre cow shelter near the college, he added. Discussing the development of Gorakhpur, the chief minister mentioned that the fertilizer factory, which was closed during the Congress government, was restarted by the Modi government. "A new AIIMS has been established in Gorakhpur, and the Link Expressway is about to become operational. The establishment of large-scale industries in GIDA (Gorakhpur Industrial

Development Authority) has provided employment to 5,000 youths in the region," he added. The chief minister mentioned the consecration of Lord Ram's idol in Ayodhya, comparing the transformation of the city under the present government with the situation during opposition governments, which ordered firing on the devotees of Lord Ram. He noted that the blessings of the deity and prasad (offering) are also available. Seeking support for MP Ravi Kishan Shukla, the candidate from Gorakhpur in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Chief Minister Yogi said that every party worker would go door to door posing as Ravi Kishan and ask for votes.

Calcutta HC judge to resign, may join BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Justice Abhijeet Gangopadhyay the much banded "people's judge" of the Calcutta High Court on Sunday announced his decision to resign from his post and join politics. "I have decided to descend in a larger field... I will join politics and may join any of the parties ... It could be Left, Congress or the BJP," the judge who is responsible for sending many politicians including Trinamool Congress ministers, and MLAs to jail said. Justice Gangopadhyay is likely to formally resign on Tuesday as per Article 2017A. He has been handling school



services recruitment cases. Though he would not say as to which party he would join, sources close to him said he was going to join BJP and most probably could contest from Tamluk seat. "I will not disclose which party I will join," he said adding he would contest from any seat that his party would ask him to contest from.

Parents of missing seaman seek PM intervention for son return

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Aggrieved parents of a missing seaman Sahil Verma, hailing from Jammu Sunday made a passionate appeal to the Prime Minister, Defence Minister, and Home Minister to ensure the safe return of their missing son. This appeal was made by the parents a day after the Western Naval Command of the Indian Navy made public that a Naval Board of Inquiry had been ordered for detailed investigations to ascertain the whereabouts of the missing Seaman Sahil Verma. Worried family members also demanded a CBI probe into the circumstances leading to his "mysterious disappearance" at sea from an Indian naval ship while on deployment. On Saturday, the Western Naval Command posted a message on its official handle on X, "In an unfortunate incident, Sahil Verma, Seaman II, has



been reported missing at sea from (an) Indian Naval Ship while on deployment since February 27, 2024. The Navy immediately launched a massive search operation with ships and aircraft, which is continuing." In Jammu, the family members are struggling to receive real-time information in the absence of any direct liaison with the senior officers of the Western Naval Command. On Sunday, father Subash Chander and mother Rama Kumari — who live in the Ghou Manhasan area of Jammu — sought direct intervention from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence

Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha to ensure the safe return of their missing son. "It is astonishing that a soldier went missing from his naval ship and is not traceable. I have been told that the CCTV cameras installed on the ship did not find anyone falling into the sea. Then where is my son?" Chander said at his residence on the outskirts of the city. Referring to the information shared by the superior officers so far Chander said, "We got a call on February 29 informing that our son went missing on board the ship two days before that... we last talked to him on Sunday (February 25) and nothing is known (about) what happened to him." "We want the government to hand over the case to the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) for a thorough probe. He was on duty and is missing," he added.

12 names announced by BJP in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Though the current situation in the State and the strong anti-incumbency wave against the CPI(M) led Kerala Government looked favourable for forces opposed to the Marxists, the names of 12 BJP candidates announced on Saturday evening has dampened the spirit of the Hindutva party activists and supporters. "The only thing which we could say after going through the list of 12 names announced by the BJP High Command is that there is no possibility of the Lotus blooming this time too in the State," said a veteran BJP leader who has been with the party since its previous incarnation as Jan Sangh. The leader, who never aspired for any power or position in the party said that the names announced on Saturday do not inspire the voters. "These names are hard to sell in Kerala," he said. Even union minister V Muraliedharan, who is the



BJP candidate from Attingal constituency was cautious in his reaction. "The Kerala voters had always voted against the pattern followed by their north Indian counterparts. But this time, the good works done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is certain to make a change in the State," said Muraliedharan. But the union minister steered clear from making any comments on the Prime Minister's forecast that the NDA would cross double digit mark in Kerala. The initial euphoria created by Suresh Gopi, the film

actor-turned-politician at Thrissur is slowly dying down as the sitting MP T N Prathapan of Indian National Congress and Sunil Kumar, the challenger from the CPI getting into high pitch campaign. "Suresh Gopi will win from Thrissur if the BJP workers and activists vote for him. But if the past records are any indication, it is unlikely because of the group war and caste dynamics. The Eezhavas in the party are likely to vote for the CPI candidate and there is a possibility of the BJP candidate finishing third," said Raju

Raphel, veteran journalist based in Thrissur. Candidates like M T Ramesh (Kozhikode), Praafal Krishnan (Vatakara), C Raghunath (Kannur), Niveditha Subramaniam (Ponnani) C Krishnakumar (Palakkadu) and Shobha Surendran (Alappuzha) are likely to end up as also rans, according to many BJP leaders who spoke to The Pioneer. Thiruvananthapuram will see Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar taking on Sashi Tharoor of INC. Though Tharoor's track record as MP during the last three terms are not impressive, even his rivals in the party agree that the playboy politician would register a smooth sailing. Chandrasekhar, a business baron who owns Asianet News, a Malayalam TV channel may have to do a lot of explaining to the voters as his channel is the most virulent critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP. The channel was in the forefront of the agitation against

the CAA and Farm Reforms Bill. It is interesting to see how the channel is going to handle the bout between Chandrasekhar and Tharoor. It was widely believed that P C Gorge, the seven-time legislator who joined the party would be fielded from Pathanamthitta but the ticket has been given to Anil Antony, the elder son of A K Antony, veteran Congress leader. Though GGeorge sounded unconcerned about missing the bus, he made it clear that Anil may have to be taken all around the constituency to be introduced to the voters as he is not known widely. Some of the seat expectants, seeing the writing on the wall have made a strategic withdrawal from the race and are trying to get accommodated in any of the Raj Bhavans in the country. "Some are being supported and propped up by living saints and gurus," said a woman leader who too expressed her unhappiness in not getting a party ticket.

NH 44 closed due to damaged road near Panthyal

PNS ■ JAMMU

The National Highway connecting the Union Territory of Jammu Kashmir with the rest of India suffered damages near Panthyal after a major portion of the road link connecting the T-5 tunnel was washed away during the fresh spell of heavy rains in the region. The vulnerable road patch witnessed a similar episode in July 2023, a few months after the T-5 tunnel was thrown open for vehicular movement giving relief to the hapless commuters tired of maneuvering their vehicles through the makeshift tunnel to prevent getting hit by shooting stones. The traffic police department Sunday while posting the latest image of the road condition advised commuters to avoid traveling on the National Highway -44 due to a damaged road near Panthyal. The road clearing operations were also going on along several patches near Nachlana, Dalvas due to landslides and shooting stones. Traffic on the National Highway was not allowed for the second consecutive day on Sunday, owing to landslides, mudslides and shooting stones. The multiple landslides triggered by incessant rains between Banihal and Ramban led the highway to be blocked since Saturday. However, with the improvement of the weather, NHAI has stepped up efforts to ensure the early opening of the arterial road.

INDIA Bloc kickstarts...

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Lauding Lal's son and heir apparent Tejashwi for ensuring that jobs were created on a large scale during the 17-month-period the latter occupied the Deputy CM's post, Kharage said, "Your chacha (referring to Nitish) has done a flip-flop. He may do so again. But do not accept him henceforth." Notably, Kumar, who heads the JD(U), had allied with RJD-Congress and Left combine in 2022, snapping ties with the BJP which he accused of trying to engineer a split in his own party. He played a key role in the formation of the INDIA Bloc, though after returning to the NDA, he has been claiming that he was never happy with the way things moved forward in the Opposition coalition and that even the acronym did not have his approval. Lal, arch-rival of Nitish, who

signed off his speech in style asking the crowds to "be prepared for the upcoming elections and said he will be there to boost morale of the people as they vote to drive out Modi from power at the Centre". Recalling Kumar's first volte face in 2017, the RJD president said, "I had not hurled any abuses at Nitish back then, only called him 'palturam' (turncoat). The label has stuck to his persona by virtue of his own deeds. I can see funny videos about him on social media and wonder whether these do not drive him to shame." The wily leader had recently fished in the Bihar NDA's troubled waters by claiming his "doors were always open" for the JD(U) boss, who has aligned with the BJP despite the party maintaining that it will pursue the ambition of forming its own Government in Bihar.

FINAL CALL FROM PM: KABHI...

From Page 1

Government officials said the PM will visit Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and launch projects in Delhi as well. On Monday, he will unveil multiple development projects in Adilabad, Telangana, and later visit the Bharatiya

Nabhikeya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI) in Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu. He will address public meetings in Adilabad as well as Chennai. A five-tier security arrangement has been made for Modi's visit to Chennai on March 4. Modi will launch several projects in Sangareddy, Telangana, on March 5 and address an event before traveling to Odisha, where he will inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of numerous development initiatives. He will then address a public meeting in Chandikhole, Odisha, before traveling to West Bengal.

Elephantine...

From Page 1

"The biggest celebration in Sanatana Dharma was the return of Lord Rama and Sita to Ayodhya after defeating Raavana. It was mentioned that people in Ayodhya celebrated the Lord's return after 14 years of exile by lighting Diya and this became Diwali. But there is no mention about elephants being paraded during the celebrations. It is all the handiwork of some abnormal kings," said Dr Krishna. "Please remember that though Thrissur Pooram, the mother of all festivals, is celebrated for a day, the district is busy round-the-year with preparations for the next Pooram. It has turned out to be an industry that sustains the livelihood of thousands of people engaged in various works associated with Pooram. Though labelled as a Hindu festival, the Pooram is a venture by people belonging to different religions and communities making it a celebration of humanity.

Bhojpuri actor Pawan opts out...

From Page 1

The TMC alleged that many of his songs were crude and depicted women, including those from the State, in a vulgar way. TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee shared Singh's post on X and said, "The indomitable spirit and power of the people of West Bengal." TMC leader Santanu Sen alleged that the BJP speaks about women empowerment, but in reality they are anti-women. Asansol is home to a sizeable migrant population, and the BJP had hoped that Singh would be an effective counter to Sinha, the actor-politician who was in the saffron party for decades before walking out in 2019.

NAFRAT KI... Dr Harshvardhan Bids...

From Page 1

Her remarks on Nathuram Godse, whom she called a 'patriot', also did not sit well with the BJP. Her conduct earned censure from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Five years later, she lost her seat. She stirred controversy with remarks on former Mumbai ATS chief Hemant Karkare, who died during the 2008 terror attacks, suggesting he was killed because of her 'curse'. Additionally, her lack of activity in her constituency worked against her. A notable absence in the BJP list that surprised many was West Delhi MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, a two-time MP and son of former Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma. Before the 2020 Delhi elections, Verma made incendiary remarks during the Shaheen Bagh protest, suggesting the demonstrators would be cleared in an hour if the BJP came to power in the national Capital. Last year, reports emerged that the BJP leadership strongly condemned Verma's remarks, which called for an "economic boycott" of a particular community. Verma made these comments during a gathering titled 'Virat Hindu Sabha' organised by the local unit of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other Hindu organisations in East Delhi on October 9 last year. In his speech, Verma advocated for a "complete boycott" of "these people," without explicitly naming any particular community. South Delhi MP Ramesh

Bidhuri recently came under scrutiny for making hate remarks in Parliament during a discussion on the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission. Videos of Bidhuri's contentious comments targeting MP Danish Ali quickly circulated on social media, drawing widespread criticism. BJP president JP Nadda reportedly issued a show cause notice to Bidhuri, their party MP, over his use of objectionable language against Ali within Parliament. The offending remarks were expunged from the Parliamentary records, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh promptly expressed regret for Bidhuri's conduct during the Session. Bidhuri reacted to the party's decision to deny him a ticket for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, expressing confidence that the ruling party must have put a lot of thought behind their decision to deny tickets to four sitting MPs in Delhi. In an indirect address to the fresh faces selected by the BJP for the Lok Sabha election, Bidhuri said these are guests, "hum toh ghar ke log hain (we are family members)." He further stated that those who are part of the family have the responsibility to uphold the unit's ideology and work towards maintaining its dignity and reputation. Bidhuri emphasised that the BJP is not a family party and that they must have made the decision (to deny him a ticket) after significant deliberation.

"They could convince me only because for me politics meant opportunity to fight our three main enemies - poverty, disease and ignorance," he added. "Without remorse, I must say that it has been a marvelous innings during which my passion to serve the common man was quenched. I served as Delhi Health Minister as well as twice Union Health Minister, a subject close to my heart. I had the rare opportunity bestowed upon me to be able to first work towards creating a polio free Bharat and then to take care of the health of millions of our countrymen grappling with the dreaded Covid-19 during its first and second phases," Vardhan wrote on X (formerly Twitter). "In the long history of mankind, only a few have been granted the privilege to defend their people in hours of gravest danger! And I can proudly claim that I didn't shirk responsibility, but welcomed it. My gratitude to Ma Bharati. My reverence to my fellow citizens and my obedience to the values enshrined in our Constitution. And yes, that was the biggest privilege that Bhagwan Shri Ram bestowed upon me, the privilege of being able to save human lives!" Vardhan added. "I would like to thank all my party karyakartas, my fans and supporters amongst the common citizens as well as my party leaders... all of whom have contributed to this remarkable journey spanning over three decades," he wrote.

Weather change woes...

From Page 1

"Hailstorm observed at isolated places over Jammu-Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh," the IMD said in its special bulletin on Sunday. Meanwhile, the units of Delhi, Noida and other places in the National Capital

Region woke up to a fresh spell of rain in the early morning hours of Sunday. Delhi recorded 4 mm rainfall in the last 24 hours ending at 8:30 am as the National Capital Region and its surrounding parts experienced a sudden shift in weather as the region received light rainfall on Saturday morning with experiencing strong winds and a spell of showers. Following the rainfall, cloudy skies engulfed the region and the adjoining areas, bringing the temperature a notch down. The minimum temperature was recorded as 13.7 degrees Celsius on Sunday, normal for this time of the year. The

humidity level was recorded at 73 per cent. Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 103, in the 'moderate' category, at 9 am, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. Delhi is likely to witness a generally cloudy sky with the possibility of more rain or drizzle, the IMD said. Thunderstorm with light-to-moderate intensity rain may occur over isolated places of Delhi (Civil Lines, Dilshad Garden, Seemapuri, Kashmiri Gate, Seelampur, Shahadra, Vivek Vihar, Red Fort, Preet Vihar, Rajeev Chowk, ITO, India Gate, Akshardham Temple, Nehru Stadium) as well as in adjoining areas, the IMD

said, adding that there is also a possibility of hailstorm. The IMD predicted scattered to fairly widespread light to moderate rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds over the northern India belt with States including Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Delhi. Although, the IMD said there would be no significant change in minimum temperatures over northwest India during the next three days it would fall by 3-5 degrees Celsius thereafter. Four people died in separate lightning strike incidents in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday as rain and hailstorms lashed

parts of the UP. The deaths were reported from Lakhimpur Kheri, Hardoi, Sitapur and Shahjahanpur, said Relief Commissioner Naveen Kumar. Farrukhabad, Kannauj, Muzaffarnagar, Jalaun, Jhansi, Kanpur Dehat, Shahjahanpur, Lalitpur and Saharanpur were hit by hailstorms between 8:30 am and 2:30 pm, he said. A report was received from Mathura about a house collapse due to heavy rain, Kumar said. A Western Disturbance, coupled with a cyclonic circulation over northwest Afghanistan and its vicinity, alongside a trough extending from this circulation to the

Northwest Arabian Sea in the lower and middle tropospheric levels, is currently influencing weather patterns, according to the weather agency. Western Disturbances are most common during the winter months (November to March), but they can also occur during the pre-monsoon season (April to June). While a Google search would show that a western disturbance (WD) is an extra-tropical storm which originates in the Mediterranean region, the meaning of WD lies in its name. The disturbance travels from the "western" to the eastern direction. Disturbance means

an area of "disturbed" or reduced air pressure. Equilibrium exists in nature due to which the air in a region tries to normalise its pressure. In the term "extra-tropical storm", storm refers to low pressure. "Extra-tropical" means outside the tropics. As the Western Disturbance originates outside the tropical region, the word "extra-tropical" has been associated with them. Upon its arrival in Pakistan and northern India, clouds along with rain and snow also arrive. The moisture which Western Disturbances carry with them comes from the Mediterranean Sea and/or from the Atlantic Ocean. According to IMD, in certain

areas of Punjab, Haryana, and north western Rajasthan, hailstorm is also expected. However, the IMD predicts a significant reduction in the intensity and distribution of the severe weather in these regions from Monday onwards. According to IMD's forecast, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, and Odisha will see thunderstorms with lightning and hailstorms until March 4. While rain is likely to continue in Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland until March 5; in Arunachal Pradesh IMD expects it to extend until March 8. Some states are also likely to experience heavy snowfall over the next few days.

LG approves draft uniform policy for inter departmental allotment of land

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved a draft uniform policy for inter-departmental allotment of land including Subordinate Departments/Autonomous Bodies/Boards. The draft policy assumes significance as there was no uniform policy to deal with the inter-departmental allotment of government land, which led to inordinate delays extending up to years in the execution of critical projects, even as files to this effect kept shuffling between departments/agencies. The policy is now formulated with the approval of the LG and shall come in force with immediate effect.

"The policy inter alia, deals with the rates at which land shall be allotted, depending upon the nature of the allotment. If the allotment is for public utility it would be free of cost, provided the allotting agency had got the land in question, free of cost. In cases where the allotting agency got the land in question, at some cost i.e by way of acquisition, the rate will be based on no



profit no loss basis (as is the case with allotment of land from Delhi Development Authority (DDA)), for the allotment of land. In cases, where the land is being allotted by the land owning department to another for commercial purposes, Zonal variant rates of DDA will be charged for allotment," Raj Niwas said in a statement.

A seven-member Committee headed by Additional Chief Secretary (GAD) after several days of deliberations formulated the policy. The Committee had held deliberations on the issue based on the suggestions and inputs received from various departments.

The Chief Secretary had also convened the meeting on the subject in which officers of the Urban Development Department, L&B Department, Industries Department, Finance Department, Law Department, MCD and Education attended the meeting. The draft policy elaborates the procedure for allotment of land by Land Owning Agency to any other government body (Allottee Agency) and specific recommendations in this regard will require the approval of the LG.

"The Land and Building Department shall be the Nodal Department for the implementation of the policy and the

Land Owning Agency and Allottee Agency shall mutually decide upon the nature of allotment, in terms of whether the allotment will be on leasehold or freehold basis etc. The policy also makes it clear that prior approval of LG shall be needed for cancellation of allotment of land".

"Further, a committee under the chairmanship of Principal Secretary (Revenue) consisting of members from land requisitioning body, land owning body and the concerned District Magistrate, will examine the request for allotment of land vis-à-vis development control norms, utility and opportunity cost of the project etc. The Committee will have to submit its recommendations through the Chief Secretary, before the LG for consideration and final decision," read the statement. "The Policy, as suggested by the Law and Justice (L&J) Department, also has suitable clauses for 'keeping a record of transferred/allotment of land in the custody of concerned Administrative Department, so as to ensure proper record management in perpetuity', it said.

Three killed, four injured as car collides with truck on flyover

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Three men were killed and four injured after their car collided with a truck on the Badarpur flyover in southeast Delhi, police said on Sunday. The accident occurred late on Saturday when seven men were returning to Okhla's Sanjay Colony from a wedding in Haryana's Faridabad, they added.

Officers at Badarpur police station received a PCR call at 12.48 am about an accident on the Badarpur flyover near the Honda showroom, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Rajesh Deo said.

A police team reached the spot and rushed the injured to the trauma centre at AIIMS, Deo said. Investigations revealed that the car driver lost control of his vehicle and hit a divider on the flyover. The car bounced off the divider under the impact of the collision and landed on the opposite carriageway, where it collided with the truck, he added. The victims have been identified as one Raj (21), Sanju (38) and Dinesh (22), the



police said. Among the injured, one Ansul (18) is said to be critically while Neeraj (18), Ajit (28) and Vishal (28) are stable, they said.

Raj was unmarried and living with his family in Laxmi Nagar. His father works as a tailor in Mathura while his mother has passed away, the police said.

Sanju, a resident of Sanjay Colony, was married with two children -- a son and a daughter. He worked as a labourer at a tailor shop. Dinesh, also a resident of Sanjay Colony, was unmarried. He was a cloth cutter at a shop in Okhla, they added. According to the police, the impact of the accident was such that the car was completely mangled, the police said.

Capital witnesses drizzle, records maximum temperature



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhiites woke up to light rain on Sunday, with the minimum temperature settling at 13.7 degrees Celsius. The city recorded a maximum temperature of 26.2 degrees Celsius, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The national Capital registered 4 mm rainfall in the 24-hour period ending at 8:30 am. The city is likely to witness a generally cloudy sky with the possibility of more rain or drizzle, the IMD said.

Thunderstorm with light-to-moderate intensity rain may occur over isolated places of Delhi (Civil Lines, Dilshad Garden, Seemapuri, Kashmiri Gate, Seelampur, Shahadra,

Vivek Vihar, Red Fort, Preet Vihar, Rajeev Chowk, ITO, India Gate, Akshardham Temple, Nehru Stadium) as well as in adjoining areas, the IMD said, adding that there is also a possibility of hailstorm.

The sky would be cloudy in the next few days. However, there is no forecast of rain in the coming days, the IMD said.

The humidity level was recorded at 70 per cent at 5:20 pm. Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 125, in the "moderate" category, at 6 pm, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

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".

Bansuri questions AAP on its choice of candidate

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Sunday attacked the BJP for fielding Bansuri Swaraj from the New Delhi constituency in the Lok Sabha elections, claiming she had represented "anti-national powers" in court, even as she hit back at Delhi's ruling party over its choice of candidate from the seat. Hitting back, Swaraj questioned the AAP on its choice of candidate, who was allegedly beaten up by his own cadre in Rajendra Nagar on Saturday.

Responding to the AAP's allegations, she said, "I would like to ask the AAP — why have you fielded a candidate who was beaten up by his own cadre in Rajendra Nagar yesterday (Saturday)?"

"They have named a candidate who is not liked by his own party members. They can put allegations against us but people will give them a reply in the elections," she said. The AAP



has named Somnath Bharti as its candidate from the New Delhi seat. Delhi Minister Atishi said at a press conference that Swaraj — the daughter of late BJP leader and former Union Minister Sushma Swaraj — should apologise to the people of the country for taking up such cases and also demanded that the saffron party replace her. "Bansuri Swaraj has replaced Meenakshi Lekhi from the

New Delhi Lok Sabha constituency. She has represented anti-national powers in courts of law," the senior AAP leader claimed. "She (Swaraj) represented the Chandigarh mayor who was elected by cheating in the recent mayoral polls. She has represented Lalit Modi, a fugitive, from 2012 to 2014 in courts of law," Atishi alleged. She also demanded that the BJP change its candidate from the constituency.

Flower festival Palaash concludes at DDA Greens

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA)'s two-day flower festival Palaash concluded at DDA Greens-Shivaji Marg on Sunday, drawing people of the national Capital closer to the nature in a fun-filled environment. Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena visited the festival and appreciated the hard work of the participants and DDA in making the festival successful.

The festival saw plethora of activities including flower display, entertainment avenues and various competitions. To make the festival participative, many competitions were organised, which were also open to the public like flowering and foliage plants in a pot, flower arrangement in vases, flower themed fancy dress for children, floral rangoli competition and painting competition for children.



The festival presented a stunning array of flowers, plants, and floral arrangements. Large crowd gathered to explore different varieties of flowers from indigenous to exotic, beautifully arranged to create captivating displays.

Alongside the floral displays, the festival also featured entertainment avenues such as DJ play, ceremonial band performance, interactive selfie points and ride attraction for kids to tickle their hearts. To tantalize the taste buds of visitors, the festival also offered a selection of delicacies from our rich street food.

DDA's flower festival is organised annually as an exhibition-cum-competition event amongst all Horticulture Divisions of Delhi Development Authority, vying for recognition as the foremost custodians of DDA Parks. Last year, it was held at

Swarn Jayanti Park Rohini.

The objective of the festival is to promote and encourage residents of city to collaborate with DDA towards the betterment of greens, also to foster the passion of horticulture enthusiasts towards the scrupulous upkeep of greens.

The grassroot level workers get an opportunity to display their skills while a healthy competition amongst them is promoted. The event is named Palaash after the flower of Butea monosperma, which blooms in the capital during this time.

The Greens at Shivaji Marg constitute of three parts readily accessible from Shivaji Marg & Rohtak Road. Spanning acres of meticulously manicured grounds, the park offers a respite from the hustle and bustle of city life, inviting visitors to reconnect with nature and rejuvenate their senses.

Classify cancer as notifiable disease, improve access to treatment, say experts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Highlighting the pressing need for concerted efforts to address the challenges associated with cancer care in India, experts here have urged the government to prioritise the classification of the disease as a notifiable disease and to work towards improving access to comprehensive care and treatment facilities nationwide.

This move, they argue, would ensure accurate reporting of incidence and enable effective follow-up measures, the argued.

Indrani Kaushal, Joint Secretary, Union Health Ministry underscored the gravity of the situation, citing projections from a study conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). According to the study, India is projected to witness 15.33 lakh new cancer cases annually, with an estimated mortality rate of around 8 lakh.

Speaking at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) Roundtable for the Eastern Region, Kaushal highlighted Odisha as one of the top 12 states contributing significantly to the country's cancer incidence.

The experts also drew attention to the inadequate infrastructure for cancer care in India, noting that 85% of districts in the four Eastern states lack comprehensive cancer care centers.

Only 20% of cancer patients in the country have access to radiotherapy, a crucial treatment modality. Raj Gore, the co-lead of the

FICCI Task Force on Cancer Care and CEO of Healthcare Global Enterprises Limited (HCG), emphasized the urgent need for more comprehensive cancer care centers across the nation. He noted that less than 30% of districts in India have access to such facilities, highlighting the magnitude of the problem.

"Our task is cut out, and the magnitude of the problem is far greater than many realise," stated Gore.

"Our focus should not only be on raising awareness and prevention but also on ensuring better patient outcomes through timely and complete treatment of patients," he added.

Gore stressed the importance of not only raising awareness and prevention efforts but also ensuring better patient outcomes through timely and complete treatment. Additionally, the experts called for enhanced grassroots-level prevention and awareness programs, along with training initiatives for healthcare workers such as Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs).

The formation of the FICCI Task Force on Cancer Care represents a concerted effort to tackle these challenges head-on.

"Our focus should not only be on raising awareness and prevention but also on ensuring better patient outcomes through timely and complete treatment of patients. This encompasses improving access to comprehensive cancer care centres and mitigating the additional financial burden on patients and their families," added Gore.

NDRF enhances rescuers skills to ensure dignity of the dead

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The NDRF, which is mandated to save lives during disasters, has now taken upon itself to train its rescuers and dogs in specialised skills for correct identification of the dead and ensure their dignity. The federal contingency force is working on new areas of victim identification forensics and training of cadaver dogs, NDRF Director General (DG) Atul Karwal told PTI during an interaction.

The DG said a new 'victim identification' capsule has been added to the NDRF's existing module on deceased management that is imparted to the personnel as a part of the basic 'first responder course'. As part of this module, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) rescuers are trained on how to recover and take care of the bodies during accidents and disasters, ensure respect to the mortal remains which may be rotten or broken into pieces, how to put them together and place them in body bags and precautions to be taken so that there is no spread of an epidemic.

"We are shortly going to start a victim identification course from what we learnt during the Balasore rail accident... This is forensic science. When we recovered bodies in Balasore, we later found that the exact location of the recovery was not marked.

"What should have been done is that if we are recovering a body from bogie X, we should put a tag or mark there so that later you can match it with the railway reservation chart or the passenger manifest and ensure that the person is identified swiftly and correctly," Karwal said. This course will also train our



rescuers in gaining skills that will enable them to help the local administration and medical staff in taking biometrics and DNA samples of victims in time so that down the line, identification of the deceased is possible, he said.

The Balasore accident involved a massive collision of three trains near the Bahanaga Bazar station in Odisha on June 2, 2023 killing more than 290 passengers. It took many days to identify some of the victims, hand them over to their kin even as many bodies remained unclaimed. The NDRF chief also spoke about enhancing capabilities of the canine squad of the force, which currently is only trained to sniff out victims who are alive, in this domain.

"Cadaver dog training is right now under review. We are thinking how can we do that. We did some experimentation with dogs detecting victims who are drowned... Dogs swimming on the surface detecting a drowned human victim under the water..." Karwal said.

Dog breeds like the Belgian Malinois, Labrador etc are being tried and this is another avenue which can be explored hereafter, the DG said. Cadaver dogs are trained to

pick the odour of the dead inside an earthquake-hit building or any such disaster site. Karwal said a "holistic" review of the training, equipment and the physical and mental capacity of the NDRF personnel has also been undertaken. We completed a training needs analysis (TNA) along with the experts of the IIM Rohtak, he said.

A similar TNA was conducted for the Indian Police Service (IPS) trainees at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy in Hyderabad when Karwal headed it as its director.

IIM Rohtak experts conducted a survey by putting a questionnaire to all 14,000 rescuers. They looked at ten states and did a survey asking police, home guards, civil defence and local administration they interact with. The experts also went to three places where victims were either addressed or were taken care of by the NDRF, the DG said.

"The idea was to find out how did we (NDRF rescuers) come across to other stakeholders, the victims, what attributes do you bring on board which a victim sees but I am blind to and which we might need to improve upon," he said.

A divine journey through art

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

If you're seeking more of the divine saga of Lord Rama following the Ram Mandir consecration at Ayodhya early this year, then the Ramayana Chitra Kavyam Exhibition being showcased at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) here is the perfect continuation.

This exhibition offers a captivating exploration of the Ramayana of the epic tale of Lord Rama, providing a rich tapestry of artistic interpretations and cultural expressions.

Jointly inaugurated by Meenakshi Lekhi, Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, and Jeevan Thondaman, Minister in the Government of Sri Lanka on March 1, the exhibition marks a momentous occasion in fostering cultural exchange and artistic expression between the two neighbouring nations. From paintings to sculptures, textiles to shadow puppets, each artwork offers a unique perspective on the epic saga of Lord Rama.

The exhibition which will remain on view until 30th April 2024, provides a unique and enriching experience for all who attend. Sarita Verma, an IT professional who has love for mythology and never misses a chance to attend such exhibitions at the venue said, "this offers an opportunity to immerse myself in various cultural festivals, performances, and events, including traditional music, dance, and storytelling related to our great epic."

After the inauguration of the exhibition, Thondaman too



had noted that "Ramayana serves as a common cultural narrative, for both Sri Lanka and India, contributes to a shared cultural consciousness, and strengthens ties." Lekhi had echoed similar sentiments as she said, "the footprint of Ramayana has been magnanimous and undeniable in the world, especially in South East Asia.

"The Ramayana is a timeless text which stands as a beacon of wisdom, virtue, and moral guidance. The epic is a reservoir of cultural values that have transcended time and space, connecting diverse civilisations in a shared understanding of humanity."

Lekhi highlighted the Ramayana's connection with Sri Lanka which is etched in the landscape, where sites like Ashok Vatika are steeped in the lore of Lord Rama's journey. Further, "it strengthens the civilizational and cultural links, not only through the Ramayana Trail, which entwines the recently sanctified Ram Mandir in Ayodhya but also the Buddhist pil-

grimage circuit between the two countries," she added.

Director General of NGMA Dr. Sanjeev Kishor Goutam said that Ramayana Chitra Kavyam stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of the epic, showcasing the creativity and talent of eminent Indian modern, contemporary, and traditional artists.

The exhibition is also showcasing various cultural festivals, including Natyakavyam Bharatanatyam performances by the renowned Padmashri Geeta Chandran, Ramcharit Prasang by Ramsahay Pandey (Padmashri) & Group, Hari Katha in Sanskrit by Uma Maheshwari (Padmashri), Natyakatha: Katha Siya Ram Ki by Padma Vibhushan, Dr. Sonal Mansingh.

Also on the platter is enchanting performances like Dastangoi, Ram ka Vanvas by Fouzia Dastango & Ritesh Yadav, Ramayana Chaarni Gaan by Yogesh Bhai Gadhvi, Jagatoddharana based on Ramayana by Banashree Rao & Group, Parshurama by Shashidharan Nair, Ramkatha- Kabir ke Ram by Kaluram Damariya & Group.

PM Modi to attend Bharat Shakti war game in Pokhran

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Pokhran, Rajasthan on March 12 to witness war game 'Bharat Shakti' showcasing India's operational readiness to meet any challenge and increased use of indigenous made weapons and systems.

The exercise comes at a time when the government has given a big boost to Indian defence industry to achieve self-reliance in developing state of art of weapons for use by the three Services. Efforts are also on to accelerate export of weapon systems to friendly countries.

As regards the exercise, it was learnt Prime Minister Modi may urge the military leadership to develop strategies and tactics suited to Indian conditions security challenges. The top military brass including Chief of Defence Staff(CDS)General Anil



Chauhan will be present at the exercise, it was learnt.

The exercise also test the resilience and integrity of indigenous communication systems and networks to ensure that the enemy in unable to hack into them during hostile conditions.

'Bharat Shakti' exercise will also put to practice ways evolved to enhance synergy

among the three services, sources said.

The mega drill is likely to see participation of Tejas fighter aircraft, K-9 artillery guns, indigenous drones, Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers and short-range missiles. Last year, Prime Minister Modi undertook a sortie in the indigenously designed and manufactured Tejas jet.

CBI chargesheets seven in Manipur armoury loot case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has filed a charge sheet against seven accused in connection with the looting of arms and ammunition from the Bishnupur police armoury during the Manipur ethnic violence last year, officials said on Sunday.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which is probing cases related to the ethnic clashes in Manipur, recently filed its charge sheet before the court of chief judicial magistrate in Kamrup (Metro) in Assam's Guwahati.

The accused named in the charge sheet are Laishram Prem Singh, Khumukcham Dhiren alias Thapka, Moirangthem Anand Singh, Athokpam Kajit alias Kishorjit, Loukrakpam Michael Mangangcha alias Michael, Konthoujam Romojit Meitei alias Romojit, and Keisham Johnson alias Johnson. On August 3 last year, a mob looted more than 300 weapons, 19,800 rounds of ammunition and other accessories from two rooms of the 2nd Indian Reserve Battalion headquarters at



Naransaina in Bishnupur. Around 9,000 rounds of bullets of different calibres, an AK series assault rifle, three 'Ghaatak' rifles, 195 self-loading rifles, five MP-5 guns, 16 9mm pistols, 25 bulletproof jackets, 21 carbines, and 124 hand grenades, among others, were looted by the mob, the officials said.

Barring Laishram Prem Singh and Khumukcham Dhiren alias Thapka, the remaining five have been earlier charge-sheeted by the CBI in looting of police armoury at the Manipur Police Training

Centre (MPTC) at Pangei in Imphal.

This incident took place on May 4 last year, the day ethnic clashes between the majority Meitei community and tribal Kukis broke out in the northeast state. As alleged in the FIR, a mob stormed into the MPTC complex and looted a huge number of arms and ammunition from the armoury.

Moirangthem Anand Singh is alleged to be a former member of the proscribed People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and the Kangleipak

Communist Party (Noyon), while the remaining are believed to be overground workers of valley-based banned terror outfits.

They had earlier been arrested by the Manipur Police in September last year when they were allegedly extorting money by wearing police uniform and carrying sophisticated weapons, the officials said. Their arrest had sparked off a protest that continued for two days.

The five were released following a court order but Singh was picked up by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), placed under arrest and brought to the national capital.

Singh was arrested for allegedly having links with Myanmar-based rebel groups and conspiring to wage war against India by exploiting the current ethnic unrest in Manipur. While Singh is in judicial custody, the fate of the other six was not immediately known.

The Supreme Court in August last year had transferred all CBI cases from Manipur to Assam.

The top court's direction

came during a hearing of a batch of petitions related to the clashes in Manipur. Among the petitioners were two Kuki women whose assault by a mob was recorded on video which went viral later.

Among the slew of measures announced by the apex court were ensuring recording of statements of the victims and also directing the chief justice of the Gauhati High Court to nominate judicial officers above the rank of judicial magistrate (first class) and sessions judge to deal with cases related to the Manipur violence.

The state has witnessed escalating violence since May 3, 2023 with 219 casualties reported after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' in the hill districts protested the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The Meiteis, constituting around 53 per cent of Manipur's population, reside predominantly in the Imphal Valley. The tribals, including Nagas and Kukis, who make up 40 per cent, primarily inhabit the hill districts.

Two chargesheeted for revival of naxal activities in Bihar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The NIA has chargesheeted two CPI(Maoist) activists, including a politburo member, in a case related to attempts by the proscribed outfit to revive its activities in Bihar's Magadh zone, an official said on Sunday.

The supplementary charge sheet was filed in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) special court in Patna against key politburo member Pramod Mishra alias 'Sohan Da' of Aurangabad district and his associate Anil Yadav alias 'Ankush' of Gaya, the federal agency spokesperson said. The NIA had on February 2 chargesheeted two other persons in the case.

Mishra, also known as Vanshijari, Doctor Saab, Janardan, Dada and Baba Ji,



and Yadav have been charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the official said.

According to NIA, both have criminal cases registered against them under sections of

the IPC, Explosive Substances Act, Arms Act and the UAPA. "Mishra has 39 cases registered against him in various police stations in Aurangabad and Gaya, in addition to six cases in Jharkhand and two in Kaimur area. Yadav has six cases against him in various police stations

in the districts of Aurangabad and Gaya," the spokesperson said.

The official said investigations have revealed that Mishra was involved in promoting and propagating Maoist ideology, for which he was also recruiting cadres in his area.

He was also raising funds and organising meetings of the old Naxal cadres, the spokesperson said, adding that Yadav, a subzonal committee Member and active cadre of the outfit, was involved in raising funds through the collection of levy from brick kiln owners and contractors.

Investigations in the case were initiated by the NIA on September 26 last year and the agency found that these two accused, along with Rohit Rai, Pramod Yadav and other, had conducted a meeting in Mahi

village of Aurangabad on June 8 last year.

"The meeting was aimed at the organisation's revival in Magadh zone and the collection of levy from business establishments, contractors, toll plazas and other such entities for strengthening the CPI(Maoist) activities," the spokesperson said. Acting on Mishra's directions, according to the official, the remaining three accused and others were engaged in motivating and recruiting more cadres to carry out illegal and violent activities to further their unlawful and nefarious designs and plans. They were actively promoting the outfit's ideology and carrying out unlawful activities intended to disrupt peace and public order, the spokesperson added.

Brainstorming session to boost Make in India initiative in defence sector

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking the spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat and 'Make in India' initiative forward, the Department of Military Affairs under the Ministry of Defence, is conducting an intensive brainstorming over the next two days on March 4-5, 2024 between the Service Headquarters and important stakeholders from Department of Defence Production, Defence Industry representatives and other relevant partners.

Giving this information here on Sunday, Defence Ministry officials said the key take-aways of the meeting will

include the implementable way forward derived from consultative and participative processes through high-level deliberations to provide impetus to indigenisation and also devise ways and means to enhance participation of private industry in defence research and development(R&D) and manufacturing ecosystem.

Chief of Defence Staff(CDS) General Anil Chauhan will chair the sessions, while Defence Secretary Girdhar Aramane will deliver the keynote address.

The event covers a wide canvas ranging from identification of challenges and evolving a way ahead to provide impetus to indigenisation

efforts of Armed forces, address sustenance-related issues, invigorate private sector participation in defence R&D and manufacturing ecosystem and most importantly create and enhance Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul facilities for the Armed Forces.

The HQ IDS and SIDM are coordinating the event and it will see the participation of key representatives from MoD, Services, and Industry under one roof to further strengthen the indigenisation efforts.

This will pave the way to formulate a time-bound action plan to give impetus for indigenisation in defence sector.

Centre ruthless approach towards narco trade has borne results: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Sunday released three videos about the Modi Government's success in dealing with the menace of drugs.

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah sent out a series of posts on X (formerly Twitter) and the videos.

In one of the posts Shah said, "The Modi Government's ruthless approach towards narco-trade has borne effective results. The upshot of this approach is the drastic rise in the number of arrests and seizures."

In another post, Shah maintained, "An invincible anti-narcotics apparatus has been built nationwide through Coordination, Cooperation and Collaboration among governments and agencies under the guidance of Modi Ji. The strategy has resulted in an increased number of drug seizures and cases registered."

Shah also said, "A #DrugsFreeBharat is the greatest gift to our future generations. Our nation is speeding to achieve this goal through the detection of drugs, destruction of drug networks, and deten-



tion of culprits while rehabilitating addicts under the leadership of PM Modi Ji."

On account of the multi-pronged efforts made by the Modi government to rein in the illegal drug trade the quantity of narcotics seized increased by almost 100% and the cases registered against those dealing in it increased by 152%.

According to the data released by the Ministry, during the period 2006 to 2013 the number of cases registered was 1257 in number which shot up by 3 times during 2014-2023 to 3755.

The arrests increased by 4 times from 1363 in the 2006-13 period to 5745 in the 2014-23 period. The quantity of seized drugs doubled during the Modi regime to 3.95 lakh

kgs from 1.52 lakh kgs seized during 2006-13. The value of seized drugs jumped 30 times during the Modi government to Rs.22,000 crore from Rs.768 crore achieved in the period 2006-13.

The anti-narcotics agencies also destroyed 12 lakh kgs of drugs worth Rs.12,000 crores during the Modi government. Till June 2023, NCB conducted a financial investigation in 23 such cases in which property worth ₹74,75,00,531 was frozen.

In a bid to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a drug-free India the four (04) tier NCORD mechanism was strengthened in 2019 for better cohesion and synergy between the Central and State drug law enforcement agencies.

Rajnath to inaugurate DefConnect 2024 today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to give a boost to indigenous innovation in defence production, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday here will inaugurate 'DefConnect 2024'. The event organised by Innovations for Defence Excellence-Defence Innovation Organisation (iDEX-DIO) will also explore ways to facilitate partnerships to address the evolving security challenges.

Giving details here on Sunday, defence ministry officials said 'DefConnect 2024' represents a significant milestone in the country's defence innovation landscape, bringing together key stakeholders including the Armed Forces, defence industry leaders, start-ups, academia, and policymakers.

The event aims to facilitate meaningful engagements, showcase cutting-edge technologies and is poised to be a transformative platform for fostering collaboration, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the defence sector. The event will attract a large number of innovators and investors from India's leading industries in the defence sector. The iDEX framework allows military per-



sonnel to work with innovators in a co-development model. They serve as end users, nodals and domain experts. This collaboration helps guide innovation and smoothly integrate advancements into existing platforms by leveraging expertise and insights of the end user. Till date, iDEX has launched 10 rounds of Defence India Start-up Challenge (DISC) and 11 rounds of Open Challenges (OC), receiving more than 9,000 applications from individual innovators and start-ups against challenges from the Tri-Services, Defence Space Agency, Defence Public Sector Undertakings, Indian Coast Guard, Border Roads Organisation and other agencies. The event will also witness

an All-Women Panel Discussion on 'Women as Drivers of Change' ahead of International Women's Day on March 08, 2024.

The showcase of cutting-edge technologies developed by iDEX winners is going to be the key attraction for all the visitors. It will offer a unique opportunity to meet iDEX start-ups and understand their innovative technologies.

The iDEX, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018, essentially provides a unified platform for various stakeholders in the defence and aerospace sectors. It acts like an umbrella organisation to oversee technology development and potential collaborations in this specific field.

Navy to commission helicopter Seahawk at INS Garuda on March 6

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy will commission the newly inducted MH 60R Seahawk (a maritime variant of the Blackhawk helicopter) multi-role helicopter on March 6 Mar at INS Garuda, Kochi marking a pivotal moment in India's defence modernisation journey. The Seahawks squadron will be commissioned in the Indian Navy as INAS 334, navy said here on Sunday.

The Indian Navy is set to witness a significant surge in its maritime prowess with the induction of the Seahawks. The helicopter is designed for anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare (ASuW), search and rescue (SAR), medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) and vertical replenishment (VERTREP). The helicopter has been rigorously tested in Indian Reference Atmosphere (IRA) conditions and is fully integrated into the Fleet. The advanced weapons, sensors and avionics suite make the Seahawks ideal for the Indian Navy's maritime security needs, offering enhanced capabilities for both conven-

tional as well as asymmetric threats.

The MH 60R helicopter will enhance India's blue-water capabilities, extending the operational reach of the Navy and supporting sustained naval operations across spectrums and over vast maritime domains.

The Seahawk's deployment in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) would strengthen the Indian Navy's maritime presence, dissuading potential threats and ensuring a secure and safe environment in this strategically crucial region. The commissioning of the Seahawks underscores Indian Navy's steadfast dedication to fortifying maritime security, aligning seamlessly with the government of India's visionary goal of ensuring Security And Growth for All in the Region.

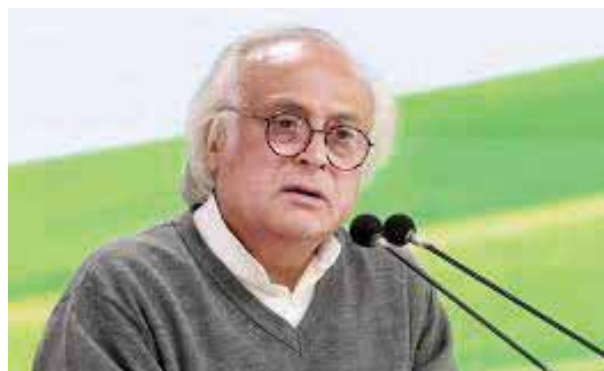
India and the US inked the deal for acquisition of 24 Seahawks in 2020 through the Foreign Military Sale(FMS)route. It means the US government stands guarantee for all the terms and conditions of the contract. All the 24 helicopters will be inducted by next year.

Rahul interacted with potential Agniveer recruits: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday attacked the Centre over the Agniveer scheme, alleging that it has "compromised" national security and "severely disrupted" the armed forces' recruitment processes in India.

The Congress' attack came after party leader Rahul Gandhi had an interaction with ex-servicemen, potential Agniveer recruits and the youth whose regular recruitment into the armed forces has been disrupted by the introduction of Agniveer during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Madhya Pradesh.



charge communications Jairam Ramesh in a statement said that Rahul Gandhi had a 40-minute interaction with the three communities on the morning of the 50th day of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

"The Agniveer scheme has compromised national security and severely disrupted the armed forces' recruitment processes in India," he alleged. Ramesh claimed the ex-servicemen have noted that the

scheme compromises national security by demoralising the armed forces and rushing through training for our servicemen in a mere six months. "Potential Agniveer recruits are dissatisfied by the loss of prestige and economic security due to the scheme," he said. "Finally, there are about 1.5 lakh youths who have completed all formalities for regular recruitment to the armed forces who have not been recruited because of the arbitrary introduction of the Agniveer scheme," Ramesh said.

The Congress leader claimed that as presently designed, the Agniveer scheme is detrimental in all respects and is an "anyway" (injustice) to our ser-

vicemen and to our youth.

"The ex-servicemen and Agniveer recruits have been protesting against the Modi government's policies for several months, having held several demonstrations at the Jantar Mantar in Delhi and taken out a padyatra from Champaran in Bihar to New Delhi," Ramesh said.

"The Agniveer scheme was pushed through without any discussion and consultation as revealed by the former Chief of Army Staff himself in his memoir," he said.

Ramesh further said that Gandhi promised a comprehensive review and appropriate amendments to the Agniveer scheme.

NGT seeks Centre response on plea seeking to declare Jim Corbett Park as eco sensitive zone

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has sought the Centre's response on a plea seeking directions to declare the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand as an Eco-Sensitive Zone.

The green panel was hearing a plea underlining that such a declaration is vital for protecting and conserving the ecology, wildlife, biological diversity, and the flora and fauna of the national park.

The National Environment Policy of 2006 defines an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) as areas or zones with identified environ-

mental resources having incomparable values that require special attention for their conservation because of their landscape, wildlife, biodiversity, historical and natural values. A bench of National Green Tribunal Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Expert Member A Senthil Vel said, "The original application (OA) raises a substantial issue relating to compliance with the environmental norms."

"Issue notice to the respondents," it added in an order passed last month.

The respondents in the matter include the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and

Climate Change, National Board for Wildlife, National Tiger Conservation Authority, Central Empowered Committee (formed by the Supreme Court), and the states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh along with their principal chief conservators of forests and the district magistrates concerned.

According to the plea by advocate Nandita Bansal, the ministry issued the Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2002, categorically stating that land falling within 10 kilometres of the boundaries of national parks and sanctuaries should be notified as 'Eco-Fragile Zones'.

Fulfil dream of developed India in next 25 years: Modi to new recruits

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated candidates given the appointment letters for Gujarat Government jobs on Sunday and urged them to help solve problems of the common people and work to fulfil the dream of a developed India in the next 25 years.

During a function organised in the state capital Gandhinagar, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel distributed the appointment letters to 1,990 candidates selected

through direct recruitment in various state government departments.

In his congratulatory message to the newly-appointed candidates read out at the event, PM Modi said this is an excellent opportunity for them to join the government service and serve the country.

"The coming 25 years are very important for our country," he said.

The PM said their priority should be to remove difficulties from the lives of the people, he said.

"Your determination and



decisions taken in the interest of the country will strengthen the development of the nation, and this responsibility will also bring new opportunities and challenges for you," Modi said.

"No matter in which department you are appointed, in which city or village you are, you should always keep in mind that your work should help the common people, solve their problems, make their life easy, and fulfil everyone's dream of building a developed India in the next

25 years," he said.

The PM also appealed to them to continue the process of learning and self-development even after assuming new responsibilities.

Chief Minister Patel wished a bright future for the newly appointed candidates and said PM Modi has resolved to build a developed India by 2047 by giving proper opportunities to harness the power of the country's youth.

"Gujarat will take the lead in building a developed India by building a developed Gujarat," Patel said in his address.

He urged the new recruits to be determined and serve the people sincerely with the mantra of 'Sauna Saath, Sauna Vikas, Sauna Vishwas and Sauna Prayaasa' (everyone's support, development, trust and effort).

"After joining the government service, you all also have the opportunity to increase the country's pride by working with diligence and complete transparency," Patel said.

The CM expressed hope that the new recruits will win the people's trust by doing exemplary work.



Uddhav targets BJP

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Sunday criticised the BJP, stating that its policy of undermining other political parties is not sustainable.

Taking aim at the BJP's initial Lok Sabha candidate list, which included figures like Kripashankar Singh, previously accused of money laundering, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray expressed surprise at the exclusion of senior leaders like Nitin Gadkari from the list.

Singh, who had faced allegations of financial misconduct, was nominated to contest from Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, as announced by the BJP on Saturday.

The BJP has not released its candidates for the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra. Thackeray, without directly naming the BJP or Prime Minister Narendra Modi, remarked, "The politics of dismantling opposition parties will not endure...



'jumla' should be renamed as 'guarantee'." Referring to the list, he highlighted his past collaboration with Union minister Gadkari, who had expedited the completion of the Mumbai-Pune expressway, a project initiated by Shiv Sena founder Balasaheb Thackeray.

Singh's history includes leading the Mumbai unit of Congress and serving as a Minister of State for Home.

He parted ways with the Congress in 2019 due to disagreements regarding the party's stance on the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status by the NDA government. He later joined the BJP in 2021.

Responding to Thackeray's remarks, Singh dismissed them, questioning the political credibility of someone without their own party.

"I don't take remarks of a

person who doesn't have a political party of his own and did attend office at the Mantralaya for even two-and-a-half days in his tenure of 2.5 years as chief minister, seriously," he told PTI.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut targeted Maharashtra's Deputy CMs Devendra Fadnis (BJP) and Ajit Pawar (NCP) over Singh's inclusion in the BJP list.

Raut pointed out Fadnis's earlier claims about prosecuting leaders like Ajit Pawar and Kripashankar Singh, raising doubts about the BJP's governance standards.

Regarding the future political landscape in Maharashtra, Raut emphasised the unity between the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) workers to counter the BJP and prevent potential authoritarian rule post-2024.

The MVA comprises the Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar and Congress.

CM: 2023 most successful year for anti drugs operations in Assam

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said 2023 was the most successful year for the state in terms of anti-drugs operations.

The chief minister said drugs worth Rs 718 crore were seized over 4,700 arrests made during the period.

"The Modi government is deploying a whole-of-government approach to build a #DrugsFreeBharat," Sarma wrote on X.

"In 2023, Assam Police seized drugs worth Rs 718 cr and arrested over 4,700 drug traffickers making it the most successful year for anti-drugs operations in the state," he added.

Sarma also shared a video on the various steps being taken by the central government in the war on drugs.

Meanwhile, two persons were



arrested and 500 grams of heroin was recovered from their possession in Guwahati, Sarma said in another post on X.

The operation was carried out by the special task force of state police.

Two persons were apprehended by the STF after a hot pursuit in Guwahati, Sarma said.

"... Search and seizure were conducted on their premises & 34 soap boxes of heroin weighing 500 gm was recovered," the CM added.

Five time Odisha MLA Dhali joins BJP day after quitting BJD

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Five-time Odisha MLA Arabinda Dhali on Sunday joined the BJP, a day after resigning from the ruling BJD.

Dhali went to the BJP office in Bhubaneswar along with his supporters in a procession, and formally joined the party in the presence of its state president Manmohan Samal and MP Aparajita Sarangi, among others.

Former MLA Mukunda Sodi, who also resigned from the BJD, joined the BJP along with Dhali.

Addressing the press, Dhali alleged that there was no democracy within the BJD and senior leaders were being neglected.

"After feeling suffocated, I left the BJD and joined the BJP, which has internal democracy," he said.

Dhali, the MLA of Jaydev in Khorda district, claimed that the BJP will form the next government in the state by winning more than 100 of the assembly's 147 seats.

He was first elected to the assembly from the Malkangiri seat in a by-election in 1992 on a BJP ticket. He retained the seat for two more terms.

He then joined the BJD, and was elected to the assembly from Jaydev in 2009. He also won the 2019 election from the seat.

A law graduate, he served as a minister in the BJD-BJP coalition government led by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

He held portfolios such as Cooperation (2000-2004), and Textiles and Handloom (2000-2002), besides Commerce and Transport (2002-2004).

The BJD claimed that Dhali joining the BJP will have no impact on it.

"Ahead of elections, it is normal for many political leaders to switch from one party to another. The leaders, whose winning chances are very low and are aware that the party is not going to give them nominations, are leaving the BJD," senior BJD leader Raj Kishore Das said.

Recently, expelled BJD MLAs Pradeep Panigrahy and Prashant Jagdev also joined the BJP. Former Minister Debasis Nayak of the BJD also switched sides.

Another expelled BJD leader Rajendra Das, a former MLA, is also likely to join the BJP soon.

Modi to inaugurate Howrah Maidan Esplanade

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will next week inaugurate Kolkata Metro Railway's Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section, touted to be the first transportation tunnel "under any mighty river in India", a government release said on Sunday.

The PM will also inaugurate in Kolkata the Kavi Subhash-Hemanta Mukhopadhyay and the Taratala-Majerhat metro sections, "with a focus on enhancing avenues for ensuring ease of urban mobility", it said.

Modi is scheduled to visit

Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar from March 4-6, the release said.

The Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section (East West Metro corridor) has the first transportation tunnel under "any mighty river in India", said the release.

It passes under the River Hooghly, on the east and west banks of which are situated Kolkata and Howrah cities, respectively.

Kolkata Metro created history in April 2023, when its rake ran through a tunnel under a river, the Hooghly, for the first time in the country.



Modi will also launch the Kavi Subhash-Hemanta Mukhopadhyay metro section of the Kavi Subhash-Airport line and the Taratala-Majerhat section, which is a part of the Joka-Esplanade line, the release said.

The Howrah metro station is

also the deepest metro station in India.

The 4.8-km stretch between Howrah Maidan and Esplanade is the second section of the East West Metro corridor between Howrah Maidan and IT hub Salt Lake Sector V.

The Esplanade-Sealdah stretch of the East West alignment is awaiting completion.

Metro Railway General Manager P Uday Kumar Reddy had earlier said it is targeting June-July this year to start commercial operation in the entire route of East West alignment.

Completion of the project has suffered delays owing to an aquifer burst at Bowbazar in central Kolkata on August 31, 2019, leading to severe ground subsidence, and the collapse of a number of buildings there and two more water leakage incidents at the same site in 2022 during tunneling and construction work.

The Salt Lake Sector V to Sealdah stretch of the East-West Metro corridor is commercially operational at present.

Out of the total 16.6 km length of the East West Metro, the underground corridor

constitutes 10.8 km between Howrah Maidan and Phoolbagan, with the tunnel under the Hooghly river. The rest of the stretch is elevated corridor.

The release said that the Majerhat metro station, on the Taratala-Majerhat section, is a unique elevated metro station across railway lines and platforms.

Metro services on the 6.5 km stretch between Joka and Taratala of the Joka-Esplanade project are already operational.

BJP banking on its sitting MPs in UP

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

After the declaration of candidates on 51 seats by the ruling BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the political picture of the contest in Uttar Pradesh is becoming clear.

INDIA bloc partner Samajwadi Party (SP) has so far declared tickets on 31 seats, including Varanasi, which it later withdrew due to the seat-sharing arrangement with the Congress.

Amidst party workers' demand of fielding Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Amethi and Raebareilly seats, the Congress is yet to come up with its list.

As per the arrangement, the Congress will field candidates on 17 seats while the SP will contest on 63 seats.

Apart from Raebareilly, Amethi and Varanasi, the other seats on which the Congress will contest include Kanpur City, Fatehpur Sekri, Basgaon, Saharanpur, Prayagraj, Maharajganj, Amroha, Jhansi, Bulandshahr, Ghaziabad, Mathura, Sitapur, Barabanki and Deoria.

Sonia Gandhi is currently the MP from Raebareilly, while Rahul Gandhi lost his Amethi seat to BJP leader Smriti Irani in 2019 polls.

Aiming to retain power at the Centre for the third time in a



row, the BJP banked heavily on its sitting MPs and the party is working on a target to win all the 80 seats in the state.

The notable names in the BJP's first list include Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh from Lucknow, Hema Malini from Mathura, Ajay Mishra Teni from Kheri, Smriti Irani from Amethi, Lallu Singh from Faizabad (Ayodhya) and Mahendra Nath Pandey from Chandauli among others.

The new faces in the BJP list included Saket Mishra from Shravasti and Kripa Shankar Singh from Jaunpur. Sitting MP from Ambedkar Nagar Ritesh Pandey, who recently resigned from the BSP and joined the BJP, has also been given a ticket.

Saket Mishra, who is a sitting

previous elections in 2014 and 2019 comfortably by a margin of 2.72 lakh and 3.47 votes, respectively.

The BJP has again reposed faith in Ajay Mishra Teni from Kheri. Mishra had been in the thick of storm in connection with October 3, 2021, violence in which his son Ashish Mishra allegedly ran his car over the farmers protesting in Lakhimpur Kheri. Mishra won the Lok Sabha elections from the Kheri constituency in 2014 and 2019.

The BJP has also reposed faith in Smriti Irani for the Amethi seat, regarded as a Gandhi stronghold. Irani had rendered a major blow to the Congress, defeating its then sitting MP Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 elections by a margin of more than 55,000 votes.

From Raebareilly, though the BJP has not declared any name yet but speculations are rife that it may field SP MLA Manoj Kumar Pandey, who recently resigned as the party's chief whip in the state assembly while Shivpal Yadav has been given a ticket from the Budaun seat.

Those playing with future of youth will rot in jail for rest of their lives: Yogi

PTI ■ GORAKHPUR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said those playing with the future of the youth in the state will rot in jail for the rest of their lives while the properties of their parents and grand parents will be confiscated.

Addressing the students at the Rajkiya Jubilee Inter College ground during the smartphone/tablet distribution event, Adityanath said not only the cities of Uttar Pradesh will be smart, but also the youth of the state with smartphones and smart classes.

In the programme, 1,500 students were provided with tablets and 3,000 students received smartphones.

The chief minister personally handed tablets to 15 students and smartphones to 10 students.

He also laid the foundation stone of Project Alankar worth Rs 17.35 crore in 26 secondary schools and 330 premium smart classrooms to be built at a cost of Rs 7.58 crore in 141 secondary schools.

Adityanath handed over the Smart Class Certificate to the principals of four intermediate colleges.

He said with the introduction of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Empowerment Scheme in November 2021, the distribution of smartphones and tablets commenced.



The objective is to digitally empower the youth, ensuring that their education remains uninterrupted in potential future pandemics such as COVID-19, he said.

Adityanath said that when physical education came to a halt during COVID 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi envisioned fostering connections through technology.

In alignment with his vision, Uttar Pradesh has already distributed smartphones and tablets to 20 lakh youths without discrimination and has set the target to give it to two crore youths across the state, he added.

The chief minister said the schemes of the central and state governments that are essential for the future and self-reliance of the youth have also been added to these devices.

Empowered with technology, the youth will forge ahead and contribute to realising the vision of a developed India, he said.

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The customers who are being serviced from the location which is being closed will be serviced from the new location from 03/06/2024 onwards.

All the concerned persons are requested to take note of same.

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The U.P. Real Estate Appellate Tribunal, Lucknow 4th floor, Indra Bhanu, Ashok Marg, Lucknow-226001
Letter no. 64 / Appeal no.564-2023/UPREAT/2023
Lucknow Dated 26/02/2024
Notice for Publication Appeal no. 564/2023
RATAN BUILDTECH PRIVATE LIMITED ...Appellant
vs
KAMLA ...Respondent
To: KAMLA Address BS 803, Galaxy Diamond Plaza, Greater Noida west, Gautam Buddha Nagar, 201318, Uttar Pradesh
Subject-Regarding Appeal u/s 44 of the RERA Act, 2016.
You are hereby informed that said appeal, was taken up for hearing on 21/02/2024. You are therefore directed to be present before the Tribunal either in person or through legal representative as provided U/s 56 of the Act to oppose reply the Appeal otherwise the said appeal will be heard ex parte in your absence.
Now the case is fixed for hearing on 28.03.2023.
Registrar UPREAT Lucknow

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed I. Chander D/o Onkar Nath alias Onkar Nath Chadha, am filing application in L&DO for substitution/mutation of the property No.93-B, Single Storey, Ramesh Nagar, New Delhi-110015 in the name of ONKAR NATHI alias ONKAR NATH CHADHA, on the grounds of his death and registered WILL.
If there are any objections/claims from the general public on this application, the same shall be communicated to L&DO with supporting documents through registered post or by visiting L&DO at Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi or through an email at kdo@nic.in, within 30 days of publication of this notice.
Name: CHANDER, Address: 93-B, Single Storey, Ramesh Nagar, New Delhi - 110015
Phone No.9205711749 Email: chadhaomkar@gmail.com



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A curated list

BJP names 195 in first list; retains some MPs, drops some and moves a few from RS to LS poll arena

The well-oiled poll machinery of the BJP has released its first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, leading to intrigue and speculation across political circles. With this move, the party has not only initiated its electoral process even though the election dates have not yet been announced, it has also sent out strategic messages through its selection of candidates. The decision to retain some MPs, drop others, and move certain members from the States or the Rajya Sabha to the Lok Sabha poll arena carries significant implications. The retention of several incumbents underscores the party's commitment to stability and continuity in its leadership. By fielding sitting MPs or MLAs, the BJP aims to leverage their incumbency advantages, including name recognition, constituency connect and established voter base. Simultaneously, the omission of some incumbents indicates the party's emphasis on accountability. The decision may stem from various factors, including performance evaluation, local dynamics or the need for rejuvenation in specific constituencies. In this context, the notable names are West Delhi MP Parvesh Sahib Singh and South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri, who have both been dropped for apparent inflammatory or derogatory remarks against a particular community. In Bhopal, firebrand leader Pragya Thakur belongs to the same category.



In the list of alleged non-performers, the party's East Delhi MP Gautam Gambhir and Hazaribagh MP Jayant Sinha have sought to be excused from the poll battle though insiders claim their move was to pre-empt from being publicly dropped from the nominee list.

Another noteworthy aspect of BJP's nominee list is the strategic repositioning of certain members from States or the Rajya Sabha to face people's mandate. This manoeuvre highlights the party's astute deployment of resources and talent to maximise its electoral prospects. By fielding prominent figures from other arenas, such as the Rajya Sabha or States, the BJP aims to capitalise on their stature, experience and network. Additionally, such strategic moves enable the party to strengthen its presence in regions where it seeks to expand its footprint or counter the Opposition's strongholds. Over the years, the importance of candidates has declined considerably; voting is done mostly on party lines. The Prime Minister has himself said that each of the votes cast for the BJP is a vote for him. However, the presence of candidates and their charisma do matter: By bringing in seasoned leaders from diverse backgrounds, the BJP seeks to project a broad-based appeal and a unified front. Overall, the party's first list encapsulates a nuanced blend of continuity, accountability and strategic deployment of resources. Through these strategic manoeuvres, the BJP aims to consolidate its electoral base, address grassroots grievances and position itself favourably for the elections.

PICTALK



A Royal Bengal Tiger at the Byculla zoo on the World Wildlife Day, in Mumbai

The Greek presence at Raisina Dialogue



UMANG KOHLI

With Turkey's consistent anti-India stance, India's calculated response includes bolstering ties with Greece, embroiled in a rivalry with Turkey

The Raisina Dialogue, a conference held annually in New Delhi, is India's flagship conference on geopolitics.

One may wonder why Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis was the chief guest and what importance Greece play in the larger scheme of things as far as India is concerned. One may recollect that Turkey has been taking an anti-India stance at most of the international forums. Since the abrogation of Article 370, Turkey has been raising the Kashmir issue, including at the United Nations General Assembly.

India has given well-calibrated responses to Turkey in a phased manner, one of them being, Prime Minister Narendra Modi holding meetings with the president of Cyprus and prime ministers of Armenia and Greece. All of these states have various disputes with Turkey. Greece and Turkey have been regional adversaries in the Aegean Sea, both asserting claims over their borders in the Sea. They were on the brink of war in 1996 over islets in the Aegean Sea. So honouring Greece's PM at a strategic dialogue in Delhi is a masterstroke that will have ripple effects in Ankara.

Is calling PM Kyriakos of Greece as Chief Guest of Raisina Hills dialogue a strategic response to Turkey? Has India now mastered the art of mixing global diplomacy with national interest? Will the present Raisina dialogue have an impact on global geopolitics? Is Greece our gateway to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea? In the years to come can Greece provide us with the trade routes we so require? Will the coming together of the world's oldest civilizations shape the future of the world in the years to come?

We should not forget that Greece and India have common security concerns in the Mediterranean Sea. India can help Greece in the field of cyber security and Greece can assist India with merchant vessels. Greece can become an important partner in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor launched during India's G20 presidency last year. The other common areas of growth can be in



renewable energy, infrastructure, ports and shipping, and logistics.

The position of Greece is the world map is such that it has considerable dominance over the Mediterranean Sea. It is also a gateway to Europe. Greece is a member of NATO and has a rich cultural heritage. India on the other hand is looking to expand trade ties westwards. India also is considering better defence ties with countries that have similar ideologies. The scope of defence ties with Greece is hence immense.

Over the past few years, Greece has given importance to defence cooperation and military exercises between the two countries. Greece has always backed India's position on the Kashmir issue. India and Greece have common concerns with maritime security and implementation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. This law is being violated by Turkey and China in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific almost every day.

It will be in the scheme of things if in the future India and Greece build upon the already existing defence ties. India can always look forward to exporting defence equipment



BOTH COUNTRIES HAVE A SHARED HISTORICAL LINKAGE AND LONG-STANDING TIES WHICH IS AT THE CORE OF THEIR GROWING STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP. GREECE'S INTEREST IN JOINING THE INDO-PACIFIC OCEANS INITIATIVE TO CONSERVE AND SUSTAIN THE MARITIME DOMAIN IS A BOLD STEP

particularly anti-drone systems to Greece keeping in view that Turkey has built an extensive Drone system that can be used to dominate various islands that are otherwise part of Greece. India can also seek help in shipbuilding technology from Greece, as Greece has an age-old tradition of making boats and ships. A collaboration between Mazgaon Dockyard and Skaramanga Shipyard can give Indian shipbuilding a major flip. Skaramanga has expertise in ship repair and maintenance. Greece is one country that has tremendous tourism potential as it is known to be the birthplace of Western civilization. Greece has stunning archaeological treasures, beautiful seaside villages and sun-soaked beaches making it one of the most interesting places to visit for Indians. Cruise holidays between Mumbai and Greece then hold a lot of promise. India and Greece must build a Strategic Partnership by upgrading their bilateral ties further and forging cooperation in dimensions of economic, defence, maritime, shipping and cultural fields as they have a common interest in international and regional developments. India and Greece also have shared values

of democracy, freedom, international peace and security, rules-based international order, respect for international law including UNCLOS, and human rights.

Both countries have a shared historical linkage and long-standing ties which is at the core of their growing strategic relationship. Greece's interest in joining the Indo-Pacific Oceans initiative to conserve and sustain the maritime domain is a bold step. Both countries are equally affected by climate change and biodiversity loss and can work together in this direction too. It looks like in the future India and Greece can shape Global Geopolitics in a way that suits each other's countries' interests. Close ties between the two countries could be beneficial for both. Greece can balance the negative sentiment that Turkey is trying to generate against India at various international forums. Greece can also facilitate India's ambition to trade with the EU via its maritime fleet and favourable trade routes that provide India exclusive access to European Markets.

(The writer is an expert on geopolitics and international Affairs. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A SPOT OF GOOD NEWS

Sir — A recent wildlife survey conducted by India's Ministry of Environment indicates a rise in the national leopard population. This is a significant development for conservation efforts, with estimates suggesting an increase of approximately 1% annually between 2018 and 2022, reaching a total of 13,874 individuals, Madhya Pradesh currently boasts the highest leopard population within the country, with nearly 4,000 residing within its borders. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that some limitations exist within the data. The survey methodology excluded non-forested areas, high-altitude regions, and certain arid environments, which could potentially hold additional leopard populations. A critical challenge facing leopard conservation is the increasing human-wildlife conflict. As human settlements expand and encroach upon leopard habitats, these magnificent creatures are forced to venture into populated areas in search of prey and territory. The population increase signifies a positive trend for leopard conservation in India. The success of conservation initiatives within tiger reserves, which also serve as crucial habitats for leopards, appears to be a contributing factor. Continued efforts to address human-wildlife conflict, expand surveys to encompass a wider range of habitats, and focus on habitat protection will be essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of leopard populations nationwide.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

SOLAR POWER FOR INDUSTRY

Sir — After the focus on domestic rooftop solar power generation, it may be time to take a look at industrial solar rooftop plants if Goa wants to meet its renewable energy goals. A study by the Goa Energy Development Agency has concluded that industrial sheds can be gainfully used to install solar panels on a much larger scale than household rooftops. The state has set a goal to generate 150MW of green energy over the next two years with rapid adoption of power generation and net meter-

Elimination of poverty an imperative



The news about Extreme poverty having been eliminated in India fails to satisfy everyone. The global institution seems to have prepared the report based on the Indian official release of certain data about the level of purchasing power in Rural and Urban areas. This data itself suffers scientific approach in arriving at the figure. Further taking the price line of 2017 is also not acceptable because inflation has increased phenomenally causing many to tighten their belts. Moreover, the very article in the basket taken to

assess the situation needs review. For example, the Indian government claimed a sharp reduction in Multidimensional Poverty.

The point to ponder over is that people in poverty send their wards to school not because of their improved economic ability but due to free food and free education made available in most states. The predominantly majority of the rural population is living on daily wage earnings and has nothing to do with the vehicles being purchased by medium or big farmers. It is something like feeling complacent about the increase in per capita income of Indians which is the increase in the income of a few individuals and corporate firms and not the people at the bottom level. Therefore let us not try to fool ourselves with misleading figures flashed often. Let the system of survey be changed into a scientific one to rely on them.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

playing a key role in the scheme of things.

Though solar panels have been installed on 850 residential terraces and 200 commercial establishments, the total power generated by them is a meagre 21MW. There is scope for capacity addition of 100MW if government building rooftops and waterbodies are used for panel installations; the latter making use of floating membrane technology. Centre must incubate Indian startups in the renewable energy field to come up with indigenous solutions so that dependence on Chinese manufacturers for photovoltaic cells is reduced. Solar power has literally a bright future in the country provided government policy aligns with native innovation and acts as an enabler; learning from and adopting best practices in the renewable energy field.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

CHARAIDEO TO BE UNESCO SITE

Sir — Charaideo Maidams are slated to be Assam's third UNESCO World Heritage Site after Kaziranga National Park and Manas National Park got the coveted tag

almost 40 years ago in 1985. Charaideo Maidams are just the tip of the iceberg in a culture-rich Assam where every corner speaks history.

Assam's rich history has always been out in the cold but now it is receiving all the fanfare and the attention of the larger national populace. The Ahoms were invaders but instead of ravaging the cultural landscape or imposing their culture, they enriched the Assamese culture in its nascent stage. Assam is because of Ahoms and we are forever grateful that they chose Assam as their kingdom. I humbly urge the government of Assam and the Union Ministry of Culture to nominate many such worthy sites like Majuli, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Dehing Patkai National Park, Rock Cut Cave in Bongaigaon, Bamuni Hills in Tezpur, and many others for the UNESCO World Heritage site tag so that Assam gets its due importance that it has been long denied of.

Noopur Baruah | Tezpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The complexity of communication

Benjamin Franklin aptly stated, mastering communication is not just saying the right thing but also resisting the temptation to say the wrong thing

Recently out for my morning walk I overheard a walker talking to another co-walker, "We don't know what the peoples wants..."

I have no interest in commenting on the grammar of the sentence — after all the two parties involved in the communication were comfortable with their conversation.

I had shifted to an English medium school only after I had reached class 9. It was not a pleasant experience for me. The school was in Delhi, and to my unsophisticated self, coming from small town India, I felt as alienated amongst those English speaking smart boys and girls, as a Martian might feel on first visit to Earth. Only three years later, I was to make an irritated comment to a friend, "Stop that clownship!" My inadequate knowledge of the universal language almost turned me into an introvert. It was only after I had started my professional journey in the railways, that too as a Hindi speaking north Indian, posted in Bengal, heading a maintenance shed



of 1000+ staff, I realised and then resolved the difficulties faced in communicating with a predominantly Bangla speaking workforce. It was a mutual understanding. We would be talking to each other in our respective mother tongues, yet understanding each other more through non-verbal communication of hand and eye movement or body language. By now I had gained enough confidence and felt slightly more comfortable during my first study tour to Japan. In transit, at Bangkok airport, I approached the girl at a sandwich kiosk in my perfect Queens English. The girl was nonplussed, "Oui. Please speak slowly. I can't understand you." A few weeks later, a co-participant from Sri Lanka on

the same study tour, was to further deflate my ego, "Sanjay, your English is atrocious." I continued to improve my English in the following years. Till I started meeting professionals from different nationalities, not speaking English as a first language. They were comfortable in their broken English and did not shy away from seeking help from colleagues, if required, for the right English word. But then a communication between two people, about something they want to convey, can sometimes have, hilarious at best and disastrous at worst, consequences. More recently, addressing a group of wide-eyed university students, I was to tell them, "Communication is

the key. Never break a communication — write a letter, call, send an email, communicate on tinder..."

This caused much hilarity in the auditorium, in which even I participated wholeheartedly. It was only later, as I checked the net, I realised that Tinder is a dating site, and not expected to be indulged in for the kind of communication that I was talking about. Like another time recently, a friend sent her driver for me to sign a few cheques. The security guard understood his intent of visit for 'cheque signing' to be his name 'Cheek Singh'. I would still stay, communication is the key, whatever verbal and/or non-verbal means you employ, in whichever language. I couldn't agree more with Benjamin Franklin, "Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA



FIRST COLUMN

THE MENACE OF A TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENT

We must resist the allure of toxicity, lest we become complicit in its propagation



SAKSHI SETHI

The success of any organisation rests on how well and healthy its work environment is. The workplace is a very sensitive place, be it in schools, colleges or business organizations. The employees and workers need to be motivated by their principals and bosses to do their work properly else they get demoralised. However, when a toxic work environment engulfs an organisation, it can have disastrous consequences for both the employees and the organisation at large. A recent study found that around 40 per cent of people in the US have left jobs due to an overly stressed work environment. Workplace violence has existed throughout history. The toxic behaviours have been allowed to fester unchecked. A few influential individuals within the organisation engage in bullying, manipulation, and favouritism, which permeate throughout the company's structure. At the same time, their behaviours create an environment that builds walls and crushes creativity and loyalty. Toxicity in the workplace is a pervasive and serious issue that affects employees at all levels of an organization. At the same time, it is also a combination of dysfunctional behaviours among leaders that causes them to conduct unhealthy organisational practices. Organisational toxicity is driven by disempowering practices, individuals with a mentality of personal entitlement and resistance to change. It is an insidious problem that can be difficult to recognise, yet its effects on the mental and physical well-being of employees can be devastating. When the work environment is toxic, it trickles down. There is no denying the fact that toxic leadership leads to a toxic environment. One of the reasons for toxicity in the work environment is a lack of true diversity and inclusion followed by a lack of effective communication.



Nowadays, new executives have adopted a top-down approach, leaving little room for the honest exchange of ideas and feedback. This has resulted in unheard voices of the employees, leading to a growing sense of alienation and frustration amongst the workforce. Even the teachers and educators in schools and colleges are also the victims of the same. Employees have started to experience emotional responses that include anger, irritability, cynicism, distress, psychological strain, job insecurity, fear and shame. In other words, an atmosphere of behaviour that is more crippling for employees than all other work-related stress put together is created.

The toxic work environment encourages a cutthroat competition, where colleagues undermine and sabotage each other, instead of valuing the teamwork. Also, being overworked and overburdened can lead to severe burnout and even cause resentment. Organisations and other workplaces should allow room for creativity for more than meeting a lettered standard. By fostering open communication, promoting empathy and encouraging a supportive culture, organisations can build an environment where employees can thrive thereby leading to increased productivity, creativity, and overall success. Simultaneously, if teachers cannot be diverse—using their individuality, uniqueness and creativity—to diversify the lessons organically, then the entire concept of differentiation is missed. Teachers become teachers because they are creative people who have a desire to share their knowledge with others. Remember, a toxic work environment will tarnish the organisation's reputation. Negative employee experiences spread through word-of-mouth and social media, discouraging potential candidates from joining the organization. It's the individual's peace and sanity that is worth more than dealing with organisations that don't value them enough to stop the bad behaviour. One needs to protect their mental health at work at all costs. Various factors are responsible for brewing a toxic culture, the results of which are catastrophic and can sink the organisation into an abyss of failure.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

The inspiring saga of the Goat Bank

Despite its significant contribution to the economy, the goat sector largely operates in the informal market, underscoring the need for greater recognition

In a remarkable feat of rural innovation, Kalahandi couple Jayanti Mahapatra and Biren Sahu have earned praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for their groundbreaking agri-tech startup located in the remote Salebhata village. Their unique Goat Bank, recognised in 'Mann Ki Baat,' breaks traditional banking norms, empowering local farmers and uplifting the community's socio-economic status through innovative rural solutions. Goats often referred to as the "ATM" or "poor man's cow," play a pivotal role in India's livelihoods and nutritional security. Their popularity stems from factors such as low capital investment, adaptability, early maturity, prolific breeding, superior chevon quality, and steady returns. Amid changing agro-climatic conditions, goats emerge as the 'Future Animal' for national prosperity. Goat meat commands a premium in the market and goat milk offers therapeutic benefits. Despite constituting 27.80 per cent of the total livestock and contributing significantly to the national economy with annual revenue of Rs 38,590 crores, the goat sector often operates in the informal and untaxed market. The goat, however, deserves serious attention and investment. Contributing 3% of milk, 13.8% of goat meat, and 0.18 million tonnes of skin in India, goats have immense economic potential. As goat farmers strive for financial inclusion, recognising and investing in the goat sector can lead to substantial economic upliftment, making it imperative for the goat to take centre stage in national agricultural and economic planning. Traditionally, successful livestock development strategies have heavily relied on providing credit to empower underprivileged individuals to acquire or replenish their livestock. This not only marks the initial foray into livestock ownership but also serves as a pivotal step towards breaking free from the shackles of poverty, paving the way for a more secure and prosperous life. In the evolution of livestock development strategies, the traditional reliance on credit to empower underprivileged individuals has given rise to an innovative approach embodied by the Goat Bank. Welcome to the innovative realm of the Goat Bank, where farming dreams come alive with a unique twist. Instead of conventional cash, the bank offers aspiring farmers a lifeline in the form of a pregnant female goat. It's not a giveaway; a deal is struck. Deserving farmers receive guidance on scientific goat rearing, along with support for vaccinations, deworming, ear tagging, and premium concentrate feed during pregnancy. In return, farmers commit to caring for the goats and returning six to eight kids to the Goat Bank. The math magic unfolds as goats, with a 7 to 8-month kidding interval, yield two or three kids in each kidding cycle. Over two years, farmers find themselves with an impressive twelve to fourteen kids from just two does. Beyond personal gain, these farmers extend the goat family, nurturing them and, when the time is right, selling them for a lucrative profit. This cycle of goat generosity creates a symbiotic relationship, with benefits flowing from the Goat Bank to the farmers and ultimately reaching the market. It's a win-win scenario, shaping



GOATS, OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE 'ATM' OR 'POOR MAN'S COW,' PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN INDIA'S LIVELIHOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SECURITY

a pathway for sustainable farming practices and economic prosperity. In Maharashtra's Akola district, Naresh Deshmukh's visionary Goat Bank, launched in July 2018, redefines empowerment. Aspiring farmers pay a nominal Rs 1,200 registration fee, entering into a loan agreement to return four lambs within 40 months. This innovative scheme fosters accountability, propelling a sustainable growth cycle. Women participating in goat rearing anticipate significant profits, enabling investments in land, education, and celebrating life's milestones. In Salebhata village, Kalahandi district of Odisha, the Goat Bank, spearheaded by Jayanti Mahapatra and Biren Sahu, offers needy farmers two adult female goats, hailing from the resilient breeds of native Kalahandi or Black Bengal. During two years, the goats exhibit their prolific nature, birthing impressive 9-10 kids. The bank retains six of these newborns, channelling the rest back to the same families dedicated to goat farming. This sustainable cycle has now woven a network connecting 1,000 farmers across 50 villages. In the undulating agro-climatic expanse of western Odisha, encompassing Kalahandi and Nuapada districts, the author's research illuminates a striking reality: 95% of goats thrive as indigenous, hardy, uniquely adapted to endure temperatures soaring up to 48°C. These robust creatures are meticulously managed in modest hold-

ings under semi-extensive systems, relying solely on roadside grass and tree leaves as their primary sustenance, achieving impressive average adult body weights of 35 kg for males and 30 kg for females. The elegance of this agricultural practice lies in its simplicity, relying on family labour and minimal investment, mainly directed towards veterinary care. Farmers, with negligible expenditure, witness substantial profits. The sale of castrated males after four years commands prices between Rs. 25,000 to 30,000, while females are priced slightly lower. During the Chatar Parab festival (a local festival), prices experience a commendable surge, contributing to an annual income of approximately Rs. 100,000 from goat sales. Through extensive interviews, the author uncovers a burgeoning interest among landless farmers to engage in goat rearing, signalling a desire for expansion. However, these aspiring farmers articulate a need for essential elements like proper housing, quality feed, and a superior breeding buck to unleash the full growth potential of their goat herds. While existing state government schemes provide very good assistance to many goat farmers in this zone, the author still posits that pioneering initiatives like a goat bank have the potential to include more landless, downtrodden farmers in the journey. Such innovative concepts could substantially contribute to the financial stability and prosperity of a broader section of farmers, offer-

ing a promising avenue for uplifting native goats and enhancing the overall well-being of the farming community in the area. The success stories from Salebhata village in Kalahandi and Sangavi Mohadi village in Maharashtra illustrate how the Goat Bank is not merely an institution but a catalyst for positive change. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightfully recognises the transformative power of such initiatives, it becomes evident that the goat, often overlooked, deserves centre stage as a species worthy of serious investment. The Goat Bank model showcases a sustainable cycle of growth, from the bank to the farmers and eventually to the market, fostering economic upliftment and financial inclusion. The Goat Bank revolution is not just about goats; it's about changing lives, revitalising rural economies, and creating a blueprint for similar innovations across the country. As more farmers join such schemes and receive the support they need, the potential for further improvement of goat farming practices in native tracts becomes promising. The winds of change are indeed blowing, and the resonant call for serious attention and investment in the goat sector is no longer a distant bleat but a reality that holds the promise of a brighter and more prosperous future for rural India. *(The writer is a scientist at Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology, Bhawanipatna; views are personal)*



PARAG ACHARYA

Creating awareness about menstrual rights among men

Menstrual rights encompass not only access to hygiene products but also the eradication of discriminatory practices surrounding this natural biological phenomenon

Menstruation, a natural facet of human existence, has often been cloaked in stigma and silence. As we delve into the stories from Leh, it is crucial to understand the broader context of menstrual rights and the significance of these conversations. Menstrual rights include access to menstrual hygiene products, comprehensive education about menstruation, and the elimination of discriminatory practices associated with this natural biological process. The lack of awareness has fueled a culture of shame and secrecy. In Leh, the conversation around menstruation has undergone a transformative journey. Traditionally, whispers among friends were the primary source of information



QAMARUN NISSA

for young girls, making it a taboo subject. However, today, strides have been made, enabling open discussions, particularly between mothers and daughters. In Leh, the celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28th, 2023, is a significant event. The event, exclusively held at a government girls' higher secondary school, reflects a pivotal shift. Surprisingly, on this day, not a

single male presence is noted; only the cameraperson was a man. Why do we think that including men in this conversation isn't important? In Leh, most of the shopkeepers give pads wrapped in newspapers. Wrapping a pad in the newspaper is not a solution; rather, it perpetuates improper handling of menstrual products. There is a need for a more respectful and informed approach to changing societal norms and practices surrounding menstruation. Mutup Dolma, a 17-year-old from Hanu village, which is approximately 200 kilometres from Leh, shares her story about periods. In her hometown, it's not easy to talk openly about menstruation. People feel uncomfortable saying words like "periods" in public,

and asking for pads from male shopkeepers is a challenge. When Mutup moved to Leh for school, things changed. In Leh, she could buy pads without feeling awkward because people didn't know her. But in her hometown, cultural norms made talking about periods difficult. Mutup thinks it is very important to have an open conversation. "I got scared when I got my first period," recalled Mutup. It was hard for her to understand what was happening until she talked to her mom. She mentioned, "When sometimes my mom isn't home, it is very difficult to ask for money from my father for menstrual products." Moving to Leh for education made it easier for her to buy menstrual products, but she realised the gap in aware-

ness between urban and rural areas. Hailing from Ibx Colony in Leh, Tsewang Namgyal, a 17-year-old boy, noticed something strange in his science class. Whenever their teacher explained the menstrual cycle, his friends would laugh. When he tried to tell them it was a biological process and shouldn't be mocked, they made fun of him. This laughter affected the girls in their class, making them feel embarrassed. Going back to his village, Tsewang observed that his cousins were hesitant to discuss menstruation due to a lack of awareness. Jigmet Skit, a 19-year-old resident of Skara, Leh, shares her perspective on menstruation. Despite being part of many menstrual awareness programmes in school,

she expresses discomfort due to the segregation of boys from these discussions. Jigmet believes that schools should create an open environment like home, fostering learning and awareness rather than perpetuating secrecy. According to Jigmet, the awkwardness in society stems from the practice of hiding menstruation, especially in schools. She emphasises that women should openly share information to eliminate discomfort and encourage discussions about menstrual health. In her experience, when she gets her period, she is not able to go out for 3 days because of the pain, and it becomes difficult when they ask why she is not able to go out; it becomes difficult to answer her friends and even her father due to a

lack of understanding. Jigmet hopes that breaking the silence and providing equal awareness will end the societal awkwardness around menstruation. This, she believes, will enable girls to share their problems openly and make it easier for everyone to endure. Abdul Wahid, age 21, a resident of Shenam Leh, reflects on his school days when he and his friends lacked awareness about menstruation. He recalls an incident where they would check girls' bags and laugh at the sight of pads. However, upon moving to Delhi for studies, he noticed a stark difference in people's openness about menstruation. Now, during his visits to Leh, Abdul actively helps his cousin's sister to buy pads, a task he once refused to do dur-

ing his school days. He emphasises the importance of open conversations about menstruation, highlighting that knowledge about periods enables individuals to assist someone in need during menstruation. Stories from Mutup, Tsewang, Jigmet, and Abdul show the changes and challenges in understanding menstruation. Leh is making progress by celebrating Menstrual Hygiene Day and encouraging discussions. Despite this, there's still a need for better education about periods. Changing cultural norms and ensuring menstrual rights are essential for a society free from shame and secrecy. *(The writer is the winner of Sanjoy Ghose Media awards 2024; views are personal. Charkha Features)*

Netanyahu and his top rival clash rocks Israel's war-time cabinet

AP ■ TEL AVIV (ISRAEL)

A top Israeli Cabinet minister headed to Washington on Sunday for talks with US officials, sparking a rebuke from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to an Israeli official, in a sign of widening cracks in Israel's wartime government nearly five months into its war with Hamas.

The trip by Benny Gantz, a centrist political rival who joined Netanyahu's hard-line government in the early days of the war following Hamas' October 7 attack on southern Israel, comes amid deep disagreements between Netanyahu and President Joe Biden over how to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and create a post-war vision for the enclave.

The US was prompted to airdrop aid into Gaza on Saturday after dozens of Palestinians rushing to grab food from trucks were killed last week. The airdrops circumvent what's been a prohibitive aid delivery system, which has been hobbled by Israeli restrictions, logistical issues within Gaza as well as the fighting inside the tiny enclave. Aid officials say the airdrops are far less effective than the aid sent via trucks.

US priorities in the region have increasingly been hampered by Netanyahu's hard-line Cabinet, where ultranationalists dominate. Gantz's more moderate party at times acts as a counterweight to Netanyahu's far-right allies.

An official from Netanyahu's Likud party said Gantz's visit was without authorisation from the Israeli leader. The official said Netanyahu had a "tough talk" with Gantz about the trip and told him the country has "just one prime minister".

An Israeli official said Gantz had informed Netanyahu of his intention to travel to the US and to coordinate messaging with him. The official said the visit is meant to strengthen ties with Washington, to bolster support for Israel's ground campaign and to push for the release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza.

Gantz is set to meet with US Vice President Kamala Harris and national security

US military aircraft airdrop thousands meals into Gaza

AP ■ WASHINGTON

US military C-130 cargo planes dropped food in pallets over Gaza on Saturday in the opening stage of an emergency humanitarian assistance authorised by President Joe Biden after more than 100 Palestinians who had surged to pull goods off an aid convoy were killed during a chaotic encounter with Israeli troops.

Three planes from Air Forces Central dropped 66 bundles containing about 38,000 meals into Gaza at 8:30 a.m. EST (3:30 p.m. local).

The bundles were dropped in southwest Gaza, on the beach along the territory's Mediterranean coast. The airdrop was coordinated with the Royal Jordanian Air Force, which said it had two food airdrops Saturday in northern Gaza and has conducted several rounds in recent months.

"The amount of aid flowing to Gaza is not nearly enough and we will continue to pull out every stop we can to get more aid in," President Joe Biden said Saturday in a post on the social media site X, formerly known as Twitter.

US Central Command said on X that "the combined operation included U.S. Air Force and R/JAF C-130 aircraft and respective Army Soldiers specialised in aerial delivery of supplies, built bundles and ensured the safe drop of food aid." The US airdrop is expected to be the first of many. Three Biden administration officials said the planes dropped the military Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) — shelf-stable meals that contain a day's worth of calories in each sealed package

adviser Jake Sullivan, according to his National Unity party.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised to discuss the dispute with the media.

Netanyahu has tanked in popularity since the war broke out, according to most opinion polls, with many Israelis holding him responsible for Hamas'

in locations that were thought would provide civilians with the greatest level of safety to access aid. Afterward, the US monitored the sites and was able to see civilians approach and distribute food among themselves, according to the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide additional details that had not been made public.

Biden on Friday announced the U.S. would begin air dropping food to starving Gazans after at least 115 Palestinians were killed and hundreds more wounded in the Thursday attack as they scrambled for aid, the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said.

Hundreds of people had rushed about 30 trucks bringing a pre-dawn delivery of aid to the north.

Palestinians said nearby Israeli troops shot into the crowds. Israel said they fired warning shots toward the crowd and insisted many of the dead were trampled.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said Friday that the airdrops were being planned to deliver emergency humanitarian assistance in a safe way to people on the ground. The United States believes the airdrops will help address the dire situation in Gaza, but they are no replacement for trucks, which can transport far more aid more effectively, though Thursday's events also showed the risks with ground transport.

Kirby said the airdrops have an advantage over trucks because planes can move aid to a particular location very quickly. But in terms of volume,

the airdrops will be "a supplement to, not a replacement for moving things in by ground."

The C-130 is widely used to deliver aid to remote places because of its ability to land in austere environments.

A C-130 can airlift as much as 42,000 pounds of cargo and its crews know how to rig the cargo, which sometimes can include even vehicles, onto massive pallets that can be safely dropped out of the back of the aircraft.

Air Force loadmasters secure the bundles onto pallets with netting that is rigged for release in the back of a C-130, and then crews release it with a parachute when the aircraft reaches the intended delivery zone.

The Air Force's C-130 has been used in years past to airdrop humanitarian aid into Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti and other locations and the airframe is used in an annual multi-national "Operation Christmas Drop" that airdrops pallets of toys, supplies, non-perishable food and fishing supplies to remote locations in the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau.

Since the war began on Oct. 7, Israel has barred entry of food, water, medicine and other supplies, except for a trickle of aid entering the south from Egypt at the Rafah crossing and Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing.

The United Nations says one-quarter of Gaza's 2.3 million people face starvation. Aid officials have said that airdrops are not an efficient means of distributing aid and are a measure of last resort.

Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and fighters.

Around 80 per cent of the population of 2.3 million have fled their homes, and UN agencies say hundreds of thousands are on the brink of famine. Critics say Netanyahu's decision-making has been tainted by political considerations, a charge he denies.

Election for control of Serbia's capital set to be rerun

Belgrade (AP): A key vote for control of Serbia's capital, Belgrade — a focal point of widespread fraud reports after last December elections — is to be rerun later this year, officials said Sunday. The announcement follows months of soaring political tensions over claims that the ruling populists of President Aleksandar Vucic orchestrated a fraud in the vote for Belgrade's city assembly. The right-wing Serbian Progressive Party was declared the winner of the December 17 election. But the main opposition alliance, Serbia Against Violence, have insisted they were robbed of a victory in Belgrade and that the parliamentary vote that took place at the same time was also marred by widespread irregularities. The dispute has led to large street protests. It was not immediately clear when the new vote would be held. Sunday marked the formal deadline to form the Belgrade city authorities following the vote in December.

MQ9-B drone sales to India enters next step

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The sale of 31 MQ9-B SkyGuardian Drones to India is expected to be fast-tracked now that the major hurdle of mandatory 30 days of Congressional notification is likely to pass without any objection from the lawmakers on Sunday, but for the routine procedural matters posed by the upcoming general elections.

The Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified the US Congress in February about the determination of the State Department of a possible Foreign Military Sale to India of 31 MQ9-B Remotely Piloted Aircraft and related equipment for an estimated cost of USD 3.99 billion.

The 31 MQ9-B SkyGuardian Drones itself cost USD 1.70 billion, while the rest of the services including technology and equipment are estimated to cost USD 2.29 billion. In addition to 31 MQ9-B SkyGuardian Aircraft, the proposed deal includes 161 Embedded Global Positioning & Inertial Navigation Systems (EGIs), 35 L3 Rio Grande Communications Intelligence Sensor Suite.



"This sale is necessary in furtherance of the US foreign policy and national security objectives," the notification said.

The next step is for the United States to send a letter of offer and acceptance to India, which under normal circumstances should be considered as a mere formality.

Announced by US President Joe Biden during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington DC in June 2023, all major legal and bureaucratic procedures on the issue have already been cleared from the Indian side including that from the Union Cabinet.

After the letter goes out from the State Department, the next step is for India to give a

formal acceptance letter on the matter to the United States, which is essential for the formal price negotiations between the two countries to begin.

The announcement of the general election, which brings into force the Model Code of Conduct, is unlikely to pose any last legal hurdle.

"Model Code is not applicable to any matter pertaining directly to the defence forces, be it the recruitments/promotions for defence forces, any service matters pertaining to them, defence purchases of any kind, tenders relating to the matter of the defence forces and therefore no reference in such matters need to be sent to the Election Commission," says the Model Code of Conduct issued by the Election Commission of India.

"These instructions shall be treated as standing instructions of the Commission and will be applicable for all elections in future. This may be brought to the notice of all concerned for future guidance," said the Election Commission of India in a letter issued on the issue to the Ministry of Defence on March 27, 2014, in response to a query.

Medical plane carrying Norway's King Harald V departs Malaysia

AP ■ LANGKAWI

An airplane carrying Norway's King Harald V departed Malaysia on Sunday, a day after he was implanted with a pacemaker. Europe's oldest reigning monarch was hospitalised for an infection during a private vacation on the northern resort island of Langkawi, the royal house said Tuesday. He underwent surgery at the Sultanah Maliha Hospital on Saturday to implant a temporary pacemaker due to a low heart rate, according to the royal house. Norwegian media outlets said Harald travelled to Malaysia with his wife, Queen Sonja, to celebrate his 87th birthday. A Scandinavian Airlines medical evacuation plane, which took off from Oslo on Thursday, arrived in Langkawi on Friday. The Boeing 737-700 aircraft has

previously been used as a flying ambulance. According to FlightRadar24, the same plane departed from Langkawi on Sunday headed for Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, from where it is scheduled to travel onward to Norway.

The Norwegian royal house confirmed Sunday that the monarch has left Malaysia and the plane is expected to arrive in Oslo early Monday.

"Upon arrival in Norway, His Majesty will be admitted to the (Oslo) hospital Rikshospitalet," the royal palace said, adding that Harald would remain on sick leave for the next two weeks, during which Crown Prince Haakon will assume the monarch's duties.

According to Norwegian news agency NTB, which cited information from Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, the king's transport back to

Norway will cost an estimated 2 million Norwegian kroner (USD 190,000), which will be taken from the defense budget.

The aging Norwegian monarch has suffered from frail health over the past few years, and has been admitted to a hospital for treatment on numerous occasions. Harald, who has been seen using crutches, had an operation to replace a heart valve in October 2020 after being hospitalized with breathing difficulties.

Harald has repeatedly said he has no plans to abdicate, unlike his second cousin Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, who stepped down earlier this year.

Harald's duties as Norway's head of state are ceremonial and he holds no political power. He ascended to the throne following the death of his father, King Olav, in 1991.

Malaysia may renew hunt for missing flight MH370

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia's government said on Sunday it may renew the hunt for missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 after a US technology firm proposed a fresh search in the southern Indian Ocean where the plane is believed to have crashed a decade ago.

Transport Minister Anthony Loke said Texas-based Ocean Infinity has proposed another "no find, no fee" basis to scour the seabeds, expanding from the site where it first searched in 2018.

He said he has invited the company to meet him to evaluate new scientific evidence it has to find the plane's final resting place.

If the evidence is credible, he said, he will seek Cabinet's approval to sign a new contract with Ocean Infinity to resume the search.

"The government is steadfast in our resolve to locate MH370," Loke told a remembrance event to mark the 10th anniversary of the disappearance of the jet. "We really hope the search can find the plane and provide truth to the next-of-kin." The Boeing 777 plane carrying 239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, from the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Beijing, vanished from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014. Satellite data showed the plane deviated from its flight path and was believed to have crashed in the southern Indian Ocean.

But an expensive multinational government search failed to turn up any clues, although several pieces of debris washed ashore on the east African coast and Indian Ocean islands. A private search in 2018 by Ocean Infinity also found nothing but the tragedy sparked moves to bolster aviation safety. AP

'Extremist preachers from countries like Pak to be blocked from entering UK'

London (PTI): Hate preachers with extremist Islamist views from countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indonesia will be blocked from entering Britain under new plans being drafted by the government, according to a UK media report on Sunday.

The Daily Telegraph reports that the British government is concerned about a "shocking increase" in extremist activity and officials are being deputed to identify the most dangerous extremists from overseas so they can be added to visa warning lists. Under the new plans, those on the list will be automatically refused entry to the UK.

The revelation comes days after British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak delivered an impassioned speech from the podium at 10 Downing Street in London, warning that the country's democratic and multi-faith values were under threat by extremists.

"We will also act to prevent people entering this country whose aim is to undermine its values," Sunak said in his speech on Friday.

"The Home Secretary has instructed that if those here on visas choose to spew hate on protests or seek to intimidate people we will remove their right to be here," he said.

The British Indian leader had also appealed to demonstrators taking to the streets of the country to protest against the Israel-Hamas conflict to ensure their actions are not hijacked by extremists.

"The time has now come for us all to stand together to combat the forces of division and beat this poison. We must face down the extremists who would tear us apart," he said, warning that "Islamist extrem-

ists and the far right feed off and embolden each other."

Thousands took to the streets for another wave of pro-Palestine protests on Saturday, with the Metropolitan Police making 12 arrests for activities in breach of peace in London.

According to 'The Daily Telegraph' report, an official review by Lord Walney, the government's independent adviser on political violence and disruption, calls on ministers to tackle the growing threat posed by fringe, Left-wing groups that have allied with Islamist extremists at such pro-Palestine marches across the UK.

"One of the conclusions of my review is to look at and understand the threat from anti-democratic far-Left groups, alongside that posed by Islamists and the far right... You are seeing an unholy alliance between far-Left groups and some of the Islamist extremists that has been seen on the marches," he told the newspaper.

Walney's report is with the UK Home Office and is due to be published later this month.

"Extremism has no place in our society and we will not tolerate tactics that set out to intimidate, threaten or cause disruption to the law-abiding majority," a Home Office spokesperson said.

"In recent months, we have also witnessed a small number of protestors display violent and hateful behaviour, and the police have our full support in tackling extremism and hate crime.

We are considering the report's recommendations extremely carefully and will respond in due course," the spokesperson said.

S Korean doctors hold massive anti-govt rally

AP ■ SEOUL

Thousands of senior doctors rallied in the South Korean capital, Seoul, on Sunday to express their support for junior doctors who have been on strike for nearly two weeks over a government plan to sharply increase the number of medical school admissions. The rally came as the government said it would begin to take steps Monday to suspend the doctors' licenses of nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents for defying government orders to end their walkouts, which have disrupted hospital operations. "The government's absurd medical policy has triggered immense resistance by trainee doctors and medical students, and we doctors have become one," Park Sung-min, a senior member of the Korea Medical Association, said in a speech at the rally. "I'm asking the government: Please, stop the threats and suppression



now." Protesters chanted slogans, sang and held placards criticising the government's plan. There were no reports of violence.

As of Thursday night, 8,945 of the country's 13,000 medical interns and residents were confirmed to have left their worksites, according to the Health Ministry. The government had said they would face minimum three-month license suspensions and indict-

ments by prosecutors if they didn't return by February 29. The striking doctors are a fraction of South Korea's 140,000 doctors. But they account for 30-40 per cent of the total doctors at some major hospitals, where they assist senior doctors during surgeries and other treatments while training. Their walkouts have subsequently caused numerous cancellations of surgeries and medical treatments at the hos-

pitals. Senior doctors have staged a series of rallies backing the young doctors but haven't joined the walkouts. If they also launch strikes, observers say that would be a major blow to South Korea's medical service. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo on Sunday urged senior doctors to persuade the striking junior doctors to return to work.

Police said they were investigating five ranking Korea Medical Association officials accused of inciting and abetting the junior doctors' walkouts. Seoul police chief Cho Ji-ho told reporters Sunday that police had raided KMA offices as part of the investigation.

The government wants to increase South Korea's medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current 3,058, to better deal with the country's rapidly aging population.

Officials say South Korea's doctor-to-population ratio is

one of the lowest among developed countries.

But many doctors have vehemently protested the plan, saying medical schools can't handle such a sharp increase in the number of students.

They say the recruitment plan also does not address a chronic shortage of doctors in essential but low-paying specialties like pediatrics and emergency departments. Doctors say adding too many new doctors would also increase public medical expenses since greater competition would lead to excess treatments. Without concrete plans on how to educate the newly added students, "the quality of medical education will plunge endlessly, resulting in a unsafe, low-quality medical service and eventually a collapse of the medical service of the Republic of Korea," Lee Jeong-geun, acting leader of the Korea Medical Association, said at the rally.

Organised crime attacks on local candidates raise fears Mexico City

AP ■ WAJIMA

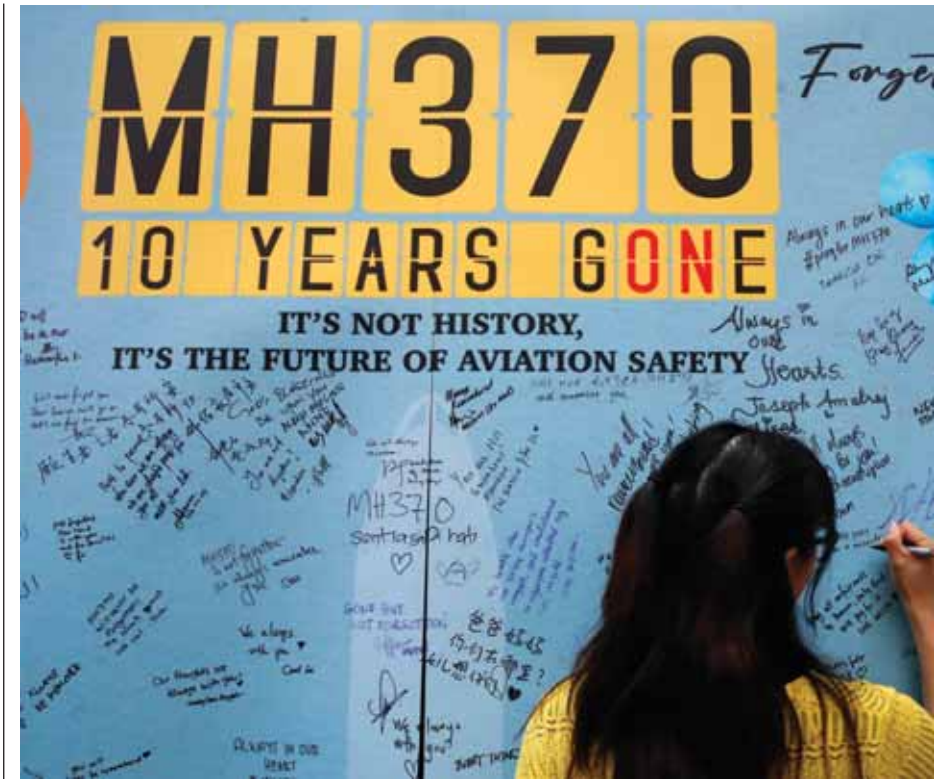
As Mexico prepares for the largest elections in its history, organised crime is once again preying on local candidates across swaths of the country where cartels dominate, raising concerns among experts that these could be Mexico's bloodiest elections ever. Julian Lopez, coordinator for the Citizen Movement party in the southern state of Guerrero, experienced it first hand when rifle-toting gunmen abducted him and two colleagues while they were driving on Feb. 7. The 43-year-old Lopez was beaten, stripped of his possessions, made to kneel near a remote garbage dump and ultimately abandoned in the middle of the night. Two mayoral hopefuls in the town of Maravatio in neighboring Michoacan state were not so fortunate. They were killed by gunmen within hours

of each other Monday. One was from the governing Morena party of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the other from the conservative National Action Party. A third mayoral hopeful from that town was abducted and found dead in November. On Feb. 10, a man running for Congress for the Morena party in the sprawling Mexico City suburb of Ecatepec was fatally shot in the street alongside his brother. He had allegedly received threats from a local union.

A month earlier, on Jan. 5, the local leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party and candidate for mayor of Suchiate, Chiapas, was killed. The same day, in the northwestern state of Colima, a mayoral candidate of the Citizen Movement party in Armeria was shot by gunmen while in his vehicle. Lopez, the candidate in Guerrero, has refused to

travel in armoured vehicles with armed security since his abduction. "How will it look to see a leader moving around the state of Guerrero with armed officials and in armored cars?" he asked. "I don't think that's the way to get closer to the people or promote citizen participation." Thousands of local candidates find themselves in a similar quandary ahead of the June 2 elections, which will occur in all 32 jurisdictions, with more than 20,000 positions up for grabs, making it Mexico's largest election, according to the National Electoral Institute.

While federal authorities offer security details to national candidates, those running for local offices - the ones that drug cartels really want to control - are completely exposed and acutely aware of the optics of running from within a security bubble.



A woman writes well messages on the message board during the tenth annual remembrance event at a shopping mall, in Subang Jaya, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Sunday. Ten years ago, a Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, had disappeared March 8, 2014 while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with over 200 people on board. AP/PTI

Shehbaz becomes Pak PM for second time

Vows to rebuild economy

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pledging to revive Pakistan's debt-trapped economy and eradicate terrorism, newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said his government would not allow the country to become part of some "great game" and would maintain cordial relations with neighbours based on the principles of equality.

In his victory speech in the National Assembly soon after he was elected as the 24th prime minister and for a second time since 2022, the 72-year-old profusely thanked his elder brother and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif and allies for putting their trust in him and allowing him to head a coalition government after last month's election resulted in a hung Parliament.

While Shehbaz secured 201 votes, his challenger Omar Ayub Khan of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) got only 92 votes in the election held at the newly-elected National Assembly.

Shehbaz said that as no party secured a clear parliamentary majority, it was "the democratic way" that "like-minded parties may form a coalition government".

Following the February 8 marred by allegations of vote rigging, the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) headed by Nawaz Sharif, reached a coalition deal with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) led by former minister Bilawal Zardari-Bhutto.

This post-poll deal effectively ensured that jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's PTI party would not return to power though independent candidates backed by it won the maximum number of seats in Parliament. Amidst vociferous sloganeering by the members of Imran Khan's party members against alleged "mandate



thieves," Shehbaz warned that Pakistan was facing an alarming debt crisis where even the expenditures of the National Assembly were being paid by borrowing money.

He said that his government would work hard and set a goal to become a member of G20 countries by 2030. The G20 or Group of 20 is an intergovernmental forum of the world's major developed and developing economies.

He said that Pakistan would not become part of any "great game" and his government would increase the number of friends. He pledged to build and improve ties with all leading nations, including its neighbours.

"We will keep ties with neighbours on the basis of equality," Shehbaz said.

Shehbaz, however, raked up the Kashmir issue and equated it with Palestine. "Let's all come together [...] and the National Assembly should pass a resolution for the freedom of Kashmiris and Palestinians," he added. Shehbaz said that his elder brother has never even thought of harming the country, unlike his opponents.

"This is the difference between this leadership and that leadership [...] the entire assembly is witness to the fact that we never thought of the politics of revenge.

"Never was once a pot

broken, nor was any building ever damaged [...] but it shameful that the country saw a day when GHQ, corps commander houses, airfields were attacked on May 9," Shehbaz said, referring to the unprecedented attacks following Khan's arrest in an alleged corruption case last year.

He said that perpetrators of the May 9 riots will not be forgiven, vowing action against all those who were involved in the riots. Shehbaz also promised to end terrorism in the country and address its root causes. He said his government aims to take the National Action Plan (NAP) forward.

In his address, Shehbaz said Pakistan had a big challenge and opportunity before it. "If we come together and decide to change the fate of Pakistan [...] then God willing, we will defeat these challenges and take Pakistan to its rightful position," he said. He said that this job was difficult but not impossible. Shehbaz said that Pakistan is facing an alarming debt crisis where even the expenditures of the National Assembly were being paid by borrowing money.

"But if we decide to do a deep surgery and bring changes in the system, basic reform [...] and I have no doubt that Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari and others will agree that we can either get rid

More than 100 supporters of PTI protesting vote rigging arrested

PTI ■ LAHORE

More than 100 supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party have been arrested from different parts of Punjab province of Pakistan for staging rallies against alleged vote rigging, police said on Sunday.

On the call of party founder Imran Khan, supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party held protests across Pakistan on Saturday against the alleged "massive rigging" in the February 8 general elections. Most arrests took place in Lahore where newly elected Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz ordered a clamp down on the protesting PTI supporters. "Police thrashed and arrested 80 workers and leaders in Lahore. Over 20 have been arrested in Gujrat city. Protests were held in 38 cities of Punjab and the federal capital Islamabad," a PTI spokesperson said on Sunday.

In Lahore, police baton-charged protesters at GPO Chowk and Liberty Chowk. "PTI leaders Mian Shahzad Farooq and Afzaal Azeem Pahat, who contested the election last month against Maryam Nawaz and her uncle Shehbaz Sharif, respectively, were also arrested. Farooq had defeated Maryam but the

biggest challenge faced by the country. Shehbaz highlighted the burden of debt paying and said that the country was required to pay billions of rupees in interest only. He highlighted that the energy sector was crumbling due to the accumulating debt owed by the country to the power-producing companies. He also said that state-owned entities like Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) were running into losses worth billions of rupees.

He promised to put the country on the path of development. "Though it is easier said than done, we will fulfil our task," he said.

Termed the agriculture sector as the economy's backbone, Shehbaz said that his government would provide subsidies to the farmers. He also promised to bring investment into the country and create economic conditions that would spur economic growth. Shehbaz was first sworn in as Pakistan's prime minister in April 2022, after Imran Khan was dramatically ousted from power in a parliamentary no-confidence vote.

He promised to put the country on the path of development. "Though it is easier said than done, we will fulfil our task," he said.

Election Commission of Pakistan had changed the result," the spokesperson said. Aftab Bajwa, the former bar secretary of the Supreme Court, was also arrested.

Videos of Khan's supporters being dragged out of cars and beaten for displaying PTI flags were doing the rounds on social media. Punjab police said they arrested those protesters who blocked the road. The service of X, formerly Twitter, also remained disrupted in the country on Saturday and Sunday. The disruption of different social media sites, particularly X, has become an order of the day after the controversy-marred polls.

The PTI has condemned the "brutal" police action to stop the peaceful protest against the massive rigging in elections and stealing the mandate of the people to impose "the mandate thieves" on the nation. PTI Central Punjab General Secretary Hammad Azhar said: "Controversial and fake CM Maryam Nawaz has committed fascism by using the State's machinery against peaceful protesters."

PTI spokesperson Raouf Hasan denounced the "fascist, coercive tactics and the unlawful use of State machinery" to disrupt the peaceful protest across the country against the

theft of the public mandate.

"The nation will not rest till it reclaims stolen mandate from the thieves. The government of mandate thieves is unacceptable," Hasan said.

Hasan said the people came in droves on the call of their beloved leader Imran Khan to protest against poll fraud, which proved that the mandate thieves rode to power on the coattails of the stolen votes. "The erection of unconstitutional obstacles and massive police deployment in the way of protesters clearly shows the level of fear of the fake government of mandate thieves."

Hasan went on to say that the people gave a clear and huge mandate to Khan, however, the clear majority was converted into a minority fraudulently through result manipulation. Hasan made it clear the PTI would strongly resist any attempt to impose the fraudsters on the country.

"We will not accept the fake government formed based on Form 47 fraudulently prepared by the ECP," he said. He emphasised the future of Pakistan was linked with democracy and democratic values and norms. Democracy can only be brought in Pakistan by giving people the constitutional authority of decision-making, he said.

Shehbaz a favourite of establishment

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Shehbaz Sharif, who is known to be an astute politician and a good administrator, has once again donned the mantle of prime ministership of cash-strapped Pakistan by a quirk of fate and his amicable ties with the powerful establishment in the coup-prone country.

The 72-year-old President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the younger brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, always played the second fiddle to the 74-year-old party supremo, who returned to Pakistan in October last year, in his bid to script history by becoming the premier for a record fourth time in 2024.

However, the outcome of the February 8 elections crushed Nawaz Sharif's dream of becoming the prime minister for the fourth time. The PML-N, which was hoping to form a government on its own, won only 75 seats, trailing behind independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the 336-member National Assembly.

With the election leading to a hung Parliament, the PML-N did not have much of a choice, but to form a coalition government to prevent Khan's PTI from making its bid to return to power.

Nawaz had tasked Shehbaz to negotiate with other like-minded parties on the formation of a coalition government. However, the PML-N party soon realised that there was opposition to Nawaz Sharif's candidacy. Thus, the elder Sharif was left with no choice but to nominate his younger brother as the consensus prime ministerial candidate of the PML-N and the Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) last month.

Party sources say Nawaz was not comfortable heading a coalition government and abdicated his claim for the premier-ship in favour of his younger brother, who seemed to have the blessings of the military. Shehbaz reportedly rejected several offers by the powerful establishment on different occasions to become prime minister

by ditching his brother. He is known for the speedy completion of mega projects, which popularised a new local phrase of "Shehbaz Sharif speed" for development schemes.

During his two successive tenures as chief minister of Punjab (2008-2013 and 2013-2018), a network of underpasses, overhead bridges and mass transit systems was introduced in the most populous Punjab province and was completed in record time.

Born in September 1951 in a Punjabi-speaking Kashmiri family in Lahore, Shehbaz did his graduation from the Government College University, Lahore. His family emigrated from Anantnag in Kashmir for business and settled in the village of Jati Umra in Amritsar district, Punjab at the beginning of the 20th century before moving to Pakistan.

Shehbaz, who looked after the sprawling family business, hit the political scene in the late 1980s when he was elected as a member of the Punjab Assembly in 1988. Shehbaz served as chief minister of Punjab from 1997 to 1999, when his brother was serving his second term as prime minister but fell out with the military. Following General Pervez Musharraf's coup in 1999 toppling the Nawaz Sharif government, Shehbaz along with the family spent eight years in exile in Saudi Arabia after striking a deal with the then-military ruler.

The family returned to Pakistan in 2007. Shehbaz wore the hat of Punjab chief minister for the second term in 2008 and he won the same slot for the third time in 2013. After then-prime minister Nawaz Sharif was disqualified from holding office in 2017 in the Panama Papers case, the PML-N appointed Shehbaz as its president.

Shehbaz also showed himself as an astute politician when he served as a leader of the opposition from 2018 to 2022 after the PML-N lost to Khan's PTI in the 2018 polls. It was once again quite a tough period for the Sharifs, as the elder Sharif was convicted in two different cases of corruption, along with his daughter, and jailed.

Xi congratulates new Pak PM

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday congratulated Shehbaz Sharif on his election as the Prime Minister of Pakistan for a second time and hoped that Beijing and Islamabad will continue to deepen their all-weather strategic cooperative partnership under his leadership.

Shehbaz Sharif, who was the consensus candidate of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), was on Sunday elected as the prime minister for the second consecutive term. Shehbaz received 201 votes in the 336-member house while his challenger Omar Ayub Khan of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) secured 92 votes. In his congratulatory message, Xi said he believes that under the leadership of younger Sharif and the new Pakistani government, and with the united efforts of all walks of life in Pakistan, the country will achieve new and

greater accomplishments in the cause of national development and progress. Xi stressed that China and Pakistan should continue their traditional friendship, strengthen exchanges and cooperation in all fields, jointly build an upgraded version of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), continue to deepen the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and build a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era to bring more benefits for the people of the two countries.

In his victory speech, Shehbaz Sharif vowed to further promote the CPEC projects with China, an all-weather ally. There is a sense of relief among the official circles here that Pakistan, a key ally of China which has been going through grave economic and political crises for the last several years, has an elected government that Beijing could deal with.

China had an uneasy relationship with former prime minister Imran Khan's gov-

ernment which was blamed for the slow pace of USD 60 billion CPEC. Both Shehbaz, his brother and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif are familiar political figures for the ruling Chinese Communist Party as both of them along with the Pakistan military strengthened the all-weather alliance during their tenures. They are also firm backers of the strategic CPEC project.

China has been providing forex loans and rollover of its debt periodically to bail out Pakistan which is facing a severe economic crisis. Recent reports from Islamabad said China has agreed to roll over a USD 2 billion loan due to be paid in March.

Besides Xi, Chinese Premier Li Qiang sent a congratulatory message to Shehbaz, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Shehbaz will be administered the oath of office on Monday at the Presidential mansion, Aiwan-e-Sadr. Shehbaz earlier served as prime minister of a coalition government from April 2022 to August 2023 before Parliament

Joint session of Parl to elect Pakistan's new prez called on March 9

Islamabad (PTI): Newly-elected National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq on Sunday summoned a joint session of the Parliament to elect the next president of Pakistan on March 9, a position that former president Asif Ali Zardari is almost certain to win again after nearly 11 years. In a notification issued today, the speaker summoned the session at 10 am, with Zardari, 68, set to face off against his rival ethnic Pashtun politician Mahmood Khan Achakzai.

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 set to become the president for the second time as he is being supported by the parties that enjoy a majority in the electoral college. He also served as president from 2008 to 2013.

Death toll rises from drone strike on Ukrainian port city

AP ■ KYIV

The death toll rose to 10 on Sunday from a Russian drone strike that destroyed an apartment block in Ukraine's southern port city of Odesa the previous day when a local official reported that the body of a third child was pulled from the rubble. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on Western allies to boost Ukraine's air defences in the wake of the deadly attack.

Oleh Kiper, the governor of the Odesa region, said on Telegram that rescue workers on Sunday morning retrieved the remains of a woman and her baby, who appeared "not even a year old".

Kiper added that emergency services continue to comb through the rubble. On Saturday, Ukrainian authorities reported that a months-old baby was among those killed

SL tourism sector sees 122% growth in Jan '24 compared to last year, says minister

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan minister on Sunday said the country's external sector performance has seen a marked improvement year on year with tourism fetching USD 342 million in January 2024, an impressive 122 per cent jump from last year. Speaking in Ruwanwella, his home constituency, Minister of State for Finance Ranjith Siyambalapatiya was delving into the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's external sector indicators issued mid-week.

Siyambalapatiya said the bank figures show that receipts from tourism had fetched USD 342 million, which is a 122 per cent growth in January 2024 year on year. The inward remittances from Sri Lankan expats in January 2024 had grown by five per cent to USD 488 mil-

Kuwait to hold polls on Apr 4, latest round of voting in years of turmoil

AP ■ DUBAI

Kuwait said on Saturday it will hold elections for its national assembly on April 4, its latest round of voting after years of political turmoil. The state-run KUNA news agency made the announcement, citing a decree published by the oil-rich country's official gazette. In February, Kuwait's third dissolved parliament after a lawmaker reportedly insulted the ruler.

Domestic political disputes have been gripping Kuwait for years — including the overhaul of Kuwait's welfare system — which prevented the sheikhdom from taking on debt. That has left it with little in its coffers to pay bloated public sector salaries, despite generating immense wealth from its oil reserves.

Parliament has been repeatedly dissolved after failing to move forward, with Kuwait's Constitutional Court in 2023 annulling a 2022 decree overturning another such annulment. The country's late emir then annulled that parliament again and held an election for a new parliament, which was annulled with the February decision. Kuwait, a nation home to some 4.2 million people that's slightly smaller than the US state of New Jersey, has the world's sixth-largest known oil reserves.

It has been a staunch US ally since the 1991 Gulf War expelled the occupying Iraqi forces of Saddam Hussein. Kuwait hosts some 13,500 American troops in the country, as well as the forward headquarters of the US Army in the Middle East.

Pak Senate to take up motion seeking permanent ban on social media sites

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Amidst serious concerns over the continued disruption of the social media platform X in Pakistan for over a fortnight now, a member of the Senate has demanded a permanent ban on all social media due to its negative impact on the younger generation.

Senator Bahramand Khan Tangi, who was recently expelled by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) after he moved a resolution seeking the delaying of the February 8 polls, in the resolution called for a complete ban on all social media platforms, deeming them detrimental to the future of the young generation. Dawn News reported.

The resolution notes with concern "the use of such platforms against the interests of the country through negative and malicious propaganda against the armed forces of Pakistan" and calls upon the Senate to recommend to the government to ban Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube to save the young generation from their negative and devastating effects.

The X website has been largely offline since February

17, with occasional service restorations, mainly after former commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chhatta made a statement in front of the media claiming that the "elections were rigged".

Separately, reports said authorities are considering a blanket ban on all Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), prompting the IT and services sector to express concerns that such action could severely harm the cash-strapped country's economy.

A majority of users are using VPNs to access the platform. Numerous posts have been mocking the authorities, including caretaker IT Minister Umar Saif, for using a VPN. Saif uses a VPN as his current location in recent tweets is showing Hong Kong. So far, no authority has

taken responsibility for restricting the services of X, which activists see as a dangerous trend. "This way, those in power are saying that they can ban any platform without any reason or being answerable to anyone," said Nighat Dad, a digital rights activist and member of the UN Secretary General's advisory board on AI.

She added that such a blanket ban on any platform is a violation of fundamental rights, and those in power are not considering the reputation of the country worldwide, especially concerning those who are being invited to invest in Pakistan. Rumours that even VPNs will be banned in the country have rung alarm bells in the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA).

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SL tourism sector sees 122% growth in Jan '24 compared to last year, says minister

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan minister on Sunday said the country's external sector performance has seen a marked improvement year on year with tourism fetching USD 342 million in January 2024, an impressive 122 per cent jump from last year. Speaking in Ruwanwella, his home constituency, Minister of State for Finance Ranjith Siyambalapatiya was delving into the Central Bank of Sri Lanka's external sector indicators issued mid-week.

Siyambalapatiya said the bank figures show that receipts from tourism had fetched USD 342 million, which is a 122 per cent growth in January 2024 year on year. The inward remittances from Sri Lankan expats in January 2024 had grown by five per cent to USD 488 mil-

Kuwait to hold polls on Apr 4, latest round of voting in years of turmoil

AP ■ DUBAI

Kuwait said on Saturday it will hold elections for its national assembly on April 4, its latest round of voting after years of political turmoil. The state-run KUNA news agency made the announcement, citing a decree published by the oil-rich country's official gazette. In February, Kuwait's third dissolved parliament after a lawmaker reportedly insulted the ruler.

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India on global stage of chip makers in five years: Vaishnaw

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

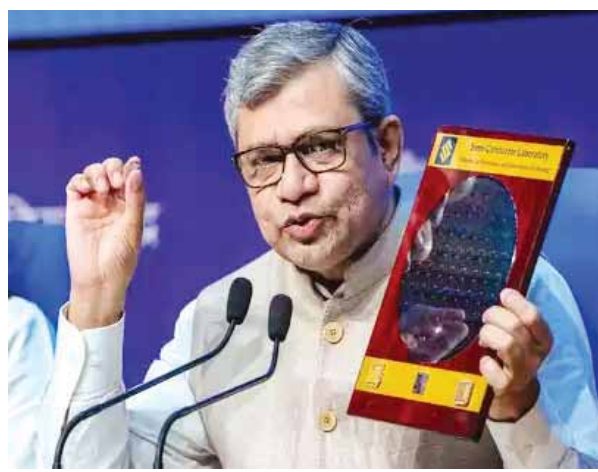
India will, in next five years, join the high-stake global stage of semiconductor manufacturing as it combines unparalleled design capabilities with USD 10 billion of incentives to draw manufacturers to set up new fabs and units that will cut dominance of Taiwan, South Korea and China, said IT and Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

In an interview to PTI, he said India's well-crafted policies are tempting manufacturers to set up new fabs (semiconductor fabrication plants) and pouring investment in related sectors. Semiconductors are an essential component of electronic devices, and are

used in automobiles to computers, mobile phones and even washing machines. India already has factories of best known automobile companies — from Renault-Nissan to Hyundai, computer makers such as Dell, Apple suppliers and electronic makers like Samsung which produce TVs, washing machines and fridges, among others.

Now, India is eyeing to step up the manufacturing value chain with a high-stake semiconductor manufacturing. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's Rs 76,000 crore of incentives have got four players including Micron and Tatas.

Vaishnaw said the country already has roughly one-third of global design talent.



His government is leveraging this and India's geopolitical clout to become an indispensable partner for tech ambitions of the US, which

like other western economies, is looking to decouple their supply chains from China. Beijing's draconian lockdowns had disrupted global chip

supply and sent companies and governments on a hunt for alternative sources of production.

India is offering itself as a democratic and trusted alternative tech hub to China. "People who were earlier thinking when should we go to India or should we go to India...Now they are asking how soon do we go to India...That is the change which is happening. This means, practically every big player would now like to reconsider their investment plans and come to India," he said.

Asked about the timelines when India would aim to be a formidable player rivaling known semiconductor destinations, the minister said "in the coming 5 years, definitely".

Last week, the Cabinet approved proposals to set up three semiconductor plants, including a mega fab by Tata Group, at a cumulative investment of Rs 1.26 lakh crore, as India moved to position itself as an international powerhouse in chip manufacturing.

"...It is very important for any developing country, an economy of our size, to have a semiconductor supply chain within the country. We have very strong design capabilities, as a corollary of design capabilities we must have the manufacturing capability also because that is where value gets added further," Vaishnaw explained. The semiconductor plans will make India self-reliant, trigger a multiplier effect on economy and various

industries, create job and spur livelihoods, according to the minister.

"The semiconductor industry is a big multiplier for many more industries — automobiles, electric vehicle, electronics, power electronics, defence — every manufacturing sector requires semiconductors. So having that as a semiconductor value chain within the ecosystem will be pull for all of these," Vaishnaw said.

As per the announcements, Tata Electronics Pvt Ltd will set up a semiconductor fab in partnership with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp at Dholera's special industrial region in Gujarat. The plant will have the capacity to produce 50,000

wafers per month and involve an investment of Rs 91,000 crore.

These chips driven by advanced technology will cater to multiple sectors — power management chips for electric vehicles (EV), telecom, defence, automotive, consumer electronics, display, and power electronics.

The government has also approved a proposal by Tatas to build a greenfield semiconductor assembly and test facility in Jagiroad, Assam. The facility will be built with an investment outlay of Rs 27,000 crore and is expected to generate over 27,000 direct and indirect jobs in the region.

Notably, this will be India's first semiconductor unit in the northeast.

LIC Housing Finance to raise funds via green bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

LIC Housing Finance, the mortgage arm of insurance behemoth LIC, plans to mobilise funds through green bonds in the coming financial year with an aim to finance environmentally-sustainable housing projects.

"Green financing is something that we will look at the next year and we would deploy the fund for financing green housing projects," LIC Housing Finance MD and CEO Tribhuvan Adhikari told PTI in an interaction.

LIC Housing Finance will have its board meeting on March 7 to consider and approve the borrowing plan for 2024-2025 through loans or issue of redeemable non-convertible debentures, zero coupon bonds, subordinate debt, Tier II bonds or any other means approved by the regulator.

Adhikari said the company hopes to hit the net profit of Rs 5,000 crore-milestone by the end of current financial



year on the back of robust loan demand and expansion in non-core business.

The non-core businesses include Loan Against Property (LAP) and affordable housing finance, he said.

"Affordable housing segment remained strong in tier-2 and tier-3 markets. We remained focused on this segment, as it gives an opportunity to millions of aspiring Indians to own their home with a moderate budget," he said.

In addition to business growth, he said, "our endeavour has been to improve service standards

through ongoing digital transformation of our processes".

With fourth quarter usually being the most important business months for the company, and going by the current trends, he said, "we expect to close this financial year with healthy numbers."

He said, the company has earned a net profit of Rs 3,675 crore in the three quarters and hope to touch the milestone of Rs 5,000 crore by the end of this financial year.

During 2022-23, the biggest housing finance company had earned a net profit of Rs 2,891 crore.

FM to inaugurate conference of GST enforcement chiefs today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will inaugurate on Monday a conference of enforcement chiefs of all state and central GST officers to tackle tax evasion.

In the conference, Goods and Services Tax (GST) formations will deliberate on combating GST evasion, including examining current challenges and delving into successful methods adopted by central and state tax enforcement officers.

It would also strategise on effective methods to combat fake invoicing, sharing best practices, fostering synergy, and leveraging technology and data.

The conference will also balance ease of doing business and discuss striking a crucial equilibrium between facilitating a smooth business environment and implementing effective and deterrent enforcement measures.



Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman will inaugurate the one-day conference and also deliver the keynote address on March 4, a finance ministry statement said.

Embracing the spirit of cooperative federalism as exemplified by GST, this conference serves as a valuable platform for both Centre and state GST Enforcement authorities to share best practices, foster mutual learning, and collectively strengthen the GST administration, it added.

Term deposits rise on rising interest rates

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rising interest rates seem to be driving more people to go in for term savings plans as the share of such instruments in total bank deposits increased to 60.3 per cent in December 2023 from 57.2 per cent in March 2023, according to the Reserve Bank data.

On an incremental basis, term deposits accounted for nearly 97.6 per cent of the total deposits during April-December 2023 and the shares of current account and savings account (CASA) deposits went down, said RBI's Quarterly BSR-2: Deposits with Scheduled Commercial Banks - December 2023. "Rising return on term deposits has been driving the compositional shift in bank

deposits: the share of term deposits in total deposits increased to 60.3 per cent in December 2023 from 57.2 per cent in March 2023," it said.

RBI further said that deposits moved to higher interest rate buckets as the share of term deposits bearing over 7 per cent interest rate rose to 61.4 per cent of the total term deposits in December 2023 from 54.7 per cent a quarter ago and 33.7 per cent in March 2023.

It is almost a year that the Reserve Bank has kept the short-term lending rate or repo rate at 6.5 per cent. The benchmark interest rate was last raised in February 2023 to 6.5 per cent from 6.25 per cent due to inflation driven mainly by global developments.

In an off-cycle meeting in May 2022, the Monetary Policy Committee of RBI

raised the policy rate by 40 basis points and it was followed by rate hikes of varying sizes, in each of the five subsequent meetings till February 2023. The repo rate was raised by 250 basis points cumulatively between May 2022 and February 2023.

RBI's quarterly BSR data also showed that nearly two thirds of the incremental term deposits during October-December 2023 were of the size 'Rs 1 lakh to less than Rs 1 crore'. The corresponding share in the previous quarter was 46.5 per cent. Female customers made significant contribution in deposit accretion. Their shares in incremental CASA, term, and total deposits during October-December 2023 were 63.4 per cent, 36.1 per cent, and 40.1 per cent, respectively.

IFFCO moves NCLT against Triumph Offshore, Swan Energy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IFFCO has moved the NCLT against Swan Energy Ltd (SEL) and their joint venture Triumph Offshore to restrain their JV firm from passing any resolution without its approval and issuing any share/security to the lenders against loans.

Seeking an injunction against any such proposal, IFFCO, in its petition filed before the Ahmedabad bench of the NCLT, alleged that Triumph Offshore is pre-paying the debt, which may result in dilution of its shareholding in the joint venture firm and is detrimental to its interest.

IFFCO has moved the NCLT under sections 241 and 242 of the Companies Act 2013, alleging oppression and

mismanagement.

It has prayed to restrain Swan Energy and Triumph Offshore "from passing any board resolution without the prior written approval of petitioner (IFFCO), with reference to the substitution of the bank term loan with promoters loan or from issuing any shares/security or any instrument convertible into equity in favour of R2 (SEL) or any third party, which may result into diluting shareholder of the petitioner".

Leading fertiliser player IFFCO owns 49 per cent of Triumph Offshore, the joint venture with Swan Energy, established to set up a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU). Swan Energy Ltd (SEL) is the majority partner with a 51 per

cent stake.

Triumph Offshore's board comprises three nominees from Swan Energy, two from IFFCO and two independent directors.

According to IFFCO, Triumph Offshore had tied up with banks to get a term loan of Rs 1,604 crore, out of which SBI sanctioned Rs 500 crore. To secure the loan, the entire equity share capital held by IFFCO was mortgaged with lenders.

IFFCO has alleged that Triumph Offshore -- through its nominee directors and two independent directors -- "has worked in cohorts with R2 (SEL) to create a situation wherein R1 (Triumph) has been rendered in a state of financial crisis by using all cash reserves to hastily and

needlessly pre-pay lenders' money".

Moreover, it has also not taken any steps to charter any Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) and the decision were taken by the directors "only to facilitate the intentions" of SEL to ultimately lead Triumph Offshore, where it becomes a necessity to accept the proposal if accepting the loan from SEL to restore JV's capacity to repay bank loans, it added.

It has prayed the National Company Law Tribunal to pass directions to Triumph Offshore and its employees from taking any loan from SEL or its affiliates without its written approval.

IFFCO in its petition submitted that Swan Energy

on September 22, 2023, decided to call an extraordinary general meeting on October 19, 2023, to raise Rs 1,435.50 crore by issuing preferential issue of shares to a foreign entity GCP INAB PTE Ltd, Singapore. The issue price was proposed at around 60 per cent premium to the then market price. Triumph Offshore called a board meeting with a shorter notice on October 10, 2023, to approve the proposal for making a rights issue of Rs 1,100 crore to SEL for replacing the bank loan with a promoter loan.

The move was opposed by IFFCO's nominee director stating that the said items were part of 'reserved matters'.

PTI ■ NEW JAMSHEDPUR

Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran on Sunday said the conglomerate would continue to uphold the legacy of its founder Jamsetji Tata, and remain committed to the principles of integrity, innovation and social responsibility.

Chandrasekaran was addressing a gathering at the Postal Park in Bistupur in Jharkhand's Jamshedpur after paying homage to Jamsetji Tata on his 185th birth anniversary. He was accompanied by Tata Steel CEO and MD TV Narendran.

"Our founder, Jamsetji Tata, envisioned a future where industry would be a force for positive change, and it is with great pride that we continue to uphold his legacy. In this occasion, we



reaffirm our commitment to the principles of integrity, innovation, and social responsibility that have guided us since our inception," Chandrasekaran said.

"We will continue to work together with the community to build a brighter, more prosperous future for Jamshedpur and its residents," he added.

Later, he inaugurated an exhibition at Steelennium Hall at Jamshedpur Works of Tata Steel, where various

departments presented their technology-led initiatives.

Various programmes were organised to celebrate Founder's Day across various units of the group.

Chandrasekaran also flagged off green-fuel-powered commercial vehicles of Tata Motors, meant for Tata Steel. The fleet included Prima tractors, tippers and the Ultra EV bus, powered by Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and battery electric technologies, the company said in a statement.

BUSINESS BRIEF



VIT-AP UNIVERSITY HOLDS MEET

Institutional collaboration stands as a cornerstone for effective knowledge sharing and collective progress said Prof TG Sitaram Chairman -AICTE. He attended the inaugural session of the Sixth Meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Higher Education Planning Board being organized by Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE) a Statutory Body of the Government of A.P, and hosted by VIT-AP University. Speaking on the occasion Prof Sitaram appreciated the said educated AP Government and APSCHE efforts in promoting quality education. He commended the initiative of HEPP making all the top end institutions working together for the cause of higher education. The synergy created when various entities work together not only fosters a culture of collaboration but also accelerates advancements in knowledge across disciplines.



ORAL CAVITY CANCER AWARENESS EVENT AT SRM

A record-breaking event of 4,000 students in the age group between 14 and 21 coming together under a single roof for an awareness programme and demonstration of self-examination to detect oral cancer, was held at SRM Kattankulathur Dental College and Hospital last week. The event was organised by the Department of Oral Pathology and Microbiology. The students were taught about the importance and means for "self-detection" of the oral cavity that helped in detecting early signs of oral cancer. The training session was followed by students performing self-examination on them.

Consumption of paan, tobacco, other intoxicants has increased

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Consumption of paan, tobacco and other intoxicants has increased with people spending a bigger portion of their income on such products in the last 10 years, according to a survey. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23, released last week, revealed that the expenditure on paan, tobacco and intoxicants as a portion of total household spending has increased in rural as well as urban areas.

The data showed that the expenditure on these items has increased to 3.79 per cent in 2022-23 in rural areas from 3.21 per cent in 2011-12. Similarly, in urban areas, the spending grew from 1.61 per cent in 2011-12 to 2.43 per cent in 2022-23. The proportion of spending on education has reduced to 5.78 per cent in urban areas in 2022-23 from 6.90 per cent in 2011-12. In rural areas, this proportion has come down to 3.30 per



distribution separately for the rural and urban sectors of the country, for states and Union Territories, and different socio-economic groups.

The survey also stated that spending on beverages and processed food has increased to 10.64 per cent in urban areas in 2022-23 from 8.98 per cent in 2011-12. In rural areas, it increased from 7.90 per cent in 2011-12 to 9.62 per cent in 2022-23. The spending on conveyance also rose from 6.52 per cent in 2011-12 to 8.59 per cent in 2022-23 in urban areas. It also climbed in rural areas from 4.20 per cent in 2011-12 to 7.55 per cent in 2022-23. According to the study, the MPCE more than doubled during the period from 2011-12 to 2022-23. The average MPCE at current prices (without imputation) more than doubled to Rs 6,459 in urban areas in 2022-23 from Rs 2,630 in 2011-12. In rural areas, it jumped to Rs 3,773 in 2022-23 from Rs 1,430 in 2011-12.

India used car market to touch \$100 billion by 2034: CARS24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian used car market is expected to touch the USD 100 billion-mark in the next ten years on the back of rising disposable incomes and a growing middle class, according to CARS24 Co-Founder and CEO Vikram Chopra.

As per the findings of the Gurugram-based online used car marketplace, there are changes in market dynamics with customers opting for frequent upgrades when it comes to cars.

"According to our internal study, the anticipated growth of the Indian used car market is set to occur at a 15 per cent CAGR, increasing from USD 25 billion in 2023 to USD 100 billion by 2034," Chopra told PTI in an interaction.

The growth trajectory is propelled by various factors unique to the Indian market, including urbanisation and a growing middle class, which is changing consumer preferences and boosting the



demand for affordable mobility solutions, he added.

Chopra noted that when CARS24 began its journey eight years ago, the used car market size stood at around USD 10-15 billion.

"I think, in the last 3-4 years, with different kinds of cars coming up, the market has truly accelerated," he stated.

The car ownership in the country remains low as compared to various developed geographies,

In the US and China or in Europe, 80-90 per cent of the population has a car while in India only around 8 per cent of the population owns a four-wheeler, he added.

"So we still have a long way to go from here," Chopra said.

Another prominent indicator of the adoption of the used cars trend is the shortened ownership cycle, as the younger generation is opting to sell their cars within 5-6 years of purchase, in stark contrast to the patterns observed two decades ago when vehicles were typically held for 10-12 years, he noted.

"As millennials increasingly opt for more frequent car upgrades, the market is witnessing a consistent inflow of high-quality, aspirational cars," Chopra said.

Further, he noted that the demand for feature-packed SUVs has also surged in the last four years, experiencing significant growth from 30 per cent in FY19 to 59 per cent in the first half of FY24.

ADITI FINISHES 21ST IN SINGAPORE

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Indian golfer Aditi Ashok finished 21st at the women's World Championship with a final card of 2-under 70 here on Sunday after being in top-10 in the first two days. Aditi had an early bogey, but recovered well with three birdies on the Par-5s on the fifth, eighth and 13th and another one on Par-4 ninth. She dropped a bogey on the closing 18th. Aditi, who was making her debut in the event, shot 72-69-73 in her earlier rounds. Australia's Hannah Green, shot her third straight 67 after 74 start in the first round, to total 13-under and win the title one shot clear of French golfer, Celine Boutier (67). A week ago Aditi was T-31 at



the Honda LPGA. Aditi, a five-time Ladies European Tour winner, is already certain to play her third Olympic Games in Paris this year. Four players, Japanese duo Yuna Nishimura (66) and Nasa Hataoka (69), Korea's Mi Hyang Lee (67) and Canadian Brooke Henderson (68) were tied for third place. Green had a stunning finish as she rolled in three birdies in a row on the last three holes to grab a well-deserved win. The icing on the cake was the 20-foot putt Green holed on the 18th to pip World No. 3 Boutier by one shot. Boutier, who had three birdies on the back nine, failed to make any more in her last three holes.



Green wins LPGA tournament in Singapore

AP ■ SINGAPORE

Hannah Green made a stunning 30-foot birdie at the final hole to clinch a one-stroke victory over Celine Boutier at the LPGA Tour's Women's World Championship on Sunday. Green made six birdies, three of which came in the final three holes, against a bogey in a final round 67 for a 13 under-par-275 at Sentosa Golf Club. It was the 27-year-old Australian's fourth LPGA title, and first since the JM Eagle LA Championship last year. Boutier (67), who had said on Saturday she was attending Taylor Swift's Singapore concert as a nice way to relax for the final round, seemed destined to win on Sunday as she pulled two strokes clear in the final stages only for Green to produce some magic of her own to take the win. The 30-year-old Frenchwoman, who won four titles last season including wins at the Women's Scottish Open and the Evian Championship for her first major title, finished at 12 under-par-276. Yuna Nishimura (66) had the equal-best round of the day as her six birdies in a blemish-free final round lifted her to 9-under 279 and into a four-way tie for third with Brooke Henderson (68), Mi Hyang Lee (67) and Nasa Hataoka (69). Overnight leader Ayaka Furue of Japan had a disappointing round of 3-over Sunday as she slipped to a tie for eighth at 7-under 288 in the 66-player, no-cut tournament.

De Minaur beats Rudd



AP ■ ACAPULCO (MÉXICO)

Alex De Minaur beat Casper Rudd 6-4, 6-4 on Saturday to become the first player to win back-to-back titles in the Mexican Open since 2012. The third-seeded De Minaur won his eighth ATP title to become the fourth player to repeat as champion in Mexico, the first since David Ferrer in 2010-12. The 25-year-old Australian won his 10 consecutive matches in Acapulco to break a four-match losing streak in ATP finals, including Rotterdam earlier this year. "Acapulco is becoming like a second home. I thought that it was impossible to get feel better after what happened last year, but I came back a year later to defend the title and it has been true pleasure," De Minaur said.

The Mexican Open was nearly cancelled because a category five hurricane hit the city four months ago, leaving 52 people dead. The Diamond Zone, an oceanfront area replete with hotels and where the tennis arena is located, was devastated. "We (the tennis players) wanted to bring some joy to this wonderful city and I'm sure that Acapulco will shine stronger than ever," added the Australian. The sixth-seeded Rudd missed the chance to win his 11th title in the ATP and his first ATP 500 title. De Minaur took an early break to take a 3-1 lead in the first set and both held their serve for the 6-4 score in the first one. In the second, both players exchanged breaks in the first four games and the Australian got a break in the seventh game to take the lead.

Six veteran athletes from HP to participate in World Masters Athletics Championships

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR (HP)

Six veteran athletes from Himachal Pradesh, including long distance runner Surinder Singh Dehal of Hamirpur, will participate in the World Masters Athletics Championships to be held in Gothenburg, Sweden from August 13 to 25. The World Masters Athletics

Championships are the biennial championships for masters athletics events held under the auspices of World Masters Athletics for athletes who are 35 years of age or older. "It is a matter of joy for the state. Athletes from HP had performed well and won eight medals in the 44th National Master Athletics

Competition held in Pune from February 13 to 17," Masters Athletics Federation Himachal Pradesh President Ripudaman Kaushik said on Sunday. Dehal (10,000m) and Ashwini Kumar Sharma (1500m and 2000m steeplechase, 800m) will compete in the above 65 years age category.

While Harish Kumar (triple jump), Dwarika Thakur (1500 meters and 5000 meters), Brijlal Thakur (100m and 300m hurdles) have been selected in the 60 above age group. Bhishan Singh Chauhan, who will take part in the discus throw, javelin throw and shot put events, will compete in the above 55 years age group.

Sainz enjoys racing again in his last F1 season

AP ■ SAKHIR (BAHRAIN)

Carlos Sainz Jr. is having fun driving for the Ferrari again. Sainz said he was relieved to be able to tap into his aggressive side with a series of overtakes, including two close moves on teammate Charles Leclerc, on his way to third place at the Bahrain Grand Prix on Saturday. Sainz's first podium finish since October starts his last season with Ferrari on a high. The record 24-race season means it will be an extended goodbye before Lewis Hamilton takes over his seat next year. Sainz is still seeking a team for 2025. "It wasn't a straightforward and an easy race, but I enjoyed it a lot," Sainz said, adding it was his first race since the Austrian Grand Prix in July



where he felt free to attack for positions without fear of his Ferrari ruining its tyres while following closely behind another car. "I love going racing, and I love going overtaking, being aggressive, attacking. And, with last year's car, it was simply impossible to do that," Sainz said. Bahrain is a stern test of how

well the drivers and cars manage their tyres, Sainz said, so to "do an overtaking, attacking race for me is a relief and it gives me a feeling that we will be able to do this more often this year." "It doesn't mean we will do it every race at all, because I still think one of our strongest parts of our car is qualifying, so I think we will still qualify ahead of what maybe our true position is. But, at least we're not degrading (tyres) and defending like crazy like we were doing last year." Sainz was the only non-Red Bull driver to win a race last year, but his Singapore Grand Prix victory was all about taking care of worn tyres on a rare off day for Max Verstappen. It was one of just three podium finishes all year for the Spanish driver.

Marta, Katie battle way into San Diego Open final

AP ■ SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA (USA)

Sixth-seeded Marta Kostyuk fought off an early deficit on Saturday to beat top seed Jessica Pegula 7-6(4), 6-1 and reach the final of the San Diego Open. With the surprise comeback, Kostyuk, of Ukraine, moved into Sunday's final where she will face qualifier Katie Boulter, who bested third-seeded Emma Navarro 6-3, 6-1 in the other semi-final match. After Pegula jumped out to a 5-1 lead in the first set, Kostyuk tossed her racquet in disgust twice. But, she regained her composure and went on to capture the next four games, breaking Pegula's serve to knot the score 5-5. Kostyuk then held serve to take a 6-5 lead, before Pegula knotted matters at 6-6. In the tiebreaker, Kostyuk took advantage of several errors by Pegula to claim the first set. By now under control and surging, Kostyuk broke Pegula's serve to start the second set and then promptly raced to a 5-1 lead. At that point, it was Pegula who took an angry swipe at the court surface with her racquet. With Pegula serving at match point, Kostyuk slammed Pegula's lob in triumph. "I wasn't really happy with the trajectory of my game," said Kostyuk. "I kept trying to do something to change



things. You know, I really don't know the answer to what happened after that." In the first of Saturday's semi-finals, the unseeded Boulter continued her surprising string of upsets with her win over Navarro. Boulter's match against Kostyuk marks her first appearance in a WTA 500 final. Boulter took the first set after twice breaking Navarro's serve. Played in threatening, wind-swept conditions, the match was halted shortly after the first set for 33 minutes by a sudden downpour. Just before the deluge, Boulter held serve in the opening game of the second set. When play resumed, Boulter, of England, eased past Navarro with aggressive baseline shot-making and an onslaught of 24 winners. "When I saw a black cloud coming, I was sort of distracted because it's never easy coming back from a

rain delay," Boulter said. "But, I was very happy with my tennis and the way it turned out." Boulter's road to the final includes wins over No. 28-ranked Donna Vekic of Croatia and No. 13 Beatriz Haddad Maia of Brazil. "Honestly, at the start of this week, I didn't think I'd be in this position," said Boulter. "But, I'm just going to go out there and swing away." Navarro, who reached the event's semi-finals in late 2023 as a qualifier, admitted she was frustrated by Boulter, who lost only three points on her serve in the opening set. "I tried to get some traction, but I just couldn't quite execute when I wanted to get it going," said Navarro. "She put a lot of pressure on my service and return games, so it was really tough to get any points." The San Diego Open is a WTA Tour 500 event with a total purse of USD 922,573.

Tiger Woods wins Bob Jones Award

AP ■ FAR HILLS (US)

Tiger Woods has been selected to receive the Bob Jones Award, the highest honor from the USGA that recognizes his commitment to sportsmanship and respect for golf's traditions. Woods typically is honored for his performances on the course, where he has won 15 majors among his 82 career victories on the PGA Tour. "This award goes beyond performance,

recognizing the lasting impact of one person's journey that has forever changed the image and growth of golf," said Mike Whan, the CEO of the USGA. "There are very few who stand alongside Tiger Woods in terms of on-course accomplishments, and he is in a class of his own when it comes to the impact he has made on the game and future generations who will play it." Woods was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2022, and he received the



Presidential Medal of Freedom from Donald Trump in 2019. Woods is a nine-time USGA champion, winning three straight U.S. Junior Amateurs, followed by three straight U.S.

Amateurs, and then the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach (2000), Bethpage Black (2002) and Torrey Pines (2008). "Bob Jones was a pillar of our game because of the integrity with which he played it, and I'm truly humbled to receive the award that bears his name and join the many who have received it before me who continue his legacy," Woods said in a statement. Jones won the Grand Slam in 1930 when it was comprised of the U.S. Open, U.S. Amateur,

British Open and British Amateur. He later co-founded Augusta National Golf Club and created the Masters. Off the golf course, Woods launched what now is called the TGR Foundation that emphasizes educational opportunities, along with STEM-based learning at the TGR Learning Lab in California. He also has started a golf course design firm. One of his courses in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, hosted a PGA Tour event last fall.

Vinícius scores two to earn Madrid draw

AP ■ BARCELONA

Vinícius Júnior scored twice to lift Real Madrid to 2-2 against Valencia in the Spanish league in his first return to Mestalla Stadium where he was racially abused last season. Jude Bellingham was re-carded after the final whistle when he protested the referee's decision to waive off what would have been the winning goal. The referee said time expired just before Bellingham's last-gasp header. Vinícius struck in the 50th and 76th minutes to wipe out first-half goals by Hugo Duro and Roman Yaremchuk. Last May's racial attack was among the worst the Black player has had to repeatedly endure in Spain. It led to an upswell of support for the Brazil forward and forced soccer authorities to take action, even though the abuse toward him has continued. While there were no immediate reports of more

racial insults on Saturday, a large group of spectators did chant "Vinícius is stupid" and booed him loudly throughout. After his first goal, Vinícius held up his fist toward the Valencia fans behind the goal. After his equalizer, he cupped his ears as if asking for more from the fans who jeered him. While Valencia banned three fans for life from its stadium after they were identified as having racially abused Vinícius last season, the club has likewise criticized the player and Madrid for what it considers the unfair categorization of its fanbase as predominantly racist. In a short interview with Madrid's club television, Vinícius did not mention the fans and said only that it was "a very difficult game." But on his Instagram account he posted an image of himself

raising his fist after his first goal with the short message "The fight continues." "Vinícius played a very good game," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "He was decisive for us, even though he was more effective in the area than outside it. (Defender Dimitri) Foulquier played a great game defending him, so he had to find his spaces inside the area and he scored two very important goals for us." Madrid leads the league with a seven-point advantage over Girona and a nine-point advantage over Barcelona before they both play games on Sunday. Duro used his head to redirect in what looked like an errant shot by Fran Pérez in the 27th after Federico Valverde lost the ball with a risky pass. Three minutes later,



Yaremchuk intercepted Dani Carvajal's pass back toward his own area, where the Ukraine forward pounced, dribbled around goalkeeper Andriy Lunin and rolled the

ball home. But Madrid was able to grab one back in first-half added time when Carvajal's cross grazed three players before finding Vinícius to push it

home. Vinícius made it even when he headed in a cross from substitute Brahim Díaz. Valencia defender Mouctar Diakhaby was carried off on a stretcher after an apparent leg injury when Aurélien Tchouaméni crashed into him in the final minutes. **BELLINGHAM SENT OFF** Bellingham, who leads the league with 16 goals, started for Madrid after missing three games with an ankle sprain. The England midfielder was celebrating what would have been a last-gasp header when referee Jesús Gil Manzano signaled it came too late. Surrounded by protesting Madrid players, Gil Manzano showed a red card to Bellingham. Gil Manzano put in his referee report that

Bellingham had "run toward him in an aggressive manner shouting repeatedly" with an expletive in English to describe the goal. **FIRE VICTIMS** The game was Valencia's first in two weeks after its match in the last round was postponed in respect for the victims of a deadly fire in the Mediterranean city. Both teams formed an honor guard before kickoff for representatives of the victims and security and rescue services and a moment of silence. **SOCIEDAD LOSES** Real Sociedad lost at Sevilla 3-2 as the Basque Country club continued to struggle before it hosts Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League. Sociedad hosts PSG on

Tuesday needing to overturn a 2-0 first-leg loss in the round of 16. Imanol Alguacil's Sociedad started the season strong, but it has lost five of its last six games across all competitions. It was eliminated from the Copa del Rey semifinals by Mallorca on penalties in front of its fans in San Sebastian this week. **MAYORAL HURT** Getafe striker Borja Mayoral, who has 15 league goals, had to be substituted late in his team's 3-3 draw with Las Palmas due to an apparent left leg injury. Getafe wasted leads of 2-0 and 3-2. Las Palmas completed its comeback with Munir El Haddadi's decisive equalizer. **HAIL STORM** Rayo Vallecano's 1-1 draw at home with Cadiz was paused for several minutes in the second half when hail pelted the field during a heavy rainstorm.

India climb to top spot in WTC standings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Two-time finalists India jumped to the top of the World Test Championship standings, replacing New Zealand in the latest rankings issued on Sunday.

India, who defeated England by five wickets in the fourth Test in Ranchi to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series, replaced the Kiwis with a stronger points percentage of 64.58.

With five wins, two losses and one draw, India have 62 points



in 8 matches, while the Black Caps have 36 from five matches (three wins, two losses) and have a points percentage of 60.00.

Before the start of the Wellington Test, New Zealand were sitting at the top of the table with 36 points in four games and a points percentage of 75.

But following their massive 172-run defeat, the 2021 WTC champions lost the top spot, slipping to the No 2 position with a points percentage of 60.

Third-placed Australia have closed on the gap after the

Wellington Test, gaining 12 crucial points as they now have 78 points from 11 matches (seven wins, three losses and one draw).

Their points percentage has also increased from 55 to 59.09.

The 2023 champions have the opportunity to surpass New Zealand and move up to the second spot if they win the second and final Test at Christchurch from March 8.

India, meanwhile, take on England in the final match of the five-Test series in Dharamsala from March 7.



Himanshu hundred gives MP edge over Vidarbha

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Himanshu Mantri showed patience and technical aptitude while constructing a fine hundred to singlehandedly guide Madhya Pradesh to 252 in their first innings against Vidarbha on the second day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Sunday.

Mantri's 126 off 265 balls (13x4, 1x6) helped Madhya Pradesh to gain a small yet significant 82-run lead after beginning the day at 47 for one.

In their second innings, Vidarbha reached 13 for the loss of Atharva Taide at stumps, trailing by 69 runs.

The importance of Mantri's knock, his third hundred of the season, can be gauged from the fact that the next highest score in MP innings was a 30 by Saransh Jain.

But in the morning session, Mantri made a steady start through Mantri and Harsh Gawli as the second wicket pair stretched their alliance to 61 as Vidarbha reached 81 for one.

But pacer Yash Thakur (3/51) trapped Gawli (25, 77b) in front of the wicket to snap the stand and Vidarbha lost two more wickets while adding another 12 runs.

Veteran speedster Umesh Yadav (3/40) yorked hosts skipper Shubham Sharma (1) and Thakur won an appeal for leg-before against shuffling Venkatesh Iyer (0).

Vidarbha slipped to an uncomfortable 93 for four but Sagar Solanki (25) gave Mantri solid support as the fifth wicket duo milked 42 runs to steady the ship.

A mix-up with Mantri saw Solanki getting out but a

more solid period followed.

Mantri found another willing partner in Jain as the duo added 73 runs for the sixth wicket, taking MP past Vidarbha's first innings total of 170.

The pitch was eased out a bit as compared to Day 1 but there was enough carry and bounce on the track to keep the bowlers interested.

As the day progressed, spinners too received a bit of turn as left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate and off-spinner Akshay Wakhare posed some questions.

But Mantri had enough skill sets with him to negate those threats - playing the spinners with the turn or standing just outside the crease against the pacers to smother the swing.

Soon, Mantri reached his century with a quick single off Wakhare, and celebrated the moment with a roar.

But just as they were going strong, Jain's hard-handed prod off Wakhare ended with Aman Mokhadde at cover.

Mantri, who received a reprieve on 115, too did not last long as his attempt to sweep Wakhare fetched fatal results.

The ball ballooned off a top-edge and stumper Akshay Wadkar showed fine anticipation to complete the catch diving towards his right.

The Vidarbha innings also folded soon as the last three wickets fell for 21 runs.

Brief scores: Vidarbha: 170 and 13/1 Madhya Pradesh 1st innings: 252 all out in 94.3 overs (Himanshu Mantri 126, Saransh Jain 30; Umesh Yadav 3/40, Yash Thakur 3/51, Akshay Wakhare 2/68).

Pucovski suffers concussion after taking blow on head



PTI ■ HOBART

Australian batter Will Pucovski suffered a nasty blow on his head and had to be substituted while playing for Victoria in a Sheffield Shield match against Tasmania here on Sunday.

The No. 3 batter retired hurt for 0 after being hit on his helmet from a Riley Meredith bouncer. It was just the second delivery he faced in Victoria's chase of 442 in the second innings.

The 26-year-old, who has experienced several blows to the head with the most recent being in a second XI match in January, was struck on the left side of his helmet after he turned his head to a rising delivery from Meredith.

The blow left him visibly disturbed as he knelt on the pitch. The medical staff rushed to the centre. He eventually got up and slowly walked off the field, rubbing his eyes.

"Will is currently in the hands of our medical professionals," a Cricket Victoria spokesperson said. "We'll look to provide an update in due course."

Reserve batter Campbell Kellaway came in as a concussion substitute.

Pucovski had returned after the blow in January to score 131 in their Shield match against New South Wales at the SCG last month.

He has also battled "mental health" issues in the past.

"The mental health has been a much bigger issue for me than even the concussions," he told the Vic State Cricket podcast. "I don't fear for my long-term health, it's more the mental health side that's been the tougher part."

The righthander has played one Test against India in January 2021.

Will New Zealand recall retired Neil for Christchurch Test?

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand might be tempted to recall retired pacer Neil Wagner to the side for the second and final Test against Australia following an injury to fast bowler Will O'Rourke.

The hosts suffered a crushing 172-run defeat in the opening Test here on Sunday and skipper Tim Southee said the door was not shut on Wagner, who had bid a tearful adieu to international cricket last week after taking 260 wickets in 64 Test matches.

The South Africa-born pacer had announced the decision to retire days before the Test series against Australia after learning that he won't feature in the opening game and will be released from the squad for the second Test in Christchurch, starting March 8.

"We haven't had a lot of discussions as yet. We'll see how Will scrubs up. The physio hasn't sort of put a time-frame on it or how bad it is. We'll just wait and see how Will goes over the next couple of days. I'm sure there'll be an update in the next 24 hours," said Southee.

"We obviously have to go on and make a decision on who comes in



and what role we sort of see that playing out in Christchurch.

"(Wagner's) had a great reception here over the last week where he got a couple of moments on the field and obviously he's been a fan favourite for a long time," said the home skipper.

Southee though was sure that pacer Trent Boult, who last played in a Test in June 2022, won't play the second game.

"I don't think his loading is up to it on the back of T20," Southee said. Southee had requested to be left out of New Zealand's central contract list in August, 2022.

World's shortest retirement

Meanwhile, Australian skipper Pat Cummins backed Wagner to come out of retirement.

"World's shortest retirement. I mean, why not? If he's your next best bowler that you think is going to perform, then go for it. I've faced him before. It'd be good to see. He's high energy. It's been good fun chatting to him each morning out here, so see how he goes," said Cummins.

Australia have retained the Trans-Tasman Trophy for the 12th successive time after ensuring that they won't lose the series with their victory in the series-opener.

Vaughan wants England cricket team to adopt Man City manager approach

PTI ■ LONDON

For Michael Vaughan, Pep Guardiola is the best sporting leader in the last 15 years and the former England skipper won't mind if Ben Stokes employs Manchester City manager's approach of never allowing players to take their places for granted.

Vaughan made the statement on the back of England's aggressive "Bazball" strategy under coach Brendon McCullum and Stokes which backfired in the ongoing India tour.

England have already lost the five-match series 3-1 after winning the first Test in Hyderabad.

Vaughan questioned the

approach of England batters and demanded greater accountability from them.

"I often mention Pep Guardiola's approach. In my eyes he's the best sporting leader of this generation, say the last 15 years. He never allows his players to get comfortable. He always keeps them guessing, and they all know they are guaranteed nothing," he wrote in a column for Daily Telegraph.

"If a great sporting leader like Pep has everyone on their toes like that, is it right that an England cricket team that is decent but struggling to crack the next level should be as comfortable as it seems?"

"The whole batting lineup has known week in, week out on this

tour that it will be playing the next game. That is about to change, because after this tour Harry Brook will be back. He has to bat at No 5, because he should be the bedrock of their batting with Joe Root. Does that mean England's statement moment is coming?" he questioned.

Vaughan questioned England's selection policy and said despite losing the series the visitors have a lot at stake to play for in the final Test in Dharamsala beginning March 7.

"Consistency of selection is such a fine balance in team sports. Making people comfortable is right, and England have generally batted well over the last two years.

"There comes a point, though, where when it's your batting that is costing you the biggest series you can't keep sending the same guys out there every week," he wrote.

"The series may have been lost already with a game to spare but a big week looms for England in Dharamsala. There is a massive difference between losing the series 3-2 and 4-1. You have lost either way but 3-2 would show England were right in this series for much of it, and two wins in India is an achievement."

Vaughan said a loss in Dharamsala would be a demoralising result for England. He once again criticised England's batters approach. "India haven't lost two matches

in a series at home since 2012, on their run of 17 series wins in a row. 4-1 would be a very disappointing end to a disappointing winter, with the World Cup debacle, both white-ball series lost in the Caribbean and even a poor World Cup for the Under 19s," he wrote.

"It's a huge week for a number of England's batsmen. When we think of this England team, we think of their wonderfully dynamic batting. But when you look at why they haven't won any of their last three series, it's down to the batting."

"There never seems to be much scrutiny or noise around England's batsmen. Even last week I chuckled. They lost in Ranchi in large part because

they didn't bat well enough, but there was lots of finger pointing at Ollie Robinson, a bowler who scored an important half-century!"

"He looked well short of a gallop with the ball and dropped a catch but I thought it was ironic that he became a scapegoat. It's classic 'batsmen vs bowlers stuff.'" Vaughan feels when it comes to team selection there should be consistency in the batting order.

"Complacency can be damaging. As a management team, how you approach selection of batsmen and bowlers is obviously different. Fast bowlers, especially, sit out games and are rightly rotated to preserve their bodies," he wrote.

Shardul led Mumbai rearguard puts Tamil Nadu on mat

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shardul Thakur's sizzling 109 and Tanush Kotian's unbeaten 74 offset R Sai Kishore's six-wicket haul, putting Mumbai in command by powering to a 207-run first-innings lead over Tamil Nadu on the second day of the Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Sunday.

Thakur's sensational counterattacking hundred, featuring 13 fours and four sixes from a mere 104 balls, pulled Mumbai out of doldrums after they were reduced to 106 for seven at one stage.

At stumps, Mumbai were 353 for 9 at stumps against TN's first innings' 146, with Sai Kishore causing the

maximum damage.

Sai Kishore (6/97) ran through a chunk of Mumbai's batting line-up, while Shreyas Iyer (3) fell to pacer Sandeep Warrier as Tamil Nadu levelled up with the hosts for the first time in the game.

But Thakur launched a stunning onslaught, putting each of Tamil Nadu bowlers under severe pressure while forging vital partnerships along the way to take Mumbai far ahead in the game.

Thakur teamed up with Hardik Tamore (35) for a crucial 105-run stand for the eighth wicket and took Mumbai further ahead in the company of Kotian, adding another 79 runs for the ninth wicket. Using his blade to perfection, Thakur was adroit



with his hands to pierce gaps at will and did not miss out clearing the field with disdain four times for maximums - one of which also brought up his maiden century across formats.

Thakur, who also struggled with an ankle-related issue along the way, finally fell to Kuldeep Sen (2/65) in the third session, which brought the pair of Kotian and Tushar Deshpande together again after their heroics in the last match.

Coming off a 232-run stand for the 10th wicket in the previous match, Kotian and Deshpande picked from where they left off to put on another 63-run unbeaten stand for the 10th wicket. With Deshpande (17 not out)

joining him much later in his innings, Kotian excelled in this innings like a specialist batter, cracking 10 fours from 109 balls to get to 74 not out.

If it were not for yet another rearguard from their tailenders, who shone in the quarterfinal as well, Mumbai would not have ended the day's play with a massive lead, for most of their key batters cut a sorry figure.

On a cloudy morning with breeze sweeping across the field here at the BKC Ground, Sai Kishore's decision to open the bowling in conditions conducive to seamers raised a few eyebrows.

But the Tamil Nadu skipper and leading wicket-taker this Ranji Trophy only validated his move with relentless

pressure on the Mumbai batters, delivering a superb 17-6-28-4 in the first session, and took a break only after sending down 22 overs at a stretch.

After nightwatchman Mohit Avasthi (2) was stumped, Sai Kishore ended his counterpart Ajinkya Rahane's 67-ball vigil for a mere 19 (2x4s) by getting him caught at the first slip.

Rahane strode out confidently to defend on the front foot but only to have the ball kissing the outside edge and being collected by Baba Indrajith at the first slip.

Mumbai's woes compounded when Iyer, pounded by lack of runs and loss of central contract, was cleaned by Tamil Nadu pacer Warrier for

a mere three.

But Musheer (55 off 131 balls, 6x4s) continued to take giant strides, shouldering the responsibility of getting runs for his side from the other end. The 18-year-old also made no returns when Tamil Nadu fielders, both in front and behind him, tried to unsettle him.

However, a lapse in concentration saw Musheer's innings ending prematurely when his backfoot was caught 'on line' at the crease with N Jagadeesan quick in taking off the balls.

Brief scores: Tamil Nadu 146 trail Mumbai 353/9 in 100 overs (Musheer Khan 55, Shardul Thakur 109, Tanush Kotian 74; R Sai Kishore 6/97) by 207 runs.