



OPINION 6
BOOST DETERRENCE TO
SUBDUE CHINA

WORLD 8
BIDEN AND TRUMP SWEEP
SUPER TUESDAY PRIMARIES

MONEY 10
85 PER CENT PAYTM WALLET USERS
NOT TO FACE DISRUPTION: RBI

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 66
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY MARCH 7, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



INDIA TO PRESS
FOR 4-1 AGAINST
ENGLAND
12 SPORTS

Sandeshkhali Women brief Narendra Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Abhinandan' programme, at Barasat in North 24 Parganas district, on Wednesday

Mamata Banerjee Government for promoting atrocities against women, as seen at Sandeshkhali block in North 24 Parganas. "What happened to the mothers and sisters of Sandeshkhali - which hit the national headlines after women here recently rose up in revolt against land-grab and sexual assault against them - was a matter of shame," he said. "The TMC has committed a big sin by protecting the people who had insulted our women. It is a matter of big shame, and I am sure the incident at Sandeshkhali has angered the women of Bengal. "This anger will not remain limited to Sandeshkhali; the storm that brewed there will engulf the entire State," the PM said. Addressing an all-women's rally named Nari Shakti Vandan Abhinandan at Barasat in North 24 Parganas, Modi criticised how corruption and abuse of women had become the hallmark of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance and its constituent TMC. Targeting the INDIA leaders the PM said, "Realising that the National Democratic Alliance was coming back to

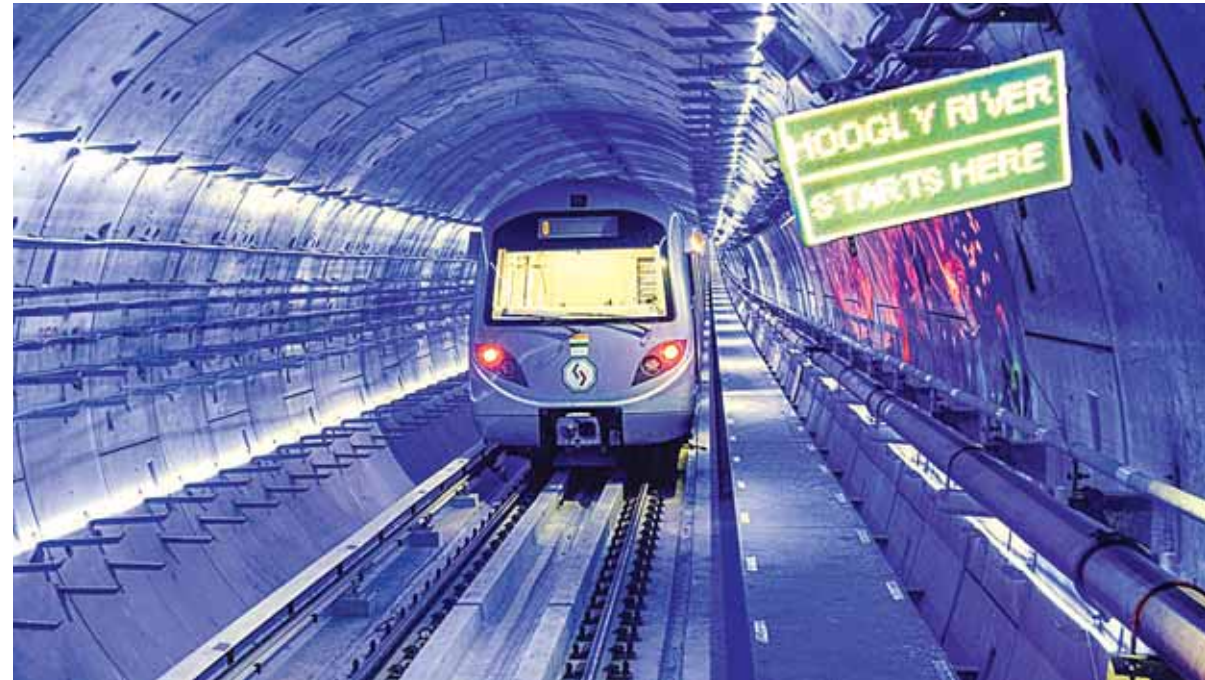
SUGAR SENGUPTA ■ BARASAT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with some victims of Sandeshkhali on Wednesday, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders have been levelled. BJP sources said the PM assured them of help. "Some of the victims of sexual attack had come to Barasat, and they met the Prime Minister, and



he assured them help," sources said. The meeting took place after the PM's rally at Barasat, which is the headquarters of North 24 Parganas district where Sandeshkhali is located. The women expressed their happiness at meeting the PM and said they requested him to ensure that the women of Sandeshkhali get justice. Modi launched a scathing attack on the

INDIA GETS ITS FIRST UNDERSEA METRO



PM Modi inaugurates yet another sea link

PTI

power the leaders of INDIA alliance have lost their sleep and balance which is why they have started abusing Modi ... the corrupt people of INDIA are saying that I speak about dynastic politics because I have no family of my own ... but truth to be told the entire people of the country including those sitting in front of me are my family." The PM who on Wednesday inaugurated India's first under water metro railway service — that runs beneath the Ganges connecting

Howrah and Kolkata — besides launching projects worth more than ₹15,000 crore accused the INDIA ruled States of impeding all the Central schemes whereas his Government was trying its best to implement them so that India could be taken forward. "The Governments led by the INDIA alliance are putting brakes on the schemes launched by the BJP Government ... like the TMC Government refused to implement the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme,

Ujjwala Gas scheme and drinking water projects," he said adding how "during the TMC regime an eclipse had swallowed up Bengal." This was the PM's third rally in Bengal in a week's time with the previous two being held at Arambagh and Krishnagar on March 1 and 2. Modi who later proceeded to Bihar asked the people to throw out the TMC from power in order to ensure development in the State. Desperate to save its women's vote bank the TMC was prompt to react even as

the party took a two-pronged measure by announcing women-centric projects and by countering the Prime Minister's allegations. While Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee went on the X to announce her Government's plans to increase the salaries of ICDS and Asha workers, party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh attacked Modi for shedding "crocodile tears" when the women of the BJP ruled States were crying. **Continued on Page 2**

Despite BJP predictions, Gandhis to set foot in UP



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is likely to make her poll debut from the Raebareli constituency in Uttar Pradesh for the Lok Sabha 2024 Elections which has been represented by her mother former Congress President Sonia Gandhi who has now made inroads to Rajya Sabha. Posters of Priyanka Gandhi have already come up in Rae Bareilly while neighbouring Amethi too has been splashed with posters of Rahul Gandhi who lost the last Lok Sabha polls to BJP's Smriti Irani. The Rae Bareilly seat was won by Sonia five times in the past, including 2019, when she was the sole Congress leader to win a UP Lok Sabha seat. Posters seeking Priyanka's candidature

from Raebareli, put up by Congress workers, read, "Take Congress' development work forward, Raebareli is calling... Priyanka, please come." Congress sources said Rahul is also likely to contest from both Amethi in Uttar Pradesh and Wayanad in Kerala which he is representing currently. The top leadership of the Congress will meet in the national Capital on Thursday to finalise the party candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. "The first meeting of the Congress' Central Election Committee (CEC) that considers and decides on candidates for Lok Sabha polls is being held on March 7," AICC general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh said. Top leaders, including president Mallikarjun Kharge and former chiefs Sonia and Rahul will be present at a meeting, besides other senior leaders who are part of the panel. The Congress has not declared any candidate so far. Last week, the BJP came out with its first list of 195 candidates for the Lok Sabha elections. Besides the seat-sharing formula of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) of which the Congress is part for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls was also finalised in the meeting of its leaders in Mumbai on Wednesday. Maharashtra has 48 Lok Sabha seats. **Continued on Page 2**

Amit Shah reaches out to Maharashtra



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The ruling BJP may contest at least 32 Lok Sabha seats in the forthcoming elections in Maharashtra, leaving the remaining 16 seats to its alliance partners Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led NCP. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was on a two-day visit to the city, is understood to have agreed to allocate collectively 16 seats to the Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led NCP. Shah, who held one round of talks with Shinde and Ajit Pawar at the State-run Sahayadri guest on Tuesday night, met them once again at the Jio world centre on

Wednesday. NCP leaders Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare were also present at Wednesday's meeting. While the Shinde-led Shiv Sena had sought at least 13 seats, the Ajit Pawar-headed NCP had demanded as many as 10 seats. However, Shah made it clear to them that the BJP could not allocate more than 16 seats to the two parties. Between the two ruling alliance partners, the Shinde-led Shiv Sena may get "nine to 10 seats", while the NCP (AP) will have to remain content with the remaining "6 to 7" seats. "Maha-Yuti, as the BJP-led ruling alliance called in the State, is likely to finalise its seat-sharing

arrangement by either the end of this week or early next week. Of the seats allocated to the NCP, the BJP has set aside the prestigious Baramati seat to deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar. Sunetra will be taking on rival NCP leader and three-time MP Supriya Sule, who is the daughter of Sharad Pawar. Similarly, the BJP has allocated Raigad seat in coastal Konkan region for the NCP. State NCP (AP) chief Sunil Tatkare may himself contest Raigad seat in coastal Konkan region.

There has been a delay in the formalisation of Lok Sabha seat-sharing arrangement in Maharashtra. The BJP announced its first list of 19 candidates on Saturday. However, it did not announce its candidates for Maharashtra, as the party had not formalised its seat tie-up with its alliance partners — Shiv Sena (Shinde) and NCP (AP). The State BJP leaders, including Devendra Fadnis, wanted Shah to intervene and firm up the seat-sharing arrangement with the Shinde Sena and Ajit Pawar BJP. During his two rounds of talks, Shinde hammered out a seat-sharing deal with the Shinde Sena and NCP (AP) on Tuesday night and Monday morning.



Marine Commandos (MARCOS) leave after patrolling the Jhelum river ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kashmir valley, in Srinagar on Wednesday

Modi to visit Kashmir, post Article 370 era

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the beginning of the poll battle on ground zero, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be arriving in Kashmir Valley, for the first time after the Abrogation of Article 370, on Thursday to participate in the 'Viksit Bharat Viksit Jammu Kashmir' programme. Modi's visit to the valley is aimed at galvanising the party cadre and bolstering the party's poll campaign. The mass contact programme of the Prime Minister has also raised the hopes of residents in the valley as they are anticipating the conduct of the Assembly polls alongside Lok Sabha polls. **Continued on Page 2**

By winning the hearts and minds of the people of Kashmir, the Prime Minister will be sending a firm message to the political opponents who often raise fingers questioning the Kashmir policy of the ruling dispensation. To welcome the Prime Minister, Srinagar city has been decked up with king-size hoardings and party flags along the fortified route leading to the venue of the public rally at Bakshi stadium. The entire Bakshi stadium has been draped in colours of India. Elaborate security arrangements have been put in place to ensure an incident-free culmination of the programme. **Continued on Page 2**

The NCR community enlarged with Metro connection

RAJESH KUMAR ■ MEERUT/AGRA

With the flagging off of 17-km Duhai-Modi Nagar North section of the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor, the Namo Bharat train becomes operational on 34 km of the corridor, spanning eight stations from Sahibabad to Modi Nagar North. Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the additional section on Wednesday remotely from Kolkata. Simultaneously the priority corridor of Agra Metro was inaugurated virtually by the Prime Minister as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other leaders took the inaugural train ride from the Taj Mahal station to Taj Mahal East station. With the launch of Agra Metro,

Uttar Pradesh becomes the sixth State to have metro facilities in most cities, with services in Lucknow, Ghaziabad, Noida, Greater Noida and Kanpur, he added. The RRTS extension encompasses three stations - Murad Nagar, Modi Nagar South and Modi Nagar North. The Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor, stretching over 82 km, is expected to reduce travel time between Delhi and Meerut to less than an hour. Speaking at the inauguration, Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said once the entire Rapid Rail Transit System is ready, it will be the "second largest metro system" in the country. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we could



develop this corridor at such a fast pace. The work of RRTS and its quality is the finest in the country. Once the entire rapid rail transit system is ready, it will be the second largest metro system in the country," Puri said. According to the National Capital Region Transport Corporation, or NCRTC, on the Murad Nagar Station, the work of Automatic Fare Collection (AFC) System, Platform Screen Door (PSD), CCTV installation, Customer Service Centre, Ticketing Counter, Railing and Washroom construction is over. "Along with this, escalators and lifts have also been installed for movement from the concourse to the platform level. Presently the work of roof sealing, painting and

lighting of the station is going on. For the convenience of passengers, two entry and exit gates are being built in the station, the construction work of which is in the final stage," the NCRTC said. The Murad Nagar Station has been connected with the Murad Nagar Bus Stand under multimodal integration to ease passenger movement. Modi Nagar has been given two stations - Modi Nagar South and Modi Nagar North - under the project, in view of intractable traffic jams the stretch often witnesses. The length of both these stations is approximately 215 metres, width approximately 25 metres, and height of the platform approximately 16 metres. **Continued on Page 2**

TMC leader and former Minister Tapas joins BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Senior Trinamool Congress leader and former Bengal Minister who had on Tuesday quit the party on Wednesday joined the BJP.



On whether the TMC would be able to win the coming elections he said, "a Government of pirates and demons cannot stand ... they will crumble down soon."

Supriya to take on Sunetra Pawar in Baramati

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Pawar's home turf of Baramati in western Maharashtra is preparing itself for a battle royale between two prominent members of the family — Sharad Pawar's daughter and three-time MP Supriya Sule and deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar — in the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls.

in the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena-BJP alliance government in the state on July 2, 2023.

In the Gram Panchayat elections held in November last year, the Ajit Pawar-led NCP made inroads into the Baramati in the Gram Panchayat (GP) polls, when it walked away with 109 GP seats out of a total 231 seats followed among others by Sr Pawar-led NCP (27) and Congress (25).

Bengal CID hands over Sheikh Shahjahan to CBI



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

After initial hesitancy the Criminal Investigation Department of the Bengal Police finally handed over TMC strongman and don of Sandeshkhali Sheikh Shahjahan to the Central Bureau of Investigation and transferred the papers related to the case to the central agency.

women rose up in revolt in a separate case of land grab and sexual assault by his men. The transfer comes a day after the Calcutta High Court directed the Bengal Police to transfer the case to the CBI and on a day when a State Government appeal before a Division Bench of the same court was turned down.

Noida girl taking board exams raped while on way to tuition

PTI ■ NOIDA

A class 12 student, who is taking ongoing board exams, was allegedly raped by a 25-year-old man from her neighbourhood in Noida Extension while she was on her way to tuition, police officials said on Wednesday.

The accused, who was at large since the incident on February 29, was held from Shahberi furniture market on Wednesday, the officials said. "My daughter was on her way to a tuition class when the accused coaxed her into talking to him. He then administered an intoxicating substance to her, making her unconscious and took her to a flat where he forced himself on her," the girl's father said in his complaint to the police.

Drone technology being harnessed to bolster healthcare

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

From AIIMS Deogarh in Jharkhand to AIIMS Jodhpur in Rajasthan, and AIIMS Rajkot in Gujarat to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Manipur and AIIMS Patna in Bihar, drone technology is being harnessed in a big way by the Government institutions to bolster healthcare initiatives in the country.



ability, cost and error. "... also underscores collaborative efforts for a paradigm shift in healthcare accessibility," said Kumar. Similarly, TechEagle, a brainchild of IIT alumni has achieved a groundbreaking milestone by completing one of the longest drone delivery flights in collaboration with AIIMS Rishikesh which successfully transported essential Tuberculosis (TB) medicine under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Yojna.

adeptly navigated through complex terrains and elevations, achieving an impressive altitude gain of over 2.5 kilometers in a single 47 km journey. To put this feat into perspective, the same distance would take more than 4 hours by road. TechEagle has also announced a partnership with AIIMS Jodhpur to deliver healthcare essentials for the tribal population mostly living in inaccessible terrains.

health centres at AIIMS Rajkot and AIIMS Mangalagiri. "The quick implementation of BVLOS (Beyond Visual Line of Sight) drone delivery services in 10 AIIMS & INT's hospitals ensures improving healthcare logistics with safety and reliability," TechEagle founder and CEO Vikram Singh Meena said. Similarly, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has partnered with TSAW Drones, a drone logistics start-up, to deliver vital medical supplies using drones in three areas namely Yaddari Bhubanagiri district (Telangana), Manipal (Karnataka), and Lahaul (Himachal Pradesh). The aim is to connect various points, such as distribution centres and PHCs, to facilitate the transfer of essential medical supplies, tuberculosis samples, tissue specimens, and diagnostic samples.

areas." Kishan Tiwari, Founder and CEO of TSAW Drones, expressed confidence in the initiative, noting, "Navigating challenging terrains and reaching high altitudes to assist underserved communities presents a formidable challenge, but we are wholly equipped to handle it." It was during the coronavirus pandemic, several government agencies in India tested drones for potential logistical support. ICMR, for instance, had introduced its i-Drone programme to explore the feasibility of using drones to distribute Covid-19 vaccines and medicines in the north-eastern region.

Birla, Thakur address National Youth Parliament Festival 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Union Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Anurag Singh Thakur on Wednesday addressed the National Youth Parliament Festival, 2024 on its concluding day in the Central Hall of the Parliament. Addressing the gathering, Birla congratulated all the participants and the winners. He said that the Central Hall has a history and this hall was central in making of the constitution after the independence. Birla also said that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi have huge expectations from the youth and in achieving nation's goal of Viksit Bharat.



Speaking on the occasion Anurag Singh Thakur said that the determined voice of Youth shows the determination of India as a nation. He said that India has seen the positive use of technology and its movement from fragile five to top five economies of the world. He also said that India has moved from weak leadership to strong leadership and can today walk shoulder to shoulder with the world leaders. He also highlighted the fact that in last 10 years government under the leadership of Modi has moved around 250 million poor out of multi-dimensional poverty. He also urged the participants

to make use of various platforms like YouTube to take the government policies to the people preferably in vernacular language. He also urged youth to focus on team led leadership and said that the network created today will be your Net Worth in life. 'The National Youth Parliament is being organised this year based on the theme of 'Young Voices: Engage and Empower for Nation's Transformation'. The National Youth Parliament Festival, 2024 has been organised from February 9, 2024 to March 6, 2024 across the country. This Youth Parliament has been organised at three levels covering 785 Districts of the country.

Modi to visit Kashmir, post...

From Page 1 High-rise buildings surrounding the venue have been occupied, and sharpshooters have been deployed to ensure a secure environment. In addition to ground surveillance, strong aerial surveillance has been implemented to monitor the area. Drones and CCTV cameras are being used for surveillance while foot patrolling by the security forces has been intensified in a two-kilometre radius around the venue. Marine commandos have been deployed in Jhelum River and Dal Lake to prevent the use of these water bodies for any subversive activities.

Prime Minister will launch nationwide projects related to the tourism sector worth more than Rs 1,400 crore under the 'Swadesh Darshan' and 'PRASHAD' (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive) schemes, including a project for the integrated development of the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar. He will launch the 'Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice Tourist Destination Poll' and the 'Chalo India Global Diaspora' campaign as well, besides announcing tourist destinations selected under the Challenge-Based Destination Development (CBDD) scheme. Modi will distribute appointment letters to nearly 1,000 newly recruited Government employees in Jammu and Kashmir and also interact with the beneficiaries of various Central schemes, including women achievers, farmers and entrepreneurs, the statement said. In a step that will provide a major boost to the agronomy of the region under the 'Holistic Agriculture Development Programme' (HADP) to be launched by the Prime Minister, the statement said it will cover the full spectrum of activities in three major domains of horticulture, agriculture and

livestock husbandry. The programme is expected to equip about 2.5 lakh farmers with skill-development training and about 2,000 farmers' service centres will be established and robust value chains put in place for the welfare of the farming community. The tourism projects to be launched by Modi are in line with his vision to improve the overall experience of tourists and pilgrims visiting prominent pilgrimage and tourism sites across the country by building world-class infrastructure and amenities at these sites, the statement said. Besides the Hazratbal shrine project, the initiatives include tourism facilities in the Northeast Circuit in Meghalaya, the Spiritual Circuit in Bihar and Rajasthan, Rural and Tirthankar Circuit in Bihar and some other projects in states such as Telangana and Madhya Pradesh. The Prime Minister will also launch 43 projects that will develop a wide range of pilgrimage and tourist sites across the country. He will also launch the first-ever countrywide initiative to identify the pulse of the nation on tourism in the form of 'Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice 2024', the statement said.

Despite BJP predictions...

From Page 1

The MVA constituents — Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) headed by Uddhav Thackeray and the NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar led by Sharad Pawar — have been holding hectic parleys for several days to reach a consensus on seat-sharing. Prakash Ambedkar of the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) will also be part of the seat-sharing talks. Seat sharing as part of INDIA Bloc strategy has already been announced for major States Uttar Pradesh and Delhi and is to be announced by this weekend for

Maharashtra and Jharkhand. Seeking to woo the country's youth ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Congress will for the first time ever offer them the "right to employment" as part of its poll promise for the Lok Sabha elections. The party's manifesto committee, which is headed by former Finance Minister P Chidambaram and has senior leaders like Priyanka, Shashi Tharoor and Anand Sharma, among others, has sealed the manifesto after a marathon meeting on Tuesday and will be announced after the poll dates next week.

Sandeshkhali Women...

From Page 1

The Chief Minister said, "Asha workers are our pride as they work very hard. They support us in all the bad times. I am happy to announce that their salaries have been increased by Rs 750 from the month of April. The Anganwadi workers get Rs 8,250. Their salaries have been increased by Rs 750 (from April). The ICDS helpers get about Rs 6000. Their salaries have been increased by Rs 500 from April 1."

The NCR community enlarged...

From Page 1

"There is usually a traffic jam in Modi Nagar from Modi Mill till Raj Chowpla. Many times, it takes hours for people to cross this area. "In view of the dense population of people in this area, the NCRTC has decided to build two stations here, Modi Nagar South and Modi Nagar North. With these two stations, Modi Nagar will get relief from the problem of severe traffic jams," the NCRTC said. The newly-added 17-km stretch of the Namo Bharat train extends the coverage of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS corridor beyond its initial operational 'priority section.'

The RRTS boasts a design speed of 180 kmph and operation speed of 160 kmph. Agra Metro services on the 6-km corridor will be available to commuters from Thursday onwards, with stops at Taj Mahal East station, Captain Shubham Gupta station, Fatehabad Road station, Taj Mahal station and Mankameshwar Temple station. Speaking at the flagging off ceremony at the Taj Mahal station, Yogi said Agra Metro would provide world-class public transport to locals and tourists visiting the city. "Agra is one of the oldest cities of Uttar Pradesh. It is a

part of 'Braj bhoomi'. This city is associated with stories of bravery and valour of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj," the chief minister said. Yogi appreciated the Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation (UPMRC) for timely completion of the first phase of Agra Metro, and said it has become operational nine months ahead of schedule. Modi had laid the foundation stone of the metro on December 7, 2020 and it was completed in 23 months, the Chief Minister said even as he lauded the UPMRC for "maintaining the quality" of the project.

Skeletons of SFI high handedness tumbling out

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Closely on the heels of the conspicuous death of J S Sidharth, the second year B V Sc student of Kerala Veterinary and Agricultural Science University at Wayanad, the former principal of Government Arts and Science College, Kasaragod has come out with startling disclosures about how the student wing of the CPI(M) promotes drug abuse and sexual anarchy in the campus. Sidharth was found dead in his hostel room in the University and it is widely reported that he was murdered by the SFI leaders of the college after a three-night long trial. He was murdered by the student leaders and his body was hanged by the killers to look like a suicide. The vice-chancellor and dean of the College have been put under suspension by Governor Arif Mohammed Khan after interacting with Sidharth's parents and colleagues. The death of Sidharth is attributed to his dancing in the campus with a Muslim student which was not liked by his seniors belonging to the Muslim community. The SFI has a considerable followers among the Muslim community as the students wing always dance to the tune of the jihadists.

Prof Rema, former principal, Government Arts and Science College, Kasaragod, in a social media message said that there was nothing shocking in the death of Sidharth. "The SFI is a cabal of criminals. I had challenged their activities while I was the principal of the college. They are drug pushers and well experienced in sexually abusing girl students in the college. When I took strong measures to check the spread of narcotics and sexual abuses of girls, the SFI leaders approached the minister for higher education Bindu and got me transferred to a college in Malappuram district," said Prof Rema in the video message. She also named Immanuel, a former student of the college who had made the campus his "favorite hunting ground" for young girls. Since other teachers and staff members are afraid of the high-handed behavior of SFI goons, they fall in line and keep silence," said Prof Rema. She is getting retired on 31 March and according to sources in the department of higher education, minister Bindu (wife of CPI(M) polit bureau member Vijayaraghavan) has left word to put Rema under suspension so that she would not be able to draw her post-retirement allowances and pension.

HC annuls suspension of seven BJP MLAs

Says punishment not sustainable

PTI NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court struck down on Wednesday the State Assembly speaker ordering suspension of seven BJP MLAs for interrupting Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena...



are in violation of the procedure prescribed under the Fifth Schedule (pertaining to Code of Conduct) and Chapter XI," the court said.

ment in excess of what could have been given under the rule invoked. Justice Prasad said they have actually been awarded the punishment of indefinite suspension as per another provision without even being heard which has been held to be invalid by the Supreme Court.

Prasad said the suspension of the petitioners till the Committee of Privileges has taken a decision was not one of the prescribed punishments and the rule invoked does not stipulate suspension for an "indefinite period".

referred to the Committee of Privileges. "In the absence of any application of mind by the Speaker in referring the matter to the Committee of Privileges and in view of the fact that the petitioners have not been heard while being given punishment of suspension till the Committee of Privileges decides the matter and since the punishment under Rule 77 of Chapter XI can be prescribed only after a Member is heard, the direction for suspending the Petitioners till the Committee of Privileges takes a decision cannot be sustained," the court said.

Farmers protest: Capital borders face traffic jams

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

In the backdrop of a call to reach Delhi on Wednesday by agitating farmers, traffic was affected at borders of the national Capital, police said. The Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), the two umbrella bodies that are spearheading the farmers' agitation, had on Sunday called on farmers across the country to reach Delhi on Wednesday.



said force is already deployed at the Delhi-Haryana border. "We are keeping a tab on the situation in the wake of this call given by the farmers." Another officer said, "We had temporarily removed barriers for commuters at the Singhu and the Tikri borders. The deployment of police and paramilitary personnel is still there and (they) will ensure strict, round-the-clock vigil."

and forces have been deployed. Besides, we are trying to ensure that it doesn't affect the traffic." Security has been mounted at ISBT Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar, and Sarai Kale Khan.

DU likely to extend validity of two MPhil courses

New Delhi: The Delhi University is likely to table a proposal to extend the validity for two of its MPhil courses in Clinical Psychology and Psychiatric Social Work till the academic session in 2025-26, in partial relaxation to the UGC's notification to discontinue MPhil courses as per the recommendations of NEP 2020.

ED files fresh complaint against Kejrival for skipping summons

PTI NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has filed a fresh complaint before a Delhi court seeking prosecution of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for skipping its summonses in a money laundering investigation, official sources said Wednesday.



had called all these eight ED summonses as "illegal" and informed the federal agency last time that he can be questioned via a video conferencing link after March 12.

DDA notice to Hindu refugees living in Yamuna floodplain area

PTI NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has issued notices to Hindu refugees from Pakistan who live near Gurudwara Majnu Ka Tilla in the Yamuna floodplain area asking them to vacate the place, locals claimed on Wednesday.

vacate this area as soon as possible. The whole camp has been informed and notices have been served to all of us. We just recovered from the losses we faced during the Delhi floods and now they are about to run a bulldozer here. How are people supposed to vacate in such a short notice and where are they supposed to go?" Das asked.

as per direction of the NGT to the DDA, the Yamuna floodplain area under the jurisdiction of the DDA should be made free from all encroachment. "In the compliance of the order, it is proposed to organise a demolition drive against the encroachment in the Yamuna floodplain area near south of Gurudwara Majnu Ka Tilla (western bank) on March 7 and 8," the notice stated.

vacant the area by Wednesday. Otherwise they will be self responsible for any loss held due to any demolition drive against the encroachment on Thursday or later," the notice added.

SUV with red beacon seized over reckless driving

PTI NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Wednesday said a Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) was seized and its driver booked for reckless and dangerous driving in west Delhi's Rajouri Garden area. Police alleged that the driver, who is a large, drove the vehicle fitted with a red and blue beacon in a zig-zag manner for an Instagram reel and shared the clip on the social media platform to increase followers.

LG flags poor living conditions in Shahdara

PTI NEW DELHI

Lt Governor V K Saxena on Wednesday flagged the poor conditions in which people were living in a colony in Shahdara in north-east Delhi, a day after he drew Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's attention to similar problems in other areas of the national capital.



took stock of the situation and always kept you informed about the problems. I have been doing this for the last one and a half years and will continue to do so in future also," he said in his post in Hindi.

LG asks DSIIDC to grant six months extension to allottees under relocation scheme

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) V K Saxena on Wednesday directed Delhi State Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) to grant an extension of six months to allottees in industrial areas of Narela, Bhorganh and Bawana under the relocation scheme.

Photographer injured after being stabbed by visitor at India Gate

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

A 28-year-old man, who works as a photographer at the India Gate, was injured after being attacked by a visitor with a knife on Tuesday afternoon, police said on Wednesday.

knife," the officer said. The reason of the fight is still being verified, police said. Another police officer said that Singh was taken to the hospital by other photographers from where he was discharged after treatment. He has received stitches in his neck and fingers, the officer said.

Man shoots self in Neb Sarai, family alleges murder

PTI NEW DELHI

A 38-year-old man died after he allegedly shot himself at his friend's house in Neb Sarai area of south Delhi, police said on Wednesday.



shot himself in the house and is lying in the room," Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Ankit Chauhan said. A police team was rushed to the spot and found Bharat lying. A country-made pistol along with one live round and one fired round was recovered from there, he added.

Expedite NOC for MCD schools: HC to fire department

PTI NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the Department of Delhi Fire Services (DFS) to expedite the process of no-objection certificate sought by the municipal corporation regarding its 92 schools.

The court was hearing a public interest litigation by advocate Kush Kalra who has claimed that many schools, both private and government-run/aided, have not complied with fire safety and building stability norms.



schools and civil and electrical work pending in 116 schools. The DFS is directed to expedite the process of NOC filed by MCD qua 92 schools. The two schools that have been termed as dangerous buildings should either be vacated, reconstructed or strengthened forthwith," the bench said.

It noted that the status report of MCD states that approach road to 101 schools is very narrow and thus NOC cannot be issued qua them. "MCD is directed to explore the options of either widening the approach road or shifting the schools or providing fire safety measures within the school itself," the bench said and directed the MCD to file a fresh status report in the matter.

schools in India to have fire safety and stability certificates, but these were not being complied with. He has alleged that the Delhi government's Directorate of Education, the Department of Fire Services and Public Works Department are being negligent in performing their duties to take steps to ensure that the schools are complying with building stability and fire safety norms.

Police close to cracking Café blast case: Minister

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the police are pursuing vital clues and getting close to cracking the March one Rameshwaram Café low-intensity blast incident.



No arrests have been made in connection with the case. Based on suspicion, some people were summoned by police, who gathered "information" from them, the Minister said.

the blast at the popular eatery at Brookefield area near Whitefield here. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh for information about the suspected bomber in the March 1 Rameshwaram Café blast case in Bengaluru.

probe into the blast at the café was handed over to the NIA earlier this week. At least 10 people were injured in the blast at Rameshwaram Café in Brookfield in East Bengaluru on March 1.

Amravati MP Rana receives death threat on WhatsApp

PTI ■ AMRAVATI
An FIR was registered against unidentified persons for allegedly threatening to kill Amravati MP Navnet Rana by sending an audio message on her WhatsApp number, police said on Wednesday.

The sender of the message also used objectionable words against the Independent MP, as per the FIR. "Rana received the threat message on her phone number on March 3 following which her personal assistant lodged a complaint with the police.

Advertisement for 'कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, एफ0आई0यू0, उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान'. Includes contact details for Haripur Gram Kalsi and a table of services offered.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding a dispute over land measuring 50 sq. yards in Mohalla Ram Nagar, Gurgaon, Haryana.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding a dispute over land measuring 44 sq. yards in the area of Village Behla Hajipur, Pergana Loni Tehsil, District Ghazabad, U.P.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER for Electrical Work in Connection with Renovation of Driveway of Rail Bhawan premises. Issued by Northern Railway.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding a dispute over land measuring 50 sq. yards in the area of Village Behla Hajipur, Pergana Loni Tehsil, District Ghazabad, U.P.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding a dispute over land measuring 44 sq. yards in the area of Village Behla Hajipur, Pergana Loni Tehsil, District Ghazabad, U.P.

SAFE DEPOSIT LOCKER BREAK OPEN PUBLIC NOTICE from Karur Vysya Bank. The following hirers have failed to pay the locker rent dues.

FORM NO. 5 THE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, ALLAHABAD (9/2-A, Panna Lal Road, Allahabad-211 002, U.P.)

CHANGE OF NAME notice for I, Ahmad Yusuf Shaikh, S/O. Mohammad Anzar Azmi, R/O. L-2, Ghaffar Manzil Extn. Part-2, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi-110025.

SAFE DEPOSIT LOCKER BREAK OPEN PUBLIC NOTICE from Karur Vysya Bank. The following hirers have failed to pay the locker rent dues.

Versus M/S. MR. ANKIT BEHL & OTHERS. Summons for Filing Reply & Appearance by Publication. Date: 31.01.2024

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PWD CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION, DISPUR, GUWAHATI-6. PRESS NOTICE regarding bids for Post Constructional Anti-Termite Treatment Works.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding a dispute over land measuring 44 sq. yards in the area of Village Behla Hajipur, Pergana Loni Tehsil, District Ghazabad, U.P.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding a dispute over land measuring 44 sq. yards in the area of Village Behla Hajipur, Pergana Loni Tehsil, District Ghazabad, U.P.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, ANGUL. No. 794. 1st Corrigendum to Bid Identification No. Road Online-AGL-05/2023-24

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER PWD BUILDING ASSAM CHANDMARI GUWAHATI-3. No CE/TB-11/42/2023/ pt/6. PRESS NOTICE regarding bids for Construction of 10 Bedded Ayush Hospital at Bajali.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER PWD BUILDING ASSAM CHANDMARI GUWAHATI-3. No. CE/TB-VIII/12/2024/5. PRESS NOTICE regarding bids for Construction of Circuit House Building at Silchar.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER M.P. STATE AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD. 26- Arera Hills Jail Road Bhopal. No./Const./P.Cell/KSN/Morena/23-24/3267. NOTICE INVITING TENDER

IN THE COURT OF LEARNED DISTRICT JUDGE RAMBAN. IN THE MATTER OF: SHUBAM GUPTA S/O. LATE SANJAY GUPTA, R/O WARD NO.07 MAITRA RAMBAN TEHSIL RAMBAN AND DISTRICT RAMBAN, JAMMU AND KASHMIR.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM FLOOD AND RIVER EROSION MANAGEMENT AGENCY OF ASSAM, (FREMAA). Address: 4th Floor, Assam Water Centre Basistha Chariail, NH 27 Guwahati, Assam-781029.

ICICI Bank PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE. The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction and Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

ICICI Bank PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE. The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction and Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

VERSUS THREE SIXTY FIVE GADGETS AND ANOTHER. IN THE MATTER OF: SUIT UNDER ORDER XXXVII OF CPC FOR RECOVERY OF RS-10,00,000 (TEN LACS).



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

Missing nationalism

DMK's A Raja courts controversy, claims that India is not a nation but a subcontinent

Former Union Minister and DMK leader A Raja has stirred up a controversy by suggesting that India is "not a nation but a subcontinent". The remark, not the first such coming from the Dravidian party's stables, has not only reignited discussions on nationalism and diversity but also brought into focus the complexities of India's historical, cultural and geographical realities. Geographically, the Indian subcontinent is a vast landmass bounded by the Himalayas in the north and surrounded by the seas on three sides. It encompasses a diverse array of cultures, languages, religions and ethnicities, making it one of the most heterogeneous regions in the world. However, the question of whether it is a nation or a subcontinent is a matter of interpretation. According to Merriam-Webster, a nation is a "group of people who share one or more nationalities and have a defined territory and Government". Seen in this light, nation refers to people, not to geography. But it is often defined by a common identity, shared history and a sense of belonging among its people. From the ancient civilisations of the Indus Valley and the Vedic period to the Mughal Empire and British rule, India's history is a saga of conquests, assimilation and cultural exchange. Upon Independence in 1947, India emerged as a sovereign nation-State with a democratic system of governance and a commitment to secularism and pluralism. The framers of the Indian Constitution sought to forge a nation out of the diverse strands of Indian society, enshrining principles of equality, liberty and fraternity.



However, despite these efforts, the idea of India as a nation is often contested. The legacy of colonialism, coupled with enduring fault lines of caste, class and religion, has led some to question the unity and coherence of the Indian nation. The rise of regionalism has further complicated the picture, challenging the notion of a monolithic Indian identity. However, going by the definition of a nation, when the above argument is given, it is actually about ethnic communities and not a nation. A nation can be formed by diverse groups. A Raja's remark has struck a chord precisely because it touches upon these fault lines. But this is exactly the path we must not take as such controversies are anathema to nation building and have in them seeds of Balkanisation. Some people may make political capital out of it but they cause irreparable damage to the idea of India. By characterising India as a subcontinent, Raja highlights the fissures and fault lines that run through the fabric of Indian society. Some may see it as an acknowledgement of India's rich diversity and pluralism while, for others, it may be interpreted as a negation of the nation-State idea. This, therefore, is an unacceptable formulation. India's strength lies in its ability to embrace its diversity while forging a common destiny based on the principles of justice, equality and fraternity. After all, in the words of Rabindranath Tagore: "The unity of India is not to be found in uniformity but in diversity."

PICTALK



An artiste dressed as Lord Shiva takes part in a religious procession ahead of the 'Maha Shivratri,' in Jalandhar

Boost deterrence to subdue China

Foreign Minister S Jaishankar calling China a bully and seeking support from the US is likely to further strain relations with Beijing



ASHOK K MEHTA

Earlier this month former Army Chief Gen Naravane at a literary festival in Ajmer called China India's primary threat adding confrontation along the LAC was a good thing as it exposed this ground reality that Delhi was shy to admit. Last week EAM S Jaishankar and Defence Secretary Giridhar Armane called a spade a spade which will infuriate Beijing. In 1998 India gave China as the reason for carrying out nuclear tests which annoyed the Chinese so much that then foreign minister Jaswant Singh had to travel to Beijing to "untie the knot". I was witness to the repair exercise in Beijing even as our Army was retaking Tololing Heights, Kargil. Singh had to say that China was not a threat. Sometime later than defence minister George Fernandes called China the number one threat though it was misreported as the "No. 1 enemy". This caused a diplomatic furore as China is acutely sensitive to being seen as or worse a threat by any country. The government hopes to secure full disengagement of Chinese intrusions diplomatically though the gloves came off last week in February. EAM S Jaishankar speaking at the Raisina dialogue said that China should not be allowed to play mind -games to counter which India must use other means (implying US help) to seek better equilibrium. His comments came a day after Armane at the INDUS-X FORUM in Delhi called Beijing a bully adding "We expect our friend US will be there in case we need their support". Not since 1962 have we sought US military support. Calling China a bully will incense China. US help so far is high-tech military equipment worth USD 20bn and another USD in the pipeline. During the PLA incursions in Ladakh and later in Tawang, the US provided critical real-time intelligence, and high altitude equipment for India's counter deployment. Whether combat contingencies on LAC and US help; and India's assistance to the US in a Taiwan conflict have been discussed is not known though boots on the ground are unlikely. In 1962 Jawaharlal Nehru



sought military assistance from President John Kennedy when Se La and Bomdi La had fallen. 12 squadrons of fighters manned by US pilots, and two squadrons of B47s to take out PLA bases in Tibet were sought. Nehru wrote: "Chinese invasion threatened the survival of India. We are confident that your great country will help us in our fight". Armane's plea indicated a "strong resolve that we will support each other in face of common threat". This brings the centre-stage question of US reliability as a partner given India's historical experience of US sanctions/embargos. It recalls that when Delhi signed a contract with the UK for Hawk trainer aircraft, a clause was inserted that there would be no US parts in the aircraft. The US similarly questions India's reliability given its close ties with the USSR/Russia and strategic autonomy. At the Munich Security Conference last month Jaishankar was asked whether the US is happy and comfortable with India doing whatever it wanted whenever it wanted. His reply: "India is smart enough to exercise multiple choices". Jaishankar says that China has broken protocols and faith which have violated a peaceful and tranquil border that is essential for normal bilateral relations whereas China's line is that border issues and bilat-



CHINA'S CONTINUED COERCIVE BEHAVIOUR IS INCREASING. JAISHANKAR PROUDLY TALKS OF INDIA'S SWIFT COUNTER-DEPLOYMENT ALONG THE LAC, WHICH IS TANTAMOUNT TO CLOSING THE STABLE DOOR AFTER THE HORSE HAS BOLTED

eral relations are two separate issues. Its spokesperson reminds India ad nauseum that the border problem "is leftover from history and not whole of China-India relations" lately adding "It is unwise and inappropriate for the Indian side to insist on linking border with bilateral relations". Two video clips reflect how seriously and diligently China diplomacy is being pursued. The first video shows Prime Minister Modi rising from his dining table accompanied by an interpreter during the Bali G20 summit, walking up to President Xi Jinping and engaging in conversation without his two shadow aides, NSA Ajit Doval and Jaishankar. This video was soon blanked out. The other video is more recent at the Munich Security Conference where Foreign Minister Wang Yi is speaking and Jaishankar is in the audience. As soon as Wang finishes, Jaishankar walks up to him for a 'chance encounter' and conversation. Neither side has reported the contents of the conversation. Indian aim is to keep dialogue and diplomacy alive even if the Chinese have closed the door to further demilitarisation in Depsang and Demchok, two key launchpads for offensive operations by India. Jaishankar has not yielded about seeking

'equilibrium' in bilateral relations even as successive Army Chiefs have sought restoration of the status quo ante April 2020. He is buying time until the elections ensuring the word 'China' does not figure during the election campaign. The Chinese fired the last salvo during the Raisina Dialogue last month when Jaishankar said that the biggest opponent to Security Council reforms is not a Western country alluding to China. Its spokesperson Mao Ning retorted, "Reform should benefit all member states rather than serving selfish interests of a few". That puts paid to India's prospects for reforms at the UN. The 1988 modus vivendi has expired. China's continued coercive behaviour is increasing. Jaishankar proudly talks of India's swift counter-deployment along LAC which is tantamount to closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. Unless India substantially enhances deterrence vis a vis China—the military modernization budget in real terms is less than the previous year's—Beijing will continue to bully Delhi.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CHALLENGES FOR THE PAK GOVERNMENT

Sir — The recent Pakistani general election held in February 2024 has brought deep-seated fractures within the nation's political landscape to light. With no decisive winner, allegations of widespread electoral irregularities, and the exclusion of Imran Khan's PTI party, Pakistan's democratic process faces significant challenges. Against a backdrop of economic adversity and public discontent over military interference, the country's future appears uncertain. Despite Shehbaz Sharif's appointment as Prime Minister through coalition-building efforts, the government must navigate internal tensions, restore public faith in democratic institutions, and prioritise economic revitalization to address widespread hardship. Pakistan's socio-economic challenges exacerbate political tensions, with high inflation and stalled growth amplifying public frustration.

The international community is crucial to supporting Pakistan's stability by promoting economic development initiatives and electoral transparency. Given Pakistan's status as a nuclear-powered nation, stability in the region is paramount, with implications extending to neighbouring countries like India. Pakistan stands at a pivotal juncture, and concerted efforts from domestic leadership, the international community, and the military are essential to steer the country towards stability and prosperity.

Amarjeet Kumar | Hazaribagh

BEEF SMUGGLING

Sir — Referring to news of Beef Smuggling in our country it is very sad to observe that despite so many laws, awareness programmes and other things that have been introduced to protect animals from this illegal hunting and smuggling, our country in which animals are worshipped is killing innocent animals for just some money. Recently, Bajrang Dal has thwarted an illegal smuggling of beef at Paradip port. Bajrang Dal activists intercepted a truck which originated from Andhra Pradesh. The truck was laden with vegetables and other goods but emitted a foul smell which

SC removes immunity cover



The unanimous verdict from the seven judges bench of the Apex Court on Parliamentary privileges for the members is a progressive one. It says there is no immunity to the member from criminal proceedings who commits the crime of taking a bribe for asking a question or casting

his vote in his legislative body. The parliamentary privileges granted to him under Article 105 and Article 194 are meant to discharge his duties without fear but not to indulge in illegal gratifications. The previous verdict of the five judges' bench in 1998 in a similar case had extended immunity for all deeds in the House.

Now the fresh judgement has nullified the previous one and has come clear about the misuse of immunity. The malpractices like cash for queries or votes for notes would make democracy a mockery by snatching away the trust of people which should be discouraged. At the same time, the members should be given protection from wrong allegations with mail mentions.

DVG Sankara Rao | Vizianagaram

led to suspicion among the activists and law enforcement officials.

Afterthought the whole search operation truck was detained and the police started its investigation process to find out the real culprits behind this inhuman act. The discovery has laid many questions. Though the government has been overseeing these issues it has to work more effectively to stop this cruel act. Just like humans animals also have a life how can one kill them just for some amount of money? A human being cries a lot when a knife slightly cuts his finger how he can not feel the pain of such innocent animals who also have the feelings? Not only government need to be strict in this case but also the citizens must be aware of all these cruel acts and must report this incident immediately.

Aarushi Pathania | Kangra

DEFORESTATION ON A GLOBAL LEVEL

Sir — Humans have started clearing forests in many places for development, agricultural space etc. This session is going on globally. According to a report, Brazil alone cut down 43 per cent of the world's forest in 2022. As much as 1.77 million hectares of huge forests were cut down and destroyed. Followed by Congo, Bolivia, and Indonesia. Peru, Colombia,

Laos, etc. have also done massive deforestation. This news was read recently. India is no exception to this. Even in India, a large amount of forest resources have been destroyed for widening roads, making new roads, industrialization, and urbanisation.

New trees are not being planted as much as trees and forests are being destroyed. Due to this, the balance of nature will be disturbed, with unseasonable and heavy rains, and increased heat and temperature. These are the symptoms. Many birds have been destroyed or are on the verge of extinction due to this deforestation. If the forests are destroyed, there will be a big crisis in front of the human being and they will also be on the way to being destroyed by the earth. This is such a tragedy that organisations like the United Nations should pay attention to this. So it will come to some extent. Different nations should also look at this deforestation as a future destruction. Let's hope that in the next few years, humans will wake up to this and reduce deforestation.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Microinsurance boosts financial inclusion

It not only protects vulnerable populations from financial risks but also contributes to the overall socio-economic development of the country



ANKIT AGRAWAL

With the rising awareness around insurance in the country, it is evident that individuals are recognising the pivotal role it plays in safeguarding the financial aspect of our lives. The sector is poised to grow at an unprecedented rate in the coming years. With growing income giving the desired impetus to the sector, it is expected that the Indian insurance industry will reach a US\$ 222 billion market by 2026, as per the report by IBEF.

However, the industry faces the challenge of low insurance penetration, standing at 4%, owing to the major population of underserved communities finding it difficult to avail of insurance plans. Therefore, to bolster the prospects of the industry, it is essential to diversify and expand the insurance offering to the group to ensure the maximum number of people are insured in the country. Looking at the insurance gap in low-income households, microinsurance has been introduced to improve the accessibility and affordability of insurance among the group. Specifically tailored



to address the risks of underprivileged communities, it focuses on protecting the population from plunging deeper into poverty. Offering affordable insurance products comes with the ability to help the groups cope and recover from difficult financial situations. Consequently, by empowering the communities, microinsurance drives the socio-economic development of the group, which invariably contributes to elevating their living standards.

1) Boosting crisis recovery In an attempt to alleviate the poverty of the country, the government has been continuously working towards improving the risk-handling capacity of the group. To achieve this purpose, the policies under microinsurance are in alignment with providing insurance cushioning from any unfortunate event. Offering compensation for a wide array of risks

entailing health, term life, death, disability, crop insurance, livestock/cattle insurance, accidents, natural disasters, etc. contributes to the resilience of economically marginalised groups. Government Schemes namely Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), enabling free access to health insurance, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) providing life and accident coverage respectively, further support the cause of boosting crisis recovery in the group.

2) Fostering financial inclusion: Microinsurance, offering coverage at low premiums, encourages deeper penetration of insurance among marginalised groups. It serves the purpose of promoting the financial inclusion of the community, who otherwise were unable to avail of traditional insurance products due to high costs. Consequently, bringing the marginalised section into the formal financial system can play a crucial role in converting them into valuable assets, thereby contributing to the larger cause of augmenting

the economic growth of the country.

3) Encouraging women's empowerment: In rural India, women play an integral part in managing the household, and along with this, they actively participate in income generation. To further drive the empowerment of women, government schemes such as Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) can invariably contribute to creating agriculture-based livelihoods for women belonging to rural areas. Specifically devised to cater to the unique needs of women, innovating and introducing more ground-breaking microinsurance programmes for women can bolster their financial independence. Along with this, the awareness created around microinsurance can help women improve the health outcomes of their families by availing healthcare services and timely facilitation of medical treatment. It can immensely assist them in making informed decisions for driving the well-being of their families.

(The writer is a financial advisor; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE CONSEQUENCES OF WORKPLACE STRESS

Do not ignore warning signs and adopt strategies to combat stress-induced issues



RAVI VALLURI

Karoshi was a successful Japanese entrepreneur, educated at the Lakeland College and the International University of Japan, who possessed a Midas touch and magically amassed trillions of Yen. As a youngster he was fearless, but soon his mind gave way to the lucre of money; indulging in forbidden activities, he perilously ignored the tenets of Shinto and soon succumbed to Karoshi.

Karoshi is a Japanese word that signifies sudden death by cardiac arrest or stroke, triggered by overwork. "The present moment is inevitable," is a sutra that has been articulated by several enlightened Masters. Only by living in the present moment can an individual annihilate the cobwebs of fear and stress which mushroom in the mind. It is prudent to live and traverse purposefully and mindfully, rather than think about the past or the future and lose track in the Byzantine labyrinths and consequently misplace precious peace of mind. It should not be forgotten that the Japanese entrepreneur became deceitful and snuffed out his life. Stress over a period acquires a negative connotation. However, some high-end achievers rekindle their passion to excel in high-pressure conditions. Tension or stress in these individuals increases tautness or stretch in the mind, which makes them deliver on the world stage. Even if they are girdled with negative emotions, their minds are robust and resolute enough not to capitulate and instead blossom like a lotus in a lake that is otherwise overflowing, and live in the present moment to accomplish their Holy Grail. Those not blessed with such an attitude flounder while clambering to the summit and accumulate stress due to the constraints and demands they face.



This occurs when high expectations do not match with the desired results. In an organisational setup, an excellent performance review normally triggers a jump in emoluments or even a promotion, while a below-par presentation review may be interpreted as a lackadaisical performance which can even amount to being fired from the placement. An organisation is akin to an organism which has its limitations and can lead to intriguing situations.

An employee can also suffer from family, economic or personality misadventures which may disorient his performance and thus result in a tardy result. Many times privation of an adequate social support system or hostility and perceived malevolence of co-workers affect the performance of employees and thereby lead to stressful situations.

The tragic consequences of such situations are dangerous as they often lead to physiological disorders like migraines, insomnia, spondylitis, diabetes, obesity, infertility, and hypertension/hypotension which can result in cardiac problems or strokes.

Dreaded psychological symptoms can also arise in the form of anxiety, depression, and diminishing interest in the job at hand, which leads to enormous vexation. They are a demotivated set of personnel whose productivity is singularly low and the organisation is plagued by a high percentage of absenteeism and turnover. Organisations need to follow a two-pronged strategy to win the problem. Actuate the employees by offering suitable apertures and resort to mid-course corrections by stimulating the mind through proper time management, prioritising activities, rescheduling work, and offering packages of mental diversion. Alternatively, employers could set up gyms and swimming pools on the premises, which exhort employees to do physical exercise to soothe frayed nerves and undertake wellness programmes such as the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living or the Vipassana breathing techniques. Know your enemy, know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster," wrote Sun Tzu.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd and is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

Clarify the MSP legal guarantee confusion

As tensions mount and disruptions escalate, the urgency for decisive action to safeguard farmers' interests and stabilise the agricultural economy increases



AS MITTAL

The resurgence of protests by farmers has brought attention to their longstanding struggle for sustainable profitability in the agricultural sector. Although their demands are diverse, their primary request is for a legal guarantee for MSP (Minimum Support Prices). Farmers believe that the government has not shown genuine interest in effectively implementing MSP, which has led to distrust, frustration, and the need for a legal guarantee. These issues have forced them to leave their homes and farms and take to the highways in protest, resulting in the death of three farmers, a couple of injuries, and a disruption of normalcy that has affected the commuters and business activities.

In September 2020, the government introduced three controversial farm laws that were met with widespread protests and demands for their repeal. While the laws were eventually repealed in November 2021, there has been no interim report from the Committee on MSP formed to address farmers' concerns. This delay in decision-making perpetuates uncertainties in the agricultural sector and undermines the effectiveness of the present MSP as a stabilising force.

MSP was introduced in 1966-67 to ensure food security amid food scarcity. Despite broad political support for a legal guarantee for MSP, successive governments have failed to formalise this issue, leaving the agricultural sector in a state of uncertainty. However, it is high time to address the weakening of the decades-old MSP policy, remove the complexities surrounding its legislation, and recognise the potential benefits of legalising MSP to fuel the wholesome growth of the agriculture sector, which is the country's lifeline. The Modi government has demonstrated its commendable ability to revamp decades-old mechanisms with various robust reforms such as the amendments to Indian Penal Codes and the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, and now they must take bold steps to address this pressing issue.

Why farmers asking for legal guarantee: The MSP is an administered advisory price for 23 crops and is determined annually by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) as a key government intervention to insulate farmers from price volatility when the market prices fall below the MSP as well as of consumers against corrupt manipulative market inflation and maintains food security. It has been in existence in India for more than five decades. Why, then, are farmers asking for a legal guarantee? Only 6% of farmers benefit from MSP, and it procures just 11% of total agricultural output in the country, according to the latest available NITI Aayog data. Over 90% of crops are sold at prices that are 20-30% lower than the declared MSP, leading to average losses of Rs 20,000 per acre and about Rs 10 lakh crore annually for farmers. A study by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development found that Indian farmers have been suffering losses since 2000 due to ineffective policies. The report revealed that Indian farmers lost Rs 45 lakh crore during 2000-2017 due to low prices.

Misconceptions in legalising: The legalisation of MSP has been hindered by exaggerated claims about its fiscal costs. These claims have misled successive governments, and it is essential to clarify that legal-



THE POTENTIAL BOYCOTT OF FARM PRODUCE IN PLACES WITH MSP LEGAL REGIMES BY THE TRADERS IS AN IRRATIONAL ARGUMENT BECAUSE THE COMMODITY'S SUPPLY IS TIGHT AGAINST THE DEMAND FOR FARM PRODUCE

ising MSP does not entail the government procuring all agricultural produce. The apprehensions over excessive fiscal requirements are unfounded and should not prevent the legalisation of MSP.

To make MSP a legal guarantee, necessary amendments are needed in the Agricultural Produce & Livestock Market Committee (APMC) Act by incorporating a clause that 'auction of farm produce in APMC's markets is legally not permitted below the declared MSP prices'. The apprehensions on the operation of MSP legal guarantee are that most of the sales of farm produce are not in APMCs, and traders may boycott the purchases of farm produce. The government does not have physical and economic resources to purchase, store, and market the procured farm produce, which is an irrational argument. Government intervention is necessary only when market prices fall below MSP, and it does not require the procurement of the entire marketable surplus.

The potential boycott of farm produce in places MSP legal regimes by the traders is an irrational argument because the commodity's supply is tight against the demand for farm produce. First, this was also evident from the fact that the government could manage to procure only 26 million tonnes of wheat at MSP against the target of 44.4 million tonnes fixed for the 2023 season. Second, the government's expenditure on procurement and imports of farm produce like edible oil and pulses, and on procurement of food grains on MSP in 2022-23, has already surpassed Rs 5 lakh crore and Rs 2.28 lakh crore, respectively.

Claims that the MSP legal guarantee will create fiscal disasters for India are baseless. According to gov-

ernment estimates, the MSP values of the total production of the 23 crops worked out to be around Rs 17 lakh crore, and some studies worked out to be around Rs 10 lakh crore. Furthermore, only 70% of the farm produce comes to markets as a marketable surplus, and farmers' families consume the rest for household purposes. The MSP legal guarantee will cost the government about Rs 5 lakh crore if traders or big corporations engaged in processing boycott the APMC's markets, which is an unlikely scenario. It is time to dismiss the misconceptions surrounding the legalisation of MSP and focus on the merits of providing a legal guarantee for MSP.

Merits of legalising MSP: Farming is inherently risky, influenced by factors such as weather conditions, pest attacks, and market dynamics. Establishing a legally binding framework for minimum floor prices across all crops, will mitigate the current challenges and safeguard farmers from unpredictable fluctuations in the prices of their produce. However, the government has proposed buying cotton, maize, tur, urad and Masur for five years directly from the farmers at the MSP without any quantitative limit. Notably, these crops are grown outside Punjab and Haryana, the home states of the protesting farmers. From this, can it infer that small pulses growing farmers all over the country stand to benefit? Legalising MSP for a wider variety of crops ensures that the benefits of price stability are not limited to specific segments of the farming community. Small and marginal farmers cultivating diverse crops can access the protective shield of MSP, contributing to inclusive agricultural growth, and playing a pivotal role in ensuring food security for the nation by maintaining a stable production

environment for key staples, contributing to the overall food security of the country.

A legal framework enables the government to conduct strategic operations in domestic and international markets. By selling procured produce at minimal markups during times of higher market prices, the government can manage inflation surges, ensuring price stability for consumers.

MSP reduces the vulnerability of farmers to market fluctuations, ensuring a minimum income for their produce. Farmers can navigate uncertainties more confidently, knowing that the government is legally bound to intervene when market prices fall below the MSP. A guaranteed MSP leads to increased rural income. This, in turn, stimulates the rural economy by boosting demand for goods and services, creating a positive ripple effect in various sectors.

The way forward: Policymakers can pave the way for a more secure and prosperous future for farmers by dispelling misconceptions and addressing concerns. Replacing the decades-old and inefficient MSP policy with a legislatively guaranteed MSP offers a comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. It not only ensures consistent implementation but also promotes diversification, inclusivity, and economic resilience, contributing to the wholesome well-being of farmers and the prosperity of the rural economy. This will help to fuel the dream of a 'Viksit Bharat'.

(The author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy & Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council; views expressed are personal)

Philanthropic collaboratives: A new paradigm for social impact

These collaboratives are reshaping the philanthropic sector, offering efficient solutions and paving the way for long-term systemic change

India's philanthropic landscape has shifted significantly in recent years, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic four years ago. In early 2020, The Bridgespan Group, a reputed research group published a report on philanthropic collaboratives in India, delving into how and why philanthropists and other stakeholders were working together to address social challenges at scale. It was an early signal of the change that was to come.

When the pandemic hit, the collaborative model gained momentum. During the early months of the lockdown, diverse NGOs, philanthropists, CSR organisations, and the private sector came together to reach vulnerable communities—particularly to enable



PRITHA VENKATACHALAM

access to healthcare, nutrition, and education. The need for prompt relief meant that grassroots NGOs, working alone, could have only limited reach and impact, especially in far-flung rural communities. This is how the Responsible Coalition for Resilient Communities (formerly the Rapid Community Response), or RCRC, was started. Growing from 20 NGOs in

May 2020, RCRC now has more than 98 member organisations united by a desire to help India's rural population. From facing crisis to building resilience

In its 2020 research, it tracked 13 philanthropic collaboratives across the country, which were defined as entities co-created by three or more independent actors, including at least one philanthropist or philanthropist. As we note in our latest report, The Growing Momentum of Philanthropic Collaboratives in India, the number of collaboratives in India has grown at least three-fold since, with capital invested in them having grown more than sixfold. These collaboratives pursue shared visions and strategies for achieving social impact, using

common resources and agreed-upon governance mechanisms.

While the pandemic was key in uniting diverse stakeholders for humanitarian and relief causes, there have been other reasons behind the recent rise in collaborative initiatives. Chief among them is the ability to share risk across many players, making it easier to build solutions at scale. EdelGive Foundation's Grassroots, Resilience, Ownership, and Wellness (GROW) Fund brings together Indian and international funders—including philanthropic institutions, individual philanthropists, eminent businesspersons, and changemakers. Together, they build the capabilities, resilience, and future-readiness of 100 grass-

roots organisations across India, by investing up to Rs 100 crores across them over two years. Additionally, when collaboratives enable funding for early-stage, innovative initiatives, the risk is divided so it does not fall upon a single funder. The India Climate Collaborative is a case in point, having launched in 2019 with more than 10 funders coming together.

Philanthropic collaboratives also tend to have greater credibility with governments: Having several organisations and individuals united in collective thinking can assuage and influence those in the public sector wary of individual, vested agendas. Another growth driver is the community-level lens many collaboratives undertake, bringing

together partners with complementary skills to deliver integrated solutions that aim to lift entire communities or demographics, rather than solve one challenge at a time. Anamaya, the tribal health collaborative, and the Dasra Adolescents Collaborative, each aspire for population-level change for specific communities.

The research also pointed to how collaboratives are now forming across a wider set of issue areas. While most of them addressed near-term pandemic needs in healthcare and education in 2020, collaboratives are now working on environment, rural transformation, climate, equity, and other issues. The power of the collective Collaboratives offer efficient

solutions because of how they approach their work—most notably how they set goals for field strengthening, scaling impact, and supporting promising organisations. Field strengthening, also known as ecosystem building or field building, is critical in a country like India, where entire ecosystems with multiple stakeholders need to evolve to drive sustainable impact. It involves the often-unseen work of coordinating across diverse actors to pursue shifts in policy and institutional practices, strengthening relationships, enhancing funding, or changing public narratives around an issue.

The Migrants Resilience Collaborative (MRC) a grassroots-led multi-stakeholder initiative formed at the height

of the pandemic to provide relief to migrant workers, it now focuses on building resilience by fixing broken social protection delivery systems across India for these communities. They hold the potential to address complex social challenges across the Sustainable Development Goals—such as gender inequalities, poverty, WASH, and climate change—over the long term. This offers domestic philanthropies—corporations, family foundations, and wealthy individuals—many untapped opportunities to have an outsized impact on India's development through joining forces with other mission-aligned stakeholders.

(The author writes on philanthropic subjects; views are personal)

Nishant makes winning start at Olympic Qualifier

PTI ■ BUSTO ARSIZIO (ITALY)

World Championships bronze medallist Nishant Dev started his campaign at the 1st Olympic Boxing Qualifier with an exciting 3-1 win against British pugilist Lewis Richardson but the seasoned Shiva Thapa lost here on Wednesday.

Competing in the men's 71kg category, Nishant didn't take much time to settle in against the Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Richardson and went into the attacking mode from the word go, winning the first round 4-1.

The 23-year-old Indian became even more dominant in the second round with the help of his long reach and delivered some effective right hooks to win it 5-0.

He produced a controlled performance in the third round as well and avoided multiple attacks from his opponent while trying to



protect his lead and ultimately won the bout with a split decision.

Six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), however, went down to reigning world champion Uzbekistan's Ruslan Abdullaev.

Ruslan, living up to his reputation with his pinpoint punches, penetrated Shiva's defense multiple times which forced the Indian pugilist to go on the defensive from the start.

The defensive approach didn't last long as Abdullaev continued his attacking display

before the referee stopped the contest in the first round. Meanwhile, national champion Lakshya Chahar (80kg) also made an exit from the competition after losing against former Asian Championships silver medallist Iran's Gheshlaghi

Meysam. After going down 2-3 in the first round, Lakshya fought back well in the second and was looking good in the final round as well. However, the Iranian knocked him out with just 20 seconds remaining on the clock.

Birmingham Commonwealth

Games bronze medallist Jaismine (60kg) also bowed out of the competition with a 0-5 loss against Japan's Ayaka Taguchi.

Later Wednesday night, youth world champion Ankushita Boro (66kg) will face Sonvico Emilie of France while national champion Sanjeet (92kg) will square off against Aibek Oralbay of Kazakhstan.

The first World Olympic Qualifier is hosting over 590 boxers and will offer a total of 49 quotas, including 28 for men and 21 for women, at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Between 45 and 51 boxers will qualify for the second World Qualification Tournament, to be held in Bangkok from May 23 to June 3.

India have already secured four quotas for Paris 2024 with Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) confirming their berths with impressive performances at the Asian Games.



Will do everything in my power to earn points for Olympic qualification: Lahiri

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Having played "well below his potential" in the last two Olympics, Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri said he will do everything in his power to qualify for the Paris Games and make a bid for a dream podium finish at the quadrennial showpiece.

Lahiri, who switched to LIV Golf from the USPGA in 2022 and shifted his base from Florida to Dubai, has been handicapped in his endeavour to secure a Paris berth because the new rival entity cannot grant world ranking points to qualify for the Olympics.

The 36-year-old will have to compete in the limited tournaments available outside LIV Golf and hope to earn enough points and then keep his fingers crossed for a Paris berth.

"It's very important for me to represent my country. I have been at the Olympics a couple of times, both times I've played well below my potential and it's something that I would love to change," said Lahiri during an interaction facilitated by FanCode.

"To be able to do that, I need those world ranking points. Unfortunately, that is the only qualification system even though, in my opinion, that shouldn't be the case. But because that is the way it is, I am actually trying to play as many tournaments as I can outside of the LIV Golf schedule," said Lahiri.

everything in my power to give myself the opportunity to earn those points however it is possible," said the 2015 Indian Open winner, who will be seen at the DLF Golf & Country Club from March 28-31 after nearly five years bidding for his second national title.

"And that's (performance) all I can really control. I can't control the outcome, I can't control whether I do make it to the team but I can put in the effort and my commitment, which is 110 per cent."

After a phenomenal 2015, which saw him win twice on the European Tour, and the T5 finish at the PGA Championship aiding his elevation to the PGA Tour, Anirban had a comparatively quiet year, until he finished runner-up at The Players Championship in 2022.

Lahiri would hope luck shines on him again as he begins the crucial phase of his Olympic qualification journey. He is currently ranked 350 in the world, while Shubhankar Sharma (201) and Gaganjeet Bhullar (229) are the front runners to make the cut for Paris.

At the Tokyo Games, Aditi Ashok was in contention for a medal until the 17th hole before falling short by a stroke to finish fourth.

The 25-year-old from Bengaluru had won the Asian Games silver in Hangzhou last year and also secured her second victory of the Ladies European Tour season, clinching the Costa del Sol Open de Espana.

Asked about India's chances at the Paris Olympics, Lahiri said: "Difficult question to answer because golf is a sport which is very difficult to look at a personal best in terms of a swimmer or an athlete and say 'oh this guy has got a good chance.'"

"I do feel that Aditi has been playing really well and Gagan (Gaganjeet Bhullar) has been playing really well. Shubhankar (Sharma) has played very well on the golf course (in Paris, which will be used during the Olympics). I think Shubhankar should be a lock definitely on that flight to Paris.



National will be selection trial to pick new core probables: Hockey India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey on Wednesday said the women's national championship to be held from March 13 in Pune will double up as a selection trial to pick a new group of core probables.

The nationals will be held from March 13 to 23. The national women's hockey team has endured an underwhelming run in the past few months, the lowest point being its failure to qualify for this year's Paris Olympics.

"...We will have participation from 28 states and UTs, with members of the Indian team representing their respective states. Hockey India selectors will be closely watching the performances of all the players and based on their recommendation, a new core group will be selected," Tirkey said in a press release from Hockey India.

Tirkey said no player can take her "place for granted". The national team is without a national coach after Dutchwoman Janneke Schopman resigned from the post citing a hostile work environment.

"Everyone will need to perform to their best potential to make the cut. We need to now focus on making the qualification for the FIH Women's World Cup in 2026 and build towards the LA Olympics with optimism.

"There is plenty of talent in India, the National Championship is an important platform to identify new talent and we need to further strengthen the domestic structure to bring them to the core," he said.

Hockey India secretary general Bhola Nath Singh revealed that a domestic league for women hockey players is also in the works.

"We are putting our minds together to introduce a few new tournaments in the domestic calendar, particularly for the development of women's hockey..."

"...We are also working on starting a domestic league for women that could further give opportunity for aspiring players to showcase their talent and make their way into the national programme," he said.

WFI to allow only genuine wrestlers to compete at trials

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) would allow wrestlers from their original states to compete at the upcoming trials and one grappler will be allowed to participate in more than one category over two days of selection competition, starting March 10.

In its circular issued on Tuesday, the WFI, wrote, "Wrestlers participated in Senior National Championship held at Jaipur will bring their WFI Licence Book, Birth Certificate, Adhar Card to verify the genuineness of their state."

"Several wrestlers, who actually hailed from Haryana, represented states like Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim at the Nationals conducted by the ad-hoc committee in Jaipur. This is wrong and we will now allow this," a WFI source told PTI.

"Sikkim and Arunachal are not even affiliated state bodies. We will not stop anyone from competing but wrestlers have to come from their original state. Even if a genuine wrestler comes from Arunachal, we will allow him as a special invitee," said the source.

The trials are being held to select the teams for the Asian Championships and Asian Olympic Games Qualifiers, both scheduled to be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

With two sets of senior National Championships



taking place earlier this year, the WFI has told the grapplers coming for the crucial upcoming national trials to bring all necessary documents to prove their "genuineness".

The suspended WFI had organised the Nationals in

Pune in January, while the sports ministry-constituted ad-hoc committee had conducted a similar exercise in Jaipur from February 2-5.

The WFI has also said that wrestlers competing in a weight category on March 10 - the first day of the trial -- can also compete in a different weight category on the second day in another weight category.

"It will ensure that if a strong wrestler like Aman Sehrawat or Ravi Dahiya misses out on selection in Olympic weight category (57kg) then he can get a chance in non-Olympic weight category (61kg)."

Khelo India medal winners now eligible for Government jobs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Medal winners in all Khelo India competitions will now be eligible for government jobs as per a revised criteria, Sports Minister Anurag Thakur said on Wednesday.

Thakur said the move is in keeping with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "vision of a robust sports ecosystem, nurturing talent at grassroots level and turning sports into a lucrative and viable career option."

He said the department of personnel and training, in consultation with the sports ministry, has made

"progressive revisions to the eligibility criteria for sportspersons seeking government jobs."

"This groundbreaking step now extends eligibility to medal winners from the Khelo India Games — Youth, University, Para and Winter Games — to be eligible for government jobs. Additionally, games and events have been clearly defined to ensure inclusivity across various sports," Thakur said in his post on X.

"These revised rules mark a significant stride in supporting our athletes in making Bharat a sporting superpower," he added.

Arshvant leads by 4 shots in USKG Malaysian championships

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Leader Arshvant Srivastava of India blazed the Glenmarie Golf and Country Club with the day's best card of 3-under 69 in the Boys 13-14 age category on the opening day of US Kids Malaysian Championships here.

It was a fine opening day for the seven-member Indian squad.

While Arshvant led his group, four other Indians were in Top-3 after the first day of the three-day event which carries WAGR points and grants priority points for entry into US Kids World Championships and European Championships later in the year.

The 14-year-old Arshvant,



whose coach Amit Dubey was with him, shot 69 with five birdies against two bogeys, the second of which came on the tricky 18th hole at the 6,256-yard course.

Arshvant birdied second, sixth, ninth, 13th and the 17th, while he dropped shots on eighth and 18th.

Srivastava led two Korean boys Woosung Sun (73) and Geon Kang (74) by four and

five shots respectively.

Two other Indians, Sohng Har Kantor (79) and Ved Sai Machiraju (85) were T-7 and T-14 respectively.

Divjot Gupta (40) was lying second behind Clifton Michael Lumy of Indonesia (39) while another Indian Ruslaan Alam Khan (44) was third in Boys 8 and Under category.

Jot Sarup Gupta (77) was four shots behind leader Aaron Zhang of China (73) in Boys 10 and under.

In the Girls 13-14 category Kriti Parekh was lying second with a round of 83 and the leader was Wang Enxi (76).

A total of 106 junior golfers from 16 countries, including 37 players from Malaysia, are competing in the three-day tournament.

Mbappé scores twice

AP ■ SAN SEBASTIAN (SPAIN)

Kylian Mbappé led Paris Saint-Germain back to the Champions League quarterfinals on Tuesday, scoring both goals in a 2-1 win over Real Sociedad that kept alive the French club's hopes of winning the European title in its last season with the France forward.

PSG advanced 4-1 on aggregate, with Mbappé also scoring one of the goals in the 2-0 win in the first leg in Paris three weeks ago. Mbappé has already told PSG he will not stay with the club after this season.

Despite huge spending to try to win the Champions League for the first time, PSG had been eliminated from the last 16 five times in the last seven seasons, including the last two. It had made it to the semifinals in 2021 and was runner-up in 2020.

"We knew right away that we couldn't go to sleep," Mbappé said. "If they had opened the scoring, they would have pushed on with their fans' backing. We had to dampen their hopes early on. That's what we did, and we're very



happy to be back in the quarterfinals."

Mbappé was the difference-maker again on Tuesday, opening the scoring with a beautiful goal in the 15th minute after a couple of nifty moves inside the area to cut back from near the touchline and fire a firm right-footed shot into the far corner. The shot broke the netting by the far post, prompting a short stoppage in play so it could be fixed.

Mbappé's second goal came in the 56th with a run that started from near the midfield line. He sped to the open

space to collect a long pass by Lee Kang-in and calmly found the net from inside the area.

At 25 years and 76 days, Mbappé became the second-youngest player to reach 45 Champions League goals, from group stage to final. Lionel Messi reached that mark at 24 years and 257 days. Mbappé stands at 46 goals.

Mbappé hadn't scored in his last two appearances with PSG but had eight goals in his last eight matches with the club. He had been replaced in the last two matches but played through the final whistle on Tuesday.

PSG had won 10 of its last 13 matches in all competitions but was coming off consecutive draws against Rennes and Monaco in the French league.

Mikel Merino scored Sociedad's lone goal in the 89th to give the home crowd some reason to celebrate.

"We wanted to qualify, but we also wanted to win," Mbappé said. "We had a game plan that was clear, and we managed to score early. We didn't come under too much pressure, just a little at the end."

LIV Golf abandons its pursuit of getting world ranking points

AP ■ RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA)

The Great White Shark is waving the white flag when it comes to LIV Golf being recognized by the Official World Golf Ranking. Greg Norman, the CEO and commissioner of the Saudi-funded league, has told his players that LIV has withdrawn its application.

LIV Golf first applied for world ranking points in July 2022, about a month after the league launched with the same 48 players competing over 54 holes with no cut.

The OWGR board formally rejected the application last October, saying it could not fairly measure a league with the same group of players against 24 other tours around the world that have fuller tournaments and a path to get into them.

"We have made enormous efforts to fight for you and to ensure your accomplishments are recognized within the existing ranking system," Norman wrote to players in a



letter reported by multiple media outlets. "Unfortunately, the OWGR has shown little willingness to productively work with us."

The four majors use the world ranking as part of their criteria. Representatives from the majors were the ones voting to reject LIV's application last fall. The stronger effect would be the Olympics, which also relies on the world ranking to determine eligibility. Players like former British Open champion Cameron Smith of Australia and Tyrrell Hatton of

England are unlikely to qualify, depending on how they fare in the majors.

Peter Dawson, chairman of the OWGR board, had said in October that "we are not at war" with LIV. He said it was a technical decision, not a political one. Dawson said LIV did not have a format that allowed it to be ranked equitably with other tours and "thousands of players trying to compete on them."

LIV now has 54 players, though it still has a team competition that runs

concurrently with individual play. Four players were able to qualify for the 2024 season, and the rosters are set for the 13 tournaments, barring the occasional alternate for injury.

By now, it's almost a moot point. LIV has only four players in the top 50, and eight in the top 100. Those numbers are shrinking.

Two of the top 50 - Masters champion Jon Rahm (No. 3) and Hatton at No. 17 - joined LIV only within the last few months. The others are PGA champion Brooks Koepka (No. 30) and Smith (No. 50).

Even if LIV were to make adjustments to create more open qualifying, the players would be so far removed from the top that it would be difficult for them to make up ground.

The only points LIV players get now are when they play the European and Asian tours. Joaquin Niemann (No. 76) won the Australian Open and had two other top-5 finishes in co-sanctioned European tour events.

