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WITH HUNGER WORSENING

**MONEY 10**  
GOVERNMENT REVAMPS  
PHARMA SCHEME

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## Centre implements Citizenship Act CAA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

With the Lok Sabha elections due in next couple of months, the Centre on Monday announced the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, a move that comes four years after the law was passed which paves the way for citizenship to undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The CAA rules came into force in the country with immediate effect as per a Gazette notification.

Home Minister Amit Shah said with CAA implementation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has delivered on another commitment and realised the promise of makers of our Constitution. "CAA rules enable minorities persecuted on religious grounds in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan to acquire citizenship in India," Shah said in a statement.

Now with the notification, the BJP-led Modi Government will start granting Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants — Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and



BJP workers celebrate after the Central Government notified the rules for implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, in Varanasi, on Monday. PTI

Christians — from the three countries. "These rules, called the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024 will enable the persons eligible under CAA-2019 to apply for the grant of Indian citizenship. The applications will be submitted in a completely online mode for which a web portal has been provided," a Home Ministry spokesperson said. Over 100 people lost their lives during the anti-CAA protests or police action and security was beefed up in Shaheen Bagh, Jamia Millia Islamia and other areas of the

national Capital where anti-CAA protests were held in the past. Security has also been stepped up in Assam as the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and 30 indigenous organisations said it will burn copies of the CAA across the State. It also announced a series of protest programmes, while also taking forward its legal battle against the Act. While the ruling BJP party expressed their delight as the Modi Government has made up to its one more commitment after abrogation of Article 370, Ram Temple at

Ayodhya and now the CAA, Opposition parties like Congress and TMC alleged that the timing of notifying the CAA rules evidently designed to polarise the coming Lok Sabha elections, especially in West Bengal and Assam. TMC said it will oppose the Act tooth and nail. The CAA was passed in December 2019 and subsequently got the President's assent but there were protests in several parts of the country against it, with many Opposition parties speaking out against the law calling it "discriminatory".

The law could not come into effect as rules had not been notified till now. According to the Manual on Parliamentary Work, the rules for any legislation should be framed within six months of the presidential assent or the Government has to seek an extension from the Committees on Subordinate Legislation in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Since 2020, the Home Ministry has been taking extensions at regular intervals from the Parliamentary Committee for framing the rules. No document will be sought from the applicants, an official said. On December 27, 2023, Shah said no one can stop the implementation of the CAA as it is the law of the land and accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of misleading people on the issue. Addressing a party meeting in Kolkata, Shah said it is the BJP's commitment to implement the CAA. Implementing the controversial CAA was a major poll plank of the BJP in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in West Bengal. The saffron party's leaders consider it a plausible factor that led to the rise of the BJP in Bengal.

## SBI faces SC ire on electoral bonds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chastising the SBI, the Supreme Court on Monday ordered it to disclose the details of the electoral bonds encashed by political parties to the Election Commission by the close of the business hours on March 12 and warned the country's largest public sector lender that the court may proceed against it for "wilful disobedience" if it failed to comply with its directions and deadlines. A five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, while dismissing the State Bank of India's plea seeking extension of time till June 30 to disclose the details, also directed the EC to publish the information shared by the bank on its official website by 5 pm on March 15. The order was passed by the bench, which also comprised Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, J B Pardiwala, and Manoj Misra. In a landmark verdict delivered on February 15, the same five-judge constitution bench had scrapped the Centre's controversial electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional", and ordered disclosure by the EC of donors, the amount



donated by them and the recipients by March 13. Ordering the closure of the scheme, the top court directed the SBI, the authorised financial institution under the scheme, to submit by March 6 the details of the electoral bonds purchased since April 12, 2019 till date to the Election Commission. Opposition leaders hailed the apex court's order passed on Monday and said the country will soon come to know who donated to which party through electoral bonds. "With the Supreme Court's decision, the country will soon come to know who donated to the BJP through electoral bonds. This is the first step in exposing the corruption, scams and transactions of the Modi Government," Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post in Hindi on 'X'. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav expressed delight over the top court's decision rejecting the SBI's plea seeking extension of time to furnish the details of electoral bonds to the Election Commission. When asked to comment on the apex court's order, Yadav said, "The people of the entire country should be informed about this. Glad that at least the list (list of people associated with electoral bonds) will come through the Supreme Court. From this list it will be known whom the election bonds related to. Now, the question is whether that list will be made public or not." The apex court passed the order while hearing the SBI's application for extension of time till June 30 to furnish the details.

Continued on Page 2

## Court orders scientific survey of Bhojshala monument in MP

PTI ■ INDORE

The Madhya Pradesh High Court here on Monday directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to carry out a scientific survey of the medieval-era Bhojshala complex in Dhar district. Hindus consider Bhojshala, an ASI-protected 11th century monument, to be a temple dedicated to Vagdevi (Goddess Saraswati), while the Muslim community calls it Kamal Maula Mosque. "This court has drawn only one conclusion that Constitutional as well as statutory obligations of the ASI to have a scientific survey, study convened at the earliest of Bhojshala Temple and Kamal Maula Mosque," observed a division bench of the HC at Indore comprising Justices SA Dharmadhikari and Devnarayan Mishra. The HC direction came while hearing a plea of an outfit called Hindu Front For Justice. The bench posted the matter for next hearing on April 29.

## Dwarka Expressway to ease Delhi, Gurugram travel time

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI/GURUGRAM

The much awaited 19 km-long Haryana section of the Dwarka Expressway that will cut travel time between Delhi and adjoining business hubs in Gurugram was thrown open for the public by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. The total length of Dwarka Expressway is 29 km, out of which 18.9 km falls in Haryana, while the remaining 10.1 km is in Delhi. On March 9, 2019, the then Union Ministers, Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitley and Nitin Gadkari had laid the foundation stone for Dwarka Expressway. The PM simultaneously also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of ₹one lakh crore-worth National Highway projects across the country and said the implementation speed of infrastructure projects will be accelerated manifold in the next five years to make India the world's third largest economy. Detailing the pace of his Government's approach to infrastructure projects, the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways Nitin Gadkari and Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, inspects the four Level-Interchange of the Haryana Section of the Dwarka Expressway during its inauguration, on Monday. PTI

Prime Minister said he has laid the foundation stone or inaugurated projects worth ₹10 lakh crore in less than three months of the current calendar year. He inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for 114 National Highway (NH) projects. The PM said the Dwarka Expressway will

change the travel experience between Delhi and Haryana forever and "will shift gears not just in the vehicles but also in the lives of the people of the region". Modi opened the Haryana section of the Dwarka Expressway which has been built at a cost of ₹4,100 crore.

Continued on Page 2

## Leopards battling human threats in India

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

From the dangers posed by selfie-seeking citizens in Telangana to the heartbreaking instances of being beaten in human-animal conflict in the national capital, rapid urbanisation, and the ruthless poachers across the States, leopards in India seem to be on the run for their life. Road accidents are also becoming a significant cause of leopard fatalities in the country. India has lost 137 leopards in just two months and ten days this year alone. Among these casualties, a staggering 32 majestic cats fall victim to the poachers, according to data available from the website of the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI). This is quite high, given that

in calendar year 2023, a total 565 leopards had succumbed to various causes with 155 trapped by poachers to earn quick bucks in the international market. The disturbing data comes amid a report released by the Union Environment Ministry that has suggested the leopard population has witnessed a marginal increase to estimated 13,874 leopards, up from 12,852 in 2018, even as human-leopard conflicts remain a major worry. "The data shows that the leopard population hasn't grown the same way the tiger population has grown. It is a marginal increase," Wildlife Institute of India's (WII) former dean YV Jhala told a media house. However, he said since



leopards remain enticing targets for poachers, "it is a matter of satisfaction to manage the status quo". In Telangana majestic leopards faced a grim fate, marked by tragedy and sorrow when an ill-fated animal was captured in videos by locals from Kansanpalli of

Damaragidda mandal. In these recordings, the young leopard appeared visibly unwell, yet this did not deter the locals from pursuing it in a misguided attempt to capture selfies with the wild creature. In fact, at the heart of the issue lies the relentless encroachment of human civilisation into leopard territory. As forests are cleared for agriculture, industry, and urban expansion, the natural habitats that sustain leopard populations are shrinking at an alarming rate. Wildlife experts said increasing territorial fight among tiger and leopard in many tiger reserves also threatens their existence.

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# My third term will write new chapter on rise of women power: Modi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday cited a host of women-centric schemes of his Government to assert that only a society which boosts women's standing and creates opportunities for them can advance. He made these observations here while participating in the 'Sashakt Nari-Viksit Bharat' programme and witnessed agricultural drone demonstrations conducted by Namo Drone Didis at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa. The Namo Drone Didi and Lakhpati Didi initiatives are integral to the Prime Minister's vision of fostering economic empowerment and financial autonomy among women,

especially in rural areas. His third term will write a new chapter in the rise of women power, Modi said exuding confidence of retaining power in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. In a swipe at previous governments, he said women's lives and hardships were not a priority for them while the BJP dispensation has come out with different initiatives to help them at every stage of life. Modi said he is the first prime minister who spoke of a host of issues related to women, including lack of toilets, use of sanitary pads, adverse effects of smoke-causing kitchen fuels like wood and coal, and the need for bank accounts from the ramparts of the Red Fort, a reference to his Independence Day speeches. He said political parties like the



Congress made fun of him and insulted him for this. He asserted that what he saw at his home, in his neighbourhood and villages during his travels

shaped his sensibilities and schemes for women. Over Rs 8 lakh crore has been disbursed among women under various government

schemes, Modi said. Over 1 crore women have become 'Lakhpati Didis' so far, he said. The prime minister said that his experience has been that a

little help to women can make them a help to others. Those politicians who are only concerned about their families can never understand this, he said. At the 'Sashakt Nari-Viksit Bharat' programme, Modi disbursed around Rs 8,000 crore as bank loans to self-help groups (SHGs). He interacted with women beneficiaries from different parts of the country, enquired about various aspects of their work and lauded their hard work and determination. Modi also felicitated 'Lakhpati Didis', who have achieved success with the support of the 'Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission' and are supporting the upliftment of other self-help group members. During the event, he handed

over drones to 1,000 'Namo Drone Didis', women chosen to operate drones for agriculture and related purposes. He also disbursed about Rs 2,000 crore Capitalisation Support Fund to SHGs. The 'Namo Drone Didi' and 'Lakhpati Didi' initiatives are integral to the prime minister's vision of fostering economic empowerment and financial autonomy among women, especially in rural areas, the Prime Minister's Office had said earlier in a statement. Union Rural Development Minister Giriraj Singh said the Narendra Modi government's focus is on empowering women in different ways and the over 10 crore women associated with self-help groups are the face of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. At the 'Sashakt Nari-Viksit

Bharat' programme, Singh said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, work was being done for the economic independence of women at such a large scale for the first time. "There are 20 crore rural households in the country. We have reached out to 10 crore women who are now linked with self-help groups... Ten crore women have been empowered," he said, adding, "Aatmanirbhar Mahila (self-reliant women) will be the real face of Aatmanirbhar Bharat." Singh also mentioned schemes such as Ujjwala, Swachh Bharat, PM Poshan, Jal Jeevan, Mudra Yojana, Ayushman Bharat, and PM Awas Yojana, among others to highlight the works done by the BJP dispensation for the welfare of the people.

## Ensure intimidation free polls: EC to observers

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Election Commission on Monday asked its observers to ensure polls free of coercion and intimidation and pushed for judicious use of central and state forces keeping in mind that their deployment should not favour any particular party. Addressing a meeting of more than 2,100 general, police and expenditure observers here ahead of the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections and some state assembly polls, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar directed them to ensure a level-playing field for free and fair elections. The polls should be free of intimidation and inducement, he said. The CEC reminded them that as observers, they represent the commission, and are expected to conduct themselves professionally and be accessible to all stakeholders, including candidates. The observers were instructed to be tough but polite in their conduct on the field, the Election Commission (EC) said in a statement. The observers were also asked to be confined physically with-



in the boundaries of a parliamentary constituency they are allotted during the entire electoral process. GPS tracking has been proposed to be fitted in their vehicles, it said. They were also told to always remain available on their phones and e-mails, and respond to the calls of candidates, parties, voters and polling personnel. "Any complaints in this regard shall be viewed seriously by the commission," it said. The observers need to come out of their comfort zones during the entire election process, the statement said. During the day-long briefing sessions, the officers were given comprehensive and thorough inputs about the various aspects of election management by the

senior deputy election commissioner, deputy election commissioners and others. Observers are tasked with ensuring a free and fair electoral process. They are deployed in poll-bound areas ahead of announcement of elections and work as the eyes and ears of the poll authority in states. More than 2,150 senior officers drawn from the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service as well as officers from the Indian Revenue Service and few other central services attended the briefing meeting which was organised in a hybrid mode. Around 900 general observers, 450 police observers and 800 expenditure observers are being deployed for the forthcoming elections.

## Congress slams BJP over its MP remark

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Congress on Monday slammed the BJP over its MP Anantkumar Hegde's remarks about amending the Constitution, alleging that the Constitution is inconvenient for the BJP's "autocratic plans" and that it is aiming for 400-plus seats to "officially convert India into a dictatorship". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge attacked the BJP over about amending the Constitution, alleging that the ruling party is against social justice and secularism enshrined in the Constitution. BJP though has dubbed Hegde's remarks "personal opinion" and sought a clarification from him. The Karnataka unit of the BJP said, "MP Anantkumar Hegde's remarks on the Constitution are his personal views and do not reflect the party's stance. BJP reaffirms our unwavering commitment to uphold the nation's Constitution and will ask for an explanation from Hegde regarding his comments." Addressing a Press conference at the party headquarters,



Kharge said the BJP aims to get a massive mandate only for amending the Constitution. He claimed that on one hand Prime Minister Narendra Modi states that the Constitution will not be changed and on the other hand, he makes his people say that they need two-thirds majority to amend it. This statement has been made not by any fringe element but a BJP MP, Kharge said. "They (BJP) are against social justice and secularism enshrined in the Constitution. This is not a good mindset, this will create upheaval in country if you want to change the Constitution," Kharge said, hitting out at the BJP. That is why PM Modi says 400-plus seats for the NDA as they want to amend the Constitution, Kharge claimed. Congress general secretary,

organisation, K C Venugopal also alleged that the BJP has a "forked tongue" with which it conveys two messages -- one for public decorum and the other its "Mann Ki Baat". Former Home Minister P Chidambaram claimed that if the Constitution is amended according to the BJP-RSS agenda, it will be the end of parliamentary democracy, federalism, rights of the minorities, and English being one of the two official languages. "The BJP's intention to amend the Constitution was never a secret. Dozens of BJP leaders in private conversations have said that India must be a Hindu Rashtra, that Hindi must be the sole official language of India and the central government must be strong and prevail over the state governments," Chidambaram said.

## SC to examine HC ruling that downloading, watching child porn not offence under POCSO IT laws

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Terming as "atrocious", the Supreme Court on Monday agreed to hear a plea challenging a Madras High Court ruling which said that mere downloading and watching child pornography is not an offence under the POCSO Act and the Information Technology law. The high court had, on January 11, quashed the criminal proceedings against a 28-year-old man charged with downloading on his mobile phone pornographic content involving children. The present-day children are grappling with the serious issue of watching porn and instead of punishing them, the society must be "mature enough" to educate them, it had also said. A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior advocate H S Phoolka, appearing for two petitioner organisations, that the high court judgement was contrary to the laws. "This (the high court judgement) is atrocious. How can

the single judge say this? Issue notice returnable in three weeks," the CJI said. A senior lawyer appeared for two petitioner organisations - 'Just Rights for Children Alliance' of Faridabad and New Delhi-based 'Bachpan Bachao Andolan'. The NGOs work for the welfare of children. The top court also sought the response of S Harish, a resident of Chennai and the two police officers concerned of Tamil Nadu. The high court had quashed the criminal case against Harish under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and the Information Technology Act, 2000. "In order to constitute an offence under Section 67-B of Information Technology Act, 2000, the accused person must have published, transmitted, created material depicting children in a sexually explicit act or conduct. A careful reading of this provision does not make watching child pornography, per se, an offence under Section 67-B of Information Technology Act, 2000," the high court had said.

## Opposition takes swipe at Centre after SC ruling on electoral bonds

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
Opposition parties on Monday came down heavily on the BJP-led Centre after the Supreme Court directive on Electoral Bonds with the Congress taking a swipe at the government which came to power on the promise of bringing black money back from Swiss banks in 100 days did whatever it could to hide the data of its own bank from the apex Court. Congress hailed the dismissal of SBI's plea in the electoral bonds issue, while the Left parties too welcomed the Court's decision and said it was a major step towards ensuring transparency in electoral funding. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav expressed delight over the Supreme Court's decision rejecting the SBI's plea seeking extension of time to furnish the details of electoral bonds to the Election Commission. Congress also said that the apex court has once again come to protect democracy from the "devious machinations" of the current regime and that its decision is a victory for ensuring a level-playing field. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that after the SBI asked for four-and-a-half months to publish the electoral bond details, it became clear that the Modi government was making every possible effort to cover up its dark deeds. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi too attacked the government over the electoral bonds issue, saying, "Narendra Modi's donation 'Narendra is about to be exposed!' The government which came to power by promising to bring back black money from Swiss banks in 100 days 'apne hi bank ka data chhipane ke liye Supreme Court mein sir ke bal khadi ho



gayi", Rahul said in a swipe at the Modi government. "Electoral Bonds will prove to be the biggest scam in Indian history and will reveal the real face of Narendra Modi in front of the country by exposing the nexus between corrupt industrialists and the government," he said in a post in Hindi on 'X'. "The chronology is clear -- donate-take business; donate-take protection," Gandhi added. He alleged that the Modi government showered blessings on those who donated and imposed tax burdens on the general public. Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said the top court's order "is a tight slap" on the SBI for defying its earlier judgment. "This was a self-inflicted stain. The order of the Supreme Court today gives an opportunity to SBI to wipe the stain and redeem itself. I am sorry for the Chairman of SBI and the fine band of officers that they placed themselves in this situation," Chidambaram said in a post on 'X'. Speaking to reporters after the Supreme Court ordered SBI to disclose the details of electoral bonds to the Election Commission by the close of business hours on March 12, CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury said it is an important step towards stopping the "legalisation of corruption". "This SC judgment is a big step forward in ensuring transparency in political funding and particularly electoral funding. That transparency should have never been violated in the first place," he said.

## New blood test could identify sleep deprived drivers

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
In a significant step towards accurately detecting sleep-deprived drivers, scientists from Monash University in Australia and the University of Birmingham in the UK have developed a new blood test that could potentially prevent road accidents in the future. The study, published in the journal Science Advances, shows that the biomarker used in the test accurately predicted when the study volunteers had been awake for over 24 hours under controlled laboratory conditions. Future work could examine whether these biomarkers are evident in saliva or breath and lead to a roadside test.

The test detected whether individuals had been awake for 24 hours with a 99.2 per cent probability of being correct when compared to well-rested samples, the researchers said. When a single sample was considered without the well-rested comparison (similar to a diagnostic blood test), it dropped to 89.1 per cent, which was still very high, they said. With about 20 per cent of road accidents worldwide caused by sleep deprivation, researchers hope the discovery may inform future tests to quickly and simply identify sleep-deprived drivers. The biomarker could also be developed for other situations where sleep deprivation may lead to catastrophic consequences, such as in safety-critical workplaces.



"This is a really exciting discovery for sleep scientists, and could be transformative to the future management of health and safety relating to insufficient sleep," said study senior author Clare Anderson who led the research while she was with Monash University.

"While more work is required, this is a promising first step," said Anderson, Professor at the University of Birmingham. The researchers noted that there is strong evidence that less than five hours of sleep is associated with unsafe driving. However, driving after being awake for 24 hours is at least

comparable to more than double the Australian legal limit of alcohol performance-wise, they said. The test may be also ideal for future forensic use but further validation is required. Study first author Katy Jeppe, from Monash University, said it was difficult to say how soon the test could be developed for post-accident use. "Next steps would be to test it in a less controlled environment and maybe under forensic conditions, particularly if it was to be used as evidence for crashes involving drivers falling asleep," Jeppe said. "Given it is blood, the test is more limited in a roadside context, but future work could examine whether our metabolites, and therefore the bio-

marker, are evident in saliva or breath," the researcher said. This sleep deprivation biomarker is based on 24 hours or more awake but can detect down to 18 hours awake. A biomarker for limited sleep over the previous night could be developed but more research is required to combine the time since sleep with the amount of sleep in the predictions. "Much further work would be needed if laws were to change and a sleep deprivation test introduced on the road or in workplaces," Jeppe said. "This would include further validation of biomarkers, as well as establishing safe levels of sleep to prevent and recover from impairment, not to mention the extensive legal process," he added.

## Survey planned to find out women participation in renewable energy sector

**ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
As India aims to transition towards a greener economy, pledging to enhance non-fossil energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030, the Government is working on a plan to green skill women in a big way to help it achieve its goal for which it has embarked upon a nationwide survey focused on assessing female's participation in the renewable energy sector. This survey aims to gather data on women's involvement in various aspects of renewable energy, including employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership roles, since they are the one who are majorly impacted due to such moves necessitated by the growing climate change threats, as per the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE). Union New and Renewable Energy Secretary, Bhupinder Singh Bhalla added, "There is requirement of gender-specific employment data at various

levels in the sector and the ongoing primary survey is being led by the Ministry, in association with Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), on job opportunities and representation of women in the renewable energy workforce." According to 'India's Expanding Clean Energy Workforce' report by NRDC and CEEW, and Skill Council for Green Jobs (SCGG), India's renewable energy sector could potentially employ around one million people by 2030, which would be ten times more than the existing workforce of an estimated 1.1 lakh (110,000) employed by the sector. It highlighted that most of the new jobs would be generated by small-scale renewable energy projects such as rooftop solar and mini and micro-grid systems compared to utility or large-scale projects like solar parks. The Union Secretary also emphasized the requirement for skilled workforce at

various levels for effective implementation of the programmes and schemes of the Government and in achieving the targeted capacities and opportunities available, for women to assume a larger role in the renewable energy sector. Speaking at an event 'Women in Renewable Energy: Inspiring Gender Inclusion through Skill Development and Targeted Policies for Green Jobs' held recently in the national capital, he said that a large number of people have started registering on the national portal to participate in the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana scheme recently announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Through a video message, Union Minister for Power and Renewable Energy RK Singh reiterated the Government's commitment to designing women-centric policies and initiatives for enhancing women's livelihoods, improving health, and building community resilience.

## India carries out first flight test of Agni 5 under Mission Divyastra

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
India on Monday successfully conducted the first flight test of the indigenously designed Agni-5 missile capable of deploying multiple warheads. The nuclear-capable missile named 'Divyastra' can hit targets at range of more than 5,000 kms including China. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) scientists for the feat. "Proud of our DRDO scientists for Mission Divyastra, the first flight test of indigenously developed Agni-5 missile with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology," Modi said on 'X'. The mission was headed by a woman scientist. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also congratulated DRDO scientists on the successful test of Mission Divyastra. With the latest achievement



ensuring that a single intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) can deploy multiple warheads at different locations, India has joined the select group of nations having MIRV capability. The other nations include US, Russia and China. The weapon system is equipped with indigenous avionics systems and high-accuracy sensor packages which ensured that the re-entry vehicles reached the target points within the desired accuracy. The capability is an enunciator of India's growing technological prowess. The Agni-5, with a range of 5000 km, is developed considering the long-term security needs of the

country. The missile can bring almost the entire Asia including the northernmost part of China as well as some regions in Europe under its striking range. The Agni 1 to 4 missiles have ranges from 700 km to 3,500 km and have already been deployed. India in 2022 had conducted a successful night time flight test of surface to surface Agni-5. The nuclear capable missile which uses a three-stage solid fuelled engine, has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and operated by the Strategic Forces Command (SFC). It is a key tri-services formation that manages and administers all the strategic assets and falls under purview of the Nuclear Command Authority of India. The test was carried out primarily to validate various new technologies onboard the missile which can strike targets at ranges of around 5,000 to 5,500 kilometers with a very high degree of accuracy.





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## Foreign wand

### One million new jobs likely as European Free Trade Association signs 'watershed' pact with India

Bringing to life the 'Better late than never' adage, India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) have sealed a groundbreaking agreement after 16 long years of negotiation. The \$100bn treaty with the four-member European bloc --- comprising Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland --- marks a significant milestone in bilateral trade relations. As part of the deal, India will lift most import tariffs on industrial products from these countries in return for investment over 15 years. The agreement, termed 'watershed' by analysts and Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, includes trade in goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights. It aims to dismantle trade barriers, streamline regulatory frameworks and foster a more conducive environment for commerce between India and the EFTA member States. The culmination of this prolonged negotiation process has far-reaching implications, particularly in terms of job creation in India. With an estimated one million jobs likely to be created across sectors, the agreement holds immense promise for the Indian workforce, especially at a time when the global economy is facing a variety of challenges. The job creation potential stems from several factors embedded in the pact. The agreement provides Indian businesses with enhanced access to the markets of EFTA countries, facilitating increased exports of goods and services. This expanded market reach is expected to spur demand for Indian products, consequently leading to the creation of employment opportunities. By fostering a conducive environment for investments, the deal would attract greater foreign direct investment (FDI) into India. The increased investment inflows have the potential to catalyse economic growth, stimulate industrial development.

One of the biggest advantages for India would be in technology transfer: Collaboration with EFTA member States could facilitate the transfer of advanced technologies and best practices to India. This transfer of knowledge and expertise has the potential of enhancing the skill sets of the Indian workforce, opening up employment avenues in high-value sectors. As SMEs constitute a significant portion of India's economy, the expansion of their business operations would invariably lead to job creation at the grassroots. The provisions related to agricultural trade and market access could provide the much-needed stimulus to rural economy with emphasis on farming, agri-business and related industries. However, the successful implementation of the pact hinges on effective policy coordination, institutional capacity building and stakeholder engagement. Addressing logistical challenges, ensuring compliance with regulatory standards and promoting inclusive growth will be imperative to fully harness the benefits. Moreover, it is essential to monitor the socio-economic impacts of the agreement to ensure that the benefits are distributed equitably. Efforts should be made to mitigate any adverse effects on vulnerable groups and to promote sustainable and inclusive development.

## PICTALK



Women play with colours ahead of the festival of Holi, in Nadia

# Educational traditions for future preparedness



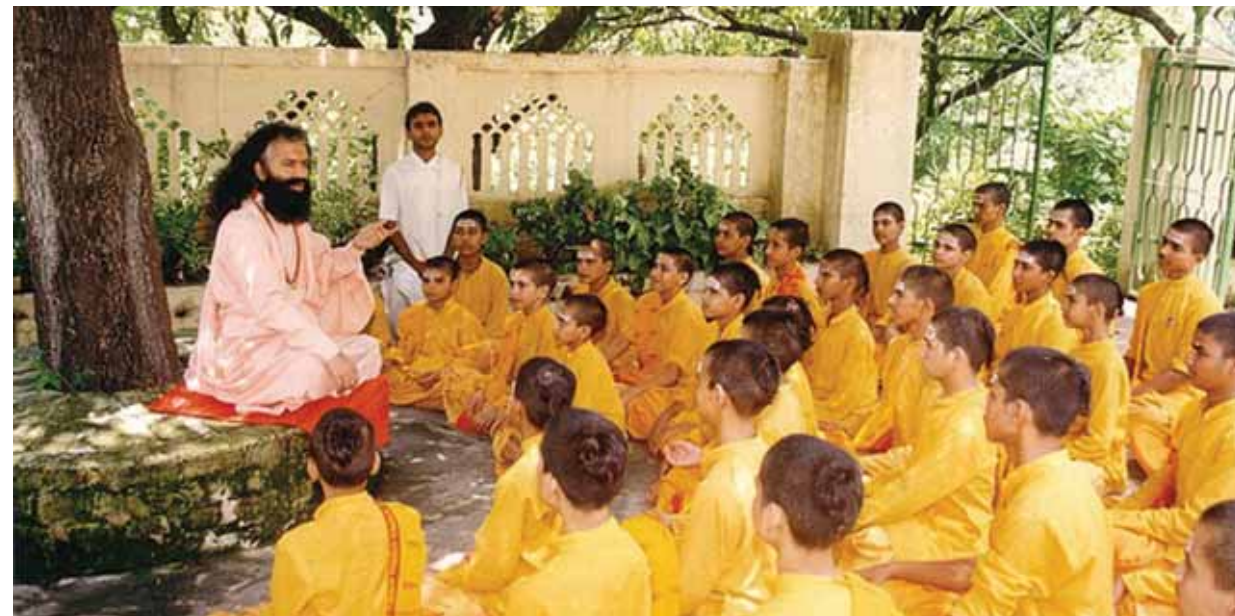
VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

### Traditional systems, like the Gurukul method, stand juxtaposed against modern approaches, typified by the English education system

Everyone tries to prepare for the future. Most futures are difficult to foresee and preparing for them can only be based on some assumptions. The veracity of such assumptions is always open to doubt. Hence, preparing for the future, by definition, becomes one of the most conjectural efforts, several of whose assumptions need to be first checked out.

Yet, this cannot become an argument for not preparing for the future. It requires, therefore, foreseeing the future as a factor of continuing the present state of affairs in their logical linear sequence. It is another matter that the linearity of any process, be it technological, or even contextual, may be in doubt. Yet, this approach stands in its own right. Thus, it is that school curriculum is preparation for the future because it teaches you the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, all of which will, in some manner, help you cope with the future. As one grows, maybe through the curriculum system of schools, college or university, there are assumptions and there are logical flows. The logic of these sequential learning processes can be open to serious questions, and sometimes it becomes counter-productive by being out of sync with the requirements of the times.

That is a risk one has to take. Preparing for the future, therefore, can have its own hazards. Within the framework of the hazards, some assumptions could hold some truth. One of the assumptions is the need and the ability for strategic thinking. One also needs the skills to cope with an evolving environment and meet the requirement to achieve what one may set as one's goals be they financial or professional. One thing which cuts across all variations is the need to be a constantly evolving and growing person. Data and information are one of the coping stones of this learning process. Hence, it follows that one of the basic skills a person requires is identification of what constitutes information. This may require some rethinking on the elements and the



parameters of formal education at the school level. One is fortunate if one is mentored properly during this phase, and this is where the Gurukul system, which India practiced till not so long ago, had at its core the mentorship of a wise, knowledgeable, and learned person who could impart only information but insights. The difference between what is now popularly termed as "English education" and the Gurukul system has become so wide that it is difficult to find distinguished learning institutions in sufficient numbers of the Gurukul tradition.

In an era of job markets and benchmarking of skills, the certification process which the so-called English education system follows comes in very handy. Hence, its relevance remains in the job market, and many jobs are open only to certain qualifications such as secondary certificate, bachelor certificates or the master certificate of the so-called university system. The parallel Indian system also has certain benchmarks such as a person could be a Kavya Teerth. This means that the person with the title of Kavya Teerth had proficiency in poetry and poetics. This would entitle him to be ranked as a person who has achieved excellence of a proficiency

equivalent to a Teerth. The concern is that the job market does not often advertise for a person with the proficiency of a Teerth qualification in poetry and poetics.

Thus, the issue arises of calibrating the job qualifications requirements to a degree or the proficiency certificates being awarded by educational institutions. Unless this issue is addressed with a single-minded devotion of finding solutions, the present contradictions between the English system of education and the Gurukul system of education will continue to be loaded in favour of the University or the English system of education. By all estimates, the Gurukul system of education was never loaded in favour of numbers, and as such, institutionalization of the Gurukul system seldom, if ever took place on the scale at which the English or the university system operated.

Further, the Gurukul system of education seldom had the kind of timetable which the English or the university system thrives on. Be it at the school level or the higher education level, in the English/University system of education a six-day week always had variations of subjects and inputs.

As compared to this, a Gurukul system of education may expect six months of intensive training, learning, and more in one subject, say geography, mathematics or whatever. It is easy to talk of "Indianness" and easier to sloganise it. The need, however, is to develop intensive educational insights which enable a person to understand which philosophy of education and which method of learning produces better preparation for the future.

To sum it all up, preparing for the future, in part, involves knowing methods of creating competencies for the unknown. It also requires creating some applicable assumptions. Whether the English or the university system of education can do it better, or can the Gurukul system do better, is a consideration which requires a lot more thinking and analysis than what it has merited so far. Mercifully, the National Education Policy has already planted the seeds by talking of "Indian educational system". The seed has to sprout, be nurtured and allowed to grow before the fruits start coming in.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)



DEVELOP INTENSIVE EDUCATIONAL INSIGHTS WHICH ENABLE A PERSON TO UNDERSTAND WHICH PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND WHICH METHOD OF LEARNING PRODUCES BETTER PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### HUMAN LIFE MATTERS

Sir — This refers to Hiranmay Karlekar's article, "Giving stray dogs a bad name" (March 9, 2024). India has around 20,000 rabies deaths a year which according to the World Health Organisation, "accounts for 36 percent of the world's deaths." Most of the victims of rabies in India are under the age of 15 years. This fatal disease has been eliminated from many countries. It is a challenging job in a country like India where dogs are allowed to roam freely. Rabies can be eliminated by vaccinating all dogs for a number of years and by sterilising the stray dog population. Bhutan has successfully sterilised and vaccinated its entire stray dog population after pursuing a 14-year-long programme. Bhutan sets an example which India needs to follow. Most of the victims of dog bites and rabies belong to the poor working class of our society as they have to work in the open to build our roads, bridges and houses for all of us and to serve everything at our doors starting from morning newspapers to food packets. It is really perplexing that their deaths evoke little public sympathy and a lukewarm response from the authorities. I love dogs as much as I hate insensitive attitudes towards poor workers. All stray dogs must immediately be sterilised and kept in an enclosed area to minimise colossal loss of human lives.

Sujit De | Kolkata

### RISING SUICIDE CASES

Sir — Between 2018 and 2022, 64 MBBS students reportedly took their own lives and 58 postgraduate students followed suit, ostensibly due to severe anxiety and depression. Also, 1270 students discontinued their studies midway. These are unwanted numbers not only for the students, who have high hopes of becoming doctors but also for the government and the society that faces an acute paucity of qualified doctors. A methodical study to pinpoint reasons for the burnout of medical students is the need of the hour. The National Medical Commission (NMC) has put in place a 15-member task force to

### Election Commissioner resigns



The resignation of Election Commissioner Arun Goel from the Election Commission of India has become sensational news due to its timing and causes a lot of doubts in the minds of many on the possibility of holding a fair and free election. The news is sensational because elections are to be announced very

soon. In this critical hour, the resignation of Election Commissioner would indeed be a setback for the Election Commission. The reason for tendering resignation in such a hurry needs to be explained as speculations are doing rounds in the media.

Two prominent reasons placed by the debates are either serious differences within the official circle or to contest elections. Differences in the official circle need not be kept a secret, at least, after tendering resignation. Now the doubt about the free and fair poll is because the vacancies will be filled by the selection committee, which has two from the ruling party and one from the opposition. It is easy to conclude that the selected candidates will enjoy the support of the ruling dispensation and are bound to serve their cause. The erosion of democracy begins from here.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

address the issue. It has rightly asked the task force to study existing literature and data on mental health and suicide incidents among medical students.

Evidence-based strategies to boost the mental health of medical students cannot be overstated. At present, both the UG and the PG students are overburdened with syllabus and work. The result of all this is a high prevalence of anxiety, depression, fear of failure and suicidal thoughts. The mental health plan layout of the task force asked to report by May 31, may or may not bring about a radical shift in the thoughts and actions of the medical students. However, it is heartening that a start has been made by the NMC.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

### BAN HOT FOOD IN PLASTIC BAGS

Sir — Despite the ban on plastic bags and compostable plastic bags for carrying or dispensing commodities across the country, they are still extensively used, especially for packaging food in hotels. Items like tea, coffee, milk, sambar, rasam, and hot curry are commonly packed in plastic bags

in hotels. Many doctors cite a worry that there is an increase in the number of people suffering from kidney and throat ailments, cancer, and infertility in the city due to the consumption of hot food items carried in low-quality plastic bags or boxes. When hot food or liquid is packed in a plastic bag, toxic chemicals like styrene and bisphenol can leach into the food, potentially leading to cancer, heart disease and other reproductive problems.

Therefore, the Department of Food Safety must enforce a ban on packing hot edible items, including beverages, in plastic bags and harmful containers, particularly in cities. Hoteliers and owners of tea and coffee shops should be instructed not to use plastic bags or containers for packing hot edible items. Additionally, traders should prominently display announcements in their business establishments, urging customers to bring their vessels for purchasing any hot edible items.

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

# Conservation techniques for sustainable farming

### In the face of challenges posed by soil erosion, water scarcity and ecological imbalance, farmers worldwide are turning to Conservation Agriculture

To fulfil the demands of the expanding global population, farmers must overcome obstacles such as soil erosion and water loss from conventional agricultural production. Conservation Agriculture (CA) makes effective use of natural resources to provide a sustainable solution. CA techniques raise revenue, boost resource efficiency, and enhance soil fertility. A traditional farming method called tillage involves adjusting the soil by ploughing, harrowing, and ploughing to attain the ideal tilth and friability.

Despite its advantages, tillage faces problems such as declining soil fertility, ecological imbalance, loss of sustainability, and water scarcity. Among its disadvantages are the depletion of soil organic matter brought on by exposure to air and sunlight, the breakdown of soil aggregates more frequently, soil erosion, increased production costs as a result of fuel consumption and wear and tear on machinery, and greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, which contribute to global warming. Sustainable farming strategies, which pre-



serve resources without endangering the environment, have been introduced in response to the negative effects of conventional agricultural production.

CA eschews ploughing and other soil disturbance practices in favour of little soil mechanical interference. With the use of sophisticated zero-tillage seeders known as zero-ferti-cum-seed drills, crop seeds are directly dispersed into undisturbed soil. Herbicide application and weed-slashing/rolling are part of land planning. Organic agricultural leftovers are more likely to be deposited on untilled fields, where they form mulch that protects the soil from wind and rain, evens out soil temperature, and encourages the growth of microorganisms. This strategy distributes the best use of goods and services with less expensive production, lowering the usage of fossil fuels

and greenhouse gas emissions.

The main goals of conservation agriculture are to maintain a permanent organic soil cover to shield against the damaging effects of sunlight and rain, to supply nutrients for the quick growth of soil micro- and macroorganisms, and to modify the soil's microclimate for ideal development.

However, since burning or removing leftovers can hurt the fertility and health of the soil, residue management poses a threat to crop output in India. In CA, crops are rotated sensibly to give soil fauna and microflora a varied diet and to take advantage of soil strata for the cycling of nutrients and water. More diversified crop rotations encourage stable root channels and macropores, optimal water infiltration and a decrease in insect incidences. Crop rotation, organic residue integration, and tillage technique modifications can significantly impact soil fertility by increasing soil aggregate and nutrient availability.

Organic crop residue management raises soil microbial biomass and nitrogen levels

compared to no-till systems. CA is a sustainable crop-production technique that reduces soil erosion, water and land degradation, and dependency on foreign inputs. By using less petroleum, CA enhances ecosystem quality and soil and water quality, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and helps reduce global warming and air pollution. It also reduces labour, time and production expenses for farmers.

To encourage CA adoption, farmers, researchers, and technicians must change their perspectives on sustainable production strategies, such as minimal or no tillage combined with proper residue management. Socioeconomic barriers to CA adoption include inadequate residue management and sowing device selection. Farmers often burn leftover crop residue during crop rotation, contributing to environmental degradation and loss of sustainability.

(The author is an assistant professor at Agronomy College of Agriculture and Environmental Technology Surajmal University; views are personal)



HIMANSHU VERMA



## FIRST COLUMN

## COMBATING THE RISE OF CYBERBULLYING

Facilitated by digital platforms, it is becoming increasingly pervasive



SHAINY SHARMA

The internet today has created an entirely new world of social communications, particularly for youth. No one can deny that technology has come a long way to make the lives of humans easier but at the same time, the negative aspect of it cannot be ignored. Over the years, the advancement in technology has caused a severe rise in health issues among individuals and above all has cut off people from society at large rather than connecting them. Gen Z, who are often sleep-deprived nowadays are affected due to online bullying i.e. cyberbullying. This type of bullying is rising drastically as more and more users are victimised by this.

There are numerous ways to define cyberbullying. But most importantly, it is the use of digital technology to intentionally hurt, harass, or intimidate others online. It is often regarded as one of the serious offences that can harm the online reputation of everyone involved. Cyberbullying comes in various forms and doesn't necessarily mean hacking someone's profile or posing to be someone else but it could be flaming, trolling, harassment, denigration, and many more. Once something is over the internet it is out forever and can lead to depression, anxiety, and sometimes fear of using the technology. It can affect young minds in a very negative way so it can go up to the threat of death. The victim's ability to focus and achieve their personal goals also decreases.

To promote better mental health among the youth, it becomes important to raise awareness about issues arising from the cyber world. Today, cyberbullying prevention is the utmost need of the hour. It needs to be monitored constantly and put an end to. Adopting various ways



such as no sharing of personal information (home address, phone numbers, and bank details) online, avoiding posting photographs of self and others, and discussing personal matters over social media. Avoiding sharing the internet password and account details with anyone and not clicking mysterious links or SPAM are a few measures one can adopt to prevent being the victim of cyberbullying. At the same time, parents too need to educate their children about this type of bully. Gone are the days when children and teenagers were troubled by school bullies. Today, they are targeted via the internet which proves to be more dangerous than traditional forms of bullying.

Parents should install parental control applications to keep monitoring their child's online activities and at the same time, they must also establish communications with their child so that they open up to them when faced with such bullying. Most importantly, parents too need to familiarise themselves with various online facilities such as social networking, chatting, and many more.

In the times of artificial intelligence, one needs to be extra cautious to protect oneself from any cyber-attack. The effect of getting bullied through this mode is highly detrimental and may lead to fatal consequences.

There is no denying the fact that technology has brought ease to learn and earn for everyone but at the same time learning to use it properly and wisely is far more important.

Remember, try not to be the victim of the same. Treating everyone you meet online with respect is the only way to prevent yourself from being the victim of cyberbullying. It is not a form of fun or entertainment, but a serious issue that can cause lasting emotional and psychological harm.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

## Empowering MSMEs through timely payments



MANOJ KUMAR ANAND

Recognising the need to strengthen the MSME sector, the Govt has introduced innovative measures aimed at enhancing their financial resilience



Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) constitute a vital sector of the Indian economy, actively engaged in both the service and manufacturing industries. Their significance lies in their substantial contribution to India's GDP, and the Government aims to elevate this contribution to 50 per cent in the foreseeable future. Consequently, MSMEs are rightfully considered the backbone of the nation's economy, playing a pivotal role in its growth trajectory by employing millions of unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

In terms of economic output, MSMEs play a significant role. They contribute over 29 per cent to the GDP and account for half of the country's total exports. Additionally, they are responsible for approximately one-third of India's manufacturing output. With an employment base exceeding 11 crores, there's a concerted effort to elevate this figure to 15 crores in the coming years.

Acknowledging the critical role played by MSMEs, both the central Government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have rolled out several schemes to support MSME entrepreneurs. Some notable initiatives include MSME Samadhaar, Udyog Aadhaar, Mudra, ZED Scheme, Make In India, and Stand-Up India.

Despite the provisions outlined in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act of 2006, MSMEs often faced challenges, particularly concerning timely payments from larger enterprises. To address this issue, an innovative provision was introduced in the Finance Act 2023 under section 43B(h) by the then Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitaraman. This provision aimed to strengthen MSMEs by ensuring timely payments from buyers, underscoring their status as growth engines of the economy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, MSMEs were severely impacted due to constrained credit cycles. To facilitate their recovery post-pandemic, the Government has implemented continuous measures to



WHILE SIGNIFICANT STRIDES HAVE BEEN MADE TO BOLSTER THE MSME SECTOR IN INDIA, THERE'S A CONTINUOUS NEED FOR PROACTIVE MEASURES TO ADDRESS EVOLVING CHALLENGES AND UNLOCK THE SECTOR'S FULL POTENTIAL

bolster the MSME ecosystem in India. Notably, the Finance Act 2023's provision, section 43B(h), extended to amounts payable to micro and small enterprises covered under the MSMED Act 2006. This move was geared towards enhancing the credit cycle of MSMEs, ensuring smoother business operations.

Section 15 of the MSMED Act stipulates the time limit for payments to MSMEs by buyers, emphasising timely settlements. However, the non-utilisation of these provisions in the past was often attributed to the vulnerability of micro and small enterprises vis-à-vis medium and large enterprises. The introduction of section 43B(h) sought to address this disparity, mandating timely payments and penalising delays beyond specified limits.

Under this provision, any sum payable by the assessee to a micro or small enterprise beyond the time limit specified in section 15 of the MSMED Act 2006 would be subject to disallowance. Additionally, interest for delayed payment, set at three times the Repo Linked Benchmark Lending Rate (RBLR), compounded monthly, as per section 15 of the MSMED Act 2006, would also be applicable. It's crucial to note that the registration of the buyer under the MSMED Act, 2006, is a prerequisite to avail the benefits under section 43B(h). However, this provision does not extend to dues outstanding to traders as per the MSMED Act's definition of enterprise.

The practical implications of section 43B(h) are manifold. Firstly, it ensures a smoother payment cycle for MSMEs, incentivising large entities to settle dues within the stipulated time frame. This not only ensures their financial stability but also fosters their growth.

Secondly, it empowers MSMEs with better bargaining power when negotiating payment terms with larger counterparts, minimizing disputes and legal complexities.

To qualify as micro, small, or medium enterprises under the MSMED Act 2006, specific criteria must be met regarding net investment in plant and machinery or equipment, as well as net turnover. It's noteworthy that only micro and small enterprises are considered suppliers for section 43B(h), whereas medium enterprises are excluded from its ambit. The effective implementation of section 43B(h) hinges on various factors, including clear communication between buyers and suppliers, adherence to agreed payment terms, and compliance with regulatory requirements. Furthermore, the provision mandates timely disclosure and reporting by auditors, ensuring transparency and accountability in financial dealings. In conclusion, section 43B(h) represents a significant step towards bolstering the MSME sector in India by promoting timely payments and strengthening their financial position. However, its successful implementation necessitates collaboration between stakeholders, proactive compliance, and robust enforcement mechanisms. By fostering a conducive environment for MSMEs to thrive, India can unleash their full potential as an engine of economic growth and job creation.

Despite the progressive measures introduced, such as the Finance Act 2023's provision under section 43B(h), challenges persist in ensuring comprehensive compliance and effective enforcement mechanisms. It's imperative for stakeholders, including MSMEs, large enterprises, regulatory bodies, and auditors, to collaborate closely to address these challenges and

realise the full potential of the MSME sector. Furthermore, the transition from Udyog Aadhaar Memorandum (UAM) to Udyam Registration has been a significant regulatory change impacting MSMEs. The mandatory conversion to Udyam Registration underscores the Government's commitment to streamlining registration processes and enhancing transparency in the MSME ecosystem. However, ensuring widespread awareness and seamless implementation of this transition remains a critical task.

The availability of financing options tailored to the unique needs of MSMEs is another area requiring concerted efforts. While initiatives like the Mudra scheme have aimed to address the financing gap for MSMEs, there's a need for continued innovation and expansion of financial instruments to support their growth ambitions effectively. Fostering an ecosystem conducive to innovation and technological adoption is essential for enhancing the competitiveness of MSMEs in a rapidly evolving global landscape. Initiatives like Make In India and the ZED Scheme provide valuable support in this regard by encouraging domestic manufacturing and promoting quality standards.

In conclusion, while significant strides have been made to bolster the MSME sector in India, there's a continuous need for proactive measures to address evolving challenges and unlock the sector's full potential. By leveraging technology, fostering financial inclusion, and promoting an enabling regulatory environment, India can further strengthen its MSME ecosystem and propel economic growth and job creation.

(The writer is a Chartered Accountant &amp; Insolvency Professional; views are personal)

## India's semiconductor quest amid geopolitical dynamics

In the global arena, semiconductor chips have emerged as critical assets shaping geopolitical strategies

Semiconductor chips are positioned as the new oil by some; some see them as a threat to national security, while others view them as a passport to economic prosperity. Dominated by companies from the United States, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and the Netherlands, the semiconductor industry is seen as the new oil, serving as a fulcrum of future geopolitical strength for these nations. Similarly, traditional military combat is no match for AI-enabled missile attacks, quantum computer-driven decision-making, drone swarms, and cyberattacks powered by state-of-the-art semiconductor chips, the manufacturing capabilities of which bestow power and influence. They are embedded in our



ISHOO RATNA SRIVASTAV

lives, from coffee machines and mobile phones to electric vehicles and health equipment, offering an industry potential of trillions of dollars by 2030, according to McKinsey. India's ambition to ascend the pecking order of global superpowers by building advanced technology manufacturing capabilities, including semiconductor chips, is aptly based on a bold vision,

the realization of which requires careful analysis of the following: Complex value chain: The three core verticals of Design, Fabrication, and ATP form one of the most diverse supply chains in the world, crossing as many as 70 borders before reaching the consumer. US companies dominate the design of advanced chips, capturing ~47 per cent of the value. Foundries manufacture the designed chips operating at subatomic-level precision, capturing ~24 per cent of the value. ATP is a relatively automated and lower-value business but is now changing with advanced packaging techniques. Precision: The advanced chips, benchmarked below 7 nanometers (nm), are the true test of technology

manufacturing capabilities, currently largely vested with Taiwan and South Korea. These foundries require facilities 10,000 times cleaner than a hospital surgical room, and the purity standards of some of the 300 different materials needed to produce an advanced semiconductor are 1,000 times higher than for solar energy panels. Geopolitics: The US continues to control key choke points of the global supply chain and retains the ability to influence other nations that wrest control over manufacturing processes. Samsung's decision to diversify its manufacturing to Vietnam signals the unfolding of opportunities for other nations from a technological decoupling with China. Technological Catchup of



South Korea and Taiwan: In less than twenty years, Taiwan and South Korea displaced the technology leaders like Germany and climbed the patent charts on semiconductors from zero to 386 and 267 respectively in the late nineties. In South Korea, the chaebols led vertical integration from the design to the testing of chips and anchored R&D, whereas a network of specialised firms and

Government-supported institutions developed the R&D capabilities and acquired foreign technologies in Taiwan. Though they followed different evolutionary paths in the semiconductor industry, both leveraged inter-country mobility of experts wherein return of foreign-educated nationals provided significant transfer of best practices and state-of-the-art knowledge. India's moonshot at becoming a Semiconductor Hub: The recent promise of \$10 billion under the Semicon India programme, the PLI scheme, and the separate Design-Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme aspires to build India's muscle across the semiconductor value chain. Its international strategic partnerships as part of the

QUAD, India-US iCET, and investment interests from leading US firms like Micron are aimed at exploiting opportunities in technology, resourcing, talent, and research. However, in a complex industry such as Semiconductors, only industrial cooperation can do so much. Talent is identified as one of the top three risks for the industry, whereas India's skilled workforce can at best claim expertise in Chip design. India is said to be two decades behind the Chip curve, and some of the most developed nations in advanced manufacturing have struggled to establish prominence in the field. India's attractiveness therefore needs to extend beyond the availability of cheap land and capital and instead emerge as

an attractive destination for the highly specialised global knowledge workers who relocate with their families and participate in the country's ambitious journey of development. It's also important to grab the opportunities offered by the decoupling that allows India to find value-aligned international partners, who, knowing its history of respectful coexistence and burgeoning economic prominence, bridge the R&D and execution gaps. India's success with Chandrayaan-3, 5G, and Digital technologies does offer optimism with respect to its ability to realise its formidable vision.

(The writer is Deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer, North Western Railway, views are personal)







Government revamps pharma scheme; broadens eligibility criteria

PTI ■ NEW DELHI The Department of Pharmaceuticals has revamped a scheme which entails financial assistance to drug companies to help them upgrade their facilities to produce medicines conforming to global standards, an official release said on Monday.

Preference however remains for MSMEs, supporting smaller players in achieving high-quality manufacturing standards, it added. The revamped scheme also introduces more flexible financing options, emphasising subsidies on reimbursement basis, over traditional credit-linked approach. This flexibility is designed to diversify the financing options of the participating units, facilitating a more widespread adoption of the scheme, the statement said.



Eligible activities include improvements such as HVAC systems, water and steam utilities, testing laboratories, stability chambers, clean room facilities, effluent treatment, waste management etc. Ensuring comprehensive support for participating units, it added. Similarly, the revised scheme allows integration with state government schemes, enabling units to benefit from additional top-up assistance. This collaborative approach

aims to maximise support for the pharmaceutical industry in their technology upgradation efforts, as per the statement. The scheme also introduces a robust verification mechanism through a project management agency, ensuring transparency, accountability and the efficient allocation of resources, it added. The revised guideline aims to support the pharmaceutical industry's up-gradation to the Revised Schedule-M & WHO-GMP standards, enhancing the quality and safety of pharmaceutical products manufactured in the country, the ministry stated.

intimate the licensing authority about recalling a drug and also report product defects, deterioration or faulty production. These guidelines come against the backdrop of complaints of sub-standard Indian drugs and deaths abroad reportedly due to it since 2022. Schedule M part of Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940 deals with 'Good Manufacturing Practices' to be followed by pharmaceutical manufacturing units in the country. There are around 10,500 manufacturing units in the country out of which around 8,500 fall under the MSME category. India is a major exporter of medicines to low/middle-income countries (LMICs) which require WHO GMP certification.

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, many others want to start rupee trade with India: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Many developed and developing countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and nations of the Gulf region are keen to start trade in rupee with India as it would help cut transaction costs for businesses, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said. He expressed confidence that the development is going to be a "very game-changing" dimension to India's international trade.

It involves the central bankers of both nations to create the framework and then it evolves acceptance by importers and exporters, Goyal said, adding "when it will take off, it'll just fly". The engagement is also beneficial as the Indian Rupee is mostly stable against most of the international currencies and according to experts, this is one of the reasons that different nations today want to have trade relations built on rupee trade. The rupee trade is also helping many of the countries, which have dollar shortages. India has started trade in the rupee with neighbouring countries, including Nepal and Bhutan. The rupee trade mechanism has been initiated to facilitate trade in national currency with Russia, while Sri Lanka has included the rupee in its list of designated foreign currencies. India's first-ever payment in rupees for crude oil purchased was from the UAE and that is helping the world's third largest energy consumer to push for taking the local currency global, as it looks for similar deals with other suppliers. Changes have been made in the FTP (Foreign Trade Policy) to allow international trade settlement in Indian Rupee with a view to making INR a global currency. In July 2022, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to allow the settlement of India's international trade in rupee. Accordingly, authorised Indian banks are permitted to open and maintain special rupee Vostro accounts of the partner trading country's banks.



JM Financial shares plummet 10 per cent after Sebi ban

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

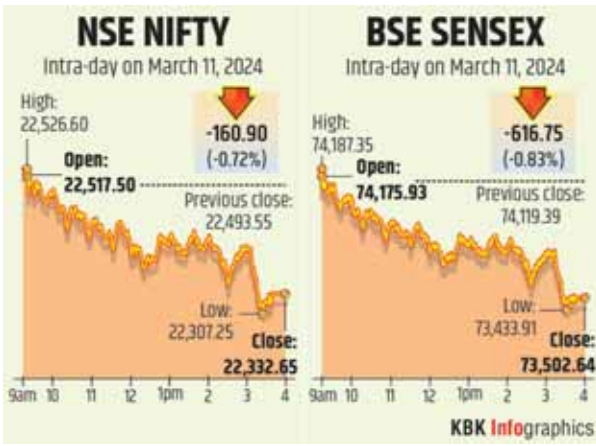
Shares of JM Financial plummeted 10 per cent on Monday, days after Sebi barred the company from accepting new mandates to act as a lead manager for the public issue of debt securities, for flouting regulatory norms. The stock of JM Financial tumbled 9.78 per cent and 9.77 per cent to settle at Rs 79.35 each on NSE and BSE. In volume trade, 1.80 crore equity shares were traded on NSE, while 13.59 lakh shares were traded on the BSE during the day.

mandates, JM Financial can continue to act as a lead manager for the public issue of debt securities for a period of 60 days, Sebi said in its interim order. The regulator's order came days after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) barred JM Financial Products Ltd from providing any form of financing against shares and debentures, including sanction and disbursement of loans against the Sebi's directive came after the markets regulator undertook a routine examination of the public issues of Non-Convertible Debentures (NCD) during 2023. The investigation focused on the activities of JM Financial and its related entities in a particular debt issue. After being barred from accepting new mandates by Sebi, JM Financial said it would fully cooperate with the capital markets regulator in its investigation into the public issue of debt securities.

Markets break two days rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock market benchmark Sensex declined by 616.75 points on Monday, snapping its two-day gaining streak due to selling in metal and banking shares amid weak trends in the global markets. Taking a breather after a record-breaking rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 616.75 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 73,502.64 due to profit taking. During the day, the barometer tanked 685.48 points to 73,433.91. The broader Nifty slumped by 160.90 points or 0.72 per cent to close at 22,332.65.



markets due to uncertainty over rate cuts impacted the domestic market sentiment, which is currently at an overbought level. The stronger-than-expected US non-farm payroll data and caution ahead of the release of US inflation data tomorrow kept investors on the edge," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. "The broader market continued its underperformance due to valuation concerns, while investors are rebalancing their portfolios to include safe haven assets like gold," he added. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 2.01 per cent and mid-

cap index dipped 0.24 per cent. Among sectoral indices, telecommunication plunged by 2.40 per cent, metal by 1.39 per cent, utilities by 1.25 per cent, realty by 1.16 per cent, and energy by 1.15 per cent. Healthcare was the only gainer. Shares of State Bank of India settled 2 per cent lower on Monday after the Supreme Court trashed the public sector lender's plea seeking an extension of time to disclose the details of electoral bonds to the Election Commission and ordered it to give the data related to poll bonds by close of business hours on March 12. The apex court also put the SBI

on notice and said it may be inclined to proceed against the lender for "wilful disobedience" of its February 15 verdict, if the bank failed to comply with its directions and timelines. Shares of JM Financial settled 10 per cent lower on Monday after Sebi had barred JM Financial Ltd from accepting new mandates to act as a lead manager for the public issue of debt securities, for flouting regulatory norms. Also, scrip of Alembic Pharmaceuticals finished more than 2 per cent lower on Monday after the US Food and Drug Administration issued a Form 483 with four observations for the drugmaker's Gujarat plant. Among Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index shed 2.2 per cent and South Korea's Kospi fell 0.8 per cent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 1.4 per cent and Shanghai Composite jumped 0.7 per cent. The US markets ended in negative territory on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose by 0.29 per cent to USD 82.32 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 7,304.11 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sebi chairperson Madhabi S Puri Buch on Monday said there are pockets of "froth" in small and mid-cap stocks which appear like "irrational exuberance" to the capital markets regulator. Buch also said that Sebi has evidence, pointing to signs of "price manipulation" in the small and medium enterprises (SME) segment, and asked investors to be more cautious while investing in the risky segment. Speaking to women journalists on the sidelines of an event here, Buch said the 'T+0' settlement of securities will begin on March 28 but on an optional basis. When asked about the small and mid-cap space, which has seen a fast-paced rise in valuations over the last few months, Buch admitted that there are "pockets of froth in the market" which are like bubbles. "It may not be appropriate to allow the bubble to keep

Pockets of froth in small, mid cap stocks; price manipulation in SME segment: Buch

building, because when it bursts, they impact the investors adversely. That is not a good thing," Buch said. She added that the valuation parameters are "not supported by fundamentals at all" and it appears like "irrational exuberance". Since January 2023, small and mid-cap indices have significantly outperformed the broader equity indices, and many asset management companies have stopped accepting lumpsum amounts into schemes and also capped monthly investments in such schemes. Buch also said that the Sebi has seen evidence of "price manipulation" in the SME segment, including both initial public offerings (IPOs) and secondary trading activity. "We do see the signs of price

manipulation), we have the technology to do it. We are able to see certain patterns. I'd say it is still on the kitchen table, it's not yet gone into the oven," Buch said. The capital markets regulator is still working with advisors to understand all the dimensions and analyse the data, she said, adding that if it finds some malpractices the next step may be to issue a public consultation on it. However, she did not give any specific timelines by which the capital markets regulator is mulling to act against entities which are indulging in the malpractices. She said the investors need to understand that the SME segment is different from the main board and it is necessary for Sebi to push the companies to make the necessary disclosures to investors. Regulations governing the SME segment, the disclosures and therefore, the nature of risk are all different, she said, defending the decision to have such a platform. The regulator was desirous of playing a facilitative role and introduced the SME segment where the regulations were not as high as the main board because some SMEs find it

difficult to comply with the requirements, she explained. To a question on Sebi's plan to reduce the settlement plans and introduce the T+0 or same-day settlements, Buch said the regulator plans to make such settlements live by March 28 but added that the same will be optional for investors. As per the plans, T+0 settlement will eventually lead to instantaneous settlement of trades as well. She declined to comment specifically on the actions against non-bank lender JM Financial but admitted that while there is no collaboration between the financial sector regulators, there is better data sharing. The orders against the Kampanis-promoted lender by the RBI and Sebi on consecutive days this month is only a coincidence, she said.

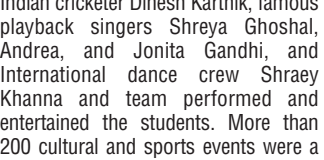
BUSINESS BRIEF

POWERGRID SIGNS MOU WITH RVPNL Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, a Maharatna CPSU under Ministry of Power, Govt of India, has signed an MoU with Rajasthan Rajya Viduyt Prasaran Nigam Limited (RVPNL) at a function held in Jaipur. It was signed in presence of R. K. Singh, Union Minister of Power, New and Renewable Energy, Govt. of India, Bhajanlal Sharma, Chief Minister, Rajasthan, and in August presence of Pralhad Joshi, Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Coal & Mines and Diya Kumari, Deputy CM, Rajasthan. The MoU was signed by Nathmal Dideel, IAS, MD, RVPNL and D. N. Rozeekar, Executive Director (BDD&JV) POWERGRID in the gracious presence of Alok, Addl. Chief Secretary (Power) Govt. of Rajasthan and RK Tyagi, CMD, POWERGRID.



VIT CHENNAI HOLDS CULTURAL AND SPORTS FEST

Indian cricketer Dinesh Karthik, famous playback singers Shreya Ghoshal, Andrea, and Jonita Gandhi, and International dance crew Shraey Khanna and team performed and entertained the students. More than 200 cultural and sports events were a part of Vibrance 2024. International students from Japan, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Poland, and Philippines, and Students from prestigious institutions like IIT, NIT, and Anna University participated in the events. Vibrance attracted over 22,000 students across India and Winners of the events received prizes worth around ₹ 10 lakhs. The great fest had its valedictory on 09.03.2024. Valedictory guest, Actor, and Social activist Sonu Sood shared his valuable thoughts with the students and encouraged them.



SRMIST, RENAULT NISSAN TECH INK PACT

SRM Institute of Science and Technology-India's premier higher education institution in engineering, technology, management, law, arts and science, and global automobile major Renault Nissan Technology and Business Centre India (Renault Nissan Tech.) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on Recently. The partnership will pave the way for driving advancements in automobile technology and education, while serving as a platform for innovation in research and developing skilled talent. As a part of the pact, Renault Nissan Tech. also handed over a car to SRM's Fab Lab, giving students an opportunity to test and develop products directly on the vehicle, paving the way for researchers to explore and arrive at sustainable mobility solutions.



EDELWEISS TOKIO LAUNCHES 3 GEN PLAN

Edelweiss Tokio Life Insurance has launched Legacy Plus that offers life cover for 2 and income lasting 3 generations through a single product. The product offers an effective way of providing for multiple customer needs, including child financial planning, legacy planning and any emerging needs during its tenure. "An average person typically has 3-4 basic concerns - child's future, retirement, legacy, any potential contingencies, etc." Subhrjit Mukhopadhyay, Executive Director, Edelweiss Tokio Life Insurance.

Control Print acquires 50.49 per cent stake in UK based Codeology Group for £1 mn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Control Print Ltd on Monday announced the acquisition of 50.49 per cent in UK-based Codeology Group Ltd, a provider of print and apply systems, for £1 million (over Rs 10 crore). The acquisition will help Control Print get a foothold in the UK market, leading to new growth opportunities, the company said in a statement. "This collaboration represents a key step in our plan to diversify our product offerings further. In addition, Codeology has a well-established presence in the UK and will benefit from our products, expertise, and support in their home markets," Control Print Joint Managing Director Shiva Kabra said. Further, he said, "This partnership will also help us expand to newer markets to provide high-quality products with Codeology's assistance. Together,



we are well-positioned to drive growth and deliver value to our customers." Codeology Group Ltd Director Jim Mason said the partnership with Control Print will give Codeology a broader vision and enhance its capabilities in offering products. "Moreover...Control Print's product additions and financial strength combined with our existing market coverage will provide a significantly higher ceiling for Codeology's growth rates. This is also a notable opportunity for us to reach a new customer base in a new market, further enhancing our network," Mason added.

Government abolishes wireless operating licence

Launches regulatory sandbox to ease trial permit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has abolished wireless operating licence and launched a regulatory sandbox for quick and online approval of product testing, Union Communications and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Monday. "While speaking at the curtain raiser of the telecom sector event India Mobile Congress (IMC) 2024, the minister said that the wireless operating licence was abolished a few months back but it is being formalised now. "There was a wireless operating licence... For operating wireless devices they had to take wireless operating licences. That has been done away with. It was done away for a few months and we are formalising it today," Vaishnav

said. The minister unveiled a regulatory sandbox for the telecom sector. He said that through the regulatory sandbox, the DoT will provide online approval for product testing at minimal charge in an easy manner to even enable students to test their products.

M.P. MADHYA KSHETRA VIDYUT VITARAN CO. LTD. (Govt. of Madhya Pradesh Undertaking) Nishtha Parisar, Bijjainagar, Govindpura, Bhopal-462023 Phone No. : 0755-2602033-34, Fax No. : 0755-2589821, E-mail : dgmp2.cz@mp.gov.in Website : https://mptenders.gov.in, CIN Number : U40109MP2002SGC015119 Bhopal, Dated : 11.03.2024 TENDER NOTICE MPMKVVCL, Bhopal invites online Bids from Agencies for Survey, Supply & Execution of below mentioned work as per Tender Specification under SSTD Scheme.



## Amandeep Drall ready for all challengers in sixth leg of WPGT

**PTI ■ GURUGRAM**  
Amandeep Drall will be among the favourites to win the sixth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour, which gets underway at the DLF Golf and Country Club here this week. It will be an exciting week with 46 players, the highest ever on the WPGT, and the prize purse will be a whopping Rs 25 lakhs. For the second straight week, the players will be playing over four rounds and 72 holes. Amandeep, who won by four shots, will be challenged by

Vani Kapoor, Hitaashee Bakshi and Sneha Singh. While Vani featured in Singapore last week, Hitaashee leads the WPGT Order of Merit, whereas Sneha is the only multiple winner this season. The field also includes the promising amateur Vidhatri Urs, who has also won on the Pro Tour this season. Another amateur to watch out for will be Zara Anand, who, along with Vidhatri, will be playing on the Indian Golf Union's national team at the Queen Sirikit Cup. One of the interesting features

this week is that the entire three-member Indian Golf Union's team for the Queen Sirikit Cup, Vidhatri, Zara and Heena Kang are in the field. It has been a closely-contested season so far with four different winners in the last five events. All of them are in the field this week. Among the others looking for their first win of 2024 will be Gaurika Bishnoi, who was second to Amandeep last week, along with Ridhima Dilawari, Neha Tripathi, Seher Atwal and Khushi Khanijau. A total of seven amateurs will be playing on the field.

## Lifter Chanu to train in Paris ahead of Olympics



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Former world champion weightlifter Mirabai Chanu's proposal to train in Paris ahead of the Olympic Games was on Monday cleared by the government. The Tokyo Olympics silver medalist will acclimatise to the weather and prepare for the quadrennial showpiece during her four-month stint in La Ferte-Milon in Paris, according to a statement by the Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell. The 29-year-old Chanu, who competes in the 49kg category, will be accompanied by two coaches and a physiotherapist. The government will bear the cost for air tickets, visa fees, accommodation, food, train-

ing, local transport and medical insurance among other expenditures under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS). The Mission Olympic Cell also cleared the proposals of equestrian exponent Anush Agarwalla to compete in eight competitions and buy equipment for his horses. "TOPS will cover his and his coach's accommodation costs, entry fees, two horse feed costs, coach fees, and horse grooms costs among other expenditures." Judoka Asmita Dey and shooter Arjun Singh Cheema's request for financial assistance were also cleared. "MOC also approved judoka Asmita Dey's proposal for financial assistance to participate in

Grand Prix, Austria and shooter Arjun Singh Cheema's request for financial assistance towards participation in ISAS Dortmund competition," said the statement. The request for financial assistance by ace Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal for participation in two international competitions along with expenditure for his support staff was also approved by MOC. "The other proposals approved by MOC during the meeting were financial assistance towards hiring of video analyst for badminton players Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, extension of contract for weightlifter Jeremy Lalrinnunga's physiotherapist and financial assistance towards buying equipment for track athlete Amoj Jacob," the statement added.



## Khandelwal wins silver in Para World Cup

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
India's Rudransh Khandelwal and Nihal Singh settled for silver and bronze respectively in the mixed 50m pistol (SH1) category as a gold medal eluded the hosts on day three of the Para Shooting World Cup here on Monday. Rudransh, Nihal and Tokyo Paralympics silver medalist Singhray also bagged the mixed 50m pistol (SH1) team silver with China claiming the top step on the podium. Teenaged shooter Rudransh, who had secured a Paris Paralympic berth last year, shot 223.2 in final to finish behind Italy's Davide Franceschetti,

who totalled 230.0 for the gold medal. Nihal had to settle for a bronze medal with 202.8 points. Earlier in the qualification round, Rudransh shot 530 and Nihal 527 to enter the eight-shooter final placed sixth and seventh. In the mixed 50m pistol (SH1) team event, the trio of Rudransh (530), Nihal (527) and Singhray (516) aggregated 1573 for the silver medal with China taking the gold with a combined score 1611. Rifle shooter Mona Agarwal is the only one so far to have won a gold medal for India in the prestigious Para World Cup for India.



## US beats Brazil 1-0 in Women Gold Cup title game

**AP ■ SAN DIEGO**  
Lindsey Horan scored on a header in first-half stoppage time and the United States beat Brazil 1-0 to win the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup. The United States lifted the trophy on Sunday despite being stunned by a loss to Mexico in the group stage of the tournament. It was the first women's Gold Cup, with the event created to bring teams in the region more meaningful competition. It was the fourth time that the United States faced Brazil in a tournament final. The Americans also won the previous three, including the 2004 and 2008 Olympics. The game drew a sellout crowd of 31,528 to San Diego's Snapdragon Stadium, a record crowd for a CONCACAF women's match. Horan scored just moments into stoppage time with a header off a well-placed lofted pass from Emily Fox. It was Horan's third goal of the tournament, her earlier goals were from the penalty spot. Lynn Williams nearly scored a second for the United States in the 79th minute but the play was offside. Casey Krueger headed out a dangerous Brazilian cross in the final

moments. The United States was stunned in the group stage of the tournament by a 2-0 loss to Mexico - just the second loss in the 43-game series. The Americans rebounded with a 3-0 win over Colombia in the quarterfinals, before advancing to the final on penalties after a rain-soaked 2-2 draw with Canada in the semifinals. Brazil had won each of its five matches in the tournament, including a 3-0 victory over Mexico in the semifinals, scoring 15 goals. The Brazilians allowed just two total goals in the team's first competitive tournament under coach Arthur Elias, who took over for Pia Sundhage after Brazil's exit at last summer's Women's World Cup. Likewise, the United States was playing its first tournament under interim coach Twila Kilgore, who assumed her role after the team parted ways with coach Vlatko Andonovski after the earliest-ever World Cup exit. The United States hired Emma Hayes as the team's coach, but she is concluding the season with Chelsea in the Women's Super League. Both Brazil and the United States have qualified for this summer's Olympics in France.

**AP ■ INDIAN WELL**  
Iga Swiatek avenged her Australian Open ouster at the hands of Linda Noskova, beating the Czech teenager 6-4, 6-0 in the third round of the BNP Paribas Open. Second-seeded Carlos Alcaraz and third-seeded Jannik Sinner each advanced in straight sets in the men's draw, but fifth-seeded Andrey Rublev lost to No. 32 seed Jiri Lehecka 6-4, 6-4. Swiatek advanced to the round of 16, where the top-ranked Polish star will face Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan. Putintseva beat Madison Keys 6-4, 6-1, part of a tough day for American singles players. Francis Tiafoe lost 6-3, 6-3 to Stefanos Tsitsipas, and Katie Volynets was eliminated by Caroline Wozniacki 6-2, 4-6, 6-0. The final American on the court, Ben Shelton, did manage a pulsating 7-6, 3-6, 7-6 victory over Francisco Cerundolo. Shelton won the decisive tiebreaker 7-5.

## Swiatek wins rematch with Noskova

The 16th-seeded Shelton advanced to face Sinner in the round of 16. The 11th-seeded Tsitsipas will face Lehecka. Noskova beat Swiatek in three sets in Australia, becoming the first teen to beat a No. 1-ranked woman at that event in 25 years. The rematch was competitive for a set, but Swiatek eventually rolled to victory in just under 73 minutes. "I made some mistakes at the beginning. I tried to maybe play to finish the rallies too early," Swiatek said. "But I knew that if I'm going to try to stay consistent and make a little bit less mistakes, my chances may come." Jasmine Paolini won another tight match against Anna Kalinskaya, 6-3, 3-6, 6-4. Paolini won the Dubai Championships two weeks ago, rallying to win a three-set final over



Kalinskaya. Alcaraz beat Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-2, 6-3, and Sinner ousted Jan Lennard-Struff 6-3, 6-4.

here so peaceful that I think that tennis players, we are going to every tournament and we try to find, you know, that peace off the court, to feel calm, you know, and we find it here." Alcaraz advances to face Fabian Marozsan, the Hungarian who beat him as a 135th-ranked qualifier at the Italian Open 10 months ago. "After that match I really wanted to rematch that match against him," Alcaraz said. "I mean, he's playing great tennis. He is beating big guys... Yeah, I'm really looking forward to playing against him again." Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula edged Sofia Kenin and Bethanie Mattek-Sands 7-5, 6-3 in an all-American doubles matchup. The top-seeded men's doubles team is out after the first round - Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen eliminated Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden 7-6, 4-6, 10-8.

## Dev one win away from securing Paris Olympic quota

**PTI ■ BUSTO ARSIZIO (ITALY)**  
World Championships medallist Nishant Dev moved within touching distance of a Paris Olympic quota after he registered a dominant victory over Christos Karaitis of Greece to enter the 71kg quarterfinals of the first World Olympic Boxing Qualifier here. The 23-year-old, who won the featherweight bronze at the World Championships last year, continued his rich vein of form, as he out-punched Karaitis by a 5-0 unanimous decision in the pre-quarterfinals late on Sunday. With the qualifying tournament offering four quota places in the men's 71kg weight class, Dev needs to win his quarterfinal on Monday to seal his passage for Paris Games and earn the fifth 2024 Olympic quota for India and the first in the men's category in boxing. However, Dev, who is vying to compete in his debut Olympic, will have his task cut out as he faces a tough opponent in 2021 World Championship silver medallist Omari Jones of the USA in the last eight round on Monday. The Haryana boxer is the only Indian boxer out of the nine-member contingent who is still in the fray for a quota. All others, including 2023 World Championship bronze medallists Deepak Bhorla (51kg) and Mohammed Hussainuddin (57kg) crashed out after losing their opening bouts. Four Indians — Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti



Pawar (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) — have so far secured Paris quotas at the Asian Games last year. The remaining Indian boxers will get a final chance to seal their passage to Paris during the second World Olympic Boxing Qualifier, scheduled to be held in Bangkok from May 23 to June 3. Between 45 and 51 boxers will qualify from the Bangkok meet. India had nine boxers competing in the Tokyo Olympics with Borgohain winning the only medal, a bronze. The Boxing Federation of India will hope to match the number if not increase it.

## Real Madrid regains seven point lead over Girona

**AP ■ MADRID**  
Real Madrid made peace with its fans with a comfortable win over Celta Vigo and reclaimed a seven-point lead at the top of the Spanish league. Vinicius Junior scored his third goal in four games on Sunday as Madrid eased to a 4-0 victory that followed consecutive draws that included a lackluster performance against Leipzig in the Champions League, which prompted jeers from the home crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. "We improved in attitude and intensity. It wasn't too hard to do better than we did on Wednesday," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "We're happy, focused and motivated because it's an important stage of the season. At Real Madrid, a draw is the first step toward a crisis." Madrid had drawn four of its last seven matches in all competitions. It advanced to the quarterfinals of the

Champions League on Wednesday despite a poor performance in a 1-1 draw against Leipzig. Defender Antonio Rudiger set up two goals on Sunday, and Turkey international Arda Guler made his scoring debut with Madrid. The hosts got two own-goals. The victory maintained Madrid's cushion at the top after second-place Girona beat Osasuna 2-0 on Saturday and third-place Barcelona defeated Mallorca 1-0 on Friday. Barcelona, the defending champion, is eight points behind Madrid with 10 rounds left. Madrid is unbeaten at the Bernabeu in 18 matches this season, with 15 wins and three draws. Its last home loss was in April 2023 against Villarreal. It is unbeaten in the league in 22 straight matches, since a 3-1 loss at Atletico Madrid. Celta had only one attempt on target in what was its eighth straight loss to Madrid. Rafa Benitez's team sits just outside the relegation zone, two points

from danger. "We were playing against the best team in the league and we were in it until the 79th minute," Benitez said. "Things could have gone differently." Vinicius opened the scoring from close range after a firm header by Rudiger in the 21st. Madrid added to the lead with own-goals by goalkeeper Vicente Guaita in the 79th and defender Carlos Dominguez in the 88th. Guaita's own-goal came after a firm header by Rudiger bounced off the crossbar and the goalkeeper's back. The 19-year-old midfielder Guler, who replaced Vinicius in the 89th, scored his first goal for Madrid four minutes into stoppage time. Vinicius again had a run-in with an opponent, shoving Oscar Mingueza to the ground after the Celta defender held the Brazil forward's jersey to stop a breakaway. Ancelotti had defended Vinicius during the week, saying he is "poorly treated."

## Diksha registers second straight Top ten finish

**PTI ■ TAMPA (US)**  
Indian golfer Diksha Dagar registered her second straight Top-10 finish with a steady 1-under 71 on the third and final day of the Aramco Team Series here. Diksha, who shot 69-70 in the first two rounds, finished 6-under 210 and was Tied-sixth. Fellow Indian, Pranavi Urs, playing her first season on the Ladies European Tour, also had a decent finish after an even par 72 on the final day. At 3-under for 54 holes, Pranavi finished T-17. It has been a good start for the two Indians, who are both multiple winners on their home tour, the Hero Women's

Pro Golf Tour. Diksha was T-9 at Morocco after being T-19 in Kenya, while Pranavi, the No. 1 golfer in India in 2022, was T-5 in Morocco. Pranavi is now 14th on the LET Order of Merit and Diksha is 17th. Alexandra Forsterling fired a final round of 67 (5) to secure a three-shot victory at 12-under. Diksha had mixed feelings as she said, "It wasn't easy but on some few holes I had good shots. Because of the wind I struggled a bit but I made some great up and downs and it was alright. I'm happy with that. But on some of the birdie holes, I made a few silly

mistakes which could have been easily birdie." Pranavi was happy with her first Aramco Team Series event. "It was my first-ever team series so I absolutely loved playing with Bronte (Law) and Sophia (Popov). I think the first hour was pretty good, it was a bit of a roller coaster but overall I think I've been playing pretty and it was good to keep the momentum going from Morocco. I think I did fairly well." Winner Forsterling sat in a share of second place overnight and started well making a birdie on the second hole. Back-to-back birdies on the sixth and seven put her in



front before she dropped a shot on the eighth. However, on the back nine, she remained calm and collected rolling in birdies on 12, 13 and 16 to stay in front and win her third title on the LET with a total of -12. England's Charley Hull, three-time LET winner, was unable to add another victory to her name, but she has two starts in LET events in 2024 and finished second in both of them. She finished in outright second place on nine-under-par after a final round of 71 (-1). England's Bronte Law, who won the 2024 Lalla Meryem Cup, had a final-day surge,

firing a round of 67 (-5) to finish in third place on eight-under-par. Spanish duo Ana Pelaez Trivino and Carlota Ciganda ended the week in a share of fourth place on seven-under-par. Five players were tied for the sixth place with France's Nastasia Nadaud, Switzerland's Chiara Tamburlini, Diksha Dagar, Belgium's Manon De Roey and Germany's Alene Krauter all finishing on six-under-par. The LET now has a two-week break before heading to Australia for the Women's NSW Open which takes place from March 29-31 at Magenta Shores Golf & Country Club.

# SHAMI COMEBACK LIKELY BY HOME SERIES AGAINST BANGLADESH: JAY

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

India's premier pacer Mohammed Shami, who is recuperating from an ankle surgery, is expected to make his comeback with the home Test series against Bangladesh later this year. BCCI secretary Jay Shah told PTI. Shami missed the five-match Test series against England and will also sit out of the IPL after having undergone surgery for Achilles tendon last month. He will also miss the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by the West Indies and the USA in June. Shami last played for India in the ODI World Cup where he was their standout performer. India will host Bangladesh for two Tests and three T20 Internationals in September. "Shami's surgery is done, he is back in India. Shami's return is likely for the home series against Bangladesh. KL Rahul needed an injection, he has

started rehab and is at the NCA," said Shah while talking to media here. Rahul missed the last four Tests of the England series after complaining of pain in his right quadriceps. He is expected to turn up for Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL, having undergone treatment in London. **RISHABH PANT ON TRACK FOR IPL COMEBACK:** The BCCI secretary also gave an update on Rishabh Pant, who is set to make his much-awaited comeback in the IPL. Pant has been out of action since a horrific car accident in December 2022. "He is battling well, he is keeping well. We will declare him fit very soon. If he can play the T20 World Cup for us, that will be a big thing for us. He is a big asset for us. "If he can keep, he can play the World Cup. Let's see how he does in the IPL," said Shah. The accident had left Pant



with a severe right knee injury that required a ligament reconstruction surgery besides a fractured wrist and ankle. But he has done well to bounce back. His IPL franchise Delhi Capitals' head coach Ricky Ponting has already stated that he would be participating in the league. **IPL CAN'T ACCEPT FOREIGN INVESTMENT:** Asked about the potential of foreign investment in the IPL, Shah said that is not possible considering the BCCI is a society and not a company. "BCCI is a society and nobody can invest in it," Shah asserted. It had been reported last year that Saudi Arabia was eyeing multi-billion dollar investment in the IPL. In India, a registered society cannot accept foreign investment without the approval of the central government and the Reserve Bank of India.



## Stokes gave India the upper hand: Ian

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Legendary Australian cricketer Ian Chappell has punched holes in England skipper Ben Stokes' aggressive leadership tactics during the just-concluded five-Test series against India, saying some of his decisions were responsible for the visitors' 1-4 series humiliation. He said that while the need of the hour on the third evening of the fourth Test in Ranchi was to give the ball to pace stalwart Jimmy Anderson to make early breakthroughs, Stokes decided to bowl part-time spinner Joe Root, thus missing a trick. "On the third evening, Stokes desperately needed to start India's chase with his best two bowlers and try to claim at least one wicket. Incredibly, he gave the ball to a part-timer, Joe Root, and ignored the experienced, probing bowling of Jimmy Anderson. India took full advantage and scored an invaluable 40 runs off just eight overs," said Chappell in his column for ESPNcricinfo. India did not lose a wicket in the post-tea session on day three, scoring 40 invaluable runs to put the pressure back on England. India won the Test by five wickets to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the series. "Stokes missed a trick in Ranchi. He then compounded his error by allowing too many easy singles on the final day (day four) by resorting to some cautious field placings. At a time when Stokes needed to be extremely brave as captain and hope he got lucky, he was abnormally conservative." "India probably would still

have won but at least by going on the attack, Stokes would have given England their best chance of an upset victory." He said that Stokes could probably take a lesson or two from former Pakistan skipper Javed Miandad, who was a "leadership master" in trying situations. Chappell added that India skipper Rohit Sharma took full advantage of the tentative field placings on day four of the Ranchi Test with a thoughtful innings, and India's solid opening partnership helped seal victory. "By allowing easy singles, Stokes gave his opponents the upper hand. He also needed to use the experience and guile of Anderson to try and force the issue on the third evening but instead relied on the part-time spin of Root." Chappell said that Kuldeep Yadav ripped open England batters' vulnerabilities to that of Jimmy Anderson. India took full advantage and scored an invaluable 40 runs off just eight overs, said Chappell in his column for ESPNcricinfo. India did not lose a wicket in the post-tea session on day three, scoring 40 invaluable runs to put the pressure back on England. India won the Test by five wickets to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the series. "Stokes missed a trick in Ranchi. He then compounded his error by allowing too many easy singles on the final day (day four) by resorting to some cautious field placings. At a time when Stokes needed to be extremely brave as captain and hope he got lucky, he was abnormally conservative." "India probably would still

## I targeted Richa toes on last delivery: Jess

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals' left-arm spinner Jess Jonassen is happy to have executed a perfect block-hole delivery last-up which didn't allow the dangerous Richa Ghosh to tee off during her team's thrilling one-run win against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Women's Premier League. However, the ace Southern Star spinner cheekily admitted that since she became the holder of 'Purple Cap' for highest wicket-taker, she hasn't been bowling well. Needing 17 to win off the last over, RCB's Richa hit two huge sixes to bring the equation down to 2 off one ball but the India international, who was already out of breath, couldn't complete a single to take the game into a Super Over with Jonassen hardly giving her any room to manoeuvre. "In the last ball, I targeted on her toes. I think (I) executed well and thankfully it went straight to Shafali, who got it in quick enough. And coming away with the one-run win felt nice after the heartbreaking loss by one run in the previous game," Jonassen was quoted as saying in a media release. The 31-year-old is currently leading the wicket-takers' chart in the season so far (10 wickets in five matches) but seemed to be in a mood to turn into a self-critic. "Since I've got that Purple Cap on my head, I've been quite ordinary with the



ball. Ideally, I'd love to keep taking wickets, but I haven't been as consistent as I was in those first couple of matches that I've played." "I'm probably my harshest critic. It's something to be mindful of and keep rectifying. I always want to try and do my best for whatever team I'm a part of," she added. Sunday's game was the closest of encounters that one has witnessed this

season and Jonassen knew things went wrong once Richa hit her for a straight six. "I internally knew that at the start of the over, if I could set it up without going for a boundary in one of the first two balls, then we were sort of well and truly on the front foot. "But, getting hit for a massive six down the ground was not ideal, and then I gave it too much air for her in the second last ball."

## Ranji Trophy final: Job is far from done for Mumbai

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Senior left-arm spinner Shams Mulani feels that Mumbai team cannot afford to be complacent despite having an overall lead of 260 runs after two days in the Ranji Trophy final against Vidarbha. Mumbai produced an all-round show on the second day at the Wankhede Stadium to take complete command, bowling out Vidarbha for a mere 105 in the first innings to earn a big 119-run lead. In their second innings, Mumbai were jolted twice early on but skipper Ajinkya Rahane (58 not out) and Musheer Khan (51 not out) led a resolute fightback with an unbeaten 107-run stand for the third wicket to take second innings score to 141/2. "Three days are left (in the game). We have not thought about anything else other than batting. Yes, we have got a healthy lead but we will look to build on it and see how we can improve and take the game away from them as much as possible," Mulani told the media after stumps. "Right now, we feel that we need to bat. There's no target in mind because we are just thinking that it's just 141. We are not thinking of the lead as of now. It's just 141 for two and we will bat along — the game is still a long way to go," he added. Mulani said Rahane's timely unbeaten fifty was worth celebrating like a century for the Mumbai dressing room. "We celebrated like it was a hundred because we knew how important this small milestone for him is. For the team, for himself, in this situation, it was very important that he stays on the wicket," Mulani said. The domination for Mumbai was, however, set up by veteran Dhawal Kulkarni, who snaffled two key wickets on first day evening and bowled a measly spell of 11-5-15-3 while adding one more dismissal to his kitty. Mulani said to see former India medium pacer Kulkarni excelling in his final game of

his career was "emotional". "It was emotional moment for all of us. For him, obviously it was very emotional. But coming the way he did — he didn't play the last four games but it didn't feel like he has not played," Mulani said. "Him coming in at a crucial stage like the finals and delivering... Coming in is a different thing and delivering in the finals is a different thing. We are very happy for him as a unit," Mulani said. The left-arm spinner also heaped praise on Musheer for his gritty 51 not out, revealing a dressing room conversation between the Mumbai players, including his elder brother Sarfaraz Khan, from last year when the 18-year-old made his debut. "Last year, when Musheer made his debut, Sarfaraz told the dressing room that what others do, this guy can do much better than that," Mulani revealed. "He knew what (kind of) character Musheer is — the gritty character that he is. He has shown that, coming into the knockouts from the (U-19) World Cup," he added. Mulani also credited his team for being disciplined enough to bundle out Vidarbha inside one session on the second day. "Discipline was the major thing, where we picked the wickets because we didn't give too many bad balls in the initial overs. In 14-15 overs (or so), we gave around 20-25 runs. We put the pressure on them by not giving too many runs and bowling in the right channel," he added. Meanwhile, Vidarbha pacer Yash Thakur admitted his team is behind in the game but expressed confidence of a turnaround given the amount of time left in the contest. "It is a long game, a five-day game. We have a chance to come back and we believe in that we will come back in this game," Thakur said. "It is a part of the game that we collapsed. We are behind in the game but you don't know, cricket is a funny game and you can make a comeback anytime," he added.

## McCullum concedes Bazball needs refinement

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

England coach Brendon McCullum has conceded that the team's much-hyped 'Bazball' approach needs some "adjustment" after India exposed its frailties and forced the visitors to become "timid" during the recently-concluded Test series here. England started with a thrilling win in Hyderabad but things went downhill for the visitors from there as India bounced back in stunning manner to take the five match rubber 4-1. "Sometimes, you can get away with things. But when you're exposed the way we have been in the back end of this series in particular, it does require some pretty deep thinking and some adjustment to make sure we're staying true to what we believe in," McCullum told the travelling British media on Sunday. "If anything, we got more timid as the series went on, and that was because of the pressure that was applied to us by the Indian line-up, not just with the ball. With the bat, they put us under a tremendous amount of pressure, too," he



added. Indian youngsters played a prominent role in the series win. In the absence of key players like Virat Kohli, Mohammed Shami and KL Rahul, the likes of Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, and Sarfaraz Khan led the charge. The series loss was England's first in the 'Bazball' era. Ben Stokes and Co. Are now winless in three series and critics have panned the one-dimensional philosophy of aggression.

"There are some things where you can get a little bit of luck on your side and you paper over a couple of the cracks. When you are exposed in the way we have been here, you know that you have to get better in some areas," McCullum said. "The next couple of months will be us working out that and making sure when we come to the summer we are a more refined version of what we are at the minute." England were guilty of squandering strong chances in

the second, third and fourth Tests while their batters displayed poor judgement, giving away their wickets. "Whether that affected our approach a little bit and put some doubt in our minds that wasn't there early in the series, I'm not really sure why at this point in time. "They probably outplayed us at the style of cricket that we want to play and made us start to retreat a little bit. So that's something that we will have to change," McCullum said.

PTI ■ DUBAI

## Australia move to second in WTC table

Australia have overtaken New Zealand to take the second spot in the World Test Championship ranking following the 2-0 series win over their Trans-Tasman rivals in Christchurch on Monday. The win in the second Test helped Australia collect 12 points on their road to defending the World Test Championship mace. Australia have improved their percentage points from 59.09 to 62.50 after 12 matches. New Zealand have dropped from 60 percentage points to 50 to be third on the list. They have played six games. India, who have won six of their nine matches, continue to lead the table 68.51.

**One guy stood up in key moments:** Cummins after thrilling series-win over NZ. Cummins lauded his team for its fearless attitude and particular praised wicketkeeper Carey for his series-clinching effort, saying the story of the rubber was that one player who stood up when they needed. A herculean effort from Alex Carey alongside Mitchell Marsh's 80 and Pat Cummins' late heroics helped Australia defeat New Zealand in the second Test and seal the series. Australia had won the first Test by 172 runs in Wellington last month. Carey finished on 98 not out while



Cummins (32 not out) struck the winning runs off New Zealand debutant Ben Sears (4/90), whose double-wicket over to collect Mitchell Marsh and Starc, earlier looked to bring the Kiwis back into the match. In the end, the 61-run partnership between Cummins and Carey sealed the deal for Australia. "If the scoreboard is not moving, you always feel in the game (from the bowling side), but if they're just chipping away at it seems like it's all happening pretty quickly. "So that was a goal today - just always be busy out there. Just keep the run rate ticking over, bit by bit getting closer," Cummins was

quoted as saying by ICC after the end of the match. Cummins feels the 92-run first innings lead over New Zealand played a big role in Australia's success in the keenly-contested clash. "That day one moved really quickly. And then after that the pitch flattened out and it was a bit tougher going for the bowlers. But yeah, the first innings lead was always key. "I think the story of this series was in key moments one guy stood up, and we didn't necessarily play complete games but you know, someone stood up and made themselves a match-winner. (We) keep finding ways to win. It's a pretty awesome squad," he said. "Amazing win, bit by bit, the boys were fantastic today."