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YEARS HIGH IN FEBRUARY

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## Congress releases its first list of LS Candidates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi will contest the Lok Sabha polls from Kerala's Wayanad again, the party announced on Friday as it released its first list of 39 candidates. Congress general secretary K C Venugopal will contest from Alappuzha (Kerala), former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel from Rajnandgaon, Jyotsna Mahant from Korba, Tamradhwaj Sahu from Mahasamund and Shashi Tharoor from Thiruvananthapuram. Venugopal said the list has 15 general category candidates while 24 are from the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities. Congress Treasurer Ajay Maken said the list has a good mix of youth and experience. The announcement came a day after the Congress' Central Election Committee (CEC) finalised the names for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections after having a discussion on over 60 Lok Sabha seats from 11 States and Union Territories. The CEC meeting was chaired by party president



Congress leaders KC Venugopal, Ajay Maken and Pawan Khera announce first list of 39 candidates for LS elections at AICC headquarters on Friday. Pioneer Photo

Mallikarjun Kharge. Discussions were held on Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Sikkim, Tripura, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Lakshadweep. "We are in election mode and on an aggressive path of campaigning with Rahul undertaking the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra which is in Gujarat," Venugopal said.

"The Congress party is very clear: We are here to reduce BJP seats to the maximum extent possible. We are ready to sacrifice anything to reduce BJP seats. But we are expecting the same level of partnership from other partners also. In some states, we need to move forward," Venugopal said.

Maken during the Press conference said the first list is a mix of both young, experienced candidates and leaders from the Youth Congress. The Nyay Yatra will end on March 17 in Mumbai with a mammoth rally planned and Kharge is writing to all INDIA Bloc partners to attend that rally, he said.

Kharge, former party chief Sonia Gandhi and Venugopal, as well as other senior leaders who are part of the CEC, were present at the meeting. There is speculation that Rahul may also contest from Amethi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from RaeBareilly, a seat which was previously held by her mother, Sonia. Both the seats are considered bastions of the Gandhi family and the local units of the Congress have demanded that the two scions of the Congress first family should contest from there. Rahul, who was previously an MP from Amethi, lost the seat in 2019 but won from Wayanad in Kerala. Ambika Soni, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, TS Singhdeo and Mohammad Jawaid are other members of the CEC. "I am honoured that the Congress has given me an opportunity to defend my seat...I look forward to a fair and effective contest. In 15 years of politics, I never needed to spend one day of negative campaigning," the sitting Thiruvananthapuram MP Shashi Tharoor said in his first reaction after the party named him again as a LS candidate. Continued on Page 2

## Modi continues to woo Women Voters

₹100 cut in LPG cylinders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Just days before the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls, the Centre on Friday announced a cut of ₹100 in domestic cooking gas cylinders saying the reduction will significantly ease the financial burden on millions of households across the country, especially benefiting "Nari Shakti" (women power). The announcement was made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a token to mark the International Women's Day. This is second slashing of the LPG prices with the last on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan in 2023, a month before Assembly polls in five States including the Hindi heartland and the BJP was successful in maximum number of States. The price of a domestic LPG cooking gas will now be ₹803 in Delhi, ₹813 in Ahmedabad, Kolkata ₹900, Mumbai ₹802 and likewise a differential rate across the cities and States. Modi said the reduction of ₹100 in LPG cylinder prices will significantly ease the financial burden on millions



of households across the country, especially benefiting "Nari Shakti" (women power). "By making cooking gas more affordable, we also aim to support the well-being of families and ensure a healthier environment. This is in line with our commitment to empowering women and ensuring 'Ease of Living' for them," the PM said in a social media post. The PM also shared the delight to nominate philanthropist Sudha Murty to the Rajya Sabha, and

counted upon how his Government's numerous measures have empowered women. Women have been at the centre of Modi's outreach and he has often asserted that their support to him and the ruling BJP have played a significant role in the party's successes. In the run up to the Lok Sabha polls, expected to be held in April-May, the BJP has intensified its connect with them as it looks to score a bigger win and retain power for a third straight term under Modi. Continued on Page 2

## NEWS BREAK Kedarnath Dham to reopen for devotees

DEHRADUN: The gates of Kedarnath will open for the devotees at 7 am on May 10, the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) announced on the occasion of Mahashivratri on Friday. The announcement was made by BKTC chairman Ajendra Ajay at the Omkareshwar temple in Ukhimath. The portals of the Himalayan temple, visited by lakhs of people every year were closed during the winters when it remains snow-bound. Greeting people on the occasion of Mahashivratri, Ajay said a record number of devotees visited Kedarnath Dham during the last yatra season and the number of pilgrims will rise further this year.

## Sandeshkhali Don breaks down, exposes ED attackers

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The alleged "tiger" of Sandeshkhali Sheikh Shahjahan — reported mastermind of attack on the Enforcement Directorate officials, land grab and sexual assault on women — have started to buckle down under pressure. According to sources the Trinamool Congress strongman who is presently in the custody of the Central Bureau of Investigation has identified a number of his accomplices who had carried out the January 5

assault on a team of ED officials that had gone to conduct search operations in his house but returned injured after being beaten up by hundreds of Shahjahan's followers. The ED had raided his house in connection to the ₹10,000 crore ration scam. As tears welled up his eyes during interrogation the "don" shared the minute details of his cronies with his interrogators allowing the CBI officials to conduct a series of raids at their houses throughout the Sandeshkhali block, sources said.



After conducting search operations in his house at Akunji Para in Sandeshkhali the CBI officials also raided the houses of Duronto Molla, Safikur Rehman and Abu Hasan Molla in Dugri

Para region, sources said. The accused however could not be found. "He has said that about 700-800 people had come on the day of attack," said CBI sources, adding however Shahjahan has denied having incited his supporters to attack the ED officials. "He has softened up but is still not accepting his guilt and is required to be questioned further," sources said. Following intense political pressure and nudging by the High Court, the State police last week arrested Shahjahan who

remained at large for about 55 days. This, also after hundreds of local women hit the national headlines when they came out in the open alleging large-scale land grab and sexual assault by Shahjahan's men. Meanwhile, the ED on Friday conducted searches at multiple locations in Kolkata and its neighbouring areas in connection with its probe into the teacher recruitment scam. Searches were conducted at Patharghata Mazar Sharif area in New Town, Nagerbazar, Rajarhat, sources said.

## Sudha Murty nominated to RS

NEW DELHI: Philanthropist and author Sudha Murty was nominated to the Rajya Sabha on Friday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauding her contribution in diverse fields. Modi asserted in a post on X that her presence in the Upper House is a powerful testament to "Nari Shakti" (women power), exemplifying the strength and potential of women in shaping the nation's destiny. Wishing her a fruitful tenure, he said, "I am delighted that the President of India has nominated Sudha Murty Ji to the Rajya Sabha. Sudha Ji's contributions to diverse fields including social work, philanthropy and education have been immense and inspiring." Murty, wife of Infosys co-founder N R Narayana Murthy, is also the chairperson of the Murty Trust and has authored several books. The 73-year-old, whose nomination comes on International Women's Day, was awarded the Padma Shri in 2006 and the Padma Bhushan in 2023.

## Bengaluru Parched



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

With a water crisis looming large in the country's Silicon Valley, the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) banned the use of drinking water for cleaning vehicles, gardening, construction, and other recreational purposes on Friday. The metropolitan administration has

introduced penalties for wasting drinking water as the city grapples with an acute shortage, aiming to promote judicious use of water. The board has recommended economical use of drinking water, considering the crisis. City residents have been urged to avoid using drinking water for washing vehicles, construction, entertainment purposes, and at cinema halls and malls (except for drinking purposes). A penalty of ₹5,000 will be imposed on violators, and in case of repetitions, they will be fined an additional amount of ₹500 each time, the board has decided. Bengaluru, with its population of 1.3 crore, faces a shortfall of over 1,500 MLD (Million Liters Per Day) in its daily water needs, which range between 2,600-2,800 MLD. Not just Bengaluru, parts of Tumakuru and Uttara Kannada districts have also been identified as susceptible to water shortage by the revenue department. As many as 236 taluks in the state have been declared drought-hit, with 219 facing severe consequences. Continued on Page 2

## India warns Indian citizens against Russian allurement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday said several Indian nationals have been "duped" to work with the Russian Army and India has strongly taken up the matter with Moscow for their early discharge. Also, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal appealed to Indian nationals to not get "swayed" by offers made by agents for support jobs with the Russian Army, saying it is fraught with danger and risk to life. Jaiswal's comments at his weekly media briefing came days after Indian national Mohammed Asfan from Hyderabad, who was duped into joining Russia's war against Ukraine, was killed. Jaiswal said strong action has been initiated against agents and unscrupulous elements who recruited the Indians on false pretexts and promises. He said India remains committed to ensure the early release of its nationals serving as support staff with the Russian Army. The Indian Embassy in Moscow on Wednesday confirmed Asfan's death in a



post on X without mentioning the reason or circumstances behind his demise. Another Indian, who also had worked as a support staff to the Russian army, died several days ago. The MEA spokesperson said India is trying its best to bring back their mortal remains. He said around 20 people have contacted the Indian Government and it is doing its best to locate them. Continued on Page 2

## 16 children sustain burn injuries due to electrocution

PTI ■ KOTA (RAJASTHAN)

Sixteen children and two others participating in 'Shiv Bara' on the occasion of Mahashivratri here sustained burn injuries after getting electrocuted on Friday noon, officials said. The children, aged 10-16 years, were electrocuted from a high-tension power line passing overhead in the Sakatpura area under the Kunhari police station, they said. A boy holding the iron rod that came in contact with the power line received 100 per cent burn injuries, while four others sustained around 40-50 per cent burn injuries, officials said. All of them were referred to SMS Hospital in Jaipur after being initially treated at Kota's MBS Hospital. Eleven other boys and a man and a woman also sustained injuries and were under treatment in MBS Hospital, they said. Kota city SP Amrita Duhan told PTI that local women with water pots on their heads and children, some of them holding flags attached to iron rods, were part of the 'Shiv Bara' for Katha at temple in Kalibasti. One of the boys in the procession was holding a 22-foot-high iron flagpole, which came in contact with a high-tension line passing overhead around noon, the SP said. A local present at the site said when the flagpole came in contact with the power line, he was electrocuted and flung into the air. Others, in an attempt to rescue the boy, tried to pull the rod away from him but also received electric shocks, the local said. Continued on Page 2

## NHAI fast tracks relief for Highway accident victims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

To provide immediate assistance to accident victims and strengthen the Incident Management System (IMS) on the National Highways, the Central road-making agency NHAI is working to enhance its existing IMS, which includes ambulances, route patrol vans and cranes, real-time tracking, and supportive supervision. NHAI officials said this will improve response time and

facilitate the referral of accident victims to the nearest health facilities, establishing a seamless process for incident management. "This will include the Operation & Management of Trauma Centres/Emergency Stabilisation Centers to maximise assistance during the golden hour and improve health outcomes. This will also help to strengthen services provided through the National Highway Toll-Free Helpline Number 1033, resulting in improved response time," said the official.



As part of this effort, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has collaborated with HLL Lifecare Limited, a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW). Under the agreement, HLL Lifecare Limited will undertake training and orientation of the Toll Plaza Staff on new initiatives and provide basic life support. Additionally, capacity building for Toll Plaza staff to improve their psychological and behavioural skills, soft skills, and

stress management will be undertaken. Moreover, HLL Lifecare Limited will provide services for comprehensive geo-tagging, mapping, and engagement of health facilities and trauma centers across National Highways to enhance emergency medical response by linking health facilities with ambulances. A blueprint for investment in trauma centers along National Highways will also be created by HLL Lifecare Limited. Continued on Page 2



# Padmaja BJP move rattles Congress

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Rahul Gandhi, former president of the Indian National Congress, will seek re-election from Wayanad in Kerala in the ensuing Lok Sabha election. The first list of Congress candidates announced late Friday evening by K C Venugopal, (the AICC Organizational Secretary) has no major changes other than the shifting of K Muraleedharan, the sitting MP from Vatakara to Thrissur. Shafi Pambal, the Islamist leader of the Congress has been fielded from Vatakara. Venugopal himself is contesting the election from Alappuzha. T N Prathapan, the sitting MP from Thrissur has given way to Muraleedharan and the sudden change has been necessitated because of Padmaja Venugopal (daughter of late K Karunakaran) crossing over to BJP on Thursday morning. Though Muraleedharan and other Congress leaders claim that Prathapan himself volunteered to make way for the former, the latter's body language and facial expression showed that he was not that happy with the move by the party's High Command. This change is being seen as an attempt by the Congress to prevent BJP candidate Suresh Gopi from making any inroads in



Thrisur. The party has retained all other sitting MPs including Sasi Tharoor, Adoor Prakash, Rajmohan Unnithan, Kodikkunnil Suresh, Haiby Eden, V K Sreekantan, M K Raghavan, K Sudhakaran, Anto Antony, Dean Kurriakose, Remya Haridas and Benni Behannan. There are 20 seats at stake from Kerala. While the Congress is contesting 17 seats, it has allocated two seats to Muslim League and one seat to a faction of the RSP. E T

Mohammed Basheer and Abdul Samadani, the two Islamists are the Muslim League nominees while N K Premachandran is the RSP nominee. If the reactions from the Congress and the CPI(M) are any indication, the decision of Padmaja Venugopal, to quit the Grand Old Party and join the BJP has rattled both the camps. Though initial reactions to Padmaja (62), the most beautiful face of the Congress in the State was subdued, by Friday morning

Leader of Opposition V D Satheshan came out with an allegation that her entry into BJP was facilitated by a former police chief of the State who still continues to hold an important position. "This is a deal between the CPI(M) and the BJP to destroy the Congress. If they have any hope of Congress getting weaker by Padmaja joining the Hindutva party, it would remain a pipedream," a visibly upset Sathesh told reporters. Rahul Mankootathil, the

Youth Congress State Chief and the TV star of the party went one step further and said that Padmaja can never claim the legacy of Karunakaran. (But the language used by Rahul in the press meet is unprintable) Padmaja said though she does not bother what Mankootathil said about her, she would drag him to court for casting aspersions on her mother late Kalyanikutty Amma. "If they are not bothered about me joining the BJP, why they are creating such hue and cry over this development?" she asked while speaking to reporters upon her return to Thiruvananthapuram on Friday morning. T N Prathapan, the Congress candidate who had launched his campaign from Thrissur withdrew from the race by "white washing" the walls in the constituency plastered with his posters and campaign billboards. Padmaja said she was quitting Congress because the High Command continued to neglect her for the last three years. "I was humiliated and disgraced by the State leaders of the party and the only option to save myself respect was to quit the Congress. There is no leadership in the Congress while the BJP has an effective and strong leadership in Narendra Modi," she said.

# Shah to attend OBC conclave in Bihar today

PTI ■ PATNA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be in Bihar on Saturday to attend a conclave on measures taken by the central government for backward classes, BJP OBC Morcha president K Laxman said. The conclave is being held as part of 10,000 "samajik sammelans" (social conferences) the OBC Morcha is organising across the country, Laxman told a press conference on Friday. "We are approaching the Lok Sabha polls. The OBCs and the EBCs (extremely backward classes), which together comprise more than 50 per cent of the population, need to be told what the Modi government has done for them in the last 10 years," he said. The function which Shah will attend at Paliganj on the outskirts of Patna on Saturday is part of the drive, Laxman said. He said steps like grant of constitutional status to the OBC Commission and quotas in NEET exams and Navodaya Vidyalayas were proof of the government's commitment to the betterment of backward classes. Asked about the demand by a number of opposition parties that a "quota within quota" for female OBCs be introduced in the Women's Reservation Bill, Laxman shot back: "They



should first tell us why the sub-quota did not find a place in the draft legislation brought by the precious Congress-led UPA government." They are trying to find excuses to stall the Narendra Modi government's attempt to ensure that women get their due, he claimed. The BJP OBC Morcha chief also alleged that Rahul Gandhi's barbs at the PM, questioning Modi's OBC status, smacked of the "Congress' hostility towards the OBCs, which has been on display since the times of Nehru". He claimed that "in a letter to the then chief ministers, Nehru had minced no words expressing his aversion to caste-based quotas. Report of the Kaka Kalelkar Commission gathered dust under Congress rule." "When V P Singh government, backed by the BJP, gave its nod to the Mandal Commission's

recommendations, the most vociferous opposition came from Rajiv Gandhi", Laxman claimed. He alleged that the RJD in Bihar and the Samajwadi Party in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh were led by people who "spoke about OBCs but worked only for their own families". Laxman also demanded an explanation why the United Front government, in which these parties were key allies, failed to consider OBC stalwart Karpoori Thakur and former prime minister Chaudhary Charan Singh for the Bharat Ratna. He also alleged Jayant Chaudhary, the Rashtriya Lok Dal Chief who is also the grandson of the ex-PM, expressed his gratitude towards the Modi government for the highest civilian honour to his late grandfather, "humiliation and abuses were heaped on him by the Congress and its allies".

# Sharad grandnephew Rohit ₹50 crore assets attached by ED

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

More than eight weeks after its officials grilled him for more than 12 hours in an alleged money laundering case, the Enforcement Directorate has attached land and property worth Rs 50.20 crore belonging to a sugar factory linked to NCP chief Sharad Pawar's grand nephew and MLA Rohit Pawar. The land and assets attached comprised 161.30 acres of land, plant & machinery and building structures collectively worth Rs 50.20 crore belonging to M/s Kannad Sahakari Shakar Karkhana (SSK) Ltd, a sugar unit owned by Baramati Agro Ltd., of which Rohit Pawar is the CEO. The ED carried out the attachment of land and assets belonging to Rohit Pawar-

linked sugar unit located at Kannad in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (known previously as Aurangabad) district under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in a case relating to the alleged illegal sale of sugar mills by Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank (MSCB) to M/s Baramati Agro Ltd. The ED is investigating an alleged money laundering case on the basis of an FIR registered by the Economic Offence Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai police under various sections of the PMLA and Indian Penal Code (IPC), following an order passed by the Bombay High Court on August 22, 2019. In the FIR, the EOW of the Mumbai police had alleged that sugar mills sold fraudulently by the MSCB at a



throw away prices to "relatives and private persons" without following due procedures. Rohit Pawar, the CEO of Baramati Agro Ltd, against whom the Mumbai police registered an FIR in August 2019, faces purported money-laundering charges linked to Rs 25,000 crore MSCB loan disbursal scam. The ED's

charge is that he indulged in 'diversion of funds' to a company that made a bid to buy an ailing sugar cooperative factory. Reacting to the attachment of land and assets belonging to a sugar factory linked to him, Rohit Pawar said: "The ED has chosen to act against on Maha Shivratri day. I am Shiv Bakt.

Lord Shiva will definitely cognisance of the injustice done to me. The ED action will boomerang on it. From this action, I can foresee that the Lok Sabha election schedule may be announced in the next few days." It may be recalled that on January 24, the ED had questioned 38-year-old Rohit Pawar for more than 12 hours in an alleged money laundering case linked to M/s Baramati Agro Ltd in the MSCB loan disbursal scam. Giving details of the alleged money laundering case registered against the Rohit Pawar-linked sugar mill, the ED officials said: "Our investigations have revealed in order to recover the outstanding loan of Rs 80.56 crore from M/s Kannad SSK Limited, the MSCB took possession of all the assets of

the sugar mill by fixing a low reserve price based on a questionnaire valuation report. Apart from M/s Baramati Agro Ltd, two other parties entered into the bidding process. The bidder with the highest bid was technically disqualified on flimsy grounds, whereas other bidders were already business associates of M/s Baramati Agro Ltd with no financial capacity in running a sugar unit". The ED said that the acquisition of the Kannad SSK was "illegal" and assets so acquired were proceeds of crime under the PMLA, 2002. Accordingly provisional attachment order was issued facilitating the attachment of all assets of Kannad SSK. Earlier, the ED had seized assets acquired by M/s Baramati Agro Ltd at a cost of Rs 121.47 crore.



# 6.53 kilogram gold, eight iPhones seized in Mumbai

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In multiple interceptions and searches, the Mumbai Airport Customs Zone-III officials have seized over 6.53 kg gold worth Rs 3.73 crore and eight expensive iPhones during the past 24 hours. Acting on an intel tip-off, the customs sleuths found unclaimed 3,300 grams of gold dust concealed wax cases in the toilet commode of a Jeddah-Mumbai Vistara flight UK-236. In another case, two Indians arriving here from Dubai by Spicejet flight SG-14 were caught with 24 pieces of gold jewelry weighing 1,278 gms. The Customs officials found gold hidden on the person and the trousers of the accused passengers. Similarly, the Customs officials intercepted another Indian arriving here from Ras Al-Khaimah via IndiGo flight 6E-1492 and seized gold dust hidden in wax, 605 gms gold chains and three expensive iPhones. "The gold dust was concealed in the passenger's rectum. He had hidden the gold chains and iPhone in his pants," a Customs official said. The customs sleuths also arrested one more Indian arriving from Abu Dhabi by IndiGo flight 6E-96 with one case of gold dust in wax and three gold articles weighing 520 gms and two iPhones, hidden in his rectum and trousers. Simultaneously, an Indian arriving here from Hanoi by VietJet Air flight VJ-907 was taken into custody with 510 gms of gold dust in wax concealed in his headgear. The Customs officials attributed the increase in gold smuggling to the fact that the prices of gold had gone up to Rs 66,000 per tola (11.66 grams). "Apart from the increase in the gold rates, another reason for the increase in the gold smuggling is that the wedding season started now," a Customs official said.

# Modi Continues...

**From Page 1**  
Attending the first National Creators' Award later, Modi urged content creators to increasingly make women a part of their work. He said the "collaboration of content and creativity grows engagement, collaboration of content and digital brings transformation, and collaboration of content with purpose shows impact". He urged the content creators to bring inspiration through their content and recalled that he had raised the issue of disrespect towards women from the ramparts of the Red Fort. Modi also requested them to forward the spirit of equality among parents while raising boys and girls. He said the content creators should showcase the capabilities of "nari shakti" (women power) and gave ideas on depicting how a mother conducts her daily tasks and women from rural and tribal areas engage in economic activity. "Content creation can help rectify wrong perceptions," he said. "A home is the foundation of dignity. It's where empowerment begins and dreams take flight. PM-AWAS Yojana has been a game-changer to further empowerment of women," he said about a scheme under which crores of homes for the poor have been built, with more women than men getting the ownership. The PM Svanidhi scheme, a micro-credit facility for street vendors, has brought happiness to the lives of the poorest workers, who include a large number of women, he said. The "Lakhpati Didi" scheme, an initiative for financial empowerment of women associated with self-help groups, has become a big platform to empower them, he added in another post. Women associated with the group are a strong foundation for building a developed India, he said.

# Congress releases..

**From Page 1**  
The Congress said it would guarantee paid apprenticeships to every graduate under 25 if it wins the upcoming election, as it tries to tap into voter concerns over high unemployment, even among the well-educated. "We are going to ensure your 'first job' of Rs 1 lakh (\$1,209) per year," Rahul said on social media. "This historic plan of ours is a forever cure for the disease of unemployment," he added.

Rahul, who is in the middle of a his second leg of Bharat Jodo Yatra exhorting young people to vote for Congress, said the party would enact a 'Right to Apprentices Act' guaranteeing a one-year apprenticeship in a Government or private institution, with the opportunity to continue in the job. "This revolutionary scheme will change the face of Indian industries and the destiny of the youth by closing the skill gap between industry and India's workforce," he said.

# NHAI fast tracks relief for...

**From Page 1**  
The HLL will also operationalise and manage state-of-art ambulance services which will be equipped with improvised 'Basic Life Support' at select locations of National Highways and will integrate technology for better communication, real time tracking and coordination. Along with this, health screening for truckers and highway users such as eye test, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and oral cancer screening and wayside amenities will also be organised. A technical support unit will also be established to provide supervision to various initiatives and coordinate with concerned NHAI officials for trouble shooting and effective implementation.

"This agreement will remain in effect for a period of five years. This unique collaboration between two government organisations underlines NHAI's focus to enhance the incident management system and provide timely assistance to accidents victims. This arrangement will play a prominent role in providing immediate medical assistance and save precious lives on the National Highways across the country," said the official. The MoU was signed in presence of NHAI chairman Santosh Kumar Yadav and Kuruvilla PC, Associate Vice President & Business Head, HLL Lifecare Limited, along with other senior officials from NHAI and HLL Lifecare Ltd.

# Mahashivratri celebrated with fervour across JK

PTI ■ JAMMU/SRINAGAR

Mahashivratri was celebrated with religious fervour across Jammu and Kashmir with thousands of devotees thronging temples amid tight security arrangements. Kashmiri Pandits, who celebrate this festival as 'Herath', began a night-long yagya and prayers as 'Har-ratri' commenced this evening. In Jammu, elaborate security arrangements were made across the region, especially in and around the temples, as a precautionary measure. Over 1.5 lakh devotees paid their obeisance at the famous Shiv Khori temple in the Reasi district of the state, while thousands of devotees thronged ancient temples of Aapshambu in Roopnagar, Pajpakhtar, Peerkho, Raghunath temple, Ranbeshwer temple, and Purmandal temple in Jammu and its outskirts.

# 16 children sustain...

**From Page 1**  
The women carrying the pots dropped them, spilling water on the ground, leading to commotion at the spot, the local added. At least 16 children and a 28-year-old man and a 38-year-old woman with burn injuries were admitted to the emergency and burn wards of MBS Hospital on Friday noon, superintendent Dr Dharmraj Meena said. Five of the children, including one with 100 per cent burn injury were referred to SMS Hospital in Jaipur after primary medical care in Kota while the 13 others were under treatment in emergency and burn wards at MBS Hospital, he said. Those referred to SMS Hospital

were identified as Shugan (13), Koshal (7), Suraj (12), Annirudh (8) and Yash (10), the superintendent said. Police have not yet received any report on the incident, however, family members of the victims, angry at the organisers of the procession, created a ruckus at the spot in Sakatpura area. The police had to intervene and pacify them, SHO at Kunhari Police Station Arvind Bhardwaj said. The organisers had not obtained prior permission for the event from the administration, however, the police have not registered any case as no report has been received on the matter so far, Bhardwaj said Friday evening.

# Bengaluru...

**From Page 1**

The State Government is exploring solutions to deal with the crisis, including recycled and treated water from residents' associations. Helpline and control rooms set up by the Government are overwhelmed, while authorities are trying to crack down on illicit water tanker operations. Tanker costs have also surged, prompting the Bangalore City District Collector to fix the rates for 200 privately operated tankers for four-month duration. Malls and cinema halls have also been instructed to use water only for drinking, cleaning of roads, and other cleaning works. "As per the BWSSB Act 1964, Articles 33 and 34, we have decided to ban the usage of drinking water for non-essential purposes," the BWSSB order reads. According to BWSSB data, Bengaluru city has a population of 14 million, including the floating population. "It is crucial to supply drinking water to the 1.40 crore population of

Bengaluru city. With the summer heat intensifying and groundwater resources depleting, it is necessary to stop the wastage of drinking water to ensure its availability for citizens," the order reads. BWSSB chairman Ram Prasath Manohar explained the measures taken by the board to address the water crisis. "There is no water scarcity in areas where Kaveri water is supplied. The issue lies in the rest of the city where the Kaveri water supply has not yet commenced. The actual demand in Bengaluru city is 1,450 MLD per day, and we are currently supplying 1,470 MLD to meet the demand," Manohar said. When asked about the feasibility of identifying violations across the city, Manohar said, "We have directed meter readers to patrol their areas daily to observe any violations. We also request that citizens help us conserve water by reporting any misuse. Citizens can inform us, and we will take swift action."



# LG approves panels for prisoners help

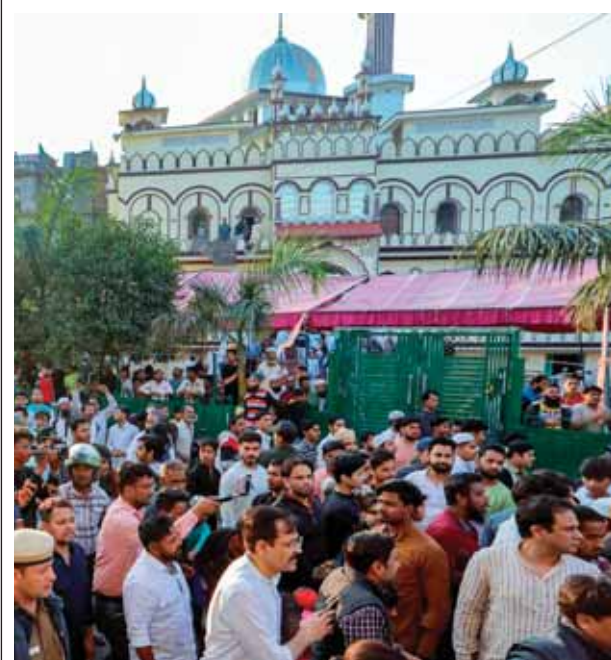
PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena has given nod for the constitution of an 'Empowered Committee' and an 'Oversight Committee' for the implementation of a year-old Centre's scheme of offering 'financial assistance to poor prisoners', Raj Niwas officials said on Friday. The scheme, which will be implemented according to the guidelines and standing operating procedure (SOP) issued by the ministry of home affairs, is likely to benefit at present 162 prisoners in various jails of Delhi who are unable to be released due to financial constraints and support, they added. The approximate amount required to provide assistance to these prisoners (161 under trial prisoners and one convict) have been calculated to Rs 23.79 lakh by the prison department. The scheme will not only



benefit the poor jail inmates but also resolve the overcrowding problem in the jails, officials said. "The LG took note that implementation of the scheme has been delayed despite the Union home minister writing to the Delhi chief minister in May last year to take advantage of the scheme for which the entire fund will be provided by the Centre. Later in June, Union home secretary had also written letter to the Delhi government for taking necessary action for the implementation of the scheme," the official said. Saxena also noticed that the scheme was part of the Union Budget 2023-24 and there is a need for its expeditious implementation according to the SOP circulated by the ministry of home affairs, he added. The home department of the Delhi government proposed that 'Empowered Committee' according to the guidelines

and SOP will have district collector or District Magistrate, secretary, district legal services authority, deputy commissioner of police, superintendent or deputy superintendent of the concerned prison, judge in-charge of the concerned prison and a nominee of the district judge. The 'Oversight Committee' will have principal secretary (home or jail), secretary (law), secretary (state legal services authority), DIG or IG (prison), registrar general of the high court and special commissioner of police. The objectives of the scheme include providing financial assistance to those poor inmates who are primarily deprived of social ties or are less educated and belong to low income groups, the officials said. This step will enable them to become a part of the mainstream society as a valuable citizen, after getting released from jail, they added.



## Cop suspended for kicking namazis in Inderlok

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Friday suspended a sub-inspector for allegedly kicking a few people offering namaz on a road in north Delhi's Inderlok area on Friday, police said. The incident happened during the 'jume ki namaz' (Friday prayers) around 2 pm near Inderlok Metro Station. Locals in response blocked the road and demanded action against the policeman, which led to stepping up of security in the area to maintain law and order situation. The act was purportedly caught in a video that has since gone viral on social media. The video showed a sub-inspector kicking a few people while they were offering namaz on the road.

"In the incident which happened today, the police post in-charge who was seen in the video has been suspended with immediate effect. Necessary disciplinary action is also being taken," Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) MK Meena said. Soon after the incident, the police took cognisance of the video and initiated a probe, Meena said. Earlier in the day, the DCP met the protesters and assured them that strict action would be taken against the accused, an official said. The Delhi Congress termed the incident "shameful" in a post on X. "Very shameful! @DelhiPolice's jawan is kicking people offering namaz on the road. What could be more shameful than this?" the party said in a post in Hindi.

# JNU notifies election committee for students union polls

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University has notified the election committee for the students' union polls after a hiatus of four years. The last JNUSU elections were held in 2019 and had been stalled since COVID-19 pandemic. The Executive Committee members have elected Shaileendra Kumar as the chair-

person of the election committee for presiding over the JNUSU elections 2023-24, the notification said. Dean of Students Manuradha Chaudhary released a list of 42 students, including the chairperson, who will form the election committee and help in counting of votes as well as declaration of the poll results. "In reference to the circular dated 16.02.2024 wherein Ms Aishe Ghosh and Mr Md



Danish were authorised to conduct GBM of the students for formation of the election committee to initiate the JNUSU elections 2023-24 process. In this regard, the following list of EC members along with chairperson election committee has been submitted. The dean of students hereby notifies the same," the notification dated March 6 read. The preparations for polls will

now be kickstarted, and further ratcheted up after the dean office announces the dates for holding the JNUSU elections. In the 2019 polls, the united front of Left student organisations SFI, AISA, AISF and DSF swept the JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) polls, with Aishe Ghosh elected as president, defeating arch-rival RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad.

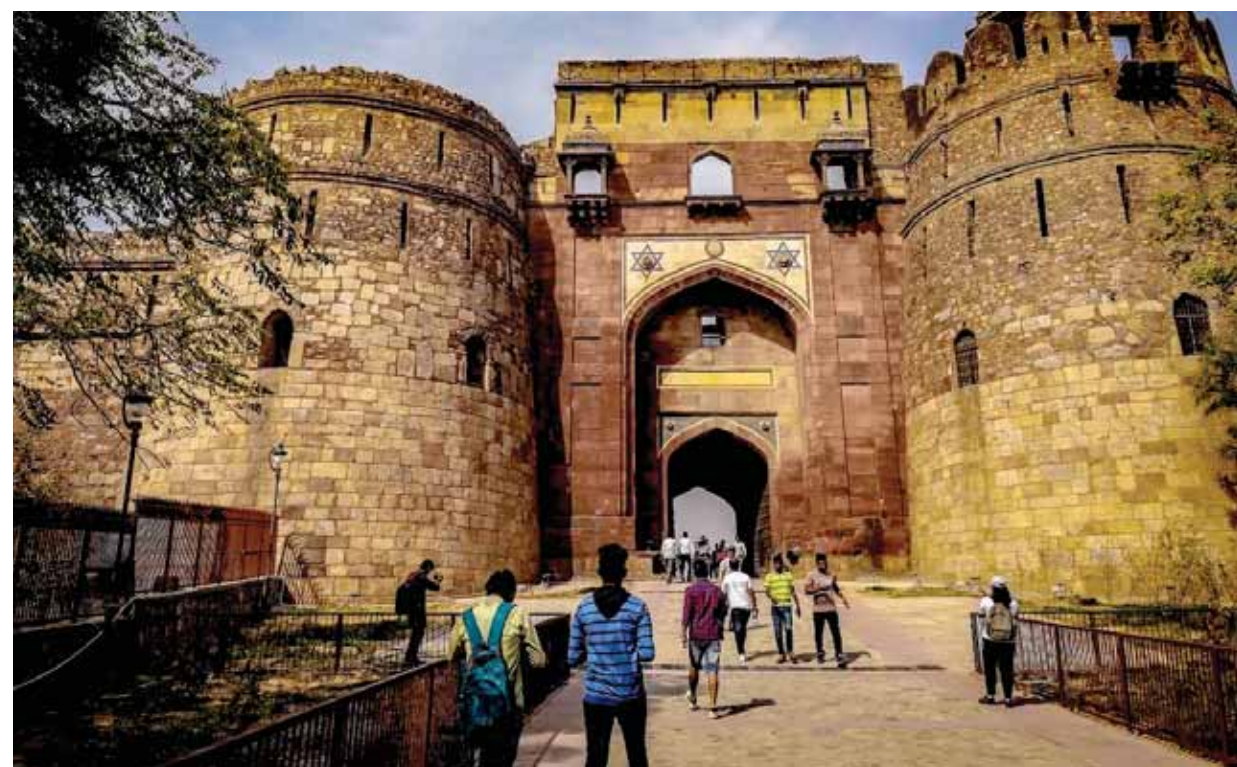


Devotees offer prayers to Lord Shiva on the occasion of Maha Shivratri festival in New Delhi on Friday  
Ranjjan Dimri / The Pioneer

# Artists to gather at Purana Quila

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A large number of artists are expected to gather at the historic Purana Quila here on Sunday as a part of a day-long camp to create a range of artworks driven by the vision of 'Viksit Bharat', officials said. The National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) and Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA) have joined hands for the 'Viksit Bharat Ambassador Artist Workshop', which will see the participation of both professional artists and fine arts students, they said on Thursday. "The day-long workshop will be hosted at the Purana Quila and each artist is free to explore the medium, from sketching to acrylic painting and photography to other forms of art," said Sanjeev Kishor Goutam, director general of the NGMA. "While an artist cannot be restricted to a time frame in imaging an art, the overarching theme will be Viksit Bharat by 2047," Goutam said. The event will represent a collective journey towards progress and development, encapsulating the essence of the vision for a thriving and



culturally rich India, Culture Ministry officials said. The timing will be 9 am to 5 pm, Goutam said. These artists will be the 'Viksit Bharat ambassadors' as they will dream up the developed India as they wish to see it.

"So, someone can depict through art a pollution-free environment in India or an India they wish to see by 2047 or even beyond if they wish too," secretary in-charge of LKA Rajiv Kumar said.

The officials said around 2,000 to 3,000 professional artists are expected to attend the camp, while a call has been given to around 5,000 to 6,000 students of fine arts to take part as well. Besides, school students will be urged

to participate virtually by presenting a painting or other artwork online, Kumar said. When asked if there was a plan to collect the artworks, Kumar said, "We will decide after the camp, no decision as such now."

# New technology for brain tumour treatment unveiled

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Offering patients a pain-free and non-invasive alternative for brain tumour treatment that lasts just 30 minutes, Apollo Hospitals Group on Friday launched South Asia's first ZAP-X Radiosurgery, providing a transformative approach to treating brain tumours with minimal radiation exposures. The traditional brain surgery lasts 3-4 hours and longer treatment sessions. "The ZAP-X platform provides an attractive option for individuals undergoing brain tumour treatment with the shorter treatment sessions further contributing

to patient comfort and convenience. By providing a pain-free and non-invasive alternative, the platform offers hope and optimism for patients and their families facing the challenges of brain tumor diagnosis and treatment," said Dr Prathap Chandra Reddy, Founder Chairman, Apollo Hospitals Group at an event held here to launch the technology. He added: "This innovative technology designed for the treatment of brain tumours allows for non-invasive, pain-free sessions lasting 30 minutes, with minimal exposure to radiation. "ZAP-X also comes with advanced safety protocols, including instant error detection and reduced



radiation leakage, that ensure the patient's well-being and quality of life post treatment. Furthermore, as an outpatient procedure it allows for greater convenience and accessibility for patients." Prof. John R. Adler, Founder and CEO, Zap Surgical and Professor of Neurosurgery, Stanford School of Medicine said, "Stereotactic radiosurgery is among the most important medical advancements of the past century. Eligible patients no longer must experience debilitating surgical resections, or potentially lose cognitive capacity by undergoing whole-brain radiotherapy. Instead, with ZAP-X

radiosurgery, patients can now be quickly treated in an outpatient setting and often return to normal activities the same day with no incisions, and no pain." ZAP-X allows for a day-care procedure, enabling patients to return home post-treatment, unlike traditional surgeries requiring 4-7 days or more of hospitalisation, and without the necessity of anaesthesia. This innovative method improves patient outcomes by enhancing the ability to avoid critical structures like the brain stem, eyes, and optic nerves, while also drastically minimizing exposure to healthy brain tissue to safeguard a patient's cognitive function.

Experts say that ZAP-X's proven clinical capabilities will enable neurologists and neurosurgeons in treating primary and metastatic brain tumours, Arteriovenous Malformations (AVMs), trigeminal neuralgias, movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease, Epilepsy and other intracranial lesions such as meningiomas, acoustic neuromas, and pituitary adenomas, with better accuracy and fewer side effects to patients. With the rising tide of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), the experts hope that ZAP-X will be a new addition in the country's fight against the chronic diseases, of whom cancers form a significant portion.



# Let us share India stories to world: Modi

## Prime Minister presents first ever National Creators Awards in 20 categories

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday here presented the first-ever National Creators Award. After presenting the award Modi in his address asked content creators to start a Create on India Movement and tell stories of India to everyone. "Let us together start a Create on India Movement. Let us share stories related to India, India's culture, India's heritage and traditions with the whole world. Let us tell our stories of India to everyone. Let us Create on India, Create for the World," the Prime Minister said.



Singer Maithili Thakur takes selfie with PM Modi at National Creators' Awards at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Friday

The awards were given across 20 categories, including the best storyteller, the disruptor, celebrity creator, green champion, the best creator for social change, most impactful agri creator, cultural ambassador, best travel creator, swachhta ambassador, new India cham-

motivational speaker Jaya Kishori, American YouTuber Drew Hicks, and others. Jaya Kishori was presented the Best Creator for Social Change Award. Kabita Singh (Kabita's Kitchen) was presented the Best Creator in Food Category Award. Drew Hicks was presented the Best International Creator Award. Kamiya Jani was presented the Favourite Travel Creator Award. Ranveer Allahbadia (BeerBiceps) was presented the Disruptor of the Year Award, RJ Raunac (Bauaa) was presented the Most Creative Creator-Male Award and Shradha Jain was presented the Most Creative Creator (Female) Award. Aridaman was presented the Best Micro Creator Award. Nishchay was presented the Best Creator in Gaming Category Award. Ankit Baiyanpuria was presented the Best Health and Fitness

Creator Award. Naman Deshmukh was presented the Best Creator in Education Category Award. Jahnvi Singh was presented the Heritage Fashion Icon Award. Malhar Kalambe presented the Swachhta Ambassador Award. Gaurav Chaudhary presented the Best Creator in Tech Category Award. Maithili Thakur was presented the Cultural Ambassador of the Year Award. Pankhti Pandey was presented the Favourite Green Champion Award. Keerthika Govindasamy was presented the Best Storyteller Award. Aman Gupta was presented the Celebrity Creator Award. The winners, including three international creators, were decided after more than 1.5 lakh nominations across 20 different categories were received. Subsequently, in the voting round, about 10 lakh votes were cast for digital creators in various award categories.

# Kovind panel to soon submit report on one nation, one poll

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The high-level committee led by former president Ram Nath Kovind is in the process of submitting its report to the government on 'one nation, one election', sources said on Friday.



Besides suggesting a procedure to synchronise the terms of state assemblies to ensure that all polls are held together from 2029 onwards, the committee is also likely to push for a common electoral roll for elections to Lok Sabha, assemblies and local bodies, including municipalities and panchayats. Set up in September 2023, the panel headed by former president Kovind is mandated to examine and make recommendations at the earliest on the issue of holding elections simultaneously. At least five articles of the Constitution along with provisions of the Representation of the People Act would need to be amended to hold synchronised elections.

said it would require an estimated Rs 10,000 crore every 15 years to procure new Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) if polls are held simultaneously. In a communication sent to the government last year, the Commission noted that the shelf life of EVMs was 15 years and one set of machines could be used to conduct three cycles of elections in their life span if polls were held together. Separately, the Law Commission is also on the verge of finalising its report on simultaneous polls and it may suggest a separate chapter in the Constitution on 'simultaneous elections'. It is likely to suggest a roadmap on synchronising tenures of state assemblies in three phases by mid-2029. According to sources, the Commission, under Justice (ret'd) Ritu Raj Awasthi, would recommend an amendment to the Constitution to add a "new chapter or part" on simultaneous elections. The new chapter would address issues related to "simultaneous election", "sustainability of simultaneous elections" and "common electoral roll" so that the three-tier simultaneous polls could be held together "in one go", the sources explained.

The sources said these are — Article 83 on the duration of the Houses of Parliament, Article 85 on the dissolution of Lok Sabha by the President, Article 172 on the duration of the state legislatures, Article 174 on the dissolution of state legislatures, and Article 356 relating to the imposition of President's Rule in states. While the Election Commission is mandated to hold Presidential, vice-presidential, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and state legislature polls, respective state election commissions hold local body polls. Parties such as the BJP have told the Kovind panel that the local body elections should be held by state election commissions but in sync with Lok Sabha and assembly polls. The Election Commission has

recommended will have "power of non-extant" to override other provisions in the Constitution dealing with terms of assemblies.



# First Indian women maritime mission undertaken

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A maiden all-women maritime surveillance mission was undertaken by the Andaman and Nicobar Command on the 40th anniversary of INAS 318 and International Women's Day on March 08. The crew based at INS Utkrosh comprised Lt Commander Shubhangi Swaroop, Lt Commander Divya Sharma and Lt Vaishali Mishra.

# President Murmu awards President Standard and Colours to four IAF units

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday awarded the prestigious President's Standard to 45 Squadron and 221 Squadron, and the President's Colours to 11 Base Repair Depot (BRD) and 509 Signal Unit (SU) of the Indian Air Force (IAF). The award of the President's Standard and Colours is the highest honour that can be bestowed upon any military unit.

This is the first time in the history of the IAF that four units have been awarded the President's Standard and Colours together in a single ceremony. The President's Standard were received by Group Captain M Surendran, Commanding Officer of 45 Squadron and Group Captain Shubhankar, Commanding Officer of 221 Squadron. The President's Colours were received by Air Commodore Ashutosh Vaidya, Air Officer



Commanding of 11 BRD and Group Captain Vivek Sharma, SU during an impressive parade at Air Force Station Hindan, Ghaziabad.

Addressing the parade, the President congratulated the units receiving the President's Standard and Colours, and commended them for their services to the nation. She highlighted the courage, commitment and sacrifices of the Indian Air Force during war and peacetime operations, both within India and overseas. She also brought out the important contributions of the IAF in the ongoing space programmes of the country and the upcoming Gaganyaan mission.

# BJP, TDP, Jana Sena to have LS polls ties, claims TDP leader

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader and Rajya Sabha MP K Ravindra Kumar claimed on Friday that the BJP, the Jana Sena and his party have decided in principle to work together for upcoming polls and the modalities are being worked out. A day after TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu held delibera-

tions with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief J P Nadda, Kumar told PTI that preliminary discussions have taken place for the "purpose of an alliance" for the Lok Sabha and state Assembly polls, which are held simultaneously in Andhra Pradesh. "In principle, the BJP, TDP and Jana Sena have decided to work together," he added. The BJP is keen on expanding the

National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and is believed to have come close to sealing a tie-up with Odisha's ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD), its former ally like the TDP. While Naidu had walked out of the BJP-led NDA in 2018 in protest against the Centre not granting a special status to Andhra Pradesh, BJD president and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had quit the alliance in 2009.

Jana Sena president and actor Pawan Kalyan was also part of the discussions that went on for more than an hour and a half at Shah's residence here on Thursday night. Sources said the number of seats the BJP will get in such an alliance remains a sticking point. Andhra Pradesh has 25 Lok Sabha and 175 Assembly constituencies. The top leaders of the three parties may hold another round of discus-

sions to sort out the differences and finalise the arrangements, the sources added. While the BJP wants to contest more than 20 Assembly and around eight Lok Sabha seats, the main opposition party in the southern state, TDP, is unwilling to concede more than five-six parliamentary seats. The TDP also wants the BJP, which is a marginal player in Andhra Pradesh, to not contest more than 10

Assembly seats, the sources said. TDP leaders believe that agreeing to the BJP's demand may hand over an advantage to the state's ruling YSR Congress Party, headed by Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy. Though the BJP has made no official comments on the negotiations, some of its leaders have argued that Prime Minister appeal can prove to be the "X factor" that may tilt the balance in favour of such an alliance.

# Severe dengue cases linked to secondary infections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As dengue cases continue to rise globally, a recent study has challenged the commonly held belief that severe dengue cases are primarily linked to secondary infections. The study led by researchers from the Delhi-based International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) highlighted that even primary dengue infections can result in severe cases and fatalities. This finding has important implications for public health and in developing and implementing effective and safe vaccine strategies for controlling dengue. Over the past two decades, dengue infections have greatly increased in India. Dengue patients fall into two categories -- those experiencing the infection for the first time, known as primary infections and those who get re-infected after a previous exposure, known as secondary infections.



After analyzing severe dengue cases in a group of children in India, showing that more than half could be attributed to primary rather than secondary infection, the team emphasised the need to re-evaluate the understanding of dengue and the strategies employed to combat the viral

disease cause by the dengue virus (DENV), transmitted to humans through the bite of infected mosquitoes. "Dengue virus infection is a huge public health problem in India. Many patients develop severe diseases that can also be sometimes fatal," said lead author of the study, Anmol

Chandele, from ICGEB. The research was published recently in the journal Nature Medicine. "However, much of the ongoing vaccine intervention research is based on the currently widely held global belief that primary dengue infections are not usually

dangerous and that the severe dengue disease is mainly due to secondary infections," Chandele said.

Italy is a striking example of the expansion of dengue as also evidenced by a recent study on which Alessandro Marcello, head of the ICGEB Molecular Virology laboratory operating in the Area Science Park in Trieste, Italy, collaborated. "During 2023, in Italy, we had the highest number of cases and autochthonous transmissions of dengue so far. Climate change, above all, but also the movement of people, are the biggest contributors to the circulation of dengue in new areas. The study by our Indian colleagues shows us the need to protect our population also from the first encounter with the virus," Marcello said. For the study, Chandele collaborated with researchers from Emory School of Medicine, US, the All India Institute Of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, and St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru.

# Congress appeal against penalty for discrepancies in tax returns dismissed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Appellate Tribunal on Friday dismissed the Congress party's appeal against imposition of penalty for discrepancies in tax returns for previous years and said it was exploring all legal options and will move the high court against it very soon. Sources said the tribunal had dismissed the appeal of the Congress for imposition of penalties of Rs 210 crore by the Income Tax department here on Friday. Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said the party is exploring all legal options and would move the high court "very soon". "The BJP government has deliberately chosen the timing of this to coincide with national elections," said Maken. He said the I-T tribunal order freezing Congress's funds is "an attack on democracy" as it has

come just ahead of national elections. "How can one expect fair elections in such a situation when funds to the tune of Rs 270 crore have been frozen or taken away by the Income Tax authorities from Congress party's accounts," he asked. Confirming the order, Congress' legal cell head Vivek Tankha said the Tribunal has not even followed its own past precedents in this regard and the party will be approaching the High Court soon. "We are disappointed with the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal order. We will be moving the High Court very soon. They have not followed their own past precedents in granting relief on payment of 20 percent penalty and that too to a national party which is now on the verge of contesting national elections, which is going to be notified soon," said Tankha.

# Harivansh highlights importance of parliamentary cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A delegation of parliamentarians led by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh visited Hungary from March 7 to 8 and underlined the strong economic partnership between India and the European country. Harivansh highlighted the importance of parliamentary cooperation as a key pillar of the vibrant relations between India and Hungary after he met Deputy Speaker of the

Hungarian National Assembly Istvan Yakab and interacted with the Hungarian-Indian Friendship Group of the Hungarian National Assembly, chaired by Péter Cseresnyés. The two sides discussed various opportunities to further deepen the bilateral relations and emphasised the importance of cultural as well as people-to-people interactions, according to an official statement issued by the Rajya Sabha secretariat. They also took a comprehensive parliamentary tour to get detailed insights into Hungary's

parliamentary traditions, the statement said. The tour organised on the invitation of Yakab included two Rajya Sabha members, Ashok Bajpai and Lieutenant General (Retired) D P Vats, along with Rajya Sabha Secretary General P C Mody. "Our cultural cooperation has a long history. I am happy to note that there is a huge interest in yoga, Indian music, dance and ayurveda in Hungary. Our friendship extends to the people-to-people connections that have been nurtured over



the years," Harivansh said. The Hungarian-Indian Friendship Group also talked about collaborations, including in the areas of artificial intelligence, water management and space research. The warm, friendly, multi-faceted and substantive diplomatic relations between India and Hungary marked the milestone of 75th anniversary in 2023, the statement said. There has been regular parliamentary exchanges between the two countries and the president of the

Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs of Hungary, Zsolt Nemeth, visited India in January. Yakab visited India in February 2023. The strong Indian diaspora in Hungary of around 9,000 acts as a strong bridge between the two countries. On the occasion, the team at the Hungarian Parliament organised a Odissi dance performance. The troupe led by Virág Réka Túri truly showed how cultural relations form the basis of the strong ties between the two countries, the statement said.



PM to launch Barauni, Guwahati national gas pipeline today

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate the Barauni-Guwahati National Gas Pipeline (BGPL), a milestone project linking the North East region to the National Gas Grid...



even deep water," he said. GAIL employed innovative techniques including micro tunneling and horizontal directional drilling to overcome these challenges...

the project, including mitigation strategies to preserve water quality and vegetative cover along the pipeline route. While acknowledging delays in the project's completion, initially targeted for December 2021, the official claimed that there was no significant cost escalation associated with the delays.

Gadkari name will be first in BJP list from Maharashtra: Fadnavis

Maharashtra deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said Union minister Nitin Gadkari's name would be the first in the list of BJP candidates once the ruling alliance in the state finalises its seat-sharing agreement for the Lok Sabha elections.

our prominent leader. He contests from Nagpur. When the first list of candidates (of BJP) was released, there had been no discussions among Mahayuti partners (BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led NCP)...

someone the post of US President." Speaking at a rally on Thursday, Thackeray had said Gadkari should show "Maharashtra's mettle" and resign instead of "bowing before Delhi".

Dhankar: Woman is always in leadership role right from birth

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar celebrated International Women's Day with ISRO scientists, praising the space agency for its culture of gender diversity and inclusivity in decision making process and describing it as a befitting example to other organisations.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE

I, Sucha Singh Bajwa S/o Late Sowam Singh Bajwa R/o, J-192, Jalvayu Vihar, Sector-25, Noida, G.B.Nagar U.P.(201301) have lost the original property document of J-192, second floor, Jalvayu Vihar Sector-25 allotment letter, possession certificate, letter of clearance and possession from AFNH new Delhi. Sab-lease deed (registry) dated 01/02/2011, Jld number 2272, pages 391 to 424. I lost the above document between Noida Sector 21 to 25, on 07/01/2024. I lodged an FIR in Sector 20 police station on 23/01/2024. If anyone found please contact at above address.

GOVT. OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PWD

Notice Inviting e-Tender (2nd Call) The Executive Engineer, PWD, Bajali District & Bongaigaon District Territorial Building Division, Pathasala on behalf of Governor of Assam invites item rate bids in electronic tendering system for the work-Establishment of 30KLD Dairy Processing Plant at Galia, Bhabanipur in Pathasala, Bajali, Assam.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is publically notified that the Residential Plot No. 251, Block-B, Sector-105, Noida has been allotted/transferred in the name of Mr. Vasdev S/o Late Lalita Prasad R/o BB-393, Bagrain Basti, Nabi Karim, Pahar Ganj, Delhi-110055 and Mr. Vasdev S/o Late Lalita Prasad had executed a WILL on 07.09.2015 at Sub-Registrar-III, New Delhi in favour of his son Rajesh Kumar S/o Late Vasdev R/o BB-393, Bagrain Basti, Nabi Karim, Pahar Ganj, Delhi-110055 and Mr. Vasdev S/o Late Lalita Prasad has expired on 02.10.2020, so with the help of the notice it is informed the transfer of the above said plot goes in favour of Rajesh Kumar S/o Late Vasdev. If anyone has/have any objection/hesitation may submit his/her/their objection in the residential plot department of Noida Authority along with sufficient proofs within 30 days of the publication of this notice.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER : PWD : BUILDING : ASSAM : CHANDMARI : GUWAHATI-3,

Press Notice No. T/TB-11/38/2023/ The Chief Engineer, P.W.D (Bldg.), Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites bids through Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode-I of contract (Single stage two-part bidding system) for the work detailed in the table below, from contractors having experience in similar nature of works. Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in

Table with 5 columns: Sl. No, Name of Work, Approx. bid Value (Rs. in lakh), Time of completion, Bid security, Tender Cost (Rs.).

Note :- 1. Value of work may vary during uploading of DNIT for which no claim will be entertained. 2. The Press Notice will form a part of the Bidding Document.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER PWD BUILDING ASSAM CHANDMARI GUWAHATI-3

Press Notice No CE/TB-III-24/2024/4 The Spl. Chief Engineer, P.W.D (Building), (Health & Education) Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 on behalf of the Governor of Assam invite bids through Engineering Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode-I e-tenders in two bid system for the following work from eligible contractors having experience of similar nature of work.

Table with 5 columns: Sl. No, Name of Work, Bid Value (In Rs.), Bid Security (In Rs.), Tender Cost (In Rs.), Time of Completion.

Note :- 1. All terms and conditions will be as per the bidding document. Press Notice will be a part of bidding document. 2. The Bid Price may vary at the time of uploading of DNIT for which no claim will be admissible

PUBLIC NOTICE To be known to all, DALIT SINGH VASUDEVA S/o LATE S.H.A.S.VASUDEVA R/o C-3/173, FIRST FLOOR, JANAK PURI, NEW DELHI-110058

Table with 6 columns: Sr. No., CUSTOMER NAME, LOAN A/C NO., AMOUNT OUTSTANDING (IN RS.), DATE OF RECALL NOTICE, GROSS WEIGHT, NET WEIGHT.

AXIS BANK LTD. PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION OF PLEDGED ASSETS BEING GOLD ORNAMENTS

THE BORROWERS, IN SPECIFIC AND THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT PUBLIC AUCTION OF THE GOLD ORNAMENTS PLEDGED IN THE BELOW ACCOUNTS IS PROPOSED TO BE CONDUCTED BY THE AXIS BANK AT THE BELOW MENTIONED BRANCH.

Large table with 6 columns: Sr. No., CUSTOMER NAME, LOAN A/C NO., AMOUNT OUTSTANDING (IN RS.), DATE OF RECALL NOTICE, GROSS WEIGHT, NET WEIGHT.

M.P. PASCHIM KSHETRA VIDYUT VITRAN CO. LTD. Office of The Superintending Engineer (O&M), Jhabua Circle Power House Road, Jhabua, CIN : U40109MP2002SGC015121

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS Online-tender is invited for services as per tender specification given below:

म.प्र. पुलिस आवास एवं अधो. वि. निगम कार्यालय परियोजना यंत्री, संभाग क्र.-1, भद्रमदा रोड, भोपाल





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Primary concern

As Biden and Trump prepare for the race to White House, will the US break barriers or build new walls?

It is a leap year and time, therefore, for the US elections. In the ensuing months, the American electorate will be inundated with campaign ads, rallies and debates as incumbent Joe Biden and challenger Donald Trump make their case in front of the voters. Though decided by the Americans, the outcome has far-reaching consequences for the entire world. As the primaries draw to a close, the political milieu in the US is beginning to take shape. With Biden securing the Democratic nomination and Trump emerging as the clear frontrunner for the Republican Party, the stage is set for a highly charged rematch in November. Biden's journey to the Democratic nomination has been marked by resilience and a resurgence in support. Despite initial doubts about his candidacy, he secured key victories in primary contests across the country, demonstrating his broad appeal among voters. His success can be attributed to a combination of factors, including his experience in administration, his message of unity and his ability to connect with the voters on a personal level. Throughout the primary season, Biden faced stiff competition from different candidates, each vying for the opportunity to challenge Trump. However, as the primaries progressed, Biden emerged as the clear frontrunner, consolidating support from both moderate and progressive wings of the Democratic Party. His decisive wins in crucial States like California, Texas and Florida cemented his position as the party's nominee.

On the Republican side, Trump's path to nomination has been relatively uncontested. Though there were legal hurdles, he eventually managed to skirt them and emerge as a clear choice of Republicans. Trump faced minimal opposition within his own party, allowing him to focus his attention on rallying his base. Despite the criticism, Trump's grip on the party remains strong, with his approval ratings consistently high. He has maintained a loyal base of supporters, who are drawn to his unorthodox style and populist rhetoric. While his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and other controversies have sparked criticism, Trump's resilience and ability to navigate turbulent political waters cannot be underestimated. With polarising issues such as healthcare, immigration and climate change dominating the national conversation, both candidates are expected to mobilise their supporters to turn out in record numbers. For Biden, the challenge will be to unite a fractured Democratic Party and appeal to voters across the ideological spectrum. He will need to capitalise on his strengths as a seasoned statesman and articulate a clear vision for the future. Meanwhile, Trump will seek to energise his base, touting his record on economy and national security while painting Biden as a tool of the radical left. Though Biden is progressive and politically correct, Trump's style of leadership appeals to the conservative mindset. As both the candidates slog, one thing is for sure: The contest will be historic. Will America build walls or break barriers, is a question only the American people can answer.

### PICTALK



Devotees offer prayers at a Shiva temple on Maha Shivratri, in Moradabad

# Giving stray dogs a bad name

Stray dogs suffer because they cannot argue in their own defence in a human language

A deficiency stray dogs suffer from, and that have sometimes proved fatal to them, is that they do not speak a human language. Thus, accused of attacking, and killing, a child, they cannot argue that the real offenders were actually pet dogs. Nor can a bitch contend that she had severely bitten a man to stop him from killing, one by one, her puppies by trampling on them. On the other hand, people who seek vicarious satisfaction of their genocidal instinct by demanding the mass slaughter of stray dogs, often present the latter as posing severe threats to humans by spreading rabies, biting vast numbers of people, causing traffic accidents, and otherwise preying on people's fear psychosis.

An example of how stray dogs' inability to speak a human language can prove fatal for them is provided by a tragic incident in which a 16-month-old child was killed in New Delhi's Tughlak Lane area on February 24, 2024. Claimed to have been found lying grievously injured in the service lane of Prithviraj Road, she was rushed to the Safdarjung Hospital at 5 p.m. where she died at 7.15 p.m. Spearheaded by the media, the word spread like wildfire that stray dogs had killed her. What was the basis for such a conclusion? The question is important. According to a press release on the incident by seven leading animal activists, the police, who were informed of the incident at 6.24 p.m., rushed to meet members of the girl's family at Safdarjung Hospital. The first police officer who reached the hospital reported that none from the family was an eye-witness to the tragedy; nor did he find any eye-witness among the crowd of local residents, onlookers and visitors who were present on the spot. Nor, according to the press release, is there any visual evidence of the child being attacked. Dhobi Ghat, where the child lived with her extended family, abuts Mr LK Advani's residence. The spot where the injured child is claimed to have been found is directly within viewing distance of a 24-hour police lookout point



inside Mr Advani's house. It is impossible for his security staff to have neither seen nor heard a child being attacked by a pack of stray dogs. Nor is it possible that such an incident does not feature in the recorded footage of the CCTV cameras present in the area. The claim that the noise of the attack was drowned by the loud music played in a party in the neighbourhood does not stand. The child was taken to the hospital at 5 p.m. The party was held in the evening. Music was played after 8 p.m. Nor could stray dogs have killed the child inside the Dhobi Ghat where over 10 families live in a gated community, which stray dogs cannot enter. This implies that the 16-month-old had got out of the compound and reached the spot where she was allegedly found, and which is some 150 metres away from the compound gate. How could she have done it on her own? Also, how is it that she was not stopped and sent home, particularly from the gate where she must have been seen walking out alone? This implies that the child might have been killed inside



COULD IT BE THAT THE CHILD, LEFT UNATTENDED, HAD GOT CLOSE TO THE DOG WHICH HAD SEVERELY MAULED IT? THERE MUST BE A THOROUGH-GOING SEARCH FOR AN ANSWER

the compound. If so, by whom? The press release by animal activists mentions a Pitbull living with the child's family. Walked daily on a leash by her family members, it was very much present on the day of the incident. Used for breeding and kept mostly chained, it had become unfriendly, a fact confirmed by two incidents in the recent past. According to the press release, Zee News reporters who had visited the Dhobi Ghat area and met the family to do a video on the incident, had heard a dog barking from one of the houses. Asked, family members denied the presence of a Pitbull. The reporters, however, spotted one being dragged away as they were leaving. The family brusquely told them to quit the premises upon their asking about the dog. Could it be that the child, left unattended, had got close to the dog which had severely mauled it? There must be a thorough-going search for an answer. Meanwhile, one also needs to ask: how many attacks attributed to stray dogs are actually by them?

Since they cannot deny their involvement in a human language, one needs to investigate such incidents most exhaustively and pronounce them guilty only on the basis of incontrovertible evidence. Meanwhile, there has to be a thorough investigation to establish the truth in the present case and in all future cases in which the culpability of stray dogs is alleged. Before waxing indignant on stray dogs attacking humans, one needs to ponder what humans routinely do to stray dogs, other animals and members of their own species. In the present instance, two dogs, that had nothing to do with the child's death were cruelly killed in its vengeful aftermath. As Erich Fromm states in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, "Man's history is a record of extraordinary destructiveness and cruelty and human aggression it seems, far surpasses that of that of man's animal ancestors, and man is in contrast to most animals, a real killer." (The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A CONTENTIOUS REMARK BY RAJA

Sir — The hate speech of A Raja, a former Union Minister, has got its place in almost all the main media. In the process of conveying his opinion fiercely against 'Jai Sri Ram', he had crossed all the limits. He got himself entangled with the wrong narration confusingly mixing national factors with religious belief. The Indian region is geographically called a subcontinent, no doubt. But it has nothing to do with political nationhood. India is, of course, a nation with diversified geographical, cultural, religious and lingual aspects. But if nationhood is described in every individual aspect today as every state has people of different faiths, speaking different languages and practising different culture and civilisation perhaps every district may have to be called a nation.

India is a Union of States and every State has diversified aspects of all the features. Merely basing on language and culture to describe nationhood would be utterly wrong. Once the head of RSS said all Indians are Hindus by having been born in India. It carries little meaning and such claims cannot be subscribed to by everyone. Therefore one who claims to be a leader should be mindful of what is being uttered in public.

AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

### HELMETS SAVE LIVES

Sir — Although wearing a helmet is discomforting to the riders, its advantages easily outweigh the hardship of sporting one. Of course, there is much more to safety than mere comfort. The head followed by the chest and abdomen are prone to severe injuries in road accidents. Linear or direct impact forces on the head are considerably reduced due to high-quality helmets. The foam shell of the helmets largely absorbs the impact, dissipating the impact energy. Skull injuries and fractures are avoided or minimised and so are brain injuries. Several reports have indicated that fatalities due to two-wheeler accidents are lessened by thirty-seven per cent when a driver or pillion rider protects their heads with

### Heroic efforts by Karnataka Police



Police in India are more feared and criticised by common citizens for their high-handedness, but we have not seen the human side of the police. Traffic Sub Inspector Nagaraja A R was returning to his duty after his lunch, when he heard the screams of people crying for help as a two-year-old boy had accidentally fallen into a 10 feet water the deep sump

tank at BEL layout, PSI Nagaraja displaying the remarkable presence of his mind and bravery, in his uniform, he rushed to the spot without any hesitation entered the water sump and saved the two-year toddler, he further administered CPR on child and revived the unconscious child and then the child was rushed to a nearby hospital where he reported he is recapturing. PSI Nagaraja has displayed bravery risking his life thus bringing glory to the police department, his work exemplifies the best of our police who always rise to the occasion, which deserves the highest praise, he has set an example for the younger generation and other policemen who we must always rise to such occasions and safeguard the lives thus brought glory to the Police Department.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

helmets. Head injury risk is reduced by sixty-nine per cent due to helmet use. Moreover, the severity of road accident injuries is unquestionably minimised. An All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS) Trauma Centre study has said that, in 2022, forty per cent of pillion riders of Delhi suffered injuries because they did not wear helmets. Simultaneously, the encouraging aspect of the study was that eighty-five per cent of the bikers used helmets. The Motor Vehicles Act, of 1988 has made helmet use compulsory in India. The amendment Act of 2019 says that every individual above the age of 4 shall wear protective gear while driving motorcycles; that includes both the driver and the pillion rider.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

### ASHWIN, A GREAT OFF-SPINNER

Sir — The greatest arena for spin in the world is India. And guess who's taken the most test wickets in India? It's Ashwin. Spinners matured with age and Ashwin displayed his trump card role in International cricket. Ash WIN a match winner suits his role as an all-rounder. Add the runs and the hundreds he has scored to the 500 wickets and you will understand the enormity of his achievement. Ashwin has more than 350 home wickets out of his 507 wickets. Cricket is a competitive game where the stakes are very high. Moreover, Ashwin won the Man of the Series 10 times in his long and illustrious career and that is a unique career. India, Ashwin, who has played 99 Tests so far, will become the 14th Indian cricketer to play 100 Test matches when he takes the field in the fifth Test against England in Dharamsala. Winning is a habit and Ashwin cultivated this habit in big measure by accounting for almost all world-class batsmen in the world. The highest Match Winability is 72%. And Ashwin's is 69.8%. The next best figure after Shane Warne. So, without an iota of doubt, Ashwin is India's greatest spinner.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

**Corrigendum:** On March 7, a statement was wrongly attributed to the EAM S Jaishankar on this page. It was actually made by foreign secretary Giridhar Aramane. The error is regretted.

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The case for disclosure of judicial assets

There are concerns regarding judicial accountability, which makes a strong case for the disclosure of assets by judges in the higher judiciary

Recently, an action taken report was tabled in Parliament by the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice during the budget session. It was in furtherance of the recommendations of the 133rd report of the same standing committee titled "Judicial Processes and Their Reform". Out of the many recommendations made in the report, one crucial to the facets of democracy is the "Mandatory Declaration of Assets by the Judges of the Supreme Court and High Court". The importance of disclosure of assets can be deduced from the words of Justice Warren E. Burger (former Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court), wherein he said, "A court which is final and unreviewable needs more careful scrutiny than any other." Therefore, scrutinising the assets of judges officiating in the higher judiciary is important to maintain a legitimate check.

**Past Attempts and Current Practice** Previously, two attempts were made for the disclosure of assets by Judges in the high-



er judiciary: first in 1997 and another in 2009. Both were by way of court resolution and did not yield any positive results. Also, in 2009, a bill was tabled, named "The Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill", which lapsed due to the dissolution of Lok Sabha.

### Why Disclose?

Judges have rectified many wrongs, but instances like those of Justice Dinakaran and Justice Ramaswami indicate that the house is not in order. Additionally, in one instance, a retired High Court Judge paid a bribe of 8.5 crore to become Governor, and in another case, an envelope of 15 lakhs was meant for a Judge from the Punjab & Haryana High Court. These incidents raise eyebrows against the higher judiciary. Here, we need to heed the words of Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer, who wrote in one of his articles that "Corruption and

decline are now creeping into the vitals of the Higher Courts, and the urgent need to arrest this trend." If making assets public is mandated, a deterrent factor will act on the higher judiciary, keeping them conscious of their actions.

### Time Demands Parity!

Failing to disclose assets proactively (with exceptions) or not passing administrative orders to bind themselves to disclose assets, Hon'ble Judges in the Higher Judiciary have created a room that alleges the breach of equality, both vertically and horizontally.

When it comes to vertical treatment, for instance, in Uttar Pradesh, the Hon'ble Allahabad High Court warrants judicial officers in the district judiciary to disclose the commodities they buy, exceeding a certain multiple of their basic pay. This is done by issuing circulars at regular intervals. Also, via the vigilance department in various High Courts, checks are kept over judges in the district judiciary by taking details of their assets and properties. Sadly, High Courts have never bothered to issue the same circular for themselves. Now,

the judges should remember that they are the court which often emphasises the need for equal treatment.

It is pertinent to note that the demand for disclosure of assets has been backed by doyens in the bar too. Fali S. Nariman, in his book "The State of the Nation," mentions the disclosure of assets, and in 2009, Shri. K.K. Venugopal, seconding the opinion of Justice Shylendra, said that "judges should give full disclosure of their assets."

### What Lies Ahead

It is now for the central government to amend the High Court Judges Act (1954) and the Supreme Court Judges Act (1958), thereafter attaching a preamble to the Acts, which specifies its purpose as "for promoting accountability and transparency." This is necessary because section 24 in both Acts (pari-materia) allows the central government to frame rules only for the purpose of these Acts. Unfortunately, the purpose for accountability is nowhere to be seen in these Acts as of now.

(Author is a Delhi-based advocate; views are personal)



KISHLAY MISHRA





## FIRST COLUMN

## INDIA'S PUSH FOR SEMICONDUCTORS

S Jaishankar's tour of Korea and Japan prioritises the semiconductor industry



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

**E**AM visits South Korea and Japan, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar was on tour to South Korea and Japan, this week. These two nations in India's Asian neighbourhood, are also some of its closest allies while also being a major source of inward investments. The press release from MEA outlined the Korean visit to be dominated by "India - Republic of Korea Special Strategic Partnership expanded to diverse areas of cooperation, which include trade, investments, defence, education, S&T, and culture. The JCM is expected to comprehensively review the entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and explore avenues for further strengthening it. It will also provide an opportunity for the two sides to exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest."

The Japanese leg of the journey highlighted "issues of bilateral, regional and global importance, and exchange views on cooperation for a free, open, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific." It is also no coincidence that a special roundtable of the Raisina Dialogue, an important international diplomacy platform, propped up by India's external affairs ministry, also took place in Tokyo during EAM's visit. Earlier justifying holding the Raisina roundtable in Tokyo, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal had said "Raisina has become today an important global platform. We just had the Raisina Dialogue, where people from all over the world, leaders, political leaders, think tanks, and strategic thinkers all came to Delhi. We had the Greek Prime Minister who was the chief guest. So, there is a global resonance of this platform today. Japan, of course, is a very important partner for us and this particular engagement will help our conversation, will help our engagement with Japan as much."



The real outcomes of the meetings in South Korea and Japan will be unveiled in the coming few months, where India has laid claim to occupy a significant chunk of the semiconductors supply chain network. Recently Indian cabinet approved a whole range of semiconductor proposals running into lakhs of crores. The current global semiconductor manufacturing capability is disproportionately cornered by Taiwan, South Korea and China, while the US and Jaan have a minority share in the pie. The Covid pandemic and subsequent actions by China, including the weaponisation of semiconductors (a critical component of all machines from toasters to high-end space rockets) have forced almost every country to secure their supply chains and diversify. India doesn't have great relations with China and the situation is unlikely to improve in the coming years, that leaves India to fall back on its old allies Japan, and South Korea with a fair amount of support from the US and EU, to look at getting some a sizeable portion of the semiconductor manufacturing cake. In the vibrant Gujarat summit, held in January 2024, the state Chief Minister indicated that several South Korean and Japanese semiconductor firms are actively considering Gujarat for investments. The race to secure semiconductor manufacturing is in reality the current state of geopolitics as seen through a minuscule chip.

The US and China are trying to outdo each other in the race for greater technological prowess, whose building blocks are the chips (minute integrated circuit boards, requiring complex multilayered, multiple steps design and manufacturing), which power almost every machine in today's world. The US has already blocked the export of high-tech chips, which can find their way to state-of-the-art military technology, to China stalling its total technology dominance ambitions. Indian Prime Minister and the current government, are confident of returning to power towards the middle of this year and want to waste no time in setting up the large employment-generating technology factories for tomorrow. EAM's South Korea and Japan, justify the need for India's ambitious journey for the next decade.

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

## Patent pooling: A path to welfare and prosperity



AMIT SINGH

It facilitates collaboration and innovation by allowing multiple parties to share their patents for a common goal, promoting fair access to essential inventions



**P**atent pooling relates to an agreement between two or more patent owners to aggregate one or more of their patents for cross-licensing to each other or third parties. Historical road map indicates that patent pools come into the picture when the technology is multifaceted & complex and it needs to put together different composites of the technology landscape to attain required and superior technical solutions. Generally, these patent pools cover mature technologies concerning time and are yet to be fully developed.

Apart from technological aspects, the motivation for forming a patent pool by two competitors may be to facilitate the partaking and transfer of patented technology and, ultimately, making possible innovation (technological solution) without causing an eruption of IP-related legal battle.

Pools make life easier for licensors and licensees by dramatically reducing the cost and time needed to invest in the licensing process. They are a useful tool for bringing technology to market more quickly, efficiently and fairly, and generally at a better overall price for licensees. Sometimes the dealings and inner workings of pools may seem obscure. However, compared to the often murky battles of individual companies over SEP licensing - think Qualcomm and Apple, for example - they are beacons of transparency. Patent pools have a significant economic aspect as far as inventing around is concerned; by sharing patented technology, companies save the time and money required for inventing around the technology. It is worth mentioning that efforts of inventing around never guarantee results fulfilling the technological gap.

The creation of a patent pool is always a better plan of action instead of creating reasons for patent lawsuits for an industry having multiple players holding patent rights with overlapping scopes. The wireless and telecommunication industry

is such a technological zone which is very progressive & dynamic and resulting in multiple patents relating to technologies needing the support of other neighbouring technologies (of overlapping scope) to get the intended results. In other words, this sector gives scope to many complementary patents which are used together to produce a specific output and are not substitutes for each other.

One may think that such a scenario invites a vast scope of patent pooling in this technological zone, however, on the other hand, some Industry experts like Bowman Heiden, deputy director at the Centre for Intellectual Property in Sweden and a well-known expert on standardisation and patent pools, explains why pools in the telecommunications sector have been unsuccessful so far. "Large licensors in wireless have always preferred to go it alone in mobile telecom," he says. "In that sector, the concentration among the implementers of the standard, your prospective licensees, is currently very high. In the handset market, if you license Apple, Samsung and Huawei, you have a big chunk of the potential total licensing income covered. Big licensors in this space, such as Ericsson, Qualcomm and Nokia, prefer to handle these implementers on their own. However, it should not be concluded that patent pooling is not trending in the telecommunication sector; recently ASUS and IP Bridge have joined Via Licensing's 4G Multi-Generational Patent Pool, and now the tally of a total number of licensors has reached twenty-one.

One way to achieve better access to new medicines is patent pools, which allow third parties to

acquire non-exclusive licenses for the intellectual property needed to develop products. While patent pools have existed for several decades in other fields of technology, they are a relatively new concept in public health, where they have been applied to address some of the access challenges in low and middle-income countries. To improve access to antiretroviral treatment in low and middle-income countries, the United States established the Medicines Patent Pool in 2010 as the first public health patent pool. A good example of improvement in access to medicines is treatment for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. Later, the patent pool's mandate was expanded to treatments for tuberculosis and hepatitis C.

The Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) is a United Nations-backed public health organisation working to increase access to and facilitate the development of, life-saving medicines for low- and middle-income countries. It encourages to pool of intellectual property to encourage generic manufacture and the development of new formulations.

The experience of the MPP in dealing with access to HIV drugs has provided a concrete example of how patent pooling can contribute to addressing some of the innovation and access challenges relating to health technologies. Public health patent pools represent an innovative type of partnership that can be used to manage privately held IP rights in the public interest. In March 2020, the MPP expanded its scope to include any health technology that contributes to the global response to Covid-19. Although there is a general con-

cord on the positive impact of patent pools and it is well accepted that they are efficiency-enhancing, however, there may be certain instances where the patent pools may lead to possible competition rules violations. For instance, in Summit vs. VISX, two US firms engaged in a patent pool and developed their technology for performing laser eye surgery. Both companies successfully applied for individual patent protection. This type of technology was not available on the market. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC, one of the US antitrust enforcement agencies) concluded that the patents were substitutes rather than complements. Therefore, the FTC found that the patent pool restricted competition that would have existed otherwise in the absence of the patent pool. It is worth mentioning that substitute patents address the same issue by using alternative technologies, hence non-blocking. Patent pooling has been considered a potent solution in the field of technologies since the Sewing Machine Combination of 1856, however, in the recent past it has gained recognition as a talisman to provide access to essential medicines to low and middle-income countries.

Although patent pooling may cause possible competition law violations, the positive aspects are more than a few negatives. There will be a rising curve of patent pooling in the future because of its inherent characteristics of time & cost efficiency, resource management and curb on IP disputes.

(The author is Deputy Controller of Patents and Designs at the Patent Office, Delhi; views are personal)

ALTHOUGH PATENT POOLING MAY CAUSE COMPETITION AND A LAW VIOLATION, THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OUTWEIGH THE FEW NEGATIVES

## India's battle against China's strategic dumping tactics

With the spotlight on the Isopropyl Alcohol industry, pivotal for pharmaceutical production, India faces mounting challenges from China in the global market

**T**he year 2023 marked a milestone in the trade relationship between India and China. From 1995 to 2023 China orchestrated a strategic onslaught on India, launching 12 major Anti-Dumping Duty measures, predominantly in the Chemical Sector. Anti-dumping duty is a trade remedy measure that countries may impose on imports that are sold at prices lower than their fair market value, thereby undercutting prices and causing harm to domestic industries.

China's trade attack on India has been typical of salami cuts, that is, targeting specific critical industries and ensuring that India's capacities in that industry are completely demolished. A classic case is that of Penicillin-G,



JAIJIT BHATTACHARYA

wherein the flooding of Chinese imports wiped off our capability to manufacture this critical medicine, and now the government is investing taxpayer money into Production Linked Incentives (PLI) to get our capacities in Penicillin-G revived. And when our Penicillin-G capacities were shut down, the Chinese jacked up the prices of this vital drug to usurious levels.

**Isopropyl Alcohol Industry:** We now see a similar attack on Isopropyl Alcohol (IPA) which is critical for bulk drug APIs and an ingredient in the formulation of drugs and sanitizers. It is to be noted that 75-80% of the domestic demand for IPA stems from our Pharmaceutical industry underscoring the significance of the chemical.

In FY 23 China's share in total IPA imports to India stood at 64%. With a domestic capacity of 14,10,000 Mt per annum (source: ICIS) which is 6.5 times the IPA demand in India, China is strategically flooding the Indian market with surplus IPA. This poses a severe threat to domestic IPA producers as China's dumping prices are lower than the cost of production of

domestic Indian Industry and this could potentially lead to incapacitating Indian IPA capacities.

This has sent global alarm bells ringing with the USA, which was trying to move away from its dependence on the Chinese supply chain for medicines to Indian-sourced medicines. However the US is now worried that India itself is dependent on China, and such unrestrained dumping from China will challenge the supply-chain resilience of the pharma industry.

**Trade Remedies:** So what can India do to protect the supply-chain resilience of the pharma industry and avoid a repeat of the Penicillin-G fiasco? WTO provides all economies with the ability to

provide trade remedies through anti-dumping duties, similar to what China has been levying on Indian chemicals and the US has been levying on Indian-origin carbon and alloy pipes. India must immediately consider applying ADD on import of IPA, to safeguard our pharma industry and to continue to be the pharma capital of the world. China's Defensive Play: Last week, China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) reapplied the anti-dumping duty for 5 years on o-chloro-p-nitroaniline (OCPNA), a chemical sourced from India predominantly used in dyes and pigment production. The ministry justified this move as a "legitimate response". The ministry also said, "The situation left Chinese enterprises

in a state of unstable production and operation and made them susceptible to dumped imported products". India's Chemical Sector Resilience and Regulatory Landscape: The fact that China is imposing Anti-Dumping Duties on Indian-sourced chemicals demonstrates the competitiveness and robustness of the Indian Chemical sector. China's trade tactics reveal a strategy to erode the foundation of the Indian Chemical Sector systematically. Either by dumping the surplus into India to make the market unattractive for Indian players or imposing trade remedies such as Anti-dumping Duty to restrict market access to Indian exporters. The domestic industry keeps frequenting the Directorate

General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) to share their challenges, after thorough due diligence DGTR shares its recommendation to the Director of Revenue (DoR) for further implementation. However, recent data from the Centre For Digital Economy Policy Research (C-DEP) shows that the Ministry of Finance (MoF) rejection rate of DGTR recommendations increased to 61% in the period 2020 to 2022, while the rejection rate was 0.67% for the period 1995 to 2022.

**Government Interventions:** Amid this global chessboard of trade wars, there is a clear need for a proactive interface between the government and the domestic industries. Faster and more responsible trade interventions can prevent

Indian sectors (like IPA) from succumbing to the pressures of the trade wars and the onslaught of imports. However, it's crucial to recognise that any trade intervention loses its effectiveness if the domestic industry has already succumbed to the pressures of imports.

As India dreams of reaching a \$10 Trillion Economy by 2030, navigating the global trade dynamics is crucial. The government's timely and strategic interventions will determine the ability to safeguard the domestic industries, India's economic aspirations and supply chain resilience on the global stage.

(The writer is President of the Centre for Digital Economy Policy Research (C-DEP); views are personal)



# Biden slams Trump; says democracy and freedom under threat

AP ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden delivered a feisty speech on Thursday to defend his policies before skeptical voters in an election year as he launched a vitriolic attack on his Republican rival Donald Trump who he said was a "threat" to democracy within the country and globally. Without taking the name of Trump, Biden, a Democrat, in his final State of the Union Address to the joint session of the US Congress, less than eight months ahead of the presidential elections, identified him as "my predecessor", which he mentioned as many as 13 times in his speech that lasted for over an hour. Following Super Tuesday primary contests, it has become clear that it will be a rematch of 2022 in the November 5, 2024 presidential elections. Biden, 81, who is the oldest American president, slammed Trump, 77, on several issues ranging from his recent comment on Russian President Vladimir Putin, immigration, January 6 insurrection, abor-



President Joe Biden delivers the State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol, Thursday March 7, 2024, in Washington, as Vice President Kamala Harris and House Speaker Mike Johnson of La, listen. AP/PTI

tion, and gun control. "A president, my predecessor, who failed the most basic duty. Any President owes the American people the duty to care. That is unforgivable," Biden, said amidst multiple standing ova-

tions from Democratic Party lawmakers. "Now, my predecessor, a former Republican President, tells Putin, 'Do whatever the hell you want.' A former American President actually

said that, bowing down to a Russian leader. It's outrageous. It's dangerous. It's unacceptable," Biden said. Trump recently said he would encourage Russia to do "whatever the hell they want" to any NATO member country that doesn't meet spending guidelines on defence in a stunning admission he would not abide by the collective defence clause at the heart of the alliance if reelected. Biden said he came to the office determined to get America through one of the toughest periods in the nation's history. "Not since President Lincoln and the Civil War have freedom and democracy been under assault here at home as they are today. What makes our moment rare is that freedom and democracy are under attack, both at home and overseas, at the very same time. Overseas, Putin of Russia is on the march, invading Ukraine and sowing chaos throughout Europe and beyond," he said. He also sought the support of the US Congress for providing

weapons to Ukraine to stop Russia. "If anybody in this room thinks Putin will stop at Ukraine, I assure you, he will not. But Ukraine can stop Putin if we stand with Ukraine and provide the weapons it needs to defend itself. That is all Ukraine is asking," Biden said. They are not asking for American soldiers. In fact, there are no American soldiers at war in Ukraine, he said. "And I am determined to keep it that way," he said. "But now assistance for Ukraine is being blocked by those who want us to walk away from our leadership in the world," he said. A former American President actually said that, bowing down to a Russian leader. It's outrageous. It's dangerous. It's unacceptable," Biden said. His third State of the Union address came amidst questions over Biden's age and fitness for office. But Biden came out fired up and gave an energetic speech that was a far cry from some of his more

subdued efforts that have concerned supporters. He delivered much of the speech at high volume, CNN commented. Biden said history is watching, just like history watched three years ago on January 6, referring to the mob attack on the United States Capitol Building in Washington, DC, by supporters of then-US president Trump, two months after his defeat in the 2020 presidential election. "We all saw with our own eyes these insurrectionists were not patriots. They had come to stop the peaceful transfer of power and to overturn the will of the people. January 6th and the lies about the 2020 election, and the plots to steal the election, posed the gravest threat to our democracy since the Civil War. But they failed. America stood strong and democracy prevailed," Biden said. "But we must be honest, the threat remains and democracy must be defended. My predecessor and some of you here seek to bury the truth of January 6th. I will not do that.

This is a moment to speak the truth and bury the lies. I will do that," Biden said. "Between those who want to pull America back to the past and those who want to move America into the future. My lifetime has taught me to embrace freedom and democracy," Biden said. A future based on the core values that have defined America. "Now some other people my age see a different story. An American story of resentment, revenge, and retribution," he said. The bulk of his discussion of foreign policy came towards the end when he turned his attention to the Middle East. The Gaza war has divided Democrats, with a vocal portion of the president's liberal flank calling for the US to use every means at its disposal to push for a ceasefire. Biden said his administration was working towards a ceasefire that would last "at least 6 weeks," and he detailed a new plan - announced earlier in the day - for the US to construct a temporary seaport in Gaza to allow humanitarian aid to enter by ship. He also had

some harsh words for Israel, calling the civilian casualties in Gaza "heartbreaking" and saying it had a "fundamental responsibility" to protect innocent lives. Biden also slammed Trump on his border policies and said that his predecessor has opposed his move on immigration and border security. He forcefully called on Republican lawmakers in Congress to pass a bipartisan immigration compromise that stalled last month, accusing them of derailing the proposal for political reasons. "He feels it would be a political win for me and a political loser for him. It's not about him or me. It'd be a winner for America!" he said. "My Republican friends you owe it to the American people to get this bill done. We need to act. And if my predecessor is watching instead of playing politics and pressuring members of Congress to block this bill, join me in telling Congress to pass it! We can do it together.

## Ship to head to Gaza as test of new humanitarian corridor: Official

AP ■ NICOSIA (CYPRUS)

A ship will head to Gaza on Friday carrying humanitarian aid, the European Commission president said, as international donors launch a sea corridor to supply the territory, which faces widespread hunger and shortages of other essential supplies after nearly five months of war. A ship belonging to Spain's Open Arms will make a pilot voyage to test the sea corridor, Ursula von der Leyen told reporters in Cyprus, where she's inspecting preparations for the sea corridor. It's been waiting at Cyprus's port of Larnaca waiting for permission to deliver food aid from World Central Kitchen, a US charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés. She said the EU, together with the US, the United Arab Emirates and other involved partner countries are launching the sea corridor to deliver large quantities of aid to Gaza to respond to a "humanitarian catastrophe," speaking at a news conference with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides. Efforts to dramatically ramp up aid deliveries signaled growing frustration with Israel's conduct in the war in the United States and Europe. The previous day, US President Joe Biden announced a plan to open an offshore port to help deliver aid, underscoring how the United States is having to go around Israel, its main Mideast ally and the top recipient of US military aid, to get aid into Gaza, including through airdrops that started last week. Israel accuses Hamas of commandeering some aid deliveries. Efforts to set up a sea route for aid deliveries come amid mounting alarm over the spread of hunger among Gaza's 2.3 million people. Hunger is most acute in northern Gaza, which has been isolated by Israeli forces for months and suffered long cutoffs of food

supply deliveries. After months of warnings over the risk of famine in Gaza under Israel's bombardment, offensives and siege, hospital doctors have reported 20 malnutrition-related deaths at two northern Gaza hospitals. While reiterating his support for Israel, Biden used his State of the Union speech to reiterate demands that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu allow in more aid to Gaza. "To the leadership of Israel, I say this: Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip," Biden declared before Congress. He also repeated calls for Israel to do more to protect civilians in the fighting, and to work toward Palestinian statehood as the only long-term solution to Israeli-Palestinian violence. US officials said it will likely be weeks before the Gaza pier is operational. Aid groups have said their efforts to deliver desperately needed supplies to Gaza have been hampered because of the difficulty of coordinating with the Israeli military, the ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order. It is even more difficult to get aid to the isolated north. Sigrid Kaag, the UN senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told reporters late Thursday that air and sea deliveries cannot make up for a shortage of supply routes on land. EU Commission spokesman Balazs Ujvari said on Wednesday the bloc would consider air drops, but this would be a last resort and cannot replace ground access to the enclave. Ujvari said the EU has so far carried out around 40 flights to deliver aid to Gaza, primarily through Egypt. Meanwhile, efforts to reach a cease-fire before Ramadan appeared stalled. Hamas said Thursday that its delegation had left Cairo, where talks were being held, until next week.

## Biden orders US military to set up temporary aid port for Gaza

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden ordered the US military on Thursday to set up a temporary port off the coast of Gaza, joining international partners in trying to carve out a sea route to deliver food and other aid to desperate Palestinian civilians cut off by the Hamas-Israel war and by Israeli restrictions on humanitarian access by land. While reiterating his support for Israel, Biden used the announcement and the bright spotlight of his State of the Union speech to renew months of US calls to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to change how he conducts the war, including by allowing in more aid to Gaza and doing more to protect humanitarian workers there. "To the leadership of Israel I say this: Humanitarian assistance cannot be a secondary consideration or a bargaining chip," Biden declared before Congress. He repeated calls as well for Israel to do more to protect civilians in the fighting, and to work toward Palestinian statehood as the only long-term



Protesters block Pennsylvania Ave. during a pro-Palestinian demonstration near the U.S. Capitol in preparation for President Joe Biden's State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress on Thursday. AP/PTI

solution resorting to an unusual workaround after months of appealing to Israel, the US's close ally and top recipient of military aid, to step up access and protection for trucks bearing humanitarian goods for Gaza. Meanwhile on Thursday, efforts to reach a cease-fire before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which starts within

days, appeared stalled. Hamas said its delegation had left Cairo, where talks were being held. The outline for the cease-fire included a wide infusion of aid into Gaza. A widening humanitarian crisis across Gaza and tight Israeli control of aid trucks has left virtually the entire population desperately short of food, the UN says. Medical workers in

northern Gaza this past week reported 15 children dead of starvation there. In a meeting pressing Israel Ambassador Michael Herzog to provide access and security for more aid trucks, the US international development director, Samantha Power, warned that blocked Gaza "faced a real risk of famine", her office said on Thursday. Israel accuses Hamas of commandeering some aid deliveries. The US officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview Biden's announcement before his State of the Union speech, said the planned operation will not require American troops on the ground to build the pier that is intended to allow more shipments of food, medicine and other essential items from a port in the Mediterranean island country of Cyprus. The US officials said it would likely take weeks before the pier was operational. They gave few other immediate details. One of the options under consideration is for the military to provide a floating

pier called a JLOTS, or Joint Logistics-Over-the-Shore, another US official said on the condition of anonymity to discuss the options before a decision has been made. The large floating pier allows supplies to be delivered without having a fixed port in place, alleviating the need to have troops on a dock on shore. Ships can sail to the pier, which is secured by anchors, and dock there. Defence Department spokesman Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said in a statement on Thursday that US officials and international partners were looking at options, including using commercial companies and contractors to aid in the delivery. Officials from the US, Europe, Israel and the Middle East have already been deep in discussions and preparations on the possibility of opening a maritime sea route. Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides in November offered use of his country's port in Larnaca for aid deliveries to the Palestinian enclave, a 230-mile (370-kilometer) journey from Cyprus.

and police said there was no continuing threat to public safety. Don Perera, a neighbor, said he met the family that lived in the home last fall at a Halloween party at the nearby Catholic elementary school. He said the father was from Sri Lanka. Shanti Ramesh, who lives across the street, was alerted to a commotion late Wednesday. From her balcony, she saw a man sitting on the driveway of the home and yelling before two police officers arrived and carried him away. On Thursday morning, five marked police cars were parked on the street and in driveways near the home, which is a middle unit of a row of brick townhouses. Several people in white jumpsuits were going in and out of the home throughout the early morning, while parents and kids walked and biked by on their way to a nearby elementary school.

## UK ex-PM Theresa May to stand down as MP after 27 years

PTI ■ LONDON

Theresa May, Britain's second female prime minister who ruled between 2016 and 2019, on Friday announced her exit from frontline politics after 27 years as an MP in the House of Commons. The 67-year-old, whose travels with getting a Brexit deal through Parliament in the wake of the June 2016 referendum ended in a forced exit from 10, Downing Street over four years ago, said she had taken the "difficult decision" to not contest the next general election from her Maidenhead constituency in south-east England. She has been the Conservative MP for the Berkshire seat since 1997, having been elected seven times. "Since stepping down as prime minister, I have enjoyed being a backbencher again and having more time to work for my con-

stituents and champion causes close to my heart, including most recently launching a Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking," said May in a statement to her local 'Maidenhead Advertiser'. "These causes have been taking an increasing amount of my time. Because of this, after much careful thought and consideration, I have realised that, looking ahead, I would no longer be able to do my job as an MP in the way I believe is right and my constituents deserve. I have therefore taken the difficult decision to stand down at the next general election," she said. The senior parliamentarian, often referred to as the "new Iron Lady" as the second female prime minister of the UK after Margaret Thatcher, pledged her continued support to the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak-led government and said she believed the

Conservatives could win the next election, which is expected later this year. "As I pass the baton on, I will be working with my successor to secure a Conservative victory in Maidenhead. I remain committed to supporting Rishi Sunak and the government and believe that the Conservatives can win the election," said May, whose term as home secretary before her innings at Downing Street is associated with stringent migration policies including abolishing the post-study work visa for international students. "I have always said there is no greater privilege than being an MP; I have served as home secretary and prime minister but none of that would have been possible without the people of Maidenhead and the constituency which I have been proud to call my home," she added.

## 6 die after mass stabbing

AP ■ TORONTO

A 19-year-old student from Sri Lanka is accused of stabbing and killing six people he lived with, including a 2 1/2-month-old baby girl and three other kids from a Sri Lankan family, Ottawa police said Thursday. Ottawa police chief Eric Stubbs said an "edged weapon" or "knife-like object" was used by the suspect, who was identified as Febrio De-Zoysa. He has been charged with six counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder. Mass killings are rare in Canada. Stubbs said the deceased are Sri Lankan nationals who recently came to Canada. He said they include a 35-year-old mother, a 7-year-old son, a 4-year-old daughter, a 2-year-old daughter and the 2 1/2-month-old baby girl as well as a 40-year-old acquaintance of the family. The police chief said when the first officers arrived

at the home the family's father was outside and screaming for someone to call 911. Police received two emergency calls at 10:52 p.m. Wednesday. The father is in hospital with serious, but non-life-threatening, injuries. "This was a senseless act of violence perpetrated on purely innocent people," Stubbs said. Sri Lanka's high commission said that it is in touch with relatives in the country's capital, Colombo. De-Zoysa made a brief appearance in court Thursday and mumbled his assent as the justice of the peace ordered him not to speak to the father who survived the attack or to four other witnesses who provided statements to the police. His case was adjourned until March 13 to give him time to find a lawyer. Police were called to the home in the Barrhaven area just before 11 p.m. Wednesday night. The suspect was arrested quickly after that,

## North conducts firing drills in response to South Korea-US military training

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised artillery firing drills aimed at boosting combat readiness, state media reported Friday, days after his country vowed to take corresponding military steps against the ongoing South Korean-US military training that it regards as an invasion rehearsal. Thursday's drills involved frontline artillery units, whose weapons place Seoul, the South Korean capital, in their striking range, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said. Kim said artillery units must "take the initiative with merciless and rapid strikes at the moment of their entry into an actual war," KCNA said. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Friday that it had detected North Korea firing artillery into the waters off its west coast the pre-

vious day. It said South Korea will make a stern and overwhelming response in the event of provocations by North Korea. North Korea's forward-deployed long-range artillery guns pose a serious security threat to Seoul, a city with 10 million people which is about 40 to 50 kilometres (25 to 30 miles) from the border with North Korea. North Korea's Defence Ministry said Tuesday it would conduct unspecified "responsible military activities" in response to the annual South Korea-US military drills that began on Monday. Kim visited a western operational training ground on Wednesday and called for stronger war fighting capabilities. The 11-day South Korean-US drills involve a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the number conducted last year. North

Korea views South Korea-US military exercises as a major security threat, calling them a preparation to launch attacks on the North. Seoul and Washington officials have said their drills are defensive in nature. North Korea has sharply accelerated its missile testing activities since 2022 in part of efforts to develop more powerful nuclear-capable weapons targeting the US mainland and South Korea. The South Korean and US militaries have expanded their drills in response. Experts say North Korea likely aims to use a modernised arsenal to win sanctions relief from the United States when diplomacy restarts. They say North Korea could increase its weapons tests and dial up warlike rhetoric this year as the United States and South Korea hold major elections.

## WORLD MARKS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

### France to sea right to abortion in its constitution

AP ■ PARIS

France's leadership will use a Napoleon-era press to seal the right to abortion into the country's constitution in a historic ceremony on Friday that's open to the public — and designed to show support to women across the world on International Women's Day. France is the first country to explicitly guarantee abortion rights in the national charter. While abortion is a deeply divisive issue in the United States, it's legal in nearly all of Europe and overwhelmingly supported in France, where it's seen more as a question of public health and not politics. French legislators approved the constitutional amendment on Monday in a 780-72 vote that was backed by many far-right lawmakers. Friday's ceremony, held on the cobblestones of Vendôme Plaza in Paris, is a key event on



Participants march to mark the International Women's Day Friday in Tokyo. AP/PTI

a day focused on advancing women's rights globally. Marches, protests and conferences are being held from Jakarta, Indonesia, to Mexico City and beyond. The French constitutional amendment has been hailed by

women's rights advocates around the world, including places where women struggle to access birth control or maternal health care. French President Emmanuel Macron called it a direct result of the US Supreme Court ruling in

2022 rescinding long-held abortion rights. Macron's critics questioned why he pursued the measure in a country with no obvious threat to abortion rights but where women face a multitude of other problems. France has a persistently high rate of women killed by their partners and challenges remain in prosecuting sexual abuse against women by powerful celebrities and other men. French women also see lower pay and pensions — especially women who are not white. Macron's government said the abortion amendment was important to avoid a US-like scenario for women in France, as hard-right groups are gaining ground and seeking to turn back the clock on freedoms around Europe. Macron will preside over the constitutional ceremony. Justice Minister Eric Dupond-

Moretti will use a 100-kilogram (220-pound) press from 1810 to imprint the amendment in France's 1958 constitution. It will include the phrase saying, "the freedom of women to have recourse to an abortion, which is guaranteed." The ceremony will be held outdoors with the public invited, in another first. France follows in the footsteps of the former Yugoslavia, whose 1974 constitution included the phrase: "A person is free to decide on having children." Yugoslavia's successor states retained similar language in their constitutions, though they did not spell out guaranteed abortion rights. In Ireland, voters will decide on Friday whether to change the constitution to remove passages referring to women's domestic duties and broadening the definition of the family.



# Zardari set to be Pak prez for second time

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former president Asif Ali Zardari is set to be elected as the 14th president of the country in the election scheduled to be held on Saturday. The new president would replace the incumbent Dr Arif Alvi, whose five-year term ended last year. However, he has continued since the new electoral college was not yet formed.

Zardari, a businessman-turned-politician is the husband of slain Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto. The 68-year-old co-chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is supported by the coalition government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) which has the necessary numbers.

This is part of a quid pro quo deal after the February 8 polls delivered a fractured mandate: PPP supported PML-N's candidate for prime minister's post and also got to form the government in the Punjab provincial assembly while Zardari got the support of PML-N and his party got to rule the Sindh province.

Zardari, who served as the president from 2008 to 2013, will also be the first civilian to be elected for the second time as president. He is challenged by Mahmood Khan Achakzai, who is the head of his Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) and is contesting from the platform of the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), which came to prominence after independent candidates backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) joined it. The ruling coalition is confident that Zardari will be elected as president for the second time as the parties have a majority in the Senate, National Assembly, Punjab Assembly, Sindh Assembly and Balochistan Assembly. The opposition enjoys a majority only in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa assembly.

As per Pakistan's Constitution, the president is indirectly elect-



ed by an electoral college comprising federal and provincial lawmakers. The parliament buildings and buildings of the provincial assemblies have been designated as polling stations to let the lawmakers vote.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the polling would be held from 10 am to 4 pm in the Parliament House and the four provincial assemblies. Pakistan's first president was Iskandar Mirza, who took office on March 23, 1956, after the first Constitution was adopted and the country became a republic. Before that, the country was led by the governor general who ruled under the amended India Act of 1956. Meanwhile, his predecessor Dr Arif Alvi on Friday was presented a farewell guard of honour as he made way for the new president. He was elected in September 2018 for five years and his term had already expired but he, as per law, continued working as a caretaker as his successor could not be elected due to the absence of the National Assembly and provincial assemblies, which were dissolved in August 2023, much ahead of the February 8 general elections.

Meanwhile, with less than 24 hours to go for the presidential elections, Achakzai, the candidate backed by Khan and PTI on Friday demanded the postponement of elections on the plea that the electoral college was incomplete. Achakzai in a letter to the ECP highlighted that there were some reserved

## Imran Khan-backed candidate demands postponement of presidential poll

Islamabad (PTI): On the eve of Pakistan's presidential election, Mahmood Khan Achakzai, the candidate backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan demanded the postponement of elections on the plea that the electoral college was incomplete.

The election is scheduled to be held on Saturday and Achakzai has the support of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party of Khan. He is challenging Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan Peoples Party, who is being backed by the ruling coalition led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. Achakzai, who is also the head of his Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), sent a letter to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), highlighting that there were some reserved seats in the National and provincial assemblies which were vacant as no one was elected to them. "If the presidential election is conducted as per the schedule that would be a denial of their votes, which otherwise is against the fundamental rights, law and Constitution," he stated. The letter pointed out that the completion of the electoral college was not possible unless members of the reserved seats were elected, and demanded that the presidential elections be delayed or postponed until the completion of the process.

seats in the national and provincial assemblies that were vacant as no one was elected to them. "If the presidential election is conducted as per the schedule that would be a denial of their votes, which otherwise is against the fundamental rights, law and the Constitution," he stated.

# X suspension in Pak enters fourth week

PTI ■ LAHORE

Suspension of popular microblogging platform X in Pakistan entered the fourth week on Friday after it was enforced apparently to forestall the "propaganda" of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party that accused the PML-N of a 'massive rigging' in the February 8 polls.

Neither the previous caretaker government nor the new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's administration is ready to offer any reason as to why the country is seeing the suspension of X for such a long period. Despite the Sindh High Court directing the restoration of citizens' access to popular social media service X, it has remained inaccessible in Pakistan for more than three weeks.

Although such decisions are usually officially justified by the authorities based on some pretext or the other, this time around the state does not seem too bothered about providing any explanation as to why users are being denied access to X. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) regulates internet access in the country. The PTA, however, flatly denies that X is blocked.

"If the country's top regulator is claiming that it is not doing the blocking, who is then preventing access to X?" asked the PTI, adding that X is a valuable source of information for millions and access to it cannot be denied arbitrarily. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)

party has said that since the "mandate thieves" and their backers are afraid of people's voices they want to place a ban on social media for an indefinite period to prolong their fascist rule.

The Pakistani authorities plugged off X in mid-February following the explosive press conference of top government officer, Rawalpindi Commissioner Liaquat Chatha, alleging that Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa and Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja are involved in massive rigging in the February 8 polls.

X was then taken by storm in Pakistan calling for an audit of the election and return the "stolen mandate" to Imran Khan's PTI.

The PTI claims to have won over 180 National Assembly seats out of a total 266 in the country as per Form 45 (manual result sheet) but the powers that be manipulated the results and gifted most of its over 90 NA seats to its favourite PML-N of the Sharifs. As the commissioner alleged that he was forced to change the result of 13 National Assembly seats in the Rawalpindi division making the PTI-backed independent candidates a loser to benefit the PML-N, the social media was abuzz with calls for the election audit.

"The Pakistani authorities found no other way to control that criticism and chose to disrupt X in the country," the PTI said. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

## Had to work 'quite hard' to 'make space' as a woman in PML-N, says Maryam

Lahore (PTI): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, who scripted history when she became the first woman to occupy the post in any province of Pakistan, on Friday said she had to work "quite hard" for more than a decade to "make space" for herself in the ruling PML-N, a party founded by her father Nawaz Sharif. Speaking at an event to mark Women's Day in Lahore, she said, "As this has been a very male-dominated party historically, I also had to work quite hard for 12-13 years to make space for myself."

"But if I am standing here, it is a message for every woman, mother and daughter, that if you want to do something, then being a woman cannot be an obstacle in fulfilling your dreams and mission," she was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper. Maryam, 50, who is considered a political heir to Nawaz Sharif, took oath as the chief minister of Punjab on February 26 reportedly as part of a deal worked out with the blessings of the powerful Pakistan Army when the three-time former premier's Pakistan Muslim



(HRCP) said that shutting down the internet or any social media platforms bleeds online businesses and commerce and adds to the misery of an already fragile and struggling economy.

"It also infringes on people's

right to democratic decision-making, information and expression. This practice must stop immediately," it said. Commenting on the ban, Digital rights activist Nighad Dada said: "You cannot set down an entire platform and

eight decades. Maryam was born on October 28, 1973, in Lahore when her father, then leading a steel conglomerate, was not active in politics. After graduating from the Convent of Jesus and Mary school, she pursued her undergraduate studies at Punjab University and also earned a master's degree from the same institution.

She was married off at the age of 19 to Capt Mohammad Saffar who later quit the army and joined civil service through a quota in the government of his father-in-law. He later quit that job too and started a business.

Maryam was leading a life away from the political glitz and raised her three children like any other elite family would do before she stepped into active politics in 2011 while her two brothers — Hussain and Hasan, British nationals — chose to prefer to run the family business in London. She, however, rose to fame when she launched a popular anti-military tirade for ousting her father from power in 2017.

impose a blanket ban. This is a clear violation of fundamental rights."

It is pertinent to mention that the Pakistani authorities had shut down internet and mobile services in the country on election day.

## SL prez invites opp leaders for IMF bailout programme

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Thursday urged the leaders of the opposition parties to attend a review meeting of the IMF programme next week to help the cash-strapped nation to overcome the financial crisis it has been facing since 2022, an official statement said. On Thursday, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) began their two-week-long second review of the March 2023 bailout of USD 2.9 billion spanning over 4 years. Wickremesinghe, who is also the finance minister, is the steer of the programme which had resulted in a series of unpopular reforms being set in to put Sri Lanka's bankrupt economy back on course.

"Sajith Premadasa and Sivagnanam Sritharan have been invited to attend the meeting with the IMF on Monday 11 March," said the statement issued by Wickremesinghe's office.

**INDIAN RAILWAYS**  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS  
(RAILWAY BOARD)  
E-TENDER NO. 2024RSI9542TC

Executive Director, Railway Stores(S), Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, Government of India invites e-tender for procurement of 2,545 Nos. BOBYNHSM1 Wagons to RDSO's Specification No. WD-04-BOBYN-2011 of March, 2011 and 3,000 Nos. BVCM-C Wagons to RDSO's Specification No. WD-01-BVCM-2017.

2.0 The interested tenderers are advised to visit the website <http://ireps.gov.in> for details of the tender and submission of their e-bids. No manual offers will be accepted against e-tender.

4.0 Tender will be closed at 15.00 hours on 09.04.2024.

5.0 Any corrigendum to this tender will be published on the website <http://ireps.gov.in> only and not in print media.

Director, Railway Stores (W),  
Ministry of Railways, Railway Board, New Delhi.  
for and on behalf of the President of India.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
TENDER NOTICE

Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

Sr.DMM, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the president of India invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items.

S.N.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
1.	93245380	AUTOMATIC RAKE TEST RIG AS PER SPECIFICATION ATTACHED AS ANNEXURE 'A'. (With all Corrigendum)	04 Nos.	02.04.2024
2.	93245406	PARALLEL CLAMP 157-65/107/150 as per RDSO Specification no. ET1/OHE/1031-3 Rev-A and RI No. 1031-3. (With all Corrigendum)	15836 Nos.	04.04.2024

NOTE-1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) for details. 2. No manual offer will be entertained.

Sr. DMM/NS/LP/93245406/2024 Date:- 07.03.2024  
746/2024

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
2nd CORRIGENDUM

Tender No.30-ELECT-54-T-2023-24-E3

Name of Work: i) Electrical work in connection with S&T conference hall at room no. 207 & 208 annex-1 B. House, New Delhi. ii) Electrical work in connection with renovation/upgradation of Conference Hall, Kitchen, Wash room of Commercial Branch, Baroda House. The amendments in above said tender are as under:

Tender No. 30-ELECT-54-T-2023-24-E3		
	Earlier published	Amended
Name of work	i) Electrical work in connection with S&T conference hall at room no. 207 & 208 annex-1 B. House, New Delhi. ii) Electrical work in connection with renovation/upgradation of Conference Hall, Kitchen, Wash room of Commercial Branch, Baroda House.	Cancelled due to administrative reason
Approx cost of the works in	Rs. 33.09 lacs	
Address of the office	Sr. Divil Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.	
Bid Security	Rs. 66200.00	
Date & time of submission of tender	11.03.2024, 12.00 Hrs.	
Opening of tender	11.03.2024, 12.00 Hrs.	

The tender document of above-mentioned tender has been modified kindly go through the amended documents available on [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) and submit your offer accordingly.

743/24

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**JYOTIRGAMYA ENTERPRISES LIMITED**

Regd. Office: 118 Vishal Tower, Janakpuri, New Delhi- 110058  
CIN: L24100DL1986PLC234423; Ph: +91-7322820131.  
Email: [jyotirgamyenterprises@gmail.com](mailto:jyotirgamyenterprises@gmail.com);  
Website: [www.jelglobe.com](http://www.jelglobe.com)

**NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, E-VOTING AND BOOK CLOSURE**

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") for the FY 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23 of the Members of JYOTIRGAMYA ENTERPRISES LIMITED ("the Company") is scheduled to be held on Saturday, 30 March 2024 at 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M. at 118 Vishal Tower, Janakpuri, New Delhi- 110058 to transact the Ordinary businesses as set out in Notice convening the AGM of the Company.

The dispatch of the notice of AGM for the FY 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, inter alia indicating the process and manner of remote e-voting, along with attendance slip and proxy form, has been completed on 7 March 2024, to the Members whose names appear in the Register of Members/List of beneficiaries received from the depositories in the following manner:

- Through email to the Members who have registered their email ID; and
- Through post to other Members who have not registered their email ID.

In terms of Section 108 of the Companies Act, 2013 (the 'Act') read with Rule 20 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, as amended, and Regulation 44 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 (the 'Listing Regulations') and Secretarial Standard on General Meetings (SS2) issued by the Institute of Company Secretaries of India, the Company is providing the facility to its Members to exercise their right to vote by electronic means on any or all of the businesses specified in the Notice convening the AGM of the Company (remote e-voting), through e-voting services of Central Depository Services (India) Limited ("CDSL"). The details pursuant to the Act and Rules made thereunder are as under:

- Members holding shares either in physical form or in dematerialized form and whose name is recorded in the register of members or in the register of beneficial owners maintained by the depositories, as on the cut-off date, i.e. March 22, 2024 ('eligible Members'), shall be entitled to exercise their right to vote by remote e-voting as well as voting to be held at AGM on any or all of the businesses specified in the Notice convening the AGM of the Company;
- The remote e-voting will commence on March 27, 2024 at 9:00 A.M. ;
- The remote e-voting will end on March 29, 2024 at 5:00 P.M. ;
- The remote e-voting module shall be disabled for voting thereafter and voting through electronic means shall not be allowed thereafter. Once the vote on a resolution is cast by a Member, the Member shall not be allowed to change it subsequently;
- Members may note that:
  - the facility for voting through ballot paper shall be made available at the AGM and the members attending the meeting who have not casted their vote by remote e-voting shall be able to exercise their rights at the meeting through ballot paper;
  - A member may participate in the AGM even after exercising his right to vote through remote e-voting but shall not be allowed to vote at the AGM.
- In case a person has become a Member of the Company after the dispatch of the AGM Notice but on or before the cut-off date, i.e. March 22, 2024, may obtain the login ID and password by sending request at [helpdesk.evoting@cdslindia.com](mailto:helpdesk.evoting@cdslindia.com).
- A person, whose name is recorded in the register of Members or in the register of Beneficial owners maintained by the depositories as on cut-off date only shall be entitled to avail the facility of remote e-voting as well as voting at the AGM through ballot paper.
- In case of any queries, you may refer to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for members and e-voting user manual for members available at the Download sections of <http://www.evoting.com> or contact Mr. Rakesh Dalvi, Sr. Manager, (CDSL), Central Depository Services (India) Limited, A Wing, 25th Floor, Marathon Futurex, Mafatlal Mill Compounds, NM Joshi Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400013 or send an email to [helpdesk.evoting@cdslindia.com](mailto:helpdesk.evoting@cdslindia.com) or call on toll free no. 1800 22 55 33 or may write to the Company Secretary at the Registered Office of the Company.
- The Notice convening the AGM and other relevant documents will be available on the website of the Company [www.jelglobe.com](http://www.jelglobe.com) and the website of CDSL at [evoting@cdslindia.com](mailto:evoting@cdslindia.com).

By the order of the Board  
For JYOTIRGAMYA ENTERPRISES LIMITED  
Sd/-  
SAHIL MINHAJ KHAN  
Managing Director  
DIN: 06624897

Date: 07.03.2024  
Place: New Delhi

# Zelensky in Turkiye as Erdogan likely to press for negotiations to end war

Istanbul (AP): Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky was in Istanbul on Friday for talks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan whose NATO-member country has sought to balance its close relations with both Kyiv and Moscow and repeatedly offered to act as a peace-broker between them.

During the talks in Istanbul, Erdogan was expected to press for negotiations to end Russia's war in Ukraine, now in its third year, a Turkish government official said. Talks would also focus on a possible new measure that would guarantee navigational safety of commercial vessels in the Black Sea, the official said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with Turkish

government protocol. The visit comes as Zelensky continues to press other nations for more munitions and weaponry to halt the advance of Russian troops trying to make deeper gains into the Ukraine-held western part of the Donetsk region and also penetrating into the Kharkiv region north of it. Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the outbreak of the war, Turkiye hosted a meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers as well as unsuccessful talks between the two countries' negotiating teams aimed at ending the hostilities.

Later in 2022, Turkiye, along with the United Nations, also brokered a deal between Russia and Ukraine that allowed the

shipment of millions of tons of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. Russia however, pulled out of the deal last year, citing obstacles to its export of food and fertilizers. In Istanbul, Zelensky was also to visit shipyards where Turkish companies are building two corvettes for the Ukrainian navy, according to his office. Zelensky last visited Turkiye last July, when he returned back to Ukraine together with a group of Ukrainian commanders who were in Turkiye following a prison exchange deal, and were to remain on Turkish territory until the end of the war. There was no explanation from Ankara or Kyiv about why they were allowed to return to Ukraine.

## Zaluzhnyi to be Ukraine's new envoy to UK

Kyiv (AP): Ukraine's former military chief has been appointed the country's new ambassador to the United Kingdom, a month after he was sacked as head of the armed forces by President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Zelensky announced that he has approved the appointment of Valerii Zaluzhnyi to one of Ukraine's most important diplomatic positions. Britain is a key supporter of Ukraine in its war with Russia.

Zelensky fired Zaluzhnyi as military commander-in-chief in February, part of a shake-up aimed at reigniting momentum in the deadlocked war. The president said at the time that Ukraine must be led by individuals who are "convinced of victory" against Russia. Zaluzhnyi is widely respected among Ukrainian troops and considered a national hero. He is credited with stalling Russia's full-scale invasion in the early days of the war and expertly pushing back Moscow's troops.

Reported tensions between Zaluzhnyi and the president grew after Ukraine's much-touted 2023 counteroffensive failed to make major territorial gains.

## 10 yrs on, parents of Chinese passengers on MH370 still searching for answers

AP ■ BEIJING

Ten years on, the families of Chinese passengers who disappeared on board a lost Malaysia Airlines flight still are searching for answers. On Friday, a few dozen relatives of the passengers met officials at China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing as part of their long journey for answers. They also visited the Malaysian Embassy to present their demands. Even after such a long time, the wound remains raw for many of the families. Friday is the 10th anniversary of the disappearance of flight MH370. The Boeing 777 left Kuala Lumpur bound for Beijing with 239 people on board on March 8, 2014, but took a sharp turn south and fell off the radar. It never made it to Beijing. The plane's disappearance drew attention from around the world and has generated countless conspiracy theories. Only debris from the aircraft has been found.

The majority of the plane's passengers, 154, were Chinese. Among the families were elderly parents who lost adult chil-

dren. "Where did the plane go? Where is the person?" said Li Shuce, who lost his son on the flight. "If he's alive I want to see him; if he's dead, I want to see his body."

Li was surrounded by police, who were managing the crowd in front of the building where the families met government officials. They corralled journalists behind a barrier made of ropes and a whiteboard. Later, the families went to the Malaysian embassy in Beijing where they chanted in front of the building, "Malaysia, return my loved one! Without seeing them, we won't give up."

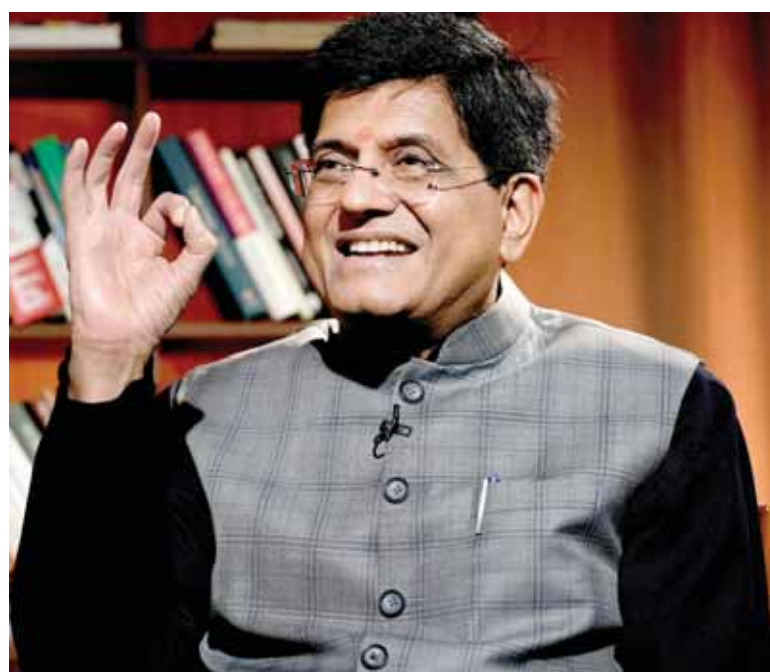
Another woman who gave only her last name, Gao, because she was concerned about police harassment, said she believed her husband's death last year was precipitated by not knowing the circumstances of their son's death: He was returning from a vacation with his wife and 3-year-old daughter in Malaysia when the flight vanished. Gao and her husband belonged to a generation that could only have one child because of China's one-child policy, which has since been relaxed.



# Keeping in mind FTAs long term benefits for India: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said that the Modi government always keeps in mind commensurate and long-term benefits for the domestic industry while negotiating free trade agreements. He stressed that "gone" are the days when India used to accept the terms of the world. "We crystal gaze into the future to make sure that its (FTAs) impact in the future will also be positive and we also look at balanced, fair and equitable FTAs," he told PTI in an interview. "So we can see the big Indian opportunity that we are offering and we want to make sure that we get commensurate benefits (from these pacts) for the country," he said. He indicated "some good news" on this front in the days to come. The remarks assume significance as India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) bloc concluded the talks for an FTA. EFTA members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. The minister said that the free trade pacts of the Modi government involve a huge amount of stakeholder consultations with industry. Besides, every line ministry also gets involved in making sure that the government protects the country's long-term interests, he said. "Today we give out the terms, based on the big Indian opportunity that we bring to the table. I am very confident that we hear some good news in the



days to come. Our officers are relentlessly pursuing several engagements. Let us see who pips the others," he said. Under free trade pacts, two trading partners significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them, besides easing norms to promote trade in services and investments. FTA talks for the UK and Oman are also at an advanced stage. UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Kemi Badenoch has said trade

deal being negotiated with India is "possible" to be concluded before a general election in the country but Britain does not want to use that as a deadline. The minister in charge of signing off on the free trade agreement (FTA), now in its 14th round of negotiations, pointed to India's "protectionist economy" in comparison with the UK's liberalised regime as one of the factors behind the long-drawn discussions. Badenoch, who was speaking during a Global Trade conference at the think tank Chatham House on Thursday, stressed that she wanted to ensure a "commercially meaningful" pact as opposed to just a pre-election picture opportunity. "India is still very protectionist where we are very, very liberalised," claimed Badenoch. "I am not interested in just taking a picture and moving on. It has to be something that is commercially meaningful. People need to be able to say 'ah now I can do this', like we had with our Australia agreement or with Japan for example," she said, referring to FTAs with the two major economies. On the timeline for getting to the finishing line with the talks with India, she added: "We can actually sign an agreement before the Indian election. I suspect that that is not necessarily going to be the case because I don't want to use any election as a deadline. "It is possible that that will be done but I am very resistant to deadlines being set on trade negotiations because it runs down the clock. It is very possible that we can sign but I am not using it as a deadline for the work that I am carrying out basically." India and the UK have been negotiating an FTA since January 2022 to significantly enhance the GBP 36-billion bilateral trading partnership. The 13th round of talks concluded on December 15 last year, with both sides hopeful that the ongoing fourteenth round will end in an agreement. With both India and the UK set for a general election this year, signing off on a trade agreement has taken on particular urgency before leaders on both sides get into campaign mode.

# Will fully cooperate with Sebi in probe: JM Financial

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

JM Financial Ltd has said it would fully cooperate with capital market regulator Sebi in its investigation into the public issue of debt securities. The statement came after Sebi barred JM Financial from accepting new mandates to act as a lead manager for the public issue of debt securities, for flouting regulatory norms. However, JM Financial can continue to act as a lead manager for the public issue of debt securities for a period of 60 days in case of existing mandates, Sebi said in its interim order on Thursday. Further, the regulator will undertake an investigation into these issues, to be completed within six months. Following the order, JM Financial in a filing to the stock exchanges said, "The company shall fully cooperate with Sebi in this investigation." The Sebi's directive came days after the Reserve Bank barred JM Financial Products Ltd from providing any form of financing against shares and debentures, including sanction and disbursement of loans against initial public offering (IPO). The regulator's order followed after it undertook a routine examination of the public issues of Non-Convertible Debentures (NCD) during the year 2023. The investigation focused on the activities of JM Financial and its related entities in a particular debt issue. In its interim order, Sebi said the manner in which subscriptions have been managed in this public issue of debt instruments is "shocking". The transactions at every stage of this public issue appear to have been done in a pre-determined and pre-meditated manner; and



executed clinically to ensure subscription and success. "The regulator noted that notice (JM Financial) along with its connected group entities were prima facie noted to have given an assured exit to certain investors at a profit, thereby incentivising them to apply in the public issue in contravention of the regulatory mandates," it stated. The scheme, it is prima facie noted, involved getting individual investors, who would otherwise not have participated in the issue, to make applications not just by providing funds to them but also by assuring them an exit at a profit on the listing day. While the regulator has examined modus-operandi in one case, the bank statements of the investors, operated through Power of Attorney (PoA) by the JM Group entities, suggest that this practice is followed in most public issues. The pattern of transactions seen in the bank statements suggests that this is not an isolated incident, Sebi noted.

# Forex kitty jumps to USD 625.63 billion

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves jumped USD 6.55 billion to USD 625.626 billion for the week ended March 1, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had risen by USD 2.975 billion to USD 619.072 billion. It can be noted that in October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year. For the week ended March 1, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 6.043 billion to USD 554.231 billion, the data said. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased by USD 569 million to USD 48.417 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 17 million to USD 18.18 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 41 million to USD 4.798 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed.

# Equity MFs inflow nears two years high in February

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Equity mutual funds continued their positive momentum with inflow of Rs 26,866 crore in February, making it the highest monthly infusion in 23 months, driven by massive interest for thematic funds and launch of new fund offerings (NFOs). Also, the latest flow was about 23 per cent higher than inflows of Rs 21,780 crore in January. Moreover, monthly Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) contributions reached a fresh high of Rs 19,186 crore, surpassing January's Rs 18,838 crore, according to the data released by Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) on Friday. "As we delve into the Feb 2024 data, we observe that there is a

surge in SIP accounts, totalling 8.20 crore with 49.79 lakh new SIP registrations. This underscores investors' unwavering commitment to disciplined wealth accumulation," Venkat Chalasan, Chief Executive, AMFI, said. Overall, the mutual fund industry witnessed an inflow of Rs 1.2 lakh crore in February, almost similar to the one seen in the preceding month. The huge inflow was driven by contributions from debt-oriented schemes at Rs 63,809 crore, equity schemes at Rs 26,866 crore and hybrid schemes at Rs 18,105 crore. The strong inflow has pushed the net assets under management to Rs 54.54 lakh crore at February-end from Rs 52.74 lakh crore in the

preceding month. The flow in February this year was the highest since March 2022, when equity-oriented mutual funds witnessed an inflow of Rs 28,463 crore. Also, the latest flow marks the 36th consecutive month of net inflows in equity funds. The equity segment was also aided by eight new fund launches during the month which cumulatively garnered Rs 8,692 crore, Melvyn Santarita, Analyst, Morningstar Investment Research India, said. Anand Vardarajan, Business Head, Banking, Institutional Clients, Alternate Products and Product Strategy, Tata Asset Management said that equity inflows continue to soar largely led by some NFOs. Notably thematic/sectoral have



seen massive interest. Barring focused funds, which saw an outflow of Rs 533 crore, all categories experienced inflow in equity segments. The sectoral or thematic funds category saw the highest

inflows to the tune of Rs 11,263 crore. This was followed by large & midcap category with a net attraction of Rs 3,157 crore, small cap (Rs 2,922 crore) and mid cap (Rs 1,808 crore). However, inflows in small cap

and mid-cap dropped by 10 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively in the preceding month possibly due to investors opting to book profits on the back of a sharp uptick in the performance of these categories. Interestingly, the large cap category saw its third highest flows in 20 months to Rs 921 crore in February. Apart from equities, debt-focused funds attracted net inflows totalling Rs 63,809 crore in February, marking the second consecutive month of positive inflows. In January, these funds experienced a surge of Rs 76,469 crore. Within the open-ended category, liquid funds received the maximum inflows, followed by Corporate Bond Fund and Short Duration

# Certain payments to units in IFSC exempted from TDS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has exempted certain payments made to units of 14 services sectors in IFSC from TDS provisions effective April 1, a move which will reduce tax compliance burden. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) in a notification said that no TDS will have to be deducted for payments to units in sectors like FinTech, banking, fund management entity, finance company, credit rating agency, insurance intermediary and investment banking. The TDS exemption will now

be applicable on payments like professional/referral fee, brokerage income, interest on External Commercial Borrowings /Loans, insurance commission, dividend and credit rating fee. International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in Gujarat is being developed as a tax-neutral enclave for the financial sector. Nangia & Co LLP Partner Amit Agarwal said the notification by the CBDT offers a significant relief by exempting specified payments made to the units in IFSC from TDS. Previously, exemptions from withholding tax were limited to



payments associated with leasing of ships, leasing of aircraft among others. However, the recent notification broadens the scope, encompassing various payments such as interest on ECBs, professional fees, referral fees, dividend income to finance companies, banking

units, etc, established in IFSC. "From an M&A perspective, the inclusion of payments like investment advisory fees and professional fees to Investment Advisors and Fund Management entities respectively, enhances the appeal of establishing fund structures in

IFSC," Agarwal said. The process laid down includes the furnishing of Form No. 1 by an IFSC unit to the payer following which the payer shall not deduct the TDS. The notification shall come into force from April 1, 2024, and relaxations provided therein shall be applicable for 10 consecutive assessment years. Further, the payer will also be required to furnish the particulars of all such payments in the TDS statement. "It is certainly a welcome step and no less relevant in order to promote IFSC as a global investment destination," Agarwal said.



# Number of board seats held by women in India Inc rises in last five years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of board seats held by women across India Inc has increased gradually over the past five years with them holding 18.3 per cent board seats in 2023, a Deloitte report said on Friday. The 'Women in the boardroom: A global perspective' report, however, said that it is lower than the global average of 23.3 per cent. The report by Deloitte Global Boardroom Program analysed more than 18,000 companies in 50 countries exploring representation of women in the boardroom. This includes analysis of 400 companies from India. "Boardroom diversity requires a paradigm shift. Since many companies prefer to recruit board members with CEO or CFO experience, these numbers do not paint an optimistic outlook for pipeline development. India Inc. Must break from historical patterns and prioritise capabilities over past roles," Deloitte South Asia Chairperson Shefali Goradia said. The report shows a gradual increase in the number of board seats held by women across India Inc, with women holding 18.3 per cent board seats in 2023, up from 13.8 per cent in 2018, and 17.1 per cent in 2021, said the report released on the International Women's Day. India's number is lower than the global average of 23.3 per cent, which has seen an increase of 3.6 per cent since 2022, reducing the timeline towards achieving parity by seven years — from 2045 to 2038. "This indicates that even if India

were to match the global pace, achieving gender parity on boards would still remain a distant goal until a robust pipeline of women leaders is developed," the report said. Goradia said by nurturing governance expertise creatively and regularly evaluating the progress, a robust pipeline of talented women leaders can be cultivated for a brighter future in corporate governance. Deloitte Global has developed the "stretch factor," a research tool that measures the average number of board seats an individual holds in a particular market. The higher the stretch factor, the more seats are held by any single director in a given market. The stretch factor among women in India increased to 1.32 in 2023 as compared to 1.30 in 2021. While the average stayed the same for men at 1.20. This further indicates a low pipeline of women leaders and stresses on the need to create a larger pool of women leaders with varied skillsets. Although India saw a decline in board chairs held by women in 2023, with only 4.1 per cent of women chairing boards as compared to 4.5 per cent in 2018, it witnessed an increase in the number of women taking up CEO roles - 5.1 per cent female CEOs against 3.4 per cent in 2018. In India, sectoral trends paint an optimistic picture for women representation across boardrooms. All of the sectors examined in the survey showed an increase in the number of women on boards in 2023 as against 2018.

# inDrive to help women choose driving as career

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Global ride-hailing app inDrive on Friday announced the launch of a DrivingNaari programme to provide equal opportunities to women in the field of driving as a career. The programme will empower underprivileged women to become professional drivers and give them access to remunerative 'livelihoods with dignity', inDrive said in a statement. "We are launching a pilot project with women from Delhi NCR, and then plan to scale across India. We will welcome women from all over India to register for the inDrive DrivingNaari programme and take up commercial driving as a career option," an inDrive spokesperson for APAC region said. inDrive has collaborated with Institute of Driving and Traffic Research (IDTR) managed by Maruti Suzuki to provide a full 30-day driving course to all participants. The participants will also be given medical insurance, round the clock road assistance, and a safety kit. Upon becoming a driver part-



ner with inDrive, they will be provided a car on lease, financed by inDrive, with commission-free rides on the inDrive platform, the company said. The company is also offering security features such as option to choose passengers based on their profiles, routes and price offers, driver verification, safety button and rate the passenger. Women drivers will be provided training to use these features, inDrive said. InDrive follows a fair-price setting model under which passengers and drivers negotiate fares among themselves. It offers ride-hailing, intercity, freight, and delivery services in India.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Women in India are increasingly stepping into the realm of entrepreneurship as they strive for financial independence and empowerment. While there has been a surge in the number of women entrepreneurs making their mark in various industries, a significant challenge persists. Despite their entrepreneurial drive and innovative ideas, many women face obstacles in securing investor confidence and funding support. This disparity highlights the need for greater support systems and initiatives to bridge the gap and empower women entrepreneurs to thrive in the competitive business landscape. "The upward trajectory in the representation of women in the Best Workplaces, soaring from 21 per cent in 2021 to a commendable 26 per cent in 2023, speaks volumes about the trans-

# More women stepping into entrepreneurship roles



formative journey towards gender inclusivity," said Yeshasvini Ramaswamy, CEO of Great Place To Work, India. Ramaswamy said that while India has made significant progress in fostering diverse workplaces, it needs to actively listen beyond socio-economic barriers, address the needs of our female employees (across age

brackets), and create an environment where they are genuinely empowered. "Investing in female leadership development needs building inclusive cultures, and celebrating diverse voices are not just buzzwords but essential steps toward unlocking our collective promise," she said. Organisations recognised for their efforts in building positive work environments for women see a demonstrably happier and more engaged workforce, she noted. Co-founder of YesMadam, Akanksha Vishnoi said it is essential to acknowledge and address these obstacles, creating a supportive environment where women can thrive.

"By championing diversity, fostering inclusion, and implementing supportive policies, companies should endeavour to create an ecosystem where women can balance their caregiving responsibilities with their professional aspirations," Vishnoi said. Women entrepreneurs face significant challenges when it comes to raising funds. Research indicates that gender bias is prevalent during the funding process, with 62 per cent of women entrepreneurs experiencing some form of bias. This bias often manifests as sexism, hindering women from securing investor confidence and funding support.

# Fund of Funds commits ₹9,500 crore for startups: SIDBI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

SIDBI chairman S Ramann on Friday said that the Fund of Funds for Start-ups (FFS) has committed Rs 9,500 crore for the promotion of new ventures in the country. The FFS was unveiled by the Prime Minister on January 16, 2016, in line with the Start-up

India Action Plan. It has approved a corpus of Rs 10,000 crore for contribution to various Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) registered with SEBI. Introduced with a focused objective of supporting development and growth of innovation-driven enterprises, FFS facilitates funding needs for start-ups through participation in the

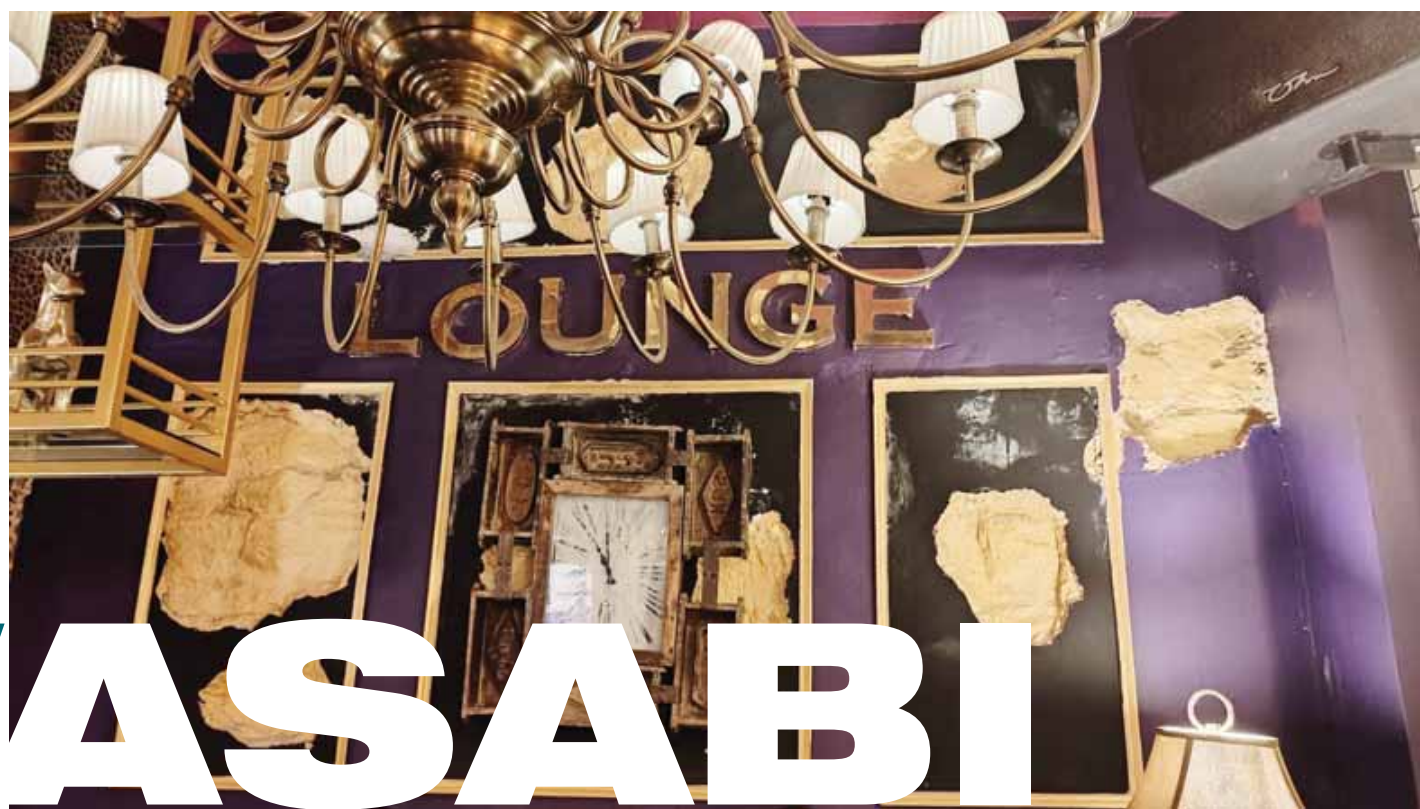
capital of SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds. The commitment of Rs 9500 crore has led to over 100 AIFs raising Rs 56,000 crore more, he said at TiEcon Delhi 2024 conference here. "It's really a staggering figure. The ability of all of you (AIFs) to go out and bring in that kind of money from your foreign

Limited Partners (LPs) convince the Indians to become LPs," he said. Observing that AIFs space is getting more exciting, he said, there is still a lot of money to be tapped by fund managers. Easy exit and further ease of doing business could help more capital to flow in from offshore, he said.





Zanzi restaurant derives its name from the Japanese word Zanzi which means happiness and energy. The restaurant lives up to its name — spreading happiness and energy, writes PAWAN SONI



# The WASABI PUNCH



I asked Aishwarya, the owner of Zanzi by Dramz at Mehrauli, for the meaning of the word 'Zanzi'. She smilingly replied that it means 'unique'. Zanzi by Dramz offers a unique take on a Japanese restaurant. The interior features a deliberately tattered and distressed look on the walls, portraits of English emperors, large chandeliers, lounge-ish sofas that may be a bit uncomfortable, and camera-style lamps, setting it apart from other Japanese restaurants I have visited. On the food front, there are some distinctive elements as well. For example, we were served an amuse-bouche that included Kaiso (sea weed) Tofu, Tsukemono (Pickled veggies), and Udon Noodles. While the individual ingredients were tasty, as a dish, it did not make a lasting impression on me, especially as an amuse-bouche where serving carbs at the beginning of the meal is usually avoided. The sushi we tried was decent, with



a notable pungency in the wasabi. However, I expected the pizza to be the wafer-thin style with veggies or fish sliced similarly. Unfortunately, it was a regular pizza. The poke bowl, a mix of carbs and proteins with sticky rice, meats of your choice, and veggies, was quite tasty. I opted for the fish poke bowl with river sole, which was another 'unique' combination for a Japanese

restaurant. In my opinion, salmon or tuna would have been a better fit. We ended the meal with delicious pastries, though they did not have a Japanese connection either. While Japan is known for its processes, quality of ingredients, and attention to detail, Zanzi by Dramz still lacks the finesse in its efforts. Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

## WHAT ARE WOMEN MADE OF?



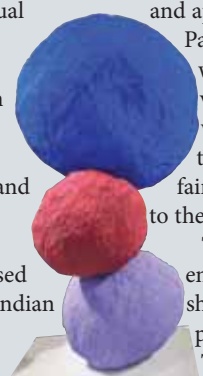
Shangri-La Eros New Delhi celebrates International Women's Day with a poetic campaign highlighting the inclusivity, talent, and resilience. Step into the elevator of empowerment where each floor unveils a mural of strong women - champions of their own narratives! Each meaningful verse penned by our skilled lyricists, beautifully encapsulates the soul and spirit of our journey together as a team. With every verse recited in our film, we illuminate the journey towards breaking societal stereotypes. These remarkable women aren't just staff; they're the heartbeat of Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, embodying power, resilience, and independence. Together, let's shatter barriers! #WOMENWILLBEWOMEN #Inspire Inclusivity #ShangrilaNewDelhi



## Celebrating the vibrancy of contemporary art

The India Art Fair, an annual celebration of contemporary art, returned to the heart of Delhi in 2024, captivating art enthusiasts and collectors alike with its mesmerizing array of artworks and engaging programs. Held at the NSIC Exhibition Grounds, this year's edition of the fair showcased the dynamism and diversity of Indian and international art, offering a platform for artists, galleries, collectors, and curators to connect and engage with the evolving art scene. Highlighting the Fair's theme of "Innovation and Tradition," the 2024 edition featured a curated selection of artworks that explored the intersection of traditional art forms with modern techniques and concepts. From paintings and sculptures to installations and new media art, visitors were treated to a visual feast that reflected the rich tapestry of Indian culture and creativity. One of the key highlights of the fair was the presence of leading contemporary artists from India and around the world, who showcased their latest works and engaged in dialogue with visitors. Renowned Indian artists such as Subodh Gupta, Bharti Kher, and Jitish Kallat exhibited their thought-provoking pieces, while international names like Ai Weiwei, Yayoi Kusama, and Olafur Eliasson added a global perspective to the event. The CP Kukreja Foundation for Design Excellence showcased, for the first time, an exhibition on Jawaharlal Nehru University titled "The Masterplan". Curated by Vishal Dar, the exhibition commemorated fifty years of the university. In addition to the impressive lineup of artworks, the India Art Fair 2024 offered a diverse range of programs and events aimed at fostering a deeper understanding

and appreciation of contemporary art. Panel discussions, artist talks, and workshops provided insights into various artistic practices and trends, while curated walks guided visitors through the different sections of the fair, offering context and interpretation to the exhibited works. The fair also served as a platform for emerging artists and galleries to showcase their talent and connect with potential collectors and collaborators. The "Platform" section, dedicated to solo and two-person exhibitions by emerging artists, provided a glimpse into the future of Indian art and introduced fresh voices to the contemporary art scene. Another noteworthy aspect of the India Art Fair 2024 was its focus on sustainability and environmental consciousness. Recognizing the importance of responsible practices in the art world, the fair implemented initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint and promote eco-friendly alternatives. From using recycled materials for exhibition displays to organizing tree-planting drives, the fair demonstrated its commitment to environmental stewardship. As one of the premier art events in the region, the India Art Fair continues to play a vital role in shaping the cultural landscape of the country. By providing a platform for artistic expression, dialogue, and exchange, the fair contributes to the growth and development of the contemporary art ecosystem in India, fostering creativity, innovation, and inclusivity. The India Art Fair 2024 was a resounding success, bringing together artists, collectors, and enthusiasts in celebration of contemporary art. With its diverse array of artworks, engaging programs, and commitment to sustainability, the fair showcased the vibrant spirit of Indian art and reaffirmed Delhi's position as a thriving hub of creativity and culture.



## A serenade to heritage

VHAH Fest is all about heritage, art, and healing in the enchanted realm of Ramgarh Shekhawati. An experience of lifetime. GYANESHWAR DAYAL was there to experience the whispers of eternity

In the heart of the majestic realm of Ramgarh Shekhawati, Rajasthan, the 8th annual Vedaaranya Heritage and Healing Festival (VHAH) 2024 recently unfolded its enchanting chapters. From January 26th to 29th, 2024, the festival unfolded with a mesmerizing blend of cultural experiences, weaving a tapestry that harmonized "East meets West" performances, renowned musicians, heritage experts, and artisans. This celebration of heritage, art, and healing, orchestrated through a harmonious collaboration between the Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan, the Shruti Foundation, and the INTACH Shekhawati Chapter, cast a spellbinding ambience over the historical wonderland. Ramgarh Shekhawati, once abandoned by opulent merchants, has gracefully metamorphosed into one of the globe's most coveted heritage destinations. A treasury of over 200 Havelis, 36 cenotaphs, and 101 temples, it proudly claims the distinction of hosting the world's sole Veda temple — a sanctuary where the sacred Vedic texts take center stage, devoid of conventional deities. The spirit behind the festival is Dr Shruti Poddar who came to her ancestral town ten years back only to be dismayed by the plunder and loss of the heritage that lay all around in the ruins. She set out to restore the town to its former glory and the VHAH Fest became one of the major tools of attracting the world attention to it. "For me this festival is more than just a festival for entertainment, it is an effort to revive the rich past of Ramgarh Shekhawati and draw world attention to it" Says Shruti. She has been quite successful in her endeavour as VHAH fest is now a major event on Country's event Calander. The festival commenced with a soul-stirring performance by the talented students of Shekhawati from various schools, setting the stage for a cultural



In the enchanting realm of the VHAH festival, nestled within the historical tapestry of Ramgarh Shekhawati, Sonal Mansingh's ethereal dance unfolded, weaving a mesmerizing narrative that transcended the boundaries of time and space. Mira, the legendary poetess-saint, found her voice anew through the artistry of Sonal Mansingh, whose every movement was a delicate brushstroke, painting the air with the hues of devotion and passion. The stage became a living canvas, adorned with the graceful arcs of Sonal's limbs, mirroring the profound verses of Mira's poetry. As the fragrant breeze of Shekhawati whispered through the open-air venue, the audience was transported into a dreamscape, where the past and present coalesced in a dance of beauty and spirituality. Sonal Mansingh's evocative performance, a symphony of expression, seamlessly harmonized with Mira's verses, creating a sensory feast that left an indelible imprint on the hearts of those fortunate enough to witness this celestial fusion of art and culture. In the hallowed ambience of Ramgarh Shekhawati, the VHAH festival became a sanctuary for the soul, where the poetic resonance of Mira's narrative found transcendence through the sublime dance of Sonal Mansingh. Shekhawati. "This hidden gem has garnered well-deserved attention, and I am dedicated to unearthing the tangible and intangible heritage of India," she declared. In fact the festival is just not about the fine arts but also about revival of the place, showcasing its rendezvous with architecture, Ayurveda and intricate hand-made products. The itinerary featured a Food and Crafts Mela, artistic



workshops, an exploration of the Veda Temple's architectural marvels, and a Lime (Chuna) Technology demonstration by the INTACH Shekhawati Chapter. Dr. Sonal Mansingh, a Member of the Rajya Sabha, added her voice to the chorus of admiration. "VHAH Festival has elevated the Indian Cultural Heritage scene to new heights," she marveled, expressing hope that the majestic Havelis of Ramgarh Shekhawati would become magnets for global tourism. Participants immersed themselves in a Kantha Textile workshop, explored upcycled products, and engaged in weaving sessions with Katran (Waste Material). The cultural performances were nothing short of enchanting - from Dr. Sonal Mansingh's rendition of "Meera" to the Sitar and Cello Jugalbandi by Pandit Shubhendra Rao and Maestro Saskia Rao De Haas, and the mesmerizing "TRIDHARA" by Guru Geeta Chandran. Other highlights included an Iranian Folk dance, Rajasthan Sufi and Folk Music by MIRS of Rajasthan, and a screening of "The History and Heritage of Ramgarh Shekhawati." Renowned Artist Satish Gupta captivated audiences with a "Live Calligraphy" performance, supported by Dr. Shruti Nada Poddar's ethereal Shiva Chants. Healing sessions added a profound dimension to the festival, offering local Ayurvedic insights, "A Superfood a Day" with Health Transformation Coach Vidhi Beri, and Yoga Healing Sessions with Bijal Doshi. Attendees explored the heritage of Ramgarh Shekhawati through guided tours, connecting with the soul of this resplendent wonderland. In the symphony of heritage, art, and healing, the Vedaaranya Heritage and Healing Festival left an indelible mark, inviting patrons to rediscover the timeless elegance of Ramgarh Shekhawati.



# ROHIT, GILL PUT INDIA IN DRIVER SEAT

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

Skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill's splendid hundreds gave India complete control of the fifth Test against England despite a late batting collapse that saw the hosts end day two at 473 for eight here on Friday. India lost as many as five wickets for 97 runs in the final session after Rohit (103 off 162 balls) and Gill (110 off 150 balls) shared a stroke-filled 171-run partnership off 244 balls for the second wicket. Debutant Devdutt Padikkal (65 off 103) showed a lot of class in his debut innings while Sarfaraz Khan (56 off 60) was guilty of throwing away his wicket first ball after tea. The home team, which began the day at 135 for one, led England by 255 runs at stumps. Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir (4/170 in 44 overs), who was taken to the cleaners by the Indian openers, bounced back strongly to take three wickets in the final session. Left-arm spinner Tom Hartley (2/126 in 39) too was impressive towards the end of the day while Mark Wood (0/89 in 15) was the

most expensive. The pitch remains good for batting and at 376 for three at tea, India looked set to bat England out of the game before the combination of good bowling and reckless batting kept the visitors alive in the match. India scored at close to 4.5 runs per over until slowing down significantly in the final session. Kuldeep Yadav spun the ball a lot more than fellow Indian spinners on day one but after a tough time in the first two sessions on day two, Bashir and Co. Got a lot out of the surface. Sarfaraz tried to cut a harmless ball off Bashir and ended up giving an easy catch to Joe Root at first slip. Padikkal got a gem from the England off-spinner that spun away from middle stump to hit the top of the off-stump. Like Sarfaraz, Dhruv Jurel (15) too went for an avoidable shot and perished. After lunch, England captain Ben Stokes bowled Rohit Sharma off his first ball in nine months to give the visitors something to cheer about. But Sarfaraz and Padikkal then got together and ensured runs

kept flowing for the home team. Stokes, who had been bowling only in the nets thus far, finally decided to roll his arm over in a match situation after nothing went England's way in the morning session. He had stopped bowling owing to a knee injury and had undergone surgery last year. Bowling the second over of the afternoon session, Stokes produced a peach that seamed away a touch from good length to dislodge Rohit's off-stump. In the next over, James Anderson bowled Gill with a beauty that seamed back in, leaving India at 279 for three. In his debut game, Padikkal's off-side play stood out as he regaled the crowd with exquisite back-foot punches and cover drives. Sarfaraz, on the other hand, started slowly before changing gears both against pace and spin. What attracted most attention was his attacking play against the express pace of Mark Wood. His game against fast bowlers has been questioned but Sarfaraz was razor sharp on Friday as he dispatched Wood



for a lofted back-drive before pulling him for a six over over backward square leg. He also played a ramp shot off Wood using the extra pace and bounce that he generated. In the morning, skipper Rohit and Gill struck hundreds as India pressed the advantage in the game by reaching 264 for one at lunch. Rohit and Gill walked out in the middle in bright sunshine and milked the conditions to take India well past England's first innings total of 218. England tried everything to contain them, whether it was employing the leg-slip for Rohit when Bashir was in operation or Wood using the odd short ball against the overnight unbeaten duo with as many as six fielders on the leg side. However, nothing worked for the visitors despite the Barmy Army making a lot more noise compared to Indian fans at the stunning HPCA stadium. Rohit and Gill collected 129 runs from 30 overs in the two hours of play. Rohit and Gill gave themselves an over each after start of play before going for their strokes.

Off-spinner Bashir opened the bowling alongside Anderson and was put under immense pressure by Rohit, who deposited him for a straight six and a four in his second over to set the tone. Gill, who played some audacious strokes on the opening day, carried on in the same vein as he took two steps forward against the great Anderson for a straight six, which was followed by a square cut. The only real chance that England had in the session went begging when Zak Crawley could not latch on to a sharp catch offered by Rohit at leg-slip. Wood resorted to the short ball tactic against the well-set duo but that did not work either. Rohit completed his 12th Test hundred and second of the series by flicking Tom Hartley for a single. Two ball later, Gill followed him into three digits by slog-sweeping Bashir for a four. After completing his second ton of the series, Gill took his helmet off and bowed to the spectators in the stands including his proud father Lakhwinder.



## Afghanistan batter Noor retires from international cricket

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran Afghanistan batter Noor Ali Zadran has announced his retirement from international cricket, bringing down curtains on an international career spanning more than a decade. The 35-year-old, who starred with a 28-ball 45 in Afghanistan's first-ever ODI against Scotland in 2009, played his final game last week at the Tolerance Oval in the Test match against Ireland. "Top-order batter @NoorAliZadran decided to call time on his international cricket. He has represented #AfghanAtalan in 2 Tests, 51 ODIs and 23 T20Is and has scored 1930 runs with 11 fifties and a hundred to his name," Afghanistan Cricket Board tweeted on Thursday. The opener's first T20I came in February 2010, which was Afghanistan's second game in the format. He made his Test debut earlier this year, against Sri Lanka. He received his maiden Test Cap from his nephew and teammate Ibrahim Zadran. One of his most memorable innings was the half-century against India at the 2010 T20 World Cup, which marked Afghanistan's first World Cup appearance.

## Our destiny is in our hands: Williams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A mixed bag campaign so far in the ongoing WPL with three wins from six games, Royal Challengers Bangalore head coach Luke Williams believes their destiny now is in their own hands as they are capable of beating any team in the tournament going forward. RCB are currently third on the league table with six points, behind Mumbai Indians and leaders Delhi Capitals. Having slumped to their third defeat in the tournament against Gujarat Giants here on Wednesday, RCB is looking for a turnaround against hosts Delhi Capitals on Sunday. "We've played well enough at times through this tournament to win three games of cricket. So, our destiny is in our own hands in this tournament," Williams said on RCB's Gameday Diary. "I really hope that we know, we believe, we trust that our best cricket will be to beat any team in this competition." The 43-year-old Adelaide-born former



player, who has played first-class cricket for South Australia, has urged his side to recover well during the three-day break and give their all in the remaining two league matches to be in contention for a play-off berth. "So, for us, it's about some recovery. We've obviously had a busy schedule, but also had some time to think and plan and look forward to Sunday night where we're going to put our best performance for the season against Delhi," Williams said.

RCB's final league match will be against defending champions Mumbai Indians here on Tuesday. Talking about RCB's 19-run loss against Gujarat Giants on Wednesday, Williams preferred to dwell on the positive aspects that came out of the game. "Tough night. Tough start to our innings, obviously 130 for no loss after 12 overs. I thought it was a really impressive effort at the back end of the innings, from that particular position where often it'd be 220 to 230. To keep Gujarat under 200, I thought was a very good effort," he said, lauding the efforts of his bowlers. "So, some positives to take out from our bowling, but still some stuff to think about and we'll look to improve our execution." Opting to bat, Gujarat posted a big total of 199 for 5 on a decent batting track. At one point of time, Gujarat were cruising at 134 for no loss after 12 overs, but RCB bowlers brilliantly pulled things back, conceding just 65 runs in the last eight overs to restrict their opponents under 200.

## IPL has made all three formats more competitive: Dharmal



PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

The Indian Premier League has not only played an important role in talent identification over the years but has also made all three formats of the game more competitive, league chairman Arun Dharmal said on Friday. Since its maiden season in 2008, the IPL and T20 cricket have grown exponentially. Several players including the likes of Jasprit Bumrah, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rinku Singh have gone on to get the coveted India cap after stellar performances in the lucrative league. "IPL has done a phenomenal job as far as the identification of new boys is concerned. We have seen, every season you will have very talented youngsters coming in like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rinku Singh," Dharmal told PTI Video in an exclusive chat here. "They have then played for India also, so that way IPL has turned out to be a great tournament for the young talent and hopefully this season is going to be no different," he added. "The IPL has become the world's second-richest sports league in terms of per match value, behind USA's National Football League (NFL) and Dharmal feels the league has a had a positive effect on the Test and ODI formats as well. "Definitely IPL in the last 15

years has become the second most important league in the world, it is the second most valuable league. You can imagine how cricket has tremendously shifted post-IPL, we have seen Test matches yielding more results, ODI's becoming more competitive." "Some two decades back 250-300 used to be a good score now you have 400 happening regularly, we all celebrated when Sachin scored his first 200 in an ODI game and after that there has been so much that has come, and thanks to this T20 format and this IPL coming into play," Dharmal added. The upcoming season of the IPL is set to begin on March 22 and the league will be held entirely in the country despite the coinciding general elections. "We have come out with the schedule for about two weeks only as of now and we are waiting for the election commission to come out with the election schedule. "As and when that comes, accordingly we will work out the schedule for the rest of the tournament, hopefully, we will get a good number of games in Dharamshala also." England and India are playing the final Test of the five-match series here. Although it is a dead rubber as the hosts have taken a 3-1 lead in the ongoing series, it is a milestone game for senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and England wicket-keeper batter Jonny Bairstow, who are playing their 100th Test. "The final Test of this series is taking place here and we are lucky that it's going to be a historical Test given it's Ashwin's 100th, Bairstow's 100th and most likely Anderson will get 700 wickets and it's starting on a day when Sunil Gavaskar scored 10,000 runs so it's historic in that sense also," Dharmal observed.



## Matthew to miss first two IPL matches

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Matthew Wade will miss at least the first two matches of the IPL 2024 for Gujarat Titans as the wicketkeeper-batter will be playing in the Sheffield Shield final for Tasmania from March 21 to 25. This edition of the IPL is scheduled to begin from March 22. Last year's finalists Titans will play their first match against Mumbai Indians on March 25 and their second game is against Chennai Super Kings on March 27, and Wade will not be able to figure in them. However, the left-hander could be available for selection for Titans' third IPL match against Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 31. "He's spoken with his IPL franchise and they're happy to allow him to stay here, which probably equates to him potentially missing their first game," Tasmania head coach Jeff Vaughan told reporters in Hobart. "We feel very fortunate to have someone of Matt's ilk coming back into our group, and his experience and his performances at the back end of our season," said Vaughan. Wade was part of GT's title-winning run in IPL 2022 where he played 10 matches, scoring 157 runs at a strike rate of 113. But the 36-year-old did not play a single match in the previous edition as Wriddhiman Saha was preferred for the role of wicketkeeper-batter.

## Kohli longevity is connected to fitness: Du Plessis

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Virat Kohli's unwavering passion for fitness is the secret behind his longevity at top-flight cricket and young cricketers should take a cue from that to build a career of their own, reckoned Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis. Kohli brought in a culture change in the Royal Challengers dressing room during his time as their skipper, making fitness a non-negotiable part of a player's life. "He's amazing, he trains hard, he's very fit. I feel in today's age of sport, you have to be like that if you're looking for longevity. So, he will be a great example," Du Plessis told Star Sports. Du Plessis said talent alone will not help a budding player to construct an extended career at



top-level sport. "The younger generation may feel like they can just come in and rely on their talent. Yes, they are good enough in terms of talent. "But in terms of longevity in your body to make sure you can play for as long as possible, fitness will definitely play a role," he said. The former South African captain, himself a gym

approach to being a professional sportsman. I think that's why we connected so well in my first season at RCB. We were very similar," he said. Under Du Plessis, the Royal Challengers had reached the playoffs in 2022, while they finished sixth in the previous edition. Former India and RCB pacer Varun Aaron, who recently announced his retirement, hoped Kohli would bat in this IPL like he did in 2016, beginning on March 22. Kohli scored 973 runs in that season to top the batting charts. "I hope he gets back to that kind of form (2016) in this IPL. The IPL is a long season and to continue that form is to be superhuman. During that season, the way he was batting, it was surreal to watch it from the side-lines," said Aaron.

# Hazlewood takes 5-31, Australia in control of 2nd Test

AP ■ CHRISTCHURCH (NEW ZEALAND)

Josh Hazlewood took 5-31 as Australia bowled out New Zealand for 162 on the opening day of the second Test on Friday, overshadowing the 100th test appearances of Kane Williamson and Tim Southee. Williamson made 17 in the course of an accelerating collapse of the New Zealand batting order in which Tom Latham's 38 was the highest score. Southee made 26 in a 55-run partnership for the ninth wicket with Matt Henry (29) which was the highest of the innings. By stumps, Australia was 124-4 and the deficit had been reduced to 38. Marnus Labuschagne had played his way out of a slump and was 45 not out at the close and night-watchman Nathan Lyon was unbeaten on one.

Australia had been 32-2 after Ben Sears dismissed Steve Smith (11) with his third ball in test cricket and Usman Khawaja was bowled by Henry. Labuschagne put on 49 with first test century-maker Cameron Green who was out for 25 in the last hour. Henry dismissed Travis Head (21) when Australia was 107-4 and finished the day with 3-39. But, Labuschagne's fighting innings ensured Australia finished the day on top. "What we pride ourselves on is how we go about our work and obviously it wasn't ideal with the bat," Henry said. "But, we knew how we to operate out here with the ball to put Australia under pressure. "But, there's a long way to go and it's going to be a big first session tomorrow." Hazlewood's inexorable line and length, just on off stump and ducking away, was too



much for the New Zealand top order. His 12th five-wicket bag in tests included the wickets of Williamson, Latham, Rachin Ravindra, Daryl Mitchell and Henry, whose wicket was the last to fall in only the 46th over. Mitchell Starc took the wickets of Will Young (14), Glenn Phillips (2) and Scott Kuggeleijn for a first-ball duck. With Phillips' wicket, Starc surpassed Dennis Lillee's career tally of 356 Test wickets, a significant Australian milestone. Australia captain Pat Cummins sent in New Zealand on a greenish pitch after winning the toss Friday. At the end of the first hour, he might have questioned his decision: New Zealand was 35-0 and Latham especially was looking comfortable. Cummins had tried his three frontline seamers and even thrown the ball to spinner Nathan Lyon in the first 12

overs. There didn't seem to be the life he had expected on the pitch at Hagley Oval. But after the first hour, the pitch seemed to offer more and Hazlewood particularly knew how to get the best from it. He bowled on a good length or fuller on that middle and off line and caused the ball to seam away after angling in and forcing the batters to play. It was a formula that accounted for most of the New Zealand top and middle order. Of the first eight New Zealand wickets to fall, seven fell to catches behind the wicket. Wicketkeeper Alex Carey took five catches in the innings, three off Hazlewood. Hazlewood compelled the batter to play with his line through the air and when the batter was committed the trap was sprung. But, batters should have been able to take the risk and leave the good-length ball which, on

a first-day pitch, was inevitably bouncing above stump height. Fuller deliveries couldn't be left and Hazlewood produced a superb fuller delivery to Williamson which angled in and struck him on the back pad after beating the inside edge. Williamson reviewed, but despairingly. He had walked before the replay on the big screen showed the decision would not be overturned. Just over an hour earlier, Williamson had walked to the crease on the fall of Young's wicket with New Zealand 47-0 to a standing ovation from a capacity crowd. He left in relative silence, the realization gradually dawning on New Zealand fans that the Black Caps batters were failing again. New Zealand was bowled out for 179 and 196 on the way to a 172-run loss in the opening Test at the Basin Reserve in Wellington.