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I AM HAPPY TO BE DHRUV, SAYS JUREL 12 SPORTS

EC to DECLARE LS DATES TODAY

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Friday said it will announce the poll schedule on Saturday for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections as well as simultaneous Assembly elections in a few States setting the tone and tenor for the three months long festival of democracy.

The EC will also announce the dates for the Assembly elections scheduled in Odisha, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, are also set to vote, in line with a Supreme Court order directing the conduct of Assembly polls by September 30 as the first step towards restoration of statehood.



Chief Election Commissioner of India (CEC) Rajiv Kumar with the two newly-appointed Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Gyanesh Kumar

manifestos and general conduct. The announcement by the EC regarding the poll schedule comes on a day the two newly-appointed Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, will announce the poll dates.

The EC had ended its survey with a tour of Jammu and Kashmir this week. In a first, the poll panel has given 24-hour notice of a Press conference to announce voting dates, polling phases, and other details, including deployment of security personnel in States where post-poll violence and clashes with Maoist or rebel forces is a factor that needs to be considered.

The term of the 17th Lok Sabha is set to end on June 16 while the terms of the Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim Assemblies will end on June 11, June 2, June 24 and June 2, respectively. Last time the Lok Sabha polls were announced on May 10 and held in seven phases beginning April 11. Votes were counted on May 23. According to EC, nearly 97 crore people are eligible to cast vote in the upcoming polls at over 12 lakh polling stations. The upcoming Lok Sabha polls are again being dubbed as Prime Minister Narendra Modi vs the

rest in the absence of a single Opposition face to counter the BJP. However, a host of leaders from both sides of the political divide are dominating the narrative in the run up to the general election.

The BJP has so far released two lists of 267 candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, while the Congress announced the names of 82 candidates over two lists. For the BJP, Modi is the electoral poster boy who is already crisscrossing the country to woo voters across the States.

Regional and national parties have already begun announcing their candidates for the elections to the 543 Parliamentary constituencies.

The BJP is looking to consolidate its grip on power as it aims for a historic third term while a band of Opposition parties, including the Congress, has formed a united front called INDIA to deny PM Modi another victory. Several other regional heavyweights are also in the fray, including a bevy of topline southern parties, who are fighting to bolster their presence in the states they represent.

In 2014, BJP stormed to power by winning 282 seats in the Lok Sabha. Its coalition NDA secured 353 seats. The Congress was reduced to just 44 seats in the Lok Sabha, its lowest ever tally in history. In terms of vote share, BJP managed to secure 31 per cent of the total votes while Congress won 19.3 per cent of the total votes cast.

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File Photo: Pioneer

SC raps SBI for not sharing complete electoral bond data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Admonishing the State Bank of India for furnishing incomplete information, the Supreme Court said on Friday the bank was required to provide the number unique to each electoral bond that would disclose the link between the buyer and the recipient political party.

It issued a notice to the country's largest bank to explain the reasons for non-disclosure of unique alpha numeric numbers in compliance of its directions, saying the SBI was "duty bound" to reveal them. A five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said the apex court had, in its verdict in the electoral bonds case, directed the disclosure of all the details of the bonds, including the purchaser, amount and date of purchase.

The bench, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, issued notice to the SBI and posted the matter for resumed hearing on March 18.

Who is appearing for the SBI? Because, in our judgement, we had directed disclosure specifically of all details of the bonds including the purchaser, the amount and the date of purchase. They have not disclosed the bond numbers. That has to be disclosed by the SBI," the CJ said.

"But, really speaking, we can take exception to what they have disclosed because they were duty bound," he added.

The apex court was hearing an application filed by the Election Commission seeking a modification of the operative portion of its March 11 order in the electoral bonds case. It directed the registrar (judicial) to ensure that the data filed earlier by the poll panel before it in a sealed cover be scanned and digitised.

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BRS leader Kavitha arrested in excise policy scam

PTI ■ HYDERABAD/NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Friday arrested BRS leader K Kavitha after a daylong raid at her premises in Hyderabad and was taking her to Delhi for questioning in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy, agency sources said.



Agency sources said the BRS leader was being brought to Delhi for questioning. The arrest of Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, came after a daylong raid by the ED at her premises in Hyderabad.

The ED questioned Kavitha thrice last year in this case and again summoned her this year but she did not depose citing a Supreme Court direction that allowed her protection from any coercive action.

Talking to reporters in Hyderabad, BRS leader and former Telangana minister Vemula Prashanth Reddy Kavitha was being taken to Delhi on a 8.45 pm flight. He alleged that the move was "pre-planned" and said they would protest against it. BRS working president KT Rama Rao, former Minister Harish Rao and a large number of party workers gathered at Kavitha's residence and raised slogans.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves to supporters during a public meeting, ahead of the Lok Sabha election, in Kanyakumari, on Friday

Modi spearheads BJP Southward push

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Election campaign in Kerala reached a crescendo by Friday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a whirlwind tour to Pathanamthitta and scintillated a capacity crowd of nearly ten thousand people with his emotion packed words.

The Lok Sabha constituency of Pathanamthitta from where the BJP has fielded Anil K Antony, son of former Union Defence Minister and Congress leader AK Antony was the cynosure of all eyes as Modi is the first Prime Minister to campaign from here in the electoral history of Kerala.

The presence of Padmaja Venugopal, daughter of former Chief Minister and Congress strongman late K Karunakaran

added fuel to the fire. Modi, who began his 45 minutes speech by reciting the Sarana Mantra of Lord Ayyappa, the presiding deity of the holy shrine of Sabarimala Temple in the district lambasted the ruling CPI(M) and the Opposition Congress for their failure in ensuring the safety of the common man in the State. Modi pointed out the attack on a Christian priest in the district by religious extremists and the failure of the police to control such frequent attacks.

The priest of St Mary's Forane Church in Poonjar in Pathanamthitta was seriously injured by a group of Islamist youths when the former requested them not to use the church premises to test drive

their high end cars and bikes. It was after two days of the incident Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan named the youths as Islamic extremists.

"Kerala which is being ruled alternately by the CPI(M) and the Congress have become a safe haven for corruption and nepotism. While the CPI(M) has specialised in making money through gold smuggling, the Congress is engaged in making fast buck through solar energy deals. Under the CPI(M) ruling, the educational institutes in the State have become safe havens for anti-social elements," said Modi referring to the death of many students in the campuses in Kerala.

Continued on Page 2

India terms US CAA remark misinformed

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

Taking exception to certain remarks by the United States regarding the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), India on Friday termed them as "misplaced, unwarranted and misinformed" and said the CAA addresses issue of statelessness, provides human dignity and supports human rights.

New Delhi also said those who do not understand India's pluralistic traditions better not attempt lecturing. This strong reaction from India came after the US said it is concerned about the notification of the CAA in India and is closely



monitoring its implementation.

"The CAA is about giving citizenship, not about taking away citizenship. It addresses the issue of statelessness, provides human dignity and supports human rights,"

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal here said. Brushing aside the US remarks, he said "vote-bank politics" should not determine views about a "laudable initiative" to help

those in distress. Lectures by those who have a limited understanding of India's pluralistic traditions and the region's post-partition history are best not attempted, Jaiswal said. His strong comments at a media briefing came when asked about the criticism against the CAA from Washington and various other parts of the globe. "The CAA is about giving citizenship, not about taking away citizenship. It addresses the issue of statelessness, provides human dignity and supports human rights," Jaiswal said, asserting that the law is an internal matter of India.

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Commercial services of the country's first underwater metro train commenced in Kolkata on Friday with hundreds of passengers erupting into jubilation on their first ride. A train began its journey from the Howrah Maidan station on the East-West metro corridor of Kolkata at 7 am with loud cheers and claps from commuters, while another started from Esplanade station at the same time. The commercial services began after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on March 6 inaugurated the Howrah Maidan-Esplanade section of Kolkata Metro's East-West corridor

Animal lovers link canine aggression to human exploitation

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Animal activists and organisations, while welcoming the ban on the import, sale, and breeding of 23 'ferocious' dogs by the Centre on Wednesday, have also highlighted some concerns about the reason mentioned behind it and the implementation of regulations.

The move aims to curb the rising cases of dog bites in the country on citizens, especially on the elderly and



Representational Image

children. While the activists support the ban, they said the reason is false and attribute the

aggression in dogs to humans who engage them in exploitative activities such as dogfighting.

People For Animal (PFA) Trustee and animal right's activist Ambika Shukla said, "We are for the regulation of dog breeding but using the term 'threat to human life' pins the blame on dogs. Humans are unleashing cruelty and abuse and treating them as prisoners, making them aggressive. If you want to ban them, do so because humans do not know how to breed them in this country." She said because these voiceless creatures aren't a vote bank for the political parties, it's easier for the

Government to impose rules on them instead of humans who engage in cruelty and abuse. People For Animals (PFA) director and member of the executive committee, Delhi Animal Welfare Board, Dr Asher R Jesudoss lauded the ban, while stating, "We are in support of the ban. These breeds aren't suited for the Indian climate. The limited urban spaces, where these dogs are raised, hamper their exercise and training, resulting in making them

aggressive. Let us find homes for the 4 crore street dog population before bringing more foreign breeds into the country." He said the Delhi Animal Welfare Board is not functioning properly. "Since its formation in 2023, the board has met once, with no agendas listed for the meeting," he said. The Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi Government must step up the implementation of the rules in the city, he said. The activist said, "It has been tough to get Delhi Animal

Welfare Board to fulfill their mandated duties towards these animals. There has been close to no action on the ground. Moreover, people involved in heinous activities like illegal dog breeding & dogfighting are vote banks for political parties across the country. Even though the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court had ordered the Delhi Animal Welfare Board to hold a meeting once every month, nothing has moved on that front since then.

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# India, Bhutan review ties

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

India and Bhutan reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral ties during talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his counterpart Tshering Tobgay who conveyed his deep appreciation for India's role as a reliable, trusted and valued partner in Bhutan's developmental priorities. Tobgay, who is on a five-day visit to India, said this during wide-ranging talks he and Prime Minister Modi held on Thursday evening. Ministry of External Affairs(MEA)said here on Friday. Modi is visiting Bhutan next week.



Bhutan's developmental priorities," it said. The MEA said on behalf of the Bhutanese King, Tobgay extended an invitation to Modi to visit Bhutan next week. "The prime minister accepted the invitation," it said. President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said India deeply values its multi-faceted partnership with Bhutan and the spiritual heritage of Buddhism connects the two countries. She said Bhutan can count on India as a reliable friend and partner. Welcoming Bhutanese Prime

Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay, who called on the president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here, Murmu said India and Bhutan enjoy a close and unique relationship, based on mutual trust, goodwill and understanding at all levels. She appreciated the fact that the Bhutanese prime minister chose India for his first overseas visit after taking the oath of office. President Murmu said the shared spiritual heritage of Buddhism connects the two countries. She highlighted that

India deeply values its multi-faceted partnership with Bhutan, spanning across sectors such as energy cooperation, development partnership, people-to-people relations and trade and investment linkages, according to a statement issued by the president's office. The President said India is privileged to partner with Bhutan in the development of the cooperation sector and towards enhancing the socio-economic well-being and prosperity of the people of the Himalayan country.

# Electoral bond: BJP top receiver, TMC second

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

A data uploaded by the Election Commission on its website regarding electoral bonds shows, the BJP was by far the biggest beneficiary of the electoral bonds scheme, receiving ₹6,061 crore as political donations in the last five years. This amounts to 48 per cent of all electoral bonds encashed by political parties since the start of 2019-20 and before it was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court earlier this year. Surprisingly, the Trinamool Congress was second on the list with bonds worth ₹1610 crore. The Congress is in the third spot with ₹1422 crore. Rounding off the top five are Bharat Rashtia Samithi, formerly Telangana Rashtia Samithi, with ₹1,215 crore and the Biju Janata Dal with ₹776 crore. Interestingly, the data uploaded by the EC does not say who donated to which party. The list of entities which purchased electoral bonds to make political donations is a veritable Who's Who of the corporate world. But possibly the biggest donor, according to the list



released by the Election Commission, is a little known lottery company called Future Gaming and Hotel Services. The better known names include steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal, Sunil Bharti Mittal's Bharti Airtel, Anil Agarwal's Vedanta, ITC, Mahindra and Mahindra, DLF, PVR, Birlas, Bajajs, Jindals, Spicejet, IndiGo and the Goenkas. Cumulatively, the top 20 donors accounted for ₹5,830 crore, which is almost 48 per cent of the total bonds purchased between April 2019 and February 2024. Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited, a little-known company with a registered address at Navi Mumbai's Dhirubhai Ambani Knowledge City (DAKC) and having links to Reliance Industries, was the third largest donor to political parties using electoral bonds. It bought ₹410 crore of electoral bonds between financial years

2021-22 and 2023-24, but Reliance said the company is not a subsidiary of any Reliance entity. Electoral bond purchases and donations by Qwik Supply were behind ₹1,368 crore of Future Gaming and Hotel Services — another little-known lottery company — and ₹966 crore of Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering & Infra, according to information uploaded by the Election Commission on its website. Publicly available information describes Qwik Supply as a manufacturer of warehouses and storage units. The unlisted private company was incorporated on November 9, 2000, with an authorised share capital of ₹130.99 crore. Its paid-up capital is ₹129.99 crore. The firm had a revenue of over ₹500 crore in 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023) but profit numbers were not known. It bought electoral bonds worth ₹360 crore in 2021-22 to give away to political parties. In the same year, its net profit was only ₹21.72 crores. It bought another ₹50 crore worth of bonds in the financial year 2023-24. Future Gaming and Hotel Services purchased possibly

the highest amount of bonds worth ₹1,368 crore, followed by Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd at ₹966 crore. Future Gaming was probed by the Enforcement Directorate in March 2022. While it is already known that the ruling BJP received the highest amount of donation of over ₹6,000 crore followed by the Congress party, the data dump only disclosed the amount donated by each entity or individual. Among the known corporates, Agarwal's Vedanta Ltd bought ₹398 crore worth of bonds, while Sunil Mittal's three companies together purchased a total of ₹246 crore worth of bonds. Steel magnate Lakshmi Niwas Mittal bought ₹35 crore worth of bonds in his individual capacity. Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering, which has bagged contracts of several large infrastructure projects, bought bonds worth ₹966 crore. While most of the bonds have been issued in the name of political parties, the donations made to the Congress and the Samajwadi Party were made in the name of 'President, All India Congress Committee' and 'Adyaksha Samajwadi Party'.

# Situation across LAC stable, but sensitive: Army Chief

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

With tension persisting at the border in Ladakh for the last four years, Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Friday here said he would describe the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as "stable but sensitive" while asserting that deployment of Indian troops and other elements there is "extremely robust" and "balanced".



Making these assertions during a panel discussion in a conclave organized by a private television network, he also said "we need to keep a close watch and monitor" what other developments are taking place along the border in terms of infrastructure and movement of troops. The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Lake area. Ties between India and China nose-dived significantly following the clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades. Asked what was the current situation at the LAC, Pande said, "Very briefly if I were to sum up as to what the situation is, I would describe it to be stable but sensitive. And, this is where we need to keep a close watch, monitor very closely the activities across the LAC, both in the immediate, shall we say depth, and further behind." "I would say upfront, our deployment in terms of the troops and other elements that we have along the LAC, is extremely robust and, it is balanced. We also have or we do maintain adequate reserves, in terms of our infantry formation and other artilleries and the other elements, to be able to deal with any situation that may arise across the entire length of the LAC. So, this is as far as our preparedness is concerned," he

added. India and China recently held a fresh round of high-level military talks to resolve the border row that witnessed both sides agreeing to maintain "peace and tranquility" on the ground but there was no indication of any breakthrough. The Army chief was also asked what lessons have been learnt from tussles at the border, to which he said, not only what is happening along the border, "I would say there are very profound lessons that we need to learn from conflicts happening around the world." These lessons are at the "strategic level, operational level and tactical level." "At the strategic level, national security is gaining salience in the international system and what it has shown is that when national interests are involved, nations would not hesitate to go to war. Second, in situation where you have contested borders, such as ours, the land will continue to remain a decisive domain of warfare," Pande said. Third is self-reliance, it has shown that not only in this conflict, but also during the pandemic time, "the importance for us to become self-reliant, to have near zero dependency on ex/import requirements." "At the operational level, the importance of non-contact warfare, as we call it non-kinetic warfare... Cyber, information space, battle of narratives, influence operations,

# Model code to come into force after announcement today Lok Sabha polls schedule

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

With schedule of Lok Sabha polls to be announced on Saturday, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) will come into force immediately. Interestingly, the first exercise to have such a conduct was carried out during the Assembly elections in 1960 in Kerala. The dos and don'ts for political parties subsequently evolved over the last 60 years to assume its present form, according to the Election Commission. The MCC is a set of conventions agreed upon by all stakeholders during the elections. Its objective is to keep campaign, polling and counting orderly, clean and peaceful and check any abuse of state machinery and finances by the party in power. It does not enjoy any statutory backing. However, the Supreme Court has upheld its sanctity on several occasions. The Election Commission is fully authorised to investigate any violation of the code, and pronounce punishment. The code comes into force as soon as the EC announces the poll schedule and remains operational until the process is concluded. "The code has evolved over the last 60 years to assume its present form. It had its origin during assembly elections in Kerala, 1960 when the administration tried to evolve a 'code of conduct' for the political parties," read the book titled "Leap of Faith". The book was published by the ECI to document journey published by the Election Commission to document the journey of elections in India. "The Model Code of Conduct was first issued by Election



Commission of India under the title of 'Minimum Code of Conduct' on September 26, 1968 during the Mid-Term Elections 1968-69. The code was further revised in 1979, 1982, 1991 and 2013," the book added. A document titled, "Role and Responsibilities of Political Parties during Elections: An Appeal to Political Parties for the Observance of a Minimum Code of Conduct during Election Propaganda and Campaign", determining the standard political behaviour, was prepared by the commission during the mid-term general elections of 1968 and 1969. It was in 1979 that the Election Commission, in a conference of political parties, consolidated the code by adding a section monitoring the conduct of "parties in power". A revised code with a comprehensive framework was hence issued to prevent the powerful political actors from obtaining an undue advantage of their position. A parliamentary panel had in 2013 recommended that MCC be granted legal backing to ensure there is no vacuum for ECI to exercise its power, which is residuary in nature.

The panel had also recommended that MCC be enforced from the date of notification of polls and not date of announcement; a revision in election expenditure limit of candidates to make it more realistic; fast-track courts to dispose of election disputes within 12 months and allowing independent MPs to join any political party within six months of election. Former Chief Election Commissioner S Y Quraishi was a strong advocate of legalisation of the MCC during his tenure and had suggested stringent legal action against politicians who flout it. According to the EC, the MCC states that the party in power at the Centre and in the states should ensure that it does not use its official position for campaigning. Ministers and other government authorities cannot announce financial grants in any form. No project or scheme which may have the effect of influencing the voter in favour of the party in power can be announced, and ministers cannot use official machinery for campaign purposes. India is gearing up for the next general elections to elect its 18th Lok Sabha, the schedule for which will be announced on Saturday. Last General Elections in the country were held in 2019. The term of the present Lok Sabha ends on June 16 and a new House has to be constituted before that. The term of the assemblies in Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Odisha is coming to an end on various dates in June. Last time the Lok Sabha polls were announced on March 10 and held in seven phases beginning April 11. Votes were counted on May 23.

# Indian Navy responds to SOS by Bangladeshi vessel seized by pirates

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy has responded to an SOS by Bangladesh-flagged bulk carrier with 23 crew members that was seized by pirates off the coast of Somalia earlier this week, the Navy said in a statement on Friday. The MV Abdullah was sailing from Mozambique's capital Maputo to the United Arab Emirates with a cargo of 55,000 tonnes of coal when it was attacked around midday on Tuesday, the company said. "A group of 15-20 Somali pirates hijacked the ship," said Meherul Karim, chief executive officer of Kabir Steel Rolling Mills, which owns the MV Abdullah vessel. "On receipt of intimation, the Long-Range Maritime Patrol (LRMP) aircraft was immediately deployed and on locating the MV (Abdullah) in the evening of 12 March, attempted to establish communication to ascertain status of ship's crew members. However, no response was received from the ship," said the Indian Navy. "The Mission Deployed warship on Maritime Security Operations, which had also been diverted, intercepted the hijacked MV on the morning of 14 March. The safety of the MV's crew (all Bangladesh nationals) held hostage by the armed pirates was ascertained and the Indian Navy warship continued to maintain in close vicinity of the MV till its arrival in the territorial waters of Somalia," it added. In the last few weeks, the Indian Navy has extended assistance to a number of merchant vessels in the Western Indian Ocean following attacks on them. The Indian Navy, earlier this month, foiled a piracy attempt on an Iranian-flagged fishing

vessel with a crew of 11 Iranian and eight Pakistani nationals along the East coast of Somalia. In January, Indian warship INS Sumitra rescued 19 Pakistani crew members of a fishing vessel after their Iranian-flagged vessel was attacked by pirates in the east coast of Somalia. The Navy on January 5 thwarted an attempted hijacking of Liberian-flagged vessel MV Lila Norfolk in the North Arabian Sea and rescued all its crew members. Liberian-flagged vessel MV Chem Pluto, with 21 Indian crew members, was the target of a drone attack off India's west coast on December 23. The Navy has already enhanced deployment of its frontline ships and surveillance aircraft for maritime security operations in view of the maritime environment in critical sea lanes, including in the North and Central Arabian Sea. There have been mounting global concerns over Houthi militants launching a series of attacks on cargo vessels in the Red Sea in the last few months. Hijackings off Somalia since December have fuelled concerns about a resurgence of Indian Ocean raids by opportunistic pirates, coming on top of a separate surge in attacks launched by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Houthi militia, who control a part of Yemen, have launched scores of drone and missile attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden targeting what they deem to be Israeli-linked vessels in response to Israel's war against the Palestinian militant group Hamas in Gaza. International naval forces have been diverted north from the Gulf of Aden into the Red Sea, sparking fears that pirates will exploit the security gap.

# Rajnath inaugurates newly built Navy HQ

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Nausena Bhawan, the newly constructed Headquarters of the Indian Navy, located at Delhi Cantonment was inaugurated on Friday by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The inauguration marks a significant milestone for the Indian Navy as it establishes its first independent headquarters in Delhi. Previously, the Navy operated from 13 different locations, necessitating a consolidated and purpose-built facility such as Nausena Bhawan. The architectural design of Nausena Bhawan was selected through a rigorous all-India competition process, ensuring the building's functionality and aesthetic appeal. Comprising



three wings across four stories, the building incorporates innovative construction technologies to optimize efficiency and sustainability. Efforts toward energy and water conservation are evident throughout the complex, with the integration of solar generation systems and advanced building materials. The Hybrid Reinforced Cement Concrete

Construction system enables the construction of large spans with maximum speed, while the building's design emphasises integration with natural elements through landscaped gardens and internal courtyards. Internally, Nausena Bhawan boasts a comfortable and congenial atmosphere facilitated by a Central Heating, Ventilation

and Air Conditioning system utilising Advanced Oxidation Plasma technology. Moreover, the complex is equipped with a state-of-the-art Integrated Building Management System, ensuring efficient coordination and monitoring of security services and utility systems. The building has achieved a Green Rating IV under the Integrated Habitability Assessment, underscoring its commitment to sustainable practices. Additionally, the complex features a comprehensive three-tier security system, including cutting-edge technologies such as Automatic Underbody scanning of vehicles, Power fence, Face Recognition Cameras, Bollards, Vehicle Stoppers, Access Control, and Security Cameras.

# Yoga to empower women

**ARCHANA JYOTI ■** NEW DELHI

With the theme 'Yoga for Women Empowerment' for this International Yoga Day to be observed on June 21, India is embarking upon a year-long mission to empower the country's half of the population to help reach their full potential with the physical and mental benefits of the practice. "Yoga is a comprehensive instrument for empowering women, encompassing their physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being," Rajesh Kotecha said adding that "Empowered women take on roles as leaders, educators, and advocates for change, promoting inclusivity, diversity, and empowerment across society." Speaking at the Yoga Mahotsav-2024, held here to mark the 100-

day countdown to the 10th edition of International Day of Yoga (IDY), Kotecha said that the aim of holding the mega event is to propel Yoga into a wide-spread movement with a focus on women's well-being and promoting global health and peace. The Ayush Ministry has actively supported studies on various conditions affecting women, including PCOS/PCOD, stress management, and the like, to focus on women's health irrespective of their age or condition, promoting women's empowerment through evidence-based research, he said at the event, attended by Joint Secretary, Ayush, Kavita Garg, DDC Ministry of Ayush, Satyjit Paul, Advisor (Ayurveda), Ministry of Ayush, Vaidya Manoj Nesari, Chairman, National Commission of

Homoeopathy, Dr. Anil Khurana, and Director Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY). Vijaylakshmi Bhardwaj among others. Hansaji Jayadeva, Director of The Yoga Institute, Mumbai emphasized the enduring value of good actions, stating that they are the best currency that sustains us forever. She highlighted the importance of accepting people as they are and finding joy in understanding them, rather than letting oneself be disturbed by the actions of others. During her address at the panel discussion on "Yoga and Women Empowerment: Different Dimensions" Dr. Tanuja Nesari, Director, All India Institute of Ayurveda, Delhi underscored the symbiotic relationship between Yoga and Ayurveda. "While Yoga embod-

ies the spiritual essence of Ayurveda, Ayurveda encapsulates the physical aspect of Yoga, portraying them as complementary aspects of holistic wellness..." She stressed the necessity of integrating Ayurveda and Yoga within healthcare practices to ensure comprehensive well-being and pointed out the efficacy of Yoga breathing techniques and a Sattvic diet in maintaining mood balance, managing menopausal symptoms, irregular periods, and reducing anxiety. Dr. HR Nagendra, Chancellor, SVYASA University, Bengaluru highlighted the challenges posed by modern lifestyle disorders as well as non-communicable diseases which can be effectively tackled by integrating Ayush healthcare, and particularly,

HC permits BJP to conduct road show in Coimbatore

PTI ■ CHENNAI The Madras High Court on Friday directed the police in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore to grant permission with certain conditions to BJP to conduct a four km road show of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in that city on March 18.

order denying permission to BJP to conduct the road show on Monday. In his petition, Ramesh Kumar submitted he had applied for permission with the police on March 14 to permit him to conduct a road show for a span of four km via Mettupalayam road, Coimbatore for the purpose of enabling people to meet the Prime Minister.



without any interference of touts and also promote the habit of saying no to drugs keeping in perspective the recent incidents hazardous drug trafficking in Tamil Nadu, he added.

Coimbatore in the event of conducting such road show and also in view of security threats as if it prevails. The order was arbitrary and in contrary to the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution of India.

Days not far when Ram Rajya will be established: Rajnath Chhatra (Jharkhand), Mar 15 (PTI) Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday asserted that the days were not far when 'Ram Rajya' will be established in India, which would be among the top three economies in the world by 2027.

or CAA and demanded to know under what circumstances the population of Hindus in Pakistan dwindled to about 3 per cent from about 23 per cent. Addressing a rally at Itkhor, around 160 km from state capital Ranchi, Singh said, "Ram Rajya will be established in India with the consecration of Ayodhya temple... Ram Lalla has reached his palace from his hut."

under Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the back of development work undertaken by him and it is God's wish that he remains the PM not only for the third time but for the fourth time as well," he said.

More Congress leaders join BJP in MP



Former Congress MLA from Mhow, Antarr Singh Darbar, and his senior party colleague from Indore, Pankaj Sanghvi, were among many leaders from the grand old party who joined the BJP in Madhya Pradesh on Friday.

by the "magnificent works and developmental activities" being carried out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the country and CM Yadav in MP.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of the owner of Plot No. 113, area measuring 250 Sq. Yds., Situated at Sector-4 R, Urban Estate Faridabad, vide sale deed 05.10.1983, and rego. Award dated 19.11.2007...

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of the owner of Plot No. 113, area measuring 250 Sq. Yds., Situated at Sector-4 R, Urban Estate Faridabad, vide sale deed 05.10.1983...

PUBLIC NOTICE: Be it known to public at large through this notice that the client Jyotinder Chauhan S/O Shri Suresh Chauhan R/o Flat No. 5118, 2nd Floor, Pocket-B-7, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110075...

PUBLIC NOTICE: This is to inform to all concerned that Mrs. Tanuja Chawla W/o Mr. Narinder Singh & Mr. Narinder Singh S/O Mr. Gurab Singh both R/o 83 DDA Flats, Jaijv Park, East Punjab Bagh New Delhi-110026...

E-TENDER NOTICE: E-Tenders are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned.

Congress MP quits after being denied LS ticket

Congress MP Abdul Khaleque, who has been denied a ticket in Assam for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, resigned from the party on Friday.

I, Anju W/o Late Sh. Vikas Dahiya R/o Gopalpur (13-R), Sonipat, Haryana-131402, declare that name of my minor daughter has been wrongly written as Krupa, aged 09 years in my husband Service Record.

PUBLIC NOTICE: In The Pioneer Newspaper our publication was published on dated 15-03-2024 in Page No. 2/5 mentioning that Mr. Kalish Sharma is purchasing and mortgaging the Entire Plot No. 398, area measuring 209 Sq. Mtrs., situated at Sector 31, of the Urban Estate, Faridabad, Haryana.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice is hereby given to the public that there is Outstanding Payable Amount in our books of account of following Person/Companies/Firms which was Invested in our Company through Sh. Naresh Bajaj & Sh. Harish Sonik in the year 2019.

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is hereby informed to public at large that my clients Ram Kumar Jain S/O Amolak Chand Jain and Rekha Jain W/o Ram Kumar Jain R/o 54 Gali No-4 New Krishna Nagar, Krishna Nagar, East Delhi-110051 have debarred their son Robin Jain S/O Ram Kumar Jain from their moveable and immovable properties and severed the relationship from him due to his bad behaviour and illegal activity.

Table with 10 columns: Sr. no, Tender no, Name of Work, Probable amount of contract (in lacs), Earnest money (in lacs), Completion period, बिबिदा जारी दिनांक, बिबिदा जलनलोक की अंतिम दिनांक, Call, Form. Includes tender details for Design, Laying Jointing Interconnection, Testing & Commissioning of Clear Water Rising Main.

कार्यालय, नगर पालिक निगम, भिलाई E-Procurement Tender Notice Main Portal: https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in Bhillai/Dated:15/03/2024

MADHYA PRADESH STATE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD. Paryatan Bhawan, Bhadbadha Road, Bhopal-462003 Phone: 91-755-4027100, 2774340/42 www.mpstdc.com

न्यायालय माननीय श्रीमान व्यवहार न्यायाधीश महोदय, विलासपुर (छ.ग.) इस्तफा प्रो. क्रमांक - 3 आदेश दिनांक : 02.03.2024

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is for the information of all allottees of residential project Paras Quarter being developed by the Promoter M/s. Fantasy Buildwell Pvt. Ltd. in Gwal Pahari, Sector 2, Gurugram.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, NORTHERN (R&B) CIRCLE SAMBALPUR e - Procurement BID IDENTIFICATION No CCENC (R AND B) /39/ 2023-24 No. 1458 Dtd. 15.03.2024

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

Tender Notice Reference No. PGSC/Admin/ Digital Projection /2024/02 Pushpa Gaur Science City invites online bids for the following: SL No, Item, Quantity

प्रथम व्यवहार न्यायाधीश वर्ग-2 के द्वितीय अतिरिक्त न्यायाधीश विलासपुर (छ.ग.) HARYANA REAL ESTATE REGULATORY AUTHORITY

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is further informed that the Director, Town and Country Planning Department Haryana (DTCP) has granted license No. 186 of 2023 for development of Group Housing Project on an additional / adjoining land of 4.26875 Acres to the Project Paras Quarter and subsequently has also approved the complete project to be developed under phase wise manner i.e. in Phase - 1, 2 & 3, out of which Phase - 1 has already been granted with Occupation Certificate (OC) on 4.06.2018 and 22.06.2020.

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Winning strategy

### BJP replaces a significant number of sitting MPs with new faces to enhance its voter appeal

In a strategic move aimed at tackling anti-incumbency and heightening its electoral appeal, the BJP has made an unusual shift in its nomination process: The party has dropped over 20 per cent of its sitting MPs in the upcoming elections. This move, while seemingly risky, reflects the ruling party's proactive approach in addressing voter discontent. Anti-incumbency, or the tendency of voters to feel dissatisfied with their chosen representatives and opt for change, can seriously affect a party's poll prospects. Over time, entrenched power can lead to complacency and perceived administrative inertia. Therefore, parties often grapple with the challenge of mitigating the anti-incumbency sentiment. However, the move appears strange this time as the BJP is confident of securing more than 370 seats in the Lok Sabha. Worldly wisdom says that sidelining 100-plus sitting MPs can create a disgruntled group in its ranks, which can be equally detrimental for the party. Such 'rebels' work at cross purposes with party interests. On the other hand, the decision means that the BJP acknowledges the prevailing voter mood. By opting for fresh faces and new voices, the party aims to present itself as responsive to public sentiment. This strategic manoeuvre reflects its commitment to adaptability and willingness to embrace change in pursuit of electoral success.



Several other factors may also have contributed to the BJP's decision. One, demographic shifts and evolving socio-economic dynamics necessitate a recalibration of political strategies. As constituencies evolve, a party must ensure that its candidates are

in tune with the electorate's aspirations. Besides, internal assessments and feedback mechanisms may have highlighted areas where incumbent representatives were perceived as underperformers. Through its nomination overhaul, the BJP aims to prove that it is responsive to feedback, and promote accountability within its ranks. As the Opposition intensifies its campaign to capitalise on any perceived BJP weakness, the latter recognises the importance of maintaining its electoral edge. The BJP is poised to prioritise several issues in its campaign strategy, including highlighting its record in development and governance, emphasising achievements in economic growth and infrastructure projects. But the BJP's trump card is the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His charisma, decisive leadership and a clear vision for future is what the BJP would heavily bank upon. Given such an impressive array of issues to encash, if one were to look at the move from the other side of the fence, it was perhaps an unnecessary move as the Lok Sabha voting is generally for the party and the leader; a candidate's credentials are generally the last thing on the minds of voters. The decision to drop the sitting MPs in large numbers hints at a streak of apprehension within the party's ranks.

### PICTALK



Cadets celebrate during the passing out ceremony of class 2020-2024 of B. Tech Marine Engineering, in Kolkata

# India is not a nation, but a subcontinent!



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

### A Raja, a DMK MP, has sparked controversy with his recent statement, dismissing India as a nation and branding it as a subcontinent instead

Nothing is shocking in the statement made by A Raja MP, that India was not a nation but a subcontinent. "India was neither a nation in the past nor will it remain as a nation in future," declared Raja while addressing a meeting held by his party, the DMK.

Neither the DMK nor the Dravida Kazhagam, its precursor, accepted the concept of India. The founding fathers of these Kazhakams (Tamil for Forum) have an inherent hatred towards anything that is Indian. The Dravidians firmly believe Robert Caldwell, a British evangelist who came to India during the colonial era, claims that there is no link between the Dravidians and Aryans (north Indians) and Tamil is the mother of all languages. The Dravidians have no answer to the question of how an evangelist with no known credentials as a linguist claims that Tamil has no connection with Sanskrit.

Muthuvel Karunanidhi, the DMK patriarch, who never missed any chance to ridicule Sanskrit and Hindi is on record insulting these languages as impotent. The name Karunanidhi itself is a Sanskrit term. His grandchildren Udhayanidhi, Dayanidhi and Aditya, grand nephews Kalanidhi and Dayanidhi flaunt Sanskrit names. Karunanidhi's son Stalin, the reigning chief minister, claims that Sanskrit and Hindi are part of Hinduism.

This is not the first time people like Raja have courted controversy by putting their foot in the mouth. Immediately after the 2019 Lok Sabha election, T Thirumavalavan, who is the founder of the SC/ST outfit VCK declared that North Indians were not welcome in Tamil Nadu. He also declared that Rohingya Muslims and Islamic immigrants should be given citizenship in Tamil Nadu. Thirumavalavan, in his eagerness to prove his anti-Hindutva stance, went one step further and changed the name of his nonagenarian father from Ramasamy to Tholkappian! Every uttering by the leaders of the DMK and its allies gives



enough hint that they are for seceding from India and forming a separate Dravida Nadu. Stalin, while speaking in a public function at Erode in 2018 declared that a separate Dravida Nadu was still an agenda of the DMK and it has been put on the backburner for the time being. Stalin declared that all South Indian States should unitedly demand a Dravida Nation. "If such a situation comes it would be welcome. We hope that such a situation arises," said the DMK chief. Stalin has become wiser over the years to understand the truth that Tamil Nadu can never become a stand-alone State without Karnataka and Kerala. If Karnataka refuses to release Kaveri River Water and Kerala decides to go ahead with its plans to build a new dam in place of the existing Mullaperiyar, which has outlived its utility, Tamil Nadu is in for major crisis.

The intransigent attitude of the Dravidian party not to accept the reforms and suggestions proposed by the Centre is ample proof of the fact that the State wants to pursue an independent path. Its refusal to launch the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya program in the State speaks volumes of the DMK's aversion to anything that is Indian. A scheme



TAMIL NADU CAN NEVER BECOME A STAND-ALONE STATE WITHOUT KARNATAKA AND KERALA. IF KARNATAKA REFUSES TO RELEASE KAVERI RIVER WATER AND KERALA DECIDES TO GO AHEAD WITH ITS PLANS TO BUILD A NEW DAM, THIS CAN BE A MAJOR CRISIS FOR TAMIL NADU

conceived and introduced by late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to make public school education available to the backward region of the district would have a cosmopolitan atmosphere with students drawn out from all over the country. The school to be built in the backward region of the district would have a cosmopolitan atmosphere with students drawn out from all over the country. The school to be built in the backward region of the district would have a cosmopolitan atmosphere with students drawn out from all over the country. The school to be built in the backward region of the district would have a cosmopolitan atmosphere with students drawn out from all over the country.

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was the chairman of the Sabha from its inception in 1918 till his last in 1948.

While the DMK is always at the forefront of attacking Sanatana Dharma for the murder of Mahatma Gandhi, the party has no qualms about having an electoral alliance with forces that support the assassins of Rajiv Gandhi.

The party had gone out of its way to get clemency for the murderers of Rajiv Gandhi and even their liberation from imprisonment. The DMK led by Vaiko and VCK led by Thol Thirumavalavan are fanatic supporters of LTTE and its founder V Prabhakaran. Every year on the birth and death anniversaries of Prabhakaran, rationalists Vaiko and Thirumavalavan offer prayers for the LTTE chief and his comrades who waged war against India.

There are enough instances to prove the secret secessionist plans being conceived by these elements. The DMK and its associates are a threat to the national security and integrity. The centre and other state governments are advised to be "Caveat Emptor" (Customers, Beware!) in their dealings with the DMK and fringe parties like MDMK and VCK. (The writer is special correspondent with the Pioneer, views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### VR HAS BECOME A MENACE

Sir — In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, virtual reality (VR) is emerging as a game-changer, not only in the realm of entertainment and gaming but also in the field of mental health. While VR has been captivating users with its ability to transport them to alternate realities, it also holds immense promise as a therapeutic tool. Recent years have witnessed a growing body of research and a surge in VR applications specifically designed to alleviate stress, and anxiety, and even assist in the treatment of conditions like PTSD and social anxiety. By immersing individuals in controlled, immersive environments, VR is harnessing the power of technology to positively impact emotional well-being. Prepare to journey through a landscape where pixels and pixels alone have the potential to heal and rejuvenate the human mind. Welcome to the fascinating world of VR's therapeutic promise.

Rajeev Yadav | Ujjain

### SUNAK'S PARTY IS IN TROUBLE

Sir — British Indian-origin Prime Minister Rishi Sunak feels that moving to 10 Downing Street is proving inauspicious for him. Ever since he assumed this position, his conservative party, has been getting into various problems. The popularity of this government is continuously sliding downwards. By throwing the country into the fire of Brexit, this party has worsened the economic condition of the country. The economic situation is rapidly moving towards recession. Sometimes its MPs appear to be victims of Islamophobia. Sometimes a donor makes an indecent comment towards a black woman MP. Recently Conservative MP Lee Anderson has expressed outrage by saying that "Islamists" have "taken control" of Labour's London mayor, Sadiq Khan. The party tried to save its own life by immediately throwing him out of the party. This uproar had not yet subsided

### Water crisis in Bengaluru



It is pathetic to see that Bengaluru, the 'Garden City of India' has been facing a severe water crisis, the kind which the city has never witnessed before in its nearly 500-year history. The present water crisis in Bengaluru is not a resource-based concern, but an issue emerging out of poor policy implementation. Though Bengaluru has been receiving abundant rainfall every winter, the local government hasn't invested enough to get water to every resident across the city.

For years the thirsty city has swung between Cauvery and tanks. The administration of Bengaluru must start anticipating the water problem and create effective alternate plans instead of just managing the situation. The causes of the failures and problems relating to water governance in Bengaluru must be examined as a whole mainly because this is not a case of 'tapless homes', but a problem of 'waterless taps'.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

when due to a new revelation, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak appeared to be on the defensive. Industrialist Frank Hester, who has donated £10 million to the Conservatives, told a meeting in 2019 that he did not hate all black women. But he said watching Ms Diane Abbott, Britain's longest-serving black MP, on TV "makes you want to hate all black women just because she's there". Will the Conservative Party return the donated amount to the donor and take legal action against him by accusing him of racism? Or will they consider racism as the ideology of the party and stand in the support of donors?

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

### RISHABH PANT IS BACK

Sir — A sportsperson will never lose whether it's on a track field or in a life race, and this phrase would prove true

by Rishabh Pant, one of the most gifted players and wicketkeepers of men in blue. The decision to come back on the field after the long break of 14 months is positive news for all the fans of the Indian wicketkeeper. In the upcoming IPL matches, the number 17 jersey will showcase his sportsmanship spirit and battle for Delhi Capitals. Rishabh Pant, after surviving a life-threatening car accident and ahead of that moment, the wicketkeeper-batter is nervous like a debutant all over again. Seeing Pant on the pitch with his weapon and marking the tally with the score is good. The true motivating force for sports is the only reason for coming back for players like him.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Fifth-generation stealth jet to be a reality soon

### India makes a significant stride in its defence programme with the approval of the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft project

The Cabinet Committee on Security cleared the project to design and develop the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) on March 7. This aircraft will be a fifth-generation, medium-weight stealth fighter jet. The Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) is spearheading the project, valued at around Rs 15,000 crore. Under this project, DRDO's Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) will collaborate with various private and public sector agencies to develop the stealth jet and associated technology. It's anticipated that approximately five prototypes will be built within a span of five years. The manufacturing of these prototypes will involve the public sector unit Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). This endeavour will propel India into a select group of nations either possessing or developing 5th generation fighter jets.



cross-section. Secondly, it can achieve 'Supercruise', enabling it to fly faster than the speed of sound without relying on fuel-intensive afterburners. Thirdly, it is equipped with advanced avionics, sensors, and network-centric operations. Increasingly, artificial intelligence is being integrated to enhance the pilot-aircraft interface, allowing a single pilot to manage both flight and combat operations. Lastly, it has the ability to outperform adversaries by detecting and engaging targets from considerable distances, facilitated by active electronically scanned array (AESA) radars. Achieving stealth involves meticulously shaping the aircraft to scatter radar waves rather than reflecting them, in addition to employing specialized materials and paints known as 'Radar Absorbing Structures' to further minimize radar reflectivity. In stealth mode,

these fighters conceal their weapons within internal bays, relying solely on internally-carried fuel to avoid radar detection, as external weapons or fuel tanks compromise stealth by reflecting radar waves.

The AMCA is slated for development in two phases. Phase 1 will result in the AMCA Mk-1, powered by the US GE-414 engine. Phase 2 will see the development of the AMCA Mk-2, featuring a more advanced and powerful engine. However, it's important to note that the projected induction of the AMCA by 2035 may not result in a 'completely 5th-generation fighter aircraft'.

China is poised to surpass the US in stealth aircraft production. China's J-20A Mighty Dragon, its first fifth-generation fighter, was expected to outnumber the US Air Force's F-22 Raptor fleet last year. Notably, the F-22 Raptor, the first operational fifth-generation fighter, has ceased production, with the US focusing on the more cost-effective F-35 Lightning II stealth fighter family. India withdrew from the Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft program

(FGFA) in April 2018, a joint effort with Russia aimed at developing an India-specific variant of the Russian Su-57 stealth fighter. Following a series of challenges, India's indigenous LCA Tejas has been inducted by the Indian Air Force. Despite this, India's fighter squadron strength continues to decline, falling short of the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons. New Delhi is exploring various options to bolster squadron numbers, recognising that a few Rafale and Tejas LCA squadrons are insufficient to bridge the gap. From the Indian Air Force's perspective, the urgency and importance of acquiring manned stealth fighters necessitate Cabinet Committee on Security approval for the AMCA project. While the project has received the much-awaited green light, it's crucial to remain vigilant regarding potential pitfalls and the project's impact on the Indian Air Force's combat capabilities. With meticulous planning and execution, it could prove to be a game-changer.

(The author is a freelance writer, views are personal)



RAHUL KAMBLE

## FIRST COLUMN

THE SILENT EPIDEMIC  
AMONG STUDENTSFrom sweaty palms to sleepless nights,  
the toll of exam stress is palpable

RAVI VALLURI

Rachel felt irritable on denouement day. She felt nauseous, her palms were sweaty, her facial muscles twitching and she was on tenterhooks on her way to appear for the 12th standard math examination. A student's anxiety gets compounded by gargantuan expectations of apprehensive parents and those of an extended family consisting of grandparents, siblings and peers.

The power and focus of the mind shift from solving complex quadratic equations appearing in the question paper to handling unnecessary pressure generated. Kid Stuf, was a musical produced by St Xavier's School Delhi, in which I was a participant too. The storyline championed the cause of children against the overbearing attitude of parents and an oppressive education system. It had the iconic lines – "School is such a bore and we are building more."

A student should approach examinations bubbling with energy. The mind ought to be in a state of equilibrium and remain fresh like dew on a petal. The mind should be razor-sharp to solve the questions appearing in the question paper. Anxiety disorders take a massive toll on the human body. It leads to improper sleep, an irritable disposition, obesity, acid refluxes, mood swings, decreased memory power resulting in a dip in output, loss of appetite, reduction in immunity levels, and disturbingly students are now getting afflicted with Type II diabetes.

Anxiety is an uneasy feeling about the outcome and a state of disquietude. Students find themselves in a pressure cooker kind of situation, thereby unable to score the winning runs. Several students develop psychosomatic disorders and perforce have to seek remedial help through counsellors and psychiatrists. The innocence of a child is sacrificed under the scanner and the scalpel of a doctor. This is indeed both bizarre and tragic.



Today, we have access to technology and highly qualified teachers, who impart quality education. Yet, the number of students is very large so it is practically impossible to pay minute attention to the needs and requirements of every child. Therefore, in such a situation, empathetic parenting can act as an ideal buffer to combat the stress faced by students, especially during examination time.

Good humour is a tonic for the body and mind. It is the best antidote for anxiety and depression. It is a business asset. It attracts and keeps friends. It lightens human burdens. It is the direct route to serenity and contentment,' writes GrenvilleKleison.

Teachers should create an Aha! moment in the classroom to attract the attention of the students and parents need to be innovative to spread warmth and mirth in the household, to uplift the mood of their child. The examination schedule, as planned by the controller of examinations, needs a review. It extends and stretches over a long jurisdiction of time. Whether the students can maintain their interest and motivation levels needs to be debated by the stakeholders. It is quite possible that ennui sets in and the mind gets distracted and consequently loses the focus. It reminds me of a cricket team touring Down Under which had to play a five-test series, followed by one-dayers and T-20s. If there are no fresh pairs of legs, visitors are likely to be pummeled.

These are however extraneous factors, beyond the control of a student. What a student can do is adopt simple measures such as taking a long walk, a yoga session, pranayama, proper diet and adequate rest along with intake of fluids or even listening to soothing music in the run-up to the examinations. Test the skill of the student, not their anxiety levels.

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

The eventful centennial  
of Jimmy CarterAs Jimmy Carter reaches the milestone of his 100th birthday, let us reflect  
on the extraordinary journey of the 39th President of the United States

SANTOSH MATHEW

We can choose to alleviate suffering. We can choose to work together for peace. We can make these changes—and we must:

Jimmy Carter.

At 100, Jimmy Carter is the oldest president in United States history. James Earl Carter Jr., the 39th President of the United States, has not only witnessed the ebb and flow of American history but has actively shaped its course with a commitment to peace, justice, and compassion. Born on October 1, 1924, in Plains, Georgia, Jimmy Carter's journey from a humble peanut farm to the highest office in the land is a testament to the American dream.

As we commemorate his centennial birthday, it is an opportune moment to delve into the extraordinary life of a man whose presidency, post-presidential years, and philanthropic endeavours have left an indelible mark on the fabric of our nation and the world. Join us on a reflective journey through the highs and lows of Jimmy Carter's century-long life, exploring the milestones, challenges, and enduring principles that define his legacy. From the Oval Office to Habitat for Humanity work sites, Carter's story is one of resilience, compassion, and an unyielding belief in the power of diplomacy and cooperation. As we celebrate the centennial of this statesman, it is an occasion not only to honour the past but also to glean insights from a life rich in experiences, lessons, and an unwavering commitment to making the world a better place.

From 1977 to 1981, Jimmy Carter served as the President of the United States. Before becoming president, Jimmy Carter served as the Governor of Georgia in 1971. Despite running for president again in 1982 (Democrat) and competing against Ronald Reagan, he faced defeat. After leaving the presidency, he, along with his wife Rosalynn Carter, established the Carter Centre in 1982 in pursuit of helping the disadvantaged. Rosalynn Carter became the first lady and the first woman to serve as a board member of the Carter Centre. In 2002, Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards peace and his exemplary actions in promoting human welfare. Despite reaching the age of 90, he remained active in various fields.

Carter continued his philanthropic work, including building houses for low-income families through Habitat for Humanity, reducing diseases and elevating the quality of life for the underprivileged. His advocacy for human rights, international conflict resolution, presidency, human rights, and socio-economic development reflects his dedication to humanitarian causes. Carter's dedication to peace and social justice, as well as his active involvement in public service, sets him apart among U.S. presidents. Carter played a key role in mediating international conflicts, notably contributing to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. His post-presidential activities, including receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and actively participating in various humanitarian initiatives, showcase his commitment to making a positive impact on the world. However, his attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran, known as Operation Eagle Claw, failed.



CARTER VISITED THE VILLAGE OF CHUMUKEDIMA. THE PURPOSE OF HIS VISIT WAS TO REVITALISE THE VILLAGE WHERE HIS MOTHER, LILLIAN PEACE, HAD SERVED IN THE PEACE CORPS. DURING HIS JOURNEY, CARTER DISTRIBUTED A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF MONEY TO THE VILLAGERS

In his personal life, Jimmy Carter married Rosalynn in 1946, and their marriage lasted more than seven decades. They have four children: Jack, James, Donnel, and Amy. Roselyn "Rosalynn" Carter, actively participated in various activities, including writing, activism, and advocacy for different causes. She was born in 1927. Rosalynn was actively involved in various meetings and discussions as the First Lady. She faced controversies, engaged in foreign trips, and represented her husband in diplomatic roles. In 1978, the then-American President Jimmy Carter visited India. Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister at that time. He had a meeting with 500 media persons. Carter visited the village of Chumukedima. The purpose of his visit was to revitalise the village where his mother, Lillian Peace, had served in the Peace Corps. During his journey, Carter distributed a considerable amount of money to the villagers. The village was later renamed as Carterpuri. Despite facing challenges and controversies, Jimmy Carter remained an active and influential figure in national and international affairs throughout his life. His contributions to diplomacy, human rights, and conflict resolution earned him recognition and respect. Even though his time as the American President failed, he left the White House and continued his work as a

global advocate for human rights. He established the Carter Presidential Foundation to protect human rights globally, helping those in need and experiencing hardship. The organisation has grown globally, assisting those in distress in Africa, Latin America, and other societies. Carter's compassionate activities in these regions included health-care services and other humanitarian initiatives. Today, he remains one of the eminent figures among the great presidents of America. As Jimmy Carter reaches the remarkable milestone of a century on this Earth, we find ourselves not merely celebrating the passage of time but honouring a life devoted to service, humility, and the unwavering pursuit of a better world. From the peanut fields of Plains, Georgia, to the corridors of power in Washington, D.C., Carter's journey has been emblematic of the American spirit—a testament to the belief that ordinary individuals can bring about extraordinary change. As we reflect on the legacy of the 39th President of the United States, it becomes evident that Jimmy Carter's impact extends far beyond the confines of his political career. His commitment to diplomacy, human rights, and humanitarian causes has transcended the boundaries of his presidency, leaving an indelible mark on the global stage. Carter's post-presidential years have been

characterized by a tireless dedication to building homes with Habitat for Humanity, mediating conflicts, and advancing public health initiatives. His work stands as a reminder that true leadership extends beyond the trappings of office, resonating in the actions and deeds that shape the lives of those around us.

As we commemorate Jimmy Carter's 100th birthday, let us not only acknowledge the historical significance of his tenure but also recognize the enduring relevance of his values. In an era marked by division and uncertainty, Carter's commitment to dialogue, cooperation, and compassion serves as a beacon of hope—a reminder that the pursuit of justice and peace knows no age limit. As the sun sets on a century of Jimmy Carter's remarkable life, we are left with a legacy that challenges us to aspire to something greater than ourselves. May we draw inspiration from his example, fostering a world where empathy triumphs over apathy, where diplomacy prevails over discord, and where the pursuit of a better tomorrow remains a timeless endeavour. Happy 100th birthday, President Jimmy Carter—a centennial celebration of a life well-lived and a legacy that continues to illuminate our path forward. "We know that a peaceful world cannot long exist, one-third rich and two-thirds hungry?"- Jimmy Carter.

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

## Bridging the digital gap in rural Jammu and Kashmir

The Army initiative is empowering rural youth through computer literacy in Jammu and Kashmir

The Indian Army launched a three-month project in November of the previous year to enhance computer skills among students at a government high school located in the border area of Khui Milan, Akhnoor tehsil, Jammu district. This initiative aimed to equip students with basic computer skills, paving the way for future employment opportunities. Upon completing the course, students received certification. Balvir Singh, the computer teacher appointed by the army for this school, explains that the program was designed for students to grasp the fundamentals of computers within 90 days. He emphasised the program's goal: to ensure that children in rural areas are at



HARISH KUMAR

par with their urban counterparts, bridging the technological gap. In the past, children used to receive computer education directly from army personnel. However, facing challenges in commuting to them daily, as mentioned by the Regional Education Officer, Vidushi Gupta. In response to this, the army has donated 10 computers to the school under this program, ensuring that chil-

dren don't have to travel far to learn computers. Sanjeevani Verma, a student from the same high school, expressed gratitude, stating, "My family's financial situation is very weak, due to which I could not go anywhere to learn computers. Now, the Indian Army has provided computers to our school and also appointed a teacher to teach us." She further added, "This has proved to be very beneficial for us. Today's India is becoming digital, and therefore, we need to learn computers." In remote rural areas, computer literacy rates are still low. Especially compared to men, rural women and girls are still distant from computer knowledge. According to a 2023 report, over 40% of the Indians sur-

veyed in the age group of 15-29 years reported having the basic skill of handling files on computers. However, the abilities declined as the difficulty level of skills increased. The report also stated that men's abilities with computers far exceeded those of women and urban areas were better at handling computer-related tasks. The share of men who could perform the simplest task of handling computer files was 13 percentage points more than women. Under the stark urban-rural gap, in urban areas, the same task was performed by 27% more people than those living in rural areas. Other organisations have joined the effort to impart computer skills to the children of Jammu and Kashmir. In the

bordering district of Poonch, a non-governmental organisation named 'Seva Bharati' has established a centre in Manganad village dedicated to teaching children computer skills. Prince Kumar, a 22-year-old youth, shared, "I come to learn at this computer centre every day. Initially, I did not know about computers at all, but now I have gradually learned many things about computers." The organisation has provided two computers, and a teacher has been appointed, dedicating two hours to instructing adolescent boys and girls. This initiative is particularly beneficial for girls in the village, where computer literacy is low, and the female computer literacy rate is almost negligible.

Today, due to the advancement of computers, the entire world has shrunk into the form of a technological village. In today's era, knowing computers has become a priority. There is no field today where the use of a computer is not essential, whether it is the government or the private sector. A 25-year-old woman named Suraksha Devi says that keeping up with the digital world without knowledge of computers is challenging. While almost everyone today has a smartphone, which is a type of computer, certain things remain incomplete without learning about computers. In the centre of Manganad village, Suraksha Devi has learned things about the Internet. She has also learned

to work on MS Word and Excel. She says that today's girls, whether from rural areas or urban areas, should be computer literate because it will be crucial in making them empowered and self-reliant. Reflecting on the success of the course, Balbir Singh expresses, "Over the 3-month course, our primary aim has been to impart comprehensive foundational knowledge to the children. The basic test we administered during this period yielded remarkably positive results from the students. We extend our gratitude to the Indian Army for generously providing us with 10 computers. Witnessing the dedication of the children, they took the initiative to install these computers with-

in the school premises." Adarsh Sharma, a sixth-grade participant in the computer course, expresses, "The computer skills we've acquired in this course can prove beneficial in our future endeavours. Whether it's a government or private job, the demand for computer literacy spans across all sectors today. I extend my gratitude to the Indian Army, whose support has afforded us the chance to learn about computers at an early stage. Additionally, I want to thank our computer instructor for imparting valuable knowledge and insights." (The writer writes on socio-economic development challenges of rural communities of J&K; views are personal. Charkha Features)

# Ship carrying over 220 tons of aid nears Gaza

**AP ■ WADI GAZA**  
A ship carrying 200 tons of aid approached the coast of Gaza on Friday in a mission to inaugurate a sea route from Cyprus to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the enclave five months into the war between Israel and Hamas.  
The ship, operated by the Spanish aid group Open Arms, left Cyprus on Tuesday towing a barge laden with food sent by World Central Kitchen, the charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés. It could be seen off Gaza's coast Friday morning.  
Israel has been under increasing pressure to allow more aid into Gaza. The United States has joined other countries in airdropping supplies to the isolated region of northern Gaza and has announced separate plans to construct a pier to get aid in. Aid groups said the airdrops and sea shipments are far less efficient ways of delivering the massive amounts of aid needed in Gaza. Instead, the groups have called on Israel to guarantee safe corridors for truck convoys after land deliveries became nearly impossible because of military restrictions, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of order after the Hamas-run police force largely vanished from the streets. The daily number of supply trucks entering Gaza since the war began has been far below the 70 that entered before October 7.  
Earlier in the week, Israel allowed six aid trucks to enter directly into the north, a step aid groups have long called for. World Central Kitchen operates 65 kitchens across Gaza from where it has served 32 million meals since the war started, the group said. The aid includes rice, flour, lentils, beans, tuna and canned meat, according to World Central Kitchen spokesperson Linda



Roth. It plans to distribute the food in the north, the largely devastated target of Israel's initial offensive in Gaza, which has been mostly cut off by Israeli forces since October. Up to 300,000 Palestinians are believed to have remained there despite Israeli evacuation orders, with many reduced to eating animal feed in recent weeks. The aid is a tiny fraction of what is required, but the shipment was intended to pave the way for other larger shipments, officials working on the route have said.  
A second vessel being loaded with even more aid will head to Gaza once the aid on the first ship is offloaded and distributed, Cyprus' Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos said. He declined to specify when the second vessel would leave, saying it depends in part on whether the Open Arms delivery goes smoothly.  
The Israel-Hamas war was triggered by Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and left another 250 taken into Gaza as hostages. Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed over 31,000 Palestinians and driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes. A quarter of Gaza's population is starving, according to the United

Nations. The ship could be spotted from the coast hours after the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza accused Israeli forces of launching an attack near an aid distribution point in northern Gaza, killing 20 people and wounding 155 others.  
The Israeli military said in a statement that Palestinian gunmen were the ones to open fire and that none of its forces, who were securing a convoy of 31 aid trucks, fired toward the waiting crowd or the convoy. Some of those in the crowd were run over by the trucks, it said.  
The health ministry said a group waiting for aid near the Kuwaiti roundabout was hit by Israeli shelling late Thursday. Bloodshed surrounding an aid convoy on Feb. 29 killed 118 Palestinians in northern Gaza. The Israeli military said some of its forces fired at people in the crowd who were advancing toward them. Witnesses and hospital officials said many of the casualties were from bullet wounds. The Israeli military said many of the casualties were caused by a stampede over the food and people being run over by the aid trucks. After that, plans for the sea route took shape and the United States and other coun-

tries joined Jordan in dropping aid into the north by plane.  
But people in northern Gaza say the airdrops are insufficient to meeting the vast need. Many can't access the aid because people are fighting over it, said Suwar Baroud, 24, who was displaced by the fighting and is now in Gaza City. Some people hoard it and sell it in the market, she said.  
A recent airdrop that malfunctioned plummeted from the sky and killed five people. Another drop landed in a sewage and garbage dump, said Riham Abu al-Bid, 27. Men ran in but were unable to retrieve anything, she said. "I wish these airdrops never happened and that our dignity and freedom would be taken into consideration, so we can get our sustenance in a dignified way and not in a manner that is so humiliating," she said. The war has exacerbated tension throughout the region and threatened to flare into broader violence.  
At Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third-holiest site in Islam, the first Friday prayers of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan were being held amid Israeli restrictions on worshippers.  
The mosque has been a frequent flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence in the past. Hamas hopes a fresh eruption now would put more pressure on Israel and improve the militant group's leverage in cease-fire talks.  
But Israel put restrictions in place limiting West Bank Palestinians' access to the compound for Friday's prayers to men over 55, women over 50 and children under 10. The compound has long been a deeply contested religious space, as it stands on the Temple Mount, which Jews consider their most sacred site.

# Rishi Sunak firmly rules out May 2 general election

**PTI ■ LONDON**  
British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has firmly ruled out an early general election to coincide with local polls scheduled for May 2 amid intense speculation from the Opposition Labour benches.  
The British Indian leader had indicated earlier in the year that he was considering going to the polls in the second half of the year but in recent weeks there had been mounting theories that he may call a snap election in early May.  
But during an interview with 'TV News West Country' channel on Thursday, he sought to quash the speculation having previously preferred to keep people guessing.  
"In several weeks' time we've got elections for police and crime commissioners, for local councils, for mayors across the country," the 43-year-old prime minister said.  
Asked if there would also be a general election at the same time, Sunak said: "There won't be a general election on that day but when there is a general election, what matters is the choice."  
"I can see that the Labour Party are trying to whip up this idea that I'm about to call a general election. It's very deliberate, it's because they want to avoid questions about how they're going to fund all of their spending commitments," he added.  
Labour's deputy national campaign coordinator Ellie Reeves responded on Friday to say "people rightly want a general election" after 14 years of a Conservative-led government and accused the governing Tories of "running scared".  
"I think he should get on and call it for May 2. What's he running scared of," Reeves told 'Sky



News'. Sunak faces a tough political landscape as his party lags in most opinion polls with clear signs of anti-incumbency, with the Labour Party holding a steady lead.

A lot was riding on the Spring Budget earlier this month when Chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced some tax cuts. However, the reaction on all sides of the political spectrum is that the announcements are unlikely to have favourably moved the dial on the electoral fortunes of the Conservative Party.  
The repeal of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act in 2022 restored the ability of British prime ministers to set election dates. However, by law a general election has to take place at least every five years, making January 2025 the outermost deadline for Sunak to go to the ballot box.  
While local council and mayoral elections across England, which take place every four years, have been scheduled for May 2 for some time, the date for a general election remains uncertain.

# William and Harry salute Diana's legacy

**AP ■ LONDON**  
Prince William and Prince Harry both took part in an awards ceremony in honor of their late mother Princess Diana — but the estranged brothers were many miles apart at the time.  
William gave a speech at the Diana Legacy Award, which recognizes young people around the world who are working to improve their communities. California-based Harry addressed the event Thursday by video link, after his brother had left the ceremony at London's Science Museum.  
William said many of the recipients "have overcome adversity and prejudice, but they are driven by courage, compassion and commitment — qualities shared by my mother." Mentioning his wife Kate — who has not appeared at any



public engagements since undergoing abdominal surgery in January — William said Diana's legacy "is something that both Catherine and I have sought to focus on through our work".  
Harry spoke to the audience via a live video call. He thanked organizers and winners "for inspiring so many others and at the same time protecting my

mother's legacy." "I really appreciate that," Harry said.  
Princess Diana was killed in a car crash in Paris in 1997, when William was 15 and Harry was 12.  
The brothers have fallen out since Harry and his wife Meghan quit royal duties and moved to the United States in 2020.  
Harry has alleged that the British media treated him and Meghan as villains compared with virtuous William and Kate, and accused palace officials of lying to protect his elder brother.  
William, who is heir to the throne, has kept silent in public about the rift.  
Last month Harry flew to London to visit his father King Charles III after the monarch was diagnosed with cancer. He did not meet William during the 24-hour flying visit.

# Houthi rebels strike oil tanker, crew safe

**AP ■ DUBAI**  
A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels struck a tanker in the Red Sea early Friday, causing damage to the vessel while the crew was reported unharmed, authorities said.  
The attack off the port city of Hodeida comes as part of the rebels' campaign against shipping over Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.  
The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said the ship reported being "struck by a missile."  
"The vessel has sustained some damage," the UKMTO added. It described the crew as being "safe" and said the ship was continuing on its way, suggesting the damage wasn't severe.  
The private security firm Ambery also reported Friday's attack and said the tanker with armed guards aboard had a "near miss" on Thursday off the coast of Yemen in the Gulf of Aden. It said the ship had been Israel-affiliated but changed owners in February.  
The Houthi did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack — it typically takes the rebels hours to acknowledge

their assaults. Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, said an "important announcement" would be coming later Friday afternoon from the rebels.  
The Houthis have attacked ships since November, saying they want to force Israel to end its offensive in Gaza.  
The ships targeted by the Houthis, however, largely have had little or no connection to Israel, the US or other nations involved in the war. The rebels have also fired missiles toward Israel, though they have largely fallen short or been intercepted.  
The assaults on shipping have raised the profile of the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962.  
A report on Thursday claimed the Houthis now had a hypersonic missile, potentially increasing that cachet and putting more pressure on Israel after a cease-fire deal failed to take hold in Gaza before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.  
Hypersonic missiles also would pose a more serious threat to American and allied warships in the region.

# Voters head to poll booths in Russia

**AP ■ MOSCOW**  
Voters headed to the polls in Russia on Friday for a three-day presidential election that is all but certain to extend President Vladimir Putin's rule by six more years after he stifled dissent.  
The election takes place against the backdrop of a ruthless crackdown that has crippled independent media and prominent rights groups and given Putin full control of the political system.  
It also comes as Moscow's war in Ukraine enters its third year. Russia has the advantage on the battlefield, where it is making small, if slow, gains. Ukraine, meanwhile, has made Moscow look vulnerable behind the front line: Long-range drone attacks have struck deep inside Russia, while high-tech drones have put its Black Sea fleet on the defensive.  
Voters are casting their ballots Friday through Sunday at polling stations across the vast country's 11 time zones, as well as in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine. Russians also can vote online, the first time the option has been used in a presidential contest; more than 200,000 people in Moscow voted online soon after the polls opened, authorities said. The election holds little sus-



pense since Putin, 71, is running for his fifth term virtually unchallenged. His political opponents are either in jail or in exile abroad, and the fiercest of them, Alexei Navalny, died in a remote Arctic penal colony last month. The three other candidates on the ballot are low-profile politicians from token opposition parties that toe the Kremlin's line. Observers have little to no

expectation that the election will be free and fair. Beyond the fact that voters have been presented with little choice, the possibilities for independent monitoring are very limited. Only registered candidates or state-backed advisory bodies can assign observers to polling stations, decreasing the likelihood of independent watchdogs. With balloting over three days in nearly 100,000 polling

stations in the country, any true monitoring is difficult anyway.  
"The elections in Russia as a whole are a sham. The Kremlin controls who's on the ballot. The Kremlin controls how they can campaign. To say nothing of being able to control every aspect of the voting and the vote-counting process," said Sam Greene, director for Democratic Resilience at the

Center for European Policy Analysis in Washington. Ukraine and the West have also condemned Russia for holding the vote in Ukrainian regions that Moscow's forces have seized and occupied.  
In many ways, Ukraine is at the heart of this election, political analysts and opposition figures say.  
They say Putin wants to use his all-but-assured electoral victory as evidence that the war and his handling of it enjoys widespread support. The opposition, meanwhile, hopes to use the vote to demonstrate their discontent with both the war and the Kremlin.  
The Kremlin banned two politicians from the ballot who sought to run on an antiwar agenda and attracted genuine — albeit not overwhelming — support, thus depriving the voters of any choice on the "main issue of Russia's political agenda," said political analyst Abbas Gallyamov, who used to work as Putin's speechwriter.  
Russia's scattered opposition has urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to show up at the polls at noon on Sunday, the final day of voting, in protest. The strategy was endorsed by Navalny not long before his death.  
"We need to use election day to show that we exist and there are

many of us, we are actual, living, real people and we are against Putin. ... What to do next is up to you. You can vote for any candidate except Putin. You could ruin your ballot," his widow, Yulia Navalnaya, said. How well this strategy will work remains unclear.  
Golos, Russia's renowned independent election observer group, said in a report this week that authorities were "doing everything so that the people don't notice the very fact of the election happening." The watchdog described the campaign ahead of the vote as "practically unnoticeable" and "the most vapid" since 2000, when Golos was founded and started monitoring elections in Russia.  
Putin's campaigning was cloaked in presidential activities, and other candidates were "demonstrably passive," the report said.  
State media dedicated less airtime to the election than in 2018, when Putin was last elected, according to Golos. Instead of promoting the vote to ensure a desired turnout, authorities appear to be betting on pressuring voters they can control — for instance, Russians who work in state-run companies or institutions — to show up at the polls, the group said.

# Prosecutors open to delaying Trump's hush-money trial

**AP ■ NEW YORK**  
New York prosecutors said on Thursday they are open to delaying the start of Donald Trump's hush-money criminal trial by a month "in an abundance of caution" to give the former president's lawyers time to review evidence they only recently obtained from a previous federal investigation into the matter.  
The Manhattan district attorney's office said in a court filing that it does not oppose adjourning the trial for 30 days but would fight the defense's push for a longer delay. Judge Juan Manuel Merchan did not immediately rule.  
Jury selection is scheduled for March 25. The hush-money case is one of four criminal

indictments against Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.  
Trump's legal team said it has received tens of thousands of pages of evidence from the US attorney's office in Manhattan in the last two weeks, including records about former Trump lawyer-turned-prosecution witness Michael Cohen that are "exculpatory and favourable to the defence".  
Prosecutors said most of the newly turned over material is "largely irrelevant to the subject matter of this case", though some records are pertinent.  
Trump's lawyers want a 90-day delay, but they've also asked Merchan to dismiss the case entirely, alleging the last-minute disclosures amounted to prosecutorial misconduct and violated rules governing

the sharing of evidence. That process, called discovery, is routine in criminal cases and is intended to help ensure a fair trial.  
Prosecutors contend Trump's lawyers caused the problem by waiting until January 18 to subpoena the US attorney's office for the full case file — a mere nine weeks before the scheduled start of jury selection.  
District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office said it requested the full file last year, but the US attorney's office only turned over a subset of records. Trump's lawyers received that material last June and had ample time to seek additional evidence from the federal probe, the DA's office said.  
Short trial delays because of issues with evidence aren't unusual, but any delay in a case



involving Trump would be significant, with trial dates in his other criminal cases up in the air and Election Day less than eight months away. The defence has also sought to delay the trial until after the

Supreme Court rules on Trump's presidential immunity claims, which his lawyers say could apply to some of the allegations and evidence in the hush-money case. The Supreme Court is scheduled to

hear oral arguments April 25. Arlo Devlin-Brown, a former chief of public corruption for the US attorney's office in Manhattan, said prosecutors may be acquiescing to a delay because they recognise the amount of material is substantial and want to stake out a position they think Merchan will find reasonable.  
"The Trump team likely views this as quite a positive on two fronts: They're getting a trove of documents, some of which may be useful, and they're getting more time," said Devlin-Brown, who is not involved in the hush-money case.  
Since March 4, Trump's lawyers have received at least 84,000 pages of records from the US attorney's office, including a batch of 31,000 pages on Wednesday, according to a

court filing. More material is expected to be turned over in the coming days.  
The hush-money case centres on allegations that Trump falsified his company's records to hide the true nature of payments to Cohen, who paid porn actor Stormy Daniels USD 130,000 during the 2016 presidential campaign to suppress her claims of an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump years earlier.  
Trump pleaded not guilty last year to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records and has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels. His lawyers argue the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses and not part of any cover-up.  
Trump has repeatedly sought to postpone his criminal trials

while he campaigns to retake the White House.  
"We want delays," Trump told reporters as he headed into a February 15 hearing in New York case. "Obviously I'm running for election. How can you run for election if you're sitting in a courthouse in Manhattan all day long?"  
At that hearing, prosecutor Matthew Colangelo complained that Trump was attempting to use his complicated legal calendar "to evade accountability" by seeking delays.  
But Manhattan prosecutors' new willingness to bump the trial comes about a week after another document dump prompted them to abandon another high-profile case in the midst of a trial — a fact Trump's lawyers hardly missed.



Shehbaz proposes 5-year plan for Pak's economic revival

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The newly-elected government of Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has decided to work on a comprehensive five-year roadmap for the cash-strapped country's economic resurgence, according to a media report on Friday.

Minister of State for IT Shaza Fatima Khawaja said after the meeting, Khawaja said the committee, after getting the required information from the ministries and divisions, would prepare a consolidated document carrying five-year targets for all sectors.

for the projects should be presented and steps should be taken on a priority basis to speed up progress in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, information technology, foreign investment and small and medium (SME) enterprises.



agriculture sector would also be increased with the use of technology. The loss-making government institutions would be privatised on a priority basis, he added.

Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh reiterated Prime Minister Shehbaz's commitment to Pakistan's rapid development and asked the opposition parties to work with the government to provide relief to the common man.

total strategies for agriculture, education, SMEs' promotion and energy transition to cheap and green energy. He said that under the agriculture strategy, farmers in rural areas would be provided direct subsidy so that they could arrange fertilisers.

FTA with Iran likely during Raisi's visit to Pak, says envoy

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Iranian ambassador to Pakistan has said a Free Trade Agreement with Pakistan is likely to be finalised during the planned visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Islamabad, according to a media report on Friday.

billon, which increased by 11 per cent in the last 11 months. After the FTA and bilateral agreements for the promotion of mutual trade, there is a strong possibility that the mutual trade between Pakistan and Iran would reach USD 5 billion in the next few years," he added.

'Pak govt has access to legal phone interception system' Top telecom authority informs Islamabad High Court

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's telecommunication authority has installed a system for legal phone interception and the system was at the disposal of the government and its agencies, the chairman of the country's top telecom body told a court here.

hearing of a case at the Islamabad High Court on Thursday, the Dawn newspaper reported. Responding to a question by Justice Babar Sattar, who was heading the IHC bench, about whether there was a mechanism for legal interception, Rehman said that the top telecom body had installed a system, but it was at the disposal of the federal government and its agencies.

visions of the licence for telecom operators have been enforced, except the provision of legal interception. "Phone hacking has become so easy that if you leave your mobile phone somewhere and go to the washroom, I can connect and hack it before you return," Rehman told the court.

On being asked if audio recording or phone tapping was being done illegally, the counsel for the telecom authority replied that legal interception does not pertain to cellular services, as it is the domain of the PTA, the government and relevant agencies, the report said.

consumers, the operators are obligated to keep their personal information confidential. The court also asked if telecom operators could share an individual's personal information with any agency without the government's permission.

shared information relating to a consumer with the relevant agencies and directed the telecom operators to submit a detailed report by the next hearing date. The court was hearing a case on the petitions of former chief justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar's son Mian Najam-us-Saqib and jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi, about their audio conversation leaks, according to the report.

IMF criticises Pak finance ministry declaration that all targets have been achieved

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The IMF has expressed its displeasure to cash-strapped Pakistan's claim that it had achieved all structural benchmarks, and quantitative and indicative targets even before scrutinising and completing the review by the global lender.

getting any feedback from the IMF. The IMF review mission grilled the finance ministry team in the maiden session of the review talks and everyone seemed clueless about how to respond. The News International reported. However, Finance Minister Aurangzeb took the stance that he had taken note of it and such an episode would never be repeated in future.

confirmed while talking to the newspaper on Thursday. The IMF team also asked about the possibility of achieving the target for the last quarter (April-June) to meet the desired annual tax collection target of Rs 9,415 billion.

A pair of Chinese satellites failed to reach a planned orbit on their way to the moon after experiencing abnormalities, a rare setback for Beijing's high-profile space programme. The satellites, known as DRO-A and DRO-B, were launched on Wednesday evening from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in the Sichuan Province, the launch centre said in a press release on Thursday.

attached to a Long March-2C carrier rocket, it said. The first and second stages of the rocket operated normally, while the upper stage encountered an abnormality during flight, causing the satellites to fail to enter the preset orbit accurately, it said.

The relevant disposal work is currently underway, state-run Xinhua news agency reported, citing the launch centre. The plan was for the two satellites to head towards the moon and enter a distant retrograde orbit (DRO).

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences advertisement for VACANCIES, including details on application process and contact information.

PPGCL advertisement for Carbon Steel Seamless Pipe, including company details and contact information.

Municipal Corporation Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar advertisement for an Executive Engineer position.

Table listing tender details for Underground Drainage Project, including work name, location, and submission date.

Verka advertisement for Punjab State Cooperative Milk Producers Federation LTD, including contact details.

Verka advertisement for e-tenders, listing various procurement items and their specifications.

Somalia hotel siege ends

AP ■ MOGADISHU

Security forces in Somalia say they have killed all five attackers who laid siege to a hotel in a normally secure area of the capital. Police spokesperson Kasim Roble said Friday that three soldiers were killed and 27 people injured in the Thursday night attack on the SYL Hotel in Mogadishu.

hotel is secure now, and lawmakers and other hotel residents started returning, and the security situation returned to normal," Roble said. Journalists were barred from accessing the hotel after the siege ended.

15 Indian fishermen detained by Lanka Navy for poaching

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The Sri Lanka Navy on Friday detained at least 15 Indian fishermen off the coast of Karainagar in the northern Jaffna Peninsula for allegedly fishing in the island nation's waters, an official statement said, in the latest such incident this year.

The fishermen and their trawler were escorted by the navy to the Kankesanturai port and handed over to the fishing directorate for further action. In recent weeks, Sri Lankan fishermen have protested against the authorities to protect their rights from the alleged poaching by their Indian counterparts in the Sri Lankan waters.

Migrant boat sinks off Turkiye's coast, killing at least 16 people

AP ■ ANKARA

A rubber dinghy carrying migrants sank off Turkiye's northern Aegean coast on Friday, killing at least 16 people, officials said. Turkish coast guard personnel rescued two migrants from the sea off the town of Eceabat in Canakkale province, while two others were able to reach the shore by themselves, Gov. İlhami Aktas said.

It was not clear how many people were on the boat when it sank and the coast guard was continuing to search the area, he said. Aktas told the state-run Anadolu Agency that four of the dead were infants and children. The migrants' nationalities were not immediately known. Ten coast guard boats and two helicopters were involved in the search and rescue mission, Anadolu reported. Several ambulances were

standby at a nearby port. Although their numbers have declined in recent years, migrants mostly from the Middle East and Africa often leave Turkiye to try to reach Greece in search of a better life in European countries. Some migrants leaving Turkiye also attempt to sail to Italy. The Turkish coast guard said it caught at least 93 migrants attempting to leave the Turkish coast on boats this week.

Uttarakhand Jal Sansthan advertisement for a recruitment drive, including details on application process and contact information.

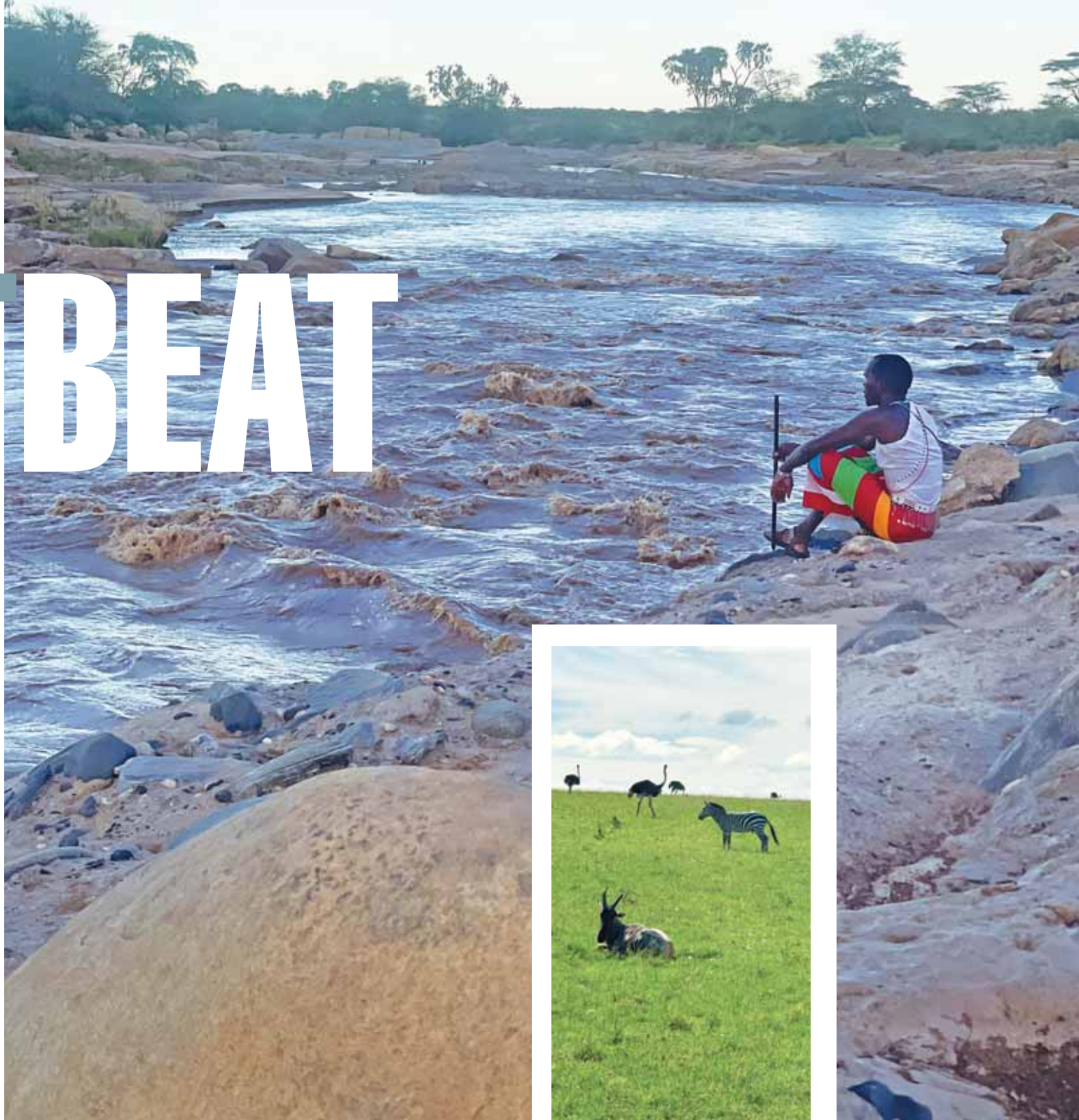
Uttarakhand Jal Sansthan advertisement for a recruitment drive, including details on application process and contact information.





From the bustling streets of Nairobi to the untamed wilderness of Shaba National Reserve, and the pristine beaches of Mombasa, Kenya beckons with promises of adventure, serenity, and hospitality. Join **DIVYA BHATIA** as she uncovers the hidden gems and unforgettable moments that await in this extraordinary African paradise

# THE HEART BEAT OF AFRICA



In recent years, Kenya has blossomed into a radiant beacon of adventure and natural wonder, casting a spell on Indian travelers with its awe-inspiring landscapes and vibrant biodiversity. The proposal by Ranbir Kapoor to Alia Bhatt amidst the scenic backdrop of Masai Mara only served to etch Kenya deeper into the consciousness of Indian wanderers, leaving an indelible mark on their souls. While Masai Mara gleams as an iconic wildlife haven, Kenya offers a rich tapestry of diverse experiences for the discerning traveler, promising an immersive escapade into nature's embrace, where serenity, warmth, and hospitality intertwine to craft unforgettable memories.

### UNRAVELING NAIROBI

Our expedition commences in Nairobi, a vibrant metropolis pulsating with life and culture. Despite its modern skyline and bustling thoroughfares, Nairobi retains a profound connection with the natural world, seamlessly blending urban dynamism with wilderness allure. As we delve into the city's heart, a kaleidoscope of experiences unfolds before us - from wildlife safaris within city limits to cultural showcases honoring Kenya's rich heritage. Our first stop, The Giraffe Centre, stands as a testament to Nairobi's unique allure, providing sanctuary for the endangered Rothschild Giraffe. Here, amidst verdant surroundings, visitors have the rare chance to observe these graceful creatures up close. From a raised platform, we extend our hands to feed the gentle giants, their inquisitive gazes reflecting a bond between humans and wildlife. Our journey continues to Nairobi National Park, an oasis of tranquillity amidst urban sprawl, where majestic lions roam against the backdrop of Nairobi's skyline, reminding us of the delicate harmony between progress and preservation. No exploration of Nairobi is complete without wandering its bustling markets - the Maasai Market and City Market. Here, we immerse ourselves in a riot of colours and textures, navigating alleyways lined with stalls brimming with handcrafted treasures, each artifact narrating a tale of Kenya's rich cultural mosaic.

### EMBARCKING ON A SAFARI

Leaving Nairobi behind, we venture into Kenya's wilderness, bound for Shaba National Reserve. Nestled between Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Parks, Shaba unveils untamed landscapes and abundant wildlife across its rugged terrain. As we traverse dusty plains and rocky hills, a symphony of sights and sounds unfolds - Somali



### TRAVEL TIPS THAT MAY COME HANDY...

Here are a few important things to remember before you pack your bags for Kenya:

- Apply for an eTA in advance. Indians need only an electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) to enter Kenya, and the process is simple and hassle-free. This eTA is free of cost.
- Make sure to apply for the Yellow Fever vaccination well in advance, as it can take some time to obtain. Additionally, ensure you have the polio vaccination certificate before you travel, as it is a mandatory travel document for entry into Kenya.
- Kenya is a tourist-friendly country, and you can find various ATMs, currency exchange shops, and all kinds of cards are accepted, even at small shops. Still it is suggested to carry smaller denominations of Kenyan Shilling (KES) for easier transactions.
- Avoid bringing mosquito repellents from India, as they may not be effective. It's better to purchase them in Kenya, where they are more potent.
- During game drives or hiking tours, avoid wearing shorts, as you may encounter strange insects or come into contact with poisonous plants or shrubs in the wild.
- Don't forget to purchase traditional Kenyan artifacts, jewellery, and other souvenirs, as they are unique and offer wonderful memories of your trip.
- Food is not a challenge. You have multiple options available, including Indian food.
- Buy a local sim at the airport as it is easy and a convenient option. You can also exchange the currency at the airport as they offer good exchange rates.
- Avoid walking alone in poorly lit areas at night and ensure to keep your valuables securely with you at all times. If you're traveling with children, remember to carry an ample supply of medicines and bottled water. It's advisable to book accommodations and tour operators with reputable credentials to ensure a safe and enjoyable stay.
- Bargaining is a customary practice in Kenya's markets and when interacting with street vendors, so don't hesitate to showcase your Indian talent for negotiation.

giraffes, Grevy's zebras, and the famed "Special Five" thriving amidst the harsh beauty of Shaba. Against this backdrop, life's resilience in adversity becomes apparent, a testament to nature's enduring spirit.

### LAKE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK

Our journey leads us to Lake Nakuru National Park, nestled within the Great Rift Valley. Named for its algae blooms, the lake teems with birdlife, while terrestrial wonders abound - endangered rhinos, graceful giraffes, and towering waterbucks. Against the lake's shimmering waters, a tableau of life unfolds, each creature a testament to the delicate balance of nature. From the lumbering hippopotamuses to the agile impalas, Lake Nakuru's wildlife captivates us with its beauty and resilience, reminding us of the fragility of the natural world.



### VENTURING INTO MAASAI MARA

We were filled with eager anticipation, brimming with high expectations, as we awaited the chance to behold the majestic Lions in their natural domain. Each day held the promise of a fresh adventure, yet it was the exhilarating game drives, offering glimpses of the iconic "Big Five" in their native environs, that truly elevated our excitement to unprecedented heights at Maasai Mara. Famed for its awe-inspiring wildebeest migration, a spectacle defying adequate description, Maasai Mara exceeded all expectations. At long last, our much-anticipated moment arrived, and the sight of these magnificent creatures in their element undoubtedly made our day. The longer one spends in Maasai Mara, the deeper the enchantment with its splendour grows. Undoubtedly, it stands as one of Earth's most breathtaking locales, its expansive savanna vistas leaving visitors spellbound. Here, the dream of encountering the "Big Five" becomes tangible reality. During our sojourn, we were privileged not only to

observe a regal lion family but also to witness cheetahs stealthily concealed amidst the golden grass, a lioness on the hunt for her next meal, and a sizable herd of hippos luxuriating in the Mara River. And who could overlook the majestic African elephants traversing the plains? Yet beyond its abundant wildlife, Maasai Mara offers a portal into Kenya's rich cultural tapestry, with opportunities to engage with Maasai communities and partake in age-old customs firsthand. As we immersed ourselves in the cadences of Maasai existence, we were warmly embraced, our hosts eager to impart their traditions and narratives. From the intricate beauty of Maasai beadwork to the pulsating rhythms of traditional melodies, Maasai Mara serves as a gateway to a world untouched by the passage of time, where ancient customs endure amidst the shifting currents of modernity.

### EXPLORING MOMBASA

Our journey culminates in Mombasa, a coastal gem blessed with pristine beaches and rich cultural



traveler, ensuring a tranquil haven following a day of exploration. Throughout our excursion, we chose to reside at Sarova Hotels, Resorts & Game Lodges across all our destinations. Among the standout attributes of Sarova properties are their remarkable locations and exclusive experiences. The Sarova Hotel Group not only furnishes sumptuous accommodations but also upholds a steadfast commitment to sustainable tourism and ethical practices. Through active participation in environmental conservation and community initiatives, the hotel group demonstrates a sincere dedication to safeguarding Kenya's natural and cultural legacy. For further information regarding Sarova Hotels and Resorts or to make reservations, please visit their website at [www.sarovahotels.com](http://www.sarovahotels.com).

### TRAVEL BETWEEN THE CITIES

Kenya's cities are well-connected by road, but for those seeking true adventure, consider ALS for swift and scenic travel. For game drives, rely on One Above Destination Management Service for a fleet of vehicles and experienced drivers. In Kenya, adventure beckons at every turn - a symphony of nature's bounty and cultural riches, promising indelible memories and a journey of a lifetime.

heritage. Diani Beach beckons with its azure waters and golden sands, while Mombasa Marine National Park offers a glimpse into underwater wonders. Snorkeling amidst vibrant marine life, we conclude our adventure with a taste of Mombasa's vibrant nightlife.

### FINDING A PLACE IN WILDERNESS

As we journey through Kenya, we discover solace in a variety of lodges and camps, each offering a distinctive fusion of comfort and adventure amidst the untamed wilderness. Ranging from opulent safari lodges to humble tented camps, Kenya's accommodations cater to the preferences of every



# STOP CLOCK RULE MADE PERMANENT IN ODIS, T20IS

PTI ■ DUBAI

Cracking the whip on time-wasting tactics in white-ball cricket, the ICC on Friday announced that the stop-clock system, which requires teams to start a new over within 60 seconds of the previous one to avoid penalty runs, will become a permanent feature starting with the T20 World Cup this year.

The system, which is currently on trial, was introduced in December 2023, and has now been incorporated into the standard playing conditions which will be in operation from June 1, 2024, when T20 World Cup begins in the USA and the West Indies.

The failure of the fielding side to be ready to bowl the first ball of their next over within the stipulated 60 seconds will attract two warnings, and the subsequent breaches will lead to a five-run penalty per incident.

"The stop-clock is set to become permanent in all ODIs and T20Is from June 2024, starting with the ICC men's T20 World Cup 2024 in the West Indies and USA," the ICC said in a statement after its Annual Board Meeting.

"The trial was supposed to run until April 2024, but the experiment has already yielded results in terms of timely completion of matches, saving approximately 20 minutes per ODI match," it added.



An electronic clock, counting down from 60 to zero, will be displayed on the ground, and the third umpire can determine the start of the clock.

However, the ICC has also laid out some exceptions to the rule, and the clock, if it has already been started, can be cancelled in some situations.

"If a new batter comes to the crease between the overs, during official drinks interval or during the on-field treatment of an injury to a batter or a fielder. The rule will also not be activated if the time is lost because of circumstances beyond the control of the fielding side," the ICC said.

Fielding Teams have often been guilty of trying to slow down proceedings to get more time to strategise and change field placements after every delivery. So far, the team and the captain could only be penalised financially which hasn't worked as well in stopping the practice.

## APPROVES RESERVE DAY FOR T20 WC SEMIS, FINAL

meeting has also approved reserve days for the semifinals (June 27) and the final (June 29) of the T20 World Cup. During the league or Super Eight stages, a minimum of five overs will have to be bowled to the team batting second to constitute a full game.

However, in the knockout matches, a minimum of 10 overs need to be bowled in the second innings to constitute a match.

The global governing body also approved the qualification process for the T20 World Cup 2026, to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

The tournament will feature 20 teams and will have 12 automatic qualifiers. The top eight teams in the 2024 World Cup will join India and Sri Lanka as automatic qualifiers, with the remaining spots taken up by the next best-ranked sides in the ICC T20I rankings as of June 30, 2024.

The remaining eight positions will be filled through the ICC Regional Qualifiers.

He might be drawing comparisons with Mahendra Singh Dhoni, but wicketkeeper-batter Dhruv Jurel on Friday said nobody can quite match up to the former India captain and he would rather focus on carving his own niche in international cricket. Jurel, who made his Test debut during the recently-concluded series against England, was sharp behind the wickets, solid with the bat and quite instinctive while guiding captain Rohit Sharma during DRS calls.

# There is only one MSD, I am happy to be Dhruv: Jurel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

"Thank you so much Gavaskar sir for comparing me with Dhoni sir. But I want to say personally that no one can replicate what Dhoni sir has done," Jurel said at the 'India Today Conclave' here.



When I got the baggy cap (India Test cap), it was a different feeling altogether. There is no contest whatsoever (between the two). Test cricket is at a different level," he said. On whether he fancies his chances of making the squad for the T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the USA, Jurel said he wasn't thinking so far ahead. "The World Cup is to be held in June. "To be honest, I don't have to think much; let's just control the controllables," he said. Jurel also praised the BCCI's recent move to reward those

dedication and the way he bats. Our batting style is similar. He told me before the game (Ranji final) to think of it as a normal match and not to take too much pressure."

"From outside, it may feel like a normal match but on the field, we feel pressure on the field. He told me to back my skills and follow the process," he added.

Musheer, who was also the leading run-scorer in the ICC Under-19 World Cup earlier this year including two hundreds, was quite chuffed after Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph after a gap of eight years.

"It's a matter of pride that we have amassed 42 titles. Many great players have played here (for Mumbai). I feel very proud that I have played for Mumbai and won a championship."

"I also want to thank the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) and congratulate them because they have provided us with a lot of support. I hope they continue to back us in the same way," he said.

# Wade to retire from first class cricket

PTI ■ HOBBART

Australian wicketkeeper-batter Matthew Wade on Friday said he will retire from first-class cricket after the upcoming Sheffield Shield final, but will remain available for selection in white-ball formats.

Wade appeared in 36 Tests for Australia and made 1613 runs with four centuries at an average of 29.87. His last Test appearance was against India at Brisbane in 2021 after which he lost his place to Alex Carey.



favourite format. What I'm going to miss is sitting down after four days of really grinding it out in a First-Class game and having a beer with your teammates. "I've played franchise leagues around the world and you don't get that feeling," he added.



# SA pacer Ngidi ruled out of IPL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

South African pacer Lungi Ngidi, who was signed by the Delhi Capitals, was on Friday ruled out of the IPL 2024 due to an injury. The Capitals have roped in Australian all-rounder Jake Fraser-McGurk in place of Ngidi.

# Dad told me to play domestic cricket: Sarfaraz

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sarfaraz Khan said on Friday that his father, Naushad, urged him to play domestic matches as if he was playing for the country even when his selection to the Indian team was getting delayed despite scoring tall runs in the national circuit.

69.85 with 14 centuries, the Mumbai cricketer wasn't getting a break in the India team. Even the legendary Sunil Gavaskar backed his Test selection last year after seeing him score copious amount of runs in domestic cricket.

"I would ask my father when would I get a chance to play for India and if there were people supporting us. He would tell me just one thing, 'think as if you're playing for India in your next domestic match and score runs there as well.' "So I only had one job, that was to score runs wherever I'm playing," Sarfaraz said during the India Today

conclave here. Sarfaraz was handed the Test cap by former India captain Anil Kumble before the third Test in Rajkot, where he scored two half-tons to emulate Gavaskar. "From my childhood, I have been hearing stories about the importance of Test cricket. My father kept telling me the importance of the longest format of the game. It's not like there was no pressure, I felt pressure when I was playing my maiden series," Sarfaraz said. Sarfaraz thanked Gavaskar for taking up his cause. Gavaskar, reacting to the cricketer not getting a Test berth in

# Not disappointed about missing IPL: Musheer

PTI ■ MUMBAI

An IPL contract might be on top of cricketers' bucket list, but Mumbai's teenaged Ranji Trophy hero Musheer Khan is happy that he went unsold during last year's player auction because it gives him some more time to "understand" the T20 format. The 19-year-old, who became the youngest Mumbai batter to score a hundred in a Ranji final eclipsing the mark of legendary Sachin Tendulkar, was confident of making his mark in the IPL in due course. "My name is not in the IPL. But I don't feel disappointed. My father tells me to play Test cricket and play for Team India. IPL will eventually happen, if not today then tomorrow," Musheer told PTI Video recalling the words of his father and formative coach Naushad.

"It's good that I got another year to prepare for the IPL. I will understand T20 cricket more, and how I should prepare for this format," said Musheer, who has so far played just five First-Class matches. Musheer embossed his name on the Ranji final against Vidarbha recently with a 136 in the second innings that helped Mumbai set a massive target of 538. It eventually helped Mumbai land their record-extending 42nd title in the Ranji Trophy.

# Excited to be back in CSK: Shardul

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Fresh from a title-winning run with Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy, India all-rounder Shardul Thakur is now looking forward to his IPL homecoming with the Chennai Super Kings where he expects to "grow" under the leadership of Mahendra Singh Dhoni after a not-so-great season last year.

"I am very excited to play under Mahi Bhai. There is something or the other that you take away from the game when you are playing with him. He is standing behind the stumps, guiding you, allowing you to grow," he said on the sidelines of the Ranji Trophy final against Vidarbha here on Thursday which the hosts won by 169 runs for a 42nd title.



Thakur said Dhoni's leadership style is driven by the philosophy of allowing individuals to flourish. "I think that's the biggest quality that he possesses, he gives a lot of freedom to players and asks them to take ownership of their performances, and I am excited to join CSK again, I will say I am playing for a team that values family and values family culture," said the all-rounder. Thakur will be joined by new entrants like youngster Sameer Rizvi and New Zealand all-

rounders Daryl Mitchell and Rachin Ravindra in the CSK dugout. Reflecting on Mumbai's brilliant Ranji campaign this year, Thakur lavished praise on his teammates and the Mumbai Cricket Association for the winning run. On his part, Thakur struck a hundred in the semifinal against Tamil Nadu and contributed a 75-run knock in the first innings of the final against Vidarbha. "I started off very late, I played a couple of Vijay Hazare games for the team and then I came back to the team only in the second last league game, the sixth league game, but all the boys, coaches, and support staff they have been working really hard from the month of June till now," he said. "I think the process for everyone started from the month of June whether it is fitness, game-related, polishing their skills, each and every thing...In Mumbai, for three-four months you can't have any cricket because of rains. "Today we were 15 of us but there are three to four members of our team who were not in the squad today but you know they have played one or two odd games at some point in time and they have done well in that game so "...Overall the credit, I would give right from the MCA management because association, supported us each and every time, the coaches, the support staff, physiotherapists, trainers, everyone and the boys of course," Thakur said. Thakur was particularly impressed with 19-year-old Musheer Khan, who became the youngest player of the match winner in a Ranji final after his brilliant second innings hundred that helped Mumbai set Vidarbha a mammoth target of 538. "I think the way he (Musheer Khan) is batting and contributing in the field, they way he is fielding and the way he is bowling. I think he is mature enough to play at the highest level of cricket in the Ranji trophy or the IPL," Thakur said. "We hardly find these kinds of players who are already ready when they come to the Ranji trophy and he is one of them," he pointed out. "...It's always pleasing to see youngsters coming in and performing straight away. The kind of maturity that he has shown in the last three games is just unreal to see," he signed off.