

**OPINION 6**  
SHADOW OF WORLD  
WAR III?

**WORLD 8**  
MUIZZU SEEKS DEBT  
RELIEF FROM INDIA

**MONEY 10**  
STOCK MARKETS RISE FOR  
THIRD SESSION

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# KEJRIWAL KINGPIN OF LIQOURGATE: ED

## DELHI CM BEHIND JUDICIAL BARS

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a major setback to AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, once revered as an anti-corruption crusader, was sent to the Enforcement Directorate's custody till March 28. The court passed the order on the ED application seeking a 10-day custody in the case. Arguing for his custody, the ED counsel Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, on Friday told the Special Judge Kavari Baweja at the Rouse Avenue court that Kejriwal is a "key conspirator" and "kingpin" in the liquorgate scam case. "Kejriwal was the kingpin and key conspirator of the Delhi excise scam in collusion with Ministers of the Delhi Government, AAP leaders and other persons," the ED informed the court. The ED said Kejriwal was directly involved in the formulation of the liquor policy and the subsequent use of the proceeds of the crime. "Kejriwal took advantage of being the Chief Minister of Delhi to facilitate money laundering by the AAP, which is a 'major beneficiary' of the proceeds of crimes generated in the alleged liquor scam case," it said. The ED claimed in its remand papers that "Kejriwal was intrinsically involved in the conspiracy of formulation of the



excise policy 2021-22 to favour certain persons and also involved in the demanding of kickbacks from liquor businessmen in exchange of favours granting in the said policy". Appearing for Kejriwal, senior advocate and Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said

remand should not be the norm and it should be looked into whether Kejriwal's custody is needed. Singhvi said there was "no material" or "evidence" to show any wrongdoing in excise policy formulation or receipt of any proceeds by the AAP supremo. While opposing the ED's

demand for his custody, Kejriwal's lawyer told the court "that the present case is stitched together only on the basis of statements of co-accused and statements of officers who are working under the control of the complainant herein the LG of Delhi". "There is no material or

evidence to show any wrongdoing in policy formulation or any receipt of any proceeds by the arrestee. That despite investigating the matter for over a year and conducting more than 200 raids, no incriminating material showing involvement of the arrestee in any crime or involvement in any process/activity was found," he contended. He said to "unleash political vendetta" and for extraneous reasons, powers under Section 50 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) are "misused in malicious manner and people are coerced, forced and pressurised to give unsubstantiated statements" in the case. In its remand application, the ED told the court it has recorded the statements of various people engaged in the election campaign-related activities of the AAP during the Goa polls and it was found that "cash payments were made to them for work like survey workers, area managers, Assembly managers etc". "These persons and activities related to the election campaign were overall managed by Vijay Nair (former AAP communications chief arrested in this case) and Durgesh Pathak, AAP MLA," it said. **Continued on Page 2**

## Political meltdown in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which made a dramatic entry in the governance of the national Capital by squeezing itself in the political space of bigger national parties — the Congress and BJP — almost 10 years ago may see a meltdown post this Lok Sabha polls, as it worst fears have come true after the arrest of its founder, party convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in money laundering case related to the excise policy scam and a pending Delhi Jal Board (DJB) multi crore alleged fraud case. The AAP is now in a Catch-22 situation about "what and who next", as heir apparent of the party and cofounders — Manish Sisodia, Satyender Jain, Sanjay Singh — all are in jail and there is a huge gap between Kejriwal and the party at the ground level. Kejriwal's phoenix rise was at the cost of denting the 15 years Congress regime led by Sheila Dikshit. The Congress faced three defeats at the hands of Kejriwal in the national Capital. The AAP leader also tarnished the image of top BJP leaders like late Arun Jaitley and Union Minister Nitin Gadhkari in successive protests and Press conferences. Currently, the real challenge for the AAP is in identifying a dynamic leader who can successfully navigate both the party's affairs and the governance of Delhi in the absence of Kejriwal.



Ranjani Dimri/Pioneer

More significantly, the urgency of this task is further heightened as the AAP prepares to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls in Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat, Assam, and Haryana, where Kejriwal was expected to play a key role as the party's key campaigner. The party is eyeing at expanding its footprint across the country and has tied up with the Congress to contest the Lok Sabha polls against the BJP in Delhi, Haryana and Gujarat. Kejriwal is the fulcrum of the party's Lok Sabha campaign and its star campaigner. **Continued on Page 2**

# Tamil Nadu to create electoral history

## DMK in solo contest against a national party

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

For the first time in its political history since 1967, Tamil Nadu will see the DMK fighting head on against a national party while the traditional challenger AIADMK is getting relegated to the status of "also rans". No major political parties find place as a constituent of the AIADMK except some fringe elements while the major players in the State have lined up under the DMK and the BJP. The Congress, the Communists, the Islamic outfits, the Dalits and the regional parties from South west Tamil Nadu are all lined up under the leadership of the DMK while the BJP has regional parties like Tamil Manila Congress (TMC) and the Vanniyar community's Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) under its banner. The surprise element in the formation of alliances was the decision of DMKD founded by late actor Vijayakanth crossing over to the AIADMK camp.



The whole Tamil Nadu had stood in shocked silence when Premalatha, party founder's main driving force, abused AIADMK supremo Jayalalithaa with the choicest abuses during the 2016 Assembly election. The DMKD was the lead constituent of the People's Welfare Front which had projected Vijayakanth as the chief ministerial candidate in that polls. The DMKD was wiped out in the poll and Vijayakanth lost his security deposit in the last

election of his life. Since then Vijayakanth was bed ridden till he breathed his last in 2023. How can the AIADMK get along with Premalatha who had insulted and abused Jayalalithaa by calling her names is the question being asked all over Tamil Nadu. "She is a robber, dacoit, and corrupt dictator rolled into one. Jayalalithaa is a curse on Tamil Nadu," Premalatha had said in the election meetings she addressed. The AIADMK has turned into

a party of Gaunders (a powerful caste in Tamil Nadu) as the Thevars, the major followers of the party have left it for good. Though TTV Dhinakaran had launched a party after the demise of Jayalalithaa and the conviction of his aunt V K Sasikala, the party reached nowhere. Sasikala does not come out of the fortress-like bungalow at T Nagar, a shopping centre in Chennai. O Panneerselvam, three-time Chief Minister who had declared a Dharma Yudh against Edappadi Palaniswamy is yet to make up his mind about where to go and whom to align with. "The AIADMK is almost finished and is on a ventilator support system. Chances are that by 2026 there would not be any AIADMK. The Lok Sabha election in Tamil Nadu is between the DMK-led front and the BJP-led NDA. This is the semifinal match before the grand finale of the 2026 election," said KV Rajasekharan, author and political commentator. **Continued on Page 2**

# Holi heat on North India

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Highlighting a concerning trend amidst the threat of climate change, a study has said there is a growing probability of temperatures soaring to as high as 40 degrees Celsius during late March, coinciding with the Holi celebration, in at least nine States, including States like Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Bihar. Maharashtra currently exhibits the highest probability at 14 per cent while among the cities, Bilaspur has the highest risk with a 31 per cent chance of reaching 40 degrees Celsius, which is 2.5 times higher than in the 1970s. Such a scenario, which was once considered rare, underscores the escalating impact of climate change on weather patterns and cultural festivities, particularly during the festival of colours, traditionally celebrated amidst the onset of spring. The report from Climate Central, a US-based group of scientists comes days after the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) had forecast that the country is likely to experience warmer summer this year, with above normal day and night



File Photo/PTI

temperatures from March till May over most parts of the country due to El Nino conditions, except over some isolated areas of northwest, northeast, central and peninsular India. Predicting the warm weather, the US-based researchers too pointed out that States that will be impacted by extreme heat waves will be Rajasthan, Gujarat, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. Citywise, said the study, a total of 37 cities now have at least a 1 per cent chance of experiencing extreme heat, with 11 cities having a

probability exceeding 10 per cent. To show this change, the researchers calculated the difference between the warming rates in March and April, expressed as the change in average temperature since 1970. On regional impact, the study said, the warming trend is observed across all of India, particularly in March and April, with central regions experiencing the fastest changes. With the exception of Madurai, the 15 cities with the highest risk of experiencing temperatures above 4 degrees Celsius are in central India, the analysis

showed. Climate Central said March and April are warming across India. During March, the northern and western regions have the fastest warming, with the largest change since 1970 in March occurring in Jammu and Kashmir (2.8 degrees Celsius). Warming is more uniform in April and Mizoram has the largest change since 1970 (1.9 degrees Celsius). "There has been an abrupt transition in the temperatures from cool winter-like temperatures to much warmer conditions now. **Continued on Page 2**

# Narendra Modi decorated in Royal Kingdom of Bhutan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday received Bhutan's highest civilian award, the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo', the first foreign Head of the Government to receive the honour. The award has been conferred to Prime Minister Modi in recognition of "his outstanding contribution to the growth of India-Bhutan relations and for his distinguished service to the Bhutanese nation and people." "Honoured to be conferred with 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo' Award by Bhutan. I dedicate it to 140 crore Indians," Modi posted on X soon after. Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck awarded the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo' to Modi. The announcement for the honour was made by the King of Bhutan during the 114th National Day celebrations on December 17, 2021. On Friday, Modi received it during his two-day State visit, his third since he took over as the Prime Minister in 2014. A statement from the Indian Embassy in 2021, when the announcement was made, said, "As per ranking and precedence established, the Order of the Druk Gyalpo was instituted as the decoration for lifetime

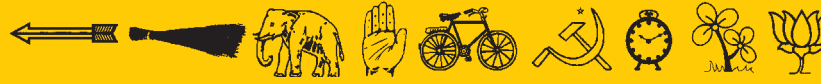


Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves at people after receiving the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo', Bhutan's highest civilian award, at Tendrelhang, Thimphu, on Friday

achievement and is the pinnacle of the honour system in Bhutan, taking precedence over all orders, decorations and medals." In 2020, Modi received the 'Legion of Merit by the US Government' award of the US Armed Forces and in 2019, Russia conferred its highest civilian honour 'The order of St Andrew' award on Modi. Earlier in the day, hours after he arrived in the Himalayan nation, Modi said he was grateful to the Bhutanese people for according to him a "memorable welcome" to their beautiful country and hoped that India-Bhutan friendship "keeps scaling new

heights." Modi's visit seeks to further cement India's unique and enduring relations with Bhutan as part of the country's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy. Meanwhile, India and Bhutan on Friday exchanged several MoUs and signed agreements in the fields of energy, trade, digital connectivity, space and agriculture, and finalised the MoU on the establishment of rail links between the two nations. The MoUs were exchanged here in the presence of Modi and Tobgay during the ongoing two-day State visit of Modi. The two leaders held discussions on various

aspects of the multi-faceted bilateral relations and "forged an understanding to further enhance cooperation in sectors such as renewable energy, agriculture, youth exchange, environment and forestry, and tourism," it said. India and Bhutan enjoy long-standing and exceptional ties characterised by utmost trust, goodwill, and mutual understanding at all levels, the MEA said. "Ahead of the meeting, Modi and Prime Minister of Bhutan witnessed exchange of several MoUs/Agreements on energy, trade, digital connectivity, space, agriculture, and youth connect among others," the statement said.



# Opposition CMs being targeted, arrested: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Amid apprehensions (read trepidations) within the Trinamool Congress about whether Mamata Banerjee was going to become the "next target" of the Enforcement Directorate after Arvind Kejriwal, the Bengal Chief Minister tended to put up a brave face, "vehemently condemning" on Friday the central agencies act of arresting her Delhi counterpart ahead of the Lok Sabha elections and wondering why only the Opposition Chief Ministers and not their BJP counterparts were being arrested by the agency in question.

Calling Thursday's arrest of her Delhi counterpart a blatant assault on democracy, Banerjee who was presently recuperating

from a head injury that she got a few days ago wrote on the X handle, "I vehemently condemn the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, the sitting elected Chief Minister of Delhi elected by the people. I have personally reached out to Smt Sunita Kejriwal to extend my unwavering support and solidarity", and called upon the members of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance to "express strong objection" against the ED's "unconstitutional" act.

The Chief Minister's statement came at a time when the ED officials had swooped down at five locations in Bengal including the residence of a senior TMC leader and State minister Chandranath Sinha at Bolpur. It is "outrageous that while elected opposition CMs are

being deliberately targeted and arrested, individuals accused under CBI/ED investigations are allowed to continue their malpractices with impunity, especially after aligning with the BJP, Banerjee who is also the chairperson of the TMC said.

Kejriwal was on arrested by the ED from his Delhi residence in the night intervening Thursday and Friday in an excise policy-related money-laundering case. Saying that her party too would be represented --- by TMC MPs Derek 'O'Brien and Nadimul Haq --- in the INDIA delegation that was to meet the Election Commission of India on Friday, the Chief Minister said that Kejriwal's arrest was a blatant assault on the democracy as the arrests were done



when the Model Code of Conduct was in place. "This is a blatant assault on democracy. Today, our INDIA alliance will meet the EC to express our strong objection to the deliberate targeting and arrests of opposition leaders,

particularly during the MCC period ... I have designated Derek o' Brien MP and Md Nadimul Haque to represent AITC in this crucial meeting with the Election Commission," she said. Attacking the BJP Government for letting lose a "reign of terror" ahead of the elections "in order to terrorise the opposition parties so as to win the elections," Bengal Minister Shashi Panja said that "our Chief Minister and the entire TMC stands by the Aam Aadmi Party and its leadership as can be seen from the fact that our Chief Minister has personally spoken to Sunita Kejriwal ji the wife of Arvind Kejriwal ji and expressed solidarity."

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh too condemned Kejriwal's arrest saying that the BJP was doing so because they were sure that they will not be able to win in the elections. "They are almost sure that they are losing ... this is why they are trying to hold on to power by hook or by crook."

When contacted Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury and CPI(M) central committee member Sujani Chakrabarty said that the ED was not doing anything to the corrupt leaders who had either joined their party or left the INDIA alliance. "Kejriwal ji has been arrested because he has not left the INDIA alliance ... if like Mamata Banerjee he had left the Alliance then he would have escaped this arrest," Chowdhury said referring to how the TMC refused to join cause with the Congress in Bengal. Chakrabarty too said that "BJP will not do anything to its cronies like the TMC even if they steal everything ... this is the reason Mamata Banerjee is keeping them in good humor and in return the BJP is not arresting doing anything to

her or her nephew Abhishek Banerjee despite their a large number of evidence against them." Meanwhile, raids were still going on at minister Sinha's residence --- for more than 10 hours --- and he was still being questioned when reports last came in. According to sources Sinha was being questioned about a register --- that was recovered from the residence of Kuntal Ghosh one of the prime accused in the recruitment scam --- in which about 100 names were mentioned who were allegedly recommended by the minister to him. When asked he however said, "I have done no wrong consciously ever ... I will answer all the questions to the best of my knowledge when they ask me."

# MVA nominates Shivaji scion from Kolhapur

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a land of great Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji, not an election passes without his descendent being in fray. This time around, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) has nominated Chhatrapati Shrimant Shahu Maharaj --- the 12th direct descendent of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj --- as its candidate from Kolhapur Lok Sabha constituency, on a Congress ticket.

The name of Shahu Chhatrapati figured in the first list of seven Lok Sabha candidates that the Congress announced for Maharashtra on Thursday night.

Seventy-six year-old Shivaji scion is the grandson of the great reformer, Chhatrapati Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, a democrat and an associate of late Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj's candidature came a day after he had decided to enter the electoral fray as the people in Kolhapur wanted him to do so.

Earlier, Shahu Chhatrapati's son Yuvraj Sambhajaraje Chhatrapati, the 13th direct descendent of founder of the Maratha Empire - who had earlier wanted to contest the Lok Sabha polls, had bowed out of the Kolhapur election race.

A former President-nominated Rajya Sabha Member, Yuvraj Sambhajaraje announced that he was withdrawing from the LS poll fray in favour of his "revered father", a move that went well with the people and political leaders of different hues in Kolhapur.

Yuvraj Sambhajaraje has announced that he would work hard in tandem with the workers of MVA constituents - Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) for

the victory of his father. Meanwhile, Chhatrapati Udayanraje Bhonsle - the 13th direct descendent of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj - is keen to contest the polls from the neighbouring Satara constituency, where he had been defeated as a BJP candidate in the October 2019 Lok Sabha by-polls.

It may be recalled that NCP chief Sharad Pawar had contributed to the defeat of Udayanraje Bhonsle by campaigning vigorously for his party's bureaucrat-turned-politician Shrinivas D Patil who trounced the Shivaji scion by a margin of 87,717 votes.

The crucial point in the Satara Lok Sabha by-poll campaign was when Pawar addressed a public rally for Patil amid pouring rain last week, a sight that created a lot of sympathy for both the Maratha leader and Patil. The sympathy, coupled with the Udayanraje's unbearable arrogance witnessed on several occasions in the past, worked in favour of Patil. Once a close associate of NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Udayanraje had earlier quit the then united Sharad Pawar-led party, resigned from Lok Sabha and joined the BJP. Later on, Udayanraje contested the October 2019 Lok Sabha by-polls on a BJP ticket.

Udayanraje's defeat came as a huge setback for the BJP which had not only roped him into the BJP ahead of the Assembly polls and sought to usurp Maratha card from the NCP by using him like a trophy in its campaign.

The BJP had made it a prestige issue to ensure the victory of Udayanraje. So much so that both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit had campaigned for Udayanraje.

# TMC attacks Centre on CAA, says it is peddling jumlas

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has once again attacked the BJP Government for "peddling more Jumlas in the electoral market in the name of Modi's Guarantee and the Citizenship Amendment Act." Party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Friday launched a scathing attack on the BJP government for unleashing a "jumla" in the form of CAA saying, "it will serve no purpose because you cannot provide citizenship to a person twice," and warning the people against filling up the forms that would amount

to entering into a trap set up by the saffron Government to include them in the National Register for Citizens like in Assam.

"They have put 12 lakh Hindu Bengalis to detention camps after getting them listed in the NRC... CAA is nothing but a Jumla and a trap to get you listed in the NRC by default and then get you lodged in the detention centres as they have done in Assam," Banerjee addressing an election rally at Katwa in Burdwan said assuring however that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee would never let them throw out of India.



Referring to the CAA form Banerjee said how it was full of paraphernalia. "They have given a 40 page document in which there are 38 pages of forms that have to be filled by you ... my question is why will you despite being Indian citizens fill up so many dotted lines," Banerjee said asking the people not to opt for CAA registration.

Stopping short of naming Prime Minister Narendra Modi he said how some people were giving "false guarantees" on various things "but if you continue to support Mamata Banerjee she would fulfill all her guarantees

including the promise of providing houses to all by the end of December." Referring to the women-centric State schemes like Laxmi Bhandar, Swasthya Saathi (health insurance) for all, Kanyashree, Rupashree etc Banerjee said "while they have promised Ayushman Bharat to limited number of people excluding those who have television or motorcycles in their houses ... we have made Swasthya Saathi universally applicable," insisting, "this is the real guarantee which is given by Didi and which is not a Jumla delivered by Modi."

# SC refuses bail to Kavitha in excise case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



The Supreme Court on Friday refused to grant bail to BRS leader K Kavitha, who has been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi excise policy scam case. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi asked Kavitha to approach the trial court, saying it is a practice which this court is following and cannot bypass the protocol.

The bench said as far as

Kavitha's plea challenging the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is concerned, the

court is issuing notice to the ED and seeking its response in six weeks. "The petition challenging the provisions will come up with the pending matters," the bench told senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Kavitha.

At the outset, Sibal told the bench that he has one request to the court that he should not be asked to go to the High Court.

"Please see what is happening in our country. People are being arrested on the basis of

an approver's statement. I am very upset," he said. The bench told Sibal, "As a counsel, you should never be upset. Don't be so emotional. Main writ petition can be put up for hearing with other petitions (pending matters) in July. As far as bail is concerned, we are very clear, you have to go to the trial court."

When Sibal referred to the arrest of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and other political leaders, the bench asked him not to make

political statements. "We have been very clear and uniformly following this practice in this bench. All of us in principle agree, we should not because there is a political person or someone who can directly afford to come to the Supreme Court, bypass all the statutory and constitutional forums," the bench said. Sibal then referred to the case file and referred to the statements made by the ED in the court last year in September that she is not an accused.

# Holi heat on...

From Page 1

"After the strong warming trend observed in February, March is also likely to follow the same pattern. These warming trends in India are a clear sign of the impacts of human-led climate change," said Andrew Pershing, VP for Science, Climate Central. The authors also emphasised the role of human-led climate change in the escalating temperatures. Mahesh

Palawat from Skymet Weather corroborates this, stating that climate change is the driving force behind soaring temperatures and warns of more frequent heatwaves and intense summers. The report also mentioned global efforts to reduce CO2 emissions to mitigate the impacts of climate change. It highlighted the urgency to limit further temperature rise to prevent worsening climate impacts.

# Tamil...

From Page 1

The names of the AIADMK candidates released by Edappadi Palaniswamy speak volumes about the state of affairs in that party. "I will be surprised if ten of them get elected. Palaniswamy has proved that he does not possess the leadership qualities," said Arjun Sampath, founder, Hindu Peoples Party. Interestingly, the AIADMK tried to get in touch with the RSS leadership in the State but it has been proved futile.

# Political meltdown in Delhi

From Page 1

The party is already feeling the pinch of the absence of its senior leaders like Manish Sisodia, Satyendra Jain and Sanjay Singh. Now the arrest of Kejriwal has landed the ruling party of Delhi in the doldrums. On earlier occasions, whenever this question rose, the party maintained a tough stance saying it will fight it out, but there is no denying the fact that AAP's think tank won't find it easy to wriggle out of this problem. The party's campaign in Delhi, where it is contesting on four seats and in Gujarat, where it has

fielded candidates on two seats, is centred around Kejriwal. In Delhi, the party's campaign is titled, "Sansad Mein Bhi Kejriwal, Toh Dilli Hogi Aur Khush Haal" while in Gujarat, it is being run as 'Gujarat Mein Bhi Kejriwal'. In Punjab, while the campaign is centred around State Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Kejriwal had been frequently travelling to the State, where the AAP is contesting all the 13 seats without an alliance with Congress.

The AAP had alleged that there was a conspiracy to arrest Kejriwal since his comments were making the

BJP uncomfortable. Earlier this week, Bharadwaj said, "The face will be Kejriwal. He is the only face that people trust and love. The strategy will be formed once we reach that stage." The role and responsibilities of top AAP leaders, including its national organisation secretary Sandeep Pathak, Mann and Delhi Ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj, are likely to grow within the party. Mann said he will attend the next meeting of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) Bloc." I have been to these meetings along with Kejriwal in

Bengaluru, Mumbai and Patna," the Punjab Chief Minister said while talking to reporters.

Before Kejriwal's arrest, the party, somewhere, at the back of its mind, was also hoping that he is not arrested considering his mass appeal and popularity, especially among the people of Delhi.

The AAP will now be in an awkward situation even in States like Delhi and Punjab which has its 2/3rd majority Governments. Legal experts said there is no legal bar on Kejriwal continuing as Chief Minister from jail. Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan

said there is no bar in law on a person continuing as Chief Minister once arrested, senior advocate Vikas Singh said. Though legally there is no bar, administratively it will be next to impossible. Given Delhi's status as a State with a Union Territory status, the Lieutenant Governor's role becomes more important. According to experts, the Raj Niwas has a very important role to play and he can, in fact, recommend the imposition of President's rule. The AAP leadership faces a daunting task in identifying a leader whose stature even remotely matches that of Kejriwal, who has served as the party's convener since its inception in 2011 and held the post of Delhi Chief Minister for three consecutive terms spanning

nearly a decade. After Modi, Kejriwal is the only leader having a quality to connect with the common man. Presently, AAP does not have any leader to connect with the people.

Apart from Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal, a former IRS officer, the names of Ministers Atishi (who holds the maximum number of portfolios in the Delhi Government), Saurabh Bharadwaj and Swati Maliwal too are taking rounds for the post of Delhi Chief Minister.

Top leaders of the AAP, including Atishi, Saurabh, Ram Niwas Goel categorically stated that AAP convener will continue to hold the post of the Chief Minister of Delhi and will work from the jail if required.

The Representation of People Act (RP Act), 1951, deals with elections, qualification and disqualification of lawmakers. According to the Act, an MP or an MLA stands disqualified, if s/he is convicted for an offence. However, since Kejriwal has not been convicted yet, there is no bar on him continuing as Chief Minister.

Article 239 AA defines the role of the elected Government, the LG and Parliament when it comes to Delhi. The entire power of the elected Government and the CM of Delhi has its origin in this provision of the Constitution.

However, the LG has the powers to recommend the suspension of operation of this provision. Article 239 AB gives powers to an LG to

recommend to the President of India to suspend the operation of Article 239 AA. In February 2024, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader and then Chief Minister Hemant Soren was arrested by the ED in a money-laundering case. Soren resigned as CM after his arrest, and Seraikela MLA Champai Soren replaced him. Similarly, in 2001, when Tamil Nadu CM J Jayalalithaa was arrested in a disproportionate assets case, she picked O Paneerselvam to be the CM till she obtained a bail. This was repeated in 2014, when she was convicted and arrested in the same case. Paneerselvam resigned in both 2001 and 2014, after she obtained a bail and a stay of her conviction, respectively.



Ranjan Dimri

# AAP workers protest against BJP over Kejriwal arrest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Raising slogans "Arvind tum sangharsh karo, hum tumhare sath hain" and "tyranny won't last", scores of AAP leaders and workers on Friday hit the streets to protest against the BJP over Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, with AAP Ministers Atishi, Saurabh Bharadwaj and others being detained. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case on Thursday evening. Be it inside jail or outside, his life is dedicated to the nation, Kejriwal said on Friday as hundreds of AAP workers and leaders took the streets against the BJP over his arrest, raising slogans of "Arvind tum sangharsh karo, hum tumhare sath hain" and "tyranny won't last". There was a sea of khaki and blue outside the AAP headquarters on the Rouse Avenue

Road in Central Delhi as multiple layers of barricades and a large number of security personnel were deployed to thwart party leaders and workers from marching towards the BJP headquarters. Several protesters were bungled into buses as they gathered at the ITO intersection around 10.30 am to proceed towards the BJP office on the DDU Marg. Paramilitary personnel in anti-riot gear were also deployed to maintain law and order.

Many AAP workers lay down on the road to resist the police's attempts to detain them. Women police personnel were seen dragging female protesters, many of whom were demonstrating carrying pictures of Kejriwal. According to police, more than 50 protesters have been detained so far and taken to various police stations located far away from Central Delhi. The AAP said that an "undeclared emergency like situation has arrived in the country and



Ranjan Dimri

alleged that the BJP is finishing opposition parties by sending their leaders to jail or making them join it by threatening them. The party claimed that Kejriwal's arrest will prove to be the biggest political mistake of

the BJP. AAP senior leader Atishi, Bharadwaj and others tried to proceed towards the BJP headquarters around 11 am, they were taken away in police buses. Police officers were seen asking

protesters to disperse as prohibitory orders under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure were in force in the area. There was jostling between AAP workers and police as they tried

to detain them. Atishi was seen resisting women police personnel who were trying to stop her from protesting. Party workers sat down on the road and raised slogans even as police and paramilitary personnel tried to pick them up and detain them.

"I have been detained by the Delhi Police while peacefully protesting at ITO. First, these people arrest the chief minister of Delhi in false cases, and now, those participating in peaceful protests are also being arrested. If this isn't the murder of democracy, then what is?" Atishi posted on X. Punjab Minister Harjot Bains was also detained by police Hours after his detention, Bharadwaj released a video on X from the Alipur police station where he along with his party's workers are seen singing "Mera rang de basanti chola". While being detained by police, Bharadwaj alleged that Kejriwal's family members have been put under house and no one is being allowed to meet them.

Meanwhile addressing a press conference, Atishi said the AAP is worried about the security of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in ED custody. Atishi said this is for the first time in India's democratic history that a national party's chief has been arrested before the Lok Sabha polls. "ED has not been able to produce a single evidence. This shows how fearful the BJP is of Arvind Kejriwal," she charged. "They know that only one leader can challenge them which is why they are making every attempt to trample Arvind Kejriwal and AAP," the minister added. Atishi said the Aam Aadmi Party was worried about the Kejriwal's safety and security in ED custody. "Being the chief minister of Delhi, Kejriwal has Z+ security cover. Now he is in ED custody. Who will be responsible for Kejriwal's safety? Who is entering his lock-up in the ED office? The Centre has to answer about his security arrangements there,"

she said. Delhi Cabinet minister Gopal Rai visited Kejriwal's residence to meet his family but claimed that he was not being allowed to enter. "I have been asked to wait. Kejriwal has been arrested. Nobody knows what state his family is in. His ailing parents are inside. Under which law have they been placed under house arrest?" he charged. During the press conference, Atishi accused the BJP of hatching a "political conspiracy" against Kejriwal and the opposition leaders. "If leaders facing corruption allegations join the BJP, their cases are not investigated. Hemant Soren is arrested and Congress bank accounts are frozen. This is an attempt to affect elections," she added. The minister stressed that "Arvind Kejriwal is an ideology, an inspiration"

## Barricades, closed roads cause heavy traffic jam

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Commuters were having a harrowing time at ITO, Rajghat and Vikas Marg here on Friday morning as they were hit by heavy traffic congestion due to closure of roads towards DDU Marg in view of AAP's protest. Besides, security has been beefed up in several parts of the city and many roads have been barricaded after the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday night, leading to massive protests by the leaders and workers of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The Delhi police have put up multiple layers of barricading on the roads leading to the offices of BJP, AAP and ED in view of the demonstrations. AAP leaders and supporters are protesting at the ITO intersection, which is near the AAP and BJP headquarters at the DDU Marg here. Police officials were asking protesters to disperse in view of prohibitory orders under section 144 of the CrPC imposed in the area. The Delhi traffic police issued an advisory on X, "In view of the proposed protest by politi-



Ranjan Dimri

cal party at DDU Marg Delhi, traffic will remain heavy at IP Marg, Vikas Marg, Minto Road and Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg. DDU marg will remain closed for traffic movement. Kindly avoid these roads and plan your journey accordingly." Many AAP workers and supporters blocked the roads at different places in central Delhi, forcing the police to detain them, which led to massive traffic jams at ITO and Rajghat. Huge traffic congestion was also witnessed at Geeta Colony and Rajghat. As the roads leading to the ED office were also shut, the traffic police advised commuters to avoid Krishna Menon Marg, Motilal Nehru

Marg, Janpath, and Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Road. Following Kejriwal's arrest Thursday evening, the AAP had given a nationwide call for protest against the BJP. Ahead of the protest, police beefed up security with multi-layered barricading on roads where AAP leaders and workers had planned to stage demonstrations. Paramilitary personnel have also been deployed to maintain law and order situation in the areas around the offices of AAP, BJP and ED. AAP leader Gopal Rai had announced nationwide protests against the BJP over the arrest of the Delhi chief minister.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday accused the Aam Aadmi Party of peddling a bundle of lies on the issue of its leader Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, asserting that those who are corrupt will go to jail. The BJP further slammed the AAP saying there is an old saying "Chor Machaye Shor" (the culprit makes a lot of noise to cover up the crime) and the AAP's "shameless" protest against the arrest of Kejriwal is a fitting example. BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said politicians used to scratch each other's back to help each other while indulging in scams but this has changed in the last 10 years under the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Should he (Kejriwal) be let off because he is a chief minister and not a common man," he asked, alleging that the Delhi chief minister is a kingpin in the corruption case being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). With opposition parties, including the Congress, rallying to Kejriwal's defence and describing his arrest as



part of the Union government's crackdown on their leaders, the BJP spokesperson said it is a case of thieves displaying brotherhood. He is the leader of the corrupt, Patra charged and added that AAP leaders have been peddling a bundle of lies on the matter. Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are also on bail in a corruption case, he said, adding mockingly that it is "bail bond" among them. They are also coming together as their ships are sinking, he said. Dismissing AAP leaders' allegation of political vendetta, Patra asked if people will believe courts or them and said every thief claims innocence when caught. With the

AAP insisting that Kejriwal will remain chief minister, the BJP leader said it shows his greed for power and post while he and his colleagues rose in politics by claiming to disdain the very thing. As Delhi government minister Atishi questioned the arrest of a chief minister and expressed concern about his safety as he has "Z plus" security, he hit back, saying it shows their sense of entitlement. She is saying how a CM can be arrested as he is not a common man, Patra said, noting that Kejriwal once named the likes of Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Lalu Prasad Yadav as corrupt and would ask when people will start going to the

jail. The AAP leader then claimed he has entered politics to cleanse it but began living in a palace and moving around in a security cover, he said. "It is high time that people who are embroiled in corruption are arrested," Patra asserted. Patra also played a statement of Congress leader Ajay Maken in which the he had lashed out at Kejriwal for the alleged excise scam and accused him of using Rs 100 crore collected from it to harm the Congress in the Goa assembly polls in 2022. Even the Supreme Court has spoken about a money trail of over Rs 338 crore while denying bail to AAP leader Manish Sisodia in the same case, he said. Following Kejriwal's arrest Thursday evening, the AAP had given a nationwide call for protest against the BJP. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva also slammed the AAP saying the party has lost all moral grounds as its leader has been arrested in a "corruption" case. "Kejriwal knew the corruption that happened in framing and executing the excise policy as his former Deputy

Manish Sisodia and party MP Sanjay Singh went to jail over it, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said. "He himself skipped nine Enforcement Directorate summonses. He will now have to answer the ED because he was involved in corruption that is why he has been arrested," Sachdeva said. There is an old saying "Chor Machaye Shor" (the culprit makes a lot of noise to cover up the crime) and the AAP's "shameless" protest against the arrest of Kejriwal is a fitting example, he said. Aam Aadmi Party and its leaders are "crying" over Kejriwal's arrest but they have lost all moral grounds, and the people of Delhi have lost faith in them, he said. Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri has said that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal did not listen to anyone while implementing the liquor policy in Delhi. "He did not even listen to his guru Anna Hazare and did not follow our advice in the Assembly. This is the reason why he has now to see such days," Bidhuri said.

## AAP will not celebrate Holi, gherao PM house on March 26: Rai

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi unit AAP convener Gopal Rai on Friday announced that the AAP will not celebrate Holi this year and will gherao the Prime Minister's residence on March 26 to register its protest against Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Addressing a press conference here, Rai alleged that MLAs and councillors of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) were stopped from meeting the family members of the Delhi chief minister, who was arrested by the ED in an excise policy-linked money-laundering case on Thursday. "Workers and leaders were detained throughout the day. The whole country is sad and angered by Kejriwal's arrest. At 10 am on Saturday, all AAP

MLAs, councillors, office-bearers, INDIA bloc representatives will take a pledge to save democracy. We will gather at the Shaheed Park on Saturday, the martyrdom day of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev," the Delhi minister said. He added that Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will also attend the programme. "On March 24, effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be burnt in all Assembly constituencies. On the day of Holi on March 25, we will not organise any programme and on March 26, we will gherao the prime minister's residence," Rai said. He said a joint movement against the AAP national convener's arrest will be announced soon after discussions among the INDIA bloc constituents.

## AAP starts #IStandWithKejriwal campaign on social media

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party leaders and MLAs on Friday started a hashtag campaign "IStandWithKejriwal" and "IndiaWithKejriwal" on social media platform X to garner support for Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a connection with an excise policy-linked money laundering case. AAP's allies in the INDIA bloc have also extended support to the party's national convener and condemned his arrest. Hashtags such as "DeshKejriwalKeSathHain" and "ArvindKejriwalArrested" are among the top five trends in India on X so far. Many AAP leaders, including Saurabh Bharadwaj, Kailash Gahlot, Durgesh Pathak, Shelly Oberoi, Jasmine Shah, and Sanjeev Jha used the hashtag "IStandWithKejriwal" and "IndiaWithKejriwal" in their

posts on X. Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, who was detained by police, posted a video on X from Alipur Police Station of him and several other AAP workers singing "mera rang de basanti chola". In a separate post, he wrote "the prison of any dictator is not strong enough to imprison democracy for long," sharing a poster with "IStandWithKejriwal" written on it. AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh's wife Anit Singh also posted on social media using her husband's X handle and extended her support to Kejriwal. "Now the only hope is from the people of the country, the dictatorial government of BJP has to be removed and the democracy of the country has to be saved," she wrote. Sanjay Singh is lodged in Tihar jail in connection with the excise policy-linked money laundering case, in which Kejriwal was arrested on

Thursday. Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot shared a poster of Kejriwal with a tagline "India with Kejriwal". "The entire country stands with Delhi's son. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, voices are being raised in support of Kejriwal. The people of the country will not let the staunch patriot who changed the politics of the country be left alone," he wrote. Comparing him with Bhagat Singh, AAP's Lok Sabha candidate from West Delhi Mahabul Mishra wrote, "For every Bhagat Singh, there were millions of Bhagat Singhs on the streets. Similarly, for every Kejriwal, there will be millions of Kejriwals coming out to uphold Modi's tyranny." The party's Lok Sabha candidate from New Delhi constituency, Somnath Bharti, called for a united struggle against the party leader's arrest, while also targeting the BJP over the electoral bond scheme.

## Yogendra terms CM arrest as unjust

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Some former AAP leaders, who fell out of favour with party supreme Arvind Kejriwal over the years, came out in his support on Friday, claiming that a sitting Chief Minister's arrest before the Lok Sabha elections "without evidence" is akin to "murder of democracy". However, former Tourism Minister in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government, who is now a vice-president in the Delhi BJP, Kapil Mishra described Kejriwal's arrest as a "joyous day" for the residents of the national Capital. Political activist and founder of Swaraj India Yogendra Yadav, who was removed from the AAP in 2015 by its disciplinary committee, termed Kejriwal's arrest as "unjust". "I am astonished. What is going on in this country in the name of democracy? You change the referee before the

match by appointing new ECs (election commissioners). You are freezing the bank accounts of opponent. Notices have been given in 30-year-old cases. Do proper investigation. If court convicts, then be it PM (prime minister) or anybody else, they should be punished," he said while talking to PTI. Yadav said "making arrests before an election by hook or by crook is like murder of democracy." Unjust (what) has been done to Arvind Kejriwal. I'm sure people will teach them a lesson," he said. Opposition parties, including the Congress, the RJD and the TMC, have been attacking the BJP-led central government over the AAP leader's arrest. Kejriwal and Yadav, who were prominent leaders of the Anna Hazare-led 'India Against Corruption' movement of 2011-12, also founded the AAP along with others in 2012. However, amid internal squabbling, many top AAP

leaders, including Yadav and Prashant Bhushan, quit the party. On Kejriwal's arrest, Bhushan claimed that there was "no documentary evidence" with the ED against the chief minister. "It's astounding that the ED has arrested a chief minister just before the elections after the Model Code of Conduct has come into place, and in a case, where they don't have any documentary evidence to show that he was involved in corruption, where they are relying on a statement of some approver who was the officer of a company. The company that had given electoral bonds to the BJP party which controls the ED," Bhushan said, without naming names. Targeting the AAP, Mishra said, "It is a joyous day for the people of Delhi. It's a day for justice." It is freedom from the rule of a "corrupt and dishonest" government, Mishra said

# BJP, BJD to go solo in LS, Assembly polls in Odisha

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI/BHUBANESWAR

After several rounds of meetings in the last one month, the BJP and the BJD both announced to go solo in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Odisha. The BJD and the BJP were in alliance for around 11 years between 1998 and 2009 and fought three Lok Sabha and two Assembly elections together. State BJP president Manmohan Samal said BJP will fight this election alone in all 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats to create a developed India and a developed Odisha under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fulfil the hopes, aspirations and aspirations of four and a half crore Odias. Soon after the development, senior BJD MP and one of its founder members Bhartruhari Mahtab resigned from the primary membership of the party on Friday. Mahtab, a six-time MP from the Cuttack Lok Sabha constituency, said: "I have sent my resignation letter



to BJD president and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik at 4 pm today." The veteran parliamentarian, who was awarded the 'Sanskat Ratna' for four consecutive years from 2017 to 2020 for his outstanding performance in Parliament debates, said he quit the party as he did not get ample opportunity to work freely in the BJD. Talks on pre-poll alliance were being held between the ruling BJD and the opposition BJP for the past few days. Earlier this week, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said in Delhi that BJP national president J P Nadda will take a final call on the alliance with the Biju Janata

Dal (BJD). Samal, in his statement, also thanked BJD president and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik for his party's support to the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre on various issues for the last 10 years. "We feel that the states that have dual engine governments across the country, make extensive development and accelerate welfare work for poor," he said. The BJP state president also claimed that many of the welfare schemes of the Modi government are not reaching the grassroots level, and the poor people of Odisha failed to the benefits.

# Opposition condemns arrest of Kejriwal

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Constituents of the INDIA Bloc and the other non-BJP political parties strongly condemned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest on Thursday and claimed that the BJP is scared of the outcome of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and acting out of panic to create problems for the opposition. Interestingly, the Mamata Banerjee led Trinamool Congress, which is no more part of the INDIA bloc and has already announced her candidates for Lok Sabha, party leaders rushed to Delhi to be part of the Opposition meeting related to Kejriwal who are planning to knock the doors of Nirvachan Sadan. Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien questioned the timing of the arrest, when the Model Code of Conduct is in place. He alleged that as the poll process has begun, every opposition party is being harassed. "How can we expect fair elections in India if sitting CMs and prominent opposition leaders are arrested weeks before polls? If SC and ECI fail to act now, who will stand with people against BJP's oppressive politics in future?" O'Brien asked. While Congress president



Mallikarjun Kharge said the "arrogant" BJP is making false claims of victory every day and trying to weaken the opposition by indulging in "illegal means" ahead of the parliamentary polls, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi alleged that a "scared dictator" wants to create a dead democracy and said the INDIA bloc will give a befitting reply to such designs. "While capturing all the institutions, including the media, breaking up parties, extorting money from companies, freezing the accounts of the main opposition party were not enough for the 'devilish power', now the arrest of elected chief

ministers has also become a common thing," Rahul Gandhi said adding "INDIA will give a befitting reply to this," he added. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said ahead of Elections 2024, driven by fear of a decade of failures and the imminent defeat, the fascist BJP govt sinks to despicable depths by arresting Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, following the unjust targeting of brother Hemant Soren." NCP leader Sharad Pawar condemned the "vindictive misuse of central agencies to target the opposition, especially as general elections loom". "This arrest showcases the depth to

which BJP will stoop for power. 'INDIA' stands united against this unconstitutional action against Arvind Kejriwal," he said. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi are in "panic" over their impending rejection by people in the upcoming polls. "It's the second sitting CM of the INDIA bloc to be arrested. Clearly, Modi and the BJP are in panic over people's rejection in the ongoing elections," he said. CPI general secretary D Raja said the BJP's desperation ahead of the general election is on full display. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi said "with the political arrest of another sitting CM, Arvind Kejriwal, the BJP government, its Extended Department have made it clear that they aren't anywhere close to winning 400 seats". While Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said Kejriwal's arrest "will give birth to a new people's revolution", PDP president Mehbooba Mufti said Kejriwal's arrest reeks of political vendetta and growing authoritarianism. "The arbitrary arrest of yet another CM by ED reeks of political vendetta and growing authoritarianism," she said in a social media post.

# 20 CBSE schools disaffiliated

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has disaffiliated 20 schools, five of them in Delhi, for enrolling dummy students and ineligible candidates, its secretary Himanshu Gupta said on Friday. The board has also downgraded affiliation of three schools. "Pursuant to the surprise inspection conducted in CBSE schools across the country to check whether the schools are running as per the provisions and norms contained in affiliation and examination by-laws, it was found that some schools were committing various malpractices of presenting dummy students, ineligible candidates and not maintained records properly," Gupta said. "After thorough inquiry, it has been decided to disaffiliate 20 schools and downgrade three schools," he added. Five of the disaffiliated schools are in Delhi, three in Uttar Pradesh, two each in Kerala, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, and one each in Jammu and Kashmir, Dehradun, Assam and Madhya Pradesh. "The schools with downgraded affiliation are in Delhi, Punjab and Assam.

# SC junks Centre review plea on ED

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court has dismissed the Centre's petition seeking review of its verdict which said the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is required to furnish the grounds of arrest to an accused in writing "without exception", saying there was no error in its judgement warranting reconsideration. A bench of Justices AS Bopanna and Sanjay Kumar considered the review petition in chambers and passed the order. "We have carefully gone through the review petitions and the connected papers. We do not find any error, much less apparent, in the order impugned, warranting its reconsideration. The review petitions are dismissed accordingly. Pending application, if any, stands disposed of," the bench said. In its order passed on March 20, the bench also dismissed the Centre's application for an open court hearing. The Centre had sought a review of the October 3 order



of the apex court by which it had set aside the orders of the Punjab and Haryana High Court as well as the arrest memos, while directing the release of Basant Bansal and Pankaj Bansal, directors of Gurugram-based realty group M3M, in a money laundering case. The top court had come down heavily on the ED and said it is not expected to be "vindictive" in its conduct and must act with utmost probity and fairness. It had said being a premier

investigating agency charged with the onerous responsibility of curbing the debilitating economic offence of money laundering in the country, every action of the ED in the course of such exercise is expected to be "transparent, above board and conforming to pristine standards of fair play in action". "The ED, mantled with far-reaching powers under the stringent Act of 2002, is not expected to be vindictive in its conduct and must be seen to be acting with utmost probity and

with the highest degree of dispassion and fairness," the top court had said. It had said the failure of the accused to respond to the questions put to them by the ED would not be sufficient in itself for the investigating officer to opine that they were liable to be arrested. "Mere non-cooperation of a witness in response to the summons issued under Section 50 of the (PMLA) Act of 2002 would not be enough to render him/her liable to be arrested under Section 19," the top court had said. Justice Kumar, who had penned the verdict on behalf of the bench, also questioned the manner of arrest of the Bansals in the case and said the chronology of events "speaks volumes and reflects rather poorly, if not negatively, on the ED's style of functioning". The top court had said if any sensitive material is mentioned in the grounds of arrest, it would always be open for the ED to redact such sensitive portions in the document and

furnish the edited copy of grounds of arrest to the arrested person so as to safeguard the sanctity of the investigation. Basant and Pankaj Bansal were arrested by the ED in connection with the money laundering probe linked to an alleged bribery case. The money laundering case in which Basant and Pankaj Bansal were arrested pertained to an FIR filed by the anti-corruption bureau of the Haryana Police in April last year against Sudhir Parmar, a former special judge for ED and CBI cases who was posted in Panchkula, his nephew and a third M3M group director Roop Kumar Bansal. In its FIR, the ED had alleged that reliable information was received about Parmar showing "favouritism" to the Bansals and real estate firm IREO owner Lalit Goyal in the ED and CBI cases pending against them in his court. Parmar was suspended by the Punjab and Haryana High Court after a case was registered against him by the anti-corruption.

# SC reserves order on Kerala plea for interim relief over ceiling on borrowing

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Friday reserved its order on Kerala Government's plea seeking interim relief in a lawsuit contesting a ceiling on the State's net borrowing. The Kerala Government has filed a suit in the apex court accusing the Centre of interfering in the exercise of its "exclusive, autonomous and plenary powers" to regulate the state's finances by imposing a cap on borrowing. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and K V Viswanathan reserved the order after hearing two sides. The Centre had on Thursday told the apex court that the Kerala government has been "over-borrowing" in the recent years which reflected its difficult financial situation. The Kerala government asserted its finances are "sustainable enough" to bear the burden of over-borrowing in the previous years.



On March 13, the Centre had told the top court that it was willing to allow the Kerala government to borrow Rs 5,000 crore, subject to certain conditions, to deal with the financial issues facing the state as a "very special and exceptional measure". However, the Kerala government had said Rs 5,000 crore "does not take us anywhere" and the absolute minimum requirement stood at Rs 10,000 crore.

In an original suit filed under Article 131 of the Constitution, the Kerala government has said the Constitution bestows fiscal autonomy upon states to regulate their finances under various articles, and the borrowing limits or the extent of such borrowings are regulated by state legislation. Article 131 of the Constitution deals with the original jurisdiction of the apex court in any dispute between the Centre and states.

# India braces for water scarcity as storage declines

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

As the summer season approaches, India braces itself for a challenging scenario of water scarcity, as evidenced by recent data from the Central Water Commission (CWC) concerning the live storage capacity in the country's primary reservoirs. The figures paint a stark picture, revealing that the current storage levels stand at a mere 38 per cent of their total capacity. This alarming statistic not only raises immediate concerns but also underscores a worrying trend amid the broader context of climate change which threatens to impact the water resources banks such as glaciers and rivers across the Himalayas range. As per the data, in urban areas like Bengaluru, the situation is already dire, with water shortages becoming increasingly prevalent. The city is grappling with a substantial daily shortfall of approximately 500 million litres, pitted against a staggering demand of 2,600 million litres per day. Such a deficit places immense strain on the city's water resources and infrastructure, significantly impacting the lives of its residents. The predicament in Bengaluru is further exacerbated by the drying up of borewells, which serve as a vital source of water for thousands of households. Shockingly, out of the 14,000 borewells scattered across the city, nearly half, amounting to 6,900, have already run dry. This alarming trend reflects the severity of the water crisis unfolding in one of India's

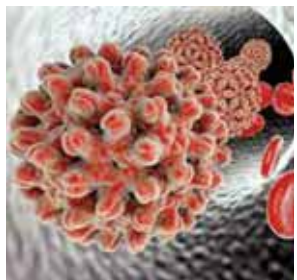


major urban centers. Among the States, Karnataka, along with several others including Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, and others, have reported lower storage levels compared to the same period last year, as highlighted in the weekly bulletin by the CWC. According to the statistics, the total live storage capacity of the 150 primary reservoirs in India amounts to a significant 178.784 billion cubic meters (BCM). However, the current live storage available in these reservoirs paints a different picture, standing at a mere 67.591 BCM, which represents just 38 per cent of their total capacity. This disparity between capacity and actual storage levels raises questions about the efficacy of water management practices and the need for more sustainable solutions. In the Southern region of India, encompassing states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, the situation is particularly grim. Here, the total live storage available in reservoirs is a mere 23 per cent of their total capacity. This dismal figure marks a significant decrease compared to storage levels during the same period last year and falls below the average storage over the past decade.

# Lack of awareness on Hepatitis B led to stigmatisation: Experts

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Despite Hepatitis B being a significant public health concern, affecting over 40 million individuals, there persists a widespread lack of awareness and understanding, leading to misconceptions and stigmatisation of those affected in India, experts said here at an event. It may be mentioned that while India is still grappling with the taboo surrounding the disease, Maldives and Sri Lanka have already achieved hepatitis B control as was announced by the World Health Organization early this year. It said that two countries have had consistently high coverage of hepatitis B vaccine doses in infants and a low prevalence of the deadly disease, corroborated through serological surveys conducted recently in both countries. The two countries join Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand, who achieved the same feat in 2019. In India there seems to be a long way to go, as was deliberated by the expert here at the 'Illness to Wellness' initiative which was organized by ASSOCHAM in collaboration with the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) to dispel myths and stigmas associated with the disease. "Winning Over Mothers With Hepatitis B" (WOMB) initiative forms part of a broader national campaign aimed at generating awareness about various mind and body conditions and promoting holistic healthy living. Specifically,



the WOMB initiative is focused on spreading awareness about the prevention and control of mother-to-child transmission of viral hepatitis, with a primary emphasis on Hepatitis B. During the session, Dr. Shiv K Sarin, Director & Chancellor of ILBS, and Dr. Arti Ahuja, ex-secretary of Union Ministry of Labour and Employment expressed grave concerns about the discrimination and social stigma experienced by Hepatitis B patients. They highlighted the critical importance of vaccination and information dissemination in combating the shame and fear surrounding the disease. Dr. Ahuja further emphasized the imperative for a shift towards preventive healthcare measures, advocating for a proactive approach to maintaining good health rather than relying solely on treatment. Anil Rajput, Chairperson of ASSOCHAM National CSR Council, lauded the WOMB initiative for its efforts to raise awareness about the transmission of Hepatitis B from mother to child and its commitment to eliminating stigma and discrimination against affected mothers.

# Document on enhancing infection prevention, control measures unveiled

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

A guidance document focusing on enhancing infection prevention and control measures, particularly in optimising biomedical waste management during public health emergencies was jointly unveiled by AIIMS-Delhi and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) on Friday. This comprehensive document aims to empower secondary and tertiary healthcare facilities across India with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively respond to such emergencies. Developed collaboratively by the Department of Hospital Administration at AIIMS New Delhi, the National Health Systems Resource Centre under the Ministry of Health, and USAID India, the guidance document provides up-to-date information and training resources for healthcare workers. It covers various aspects of infection prevention and control, equipping them with the latest tools and technologies to manage biomedical waste and handle public health emergencies more efficiently. Dr. Atul Gawande, USAID Assistant Administrator for Global Health, highlighted the significance of the guidance in advancing global health security and strengthening the response to emerging health threats. He emphasized USAID's commitment to partnering with countries like India to enhance healthcare worker capacity and improve emergency response capabilities. Dr. M Srinivas, Director of



AIIMS-Delhi, praised the proactive efforts of the Ministry of Health and USAID in developing and implementing the guidance document. He underscored the importance of such initiatives in bolstering healthcare preparedness and ensuring the well-being of communities. As part of this initiative, faculty members and nursing officers from 32 medical colleges and AIIMS across 17 states have undergone training, reflecting the collaborative efforts between USAID and AIIMS-Delhi to enhance infection prevention practices and biomedical waste management. Dr Vijaydeep Siddharth, the project lead, said, "The significance of the guidance document cannot be overstated. Through meticulously conducted research and rigorous analysis, this document sheds light on various aspects pertaining to infection prevention and control for public health emergencies preparedness and is a synthesis of existing evidence complemented by the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic." "We dedicate this document to all the healthcare workers committed to providing better patient care and worked tirelessly during the COVID-19 pandemic to save the entire humanity," Dr Siddharth added.

# DGCA fines Air India ₹80 lakh for violation of norms

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday imposed an Rs 80 lakh penalty on Air India for violations of flight duty and fatigue management norms, including failure to provide adequate rest to flight crew before and after ultra-long haul flights. This is at least the third time in less than two months that Tata Group-owned Air India has been fined by the DGCA. The latest penalty also comes at a time when the DGCA has decided not to extend the June 1 deadline for implementing the revised flight duty norms that will provide more rest hours for pilots. In January, the watchdog conducted a spot audit of Air India to verify the airline's compliance with Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) and Fatigue Management System (FMS) regulations. During the audit, evidence was collected and fleet-wise random reports were analysed. "The analysis of reports and evidence revealed that Air India Limited operated flight(s) with both flight crew aged above 60 years flying together in a few instances...The operator was also found deficient in providing adequate weekly rest, adequate rest before & after ultra-long range flights and adequate rest on layover to the flight crew, which violates the extant provisions of the Civil Aviation Requirements pertaining to FDTL," the DGCA said in a release. Generally, ultra-long-haul

flights are those having a duration of more than 16 hours. Air India operates such flights to destinations in Canada and the US. Further, the DGCA on Friday said there were instances of exceeding duty periods, wrongly marked training records and overlapping duties. On March 1, the watchdog issued a show cause notice to Air India with respect to the violations. "The operator submitted its response to the show cause notice which was not found satisfactory. Pursuant to the non-satisfactory response submitted by the operator, a fine of Rs 80,00,000 has been imposed on the operator," the release said. Having both cockpit crew members or pilots aged above 60 years in a flight violates Rule (2) of Rule 28 A of the Aircraft Rules, 1937. "No person holding a pilot's licence issued under these rules and having attained the age of sixty years shall act as Pilot-in-Command or Co-pilot of an aircraft engaged in commercial air transport operations unless it is operated in a multi-crew environment and the other pilot is less than sixty years of age," as per the rule. Earlier this month, the DGCA said it would not be extending the June 1 deadline for implementing the revised flight duty norms for pilots. The Federation of Indian Airlines (FIA), comprising Air India, SpiceJet and IndiGo, had written at least twice to the regulator, seeking more time for implementation of the revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms issued on January 8.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Fall from grace

With Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal behind bars in the liquor scam, the future of AAP and allies is in balance

Few stories have been as riveting and controversial as that of Arvind Kejriwal, the anti-corruption crusader-turned-politician who took over as the Chief Minister of Delhi with a huge, unprecedented mandate. He rose to prominence as the face of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), promising a new era of clean governance. However, events have now taken a dramatic turn, with Kejriwal finding himself embroiled in a high-profile liquor scam, a stark contrast to the clean image he once projected. His political journey began in 2011 with Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement. Alongside figures like Anna and Kiran Bedi, Kejriwal became a symbol of hope for many disillusioned with the rampant corruption in politics. His activism resulted in the formation of AAP in 2012, with the party making significant inroads in the Delhi Assembly elections the following year and forming the Government. Under Kejriwal's leadership, the AAP Government in Delhi introduced several populist measures aimed at improving the lives of citizens. Initiatives such as Mohalla Clinics, providing affordable health-care, garnered praise from across the world. It goes to Kejriwal's credit and that of his deputy Manish Sisodia that Government schools transformed into centres of excellence. The Chief Minister has painstakingly crafted his image as an unblemished and incorruptible leader, cementing his position as a formidable political force and fanning out across the country, forming the Government in Punjab as well. However, his alleged involvement in a liquor scam has cast a shadow over Kejriwal's once-untarnished reputation.



The impact of his arrest on national politics cannot be overstated as it comes weeks before the Lok Sabha elections. With the Chief Minister embroiled in legal battles and the AAP leadership distracted by the scandal, the administration's ability to effectively govern the Capital is severely compromised. Furthermore, as a prominent figure of the Opposition camp, Kejriwal's arrest could weaken the anti-BJP bloc, of which the AAP is a significant member. The BJP, which has been eager to expand its influence in the Capital, may seek to capitalise on the development. Accused of turning a blind eye to illicit liquor trade in Delhi, Kejriwal now finds himself at the centre of a political storm. The irony of a former anti-corruption crusader being accused of complicity in a corruption scandal has not been lost on observers. That said, it is also true that Kejriwal is one of the biggest eyesores for the BJP as his party has replaced the latter in both the State legislature and the MCD, though all the seven Delhi MPs belong to the BJP. With the AAP brass — Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh, Satyendra Jain and now the Chief Minister himself — behind bars, the political vendetta angle cannot be ruled out. Moreover, the conviction rate of the Enforcement Directorate is abysmally low and it has been accused by the Opposition of being a tool to harass the opponents. At this point, it is difficult to say what the actuality is, maybe somewhere between the two extremes.

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Women drenched in colours celebrate Holi, in Nadia

## Shadow of World War III?

The danger is inherent in the continuing conflict in Ukraine



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Can the war in Ukraine lead to World War III? It can if talk about an event presages its occurrence. The latest mention has been by Vladimir Putin, who said on March 18, 2024, that a direct conflict between Russia and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) would mean that the planet was one step away from World War III. He, however, had added that hardly anyone wanted any such scenario. Other Russian leaders have also mentioned the possibility. Alexander Venediktov, deputy secretary of the Security Council of Russia, had said on October 13, 2022, that Ukraine's admission into NATO was guaranteed to escalate the conflict in that country into the third world war. Western countries have also been taking the danger of a wider war with Russia seriously. The German newspaper, Bild, reported on January 15, 2024, that the country's army was gearing up to cope with a Russian attack on the Baltic countries—Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia—in the summer of 2025, that would begin with a spring offensive in Ukraine this year.

Russia's talk of World War III may well be a part of a strategy to reduce the United States' and European countries' support to Ukraine. Germany's response mentioned above, however, indicates that such talk is being taken seriously. In fact, the German defence minister, Boris Pistorius, has signed an agreement with his Lithuanian counterpart, Arvydas Anusauskas, for stationing 4,800 German troops and 200 civilians in the latter's country. With countries preparing for war, speculation about the conflict in Ukraine escalating into World War III is understandable. But then, what is a World War? It can be defined as a large-scale conflict involving a number of countries on both sides, stretching over large tracts of the earth, and affecting even on countries that are not directly involved. As things are, World War III would see the United States-led NATO countries pitted against Russia which may be joined by Belarus, China and North Korea. While talking about the danger of a third world war breaking out over Ukraine, all important



global leaders, including Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin, say that they neither want it nor is it likely to happen. But then the US did not expect the Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 (US calendar) which severely mauled the its Pacific Fleet. Nor did the European powers expect Germany's surprise attack on Poland on September 1, 1939, which triggered the beginning of World War II. In the present instance, people have been hearing of a World War III ever since the end of World War II, when the world came to be divided into two blocs. One comprised countries led by the US and clustered round pacts like the NATO, Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), the first two targeting the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the third one, China. Other bloc comprised countries of East Europe which had come into the USSR's orbit after the end of World War II, and which were members of the Warsaw Pact led by it. China enjoyed observer status in respect of the pact until it withdrew in 1961.



THE TWO BLOCS CAME CLOSE TO A WAR ON TWO OCCASIONS. ON MAY 1, 1960, A SOVIET MISSILE BROUGHT DOWN A U-2 SPY PLANE, OPERATED UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE US CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, IN RUSSIAN TERRITORY

The Cold War that came to prevail between the two blocs was marked by frigid and unfriendly ties. There was no shooting war. The restraining factor was the large nuclear arsenals which both the US and the USSR — and later China — possessed, and the smaller stockpiles of countries like Britain and France. A war between the two blocs, it was felt, would lead to the use of nuclear weapons. The USSR's premier, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, graphically summed up the horrors of the resultant scenario when he said, "The living will envy the dead." The two blocs came close to a war on two occasions. On May 1, 1960, a Soviet missile brought down a U-2 spy plane, operated under the aegis of the US Central Intelligence Agency, in Russian territory. Its pilot, Francis Gary Powers, who had parachuted to safety, was taken prisoner. The incident put on hold the thaw in US-USSR relations that had followed a meeting at Camp David, Maryland, between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Prime Minister Khrushchev, in September, 1959. It also scuttled the Paris summit in

mid-May among the US, the United Kingdom, France and USSR after Khrushchev walked out of it following Eisenhower's refusal to apologise for the U-2 mission. The second occasion was the Cuban missile crisis of October, 1962, triggered by the USSR's move to install SS-4 and SS-5 missiles in Cuba which could hit targets in the US. The latter, under President John F. Kennedy, imposed naval quarantine (read blockade) on Cuba, which the USSR declared it would defy. The matter ended with Kremlin agreeing to discontinue construction work on missile sites and removing weapons the US considered offensive and the US agreeing to remove the Jupiter Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles it had placed on Turkey's border with the USSR. Would good sense prevail in Ukraine's case as it did on the above two occasions? That needs to be seen. One thing, however, is certain. Serious moves need to be made to ensure an early negotiated settlement.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### WATER CRISIS IN BENGALURU

Sir — Bengaluru is known as the IT hub of the country. However, this city has around one and a half crore population fighting for water recently. The city is still famous as a good place to work and live. But this year due to a lack of rainfall in this city and Karnataka, this city has faced a major water crisis. People have installed water-saving devices on taps. The water supply is stopped for four hours in the morning and evening. Water required for drinking and housework needs to be bought, so obviously the cost for families has also increased. The Chief Minister of Karnataka has suggested that IT companies should allow people to work from home and schools and coaching centres should study from home. This year, the water level of the Cauvery River has decreased due to the decrease of monsoon. Bangalore city had 262 lakes till 1961. About 70 per cent of the area was green. At that time this city was known as Garden City or Lake City. Today only 81 lakes remain. Concrete forest stands on about 94 per cent of the area. This is not the situation of Bengaluru city in the country but many other cities are also experiencing water scarcity. The water level has decreased by digging the wells. Bangalore city alone has 10995 wells. As the overall environment continues to deteriorate, living is becoming difficult day by day and the severe water scarcity in Bangalore is one example of this. Other cities should take a lesson from water scarcity in this city. Shantaram Wagh | Pune

### EVM VULNERABILITIES

Sir — India is going to be the third-largest economy by 2047, the Indian government is still facing significant challenges. In this world of AI advancement, the cybersecurity risk is on the rise, making it easier to infiltrate networks nowadays, and the introduction of EVMs will escalate deceptive practices as well the biggest concern which must be raised is about the privacy of an individual can be infringed easily, conceiving or by giving the amount of

### World Happiness Report 2024



India ranked 126, out of 143, the same as last year, in the happiness index even though the union government claims to be the third economy in the coming years. The report was unveiled on 20 March by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Happiness comes only when

there is contentment because of several factors like income per head, social support, life expectancy and freedom apart from levels of generosity contributing to concluding to bring happiness. Contrary to all these factors, another global report titled "Income and Wealth Inequality in India" shows the real beneficiaries in recent years' growth appear to be super-rich, (1 per cent of 22.6 per cent in the total income of the country and a 40.1 per cent share in the total wealth in 2022-23.) This proves beyond any iota of truth how happiness can come when India's income inequality which is due to pro-rich policies is at a historic high. S K Khosla | Chandigarh

money to economically disadvantaged individuals and capturing their votes is the pursuit that can be done smoothly. Not all of the nation's citizens have technological proficiency, and due to being in the impoverished segment, some individuals cannot even be able to afford smart devices. Additionally, connectivity issues are also one of the crucial problems, such as the hindrances which impede their ability to vote. Hence, EVM will require robust measures to deal with these challenges. Zakir Hussain | Kazipet

### RISING SUICIDES AMONG STUDENTS

Sir — This refers to your news report 'Scolded by father for eating junk food, female BBA student hangs self' (20th March). A 19-year-old female student of Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) allegedly hanged herself to death at home in Maharashtra's Nagpur after being scolded by her father for eating junk food is heart-wrenching. Unable to bear father's rebuke for eating junk food, the daughter hanged herself to death in the kitchen using a long cloth. How easily did she cut short her life without thinking about her parents? What must have become of her parents after losing her daughter? Despite being well read and well lettered students are committing suicides for trivial matters and

the slightest remark of their parents. Nowadays parents' advice cuts no ice with teens and youngsters. They consider life all beer and Skittles. They have their way. They never care about the consequences. It's natural for children to act in a particular way or for something to happen in that way. Parents are cored and helpless to put up with their children's insolences. Children are quickly sulky with their parents over trifles. They are taking extreme steps. They are losing their precious life. As soon as they attain the age of puberty they become froward and intractable. They don't realise who they are talking to? In a fit of rage, they are taking extreme steps. They are taking their parent's valuable advice to heart and breaking their parents' hearts to pieces. Generally, parents' advice and words are beyond the comprehension of teens and youngsters. It's high time for teens and youngsters to be dutiful and submissive to their parents never take the words and advice of parents to their hearts and always abide by parents' advice to succeed in life. Students must take the bull by the horns in life. They must not abandon hope and cut their lives short. Zubair Khan | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Shifting alliances and tensions in South Asia

South Asia has experienced a significant transformation marked by notable developments that are redefining the relationships among major stakeholders

The geopolitical dynamics of South Asia have undergone a profound transformation in recent years, marked by a series of significant developments that have reshaped the relationships between India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban. What initially appeared to be a strategic win for Pakistan with the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has now turned into a complex web of alliances and rivalries, with India and the Taliban exploring new avenues for cooperation, while Pakistan finds itself embroiled in a conflict with its western neighbour.



Afghanistan. When the Taliban reclaimed power in Kabul on 15th August 2021, the then Pakistani PM Imran Khan expressed optimism, describing it as a "breaking the shackles of slavery" moment for Afghanistan.

There was a widespread belief among Pakistanis that the Taliban, whom they often referred to as "our brothers," would help Pakistan in its quest to assert control over Kashmir, a disputed region between India and Pakistan. This sentiment was rooted in the belief that a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan would be more sympathetic to Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and would support Pakistan's efforts to wrest control of the region from India. However, the euphoria of the Taliban's return quickly dissipated as concerns grew over the group's ability to govern effectively and maintain stability. Pakistan's hopes for a

strategic win in Afghanistan were further dampened by the emergence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a Pakistani Taliban group that found sanctuary in Afghanistan and began launching attacks on Pakistani soil. The situation took a dramatic turn on 16th March 2024 when Afghan militants attacked Pakistani soldiers at a border killing 7 of them. Pakistan retaliated with strikes against Afghan militants citing concerns over cross-border terrorism and the presence of Pakistani Taliban militants allegedly supported by Kabul. Meanwhile, India's relationship with the Taliban has evolved, with the two sides engaging in talks for trade and economic cooperation. The Indian delegation, led by J P Singh has met the current Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Mottaqi and the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul to discuss humanitarian assistance and trade. This development has caught Pakistan off guard, as it now finds itself on the opposite side of the table from India, its traditional

rival. Amidst the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the US special representative for Afghanistan, Thomas West, is set to travel to India in the third week of March 2024 for consultations on working together to support the Afghan people. This visit follows the Indian delegation's recent stated meeting with the Taliban ministry. West's visit is particularly significant as he engages with the Taliban and mobilises international support for Afghanistan. However, these diplomatic efforts come in the wake of Pakistan launching airstrikes in border regions of Afghanistan, resulting in the tragic deaths of at least eight civilians. As the situation continues to evolve, it remains to be seen how these shifting alliances will shape the future of South Asia. The once-clear lines of allegiance and enmity have blurred, creating a complex and unpredictable geopolitical landscape that will require careful navigation by all parties involved. (The writer is author and an academician; views are personal)



SULAGNA MOHANTY



## FIRST COLUMN

### THE MYSTICAL DEPTHS OF HOLI

Puranas are not mere fables; they document our ancestors' exploration of consciousness



ASHWINI GURUJI

Holi is the day when Holika, who had the boon to remain unscathed in fire, took Prahlad in her lap and sat in fire. Lord Vishnu came to Prahlad's aid and as a result, Holika burnt while Prahlad remained unharmed. The stories from Puranas appear to be mythological tales to a layman as the incidents described in them often refer to things that seem supernatural or surreal, take for example, the power to remain unscathed in fire or the invocation of energy called Vishnu. Puranas are in fact chronicles of real events that occurred with our ancestors, who inhabited this planet many thousand years ago. These ancestors were not aliens or super-humans, they were humans like you and me, only they were able to tap into the phenomenal potential that a human being has. Majority of us, on the other hand, leave that force within us unused.

For most of us the world exists in these four dimensions, them being length, breath, depth and time (time being measured as the distance between two thoughts). Everything that we see, touch, smell, taste or hear, we define it in these four dimensions. Those who have been doing the practices of yog and sanatan kriya at Dhyana Ashram for some time now might be able to describe a sixth or a seventh dimension also. What if I was to tell you, that there actually are sixteen dimensions in creation and that a human being is equipped to perceive all these 16 dimensions?

Majority of us spend our life and birth in the experiences of five basic senses which are enough to satiate our basic needs and desires. A human being however has a total of sixteen senses and awakening of these senses is known as siddhis in yoga. Just as the world appears black to a blind person while a person who can see would describe it in colours and light, in the same way the world appears the way it does to us because of non-activation of these senses and a person in whom the 6th, 7th or 8th sense is active would describe it very differently.



When you close your eyes in dhyana, certain forms, shapes, smells, colours and sensations are revealed to you. Is it a play of mind or do those things actually exist? If it is a play of mind then how is it that those experiences are identical to the descriptions found in our ancient texts and they happen to even those who have never seen those texts in their life? Definitely, not the play of mind. People who are into the practices see their thoughts manifest in front of their eyes, which cannot be the play of mind. All those things exist in the 'other' dimensions and can be perceived through higher senses. Interacting with subtler energies like Lord Vishnu or controlling the fire element too are a function of the other senses.

There are certain days when the position of constellations is such that doors to other dimensions open and it is extremely easy to access them through mantras, kriyas and yagyas as prescribed by ones' Guru. The night of holi is one of them. On this night it is extremely easy to access an aspect of the energy of the preserver. Mantras, which are codified, unmanifested forms of gods and goddesses, on this day develop the body and energy of respective gods and goddesses. Night of Holi is the night of wish fulfillment and manifestation of thoughts through mantra given by the Guru.

*(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)*

# Enigmatic dilemma of Katchatheevu



SANTOSH MATHEU

In election time, this disputed island once again emerges as a recurrent motif, stirring debates and evoking impassioned responses across Tamil Nadu



Amidst the escalating political fervour in Tamil Nadu ahead of the imminent Lok Sabha elections, Katchatheevu emerges once more as a recurrent yet elusive topic, akin to the unexpected pickles accompanying a plate of biryani. This contentious subject continues to command attention, igniting debates and stirring strong sentiments across the region.

Situated in the heart of the Palk Strait, Katchatheevu has long been a focal point in Tamil Nadu's political dialogue, particularly during election seasons. With the Lok Sabha elections looming, Katchatheevu has once again taken centre stage in Tamil Nadu's political arena. Political parties, especially those entrenched in the state, are leveraging the Katchatheevu issue to amass support and mobilise voters.

Critics argue that it is ironic for Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Stalin to question the central government's actions regarding the recovery of Katchatheevu over the past decade. Narendra Modi, along with the Congress and DMK, accuses the unilateral transfer of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), endeavouring to establish itself in Tamil Nadu politics, seeks to position itself as a champion of Tamil fishermen's rights. However, the party's alliances and policies at the national level have often contradicted the interests of Tamil Nadu fishermen, breeding scepticism among voters.

Katchatheevu is a diminutive island spanning a mere 285 acres, devoid of any freshwater source. Since its cession to Sri Lanka in 1974 through a contentious agreement between then-Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Katchatheevu has remained a bone of contention between India and Sri Lanka. The island, with a scant area of 1.15 square kilometres, linked to the Pak Strait, was ratified by Parliament in 1976. Tamil Nadu fishermen have utilised this small island for rest and anchorage for centuries, prompting calls from Tamil Nadu politicians to reclaim it. This island, christened after the Roman



THE INCEPTION OF ST ANTONY'S SHRINE DATES BACK TO THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, WHEN PORTUGUESE MISSIONARIES ERECTED A CHAPEL ON KATCHATHEEVU TO CATER TO THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF THE LOCAL FISHING POPULACE

Catholic church in honour of the revered patron saint of Tamil Christian fishermen, is accessible sans passport, facilitating the annual usage by thousands of Indian fishermen for rest and repairs. Nestled amidst the cerulean waters of the Palk Strait, Katchatheevu not only embodies a disputed islet but also hosts the revered symbol of faith — St Antony's Shrine. This sacred sanctuary, dedicated to St Antony, the patron saint of lost things and fishermen, holds profound significance for the fishing communities of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The inception of St Antony's Shrine dates back to the early 20th century when Portuguese missionaries erected a chapel on Katchatheevu to cater to the spiritual needs of the local fishing populace. Over time, the shrine gained popularity, drawing devotees from afar seeking solace and blessings from St Antony. The disputed sovereignty of Katchatheevu has intermittently disrupted pilgrimage activities, escalating tensions between India and Sri Lanka. Fishermen from Rameswaram, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore and Karaikal (Pondicherry), who historically utilised this island for rest and minor repairs, now face imprisonment in Sri Lankan jails for breaching maritime borders. Disputes stemming from this small island, located just 15 miles from Rameswaram, are straining India-Sri Lanka relations. The clamour to reclaim this island, steeped in historical ties with the ancient kingdom of Ramanathapuram, is gaining momentum. The Tamil Nadu assembly advocates for more authority to address these issues, while the central government has issued directives to allocate resources to tackle these demands. The sentiment among the people

of Tamil Nadu, particularly the fishing community, remains deeply entwined with the Katchatheevu issue. For generations, Tamil fishermen have depended on the waters surrounding Katchatheevu for their livelihoods, and the loss of access to these traditional fishing grounds has inflicted significant hardship. As Tamil Nadu braces itself for the Lok Sabha elections, the Katchatheevu issue persists as a potent symbol of Tamil pride and identity. The election's outcome may well shape the future trajectory of this contentious matter, with political parties vying for public support by pledging to reclaim Katchatheevu and safeguard the rights of Tamil fishermen. The ballot box will serve as the ultimate arbiter, determining whether Katchatheevu remains a distant aspiration or materialises as a tangible reality, restoring pride and dignity to the Tamil fishing community. In conclusion, the Katchatheevu issue stands as a poignant emblem of Tamil Nadu's struggle for sovereignty and the protection of fishermen's rights. As the political landscape simmers with fervour ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the fate of Katchatheevu hangs in the balance, awaiting the verdict of the electorate. The significance of Katchatheevu extends beyond mere territorial disputes; it embodies the cultural heritage and livelihoods of Tamil fishermen, whose lives are intricately woven with the waters surrounding the island. The relentless efforts of Tamil Nadu politicians to reclaim Katchatheevu underscore the deep-rooted connection between the people and their land, reflecting an unwavering commitment to safeguarding Tamil Nadu's interests. However, the road to reclaiming

Katchatheevu is fraught with challenges, both political and diplomatic. While promises abound during election campaigns, the true test lies in translating rhetoric into action post-election. The incoming government's ability to navigate the complex web of international relations while prioritising the welfare of Tamil fishermen will determine the fate of Katchatheevu. Regardless of political affiliations, it is imperative for elected representatives to uphold the aspirations of the people and work towards a resolution that ensures justice for Tamil Nadu's fishing community. This entails diplomatic dialogue, strategic negotiations, and unwavering determination to secure the return of Katchatheevu to Indian sovereignty. As Tamil Nadu heads to the polls, voters hold the power to shape the course of history, steering the trajectory of the Katchatheevu issue. Beyond electoral rhetoric, the voices of Tamil Nadu's fishermen resonate, echoing their plea for justice and dignity. The ballot box thus becomes not only a symbol of democracy but also a beacon of hope for the restoration of Tamil pride and the preservation of fishermen's rights. In the end, the resolution of the Katchatheevu issue transcends political victories; it is a testament to the resilience and unity of the Tamil people in their quest for justice and self-determination. As the journey continues, let us remain steadfast in our pursuit of a future where Katchatheevu once again becomes a sanctuary for Tamil fishermen, a beacon of hope amidst the turbulent seas of politics and diplomacy. *(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)*

# Empowering India's Gen Z: Shaping the future of democracy

With their digital-savvy and progressive outlook, Gen Z represents a demographic bloc that has the power to change the political narrative

The current decade belongs to India's demographic dividend. Today in 2024, as India gears up for its 18th Lok Sabha Election, it is important to understand the electoral preferences and political choices of our youth, especially Gen Z voters. It is crucial to comprehend the political views of Gen Z regarding politics, the prevailing political parties, and their leaders in India, as well as how they shape their election narrative and their perspectives on general elections in the country. Elections globally are no longer a mundane affair where the opinions of the elder family members dictate the political choices of the entire family. In the 21st century, as we champion fundamental rights, liberal and democratic values,



KIRTI DIMPLE

many Gen Z individuals advocate for freedom of choice in all aspects. With their significant population, political parties are incentivized to revamp their targeting strategies to appeal to this demographic. There has been a noticeable global shift in how political parties focus on engaging with Gen Z, with many parties dedicating specific agendas and subjects to attract them.

As Gen Z increasingly form their own political opinions independent of familial influence, political parties must address their concerns to ensure their active participation. With India being home to a diverse electorate of 96.8 crores, including various categories such as transgender, overseas, service electorate, voters with disabilities, first-time voters, and regular voters, it is crucial to understand the political choices of Gen Z could significantly impact the outcome of the elections, provided parties can earn their confidence through effective policy-making. Gen Z represents one of the most pragmatic segments of

the population, shaping their opinions based on internet research. Amidst widespread social media usage, political parties are leveraging these platforms to promote their agendas directly to smartphones. The issues important to Gen Z, such as digital equality, climate action, mental health, non-religious bias, gender equality, quality education, employment security, and fostering an environment conducive to risk-taking, differ significantly from those of traditional voters. To amplify their voices, many parties are incorporating young faces into their ranks to establish a connection with the youth. Both ruling and opposition parties actively engage with Gen Z through various

social media channels, including Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook. Statistics reveal that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leads in social media activity, followed by the Aam Aadmi Party and then the Indian National Congress. Among political leaders, BJP's Narendra Modi remains the preferred choice for Gen Z, followed by others. Gen Z closely associates with these leaders through social media platforms, often shaping their opinions based on what they see on their screens. However, it's essential for political parties to understand that this generation values facts over fake gimmicks and extensively fact-checks information before forming opinions. As the 18th Assembly Election

approaches, it is imperative for political parties to recognise the importance of Gen Z voters. They represent the future of the political landscape and can potentially revolutionise the entire system. Gen Z's silent role in this year's general election is invaluable, and it is crucial for all Gen Z voters to fulfil their electoral duties diligently. They possess the power to bring about significant changes in India's political sphere, and their agendas reflect the evolving political needs of the country. New India must recognise and appreciate the potential of this new generation, just as they excel in other fields, as they have the capability to transform the nation's political system. on, the political landscape of

India is undergoing a transformative phase, with the rise of Gen Z as a significant force to reckon with. As the nation prepares for the 18th Lok Sabha Election, the voices and choices of Gen Z resonate louder than ever before. Their preferences, shaped by digital connectivity and a quest for factual information, demand attention from political parties seeking to secure electoral victories. The sheer size of the Gen Z population underscores its potential to sway election outcomes and influence policy directions. Their advocacy for progressive values, coupled with a penchant for transparency and accountability, underscores their pivotal role in shaping the future of Indian democracy.

It is imperative for political stakeholders to engage meaningfully with Gen Z, addressing their concerns and aspirations. By recognising the agency and significance of this dynamic demographic, India can pave the way for a more inclusive and responsive political system. In essence, the empowerment of Gen Z represents not just a generational shift, but a paradigmatic evolution in India's democratic ethos. By harnessing their energy, ideas, and ideals, the nation can chart a course towards a more equitable and resilient future. *(The writer is an assistant professor at the Department of Management, Dr Virendra Swarup Institute of Computer Studies, Kanpur; views are personal)*





# Russia attacks Ukrainian electrical power facilities

AP ■ KYIV  
Russia attacked electrical power facilities in much of Ukraine, including the country's largest hydroelectric plant, causing widespread outages and killing at least five people, officials said on Friday.  
President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said more than 60 drones and about 90 rockets were used in the attack. The attack came a day after Russia launched 31 missiles in a single attack on the capital. It was the largest assault on Ukraine's energy infrastructure this year and one of the largest since the outbreak of the war, according to Ukrainian authorities.  
"Even last winter, attacks on our energy system were not as large as they were this night," said the head of energy utility Ukrenergo, Volodymyr Kudrytskyi.  
Last winter, Russia deliberately targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, resulting in frequent blackouts across the country. Many had warned that Russia might repeat this strategy ahead of this winter. But instead, Russia has launched massive missile and drone attacks primarily directed at Ukraine's defense industry. Every large-scale air attack depletes Ukraine's capabilities to repel Russian missiles. Zelenskyy has been urging Ukraine's Western allies for weeks to provide additional air defense systems and ammunition amid delays in aid from the US.  
"With Russian missiles, there are no delays, like with aid packages to our state. Shaheds don't have indecisiveness, as do some politicians. It is important to understand the cost of delays and postponed decisions," Zelenskyy said, referring to Iranian-made Shahed drones, which are widely used by Russia in the war. The attacks caused a fire at the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station, which supplies electricity to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Europe's largest nuclear power installation.  
The main external power line

## EU to impose tariffs on Russian grain

Brussels (AP): The European Commission wants to prevent Russia from using farm products as a tool to wreak havoc on the EU market and is moving to impose tariffs on grain imports from Russia and Belarus. The tariffs are also aimed at denying Russia revenue, because they will effectively suppress exports to the EU, the commission said. Imports, of course, oilseeds and derived products from Russia and its Belarus ally are just about 1 per cent of the overall size of the EU market, with domestic suppliers providing the bulk.  
But with angry farmers already worried by the increase of cheap Ukrainian imports, the EU fears Russia will be encouraged to take advantage of the tense situation to further destabilize the 27-nation bloc.  
"This shortfall in supply will be filled partially by EU's domestic production and, therefore, benefit EU farmers who will be able to sell in the EU," the commission said. "In addition, the shortfall is expected to be partially filled by imports from third countries which traditionally supply the EU market such as the US, Brazil, Ukraine, Serbia, or Argentina."  
EU imports of cereals, oilseeds and derived products from Russia including wheat, maize, and sunflower meal were 4.2 million metric tons in 2023, worth 1.3 billion euros. In comparison, EU suppliers provide 300 million metric tons per year.

to the plant was cut off, International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Grossi said early Friday, but Ukraine's nuclear energy operator said it was restored several hours later. The plant is occupied by Russian troops, and fighting

disrupt supplies to the nuclear plant but would potentially cause severe flooding similar to what occurred last year when a major dam at Kakhovka further down the Dnieper collapsed. Three people were killed and at least eight injured in the Russian attack, said Zaporizhzhia regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov.  
Attacks on energy facilities in the Kharkiv region caused blackouts in the country's second-largest city and disrupted critical air-raid siren systems. Regional Governor Oleh Syniehubov said police would inform residents of possible air raids through loudspeakers and walkie-talkies and that alerts would be sent to cellular phones.  
Other attacks were reported in areas of western Ukraine far from the front lines. Two people died in the Khmelnytskyi region, according to the Internal Affairs Ministry.  
The power outages left 1,060 miners trapped in the Dnipropetrovsk region and an evacuation was underway, according to private energy company DTEK. "The world sees the targets of Russian terrorists as clearly as possible: power plants and energy supply lines, a hydroelectric dam, ordinary residential buildings, even a trolleybus. Russia is fighting against the ordinary life of people," Zelenskyy said Friday on the Telegram messaging app.  
Russian officials said Friday that one person died and at least three were injured in Ukrainian shelling of areas near the border.  
The governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said a woman was killed when a shell hit nearby while she was walking her dogs and that two others were injured. The town of Tetkino in the Kursk region was shelled, injuring one person, said Gov. Roman Starovoi. Both regions have been subject to shelling and drone attacks in recent weeks and officials have said that attempts by Ukrainian fighters to cross into Russian territory have been repelled.



People gather in Gloucester City, NJ, to view the USS New Jersey moved down Delaware River Thursday, March 21, 2024. The retired battleship is initially headed to the Paulsboro Marine Terminal, where it will be balanced to prepare for dry docking, and will then go to the Philadelphia Navy Yard six AP/PTI

## EU slaps sanctions on Russian justice officials blamed for jailing Navalny

AP ■ BRUSSELS  
The European Union on Friday imposed sanctions on the Russian justice and prison officials responsible for imprisoning opposition leader Alexei Navalny before his death last month.  
"Alexei Navalny's slow killing by the Kremlin regime is a stark reminder of its utter disregard for human life," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement announcing the move.  
Borrell said the sanctions, which target 33 officials and two prisons and involve asset freezes and travel bans, "demonstrate our determination to hold Russia's political leadership and authorities to account for the continuing violation of the human rights in Russia."



Navalny, the most persistent foe of President Vladimir Putin, was serving a 19-year sentence when he died. He had been behind bars since January 2021 after returning to Russia from Germany where he had been recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin.  
The cause of his Feb. 16 death has been described by officials only as due to natural causes. The EU said that its measures would hit the IK-6 corrective colony and the IK-3 maximum security corrective colony, including the official in charge Vadim Kalinin, where Navalny

had been held before his death. "Both colonies are known for exerting physical and psychological pressure, full isolation, torture and violence on prisoners. In both places Mr Navalny suffered abuses, including through repeated solitary confinement in a punishment cell and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, leading to the severe deterioration of his health," it said.  
Justice officials targeted by the EU measures include Andrey Suvorov, who last year sentenced Navalny to 19 years in a special regime colony, and Kirill Nikiforov, who rejected Navalny's lawsuit against IK-6 to appeal his transfer to a punishment cell for 12 days. It's unclear whether the officials traveled to or through EU countries or had significant assets in Europe.

## Efforts to rescue 13 people trapped in gold mine continue on fifth day

Moscow (AP): Rescue workers laboured for a fifth day on Friday to reach 13 people trapped deep underground in a collapsed gold mine in Russia's far east, news reports said. They said no contact has been made with the miners in the Amur region, about 5,000 kilometres (3,000 miles) east of Moscow. At least 13 miners are trapped, regional officials said Tuesday.  
The state news agency RIA-Novosti cited emergency officials as saying that powerful pumps have completed taking water out of the mine. The miners were trapped at a depth of about 125 metres (400 feet) when part of the mine collapsed on Monday. The cause of the accident has not been announced.

## SL Prez releases 234 acres of land in Jaffna for farmers' use

PTI ■ COLOMBO  
Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Friday released 234 acres of land, previously held by the Jaffna Security Forces Headquarters, to farmers in the area, according to an official statement.  
Jaffna is a Tamil-dominated capital city of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.  
"President Ranil Wickremesinghe released 234 acres of land which were previously held by the Jaffna Security Forces Headquarters, to farmers for cultivation purposes in 5 Grama Niladhari Divisions in Jaffna," the statement issued by the President's Media Division (PMD) said in a post on X.  
These plots of land were released to farmers across five Grama Niladhari Divisions in Jaffna for cultivation purposes. Wickremesinghe symbolically presented the deeds benefiting 408 individuals at a ceremony held in Jaffna's Oddakapulam under the Urumaya national programme, aimed at distributing two million freehold deeds to the deserving public. Officials said some 68 acres had also been released on March 10.  
These lands had been cultivated by the military since public access to them had been shut due to the military operations against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) till 2009. During and after the conflict with LTTE, some 3,500 acres of privately owned lands were taken over by the military to create the high-security zone around the Palaly military base of Jaffna which is also the site for the current Jaffna International Airport.  
Since 2015 some of these lands have been released to their private owners in response to pleas after the military defeated the LTTE in 2009.  
Jaffna holds great significance as it was the region where the LTTE had run a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader V Prabhakaran.

## Hungary's Orbán congratulates Putin on election victory

AP ■ BUDAPEST  
Hungary's populist prime minister, Viktor Orbán, has congratulated Russian President Vladimir Putin on his victory in an election that was criticised by most Western leaders. Orbán, widely seen as Putin's closest ally in the European Union, sent the letter of congratulations to Putin on Thursday after the release of official election results in Russia, according to his press chief. The Hungarian leader was the only head of a EU country to congratulate Putin on his reelection, which will extend his nearly quarter-century rule of Russia by another six years.  
Putin's landslide victory was widely criticised by Western leaders, who characterised the result as preordained in Russia's repressive political system. The EU criticised the election as taking place in a "highly restricted environment exacerbated also by Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine."  
"Russian authorities have continued to increase the system-

atic internal repression by cracking down on opposition politicians, civil society organisations, independent media and other critical voices with the use of repressive legislation and politically motivated prison sentences," an EU statement said. Orbán's letter said that the cooperation between Hungary and Russia, "based on mutual respect, enables important discussions even in challenging geopolitical contexts".  
He also pointed out what he called Hungary's "commitment to peace", which has taken the form of repeated calls for an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine without outlining what such a step would entail for that country's territorial integrity.  
Orbán's government has taken a differing approach to the war in Ukraine from its EU and NATO allies since Russia began its full-scale invasion more than two years ago. Hungary has refused to supply Ukraine with weapons or allow their transfer across its borders, and has held up EU efforts to supply Ukraine with badly needed funding.

Hungary has also sought to deepen energy deals with Moscow even as other countries in Europe have decreased their dependency on Russian fossil fuels. Orbán's approach has led to significant tensions with Ukraine's government and with his partners in the EU.  
Speaking in an interview with Hungarian public radio from Brussels on Friday, Orbán accused EU leaders of taking an increasingly active role in the conflict in Ukraine, something he predicted would be a key issue in the bloc's elections this summer.  
"The leaders speak as if they are fighting their own war against Russia. Not like us who say, Look, this is a war between Russia and Ukraine. This is not our war," Orbán said. "We are not at war with Russia, they are at war, and they even speak as if Russia must be defeated." On Thursday, Hungary refused to support a Czech-led effort to acquire ammunition that Ukraine badly needs from third countries outside the EU.

## Pak court sentences woman to life for burning Quran pages

PTI ■ LAHORE  
A Pakistani court in Punjab province has sentenced a 40-year-old woman to life in prison after finding her guilty of burning pages of Islam's holy book, a court official said on Friday.  
Asia Bibi, a Muslim resident of the thickly populated Bedian Road area of Lahore, was arrested by police in 2021 on a complaint by a man of her locality who accused her of burning a copy of the Quran outside her house.  
"The Lahore sessions court on Thursday handed down life imprisonment to Asia Bibi on the charges of desecration of the Holy Quran," a court official told PTI. She was subsequently booked under the stringent blasphemy laws of the country. Her counsel, advocate Sarmad Ali, pointed out fundamental flaws in the case against Asia saying she did not commit any blasphemy and she was implicated wrongfully by her neighbour to settle a personal score.

## Pak SC rules sacking of HC ex-judge as illegal

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD  
Pakistan's Supreme Court on Friday declared the sacking of a former high court judge as illegal, years after he was removed over a speech against the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the powerful intelligence agency of the country.  
Former Islamabad High Court senior puisne judge Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui was sacked on October 11, 2018, by the Supreme Judicial Council, the highest body authorised to take action against judges of high and supreme courts, based on a speech he had delivered weeks ago at the Rawalpindi Bar Association.  
Siddiqui in his address had accused the ISI of influencing the court proceedings and forming benches of choice.  
The sacked judge had challenged his removal in the apex court, which after lapses of several years started the hearing. A five-member panel led by

Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa and including Justice Aminuddin Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi, and Justice Irfan Saadat conducted the hearing, which was broadcast live. The bench concluded the proceedings of the hearing on January 23 and reserved judgment, which was announced on Friday. The bench ruled that Siddiqui's removal was illegal and he would be considered a retired judge of the Islamabad High Court and entitled to all the benefits of a former judge. A day before the hearing concluded, former ISI director general retired Lt Gen Faiz Hameed had submitted his response to Justice Siddiqui's petition. He rejected the allegations of his involvement in the constitution of IHC benches to prolong the detention of former premier Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz. The ex-spy-master claimed Justice Siddiqui had dragged him into the case for no reason.

At the previous hearing, notices had been issued to Gen Hameed, retired Brigadier Irfan Ramay, former IHC Chief Justice Anwar Khan Kasi and former Supreme Court registrar Arbab Muhammad Arif. Siddiqui had named seven individuals in his amended plea, however, the court remarked that three others — former Chief of Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, and two retired brigadiers, Faisal Marwat and Tahir Wafat, had no direct connection with the case. During the last hearing, Chief Justice Isa said the court could not punish anyone without conducting an inquiry. "The Supreme Court has to draw a line on the difference between the Supreme Court and the Supreme Judicial Council," he observed.  
"If removing a judge is so easy, then this is a threat to the independence of the judiciary," the top judge had further noted, adding that the current matter was public and people had a right to know the truth.

# Indonesia's rescue of Rohingya refugees at sea is a reminder of an ordeal that began in Myanmar

AP ■ BANGKOK  
A dramatic story of survival and rescue off the western coast of Indonesia's Aceh province has put the spotlight again on the plight of ethnic Rohingya Muslim refugees from Myanmar who make extremely dangerous voyages across the Indian Ocean to seek better lives.  
Desperate survivors were pulled to safety from their capsized boat by local fishermen on Thursday, after a yet-unknown number perished. For Rohingya refugees living in squalid refugee camps in Bangladesh, escaping across the seas might seem like a good option — but it's often a deadly one. The U.N. estimates that as many as one in eight people die or disappear in the attempt.  
The UN refugee agency said in

January that of 4,500 Rohingyas embarking on sea journeys last year in Southeast Asian waters, 569 were reported dead or missing.  
**ROOTS OF DISPLACEMENT**  
Members of the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority have long been considered by Myanmar's Buddhist majority to be illegal settlers from Bangladesh, even though many of their families lived in Myanmar for generations. Aside from social discrimination, nearly all have been denied citizenship since 1982, effectively rendering them stateless, and have been denied freedom of movement and other basic rights.  
In August 2017, Myanmar's military launched what it called a clearance campaign in northern Rakhine State in response

to attacks by a shadowy Rohingya insurgent group. The counterinsurgency action forced about 740,000 Rohingyas to flee to neighboring Bangladesh and led to accusations that security forces committed mass rapes, killings and burned thousands of homes. International courts are now considering whether the campaign amounted to genocide. There are now about 1 million Rohingyas residing in refugee camps in Bangladesh, including those who fled previous waves of repression.  
An estimated 600,000 Rohingyas still live in Myanmar, most in camps for internally displaced people or tightly restricted ghettos.

**ESCAPE BY SEA**  
Social and economic pressures convince some Rohingyas living in camps in Myanmar as well as Bangladesh to embark on the dangerous sea voyage to Malaysia or Indonesia, which have Muslim majority

populations. The suffer from a lack of economic opportunity, as well as unhealthy physical and psychological conditions in the camps. Because the majority of Rohingya refugees are stateless, they have no legal hope of resettlement.  
The modest job opportunities they believe await them elsewhere are a strong attraction, and in some cases they can get help from relatives who have already started new lives abroad. But they are often exploited by human traffickers who charge extortionate amounts — anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars — to make the crossing on ramshackle boats with little concern for safety. In some cases, the traffickers deliver the refugees to confederates who trap them into jobs of virtual slavery.

## IS group claims responsibility for bombing at Afghan bank

Islamabad (AP): The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a deadly bombing that targeted Taliban trying to collect their salaries at a bank in southern Afghanistan. The bombing on Thursday at a branch of New Kabul Bank in Kandahar city killed three people and wounded 12 others.  
All of the victims were people who had gathered there to collect their monthly salaries, said Inamullah Samangani, head of the government's Kandahar Information and Culture Department. The Islamic State group's affiliate, a major Taliban rival, has conducted attacks on schools, hospitals, mosques and Shiite areas throughout Afghanistan. The militant group said that the suicide bomber detonated his explosive belt among the Taliban gathered near the bank to receive their salaries.

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
TENDER CALL NOTICE NO.EM/WS-09/2024  
File No.EM/WS/TECH-02/2024/361  
Date: 18.03.2024  
Name of the work "Grant of license for Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Operation & Maintenance of 06 nos. 100 Ton Capacity HMC's for a period of 05 years" Last date and time of submission of bid: 06.05.2024 upto 1800 Hrs.,  
Refer our website for details : <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.  
Sd/- Executive Engineer (M)  
Workshop Division-I, Paradip Port Authority  
PPA/PR/97/2023-2024 dtd.21.03.2024

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given by Mr. Saurabh Maheshwari & Mr. Deepak Maheshwari that Original Requisitionment Deed dated 06.04.2017 in favour of Mrs. Indra Maheshwari in respect of Plot Bearing No. GA, Block-B-1, area measuring 175 Sq. Mtrs., situated at Yamuna Vihar, Delhi Registered vide Doc no. 434 has been lost/destroyed. Mr. Saurabh Maheshwari & Mr. Deepak Maheshwari will be taking financial assistance from Bajaj Finance Limited. Public is being warned not to deal with the said document. Any person dealing with the said document would do so at their own risk & responsibility. Owner shall not be liable in any manner whatsoever for any loss incurred by such person. If anybody found these documents or notices any misuse of the above mentioned document, Concern person is required to communicate in writing to the undersigned at below address.  
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FROM CANCER SURVIVOR TO CHART TOPPING ARTIST

# Allen Ling's Musical Journey

**ALLEN LING** and Flipsyde Guitarist **DAVE LOPEZ** need no introduction. Allen's recent Tour of Asia was a huge success.. Despite his music career starting only last year, the American-Chinese artist has swiftly climbed the charts with his acclaimed *Heartbreak Trilogy*. In an exclusive interview with **SAKSHI PRIYA** from the *Pioneer*, Allen shared the story behind his track *Closer* and his collaboration with Dave Lopez while Dave shared his experience working with Allen

**C**ould you share your experience touring Asia, particularly your recent performance in Mumbai?

Dave and I, we both love people. We are big extroverts. To see so many people are coming here to watch was great. But I have got to say, the traffic is a little unnerving. Cars were driving super close to each other, yet somehow no accidents happened. It was pretty nerve-wracking but also kind of impressive.

Have you had the chance to explore any Indian delicacies, such as the famous Mumbai street food, Vada Pav?

I did try some Indian cuisine cautiously. I sampled a delicious Masala Dosa, a crepe filled with mashed potatoes, which was fantastic for morning breakfast. However, I am quite conservative with my food choices, so I did not try much else beyond that.

Allen Ling, your recent single, *Closer*, has garnered significant attention worldwide. Can you share some insights into the inspiration behind the song and its creation process?

I actually wrote *Closer* 12 years ago, and Dave got to hear it only four or five years ago. Last year, we decided to give it a whole new spin. Dave added layers with his guitar skills, and I re-recorded the vocals, giving it a fresh feel. Dave is not just the guitarist but also the producer behind every song you hear from us, which adds a unique touch to our music.

Dave Lopez, as a member of the internationally acclaimed band Flipsyde, what drew you to collaborate with Allen Ling on his latest single *Closer*? How was your experience working together on this project?

He is a great guy and it was fun and an easy collaboration because we do not step on each other's ideas. I come up with melodies and also what he is doing because he does play the guitar and I do not have to worry about anything.



So it is a very easy and natural collaboration.

Allen, your journey from being a physical therapist to a chart-topping artist is truly inspiring. How do you believe your background has influenced your approach to music?

Being raised by Asian parents, there's a certain formula for life

expectations where you are supposed to pursue a career for the family, which does not leave much room for your own self-expression. Now, I feel much more mature and pleased that my parents got what they wanted from me, which is kids, and they see me flourishing as a business person. However, I also have to please myself. Having Dave in my life has helped me channel a

lot of energy into creating. He pushed me to a point where I can share more because I used to hide in the studio, tweaking my music and keeping it to myself. Dave encouraged me to perform and sing all my songs. I doubted myself, thinking I am not that good, but Dave asked me to rehearse until I got better. You really need someone like Dave in your life because if you

do not have someone pushing you every day to become better at something, you will never improve; you will stay the same.

Dave, Flipsyde has a diverse musical style that blends elements of hip-hop, rock, and pop. How do you see Allen's music fitting within this musical landscape, and what unique



**DAVE ENCOURAGED ME TO PERFORM AND SING ALL MY SONGS. I DOUBTED MYSELF, THINKING I AM NOT THAT GOOD, BUT DAVE ASKED ME TO REHEARSE UNTIL I GOT BETTER. YOU REALLY NEED SOMEONE LIKE DAVE IN YOUR LIFE BECAUSE IF YOU DO NOT HAVE SOMEONE PUSHING YOU EVERY DAY TO BECOME BETTER AT SOMETHING, YOU WILL NEVER IMPROVE; YOU WILL STAY THE SAME**

—ALLEN LING

contributions do you think he brings to the industry?

For me, good music is the priority. I always try to do what I like naturally; it is not forced. I receive offers all the time, but if I am not feeling it, it is hard to do things just for money or fame. If it doesn't make me feel good, then it's not going to be good, and that's my philosophy. I have never been a rich guy, and I am used to being normal. People say, "If you do this, you'll become famous and make more money," but I think it will make you miserable. So, I don't worry about that. I believe music is timeless. I respect music so much that I believe you have to do something you feel good about and love because even when you are no longer on this earth, your music will still be here, so you will still be here. I still listen to Jimi Hendrix and John Legend. They're not here, but their music is still with us. You can make lots of money with bad music that no one cares about, so you have to take it seriously because that's the only way you leave a mark. Once you release a song, it remains forever.

Allen, with the release *Closer*, you have also launched not one, but two video versions, adding to the cinematic experience. Can you tell us more about the creative process behind these videos and the vision you had for each?

We actually released a total of four music videos. I chose not to enter them into any festivals, including the music video contest, but surprisingly, the first two videos won hundreds of awards, including dozens in India, which was a shock to me, but also made me very happy. There are several reasons why I chose to focus on India. I believe my art is appreciated here. I have an animation company in Bengaluru that creates my comic book cartoons, and Dave encouraged me. He said that people appreciate me more in India than in the US, so I should start my career here. Since Dave has experience here, I decided to follow his advice. It's important to seek advice from those who have relevant experience.

# Fish IN GOOD WATERS

PAWAN SONI

dives into the world of sustainable fishing, crucial to nutrition and maintaining the local ecological balance



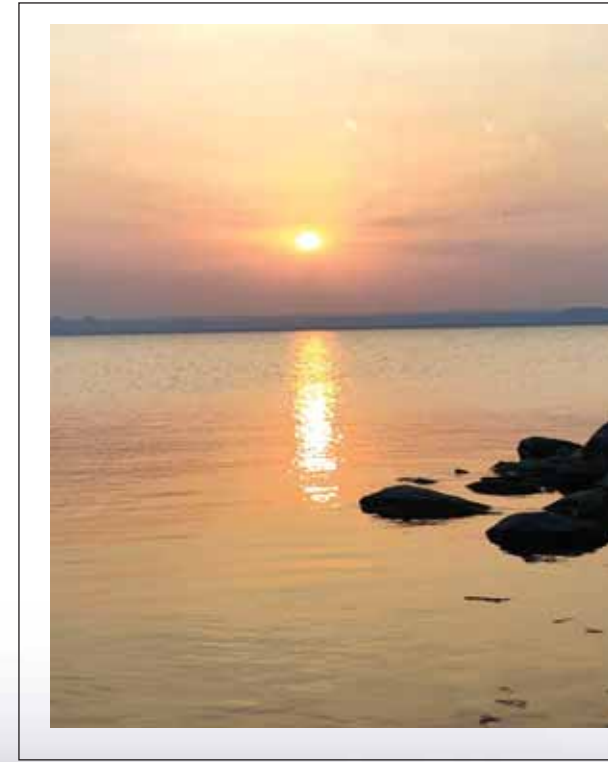
**I**n the era of millets and a focus on organic foods, one area that has seen little change is non-vegetarian consumption. Unfortunately, the quality of meats consumed has declined in terms of nutritional content.

Where our forefathers consumed free-range chicken and fish, today we consume artificially bred, space-constrained birds and animals. They are fed chemicals for faster growth, their feed is no longer natural, and in some cases, even the color of the meat is artificially enhanced.

During a recent visit to the beautiful Rajghat dam on the border of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, interacting with officials from Dam Good Fish was enlightening. This company sells fresh and naturally grown fish from the dam across India to patrons who value quality. Surprisingly, even the price differential isn't significant, at least not currently.

Dr. CS Umrao, a PhD doctor who has worked closely with government departments for a long time, took us to the middle of this huge 472-square-kilometer dam and showed us various boats used for fishing. These fishermen operate manually powered fishing boats and return after a couple of days. However, their catch is collected daily by a motored trailer and immediately sent to the market after proper temperature-controlled processing. Dr. Umrao states that these fish are more nutritious than artificially bred fish or those raised in ponds due to the following reasons:

● **TISSUE TOUGHNESS:** Fish in dams travel hundreds of kilometers daily. This free movement helps build their tissues, resulting in a better taste and scientifically proven higher nutritional value.



● **ORGANIC FEED:** These fish are often found in their natural habitat, allowing them to feed on a diverse diet rich in natural nutrients. Whereas artificial feeding also helps for faster growth in the ponds. Consequently, fish coming from dams tend to be higher in essential nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, crucial for brain and heart health. Additionally, dam-fresh fish are often lower in harmful pollutants and contaminants commonly found in commercially bred fish, making them a safer and healthier choice.

● **NO ANTIBIOTICS:** Since Fish raised in ponds are living

in stagnant water which doesn't clean by itself, they are often given antibiotics to prevent diseases. In contrast, fish from dams lead a more natural life and develop natural immunity. From an environmental perspective, opting for dam-fresh fish can have a positive impact. Unlike commercially bred fish, which are often raised in crowded and unnatural conditions, fish from dams are part of a natural ecosystem. Their consumption supports sustainable fishing practices and helps maintain the ecological balance of dams and their surrounding areas.

Furthermore, consuming fish from dams can have economic benefits.

Many local communities rely on fishing as a source of livelihood, and supporting local fisheries can help stimulate local economies. By promoting the consumption of dam-fresh fish, consumers can contribute to the growth of sustainable fishing practices and the development of local fishing communities.

When asked why fish from ponds are still being bred despite the established advantages of eating fish from dams, Shailesh Patel, founder of Dam Good Fish, explained, "There are a few reasons. First, there is a slight cost advantage, and second, there is year-round availability of a few varieties. Furthermore, most consumers are ignorant and simply consume what is easily available."

There is a small guest house near the dam with a few rooms and a good open area. This can also be a great picnic spot for those looking for a calm and relaxed holiday. Getting to eat fish directly from the dam and cooking it with minimal ingredients to enhance its natural flavors is an experience in itself.

The advantages of eating fish from dams are clear. Not only do these fish offer superior nutritional benefits, but they also support environmental sustainability and local economies. As consumers become more conscious of their food choices, opting for dam-fresh fish can be a step toward a healthier, more sustainable future.



# Kotian replaces Zampa at Royals



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Mumbai's crisis man Tanush Kotian, who played a key role in their record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy triumph this season, was on Friday drafted in by Rajasthan Royals as a replacement for Aussie Adam Zampa. Kotian joined at his base price of Rs 20 lakh, the IPL announced. Zampa, who picked up eight wickets from six matches for the Royals last season, was retained at his Rs 1.5-crore contract but the Australian leg-spinner pulled out citing heavy workload in the build up to the T20 World Cup in June. Kotian, an off-spinner and a handy lower-order batter, was expecting an IPL contract in 2023 after playing a

vital role in Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy triumph but was reported for a suspect bowling action. But the 25-year-old showed resilience to fight back and become the player-of-the-tournament (502 runs and 29 wickets) in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph this season. Kotian, who usually bats at No. 8, scored an unbeaten 120 in second innings and followed it up with an 89 not out in the quarterfinal and semifinal games against Baroda and Tamil Nadu respectively. IPL also announced Karnataka wicketkeeper-batter BR Sharath as a replacement for Robin Minz at Gujarat Titans. Jharkhand's Minz was ruled out after getting injured in a freak motorcycle accident recently.

# Shreyas comeback in spotlight

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**

Shreyas Iyer's comeback from a long injury layoff will be in focus as IPL's two biggest signings, Australian pacers Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins, go head to head in Kolkata Knight Riders' opening match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Saturday. The Indian batter, after missing the entire season last year due to a back injury, returns to lead KKR, who have made some tactical additions while keeping the nucleus of the side intact. Shreyas sparked with the bat with a 95 in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph recently but it remains to be seen whether he'll be available for all the matches, given his fitness concerns. KKR's most successful leader Gautam Gambhir is back in his second innings as a mentor. His partnership with head coach Chandrakant Pandit, a shrewd tactician in domestic circuit, will be the key to their revival. "This is your franchise, make it or break it," team principal owner Shah Rukh Khan has told Gambhir. Under the former India cricketer's captaincy, KKR had a golden run from 2011-2017 -- two IPL titles, five playoffs and a runners-up finish in the now defunct

Champions League T20 tournament. The biggest signing of this IPL is with KKR, and by acquiring Starc at a record sum of Rs 24.75-crore, the left-arm quick will be under huge pressure to perform. His spell in power-play and the death overs will be the key. Starc and Andre Russell are the only two experienced pacers in KKR's ranks, and with no like-for-like replacements for them, their workload management will be crucial. KKR boast of a star-studded top-order batting lineup in Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Phil Salt, Venkatesh Iyer and Shreyas to go with the Russell-Rinku Singh firepower at the death. But the Gambhir-mentored side will rely heavily on the home conditions to offer some spin so as to give the likes of Sunil Narine, Varun Chakravathy and Suyash Sharma some assistance. Starc will have his skipper Cummins leading SRH in the adjacent dug-out as the Australian captain will also have his task cut out. Cummins (Rs 20.50-crore) is the second-most expensive buy in this IPL and all eyes will be on him to revive the fortunes of the side that has had two wooden-spoon



finishes in the last three seasons. On paper, KKR with a star-studded batting and spin-heavy attack to complement Starc's pace, will be overwhelming favourites. But SRH, under the shrewd captaincy of Cummins, will definitely fancy their chances. Travis Head and Heinrich Klaasen's batting firepower in the power-play

and death overs will be vital. Their bowling also looks balanced with the experienced Cummins and India's veteran death-overs specialist Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the lineup, while the likes of Washington Sundar and Wanindu Hasaranga will be crucial in the spin department.

It remains to be seen whether Hasaranga, the ace Sri Lankan allrounder who has been banned by the ICC for the Tests against Bangladesh, will be available for SRH's opener.

**SQUADS:**

**Kolkata Knight Riders:** Shreyas Iyer (c), Nitish Rana (vc), Manish Pandey, Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh, Sakib Hussain, Anukul Roy, Venkatesh Iyer, Sherfane Rutherford, Angkrish, Raghuvanshi, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, KS Bharat, Phil Salt, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Dushmantha Chameera, Varun Chakravathy, Mitchell Starc, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Harshit Rana and Suyash Sharma.  
**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Travis Head, Wanindu Hasaranga, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav, Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyan.

**PTI ■ CHANDIGARH**

Rishabh Pant is experiencing a rentire gamut of emotions from nervousness to excitement as he gears up for his first competitive game in nearly 15 months when he leads Delhi Capitals in their IPL opener against Punjab Kings here on Saturday. Coming back after a painstakingly long rehab following a horrific car crash in December, 2022, Pant feels grateful to be back on the 22-yard strip. "Jittery, nervous, excited...All of it, but at the same time, just happy, being able to come back to professional cricket. I'm just looking forward to playing my first game tomorrow," Pant said ahead of his team's first match of the season. The ace keeper-batter knows that it will take time to get back to his old self and he wants to take one day at a time with extended batting sessions at the DC nets. "Every time I take the field, it's a different feeling altogether. I just wanted to bat as much as I could and get better every day. I don't think much ahead, I take one day at a time, and give my 100%," he added while talking about Delhi Capitals' pre-season camp in Visakhapatnam. Just like his batting, Pant wants to keep his team's approach as simple as possible. "Most of the conversations are pretty

# Want to bat as long as possible and get better every day: Pant



simple. We just want to go out there, have fun, not complicate things and give our 100% in all the games," he said. Head coach Ricky Ponting couldn't be happier that his skipper is back where he belongs.

"We are about to start an IPL, it's really an exciting time of the year. It becomes more exciting when your captain is back in your team. He is our leader. He is the heartbeat of this franchise and having him back is going to make this team a lot

stronger," Ponting said when asked about Pant's return. Ponting feels that if Pant is a bit nervous going into his first game, it is a good sign and he didn't rule out a special effort on the left-hander's return. "We had a week's training in Vizag before coming here and trust me Rishabh is back and ready to play. He will be a little bit nervous tomorrow, playing his first game in a while but nerves are always good because it means something to you. "I've seen where his game is at, and don't be surprised if something special happens tomorrow," he said. The DC did their pre-tournament camp in Visakhapatnam as Feroz Shah Kotla was being used for WPL matches and Ponting wanted a good start. "Make no mistake, we have got a great team this year. Our preparations have been absolutely perfect. We are just looking to topping it off today, and make sure we put in a performance that I know would be good enough to win the game tomorrow," Ponting said.



# OPENING CEREMONY OF INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE (IPL) 2024



## OTHER SPORTS



# Sathiyam wins first ever WTT Feeder title

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Star paddler G. Sathiyam has become the first-ever Indian to win a men's singles trophy at a WTT Feeder Series event in Beirut, Lebanon. He defeated compatriot Manav Thakkar 3-1 (6-11 11-7 11-7 11-4) on the final day of WTT Feeder Beirut 2024 on Thursday night. Seeded No.11, Sathiyam enjoyed a rewarding path to the final in the Lebanese capital, taking down No.5 seed Harmeet Desai (15-13 6-11 11-8 13-11) and top seed Chuang Chih-Yuan (11-8 11-13 11-8 11-9) along the way. But the match Sathiyam will remember most is the final as he overcame an early setback to see off No.9 seed Thakkar in four

games. The result marks Sathiyam's first men's singles success at a WTT event, and his first singles title at an international ranking event since ITTF Czech International Open 2021. Meanwhile, Xia Lian Ni picked up her second WTT Feeder title in women's singles, producing an excellent display to break down Suh Hyo Won's defensive barrier 11-9 11-5 11-5. A wildcard entrant for the event, Ni dropped just one game on her way to the semifinal, and was even more clinical at the penultimate hurdle, needing just three games to dispatch No.2 seed Chen Szu-Yu (11-7 11-9 11-4). Appearing in her first international women's singles final since 2018, Suh did everything in her power to try and lay her

hands on a first WTT singles trophy. But there was no denying Ni as the 60-year-old age-defying star collected her second title at this level, one year on from earning her first at WTT Feeder Hairov 2023. In men's doubles, the Indian pair of Manav Thakkar and Manush Utpalbhai Shah had to be content with the second position, losing 11-5, 7-11 11-13 12-14) against Andy Pereira and Jorge Campos, who are the first pair from Cuba to strike WTT title success. Among other Indians, Diya Chitale and Manush Shah defeated Manav and Archana Kamath 3-1 (11-6 10-12 11-6 11-6) to win the mixed doubles title.

**AP ■ MELBOURNE**

Williams driver Logan Sargeant will take no part in the Australian Grand Prix after his team gave his car teammate Alex Albon, whose own vehicle was wrecked in a crash in Friday's practice. In what Sargeant called "the hardest moment I can remember in my career," F1's only American driver will sit out Saturday's qualifying and Sunday's race at the Albert Park circuit. Williams decided Albon - who praised Sargeant as a "team player" - was likelier to score points. Albon lost control and slid into the barriers in the first practice session before bouncing off into the barrier on the other side of the track. Albon was unhurt but did not take part in the second session while Williams checked whether his car could be

# Logan out of Australian GP

repaired. The team eventually decided the "extensive damage" meant the car had to be returned to the team's base in England. Williams confirmed the team had not brought a spare third chassis to the event. "While Logan should not have to suffer from a mistake that he did not make, every race counts when the midfield is tighter than ever, so we have made the call based on our best potential to score points this weekend," team principal James Vowles said. "This decision was not made lightly, and we cannot thank Logan enough for his graceful acceptance, demonstrating his dedication to the team; he is a true team player. This will prove a tough weekend for Williams, and this situation is not one that



we will put ourselves in again." Vowles added it was "unacceptable" that Williams didn't have a spare chassis available, "but it is a reflection of how behind we were in the winter period," when the team struggled to get its new cars designed and built in time for pre-season testing. Williams was a dominant team in the 1980s and

1990s but has usually been among F1's slowest in recent years and has relatively outdated infrastructure compared to its F1 rivals, something Vowles has tried to modernize. It will be the first time the Florida-born Sargeant has failed to start a Grand Prix since he made his debut in F1 last year. "This is the hardest moment I

can remember in my career and it's absolutely not easy," Sargeant said. "I am, however, completely here for the team and will continue to contribute in any way that I can this weekend to maximize what we can do." Albon, who was born in Britain but races under the Thai flag, has consistently outperformed his American teammate in qualifying and races. Albon scored 27 points to Sargeant's one last year. Neither driver has scored a point yet in 2024, though Albon placed ahead of Sargeant in the two races so far in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. "I have to be totally honest and say that no driver would want to give up his seat," Albon said. "I would never want anything like this to happen. Logan has always been a consummate professional and a team player from day one, and this won't be an easy one for him to take.

# Haryana boxers dominate Sub Junior National Championship

**PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA**

Haryana boxers put up an impressive show on day three of the Sub-Junior National Championship as nine boys and six girls punched their way to the quarterfinals here on Friday. Uday Singh led the way for team Haryana as he outclassed Punjab's Ranveer in a 37kg bout with a unanimous 5-0 decision. Ravi Sihag (49kg), Lakshay (52kg) and Naman (58kg) then extended Haryana's winning tally with victories by similar margins. Sanchit Jayani (46kg), Arpit (55kg) and Anmol Dahiya (64kg) also produced a dominant show as all three

won their respective bouts with the referee stopping the contest. Sanchit defeated Kerala's Vishnu in round two while Arpit and Anmol thrashed Steel Plants Sports Control Board's (SPSCB) Rehan Sheikh and Tamil Nadu's L Gowtham Raja respectively in round one. Siddhant (61kg) fought a tough bout against Tamil Nadu's M D Deva Akash but managed to eke out a 3-2 split decision win. The last pugilist in action for Haryana on day three, Kartik Dagar (70kg) also managed to overcome Manipur's Leimapkam challenge with a 4-1 win. Delhi and Tamil Nadu also had a great outing with six and



five of their boxers in the boys category progressing to the quarterfinals. Haryana continued its domination in the girl's section with Khushi (33kg) opening the day with a win against Meghalaya's

Naphisakmen in round one courtesy of an RSC decision. Following a similar display, Nischal Sharma (37kg) and Manshi Malik (67+kg) also earned identical RSC wins in round one against Pondicherry's Jaseetha and Jammu and Kashmir's Mansimar Kour, respectively. Bhoomi (35kg), Khushika (49kg), and Sukhreet (64kg) were the other boxers to progress into the next round. Six pugilists from Delhi and five from Tamil Nadu also made their way into the quarterfinals in the girl's section. The semi-finals and finals will be played on Sunday and Monday respectively.